

PAST AND PRESENT

David E. Apter

I find writing about myself an awkward business. Is it because I have spent such a good part of my life interviewing people in many parts of the world that I am resistant to interviewing myself? Is it the professional part of me that regards such interrogation with suspicion? Perhaps the answers to these questions will become more obvious in the event. What I want to avoid is that common garden variety of faults that introspection is likely to incur – not least of all a self-serving narrative. Hence I have arranged this trajectory in terms of the progression of places in which I lived or worked, and in terms of both practical problems and circumstances and ideas. By taking a glance over the shoulder, as it were, I want to highlight how experiences and thinking about them have evolved over what are now many years.

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I have very few recollections of early childhood. These were blocked – effectively erased – by the sudden death of my father when I was twelve years old. Insofar as it is possible, I want to try to bring back something of what was lost, but must be tucked somewhere in the corner of my memory. What I do recall prior to that event is a fairly normal family of four, including me and my younger sister. Although neither parent completed high school, both were not only passionately interested in cultural and political affairs but exceptionally well read. They were, in a word, serious intellectuals.

My father came to this country from Russia at around age fifteen. As a soldier in World War I, he was gassed, leaving his lungs permanently damaged. By the time he died, he had become head of the New York office of the Stiles Brick Corporation. He was interested in architectural design and was, I believe, the first to import glass brick from Holland. If I close my eyes, I see a fairly tall man, rather striking, dressed conservatively – suit, vest, shirt with detachable collar, discreet cuff links. It seems to

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me that despite the damage to his lungs he was rarely without a cigarette. The family was financially well off. In looking back, what intrigues me most about him – and the source of his greatest influence on me – is that although his was a world of business, architects, designers, and builders, politically he was on the left.

We lived in a white clapboard house in Mount Vernon, New York. One of my most vivid memories was in 1936, when the German dirigible, the *Hindenberg*, passed over the playground of my school en route to its fateful demise in New Jersey. I remember the large red markings and the black swastika on its tail.

I remember as well my mother hauling me off on Saturday mornings to the Walter Damrosch concerts for young people at Carnegie Hall, when I much preferred to stay home and play baseball. (Even worse, she insisted that I wear what were called at the time Little Lord Fauntleroy suits.) Unfortunately, the chemistry between my mother and me was never very good.

The only extended family with which I had any relationship was my father's, and that was pretty minimal. Nevertheless, I found them interesting, not least because several of them were, if not founding members of the Communist Party, among its earliest adherents. Some remained convinced Stalinists all their lives. Family get-togethers were rarely complete without intense political arguments over correct party lines, deviations, and the finer points of Marxism. One uncle, a professional photographer who was an acquaintance of Alfred Stieglitz and president of the New York Professional Photographers Association, was more of a free spirit who had once been an anarchist in Colorado. He was my favorite. Through him I developed an early interest in photography.

My father's death was an event I still remember vividly. In hospital for an ordinary operation, he was to come home the next day, following which we were to move into a new house my parents had built. I remember being awakened at around four one morning by the sound of knocking at our door. I heard my mother depart. I was afraid. I prayed for the only time in my life.

Later that morning, some people came to the house and took me to my mother on the other side of town. They told me what I had already surmised. I recall walking slowly up a flight of stairs to find my mother lying in bed, moaning and kissing her ring. I called out to her several times. There was no response. A kind of numbness came over me. Slowly and carefully, I turned to descend the stairs, which now seemed suddenly steeper. Although it was a sunny morning, the light seemed both bright and black. By the time I reached the bottom of the stairs, I had become another person.

I never went back to my home or school, nor had a chance to say goodbye to friends. The three of us were now ensconced in a small one-bedroom apartment on the other side of Mount Vernon. The year was 1936, the country still in the midst of depression, and the new house could not be sold. We were now in severely straitened circumstances. To make matters worse, my mother never reconciled herself to her husband's death, mourning it anew every day. I began to do badly in school. There

were terrible rows. The close quarters in the apartment did not help. I resented the fact that I had to sleep on the floor in the living room.

In high school, I qualified for the National Youth Administration, a New Deal welfare program for the children of poor people. It paid six dollars a month. I worked half time and went to school the other half. The job consisted of scraping plates in the school kitchen and picking up debris from the floor in the cafeteria. All my co-workers were either black or Italian and, in terms of the students, distinctly from the “wrong side of the tracks.” To my mind, they were fellow proletarians oppressed by the student bourgeoisie. I took another job in a small department store which paid a bit more, and another in a nearby clothing store in the delinquent bills department. I quit after reading the pathetic and barely literate letters of the mostly black customers who could not pay their bills.

At seventeen, I left home without getting a high school diploma. I had read about a program called the Volunteer Land Corps. Its purpose was to place students in farm jobs in Vermont. I applied, was accepted, and went to work as a farm laborer.

At the time, 1942, Vermont farming was still much as it had been at the end of the nineteenth century. Virtually everything was done by hand or horse. My first job was with a French Canadian farmer. He had a large family, the children mostly girls, hence his need for help. The work was hard – harder than anything I had experienced by far. Yet we found time to discuss religion, anti-Catholic prejudice, and the hostility of Vermonters to “Canucks.” To please him I went to church every Sunday, finding it fascinating that anyone could be a true believer, yet enjoying the ritual. Subsequently, I worked for the county agent, who taught me a bit about agriculture and the arcane mysteries of town meeting government, and finally for an old Yankee named Milt Northrop. He was the best educated of the lot, but mostly we talked baseball. The better I became at farm work, the more I enjoyed rural life. I was, as they say, free at last.

In fact, it did not take long to become adept at using farm machinery and hand tools. Milking was done by hand, haying with horses. In winter, we cut down trees with the double-bitted axes and two-man saws, skidding twelve-foot logs down the mountains by horse and sledge. I tried to buy a farm for back taxes (although I had no credit) and thought about going to Randolph Center Agricultural School in Randolph Junction, Vermont. My sole diversion was hitching rides to Goddard College in nearby Plainfield for square dancing. Occasionally, I attended a class. For some of the students I was a local character. I began to develop a Vermont accent and chew tobacco.

