

Kenya Human Rights

Interviewer: Robert M. Press, during research for dissertation at the University of Florida.

Location of interview: Nairobi, Kenya

[BP is interviewer Bob Press; WB is interviewee Wafula Buke, a former student activist in Kenya]

Interview Oct. 5, 2002, at our cottage. In the yard

Wafula Buke

[Some brief questions by the interviewer, Bob Press, are omitted where not essential to the understanding of the responses, to allow more uninterrupted responses.]

Profession: human rights activist

Ethnic: Luhya

(Oct. 4, 2002, formed the African Liberation Initiatives; he was named Executive Secretary.)

Ed. Forced to leave the University in his third year, in 1987, when he was arrested in the second week of his leadership of the Student Organization of the University of Nairobi.

Residence: 87-91 (prison); 91-92 Uganda "to avoid arrest;" 92-97 Nairobi, Kisumu, Bugoma Kenya

Ethnicity: Luyah

Religion – none

Pol. affiliations 92-97: 92 Ford; 92-95 Ford Kenya; 95-98 Safina. Later SDP ?

Marital status: 92-95 married.

Tape one, Side One

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BP. What did you do to try to advance human rights [in Kenya] starting around 87 or around that time – specific actions that you took?

WB I think the first action that I can name is – the conditions in which we were then were very dictatorial. Life was so difficult because people could not think and speak freely. So, being a student, I thought the best platform...was to organize students and provide a leadership that would also reinforce democratic forces in the fight for human rights in Kenya.

[Activist student leader]

BP So you became a student leader. What was your position?

WB I was the Chairman of the Students Organization of Nairobi University (SONU ??verify).

BP Were you elected?

WB I was elected

BP What year student were you?

WB I was third year then.

BP Why did they choose you? What had you done to get chosen?

WB Well, one, I would say that we had quite a struggle because in second year I had stood. By that time the government was so unhappy with them – with the growing opposition they [the government] decided to rig me. So I was rigged out in second year when I was elected. I was supposed to be elected chairman, but they rigged me out.

BP What had you done to make them want to rig you out?

[Tactics – freedom of speech demonstration]

WB I had organized a demonstration against...America, after the bombing [of Libya] under the Reagan Administration. And I had also been involved in many, many other things [aimed at] internal [University] reforms as well as organizing students against what was going on.

BP Could you tell me what those things were?

[Academic repression]

WB We had internal problems like academic freedom. We'd have lecturers being arrested. We had professor Mutomo Mkange [spelling??] and...Okech Owiti [spelling??], a law lecturer. You know, they were arrested, just because of their commitment to democratic ideal and human rights. So now as a first year – I basically tried to see if it was possible for us to also challenge that as beneficiaries and allies of these people.

BP So you saw these things happening; what did you do about them? You organized a demonstration when, against the bombing of Libya by the U.S.?

WB By the U.S., yes. I organized that in 1986, I think it was April, about two weeks after the bombing [dates??].

[State Tactic: arrest student leader to stop protests against a donor -U.S.]

BP A rally of students?

WB Yes, but **I was arrested before it could take off**. Some tried, but basically the government moved in and arrested me before I could go to the rally... I was just held for some hours.
...we also basically made leaflets available and explained the situation to the students. And of course the government knew what we were – who those particular actors were.

BP Leaflets on what topic?

WB On the issues of academic freedom and the arrest of progressive lecturers. We also had internal problems of administration; you could talk about maybe embezzling, corruption; those small things to do with food also. Student issues.... 86 and 7. So when we were in polls I stood and they rigged me out [in 1986?].

[Student 'coup']

That same year, after about one month we organized the first rally to [denounce] their Cabinet [of the elected student leaders]. We mobilized students and basically overthrew them in a non-violent student 'coup' I'd say.

BP Overthrew elected students?

WB The elected students, yeah. Just the African way.

BP How did you overthrow them?

WB Well one, we mobilized very many students. We told students not to boycott but to come because all of them were unhappy. So when they came, they could not allow these people to talk. So of course they [supporters of Buke and his friends] made demands that we speak instead of these people. So I came, took over, along with my colleagues, Kabere Njenga (?). We proceeded to announce suspension of the [student] constitution so we can get – we've been taught by African dictators how to go about staging a coup [laughs]. Suspend the constitution and create a vacuum. And then you start giving decrees that the office is disbanded and you have to have another interim team of about twenty, then you go on until you organize free and fair elections...

BP Did they then organize free elections?

WB No, the government moved in and gave us an ultimatum and said: A – that we step down or -. So we had a meeting with my Cabinet, the coup leaders, and the...University Senate. And the negotiations that ensued led to some of my colleagues [becoming] so scared that we called off the coup and waited for the following year when I was elected by a landslide. I was elected by a landslide.

BP 1987.

WB '87, yes.

BP What was your agenda; what did you do as student leader?

[TACTICS of a university student activist in 1987]

WB What did I do? You know, one: we needed to use, to create the necessary atmosphere in [the] University that would enable them to be a platform for democratic forces. So that the students were supposed to be a front toward that particular struggle, you know, led by Jeramogi [spelling??] Oginga Odinga in those days. So one of the things we did was try and get the Moi influence out of the University. We did that by banning tribal organizations which Moi was using. Every once in a while he'd call students from [a particular ethnic region] and gives them money; calls students from several other tribes and gives them money. So they come in there and because of the activities of the tribal organizations they are more funded [by the government] than the central [student] organization. The overall organization became so weak, so as he calls his tribal organizations he doesn't do any business with the University, the overall student body. And anytime he tries to deal with them he does so by maybe taking them on outings...basically to misuse them so they come up and become traitors against us. So for us we said that nobody – all tribal organizations we'll ban them. We also banned students from going out with the Head of State; and we said if anyone goes out with the Head of State he comes back, we either lynch him or we expel him from the [organization] of students. Then we also had a commitment saying that we are not going to non-partisan, you know, observers, in what was evolving in Kenya; we are going to be participants in looking for solutions of the Kenyan problems. Basically saying that we are shifting our position from being conformists to being participants in the struggle for human rights in Kenya. There are many other things we tried to do, of course. We tried to introduce – we had a position to get involved, trying to open up space for serious discussion. Like having public symposiums, which had completely disappeared.

BP Did you hold public discussions?

WB No, **I was only student leader for nine days.** I only made a declaration of what I intended to do.

BP Nine days.

WB Yeah

100

BP And all of this you set out as an agenda within nine days.

WB That was our agenda. We were ambitious enough. We thought because the student community is the only one that is organized team which the government can not disorganize because all parties don't exist (??). We decided to set up – we considered our Cabinet also a replicate [of government]; ...if you were Secretary of Foreign Affairs...we [assigned] you the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, so that your mandate is global, we would say. If you were Secretary of Health, your mandate is to talk about health in the whole country, you don't talk [just] of the University.

BP Secretary of Health in the student organization?

WB. It's the equivalent of the Minister for ...Health in the country.

BP Student leaders took on portfolios of...

WB of the Cabinet.

BP ...of the Cabinet...

WB ...official Cabinet, because we felt they needed to be monitored.

BP What was your position?

WB Me? I was the Chairman, kind of President now, Chairman of the Cabinet. Moi would say...[Moi said no one could use the title "President" except him in Kenya].

BP OK. You got arrested. Tell me about that. Did you know it was coming? Was it sudden? What were the reasons given for your arrest?

WB One, I could see that we, the students, were very enthusiastic. They had a lot of confidence in us and expected so much from us. They were basically saying by their commitment to us that we were mandated to deploy them anywhere. So I knew that the mood that prevailed at the University, and what we wanted to do, and the environment that we were operating nationally was such that we were not going to go far. So I called my kitchen Cabinet – I would call it the "vanguard" – about four or five people [who??].

