

A Matter of Landscape

TIMOTHY HOLMES
A Story

A few hours after take-off, the whispering moth of a plane was flying in crystal daylight over the brown sea of the Sahara. Looking out of my window on the port side, I could see nothing but the blue above and the dun below, many miles below, though in the far distance there were the beginnings of a bank of clouds over the Nile or perhaps the Red Sea. The seats are arranged two-three in economy, and they were all taken. Peering over them one could see only the tops of heads, some glistening and well combed, some revealing the bald patch, some neatly coiffeured, some rough and dry. Young children were beginning to clamber, and infants in their special cots were starting to squawk as the effects of the sedative their mothers had given them for silence' sake wore off. The hostesses started the breakfast round, and the rustle of early edition London papers subsided into the bored murmur of people eating.

I sat with my coffee on the flipdown in front of me, my book in my left hand, enjoying the comfort of the seat and the satisfied hum of the aircraft: I was a commuter on this run. London-Nairobi, back and forth at least four times a month, had been for the past five years and experienced enough to discuss in detail the points of all the different planes I had used on the route, the grumbling Britannia, the wobbly Comet, cumbrous Boeing, and now the sleek and smooth VC10. If I felt inclined this alone equipped me to start and sustain a conversation between stops, but that day I wanted quiet, to be on my own, a feeling that persisted, perhaps grew, when the occupants of the two seats next to mine began to prepare for talk — a comment on the fruit juice, a comparison, the offer of cigarettes, exchange of newspapers: a north-American voice, east coast, an English voice laced with the slight whine and abrupt intonation of southern Africa. It was the American who really began:

'You going all the way?'

'Yes, I'm going to Lusaka.'

'You going on holiday?'

'No it's no place for a holiday. I live there.'

'Is that right?'

After a few minutes I knew I had beside me a lecturer in Ethnography at the Lusaka university: he was a Rhodesian, had been to school in England and to university in Johannesburg, where one of his teachers had been the renowned Raymond Dart (the American didn't know about him), Africa's greatest pioneer palaeontologist. The American was a consultant, on his way to Lusaka for a month or so looking into a project the government was interested in --- making sacks from kenaf fibre. The Rhodesian knew about kenaf.

'My name's Macrae, Steve Macrae.'

'Robin Smith.'

'It sure is good to meet you.'

Macrae glanced across me out of the porthole trying to see the earth.

'I suppose all that brown stuff down there is the desert,' he asked. 'Yes, it's one of the deserts. There're a lot of deserts in Africa --- Sahara, Kalahari, Namib, Somali.' This was the American's first trip to the continent, as his researches into kenaf had

taken him mostly to the far east . . . 'You know, the Philippines, Vietnam, New Zealand.' The best kenaf grew in Indonesia, but 'No one bothered to make a proposition of it.'

'What about a drink, hey Robin?' The Rhodesian looked cautiously at his watch, and Macrae laughed a loud happy laugh that woke a baby two rows down. 'The day I meet an Englishman who takes a drink without looking at the time, I'll buy drinks for the whole house. Hey hostess. What you having Robin?'

'Gin and tonic, but I'm not any more English than you are.'

'I didn't mean any offence, but I've seen a lot of Englishmen do that in my time. It's great in London having the English for breakfast and offering them drinks when they've finished their marmalade.' He laughed again.

'My brother went to school in South Africa, a school run by Catholic brothers. Some of them were French Canadians, and once my brother nearly got beaten for calling one of them a Frenchman; that was some time back of course.'

'Sure.'

'It's rather the same with us. My family has been in South Africa and Rhodesia for generations, and we certainly don't feel very English --- just the language, but then we must remember that language is only part of a person's make-up. His culture, his personality, is made with a lot of other factors as well.'

It seemed to me that the Rhodesian's voice had sharpened, his accent become a little more clipped.

'Well, my folks have been in the States now since God knows when, but we still like to make out we've got some connection with the old country.'

