



Sarl Studio

ERIC STOKES

Eric Thomas Stokes 1924–1981

ERIC STOKES was born on 10 July 1924 in Hampstead, London into a Cockney working-class environment. His father, Walter John Stokes, had fought in the Rifle Brigade in the First World War and had been severely traumatised. After the War he was only able to take casual jobs. Eric Stokes's mother, Winifred came from a Welsh Baptist family. Her religious beliefs and love of poetry, strongly influenced the young Stokes. He won a scholarship to Holloway School and received an uneventful education until the outbreak of war, when his school was evacuated from London and he was sent to Towcester, Northamptonshire. Boarded in village houses, Stokes was thrown together with Frank King (MA Christ's College, Cambridge; Headmaster, Highbury Grove School, 1955), the history master of Holloway School, who was a formative influence on his intellectual life and later took him to visit Cambridge. T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, which King recommended to Stokes, seems to have awakened an early interest in travel. As a boy, Stokes had spent much time wandering around London streets and churches which also gave him a strong sense of the lived past. During the War he sometimes hitch-hiked to the capital with friends to observe the bomb damage at first hand. He always retained his affection for London and, in later years, he sometimes took his graduate students on long rambles from one Wren church to the next on the way from King's Cross Station to the India Office Library on the South Bank.

In December 1941 Stokes won an Exhibition to Christ's College, Cambridge to read History.¹ The life of the University was severely disrupted by war but Stokes developed a life-long interest in the History of Political Thought, which was already a major subject in the Historical Tripos. Michael Oakeshott, the philosopher and political theorist, had been a Fellow and College Lecturer at Gonville and Gaius College and was a member of the

¹ Cambridge University Reporter, 24 Dec. 1941.

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History Faculty until 1940. He was to take up this position again in 1947, by which time Stokes had himself returned to Cambridge. Herbert Butterfield was also lecturing in the Faculty and had begun his campaign to return political philosophy and religion to a central place in the analysis of historical change.

In the meantime, however, Stokes was 'tossed casually by war half-way across the globe and brigaded willy-nilly with men of diverse Commonwealth nations and races'.² In 1943 he was called up as an officer cadet and sent by a long and circuitous sea route to India. Avoiding U-boats, his troopship zig-zagged across the Atlantic before passing through the Mediterranean and Arabian seas. Two thirds of the soldiers on board were suffering from dysentery and sunburn by the time their boat finally docked in Bombay in the spring of 1944.

Eric Stokes's years in India from 1944–6 were the formative influence on his view of the world. He found his later periods in Malaya and Africa challenging, but it was India to which he was most attached and where he felt most at home. His experience there taught him the 'conviction, or if you will, illusion . . . that part of the total meaning of things was to be discovered in this encounter with the world outside the European continent',³ especially as this experience lay 'beyond the confines of urban, industrial civilisation'.⁴ In the spring of 1944, he reported as an officer cadet trainee to the Cadet Wing, School of Artillery, India Command at Deolali near Bombay.⁵ Later in the year he moved for further training to Ambala in the Punjab. Stokes was commissioned as a Lieutenant in the Royal Artillery and finally, in early 1945, allotted to the 30th Indian Mountain Artillery Regiment. He spent the first half of 1945 in a Reinforcement Camp for South-East Asia Command at an unidentified location 'east of the Brahmaputra'.⁶ He never set foot in Burma during wartime because the dramatic Japanese surrender intervened.

Mountain artillery units were still an essential fighting arm in the difficult terrain of southern Asia. Yet the spirit of Stokes's new unit seemed to harken back to the days of Kipling's 'Barrack-room Ballads' and the struggles of martial races on the mountainous rim of India. The Colonel under whom he was to serve was reputed to be 'very horsey', disliking 'stinking mechanical vehicles'.⁷ Stokes used to remark ironically that in the 1940s, when the rest of

² 'The Voice of the Hooligan. Kipling and the Commonwealth Experience' in N. McKendrick (ed.), *Historical Perspectives. Studies in English thought and Society in honour of J. H. Plumb* (London, 1974), p. 286.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

⁵ E. T. Stokes [ETS] to Jessie Muirhead [JM], 1 Aug. 1944.

⁶ ETS to JM, 21 May 1945

⁷ ETS to JM, 21 May 1945.

the world was engaged in a death-struggle which was resolved by mass air-bombardment and nuclear warfare, the Indian authorities were still apparently more concerned with uprisings on the North-West Frontier. Pathan millenarian leaders seemed to bulk as large in their strategy as Adolf Hitler or Marshal Tojo.

Stokes was trained by his martinet unit commander as a connoisseur of the pack mules and small horses which pulled the Mountain Artillery over the Indian ranges. He learned that white mules were always to be purchased in preference to brown ones and that the bruising inflicted by falling off them was mild by comparison with the abuse that he received from his superior officers when he did so. He was wary of the mules, which frequently bit or kicked him. But he wrote to his sister, Jessie Muirhead, that he preferred working with the animals alongside Indian troops to the brittle and formal life of the officers' mess.

Eric Stokes's early contacts with Indians made him much more open with his Indian colleagues and graduate students of later days than many of his peers. In 1944 he wrote from India of his pleasure of meeting Indians on equal terms as compared with 'the mercenary servility which is the normal rule here'.⁸ He was always prepared to chide and joke with them in a manner which initially startled, but ultimately charmed even the most prickly members of the Indian intelligentsia whom he later encountered. Here the Subaltern of Mountain Artillery was perhaps of some service to the later historian of India. In one respect, though, Stokes did not put his Indian experiences to the service of his academic scholarship. He learned a considerable amount of Urdu in the Army. His notes for artillery manoeuvres are written in Romanised Urdu, and he received friendly letters from his Indian NCOs in the language.⁹ When he began to work on Indian social history in the 1970s, he never built on this proficiency in spoken Urdu. Perhaps the hiatus had been too long, or the Arabic script was too daunting.

Relatively few of Stokes's letters to his family during these years contain general comments about the situation in south Asia. He records his life as a rigid and often tedious routine, enlivened by games of chess and second rate-American films. To ease the boredom, which was not broken until the unit was ready for action in the very month that the atomic bomb was dropped, he made observations of the tropical night-sky and distantly admired the grace of Indian women during early morning rides around the military stations. His sister sent him *The New Statesman* and *Penguin New Writing* which sustained his strong political and literary interests.

Occasionally Stokes's broader reflections broke through the circumstantial

⁸ ETS to JM, 1 Oct. 1944.

⁹ Letter in romanised Urdu to ETS in London from an Indian NCO (illegible), 1946.

detail of these letters. Visiting Bombay, he was struck by the wealth of Malabar Hill, home of the local elite, and compared it with the poverty of the 'depressed classes or untouchables, the biggest blot on Indian life and a crying condemnation of the caste system which perpetuates it'.¹⁰ He felt the hostility of the residents of the major towns to the British, now clinging to their great south Asian Empire by their finger tips. Walking through the Indian neighbourhoods of Calcutta in his uniform, he realised with 'what cold hatred the politically conscious people (clerks, etc.) regarded me' and felt 'rather like a Nazi officer must have felt, walking along a Paris Boulevard'.¹¹ Visiting Calcutta University's History Department he fell into strenuous debate with its lecturers, trying to persuade them that 'we English weren't such blackguards as they tended to think'.¹² Stokes remained ambivalent about the British Empire, being born into it and yet criticising it from the inside. He remarked that his Calcutta opponents were rational men who could see both sides of the argument. They could hardly be expected to view the British dispassionately. In an abject failure of colonial rule, 'two million peasants had died a mere two years ago'¹³ during the great Bengal famine of 1943.

Stokes was in Delhi, on leave from Ambala, during the visit of the Cabinet Mission in April 1946. This was the British delegation which failed to bring about a final compromise between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, and so paved the way for the Partition of August 1947. At this time he recorded his sympathy for the Hindus in a striking manner. Deploring the preponderance of Muslim buildings in Delhi, he wrote 'From the beginning out here I have been more attracted towards Hinduism than Islam, which I instinctively regard as something alien to India.'¹⁴ He recognised that Hindus and Muslims had lived together in reasonable harmony for a thousand years, and that a considerable exchange of values and practices had taken place. Contemporary communal hatreds were, he thought, not so much a consequence of British policies of divide-and-rule, but resulted instead from 'a growing knowledge of and realisation of the past . . . The Hindu is become growingly aware of the devastation of his culture which the Muslims carried out. There is hardly a Hindu temple of any age or note in the whole of the north Indian plain.' These thoughts about Indian religion mirrored quite directly the ideology of the emergent Hindu right wing.

Eric Stokes's early views on Indian religion are also intriguing on a personal level. He recorded his preference for friendship with Muslims. His own strong, but rather abstract Christian convictions might have been expected

¹⁰ ETS to JM, 15 Dec. 1944.

¹¹ ETS to JM, 24 June 1945.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ ETS to JM, 3 April 1946.

to find a sympathetic echo in Islam, as with many Britons who disliked what they took to be the 'idolatry' of Hinduism. But here we begin to glimpse the attraction to paradox and ambiguity which was an important component of his attitudes. Having read some of the Hindu scriptures in translation, Hinduism itself appeared to him to be a congenial religion of paradox and diversity. Complex to the end, he finished the letter to his sister about Delhi's architecture by wondering if he had been too harsh about Muslim culture.