[University activists risk arrest]

I told them, you know, we hope you are aware; I asked them whether they were aware that we could not go beyond – we can't finish our studies, and if the worst happens, we shall be jailed or expelled, but we can't escape both of them: are you aware? And my colleagues said 'yes, yes, yes, yes. They all agreed, the four. So I told them we should develop a program, a program of very – a program that would sustain the struggle and make sure that we managed to implement it in two months. And for us – what we had in mind was creating cadres...small caucuses, bringing in first years. I remember because of the situation we were dealing with we decided that the better thing to do was to bring the first year and second years into the student leadership. So we developed a program of re-orientation of the students that should last two months, hoping that we should only survive for two months.

[State TACTIC – preemptive arrest of student leader Buke]

But the state was a bit smarter than us, so we were thrown in [to custody] after nine days.

BP What were the charges.

WB Hmm, I think I remember the words: doing an act prejudicial to the interests of the Republic of Kenya. They called me a spy.

BP A spy for...?

WB For Libya.

BP Were you?

WB I have not seen a Libyan up till now, just seeing one. And I've really struggled to see one. When I went to Geneva I tried to see one. I didn't succeed. I was in Nigeria, I tried to see one. Even here I've tried to see one; I've not seen a Libyan except [Libyan leader] Khaddafi on TV. [laughs]

BP Why do you think they charged you with being a spy for Libya? Out of all these things you were doing?

WB One, I had to be jailed. So it doesn't matter how; but I had to be jailed. So if they didn't get that one [charge], they'd have gotten another one. But I think for me being jailed as a Libyan spy was a bit relevant to what we had done in first year [at the University], organizing against the American bombing of Tripoli...

[Torture of students]

BP Were you tortured?

WB Of course, quite.

BP Would you describe that at least in some general ways.

WB Well, we were put in **water-logged cells**; of course we were stripped naked, beaten many times.

BP How high was the water?

WB No, it was just low. [With his hand he indicates a height part way up his ankle.]

BP How long were you kept in there?

WB Stayed there for, was it one day? One day, yeah. But **the beatings were quite intense.**

BP The beatings, how many times were you beaten?

WB Throughout.

BP Throughout what?

WB Throughout the sixteen days.

BP So a sixteen-day period. Beaten with what?

WB Well, it ranges of course from blows, fists, rubber tires, rubber bands.

BP Tire what?

WB Some rubber from tires – vehicle tires. And of course, you know, sticks – pieces of wood.

BP What were they asking you to confess to, if anything?

WB Well, first it began by claiming that I was part of a conspiracy of the Americans through the Ku Klux Klan to overthrow Moi. I just couldn't understand what they were talking about. [Newspapers carried a report by the government that the Ku Klux Klan planned to overthrow the government; the misspelling [verify??] indicates that whoever invented the story within the government either could not spell or was possibly making the same written juxtaposition of r's and l's that many Kikuyus make]. It began like that. And I had an American girlfriend called – some lady, its not important. So they claimed that the American girlfriend was a CIA [U.S. Central Intelligence Agency] operative and we had met the American Ambassador many times. So what they would do is ask: How many times did you meet the American Ambassador; that's the question. I've never met any – to this day also [October 5, 2002] – I've never met an Ambassador from America to this day. At least I've seen these days, but those days I never saw anything. So that went on then they shifted again to the Libyans. Now you can see they're confused and just wanted to get me to..

BP Did you sign confession papers?

WB **Yeah, hey. How else do you leave that place** [Nyayo House, a tall government building in downtown Nairobi where much of the government torture of accused dissidents took place in the late 1980s [and early 1990s]? You sign it very happily in when [you arrive in] the jail you feel very happy. Anything else better than Nyao House.

BP Was it Nyayo House where you were [tortured]?

WB Nyayo House.

BP And so the false confession was related to which charge?

WB The false confession was related to being a Libyan spy.

BP And how many years were you sentenced to?

WB Five, that means in Kenya three [years] and four months because of the remission of a third [only for good behavior??] Or they call it parole.

BP 'Good' time. And that's what you served: the full time, three years...?

WB Yeah. Yes.

BP Were you defended by a lawyer?

WB No, there were no lawyers [in] those days [willing to take up such cases. The few willing were often unable to get to the rapid, surprise Kangaroo courts the state held for those tortured into confession.]

BP No one defended you as a lawyer?

[Fear – most lawyers would not defend human rights activists]

WB I'm actually **saying there were no lawyers in those days for human rights...no body could show up, except [John] Khaminwa who was then in detention.** So he could not have helped me.

BP John Khamwinwa [who was one of the first lawyers in Kenya to take up human rights cases against the government.]

WB John Khamwinwa. He was a great man.

BP Gibson?

WB Those ones; there were no lawyers; there was just John Khamwinwa or nobody. And he was in detention so there was nobody who was ever represented in court that year. [I believe some were, by Pheroze Nowrojee and others]. The ones handed over to us [??] were one hundred or two hundred but none of them had a lawyer. I was the only student jailed.

BP You mean the 100 or so of Mwakenya.

WB Yeah.

BP Were you ever accused of being Mwakenya?

WB No. That was earlier. No, they were still jailing people [on Mwakenya charges]; at least they gave me my own charge.

BP When were you sentenced – arrested.

WB I was arrested in October 1987 [and released in] '91.

BP Let's go back just a little on your strategy and why you wanted to present that kind of student activist agenda. What were you hoping to accomplish.

[Student activists' goal: new, Socialist course for Kenya: approaches "revolutionary" plan]

WB You know, one, we had- at the time, most of what we; I must say that the opposition then had socialist orientation – Marxist. Most of the underground movements, most of those opposed to the establishment and...doing something about it were socialist-oriented. Even the John Khamwinwas were involved in the formation of the Kenya Socialist Party that leads to when they were jailed. But, so you can see that our aspirations were not just to open up space- open up space to talk and achieve nothing, like we are doing now, I think, substantially. But also to really get quality of life of our people changing and **putting Kenya on course to redevelopment of the lives of our people** – economic development and the creation of institutions that would help in that regard.

BP So it was two-fold, then. Basic political and human rights – freedom of expression, and economic development along a socialist or perhaps a **Marxist path** that would lead to –

WN –fundamental change.

BP Would you describe yourself at that time as a Marxist or socialist?

[Following socialist line]

WB No, I was [following] socialistic lines...because I was not fully-conscious. I can't call myself a Marxist when I didn't understand all those things. Now I am a socialist proper. I've read a bit, a little more, and I am doing something about it.

Just today and yesterday, we've been in the process of forming a socialist platform which we did – we had representation from Uganda. We'd like to create a movement here that has the same name as in Uganda. So we just formed The New African Socialist Movement. Yesterday.

BP What's its aims...

[Seeking new paradigm; power shift – like a peaceful revolution]

WB The aims are...the so-called globalization is the same, same, old imperialism. And capitalism is just about shifting resources from the periphery to the center and that's why we are poor. We really want to see if it is possible for us to provide an alternative, economic-social paradigm to what exists. And we see it better captured in the word "socialist."

BP Is it a political party?

[social movement]

WB No, its just **a movement**. We are aware that we can't really determine what each should take; there are no cadres, so we have to start doing the groundwork, educating our people, getting them to understand reality properly so that we can create a basis for a serious struggle. Maybe forty years from now, or a hundred, or twenty, you don't know. We can't talk about power because even if we took part in the ordinary [politics] we don't have enough cadres, we don't have enough communists...we don't have people who understand. We don't have enough. You can't bring a social revolution without socialists. It's not possible. It's not a priority for us. We've been gathering a lot of books so we intend to really help, make available, progressive literature to our people.

