Itinerary of a Collector of African Art: an interview with Herbert Weiss

Weiss apartment, Washington D. C., Saturday, November 15, 2014

Interview conducted and edited by Yves Abrioux and Kenneth J. Knoespel with additional text by Herbert Weiss[1]

… Protest, violent protest, typically rural and almost never urban. Whereas in North Africa and the rest of the world and historically in the West, it's very urban, unless you go back to the Middle Ages. It's a question I raised in the 1960s…

A taste for African art

My intellectual input on the subject of African traditional or tribal art has to be viewed as quite limited. Although I have collected almost from the time I arrived in the Congo – I acquired my first piece in Luluabourg in November 1960 – my purpose in collecting has always been essentially to fulfill my own aesthetic interests and values.

[1] This conversation took place in the wake of the exhibition *Mapping Place, Africa Beyond Paper* curated by Teri Williams, Kenneth J. Knoespel and Yves Abrioux at the Robert C. Williams Museum of Papermaking, Georgia Institute of Technology, February-June, 2014, in the context of *Africa Atlanta*, an initiative of the Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts, Georgia Institute of Technology (exhibition catalogue published by the Georgia Institute of Technology). Preparations for the exhibition involved extensive discussions with Herbert Weiss both on his collection of African art and on the maps he kept from his work in the Congo in 1959 and 1960, a number of which were included in the exhibition. The exhibition was followed by an international conference, *Africa beyond Africa: The Future of Cultural, Social and Scientific Research*, Georgia Institute of Technology, May 16-17, 2014, that was also part of *Africa Atlanta*

Somebody like Zoe Strother at Columbia University who is an art historian of course does infinitely more. For instance, she is interested in breaking down the barrier between received definitions of traditional African art that emphasize purity, in other words, art that is unaffected by colonial impact, and traditional/tribal art that evolved during the colonial period and was affected by the colonial condition. Why, she argues, consider this as any less valid? On the contrary, it may be more valid because it shows, as with every other art form, evolution under the pressures of current conditions.

I don't know what most of these pieces in my collection were used for. That's not my purpose in collecting. My purpose is to collect African tribal art for the same reason I would collect Western modern art – because it speaks to me aesthetically. But, I do believe it is undervalued if one puts it into a comparative framework. For instance, I believe that a lot of Warega art has the same aesthetic, stylistic values as a Brancusi sculpture but sells for a small fraction of what a piece by Brancusi sells for and is only known by people focused on African tribal art. In fact, I believe the Warega sculptures are much more imaginative than Brancusi's work which I find somewhat repetitive. That contradiction interests me. I look at it from the point of view of a universal aesthetic that is then somewhat artificially subdivided. For instance, within a universal aesthetic, I am interested in the interface between Expressionism and Cubism. That's my taste. Before I went to Africa I was particularly drawn to the sculpture of Marini.[2] You know, the sculptor who always had these riders on horses. That is the aesthetic that made me so excited about the

[2] Marino Marini (1901-1980), Italian sculptor.

first piece of African art I bought. That Lulua monkey over there. I don't know if you see the linkage. To me, there is a daring in the treatment of volumes which, to my sense, recalls the way Marini treats volumes. And yet there's a strong psychological element in the piece. You can impute a personality and even an attitude to this little monkey. That's where I come from, where art is concerned

You may be interested in the attempt to link African and African-American Art. You know there's an exhibit of Cosby's collection at the National Museum of African Art.[3] Why did they put it in the National Museum of African Art, when it's African-American art, why not in the National Gallery? Well, I think the reason is that African-Americans are enormously eager to develop those links with Africa. There is an African-American anthropologist living in my building. She's very interested in making these connections. She's deep into West African influences in the Americas. Then, of course, there is the exhibit last spring at the Carter Center in Atlanta that emphasizes the link between Kongo art and African American art.[4]

As you know, I was sorry that the loans from Tervuren Museum[5] were all concentrated on Kongo art because it denied the American pubic the incredible richness of the Tervuren collection on *C*ongo art – Congo with a C. But if your emphasis is on crossing the seas, then the Bakongo people are probably the closest

[3] *African and African American Artworks in Dialogue*, Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Nov. 2014-Jan. 2016, bringing together works from the National Museum of African Art and the Camille O. and William H. Cosby Collection.

[4] The travelling exhibition *Kongo Across the Waters* was on display at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, Atlanta, May-September 2014, as part of *Africa-Atlanta*, a citywide year-long series of art exhibits, lectures, performances and conferences highlighting Atlanta as a nexus for reinventing the cultural and economic bonds among Africa, Europe and the Americas, organized by the Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts, Georgia Institute of Technology.

[5] *Kongo Across the Waters* was organized by the Royal Museum for Africa, Tervuren (near Brussels). It consisted of works from its collections relating to the historic kingdom of Kongo that covered areas in what is now the southern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo but also in Angola.

link because they are located at the mouth of the Congo River and were massively subject to the Atlantic slave trade.

A politically significant sculpture

Of course I was immensely interested and pleased when I happened upon a substantive link between art and my professional interests – the history of protest, especially rural protest in the Congo and more generally all over Africa. That is what happened when in 1972 in Gungu, a large village in what is today Bandundu Province. I was offered and later purchased a Pende figure that was identified as representing M. Maximillien Balot, a Belgian colonial administrator who was killed by some villagers in 1931. This tragic event was the spark that started the Pende Revolt which was one of the last major, ethnically limited (although some non-Pende participated), uprisings against Belgian rule. Research and the revelations of a courageous Belgian magistrate who was sent to investigate what had caused both the killing of Balot and the revolt allowed me to reconstruct the history of these events. It turned out that for years prior to this event a collusive relationship between local administrators and representatives of the Belgian subsidiary of Lever Bros resulted in an abusive system of forced labor that was used to extract palm nuts used in the production of oil used to make soap. When village men refused this arduous work far away from their homes, they often ran away in order to avoid the recruiters. The Belgian administrators and the company agents responded by taking their wives hostage and sometimes sexually abused them. When the men were caught, they themselves were flogged. On the specific occasion that resulted in

the Revolt, a man whose wife had been "taken" while he was hiding was so incensed that he confronted the white recruiter in question. Instead of somehow compensating the husband he was charged with attacking the recruiter. An administrator, M. Balot, was sent to the village to investigate the situation. He made it to the village but not out of it. He was attacked, killed and cut into pieces – and with that the revolt began. The repression soon followed. It was both inefficient and – even for then – surprisingly cruel. Orders were given that no capitulations were to be accepted before all the pieces of Balot's body were returned. Since they were distributed among many clans few of the would-be capitulators were in a position to fulfil this demand. Nonetheless, some prisoners were taken and they were tortured – some to death.

The Pende have a long history of protest against colonial rule. They were among the most determined groups involved in the independence struggle (1959-60) and their leaders were allied to (Patrice) Lumumba, the Congo's first Prime Minister.[6] Shortly after Lumumba was overthrown in a coup and assassinated, the Pende joined Pierre Mulele in starting the huge "Congo Rebellions" of 1963-8 – the spark that started largest post-independence revolutionary movement in Africa for many years. One of the Pende leaders, decades later, became the king-maker of the 2006 election in the Congo by backing Joseph Kabila, the current President.

[6] Patrice Lumumba (1925 – 1961), founder and leader of the *Mouvement national congolais* (MNC) and the first democratically elected leader of the Congo. He was soon ousted from power and executed with American complicity.

Zoe Strother, Richard Woodward (the Curator of African Art the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts) and I have written an article[7] about the Balot figure and the context surrounding his death. It was also the focus of my talk at the GTU Paper Museum. So, you see, when the opportunity presents itself, I immerse myself in the link between art, politics and history - especially protest.

Growing up in the Sudan

The most fundamental experience in my entire life was being ripped away from what would have been a normal middle-class business-oriented life of a Jewish boy in Vienna. Instead, I ended up with an academic career in the US. This transformation started with 1938. German invasion of Austria and the immediate imposition of an anti-Jewish pogrom. The Austrians were enthusiastic anti-Semites - more so than the Germans had been at the beginning of the Nazi regime. In any case, there it was. My nuclear family was lucky; we managed to emigrate only a few months after the Nazi takeover to what was then the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

What effect did that have on me? First of all, I suppose it pushed me to a vehemently anti-Fascist position. That was just understood. Then came the Second World War. Of course one was for the Allies, applauding every victory. There was also, in terms of the friends that surrounded my parents, a sympathy for equality, cultural pluralism (although it wasn't called that then), and fairness. That meant, for instance, that one had greater sympathy for the British Labor Party than for the

[7] Herbert F. Weiss, Richard B. Woodward, Z.S. Strother, "Art with a Fight in it: Discovering that a statue of a Colonial Officer is a Power Object from the 1931 Pende Rebellion" (provisional title), with a contribution from Gudijiga Christophe and Kiangu Sindani. To be published in *African Arts.*

Conservative Party, despite the fact that the hero of the war was Churchill, a Conservative. But one was sympathetic to the notion that, "well ok, you won the war – but now go home". "Now" was the time for social democracy or, in any case, for a much greater concern for the breakdown of class structures and greater equality. That's the kind of background I came from. It's amorphous but then I was a young kid at the time and there was no reason to be anything but amorphous.

Then there was the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. I think that had a great deal to do, both for my parents and myself, with pushing us into cultural pluralism. We were open to everybody. We met all these different types of people there who we would never have met in Vienna – Lebanese, Sudanese, Brits, and Armenians – because of all the expatriate communities that basically constituted our social environment in Khartoum. It also included the local Jewish community, which was quite substantial at the time.

Another experience was formative. It came through the help of a person who had become a friend of my parents. He was a Christian Lebanese married to a Scottish woman and they had two sons – one a year older than I was, the other a year younger – as well as other younger children. Edward Atiyah had graduated from a British boarding school in Egypt, called Victoria College. This school had been created, if I'm not mistaken, around 1910, in order to allow the sons of Middle-Eastern elites to attend British universities. You worked toward the Oxford and Cambridge School Certificates, the equivalent of a *Baccalauréat*. It drew the sons of the elites from many parts of Middle East and even beyond. For instance, the Libyan royal family sent its sons there. The Zanzibar Sultan sent his grandsons there. The

sons of the Sudanese elite were sent there and of course there were lots of Egyptians. The Husseinis from Jordan and Jerusalem also attended.

I think the subtext at the time was that post-Napoleonic Egypt was culturally more under the influence of France. So this British initiative reflected the new political realities of the Middle East at the end of the 19th Century which were, of course, dominated by Britain. Edward Atiyah unexpectedly received scholarships for both of his sons at Victoria College and he extremely generously transferred one of them to me for the first year I attended. Of course, at the time – 1941 – my parents had not yet come close to earning enough money to pay the expensive school fees involved.

