

The Multiracial Myth

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INTRODUCTION

There are no truly non-racial states today, if by that we mean consisting only of persons of a separate physical type with a distinct language and culture. All states have some mixture of races, though in some the degree of common identity in belonging to one race is so widespread as to deserve the appellation of *relatively homogeneous*; among such are Japan, China, Iran, Bulgaria, Spain, Swaziland, Morocco, the Scandinavian Countries, the United Kingdom and Australia. This homogeneity has usually arisen from the heterogeneity of the past (often the distant past), from the gradual welding of peoples of different ethnic origin into a unified society; but also, as in the very recent case of Australia, from the migration of members of an established homogeneous state into the new land, accompanied by the subjugation or extermination of the existing peoples — as in the example of Tasmania from the same area.

My justification for describing such states as 'non-racial' is firstly, that the citizens themselves see their society as mono-racial — Nordic, Arab, or Polynesian; or even (despite the race-consciousness that has spread across the world) in terms of a nationality that transcends obvious ethnic difference — Chinamen, Spaniards, Canadians. And secondly that the forms of government peculiar to these states take no account of racial difference in law or in political structures. These government forms, it may be noted, run the whole gamut, from left to right, from totalitarianism to liberalism, from feudal monarchy to industrial

democracy. And thirdly, the paradox of racial exclusiveness that all display in marked degree; the fact that whatever the form of government or the dominant political ideology, it is almost as hard for people of other races to enter into full membership of these societies as it is for the proverbial camel to pass through the eye of a needle. What European can be accepted as Japanese? What African Negro can become an Icelander? What prospects exist for Indians in Hungary or Poland? Perhaps the best example of this exclusiveness is to be found in the modern state of Israel created by those same people — the Jews — who have suffered most from its effects in European countries.

Israel, as we know, has a problem of Arab minorities, now exacerbated as a result of the 1967 war, fought to maintain her own national identity. The United Kingdom, too, is facing racial strains, the legacy of her Imperial past — itself an assertion of national consciousness. And even Australia, almost exclusively white (if we ignore the Aborigines as Australians have) and overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon in origin, has an external race problem likely to become more critical by the end of the century. Despite these qualifications, such societies remain mono-racial in type; the minorities are a matter for political accommodation within the established order, not a determinant of the political system.

THE PLURAL SOCIETY

Clearly our main concern is with those other societies of the world where government is divided between ethnic groups in some scale

of authority, so that political activity becomes preoccupied with racial interests.

It was a now rather neglected writer, J. S. Furnivall, who first called serious attention to what has become known as the 'Plural Society': the situation where different peoples, divided by religion, culture, language, ethnicity, or a combination of all four, live side by side but separately, within the same political unit.¹ In the colonial societies of Burma and Java, Furnivall found a medley of different peoples who mixed but never combined, who all, as he wrote, 'met in the economic sphere, the market place, but they lived apart and continually tended to fall apart unless held together by the British Government'.² Furnivall was arguing that under colonial rule — British, French and Dutch — economic forces had been set free to determine the new social order; because he believed such a society to be inefficient, and unmindful of social welfare, he called for a change of colonial policy to promote a common social will as a prerequisite for independence. Furnivall's influence on official thinking could have been considerable, but circumstances, in the shape of the Second World War and the consequent impetus for decolonisation of most of South East Asia, overtook his hope for a controlled experiment by the Colonial powers. The concept of the Plural Society remains, and the model has been held to be applicable in other areas of the developing world besides South East Asia, particularly our own continent. The words 'plural' and 'racial' are deemed interchangeable, though the diversity found in Asian societies was not exclusively ethnic by any means. But Furnivall's analysis called attention to the absence of a common social will in these societies and others like them. If that was the case, how was this sort of society governed? How was it held together as a political entity?

The short answer is that in colonial Burma and Indonesia, the political decisions were taken by the European administrators in accordance with the objectives of Britain or Holland. So the pluralistic nature of these societies was not *politically* significant *until* they moved towards the goal of independence by one means or another. Then the other groups came to constitute a threat to each group's interest — hence the search for some constitutional arrangement whereby a common social will could develop without destroying each

group's solidarity and their continued co-existence with the others. In every case these arrangements were cast within the mould of representative government as developed in the West.

