

AFRICA  
&  
THE COMMONWEALTH  
1971 - 1995

BY

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## AFRICA & THE COMMONWEALTH 1971-1995

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## Introduction

This memoir covers my time in the Diplomatic Service dealing with Africa, either part or full time, and with Commonwealth affairs.

It begins with the two and a half years I served as Private Secretary to the Minister for Africa from 1971 - 1974. I was also dealing with the other subjects, European and economic, for which the Minister was responsible. These are recorded separately.

My next involvement with Africa was as High Commissioner to Ghana from 1989 - 1992, when I was also accredited as HM Ambassador to Togo.

From Ghana I returned to London as Assistant Under Secretary of State (AUSS) for Africa and the Commonwealth from 1992 - 1995.

The memoir is divided into two parts as follows:

Part 1 covers my main responsibilities as Private Secretary, High Commissioner to Ghana, Ambassador to Togo and AUSS. It includes chapters on my general responsibilities as AUSS not only for Africa but also for Commonwealth affairs and, more specifically, the 1993 and 1995 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGMs) in Cyprus and New Zealand.

Part 2 combines, under individual country headings, the visits I made to them both as Private Secretary and later as AUSS. Short passages in italics provide information about events in each country before, between and after my visits.

In all I spent nearly 9 years dealing with Africa out of my total of 36 years in the Diplomatic Service: a quarter of my career.

## **Part 1: APPOINTMENTS**

### **CHAPTER 1**

#### **PRIVATE SECRETARY 1971-1974**

##### **AFRICA**

###### **Introduction**

Towards the end of my first overseas posting in the Embassy in Athens, I was introduced to Anthony Royle on a visit he and his wife paid when he was a Junior FCO Minister. I remember attending a dinner given for the Royles by Derek Dobson, the political counsellor in the Embassy, and being questioned by Tony Royle on my circle of Greek friends and contacts. I was entrusted with seeing him and his wife off at the airport. I later learned that he had asked for me as his Private Secretary. By ill luck, I could not be released from Athens when he needed me. But the Office found me another Private Secretary job when I came home some months later. This was as Lord Lothian's Private Secretary. Peter Lothian was a Scottish landowner and friend of Alec Douglas Home, Foreign Secretary in Edward Heath's 1970 Government. He served as Parliamentary Under Secretary (i.e. the lowest rank of junior Minister) from 1970 to 1972.

In 1972 Lord Lothian was replaced by Lady Tweedsmuir as Minister of State. Priscilla Tweedsmuir was a well known Tory backbencher, having been M.P. for Aberdeen South for twenty years from 1946 to 1966 and then given a peerage in 1970. I became her Private Secretary when Lord Lothian left.

Both Ministers were responsible for Britain's relations with Africa as well as for certain other subjects. This memoir covers my African Private Secretary duties only.

In 1971, only fourteen years had elapsed since Ghana had achieved its independence in 1957, the first of Britain's African colonies to do so. Some of our other African colonies had been given independence much more recently: e.g. Swaziland in 1968. The Seychelles were not to become independent until 1976. Memories of the colonial past were therefore fresh. But it is probably true to say that, since granting independence, British Governments had to some extent turned their backs on black Africa. It was certainly accused of having done so by many of its critics, both domestic and international, at the time. A large part of the reason was that two of the most important of our former dependencies, Rhodesia and South Africa, were in the hands of Governments that did not represent the interests of the majority of their populations and were indeed regarded by many as illegitimate, including in Rhodesia's case by the British Government. They therefore represented unfinished business from Britain's colonial past and stood in the way of developing our relations with Africa in a way that would have served both British and African other interests.

During my time as a Private Secretary, therefore, Rhodesia and South Africa dominated Britain's relations with black Africa. Ian Smith's illegal declaration of independence (IDI) in December 1965 had given the white minority control of the Government of Southern Rhodesia. Successive British Governments were to find the search for a way of transferring power to the majority as a whole both difficult and politically damaging to Britain's relations with the rest of black Africa. The problem exercised the Labour Government of Harold Wilson and the Conservative Governments of first Edward

Heath and later of Margaret Thatcher who was eventually to find a solution. Because of its importance, the subject was dealt with mainly by the Foreign Secretary rather than at junior ministerial level. Lord Lothian and Lady Tweedsmuir were involved indirectly and in the House of Lords where they were responsible for presenting and defending the Government's policies on this as on other foreign policy issues. I remember sitting in the officials' box in the House of Lords while my Minister took part in major debates on Rhodesia, most dramatically when the Government accepted the findings of the Commission under Lord Pearce that the settlement worked out by Lord Goodman with Smith's regime was unacceptable to majority opinion in Rhodesia.

The main issue on South Africa was sanctions. The Heath Government had resumed the sale of defence equipment, in particular Wasp helicopters, to apartheid South Africa provided it could not be used for internal security purposes. This policy had outraged many parts of black Africa and HMG's domestic opponents, who objected that arms for external use could be easily diverted for internal repression.

Two other African issues preoccupied Ministers at the time. First was the relationship between our former colonies and the European Economic Community. Negotiations in Brussels on the terms of Britain's entry to the EEC took place during my time as a Private Secretary. These were to lead to Britain joining the EEC on 1 January 1973. The implications for Africa featured in Brussels, in ministerial discussions with African Governments and in debates in Parliament.

Secondly, Idi Amin's expulsion of the Asian community from Uganda in 1972 became a major headache for Heath's Government. I believe that, eventually, as many as 30,000 Asians were given refuge in Britain. It fell largely to Lady Tweedsmuir to speak for the Government on this issue in the House of Lords; and, unsurprisingly, she was sometimes given a rough ride by their lordships.

Significantly, one subject which received much less attention then, in the 1970s, than it was to attract in the 1990s during my time as Under Secretary for Africa, was the quality of African governments and the extent to which they might or might not conform to Western ideals of democracy. This was not surprising given Britain's inability at the time to implant democracy in South Africa and Rhodesia. If Britain couldn't give democracy to its Empire, how could we credibly insist on democracy in our former colonies? Another difference between then and the 1990s was the lack of interest which Britain took then in the economic policies of African Governments. The days when we were to lecture them on the advantages of market-based economies had not yet come.

The most interesting part of my African duties were during my Ministers' visits to Africa. These were intended to familiarise them with the continent and to keep in touch with the Governments concerned. At the time, when our relations were bedevilled by the problems of Rhodesia and South Africa, it was considered important to keep a foot in the door. Essentially Britain was marking time until, majority rule having been achieved in both countries, we could cultivate stronger relations with the rest of the continent. The Minister therefore called wherever possible on African Heads of Government, senior Ministers, other senior figures and the press; met the local British community (mainly businessmen and farmers) and the staff of British diplomatic missions; and visited the countryside to get some understanding of agriculture, mining, development issues, vocational training, education etc. Our programmes happily sometimes included visits to game parks. The longest of these individual country visits lasted for as much as ten days, far longer than any of mine as an Under Secretary in the 1990s when I aimed at covering up to four or even five countries in a fortnight at a time.

My own Private Secretary duties were not usually onerous. Besides ensuring that the Minister had all the briefing that he and she needed available at the right moment, I used to make a record of the main meetings with senior Government figures, scribbling away during the meeting and then dictating a record to a High Commission or Embassy secretary immediately afterwards. These records were sometimes sent as telegrams to the FCO; but more often distributed through the diplomatic bag. I followed up later any specific commitments the Minister had made and drafted thank you letters for the Minister to send to all concerned. I also advised the Mission on any personal preferences the Minister might have. But the real work of looking after the Minister fell on the Head of Mission and his staff; and they knew better than I what sort of ministerial programme was possible and sensible.

The agenda for any visit often included the main subjects I have already mentioned: Rhodesia, South Africa, Britain's and Africa's relations with the EEC and after 1972 the immigration of Asians to Britain. There might also be some subjects of purely local relevance which required discussion at ministerial level. The most important of these, as I record below, were the Africanisation of British owned farms, particularly in Kenya and Tanzania, and landing rights for Concorde in Nigeria. Otherwise I am struck, looking back, how relatively thin the agenda was for a typical ministerial visit, particularly compared to the agendas for both Ministerial and Under Secretary visits in the 1990s. Such, it is worth repeating, was the effect of the shadow thrown on British/African relations by the difficult problems of Rhodesia and South Africa.

## CHAPTER 2

### HIGH COMMISSIONER TO GHANA 1989-1992 AND AUSS VISITS TO GHANA 1993/1994

“You’ll be bored in Eastern Europe”, Mark Russell said. “You’ll find Africa far more interesting”.

Mark had once served in Romania and was now, in 1988, Chief Clerk, the traditional title then still used for the Deputy Under Secretary in charge of the FCO’s personnel and administration. As head of Personnel Policy Department, I came under him; and we were discussing my next post which I hoped would be my first as a Head of Mission overseas. I had thought it might be a good plan to develop a new string to my bow by diversifying my experience with a posting to Eastern Europe where I knew Ambassador vacancies were coming up in both Bucharest and Sofia. But Mark thought otherwise and, I dare say, was short of candidates for our missions in Africa. No one then knew that the Berlin Wall would shortly fall and that life for embassies in Eastern Europe would become so interesting.

So, in October 1989, Veronica and I found ourselves in Accra, living in a rectangular box of a house built for the British High Commissioner in the old cantonments by the Ministry of Works shortly after Ghana’s independence in 1957. Its glory was its garden, full of trees and flowering shrubs planted by successive High Commissioners and their wives, including two palms where vultures had made their nests and used to eye us at our breakfast on the terrace.

In the distance to the south lay the coast and Christiansborg Castle, the seat of Government, where the President lived and where once my grandfather, Sir Alexander Slater, had ruled as Governor of the Gold Coast from 1927 to 1932. It had originally been started by the Danes in 1661 as a safe headquarters for merchants trading for gold, ivory and slaves. It was transferred to the British Crown in 1850 and became the official seat of the Governors of the Gold Coast for the next 107 years. There had been some earnest discussion in London, when my appointment was being considered, about whether the Ghanaian Government would accept as High Commissioner the grandson of one of Ghana’s colonial governors. The view was that it would and indeed might be mildly tickled by the relationship. So it proved. I found it intensely moving to serve in a country with such a close family connexion. But I trod carefully.

Towards the end of our short time in Ghana, my Mother visited us, with her youngest sister, my Aunt Joan, who, according to family legend, had been the first white colonial baby in Freetown in 1919/20, when her father was Governor of Sierra Leone before he came to Accra. My Mother celebrated her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday with us, having celebrated her 21<sup>st</sup> as the Governor’s daughter in the Castle. We were able to assemble some Ghanaians who remembered Governor Slater, including one who he had inspected in a troop of Boy Scouts. I asked Anan Cato, Chief of State Protocol, if my Mother might re-visit the Castle. He consulted the President who promptly agreed. Anan gave Mum, Joan, Veronica and me a guided tour of the Castle including of the battlements overlooking the sea. The day before she left, Anan rang to invite us all to tea with the President but disappointingly we couldn’t accept because flight bookings were not changeable.

The name Slater meant much less in modern Ghana than that of his predecessor as Governor, Gordon Guggisburg, who had served in the prosperous years before the Depression and had been able to spend freely on public buildings, including on Achimota College, the Eton of the Gold Coast, and Takoradi Harbour in the West, which remain monuments to enlightened colonial rule. Governor Slater had

presided during the Depression and had been forced to retrench, including by reducing the starting salary of the long-suffering Government Clerks from £60 to £48 per annum. He had left behind no great memorials. Only a road beside Korle Bu hospital in the west of the city was named after him; and I occasionally met Ghanaians with his unusual second name, Ransford. I began by wondering if he had been quite such a pillar of good behaviour as my Grandmother maintained ...until I learned that it had been the custom to name a child after a well known person.

In 1989 Ghana was at a critical moment in its post independence history. It had been the first of Britain's African colonies to win independence, under Kwame Nkrumah in 1957. Its future then seemed reasonably bright, with a per capita income high by African standards. During the 1950s and into the early 1960s it was considered a middle income country, ranking above Malaysia for example. Its assets included an enterprising and educated people, harmonious tribal relations, reasonable infrastructure, gold, timber and cocoa. But, for the next 20 years its economic performance was well below average in a region noted for its disappointing economic development. Gross economic mismanagement was largely to blame. Real per capita incomes fell by a third from 1970 to 1982. The real minimum wage fell by an even more painful 62%. Net investment was negative. And Ghana lost human capital also as the rapid deterioration of real wages and living standards caused many of Ghana's better educated workers – teachers, doctors and civil servants – to emigrate. Inflation averaged some 35% per year compared to about 11% in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa.

Then things got even worse. In the early 1980s, further shocks brought the economy to a virtual standstill. Nigeria expelled many of its migrant labourers, forcing over a million Ghanaian workers to return home. And a severe drought drastically reduced agricultural output, including cocoa production on which the economy as a whole as well as the personal livelihoods of many rural Ghanaians were heavily dependent. Life became very hard indeed for everyone, even for example for the family of a senior banker friend of mine who told me that they had had to survive on a single meal a day. An overvalued currency made imports prohibitively expensive with the result that shop shelves were empty and spare parts for everything from the mines to cars unobtainable. Malaysia had far outstripped Ghana in wealth and reputation.

As the economy collapsed, so did the Government. After a succession of military coups by Generals, Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings seized power in 1979. Initially he intended to clean up the Government and restore power to an elected Government. The cleaning up included the execution of three former military Heads of State on the beach below Accra. He duly transferred power to an elected Government; but on the last day of 1981, exasperated by continued mismanagement and corruption, he took power again in what became known as his "second coming", this time as Chairman of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC).

During the next seven years, i.e. prior to my arrival in 1989, Rawlings pursued a tough and consistent policy of economy recovery. This was founded on an agreement with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank negotiated by three remarkable Ghanaians who I came to respect for their skills and personal courage: Kwesi Botchwey, Finance Minister; Joe Abbey, a professional economist and High Commissioner to London; and Tsatsu Tsikata, another academic economist, a lawyer and head of the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation, who had once taught at Oxford. They flew to Washington and, dressed in their Ghanaian national dress, reached agreement with the hard men of Washington on an Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) which would eventually lead to Ghana's revival. It embraced exchange control liberalisation, currency devaluation, encouragement of free markets, reform and

privatisation of state enterprises, control of public expenditure, an extensive public investment programme in roads, railways, ports, water supply and telecommunications and management reform of the public service and the banks.

This far reaching and painful programme, supported by the international community and a generous aid programme, was accompanied by expenditure to alleviate the plight of the poor as recovery slowly took effect. It was known, clumsily enough, as PAMSCAD: the Programme of Actions to Mitigate the Social Consequences of Adjustment, a title which came to trip lightly off the tongues of politicians and diplomats. Perhaps Britain could have done with a Pamscad during our own recent austerity programme. Greece certainly could.

This was the background to the work of the High Commission. I was lucky in my Deputy, first Tom Young and his wife, Elisabeth; and then Mike Greenstreet and Joanna. Tom went on to be High Commissioner to Zambia. Sadly, both he and Mike were to die before their time. We had some congenial colleagues, including Hugh McLeod, who I had known in Islamabad, and Graham McKinley, the Defence Adviser. We had ambitious objectives. Most important of these were to support the ERP through our aid programme of some £20 million p.a. and to encourage good government. By the latter we meant the basics: the rule of law, honest administration free of corruption, freedom of speech, Government answerable to the people through some form of electoral process, professional and disciplined armed forces under the control of Government.

In addition we performed all the other usual diplomatic tasks: promotion of commercial exports in support of British businessmen, support for the British Council's office in Accra and Kumasi, immigration control and consular work. Britain also ran a small Military Advisory Team of four officers who worked very closely with the Ghanaian Armed Forces to strengthen their military effectiveness and teach them their proper place under constitutional rule. The Defence Adviser played a vital role in this work. And our 18 year old son, Nicholas, on his gap year between Wellington and Exeter University, also helped - with a dinghy sailing course for Ghanaian naval cadets.

I could write reams about the work we did. But, with the benefit of hindsight, looking back over the twenty years since we left Ghana, there is one subject that may be of particular interest to the future historian. And that is JJ Rawlings himself, who can reasonably claim to be the main cause of Ghana's recovery and the founder of its present relative prosperity. I suppose it is possible that someone else would have taken action to stop Ghana's descent into chaos if he had not appeared. But none of the Generals that launched their coups in the 1970s had been that person and indeed they had only made matters worse. And I met no one else, either in or outside Rawlings's own circle, who could have done half as well as he did. Perhaps I should add that I doubt if all Ghana's politicians, either past or present, would share these views.

I tried very hard to get to know Rawlings, because it was obvious that by far the best way to get across HMG's message about the importance of "good government" and the ERP was to win his personal trust and thus gain direct regular personal access to him. I am afraid to say that, in this, I failed. I had only a couple of formal meetings with him when we talked real substance. Linda Chalker, who combined the jobs of Minister for Overseas Development and Minister for Africa, also met him on some of her visits to Accra and secured his respect. But even she could not always get access to him. Consequently we were obliged to conduct our business through other members of the PNDC, departmental Ministers and others with access of their own to Rawlings. I invested a lot of effort in

cultivating these people and was reasonably successful in winning their trust. I have little doubt that much of what I said of any importance reached the ears of Rawlings, if not always in quite the form that I had intended. But, in one way and another, he was left in no doubt of HMG's position on the main items in our agenda. And I like to think that what we said, and what our international friends of like mind were also saying, had a helpful effect in nudging Rawlings and his Government along the hard road to recovery.

Although I failed in my aim of getting close to Rawlings, I spent a lot of time studying him from a distance, listened to his speeches, talked frequently to people who did know him and had a number of short, casual conversations with him as he moved around the country. On the strength of all this I record here my impressions of Rawlings at the time, his attitude towards the restoration of democracy in Ghana and my first substantive meeting with him which ranks as one of the most interesting encounters in my diplomatic career.

Before leaving London, John Major in his brief period as Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary before Mrs Thatcher moved him to the Treasury, asked me to report on what made Rawlings tick, whether any of his Marxist rhetoric went more than skin deep and whether there was anything we could do to make him more pro-Western in outlook as well as in action. These questions were in my mind during the whole of my time in Ghana.

I didn't find it easy to summarise his complex personality. A towering ego contrasted with a sense of inferiority probably derived from his mixed blood as the son of an Ewe woman in the east of Ghana and a Scottish businessman who later rejected him. I heard several versions of this alleged rejection. Common to them all was that he had visited Scotland as a young man to find his father and had called at what he understood was his home (another version said "shop"). The man who answered his call said that Mr Rawlings was out. Later JJ concluded that it was his father himself who had given him that answer. He failed to make contact then or later.

Rawlings appeared to be a lonely figure: aloof, moody and emotional. He was surprisingly inarticulate for someone who could talk charismatically for hours to a Ghanaian crowd. He was both ruthless and sensitive to the misfortunes of others. He could be impulsive but had shown great consistency of purpose and policy. His early public rhetoric and association with Fidel Castro, Ortega, Mengistu and, above all, Ghadaffi had earned him a reputation as a Marxist revolutionary. He remained proud of this image and concerned not to damage it. But at heart he was a pragmatist not an ideologue and certainly never a Marxist.

He was open to influence by those he trusted, in particular by the PNDC member for Foreign Affairs and National Security, Captain Kojo Tsikata, on whose tight and ruthless control over security his hold on power depended, and whose radical, anti-Western views appeared to be gradually moderating. The Captain's cousin, Tsatsu Tsikata (one of the three Ghanaian negotiators in Washington) was probably another important influence. In the crucial field of economic policy, he depended heavily on PV Obeng (Prime Minister equivalent), Kwesi Botchey and Joe Abbey (the other Washington negotiators). But he was not an economist.

Here I digress with a memory of what seemed at the time to be an early setback in my efforts to win Rawlings's trust. As a new High Commissioner, I had been dutifully going the rounds, in accordance with diplomatic custom, of other Heads of Mission. I was told later by a Ghanaian civil servant friend

that Rawlings had been told that I had said to an Eastern European Ambassador that he, Rawlings, didn't understand economics. My friend believed that the Ambassador had been deliberately trying to poison Rawlings against me or that someone else had deliberately made mischief out of what the Ambassador had said. I fear that there was probably some truth in what I was reported to have said although my remark was taken out of context and exaggerated. Indeed it is possible that all I did was to have asked the Ambassador whether he thought that Rawlings understood economics. The fact that I might have been right in any judgement I made was of course irrelevant. I shall never know the truth of the story and what effect, if any, my reported incautious remark actually had on Rawlings or my reputation. But the incident was a lesson in how careful I needed to be and how easy it was to fall victim to the local variant of Chinese whispers.

But whispers could also help. On one occasion I took part in some kind of development seminar at which a number of western heads of mission were invited to speak. When my turn came, I prefaced my remarks by saying how proud I had been to have been given my name label for the conference with 'Ghana' written below my name ( a mistake). I had pinned it on my jacket and showed it the audience. I heard within the day that Rawlings had heard of my remark from a Ghanaian official who had been present; and that it had gone down well. I was confident that he had also heard of my subsequent remarks at the seminar about the importance Britain attached to "good government" in deciding how to allocate our aid.

Here ends the digression. Now back to my assessment of Rawlings. I was told he spent more time with comparatively junior figures in the Castle than with many of his Ministers. These young Turks had similar anti-Western prejudices to his own and were thus able to influence him on a wide range of issues (including maybe on what the new British High Commissioner was saying to fellow diplomats?) His wife, an attractive lady who was as difficult to meet as he was, was believed to be trying to build a political constituency for him (and for herself, as later became obvious) amongst Ghana's women. She had a disproportionate voice in some government decisions including appointments.

I concluded that there were a number of specific forces that motivated Rawlings. He was intensely patriotic and therefore determined to rescue Ghana from the corruption and economic decay of the past and to restore her good name in the world. He was genuinely concerned for the lot of ordinary Ghanaians and sympathetic towards the poor. He was deeply suspicious of an international order which he believed discriminated against developing countries and allowed the western world to exploit them. He had a particular distrust of the private sector for reasons that no one could explain to me. He was acutely sensitive to any discrimination, real or imagined, by expatriates against Ghanaians, whites against blacks. But this feeling was combined with a respect for individual expatriates and a willingness to accept their presence in Ghana when they had particular skills to contribute. Above all he had become determined not to surrender power for a second time until he was satisfied that Ghana's economic recovery had become irreversible.

If Rawlings distrusted the world economic order so much, why then had he accepted an economic recovery programme based on orthodox IMF/World Bank economic liberalism? The answer lay in his patriotism and his determination to help the poor in Ghana. As a German visitor said, "He gives the impression of loving his country so much that he is even prepared to accept capitalist policies and help". When he took power in 1981 for the second time, Ghana was bankrupt and only the West had the resources and interest to rescue her. He therefore swallowed his scruples and accepted international conditional financing. But he did not altogether abandon his revolutionary anti colonial rhetoric, partly

out of deference to the left wing members and supporters of his Government. In the four years before my arrival, this rhetoric had diminished. Even UK policies on South Africa came in for less criticism. And there had been a noticeable warming of UK/Ghana relations which it was the job of the High Commission to nourish.

Our main weapon was the aid programme. And much discussion took place, first between the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) and the FCO in which the High Commission took full part, and then with the Ghana Government on how Britain could best help. Our programme included balance of payments capital aid, help with PAMSCAD and technical advice on how Ghana could make the existing economic order, of which she was so suspicious, work more in her favour e.g. by attracting more inward investment, promoting her exports and privatising her State owned assets. The ODA also funded a programme of police training. This and our military assistance programme provided a much needed service and earned us the goodwill of Rawlings and his PNDC.

We also overhauled our visa operations in the High Commission. These had attracted a lot of criticism for the length of the queue and inadequate queuing facilities after a visa regime had had to be introduced in Ghana and elsewhere. London provided more staff and a sheltered waiting area was built in record time to provide a quicker and more dignified service for the thousands of Ghanaians who wanted to visit the UK. I remember the tangible good effect this had on the High Commission's reputation in Accra.

The High Commission advocated developing stronger relations with carefully selected key figures through inviting them to London. We also began to argue for a UK invitation to Rawlings himself. But privately I recognised that this was unlikely to be politically acceptable in London until his anti Western rhetoric had further abated and he had committed himself more firmly to the restoration of democracy..

The issue of when and if Rawlings intended to restore parliamentary rule dominated my time and thought in Accra. And the tactical question facing Britain and its international friends was how far we should go in pressing them to do so and what exactly our tactics should be. I used to debate these questions in correspondence with West African Department in the FCO. Charlotte Rycroft, its head, was a particularly helpful and constructive interlocutor. Tragically she was later to be killed in a road accident in Canada.

Rawlings's professed aim, from early in his rule, was respectable: to give power to the people and ensure their full participation in the processes by which they were governed. But he did not know how to achieve this and probably believed that, without himself, power would be monopolised by the rich. By the time I arrived at the end of 1989, I doubt if he had made up his mind how long to stay in power. And he did not understand the importance in economic development of what the President of the World Bank was calling "good governance" and of a better balance between government and the governed.

He had recently taken a tentative first step with elections in 1988/89 to Assemblies in Ghana's 110 districts. I used to try to meet District Assembly members in my provincial tours. Although political parties remained banned and a third of the members were appointed by the Government, the other two thirds were elected. Assembly powers were heavily circumscribed. Ghanaians could air their views and grievances and, more importantly, the Government declared that the Assemblies were to be the channel through which grass roots opinion would determine future political development. But Justice Annan

(Vice President equivalent) told me that this bottom-up approach could take another five years or so to lead to a next stage, which itself had not yet been defined.

In the second half of 1990, Rawlings launched a series of regional seminars to consult the District Assemblies and other grass roots organisations on the form of democracy that would best suit Ghanaian circumstances. Opinion in this political debate polarised between those who wanted an immediate return to multi-party politics and those who preferred a no-party political system based on the Assemblies. Many observers feared that the debate had been intended as a smoke screen behind which the PNDC could prolong their power. But, whatever the intention, a momentum was building.

In January 1991, Rawlings announced “the final phase in our journey as a provisional government and the road towards... a new constitutional order”. A new constitution was to be prepared during 1991 with the help of a national consultative body and a drafting group of constitutional experts. In May the Government announced that the new Constitution would include provision for political parties and, after discussion in a Consultative Assembly, be submitted to a national referendum in early 1992.

In the event the timing slipped and, by the time I left Ghana in early 1992, work on the Constitution was still in progress and no referendum had yet been held. But, by the end of the year, the process had been completed and elections held: Ghana’s first for thirteen years, which were judged by international observers to have been largely free and fair. Rawlings won them and went on to win the next elections, in 1996, also judged largely free and fair. He then stood down in accordance with the Constitution, a rare example of an African dictator voluntarily giving up power.

With the benefit of hindsight, it all looks straightforward. But throughout our time in Accra, it was far from obvious that Rawlings would adopt such a bold and rapid progress towards democracy. And the High Commission agonised continually over how far we should go in pressing him to do so. In public I confined myself to pressing the cause of good government. In private we made it clear that our aid programme was dependent on Ghana’s willingness to move towards greater pluralism. Quietly, mostly behind the scenes, taking whatever opportunities arose, including at Ministerial level, we tried to nudge the Ghanaians along the road away from military dictatorship and towards greater public participation. I have little doubt that what we and other Western countries said and did had a significant effect on the speed with which Rawlings eventually moved towards the 1992 elections.

To my frustration, my first meeting with Rawlings did not take place until 6 July 1990 after I had been in post for some nine months. My predecessor, Arthur Wyatt, had left me graphic accounts of several long tête-a-tête meetings with him. But he now seemed to want to keep diplomats at a distance; and we waited in a queue until he was ready to see a number of us, in the order of arrival, on a single day. I was told I would have twenty minutes or so with him; but the call lasted an hour and a half to the visible dismay of the Chief of State Protocol. My Yugoslav and South Korean colleagues, who were next in line, had a long wait.

Rawlings and I sat together on the divan in an upstairs room in the Castle. I think it was in part of the building which had been added since my Grandfather’s day. A number of officials were present, including Jack Wilmot, the acting head of the MFA. Rawlings sat turned slightly away from me and began with a side-long glance over his right shoulder by asking me my impressions of Ghana so far. I launched into what proved to be a long monologue, far too long but it enabled me to make a number of

key points and I was hoping that sooner or later I would succeed in triggering a response from him. Eventually he sparked, with fascinating results.

In my opening monologue I began by thanking him for the warm and courteous welcome I had received and my ready access to members of his Government. I had been travelling throughout the country to learn about it at first hand and had now visited all the Regions. I had seen the slow but perceptible effects that the ERP was having in the rural areas but understood the difficulties faced by those still in the heat of the fire (a phrase used by Rawlings in a speech the day before). I had seen for myself the effects on farmers of depressed commodity prices. I had seen less at first hand of urban poverty but my son had told me of his experiences doing voluntary work at a health clinic in Nima (one of Accra's slums). I had also seen some of the District Assemblies at work and had been reading that morning with great interest his speech on them in Sunyani on 5 July.

Rawlings sat impassively, listening with little expression although occasionally he showed a flicker of interest.

I plugged on by reviewing our bilateral relations. I said that these seemed better than a few years ago; but I was struck by the contrast between the political relationship where we seemed often at odds with each other, e.g. over South Africa, and the every day effective easy co-operation we enjoyed on practical matters. I gave as examples of the latter: co-operation on drugs and other security matters, the work of our Military Advisory Team, the British Council's activities including in Junior Secondary School reform, immigration work on which I told him of the improvements we were making to our visa operation and the work of countless Ghanaians in the UK and of UK citizens in Ghana. I said that we appreciated the contribution made by the former to our national life and economy; and I had been glad to meet numerous UK citizens apparently doing useful work throughout Ghana whose contribution I understood was appreciated. I then spoke of the value of recent Ministerial contacts in helping to improve mutual understanding. More such contacts would be helpful in improving political relations. Diplomats were not enough. He smiled.

Still no reaction from Rawlings. I began to think he would never speak.

So I turned to trade, aid and the ERP. I said that I was glad to find that there was substantial commercial business in both directions. A steady stream of UK businessmen and potential investors came through my office. They understood the importance of operating within the law and were in general serious and responsible people. I mentioned Britain's interest in the contract to renovate Kotoka airport. Tough negotiations were now taking place and I hoped that, with the £8 million grant we had now offered, agreement could be reached soon (no reaction from Rawlings). I said that Britain was continuing its support for the ERP and that I had just announced two new pledges totalling £26 million. We admired the ERP and welcomed its consistency of purpose e.g. on exchange rate reform, privatisation, reform of the civil service, education and the banking sector. But recovery was a long haul. It seemed to me that the two main current problems were how to tackle the worryingly high rate of inflation and to encourage private investment. The latter would be vital in regenerating the economy.

At this point I asked Rawlings for his reaction. Was I on the right lines? He said with a smile "Yes, I think so. What did I think of his recent speech about District Assemblies?" I asked whether he wanted me to be frank. He said yes. I said that my understanding was that he was placing great emphasis on the need for a government more responsive to the needs and wishes of ordinary people. The critical

point seemed to me to be to find the right political structures which would enable the governed to control the way power was used in the State and to have a say in the appointment and removal of office holders through free elections. The nature of these structures would vary from country to country depending on local circumstances. He had talked in Sunyani of the District Assemblies' role in strengthening public participation at the grass roots and of the need to create structures at town, area and even unit levels. But what structures did he have in mind above District level? How could government as a whole at the national level become accountable to the people?

Rawlings then either dodged my question or didn't understand it. He asked one of the officials present to explain local structures to enable people to express themselves. Anan Cato, the Chief of State Protocol, an outstanding diplomat later to be Ghana's High Commissioner in London, intervened helpfully by saying that he thought I meant what structures were planned above the District level and, less helpfully, that this question was premature because the Government first wanted to establish the District Assemblies firmly before considering the next step. They were one element on the road to democracy and others would follow in due course. I had another go at getting the conversation back to where I wanted it. I referred to a recent speech given by Mr Hurd, as Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, in which he had spoken of the importance of accountability, control of corruption and greater public participation. These were constant themes in the Chairman's own speeches. But good government and economic recovery, which went hand in hand, depended also on such things as the rule of law, freedom of speech and of the press, respect for human rights and political institutions which make government responsible to the governed.

I had lit the blue touch paper. Rawlings then took over the discussion. To my relief, he silenced another attempt by his advisers to intervene again. Then, speaking with considerable passion and his upper lip quivering, he talked first about a German woman he had known ten or so years ago. She had recently published a book full of filthy slanders about him and allegations about their relationship (I assumed that he was talking about "A Piece of Madness; Memories of Africa" by Ilka Model). Was this, Rawlings asked, what I meant by freedom of speech? What good was done by circulating such trash?

For a moment, so threateningly and aggressively did he speak, that I feared he would bring the meeting to an abrupt halt. But he continued in similar vein. It was futile, he said, to talk of the rule of law when Ghana's legal community offered so little protection to the ordinary man in the street. Upper lip trembling again, he spoke of the case of a six year old boy whom he had seen with whip lash mark on his back inflicted by his step-mother. "Don't talk to me about the rule of law if the legal system can't even protect a child six years old." The lawyers and big business were in league together. Some of the bankers had stolen vast sums of money. He would personally like to be able to strip all the clothes off their backs "down to their underpants."

A minute or two later, after he had cooled down a bit, I reverted to this remark. I said that 6 year old children might be molested and bankers steal in Britain as in Ghana. But it was for the law courts to deal with such cases rather than the Head of State. He said "OK, but if the law courts don't, I will" and roared with laughter. One of the advisers chipped in and argued that the Ghanaian legal system provided for all sorts of satisfactory safeguards. I was wrong to suggest otherwise. I forbore to point out that it had been Rawlings himself who had just criticised Ghana's legal system. I said that the difficulty seemed to be to find a way of strengthening the legal system to offer protection against abuse. It must be possible to find experts to give advice on such matters. Perhaps this was an area where Britain could help. Rawlings welcomed this idea.

I asked if we could go back to the question of private investment. Rawlings nodded. I said that I had listened very carefully to his speeches on private investment and the private sector. His personal attitude as expressed in public was crucial. People both inside and outside Ghana attached enormous importance to what he said. He immediately replied that he understood this, but the difficulties (unspecified) were enormous. Big businessmen abused their position. He referred to some local distributors for a big British company who had built a factory on someone else's land. Despite this Rawlings had helped him get his daughter back after she had been kidnapped. He spoke also of the owner of one of the Accra night clubs who had invited the Chief of Police to attend a foundation laying ceremony for the club. The "idiot policeman" had attended, apparently not understanding that the owner could use his presence to intimidate people with whom the owner subsequently dealt. Rawlings was scathing also about other well known Ghanaian businessmen whom he accused of abusing their wealth and positions. Reverting to our earlier discussion about democracy, he said that one of the benefits of the Revolution had been to enable the factory workers, through their elected Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, to have a voice in the conduct of the business. In this way the rights of the people had been protected and a better balance achieved between the rich profiteers and the little man who got so little.

I said that it seemed to me that the main difficulty was to find some way of encouraging the private sector and thus to unleash individual energy and initiative (he nodded), at the same time preventing abuses by the rich and protecting the small man. I knew that, under his leadership, the Ghanaian economy had recovered to an astonishing extent since 1982. But, if the recovery was to be sustained and self-generating growth achieved, the private sector would have to supply the main engine of growth. Rawlings again nodded his agreement. He said that he would be meeting his economic advisers later in the day to consider policy towards the private sector, including on privatisation. He also wanted at some stage to have a good talk with private sector representatives. I said that progress on privatisation would be welcome.

He then launched into a fresh tirade, this time against the Divestiture (i.e. privatisation) Implementation Committee for its slowness in implementing the policy. They had huge piles of files but actually did nothing. It was high time something was done about it. At this point he was speaking more to his advisers than to me, and they shuffled their feet uncomfortably. I said that privatisation was a very difficult exercise as we had discovered in the UK. I did not know whether our own experience was relevant to Ghana but perhaps we should share it. Rawlings said "Don't hesitate, don't hold back. Let us have any advice you've got." I said that I had suggested to Ebo Tawiah (PNDC member in charge of divestiture) how we could help. He agreed enthusiastically: "Yes: let's work something out".

Rawlings raised the Abu affair. A German company was alleged to have built a road which had subsequently subsided. "Those bloody Germans" had thought that they could get away with shoddy work. Did I realise that ordinary Ghanaians could have been killed on that road when it started to subside?

About half way through all this, the risk of me being thrown out receded. Rawlings thawed considerably. He turned towards me and from time to time patted me on the knee and once gave it a hard thump. He moved up the divan to sit closer and sometimes, for greater effect, put his face close to mine. We stared at one another eye ball to eye ball. At one point he said "He's an Englishman. Give him some tea", which is when the advisers realised that they were in for a longer meeting still. He became

very friendly and made numerous warm references to the help that Britain had given. He mentioned our military team approvingly and expressed regret that our police adviser had gone. I explained that he was ill and hoped to be back soon. Rawlings said that Ghana needed more of our police advisers.

Eventually the advisers got restive and made signs that the meeting should end. I said that I had one more question. Our meeting had been valuable in helping me to understand his views. Could we meet regularly? "Yes" he said "we should certainly do that". He said that he had difficulty in getting his feelings and ideas across sometimes; but just because he was not articulate did not mean that he did not have important things to say. "I feel so frustrated sometimes", he said. He repeated again that we should certainly meet more often.

Finally he stood up. He asked whether he had answered all my questions and laughed when I replied that he had made a beginning. He said that the main point that he wanted to leave with me was that he did understand the importance of the private sector and, yes, he did want to find the right way of restoring true democracy.

The meeting had fallen into three parts: first my long monologue when I began to despair of getting him to talk; second when the advisers tried to intervene with technicalities; and, much the longest, when he finally came to life. He spoke with great force, passion and at times charm, but inarticulately and with long pauses when he searched for words or thoughts and brushed aside attempts by me or his advisers to help him out or otherwise intervene. He sometimes lost the thread of the argument and preferred to use specific stories to illustrate his meaning. Throughout a sense of sincerity, honesty and genuine concern for the ordinary Ghanaian came across strongly. He was uninterested in wider international subjects including South Africa. He looked fit and well, although I was struck by the trembling of the upper lip during the emotional passages. He didn't smoke and his mood fluctuated from the initial rather sullen reserve, through emotional excitement, to calmer waters towards the end when he spoke with real warmth about what Britain was doing in Ghana. I found the experience daunting and exciting and left with a feeling that I might be able to get on closer terms with him. How wrong I proved to be.

Not long after my arrival, the Ghanaians joined other anglophone members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in setting up the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to intervene in the Liberian civil war. ECOMOG'S first Force Commander was a Ghanaian Lieutenant General: Arnold Qainoo, one of the nine members of the PNDC, who unexpectedly called at the High Commission one day to ask for my advice and help. I was careful to avoid making any British commitment. He was a friendly and gregarious man who I got to know quite well. When I eventually called on him to say goodbye, he presented me with a small animal wooden carving which he asked me to keep on my desk always to remind me of him. This I have done and there it stands to this day.

I recall another encounter with a senior Minister with less affection. At the time of the first Iraq war, I received instructions from the FCO to ask for the diplomatic support of the Ghanaian Government at the UN and in dealings with Saddam Hussein's Government. I called on Obed Asamoah, Ghana's Foreign Secretary. In delivering my message, I spoke in fairly firm terms. Probably too firm. He reacted sharply by getting up from his arm chair and walking over to his desk, making it clear that our meeting was over and I should leave. It took me several weeks to restore my relationship with him. This I did by suggesting that I call for a general tour d'horizon, in the course of which I went through all the ways in

which Britain was giving Ghana help with development aid, military assistance, through the British Council etc. He expressed surprise. "I had not realised that you were doing so much", he said. We were back on terms. Looking back, the incident did no harm and may even have given me a reputation for willingness to talk tough when necessary.

I spent little time in discussing other international issues with senior Government figures. On such matters as South Africa, we agreed to differ. Mandela's release from prison and President De Klerk's overtures to the ANC were beginning in any case to ease a major source of disagreement between Britain and African critics of our policy towards Southern Africa. Mandela himself visited Ghana during my time there, as part of a tour of his international supporters. The Diplomatic Corps were invited to greet him at the airport on arrival. I remember shaking his hand as he moved down the line of diplomats on the tarmac. He had a word for each of us. To me he said that he had enjoyed meeting John Major recently in London. That evening we were all invited to a Government reception in his honour. He was the only one in black tie, not having been warned, as he told us in his speech, of Ghana's informality.

Negotiation of the Kotoka international airport contract, which I had mentioned to Rawlings, provided an instructive glimpse into the workings of Ghanaian government. When we arrived it was a pleasant friendly, if rather ramshackle, airport with little security where crowds of jolly people met and saw off their friends and relations, without serious barriers between air-side and land-side. Our house wasn't far away and we got used to the roar of departing planes as they took off over our heads. The pineapple planes were particularly noisy, because they were heavily loaded with fruit for the European market to make the maximum use of available space in the plane and took off early in the morning when the air was cooler and, we were told, lift was better. They woke us at 5 a.m. or so with a noise like the end of the world as they sometimes seemed barely to clear the roof over our bedroom.

Both Plessey and Taylor Woodrow (called Taysec in Ghana) were determined to procure the joint contract for a complete renovation of the airport, including the terminal, the runway and all the electronics and navigation instruments. The ODA agreed to provide aid funds to help pay for the work in view of the importance of the airport for the economy in general. Our main competitor was a French consortium supported naturally by the French Embassy in the same way that we in the High Commission gave all the support we could to Plessey and Taysec. The scene was set for a titanic struggle between France and Britain. We felt that our honour, as well as our national commercial interest, were at stake. And my friendly French colleague and I, who normally enjoyed the best of personal relations, eyed each other with increasing unease and suspicion. I lobbied every Ghanaian minister and official who I thought might conceivably have a say in the matter and paid particular attention to Botchwey, the Finance Minister.

One happy day, Botchwey rang me up to say that the contract had been awarded to the British. I was of course absolutely delighted. The next morning EU Ambassadors had one of their regular weekly meetings to exchange information and views on whatever was going on at the time. The French Ambassador could hardly meet my eye. He was clearly extremely upset. I later discovered that the reason for his discomfiture was not only the obvious one that Britain had won and France had lost but that he had been assured, right up until the day of decision, that the contract would go to France. We had each been negotiating with different parts of the Government which each supported a different side and each believed that its side would win. I could well imagine how angry I would have been in my French colleague's position. But this did not spoil my own enjoyment of British success.

It was never easy to know exactly where power lay and how best to navigate through government thickets. I was to discover later, in rather a similar commercial contest, that the same applied to the Canadian administration, as indeed it does in Whitehall and elsewhere, not just in the developing world. An Ambassador or High Commissioner would always do well to find some sympathetic knowledgeable local person who could provide friendly informal advice when he or she didn't know where to turn. In Ghana I was exceptionally lucky in this respect. My cousin, Roger Goodenough, had given me an introduction to Sam Sey who had once been Barclays Bank local manager and had gone on to be Deputy Governor of the Bank of Ghana. He had also served for a time as a governor of London House for overseas graduates (now called Goodenough College). He and his wife, Elisabeth, invited Veronica and me to a family supper soon after we arrived. He was to become a friend who I learned to trust and admire. We were shocked by his early death followed shortly by the death of Elisabeth. During most of our time in Ghana I could rely on Sam to help guide me through Ghanaian personalities and customs. He did so without in any way compromising his own loyalty to his own country and people. It was typical of the man that he seemed to enjoy the respect of all sides of the local political spectrum.

As I had told Rawlings, I did a great deal of provincial touring which provided fascinating glimpses into rural and small town life and opportunities for uninhibited discussion with provincial officials and chiefs. It also demanded lots of short notice speech making. Some of these stick in the mind. At Kete Krachi, largely cut off by the Volta Lake and therefore little visited by passing dignitaries, I was taken to visit the local secondary school where I suddenly found myself in an assembly room with 600 students waiting attentively for me to address them. On another occasion, in Kumasi I was invited by the students to attend the 31<sup>st</sup> anniversary celebration of Queen Elizabeth II Hall at the University. I had expected to play a passive role but should have known better. Luckily I arrived on time and the ceremony began 45 minutes late. We were given copies of the programme. Idly scanning it, I observed that there was to be an address by the guest of honour. I asked the Vice-Chancellor who this was; and he replied "I don't know but expect it's you". Accordingly I improvised some notes for a jokey speech suitable for an informal meeting of students which I anticipated. That was my second mistake.

In the fullness of time the Vice-Chancellor and I were driven in state to a nearby football field, surrounded three deep by students, their families and others with nothing better to do. The Student Cadet Corps came smartly to attention and a police band struck up as we mounted a fine platform on which University Dignitaries, Army and Police Representatives were assembled. The Band played the Ghanaian National Anthem. The Vice-Chancellor and I inspected the Cadets and the Band. There followed a march past, taking-of-salute and review order. I tore up my jokey speech and, while the Hall Master and Hall President gave welcoming addresses, composed something more suitable for the dignity of the occasion.

Once the Guest of Honour (me as predicted by the V-C) had addressed the multitude, the Army Representative took his turn. He delivered a brisk pep talk on the importance of good relations between the Army and the University and the need for peace and good order on the campus. The effect of this was only slightly marred by the late arrival of a bedraggled sheep on the parade ground whose frantic baaing provoked gales of laughter from the students who kept on driving it back towards the rostrum to prolong the fun.

An essential part of any provincial tour by a diplomat, particularly by a British High Commissioner in view of our colonial history, was a call on the local Chief. The most important of these was the Asantehene, Otumfuo Opoku Ware II, Chief of the Ashanti, against whose ancestor we had fought the Ashanti wars in the nineteenth century. Indeed we had exiled that ancestor to the Seychelles. This shared history if anything strengthened the affection between modern British and Ashanti representatives.

My first call on the Asantehene, who had been away, staying at his house near Harrods in London, when I first visited Kumasi, took place in June 1990 and was a formal affair. I was accompanied by my linguist, Mrs Nina Chachu, local representative of the British Council. I was ushered to a large gilded arm chair, with red damask upholstery, next to the Otumfuo who sat on a magnificent throne, dressed in ceremonial cloth and wearing huge gold rings and other ornaments. He was accompanied by his Personal Secretary, Mr ASY Andoh, and his senior linguist, Nana Boakye Yam II. Other lesser chiefs sat in a square around us. Mr Andoh began by asking Mrs Chachu what my mission was. She replied formally that I would explain which I did. My remarks were interpreted in chunks by Mr Andoh to the senior linguist who then repeated them in Twi to the Otumfuo who thus had three chances to hear me since he spoke perfect English. He replied by the same route. Once this formal exchange was over, the Otumfuo turned to me and suggested we continue our discussion in English without intermediaries.

One of the most moving calls Veronica and I paid was on the Sandema Na at his small mud brick Palace just west of Tono in Upper East Region not far from Ghana's northern border with Niger. The old man was nearly 80 and blind from river blindness like so many northern Ghanaians at that time. But he was a tall and immensely impressive figure after 60 years as Chief "on the skin". He received us in a small upper room through which a warm soft breeze blew from the surrounding arid countryside. We exchanged speeches through an interpreter and continued speaking through the interpreter as the Sandema Na spoke no English. He recalled his only visit to London, for the Coronation in 1953 when he remembered seeing, before blindness had overcome him, the same birds in London as he knew from Sandema. They were bathing in the puddles of the Mall. The water lilies in the lake at Buckingham Palace to which he had been invited for a garden party were also familiar from Northern Ghana. On the wall behind him were pictures of King George VI and of Queen Elizabeth II, a certificate of entry in International Who's Who and a fine pendulum clock. We exchanged gifts: a tunic, hat and some cloth for us and a bottle of Black Label Whisky for him. Afterwards we were treated to a fine display of dancing outside the Palace: we sitting on one side and he and his elders on the other under a magnificent ceremonial umbrella.

Exchange of gifts was customary on such occasions. Black Label always went down well – they used to drink it mixed with Campari. And as often as not, I used to receive a Ghanaian tunic or a wooden stool. But I was once given a live turkey and was wondering what to do with it when the problem was solved by the local District Secretary who suggested that I hand it over to be eaten by the patients of a health clinic to which we had been hijacked by the Nigerian SRN midwife, a formidable lady.

In addition to calls on chiefs, a typical morning's programme might include visits to a cassava processing project constructed by the 31<sup>st</sup> December Women's Movement, a day care centre, a Junior Secondary School, which might or might not have a roof, a new well and a briefing by the District Secretary. We also inspected numerous KVIPs. The Kumasi Ventilated Improved Privy came in a variety of sizes, one even extending to a twelve seater, which we were careful to inspect from up wind. They made a valuable contribution to local health and convenience.

Naturally these visits had an ulterior motive on the part of our local hosts who were looking for funds to support their projects. Luckily the High Commission had a small budget for such purposes without having recourse to the ODA itself which preferred to devote its aid to more strategic national schemes. Usually our hosts were content to draw our attention to their current needs and to include a general request for help in their welcoming addresses. They well understood that we could not always respond. Only once did they go further. After a day's journey along atrocious muddy roads in the forest west of Kumasi, when we had been accompanied by a strong press contingent, we were greeted by the Assembly Presiding Member (alias the Chief). By then it was pouring with rain and a durbar, which had been planned, had to be truncated. The Presiding Member made his welcoming address, appealing for a new water supply and funds for the planned health centre. He then announced that "the Chiefs and people of Nerebehi have unanimously decided to install the British High Commissioner as "Nkosuohene" of Nerebehi under the stool name of Nana Amaniampong I". Thus enstooled as a Development Chief, I returned to Accra with the expectations of the people of Nerebehi weighing heavily upon me.

The ERP included rehabilitation of the Ghana Railway Corporation, which Britain and some other European Community members were supporting. Towards the end of our time in Ghana, the Dutch Ambassador, Sam Bloembergen, proposed to his EC colleagues that we travel together by rail from Takoradi in the west to Kumasi in the centre as an act of Community solidarity. We were a party of 16: the Danish, Dutch and French Ambassadors and their wives, the Italian and German Ambassadors, the EC delegate (later delegates were to become known as Ambassadors as the Commission's powers were extended) and his wife, five children and myself. Only the Spanish Ambassador was absent pleading urgent other business. Reluctantly Veronica opted out also, on advice from Ghanaian friends who feared that the train might well arrive more than 24 hours late. If so, she would have missed her flight to London the next day.

In their heyday, the railways carried two million tonnes of freight and over six million passengers a year. By 1984 these figures had fallen to 373,000 tonnes and 2.2 million passengers. Most of this traffic was carried on the Western line on which we were to travel and which had been partly rehabilitated. East Germany had provided 160 new coaches on barter terms. Britain had just agreed to rehabilitate some locomotives. This gave me an edge on most of my colleagues. The stations we passed through were as dilapidated as so many other Ghanaian public buildings. Some of the signal boxes looked as if they hadn't been touched since my Grandfather's day in the 1930s. But the signals worked.

The day of our journey illustrated one of the railways' problems. Told to expect a 6 a.m. start, this slipped to 7 and then 8 a.m. We finally left at 8.45 a.m. in a special train put on for our benefit. The delay was caused by the derailment of a timber wagon the previous evening. Further delay followed as we proceeded in fits and starts at a stately 30-40 mph along the line while the obstacle was removed. We finally arrived in Kumasi in the evening only 4 hours late. Veronica might have caught her plane after all. I won the EC sweepstake on our arrival time, organised by the Italian Ambassador, by the simple expedient of selecting a time half an hour after the latest chosen by any of my more optimistic colleagues.