Quite unexpectedly, I came in contact with Dorothy Thompson, the distinguished journalist and former wife of Sinclair Lewis, who had read something I had written that was locally published. She invited me to her farm in Barnard for a few days. Suddenly, I caught a glimmer of a wholly different world. Through her intercession I found myself acting in a movie. As it appeared that I had some modest talent for acting, I was asked to sign a contract to be in a play on Broadway. Too young to sign, I needed the assent of my mother. She flatly refused. Shortly afterwards, I was drafted.

Given my interest in photography, I applied for and took the Army photography examination, scored at the top, and waited confidently for orders to join a photography cohort. The orders came through assigning me to Camp Croft in Spartansburg, South Carolina, an infantry basic-training center specializing, if that is the right word, in the .30-caliber water-cooled machine gun and the 81-millimeter mortar. After thirteen weeks of basic training, our unit was sent to Fort Meade, Maryland, for overseas assignment. There we were issued new uniforms and lined up on a parade ground in preparation for transport to the ship. The first sergeant called out the names of everyone in my platoon except me. Instead, he handed me orders to report to a regimental dispensary. I was now in the Army Medical Corps, handed a grapefruit and a syringe, and told to practice giving shots.

After some time, the regiment was sent to Oregon. By this time I had begun to think about going to college. I would walk on the campus of Oregon State University at Corvallis thinking how lucky those students were. To save money for college, I worked at night on an assembly line. I began as well to take Army correspondence courses to make up for my lack of high school credits.

Eventually the regiment was shipped to Camp Picket, Virginia, the personnel of the dispensary attached to a black regiment. In the segregated Army of those days, there was a policy of assigning white southern officers and technical personnel to black regiments. A certain Captain Reich, from Kentucky, now joined us. A large, shambling sort of person, he made no bones about disliking blacks and indeed took delight in tormenting them. One morning on "sick call," a black soldier came hopping into the treatment room with a very badly infected big toe. His whole leg was swollen. Captain Reich looked at it and told me to cut out the nail, lance the toe, and suture it. I explained that we were out of anesthetic and this would be a very painful operation. "That's all right, sergeant," said the captain, "go ahead and draw a little black blood. It will be good for him." The treatment room, which at the time was quite full, suddenly became silent. Again I demurred. Finally he said, "Sergeant, I am giving you a direct order." Still I refused. The captain threatened to have me court-martialed and stormed out of the room. This event, only one of several I experienced while serving in the South, was my introduction to real racism in this country.

My unknown tutors were writing on my papers "You must go to college." Encouraged, and to the amusement of my colleagues in the dispensary, I tried my hand at writing poems and submitted one for an Army-Navy-Marine Corps prize. To my great surprise (and theirs), I won and received a check from Mrs. Junius P. Morgan, which of course prompted everyone in the dispensary to begin writing poetry as well.

In spite of the fact that I lacked both money and credentials, two colleges I knew about intrigued me – Black Mountain and Antioch. Since I was thinking about becoming a union organizer, Antioch seemed the better alternative, and I liked the idea of its work-study program. I began working nights as a bartender in the officers' club to save up some money for college. After applying to Antioch, I was provision-

ally accepted because of the poetry prize. I still had no idea how, in the event of an acceptance, I would pay for this when, to everyone's surprise, the GI Bill was passed. Everything changed. Everything became possible

As soon as I was discharged, I went straight to Yellow Springs, Ohio, to be interviewed at Antioch. I was accepted subject to making up a year's math in a month. A marvelous math teacher from high school days, Miss Marshall, took me smartly in hand, so within the requisite month I passed the examination and was duly accepted for the spring semester. I headed out for Antioch in March 1946, certain I would flunk out. Instead, after taking the set of achievement exams required of incoming students, I not only did well but was able to shorten what was then an academic program of five years to three. As befit a prospective labor organizer, I became an economics major.

Among the attractions of Antioch was its social and political activism. Several of us organized a boycott of the white barbershops in Yellow Springs because they refused to cut the hair of black students. We also drove Zeke's, one of the local taverns that was similarly segregated, out of business. We passed out leaflets for the CIO in Dayton, and one summer I and several other students made a get-out-the-vote movie for the CIO.

A crucial event at Antioch was my meeting Lewis Corey, who with John Reed had been one of the founders of the American Communist Party. He became both teacher and mentor. Although I prided myself on my home-grown knowledge of Marxism, he kept sending me back to the texts. It did not take long to figure out that my interpretations were on the whole pretty faulty. Although in some ways quite doctrinaire, I had never joined the party, distrusting any party line, and of course found the Soviet purges totally repugnant. I was introduced to other economic ideas and began drifting away from Marxism.¹ At one point I found myself in an intense discussion with a brilliant young fellow student, Eleanor Selwyn, over Arthur Koestler's book *The Yogi and the Commissar*. We disagreed vigorously. In the end I had to admit that she was right. We married in December 1947.

The three faculty members who made the biggest impression on me, in addition to Corey himself, were Valdemar Carlson, who taught me Keynesian economics but also gave me an appreciation of the elegance of neoclassical economics; George Geiger in philosophy; and Heinz Eulau in political science. The latter convinced me to shift to political science for graduate work and encouraged my interest in interdisciplinary work in the social sciences.²

The Antioch work-study program provided a second defining experience with racism in this country. Intermittently from 1946 to 1948, I was based in Memphis, Tennessee, as a field intern for the National Labor Relations Board during what was called "Operation Dixie," the first major organizational campaign for black workers by the CIO (at the time separate from the AFL). My job was to investigate unfair labor practices by companies against unions and hold NLRB union certification elections. We had to go into shotgun shacks and get affidavits from illiterate black work-

ers who had been abused by company thugs. In West Memphis, Arkansas, two of my key witnesses were murdered. In Pochontas, Arkansas, I was ridden out of town by a posse of “city fathers.” In Jackson, Mississippi, I was dumped in the Mississippi river by officers of the Pet Milk Company, this last turning out to be, shall we say, a sociological immersion.³

By now my interests had broadened, and my wife and I decided to pursue graduate degrees. Along with our friends Clifford and Hilly Geertz, we applied to Harvard and were duly accepted, I in the Government Department, my wife and the Geertzes in the Social Relations Department. It was the heyday of Talcott Parsons and I wanted to do half my academic work with him in social relations. Harvard’s Government Department flatly refused to permit this. However, Princeton, to which I had also applied, agreed to let me work in both political science and sociology. We went to Princeton thinking that Eleanor, who was also accepted at Columbia, would finish her graduate work after I did.

