



## **Making social worlds**

*South African passbooks*

### **Geoff Budlender, Advocate of the Supreme Court:**

Well the Passbook was a document which all Africans had to carry from the age of sixteen. They had to produce it on demand. It was a criminal offence to fail to produce it on demand.

### **Michael Masote, Violinist:**

It was always in my back pocket. It was easy. Because when they say 'Pass', you always, you have to go to the back and then produce it and give it to this man. He knows what he's looking for.

### **Sheila Masote, Educator:**

The women's passes were, it was a long, it could be about eight inches long. And then they made, because it's for women. They made a pouch that long, with a string. So and when people say 'we forget them'. They say 'put them around your necks'. And then you'd see women with this. Some women, we will not do that.

### **Sheena Duncan, Past president 'Black Sash' (civil rights organisation):**

Well, it was everything. It was whether you were allowed to look for a job. Whether you were allowed to work in a job. Whether you were eligible to have a house. It ruled your whole life, that system.

### **Geoff Budlender, Advocate of the Supreme Court:**

It was the, the core of your existence, was all in the passbook.

### **Michael Masote:**

In fact most of the time we do not understand all this hieroglyphics, that were stamped to say what does 'x' what mean and all that. We just know that it says permitted to remain in the proclaimed area of Johannesburg whilst you are a student, whilst you're a scholar. That type of thing. And in that pass also, there used to be what they used to call 'Poll Tax'. So they check whether you are a bone fide citizen of the city. Are you working? Have you paid Poll Tax? If you haven't, there's a big van waiting for you there. You will be thrown in there, and you'll spend fourteen days in prison.

### **Prof. Deborah Posel:**

Apartheid was unthinkable without a particular conception of what a state was entitled to do. A particular imagining of the prerogatives of power. And that was a notion that the state had both the entitlement, and the responsibility to regulate, to order the society in as systematic and thoroughgoing a way as possible. At a time when many other parts of the developed world were not doing things like finger printing people, and requiring identity documents, this country was far ahead of the game.