

DAVID WEBSTER TAPE 1 SIDE 1 8.8.85

DW: Tell me where and when you were born.

DW: Louantia, Zambia 1945

JF: What were your parents doing there?

DW: My father was a miner, he was a fitter and turner trained in Roodepoort as an artisan and then went to Zambia in 1925. He was involved in the miners strike of 1922., as a very young man - he was born in 1901.

For him the strike was a tragic event although I don't understand this fully. He went on strike and then he was called up into the army and then he was a territorial officer or person in the Transvaal Scottish.

He was sent as an army person to fight strikers in Benoni. His sister's fiance was killed in Benoni with a battle with strikers. It was complicated as he was on strike and was not just scabbing but double scabbing by serving in the army.

There was this post world war 1 high patriotism about you must serve if you are called up kind of stuff. So that was an amazingly traumatic event, so in '24 he made inquiries about new gold and copper mines opening in Zambia and in '25 went there.

JF: Did he learn anything from the experience about the state's power?

DW: No, I think he was very unreflective about those things, he wasn't a political figure at all. In fact he rather admired Smuts in a funny kind of way.

But he did decide that this was an event he couldn't come to terms with. What actually did happen too was his brother in law, a person that he knew in Roodepoort actually scabbed, kept on going to work. And this person married my father's sister after her fiance had been killed and my father took a very long time to come to terms with that as well.

Somehow he didn't seem to think that serving in the army against strikers was unacceptable, whereas scabbing was.

JF: Did you learn about this early or way later?

DW: Only at the end of his life. He died before I could speak with him very clearly about any of these things, unfortunately, so I really only learnt about it in '72 when he died.

I was interested at that time for the first time and had just started to talk those things through. It was very puzzling to me because I wasn't very sussed politically at that time.

JF: Did you grow up in Zambia?

DW: Yes I did, I spent my first 21 years there. Then I was sent to school in Northern Rhodesia then, where I was born, and then to university in South Africa.

Then my father retired from the copper mines in 1967 when I was 22, and retired to East London in South Africa., which is where he had been born.

I was still at university and went to live with them there. We pulled up all our roots in Zambia, which got independence in '64. My father was very happy where he was and toyed with the idea of retiring in Zambia, but in the end all his friends left and he was also doubtful, so he went back to E.L where he knew people and had a bit of family.

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JF: Where did you go to university?

DW: Rhodes, Grahamstown. That was another reason, that he wanted to be near where I was studying.

JF: Do you have any idea about the difference between whites and carneys as they were then?

DW: As a matter of fact, quite a clear idea. Zambia was a fascinating place. It was always much more racist than Rhodesia. Northern Rhodesia was more racist than Southern Rhodesia from the beginning.

The reason was that N.Rhodesia was a mono economy on copper, and it was a particular kind of copper mining, deep level mining, and the only people in the vicinity who had skill in this were S.A gold miners. There were some English immigrants, coal miners from Newcastle and Scotland as well and one or two Australians and Americans.

Rather like the composition of the SoutheAfrican labour force but the vast majority of people who fromed the Zambian copper belt and made the mines work, the riggers, the fitters and turners, about 80% were trained in South Africa, and apprenticed on our gold mines here.

It was in a highly racist envoronment and so this little microcosm of South Africa got transplanted and became the hub of industry in Zambia. It was therefore in a position to influence dominant racial attitudes as well.

It was an intriguing place with a little microcosm of the S.A Wits-waterrand because even the rugby clubs of little towns were named afer ~~xxxx~~ Johannesburg clubs.

Happily my town wasn't, it had a rugby club named Roan Antelope after the mine, but our rugby colours were the same as Roodepoort. At Kitwe, the clubs were called pirate s and Diggers and they are both Joburg clubs.

All the surrounding towns had their clubs modelled on Witswaterand clubs. The social life focused on what was called the recreation club, which was a South African phenomenon too.

There was a little mining company town which provided the entire life-style of the people, the recreation and shops.

Black life was very structured in compound and township life, but white life was also very controlled in its own way. So being such a monoconomy and focused on a South African style, it was exceedingly racist.

It was very easy to move from Zambia to S.A and back and be completely racist and have no problems whatsoever, in adjsuting to the style of lilfe.

Whereas N.Rhodesians always regarded S.Rhodesians as being a bit suspect, a bit liberal, not that they were of course but it seemed that way.

They definitely had a more tolerant attitude towards black people.

JF: Did you grow up with those attitudes?

DW: Yes, I was quite a racist kid, although my father in a very sweet kind of way, and my mother too, was very correct about treating human beings as human beings.

It might not sound liberal, but in those days it was quite a liberal stand to take, like we had a domestic servant who was a male like most of the domestic servants in Zambia, and he was an adult about 40 I suppose and my father was very clear that one had to treat him as an adult, not humiliate him, which I did once or twice and got upbraided for it.