At the time, the Princeton graduate school offered an interesting intellectual mix. Although it was still the heyday of institutionalism, the main components of which were law, history, and political theory and their various incarnations in systems of government, behaviorism was just beginning to challenge its orthodoxy, not least in terms of empirical enquiry into why people acted as they did in political life. In the Sociology Department at the time, there was also a representative Parsonian structural functionalist, Marion J. Levy. In his seminar I was introduced to that long pedigree of historical sociology which culminated in the work of Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Vilfredo Pareto, and others who shared an interest in problems of modernization and development and seemed to provide grounding in a fascinating combination of problematic concerns and analytical frameworks. Having always been interested in the rise of modern capitalism, and transitions from “traditional” societies to “rationalized” developmental states, I found such concerns extremely congenial.⁴

It was in my second year at Princeton that my experiences in the Army and in the South for the NLRB came together in what seemed to me a fascinating professional project. My wife, Eleanor, read in the *New York Times* about a certain Kwame Nkrumah being released from jail in the Gold Coast to become prime minister in a colonial territory that was evolving toward independence via devolution to parliamentary institutions—the first sub-Saharan territory to do so. The reaction on both our parts was immediate. This was it—we had to study this. It would be the sh ot heard around Africa, if not the world, and was bound to have profound consequences on race relations in the United States. (Nkrumah had studied at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania.) Here, then, was a chance to study a fascinating transition that embodied all the issues—colonialism to independence, tradition to modernity, nationalism and democracy. It seemed the ideal topic to bring together previous experience with prospects for a new future for Africans. I wrote up a dissertation prospectus on what I called political institutional transfer, that is, whether or not parliamentary institutions were suitable

as effective instrumentalities for translating nationalist movements into competitive party politics and enabling the mutual prosperity of development and democracy.

The prospectus was flatly rejected, not on its merits, but on the grounds that studying things African was not suitable. My supervisor suggested a thesis on Norwegian socialism. Although lacking official approval, I applied for a Social Science Research Council grant to go to the Gold Coast. We were absolutely ecstatic when it came through.⁵ Just prior to our departure, one Princeton faculty member, the most reactionary professor in the department, said, “We once had a fellow go to Africa—never been heard from since.”

At the time, I had no background in African studies other than that provided by my own reading. (Apart from Northwestern’s, there were virtually no African studies programs in the United States.) So we decided to go to Oxford for a study term before proceeding to the Gold Coast. Leaving the United States in early 1952 was like emerging from a political cocoon. We had not realized how much we had become politically cautious during the McCarthy period. We also empathized with an England still visibly recovering from the war. Rationing was still on. The food was miserable. Nevertheless, like many Americans, we were enchanted by Oxford. It was exciting and beautiful. We felt completely accepted, even though I made no bones about being anticolonialist and pronationalist. We found a room at 22 Norham Gardens in a high Victorian yellow-brick residence. (Our landlord was a Viennese refugee psychoanalyst who had studied with Freud.) I enrolled in seminars in African anthropology with E.E. Evans-Pritchard, African history with Marjory Perham, economics with S.H. Frankel, and parliamentary socialism with G.D.H. Cole.

We made many friends. Oxford was not only accessible in itself, it provided access to everyone from Colonial Office officials to academics from the colonies on study leave in the U.K.—most importantly, academics from the then University College of the Gold Coast—socialist intellectuals, politician members of the Fabian Society, and so on.⁶ I was given an office in the Institute of Colonial Studies on the fifth floor, which was freezing. Every day an old lady would shuffle up the stairs to bring me a cup of tea. (“Ave a cup a tea, luv,” she would say.) I was grateful to be given an ancient typewriter that had once belonged to Lord Lugard and had keys so large you could type with gloves on. The African materials in Rhodes Library were superb. I was asked to take up a studentship at Nuffield College. I met people who were knowledgeable about Africa, some of whom were returning to the Gold Coast around the time we were and promised to help us in field work.

It was through Thomas Hodgkin, that remarkable “wandering scholar” of Africa, whose wife later received a Nobel Prize in crystallography, that we were put in touch with faculty on leave in Oxford from the University of the Gold Coast.⁷ Through them we were able to arrange housing with a remarkable Quaker professor of economics and his wife, Walter and Maisie Birmingham. We remained in touch with them until Walter died a few years ago.

When we left Oxford for the Gold Coast by boat, traveling “missionary class,” we had high hopes for the Nkrumah “revolution” as a blow not only for African freedom but for black people everywhere.

The Gold Coast (now Ghana) was to be the first of four major and defining periods of research in my life: two in Africa and one each in Japan and China, with forays in Latin America, Northern Ireland, and elsewhere. These areas and cultures were so different from one another that it appeared an absolutely foolhardy undertaking. In fact, there was an underlying theoretical or intellectual rationale for selecting them, despite a good deal of serendipity associated with each particular case. Each of the major case studies involving extensive field work resulted in a book and a cluster of articles. My research in West and East Africa was undertaken in the dying days of colonialism, a moment when some of the most remarkable nationalist figures were coming into their own politically. Among them were Nkrumah in the Gold Coast, Nnandi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo from Nigeria, Léopold Senghor and Sékou Touré in Senegal and Guinea, Modibo Keita in Mali, Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, and Patrice Lumumba in Congo.⁸ It was also a time when “development” was on everyone’s lips and its beneficent consequences were almost universally assumed.

The Gold Coast interested me not only because of its social and political importance, which I thought would be historic, but also because it seemed such a good test case for the adaptability of parliamentary institutions as a method of transition from colonialism to a democratic state, especially in the final stages of colonialism. In both British and French territories, frantic efforts were being made to convert anticolonial nationalist movements into political parties that would sustain democratic institutions. It was a game in which increasing militant demands for greater autonomy led to the accelerating devolution of power from colonial legislatures to local elective bodies and more effective party organization. Such devolution was also driven by fears that, given cold war politics, withholding independence would drive nationalist leaders into the arms of the Soviet Union and/or China. The hope was that parliamentary institutions would quickly absorb and transform nationalist movements, converting them into normal competitive parties, and that national politics would be buttressed by democratic local governments, so that it would be more in everyone’s interest to remain democratic than to become authoritarian. This assumption proved quite wrong in many cases and for many reasons, not least because many African political leaders desired to put their stamp on a home-grown version of the state, while fearing that democratic institutions would so dilute their power that it would be impossible to govern at all.

