

tise it. In his Epilogue, Mr. Luthuli, in a passage less austere than most, grieves over those whose good and honourable desires led to banishment, deportation and gaol, while their families suffered poverty and acute distress. One may well grieve over them, and over South Africa. And one may grieve over the noble writer of this book, whose life has been spent in brave struggle and resistance and suffering, when it could have been spent more fruitfully and creatively in the service of South Africa. ●

Are Africans Backward?

EDWARD ROUX

The Progress and Evolution of Man in Africa, L. S. B. Leakey (Oxford University Press)

THIS LITTLE VOLUME contains two lectures recently given by Dr. Leakey in Britain. In the first he discusses the progress of man in Africa, in the second Africa's contribution to human evolution. The writer is intrigued by the interesting fact that Africa, considered in recent times the most backward of the continents, appears to have been not merely the place where man evolved from non-man but also the region where the first form of human culture was developed.

What constitutes man as distinct from non-man is of course a matter of definition. Dr. Leakey thinks the basic criterion of humanity is the ability to make tools to a set and regular pattern. That this occurred for the first time in Africa is well substantiated by the archaeological evidence. The implication therefore is that "Africans" initiated that long progressive process which led to modern civilisation. But this is not the same thing as saying that the Africans (i.e. the Negroid peoples as we know them today) were the pioneers of culture. Presumably there was a time when all men were Africans, since no men existed outside of Africa.

There is confusion here between places and peoples, since Dr. Leakey at one moment is comparing cultural developments in Europe and Africa ("while Africa cannot challenge Europe in respect of the oldest depictive art . . . man in Africa during the early stages of the hand-axe culture was already sufficiently interested in colouring matter to transport lumps of red ochre for many miles to his home") and in the next breath is considering the chaos in the Congo where he says Europeans are mistakenly trying to impose their ideas of democracy upon Africans accustomed to quite different systems of government.

One can agree with Leakey when he says that he "does not blame racial factors for African stagnation during the period which commenced about 5,000 B.C. and continued until a few years ago." There were other factors, mainly geographic and climatic which were beyond human control.

The cultural revolution which made man a recording

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animal (a writer and builder) started neither in Africa nor in Europe, but in Asia. It affected the Greeks 2,800 years ago, the Germans a thousand years ago and the Africans only in modern times, not because the Greeks were "superior" to the Germans and the Germans "superior" to the Africans, but because of purely fortuitous circumstances.

The argument here is clear enough: environmental and not racial factors seem to be responsible for African backwardness. But this argument is not sustained with any degree of clarity, because Leakey fails to face up to the fundamental difficulty which bedevils almost all discussions involving race. This difficulty arises from our inability to separate out the effects of nature and nurture in human affairs.

There is of course an irrelevant diversion (a false trail) which must be avoided before the discussion gets under way. This is the subjective idea of "superiority" and "inferiority". Leakey realises this: people are prone, he says, to consider as superior the qualities of the race to which they happen to belong. In the case of the Africans there were "certain ways" in which they were perhaps superior to their white invaders. A number of examples are given. Africans believed in practised family planning; the Kikuyu for instance that a woman should not start another child before the previous one was two years old, because both mother and children would suffer. Africans did not impose the death penalty except on the persistent murderer. They believed that restitution must be made to the bereaved family. Other examples concern the rights of women and the avoidance of drunkenness.

It is strange that a biologist should consider such differences between European and African custom as evidence of *inherited* mental and psychological differences. He does not actually state that he regards these differences as genetic in nature but it is clear enough that he means this because these examples are introduced by the following statement:

"As a social anthropologist, I naturally accept and even stress the fact that there are major differences, both mental and psychological, which separate the different races of mankind. Indeed I would be inclined to suggest that however great may be the physical differences between such races as the European and the Negro, the mental and psychological differences are greater still."

A statement such as this can have little meaning unless the terms "mental" and "psychological" are very carefully defined. Individuals within a group differ in ability and temperament. The causes of such differences are highly complex, involving both genetical and environmental factors. Whether there are overall statistically significant differences in genetic factors between races which affect social and political behaviour is something which we cannot determine from existing data.

On the face of it there are other and more obvious explanations as to why, for instance, "one man one vote" has resulted in dictatorship in Ghana or Russia and a form of liberal democracy in Holland or England.

EDWARD ROUX, a lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand, is the author of *Time Longer Than Rope*.

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