

REITH LECTURES 1961: The Colonial Reckoning

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Lecture 4: The Problem of White Settlement

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I must confess that it has been difficult to keep back this question of white settlement for this talk. Much that I have been saying about African nationalism and British policy applies also to the settled areas of British Africa. With one fundamental difference: a British government can pack up and go when the moment for abdication arrives. But where there is a hard stratification of black majority under white minority, and the black layer begins to heave into political assertion, the whole structure threatens to disrupt. Consider the areas of conflict in Africa. Algeria? A million settlers, six years of war. The cost? Perhaps 200,000 lives, so far! Angola? Thousands killed by African massacre and Portuguese repression. The Congo? A chaos from which thousands of Belgian settlers have fled. Kenya and Central Africa? They now face Britain with her gravest remaining problems. South Africa? Three million whites in a rigid stratum still holding down 10,000,000 Africans, but at what cost in tension and injustice!

Africa's total population is estimated at 230,000,000— 225,000,000 Africans, some 5,500,000 Europeans—that is, less than two Europeans to every hundred Africans. The majority of the Africans are the Negro or Negroid peoples south of the Sahara. And even in Algeria and South Africa the whites are only a minority. Between these two regions (which are some 3,000 miles apart) are scattered the remaining Europeans; the majority, north of the settled Rhodesia, are mainly birds of passage—government servants, business men, missionaries and so on. Even in Kenya, a very large proportion of the 65,000 whites are not rooted settlers.

Africa is, therefore, pretty solidly African. How is it, then, that the small numbers of Europeans do not represent a small problem? Most of the world's nations are amalgams, formed gradually through migration and mixture. But the modern domination of the world by the West was accompanied by migration of a new and powerful kind. The migrants arrived abruptly from across the oceans, with all the power of their strong civilization, their new weapons, new techniques, and the strength which came from their retaining contact with their base in Europe. Crowded, industrious Asia offered them no foothold for settlement. But in the Americas, in Australia and New Zealand, the immigrants found weak, scanty peoples and these they dominated, and sometimes destroyed. They then built up their own utterly different civilization.

But, since these newcomers were rationalizing people, they had to justify their actions. Remember the behaviour of the Spanish conquerors of the lonely empires of the Aztecs and the Incas. In the age of Discovery most of the discoverers were men of violence. So here was wholesale plunder, slaughter, and enslavement of the peoples of these fascinating but fragile civilizations. The pretext was the spreading of Christianity, yet for the first time colonialism had to meet the real challenge of this

faith. A great Christian, Las Casas, came back from America to report the appalling cruelty of his own countrymen, so great that he feared God would destroy Spain for her misdeeds. He appealed to Ferdinand and Isabella. Another cleric opposed him. He appealed back to Aristotle who had considered this issue, as indeed he had considered most others. Although not always consistent about this, he did lay down that war could be waged against men who, 'though intended by nature to be governed, will not submit, for war of this kind is naturally just': 'By nature', the key words with the injurious idea, to be so often repeated or implied by later ages. Las Casas made the noble, and, as we now think, the only reply: 'All the peoples of the world are men'. But, alas! Las Casas, while pitying the poor Amerindians, who could not stand up to ill-treatment and hard-labour, encouraged the importation of Negroes who were so well able to do so.

The English adventurers and their American descendants dealt out much the same treatment to the Red Indians in North America. Some of these tribes defied both conquest and slavery. 'We are not your slaves', said the leader of the famous Six Nations. 'These forests, these lakes and rivers are ours, and before we will part with them we will spatter the leaves with your blood or die every man in the attempt'. There followed the ghastly, long-drawn-out struggle which lives on as material for schoolboy romances, and for ceaseless manufacture of so-called 'western' films to satisfy the sense of adventure—or is it the suppressed blood lust?—of our urban civilization. President Theodore Roosevelt wrote the Red Indians' epitaph in his book *The Winning of the West*, 'The settler and the pioneers', he concluded, 'have at bottom had justice on their side: this great continent could not have been kept as nothing but a game preserve for squalid savages'. We may, therefore, be grateful to the late Gary Cooper for stripping the romance from this grim story in his last television commentary. Was there, this makes us ask, no middle course?

West Africa was too inhospitable to tempt our own seventeenth and eighteenth century forefathers to do more than pick up their slaves on the coast. Some West Africans, it is said, told a European that they meant to put up a statue, many, oh! very many times life-size, to their great protector and deliverer. The European complacently inquired whether the choice would be Wilberforce or Buxton. 'No', came the reply, 'the mosquito'.

