

BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index

GRANT, Ann (born 13 August 1948)

Career (with, on right, relevant pages in interview)

Joined FCO, 1971	pp 2-4
Third Secretary Political, North East India, 1973–75	pp 4-7
Department of Energy, 1976–79	pp 8-10
News Department, 1979	pp 10-14
Head of Chancery and Consul, Maputo, 1981–84	pp 14-21
1st Secretary (Energy), Office of UK Perm. Rep. to EU, Brussels, 1987–89	pp 22-25
Communications Director, Oxfam, 1989–91	pp 26-29
Rejoined FCO, 1991	
Head of Recruitment [? 1991-92]	pp 30-31
Counsellor (Economic and Social Affairs), UK Mission to UN, New York, 1992–96	pp 31-35
Counsellor, Head of Equatorial Africa Department, FCO, 1996–98 and Director, African Department, FCO, 1998–2000	pp 35-41
High Commissioner, South Africa, 2000–05	pp 41-52

BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME

RECOLLECTIONS OF ANN GRANT

RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY CATHERINE MANNING

This is the first interview with Ann Grant. It is 14th April 2021.

CM: Ann, I always start by asking how you came to join the Foreign Office. Was it a long-held ambition or was it something you stumbled into?

AG: I did it for a dare. I studied African Studies and International Relations at Sussex and then Politics at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) and I was very interested in how policy was made. I didn't know anyone who had been in the Foreign Office. When I finished my Masters, I looked into the kind of jobs I could do and looked at the Foreign Office. I was strongly advised that there was absolutely no way I would be considered and steered very much to what was then – not the Fast Stream – the Consular Service. I said, 'No, I'm not interested in that, I am interested in the politics.' But I was told that because I was state school; I wasn't Oxbridge; I was a woman, obviously, that there was no chance of my getting in. That spurred me on and I applied for the Fast Stream. It was almost like an anthropological experiment, I have to say. I thought that some of it was very silly indeed, and of course lasted for days. And then I didn't hear anything for months. But it was a long shot and, as I say, a dare, so I never actually considered what it would be like if I got in. Then again, I think people forget. I was the *soixante-huitard* generation; we were absolutely confident that globally the Revolution would take off and win and probably any job I went into wouldn't last for long. It was not a serious application, is what I am trying to say. But then when I got the offer, I thought why not? Let me see what it's like. I realized many years later, when I became Head of Recruitment in the Office, what an advantage it is not to have too much riding on the interview. You're much more relaxed; you're much more yourself; you're not trying hard. That was the start for me. It wasn't a serious application and it wasn't something that I considered staying in for long.

CM: Just to get some dates in here – this was in 1971 when you joined the Office. And am I right that this was the year that the change was made and women no longer had to give up their job in the Foreign Office if they got married?

AG: That was 1972. When I joined there were 20 of us. The Diplomatic Service Association was what passed for a union for us. None of the other new entrants wanted to be in the union, so I got that slot, which was the new entrants' slot on the DSA Committee – it was very interesting. It was chaired by Sir Tom Brimelow who was a marvellous man I realize in retrospect. He called a meeting in what was effectively the summer holidays, because the DSA was asked to approve the Marriage Regulation, or was consulted on it. I think if we had been against it, there would have been another round of consultation. There were a couple of people on the Committee who were dead against it. One of them said out loud, 'What kind of a man would want to trail round the world after a woman?' To which Sir Tom Brimelow said, after a pause, 'Prince Philip?' And that was it, game, set and match. That was the Committee, a very historic Committee, that approved the Marriage Regulation. But you're right, anybody older than me was not married and as most women are married that was one of the reasons why there was such a tiny number of women older than me.

CM: In the interview process, did they ask you any questions about the possibility of your getting married, your thoughts on marriage, or they left it completely aside?

AG: No, completely illegally, as it would be now, they asked me at my final interview, when you sit like Mastermind with this panel around, on this single chair. I had a ring – I still wear it - which was my grandmother's wedding ring, on my right hand. The woman on the panel said, 'What's that? Have you been married and divorced?' And I said, 'No,' very tearfully. 'It was my grandmother's ring.' So that shut her up. But I was asked at various points. The main one was on hard language training. When we got in, we were all tested for language aptitude and I came top, because I am a good mimic. They took me to one side and said, 'This is very awkward because obviously you couldn't do Arabic, because you couldn't go into any Arab country or Japan. And if we put you to learn Russian or Chinese that would be two years at university and that would be a very big investment if you then left to get married.' I should have made a fuss, but as I didn't think I was staying, I thought it would be awful if I did do the two years' training and then left. They'd never train another woman again. So I didn't.

I spent just under two years in London before I went to Calcutta/Kolkata. We only had two weeks of training at that time and sat on a desk, in my case in South-East Asia Department. My big drama there was – I was a desk officer for the Philippines – that I got to meet Imelda Marcos from the airport. She descended the steps of the plane in an all-in-one leopard skin

catsuit and heels. The poor chap from the Palace who had come with me – there was one from the Queen and one from the Foreign Office – nearly fell over. It was a great spectator sport and I learned a lot, mostly about my colleagues. I learned how to write reports, how to do minutes, how to deal with the post I was involved with, Manila. There was no email, no telephone, so we did everything by Bag. Letters took two weeks to arrive and two weeks for a reply, so it was a much slower exchange. On the other hand, because I was still a student in my head, I read every book I could possibly find about the Philippines; I went to music concerts; I was very much involved and I think that sort of knowledge on the desk doesn't happen anymore.

Third Secretary Political, North East India, 1973–75

CM: You did your hard language test, but you didn't do a hard language?

AG: No. When I went to Kolkata, I did, I think, six months of one day a week of Bengali, which was interesting, but really only got you to the alphabet because it is quite a hard language with a different script and different tonal sounds. I got on quite well with that when I got to Kolkata, so it was better than nothing.

CM: What was the role of the Third Secretary Political in the Deputy High Commission in Bengal in those days? Were you very focused on the politics of Bengal?

AG: It was an extraordinary job, which has long since been abolished. It was a follow on from the Oriental Secretary, somebody who was focused on the culture and the politics of a very specific part of India, the whole of north-east India – so it wasn't just Bengal, but Bihar, Assam, Mizoram, the whole of that area. It was the top of the list of hardship posts at that time. It was an amazing job, very specific, very focused on the politics. And the politics of Bengal were very exciting, different, very, very involving and absorbing for me. When I travelled, I was out of contact for weeks, which was a wonderful freedom you'd never get now. Bengal was a very left-wing part of India; Bengal was always known as the Ireland of India with a very impressive intellectual and educational elite there. I remember the wife of the First Minister of Bengal, the Governor of Bengal, who of course had been to Camden School for Girls, Mrs S. S. Ray. She said to me, 'I hear, darling, that this is your first post.' 'Yes,' I said, 'Yes, it is.' 'You are so lucky,' she said. 'You could have got Delhi.' Which to her would have been like the pits. I only went to Delhi twice and that was considered a complete waste of time by my Bengali colleagues.

What was extraordinary to me, having come from this so-called revolutionary background in the UK, was that the sons and daughters of these elites were the people who went to join the Naxalites. They actually did make bombs and live in the bush. I had no idea that actually happened. They would join the peasants, as they would say. They were living the dream of the middle-class revolutionaries, as I used to know them. They were out of contact, away from their families, living as guerillas. I never met any of them; I knew of them through their parents. It's quite interesting, because there is now quite a lot of literature, both novels and non-fiction, that talks about those experiences. Then it was, 'It's awful. Anup left two years ago and we've never heard from him. We just hope he's still alive.' And this was some PhD or some medical student. I could understand because of the massive inequality and the dreadful situation of most people. If you were an idealistic young person, this was the way you saw for change.

The other great thing that was amazing about Kolkata was the culture. Satyajit Ray and Ravi Shankar, and anyone you have ever heard of, is actually Bengali. They would have all-night concerts where you would be sitting in some run-down palace, on the ground, moving in and out, having something to eat, going back in, with the most marvellous music going on. And wonderful dance as well. We had a very talented and large team of [? from the] British Council which was composed of these people, who introduced me to everything. We were extremely proud of ourselves compared with our poor colleagues in Delhi who lived in blocks of flats in a compound and their big night out was playing darts with the Australians. We felt that we were much better integrated and much better informed about the country.

I travelled once with Michael Foot who was loved and well-known in Bengal. We went on a lecture tour where he was cheered to the rafters. My boss Stephen Miles, who was Deputy High Commissioner, said, 'Oh, you must meet Ann. She's terribly red.' Another highlight was going to the Commonwealth War Graves in those hilly areas, Kohima, Imphal, on the borders of where the Naxalites were active, though I never saw any evidence of it. Also touring the tea estates, where again, if you closed your eyes, it was a bit like Noel Coward. Everybody was Dolly or Baby or Buffie, all Indian. I remember staying overnight when I toured with the film of Princess Anne's wedding on 35mm and a projector all around the tea estates; very much appreciated, I think by certain people there. I stayed over at one of the estates there and at breakfast we had kippers and bacon and egg. I said, 'Oh, you shouldn't have done all this for me.' Their faces froze and they said, 'We have this every day.' It was a bad gaffe; it still makes me blush.

Anyway, against all that there was absolutely terrible poverty. It was not long after the Bangladesh War; there were refugee tents all around the city; people were dying in the streets. It was the only time I had what you might call an eating disorder: I found it very difficult to eat, just because so many people weren't. And the indifference to that of most of my colleagues, who said, 'You'll get used to that. It's awful, isn't it? But you won't see it after a while.' Well, that never happened to me.

I did feel sometimes, well often, that we were on the wrong side. We at the Deputy High Commission were part of this rather privileged elite who had wonderful parties and entertained each other, including the political people, but also a lot of the ex-princes who still had a high regard for Britain. I didn't feel we were doing anything at all to bridge the gap. We had a few projects, what you might call charity projects, but it was quite clear that our job was to talk to the people in power and not to have anything much to do, in any meaningful way, with the have nots. I had a wonderful Head of Chancery, Tony Morgan, who was a little bit like me, who felt very much more engaged. But if you looked at the structure of the High Commission and the Deputy High Commission it was the traditional role of getting to know the government and business, making sure they understood what we were about and reporting back. There wasn't a DFID then, of course. We would have what I would call charity projects across the whole country, a few in Kolkata, but nothing I would call development. From where I was sitting and from that area of India, which was huge, I couldn't see anything that was in any way a meaningful contribution. It was obvious too that the government of India at that time would not have been the sort of partner that we would have liked to be partnered with. I just remember that I thought that we were very disconnected.

We had very good access, I did know the Chief Minister and his wife and they took me on; I also met all the political leaders who subsequently became the governors or the chief ministers of Bengal, the head of the Communist Party, the head of the Communist Party (Marxist), mostly elite Brahmins. I also knew quite a lot of people at the University where I was trying to keep up my Bengali. I had no problem of access and wherever I travelled, I was a member of the High Commission and that was really somebody. We had no travel budget, so I hardly went to Delhi, as I said, and R&R was in Dhaka. We liked to go with the Bag. You only went for the weekend, but I think I only did that three or four times, so we didn't get out of the region very much. We just took on the Bengali attitude towards the rest of India, and especially a dislike of Mrs Gandhi, who was loathed in Bengal. We didn't

really have a relationship with Delhi. I guess the Deputy High Commissioner did, as part of the management team, but no contact really at our level, so it was like being in a completely separate country and post. There was a small diplomatic community in Kolkata, because of course most countries just had people in Delhi, but apart from that it was very separate and we were the top of a rather odd pyramid.

CM: I think one of the things that people in the Foreign Office today would find strange was then one went on a posting and stayed until it was time to leave, so you didn't pop home for someone's wedding or Christmas.

AG: Yes, I was there for over three years and I went home once in the middle. Part of the attraction of the Office was that you weren't a tourist. You were living and working in the country and the great privilege was the access you had and the ability you had to understand what was going on under the surface. Though I had a big and loving family and I had never been away from home, except to Uganda for a year on VSO when I was seventeen, I didn't go home and I didn't think of going home. I did find, when I looked at some of my old papers a few months ago, that my mother had written to me every single week; my brothers and sisters occasionally wrote of what they were doing at school and most of them said, 'It would be lovely to hear from you.' So I realized that I was the one who wasn't corresponding. No, I never dreamed of going home, it was just not on offer.

CM: When you look back on your time in India, do you have an affection for India and Bengal, or do you still have that sense of injustice?

AG: It's very interesting. I think everyone should go to India, because it has so many different facets of what should be everybody's life. As I had done Development Studies, I remember talking to a very old and very wise colleague of mine in the British Council, Samaren Roy. I remember going on and on about development and whether it was peasant-based or industrial-based, some nonsense or other and he said, 'My dear, India is not a developing country; it is a very advanced country in a state of decline.' Which was absolutely spot on. It is the sophistication and the complexity of the society that has stuck with me. I still read about it; I have a couple of Bengali friends now in London. I do have a partiality for Bengal over India, definitely, that prejudice remains. I do find it fascinating and I am shocked, as I think we all are, at the asymmetry between how much Bengalis know about Britain and how much Indians know about Britain and how little anyone here knows about them.

Department of Energy, 1976-79

CM: You were in Bengal from 1973 to the end of '75. When you came home you went to the Department of Energy. Now, this was an unusual move.