So my father was correct but racist too, no question.

JF: What about your background, was it as close as it can come to being white working class, or was that setting, even though he was a fitter and turner, he had the ambience of the bourgeoisie of Zambia?

DW: A tricky question because a minig town is the most astonishing microcosm, it is full of hierarchy and status and I wouldn't know if this is replicated in coal mines in England, working class communities in America, but I have never been in a place with more emphasis placed on status and hierarchy.

Not class, because you all belong roughly to the same class, a form of working class but the internal recognition of difference within that class was astonishing to watch.

First of all blacks just didn't count at all, they weren't part of your social universe, but that within your own internal white community, there were those who did the very menial tasks, supervisory and shift work, the guys who supervised gangs of workers on the roads, they were bottom of the hierarchy.

Then came the rockbreakers, although they were an interesting community, or category, they were very unskilled white people who led a team of blacks drilling at the rock face and they got a bonus for however much rock they broke.

They made an enormous amount of money, and they were often the poorest educated with no skills at all, because drilling and blasting is actually not a skill and yet they earned the highest salaries of anybody there.

They were an ambiguous category. Then came the artisans of my father's kind, they were hierarchically arranged according to whether you were just an artisan, a fitter, a mechanic, a joiner or a supervisory group above those called Sectional engineers.

My father was a case in point of how he rose through the ranks to end his career of 40 years to end as a sectional engineer, which meant from the days I can remember he never practiced fitter and turning, he was a supervisor of other people's labour.

He ran the mine garage and workshop for some years, and the boilmakers etc. As more and more black people became involved in those lower sections of labour, he was supervising them as well of course.

It was a typical case in a way of starting with craft like skills and then moving into supervisory positions over other people who do bits and pieces of the job.

Then there were the mining underground guys, the smelter guys and so on who were slightly higher status, and then the administrators who ran the books, the timekeepers, the accountants. In those days, they didn't have computers, they had a thing called a hololith machine, a punched card which sorted things by category, a bit like an early computer.

They were a different category of people too, although not terribly highly thought of. You learnt your skills in the work place and those guys were stigmatised as not really having got their hands dirty.

In the mines, it's interesting that they always promoted people, especially from underground, to be the mine manager in the end. These were not people with great managerial skills normally, but people who had worked their way through the system and become by dint of leadership qualities of a kind, respected by people.

The administration thing happened somewhere else, like our mine was a group called Rhodesian Selection Trust which is now called Roan Selection Trust. Anglo-American was the other major company there.

So the admin tended to be done somewhere else like in Salisbury or Joburg, but the day to day running and control was done by some one who had come up through the mine structures.

JF: I want to get a larger picture of the white working class thing, but let me just backtrack to...to get back to the theme of the awareness of blacks and racism, was there in that community, shock and horror about independence and what it would bring?

DW: Very much. Zambia didn't have a very bloody runup to independence, in fact there were a couple of cases of rioting and violence and one or two white people got killed, and a kind of angst arose in the community (white).

And certainly people predicted Oh when independence comes this is the end of our place, we are all getting out fast, and it came. By then I was a university student, and we rather enjoyed it. All us Zambians at Rhodes University had a party, and you were invited to write off to Zambia to get a package which consisted of a Zambian flag in cardboard and a record with Nkosi Sikelele adapted to Zambian circumstances, a speech from Kuanda etc.

We didn't take it terribly seriously down at Rhodes but people back home were, things started taking a bad turn when they started changing street names, Rhodes Ave to Lomumba Street or something.

They started changing school names and integrating schools which up until that point had been pretty segregated, and everyone started to pull their kids out of the local government schools and send them ~~xxxx~~ south to Rhodesia to all white other schools, sometimes government, sometimes private.

There was consternation alright and in fact a major exodus, but that was immediately stopped by a discriminatory wage introduced in Zambia between local Zambians and what were called expatriots.

Expatriots were told We are Zambiansing and you're got to train people up into your job, but in reality that took years and it is still going on as far as I know.

Expatriots if they retained your foreign passport made a killing, their salaries doubled some of them. So there was a mixture of expedience and fear.

People like my father were in a slightly different thing because they were reaching retirement anyway. No one really in my father's generation thought of Zambia as home, my father was one of few who kind of thought of it as a bit home, but all the English immigrants spoke of the home country meaning England.

The Afrikaans or South African miners used to talk of home as being Joburg or somewhere, usually Joburg. So most people who were there didn't think of the place as home at all, so Zambia hastened the return to home for many of those people.

Coincidentally Palabora opened up as a copper mine in the N.E transvaal and it became just a little piece of Rhodesia. It was astonishing. My brother at the time was qualifying as an analytical chemist, and didn't hesitate to apply for a job at Palabora.