Caste divisions also seemed to be a critical feature of Indian life to Stokes at this time. On an earlier visit to Bombay, Stokes had speculated that there was a good chance that 'when the British bayonets left India' the wealthy Parsi Zoroastrian community of Bombay might be subject to 'a scourge greater than the pogroms of the Middle Ages' from a revolution of the untouchables.¹⁵ His attitudes mirrored the conventional British view that Indian society was irrevocably split on the lines of caste and religion and that the Raj was the only thing that lay between India and anarchy. That view was at least plausible in the last two years of British rule.

The young British officer's casual observation of the strong communal divisions which permeated the Indian Army confirmed these judgements of racial essence. Stokes noted that the Mountain Artillery regiments took the pick of Indian troops, especially 'Sikhs and [Muslim] Punjabis. The former are definitely more clever, but the Punjabis are easily the most lovable.'¹⁶ He also wrote that he had intervened in a dispute between a Muslim Sanitary Havildar and a Hindu Gurkha soldier who complained that his food had been polluted by the Muslim.¹⁷ In Malaya in the following year, he complained that his Ahir troops were to be replaced with Dogras (Kashmiri Hindus). The Ahirs (pastoralists and peasants from north India) 'are not soldiers by instinct, and hence need a lot of supervision' but 'they were very likeable individually'.¹⁸

When, in the early 1960s, Stokes first began to write on Indian social as opposed to intellectual history, he still thought of castes and religions as concrete and sharply defined social units. His later experience of the African 'tribe' had already raised many questions for him about the ultimate value of these colonial social categories. But the early analyses of the Rebellion of 1857 tend to describe the castes as the major actors.¹⁹ In the 1970s, however, he was to be influenced at Cambridge by the social anthropology of Edmund Leach and Stanley Tambiah, which held that castes were not the hard-edged entities that Stokes had once thought. Close reading of British Indian revenue and

¹⁵ ETS to JM, 15 Dec. 1944.

¹⁶ ETS to JM, 15 Dec. 1944.

¹⁷ ETS to JM, 8 May 1945.

¹⁸ ETS to JM, 8 Feb. 1946.

¹⁹ Eric Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj. Studies in agrarian society and peasant rebellion in colonial India* (Cambridge, 1978), preface; cf. pp. 140–84.

rent-rate reports of the nineteenth century was to convince him that factions and interests within broad caste groups were the most important units of analysis.²⁰ In this respect, he was to quietly move from the colonial to the post-colonial in his own thinking.

Meanwhile, in India Command, Stokes noted what he regarded as the ominous failure of the Army to recognise Victory in Asia Day (15 August 1945). He speculated that units such as his, which had recently finished their training, would be used to reoccupy the former south-east Asian territories of the British Empire. In the event, his unit left Bangalore on 21 September 1945 and carried out occupation duties near Rangoon and Bangkok. It was finally stationed in Malaya for a brief period in early 1946. Here its main duty was to disband the Indian National Army, the force which had been raised by the nationalist leader, Subhas Chandra Bose, to fight alongside the Japanese against the British.

Stokes's first introduction to Malaya, where he and his wife were later to spend five years, was not auspicious. The country had been wrecked by warfare; rations and commodities were hard to come by. Stokes also felt the people of the Far East were 'inscrutable' and never imagined forming the links with them which he believed he had developed with Indians.²¹ Yet he thought that he had had a 'very easy war' and had missed 'very sticky' fighting on the Burma Front by the 'skin of his teeth'.²² Writing from the Royal Artillery Mess in Peshawar on 22 July 1946, he remarked that, despite the heat of the North-West Frontier, he would have preferred India to the grim England of 1946, but Cambridge would probably not keep open his place unless he returned for the Michaelmas Term 1946.

Another consideration dampened Stokes's interest in going home. A confirmed democrat of twenty one years of age in the days of Attlee's popular government, he nevertheless wrote that he would find it a great wrench to break with 'a society where relations are still unmarred by twisted views of equality' which prevailed in the West.²³ Dealing with Indian troops, who looked to the British officer for their welfare and happiness created 'a very happy, idyllic relationship' so different from the 'national and class struggles' of Europe. Such romantic and paternalist attitudes had been essential to the British Empire and explain why so many of its servants found it difficult to live in post-war Britain, preferring Africa or Australasia. In Eric Stokes's case, they also chimed with his continuing interests in Michael Oakeshott's ideas,

²⁰ Eric Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj. Studies in agrarian society and peasant rebellion in colonial India* (Cambridge, 1978), preface; cf. pp. 140–84.

²¹ ETS to JM, 8 Feb. 1946.

²² ETS to JM, 15 Aug. 1945.

²³ ETS to JM, 8 Feb. 1946.

the role of Victorian idealist philosophy in the British Empire and the poetry of Tennyson or Kipling.

Demobilised under an early release scheme, Stokes returned to Christ's for the Michaelmas Term 1946 along with so many other members of the wartime generation. History teaching at Christ's had been galvanised by the arrival there as Fellow of J. H. Plumb, who had worked in intelligence during the War. Stokes was to take Plumb's special subject in Part II of the Tripos and was also supervised by Anthony Steel, the medieval historian. The moral and intellectual life of the University had been transformed more broadly by the return of hundreds of mature and experienced men and women. Acutely aware of the loss of life and promise they had witnessed, they were determined to make every moment count.

Stokes pursued his academic interests in British History and the History of political theory. He was inspired by Plumb's lectures on the eighteenth century and Pevsner's on English architecture, besides following the lectures of David Knowles, Michael Postan, Helen Cam, John Saltmarsh, and Edward Miller. His growing interest in the peasantry, in sharp contrast to his concerns in intellectual history, was also galvanised by reading Marc Bloch's studies of France.

The returning 1946 year included Charles Parkin, whom Stokes had met in India (Fellow and College Lecturer, Clare College, 1948–83) and Frank Spooner (Fellow, 1951–7, later Professor of Economic History at Durham, 1966–85) who became close friends of his. Parkin was another enthusiast for the History of Political Thought and later wrote on Edmund Burke. Other contemporaries and later correspondents were 'Bill' E. T. Williams (later Warden of Rhodes House, Oxford), James Mossman (later Foreign Office Intelligence and foreign affairs journalist) and Kenneth Ballhatchet (later Professor of History at SOAS, London University). Christie Eliezer, a Tamil mathematician from Sri Lanka was also a close friend with whom Stokes was to serve in Malaya. All these men helped develop his historical interests. The letters written between them over the next two decades ranged over politics, religion, and current affairs. Almost Victorian in tone, they are testimony to high-minded ideals of scholarship and service and to a day-to-day literary stylishness, which are now difficult to reproduce.

Two other important developments occurred at this period. In 1947 Eric Stokes, who had always been of a questioning but spiritual frame of mind, was confirmed as an Anglican Christian in Christ's College Chapel. The officiating priest was Canon I. T. Ramsey, an important influence on Stokes's religious life. About this time, he met Florence Mary Lee, then a student teacher at Homerton College, whom he married in 1949. They were to bring up their four daughters in Malaya and Rhodesia.

After graduation in 1949, Stokes's experience of India and interest in the

history of political thought drew him, by a stroke of cleverness, to combine two fields that were to become very significant in post-War Cambridge: extra-European history and the history of political thought. He began to work on the influence of James Mill and the British utilitarians on the government of the East India Company. This work was finally presented as a Ph.D. thesis in 1952 and was published as *The English Utilitarians and India* in 1959. His supervisor in this work was Dr. T. G. P. Spear (graduate of St Catharine's College and Bursar of Selwyn), formerly of the Government of India Information Service in Delhi, who had returned to Selwyn College as Fellow and Bursar after Independence. Spear proved an enthusiastic but somewhat distant supervisor (apparently he did not finally read the thesis in full until after it had been examined in late 1952).²⁴ Spear's own interests in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Delhi fitted well with those of Stokes. One of Stokes's examiners was to be C. H. Philips (later Director of SOAS and Vice-Chancellor of London University), an expert on the history of the East India Company. Philips also proved to be a strong supporter of Stokes throughout his career.

The opportunities for university teaching in straitened post-war Britain were limited. By 1950 Stokes had decided he was unlikely to secure a position in Britain. Now married, he began to look for academic posts overseas. This attracted him because he was acutely aware of the importance of training a generation of local people to occupy positions of responsibility, now that British rule in Asia was ending. At this period, lecturers' posts in the Empire were still dispensed by the Inter-University Board for Higher Education which worked closely with the Colonial Office. Stokes went to London for an interview in answer to an advertisement for a history post in the Caribbean. Instead, on arrival, he was sent down the corridor to the door marked 'Malaya', where he secured a lectureship in the new University of Malaya in Singapore.

The Federation of Malaya (present-day Malaysia and Singapore) to which Eric and Florence Stokes embarked in the middle of 1950 was a different place from the devastated society which he had briefly visited four years before. The region was now beginning to embark upon the long economic boom which was to make it the world's most dynamic economic region. The old colonial society patterned on the Indian model with its huge bungalows, lush gardens, and innumerable servants had been destroyed by Japanese occupation and the horrors of internment in Changi Gaol. It had given way to a more modest, and less racially segregated expatriate community of middle-class people with restricted incomes of whom the Stokes were typical. In the University, European, Malay, and Chinese staff and students lived together. The Chinese element was dominant among the undergraduates, accounting for 564 out of the 859 students in 1951–2. Malay men were better represented on the Arts

²⁴ P. Spear to ETS, 21 Feb. 1953.

side, though Malay women were notable by their absence throughout the University.²⁵

Government policy, too, had changed quite rapidly immediately before the Stokeses' arrival, reflecting Britain's need to cling on in an area of great strategic and economic importance. It was only recently that the authorities had decided to transform the venerable Raffles College, an undergraduate teaching institution, and an associated medical college into the University of Malaya, which was to have advanced English-medium teaching and research facilities.²⁶ The developmental aspects of colonial rule were to be stressed in what John Lonsdale has called 'the imperialism of the welfare state'. The new History Department taught British, European, and Commonwealth history (all of which Stokes tried his hand at). But Malcolm MacDonald, who was both High Commissioner and Chancellor of the University, along with some of his officials, believed that a sense of common Malayan identity should also be fostered.²⁷ Malayan and Chinese literature and some south and south-east Asian history made its appearance in the advanced classes at the University.