This gift was extremely lucky for my educational future since there were virtually no alternatives for me in Khartoum that would have ultimately led to entrance at any Western university. An English school did exist but you had to be an English subject to be accepted. I couldn't attend because we were stateless at the time. So the school I did attend between the age of 8 and 11 was the Italian Catholic Sisters' School for Girls. Shortly after World War II began the British authorities closed down Comboni College for Boys - which was run by Italian monks – because of the Italian association. Armed struggle began immediately between British forces in the Sudan and the Italians in Ethiopia and Eritrea. I guess the school run by nuns was deemed less dangerous. Of course there were government run Arab schools and Muslim religious schools but to my knowledge none of the expatriates attended them. So Victoria College was a blessing. That is not to say that at the age of eleven I

enjoyed travelling four days away from home to go to school. I only returned to my parents and my home during summer vacations.

Later on my parents were sufficiently well off to pay the school fees – not really well off but they made all the typical sacrifices – and I attended Victoria College for five years between 1941 and 1946, first in Cairo because of the bombardments that were taking place in Alexandria; then later on in Alexandria, which was the home campus of the school, for the last couple of years. Now of course those years gave me a whole different input again, because the kids in that school came from this privileged multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-everything background. But they were all well-to-do. I was certainly the poorest kid in a school of some 500.

The teachers were almost all British and they were able to inculcate a sense of elitist unity. We would go into town feeling very superior and looking down on people because we were "Victorians". And it didn't matter whether you were Egyptian, Muslim or Jewish, white or black. No. It was a new identity. Yet, the usual anti-authority attitudes of male teenagers coupled with the broad anti-British nationalism among Arabs that grew during the war also had its impact – even on me. For instance, true to British boarding school practices a strong hierarchical cast system was established with a select dozen of senior boys appointed as prefects. They had immense power. They could even get one caned! Anyway, some of us were inspired to organize a rebellion against this system. We totally boycotted the prefects and refused not only to follow their orders but even to talk to them. Our protest movement was initially quite successful and largely undermined the disciplinary system the staff depended on. In the end, the Headmaster called in the

"rebel leaders" – one of them being me – and told us we either quit immediately or we would be prevented from graduating. We found this utterly unfair because we had technically acted in a legal fashion. Yet, with this threat we knew we were beaten. Who would want to spend another year going to high school? It was an early lesson in the uses of power.

We had a uniform – a blazer and grey pants. A blazer with 'VC' here (points to the position of the left breast-pocket). There's a book out about Victoria College. In fact two books and many books that refer to it. For a while the President of my alumni association was King Hussein of Jordan. I guess I'm one of the few people who can refer to "my president, the King!"

Assimilating to America

Now, when I came to the States, I first worked for approximately half a year as an office boy. Then I looked to enter university. For reasons that are not important here, I ended up the University of Oregon in Eugene. At the time, this was a university of some quality that drew its student body overwhelmingly from veterans of the Second World War and from various parts of Oregon and surrounding states. A lot of the students came from rural backgrounds.

I had a very hard time assimilating to America. It was much more difficult, in a certain way, than assimilating to all of these Middle-Eastern sons of tycoons at Victoria College. As an immigrant, there was this incredibly strong pressure, first to like America and second to copy everything.

I joined what was called a cooperative. In other words, we lived and ate together in a house. It was like a Greek letter fraternity for poorer people. My older "brothers" would try to teach me how to "be" for instance how to eat with a knife and fork – American style! The idea that you're going to teach me how to eat was, in my eyes, deeply insulting.

What I didn't know and came as a big shock was that at the end of the first semester they had a vote as to who among the new members of the cooperative would be invited to remain or to leave. Of the approximately ten people up for membership, two were asked to leave and I was one of them. It was a shock. I didn't see it coming. It was logical, in hindsight. There were two interesting things about it.

The other guy who was asked to leave was the only other Jew in the co-op. Given my then utopian opinion about the US, that was a particular surprise. The second thing that was interesting and touching was that the president of the co-op was a veteran. He had been wounded Europe. He was a mature guy. It was his duty to tell me I was out. Apparently there had been a big fight and some of the veterans who had all these experiences in Europe or the Pacific were dead set against expelling me. He was very unhappy about the vote that had in the end decided to do so. He had tears in his eyes and begged me not to quit university studies as a result of my exclusion from the coop. While I was of course hurt by their decision and moved by his deep concern, I thought his worry about my giving up a university education was both odd and absurd. Because you guys do not like me, I'm going to stop being educated? I think his concern reflected how important the social aspect

of going to college was for many of the students there, and perhaps all over America, in the 1940's.

With the exception of the veterans, the students at the University of Oregon, as I perceived them, had extremely narrow cultural parameters. Many came from rural backgrounds and there were very few immigrants. This of course extended beyond the university. I will give you an example. While I was a student there I became a member of the One-World Club. The academic adviser of the club told us we had an invitation for a couple of members to give a talk to a Grange meeting. A Grange is a fraternal order of farmers. This was in the dead of winter. We took a car and drove for an hour and a half in the snow and ended up in this little village. There was a special little house, which was the Grange meeting hall. We had to wait outside because their ceremony hadn't finished. Then we entered and my job was to talk about the Middle East. This was the first time I had given a public talk apart from being a member of the debating club at Victoria College. I don't know what I said or if it made sense at all.

There was another student, who was more mature than I was. He had grown up in Jerusalem. He also talked about the Middle East. Then came, "Any questions?" Of course there was deadly silence. Kind of a defeat. Then finally one hand went up. A courageous person, who had a question. And the question was, "What did we think about Rita Hayworth and Prince Ali Kahn getting married?" That was apparently the closest this audience came to the Middle East!

This was 1947 or 1948, probably 48. But, I got the best complement I ever have received as a speaker there. And, as you can see, I've been a speaker ever since! An old man came up to me pointing with one finger to his ear and pushed his other finger into my chest: "I couldn't quite hear what you said - but I liked it!"

A brush with Zionism

There were very countervailing experiences in my head. Obviously, you don't have the coherence of an 80-year-old when you are 18. On the one hand, I had this great desire to be an America and this great abstract admiration for the idea of Lincolnian America - as seen from abroad. This version got somewhat beaten up. But there's another element that I have to add, if you really want to understand me.

In the Sudan, my parents had good friends who were Jews, both born in Palestine. I think their parents had also been born there. In other words, they were what are called Sabras. Under British rule, they were able to run a business in Khartoum. They had a factory that produced buttons made out of shells that were harvested in the Red Sea. Obviously, they were Zionists. My parents were not Zionists. My father had four siblings who had managed to escape to the United States. There was never any thought of going back to Europe. That was finished. The thought was, "We can't stay in the Sudan; we don't belong here. We'll go to America."

Our good friends were appalled. They said, "Here you have a 16-year-old son. There are Jews dying trying to get into Palestine from refugee camps in Europe. You have a Sudanese government *laissez-passé.* You can get on a train and get out in

Jerusalem and once you're there you could become part of the Jewish community. How can you take a 16-year-old Jewish boy who has survived the Holocaust away and not join the struggle to create a Jewish state?"

So out of this – partly a guilt trip – came a graduation present. With my mother we went o0n a 6 weeks trip to Palestine. If joining the Jewish community in Palestine really appealed to me – the future generation! – then the plans to immigrate to the US could be reconsidered. We also had my grandmother with us – my mother's mother in the Sudan. I suppose it's sort of a Jewish family story. Basically, I could have said, "This really speaks to me. Let's all move there." I think they probably would have tried to do that.

I graduated in the summer of 1946, before the state of Israel was officially recognized. So we - my mother and I with my father joining us later – took the train from Cairo to Jerusalem. There was an undeniable appeal of a world made up of Jews, where anti-Semitism was not only absent but impossible. This was a condition I had never before experienced. In Vienna, I had been sent to a school for subordinated races. In Egypt and the Sudan there was at the time no persecution of Jews yet there were milder forms of anti-Semitism – for instance Jews were all misers. Here I was in Tel Aviv and everybody was Jewish. It was uplifting. But on the other hand, the attitude towards the Palestinians contradicted all my political and philosophical values (if one can call them that in a 16-year-old). I perceived them as racist. Today we see this is the case very openly. Then it was not in full bloom. But I saw it that way. I remember we were at a bed and breakfast and I was expressing some of my opinions. My best friend was an Egyptian Muslim. The

owner was so angry he spat on his own carpet in response to what I was saying. We were pretty much worlds apart. So our Zionist friends did not win the day – we left the Sudan for the US in the fall of 1946.

Not belonging

What I had in my mind at the time – of course I had not yet been to America – was this notion of Lincoln having defined the US. It was an unfair comparison. I had compared an abstract ideal with a practical reality – the US and the Jewish community of Palestine. I was shocked, for instance, in a history class at the University of Oregon when I read a speech by Lincoln in which he said something to effect of, "With slavery or without slavery, the union…" What? You were willing to accept slavery? You, Lincoln! America was not what I had dreamt it to be. When I came to the US I had this great feeling that I had never belonged anywhere but now I would. This hope was somewhat dampened by my Oregon experience.

At Victory College, as a Victorian, I belonged. But the other students were all members of separate communities and, in that sense, they had roots. I had lost mine before they ever rooted. There was a very strong feeling of that. On the other hand, there was a pride in self. I think I preserved my identity by doing exactly the opposite of what it was necessary to do in order to achieve what I wanted to achieve, i.e. assimilation. I continued to eat in the European way as I had been taught at home and refused to first cut up my meat and then switch the fork to the right hand!

I had a cousin with a very similar background but who was three years older. He came to the US during the war. He had been sent in the *Kindertransport* from Vienna to Britain and then, after his parents joined him, they made their way to the US. He came in something like 1942. He was old enough to volunteer for the army and ended up a paratrooper sergeant. He spoke with a really American slangy accent.

When he left the army after the war, he joined the National Guard. He ended up as the Adjutant General of the Oregon National Guard – a one star general. He became a big political personality in Portland, Oregon, although not a professional politician. There's a hangar at the airport named after him. There's a Housing Project in Portland Oregon named after him. He was the chairman of the Portland Civil Rights Commission. His name was Fred Rosenbaum. In fact, he did something that lives long after he died. During the Vietnam War, he was the chairman of the Portland Oregon Housing Authority, which was a non-paid, non-professional position. He had a problem with the kids in the Authority's housing projects during the summer when they did not go to school. So he talked the army into creating a kid's summer camp in one of the army camps – a sub-camp for disadvantaged children. Then he got the army to agree to let National Guard members who were teachers, counselors or nurses do their two-week duty by working in the camp. For many, this was preferable to doing close order drill! He was a successful businessman and insurance broker who made lots of money. The camp was subsidized by his business associates and others who volunteered donations. It has now existed for over 30 years. Every summer, hundreds of children go to it.

