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University of California  
Berkeley, California

Amini Mturi  
THE LEAKEY FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT: AMINI MTURI

Interviews conducted by  
Virginia Morell  
in 2003

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[End of Interview]

**Interview 1: May 20, 2003**

[Begin Audio File 1]

01-00:00:00

Morell: Okay we're recording too. This is an interview with Dr. Amini Mturi for the Leakey Foundation and UC Berkeley Bancroft Library. It's part of the oral history project about Louis and Mary Leakey. So, welcome, Dr. Amini Mturi.

01-00:00:16

Mturi: Thank you very much.

01-00:00:18

Morell: So what I like to do when I start these interviews is just to have the person tell me a little bit about how they came to meet the Leakeys, what was the initial point of contact.

01-00:00:29

Mturi: Well, I think my first meeting or contact with the Leakeys was in 1967 in Dakar, Senegal during the Pan-African Congress for Prehistory and Quaternary Studies. That was my first meeting. By then I was already working with the Tanzanian government as the assistant conservator, but at that particular moment I was a student at the Institute of Archaeology-London, London University. I went to Dakar for this congress and both Louis and Mary were there because they had been always attending these congresses. They were the ones we initiated—the first one in 1948 in Nairobi.

01-00:01:24

Morell: So when you met them—you knew about the Leakeys already from their work here in Tanzania, I think.

01-00:01:31

Mturi: Yeah, of course, I knew about their work. First as a Tanzanian and as I was working with the Department of Antiquities, but also, of course, as a student of archaeology, definitely you couldn't do archaeology, especially African prehistory, without knowing what the Leakeys were doing at Olduvai!  
[chuckling]

01-00:01:53

Morell: Right! So at that meeting, you had been—you were already working then for the Tanzanian government in the Antiquities Department?

01-00:02:02

Mturi: Yes.

01-00:02:03

Morell: And you had a degree in archaeology or some training?

01-00:02:06

Mturi: No. My first degree was in history from Makerere and then I went—after joining the Department of Antiquities of the Tanzanian government, I then

went for postgraduate studies in the London Institute of Archaeology, where I then studied archaeology, so archaeology—I did it as my second degree rather than the first one.

01-00:02:31

Morell:

And did you decide at that point that you were going to specialize in this early period of Tanzanian prehistory? The hominid archaeology? What was your line of work?

01-00:02:47

Mturi:

Basically really I wasn't thinking of specializing in any period, because I was the first Tanzanian to be trained in archaeology. I think it would be unlikely to specialize on anything at that particular time. I just expected to do general archaeology and—first of all, as a member of the Department of Antiquities, they was supposed to take care of all periods, both in terms of research and in terms of conservation.

01-00:03:22

Morell:

That's a lot!

01-00:03:23

Mturi:

Yes.

01-00:03:25

Morell:

To take care of all [of it]. So in Dakar, in the Senegal, you were introduced to the Leakeys? Or had they heard about you? Did they know that you were pursuing archaeology?

01-00:03:36

Mturi:

Well, they had, but we hadn't met, so I was introduced first by my boss then who was the conservator of antiquities, Hamo Sassoon, who was also attending the meeting.

01-00:03:48

Morell:

[trying to pronounce name]

01-00:03:48

Mturi:

Hamo.

01-00:03:48

Morell:

Hamo Hassoon?

01-00:03:50

Mturi:

Sassoon. Yeah. Who was also attending the meeting. Of course he knew the Leakeys because he used to visit them at Olduvai, so he was the one who first introduced me. Then of course also at that particular time, the late [J.] Desmond Clark was there also and that's how we came to know each other.

01-00:04:10

Morell:

And after that initial contact did they encourage you to come see them at Olduvai? Or what followed after your first meeting?

- 01-00:04:20  
Mturi: Well, actually, if I might admit—my first encounter wasn't very encouraging.
- 01-00:04:26  
Morell: It was not.
- 01-00:04:30  
Mturi: Kind of a disappointment, or kind of frustrating, especially with Louis. By then I had been discussing with the university or perhaps continuing with my studies to do a higher degree, and as we talked in Dakar with Hamo and people like Desmond Clark, they said, "Well, if you're going to do a higher degree, why don't you go and work in Olduvai?" So I said, "Well, if the Leakeys welcome me, I'll be prepared to work in Olduvai." But then when Leakey—Louis, was told about it he just gave a flat no.
- 01-00:05:06  
Morell: Really!
- 01-00:05:07  
Mturi: [chuckling] Yes.
- 01-00:05:08  
Morell: Oh how interesting. [chuckling]
- 01-00:05:10  
Mturi: Which rather surprised me because he knew that I was coming back to work with the Department of Antiquities. Anyway, there is no way he could avoid me.
- 01-00:05:21  
Morell: Yes, yes. Why create an enemy.
- 01-00:05:24  
Mturi: Right. Why create—but I think that was just Louis and he just said a flat no and everybody was really surprised.
- 01-00:05:30  
Morell: Now do you think—[technical interruption by videographer not transcribed] So do you think that that was—that Louis said no because he was interested in keeping Olduvai for himself? That he'd worked so long there and they'd only started making their discoveries? What did you make of this?
- 01-00:06:05  
Mturi: Well, I thought that was the reason—that he really wanted to keep Olduvai to himself. But also, I think, the Leakeys weren't really interested in training people.
- 01-00:06:18  
Morell: In training Africans.

- 01-00:06:20  
Mturi: Africans. Perhaps this could be the true reason, but I think the basic reason was that he wanted to keep Olduvai to himself, and I thought if he had to train a Tanzanian then the chances probably were I'll come back and take over!
- 01-00:06:33  
Morell: Take it away.
- 01-00:06:34  
Mturi: Take it away! [chuckling]
- 01-00:06:37  
Morell: He wanted to keep it as a—
- 01-00:06:39  
Mturi: I didn't know what Mary thought about it, but I think she wasn't happy about it, but anyway—.
- 01-00:06:45  
Morell: About his—you don't think she was happy about his refusal.
- 01-00:06:48  
Mturi: Yeah, but then, at that particular time Mary was in the shadow and there's no way she could work against Louis, so perhaps she just accepted the no. But fortunately enough, I never went for that training, and I finished my studies in London and then I came back and took over as head of the Department of Antiquities.
- 01-00:07:13  
Morell: And what year was that? What year did you return to take over the Department of Antiquities?
- 01-00:07:18  
Mturi: That was in 1968.
- 01-00:07:19  
Morell: Sixty-eight—okay, so Louis lived for about four more years. By '68 he was really not working so much at Olduvai. It was really kind of Mary's work.
- 01-00:07:30  
Mturi: Of course, as you say, you are right, at that particular period it was really Mary who was working in Olduvai and occasionally Louis came, especially when there was a major discovery. And actually throughout my first visit when I came back in '68, my first visit to Olduvai, I met Mary and she was very, very friendly. She welcomed me and encouraged me to work with her, so from that time I developed my very good relationship with Mary. I only met, actually, Louis at Olduvai once.
- 01-00:08:12  
Morell: One more time.

01-00:08:14

Mturi: One more time.

01-00:08:14

Morell: And did he remember this refusal from before?

01-00:08:19

Mturi: Well, I don't know whether he did, but that was 1969 and we had a kind of a meeting here organized by a German foundation with delegates from different countries of Africa, so he made a visit, and of course—he was good at publicity and everything—

01-00:08:39

Morell: Yes, he was.

