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## BOOKS

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### The Idea of Colonialism

INTELLECTUALS really are the limit, especially those on the other side of the Atlantic. Having spent decades preaching the iniquities of colonialism, they suddenly wake up to its virtues just at the moment when the colonial administrators are beginning to lose heart. After rendering the whole concept arid with the salt of their scepticism, they start throwing off supposedly fruitful ideas about how it can be recultivated to the advantage of world peace and security. Recently published, for example, is a massive volume, *The Idea of Colonialism*,\* written by a posse of distinguished American scholars, which solemnly puts into multi-syllable words what every colonial administrator has known in his bones all along: (1) that the withdrawal of the Western colonial Powers from presently dependent areas would enhance the power of the Soviet bloc; (2) that there are many cases of peoples who are now incapable of self-government and who could not maintain their independence; and (3) that the inter-relationship between dependent and developed peoples cannot be wholly severed in fact. Or, to put it more succinctly: if the anti-colonialists had their way the world would be plunged into economic and political chaos, the dependent peoples would exchange one relatively light yoke for another far more onerous, and the Soviet Union would inherit the earth.

What none of these distinguished contributors realise, however, is that the will to resist these developments, having been corroded ceaselessly for a quarter of a century, cannot be restored by this kind of posthumous injection of realism. Doubt and defeatism have spread too far in the Western body politic to be cured by a few pats on the back from a score of Harvard and Columbia Doctors in political science. Their belated recognition that British and French colonialism has many virtues reads like a centenary reappraisal of an unjustly denigrated

figure of the past. Indeed, one is painfully reminded of those scholarly treatises which seek to show that the divine right of kings was not such a bad doctrine after all, better at any rate than the devilish right of dictators. Interesting, even stimulating—but no amount of posthumous justification will put King Charles' head back on his shoulders.

The truth is, of course, that the "idea" of colonialism is no longer a worthwhile subject for discussion. Nobody any longer believes in the white man's missionary burden. Where it is at all possible to withdraw without running excessive dangers, the colonial Powers do so with relief. In the awkward areas, like Algeria, the argument is not about colonialism at all. It is a battle between two armies for the control of a particular piece of territory to which both lay claim—a classical struggle for power. Neither the French settler in Algeria, nor, for example, the British in Kenya, base their case on any colonial ideology, any more than in the 16th century England based her claim to Calais on a colonial ideology or the Spanish their claim to the Low Countries. They do not say: "We *ought* to rule these backward countries." They say: "What we have we hold, because our right is as good, if not better, than yours, and in any case we have more guns." And although their coloured opponents still pretend to believe in anti-colonial ideology, and exploit its emotive potentialities wherever possible, in practice they have long since shown their contempt for it. In Algeria the FLN does not for a moment think of allowing self-determination for rival rebel groups; they quite simply cut their throats. Mr. Nehru has no intention of allowing the Kashmiris to choose their own future; nor does Dr. Nkrumah hesitate to lock up his Ashanti dissidents.

The simple truth is that both sides of the colonial debate were intellectually untenable—an attempt by the colonising Powers to disguise their superior strength as superior virtue, and by the colonised to cover up their weakness by a show of moral strength. Now that the former are no longer so strong and the latter no longer

\* *The Idea of Colonialism*. Edited by ROBERT STRAUSS-HUPÉ and HARRY W. HAZARD. Atlantic Books, Stevens, 42s.

so weak, neither finds it so necessary to go on with the make-believe. Unfortunately, although both colonised and colonisers have lost faith in their ideological fictions, neither have yet taken the next step, which is frankly to recognise the facts of power. The colonising States, reluctantly made aware of the hypocrisy of their pretended motives, find it difficult to recognise that their actual motives—maintenance of economic and strategic advantage—are in no way invalidated just because their disguise has been seen through. Equally, the colonised peoples, whose pretence it has been to be struggling for abstract Freedom, for Humanity, cannot get themselves to realise that in the modern world anti-Western crusades are not only irrelevant but actually dangerous—to themselves, above all. The momentum of ideology continues to drag both parties down the road to ruin, long after each side has ceased to believe in it. As a result, the colonisers continue to hang on, but without heart in the battle, and the colonised, although winning the anti-Western battle, leave themselves defenceless in the face of Russian and Chinese expansion.