Lawrence Durrell would have enjoyed the spectacle we presented of diplomats at work. We and the escorting railway staff were comfortably accommodated in four VIP coaches. There was too much train noise for continuous conversation. In the case of the Italian Ambassador, a charming and highly

intelligent man, this did not matter since none of us was ever sure what language he was speaking at any given moment. A good deal of attention was paid to food. Most of us had brought enough to share, with the result that elaborate compliments were paid to the vast quantities that emerged from a variety of picnic boxes. The EC delegate's was the biggest, needing at least two people to carry it. The Italian Ambassador produced a vast cake which looked daunting but which proved unexpectedly delicious. We lavished him with thanks and compliments, to make up for our inability to understand him. We read a bit (Le Monde for the French Ambassador and "Martin Chuzzlewit" in the original for the Danish). Some played bridge. We admired the view: lush green forest with few big surviving trees, surprisingly hilly, not easy country to build a railway in. But the colonial government had known what it was doing. The track follows the line of the great gold fields running northeast/southwest from Obuasi, through Dunkwa, to Tarkwa and not far from Prestea; it goes through the heart of the timber country; passes the manganese mine at Nsuta; and connects with the branch line from the bauxite mine at Awaso. It links Kumasi, capital of Ashanti, with the port of Takoradi, opened by Governor Slater in 1928.

We were able to make good use of our budget for entertaining Ghanaians and indeed the British and diplomatic communities. Ghanaians were rewarding guests. One only needed a few to ensure much jollity. Add a few more and one had a ball. We used Veronica's and my combined fiftieth birthdays, which we called our hundredth, to entertain a hundred or so of our friends and contacts, including two members of the PNDC.

I also used to invite particularly interesting or important individuals for tête-à-tête lunches in the Residence. These provided the opportunity for surprisingly frank discussions with senior figures. I remember in particular Justice Annan coming to the house in this way. My aim was gradually to build a relationship of trust through which I could tackle some of our key objectives.

Catering for what became a heavy entertainment load fell on Veronica's shoulders as well as management of the household staff who numbered two cooks, a butler, house boy, laundryman and three gardeners. Veronica would sally out intrepidly, in a small second hand Peugeot we bought locally, with a bundle of cedi notes (we called it a wodge) to shop wherever she could find the right food. Supplies became more plentiful as Ghana's economy gradually recovered. But it was hot and hard work. Towards the end of our posting we engaged a driver to make Veronica's task a little easier in the heavy Accra traffic.

Many educated Ghanaians knew Britain better than we knew Ghana. But their knowledge of modern Britain was not always up-to-date. We attended a performance of Macbeth by a troupe of black actors from London, invited by the British Council. The audience's first reaction was of disappointment. They had not expected the actors to be black and they assumed therefore that they were Ghanaians and not from London at all. But once the play began, the audience joined in enthusiastically by reciting the best known lines with the actors, including "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow..." showing how well Shakespeare had been taught locally. When MacBeth appeared not to see Banquo's ghost, the audience called out "look, behind you". Just like Shakespeare's own audiences in the pit at the Globe Theatre.

Nicholas spent the first six months of our posting with us, during his GAP year, before flying to Canada to stay with Peter Kennedy, one of Veronica's four Canadian cousins. As I had told Rawlings, he worked as a volunteer at the Nima Health Clinic run by Urban Aid under Father Pat Shanahan. He got to know Accra well, driving a land rover around the town to collect medical supplies, and made many

Ghanaian and expatriate friends. Robert, then aged 10 and at the Dragon School in Oxford, used to fly out to spend his holidays with us. And Eleanor, at Edinburgh University, also visited from time to time. She and Nicholas were able to move around the town, alone and with their Ghanaian and expatriate friends, by day and night, with less fear of harm than in some parts of London. Ghana was a marvellously safe place, in stark contrast to Nigeria along the coast. Part of the difference lay in the Ghanaian temperament and a tradition of law abiding behaviour which continues to this day.

Our lives in Ghana were not all work. At weekends, particularly when the family were with us, we often drove to the beach at Mile 16 just to the west of Accra where we had a small plot enclosed by a scanty palm frond hedge under the shade of the palm trees. We rented it from the local chief. You had to be careful of the undertow and quite strong currents when you swam. Drowning was a real risk. We used to buy fish from the local fishermen whose great canoes were drawn up on the sand nearby; and cooked them on a barbecue. We enjoyed the inscriptions on the canoes. One read "Don't rush"; another "To be a man is not a day job".

The buses too were similarly inscribed with a variety of improving slogans: "God bless 007", "God is in control", "six feet at last", "no condition is permanent", "no time to die". Ghanaians loved such exhortations. Over the entrance to a Printing House in Kumasi ran these lines: "This is a printing house, cross roads of civilisation, refuge of all arts against ravages of time. Armoury of fearless truth against whispering rumours, incessant trumpet of trade. From this house words may fly abroad, not to perish as waves of sound, but fixed in time. Not corrupted by hurrying hand, but verified in proof. Friend on entering this house you stand on sacred ground."

We visited the gardens at Koforidua on the escarpment north of Accra as well as Prampram, Ada and Keta on the coast to the east. We also spent a pleasant weekend at a guest house in the hills above Ho.

I had expected to spend at least three years in Ghana. And we had been looking forward to welcoming other friends and family to visit us and to exploring all the parts of the country we had not yet seen. So I was surprised to get a short-wave radio message in the car one day, as I was returning from a call, to tell me that a personal telegram awaited me in the office. Such telegrams were rare and meant that the sender did not want anyone else in the High Commission to see its contents. The only other one I had received in Accra was to ask me if I would accept a CMG if The Queen were to approve its award. I had said yes. I couldn't imagine what was now in store.

The telegram said that the Number 1 Board in the FCO had decided to appoint me as Assistant Under Secretary of State (AUSS) for Africa and the Commonwealth and that I was needed back in London as quickly as possible. At the time Veronica was in Britain with Eleanor and I did not expect her back for another week or so. But, although I knew that there was much in Ghana that Veronica enjoyed, I also knew that there were good family reasons why some time at home would be welcome. In any case I had no choice: the Board "had decided". So I replied that, although disappointed to leave Ghana so soon and at such short notice, I was honoured to accept the appointment. All this was true.

The indirect cause of this development was, bizarrely, the break up of the old Soviet Union and the FCO's need to find someone to serve at short notice as the first British Ambassador to Ukraine which had now emerged from the Soviet grip. The obvious candidate was Simon Hemans, the then AUSS for Africa, who was a Russian speaker. So someone had to be found to take his place. And, although there was a common view in the Office that Personnel Department did not go in for much in the way of

forward planning in making appointments, on this occasion it could hardly be blamed for failing to foresee such an unlikely chain of events.

I was given three weeks to extract myself from Accra and two more before I would be needed at my new London desk. This would enable me, the FCO thoughtfully suggested, to make a familiarisation visit to Southern Africa and then to have a few days to settle in at home again. This was the closest I came to understanding the feelings of those of my FCO colleagues whose postings were abruptly cut short by such unforeseen events as war and revolution.

Further local evidence of the new world order came when I saw to my surprise that the Russian Ambassador to Ghana had driven out to Accra airport to say goodbye to us. He also was probably surprised to find that we were flying to the UK via Zimbabwe and South Africa. We had twenty four hours in Harare and I had a few days of familiarisation in Johannesburg and Capetown while Veronica stayed with her Father and stepmother, Bunty, at Hermanus in the Cape, a good place to recover from the strains of packing in Accra. She flew home direct, while I went on to visit both Mozambique and Kenya to begin to learn more about wider African affairs. We then invoked the diplomatic break clause in our tenants' lease of our house in Wimbledon and were able to secure entry at roughly the same time as I began work in the FCO once again.

### **Ghana as AUSS**

Having just spent two and a half years in Ghana as High Commissioner, there had been no immediate need to visit it in my new job as AUSS. Indeed I had wanted to keep out of my successor, David Walker's, hair to allow him time to get dug in. Curiously, he had succeeded me also as Head of Personnel Policy Department, my last job before Accra. Naturally I followed events in Ghana with particular interest and had been pleased and relieved to hear that the process of constitutional reform, in progress when I had left Accra in early 1992, had been successfully completed. Rawlings had won the Presidential elections in November 1992; and his party, the National Democratic Congress, had won the Parliamentary elections in December. Although opposition parties had boycotted the latter, Britain had recognised the validity of both elections. Rawlings now enjoyed a reasonably respectable cloak of democratic legitimacy.

### **Ghana, January 1993**

In the light of these happy developments, I therefore recommended that the Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, should visit Accra when he had time. By a convenient chance, he was planning a visit to Latin America in the 1993 Christmas Parliamentary recess. Tom Harris, who had just returned from Lagos to become Head of African Department (Equatorial), and I therefore proposed that he break his journey to Latin America to pay short visits to both Accra and Abuja. The visits were well timed in getting our relations with the new democratically elected Rawlings Government in Ghana and the transitional Government in Nigeria off to a good start and in demonstrating HMG's support for the political changes in both countries.

I accompanied Douglas Hurd to Accra and Abuja and then returned, via Lagos, to Accra for the inauguration of Ghana's Fourth Republic on 7 January 1993.

In Accra, straight off an overnight RAF flight from London, the Secretary of State first met Opposition leaders over breakfast at the Residence. He then called on Rawlings at Christiansborg Castle. Rawlings was accompanied by the familiar faces of his Prime Minister equivalent, P V Obeng, and Obed Asamoah, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs. I was present at both meetings. Two days later, on my return from Lagos, David Walker took me to call on the Secretaries of the Interior and (again) on Asamoah. David also arranged for me to meet a lot of old Ghanaian friends at the Fourth Republic celebrations and at a congenial dinner in the Residence dining room which Veronica and I had known so well.

These memoirs are not the place to record in any detail the Foreign Secretary's meetings with Rawlings and opposition leaders. But I will summarise here my conclusions from his visit and my own two days later.

Not surprisingly, Rawlings's victory in the elections had given him confidence. He was more relaxed and articulate with the Secretary of State than I had ever seen him. He was clearly going to dominate the new Government as he had dominated the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC). HMG should therefore continue its efforts to get on terms with him. I was sure that getting him to London was the key to a closer and warmer relationship. With Douglas Hurd, he seemed uncertain of his likely reception in the UK; and he urged the Foreign Secretary to help in preparing the right public message about Ghana. People should be told, he said, that there were no Mobutus in Ghana.

At the 7 January celebrations of the inauguration of the Fourth Republic, I watched a PNDC appointee (the Chief Justice) swear in, first, the Vice-Chairman of the PNDC (Justice Annan) as the non-elected Speaker of the new Parliament and, then, Rawlings himself as President. This ceremony vividly illustrated the continuity between the old and new Governments. In effect, the PNDC had triumphantly legitimised its rule. And the Opposition, in losing the Presidential elections and foolishly boycotting the Parliamentary elections, was weaker and more divided than ever. It was hard to see what part it would now play in the political process. Douglas Hurd had encouraged Rawlings to engage it. One possibility was for him to include one or two of its members in the new Government. But I doubted if they would accept his invitation even if he were to give it. I thought that HMG should stay in touch with the Opposition and continue to promote dialogue between it and the Government.

I saw Rawlings's victory as probably good for Ghana and therefore for Britain because he would be likely to stick to his economic reform programme of structural adjustment. We should continue to back this. We should especially press for more encouragement of the private sector if Ghana's economic potential was to be realised. It had still not regained its standard of living at Independence. But my travels elsewhere in Africa, since leaving Accra ten months earlier, had brought home to me the relative extent of Ghana's success. I discounted any risk of the Opposition resorting to violence.

In talking to Douglas Hurd, Rawlings had expressed his concern about the situation in both Liberia and Sierra Leone. He had welcomed Douglas Hurd's intention to initiate a discussion of them in the EU, with the Clinton Administration and with Chief Anyaoku, Commonwealth Secretary General. This exchange reinforced my long held fears at the potential knock-on effect of instability and economic

collapse in Liberia and Sierra Leone on the rest of West Africa and our interests in Nigeria and Ghana. But I recognised that there were no easy solutions, not least given our own resource constraints and the recent excesses of Strasser in Sierra Leone (on which see more below).

### **Ghana, March 1994**

I returned to Accra fourteen months later, taking advantage of a Heads of Mission Conference which Linda Chalker would be chairing in Abuja, Nigeria. I wanted to bring myself up to date on Ghana; and jumped at the chance of renewing old acquaintance.

I recall spending much of the BA day-flight out, studying my briefs for the Heads of Mission Conference and working out the best line to take with Rawlings, should David Walker succeed in getting us an appointment. Disappointingly, I saw neither Rawlings, who was becoming increasingly inaccessible; nor Captain Tsikata, who pleaded illness (probably genuine); nor Kwesi Botchwey, the Finance Minister, (out of Ghana). But we did see Obed Asamoah (still Foreign Minister), Speaker Annan, P V Obeng (now a Special Adviser to the President, but still an important figure), Colonel Osei-Owusu (Minister of the Interior, who I had first met when he was Ashanti Regional Secretary), Air Marshall Dumasie (Chief of Defence Staff), Victor Selormey (Deputy Minister of Finance and a former Economics Master at Stowe!) and a good many other old friends. I relished my return, and did not know that, sadly, this would be my last visit to Ghana.

Recent tribal clashes in the Northern Region dominated conversation during my visit. With over 1000 killed, they had been the most serious in living memory and would have been unthinkable when I had lived in Ghana from 1989 to 1992. But the dispute, over land and chieftaincy rights, had roots deep in the past. I was told that they had been brought to the surface by rash public remarks by Rawlings before the elections. Whatever the truth of this - and I do not know the facts - by the time of my visit the army was deployed in the affected areas and the violence more or less under control. I found the mood in Accra to be a mixture of alarm and shame. Time was clearly needed for tempers to cool before the problem could be tackled effectively. Even then, a solution would be hard to find. Meanwhile the cost to the Government could, according to the Deputy Finance Minister, reach \$30 million in 1994; and damage to food production would cause food shortages. Rawlings's self-confidence might have been damaged and the experience would increase the risk of tribal friction in other regions. But the Opposition was not making party-political capital out of the trouble; and the consensus seemed to be that it would not have any major impact elsewhere in Ghana. Nor would it affect significantly Ghana's economic recovery, political stability or democratisation. It might however explain the current mood of pessimism I detected. I was glad to be able to announce during my visit a British gift of £500,000 of emergency assistance for those affected by the troubles.

On the surface, the outlook for democracy was reasonably promising. Parliament was more than a rubber stamp and was beginning to do a serious job. They were grateful for our gift of desk-top publishing equipment, to produce Hansard on time, and books which I presented to Justice Annan, the Speaker. He was revelling in his new job. District Assembly elections were taking place during my visit. Theoretically they were on a non-party basis; but candidates' party allegiances were well known. There was a free press, some of it pretty scurrilous, which Rawlings had resisted the temptation to suppress.

There were no political detainees, although the prisons held some convicted of subversion against the pre-election Government. The Supreme Court had stood up to Rawlings more than once. The US Ambassador told me democracy was on track; and George Benneh, Vice Chancellor of Legon University, who had given me a farewell lunch in 1992, said that it was beginning to take root.

But beneath this surface, the picture looked less bright. The real power still lay with Rawlings and his small coterie of henchmen and women in the Castle. Annan told me that Rawlings was "still getting used to the constraints of the constitution". Captain Tsikata was still an important figure, although now less powerful. Rawlings's inaccessibility shielded him from enough moderate advice. The Opposition, having excluded itself from Parliament, wrung its hands from the sidelines. Annan admitted that their absence made Parliament a lot less lively than it should have been. The Opposition complained, rightly, that the Government were not honouring their commitment to hold a dialogue with it; and claimed that the Government were dragging their feet in putting in place fair registration procedures for the next elections in 1996. The main Opposition party claimed it was only their moderation that restrained their followers from violence. I doubted this very much. There was little appetite for violence in a political cause. On present form, Rawlings looked to me a safe bet as a presidential candidate in 1996. And so he was to prove.

So, there was a gap between political appearance and reality. But I was inclined to agree with the German Ambassador's view that we should not expect anything better only one year into democracy. Britain and our friends should maintain the pressure for political dialogue between Government and Opposition and continue the policy of nudging Rawlings down the democratic road.

I met considerable pessimism about the economy. The World Bank's local economist, an old friend, was particularly gloomy. Ghana was still suffering badly from the pre-election monetary explosion in 1992. Inflation had now almost eroded the value of the 60% pay award to civil servants in October 1992. With a few exceptions, privatisation was stuck. The Divestiture Committee, "set up to fool the World Bank", was just a front; and divestiture decisions were taken elsewhere. The public sector remained far too big. And the end of IMF financial support meant that Ghana's discussions with the IFIs in Washington now lacked point and urgency. I was told that the optimism professed in public by senior World Bank staff in Washington about Africa's economic prospects was not shared by more junior people in the field.

Predictably, UK businessmen shared this pessimism. They complained about the difficulty of getting payment out of the Government, the growth in corruption (against which Rawlings had once fought so strongly) and increased uncertainty about the future in general. They also warned of an impending power shortage, caused by increased demand, particularly in the mining sector, and by mismanagement by the Volta River Authority (now that another old friend, Louis Casely-Hayford, had stepped down). The Commonwealth Development Corporation shared these concerns and had reduced their investment plans, intending to be more cautious and selective in future.

Selormey, the Deputy Minister of Finance, tried to put a better gloss on the situation. For example, he pointed out that the Ashanti Gold Company's share flotation was expected to raise over \$300 million for the Government (equivalent to about 3-4% of GDP). But I was not convinced, comforting myself that there had been a recurring cycle of optimism and pessimism about Ghana's economic prospects

ever since I could remember. Perhaps my visit coincided with a low point. My impression was that economic recovery would continue, but slowly and only a little ahead of population growth. Talk of reaching 8-10% Far Eastern growth rates by the end of the decade was implausible.

The following year, 1995, Rawlings duly came to London as a guest of HMG. I sat next to John Major at the Cabinet table in No. 10 during his meeting with Rawlings and attended some of the other events during the visit. And in November 1999 The Queen paid her second visit to Accra (Her first had been in 1961 when Nkrumah was President). How I should have relished the chance to be there! I like to think that the work of the High Commission, including in my own time in Accra, had played a part in creating the conditions which made both these visits possible.

*Ghana has continued to benefit from democratic stability. In the 2017 Presidential elections, the opposition candidate, Nana Akufo-Addo, defeated the incumbent John Mahama. The two will face each other again in the next elections due in December 2020. Oil has now been added to gold, cocoa and timber as one of the sinews of the economy.*

## CHAPTER 3

### AMBASSADOR TO TOGO 1989-1992

I was not only British High Commissioner to Ghana but also the non-resident British Ambassador to Togo, next door. This was my only experience of serving as an Ambassador, not that there was much difference from being a High Commissioner.

Like the rest of Africa, Togo owed its highly artificial frontiers to its colonial past. It had been a German protectorate from 1884 to 1914, encompassing what is now Togo and most of what is now the Volta Region of eastern Ghana. At the outbreak of World War 1, it was invaded by British and French forces and placed under military rule. In 1916 it was divided into separate British and French administrative zones, and this was formalised in 1922 with the creation of British Togoland and French Togoland. The British area was integrated into Ghana in 1957 following a plebiscite in which 58% of its residents voted in favour of joining Ghana upon its independence, rather than remaining under British-administered trusteeship. The French-ruled area became the Republic of Togo in 1960 and is now known as the Togolese Republic. The Togo/Ghana frontier divides the Ewe tribe and even individual families. This engenders tensions between the two countries from time to time.

Since 1975 British interests in Togo had not been thought important enough to justify a resident Embassy; and what work there was had been done by an Honorary Consul in Lomé and by staff in Accra, a day's drive to the west by the coastal road.

In my time the Honorary Consul was a British citizen, out of the pages of Graham Greene, who owned a tug boat and some barges which he used to deliver heavy goods from one port to another along the West African coast. He took care to arm himself heavily against local pirates off the Liberian coast. He was on good terms with the port authorities, customs and police in Lomé and was therefore well placed to help British citizens who got into trouble. Without his local support the Embassy's task in Lomé would have been much more difficult. Towards the end of my posting, we had to replace him and found another British citizen prepared to take on the duties of Honorary Consul. She and her husband enterprisingly ran a local English-medium language school.

I had had to brush up my French beforehand; and took the FCO's higher level French exam after I had arrived in Accra. My oral examiner was a rather shy Togolese who was kind enough to pass me. Neither I nor the FCO knew if he had done so because my French had reached the right standard or out of mis-placed respect for an Ambassador.

My predecessor never presented his credentials to President Eyadema and therefore did not formally become Ambassador because of the President's unwillingness to receive him, apparently in protest against our refusal to open a resident mission. I doubt if British interests suffered significantly.

In my case, Eyadema felt obliged to receive me because of the imminent signature in Lomé of the Lomé IV Convention, an agreement between the EC and the developing countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, providing for aid and trade between them. Togolese officials wanted Britain to send a Minister to sign on behalf of the UK. I told them that this would be difficult if I had not presented my credentials beforehand. The Italians were in the same position. The Togolese caved in; and so I and my

Italian colleague in Accra went along together for the credentials ceremony which took place shortly after dawn one morning.

After the short ceremony, we were entertained to a glass of champagne and were then doorstepped in French by the Togolese press. I worked hard beforehand to prepare my remarks to ensure I made the most of this chance to get some publicity for the little that Britain was doing in Togo; and was gratified that the interviews were the leading items of TV news that evening. The Italian Ambassador got equal treatment for his remarks about the remarkable beauty of the country and the profound importance which Italy attached to its relations with Togo. He said nothing of substance but his French was more eloquent than mine and he had obviously made it all up on the spur of the moment: a lesson in how to deal with the local press without overworking.

Shortly after, less than two months after my arrival in Accra, Lord Reay, a Government whip in the House of Lords, flew out to Lomé to sign the Convention in company with scores of other national representatives. I did my best to look after him in a country of which I knew next to nothing: a case of the blind leading the blind. The British Honorary Consul proved invaluable.

Thereafter, as the properly accredited British Ambassador, I tried to breathe life into our relations with Togo. I hoped to maximise British exports, encourage Togolese moderation in international affairs and persuade them to show greater respect for human rights. I hoped that we might also be able to build on Eyadema's own long tenure of power and his ambitions as a would-be mediator in his neighbours' quarrels. He had after all been President since he murdered his predecessor in 1967.

In the event, these worthy aims were overtaken by unexpected political turmoil and economic decline in Togo. The political changes in Eastern Europe and signs of change elsewhere in Africa generated pressure on Eyadema from Togolese public opinion to move towards more open government, greater respect for human rights and freedom of expression. There were student protests and violence in the streets.

First, Eyadema conceded the establishment of a constitutional commission charged with producing a draft constitution to be put to a referendum at the end of 1991. The aim was multi-party politics. But the President came under growing pressure to move faster. By August 1991, after serious violence, he had surrendered much of his power to Kokou Koffigou, President of the Togolese Human Rights League, who was appointed Prime Minister of a transitional government.

Koffigoh tried unsuccessfully to assert his government's authority and prepare for elections. Brave, decent, moderate, but without political experience, he survived three attempts by armed soldiers to take over the radio and TV stations and one direct attempt to arrest him personally. But then the transitional Government precipitated a dramatic army intervention by announcing a ban on the organisation which had provided Togo's one party rule. The army besieged and then stormed Koffigoh's residence, suffering over 100 casualties, and took him to the Presidential Palace for talks with Eyadema. Surprisingly, rather than resign, Koffigoh announced the formation of a government of national union. It included some of Eyadema's former ministers. In formal terms, Koffigoh had lost none of his powers. In reality, however, his authority had been undermined and Eyadema's correspondingly revived. By the time I left West Africa, the future was uncertain.

Although Eyadema's rule had been seriously challenged, he ultimately consolidated power again and won multi-party presidential elections in 1993, 1998, and 2003. The opposition boycotted the 1993 election and denounced the 1998 and 2003 election results as fraudulent. At the time of his death in 2005, Eyadema was the longest-serving ruler in Africa.

Britain played no part in the events of 1990/1. I paid one short courtesy call on Koffigoh to signal our support for political change and to offer our moral backing. Otherwise the Embassy's main priority was the safety of the small British community. The main risk was that one of them would be caught in the cross fire, but happily none was hurt. We kept our consular lists up to date and mapped the whereabouts of all known British citizens: some 80 at the latest count. We established a warden network and a direct radio link with the new Honorary Consul at the British school. We also kept in good repair our relations with the French, German and US Embassies. The latter had agreed to take formal responsibility for evacuating the British community if necessary.

We also did our best to continue to monitor economic developments in Togo. 1990 had been a poor year, thanks to late rains, a fall in phosphate production, high population growth, depressed world cocoa and coffee prices and a sharp rise in the oil price. Despite this, Togo had maintained its Structural Adjustment Programme and therefore the support of the IMF and other Western donors. But, as the political situation deteriorated, so also did the economy. In 1991, growth was negative, partly because of the Government's policy of trying to head off political trouble by conceding higher wage increases, and a loss of Government revenue due to the disruption of work. The Government suspended its Structural Adjustment Programme with the result that the IMF and World Bank stopped their financial support. Germany suspended its financial and military assistance in protest at the army's attack on Koffigoh's residence.

British bilateral aid was always tiny. We had two technical assistance staff engaged on research into the large grain borer beetle, which threatened grain storage; and we ran a small English Language Training programme worth some £200,000 p.a. In 1991 the Embassy were instructed to inform the Togolese Government that, for reasons of economy, Britain had decided to end the language programme. However Togo continued to receive some £4 million of British aid through multilateral channels. Unsurprisingly the Togolese informed us shortly afterwards that they would be closing their Embassy in London, also for economic reasons. In future their accreditation would be from Paris. So we would be quits.

British exports to Togo were very small. In a normal year, they might be worth some £10 million mostly in the form of transit trade to countries to the north of Togo. In 1991, exceptionally, this figure rose to some £19 million, due to the sale of eight more Scorpion tanks to join the twelve that the army had acquired in 1988. The timing of their delivery was embarrassing, coming just before the army's attack on Koffigoh's residence. We persuaded ourselves that they made no difference to the outcome.

Twice in my time, an RN survey ship visited the port of Lomé. This helped to sustain the illusion of British interest. My own visits to Lomé were few in number. Veronica and I used to try to hold an annual Queen's Birthday Party for the small British community and as many senior Togolese as could be persuaded to attend. And one year we joined the resident diplomatic corps to watch the annual National Day parade. The highlight of this was a procession of service men and women, floats, choirs etc who marched past the President on his saluting stand. They sang lustily, including to the strains of Handel's Hallelujah chorus. They had adapted the words from 'Hallelujah, Hallelujah' to 'Eyadema,

Eyadema'. The procession seemed endless until we realised that the same people kept re-appearing as they marched in a wide circle around the saluting base and spectator stands. This occasion neatly illustrated Eyadema's personality cult. Before his political troubles, he had nursed ambitions to replace President Houphouet Boigny of the Ivory Coast in his role as one of the grand old men of Africa.

On Armistice Day each year a small, moving, ceremony took place at Wahala north of Lomé where there was a tiny cemetery with four World War 1 graves, surrounded by a low white stone wall. Two British officers and two Germans were buried there, casualties of an action on 22 August 1914 when a small British force tried to destroy a German wireless transmitter at Kenama. In touch with Berlin, it would be able to coordinate German attacks on Allied shipping in the eastern Atlantic. One of the British casualties had been Lieutenant George Masterman Thompson, based in the Gold Coast, who thus became the first British officer to be killed in action in World War 1. He was 24 when he fell. Each year the British Defence Adviser in Accra and, in some years, the British High Commissioner, a.k.a. the British Ambassador to Togo, used to attend the ceremony along with the German Ambassador to Togo because two of the graves were of German officers. On the occasion that I attended, my hospitable German colleague invited us back to his Embassy for lunch. I did not discover until long afterwards that Lieutenant Thompson was a fellow Old Wellingtonian having been at Wellington before the War.

The resident diplomats were invariably helpful, probably glad to see some different faces in such a small capital. The hospitable French Ambassador presided in some style over a strong French presence. During the street violence that threatened Eyadema's rule towards the end of my posting, he played a big part in mediating between the different factions. So I tried to keep in close touch with this near Pro Consular figure to find out what was happening. Not for the first or last time, I was glad to have served in the British Embassy in Paris. The experience had been good for my French and given me helpful familiarity with France and its diplomats. I encountered much kindness from my French colleagues throughout my career.

*Gnassingbe Eyadema ruled until his death in 2005. He was succeeded in what amounted to a coup by his son, Faure Gnassingbe, who continues in power as of 2020. Although 'elected' from time to time, he is as much a dictator as his father.*

## CHAPTER 4

### ASSISTANT UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE (AUSS), AFRICA, IN LONDON 1992 – 1995

#### GENERAL

I began my new job as Assistant Under Secretary of State (AUSS) for Africa and the Commonwealth a few weeks before John Major's unexpected victory at the polls in 1992 and therefore served under Conservative Ministers throughout my time in London, first under Douglas Hurd as Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and, towards the end, under Malcolm Rifkind. My own Minister of State was Lynda Chalker who combined the jobs of Minister for Overseas Development with that of Minister for Africa. In most ways this simplified my own job and ensured at least that there could be no conflict of interest on Africa between a Minister for Africa and a Minister for Overseas Development. It also meant that I spent more time visiting by myself as AUSS, particularly to those countries with only a small British aid programme. Despite great energy, Lady Chalker couldn't spare as much time as she would have liked in Africa given her responsibilities for the rest of the world. But it also meant that some countries received less ministerial attention than British interests required.

Very occasionally I went over to Number 10 when senior Africans called on the Prime Minister. I used to sit next to him and answer any scribbled questions he would pass me. I remember for example calls by Mandela, Rawlings and a Nigerian. John Major was always friendly to me personally and I sometimes got the impression that he was relieved to get away from more unpleasant work. I also used to see him at meetings of Commonwealth Prime Ministers of which more later.

I was lucky to have above me in the hierarchy, as Deputy Under Secretary, first Mark Elliott, with whom I had been at New College, Oxford, and who had remained a friend ever since, and then David Wright, who I had got to know well in the Administration before I went to Ghana. They took a close interest in South Africa and provided valuable support when needed but otherwise spent most of their time on other responsibilities.

All the day to day work of managing British relations with Africa and of liaising with other Government Ministries was done by the FCO's African Departments, whose work I supervised. The number of these had gradually shrunk during my career as the priority which successive Governments gave to the region in their foreign policies diminished. When I had last dealt with Africa in the 1970s, as a Private Secretary, there had been four, including a Rhodesian Department. When I had been in Ghana, West African Department (WAD) had been one of three. But my arrival as AUSS coincided more or less with the amalgamation of WAD with East African Department (EAD), leaving only two departments for Africa. We took the opportunity to rename those two: African Department Equatorial and African Department Southern (ADE and ADS), with the convenient consequence that, instead of appearing separately under W and E in the Office telephone directory, they would in future appear together at the front. When I mentioned this at the Permanent Under Secretary's morning meeting, David Gillmore laughingly accused me of a minor coup. I was lucky in the heads of both departments in my time: successively Tom Harris and David MacLennan in ADE; and Robin Christopher, Charles Humfrey and then Bruce Dinwiddy in ADS. I had known Bruce well in Personnel Policy Department when he was the Assistant Head of Department.

As AUSS for the Commonwealth, I supervised also Commonwealth Coordination Department under David Broad. It dealt with general Commonwealth issues and not with individual Commonwealth countries. Much its biggest job was to prepare and manage British participation in the biennial Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conferences of which I had the misfortune to attend two and on which I shall say more in Chapter 5 on the Commonwealth.

Each year I used to draw up a list of my formal responsibilities. These were (a) to act as the final source of policy advice to Ministers on Sub Saharan Africa (including the Indian Ocean) and the Commonwealth especially South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Angola, Mozambique and the Horn of Africa (N.B. no mention initially of Rwanda, which was to assume unexpected importance in 1994); (b) to supervise my three departments and the 25 British Diplomatic Missions covering 45 countries (some Missions covered more than one country, as I had covered Togo from Ghana); and (c) to manage the financial and manpower resources allocated for the above, ensuring that resources were deployed to best advantage. In addition I had representational duties with senior African visitors to Britain from both Government and Opposition; and I kept in contact at home with British businessmen, academics and the media.

What were the resources available to support our African policies? My three home departments were staffed by 54 members of the Diplomatic Service, including secretaries and other junior support staff. The 25 Missions had some 250 UK-based staff between them and more than that number of locally engaged staff. To the cost of all this should be added the cost of the overseas estate (i.e. Embassies, staff housing etc), IT and transport. On top of these purely FCO expenses, were the cost of the British Council, the BBC African service and the Overseas Development Administration's activities (some £300 million).

Far and away the most important country in Africa was and remains South Africa; and it was the transition to majority rule there that commanded the attention of senior Ministers, including occasionally of the Prime Minister himself. A high priority was also given to our relations with Nigeria and Kenya. Otherwise Lynda Chalker and her officials were left to manage British interests in the region as best we could. Only when things went badly wrong, as they did in Somalia and Rwanda, where incidentally few direct British interests were at stake, did the rest of the Office show much interest in what we were up to.

I shall have more to say about South Africa and other individual countries below.

### **AUSS Management role**

It was sometimes tricky to know exactly how far to involve myself in events and how best to define the Under Secretary supervisory role. But I seized one early opportunity to support a change in this traditional role. In doing so I may have irritated some of my colleagues, particularly later when the organisational changes I supported and piloted were widely implemented. Because the changes were organisational, they may sound rather boring and they certainly bored some people. But they interested me and I thought that they could have a helpful effect on the management of foreign policy.

My interest in the subject had begun as Head of Personnel Policy Department (PPD) from 1986 to 1989. I had suggested that one of the geographical Under Secretaries, perhaps the one in charge of South

America or Africa, should be asked to conduct an experiment with a delegated manpower budget with limited authority to switch jobs within their area. The idea had fallen on stony ground.

Shortly after my return to the FCO in 1992, I learned that the Board of Management were about to hold a 'strategy day' over a weekend at the Foreign Secretary's country house, Chevening, and that organisational matters were to be on the agenda. The Board consisted of the Deputy Under Secretaries under the chairmanship of the Permanent Under Secretary, then David Gillmore, who I grew to like and admire enormously. Mere Assistant Under Secretaries (AUSSs) were not as a rule invited. But, taking my courage in both hands, I told David that I had ideas on involving AUSSs in the management of resources and suggested that my presence might be helpful. He invited me to attend. During the meeting I volunteered to act as a guinea pig in a pilot scheme to test the delegation of resources to an AUSS command, more or less in the way I had proposed in PPD three or four years previously. Jeremy Greenstock, AUSS for Europe, a powerful figure later to become Ambassador to the UN in New York, also volunteered. So, both the European and the African Commands took part in the pilot scheme.

The scheme came to embrace not only the establishments of individual departments and missions but some money too, including for example the budget for funding Government invitations to overseas VIPs and the one for financing small gifts and projects which had hitherto been at the discretion of individual heads of mission. There was also discussion about including in the pilot scheme overseas scholarship funds and the money to pay for British Military training teams. The thought was that the people in our overseas posts, visits, gifts, small projects, scholarships and military training were all essentially instruments available to help in the pursuit of our foreign policy and that they ought therefore to be in the hands of the people charged with implementing that policy. After all, they knew far better than the administration departments how resources could be put to best use.

The implementation of these arrangements bristled with minor technical difficulty; and I was to find myself embroiled in all sorts of esoteric detailed discussion. But the principle was simple. And I took the view that, if we used the pilot scheme to work out the details before rolling it out more widely across the Service, we would be able to devise reasonably painless and workable arrangements for general application. Perhaps unfortunately, it was decided quite soon that the scheme looked so promising and conformed so well with wider management reforms that were under way in Whitehall that it should be implemented across the Service before it had been fully tested and perfected in one or two areas first. I think, with the benefit of hindsight, that this was a mistake. It ran into a fair amount of disgruntled opposition and criticism from colleagues who didn't want to be bothered with what they regarded as administrative chores, preferring as they did the pure milk of policy work.

This scheme did not take up too much of my time because I was provided with an extra officer to run it for me. He did so initially from within ADE; but later he formed the nucleus of a small section working direct to me that led not only on resource management but on pan African policy and the formulation of an African wide strategy. In this way, almost paradoxically, delegating resource management to an AUSS Command, far from distracting effort from policy work, actually strengthened our policy capability.

Towards the end of my time as Under Secretary for Africa, I was asked to brief John Coles on this new scheme of resource management. He was preparing himself to take over from David Gillmore as Permanent Under Secretary. We met over a sandwich lunch with the Chief Clerk, Andrew Wood. Although I didn't realise it at the time, I came to wonder later whether, in fact, I was a candidate to

succeed Andrew as Chief Clerk and that this was a convenient way for John to size me up. Whether or not this was so, I have no doubt that Rob Young, on whom his choice eventually fell, made a much better Chief Clerk than I would have done.

### **British interests in Africa**

Although these managerial changes were to become a distinctive and important part of my job as an AUSS, they took very much second place to my policy responsibilities. Looking back, I should probably have started in the job by taking stock of British interests in Africa as a whole. But starting any new job is like boarding a moving train. There was little time for reflection as I struggled with the daily issues that crossed my desk. But writing this now, more than a quarter of a century later, I begin with an overall assessment of the nature and extent of British interests in a part of the world which, frankly, remained a rather low priority for the Office as a whole. Inevitably what follows owes a good deal to that valuable advantage point called hindsight.

Douglas Hurd used to talk of the hand that Britain had been dealt by history. He meant our relations with those countries which had once been part of the British Empire and were now our partners in the Commonwealth. In 1992 sixteen of these were in Africa. South Africa re-joined in 1994; and three more joined later: Cameroon, Mozambique and Rwanda. Hurd's point was that, whether we liked it or not and however slight material British interests might be in a given country, the fact was that we were linked by history and, to some extent, Britain had a moral responsibility towards such countries. Of course Britain did have important material interests in some of them, particularly South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria. And even if they had not been members of the Commonwealth, we would have wanted a strong relationship with them. But it was significant that a country the size and wealth of Zaire, not in the Commonwealth, did not feature in any list of British priorities in Africa. Conversely, we paid a surprising amount of attention to such smaller Commonwealth countries as for example Malawi, Lesotho and Sierra Leone, precisely because they formed part of the hand dealt us by history.

Part of our calculation was the fear that some of these countries might collapse and, if they did, our moral responsibility would have demanded that we help to rescue them. I recall, for example, a visit I paid to Malawi in 1993. I concluded that, in addition to £100 million of investments and a sizeable number of British citizens (both no doubt due to the historical connexion), Malawi faced the risk of political instability and economic decline. If the economy were to collapse, it might cost us a great deal to rescue. Here was an argument for maintaining a large aid programme in Malawi.

The migration problems facing the developed world from 2015 onwards illustrate the point vividly. I recall discussion in the 1990s of whether Britain should have been doing more to support the economies of the Commonwealth countries of West Africa so as to help reduce the pressures from visa applicants seeking entry to Britain. At the time, the risk of Nigerians flooding across the Mediterranean to Southern Europe would have seemed fanciful. Now - in 2020 - things look very different. Britain seems to me to have a strong interest, for example, in assisting the Nigerian Government to confront Boko Haram and in strengthening West African societies more generally with a view to encouraging people to stay in their own countries. The trouble is that the potential problem is so vast as to be unmanageable. Instability in Nigeria, or Zaire, or Ethiopia, or in any other significant African country could easily spill over their borders and destabilise their neighbours, generating massive movements of refugees, many of whom will head gradually northwards.

In 1992, as now, Britain had a general interest in promoting democracy and “good government” (on which more later), not only because this policy would strengthen stability in the country concerned but, also, indirectly, in the rest of Africa, because failure in one place would reduce the credibility of those policies elsewhere.

We also had, and have, a general humanitarian responsibility, as a rich member of the international community, to provide emergency relief to the poor and destitute. This required us, for example, to relieve the victims of famine in Ethiopia, floods in Mozambique and civil war in Sierra Leone of which only the last was part of the hand dealt us by history.

Our commercial interests might have been only a tiny fraction of total British exports and overseas investments; but they mattered to the companies concerned and there were some big hitters e.g. BP in Angola and RTZ in Mozambique, to name two to which I gave personal high-level support during my visits to those countries. Other household names I met on my travels and to which our Diplomatic Missions gave as much support as possible included Shell, Unilever, British American Tobacco, De Beers, Land Rover, Guinness, Taylor Woodrow, Plessey, Barclays and Standard Chartered Bank. The list was long.

Wherever there was a British commercial presence, there were British citizens who required support and, on occasion, protection. Most of these were in South Africa, Zimbabwe and East Africa. But even a small country like Malawi had some 8,000 British residents.

On the other hand, British tourists were fairly few and far between. Only South Africa, Mauritius and the Gambia attracted significant numbers: 27,000 in Mauritius in 1992. The game parks of East Africa were popular but visitor numbers were relatively small and made few demands on our Missions.

I have written above of the modern immigrant tidal wave across the Mediterranean. But this is very different from the immigrants that have been coming to Britain over the last generation or so from the Commonwealth countries of West and East Africa. These have formed part of the fabric of our relations with those countries. The fact that so many people of Ghanaian, Nigerian and Kenyan origins were living in Britain and were British citizens gave Britain as a whole, and not just them, all the greater interest in those countries.

I wonder if the Ministry of Defence keeps records of exactly how many British servicemen and women have served in Africa over the years. The total number might surprise. In my time as AUSS, Britain’s military interventions in Africa were limited to short-term logistical contributions to UN forces wounding up the civil wars in Mozambique and Angola. We did not send front-line troops to intervene militarily anywhere in the continent, although I sometimes wished we had. We did so later under Blair in Sierra Leone to good effect. But Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa and the Seychelles, to name only four, provided refuelling and rest and recreation facilities for RN ships. The RAF had staged in Senegal on its way to the Falklands in 1982. Britain’s possession of Diego Garcia provided a valuable base for US forces in the Indian Ocean during the 1991/2 Gulf War and subsequently. British army units trained in Kenya and Botswana. And Britain had a strong interest in the contributions of African U.N. peacekeeping troops both in Africa itself (e.g. Botswanan units in Mozambique and Somalia, Zimbabwean in Liberia and Ethiopian in Rwanda) and elsewhere.

Britain's defence interests in Africa also included the small British Military Advisory Teams in such countries as Ghana about which I shall have more to say later. They fall into a different category because they were more the means by which we protected our interests than a distinctive interest themselves. The same could be said of our training team in Nyanga, Zimbabwe, which helped integrate the opposing forces in Mozambique's civil war.

I very much doubt if anybody in Whitehall has ever tried to compile a list of British scientific and environmental interests in Africa. In an increasingly integrated world it is something that should be done. One of the most interesting visits I made as AUSS was to Madagascar where I learned that 80% of the flora and fauna was endemic i.e. unique to the island. Britain shared a wider international interest in the preservation of this treasure house of biodiversity, a fact that helped to explain the interest that British scientists took in the country. The same applied to the importance of preserving the rest of Africa's wild life, from the elephants and rhinos of East and Southern Africa, to the gorillas of Uganda and Zaire, and of protecting the environment throughout the continent. Britain's aid programme was right to give increasingly high priority to environmental objectives.

On the other hand, companies like RTZ, Shell and BP and the gold companies had compiled thorough inventories of the continent's mineral and oil resources. The FCO was in close enough contact with these companies to be able to take account of their interests in the formulation of British policies in Africa. I recall our decision to tip the balance of British support towards the Angolan Government and away from Savimbi's opposition in recognition of BP's interest in offshore oil exploration; and I also recall lobbying the Madagascan President in support of RTZ's interest in an ilmenite mine in the south of the island.

From Britain's earliest contacts with Africa, we have recognised the threat to travellers from disease. Even if our ancestors didn't at first know their names, malaria, yellow fever and other horrors have killed countless visitors to African shores. But it wasn't until fairly recently that we came to recognise the seriousness of the threat from disease to Britain's health at home. One of the milestones in this understanding came in 1986 when Kelvin White, British High Commissioner to Zambia, wrote a despatch to the Foreign Secretary warning of the growth of AIDS in Zambia and of the potential consequences for Britain. By the time I became AUSS from 1992 - 1996, the facts had become better known. And leaders like Rawlings in Ghana and Museveni in Uganda had begun in their public speeches to warn of the dangers of AIDS. They were brave and right to do so. And President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa was unaccountably foolish to deny the link between HIV and AIDS; and President Zuma equally foolish to claim that a shower after unprotected sex was enough to provide protection.

More recently the ebola outbreak in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia have provided a further terrifying example of the threat to the world's health from disease originating in a remote region. Zika is the latest example of the same thing. In other words, it is now alarmingly clear, in a way that it wasn't a generation ago, that one of Britain's most important interests in Africa is health. But the converse is also true. Unlike aids and ebola, the corona virus originated outside Africa, in China whence it spread to the rest of the world, including Africa.

Britain also had - and has - important political interests in Africa. We needed the support of Africans in the UN and through the Non Aligned Movement and Organisation of African Unity. Our Diplomatic Missions in Africa, as elsewhere, regularly received instructions from London to lobby their local

Governments on current international issues e.g. over Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Our permanent membership of the UN Security Council gave us a political interest in collaborating in international efforts to resolve the civil wars in Angola and Mozambique, Somalia and Rwanda (on which more later). We shared a common Western interest in blocking Islamist expansionism in East Africa and across the Sahara, although my time as AUSS preceded the worst of this development; and I did not have to wrestle with the rising tide of international terrorism (as opposed to the internal national kind). The bombing of the US Embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam took place in 1998, two years after I had moved from London to Ottawa. More generally, our political activities in Africa helped to strengthen and sustain Britain's world-wide role as an essential member of the international community.

Finally, we had a vital interest in supporting Britain's national and multilateral aid programmes and ensuring that they were well aimed and spent. Again, like our military training programmes, this was less a distinctive interest in itself than part of the means by which we promoted our interests.

I end this section with a summary of British interests in Africa. The continent contained many of those countries which form part of the hand that history has dealt us and for which Britain therefore has a moral responsibility. By supporting them, we helped to avoid the potential costs of rescuing any that collapsed or of rescuing their neighbours who might suffer from the knock-on consequences from collapse next door. The problem posed by large numbers of refugees across the Mediterranean had not yet - in the 1990s - arisen. We had a general interest in promoting democracy and "good government" as a means of strengthening stability in the country concerned and, indirectly, in the rest of Africa. We had a clear humanitarian responsibility, largely recognised by British public opinion, to help the victims of natural and man-made disasters. We had commercial interests, mostly dwarfed by those in the developed world, but important to the companies concerned, which included some of the biggest British companies. Mineral resources, both potential and actual, were a big part of the picture. There were sizeable resident British expatriate communities in Southern and parts of Eastern Africa; and smaller but vocal ones in other parts of the continent. There were British tourists to protect, largely in Southern and East Africa. There were African immigrant communities in Britain itself which gave Britain a distinctive interest in their countries of origin. We had defence interests in parts of Africa, not enormous in comparative terms, but which were well worth preserving. We shared a global scientific and environmental interest in Africa's flora, fauna and geography. We had an increasingly apparent interest in the health of the continent. And we had political interests arising in particular from Britain's leading role in the world. But international terrorism in Africa had not yet emerged as a threat to our interests.

### **British objectives in Africa**

From this assessment of British interests flowed our objectives in Africa, a list which we kept under regular review. They reflected of course Britain's world-wide objectives, namely: to safeguard Britain's national security; to build Britain's prosperity by helping to increase exports and investments; and to support British nationals. Our geographical priorities in 1992 were equally recognisable:

- a peaceful transition to majority rule in South Africa;
- an end to the civil wars in Angola and Mozambique;
- the stability and prosperity of Nigeria, Kenya and Zimbabwe;
- ditto in the next most important tier of Britain's hand of history: Ghana, Zambia, Tanzania and Uganda; and in Ethiopia;

- ditto in the other 14 countries with resident British Missions;
- the rest of Africa: to a worrying extent was largely terra incognita despite non-resident British representation.

Note: In 1992 neither Rwanda nor Somalia was receiving any priority in our work. Neither was Liberia despite the civil war raging and its effect on the stability of Sierra Leone.

### **The tools of British Policy in Africa**

What were the tools and resources available to us in pursuit of these objectives?

At ministerial level, Lady Chalker, as Minister for Africa and for Overseas Development, enjoyed easy access throughout Africa. By the time I started as AUSS she had got to know all the key Heads of State and could be sure of a warm welcome wherever she went. Part of this was due to cupboard love: her interlocutors valued British aid. But it also owed much to the warmth of her personality and to her obvious liking and sympathy for Africa and its people. She was indeed the single most valuable instrument of British foreign policy in the continent. This was all the more important in countries like Ghana, Nigeria and Zimbabwe where our High Commissioners did not have easy access at the top.

Douglas Hurd, as Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, had all too little time to spare for Africa and its leaders. I accompanied him on brief visits to South Africa, Nigeria and Ghana; and he also included stops in Kenya and Somalia on his way back from South Africa in 1992. In addition he took advantage of the presence of many Commonwealth Foreign Ministers at CHOGM to meet them. All these provided rare opportunities to promote our objectives at the top level.

The Prime Minister paid only one visit to Africa during my time as AUSS. He flew to South Africa in September 1994, six months after the elections which introduced majority rule, and addressed both South African Houses of Parliament. I was involved in preparations for the visit in London but did not accompany him to South Africa. David Wright went instead, as Deputy Under Secretary of State.

Even more valuable was The Queen's visit to South Africa in 1995, in demonstrating the importance we attached to our relationship with post-apartheid South Africa. I was disappointed not to be in the royal party, although my presence would have added nothing of value. I was also disappointed no longer to be involved in African affairs in 1999 when The Queen paid her second visit to Ghana (her first was in 1961).

Lady Chalker was always keen to see visiting African leaders on their visits to London if she were not abroad. These meetings were helpful in strengthening our relations with individual leaders and their governments and in getting across whatever our current line was. But it was much more difficult to secure access for senior Africans above Lady Chalker. A call on the Prime Minister was what African leaders most wanted, even if it were only a photo opportunity to shake the PM's hand on the steps of 10 Downing Street. But No. 10 took the line that this would have been phoney and, if the PM didn't have time for a proper talk, he couldn't see the leader concerned at all. We missed a trick there.

Very occasionally, the Government invited a Head of State to pay either a State visit or, one step down, an official Guest of Government visit to London. Such honours were accorded to only two African

Heads of State in my time as AUSS. The first, incongruously, was Mugabe in 1994 who came on a full blown State Visit. Now, that seems incredible. I can only plead as an excuse that, at the time, he seemed to have put behind him his anti-British hysteria. The second Head of State visit was by Rawlings of Ghana who was invited in 1995 as a Guest of Government in recognition of his restoration of constitutional government. This latter visit played a useful part in strengthening Britain's relations with Ghana.

As for our official resources, I have already mentioned the African Departments in the FCO at home and our diplomatic missions in Africa. These provided the day-to-day means by which we maintained Britain's African interests. Lady Chalker used to chair regional conferences of Heads of Mission and the appropriate London based officials. These were invaluable in coordinating our work. I recall attending such meetings in Ghana, when I was High Commissioner and in Nigeria, Ethiopia and Zambia as AUSS.

Some of our Heads of Mission had exceptionally close relations with the local Head of State and were able to exert direct personal influence on him (there were no female African Heads of State in my time). I am thinking, for example, of the roles played by Tony Reeve in South Africa, particularly before majority rule in 1994; by Kieran Prendergast with Moi in Kenya; by first Maeve Fort and then Richard Edis with Chissano in Mozambique; by James Glaze with Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia; and by Charles Cullimore and Edward Clay with Museveni in Uganda. They all had easy, direct access at the top and could speak frankly as necessary.