Although in retrospective comparison with central Africa, south-east Asia was a relatively open and progressive colonial society, the British authorities faced serious unrest. One local correspondent informed Stokes before he set sail in late 1950 that there were now a dozen murders a day in the Federation.²⁸ He added that it was unsafe to travel beyond Johore Baru a few miles away from Singapore, and that the population 'though not pro-Bandit . . . was certainly not pro-British' and that the authorities were totally incompetent. Soon after the Stokeses arrived in Singapore, they found the city paralysed and in flames following the so-called Maria Hertogh riots (11–13 December 1950).²⁹

Further riots and disturbances followed in the next two years as the Malayan Communist Party mobilised for war against the British. Their insurgency was only brought to an end by the vigorous and authoritarian rule of General Sir Gerald Templer, who instituted the scheme of protected villages to seal off the Chinese squatter farmers from Communist infiltration.

²⁵ Student Statistics, *Magazine of the Students Union, University of Malaya, 1950–52 edn.*, p. 120.

²⁶ Edwin Lee and Tan Tai Yong, *Beyond Degrees. The making of the National University of Singapore* (Singapore, 1996), pp. 81–95; cf. minute, 9 Jan. 1948, 'Higher education salaries, Malaya' Colonial Office Records, 117/160/1, Public Record Office, London.

²⁷ Foreword, *Magazine of the Students' Union, University of Malaya, 1950–2 edn.*

²⁸ D. Fryer to ETS, 27 May 1950.

²⁹ *Singapore, An illustrated history, 1941–1984* (Information Division, Ministry of Culture, Singapore, 1984), pp. 132–3. Maria Hertogh was a Dutch Catholic girl who had been brought up during the war by a Muslim family. Following a law suit over her custody, she was sent to a Catholic orphanage, an event which sparked off mass protests during which eighteen people were killed, signalling growing tension between the colony's different ethnic and religious groups.

In the rich Chinese commercial city of Singapore, these problems seemed relatively distant, the disturbances concentrated up-country in the rubber estates. Living in the protected environment of the University of Malaya, the Stokeses encountered a few radical activists such as James Puthuchear, who was later imprisoned by the authorities. Letters from students and colleagues in other parts of the colony, however, spoke of the tense situation. On the occasion of one riot, the students came to the campus armed with hockey sticks to protect their white teachers from molestation. As a former officer, Stokes joined the local Volunteer Corps. He appears to have believed that the best way to defeat Communist insurgency was to continue the 'Asia for the Asians policy' which had been announced by Malcolm MacDonald.³⁰ Stokes's natural contacts among indigenous intellectuals included people such as Eunice Thio, a lecturer in History, who believed in nationalist political activity, but was hostile to Communist radicalism.³¹ More rapidly than most expatriates, including academics, Stokes had begun to believe in managed, but quite brisk decolonisation.

Stokes's attitudes to Malayan political issues had formed rapidly, and, as in India, he was well ahead of official and expatriate thinking. Yet his ideas were still tinged with idealistic paternalism. In a talk for University Staff he delivered in November 1952 he discussed the 'Basis of a Malayan Nation'. A nation, he wrote anticipating Benedict Anderson's main thesis, was a 'modern community' acutely aware of its own special identity which was created by economic structure and the 'intercommunication of ideas'. Malayan society was a 'frontier society' whose 'main cluster of roots went back less than three generations'.³²

In Malaya, Stokes argued, the sense of 'Malayaness' was initially developed amongst a new class, the upwardly mobile Chinese and Indian immigrants. The problem for Malaya, he thought, was that this middle class mobilisation against the British had opened up a divide not only between the commercial elites, the Malayan peasants and Chinese squatters, but even between the Chinese bourgeoisie and the old Malayan official class.³³ In these conditions 'ancient race prejudice' could flourish as it had done in India where the modern hatred of the Hindu moneylender 'rallied the ancient hostility of religion' to fight on its side and bring about Partition.

In India, though, there was a central administration and a core of nationhood which was strong enough for the British to devolve power to and ready to fight militant Communism. That was not so in Malaya or south-east Asia as a whole.³⁴ The British still had one final task in presiding over the emergence of

³⁰ Stokes to unidentified correspondent, 25 May 1952.

³¹ E. Thio to Stokes, 20 Feb. 1953.

³² 'Malayan Students compared with others, ISS Conference 1952', MS.

³³ 'Basis of a Malay Nation', MS, Nov. 1952.

³⁴ 'Malaya and the Colonial Question in Asia', 1954, MS.

a new, democratic Malaya. A successful outcome had become more likely, he told an Adult Education Class in 1953, as new Chinese immigration had ceased during the War and the new Malay-born Chinese elite was disenchanted with the Communist government in China. Yet racial antagonisms were still so strong that an independent Singapore might have to be created.³⁵ Here Stokes anticipated events nearly a decade ahead, when Singapore finally split from the newly independent Malaysia.

Nevertheless, in 1953 Stokes thought that there was still the basis for a democratic Malay nation which included Singapore. The prospects were brighter than in other Asian societies whose 'hopeless poverty makes freedom meaningless'. It depended largely on how the predominantly Chinese middle class conducted itself. The middle class would need to compromise internally between different races. More important, he thought, it would need to turn its back on its 'gross materialism', which had been intensified by western secularism, and improve its 'moral conduct' through social provision and community development. The British government also had a role here, he thought. It had a duty to do nothing to promote communalism politically. It should not, for instance, institute separate communal electorates as it had done in India. Instead, working with the trade unions it should promote social welfare. It must 'prepare the administration for the transfer of power by ensuring that now Asians of high quality are given training'.³⁶

In a small way Stokes attempted to put these ideals into action in his own sphere of authority. Soon after he arrived, he had noticed that the staff's indigenous servants were housed in cramped and unventilated quarters. He intervened with the University authorities to improve their conditions, though embarrassingly it transpired that they preferred their old quarters to the new, custom-built accommodation created for them. Still the officer of sepoy, he also wanted to provide entertainments and Christmas boxes for members of the subordinate staff to 'improve the general spirit of relationships among us'.³⁷

Biography is easier when the subject retains a straightforward and predictable moral or political position throughout his life. Fundamentally, Stokes probably did remain the Christian idealist revealed by many of his letters. But his intellect was always attracted to paradox and humour and he was constantly on the lookout for an occasion to tease, amuse, or shock his audience. While believing strongly in the historical influence of ideas, he would still sometimes take up a surprisingly materialist, even cynical position. Less than two years after his lecture on the need for a moral basis of Malay nationhood, we find him addressing a pious British Council 'Conference on

³⁵ 'Political Disunity; the historical background', MS.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ 'not sent', 1951

Commonwealth Studies' and arguing that the Commonwealth bond was ultimately based on commercial interest, and nothing more. There was a message here. Britain's 'shrewd commercial instinct' had 'preserved her from those dangerous delusions of power and prestige which have misled other colonial powers'. He presumably had the imminent French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in mind.³⁸

Stokes's desire to shock people from current orthodoxies or pieties mirrored his historian's opinion about the complexity of historical causation. He felt that neither ideological nor economic interpretations of historical events could possibly be sufficient on their own. As he wrote in a Singapore student magazine, monocausal arguments necessarily moved out of the realm of historical explanation into that of political ideology.³⁹

In general, though, it was the problems of building up a young history department, writing lectures to cover much of modern history and taking up once again the history of the English utilitarians in India that occupied Stokes in Malaya. On campus at least, relations between the races were quite good, with Muslims, Chinese, Eurasians and Europeans, working and living side by side. Stokes was distantly impressed by the energy and bravura of its head, C. N. Parkinson, a historian of Asian trade, best known, of course, for Parkinson's Law. Stokes also encouraged students and younger members of the Department to move away from European political History to studies of the local Chinese and Malay communities. Wang Gungwu, one of his students and later friends in the Malayan and Singapore university system, was later to make major contributions to the historical sociology of pre-colonial and colonial south-east Asia which took up in detail some of the issues to which Stokes had briefly alluded in his talks and unpublished papers.⁴⁰

Yet while Stokes himself wrote history about Britain, India, and central Africa, he published nothing significant about south-east Asia. His only historical exploration of the region was contained in lectures on the Malay princes and indirect rule, a form of government which he wrote about more fully in the case of Africa. Why was this? The main reason was certainly that he had not finished revising his doctoral thesis for publication. He also seems to have accepted the common Raj attitude that south-east Asia was really a poor man's India. In an unusually savage review of John Bastin, *The Native Policies of Sir Stamford Raffles in Java and Sumatra* (Oxford, 1957) in the journal *History*, he asserted that Sir Stamford Raffles was 'not a man of settled principle but . . . a mecurial opportunist', who derived anything that was

³⁸ 'Malaya and the Colonial Question in Asia', MS.

³⁹ 'Can History be Objective?', *Magazine of the Students Union, University of Malaya. Sessions 1950-51 and 1951-2*, pp. 56-65.