As things stand now, imperialism is conspiring against the Third World, in many ways – by making it impossible for us to access books of that kind. They are no longer under publication. Progress publishers is [unclear] thing. It no longer produces books. And Zed – still publishes. We hope it still maintains that particular orientation its had. For us the issue is viability: they're not there. You go to a bookshop and you can't get anything socialist; that's true. Go to Kenyan bookshops and you can't get ONE, one; I'm not talking about two. I was in Tanzania, I gathered some; in Zanzibar and I gathered some.

BP When you came out in '91, what did you do then?

[Political education in prison]

WB You see I got my [] education when I was in prison. In a way I must say it was great that I was jailed because I got a chance to interact with people who understood Kenyan crisis, who understood the various laws that determine social change...I met professors like Maina Kinyatti and other senior comrades in the struggle from the '70s and the 50's like Peter Ankihara [??]. So it's from these people that I now knew exactly what to do. So when they're going out, please when you get out get in touch with me on this; what's your address? And when you arrive you get my letter. Just follow the instructions. The struggle continues. So when I came out I also got my letter and the comrade who had written was called Mwandero Nghan'g'a [??], who was a former student leader. He's a candidate for MP from one of the constituencies. He was also a speaker yesterday, no yesterday but one. He was in jail – five years, just the same sentence as mine. [jailed] a year earlier.

BP So what you learned in prison was not all that bad, in one sense. You didn't just hear nonsense; you heard people's ideas on how to make Kenya a better country.

WB I really – it was a very important experience. I don't think I would have lived as sensibly as I am living now if I did not go to prison. It [the political education] was the other side of suffering in prison.

BP So you came out in 91; what did you do then?

[After prison – immediately resumed activism]

WB...I was only free for 45 days. When I got my letter, of course I started my work the following day. I had my first meeting with the people I was going to work with the day after my arrival home; the day after my release. We started working, working, going on. And I got a letter from Jaramogi [Oginga Odinga] and he was asking me to help in building structures for his party, which was not registered – the National Democratic Party, that was his party NDP. So now these fellows [the police] arrested one of my colleagues.

[Formed a “cell”]

They got those letters and some other information which I had and when they arrested that guy, I managed to get a leak from the police, so I ran away alongside my other two colleagues, members of one cell that I had formed. They were going to arrest me because **they knew about my underground involvements as well as my association with NDP**, which was an illegal association [then, before multi-party had been allowed in December 91] you might say.

BP In terms of the underground involvement, what were you doing specifically that was upsetting to the government?

[TACTIC – Armed training in Uganda for a revolution]

WB You know one, the reason we were having a problem because **we didn’t think that Moi was going to give in. So for us we wanted to organize**. We were organizing an armed struggle, creating structures that would facilitate that particular phase of the struggle, the armed phase of the struggle. I’m talking to you as a trained soldier myself. I trained in Uganda, after running away.

BP Uganda trained a lot of people including the Rwandese [rebels] – Kigami [??].s

WB Yeah, Museveni was good these days. He has a lot of business with America like that. Anyway –

BP What kind of experience did you have in Uganda. Were you given actual, real military training or just kind of like talking about it?

WB No, no, no. We were given military training. It was good. I can maneuver, I can crawl, I can shoot.

BP Was it by the Army itself?

WB By the Army itself. It was legitimate training. Ours was a crash program: training trainers – about four months. Four months, but we were there for a long time for political education, which was very important. I was a Political Commissar, in charge of political education. We were working with the current chairman of the NGO Council who was also there; you don’t have to - [Odour Ong’wen, who later confirmed in a separate interview that he was in exile in Uganda, though he did not mention his training there.] He may not want that to come out; I don’t know; that’s his problem. Me I have no problem.

BP...So when you were there, you had decided, I guess, that this student activism wasn’t enough; it wasn’t going to change anything. And even political parties were not going to get anywhere; it didn’t look like it at that time.

WB Political parties or political party? NDP was not registered.

BP It [seeking multi-party approval] looked like a dead end.

WB Yeah, it was a dead end.

[TACTIC – armed revolution]

BP So the other option is – revolution?

WB A revolution as process, yeah.

BP And you were seriously contemplating that and looking at that and were you aware of the risks that involved?

WB Yeah. Very aware; very aware.

BP You weren't going into it naively?

WB No, no. We –[it was a] very sincere effort – an effort that can be tried again if conditions demand it....Sometimes you can't rule out violence as a vehicle for change.

BP In most countries that has always been an option.

WB Yes, even in America itself.

BP So what happened after the four months [in Uganda].

[STATE Tactic accepting multi-party took steam out of armed struggle plan]

WB After the four months we, or course, came organized and came back. But you see, we had a problem because Moi finally allowed multi-partyism. You know that takes the steam out. Somebody has said that reforms are the package of the oppressor to really scatter a crisis. And so for us, that was a puncture. That took the steam. So we had to go back to the drawing board. That's how we ended up such a dispersed group operating as a political unit, a political entity.

[comment: did Moi fear a possible armed struggle or was it too small a threat to worry??]

BP So when you went back to the drawing board, in a figurative way, that was back here; you were in Kenya at the time, right?

[Critique of civil society “another set of rich people to run our lives.”]

WB I was back here. I came back...in 1992 and One, I didn't have a voter's card. Perhaps that's when I would have been [elected to] Parliament because I would not have been beatable if I stood from whenever I come from. At least at that time people were voting ideals because we were just fresh from the struggle. I didn't run because I had no voter's card...I was in the bush when they were registering people. Also, we need a continuous system.

You know, I could see that those who were going to be elected were going to be establishment people. You know we have criminals like Kibaki [elected President in December 2002] and all this same rif-raff from those [authoritarian KANU-controlled] days are going to come back because elections in society like these are about getting another set of rich people to run our lives [instead of] another set of thinkers taking over. So in such a scenario, the most important platform then becomes the peoples' own movement, the people's own organization. What you would have called civil society is not the current model [unclear] stakeholders, are just directors of some organization. There's a lot of money from wherever. But the real civil society –

[TACTIC – organize students nationally]

So I got involved with friends like Kabando wa Kabando, a current candidate for Parliament. He was then the chairman of the Student Organization of the University of Nairobi and we started to start working on registering – and organizing; not just registering, but **organizing and forming the National Union of Students of Kenya**. It was not existing at the time: '92, before the election. So we went various places and mobilized students – went to very university, Kenya Polytechnic [??spelling], other institutions and managed to found that organization.

[arrested again]

But the day we launched [it], I was arrested again.

[comment: Government tactic of instilling fear in University students, one of the loudest groups of critics of the government.]

BP You don't get much time when you go public with something, do you? The day you launched it you were arrested.

WB I was the interim chair for that organization.

BP Were you the person who actually organized it?

WB Well, I was working with the rest of the students – it was not my work alone; it was the work of students, actually...I didn't want to be the Chair because I was not a student then, so I wanted them for the purposes of us moving, I wanted them to take the leadership. But [said] I was one of them, so, they kind of pushed me. But that's when I ran because I was kind of scared.

BP Where were you arrested?

WB In Ufungamano House, where the launch was taking place. They [the police] came into Ufungamano House, thirty minutes [before] the time [of the launching ceremony].

BP Were you able to start the proceedings?

WB No (emphasis). No, we didn't start procedures at all.

BP How long were you held that time?

WB Four days.

BP They were sending a signal to you to forget that organization?