'A lot of Rhodesians go even further than that --- they think they're still in England, family silver on the table, visits home every year, they feel Rhodesia is just another county, one of the better ones but.' He smiled at his joke: Macrae didn't follow. 'Why, one of Rhodesia's ex-prime ministers went so far as to suggest that Rhodesia should be incorporated into the United Kingdom.' It took Smith five minutes to explain. Macrae knew nothing about the politics of central Africa, nothing of its history.

'I just go from hotel to hotel, office to office. Doesn't really make any difference to me where I am, only get home about four months of the year. Doesn't really help to know too much. Let's have another.' He swirled the last inch of opal liquid around the glass. 'These countries are pretty small beer anyway.'

Smith had the sense not to begin sentimentalising: It's easy to sentimentalise about home: past glories, future hopes, pioneer effort, the landscape, magic Africa. I've heard it often: the White commercial traveller, morosely drunk in a third-class bar in Ndola trying to make friends with the Black and imperturbably disinterested barman --- although he was white, he was 'born in the country', 'loved it', counted himself a 'white African' --- he 'understood the people,' had 'known present cabinet ministers when they were still so high' . . . But the imperturbability remained, a slight smile, slightly patronising on the barman's face as he asked 'Bwana, do you want another drink?'

Smith was talking about his work, his career. He had done his first degree in Johannesburg, and was now busy on his Doctorate hoping to complete it within the year and was returning from a visit to Manchester where he had been to see Gluckman about his thesis, an ethnological survey of a remote river valley, two hundred miles to the east of Lusaka, the lower Luangwa valley. When he had finished, he thought he would move on to social psychology.

'What do you find so interesting in all this voodoo stuff?' Macrae asked.

Smith sipped his drink, fingering the piece of lemon to release the bubbles that had collected under it. 'It's just a matter of finding out . . . We've got to find out about things, about people, about the societies we live among. And I enjoy it.'

'Well if you enjoy it, that's O.K. I don't enjoy kenaf much, but I'll be able to move on from there. Artificial fibres are going to kill kenaf anyway.' Beneath us, the earth was turning to green, a grey hazy green with tiny bundles of cloud scattered across it. Two hours to Nairobi and lunch. I ordered a beer.

'Mighty big place, this Africa,' said Macrae.

'You could drop the US into the Sahara and bury it without a trace. Throw in Europe and China as well without much of a squeeze. It's a big, very big, continent with very few people.' I felt that Smith was moving towards a theme. He ordered another round of drinks.

'That certainly will be refreshing after Boston,' said Macrae. 'Take the country I come from. It's three times the size of Britain, it's virtually flat, it has four million inhabitants. This explains something about the people. This tribe I'm investigating has only about five thousand members, and lives in a valley the size of, let's see, Maryland. Dangerous country, a lot of wild animals, rotten with malaria and bilharzia, and all the rest, hookworm and so on. Poor. Bad soil, terrible climate, hot as hell most of the years, well over a hundred every day for nine months of the year. But a beautiful social order. A system that really works, like you'd imagine the most perfectly planned society to be. Strong family ties, strict moral code, many more than ten commandments, but sensible, a method of allocating land that defies analysis but ensures that everyone gets his fair share. A very tight knit society. And the people are happy!' A romantic note had crept into the ethnologist's voice.

'I guess there's not much freedom for the individual in that kind of set-up.'

'No, there can't be. A free man there would starve or be killed or go mad. The society is a human defence against the environment, a coming to terms, particularly against the hugeness of Africa, against the isolation and loneliness. But it is a very extreme type of society --- for example a man is not allowed to make jokes with his maternal uncles, or marry anyone but the daughter of a paternal aunt.'

'Thank God I didn't have to marry one of my cousins.'

'Of course, this type of tribal structure can't last, in fact it's almost gone already. A few more schools, a government agricultural project, migration to town, and it's finished.'

'That won't be too terrible for the kids who don't want to marry their cousins.'

'But then we get all sorts of new problems. People get shaken up when they jump from one culture to another --- Americans call it 'culture shock' --- think of the gap between being for example a kenaf sack mill-worker and being what I've told you about.'

'So you're swopping the backwood boys for the city boys?'