⁴⁰ Wang Gungwu to ETS, 1 July 1952.

important in his programmes from Indian precedents, which Bastin had supposedly ignored. Bastin responded negatively to this attack, and with some justice.⁴¹ Ironically, the historiography of south-east Asia began to develop quite quickly about the time of Stokes's departure and he unwittingly made some contribution to its development.

By 1954, Stokes was, according to his letters to Charles Parkin, beginning to feel a sense of drift in his life in the University of Malaya. The Ph.D. thesis was passed but not yet published. Cambridge University Press committed an error of judgement by stating that it did not publish dissertations when Percival Spear showed the final draft to them in 1953.⁴² In the meantime, Stokes had neither the leisure nor the inclination to continue the modifications to the thesis which Spear had proposed.

The situation in Malaya was also changing. The Communists had been defeated, but the Malays had emerged in a very strong position. What Stokes had called 'the Gamble on Independence'⁴³ was in train and he may have felt that the future for expatriate academics was less rosy than it had been. Most important, the education of the Stokeses' two children was a looming problem. While educational standards were good in the Federation, many of the British residents, still scarred by memories of Japanese occupation and Communist violence, sent their children home.

Moving out of the colonial into the domestic university world, Stokes was appointed to a lectureship in History at the University of Bristol where he spent the years 1955–6. Stokes found his new colleagues pleasant, but he never really adjusted to the large civic university after the intimacy and novelty of Malaya or the traditions of Cambridge. By comparison with anthropology departments, British university history departments were still disinclined to teach overseas history, even of the constitutional and ideological sort which Stokes then practised.

Distant temporarily from the colonial frontier, Stokes had time in Bristol to consider the relationship between his recent experiences and the political thought which still preoccupied him. He was naturally attracted to the organic understanding of state and society of which Burke was the leading British proponent. He rejected abstract rights theories of the European and socialist tradition. But in view of his experiences of colonial war and repression, he worried about where the state and individual rights fitted into Burke's scheme. Was the expansion of Europe with its injustices, slaughter, and expropriation of native peoples 'natural' in the Burkean sense? 'Do you, like Burke, throw a decent veil over the beginning of states?'⁴⁴ How was the day-to-day repression

⁴¹ John Bastin to ETS, 29 July 1958 and clipping.

⁴² P. Spear to ETS, 21 Feb. 1953.

⁴³ MSS, 1954.

⁴⁴ ETS to Charles Parkin, 23 May 1956.

of the colonial state in Cyprus, Malaya, Kenya (and very shortly Suez) to be reconciled with the idea that power was a gift from God to the rulers?

The contemporary study of political ideas in Britain seemed to have little to say on such matters. 'What in your view', he asked Parkin, 'is the relationship of the academic study of historical ideas to our own political situation?'⁴⁵ Ultimately, Stokes must have answered himself. Direct action in their appropriate spheres by educated men, inspired by the best of both the liberal and the organic traditions, was the most that could be hoped for. Besides, Stokes was suffering 'regret and nostalgia over leaving Malaya'. Among other things, return to England had checked his fuller acceptance of Christianity and revived some long-standing problems he had about belief in the Divinity of Christ. He sometimes depicted himself as more of a deist or unitarian than an orthodox Christian.⁴⁶ He also began to 'feel deeply that I am not fitted for the life of an academic recluse . . . I would like to make some contribution to the awful African problem.'⁴⁷ It was this thought that went back with him to the colonial frontier in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia.

Despite his staleness with the work and the place, it was during his period in Bristol that Stokes completed most of the revisions to his Ph.D. thesis which was to be published in 1959 as *The English Utilitarians and India*. The work has been called 'a minor classic in the History of Political Thought' (F. Rosen),⁴⁸ and it was received with extremely favourable reviews. One reason for this was its literary quality. It won Stokes a 'Silver Pen Award, 1955-9' from the 'Journal Fund' of New Jersey in the same group as Henry Kissinger, Samuel Huntington, George Kennan, and Ralf Dahrendorf. It also appeared at the right time. Twelve years after Indian Independence, the British were beginning to consider their former south Asian Empire with greater objectivity. Spurred by the centenary of the Mutiny-Rebellion of 1857, Indians were also beginning to reassess the so-called Age of Reform of the 1830s which was thought to have been a prelude to the Rebellion. Most important, the book appeared to show political ideas in action and analyse the first major western attempt to modernise the 'Third World'. It attracted American interest at a time when Americans were in the grip of modernisation theory and beginning self-consciously to take up the 'White Man's burden'.

Inevitably, for a classic nearly forty years old, *The English Utilitarians* has suffered as much emulation as refutation over the years. The metaphor Stokes applied to Robinson and Gallagher's *Africa and the Victorians* applies as well to his own book. Like some ancient and scarred African bull elephant, tusks

⁴⁵ ETS to Parkin, Boxing Day 1956.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ ETS to Parkin, 25 May 1956, not sent?

⁴⁸ F. Rosen, 'Eric Stokes and the English Utilitarians' forthcoming.

splintered, one-eyed, carcass bristling with embedded spears, it still crashes on through the bush. Of the main contentions it contained, the great importance of evangelical thought on the government of Britain and its empire in the first half of the nineteenth century has been continuously vindicated. If anything, Boyd Hilton's *The Age of Atonement* (Cambridge, 1989) and continuing work by Andrew Porter show this theme being extended and developed.

By contrast, the role of utilitarianism in Indian government and Indian revenue systems has appeared to dwindle over time. The earliest line of attack on this idea was from historians of the Indian localities. These scholars showed either that Indian social structures reproduced themselves underneath the turmoil of land-revenue settlements, blunting or rendering insignificant British policy initiatives, or that the British themselves were prevented by their lack of money and knowledge of the country from effecting much change. Yet here some of Stokes's argument can be preserved. The detailed work of Peter Penner⁴⁹ has shown that men of the R. M. Bird and James Thomason school of revenue administration did actually put the 'levelling' doctrines of net-produce rent theory into practice in some districts of northern India. Later work on the history of agrarian Punjab also suggested that broadly utilitarian and evangelical ideas were important, and were acted upon by officials such as Robert Cust and Robert Montgomery.

Another, and more recent line of critique has been directed at Stokes's reading of the domestic context of utilitarian ideas. Lynn Zastoupil has argued that Stokes associated John Stuart Mill too easily with James Mill's position on Indian government. Zastoupil argues that the Younger Mill moved much closer in his views to Burke and the organic tradition which valued the customs and language of subject peoples.⁵⁰ F. Rosen has likewise argued that Stokes relied overmuch on Elie Halevy's view of the utilitarian tradition.⁵¹ This led him to over-emphasise its authoritarian implications and ignore the extent to which both James Mill and Jeremy Bentham drew rigid limits to the exercise of state power by their repeated insistence on the need for representative government.

This still leaves us with the problem of locating the ideological basis of the clear authoritarian and interventionist tone of Indian government after 1818. The answer may lie in the inheritance of the era of Lord Wellesley, whose aggressive aristocratic paternalism, inspired individuals such as Charles Metcalfe without benefit of utilitarianism. Yet Stokes's arguments may still have some force. For instance, C. E. Trevelyan, a key figure in Lord William Bentinck's 'Age of Reform', was nearer to the model of a utilitarian evangelical

⁴⁹ Peter Penner, *The Patronage Bureaucracy in North India. The Robert M. Bird and James Thomason School, 1820-70* (Delhi, 1986).

⁵⁰ Lynn Zastoupil, *John Stuart Mill and India* (Stanford, 1994).

⁵¹ F. Rosen, 'Stokes and Utilitarians'.

and in both India and Ireland, his commitment to representative government was very weak. Controversies such as this demonstrate that it is the capacity of *The English Utilitarians and India* to continue to raise historical questions which marks it out as a seminal work on the history of British government and India.

Before the book's long and somewhat painful gestation was completed, Stokes himself had been translated to another field of imperial crisis. In 1956 the British Government decided to extend its policy of developing higher education to central Africa and founded the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland at Salisbury. Roland Oliver having rejected the Chair of History, the authorities offered it to Stokes, who accepted. But the posting was a difficult one. Florence Stokes remembers that arriving in Rhodesia in 1957 was like 'landing on the moon', a far cry from the cosmopolitanism of Singapore. The journey on the Union Castle Line to South Africa was followed by a three days' train journey up into the High Veld, a reminder of the continuing social and political dependence of central Africa on the huge white bastion to the south. Though the new Principal, Walter Adams (later Director of LSE), met the Stokeses off the train, the University house they occupied was at that time four miles outside Salisbury in deep elephant grass with no telephone or public transport.

These practical problems were dwarfed by political and social ones. This was the period shortly before the acrimonious breakup of the Central African Federation into black and white dominated national units. In Southern Rhodesia the power of the new generation of white settlers who had fled post-war Britain or who were seeking a new beginning outside South Africa was visibly growing.⁵² Racial attitudes were much harsher than they had been in Malaya and black people were treated with barely concealed contempt. Initially, there were no black members of staff at the College. Black students had to pay fees for education beyond the age of eleven unless they were in mission schools while white students had their education free. Blacks were subject to rigorous pass laws which meant, for instance, that the Stokeses' African servants were unable to bring their wives or husbands to stay in the white township, although the law allowed this in the University enclave to which the Stokeses later moved.

Not the least distasteful feature of Rhodesia was that white neighbours in their first housing colony snooped on each other and informed the police of fraternisation with the blacks. African nationalism was rigidly controlled in the colony, but white political activity in sympathy with African aspirations was already growing and was strongly represented among the young British and South African teachers on the Campus. Lecturers from the University who carried out extra-mural classes in the black suburb of Harare, including Stokes,

⁵² See, e.g., Anthony Verrier, *The Road to Zimbabwe, 1890–1980* (London, 1986).

were regularly tailed by police agents. Shortly before Stokes left the Campus in 1963, one of his politically active colleagues in the History Department, Terence Ranger, was deported from the colony by the government of Sir Roy Welensky as white Southern Rhodesia slipped towards the inglorious interlude of UDI and white domination.