We were very close - neither of us had brothers or sisters – and I always envied his success, his ability to be part of and even lead his social environment. He knew everyone in Portland, Oregon. "You want to know where the real stuff takes place, like the contracts to build roads…, to know where those things are negotiated. I'll show you". He took me to a whorehouse. All the rooms were pink and purple. This was the early 70's. A black guy owned this place. We sat at a bar. "See this guy? He's got the contracts for this. And that guy has the contracts for that." Fred was deep into America, completely successful in a way that I could never, never, never be. He was my closest age peer in the family. Unfortunately he died a few years ago.

Internationalism

So what did I do, practically, to deal with this dilemma? I mean, this bit from here and this bit from there and this bit from over here. And yet the frustration of not belonging anywhere. There was this One-World Club at the University of Oregon that as I noted earlier I naturally joined and in an odd way it became something of a spring board.

The University had a speakers program for important personalities and on one occasion Cord Meyer came through to give a talk. He was a war veteran, a Marine Captain who had been very severely wounded on one of the islands in the Pacific. When he came back he was taken on as a staff member by Harold Stassen at the San Francisco Conference that established the United Nations. Out of this experience he became very enthusiastic about the UN. He was, I believe, the first or the second

president of a budding organization at the time, called the United World Federalists. The goal of the UWF was to constitutionally transform the UN into a world government. It had a very active student division. I was enthralled by his speech and, immediately thereafter, took it upon myself to make the One World Club into a chapter of this organization. I succeeded in that. They had elected me president very quickly because I was very enthusiastic. But there was a tremendous conflict between how the few members and I understood the role of leadership. I guess some Middle Eastern concept of being a President rubbed off on me. I did things like write letters in the name of the club to the college newspaper without consulting anyone. Well, this was taken very badly. Everything had to be by consensus and endless discussion. In other words, as I saw it I was to be like a clerk to a bunch of not very engaged people, instead of a leader with followers! It was a minor disaster. But it was not enough of a disaster for me not to succeed in transforming this into a chapter of the Student Division of the World Federalists.

Then, at the end of my second year at the University of Oregon, I escaped to New York. "Escape" is the word to use. At this point my parents were sufficiently well off – I mean, very marginally, but they would do anything for their one son – to pay the fees at NYU. And of course they were very happy to see me back in the family fold. So I transferred back to New York and started attending NYU in September 49.

Being the President of a miniscule UWF chapter in an arcane place like Eugene, Oregon, got me elected to the Student Council of the Student Division of the United World Federalists. You see, you had to encourage the rural areas! Poor me! I

was the representative! [*Laugher at the playful reference to H. Weiss's later commitment to rural political movements*.] That was really, psychologically speaking, in terms of my role in America, the most important watershed. I spent much too much time dealing with things in the Student Division and neglected my university studies. But that became my world. There were some very interesting kids in the Student Division. For instance, Immanuel Wallerstein.[8] That's where I met him. There were ten or fifteen like him. We formed a liberal, world-oriented, self-important group of young men and women, some of whom did incredibly well in the world both in academics and diplomacy. In politics, also. That was my most significant entry point. The entry point into what was my Americanization was in fact internationalism. In a way, it's kind of funny. But, don't forget the importance of my Jewish identity, because it was overlapping with just about everything else. Three-quarters of the people I met in New York were Jews. It was not a distinct thing. It largely overlapped.

Meeting Ruth Fisher

I also had a few friends at NYU. It was a different circle and there I met a most fascinating man – Stefan Bauer-Mengelberg. Stefan was not only a genius but a Renaissance genius. He was a master of everything. He had started off as a pianist. Then he gave that up and became a mathematician and then he gave that up and studied philosophy. All this in his 20's. He was teaching symbolic logic at NYU

[8] Immanuel Wallerstein (b. 1930), American sociologist, historical social scientist, and world-systems analyst who developed the general approach in sociology which led to the emergence of his World-System Theory.

before he had a Master's Degree! He became the assistant conductor of The New York Philharmonic. He is the world's inventor of the

first computer program that transcribes music. He could have made a fortune with this invention but gave it to the world.

So he was at NYU. I got to know him. He was several years older than me. He had been in the Army at the tail-end of the war. And, it turned out that he was a kind of general assistant to Ruth Fischer at the time. He asked if I would like to work for her for a few hours a week, basically clipping newspapers and sorting them. That is how I got to know her.[9] Of course, she had the greatest contempt for my World Federalist activities. "You're very, very young. Go play!" I found her immensely interesting. She took a shine to me. She was Viennese, originally. I was from Vienna. She was half-Jewish. Despite everything she did in America - and that was seen as far right activities - she basically remained a communist ideologically. An anti-Stalinist communist. I only become aware of her whole history slowly. As the leader of the left faction of the German Communist Party in the 1920's she had a great influence in undermining the Weimar Republic in the 1920's.

There was also the group of Weimar intellectuals – German social philosophers who ended up in New York. I didn't know so many but I knew some of them. There was

[9] Ruth Fischer (1895-1961, co-founder of the Communist Party of Austria after WW1. After she joined the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), she was elected to the KPD Central Committee with Arkadi Maslow (see note 13) and led the left wing of the Berlin KPD with him. In 1924, Fischer and Maslow assumed leadership of the party and were responsible for intensifying the KPD's turn to the left. They were expelled from the KPD two years later on Stalin's orders. They fled Nazi Germany in 1933 and settled in Paris until 1940. Ruth Fischer obtained an entry visa to the USA but Maslow had to settle for Cuba, where he died in controversial circumstances in 1941. After 1945, Fischer was associated with the anti-communist crusade in the United States where she authored the best-selling book *Stalin and German Communism*. She continued to hope for a move towards a truly democratic communism.

Kirchheimer.[10] Then there was a guy at the New School, even before I went off to Oregon. We somehow had met. This was a world of German-speaking left/liberal democrats. But you know, my parents were not intellectuals. They didn't really have a role among these people. And I was too young. You have to put this in the context of the generation to which I belonged…

The one important connection turned out to be Ruth Fischer. Well, Stefan told me about her. What was fascinating was not her history, although she'd tell stories about being at a meeting in Moscow and being thrown up in the air in jubilation. Stuff like that. She was one of the youngest members of the Comintern leadership.[11] What was fascinating was the role she had developed for herself currently in New York. First of all, she had no money at all to speak of. She had subsidies – from the Russian Research Center at Harvard, for instance. I think that was CIA money channeled to her but I don't know that for a fact. What was really fascinating were the different groups that would come and consult her. One evening you'd have the American Trotskyites come by. Dwight McDonald was a big friend. Another evening it would be Mrs. Pandit, Nehru's sister, from the Indian Mission to the UN. A week later it would be the communist cell from the Yugoslav Mission to the United Nations. There'd be Bourgiba's son, from Tunisia. They all came.

She assigned a role for me: "You are allowed to come this evening. You have to be careful to pour the cognac. Don't leave any glasses empty. And Herbert, never say a

[10] Otto Kirchheimer (1905-1965), German jurist of Jewish ancestry and political scientist of the Frankfurt School, whose work essentially covered the state and its constitution; worked as a research analyst at the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the forerunner of the CIA, starting in World War II and continuing to 1952.
[11] The Communist International or Third International (1919–1943).

word!! Don't open your mouth!" OK. That's what I would do. It was my biggest education. That and listening to her talk during the day, while I was clipping away. This was a woman who analyzed world affairs using, I would say, three times as many variables as the normal sophisticated analyst – as the people who write op-eds in the *New York Times*: "There's this development but don't forget the Chinese Congress's last meeting in which the 10th resolution..." Where did you get this? I was learning what sophisticated analysis was all about. At the time, analysis was A + B + C. She was a great, great influence on me as to how to analyze. And this went on for many years.

Eventually she left the United States. You need to remember her fame in the US was because she testified against her brother, Gerhard Eisler.[12] That put her – even though I don't remember an evening with them – in the best of relationship with the intellectuals around Joe McCarthy. And even he would call her up. Basically, what they wanted were two things: How to judge the Cold War? Who's winning? She made them very happy by always saying the communists were winning. She would joke about it and say, "As long as I tell them the communists are winning they're satisfied!"

Then there was the business about FBI agents coming and asking about so and so. Her angle towards that was basically never to say, "I'm not going to tell you anything about that." She always gave them long interviews, which – at least in her intention – were always innocuous. Of course, she didn't do that with her brother,

[12] Gerhard Eisler (1897-1968), journalist; was denounced by his sister Ruth Fischer as the most dangerous communist agent in the United States.

who she viewed as the representative of the NKVD[13] in the Western Hemisphere and presumably he had her de facto husband murdered in Cuba. That was Maslow, the man of her life and her partner in the German Communist Party.[14] You must be aware of her book, *Stalin and German Communism*.

Paris

Eventually, Fischer got fed up with being in this non-European setting. She had some discreet contacts with the Italian Communist party and she moved to Paris. At that time, I was in the army in Germany. This was 54-55. I had finished my degree at NYU and had finished a Master's at Columbia. And then I left the army in order to attend Science Po in Paris. So then I saw a lot of her, because we were both living in Paris.

At Victoria College I had to take French. In fact I hardly knew any French. My six months in Paris helped but I became fluent in French when I did that year in the Congo. There was a sort of fake structure at *Science Po*[15] that was the *Centre d'Études*

[13] *Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del*, or People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs of the Soviet Union.

[14] Arkadij Maslow (born Isaak Jefimowitsch Tschemerinski; 1891-1941). He was interned as a Russian citizen in Germany the outbreak of World War I but enlisted in the German army as an interpreter. After the war, he became close to Ruth Fischer (see note 8 above). They subsequently led the Communist Party of Germany before being expelled in 1926. When the Nazis came to power, they fled to France. From 1934 to 1936, Maslow worked closely with Trotsky and served as part of the movement towards a Fourth International. Breaking with Trotsky, Maslow and Fischer founded the short-lived Marxist-Leninist International Group. In the 1920s and 1930s Maslow was twice accused by the Stalinists of being a spy. Unlike Ruth Fischer, he failed to obtain an entry visa to the USA at the outbreak of WW2 and settled in Cuba. On 20 November 1941, Maslow was found dead in the street in Havana. The official cause was a heart attack. However, Fischer was convinced that he had been murdered by the Soviet NKVD.

[15] *Institut de Sciences Politiques*, Paris.

africaines, which was limited to foreigners. That should have been a signal that it was not really a serious academic endeavor! It was a postgraduate thing. There were a couple of Belgian colonial officials who were learning about French colonial systems. My main purpose for going there was because it allowed me to leave the army 90 days earlier than the required 24 months. So it served its purpose perfectly. Then it turned out to be pretty much of a fakery. They had an old French cavalry officer give a seminar once a week. And that was it! We all had to write some sort of short term paper about Africa and they promised us a study trip in Africa at the end of the course. I never got mine, probably because I wrote something about the Sudan and not about the French colonies.