[Playing 'game' with state to win freedom]

WB No, they told me not to step in any learning institution in Kenya. [He had been recruiting members for the student group from among university students at various campuses in Kenya], not even a nursery. But at the time it was really difficult. I actually signed that agreement because One, I had a problem. I was keeping the documents of the underground movement, keeping all of them, actually photographs of people like the current Minister of Economic Planning [full title; and verify??], Dr. Ado

Wita [misspelling??] was the President of our Organization...[unclear] called Jaime Wakalu [??]; We had even taken photographs. So if they managed to get that box we would have had the total movement – everybody being tracked down. So I decided the better thing to do – because my wife knows where I kept it. If I don't seem to be talking nicely, and they want to get more information, they'd go for my wife and beat her and she'll talk. She's not like me. So I played games **[here his voice gets very weak and hoarse:] played games and offered them [unclear] politics, everything** [here normal voice resumes:]

[comment: he does not specify what he agreed to, but apparently he went against the deal in promising to go ahead with the student union.]

So they set me free. Then the first thing I did was take the box [with membership documents] and return it to Oduor Ong'wen – go and keep the box. But I did not – the following day they told me I should go straight to the Nation, the daily papers and announce my disassociation with the National Union [of Students of Kenya] Well, I did the opposite. We went there and we said the [unclear] is unstoppable; we are going to continue operating. We said the National Union of Students of Kenya is a good project, a right project, and we are going to push on with it. And no amount of intimidation – but I knew they could not arrest [unclear] I was out. I [unclear] given instructions. My wife was around . But to be honest, that's when – you know, [voice drops"] so bad it's not possible – I just wanted to talk about – that's the day I kind of took the decision to get married because the [unclear] went to the papers; she said "my husband, my husband." So they [??] came to me and said, how does she talk about her husband [unclear] you are married? Ah...Anyway I really didn't like that. I said, [let's] just go ahead [and get married]. Anyway, its fine...

BP What happened next.

WB So that project, we also pushed, but...I found this generation of students [unclear] a big problem. I couldn't discipline them [unclear] a commitment. Most of them [who] were in the university for the time we were away, had gone down so much in terms of consciousness. You could not manage, really, to sustain the struggle for entrenching that organization. But we managed to go around and open branches in Moi University; we went to [unclear] University; we went to Egerton [??] Univeristy, we traveled all around...But you see the problem is I was not a student, so I tried to organize the students so that at least Nairobi University could be its main base. But that leadership of the University then were not comfortable with it, so they were also scared, the colleagues I was working with. So I just decided – too bad I'm not a student, so we leave it.

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BP You tried student university activities; that didn't work. You went to Uganda, looking at the armed struggle option; you actually took it seriously, trained, came back. Was there a period there when you came back when you were involved in the underground activities; I mean, there was. But what were you trying to do in that period, what was your strategy, your tactic in order to bring change in Kenya. Post-Uganda.

WB Actually I can say we found ourselves completely disorganized by multi-partyism. Because we were not expecting it, and a multi-party system is a platform that can only be used by those who have – let me call them conventional credentials for participation in bourgeoisie politics. Now we were all so

poor. We needed clothes. We were just – we had no jobs, no food. We were basically, all the struggle – most of the struggle as well. Very poor people.

BP How many were you?

WB We were quite many, of course. I mean everyone was involved with the struggle.

BP Hundreds?

WB We had – not just our organization alone. We also had Mwakenya, we also had KPF (Kenya Patriotic Front) by Koigi [Wamwere], we had many, many organizations.

BP But I've never really understood whether this was a large group [of dissidents in various organization] or not. Sometimes people exaggerate their numbers.

WB Oh, yeah, no. I can't say, we can't say we were many, in relation to the Kenya population. But I can say that we were the active elements. We can not say that the Kenyan leaders now are a proper reflection of the number of people involved in the struggle. So in the same way, I would say we were many if the current conditions [of opposition??] can be referred to as being many.

BP Did the student element of that movement have a name? Did your participation have a name?

WB Yes, yes. It was called - our organization was called Uwake, an acronym for (in Swahili) Umoja wa wazalendo wa Kupignia demockrasia Kenya [spelling??] or United Patriots Struggle for a Democratic Kenya [this was around 91, before the government went multi-party; Oduor Ong'wen apparently was chair].

[IMPACT: did armed threat move Moi to adopt multi-party?]

I want to think that one of the things that may have made [unclear] influence on Moi, get him to come to his senses is the knowledge that we were also working on the other option [armed struggle]. And of course those who have money here or interest in this country would want this kind of peace to go on . I want to think that much as we didn't shoot any bullets, but at least we may have created the necessary scare for some package of reforms to be given out in the form of agreeing to multi-partyism at the time they did. Of course you know they had to do it at some point. But it may have influenced the timing. Don't forget the Rwandese were fighting [rebels had been trained in Uganda] and they knew Museveni was also preparing us for this phase of the struggle in Kenya. So I'd like to think that we did not fight but we managed to create the necessary climate for that kind of thing – for the reforms that we now have.

BP What kind of pressure do you think the underground –

End of side A, tape one of two tapes.

Start of side B, tape one

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[Credit claiming: threat of armed rebellion pushed Moi to reforms]

WB We can not rule out the influence of the growing opposition that was ready to take up arms. Because if you look at regional politics at the time, Museveni had already waged a guerilla warfare that had taken power [in Rwanda]. And at that same time, we also know the RPF [Rwandan Patriotic Front??] had also taken up arms and was raiding the other side. It was very clear, and even the international community – this intelligence knew that Museveni was training people. The [unclear] International that is in Libya was the kind of [unclear] agreement where that training could also take place here [in Kenya]. He [Khadaffi] was training various people from various places, including South Africa. So I just think and believe that that also had to be one of the considerations in deciding as to whether to open up or do they [Moi's military] prepare to engage rebellion that is armed. I just want to think that also must have influenced the timing of the reforms that we managed to get here.

BP I understand that point, but then again for a head of state to be actually really concerned, he has to have some indication that this is more than just a few disgruntled people who are just doing a few minor things. I mean, what indication was there that this was a serious movement, a serious threat, and therefore an option would be go multi-party?

WB Well, I think the best source of information was the newspapers because the government kept accusing Uganda of training people to take him on. It made those accusations.

BP Were they true?

WB They were true. So they were talking about it and blaming – at some point, you remember, they were supposed to wage a war. Uganda and Kenya were supposed to fight. It was that kind of thing.

BP What was Uganda's motive behind that? Why would they be interested in starting a war or training people to start a war in Kenya.

[Regional politics may have pushed Moi toward reform]

WB You know, Museveni at the time understood the Kenyan problem, understood the African crisis that you go through and he subscribed to socialist ideas. And you know you can not just have – be comfortable as a candid ?? socialist in a neighborhood that is completely Western and neo-colonial. So sponsorship for the struggle of the liberation of Rwanda is in line with the pursuit of socialism for both Uganda and Africa as a whole. And I know, I have interacted with the cadres of the military, the soldiers of Uganda, the education that they were being given, the political education is just about how we can undo imperialism. I remember one civil song – you could be taught civil songs – and one of those songs was saying, you know, [starts to sing] Uganda, Africa is so rich, it has coffee – and that's why when those people, the imperialists see it they really feel very bad. You know, Africa has gold and all those things. That was Museveni.

BP That makes sense. So it was a continuation of his own [vision]...meeting up with the frustration of some Kenyans.

WB Yes.

BP So the groups, the Mwakenya, the Kenyan Patriotic Front, the other one you mentioned, they were real people in it; there were some arms; there was an intention to take up an armed struggle if worse came to worse. It was not just talk.