01-00:08:40

Mturi: So once he knew that some people are visiting Olduvai, he came specifically for that and I remember when I was introduced again, he said, “Oh yes, I know Mturi—but he knows my wife better.” [laughter] So that was really my last meeting with Louis.

01-00:09:00

Morell: And what about when they had the—maybe this happened before you came back, but wasn't there a big ceremony when they returned *Zinjanthropus*—brought it back here to Tanzania?

01-00:09:13

Mturi: That was 1965, I think.

01-00:09:14

Morell: That was '65, so you were—

01-00:09:15

Mturi: I was still in Makerere. I was still a student.

01-00:09:16

Morell: You were still a student.

01-00:09:18

Mturi: I didn't participate in the ceremony.

01-00:09:20

Morell: Okay. So you began to work with Mary at Olduvai? I think she really encouraged you to begin some research on the prehistory of Africa?

01-00:09:31

Mturi: Well, actually my—working with Mary was that as the head of the Department of Antiquities, I had overall responsibility to see what was going on at Olduvai, so I called regularly, I think perhaps four or five times a year, visited Olduvai, stayed with her, but I didn't really work with her in Olduvai. It was my regular visit to see how she is—what's going on, if there are any



problems, especially in the field of management—because again, Olduvai is a remote place and you can't really manage it from Dar es Salaam, so we entrusted her with the management of the area to see what is going on, so I made it my habit to regularly visit her and see what is going on, discuss any problems and resolve them on site. And then of course, also annually also I had to renew her license.

01-00:10:30

Morell:

Was that always rather straightforward? Renew her excavation and research permits? Was this a political thing? Or were people pleased with the way the Leakeys had put Tanzania on the prehistory map?

01-00:10:46

Mturi:

No, I think it was a straightforward thing. There was no major problem with giving her the annual license, even when things became difficult after 1977, after the breakup of the East African community, and the border between Tanzania and Kenya was closed. Somehow I managed, with the support of the government, to renew her license and she had free access. She would travel to Nairobi any time she wanted. There was no problem. Even some of the colleagues who were working with her as a member of the research team, most of them, of course, made their first stop in Nairobi to see the museum, to see the collection there. So—it was also possible to work out to give them permits to cross the border. So as I say, there was no, really, even at that particular time when there was political problems in relations between Kenya and Tanzania, it didn't disrupt her work.

01-00:11:50

Morell:

And that's largely, I'm sure, because of what you did for her here in Dar es Salaam.

01-00:11:55

Mturi:

Yeah, yeah, of course—on the Kenya side there was no problem. It was the Tanzanian side—it was we who closed the border! [chuckling]

01-00:12:01

Morell:

Right, yes.

01-00:12:05

Mturi:

So it was for me then to work with the Tanzanian authorities to get the necessary clearance and then inform the people at the border and give all the papers.

01-00:12:16

Morell:

Were you ever—did that ever cause you any problems here in Dar es Salaam? Did people ever try to block you?

01-00:12:21

Mturi:

No, no. Well, once I had explained the situation to the government and the position and what she was doing, they said okay, so long as you can clear there will be no problem. Even when we had this Pan-African Congress in

Nairobi, some of the delegates, of course then they couldn't just come to Nairobi without visiting Olduvai, and still—I did all the clearance work and all the people who wanted to come to Olduvai, they did visit Olduvai.

01-00:12:49

Morell: They came.

01-00:12:49

Mturi: They came. It was not a problem.

01-00:12:52

Morell: So how did your relationship with Mary develop? You obviously had a good friendship with her. How did that come about?

01-00:13:02

Mturi: Well, as I say, this was really because partly as their colleague working in archaeology, I'm an archaeologist, but then also as—in a way as her boss.

01-00:13:18

Morell: [chuckling] Mary's boss.

01-00:13:19

Mturi: In a way I was her boss, because without me, without my permit, without my recommendation, she wouldn't be working there. And as I said, since I made this habit of regularly visiting her to see if there are any problems, then gradually we, at the end of the day, we ended up being not just colleagues but friends.

01-00:13:42

Morell: And what were the things that you liked about Mary?

01-00:13:46

Mturi: Well, I think Mary was a straightforward person. Friendly. She was a meticulous worker. She was very much concerned about details. But also, I think, she was also concerned about Olduvai as Olduvai, that the site should be maintained, the site should be not only seen as a research resource, but she was also concerned about developing Olduvai as an educational center where people could visit, see what is going on and also appreciate and enjoy whatever knowledge is being unearthed in Olduvai. [interruption by videographer to adjust lighting] [brief interruption in recording]

01-00:14:38

Morell: Okay. I'm recording. As you began to go out there and visit Olduvai, I believe you did some research with Mary, or there was some hominid skull that you worked on, Ndotu, or something.

01-00:14:53

Mturi: Yeah, that was at Ndotu, actually. The first person who informed me about the site was Mary, again. She said there is a site to the north—actually I think probably if you look at it in terms of geology, the Ndotu Masek—this way, of

course, they also used Ndutu and Masek, the two lakes, to name some of the beds in Olduvai. So if you look at it geologically, I think Ndutu will be an extension of the Olduvai Gorge, but Mary was the one who first informed me about the site. So I went to the site and inspected it. It was kind of an interesting site because you could only work during the dry season, because during the wet season, after the rains, the site was under water! [chuckling]

01-00:15:53

Morell:

So it's a low site. Very low.

01-00:15:57

Mturi:

Yeah, it's a low site and actually it looks as if the artifacts are being eroded from the lake beds during the rainy season. So I started working there in about 1970. Of course, while I was working there, I regularly again came to Olduvai to discuss various issues with Mary and what they were finding and if they had any problems and trying to correlate with the geology of Olduvai. Then I think it was in 1974 when I was—then I had excavated a site and exposed a horizon with artifacts and faunal materials and there was the Ndutu skull.

01-00:16:47

Morell:

And what age were these beds and the artifacts that you were finding?

01-00:16:51

Mturi:

I think the artifacts they are basically—there are some debates about it, but I think it's terminal or late Acheulean. We had some few bifaces in there. It will be really the upper part—well, probably we don't have a definite date, but I think by correlating the various dates and taking various {unintelligible} of where it is, I think it would be between 300,000 and 400,000 years.

01-00:17:23

Morell:

So a late form of *Homo erectus* of some sort?

01-00:17:25

Mturi:

Yeah, yeah. Well, it's in terms of morphology and anatomy the skull is what now we call archaic *Homo sapiens*.

01-00:17:34

Morell:

Achike? How do you spell that?

01-00:17:37

Mturi:

Archaic, ancient. A-R-C-

01-00:17:42

Morell:

Oh archaic. I'm sorry.

01-00:17:43

Mturi:

Archaic, yeah.

01-00:17:44

Morell:

I've got it. Archaic *Homo sapiens*. How interesting. That's really an important time period now.