The people were not granted an opportunity to frame their own institutions; instead political power became the monopoly of the largest group, set upon transforming society in its own racial and cultural image.

Is this then the Multiracial State? Not necessarily. As I have said, many of the divisions found in plural societies are not racial at all, but cultural or religious. India, Pakistan, and Ceylon, are such examples. Conversely, there are plural societies where persons of different or mixed race live together without political power becoming the monopoly of one group; for example, Brazil, the Soviet Union, Mexico and perhaps New Zealand.

MULTIRACIALISM DEFINED

So we may use 'multiracial' as a rather inexact method of emphasising the ethnic composition of certain plural societies. But it can also be used to describe a certain kind of hope, at once a constitutional programme and an ideological ambition. In that sense it can take two forms; the first depends upon the view that racial difference is fundamental; therefore the institutions of Government must allow for some kind of 'partnership'. Relationships between members of different races are therefore a matter for government regulation. The second, while also recognising race differences, holds that these may be sublimated where other conditions (for example a commitment to the dominant culture) are met; therefore, there is no partnership, instead there is promotion of a particular set of social values as being valid for all groups. In both forms there are perceptions and assumptions about the present condition of society, and its future organisation; hence in both there is a belief about a certain kind of State — in short, a political myth.

All this may seem a bit abstruse. We need to come down to earth and look at Africa itself, for it is here that we find societies committed to the 'multiracial myth'. This is not true of all plural societies found in the continent, however. Although the Sudan is racially and culturally divided the division can be made permanent by way of partition if all else

fails. Likewise Nigeria, where the Biafrans went some way towards achieving such a partition; and also the case of the Somalis living in Kenya or Ethiopia. Theoretically, at least, in these countries government is drawn from the whole of society; there is, in fact, Majority Rule, even though it may be the rule of the racial or tribal majority group, and even rule by a relatively unrepresentative selection of that majority group. Whereas, in countries settled by Europeans (South Africa, Rhodesia and the Portuguese Territories) and also in the special case of Liberia, it is a racial minority which, under different constitutional forms, governs the country. To this list we should add Kenya and Northern Rhodesia, as they were before Independence. The point about the racial minority, and this is what distinguishes it from aristocracies or oligarchies that have existed in many other countries of the world, is its physical, cultural and linguistic distinctiveness; rather than class distinctiveness or the relative benevolence or harshness of its record. In these countries we have or have had government through European institutions, on behalf of Europeans, in support of European values and interests; for if that were not so, there would have been no point in establishing those forms of government in the first place. The case of other immigrant races, such as the Indians in Durban or Nairobi, is different — these came, and have lived until now, on the premise of accepting (willingly or not) the forms of government then existing, or which developed subsequently.

It really is a question of Black and White, then; in Southern Africa the 'multi' in multi-racial means 'two', rather than 'many'. A fellow lecturer has reminded me that had there been no indigenous population of any size in what is now Rhodesia, this country and its social, political and economic situation would today be much like that of New Zealand, with its Welfare State, Labour Party and all. Instead, here as in South Africa, the racial minority rules in a plural society, and thereby lies the crux of our contemporary problems. The minority (or the greater part of it) will be pleased to continue this political arrangement, but social forces in the modern world have already destroyed such a prospect in other countries, and are making it increasingly untenable in our own.

Indeed, the conflict of interests between

rulers and ruled is now so fundamental and extensive that the description of 'two nations' is far more apposite to our own condition than it was for nineteenth century England. Unless their interests can be protected, the minority has no reason for existence in the Southern African environment; they will lose their individual and collective identities. In seeking to preserve these identities, the minority sustains itself by the potent myth of multiracialism.

VARIETIES OF MULTIRACIALISM

Myths are not the same as dreams: the time is long gone when genocide, the extermination of another nation or race as a separate entity, could be contemplated as a practical solution to the clash of racial interest. But it is as well to remember in passing, that we live in a world where the vaporisation of whole cities and continental populations is an accepted foreign policy option; and this in our existing state of scientific and technological achievement.