He was slotted into a whole community which he knew, he knew about 200 people.

JF: A parallel with the Rhodesians down here now?

DW: I guess so.

JF: When you arrived at Rhodes did you feel at all different, working class as compared ..were there lots of kids who had parents as professionals? Was that at all a factor?

DW: The university was a sort of regional place in a way, being a Rhodesian, well schooled there anyway, there was a Rhodesian element at the University.

DW:.. there always has been, it's quite a strong thing, and ironically it was the liberal element in those days. It won't mean much to you, but the SRC president there in my second year was a guy called John Spragg.

He became NUSAS president and was chucked out of S.A because he was using a dual passport. He then went to England and worked for anti-apartheid and now as far as I know is a stalwart to the British communist party as far as I know.

Not that he had those political tendencies then but he was a Rhodesian and there was a Rhodesian clique on campus who voted in Rhodesians to the SRC. They were left of most South African students.

So there was first of all a regional allegiance that you had, which now that I think about it, did have a certain class component to it. The Rhodesian students were rather split amongst themselves, those that went to things, schools like Peterhouse which Finnaster and others went to and indeed which I kind of went to as well. The whole Rhodesian schooling needs to be looked at if you are interested in class, and upward mobility and stuff.

There was a distinction between those that went to South African private schools, St Andrews, Bishops, and certain fairly elitist government schools. In the Eastern Cape Selbourne, and in East London, Grey College.

They saw themselves as a fairly elite group and they may or may not have been in terms of class background but there was a certain style about those guys.

I would say Yes in a way some of us were country bumpkins by comparison with those people, there is no doubt about that. My town where I grew up was tiny with 6000 white people.

That meant in your youth cohort there were 200 of them if that, and you knew every last one of them.

JF: How did you arrive on campus politically, of the left N.Rhodesians?

DW: No, I was a very conservative kid, somewhere in the right I suppose. of most Rhodesians who were the liberals on campus to an extent. The reactionary Rhodesian component actually begins with the war in Rhodesia and Smith, that is when politics on S.A campuses changed with the problematic Right wing Rhodesian students.

It wasn't like that at all in those days. In my first year I didn't participate in NUSAS or student demonstrations etc and just towards the end of my first year, there was one big demonstration on Rhodes campus about Bantu education, '65.

I didn't participate in it, in fact I was quite hostile to it. In fact Glenda was my girlfriend at that time and she did and I didn't and I was hostile about her participating.

But I began to think through some of the issues and wonder about some of those things. Contemporarily with that the National party on the Rhodes campus was making a play, there were some right wing guys on the campus.

They were going around the campus trying to recruit people for the national party, and I remember vividly finding that totally out of the question.

I saw myself as a UP type person in those days I suppose, in so far as I didn't actually associate with S.A politics in those days, I thought it wasn't my problem.

I didn't know that I was going to come and live in S.A at that time anyway. I thought I'd be back in Zambia. I thought these guys are just out to lurch, the nationalists, but I didn't particularly think the demonstrations were going to be very effective or useful.

I didn't think they were my scene either, but that particular demonstration began me thinking. There was a night vigil on the library steps, rather a corny thing with lit candles, and I remember agonising about why Glenda was there and I wasn't.

DW:.. was there something to this that I was missing kind of thing. I guess that was the beginning of moving somewhere into a liberal camp as opposed to being pretty right wing actually.

JF: How did that move continue in your university life?

DW: In my second year.. Rhodes is a very paternalistic structure, in the first year, all students 1st years are put into one residence. You're housed and kept rather like boarding school.

Second year you can choose another residence, and I chose a very small and relaxed residence, and it happened to be a combination of theology students and politics in a way.

The politics were Rhodesians and the theology students were mostly South African. Through personal contact with those people I began to see a different view of things.

This is '66. I don't know if you know your South African history but those guys who were the theology students were in SCA (Students christian association) which was a fairly conservative Christian movement, and a left wing thing broke away from that called the UCS (University christian movement).

On Rhodes campus they were white students but its equivalent on black campuses were the guys who founded black theology, and I was a contemporary with a guy called Rob Stewart who subsequently was one of the really moving forces behind black consciousness.

He married a Japanese woman, and went into exile. Another one was a guy called James Polly who actually dropped out of clerical matters and now runs a film unit in Cape Town.

But he was quite a radical guy,. One of the teachers but who hung around the residences quite a lot was a guy called Basil Moore, very influential in black theology.

There were a lot of these guys who carried their debates out in a theological fashion, all about the social gospel actually, and apartheid to an extent. It wasn't that pointedly political. That was the one I interacted with quite a lot, and the other lot were people like Spragg who was my next door neighbor in residence.

A number of other liberal guys, although lets not push it further then that.

