

**A CONVERSATION WITH PETER RIDGWAY SCHMIDT, THE SANGO¹ OF
AFRICAN ARCHAEOLOGY**

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¹ According to Yoruba myth-history, Sango was the third king of the Oyo Kingdom and deity of thunder. He is revered by the later kings for his transformative power, restless energy, electrifying personality, and decisive leadership. For these qualities, he became the patron deity of the Oyo Empire that emerged during the late sixteenth century. His symbol is a double-headed axe, which represents swift and balanced justice.



Professor Peter Ridgway Schmidt

Professor Peter R. Schmidt retired in 2018 after nearly 50 years of an amazing career. In the summer of 2019, he and his wife and partner Jane Schmidt returned to Uganda to continue excavations in a region where his career was launched in 1966 when he was a postgraduate student at Makerere University. Throughout his career, Professor Schmidt explored theories, methods, and practices that would decolonize African archaeology and history from mainstream ontologies. He devoted his efforts to the training of African colleagues and capacity building in Africa at the time few of his contemporaries thought training African students in archaeology was necessary or even desirable. A prolific scholar, to date, Professor Schmidt has published four books, eleven edited and co-edited books, nine monographs, two films, five museum exhibits, 97 peer-review articles and chapters, 33 non peer-review articles and chapters, and 14 manuscripts on archaeology and heritage management.

He is a recipient of multiple grants and awards totaling \$ 5,587,000, including from National Science Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Geographic Society, PAST, US Ambassador Fund for Cultural Preservation, Fulbright Hays, Fulbright CIES, USAID, MacArthur Foundation, US Department of Education, Ford Foundation, Caltex, USIS, and Wenner-Gren. We note that his grantsmanship and advocacy was equally devoted to research, student training, and institutional development. Among his numerous academic honors are the

Peter Ucko Memorial Award (conferred 2016 by the World Archaeological Congress), Fellow, World Academy of Arts and Sciences (elected in 2012). His book, *The Archaeology of Ancient Eritrea* (2008, Red Sea Press) received the coveted SAfA best book Prize in African Archaeology. *Iron Technology in East Africa: Symbolism, Science, Archaeology* (1997) was nominated for best book in African studies in 1997, and the *Tree of Iron* was selected for the National PBS broadcast as a Black History Month feature.

Throughout his career, Professor Schmidt advocated for the decolonization of African archaeology. His overall body of work sought to understand what it means to be African, how Africans have built and sustained their communities, and how they have impacted and been affected by their culture, technology, and the environment. How might one view Professor Schmidt's overall body of work in light of his efforts to develop theories that were complementary to African worldviews? His writings offer powerful critiques of how mainstream methodologies comprehend and structure understanding of the world, gender and spatial relationships, technological innovation, exploitation of natural resources, and impact of everyday life. He urged archaeologists to engage oral traditions, ethnoarchaeology, communities, and listening as means for understanding reality of the past in all its dimensions and complexities. Without engaging an ontology that takes into consideration ritual time, he wrote, we would never come close to understanding how the archaeological record we sought to unveil become formed. To what extent has African archaeology become decolonized? And, to what extent has Professor Schmidt's ontology - theory, method, and praxis - served as a tool to emancipate African archaeology? These are questions that we sought to explore in our conversation with him.

We met Professor Schmidt in Albuquerque, New Mexico, at the Society of American Archaeology meeting in 2019 to discuss his contributions. The following interview is a selection from a longer conversation we had on African archaeology and his involvement with it.

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Innocent Pikirayi (IP): It is a tremendous privilege to be part of this conversation. The purpose of our conversation today is to talk with you about your work, your career, and your lifetime contributions to the discipline of archaeology. We both grew up reveling in your discoveries and writings about the African past. Your work has had a huge influence on our own. Over the years our friendship blossomed. We consider this occasion a huge privilege and are honored to listen and share this conversation with our colleagues and friends.

Peter Schmidt (PRS): It's my privilege.

IP: Thank you, Peter. Really, it is more than your privilege. It's also our privileges.

PRS: Well, that's a mutuality that I hold precious.

IP: Let's get into the formal conversation. You were born during the Second World War. What do you remember from that time and immediately after? What influenced how you viewed the world and the direction that you then took?

PRS: Well, I was born during a tumultuous time for my family. I was blessed by coming from a very well-educated family, but an educated family where my father could not secure employment that was commensurate with his training. He went through to an ABD in history, American history, and was unable to secure any kind of job, not even a secondary school teaching position during the depression. So, he had to go back to school, eating salami and chocolate bars, to secure an MLS in library science, because

there were, ironically, jobs open in that field. He did that and worked in the Wisconsin archives for a year. He found it extremely boring, so shifted to another job that was equally boring.

He finally decided that he needed challenges and went into farming, became a dairy farmer. He was bankrolled by my maternal grandfather and started a dairy operation in southern Wisconsin. But he was driven out by the cold winters, trying to remove freezing cow udders from the cement floor of the barn. He didn't find that that had any future.

So, he and my mom sold most of their belongings, got friends and family to contribute ration coupons for fuel, pulled up stakes and crossed America on Route 66, landing in California. There they took up residence adjacent to my uncle's apple farm. It was in derelict condition. Shortly after, we moved into a chicken house. I remember that vividly, one of my first memories, at age three, of the poverty that we experienced as a family--a chicken house in which my father poured a new cement floor. He put up drywall, crushed newspapers for insulation, built a little lean-to kitchen. And there we lived for a year and a half with my aunt, whose husband was away at war in the Pacific, trying to make a living, scratching out a living, by farming apples that were dried and then sent to the troops as rations.

My dad did that for a couple of years and then we moved to another farm, where, basically, we were subsistence farmers, raising chickens, selling eggs, trading milk for other products, raising pigs, sowing the fields with oats that we could feed to the cows. He did that for a couple of years. So, my memories are very, very much attached to those places and the struggles that my family went through.

IP: That's quite a lot, Peter

PRS: It was.

Chapurukha M. Kusimba (CMK): So, were you born in the southeast Wisconsin?

PRS: I was born in Stevens Point, which is in northern Wisconsin, a very, very cold, bitterly cold place in northern Wisconsin. Then very quickly, after only a couple of months, we moved to southern Wisconsin to a place called Elkhorn, where my grandfather had a medical practice. My other grandfather, paternal grandfather, was a Lutheran preacher. He was a pastor in a huge congregation in Plymouth, Wisconsin. My paternal side came from a long line of scholars, theological scholars, who took refuge in this country as conscientious objectors, fleeing oppression and conscription into the Prussian army. They ended up in Missouri and scraped out livings, losing a lot of their community to death from the cold winters--not being accustomed to farming--and established themselves. And eventually, my father ended up in Plymouth with his family. He was born in a sod house in Nebraska. So that's my family background, well-educated, but also with really struggling experiences at various points.

CMK: A good education doesn't necessarily prepare you for a job, no?

PRS: No. A good education prepares you for the world. My father was very adaptable. He saw opportunities when they became available. While we were living on our farm, just outside of Santa Rosa near Sebastopol, he began to diversify and start an insurance business while he was farming. Eventually, he grew that into a good business, forgot about an academic life, and prospered. Later, just as I was going off to college, he was offered an academic position at Fullerton State in Southern California. He pondered it and said, no, he was too far away from academic life and he didn't have any attraction to it any longer.

In many ways he was a frustrated academic, closet academic. I remember him sitting in his study on the top floor of our house in a small alcove, writing furiously at his typewriter. He was a closet essayist and would write about religion, all kinds of theological topics, politics, and economy. After his death, I discovered this trove of essays, scores and scores of beautifully written essays that were amazing.

CMK: Have you considered editing some of those essays and publishing them?

PRS: I have, but I haven't gotten to that yet.

CMK: You're still working on your own notes.

PRS: Yes. I always respected him deeply. While he initially was not an inspiration to me in the career I followed, he was, indeed, the foundation of my being. He had a love for history. He would sit in his chair after we went to bed, reading. I remember getting up sometimes, hearing a noise downstairs and coming and finding him sitting, reading history at 2:00 AM in the morning.

He loved it with a passion. His library was extensive. So, he never gave up that interest, and it spilled over into the family. Each evening meal that we ate as youngsters was the setting for discussions of contemporary affairs and why they were important to our lives.

IP: Well, Peter, tell us from that formative period was there anyone else who influenced you as an archaeologist?

PRS: I remember clearly the influence of my fifth-grade teacher. In grade school I was what you would call the recalcitrant student. a bit of a troublemaker [laughs]. I didn't have a lot of focus in the classroom. It didn't challenge me. As a consequence, I became a behavioral problem. The fact was I was bored. At one time, they wanted to put me in a remedial class, just to get me out of the classroom. My mother resisted that very, very vigorously. Thanks to her, I didn't end up there. My fifth-grade teacher turned me around with just one motion. The second day of class, she told us to calm down and be quiet, and I kept on running my mouth. And before I knew it, there was a huge yardstick that went (YELLING) **slap** on my desk. She said, "I told you to be quiet." I looked at her, and from that moment on, there was never any other problem. She inspired in me a curiosity about



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science. She was a scientist and she became an archaeologist later. She had an abiding interest in anything to do with natural history and archaeology. She would take us 5th graders out to the ocean, camping overnight in the dunes, and then go down into the tidal pools at low tide and collect giant krytrons, abalone, and sea anemones. We knew which ones were edible. We studied them, dissected them. And that was an enduring kind of influence. She also knew the archaeology of the Sonoma coast and would never hesitate to point out where she knew there to be Native American encampments and what places they favored along the coast to get shelter from the wind.

That was the first moment I came to realize that this knowledge was integrated into her mind-set. Her curiosity about natural history also intersected with curiosity about human history. I dedicated a short monograph to her later in my life and went back and presented it to her. She was deeply moved.

CMK: What was her name?

PRS: Edith Vaughn. She became, eventually, a high school teacher. She took an MA in archaeology. I had a great deal of affection for Edith, an inspiring, inspiring teacher. So, definitely, Edith Vaughn. She pointed the way. She instilled in me a curiosity about the world. And she also nurtured that in firsthand tutorials, three of us going out on these field trips, repeated field trips, as fifth graders, with our mentor right there, sleeping with us in the sand dunes. That was an extraordinary experience.

CMK: That was some experience. It's a pity teacher can't do that so freely today because of so many feelings about it.

PRS: After that time, I was a model student, I found my feet. I found my intellectual feet. I also found that there were other things that inspired me--music. I became a cellist to the point where my cello teacher wanted to have me audition for the Oakland Philharmonic Orchestra as I was starting high school. But I didn't see that as a future. I loved the music, but I didn't love the idea of sitting in an orchestra at a distant place with a bunch of old people, because most of them were very elderly. That did not touch me. I had other things that interested me at that time. I was very active as a Boy Scout. Scouting had a deep influence on me. It taught me independence. It taught me innovation. It taught me leadership, all of those. We would spend many of my weekends as a youth, age 13, 14, 15, out in the wilderness camping, finding our own way, creating our own paths, camping in downpours, difficult circumstances, finding some of our own food.

I became accomplished at wilderness camping, going out into the forest for two or three days, surviving on native plants. Those are very important lessons in my life. I was also invested with leadership as a relatively young person, 16 years old, as a scoutmaster on a temporary basis at scout camp, teaching younger people how to tie knots, how to sharpen knives, make fire, how to survive in the woods. And I think that that was an extremely influential trajectory in my life that stays with me today.

IP: What place do you hold dear in California.

PRS: Northern California. You ask where and what place I have affection for, an identity with, well, its northern California in the redwoods. That's where I spent a lot of time in my youth, and that's where I also find solace and peace as an adult. I have a home amongst the redwoods. I spend time meditating in places that the native people, the Pomo people of that region, consider to be sacred places--circles of trees that are spiritual places, that are living beings. It is very noteworthy to realize that the United Nations charter was signed in one of those circular tree arrangements in Muir Woods in Marin county, a highly spiritual place, a place of peace, a place of meaning.

CMK: From an African standpoint, whenever we encounter an American, we often don't relate them to humble beginnings. But, the childhood life you narrate speaks to humble beginnings. There is also a resistance streak that appears to run deeply in your family. The idea of leaving the old country, Prussia, and coming here as conscientious objectors. Did these experience inculcate a streak to always root for the underdog?

PRS: That's an interesting observation. I do think it resonates. My mother's family were Quakers. The Quakers are known for their conscientious objection. They will not be conscripted into the army. They are resisters. My father's family comes from the same kind of background. These beliefs converged in my later life, though I was raised a Lutheran. I no longer profess that faith and haven't for many decades.

My family turned to Quakerism, including my father, when I was in high school. I saw something in that as well. The first Quaker activity I was engaged in pertained to a work project on the Pomo rancheria, which some people refer to as a reservation. We high school volunteers went there over Easter vacation of my junior year. That experience was an epiphany for me. It opened me to new ontologies, different ontologies. It opened me to a completely different world. I had the great, good fortune of interacting closely with Essie Parrish, who may be the most famous Native American healer and prophet in North America during the 20th century. She invested trust in us young people, she saw that we could listen. We were curious. We were eager to help. She had us cut off a massive redwood stump that stood about 12 feet high and was 10 feet wide. I remember, as a young kid, trying to manipulate an eight-foot-long chainsaw--this massive chainsaw. One of the Native American guys in the rancheria trained us for half an hour. It took us three days to get through that stump!

Once it was cut, then she instructed us how to prepare acorns--that was an acorn preparation area for the leaching of acorn meal. She took us through that whole process, patiently training us. Then she had us collect the exterior slabs of milled redwood trees that still have the bark on them and prepare them to build a square, pyramid-like shelter. She had us create a ritual structure from those redwood slabs, in which ritual costumes would be kept—it was like a changing room as well as a ritual preparation room. From there, one would go into the roundhouse and carry out the rituals that ensued.

She included us in all of these exclusive processes. I was a bit overwhelmed by that. At first, I had difficulty understanding why she invested trust in us. But then I came to realize that she knew that we had very few preconceived ideas about her world. She was willing to share with us precisely because we didn't have preconceived ideas. We were malleable. She then shared the stories of how she became a prophet, the visions that summoned her to become a prophet. Those were extraordinary narratives. I remember the most poignant thing she ever shared with us—this was the opening to a different ontology. She told the story of a logger who came to her one day with severe bee stings on his arm, seeking treatment. She was a renowned healer.

She took a cup, made incisions. And as she related the story, she sucked bees from the wounds she made and placed them in the pot. I listened to that story, and while observing her, I saw that this was true. It was empirical truth. I recognized that and that experience has stayed with me ever since. Essie Parrish had a very profound effect on me. I think in some ways, she affected how I see the world, and certainly how I see the African worlds in which I've had the privilege to work and interact with people.

CMK: The very essence of your work has predominantly been data-driven research. In fact, all of your theoretical fulminations can be said to be drawn from field experience and knowledge to support and explore your ideas. I think this has been quite influential. But let's return to what IP has asked about how your career in archaeology developed. Your childhood experiences unconsciously steered you towards anthropology and lay the foundation. But these remained latent for a long time because all your degrees are in history.

PRS: High school was also a very formative and creative experience. I had good fortune--I'm from a small town of 17,000 in California, at that time. It was a hub, a small agricultural city, but also a medical center and an educational center that had the best junior college in all the United States. It had one of the top high schools. We had a fabulous faculty. My chemistry teacher had an advanced degree in physics. He helped develop the atomic bomb. He consulted during the summertime and taught during the rest of the year. He loved to teach. We had teachers like that. We had brilliant teachers, inspiring teachers. My English teachers were just extraordinary and demanding. We got back papers that had more red lines on them than the original. That was in high school. The preparation that they gave us for university was exceptional. So, I went to university with a perspective that came out of high school, partly. I was deeply involved in politics in high school, serving as the state student body president. I spent a lot of time traveling around the state, talking about democratic processes amongst students and how we should be exercising more initiative in our governance of high schools.

I also found that experience inspiring, because I got a lot of positive responses from high school audiences I talked with in many of the towns I visited. I thought that a career in politics, where you could clean up corruption, clean up politics, work for politics with integrity, was a direction that I wanted my career to go. I got to university and I was disabused of that notion very quickly. I found the study of politics to be banal and not engaging. That lasted only one quarter.

I remember my father saying, "You know, son, university is a time for experimentation. It's going to be the only time in your life that you'll be able to experiment. Because once you get into the real world, you're not going to be able to shift gears and change careers many times. So, you best do it in the next four years." So, I did.

CMK: How did that happen?

PRS: It has to do with another inspirational person, who was absolutely central to my being today. During my freshman year, I had the wonderful opportunity to know Allard Lowenstein. He was brought to Stanford as a visiting professor of political science. He had just finished a study in what was then southwest Africa [Namibia], investigating abuses of the apartheid regime².

He went underground, interviewing people, without the knowledge of the apartheid regime, and got out just in the nick of time; he was writing a book about this. He also acted as a house advisor in the neighboring dormitory. He immediately became a Pied Piper to upperclassmen and would hold informal seminars in his living room where he'd have papers scattered about on the floor while working, with mostly seniors and juniors present, picking his brains about Africa.