As Professor responsible for the future of a major department of a new university, Stokes's attitude was more cautious than that of his activist colleagues. His position was that 'the true British political tradition was the spirit and practice of representative government'. Democracy was still a distant ideal in central Africa because of the great gap in education between rich and poor. But representative government was not, and educated Africans should be rapidly 'admitted to a share of political power' as representatives of all Africans.⁵³ Elsewhere he justified this position by arguing that the genius of the British political tradition was not that of the abstract European Rights of Man, but of 'representative rather than democratic government'.⁵⁴ It was uniquely suited to the type of political gradualism which was needed in central Africa: 'the European is required to enter into close relations with the African, to wrench him from his tribal society, to congregate him in factories and towns, to look to him as a market, to instruct him in western tastes and values . . . For in such attunement lies the preordained harmony where interest and morality coincide.' While Stokes saw this modernisation process as inevitable, he was not sanguine about its results and regretted the rapid destruction of old beliefs and communities.

Stokes's attitudes were not informed only by his reading of political thought. As in Malaya, he was fearful that either a too fast or a too slow advance towards the goal of full representative government would pitch the country into the hands of Communist radicals. He disliked doctrinaire socialism both because it was godless and because it overrode individual rights. On this—and on this alone—he was at one with the Salisbury white oligarchy. He gave several talks to the African Broadcasting Studios. One of these (15 September 1960) was a subtle intervention in the official campaign to counter Communist influence among the black population. He argued that Communist rule in Russia did not mean equality, as some black nationalists were arguing. Instead, the Soviet Government 'deliberately kept wages low and the shops half empty of foodstuffs and household goods in order that Russia might have the world's largest standing army and such expensive toys as rockets to the moon'. The Communist danger was quite real because Africa was 'ripe for the totalitarian messianism of the Right (e.g., Egypt) or the Left'.⁵⁵

⁵³ ETS to Editor, *Evening Standard*, Salisbury, 1 Dec. 1959.

⁵⁴ 'The Meaning of Democracy. Another View', MS, apparently published in the *Central African Examiner*, a journal which catered to 'the less-unprogressive white intelligentsia' of Salisbury (Dr Richard Brown, personal communication).

⁵⁵ 'Political Messianism in Africa', *The Central African Examiner*, 17 Dec. 1960, p. 20; cf. 'Alarums-and-Excursions', *ibid.*, Dec. 1962, pp. 25–6.

On the other hand, the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was a place of considerable intellectual buoyancy, expanding its numbers of history lecturers. As Professor, Eric Stokes had to lecture across an even wider range of medieval and modern history than had been the case in Singapore. His witty, irreverent side relished the 'delightful, music-hall comedy feel to life' as panjandrum in a new but very remote college.⁵⁶ More interesting, it had been in the previous fifteen years that African history had come of age as an academic discipline in African, British, and American universities. Basil Davison's *Old Africa Rediscovered* (1960) and *Black Mother* had given the subject visibility, though Stokes thought that they were somewhat sentimental.⁵⁷

The 'scientific' historical work, however, had been done by Roland Oliver (London) G. P. Murdock (Yale) and many historians in South African Universities. In Salisbury itself, Terence Ranger was taking the lead in charting the history of black experience under colonialism. A British historian from Christ's, Richard Brown set himself to study the pre-colonial societies of central Africa. Clyde Mitchell, head of anthropology (later Professor in Manchester and Oxford) was also a powerful force in departmental politics and, as a friend of Stokes and successor to Gluckman, a firm supporter of cooperation between anthropology and history.⁵⁸ In this he was aided by Jaap van Velsen (author of *The Politics of Kinship. A Study in Social Manipulation among the Lakeside Tonga of Nyasaland* (Manchester, 1964). The ancient historian, C. R. Whittaker, was another who nudged the department towards the study of a broad social history.

With the *English Utilitarians* a recently published critical success, it was not to be expected that Stokes would give up his interest in the influence of ideas on historical change or his Indian concerns. But he devoted some of his time to the history of Zambezi Africa and the government of South Africa. The focus on smaller administrative units, tribal structures and even popular resistance was slowly to move his Indian work, too, in a different direction. He and his colleagues recognised that 'the prevalent trend in historical writing is unquestionably affected by the rise of African nationalism and the belief in the need for examining the African past with renewed sympathy and insight'.⁵⁹

A powerful influence here was the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute which, through the work of the anthropologist, Max Gluckman, and others had brought central Africa into the forefront of anthropological theory. During Stokes's time, two seminal conferences were held. The first, the Leverhulme History Conference (Salisbury, September 1960) brought together historians

⁵⁶ ETS to Parkin, 2 July 1957.

⁵⁷ 'East Africa', MS.

⁵⁸ Personal communication from Dr C. R. Whittaker, 9 January 1997.

⁵⁹ ETS, review of A. J. Hanna, *The Story of Rhodesia and Nyasaland* (London, 1960) MS, 17 Aug. 1960.

and anthropologists, including African intellectuals. Another at Lusaka in September 1963 was devoted to the new African social and political history. Some of the papers at this meeting drew on oral history techniques which were being pioneered at this time by Jan Vansina. Others considered novel topics such as the role of spirit medium cults. The historical role of these cults in the formation of African kingdoms and their resistance to European invasion was highlighted by their contemporary importance in African nationalist movements.

Terence Ranger and Richard Brown were in the forefront of this work, but a new generation of indigenous male and female history graduates of Stokes's department, such as Mutumba Mainga and Lishoma Muuka (later of the Zambian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) also made one of their first appearances before white academic audiences at this meeting.⁶⁰ To Terence Ranger's delight, Stokes had put him in charge of the first History Honours Group of students out of which Mutumba Mainga and several other future Ph.D.s were drawn.⁶¹ In addition to the new African history, a major influence on all the participants in these meetings was the school of British social anthropology. The references in the papers to 'segmentary states' and 'acephalous societies' distantly echo the seminal work of Edward Evans Pritchard. A more direct influence in Salisbury were the South African based anthropologists, Max Gluckman, Meyer Fortes (later Stokes's colleague at Cambridge), and Audrey Richards.

As in politics, so in academic matters, Stokes was a liberal rather than a radical. He approved of the new central African 'school of sociological [i.e. anthropological] history', but seemed to echo Ronald Robinson in arguing that it was 'deficient in analysis' and was condemned to mere antiquarianism unless it elucidated broad, comparative issues.⁶² This was to be a theme in Stokes's later Indian historical writing. On the one hand, he always insisted on full primary documentation. For instance, writing some years before to Parkin who felt that appropriate 'historical explanation' had no necessary connection with primary documentary evidence, Stokes asserted that 'without original sources, there is no feel of history'.⁶³ On the other hand, he believed that all history was essentially comparative history. The comparative element for Stokes was generally supplied by the structures and policies of colonial administrators, even at the level of local administration. In his Cambridge years, he seemed to accept some of Geoffrey Elton's critique of 'soft', social history topics.

⁶⁰ 'Zambesian History', MS.

⁶¹ Personal communication from Professor Ranger, 8 Jan. 1997.

⁶² 'Zambesian History', p. 4.

⁶³ Parkin to ETS, 9 Dec. 1949.

Though he took up anthropological taxonomies of kingdoms and states, Stokes was critical of the concept of culture, which he thought meaningless as an analytical term. In later years he viewed with puzzlement the headlong rush in American studies of India towards what he regarded as essentialising 'ethnohistory'. He had little time for gender studies, believed there were iron limits to the worth of the history of mentalities and paid strangely little attention to religion in his own work. Stokes, however, was in no sense an academic conservative. He always received novel intellectual positions with the fascination of the student of thought. His critique of them was pointed, but rarely dismissive.

In these circumstances, it is not surprising that Stokes's contribution to African historiography was to be largely in examining the micro-structures of central African colonial administration and the taxonomy of the more solidly founded African kingdoms. The book he edited with Richard Brown, *The Zambezi Past* (1966), which issued from the Lusaka Conference, contained a part introduction and two articles by Stokes. This work, like much of what was done in the University College, had arisen out of the need to teach undergraduate special subjects to whites and Africans in Central African History⁶⁴ and to assign archivally-based projects to advanced students.

Stokes believed that he was the only member of the department who did not really 'come off' as an African historian as such. He felt he had spent too much time finishing off his Indian work and running up the successive 'impasses', as he thought, of Milnerism and Indirect Rule. Neither of these produced much published work for him. Milnerism came to nothing because Milner himself seemed *sui generis* in British imperial history, an authoritarian failure who was of little significance compared with the idealist school of Lionel Curtis. Despite copious note-taking, Indirect Rule also seemed a dead fruit, with Lord Lugard himself already having said all that needed to be said.

It was Roland Oliver who pointed Stokes to the issue of the British pacification of central Africa. Stokes, therefore, began to research and write on the fall of Yao power on Lake Malawi and the attenuated survival under British paramountcy of King Lewanika's Barotse kingdom in the far west of the Zambezi Valley. In a retrospective comment of 1974 he argued that these essays were 'period pieces'. Because of their emphasis on the paramount importance of British motives and policies, he felt they defied the trend of Africanisation. This was then running strongly and reached its apogee as far as Barotseland was concerned in Gwyn Prins's, *The Hidden Hippopotamus* (1982).