JF: Up to now everything you have discussed, you've never had any interaction with blacks that were of any influence?

DW: Absolutely none. My school days were a closeted boarding school, with 300 students in a bush school, it was an old gold mine in a town called Essexvale in Southern Zimbabwe.

The school still goes, it is Falcon College now. Mine was called Bush-Stick. It was like a little prison camp almost, you never saw black people other than .. except in the kitchen, because you polished and cleaned your own floors. It was an astonishing little microcosm.

My Rhodes university existence was a very closeted one, it wasn't an integrated campus, we had Chinese people on campus, that's all. There was no thought of going down to the Grahamstown location to a shebeen, which Wits students might well consider in Soweto today.

Your lecturing staff and everything in your world never encouraged

DW:.. that sort of thing. Really bizarre.

JF: Were there any changes or influences at university?

DW: A very liberal thing happened. The Grahamstown City Council got very reactionary about the black workers at Rhodes who used to come and watch rugby. They used to like watching it. It is a big sport, even for black people, in the Eastern Cape.

more than soccer, These guys used to troop on foot from the location through Grahamstown to watch Rhodes University versus somebody. The Grahamstown City Council got it into their heads about '67, to stop this it was a nuisance that these guys traipsed all the way through town.

So they banned it and the students got very angry about it, and that was the first time I really started to think about it, What on earth do the city council think they are doing. What harm can these people do?

So we had a big demonstration about that particular issue, and then I started to get involved with NUSAS. I joined the NUSAS local comm.

I began to be drawn in by NUSAS concerns although in that period, it was straight liberalism. I can't even remember who the NUSAS president was.

It was like the year that they brought Robert Kennedy out, and what a revelation that was. That was quite an amazing thing. People shifted their politics at least two inches to the left at that time.

JF: Did you?

DW: Yes definitely.

JF: Why? Because he was charismatic or he seemed..he shook hands with black people?

DW: I suppose he represented international liberalism in a funny kind of way, and we were into that at that time. Half my friends were kind of doping out and getting into drugs, I was never into that scene, I never smoked even cigarettes and I always felt it not to be a part of my life, not interested.

Half of my community and friends went straight into that, hard stuff even, LSD was coming on. I couldn't find myself getting involved with that lot, and the other half became more politicised somehow. There was a definite split on campus.

I belonged to the group that moved more in the politicised direction than in the druggy dropout direction. I think we all came from the same camp in the beginning, that is we could see malaises in the society, but we weren't sure what the hell it was, or what direction the society was moving in.

The other main thing which I'm sure people don't understand today was that nothing I was ever taught was progressive at university. I mean I did politics, philosophy and economics, anthropology, french, english but I was never taught a radical course in my whole university career.

The politics course consisted of long treatises on the nature of democracy, from Plato to John Stuart Mill or something. I did an African Government course which was about colonial Africa but it was taught in such a way that made you think that colonialism was quite a beneficial thing to the indigenous populations of Africa.

In fact you probably met the woman who taught it who had actually moved up quite a lot since those days. But she taught an incredibly reactionary course, when I was a student.

So I went through the university not being stimulated by my lecturers at all, I didn't even know Marx existed when I was at University. No one talked about him, not students, not lecturers.

I finished my university undergraduate in 1968, and I never touched

DW:.. the readings of Marx ever.

JF: Then you did what?

DW: I went into Anthropology. I began incidentally as a BComm student, out of not knowing what else to do, I thought let's take a safe career. After two weeks I began to think Oh My God what have I done?

Accounting 1, elementary theory of finance and statistics and that kind of stuff. I realised this is not for me at all, and so I wrote my exmas end of that year and I passed okay, but I decided to get out of a BComm and moved into a BA.

Quite accidentally I fell into anthropology which is what I now do because it was a two year major and in order to complete my degree in three years, I had to take a course which I could major in and so I took it.

In a funny kind of way it turned me on, and in fact it was important for me because for the first time you were being taught that black people are interesting. They have societies and cultures which are of immense worth in their own right.

Again a very liberal kind of thing, but if you take the time to look at say Zulu culture, it has a logic and a system. It's not about superstition and bizarre practices, it is actually amazingly intricate, full of delicate logic and a lot to find out and know.

I found that a real trun on, I really dug anthropology from day one and suddenly I realised at the end of my firsts year of doing it that this is what I was keen on.

It was like a vocation almost, I suddenly got keen. I had kind of wafted through university at that point, and I started working at anthropology.

I began to look at black people with new eyes from that kind of perspective. I must stress it wasn't a radical course at all but what it did do was open up a new dimension for me.

I'd go back to Zambia and look at the guy who had worked in our house all these years and I'd never actually seen as a proper person at all. I'd start talking to him about what part of Zambia he had come from, he was a migrant worker.