² Allard Lowenstein (1971). Remarks by Allard K. Lowenstein. *American Journal of International Law*, 65(4):153-162; M. Scott, H. Beukes, A. Lowenstein, J. Kozonguizi & M. Kerina (1969). The South West Africa Story *Africa Today* 6 (6): 4-10 .

I was included in a number of those Africa discussion groups because I had a Kenyan roommate my freshman year, Ed Macharia. He was brought in the 1961 airlift of Kenyan students to the United States that was arranged by Tom Mboya with JFK. Ed ended up at Stanford. It was a totally different educational system from what he was accustomed to. He struggled, and I knew his struggles as I was his roommate. I think he initially struggled with me as well because of cultural differences³.

I remember, one day after the second term began, he said, “Peter, if you really want to understand me, read this book, *Facing Mount Kenya*⁴” I immediately read it and was deeply moved. That experience intersected with the presence of Al Lowenstein on campus. I enrolled in Al’s advanced course in African politics, in which he would discuss the liberation movements of various African countries. I remember him coming into the lecture room with his arms full of books that were bookmarked. He set them down on the lectern, opened a book, read a passage, and then expound.

He was a charismatic character. He had every one of us engaged. I was the only freshman in the course. I don't know what I was doing there, but I had been inspired by going over to his residence and listening to him, and knowing Ed, knowing that I deeply desired knowing more about Africa. He was very close to prime movers in all kinds of sectors of resistance and change in the United States, having led the “dump Johnson” movement. Lowenstein was one of America's most liberal leaders. He was everywhere, fomenting student revolution against the status quo, against normative expectations.

Al encouraged me to get involved in Operation Crossroads Africa. I traveled with OCA to what was then the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland which was made up from contemporary Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi. I got there because of Lowenstein. He provided me his old Rambler convertible and I and Tom Boynton, the student body president, drove that Rambler across the United States in three days, delivering it to Philadelphia, where Lowenstein was taking up residence. I then went to DC, where all the Operation Crossroads folks gathered. While we were going through the orientation led by James Robinson, a charismatic Baptist minister who started Operations Crossroads, halfway through Robinson stood up and said, “OK, everybody. We have buses waiting outside. Will you please board those buses? We're taking you to a special destination.”

Well, our destination was the White House. We gathered in the Rose Garden. John F. Kennedy came out with Hubert Humphrey and spoke to us, and acknowledged James Robinson as the inspiration for the Peace Corps. He said, “This man is why we have a Peace Corps. I modeled the Peace Corps after Operations Crossroads.” Then Humphrey spoke. JFK left the platform overlooking the Rose Garden and came down and shook our hands, wishing us well.

CMK: Everyone?

PRS: As many as he could reach. Can you imagine what impact that had? Then we were off to Africa, arriving first in Southern Rhodesia [Zimbabwe], where we immediately were greeted with deep suspicion by the colonial officials. Did we ever get a taste of the colonial mind? We were treated as if we were spies -- being sent to figure out what was happening there and to interfere in it; they feared an alliance between ourselves and

³ See Stephens, Robert F(2013). *Kenyan Student Airlifts to America 1959-1961: An Educational Odyssey*. Nairobi: East African Educations Publishers.

⁴ Jomo Kenyatta (1938). *Facing Mount Kenya*. London: Martin Seckler and Warburf Ltd.

the nationalist leaders. We moved then into Northern Rhodesia [Zambia], where we started a work project building tennis courts outside at a teacher's training college to the east of Lusaka. There we were also treated with suspicion, and the principal of the teacher's college kept us under close watch and made certain that we had very little interaction with the local community.

This frustrated us enormously because we expected to be working with youth from the surrounding communities. We would go off into the communities and talk to people and invite them to join us, and several did. That immediately led to sanctions. We were called to a meeting in the principal's home and told that we weren't to do that. That led to a bit of rebellion. Our group leader was the former Dean of Students at Stanford, Bill Craig, who was a champion of student rights. He immediately listened to us. We said, "We don't want to be part of this project anymore. Building tennis courts is not our calling." He said, "Let us try to arrange another project. I will do my best to work with the local authorities." That experience also led us into local politics, just as the colonial authorities feared.

CMK: What happened?.

PRS: Harry Nkumbula came to visit us, to try to interest us in his campaign. We didn't find him very inspirational⁵. He left us a bit flat. But then Kenneth Kaunda heard about Nkumbula's visit, and soon he appeared. We followed him around from household to household, village to village, while he campaigned. That was an amazing experience. He invited us to his first political rally out in Western Zambia. We drove all night without any of the authorities knowing and ended up at this political rally led by Sikoda Wina, who was a firebrand, the brother to Arthur Wina, another trusted advisor, who had an MA from UCLA. I remember Sikoda with his leopard skin cloak, leading the crowd in chants. That was a memorable moment. Our imaginations were captured by that. We were right in the middle of the first political rallies in that part of Africa. That is an enduring experience that lives with me today⁶.

We quickly finished the tennis courts with the participation of students from the college. Then we moved into northern Zambia to Luanshya, a mining town, a big copper mining town. We were just outside, and there we built an outdoor chapel, carving out a huge anthill and built tiered platforms into a facing anthill, where the benches were located. We did that with an Outward-Bound group of local African students. That was a much more fulfilling project. So, I took away some extraordinary experiences from Operation Crossroads. On the way back, we went to Kenya, first stopping in Dar Es Salaam, where Nyerere came to address us at the airport and praised us for good work. That was a wonderful experience.

CMK: How long had he been in power?"

PRS: Just one year in power, in '62. We went to Nairobi, where we stayed for several days. One person on our group knew Peter Kenyatta. Through Peter, a visit for four of us was arranged on Kenyatta's farm. I remember standing at the gate for about a half an hour, waiting for Peter to come. He finally came out and said his father was sleeping but to come

⁵ See G. Macola (2010). *Liberal Nationalism in Central Africa: A Biography of Harry Mwaanga Nkumbula*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁶ See Robert I. Rotberg (1965). *The Rise of Nationalism in Central Africa: The Making of Malawi and Zambia (1873-1964)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

in and sit on the porch and that he would be with us when he awakened. He came out and greeted us in wonderful form, expansive form. The first thing he said was, "Look at this." He pointed down to his sandals that had big straps. On the sandals was printed UHURU.

CMK: Freedom

PRS: He said, "This is not the Uhuru of Robert Roark. This is our UHURU." That was a wonderful hour with him, as he took us around his gardens, shared his vision of Kenya's future. The visit was capped by his saying, "I have to show you something special." He took us over to a mabati [corrugated iron] garage, unlocked it, and opened the doors. There was a shiny black Mercedes. He said, "This is a gift from my people after I was released from jail" --only couple of months before.

CMK: He was also in campaign mode at that time.

PRS: Yes. He invited us to one of his political rallies. I don't know where that fits into the whole spectrum of his political rallies, but I think it was one of the first. That was a deeply moving experience, as his special guests. So, my goodness, as a young person having those kinds of exposures, I was forever captured. After that, when I came back to Stanford, I tried to pursue interests in Africa but there was only one course offered in Africa; Joseph Greenberg, the linguist, offered it. He was a genius and very adept at bringing linguistics alive, but it certainly wasn't my interest at that time. He was rather a centered lecturer. He'd walk into the classroom, pat his pockets and look in his briefcase, and then finally realize that his lecture was inside his coat, pull it out, and read his lecture. While it wasn't particularly inspiring, it reengaged me in something that was African. There are only these bits and pieces that popped up during my college career, and that's why I was unable to pursue something more assiduously.

Archaeology was not yet in the foreground, but I was thinking about it. That was the influence of my fifth-grade teacher. I tried to register my sophomore year for a field course in archaeology. Stanford offered very few courses in anthropology and only one in archaeology. I couldn't gain entrance, as it was fully subscribed. So, I went on to other fields. I was a speech major for a while, a geology major, and an astronomy major. I explored those fields. I became, eventually, a history major. The primary reason being that I couldn't find an outlet in archaeology. The history faculty was world class, the finest history faculty in the United States. Those professors were amazing.

I would go to lectures and just be awed by their knowledge and by their abilities to communicate what they felt passionately about. I became a history major, like a good many of my peers. I don't know how many in our class were history majors, but it was hundreds out of a class of 1,200. It was far oversubscribed, but for good reason, the inspiring faculty.

CMK: Do you remember one or two names?

PRS: David Potter. David Potter was certainly an inspiration, and a number of others. I did an honors thesis in American history. Another inspiring history teacher was Jackson Turner Main, the grandson of Jackson Turner, perhaps the most famous historian of North America. He was a demanding but understanding professor who taught us rigor in archival documentation.

I remember that he assigned me the task of researching some issues that Bernard DeVoto had engaged as an historian. I had to do original research, go into the primary resources, including DeVoto's papers, and then the secondary resources that discussed

DeVoto's work⁷. I came upon Dr. Main in the library one day, and he was reading the papers from the seminar, an historiographic seminar. I said "Hello, Dr. Main. Oh, I'm sorry I'm interrupting you." He said, "No, no. I've got your paper right here. Let's talk about it. This citation here, do you notice that this is a secondary source and that you didn't properly cite it?" He said, "Let me show you." He walks over 10 feet, pulls a book off the shelf, and says, "See here. The citation within the book shows that it's not a primary source that was being cited and you cited that citation as if was primary. It was a secondary source."

CMK: It was footnote of a footnote.

PRS: Yes, exactly, the correct format for a footnote of a specific kind of footnote.

That was that level of rigor that we confronted. I really appreciated that and learned an enormous amount about what historical research is about from Dr. Main. So that was a really good grounding that also instilled a passion for history. That, of course, resonated with my father's passion for history. Yet in the background was a frustration about not being able to pursue archaeology.

I stayed on at Stanford an extra quarter to finish a language requirement that I hadn't paid attention to, which proved to be a blessing. There was a visiting professor who taught African history, the very first African historian hired at Stanford in late 1965, though on a temporary basis. I did tutorials with him, and our topic was negritude. I did an original paper on negritude. Many tutorials later, I came to a completely new understanding of the African mind and the direction some African intellectuals were taking on being African. That re-awakened a deep-seated interest in Africa that went back to my freshman year.

IP: How did you get from there to UCLA?

PRS: Well, I was going to be a history major in American history because I'd done my honors thesis on American history. But I realized, after having spent that last term studying African history and with all of these experiences behind me, that my heart lay with African history. When I arrived at UCLA in the winter of 1966, I announced that I was no longer interested in American history, I was registering in African history. They said, fine, no objection. So, I immediately enrolled in an African historiography course, and lo and behold, Merrick Posnansky was there as a visiting professor⁸. He'd taken a semester's leave from Makerere, and I enrolled in his seminar and a lecture course. That was a turning point in my life because it reawakened my deep-seated interest in Africa. It was inspiring to see someone weave together oral traditions with archaeology and make history. Merrick was very historically minded. It was always history and archaeology. Because archaeology is, after all, making history. And those conjunctions were so apparent that it was compelling to follow that. So, there was no question, at that moment, what I was going to do. I got deeply, deeply involved in my studies.

We lived in a small apartment off campus in West LA. Jane was student teaching in San Fernando Valley. Merrick several times came to our home with his young children. It was kind of a family setting, a place outside an otherwise alien institution, where you could be familial, and so we developed a relationship. He encouraged me to come do

⁷ Bernard DeVoto (1942) *The year of decision 1846*: New York: St. Martin's Griffin.

⁸ See Jonathan R. Walz (2010). An Interview with Merrick Posnansky. [*African Archaeological Review* 27\(3\):177–210.](#)

Makerere. He said, "Come to Uganda." So, we said, "OK, why not? Yes." We knew East Africa already, a bit. We went back home after the term ended and shared this with our parents. We were married, by that time, for one year. Jane's parents said, "Why don't you take this old Chevrolet of ours? We don't need it any longer." In fact, it was not that old, only 10 years old. They said, "Drive it across country and then sell it to fund your trip to Africa." We did just that. We packed our belongings into the old Chevy, and we drove across the country in about four days, with only one small break down in Wyoming. And we got to Queens, New York, on a Sunday and tried to find a way to sell it. It wasn't the most auspicious time to try to sell a car, but we finally found a car dealer who knew someone who was interested in the car. They came, looked at it, test drove it, and they said, "This is just what we're looking for."

They had all their money in traveler's checks because, evidently, they were declaring bankruptcy at the time. So, we had to go to a number of bars to change the money. They gave us the money and then drove us to Idlewild, now JFK Airport. We bought our tickets right at the counter on Icelandic Air and flew to Luxembourg. From there, we hitchhiked across Europe, down through Italy, from Brindisi by tramp steamer to Piraeus, by tramp boat--it was a little, little boat--across the Mediterranean to Alexandria; and, then from Alexandria to Cairo, where we got stuck staying in a hotel that cost us \$1.50 a day and had a multitude of fleas, right next to the bazaar. We could look out over the bazaar from our hotel window.

CMK: Welcome to Africa.

PRS: We wanted to go overland to Uganda, and everybody said, no, you can't do that. No, it's not possible. It's impossible. Every travel agent we went to said, no, that's not possible. So finally, I went to the railroad office and said, "How can we get to Aswan and then on to Juba?" They said, "Well, you can't get to Juba. We can sell you a ticket, though, to Aswan." I said, "You can? Everybody's been telling us we can't get there." "No", they said, "take the railroad." We bought railroad tickets down to Aswan, traveled to Aswan and took a horrendous taxi drive down to Aswan dam. I remember standing out in 120-degree heat for three hours, until someone finally took pity on us and invited us aboard these two ships tied together. Well, it happened that those two ships were taking on approximately 400 Beja camel herders, who'd just sold their camels in Cairo. They were laden in gold. I mean, those guys were rich, carrying these huge scimitars [swords]. We were packed like sardines on this boat as it chugged up the Nile at three miles an hour.

The first night, we stopped below Abu Simbel. They threw out a rope and tied it around a rock! The next day, we were off again. All they had was a hot ginger drink that burned our throats, or tea. That was it. So essentially, we went without food, except very gritty, hard bread. We didn't anticipate our needs correctly.

When we stopped and moored along the banks of the Nile to disembark for Wadi Halfa, there was a riot aboard the boat as people were trying to get immigration clearance into Sudan. People were thrown off board. Fights broke out. I remember waving our passports. The customs officer stood up. He nodded at me. I threw them over the crowd to the front of the boat: He caught them, processed our passport, tied them up again and threw them back. So, we left the boat in the first tranche, traipsed across the dunes for a couple of hundred yards, and get into a truck. Jane saw a watermelon beside the river and told me, "Hey, there's a watermelon back there." I said, "Come on now. There can't be watermelon there." Well, we get to Wadi Halfa, after an hour's drive through the dunes, and it was then a shantytown. Jane said, "Ask if there is watermelon here. I went around

from duka to duka, little stores. All they had was canned pineapple. We bought some of that. They were also selling limeade which we drank. I was asking for watermelon and drinking this limeade, which we learned later was full of Epsom salts.

About two hours later a well-dressed gentleman came up in his robes and said, "Will you please accompany me? I want to take you to the mayor." So, I said, "Of course." We came to a very well-appointed shop that I had not seen yet. They took us into the back room, and there was a table with a white linen tablecloth where we were seated. The mayor came in and said, "Welcome, my guests. I'm pleased to receive you" and sat down with us. At that point, in walked another man holding a silver tray with a watermelon on it!

IP: Wow.

PRS: He set it down on the table and our host said to us, "You may wonder why I'm doing this. I'm doing this to honor your president, a fellow American", and he pointed to JFK's picture on the wall. It moved us to tears. He said, "He saved our lives and those of our family. He brought us food." That was a deeply, deeply moving experience. From there we went on the narrow-gauge railway for three days to Khartoum.

CMK: This is 1967?

PRS: This was the summer of '66. It was immediately after the term at UCLA, on our way to Uganda. We are pressed together in this train, fourth class, three to a seat. The Baja elder, the head of this group, sat right across from us. We came to realize it was to protect us, with his eldest son also opposite us, because was an unruly crowd, with people are not having control of themselves because of the Epsom salts in the limeaid a condition that was growing uncomfortable. He came to our protection once in a very significant way. Jane was purposely bumped. She was sitting on the aisle side by passing passengers. The elder nodded to his son and he was up in a flash. He ran down the aisle after the guy, took out his sword, and pinned him to the bulkhead with the sword at his throat. That's all he did, a sheathed sword. He walked back and sat in his seat, nodded to us. We had protectors on that very difficult journey across the Nubian desert. That was a moving experience. Why us? Hospitality to foreigners? That was a very difficult trip. We were so emaciated, dehydrated by the time we got to Khartoum that a gentleman, a doctor meeting a family member, looked at us and immediately said, "Oh my god, you need help!"