Even in 1960, however, Stokes believed that it was 'important to preserve the truth that there had actually been a historical phenomenon called imperialism and that European motives and actions still deserved continued study'.⁶⁵ That

⁶⁴ 'History as taught and written at UCRN, 1957-63', *Rhodesian History*, 5, 1974, 1-3.

⁶⁵ 'History as taught', *ibid.*

view has been amply endorsed more recently. For African historians were to come to realise in the following twenty years that to account for African resistance and African social forms, from spirit cults to 'tribes', still required a steady concentration on the nature of European power which moulded them and provided the conditions in which they could reproduce themselves.

Stokes's two essays in *The Zambezi Past* and his contribution to the volume's introduction marks the transition between his early work on the political theory of empire and his later articles on Indian social history. Indeed, until Stokes and T. R. Metcalf began to work on social change in the north Indian regions in the 1960s, there was nothing remotely resembling this style of work in modern Indian historiography. In *The Zambezi Past*, Stokes is happy to concede the importance of African agency. The centralised states of pre-colonial Africa had the capacity and sometimes the will to resist European invasion. Similarly, decentralised or 'acephalous' polities also often threw up long standing resistance movements, he argued. By contrast, it was semi-centralised but segmentary kingdoms which, with their internal divisions, were easy prey to the white conquerors. He later applied some of these arguments to nineteenth-century India.

But such historical sociology could only go so far, Stokes asserted. Purposive European imperialism had also to be taken into account. Analysing Sir Harry Johnston's destruction of the Malawi kingdoms between 1893 and 1903, Stokes noted the practical constraints within which British conquest operated. Given considerable military and political resources, Lord Lugard could afford to crush indigenous resistance quickly in northern Nigeria but then totally recast native authority in the form of 'indirect rule'. The model, Stokes believed, was the Indian experience of Lord Dalhousie's period which Lugard quoted. And the key was not so much the Indian native states, but the operation of British authority in the so-called non-regulation provinces.⁶⁶ In Malawi, Johnston had no such resources. Paradoxically, he therefore set himself to systematically subvert African authority and effect a piecemeal, but complete conquest.⁶⁷ Yet even these practical constraints were not the whole story. Johnston himself was a protégé of the 'aggressive' modernising imperialism of Joseph Chamberlain and the British politicians of the 1890s.

In these essays and other papers, Stokes tried to reach behind the formal distinction between direct and indirect rule. He also sought to distance himself somewhat both from the 'Africanist' theories of his Salisbury colleagues and from the view that 'local crises' explained British policy in its entirety. This

⁶⁶ 'Indirect Rule: expediency or ideology', MS.

⁶⁷ E. T. Stokes and R. Brown (eds.), *The Zambezi Past. Studies in Central African History* (Manchester, 1966), pp. 352–75.

view had been powerfully reinforced by Robinson and Gallagher two years earlier in their *Africa and the Victorians*.

Sometime before completing his Zambezi work, Stokes had already made one final general statement on the role of ideas in the British Empire of the later nineteenth century. His inaugural lecture given in the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1960 was published as *The Political Ideas of English Imperialism*. Thirty-eight pages in length, it stands as sketch for a volume on the intellectual history of the British Empire of the later nineteenth century which he never published. He did, however, do a considerable amount of work on state papers in the UK and Africa and published several preliminary articles which were facilitated by a Rockefeller grant which he received in the late 1950s.

Stokes's inaugural in Rhodesia is particularly illuminating because it is much more self-reflective than *The English Utilitarians* and it ranges over the whole of imperial history rather than focusing on India alone. It begins with a defence of intellectual history or political thought, as he calls it, against the tendency to dismiss ideology as a force in political history which was in full spate with the 'Namierite deluge' of the 1950s and 1960s. Even if Herbert Butterfield's strictures on Namier's view of the eighteenth century lacked force (and they probably did not), Stokes argued, one could not 'take the mind out of the history' of the later nineteenth century when 'classes open to intellectual influences had a much closer hold on political power'.⁶⁸ Despite this rejection of Namierism, Stokes remained fascinated at some level by the notion of political faction and the politics of rational economic man. He was to see the heresy emerge once again in the so-called Cambridge school of Indian political history of Anil Seal and John Gallagher ten years later and often quixotically denounced his own earlier work on ideology as the history of 'one clerk talking to another'. Yet it was this capacity to tack between the politics of ideology and those of practical reason which made Stokes such an interesting historian.

In the *Political Ideas of English Imperialism* Stokes was also reacting against the highly abstract and academic history of political theory represented by the tradition of Bradley, Hobhouse, Sidgwick, and others whose reflections on politics had been removed from the active world of politics to 'the quiet of the College cloister'. His stress on the need to contextualise the work of prominent thinkers in wider and deeper currents of thought echoed the approach of Michael Oakeshott and anticipated, in a minor way, the approach of Quentin Skinner.

In his inaugural lecture, Stokes tried to demonstrate the influence of the idealist thought of T. H. Green and S. R. Bosanquet on imperial ideology. It

⁶⁸ *The Political Ideas of English Imperialism* (Salisbury, 1963), p. 7.

was ironic, he argued, that most of those latter-day Hegelians who articulated the notion of state and society as organic entities girded by sentiment and tradition were liberals in politics, uneasy about imperial expansion (this was, indeed, a description of his own views). Idealist thought was, nevertheless, an important influence on figures such as Lionel Curtis and the Round Table group who, before the First World War, had sought to refound the British Empire on an ideal of trusteeship and insist on the moral basis of imperial power. Aspects of this line of thought were later taken up by Stokes's Ph.D. student, Clive Dewey, who discerned idealist strains in the later nineteenth century discourse among British Indian officials on the ideal of 'village community' and the paternalist traditions of the Punjab Commission.⁶⁹

Stokes also provided some clues as to how he would have developed the history of Utilitarian and 'liberal imperialist' tradition which had been analysed in the *English Utilitarians*. This tradition, more calculating and devoid of sentiment than the idealist one, but equally prone to accept the use of force in the interests of progress was propelled into the later nineteenth century by thinkers such as James FitzJames Stephen and Lords Cromer and Milner who applied the 'policy of thorough' to African government. Stokes saw this tradition bifurcating towards, on the one hand, the ideology of the 'high imperialism' of the 1890s and 1900s, and towards the scientific, eugenicist, and authoritarian socialism of the Webbs and other radicals, on the other. Both these traditions subscribed to national efficiency, though the earlier utilitarian emphasis on the individual being was now supplanted by an emphasis on the individual race.

Two other features of the inaugural lecture were of interest. First, Stokes revealed his deep sympathy with Rudyard Kipling, a topic to which he was to return in his inaugural lecture in Cambridge in 1974. He resented the tendency of the post-war anti-imperialist age to denounce Kipling as a mediocre artist and a mindless chauvinist. In both these lectures he sought to show, as more recent and level-headed literary critics have done, that Kipling's views on race and empire were both more nuanced and more ambiguous than superficial readings suggest. Britain's Empire in this reading was as evanescent as all other despotisms; East did ultimately meet West, but in ways neither intended.

In Rhodesia in 1961 Stokes gave a series of talks on the meaning of University education, alerted to the topic by the teething troubles of the new African universities and colleges. He was also conscious of the debate raging in Britain associated with C. P. Snow's (another Christ's man) thesis about the 'two cultures'. Stokes's theme was the need to support humane teaching and learning in an era when the demand in both advanced and developing societies was for

⁶⁹ See, especially, C. J. Dewey, *Anglo-Indian Attitudes. The mind of the Indian Civil Service* (London, 1993), pp. 7–10.

technocrats and specialists.⁷⁰ He turned back to Sir Walter Moberley's, *The Crisis of the University* (1947) which also argued against over-specialisation. Stokes thought that one great advantage of the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was that it was still intimate enough to remain a community of learning. Stokes also drew upon Cardinal Newman's *On the Scope and Nature of University Education* to argue that 'while liberal knowledge must be morally neutral', each scholar or scientist must comprehend this learning in the light of 'private belief and faith'. The student need not be ashamed to hold fast to 'instinctive truths and elemental loves', even though he dimly perceived their true rationality. Ten years before in Singapore Stokes had argued that the western intellectual tradition derived its dynamism precisely from its rootedness in the security of 'moral and religious agency'.⁷¹ The problem was that the ancient faiths of Asia were being subverted or abandoned, freeing the intellect as a pure principle of power. The danger of the divorce of reason from morality also faced the new African societies. Here again, in Salisbury, the influence of Christian idealism broke surface from under the calm of Stokes's rationalism.

More mundane educational issues, however, divided members of the Salisbury staff. The University College's high admission standards had the inevitable effect of keeping African participation at a minimum. Opinion was divided between those members of staff who argued for a reduction of standards to promote racial integration of the student body and others who felt that this was wrong and that high academic standards were the best gift for London University to bequeath to its African offshoots.⁷² While tending to the latter view, Stokes's combination of humour and moral seriousness as Chairman of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences averted a damaging personal rift in the midst of these passionate arguments. The issue was later resolved by the institution of a pre-A-level course for African students, funded and taught by the University.

Stokes summed up his lived experience of nationalism in India, south-east Asia, and Africa when he wrote for a Rhodesia talk 'a democracy cannot hold down another community against its will . . . a prolonged effort at coercion drives the nationalist movement into the hands of the extremists, so that the final solution is always worse than the one which might have been obtained by negotiation at the beginning'.⁷³ To today's audience this may seem self-evident; to the Salisbury audience of 1962, it was far from so. Milnerism fitted here too. Stokes interpreted Milner as a late embodiment of that utilitarian tradition, welfare-orientated but authoritarian, whose first experiments had

⁷⁰ 'The first year at the University', MS.