I did try to take some courses on Africa at the *École d'Administration coloniale*.[16] This was located off the Luxemburg Gardens someplace. But now we were in 56, post-Suez. So there they said, "*Vous êtes americain, ce n'est pas convenable*."[17] They had all kinds of important scholars who I had heard about as an MA student at Columbia and whose lectures I wanted to attend but they wouldn't let me. So I sat at the Café Tourneau, just off the entrance to the Palais du Luxembourg. It now calls itself a *café litteraire*. In those days it had no such pretentions. But it literally was one, whereas now it's full of tourists. They had all kinds of people coming through there. Many of them were quite radical African-American authors and intellectuals. Richard Wright was one of them.

[16] Founded in 1893, the *École coloniale* was renamed *École nationale de la France d'outre-mer* in 1934 but continued to be referred to familiarly as the "*Colo*".
[17] "You're American, it just won't do."

Now, regarding Richard Wright and Ruth Fisher, they had both attended the Bandung Conference and not only met there but returned to Europe on the same ship. [18] Maybe for health reasons she didn't want to fly. Richard Wright, I think, had an aversion to flying too. They became great friends and she felt that she was quite influential in the analysis that went into his book, *White Men Listen*. I think she told me to get in touch with him. So I became friendly with Richard Wright and we met in these cafés and at his home from time to time.

There were others as well. James Baldwin used to hang out there from time to time but he used to go to homosexual cafés. There too I met a woman I had a big shine on. That was Marpessa Dawn, who was Eurydice in *Black Orfeo*.[19] We became fast friends and she used to come to my little room and cook me breakfast and type my term paper. She was in love with a Belgian guy who apparently was a thief and had escaped from France – to Belgium, I think, where he wouldn't be jailed. But he had such a yearning for her that he couldn't stop himself from coming back, so of course he was caught and thrown in jail. She had several children but little success as an actress after that one fabulous film. She was a US citizen and returned to New York pretty much penniless. Unfortunately she became completely schizophrenic! She ended up being a kind of bagwoman on the streets of New York and was finally sent to Bellevue, where a psychiatrist called me up because she had given my name. But what was I to do? She had all kinds of lovers. In her own way, she was quite fascinating – unbelievably attractive. However, this is not the focus of our interview.

[18] The first large-scale Afro–Asian Conference, held in Bandung, Indonesia, in April 1955, was an important steppingstone in the development of the non-aligned movement.
[19] A film by Marcel Camus, 1959.

Ruth Fisher's evening conversations, that I was allowed to listen to, broadened my horizons in a very primitive sort of way, because half the time I didn't know what they were talking about. What broadened my sense of how to analyze was listening to her analyze. That would be during the day. She would be reading the newspaper for two hours in the morning and I was there and she would talk.

Interesting service in the army

I also had an interesting army time, despite the fact that I hated being a soldier because of the loss of liberty. First I was in psychological warfare, which is a whole separate story that I don't need to go into here. Then I switched to military intelligence and was posted on the East German border in 1955. So what was our job? We had to interview East German border crossers. I spoke German.

The headquarters of my company was in Bayreuth, of all places, and I was stationed for a while in a little village called Kronach that was right on the border. There were just four Americans there. What was interesting was that we had essentially a corrupt relationship with the German border guards. The German border guards were not the "new Germany." In other words, many of them had been in elite units, including the SS, during the war and had jumped at the chance to get back into some kind of military activity. This was prior to West German sovereignty but it continued after sovereignty. The deal was that anybody who crossed the

border would be caught by the border guards, who would then telephone the *Amerikanische Dienststelle.*[20] The local MI unit would send a jeep to wherever the guy or woman was stopped. Now there's a big difference pre- and post-sovereignty. Post-sovereignty, according to German law, these people could just have said, "What do you want from me? Get lost! I'm taking a bus!" And that would have been that. But, of course, the way that it was orchestrated was: "Stop!" Then an American jeep zoomed up. "Get in!" Given all the propaganda in East Germany about what would happen to them, no one ever said a thing. We had villa and in the basement of the villa there were double-decker bunks. These guys were told to go and sleep there. Certainly, they were not physically mistreated. But they absolutely weren't free to walk out. Then came day-long interviews. What were these interviews about? "What village are you from?" Some of them were probably prostitutes who thought the American soldiers paid more than the Soviets which was no doubt true.

This was in 1955, very precisely. We would ask them, "So you're from this village?" The terms of what to interview them about would interest you. It was, "Draw a little plan of the village. Where is the church? How high is the church?" I think they were collecting detailed, modernized topography. This was pre-satellites. We were not told what the purpose was. But if there was someone of interest they would be sent to another camp where sometimes they interrogated them for a month. Of course, I had no sympathy for them at all. But the fact of the matter is we were holding them in effect as prisoners and getting deep into their knowledge when we had no legal right to do this at all. The German press discovered this and

[20] The American Duty Station.

there were articles about it. The border crossers then realized that they didn't have to have gone through this. I imagine it wasn't exactly something that aroused great enthusiasm among them for the US. But the fact of the matter is that they crossed because they wanted freedom of some kind or economic benefits that were not present in East Germany. *We* certainly never paid any serious price for this. We must have garnered important information, at least cumulatively. But at my level, what we did was quite banal.

The Herrenabend

I had made the acquaintance of a German lawyer in Wiesbaden through a mutual friend in New York. Her name was Cornelia Schaeffer. She became a major editor of American publishing houses. I believe she became co-publisher of Athenaeum Press. If I remember correctly the lawyer's name was Franken. He had an interesting past during the war since he was an officer in a unit of the German Army made up of Indians who had been induced, or sought to, fight the British. After the war he was part of a very elite group of highly placed men who met periodically in what they called the *Herrenabend*. It was an informal, influential friendship circle. This was 1955.

The *Herrenabend* was the political and intellectual elite of Bonn. You had the number one Jesuit in there, the editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* etc. When Franzen heard that this little American private, who was a friend of the daughter of a friend of his, had a connection to Ruth Fischer he asked if I could persuade her to come to the *Herrenabend and speak*. So I called up Ruth Fischer and explained what

the *Herrenabend* was all about. And she bit into the carrot! That was interesting. So there I was invited to be among all these important Germans. I got a pass from my commanding officer and off I went. Once again, I had this listening role. She took great pleasure in all this. She introduced me to a German general: *"Here is Private Weiss, one of your defenders*." She had great fun with me.

Anyway, the political leadership in Bonn were apparently very worried by what she was saying in her lectures in Germany. Remember, she was the former Secretary General of the German Communist Part in the 20's and this was '55 and there was the whole issue of the newly sovereign Germany and how it was going to pose itself in regard to the Cold War and especially vis a vis the Soviet sphere and East Germany. I think her lectures were in effect opposed to the Bonn government's policies. And here she was with her incredible intellectual acumen. Bonn heard about this and asked Franzen if they could send someone from the Cabinet to debate with her, rather than the group simply listening to her. He agreed. That was his world. She was not his world.

So who did they send? Franz Joseph Strauss![21] So that was an evening when being a fly on the wall was most fascinating. I remember some quotes of his. He was just vicious against her. At one point she just corrected him. "Don't talk to me like that!" But I remember that they talked about NATO and future German policy toward the East, i.e. the Soviet Union and its allies. He was quite critical of what he saw as a weak French foreign policy. He said, *"Wenn die Franzozen mit den*

[21] Franz Joseph Strauss (1915-1988), German politician, leader of the right-wing Christian Social Union in Bavaria. A controversial figure, Strauss served in successive German governments and was a long-time minister-president of the *Land* of Bavaria.

Marocannern nicht fertig werden, dann weren eben wir es machen mussen".[22] And later he held forth about a Europe armed with Atomic weapons.

So it's a good thing they got rid of him before he became chancellor. The meeting went on from 7 till past midnight, when she said, "I'm too tired. I have to go." The next morning I spoke with Franzen and he said, "Well they stayed here until 4:00 in the morning." So, you know, there were these moments that educated me.

At the State Department

We're up to '55. I spent 8 months in Paris and I got a *Certificat d'études africaine.* Then I came back and started looking for a job. Of course, with a Master's Degree from Columbia and just out of the army, it was very hard to find anything. I applied, for instance, to Oxfam. I applied to the African-American Institute. I also applied to the Research Division of the State Department. I applied to USIS, the US information service. In other words, I just wanted a job in my field. I also applied for jobs in business – import export – although I would have hated getting such a job. I did actually get a job with the Institute for International Education where my job was to interview foreigners who wanted scholarships in the United States. It was a boring job. With the exception of one event, which I will tell you about. An Indian gentleman came to me once with that purpose in mind and he very ostentatiously presented his business card to me and the card said something like this: "Raja Singh, University of Calcutta, B.A. University of Bombay, M.A. (failed)." So, in Indian,

[22] "If the French can't deal with the Moroccans, we'll have to do it."

the fact that you attended apparently is a hierarchical step. But in New York this is the kind of thing you suppress.

Finally my security clearance came through with INR, the Intelligence and Research Division of the State Department. It turned out there was a Herbert Weiss who was 15 years older than me who was a member of the Communist Party of the United States and the poor FBI couldn't sort the two of us out for something like 15 months! We're talking 57-58. Finally they managed to sort us out and I got this job very much because of my *Certificat d'études africaines*.

In fact, if you want an amusing chain of my entire professional life, it all starts with my trying to get those 90 days less army duty. See, if it hadn't been for that my whole career would be different. Because I would have immediately come home to the States. I needed a university that was willing to send the army a letter saying that their semester started on the 1st of January. Of course, no university semester in the US or in France for that matter starts on the 1st of January but at Sience-Po they were very agreeable on that matter. Perhaps they were so anti-American that they agreed so as to have one fewer American "occupier" of the European *patrie!!* So they gave me that letter, which no American university would have been willing to give me. I went to Paris and got the *Certificat* and with the *Certificat* got the job with the State Department.

The *Certificat* was totally symbolic. I learned nothing there. This once-a-week professor kept telling us stories about how it was in the 20's in Madagascar. Very anecdotal and very useless. So I got into the State Department and, of course, now

we're in 1958 and the big thing in '58, as you know, was Guinea's decision to separate itself from France and become a Soviet ally or satellite, or whatever you want to call it. My main job was to follow news from all the French-speaking countries in sub-Sahara Africa but especially Guinea. You remember there was the election of 1958, so I had to make prognoses on who would vote for or against the French Community and that sort of thing. This had to be done on the basis of very, very inadequate information. Because all we had – we, the United States – in Africa were consulates. These were passport people, not political analysts. Probably not many French speakers among them, either. There's another little story that I think will amuse you. Early on I went to my boss and I said, "Look, these reports that I'm supposed to read don't really give me very good information to write these analyses that you're asking me to write." The State Department, of course, had subscriptions to various newspapers but by the time they reached us at the lower end of the research network they'd be out of date or even lost. So I said, "Couldn't we right here subscribe to some key newspapers?" He said, "Well, what newspaper would you suggest?" To which I said, "Couldn't we at least have *Le Monde*?" To which he said, "Do you think it is a good newspaper?"