In 1952, when my wife and I went to the Gold Coast, only four political scientists in the United States were interested in Africa.⁹ At the time, Americans were welcomed more by Africans than by the colonial officials, but if you came from the “right place,” colonial authorities could be very helpful. With Princeton and Oxford providing “credentials,” it was possible to make contact with and interview virtually everyone – na-

tionalist political leaders, colonial officials, chiefs, politicians, and local government officials, not to speak of ordinary people from almost all walks of life. When we arrived, parliamentary institutions were functioning quite well. Although Nkrumah's party was clearly ascendant, there were serious opposition parties, a healthy degree of political competition, a vibrant press, a significant intellectual elite, and a sense of historic mission.

The Nkrumah I came to know was a quite remarkable man. The mass movement he and his associates organized, the Convention People's Party, literally scooped up the entire younger generation and a good many of the older people as well, regardless of ethnic, religious, class, or other differences. Not only did the parliament function according to the rules of the British model, but the civil service was rapidly being Africanized while its structure remained intact. Moreover, at the time the Gold Coast was also the most economically developed of the African countries save South Africa, and with no settled white population. Indeed, at independence in 1957, Ghana's GNP was roughly the same as that of South Korea.

Of course, the picture changed radically after independence. Nkrumah, who saw himself as a liberator of Africa in general, became very much influenced by the Soviet Union and was even more impressed by China. Very quickly, he eliminated the opposition, establishing a one-party parliamentary state, abolishing even such things as the Boy Scouts in favor of the Young Pioneers. He set up an ideological institute and published a "little black book" to parallel Mao's little red ones. In six months after independence, as some of the banned opposition parties went underground and organized themselves on ethnic lines, Nkrumah, after several attempts on his life, sealed himself off from the public and surrounded himself with sycophants. He relied on the secret police. His followers passed along only information that was pleasing to him and suppressed news of what was really going on. It occurred to me that a fairly fundamental political principle was an inverse relationship between information and coercion.

What happened in Ghana – a military coup against Nkrumah, the return to civilian rule, and a see-saw pattern of civilian and army rule – became a pattern in many African countries, not least Uganda, where I was to do my second field study. There, unlike in Ghana, where the mobilization of all groups within one movement became the prime force for independence, the closer the country moved to independence, the more intense the ethnic and religious rivalries became. Indeed, these kinds of events convinced me that development and democracy could just as easily evolve in mutually contradictory as in complementary ways. Of course, there were many reasons why African political leaders were encouraged to jettison the substance, if not the form, of parliamentary government, among them the desire to catch up economically and take great leaps forward that required dragooning an increasingly hostile population and harnessing it for collective efforts.¹⁰

If authoritarianism was one political consequence, growing economic inequality, regional disparities, and corruption were others. The more I studied Ghana, the

clearer it became that democracy and capitalism were far less likely to be mutually reinforcing than the developmental theorists believed, while the alternative now favored by nationalists – some form of socialism – ended up not only reinforcing autocracy but destroying the economic infrastructure as well. Not surprisingly, political violence was one of the consequences.¹¹

While in the Gold Coast, I was offered a studentship at Oxford and a post-doctoral fellowship at the Center for International Studies at Princeton (although I had not yet started writing my thesis), the Politics Department now taking credit for having steered me in the direction of Africa. In accepting the latter, I was told to have the dissertation completed by the end of December, when their annual report went in, in order to regularize my situation. On my return to Princeton, I worked pretty much day and night to complete the dissertation on time and spent the next few months revising it and submitting it for publication to Princeton University Press. To my great astonishment, it was accepted. It was in that same year that our daughter Emily was born.

As it happened, while still in the Gold Coast I had met Melville Herskovits, at that time the leading Africanist in the country. He suggested I apply for a job at Northwestern. That was how I got my first teaching job.

Northwestern at that time was particularly interesting for several reasons. One was that the Political Science Department had received a Carnegie Corporation grant to reexamine the discipline. As a result, the department had split into warring factions that fought each other with what can only be described as “tribal” intensity. Nor did it help matters that the “behaviorists,” with whom I was in analytical sympathy, were proto-McCarthyites, while the institutionalists, with whom I was in political sympathy, were bitterly opposed to McCarthyism. On the good side, I had an easy and fruitful relationship with both the Sociology and Anthropology Departments. The Herskovitses more or less took us under their wing. Sociologists, unlike political scientists, were a particularly congenial group.¹² During my post-doctoral fellowship year at Princeton, I had met two remarkable anthropologists, Lloyd Fallers and Audrey Richards. Dr. Richards, director of the East African Institute of Social Research, persuaded me to come to Uganda to do a second research tour. Uganda fascinated me because, as already indicated, the situation prior to independence was quite the opposite of what had occurred in Ghana. The latter involved a mass nationalist movement, populist in character, which was, at least for the time being, successful in overriding ethnic and other differences. In Uganda, the more authority was devolved to Africans, the more intense became the conflict between political parties organized along different ethnic, religious, and linguistic lines. The result was increasingly bitter cleavage politics.

Northwestern granted me a leave. I received a grant from the Ford Foundation. In the summer of 1955, we returned to Oxford for preliminary research and then proceeded to Uganda. As in the Gold Coast, we had exceptional access, not least through our association with Oxford. At the time, Makerere University College was becoming

a major educational center for Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya. We were affiliated with the East African Institute of Social Research..