⁷¹ 'Malayan Students', MS.

⁷² Personal communication from Professor Terence Ranger, 19 March 1997.

⁷³ 'Nationalism', MS.

been carried out in India in the 1830s. Milner's austere 'priest-like' devotion to duty and the state both attracted and repelled Stokes.⁷⁴ Milner argued that the Boer Republics were hangovers of the medieval world trying to impede the development of the modern. But it was in his time, Stokes thought, that the 'ideal of imperialism' (a term Stokes used in a specific sense) was 'tested and defeated'. The High Commissioner had forgotten the limitations to state action that did not rest on the popular will.

This, however, was not a lesson that had been learned by the white ruling class in Southern Rhodesia. Though Stokes had greatly enjoyed his years at Salisbury and regarded them as a period of service to the broader ideal of a racially blind Commonwealth, he had already begun to look for positions in British universities which were poised to expand once again. In 1960 for instance, he was in discussion with University College London about a Readership there⁷⁵ and had also been approached by J. S. Galbraith about a position in the University of California. By 1963 he was determined to return to Britain.

Political uncertainty in Africa was a major concern. It was clear to Stokes that the racial tensions of central and southern Africa could not be resolved without major conflagrations now that Kenya, Uganda, Nyasaland, and Northern Rhodesia were independent, majority-ruled republics, while the white Rhodesian expatriates clung resolutely to power in Salisbury. The University College, founded to create a cohesive multi-racial ruling elite for central Africa as a whole could not possibly work when nationalism and racism were tearing apart the political environment in which it had developed. As Stokes wrote to Sir Alexander Carr-Saunders (Director of the London School of Economics, 1937–56, Vice-Chancellor, London University) of the deportation by the Federal Government of Terence Ranger, who was regarded as a dangerous radical, 'Terry's expulsion has merely brought to a head the long-gathering crisis. With the Rhodesian Front Victory, the impending break-up of the Federation, and our unpopularity in the [African-ruled] North, the College is now looking into the mouth of that dark tunnel through which, as you expressively said to me, it needs must pass.'⁷⁶

Stokes's attitude to the College's Principal, Walter Adams was ambivalent, but he certainly doubted the wisdom of Adams's 'Napoleonic principle: when in doubt expand'. This was because 'a University cannot operate like a resistance movement and must be in an effective working relationship with the Government of the day',⁷⁷ a view that also divided him from his more radical younger colleagues.⁷⁸ The real tragedy, according to Stokes, was that

⁷⁴ 'Milner and Southern Africa', MS.

⁷⁵ Ifor Evans to ETS, 5 Jan. 1960.

⁷⁶ ETS to Sir Alexander Carr-Saunders, duplicate, 25 Jan. 1963.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Personal communication from Dr C. R. Whittaker, 9 Jan. 1997.

‘the multi-racial ideal on which the College was founded has been rejected—at least in the political sense—by black and white alike’.⁷⁹ The College Council remained, apart from one silent African, completely white and, in effect, dominated by the Salisbury European members. The student body was still overwhelmingly white. The result was the spread of a ‘quiet despair about the future’ among the staff.

The danger Stokes saw was of the fragmentation of university education in central and East Africa into a devalued system in the black north, cut off from its London links, and an embattled white core in Salisbury. The solution which Stokes (and Ranger) proposed was that the College at Lusaka (Northern Rhodesia–Zambia) should be taken into direct communication with London University once the Federation broke up in order to preserve its quality of education. Stokes also felt that the rapid development of a law school in Salisbury might help to recruit able young Africans and preserve ‘the British conception of higher education in central Africa’.⁸⁰ In the event, ‘quiet despair’ was to be a more appropriate emotion; all the institutions in contention would be battered by economic collapse and revolutionary war in the 1970s.

The Stokeses’ decision to return to the UK was also determined by family concerns. The perennial problems of securing a good education for four daughters loomed again. In 1963, therefore, Stokes applied for the position of Lecturer in History at the University of Cambridge and was appointed as a University Lecturer in Colonial Studies from 1 October 1963 to the retiring age.⁸¹ Since he had left the University in 1949, he had kept in close touch with it through his friend Charles Parkin, besides entertaining visiting luminaries such as Ronald Robinson.

Cambridge was unusual among British universities at this time in that its History Faculty regarded Commonwealth and ‘extra-European’ history as a staple of undergraduate teaching. To the older generation of historians of the Commonwealth and Empire such as Nicholas Mansergh and E. E. Rich was now added the dynamic pair of Robinson and Gallagher, whose *Africa and the Victorians* Stokes had both welcomed and critiqued several years before. It was Rich, however, a historian of Canada and Master of St Catharine’s College, who proved Stokes’s strongest supporter and it was to Rich’s College that he returned in the Michaelmas Term of 1963. Stokes followed Oliver MacDonagh as Director of Studies in History and went through the usual *cursus honorum* of College office and committees. Such committees were particularly active as the College engaged in a large and contentious rebuilding programme, expanded its Fellowship and, ultimately, admitted women.

Stokes, though sceptical and impish in his attitude to established authority,

⁷⁹ ETS to Carr-Saunders, 25 Jan. 1963, p. 2.

⁸⁰ ‘A Law School and the Future of Higher Education in Central Africa’, draft MS., 1962–3?

⁸¹ *Reporter*, 31 July 1963, p. 2071.

had always venerated the ideal of Cambridge from afar, 'the sense of generation on generation, the beauty of ancient buildings, the grace of ceremony, the peace of College courts' as he saw it from Singapore in 1952.⁸² Now ensconced in the Fenland town struggling to slough off, in the early 1960s, its Victorian carapace, the romance tarnished somewhat.

Stokes kept in touch with his Rhodesian colleagues, particularly during the events which followed the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965. He continued to be involved in Asian and African issues at the national level as a result of his membership of the Inter-University Council for Higher Education (1972–9), the Indian Committee of the British Council, the Cambridge Livingstone Trust and membership of the Governing Body of the School of Oriental and African Studies. His many research and lecture trips to India also kept him abreast of events in the Subcontinent, and on one of these, in 1977, he became an Honorary D.Litt. of the University of Mysore.

Yet Stokes's life undoubtedly became more sedate and domestic than it had been in the colonies. A moderate reformer as ever, he was more favourable than most of his peers to demands for student representation and an end to formal dining in college halls. With four academic daughters and a resolute wife, he resented the manner in which female guests were excluded from high table and women were denied access to the older colleges. Even at the height of the generally tame student demonstrations which marked the Vietnam era in Cambridge, he urged the Governing Body of St Catharine's 'not to hate the undergraduate'. On the other hand, he was no libertarian. He was hostile to the casual sexual permissiveness which was another feature of this period, believing that it damaged family life, which he greatly valued.

Stokes was elected in 1970 to the Smuts Chair of Commonwealth History in succession to Professor P. N. Mansergh and in 1977 he became Chairman of the History Faculty. His main concern in College and Faculty committees was to promote talent and work for some change in the rather hidebound Historical Tripos. The fact that Stokes was a proficient political theorist greatly aided his attempts to promote extra-European history, as 'intellectual historians' then regarded themselves as the elite of the Cambridge Faculty. Stokes attracted an international body of graduate students who mostly worked with him on Indian agrarian issues in contrast to the so-called 'Cambridge school' of political historians of India grouped around Anil Seal and John Gallagher. Several of these went on to make major contributions to Indian agrarian history through the sort of detailed studies of rent, revenue, and demographic change which he had pioneered.⁸³ As a supervisor, Stokes was supportive and kind, but

⁸² 'Malayan Students' MS., 1952, p. 2.

⁸³ e.g., Professor Ernest Chew, Dr Clive Dewey, Dr Neil C. Charlesworth, Dr Ratnalekha Ray, Dr Chittabrata Palit, Dr Simon Commander, Dr Peter Musgrave, Professor Sugata Bose, Professor Sumit Guha. Dr Susan B. Bayly, however, turned towards the study of religion.

definitely of the old school in that he viewed the writing of a dissertation as the personal act of a mature scholar, not as an exercise in teaching, or 'training', as the rubric now has it. His graduate students appreciated their visits to the Stokeses' house in south Cambridge. For many of them, their strongest memories of Eric Stokes were of his impish humour and capacity to puncture academic pomposity even while chairing meetings in Commonwealth History.

At Cambridge, Eric Stokes's intellectual life developed in two main directions which had already been foreshadowed in Malaya and Africa, towards theories of imperialism and Indian social history. Lecturing for the Part I Tripos paper, the 'Expansion of Europe' and the new paper he had helped to establish, 'The West and the "Third World" since the First World War', he tried to maintain the broad overview of imperial ideology and practice which had informed *The English Utilitarians*. Much of his intellectual effort here was spent in responding to Robinson and Gallagher's challenge to the field, while reserving a space for the intellectual history of empire. He expanded the critique of *Africa and the Victorians* which he had published in Rhodesia⁸⁴ in a series of articles and lectures. This was the most acute and also the most sympathetic of the large number of reviews, comments, and even multi-volume works attempting to turn back their 'historiographical revolution'. Ronald Robinson admitted as much when he remarked 'Old Stokey, was the only one who ever really understood us'.