- 01-00:17:53  
Mturi: Yeah.
- 01-00:17:53  
Morell: What was Mary's reaction as you began to work on that site? Did she come to see the excavation? Give you any guidance?
- 01-00:18:03  
Mturi: Well, I think she came once or twice. I don't remember, but as I say, it was near, Ndotu is very near Olduvai.
- 01-00:18:13  
Morell: About an hour away?
- 01-00:18:15  
Mturi: Yeah, about an hour away. As I recall, I think she came to the site once. Of course, she was busy, not only at Olduvai but at the same time sometimes while I was there she was away in the United States giving lectures and other things.
- 01-00:18:44  
Morell: And how much of the skull did you recover? Is it the cranium? Or the face?
- 01-00:18:50  
Mturi: It's basically the cranium.
- 01-00:18:51  
Morell: And what was Mary's reaction to this discovery?
- 01-00:18:58  
Mturi: I think—what did she say when she came to the site, she said—“Mturi, this is unfair.” I said, “Why?” “For us—we worked for years in Olduvai before discovering a hominid. And here you just come and dig a trench and here is a hominid!” [chuckling] I said, “Well, probably I'm luckier than you!” But of course she did it as a kind of a joke.
- 01-00:19:28  
Morell: Yeah, sure. But it's a nice joke. That is very lucky. It was a test trench that you were digging?
- 01-00:19:34  
Mturi: No, no, no. Of course she just put it to say—“Well, you put first the trench and then you find the skull. This is very, very unfair. We worked for years at Olduvai before we got *Zinj*.”
- 01-00:19:51  
Morell: That was very lucky for you.
- 01-00:19:52  
Mturi: Yeah [chuckling].

- 01-00:19:54  
Morell: So once that was found, I think—did she coauthor a paper with you? Or that was just—she left that entirely—
- 01-00:20:02  
Mturi: Yeah, she left that entirely for me.
- 01-00:20:03  
Morell: It was entirely for you.
- 01-00:20:03  
Mturi: Yeah, entirely for me.
- 01-00:20:04  
Morell: To work with.
- 01-00:20:05  
Mturi: Actually eventually I worked with Ron Clarke. He's the one who studied the skull, but of course my contact with Ron was again through Mary.
- 01-00:20:16  
Morell: Through Mary. And in terms of the people who worked with you on your excavation—did she supply you with some of her excavators? Or did you bring students from your—
- 01-00:20:26  
Mturi: No, I came with my own team from Dar es Salaam.
- 01-00:20:28  
Morell: You came with your own team.
- 01-00:20:30  
Mturi: Of course, I came with my own employees from Dar es Salaam and then I also recruited some casual workers from Ngorongoro. Of course, Ndotu again is in the Serengeti, so there are no people around, so if you wanted any people to assist you in anything, you had to go to Ngorongoro Conservation Area.
- 01-00:20:51  
Morell: And find some people to bring out.
- 01-00:20:51  
Mturi: Yeah, find some people there, yeah.
- 01-00:20:54  
Morell: And did she give you some assistance in terms of say, setting up your camp or helping you in organizing things? How did you go about it?
- 01-00:21:04  
Mturi: No, no—as I say, I was fully equipped with the department. We had all the logistics. We had our camping equipment, everything.

- 01-00:21:13  
Morell: And did she help you with research grants and getting some funding?
- 01-00:21:18  
Mturi: No. That work was by my own department.
- 01-00:21:23  
Morell: By the Tanzanian government.
- 01-00:21:25  
Mturi: Government, yeah.
- 01-00:21:26  
Morell: Did Mary ever help you look for money outside of Tanzania? Did she offer any assistance that way?
- 01-00:21:35  
Mturi: Well, she might anyway, in that actually, because I did apply for funding for several times especially—not for Ndutu, but when I was working in [Lake] Natron with the late Glynn Isaac, I was supported by the Leakey Foundation. I don't know whom they used as a referee—probably it could be Mary!  
[chuckling]
- 01-00:21:57  
Morell: Probably it was Mary.
- 01-00:22:00  
Mturi: But definitely, anyway, if I'd asked her for her support or for a recommendation, I know she would have given it.
- 01-00:22:06  
Morell: Did you go out to the Laetoli site when she had the footprint excavations underway? Were you able to visit that in your capacity as the director?
- 01-00:22:20  
Mturi: Yeah, actually, after she started working at Laetoli, most of the fieldwork was being done at Laetoli rather than Olduvai, though of course her best camp was still at Olduvai. So again, as I used to visit her regularly at Olduvai, I also used to visit her regularly at Laetoli while she was working there.
- 01-00:22:42  
Morell: And were you able to see the hominid footprint trail as that was being excavated?
- 01-00:22:48  
Mturi: Yes, I did.
- 01-00:22:49  
Morell: What was your reaction to that or what did Mary tell you about it too?

01-00:22:54

Mturi:

Well, of course, there are so many footprints. Of course, the first couple of footprints which we thought were hominid and they were still debatable—but of course, this one was spectacular and there was no argument about it.

01-00:23:09

Morell:

The second trail.

01-00:23:10

Mturi:

Yeah, the second trail. It was so obvious. So it was an exciting, really an exciting discovery, but I think by the time I learned about it and I visited it, I think the excitement has ended and everyone now is concentrating and seeing what it is and documenting and everybody—

01-00:23:31

Morell:

So it was more work rather than—

01-00:23:32

Mturi:

Yeah, it is more work than anything else.

01-00:23:34

Morell:

Did Mary take you along and describe the trail to you? Or show you some of the aspects of it?

01-00:23:43

Mturi:

Well, actually, what she did—she took me to all the sites, all the major sites and all the areas where they had made discoveries. This is usually what she did anytime if we asked her, she would take me around. Then, of course, for the footprints trail, she told me, explained, gave me her own opinion, what she thought, and all these things. So as I said, with her I had no problems. She was open and we would sit and discuss issues and she would show me anything if I wanted to see anything, so that was no problem.

01-00:24:22

Morell:

Were you able to continue with some research of your own at Ndotu? You said at Lake Natron you were also working on a site there? What were you doing there with Glynn Isaac?

01-00:24:36

Mturi:

Again—Lake Natron is one of these sites which is fairly hilly. Of course, Glynn and Richard worked at Natron in 1963, I think, and they recovered a hominid, which is, I think an australopithecine. Then the work stopped for some time and then, of course, Glynn also excavated two sites and recovered late Acheulean, early Acheulean materials and the dating there was about 1.5, so it was a fairly early site. But then, I think in 1978 or the late seventies, then again, together with Glynn Isaac we started work there and we were working as a team from Tanzania, Glynn from the United States, Maurice Taieb from France, and worked up with a team. Glynn and myself we did most of the archaeology and then Maurice Taieb did most of the geology. So again, during that time we, beside the sites which were worked by Glynn in the sixties, I

also surveyed and recorded two more major sites, one with early Acheulean and the other one it was late Acheulean, but we also, we did what people now call landscape archaeology or off-site archaeology, trying just to walk through the landscape and record whatever material is there in terms of artifacts, in terms of faunal materials, especially those with cut marks.

01-00:26:37

Morell:

With cut marks. Did Mary's work at Olduvai influence how you did your archaeology, how you did your excavations, or how you thought about research at these sites?

01-00:26:51

Mturi:

Yeah, of course, again, in a way that we came on back and forth in that we're trying to use Olduvai as a reference point. But of course, we really didn't do major excavations at Natron. It was mostly documentation, recording, and surface materials, but we did also—did some test excavations and, of course, we combined different methods, including what, of course you must tell that Mary was a very systematic excavator. But I think we followed her methodology in terms of detailed and systematic recording and documentation of whatever we found, and so I think she did influence, yes. But of course you also realize that we had Glynn who had worked with the Leakeys in Olorgesailie, so he's capable of taking two systems and trying to integrate them.