AG: When I left Kolkata, I actually resigned. I resigned from Kolkata in my last month or so: I sent a letter, pigeon post. Never got a reply. Sent another letter. Never got a reply. When I got back, I said, 'Did you get my letter?' They said, 'Oh, yes, we often get letters like that from Kolkata. We didn't take any notice.' But they were very smart; they said, 'You shouldn't just be leaving. Why don't you go somewhere else in the Civil Service and then when you've come to your senses, you can come back.'

So I went to the Department of Energy, which was exciting because Tony Benn was our Minister. He was everything anybody ever said. Anybody who worked for him would say what a delightful and inspiring man he was. And this is where my inverted snobbery came into play, because he was taken with state-educated, non-Oxbridge civil servants. Because I worked for a junior minister, I was often in his company. I also met Lord Balogh who I have subsequently seen was tagged by MI5 as a Communist sympathizer, and then Bernard Ingham who, way before he worked for Mrs Thatcher, cut his teeth on Tony Benn. He was the press man. There was very little mutual respect and understanding between the Foreign Office and the Department of Energy. FCO people thought, what on earth are you doing? It'll be awful. You'll be working on some boring desk and you'll never do anything or go anywhere. On the other hand, Department of Energy people said, 'What do you actually do? Stand around with a drink. We've got more PhDs in the Department of Energy than in the whole of the rest of Whitehall put together, you know; we're the real smart guys. We're earning all the money from the oil to pay for everything.' So there was mutual despising.

The most interesting thing – and it sounds like a hundred years ago instead of forty – is that all the nationalized industries were run from the Department. We had Joe Gormley and others coming in and doing negotiations on pay with the civil servants, on the desk, the head of the Gas Department or the Coal Section. The Department set prices, set wages and set the regulatory framework. The Boards of the nationalized industries, the Gas Board, the Coal Board, were also notionally under our roof, so it was a top-down economy. I was also there when North Sea oil was just being regulated, when the British National Oil Corporation was set up in, I think, '75. That was what would be, had we stuck with it, something like the Norwegian set up when you had basically the oil managed and produced for the benefit of the

country rather than spent on an annual basis. So it was a real experiment: '75-82. I worked for an oil company when I left the Office; some of the people like the Trinidadians and the Ghanaians, who were just setting up in the oil business, were looking at BNOC as a possible oversight structure. Anyway, it didn't survive the Conservative government which abolished it in '82.

Another part of my job - it's like Groundhog Day - was the Save It campaign which was designed to save energy and was very popular especially in schools and colleges, where ideas about how you could save energy won the competitions by saying Wear More Clothes. Children sent in wonderful ideas like duvet coats which you put on when you sat down in the evening – all these very progressive ideas that are now coming round again: insulating your home. It meant travelling all around the UK, which I had never done, with the Minister. I feel very privileged that I had that sort of window on a completely different side of life, so it was very much like another posting. My minister, the Minister for Gas, was a man called Lord Lovell-Davis who was appointed by Wilson. He was a PR man, a Wilson peer, a delightful guy. I remember we were invited onto a gas rig, as would be normal. I was the first woman who had been private secretary, I think, and of course they said, 'We can't have her because we can't have women on rigs.' So he said, 'Well, I'm not going.' We helicoptered out there, we stayed a very short period time and were whizzed out again.

CM: You say in your notes that it was Tony Benn versus the Cabinet. Did you see that antagonism in your time in the Department of Energy?

AG: It's now a matter of record that there was mutual undermining on a massive scale. We found out later that our Permanent Secretary was sending briefings to No. 10 before Cabinet so that they would know what he was going to say. Nobody trusted anyone in the rest of government. Tony Benn had been demoted into Energy from the Department of Trade and Industry because he was considered too left-wing and he was from part of the party that was barely hanging on in the Cabinet at all. He had around him this team of impressive left-wing thinkers and advisers, so it was a sort of containment exercise, I think. Unfortunately, he had this rather impressive portfolio of nationalized industries and oil companies which gave him quite a lot of leeway, but when it came to broader Cabinet decisions, not on energy or industry, it was a stitch up and Tony was told afterwards. Or so we were told; I don't know, but I am assuming, and I think there has been quite a lot of documentation since, that that was right. Tony Benn had very few allies in Cabinet; his allies were in the party and in the

country. Everyone knew he was popular, so that didn't help. Callaghan wasn't popular in the same way; he wasn't so much of a people person or an appealing personality. He was just the kindest man, Tony Benn. He was the kind of person who would say, 'Has anybody seen if the drivers have got anything to eat?' He really was everything they say, but I think he got to the point, by the time he left Energy of being more concerned with being right than with being in power. His view was that if Labour being in power meant James Callaghan, then he'd rather they weren't.

CM: After two years at Energy (which must have been such a change from the Foreign Office and from India) the Foreign Office tempted you back. Or you hadn't actually left them?

AG: I hadn't actually left. I was formally still on the books and I had gone on secondment and I think somebody asked me to lunch and asked me to come back. I can't remember the mechanics of it. I did love the Department, but I couldn't see myself going in those doors for the next twenty years however interesting the work was. My main motivation was still to travel and that's what brought me back.

CM: We are now in 1979 and your guy – presumably he was a guy – in POD (Personnel Operations Department) suggested News Department to you. Were you given a choice? Did you have any input in where you went on your return to the Foreign Office?

AG: I don't think I was told where I was going or what I was doing. Again, that's very new – to be asked what you want to do! All I remember is being told when I joined that you get one chance to say no. You could say no to Israel and to South Africa; I can't remember for what reasons and may even be misremembering that. I do remember that you had one chance to say no and two strikes and you're out, really. Me, having wanted to go to Africa so much, having been sent to Kolkata against my will and my better judgement, I was so wrong. I thought, in the future I'm not going to say anything because I don't know enough to say no. Kolkata did that for me: I didn't want to go and I was completely wrong.

News Department, 1979

CM: My memory of News Department in that period was that it was a very hot department, very buzzy, very exciting, that everyone wanted to be in. Is that right?

AG: Absolutely right. It was amazing and when I think about it, it was a bit ridiculous. We did manage the news. There was a press conference every day to which anybody could come, but then we had these diplomatic correspondents who got brought in at three and given

supposedly the inside track. These were the kind of people who would come to dinners when you got a visiting minister or president and were very much part of the establishment. We had much more control then. One technique was that if you had something that you didn't want them to focus on, you scrambled round in the morning for a big story from somewhere else. Most times that worked.

I went to News Department in '79, before the election which Mrs Thatcher won, and before there was any security at No. 10. We were hanging out of the window opposite No. 10, which was the News Department room, when Mrs Thatcher came in. I think there were too many people in the way for me to see her standing in the door way quoting St Francis, but we saw it on the news later. I don't think most of us realized that the Conservatives would be in power for so long or that she would become the phenomenon that she did.

CM: How was News Department organized? Did you have a regional focus or were you given a story and you did the briefing and the follow up on that?

AG: You had a regional focus. I had for a large part of the time the Middle East correspondents. You knew the correspondents from your region in London; you answered their questions, but you also handled any visits either way in that region. Each of us took a turn to take the press conference every day. I was very lucky: I had the press conference that announced the Lancaster House Conference. It just happened to be me.

CM: You got a reaction when you announced that?

AG: People ran out of the room. That was really exciting. I carried on doing a bit of back up for Lancaster House when the Conference was on. The real press officer who was assigned full time to Lancaster House from News Department was the excellent Charles de Chassiron, who was one of my colleagues. He was there the whole time. I was there for some of the debriefing as it went along. One that sticks with me was with Lord Carrington whom I had enormous respect for. He didn't say anything unless it was worth saying. We came back and I remember everyone was talking about what had happened that day. If you remember, we were pushing hard for Bishop Muzorewa against Mugabe. Carrington didn't say very much, but he said, 'I'm sorry,' he said, 'you could see as soon as you went into the room that the most intelligent man was the one we were not in favour of. Do we always have to back the not so clever ones?' He got that absolutely right. Then when the election came and nobody really knew what was going to happen, it was Paul Lever who was Carrington's Private Secretary who got the election result completely right.

I did have some encounters with Mrs Thatcher in connection with her trip to the Middle East, because I was the only one who knew the correspondents and could pronounce their names. They'd been generally hostile, all the Middle East correspondents, because they knew Mrs T. was a friend of Israel and all of that and I used to get it all the time: how unfair we were and how we didn't listen to the Arab side of the story. Then she went on this very successful visit round the Middle East, her first one, when she wore all the clothes, amazing outfits. Before she went, she had them all in to No. 10 to brief them on the itinerary and what she was going to do. My heart was in my mouth. I thought they were really going to let her have it, because they were always letting me have it. We went in and she was there and she said, 'Have any of you been to No. 10 before? Shall we just walk around?' Then, 'Shall we have a photo?' Then, 'No, don't let's just have a group photo, let's have a photo with each of you.' I thought that's the difference between a civil servant and a politician. By the time we got to the briefing, they were all absolutely enchanted. They'd got their front-page picture, Me and the Prime Minister. They asked her some very innocuous questions and then, 'Is that the time?' Masterful! This was a total PR job: all she had to do was meet these correspondents and make sure she got as good as possible press in advance and she did in spades.

I came across her again at the end of my career, because her son, Mark, lived in South Africa. She came every year to see the grandchildren before he was arrested, so I met her then, once before she'd had her stroke and once after. Before that, when I got the job of High Commissioner to South Africa in 2000, she summoned me to the Thatcher Foundation to come in and get my marching orders. She told me what she thought about South Africa, that there were still lots of communists in the government and the real test would be the pace of privatization. I didn't have to say anything, I just sat there. Ditto, when she came to South Africa. I had my three points to make about what was happening in South Africa to brief her. I got to the first five minutes and then she took over and she told me what was happening in South Africa. At the end of it she said to me, 'Thank you so much, my dear, that was marvellous.' A relief for me.

CM: A last question about News Department. Did you come in early enough before the election to see a difference in style between David Owen and Lord Carrington?

AG: I don't think I ever met David Owen at all. We rarely saw the top people; my head of department might have briefed him but not the rest of us, unless there was a reason for bringing us in. I do remember Lord Carrington from that encounter, and for some reason a

couple of other times I must have been there when he was being briefed. I remember him as a very wry and amused presence. We did feel that he had enormous clout with Thatcher. Instead of it being Foreign Office versus No. 10, which it has sometimes become subsequently, the P.M. relied on Carrington very much in her first few years.

CM: We all know that both Labour and Conservative governments have been very dependent on the Red Tops and were desperate for the support of the Mail and the Sun. Was it like that in your day in News Department?

AG: The Mirror, the Mail and the Sun all had their trusties. In those days they all had their diplomatic correspondents. They would come on trips with the Foreign Secretary; they were very much part of the system. There was not the same playing to the gallery and a lot more confidence. Also, foreign policy until about twenty years ago was pretty bi-partisan; there weren't party differences on vast swathes on foreign policy. There was a consensus; it wasn't something to beat the government with. I often thought it mattered far more who our minister was than which party was in power. If we had a strong, committed, effective foreign secretary, that was a win, whichever party was in power. Carrington, as I indicated with the Mugabe comment, wasn't at all a creature of the Office; he was much loved by the Office, but he had the ability to think outside the civil service mentality. He was interested, genuinely curious about the world, and that again, which I once thought was standard for both politicians and diplomats, I have found is actually quite rare.

News Department was great spectator sport – you saw so many people coming through, you saw so many events up close, you felt excited. No mobile phones, of course, so you had a home number and the Office number and if you were on duty overnight or over a weekend, you had to run and hope nothing happened in the time it took you to get home. In News Department we felt we were at the heart of the news. We had to respond to the news on a daily basis, but I remember we had to go home with brief cases full of people who might die overnight. Like Tito. Tito we carried around for the whole of my time in News Department; he never died while I was there! We did work long hours but we thought that was part of the price we paid for being in a very exciting department rather somewhere that was slower moving. What it was like to be on a desk in a regular geographical department, I don't suppose it was too different. I remember I was at home with my parents – I'm one of six brothers and sisters – and a big selection of them for Sunday lunch. I got a phone call because I'd given their number and I had to go in for something or other. I remember one of

my sisters saying, 'All that education and you still have to work on a Sunday.' They never understood what on earth I did from start to finish, but that was a nice comment, I thought.

CM: The next move was, at last, to Africa. Somebody had listened to you. Presumably you'd been filling in forms saying where you wanted to go next.

AG: No, it wasn't that. We never had forms to fill in and I happen to know that I was the third choice. They put two people up to the Ambassador and for various reasons they fell away and I was the one who was left. The person in Personnel Department later showed me the exchange which was, 'No, we don't want her. We very much need a diplomatic wife to support my wife, the Ambassador's wife, and I don't think she'd go down very well with the rest of the staff.' Eventually, it was, 'Sorry, it's her or nothing.' That's how I got Mozambique – obviously I didn't know this at the time, but I found out. I knew I had been turned down, but I didn't know the final exchanges.

Deputy Ambassador/Consul General/Naval Reporting Officer, Maputo, Mozambique, 1981-4

CM: Your first Ambassador was John Stewart. Did he repent?