Not all of our Heads of Mission enjoyed such easy access at the top even in Commonwealth countries. Neither Mugabe in Zimbabwe nor Babangida and Abacha in Nigeria nor Banda in Malawi were willing to see our High Commissioners regularly and on request. In Ghana, in his first few years as President, Rawlings saw Arthur Wyatt, my predecessor as High Commissioner, a good deal; but I and my successor had difficulty in getting access to him. This followed a pattern evident elsewhere. Early in the term of a President, he might be more interested in direct contact with a British diplomat. Later this might change. Moi in Kenya was the main exception. His door remained open to successive British High Commissioners. In most non-Commonwealth countries, where there was a resident British Mission, access was surprisingly easy. In addition to Ethiopia and Mozambique (see above), Meg Rothwell in Ivory Coast and Peter Smith in Madagascar enjoyed a good personal relationship with the President. The main exception was Zaire where Mobutu was not in the habit of receiving our Ambassadors.

I ought to mention here my own visits as AUSS. I made 42 visits to 27 countries, thus more than one visit to some countries. I undertook these as a way of learning about my parish and keeping abreast of developments. I also wanted to see our Ambassadors and High Commissioners at work so that I could write the annual personal appraisal of their performance that was required by the FCO's Personnel Departments.

But my visits were also one of the means available to us in promoting our objectives in Africa. Those of our Heads of Mission who themselves had easy access to the Head of State were usually able to introduce me to him as well as to key Ministers, including the Foreign and Finance Ministers. In this way and on other occasions I met most of the African Heads of State in countries with a resident British Missions, except for Babangida and Abacha of Nigeria, Mobutu of Zaire, Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Banda of Malawi and Nujoma of Namibia. Some of those who I did not call on in the course of my own visits,

I met on other occasions, including Mandela, De Klerk and Rawlings. Most of these calls gave me an opportunity to press home at the top level British messages on the importance of democracy and good government (which I define below), domestic political reconciliation and the conditions we were attaching to our aid programmes (again see below). I gave the same messages to the many senior African ministers from all over the continent who I saw on their visits to London. I shall have more to say about my individual country visits in Part 2 below.

The most powerful tool available to us in furthering British aims was the aid programme. Even then, long before David Cameron raised our aid to the UN development target of 0.7% p.a. of gross national income, Britain was spending hundreds of million pounds in Africa, mostly in Commonwealth countries. In 1992/3 about 40% of our world-wide bilateral aid - more than £500 million - went to African countries. Some of this was direct balance of payments financial aid; and some programme aid to specific projects or sectors especially health, education and communications. Increasingly we were linking the provision of this aid to the political and economic performance of the recipients. I shall say more of this below.

In addition, Britain was a major contributor to multilateral development organisations, which also treated Africa as a priority. The European Community's aid programme to sub-Saharan Africa for the period 1990–95 amounted to £7.6 billion. The British share was £1.25 billion. How best to ensure that this aid was spent wisely and in accordance with British objectives was a growing preoccupation.

Most of our bilateral aid was under the direct authority of the Overseas Development Administration headed by Lady Chalker. But a small proportion was delegated to Heads of Mission and to me as AUSS to spend on projects and gifts in support of our political objectives. For example, my AUSS budget funded the purchase of computers for Nigerian political parties, thus demonstrating our support for multi-party rule. In Ghana, the High Commissioner's local gift scheme funded some desk top publishing equipment for the production of Ghana's Hansard, in this small way illustrating our support for Parliament. Usually we were able to generate useful local publicity for our gifts and their political purpose.

The British Council was another valuable tool in our armoury. Its provision of libraries, UK scholarships, English language training and the administration of donor aid programmes (not only Britain's) were popular throughout Africa and helped promote British values and interests. Although the Council was autonomous and took its own decisions on what to do and where to do it, both the Diplomatic and Development wings of the FCO had opportunities in London to express views on the matter, as did our High Commissioners and Ambassadors in the field. For a small example, in Ethiopia, I seem to recall that it was on the recommendation of our Ambassador that the Council organised an Open University MBA course for President Meles Zenawi; and I also remember the President asking me if some of his Ministers could be included in the course. Here was an original way of encouraging good administration at the most senior level.

Even more important was the role of the Ministry of Defence and of Britain's armed forces. We avoided contributing directly to UN peacekeeping forces; but we sent a battalion to Angola in 1995 to provide logistical support to the UN peacekeeping forces. And we provided regular military training for the forces of Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and the Gambia in West Africa; Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland in the south; and Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. In some of these countries the training was provided by a resident British Military Advisory Team (BMAT) and in others by one-off training visits.

Their value was not only in providing specific military training but also in teaching African soldiers their functions as servants of the State and guardians, rather than rivals, of the civil power. And, incidentally, our trainers were able to provide Britain with useful information on the local armed forces and individual officers.

One of the most successful British military training operations was in Nyanga in eastern Zimbabwe. There we established a small camp where we provided training for Mozambican army instructors from both sides in Mozambique's civil war. I shall have more to say about this later.

We also provided police training with similar objectives including in Nigeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, Namibia and Swaziland. I recall Rawlings's enthusiasm for this kind of practical help.

The BBC's overseas service was another very effective means of promoting Britain's voice. I hesitate to include it in a list of the tools of British foreign policy because that would encourage the belief that it was under the control of the British Government of the day, a strong belief particularly in authoritarian states. On the contrary the BBC was of course editorially independent, as I and my Diplomatic Service colleagues never tired of asserting. But its provision of reliable, trusted information, untinged by political bias, indirectly served British interests. For this reason, we believed that the BBC's budget should be expanded to provide stronger audibility and a service more tailor-made to its African audiences. One difficulty was that the FCO itself was responsible for negotiating the BBC's overseas budget with the Treasury who tended to argue that any increase should be funded from savings elsewhere in the FCO budget. Which would best serve British interests: another BBC transmitter in Southern Africa or the maintenance of a British Embassy in Antananarivo or Mbabane? Faced with such a choice, I would have chosen the maintenance of an Embassy.

Another useful tool was the small budget which paid for our Missions to invite leading figures to Britain where each would be given a programme tailor made to their interests. We hoped that by getting suitable journalists, civil servants and others with local influence to Britain we would be able to improve their understanding of British policy and even to turn them into our friends. I used to see some of these people in my FCO office.

### **British Policies in Africa**

If I had to summarise our policy in Africa during my time as AUSS in a single phrase, it would be "Good Government". In June 1990, Douglas Hurd had made a speech affirming his belief that "good government" went hand in hand with successful economic development: "Economic success depends to a very large extent on effective and honest government, political pluralism and ... observance of the rule of law, freer and more open economies." In a sentence which was much quoted thereafter by British Heads of Mission to explain British policy to their local audiences, "Countries which tend towards pluralism, public accountability, respect for the rule of law, human rights, market principles, should be encouraged. Governments which persist with repressive policies, corrupt management, wasteful and discredited economic systems should not expect us to support their folly with scarce aid resources which could be used better elsewhere".

This theme was taken up subsequently by Lynda Chalker as Minister for Overseas Development. In June 1991, she listed four components of good government:

- sound economic and social policies, free markets and an enhanced role for the private sector, the provision of essential services and curbs on military expenditure;
- competence of government: the need for training to improve administrative capacity;
- pluralistic political systems that are open and accountable, to reduce political interference and corruption, and a free press;
- respect for human rights and the rule of law.

There were two aspects to this. First Britain was linking the provision of its aid to a country's performance on "good government". Secondly, it was actively looking for areas in which its aid could make a specific contribution to better government. Help with training to improve administrative capacity and legal systems were two obvious examples of this second aspect.

One important question arose in our definition of "good government", which we never clearly answered. Did the phrase "political pluralism" include multi-party rule? Or did we accept that, in some African circumstances, single-party rule made more sense, particularly given the strong tribal structure of African society. I had never forgotten a remark made to me by P.V.Obeng, Ghana's Prime Minister equivalent in Rawlings's PNDC Government. "Anthony", he had said with a smile, "you must always remember that, when the elders of an African tribe are discussing a course of action, they are free to voice their opinion freely up until the moment when the decision is taken. Then, if they continue to express a view at variance with that decision, they are....**killed**" (said with emphasis). Such a tradition was incompatible with multi-partyism and the right of an Opposition, in a Westminster style system, to criticise the Government.

During my visit to Uganda in February 1995, a Constituent Assembly was discussing the country's new constitution. The most controversial unresolved issue was multi-partyism on which so far Government and Opposition had failed to agree. The most likely outcome was that it would reach consensus (i.e. a two-thirds majority) on postponing multi-partyism for another five years. If the Opposition were to accept such a consensus, Britain's position would be comfortable because it would have been absurd for us to insist on multi-partyism against the consensus. On the other hand, the Opposition might continue to insist on multi-partyism in defiance of a consensus against it. In that case, a confrontation could develop between Government and Opposition with a risk of violence. Britain's position would then be awkward. I did not see how, for example, given our declared position against repression and despite our support for the rule of law, we could condone a Government crack-down on a major Opposition rally, even if it were held in defiance of the law, if it led to police violence. We might then have found ourselves on a collision course with Museveni and his Government.

In the event Museveni stuck to single party rule until much later; and we fudged our position. But the dilemma remained unresolved both in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa. We sometimes insisted on multi-partyism and sometimes not, depending on local circumstances and the general direction that a particular country was taking towards better government. In Kenya for example, in 1991, Britain and other western donors had resolved to withhold further assistance to Kenya for six months pending progress in social and economic reforms. Later that year, President Moi announced his willingness to institute a multi-party system with free and competitive elections in 1992. This suggested that the reforms were triggered or at least accelerated by donor pressure.

An essential part of our policy was to work closely with those of our main western partners with interests and aid programmes in Africa. This meant especially France, Germany and Portugal in the

European Union; and the US, Japan and Russia. I held bilateral talks with my opposite numbers in the capitals of all these countries; and some of them came to London also. With the Russian I focussed particularly on Angola and Mozambique where the Soviet Union had developed close relations with many key figures during the civil wars which it had fuelled in the days of East/West confrontation. In addition to bilateral talks with the three EU members, I attended regular meetings of all my EU opposite numbers to concert our African policies.

Britain also worked with all those other international bodies which operated in their respective roles in the continent. These included those of which Britain was a member, especially the UN, the World Bank, the IMF and the Commonwealth; and those of which we were not, particularly the OAU and the various African regional bodies.

The UN became involved wherever there was significant risk of conflict and of course where conflict actually existed. Our UN Mission in New York was the principal means of aligning British and UN objectives and activities. It was at the centre of UN involvement in Rwanda and Somalia, Angola and Mozambique for example. But our local Heads of Mission kept in touch with UN military forces, the UN Secretary General's Special Representatives and other UN figures. And I recall discussions in Kinshasa which I had with Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Representative to Zaire, who was trying to negotiate the formation of an interim government as a way of ending the political stalemate between Mobutu and his opponents. In Maputo I met Aldo Ajello, the Special Representative in charge of UN forces in Mozambique.

In 1994, in the wake of the disasters first in Somalia and then in Rwanda, Britain developed proposals on conflict prevention and resolution. On a visit to Addis Ababa in September 1994 I briefed Salim Ahmed Salim, OAU Secretary General, on these ideas. I told him that the Prime Minister would be mentioning them in general terms in his speech in Cape Town and the Foreign Secretary to the UN, both a week later. We wanted to cooperate with the OAU in developing our ideas and to ensure that they were consistent with OAU thinking and acceptable to Africa. We might for example, I told Salim, orientate our military training in Africa more towards peacekeeping and help train the OAU's own military secretariat. I told him about a joint UK/Zimbabwean military workshop planned for early 1995. I said another possibility was the creation of logistical bases where equipment could be stored and quickly deployed for peacekeeping operations. Salim welcomed our approach and raised no difficulty with any of our proposals. He was particularly enthusiastic about the idea of logistical bases. I later told Moi in Kenya about our ideas. He too reacted positively, welcoming personal consultation.

Our policies on conflict prevention were supported also by diplomatic mediation by our Heads of Mission where opportunity offered. For example, James Glaze's close relationship with Meles Zenawi enabled him to help mediate between the Government and the Oromo Liberation Front which had withdrawn its support from Meles's transitional government despite having previously collaborated with him in the overthrow of the Dergue. The task of mediation was being carried out by a Contact Group of Western Ambassadors, in which James played a leading part. I say more of this later in my country tour of Ethiopia. In the event our attempts at reconciliation were to fail and later the OLF resorted to guerrilla war against the Government, a war they were to lose.

Richard Edis's mediation between the FRELIMO Mozambique government and the Opposition, RENAMO, during the 1994 elections was more successful. Richard was described by the UN's Aldo

Ajello as “the principal architect of a real miracle, in keeping the peace process active in the run-up to the elections”.

We aimed to work particularly closely with the Commonwealth Secretary General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku from Nigeria, who sometimes played an important role in Commonwealth Africa, particularly at Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (on more of these see Chapter 5 below). Lady Chalker, supported by me, did her best to ensure that the Chief’s actions accorded with British aims and that, wherever possible, we gave him our support. But he was a force to be reckoned with; and we occasionally found ourselves at cross purposes, for example in Lesotho where we could not understand the Chief’s support for the King.

I shall have more to say in my chapter on the Commonwealth about the Harare Declaration issued by Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1990. This landmark agreement set the Commonwealth on a new course: that of promoting democracy and good governance, human rights and the rule of law, gender equality and sustainable economic and social development. We were able to use this agreed commitment to press our case for good government throughout Commonwealth Africa.

From time to time, the question arose whether we should take sanctions against a particularly objectionable regime. We were careful to do so in the company of as many other western donors as possible. We introduced an arms embargo and visa restrictions against Zaire in protest at Mobutu’s repressive and corrupt regime which provided a conspicuous example of bad government. We also banned arms sales, military training and British Ministerial visits to Nigeria in the wake of Abacha’s coup; and took similar measures against Strasser’s Sierra Leone.

To summarise our policy to Africa: our main agenda was “good government” to which we linked our aid programmes with increasing determination and in close collaboration with other western allies. Our aid gave us real clout and made a significant contribution to the achievement of our political and economic objectives. We focussed strongly on the leadership in each country through the Prime Minister (rarely), the Foreign Secretary (occasionally), Lady Chalker (fairly frequently) and our Heads of Mission in the field (systematically and continuously). I lent my support where I could. Our aim in these personal contacts was to persuade African Heads of State to adopt and support our ‘good government’ approach. We used our Commonwealth membership to support our objectives.

We encouraged our Heads of Mission to mediate in local conflicts where their intervention might make a difference and could be done without exposing us to charges of interference. We were ready to consider the provision of logistical military support to UN forces but not to take part in UN front line operations. We provided military training throughout the continent; and we developed proposals to collaborate with the OAU in conflict prevention and resolution. Where it was unavoidable, we introduced economic and other sanctions against the worst regimes. We tailored our policies to give as much support as possible to British firms and citizens working in Africa, through advice, and personal interventions at a senior level.

#### **The main events during my time as AUSS (1992 - 1995)**

In the grand sweep of history, only two events may be remembered: majority rule in South Africa in April 1994; and the genocide in Rwanda the same month.

A third event had a big influence at the time: the battle of Mogadishu in October 1993 when 18 US troops were among other peacekeeping forces killed in a UN operation aimed at creating a secure enough environment for the provision of humanitarian relief to be delivered to increasingly lawless and famine-stricken Somalia. This ended the US's (then) bloodiest overseas military intervention since the Vietnam war. It had the effect of discouraging further US and other outside military intervention in Africa at least during my time as AUSS.

Despite the disasters of Somalia and Rwanda, however, there was a mood of cautious optimism about Africa's fortunes. In many ways they were looking up during my three and a half years in London. The end of apartheid and the achievement of majority rule without serious bloodshed not only greatly strengthened British relations with the South African Government but also opened the prospect of South Africa playing a constructive part in the development of Southern Africa. It wasn't completely fanciful to imagine a tide of growing prosperity spreading northwards through the region over the coming decades. That was before President Mugabe in Zimbabwe turned his back on sensible economic and international policies and plunged his country into poverty and turmoil.

Not only were South African fortunes apparently improving; but the civil wars in Angola and Mozambique were drawing to a close as the Cold War ended and the super powers ceased to fight each other in the region by proxy. Meanwhile throughout the continent respect for market based economics and more accountable government was growing. Rawlings in Ghana was not the only African leader to recognise the need to abandon the disastrous socialist policies, and worse, of the past. Museveni in Uganda and Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia were among others who seemed to be willing to follow a more capitalist and democratic path. Sadly these two changed their minds later and became as reluctant as their predecessors to hold free and fair elections and surrender power.

Sub Saharan African countries fell into five main overlapping categories in the period 1992 - 95. At the top of the class were those countries which were more or less meeting the western donors' "good government" criteria: Botswana, Namibia, Gambia (until Lieutenant Jammeh ousted Jawara from office in 1994), Senegal and Mauritius.

In the second rank, were those who seemed to be moving, albeit slowly and hesitantly, in the right direction but who the donors were pressing to do better: Kenya, Zimbabwe and the Ivory Coast.

Thirdly were those who were in transition, and making progress, from authoritarian, repressive regimes and badly managed economies towards more representative governments, plural societies and sound economic policies. This list was longer and included Lesotho, Swaziland (perhaps), Malawi (after Banda's fall in 1994), Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Cameroon, Ghana, Madagascar and the Seychelles. In all of these, also, the donors were encouraging better performance.

Next came those countries emerging from civil war and political crisis: most important of all, South Africa, but also Angola and Mozambique.

Five countries were clearly going in the wrong direction: Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Zaire, Rwanda and Somalia of which the last two suffered disaster.

It wasn't difficult to identify the main ingredients of success, although there might be room for discussion of the extent to which each factor was a cause or consequence of success. My own conclusion

was that the single most important pre-condition of success was good leadership. It was this above all which led to 'good government', political stability based on accountable (preferably multi-party) rule, sound economic policies, successful reconciliation after civil war, donor support including debt forgiveness or re-scheduling. And, although good leadership could not of course take the credit for the material resources of their countries nor for fair world commodity prices, bad leadership was certainly to blame, as in Nigeria (with its oil) and Zaire (minerals), for the desperate plight of some countries richly endowed with material resources. Equally, good leadership could help compensate for their lack, as in Mauritius and Malawi. Where good leadership and material wealth coincided, as in Botswana (diamonds), the results were impressive.

The main obstacles to success were equally obvious. To a large extent the main factors were simply the converse of the ingredients of success I have enumerated. Top of the list came bad leadership. This was usually accompanied by corruption and often followed military intervention, as in Nigeria, although there were even more examples of civilian misrule for which the armed forces were not responsible. There were other obstacles, however, with which good leadership had a harder time in coping: excessive population growth, illiteracy and poor education, disease (malaria and AIDS to name only two), and strong tribal and racial tensions (as in Nigeria, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Kenya and South Africa). An important factor over which nobody had any control was the weather. Drought could wreak havoc with the best laid economic plan.

A further problem difficult to cope with was the existence of the wrong borders: Lesotho and Swaziland (which might have done better within South Africa); Gambia and Senegal (in a single entity); Togo (in Ghana), Cameroon (awkwardly divided between its anglophones and francophones); Ethiopia and Eritrea (whose borders had led to civil war followed by separation); Nigeria and Zaire (both of which owed much of their instability to their colonial borders).

The root cause of Africa's border problems lay in the nineteenth century with the rivalries of the colonial powers. But it was an open question what would have happened if the colonialists had never arrived. Would there have been perhaps literally thousands of independent tribes each within its own political borders? Or would those tribes have come together in three or four empires or federations? Or something in between? And, whatever the outcome, what would have been the effect on the quality of government, of economic management and of individual well being? Such intriguing questions lie well outside the scope of this memoir.

I have referred above to economic management and mismanagement. These were critical factors in determining the fortunes of all African countries, as elsewhere in the world. And, as elsewhere, the classic economic policy errors were well recognised. Corruption, excessive public expenditure, including a swollen civil service, monopolies, nationalisation and hostility to the private sector, an overvalued currency and state subsidies were all too familiar ills throughout the continent. The structural adjustment programmes of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, so strongly supported by the donors, were aimed at correcting these ills. Our diplomatic missions took every opportunity, in public speeches and private meetings, to press this agenda. And wherever I travelled, I found myself arguing the case for "adjustment", along with its accompaniment of "good government", with Presidents, Ministers, Opposition leaders, business communities and the media.

### **Countries to which Britain paid little attention**

Of the 45 Sub Saharan Africa countries, for which I became responsible in 1992, Britain did not have resident diplomatic missions in 19 of them. With the opening of a small mission in Rwanda in 1994, this number fell to 18. Of the original 19, I had visited Liberia as a Private Secretary in 1971; visited Togo as non-resident Ambassador several times from 1989 to 1992; visited Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger as a tourist in 1990; spent a few hours in Somalia as AUSS in 1992 and visited Rwanda as AUSS in 1995. I never visited the remaining 12 countries: Burundi, Djibouti, Guinea-Conakry, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Cape Verde, Benin, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) and Chad. All these countries were visited from time to time by the non-resident British Ambassador responsible.

So it could be said that Britain was in touch with every African country; and could, if necessary, intervene diplomatically in their capitals. I therefore doubt very much if British interests suffered serious harm from our incomplete coverage. But the fact is that we knew less about Africa in the 1990s than we had earlier when our network of resident missions included Somalia, Liberia, Mali, Burkino Faso (or Upper Volta as it used to be), Niger, Togo and Gabon. The list may not be complete. I don't know which other countries outside Africa had a more complete coverage and deeper knowledge in the 1990s: probably France, the US and conceivably Germany. We sometimes used to rely on their expertise and influence to make good our weaknesses.

### **General reflections on my time as AUSS Africa**

At this point in the story, I want to stand back and summarise my general reflections on the job of AUSS Africa.

In some ways it was the best job I had in the Diplomatic Service. It gave me an opportunity to make a difference, both in the region for which I was responsible and in the FCO itself. It wasn't an easy job. Indeed it was both professionally difficult and at times I found it very stressful, although nowhere near as stressful as the jobs of some of my AUSS colleagues. The run-up to majority rule in South Africa, the genocide in Rwanda, successive crises in Nigeria and elsewhere presented unexpected and formidable challenges for British policy and policymakers. I occasionally found myself near the centre of events which attracted close attention from Ministers, senior officials, the press and the public. I used to remember the words of a head of department in which I once worked: "Shaving in the morning I looked at my reflexion in the mirror and wondered if today was the day when I would be found out".

It was important to keep in mind the wider context of British foreign policy in which Africa played only a small part. For this, my attendance at the Permanent Under Secretary's half-hour meeting, held daily at 10.30 a.m, was invaluable as well as fascinating. It provided a daily opportunity for each AUSS in turn to report anything of importance in his/her parish. Often I had nothing to report. But two or three times a week, there was something in one or other parts of Africa worth mentioning. I needed to make sure I was reasonably well briefed and to keep my remarks short and pithy. But most of the interest for me lay in the reports made by my colleagues, particularly on such matters as the EU, the Balkans, China and Russia. The PUS, first David Gillmore and then John Coles, was always meticulous in allowing everyone to have a say if he/she judged it of enough interest to the rest of the room.

Winning the confidence of Ministers, senior officials, my Heads of Department in London, my opposite numbers in the Overseas Development Administration and British Heads of Mission and their staff in the field, was vital. For this, travel was essential, mainly in Africa but also to the capitals of our main international partners. It gradually built up my first hand knowledge of the continent and enabled me to speak with growing confidence as the months went by. And, as my own self confidence grew, so also did the confidence placed in me by others, and so also did my satisfaction in the job.

It was also essential to keep in touch with British business head offices in Britain and helpful to do so with outside experts, including in the university world and the press. I needed to underpin these personal contacts with as much background reading on Africa as possible. In retrospect, I should have done more such reading and also spent more time talking to outside experts. But time was not always on my side. I would spend from 0830 to 1830 each day at my desk and take home work most evenings and at weekends. Often I would use the weekend to begin and/or end an overseas trip so as to maximise the time available in the field. If I returned home on a Saturday, I would use the Sunday to write my reports on each country visit. My three and a half years in the job were utterly absorbing and enormously rewarding. I could not have done it without Veronica's understanding and support.

## CHAPTER 5

### AUSS 1992 – 1995: THE COMMONWEALTH

My AUSS responsibilities included not only Africa but also the Commonwealth. Another AUSS could equally well have looked after the Commonwealth. But the number of its African members and the importance of the South African issue over many years and, to a lesser extent, of Nigeria and other major African countries, had made sense of brigading both Africa and the Commonwealth in the same AUSS command. This meant not that I had any responsibility for Britain's bilateral relations with non-African Commonwealth members; only for the institution itself and questions which affected the whole membership.

For most of the time, I left the Commonwealth Coordination Department to get on with whatever needed doing. The Head of this for most of my time as AUSS was David Broad, an agreeable man with whom I got on well. He wasn't afraid to criticise me if he thought I had got things wrong. One of the few issues in which he was obliged to involve me was the review of the Commonwealth Institute which led to HMG announcing its intention to withdraw funding under the FCO's remorseless budgetary constraints. David and I both thought this a short sighted decision but were powerless to prevent it.

My own views on the Commonwealth had I suppose been influenced by Grandfather Slater's colonial career. It seemed to me to be a useful but not essential organisation which could help to bridge the gap between the developed and developing world. It could make a contribution to multi-cultural and multi-ethnic cooperation, for example through the Commonwealth Games and the annual Commonwealth Day. I recall attending the annual Commonwealth service in Westminster Abbey and Archbishop Tutu dancing on the pavement outside afterwards.

The Commonwealth could also play a helpful political role by bringing pressure to bear on those of its member governments which were, in our view, misbehaving, for example through abuses of human rights or refusal to hold elections. There were also a number of Commonwealth organisations of value to the whole membership. I am thinking particularly of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association which brought MPs together; the Commonwealth of Learning, based in Vancouver, which promoted distance learning; the London based Commonwealth Foundation charged with promoting closer contact between professional associations throughout the Commonwealth. There were quite close legal contacts which could be useful in strengthening the rule of law where it was weak. And it was valued by some Commonwealth leaders, particularly in Africa, as a channel through which they might make their voices heard.

I doubted if any of these links made a great deal of difference to our bilateral relations with the developed Commonwealth e.g. Australia, Canada and New Zealand because contact would have flourished without the Commonwealth. But they probably helped strengthen our relations with the bigger African countries; and they also helped in maintaining British interest in the poorer and smaller Commonwealth members.

Some of my colleagues tended to dismiss the Commonwealth as more trouble than it was worth. For me the main point was that it existed as part of the hand which history had dealt Britain and we might as well make the most of it. Commonwealth membership was not an alternative to the other organisations of which we were members, but added something to our international reach and

influence. I had no doubt that, in our place, France would have taken the organisation very seriously indeed, as they did La Francophonie.

Every second year the Commonwealth took over my life for an unpleasant week or so. As AUSS I attended two of the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGMs) which were the Commonwealth's most formal political activity. The first lasted four days and took place in Limassol, Cyprus, in October 1993. The second lasted three days in Auckland, New Zealand, in November 1995. Both were unforgettable and disagreeable experiences, although I suppose I must now admit that I am glad to have gone if only to be able to boast about having survived. I should add in all fairness that many of my Diplomatic Service colleagues had much more intensive conference experiences, for example at EC meetings and in the UN, and may even have enjoyed them. But they weren't my scene.

The Queen, as Head of the Commonwealth, attended both CHOGMs in her ceremonial role. In Limassol she stayed on the Royal Yacht, *Britannia*, on which she gave a reception for delegations, including me: one of the two occasions I saw for myself the value of the Yacht in promoting Britain (the second was to be in Canada).

The Prime Minister, John Major, led the British CHOGM delegations to both Cyprus and New Zealand. Douglas Hurd accompanied him to Cyprus; but, in the absence of a specific role, wisely made a side trip to the Middle East during the conference. He also had the happy idea of inviting African Foreign Ministers for a round table dinner discussion of African issues while Heads of Government were otherwise socially engaged. I attended this and joined in the discussion, all the more so having met many of the guests on my country tours of Africa. By November 1995, Hurd had just been replaced as Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary by Malcolm Rifkind; and so Lynda Chalker went to New Zealand to provide the PM with ministerial back-up.

The Permanent Under Secretary (PUS) led the official delegation: David Gillmore in Cyprus and John Coles in New Zealand. The delegation included two or three other senior FCO and ODA officials to cope with whatever the specific agenda was that year. So it was a high powered team on both occasions.

The mechanics of the meetings were always much the same. The Heads of Government met formally to discuss their agenda and then spent a day or so in informal meetings at a retreat somewhere out of town. They were not accompanied by any of their delegations. This gave them an opportunity to get to know each other. Officials retired to something called the Committee of the Whole, familiarly known as the Committee of the Black Hole, to discuss what became the communique of the meeting.

Theoretically, the communique recorded the conclusions of Heads of Government; and so to some extent we relied on reports reaching us from Heads via the Commonwealth Secretariat to compile the communique. But many of the subjects in the communique were never discussed by Heads. They were included only so that it could be said that they had been addressed by the Commonwealth. So far as I know, nine tenths of both the Cyprus and New Zealand communiqués were read only by a tiny group of experts in our respective Foreign Ministries and then consigned to the archives rarely to be consulted again. I shall have more to say about the other tenth below.

Picture a small conference room with some 50 officials seated at an oblong table, each representing a Commonwealth member state. In a second row sat the supporting officials of the larger states. The representatives of the smaller states might have only one or even no supporters. The meeting was chaired by one of the two Commonwealth Deputy Secretaries General, either Sir Humphrey Maud, seconded to the Secretariat after a distinguished career in the FCO or Sir Anthony Siaguru of Papua New Guinea. We worked our way through long drafts circulated by the Secretariat. The process could take all night. The record was held by our final session in Cyprus which lasted nearly 24 hours non-stop. Sandwiches were supplied in the conference room. The smell of humanity enriched the atmosphere. The protocol was that the representative of any member state was entitled to speak for as long as he (I recall the presence of no she's, luckily for them) chose on any subject he chose. Thus, at 3 a.m. we listened on one occasion for some 45 minutes to the views on the Middle East of the representative of one small Commonwealth Pacific island. Eventually we emerged bleary eyed with a final draft for submission to Heads of Government for their approval. We then sent our reporting telegrams to our capitals and left for the airport.

David Gillmore attended the entire meeting of the Committee of the Black Hole in Cyprus. In London afterwards, the Prime Minister wrote to thank David for the work of the delegation. He included this sentence: "Your own performance in sitting up night after night to negotiate a 74 paragraph communique plus a 52 paragraph annex, culminating in a 22-hour session into the final day, was an epic performance which will find its place in the annals of the Diplomatic Service". Wisely John Coles left me in the British seat for much of the meeting in Auckland, supported by the rest of the delegation. He sent me a generous letter afterwards saying "Just a line to say how admirable I thought your performance in Auckland was. Your advice to the Prime Minister was always cool, clear and well-judged. You put in tremendously long hours. I should have felt lost without you. Many thanks. " Handsome words indeed, if not fully deserved.

I now come to substance. The Cyprus CHOGM was not one of the best. It was inevitably dominated by discussion of the Cyprus problem because the Cyprus delegation tried to enlist the Commonwealth on its side in its quarrel with Turkey. After mind-numbing discussions in the Committee of the Black Hole, in which David Gillmore exhibited exemplary patience with the Cyprus delegate, the communique reiterated the organisation's "support for the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and non-aligned status of the Republic of Cyprus" and the need for Turkish forces and settlers to withdraw from Northern Cyprus. It urged compliance with United Nations Resolutions on Cyprus. This all sank without trace, leaving the fundamental issues unchanged. But the Cyprus Government were able to boast to its Greek public opinion that it had successfully championed their cause against Turkey.

More helpfully, the meeting also agreed to lift economic sanctions against South Africa (still outside the Commonwealth) in the light of moves by the South African government to end apartheid and grant voting rights to the non-white majority. But it also agreed to continue its arms embargo until a new multi-racial government was elected. This was fine as far as it went; but probably had little effect on events in South Africa as de Klerk's government inched towards accepting majority rule a year later.

To my personal satisfaction, the meeting agreed to accept [Cameroon](#) as a member due to improvements in its human rights situation, but on condition that it fully comply with the Commonwealth Harare Declaration on pluralism and human rights by 1995. This was more or less in line with the recommendations I had made to British ministers after my recent visit to Cameroon and it paved the way for Cameroon's attendance at CHOGM in 1995.

Nothing useful was achieved to encourage Sierra Leone's return to democracy after its recent coup. And all that could be achieved on the Secretariat's ambitions to develop a declaration on a 'global humanitarian order' was agreement to appoint a group to study how best to promote conflict resolution and human rights. Nor did much of value come out of the meeting's discussions on trade and social issues, except possibly a statement on the latest round of multilateral trade negotiations known as the Uruguay Round.

The 1993 meeting left me with a feeling of mild dread at the thought that I might still be AUSS for the 1995 meeting. And so it proved. But, in practice, although the New Zealand CHOGM was as disagreeable an experience personally as Cyprus, it was more eventful and achieved much more than I had expected.

In 1993, I had flown out to Cyprus on the PM's RAF plane and recall a briefing meeting with him on the flight when he was his usual friendly self. Otherwise I saw virtually nothing of him. In 1995 I flew out to New Zealand commercially via Tokyo, breaking my journey there for talks on Africa with my Japanese opposite number. But once in New Zealand events conspired to bring me in closer contact with John Major.

The meeting unfortunately coincided with France's decision to conduct a series of six nuclear tests in the Pacific between September 1995 and January 1996. This provoked an angry debate at CHOGM. The PM was obliged to disassociate Britain from his colleagues' condemnation of French nuclear testing. Britain's own nuclear status and its friendship with France took precedence.

The rancour that this difference of opinion might have created was however blown aside during the retreat weekend by the news of the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others in Nigeria. A writer and human rights activist, Saro-Wiwa had been condemned to death for four alleged murders. He claimed he was framed by Abacha's Government because of his opposition and that of his Ogoni tribe to the oil industry in the Niger Delta region of southern Nigeria. He said the case against him and his friends was designed to prevent the Ogoni from stopping pollution of their homeland and getting a fair share of oil profits.

This bad news reached me at around 6 a.m. in a call from the BBC in London asking for a comment. Having gone to bed in the early hours in my hotel room, I was woken by the call. I disengaged myself from the BBC and, having failed to make telephone contact, I sped upstairs in my pyjamas to find a private secretary, who had already heard the news. It was agreed that the PM would hold a breakfast meeting to decide on a course of action before he had to leave for the retreat. I was invited to attend and spent most of the meal answering questions from the PM as best as I could. I thanked my lucky stars that I had decided to visit Nigeria in October, less than a month earlier, in case Nigeria featured at CHOGM. I was therefore adequately briefed, although had to chase around afterwards to find answers to some detailed questions on the level of British investments in Nigeria. Following the breakfast, the PM described the executions to the press as "judicial murders" and said that he did not see how Nigeria could remain in the Commonwealth. Simultaneously, President Mandela, appearing at CHOGM for the first time, South Africa having been re-admitted to the Commonwealth at the coming of majority rule in 1994, said his delegation would recommend Nigeria's suspension until a democratic government was elected.

That same morning, at the retreat, emotional appeals by, in particular, Mandela and Mugabe and John Major's own backing persuaded Heads of Government to suspend Nigeria from Commonwealth membership despite concerns by some that to do so would infringe Nigerian sovereignty. Heads also decided that, unless Nigeria made progress on fulfilling the Commonwealth Harare principles on democracy etc (including the release of political prisoners), within a timetable not yet decided but likely to be two years, Nigeria would be expelled from the Commonwealth.

The dramatic timing of the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his 8 co-defendants during CHOGM itself provoked a much tougher reaction than would otherwise have been obtainable. Not only did it secure the suspension of Nigeria, but it had a similar effect on CHOGM's discussion of the further implementation of the Harare Declaration. Heads agreed the "Millbrook (where the retreat was held) Commonwealth Action Programme on the Harare Declaration". This included a ladder of measures, from technical assistance to punitive action, to support the Harare principles and encourage the restoration of democracy if an elected government were overthrown. It also established a standing Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group to deal with violations of Harare. Its task would be to recommend measures for collective Commonwealth action aimed at the speedy restoration of democracy and constitutional rule. It was agreed that it should comprise the Foreign Ministers of South Africa, Zimbabwe, Ghana, New Zealand, Canada, Britain, Malaysia and Jamaica.

The British delegation expected the Secretary General to convene the Ministerial Group shortly to deal with Nigeria. We should need to consider whether to propose that it should deal also with the Gambia, following the military coup there, which largely escaped CHOGM's attention. Sierra Leone received friendly encouragement for its elections announced for February 1996.

The Secretary General proposed this action programme at the retreat. He had been consulting widely but sporadically for many months and had played his cards close. The outcome owed much to British insistence on the need for a mechanism to ensure more systematic implementation of the Harare Declaration. But for the coincidence of the Nigerian executions, the action programme might not have received endorsement. It had clear potential as a way of promoting Britain's 'good government' agenda, although its details would need working out and the proof of its usefulness would only be in the eating. My successor would have the job of pressing forward at official level, as I ceased to be AUSS shortly after my return from Auckland.

South Africa's return to CHOGM was of course excellent news. This was Cameroon's first appearance. On future membership, Heads requested the Secretary General to set up an intergovernmental group to advise on the criteria for assessing future applications for membership of the Commonwealth. We had hoped to get agreement on postponing consideration of Mozambique's membership application until after the group had reported. But neither we nor anyone else was willing to stand up to Mandela and the Heads of other Southern African members who argued strongly for making Mozambique an exception to the more rigorous process we favoured. It was therefore warmly welcomed as the 53rd member of the association. This broke new ground because, unlike all other Commonwealth members, Mozambique, a former Portuguese colony, had no historic connection with the old British Empire. Cameroon, on the other hand, was partly made up of the former British Cameroon. Rwanda was later to become another exception to the general rule.

Otherwise, the New Zealand CHOGM included discussion on the usual wide range of subjects. They included British ideas for tackling multilateral debt, money laundering, financial crime and reform of

the UN; aid and development; Cyprus, Hong Kong, Fiji, Bosnia and other international issues. As in Cyprus, little of value was achieved on much of the agenda. But the British delegation came away feeling that our main objective had been achieved: namely to capitalise on South Africa's return to give the Commonwealth renewed impetus, particularly through promoting 'good government'. And many delegates, in the euphoria habitually induced at CHOGMs by surviving endless discussion and sleepless nights, probably believed that this CHOGM had given the Commonwealth fresh vigour. They could point to the Millbrook Action Programme and the accession of Cameroon and Mozambique. Who, they asked, would want to join a moribund club? There might be some truth in this. It was too soon to judge. But at least we now had a better opportunity than for many years to turn the Commonwealth to British advantage.

CHOGM's last action was to accept with much pleasure the offer which John Major made for Britain to host their next meeting in 1997. In the event it was held in Edinburgh in October 1997 and chaired by Britain's newly elected Prime Minister, Tony Blair. I am glad to say that, by that time, I was High Commissioner to Canada living in Ottawa.

## PART 2 COUNTRY TOURS OF AFRICA

During my time dealing with Africa - as a Private Secretary, High Commissioner to Ghana/ Ambassador to Togo and as AUSS - I visited a total of 33 Sub Saharan African countries, many of them several times. What follows is based on my memories of those visits in which I have included some general reflections on the course of events in the countries concerned and of British interests in them. I begin with Liberia in West Africa, if only because it was my first visit to black Africa. I then follow a roughly geographical order from West to East through Central to Southern, finishing with the Indian Ocean. The visits are grouped by country. I have added short passages in italics covering some salient features of the years prior to my first visit, the years between my visits and the years since the last visit until 2020.



Map of West Africa

## CHAPTER 6

### ANGLOPHONE WEST AFRICA: LIBERIA, NIGERIA, SIERRA LEONE, GAMBIA

(Ghana is covered in chapter 2 above.)

#### LIBERIA

##### Liberia, 1847 to 1971

*The Republic of Liberia began as a settlement of the American Colonisation Society, who believed black people would face better chances for freedom in Africa than in the United States. In 1847 the people proclaimed independence and in 1848 elected their first President, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, a wealthy, free-born African American from Virginia, who had settled in Liberia. By the American Civil War, more than 18,000 black people, mainly freed slaves, from the US and Caribbean had moved to the settlement. Its population in 1971 comprised the descendants of these people and of the indigenous people.*

*Liberia is the only African republic to have self-proclaimed independence without gaining independence through revolt from any other power, and is Africa's first and oldest modern republic. Democratic elections had gradually given way to virtually one party rule.*

### **Liberia, July 1971**

My introduction to Africa was a visit to Liberia in July 1971 as Lord Lothian's newly appointed Private Secretary. The timing was inconvenient, both to Lord Lothian, who was looking forward to the House of Lords' summer recess in a few days and then a holiday in Scotland; and to me, who had not yet managed to find a house nor even unpack the heavy luggage after our return from the Embassy in Athens.

Lord Lothian had not intended to visit Liberia, either in the summer of 1971 or, quite possibly, ever. It featured in no list of Britain's priorities in Africa. Although Britain had always enjoyed a friendly relationship with the country and its Government and had maintained a small Embassy in Monrovia, our material interests there were small.

On Friday 23 July 1971, the President of Liberia, Dr William Tubman, died in a London clinic after prostate surgery. He and his True Whig party had been in power for 27 years. On Tuesday 27 July, it was decided that Prince William of Gloucester should represent The Queen at the funeral in Monrovia on Thursday 29 July; and that Lord Lothian should represent HMG. Having served in the Diplomatic Service, including in the British High Commission in Lagos, Prince William knew West Africa. He did not take an ADC to the funeral; and I was told that I would have to look after both him and Lord Lothian. Given that this would be my first overseas trip as a Private Secretary, I felt some trepidation. Lord Lothian was far too kind to say so; but he too must have wondered how I would cope. Luckily for us both, we were accompanied by Harold Smedley, one of the two AUSSs for Africa at the time. I was to get to know him well on subsequent travels in Africa. He had once been High Commissioner to Ghana and was an experienced and indulgent man. I could not foresee that I would one day follow in his steps both as High Commissioner to Ghana and AUSS for Africa.

We had some ten hours to prepare, between hearing of our departure and the midnight departure of, if I remember right, the British Caledonian flight from Heathrow. I just had time to hire morning suit and evening tails from Moss Bros to meet the very formal Liberian dress code and to view a flat in Holland Park which we were in danger of losing unless we put in a bid quickly. Veronica packed my case in Henley-on-Thames where we were living temporarily with my Mother and brought it up to London. Am I right that Veronica and I had time for supper together at Costa's in Notting Hill before leaving for the airport? Was it then that we decided to make an offer for Flat 1 in 59 Holland Park? Meanwhile, Protocol Department ordered a wreath from Harrods which delivered it to the aircraft for Prince William to lay at the right moment.

After a night flight, we landed in Monrovia which was as hot and sticky as I had imagined. The Prince and Minister were met at the airport by Martin Moynihan, the British Ambassador, and by the Speaker of Parliament who, we were told, was second in seniority to the President himself, now William Tolbert, who had succeeded Tubman. The Embassy took delivery of the Harrods wreath.

The Prince stayed at the Embassy with the Moynihans; and Harold Smedley and I at the Ducor Intercontinental Hotel where the Liberians were accommodating most visiting representatives. The

Emperor of Ethiopia and the Presidents of Mauritania and The Gambia stayed at the President's Executive Mansion. I never discovered where President Houphouet Boigny of the Ivory Coast or General Gowon of Nigeria stayed. With the Prince at the Embassy and me in the Hotel, would this ease or complicate my task as his Acting ADC? I was uncertain of the role of the Liberian Protocol Officer who had been attached to the Prince.

The State Funeral was held at the Centennial Memorial Pavilion. The throngs were so great that we all had to get out of our cars and elbow a way through, dressed in our finery of morning coat and striped trousers. The Pavilion itself was packed. During the long service, the Heads of Delegation were invited to lay their wreaths on the bier. I had been assured that the British wreath, which I had still not seen, would be delivered to the Pavilion and handed to the Prince at the right moment. But, when his turn came and he stepped forward to lay it, the wreath could not be found. A search ensued, conducted mainly by the Chief of Protocol and me. Eventually, I suggested to the Prince, whispering in his ear, that he pretend to lay the wreath by leaning over the bier and re-arranging the wreaths already in place. Just at that moment, I heard a glad cry from the Chief of Protocol who had located our wreath. It was so large and magnificent that it had been hung in a place of honour on the pulpit. The Chief of Protocol handed it to me; and I handed it to the Prince, who laid it on the bier. We stepped back to return to our places. Unfortunately I had not realised how close I was to the Emperor Haile Selassie and very nearly trod on his toes. But he was saved by his bodyguards who shouldered me aside, and I slunk away.

The next act in the drama was the procession to the graveyard. All the VIPs formed a line on foot behind the bier as it was borne (on a gun carriage?) through the streets. The Prince and Lord Lothian, closely escorted by the Ambassador and me, found ourselves near the front, just behind the Emperor. Walking beside Haile Selassie was Idi Amin, whose first appearance on the African stage this was, after his overthrow of Obote during the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Singapore. The tiny Emperor and the giant figure of Amin formed a striking pair side by side. I heard one Liberian bystander say to a friend, as we shuffled past in the hot sun: "Is that the Emperor's bodyguard?"

After a while we reached the graveyard. The coffin was placed on metal rollers which, at the press of an electric button, were intended to rotate, carrying the coffin smoothly forward into a magnificent marble tomb. As far as I could see, a lift in the tomb would then lower the coffin into a chamber below ground. The button was pressed; but the coffin failed to move forward. General consternation! But the Prince kept his head. He had spotted that the edge of the coffin had caught on the side of the entrance to the tomb; and that, although the rollers were turning alright, the coffin itself was stuck. With a prod of his foot, he freed the coffin which slid into the tomb and disappeared from sight into the depths below. General relief all round. But, just at that moment, Kofi Busia, the elected Prime Minister of Ghana, fainted at our feet in the press and heat. Again, it was the Prince who saved the day. He (and his Acting ADC) pushed back the VIPs to clear a space around Busia and give him air. All was well. Busia was led away looking rather shaky. Sadly neither Lord Lothian nor Lady Tweedsmuir were ever to visit Ghana; and so I didn't go there until 1989 when I arrived in Accra as High Commissioner.

The farewell State Banquet that evening, a white tie and evening tails affair, concluded the programme. There were only two speeches: President Tolbert proposed a toast of the Emperor; and the Emperor, in reply, seemed to give the final seal of legitimacy and approval to Dr Tolbert's succession.

*Some nine years later, Tolbert was killed in a coup led by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe. Years of political instability ensued. Five years of military rule and five years of civilian rule were followed by two civil*

*wars, in which half a million people were either killed or displaced and the economy devastated. Eventually a peace agreement was signed in 2003 and elections held in 2005, when Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected President. She was re-elected in 2012. The 2017 elections were won by George Weah, a former professional football striker, becoming one of the youngest serving Presidents in Africa.*

## **NIGERIA**

### **Nigeria 1960 - 1973**

*After independence from British rule in 1960, Nigeria's First Republic ended with two military coups in 1966, from which General Gowon emerged as President. His military government defeated Biafran's bid for independence in the Civil War of 1967 to 1970. He was President at the time of Lady Tweedsmuir's visit in December 1973 and would remain President until his removal in another military coup in 1975.*

### **Nigeria, December 1973**

This was the longest visit Lady Tweedsmuir paid to any single African country: ten days. It was much longer than any other visit I made either as a Private Secretary or AUSS. And it was my last visit to Africa as a Private Secretary. Alan Campbell, the AUSS accompanied the Minister throughout.

We flew first to Kano, on the edge of the desert. The visit to Northern Nigeria was especially timely in view of the Sahelian drought. We went also to Kaduna and Jos in the north before going on to Ibadan and finally Lagos. Our path led through commercial and industrial enterprises, universities, research establishments, museums and hospitals and into the courts of traditional rulers like the Alafin of Oyo near Ibadan. We thus saw economic progress and backwardness side by side. The Minister called on Military Governors, State Commissioners and other leading figures of the Nigerian and British communities. She gave a good many press and television interviews in which she came under heavy fire for the recent delivery of Wasp helicopters to South Africa and for our vote against the adoption of a UN Convention on "The Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid". And she attended the St Andrew's Ball in Lagos.

In Lagos, Lady Tweedsmuir held talks with the Federal Commissioner for External Affairs, Dr Okoi Arikpo. They discussed world oil supplies in the light of the recent steep hike in the oil price and various problems faced by British companies doing business in Nigeria. Her most important objective was to secure Nigerian agreement for Concorde to land in Lagos on its way to and from South Africa. Sadly her failure meant that Concorde was never able to open a service to the South. Interestingly Dr Arikpo refrained from raising any of the South African and Portuguese complex of problems, presumably because he felt it unnecessary to rehearse well known positions. Looking back on the visit, I am surprised that we didn't at least go through the motions of defending British policy on Rhodesia and South Africa, however objectionable our position was to the Nigerians.

Unfortunately the Minister did not meet the President, General Gowon, who was visiting the northern drought-affected areas. But the visit had been worthwhile, if only as a means of strengthening personal links between the two countries and demonstrating Britain's continued interest in the largest and most important of her former African possessions except for South Africa itself. It was unfortunate that the visit took place within a few months before the fall of the Heath Government when Lady Tweedsmuir was replaced as Minister for Africa by Labour's Goronwy Roberts and I as Private Secretary by Tony Galsworthy, a Chinese speaker later to become Ambassador to China.

### **Nigeria, 1973 to 1992**

*After General Gowon's fall in 1975, Nigeria remained under a succession of military dictators except for one short period of civilian rule from 1979 to 1983. General Ibrahim Babangida took power in 1985 and promised a return to civilian rule by the end of 1992. The country therefore seemed to be on the brink of another lively period in its turbulent post colonial history.*

In 1986, as Head of Personnel Policy Department, I had accompanied, Tim Eggar, a junior Foreign Office Minister in charge of immigration, to plan a new visa regime.

### **Nigeria, June 1992**

Early in my time as AUSS, I spent five days in the country, visiting Lagos, Benin City, Kaduna, Jos and the new capital at Abuja. I was accompanied throughout by the High Commissioner, Christopher MacRae, a man of enormous energy who spent much of his time visiting every corner of the country and who therefore knew, and was known and respected by, an impressive range of senior Nigerians.

Lagos was its usual steamy self although a lot of new roads had made movement around the city much easier. The journey to the airport took less than an hour instead of anything up to six, let alone the 24 hours that legend said two High Commission security officers had once spent, in the 1970s, on the road to and from the airport to pick up the diplomatic bags.

In Lagos, Christopher took me to the National War College, due to be opened formally by Babangida shortly, and where a four-man British training team was to provide high level training to the Nigerian armed forces. We also attended the May Ball of the Oxford and Cambridge Club of Nigeria which included among its members many great and good senior Nigerians. Britain's universities are a powerful tool of "soft diplomacy": the exercise of indirect influence through informal links.

In Benin City, to the east of Lagos, we had lunch with the Governor, dinner with the Pro-Chancellor of Edo State University and called on the traditional ruler, the Oba of Benin. We also visited the Institute of Child Health at the University of Benin where Christopher presented a soya grinder funded from his Heads of Mission Gift Scheme.

From Benin City we returned four hours by road to Lagos; flew to Kaduna, where we met the resident Deputy High Commissioner, his staff and the ODA's pest control team; and then drove three hours to Jos, capital of Plateau State. Because of its height and climate, Jos was then one of Nigeria's most agreeable cities. There we visited the police training college where a team of five British police officers were providing advice and training under one of the ODA's "good government" projects. We called on the Governor and had a look at the bank where John Major had once worked as a young man. Nigerians took a close interest in this association.

Finally we drove to Abuja where construction of the new High Commission office, Residence and staff housing was at varied stages. An advance guard from the High Commission was due to set up shop shortly. We made some calls at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which had already moved from Lagos. And I presented two computers to the Chairman of the National Republican Convention (NRC) and to the Social Democratic Convention. Although both parties were little more than Babangida's creatures, they were composed of civilians; and the gift, was intended as a gesture of support for the promised transition to civilian rule.