WB It was not just talk, we were actually there. We've lost several people. Women, we had them [??] Several of our people have been shot after leaving the place [Uganda]. They came back here. They killed several of those who were not known. I really feel very bad. We've lost about – quite a number. And others joined the Odongofe?? You heard about the feda? February 18 Revolutionary Army. Some of our colleagues joined that organization when those of us joined the NGO sector and abandoned them; so they joined, more serious people. Some died; others are still alive.

BP Your own journey took you a different way after multi-party. You shifted into NGOs.

TACTIC – organize unemployed in non-violent resistance]

WB Yeah, I shifted to SDP [Social Democratic Party]. You know what I did – after the student movement failing, I decided that because I can't run the student movement alone, without – I'm also poor; let me go back home and organize, organize, organize along the lines that I know. So I, in conjunction with my colleagues in my home district began what is called an Unemployed People's Movement. In a way - I want to say that's the most effective project I've ever come up with because we basically – because of our numerical power and our organization, we managed to control the [administrative] division, basically. If we didn't improve of something [in his constituency, Sirisia ??, in the Luyah area.] ...[we managed] to influence the political process in the division and also determine the leadership.

I already had problems with the elites because we elites are so unstable. The middle class is an unstable people. You can not expect them to sustain the struggle. So I wanted to see whether I could build cadres of those fellows whose liberation aren't [??] impossible after some serious change – the politics of the nation.

[TACTIC – shun Moi day]

So the UPM was about every 15 people, form a village. We don't call them cells because of the implications. [This was in]1995, thereabouts. So if we say, one of those days, Moi day, we decided that we're not going to – that rally's not going to take place. So we deployed unemployed people, our "villages" to block all the roads so people don't come to the shopping center. And the DO [District Officer] not having anybody turning up except the Chiefs –Not really blocking the roads but covering the roads and telling people this is what we've decided to do. The meeting couldn't take place.

[STATE response: ban all public gatherings]

Then the DO became very oppressive, banned all games , darts, anything that's played by people at the shopping center. He banned the video shows – because he realized that every gathering was discussing our politics. So we also decided to hit back. We hit back by what you call – we slapped social sanctions against him. We said nobody talks and greets the DO in the division. So if he enters this bar, everybody walks out. If he enters a shop, everybody goes out from that shop. If he passes, if you see him coming, we change direction. So this went on for a week.

[Shunning District Officer wins restoration of freedom of assembly]

The DO just couldn't operate. Things were so bad, so he had to call for a cease-fire. He allowed people to basically say, no problem, you do this and that kind of thing.

[IMPACT: shunning police ends harassment; local police official fired for cooperating]

So we – then we also, the local brew, changa [??], there were also too many arrests. So we told people you go out and drink in groups of about ten. When the police come, you don't run away, you just pour the beer down, make sure the ladies are safe...then you walk away. So the sanctions against the police [what sanctions??] were also very util. Policemen became so humble, very humble.

Social sanctions for me means you don't talk to a fellow, you don't socialize, you don't greet. [It's like shunning]. What happened [when social sanctions were applied against the police] is that the police, basically now, in fact – the instructor in charge, he started shifted...and became our ally. In fact, finally he was sacked, sacked because of his position against the DO arising from our position, our mobilization of the population.

BP So did you reduce harassment by the police?

WB Oh, come on. It stopped, we didn't [just] reduce [it]. It stopped. In fact, information went all over about the region. We didn't want any media thing – we just wanted – I had already tried the National Union of Students of Kenya [using the media] and it didn't work – so I didn't want again to go to the media about what existed. So I wanted them to know UPM was there because they can also feel it. This went on for nine months.

[radical ties land him in jail again]

Then, unfortunately –God, I suppose I'm unlucky (almost whispered) – Anyway...these February 18 Movement People, I knew them. Sometimes they used to come to Kenya, then they came and talked to me. They sleep in my place, then they go back. They came and told me that they are about to strike. Me, I told them: too bad, you guys; me, I don't agree with Odongo [??] because I don't think Odongo [??] understands our politics. He's not educated enough; he doesn't understand the dynamics of war, no the dynamics of an armed struggle. So I cannot work with him. So ...they just came and struck in my home place, the same Sirisia [??district]. So giving these people an opportunity to completely dismantle my projects. So they arrested UPM members, some of them ran away to Uganda; others went to Lodwar. Me I was arrested and beaten up – you know about that. They even broke this tooth. It was the longest time I've stayed in prison [without a charge]; I stayed in custody for nine days.

TACTIC –seek safety as member of a public group (Safina)

So now I realized I can't operate from home, after being released. To be honest, I joined Safina because I wanted to be more visible and therefore safer. It was not a serious political decision that I agreed with them.

[Individual vs. organization activism: coming in from the cold; joining organizations for “protection”]

But the local leadership didn't want me; they were scared of me because they saw me as a very hardened criminal who must be involved in every criminal thing. They didn't even push for my release. So I realized, God, I'm just alone. I remember talking to my wife and telling her: You mean nobody talked about my being in prison at all? She said no. Has anybody come to visit you and even just tried to help? Nothing. And yet I had worked for these people [Safina??], helped them get elected in the other constituencies. So I told [his wife] just feed me for one week. So I realized I was alone and that's very dangerous. So I linked up with [Richard] Leakey [of Safina] - as a survival thing as well [to] get an

opportunity to participate in the reforms and struggles. So tactically it was viable. But also [joining gave] a platform for me to participate in reformist politics. I was [on the secretariat of Safina] Director of Operations or something like that [??]. [He was also a NCEC?? member ??

BP Did that provide the platform and the protection you thought it would?

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WB Yes, they did. But finally when Safina was registered, I remember Leakey and Muite and Fara [??] went to Amos Wako [then Attorney General] and Amos Wako told them the reason why we did not register Safina is because of this – then he took a huge file and put it on the table. And the file was titled Wafula Buke. So they said I think that was some kind of scapegoat; but at least they presented my file as the reason why they did not register Safina. But that was a lie. What it means simply is that [unclear]. That's what Leakey and Muite told me.

BP So from Safina – you were active a couple of years; then you went to KHRC [Kenya Human Rights Commission]. Why did you go into it and why did you leave it?

[Discovering activism is marketable: he got a job with KHRC]

WB Why did I go to KHRC? Well, for me KHRC was a bit of a surprise...I did not know that I'm employable. I didn't have any papers. The police took away all my documents. Up to now I can't prove I was in school except for the English and a few ideas I may have. So when they advertised for that job, I didn't even want to apply. But the fellows said, no, just apply; we know what you can do. Just apply and try your luck. We are going to be very fair. We shall not really pin you down [to] produce your primary certificate or whatever. So I sent in my application. And they picked me. It was a surprise to me. But it also made me now to understand about the new regime, also the new era; the new forms of struggle that I had imagined.

[NGO framework NOT revolutionary]

I was now getting involved in the struggle for human rights. Their framework was very clearly defined. The difference is that now, the issue of moderation. The struggle had very, very specific dossiers, prescribed both by our own managers as well as our partners in this so-called struggle, NGO-led struggle. And we used to speak against dictatorship in any language that we chose. Now, within the NGOs you can see there is a need for diplomacy. You talk – there's a [unclear] for everything; you don't just go abusing people carelessly. I was not aware of some very rigid code of conduct which emphasis is moderation and confinement – certain forms of struggle. For us we beloved in change by any means necessary. Now we were realizing that within the NGO framework, it is change by one means: non-violence. You see. That was one.