I started asking what tribe he belonged to and what language they spoke. And incidentally Zambia is in the anthropological literature...

TAPE 1 SIDE 2

DW:...is probably the most written up country in the whole world and my home town Louantia has had more books and articles written on it than any other place in the social sciences.

It's ironic, I suddenly found My home town has had five books and twenty articles written about it, about the black people who live there. I read them avidly and started to go around the township and look and meet people and hang out in the pubs.

I started moving within Zambia itself in a more mixed community. That was fascinating and I discovered suddenly one or two whites doing the same thing.

They had been doing it for years but I'd never known it because I wasn't part of that scene. I used to work with other black people in the copper mine in vac jobs, and it was after independence anyway and black people were much more self confident about their lives and more willing to integrate with whites on an equal footing too, so it became easier to interact.

JF: Spicing?...

DW: ~~Luanshya~~ Luanshya. It's one of the six copper belt towns about thirty miles from where Ian Filmser(?) was born.

Phumster

JF: Did your parents or friends in the community back there think you were a bit odd?

DW: There was a problem. First I began to shed some of my old school friends who thought this guy is a bit off. This wasn't a major shift in that I would have black people round to dinner, and that sort of thing. My parents wouldn't have countenanced that at all.

Indeed, I phoned my mother tonight to say I'm coming for Victoria Mligi's funeral, can I bring some friends to stay, and she said Are they black, because if they were she wouldn't have accepted them, even now.

It took the form of socialising with them and drinking with them, going to watch soccer with them which was a big sport in Zambia. I used to support our local soccer team.

There was a guy called Agistillia Bwagla who was a great soccer player who played for Zambia and I worked with him, we became quite mates, and I used to go and watch him play.

It's true that it wasn't a popular thing to do. But on the other hand it didn't cause me any great stigmatisation either. My social universe was still pretty much white, south African originated people.

JF: After you finished your degree what did you do?

DW: That is when the real change took place because I did an honours in Anthropology which was preparation for doing research, an MA. Not from any great planning, but I decided not to do research in S.A.

Because in those days, doing research in S.A. was incredibly tricky. '69, '70, even though it was one of the quieter periods of S.A. history. Black communities are largely speaking hostile to whites in S.A, there is a suspicion gap to overcome if you are going to do research.

Getting permission from the authorities is another ball game or at least it was then, much tougher than now, with permits. By then I was on the police books for NUSAS protest, nothing great but they have taken your photograph and one or two pickets your name.

So I took a choice to work outside and tossed up between Lesotho and Mocambique. Because one of my lecturers had researched in Mocambique and it was faraway and exotic, and I read a book about a wonderful group of people living there who were musicians and I was into music in a big way and still am, I'm going to study the Choep in Mocambique, I thought.

With help from the lecturer and a Portuguese guy I knew who taught in Durban, I got clearance from the Portuguese security police which was the main issue there.

On an absolute shoestring, married Glenda and went off to live in Mocambique for a full year. We lived from Jan to Dec in the Choep community in Mocambique.

We were amazingly poor so we were forced to live at the same standard as the rest of the Choep population, somewhat below it actually as they were mostly good farmers.

It turned into an amazing year, and developed a whole lot of consciousness about black people. I suddenly realised, the focus in my study, not by choice, was that I studied local level politics.

That was what everybody did, studied politics in a big way, and there were people without one jot of education. Guys who had never seen a school and couldn't write their name, could speak a smattering of Portuguese and a minimum of English because most of them had worked in the gold mines.

Quite a lot of Fungalore, the linguafranca and Chopian Zulu. I had to learn the language as there was no way I could communicate with them, the women especially. There were no grammars and dictionaries, it was by listening and talking and struggling.

I think I learnt it quite well in retrospect, I can speak it more than Zulu now with its textbooks and tape aids etc. We had huts built in that community and lived in a homestead like they did.

I did have a research assistant who spoke a little English and helped me a bit, and I turned everything that happened, weddings, funerals, celebrations, went and worked in peoples fields and helped them build huts

DW:..went fishing, made pots, went hunting. Court cases, everything. The system was so fascinating and I began to realise that these people had such an intelligence and a grasp of the subtleties of politics and the ability to sum up someone's character.

To cut through bullshit, and I realised this was something quite out of my ordinary experience. I'd not been led to see black people as intelligent, rational, able to accept independence in Zambia even, I was still doubtful about Kuanda and thinking it might well go to rack and ruin with Kuanda.

I didn't rate him as a politician and I thought Kwapekwe was somehow a better guy. I had doubts about whether black people would run Zambia in a sufficiently coherent way to make it work.

I began to realise that actually there is this amazing grass roots suss and politics and knowledge and intelligence that most whites don't even come close to.

Realising then that having an education and being literate is nothing to do with that intelligence. That was one thing. The second thing is I watched with my own eyes Portuguese colonialism happen.