As multiracialism as a form of government loses support, even the threat of genocide might prove a powerful deterrent to alternative propositions; international indifference to the haphazard massacres of thousands of unfortunate Hutu tribespeople in Burundi — the result of a conflict of interests at least partially racial — is a blood-stained signpost in that direction.

But to return to our main argument, the search for some multiracial accommodation in Southern Africa takes a number of different forms. The present Rhodesian constitution enshrines the notion of Parity, sooner or — in this case — later, and the thinking behind it can be found in the Whaley Report. Because 'perpetual or ultimate domination by one race or ethnic group over another' is rejected, a country's constitution has the purpose of ensuring harmony between the different groups, by means of racial parity of political representation.³ Political competition between the races is potentially destructive; therefore it must be avoided; this can be done by giving equal weighting to the political power of each race. This is Parity and when it is achieved mistrust and fears will be removed and racial co-operation becomes possible. Central to this reasoning is the rejection of representation on anything close to a proportionate basis; the equal right of individuals of different race to co-exist in the same political unit, is

translated into an equal share of the political cake for each racial group. Whatever the logic of this deduction, it is arguable that there is some very rough and ready 'balance' between the preponderance of numbers on the one hand and the near monopoly of skills and experience on the other. The problem with Parity is that if it is to be expected to create racial co-operation and harmony then it must extend far beyond a division of seats in the National Assembly; at the very least into the Cabinet, the judiciary and the whole of the central government administration including the Armed Forces; otherwise these institutions will continue to be the preserve of the dominant minority. There must also be at least an equal cut of the economic and financial cake, and the meaning of 'equal' here is fraught with difficulties. How equal is \$20 million to each race for education services when the same amount of money has to be spent on ten times as many people? How equal is 45,000,000 acres of land each in terms of population pressure and economic potential? Consider these points in the context of South Africa rather than Rhodesia and you can appreciate that to give any substance to the Parity concept amounts to nothing less than a social and economic revolution.

Whatever the extent of Parity, at whatever pace it is to be attained, it rests upon yet another belief, that social behaviour can be differentiated in terms of one's own racial group; that all people of the same race have a full identity of political interests. Although this is patently untrue (otherwise, why impose banning orders, expulsions, restrictions on members of the dominant racial minority?) it serves as the basis of another form of multi-racial government: Apartheid or Separate Development, the partition of the State between the various racial groups in order that all can live apart from each other, in a peace controlled by the dominant group. In such a state, there is, in contrast with the design for racial Parity, no overlapping membership between the groups, and so no federation of separate or equal political units. Of course, it may be politically expedient, as in South Africa and South West Africa today, to encourage the same units to become fully independent, but that is complete partition, a likely but not inevitable development of multiracialism.

What is it then, that cements the Apartheid

society together with any permanency? It can only be the continued rule of the dominant, white minority, purged of its more extreme racist ideology, perhaps willing even to absorb a minority smaller than itself, such as the Cape Coloureds, but always keeping the power of final decision-making in its own, civilised, hands. As Sir de Villiers Graaff said in 1969:

The real interests of South Africa as a whole, as well as of the races constituting South Africa can best be served and advanced by the leadership of the White group. Why should we deny that leadership to the people of South Africa?⁴

So the racial homelands are the continuing expressions of that leadership role; however economically viable they may become, they are a white, and not a black, creation. Even with the financial and technological means to realise their highest potential, their existence is seen as constituting a denial of the black man's identity.

It is Portugal's claim that in her African territories social discrimination based on racial differences is not allowed. Since Angola and Moçambique appear to be launched, however hesitantly, on the road to full autonomy, can these be the truly multiracial states of the future? Certainly individual race relations are not regulated by the State, and there does not appear to be any deliberate physical or economic segregation. But Portuguese colonial policy has never imagined any alternative to white rule; the validity of traditional African society has been rejected in favour of assimilation to Portuguese institutions; miscegenation derives not from colour blindness but colour consciousness, from the belief in lighter skin colour as a mark of political respectability. Consequently while there is no Apartheid, there is no Parity either, only the dominance of one racial group and its culture to the exclusion of any other. In these territories the overwhelming majority — 95 per cent in Angola, 97 in Moçambique — are of the negro race; only a handful of these, together with the 3.5 per cent of European and Mixed Race (Mestizos) play a role in political decision-making as a function of their cultural commitment; simply being a member of the African society of these territories is no ground for taking part in their government. Portuguese like to point to Brazil as the model for their