We said, "Just get us to a lodging." He took us to a lodging, where we spent the night with cold water running on us in the bathtub. We were stranded in Khartoum for about a week. Finally, with our last remaining money, we were able to buy air tickets out of Khartoum to Juba and on to Entebbe. We took a bullet in the plane as we were landing in Juba because of the rebellion at that time. When we landed in Entebbe, we were met by Merrick Posnansky, and that was the beginning of our stay at Makerere. Makerere was a phenomenal institution at that time, with world class scholars, people like Ali Mazrui, Goran Hyden, Merrick Posnansky, Victor Turner.

CMK: Who were the others you studied with?

PRS: Peter Rigby. David McMaster, a wonderful human geographer from University of Glasgow, and so on. It was rigorous, demanding. I had to write three research papers a week and produce them for seminars. The three seminars each had a paper per week. As I go back and look at that, I wonder how I could be that productive as a student. It was rigorous, demanding, and exciting, because you were working with the best minds in the world, deeply dedicated Africanists who made their lives in Africa. Visiting scholars, like Lucy Mair and Mary Douglas came to visit for a week and held seminars.

I think one of the most profound experiences was with Victor Turner, who opened a new world to me, the world of structural analysis and its capacity to decode history. its diachronic capacities, because he saw things that Lévi-Strauss hadn't seen⁹. The practice of structuralism by Lévi-Strauss had always been characterized as ahistorical. This is something that Lévi-Strauss, himself, came to realize was a disability. Right at the end of his career, he tried to change this. And I remember being present at a lecture he gave at Berkeley when I was a visiting professor there in 1984. It was possibly the last public lecture he gave about the application of structuralism to genealogical data in the South Pacific, in which you could apply structuralism to decode historical change, change in institutions, religious institutions, social, and political institutions. He applied that approach to Elman Service's data. I don't think there were about a half dozen people in the audience of 3,000 who understood what he was talking about, because you really needed to be grounded deeply in structuralism. I happened to be because I was mentored by Victor Turner and I read widely in structuralism¹⁰.

One of the high points of my life was after that lecture, at a reception, waiting patiently for an opportunity to speak with him, sharing my work in Africa with him about using structuralism to get at periodization and change in Haya oral traditions. He looked at me and said, "When did you do this?" I replied, "About 10 years ago." He said, "That's very interesting. Good for you." I said, "Thank you, sir." That was one of the high points of my life.

CMK: Your first book, *Historical Archaeology*, addresses this very question of historical archaeology (Schmidt 1978).

PRS: Yes. And, that was a risky business, because structuralism is perceived, still to this day--and there are many, many volumes written about it--as being ahistorical. And in many practices, it is, indeed. In Lévi-Strauss's own work, *Honey to Ashes*, and all the other work that he did on the Amazon, it's ahistorical.

But it has phenomenal potential to be a very powerful historical tool, if applied to the right set of data. That's what I tried to do amongst the Haya, by showing how the oral traditions associated with the Rugomora Mahe site were, in fact, co-mingled with ancient Bacwezi myth about King Rugomora, who was a 17th century king. Structuralism unveiled that process.

So, I've always considered as unfortunate the characterization of structuralism as strictly ahistorical, because it has significant potential. I tried to address that, again, in my article in the *Encyclopedia of African Archaeology* that Peter Mitchell and Paul Lane edited, by revisiting it and trying to revitalize interest in it. But you do have to be schooled in it, and it's not easy. I acknowledge that (Schmidt 2013).

IP: Peter, I need to take you back to your early years at Makerere. And this kind of mentoring and your encounter with structuralism. How did you get into the discipline of deep history through archaeology?

⁹ See, for example, Victor W. Turner (1967). *The forest of symbols: aspects of Ndembu ritual* Cornell: Cornell University Press.

¹⁰ See Stephen G. Wieting (1972) Myth and Symbol Analysis of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Victor Turner. *Social Compass*, 19 (2):139–154.

PRS: Well, one of the principle courses that I took while at Makerere was with Merrick Posnansky over two terms. One was a general course on African prehistory, in which we looked at the full spectrum of knowledge, at that time, about Africa. I was also teaching at the time as a TA for his general course in East African history, a good part of which was archaeologically based. So that provided me with an opportunity to get deeper into the literature and to become fluent in it as a teacher. That was an invaluable experience. At the same time, I was working for Merrick in the National Museum of Uganda. I worked with his ceramic collections from Bigo, looking at them in terms of decorative motifs, technology, working up typologies, that kind of endeavor. That gave me a hands-on exposure to some of the archaeology. In the second term, we did a lot of field trips. We went right into the places that had been excavated, or had deep historical meaning, in terms of the more recent history of that part of Africa. For example, we visited the Kingdom of Bunyoro and the Mukama's capital and were briefed by the Mukama himself about the history of his kingdom. That was a profound experience, listening to him relate the oral traditions about what it meant to be the King of the Bunyoro. We also visited the highlands of Kenya and the Sirikwa holes that John Sutton had studied. Being out on that landscape, going from site to site, listening to the narratives, that was a deeply moving experience. It was an empirically grounded experience that really gave me an understanding of what fieldwork might look like in that setting.

We also went to Nsongezi, which was a site that Glen Cole from the Field Museum, had excavated. We walked through that site, saw the huge cleavers, tens of thousands of hand axes on the surface. It was extraordinary. I mean, it was mind-boggling to visit the Nsongezi site, and then nearby Sangoan sites. From there, we went to Karagwe Kingdom, to the capital of King Rumanyika where Speke and Grant visited for a while. That's where Speke left Grant behind when he went to Buganda, abandoning Grant at Bweranyange. He then went on to 'discover' the Nile. But in any event, we visited Bweranyange. We saw the collection of iron artifacts, the royal artifacts of Bweranyange, since disappeared and dissipated around the world through illicit means¹¹.

Those were stored in a little common mabati [corrugated iron] hut without any caretaker. They were vulnerable at that time. Subsequently, Hamo Sassoon, who was then Director of Antiquities in Uganda when we were there, went on to study those and produced a PhD on that assemblage.

After we visited Bweranyange, we went on to Bukoba. We visited the rock art around Bukoba and the town itself. I was really taken by the natural environment, the landscape of that area, the interdigitated swamps and ridges, the lushness, the hospitality of the people. It was like love at first sight. And, there was a resonance about the place. There was something deep within me that found it comfortable and very interesting. That's where I ended up. where I returned. That visit touched something in me of all the places I visited.

CMK: You keep going back and forth to Bukoba.

PRS: That was a formative experience. Makerere really set the pathway to the rest of my career. I didn't do any practical archaeology there. I studied archaeology. I think at that time I had a good mastery of East African archaeology, to be sure, and a knowledge of archaeology around the continent, too. I was a diploma student. I would have had to stay

¹¹ Professor Schmidt discusses some these experiences in *Oral Traditions, Archaeology & History: A Short Reflective History In A History of African Archaeology*, ed., P. Robertshaw, pp. 252- 70. London: James Currey.

for another whole year to do a diploma dissertation. Jane and I thought, that's just not worth it. Our experience there had been extremely valuable and unparalleled, but we recognized it was time to go back to UCLA and finish my MA. So, we did just that.

We returned to the US. I re-enrolled to UCLA, and they accepted all my Makerere credits. I had just one semester to finish my MA. I was not very satisfied that I could find the direction I needed at UCLA. There was nobody engaged in Africa and archaeology, just no one there. There was a gentleman who did West African history and there was Leonard Thompson. He was a masterful historian, to be sure, of southern African, who I deeply respected, but it wasn't the area that I wanted to pursue.

Ed Steinhart, who became a historian of eastern Africa and Uganda, in particular, had gone to Northwestern the year before, leaving UCLA. So, I contacted him and asked what he would recommend? And he said, "By all means, come here. It's an exciting, really, really involved place." So, Jane and I did.

On the way to Northwestern, we were offered a blueberry farm in Washington by friends of her family, a beautiful, exquisite blueberry farm. The owners were an elderly couple and they had reached the end of their farming career. They offered it to us on the spot when we stopped by for a social visit. That was a very difficult moment for us. It resonated with something in my background. I've always wanted to farm. In fact, we raised food for our family for a dozen years, Jane and I, huge gardens in New England. We seriously considered it. It was agonizing. Would we do that, or would we go on with a career in African archaeology? African archaeology won. We continued on to Northwestern.

IP: And still at Makerere, one interesting aspect that brings your career prominently is the structuralism you have alluded to earlier. How different is your experience in structuralism? Based on your work in East Africa, do you see any differences in the structuralism applied in southern Africa? For instance, Tom Huffman's use of structuralism?¹²

PRS: Let's keep that as the reference to structuralism. That is an application of structuralism that is ahistorical, because it does not look at phenomena diachronically. It freezes things in time. It does not look at the possibility of change at Great Zimbabwe, and certainly Great Zimbabwe was not static over time.

You're an authority of Great Zimbabwe, you want to understand what kind of changes may have occurred, rather to use structuralism to block those changes. But that wasn't done. Rather, time was frozen and represented as universal, something that pertained to that place over extended periods of time. I think that does a grave injustice to the dynamic history of Great Zimbabwe. We know that constantly societies change. And, we know that technology is interacting with human beings, and as we know from iron technology humans are interacting with non-human beings too, aren't they?

IP: Yes.

PRS: Because the furnaces are non-humans. They are living non-human beings. Interactionally and structurally, that's enormously important. That ontology, I think, has been significantly overlooked. I've come to rethink my own work in terms of those kinds of phenomena. At first, I thought in terms of ritual enactment, embodied enactment using metaphors and metonymies. That, to be sure, does imbue iron technologies with those attributes. But the really important aspect is one that's ontological. This shoots through

¹² Huffman, T. N. 1984. Expressive Space in the Zimbabwe Culture. *Man* New Series 19(4):593-612.

other domains of society. It also relates to new moon ceremonies that have to do with life and birth and rebirth though the use of snakes possessed by human spirits. It is the same kind of cycle of renewal that you see in iron smelting, giving birth to living matter, which allows society to reproduce itself. But inevitably, also results in death. These are basic axioms by which society is organized, structured. If we don't understand ontologies, I think that-- and I made this point yesterday in a talk--we're working in the dark, perhaps our own distinct archaeological ontology. We are so preoccupied by science, so preoccupied by our own endeavors, that we don't take the time or interest in learning the governing principles of cultures with which we are working. Because ontology structures behavior. It structures space. It structures everything that people do. And if we don't have those understandings, then we're in a bad fix. I think that this is--and we can talk more about this later--one of the major issues facing African archaeology today.

IP: It is a kind of fast forward base which was triggered by my base on structuralism. It can maybe go back to the ethnoarchaeological base.

CMK: So, your first research focused on linking tradition and oral histories with archaeology. To what do you attribute that perspective and why did you change to iron technology?

PRS: I see them as inextricably linked. Certainly, the perspective of using oral traditions to weave a more complex and nuanced fabric of history comes out of the experiences of working with Merrick Posnansky, Victor Turners, and others, including Ivor Wilks at Northwestern. I'm deeply indebted to both Ivor Wilks and John Rowe, historians of Africa who had a deep respect for oral traditions. I was very fortunate at Northwestern in having John Rowe as my advisor, a more a traditional historian of East Africa. But he used oral traditions, along with archival sources. He gave me complete license to do as I wanted, to follow my mind in bringing archaeology together with other sources, particularly oral traditions. I took a historiography course from him, and then he released me from additional courses. I went to anthropology. I took most of my courses in anthropology, archaeology, and political anthropology. I took a tutorial with Ivor Wilks, and that was an extremely deep influence on my thinking, because Ivor was perhaps one of the most rigorous thinkers ever in African history, in terms of the use of oral traditions. Some of his students, like Tom McCaskie, who followed rigorously in that same tradition, say explicitly that most academics don't get it. They don't get the value of oral traditions. They do not see them as empirical evidence. They do not understand that people are constantly remaking their histories in the present to satisfy their contemporary needs, drawing on the threads of the past. And any such thing as veracity and cross-checking with archival sources is irrelevant, because you must understand them within their own context, their own meanings, and how people make history. That's the value of oral traditions. That's what we want to understand, that process of history making. But most historians don't get that at all.

CMK: At that time the American Historical Association was somewhat ambivalent about the utility of oral traditions as history. How did these debates fit into or influence your ongoing research?

PRS: I think that I was in an atmosphere and a setting there that nobody paid attention to that debate. They did good work that was respected by their peers in Africa and in that academic community. They were not distracted by the debates. Vansina, of course, just forged his own path. He was very supportive of my work. He read my dissertation, helped

me revise it for a book, made extensive comments. His generosity was extraordinary. I was really fortunate to have people like that supportive of what I was doing¹³.

CMK: Did you attend his [Jan Vansina] seminars at the University of Wisconsin?

PRS: I did not. No, because I was on a fast track. I'd been to UCLA Makerere. I was eager to get to the field and I could see my goals. I spent a year at Northwestern, observing as much as I could, also enrolling in Stuart Struever's archaeology courses. Now, that was also a very formative experience. Stuart Struever was in the lead in New Archaeology, along with Binford, Hill, and the whole gang of new archaeologists¹⁴. He was sitting at the feet of Binford, who was then teaching at Chicago, writing his dissertation the year that I was enrolled.

PRS: We were force fed New Archaeology like a goose is force fed. We got it from A through Z.

CMK: As it was being formed.

PRS: Yes, as it was being formed, and it was exciting, it was the gospel. I remember electric excitement in the seminar about theory. I also remember being assigned Binford for my seminar paper, which was a formidable task, and I tried to find a way to wiggle through it. I took his work at Apple Creek and Hatchery West, in which he tries to formulate moieties. You look closely at that work and it's an abomination. It was filled with speculation and sloppy archaeology. Those sites were deeply looted. He was not seeing illusions, he was delusional.

CMK: He saw what he wanted to see.

PRS: He saw what he wanted to see. He was also drinking heavily at the time; it was simply a fabrication of his mind. There was no empirical evidence to sustain it. I took it apart and I presented that seminar paper. Struever was sitting directly across from me. I remember how his head began to tilt downward until he was looking at the table and not making eye contact. After I finished, he said, "Thank you, Peter. Next paper." I got an A on the paper, but the critique was too much to the point, it was too close to home. I was taking on his mentor in a way that he knew to be true, but to publicly voice it was another matter. Later, I revised that paper when I was at Brown and he was SAA president.¹⁵ He came for a big lecture and we had a reception afterwards. As he was leaving, I handed him the revised paper. I said, "Stu, would you look at this and comment on it, because I want to publish it?" He paged through it, and he turned to me and said, "Kill it. Do not publish this." And I asked why. He said, "He will eat you up and shred you. Forget about it." He said it with such vehemence and sincerity that it put a chill in me. I filed it away and it's still in my files. I was talking to somebody about this the other day and they said, I should reframe it in the context of that story and publish it.

¹³ Jan M. Vansina (1985) *Oral tradition as history*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

¹⁴ Richard A. Watson (1972) discussed the influence of the 'new archaeology' of the 1960s in *Antiquity* 46 (183):210-215.

¹⁵ Stuart Struever (1971) Comments on archaeological data requirements and research strategy *American Antiquity* 36 (1):9-19.

CMK: You should, because you revisit some of his later work, in *Archaeologies of Listening*, a very, very, pointed critique of his incapacity to listen¹⁶.

PRS: Yes, we do. I do say some interesting things. His deafness to local people, his disrespect and disregard for local voices of knowledge. It was profound. And it affects his work and seriously compromises his ethnoarchaeology to the point where he was not willing to listen to local people and what their views were. In fact, he went out of his way to silence them and to privilege his own endless speculations about what might have been, rather than listening to local knowledge. That was a very unfortunate model for American archaeologists. It has not been approached critically. It was accepted as a revelation, as gospel. It really demands critical review. I think it's a compelling issue for all of us to revisit that work and to see it for what it is. It is not ethnoarchaeology. It's speculative archaeology.

CMK: It's basically what a colleague of mine once famously said, men believe what they want to believe. After your work with oral traditions, you moved into the study of iron technology using ethnoarchaeological methods. Did this mark a shift in your approach to archaeology of Africa?

PRS: It's the same kind of phenomenon. There was no switch. It was a seamless transition. In fact, it's working within the same domain. It's just a different focus within that same domain because technology is socially constructed. It's ontological. And so too are oral traditions socially constructed according to ontologies. So, they seamlessly fit together. And the iron technology studies arose out of my initial work at the Rugomora Mahe site because a lot of the evidence we were dealing with was technological as well as the oral traditions. Of course, the oral traditions have characteristics that show that they go way, way back in time. That was greeted in a very skeptical manner by Western-bound thinkers who see history constructed according to the archive only. They see oral traditions as having no legitimacy as historical instruments beyond arbitrary limits of 1,000-- or let's say 400 years or 100 years-- whatever the disposition of the critic. And this is a legacy that goes back to Robert Lowie¹⁷. I talk about this in the listening book, the extreme denigration of oral traditions as historical sources within American anthropology particularly. This is a legacy that stays with us today. That same paradigm is deeply embedded today. The response to research at the Rugomora Mahe site in Katuruka was skeptical in the extreme, voiced by some still-living contemporary archaeologists but without an awareness of the kind of evidence that's marshaled in support of it.