01-00:27:56

Morell:

So it's coming down from the Leakeys through Glynn to you. So there was this idea that, well, of course, the Ndutu site and Lake Natron too—you were trying to tie these in to the Olduvai record or connect them somehow with how these early hominids lived in this part of the East African landscape.

01-00:28:17

Mturi:

Yeah, sure, sure, of course, as I said, Olduvai, Laetoli, especially—Olduvai is one of the best-documented sites, not only in terms of archaeology but also in terms of dating, so always as I say we need to refer to what is happening in Olduvai and how what we are finding leads to Olduvai, and work in terms of chronology, in terms of hominid behavior, and also in terms of archaeological assemblages. Since, as I say, Mary has written the studies there on the stone tools, the artifacts, which they have recovered in Bed 1, Bed 2, and Bed 4, so there is no way that you could work in those areas without keeping going back and forth and referring to Olduvai, and again, of course also, you need to realize that as I said, even Natron, when looking at Lake Natron, we are dealing with the Plio-Pleistocene period, so you keep on saying, okay I'm finding these, how does it compare with Olduvai! [chuckling] Something you can't escape.

01-00:29:45

Morell:

So Olduvai is definitely the standard.



- 01-00:29:48  
Mturi: Yeah. Well, it is the standard—of course, it was really the standard up to a certain period, because Olduvai is only a sampling, part of the Plio-Pleistocene period, but for its part which is the sampling, it is one of the best documented, so there isn't really any other way you can work in that period without referring to what is happening—
- 01-00:30:13  
Morell: And especially because of that continuous record.
- 01-00:30:14  
Mturi: Yeah, all that continuous record.
- 01-00:30:17  
Morell: And did you—you must have been a student at the university when Louis and Mary found *Zinjanthropus*.
- 01-00:30:26  
Mturi: Yeah, I was.
- 01-00:30:27  
Morell: And what was your reaction when you heard about that?
- 01-00:30:29  
Mturi: I must admit I never heard about it.
- 01-00:30:31  
Morell: I'm sorry?
- 01-00:30:32  
Mturi: I never heard about it!
- 01-00:30:33  
Morell: You didn't hear about it. How interesting.
- 01-00:30:37  
Mturi: You see one problem, you realize, archaeology is a fairly specialized field and I must admit that this discovery is, of course, very important, but they didn't have a major impact on the Tanzanian scene because it's kind of a strange—by then it was a strange subject. People said, "What is it?" So I think, as I said, I was saying that, really, I never heard about it.
- 01-00:31:11  
Morell: You didn't hear about it. How interesting.
- 01-00:31:13  
Mturi: I heard about it later. Again, the problem again here, is as I said, first of all archaeology and prehistory, whatever it is, is kind of seen as a fairly specialized field.
- 01-00:31:25  
Morell: Here in Tanzania?

01-00:31:28

Mturi:

Well, in Tanzania in the context, as I said, I was the first Tanzanian to study archaeology, in the late sixties, so you can see that to the Tanzanians it is a field and actually everybody was surprised, they say, “How did you come to archaeology? How do come to work at the Department of Antiquities?” It was a kind of a field for expatriates.

01-00:31:55

Morell:

Yes.

01-00:31:59

Mturi:

So again, this is one area whereby, as I say, now things are changing with the University of Dar es Salaam now having an archaeology unit, but even there you will be surprised that hardly anybody applies for admission to that course because even in most of the secondary schools, they really don't know anything about archaeology. Most of the people who join the archaeology program there, they join after coming to the university—they applied for other things, other programs, and they have got a system of orientation week, one week where first-year students are being oriented into what is going on at the university and what is being offered. This really is the period when the unit gets students. So again, it's the impact archaeology has. It's very minimal in our educational system.

01-00:33:00

Morell:

It's a surprise given how important East Africa is in the evolution of humans. It's surprising, isn't it, that it doesn't get more attention here in its own country, the discoveries in its own—

01-00:33:13

Mturi:

Yeah, I think there are two reasons here: one is it's something remote and for a newly independent country they tend to say, “Well, but how relevant is this to our own development?” So even if you go to the teaching of history, they think more about the most recent periods, but also, I think it is economics. It is looked at as a kind of luxury.

01-00:33:46

Morell:

It's a luxury.

01-00:33:47

Mturi:

Yeah, but now I think, well, people are starting seeing it differently—it's knowledge, we need to know our origins, and Tanzania, East Africa, is making a major contribution in this field. So it's a thing we should be proud of, but needs to be encouraged, to keep on talking, and sometimes I say it—people they think it's a joke, but I say, “You guys, if you want to assess the impact of archaeology, the impact of what the Leakeys have been doing at Olduvai, you will be surprised that American students know more about Olduvai than Tanzanian students.

01-00:34:36

Morell:

[chuckling] What's the reaction from Tanzanians when they hear that?

01-00:34:41

Mturi:

Well, they—of course, it's a fact. It's a fact, as I say. They say "Why?" I say, "Well, there are a number of reasons." But of course, human origins is a typical subject in the United States, most of the funding comes from the United States. The Leakeys have been doing lecture programs and so it is widely known there.

01-00:35:07

Morell:

And there's money.

01-00:35:08

Mturi:

And there is money.

01-00:35:10

Morell:

And there are jobs associated with it.

01-00:35:11

Mturi:

Jobs, and so that's the situation. But as I say, things are now changing and probably again, as I said, we need on our own now, the university, the department here, the museums, to have more outreach programs. I've been going to schools, even as late as—about last year I was in the field in Kondoa where, of course, the Leakeys also worked on the rock paintings. You'll be surprised that I went to the villages where these rock features are located and most of the people, quite a number who don't know about them.

01-00:35:56

Morell:

They don't even know that they're there.

01-00:35:57

Mturi:

They're there—and I visited some primary schools, but even then, because the primary schools even, located perhaps within two or three kilometers of shelter rock paintings, their knowledge is minimal. So again, we need to have these educational outreach programs so that people can start relating their own history to what is going on in these remote places and remote ages. So well, it's not blaming anybody, but that's just the system.

01-00:36:41

Morell:

That's the system. So how—

01-00:36:43

Mturi:

Because you will be surprised even if you go there, not only in primary or secondary education—even at the university level.

01-00:36:57

Morell:

So how did you then—[interruption in recording, tape change] Okay, so I'm curious how you then decided, since it's not common for Tanzanians to be interested in prehistory, how you came to be interested in the subject, in archaeology.

01-00:37:13

Mturi:

Well, I think it's a very interesting question. People keep asking me, how did you decided to do archaeology? I say, actually—I did history myself. My first degree was in history, but I never know anything about archaeology, the way history was being taught, all right? I think I came to this really by accident. When we were students at the university, we always tried to look for temporary employment, to earn some money during our vacations and what I did—it sounds funny—I just took a government directory, looked at the various ministries and departments and then I saw this department called Antiquities. I didn't know what it meant actually. I knew it has to do something with ancient things. So I logically asked, I deduced that—it will be easier to get a job here because I think nobody else will apply. [laughter] Which I did! I got the job; I got a temporary employment.

01-00:38:28

Morell:

And there weren't other people applying for jobs. You were right.