AG: Well, when I left, we were walking on the beach. We'd had a good relationship by the end. He left after two years or a year and a half. He walked along and said, 'I'd just like to say you've done a jolly good job.' He gave me a very good report, which I was very grateful for. 'But I just want to know,' he said, 'Why aren't you married?' He came from a good place. He had his wife and his sister; he'd never worked with women before. His wife was extremely bright and very important to him; they were a real team. But that's what he thought I should be doing, what his wife had done. He just couldn't get it. I said, 'Maybe I've got ambitions more like yours than your wife's.' Stunned look. One of my conclusions at the end of my very long career was it really isn't worth trying to persuade your elders. There's no point. You may, at the end of their careers, persuade them that a woman can do a good job, but what's the point then? They just retire and go away. I met that all the time. In my generation, I was often the first one they'd ever come across, except a secretary. In retrospect, I played down any prejudice there might have been because of my gender. I always attributed it to my being odd for other reasons, whether political or class or whatever; they were more acceptable explanations for me. I found that much easier to accept that my face didn't fit for those reasons than because I was a woman. In retrospect, that was probably always the case, not just from my bosses but from the outside world. When I was in Kolkata,

when we went on a diplomatic visit, we would go into meetings and I would be put with the women for dinners and so on. Yes, in retrospect, it was clear. It never bothered me that much, partly because I was there for my own reasons. I always thought, especially after I had left in '76, I could always leave. Like all of us, we've been looking back at what we found acceptable at the time, what would now be totally unacceptable sexual harassment, my technique was to burst out laughing. I used to say, 'I've read about these things, I've seen them in films, I never actually thought anybody would actually do it. Plus, if I go back now and tell my Department, I will tell everybody, if you ever do that again.' To which the reply was, 'I thought you were intelligent. It turns out you're a very stupid woman. You won't get anywhere like that.' That was from a very senior man in London. But ... sometimes being a woman can work in your favour, because expectations are so low that if you just do a basically decent job, you're something marvellous. I remember in my first job in the Third Room, they taught me how to do one of those safes, where you have to do three turns and so on. They showed me before we went to lunch – can you imagine, we all went out to lunch. I was back first and opened it. The other two came back in and said, 'Did you open that safe?' This woman's really, really bright. As I say, it sometimes helped. And sometimes you got into places and you got insights from women that men wouldn't get. Glad it's changed. As I said, my defence was humour. But I realise that's because I was confident, I was extrovert. The more junior you are, the combination of being junior and a woman is really tough. As you get more senior, the hierarchy helps. But if you are quite shy and junior and I know from women friends in the Office that they had much worse experiences than me, when I said, 'Just tell them to bugger off,' they felt they weren't able to do that. I do think it was a help not having that which most of my male colleagues had: a desperate ambition to reach the top. I never thought that; I always thought, if I don't like it I can go. There are hundreds of other things I can do, but if everything is riding on your career, you're vulnerable.

CM: Let's get a few dates and details in here. 1981 you went off to Maputo in Mozambique and you were Deputy Ambassador.

AG: It was a small post. I was still a First Secretary, I think, and the Consul General, which meant that I got a very grand commission from the Queen, grander than a regular diplomatic one.

Maputo was special. I couldn't have been luckier. It was a Marxist republic. Their great slogan was 'Development Without Business' and they really meant it. You couldn't buy

much. Even in the diplomatic shop you could only buy socialist products like jam and tinned fish and vodka. But you had to queue for everything else along with ordinary people. So it was tough in a practical sense, but it was amazingly exciting from a work point of view. We had a huge part of the Cold War: the East and West Germans watching each other; the Americans watching the Chinese and the Soviets and we had all liberation movements of the world who were honoured guests and stars of the diplomatic community.

I was also the Naval Reporting Officer. I was issued with binoculars which were always regarded with enormous suspicion so you had to be very careful when you got them out and I had to report on any Soviet ships or submarines on the horizon. I was briefed before I left by this mad person in the Ministry of Defence who was the co-ordinator of the Naval Reporting Officers. I was examined on these silhouettes. From another era! You thought, couldn't they have spy planes or something? When I went back on leave he always had piles of photographs from members of the public as well as mine. We had one real scoop. A disaffected and nice woman, the secretary, had gone out one Saturday and found herself with some Soviet sailors. She got onto the submarine. I said, 'You have to write this up.' She was very good and wrote it up, but then of course she got into trouble for having gone on the submarine. There were quite often Soviet submarines coming into the port. It was funny; you'd drive slowly into the port and you'd see the Canadian driving and we'd all be driving slowly.

The Mozambican Security Service, who were usually nice guys, were parked outside the house, whom we used to give tea to and so on. The East Germans advised on internal security; the Soviets advised on military; the Cubans advised on foreign policy. I secretly had a good relationship with my opposite number in the Cuban Embassy, which both of us would have been sent home for. We couldn't travel more than thirty miles outside the capital without permission, so there were all those sorts of Soviet requirements. We couldn't travel at all without permissions. I was determined to visit all the nine provinces while I was there, so I was often in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, saying, 'Can I go to Nampula?' 'Miss Grant, you have a nice house, you have nice friends, why do you want to travel?' Of course, they thought I was a spy, because why would anybody want to travel around the country? It was the Cubans I think who cleared me in the end of not being a spy, because they checked me out. Freedom of movement was an issue, but alongside that some amazing contacts, real fun.

CM: Did you manage in English or did you teach yourself Portuguese?

AG: I learned Portuguese. I had six weeks of language training in Portuguese, three weeks in London and three weeks in Lisbon before I left; I have to say, Lisbon Portuguese was pretty incomprehensible to me. But as soon as I arrived, I could see, if I didn't speak Portuguese, I would get nowhere. And Chissano (Joaquim Chissano, Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1976-86) who is now a master of English, didn't speak much English then; he spoke French and Portuguese. I learned my Portuguese from a lot of the exiles, from Brazilians who were exiles from the dictatorship in Brazil, and from a couple of Mozambican friends, so very quickly I was immersed and that's the only way. Nobody spoke English to me, except in the Office. It's the only language I have ever spoken really well and I still try to keep it up. It's a lovely language and it was no hardship.

CM: In your notes you mention Mrs Thatcher and the Falklands War. How did Mrs Thatcher and the Falklands impinge on Mozambique?

AG: It was total Cold War time. We had no official warning in Maputo. My Ambassador was on leave, as far as I remember. I was listening to the World Service on my radio at home. I had to lie on the floor with a coat hanger up to get any of it. I heard that Parliament was meeting on a Saturday and I said, 'This must be a mistake. This can't be right.' Then I heard Michael Foot supporting the government and I thought, there's something serious going on here. Finally, we got a telegram saying that we had to inform our President or our Foreign Minister that there'd be a total exclusion zone in the South Atlantic and they were not to send their ships. They had two research vessels in the Mozambican navy neither of which was very seaworthy. I went back to them in London to say there's no way that this applies to Mozambique. We hadn't had any background briefing or anything. We were in Africa, nobody thought to send us anything detailed. They said, 'No, you've got to. Everybody's got to.' I thought, Oh, my gosh, I'm going to get the anti-imperialist rant from my friends in the Cuban Embassy who will say this is an imperialist venture. I went in to see President Machel, the Cuban, a couple of other people, all stood in a line. I said, 'I'm so sorry, I've got to tell you that ...' and then I read the brief. Machel came up to me and punched me on the shoulder and said, 'What a woman!' The people who had been briefing him were obviously aghast; he was not sticking to the script. He said, 'Will there be any videos?' I said, thrilled by this, 'Absolutely. I'll get them to you right away.' That was his reaction. In spite of everything, he just thought Wow! Even though he was completely on

the wrong side. Equally, it was a dictator in Argentina, so it was very difficult actually for the Communist International to know which way to jump. For Machel personally, it was quite clear; he just thought that was amazing. Again, I was able to go back on the back of that and send him those videos.

A little bit later, I put up the first application from a Warsaw Pact country, which Mozambique was, to send two students to Sandhurst. I bid and somebody in London thought actually this would be a good idea. This is the kind of thing that works for us. We had two wonderful, hand-picked cadets at the top of their tree. Machel and I were there (again my Ambassador was away) and they came in. He said, 'No, they're no good. They're not tall enough.' I said, 'But they're really good.' 'No,' he said. 'I've seen these films, I know.' (He was a short man himself.) 'They've got to be a foot taller.' We did get two wonderful recruits. They had a very hard time, as anybody does in that intensive Sandhurst training, but the moving thing was that when I got back to London, I went in loco parentis to their passing out parade.

The Machel-Thatcher dynamic was strangely positive. I was able to brief both sides, I was able to brief my friend who was Machel's right hand man that Mrs Thatcher had a high regard for Machel. She did. Partly because he wasn't Commonwealth; she couldn't stand the Commonwealth. This was a man with whom she could do business. This was a man who ran his country effectively. The fact that he was a Communist didn't rule him out. By all accounts the visit of Machel to the UK was a great success – my Ambassador was on the visit, not me - and went very well in London. It was a very unlikely, but very welcome aspect of the role that she got on well with him.

One standard requirement was that if any of us had contact with a Communist, we had to do a report back home. I said, 'This is a bit daft, because almost everybody I meet is a Communist. Do I really have to do a report on each one of them? Can't I do one at the end of the week?' 'No, it's for your own protection, in case you come up in their communications and we didn't know.' It was absolutely forbidden to meet anyone from the PLO or the ANC or other liberation movements. But it was a small town and we all went to each other's parties. The Brazilians and the Cubans ran the best parties ever, so nobody was going to miss out on that. I did report any substantive conversation which I was quite happy to do.

The ANC. I had been an anti-apartheid supporter when I was at school and university and I knew a little bit about who was who. The Africa Editor of the Financial Times, a good

friend, had had an interview with Joe Slovo, in the afternoon he turned up at the door with Joe Slovo. I said, 'You know I can't meet.' They said, 'Yes, we know that. That's absolutely right. That's fair enough, but,' my friend said, 'we'd just like to come in and have a drink.' They did. He was absolutely my hero, Joe Slovo. His wife, Ruth First, taught me when I was at SOAS; she was a visiting lecturer. She was at the university in Maputo. I met her once at a reception and I said, 'Remember me, I wasn't really your student, but I was at SOAS at the time and I really appreciated your lectures.' She said, 'What are you doing here?' thinking like everyone else that the only foreigners in Mozambique were what they called co-operants, solidarity workers who were doing teaching or medicine from friendly countries, or diplomats. There weren't any NGOs or business people. I said, 'I'm at the British Embassy.' She said, 'Oh, dear.' And turned on her heels. So that was that. She was later tragically killed by a bomb.

CM: And what about South Africa and its role in Mozambique in your time there?

AG: That hung over us the whole time. We had a couple of bombing raids, very close to the Embassy because we were in a small enclave in what passed for the posh bit of Maputo. One nearly landed on our lawn. It took them, what? twenty minutes to fly there and back. The big fear was that we would be like Angola and that tanks would come over the border. We were, luckily, not the ex-colonial power – my Portuguese colleagues had to handle that, but HMG and Reagan, were the top supporters of the South African regime and therefore regarded with great suspicion that we were reporting or somehow spying. It took me a while to convince people that wasn't the case for us. They bombed in 1983, that was the worse bombing and in fact the Ambassador was very angered by that; he sent back a stinging report. In the end the thing they bombed was a jam factory, nothing to do with anybody in the ANC. Quite a few people were killed. Eventually, in order to forestall the invasion that they felt was coming, the South Africans signed a deal with the Mozambicans. I remember lots of conversations way into the night about the justice of that. My Mozambican friends said, 'Look, you know, you South Africans, you are absolutely hopeless at armed struggle or whatever you're saying, you're not going to get anywhere and we are going to be collateral damage to your failure. You're operating from here, but you're not getting anywhere and you'll just be a pretext for the South Africans to invade.' The deal was that the ANC had to leave, but the sad thing was that most of them – they were actually quite well off in comparison with most Mozambicans. They had Swedish funding; they had beer from over the border; most of them didn't bother to learn Portuguese and when their big safe house was

emptied and they were driven out, there were Mozambicans who clapped. That was a good lesson in how not to be an exile liberation movement. There was a resident group that had to move, but the rest of them were always travelling. There were some in France, in Cuba, all over Africa, obviously, and other places where they were training, so they were an international outfit. They had had a base in London, ever since the beginning. Mbeki, who came back later as President on a state visit, which was very important for him, said that they were treated as just rubbish, never given a proper meeting or a proper interview with anybody in the Foreign Office or anybody in the government at all.

The focus of my job was the standard one: looking at who did what in the Mozambican government, who were the important people, how did it work, the relationship between the army and the government, the Party and the government. Much of it was on Mozambican politics, how real the socialist experiment was. I had great access through a couple of people who became my friends to the leadership of the Party and the government. That was a big part of the job and the other was people who were important to Mozambique, the Soviets and the East Germans and the Cubans who were there in force, so there was interest in their activities. Mozambique was one of the countries on the front line; it was one of the front-line states. Quite a little community of us, the people in the High Commissions in Zambia and all around, were much more critical of the South Africans and how they were behaving in the region than our colleagues in Pretoria, so we would quite often do what you might call complementary reports about what it felt like to be a neighbour of South Africa.