It's very clear that the point of conservation rests in ritual enactment. Through thousands of years, sacred sites are instrumental in the lives of people and they engage in embodied rituals at those sites. Oral traditions are preserved within them because of embodied experiences and passed on from generation to generation. Of course, there are changes. We witness that at the Rugomora Mahe site, don't we? There is the incorporation of ancient Bacwezi myth, which I think was associated with that site from

¹⁶ P.R. Schmidt and Kehoe, A. B. 2019. *Archaeologies of listening: beginning thoughts*. In *Archaeologies of Listening*, eds., P.R. Schmidt and A.B. Kehoe, pp. 1-24. Gainesville FL: University Press of Florida.

¹⁷ Robert H. Lowie (1915). Oral tradition and history. *American Anthropologist* 17 (3):597-599.

time immemorial or at least from the beginning of the Bacwezi 1,000 or so years ago. Beyond that, the history has been remade any number of times. The challenge before us is to understand how it's remade and why it's remade, but also to acknowledge that basic core historical values are retained because of ritual enactment. That's not a difficult phenomenon to recognize and understand. Nonetheless, some people continue to either ignore it or write it out. I think it's something worthy of repeated emphasis in all our work, that when we find deep time oral traditions, I would say that's because of ritual enactment. You see it in Zimbabwe. You've seen it in Kenya. And if we engage in that kind of research, we will find it virtually anywhere we work. We need to open ourselves to understanding those processes of ritual enactment and how historically important they are. Why is it that you have deep-time oral traditions in Mesopotamia but not in Africa? The question itself points to the absurdity of all of it. Of course, across a huge range of cultures--where these processes of ritual enactment preserve the past or parts of the past--is something to which we need to devote much more work. We need much more rigorous attention to it. We need to shift our perceptions.

Iron technology is basically an ontological exercise, as is a whole range of oral traditions that are ritually enacted. So, they're linked-- inextricably linked. I don't think there's any switching there. I think it's a natural movement amongst domains. And the more we begin to think about that, as natural movement from domain to domain with governing principles-- structuring principles of ontology-- the better off we'll be as practicing archaeologists. I think that's part of the decolonizing process.

IP: One of the highlights of your career is when you and your collaborators announced the practice of preheating in African iron technology. Why do you think this discovery did not gain as much traction as you had expected?

PRS: The issue of preheating has an interesting genesis. And it grows out of analysis of the artifacts excavated at the Rugomora Mahe site back in 1970. During the mid-70s--when I was working together with Don Avery, who was a metallurgist at Brown University--we puzzled over the tuyere fragments and why so many were reduced, vitrified, and slime covered. And it was obvious to us that they had to be inside the furnaces. So that was the light that went off that led to the preheating hypothesis. If they're inside the furnace, then they're going to preheat.

I was really fortunate to work with Avery--a brilliant thermodynamic theorist and applied thermodynamic physicist—who designed to refractory furnaces amongst other things. He was also avocationally an iron smelter. He tried to replicate iron smelting and was eager to work with us in the observation of iron smelting.

When we measured furnace temperatures and temperatures inside the tuyeres, it became obvious to us that there was preheating occurring or else the reduction zone inside those furnaces could not have reached higher temperatures than you would normally expect from a bloomery furnace. We published that article in *Science* to significant acclaim and support from people like Theodore Wertheim at MIT and even Nick van der Merwe, who later changed his mind about it¹⁸. Subsequently, it came under attack from a commercial metallurgist in Canada who designed large scale iron smelting furnaces. He attacked the idea of preheating and reckoned that it was a very minimal amount. But he was using

¹⁸ Schmidt, P. R. & Avery, D.H. 1978) Prehistoric Culture and Complex Iron Smelting in Tanzania. *Science*, 201:1085-1089.

principles that were not applicable to the Haya furnace because he assumed the air blast was continuous. That's not the case in a Haya furnace. With continuous air blast, there's laminar flow. And you would get a minimal amount of preheating.

IP: Yeah, because of cold air that is flowing.

PRS: Yes, just flowing through, creating a barrier on the tuyere wall. The really innovative part of the Haya furnace was the insertion of the blow pipes all the way inside. Certainly, we know that the walls were heated to a temperature of about 1,250 degrees centigrade. It is the push-pull effect--*the turbulence*--inside that blow pipe that is important as you are beating the bellows at 480 strokes a minute, back and forth and back and forth. Avery's calculations show that there's a very significant preheat. After it was first challenged, he went back and recalculated it and lowered his estimates, I think, in a reasonable manner. But then that was attacked as mystifying mathematical calculations. Rather than trying to understand the principles that were unfolding within the Haya furnace, there was simply a broadside leveled against the mathematical calculation and also the challenge that said nothing had been proven—it is yet to be proven. Well, in any kind of scientific endeavor, any bench scientist will tell you in the testing of a hypothesis, it will stand until it's disproven. You go after the null hypothesis, don't you?

IP: Yes.

PRS: Yes. We've not affirmed the null hypothesis in preheating. And therein lies a basic scientific flaw on the part of the critics. There is nothing that they can marshal that disproves the preheating hypothesis. No evidence whatsoever, just claims to the contrary. Rehder's [the commercial metallurgist] claims do not hold up. Some of those are repeated by Killick, who basically comes down to the point that this is a mystifying mathematical calculation. So, what are we left with? We're left with a lot of archaeological evidence that shows something to the contrary. It shows a record of experimentation over a 150-year period in the early Iron Age to get the blow pipes right. Initially they started without using a refractory clay, with blow pipes tending to break a lot. If you look at the blow pipes that come out of the early Iron Age furnaces--the earlier ones--they have a high degree of vitrification along the edges of the breaks, a high ratio of blow pipes that broke inside the furnaces. That decreased over time as they mastered refractory blow pipes and evidently gained access to the right clay sources.

The archaeological evidence is potent. It shows scientific experimentation on the part of ancient iron smelters. It's rather remarkable evidence. I don't know anything else quite like it in the archaeological record that shows that kind of innovation occurring over 150-year period of experimentation. It's there, the physical material record is there. Terry Childs assiduously went through and documented every single piece of blow pipe. We have it all quantified. We can show it through time and the change that occurred. That archaeological evidence has also been ignored.

IP: It is ignored, yes.



Peter Schmidt pointing to an iron smelting furnace at the KM3 site, 1978

PRS: If you ignore evidence, it's much easier to make an argument to the contrary. But there's no disposing of it. It sits there, and it's potent. It has to be acknowledged. And, it also must be acknowledged that the hypothesis has not been disproved. It stands. Why is it that it hasn't taken traction? Well, if anybody speaks up and says anything about it, they come under a hard critique. People are hesitant. People are reluctant. They don't want to come under examination and critique for following an idea that's been condemned--if not blasted--by certain people who simply do not want to see it accepted.

This is an issue that runs deep to the heart of acknowledging African innovation--the denial of African innovation-- in this case. It is a profoundly disquieting issue and I'm not keeping quiet about it. I've just published an article [chapter] about this and the scientific inadequacy of the critique--how science has not been practiced by the critics of the

preheating hypothesis.¹⁹ Until such time as evidence is marshalled to disprove the hypothesis, then it stands. It should be acknowledged as a viable hypothesis that's very important to the history of Africa.

IP: Because this critique came up in the late '80s and persisted for some time, there was still time where they could go back and study it. But that was not taken up by critics. Do you think it would have taken a long time?

PRS: No, they could've done it. Anybody could have gone to the Haya and asked for iron smelting to happen again. It wasn't up to me to do that. I did it three times, in 1976 with Avery, 1979, and 1984. How many times does one have to do it?

CMK: The *Tree of Iron*²⁰ about Haya iron smelting was a very beautiful documentary, a documentary film that is still used in classroom instruction. It took a lot of time to do that.

PRS: I recently had a physicist from Yale contact me about this. I sent her all the literature, including critiques and the film. She wrote back and said, "I can't believe this. This really does test credibility." There are a few people with axes to grind who are not prepared to acknowledge that this is, first of all, an important, terribly important, hypothesis and set of observations, empirically based, for African history. Secondly, they have yet to acknowledge that they have failed in their scientific responsibilities. And, having failed that, it's time for them to keep their silence and allow this to emerge as an important part of African history.

CMK: You can extend this argument to any innovation that happens. We have been witnessing it on the discovery of traditional methods of making beads among the Yoruba in West Africa. It seems that any innovation that comes to light from Africa passes through many high hoops. When we found clear evidence of crucible steel production on the coast of Kenya; that discovery was also denied even when it was from a melting context.

PRS: Yes, I know. Important findings that are contrary to conventional wisdom arising out of colonialism, basically. Our attempts to decolonize those paradigms have met great resistance and the denial of empirical evidence based on ephemeral notions. A mathematical formula is mystifying. If it's mystifying, you best find somebody who can interpret it for you, not call it mystifying. That's an abdication of responsibility.

IP: Another dimension or aspect of your work, which we find quite interesting and which some of us have actually embraced strongly is community archaeology and heritage. How did this originate? And how do you link this with your body of work in ethnoarchaeological science?

PRS: Those are a set of very important but complex questions. I think it goes back to Stuart Struever. When I came into the field, I was all about hypothesis testing. All about verification of oral traditions. That Western mindset--you have to find empirical evidence that sustains the oral traditions. I was quickly re-educated by Haya elders. This is one of the most important things that's happened to me in my life as well as in my career. They instilled in me an appreciation for their narrative histories, the passion they felt for them, the

¹⁹ P. R. Schmidt. 2018. Science in Africa: A History of Ingenuity and Invention in African Iron Technology. In *A Companion to African History*, eds. W. H. Wonger, C. Ambler, and N. Achebe, pp. 267-288. Hoboken NJ: Wiley Blackwell.

²⁰ O'Neill, P., Muhly, F., and Schmidt, P. R. 1988. *The Tree of Iron* A 58-minute, color documentary. Producer. A National PBS Black History Month feature, Feb. 1995.

encyclopedic knowledge they held in their minds about their histories. This instilled a deep respect for them as people and as historians. I came to realize that anything regarding hypothesis testing about oral traditions was not only specious but misguided. I embraced them as teachers. I embraced them as knowledgeable experts. I embraced them as fellow historians. That forever changed my perspective. I saw myself at home, listening to my father again. And it changed my perspective on the world. I became part of their community. They respected me for showing interest in their knowledge. And then they guided me. They guided me to the Rugomora Mahe site in Katuruka. They said to me, Peter, you've been going and looking at these iron things and these slag heaps. Why don't you come visit the site? We've been talking about it. Why don't you excavate there? I remember one elder in particular challenging me. He said, "Why don't you do that? You want to excavate, you go there." And so, I agreed. I visited the site with a couple of elders. That is when they stood and said, "This is where Rugomora Mahe built the iron tower and this is where the smiths forged the iron". I listened to those tales. They asked, "Why don't you excavate here?" I thought, well, this is really an interesting site. They maintain that this is a central site. Why not begin here? This was after 10 months of listening, in Kiziba Kingdom, Ihangiro Kingdom, Kyamutwara Kingdom, and Maruku Kingdom. So, that's where we started. In the very first test pit, of course I've written about this, we down on top of an early Iron Age forge. I was staggered. It was an emotional experience. Intellectually I couldn't deal with it at first. I'm like, how did they know this was here? They brought me here and insisted that I excavated

That was a collaborative effort. That was where my collaborations began, as part of that community of knowledgeable elders. That took it another step further. Most of the folks who worked on that excavation were from that village or a neighboring village. I trained those people over the years as first-class archaeologists. I could send them into the field to do survey and check in with them every two weeks. And they meticulously labeled bags of artifacts and made maps of exactly where they found evidence.

I could trust them with doing survey that was as good as I did. There was eventually a coterie of about a half a dozen out of the 15 or so who began working with me. I found that placement of trust in those local farmers to be a lesson that if you invest trust people, they can do the very best work possible.

They can do work as brilliant in the field as any university-trained archaeologist. That is a principle that I tried to apply when I began to develop the archaeology program at Dar es Salaam, that you can build trust and then you can build capacity. If trust is invested, then capacity follows much more freely as people mutually open themselves to that learning process and then engage in collaborative research.

While these counterparts from Buhaya never became professional archaeologists, they did the work of professional archaeologists. One of them, the president of the Katuruka Preservation and Conservation Association—he died just last year--was a spectacular field archaeologist. He trained students for me. When I went into the field, I would hand them over to Samson and say, "Samson will teach you. He knows everything you need to know." He knew not only the archaeology; he also knew the local oral traditions. As a mid-60s elder, he was the most knowledgeable man for miles around. He came to value--by virtue of that experience as an archaeologist and learning how important the archaeology of Katuruka was to African history—oral traditions. He took it upon himself to learn as much of the oral traditions as possible from elders and became a

knowledgeable elder himself, to whom people went to learn. I always considered Samson as an incredible example of what can happen when you invest trust in people.

Right from the get-go, I think my attitude towards community engagement and participation arises out of my initial experience. It's always been there. I haven't openly acknowledged it but as I think back on my career, it was there at the beginning. We didn't call it community engagement then. Paradigms have shifted. Our self-awareness has become more critical. Our motivation to change our practice has become a lot more self-aware, hopefully. As I look back--as you asked me to--I trace it right to those very first couple of years in Buhaya. The elders taught me.

IP: Peter, can one study archaeology in Africa—or let's say, African archaeology—without engaging the community?

PRS: I think this is one of the biggest issues facing archaeology in Africa now. I don't think we can practice archaeology without community engagement. I don't think we can afford those risks. The risk of alienation, the risk of distancing the practice of archaeology from community needs. I sat through a session [at the SAA meetings] yesterday. My reaction to that session amplified and repeated many other similar experiences at professional meetings. This is an issue that Tom Patterson and I addressed in our introduction to *Making Alternative Histories*, that our archaeological dialogue tends to be so lingo-laden, theory-laden, data-laden, that we're not communicating with the very people whose histories we are studying and engaging²¹.

That is beyond problematic. Let me say it straight out. That is colonial. It's something that Africa can no longer afford. I worry for the young people that I hear giving presentations that are distanced from the needs of the communities where they're working. I find it distressing and also deeply of grave concern because if we are not communicating in a way where the local people whose history we are studying can understand, then what's the point of it? This is in Africa. This is African history. It's not the history of academic enterprises in the United States or Europe or Asia or wherever someone's from. It's not fulfilling the career goals of young archaeologists who have to compete for tenure or have to show the most expertise in their scientific presentations at meetings. That is not the purpose of it all. If we are studying African history--as we are when we're doing archaeology because we're making history--then our first responsibility is to the people whose history it is. If we lose sight of that, then there is no point in doing it. Is better left undone in some respects.

If you're writing scientific treatises and books that local people cannot understand, even the best educated of them--a lawyer in Zimbabwe or a doctor or a well-educated clerk in Uganda or Kenya--who reads local archaeology and can't make sense of it, cannot comprehend its significance to their history, then we have a problem. If we're not writing for an audience that can comprehend what we're saying, then we're writing for an exclusively elite audience. That is an enterprise that's filled with problems because our first responsibility is to those who identify with that history and whose history it is. So, how can we do archaeology without engaging community?

I hear a lot of lip service to it. I hear a lot of presentations. I go around in meetings listening to community archaeology symposia. There is a lot of self-praise, back patting.

²¹ Schmidt, P.R., and Patterson, T. 1995. From Constructing to Making Alternative Histories. In *Making Alternative Histories*, eds., P. Schmidt and T. Patterson, pp. 1-22. Santa Fe NM: SAR Press.

Oh yes, I went into this community. And we did this and this together. And the pupils came out. They learned archaeology. And we did some dissemination of results in the community.

Well that's fine. That's good. But it's not long term. It is not engaging community members in terms of building their capacity to practice archaeology or to understand it or interpret it. They're not engaged in the interpretive process. And they're truly not engaged in the investigatory process. They're not designing the research. They're not asking for the research, in most cases, 95% of them or more. It's not initiated by the communities. They don't own it. And it is a matter of ownership, isn't it?

We have a lot of archaeologists thinking they're engaging in community archaeology. But they're talking about it in a very superficial way. They're talking about genres of public archaeology. They're not truly engaging community. True community engagement means stepping back--I talk about this in *Archaeologies of Listening*--and practicing epistemic humility, putting aside one's role as professor, director of projects, expert, and just closing one's mouth and listening, letting the knowledge unfold, privileging local knowledge and learning from it and finding that there are incredible nuggets of local knowledge that one could never have imagined oneself.

It's allowing one's self to learn, rather than do the teaching. That's a big step from many of us. It continues to be a struggle, I think, for all of us. How do we step back from our roles and open ourselves? Sometimes we do it successfully. Other times we don't. We know that in ourselves regardless of who we are. I think that's the challenge before us. If we cannot do an archaeology that pertains to the needs of communities by fully engaging them, allowing them to put out their agendas, and find archaeology meaningful to their needs-- meaningful to their futures--then I think we've failed in our mission. And I worry about the future.