Getting into the Belgian Congo

Basically, they were not happy with me in the State Department and I wasn't happy with them. It was not going to be a successful career. Then a fortuitous thing happened. There was a research director – Arnold Rivkin – at MIT's Center for International Studies who had worked for the Marshall Plan and was interested in

Africa. He developed a project involving a comparative study of four African states/colonies to be undertaken by two economists and two political scientists that he submitted to the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. They agreed to fund it and I was chosen as one of the political scientists because one of the countries was Guinea and as noted above that had been my main focus in the State Department. So he hired me even though I didn't have a Ph.D. (the three others were far senior to me and had Ph.D.'s). So I was to do Guinea. Nigeria was the other country. I was paired with one of the economists.

Then, one month before we were supposed to go into the field – we were all in Cambridge at MIT for a month to get acquainted and get things settled and so on –, he called me into his office and said the other political scientist who was supposed to cover the Belgian Congo and the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland basically had only high school French, whereas I had a certificate from the University of Paris. A French certificate! So he said, "What would you say if you switched Nigeria for the Congo?" Now, I was very worried about Nigeria. At that time, among American social scientists focused on Africa, Nigeria was the *one* country on which there was substantial research. It was huge. It was well documented. For me, it meant starting from scratch. And the job was to produce a book. I was not into books and producing a book was a terror in and of itself. So Nigeria was a double terror. Nonetheless, I said, "Look!" This shows how little I knew, even though I had been in the research division, where the Belgian Congo incidentally was one of my countries, because I never looked at it, because I had other priorities. We're in September of 1959. I said, "Look! I'm interested in independence struggles. There's nothing going on in the

Belgian Congo. You're asking me to go to the Belgian Congo. I don't know what I'm going to do there." So he said, "I tell you what. Go to the Belgian Congo for three months. If you find nothing to research there, go to Guinea and only write about Guinea." This, of course, was like manna from heaven. To make a long story short, I never ended up in Guinea. This is how I got into the Belgian Congo.

The World Federalist Movement

I had written a Master's Thesis on the independence struggle in the Sudan. And, to a certain extent, at Victoria College in the 40's the mood was very much anticolonial and I was sympathetic to that. The end of WW II was sympathetic to it. Only reactionaries wanted these empires to continue. So we were all sympathetic. Certainly among the World Federalists we were all very sympathetic. In fact, there was a glorious moment I should tell you about.

In the late 40's all the international umbrella organizations – what we would today call NGOs – split, obviously, between the communist-dominated ones and – often newly formed - Western ones. That meant that the Western ones usually seceded. There was a big battle between these two political orientations for the newly liberated colonial areas in the 1950's. Which way would they go? As I recounted earlier in the late 40's early 50's I was a member of the National Student Council of the United World Federalists. I was appointed as one of the delegates to what was called the Young Adult Council. The Young Adult Council was the American umbrella organization of youth organizations. Of course, there was an American umbrella organization for student organizations, for women's

organizations, for labor organizations, etc. The Young Adult Council was the American member and, to a large extent, the sponsor of the World Assembly of Youth – the Western or democratic counter to the World Federation of Youth, which was Communist oriented with its headquarters in Prague, if I remember correctly. After the Communist coup in Prague there was this split. So the World Assembly of Youth had its first conference or congress on the campus of Cornell in Ithaca and I was an American delegate to that.

That must have been in '51. I can't be sure of that but it's easy to check. It was a huge thing with delegates from all over. To a certain degree, some of us in the World Federalists pushed to have a focus on what was then called 'Truman's Point Four", which was basically developing third-world countries. A pre-congress seminar was organized at the Fieldston School in the Bronx in New York to deal with the issue. What do we recommend to our member organizations, to the congress, regarding economic aid, development, participation etc.? I was also a delegate to this. Of course, my internationalist background led to my being pushed into those positions or volunteering and having my volunteering accepted – until real power was involved. When real power was involved I was much too much an ornery and obnoxious personality to get those positions. But prior to those positions – "Well, he's been all over the world. He knows about Africa, he grew up there." So despite being the eternal outsider, I represented the US even before being a US citizen.

Yes, I did have a talent for finding a home in homelessness, which became translated into an American identity focused on internationalism. There's a contradiction there, I know. I've lived this contradiction. I live it today. Because of

my personality and because I never really fit in, I would never get elected to anything that had real power. Not that I would not like positions with power, but they are out of reach and therefore I fall back on being a provocateur.

The French, the CIA and the struggle for decolonization

To return to the World Assembly of Youth, I was pushing hard and we ended up with this seminar which a lot of people attended. The politics of the World Assembly of Youth was, in and of itself, quite interesting. I'll give you a little flavor of it. The Young Adult Council was truly run by youth. Of course, in Europe, and even in the Third World, youth were seen as far too politically important to be run by the youth. There was always a godfather from the establishment. This was doubly true in France. There was a big to-do for the young people who came. The French, as usual, felt that they didn't have enough power. They found an unbelievably imaginative, though outrageous, way of achieving more power. They came to the World Assembly of Youth with 12 colonial delegations and claimed that they were separate delegations. There was a guy from the *Quai d'Orsay*,[23] who ran them all. Although at the time, the French colonies weren't permitted to be active in the international world – and the colonies at the time were certainly not independent states - this was nonetheless an entry into the international world for members of the colonial elite. Top politically activists were eager to become delegates because this international "youth" meeting was one of the few international events that the French Government allowed them to participate in at the time. Now we in the

[23] The French foreign ministry.

American delegation looked at this with our one vote. Here was Marshall-Plan-saved France with all these votes.

"Really", I said, "this is dirt easy." We as the American delegation will propose a resolution against colonialism. What's more logical in the Post-WW II world? And all these French delegations from Africa can't vote against that and it will split them from their Foreign Ministry "guides". That's exactly what happened. I became fast friends with all kinds of African leaders from then on. For instance, Émile Derlin Zinsou from Benin[24] was a delegate and we became fast *tu-toi* friends and he became the President of his country.

The only problem was that the money came from the CIA. We didn't know this at the time. It was a huge event. Supposedly it was all sponsored by Corning Glass – a big corporation was going to help the youth of the world. Turned out later on that the *New York Times* revealed it was a conduit. So there were godfathers there, so to speak. The "adults" leading the British and French delegations complained bitterly about this Weiss fellow. I was quoted by the *New York Times*. Some little paragraph. "Herbert Weiss of the American delegation said…," Of course, I was immensely proud. At any rate, I hope you will see that my interest in and sympathy for independence struggles in African colonies – as well as elsewhere – has substantial roots.

Rural radicalism

[24] Émile Derlin Zinsou (b. 1918), President of Benin, 1968 -1969.

I keep going on in a kind of stream-of-consciousness fashion. Now, this question of rural radicalism. Where did the rural radicalism come from? It was explained – perhaps explained in an overly detailed fashion – in the introduction to my book. To summarize the introduction. When I arrived in the Congo in December 1959 I carried with me a generally adopted view of African independence movements: Modern elites influenced by European leftist intellectuals and movements managed to mobilize urban citizens initially via civil society organizations; later, when permitted, via political parties. They struggled against colonial regimes and the traditionalists who by and large dominated the rural areas and were allied to the colonial rulers. The "modern elites" - as they were then called - fought for political rights and elections and when those were granted they had to move their parties into the rural areas in order to mobilize those citizens in anticipation of the elections. Eventually, the nationalist forces managed to unite and after winning critical elections, gained power and independence. The movements were usually led by charismatic leaders – viz. Nkrumah, Senghor, Toure, Houphouet-Boigny, etc.

As I began my research, this received scenario increasingly failed to fit the Congo. My first candidate for charismatic leader was the ABAKO[25] leader Kasavubu but when I saw him address a crowd after the end of the Kisantu Congress he seemed anything but charismatic. On the contrary, those villagers who listened to him appeared to be disappointed and unimpressed and – it seemed to me – he was unsure and worried. That was the first seed of doubt. Many followed. And then I

[25] *Association des Bakongo pour l'unification, la conservation et l'expansion de la langue kikongo*. Founded in 1950 as a cultural organization, the association played a major role in the fight for independence.

was taken on a field trip with a top party leader and again I saw that he did not – was he unable to? - impose party decisions on village sections. Then, when I had access to party documents I saw that leaders sometimes ordered actions after they were widely and spontaneously undertaken by local initiatives and party sections. In other words, the leaders were following the followers! That in a nutshell was the germ of rural radicalism.

How did I gain access to party documents? I say with some pride that my success was in persuading the leaders of the *Parti solidaire africain* (PSA)[26] that they ought to trust me completely and that the way I could do my work was if they opened their files to me. I had adapted a Verifax machine to the battery of my VW. That's how I managed to have copies of these documents. All the documents that I collected in 1960. Not the documents on the rebellion. That started in 1963, so obviously I couldn't have collected them during my first trip. No, those were collected in '66.

The history before the beginnings of the independence struggle is obviously not sufficiently studied and is difficult to get hold of. My recent work on the Pende Revolt of 1931, which was undertaken much later than the research under discussion here, obviously, has really opened my eyes to a whole aspect that I had

[26] The *Parti solidaire africain* (PSA) was formed in the aftermath of a series of riots in Leopoldville in 1958 which prompted Baudouin of Belgium to announce independence for the colony as his long-term aim. Formally established in February 1959, the PSA quickly became one of the best organized independence parties, establishing a strong base amongst the rural communities in the Kwango and Kwilu Districts. It did not, however, identify with any particular ethnic group but preached socialism. The party was part of the first post-independence coalition government under Patrice Lumumba. It went into opposition after the elimination of Lumumba. A wing of the PSA under Pierre Mulele subsequently led the Kwilu rebellion. The PSA was sidelined and disappeared completely after the emergence of Mobutu Sese Seko in 1965.

ignored when I was doing my research on the independence struggle. Incidentally, it connects to that art-piece of mine and to the article that the three of us (Strother, Woodward and I) are writing.

I think there are two parts to this pre-independence history of struggles. There's what was happening in the cities with the westernized elites. This was more important in French and British areas, because they allowed Africans to go higher in the education system and gain better positions than was possible in the Belgian areas. Nevertheless, their role of the "modern elite" was similar. Now, the elites are not unimportant for the rural radicalism that emerges. But of course what has been very poorly studied is what today we would accomplish by conducting public opinion surveys in rural areas.

How do these people feel about their life, about the people who govern them – and about their urban leaders? There's very little information on that. So we can only look at the sporadic spurts of violence and intuitive conclusions. In the Belgian Congo, what I found – and here, perhaps, my Sudanese childhood experience is a little bit relevant – was that there was a considerable feeling , I suppose you could call it subconscious, of passivity, of abnegation. In other words, the depth to which the colonial system penetrated was far greater than I would say in the Arab or Muslim world. The Muslims and Arabs retained an identity, a hierarchy separate from that which had been imposed on them by the colonial system.