The British immigrants, like the Dutch, but unlike the Spanish and Portuguese, drew a rigid racial line between themselves and the natives. They meant to retain both their political control and the purity of their blood. Hence the angry humiliation of the awakening Africans, when they tried to make the first grades in the new Western civilization and ran into the rigid colour bar. For the Germanic speaking Europeans, British, Germans, Americans, and Dutch share a deep bias against inter-marriage with the Negro race. We cannot avoid confronting this granite-hard fact. It lies at the very heart of our present problem in Africa. This conscious, or unconscious, fear of race-mixture accounts both for the white man's innermost ring of defence and for his outer ring of political, social, and economic ramparts. It explains many of the news items we get from the southern United States, from South Africa, the Rhodesias and Kenya, and from Notting Hill, with the news of occasional retaliatory orgies of raping of white women in the Congo.

British settlers in tropical Africa have had the additional fear, conscious or sub-conscious, of being such tiny minorities. Many years ago, when waiting in Aden for a ship to take me across to Somaliland, then still a pretty wild place, I suddenly had a feeling that I could not leave the relative civilization of Aden and plunge into that unknown land across the sea. It was not ordinary physical fear, certainly not sexual fear. It was the fear that myself, this white, English, self-loved, cultivated self, would in some way be lost, overwhelmed, cut off from its base among tens of thousands of other beings, not necessarily inferior but utterly alien and uncomprehending. The nightmare feeling passed, and I have never felt anything like it in Somaliland or anywhere else. But how many settlers and indeed missionaries, especially in lonely places, may not sometimes add this half-conscious dread to all other more rational fears.

Races, it is often said, are divided by a culture-bar as well as a colour bar. There is also the class bar. Many Kenya settlers belonged to what we used to call the gentry, if not to the aristocracy. They came from a country of still strong class divisions. They saw the African tribesmen living in their dark little huts, either naked or in greasy goat skins. At home they had had no social contact with their servants and labourers—how much less would contact seem possible where barriers of race, and of mutual incomprehension, were added to that of status! It was therefore not easy for the settlers to adjust their attitudes to the first educated Africans who arose from the masses to imitate, or, as the settlers might think, to challenge or caricature them. African nationalism today demands compensation for this long inequality. Yet settlers shrink from the idea of living under African rulers. The settlers' future in Kenya and Central Africa hangs in the balance.

Consider first the settlers' side. The regions in the east to which our countrymen migrated differed completely from West Africa. The west had a large population, many important chiefs and considerable states. Its heat and soil made its coastal regions a natural greenhouse for the steady production of cocoa and palm oil. This almost ready-made native economy meant a ready-made revenue. And, if Africans were to be helped to advance, governments had to build up revenues. Britain neither could nor would have poured out the necessary funds. Now contrast Central Africa and Kenya, mostly poor soil, much arid steppe, a scanty and ill-distributed rainfall, and, therefore, a scanty ill-distributed population, most of it far more backward in civilization than in West Africa.

Achievements of the Settlers

Yet there were some areas of high cool land, especially in Kenya, almost uninhabited, which white settlers could make richly productive, which could repay the building of a railway. But only at the cost of long practical and scientific experiment in types of soil, of seed and of livestock, in hard-bought experience of the fickle climate. In Southern Rhodesia minerals, asbestos, gold, chromium, coal, set the production graphs climbing, and manufactures followed. In Northern Rhodesia a string of mines rear their shaft heads out of the bush and belch out flaming slag. Between 1945 and 1952 the output of copper rocketed in value from some £7,000,000 to nearly £70,000,000. Unlike West Africa, therefore, these settled countries have complex, European-type economies, highly dependent on scientific research, capital and managerial skill, and with African populations increasingly dependent upon industrial

wages. Settlers ask how these new and still precarious economic structures could be put tomorrow under the control of inexperienced African governments.

That is the economic side. On the human side, the settlers, the farmers above all, have committed themselves, their resources, and their families to Africa. They did not go out as philanthropists, but most of them, after taking one look at Africa, saw themselves—and still see themselves—as agents of civilization. I think especially of Kenya, of friends who put their small fortunes, their officer's gratuity perhaps, into a raw block of the veld. They broke it into shape, built a small house, ran in and out of debt as prices or climate failed them. The wife would make a garden with the glorious range of Kenya's flowers; would care, as so many have done for their African labourers, and their labourers' wives and children. These countrymen of ours have given all their hearts and hopes to that glorious land. Today they must choose— either to stay under an African government or to pull out, perhaps in middle or late age, to face a new life, abandoning all they have struggled to create.