We were in Portuguese Africa, which was more relaxed socially than any of our colonies, that's for sure. I remember there was some conversation to which I was privy – I can't remember what on earth I was doing – Machel saying - it must have been when we had a visitor – 'It's not as if we went to the supermarket and chose which philosophy or which ideas do we want. You supported the Portuguese up to the last shot in 1975,' (because obviously they were NATO members). 'Nobody would speak to us, nobody would help us, so we didn't have a choice. We had to go with the other side. But mostly we are nationalists. What drives us is being Mozambican and we had only one way to be Mozambican and we still have, because you people are still supporting the South Africans.' The cultural background was African, was Mozambican, overlaid on that was Portuguese, which was much less stuffy, if you like, in social encounters, more racial intermarriage. There were lots of Mozambicans in the countryside with huge families who were mixed and Portuguese by origin. I avoided South Africa if I could and I used to come and go via Harare, and I

remember thinking how much more relaxed and enjoyable Maputo was than Harare, which was segregated in a really unpleasant way, even though they had done all the right things and they had an election. Socially, it was much easier in Maputo. When you went to the provinces, having got through all these permissions, I would turn up somewhere. I remember I was going on a boat to a couple of islands and I said to this person, 'Can I leave my car here?' 'Absolutely,' he said. 'I'll look after it.' I came back; it was shiny; it was in perfect order. I said, 'Thank you so much. What can I give you?' He said, 'I am a member of the Party and you are an honoured guest. There is no question of money.' Which is laughable now, because Mozambique is a by-word for corruption, but at that time there were lots of amazing people in the middle of nowhere, twenty eight to thirty five, doing their bit for virtually nothing, because they believed. It didn't last long and was not sustainable, but it was marvellous at the time and it meant that I was treated well and I had access that I never dreamed I would.

I could go on forever about Maputo and I still have Mozambican friends, even though it's a million years ago. A big part of my heart.

It is 10th May 2021. This is the second interview with Ann Grant for the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme, Catherine Manning recording.

CM: Ann, we finished our last session with your account of your three years in Maputo in Mozambique. It was obviously a very interesting period for you and one felt that you had really bonded with the country.

AG: The only thing I would say there is that in many ways – it depends on what you're looking for in a career – being number two in a small mission is the best job of all, because you don't have the housekeeping, representational, having to go to the Bulgarian National Day, and you're old enough and experienced enough to get out and about without the focus on you that you would have as the ambassador, the top person. I felt it gave me more freedom and ability to engage with the country than I had before or since. That was part of the reason that it made such an impact. So instead of the career being that you go up and then you finally reach the top, I sometimes feel that it goes round and around, because other

obligations that aren't as interesting and even in policy terms probably aren't as important as some of the other functions of a head of mission get in the way.

UKRep, Brussels, 1987-9

CM: After Mozambique you came back to London for a relatively short period, about eighteen months, and then in 1987 you moved to UKREP Brussels, which in some ways seems quite a change from your experience in Calcutta and Mozambique, but was very cleverly picking up on your period in the Department in Energy. Was that the reason that you went there?

AG: I had a partner who was the same seniority as me and it was one of the few places we could go together and still both have a job. I think we were the first unmarried partnership that was accommodated by the regulations.

CM: Could I ask you to comment a little more about this, because it is interesting to see how the Foreign Office adapted itself to changing patterns of life in your generation of diplomats. Was this difficult to negotiate?

AG: There wasn't really anything in the regulations to accommodate this. It was such a weird innovation – not in the rest of the country but in the Foreign Office. I always think diplomatic services are twenty years behind their own culture, wherever they are. Nobody quite knew what to do, but I was extremely lucky and had a very good friend and colleague in Personnel Policy, who said, 'How do we fix this?' David Hannay (UK Permanent Representative to the European Economic Community) at the other end, said, 'Well, I think they're very good, aren't they?' The wonderful thing about David Hannay was - he's now a hero of mine – he was totally fair. If you were a very good receptionist, you were fantastic; if you were a not very good minister, you were useless: all he cared about was the quality of your work. If they told him he was getting two good first secretaries, that was good enough for him and anything else was just a nonsense. He was also, as I think other people will back up – if you worked for him, you were, by definition, above average. So with the support of the person in Personnel Policy saying, 'This is what we are proposing,' and David saying, 'Of course, that's no problem,' that was very good. Where it became more difficult was things like what accommodation were we entitled to? My starting point was: we could both have a first secretary flat, or we could do something together which was less expensive. It wasn't their fault; it was just that they hadn't done it before. After a couple of conversations, we were very happily accommodated. Interestingly enough, when the regulations changed on

same-sex couples, a couple got in touch with me and said, ‘What did you do?’ Had I had a different person at the London end or the Brussels end, it could have been much less easy; it was very much down to those individuals for smoothing the way.

CM: And the solution to the flat problem was that they found you a nice flat that you both could use?

AG: Exactly. The place was gorgeous, inherited from a counsellor who’d left, so we put the two together.

CM: In those days in Brussels, did most people entertain at home or did you mostly entertain in restaurants?

AG: Probably about half and half. We did quite a lot of entertaining of colleagues. I had two career anchors; one was emerging countries and the other was multi-lateral. In Brussels it was very much your colleagues. I was in Energy and Environment and we were quite a distinct and tight group of people and quite a small number of people in the Commission, so we did use to entertain a lot in each other’s homes. My partner was the press person with journalist contacts so we did entertain at home, but a lot of it was one-to-one lunches with people, before and after meetings. This was when I learned what everybody knows, I’m sure, which is you don’t get anything done in a meeting if you haven’t prepared the ground and you don’t know where people are coming from before you sit down. A big part of the job was getting to know people personally and then feeding back in.

Energy and the Environment was interesting. It was very embryonic then, only a few people. We spent the first two years that I was there, almost full-time, engaged on the fall-out, the negotiating fall-out as well as the real fall-out, from Chernobyl, which had stopped trade between countries because of the different levels of acceptable radiation in food, milk especially. We spent two years trying to establish a common level of acceptable radiation so that when the next Chernobyl happened, we wouldn’t have to stop trading between countries. It was a bit surreal. It also meant that we had very good communication between France and the UK. We worked in sync because we were the only two nuclear powers. Everybody else was anti. That helped.

Because it was very scientific staffing, it was very anglophone, so very disappointingly for me – I thought I’d go to Brussels and improve my French – we were one of the few parts of the system that spoke English rather than French. We found out lots of interesting things,

like the natural level of radiation in French mineral water, like Evian, is extremely high. We were setting acceptable levels of radiation in various foodstuffs, so we had to learn about becquerels and other ways of measuring radiation, the fact that there isn't good radiation and bad radiation – all those things. It took us, honestly, two years of very frequent meetings. I think I mentioned in my notes a visit to Sellafield. It was hugely controversial in Ireland because of the Irish Sea and their belief that we were doing all sorts of dreadful things. It wasn't properly managed, I think it's fair to say. I went to Sellafield with Nick Fenn, our excellent Ambassador to Ireland, trying to get a better account of how things were run. I remember they had a sort of guest house near to Sellafield and as we turned up on the first evening, we were at the bar being served drinks and also winkles and mussels. Nick looked at me and I looked at him and we thought, you'd better do it.

I thought it might be boring, Brussels, but it wasn't at all, partly because it was my first experience of multi-lateral negotiations, having to read and to manage and work with a whole range of colleagues from other EU countries, but also working with the whole of Whitehall, where again my time at the Department of Energy stood me in good stead. It really wasn't a Foreign Office job; it was great in that you felt that you were working for the whole government. Sir David Hannay thought he was working for the whole government and quite a lot of the fun and the interest was David taking on London. I realized again when I got older myself and had other jobs, what a role somebody like that plays as a buffer between all the rest of us, getting on with our work, and some of what was unreasonable or just not right coming from the London end. He managed that on behalf of the rest of us and that was something that was not really visible to me at the time; I realize that he did a lot of that. It was a great time, I think, listening and learning, which is what you have to do if you are in big set up; plus learning a lot about seeing ourselves as others see us.

It was interesting because Energy and the Environment were then second-class subjects. It was a bit like when I went to the UN later. All the things that I worked on were seen as slightly peripheral; they have turned out to be very important. That was not how they were seen; it was almost a technical area to be managed and to make sure we didn't cause any trouble rather than a positive agenda, though we had just the beginnings of the environmental movement. It was much more in the Netherlands and Germany than in Britain at that time, but again it really didn't touch us, working on the desks. The future of nuclear power, the future of nuclear waste, which still keeps me awake at night, was not high on the government's agenda. Even when we spoke in morning meetings and so on, we didn't really

register on other people's radar. The approach of Mrs Thatcher to the EU was noise on the side, for me.

I have to say that one of the things that stayed with me is what a shame it was that our strike rate, which was extremely high, was not understood at home. In other words, if you did want to achieve something as the UK – certainly in my sector, but not only, and especially if you were working with France or one of the big countries, you could do so. I remember my colleague from Portugal. We did a telegram every night if we'd had a meeting, because it had to be there in the morning, so we would quite often stay late. I remember my Portuguese colleague saying, 'Where are you going?' and I said, 'I've just got to go back and write this up.' He did a letter every week and all they had to look at was fisheries and East Timor, I think those were the two for the Portuguese, and for everything else they said, 'Just go with the Brits.' It was really interesting that, though there was a large number of members, not everybody was doing the due diligence that maybe four or five of us were and our strike rate, as I say, of getting what we wanted for British policy was enormous. We won many battles and got so much support from so many countries that there was no other way we could have done it. Yet nobody ever wanted to say that back in London. I think two things: if you did have a success you wanted to claim it for yourself as a country and not for the institution and secondly that if anything went wrong, there was a culture of blaming the EU, even if it was nothing to do with them. There was a political culture and both parties fell foul of it, of taking the credit personally for your country rather than for the EU and it was convenient, if you didn't get what you wanted, to say it was the EU's fault. There was never the pride in achievement at all, which funnily enough, you saw in the UN sometimes, where people would always be saying, 'The Brits made it happen.' I suppose as a negotiator, it doesn't serve you well to crow. The perception of Brussels being boring and complicated meant that people didn't want to cover it.

The social side of life was very interesting, very international. Brussels is a much more quirky and odd place than I'd thought. Belgians themselves were very difficult to get to know. People did tend to close their doors at about 6.30. My Belgian colleague was a very interesting guy, very artistic, who lived in a loft in the middle of Brussels. But as people always say, it is very easy to go all over Europe from Brussels and we did a lot of travelling, and a lot of travelling within Belgium. I really enjoyed it and because you were in an international community you didn't feel at all trapped or as if it was a small world.

OXFAM, 1989-91

CM: Nonetheless, after this very interesting and challenging job, you left the Foreign Office and moved to Oxfam. Can you give us some background about why you made that move?

AG: I wasn't looking to change. I was actually very happy in Brussels, especially after a couple of years. It was one of those classic cases. I was reading the Sunday papers, which people still did – paper paper, and I came across an advert. It was when Oxfam was moving from being a service delivery NGO, when you helped with food and water and so on, to an advocacy and campaigning NGO. They were setting up this new post of Director for Advocacy, Campaigns, Education, Media. I thought if ever I did anything else, it would be that. It had my name on it; it had all the things I was interested in. I hadn't had an interview or done anything outside since I joined the Office in 1972, so I thought, I'll apply and it'll be interesting to see what they're looking for and to do an interview, maybe, and just see how I stand in relation to the competition. So I wrote away and I got a first interview; I was really thrilled. I didn't tell anyone; I went back to Oxford for the interview and I thought, that's really good, I got on the short list. And blow me, I got the job. My biggest fear was telling David Hannay. I thought the one thing he doesn't like is surprises or things that interrupt the work flow, so I went in fear and trembling into his office and said, 'I've got something to tell you ...' And quite unexpectedly, he said, 'That's great; that's marvellous. You're just right for that and, of course, you must take unpaid leave. That's super.' I think Jonathan Porrit had just gone to Friends of the Earth, so he thought this was a coming thing. He wrote back to London to say I should have SUPL (special unpaid leave) and I was refused. They had specific places you could go on SUPL, which were basically companies and I think – it's difficult to remember – Oxfam was seen as a rather dangerous, left-wing organization, that was probably not the sort of place we should want to go. It was rather wonderful for me because David took on the Office and started writing letters saying this is ridiculous and what were they thinking and so on, but the fact that those letters were on file was very important later when I came back. The other places that people were sent on SUPL were chosen by the Office. I think, at that time, Oxfam had a ceiling of how much money they would accept from the government. On the ground, no NGO then would go into a high commission or an embassy, unless they were in real trouble. There was no culture of co-operation between the Oxfams of this world and the Office. Indeed, when I did join Oxfam there were demonstrations against me, because I'd come from the Thatcher government. The idea that civil servants are neutral is not generally known. I spent my first six months going round

Oxfam in the UK, proving that I wasn't a Thatcher clone and that I believed in what they believed in. That was the extreme end; others were just wary. But it just goes to show the lack of mutual understanding and trust between the government and Oxfam at that time.

The inspiration for Oxfam changing was the then Spastics Society, now Scope, which used to be dishing out wheelchairs and things and then decided to go back upstream and say what's causing many of these conditions? Let's campaign for better treatment and better understanding of birth defects and so on. So it was that which led Oxfam to work on the causes of poverty and then you come right up against the political and we became perceived as much more political. The Office thought it was a bit of a gamble and not the sort of thing I could go out on and come back with.

CM: Were there any particular issues you focused on during your time in Oxfam?

AG: My role was to create this new Division. We had already inside Oxfam a press team, a campaigning team, publications and an education programme, but it was pulling all that together and deciding what we were pushing for, what our advocacy would consist of and who we needed to talk to in order to have an effect. Indeed, we had a big push to get development education into the National Curriculum, alongside some other NGOs, and in the end we won that one, for example. It was also working with our grass roots partners on a whole range of issues. We had programmes in the front-line states around southern Africa, in South Africa and in the Occupied Territories in the Middle East. Both of those meant that we were reported to the Charity Commission and investigated. I had to appear twice in front of the Charity Commission, charged with violating charitable law. We won both of those, but it was a very difficult time and we lost quite a lot of support during those two periods.