Among the first people I met was the colonial governor, Sir Andrew Cohen. A remarkable man, quite unlike other governors, he favored independence and indeed had been responsible in the Colonial Office for charting the course for independence for African territories. A moderate socialist and intellectual, he got into a bitter conflict with the Kabaka, or king of Buganda, which resulted in the choosing up of sides among intellectuals, not to speak of the intense standoff between the Baganda, the dominant ethnic group in Uganda, and the colonial authorities. It was the kind of fault-line conflict that revealed a variety of the structural tensions and interpersonal conflicts going on at the time.¹³

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In Uganda I was fascinated by the interplay of several different matters, all revealed within the compass of the small case study. Buganda, the most developed and autonomous province in Uganda, had a complex system of chieftaincies, each made by the British into a civil service administrative position. This system had been constructed over and above an earlier clan system, a process that actually had begun prior to the arrival of the British. The colonial authorities reinforced this system by assigning private property rights to individuals and land (*mailo land*) to each chieftaincy. Of the twenty main chieftaincies, ten were reserved for Protestants, eight for Catholics, and two for Muslims, reflecting an earlier competition between missionaries. Hence, as independence neared, not only were there differences between religious groups, but insofar as they coincided with ethnic and linguistic affiliations, not only in Buganda but elsewhere in the country, political parties tended to divide along religious/ethnic lines. Moreover, deeper fault lines ran between those in the north and the Baganda, with the former providing the predominant recruitment to the army. Hence, by the time independence occurred, everything was in place for the intensification of conflict, with results that at their most notorious involved the domination of the country by Idi Amin.

With the country dominated by one ethnic group, the Baganda, when the British occupied it and divided by religion, ethnic group, language, and so on, the British privileged the role of Buganda, giving it its own local parliament and cabinet, as well as retaining the king, or Kabaka, in power. This special treatment did not sit well with the other provinces and districts, especially to the north of the country, where most of the military came from. The closer independence came, the more the Baganda tried to insure institutional arrangements that would enable them to continue to dominate the country, and the more the prevailing social cleavages intensified. Political parties became more and more ethnic in clientele, as well as Catholic versus Protestant, and increasingly hostile to each other. Although something of a Fabian socialist, the governor had little sympathy for the Baganda and none for the Kabaka, whom he regarded as a not very savory figure, exiling him in what became a cause célèbre. Moreover, he kept pushing the country faster toward independence on the grounds that only as the

deadline approached would the parties be forced to resolve their differences. In the end, not only was the Kabaka restored to power, but the political parties kept jockeying for position until the transition itself, to the point where party politics became war by other means. Independence came all right, and within a few years the power of the Baganda was broken, to be followed by the taking over of power by the northerners, not least the chief of the army – Idi Amin.

After returning to the United States, I spent another year at Northwestern, where our son Andrew was born. The following year I took up a post at the University of Chicago and a year later received a fellowship from the Center for Advanced Studies in Behavioral Science at Palo Alto for the year 1958-59. The center included not only such luminaries as Roman Jakobson, Meyer Fortes, Raymond Firth, and other extraordinary anthropologists, linguists, philosophers (W.V. Quine, for example), and economists, but also Lloyd Fallers, who had replaced Audrey Richards as director of the East African Institute of Social Research and was now at Berkeley, and Clifford Geertz, my friend from Antioch days. It was under such benign conditions that I wrote up my Uganda materials. *The Political Kingdom in Uganda* was published in 1961 by Princeton University Press. It too went through a number of editions and is still in print.

Shortly after I returned to Northwestern, I was offered a job at the University of Chicago and moved there in 1957. Chicago was, and in many ways remains, my ideal of what an American university ought to be. I stayed for four intense years, received tenure, and did some of my best teaching there. During my year at the center, a group of us organized the Committee for the Comparative Study of New Nations. It was warmly supported by the university. We asked Edward Shils to be chair and I became executive secretary. With a substantial grant from the Carnegie Corporation, we were able to recruit Clifford Geertz and Lloyd Fallers from Berkeley, Morris Janowitz from Michigan, Robert LeVine from Northwestern, and several others. It was not only a wonderful group but the range and spirit of the enterprise were nothing short of inspiring.

Although I was extremely attached to the university and to the group I had been instrumental in founding, I did not like living in Chicago. The Midwest made me claustrophobic. Hence, when I was offered a job at the University of California at Berkeley in 1961, I took it. On arriving there, I ran the very first Peace Corps program (which was quite a story in itself) and several subsequent ones. I also became the director of the Institute of International Studies, at that time the largest of its kind in the country. I was particularly concerned to break down the insularity of the area studies programs, working first with Seymour Martin Lipset and then with Neil Smelser, who became associate director. We established a comparative group broadly similar to the one at Chicago.

I kept going back to Africa often enough to witness first hand how development and parliamentary government became vulnerable to each other. Radicalization led to one-party states in the name of socialism, as well as military coups, and politi-

cal violence was the largely unanticipated result of independence. But I now felt the need for more comparative research. At Berkeley, I began to think seriously about working in Latin America on the contradictions between development and democracy. Under the auspices of the institute, I was able to put together a research group called the Politics of Modernization Project. Among its members were Jose Nun, from Argentina, and Magali Sarfatti, together with some brilliant graduate students. Nun had already been thinking in terms of social polarization and marginality and their political consequences, which seemed to me the key to a good deal of the negative social fallout of development. In Latin America, one could see a sharp divide between the broad spectrum of people who were becoming functionally superfluous, and the new functional elites, who controlled the economy. It was a condition susceptible to populist appeals and opportunities for self-constituted agents, on the left or the right, who believed that the only hope lay in overthrowing not just a government but the entire political system. We begin to examine the degree to which marginalization and functional polarization had common origins and were to be found in one form or another in many Latin American countries, providing a fertile ground for violence. The Politics of Modernization Project received a substantial grant from the Ford Foundation. Accordingly, I shifted my research focus and arenas of field work from Africa to Latin America, learned Spanish, and began working on what was originally intended to be a three-case comparison: Argentina, with its highly developed urban culture and rural hinterlands; Peru, as the most ethnically and socially stratified of the three countries; and Salvador Allende's Chile, which seemed to promise the best combination of developmental socialism within the context of democratic institutions. I began extensive interviewing on successive occasions in all three countries, preparatory for a year's leave and field work.

It was in 1968, while I was a visiting fellow at All Souls College, Oxford, that I was offered a job at Yale. All of us – the two children kicking and screaming, the dog, and my wife and I – gave up life in one of the most beautiful places in the United States to come back to the East Coast. At the time, we were concerned about the street scene in Berkeley and the pull it exerted on the children. Also, under Kingman Brewster Yale had embarked on major changes, not least coeducation. (Indeed, we arrived at the same time as the first women undergraduates.) I was able to transfer my Ford Foundation grant to Yale. The research proved fascinating, but each case was highly intricate and complex. Among the most interesting interviews I had was a lengthy one with Juan Perón in Madrid. It led to contacts with some of the more militant revolutionaries of the so-called left within the Peronist movement.