The difficulty, of course, is that both sides have a certain short-term interest in continuing the ideological debate. Nobody would deny that it helps the dependent areas in their struggle to wrest power from the West to pretend at the United Nations that their aim is individual freedom, democracy, self-determination, etc., just as it helped the West in the heyday of its colonial expansion to boast of a civilising mission. So long, therefore, as the colonised peoples continue to talk nonsense about "Liberty" the West will continue to talk nonsense about "Civilisation." Neither side can afford to shoulder the onus of realism unilaterally—at least not in public.

What is needed is a generation of coloured intellectuals able to debunk anti-colonial hypocrisy from within as effectively as during the last few decades white intellectuals have debunked colonial hypocrisy from within. Unfortunately, there is no Asian Mr. Gollancz to tell some of the new Asian statesmen that they are something of a humbug; nor is it reasonable to expect Dr. Nkrumah to set up an Accra School of Economics under some black Harold Laski to urge the British to stand up for their rights. It is, I suggest, up to a new generation of Western intellectuals to set about the massive process of re-education. They must not only restore realism to their own peoples but also to Africa and Asia. Having in the past wonderfully fogged the issue, they must set about clarifying it.

I am sure this cannot be done by the method adopted by the writers in *The Idea of Colonialism*. Judicious analysis of the benefits dependent peoples receive from the colonial status, mild

contradictions of the wilder charges against imperialism, balanced suggestions for a combined N.A.T.O. approach to the development of backward countries, do not begin to measure up to the problem. Merely to defend colonialism, or to attempt its reform, or to point out the dangers of too precipitate a change, allows the debate to remain in its present intellectually stultifying groove. The only way to inculcate realism is to re-phrase, so to speak, the motion under debate. It is, I think, valueless to-day to argue about how best to lead the dependent peoples towards self-government, or how best to discourage newly-independent peoples from abusing their new freedom, or how to deal with areas which for one reason or another can never hope to be independent. Defined in these ways the argument at once reverts to ideological slogan-thinking which goes round and round in circles. The rewarding question is surely: "How can the emerging continents of Asia and Africa be fitted into a world balance-of-power which does not leave the West hopelessly at a disadvantage?" Until this root question is answered it is impossible to think realistically about the branch problems, such as which country should enjoy independence and when.

It seems to me that what is called the evolving Commonwealth, or the supposedly imaginative Gaullist concept of a French Federation, only postpone any realistic grappling with this root question. To suppose that Britain, India, Ceylon, Ghana, Nigeria, and Australia, can form a viable political community, is manifestly absurd—a hangover, on all sides, of colonial habits of thought. In the long run, the relationship between Africa and Asia and Europe and America will be determined, as are all international relationships, on calculations of national interest which by definition cannot be fixed on a permanent basis. India's links with Britain, for example, will depend more on what China does in the future than on what Britain did in the past.

Just as in the 19th century the relationship between individual European Powers was constantly shifting, in accordance with changes in the balance of power, so to-day relations between Afro-Asia and Europe and America will also be subject to diplomatic revolutions. Nothing has happened to make the brute facts of power less decisive. The only difference is that the West has become so accustomed to regarding the new continents, as, somehow, "moral problems," requiring a wholly different approach from that normally governing international relations, that it cannot adapt itself to current reality. It persists, therefore, in searching for a new, enlightened colonial policy whereas what is actually required is a new, realistic foreign policy.

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If imperialism means an attempt by one State to increase its power beyond its present borders, then the essence of imperialism is expansion. Are Britain and France to-day expansionist Powers? They are, in fact, the very opposite, concerned only with preserving the status quo. It is precisely the so-called anti-imperialist States, like India and Egypt and Morocco, who wish to expand. It is, for example, India which wishes to expand her power into Goa against the will of the local inhabitants, rather than Portugal which wishes to expand into India; it is Ghana which boasts of her intention to extend her influence throughout all West Africa; and it is Morocco that claims "sovereignty" over the Sahara, where no Moroccans live.

The difficulty is, of course, that imperialist Powers usually only earn that title after they have ceased to deserve it. While they are in the process of expansion, they can usually concentrate attention not so much on what they are gaining as on what other ex-imperialist Powers are losing. After World War I, for example, Britain and France vastly increased their power in Europe and the Levant by undermining the Hapsburg and Ottoman Empires. What was, in fact, Anglo-French imperialism looked to much of the world as Anglo-French anti-imperialism and support for "self-determination." To-day, the tables are being turned. Egypt is hailed as a great exponent of anti-imperialism because she is successfully erecting her own empire under the guise of breaking up Britain's. The same thing happened in India. As Britain withdrew, the new State of India extended its power into Kashmir and Hyderabad. There is nothing necessarily wrong in this. Nor is there necessarily anything right. It is not anti-imperialism triumphing over imperialism, not liberty replacing subjection. It is one Power replacing another.