There was, of course, a hierarchy in Central Africa too. There were chiefs. But these hierarchies were undermined far more deeply than was the case elsewhere.

For instance in India. I don't know much about India but I'm assuming this. The colonial project, psychologically and culturally, was far more successful in Central Africa. One piece of evidence was the rate of conversion to Christianity. And the tenacity of that conversion. I mean you by that, you didn't have to remain a Christian after independence, but massively they did.

I suppose where there's rural radicalism there's some urban opposition to the colonial system and/or occupation. That's an important relationship. The one wouldn't happen without the other. In other words, biting away at the total oppressiveness of the system with its psychological implications of acceptance was initially the role of the modern elite. But their little successes in that regard, their moderate successes, opened a floodgate for an anger that must, in my opinion, have been seething among the rural population but was totally suppressed – except for moments like the Pende Revolt earlier. So, the modern elite opens the gate, symbolically speaking, never expecting a mass of people to rush through it. That gate is the gate to radical expression. That's how I would put that relationship.

However, there is another problem that the term raises. (Let me say parenthetically that the Social Science Research Council is planning to have some sort of a seminar in the spring of next year on this very theme.) When I defined rural radicalism during the independence struggle, what was I referring to? I was referring to the fact that the followers in the rural areas were angrier with the system than their elite leaders. The word radicalism isn't ideological, left versus right. The rural populations were angrier at the colonial condition and more willing to see it end than their more modern elite leaders. Then, three years later, you have

the Congo Rebellions. Basically, my first use of the term "rural radicalism" is a commentary on the relationship between leaders and followers during the independence struggle. It's limited to that in this context.

In the spring of 1960, there was a moment when the leaders of the PSA seemed to be in harmony with their followers for a short period of time but my ABAKO examples show that the leaders were really running after the followers, saying "Yes, yes, yes" when they did things they really didn't want them to do. Such as boycotting the medical services. These ABAKO leaders were not in favor of blocking sleeping sickness inoculations. But they didn't or daren't say, "Cut out this crap!" There you have a good portrait of this relationship.

The Kwilu Rebellion in the RDC

Then, of course, you have Mulele[27] coming back after months in exile in Egypt and China and starting the Kwilu Rebellion which then blooms in half the country. But now the relationship is entirely different. You could argue that the leaders are now touched by ideology. Clearly, Mulele is very much affected by Maoism. You could say now, all of a sudden, the relationship that I define has reversed itself. First, the whole movement is much more radical than the independence struggle. This is a real revolutionary movement in its methods and goals. Second, now the leaders are, I believe, more radical than the followers. Mulele, of course, was also a leader during

[27] Pierre Mulele (1929-1968) was briefly Minister of Education under Lumumba. Following the assassination of Lumumba, he left for Cairo and subsequently China, before returning as a Maoist to lead the 1964 Kwilu Rebellion.

the independence struggle. Many of top ones were. But now, only two-three years later, they are different and the movement they are leading is totally different.

Interestingly enough, the provincial president of the PSA – that is to say in 1959-60 - was Cléophas Kamitatu,[28] unfortunately deceased but a good friend of mine for decades. When I liberated those documents – the Kwilu Rebellion documents (there are about 4,500 documents; the originals are at the Hoover Institution in California) – there were 420 *listes d'équipe*. An *équipe* was the lowest structure in the rebellion. That's a lot of people. 10,000 names. They were usually listed hierarchically: *Chief militaire, Commisaire politique, Adjutant*, etc. I took many of these names and made a long list of them and then I went to Kamitatu.

One of the things I had failed to do but wanted to do was to conduct a kind of 'leadership sociology' of this movement: "Who are these people? What happened to them? Who were they before?" It turned out not to be possible to do that. So I went to Kamitatu. Now here's the guy who organized the province in 1960 in great detail. He knew everybody. Every PSA leader. He went through the list and hardly ever recognized a single name. Name after name: "*Connais pas*" – "*Connais pas*" – "*Connais pas.*" I spent an hour with him reading names. "*Connais pas.*" He himself was surprised.

In other words, what had happened to the PSA elite? We more or less know. They went to the cities and towns. Mulele never captured a single town. So while he and 4 or 5 or 10 were known, they had to draw on people in the villages who had

[28] Cléophas Kamitatu (1931-2008), Provincial President of the PSA; was briefly foreign minister of the DRC in 1965.

not held even the lowest leadership positions during the independence struggle just three years earlier. That has to be seen as one of the great weaknesses of the rebellion. Once you left the very top level, you were dealing with totally untested people. Since you're interested in this, I have to give you an article I wrote with an assistant, which analyzed these lists. Again, it produces an interesting insight, in my opinion, which speaks to the weakness of the movement. One of the things that I was able to do, with perhaps 10% of the names, was to separate the dates of induction.

This rebellion occurred very quickly and died very quickly. From September to December 1963 they were underground. They were pursued by the police and the army. In December, in two weeks, they basically liberate the area. Now they're dominant. They develop their structure, their bureaucracy, etc. etc., during the spring of '64. By the end of '64 it's already downhill and gone. A *Blitz* rebellion, so to speak.

Now, take the people who were inducted early. In normal circumstances, you would think they would come up the ladder. These were the ones who had the courage and ideological commitment. After December, it was not worth your life *not* to join. Before December, your life was in danger if you *did* join. It turns out, when you look at all the lists, that those who were inducted early were at a significant *disadvantage* compared to those who were inducted later. This seems to me to imply two things.

1) At the village level, the first who joined were the 'do-no-goods', the obstructionists, the outsiders. Probably there was at least an element of that.

2) More importantly, the people who had leadership positions later were the village elites, who simply said, "OK, now that there's a revolution we have to be part of it." There are hundreds of letters that in effect say just that. Now we're talking about the documents in the metal footlocker. "*Nous sommes dans le village xyz*. *Nous sommes tous pour la revolution. Envoyez nous des cartouches, des bics*!"[29] In other words, they're treating this like the new administration. "We're for you." "Give us..." It would take incredible research to be able to really investigate the names. I could not have done that. It's something that only a big project with Congolese assistance could have done – really go over the names and find out about the *chef militaire de tel village*.[30] What position did he have before anything happened? My assumption is – there's no proof of this – that whatever was left of elites in the village, because the successful ones left as a result of political election and appointments, were sort of the unsuccessful ones. Or perhaps traditional leaders. But in the Kwilu, traditional leaders were very local. The larger structures had been destroyed or lost. So these were the people left, who sort of self-appointed themselves. In order to get his movement functioning and spreading, Mulele had no choice but to say, "Amen. You're all for us. OK." *"Nous avons formé une équipe, donnez-nous un numero…"*[31] There were 500 people in the bush, in huts, that made up the *direction generale*. They even had a department of archives.

[29] "We're in village xyz. We're all for the revolution. Send us cartridges and ballpoint pens."
[30] "The military chief of such and such a village."
[31] "We have set up a team, give us a number…"

Of course, we don't know what would have happened if the Rebellion had either lasted longer or won. We know what happened during the independence struggle, but we do not have a good basis for comparison. Mulele, clearly, by the time he organized the rebellion, had a quasi-Marxist position. If you look at the documents, the ones Benoît Verhaegen pulled together in *Rebellions au Congo* (CRISP, Tome I, 1966, Brussels), the *leçons politiques* were very different from the policy declarations made by the modern elite leadership of the PSA in 1959-60. It involved a revolutionary restructuring of society. But of course, if you're talking about the common denominator of all elites wanting to rule after their own principles, yes, they have that in common. Of course. What else is new in the world! They weren't creating an anarchic system of direct democracy, that's for sure. But I think, especially in the Kwilu with Mulele having been in China for close to a year, they did have an ideological project. And from time to time did try to go against the will of the followers. Apparently, he tried to persuade them not to believe in magic. But they firmly believed in magic. And they fought using magic to very good use. Because they weren't the only ones who believed in magic. The Congolese army believed in magic – and specifically the rebel's magic - too and as a result they were totally pathetic. Fully armed government forces running away from rebels waving palm leaves and chanting who possessed virtually no modern arms. So, ironically, it was wrong of Mulele to dissuade the use of magic. If he had succeeded he would have weakened his movement. But, his modernism made him do it.

There's another element. The Rebellion was made up largely of the Pende and the Mbunda. Mulele was an Mbunda. There was a kind of Pende rebellion within

the revolution, which I think is significant regarding the role of ethnicity. The charge was that he was sending the Pende to the front and protecting the Mbunda. What is more natural? And what is more natural if it is not true yet is used as a charge against a leader? Of course, the Eastern Rebellion was more anarchic. Less affected by some sort of Marxism – but even to use that term is silly – by some sort of left-inspired ideology.

Common sense against abstract constructs

I am not versed in the area of European political history dealing with rural populations. One of the reviews of my book – the English edition – spoke of what I was describing as a *jacquerie*. We know that in medieval times in Europe there were rural protest movements that used violence. Maybe this has to do with stages of development. When I first launched into this, it was viewed as a sharp departure from received and accepted interpretations of the role of rural populations in the independence struggles of Africa. In a way this was, one could say, a radical departure. But, I simply reported and analyzed what I was observing in the field. I never got into this in an ideological or philosophical fashion. However, at NYU I did point out that my work gave some empirical support to Maoist theories. When Sidney Hook,[32] – a colleague and one of my former professors, who was an important anti-communist – met me on the street, he said: "Weiss, I hear that you've become a Maoist!" I think there are many angles to this. On the political philosophy angle, I pass. My work is entirely empirical.

[32] Sidney Hook (1902-1989), American pragmatist philosopher.

As an illustration take the role of Benoît Verhaegen. There was a festschrift for him. He called what he did *histoire immediate*, which I always thought was putting a methodological label on a common sense approach to the study of current affairs, although I had the greatest respect for his empirical work.[33] I was a good friend of his, so they asked me to write an article admiring *histoire immediate*. I said I couldn't do that. So they said, "Well, why don't you rework the introduction to your book?" The Introduction basically tells the story of the field research in very personal terms. So I called it "In Defense of Common Sense". That's my approach. It's common sense against abstract constructs.

Of course, we were trapped when we went out into the field, when all of us went out, because there was a construct we inherited – God only knows where it came from! – which, as I said earlier, ordained that there was no protest until these western educated elites came along. Now these elites did have their role but it's a lot more than just that. Take some of the classic works. I mention this in the conclusion of my book. Take, for instance, the great study of the Gold Coast – now Ghana - independence movements by David Apter.[34] David Apter was a professor at Yale and one of the great minds in political development. He's written a book about Argentina. Endlessly my superior. But look at his book. This great scholar was a close friend of Nkrumah's.[35] He had lockers of documents from Nkrumah at his beck and call. You look at that book and it goes on and on about the elites of Nkrumah's

[33] Benoît Verhaegen (1929-2009), Belgian historian. For an introduction to Verhaegen's *histoire immédiate* method, see his *Rébellions au Congo*, vol. I, Bruxelles, CRISP, Kinshasa, IRES, INEP, 1966, p. 13-17.
[34] David Apter, *The Gold Coast in Transition*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 1955.
[35] Kwame Nkruma (1909-1972) became the first Prime Minister of the Gold Coast in 1951, and led it to independence as Ghana in 1957. He was an influential advocate of Pan-Africanism.

political party and then it says they decided to go out into the rural areas. So he writes his three pages on the rural thrust - in the whole book. Everybody joined. By magic, everybody joined. And that was that. To my mind it's such a substantial lacuna. You're leaving out 90% of the population without describing its reactions, motivations, its internal conflicts.