01-00:38:31

Mturi:

I was the only one and I got it, and then because I was the only one, then almost it became where that every vacation I came to work at the Department of Antiquities.

01-00:38:44

Morell:

So you had on-the-job training.

01-00:38:46

Mturi:

Yeah, on-the-job training. And that's where really I got, then, I said, well, eventually they asked me, "Do you want to join the department?" I said, "Well, I think now I know what the department is supposed to be doing, after I have worked for three years in all the vacations." So I said, "Okay."

01-00:39:03

Morell:

And was this was Doctor Sassoon?

01-00:39:05

Mturi:

Yeah, Hamo Sassoon said, "Okay, you come and join." And then back then we have to go to study archaeology. I said, "Well, good." So that's really how I got initiated into the thing. It's one of these things which happens really. I joined the department; I didn't know anything about what they were supposed to be doing. I didn't know anything about archaeology. As I said, I did an honors degree in history at Makerere, but of course, by then when I was at Makerere, Professor [Merrick] Posnansky was there, but he was not teaching in the History Department, nor was he teaching prehistory. I think he was at the Institute of African Studies.

01-00:39:56

Morell:

There is no archaeology.

01-00:39:57

Mturi:

There was no archaeology there.

01-00:39:59

Morell:

Interesting. When you started working there at the Antiquities Department, what did you make of that field of research? Did it interest you? Aside from the fact that you could get a job.

01-00:40:10

Mturi:

Well, eventually, of course, me also doing history, eventually I said I was quite, the relationship between what was happening in the department and in history, so after—once I knew what the department was supposed to be doing and also I was doing history, so I said, “Okay, after all I’m not completely off side.” I think I’m doing something which is related to what I am studying. So I did see some connection between the two. [laughter]

01-00:40:44

Morell:

Right. So it made sense.

01-00:40:46

Mturi:

Right. It made sense, it made sense.

01-00:40:50

Morell:

And so then you were given real opportunities because you were a rare person, a Tanzanian who was interested in antiquities.

01-00:40:57

Mturi:

Yeah, a Tanzanian there, yeah.

01-00:40:59

Morell:

And Mary must have seen that too. She must have recognized that this was someone who was exceptional. That must have been another reason that she encouraged you.

01-00:41:09

Mturi:

Well, of course, as I said, perhaps Mary didn’t have much of an option, which is the truth. [chuckling] Probably we were the only two people, for quite a period, who could sit together and talk about archaeology in Tanzania.

01-00:41:29

Morell:

Wow. You and Mary.

01-00:41:31

Mturi:

Yeah, me and Mary.

01-00:41:34

Morell:

That’s amazing.

01-00:41:37

Mturi:

Of course there was somebody at the university, Dr. John Sutton, within the history department, he was in archaeology, but of course he was much more interested in the more recent period. So in the context of Tanzania, for quite a long time, if you talk about archaeology and anything about archaeological teaching or research, well, it’s Mary and me. So again, as I said, because of

the working relationship, when the [things] arise between what she was doing, what I was doing in the Department of Antiquities, probably they'll say it was just logical that we developed that way. As I said, she—probably it would have been difficult if it was Louis.

01-00:42:29

Morell: That's interesting. So you didn't find it a problem that it was a woman.

01-00:42:34

Mturi: No, no, I didn't.

01-00:42:35

Morell: That wasn't—it would have been more difficult if it had been the man, perhaps.

01-00:42:38

Mturi: Well, no, I think not because she's a woman—I think it's that they differ in character.

01-00:42:49

Morell: And how do you see that?

01-00:42:52

Mturi: Well, because after—let's admit that before 1972, nobody really—when we're talking about Olduvai, we knew about Louis. Louis was usually a domineering figure. And he didn't deliberately suppress Mary, but I think he kept her on the background.

01-00:43:15

Morell: And she was quiet also, by nature.

01-00:43:17

Mturi: Of course, yeah, by nature, she was quiet. Mary was doing most of the job, right.

01-00:43:21

Morell: She was doing the work.

01-00:43:23

Mturi: She was doing the work—she was doing the scientific work, and of course, Leakey, because of the way he did these things, was doing the publicity, and so people knew that it was Louis rather than Mary. So Mary, for a long time, worked under the shadow of Louis. And I say today, particularly because Louis is a domineering character, and he doesn't really want somebody else to come near him. [chuckling]

01-00:43:52

Morell: As you found out too, yourself.

01-00:43:54

Mturi: So, you know, Mary really came to her own after 1972.

- 01-00:44:00  
Morell: After he died.
- 01-00:44:01  
Mturi: After he died. Then she took over everything, not only the research work, but also the organization and the publicity, the fundraising. Then the reality of the time when people said, “So there was somebody else working in Olduvai!”  
[laughter]
- 01-00:44:19  
Morell: Did you notice a change in her character as she came out of Louis’s shadow and began to assert herself more?
- 01-00:44:31  
Mturi: No, to me, I didn’t really see much of a change, because as I said, *she* was the one who was working in Olduvai.
- 01-00:44:41  
Morell: You knew this already.
- 01-00:44:42  
Mturi: I knew that already. She was the one who, every time I went there, even in the research—she was the one who was assembling the research team; she was the one who was there coordinating, so to me it wasn’t really—I didn’t see any change. I think it was to the outside world, rather than me. Of course, I did realize it was really unfair. She was doing most of the job, but the credit and the publicity were someone else, who actually flies in once in a while, especially when there is a major discovery. But then, that’s how things are.
- 01-00:45:20  
Morell: Yeah, and he was doing the fundraising, so.
- 01-00:45:25  
Mturi: So, and of course, I think Mary said, “Okay. Don’t worry about that, Mturi, he is good at that and he is good at fundraising. I’m not good in that.” So what she’s doing—“He is promoting Olduvai, he is raising money, it supports our work, so why worry?”
- 01-00:45:47  
Morell: That was what she would say to you about it.
- 01-00:45:50  
Mturi: Yeah, yeah.
- 01-00:45:51  
Morell: So you did discuss this with her.
- 01-00:45:53  
Mturi: Yeah, we did discuss, we did discuss issues sometimes, but I said, “Well, it’s okay, but,”—Mary was a little bit shy. She would admit that, “Well, Louis is

good at that. He's good at organizing. He's good at publicity. He's pompous and I think he can better handle the Americans than myself." [laughter]

01-00:46:23

Morell: Yeah, he did too.

01-00:46:23

Mturi: Which is true, which is true.

01-00:46:27

Morell: So as you, over the years, saw Mary develop this way, didn't you help to arrange an honorary doctorate for her? Or have some influence on that here at the university?

01-00:46:40

Mturi: No, I didn't.

01-00:46:41

Morell: You didn't do that. I thought that was partly your work.

01-00:46:44

Mturi: No, I didn't.

01-00:46:45

Morell: But you were there. She began to get awards and recognition.

01-00:46:50

Mturi: Yeah, they were, yeah.

01-00:46:51

Morell: And how was she seen by other Tanzanians? Did they regard her as a strange mzungu woman working in this desert by herself? Or did people respect her for what she did? What was the attitude toward her?

01-00:47:10

Mturi: Well, again, as I said, she worked in Olduvai, but I think her contact with Tanzanians was minimal. Of course, besides the people at Ngorongoro who of course also assisted her in terms of logistics, I think we are—she had better contacts in Nairobi.