****[Shift: from seeking overthrow to “wanting the system to work”]**

Then also, our analysis also shifted. We used to trace our problems to the point where you could now talk about socio-economic origins of our problems, historical roots of our problems. You could go up to colonialism. But **now, within the NGO framework, that anti-imperialist style was deleted from our minds.** So social analysis also took a completely different perspective. I must say, I found that a very dangerous period. Over time I was...also evolving; you know you could now start appreciating the importance of the police, you could also talk of the [whether or not] they flying squad [an anti-riot

police unit] should operate like this. **We were now kind of part of the government: we wanted the system to work.**

Now in those days you'd know that the state as it is constituted has to be an instrument of dictatorship because these police are trained badly and Moi is still in power. And the closer you take the police to the people the more difficult it is for them to think more freely...But now I find [unclear] you talk about policy. Now, the state as it is, the killings that go on: if we organize community police, what does it mean. It means we are making the police manage to really cripple alternative organizations. So I just found as we were going through – we were basically being co-opted in governance. I really don't know if that makes sense.

BP Given your background and your own orientation, it makes sense. It's a big change; You came in from the cold, and you got warm, but then you went back out into the cold again. What prompted you to leave [KHRC].

[NGO CRITIQUE:]

WB Yes. So now **over time I realized that honestly, these [the NGO community] were the new missionaries. These were now the new missionaries at this point in time in the age of imperialism. We were now the people preaching hope in a situation that is completely hopeless. So over time – the last project that they gave me was community policing. And I was just angry and did not manage, basically, to do that. I attended so many workshops.

[Playing a game to please donors: “None of them is open.”]

But you see the problem with the donor model is that people know that if you're given money by USAID you don't need [unclear] America. So you go to a public meeting and everybody's [emphasis] presentation, even our radical comrades, are so measured. None of them is open enough. And there are some, you know, like the Anyang' Nyong'os - but if donors are there [at the meeting] and the media is there, they [the Kenyan NGO leaders] are basically just scared of saying things wholly. So me, I realized what I need to do is liberate his head; get myself to survive in any other way so that I can now go back to my own readings [??].

BP So you quit.

[Travels – looking for support, ideas]

WB I quit. [He joined KHRC in 1996 and he left in 1999]/. I resigned. So after KHRC, I must say that even if that [his resignation, presumably] was bad, I really like to get a lot. I gained many things at a personal level; I went to Geneva and Nigeria. I met the left there [in Nigeria]. And I got new skills, computers...I managed to get books. Over time, the second year, I changed my mind and decided I really had to try and organize – even when I go out.. I spend 70 percent of my time on what I consider revolutionary work. And 30 percent on NGO work. If I'm given money to go and do an honest thing,, I make sure 70 percent is deployed on what I consider to be the correct work; [and the rest on the NGO work].

So if we had a workshop in [names a place] for two weeks, we shall have no more human rights education as we know it, then at night we negate some of those things and may give a more comprehensive analysis of our social situation.

BP Describe the 70 percent, because it's a tactic, it's a strategy which is seeking change. It's an alternative method of seeking change. What does it amount to; what does that mean, that part of your daily [work]...revolutionary work is a kind of a general term; it can mean anything.

WB What I mean – I must say the figure are about what some of us though we ought to do.

BP I mean to you have an organization; are you talking to people; are you making leaflets...

[Cheating to earn money for activism]

WB For example, when I went to Nigeria, there were several things they wanted me to do. Like they wanted me to fly to Ibadan, fly to Ibo land, places which are very expensive. So one of the things I can do is get a ticket stolen from me – well, you know Nigeria is very corrupt. Then you get a ticket and go by bus and that money I use it to go and meet leftists, underground leftists; and I also buy leftists books, a collection of Lenin's works, and all those things I can't get [here]. And I also hold meetings with leftist people, professors. Basically that's what I mean by the 70 percent. When I came back I had too many books, I had quite a wide network. I had learned so much about how the left is organizing within the framework of NGOs.

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BP In a sense you were educating yourself.

WB Yeah, that's true: educating myself. But you see what we were also doing internally, seeing whether it is possible for us to constitute a leftist movement outside so that we work with the NGOs but are able to use the available facilities and resources to support it. But then over time I realized that no senior comrade [a term he used repeatedly] is out there. So I decided I was the senior comrade who should go out 'there' and be brave enough to be harassed by life out there as we tried to move towards setting [up] an alternative platform for...challenging the current order.

[Ideology]

Imperialism is an issue. The bombing of this particular Embassy [the U.S. Embassy was bombed in 1998 in Nairobi, also destroying a large office building in which accounted for most of the victims – mostly Kenyans.] and the death of many people is just about global colonizing anyway. [He went on to allege that Kenya was the headquarters of the U.S. CIA operations in black Africa]. So that we were bombed has something to do with that. My own analysis – we have an American base in Mombassa, though the American Embassy has called me once and given me hell when we were quarrelling over the coming of this [unclear]. That base employs people in the Middle East to become killers there. So when they become bombers, for God's sake, we are also part of that. The offensive machine of the Americans. So I am saying that what lacks is a platform that can even explain that in a public symposium, in a public place. So I'm out here. I left that NGO to also come and fill a space which is a bit very difficult and [with] which nobody wants to do. Sorry if I'm getting irrelevant.

[This is vague. I am not clear what he left KHRC to do or what the conditions of his departure were.]

BP. No, it's not irrelevant. It helps me understand the various ways people seek change. That's still my basic question; I'm very interested. Go ahead.

[I turned off the tape recorder for a moment to think of a new line of questions.]

How effective do you think the NGOs, Kenya Human Rights Commission and others were in pressuring Moi's government to make concessions on human rights between '87 and '97. They were mostly active after '92.

[NGO Elitism denounced; key organizations named]

WB Yeah. It's true that the NGOs have really done a lot. Done a lot because – one of the biggest problems that all struggles face – reformist and otherwise – is the issue of resources. Organizing involves expenditures. So NGOs kind of fill that particular gap. They make resources available and you could organize demonstrations very easily. And you will remember that, in fact, the original FORD...did not have [unclear]; people were just demonstrating. But you see now with the [growth] of NGOs you find [activities] very systematized: ways of communicating with the state, because you have posters, press releases, you have secretariat for organizing leaflets for distribution and that kind of – So I must say that after '92, our NGOs played a very big role in trying to push for the removal of – I mean for more concessions. You know that, for example, the NCEC, is an organization that was formed as the result of NGO initiatives. KHRC was there; 4Cs [Citizens Coalition for Constitutional Change – verify ??] was there; Public Law Institute; Kitu Cha Sheria – the main consultations had managed to come up with that idea and used their funding [unclear] to get delegates to come from all over and therefore get a strategy in place that could push for things – push for [unclear] reforms.

**[IMPACT of NGOs on reforms; but very elitist;
[Donors impact on NGOs]**

So I'm saying that NGOs really paid a part in getting Moi to give in to peoples' demands for some changes. The other side of the coin, also, is that NGOs have this other problem – they elitized the civil society. **The so-called civil society now became the exclusive [place] of the elites** who were chosen by those who have money – **the donors choose for us who the civil society is composed of.** Because somebody Pamjoa Trust [??] is four people – four directors. Those four directors are calling themselves an organization.

[Example of elitism: Kenya Human Rights Commission?]

They go and speak – I'll just give you an example – Kenya Human Rights Commission is a very big organization, very powerful. But how many Directors do they have? It is an organization belonging to ten people. So now if you're going to call ten people an organization that is big, please I think we need to define why, I mean what organization is all about.

[Pre-NGOs, more direct government-people dealings]

So, I'm saying that the benefits that accrue from a dynamic and real civil society that includes the people – actually, in my opinion, start disappearing. So that in the past you'd talk of maybe coffee farmers and all those organizations where peasants were involved in class [??] production, maybe jua kali sector – these fellows who were involved in – you know jua kali, isn't it (BP: yeah). Jua kali – we could – in the absence of any NGOs, the government was doing business directly with those particular sectors. You see, and that to me – even the religious sector...we were really taken to be a serious organization...