I was growing restless with this conversation and wished they would change the subject, start on about the Philippines perhaps. I put my dark glasses on and lay back in my seat, thinking dreamily about some incident in London. The plane tilted a little as it changed course a few degrees: we'd be getting over Kenya soon. My neighbours had another drink, the American ordering a double and enquiring about pretzels. He was offered a bowl of nuts. A faint air of unease infected the cabin as men shuffled to the lavatories and women wearied of entertaining their children.

'But what makes you so damned different from the English?'

Macrae grunted as he pitched a handful of peanuts into his mouth.

'I was coming round to that. It's a matter of landscape. A man brought up in London wouldn't be the same man if he'd been reared in the Luangwa. That valley has produced an extreme form of social organisation, just as a big city, New York, or Tokyo does. But the forms of organisation that work in America or Japan don't necessarily work in Africa. They change. You said yourself what a relief Africa would be after Boston. I wonder.'

'Why?'

'The space, the distance, the freedom from those restraints of home. Something peculiar happens to a lot of whites in Africa. They live in a thin expatriate atmosphere, they seem to expand, to grow larger than life. They can't or don't integrate: they expect Africans to integrate with them, if they think that way at all. They are generally quite rich, so they are able to indulge. They indulge in activities they feel make their characters more suited to their expanded horizons, physical horizons that is. They like eating, drinking, womanizing, entertaining, on a grand scale. See themselves as big game hunters shooting elephants all the time. You may enjoy it for a while, but I expect you'll soon get weary of it.

It's a bit like being in a room full of shadow-boxers. They dream. But they're cut off from society as a whole, cut off from civic life. Even in Rhodesia or South Africa where there are well established communities of whites, you'll notice this feeling of being cut off. They don't notice it so much now they've got used to it, but you would.'

The American was munching. 'This is all too far out for me.'

'Let me tell you a story.'

I could imagine him in the lecture room, spicing the theory with picturesque anecdotes loaded with point. But we would soon be in Nairobi.

'There was this fellow. I didn't know him well but my brother did. He grew up in the Cape, just on the fringes of the desert. His father was a sheep farmer, an Englishman, who had married an Afrikaner girl, both quite rich. Peter, that's the boy, was very intelligent. He wanted to be an artist, or a writer. Even as a small boy he used to spend days and days on his own, or with the servants, out in the bush. Took an interest in everything, he came to know all the birds and insects and so on, collected snakes, all the things a lonely boy would do. But he was far more intelligent than any of his friends, and used to read a lot.

'His father was quite proud of him, sent him off to boarding school and then to the university in Johannesburg, a year or so after my time, but my brother was there. Peter took a degree in engineering, mining engineering. His father had insisted on that, hoping it would keep him down to earth.

'His first job was at Messina, a copper mine in the far northern Transvaal, a very hot place indeed. I've driven all the way from the Cape to Mombasa, and Messina was the hottest place by far. It's in the Limpopo valley, flat, baobab country. You wait till you see your first baobab. In fact Africans had been mining copper there for centuries before the whites came, but the South Africans keep quiet about that sort of thing.'

Macrae was looking slightly puzzled, but Smith didn't pause, except to sip his blueish drink or draw at his cigarette. 'Peter liked it there. It was new country to him and he liked his work as well, but he didn't get on with the other miners. Also the ancient diggings in the hills round about fascinated him and set him thinking, and when a job came up at the Kinglele mine in Uganda, he took it. That was before independence broke out in east Africa, and South Africans could travel more freely. But in Uganda, he didn't get on with the British -- the colonial service had a lot of men in it who were rather snobbishly anti-South African. But, as before, he liked Uganda, made some friends among the Africans, and after a while married an English nurse who was in Africa apparently to get away from a claustrophobic family of retired majors and civil service types. They used to go out into the game parks a lot, Mr. and Mrs. Peter that is, and he started work on a book of drawings. Then trouble came, first the anti-South African boycott: he nearly lost his job then, then the usual pre-independence agitation and rioting. His wife persuaded him to leave, and he moved south again, this time to the Copperbelt, that's just a few hundred miles north of Lusaka.