From Abuja, Christopher MacRae and I flew back to Lagos where there was just time for a meeting with the French Ambassador and a dinner to meet more senior Nigerians before I caught the midnight flight to London.

This busy programme illustrated Christopher Macrae's hectic life as High Commissioner. For me, as visiting AUSS, it was particularly useful to see so much of the country, given Nigeria's size and tribal diversity. Wherever we went, two main issues dominated discussion: the transition to civilian rule and Nigeria's economic prospects.

Few then doubted that, barring accidents, President Babangida would, more or less successfully, complete the promised transition by the end of 1992. Federal Assembly and Senate Elections were due in July; and Presidential elections in December followed by a transfer of power on 2 January 1993. Recent clashes between Muslims and Christians, mainly in the North, and disturbances in the South, caused by economic difficulties, had created tensions and nervousness, but had now subsided. They might recur but, it was thought then, would have to be unexpectedly serious to affect the election timetable.

The Nigerians I met seemed more concerned by the risk of further military intervention at some point after the restoration of civilian rule. The fear was that a democratic government would fail to grapple successfully with Nigeria's problems and that, after a couple of years or so, the army would step in again. More than one Nigerian said they hoped that, if that were to happen, Britain would throw its weight against the usurper e.g. by cutting off aid. Our influence was rated highly; and there was wide civilian approval of our "good government" policy.

I found that people were too pre-occupied with immediate political prospects to be much interested in the fundamental question whether Nigeria could survive as a nation in the longer term. In my view then, which I later came to believe was wrong, ethnic and religious tensions as well as social and

economic strains continued to threaten Nigeria's unity as they had in the past. The (otherwise fortunate) absence of any external enemy against which the nation must rally; failure to build suitable and durable national institutions; North/ South mutual suspicions; and examples of national disintegration in the rest of the world; these all added to the centrifugal forces at work. For the time being, however, the habit of statehood, pride in Nigeria's weight in the world, competition for political power and a shared preoccupation with the current political agenda, were together enough to maintain national unity. I thought that attitudes could quickly change if the economy were to spin out of control or the new civilian government to run into other serious difficulty. The economy was the key.

In 1992, Nigeria's economic prospects were grim. With my support, Christopher MacRae recommended that the Prime Minister send a message to Babangida urging him to reach agreement with the IMF on a suitable economic package. Without one, negotiations with the international financial community on how to bring down Nigeria's colossal debt burden could not begin. There was much concern among Western donor representatives in Lagos at the President's appointment of Alhaji Ahmed Abubakar as the new Finance Minister. He had the right skills but was reputed to be corrupt and lacked the political backing and power to insist on the tough measures that were essential. Unless Babangida could be persuaded of the urgency of the problem, prospects of getting a grip on it before a civilian government took over were poor. And an elected government would find the task even harder.

On the other hand, with effective economic management, capable of enforcing budgetary discipline, and backed by political muscle determined to tackle corruption and to stand up to popular pressure to compromise, Nigeria's economy could recover. It had major assets: substantial oil reserves, agricultural potential, an infrastructure much less damaged than Ghana's when Rawlings seized power, an energetic and enterprising people and, above all, understanding of the importance of the private sector and private investment whether domestic or foreign.

The key therefore was leadership. We had to hope that, among the plethora of presidential candidates who had put their names forward, was one who would be equal to the task. I met nobody who was confident that there was.

In June 1992 our talks at the MFA in Abuja concentrated on South Africa. The Nigerian side's approach was refreshing. Like us, they believed that the CODESA process, although stalled at the time, was alive and would reach agreement in due course on a way forward to elections. The Nigerians had encouraged the ANC privately not to rule out a federal approach; and were exercising a healthy influence (sic!) on ANC economic policy thinking. Having recently received a visit from de Klerk in Abuja, they had influence on both sides and seemed likely to use it in a helpful, moderate and cautious way. They did not mention sanctions. I concluded that it would be worth keeping in touch with the Nigerians on South Africa in the months ahead.

There was plenty of substance in the British/Nigerian bilateral relationship; but it was being conducted, as in Ghana, with the home ministries and largely bypassed the MFA. The latter raised with Christopher MacRae and me none of Nigeria's current menu of grumbles e.g. visas, Nigeria's bad international press, alleged foreign interventions in Nigeria's affairs. Instead they went out of their way to emphasise the positive side of the relationship. They thanked us for British aid. On my side, I did not

raise the subject of political detainees on which the EU were discussing a possible joint demarche; nor any of the bilateral matters on which other ministries were better interlocutors than the MFA. So all was sweetness and light on this occasion.

I was impressed by the excellent access that Christopher MacRae and his staff had at every level with the important exceptions only of the President and Foreign Minister. As I had found as High Commissioner to Ghana, the lack of contact at the top was worrying. A visit by the Prime Minister and/or the Secretary of State would be useful in getting Britain off to a good start with the new civilian government in 1993. And I hoped that Lady Chalker too could visit again before long.

I concluded from my visit that there was plenty of important work for a well staffed High Commission, under strong leadership like MacRae's, in a country where Britain still occupied a pre-eminent position and thus enjoyed a head start over all our competitors if only we could continue to find the will and resources to make use of it.

### **Nigeria, 1992 to 1995**

*In the event, the Presidential elections due in December 1992 were postponed. On 2 January 1993, Babangida appointed the non-political businessman, Ernest Shonekan, as head of Government Affairs under his, Babangida's, continued leadership. This move was intended as a step towards the restoration of full civilian rule. Almost immediately, the Secretary of State, Douglas Hurd, paid a very brief visit to Abuja (and Accra - see Chapter 2 above) on his way to Latin America. I accompanied him. Fortuitously, Hurd's visit and meetings with Babangida and Shonekan were thus well timed in getting our relations with the new transitional Nigerian Government off to a good start.*

*Presidential elections took place on 12 June 1993. The prominent Yoruba businessman, Chief Abiola, emerged the probable winner. But he was unacceptable to the army and Babangida annulled the election. Instead he installed Shonekan as Interim President to lead the transitional government. Babangida himself resigned in August 1993. Shortly afterwards, in November 1993, rather than accept civilian rule, the army stepped in again. General Sani Abacha seized power. Britain and others introduced a ban on arms sales and military training to express our dismay at Abacha's take over. The EU as a whole and the US banned ministerial visits.*

*Abacha's Presidency lasted from November 1993 until June 1998 when he died in office. Meanwhile Chief Abiola, the probable winner of the aborted 1993 election, had been detained for four years. He died, allegedly murdered, on the day he was due to be released and shortly after Abacha's own death. The whole dreadful saga would have made a fitting subject for a Shakespearian play.*

### **Nigeria, October 1995**

My second visit to Nigeria as AUSS, in October 1995, therefore took place nearly two years into General Abacha's military Presidency, with Chief Abiola, the probable victor of the 1993 annulled elections, in detention. I had decided to visit the country then because of the looming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), due to be held in Auckland, New Zealand, in November 1995. CHOGM would undoubtedly want to discuss the criteria for Commonwealth membership and the

situation in Nigeria, whether or not Abacha himself decided to attend. I would be among the PM's party of official advisers in Auckland and wanted, therefore, to bring myself up to date on Nigerian affairs at first hand. I hoped also that my visit would help maintain international pressure on the government to respect human rights and for an accelerated constitutional timetable; and I wanted to discuss with our High Commissioner our strategy on Nigeria at CHOGM.

By a curious twist of fate or fortune, in 1994 I had applied for appointment as High Commissioner to Nigeria in succession to Christopher MacRae who had been transferred to Pakistan. Given my African experience and as the AUSS, I had been confident of success. The Number 1 Promotion Board's decision to appoint Thorold Masefield (then High Commissioner in Dar Es Salaam) to Nigeria therefore came as a surprise and disappointment. It meant that I would remain as AUSS for another 18 months and eventually be appointed, to my later delight, High Commissioner to Ottawa. The moral of this saga is either: "one shouldn't count chickens....."; or "It's an ill wind that blows no good". Perhaps both.

I had had a high opinion of Thorold as High Commissioner to Tanzania and knew him quite well from our earlier diplomatic careers, having succeeded him in Islamabad in 1982. He organised an excellent programme for me in Lagos and Abuja. He introduced me to a range of opinion leaders across the political spectrum from Kingibe, Abacha's Minister of Interior, to the leader of the radical National Conscience Party and other human rights activists. I had talks in Abuja with the MFA Director General and others on African issues and CHOGM itself. And I met local Heads of Mission and Nigerian business leaders. I recall vividly a dinner given for me in Lagos by Thorold Masefield and his wife, Jenny, attended by 30 or 40 senior Nigerians, resplendent in national dress: colourful, noisy, self-confident, energetic and enormous fun. I envied my hosts.

I did not see Abacha. Access to the top remained a problem. But Thorold subsequently delivered a personal message to Abacha from the PM.

Nobody I met believed that the military government at present was vulnerable to international or internal popular pressure. The army had a firm grip. Abacha's own position seemed strong. He was probably secure, at least for the time being, from any coup by middle-ranking or junior officers. We should not exclude a possible general's coup like the one that brought him to power; but should plan on having to deal with him for the foreseeable future.

A fortnight before my visit, Abacha had announced a timetable for a three year transition to civilian rule. I found a qualified welcome among those I met for this commitment and relief that there had been no political executions. This was offset by concerns at the excessive length of the three year timetable and the obvious risk of yet further delay; the long prison sentences for the regime's political opponents; and the continued detention of a number of others, including Chief Abiola and Obasanjo, ex President and the only military ruler of Nigeria to have restored democracy voluntarily. However, there seemed to be a consensus among all, except Abacha's most radical opponents, that the best available strategy was to try to build on his timetable. I could not see Nigeria's political elite standing aside from it.

There were indeed many who said that it might be possible to win improvements to what Abacha had publicly announced. Such improvements were thought to include, conceivably, a shorter timetable (people talked of two years); the release of Abiola, some other political detainees and even a few recent coup plotters; the restoration of *habeas corpus* and trade union rights; the appointment of a civilian prime minister; and some sort of international involvement, including monitoring of the timetable. But it was not likely that it would be possible to achieve all of these. At best, some only would be attainable. And some things would remain out of reach altogether. These almost certainly included a transitional government not under military control and the blanket release of all detainees and coup plotters.

Amongst the Commonwealth and Western diplomats I met, opinions differed on which of all these improvements was the most important. For example, some argued that priority should be given to shortening and improving the timetable; others that the emphasis should be on human rights. The French Ambassador told us that President Chirac had instructed him to give priority to human rights and not to press too hard on constitutional reform. The US took the opposite view.

Opinion also varied, among diplomats and Nigerians, on the right tactics by the international community. At one extreme, were those who argued that friendly persuasion and dialogue would be the most effective. At the other extreme, were those who advocated threats and tough measures if Abacha did not concede more. But I was struck by the breadth of the consensus which believed that the right policy was one of continuing international engagement and friendly persuasion at the highest level. Some shared our own belief in some degree of stick too; but stopping well short of aggressive confrontation. This, given the Nigerian mentality, would have the opposite effect to what was intended. Among the diplomats, the US seemed to be at the toughest end of the spectrum and all but the old Commonwealth at the “wettest”.

There was much talk of CHOGM. Kingibe, Minister of the Interior, and the MFA were clearly nervous that Abacha would be pilloried if he went. They and many Commonwealth diplomats seemed to think that New Zealand, Britain and others were, in any case, trying to block Abacha’s attendance. I assured them that this was not so. I reminded him that the PM had told Abacha personally that he hoped that they would meet in New Zealand. I argued the advantages of Abacha’s attendance: that he could personally brief his fellow Heads of Government about the complexities of the situation in Nigeria and his own plans; and that Nigeria’s voice could be heard on the rest of the CHOGM agenda. I privately agreed with those who thought that, however useful his attendance, he would not go because he would not dare leave Nigeria for so long given security concerns. There were precedents for the overthrow of Commonwealth leaders while at CHOGM.

The economy remained a monumental mess. Corruption was as bad as ever. Inflation was high. Interest rates were negative. The Deputy Governor of the Bank of Nigeria spoke, in the presence of senior foreign and Nigerian businessmen, of the “arrogance” of the international financial institutions. Too much regulation in the 1994 budget continued to do severe damage. The infrastructure was still crumbling: in Lagos half of a major flyover had recently collapsed. Living conditions for the many poor were bad and getting worse. Criminal violence was therefore increasing. I was given an armed escort vehicle between the airport and the Residence after dark. There were tales of Nigerians being robbed at gun point and left in their underpants at the side of the airport road.

The optimists claimed to see a glimmer of light and could cite credible evidence. The 1995 budget had begun a process of guided de-regulation. Money supply was being tightly controlled, indeed businessmen said too tightly. Measures were being taken to encourage foreign investment, albeit with little success yet. The oil companies, including Shell and BP, were reporting better cooperation from the Government. The “economic summit” which Ernest Shonekan had set up, during his brief rule in 1993, as a forum for discussion of economic policy between the business community and government, was continuing its work. There was hope that the 1996 budget would introduce more sensible economic policies. So, although there was little prospect of short-term improvement, the ground was being gradually prepared for improvement in the longer-term. But I was not optimistic myself.

I drew from my visit the following conclusions for British policy. We should maintain our present measures against the regime. We should use all available channels of firm persuasion to secure improvements. The PM’s relationship with Abacha was potentially important and should be developed. We should give priority to getting a shorter timetable (recognising privately that we would do well even to get Abacha to stick to three years for the restoration of constitutional rule). We should press for the release of Abiola, Obasanjo and other detainees. And we should encourage Abacha to adopt confidence building measures such as appointing a civilian prime minister and accepting some kind of international involvement.

I returned to London from Nigeria a month before CHOGM in New Zealand. My visit had encouraged me in two particular thoughts. First, we might seek agreement at CHOGM to some kind of Commonwealth committee of wise men or contact group to monitor developments in Nigeria and to make recommendations. But, secondly, we might try to get it agreed that Nigeria’s Head of State should not attend the 1997 CHOGM, probably to be held in London, unless democratically elected. I also suggested that CHOGM should discuss other measures, including forms of ostracisation against the regime, for possible later implementation.

As I left Nigeria after this, my last visit to Africa as AUSS, neither I nor other observers foresaw the events in Nigeria that were to change the situation so dramatically on the eve of CHOGM itself. I have dealt with those in Chapter 5 above on the Commonwealth.

*Nigeria continued under military rule until 1999 when Obasanjo was elected President in a newly inaugurated Fourth Republic, which remains in place. He was re-elected in 2003 despite reported electoral irregularities. In 2007 Umaru Yar’Adua won the presidential elections but died in office. He was replaced by the Vice-President, Goodluck Jonathan, who won the 2011 elections. Muhammadu Buhari won the 2015 elections, becoming the first opposition candidate to do so in Nigeria’s history. Goodluck was generally praised for conceding defeat and limiting the risk of unrest. In the 2019 Presidential elections, Buhari was re-elected for a second term in office.*

## SIERRA LEONE

### Sierra Leone, 1961 to 1973

*Sierra Leone had won independence from British rule under its first Prime Minister, Sir Milton Margai in 1961. Six years later, in 1967, Siaka Stevens had been elected PM; almost immediately overthrown by military coup; but reinstated as PM in 1968; and had become President in 1971 on the adoption of a Republican constitution. Stevens was to remain in office for some 15 years more, until 1985. Lady Tweedsmuir's visit therefore came when Sierra Leone was under Stevens' democratic rule, but against a background of earlier military interventions.*

### Sierra Leone, January 1973

Sierra Leone was the second of the three West African countries which Lady Tweedsmuir visited in January 1973 immediately after Britain's entry into the EEC.

From the airport, we were taken in the High Commission launch, Tagarin, across the vast harbour to Freetown. We visited Fourah Bay College (founded 1827) and were shown aid projects, agricultural activities and the diamond mines at Yengema to which we flew by light aircraft. I seem to remember that the plane belonged to de Beers. As we came in to land at Yengema, we noticed what looked from the air like large mole hills pockmarking the landing strip. The pilot was able to thread his way between them; and we could then see that they were the diggings of illicit diamond miners hoping to make their fortunes from alluvial diamonds beneath the strip itself. We were taken by car into the centre of Yengema where a large area was covered by more illicit diamond diggings. At the edge of this area was a small brick building with a familiar blue sign over the front: Barclays Bank. We could actually see the underneath of one of the corner stones, where a miner had been at work in search of diamonds, not in the bank vault but in the ground beneath the foundations of the building. In the squalor of these diggings, Lady Tweedsmuir declined an offer to buy a minute diamond, to which the "owner" was almost certainly not entitled.

The Government drew little tax advantage from the diamond trade, because of the difficulty of controlling access to the diggings. The area was too large to fence securely; and no sooner had a digger and his pickaxe been chased away from one digging than he dug somewhere else ... including on the airport runway. The diamonds themselves could easily be smuggled away tax free. This environment was an extraordinary contrast to the diamond "pipe" of Orapa in Botswana which I had visited with Lord Lothian in 1972 (see Chapter 11 below).

Lady Tweedsmuir had formal talks with President Stevens and his Ministers. She emphasised HMG's faith that, by joining the EEC, Britain would grow in strength and improve her capacity to help the developing world. Sierra Leone's opportunities for trade with Europe would be enhanced. She encouraged Sierra Leone to join in negotiations between the developing world and the EEC on aid and trade. The President replied that the Government were considering carefully what they should do and would need to consult their African friends before deciding.

The EEC not only dominated Lady Tweedsmuir's official talks; but it also absorbed virtually all her interview with journalists at the end of her visit and took up most of the time when she visited Parliament for talks with the Speaker, the Leader of the House and the Leader of the Opposition. No one present on this latter occasion could have suspected that Parliamentary democracy in Sierra Leone had already been threatened and would be destroyed for a period in the future.

I remember the High Commissioner, Ian Watt, commenting on the delicate balance needed by the British official visitor between demonstrating sincere interest in a recent colony like Sierra Leone and seeming to offer unsolicited advice. He congratulated Lady Tweedsmuir on getting that balance right. My own experience of both her and of Lord Lothian supported this judgement. They were both the souls of tact.

This visit had a particular personal interest for me. My Grandfather, Alexander Slater, had been Governor of Sierra Leone from 1922 to 1927 before his transfer to Accra. He had been knighted there in 1924. I noticed a road sign "Slater Road", in which the main jail stood; later learned of a plaque with his name in the centre of the town; and wondered if the chair in which the President sat during our meeting with him had once been the Governor's.

### **Sierra Leone, 1973 to 1993**

*Since my last visit with Lady Tweedsmuir in 1973, Sierra Leone had been descending a steep spiral of political instability and economic failure under first Dr Siaka Stevens, then Major General Joseph Momoh, and finally the 25 year old army captain Valentine Strasser who, with his young army colleagues, had overthrown Momoh in a coup in 1992, barely a year before my visit.*

### **Sierra Leone, May 1993**

A little over a year after starting as AUSS, I made my only visit in the job to the four countries: Sierra Leone, Gambia, Senegal and Ivory Coast. My 12 day tour, from 12 to 24 May, was as fascinating and demanding as any of my country visits.

My first stop, after an easy day flight from London, was Freetown, which I had last visited with Lady Tweedsmuir in 1973, twenty years earlier. At the time of my visit, the fundamental question was whether Strasser's coup would have brought to an end 30 years of decline and would be able to create the conditions of recovery. Superficially at least, the situation resembled that in Ghana at the time of Rawlings's coup in 1979. The answer to the same question in Ghana turned out to be "Yes" - eventually. Tragically for Sierra Leone, the answer would be "No." Strasser's coup was to lead to further collapse.

Britain had suspended balance of payments support and its military assistance programme in protest at Strasser's coup. In March, Linda Chalker had sent a message to Lamin Kamara, Strasser's Foreign Minister, setting out our conditions on "good government etc" for resuming both programmes. In April, Strasser had announced elections in three years, the release of some detainees and other

liberalising measures. My main purpose in going to Sierra Leone at this particular time was - in consultation with David Sprague, our High Commissioner - to assess the Government's intentions and its progress in meeting Linda Chalker's March conditions. I sent my conclusions and recommendations to Lady Chalker and Whitehall in a telegram that I drafted on a hot, sticky Sunday morning in my ground-floor bedroom of the Residence in Banjul the day after leaving Freetown. I summarise my recommendations on a later page.

The handicaps facing Sierra Leone were formidable. The Momoh years had left a legacy of economic mismanagement, institutional decay, collapse of the infrastructure, corruption and human rights abuse. The war in Liberia, next door, and the accompanying civil war in Sierra Leone's eastern provinces had compounded these difficulties. As a result the country was almost at the bottom of the World Bank's human development index and had an annual per capita GNP of only \$240.

I found little sign that the structural adjustment programme, which had been put in place in 1989 under Momoh and was being maintained by Strasser, was making much difference on the ground. The local British business community did not sound confident of commercial survival in the medium term, although they intended to hang on for the time being.

Strasser and his team brought no obvious qualifications to the task of recovery. In their twenties, they had no knowledge of government, little education and no economic or business experience. Their ranks included some, like Captain Musa, Strasser's deputy, who were dangerous and unpredictable. He was generally blamed for the decision to execute 26 alleged coup plotters the previous December. David Sprague, our High Commissioner, took me to see him, but we got little out of him, in the presence of the press. He began to stutter when asked a difficult question. He occupied a key position at the centre of government, at least in theory; but in practice he was said to be incapable of chairing a meeting and I got the strong impression that the regime lacked any effective instrument of government. The Civil Service was over-staffed, under-paid and demoralised.

However, trying to look on the brighter side, I thought that the situation was not hopeless. There were some grounds for optimism.

Unlike The Gambia, Sierra Leone was a potentially viable economic unit. It had mineral wealth (diamonds, gold, rutile and bauxite), good cultivable land and rich fisheries. It also had a long educational tradition, including the oldest university in West Africa, Fourah Bay College, visible as the visitor arrived across the harbour from the airport. Admittedly these assets had done the country little good since independence; but provided a foundation on which to build.

Strasser himself made a better personal impression than Musa. I met him twice. The first occasion, early in my programme, was a formal meeting in State House (which my grandfather had once occupied) when he wore uniform, hid behind dark glasses and was accompanied by numerous hangers-on. Our second meeting took place in his residence just before I left for the airport. He had with him only his ADC and Lieutenant Kargbo, Secretary General of the Ruling Council. They were dressed casually, Strasser in jeans and a purple shirt, without "shades". The atmosphere was more relaxed. On each

occasion he was clearly listening intently to what I said about the importance of providing a constitutional programme, improving human rights performance and bringing more civilians into the government. Each time he stressed his determination to restore constitutional, democratic rule; and to meet donor concerns on human rights.

I concluded that the main conditions on which Sierra Leone's prospects would depend were:

- an end to the war in the east and in Liberia; and the restoration to normality of life in the war zone;
- the establishment of an effective administration, including bringing in civilians with experience of the private sector. Even with the necessary will, it would be hard to find people of the right quality;
- making sure that the State got its share of the diamond wealth. Unfortunately, as I had seen so vividly in 1973, the diamonds were widely scattered in alluvial deposits on the surface. Mining and smuggling were therefore easy. Tighter customs controls would help but could only be partially effective at best;
- maintenance of the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP). Here the Government had done well; but its successors would have to stick to sensible macro-economic policies in the years ahead;
- donor support which was dependent on the ERP, on satisfactory progress towards democracy and on an improved human rights record. The key would be the UK's attitude since other donors would probably take their cue from us.

Even if all these conditions were met, recovery would be difficult and slow. It was hard to be optimistic about the chances of success.

So far as Britain's bilateral relations with Sierra Leone were concerned, it was worth remembering that Britain was not only the former colonial power; but that the colony had been founded as long ago as 1787, i.e. much earlier than Ghana and Nigeria, as a home for unwanted free black people living in England and North America; and that it grew as the British captured slave ships and released the slaves at Freetown. The bilateral relationship was therefore older, deeper and more intimate than that between Britain and others of its former African colonies. This gave Britain a pre-eminent place in the attentions, if not the affections, of many Sierra Leonians. And it helped to explain the political influence we could wield if we chose. David Sprague, our High Commissioner, was making the most of this advantage, knew everyone in town and was able to introduce me to the main figures.

I was told that Britain's decision to withdraw an offer of balance of payments support after the December executions had come as a great shock to the Government; and that, although widely resented, it had earned grudging respect among even those opposed to our policy. Moreover it was clear that Strasser's April announcement of elections in three years had been the direct consequence of Lady Chalker's March message setting out our conditions for resuming balance of payments support. The level at which I was received and the apparently close attention paid to what I said were further evidence of the importance attached to our position as the key to unlock wider donor support. And those who knew the rural areas spoke eloquently of the warmth with which Britain was regarded. It went beyond cupboard love.

I asked myself what was the British interest in Sierra Leone. In doing so, I tried to set aside in my mind my own family history. But, as with other poor Commonwealth states, I believed that Sierra Leone did

have a moral claim on our support. In Douglas Hurd's words, it was part of the hand history had dealt us. More to the point, if it were to go the way of Somalia, it could cost us and the international community a great deal to rescue. We also had an interest, as elsewhere, in the success of structural adjustment and of our "good government" policies. If Sierra Leone could be rescued from the pit into which Momoh had dug it, these policies would look more credible and would command more respect elsewhere.

Furthermore, Britain had a more tangible, commercial interest in the country as a potential market for our exports. At the time of my visit, our market share of 14% was worth a mere £15 - 20 million p.a. Judging by our record elsewhere in Commonwealth Africa, a market share of double that should have been achievable. And the total market would grow dramatically if recovery took off. We therefore had a stake in Sierra Leone's success.

Whether these interests were enough to justify the present level of resources we devoted to Sierra Leone would depend on the FCO's overall budget and other priorities. The present level was low. The High Commission had 6 home based staff and cost £700,000 annually. The 6 were due to fall to 4 the next year. Our technical assistance programme cost £1.5 million p.a. to which might be added whatever balance of payments support and military assistance that Ministers would agree following my visit. The British Council ran a good operation from a superb site and was a significant asset for Britain. In addition the BBC provided full English language World Service coverage which was listened to attentively by Sierra Leoneans with a radio. To all this should be added the British share of multilateral, including EC, aid and the £8 million in emergency relief aid for those displaced as a result of the war in Liberia. I also handed over £20,000 of medical equipment at a ceremony in the High Commission to add to the help we had previously given ECOMOG, the West African force that had intervened to try to bring peace to Liberia. The ceremony was attended by Nigerian and Ghanaian representatives. The Sierra Leoneans failed to show up.

The telegram I sent from Banjul the day after I left Freetown recommended that Britain should adopt a staged approach in resuming assistance to Sierra Leone. We should confirm straight away our offer of military training for 30 officers in Accra. We should provide £2 million of balance of payments aid when Strasser's Government had published a programme for the restoration of democracy and a full list of everyone detained without charge; and a further £2 million, three months later, depending on progress in implementing the constitutional programme and on vigorous action being taken to bring to trial or release the remaining detainees and those under house arrest. I advised this phased approach because I did not believe that we could take the Sierra Leone Government's professed good intentions at face value; I thought that continuous pressure would be needed in getting them to move in the right direction; and that success would depend on a policy of encouragement not confrontation, as it had with Rawlings in Ghana. If we pushed Strasser and his colleagues too hard or fast, we risked them reacting angrily, impetuously and unpredictably.

The memory of Sierra Leone I took away was of a wretchedly poor Commonwealth country, wrecked by corruption and mismanagement, but with greater economic potential than many, if only "good government" could be supplied. Strasser and his colleagues, unattractive as some of them were, might conceivably succeed in doing what Rawlings had done to Ghana. But, because the donor world had become more impatient with dictators than it used to be, Strasser had less time than Rawlings had had;

and the odds, I thought, were probably against success. But he was worth backing if his deeds started soon to match his words.

*So far as I can recall, my advice was broadly followed. But in 1996 Strasser was overthrown by his deputy , Brigadier Julius Maada Bio.. Multiparty elections followed. The winner, Ahmad Kabbah, was himself overthrown by a military coup in 1997. Much worse was to follow. The civil war, which had been so exacerbated by Liberian intervention, was eventually brought to an end and Kabbah restored to power in 2002, with the help of successful British intervention (much to the credit of Tony Blair's Government) and a large United Nations peacekeeping mission. Kabbah was succeeded in 2007 by Ernest Koroma who won free and fair elections in that year and again in 2012. The 2018 presidential election, in which neither candidate reached the required threshold of 55%, went to a second round of voting, in which Julius Maada Bio (qv) was elected with 51% of the vote.*

*My Grandfather has surely been turning in his grave.*

## THE GAMBIA

### The Gambia, 1965 to 1973

*The Gambia gained independence from British rule under the leadership of Dawda Jawara in 1965. His democratically elected Government was in power at the time of Lady Tweedsmuir's visit in 1973.*

### The Gambia, January 1973

Having first visited Cameroon and Sierra Leone, Lady Tweedsmuir's final visit on her three-country tour was to The Gambia. By this time Alan Campbell, the AUSS, had left the party. It was a long visit which gave the Minister time to visit rural areas as well as for talks in Bathurst. The Gambian Government and Jim Parker, the High Commissioner, organised a full programme.

In Bathurst, we stayed in the Residence: a delightful wooden building on stilts within the sound of the sea. If I remember rightly, it had been an old trading fort in colonial times. The Gambians took the Minister's security very seriously, providing a perpetual mobile guard of honour throughout her time in the capital. On the first evening, a guard detachment paraded on the cliff top to greet her return, clad in beach robe and towel, from a quick bathe below the Residence.

On the first morning, Lady Tweedsmuir paid a courtesy call on President Jawara who showed her around his rose garden and new lawns. She subsequently met him at the local Caledonian Society's Burns Night supper held in her honour and which the President customarily attended by reason of his veterinary training at Glasgow University. She met him again at a State Dinner which he gave in her honour. And, on the last morning of her visit, she had a full discussion at State House with him and a small group of Ministers and officials. He conducted this meeting in a quiet, courteous manner but crisply, frankly and to the point.

As in Sierra Leone, Lady Tweedsmuir encouraged The Gambia to take part in the negotiations between the EC and the developing countries which would lead to the agreement known as Yaounde 3. Jawara agreed and hoped that the eligible states would concert their approach. He spoke of The Gambia's relations with Senegal which he described as having reached a balance. Senegal seemed to have accepted that its earlier tendency to adopt a paternalistic attitude towards The Gambia was no longer acceptable. Jawara did not exclude the possibility one day of a Senegalo-Gambian Federation or Union but thought that this would not be in The Gambia's best interests for the foreseeable future. Contrary to what his officials had expected before the meeting, he did not mention Rhodesia or the Portuguese colonies. In short he avoided subjects likely to be controversial between us. He was a charming and considerate host.

The rest of the visit was spent on visiting a variety of agricultural projects and the UK Medical Research Council's Centre at Fajara devoted to anti-malaria research. The President lent the Minister his Presidential launch which enabled her to travel up-country to Mansa Konko where the Divisional Commissioner lent us his rambling house. He had studied in Moscow on a Soviet scholarship and had clearly not enjoyed the experience. Our arrival there was delayed by a memorable diversion to James Island, the historic birth-place of British settlement in tropical Africa. I picked up from the ground a fruit of the baobab tree and took it home where we ate its lemon flavoured seeds. Because of the tide, a dinghy ferried us ashore. At one point half the party were marooned on the island, the outboard motor of the dinghy having fallen in the water, and the rest were on the launch which had stuck on a sand bank attempting a rescue. The tide eventually rose and the two halves of the party - and the engine - were happily re-united. The delay enabled us to watch the sunset and nightfall on this majestic and peaceful river. I half expected Sanders of the River to come around the bend and to hear the singing of Paul Robeson.

We learned a great deal about the work of collectives, dry season vegetable growing, agricultural extension services, irrigated rice schemes, mixed farm training, livestock development - and the warmth of the welcome given to their visitors by Gambian villagers. We saw nothing dramatic, just the simple facts of everyday African life. And, rare in Africa at the time, nobody had a quarrel to pick with us.

### **The Gambia, May 1993**

*President Jawara was still in power, democratically elected, twenty years later when I visited The Gambia as AUSS in May 1993.*

I arrived in Banjul from Freetown. As in 1973, I stayed in the Residence but, instead of on the main floor raised on stilts, this time my room was on the ground floor which had been filled in between the stilts. A romantic colonial fort had been turned into a suburban villa. Since this second visit included a weekend, the main working programme had to be fitted into one and a half days. It included calls on President Jawara, the Vice President/Minister of Defence, the Minister of the Interior and the Nigerian Commander of The Gambian army as well as talks with the excellent Foreign Minister, Omar Sey. Our High Commissioner, Alan Pover, had good access at every level he needed and had organised a full programme.

So important was the relationship between The Gambia and Senegal, which surrounds it to landward, that I will begin with it.

Nowhere in Africa was its political geography more damagingly distorted by the colonisers than in the Gambia and Senegal. It is tragic that British efforts in the nineteenth century to exchange The Gambia for French territory, in e.g. Ivory Coast or Gabon, failed; and the Senegambia Confederation, formed in the wake of the attempted coup in The Gambia in 1981, broke down and was dissolved in 1989. It had been replaced by a Treaty of Friendship, intended to strengthen cooperation between the two countries. But I found little evidence of success. The main current stumbling block was over transport, where the two sides could not agree on payment to The Gambia by Senegalese vehicles crossing The Gambia from one part of Senegal to the other. There had been some contact on security matters, mainly over the rebellion in the Casamance, from which The Gambia separates the bulk of Senegal. But The Gambian Inspector General of Police, whom I met, was not in contact with his Senegalese opposite number, and did not even know his telephone number. And military cooperation was conspicuously lacking: no direct contacts, no joint exercises, despite discreet encouragement by Alan Pover in Banjul and Roger Beetham, our Ambassador in Dakar. Their close cooperation was a model of its kind and an example not only to their hosts but to other British Heads of Mission in similar situations around the world.

Clearly we had to continue to encourage closer cooperation between the two Governments. But it would be uphill work. My strong impression was that, despite close tribal affinities across the frontier, The Gambia's sense of national identity was too strong to make federation a realistic possibility in the foreseeable future. And Senegal loomed much longer on its horizon than The Gambia did on Senegal's. Each country blamed the other for unwillingness to respond to the other's overtures, which were in any case muted or non-existent. They were not enemies; and, far from being a threat to its tiny neighbour, Senegal rescued it from a coup in 1981 and would probably do so again if necessary. But their history, political culture and respective size were too different for them to be comfortable with each other. Perhaps only The Gambia's total economic collapse or a wholesale re-drawing of African boundaries could call in question its political identity, let alone its independence.

Perhaps only Botswana among African countries could, in 1993, boast so good a democratic record since independence. Multi-party elections, respect for human rights, relatively low levels of corruption and the rule of law had all prevailed. This admirable state of affairs had been mostly due to Jawara, who had led the country, first as Prime Minister from independence in 1962 until a referendum made The Gambia into a Republic in 1970; and then as President. I enjoyed being firmly told by Jawara that our "good government" policy should include multi-partyism (although I continued to think our nuanced policy right for presentational reasons). He had not of course been put to the ultimate democratic test of electoral defeat because, despite his low birth, he conformed to the ideal of an African chief respected by his people for his leadership, moderation and good sense, who united his people and was therefore supported by them. This and the ineffectiveness of the Opposition explained his repeated electoral victories. During his long rule, democracy seemed to have taken root; and, at the time of my visit at least, observers agreed that, when he retired, as he might soon, it would survive the immediate transition. But there was no worthy successor in prospect. Furthermore, the country's political stability was likely to be buffeted by economic storms ahead.

Jawara's record of "good government" did not always include sensible economic policies. By 1985 the economy had got into serious trouble: a swollen civil service, state subsidies, high inflation, exchange controls, parastatals. Democracy had not succeeded in protecting the country from these and other economic follies being committed elsewhere by Africa's dictators. But in 1985, to his and The Gambia's credit, Jawara embarked on a classic, IMF-supported, macro-economic stabilisation process. He described it to me; and I had never heard from an African leader a more convinced defence of the need for a simultaneous package of structural measures, accompanied by a frank campaign to explain to the people the case for it, its likely short term costs and ultimate benefits. I thought the World Bank could do worse than invite Jawara to write the forward for their next publication on structural adjustment. It was a pity that he had not seen the light earlier.

This economic recovery programme had remained on track, with real benefits to the economy: 5% GDP growth in all but one of the previous six years. And yet Banjul seemed a much shabbier place than on my last visit twenty years earlier; and my talks with representatives of the EC Commission and Standard Chartered Bank left me pessimistic about future economic prospects. The essentials were that Gambian foreign exchange earnings depended on entrepôt trade, groundnuts and tourism. The entrepôt trade, in which The Gambia imported goods from e.g. the Far East for re-export to its Francophone neighbours, was vulnerable to a realignment of the CFA franc. Groundnut production had been hit by the low world price. As for tourism, it was suffering from the recession in Europe and Gambian hotels were said to be steadily deteriorating. In any case, because of its high import content, it contributed only about 3% to GDP. Prospects for diversification into horticulture were limited. For example, the local chrysanthemum industry could not produce flowers in any quantity; nor could it afford air freight costs which were high because the planes travelled one way empty. There was little prospect of attracting foreign investment to such a small domestic market. In short, brave talk of The Gambia becoming the Hong Kong or Singapore of West Africa was moonshine. If these forecasts were correct, The Gambia seemed likely to remain one of the world's poorest countries, heavily dependent on foreign aid. In 1991, it received \$93 of aid per head of population, one of the highest averages in Sub-Saharan Africa.

As the former colonial power and one of the few Western countries with resident diplomatic representations, Britain occupied a special place in the Gambian firmament. Jawara had supported us over the years in the UN General Assembly. Relations were good; but increasingly thin. Linda Chalker had last visited in 1987 and there had been no contacts with British Ministers since Jawara's official visit to Britain in 1990. My own warm reception demonstrated The Gambian interest in maintaining contact, if only at official level.

Last year, we had withdrawn our military training team, now replaced by a 70-strong Nigerian team. There was a British police adviser. We would be cutting our aid from £6 million in 1989/90 to £2 million in 1995/96. There was no British Council presence. The High Commission had steadily declined in numbers over the years.

Did the resources we deployed in The Gambia match our interests? The most important was our interest in being seen to support one of the very few African countries which shared our democratic and human rights values; and a loyal friend over a generation. Our reputation in Africa and the Commonwealth would be damaged if we were to turn our backs, particularly for as long as Jawara

remained President. The Gambia's continued support for HMG's foreign policies in international organisations was also worth maintaining. Otherwise our direct material interests (hardly any investment, annual exports of around £18 million) could be protected from Dakar as adequately as those in Togo were from Accra. We would no doubt need an Honorary Consul to look after British tourists; and we could look to the EC Commission office for support also. The latter would be the only resident EC Mission in Banjul if we were to withdraw.

My conclusion was that, for as long as Britain could afford a world-wide international role and the present pattern of resident diplomatic missions in virtually all Commonwealth members, a small Mission in Banjul would be worth keeping.

*The following year, in 1994, Jawara was ousted from office in a bloodless coup led by a young army officer: Lieutenant Yahya Jammeh. Jawara was rescued by an American warship and never regained power. I was with Linda Chalker when she met Jammeh in the margins of a conference in Denmark a year or so later. He reminded me of Valentine Strasser and, at a similar age, Jerry Rawlings. Events had made nonsense of the conclusions I had reached on my 1993 visit. We had had to review our position. So did The Gambia.*

*In 2013 it left the Commonwealth. In 2015, in a further break with the colonial past, Jammeh declared The Gambia an Islamic Republic. But his 22-year rule came to an end in 2016, when he was defeated in an unexpected election result by the main opposition candidate, Adama Barrow. Jammeh only left office after mediation by neighbouring countries and the threat of armed intervention. Barrow initially undertook to step down after 3 years but later extended his rule to a five year term. Elections are due in 2021.*

*In 2017, Boris Johnson became the first British Foreign Secretary to visit The Gambia since independence. I do not know why our interests in Africa justified such a visit.*

*The Gambia returned to the Commonwealth in 2018.*



Map of West Africa

## CHAPTER 7

### FRANCOPHONE WEST AFRICA: SENEGAL, IVORY COAST, CAMEROON, and a road trip through Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali (Togo is covered in Chapter 3 above)

*France's former colonies received their independence more or less at the same time as Britain's. Thereafter the main difference between francophone and anglophone West Africa was far greater French involvement in their former territories. Only much later, after my own African responsibilities had ended, did French involvement significantly diminish. But even then the common currency of the CFA continued and France still maintained serious military forces in the region which she was able and willing to use in the interests of stability and her own interests. Throughout the last 60 years, since British and French African rule ended, each country has focussed mainly on those African countries which formed part of its own 'hand of history'.*

## SENEGAL

### Senegal, 1960 to 1993

*Senegal has managed to avoid the military coups which have bedevilled Anglophone West Africans. Its first President, Leopold Senghor, resigned peacefully in favour of Abdou Diouf in 1981. President Diouf was re-elected in 1993.*

;

### Senegal, May 1993

My 1993 tour of West Africa included my first and only visit to francophone Senegal. Unavoidably, my visit was ill-timed, coming just after the legislative elections but before the results had been declared and a new Government sworn in. There was no question of a mere official calling on President Diouf. The Foreign Minister was away. So, uniquely in my African travels, I saw no Ministers. But our Ambassador, Roger Beetham, took me to call on the Chief of General Staff, General Seck, and on officials in the Presidency, Prime Minister's office and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. My programme also included meetings with foreign diplomats; and I spent Ascension Day - a local public holiday - visiting ODA water projects outside Dakar. I came away with some clear impressions.

Senegal could boast of being a multi-party democracy and had a fairly good human rights record. But, in Roger Beetham's word, it was not run by mental democrats. They had never taken a turn in opposition (but would do so in 2000). One attempt at a coalition had collapsed the previous year. And the country's democratic credentials had been tarnished by the arrest, just before my visit, of Maitre Wade, the principal Opposition leader (to be elected as President in 2000), in connexion with the murder of the Vice-President of the Constitutional Court. All those who I spoke to on the subject regarded Wade's involvement as inconceivable, and indeed he was released the night I arrived. He should not have been arrested in the first place.

There was a lively free press. But television was state-run and heavily biased against the Opposition. The radio was run on a much looser rein; and it was good to hear the Director of Radio (trained in Bush House) describe how he made the most of the considerable freedom he was allowed.

The murder for which Maitre Wade had been arrested had shocked the country. Responsibility was still unclear. There was no tradition of political murder. Most people I spoke to seemed convinced that it had nothing to do with separatist violence in the Casamance, that part of Senegal which lay to the south of The Gambia. The violence there had subsided, for the time being at least. There were some indications that the Government might now have recognised the need to tackle the economic and social roots of the problem and that the worst of the violence might be over. Certainly I was impressed by the degree of sensitivity with which General Seck and the PM's Diplomatic Adviser both spoke about the grievances of the separatists and the need to address them seriously. Nevertheless the situation in the Casamance, as well as political tensions following the elections and the recent murder were all causing concern about the underlying stability of the country.

The Senegalese seemed satisfied that the Gambians were not meddling in the Casamance, whatever suspicions Senegal might have had in the past. General Seck told us that cooperation between the two countries was good, although he would have liked closer cooperation between the defence forces. He commented ruefully that he was required to go through the MFA if he wanted to contact his Gambian opposite number. I suspected that contact would have been no closer even if it had been direct, since the Commander of the Gambian Army was Nigerian. General Seck made no secret of his deep suspicion of Nigerian regional ambitions, nor of his contempt for their military capacity e.g. in Liberia. Some of the Senegalese officials I met at dinner given by the Beethams blamed the Gambians for the thinness of bilateral relations, claiming that Banjul never responded to Dakar's initiatives for closer cooperation. I had heard the converse in Banjul.

As for Liberia, the Senegalese were clearly following the situation even if they were no longer participating in the peacekeeping efforts of ECOMOG. As in Freetown and Banjul, I encountered extreme scepticism over the willingness of the dreadful Taylor in Liberia to abide by any peace agreement he might sign. The PM's Diplomatic Adviser told me he was convinced that Libya was still supplying Taylor with arms via Burkino Faso and Ivory Coast.

Superficially, Dakar looked prosperous compared to the capitals of Anglophone West Africa; and it had something of the air of a French city. GNP per capita in 1991 was \$720, nearly three times as high as Sierra Leone for example. But all the foreign diplomats I met were gloomy about the future. Two main reasons were given. First, the four main foreign exchange earners were too narrow a base: tourists had been put off by the violence in the Casamance; the phosphate industry was handicapped by high cadmium content; groundnuts by the high world price; and fishing might have reached its peak. The second reason for gloom was said to be the Government's failure to restore competitiveness. Despite talk of controlling public expenditure, broadening the tax base and collecting customs duties more vigorously, action did not match the rhetoric.

The IMF representative and other diplomats blamed the French for not putting more pressure on the Government to take the necessary corrective action. I was told that, in the last resort, the French were always willing to pay the Government's wage bill. Almost unbelievably, Civil Service wages were said to be 50% higher in real terms than the EC average. As I was to hear in Ivory Coast, there was much talk of the need to devalue the CFA franc; and wide agreement that it would happen soon.

Senegalese officials tried to talk up the likelihood of the Government taking tough economic action. But foreign observers were doubtful that the Government would be willing to face the social and political consequences of doing so.

The bilateral relationship between Britain and Senegal was warm enough but lacked substance; and Roger Beetham had an ungrateful task in keeping our end up with limited resources. We could try to comfort ourselves that our good relations were based on common values rather than strong historical or economic links. But even our values might not be all that common, given the occasional ambivalence of Government attitudes to the notion of democratic 'Opposition'. And yet my visit left me more

satisfied that Britain had interests in Senegal worth protecting than I had expected. Here were the main ones:

- Senegal had a moderate, pro-Western government that was unusually active on the world stage. President Diouf had proved the value of a good relationship in 1982 when he responded immediately to our request for staging facilities for the air-bridge to the Falklands. And Senegal had fought with the allies in the (first) Gulf War.
- Dakar was a regular port of call for the Royal Navy. There had been three ships' visits in 1992.
- Although British businessmen currently made little effort, there was some commercial potential in the market. Economic growth would increase the opportunities.
- Our relationship with Senegal and keeping an Embassy there helped to maintain our credibility with the French Government (and others) as a serious partner in Africa. It also helped to sustain our UN Security Council credentials.
- For as long as we retained our interest in The Gambia, as a Commonwealth member, we needed to monitor Senegal's policy towards her neighbours. And, if we were ever to withdraw from Banjul, we should need to cover The Gambia from Dakar.
- Dakar was at present the hub of our non-resident representation in the region, including to Cape Verde (currently in the Security Council), Guinea (with some commercial potential) and Mali (through which the trans-Saharan tourist traffic passed, generating consular business). Without Dakar, we could not cover the region adequately.

Our resources to sustain our interests had diminished over the years. The Embassy had 6 home based staff and cost £790,000 annually. The British Council had a small office. Our aid programme focussed on village water supply and English language training. It cost just under £1 million in 1993/94 and was due to fall to half that in 1995/96. It was thus dwarfed by Britain's share of the multilateral aid reaching Senegal, including nearly £10 million as our share of EC aid. The need to ensure that Britain earned due credit in public for this money was increasing as the proportion of UK aid passing through multilateral channels grew.

I left with one further, more domestic, impression. The Residence was one of the three most agreeable houses where I stayed during my African travels. The other two were Addis Ababa and Cape Town. I now understood better one of the reasons why some of my colleagues included Dakar among their post preferences. Made of red brick, it stood four-square, with almost Queen Anne proportions, not too large, but with tall, airy rooms and in a pleasant neighbourhood. I could easily imagine many worse houses in which to spend three years, and in a lively, colourful African city with a veneer of French charm.

*Abdou Diouf conceded victory peacefully in 2000 to Abdoulaye Wade. Wade was succeeded by Macky Sali in 2012. Sale was elected for a second term in the Presidential elections of 2019.*

## IVORY COAST

### Ivory Coast, 1960 to 1993

*The Ivory Coast prospered in the first thirty years of its independence under the one-party rule of President Houphouet-Boigny who kept political competition at bay. But in 1990 political unrest, civil service strikes and student opposition to growing corruption forced him to concede the principle of multiparty rule.*

### Ivory Coast, May 1993

My visit fell in the last year of Felix Houphouet-Boigny's 33 year Presidency; not that I knew in May that I would attend his funeral 7 months later. This was my first visit to the country, apart from driving through it in 1990, when we were living in Ghana.

There was no question of my calling on the President. But our formidable Ambassador, Meg Rothwell, and the Ivorian Government made the most of my 1 ½ working days. Addressed throughout as "Monsieur le Ministre" (despite having been told that I was an official), I was greeted and seen off at the airport by the Secretary General of the MFA; had two hours of talks on foreign policy issues with M. Essy, the Foreign Minister, and a team of his officials and given an hour of the time of the Prime Minister, M. Ouattara. Typically of a Francophone country, and familiar to me from my time as Ambassador to Togo and from my visit to Cameroon, the main evening TV news gave pride of place to their door-step interview with me as I came out of the PM's office. I was able to watch my interview at a dinner party given in my honour an hour later by Meg Rothwell: a disconcerting experience in the presence of other notables, including the Foreign Minister. I also met the Secretary General of the main opposition party, Professor Gbagbo, and a good many other local and foreign dignitaries, including the Ivorian representative on the International Olympic Committee, who was very pleased with his recent visit to Britain but did not reveal his voting intentions.

Until recently, the Ivory Coast had had an enviable record of political stability since its independence in 1960. This happy state of affairs had been largely due to economic growth, French support and the political skills, good sense and unchallenged authority of President Houphouet-Boigny. By African standards, despite one-party rule until 1990 when his ruling party had won multi-party parliamentary elections and he himself the Presidency elections yet again, his rule had not been repressive. Fundamental freedoms had been more or less respected, the state had not terrorised the population and Houphouet-Boigny had managed to defuse effective opposition by assimilating its main members into the ranks of the ruling party. Professor Gbagbo was, so far at least, an exception. Civil unrest and violence in 1992, triggered by clashes between students and the army, had been brought under control; and subsequent tension defused by a general Amnesty. How different, I later reflected, would have been the fortunes of Ethiopia, Uganda, Zaire and Zimbabwe if they had had a President like Papa Houphouet (or Moi for that matter) in charge, instead of Mengistu, Amin, Mobutu and Mugabe!

But my impression was that Ivorian stability was fragile. It could crack when Houphouët-Boigny eventually died, not that at the time of my visit he was expected to do so soon. He could easily, many thought, survive to fight the next Presidential election in 1995. I met nobody who did not expect him to win if he did, including, I suspected, Gbagbo, who gave the impression of planning more for the elections in 2000, by which time other contenders might have appeared. The succession therefore was unclear; nor was it possible to be confident that the country would complete the transition to multi-party democracy smoothly. Further student unrest could provoke more violence, particularly if economic difficulties grew, as seemed likely. And the Liberian civil war, next door, could also threaten stability.

Liberia was the dominant external issue; and the Foreign Minister concentrated heavily on it in our talks. It seemed to me clear that the Ivorian Government was not optimistic that the UN's efforts then under way to promote a settlement would succeed; was as uneasy as other Francophones about the presence of Nigerian troops in Liberia; and that, although they denied supporting the infamous Taylor in Liberia, they might well be conniving in supplies reaching him through the Ivory Coast from Burkina Faso. The Red Cross representative was adamant that this was happening.

My arrival coincided with the suspense of the talks being held under Ivorian auspices in Abidjan between the two sides in the Angolan civil war. The Foreign Minister rehearsed the sad tale for me in detail.