01-00:47:32

Morell: So she was more known for—

01-00:47:36

Mturi: Yeah, I think she was more known in Nairobi than on the Tanzanian side.

01-00:47:40

Morell: Even though she was doing her work here.

01-00:47:41

Mturi: Yeah, the work here, and I think, also—probably if the university here had had a teaching, an archaeological research and teaching program, probably



there would have been much more contact between her and the university, but then we had problems. It took us a lot of fighting to establish the program. It started in 1985 when she had really retired from field work.

01-00:48:09

Morell: Right, right. So it wasn't until '85 that there was an archaeological department at the university.

01-00:48:15

Mturi: At the university.

01-00:48:18

Morell: That's late, yeah.

01-00:48:19

Mturi: It's late, and again, I think, Mary also—she only gave about, throughout her lifetime, I think two public lectures about her work in Olduvai, but again, then—it's not her problem, because Leakey must have an audience, and you must have people interested in the subject, so again through my own initiative that I said, "Well, Mary I think"—she was prepared, not reluctant to give lectures.

01-00:48:53

Morell: You mean here in Tanzania.

01-00:48:55

Mturi: Yeah, but you need to invite her, somebody must organize and somebody must invite her. As I said, well, if the university was active then probably we could have developed a way whereby she could give annual lectures, but even to try to convince the university that they needed, this university, to establish a research and training program in archaeology—the reaction was rather negative. We had to push on for more than ten years.

01-00:49:29

Morell: My goodness. Was that just because they felt that they didn't really need archaeologists?

01-00:49:34

Mturi: Well, again, as I said, a young country and a young university, they had their own priorities, and probably archaeology—archaeology, it's a little bit remote you know. It's not one of their priorities. So as I said, if we had this program earlier, probably Mary would have had much more impact on the Tanzanian scene, but then we had no forum. No forum! [chuckling]

01-00:50:05

Morell: Yeah, the Department of Antiquities, and that was it!

01-00:50:07

Mturi: Well, the Department of Antiquities, then we—actually the first public lecture which she gave in Dar es Salaam—I had to kind of force it anyway—was

organized by the Tanzanian Society, which is a society which, of course, is a multidisciplinary—it encompasses everything, the social sciences, the natural sciences, people who were interested in Tanzania as Tanzania. So, well, to them, this could be a topic. By then, through the society it could make it a regular annual program, see, because we have diverse interests. So—again, as I said, one of the basic reasons that the Leakeys and their work in Olduvai and Laetoli didn't have much impact in Tanzania is really much of a Tanzanian problem.

01-00:51:00

Morell: More of a Tanzanian problem.

01-00:51:01

Mturi: A problem—that we had it to cultivate, to develop that audience, and as I said, without really a program with the university and more input in the secondary schools, you can't develop that audience.

01-00:51:17

Morell: No, you can't, yeah, that's true. And what about at this point in time? If you're looking back at what Louis and Mary did at Olduvai Gorge, first as a professional in their field, how do you regard, how would you assess their work and their accomplishments?

01-00:51:38

Mturi: Well, first of all, I think we look [at] it in the context not of Tanzania, but in the development of paleoanthropology in general, that I think their work had a major impact, especially after 1959. After the discovery of the famous *Zinj* and then resources were made available to the Leakeys through the National Geographic Society. And then Mary's meticulous, systematic work. First of all, first of all, the *Zinjanthropus* itself was a major breakthrough and it changed the perspective of a lot of people, how we looked at human origins.

01-00:52:24

Morell: Absolutely.

01-00:52:26

Mturi: First of all, it was the first radiometrically-dated hominid remain. It can—now came a point, they say, no, now I think human origin goes much far back than what we thought. Not only that, but he added almost a million years to the {type chronology?}, so that one itself was a major—it changed the whole perception, not only about Tanzania, but actually about human origins, how old are we? Where did we start? Okay that's one area where Olduvai or Leakeys had a major impact.

The second major impact, it comes basically through Mary's work. Once with the discovery of *Zinj* and then funding and her meticulous excavations and exposure of what she called living floors, which she considered pictures of artifacts, faunal materials, in striated areas which you could relate to hominid finds. Now that again opened up a wider debate in terms of hominid behavior.

It's really the work of Mary Leakey, especially the excavations in Bed 1 and Bed 2 that people now started testing various hypotheses about human behavior—the whole question of home base, the center for {a living place?}, really which of course, I knew that Glynn Isaac was upbeat about it, he was the one who—but actually he developed it out of what has been developed at Olduvai.

01-00:54:19

Morell: What Mary had done.

01-00:54:20

Mturi: And besides. Okay, then the whole issue about hunting, scavenging, and all these things. So again, Mary, as I said, in terms of paleoanthropology, a lot of what we are debating today, the various issues about biocultural hominid behavior—what we are debating today, really, were generated, first of all through Mary's work at Olduvai.

01-00:54:49

Morell: So she really set the stage.

01-00:54:53

Mturi: Yeah, yeah. That's one major impact. The second one, I think, again is her methodology. Of course, now people are saying perhaps we concentrated too much on a site, an area, and we excavated systematically. Perhaps this horizon doesn't give us enough data to understand the whole spectrum of hominid behavior. But I think it was a good starting point. Of course now we have what is called offsite archaeology, what's now called landscape archaeology. But of course, we are developing stage by stage, but probably without that area, glimpses of what is there at Olduvai and what is the association between hominid remains, faunal remains, stone tools, and what does this mean—probably even these other approaches wouldn't really have developed.

01-00:55:58

Morell: So she made the baseline.

01-00:56:02

Mturi: The baseline. Of course, we disagree people are whatever, now perhaps, her interpretations aren't necessarily correct perhaps, but I think she did her best, she produced the evidence, and we've started debating about the evidence. At least there was something to debate about! [chuckling]

01-00:56:28

Morell: Within Tanzania, how are the Leakeys viewed at this point in time. Are they well known? Or is that, again, something like you were saying, children really don't know—

01-00:56:42

Mturi: Well, Leakey is Leakey. People know. They know Olduvai. At least, they know about the Leakeys. If you go through the secondary schools, what is being discovered in Olduvai is being mentioned.

- 01-00:57:02  
Morell: It is mentioned.
- 01-00:57:03  
Mturi: It is mentioned, or it's supposed to be there.
- 01-00:57:05  
Morell: It's supposed to be there [chuckling].
- 01-00:57:06  
Mturi: But again, the problem is, you can have something incorporated in the curriculum—how to deliver it. Do you have the people to deliver that proper curriculum? So it *is* appreciated; it is included, especially after 1973. And I think this happened, again, through my own influence, because there was some time when the Department of Antiquities was in the Ministry of Education, so we tried to fight and say, okay we need to incorporate these things. Eventually, they were incorporated in the syllabus and if you go to the biology syllabus, they talk about evolution and particularly mention the Leakeys and their work at Olduvai. But again the problem—I have done some evaluation that the delivery is problematic, the teachers themselves are not well informed! That's one. Secondly—you'd be surprised again, people—when I say this people say, “Well, but no, I think you are exaggerating.” But I say, “This is a fact.” I say, “To most of Tanzanians, it is as if research work at Olduvai stopped after the discovery of *Zinjanthropus*.”
- 01-00:58:24  
Morell: [chuckling] That's interesting!
- 01-00:58:28  
Mturi: When I mean it stopped, it means all the discoveries are not known.
- 01-00:58:32  
Morell: They're not known.
- 01-00:58:33  
Mturi: Even Laetoli! The footprints.
- 01-00:58:35  
Morell: Really. The footprints aren't known.
- 01-00:58:36  
Mturi: So if you go and talk with secondary school teachers—“Ah *Zinjanthropus*, *Zinjanthropus*.” Ask them about Olduvai—what's the significance of Olduvai, they'll say *Zinjanthropus*, that's the end of the story.
- 01-00:58:46  
Morell: Oh my goodness.
- 01-00:58:48  
Mturi: So it looks as if—again as I said, it's as if after the Leakeys discovered *Zinjanthropus*, work stopped. No more research was done.