Turn to the African's side. He now sees himself as having been treated as a despised inferior, discriminated against, his social life disrupted by labour migration and other forces. Above all, he fears for his land, the land of his family, his fathers, their spirits and their graves, the security for his old age. And this in his own country, as the result, as he sees it, of the recent intrusion of white men! Add to this the political side. And—here we come to Aristotle again—it was part of the settlers' earlier case that the Africans were inherently unfit to rule—'intended by nature to be governed'. Here came the usual argument about the 2,000 years which, they said, it had taken Britain to reach her present civilization. In the nineteen-thirties I used to study the newspaper, the Nairobi *East African Standard*, and read the settlers' angry speeches and letters attacking the government, very often for its protection of African interests. More and more Africans were also reading them, and I would weigh their cumulative effects on these readers who were getting no very good example of civic behaviour. I would hear the not uncommon light remark by settlers, who could have no acquaintance with the dimensions of evolution, that Africans were 'just off the trees'.

Bewilderment and Resentment

Is it unfair to the settlers to remember these things now when relations are so different—and so difficult? But is it fair to the Africans *not* to remember that this was the atmosphere in which their first bewilderment could harden into the resentment of an almost incurable humiliation? They feared that the settlers would win their struggle to gain what they called 'self-government' as they had in South Africa and—a nearer parallel—in Southern Rhodesia. About 1930 they very nearly did so, and I well remember the intense struggle in Britain of those of us who opposed this surrender.

But for the masses the land issue was always closer and more crucial. Many investigators have measured out the exact amount of inhabited land that was taken away from Africans in Kenya. It is, in fact, a small proportion of the whole. But few Africans will accept the figures. This is because their numbers have swelled under Britain's peace and social services; because they now produce more, and need more. They look out of their little plots to the large nearby European farms. It was the Kikuyu who suffered most from these resentments. Their beautiful wooded hills stretch down from the foot of their sacred Mount Kenya to lap around Nairobi. They

go out to work on the European farms. They crowd into the capital, gaze at the European luxuries through the plate-glass windows. They are the most ambitious, the most sophisticated, perhaps the ablest of the Kenya tribes. Minds full of bitter anger and envy within were open to incitement from without.

So we come to Mau Mau, that most ghastly of rebellions with its bestial oaths and cult of torture and murder. Today we busy ourselves studying the psychology of frustration both in nations and classes and the perversities into which it drives its victims. A Kenya leader said in effect the other day 'Call us savages and we will go back to savagery'. How deep must have been the frustrations of the Kikuyu to drive them to practices which deliberately violated the sanctities of their own sexual and tribal life! Both morally and physically the outbreak injured them far more than the settlers. By the end, 80,000 were in detention; how many killed in fighting, how many loyalists murdered, cannot be known. I cannot forget that look in the eyes of the so-called hardcore prisoners, men and women, dark faces made so much darker by their look of settled hate. Europeans lost strangely few to the Kikuyu knives. I was only twice briefly in Kikuyu country during the Mau Mau, but just long enough to know what it was to wonder if a noise in the night meant that they were coming—far worse than any London air-raid fear—and one with which the settlers on their isolated farms, often women alone with their children, had to endure for two or three years on end. And yet— if there had been no white settlement, would there have been Mau Mau?

Mau Mau's Results

We British hate even to admit that the blackmail of violence can pay. Yet even before Mau Mau ended, the Government had made such vigorous efforts to divert the disordered Kikuyu to agriculture that this tribe can now show perhaps the best farming in Africa. The Government actually began to force through the revolutionary advance to individual tenure. But Mau Mau had even wider results. This one tribe had disrupted the whole life of the colony, demanded the mobilization of all its resources, the dispatch of British troops, the expenditure of £60,000,000. There was surely only one conclusion—that Kenya could never face another tribal movement of this kind—still less a movement wider than the tribe. And that, in turn, must surely mean that the Kenya Africans could not for long be denied the independence that had been given to the Sudan and Ghana, that was clearly coming to Tanganyika and Uganda. Hence the Lancaster House Conference of 1960, when Mr. Macleod shattered such illusions as the settlers still cherished about their future. How much more serious would the issue be today if the settlers had succeeded in gaining so-called 'self-government' and so entrenched themselves more strongly, yet still hopelessly, in the heart of black tropical Africa!

Now look at Central Africa. Sir Roy Welensky is a courageous man but he has his back to the wall, and from there he has had some hard things to say about Britain and our erratic conscience. But surely the original mistake was in our ever agreeing to the Central African Federation. If we had seen Africa steadily and seen it whole, we should have realized that this was a highly precarious experiment. Why was it attempted? The Rhodesian settlers, especially those in the all but-independent Southern Rhodesia, felt themselves in danger of being caught between the two fires—Afrikaner nationalism to the south, African nationalism to the north. British

governments saw that, if Southern Rhodesia gravitated from weakness into the orbit of South Africa, both *apartheid* and Afrikanerdom would creep up north to the territories still under the Colonial Office, and would perhaps absorb Northern Rhodesia with its many Mrikaner miners. It would then come up sharp against the African nationalism of Nyasaland and of a Tanganyika which, as a United Nations trust territory, was internationally assured of its independence. But if the two Rhodesias and Nyasaland, already very much of an economic unit, could become a *political* unit, a large and potentially rich Commonwealth dominion would be born. Southern Rhodesia might then liberalize further her own native policy, and the whole region would achieve a more equal system than *apartheid*, and one capable, under British influence, of still further liberalization.