I was given a fairly full picture of the Ivorian economy. The past record of economic growth had been impressive. The country's prosperity had been built on agriculture, mainly cocoa, and coffee, but with some diversification into cotton, rubber, palm oil and horticulture. The approach to Abidjan by air showed vast plantations stretching in orderly patterns to the horizon. Part of their success was owed to the luck of high commodity prices in the 1970s and 80s; and to generous French support. But the Ivorians had also had the good sense to encourage the private sector, invest in physical infrastructure and promote modest industrialisation e.g. textiles. The result had been a GNP per capita of \$1100 in 1987 which was over four times greater than diamond rich Sierra Leone, further along the coast. Other visible signs of success were good communications and a capital city of sky scrapers and fly-overs that would not have looked out of place in North America. Ivory Coast was unlike any other country in black Africa outside South Africa. Watching the Hobycats racing in the lagoon from the Yacht Club against the backdrop of Abidjan on Sunday afternoon was an unfamiliar sight on my African travels.

But, below this glittering surface, the economy was not sound; and I foresaw serious trouble ahead. Commodity prices had fallen. France was gradually reducing its technical assistance programme. Investment in maintenance and improving the underlying productive capacity of the economy had been inadequate. There had been excessive and unnecessary conspicuous expenditure, including on the famous Basilica at Yamoussoukro, costing between \$100 and \$200 million, depending on who one believed. In other ways too Ivory Coast conformed to the African norm: corruption, monopolies, nationalisation, an over-valued currency, a swollen civil service on which it was said that two thirds of public expenditure was spent. For a country so comparatively well off, the illiteracy rate at 45-50% was shamefully high. And the population growth rate was a frightening 3.8%. Cynics, who included the EC delegate and Reuters correspondent, said that the French ran the country; the Lebanese provided entrepreneurial skills; Burkinabe immigrants supplied the labour; - and the Ivorians took the profits.

Between 1987 and 1992 GNP per capita had fallen from \$1100 to \$700. External debt had risen alarmingly. Annual interest on the country's debt to the World Bank amounted to \$320 million, a sum provided by France and paid direct to the Bank. Crime was a serious problem.

Future economic prospects would depend, in general terms, on an end to the world recession, recovery of commodity prices and Ivorian willingness to take the necessary measures to improve competitiveness. These would have to include, above all, a politically difficult reduction in the civil service wage bill and, according to the Prime Minister himself, devaluation of the CFA franc. The World Bank representative was adamant: economic recovery would not be possible without devaluation. The effect on French prestige would be damaging. But I was struck both in Senegal and Ivory Coast by the strength of belief among many observers that devaluation was both necessary and likely in the course of 1993.

I had quite a tough conversation with the Prime Minister. I argued the case for structural adjustment and made it plain that further loans would be dependent on firm action to reduce public expenditure etc. Ouattara claimed that the Government could not take stricter action without incurring unacceptable political and social risks; and that the international community should reduce the debt burden and do more to support countries in difficulty like Ivory Coast. And the G7 should take action to stimulate the world economy. I pointed out that Britain had been in the forefront of discussions on debt relief for the poorest countries, which did not however include Ivory Coast; and that we were doing our bit through multilateral aid and CDC investment. But I had the familiar feeling of trying to make bricks without straw.

Perhaps the last words on the economy should be those of the French Ambassador: "I make no forecasts; but observe that the trend is downwards."

Inevitable in a francophone country, I found the bilateral relationship to be thin. But it was surprisingly cordial, thanks in part to the excellent personal relations Meg Rothwell had with the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and other senior figures. As in so many other of our African diplomatic missions, the personality and effectiveness of our Head of Mission, some more junior in strict diplomatic rank than others, contributed to a surprising extent to the success with which Britain punched above its weight. The warmth of my own welcome was due also to the opportunity my visit presented to the Ivorians to lobby for British involvement in finding solutions in Liberia and Sierra Leone; and for our support in the G7 and the International Financial Institutions.

In my various meetings and on TV, I made the most of what we were doing for Ivory Coast: help with English Language Training, a £17 million share of multilateral expenditure in 1989; the CDC's investments. I cited Douglas Hurd's visit to West Africa in January 1993 and Linda Chalker's regular visits to the continent as proof that we had not turned our backs on our friends in the developing world; and I reminded my hosts of our active role in the UN Security Council on conflict resolution in Africa and elsewhere.

What I did not say, of course, was that our Embassy of 6 home based staff was small and lacked more than the minimum tools: a small scholarship and gifts programme, a small visits programme and a tiny bilateral ODA programme. The British Council, having opened in 1990, had then closed in 1992, to the surprise and bitterness of the Ivorian authorities. This minimalist presence might not matter much if the country's economy continued to decline. But I concluded that we should not ignore the place. It exercised a reasonably moderate influence in non-aligned discussions. It was playing a positive role on Angola and, although less helpful on Liberia, was in a position to contribute to a solution. If it were to collapse, the effect on the rest of the region would harm British interests e.g. in Ghana next door. If the economy turned the corner, some good business might result if only British businessmen could be persuaded to take the market more seriously. And already off-shore gas fields were showing promise. Surely, if the Netherlands could capture 5.3% of the market, Britain could do better than 3.4%?

### **President Houphouet-Boigny's funeral, Yammasoukro, 7 February 1994**

Five months after my May 1993 visit to Abidjan, President Houphouet-Boigny died. It was decided that the Duchess of Kent should represent The Queen and Lady Chalker the Government at the President's funeral at his ancestral home of Yammasoukro in February 1994. I accompanied the two ladies in an aircraft of The Queen's flight.

The service was held in the Cathedral at Yammasoukro, built by the President and reputed to be a few inches shorter than St Peter's in Rome. It accommodated 7,000 guests; but there were seats for many thousands more outside and for thousands more standing.

Meg Rothwell, the Ambassador, escorted us to our seats a full two hours before the service began. We had to arrive early to ensure we got seats but also because so many Heads of State were due to arrive at the last minute. The most important of these was President Mitterand and a very senior delegation from Paris, including former President Giscard. They came by Concorde. We were told that the supersonic aircraft could hold just enough fuel to reach Yammasoukro and land there without circling the airport. This meant that the French did not want to take off from Paris until everyone else had arrived, to ensure that Concorde was not held up by other VIPs trying to land at the same time. The flight from Paris would take just two hours.

Each seat inside the Cathedral had its own air-conditioning vent. But they had to be turned on full blast because all the side windows were open to allow those sitting outside to hear the service. The temperature was therefore hot but bearable as we waited interminably for everyone to arrive and the service to begin. The music, including of Handel and Gounod, helped to compensate for our relative discomfort; but in truth I wouldn't have wanted to miss the occasion.

Thus two funerals virtually book-ended my African career: Tubman's in Monrovia in 1971, my first visit to black Africa; and Houphouet-Boigny's in Yammasoukro in 1994 near the end of my time as AUSS.

*Houphouet-Boigny's death in 1993 proved to be the end of stability in Ivory Coast for more than twenty years. Although his successor, Henri Bédié, won re-election as President in 1995, he was overthrown in*

*a military coup in December 1999 and was succeeded by retired General Robert Guéi. In 2000, Guéi stood in the presidential election but was defeated by Laurent Gbagbo and assassinated during the civil war which broke out from 2002 to 2007. In the (postponed) election in 2010, Gbagbo was defeated by Alassane Ouattara but refused to accept the internationally recognised result. Civil war ensued again. In 2011 Gbagbo was arrested and sent to the International Criminal Court for trial for crimes against humanity. Proceedings in the Court continue as of 2020. In 2015 Ouattara won a second five year term; and a third in 2020 in elections boycotted by the Opposition as unconstitutional.*

## **NIGER, BURKINO FASO, MALI & THE IVORY COAST**

**(a road tour from Accra, 14 November to 1 December 1990)**

During our time in Ghana, in November 1990, we made a memorable seventeen day expedition in three land rovers to Ghana's francophone neighbours: Togo, Benin, Burkino Faso, Niger, Mali and Ivory Coast, in the company of the High Commission Defence Adviser, Graham McKinley, and his wife Jackie, and of the Dutch Managing Director of Shell Ghana, Alexander Baelaerts, and his wife Carola. We took two Ghanaian drivers with us: Mohammed and Quarshie.

I knew little of the political situation in any of the countries we visited. The current presidents of Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali - Colonel Ali Saibou, Blaise Compaoré and Moussa Traoré - had all come to power through a military coup. But, as tourists we had no contact with Governments and saw little evidence of military rule during our tour. But the common French heritage was ever present in the language and the common currency, the CFA franc, which saved us the trouble of constant money-changing.

We had planned to reach Timbuktoo via Gao in Mali. But in Kara, Northern Togo, our first overnight stop, I received a telegram from Roger Beetham in Dakar, British Ambassador to Senegal and Mali, via the Honorary Consul in Lome. It read "You are obviously not aware that since the summer there have been serious incidents between Touaregs and the Mali army in and around Gao with several hundred deaths. There is a state of emergency in Gao province and a curfew in Timbuktoo. Road travel between Gao and the Niger border (where foreigners have been among those killed) and north and east of Gao is strongly discouraged both by the Mali authorities and by ourselves and consular department in London". I felt foolish not to have consulted Roger earlier and was grateful he had taken so much trouble to track us down (and spare himself the trouble of having to pick up the bits if we had met any revolting Touaregs).

To cut a long story short, and although we received conflicting advice from the US Ambassador in Niamey, capital of Niger, who advised that access to Timbuktoo via Gao would probably have been safe, we decided that discretion was the better part..... and so aborted our plan to visit Timbuktoo. Instead we went as far as Ayorou, a market town on the edge of the desert three and a half hours' drive north of Niamey, where we saw tall Touareg tribesmen from the desert in magnificent cloaks of blue and green, leading their camels in the dusty market square. Near Ayorou we found a guide to take us hippo watching on the Niger river. The pirogue he had arranged was not at the appointed place; and instead he flagged down a passing pirogue taxi and persuaded its passengers to disembark while it took us to see the hippos wallowing in mud agreeably on a bank in the middle of the river. Later, we hunted for quartz crystals and iron smelt from an ancient Tourag forge on the desolate edge of the desert.

From Ayorou we turned back, re-entering Burkina Faso and then entering Mali further to the west. It was here, at a campsite on a bad and little used road north of Ouagadougou, between Ouahigouya and Koro, that we heard of Mrs Thatcher's resignation as we listened to the World Service six o'clock news sitting enjoying an evening sundowner. We speculated on the result of the leadership contest, now between Hurd, Heseltine and Major as Mohammed and Quarshie went off to town to try to get a land rover roof rack welded. They returned with bottles of ice cold beer, which we drank under a sky bright with stars and to the sound of the sinister barking of jackals and dogs in the distance.

The border crossing to Mali may have been remote and we even saw a sign for Upper Volta, the old name for Burkina Faso. But the news of Mrs Thatcher's resignation had reached the policeman at the lonely dusty border post. When he saw our passports, he said "Vous etes britanniques. Dites moi. La dame de fer. Pourquoi est ce qu'elle a demissioné?"

In Mali we visited the magnificent mud-built mosques at Mopti and Djenne on the Niger river and then the Dogon valley near Bandiagara. Here an animist people, who had refused to convert to Islam, had built villages in defensible positions along the walls of a great escarpment. Dogon art and sculpture has subsequently made the area a popular tourist destination. At the time of our visit, we were the only tourists.

Some nights we camped and the rest we found hotels. In all but one of our campsites - south of Douenza - we were quickly surrounded by well behaved local villagers and children who watched our every move with close attention. At our first - just inside Niger - a storm dispersed our audience. By the time Graham had taken advantage of a natural shower to cover himself thoroughly in soap, the rain stopped. Wherever we were we spent hours admiring the night sky bright with stars and listening to the rustle and cries of passing animals.

The hotels were of varying quality but we usually had no difficulty in finding one. Only in Bobo Dioulassa did our visit coincide with a local conference and all the hotels were fully booked. The choice seemed to be to drive out of town to find a campsite and ... the local brothel. Eventually, with directions from some nervous soldiers who had stopped our land rovers at the point of their guns, we found a Catholic Mission where Veronica persuaded the Sister Superior to grant us refuge for the night.

So we failed in our original objective of getting to Timbuktoo, which we shall now never see. And the circumstances under which we were to leave Ghana meant that we had to abandon a vague plan to follow in the footsteps of Tom and Elisabeth Young who intrepidly returned home from Accra by land across the Sahara. But our circumnavigation of modern Ghana gave us a glimpse of Francophone Africa and the dry areas of the Sahel, where the medieval kingdom of Ghana had once been, and helped to put modern Ghana in perspective for us. I was left with the feeling that Britain should give higher priority to closer regional integration in West Africa as a framework for Ghanaian stability and prosperity and therefore for the pursuit of long term British interests in the area. There is nothing like visiting a place and long hours of travel to stimulate thought.

## CAMEROON

### Cameroon, 1960 to 1973

*Cameroon's history is complicated. In simple terms the old German colony of Cameroon was divided between Britain and France at the end of the First World War. After the Second World War, the British bit was again divided following a plebiscite. The western part joined Nigeria; and the eastern part joined what had been French territory. Present day Cameroon therefore comprises what used to be British Southern Cameroon, centred on Bamenda in the west, and the old French Cameroon. The first President of independent Cameroon from 1960 was Ahidjo who was in office at the time of Lady Tweedsmuir's 1973 visit.*

### Cameroon, January 1973

In January 1973, less than three weeks after Britain had joined the EEC, Lady Tweedsmuir made a three-country tour of Cameroon, Sierra Leone and Gambia. Alan Campbell, Assistant Under-Secretary for Africa, accompanied the Minister to Cameroon and Sierra Leone and entertained her with a fund of amusing stories.

In Yaounde, the Minister made courtesy visits (the term used by the Cameroonians), on the Minister of Foreign Affairs and, in view of her particular interest in agricultural development, the Minister of Agriculture. Both Ministers stressed the desire of Cameroon to receive more aid as a result of Britain's accession to the EEC and its preoccupation with the terms of trade and low commodity prices. Lady Tweedsmuir could not make firm promises on aid; but she was able to remind the Cameroonians that we had been helpful on the cocoa and coffee agreements.

Outside Yaounde, she visited an agricultural school at Nkolbisson and, in striking contrast, a cocoa co-operative project at Okola. In one village, she was welcomed by a group of women with song and dance. To their surprise and pleasure, she joined in. Afterwards, as if to remind us we were in francophone Africa, we were entertained to champagne in the Sous-Prefet's house.

It was politic for Lady Tweedsmuir to spend 24 hours also in South West Cameroon, formerly British Southern Cameroons. This enabled her to visit the Headquarters of the Cameroons Development Corporation at Bota and two British-aided training projects. In those remote days, Britain had a UK based member of staff as Consul in Buea. It was there that we spent the night, visiting the Tole Tea estate on the way. And, on what was a warm day even at 3,000 feet, the Governor of the province gave us lunch at a hotel which thriftily used the gravy from the main course of Irish stew as the basis of the preceding cock-a-leekie soup.

Looking back over 40 years, I cannot recall any suggestion that the Minister should have called on President Ahidjo. Nor did she meet Paul Biya, who was Secretary General of the Presidency at the time and who would become Prime Minister not long afterwards and eventually President as he still is in

2020. Indeed I am struck by the contrast between that visit by a Minister in 1973, which concentrated so heavily on agricultural development, and my own - that of a mere official - in 1993 which focussed heavily on the political and constitutional development of the country, and when I called on President Biya.

*Ahidjo stepped down on 4 November 1982 and left power to his constitutional successor, Paul Biya.*

### **Cameroon, September 1993**

Having had to postpone a visit to Cameroon twice, I was keen to get there before the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), due in Cyprus in October 1993, because of Cameroon's application for Commonwealth membership. I wanted to be able to give advice to Ministers on the subject from some personal contact with Government and Opposition. My only previous visit had been in 1973 with Lady Tweedsmuir.

Our Ambassador, Bill Quantrill, had organised a full programme in Yaounde and his deputy, Charles Hamilton, took me to Bamenda, the capital of Anglophone Cameroon. I was given high level attention by the Cameroonians. I saw President Biya; his Anglophone Prime Minister, who gave me a dinner attended also by half a dozen of his cabinet; the Finance Minister; and the Acting Foreign Minister. I also met the Chairman of the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms; opposition politicians; a cross-section of other senior Cameroonians; and foreign diplomats. I gave a well attended press conference in Yaounde when I was questioned on Britain's policy on Cameroon joining the Commonwealth; and, in Bamenda, had dinner with Fru Ndi, Chairman of the Social Democratic Front, met other opposition figures, the Catholic Archbishop and the (francophone) Governor.

Cameroon's application for Commonwealth membership dominated my visit. As I had expected, I came under heavy pressure from both Government (from the President down) and Opposition and in the press for UK support for Cameroon's application. Biya probably saw membership as a way of demonstrating international approval of his Government, including its respect for human rights, and of satisfying the ambitions of his own anglophone community. Most anglophones, including the main Opposition leader (Fru Ndi), wanted immediate unconditional membership. But there were some (number uncertain but probably small) who wanted it only after further political liberalisation and human rights reform. They calculated that this would increase pressure on the Government to make concessions. In this, they might have overestimated Biya's interest in membership.

I took the line that decisions on membership would be reached the following month by Heads of Government in Cyprus and that I could not predict the outcome. But I made it clear in private discussions with Government and Opposition that there were concerns about the conduct of the 1992 Presidential elections, the slow progress of the constitutional debate (see below) and reports of continuing human rights abuses; and that Cameroon might not therefore be seen to have met the criteria for Commonwealth membership drawn up by CHOGM in Harare in 1991 and enshrined in the Harare Declaration.

It seemed to me that Britain had two distinct but overlapping objectives in this matter:

- (1) to re-affirm and strengthen the Commonwealth's general commitment to "good government" as expressed in the Harare Declaration. This objective could probably be best served by insisting, as a pre-condition of Cameroon's membership, on improvements in its "good government" record. These should include: quicker progress in drafting a new constitution acceptable to the people as a whole; and evidence of greater commitment by the Government to respect for human rights (e.g. by support for the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms, on which I pressed Biya and the Prime Minister particularly hard) and to political liberalisation more generally.
- (2) on the other hand we wanted to promote political stability and "good government" in Cameroon itself. Stability was threatened by the anglophones' current sense of isolation and frustration. Some of them were talking of secession as the only cure. I doubted if this were a serious danger yet. But there was no doubting their resentment at their treatment by the francophones, though they might be exaggerating their woes. The resulting tension was holding back dialogue and prospects of agreement on a new constitution. It was also prejudicing any immediate chance of building a political consensus behind the tough measures needed to tackle the country's serious economic difficulties. Commonwealth membership would not provide a panacea for all these ills. But, by helping to ease tensions, it could create a more favourable climate for tackling them. And above all it would enable the Commonwealth to bring its weight to bear in favour of democracy and human rights. The anglophones were hoping that membership would bring access to advice, training and institution building. Their expectations were no doubt excessive, but the psychological impact of membership for good could be significant.

My recommendation to Ministers was that Britain should argue for an agreement in principle by CHOGM in 1993 that Cameroon should be invited to participate in the 1995 CHOGM, provided specified criteria had been met. These might include agreement on a new constitution acceptable to the people as a whole and confirmation, perhaps by a team of Commonwealth "wise men", of Cameroon's human rights credentials. I suggested that we should lobby some key Commonwealth partners on this approach, starting with Canada as the main Commonwealth bilingual state. But I warned that, if Canada were in favour of immediate Cameroon membership, we might do best to fall into line.

Apart from addressing this issue, my visit enabled me to take stock of the current political and economic situation. My main impression was that Cameroon was in a mess on both fronts. The mess was much less bad than Zaire's; but worse than the other main francophone countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Politically, the inevitable tribal tensions underlay the struggle between those still hankering after the old one-party system and those wanting greater pluralism and a genuine multi-party system. These problems were exacerbated by the cleavage between the francophone majority and the anglophone minority. Some degree of decentralisation / federalism was probably needed to accommodate the latter; but this was still resisted by the francophones. It was a great pity that either Britain or France had not got the whole of the old German colony after World War 1.

Although Biya had launched a process of constitutional reform, he was keeping it under tight control and it was making slow progress. As elsewhere much greater dialogue between government and opposition was desirable. But there was little mutual trust, not surprisingly given that the results of the

1992 Presidential elections had not been accepted by the people of Cameroon as a whole. We could and should urge dialogue on both sides, as I had on both Biya and Fru Ndi; but each side blamed the other for setting conditions which prevented dialogue. It was difficult to know how the gap could be bridged.

There had been fewer major incidents of human rights abuse than the previous year. But this was largely because there had been no elections since then to provide the occasion. Abuses were continuing; and Biya seemed unwilling to give the firm lead needed to bring the situation under control, including imposing stronger discipline on the police and supporting the Human Rights Commission. I urged him to see its Chairman and provide him with a budget; but I was not confident he would do either.

The economy was in serious trouble. The local World Bank economist told us that GNP per capita had fallen by 30% from \$1200 in 1987 to \$800 now. This fall had been caused by the collapse in the world prices of coffee, cocoa and cotton; non-viable public enterprises; non-money making public investments (including a \$300 million airport for Yaounde); poor revenue collection; declining oil production; and weak economic management in general. Indeed there was a vacuum of power at the top with government largely unmanageable. Arrears to both the World Bank and the IMF were building up. Public Servants' pay was in arrears. There had been minor troop demonstrations for better pay. The French Government were considering imposing tougher conditions on their future loans. I told Biya that the International Financial Institutions would not help without agreement on a structural adjustment package.

Political entente was probably essential if the necessary economic reforms were to be put in place. But falling GNP made such entente harder. And I doubted if Fru Ndi, whose support for tougher measures would be essential, understood the nature of structural adjustment. For him, democracy alone would be enough to encourage foreign investment which would, he believed, solve the problem. I did my best to make him more realistic.

As usual I tried to assess Britain's interest. Unlike some other African countries, Cameroon was potentially a viable state, rich in resources including oil, and as such could be a useful export market. In 1992 British exports had been worth nearly £20 million; but this figure could increase significantly if/when the economy recovered.

In addition we had a general interest, as elsewhere, in the promotion of "good government". This was sharpened by Cameroon's partial anglophone identity. The anglophones regarded their existence as giving Britain a moral responsibility for their welfare and therefore for Cameroon's entry to the Commonwealth. I discouraged expectations that entry would bring any increase in aid.

We were in fact planning to reduce our bilateral aid from £3.2 million in 1993/4 to £2 million in 1995/6. This would mean ending our educational programme in anglophone Cameroon and our agricultural research project. In future we were planning to concentrate on forestry and "good government". The British Council were planning to move their library from Yaounde, where it was not well used, to Bamenda. This would help to assuage anglophone concerns that we were turning our backs on them.

CDC's investments and the aid we gave through multilateral channels, including the EC, were also important. As elsewhere, our EC contribution tended to be overlooked.

We were also planning to close our consulate in Douala on the coast before the end of 1993. We should then have only the 4 home based staff in Yaounde left in Cameroon: the bare minimum to protect and promote our interests. I had an uneasy feeling this might not be enough, particularly if the economy picked up.

I left Cameroon with two vivid memories. The first was of breakfast given me by the francophone Governor in Bamenda on my last morning. It was laid out in a buffet on his terrace, looking down on the town and valley below from which a morning mist was rising, mingled with the smoke of cooking fires. The sun was rising over blue hills in the distance. We were served good French claret with a substantial meal as the Governor told us about the province. Luckily I resisted temptation because, after the meal, Charles Hamilton and I left immediately in the Embassy Range Rover for Douala so that I could catch a plane to Brazzaville. During the journey, I drafted my recommendations on our approach to Cameroon's Commonwealth application so that Charles could send them off to London by telegram as soon as possible. Sitting on the back seat along the jungle road as I scribbled away, was my final memory of my visit.

In October 1993 CHOGM decided to admit Cameroon to the Commonwealth in 1995 on condition that it satisfied the criteria set out in the Harare Declaration. In 1995 it became a full member.

*Paul Biya remains in office in 2020, having won every Presidential election since he succeeded Ahidjo in 1982. He may well stand and win in the next election due in 2022.*



Map of East Africa and the Horn of Africa

## CHAPTER 8

### THE HORN OF AFRICA: ETHIOPIA, ERITREA AND SOMALIA

#### ETHIOPIA

##### Ethiopia, pre-1971

*Ethiopia is Africa's oldest independent country. Apart from a five-year occupation by Mussolini's Italy, it was never colonised. It served as a symbol of African independence throughout the colonial period, and was a founder member of the United Nations and the African base for the Organisation of African Unity and other international organisations.*

*A monarchy for much of its history, in 1971 it was still under the rule of Emperor Haile Selassie 1.*

## Ethiopia, October 1971 and September/October 1973

I accompanied Lord Lothian and Lady Tweedsmuir on their visits to Ethiopia, in 1971 and 1973 .

Lord Lothian's visit coincided with one by the Royal College of Defence Studies. Richard Dorman was Charge d'Affaires but made light of organising both visits simultaneously. We stayed in the Addis Hilton. Whether because of their food or the meals given us by our Ethiopian hosts, I got a bad attack of diarrhoea, a fact I chiefly remember because this was one of only two occasions when I suffered any illness during the 60 and more African visits I have made.

On each visit, we called on the Emperor Haile Selassie in the Jubilee Palace. The Minister led the way into a huge room at the far end of which, in front of his throne, stood the small erect figure of the Emperor. We were each introduced and, after a few pleasantries, he invited us behind the throne room to a small sitting room where we were given tea and cake (chocolate on the first visit and coffee on the second, or maybe vice versa). Conversation was in French and largely trivial, confined to polite exchanges about Anglo-Ethiopian friendship and the Emperor's affection for the British Royal Family. But in 1973 we discovered that he had a sense of humour. After Lady Tweedsmuir had been introduced, Willie Morris, the Ambassador, a short man more or less the same height as the Emperor, introduced first Martin Ewans and then me. We were each over 6 foot. With a smile as he looked up at Martin and me and then down again to the Ambassador, Haile Selassie commented: "I see that Her Majesty chooses her envoy to my Court with care". Willie Morris's predecessor as Ambassador had been Alan Campbell who was also the Emperor's height.

The main subject of Lord Lothian's discussion with the Emperor's Ministers was Southern Africa, particularly Rhodesia on which Lord Lothian explained HMG's efforts to reach an acceptable settlement. Arms supplies to South Africa were not raised. The Foreign Minister expressed Ethiopia's strong views on South Africa in sensible terms. Lord Lothian had an easier than expected passage.

Lord Lothian also saw something of the British aid programme, including in agriculture; and visited the Medical Faculty of the University and the Cheshire Home outside Addis where two young British volunteers looked after some 40 crippled children in a shoe-string operation.

Lady Tweedsmuir's visit in 1973 lasted a full week and coincided with the religious feast of Mascal which marks the end of the Ethiopian winter when three months of heavy rains leave the highland countryside carpeted with yellow Mascal daisies. She attended the Mascal Eve celebrations in Addis; spent a day in the central highlands; saw the rock churches at Lalibella; spent a weekend in the Rift Valley visiting British technical assistance projects; and had talks with the Prime Minister and others in Addis Ababa.

Lady Tweedsmuir's meeting with the Secretary General of the OAU had the most substance of any of her meetings but covered only two subjects: Rhodesia and Africa's relations with the EC. On Rhodesia, he adopted a rather dogmatic and hectoring manner to which Lady Tweedsmuir stood up robustly, repudiating any suggestion of bad faith by HMG. On Europe his tone was quite different, implying that the British Government was a quasi-ally on whose support the Africans counted in getting the terms for Association with the EC which suited them best.

Lady Tweedsmuir's talks with the Prime Minister and the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs concentrated on Ethiopian foreign policy, including the Middle East and Somalia. Her call on the PM coincided with an offensively worded attack by the Ethiopian Foreign Minister at the UN against British policy on Rhodesia. When Lady Tweedsmuir mentioned this speech to the PM, he smiled and said he had not read the speech, dismissing it by saying that in New York "ils bavardent".

Lady Tweedsmuir also signed two aid agreements on highway equipment with the Minister of Finance. It was odd that, despite the growing drought and famine in Ethiopia at the time, only the Ministers of Agriculture and Community Development mentioned the distress in the countryside. Neither the PM nor the Emperor himself raised the subject. Here must have lain one of the causes of the Emperor's fall a year later when he was deposed by the communist Derg. He died a year after that, probably murdered by the Derg. I can still see him in my mind's eye: a small, immensely dignified figure as he stood waiting for us in his Palace.

### **Ethiopia, 1973 to 1992**

*Shortly after my last visit, with Lady Tweedsmuir, to Ethiopia in October 1973, the Emperor was deposed and murdered. Since then the Dergue, a horrid Marxist dictatorship, backed by the Soviet Union, had come and, in 1991, gone. Now, in July 1992, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) under Meles Zenawi, Interim President of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, were apparently planning a transition to a plural political system and market based economy. To me, the prospects for neither seemed promising.*

### **Ethiopia, July 1992**

Our experienced Ambassador, James Glaze, escorted me on a full programme of calls including on Meles himself, his Foreign Minister, the Council of Representatives (the nearest Ethiopia had yet got to a Parliament) and the Election Commission. We also called on Salim Salim, OAU Secretary General, UNDP and the Vice Chairman of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The Front represented the Oromo people who had collaborated with the EPRDF in overthrowing the Dergue but had subsequently withdrawn from Meles's Transitional Government. I also attended part of a meeting of a contact group of Western Ambassadors, chaired by James Glaze, who were trying to promote a political settlement between the EPRDF and the OLF.

At the time of my 1992 visit, Ethiopia had about it the smell of Yugoslavia. It was increasingly clear that the recent regional elections had been neither free nor fair; and that the OLF's withdrawal from the Government could lead to serious ethnic based conflict and even disintegration. I saw four possible broad scenarios:

- (a) The EPRDF and OLF would become reconciled and the existing political process leading to national elections would be put back on the rails (thanks in part perhaps to the efforts of the Western contact group);
- (b) Reconciliation would occur but only after the launch of some new political process which minimised the threat to unity from ethnic and religious divisions;

- (c) More or less indefinite low level guerrilla activity, with the EPRDF remaining in the saddle and the OLF unreconciled;
- (d) Increasing violence and disorder leading to formal dismemberment of Ethiopia.

It was too soon to predict which scenario was most likely. Some, like Issayas Afeworki, who we called on later in Eritrea, believed that Meles had made a fundamental mistake at the outset by carving up the country into administrative regions explicitly based on ethnic groups, rather like the process which had led in Nigeria to the Biafran war. I thought that there was much in this view. But Meles told James Glaze and me that he had not yet concluded that the path he had chosen was the wrong one. So scenario (a) need not be ruled out. Of the others, I was inclined to think that worst case (d), dismemberment, was the least likely, if only because of the EPRDF's strength. But I wasn't prepared to bet on a peaceful outcome.

I discussed the work of the Western Contact Group, in which James Glaze was playing such a leading part, with both Meles and the OLF. I stressed that we did not wish to become formal mediators and wanted to avoid burning our fingers by being criticised for interference; but were content to continue our role as informal go-between if the parties wanted us. Both Meles and the OLF assured me they did. Meles suggested that the German Ambassador should be invited to join the Group, given German links with the OLF. He subsequently joined.

There were some brighter spots in the economic situation. The Transitional Government was an infinitely better, including more open, government than the Dergue. Meles's obvious intelligence was an asset. He seemed receptive to my pitch on human rights. The government had opened serious negotiations on structural adjustment with the IMF. The informal sector was reviving. Ethiopians learned quickly and there was some mineral wealth. Western donor support would be available.

But I was not optimistic that these assets would be enough. On the debit side there were many factors. The dead weight of Haile Selassie's and Mengistu's legacies would take a long time to shake off; and old attitudes would die hard. Political crisis would distract attention from economic policy priorities. Suspicion of IMF policies would be difficult to overcome among EPRDF cadres who had been marxists until recently. Devaluation of the currency, privatisation of industry and a sensible investment code were all urgently needed. But there was a failure to understand that the costs of such structural adjustments would be smaller than the costs of not adjusting. In any case, as a World Bank mission had reported the previous autumn, "there was no structure to adjust". In short, the economic development of Ethiopia would be a very long haul.

But British interests in Ethiopia were such that we should make an effort. I saw three main interests, apart from a strong humanitarian case:

- (a) with over 50 million people, Ethiopia's sheer size as the second largest country in Sub-Saharan Africa after Nigeria gave it weight we should not ignore; and, if our long-term objective of political stability and economic development in Africa was serious, we should accept some responsibility in Ethiopia;

- (b) as elsewhere, we would need to “spend to save”. Development aid should eventually reduce the cost to us and other donors of emergency relief and humanitarian assistance. Since September 1990, the UK had contributed over £58 million of humanitarian aid;
- (c) a stable Ethiopia would make chronic instability in the rest of the Horn of Africa less difficult to handle and reduce the flow of refugees which was threatening to overwhelm parts of Kenya.

For these reasons, I left Addis with the belief that we should maintain a strong Embassy and as large an aid programme as we could afford. I also saw a pressing need for larger purpose-built premises for the British Council’s Library.

### **Ethiopia, September 1994**

I returned briefly to Addis Ababa the following year, **1993**, for a Heads of Mission conference chaired by Linda Chalker. But it wasn’t until **September 1994** that I had the opportunity of another full programme of calls. By then James Glaze had been replaced as Ambassador by Robin Christopher who I knew and respected, as a formidable operator, from his time as Head of African Department (Southern). On this occasion I was on my way to a Southern African Heads of Mission conference in Zimbabwe and to visiting Malawi, taking advantage of Ethiopian Airways direct service to Lilongwe. I wanted to update myself on Ethiopia’s transition to a more plural political system and market-based economy and to reinforce our “good government” message with Meles Zenawi, who had retained his title of Interim President of the Transitional Government. In addition to Meles, Robin Christopher took me to call on the Minister for External Economic Cooperation and the OAU Secretary General; and I met various members of the opposition and the diplomatic community.

I left Ethiopia on this occasion less pessimistic than after my 1992 visit. Fears about serious ethnic-based conflict leading to the country’s disintegration now looked less likely. But worries about the Government’s policies of “ethnic regionalism” remained. The division of the country into administrative regions explicitly based on ethnic groups continued to risk exacerbating ethnic tensions.

The transition to constitutional rule was still more or less on course: (flawed) regional elections in 1992, constituent assembly elections earlier in 1994 (but not yet completed) and national elections due in 1995. But the Opposition had stayed outside this process and had not yet agreed with the Government on terms for their participation in next year’s elections. Western Embassies were urging dialogue. I encouraged Meles to bend over backwards to reach an accommodation with opposition parties. He said that he was prepared to go the extra mile to get the OLF on board. But I was not optimistic. It was possible that the elections would take place without opposition participation. Occasional armed clashes between government and opposition supporters would continue. But the Government would not lose control. And so it was to prove.

I also told Meles that the “Good Government” agenda had come to stay. He said that, even without donor conditionality, Ethiopians wanted democracy and economic reform. Fine words; but I was not wholly convinced. Former freedom fighters, in Ethiopia as elsewhere in Africa, tended to be of an authoritarian cast of mind. Meles and his colleagues would no doubt do their best to retain power one way or another. Like Rawlings in Ghana they would probably succeed (but Rawlings was later to prove

this comparison unfair to him) and would continue to provide Ethiopia with better government than the Emperor or Mengistu had. But it might not always meet our “good government” criteria. This could present us with awkward decisions on our aid programme.

Another vital aspect of good government was human rights. I doubted if respect for them came naturally to Meles and the EPRDF. At the time of my visit, the Government had recently released large numbers of OLF prisoners from the 1992 clashes and Meles hinted to me that he might be willing to pardon the relatively few still detained. Meanwhile preparations were well advanced to charge and try Mengistu supporters for abuses of human rights. I met the Chief Prosecutor who struck me as dispassionate, serious and determined to avoid a witch hunt. I feared he lacked resources. Britain was considering offering assistance. We also needed to consider what could be done if some of the accused, now in exile in North America, tried to enter Britain to avoid extradition: there was no bilateral treaty. I left concerned that human rights were another area which might complicate the bilateral relationship.

By 1994 Ethiopia’s structural adjustment programme, backed by the IMF, IBRD and bilateral donors, had made good progress towards macro economic stability since the abandonment of Mengistu’s Marxist policies. But the Government’s attitude to private investment, privatisation and civil service reform was still ambivalent. It had for example postponed much needed liberalisation of the investment code until after the elections the next year and seemed not to understand the damage that this delay would cause. One local British businessman complained bitterly that the Government had no understanding of the needs of business and failed to distinguish between responsible companies and fly-by-night Lebanese operators.

I got the impression that the Government were determined not to be pushed too far by the donors. The Minister for External Cooperation hoped that the country would be able to do without balance of payments support within five years. Ethiopian pride might be tempted to choose poverty rather than donor conditionality once the worst economic damage had been repaired. If so the donor’s ability to insist on the “good government” agenda would be weakened. On a brighter note, however, there was a welcome absence of corruption on any significant scale.

Impressively, Ethiopia was playing an increasingly self-confident role in the region. It was involved in the search for a settlement in Somalia and Sudan. It had sent peace keeping troops to Rwanda. Meles told me that it would contribute to other peace keeping operations in future if there was a distinctive contribution it could make. Increasingly, its size, weight and improved leadership made it look like the key to the long term stability of the region.

It was on this visit that I briefed the OAU Secretary General about the proposals we were developing on conflict prevention/resolution. I have written about this conversation in Chapter 4 above. I also encouraged Salim to play a more active part in restoring democracy to The Gambia. He said he would discuss the issue with African leaders at the UN General Assembly. But he doubted that the OAU could take effective action. So did I. The OAU was not in the habit of interfering in the internal affairs of its members.

The bilateral relationship was in good shape. Meles paid tribute to our “excellent” police project and expressed his thanks for the MBA programme which he and several colleagues had just completed through the Open University. This had gained Britain much credit. Meles pressed for the project to be extended to the next tier of government.

British exports were gradually recovering from the civil war. They had reached £58 million and should grow further as the economy recovered. The visa section of the Embassy was struggling to meet a significant rise in demand, mainly from Somali applicants; and we would have to strengthen the section as soon as possible.

The British Council had decided since my last visit to refurbish its old library rather than to build a new one. I thought this a pity given that the library held the record for the number of annual loans by any Council library world wide. But I concluded that refurbishment would serve.

In this, my fifth and last visit to Ethiopia, I reflected once again how much I should have enjoyed a posting to Addis Ababa. The country, its culture and history were fascinating. The capital, with its smell of burning eucalyptus as one entered the airport and its mountain air, delightful. Its governing classes, when not Marxists, were welcoming. The Compound, especially the Residence itself - an attractive bungalow built around an internal courtyard and covered in slow growing bougainvillea - was charming. Ethiopia, when not in the grip of the Dergue, was one of the most rewarding and agreeable countries in Africa in which to serve as a diplomat.

*Meles died in 2012. He was succeeded as Prime Minister by his deputy, Hailemariam Desalegn who won the 2015 elections. Protests broke out in 2016, demanding an end to human rights abuses, the release of political prisoners and a fairer redistribution of the wealth. The Government cracked down hard and declared a state of emergency in October 2016. In 2018 Desalegn resigned, to be replaced as leader of the ruling EPRDF and therefore Prime Minister by Abiy Ahmed, an ethnic Oromo. He launched a comprehensive programme of political reform at home and diplomatic bridge-building abroad. The Government lifted the state of emergency, reached a settlement to end the war with Eritrea and signed a peace deal with the Ogaden National Liberation Front, ending a 34-year armed rebellion. Parliament elected Sahle-Work Zewde as Ethiopia's first female head of state since Empress Zewditu in 1928-1930. The Government survived a coup attempt in 2019. Elections, due in 2020, have been postponed by the corona virus outbreak. Abiy Ahmed remains Prime Minister meanwhile.*

## **ERITREA**

### **Eritrea, pre-1992**

*Eritrea's recent history provided the key to understanding the situation in 1992. It had been under Italian rule from 1890 to 1941; and British from 1941 to 1952. In 1952 the UN authorised its federation with Ethiopia into which it was fully incorporated by Haile Selassie in 1960. For the next 30 years the Eritrean opposition fought for independence first against the Emperor and then against the Dergue. The EPLF's defeat of Mengistu in 1991 had been achieved in alliance with the Ethiopian People's*

*Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). A condition of that alliance was that Eritrea would have its right to self-determination recognised by the new government in Addis Ababa. This right had been endorsed in 1991 after Mengistu's defeat; and agreement reached that the Provisional Government of Eritrea (PGE) should have sole responsibility for the territory of Eritrea pending a referendum on independence to be held by April 1994.*

### **Eritrea, July 1992**

When I visited Eritrea in 1992 it was still a part of Ethiopia - sort of. I flew to Asmara with James Glaze from Addis Ababa during my visit there. We called on Issayas Afeworki, Secretary General of the Provisional Government of Eritrea (PGE), and other local and foreign dignitaries. We visited the British Council library in Asmara and the Commonwealth War Graves cemetery just outside. And we were proudly shown the dump of Mengistu's Soviet tanks and other military equipment rusting in the city's outskirts. We were also taken to the old trenches beyond Dekamehare, south of Asmara, where the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) had made their final breakthrough which drove Mengistu into exile only the year before. Two unburied human skeletons reminded us how recently the war had ended. The villages we drove through were still shattered. Only the pleasant town of Asmara was untouched, with its still visible Italian influence lending a distinctive charm.

Eritrea, a state in the making, was thus in an international political limbo in 1992: neither still a full part of Ethiopia, nor yet *de iure* independent. The PGE wanted UN involvement in the referendum promised for 1993 to secure international (including OAU) blessing for independence; but, as James Glaze's and my call on Issayas showed, was suspicious of UN and OAU intentions. The Chairman of the Referendum Commission told me that, having fought for 30 years for independence, the Eritreans were fearful of being robbed of their goal in the peace. The main obstacles were, on the one hand, the PGE's unfamiliarity with the ways of the world and, on the other, OAU nervousness of setting a precedent for changing African colonial-era boundaries. It looked in 1992 as if, in the end, good sense and realism would probably prevail, not least because Meles of Ethiopia remained committed to recognition of Eritrea. So much the better for the immediate peace of the region.

I was less optimistic about Eritrea's longer-term prospects of political stability. Its present unity and clear sense of national purpose might be due more to reaction against the policies of Haile Selassie and Mengistu than to anything more fundamental. Once it achieved independence, its internal ethnic and religious diversity (the Muslim/Christian split was 50/50) could destabilise it, as similar centrifugal forces were doing in the rest of the Horn. Nor was Eritrea, post-independence, yet certain to join the ranks of multi-party democrats.

Eritrea's economic prospects also were poor. The Secretary of Economic Affairs, who seemed to possess few qualifications for the job, told us that Eritrea had begun its separate existence with less than zero assets because Mengistu had removed some of them to Addis Ababa before his defeat. The Secretary also complained that the Eritrean economy was suffering from Ethiopia's refusal so far to devalue their shared currency. In the short term, investors were no doubt staying away because of political uncertainty. But I found it hard to believe that, even in the longer-term, Eritrea would attract much investment unless oil were found. The Italian Consul General talked up Eritrea's advantages; but the

UN representatives I talked to were much more pessimistic about the country's long-term economic viability.

I saw Britain's interests as follows:

- as a Security Council Permanent Member, we needed to follow the UN's involvement at least until the referendum in 1993;
- the PGE was a useful window on Ethiopia through which to learn about, and perhaps influence, events there;
- Eritrea was the only part of the Horn where, for the moment at least, there was peace and stability. Their preservation could help the region as a whole;
- Britain had contributed nearly £13 million of humanitarian aid to Eritrea since September 1990. Contributing to the country's economic development would save future humanitarian relief;
- commercial prospects, although limited, were not negligible. UK firms had already picked up one or two small contracts.

As for future British involvement, I saw no case in the foreseeable future for a resident Mission. Our Ambassador should cover Eritrea from Addis Ababa, with the help of an Honorary Consul in Asmara. A limited programme of technical assistance would be helpful although there were signs that the Eritreans were feeling overwhelmed by too many rather large aid missions. The British Council library was meeting a healthy demand and was a good way of maintaining a modest visible British presence in Eritrea at a critical time. In general we should continue to keep a fairly close eye on developments in Eritrea in the run-up to the referendum in 1993 and at least for a time afterwards; we should avoid any temptation to increase our involvement, concentrating instead on Ethiopia; and we should encourage the Italians in their evident intention of playing an active role in the country. If, unexpectedly, Eritrea were to start booming, we could re-consider our approach.

*The referendum was duly held and Eritrea became independent in 1993. But hostility between Eritrea and Ethiopia persisted, leading to war over a border dispute in 1998-2000. A peace settlement was finally reached in 2018. Isaias Afwerki remains President in 2020 and his People's Front for Democracy and Justice is still the sole political party. In 2002 Britain opened a small resident embassy in Asmara.*

## SOMALIA

### Somalia 1960 - 1992

*In 1960, an independent Somali Republic was created out of a British protectorate and a UN trusteeship under Italian administration.*

*In 1991, the country collapsed into anarchy after the overthrow of the military regime of President Siad Barre. This precipitated the arrival of a UN force of military observers in July 1992, about two months before the EC Troika visit of September. UN intervention was aimed at creating a secure enough environment for humanitarian operations to be carried out in increasingly lawless and famine conditions.*

## Somalia, September 1992

The EC Troika, led by Douglas Hurd, landed at Kenya on its way back from Johannesburg in September 1992 (see Chapter 11 below). The three Foreign Ministers paid a courtesy call, I seem to remember, on Moi; but I did not accompany them. The main aim was to visit Mogadishu to which we were flown in an RAF Hercules from Nairobi.

The Hercules made a steep descent to Mogadishu airport, to avoid the risk of being fired upon from the ground as we came in to land. We were met by UN officials and various Somalis; and were taken in a convoy of UN vehicles to the UN headquarters in the centre of the town. We were escorted by young men, known as 'technicals', brandishing kalashnikovs and similar weapons in jeeps mounted with heavier fixed guns. We drove through scenes of devastation on either side of the road. Scarcely a building had been left standing. From time to time, our escorts fired volleys of shots into the air. We saw very few people on the way.

At the UN HQ, the Ministers went inside to be briefed on the political and military situation. By this time it had started to rain. I and, I seem to recall, my Danish and Portuguese colleagues, were introduced to some wild looking fellows in the street, who purported to be representatives of one of the local factions. We had an earnest discussion with them about the situation as the rain poured down. I fear nothing useful emerged from this encounter. But we reported our conversation to our Ministers who expressed polite interest in what both the UN and we told them. On our way back to the airport, still escorted by our faithful "technicals" and the continuous sound of their casual firing, we were taken to see a local hospital. Unsurprisingly it was badly in need of medical supplies.

I am sorry to say that, so far as I can recall after so many years, the visit achieved nothing worthwhile, other than to give us all a glimpse of the devastation that the civil war had inflicted on Mogadishu and the appalling conditions in which the Somalis were living. UN officials and foreign aid workers were better housed but operated in difficult and dangerous conditions. The visit also of course demonstrated EC political interest in the problems faced by Somalia. But this was of limited value given the enormous gap between our feelings of deep sympathy and our capacity for action, which was small. All we could do was to support the case for continued humanitarian assistance and UN engagement.

*In the year after this visit, the UN force met increasing difficulty. In June 1993 24 Pakistani soldiers were killed and in October 1993 18 US soldiers were among those killed in the Battle of Mogadishu. The UN withdrew in 1995 having failed to establish any central authority.*

*As rival warlords tore the country apart into clan-based fiefdoms, an internationally-backed unity government formed in 2000 failed to establish control, and the two relatively peaceful northern regions of Somaliland and Puntland effectively broke away.*

*The seizure of the capital Mogadishu and much of the country's south by a coalition of Islamist shariah courts in 2006 prompted an intervention by Ethiopian, and later, African Union, forces. Since 2012, when a new internationally-backed government was installed, Somalia has been inching towards stability, but the new authorities still face a challenge from Al-Qaeda-aligned Al-Shabab insurgents. Parliamentary and Presidential elections have had to be postponed due to the corona virus pandemic,*

*increased attacks from Al-Shabab and a severe locust infestation. Meanwhile the former Prime Minister, Mohammed Abdullahi Mohamed, elected as President in 2017, remains in power in 2020.*



Map of East Africa and the Horn of Africa

## CHAPTER 9

### EAST AFRICA: KENYA, TANZANIA, UGANDA AND RWANDA

#### KENYA

##### Kenya, pre-1971

*Lord Lothian's visit took place less than eight years after Kenya had achieved independence from Britain under President Jomo Kenyatta's one-party rule in 1963. Kenyatta remained President at the time of Lord Lothian's visit.*

##### Kenya, October 1971

Not only was this Lord Lothian's first visit to Nairobi since taking office in May 1970; but it was the first British Ministerial visit to Kenya in two years. Nor did Lady Tweedsmuir manage to visit it during my time as Private Secretary.

The purpose of this visit was, as usual, familiarisation. But it aroused speculation that it was intended to discuss matters of substance, particularly Rhodesia, with the Kenyan Government. In fact, I cannot recall that such matters were formally discussed at all.

Because the Foreign and Finance Ministers were both absent, Lord Lothian had talks with Vice President Moi and the Attorney General, Charles Njonjo. Both told him of the difficulties Kenya was having with Tanzania and President Nyerere in the East African Community. Kenya felt that it was paying more than its fair share of the costs. Ironically in the light of Amin's later behaviour, Njonjo said that Kenya had been pleased when Amin had overthrown President Obote in Uganda. Relations between Amin's Uganda and Kenya were now much improved. Britain of course felt the same at the time. How wrong we were to prove.

The most interesting part of the tour was the visit that Lord Lothian paid to a prominent British farmer in Kipkabus, near Eldoret, in the Kenyan highlands. Denis Whetham and his wife farmed pyrethrum, an insecticide. He and other British farmers in the area were coming under increasing pressure from local people to sell their farms to Africans. Moi was to tell Lord Lothian later that he appreciated the problems of the remaining settlers in Kenya and that he was keen to deal effectively with the problem. The writing was of course on the wall, as it was also in Tanzania. But the Kenyans were a good deal more sensitive in how they handled it.

Unsurprisingly, Lord Lothian had his ear bent by the settlers. Some of them appeared to feel that their problems should be the major preoccupation of HMG and the High Commission. There were some 270 left at the time in Kenya. I felt sympathy for their likely future; and envy for the life style they had enjoyed in the past. I also admired the efficiency with which they farmed, albeit with the benefit of cheap African labour. We were able to compare their farms with another farm bought two years or so earlier by a retired African police officer, said to be one of the most successful African farmers in the country. It looked reasonably prosperous and well-run; but did not equal the Whetham farm. We also saw another farm in the area which had been sold to an African earlier on and which had now deteriorated badly. Lord Lothian was good at listening to the settlers' woes. And the willingness of a Minister to listen probably helped their morale. But neither he nor anyone else could offer a solution to their basic problems caused by the rising tide of Africanisation.

### **Kenya, 1971 to 1992**

*Jomo Kenyatta died in 1978. He was succeeded by his Vice President, Daniel arap Moi, who won re-election as President in 1979, 1983 and 1988 under the original single-party constitution.*

### **Kenya, March 1992**

Looking back on my work as AUSS, it seems odd now how comparatively little time I spent in Kenya given its political and commercial importance to UK interests. This was probably due to a combination of reasons. Although important, Kenya suffered no major crisis. In 1992 it had accepted the principle of multi-partyism, albeit rather unconvincingly. Both High Commissioners, Sir Roger Tomkys and Sir Kieran Prendergast were powerful figures, more senior than me, and needed my support on the ground less than more junior heads of mission in Africa. In any case, they received a good number of other visitors from Whitehall, including ministers. My word would have carried little weight with Kenyans

used to receiving much more senior UK figures. In short my time was better spent elsewhere. Of course I needed to keep up with events in Kenya; but this could be done from my desk in London. With the benefit of hind sight, I wish that early on as AUSS I had been able to spend several days in Nairobi and in touring the country as I had in Nigeria.