While he certainly drew on earlier responses of Colin Newbury and David Fieldhouse, Stokes anticipated practically every lineament of the critique of *Africa and the Victorians* which the field later painfully developed. Essentially, his argument was that their emphasis on the supreme importance of the British occupation of Egypt in triggering the Partition of Africa was overdone. The French were already seeking to advance in West Africa as early as 1878, while the movement forward of chartered companies, individual entrepreneurs, anti-slavers, and others could not be reduced to the Egyptian question.

Whereas Robinson and Gallagher's understanding of contemporary Suez and South African crises in the 1940s and 1950s shaped their view of the Scramble for Africa, Stokes's personal experience of the working of sub-imperial agents and colonial capital in south-east Asia and Africa gave him a more complex view of that history. It was ironic, he thought, that despite Robinson and Gallagher's apparent emphasis on African agency, they reduced central Africa to a passive victim of colonial expansion from north and south, while the Muslim *jihads* of French West Africa became, for them, epiphenomena of European expansion.

It is notable also that, rather than tackling the Robinson and Gallagher

⁸⁴ 'Historical Association of Rhodesia and Nyasaland', 1963.

thesis at the level of the ideology of empire, he chided their apparent diminution of the economic factor in British territorial expansion. Lenin and Hobson continued to play a (reduced) part in Stokes's scheme, while they had been rejected with derision by Robinson and Gallagher. European capitalism did change its form about 1900, Stokes thought, but Lenin's view of 'imperialism the highest stage of capitalism' had to be understood as an argument directed more to developments in European government and finance than African and Asian ones. If one read what Lenin really wrote about Africa during the period of the Scramble, it was much the same as what Robinson and Gallagher said, he concluded mischievously.⁸⁵

Stokes genuinely admired Robinson and Gallagher, the 'great artificers' of the new imperial history, and he always eschewed the point scoring and idle comparisons between the virtues of the Smuts Professor, the Beit Professor, and the Vere Harmsworth Professor, which some of their less stellar followers indulged in. It was remarkable indeed that all this talent was circulating between Oxford and Cambridge in the same short span of years. Normally dull seminars on 'imperial and Commonwealth history' at the two places were temporarily galvanised by Stokes's iconoclasm and the ironic detachment of Robinson or Gallagher. But one reason why Stokes admired his compères was that they had 'turned the field' by a single stroke of insight. Since the *English Utilitarians*, he had felt himself unable to do that, once gloomily remarking that scholars produce only two truly original books, if they are lucky, one impelled by the hunger of youth, the other by intimations of mortality.

Stokes's difficulty was that the complexity of his understanding of history was in absolute antithesis to his view that the field responded to the one brilliant idea. In the circumstances, he could not have found a more difficult terrain to work on than Indian agrarian history of the early nineteenth century. It is easy to see why the topic appealed to him, of course. Indigenous resistance had become a scholarly industry and Stokes was highly responsive to the interest in resistance of the clever young Indians who now came to study Ph.D.s under him in increasing numbers. Stokes's early essays on the Mutiny–Rebellion of 1857 referred back to the work done by his Africanist colleagues on the link between 'primary' anti-colonial resistance and later 'proto-nationalist' movements. With Mau Mau ten years behind, the Vietnamese revolution in its final bloody stages, and peasant revolutions breaking out in Latin America, western capitalism seemed about to bury itself in the mud of peasant resistance. This was a romantic delusion, as we now know, but compelling at the time.

Stokes also felt the pull of British and European historiography and, more

⁸⁵ E. T. Stokes, 'Late nineteenth-century colonial expansion and the attack on the theory of economic imperialism: a case of mistaken identity?', *Historical Journal*, 12, 2 (1969), 285–301.

circumspectly, anthropology. The agrarian history of M. M. Postan, Joan Thirsk, and Eric Hobsbawm was mirrored in Europe by the grand syntheses of Fernand Braudel and Emmanuel le Roy Ladurie. Indian anthropology and history now seemed set on an upward path in Europe, north America, and India. More practically, the Indian rebellion of 1857 was a topic that could be mined for sources in Cambridge itself and had considerable potential for undergraduate and graduate research in the University.

Stokes was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1980, but, sadly, was unable to attend any meetings. He died tragically young at the age of fifty-six. It is difficult to know whether he would have produced the other 'big book' on agrarian history or ventured back into the terrain of the history of imperial ideas. The two volumes of essays on Indian agrarian history, *The Peasant and the Raj* (Cambridge, 1978) and *The Peasant Armed* (New Delhi, 1986) are considerable achievements in their own right, if inevitably unfinished and difficult for non-specialists to penetrate. His own work and that of his colleagues on African political systems and resistance movements made it clear to him how primitive Indian agrarian historiography was even in the early 1960s when he was searching for a new topic. A simplistic argument that the 1857 Rebellion was merely a mutiny was confronted by the equally simplistic view that it was the 'first war of independence'. The Marxist argument, that the 'landlords' betrayed the people to the British in the course of the struggle, seemed complex by comparison.

Using the detailed British records of the Rebellion and the official rent-rate and land-revenue settlement reports of the 1870s and 1880s, Stokes began to show how the particular forms of the pre-existing Indian political systems combined with the impact of British agrarian taxation to create very different outcomes in different parts of north India. This was very much the work of a 'splitter' rather than a 'lumper'. He distanced himself from the view promoted at that time by T. R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt* (Berkeley, 1966) that the Rebellion was determined by the degree of penetration of indigenous capitalism in the form of the moneylender or *bania*. Instead, he found that the weight of land-revenue and access to commercial opportunities was a more accurate 'predictor' of the propensity to rebel than were the depredations of the moneylender. He also retreated from his own early view that simple caste affiliations were the mainspring of revolt.

Much of this work was very austere; its generalisations were delicately moulded and never exaggerated. One Indian historian, Gyanendra Pandey, argued that this was constraining empirical history, unable to take seriously the reality of popular resistance and revolt.⁸⁶ More recently, Rajat Ray has

⁸⁶ G. Pandey, 'A view of the observable. A positivist "understanding" of agrarian society and political protest in colonial India', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 7 (1979-80), 375-83.

implied that Stokes underplayed the element of 'traditional patriotism' and by inference religious feeling in the Rebellion.⁸⁷ Both views have some truth in them. Stokes made little use of indigenous sources (even in translation) and he steered clear of religion and culture as an issue in his analysis. It is noteworthy that only one of the ninety or more undergraduate long essays that he assigned for his Cambridge documentary-based Special Subject on 1857 in the early 1970s concerned religion and ideology. Most of these student papers were set as detailed district or subdivisional studies of tenurial forms, such as he was carrying out himself.

This was partly because Stokes had become suspicious of the tendency of the contemporary American 'ethnohistory' to reify 'culture' as a social given. His wary but admiring relationship with British social anthropology did not extend to French structuralism or American debates about historical meta-narratives. Indeed, he specifically warned one of his graduate students not to waste time reading about the anthropology of religion. His views may also have reflected the hard, positivistic stance taken by both the right and the left in Cambridge at that time, with Geoffrey Elton lauding the mythical historian who entered the archives with a mind like a *tabula rasa*, while Peter Laslett urged his followers to retool with statistics or be relegated. Yet Stokes's stance remains a puzzle, given his own stated conviction that religion was the fundamental aspect of human experience. The result was that it seemed in Stokes's later historical writings that Europeans continued to have ideology and religion (though he now saw these as largely ineffectual in practice), while Asians or Africans merely had tenurial systems and the structures of everyday economic life.

The only break in a socio-economic history as dead-level as the great north Indian plain itself were the first two remarkable chapters of his posthumous work, *The Peasant Armed* which deal with the British and Indian soldiers of the Bengal Army, and subjectively drew on his experience as a young man in the Indian Mountain Artillery. The stylistic excellence of this work was reminiscent of the articles on literature and empire which he regularly wrote for the *Times Literary Supplement*, to finance new dresses for his daughters, or so he claimed, and his inaugural lecture 'Kipling: the Voice of the Hooligan', published in the Festschrift for J. H. Plumb. This imaginative piece of writing played on the tension between the sense of an idealised agrarian past and the onset of modern industrialisation in Kipling's work, especially *Kim*. Stokes argued that the agrarian historian was trying to do something similar in his

⁸⁷ R. K. Ray, 'Race, Religion and Realm. The political theory of "the Reigning India Crusade"', in Mushirul Hasan and Narayani Gupta (eds.), *India's Colonial Encounter. Essays in Memory of Eric Stokes* (Delhi, 1993), pp. 133–82.

attempt to capture the reality of that past before its memory was entirely eclipsed.

Eric Stokes regarded all his work on the agrarian history of India as provisional, and often said so. When he died of lung cancer on 5 February 1981 (never having smoked a cigarette in his life), his work on the Mutiny book was palpably incomplete. Whether he would ever have attempted to reintegrate the history of political thought with economic and social history, and the history of the British colonisers with that of indigenous society, remains unclear. My view is that paradox, scepticism, and a fundamental honesty about the limits of historical explanation would always have impeded him from bundling up his ideas on this subject in an appropriately dramatic form. He was also acutely aware that there is a right time for an idea in the development of historiography. The high tide of 'area studies' and local history in the 1970s had swept himself and many others into the creeks of the Ganges, the Jumna or the Limpopo, as he once memorably put it. But the tide was now receding and there was a danger that a whole generation of historians would be beached on the sands of these distant rivers.

Eric Stokes's work and teaching on Britain, India, and Africa nevertheless remain a vital intellectual influence in universities throughout the world, not least in India and Africa themselves. His own life and writings also stand as a memorial to a time now only forty years past, but seemingly of the deepest antiquity, when educated, middle-class Britons played a significant, and sometimes, as in Stokes's case, humane role on the World Stage.

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Fellow of the Academy

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