Imperialist Powers on the make have always used the principle of self-determination to help disrupt empires on the wane. Nineteenth-century British penetration into Africa was enormously facilitated by championing one tribe's right to independence from some other tribe; or one pretender chief's claim to overthrow the current legitimate ruler. To many groups, therefore, Britain arrived as the great liberator. Their right to self-determination was augmented rather than diminished.

Take another example. In Eastern and Central Europe after the first World War, the principle of national self-determination was also used by new imperialism against old. The destruction of the Austro-Hungarian empire—the old imperial order—at once called forth new imperialisms. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and Yugoslavia rushed into the power vacuum and struggled among each other to carve out

the maximum sphere of influence possible. Germany put an end to this struggle by exploiting the same self-determination principle against these very countries. The German minorities in Czechoslovakia and Poland became the excuse for a new German imperialism, an excuse which, in the notorious *Times* leader at the time of Munich, was accepted by the West: "Self-determination, the professed principle of the Versailles Treaty, has been invoked by Hitler against its written text, and his appeal has been allowed."

It seems to me that writers and thinkers on international affairs to-day are falling into a similar trap. We must, they say, "come to terms" with Arab and Asian nationalism, which in effect means allowing them to determine their own future as they see fit. This, however, is a novel doctrine which does not stand up to a moment's analysis. There is no possible moral obligation for one State voluntarily to allow another to take actions which are gravely contrary to its own interests. If Britain refuses to withdraw a base, this has nothing to do with colonialism or any other "ism"—except perhaps realism. It is because Britain believes that withdrawal would endanger the balance of power. Exactly the same considerations should govern Britain's attitude to Ceylon or Egypt, for example, as would govern America's attitude to Italy. If Italy went Communist and threatened to vote itself behind the Iron Curtain, the United States would probably intervene with force. If Jordan threatened to merge with Israel, Egypt would also hold itself free to prevent this by force. And India has already moved to prevent Kashmir from merging with Pakistan. This would not be colonialism, any more than Britain's decision in 1939 to fight for the independence of Poland was colonialism.

It is absurd to suppose that just because the newly independent countries were once colonies, and the West was once their colonisers, they should be regarded as outside the normal patterns of international behaviour. We are, in short, no more obliged to accept "Afro-Asian terms" than any other country's terms. Nor is the West likely to gain the long-term friendship of Africa and Asia by acceding to their demands for precipitate withdrawal. The idea that if the West gets out fast enough a grateful coloured world will rally to its side is naïve. Far from it being the *realpolitik* school who still think in colonialist terms it is, in fact, the liberals who still persist in expecting former colonial areas, who are now independent, to behave quite differently from any other States in history. They refuse to believe that these areas will ever graduate into the world of power-politics—an attitude which, to my mind, smacks of intolerable patronage. Those who recognise that Asia and

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Africa could prove formidable rivals seem to me far less colonial-minded than those who continue to treat them like children who can be bribed by sweets.

Advocates of "hanging on" as long as physically possible are hardly more sensible. Clearly there comes a moment when imperial possessions prove more a source of weakness than strength. The Afro-Asian independence movement constitutes a major diplomatic and political revolution. Areas of great strategic and economic importance can no longer be relied upon as falling within the Western sphere of interest. But there is nothing unique in this kind of setback. The challenge it poses is not fundamentally different from the sudden desertion of a major ally in the struggles of the past such as, for example, the seemingly catastrophic decision of Maria Theresa to ally the Hapsburgs with the Bourbons against Britain in the mid-18th century. This came to Britain as just as great a shock as do Mr. Nehru's cold war antics to-day. But Pitt did not waste time lamenting; nor did the scholars of the day write books, entitled "The Idea of Hapsburgism," about how to recapture Austrian friendship. Instead Britain made every effort to restore her security by forging new links with Prussia.