'This time, the pre-independence fever caught him rather differently. He was promoted, to discourage him from leaving. But his wife ran off with a British colonial civil service officer who had been pensioned off with a lot of money and was going back to England. About a year after she'd gone, he took up with a pretty Nigerian girl, also a nurse. This caused a bit of a scandal at the club, but he took no notice and seemed quite happy for a while.

'If he had one vice it was hypochondria. When he was a boy, he'd been bitten by a pet mongoose that turned rabid about a fortnight later. He was so ashamed of having been bitten at all that he didn't tell his father, and spent six months of agony waiting for the first symptoms; that would have been the end.

'Sure, I know that, we have mad foxes in the woods in New England.'

'All children who grow up on farms read the medical dictionary, so he knew what to expect. Anyway, when he'd been on the Copperbelt for about two years, he got the idea that he had

Hansen's disease.'

'What in God's name is that?'

'Leprosy. He imagined that the small warts on his hands were the nodules, and found others on his skin, especially on the leg. The nurse told him they were nothing. Then he began to think he was losing the feeling in his fingers, and used to go around the house touching hot taps and cold taps, sunny window ledges and the wall of the refrigerator to make sure. He started wearing gloves and heavy-toed boots.'

'How do you know all this?'

'My brother told me. He's a doctor on the mine, and the Nigerian worked with him. Then he started to plan his life: he'd keep his job as long as he could, until he was found out. Then he'd have to go to a leprosarium. He thought he'd like to go to one in the Transvaal, run by the Dutch Reformed Church. He drew up lists of things to take, books, clothes and so on, and even wrote to book a place! . . .'

The stewardess's voice came over the intercom to warn us

that we were about to land. The rolling high country of Kenya could be seen through the cloud, and passengers started to reach up for their hand luggage and fasten their seatbelts. Smith went on talking through the bustle and chatter. My ears were sore and slightly deaf with pressure bubbles, but as the plane landed with a whoosh at Nairobi, I heard Macrae say, 'Is that right!' People were rubbing their eyes and pressing fingers into their ears.

'Yes, she got him to the doctor in the end. Nothing but heavy scurf and a slight sub-cutaneous parasite infection in his left leg. It took him a few weeks to get over it.'

We were standing in the aisle now, sweat pouring from foreheads. There was a lot of noise and tired scuffling, and I had difficulty in catching Smith's words. As we were going down the steps on to the tarmac, I heard him say 'Yes, they've got one.'

'Fast work' said Macrae.

They were ahead of me through the main entrance of the building, and together turned into Transit. I cleared myself through customs and Immigration, found my driver, and in less than an hour was home in Limuru.



COLONIALISM IN ANGOLA WILL BE DEFEATED

Five centuries have elapsed since Portuguese colonialists infiltrated into Angola. Since then, the Angolan people have been subjected to the most ruthless and brutal domination known anywhere in Africa. But history repeats itself: wherever there is oppression there is bound to be resistance. Since 1482, massacre and torture highlighted the Angolan people's oppression. In this most dramatic period, Angola sacrificed her best children: Antonio Manumualuza (King of the Congo Kingdom), Lieutenant M'buta, Queen Nginga, King Ngola, King Mandume, King Eukukui, King Matuyakevele, King Mwatiava and many others. However, due to the regionalism of that age, the resistance did not take on a national character, and our ancestors did not succeed in completely defeating the enemy.

Since 1961 the Angolan people have been waging an armed struggle. This armed struggle in Angola is but a continuation of our ancestors' resistance; though the Portuguese Government campaign widely to convince the world that it is the work of foreigners who are for the Portuguese, the communists. If this were true, the echo of resistance today, and that of our forefathers, would not resound throughout the country.

But, neither armed struggle nor guerrilla warfare make victory inevitable. Victory is only possible if the Angolan struggle takes the form of a people's war, or "if the historical reality is interpreted correctly by the people and the forces involved are utilised correctly."

BIRTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF ANGOLAN NATIONALISM

Angolan nationalism was born from the social and regional disparities which, indeed, has impeded the attempts at political unification of the Angolan groups operating from outside Angola.