I worry about the lip service. I worry about the self-congratulations. About what are called community projects when in fact, there's not true engagement. And let's face it, true engagement takes a degree of longevity, of exposure. It takes building trust, doesn't it? Building trust is not as easy as one would like to think, even if you're from the same culture because still, you come into that culture as an expert, as the educated outsider. You carry all kinds of baggage with you. One of the ironies is that sometimes if you're a white guy working in Africa, it's easier. People may be less suspicious of you.

CMK: It can be very difficult to work in some parts of one's own country. IP discusses in his chapter in the *Community Archaeology* volume²². So, what are some of the significant issues in community approaches to archaeology and heritage today?

PRS: I think the foremost problem is the widespread destruction of heritage sites. It's uncontrolled in most instances. There are many exceptions to that generalization, I realize. I find that centralized institutions have failed in their responsibilities. I think that's a major issue facing the continent.

There's deep suspicion of community initiatives on the part of central authorities invested with so-called protection of the heritage. You see a very sad record on the part of national museums and antiquities departments who are invested with the authority to protect, study, and conserve heritage. I believe this to be a deep colonial legacy.

²² Schmidt, P. R., and I. Pikirayi, eds. (2016). *Community archaeology and heritage in Africa: decolonizing practice*. Routledge, London and New York.

If you look how colonial governments treated natural resources, I think that sets the model for heritage. They created huge parks-- protected areas like the Serengeti. They threw people out. They excluded-- the Maasai, for example, from the Serengeti. And then they cut up the Serengeti and made the Ngorongoro Conservation Area and thought about throwing the Maasai out of that too. But Henry Fosbrooke came into the scene, supposedly as the savior, in 1959. He put together a council made up of outside advisors-- government officials, outside experts, and three Maasai elders. That was a revolutionary design to include indigenous people, local people, into the governing council. It lasted six months before the Maasai were expelled as being troublesome and demanding. They were standing up for their rights. As they continue to try to make certain areas off bounds for Maasai use, they eventually did that, carving out other parts of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, where Maasai could not use it. This established a precedent of exclusion of communities that exists in Tanzania, less so in Uganda, I suspect Kenya.

It's a deep colonial legacy. I call it the heritage of control. It's become deeply ingrained now in African bureaucratic culture and the African population at large. They've come to expect centralized control. Centralized authority is accepted and all of its ineptitudes with it, all of its failures. So, there is this heritage of failure in the protection of natural resources and heritage. The irony is that now antiquities in Tanzania is in the same ministry of natural resources. And I think they're infected by that heritage.

CMK: Exactly.

PRS: But the juxtaposition there in that country doesn't make it any more unusual than what you find in Kenya or anywhere else. The failure of central authorities to understand heritage and what heritage is and then to protect it and to refuse to engage communities I think is the biggest problem facing Africa today because it's systemic and it's central to the African countries and the people themselves.

I don't know what the solutions are outside of dissolving antiquities departments and beginning afresh. Getting rid of all that colonial heritage and legislation and totally recasting it and allowing communities to take the initiatives and govern in their own heritage. Because I think that's the only way that heritage is going to be adequately protected, studied, and appreciated.

That's the systemic problem that faces the continent at large and some particular countries even more profoundly. I identify that as a real problem. But I also identify many elements of our practice. When IP and I put together that book--in the introduction we wrote to it--we're talking about decolonizing practice. And we haven't even begun to think of all of the dimensions that impacts. I earlier referred to the ontologies that we use in our practice. And one of the ontologies that we carry with us a science and our own roles as scientific experts-- or heritage experts-- that we know better than anybody else what should be done. Laurajane Smith refers to this at a global level as the authorized heritage discourse.

I think for Africa it's manifest in a daily lived experience in our own practice, that we do assume that we have the answers. That we do assume that we can call something archaeological heritage. What is archaeological heritage? It's something that we make, isn't it? We call it archaeological. That's in our lexicon. That's in our scientific practice. It's not archaeological heritage to anybody else. It may be heritage to a certain people. But it's not their archaeological heritage. And therein lies I think a very serious ontological issue.

Laurajane Smith also addresses that issue. We, I think, need to rethink it in terms of our own frame as we are working in Africa and must constantly be reflexive about our own practice and whether or not-even by using names like archaeological heritage--we aren't engaged in an imperial exercise where we're privileging our science above local heritages. I've had some recent interactions with some African colleagues who are using this kind of terminology. Is it an archaeological component of the heritage of other people? Now, there is the possibility that local people will incorporate archaeology into their heritage discourse. That may happen when archaeology is practiced in their communities, and they identify with it, and they see its importance, and then they incorporate that into their discourse and their identities. That happened in Katuruka. I was absolutely stunned when I returned in 2008 to find that people were referring to that archaeological inquiry as their heritage. I just really couldn't believe it. They had a copy of my book that was tattered and moldy, and they'd read it again and again, thought about it and what it meant to them, then talked about it as theirs. So that is an archaeological heritage incorporated into local discourse. And I think we must be very cautious—

CMK: It is internalized into the community.

PRS: Internalized into the community. Control over heritage at the community level I think is absolutely critical for the future of archaeology in Africa because local communities have much more vested interest in preservation. They have identities with what we call archaeological sites. They value them. They're oftentimes sacred places. They're places of embedded memory that they give high value. They are best placed to see to the future those places. The failure of antiquities departments, of national museums is a sad, sad story. They continue to be hostile to community initiatives, if not outwardly so, then ignoring them and not assisting them, doing their best to see them fail. I've witnessed it.

CMK: The widespread looting of archaeological sites and destruction of archaeological sites is often an outcome of our own arrogance and practice of excluding local communities. When we began working, on the Kenya coast in the mid-1980s, there were 250 archaeological sites. Today, there are less than 20 with standing ruins, the rest have been destroyed by communities driven by poverty and the desire to keep archaeologists out and the National Museum institutions out. We've never bothered to explain the sites meaning and importance to the community and to the national heritage.

PRS: Why have those national institutions failed? Because they were working from a colonial model.

CMK: Exactly, yes.

PRS: They want to tell people what to do. They sit in their offices in distant places and make decisions that don't take the interest of communities in mind. There's a lot of self-interest involved in perpetuating that colonial bureaucratic structure as well as all the values attached to it. I find that very worrisome. So, decolonizing must also approach the way that different bureaucracies operate and the conditions and legal frameworks under which they operate.

CMK: When you think about your engagement with Africans, it goes beyond just research. Obviously, your work has shaped the way in which the two of us think about our own research. But one thing that many people may not know--and maybe many readers may not be very much aware of--is the years that you have spent in capacity building in African archaeology.



Merrick Posnansky and Peter Schmidt in Florida, 1996

IP: And human rights.

CMK: And human rights. Merrick Posnansky's research was very important in promoting this kind of archaeological praxis. Professor Posnansky's own research from Uganda to Ghana set a very clear agenda terms of his engagement with local communities²³. But why have you spent so much time on these issues rather than just focusing on research, careerism, which is what most of your counterparts were doing.

PRS: That calls for some reflection. I began in 1969 and spent nearly two full years in the field and then worked throughout the '70s. I think I spent at least four years in the field throughout the '70s. I was fortunate in being allowed to work in Tanzania. The Tanzanians saw it as advantageous to them. I had some good allies in the ministry of culture. The principal secretary was Haya. He saw the value of my work. He was a champion of the research while others in antiquities wanted to see it shut down. They did their best to prevent me from continuing my work. Suffice it to say that I had to go through repeated battles in order to continue my research amongst the Haya. I was told that I should pay more attention to Iringa and other areas.

But I saw the need for the long-term research and engagement to really understand deep time histories. So, I continued work and came to realize that so much of the archaeology in Tanzania up to that point had been constructed by outsiders--very well-

²³ M. Posnansky (2017). Archaeology and the local community in Africa: A retrospective, *Journal of Community Archaeology and Heritage* 4(2):77-84.

meaning and engaged outsiders. The absence of African researchers was abundantly clear, and I came to recognize that. I felt discomfort about that. There was something amiss. But I also felt real gratitude to not only the Haya but others in Tanzania who welcomed my research and found it useful, found it worthy. That included Julius Nyerere. Behind the scenes, Julius Nyerere was very supportive because he valued history. And he knew the value of archaeology. So in discussions with my compatriot, Jonathan Karoma-- who for a long while had been trying to get archaeology established in the history department at UDSM-- we came up with the notion that it was high time that Tanzania have its own archaeologists to study and make history in the Tanzanian manner, that too long had foreign researchers dominated the scene.

We put together a series of agreements between Brown University and the Ministry of Culture and the University of Dar es Salaam. We formulated the Foundation for African Prehistory and Archaeology as the means by which we would have the funding. These series of agreements led to the development of an archaeology unit at the University of Dar es Salaam that had the full support of the Ministry of Culture. That is when Tibakwetera, the principal secretary, became a vitally important supporter. It had early support within the Department of Antiquities of Amini Mturi, who was an enormously important voice. None of this could have been done without Amini Mturi. He was the first, arguing for years to establish training in archaeology. He couldn't get any traction. We became-- in our own way-- allies to Amini's initial attempt to get archaeology established.

It hadn't been established earlier because of lack of initiative. Rather, it was not seen as central to the needs of Tanzania. It also faced a very, very difficult battle within the Department of History. I've written about some of this in my chapter in *Making Alternative Histories*. There was a Marxist cadre that assiduously opposed it. They represented it as an enterprise that trampled on the crops of peasants and was against their interests. They did everything in their power to prevent the establishment of archaeology.

Fortunately, we had key allies in that department, amongst them Fred Kaijage. We will always remain deeply grateful to Fred because he is a visionary thinker. He saw the value of archaeology. He had come to realize the value when he was a student of John Sutton's. He and Karoma were primary forces within that department to try to change the mindset. Then we came on a very, very supportive dean, finally, after a Marxist dean had been expunged from the University by Nyerere. So, the circumstances were right. We put together a proposal to Ford Foundation.

They gave us very generous funding. That was followed by funding from Caltech, from embargoed funds within the country. They gave us a handsome amount of money to sustain that program and to sustain research projects and training projects.

CMK: So, by this time you had moved to Brown University?

PRS: I was at Brown right from the beginning. I left Northwestern for Brown. When I came back from the field, I spent a semester at Northwestern doing analysis but not finishing my writing-up. I took the job at Brown in 1971 as ABD. That was probably one of the most serious mis-directions of my career, taking a full-time teaching job, teaching introductory archaeology and biophysical [LAUGHS] anthropology and teaching political anthropology, in which I had a background. It was extremely demanding, developing courses anew and teaching very large courses, too. I had very, very little time to work on my dissertation. I also found the social atmosphere at Brown, some of it very Ivy League--stiff dinner parties.



Peter Schmidt with UDSM undergraduates Charles Saanane, Lucy Rutabinzibwa and Audax Mabulla at the EIA Nkese site in the Usambara Mts., 1987.

That just didn't resonate with me. I'm a California boy [LAUGHS]. It was alien. Jane and I agreed that we had to get into a rural setting away from that social atmosphere. So, we built a log house in rural Connecticut. That's where we raised our kids. It took me three years to finish my dissertation. That was a very difficult period in my life, trying to do that, raise a family, teach full time with new courses. I wish I'd finished my dissertation first. At that time, it was not unusual to be hired ABD.

CMK: At the time, this was really the trend that, that's how most people--everybody I know—were being hired during those times, particularly during the American anthropology meetings. You went there and they would be recruiting.

PRS: That's precisely what happened. I went to the American Anthropology meetings in San Diego. They were looking for a faculty member. I met several faculty and we hung out together. We liked one another. I got an invitation to interview. Hired. It was done very quickly.

We lived a very lovely life in our rural Connecticut setting. Growing our own food, heating the house with many, many cords of wood. To this day, when my kids hear a chainsaw, they run in the other direction because they remember cutting 8, 10 cords of wood for the winter and splitting the wood and then stacking it in the basement. We raised our own food. We had huge gardens. We learned how to make the food last deep into the winter by raising Brussels sprouts and banking potatoes and carrots in the ground. We had a huge old oak refrigerator where we could store bushels and bushels of apples and other goods. We canned and froze vegetables. We lived off the land. So, that was a very satisfying period in our lives in terms of raising the family.

CMK: We met in 1988 during the African Studies Association meeting. You had recently moved to Florida.

PRS: We moved to Florida in 1988, as a matter of opportunity and collegiality. Florida had 90 Africanists through a broad range of disciplines. There were, I think, 24 core faculty in the social sciences and languages, humanities. And the remainder in fields such as wildlife, forestry, horticulture, wetlands, a host of natural science disciplines, with accomplished scientists who had been working in the tropics for years, including Africa. Many of those were loosely articulated to the African Studies Center, so it was filled with possibilities of doing exciting interdisciplinary work. I think it was my interdisciplinary interests, interested in history-- archaeology, technology, environmental history-- that appealed to a broad range of faculty members there. Happily, I was hired. And, it was an exciting place. Very, very exciting.

IP: I met you in Gainesville 2001 during a symposium on dams. A big aspect to the conference was human rights, which you focused on.

PRS: Yes, human rights--that's where I got engaged in human rights, at the University of Florida. One of the members of our faculty, Winston Nagan, is a brilliant human rights specialist, mostly focused on Africa. He's South African. He was involved in the liberation struggle. He went through some pretty tough times when he was a student at Fort Hare during the Liberation Movement. He was close to the current president of South Africa and a number of other people in the Liberation Movement. But eventually, he thought that he was under such threat that he had to leave the country. So, he went to Oxford and eventually Yale to take law degrees and then established his career at the University of Florida. He's still very active²⁴.

I found that Winston was a person who had a passion to address key issues on the continent that had to do with human rights that were right at the core of many political issues that arise today as well as social and economic issues. He saw human rights in a broad manner, not just political and civil rights, but social and economic rights, especially

²⁴ At that time, Winston P. Nagan was the Sam T. Dell Professor at the University of Florida Frederic G. Levin School of Law; Affiliate Professor of Anthropology. He was Director of the Institute of Human Rights, Peace & Development.

the right to labor, the right to shelter, the right to health care. All of these different rights that are codified now in conventions with the United Nations; he was a champion of those perspectives.

It was exciting to be in his company and to hear this new perspective applied to issues that I dealt with. I took up the question of, what about the human right to heritage? What about the human right to a past, to a cultural identity? And he said, absolutely. We developed a relationship where he mentored me as if I was a graduate student in the law school, in human rights law. He'd give me readings when I'd go to his office. We'd discuss human rights applied to social and economic, cultural human rights. And I became more conversant and confident.

It was at a time when we're forging linkages with a lot of African universities. We had a linkage with Makerere that we put together out of my background with Makerere. There was the new government. They were rebuilding the university. Winston expressed an interest in doing something with their law school in human rights. We made a major proposal to USAID, a special project category of university linkages. We received very significant funding to build a human rights and peace center at Makerere with collaborators there.

That project got me deeply involved on a daily basis, yet we didn't have any money in our budget for bricks and mortar. What we agreed to do as faculty members engaged in this reciprocal project, was devote our per diem money to that building fund. We gave 80% of our per diem to building a human rights and peace center. Makerere matched that money out of their very precious endowment because they cared so deeply that this was an important center to the future of the university in Uganda.

It was exciting to be engaged in that, to feel the passion of the Ugandan scholars whose dreams were being fulfilled. And it really gave me an opportunity to feel the pulse of what human rights means in African settings. I became more self-aware of how human rights principles applied to heritage and culture.

IP: And soon after that, you went in Eritrea where you encountered so many issues around heritage, archaeology, human rights. Can you elaborate on that?

PRS: Eritrea was both an exciting and very difficult experience.

IP: When was that?

PRS: I first visited Eritrea at the end of the 1995 academic year. I went on sabbatical leave in '94--'95 and tidied up a bunch of loose ends. I traveled with Henry Wright and Steve Brandt to visit Eritrea. Steve had had some interactions with Eritreans, who had expressed an interest in forging ties. While there, we came across stupendous sites that had never been adequately investigated, save by a French archaeologist, Francis Anfray. Anfray's attitude towards archaeology was that of a classicist. Just get the stuff out of the ground and expose the monuments. There hadn't been anything done in Eritrea for a long time, since the beginning of the liberation struggle, since Anfray's work in the late 1950s to mid-1960s. Henry, Steve, and I were absolutely stunned by these sites. During the visit, I had an occasion to meet with Wolde-Ab Isaac, the president of the Asmara University. He asked me what I'd been doing previously in Africa. I shared with him the establishment of the archaeology program in Tanzania. He asked, "Could you do that here?" And I said, "Well, I don't know. It depends on what kind of local support you would provide. I could assist in writing a curriculum. We could start with that." He said, "Very good. Let us do that. Let us find the support for you to come and do that." Just like that.

So, we found Fulbright support. I came and wrote a curriculum with local collaborators in 1996. Once the curriculum was in place, we went back to Fulbright for support. I returned and launched the program, a training and research program much like the Dar es Salaam program. It was launched in 1998. Students were engaged. It was exciting. I've never had students any place, any place, who were as highly motivated as those Eritrean students.