[Donors]

But you see, with the emergence of NGOs and the money – and what money can do – we have that particular sector being pushed back...So that to me, in terms of continuity and sustenance of human rights, we become dependent on these fellows we keep seeing on TV because of their NGOs, as opposed

to really the masses believing in themselves and engaging the state directly. That bit I also find – much as they have achieved – but they have laid a wrong foundation.

BP They don't really represent anyone.

WB They don't really represent anyone at all. They represent the donors and themselves – the secretariats.

[NCEC weak as an “organization”]

BP What do you think of NCEC effort?

WB [It] was actually good, I must say. Because it had a very wide, very wide, quite a lot of representation.

BP I heard they had organizations formed throughout the country; or branches; is that true?

[NCEC appoints people]

WB They appoint people. I must say they have a bit of that; they try to establish branches of sort. My problem with that kind of, those kinds of things, is when you go and bring people together and they simply operate when you want them to operate. I have a problem with that concept of organizing.

BP When the leaders want them to...

WB Yeah, yeah. You know, if you talk about the civil society, its something that moves; its active on a daily basis. If you have a ruling party, that ruling party branch is operational, it's organizing this. It has a program that goes on. But if you just go and bring people together and say, now, can we elect somebody; they elect and then they disperse. I don't know whether that's an organization. And that's what the NCEC has done. You will never hear [emphasis] of what their branches do. They have never been heard doing anything at all because all that NCEC does is bring all those people together and use their coming together as a basis for legitimizing what they themselves do as elites up there. So I have a problem with that idea of organizing.

BP (on comments about NCEC by others; i.e. Lamba) I asked if it was middle class, elitist, and at first they said oh, at first, but then they branched out and had organizations represented...in the country.

[NCEC: no grass roots activity as claimed by Lamba]

WB That's not true. Just [ask] them what any of their branches has ever done. Check any paper and you never find [for example] the NCEC branch in Mombassa has condemned...they have no lives of their own.

BP If I were to look at some organization, that were effective in pushing for human rights, which are the ones you would tick off.

WB Well, we would tick the NCEC through the mass actions (of 1997); we should tick it, very heavily. We should also tick Kenya Human Rights Commission – in the formative struggles they made many

contributions. (Early 1990s). Maina [Kia]. I would mention RPP [Release Political Prisoners] as well. At least they managed to get people released – mothers' strike [of 1992].

[Pause for Wafula to check activists on list]

BP OK. Question on **motivation. Why did you do what you did?**

WB One of the factors that has led me to find satisfaction in struggles for change and positive change and stop acts of repression and human rights, it has something to do also with, I think, my upbringing. **We were very poor**, very (emphasis) poor. In fact I remember one fellow's jailed [??] We stayed alone for about two years or so...that poverty was really very biting. I remember when I was in primary school, standard three. I was in class – we didn't have trousers, so I was just using my father's shirt and I remember me a kid stripping me before girls; and I felt very – I'm saying that ...we were very, very poor really. So I've always grown up – and I remember that time I was a bit of a Christian. So I was **praying: May God help me; may God give me the ability to be useful to poor people** and try to see that I help them. And I remember as a young man I used to see that still being manifested in – when I see somebody carrying luggage, I want to help and I try to be a good boy. If an old man is cycling and he reaches the hill, you take the bicycle and help him till he reaches the top. He goes away. Those things. Actual charity.

BP Did you get that from your mother or your dad?

[Father's example inspired him]

WB My father. My father was [unclear] a very good person, also. He was a Councilor. He joined politics; local politics. So for him he always had that orientation. He was a very effective Councilor; actually the best Councilor I've known was my father. He was there for three terms. Back in the villages in Sirisia??... I also grew up in the environment – there were two communities that had some problem, this ethnic tensions, so that – the Boukousu [??] and the Sabaot [??], the Kalenjin of Mount Elgon. So now that made me know what it is to have a [unclear] which is led by people of ethnic perceptions...Luhya and Kalenjin. Mine is Luhya. So when you see, at the moment I am not affiliated with any political party because most of them are tribal and I'm not really part of that problem. These are all socializations that arises from my upbringing down there. So, but you see as you school and go on and on and until you realize that – you get to understand how you can may be useful. So every opportunity you get you also try to be useful in that regard. So the driving force for me has been the desire to make sure that some of those things somehow I went through and I see other people going through are also there to [unclear]

BP To help people avoid the kinds of things you went through?

WB ...our people, generally. Poverty is the problem. And that's why I look at the current politics: because Kenya is No. 2...in the gap between the poor and the rich. But you see all the parties, none of them is talking about it; none of them are talking about re-distribution of the national wealth. All they are talking about is getting the economy to pick up. But the economy has always been there. How have been people been living in the slums. So if you are not talking about re-distribution, an actual movement of the lives of the people themselves, then that doesn't give me the motivation to work with them. That's

why I'm outside what's going on. And I'll not even want. I'm just saying – well, that's what has been driving me.

BP How poor were you?

WB We were very poor; very poor, I think. [His mother was a housewife without any employment.] My own mother had 13 children- its outrageous. Two mothers. We [the children] are approximately 30; I don't know the number exactly (laughs). [His father had three wives. The family earned their living by farming and] a little business, also. Small farm; not too small, but small. [As an elected city official he earned only about 300 shillings per month]. The strategy for development in Kenya is the Harambee [public fund raisers – check definition??]. He is a good person [his father]...[His father paid his school fees through secondary school. When he went to the University it was free] But under 'globalization' we have to pay. [Here he was referring to World Bank structural adjustment programs that encourage governments to reduce their spending by not subsidizing education and other programs.]

BP If you had to analyze, as I'm trying to, which variables, as they call them, which factors, which things, which pressures, forced the government to change – multi-party, then better laws in '97 and a few things in between – which were the most effective?

[Key variables: domestic plus global politics]

WB Pressures – I think I can – I think it's true to also say that the role of the global community, the fall of the [Berlin] wall [in 1989] ushered in, I think, a different era. The collapse of Eastern Europe. You know, kind of made the West feel secure. They realized there was now no competition along political lines. So they were sponsoring dictatorships in Africa – you know, Mobutu was basically Africa's biggest problem, one of the biggest problem, but he was still a close friend to the [George] Bush Administration and [Ronald] Reagan. He's always been the darling of the West because of what he does for them: just think of [the country's mineral] resources.

Now Kenya is also the blue-eyed boy for the West. Britain likes [it]. So now that one party-system was also getting support from the West because they wanted to shield, to ward off the possibility of people with different thinking taking over. So I find that its possible, no, its true, so after the collapse of Eastern – of socialism, you know, they felt secure enough to let people be free, compete – because you are operating within our power. So the role of Hempstone, the Ambassador, in supporting Kamau Kurias and most of our people so they could have some change of system arises from that particular background.

So I can't say that it is exclusively our struggles that brought multi-partyism. But it is also the role of the changing political environment – the globe – the changing interests and strategies of the imperialist powers.

BP And do you feel that the tactics in 1997 were wise tactics where you have a sort of people's convention; then Moi decides to make a deal with some of the parliamentarians to make laws that were better?