CM: Was it an issue inside the organization, the tension between the need to raise money and work in these particular areas?

AG: Yes and no. It was very interesting. When I started, one of the things I thought we must do better was to get a much better understanding of what we were doing on the ground and what we were raising the money for with people in the shops and in the fundraising areas where they were raising money. By the end I thought that my job was to keep them as far apart as possible! I remember once I went to our Glasgow office with one very regal lady who'd come from Somalia from one of our programmes there. She and I went into one of the shops in Glasgow, I was saying, 'This is Mrs so and so from our office in Somalia,' and one of the women said, 'Oh, do we have shops in Somalia as well?' But most people really

believed that we were trying to tackle poverty in some of the poorest and worst places in the world and they were proud to be involved with it. There was some problem sometimes with the fundraisers, but I had a good colleague who was head of fundraising and we managed to increase our income quite substantially over the time I was there.

Also I should mention that the best ever way to travel is – it's a little bit devalued now and I'm more critical now than I was at the time – travelling in the backs of trucks with grass roots partners, singing and sleeping in stilt houses, in a way that you never could or would in any kind of professional job. There were some marvellous trips. I went all over the world. One memorable trip was Nicaragua where we had a big programme on the Caribbean coast where they were, if you like, the most party people. We drove around meeting their partners in the wilds of Nicaragua. Also in the Philippines, I remember we went to a water project. There were no roads; we had to walk on these rice terraces for about five hours and then when we got there, there were stilt houses where we slept. My colleague, who was the International Director and I, travelled together. He slept in the men's long house and I slept in the women's long house. The big drama there was that they ate dogs. That was the source of protein. You could have roast dog or dog stew. My colleague, David, who I was travelling with said, 'If you ever report me to my children, I'll have to kill you.' We duly ate the dog and at the end of it somebody, some bright spark, said, 'You know you can get rabies by being bitten by a dog; well, you can also get rabies by eating a rabid dog.' That was an amazing trip. These trips really did inspire you and when you got back and wrote about it and were able to speak about it and show the pictures, that made a huge difference. It was a great privilege to be on those trips.

My main focus was inside the organization, developing my unit. There were five of us directors and we had to reconfigure what Oxfam stood for and that was a joint enterprise for all of us. Frank Judd, who's just sadly died, was our Director.

CM: You mention that it was a big culture change, more consultative, presumably less hierarchical than the Office?

AG: Yes, very much so. It was the first time that I had 360° reporting, which was very novel at the time. I think the biggest challenge was that people were not working for money. People were volunteers; their belief was that it was their Oxfam and if something happened they didn't like, they had the right to object, so it was very difficult to change anything because you had to consult very, very widely. There was a lot of good intention behind that.

It also meant that I got very keen on what you might call the Foreign Office disciplines of taking minutes of meetings, for example. Because you would often have a long, drawn out discussion of something or other on the Friday and think thank heavens, that's all done and on the Monday somebody would come in and say, 'No, I don't think that was what happened.' Doing things in a more organized way, a more disciplined way was important. I suppose, though I say it was a big culture change, the biggest culture change was that it was almost all women. And this is true in almost any NGO; if you scratch the surface, the directors are often men, but everybody else women. Traditionally, Oxfam had always been like this. It was volunteer-driven; it was often women who didn't have full-time jobs, that was one thing. My team was 75% female and, coming from the Foreign Office which was the inverse, it was great and I still have very good friends from that time. In Oxfam people were much more politically aligned, so they had the same feelings about the Occupied Territories or about South Africa as each other. We were politically and in terms of the aims of the organization very much aligned. Despite saying there was a big change in culture, people are the same: there are always enthusiasts and good people who want to do more; there is always a set of people who just want to do a job and go home; and then there are people who are not very nice. I think the balance between them is not that different and when I went to Standard Chartered at the end of my career, people would say, 'It must be so different!' Well, yes and no. The number of people who want change and who are prepared to work to make it happen is not that great in any organization. Not everyone wants to be a manager; not everybody is ambitious; quite a lot of people are quite happy where they are and want to be left alone to get on with their jobs. The great thing in Oxfam was that we were in a huge international community with our partners in the countries where we worked. They were very inspiring.

CM: After doing this job for just a couple of years you returned to the Foreign Office. Did you feel that you had done the job that you had been set? Did you find no further developments for you in Oxfam or was there a call back to the Office?

AG: A bit of both, I think. It wasn't clear at that time how the directorship and the management was going to work in Oxfam. There was a bit of kerfuffle over that; that was part of the reason for leaving and also there were people sounding out whether I would be interested in going back.

CM: I imagine David Hannay might have been behind this, because your next posting abroad was to the UN in New York.

Head of Recruitment, [? 1991-92]

AG: Pretty much. I did have a period in Personnel Policy where I was Head of Recruitment and in Western European Department, but I can't remember their order, if they came before or after Oxfam, so I did have a stint back in the Office.

CM: What about the Recruitment job? I imagine that having a woman in that position must have been quite inspiring for young women who were thinking about joining the Office.

AG: I followed on from Judith Macgregor. She had already made a big difference on the balance of applicants. Both she and I would agree that once you get into the process I do believe and I still believe it's pretty fair; I don't think it discriminates against women or black people. The real challenge is to get people to apply and people don't apply because they think that they won't succeed. One of the things I did was to try to get every woman in the Office to go back to her own college or her own university. I didn't spend much time and effort on the Oxford and Cambridge colleges which were well covered. I did try to make the point that you are not working for the Thatcher government – it was difficult because they had been in power for so long – but you are working for whoever the people elect. You are the steady state. There was a real push for the non-traditional sources of recruitment. I used to make a bee-line for anybody different in the audience and say, 'Were you thinking of applying?' I remember one very impressive Caribbean man and he said, 'Look, everybody's after me, law firms, accountancy,' because the number of black graduates was very small. He said, 'I'm not sure I'm ready to sit down with the plaque in front of me. I've come a very long way.' There were other people who said, 'Well, I don't know about wine.' I would say, 'Come on. You can get a book on that.' Those perceptions were that it was something to be rather than a job to do. You had to be a certain kind of person. So it did matter a lot, the faces and the people that we got out there in front of people. We did make a big dent. I think if you took Judith's and my time together, the percentage of applicants from Oxford and Cambridge versus the rest was about 50/50 and the gender was getting close. I spent half my year going round universities, drumming up business, and then the other half was the Selection Board. The whole time I was doing recruitment we would not recruit anyone who was gay. There were a couple of demonstrations which I fear I may have exaggerated when I got back home: people saying, 'If you're gay, stay away' at recruitment fairs and so on. The

argument was – I never could understand the logic of the argument – you were susceptible to blackmail, but you’re only susceptible to blackmail if people don’t know. If you’re recruited and you’re openly gay - I don’t understand. But we didn’t and by definition we had no openly gay people in the Office. That was an issue that, thank heavens, has been resolved. But it took a while, a very long while. The biggest issue, which is a real one, that had applied at an earlier stage to women, was the number of posts where you couldn’t be deployed. There were so many countries where consenting adults were subject to prosecution and because we had the obligation of observing the local law, they would say, we couldn’t send them there, we couldn’t send them here, so you’re talking about a small number of pretty nice posts, so that was a real challenge. There was a survey, I remember, of all the posts around the world where a gay person could not be appointed. It was a challenge and remained so in some places and it had been an argument we’d had about women earlier. You can’t send them there. We’d love to send them, but the host country wouldn’t have them. That was the debate. I think my name was taken a couple of times: what’s her problem?

We were recruiting with the Security Service and they were much less diverse. By the time I finished, they were still hiring the usual suspects, while we had all these women and funny people behind which they were trying to hide. They were, if anything, a lot slower than us and a lot more cautious about different social backgrounds.

UKMIS. New York, 1992-6

CM: 1992 was the year of your move to New York and once again you were going to a multi-lateral organization. You were in the UK mission to the UN. What was your role there?

AG: My role was rudely called the ‘Not the Security Council’ role. There were five counsellors. Most of the effort and the focus of the Mission was on political/military Security Council issues – of course we were Permanent Members, very influential, especially with David Hannay. The economic, social and human rights Counsellor – me - worked with the rest of the organization, that’s the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Human Rights Council, all the funds and programmes: UNDP and so on, that are now extremely important. It was a big team because we had to staff a large number of committees. Most importantly, we had to get elected and there was quite a strong feeling among the UN membership that we were already members of the P5, so why on earth should we get anything else? It was a tough gig and a very different way of working from anyone who was working on the Council, the Security Council. There you had five people basically

setting the agenda, processing the work and making sure that Britain's voice was heard at that level. For us, it was again a wonderful lesson that has been very, very important for me: seeing ourselves as others see us. I realized, going around to get people to support us on this, that and the other, how many places in the world already had a picture of us. I had to smile recently when I heard 'Global Britain' because we were already global Britain because of our colonial history. Everyone knows us. The number of countries that had either a small grudge, a long-standing grudge, or a huge grudge against Britain, it was unbelievable. Places I'd never heard of, didn't know about, and people would say, 'Just remember what happened in whenever ...' And if we weren't directly the colonial power, we were associated with them and that sort of behaviour. There was a big gap between the picture of Britain that I felt a lot of people in the Office and even in the Delegation went around with in their heads - they have this picture of us as good for the world, very committed, hard-working, talented, fair, always in favour of fair play and the rule of law - and the picture in other people's heads, which was that we were duplicitous, that we were two-faced and we didn't keep our promises. That was the nicer end of the spectrum of how people regarded our role in the world and how we had behaved. The second thing was that we were seen very much as proxy for the Americans, so if you had a grudge against the Americans, you would see the Brits as their junior partner. Though there was also this love-hate thing; people would know all that, but still think Shakespeare was great. It has been very, very important to me for the rest of my life, that lesson.

A large part of my job while I was there was working on the UN Summits: the Social Summit at Copenhagen, Habitat at Istanbul. For all of those we had weekly meetings for two years beforehand and then various preparatory conferences in between in various countries. Although there are a hundred and eighty something countries, there were only twenty or twenty-five that were really engaged in the detail of the work. A particular challenge, which I noted as well, on the Social Summit, but also on the Women Summit in Beijing, which was extremely memorable, was the alliance between Washington, the Reagan Washington and John Bolton who was the Head of the UN division then, the Vatican and Iran. The reason they worked closely together was because of their position on women and the family. They also, very unluckily for me, had - except for the Americans - the Vatican and Iran had some of the best diplomats in the world, so good, so sophisticated. That was one of my biggest challenges. The Americans were cruder and not so difficult. I remember my poor Irish colleague in the EU group, because we worked as a team, getting the tap, tap on the shoulder

from the Vatican, saying, ‘You will do the right thing, won’t you, Mr Murphy?’ The Vatican diplomats rang up the first ladies of any Catholic country, and all that sort of thing. Luckily, there was a wonderful man who was the head of the delegation in that section of the Vatican that dealt with poverty, the sort of issues we were dealing with at the summits, Diarmuid Martin, currently the Archbishop of Dublin. They brought him across to sort out the terrible legacies of the church in Ireland. He was just the funniest and nicest and most reasonable guy you could find. He would try his very best, but as he used to say, pointing upwards, ‘The trouble is, Ann, I can’t vary my instructions.’ The other thing he used to do, very disarmingly, at meetings was to say, ‘Speaking as a celibate ...’ He was great and in so far as we managed to work together, we couldn’t have had a better interlocutor. He did understand the contradictions of contraception, for example, and the mixed messages of the Catholic Church when they were trying to tackle poverty in some of the poorest countries. He didn’t have any personal animus. The Iranians: one of my warmest memories is that the first time the Iranians came into the British mission was for my farewell party. So that must have been a big decision. I was extremely touched by that. I had an enormous respect for their ability to try to manage their own side and the international system.

It was wonderful, because it was Beijing and the Women’s Conference, probably the high point of Chinese openness and willingness to wish to have everybody in and to give a good account of themselves. The first time I saw a karaoke machine was in the Chinese mission - which nobody ever got into. They had a party just before we left for Beijing for the Conference where we all sang our songs before we took off. Any country in the world, including Yemen who were next to us in the seating, sent whichever women they had in government, as part of their delegation. I remember a very inspiring speech from Benazir Bhutto who spoke as a Muslim and spoke to all the Muslim women in the audience, many of whom were in tears. That was a particularly amazing experience. Ever since, wherever I’ve been, wherever I’ve gone, somebody has said, ‘Were you at Beijing? I was at Beijing as well.’ I was a bit cynical, I must say, about all this time and effort going into forms of words, especially for us. We didn’t have anyone in London who took this on really. We didn’t have anything in the Foreign Office and, by default, the lead officials were in the Department of Work and Pensions, because they did equal pay. Very lucky for me, because we didn’t really have any oversight at all. We didn’t have any policies. HMG thought we were doing everything anyway, in terms of equality and so on. So we were a bit dismissive, including myself. But when you saw the Yemeni delegation saying, ‘If my President has signed up to

this, now we're going to go back and we are going start fighting for a little bit better treatment, or a little bit better law,' so it wasn't as meaningless as I had thought. The one thing that I think we didn't do, which we should have done, one thing where we fell down, was the representation of women in peacekeeping, in negotiation and so on, which we committed to as the UK. Until recently, we really didn't do anything to follow up. For other countries, it was more transformative. When there was the prospect of a reunion for both the twentieth and twenty-fifth anniversaries, it was decided not to have them, because almost everyone thought it would go backwards. We would not get the same support internationally that we got then in 1995, because there were fewer engaged players, I guess; a very positive attitude from China. The real thorn was the US under Reagan but in the end they didn't block. It was a bit of a high point in terms of progressive policies for women that people feel now, I think quite rightly, that would be challenged.