The first nationalist movement can be traced back to 1929. In Luanda (capital of Angola), LNA (Liga Nacional Africana), AMANGOLA (Associação dos Naturais de Angola), GREMIO AFRICANO, ASSOCIACAO dos REGIONAIS DE ANGOLA were mainly formed by the African "assimilados" and by the "mulatos". Later on, in Southern Angola, AASA (Associação Africana do Sul de Angola) was founded mainly by the employees of the CFB (Benguela Railway).

These Associations had social aims as well as clandestine objectives, such as the creation of conditions for fostering the political consciousness of the Angolan people. But, due to the lack of communication between the northern and southern parts of Angola, this very promising embryo of nationalism fell on false barren soil.

From 1953 to 1958 in Luanda, PLUA (Partido de Luta Unida dos Africanos), MINA (Movimento de Libertação de Angola), and the MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola) were formed, merging at a later stage, to form the present MPLA. These groups are the true development of the aforementioned groups (social and political) which were led mostly by the Angolan petty bourgeoisie. This urbano-bourgeoisie alignment was not only responsible for the slow march towards the expansion of the political ideas in Angola as a whole, but also for the acute political imbalance that Angolan nationalism is experiencing and suffering today.

The Angolan emigrants who went to both Congos (Kinshasa and Brazzaville), Zambia and South West Africa are also victims of Portuguese colonial repression. But their status as emigrants does not affect their Angolan status. All of them are an integral part of the Angolan Nation.

The emigrants in exile were organised into tribal associations to defend their own interests, which were mainly of a social nature. In the Congo (Kinshasa), UPNA (União das populações do Norte de

alists would not go to such blighted areas.

Now South Africa practises some kind of socialism-fascist socialism—by taking ownership of railway transport, and larger shares of the Iscor Steel, Pretoria, and Escom powers, and controlling every manner of business of the black man. It has Stalin-like central planning to enforce economic separate development, with laws like Job Reservation, 90-day detention, house arrest, Sabotage Act, and the Suppression of Communism Act. All these laws are characteristic of a fascist-socialist country. Why must S.A. pretend it belongs to the Western bloc, when by the nature of its rule it does not? Perhaps it is because the Western countries are holding major investments of capital here. But these Western states are fooled if they think S.A. is in any way a Western-type democracy.

When three-quarters of the population of a country are ruled and oppressed by a quarter of that population, the minority of rulers forms the only bureaucracy, and since the minority are the only ones that can launch political parties, the country becomes a one-party state. The political parties of the majority are banned. The two white parties in S.A. only differ in their squabble on how best to oppress the non-white. They are merely the hawks and doves of white domination. They are in fact one party, since true opposition belongs only to the majority which is suppressed. This is therefore a one-party state.

Under this system, private property belongs only to the bureaucrats, the minority rulers. The 'public' is the embodiment of a particular group of individuals who hold property, i.e. the bureaucrats, the minority rulers. In S. Africa the minority possess everything, and any deals and contracts of investment the free world makes with such a country, it makes it with the bureaucrats, the minority rulers. (The Western Powers know this as they are trading with S.A.) The Black majority owns virtually no property, that is no land and no houses. The Black man is a migrant labourer in the urban area where he lives. Everything he has is leased to him, and it can be taken from him at the whim of a superintendent, who often says he must own in the Bartustans. So since the bureaucrats in S.A. own everything as a group as in communist countries, there is no private ownership of property in South Africa.

White rule does not tire of harping on a seeming state of peace in S.A. Yet over 99% of P.A.C. members released from jail are banned and banished. They live with gun barrels at their temples. That is the kind of peace existing here. Now to crowd a group of people in a concentration camp, with guns pointed at them, and then howl "there is peace in the camp" is the vilest form of self-deception. It is the vilest form of contempt for human intelligence to expect mankind to believe you.

Peace is a voluntary state, arising from contentedness. It is not a compulsion on people, facing them with horrible spooky monsters and nightmares. If you silence a crying child by thrusting a lizard at her, never assume that she is at peace. Peace is not to be maintained by the gun or by fear. One is not going to whip a child who wailed when he saw a snake under his bed; one will rather proceed to kill the snake, but you who will whip the child and not kill the snake, have yourself planted the snake there. You do this because it is not the subordination of the child that you want to achieve, but his death.