What I'm saying is that I have discovered something of which I am proud, that should result in additional research and therefore possibly revisions of conclusions dealing with mass mobilization movements elsewhere in the world. I'm not saying this existed everywhere in the Congo. I'm saying this is what I saw in the Bakongo area, where the absence of real *entrée* into the inner workings of the party prevented me from doing more than describing my reaction – what I saw with my eyes, what I heard. Then I concentrated on the PSA largely because I was given access to internal party documents and because I was operating in the Western world and challenging orthodoxies. If I didn't have documents, I was screwed. You see?

I had also had access to Lumumba's party but as with ABAKO, no documents. I think, in fact, the radicalism was more pronounced in the area controlled by his party in the Oriental Province than in the Kwilu. And also, the way they mobilized was far more *poussé* – pushed. In the PSA, the propagandists were paid a salary. In the MNC/Lumumba, they were given a commission. For every card you sold, you got so much. They were 'kings' in the rural areas. The white plantation manager who I "visited" with an MNC/Lumumba propaganda team was shaking with fear in my presence. It was pathetic. In my presence the propagandists were reassuring, but

the manager and his wife were hardly convinced. And I am not at all sure that the propagandist – who were passing through – had the authority to control the local MNC/Lumumba leaders. These propagandists were often aggressive teenagers set free to force people to pay party dues. I won't write it that way because Lumumba is Lumumba. But that's what they would, in part, find. In other words, the thesis could be fed better with reference to the Lumumba area rather than the Kwilu. But I got there late and there were no documents and it would have been impossible to make copies there. Those PSA documents were my gold. I would have stated all the same ideas about rural radicalism, but without that gold those ideas would never have been accepted. I knew that from the start.

African Studies at Brooklyn College

My direct link with the State Department ended in 59. From time to time I've had tiny roles with the Department. For instance, they had a program to send the academics abroad to give lectures at American Culture Centers, and I participated in this program at least once. And then, of course, through USAID, I had several consultantships. These were little projects with subcontracts in which I was involved. For instance, one involved making an evaluation of the impact of American humanitarian aid in Eastern Congo. Another was a contract with the National Endowment for Democracy – partially funded by Congress – to evaluate the impact of the donations they were making to Congolese human rights organizations. Things like that. In addition, there were lots of conferences and seminars that I was invited to, where one could add one's two cents' worth. But I have never again –

after 1959 - been an employee of the State Department or had any kind of a permanent or ongoing role there.

I had a short-time appointment at Stanford before I finished my PhD where I taught African politics. Then I was at NYU, where the subject was very popular. And then, for good reasons but also for not so good reasons, I switched to the City University of New York at Brooklyn College. I say this about my reasons because ideological reasons are often bad ones. We will agree, *n'est-ce pas*? My ideological reason was that CUNY had adopted open admission. Anyone who was a high-school graduate from New York City was automatically accepted at one of the university's colleges. It was a disastrously over-optimistic program but it attracted me enormously as an opportunity to link my professional role with my social values. So I was now at the Political Science Department at Brooklyn College. There were all kinds of obstacles. First of all, the quality of the students. Some of the better ones went into science and into pre-law. But something like African studies didn't attract very good students. I found out more and more about the background of the students who did come to my courses. For instance, I had a course called "Protest and Revolution" but they didn't know how to write a paper and didn't know how to do library research. So I focused on the introductory course in political science. But, this was basically a course on American politics. I found that close to obscene because of its provincialism, so I invented my own introductory course, which was focused on world political history of the 20th century. A little bit about colonialism, a little bit about wars, little bit about communism, a little bit about capitalism, a little bit about European history. A mishmash! Now, by that time I was relatively senior,

so I could basically choose my own subjects and I backed off teaching advanced courses more and more. Brooklyn also had three ethnic departments – the Judaic Studies Department, Puerto Rican Studies and what was called Africana Studies. This was basically African-American Studies but it covered Africa as well. On one or two occasions I taught joint courses with a professor in the Africana Department. These were such value-laden courses. It was a drag.

The students in those courses weren't engaged in the social movements taking place in the streets of Brooklyn or New York. No, no. They were more involved with a kind of beautified image of black history. That's basically it. And the Jewish department was involved with the same thing for Jews. And these ethnic departments gave the highest grades of any department. It was basically an identity-supporting enterprise done on the cheap because it attracted weak students who got good grades. And they were able to talk in the first person plural: "We". In the end, I backed off. Who needs that?

This was not the late 60's but somewhat later. You know, when I came from NYU I had all kinds of plans. But they fell to the ground. Because basically you were dealing with the politics of small interest groups. For instance, in the 60s, the Board of Higher Education determined that at City College, any education major would have to have a semester-long course on African history. That made a lot of sense because half these students were going out to teach in the city's public schools which were heavily attended by African American students. Brooklyn graduated a thousand education majors each year. Most classes had a maximum size of 50 seats. That meant that applying the Board's decision would result in something like 10

sections on African History each semester. That's one of things that attracted me about going to Brooklyn. [*Laughs.*] Naïve little Herbert. Need I say more? The decision was never applied to Brooklyn.

But then, on the student level… an African-American student: "Are you trying to tell us that Africans sold other Africans into slavery?" – HW: "Well, by and large, that's what happened in the vast majority of cases." – Student: "I'm out of here." I understood where the student was coming from but then we didn't have anything to say to each other. What I thought was, "For God's sake, don't be so ignorant".

On another occasion I said something about the Ottoman Empire. Blank stares from everyone in the class. This was a mid-level political science class. "Surely somebody here has heard of the Ottoman Empire? Come on." One hand goes up. "Yes?" "The German Empire." I said, "What on earth made you think it was the German Empire?" "Well," he said, with an attitude that implied "you're putting us down. You have no right to do that." This was a widespread, because I do put people down. "Well, Otto's a German name." [*Laughs.*] Well, what do you do? You say, "Well, all right."

Africa in the State Department

I got out when I reached retirement age, both because I had another opportunity – that was when Lakhdar Brahimi[36] invited me to go to South African – and also

[36] Lakhdar Brahimi (b. 1934), Algerian United Nations diplomat who served as the United Nations and Arab League Special Envoy to Syria until 14 May 2014. He is a member of The Elders, a group of world leaders working for global peace.

because I just didn't enjoy this anymore. And I was not doing the students enough good. Are you motivated to go home and really prepare your lectures? No, you are just winging it. Anything you say is a novelty to them. That's not a proper way of being a professor.

Brahimi invited me to go to South Africa in January 1994. We've since become relatively distant but really warm good friends. His motive for inviting me was twofold in my opinion (he didn't come and tell me this, in any event). One, he knew the crowd I came from – YAC and World Assembly of Youth, i.e. internationalist/liberal – when he was in the FLN.[37] He knew exactly how to place me in that world. In other words, I was a trustworthy American. And I think he did it so he could tell the State Department, "I already have an American senior advisor." Actually, that didn't work because he ended up with a guy who was high up at the State Department. So if that was his gimmick, it didn't succeed. But I think that was one thought, "I have a trustworthy American." And then the second thing was that he had been the UN Special Representative for the Congo. That's how I met him. It's a position that was completely passive by 1994 but that he continues to hold. So he was sort of figuring: "If something comes up in the Congo I need somebody who knows what the hell is going on there to back me up, because I'm not going to be following it." As far as South Africa was concerned he had four senior advisors. He did not needed a single one of them. He was a workaholic and was very self-reliant. He did his own research, he didn't need advice – but he tolerated advice from time

[37] The Young Adult Council the Algerian *Front de Libération National*, which led Algeria to independence from France after a bloody war of liberation.

to time. So, on the one hand it was an exhilarating five months because of the conditions I was witnessing and was sometimes privileged to closely observe. On the other hand, I did not feel that I was personally accomplishing very much that was useful. I was in Johannesburg. There's a lot to tell because he'd either allow me, or invite me, to drag along with him and to be present at various events. I have the greatest respect for him.

I think on the whole there was certainly a time when Africa in the State Department was an opportunity to climb faster than in other areas, because these were new openings. So a lot of very good people specialized in Africa. In my opinion, the big problem is not the personnel but the institutional rules which allow someone a maximum of 3 years in one assignment. Now, to really get into Africa or any particular country, three years is insufficient. Of course this system stops people "going native", which is the purpose of the thing. But, on the other hand, I know people, for instance in the French military, who have 20 years' experience in one or another African country. They know Chad, for instance. They're worth listening to on Chad. But the guy who's been at the US Embassy for a couple of years, I submit cannot but have a limited understanding of the country in question. However, Americans are often less isolated than other Westernern diplomats. We contact with the locals more I think. But as an American diplomat, by the time your contacts with the local people have matured to real trust, you're out of there. This is the big handicap. Of course, the other handicap is history and policy. This is something that no single State Department person can do anything about but it hangs over him/her.

There is broad anti-Americanism and there's the history in a place like the Congo – what we've actually done there.

African Studies Programs in the United States

I think that African Studies in the US by and large attracts good scholars and students and that the research being produced is very respectable. Since retiring from teaching, I don't follow this in great detail any longer. That's my impression though. The problem is not African Studies or the graduate students who specialize in this field. The problem is with undergraduate studies. That obviously depends very much of which college you are thinking about. Except among American students, I do not think that African studies has the attraction it had in the 60's and 70's at the undergraduate level. So at colleges that do not require high SAT scores you have a student body that in many places is relatively uninformed and disinterested. This is a mountain that's almost impossible to climb. And it starts in Kindergarten. I mean, by the time you expect intellectual interest in Africa its way too late.

Listening with dyslexia

There's a personality trait that affects me that I think is not unimportant. I'm deeply contrarian. When I sit and listen to a lecture I am just waiting for what I disagree with. That's a large part of what is going on in my head. "Ha! Ha! Ha! Gotcha!" That

has its ups and its downs. But I also have a handicap. I am dyslexic. Not very seriously dyslexic but clearly dyslexic. I read incredibly slowly. This has been a big handicap from which, when I was a student, I suffered greatly because I would get these reading lists and my thought was, "Forget it, I'm going to have to wing it." This was my inevitable response in every class I took: "How am I going to wing this?" There were all kinds of techniques. Let's say I understand people with bigger handicaps because I know how I handled my little handicap. What you spend a good amount of intellectual effort on is how to get around the obstacle. You get a big reading list and you have to do an exam at the end on those books which you haven't read. How are you going to do that? You need to find a method or you're not going to graduate. I worked on various ways of dealing with that. This I think is connected to my being a contrarian.