It was rather like living in Brussels in terms of work discipline. Because of the time difference, you'd come back from a long meeting and see everyone else going into bars and theatres and so on and you were going back to the office to write up your report. Most of my colleagues didn't do that. During the working week you really didn't get any evenings or any time out, I think sometimes to the detriment of some of the social things we could have been doing with colleagues. I always felt that I was a bit cheated about New York; I didn't get the full New York experience. You were much more likely to meet a Turk or a Ghanaian in my job than you were an American. One of the nice things was that we had Madeleine Albright as the American representative. After her initial run-ins with David Hannay, they became firm friends. She once or twice invited all the senior women into her office for brunch. No, you didn't meet Americans, but I am a big jazz fan so we used to go, when I could, to jazz. The amazing thing was that we got a whole month off in August, so then we went all over the States and that was a huge prize and well worth the other eleven months of keeping your head down. It was interesting to see how different Americans are from us and how vast the country is and how different Americans are from each other. We spent a lot of time wild camping and birding in places where they would say, 'Which London? London, where?' And you realized how few people had a passport. If you wanted to go anywhere, you went to another part of the States. The vastness and diversity of the country was another big lesson. I don't know how you can say you love America any more than you can say you love Europe; it just depends which bit. I just thought it was wonderful. Because we didn't have email or

mobile phones very much you just went off, and barring world war three, you could stay away until things started again in September.

Head Equatorial Africa Department, then Africa and Commonwealth Director, FCO, 1996-2000

CM: You were four years in New York, the usual length of a posting, and then back to London to become Head of Equatorial Africa Department. Then you were promoted to be Africa and Commonwealth Director.

AG: It changed its name several times; by the time I left that job I was Head of Africa Command. There were three Africa departments: Central, Southern and Equatorial was the top, all of west Africa and east Africa. That was a big job. Richard Dales was my Director when I was in Equatorial Africa Department and when he left, I took his job. As Head of Department, basically you were the reporting officer on all the heads of post, though you weren't senior to them and so you had to try to make an assessment of how things were going on the ground. I travelled to pretty much all of our posts, if you took together the head of department job and the director job. That was a very big job with, I think, the largest number of countries for any director, just because of the number of countries in Africa. I see that the FCO still has an Africa strategy, pretty much the same as the one I had. In spite of the Africa Strategy, it always was wherever the last drama had gone off, firefighting and troubleshooting, and all your plans were derailed.

I think every director was the same. You had country strategies, which were done exhaustively then, because we had a much bigger team in London, so you had a combination of the post, the desk and the department head, drawing up what the priorities were for a particular country, what kind of support we needed, international support, what the next thing was for the Commonwealth into which that particular country could feed. Then you would try to do some kind of relative priorities and, of course, you would say, 'Well, it's really important what happens in Nigeria, because it's such a huge country; Kenya is also very important.' So you always these hierarchies and then something would happen, as it did in Sierra Leone, which was not on anybody's radar, and it all went out of the window. It was, I think, very much focused on anglophone Africa. There had always been attempts to improve on this – every strategy says we must stop doing this and we must treat all African countries the same, so that's still a priority.

One of the most memorable trips I had was with Robin Cook and Hubert Védrine, his French opposite number, which was hilarious, to be honest. The message was to be that they were both interested in the whole of Africa and not just their bit. So we travelled with his team from Paris and our team from London and we got together all the heads of mission for a group big group photo in, I think, either Accra or Côte d'Ivoire and you've never seen such a miserable lot of people. I wish I could have got hold of that photograph. There were people sitting there as if saying, 'I do not want to be here.' But it was a decent effort to try to treat Africa with a bit more respect and not just as a post-colonial foot-print and to look at the things you could do that were cross-border. We had a summit every year with the French on Africa. Again, when things were not going so well with France, there was always the possibility of talking about energy and Africa, so we always had annual meetings on those two things. Some great travels; that was when I met presidents and prime ministers that I wouldn't have done before. It was strategy versus firefighting and patchy efforts to try to reorient policy. If you keep changing ministers, it's not easy.

Two things I'd like to say about that, one is that I was temping in Kinshasa when Kabila came in and Mobuto fled the country and that was when the election happened and Labour came in in '97 with a plan and a policy to create DIFID and that was very, very interesting. I think the Foreign Office misjudged the impact of that, both in prospect – it wasn't properly prepared for – but also in the implications for the Office. Because there wasn't a tradition of respect, knowledge, mainstream understanding of a lot of developing countries inside the Foreign Office, there was a little bit of, 'Oh, well, they can have it.' Without understanding that some of these countries, like India, were pretty important. There was also the wonderful phenomenon, from my point of view, of Clare Short, who came in having read a lot, having thought a lot, having a good idea of where she wanted to go and having a very strong relationship with the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, not such a strong one with Robin Cook. She was a strategic thinker and also a doer. She had been a civil servant herself and she was absolutely ready to roll and obviously, very important to me. I had met her once or twice, thank heavens, because she had been very interested and asked questions about the Great Lakes area. I said, 'Instead of her asking all these questions, why don't I go and see her and we can have a proper briefing.' So she did at least know who I was and that was an advantage. She was a driver of a lot of policy that mattered to Africa. It should have been better, because we should have had a more structured relationship where we took into account her priorities on poverty. She used to say to me, 'All you people care about is selling

arms and promoting trade.’ I said, ‘But if you put in our country objectives that you also want to know about poverty and you want to know how to best to reduce that and where we could most effectively help, put it in the post objectives and we’ll do it.’ But she never believed that. She was always delighted to come back from somewhere and there had been some awful person who’d said, ‘Oh, I don’t know how many poor people there are here. I don’t do that stuff. I’ve got somebody else.’ It was and is very important period, I think and the rationale behind it was that the issues that were raised by especially African countries, but by the least developed countries everywhere, should have a stronger voice at Cabinet. And she definitely achieved that. But that meant a lot of backfilling, a lot of running over to attend DFID meetings where one wasn’t really invited. It was a big mistake, I think, not to embrace what she had and what she was doing. Whether she would have reciprocated is another matter. The ruling was, as I recall it, that only the Permanent Secretary could speak to Clare Short, so the people, like in my team who would have been great, to speak about what they were doing and what we were doing in Africa, never got the chance. I always said to her that maybe you’re right that we’d like to sell arms, but we can’t sell arms to these poor countries that haven’t got enough money, so let’s all join together and get poverty sorted. She pretty much set up her own team, because she didn’t trust or believe that the Foreign Office was capable of taking on her agenda. I just said she was wrong, but she may have been right when it came to the people at the top, I don’t know.

CM: In your notes, Ann, you mention – and it must have come under the heading of firefighting – Sandline. Would you like to say a little bit about that and how you were involved in that?

AG: Well, maybe a little bit, but it is so covered elsewhere. There’s masses of documentation on it: two enquiries, one from the Foreign Affairs Committee, one internal enquiry, which proved not to be sufficient, so we had to have another one with the Foreign Affairs Committee. It was a bit of a shocker to me. Up till then, we always thought whatever happens, ministers front up. What happened with Sandline was that Robin Cook, who had been very vocal and very important on the Scott Enquiry which had been a very shameful example of when Foreign Office officials had colluded with not too nice people, thought perhaps it was happening again and that the mercenaries that had helped the government of Sierra Leone to survive - but quite illegally because there was a UN embargo on any kind of assistance – had been working with officials. He was advised not to speak to anyone involved, especially me, and my director, Richard Dales. The first I heard of it - we were

coming in, I remember, when the accusations came that the British had colluded, or somebody in the British government had colluded with the mercenaries who had helped in Sierra Leone, was on the radio. Robin Cook said he was absolutely appalled and he was going to set up an enquiry and those responsible would be dealt with. We hadn't done anything. So he didn't speak to us. There was a very small team around him and he was advised that the less he dealt with us and the less he knew the better, so he distanced himself from what we may or may not have done. Anyway, it was a shock. I think I was the most junior person ever put in front of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee. I was the Head of Department. There were several people senior to me who normally, up until that time, would have been fronting up for the policy and for the Office. I also found that people were briefing from the Secretary of State's office, because I knew a lot of the journalists – I'd known them for a long time – and they'd say, 'You'd better be careful about what they're saying about you.' There was a disconnect for the first time I could remember in the Office between the Secretary of State and the civil servants. I guess I was exonerated, but there was an implication again put about by the press people and others around Robin Cook, that we were perhaps not the sharpest knives in the drawer. 'Poor people in the Africa Department, you know, they weren't our best.' We were sort of forgiven. For the people on the desk, junior to me, they were the least mandarin-y you could think of. There was one who had worked his way up from the Consular Service and a heavily pregnant desk officer. If he'd come and seen them, he would have known that they weren't Tufton Bufton, who'd been in the Travellers Club.

CM: Do you have any general comments about enquiries which are something that more and more senior civil servants and diplomats have to face and their effects on people individually and the career?

AG: As I say, it was a shocker. I think you have to accept that the contract has changed between politicians and civil servants. There's no longer a willingness to take responsibility. I just remember Lord Carrington, you know. 'Whatever anybody's done, I was the Secretary of State.' Obviously, if something has gone badly wrong then it has to be investigated and lessons have to be learned, but the presumption now is that there is something wrong and therefore we have to have an enquiry, but then you have to find somebody to blame. So that contract that ministers spoke for the department has long gone. People have to be prepared for this. I wasn't too worried because our paper trail was clear and spoke for us in the end. But being careful is important and being absolutely aware that anything you say might be

taken down and used in evidence. I think the other thing is to be careful how you work with special advisers and with people whose loyalty is primarily not to the service. That's a reality of life. It's true of the Home Civil Service too. It was a new Labour government. That's something that people don't recognize. Labour hadn't been in power for eighteen years; nobody in government had ever been in government, so everyone was feeling their way, especially on matters of principle.

Robin Cook when he came out of his purdah, that was when we went on that trip to Africa. It was amusing in a way. I knew him a bit before. I'd met him, but I never knew if he remembered, in the Labour Party, but that was many years before. He was very nice, without ever mentioning at all the fact that I had been hung out to dry. It was an amusing trip partly because of the difference between him and Védrine who was an incredibly theatrical guy and who was very much more PR aware, but also because of some of the characters we met.

I remember when he met Obasanjo, who was wearing this big abaya and hugged Robin Cook. Just as he did, I thought I should have told him he's going to get hugged. He disappeared in this big robe. And the holding hands thing. Then Jerry Rawlings, who we saw in the castle. An amazing meeting, waiting several hours for an audience, and Rawlings appeared in this huge, lurex track suit with big gold trainers on. Then in the evening in some kind of big robe. There was all that humorous side of things. I am not sure that it did anything, other than that trips to Africa by secretaries of state were and still are very rare. If you haven't ever been anywhere like that before – it was a first for Robin Cook and later for Tony Blair. One of the reasons he was so impressed by seeing refugees and so on, was because he'd never seen anything like it. When you are exposed relatively late in life for the first time, it has an enormous impact. What impact Jerry Rawlings had, I don't know; he was the most amazing, larger than life character anyway.

CM: Did you get to meet most of the leaders in your countries in Africa?

AG: Yes, when I was Director. Any kind of British visit was still quite unusual, so I did. I suppose Jerry Rawlings was the most theatrical and extraordinary to look at. I went on a couple of trips, very usefully, with my opposite number in DIFID, Barbara Kelly, a great friend of mine, who was super, absolutely great. We managed to sort out all sorts of nonsense between ourselves over lunch before and then we would go and oppose and then agree with each other in meetings. I went on a couple of trips with her which were very memorable. Another memorable trip was the one to Kinshasa when I stood in because our

Ambassador was sick. We had Special Forces, both the French and the British. We had about two hundred squaddies, I think, based over the river in Brazzaville. And the Americans. In case we had to evacuate the Brits and, in our case, also the Commonwealth citizens from Kinshasa. Everyone was expecting a blood bath. Mobutu on one hand and Kabila, whose troops were advancing across the country. Because the trigger for the evacuation was with the three ambassadors on the ground, we really had to have somebody there. Our ambassador was sick and I volunteered: I was delighted. It was when I was Head of Department. So I went there to this extraordinary Residence and extraordinary building. The last time we had tried to have a commercial push in the Democratic Republic of Congo we had built this office with a big glass atrium. I couldn't think of anything worse.

We had a great military team who teased me badly. The troops were waiting on the other side of a very big river in Congo Brazzaville, in case they were needed to come over for the evacuation, but they were held over there. Half way across on this Rigid Raider, one of the big rubber reinforced dinghies, the commander said, 'Would you like to take over?' I thought, 'God.' I said, 'Of course, I would.' So I took over and got over to the other side, so that was a tick in the box. Then they took me out for a drink and it was quite clear that where we went to was a brothel. All the working girls were there, but I was OK with that. The next day I met the guys and told them what I thought was going to happen – we had no idea. The military were so impressive: 'Permission to speak, ma'am,' which I tried inculcate into my office when I got home. 'Permission to speak, ma'am. What about the bloody Congolese? It's all very well getting our own people out. What about the bloody Congolese? Where's our aid money going? Why aren't we helping these people?' They'd all given away their trainers; they were doing football training and all that. They were just so angry that we weren't doing more. The other thing was how well they treated local people. I had bodyguards everywhere I walked. They'd be walking through and some big soldier kicked a basket of some poor old woman who was sitting by the side of the road. Immediately, he dropped to his knees, takes off his sunglasses, says, in French – we'd be lucky if our staff could do that – 'I'm so sorry. My mother always told me I'm so clumsy. I am so very sorry.' Put all the stuff back in. Just instinctive. It comes from them having to deal with Northern Ireland and to rely on local people. I was enormously impressed by them. In the end there was no evacuation, but for six weeks we had this extraordinary stand-off. And in the meantime, a government was being elected in London and I missed all that.