I was stunned how brutal and incredible it was like the taxes. The nearby local headman was a horrible guy, he was an alcoholic and suspicious and hostile to me as a white.

He was no democrat or popular person in his own community. He was an appointed figure by the Portuguese authorities, but his son who was a migrant labourer was supposed to have paid his taxes, failed to do so and so they jailed the father.

They just came and took this guy who was in his fifties and jailed him, because his son hadn't paid the taxes. I thought that is not very just and then on a couple of other occasions, I watched in my own area when people had done misdemeanours and so on, the punishments, they still had forced labour.

If you made some misdemeanour, they could actually take you off and make you build roads. This was not that long ago, '69. I looked at the taxes and what people earned, there was no way they could pay the taxes properly.

And survive. I began to realise that the taxes were one of the main things that forced people to be migrant workers. Because I was studying these people seriously I started to look at what they earned and a guy would work on the S.A gold mines for say 12 months, sometimes 18, and come back with 66 rand.

He'd have some other goods, a radio and a bicycle and a tin trunk with clothing and gifts, a paraffin lamp or stove, but frankly they are trinkets and he had worked for a year let's say, and I took averages and the average was R66 saved.

So I began to see the link between mining in S.A and the exploitation and the Portuguese colonialism and that worried me a lot. The ripoffs in the shops in Mocambique of the black people, and basically I could see from their perspective how colonialism bore down on Peoples lives.

It was a burden that people carried all the time, and I began to think the Portuguese who were so affable in the cafes and so charming in their houses, are perpetuating a major crime in Mocambique.

It was something that happened to me empirically, it seeped into my consciousness without me theorising about it at all. When I finished in Mocambique, I went back every Christmas for about 4 years until about '74.

The year before independence, by the way Frelimo never got to that far south in Mocambique, there was no threat to people in that area, a place called Inyolimein the province of Inyobam, right in the South about 150 miles north of Maputo. About 100 miles south of Danekulu(?)

Then I followed them to the gold mines, I used to watch them on the gold mines and visit with Chope people, follow their music, it is incredibly beautiful, that xylophone stuff. Like the marimba.

They are like Beethoven is to the Beatles in African music, they are one group, in a different league. I kept in touch with people on the gold mines and the lives they led were stunning to behold.

I developed a keen interest in migrant labour out of that, and I wrote a couple of papers on Portuguese colonialism and migrant labour, and development exploitation.

JF: When you said you were doing local politics, did that have to do with anti-colonial organising...

DW: A much lower level than that. What had actually happened with the Portuguese authorities was a fascinating thing, and this might be idealising it but the free colonial period and in Mocambique we are talking about 1895, or 1530, as early as that, all they had were the ports, Delagoa Bay, Beira Sofalo but they never controlled the interior.

It was only with the defeat of Nykubiyan(?) in 1895 that that happened. They moved in and kept the structures of power but changed the personal, and what happened was that before, if a chief was ruling poorly in his area, he could easily be deposed by his people.

The Mocambiquan area that I worked in had a very strong ~~xxxx~~ tradition of democracy. Chiefs and headman were only there at the good will of the people that they allegedly ruled over, and their roles were that of a middle man almost.

A court case in Mocambique was the most fascinating thing, the litigants sides would get together, and all the men would sit around, people supporting bothsides and the chief or headman would sit there with two indunas, his sub guys as assessors, let's call it.

Then the case would begin, and these two guys would argue out their different perspectives about what the case was about. People from the audience would chip in and raise would appear to be completely extraneous matters.

But it had absolute pertinence to what is going on, it might be something like your cow walked into my field and destroyed half my crops, I want compensation and in our strict reading of the law, that would be the facts and you would have to debate those facts.

But these people would talk about the whole community and whether you deserved to have those cattle in your fields and whether your cattle had done it five years ago.

Or whether you had made a pass at that guy's wife the week before. People examined total relationships. These headmen used to sit there and weigh up things, but what they were weighing up was not the evidence but the feeling of the meeting.

He would bring about a consensus and a compromise would be reached and some sort of resolution to the conflict would take place. Well, our chiefs were a bit like that in their politics, they would have to work by the will of the majority of the people otherwise they would be deposed.

The Portuguese came in and elected chiefs and instead of being the elected representatives of the people, they were suddenly being bureaucrats in the colonial structure.

Their roles basically were to interpret Portuguese intentions to the people living in the fields, look here there is going to be a new tax next year and you must pay it kind of thing.

So they lost all credibility and people who used to compete for chieftainship and headmanship didn't bother anymore, because that wasn't where politics was anymore, those were government appointed figures.

Discredited people Jinga(?) you know dogs. The real politics took place lower than that and was about big men accreting your followers, gaining influence and making power plays against those chiefs and headmen.