01-00:59:04

Morell: But that's of course when work began.

01-00:59:06

Mturi: No more discoveries were made. So if you talk about other hominid remains, like those of *Homo habilis*, or *Homo erectus*, you will draw a blank. Up to today.

01-00:59:20

Morell: Amazing, amazing.

01-00:59:22

Mturi: I did see the evaluation I did with some schools, as I said, about a year ago in all aspects. Oh they'll say, "Oh yes, Olduvai, yes, *Zinjanthropus* yes." Even today, still, even when the media, once in while talks about what is happening in Olduvai, they still refer to Olduvai as the cradle of mankind. And of course—when they say the cradle of mankind, they talk about *Zinjanthropus*. They don't know that even Laetoli is older than Olduvai.

01-00:59:54

Morell: And they're not aware of the footprint trail?

01-00:59:56

Mturi: No, they are not aware of the footprints. They are not aware of the other hominid remains. They are not even—what I'll say—"What are you talking about Olduvai. Now I'm going to look at it in the context of East Africa." Even if you look at the context of East Africa, we have other sites, many sites in Kenya, in Ethiopia. So people talking of Olduvai as the cradle of mankind is the wrong concept. But this is the situation, I say, up until now as I'm talking. If anybody today, they ask me this—they say it's to write something about Olduvai, you just talk about *Zinjanthropus* and talk about Olduvai as being the cradle of mankind.

01-01:00:34

Morell: What do you think it will take to change that? To merge that prehistory period into the record of teaching or the awareness of Tanzanians about their own history, the history of humankind.

01-01:00:51

Mturi: Well, there are two main approaches. And I say, it's fortunate that the archaeology unit has been there at the university since 1985. It's more than fifteen years. It's now about eighteen years. But the linkage there is even minimal—I would have expected now that, and they would be surprised—archaeology is housed in the Faculty of Education. I would have expected by now, at least, they would have a linkage between what is happening at the archaeology unit and what is happening at the Faculty of Education in terms of teacher training. So some of the people who are taking education who are going to be teachers, they should take some courses being offered by the archaeology unit. But we are now saying, I'm sure it's now being propagated and sold that way, but at the moment I can't say how many teachers or people

taking education in the university are also doing some courses being offered by—so that's one of the—eventually we will send teachers to the secondary schools who are knowledgeable about human origins, about prehistory.

The second aspect that we need to look at—not at the curriculum. The curriculum, I don't see a problem. It's—okay, as I said, you have the curriculum; it's a piece of paper. You don't have the people to deliver, and then you haven't even equipped the teachers in terms of literature. You see—as I said, it's a kind of specialized field. Up until now, let's admit that it's now that perhaps more Tanzanians are doing research. But most of the research was being done, again, by foreign researchers.

01-01:02:52

Morell: Still. That's still the case.

01-01:02:54

Mturi: It's still the case.

01-01:02:55

Morell: Olduvai is still—

01-01:02:55

Mturi: It's still the case and whatever is published is published in specialized journals which are not available in this country. So again, what we need ourselves is Tanzanian archaeologists here working within the department, the museum, and the archaeology unit. Perhaps we should work out a program with the Ministry of Education of how we can, on a regular basis deliver this information, deliver information—so they are incorporated into the teaching programs at the various schools. The textbook I'm going through—the textbook is out of date, very much out of date.

01-01:03:35

Morell: You were saying that there are about seven Tanzanians who've done degrees in paleoanthropology.

01-01:03:41

Mturi: Yeah.

01-01:03:42

Morell: And do any of them work here in Tanzania now?

01-01:03:44

Mturi: Well—I'm talking about those who attended through the Department of Antiquities.

01-01:03:50

Morell: They were trained through the—okay, okay.

01-01:03:52

Mturi: I think all of them are in the States now.

- 01-01:03:54  
Morell: They're all in the States.
- 01-01:03:55  
Mturi: Yeah. Of course, those who are trained through the archaeology unit, as I said, all of them are back there. Now they are lecturers.
- 01-01:04:04  
Morell: They're the lecturers at the university.
- 01-01:04:07  
Mturi: At the university. So that one—and they are doing research, but of course, some of them are not—some are doing—I think it's only one who is interested in the study of human origins, but I think that's adequate for the time being. Now of course, as I said, there are more now within the university. More and more students are taking archaeology and we hope that most of these will eventually be absorbed into the National Museum, the Department of Antiquities. So that probably we will have more and more people, more and more Tanzanians working in archaeology in general. Some, of course, will specialize in paleoanthropology, and I think this will help in developing awareness among the Tanzanian public. But I think to me, the crucial thing is integrating what we are doing, the results we are getting from our research came to the educational system. Without that—
- 01-01:05:12  
Morell: So that kids hear about it from the time they start growing up.
- 01-01:05:15  
Mturi: Yeah, yeah.
- 01-01:05:16  
Morell: And did you discuss this problem with Mary? Did you talk to Mary about the lack of awareness of the discoveries—your discoveries, her discoveries?
- 01-01:05:26  
Mturi: Yeah, I did, not in a very systematic, but occasionally we did discuss these issues, and of course she did understand the problem, but as I said, “What can I do?”
- 01-01:05:37  
Morell: Especially considering where she was based in Olduvai.
- 01-01:05:40  
Mturi: Again, Olduvai is kind of a remote place. It's kind of a remote place. Of course I know some schools do occasionally visit Olduvai. They do. But I think again, because of the framework and the structuring of the system, in terms of our educational system—more knowledge about the recent periods, especially those monuments which are much more related to our recent history, perhaps are much more known, much more visited by schools.

I know the museum has an educational department. I think now they are really changing and reshaping themselves towards another {enrollment?} for quite a time. That's another area where we are now trying to see how the antiquities department in the museum. They could develop a much more systematized outreach program so that they would have contacts, because we don't need to wait for this information to be through the formal publications. How we can have—we can disseminate this information to the teachers, what is really happening, things that have been happening in Olduvai after the discovery of *Zinj*! [laughter]

01-01:06:59

Morell: That is funny! A lot of things!

01-01:07:04

Mturi: Yeah, a lot of things! A lot of things! But in reading through textbooks, reading through the media, and I listen to the teachers—*Zinj, Zinj, Zinj*.

01-01:07:13

Morell: *Zinj* is it.

01-01:07:15

Mturi: That's the end of it. When I say, after all, *Zinj* is not the most important in terms of hominids.

01-01:07:21

Morell: Just the first.