This surely is what all the Western countries who are now faced by the Afro-Asian revolution should be doing to-day. They should be seeking to create a new balance of power in the world which would enable them to accept the loss of empire without sacrifice of security. In theory this is by no means an impossible task. A political merger between North America and Western Europe would outweigh any economic, military, and even prestige losses which the West has suffered in Africa and Asia. Not only would it enormously facilitate in strict material terms the exploitation of our assets, but it would also demonstrate to the world that the West still has the will to survive by adapting itself to current reality. There can really be little doubt that the future lies with that part of the world which first succeeds in overcoming the anachronistic particularism of national sovereignty without falling back on the anachronistic instruments of foreign conquest. The spectacle of an independent sovereign Belgium is as absurd in the 20th century as the spectacle of a dependent Hungary is tragic. Western respect for the principle of national sovereignty is as unconstructive as Russia's contempt is destructive. With so much to gain from unity it will surely puzzle posterity why the West put off taking the plunge for so long.

How, it will be asked, would Western unification solve the challenge of Afro-Asian nationalism? The answer is very simple. There is no problem of Afro-Asian nationalism. The problem only arises in an acute form because the West is weak and purposeless. The West clings to its colonial possessions for two reasons: power and pride. It needs its colonies because they provide bases, resources, lines of communication and, perhaps, more important, because "the idea of colonialism" provides a sense of purpose for which as yet no real substitute has been found. But Western unification, by providing immensely fruitful new sources of power and new and inspiring political goals, would cut the West free from these preoccupations.

Of course, this sounds fanciful and visionary. But so, twenty-five years ago, did the idea of the West's voluntary withdrawal from Africa and Asia. It has taken an intellectual revolution in the West to make withdrawal practicable politics. What is needed to-day from Western intellectuals is a similar concerted effort to condition public opinion to accept a voluntary merging of national sovereignty, without which the basic material and moral strength necessary to come to terms with Africa and Asia cannot be created.

*Peregrine Worsthorne*

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MISS SHKLAR has put together an anthology of quotations upon a single theme: political and intellectual despair. She has bound it together by a very intelligent commentary of her own. Beginning with the romantic movement and the aftermath of the Enlightenment, she has brought the tale of lamentation almost up to the present day. The material available to her is of course immense. She might have continued right up to the last supplement (any last supplement) of *The Times Literary Supplement* or to the latest book (reviewed in *The Observer*) with some such title as "The Fall of Western Man" or "The Nemesis of Reason." Her central source is, inevitably, Nietzsche, and her sub-title, "The Decline of Political Faith." She also abstracts that which her theme requires from Hegel, and his concept of the "unhappy consciousness," rather under-emphasising the fact that he was the most radiant of optimists and the most utopian of utopians. It is true that he was the most formidable of all critics of the Enlightenment and of the claims of pure reason to find justice in human affairs. But he believed that the End, the final adjustment of man in the perfect society, was at hand and that he was there to announce it, at the right place and at the right time. Such a belief seems now almost a form of madness, part of the general madness of millennial hopes released by the French Revolution and by Napoleon. Perhaps we cannot now altogether recapture the original astonishment at these events, the apocalyptic sense that there is after all no limit to what men, or a single man, can do in re-making society. Then came the disintoxication, and there had to be an explanation that would show what went wrong. "Why the French Revolution failed" could well be the title of the mature works of Hegel and of the early works of Marx. Miss Shklar's tale of woe begins.

But it is now possible to stand back and to review the events in better proportion. Are there really good grounds for this loss of political faith, for this despair of reason in the arrangement of human affairs? After reading Miss Shklar, and many of the supplements and weekly reviews, and even some of the novelists and essayists, who constantly revel in the decline of our culture, I still cannot see that there are. It seems to me that these prophets have misunderstood the original programme of the rationalist philosophers, and therefore have been looking for the fruits of reason in the wrong place.

The rationalist philosophers of the 17th century guessed that the natural order could be made clearly intelligible to human reason: its underlying structure, being the product of reason, was accessible to reason: the colour and variety of its surface were only lent to it by our senses. The fruit of reason would be natural philosophy, and these philosophers were themselves natural philosophers—that is, scientists. Their guess has been proved correct—the natural sciences, and mathematics, which is their basis, have become unquestionably the greatest achievements of human reason, exactly as the rationalists forecast. If anyone sincerely believes reason to be the highest power of man, then he must also believe that the work of modern scientists and mathematicians is the greatest of human achievements.

But most of those who have written philosophy, or quasi-philosophy, from 1815 onwards, and who are quoted by Miss Shklar, have naturally been reluctant to accept the second of these propositions. For very few of them had any real contact with the developing sciences or with mathematics. Finding themselves, as philosophers, on the periphery of rational advance, and no longer at the centre, they frequently became spiteful and vindictive about the suc-

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