But it wasn't structured as an overtly clear anti-colonial struggle. It was often competition between people for influence and power within the community.

JF: Had they heard of Frelimo?

DW: Yes they had heard of Frelimo, they were very pro-Frelimo indeed and used to speak about it in very hushed terms, sort of like people talk about the ANC today.

They certainly saw it as a liberating force that would someday take them out of this servitude and take them to a promised land. I think that was one of the problems that Frelimo had, that people had very high expectations of being taken to the good life which never happened. It was a bit unrealistic.

JF: Did you ever hear stories of people who had gone to Tansania to join Frelimo or was it too far south?

DW: It was really too far south although there were some key figures who ended up in the hierarchy, although I can't remember their names. Monda Mondwane(?) came from just South of there, from the Jumbello ? district, and people used to talk about that with great approval.

There was another guy called Karalanga Thembe, from the deep south of Mocambique and he was an important military leader in Frelimo. He was proudly thought of in this area too. I think even Machel comes from the Southern area.

JF: He comes from towards Zimbabwe more.

DW: The regional works broadly speaking, the south kind of claims everybody as far as I can see. Ethnicity was not a big issue for those people as far as I could see, I mean they did think in terms of ethnic s at times, but that was because the portuguese colonial authorities forced them to.

JF: Do you think there was some inherent non-racialism in Mocambique, non-racialism of Frelimo.?

DW: I think so, I think they were drawing on a colonialism of a kind.

JF: Plus the colonialism for all its brutality wasn't as segregated.

dw; yes tha t too.

JF You talked a lot about how you discovered blacks and how the culture was so fascinating... how about how blacks felt towards you, were there any lessons in that? Had they ever seen a white man like you before in that community?

DW: No, they hadn't. That was indeed a major problem and the first three months of my field work were really hard because people either thought I was foolish or crazy, or a government spy of some kind.

Ironically being a South African and not a portuguese speaker was a tremendous advantage. Those people saw S.A despite the hardships of the gold mines as a land of milk and honey, it is where people earned their money.

The Portuguese paid people very badly, so coming from S.A and being an overt South African and quite clearly not getting on very well with portuguese colonial officials, I used to get visited by Portuguese security policemen from time to time, and it was clear to a casual observer that the encounter was a hostile one.

They were often checking on me and I was freezing and so on and people saw that. That and my South Africanness enhanced my status in the community. After a three month period there was a very important moment when I threw

DW:... a big party, it is not an important anecdote but I realised that to break the ice with these people I had to kind of make a significant gesture of humility, of wanting to be accepted by them.

My anthropological training had equipped me enough to say well, I must throw a party, an enormous one, and I did, I got lots of liquor and meat, food and called the whole community to this party.

I got the local orchestra to play and things like that. It turned into a major jamboree, starting at about five in the morning and going through till nightfall. We all got blind totally drunk.

That changed things quite radically at that point and people began to deal with me much more reasonably after that. Funny things took place like at that occasion a man sent his little girl, about 2 or 3, in a big crowd and this little girl brought me an orange.

I said oh thankyou, where is this from, and she pointed to her father. I gave her a tin of condensed milk and she took it to her father and we waved to each other, and started chatting.

He jokingly said you must marry my daughter and I said Oh yes that will be lovely and he started calling me son-in-law at that point. He did that and everyone knew it was a joke, she was only two, and a number of other people came in on the joke with relatives of his calling me brother etc.

They fitted Glenda and I INTO their social universe of a kinship kind. By that little fiction, if you like.

What I'm trying to get to, throughout the entire experience I was always an outsider in that community, everyone knew that and I knew it, no one was fooling each other, but they did come to quite like me and respect me for being somebody who took their side, and if someone was sick they could come at any time and I could get them to the hospital.

Once I interceded on the communities behalf with the local portuguese administrator, on an episode over a bridge. I persuaded him not to take a hard line with the community, he had forced them to make a bridge and it had never happened.

They saw this as a mediation that I'd performed where they might have been in some kind of trouble. People saw that I followed back in S.A too, that I came in touch with people and didn't just shirk them.

I brought them home to lunch at my house on Sundays and they used to go back and talk about that as a big event. I suspect they saw me in a slightly paternalistic way at the end.

But as quite a reasonable person I think.

JF: Did any point in this experience, anthropology or politicisation, did you come to think these people could rule south Africa?

DW: Yes, end of portuguese colonialism came as a relief to me. By the time that happened in '75 I was thrilled, I'd been supporting Frelimo since '69, and had seen with my own eyes how portuguese authorities had been behaving.

I could see that people needed liberation and when I saw the grassroots potential if only Frelimo would tap it, there was no fear for the future of Mocambique politically at all.