As luck would have it, however, in each of these cases research was thwarted by coups, first in Argentina and then in Peru. It became impossible to continue work in either country. Hence, I decided to concentrate on Allende's Chile, examining as a case study the extraordinary experiment in democratic socialism that was just beginning. I was fascinated by the experiments with worker participation, with the *tomas*, or land

seizures by peasants, and the appeals over the heads of the middle classes to both workers and the marginalized. And I wondered if using democratic institutions to undermine educational privileges and raising taxes as a means to effect reform would engender an opposition that would nullify such objectives, worthy though they might be. I left Chile preparing to come back with my family for a year's research. Two weeks after my departure, Allende was deposed and committed suicide. Augusto Pinochet's reign of terror had begun.

Although thwarted, I nevertheless had gathered considerable material on political violence. I had interviewed militants of the Fuerza Armada Revolucionaria and Monteneros in Argentina, precursors to the Shining Path in Peru, and radical militants of the leftist MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left), as well as extreme right-wing *momios* in Chile. Since I could no longer do work in Latin America, I began to broaden my research and focus on political violence itself, albeit it in a hit-or-miss fashion as the opportunity arose. I interviewed representatives of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in Damascus, Cairo, and Jerusalem; people associated with the Red Brigades in Italy; and others. I made a brief excursion into Northern Ireland in 1988 to interview militant Irish Republican Army members. The work was not only dangerous but, in the nature of the case, scattered, unsystematic, and lacking in depth.

Totally by chance, something happened that changed things radically. After I gave a lecture in Tokyo on political violence, a young man in the audience came up and said, "What you say is all well and good, but I can tell you have never spent time inside a movement. If you would like, I can get you into one." I decided to take him up on it. It led to three years of research (1979-82) that included some of the most extraordinary experiences I have ever had. What he had in mind was a conflict that was taking place over the construction of the new Narita International Airport. Seventeen radical sects joined forces with local farmers fighting the expropriation of their land. They built thirty-three fortresses around the perimeter of the airport, which in turn was guarded like an atomic facility. Over the years violence had become more or less choreographed. I was awarded a Japan Foundation grant and put together a small team of young Japanese researchers.

The site for pitched battles was farmland as well as an imperial estate containing ten thousand cherry trees. The senior government officials assumed that the land could be expropriated without too much opposition. They soon realized how mistaken they were. The first to resist were old women who chained themselves to the trees. Then the old men threatened to commit suicide under the trees and came dressed in their winding sheets. Then came the young militants who built the fortresses around the site and fought pitched battles with the police and the surveyors. The fortresses had huge gates and tall watch towers, with underground tunnels all around the proposed airport area. The militants also had underground movements, one of which, Chukaku-ha, had fired rockets at President Ronald Reagan on his state visit to Japan

and blown up sectors of the Japan National Railways when attempts were being made to privatize it. All told, I spent three years on and off working and living first with farmers, then with militants in some of their fortresses, and the last year with the designers and architects of the airport, the Dietmen, administrators, and politicians involved on the government side.

As for the farmers, they were all tough ex-soldiers from World War II who had become radicalized in part because they believed the airport was an example of American imperialism and would be used as a military staging area for Vietnam. In the first phase of the research I focused on the farmers, in the second on the militants (living in several different fortresses). Finally, I interviewed bureaucrats, parliamentarians, party officials, provincial and local authorities, and the architects of the airport. Each shift was like changing the lenses on a camera – a different perspective came into view. I had excellent collaboration from several Japanese colleagues, one of whom, Nagayo Sawa, became the coauthor of the book that resulted from this work, *Against the State*.¹⁵ It was in the course of this research that I began to emphasize what later I called discourse theory, the role of agency, the use of staging and public space as a rally ground, and the creation of social texts. It emphasized how events on the ground served as interpretive strategies to build up both a logic of rebellion and a myth of projected outcomes – in short, a *mytho-logiques*.

Such work in which politics was central nevertheless pushed me away from the conventional corpus of the discipline, something that had its own risks. A year at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton gave me opportunity to read more widely outside the discipline. And I became convinced that to deal adequately with the kinds of problems I was interested in required what was in effect a reeducation. I simply had to follow through what seemed to me a promising approach to political and social analysis. Fortunately, at this point Yale established the Whitney Humanities Center and I was made one of its founding members. It brought together people from a variety of disciplines, including literary theory, some of which I found more useful than conventional political categories.

In 1988, while a visiting fellow at Magdalene College, Oxford, I received a call from a former graduate student at Yale. She was calling from Derry, where she had married into an IRA “royal” family. Of the ten children, one had been killed by the British and two had been on hunger strike with Bobby Sands. She invited me to come stay in their mother’s house, if I dared, and interview members of the IRA. Of course, I went. It was an extraordinary experience. For one thing, it was a perfect example of the way events could be treated as a social text, by becoming part of the narrative reinterpretation of reality. The stories the IRA fighters told were grafted onto age-old equivalents in terms of Catholic martyrs. They recounted discrimination at the hands of the Protestants who dominated Ireland politically, kept the social services in their own community, and made the Catholics feel that their condition was hopeless. They recounted the fall of independent Ireland, the suffering under British colonialism,

and the redemption through the martyrs of the Easter Uprising and Bloody Sunday. As in the Japanese case, the physical space of Derry was conducive to the formation of social texts. The upper part was the Protestant ghetto, surrounded by huge mesh fencing. The lower area, or Bogside, was a poor Catholic neighborhood. In the middle stood the Mount—the British Army headquarters. Separating the Protestant and Catholic sectors was the main street, with the local council building made of neo-Gothic stone and in the square a statue of a British soldier bayoneting a German during World War I. How it survived being blown up I don't know. A road that wound down from the upper part of town and around the Mount led into the Bogside. On the wall of a blown-up building was a huge painting of Che Guevara in his beret and the sign, "You are entering free Derry."