The case *seemed* reasonable. But it failed to measure the deeper forces—irrational forces, if you will—against it. Its shock awoke the still politically somnolent northern Africans. They suddenly realized that the traditional Colonial Office path leading slowly forward to self-government was being closed. Instead they were being put under the control of the Southern Rhodesian settlers. Almost all native races have been quick to recognize the difference between a distant imperial government and its all too nearby emigrant subjects—even the Red Indians knew that, and the attempt of the British Government to protect them from the lawless advance of the white frontiersmen was one of the several causes of the American Revolution. The Maoris knew it. So did the famous Chief Khama, father of Tshekedi, who bought a top-hat and a frock coat and went to protest to Mr. Joseph Chamberlain about the goings-on of Cecil Rhodes—and won his case.

So with the Africans of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. How could it have been expected that tribes on one side of a frontier could accept settler control while tribes just over the border in Tanganyika could be seen advancing freely into independence? The political leaders of Nyasaland—that beautiful crowded little land of lakes and mountains—deliberately imported Dr. Banda as their charismatic leader from overseas. And soon after they felt driven to prove to us by bloodshed their rejection of Federation. Even the Southern Rhodesian Africans who had been apparently docile under the very intelligent, paternal rule of their settler government, began to feel the stirrings of nationalism. I attended one of the first large political meetings of Africans in the native quarter of the capital, Salisbury. The packed hail was electric with the current of suddenly released racial assertion and resolve.

The gap between the races was revealed and, alas, it has widened. Attempts were made to close it in Southern Rhodesia with relaxations of the colour bar, with generous educational and other welfare services, with a new multi-racial university. Ingeniously weighted franchises were devised favouring education and wealth to give the Europeans political predominance now but to allow Africans to qualify increasingly as they advanced in civilization. On paper this gradualism may seem just what was needed for a measured closure of the gap between the races; it reflected Britain's own development of a middle class and step- by-step extension of political and economic equality. But the Africans had by now been infected with more impatient hopes. Their leaders prefer to be at the head of the African masses, and to urge them on to total victory, rather than to be the camp- followers tagging along in the rear of the white man's forces. The width of the racial divide is shown by the tragic fall of nearly all, white or black, who have tried to reach across from one side to

the other as intermediaries; and also by the relentless intimidation which Africans deal out to those other moderate and experienced Africans who try to stand against the extremist current—that intimidation, we may note, which is wielded in other racial situations, by white men in America's black south or, even more terribly today, by both colonist and native in Algeria.

The future of these settled areas is open to many questions. In Central Africa, will the local Europeans be able to retain control long enough to enable them to impose their standards of civilization—and persuade Britain to agree? Will the Africans, especially the workers in the mines and industries, realize their own economic interest in retaining the Federation, and with it that European control of a complex economy which they cannot for many years hope to manage efficiently themselves? In Kenya, the main political issue is now settled.

The responsibility of power *might* incline an African government to safeguard the productive settlers, who provide 90 per cent, of the agricultural exports. Unfortunately the scattered and heterogeneous tribes would have made unity difficult even if there had been no settlers, no Asians, no Arab coast, no irredentist Somalis. If the new African government should use violent measures to coerce dissidents, if there should be a breakdown of security, few Europeans would wish to live with these conditions. The bitterness of the settlers at being treated, as they see it, by Britain, their own country, as expendable, is beyond measure. Compensation for them presents difficult political and administrative problems. Yet surely the nation whose governments encouraged them to settle, and to believe to the eleventh hour that their position would be protected, owes them compensation.

There are times when it seems that the problems Africa sets to black alone, certainly to black and white living together, are beyond any rational solution. It is not easy for white men, above all those whose lives are committed to Africa, even to plan a just course, as they see it, between the kind of freedom exhibited in the Congo and the kind of order exhibited in South Africa. All the more since, though man does not live by bread alone, he does need the bread which only a stable economy can provide in this physically poor and precarious continent.

Yet Africans can no longer be ruled as if they were just numbers, without names or minds. They are taking over their own destiny, taking it into inexperienced, fumbling and sometimes violent, yet eager and vigorous, hands. It cannot now be taken back.