African States (as they are now officially designated) but in that country traditional society has been all but obliterated: the indigenous Indians constitute only 3 per cent of the populations while persons of European descent account for over 63 per cent, bound to those of mixed and African blood by common ties of culture and religion. However unrepresentative Brazilian Government may be, most Brazilians have some means to promote or protect their shared interests. The African in Mozambique or Angola will never enjoy such opportunity unless there is a conscious policy for economic and social advancement; advancement which, as has been the case elsewhere in plural societies of Africa, can occur only at the expense of the non-African minorities.

CONCLUSION

To summarise, the multiracial state is a European vision, designed to protect the white minority in perpetuity. Whatever its form, it sees the African in the role of the learner, the supplicant for white values in a world of white institutions. Separate Development, Integration, Partnership, Assimilation, are all varieties of the same myth. Mr. Smith's 'Responsible Majority Rule' is just one more to be added to the list. At the heart of this myth is a concept of Africans, or what Africans might become, expressed in these words of the liberal Sir John Moffat in 1959 calling for an harmonious multiracial state in Northern Rhodesia:

a genuine partnership between the races . . . can develop only . . . by education and by closing the cultural and economic gap between the races. We need . . . a large and prosperous African middle class . . . [and the creation of] group loyalties based on common interests which cut across race.

Today, independence under an African

government is enjoyed in a Zambia that displays anything but harmonious race relations. That country demonstrates the truth about majority rule, that as Ali Mazrui has pointed out, it is an ethnic, and not a democratic, conception.⁶ In 1965, just before U.D.I., leaders of the European community in Kenya, such as Michael Blundell and Humphrey Slade, sent a message to Ian Smith, telling him that life for Whites under a Black Government was not so bad after all. 'Come on in', they said, 'the water's fine.'⁷ But Mr Smith has remained, resolutely, a non-swimmer. The point is that multiracialism is not achieved by the removal of racial discrimination; Blundell, Moffat and many others thought so, but surely General Amin has finally disillusioned them. For Africans engaged in discovering their own identity, it is the principle of Racial Sovereignty that is important, so important indeed that in asserting it, the suffering caused to themselves may rival the excesses of the Slave Trade.

I have just been re-reading the 1955 Handbook of the now defunct Capricorn Society, with a crest of a zebra on a background of Africa. It is explained that, 'the crest symbolises how each race is dependent on the other. Although the Zebra has both black and white stripes, it is one living organism and has but one heart. If a bullet pierces the zebra, the harm to the animal is the same whether the bullet has entered through the black, brown or white part of his skin'.⁸

According to the ecologists, unless we act quickly, there will be no zebras left alive in Africa. But the logic of conservation makes little impression on African peasants in need of food and living space. Likewise without co-operation from the majority, the multiracial zebra has no chance — he must face immediate extinction or a slow death in some European zoo.

REFERENCES

¹*Colonial Policy and Practice*, Cambridge, Univ. Press, 1948, especially pp.303-12.

²*Ibid.*, p.123.

³Rhodesia, *Report of the Constitutional Commission 1968* [W. R. Whaley, Chairman], Salisbury, Government Printer, 1968, p.11.

⁴Quoted in H. Adam, *Modernising Racial Domination*, Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1971, p.59.

⁵Sir John Moffat, 'The function of the state in Northern Rhodesia', in *Rhodesia. The Development of a Multi-racial State*, ed. O. Prescott, [Lusaka] The United Northern Rhodesia Association, 1959, Proceedings of Study Conference No. 3, p.21.

⁶'On the principle of racial sovereignty', in A. A. Mazrui, *Towards a Pax Africana*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967, pp.21-41.

⁷For Blundell's approach, see *East African Standard*, 22.x.1965.

⁸The Capricorn Africa Society, *Handbook for Speakers*, Salisbury, 1955, answer to question A15.