CM: It was really dictatorland you were in charge of ...

AG: Well, it was a mixed bag. Even Ghana under Rawlings was partially successful – a run of democratic elections when power has changed hands. Nigeria was no longer under military rule, crawling their way into something a little bit better. And by then you'd got a democratic South Africa, so there was a lot of optimism and a lot of hope as well. It was a patchy picture, but in many ways more optimistic.

Today it is 25th May 2021. This is the third interview with Ann Grant for the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme, Catherine Manning recording.

CM: Ann, we'll start off with a question about your time as Director for Africa and the Commonwealth. In our last conversation I didn't ask you about the Commonwealth aspect of your role and I wondered if you had anything to say about that.

AG: Not really. I thought it was an oddity that for historic reasons – and I think not really thinking through – the Commonwealth had been grouped with Africa on the basis that the majority, or a large percentage, of Commonwealth countries were in Africa. But it didn't really make any sense when we had an International Organizations Department. I thought that if we were trying to do more, or different things, with international organizations, then the Commonwealth was one of the obvious ones. I eventually did manage to get it transferred over before I left. Obviously, until then, we had a small unit dealing with the Commonwealth conferences and preparation for them, but it was more of an organizational one, pulling together the Commonwealth countries. We did a little bit of policy work but it was mostly, in my opinion, a channel and a vehicle which more suitably belonged with the other international organizations, and that's hopefully where it still is.

British High Commissioner, Pretoria, South Africa, 2000-05

CM: Well, that clears up that detail. We come now to 2000 when you finished your job as Director in London and were appointed High Commissioner to South Africa, which must have been an enormously exciting appointment for you.

AG: It's exciting for anybody, I think. It was a very positive and optimistic phase in South Africa's evolution. It had obviously had a troubled history that will take many, many decades to overcome. When I got there, I was lucky in many ways. The timing was interesting and important. For everyone it was important. For me it was; if I could have picked a job in the whole of the world it would have been South Africa, so I was delighted. I

have just been trying to edit down and focus on a few highlights and maybe lowlights, rather than run through all the wonderful times I had.

I thought I would start with Mandela, which you have to, really. That was perhaps the biggest bit of luck. Mandela – people begged him to stay on, but he very clearly said he would only do one term as President and that ended the year before I arrived. He was clear that he believed in term limits. He thought he had done his role and handed over to Thabo Mbeki, who was one of the two crown princes, if you like, who could have got the slot. Mandela was no longer President, but he was in a wonderful phase of his life. He was in very good health when I arrived, though that deteriorated in the four years I was there. He got married in 1998 to Graça Machel and he was having the time of his life. He was very active; he used to introduce himself by saying, ‘Do forgive me; I’m a pensioner; I’m unemployed and I have a criminal record.’ He could be very funny. He did lectures; he did appearances; he was very supportive of the HIV/Aids movement, which I’ll talk about a bit later. For example, when Bill Clinton came to give the Mandela Memorial Lecture, they did a sort of double act. They were saying, ‘They’ve only come here to see you.’ ‘No, they’ve only come here to see you.’ It was a wonderful sort of riffing off each other.

Mandela was very good to me. He was very scrupulous about not discussing current South African politics with me, because he said that was absolutely not his role, but he was interested. He was very keen on the Royal Family, so he was always asking me about them, as if I had just seen them. He had a particular fondness for and a good relationship with The Queen and I think was one of the few people who was able to call her Elizabeth. Despite my old friend, the High Commissioner in London before I went to South Africa, Cheryl Carolus, who said she had to keep pulling him up on his protocol and he would reply, ‘But she loves it.’ Which I am sure was true. He was solicitous about The Queen. He was particularly concerned about the negative stories coming out, I think it was when Princess Diana’s butler was leaking stuff to the press, and he was worried about the effect on the boys.

He was also very concerned to improve the situation of the traditional rulers and their education and role inside South Africa. He was from royalty himself and he was keen that these traditional leaders, who had very little formal role in a democracy, should get a better education. Once he called me to his home in Johannesburg, very early in the morning, to meet ‘somebody.’ Now, he was a punctilious time keeper from being in prison, having a strict routine and getting up very early. So I was always frightened of being late; I used to

leave very, very early to get there in time. I did make it that morning. I entered his room and there was a large group of people surrounding a young woman in traditional dress, seated on the floor. This was the Rain Queen from the north of South Africa, a traditional role. He said, 'High Commissioner, this is Modjadji, the Rain Queen, I don't know if you have met her.' I said, 'No, I haven't met her. I've been to her place, but I've never met her.' She didn't say anything. Her courtiers around her were there. He said, 'I would like her to go to London and learn computer skills and I want the British government to send her.' I said, 'Well ...' I had this dilemma because we didn't really have a relationship with traditional leaders, just with the formal leadership of any country. I knew it could be difficult to get a special deal for somebody like this. I said I would relay that. He could see I wasn't particularly keen and he said, 'Would you mind if I phoned Elizabeth?' What could I say? So, click, click of his fingers to his PA. 'Get me Elizabeth.' Five minutes later she was on the phone. I sat there. Honestly, I didn't know what to do and heaven knows what he was going to say. 'Hello, Elizabeth. How are you? How are the children? How is Britain? I've got your High Commissioner here. She's jolly good and she's doing a very good job, but I wonder if I could ask your help on one thing?' Then he made his pitch for the Rain Queen. 'Thank you very much. That would be wonderful. Thank you.' That was a particular, surreal moment. The whole entourage upped and left and he said, 'I hope you didn't mind my doing that. I am so sorry.' I thought there was only one person in the world who could click his fingers and get straight through to The Queen. He had, of course, been on a state visit to Britain and she had been to South Africa for the Commonwealth Heads of Government before I arrived.

There are a lot of people who don't impress as much in person as their reputation. Mandela was the opposite. He was physically extremely imposing; he was a very warm person and he had a very regal bearing; and despite his time keeping, he would always make time for going into the kitchen, for thanking the people on the door, for asking people how they were. He was a genuinely a great person to be around. He always seemed to have time for things that other people thought weren't important. It was a great, great time to be 'consulted' by him, even if mostly on royal matters. There was a very unkind quip that it was only because he had been locked up for twenty-seven years that he still thought Britain was so important! He was a bit old-fashioned in that respect. I think he thought the United States was sort of coming up. He was also very canny and very firm when he needed to be.

One of the things that I'll go on to talk about, one of the clouds over my time was the terrible eruption of the HIV/Aids epidemic in South Africa. Most unfortunately, for an extremely intelligent and worldly and experienced leader, President Mbeki jumped the wrong way on the causes of HIV/Aids and its treatment. One of the reasons was that he was a very early adopter of the internet about which he was much more savvy than most people around him and he locked on to this small group of doctors in California who were Aids deniers. He has a background as a contrarian, so when everybody said we've got to go down this economic path, he said, 'No we don't; we can do this.' And he was often proved right. I think he felt this was another occasion where we'd all been sold a lie, especially by the pharmaceutical companies, that the reason that it was spreading so fast in Africa was because of a mistaken perception that South Africans couldn't be sexually continent. A bunch of reasons. He refused to accept the seriousness of the situation or to put measures in place to control it. Meanwhile, many others including in the ANC became more and more concerned and there was a campaign, a very effective campaign, which is now being looked at again in the context of the current pandemic to get far cheaper treatment for HIV/Aids from the pharmaceutical companies, by relaxing the patents and so on. That was something that I and some of the other EU ambassadors became closely involved in. The other person who was quite good on HIV/Aids at that time was the Deputy President at that time, Jacob Zuma, who had a less dogmatic approach and who was somebody you could talk to about practical measures, for example in the army and in some of the state governments who were doing more on HIV/Aids than the national government.

I should mention that in the EU there were five women ambassadors: myself, the German, the Swede, the Dutch and the Finn. We were known behind our backs, we found out later, as the Big Five and we did work extremely effectively. We were some of the most active and strongest of the ambassadors in South Africa, so together we were able to do quite a lot on mobilizing assistance from outside to the NGOs who were working on HIV and Aids. Public health experts are now studying the successes of the Treatment Action Campaign. I'm still good friends with a couple of their former leaders who are still in South Africa. The issue was quite a tricky one because of the President's views and some nervousness in London that we shouldn't get on the wrong side of him, but I think we managed that by working around him. I think it will be a huge blot on his presidency, that refusal, and the consequences were that South Africa had the highest rate of infection of anywhere in the world. Only because of

the treatment being widely available much later was it more or less under control. But by then, of course, transmission had run out of control.

President Mandela was firmly behind the campaign. He used to wear an HIV positive t-shirt. He went to visit my friends who went on hunger strike until the government's policy changed. He went to visit them and made it very clear where he stood and that did matter, especially to people who were otherwise quite nervous of, if you like, an anti-government movement. That was Mandela.

By the time I left he was beginning to fail a little bit. Graça, his wife, was very good; she went with him everywhere, usually holding his hand; the relationship between the two of them was a joy to behold. She would say, 'This is so-and-so; that's him,' and manage him around as his memory was beginning to fail. The wonderful thing was to be in his company. The one difficulty I had was anybody who was anybody, whether in government or the great and the good in Britain, all wanted their photo taken with him, so I got quite harsh with that and tried to protect him just from the photo shoots. That was a very small part of a very wonderful relationship, so I was lucky in that.

Just following on from that, I always said my time in South Africa was a game of two halves, because at the beginning I was extremely lucky we had a Labour government which had some personal history with anti-apartheid in South Africa, who felt themselves very much the brothers-in-arms, the Labour Party with the ANC. We had a South Africa which was very keen to mobilize and improve inter-African trade and co-operation and present a less post-colonial and more forward-looking view of Africa with the setting up of the African Union in succession to the Organization of African Unity. So in international organizations, Gordon Brown and Tony Blair were speaking for Africa and for countering poverty in Africa at the World Bank and the G7 and in the European Union. Mbeki, Nigeria's Obasanjo and Meles from Ethiopia were trying to improve co-operation and policies in Africa, so we were, in our respective fora, doing complementary things and were in close touch on things like NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) of which we were one of the main supporters. There was a meeting of minds; there was a sentimental attachment; there were several ministerial visits; there was a summit every year in London or Cape Town or Pretoria and a lot of ministers in between who were very keen to meet their opposite numbers. That was great for me: a lot of work, but all positive.

We had another very successful state visit. It was unusual for another state visit to happen for President Mbeki, so soon after the one for President Mandela, but I think there was a strong feeling, which I pushed very hard, that we shouldn't predicate relationship with the new South Africa on President Mandela, that there was a need to make sure that the relationship was sustainable and broader and that President Mbeki, not least because of all the work he was doing with other African countries and to improve the situation in South Africa, got a state visit. It was extraordinary, I think, for Thabo Mbeki who had been treated with disrespect as an ANC terrorist through much of his time in exile. In the first and second South African Cabinets there were three groups of people: one was the group of exiles who had lived primarily outside the country; in the case of Thabo Mbeki, his whole life, until he came back, he'd lived in exile, travelling around, hustling for money, trying to get support, trying to put forward the ANC case. The second was the group of long-term prisoners like President Mandela and many of the others; and third the people who were running the internal, mass-movements of the trades unions, the student movement and so on which had tried to make the country ungovernable in the last days of the Nationalist government. Normally, reading my history of other countries, one of those groups would have come out on top and the others would have been seen off. It was an extraordinary achievement of South Africa that they all three were well represented, creating a high calibre leadership, because many people who got involved in politics in South Africa because of apartheid probably wouldn't have been involved in another country. So you had a lot of talent at the top. Mbeki's father had been co-leader with Nelson Mandela at the early stages of the movement and he was married to the ANC, if you like. He was sent off at a very young age, and was articulate, intelligent, very thoughtful, but he did not have the experience of living and working in South Africa. People used to joke, 'There's nothing wrong with our President except you've made him British.' He was much more comfortable in formal clothes; he wasn't a dancer or a singer; he wasn't particularly touchy-feely; he was very correct. But he had a very difficult role. Who would want to be president after President Mandela? When it came to the state visit, we had a good group of senior ministers who came with him and, as is the way in these things, I was in their delegation, not on the receiving line, if you like. It was just a great visit. I could see he was happy and at home and felt that some kind of circle had been closed with the way in which he was received. We had a wonderful reception, as everyone does, in the City with the Mayor of the City of London. At this great reception there were the trumpeters all around the Guildhall, in the gallery, and at that point, the President is presented with a parchment and invited to go into the banquet, and he said, 'Yes,

I think I will accept,' and, said as an aside, 'This is a marvellous use of traditional leaders. I think I'll copy that; it's really great.' He was the most relaxed I have ever seen him and it did make a big difference to him, I think, that visit. It was a great experience for me, not least because I got to stay in Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle with the delegation. We had an outside reception of our entourage when we arrived at Windsor Castle, with small tents all around and medieval finery. It was a very spectacular, very well staged event. As I say, we also had the Prime Minister coming a couple of times to South Africa and various ministerial exchanges.