I interviewed many people and from all walks of life—writers and journalists, a former boxing promoter who had lived in Brooklyn for thirty years, bomb builders and carriers, and so on. I realized that for many, especially those who had been involved in violence more or less all their lives, violence was in fact their way of life. The old maintained hospitals in their homes, made bandages, smuggled weapons. The middle-aged became the organizers and planners in neighborhoods. The young were the foot soldiers. Some three-quarters of the men in Derry were marginalized, either without jobs and on the British dole or only partially employed. Gradually, I came to understand that if the IRA were ever to win, many of these people would actually lose, since violence was their *raison d'être*. Stop it and they were nothing. Violence creates its own objects.

Not long after my work in Japan was done, and again by chance, I was asked to participate in the Distinguished Lectureship Program of the Committee on Scholarly Exchange with the People's Republic of China. This entailed giving a series of lectures in China in 1986. In addition, I was invited to do research on some relevant subject. As it happened, the Japanese movement had been invited on several occasions to China and the *mytho-logiques* of the radical sect with which I had the closest association was the Yan'an period of the Chinese revolution, the period after the Long March when survivors and others holed up in caves far from the centers of China to create what seemed to represent the New Jerusalem. I was able to put together a remarkable research team of young Chinese who were bilingual. We worked together day and night, interviewing and re-interviewing survivors of the period, including foreigners who had gone there and stayed. If ever there was a concrete and empirical case of power emerging from the narrative reconstruction of reality, this was it. I was influenced by the work of Pierre Bourdieu, whom I had gotten to know when we were both fellows of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, as well as by the work of Clifford Geertz and others whose analytical emphasis was on the relationship of social texts to interpretative action. By breaking the concept of culture into components, one could develop further a discourse theory of political power, and the Chinese case was a perfect exemplar. One did not simply go to Yan'an. Nor were the young people

simply communists. They “joined the revolution,” a kind of conversionary process in which they effectively transcended their own limitations.

Indeed, I began to see how living in caves, poring over texts, and achieving a kind of exegetical bonding gave Chinese revolutionaries the sense that not only had they a superior form of knowledge, but that it was Mao’s sinicized Marxism from which that knowledge derived. We interviewed people in their homes, sometimes for four or five hours at a time – soldiers, commanders and commissars, teachers, writers, artists, actors and actresses, journalists, and so on. All of them had made the pilgrimage to Yan’an, which in those days was very dangerous, because one had to pass through Japanese lines and GMD–occupied territories. Perhaps the most important aspect of the research was in coming to understand that within the confines of Yan’an, the revolutionaries had, in a manner of speaking, simultaneously created a republic of the mind. From 1936 to 1947, Yan’an was the crucible of the Chinese revolution. In addition to being a military redoubt, it was organized as a system of universities where Mao developed his ideas. When Yan’an was overrun by the Guomindang forces in 1947, the effort to “lance the boil” spread the poison, with Mao coming to power in Tiananmen Square in 1949.

It was during the final phases of our research, in 1989, that the Tiananmen Square protests broke out and I was able to interview hunger strikers and others. During the protests, I generally rode down to the square on my bicycle, but sometimes I hitched rides on the back of trucks. People enjoyed seeing a white-haired foreigner going to the square. I was also there when the army moved in on June 4. It was an unforgettable experience. The events still haunt the Chinese government. They do me as well. The result of the research was a book called *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao’s Republic*, which I wrote in collaboration with Tony Saich, a Chinese specialist now at Harvard but at the time director of Chinese studies at Leiden University, who knew the revolutionary period perhaps better than any other scholar. In our book, some of the main ideas that evolved in the context of the Japanese study were further refined and elaborated in terms of the relationships between text and narrative, not least the concept of “exegetical bonding” and the construction of redemptive community movements.¹⁶ The book was largely written during a fellowship at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study, which proved to be a particularly congenial intellectual environment for developing fresh ideas.

I have framed this trajectory in terms of research sites, each of which stood for an aspect of my own intellectual development. Of the main case studies, one might say that the first two, in Africa, were “for the state” in the sense that they concentrated on building the state, while the last two were “against the state” in that they focused on radical violence. Obviously, the evolution of my ideas has been closely connected to the political experiences I had while growing up, serving in the army, and studying at Antioch College. One might say that the original radical emphasis left me with both a sense of moral purpose and a professional commitment to elucidate the relation-

ship between inequality and democracy. I view this relationship as fundamental to any consideration of politics. I have tried to build up a body of research theory around this theme, and it has been these efforts that have resulted in my own theoretical trajectory.

From the start, structural theories and ideas have been among my major concerns. Perhaps my original commitment to Marxism informed an intellectual space that remained even after I stopped thinking in Marxist terms. A good many of the basic critiques made by Marxists about the so-called contradictions of capitalism remain quite appropriate, with modification, to the analysis of present-day events. Perhaps this explains why I remained intrigued not only with large structural theories but also with the need to get past them, to make what were otherwise contingent events explicable in analytical terms.¹⁷ Nor when trying to understand political systems did I ever lose sight of their connection to economic factors, especially in terms of the relevance of liberal theory. A more comparative and analytical emphasis was structural-functionalism, which seemed to me at the time a useful and generalized way of establishing systemic categories that allowed the comparison of very different social systems, both in political terms, centering around the problem of order, and through time. The fourth concern involves a shift to a more anthropological/philosophical tradition drawing on semiotics, linguistics, anthropology, and literary theory (particularly French). In my own reconstruction, this tradition falls under the category of discourse theory and has continued to provide me with fresh ideas.¹⁸ In addition to case studies, I wrote a number of more general theoretical books, the most important of which are *The Politics of Modernization*, published by the University of Chicago Press in 1965 (which went through many editions), and *Choice and the Politics of Allocation*, published by the Yale University Press in 1971 (which won the Woodrow Wilson Award of the American Political Science Association).