I did learn a lot when I was in my early 20's but mainly I learned by listening and by saying no. If I challenged you, you would come up with your best arguments. I would remember your best argument and the next day some guy would take my position of today and I'd say, "No!" And I would have good arguments because you just gave them to me! And then he would give me his, etc. In this way, I achieved some parity with all these people who had read all these books. It's only in my eighties that I am willing to talk so frankly about this. It comes back to these two elements. One is a personality element and the other is a compensation element but as you point out my being a wanderer who never really belonged anywhere and yet had access to such varied environments and cultures – that also added a lot. Why did I commit so strongly to study independence movements in the 60's? Why did I decide to dig

there? Well, I had my eyes open but also I'd been given a kind of received wisdom that always bothered me. How can we stick it to anything that is received? If you have that attitude, 'He who seeketh findeth.' You end up that way.

A universal aesthetic

There may be a link - for you to discover – between me and the art that is surrounding us here. But in my mind, with the exception of the Pende piece, all this is completely separate from my personality and intellectual journey. I suppose there's a contrarian element there too. That's where the link may be, if I think about it. I'm a Westerner and I'm supposed to appreciate ballet, opera, good books, art. Right? OK. I feel a bit guilty because I don't like opera. I can't read music and although I like a lot of music – especially classical – I have the feeling that, in the last analysis, this music isn't really touching me closely enough. I don't read good books because it's too boring, given the speed I go through them. I'm drawn to some modern sculpture spontaneously. And then there's the opportunity that slowly emerges in Africa. I have a good eye. Dealers tell me I have a good eye. I think you're just born with it. This art is something I can afford. Western art that I like as much, I can't afford. I like sculpture more than paintings or etchings, drawings, lithographs. You have to go real close to look at these. I couldn't be a collector of prints. They completely turn me off, although some prints are very nice. I like sculpture, the 3-dimensional. This came from somewhere but I don't know where. If you like the 3-dimensional, you like something that's not like the line you were supposed to follow because of your background. Hell, it's like a gift from the heavens. So I went for it.

In any aspect of art that I'm interested in – I don't know if this is too broad a statement but even if it is, let it stand – I yearn to understand a psychological content. I think that I'm a post-Freudian man in the sense that, whether you've had analysis or not or whether you read books about psychology or not (which I haven't), my subculture is permeated by personality analysis. You probably share that? I transpose that. I make a bridge between that and art. So I want to look at art and see an expression. A human or animal expression. Basically, a human expression. I want to say this is really a depressed person, or whatever it may seem to be. At the same time, for reasons that I can't explain other than by stating what appeals to me, I do like Cubistic forms. There is daring in them.

Take this, for example this Lwalwa mask *[taking a sculpture off the shelf]*. You can read a person into it. A personality. At the same time, you can take these pieces out and they become beautiful shapes in and of themselves. There is a balance which makes the thing. Here is a good example of that *[another sculpture]*. It's daringly Cubistic and yet, in the last analysis, you can read power and earnestness into the face. You read whatever you want into it. That mask over there, which is not complete in any case, is again very well balanced, in my opinion. The sharp Cubistic forms. And yet you can read something into it. So that's what I mean by being attracted to these things.

Of course I collect more broadly as well. You can't restrict yourself that strongly. Here's another example. I like faces because you can read a being into them. This is kind of an interesting piece, if the interpretation of what it is I was given is correct. It is a Kuba piece. You can see a very glum woman whose breasts have been sheared

off on purpose. Supposedly the King of the Kuba has or had about 100 wives and they might have felt neglected and unappreciated. The idea is, if you dare to go elsewhere, this is what could happen to you.

This morning I talked about a universal aesthetic. This comes in precisely if I take, for instance, a Warega Mask. Let's take this *[picking up a sculpture]* and compare it to a Brancusi. Now, they come from very different cultures. That satisfies me. The way they treat form strikes me as very similar. So, this balance between personality, shape and minimalism, is something that they share despite coming from very different cultures and as a subset of a universal aesthetic. Next to them could be a No mask from Japan. It could fit into this triad that I just created. I don't need to appreciate French art, Congo Art, or Japanese Art. I may do that but I don't need to in order to appreciate them. I appreciate them because they share a form, an aesthetic. I can appreciate all three of them on an egalitarian basis. With very rare exceptions, I completely abstract the art that I possess. In other words, you come and tell me, "Well what was this art used for?" I may know, I may not know but it is not important for me. That's not why I possess it, you see. The one exception[38] is the Pende figure of M. Balot but that is for obvious reasons – it is intimately connected to a Congolese protest movement. But other than that…

Collecting African art

This is a recently acquired Walengola mask. I didn't know that the Walengola produced masks. OK? It looks like a very good mask. The guy I exchanged it with, I

[38] The piece from the Pende revolt described above.

had never met before. I hope he didn't cheat me. My only real question about this mask is: "Do the Walengola have masks like this?" In other words, is it genuine? That's important to me for reasons, I suppose, of economy more than anything else. What is more important is that I like it. I have also bought and kept "fakes" because aesthetically I like the sculpture as such. I don't give a damn about what ritual it was involved in. Whether it was part of a circumcision ceremony or part of some other ritual. You know, some people are immensely interested in that. I'm not.

Suppose, as an atheist Jew, I find a crucifix very attractive. I objectivize it and divorce it completely from its function. What's wrong with that? But you must separate theft from some sort of agreed exchange. I mean, we're talking about theories of possession here. How it is presented is irrelevant. I don't know the history. But there is a reality. And one of the interesting things about various African objects – and I'm more familiar with that – is that, of course, some are stolen but some are desacralized. In other words their sacred or ritual quality has been drawn out of them and then they are just objects. What we need to do is talk about that type of example, rather than talking about whether all these objects were "stolen" because they are no longer in their original cultural world. Obviously, we're against theft. So I think you need to concentrate on whether it is different for me to take a mask that was sacred to an African clan and now they decided to sell it, as against a crucifix from a family who has had it in their possession for 300 years and has decided to sell it. I don't see a difference. I support a form of universalization. We have the same rules. I'm against stealing African objects but I'm fine with a purchase from a legitimate owner who has decided to sell.

I have a piece that I presented at a conference- actually the figure of M. Balot. A group of Africans in a village had come to sell it because they wanted to send some of their children to school and schooling was no longer free. It was a sacred object that had been in their clan for many years but that they were willing – apparently legitimately, let's assume legitimately – to sell. At the conference an African-American woman came up to me and said, "So why couldn't you leave the object there and just given them the money?" I said, "I happen to have their address. If you want to send them some money, why don't you do it? Why are you guilt-tripping me?" I refused to be guilty about this. This object belonged to them and they were willing to exchange it for something that to them at that moment of time was of greater value. There were times in Vienna in 1938 when we were selling things desperately and the Nazis didn't even pay for them, although they pretended to buy them. That was theft under oppressive conditions. But, whereas I believe purchases of African traditional art, under legitimate conditions, are OK, there is a problem of the price paid. As with African raw materials such as copper, timber etc. the price paid in Africa for traditional art, especially in the past, has been ridiculously low. Of course, that is grossly unfair. But now things have changed and there is art for sale in Kinshasa at prices that are far higher than what one can buy at auctions here in the US.

Sometimes you put two pieces together. Take these. There is an aesthetic. The fact that they are a pair adds to their value. Over there, there's another pair. I don't mind adopting them in my western world in the name of universalism. And I think this is more honorable than placing a great deal of value on bits of ethnographic

information. You're not going to really get into something like, "This is a mask that they danced with when they celebrated a marriage or a birth." It either fits into our Western world or it doesn't.

Leaving art aside, I am interested in getting deeper into African culture and individuals in various ways. I have African friends and I'm delighted when they open up and tell me about their mother or father and how they feel about this, that and the other thing. I'm glad to be adopted. When there's an obstacle to intimacy, overcoming the obstacle is more meaningful than when there is no obstacle, obviously. Yes, there are these cultural antagonisms. But when you overcome them, when you are adopted by other people, it is very moving, very meaningful. So when I say I'm not interested in the past of these objects, it is that I don't need objects to go and learn about people. I'm interested in the role of circumcision, magic, tradition, etc. but also university training, business tycoons etc. in Africa. If someone wants to talk about these things I will listen. I don't need an object to do this.

What does this say to you? *[He displays an oil painting]*. It's a copy of *Guernica*. A garishly colored variations on *Guernica*. There was a French man who started a school of painting in Brazzaville. They signed themselves PPP- Peintre Poto Poto. Well it became much commercialized. There was a big cement platform and a very thick thatched roof. The platform was twice the size of this room. There were artists on both sides who exhibited their paintings. It was quite an innovation. I was there looking at one painting after another. And I hit upon this one. I couldn't resist buying it because it's a 360° circle of cultural influence. When the show *Primitivism*

and Modern Art was on at MOMA [in 1984] I telephoned and wondered if it would fit in. They didn't call back.

Collecting tribal art can be a financially beneficial thing because of the phenomenal rise in the prices of good tribal art and also because of the business of charitable donations. I give objects to American museums every year and of course it results in a reduction in my taxes. I think, the US Government "spends" more on objects of art – although it almost never buys any – than do the European countries. *They* do buy much of what is in their museums. Here, there is a loss of tax revenues because the appraisals are so exaggerated. I got a call once from someone in the Congressional Reference Service. This guy was doing background research on Nelson Rockefeller, who had been nominated for the Vice- Presidency. He explained, "I'm charged with examining his income tax returns. I see here an appraisal of $5.5 million for objects of African art donated to the New York Museum of Primitive Art." This was the early 70's. I doubt he could have spent more than $500,000, so it was immensely generous for him to get a $5.5 million deduction from his gross income. Let's say he spent $1 million, although this is probably too high. Through tax not paid on this gift he cleaned up in raw cash between $3 million and $4 million! When I heard that I said to myself, "Never feel guilty about your little donations!"

Collecting maps

I haven't given any maps away. Not because I want to hold on to them, simply because I never thought, until you at the Paper Museum came along, that they would

have any value to anyone except perhaps to me. The maps from 59 and 60 are part of an even larger collection of materials that show changes in jurisdiction. The constitution currently operative in the Congo refers to 26 provinces. There's a constant tension between people wanting, on the one hand, to have more homogeneous units and, on the other hand, the tension that is created by the fact that these new, little provinces don't have the economic or administrative wherewithal to function. These are two huge dangers that pop up from day one. When the unit is homogeneous, the person in power can become a dictator. Alternatively, there isn't any money to support projects. The riches of the country and the specific province in question are supposed to fund them but this doesn't happen. Those maps are looking for a home!