We had a class of 12. That first year was interrupted by the war with Ethiopia. Our first training exercise on the Sembel site had no sooner begun than the war broke out. We were evacuated from Eritrea. That meant coming back to the US and interrupting what we were doing. Once things calmed down, I returned, against the advice of the State Department, but with a bit of a wink. They put me back on Fulbright salary, so I went back and restarted the program. We finished those very important excavations at Sembel. Then the war resumed. I did not go back until the summer of 2001, when again, things calmed down. We started with the excavations at the Mai Chiot site, which proved to be enormously important. We were also doing survey across the entire greater Asmara region.

It was that fall that things began to fall apart. When I came back, there was a graduation ceremony held shortly after. The student body president delivered a stinging critique against the government for withholding their stipends provided by the World Bank for terrace-building projects, meaning that they were essentially slave labor and given just pennies.

CMK: Just to buy food and all that.

PRS: Yes. One of the Eritrean faculty members turned to me and said, "He'll be gone tomorrow." Well, he wasn't gone in the morrow. He was incarcerated two days later. Immediately, the students came to his support. There was huge solidarity. They took to the streets. They went to the court. They sat in the court protesting the absence of a writ of *habeas corpus*. And at that point, the police moved in, began to beat them, and then came to the university, crashed down the student doors in the dormitories. They even went to private homes where students were lodged, pulled them out, and took whatever number of students they could get their hands on. Students were taken into the Danakil, into a desert encampment where several died and many others suffered from severe heatstroke. The president of the university went there to try to intercept this abuse and finally convinced the President to back off.

I'd recently been appointed dean of the faculty, a job I very reluctantly took. I remember asking President Wolde-Ab, "Are you sure you want to do this? You want to appoint a white guy at this point in the history of this country and Africa as a dean?" He replied, "Because you can settle the disputes that will inevitably break out amongst the various constituencies here. If I appoint a dean from Eritrea, they will simply intensify. People will see that he's acting out of self-interest. You have no self-interest. I need you." I agreed and did it for a year.

While I was dean, this detention of our university students unfolded. I witnessed their mothers coming into the courtyard at the front of the university, protesting their sons and daughters being hauled away to the desert camp. Then the police came, beating them with clubs and pushing them into buses. Women screaming and crying, ululating. I immediately went to the university president's office. I walked straight in and said, "Wolde'Ab, you have a severe human rights problem here. I hope that you're aware of this." He said, "No we don't!" That next year was tumultuous. It went from bad to worse.

Human rights abuses continued as I continued in that job. After one year, I went to Walde'ab's office and said, "I think my time is up."

In the meantime, certain issues arose around protection of heritage. The government had embarked upon an urban development program around Asmara, developing 13 satellite communities. Many of these directly impacted major sites. They cut huge roads through the Mai Chiot site. There were middens 2, 3 meters deep. Finding that was devastating because we had an agreement with the municipality--forged through the university--that that site would not be touched. But none of these agreements held. They were ignored. So suddenly, I found myself in the position of advocate. Certain government officials did not like that.

We had a major international conference in which several Eritrean scholars spoke openly against the kind of treatment that they were receiving-- they were minorities in Eritrea—because of their scholarship. Their scholastic analyses of government perspectives on their peoples were critical. There were some very heated discussions between some highly placed people in powerful positions and several local, minority scholars.

We archaeologists were implicated. At that conference it was articulated that archaeologists were just egg heads. They'd previously seen our work as fulfilling nationalist goals. We got trapped in that nationalist trajectory unwittingly because we'd found a remarkable civilization that dated back to 800 BC. The capital city was built on top of it, and it surrounded the city. That was a major finding, the likes of which had never been expected. They exploited that and utilized it in propaganda. There was nothing we could do to reverse it.

CMK: Exactly. That's one of the traps that we sometimes fall into as archaeologists, that the evidence that we construct can be co-opted and used for nationalist purposes.

PRS: That changed once we stood up and said, "Hey, you are destroying all of these critical sites, world-class sites." Then we became eggheads and the enemy. Meanwhile, I was educating my students in human rights. I think that also was not appreciated.

CMK: Was this also the feeling of the university president, himself?

PRS: Yes, and no. He was not unhappy to see me step down as dean. In fact, he agreed. Then he appointed me head of research, which didn't solve anything as far as I was concerned [LAUGHS]. I would have preferred to be leading the archaeology team and building capacity. As it was, we trained a remarkable number of students at the BA level, equivalent to the MA in an American university. They had five practical courses-- three fieldwork courses and two intense laboratory courses, courses in geology, environmental science, anthropology, history as well as archaeological theory, ethnoarchaeology. They took 54 units. They were accomplished by the time they got those BAs. We turned out dozens of students while that program existed. That was an accomplishment against all odds.

CMK: Yes. Our Asmeret Mehari is a product of this initiative.

PRS: Dawit Okubatsion [PhD-UF] was one of the products. Zelelam Teka [MA UF and PhD Ohio Univ.] was one of the products. Asmeret Mehari [PhD UF], Also, Daniel Habtemichael [MA UF], who just got his PhD from University Massachusetts Amherst a month ago. They're all products of that first class.

CMK: Wow.

IP: Quite an impact. That's a real impact.

CMK: That's 33% PhDs.

PRS: But none of them are practicing in Eritrea. My interest in human rights also translated into community approaches. When we built the Sembel museum through the National Museum, it was during a time that I was also charged with restructuring the National Museum into an academic unit, as an arm of the university. It was a very hostile environment because it was made up exclusively of ex-fighters who wanted to do it their way. They were artists. It was very art oriented, expressive of the Liberation Movement. It was brilliant and it had its natural place. But the university, being in charge of the museum, thought that it should be more academically constructed as a university museum like Penn or Michigan or Florida. I encountered an enormous amount of resistance after being put in charge of research and restructuring the museum. That was an extremely hostile environment while we were building the Sembel onsite museum. The National Museum essentially washed its hands of the enterprise.

CMK: And this is really true because it's never really worked very well in many places.

PRS: Right from the beginning of our attempt to construct the Sembel museum, we engaged the community. I asked a student committee to take the lead. These were graduates who were TAs, very active in archaeology. They put together a local committee made up of some housewives, some student Boy Scouts, a couple of merchants, a couple of priests, a couple of farmers-- in other words, a really diverse committee-- to run the affairs of this museum, to own it. They put in a lot of legwork on this. It was going along slowly but in the right direction. One day I was called into the university president's office and asked, point blank, "What are you doing at Sembel?" I said, "Well, you know that we're building a museum." He said, "Yes, I know that. I support that. What is this about the community that I hear?" I said, "Of course, we're engaging the community as potential owners of this place alongside the National Museum. This is absolutely critical. This is the direction that the rest of Africa hopefully will be moving." And he said, "Stop it. There'll be no more community engagement. Stop it now!" I remember sitting back in my seat and saying, "You can't be serious, Wolde-Ab." He said, "I am completely serious. Stop it."

I tried to reason with him, "This is the future." He said, "It may be the future elsewhere, but it's not going to be here." I had no option but to disengage and tell all of the hardworking TAs to disengage..

CMK: Eritrea at that time had just thrown in the towel.

PRS: It was going down the toilet. Deep down the toilet. That was part of the collapse, as other matters were unraveling, of human rights. What was happening within the central government was increasing centralization. It was a military government. During the liberation struggle, they created local assemblies where communities had a lot of voice. But once they gained power, those community assemblies were abolished. It became incredibly centralized. Everything was top down. The president would give an order, and it would go right down that dendritic tree to everybody. You would do it as ordered, no exceptions.

So, community engagement, community voices were eliminated from the scene in Eritrea. We were engaged in something that was contrary to central control and policy. That was a very bitter experience.

CMK: Wow. Those were years of great progress for Eritrea to build the nation.

PRS: That was squandered. It's a very sad story filled with pathos. I have written about this in *African Affairs*, about the anti-intellectual, post-colonial perspective in Eritrea--where first we were hailed in archaeology as essential to national identity and then seen as demons--

as the egghead opponents to the nationalism they wanted to build, which was so centrally oriented. I would not be surprised that if I returned to Eritrea today, I would be detained as soon as I set foot on their soil²⁵.

CMK: Will your students never return?

PRS: No, the students cannot afford to return. They can't entertain the idea of returning. One of our students, Werede Okubay, took years to get out of Eritrea. His story is a saga of suffering and survival, the likes of which you only hear about the Lost Boys of Sudan, finally arriving in Uganda under enormously trying circumstances and being stateless in Uganda for years. We were able to rescue him through an Amharic language teaching fellowship. He did that for four years at UF and completed an MA.

He filed for asylum in the US years ago. It will be pending for years to come. In a sense, he is still stateless, he cannot return. He wrote a chapter in *The Archaeology of Ancient Eritrea*. It was a beautiful and articulate critique of government policy towards heritage²⁶. He worked for a while in the Ministry of Tourism as an intern, being paid virtually nothing. During that internship, he had occasion to study the policies of government towards heritage. After writing that article, I warned Werede, "If you put your name on this, you'll become an enemy of the state. You may want to use a pseudonym because you're still living there." He said, "Absolutely not. I own that. I want my name on it." I said, "But you know that comes with great risk?" He explained that he was willing to take that risk. Well, as soon as it was published, he had to go underground, sleuthing around Asmara with his cap pulled down over his eyes until finally he could stand it no longer. He tried to escape to Saudi Arabia. His group was interdicted on the shores of the Red Sea. Then he tried to escape through Ethiopia, but he and his mates were betrayed by an Eritrean soldier who they thought they had co-opted. He was on the run for years. He eventually indentured himself to a farmer near the Gash River where it passes into Sudan. He stayed there under conditions of indentured servitude for a year before he tried to escape and was captured by the local police after he mistakenly thought he had understood the rhythm of their patrols--he used to play cards with them. They captured him and put in a local jail where he got malaria. Then the guy who was guarding him decided that he wanted to get out, too. They both escaped across the river to the Sudan, where he had torturous experiences, finally arriving in Uganda. If he were to return to Eritrea, he would disappear into a prison and die.

CMK: He might not even get to a prison.

PRS: Any of those students: Asmeret Mehari has helped her family out of--most all of her family--out of Eritrea with great cost and suffering. They cannot return. Their lives are in danger. I am seen as one of the forces behind that. I have spoken openly about human rights abuses.

CMK: You have.

²⁵ P.R. Schmidt, (2010). Postcolonial Silencings, Intellectuals, and the State: A View from Eritrea. *African Affairs*, 109(435):293-313.

²⁶ Werede Okubay (2008) In *The Archaeology of Ancient Eritrea*, eds. P. R. Schmidt, P.R., M.C. Curtis, and Z. Teka, pp. xxx. Red Sea Press, Trenton, NJ.

PRS: I think they have not taken kindly to that. Even a person like Wolde'Ab had to escape. He was a very close personal friend of the President. In fact, the President was his best man, I believe.

CMK: Power corrupts.

PRS: Indeed. He was head of the civil service, head of the university. The student protest ultimately caused the President to come to the university and denigrate Wolde'Ab in front of all the faculty and TAs. He called the students enemies of the liberation, the university an enemy force, and depreciated Wolde'Ab in public.

[Lunch Break]

PRS: Please let me say a little something. It's really an honor to have two people I feel close to conduct this interview. Thank you.

CMK: It's a very lonely world, Peter. We've been talking about isolation, the isolation that we all feel as Africanists. This is a sentiment that I think will be shared by many of us. Because if you look at all of the anthropology departments, it the practice that they'd hire one Africanist archaeologist. UF, where there was Steve Brandt and you was an exception. Usually, there is one person. With human origins, it's different because the locus is Africa. But with later prehistory of Africa, we are usually Lone Rangers. And so, we struggle with isolation. In many ways, I think it makes us stronger and that our work generally tends to stand out.

In your 1983 article in *American Antiquity*, you addressed archaeologists about the dangers of excluding indigenous voices. Your warning was not heeded. And, today everything that we are doing in terms of archaeology of listening, public archaeology, community archaeology was carefully illuminated in that article in 1983²⁷.

PRS: I articulated it in that article, you're right

IP: A question that resonates with our conversations concerns where we are now going. Could you give us a sense of what you think are the most critical issues facing archaeology in Africa today?

PRS: I think the answer to that question is multifaceted. I've touched on some of these issues in the previous discussions. Another way of looking at it is that there's still a severe under-capacity for Africa to produce its own archaeologists. History making in Africa is still severely limited in terms of local African capacity to make those histories. I think, IP, you struggle with this every day. You see it firsthand. You know it much more intimately than I do. I think it's an endemic issue around the continent.

I also worry about some established programs that have become incestuous--those that train a lot of their own students to become faculty members, rather than a rich crossflow across institutions to ensure that there is no stasis in terms of intellectual development. Nonetheless, I think the fundamental problem is one of capacity. This has been addressed in a number of countries, but it still is a nagging issue that does not go away. It's not going away quickly enough. I think all of us have a moral duty as well as well as an intellectual duty to address this. We cannot be passive bystanders. My engagement with the University of Dar Es Salaam arose from my feeling that I could no longer be a passive bystander. I could no longer work in a country where there was not

²⁷ P.R. Schmidt, (1983). An Alternative to a Strictly Materialist Perspective: A Review of Historical Archaeology, Ethnoarchaeology, and Symbolic Approaches in African Archaeology. *American Antiquity*, 48(1):62-81.

capacity developed to make history. The making of ancient history obviously belongs within the countries in which that occurs. And it's still, after all of these years in the period after colonialism, in a nascent stage. That is unacceptable.

I see it being perpetuated by a flood of young graduates out of American and European institutions who are hell-bent on doing research in Africa, oftentimes in a non-collaborative fashion. Or, if it's "collaborative", then let us put that in quotation marks, where the collaborators are there mostly as window dressing--playing minor roles, perhaps signing on to a project, appearing once or twice or not at all, and then having their names appear on publications as a reward for that enablement.

This is not collaboration. It only perpetuates the disequilibrium that has continued for decades. So, capacity building is still a major issue. I don't see many young scholars with this foremost in their minds. They are not articulating it. They are not living it. They are not affecting it in their own practice. It takes a community of like-minded people to solve this problem, and it is not being addressed adequately.

The efforts I made in the University of Dar es Salaam are very satisfying. They give me a great degree of satisfaction. At the same time, I'm very disquieted by a number of things that I see happening. There is a profound lack of capacity within that institution to train its students adequately in field methods--genuinely good, complete training. So, while you may build capacity with staff--that institution now has 17 faculty members in the Department of Archaeology and Heritage studies—they are inadequately funded. They cannot carry out their mission. The university has not put forward the funding to adequately train graduate students in field archaeology. That absence of internal capacity simply perpetuates the inequities. How? Because foreign researchers do have the capacity to perform research. Even in places where staff development has occurred, you have an internal lack of capacity.

More profound, I think, is a situation in which you find yourself in South Africa. There is a country that does have the capacity to train people, but there's so many systemic issues that prevent young people from going into archaeology that one worries, very deeply, about what the future holds, in other countries as well. You have skeletal staffs in so many African countries in archaeology, where it's almost an afterthought. Let me modify that. It is an afterthought.

CMK: Indeed, it is.

PRS: I see another dimension to be the need for people who engage in African archaeology from outside the continent to involve themselves in African cultures to a much greater degree than what we've seen. There is a tendency to fly in--to helicopter in--conduct their research for a month or two or three and to leave but leaving very little of their work behind. This helicoptering approach, I think, needs to change. Very rarely do you see scholars willing to engage for the long term and to conduct longitudinal research that also involves long-term interactions with communities, groups. I think long-term interactions are absolutely essential for the practice of holistic archaeology because without understanding world view, cultural practices, you put yourself at a very significant disadvantage. It's putting an emphasis exclusively on the material side of history, rather than the human side of history. It further dichotomizes archaeology from the human experience because it really valorizes disengagement and says it is alright to periodically drop in to conduct research.

This is the foremost issues facing African archaeology today.

IP: Yes.

PRS: Several years back, I wrote a piece in *The Journal of African History* that looked at the past, present, and future of historical archaeology in Eastern Africa²⁸. Some of the observations I made in that short article pertain to the continent as a whole. One of the major trends that I see that worries me a lot is that, increasingly, the archaeology of Africa focuses on the very recent past or the very ancient past.

Hominin studies, of course, have captured the imagination of the public all over the world. A huge amount of money is being invested in those kinds of studies and also, the Middle Stone Age because of the dispersal of modern Homo. Increasingly, we see resources--time and human resources--being devoted to the very ancient and deep past of Africa.

The very recent past, the colonial past, the history of slavery, is another major focus. I'm not claiming there is anything wrong with those emphases. But there is a bifurcation. What we see being increasingly diminished is study of the pre-colonial past, the period from 100 years ago--and it varies accordingly—to maybe 400--2000 years ago. Relatively speaking, compared to the deep past and the recent past, there is a minor emphasis now given to the pre-colonial past.