The reason I say it was a game of two halves was that that was the first two years when everything was sweetness and light, or most of it was. Then we had two things, two events really: the Iraq War and policy on Zimbabwe and on both of those there was a strong divergence between the two governments. There was strong public demonstration against the Iraq war in South Africa. Partly because of the gender thing, I was always on the top table, quite near to whoever the big shot was; after the Iraq war, the next formal diplomatic dinner we had, I was in the outhouse. Luckily, I had been in the country for two years, so I knew everyone. People including the Foreign Minister would ring up and bawl me out, but at least they spoke to me. They thought we had made a catastrophic error and that we had lost value as a partner and also, I think, that we had lost our status, if you like, as a broker, between the US and everyone else: we had just gone with the US. That was the perception.

From my point of view, it was revealing and disappointing. Thabo Mbeki and many in the South African Cabinet knew Iraq and the Iraqis very well, from exile and also because a couple of the ministers would come for medical treatment and so on. In the Blix UN authorized examination of whether there were weapons of mass destruction, there was a large contingent of Afrikaner scientists, because South Africa had had a secret nuclear programme before '94. Lots of jokes about this, but when they realized they were going to have to hand over to a black government, there was a very rapid decommissioning of nuclear capability and these guys had done it. So they knew not only the science, but they knew how to detect where there had been a nuclear facility, even when you did not have documentation and how it had been disposed of and so on. These unlikely characters were loaned to the UN and to Blix. I remember because a friend of mine who was a correspondent in Iraq saw them coming down the steps with their safari suits and their moustaches - from central casting. Mr van der Merwe and so on were asked, 'Oh, so you're coming to help the UN?' 'Yuss.' Men of very few words. Because they were reporting back, not only to the UN, but to the South

Africans, I know that President Mbeki felt that though it was very difficult to prove a negative, they were pretty sure that there was nothing there, though they hadn't completed their task. Mbeki was very keen that they should do that and make a report. But he also had a very strong view that anyone who was anyone in Iraq was in the Baath Party. If you were a surgeon or a headmaster or anyone you had to be in the Baath Party or you wouldn't have been employed. His strong advice was not to get rid of everybody: you could always identify the real goons, but you had not to do a sort of scorched earth. And you also had not got to think – this was so prescient – that by cutting off the head, by getting rid of Saddam Hussein, you'd done your job. You had to work with the structures that were in place. That had been his experience with the South African government that preceded him. The other imperative was to get international, UN backing. If you did, you'd be a hero and we'd be absolutely behind you. But I think the view in London was: what do the South Africans know about the Middle East? Well, a lot actually, and a lot that you don't know. They know people that you don't know from their liberation days and from their current role in the UN and elsewhere. But there was this feeling, I think, that there was a policy which was quite a lot of work with Muslim-majority countries and countries in the region, and countries on the Security Council, but nothing much to learn from South Africa. That was a little bit the feeling I got, anyway. Mbeki would certainly have liked to have spoken to the P.M. a little bit more along those lines.

A bit similar on Zimbabwe, I think. There wasn't much of an understanding of the political difficulties – though Mbeki did try to explain this a couple of times to the Prime Minister – the political difficulties of South Africans, of a South African government coming out in favour of the international condemnation of Mugabe when there was so much sympathy for him inside the country. I saw this myself whenever there was an African Union or regional gathering, SADC (South African Development Community) meeting. When there were visitors from the other countries in the region, a roar would go up when Robert Mugabe appeared. I think popular feeling was, yes, he'd used terrible methods and no, he wasn't the kind of person you'd like running your own country, but he put two fingers up to whitey. Also, the belief that there was an underlying unfairness and injustice which was that the land had been taken in the first place and OK, rough and ready measures of getting it back, but that was justice, whereas in South Africa they hadn't done that. Mbeki always said – and he was right in this, I think - that from the point of view of other African countries, they were the real Africans. There were the Gaddafis, the dictators who were running things with a rod

of iron; and then there were the patsies who were just dealing with the former colonial powers and the US and were fronting up for big business. That was the box they wanted to put Mbeki in. Sometimes I saw with Prime Minister Blair the beginning of the understanding, ‘Gosh, maybe this guy has got the political dilemmas that I’ve got,’ rather than, ‘Why aren’t you supporting us on Zimbabwe? Why don’t you just tell him not to do it?’ There was another element in South Africa which they’ve still cling to: an enormous faith in dialogue. Because it had worked, in the end, for them, they really did believe the only thing you had to do was to sit down round a table. I’m sure they would have said the same with Hitler or Stalin. In the end you’ve just got to talk. That was a strong strain. In any case, we were not happy with the stance that the South African government was taking, which was to keep having visits, to keep having envoys, to keep speaking behind the scenes, to no effect. On the other hand, sanctions had no effect either, so it was probably a draw on that. But it soured relationships and it reminded everyone of our historic role in the region in a very negative way.

I think there was sometimes some naivety on the part of the British government that we would always be seen as people of good will and good faith, when our track record in the region was of duplicity and letting people down. I think if we had been Danish or Norwegian, we might have been a bit more credible, but it didn’t take much to remind people that the original land distribution in South Africa had not been Afrikaner, it had been the Brits in the early part of the twentieth century who had first of all divided up the land and in Zimbabwe they were trying to put that right. It definitely soured the last couple of years that I was there and it reduced the number of things on which we could usefully co-operate internationally, but we did still retain a very good relationship at sector level.

They weren’t an aid-recipient country which was another thing the South Africans felt very strongly about. They were offered all sorts of aid in 1994 from everywhere in the world and they just said no. Trevor Manuel, who was the Finance Minister, said, ‘Your development minister’ (who was visiting and who wanted to see the President and the Finance Minister,) ‘What you say is development we call politics here. It’s who gets what. And that’s my decision, not yours.’ We did have good technical co-operation and there were quite a lot of exchanges, but we didn’t have a big aid programme. We had the regional office for DFID, a very good one.

I'll finish on that, my team in South Africa, which was a real privilege. It was a large team because we had representatives from most government departments. In particular, we had a very large defence mission, because President Mandela, in his reverence for British institutions, had insisted that the British should be the one who should help in the transformation of the three armed forces, the South African Defence Force, the uMkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC and another set of military which were from the homelands - each of the homelands in the pre-'94 set-up had their own military. The great challenge was to forge all these into a new South African Defence Force. Help with that job fell to the British Military Advisory Team. They were on the ground and just great, often far better tuned in to what was happening in South Africa, with ordinary South Africans, than those of us who were dealing in the political realm. That was one group. We had a large trade mission based in Johannesburg, also part of the team. A big British Council, consular people in Cape Town and so on. It was about fifty people from home and about another hundred and fifty locally-engaged staff. A big visa operation for the rest of the region, based in Pretoria. I used to have a management meeting every week when we'd all sit round and report what we were doing. My approach was that I was a support function. Instead of saying, 'You do this; you do that,' I would say, 'What's DfID got on? Can I come and open a door, go and see a minister or bring the flag car or whatever?' Similarly with the military and everyone else. These were people who were mutually quite suspicious of each other; just wanted to get on with their own job and didn't want to spend much time with the others. Especially, I guess, there was a desk-level resistance to meeting the military and vice versa, from most of the civil servants.

One transformative visit we organised: a trip to the Eastern Cape, one of the poorest but most populous provinces in South Africa. We all went together; there must have been about fifty of us including drivers and everyone else. We went to Port Elizabeth, one of the important cities in the area, as a team. I went and met the Mayors and State Governors; we had a trade exhibition; we saw some DFID projects; we had the military showing what they were doing in the area. Just travelling together, staying overnight in fairly basic places, it was great. I managed to get the Financial Times correspondent, James Lamont, to come with us and to explain to us how we could write and what we should highlight, if we were to write up this trip à la Financial Times. That was real fun. On the last day he did a sort of debrief and said we should do a box on what we were doing with the military and one of the projects should be highlighted with photos and so on. It just proved that if you're trying deliberately to create

a team there are plenty of things you could do. I did rather smile when Boris Johnson said that one of the things that would happen with the merger of DFID and the Foreign Office would be that the ambassador would be able to have authority. I thought, well, they always did. I always took the view that I was appointed by the Queen not by the Foreign Secretary and I represented not only the whole of Whitehall but anyone – trades unions, musicians, or anyone else who wanted to come and be part of Britain in South Africa. I do appreciate that I was very lucky; I had some super people in all those departments. It is much easier to have a united front in country than it is to make it work in Whitehall where you've got so many more considerations. I think you just have to accept that that is part of your job and that you're leading the whole team, and especially not going in and saying that the Foreign Office is in charge, because I really do believe that our role is to use our languages, our knowledge and our contacts on behalf whoever might need them. In the course of that you can then set out priorities and suggest policies that are optimal, but you're probably not going to be delivering them, so I think on all those fronts, I did feel quite strongly that we did a good job in South Africa in presenting a British team that understood what each element of it was trying to do. That was a highlight, I think, that trip. I've never forgotten it, partly because it was such fun, but also because thereafter I noticed that we really did start to hum.

I should note the handing over of the Cape Town office. Before '94 the old government had spent half its time in Cape Town. Parliament only met for six months and so it moved down there, or elements moved down there and the administrative government was in Pretoria. That stopped being a shift in a formal way in '94, but our mission retained a fairly large presence and indeed a very wonderful house in Cape Town as well as in Pretoria. For historic reasons we had a very beautiful building inside what would be the equivalent of the parliamentary estate in Westminster, in Cape Town. Right opposite the entrance to Parliament, which again is a very beautiful building, there was a very grand building with the coat of arms and a Union flag. I did think this was a bit much. I did say to people who were querying this in London, 'Imagine if we'd had the stars and stripes inside the fence of Parliament. It really isn't appropriate.' Plus, because of security, it was very difficult to get in and out; it was very difficult and we had, two streets away, a pretty large commercial office and consular office which could easily accommodate the two or three of us who worked on political issues and that not for the whole time, as we were mostly in Pretoria. I managed to negotiate with the South Africans, but more importantly with London, the transfer of that building. Some of my predecessors were resistant to that, said I had no sense

of history and so on. It was precisely because I had a sense of history that I was keen to make that shift. In the end there was a wonderful day when I was able to roll up the flag and hand it to our military representative and hand the key to the Foreign Minister. A couple of the ministers were in tears; I hadn't expected that. Afterwards several people said, 'That was something; that really did matter.' I think it was only right: it was a silly thing to have lasted so long. It was quite symbolic, I think, and I was very pleased to have been the person who was there when it happened. Another highlight.

CM: There's one little detail. When we started and I was making my introduction to the recording I said 'Dame Ann Grant' and you said, very firmly, 'I'm not a dame.' You had one of the most important jobs at the top of the Foreign Office; it's an acknowledgement that's given to very senior diplomats and civil servants for the roles that they've played. You were offered the title and you turned it down and I wondered if you would place on record your thinking on this.

AG: This is a difficult one, because I think there's only one thing worse than accepting an honour and that is refusing it and saying you were offered it. It's enormously arrogant. I think it was Baroness Trumpington saying something. I said no, no, I hadn't accepted it. And she said, 'You must think an awful lot of yourself!' I thought that's a very good point. I will say first of all I really have an objection to the honours system, especially in so far as it applies to the Civil Service. My view is that we do a job; it's a great and interesting job. We're well paid for it, I believe, and that's great. So why do we need an honour as well? I'm all for people who save people's lives, world-class surgeons, or people who have done thankless voluntary work for twenty or thirty years. That's what the honours system should be for. It's a little bit better now, but when I joined, for example, you got a CMG (Companion of St Michael and St George) when you were head of department. I put on record on my file that I didn't believe in honours. When I got to Mozambique, the Mozambicans were thinking of setting up an honours system because they had so little else to reward people with and I went off on my high horse, 'You don't want to go down that road.' My ambassador, unbeknown to me, put on my file something like, 'In the unlikely event that Miss Grant should be considered for an honour, I happen to know ...'. I was offered a CMG when I was head of department and then when I was appointed to South Africa the assumption was that I would be a dame either when I went or shortly afterward, and I said no. The Permanent Secretary at the time said, 'Yes, I know, people say that, but then when they're offered it, sometimes they change their mind.' I think it was devalued. I'd seen

people who were really mediocre get it simply because of where they sat. There used to be a tradition – I hope it's stopped – that when The Queen visited, if you were in Cyprus or some random place she was coming through, you got one. I'm unusual in that I find it shocking. Anyway, that was me. The South Africans were always puzzled by hereditary and non-hereditary. They kept asking me about Baroness Chalker, whether she would still keep her title when she wasn't in government. That kind of thing obviously didn't impress a former liberation movement in any case, so there was no work-related benefit at all. I've since discovered, since I've left the Office a couple of people have said to me, 'I do think you were very badly treated on your way out.' I thought, Gosh, is there something I didn't know? I think that was the belief: why didn't she get one? Of course, what you can't do is say I was offered one. I think that is the most snobbish of anything. I do believe, as I say, it's a system that's long outlived its use and I know people often say that it's for their parents, or their team, and I think there are better ways of pleasing your parents or your team. I feel quite strongly about it. I'm not a royalist either and I think it's very interesting that when you join the Office you have to say you're not a Fascist and not a Communist, but you are assumed to be not a republican which is much more relevant. That's me really.