Because these people had a clear grasp of politics and such a clear intelligence of what to do, when things needed to be done. That was a major shift for me as up until that point black people had been a group so distanced from me that apart from the few friends I'd struck up in Zambia towards the end of my stay there, I'd not been in a position to assess whether people would be useful in a political context.

Now I could see that it would be so and I translated that into a S.A experience too.

JF; No problems seeing those people ruling over you?

DW: No not really, you could see in the Mocambiquan case the absolute inevitability of the outcome. It was just a matter of time before Frelimo

DW:.. reached the area where I was. Absolutely everybody was in favour of Frelimo and there was no possibility of holding it back and I've been thinking that for years in South Africa too but it's been taking much longer.

I would have been happy to have a lot of the people living with me in Mocambique ruling over me and running my politics, in fact they did run my local politics for me.

DW: Did you go back after '74?

DW: Yes in '75 one year after independence. Then they closed the border to South Africa, it was simply that. I had a very ironic and embarrassing encounter with Frelimo.

I went with Phil Bonner and he took some photographs of Frelimo soldiers passing by while we were at a cafe in the middle of Maputo, Lorenquo Marques it still was, they arrested the lot of us, Glenda, myself, Phil and Chris.

They took us off to the Frelimo headquarters which was the military camp. Phil went in behind the gates and Chris said I can't let him go so she went but I thought they can't speak Funagalore or Choape or anything, so I went in and as you went in they detained you and made it quite clear that you were arrested and you were there, and we left Glenda with the car, and at a certain point we had to go the car, and they said who is she, and I said my wife, and they said she must come too.

They questioned us for about 5 or more hours, it was obvious they were suspecting us of being South African spies, and they let us go eventually believing our story in the end.

But it was an embarrassing situation, apart from all that they just closed the border to S.A. It has never been possible to go back.

JFB: What was it like to go back under a Frelimo government for you?

DW: It was a thrill, it was fantastic. The irony of the photo was that I had egged Phil on because as we had driven down from the border, Frelimo soldiers were doing exercise along the side of the road, and as we approached they dived into ditches and pointed their guns.

I said photograph that Phil and then in the middle of Maputo where there had always been Portuguese soldiers and trucks, suddenly there were Frelimo soldiers and I was saying this is amazing.

Rather foolishly he took this photograph in front of a large truck of Frelimo soldiers. So the purpose of our visit was to actually celebrate the independence of Mocambique, and we were also going to go into the archives the portuguese wouldn't let you into their archives.

See what they had, and if it was worth coming back in the future.

JF: When you came back and told people how exciting it was to see the changes, what were peoples attitudes to you?

DW: Academically I did that and socially too amongst friends who were willing to talk about it, and I began to teach course on Mocambique in the Anthrology dept and I used to teach courses on development and under-development and colonialism

'74, '75 on the Wits campus itself, the African studies institute had started up a series of seminars under the chairmanship of Phil Bonner.

But there was nowhere in the social sciences in Britain, America and elsewhere quite a transformation. After years of the Cold War period and Stalinism and Marxism where Marxism and communism were very frowned upon, they began to emerge in the '70's and they hit our little third world countries in '72.

Especially '74. And suddenly in the anthropological text a flowering of Anthropological marxism emerged and in the broader social sciences, Polantz was now acceptable and Ulusere(?) was fashionable, there was a sort of French structuralists, neo marxist who were anti-stalinists.

DW: They became respectable as marxists and then they fell out of fashion, and a new school of Marxism emerged, but all of this was happening '74 '76, and then I got a sabbatical leave in '76 and it was another watershed year because Soweto happened and although I wasn't doing any research in Soweto, then I had lots of friends in Soweto, I had made a point, in fact an American researcher Sue Cairn helped me, and she was studying middle class black South Africans.

She introduced me to some of her contacts in Soweto most of whom I didn't like, but two I did like very much because we shared an interest in Jazz, and I knew them well, and have kept a relationship ever since.

One or two other more working class black people mainly who I had worked with at Wits and I used to visit in Soweto quite often,

JF: What year did you come back from Mocambique?

DW: The last time I went there for research purposes was '74. I started teaching at Wits in '71 after being in Cape Town for 6 months. After my research I didn't have a job to go to immediately so I worked as a journalist on the Daily Dispatch in East London.

Then I had a junior lectureship in 1970 at Cape Town for 6 months, which was dreadful as I was very isolated. Then in '71 I came to Joburg and used to go to Mocambique in Christmas vacs for research.

JF: you were teaching in anthropology dept?

DW: Yes.

JF: was there any political involvement that you had then?

DW: NO because if you think what political structures were open to one then even by '71, there was no party which appealed to me then. I supported the progressive party I think it was called then, and had an admiration for Helen Suzman's spunky style, standing up to the govt and asking awkward questions about detention without trial and repression.

I'd moved way left of the united party as it would be...

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