I did however include two nights in Nairobi in my **March 1992** familiarisation tour between leaving Ghana and starting work as AUSS in London. Roger Tomkys, for whom I had worked in the Administration in London in the 80s, took me to call on the Vice President/Finance Minister, Professor Saitoti, and on the Permanent Secretary for Internal Security, Kimalat. Two things struck me then about Kenya, particularly by comparison with Ghana from which I had just come. First, we seemed to be supping with President Moi with almost as long a spoon as we did with Rawlings. This seemed odd given that Moi had been a much better friend of Britain than Rawlings had. I could understand one difference: the presence in London of a significant Kenyan opposition lobby that packed more punch than its Ghanaian equivalent. But I was still left with the feeling that we were demanding higher than necessary standards of the Kenyans.

Perhaps the explanation lay in the second thing that struck me: the mood of pessimism about Kenya's political and economic prospects. These contrasted with Kenya's relatively successful past. The reverse was true in Ghana: optimism about the future by contrast with Ghana's disastrous record between 1957 and 1985. These contrasts apart, the essential similarity between the two countries was the need for both to make the difficult transition to more accountable government and to continue their sensible, market based economic policies. These would not be easy in either country. But it seemed to me then, in 1992, coming direct from West Africa, that Ghana had two advantages: better endowed natural resources (gold, cocoa, timber) and easier tribal relationships. Ghana had however a very long way to make up.

*By the time of the next Presidential elections in December 1992, Moi had bowed to donor pressure and accepted a multi party system. He won the elections.*

### **Kenya, February 1995**

On my second visit to Kenya, in **February 1995**, Kieran Prendergast, an old friend who was about to leave on appointment as Ambassador to Turkey, took me to call on President Moi in Nakuru. I had last seen Moi as Vice President in 1971. By now he had become one of the grand old statesmen of Africa, who had been a good friend of Britain, if rather too authoritarian for 1990s tastes. Prendergast, like his High Commissioner predecessors, had good access to Moi; and it was a sign of Britain's relations with him that he should have been willing to see me, a mere Under Secretary.

I rehearsed to Moi British concerns for a sustained and consistent economic reform programme and for action against corruption. He confirmed that Kenya would stick with its present economic policies. I thought afterwards to myself: maybe. But we should need to continue the struggle for his ear against those of his close advisers opposed to reform. Fortunately, thanks to the efforts of British Ministers and of Kieran Prendergast himself, our relationship with Moi could bear plain talking on both sides.

I raised with Moi our concerns about Kenyan/Ugandan tensions about which the Ugandans had asked me to reassure the Kenyans of their good intentions. Moi said that the Ugandans were liars. He may have been over reliant on inaccurate intelligence from his security people. The facts were not clear.

I also took Moi through our ideas, under development at the time, on how Britain could best help with African peacekeeping e.g. through training, workshops, logistical support. For the first time he expressed welcome for our plans; and made a number of useful comments on our approach.

I gave Moi an account of my recent visits to Rwanda and Uganda. He listened carefully to what I said about the situation in Kigali but, as on previous occasions, did not show any inclination to be active. He was concerned about the situation in Burundi. He also commented on Somalia and the Sudan. In short, we had quite a wide ranging discussion on lines familiar to Keiran Prendergast from his numerous calls on the President during his time as High Commissioner.

I also met Michael Wamalwa, Leader of the Opposition, over tea at the Residence. My talk with him confirmed my impression from meeting him in London before Christmas that he was not a political heavyweight. It was hard to see him making much progress against Moi and the governing party, KANU. He could not answer convincingly my question on what his party really stood for. Kenyan political parties are about personalities and power - not principle.

I found the mood on Kenya's economy much improved from my last visit three years earlier. Steve O'Brien, the World Bank representative, described as a miracle the events of 1994. By the middle of 1993 Kenya had been on the edge of an economic abyss with inflation at 100%, serious arrears of external debt and rapidly increasing money supply. Economic mismanagement had brought the economy close to disaster. The miracle was Moi's appointment of Mudavadi as Finance Minister and Cheserem as Governor of the Central Bank. Unexpectedly they had proved to be genuine reformers; and, backed by Moi, had achieved the remarkable results of 1994. But every fresh step forward was a struggle against those opposed to reform. The next major step forward needed was parastatal reform. Above all corruption had to be brought under control. But, in O'Brien's view, if any African country could make it economically, Kenya could, thanks to the market-based policies of the 1960s and 1970s; emphasis on education and the existence of a relatively well educated labour force; and Kenya's geographical advantage.

There was nothing new in this analysis, which corrected my own superficial impression from my 1992 visit. But perhaps it did not take enough account of the essential fragility of the reform process; nor of the importance of the donors as agents of change. If Kenya's recovery was to continue and its potential realised, the donors would have to remain constructively engaged. The UK would continue to have a key role in this process.

*Moi went on to win the next Presidential elections in 1997 but stood down in 2001 when the opposition leader, Mwai Kibaki, was elected in free and fair elections. In 2007, although Kibaki was again declared the winner, the result was rejected by his opponent, Raila Odinga, and violence followed. The dispute was settled by the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, who brokered the creation in 2008 of a power*

*sharing coalition government with Kibaki as President and Odinga as Prime Minister. In the 2013 Presidential elections, Odinga was defeated by Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of Kenya's first President, Jomo Kenyatta. He also won the 2017 elections. The next are due in 2022. Thus, so far, Kenya has kept its record as one of the few African states to have avoided military rule. But stability is threatened by Al-Shabab.*

## TANZANIA

### Tanzania, pre-1971

*Tanganyika achieved independence from British rule in 1961 under its first President, Julius Nyerere. Zanzibar gained its independence in 1963. The two territories merged in Tanzania in 1964. A one-party system was introduced in 1965, when the CCM became the only legally permitted party in the country. In 1967 the Arusha Declaration committed the country to socialism.*

### Tanzania, October 1971 and September 1973

I saw more of Tanzania during my time as a Private Secretary than of anywhere else in Africa except Ethiopia, going there with both Lord Lothian and Lady Tweedsmuir. Harold Smedley, one of the two AUSSs for Africa, also accompanied Lord Lothian; and Alan Campbell came with Lady Tweedsmuir.

Lord Lothian's visit was for familiarisation purposes, but also to keep our lines open to the country during a difficult period in the bilateral relationship. He was the first Minister in Heath's Government to visit Tanzania and the first senior member of the Conservative Party to go since 1970. His visit coincided with a further round of negotiations in the attempt to resolve the Rhodesian problem and with the arbitrary expulsion by the Tanzanians of two European farmers, alleged to have abused local labourers and squatters. Both these subjects came up during our call on President Nyerere. He was friendly and relaxed, alternating between serious reflection, light hearted nonchalance and slightly hysterical laughter. I found him one of the most attractive of all the African leaders I was to meet. The discussion covered the main subjects which divided us. Nyerere dismissed the dialogue which some African states were having with South Africa with the remark that Britain should not be fooled by Banda and Houphouet-Boigny, who were like "Jews supping with Hitler". And, on arms for South Africa, he was keeping his fingers crossed in the hope that South Africa would not ask for anything beyond the Wasp helicopters that Britain had recently supplied.

The main subject of discussion with Nyerere was Rhodesia on which his opposition to our position was largely predictable. But he did not mention the principle on which black Africa was insisting i.e. no independence before majority rule (NIBMAR). Instead he concentrated on the danger he saw of Britain watering down its own five less demanding principles to make them acceptable to Ian Smith.

Lord Lothian raised with the President the nationalisation, largely without compensation, of properties owned by British citizens and about the recent arbitrary expulsion of two of them. Nyerere did not close the door on further negotiation by the High Commissioner, Horace Phillips, on behalf of some of these people. And he admitted that they served the country's interests in the short term. But he ruled out large scale private farming by foreigners in a socialist Tanzania in the longer term.

Horace Phillips subsequently took Lord Lothian, Harold Smedley and me to visit the couple of dozen British farmers and their wives who were still in Northern Tanzania, on the fertile slopes of Kilimanjaro, and who were threatened with nationalisation and expulsion. This was a fascinating experience. We stayed with one of the farmers whose land looked westwards from Kilimanjaro and met others at their local Club and at a private house for dinner. Some of them grew strawberries which they flew by private light aircraft from their own landing strips to Nairobi to catch long distance planes to the European market. They had settled there after World War 11 and had had the time of their lives. As in Kenya, Lord Lothian was submitted to a barrage of criticism of HMG for not doing more to protect them. Only one of them was honest enough to admit that the farmers were a surprising anachronism in a country like Tanzania, and that he for his part was content to carry on his agreeable living so long as there was something in it for him and local conditions were not intolerable. I seem to remember that this was the man who also described the fun that some of them used to have in encouraging local elephants on to their neighbours' land. Lord Lothian could do no more than undertake to consider the various complaints made to him and that the High Commissioner would press for compensation for the property of any of them expelled from the country. This satisfied most of them; and they thanked the Minister for his patience and sympathy.

We also went to Zanzibar, another memorable experience. We called on Sheikh Karume, the First Vice-President of Tanzania, a burly unattractive man who ruled the island with a strong hand and the economic support of East Germany. He received us at the top of the steps of the old British Residency, dressed in a tight white linen suit and collar and tie in the best colonial-era tradition instead of in local dress. He conducted us inside and entertained us to afternoon tea, with cucumber sandwiches, off the E11R monogrammed tea service which he had taken over with the Residency. We conversed politely on largely trivial matters. I remember also the cloves spread out to dry on the pavements; and the golden sand from which we swam below the High Commissioner's local house just outside the town. Anybody caught stealing the cloves could lose a hand, a punishment not available in the time of my uncle, Robert Foulger, who had been colonial Tanganyika's last Inspector of Police.

The visit could not have been expected to bring about any positive improvement in the bilateral relationship with this socialist government. There were too many major differences between us on wider African issues. But it may have helped to reduce any further deterioration; and even perhaps to counter the efforts of the communist powers, particularly China, to supplant Britain as the most ubiquitous foreign presence there. Few of us were at all optimistic in the 1970s about Tanzania's future.

Lady Tweedsmuir combined her 1973 visit to Tanzania with attending the annual Commonwealth Finance Ministers meeting which happened to be held there in September 1973. She, Alan Campbell and I were therefore included in the RAF flight on which the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his officials travelled. We re-fuelled at Luxor where we were taken to see the temples, an agreeable perk of office for the Ministers and their party.

Luxor was not the only perk. The Tanzanian Government flew both the Chancellor and Lady Tweedsmuir (but not I think her Private Secretary) up to one of the national game parks, at Mukumi, before the conference began.

Nyerere was absent on this occasion due to his sister's death up country. Instead Lady Tweedsmuir held talks with the Foreign Minister, John Malacela, whom she had met in London. They discussed

compensation for British farmers, Rhodesia (in familiar terms) and Asian immigration into Britain on which Malacela complained that Britain was taking fewer Asians from Tanzania than from Kenya and than it had taken from Uganda. They also discussed British aid to Tanzania, which was helping to mellow Tanzania's policy towards Britain.

Lady Tweedsmuir's travels in the country were extensive. We were flown by Government charter to the Dodoma region to see one of the "ujamaa" collective villages which were Nyerere's pride and where we were welcomed with song and dance by some six or seven hundred villagers. Speeches and gifts were exchanged: a hoe and axe (for labour) and a stool (for repose) in exchange for Lady Tweedsmuir's gift of a British tractor. We drove 350 miles north to Lushoto, a charming town in the Usambara Mountains, where Lady Tweedsmuir was the guest of Mamma Mary Hancock, a remarkable elderly school-mistress and Member of the Tanzanian Parliament who had been a deeply respected resident of the country since she had left Tonbridge Wells more than thirty years earlier.

Another 200 miles drive took us to the slopes of Kilimanjaro where the Minister met British farmers, including John Goodman who ran an efficient, comfortable and prosperous dairy farm and coffee estate. After strawberries and cream on the Goodmans' lawn, Lady Tweedsmuir addressed about a dozen local British farmers and their wives. As with Lord Lothian in 1971, ministerial attention helped their morale at a difficult time. After a night in Arusha and some local calls there, we spent our final night at the Manyara game park on the shores of a lake in the Rift about fifty miles west of Arusha: one of the best parks I have visited. It lay at the foot of a cliff on top of which our hotel stood. We saw a lot of animals early in the morning before leaving by air for Nairobi and our next country visit to Ethiopia (see above).

*In 1985 Nyerere retired. He was succeeded in the Presidency by Ali Hassan Mwinyi, also of the CCM. My visits as AUSS came after the Government had accepted multi-partyism in principle but before the first elections were to be held in October 1995.*

### **Tanzania, July 1992 and February 1995**

I paid two visits to Tanzania as AUSS. The first, in July 1992, fell between High Commissioners and was therefore low key; and the second in February 1995 when Roger Westbrook, the new High Commissioner introduced me to the Prime Minister, Finance Minister and other senior figures.

Much had changed since my visits in the 70s. The bilateral relationship was no longer bedevilled by President Nyerere's expropriation of British owned farms and by Rhodesian UDI. Largely as a result of Nyerere's socialist economic policies, Tanzania had become the world's second poorest country. But, at least, unlike so many other African countries, Tanzania had suffered no military coups and no significant civil disturbances or violence. Tribal tensions were much weaker than elsewhere.

It had been a bit of a mystery to me why the Government had accepted multi-partyism in 1992 after a Commission had concluded that 80% of the population wanted to maintain single-party rule. According to the Secretary General of the ruling CCM, the decision was due to the change in the world political climate i.e. they jumped before they were pushed. But another powerful reason must have

been that the CCM were so well entrenched, and the opposition so weak and fragmented, that the Government calculated that they had nothing to lose from multi-partyism. I met nobody on either visit who doubted that the CCM would win the elections due in October 1995, as indeed they decisively did.

I was not however optimistic that the CCM would rely only on its legitimate advantages and would not resort to tricks. The Chairman of the National Electoral Commission did not impress me. I doubted that he would speak up in public against Government manoeuvrings. The system of funding political parties gave the CCM an unfair advantage. The CCM Secretary General, the third most senior man in Tanzania, looked a political dinosaur, more than capable of rigging the elections. He said all the right things about multi-partyism; but did not sound as if he understood or believed them. Nor was I encouraged by the Vice Chairman of the CCM, who warned in tough terms against donor interference in internal Tanzanian politics. I stressed to the Prime Minister and others Britain's determination to pursue our good government policies, including against corruption, and to continue to link our aid to Tanzania's progress on economic and political reform. I also told them that we intended to satisfy ourselves that the electoral playing field was level.

There was a further political problem, arising from the union between Zanzibar and the mainland. The issue generated much political heat. The Zanzibaris wanted greater autonomy within the Union. They hoped that this would enable them to win a larger share of the Union cake and develop profitable links with the outside world. The issue had come to a head because of the possibility that, under multi-partyism, an opposition party (the CUF) would capture Zanzibar. If this were to happen, Zanzibar and the mainland would be in the hands of opposing parties. Political unrest, spiralling out of control into violence, seemed a real risk.

I found it hard to believe, however, that in the long run a compromise could not be found between Zanzibar and mainland. Zanzibar needed the mainland economically. And the mainland feared the risk of an independent Islamic Zanzibar coming under hostile influence. Behind mainland worries lurked fear of Islamic fundamentalism. So each side needed the other and they shared an interest in preserving the Union. But the issue would continue to generate political tension. The largest opposition party in the new Parliament might well be Zanzibar's CUF. If so, the main inter-party issues might become Zanzibar's relations with the mainland and the role of Islam in the life of the nation.

On my 1992 visit I found two contrasting views of economic prospects. The first, mostly professed by Tanzanians I met, was complacent: structural adjustment was working; the government's favourable attitude to the private sector would attract investment, as evidenced by the high turn-out at a recent Tanzanian investment conference in London; agricultural and industrial production was rising; the donor community would continue to provide massive support, as it had at the most recent donor Consultative Group meeting in Paris when some \$1 billion had been pledged. This view was echoed by the Somaia family, prominent Asian businessmen on whom I called in Tanga, a 5-hour drive north of the capital. They claimed to see good opportunities for private business in the new climate. Clearly good potential existed, particularly in agriculture. And the drought had spared Tanzania. Indeed it rained (unseasonably) for much of my 1992 visit. I was told that, if Tanzania got its act together, it could feed the whole of Southern Africa.

But the donor representatives were much gloomier. They cited the stultifying effects of 20 years of CCM rule; low educational standards; insufficient serious attention being paid to agriculture by government and donors alike; an overestimate of the importance of industry to which donor emphasis on privatisation might be contributing; and above all a lack of serious engagement by the government in the reform process. I was told that they were too apt to accept with disarming charm whatever was offered, on more or less whatever conditions, without seeking to inject ideas of their own on how to adjust proposed programmes to local circumstances. I reflected that the Ghanaians could have taught them useful lessons on this.

Meanwhile Dar Es Salaam presented a classic picture of a third world capital in which structural adjustment had recently started: abject poverty, squalor, decayed infrastructure, but with lots of new cars in traffic jams and rising property prices as expatriates competed for accommodation.

My 1995 visit confirmed these 1992 conclusions. Roger Westbrook, our new High Commissioner, took me to Dodoma, the new capital, where Ministers had gathered for a Parliamentary session. The new Finance Minister made a good impression of sincerity, attention to detail and competence. But his roots were in the CCM and he had no visible private sector experience. He was probably under the thumb of the Prime Minister, Cleopa Msuya, who had held a succession of senior official and ministerial posts throughout one-party rule. So I doubted if these men were committed to drive reform forward. I feared in fact that the reform process would not achieve any real momentum until after the elections, and then only if a new generation of political leadership emerged. For the moment Tanzania was marking time. As one senior figure said to me: Tanzania had left behind one philosophy (Nyerere's) without yet having found another.

I concluded, as I left the country, that it was worth persevering with our policies in Tanzania given our interests there. In summary, we needed to demonstrate that political pluralism and economic liberalism would deliver the prosperity that Nyerere's socialism had failed to provide if our good government policies were to be generally credible. We needed to protect our investment of over £135 million of aid offered to Tanzania since 1986 in the hope that its economy would eventually become self-sustaining. An economically viable Tanzania could form a useful member of a revived East African community; and, if agricultural production could be increased, it could help feed its drought-affected Southern neighbours, thus reducing the burden on us. Finally, Tanzania could become an increasingly useful market for British goods and investment. Already our exports were approaching £100 million.

*Tanzania's first multi-party elections were held in 1995 when Benjamin Mkapa of the CCM won the Presidency. He was re-elected in 2000. Jakay Kikweter, also of the CCM, won the 2005 and 2010 elections. CCM's candidate, John Magufuli, won in 2015, although his opponent, Edward Lowassa, a CCM defector, refused to accept the result. Magufuli won a second term in 2020. Thus the CCM has dominated the political scene since independence in 1961 and continues to do so.*

## UGANDA

### Uganda, pre-1971

*For the first three years after Ugandan independence from British rule in 1962, the Buganda Kabaka (i.e. King) was the ceremonial President, with Milton Obote as executive Prime Minister. But in 1965 Obote declared himself President expelling the King. Obote was ousted by Idi Amin in 1971.*

### Uganda, October 1971

Lord Lothian's visit to Uganda in 1971 fell between Idi Amin's overthrow of Milton Obote in January 1971 and his expulsion of Uganda's Asian community in August 1972. During those 19 months, British/Ugandan relations enjoyed a honeymoon before once again reverting to acrimony. Amin was seen in London as having brought Obote's unpleasant Eastern-leaning government to a close. Having served in the King's African Rifles, he was thought to be a straightforward fellow, intensely loyal to Britain, who could be trusted to run the country fairly and in due course to return it to the path of true democracy.

I had enjoyed the exchange of telegrams between the FCO and Dick Slater, our High Commissioner in Kampala, soon after Amin took power. Dick had reported that Amin wanted to visit Britain and had been asked by the FCO to enquire what he would like to do during his visit. The answer had been that he wanted to visit Scotland. This news had naturally pleased Alec Douglas Home, Foreign Secretary at the time, who had instructed officials to set up a good programme. After making further enquiries about Amin's detailed wishes, the High Commissioner reported that Amin had heard that sea bathing, which he much enjoyed, was exceptionally fine in Scotland and, furthermore, that Edinburgh was a good place to buy brown shoes, size 12. Officials reported this to the Foreign Secretary expecting him to share their amusement. Alec Douglas Home merely said: "The man's quite right. Edinburgh is the best place to buy shoes".

Lord Lothian, another Scot, was therefore looking forward to meeting the new President. Their formal meeting took place in Amin's Command Post (renamed from 'Government House' by Amin) on its hill in the centre of Kampala. Dick Slater, Harold Smedley (AUSS) and I accompanied the Minister. My only memory of their talks was of Lord Lothian encouraging Amin to give priority to the task of getting the Ugandan economy back on its feet. Amin seemed to be aware of the need and added that he had come to the conclusion that the economy was a greater enemy than an enemy with a gun.

An incident in this meeting has remained fresh in my memory. I hope it has not been exaggerated in the re-telling on countless occasions since. A steward brought round a tray of drinks with coca cola, orange juice, water etc. Given that it was mid morning and, in any case, that Amin was a Muslim, we were not surprised not to be offered a beer or other alcohol. Lord Lothian took a coke; Amin a glass of water; Harold Smedley, who was sitting next to me, also took water. As usual I was scribbling notes of the discussion. Suddenly I heard Harold splutter and put down his glass with a gulp. I assumed that he had swallowed the wrong way. Afterwards he told us that his water had turned out to be neat gin. We concluded that the steward had muddled the gin with the water, both kept in similar bottles in the Presidential fridge. Did Amin, a Muslim, always prefer gin in mid morning?

The Slaters invited Amin to a small dinner party of a dozen or so guests including some Cabinet Ministers. Amin brought his senior wife, an attractive woman but with little English. All was bonhomie and good humour.

In addition to his conversations with the President, Lord Lothian had discussions with the Attorney General, who was also acting as Foreign Minister in the latter's absence in New York, about the problems of the Asian community in Uganda, and with the Finance Minister about Uganda's financial problems and about the future of the East African Community, on which there were differences between Uganda and Tanzania as there were between Kenya and Tanzania. We picked up no clue of what was in store for the Asians the following year. All seemed sweetness and light between Britain and the new Ugandan Government.

The rest of the programme followed normal lines, including a visit to Jinja, the second largest town in Uganda, some 50 miles east of Kampala. Lord Lothian was shown the Nyanza textile factory. He visited a large sugar estate outside Jinja, owned by the Madhvani family, wealthy Asians some of whose members were British and some Ugandan. He visited the hydro-electric scheme at Owen Falls Dam, which supplied all of Uganda's electric power and also a surplus for export to Kenya. I seem to recall it was being renovated with British aid funds. In Kampala, he visited Makerere University and an agricultural project also financed with British aid funds. He attended an informal meeting with local newspaper editors, who listened courteously to his explanation of HMG's policy on Rhodesia. I cannot recall another occasion on this visit when Rhodesia was discussed. And, as usual, Lord Lothian met the local British community and listened to their troubles in the past and fears for the future.

The visit received full and favourable coverage in the local Press, radio and television.

*Ten months later, in August 1972, Amin announced the expulsion of the Ugandan Asian community including of course the Madhvanis. Britain had to cope with the sudden influx of some 30,000 Asians with British nationality of the 80,000 Asians eventually expelled. Amin's subsequent rule was characterised by human rights abuses, political repression, ethnic persecution, extrajudicial killings, nepotism, corruption, and gross economic mismanagement. The number of people killed as a result of his regime is estimated by international observers and human rights groups to range from 100,000 to as many as 500,000.*

*In 1979 Amin was overthrown and, in 1980, replaced by.....Milton Obote again. In 1985, Obote's repressive regime was overthrown, this time by General Yoweri Museveni. Unlike Amin, Museveni was to preside over a period of political stability, economic recovery and a degree of good government unthinkable before he became President.*

*It is easy with the benefit of hindsight to criticise HMG for its friendship with Amin in his first year as President. But I still do not believe that it was the wrong policy given what we knew, or rather did not know, at the time. Initially Amin had seemed a much better proposition than Obote.*

### **Uganda, July 1992**

The highlight of my first visit to Uganda as AUSS, in July 1992, was my call on President Museveni. I went with Charles Cullimore, the High Commissioner, straight to Museveni's office from the airport

because my Ethiopian Airways flight from Addis Ababa was delayed by some two hours (one of only two occasions in my 1970s and 1990s travels in Africa when a flight delay affected my programme).

I was as impressed by Museveni as others had been. He was direct, frank, friendly and exuded energy and determination. He was a huge improvement on his predecessors as President, notably Idi Amin who I had met in the 1970s and Milton Obote. Both had badly damaged Uganda and its relations with Britain. My last visit to Uganda in 1971 had coincided with Amin's brief honeymoon with HMG before he expelled the Asians. Since then Uganda had been through fire until Museveni began to impose order in 1986. Life was beginning to revive and the security situation to be brought under control; but the political problems were formidable and economic prospects poor despite the country's potential wealth.

Charles Cullimore and I stressed to both Museveni and the Chairman of the Constitutional Commission the importance of meeting the timetable for the return to democracy that Museveni had announced. The Commission was to produce its report and a draft constitution by the end of the year. A Constituent Assembly was to meet in 1993. And elections were promised for some time in 1994. We suspected that Museveni would be happy to draw the whole process out.

Museveni told us that he was against multi-party rule, although he would accept the verdict of the people. The question would arise what position HMG should take on this issue. In their speeches on good governance, Douglas Hurd as Secretary of State and Lady Chalker had always been careful to avoid making Western-style multi-partyism a pre-condition for accountable and democratic government. Multi-party rule had not given Uganda stability in the past. But we had given our public support for it in Kenya; and it would not be easy to ignore the inevitable Ugandan opposition pressure for our endorsement of the principle. The dilemma was a familiar one. The US Ambassador told me later in my visit that the US were limiting themselves to calling for respect for 'freedom of association'. Whether or not that came to the same thing, it at least avoided the emotive expression 'multi-partyism'. Of course, if the issue were to be put to a referendum, we might not need to take a position at all. But if Museveni were to crack down on an opposition political rally in defiance of the law, Britain and other donors would not be able to condone his action.

Cullimore and I also raised with Museveni the question of human rights and some specific recent cases of alleged infringement. He gave no ground but was prepared to discuss them with his usual apparent frankness.

We also briefly discussed Rwanda. This was at the time when the conflict between the Hutu government and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) was taking place in Rwanda. It would ultimately lead, nearly two years later, indirectly to the Rwandan genocide. The RPF was largely composed of Tutsi refugees whose families had fled to Uganda following earlier Hutu violence against the Tutsi. Cullimore and I stressed to Museveni the importance of Uganda not providing material support for the RPF and that Museveni should do all he could to persuade the RPF to agree to a ceasefire and a settlement with the Hutu Government. Museveni told us that the Rwandan exile community around the world was well able to fund the RPF's military campaign and, as he knew from his own time as a guerrilla fighter, would have no difficulty in infiltrating arms into Rwanda from neighbouring

countries. He had tried to bring the two sides in the Rwandan conflict together under his chairmanship. But the Rwandan Government representative had failed to show up.

We commended to Museveni a proposal for groups, composed of Rwandans and neutral observers, to be set up on the Ugandan side of the border, to monitor movements across the border. Museveni welcomed the idea and said that, if the Rwandan Government were content, he would announce his support for the proposal. If we had had the benefit of hindsight, we would no doubt have pressed Museveni harder on the nature of his relations with the RPF and his policies towards Rwanda itself. But Britain could not have foreseen in July 1992 the terrible events of April 1994; and had much more urgent business on its agenda. In any case Museveni had problems of his own and certainly did not hold the key to Rwanda's difficulties.

We also had an interesting exchange with Museveni on his relations with Qadhafi's Libya. He downplayed his association with Qadhafi and assured us that it had never been close enough to give Qadhafi leverage over him. I was inclined to believe this, despite Museveni's visits to both Tripoli and Pyongyang earlier in the year. It was no consolation to think that the latter might have been a shopping expedition for weapons against the perceived threat to Uganda from Sudan.

In 1992 the economy was in dire straits. Uganda's short term difficulties were massive: 63% inflation; feeble budgetary and monetary control; weak economic management; corruption; slow progress on privatisation; low savings, investments and exports; high incidence of AIDS; and, above all, crippling debt. On paper, more than a full year's export earnings (actually 104%) were needed to service Uganda's scheduled repayments of borrowings.

But, black as this picture was, there were rays of light as Uganda struggled along the path of structural adjustment with the help of the donor community. Since 1987 GDP growth had exceeded population growth. Her rich soil and good climate favoured agriculture. The process of restoring to their owners Asian properties expropriated by Amin had begun. For example, when I visited an estate owned by the Madhvani family in 1971, it had been producing 80,000 tonnes of sugar annually. In 1985 that figure was zero. In 1992 it had climbed back to 25,000 tonnes and was expected to reach 75,000 tonnes by 1995. If security continued to improve and political stability could be achieved, investor confidence would grow. But, despite all these more optimistic signs, Uganda would need Western aid indefinitely and, above all, debt reduction before the country's potential could be realised. The British aid programme included rehabilitation of the Owen Falls Dam and power station which I had first visited in 1971.

As usual on my visits, I tried to take stock of British interests. These seemed to me to be as follows:

- Uganda was one of the African Commonwealth countries where our good government policies must succeed if they were to be generally credible. We had a clear interest in the restoration of internal security after the ravages of Amin and Obote.
- Since Museveni came to power in 1986, Britain had pledged over £152 million of new aid in support of Uganda's economic reform and development. We needed to protect this investment by continuing our involvement, with the aim of helping Uganda to achieve self-sustaining growth one day. We also

needed to increase the pressure on Uganda to improve its human rights record and to move towards democracy.

- In the longer term, a stable and less impoverished Uganda could form a useful member of a revived East African community and help block Islamic expansionism from Sudan.
- It could also become a small but worthwhile market for UK goods. But at present Britain's annual exports of £35 million in 1991 barely exceeded our bilateral aid programme.
- We had a continuing obligation, on behalf of those who were British citizens, to maintain pressure on Uganda to restore the properties expropriated from the Uganda Asians or to pay them adequate compensation.

*Between my two visits to Uganda as AUSS, Rwanda suffered the genocide of Tutsis in 1994.*

### **Uganda, February 1995**

This time, I arrived in Uganda by road from Rwanda with Edward Clay who was not only High Commissioner to Uganda but also, following the Rwandan genocide in April 1994, our non-resident Ambassador to Rwanda.

Unfortunately Museveni was out of Kampala and so I could not see him. But I saw the Foreign Minister, visited the Constituent Assembly then hard at work, and met a range of political and business figures. I focussed on three main issues: the economy, political reform and Uganda's relations with Kenya.

I found an economy transformed in the two and a half years since my last visit. The IMF representative gave an optimistic account of the economic reform programme; and his optimism was shared by others, including local UK businessmen. The economy had ended 1994 in good shape: output growing strongly, modest inflation, lower interest rates, coffee doing well (and benefiting from the high world price), record foreign reserves. The IMF believed that the Government had succeeded in stabilising the economy. Museveni himself supported reform, but the executive did not interfere. The economic management team was independent and competent, if thin. The ideological battle had been won because there was now enough evidence of the success of liberal market-based economic policies for nobody serious to want to put the clock back.

The IMF and others believed that the upward trend would continue, but pointed out that recovery from 15 years of decline in GDP per capita was bound to be slow. Another decade of growth would be needed to get back to 1971 levels. Spectacular growth should not be expected. Agriculture would be the mainstay; and Uganda was unlikely to have an industrial future.

As for political reform, the most controversial unresolved issues, with which the Constituent Assembly was still grappling, were multi-partyism and how power should be shared between the centre and the regions. I have already recorded the discussion of multi-partyism and the dilemma faced by Britain in taking a position on it.

In my meeting with the Foreign Minister, I stressed our support for the Constituent Assembly which we expected to lead to a more accountable form of government. It was important to ensure a level playing field for the protagonists and a full opportunity for dialogue. I recalled the value of such dialogue in South Africa in the run-up to majority rule. I made the same points to the Assembly members I met.

My visit coincided with a deterioration in Uganda/Kenyan relations. The Kenyans were claiming that Uganda was supporting a Kenyan Opposition movement against Moi's Government. I urged calm on the Ugandan Foreign Minister who denied interference in Kenya's affairs and asked me to pass on this assurance to the Kenyans. I later did so to Moi who said, baldly, that the Ugandans were liars. It was hard to know what the truth in all this was. The Kenyans may well have been right; but I could not see what Museveni's interest was. In due course, tempers cooled and the problem subsided.

The Foreign Minister admitted that, as a southerner, he felt instinctively in sympathy with the new government in Rwanda. But he criticised their negative approach to the imminent regional refugee conference in Bujumbura to which the heads of state of countries in the great lakes region had been invited. I can no longer remember the particular issues involved. My guess is that the Rwandans were reluctant to send a high level delegation to a meeting that would be largely dominated by francophones.

I left Uganda believing that Museveni continued to deserve our full support for his economic policies; but that we might need to square up to him if he got up to any tricks in the run-up to elections or if we found that he was to blame for interference in Kenya. I feared that we might be in for a bumpier ride in our relations with him than we had enjoyed so far.

*Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Movement have ruled Uganda without interruption since seizing power in 1986. He won the 2011 presidential elections after a 2005 constitutional amendment increased presidential term limits, and went on to win again in 2016. He is now in his fifth term of office. The opposition and independent observers have complained about the fairness and transparency of polls. Museveni has already hinted that the next elections, due in 2021, may be postponed - due to corona virus. My 1995 fears have proved justified.*

## **RWANDA**

### **Rwanda, 1916 to 1994**

*Rwanda and Burundi, known as Ruanda-Urundi, was under Belgium rule from 1916 until 1962 when Ruanda was separated from Burundi and gained independence. In 1963 some 20,000 Tutsis were killed following an incursion by Tutsi rebels based in Burundi. Fighting between the two ethnic groups continued intermittently over the next three decades. In 1973, Juvénal Habyarimana took power in a military coup.*

*In 1990, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a rebel group of nearly 500,000 Tutsi refugees, led by Paul Kagame, invaded northern Rwanda from their base in Uganda, initiating the Rwandan Civil War.*

*A cease-fire ended on 6 April 1994 when Habyarimana and Burundi's President, Cyprien Ntaryamira, were killed in a rocket attack on their plane. Habyarimana's death triggered an organised campaign of violence, mainly by Hutus against Tutsis and moderate Hutus. About 800,000 people were killed. Hutu militia fled to Zaire, taking with them around 2 million Hutu refugees. France intervened militarily to protect the retreating Hutus.*

*The RPF took over the country. Kagame became Rwanda's de facto leader, initially as Vice President and Minister of Defence from 1994.*

*A UN Mission from 1993 to 1996, originally intended to aid the peace process between the Hutu-dominated Rwandan government and the RPF, was regarded as a major failure. In 2014, the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon said in a speech in Kigali that the UN was still ashamed over its failure to prevent the 1994 genocide.*

### **Rwanda, February 1995**

The Rwandan so-called 'genocide' of April 1994 has continued to haunt me. Should the UN have intervened more effectively? Why did we and other members of the international community, notably France and Belgium, not try to prevent the killing, either as part of a UN force or separately? I have been asked a couple of times by journalists/writers if I would be willing to talk to them about that terrible time. But I have declined on the grounds that I considered myself still bound by the Official Secrets Act and that, in any case, without consulting the archives, I could not rely on my memory alone to comment.

What follows does not answer the key questions likely to interest enquirers. All it does is to provide some of the context to British policy on Rwanda at the time; gives an account of my visit to Kigali in February 1995 i.e. nearly a year after the "genocide"; and records a few specific memories. I cannot be sure of their accuracy.

In April 1994 memories were fresh of the so-called Battle of Mogadishu in October 1993, in which 18 US soldiers and hundreds of local Somali militia had died. This disaster provided a bad precedent for UN/international intervention in African trouble spots; and above all made further active US intervention politically impossible for the foreseeable future. This and other demands on our time and resources in Africa, above all the run up to majority rule in South Africa - to say nothing of other events in e.g. Bosnia - monopolised international attention. The South African elections took place on 27 April 1994, three weeks after the killing in Rwanda started. This all helps to explain, if not to excuse, the failure of the international community to act.

More importantly, at least as a reason for Britain's decisions on Rwanda, was the simple fact that Britain had never had a historical interest in this ex-Belgian colony which had always, until then, been treated as part of francophone Africa. We had not had a resident embassy there and, at the time of the Rwandan Civil War, our interests in Kigali were looked after through non-resident representation from Kinshasa, nearly 1000 miles to the west. Unsurprisingly we knew very little of what was going on in Rwanda and were content to leave the place to others, notably the French and Belgians. We focussed our attention and limited resources on the countries of the Commonwealth, South Africa, a few of the

more important francophone countries like Zaire, Ivory Coast and Senegal and, because of their proximity to South Africa, the lusophone countries of Angola and Mozambique.

There has been speculation how much the outside world knew of Hutu intentions to attack the Tutsis in Rwanda before the killings began. My own memory is that there were indeed indications of impending trouble, although I don't think any one knew of their likely scale and horror. I have a specific memory of sitting at my desk in the FCO one day, some time earlier, and receiving a telephone call from my French opposite number in the Quai d'Orsay. He said that he wanted to warn Britain of signs that the French Embassy in Kigali were picking up of serious impending violence. I cannot now recall the details of his call which I no doubt recorded at the time and which will therefore be available in the archives.

After the genocide and prior to my own visit in **February 1995**, Lady Chalker herself visited the country on two occasions, accompanied by David MacLennan, Head of African Department (Equatorial), and ODA officials. The Minister had naturally seen all the key figures in the new (Tutsi) Government. A major part of her focus was on how Britain could best help the refugees. My own aim was more limited. Having never visited Rwanda, I wanted to get some first hand understanding of the country, however late in the day this might be. And I needed to discuss future British representation in Kigali. I was met by Edward Clay who had flown down from Entebbe and Dr Lilian Wong, an expert on the region from the FCO's Research Department, who had set up a mini post in Kigali to provide local British representation and to support Edward, our non-resident Ambassador. We were lucky to have such a strong team who were doing a remarkably good job in very difficult circumstances.

Edward and Lilian took me to call on President Bizimungu, Prime Minister Twagiramungu, the all-important Vice President/Defence Minister (Paul Kagame) and a wide range of other senior political and security figures. They all paid handsome tribute to the aid Britain had given since the civil war and remembered Lady Chalker's visits warmly. I formed the following impressions.

The Government were claiming that they were firmly in control of Rwandan territory, but admitted some killings of Hutus by ill disciplined government troops. At the end of the visit, we drove safely from Kigali via Ruhengeri, close to the Zaire border, to Kampala. The government were discounting any immediate Hutu threat from the external refugee camps in Zaire and anyway seemed confident of countering it. I believed them given Kagame's reputation as a resolute and effective general.

The government also seemed more confident than I had expected of being able to attract back the refugees. They said that 200,000 had already returned. We saw a good deal of fresh cultivation in the fields and a lot of people around Ruhengeri, not far from Goma. The government also believed that many extremist Hutu leaders had left the camps and were in exile in France, Gabon, Kenya, South Africa etc. On the other hand Rwandan Ministers were contemptuous and suspicious of Zaire who they believed would not be able to control the refugee camps.

Inevitably I heard much criticism of the international community: chiefly of the UN withdrawal in 1994 and its refusal/inability to provide peace-keeping forces in the camps. There was a strong feeling that

nobody understood the horror and scale of the “genocide”; and a tendency to argue that “he who is not for us is against us”. Ministers felt beleaguered, isolated, misunderstood. Having been fighting in the bush for five years, they had no experience of international diplomacy nor understanding of how, sadly, the world worked. These feelings could spell trouble for the future. I was asked if I would visit one of the sites of the worst killings; but declined because this would have meant missing my call on Kagame which I considered more important. I still think this was the right decision but it left me open to criticism for lack of interest in the killings.

I found a strong wish to distance Rwanda from the francophone world and build closer relations with anglophone East Africa and Britain. The President regretted that Rwanda was not a member of the Commonwealth. I thought they might apply, particularly if Mozambique were to join. They might be grateful for our aid so far but wanted more.

I encountered recognition of the importance of national reconciliation and evidence that some practical steps towards it were being taken. But the government resented being pushed by outsiders further than they were yet ready to go. There was very little understanding of the importance of establishing a political process and a dialogue between government and opposition. They said that, first, justice must be done. They had not yet accepted that it would be physically impossible, and self-defeating, to try all those who had helped implement the “genocide”. They were however satisfied with the work of the international tribunal under Judge Goldstone who had made a good impression during talks in Kigali the previous week.

Against this background, the policies of Britain and the international community seemed right to me. Our objectives should continue to be to rehabilitate the economy, encourage internal reconciliation, help deliver justice, get control of the camps and encourage the refugees to return to their homes. Progress would be very slow. We would all have to settle down for a long haul and keep Rwanda high up the international agenda.

I saw three particular policy issues which we needed to address:

(a) What position should Britain take on the Rwandan Government’s wish to change its international orientation towards the anglophone world?

(b) How big a part should we play in promoting political stability and economic development in Rwanda?

(c) How closely should we work with the Government itself?

I thought that our conclusions on these issues should largely determine our decision on future British representation in Kigali. My own preliminary views were as follows.

On (a) I doubted if a closer relationship between Rwanda and the anglophone world would do much for internal reconciliation. It would scare the Hutus. It would also expose Britain to further pressure for more bilateral aid. I argued that it would be better to stand back and leave the French, Belgians and Germans to carry the main burden, leaving us free to give priority to those countries in which, unlike Rwanda, we had direct material interests and experience. The same argument applied to (b). I saw no case for Britain to play a major role in Rwanda itself. But we should continue to take an active interest

through the UN Security Council, EU and other multilateral bodies. We should maintain a small bilateral aid programme as had already, at that stage, been agreed by our Ministers. I therefore doubted on (c) if too close a relationship between the two governments would be in British interests. It would arouse expectations which we would not want to satisfy. Better to encourage the French and others to resume their former position as Rwanda's main partners.

On our representation in Kigali, I took the view that we should continue to rely on a non-Resident Ambassador in Kampala supported by an Honorary Consul with some Locally Engaged staff support. Our High Commission in Kampala might also need reinforcement. Such an arrangement would be cheaper than replacing Lilian Wong with a resident mission of UK based staff but would be more effective than when Kigali was covered by our Ambassador in Kinshasa, who was too far away to visit regularly.

My negative attitude towards opening new embassies e.g. in Kigali - and Asmara - was partly justified by a credible view of British interests but was also a reflexion of the degree of priority given to Africa as a whole at the time and our other higher priority world commitments e.g. in the Balkans.

My advice was not followed. Ministers subsequently decided to set up a resident UK based mission in Kigali and to build up our aid programme. In due course the Rwanda Government largely succeeded in its aim of gradually joining anglophone Africa. In 2008 Rwanda was admitted to the Commonwealth. I have since asked myself if I was too negative over recommending the opening of new diplomatic missions in Africa. I was influenced by two factors. First I believe my caution was justified by a credible view of Britain's interests. But, secondly, it was a reflection of the priority given in British foreign policy at the time - in my view rightly - to Africa as a whole given our other global commitments.

*In 2000, Paul Kagame won the first presidential elections since the 1994 genocide. He has won all subsequent Presidential elections, but is criticised by some observers for his increasingly repressive rule.*



**Map of Central and Southern Africa**

**Chapter 10**

**CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN AFRICA: ZAIRE, ANGOLA, ZAMBIA, MALAWI, ZIMBABWE, MOZAMBIQUE and NAMIBIA.**

**ZAIRE**

**Zaire, pre-1972**

*Under King Leopold II's private rule from 1885 and Belgian state rule from 1908, the Congo achieved independence in 1960. Its first Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, was murdered by Katanga troops in 1961 following an unsuccessful attempt by the provinces of Katanga, under Moïse Tshombe, and South Kasai to secede. The Congo's Army Chief of Staff, Mobutu, gained de facto control of the whole country through a coup.*

*In 1965, Mobutu officially came into power through a second coup. In 1971 he renamed the country Zaire and ran it as a one-party state. He received considerable support from the United States for his anti-communist stance during the Cold War.*

### **Zaire, January 1972**

Lord Lothian's visit to Zaire in 1972 was only the second of a British minister since President Mobutu assumed office in 1965. The visit coincided with a drive for Zairean *authenticity* to remove traces of past colonial association with foreigners.

The President saw Lord Lothian and the British Ambassador alone. So, to my disappointment, I never met him, neither then nor twenty years later when he was still in office on my visit as AUSS. Discussion with Lord Lothian was perfunctory. Mobutu emphasised that bilateral relations were excellent, Britain never having sought to interfere in Zaire's domestic affairs. He valued the possibility of being able to exchange views sincerely and frankly, even on matters on which the two countries might not see eye-to-eye. This was as near as the President got to a reference to Rhodesia or South Africa. Neither subject was mentioned by others Lord Lothian met.

Lord Lothian was able to sign a bilateral Military Training Agreement, part of an expanding aid programme. I wondered when the Zaireans would have got around to signing it without the stimulus of a British minister in town.

*During the 21 years between my 1972 and 1993 visits, Mobutu had periodically held elections in which he was the only Presidential candidate. Although relative peace and stability were achieved, his government was guilty of severe human rights violations, political repression, a personality cult and corruption. With the ending of the Cold War, US support for him began to fade and his rule to weaken.*

*In 1990 Mobutu agreed to the principle of a multi-party system with elections and a constitution. In 1991, as details of a reform package were delayed, soldiers began looting Kinshasa to protest at their unpaid wages. Two thousand French and Belgian troops, some on U.S. Air Force planes, arrived to evacuate the 20,000 endangered foreign nationals in Kinshasa.*

*In 1992 a long-promised Sovereign National Conference was staged, attended by over 2,000 representatives from various political parties. The conference gave itself a legislative mandate and elected Archbishop Laurent Monsengwo as its chairman, and Etienne Tshisekedi, the main Opposition leader, as prime minister. By the end of the year Mobutu had created a rival government with its own prime minister.*

*In July 1993, the UN Secretary General appointed the former Algerian Foreign Minister, Lakhdar Brahimi, as a special envoy to Zaire to investigate the political crisis. He was to make several visits to Kinshasa, including one during my own visit in September 1993.*

## Zaire, September 1993

When I eventually got to Zaire as AUSS in September 1993, having had to postpone my visit from earlier in the year due to a hernia operation, I found a big contrast from my last visit in the 1970s. The country had entered a period of transition which was to lead eventually, in 1996, to Mobutu's fall. At the time of my visit, there were in effect two parallel governments co-existing.

I reached Kinshasa by speedboat across the Congo river from Brazzaville where I was met by Helen Horn, our deputy Head of Mission in Kinshasa, and by one of the Royal Military Police team responsible for guarding our Embassy staff. Kinshasa airport was open but now had fewer international connexions than Brazzaville. From the opposite bank of the Congo, Kinshasa looked an imposing modern city of skyscrapers, a Manhattan of central Africa. In fact the port was largely a shambles of scrap iron; and many of the down-town buildings were either shells or boarded up after the fighting between rival forces the previous year and in January / February 1993.

Kaye Oliver, our Charge d'Affaires, and her two home based colleagues had organised an excellent programme which enabled me to meet some of the key players in the current confused political struggle for power. They included, on one political side, two of the more moderate members of Mobutu's "Presidential Movement", but not Mobutu's Prime Minister; and, on the other side, Etienne Tshisekedi, the Prime Minister recognised by the EC and others. The latter received me in his small suburban house, lacking any other seat of government. I also met Archbishop Monsengwo, who was playing a key role in engineering a transition to multi-party rule: a much respected figure destined to become speaker of a transitional parliament in 1994; Lakhdar Brahimi, UN Special Envoy who had somewhat unexpectedly succeeded in organising round table talks between government and opposition (which was which depended on one's viewpoint); and a troika of ambassadors (Belgian, US and French) leading the donors' attempts to encourage democracy. The latter were not united, Belgium being more inclined than the US to tolerate Mobutu.

Kaye Oliver gave me a memorable dinner of about a dozen guests from different shades of political opinion. They included Monsengwo himself, Tshisekedi's foreign minister and Kengo Wa Dondo, a former PM and to be appointed PM by Mobutu again later. The conversation was therefore lively and included not only those at table but others not physically present who were consulted by mobile telephone throughout the meal.

The line between government and opposition was not always clear. Many of Zaire's political class, who now said they wanted democracy, had previously served as Mobutu's ministers; and would probably be happy to do so again if the pressures for pluralism subsided. Some MFA officials were said to serve one Foreign Minister in the morning and the other in the afternoon; and the same may have been true in other Ministries. This was not a serious source of confusion because neither Government had much real power.

To a large extent the country was now ungoverned and ungovernable. Mobutu's personal writ probably continued to run more or less throughout the country, albeit in weakened form, through his control of the security forces. And he was personally protected by Israeli trained guards. But the army

as a whole had fragmented. Each local army commander had become largely autonomous and his main concern was to provide his troops with the necessities of life. But it was still possible to travel by air around the country; and intrepid Kaye Oliver and her UK-based colleagues had made several trips, accompanied by a Royal Military Police escort. Local law and order had not completely broken down even if the authority of the central government had much diminished. But there had been violent ethnic disputes in the south and east, a foretaste of much worse to come.

The formal economy had largely collapsed. Exports of copper, zinc, cobalt and timber had fallen. The diamond trade continued but to private not public profit. The infrastructure had badly degraded. Inflation was said to be running at 3,500%, having mysteriously fallen from the previous year's figure of 5,000%. GDP per capita was US \$170 in 1991; and, according to one banker I met, was now in single figures. But in truth no statistic was reliable.

Some British companies continued to operate, including BAT, Unilever, de Beers, Land Rover and a security firm: an indication of the profits they must have been making or hoped for in the future.

Recovery depended in the first place on a political settlement. My visit took place at a critical point in the work of Brahimi's round table. The outlook was uncertain. In the best case, current discussions would reach agreement on the creation of an interim government which would supervise the transition to democracy culminating in free and fair elections in, say, a year's time. The loser, even if it were Mobutu, would accept defeat. The new Government would adopt sensible economic policies and reach agreement with the donors. I found this scenario highly improbable.

At the other extreme, violence would break out once again, perhaps in reaction to a breakdown in the current talks or, later, because the loser refused to accept electoral defeat. In this case, the downward spiral of political and economic disintegration would continue. There were obviously other scenarios between these two extremes. For example, Mobutu and his opponents could continue their political manoeuvres against a background of sporadic violence. Or an agreement could be reached but dishonoured by Mobutu who would continue to retain power by fixing elections. Given Mobutu's political skills, such an outcome seemed to me the most likely.

Brahimi told me that in the immediate future he saw only two options. Either Mobutu or Tshisekedi must give way. Brahimi believed that, because Mobutu, like Saddam Hussein, was prepared to see his people suffer any price provided he retained power, it would be Tshisekedi who gave way. Monsengwo, on the other hand, told me that Mobutu could be swept away by a popular uprising of an Eastern Europe kind if he ignored the will of the people. I doubted this in Zairean circumstances.

I concluded that US hopes of removing Mobutu were unrealistic. The donors' arms embargo and visa restrictions (on which I got a roasting from Mobutu's MFA) would not be enough. I doubted that any of the donors would be able to muster the political will to do much more given our preoccupations elsewhere. And, if Mobutu were to go, the alternative could be worse because there was no obvious successor capable of holding the country together - except possibly Monsengwo who was not a candidate. The West's best policy might therefore be, as advocated to me by Brahimi, to maintain as

much pressure on Mobutu as possible in the hope of nudging him towards greater pluralism. It would be a long slow process.