I began this trajectory with a description of loss and disruption of life in a normal household and family. It has been my privileged good fortune to have had a normal family life since the day I got married, with a wife, two children, and a dog. That normalcy, while of course extremely complicated, has been deeply satisfying. So have the universities in which I have studied and taught; the experimentalism of Antioch, the intellectual ferment at Princeton, the remarkable intellectual commitment of the University of Chicago, and the extraordinary experiment of the multiversity at the University of California. Each combined a persevering commitment to excellence with a passionate concern to augment knowledge of the world. At Yale, I have been a member of both the Political Science and the Sociology Departments, spending my last few years until retirement in 2002 as chair of sociology. I have always seen these two fields as complementary. Both, however, have suffered somewhat from the pursuit of an ideal of science that may not be entirely appropriate to the complex needs of contemporary social science. Today, for some, at any rate, the models themselves begin to become more important than the results of the research. The social sciences require professionalization all right, but professionalization with a human face. And

insofar as I see interpretation, logic, meaning, and understanding as crucial ways in which scholars act on what they know, and know about what the actions mean, I see the tendency to use models that, although more and more statistically and mathematically sophisticated, are more about the models than the substance of events they are supposed to explain. They distance the observer from the subject. In my own view, one should periodically forsake the more rarefied atmosphere of the university and rub shoulders with life as it is led by most people most of the time. One needs to be willing to come to grips with the kinds of problems people actually face, and to begin to understand how, when, and why they come to think the way they do – something to which no survey can do justice. Nor is quantification alone likely to provide the kind of understanding that is needed, now more than ever, if social science theory is to become more relevant to policy.¹⁹ Meanwhile, we can only despair that Americans are becoming relatively more provincial and undereducated in terms of the world at a time when they need to know more. We are now contributing to the chaos in the world. We have eroded longstanding alliances and reneged on social commitments, and play god with good and evil empires. We misuse science and undermine the benefits we had hoped to provide for our own people. The social contract is frayed. People are confused. Information takes the form of sound bites rather than substance. Democracy is becoming unraveled.

It may be that I exaggerate, but in contrast to the period in which this trajectory begins, immediately after World War II there was a good deal more hope than there is now. Most of my generation believed that political and social life would improve greatly over time. That there have been real accomplishments one cannot deny. But has there ever been a time (the McCarthy period excepted) when political prospects appear worse than they do now? I find today's world an anomaly and much of American life distasteful. We have never been so preemptively willing to push so many people around, or penalize the poor in favor of the rich. No wonder I prefer to spend part of each year living in France, although surely that is no panacea either. Having lived and worked in so many different places and gotten to know something of the lives, livelihoods, and cultures of people elsewhere, I find that I am very much at home in the world but less so in contemporary America. It is not a very nice feeling.

Endnotes

- 1 An event that occurred at this time made a big impression on me. I was chair of the Marxist Discussion Group. Coretta Scott (King) and her sister were members. Her sister had to do a presentation on *The Critique of the Gotha Program*. She thought Lassalle, whom Marx was excoriating, was right, not Marx. I insisted that she had got it wrong, but secretly I agreed with her. The incident troubled me. I had betrayed my own integrity.
- 2 Most of the male students in my time were veterans. Among the people I remember best were Clifford Geertz, with whom I remained in contact until his death, Hal Wilenski, and Rod Serling.

- 3 It was a time too when the Taft-Hartley Act was replacing the Wagner Act, to everyone's consternation. This not only stimulated a good deal of discussion at Antioch but served to boost recruitment to the Progressive Party, of which I became a student leader. My work for the NLRB, with its judicial militancy and support for labor against a backdrop of both corporate and populist racism in the South, was a defining moment in my understanding of American political life.
- 4 It was also a troubled time. McCarthyism was in full tilt. Students began to be careful whom they talked to and what they said. Someone from the FBI came snooping around the graduate student housing complex, asking questions about my past and quizzing me about my neighbors.
- 5 To do research on something like this required not only field work but interdisciplinary training. Although my supervisor at Princeton would not approve my prospectus, I applied for an SSRC grant to go to Africa. I got the grant, although I was warned by the grant officer, Eldbridge Sibley, that I would probably not be able to find a teaching job when I came back. I told him to let me worry about that and just give me the grant.
- 6 We also fell in with a small group of African, Indian, and British students. (We called it the Pickwick Society because we met over a five-shilling dinner at the Pickwick Hotel.) One of these was Tom Mboya, who became a famous political leader in Kenya and a likely president, until he was gunned down.
- 7 See Michael Wolfers, *Thomas Hodgkin: Wandering Scholar* (Monmouth: Merlin Press, 2007).
- 8 At the time it was possible to meet almost all of them. Most were "scholar-politicians"—that is, they were not only educated but cosmopolitan, moving quite easily in several worlds.
- 9 These included myself, James Coleman, Carl Rosberg, and Gus Liebenow.
- 10 For example, in the case of Ghana, Nkrumah, having had a "first coming" to lead his own country, decided on a second coming—the liberation of Africa as a whole.
- 11 It was in this context that I had my first encounter with a terrorist group. I had run into a young man who worked in the main library in Accra. He turned out to be head of a militant group within the Convention People's Party who saw it as their job to prevent Nkrumah from "compromising the revolution." They would beat up or eliminate those they regarded as traitors or even too troublesome. I began meeting with members of this group, the League of Ghana Patriots, at the same time that I was interviewing local officials and government civil servants. I had the uncanny sensation that if ever the twain should meet I would be a goner. I had to promise I would never publish this material—and I never have. One day, after I had been interviewing the leaders of this group quite regularly, three very tough guys I had never seen before came up to me and said that we were all going to take a walk along the sea wall in Accra. The sea wall overlooks rocks against which huge waves crash. I could feel the hair on the back of my neck stand up. Rather desperately, I said, "Let's go and have a drink first." We never did take that walk.
- 12 One of its members was Wendell Bell. He and Lora-Lee have remained our good friends ever since, and Wendell and I continue to be colleagues at Yale.
- 13 And it led me to establish a political model, consociationalism, that was picked up by other political scientists to become a focus for widespread comparative work in the field.
- 15 See David E. Apter and Nagayo Sawa, *Against the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).
- 16 See David E. Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994). A Japanese edition was published by Inawami.
- 17 See David E. Apter, "Some Contrarian Perspectives on the Political Consequences of Globalization," *New Global Studies*, Winter 2008.
- 18 See David E. Apter, "Duchamp's Urinal: Who Says What's Rational When Things Get Tough?" in R. Goodin and Charles Tilly, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) and "Politics and Theater," in Jeffrey Alexander, ed., *Social Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- 19 See David E. Apter, "Knowledge for Policy-Making: Some Questions and Caveats" (forthcoming from the World Bank).