



To the Editor

The African system

SIR — I read in your issue of June 1966 the review of *The Pacifist Conscience* by John Papworth. His remarks about Rhodesia and African civilisation are of particular interest.

The Rhodesian Front Government is trying to maintain and develop the traditional African tribal system. As you will be aware it is the first Rhodesian Government to try to restore this in the Tribal Trust Lands.

In Rhodesia we are trying to weld the traditional African system with the European democratic system.

Believing as he does in the African system I suppose that Mr. Papworth agrees with Rhodesians that the support for Rhodesian Independence given by the Rhodesian chiefs at two "indabas" represents the views of their tribesmen who form 61% of the African population as they had been consulted in the traditional way.

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[Mr. Papworth writes:

"There are two answers to be made to Mr. Pakenham's letter. First, his assertion that the Rhodesian Front Government is trying to 'maintain and develop the traditional African tribal system,' is based on a misconception. The African tribal system existed long before the white man ever set foot in Africa. Attempts by others to direct it can only subvert it. Mr. Smith's Government is no more able to develop the African system of government than the British Government can develop Mr. Smith's.

"The second misconception arises from the idea that the tribal African system can be welded to the European democratic system. Where is a European democratic system? In Britain? Where all the M.P.s make the same noises regardless of party and have no power in Westminster? In Germany? Spain? Semi-fascist Greece? Portugal? All these countries in any case are involved in military pacts and preparations which can only destroy them in the foreseeable future. Is this what Mr. Pakenham wants for Africa?

"The last paragraph in poppycock and I think Mr. Pakenham knows it. The Rhodesian chiefs are appointed by the Government and paid to do its will, so that when they express agreement with European interests in defiance of the interests of their own people they are behaving as quislings.

"The Indaba (so called) is no more indicative of the real wishes of the African people than the entrails of a chicken are of the Europeans. It is in fact nothing more than a skilful exercise in public relations with the object of misleading public opinion." — EDITOR]

Oral literary expression

SIR, — The attention of members of the panel in a recent discussion of African Oral Tradition was rightly focused on the folktales. How far they succeeded in reaching clarity is a question for individuals to decide. But I think Mr. Nkosi ran into some difficulty. Having earlier given the impression that folk story telling is primarily for school children who hunt for stories in order to have something "to tell to the class" next day at school, he went on, such as an afterthought, to cite instances of the ceremonial use of folktales among the Zulus.

There seemed to be the basic assumption that the whole activity involves adults telling the young ones tales. That is why I find embarrassing Dr. Lienhardt's statement that "there is not one good and convincing account - - - of adults sitting together in an African village, telling one another stories for entertainment." This would have been a most startling case of generalisation but for his clever addition of "from my own reading." When Ama Ata Aidoo stressed elsewhere that "folk story telling is a major social activity among African peoples," I guess she had in mind adults as well as children participating in this communal art.

Folk story telling, like its sister-genre riddling, constitutes an important phase in certain ceremonies and rituals. Among the Oras and particularly at Evbiobe folk story telling is the concluding phase of an annual festival. The ceremony is usually held in the house of the *Odiion-Urukpa*. There, adult villagers gather to tell one another tales with the sacred oil lamp giving a dim lighting that lends an added touch to the solemnity of the occasion. The narration is punctuated at convenient intervals with refrains, jokes, and asides, while all along, a kola-nut bowl and a glass of *kain kain* pass from one hand to the other. The ceremony may last till dawn; particularly when the story of *Odihirin bi Agbofenomon* is introduced — a story that takes a whole night to narrate!

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Integrating Europeans

SIR, — Matthew Nkoana, writing on *An African Bourgeoisie*, accuses Leo Kuper of having a "racially warped mind." Whether this be true or not, I wish to point out that Mr. Nkoana's article is full of prejudices itself: it is hard to see how he can claim to judge Kuper.

His prejudices are similar to those of which he accuses Dr. Kuper. He is both racially and politically biased. I would like to mention his historical and political fallacies but there is space only to discuss the important racial ones.

To substantiate my allegation I shall quote two or three sentences that make large and virtually meaningless claims and yet are clearly the basis of Mr. Nkoana's deepest convictions and create the whole sphere of his thinking.

His first sentence. "To all intents and purposes the Europeans in South Africa remain Europeans." This is crass nonsense: what is European about the writing of Roy Campbell, Dan Jacobson, Alan Paton, Van Wyk Louw? The European influence is there, obviously, but the roots are in Africa. Mr. Nkoana goes on to say, "associating together in all spheres of life to the exclusion of Africans." For him it is their associating together and their exclusiveness that make them European — for this is the effect of his rhetorical style. He doesn't really care twopence whether they have remained European or not. It doesn't occur to him that they may have achieved an indigenous culture, whatever its evils, whatever its evidence of

"racial neurosis."

This brings us to his next prejudice. It looks very much like an Africanist prejudice to me, but I am only a layman. He says "In a sense South Africa is not a multiracial society, but a country into which a European group has been transplanted, a group that refuses to integrate with the local population." Why, I ask, must integration into the local population be the only criterion by which a European becomes an African? What connexion is meant between the term "local" (proprietary?) and "African"? What is alien and what is local? There is a hidden mystique here that powerfully controls the casual journalistic manner of Mr. Nkoana, but its implications are both unpleasant and unrealistic. Even though he seems to offer the option of integration so kindly ("This, however, does not mean that individuals from that, i.e. European, group, who so wish may not be integrated into the African population.") There is an underlying notion that this is necessary and the terms are the annihilation of individual identity and total assimilation by the African group. What of those who feel, not "superior" or "inferior" but "different" and do not develop a feeling of "kinship" or "belonging" though they might feel very strong bonds of sympathy?

It occurs to me that unless African Nationalists propose to destroy, in the time-honoured manner of settling racial conflicts, all the whites who feel "different," it would do the cause of racial harmony a world of good if they set out to find out what European indigenous culture in Southern Africa was in other than in political terms. Especially as they have several quiet years ahead. They would then have the means of understanding the people whose lives they intend to modify somewhat.

ERIC HARBER
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[Mr. Nkoana writes:

"Mr. Harber would be well advised to re-read my article, which dealt with Professor Kuper's views on political organisations in South Africa, and not cultural institutions or trends. As far as the latter are concerned, there is today not much to choose between the race groups in our land, except insofar as they have been affected by racialism.

It is a pity that Mr. Harber has not elaborated on his allegation about 'historical and political fallacies' as I am afraid he is a victim of the white man's distorted version of South African history, which is being rewritten now by us (see my article elsewhere in this issue).

I must say my description of Professor Kuper's as a "racially warped mind" is pretty strong, but it was amply substantiated and Mr. Harber, who seems to have been bitten by this into jumping to the defence of the professor, does nothing to refute it.

Mr. Harber's extravagance of language is no substitute for logic. To describe my submission as "crass nonsense" and then go on to admit that there is some substance in it ("The European influence is there, obviously . . .") is to run with the hares and hunt with the hounds.

I do not know of any "time-honoured manner of settling racial conflicts," but the whole basis of my argument was that those who feel different cannot justifiably complain about being excluded from a nation-building programme.

Nowhere in my article was the term assimilation used (it is used only by those who are haunted by it); what I wrote about was integration into one nation in economic and political terms. Unlike in the beginning when we came from different cultural backgrounds, we have a lot in common with regard to cultural values." — EDITOR]