

**ON HEROES AND UHURU-WORSHIP: ESSAYS ON INDEPENDENT AFRICA**, by Ali A. Mazrui. Longmans, London, 1967. 245 pp. 36s.

For students at Makerere University College in Uganda, Professor Mazrui is a perpetual source of stimulus and new ideas. With this book a representative sample of the Mazrui phenomenon now reaches a wider audience.

The range of topics covered in these essays reflects the breadth of Professor Mazrui's interest; the style is that of a series of personal reflections suggested by reading other people's books, hearing politician's statements, or simply resulting from the play of an acute intelligence on the events of the world. Such a collection is inevitably uneven. Most of the essays make interesting reading; at least three of them are memorable; all are about Africa. Throughout the book the recurrent topic, approached in many different ways, is that of nationalism in its African context.

The dominant feature of African politics during the last two decades has obviously been the desire to build nations. At independence all African countries inherited states which had been created by external, colonial regimes. They were not yet nations. The independent state was to create the nation.

The arrival of so many new independent states on the world scene has led to a renewed discussion concerning what nationalism is.

It is refreshing to find Professor Mazrui going back to Edmund Burke and Thomas Carlyle to find if they have anything to say to the present African condition. At first glance the case may not seem very promising. Both Burke and Carlyle were speaking to a different audience, of different experience, with different priorities, in an earlier age. And neither writer believed in freedom as an ultimate value. But Burke had some important reflections to make on the subject of Revolution and Carlyle wrote a classic essay on the cult of national heroes.

Both of these writers had a profound conception of nationality as a complex phenomenon. And one senses in Professor Mazrui a distaste for the simple basis of a nationalism which in most of Africa so far has been essentially an anti-colonial reaction. 'Perhaps all that nationalism means now', he comments rather sadly, 'is: "Kick the foreign ruler out and let us rule ourselves".' (p. 5.) Who, anyway, is the foreigner? To a Biafran, a Southern Sudanese, or to a Somali in Northern Kenya? The clear distinction—so dear to the hearts of colonial administrators—of Europeans with white skins as 'foreigners' and Africans with black skins as

'natives' soon dissolves. About the racial content of African nationalist movements, Professor Mazrui is particularly honest. Nationalism in Africa, he emphasizes, started from a sense of racial consciousness rather than of territorial or cultural identity. Nationalists in Africa were more conscious of being Africans than of being Ugandans, Kenyans, Congolese or Nigerians. And after independence: 'The concept of "majority rule" which guides African governments in their diplomatic evaluations is more likely to be racially-orientated than liberally-based.' (p. 44.)

Professor Mazrui is not the first to state this clearly. But its re-statement here reflects an intellectual integrity which is apparent throughout the book. It is a rare quality in Africa at the present time and it leads Professor Mazrui to take a sceptical view of all that is doctrinaire in Africa today (and that is much); to criticize current vogues, especially 'socialism'; and to avoid scrupulously the use of emotional slogans. Only perhaps those who have to wade through a good deal of the writing coming out of Africa at present can fully appreciate how welcome this is.

The weakest essays are those concerned with subjects where, one suspects, the author's interest is least fully engaged: the relationship between the Arab countries of the North and sub-Saharan Africa; Nkrumah's Ghana; and the spirit of Afro-Asian solidarity emanating from Bandung. There is a cool appraisal of the Stanleyville rescue operation in the Congo in November, 1964. There is also the occasional blind-spot when it comes to generalizing about the African continent as a whole. Thus, he declares: 'Kenya was the first African country to have had a "war of independence" on a scale at all comparable to the original insurrection against British imperialism—the precedent of the American colonies.' (p. 23.) Some of us continue to doubt whether the Mau Mau revolt was in any sense comparable with the Boer War.

Some of the most informative essays in the book are, as one would expect, those concerned with East Africa—the area Professor Mazrui knows best. There is a detailed analysis of the failure of the three East African countries to form a Federation, and perhaps one of the best essays in the book is the one which gives the book its title. As an analysis of the *post facto* uses to which the record of the Mau Mau revolt in

Kenya has been put, this essay breaks new ground. This is particularly interesting since it concerns an important subject which continues to elude the prodigious efforts of less versatile scholars. Professor Mazrui shows very clearly how Mau Mau has become not an essentially Kikuyu revolt, but 'the Kenyan war of independence'. The guerilla warfare of the forest fighters is turned into 'the glorious fight of the armies of national liberation'. And whilst a myth has grown up around the figure of Jomo Kenyatta, it has been kept carefully separate from the myth of Mau Mau. As Professor Mazrui concludes, like others before him, an essential factor in the making of a nation is 'to get one's history wrong'. On the degree of sophistication of the populace, perhaps, depends the degree to which this is done by deliberate fabrication as opposed to the subtler forms of selection, of emphasis, of prejudice.

During the coming decades Africa is likely

to become an increasingly parochial continent. One of the results of parochialism is that a sense of proportion, of perspective, is lost. In intellectual matters this has the most serious implications, as a glance by Africans at the situation in the south of their continent should suggest. The search for historical truth becomes subordinated to other needs. Judgments become naive and inspire no respect in the world at large. At the heart of the anti-colonial movement in Africa was the search for respect. It is a difficult commodity to obtain, and it is far more easily lost than won. In the pursuit of it the enemies include the over-statement, the emotional slogan, the exaggerated claim of the importance of oneself or of one's country. It is to be hoped that not only the students at Makerere, but many people in Africa generally, will long continue to appreciate the sceptical reflections of Ali Mazrui's roving eye.

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