Our death is what you have always sought. But you want to destroy us imperceptibly. It has been your aim to make yourselves, the whites, the majority in this country, and you realised your immigration policies do not do this quickly enough. For I can tell you that unless you resort to outright genocide, you are not going to have the extinction of the Black man in this country. For every man you kill, we give birth to three.

Yes, I would like to remind you of what might happen in future. Don't cry about the Indians in Zambia. It is not the Indians you will see suffering in the future in S.A., it is yourselves. Oppression is exercised by the white minority. We might forgive an error of knowledge, but not a breach of morality. Hanging freedom fighters in Rhodesia, with full knowledge of what you are doing, knowing that your judgment of man is the pigmentation of his skin—that's not an error of knowledge. Likewise when you persecute African traders, you turn them against yourselves. Watch.

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can the majority hope that government will act in their interests. This is the very basis of democracy. It is not the whole of democracy, for that includes some rights for minorities too. But no one has previously suggested that the problem of ensuring justice for minorities can be satisfactorily solved by giving the minority in a state total power over the majority.

I do not wish to be misunderstood on this point. I am not now arguing for immediate majority rule in Rhodesia. I am arguing that there must be no independence before that majority rule has been achieved. If Britain, or Ian Smith, were saying that the majority in Rhodesia are not ready for independence yet, so colonialism has to continue, I might disagree. But my disagreement would be of the same kind as other disagreements we have here. It would be a disagreement about timing, about techniques—not about a principle. But as it is, we are disagreeing about a principle. For we are disagreeing about handing a majority over to the control of a minority. And once that is done there is no going back on it. Even if the British Government decided later that it had made a mistake, it could not undo it. The minority would already have the power—and would be using it.

Yet the implication of some of the remarks which have been made, in the Conference and outside, is that by insisting on NIBMAR as the only basis on which independence in Rhodesia can be recognised we are somehow being undemocratic. It is said that only the people of Rhodesia themselves can decide whether they are willing to accept any particular constitutional proposals; it is not up to Commonwealth members, or anyone else, to decide on their behalf.

This argument sounds very nice. For the right of a people to decide their own destiny is what all the argument is about. It would be possible for the British people, tomorrow, to decide to hand over their government to an aristocracy, to a dictator, or to impose educational qualification for the vote or membership of the Government. They could decide to pass responsibility for the administration of this country to Germany, U.S.A., or anyone else. The rest of the world may be amazed or appalled at such a decision, but it would have no right to interfere if the British people had freely come to the conclusion that this is what they wanted.

The Czechoslovakian people could have accepted the Russian occupation; they did not do so. But suppose the Russian Government had found some stooges to take over the Czechoslovak Government; in the course of time this 'new government' would almost certainly have held a referendum to legitimise its authority. Would the rest of us not have looked with some scorn at the result? We would have done so for very good reasons. It would not mean that we rejected the right of a people to decide to be occupied by foreign troops, and governed by those installed by those troops. Our scorn would have been the result of knowledge that a 'test of opinion' made at the point of a gun is meaningless.

Mr. Gorton made the same point in relation to Vietnam. He said that Australia hoped to see the people of South Vietnam freely able to choose their own form of government in a manner that was not only free but seen to be free; it was this outcome that the Paris talks must secure.

I understand that. I also understand why the South Vietnamese elections were not held in areas effectively under the control of the Vietcong. It was argued that the people in those areas could not be expected to vote against the Vietcong, because to do so would be to invite reprisals from the Vietcong. The act of voting would not make the Vietcong go away even if that was what the people wanted, so no effective choice could be offered to them. To organise an election in that area, even if possible technically, was not only meaningless, it was also highly dangerous to the participants.

This is exactly the position we take in Rhodesia in relation to 'principle No.5' of the Fearless Proposals.

First, we in Tanzania regard it as highly suspicious that Britain should think of asking the people of that country whether they agree to being governed by a minority which is distinguishable by its money, its privilege,—and largely by its colour. We cannot understand why Britain wishes to do this in Rhodesia, whereas elsewhere