When African history began as a discipline, there was a lot of excitement about pre-colonial history as it was titled, the use of oral traditions, linguistics, and some archaeology, as historians and archaeologists together were excited to bring those modes of inquiry together to forge the new paths of African history that had been long ignored. With the development of scientific archaeology applied to the deep past as well as ready access of colonial archives, there's been increasingly less emphasis on pre-colonial history and archaeology. I think that this is to the detriment of the continent, because it incorporates periods of time in which vital dynamisms of the continent occurred. We're losing the chance to gain knowledge about that past. I see the same trajectory occurring in African history. Richard Reid wrote an article back in 2011 in *The Journal of African History*, in which he identifies the same trajectories in African history. It's hard work to study the pre-colonial past²⁹.

IP: It's very hard work, yes.

PRS: You have to bring linguistics to bear, oral traditions, archaeology. It calls for a multidisciplinary approach and an interdisciplinary approach--those are distinctive but interrelated. That requires more training, more investment for field work, more time for analysis. It's a challenge to many young scholars today to undertake that endeavor. We need institutional frameworks that encourage that. We're losing sight of that very, very important part of African history. We have an obligation as archaeologists to be addressing that, but we are not. That is worrisome. It's not going to change unless we do something in a very proactive manner to arrest the trajectory as we see it now. It is not the easy way that is always the best way.

Yes, I understand that the easy way is sometimes chosen because of an absence of resources. That is why this issue calls for an institutional approach, both from funding sources and institutions themselves to create a climate that encourages younger scholars to undertake this kind of research. I think this is a crisis in the African archaeology today.

²⁸ P.R. Schmidt. (2016). Historical Archaeology in East Africa: Past Practice and Future Directions. *Journal of African History*, 57(2):183-194..

²⁹ R. Reid. (2011). Past and presentism: The 'precolonial' and foreshortening of African history, *Journal of African History*, 52 (2):135-155.

What can we do about it? Well, the first thing we can do about it is talk about it, and be self-aware about it, and make the resolve to do the best job we can within our institutions to encourage more sponsorship of this kind of research as well as to encourage our students to undertake it, to address that middle history. We need resolve. We need a self-conscious awareness as a collective, as archaeologists both on the continent and outside the continent, to be aware of this and to address it institutionally and individually. I see that as a major issue.

We earlier talked about archaeological theories that are complementary to African worldviews, changing our ontologies, changing our comprehension of how ontology structures the world, how it structures gender relationships, how it structures spatial relationships, how it structures technology, how it structures exploitation of natural resources, how it's guided by ritual. All of these are essential forms of knowledge that we need to control as archaeologists. We're not doing our job adequately.

This is an existential crisis that faces us. We need a major revision in our thinking, a major revision on our training. We're not sensitizing our students to these issues adequately--all of us. We need an ontological shift ourselves. The archaeological ontology--working in the dark--is obviously not adequate to our task. Nor is a scientific ontology adequate to the task, because it ignores other ontologies.

IP: And in the same vein, I think we are now beginning to talk meta-theory as well. What do you see as the greatest needs in theory building now?

PRS: I see ontological incorporations as the greatest need for theory building at this moment. My views may change in three, or four, or five years. But I've come to a delayed epiphany. I've been dealing with ontological issues my entire career but increasingly, I see them as key, as absolutely central to what we are doing. I've always known it to be background noise in my own practice and I have addressed them, but specifically as ontological issues. So, there's been a shift in my own thinking as I've reviewed my career and the practice of others to come to the position that this calls for a major theoretical revision in the way that we conceptualize, theorize, and execute theory in African archaeology.

IP: I remember, a few years ago when we were editing the community volume in Gainesville, following my distinguished lecture, we discussed many theoretical paradigms. You proposed a need to have a volume dedicated to archaeological theory specifically for Africa, or at least, focusing on Africa.

PRS: I think there's a great need, Innocent, as theory guides practice. If we don't have theoretical perspectives that are sensitive to African ontologies, then our practice is not going to be adequate for African peoples. So, there is a major disconnect, unless we get the theory right. I also think that has been one of the major problems in African archaeology. We've been imposing Western theories. We've not been paying attention to local theories. People have very clear local theories about their past.

IP: Exactly.

PRS: If we're working from another positionality [e.g., Western science], then we are not going to be doing an archaeology that conjoins with theories that structure African worlds. How can we justify that? I don't see that as possible to justify. I recognize that is a rhetorical question, but it is a rhetorical question that makes us reflect on our own practice and the need to push ourselves, to extend ourselves into realms that we have shied away from, that we need to embrace. They are difficult. And, they are challenging. But if we do not try, then we failed.

CMK: These are issues that you have addressed in several of your papers, about how to look at African conceptualization of time and space and the archaeological formation processes such that when excavating a sacred site, how do you devise a methodology that addresses how that sacred space was formed and used over time?

PRS: Precisely. If you do not understand the principles by which that sacred site was structured, then you're imposing your own constructs on it, your own interpretive prejudices and biases. And we haven't struggled yet to try to understand those structuring principles that are embedded deeply within African cultures. They vary from one culture to the next. While they may have common axioms, nonetheless, the variation from those axioms is significant. So, it really is culture specific. And that's the challenge before us, too. We cannot generalize across cultures. They have a lot of commonalities but there is alterity at the same time. We are compelled to understand that alterity. This is difficult territory, to be sure. While it's very difficult, it presents enormous potential.

CMK: Yes. True.

PRS: As we begin to explore and challenge ourselves to make sense of it and build those collaborative relationships by which we can struggle together--and it will take a struggle—there will be resistance to that struggle because people are comfortably situated in their own worlds. They are comfortable in that scientific world, understandably. You are comfortable at home, and that scientific world is home to most archaeologists. They have only to struggle to perhaps master isotope analysis, which is an important part of the analytical suite today, or ancient DNA, or whatever they're doing.

CMK: Explaining it is simple.

PRS: To really, truly understand what we're encountering archaeologically does not depend on isotope analysis or ancient DNA. It has to do with how people structure their behaviors through belief systems, ontologies. We are not paying attention to that. We're looking at structures and think that we understand them from our own backgrounds. Will we continue to impose that lived experience out of our worlds, impose it on the African world hiding behind the notion that we are all Africans together—that we all originated out of that same world?

CMK: In fact, there is an abandonment of pre-colonial African archaeology and anthropology, which call for a holistic methodology in favor of these radical, scientific perspectives that are drawn from recent advances in science. And, of course, on the other end of the spectrum, it relies on colonial literature. It's essentially an abandonment of holistic anthropology.

PRS: It is an abandonment. And that is extremely worrisome. I also am troubled by what I see as an increasing scientific archaeology. That's all fine and good and I appreciate it. I also embrace it. Our work in Western Uganda now is drawing on isotopic analysis, ancient DNA. The insights that are coming from that research are enormously important for Uganda. The Ugandans also embrace it. But I don't embrace it because of its value alone. I embrace it because it's going to be very key to writing a new narrative.

CMK: It's complementary to our narrative that already exists.

PRS: Or, perhaps a narrative that's different from whatever exist. Fine. We can write challenging narratives. But those narratives have to be cast in a manner that Ugandans can understand it, so they can readily embrace it and understand it, see it as part of their history. It worries me that we see this increasing dichotomy between people valorizing the science over communicating the results to the people. Thurstan Shaw realized this. He was a colonial archaeologist, but he understood it. He wrote a book that was accessible to all Nigerians. Now, how many archaeologists have done that?

CMK: We are looking at one.

PRS: Well, I think that's our mission. And we've lost sight of that mission. We need to revisit it. People have recently asked me, why are you working in Uganda doing that research? First, it started out as environmental history, looking at settlement and anthropogenic changes on the landscape. We have come up with some really exciting results. Then it took another turn--isotope analysis showing that these microlith-making peoples were raising grain within a forest environment and also hunting and fishing--the so-called Kansyore people, dating to the first half of the first millennium AD, not back 6,000 years ago, or 3,000 years ago like the mixed dating out of Western Kenya. These sites are very close to the original type site of Kansyore Island. So, that is very exciting. Maybe we will rewrite some of the history of archaeology of East Africa.

As we get deeper into the science, that worries me, but not alarmingly, as I'm determined that from this research we will write a small book that puts all of the evidence out in clear prose and narrative, write a narrative that any Ugandan high school student or citizen can understand with a high school education, which is a good part of the population.

CMK: Yes. I think one of the dangers of academia is the tension between quality and quantity. I think that an insidious weakness of scientific archaeology is that it fragments the data into an article or series of articles. This model prevents the publication of the full narrative of how people interacted with the environment, their neighbors, and those beyond the horizon.

IP: Technically, there is no communication.

PRS: Yes, I think that's a very good point. I see that increasing as a trend, that dichotomy. So, we get this plethora of technical articles that only elite scientists can understand. The audience is shrinking and shrinking down to segmented groups. And we're not writing for even a general archaeological audience anymore, let alone an anthropological audience or a historical audience. Do historians read our material anymore?

CMK: No. They're very suspicious of what we do.

PRS: I know they normally do not read archaeology.

CMK: They are extremely suspicious.

PRS: There is a great disinterest now among historians of Africa. They do not understand what we're talking about. They do not understand the technical language. They're perplexed and mystified by it, and they do not want to grapple with it. They see it as a bunch of jargon and technical arguments that they cannot relate to and assimilate into their own narratives.

CMK: Why waste time on it?

PRS: Yes, why waste time on it? So even the most prominent and open of African historians can't deal with it.

IP: That's very unfortunate.

PRS: Yes, I think that is a problem in African archaeology that, again, we need to take cognizance of and address. We need dialogue within the discipline. We need to stop shying away from these issues. They are uncomfortable issues, because they touch right to the heart of people's careers. It's not about careerism and making a career in Africa. It's about creating narratives that are genuine to the scientific evidence but also compelling to the people.

IP: This is a very critical theoretical point. It links to one of the issues that brings you here to Albuquerque, the launching of *Archaeologies of Listening*. Now, can you elaborate what

you mean by archaeologies of listening and why it is important today in the practice of archaeology in Africa?

PRS: I think the concept of archaeologies of listening is important on a global level. It's a systemic problem around the world because of the intense focus on scientific archaeology, which began with New Archaeology--hypotheses testing, the whole positivist thrust of new archaeology—that took us away from listening to indigenous voices and into depreciating indigenous knowledge. There is a sense that came out of that school of thought that indigenous knowledge is not empirically based, and that's a major philosophical flaw in the thinking of scientific archaeology. Knowledge, whatever origin it has in the present, is expressed by indigenous peoples in an empirical world. We tend not to accept it. We don't listen to it. We're not prepared--most of us--to learn from it. There is a long tradition of depreciating it that goes beyond recent archaeology, as I mentioned early, way back to Robert Lowie. Indigenous knowledge expressed through oral traditions is meaningless in their lexicon.

In African archaeology, we cannot learn about alternative theories unless we shut up, and listen, open our minds, practice epistemic humility, and be prepared to learn. That is, admittedly, a difficult thing for many people to do. We spend our lifetimes and careers becoming the experts, having the last word in seminars and classrooms, being the font of knowledge. To admit that you are lacking knowledge and have a need of more knowledge or different knowledge is a very difficult step for many to take. I think we also have an advantage for those of us who have listened to local people and appreciate how they share their knowledge about the past. We have come to very fine and nuanced understandings that there's a wealth of information there that we've just begun to learn from. It's compelling in the future of this discipline for our students and their students in the future to continue in that vein. Of course, things change--oral traditions never remain static, for example. Just like our own histories, local groups are constantly revising them and making them fit their current circumstances, the current political climate, economic setting, or whatever it may be. History is always fluid. The making of history is in flux. That defines history making.

The thought that peoples in Africa in villages and communities, urban settings, cannot do the same is arrogant in the extreme. They are remaking their histories, just as people in the West, or Asia, or anywhere remake their histories. There's so much to learn from that process. So, I think that is what *Archeologies of Listening* is about, opening our minds to other ways of seeing the world, other experiences, other ways of making history.

IP: Now that you mention the world of Asia, I see your research has recently extended into Sri Lanka. How do you explain this? And what do you see as the relationships between Sri Lanka and Africa?

PRS: My experience in Sri Lanka has been a fascinating and interesting one. It never would have happened without my experience in Africa. My experience in Africa, I believe, sensitized me to listening and the understanding that heritage has myriad ways of being expressed, that each group has its own ways of defining and living heritage, performing heritage in their daily lives, and giving it value. If you spend enough time with people, you come to understand how they do that, and what heritage means, and how it's different from how we construct it or how a group across the country constructs it.

My engagement in Sri Lanka rose through a graduate student, Rose Solongarachi, who came to UF and took a PhD in the study of Iron Age Sri Lanka around Sigiriya, a major World Heritage Site. It's one of the most popular World Heritage sites, I think, after

sites like the Terracotta Warriors in China. Sigiriya is a granitic monolith that sits 165 meters above the central Sri Lanka plain surrounded by villages, ancient waterworks, irrigation systems, dams, and sluices, very sophisticated irrigation systems that go back 1,500 to 2,000 years ago and were constructed by people in the deep past under the supervision of central authorities.

Sigiriya Rock has a peculiar history that I became aware of when I went to Sri Lanka at the invitation of Rose to help introduce ethnoarchaeology in the teaching of archaeology. While introducing ethnoarchaeology at the Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology (PGIAR)--the institute entrusted with training graduates in archaeology--I took field trips to all the major sites. Sigiriya struck me as distinctive and unusual because of massive investment of funds and the type of archaeology practiced there: expose the monumental remains, invest huge amounts of money in clearing out the moats that surrounded the central site at one time, clear out the palaces, pools, and temples at the top of the rock, and open up the water gardens—the most complex and amazing water gardens in all of ancient Asia. Massive amounts of money and effort have been devoted to those activities with little interpretation. That struck me as peculiar--just the monumental stuff for tourists to look at. I wondered, what's happening between the rock, its immediate surroundings, and the rest of Sri Lanka?

That history piqued my interest, but it really didn't come to titillate me intellectually until Jagath Weerasinghe, who was the Director of PGIAR took an interest in my work in Buhaya about listening to local voices and the discourse of local people as they defined their own heritage. He said, “You know, I think those principles apply to Sri Lanka, too. We must make some inquiries to see if this opens new insights.” So, he invited me back. Jagath and I went into the communities surrounding Sigiriya to open a series of conversations about ‘what is your heritage?’ Community members understood heritage because they heard the concept used all the time around Sigiriya, with the propaganda—this is our heritage, the heritage of Sri Lanka. They had also worked there as archaeological laborers clearing the moats, also as sweepers, incidental laborers.

This is a site with a history of elite managers ignoring UNESCO guidelines. The very archaeologists who were responsible for its prominence and nomination as a World Heritage site assiduously ignored guidelines and repeated demands by UNESCO to create a management plan and a buffer zone. They finally created a buffer zone, but it meant clearing out—just like the colonial governments did in Africa with protected areas for wildlife—people from a three-kilometer radius around Sigiriya, taking them from their ancestral villages where they'd lived for centuries and relocating them into new villages.

These were the people we talked with, right there in the shadow of the rock we carried on these conversations. One of the local heritage experts turned, pointed, and said, “That's the rock. That's not our heritage.” Whoa! So, what is their heritage? It's medicine to cure eyes—he is an eye doctor. Heritage is the knowledge held by other medical practitioners in the village. Or, heritage is basket making. Their heritage is the irrigation system that they depend on for their livelihood and have forever, and that is deteriorating now. Much of it's been obliterated by this buffer zone. That is heritage. It's the heritage of going out and working in the paddy every day, opening the sluices to get the water to the paddies, managing the dams and the reservoirs.

The eye doctor said, “What do we see but violation of that buffer zone by illegal hotels, corruption, allowing people to come and build in our paddies, prostitution coming in and infusing the village life.” It's all deteriorating under the aegis of the rock. We had a

number of these conversations. The explicit discourse was amazing as people openly expressed their dire concern about loss of heritage. Nobody's children want to continue that line of work—who wants to be a snakebite healer when they're only paid \$1 for a lot of work? It's tradition not to pay a snakebite healer very much. It's just expected he'll save your life. Snake bites are endemic.

This experience provided a set of insights that came directly out of my work in Africa and heightened my sense of awareness that local people are not being consulted by central authorities, nor do central authorities care one whit about their sensibilities and what heritage is to them, instead privileging this massive monument that in its own right is extraordinary.

CMK: This comes out in the *Archaeology of Listening* chapter?

PRS: Yes, for the local people, Sigiriya is absolutely irrelevant to their lives, except they may get a little job now and then. They're excluded from any opportunities to advance within that system. Centralized control dominates. That again gets us back to the exclusion of communities in the management and welfare of heritage. The Sigiriya managers don't care about heritages at the local level. They only privilege the national monument, now an icon. Those local discussions really opened up a new world that is consonant with the world that I've come to know in Africa.