The French ambassador told me that French interests in Zaire were mainly strategic. I thought we shared that interest. Zaire bordered nine other countries: four francophones, including Rwanda; three Commonwealth (Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia); Sudan and Angola. If Zaire were to implode, its neighbours would suffer e.g. from refugees. Mobutu's meddling in Angola (despite his MFA's assurance to me to the contrary), the Congo and Zambia went back a long way. In addition to that strategic interest, we and others had a long term commercial interest in the mineral and other wealth of Zaire. And there was the small tangible matter of our magnificent new compound, built for £4.5 million in 1991 to protect our mission. It would be a pity to abandon it now, having already sat out two bouts of violence.

I found that our small Embassy was playing a modest but useful part in the international community's efforts to encourage peaceful change in Zaire. Kaye Oliver was in constant touch with many of the main players who informed her (by the ubiquitous mobile telephones - far more used than in countries with a reliable land line network) of what was happening and clearly valued her advice and our policy of encouragement for dialogue and the political process. Indeed Monsengwo said he hoped we could do more e.g. by issuing national statements of support at appropriate moments in addition to whatever the European Community said as a body.

*In the event, none of my predictions proved accurate. In 1994, the two rival governments during my visit merged with Mobutu as Head of State (still) and Kengo Wa Dondo as Prime Minister. Although presidential and legislative elections were scheduled repeatedly over the next 2 years, they never took place.*

*In 1996/97 Mobutu was overthrown by Laurent-Désiré Kabila, a leader of Tutsi forces in Eastern Zaire, supported by the intervention of foreign troops led by Museveni of Uganda and Kagame of Rwanda. The Rwandan genocide and its aftermath thus provided the catalyst to change in Zaire.*

*Kabila became President in 1997. After a civil war lasting from 1998 to 2003, in which nine African countries became involved and over 5 million people were killed, Kabila was assassinated by a bodyguard and succeeded eight days later as President by his son, Joseph Kabila.*

*Joseph Kabila won multiparty elections in 2006 and again in 2011. The elections due in 2016 were postponed until 2018 when Felix Tshisekedi won a surprise victory. Kabila stepped down in January 2019 and Tshisekedi was inaugurated as the Fifth President of the DRC. This was the first democratic transition of power since the country gained independence in 1960.*

## ANGOLA

### Angola, pre- 1993

*As in Mozambique, when the Portuguese left Africa in 1974, civil war had broken out: between a Soviet and Cuban backed Government of the Marxist People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) backed by apartheid South Africa and the United States. In effect the Soviet Union and the United States were fighting a proxy war in Angola against the Soviet Union and Cuba.*

*The end of the Cold War had opened the possibility of peace under UN auspices. But Savimbi was to prove determined to pursue his ambition of becoming President of Angola and did not give up. The civil war continued, but without the outside military involvement of the super powers, Cuba and South Africa.*

### Angola, February 1993

I had been AUSS nearly a year before I first visited Angola in February 1993 and then made the long journey straight there and back because its air links with other countries in the region were so poor.

Britain's interest seemed to me to be two-fold: political and commercial. We shared the wider international interest in ensuring that the UN did not fail in establishing democracy and stability in Angola. Peace there would help the wider objective of building a peaceful and prosperous Southern Africa. Any efforts we could make would help protect our claim to a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

Secondly Angola was potentially a very rich country. It had enormous off-shore oil reserves in which BP had a stake as part of their global strategy of chasing "elephants", as they called fields of over a billion barrels, in high risk areas. Angola was also well endowed with diamonds, minerals and strategic metals. It had rich fishing stocks, hydroelectric potential and in the past had been a net exporter of food, the fourth largest producer of coffee in the world and the third largest producer of sisal. Even after nearly thirty years of civil war and the damage done by central economic planning of a semi Marxist government, its GNP per capita of \$781 in 1992 was more than double the sub-Saharan African average. British companies would need HMG's support in the years' ahead. In short, Angola looked to me potentially far more important for British interests than Mozambique did. I thought we should bear this difference in mind in taking decisions on the allocation of our aid and other resources.

My first visit, in 1993, came just after our Ministers had decided to tilt the emphasis in our policy on Angola towards President dos Santos's MPLA Government and away from Savimbi and UNITA. Probably as a result, John Flynn, our Ambassador managed to get me in to see Marcolino Moco (Prime Minister), the Chief of Staff of the Angolan Armed Forces and other senior MPLA people. At the time, Government forces were on the defensive and Luanda itself under threat from UNITA hit and run attacks. The expectation was that neither side could achieve outright victory but that the fighting would

continue indefinitely with the advantage swinging to and fro until arms supplies were exhausted. Eventually, after several months, the Government would probably end up with control of most towns and UNITA of the countryside. Meanwhile inconclusive talks between the two sides had been taking place in Addis Ababa. I remember being struck by the growing international conviction that the key to peace lay in bringing pressure to bear on Savimbi to compromise and in giving their support to the Government as Britain had decided to do. But the US Government was not yet ready to recognise the MPLA Government.

In a statement to the press after my call on the Prime Minister, I put the blame squarely on UNITA for the breakdown of the talks in Addis and called for the results of the recent elections to be respected. I made this statement at the request of BP for help over their bid for offshore exploration rights. I also announced a UK contribution of £100,000 for medical supplies for the Government armed forces. At the same time I told the Prime Minister privately that we hoped the Government would agree to share power with UNITA; that the Government would bring the police under tighter control; and that they would curb human rights abuses. The PM paid at least lip service to all this; but I was sceptical that his deeds would match his words. I also feared that we might have difficulty in satisfying Angolan expectations. Angolan ministers were probably hoping for significant economic assistance which we did not have the means to supply.

#### **Angola, March 1994**

I had planned my second visit to Luanda, in March 1994, to take place immediately after I had accompanied Lord Inglewood, a Government whip in the House of Lords, to Lusaka for the signature of the Lusaka Protocol on Angola. The aim was, through the presence of a member of the Government at the signature ceremony, to demonstrate HMG's support for the Angolan peace process and for our interests in Angola. In the event, signature of the Protocol slipped by five days and I decided to stick to my plan to visit Angola after Lusaka and therefore left Lusaka before signature. Before doing so I was able to call on the UN Secretary General's Special Representative and, at his request, to discuss with UN officials the UN's request for donor assistance in clearing the mines laid by both sides in the Angolan civil war and in demobilising the opposing forces. I also met George Moose, the senior US official responsible for Africa, who was in Lusaka for the signature ceremony.

I arrived in Angola from Lusaka, an overnight flight, while fighting was still continuing and amidst much speculation on whether the Lusaka agreement, providing for a UN peacekeeping force, fresh elections and a Government in which both sides would be represented, could be successfully implemented. Britain was less well placed to exert its influence than it was in Mozambique, because, unlike in Mozambique, we had no formal locus as members of the Joint Commission responsible for implementation of the agreement. Despite, or because of, this weakness in our position, I discussed with our new Ambassador, Richard Thomas, how Britain might be able to maximise its influence in other ways, for example through its aid programme and a possible military contribution to the planned UN peacekeeping force. But, in my heart I feared that the ceasefire would break down, civil war resume and the scope for promoting UK interests more effectively recede. These fears proved realistic. Peace in Angola was to prove more elusive than in Mozambique, largely because of the very different character and ambitions of the opposition leaders, Savimbi in Angola and Dhlakama in Mozambique. The MPLA was also partly to blame. But in April 1995 Britain sent a unit of the Royal Logistics Corps to provide

short term support for a 7,000 strong UN peacekeeping force in Angola for three months until UN civilian contractors took over.

I paid one other visit to Angola but cannot remember when nor much about it. I accompanied Lady Chalker on a visit she made there. It included a flight in a private plane from Luanda to somewhere on the coast to the south. I remember this much because, as we approached our destination, the pilot received a message from the control tower refusing us permission to land. We assumed that he was concerned by the appearance of an unknown aircraft at a time when the civil war was still threatening security. We circled nervously until we had succeeded in making contact with the authorities in Luanda who instructed the control tower to give us landing permission. Time has blotted out the rest of the visit in my memory.

*Savimbi was eventually killed in 2002. UNITA's new leadership declared the rebel group a political party and officially demobilized its armed forces in August 2002. The Civil War had ended. In 2017 dos Santos stepped down as President. His chosen successor, Joao Lourenco was elected President.*

## ZAMBIA

### Zambia, pre-1972

*1953-1963 The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, comprising Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Nyasaland (now Malawi) lasted ten years. It was dissolved following opposition from Kenneth Kaunda's United National Independence Party (UNIP) out of fear that it would be dominated by white-ruled Southern Rhodesia.*

*In 1964 Zambia achieved independence from British rule with Kenneth Kaunda as President. In February 1972 he introduced one-party rule; and was to win the Presidential elections of December 1973.*

### Zambia October 1972

I have little detailed memory of my first visit to Zambia with Lady Tweedsmuir. This was her first African visit after appointment; and her main aim was familiarisation as well as the need to show the Zambians that we attached importance to our commercial interests in the country and our political interest in the region as a whole. She not only met President Kaunda and some of his ministers in Lusaka but also travelled to Livingstone, to Kitwe and Ndola on the Copperbelt where she met local British businessmen. As usual I scribbled away taking notes of the main meetings; but have long since forgotten the details. I am confident that Rhodesia and South Africa featured strongly in the discussions. Kaunda was friendly and polite, perhaps influenced by his realisation by then that Britain was not going to walk away altogether from its responsibilities in Rhodesia; but also by the fall in the world price of copper on which Zambia depended so heavily.

*In 1991 Kaunda agreed to multi-party elections which were won by Frederick Chiluba, leader of the Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD).*

## **Zambia, September 1992**

Since my previous visit to Zambia, twenty years earlier, Kenneth Kaunda had gone. After 27 years of increasing misrule, he had earned the respect of the West for accepting the results of the country's multi-party election in 1991. They were won by Chiluba, a trade union leader, who went on to win again in 1996 and then to stand down after completing a second term in 2001. So Zambia seemed to fall into the category of states which deserved Western support for its acceptance of democracy. Lady Chalker developed a good relationship with Chiluba; and it was with her that I paid my first visit as AUSS in September 1992 as part of a wider tour she made to the region. After she left, I stayed on for a couple of days to see more of the High Commissioner, Peter Hinchcliffe, and his staff.

Superficially the town looked in surprisingly good shape, much better than Dar es Salaam and, until a couple of years previously, Accra. The streets were clean, buildings not too badly maintained and I had seen worse roads. All this served to remind me that Zambia had not fallen as far as many African countries. And law and order was less of a problem than, to take three extreme examples, Lagos, Nairobi or Abidjan.

I got two contrasting views of Zambia's economic prospects. The optimistic view, articulated by at least one big international company, was that there had been a fundamental change of attitude by the government which was now accessible and would listen to the private sector. A climate of confidence had been created; and a significant investor interest was developing. On the other hand, a former Governor of the Bank of Zambia was more pessimistic. He pointed out the damaging effects of high inflation, astronomically high interest rates, the low world copper price (copper accounted for 90% of foreign exchange earnings), very high unemployment, severe drought and a crippling level of debt. I was told even by the optimists "there is no hope without debt relief".

The Government had adopted a tough policy of economic reform; and most observers I spoke to thought that it could continue this policy before risking an irretrievable loss of political support. I suspected that Chiluba could probably face down his opponents for some time longer. I found it encouraging that he seemed to be so firmly committed to sensible economic policies, even though, from the way he talked, he may not have been intellectually at ease with the economic concepts involved – any more than I was. The stakes were high. For, if structural adjustment failed in Zambia, the message for other parts of Africa approaching democracy would be discouraging; and our good government objectives would be set back. As I flew back to London, two figures rang in my mind: a very large British aid programme of £55 million; and a much larger British community in Zambia than I had realised of some 12,000.

## **Zambia November 1994**

My second visit to Lusaka, when Patrick Nixon had taken over as High Commissioner, gave me a further insight into Zambia's basic strengths and weaknesses. Its strengths were considerable. Unlike so many African countries, Zambia was potentially viable within its existing borders. Despite a

multiplicity of ethnic groups, there had been no history of serious ethnic conflict. I saw no risk of it going the way of Rwanda for example. There was a sense of national identity. It seemed to have made, so far successfully, the transition to multi-party democracy. Political pluralism was secure for the time being at least. There were no serious human rights problems.

Moreover Zambia could support itself. It had rich natural resources, including gold, silver, cobalt, other precious metals and, above all, large reserves of copper. It also had considerable agricultural potential, only a small fraction of which was now used. The Minister of Agriculture spoke hopefully about the possibility of exporting maize to Angola once peace came there. With the right policies, the production of sugar, soya, coffee and tobacco could also expand.

Zambia had made good progress with a brave programme of economic reform, then in its third year. Trade and foreign exchange had been liberalised, many subsidies withdrawn. Inflation had fallen from over 400% to under 30%. Interest rates were down and the currency reasonably stable. There were goods in the shops. The Government were cooperating sensibly with the IMF over debt relief. And Zambians had shown remarkable tolerance of the tough measures that reform entailed. Attitudes had changed. Zambians no longer expected cheap subsidised food and did not automatically riot when the price of food rose as it had done under Kaunda. As a union leader, President Chiluba, was able to stand up to the unions over the unemployment caused by privatising the old, appallingly inefficient, State owned enterprises.

Despite these strengths, the mood in Lusaka was sombre. An argument was taking place, similar to the one I had known in Ghana, over the right pace of reform. Some, including probably a majority in Cabinet, wanted to go more slowly for fear of the social and therefore political consequences of too rapid reform, especially as the 1996 elections approached. Others, including a minority of clearer sighted Ministers, notably the Minister of Trade, were worried about the dangerous economic effects of failure to press ahead with the reform programme. The main current issues, during this visit, were the future of Zambian Airways, ZCCM (the copper mines parastatal) and ZIMCO (the parastatal holding company). Unless the Government summoned the courage to bite these bullets, economic reform would suffer a setback; but if it did so, it would suffer political damage. The dilemma was the classic one facing any reforming government, not only those implementing IMF and World Bank programmes of structural reform. With luck the reformers would win the argument on these current issues. But other issues would then emerge on which the basic argument would continue.

The key to success would be the position of the Government itself. The President was irresolute and appeared to lack the political will to press reform forward. Ministers who had the will lacked political strength. Those who had the strength lacked the will. Few understood the determination of the international donors. An underlying problem was that the old policies of nationalisation and state control had created an elite at the top of the Zambian establishment who were now reluctant to give up their positions of power and wealth. The closure of ZIMCO, for example, posed a major threat to its powerful management who were therefore resisting it strongly.

Against this background of strengths and weaknesses, Zambia's prospects seemed far from hopeless; but neither were they assured. Essentially they depended on continued donor support, the quality of

Zambia's leadership and whether, in the short term, Chiluba's Government could be persuaded to keep its political nerve and stick to a vigorous programme of economic reform. I saw scope for closer donor coordination and a need for Britain to take an even stronger lead in bringing pressure to bear on Chiluba himself. Lady Chalker's good relationship with him would be a powerful asset.

I have so far said too little about the British Council's work in Africa. I always tried, on my travels, to visit their offices and meet their representatives. At their best, in Africa as elsewhere, they were an enormously valuable instrument in promoting British influence. In Lusaka they had an unusually large complement of four home based officers. This number was needed to support a flourishing programme, largely based on administering and delivering the aid programmes of the donor community, including our own as well as the EU, Swedish, Canadian and Norwegian aid organisations.

*President Chiluba was succeeded by Levy Mwanawas until the latter's death in 2008. Rupiah Banda was then elected President but stepped down after his defeat in the 2011 elections by Michael Sata. Sata died in office in 2014. New elections were held in 2015/16 when Edgar Lungu was elected President. Thus multi-party elections have provided peaceful democratic transition from Chiluba's election in 1991 until now. The next elections are due in 2021.*

## **MALAWI**

### **Malawi, pre-1972**

*In 1953 Britain had combined Nyasaland with Northern and Southern Rhodesia into a single Federation, despite strong opposition from the Nyasaland African Congress and white liberal activists.*

*In 1964 Nyasaland declared independence as Malawi under the Presidency of Dr Hastings Banda. One-party rule was introduced.*

### **Malawi October 1972**

I accompanied Lady Tweedsmuir on her visit to Malawi as leader of a British delegation of MPs to the 18th Annual Conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, an important event for President Banda and Malawi. Banda saw in it an opportunity to advertise Malawi and to promote his policies of contact and dialogue with Southern Africa. Relations with Britain were then excellent because we needed Banda's support in our resistance to sanctions against South Africa. This made him a valued friend in a continent where we had few. He was also on our side in the Cold War. In his conference speech of welcome, he lavished fulsome and embarrassing praise on Britain and made much of Lady Tweedsmuir. The High Commissioner, Robin Haydon, had excellent access to him and indeed was once summoned by Banda at short notice to join a Malawi cabinet meeting. Those were the days! But even then Private Secretaries were not included in calls on the President; and so I did no more than shake his hand.

Lady Tweedsmuir made the opening speech in a debate on "Britain and the EEC: what next?" Coming just before Britain's accession to the EEC on 1 January 1973, she used the occasion to re-assure this Commonwealth audience that the EEC recognised its mission to be open to the world and would take its responsibilities to the developing world seriously. In the debate that followed some doubts were expressed, however, whether the new Europe would be as outward looking in its relations to the Commonwealth as Britain had been alone. This was to become a familiar theme in the decades that followed.

Otherwise my most vivid memories of that visit are largely personal. I visited my cousins, John and Elizabeth Crossley, on Lake Malawi where John used to build boats for local fishermen. I spent a happy day with Veronica's old friends, Ben and Caroline Cardozo, in Zomba where they seemed to lead an idyllic life with their growing family while Ben commuted to the rest of the country to carry out his duties as High Commission Defence Adviser. I visited the new capital, Lilongwe, which reminded me of Celesteville in the Baba books. I accompanied the Minister on a visit to the Lake where we gazed from our hotel at the water's edge towards the hills of Mozambique on the other side. The sand was swept by the hotel staff at sunrise in time for hotel guests to enjoy a morning swim. Everywhere jacarandas blazed. We were flown over the southern end of the lake to admire the hippos. Malawi seemed a delightful place on the surface, although even then we were aware of the current persecution of the Jehovah's Witnesses. There were more human rights' abuses to come.

*In 1993 Dr Banda was still President but, under growing political pressure at home and from the donors, he had announced a referendum for June 1993 on whether one-party or multi-party rule should be used in future.*

### **Malawi March 1993**

Malawi was one of the five southern African countries I visited as AUSS in a busy fortnight in March 1993. By that time the Cold War was over. South Africa seemed on the brink of majority rule. Britain and other donors were linking their development aid more and more strictly to better quality government in the recipient countries. Banda and his government had become increasingly repressive.

In short, British interests and objectives in Malawi were in the process of change. True, we still had substantial investments, thought in 1993 to be some £100 million; exports were £30 million or so; and there were about 8,000 British citizens. Otherwise there was little direct British material interest in Malawi. Its claims on us were those of a poor Commonwealth country to whom we owed a debt of loyalty for the political support Banda had given us. So our good name was involved. So also, as in the rest of Africa, was the credibility of our "good government" policy. It would be damaged by instability and further repression. And if the economy were to collapse, it might cost us a great deal to rescue.

Banda resented what he saw in our threat to link our aid to good government as British betrayal of an old friend. From his point of view this was understandable. But he was too old to adjust to new realities. Access to him was getting more difficult. Lady Chalker could expect to see him. And there was scope for private emissaries. But he was one of the very few Commonwealth Heads of State in

Africa to whom access by the High Commissioner and visiting senior officials was difficult, a fact that made Nigel Wenban-Smith's task as High Commissioner in 1993 even more difficult than it was already. There was no question of my seeing him.

At the time of my 1993 visit, Banda, despite his age, was stomping the country campaigning vigorously for rejection of multi-partyism in a referendum due on 14 June. The issue dominated discussion. I stressed to the two key Government figures, Tembo (Minister of State) and Ntaba (Minister of Health), and to the opposition the importance of dialogue and compromise in preparations for the referendum; and expressed concern to both sides about stories of intimidation and harassment by the Government of its opponents.

Tembo and Ntaba reacted sharply. They complained that the donor community had "moved the goalposts". They argued that the Government had fulfilled the donors' conditions for balance of payments support; and were now seeking to impose multi-partyism by supporting the opposition in the referendum. I rejected this, but failed to make much headway. The Government were in fact right to say that they had met many of our concerns on human rights. The opposition were able to hold political rallies; freedom of speech was fairly well established; the judiciary and civil service were less subject to political pressure. But the opposition continued to complain of a climate of fear that inhibited effective political campaigning. And I found a consensus among the diplomatic donor community that there was not yet a fundamental shift in the way human rights in Malawi were viewed. So I concluded that HMG was right to offer no prospect of new balance of payments money until the outcome of the referendum had been assessed. In short we should keep up the pressure on the Government.

I was struck how little attention had been paid to what would happen after the referendum, whatever its result. In particular, if multi-partyism won, as most observers thought likely, would the next elections, due in 1997, be brought forward? The prior question, of course, would be whether Banda and Tembo would accept defeat? Many feared that they would rig the referendum and cling to power, and that this would lead to widespread violence. My own guess at the time, for what it was worth, was that they would cave in. If not, trouble lay ahead.

I left pessimistic about Malawi's long term economic prospects. The immediate situation was serious. The World Bank believed that the economy had contracted by 7.5% in 1992. Longer term prospects would depend critically on adequate rainfall and donor assistance. Although the political settlement in Mozambique and a settlement in South Africa might help, Malawi's economy would not be capable of self sustaining growth in the foreseeable future. I could understand why the colonial government had tried to combine the country in a federation with Northern and Southern Rhodesia. Now its problems were being compounded by the familiar disastrous mixture of high population growth and AIDS: according to one terrifying but unverifiable statistic, 75% of the uniformed services were HIV positive.

I expected that the next few months after my departure would be a particularly difficult period in British/Malawian bilateral relations. The Malawi Government, suspicious as they were of us already, would be watching the High Commission closely for signs of bias against them in the run-up to the referendum and afterwards would be increasingly resentful if we were unwilling to relax our aid criteria. With this in mind, I asked Nigel Wenban-Smith and his staff to be particularly careful in the

way they pursued our good government policy at this time. If Banda were to go so far as to expel Nigel, this could be very damaging. I hoped that my visit would have helped demonstrate that the views the High Commission were promoting on democracy, human rights and good government were those of HMG and continued to have our full support in London.

*In the June 1993 referendum, the populace voted for a multi-party democracy. In late 1993 a presidential council was formed, the life presidency was abolished and a new constitution was put into place, effectively ending the MCP's one-party rule. In 1994 the first multi-party elections were held, in which Banda was defeated by Bakili Muluzi (a former Secretary General of the MCP and former Banda Cabinet Minister). He immediately freed political prisoners and re-established freedom of speech.*

### **Malawi September 1994**

By my next visit, in September 1994, 18 months later, the situation had therefore been transformed for the better. I had decided to squeeze in a short visit on my way to an African Heads of Mission Conference in Zimbabwe. This enabled me to see John Martin in his post as our new High Commissioner (and an old friend from Athens days); and to meet the new President and his Government. I also attended a meeting of the donor group on good governance and the closing session of a rather successful Seminar, organised by the High Commission, to encourage better cooperation between the Army and the Police.

The change for the better in the political climate since my last visit was striking. The transition to multi-party democracy had been accomplished more smoothly than anybody had expected. The referendum result had been decisively in favour of change; the Government had accepted defeat; elections had been brought forward to June 1994; and again the Government had respected the victory of the opposition. Banda had stood down and left for exile in South Africa (where he was to die in 1997). In all fairness, he and his Government deserved their share of credit for the peaceful transition. So, I believe, did the donors for their part in the process. Toughness had worked.

I found a mood of relative optimism. There was a sense of a new beginning in Malawi. Political opponents were talking to each other. John Martin managed to get three government ministers as well as leading figures from the two opposition parties to a dinner for me. There was some discussion of whether a Government of National Unity would help political stability. John Martin believed that this would not be right in Malawi. Its relative tribal homogeneity reduced the risk that ethnic based parties would lead Government to abuse its power. An opposition could play a useful role in challenging and criticising the Government. In short, something like the Westminster democratic model could work in Malawi. I wish I could ask John if he still believes this; but tragically he was to die before his time not long after leaving Malawi.

By contrast with Banda, I was able to meet his successor, President Muluzi. I congratulated him on the smooth transition and was encouraged to hear him re-affirm his commitment to the good government programme. He well understood the link between aid and good government. I told him that HMG welcomed his intention to establish an anti-corruption commission independent of government. We

were able to discuss in a leisurely meeting not only internal Malawian affairs but also Mozambique. He told me that he was in close touch with President Chissano and agreed with me that there was a need for closer contact between Chissano and Dhlakama in the run-up to the elections there.

John Martin took me to see the new State House in Lilongwe. It had been built by Banda but was not yet inhabited. I did not expect such monstrous extravagance in the scale and splendour of the rooms. It reminded me of the Basilica at Yamassoukro in the Ivory Coast. Why, I asked myself, hadn't UK balance of payments support been cut off in protest during the 1970s and 80s when it was being built? Had we really needed Banda's support so much in our resistance to sanctions against South Africa. As one of the opposition leaders I met said "Lady Chalker would never have allowed it!" But the fact was that the world had changed; and a British policy that had been right in the circumstances of the 1970s was no longer so in the 1990s. To his credit, Muluzi had decided not to live in the building; and a committee was considering what to do with it. (It became the seat of Parliament).

Economic prospects too looked brighter, at least in the short term, than they had a year before. Good rains and the resumption of donor support were largely responsible. They would remain the main determinants of economic success in the foreseeable future, given Malawi's lack of mineral resources and industrial capacity. I could see no reason for greater optimism in the longer term than under Banda. Malawi was likely to remain one of the world's poorest countries. The risk of drought, high population growth and AIDS left me as pessimistic as before.

Nor did my 1994 visit much change my assessment of Britain's interests in the country, although the High Commission now believed that the value of UK investments might be as high as £400 million instead of £100 million as previously thought. Our main interest continued to be in helping with the economic development of a poor Commonwealth country which, if it were to collapse, might cost us a great deal to rescue. As elsewhere in Africa, the credibility of our good government policy was also at stake. It had been applied so far to very good effect in Malawi.

Bilateral relations in 1994 were excellent. We were reaping the benefit of the close relations we had established with the opposition to Banda. John Martin was making the most of this advantage and was exerting real influence on the new Government and its policies as I saw for myself in attending the High Commission's Army/Police Seminar.

We still had quite a large High Commission of 12 home based staff, although it was smaller than it had been. I thought that we should continue to reduce numbers in the years ahead. The same was true of our aid programme. And I was not surprised by the ODA's recent decision to move their local regional offices (known as a Development Division) from Lilongwe to Harare, a decision which the Malawians had taken philosophically. The British Council's splendid building which, like that in Dar-es-Salaam, would be the envy of Lagos, for example, seemed out of line with the reality of British interests in Malawi in the post Banda era.

*Re-elected in 1999, Muluzi remained President until 2004, when Dr Bingu wa Mutharika was elected. Multiparty parliamentary and presidential elections were held for the fourth time in Malawi in May*

2009, and President Mutharika was successfully re-elected, despite charges of election fraud from his rival.

President Mutharika was seen by some as increasingly autocratic and dismissive of human rights, and in July 2011 protests over high costs of living, poor governance and a lack of foreign exchange reserves erupted, leaving 18 people dead.

In April 2012, Mutharika died of a heart attack. The presidential title was taken over by former Vice-President Joyce Banda (unrelated to Dr Hastings Banda). In 2014 she lost elections (coming third) and was replaced by Arthur Peter Mutharika, the brother of the third elected president of Malawi. In 2020, Lazarus Chakwera was sworn in as President ending a period of turmoil after annulled elections in 2019. A Christian preacher, he beat the incumbent Mutharika in a re-run of the 2019 polls which the courts decided had suffered from widespread irregularities. Multi-party democracy thus seemed to have survived a significant test.

## ZIMBABWE

### Zimbabwe, pre-1992

In 1965 Prime Minister Ian Smith unilaterally declared independence from Britain under white-minority rule, leading to international isolation.

In 1980, following a lengthy guerrilla war, the Lancaster House agreement provided for independence. Robert Mugabe's Zanu party won elections and Mugabe became prime minister.

Violence against what was perceived as a Shona takeover immediately erupted in Matebeleland. The campaign officially ended in 1987 after Joshua Nkomo and Mugabe reached a unity agreement that merged their respective parties, creating the Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF).

In 1987 Mugabe was elected President.

### Zimbabwe, March & September 1992 and December 1993

Veronica and I had spent a night in Harare on our way from Accra to South Africa after leaving Ghana. In the 1970s all contact with Ian Smith's illegal regime had been banned. And so this was my first visit to Zimbabwe. Kieran Prendergast, the High Commissioner, was out of town, visiting the drought areas. But Nigel and Susan Thorpe gave a dinner at which we met an MP, the Chief Economist of the Reserve Bank, the Managing Director of Barclays Bank and the local BBC representative. Two subjects dominated the discussion, one beyond the Government's control, the other not: the severe drought and Mugabe's plans to expropriate the farms of white settlers. Both seemed to represent formidable threats to the political stability and economic development of the country. And so it was to prove.

In simple terms, the history of Zimbabwe after black independence from Ian Smith's rule in 1981 has been the struggle between Mugabe's heart and his head. His heart had always been socialist, authoritarian, anti-colonial, anti-white, anti-British. His head seemed originally to understand the need for market based economic policies, the importance of foreign investment and for cooperation with

Britain as the ex-colonial power. Over the course of his long rule, his heart gradually came to dominate his head with catastrophic results for Zimbabwe's people.

### **Zimbabwe, September 1992 and December 1993**

I paid another short visit to Zimbabwe on Lady Chalker's coat tails in **September 1992**. Neither then, nor in the rest of my time as AUSS, did any of us in the Diplomatic Service predict the catastrophe that Mugabe was later to inflict on his country. Indeed, when I next visited Zimbabwe in **December 1993**, I found a general mood of optimism and confidence. The immediate cause was the end of drought. With the coming of the rains, country which was brown and apparently dead when I flew over it in 1992 looked green and living this time. People were correspondingly more cheerful. Moreover both Government and people were conscious of having successfully confronted the drought emergency and survived it. International aid had helped. But logistics and distribution systems had worked. Although many cattle had died, there had been no Somali-type starvation. There was a palpable feeling of pride in what had been achieved and confidence in the country's ability to surmount future problems. Mugabe deserved, and was given, credit for this.

Businessmen, both expatriate and Zimbabwean, shared in the feeling of optimism because they believed that the Government were now firmly committed to sensible economic policies. Lever Brothers were investing an extra £2.5 million in IT and capacity expansion and told me that Government departments had given them good cooperation in restructuring their business, including with redundancies.

Not everybody was so complimentary. The World Bank representative thought that the Government's attitude to investment and the private sector was still ambivalent. Political dinosaurs still occupied key positions in Government. But he too believed in Mugabe's commitment to structural adjustment. Indeed that commitment seemed all the more solid when the President accepted our invitation to pay a State Visit to Britain in May 1994 to coincide with an investment seminar on Zimbabwe in London. At the time, we interpreted his willingness to come as further evidence of his move away from 1980s style socialism. How wrong we were. I remember attending the Lord Mayor's banquet for Mugabe in the Guild Hall and wondering what he made of all the pomp and circumstance in those magnificent surroundings in the light of his earlier life as guerrilla war leader and left wing socialist. What were his plans for the future? I wished later that we had not invited him!

There was other evidence of a change of heart in the right direction. My visit coincided with a new initiative by commercial (i.e. including white) farmers and the Government to work together to encourage a more commercial approach to farming. This was good news and seemed to confirm that Mugabe was moving away from his hostile rhetoric against white-owned farms. We did not expect the issue to die completely and recognised that it would remain a potential irritant in our bilateral relations and would continue to threaten overseas investment in Zimbabwe. We did not trumpet our concerns in public for fear of provoking a hostile response from Mugabe. Instead we raised them by means of a private, low key dialogue with him and his Government as opportunity offered.

I had not realised before my 1993 visit just what an impressive city Harare then was by African standards: well maintained buildings, clean streets, full shops, good hotels: all in striking contrast with much of the rest of black Africa. The road network throughout the country was also well maintained

and the basic infrastructure sound. Furthermore relations between the races seemed relaxed and comfortable; and the standard of technical skills was high in the rural as well as urban areas.

Political developments in neighbouring South Africa and Mozambique added to the feeling of optimism. Although people were realistic about South Africa's medium term economic prospects and did not expect miracles from majority rule, they were naturally looking forward to it and expected to benefit from closer relations, both political and economic, with South Africa. There was almost a mood of triumphalism. Similarly they expected to benefit from peace and stability in Mozambique.

Zimbabwe saw itself as an African heavy-weight, and with good reason. They were playing a role in the South African transition as well as in Mozambique. They were sending a battalion to help restore order in Liberia and had promised to provide troops when necessary in Angola. They were taking an active part in discussions in the Organisation of African Unity on a possible conflict resolution mechanism. In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs I found that the Permanent Secretary and other senior officials held views close to our own on such matters as the need for democracy in Nigeria, on how to run Commonwealth meetings more effectively and on Bosnia. I thought that these attitudes partly explained and partly reflected Mugabe's increasingly warm personal relationship with John Major.

It was pretty obvious in 1993 that Mugabe was likely to be President for a good many more years. Although there was multi-party democracy in name, the opposition was not a significant threat to his position. He looked set to win the next elections, due in 1995, decisively. So I thought that the State Visit would be a good investment. The interesting question of whether he would accept electoral defeat, when it eventually came, remained academic only, for the time being at least.

*Mugabe's regime became increasingly authoritarian and repressive with numerous human rights violations. He maintained the revolutionary socialist rhetoric from the Cold War era, blaming Zimbabwe's economic woes on a conspiracy between Western capitalist countries. In the face of his anti-imperialist rhetoric, contemporary African political leaders were reluctant to criticise Mugabe, though Archbishop Desmond Tutu called him "a cartoon figure of an archetypal African dictator".*

*In 2002 the Commonwealth suspended Zimbabwe after a disputed Presidential election. In 2008 Opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai beat Mugabe in the presidential election but was forced to withdraw from a run-off after his supporters become the target of increased violence. In 2009 Mugabe's Zanu-PF lost their parliamentary majority forcing a power-sharing deal with Tsvangirai's MDC. Mugabe was re-elected president in 2013. The MDC alleged massive fraud and tried to seek relief through the courts. After winning the election, the Mugabe Zanu-PF government re-instituted one party rule. In July 2016 nationwide protests took place at the economic collapse in the country. In 2017 Mugabe was ousted by members of his own party in a coup, replacing him with former Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who won the 2018 Presidency election. It was probably rigged. Mugabe died in 2019.*

## MOZAMBIQUE

### Mozambique, pre-1992

*Mozambique had been a Portuguese colony until 1974 when Caetano, the President of Portugal, fell from power and the new socialist Government in Lisbon immediately granted independence to Portuguese colonies in Africa and a million Portuguese citizens fled home.*

*Mozambique's new FRELIMO Government, under President Samora Machel, established a one-party state based on Marxist principles; cracked down on opposition; and announced it was supporting the guerrilla soldiers who were fighting the Smith regime for majority rule in Rhodesia next door. It had financial and some military support from the Soviet Union and Cuba.*

*In retaliation the white Rhodesians funded RENAMO, an anti-Communist rebel army in central Mozambique. The two sides then fought a vicious civil war. But majority rule in Rhodesia and the prospect of elections in South Africa, combined with the end of the Cold War, opened the prospect of peace. Britain took a close interest because of Mozambique's importance as a 'front line state' bordering South Africa and as an outlet to the sea for Zimbabwe and Zambia. It clearly made sense for us to help promote a political settlement and contribute to economic development.*

*In 1986 President Machel was killed in a plane crash. His successor, Joaquim Chissano abandoned Marxism and began peace talks with RENAMO. In 1990 a new constitution provided for a multi-party political system, a market-based economy and free elections.*

### Mozambique, March 1992

My first visit to Mozambique in March 1992 formed part of my familiarisation tour between leaving Ghana and starting work as AUSS in London. Maeve Fort, the Ambassador and later to be High Commissioner to South Africa when I was in Canada, was well connected to President Chissano and his FRELIMO Government; and introduced me to the Foreign Minister and his deputy as well as the President's Diplomatic Adviser and the Army Commander.

I was told that the country had real potential: rich agricultural land; an existing, if dilapidated, irrigation network; mineral wealth; and port and rail facilities. But the obstacles to success were formidable: civil war and political instability, a shattered economy, low education standards and heavy dependence on Western aid which accounted for 80% of GDP. I found it hard to be optimistic and was left wondering for how long it would be worth maintaining our commitment given our competing priorities elsewhere and the lack of historical connexion. The alleged existence of the occasional red pillar box with VR embossed on them provided slim evidence of a British commercial presence in the area in the nineteenth century.

The Russian Ambassador in Maputo gave me an interesting insight into how times had changed since the Cold War. He took me aside to say that Britain should not overlook Russian knowledge of the Mozambique armed forces: Russian experience of the country and its personalities could make a contribution to the search for peace. Now that our ideological rivalry was over, Britain and Russian should talk with a view to possible cooperation. I later followed up this suggestion in talks with my Russian opposite number in Moscow.

Britain was to become quite closely involved in the work of reconciling FRELIMO and RENAMO to the point where elections could be held. Maeve Fort and her successor, Richard Edis, demonstrated the contribution that first class personal diplomacy from the person on the spot could make to British interests. They cultivated close relations with both FRELIMO and RENAMO. We in London supported them, including by inviting Dhlakama for talks. I remember meeting him in my office overlooking St James's Park and taking him on to lunch at the Royal Overseas League. I urged him to cooperate with the UN in the demobilisation of his forces and to collaborate with President Chissano in national reconciliation.

### **Mozambique December 1993**

In December 1993 I accompanied Lady Chalker on another visit to Maputo. Living conditions had vastly improved since my visit in March 1992. There were goods in the shops, the streets were reasonably clean and the traffic had increased considerably. Much of this improvement was thanks to outside help, the growth of the local foreign community and the large number of UN vehicles. Even Quelimane in Zambezia province in the north looked better off than some African towns I knew.

In a meeting with the President, Linda Chalker asked Chissano about the possibility of a Government of National Unity (GNU) to prevent "winner taking all". He came close to ruling the idea out before the elections on the grounds that acceptance of a GNU before would mean that it did not matter who won them. But he hinted that, after the elections, he would be willing to consider the idea. Dr Aldo Ajello, the UN Special Representative, who we also saw, thought that the Mozambicans might find their own solution, short of a GNU, but which would somehow associate the loser in the Government. Ajello was scathing about the quality of the UN Forces (except Botswana's) in Mozambique, particularly the Brazilian Force Commander who stuck rigidly to the letter of his UN mandate and lacked imagination and flexibility. The two men now dealt with each other on paper only. Ajello had even thrown the Brazilian's latest memo away before reading it.

Lady Chalker's meeting with Dhlakama was memorable. The Embassy's political officer, Nicholas Busvine, flew the Minister, her Private Secretary, Richard Edis and myself in the Embassy's own small aircraft to find the RENAMO leader in his forest lair in the interior. We had to circle for what seemed ages looking for the earth airstrip which was little more than a forest track, flanked by tall trees, and only visible end-on. There was just room between the trees for us to land. Dhlakama met us, dressed in smart blue blazer and polka dot tie. I wondered if he had bought them in Oxford Street after our lunch together at the Royal Overseas League. We sat under the trees, on small wooden upright chairs at the edge of the runway because there was not time to go to his nearby base. He was obviously delighted to see the Minister on his home ground. We hoped that this small gesture of international recognition would help keep him engaged in the UN process. Our take-off was no less exciting than the landing, as our wings skimmed past the tall trees flanking the strip.

From Dhlakama, we flew to Nyanga over the border in Zimbabwe where a British military team had been training a mixed force of 540 FRELIMO/RENAMO instructors. The theory was that, if you put soldiers of any nationality in front of a British NCO, they would combine in united terror of his ferocity. We had come to attend a review of the men before they returned to Mozambique to train the new, integrated, Mozambican Army. Certainly the degree of integration that had been achieved after only ten weeks' training was remarkable. I asked the first soldier I met whether he was from FRELIMO or

RENAMO. His answer was "I am a Mozambican soldier": text book stuff. Equally encouraging was the presence of a General each from the opposing sides who stood either side of Linda Chalker on the saluting base. The effect was a little spoiled by the empty flag pole opposite them between the Union Jack and the Zimbabwean flag. RENAMO had vetoed the use of the Mozambican flag because it was associated in their minds with FRELIMO.

Multi-party elections were held in Mozambique in October 1994. Polling took place over two days. At the end of the first day, alleging that they were being rigged against RENAMO, Dhlakama threatened to withdraw from them but was persuaded not to do so after some vigorous overnight diplomacy by Richard Edis and his team banging the two sides' heads together. Ajello described Richard as "the principal architect of a real miracle, in keeping the peace process active in the run-up to the elections". Richard and his staff deserved, but did not get, the highest public praise for their work that night. He later volunteered to serve as Ambassador in Angola, itself moving towards an end of civil war, where his reconciliation skills would have been valuable. But the condition he set, perhaps only half in jest, - the award of a knighthood - was unacceptable to the FCO. Nor did he win promotion as High Commissioner to Zimbabwe. Instead he was sent first to Tunis and then Algeria where his qualities were not given full scope. Sadly he died before his time: a brilliant and unusual man who might have climbed higher as a member of the Indian Civil Service in the days of Empire.

At the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in New Zealand in November 1995, of which more below, Mozambique became the only country to be admitted to the Commonwealth which had not been in its entirety a part of the British Empire. This odd outcome was largely achieved through the combined support of Mandela and Mugabe. John Major had no appetite to resist them, even though officials at least had hoped to postpone consideration of Mozambique's application for membership until after a general study on criteria for new members. Douglas Hurd too was in favour: I remember a meeting in his office at which he asked us for our views on Mozambican membership and was resistant to orthodox official advice that it would set an awkward precedent to include a country which had never been under British rule. With the benefit of hindsight, officials were probably wrong and Hurd right.

*President Chissano was re-elected in 1999 but stood down before the 2004 elections. These were won decisively by the FRELIMO candidate, Armando Guebuza. He went on to serve two five-year terms. He was succeeded by another FRELIMO leader, Filipe Nyusi, who became Mozambique's fourth democratically elected President in 2015.*

*Dhlakama continued to contest - unsuccessfully - each election, challenging the legitimacy of each result. In 2015 an insurgency by RENAMO developed in the centre and north of the country. Dhlakama agreed an end to hostilities in time for the 2015 elections; but, after losing these also, he broke off the peace process again. His death in 2018 paved the way for a peace deal in 2019 between President Nyusi and RENAMO. Nyusi won the 2019 Presidential elections.*

## NAMIBIA

### Namibia March 1993

*Namibia's colonial past had begun with German rule from 1884 when it was called South West Africa. South Africa occupied it during the First World War and administered it, initially under a League of Nations mandate. It continued to rule after the Second World War until granting Namibian independence in 1990 following a bush war of some 25 years. South Africa's departure was part of an international agreement, made possible by the end of the Cold War, by which Cuban troops, backed by the Soviet Union, had left Angola.*

This was another of the five countries I visited as AUSS in a busy fortnight in March 1993. Unlike the rest of southern Africa, I had never before been there and didn't quite know what to expect. Here was a country with the population of one small European city and a GDP only slightly larger than the budget of the Diplomatic Service. For the time being it seemed to be doing rather well; but its future looked heavily dependent on both South Africa and its northern neighbour, Angola.

The Namibians had succeeded in reconciling its black and white populations and in establishing a workable multi-racial democracy in which some 80,000 whites mainly of African and German descent co-existed with 1.3 million black people. The Cabinet, the senior ranks of the civil service, army and police, as well as the private sector were strengthened by the presence of whites with experience of government and business. For example, both the Minister of Finance and Attorney General who I met were white. National reconciliation seemed to be making good progress, although black/white strains in e.g. the police force might presage trouble ahead. One of our police advisers likened the situation to that of the RUC working for an IRA government! Human rights were being largely respected. President Nujoma's government had committed itself to an open market economic policy. The economic infrastructure, inherited from South African rule, was good by African standards. There were substantial mineral and fishery resources. Tourism offered potential. Average per capita annual income was some US\$1,300 compared to the sub-Saharan average of \$340. The debt burden was low.

But an extensive programme of calls organised by the High Commission under Henry Hogger - sadly not including the President himself and Foreign Minister who were out of town - left me uncertain whether these assets would be enough to overcome the formidable difficulties which lay ahead.

My main doubts were these. The vast gap between white and black incomes (\$16,000 p.a. for whites vs \$82 for blacks) would generate high expectations among the black majority which the economy would not be able to satisfy within any reasonable time frame. Land reform, as in Zimbabwe, would be politically essential but economically difficult and dangerous. South African majority rule would pose similar economic problems to those facing Lesotho and Swaziland, particularly in the field of investment, mining employment and in competition with South African goods. Walvis Bay represented a further potential problem. The Namibians feared that a South African majority government might not honour the UN agreement that Walvis Bay be re-integrated into Namibia.

The continued civil war in Angola also threatened Namibia's prospects. Nearly all the people I met seemed preoccupied with this. Savimbi in Angola was threatening reprisals against alleged Namibian support of his opponents. Any large new influx of refugees from Angola could cause the conflict to spill across the frontier into the north of Namibia where the bulk of the population lived as well as add to the burdens on the Namibian economy. Meanwhile Angola's own economic recovery still seemed some way off and, with it, Angola's value to Namibia as a trading partner.

On top of all these anxieties, I found it hard to believe that international interest in Namibia, high in the immediate aftermath of independence, and donors' willingness to sustain big aid programmes, would not gradually diminish. Our own aid framework foresaw a reduction in bilateral aid from £4 million in 1993/4 to £3.5 million in 1995/6. Other donors would also find it hard to maintain their programmes given other priorities.

Despite these problems, I concluded that Namibia was not necessarily destined to follow the downward path taken by other newly independent African countries in the past. Good leadership, reasonably competent economic management, a revival of mineral prices, South African prosperity, Western support albeit at a reduced level: all these offered Namibia a fair chance of stability and modest economic prosperity. But these were big ifs; and I wasn't prepared to bet whether, in 20 or so years time, Namibia would become another successful Botswana or look like a smaller version of Zambia.

Before my visit, I had not appreciated the prominence of Britain's position in Namibia. This had been achieved by our help, including the personal intervention of Mrs Thatcher, in bringing Namibia to independence; its decision to join the Commonwealth (despite unusual credentials); visits by The Queen and senior British Ministers; a small British Council office and a well targeted programme of development assistance and military and police training; and a comparatively large High Commission of 6 home based staff. This prominent position had helped in our main objective of contributing to Namibia's stability and success as an open market and multi-party democracy. In my heart of hearts I could not believe that we would be able to continue to justify this level of interest, particularly after South Africa had made a successful transition to democratic majority rule.

*In the 24 years since my visit in 1993, Namibia has succeeded in maintaining its multiparty democracy, although SWAPO has won every election since independence. The transition from the 15 year rule of President Sam Nujoma to his democratically elected successors, first Hifikepunye Pohamba and then in 2015 Hage Geingob went smoothly. President Geingob won re-election in 2019.*



**Map of Southern Africa**

**Chapter 11**

**SOUTHERN AFRICA: SOUTH AFRICA, BOTSWANA, LESOTHO AND SWAZILAND**

**SOUTH AFRICA**

**South Africa, 1814 to 1992**

*This is not a history of South Africa, But some of the major turning points are worth bearing in mind.*

*In 1814 the Dutch ceded the Cape to Britain at the end of the Napoleonic wars. It thus became part of the British Empire.*

*In 1910 Britain granted nominal independence to the Union of South Africa, incorporating the British colonies of Cape Province and Natal and the former Boer Republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. Initially the Cape was permitted to keep a restricted version of its traditional voting franchise, under which mixed race ('coloureds') and Black South Africans could vote if they met the same education and wealth criteria as whites. The Cape franchise was later abolished, leaving only whites able to vote.*

*In 1931 the Statute of Westminster abolished the last powers of the British Government and gave South Africa full sovereignty.*

*In 1948 the National Party was elected to power and imposed apartheid.*

*In 1990, after increasing internal resistance and international condemnation, including economic and military sanctions, the National Government lifted its ban on the African National Congress, released Nelson Mandela from Robbin Island, where he had been imprisoned for 27 years, and began a process which was to end with the abolition of apartheid and the introduction of majority rule.*

### **South Africa March 1992**

On leaving the High Commission in Ghana in March 1992, Veronica and I took the direct Ghana Airways flight from Accra to Harare so that I could visit all-important South Africa before taking up my new job as AUSS.

This was my first proper visit to South Africa. In the 1970s, Britain's decision to avoid ministerial contact meant that Lord Lothian had done no more than transit the country on his way to Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. In 1992 I met a wide range of people of all colours in Pretoria, Johannesburg and Cape Town. Discussion was dominated by the referendum campaign in which President de Klerk was asking whites (only) to vote on whether he should continue the constitutional reforms he was negotiating with the African National Congress (ANC) and other parties and which were ultimately to lead to the lifting of apartheid and, two years later, majority rule. Pessimism about the result seemed to be growing daily. I was later puzzled by this, given the 68% yes win on 17 March. A friend later reported from Hermanus that the town was "in an uproar" on referendum day but added that she meant by this that there were long orderly queues of white haired South Africans for each polling booth. Some uproar.

There was another feature of discussion which might have misled the observer: how to reconcile the political ambitions of the black majority with the whites' determination to remain in ultimate control. I recall vividly being told by de Klerk's chef de cabinet, Dr Jannie Roux, that de Klerk's intention was to share not abdicate power, a point repeatedly being made in London by the South African Ambassador and visiting South African Ministers. It was clear that, at that stage, the two sides remained far apart on that fundamental point. This helps to explain the agonies we went through in London over prospects for a peaceful transition to majority rule.

Visits to Alexandra township in Pretoria and to the black townships outside Cape Town brought home to me the immense gulf between white rich and black poor. The races were living in different worlds; and the black world was largely unknown to the white. I remember the story of a British Embassy official telling white South Africans at a dinner party of a visit he had made that morning to the

township of Khayelitsha and of their incredulity that he had been able to do so safely. His land rover with its Union Jack was well known in the township because of his regular visits to the Embassy's micro projects in boys clubs, health clinics and schools. Nobody could say how resources could be found to close the gap between rich and poor and meet rising aspirations in post apartheid South Africa. On the other hand the 'coloured' townships of Mitchell's Plain and Hanover Park outside Cape Town were surprisingly affluent even then.

Like other visitors before me, I was greatly impressed by the depth and extent of the Embassy's contacts with black and white, government and opposition, alike. Relations with the ANC seemed particularly effective. Our aid programme in the black townships was giving Britain both access and credibility. I was also struck by the extent to which the Embassy was able actively to intervene in internal South African affairs. Had I tried to do the same in Ghana, Rawlings would have insisted on my withdrawal. I left wondering if we would be able to continue to intervene in the same way in future and concluded that this would depend on whether the various interests in South Africa continued to need our support. I have no doubt that the role we played during apartheid helped nudge the National Party towards the agonising (for them) decision to hold elections.

The contrasts were what struck one most, then as now: the manicured elegance of Stellenbosch compared to the corrugated iron hovels of Khayelitsha; the sophisticated, liberal attitudes of the Democratic Party against the Old Testament certainties of the Conservatives; the familiar (to me from Ghana) uninhibited African warmth and vitality of a man like "Terror" Lekota of the ANC compared to the cerebral detachment of white DFA officials.