01-01:07:22

Mturi: But, of course, in terms of discovery and impact, fair enough. But then, we want to look at it in terms of human origin and its relationship with the whole system, *Zinj* now is on the sidelines.

01-01:07:38

Morell: [chuckling] That's funny. Did you have other stories, other memories about Mary that you wanted to share in this record?

01-01:07:48

Mturi: Well, I think I have said most of what I would like to say. The only thing, of course, that it was unfortunate that she did retire early from field work. And of course, her retirement was not because of age, as such, but I think she came to decide, to make that decision because of the economic situation which was then prevailing in the country.

01-01:08:19

Morell: It was just harder to work here.

01-01:08:20

Mturi: It was hard to work here, most of the things were in shortage, fuel was in shortage. Most of the things had to come from Nairobi. Eventually she called me and said, "I think I'm finding it real, real difficult to continue with my



research here. I would like really to retire—not from paleoanthropology but from active field work in Olduvai and return to Nairobi and concentrate on two things: one is prepare the monograph from Laetoli and also prepare the monograph for excavations of Bed 4.” I said, “Well, but things will change.” I said, “Okay.” “I know you’ll be trying to support me, trying to help me, but I think I have come to a point whereby I think I can’t continue any longer.” So I said, “Well, okay. So she handed over the site to me and we went there and went through, agreed on the modalities of what we had to do and all these things. And then she retired to Nairobi.

Of course, she used to come to Olduvai off and on, especially bringing some of the important visitors, explaining to them the situation. So I think, that’s really, as I say, it was not age which contributed to her retirement from field work, it was the working conditions were rather difficult, which was very unfortunate, because as I said, she retired in 1984 and then things started changing in 1985! [chuckling]

01-01:10:02

Morell: The next year!

01-01:10:02

Mturi: In the next year! So by then she had made up her mind.

01-01:10:07

Morell: She’d made a new life.

01-01:10:08

Mturi: She had made a new life. I think another thing which I would like to say, because I know it has been said that perhaps the Leakeys were trying to be domineering, the Leakeys were trying to exclude people from working in Olduvai. I remember even some phrases that the Leakeys are the czar—

Morell:

The czar.

01-01:10:34

Mturi: The czar of Tanzanian paleoanthropology, and people said, “Mturi, you are the one encouraging it. You are supporting the Leakeys. You are excluding people.” I said, “Well, first of all it’s a misconception, because ever since I know Mary and have been visiting Olduvai, Mary has been working with a lot of other people. It was a multidisciplinary approach.” But I said, “Of course, we must realize that a principal investigator, any time, has the final say to decide who he is working with.”

01-01:11:12

Morell: Yeah, because she has to work with those people.

01-01:11:15

Mturi: And sometimes she is the one who might set the agenda. There are certain problems which she wants to solve. Then I would look for the next one to

work with. But as I said, “We are not excluding.” That’s the first thing. The second thing I said, “I think I can’t give additional licenses to everybody who wants to work in Olduvai because it would be chaos.

01-01:11:34

Morell: Right, right. Did they accept that? Did people understand?

01-01:11:38

Mturi: Well, of course, they did, as I said, “Well, if you want—the only thing I can advise you, if you think, bring your proposal—try to work it how Mary can incorporate you into the team.” Because otherwise, I can’t give separate licenses to everybody who wants to work in Olduvai.

01-01:11:52

Morell: It’s not that big a site.

01-01:11:53

Mturi: There’s going to be confusion. So there was this, as I said people—but really this was the real situation. But a lot of people worked with Mary, and it’s out of their working with Mary that they are what they are. Even the disagreement with White and—

01-01:12:18

Morell: With Tim White and Don Johanson.

01-01:12:20

Mturi: But sometimes I said, “I don’t understand this.” They said, “Why?” I said, “Who brought Tim to Laetoli?”

01-01:12:27

Morell: Mary did.

01-01:12:29

Mturi: Mary did. Mary invited him. If they had disagreed, it’s purely science. And I think something was—also, it was not science it was procedure, because if I invite you there are certain things, procedures, you don’t do things before you tell me, right? This really was what brought the issue. Okay, Tim White was trusted to study the Laetoli hominids on the invitation of Mary, but when they decided to name their new species *afarensis*, they never consulted Mary. Actually Mary knew it in Stockholm.

01-01:13:09

Morell: Mary knew what?

01-01:13:12

Mturi: Knew about the new name of the species, it’s in Sweden.

01-01:13:17

Morell: In Sweden, yes.

01-01:13:18

Mturi:

And then they had the Laetoli hominid without even informing them. That's the problem. I said, "No, what this one is, it's a clear thing. Because if somebody becomes angry, even if it's me I'll be angry about that because it's a discourtesy to me." So I said, "It was a matter of procedure." Mary wasn't saying they shouldn't name any of the species if they can convince the scientific world that they're good enough, but it's the way they went about it which I think was very unfair to her. Right?

Okay then this disagreement with Johanson I said, "Their agreement is, to me, my own interpretation, is not scientific. It's an American thing. If you want to do paleoanthropology in America, Americans usually, they say Americans are good at honoring stars and heroes, and if you want to be a star of anthropology then you are going to fight with the Leakeys." That's what the Americans say. They are the ones who have built up their name there. So if you want to go into that niche and you want to get funding, you must fight with the Leakeys on that front. Not in terms of science. I said, if there is any disagreement between these—I think it's in the American scene, because then they are competing for scarce resources. The Americans always believe in having stars even if it is in science, not only in Hollywood, even in science.

Morell:

They like—

01-01:14:51

Mturi:

They like it! The Leakeys, the Leakeys they have been stars in paleoanthropology in the United States. They attracted the funding, so anybody else who wants to go through that and break that monopoly, he must battle the Leakeys. That's all. I said, "Because I'm not going to the Americans to raise funding, because I don't see any scientific problem there." They are not disagreeing in terms of science, because if it was a disagreement on science they are ways of going about it, write articles, we have our different interpretations, if not the Leakeys, Mary has got her own interpretation. She doesn't necessarily agree with [Lewis] Binford about the scavenging theory. He still believes it. I think she was a bit disappointed by {different data?} that hominid had a role, a major role in bringing about, creating the situation in those living floors, but of course there were other and we now know more about the {taxonomy?} of the sites. There are other ages. So I said, these disagreements are there. Not everybody supports the home base, there are debates about that, alternative theories are coming up. Okay, Mary is sticking to her point. Fair enough! But these other things are purely, purely in terms of—

01-01:16:10

Morell:

Politics.

01-01:16:12

Mturi:

Politics of paleoanthropology. And actually not even politics. I think it's money, funding, funding, funding. As I say, it's an American thing. These things don't happen in Britain because the systems with Britain were different.

01-01:16:24

Morell:

No, you're right. They don't really happen.

01-01:16:29

Mturi:

So again, this is the thing people have been saying, the Leakeys have done this, it's unfair, but I think in most of the cases, as I said, the Leakeys always operated on a cooperating, working with the other colleagues. Olduvai was not a closed site. A lot of scientists were invited. Some of them were inviting themselves and they were welcome and they worked with the Leakeys very well and they cooperated very well and a lot of them, really, they are what they are today because they worked with the Leakeys. They were invited and the Leakeys cooperated with them. [Cameraman calls for a pause. Nothing further is recorded on any of the sound recordings, including on the video audio.]

[End of Interview]