IP: And clearly here, Peter, I can see your African archaeology engaging with the rest of the world, you know, when it comes to Sri Lanka. And I think it does the same thing—two crucial points—relevance and engagement. Let us take into account two volumes that you have recently edited, one in English and the other in Kiswahili, which are translations of the *History of Kiziba and its Kings*. Would you like to tell us what this project is about and why you considered it?

PRS: Well, Kiziba is dear to my heart. It's the first place we lived in Buhaya, in a village called Kashasha, dead center in Kiziba kingdom; subsequently, we moved to northern Kiziba to a village called Kikukwe. Kiziba is where we spent the first nine months of our 21 months stay in Buhaya. While we were there, I interviewed countless elders about the history of Kiziba. I have volumes of notes from their encyclopedic knowledge of Kiziba history. The particularities of it are absolutely astounding.

I worked with some informants for literally weeks, and never got their complete testimonies. I did not finish with one. He could have kept me busy for another few weeks. I regret never having the opportunity to go back and finish with him. The history of Kiziba was constantly valorized in epic poetry. Epic poetry in that part of the world is enormously important for the preservation of history. Some of its mythological. A lot of it's based on the legendary pursuits of kings that go back two, three centuries.



Peter and Jane Schmidt with son Luke visiting Chief Mutaihua Lebelwa in Kiziba, 1970

The kings are memorialized in these epic poems that, as they are sung, may go on for hours. Memory was retained because there are mnemonic devices such as rhythms, refrains, and even audience participation. The audience knows when to come in and reinforce the poet's points. Those have been well recorded by people like Mulokozi and Peter Seitel who have done brilliant work on Haya epic poetry. But they also left a tradition of informal oral traditions drawing from that epic tradition³⁰.

³⁰ M. M. Mulokozi (2002) *The African Epic Controversy: Historical, Philosophical and Aesthetic Perspectives on Epic Poetry and Performance*. Dar es Salaam: The Fourth Dimension Publishing

So, I had a deep appreciation of the value that oral tradition held in that part of Buhaya. I came to understand that there was a king at the beginning of the colonial era who put together a team to investigate the oral traditions of Kiziba. He was involved in a succession dispute with his brother, a very serious succession dispute that divided the kingdom and led to multiple conflicts and minor wars.

The Germans got involved in some of those disputes, and inevitably made a series of stupid, whimsical mistakes. They were easily manipulated, easily fooled with, and they were brutal. They responded to the slightest provocation and opened up their Gatling guns and mowed people down. The accounts of those incidents are vivid, and they are oral traditions. King Mutahangarwa was one of the contesting princes before his father died. He was seriously wounded by the Germans in the back of his head. It took him months to recover from the wound. But he became keenly aware that resistance was not going to be successful and began to collaborate because he realized resistance could mean the destruction of his people. It was that brutal.

When he became king in 1903, he undertook this project, and drew together four elders, two of them from the royal clan and two from non-royal clans. Two scribes, both educated in German assisted. One was F.X. Lwamgira, who became one of the most important figures in the history of East Africa, second only to Apollo Kagwa in Buganda. He was a collaborator, a mediator, and a spokesman for colonial governments. He became indispensable to the Germans and subsequently to the British.

He became more powerful than the local Bakama [kings] and he became in his own way more powerful than the local colonial officials. He translated colonial policy for the local kings. But he made it himself, because he told the British what to do that would be consonant with how he read the local authorities. He was a man of immense power.

A lot of people see him as a tool and a stooge. In some ways he was. But he was also a massive creative force, a very, very clever and ingenious, brilliant man. He undertook this project with King Mutahangarwa. Then he wrote a piece with a German ethnographer in 1910 that they published jointly. He retired in 1946 and then gathered together Mutahangarwa papers and produced the *History of Kiziba*, 491 pages, printed by Rumuli Mission Press in the Kihaya language. It is Kihaya that's almost impossible to read today. If you give it to Haya Linguists, they can make no sense of it. The vocabulary is archaic. The syntax is absolutely mystifying. I gave it to a Haya linguist and asked him to translate it. He brought it back after a week and said, "I don't know what to do with this. I don't know what it says."

I collaborated over the last 10 years with Mr. Gelasius Kamanzi, who was raised reading that volume. His father used to read it to him. He loved the language. He loved the rhythm of the language. He loved the construction of the narratives. He helped me translate many of the narratives that came out of the village project. One day I said, "Do you know *The History of Kiziba and Its Kings*?" He said, "Do I know it? I was raised with it. It's my other soul." I said, "Would you like to translate it?" He said, "Of course, yes, yes." He spent two years translating it into English, then another two years translating it into Kiswahili, sometimes working by kerosene lamp light. It was a labor of love.

Company Limited; Peter Seitel (1999) *The Powers of Genre: Interpreting Haya Oral Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

I sponsored him in this, because this was something I resonated with. That's where I was first raised as an anthropologist, in Kiziba, with that history. I thought this was compelling. This major piece of indigenous literature had never been properly translated for the wider world and now it's coming to culmination.

The English version will be published shortly by Mkuki na Nyota Press in Dar Es Salaam, then probably about six months later, the Swahili version. I've written an introduction, explaining where it fits in the historiography of East Africa and the unfortunate consequences of it's not being accounted for with other histories written by Apollo Kagwa, and KW, the Mukama of Bunyoro, who had his history published in the series of articles in the *Uganda Journal*.

All that literature has been highly cited in the historiography of East Africa, but there are very few references to the *Kings of Kiziba*. Now, it will be accessible to scholars around the world and also to local readers in Kiswahili. If we republished it in Kihaya, it would be incomprehensible. So, it's in English for a broader audience, and it's in Kiswahili for a local audience. I felt this was something I had to do, to give back. The world's based on reciprocity. You take and you give.

CMK: When you left Brown, you went to as director of the Center of African Studies.

PRS: That's right.

CMK: Why did you make the choice to move there? You talked about this critical mass of 90 Africanists, which is, in many ways, totally unheard of. We often don't realize how huge the University of Florida is, and how engaged it is with the global south. You don't hear much about it. Instead, we focus on the program of African Studies at Northwestern because of Herskovits, and in terms of just its impact. Do you want to talk a bit about your contributions in administration--how you stuck a healthy balance between research and administration?

PRS: Oh, I see, administration in different settings. Certainly, when I headed the archaeology program in Dar, and then Asmara, that was complementary to what I do, part of a compelling engagement, because it builds capacity.

In the case of my transition from Brown to Florida, I had started an exchange program between Brown and Dar. It brought over a number of scholars who finished up their MAs, with USIA sponsorship at that time. We were able to start sending undergraduates over there.

CMK: So, Felix Chami and then Bertram Mapunda and Audax Mabulla...

PRS: Yes, Felix was sponsored on the exchange, but Bertram and Audax came on the UDSM program. That was an entirely separate, later program. That was an integral part of the Ford funding to build the Dar program: first, build the undergraduate part of it, and then transition and build the graduate training part of it so there would be faculty from Tanzania.

CMK: Essentially training the trainers.

PRS: Training the trainers. Exactly. There are a number of folks who went through that, the most prominent of which are Audax Mabulla, the Director of the National Museum. Bertram, who was Principal of the College of Humanities at Dar, and now holds a new position as Principal of Jordan University College in Morogoro, a position he just took up.

CMK: So, he left Dar?

PRS: Yes.

IP: He's very visible like that.

PRS: He did a marvelous job, just an incredible job. He took leadership there and built a department from within a department that was hostile to archaeology and wanted to

colonize it. That was a huge struggle. It wasn't just the Marxists. It was everybody who envied the equipment, the library resources that archaeology had. And they did their best to try to grab those resources. Only through conscientious resistance and persistence that was continued by Audax and Bertram. By their insistence that that program achieve prominence and sustainability did the program eventually reach separate departmental status—leading to building a marvelous museum and facility on campus. What an accomplishment. Those people should receive all the kudos possible. I'm so proud of them.

But to get back to the original question, it started at Brown. Howard Swearer--he was the President of Brown--worked with me to develop a program by which we could fabricate an exchange by having Brown students pay their tuition into a special fund at Brown. Then that fund would be used to bring scholars from the University of Dar es Salaam. That helped a couple of people complete their MA degrees. I took that idea and sold it to UF, and we started an exchange that used the same principles.

The students pay their tuition into a special fund. Granted, it's only a fifth or a sixth of what Brown students paid. The Brown exchange gradually withered because they were not willing to allocate the full tuition. But the Florida exchange has flourished right to this present day. It is now 30 years old. It's the longest exchange of any American university with an African university. It is sustainable. It doesn't depend on any outside funding. We have helped scores of Tanzanian scholars across many disciplines--literature, wildlife, you name it--to finish their PhDs by being in residence for five months.

CMK: There is always a Tanzanian student in Florida every time I visit there.

PRS: There's one, or two, or three, depending on how much money comes into the pot from the previous year. That's been a wonderful experience. The program has been taken over by Todd Leedy at Florida. After my tenure as director and leading that program, Todd has done an incredible job of sustaining it. That's one of the accomplishments that I can point to at the University of Florida--a public university taking their tuition money and investing it in an African country.

CMK: It is a model that I think ought to be emulated...-

PRS: It should be propagated, yes. It should be easy to propagate but who will be the propagators? I've talked about it in many circles, but it takes people in each institution with the will to make it work. Many university administrators are reluctant to let a penny out of their fingers. It takes a mindset whereby people must be ready to entertain the idea of institution- building in Africa through investment in human resources. I must say that it's to the University of Florida's credit they've played an instrumental role in human resource development of the University of Dar es Salaam. Some of those folks became key members of the faculty once we developed the program at Dar.

IP: So, how has human rights basically intersected with your most recent work?

PRS: Human rights came to the fore while conducting interviews in the villages of Katuruka and Nkimbo in Haya country during the initiative that elders took to preserve and revitalize their oral traditions and their sacred places. These were interviews that they held--I didn't conduct the interviews. It was done at their initiative, on their agenda, with questions they felt to be germane. Inevitably, in the majority of interviews, the discussion turned to poverty and deprivation, the lack of shelter, the lack of proper nutrition for children, the lack of sufficient money to buy critical medicines for children and other issues, including deeply profound reminiscences and grievances about the impact of HIV/AIDS. These were

highly personalized testimonies, and the community has placed an embargo on them that will last for another five years until 2024.

They are very important because they're a form of therapy for the community, with a community member taking an interest and speaking to individuals about shared experiences. It was an opportunity for people to open their hearts about the losses that they suffered and where they find themselves today. The discourses that were really poignant were those about not enough food to feed their children, the infertility of their land, the absence of manure to maintain fertility.

CMK: Cows are gone.

PRS: The cows are gone because when family members died, cows were liquidated by the children because there wasn't much land to inherit. They couldn't parse out the land anymore. It had been subdivided so much, there wasn't enough to sustain a family. So, survivors sold off cows and this left just a very small minority of householders with cattle in the village today. Whereas, before every household had at least one cow, if not multiple cows that were absolutely critical to sustain fertility in the shamba or farm. Under those conditions, there was partitioning of land to the point where no family can sustain itself on a half-acre, or even an acre of land. Then bananas were hit by nematodes and all kinds of other diseases which have destroyed the traditional banana. They plant corn which depletes the fertility of the soil. Or cassava, which has virtually no food value. They are living on famine crops and they're absolutely desperate. These are human rights issues. These are human rights claims being made: improper shelter, no education for their children--they can't afford sometimes to pay the costs of school uniforms, to buy the paper and other equipment that is needed at school.

Those were human rights claims being articulated every day in these interviews. They were not human rights claims like a claim based on, say, violation of political rights. If you go to the International Convention for Social, Economic, and Cultural Rights, then there have been human rights claims that have been based on economic issues that have been brought before the Human Rights Commission and others on social issues. Access to natural resources has been a common claim. The Katuruka claims were not claims that could be litigated, but they are nonetheless very real *individual* claims to basic human rights. It was deeply moving and, at times, depressing to hear person after person making these basic human rights claims. It pointed out to me that well-being in heritage and human rights issues are woven together.

CMK: The land is bare.

PRS: The land is bare and it's growing more barren. It's interwoven with heritage. An integral part of heritage identity in these communities is being eroded. Once heritage was embedded in the land, in its productivity, in adequately providing for your family, adequately providing for shelter. For decades and decades education was highly valued and invested in. That is no longer possible. So, heritage and human rights are inextricably woven together. It's a major issue I have tried to write about in one of the chapters in my recent book. It's a difficult issue to write about, both from an emotional perspective and also how to weave them together--how they're interrelated.

CMK: How do you weave it into a narrative that can be integrated?

PRS: It becomes a narrative that's uncomfortable, I think, for many people who are involved in heritage studies. It's a domain of pain, suffering, and discomfort that confronts us as anthropologists with some issues about which we haven't been sufficiently aware. Heritage is interwoven with the present and future. The future welfare of these villagers is wrapped up in that heritage identity, and they see it changing in only a negative direction

in terms of their well-being and basic human rights. These are issues that are not in the foreground of our thinking in heritage studies, and I think they deserve a more prominent place.

CMK: And what is your position today, as one of the oldest living Haya elders? Wouldn't that be an accurate statement that your position today in Haya society makes you one of the elders?

PRS: Yes, I'm an elder, in a manner of speaking.

CMK: And in many ways, many younger colleagues look up to you as someone who can actually teach them about their past. Not just through your writings, but--

PRS: Well, that's an irony, isn't it?

CMK: Yes. The elders have gone.

PRS: The elders have gone. We had about five elders and maybe 20 middle aged people, but altogether 200 people at the 2008 showing of the *Tree of Iron* in Katuruka in 2008. Afterwards, the elders backed me up against the Land Cruiser I was renting and said you have to help us. I asked why, what help? They said, "You are the keeper of our oral traditions." I asked, "I am the keeper of your oral traditions?" They said, "Yes, you are. We no longer remember them sufficiently. You came here and interviewed our grandfathers and our fathers, and now you're the keeper of the oral traditions. We want you to help us recover what we have now." That statement absolutely took me aback—I was frozen. I didn't know what to say, except to suggest they form a committee. It came upon me like an epiphany that, yes, indeed, I was the keeper of their oral traditions. This was an onerous responsibility. There was no choice about whether I would I come back and help them--of course I would. That wasn't a matter of choice, that was a matter of reciprocal obligation.

They asked, "What kind of committee?" I said, "I don't know--form your own committee." And they said, "OK. Come back in two days" [LAUGHS]. We came back in two days, into the village, and there was nobody in sight. I turned to Jane and I said, "Well, looks like this is not going to happen." We got out of the car, walked into a nearby home where the meeting was supposed to take place. Two people were there, but in 15 minutes, 16 people were there, half of them women, which was extraordinary because women never engaged in historical discourse--never. Yes, they would attend meetings on women's affairs, church groups, all kinds of other settings, the local cooperative society. But not that kind of discourse. That was eye opening.

My initial experience was a near epiphany in the sense that it was a flash of recognition that had never occurred to me before. It took my interlocutors amongst the Haya to bring it into my mind and make me recognize it.

So, when you ask about those volumes in English and Kiswahili, the translation of the book about the Kiziba Kings, yes, those are obligations. Moreover, I have, literally, reams of documents I gathered in the field, in Kihaya, some challenging the Kiziba royal version of history. Many clans reacted to it, saying the author didn't get it right. They formed their own clan committees and generated their own histories. I have a number of those. I have histories of Haya kingdom--extensive histories. Those are now being translated and we're moving to publish them. I am devoting myself to these materials in the next couple of years. That's a high priority, to make it available, make it accessible. Yes, if I am the keeper of oral traditions, then I have a deep obligation.

CMK: You do have a deep obligation. But what if you had written only for yourself? Which is what most of us do--we write only for ourselves.

PRS: Well, we do write for ourselves.

CMK: In publishing, we write in incomprehensible language that only we can understand.

PRS: Yes, we do. Admittedly, we do. Therein lies one of the big issues, I think. We must continually struggle to make our language accessible. I'm becoming more and more conscious of this.

CMK: I think you can do that, but—that is something we have to do, we must do. At the same time, the bulk of our work essentially has to be comprehensible to at least the majority of our readers.

PRS: It should be, and the majority of our readers should be on the continent. Yet, the majority of our readers are not on the continent right now. We all are faced with that reality. I don't make myself an exception to that.

CMK: One of the great things about your work is that it flows. It's very hard to put down. This takes really a lot of practice.

PRS: It takes a huge amount of practice. I know with the book *Community-Based Heritage in Africa: Unveiling local research and development initiatives*, I tried very hard to write that book in accessible language. I think, for the most part, I was successful because it's in a narrative style. It's not analytical. It's a narrative, setting up the events that unfolded and how I see them as significant. The more we can get away from analysis and into narration, I think the better positioned we are. I tried hard to make that book accessible.

CMK: Your work and contributions have not been about performance in terms of 'look how smart I am.' Rather, they have been about 'look how much we can learn from what I have been able to learn from Africa, from the Haya, from Tanzanians, from Eritreans.' Your influence for those who care to listen and learn is been very deep and powerful. We are very fortunate to have had you on our side. Thank you for your time, bro.

Peter R. Schmidt Publications

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