### **South Africa, September 1992**

I have a vivid memory of going with the Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, in an RAF VC10 on a visit to South Africa, Kenya and Somalia, in September 1992, during the UK Presidency of the EC, barely 6 months after starting my new job as AUSS. Hurd was accompanied by the Danish and Portuguese Foreign Ministers. Together they formed the EC Troika i.e. from three succeeding Presidencies. The aim was to offer EC support for the South African political process. With my fellow Danish and Portuguese Directors of African affairs and other officials, the Troika needed its own Government plane. The Danish party joined us in England (Brize Norton, I seem to remember); and we picked up the Portuguese in Lisbon before a night flight to Johannesburg via Ascension Island, to refuel. The RAF crew didn't bother to disturb us on landing there, as we slept higgledy piggledy wherever we could stretch out including on the floor of the plane.

My chief memory of a crowded 24 hours or so in South Africa, meeting many of the main players, was of Hurd instructing his officials, as he was going to bed at about midnight, to devise a political initiative overnight to get Buthelezi to commit to participation in a transitional government. Unsurprisingly, we did not come up with anything worth while, any more than anyone else had so far succeeded in accommodating Buthelezi on acceptable terms.

On our way back to Britain, the Troika landed at Nairobi from which we flew to Mogadishu. I have recorded my impressions of that part of the visit in chapter 8 above.

## South Africa, December 1993

My next solo visit to South Africa was in December 1993, just over four months before the elections. I wanted to bring myself up to date before the elections brought South Africa to the top of Ministers' agenda in Britain. Tony Reeve, the Ambassador, and his staff had organised calls for me on a fascinating cross section of political opinion in Pretoria, Johannesburg and Cape Town. I came away with a feeling of optimism that generally valid elections would be held on the due date of 27 April 1994, and that a Government of National Unity, headed by Mandela, would then successfully take power. I met nobody who believed that any of the likely threats to this happy outcome could abort the political process. But threats there obviously were. I thought that the worst ones came from five main directions.

One obvious threat came from Afrikaner right wingers. Prospects for success in the talks that were taking place between them and the ANC on how to satisfy their political ambitions looked poor. So they were going to have to choose between acquiescence in the new transitional constitution and violent opposition. Most of them would probably opt for a quiet life because they had an economic stake in peace. But some, perhaps only a few, might well resort to terrorism to try to disrupt the elections. This could include political killings, attempts to provoke further violence in the townships, attacks against economic installations like electricity supply stations and possibly even attempts to take over small towns. Although they might get some support from sympathisers within the police and the army, the bulk of these would obey their leaders who would remain loyal to the government. I concluded that there would not be a major insurrection. So the worst that the right wing could do would not be enough to derail the process. And the longer they delayed any challenge, the less likely one would become.

The threat from Chief Buthelezi of the Zulus and his Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) looked more serious. Buthelezi himself was behaving like a bear with a sore head, resisting all appeals to show flexibility in his attempt to win greater autonomy for the Zulu nation by making common cause with right wing Afrikaners. Optimists believed that under him the IFP would reach agreement with the ANC and the Government on some compromise under which it would join the process and participate in elections. Those of a gloomier frame of mind thought that Buthelezi himself might resign and/or the IFP might split, with probably a majority taking part in elections and the minority resorting to further violence. The pessimists feared that agreement would prove impossible; the IFP would boycott the elections and try to invalidate them by provoking violence in Natal and in as much of the rest of the country as possible with the aim of winning better political terms or, at the extreme, forcing KwaZulu-Natal's secession. My own instinct was that secession itself seemed far fetched; and that the worst that might happen was something to call in question the elections in Natal, where serious violence might break out. In that case a new Government of National Unity would presumably want to try to organise fresh elections in the region, perhaps after a further effort to reach a political accommodation with the IFP. But my conclusion was more optimistic. I found it hard to believe that a majority of the IFP would stand aside from the country's first multi-party elections; and that, in the last resort, Buthelezi would not cave in.

I met many who feared, most of all, the threat of political assassinations. There had already been some. But the worst nightmare was the murder of Mandela himself. If this were to happen, appalling violence would be unleashed. Neither he nor his principal lieutenants were adequately guarded. And even President de Klerk was not out of a fanatic's reach. I tried to persuade myself that even the

assassination of a major figure was unlikely now to halt or divert the process and that it might even give fresh impulse to the present momentum. But nobody could be sure.

Theoretically the process could still be endangered by a breakdown in the relationship between the ANC and the Government. This had so far been the key to progress. For example, the two sides might collide in the Transitional Executive Council over control of the Defence Forces or the police. A clash of this kind in the run-up to the elections was more than likely. But it would probably not be serious enough to prejudice the elections themselves. The relationship between the two sides seemed now to be too firmly based. Whether it would last the full five years of the Government of National Unity (GNU) was another matter altogether.

Underlying each of these threats was the danger of violence. Everybody I spoke to expected an increase in the present level, even if they disagreed over its likely source. At the time, in 1993, it was concentrated in Natal and the East Rand and was less bad elsewhere than a year previously. The local community peace structures, supported by international peace observers, were much stronger than they had been and had helped contain the violence. They would continue to play an essential part in keeping the peace as would the presence of international electoral observers. Alexandra was perhaps the best example of a township which had rolled back the violence. I visited it once again and saw some of the Embassy small aid projects including a cricket ground (where I first met Thabo Mbeki, eventually to become Mandela's successor as President). I also attended a Sunday morning service in Soweto with John Doble, our Consul General in Johannesburg, who drove us there in his official Jaguar. He introduced me formally to the congregation. We were the only white people present.

At the end of my own December 1993 visit I joined Lady Chalker for two days as she called on senior figures, including Buthelezi. My conclusions after reaching home were that, even if none of the likely threats to the elections and a successful transition to majority rule materialised, the dangers would not end with the elections. Violence and the threat of non-constitutional challenge to the GNU would remain serious hazards to stability in South Africa. Most people I spoke to expected a decisive but not landslide ANC victory, with de Klerk's National Party coming second. But, if the ANC were to achieve a landslide and were then to succumb to the temptation to ignore white minority concerns; or if the National Party were beaten into third or even fourth place by the unexpected success of the Afrikaner right wing or the Zulu IFP, the Government of National Unity would be more fragile, the risk of extra-parliamentary opposition worse and prospects for political stability darker.

### **South Africa, 1994 to 2017**

*Four months after my 1993 visit, elections were held, on 27 April 1994. The ANC won a decisive majority, power passed to a Government of National Unity under President Mandela and South Africa rejoined the Commonwealth. In September 1994, John Major visited the country, accompanied by David Wright, the Deputy Secretary for Africa and the Middle East. I was disappointed not to be in the party; but still more disappointed not to go when The Queen paid Her own visit in March 1995. But I was probably more useful in London keeping an eye on British interests in the rest of Africa.*

*The ANC won the 1999 general election and Thabo Mbeki succeeded Mandela who retired (dying in 2013). Mbeki was re-elected in 2004 but was ousted by his rival, Jacob Zuma, who won the elections of 2009 and 2014. He faced increasing criticisms from within and outside the ANC on grounds of*

*corruption and incompetence. In 2017 he dismissed his widely respected Finance Minister. This led to South Africa's credit rating being cut to junk status. In 2018 Zuma resigned over corruption allegations. He was replaced by Cyril Ramaphosa who went on to win the 2019 Parliamentary elections. Ramaphosa had been heavily involved in the 1993/94 talks to end apartheid and had played an important part in the drafting of the post-apartheid constitution. Indeed in 1994 the Embassy and Foreign and Commonwealth Office had speculated that he would one day win the Presidency.*

## **BOTSWANA, LESOTHO & SWAZILAND**

### **pre-1972**

*When the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910 from the main British colonies in Southern Africa, the Bechuanaland Protectorate (now Botswana), Basutoland (now Lesotho) and Swaziland were not included, but provision was made for their later incorporation in South Africa. Successive South African governments pressed Britain to transfer jurisdiction over the three territories to South Africa. This might have made administrative and economic sense. But the introduction of apartheid in South Africa in 1948, if nothing else, put paid to any prospect of incorporation as it was politically unthinkable that they could be entrusted to the tender mercies of South Africa's apartheid Government. Instead, Britain gave independence to Botswana and Lesotho in 1966 and to Swaziland, two years later, in 1968.*

*Since independence, Britain had had all too little contact with the three countries. So Lord Lothian's visit in 1972 was intended to show that we had not altogether lost interest in them and to give them some moral support in their uneasy relationship with their big South African neighbour. We flew to Johannesburg, which I was to get to know quite well some forty years later after retirement; but in 1972 we had no formal contact with the South African Government from which HMG kept its distance in those apartheid days, (although we had to rely on the courtesy of the South African authorities in facilitating our passage through their country). We used Johannesburg as the hub from which we travelled successively, by a mixture of air and road, to the three capitals of Gaborone (Botswana), Maseru (Lesotho) and Mbabane (Swaziland).*

## **BOTSWANA**

### **Botswana, January 1972**

No FCO minister had visited Botswana since 1967, a year after independence. Lord Lothian's familiarisation visit was therefore timely. It coincided auspiciously with a break in a long drought; and also with disturbances in neighbouring Rhodesia shortly after the Pearce Commission had begun work. Unsurprisingly, Rhodesia and South Africa featured largely in discussions with the President, Seretse Khama. He explained his determination to adopt a position of balance between South Africa and the African states to the north. Botswana could tell the former of her opposition to apartheid while explaining to the latter the realities of the racial situation in Southern Africa.

The President also, interestingly, emphasised the basically democratic nature of the traditional tribal institutions of Botswana, which he said helped to explain why the Western-style democracy inherited from Britain was still in such good shape and was working well. He might have also said, but didn't,

that his own moderation and good sense were further important reasons. He was one of the most impressive African Heads of Government that we were to meet.

We saw for ourselves how rich Botswana was in precious minerals. Harry Oppenheimer, Chairman of Anglo-American provided an executive jet for Lord Lothian and party to visit both the diamond mine at Orapa and the copper and nickel mine at Selibe Phikwe. The diamonds were a vital part of Botswana's success. The world's diamonds are mined in two kinds of geological formation. They are either quite widely scattered in alluvial soil on the surface or they are concentrated underground in deep vertical "pipes." I had seen with Lord Lothian in 1972 in Sierra Leone (see Chapter 6 above) an example of diamond extraction in surface alluvial soil. The contrast with Botswana was remarkable. There, diamonds had been discovered in the "pipe" at Orapa. The mine was owned and managed jointly by de Beers and the Botswana Government. The operation was concentrated in a small area on top of the "pipe", surrounded by a secure fence. The workforce was searched thoroughly on leaving the site each day. The result was that both de Beers and the Government drew worthwhile income and the people of Botswana received a fair share of the benefit through taxation. In simple terms, on the one hand, in Sierra Leone, alluvial mining, local corruption and bad government produced poverty and disaster. On the other hand, in Botswana, "pipe" diamonds and good government were ingredients of relative prosperity.

### **Botswana, March 1993**

In the 21 years since my last visit, Botswana had become one of Africa's rare success stories, with a clear separate identity which would ensure its long term independence from South Africa. In 1966 it had been one of the world's poorest countries with a per capita income of \$25. By 1993, this had grown to \$3,000. Its foreign exchange reserves were larger than those of South Africa and indeed accounted for one fifth of the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa's. Its success had been due to political stability, good leadership, sound economic management and the successful exploitation of its mineral wealth, above all diamonds. But its wealth should not be exaggerated. Rapid population growth and a drift to the towns had created 30% unemployment in the capital, Gaborone. Half the population was under 15; and some 70% was said to live close to the poverty line. It was very poor by Western standards. In Africa, success is relative.

Political stability had been of the democratic rather than the dictatorial variety. Sir Seretse Khama (who I had met with Lord Lothian in 1972 and whose English wife, Ruth, I met again this time with John Edwards, our High Commissioner) had ruled wisely and in the best interests of the country. So had his successor, President Masire. Both men had been re-elected time after time, without violence from the Opposition, who had shown no signs of abandoning the ballot box for the gun. Economic management had been consistently sound. Corrupt Ministers, of whom there had been some recent culprits, had been sacked. Financial reserves had been husbanded, extravagance avoided, appointments (white and black) made on merit, private investment encouraged.

I was told that Botswana probably had enough diamond reserves to continue at current rates of extraction for another century or so. Much less promising however was the currently depressed diamond price. Russian policy was critical. If the Russians resisted the temptation to make a short-term

killing by breaking the Central Selling Organisation cartel and nothing else happened to depress the world price, the price might begin to recover in about 18 months' time. The situation in Angola, where large quantities of alluvial diamonds were being put on the market by illicit diggers (and perhaps the rebels also), had further depressed the price. If it were to collapse, the effect on Botswana's economy would be serious.

There was no realistic alternative to dependence on diamond revenue. Efforts were being made to diversify the economy into more cotton, textile production, quality tourism and high value irrigated vegetable and citrus cultivation. This might help but could not make up for lost diamond production. It did however illustrate Botswana's determination to find solutions to its problems.

Botswana was heavily dependent on South Africa. Majority rule there, however desirable, could threaten Botswana's prosperity. For example, Botswana stood to lose from changes to the Customs Union; if South Africa were to ban or reduce migrant labour from outside its borders; and if investors were to prefer the new South Africa. I found a lot of uncertainty and anxious speculation about events in South Africa and the likely attitude of a new Government there to its neighbours. But Botswana was better placed than most to cope with change. And it was significant that nobody I spoke to talked about the reincorporation of Botswana into South Africa even as a long term theoretical possibility. Botswana's prospects as a viable political and economic entity were strong.

I reflected that the day would come when Britain too would need to re-examine its relations with Botswana following majority rule in South Africa. Would British interests continue to require the resources we were currently devoting to the country? Our resources included a High Commission of no fewer than 7 home based staff, a British Council office, an aid programme of some £5.5 million and military assistance in the form of British short-term training teams in Botswana and training in the UK for Botswana officers. As for our interests, clearly these benefitted from reinforcing success in Botswana as a model for other Sub-Saharan states of a multi-party, multi-racial democracy which respected human rights and operated a functioning market based economy. Moreover Botswana was a moderating influence for common sense in the region. President Masire was playing a helpful role among front line leaders, in Angola and Mozambique as well as in relation to South Africa. There was a well respected battalion of 700 Botswana troops in the UN force in Mozambique and 300 in Somalia. And Botswana provided training and exercise areas for the British Army.

I concluded that, for the moment, British interests and resources were in balance. But I could well imagine that, if our hopes for Southern African political stability and economic prosperity were realised, we would probably want to switch some of our resources elsewhere. We would then be faced with the awkward question, so familiar in other parts of the world, of how far we could continue to honour whatever moral responsibility we had for a poor African member of the Commonwealth with strong historical connexions with Britain.

## **Botswana, 1993 to 2017**

*Botswana has maintained its tradition of stable representative democracy, with a consistent record of uninterrupted democratic elections and good government. The elected Presidency has passed from Masire to Festus Mogae in 1999; to Ian Khama, son of the first President, in 2008; and to Mokgweetsi Masisi in 2019.*

## **LESOTHO**

### **Lesotho, January 1972**

*Lesotho's independence in 1966 had not established durable democratic government. Chief Leabua Jonathan, leader of the Basotho National Party (BNP) and the independent country's first Prime Minister, had refused to recognise the BNP's defeat in the 1970 election and locked up the successful opposition leaders of the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP).*

Chief Jonathan tried to explain to Lord Lothian why he had so far failed to restore democracy and the difficulties of party politics in an African state. They should, he claimed, be subordinated to the national interest. He was however hopeful of creating the conditions which would lead in due course back to democracy. Opposition leaders told Lord Lothian that they were less hopeful. The King, Moshoeshoe II, also expressed doubts about the prospects of a return to normality and asked for British help, a request which Lord Lothian dodged.

Inevitably both South Africa and Rhodesia were also discussed, but not in great depth. However much Lesotho might wish for a settlement in Rhodesia and for the end of apartheid in South Africa, they recognised their powerlessness and were uncritical of Britain's position. The Prime Minister said that dialogue with the South African government was the only answer; and that, although Lesotho would have preferred immediate majority rule in Rhodesia, he wished us well in our search for a solution.

### **Lesotho, 1972 to 1993**

*Chief Jonathan's non-elected government continued to rule until 1986 when a military coup forced it out of office. A Transitional Military Council that came to power then granted executive powers to King Moshoeshoe II, who had been until then a ceremonial monarch. But in 1987 the King was forced into exile after trying to secure greater executive power than the military were willing to grant. His son was installed in his place as King Letsie III. The Chairman of the military government, Major General Lekhanya, was ousted by Major General Ramaema in 1991, apparently committed to the restoration of democracy.*

### Lesotho March 1993

My visit to Lesotho reminded me of two uncomfortable truths: first that, if Lesotho, a mountainous enclave entirely surrounded by South Africa, did not exist as an independent state, it would not be invented now; and, second, that the UK had little direct material interest in the country. Lesotho's existence and importance, such as it was, to the UK derived almost entirely from the presence of the apartheid regime next door. This alone justified Britain's close involvement in Basuto affairs, but it also explained our determination to distance ourselves from the complicated local politics.

So far as the UK interest went, Lesotho took some £2 million of UK direct exports a year, plus whatever came indirectly through South Africa. There were some £5 million of British private investment. The British community numbered well under 1000. Once Lesotho's importance as a "front line state" disappeared, we would continue to have a residual moral responsibility to the country as an impoverished Commonwealth state. And, as elsewhere, the credibility of our "good government" policy as a means of promoting democracy would remain at stake.

Against this background, were we spending too much? Our energetic High Commissioner, James Cowling, and his small staff were enough to promote their main objective of nudging Lesotho towards the restoration of democracy and "good government" and to help administer our substantial, but declining, aid programme. Even in 1995/96 this was planned at £4,750,000. The British Council had a small office and library. The Commonwealth Development Corporation had investments: they had committed £20 million in the initial phase of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. And we had a three man army training team, costing £250,000 p.a. As I left Maseru, I was doubtful that we would want to maintain this level of commitment in the years ahead.

My visit coincided with a particularly lively period in local politics. These were dominated by two separate but linked issues. First, political campaigning for elections due between 27 and 29 March were in full spate. These were to be the first full elections since Chief Jonathan, leader of the ruling Basotho National Party (BNP), had annulled the 1970 election which it had lost to the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP), shortly before, as it happened, my last visit to Maseru with Lord Lothian.

Secondly, the future of the monarchy was in play during my visit. On this, for reasons that were not entirely clear, Chief Anyaoku, the Nigerian Secretary General of the Commonwealth, had despatched a Mission under Sir Anthony Siaguru to negotiate a public commitment by the main political parties to address the issue of King Moshoeshoe's reinstatement immediately after the elections. The King had been deposed but was now seeking reinstatement again. Anthony Siaguru was in town during my visit and, at Anyaoku's behest, threatening to withhold agreement to a Commonwealth election observer mission unless the issue of the monarchy was settled before the elections. My aim was to encourage free and fair elections and therefore the despatch of a Commonwealth observer mission; but to avoid taking a position on the King.

James Cowling successfully steered me through a busy programme of calls in which I made HMG's views on these issues known to the government, senior Basotho officials, leaders of the three main

political parties, local diplomats, UK businessmen and aid personnel. I reflected then and later that it was all too easy to become distracted by the fascinating detailed twists and turns of local politics from the UK's longer term objectives in the region.

I left Maseru with the strong belief that majority rule in South Africa would revive the issue of Lesotho's reincorporation into the Republic. Lesotho's economy was very heavily dependent on South Africa. Remittances from Basotho miners in South Africa provided some 45% of Lesotho's GNP: an ANC government might want those mining jobs for South Africa's unemployed once they could be trained. Moreover Lesotho benefited disproportionately from the South African Customs Union; and would probably lose some of that benefit when the Union was renegotiated. It might also lose some of its comparative advantage as a home for foreign investment when South Africa established a relationship with the European Community. Lesotho would therefore probably become even more dependent on foreign aid than it was already. But the interest of the donor community would diminish.

So, despite its separate existence for more than a century, there might well come a time when reincorporation became a serious option. I had encountered considerable concern in Maseru about the possible ill effects on Lesotho of majority rule in South Africa and an uncomfortable awareness of its vulnerability to changes in donors' priorities.

*In due course, after my visit, elections were held in the presence of Commonwealth observers, the BCP were victorious and the King reinstated. A year later, in 1996, he was killed in a car accident, to be succeeded by his son, Letsie III.*

*Lesotho's history since then is too complicated for quick summary. Elections, party splits, further attempted coups, military intervention and mediation by South Africa and Botswana, have punctuated the country's troubled course. In 2017 Tom Thabane was sworn in as Prime Minister following the electoral victory of the All Basotho Convention and its political allies. But in 2020 Thabane stepped down as Prime Minister following months of pressure after he was named as a suspect in the murder of his ex-wife. The Finance Minister, Majoro Thomas, took over as Prime Minister in May 2020.*

*There is now - in 2017 - no resident British High Commission in Maseru. The British High Commissioner to South Africa is also accredited to Lesotho. As Dame Judith Macgregor said in her accreditation address in 2014, "this does not lessen the importance we place on our bilateral relationship. Our engagement remains strong." I would have said the same in her place...*

## SWAZILAND

### Swaziland, January 1972

At independence in 1968, Swaziland had been given a Westminster-style government, although King Sobhuza II was the lynchpin of government and in practice ruled the country. This was the situation at the time of Lord Lothian's visit, the first of a British minister since independence. Lord Lothian met all Ministers but one. The King himself was unavailable, being in seclusion for the traditional "Festival of the First Fruits," the most important annual national celebration. Discussions were dominated by education, land purchase and development and relations with South Africa. The Prime Minister

explained Swaziland's opposition to apartheid and hoped the country would be able to show that a non-racial policy could work; but they were opposed to any form of boycott of South Africa given the damage that it would do to Swaziland itself.

### **Swaziland, 1972 to 1993**

*The year after Lord Lothian's visit, in 1973, the King banned all political parties and instituted the present absolute monarchy. Sobhuza II died in 1982, when he is said to have become the longest serving monarch in world history. In 1986, after a regency, his son, King Mswati III ascended the throne.*

### **Swaziland March 1993**

Old friends from our Pakistan posting, Brian and Libby Watkins, greeted me in Maseru and had laid on a busy top-level programme. Unsurprisingly in such a small Commonwealth country, Brian, as High Commissioner, enjoyed excellent access to the King and his Ministers and took me to call on all the main figures.

We spent 1 ½ hours with King Mswati III. I had been told that, although young and inexperienced, he had been learning fast since he came to the throne in 1986, straight from Sherborne School in Dorset. He had a British private secretary, funded by the ODA whose influence was helpful but who, inevitably, was viewed with suspicion by the traditionalists and others for his privileged access to the King. I agreed that we should look for a successor in due course.

The King seemed to be committed to try to lead the country towards a more representative form of government. I encouraged him in this and urged the lifting of the state of emergency and the 60 day detention law introduced by his father. Only in the first five years of its independence, from 1968 to 1972, had the country had a more or less democratic system. Elections, albeit of an indirect non-party variety, were due to be held later in the year, under a constitution designed as a compromise between western-type democracy and traditional Swazi structures in which power lay mainly with the royal family and the chiefs. I thought at the time that this compromise wouldn't last and that internal pressures for multi-party democracy, already apparent among opposition figures, would prove irresistible within another five years or so. Indirect elections were indeed held later in 1993; but I was to be proved wrong about the likely future speed of future democratisation. It was much slower than I had expected.

Swaziland too was vulnerable to change in South Africa, although it was richer than Lesotho and less dependent on its big neighbour. 80% of its imports came from South Africa to which it sent two thirds of its exports. As in Lesotho, Swaziland stood to lose if South Africans replaced foreign migrant labour in the mines under a majority government; and when the Customs Union was re-negotiated. With the ending of international sanctions, it would probably also lose its comparative advantage over South Africa as a home for foreign investment.

During my visit, I added my voice to those pressing for measures to stimulate private investment. Although the King himself, as well as the Prime Minister and Acting Finance Minister, all agreed that more was needed on this, none of them seemed able to force the necessary legislative and regulatory change through a reluctant bureaucracy. The Governor of the Central Bank clearly had an important point, too, when he told me that any attempt to set up a “one stop shop” for investors risked simply adding “another stop shop”.

British, including CDC, investments in Swaziland were substantial at some £350 million. Trade was in Swazi favour: £2.6 million of British exports against £38 million imports. There were said to be some 6,000 British citizens in the country. Otherwise, as with other front line states, our political interest was diminishing with the approach of majority rule in South Africa. But we would no doubt continue to feel a moral commitment to a relatively poor Commonwealth member, though Swaziland’s agriculture made it richer than many. And here too the credibility of our “good government” policy was being tested. Moreover, it had a voice at the UN, was a member of the OAU, played a significant role in the Southern Africa Development Council, of which the King would shortly become chairman. In short, UK interests justified our present level of attention.

But the resources we deployed to promote our interests in Swaziland were formidable. The High Commission had five home based staff; the British Council was represented; we were spending nearly £3 million in aid; and we had military and police training programmes. All this gave Britain a powerful and prominent local position which gave us considerable weight in the country. I could not imagine that we would be able to sustain this level of attention once majority rule had settled down in South Africa.

*And so it has proved. As in Lesotho, the British High Commissioner to South Africa is now - in 2020 - also accredited to Swaziland where King Mswati III remains a largely autocratic monarch, whose extravagance occasionally catches the headlines. He re-named the country Eswatini in 2018.*



**Map of Indian Ocean islands off East Africa**

## **CHAPTER 12**

### **THE INDIAN OCEAN**

Less than a month after my return from a visit to West Africa, I flew to Africa's offshore islands in the Indian Ocean: first Madagascar, then Mauritius and the Seychelles. For the only time in my AUSS travels, I expected smiles of envy from my colleagues when I got back to the FCO.

#### **MADAGASCAR**

##### **Madagascar, pre-1993**

*After gaining independence from French colonial rule in 1960, Madagascar had continued its close political and economic relationship with France until 1972. But then popular unrest, culminating in an army coup, led to the election of Vice Admiral Didier Ratsiraka and to a Socialist-Marxist Republic closely aligned with the Eastern Bloc. Large parts of the economy were nationalised. Inevitably the*

*economy collapsed and living standards suffered a sharp fall. Ratsiraka was forced to restore a market economy and introduce democratic reform.*

*My visit in 1993 came shortly after Ratsiraka's nearly twenty year rule had ended with his defeat by Zafy Albert in the Presidential elections.*

### **Madagascar, June 1993**

I spent four unforgettable days in this extraordinary country after managing to get a good sleep in my Air France night flight from Paris. Luckily there was less turbulence than over central Africa, as I discovered half-way that my seat was not firmly anchored to the cabin floor.

Britain had only a two-man Embassy in Antananarivo, led by Peter Smith, who told me he was an old friend of Linda Chalker. Peter and his deputy, Christopher Poole, had excellent access to senior Malagasies and I was able to meet the newly elected President (Zafy Albert), the Minister of the Armed Forces, other leading Malagasy figures, as well as foreign diplomats, aid personnel and the small British community; and to give a press interview. My programme also included visits to the nineteenth century Queen's Palace (full of evidence of the links between Queen Victoria and the Malagasy Royal Family); the botanical gardens and zoo, to bring home the fact that 80% of Madagascar's flora and fauna were found nowhere else in the world; a Mauritian-owned textile factory; and the offices of QIT FER, RTZ's subsidiary, which was planning to invest \$300 million in mining titanium ores in the South East of the island if it could agree satisfactory conditions with the Malagasy Government. A walk through local villages and rice fields and a Sunday trip to Lake Mantasoa, some two hours drive from Antananarivo, showed me something of life outside the capital, including the thin two-storey brick houses which were such a distinctive feature of Malagasy domestic architecture.

Like so many African countries during my time as AUSS, Madagascar was in transition from one-party rule to multi-party democracy. The former dictator, Ratsiraka, who had begun his career as a revolutionary socialist leader in 1975, had conceded multi-partyism in 1990. In the February before my June 1993 visit, he had lost the second round of Presidential elections to Zafy Albert, a mild mannered surgeon, who had successfully presented himself as a man of the people but who, according to the French Ambassador, lacked the necessary political skills to rule effectively. His political trademark was a battered old straw hat. Peter Smith's and my appointment with him took place on the same day as the last Cabinet meeting of the transitional Government at the Palace of Ambohitsorohitra. To judge from the sounds of merriment that came through the door of the ante-room where we were waiting next-door to the Cabinet Room, the mood of that last Cabinet must have been relaxed and convivial.

The political situation at the time of my visit was unclear because the full results of the legislative elections held two days earlier, and therefore the identity of the new Prime Minister and his Ministers, were not yet known. It was therefore too soon also to know how effective and stable the new Government would be and what specific policies they would adopt. Some observers feared that political stability would be threatened by the Malagasy temperament. Malagasies were said to be suspicious and jealous of each other, resentful of others' success, fearful of responsibility; and therefore incapable of concerted action. This was said to be true even within ethnic groups, still more between them. In particular there was deep distrust between the highland tribes (mainly Malay and Indonesian

in origin) and those living on the coast (where African blood predominated). According to the French Ambassador, the arrogance and superiority of the Merina aristocracy in Antananarivo towards the “cotiers” had to be seen to be believed. Not an obvious recipe for political cohesion.

As in so much of Africa, the economy was a mess. Between 1970 and 1992, GDP per capita had fallen by some 40% to \$240, the same level as Sierra Leone’s, and was now one of the lowest in the world. Total debt had reached \$3.7 billion in 1991 and debt service obligations equalled a third of export receipts. A combination of bad management, corruption and falling revenue from its main exports (coffee, vanilla and cloves) had been mainly to blame. The basic institutions of the state - army, police, judicial system, customs, universities and civil service - had virtually disintegrated. The business environment was difficult. Telecommunications and roads were in a state of collapse. The French Ambassador, a sophisticated “enarque”, who received Peter Smith and me in his large Embassy befitting France’s importance in the country, told us that, in his view, the time had come for France to call a halt. It should either pull out altogether, since it had so little to show for its aid over the years, or insist on radical changes of policy and men as the price for continued assistance. My heart warmed to his frankness as he laughed ironically when I asked him what French policy was: “How delicate of you even to ascribe a policy to us!”

And yet the country had considerable agricultural, mineral and hydro electrical potential. Its population of 12 million plus was individually able and learned quickly, even if they couldn’t work together. Literacy rates were said to be surprisingly high (86% for men and 68% for women, although perhaps lower by 1993). The quality and productivity of the workforce in the Mauritian-owned textile factory we visited were higher than those in equivalent factories in Mauritius itself. And the new President had already formed a team to negotiate with the IMF and IBRD for resumption of the structural adjustment programme. I met its head who had worked for the World Bank for 20 years. The President assured Peter Smith and me that the team would be leaving for Washington soon; and that he fully understood the importance of laws to encourage and protect foreign investment. The IMF, on the other hand, questioned whether the new Government would be willing to accept the tough measures needed to control government expenditure, tackle privatisation, control inflation, clean up the banking sector, enforce tax collection etc etc. Others, including the US Embassy and UNDP were less pessimistic - or perhaps wishful thinkers.

It was therefore just conceivable that Madagascar might be approaching a turning point in its political and economic fortunes. Certainly it would be premature to write it off before we saw the quality of the new Government and the outcome of negotiations in Washington. At best, however, recovery would be a long slow process, lasting decades not years.

Scarcely a Malagasy I met failed to acknowledge the warmth of our historical relationship in which there were two elements. First, Welsh missionaries introduced Christianity to the island in the early nineteenth century. Indeed 1973 was the 175th anniversary of their arrival. The Archbishop of Canterbury’s recent visit to Antananarivo had, incidentally, been a notable success. Secondly, unlike the French, we did not colonise Madagascar but treated it as a sovereign equal. Hence the significance of the old photographs and letters in the Queen’s Palace on a hill above the capital recording exchanges of emissaries between Queen Victoria and the Malagasy Court. One of The Queen’s letters on display spoke of Britain’s desire to trade with Madagascar. It could have been written today. This sentimental

attachment still helped open doors for us in Madagascar. In my speech to the Anglo-Malagasy Society Annual Dinner after my return I quoted a Malagasy proverb: "Marriage is not tied by a tight knot but by a loose knot". I added my own gloss: "The bonds between us may be loose but they are no less strong for that". This sort of comment seemed to go down well with the Malagasies.

As I told the President and, later, the Anglo-Malagasy Society, there were three strands to the cooperation between us. First, Britain maintained a small bilateral programme of technical and financial assistance. Worth £500,000 p.a. it focussed on English Language Training, environmental projects, locust control, drought relief and a gifts scheme. We had also provided several hundred thousand pounds worth of help following the cyclone disaster of February 1994. Secondly, as members of the European Union and other multilateral organisations, we contributed to the development of Madagascar through multilateral channels. I reminded the President that one of the yellow stars on the blue European Union flag was in reality a Union Jack. Peter Smith later told me that the President had remembered this last remark and quoted it back to Peter. The third strand in our cooperation, I told the President, and most important, was Britain's contribution to the Malagasy economy through trade and investment.

The Malagasies were under no illusions that we could play more than a modest part in their recovery. Indeed the President said that he had been told (no doubt by the French Ambassador) that we had no real interest in Francophone Africa. I disabused him of this as best I could.

Taking stock of our interests in Madagascar, I compiled the following list:

- Trade: We were well placed to increase our market share of 7.3% if the economy recovered and we could persuade British businessmen to take the market seriously. British annual exports might be only some £9 million; but could grow significantly if the Embassy's ground work in recent years bore fruit.
- Investment: RTZ wanted our help in getting Malagasy agreement to the right terms for their ilmenite mining venture. I raised this with Zafy who agreed that the project would give the right signals to other potential investors.
- Political: Madagascar was a helpful, moderate, pro-Western voice in the UN, OAU and the Indian Ocean Commission; and could exercise a restraining influence on Mauritian claims to the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.
- Aid: we needed to ensure that our share of multilateral aid was well spent.
- Environment: we shared a general international interest in the protection of Madagascar's unique environment, in which British scientists and environmental lobbies were showing increasing interest.

Our mini-mission of 2 home based and 7 local staff cost £278,000 in 1991/92. This seemed to me excellent value for money. I thought we should maintain it for at least five more years. If, by then, present investment and trade prospects had not borne fruit, we might have to re-consider. But this was not the time to withdraw, just when a democratically elected government was about to take office; and economic reform was in hand. Indeed, having closed and re-opened in the 1970s, a second closure would look oddly inconsistent.

My closing words to the Anglo-Malagasy Society dinner were intended to match the mood of the occasion. They also reflected a personal feeling as my association with Madagascar neared its end: "May the rich diversity of Madagascar never diminish. May the political transition succeed. May trade prosper to our mutual advantage. May the relations between our two countries remain as warm and as friendly as ever."

*Zafy Albert's Presidency lasted only until 1996 when he was impeached for corruption and abuse of power. Ratsiraka emerged as President again. Further political turbulence ensued. Hery Rajaonarimampianina's election as president in 2013 brought fresh hope of political stability. But his supporters and opponents remained at loggerheads. In the 2019 elections he was replaced by his old rival, Andry Rajoelina.*

*In 2005, the Labour Government closed the resident British Embassy in Antananarivo. In 2012, William Hague announced its reopening to send a strong signal about Britain's interest in and engagement with Madagascar, its Government and the wider region.*

*The Queen's Palace and other nearby buildings were burnt down in 1995 in what may have been arson. The work of restoration continues. I fear that Queen Victoria's letter on trade will not have survived.*

## **MAURITIUS**

### **Mauritius, pre-1993**

*Mauritius had been a success story since independence from British rule in 1968. It had enjoyed both political stability and impressive economic development under democratically elected governments.*

### **Mauritius, June 1993**

I had not visited Mauritius before. It was an astonishing contrast to black Africa.

Although John Harrison had only just arrived in Port Louis as High Commissioner, he and Jenny were well into their stride; and I had a full and varied programme. It included calls on Sir Anerood Jugnauth, the Prime Minister, the Acting Foreign Minister and Minister of Economic Planning and Development; and on the opposition Labour Party. I also met Cassam Uteem, the President of Mauritius at a British Council presentation on drug and alcohol abuse; and the Chief Justice. I visited Parliament and heard part of the debate on the 1993 budget. I met British businessmen and saw some of their investments, including a Lonhro sugar estate, a textile factory (supplying shirts to Marks and Spencer) and a department store owned by Courts. I visited the port and met the Sir Alexander Gibbs consultants on the port's development. I saw the British Army Training Team and the Special Mobile Force which was the nearest Mauritius got to an army.

Since I had last had anything to do with Mauritius in the early 1970s, I found that its fortunes had been transformed. At independence in 1968 its prospects had looked poorer than many, with excessive dependence on sugar, its single crop; potential inter-communal strains; and a GNP per capita of US \$195. Things hadn't improved much by the early 1980s, when unemployment had been some 40%. But

since then success had been dramatic. Economic growth had averaged 7% over the previous five years. There was full employment. Sugar dependency had fallen to less than 30% of exports by value, thanks mainly to the Government's success in attracting industry, particularly textile manufacturing, to the Export Processing Zone, and the growth of tourism. GNP per capita now exceeded \$3,000, putting Mauritius well into the category of middle income countries.

I was impressed to learn how Mauritius had achieved this revolution in its fortunes.

The Minister of Economic Planning told me that democracy had been the key. The prospect of office had taught the Opposition responsibility. And the Prime Minister, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, said that the donors had been right to link aid to good government. Most Mauritians seemed to agree. Democracy was indeed well established. Even though the Opposition had only 5 out of 62 seats in Parliament, their chance of power was not hopeless because the Government coalition could break up. The Opposition were still involved in the political process, even though they complained to the High Commissioner and me that the last elections had been rigged. I heard no convincing evidence that democracy was at risk in Mauritius at present.

The Prime Minister told us that racial and religious harmony had been an important part of success. I found it remarkable that the mixture of Indian Hindus and Muslims, Creoles (descendants of African slaves), the families of the original French settlers, and a few Chinese had not proved as combustible as racial mixtures elsewhere. Some I spoke to gave credit for this to the fact that no group was indigenous: all had come from outside the island. Others spoke of the tacit understanding that existed not to discuss in public matters likely to offend other groups. The harmony seemed to come not so much from integration, although there had been plenty of inter-marriage, as from each racial group keeping itself separate. Looking down on Port Louis from the old British fort, our guide pointed to the separate Muslim, Hindu, Chinese and Christian quarters of the city.

The Minister of Economic Planning also spoke of plain good luck. He meant particularly the luck that the population had included so many Indian traders with an innate understanding of what the private sector needed in order to thrive.

Democracy, racial harmony and good luck had all contributed to success. So had good government in its narrower sense of good administration. At the time of my visit, Mauritius had had only two Prime Ministers in its 27 years of independence: Jugnauth and Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam who I remembered meeting with Lady Tweedsmuir in London in the 1970s. Both had been reasonably effective, moderate and uncorrupt (though there had been worrying signs of growing corruption lower down). They and their Governments had followed sensible market-based economic policies and had been prepared to adapt them as circumstances had changed ( a point made to me by the US Charge d'Affaires). There was no fundamental difference between the political parties on the right policy: indeed the Opposition claimed to us that the Government had stolen their policies. Proper priority had been given to education and training. And population growth had been kept under control. At about 1% p.a. it was in striking contrast to elsewhere in the region.

Finally, the foundation of economic success had been built on sugar and its guaranteed access to the European Community under the Lome Conventions. Without that asset, Mauritius would not have achieved what it had. And, although diversification was also vital, access to the European market would continue to be important, as would the price of sugar about which I found some concern: in 1992/93 the EC sugar price had been frozen for the eighth consecutive year.

This rosy picture did however need some qualification. Inflation was expected to rise to 13 or 14%. The world recession had taken its toll. Dependence on sugar was still excessive; and the industry was not among the world's most efficient. Lohnro blamed overmanning, by as much as a third, on the Government which kept too tight a control of the labour market. In other parts of the economy, labour was short. Coats Viyella, for example, were having to import women from China on two-year contracts to sew shirts for Marks and Spencer. A further weakness was that Mauritian productivity and quality of workmanship were lower not only than Far Eastern standards but also than those of nearby Madagascar, to which textile and other companies were beginning to switch their operations.

I heard some talk also of possible growth in trade between Mauritius and South Africa, following majority rule there in 1994. But both South and indeed Southern Africa would probably be too preoccupied with their own problems, both political and economic, for the foreseeable future.

There was one other cloud on the horizon. The US Chargé described Mauritius to me as a corporate state, by which he meant that Government exercised a dominant role in the economy. The public sector was growing fast. The size and spending power of Government organisations like Air Mauritius, the State Trade Corporation and the Port Authority now dwarfed the private sector. At present they seemed to be quite well run; and the Government to have used its power and position to good effect. But such corporatism had failed comprehensively elsewhere; and I could see no particular reason why, in the longer term, Mauritius should be an exception to the world trend. The growth of corruption might be a sign of worse to come. Meanwhile, however, the corporate nature of the state meant that the Government had an important say in the award of much business. As I left, Shell and BP were waiting to hear who would win the Government contract for the whole country's annual supply of petroleum products. The decision was to be taken in Cabinet.

The Mauritian claim to sovereignty over the British Indian Ocean Territory and the continuing US need for their base in Diego Garcia gave Britain a strong interest in a good relationship with the Mauritian Government. Jugnauth had attacked our position at CHOGM in 1991. He told me that the issue could be put on one side and need not affect our relations which were, he said, good. In the longer term, however, Diego Garcia seemed likely to cause friction between us.

Otherwise, the list I compiled in my mind of British interests in Mauritius contained the usual items:

- Trade: British annual exports of £60 million accounted for 14% of the market and were rising. But the French share of 36% was much greater. As elsewhere in Africa, British businessmen complained that they could not win contracts against e.g. French and Belgian competition because HMG did not provide associated financial aid as our competitors did. But why should we, now that the Mauritian economy was doing so well?

- Investment: There were private British investments of some £60 million, mainly in banking, hotels, sugar, insurance and textiles. But there was scope for more. The CDC had a portfolio of an additional £22 million; but had closed its office in Port Louis earlier in the year.
- Tourism: In 1992, the High Commission's consular responsibilities included some 27,000 British tourists.
- Political: A member of the Commonwealth, Mauritius was a moderate, largely pro-Western voice on international issues in the UN, OAU and NAM.
- "Good Government": As a model for others of political stability and economic development, Mauritius testified to the credibility of "good government" policies. But I was given a strong message by the Acting Foreign Minister and others that Britain should reward Mauritian good governance by maintaining our aid programme; and that any reduction could jeopardise what had been achieved. I said that economic success naturally had some effect on our bilateral aid which we needed to focus on the poorest countries and that "good governance" brought its own rewards. I also pointed out the contribution that Britain made through multilateral channels and the private sector. Mauritian Ministers probably understood the logic of what I said; but they hoped that we would continue to help with scholarships, technical training and through the British Council.

Given these interests, both political and economic, I could see no grounds for changing our plans to reduce our bilateral aid programme from the £7 million we had given in 1987/88 to £1.2 million in 1995/96. I was however concerned by the MOD's proposal to withdraw the British military training team in 1994. I feared that this might provoke a fresh Mauritian attack on our position on Diego Garcia. As for our High Commission of 6 home based officers, it did not seem over generously staffed, but might need to be reviewed once the whole office was housed in a single new building in the centre of Port Louis as it would be in 1994.

But my final reflexion was about France and was less complacent. Mauritius was said to be the only country in the world where the French language was gaining ground. In this Commonwealth country, there was no English language daily newspaper. French was used officially more often than not, despite English being the official language of Government. The francophone Summit to be held in Port Louis later in the year, at the French Government's behest, would celebrate Mauritian Frenchness. Were we right to view all this with equanimity? If we were ever to erode that 36% of the market enjoyed by France, indeed if we were to protect our own 14%, we should need to show the Mauritian Government that we took the bilateral relationship seriously. We could not afford to be complacent.

*Mauritius has continued its even course of political stability and economic advance. Extraordinarily, only five men have served as Prime Minister since independence in 1968, of whom two (Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam and Sir Anerood Jugnauth) have been the fathers of two others (Dr Navin Ramgoolam and Pravind Jugnauth, the present PM, elected in 2017). The fifth was Paul Berenger, PM from 2003 to 2005. Britain's claimed sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago has come under increasing pressure from the Government of Mauritius and at the UN.*

## SEYCHELLES

### Seychelles, pre-1993

*The Seychelles had started independence in 1976 with James Mancham as President and France-Albert Rene as Prime Minister. A year later, a coup had replaced Mancham with Rene, who had turned the country into a one-party state in 1978. South African mercenaries under Mike Hoare had failed to restore Mancham in 1981; and an army led mutiny had been thwarted. In 1991, two years before my visit, Rene had restored multiparty democracy.*

### Seychelles, June 1993

I left Seychelles to the last in my 1993 tour of the three main Indian Ocean islands off the coast of Africa. I knew little more about it than that Mike Hoare's South African mercenaries, masquerading as rugby players on holiday, had failed in their 1981 coup attempt; and that this Commonwealth republic, with its dozen of islands, was a popular tourist destination. After independence in 1977, the then Prime Minister, France Albert Rene, had ousted the first President, James Mancham, and had established one-party socialist rule. Disappointingly I did not see President Rene as he had chosen the weekend of my visit to re-marry, for the third time.

With the weekend intervening awkwardly, our High Commissioner, John Sharland, had had to fit most of my official programme into a single working day. He included calls on the Minister of Health who was also acting Foreign Minister in the absence of the FM in Cairo; the Principal Secretary of the Ministry of the Environment, Economic Planning and External Relations (the title illustrated how small the Administration was); the Governor of the Central Bank; and Opposition leaders, notably James Mancham, the ousted first President. I met many of the country's leading businessmen at a Rotary Club dinner; and the French and Russian Ambassadors and US Chargé d'Affaires. I visited a tuna fish cannery and met some British aid personnel as well as the 3 home based staff of the High Commission. John Sharland also drove me over a high proportion of the roads of Mahe island where the bulk of Seychelles' population of some 70,000 lived.

My visit came just after a referendum had approved a new multi-party constitution by the solid majority of 73%. Presidential and legislative elections were to be held shortly after my visit and would complete Seychelles' transition from one-party authoritarian rule to multi-party democracy. Rene was expected to win easily because he would benefit from the islands' economic success and also from Mancham's failure to make any significant political impact since his return from exile in 1992, a few months after Rene had announced the return of multi-party politics. Mancham, who looked a bit seedy and rambled in discussion, made it clear to John Sharland and me that he thought that Rene would win. The Reverend Wavel Ramkalawan, leader of another opposition party, the Parti Sesewa, even thought that a Rene victory would be in Seychelles' best interests, given his economic achievements and despite human rights abuses (including the "disappearance" of at least seven of his opponents).

I didn't have any confidence in the quality of multi-party democracy in the immediate aftermath of the elections. It would take time for the State and the former single party to disentangle from each other. The Opposition would probably be heavily outnumbered in the Assembly. Mancham told us that he hoped that a recently established informal committee of himself, Rene and one supporter each would be maintained to discuss problems and policies. He appeared to see this as a way to exercise influence on Rene; but I thought that it might benefit Rene more by helping him to muzzle Mancham. Either way it could be helpful in promoting political consensus; and it could also lead in due course to the emergence of a new generation of younger politicians, impatient with the old leadership and keen to exploit multi-party politics more boldly. For the moment, however, Rene was probably congratulating himself for getting on-side with the CHOGM consensus in favour of democracy at Harare in 1991, while managing, like Rawlings in Ghana and Moi in Kenya, to retain power: an astute manoeuvre assuming it came off. (It did. Rene won the 1993 and subsequent elections and remained in power until he stepped down in 2004).

The economy under Rene had indeed done well. Seychelles had been even more economically successful than Mauritius and now, in 1993, enjoyed a GNP per capita of some \$5,000. Rene could also boast that his socialist policies had ensured that virtually the whole population had benefited: there was for example free health and education. But this prosperity was narrowly based on tourism and fisheries. The Governor of the Central Bank believed that revenue from tourism could increase by some 7-10% annually with the right strategy: continued emphasis on the quality end of the market, a shift into environmental tourism and investment in a gradual increase in hotel capacity. But he admitted that success would depend on the Government's ability to bring security under control: there had been a worrying increase in criminal violence in the previous two years (since, it had to be said, the introduction of greater political pluralism). The Governor saw less promise of growth in fisheries revenue. But our visit to the tuna cannery showed plenty of scope for privatisation to increase efficiency. A licensing agreement with a private Malaysia-based company and US technical management had greatly reduced the operation's loss to the State; and a profitable joint venture was in prospect.

In the short term, the economy faced trouble, with a significant budget deficit caused mainly by over-expenditure on public sector projects, apparently election related. The local Barclays Bank manager estimated that the Indian Ocean Games, to be held in Victoria shortly, would cost over £12 million, much of which would fall on Seychelles, despite assistance from the Chinese and others. Therefore, the Governor of the Central Bank assured us, the first task of the new Government would be to reduce the budget deficit through e.g. the sale of Government assets like land and hotels. But it was not yet clear that buyers could be found.

British interests in Seychelles were insubstantial. Our share of the market might, at 27%, be the sixth largest in percentage that we enjoyed world wide; but it was worth only £12 million. British tourists were growing in number, mainly in the four star hotel class. Seychelles had been politically helpful to Britain over Diego Garcia and in the main international organisations. It cooperated with us in fisheries protection work. Its progress towards democracy had added to the credibility of our 'good government' policies. As a small island state and member of the Commonwealth, it had a historical and moral claim on our support. A BBC transmitter was located on the island to relay broadcasts to East Africa. Unlike the US however, who ran an important satellite tracking station said to have been invaluable in the

(first) Gulf war, we had no strategic interests in the islands, although RN ships visited from time to time for rest and recreation..

My visit provided plenty of evidence that the Seychelles Government were uneasy about the risk of British disengagement. The Acting Foreign Minister hoped that we would recognise their willingness to meet our demands for 'good government' by maintaining our bilateral aid programme. His officials pleaded the cause of Commonwealth small island states and the fragility of their economies. They feared that Seychelles might, because of its relative wealth, one day lose its access to the European Community under the Lome Convention. They stressed the value of the British human resources development programme which included English Language Training and teacher training. As in Mauritius, I had to explain that our bilateral aid had to take account of relative wealth and needs; and that Britain contributed also to Seychelles' economy through multilateral channels, the private sector and CDC investments.

It was too early to tell my hosts that we were planning to reduce British aid from £1.4 million in 1993/94 to £300,000. We could expect further Seychelles' complaints when we informed them of our intentions. But I could see no reason to change our plans. Instead we should ensure that the money available was carefully targeted on priorities like human resource development.

If, as seemed to me might one day become necessary, we ever had to close a resident UK-based mission in Victoria, the French would heave a sigh of relief. Unlike in Mauritius, French was losing the battle against English in Seychelles. This was tough on the French Ambassador and his wife who spoke no English. Happily for Anglo-French relations, John Sharland spoke French. Our businessmen should have been able to exploit this situation and the closeness of our bilateral relationship.

On my long flight home, I reflected that, agreeable as the islands might be for a holiday, their remoteness and isolation made them less ideal as a posting than my FCO colleagues supposed. But, when I reported on my travels, I confessed that I had greatly enjoyed my three day visit.

*Rene continued as elected President until 2004 when he stepped down in favour of the Vice-President, James Michel, who served until 2016 when he was replaced by Danny Faure, also from the ruling party. But in October 2020, for the first time since the country's independence in 1977, the opposition took power with the election of an Anglican priest, Wavel Ramkalawan. The country seems to have left its immediately post-independence troubles behind.*

**THE END**

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