[NCEC preempted drive for major reforms]

WB Yeah, it's unfortunate that the NCEC did not provide leadership to the ultimate end. It's very unfortunate – because of opportunistic elements who are bought by the ruling party... We are talking about Kitui, people like – all those fellows who left the NCEC and went into parliamentary talks for

piecemeal reforms. They're there I think; they **pre-empted the push for more comprehensive reforms.**

BP In a realistic way – you're interested in a socialist approach to–

WB No, no, no. What I'm saying now is just within the framework of changes; just changes in the literal sense. Constitutional reforms – we can only end up with a liberal constitution anyway [as] we begin this political process. So even that liberal constitution, we're not able to achieve it because of the defection of people from the NCEC to the government-formed IPPG.

BP But in 2002, right now, either the constitution will or will not be adopted, but regardless of whether it is or not, your own interests are still there to try to bring people out of poverty, for one thing.

[TACTIC: seek major reforms, not liberal agenda]

WB For me, I in fact want to reduce my effort so much in engaging in liberal politics. You know, liberal politics normally sucks us in when the bourgeoisie themselves – the rich people who benefit from this system – have all united against the masses. That's when now we have to take up the liberal agenda; the liberal struggles, just like in the '80s [actually it was the '90s] when we were pushing for the registration of parties. But once things have picked up – and Kibaki is now at the forefront of fighting for constitutional reform process. For God's sake, we go back to what we used to do. Organize for more far-reaching changes. Because it is true – [name of someone] has thousands of acres in Taveta, thousands of acres; she owns 'slaves' there. Poor people can't go to school...

[end of side B, tape one of two tapes
Start of side A, tape two of two tapes]

BP So – outstanding issues and the best way to address them?

[Globalization destroys local industries]

WB Now for us, one very, very outstanding issue, at this point in time you can't do without industrialization. You must industrialize. And if you look at this history of the American economy itself, the Japanese economy, they're all of the status paramount [??]. Yet, at the moment, the global conspiracy against our development is just saying: open up the borders so that we can destroy local industries. And we have destroyed very many. We've got industries; so many have them have closed up. Textile industries are all closed. So see now – that is a very serious problem. It's a very serious problem. Global environment is very hostile to development of the third world. They just want to use us as a dumping place for everything, while they themselves have subsidies – you know those things better than me. Anyway, they protect their farmers. The other day they were subsidizing – what was it? Subsidized something; I don't remember. And yet they tell us – just go to hell. We have South Africa that is emerging as our 'local America' because they're exporting chicken here; chicken, milk. The hotel [restaurant] Steers – some of us who are considered patriots don't go there [it is apparently South African-owned.] Yet we have a lot of milk that is being poured [out] because there is nowhere they can sell it. And chicken, eggs, are imported from various places; yet we have them here... We can not really stimulate local development without also confronting ?? the external environment. External environment; that's one.

The other thing is distribution of existing resources. The other day I was in Zanzibar and I asked them to take me to a slum. And they told me there are no slums in Zanzibar. And the reason is they shared the land in 1964; well, the revolutionary government ...if you don't farm it, they would take it away.

So for us [Kenyans], we have lots and lots of land which is very poorly used; sometimes not even used at all. And people have no places to say, no jobs to do, so our local energies can?? be used because of the manner in which our resources are owned...Even some of that land that is used is not used for the right purposes. Because if our priority is food, for God's sake we can suspend planting flowers. If our priority is food, we don't need to make coffee, plant coffee...they produce jobs but [land use] should [correspond to] our priorities. There's no point planting flowers if we have a hunger crisis. I'm just saying our economy is oriented to the Western market as opposed to addressing most of the local problems. We have to have an integrated economy that can be able to ...no point of buying dollars then using those same dollars to buy maize. That's just playing around and raising costs for nothing. But I'm saying

BP In terms of strategy, your own tactics at different times in your life; right now what is your strategy [to advance human rights].

Strategy: break the Western perspective

WB Now, my strategy, at the moment: I realize that the starting point is to re-educate our people; give them the correct tools of analysis so they can understand what's going on. It's ?? always organized against you, but a time has come when you are going. It's always organized against you but a time must come when you are going to confront this particular crisis and say as a nation: what are we going to do, because the situation has gotten this bad. When that time it will only be possible at that moment if we have cadres [emphasis] who understand – are able to organize people ...to really go forward. We are organizing many public seminars where we are explaining things to our people. We have linked up with people in Uganda. We're going to deepen that understanding. We are in the process of – if we manage to come up with a strategy...with a paper that will make available some of these things. Because the mainstream papers are controlled by the same same people: they own it. So all [emphasis] the papers on the streets are just the same. They're all inspired and draw their analysis from the same same perspective, looking at Africa through the eye of Britain. The people don't understand. Even People newspaper is just the same; it's just a liberal paper.

BP Has [The Daily] Nation changed?

WB Not at all. In terms of ideology, all they do is expose; analyze from the Western perspective. Look at what they say about Zimbabwe [where the President was supporting a policy of expelling white farm owners from their land]. They ?? themselves say Zimbabwe's [President Robert] Mugabe is doing very bad. Please, it's common sense. What he's doing – he's not even doing enough because you can not come, kill people, throw them out of the land, stay there for years, for God's sake; it even makes us talking about him going away. I'm just saying that [we have to have a fresh perspective] ... But the papers – the newspapers: Nation, all of them, [charge] that Mugabe is committing a big crime. [We need] alternative thinking. That's why I don't even want to be heard in the mainstream. We've just been making noise, doing this, doing this, but we just come back to square eight.

BP How much of the analysis that you currently have is a Marxist analysis [or] a socialist analysis?

Socialism model

WB You know, in the search for the solution to problems, I think one has to approach with an open mind. If you restrict yourself to a particular paradigm, then that also become narrow. So for us, all we know is that we need to work...and we get a lot of inspiration from socialism. We've had – Christian social democrats also do that; socialist government in France. We also think we need to talk about alternatives. So we're a bit broad. It's not necessarily confined to Marxism as its defined.

BP The Social Democratic Party [in Kenya] for you doesn't work?

WB It's not a Social Democratic Party; it's only social democratic by name.

BP It's a kind of personal question: you haven't given up seeking change.

Activism compared 1980s vs. 1990s: more complicated.

WB Well, I don't think we have a choice. We have just to continue struggling or we shall all perish...So I'm still in it. I only realize that's it more – the challenges we are facing now are bigger than what we were facing in the '80s. The quality of the struggles in the '80s were better because the ideological divide was very clear. Now we've been joined by so many people who have the same, same goals. Yet they are masquerading as the leaders who want change. So now, actually struggling to emerge as the true leaders is very, very tricky, not to mention the fact that people don't understand what's going on properly. So I've finding the qualities of our struggles in the '90s and this particular millennium – this century – more difficult and more challenging than they were in the '80s because of ethnicity.

We used to have a clear divide between those who liked the government and those who don't like. And that cut across all communities. But now we have...

Ethnicity - divisive

BP Has ethnicity helped or hurt?

WB It has really hurt [emphasis] the human rights movement. It's one of the worst things that has ever happened because even arriving at the best leaders is not possible because people want to choose one of their own. So even organizing when you have to come together you have to be effective you may have to pick someone from this tribe and another from the other tribe so that you can [choose] the leadership. But that fellow may not be competent. So I'm saying that these are new things that didn't exist in the '80s so much. **The least multi-partyism has done to us is 'balkanize' us our society so bad the nation no longer exists.**

BP Would you rather not have the multi-party system?

Multi-partyism is wrong mode; try no-party system?

WB In the context, I can say this for sure, that if it was possible for us to have freedom of speech without political parties as they are, I would really go for that. I don't know if a no-party system [as Uganda tried under Yoweri Museveni] works, but if people are free to talk as I'm told they do; if they have the village councils and have their meetings and money comes to them to plan, me I would rather

try the no-party system, if at all it's possible. I have not read about it much. But I can say for sure that multi-partyism is the wrong model for us.

End of interview.