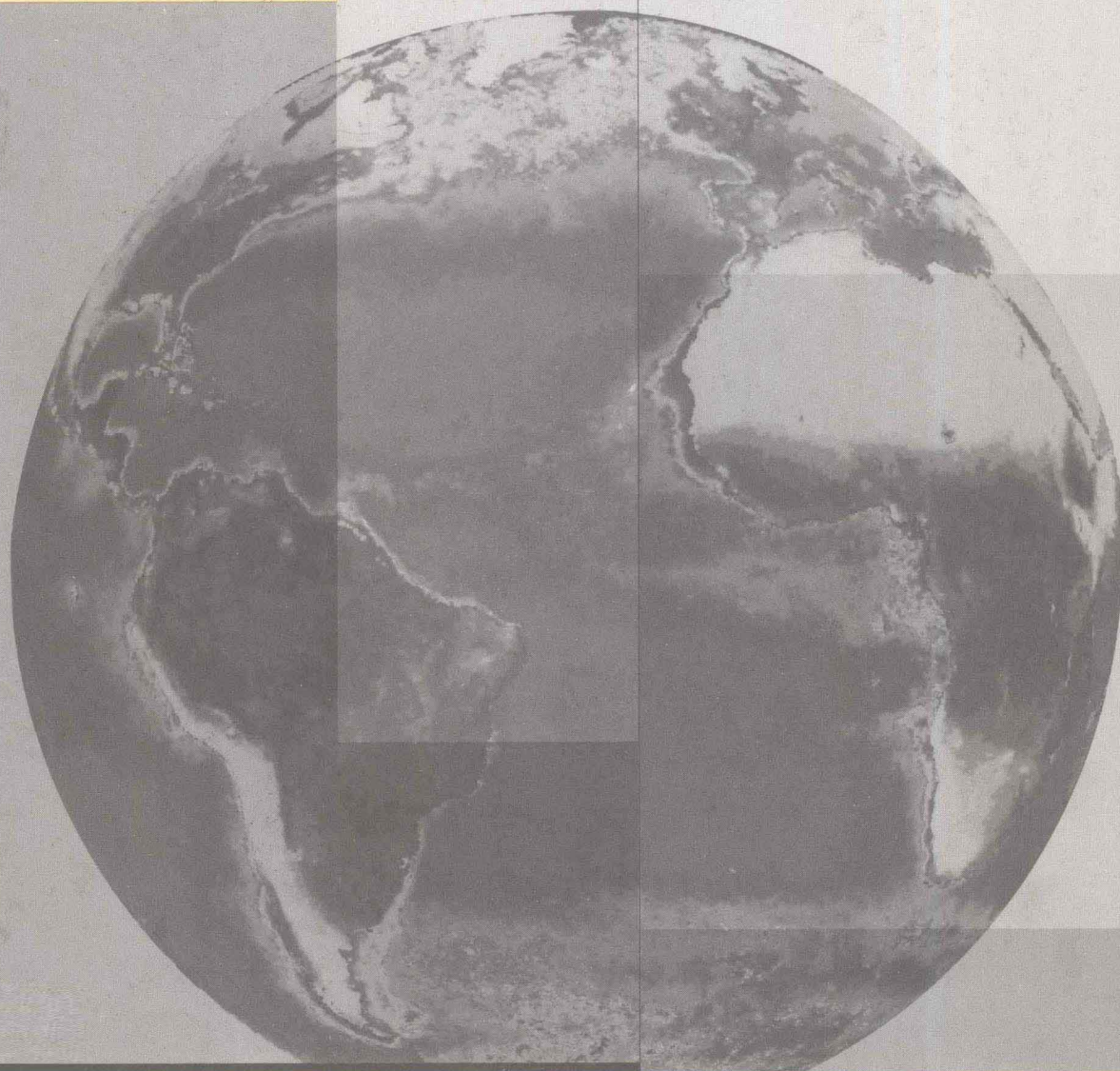


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PIERRE ETIENNE DOSTERT



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Former Circuit Judge, State of West Virginia. American University (B.A., 1957), Political Science, Georgetown University (J.D., 1959). The retired jurist has long been one of the closest observers of world trends and developments, particularly in contemporary Africa and Latin America. He is widely traveled and speaks a number of languages. As editor of the *World Today Series*®, he has energetically encouraged the production of accurate, but challenging, texts for a generation of students.

Some portions of this book are the result of contributions of others. When they are significant, they are acknowledged.

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A young Sudanese farmer

## Africa Today

### Geography and History . . .

Africa is not a land mass divided into easily understood geographical and political features. National boundaries are no more than arbitrary lines drawn by the European powers in the 19th and 20th centuries which do not reflect ethnic or natural land divisions. This book is organized into regional areas to give a clearer understanding of the problems and prospects of people living close to each other on this vast continent.

### Democracy and "Freedom" . . .

Only a few nations in Africa have been governed "democratically" as we understand that word—with openly competing political parties and total freedom of the press. In some others, such as Nigeria, there have been frequently-stalled plans by the military to turn the government over to civilian rule with no tangible results. In the remainder, if there is an "election," the winner gets a majority usually

exceeding 95%. The leadership heads the major, or only political party, and therefore is the choice of "the people." Nevertheless, although such systems prevail, the people of many of these other nations are governed democratically in the ultimate sense of the word. The leaders must show a responsibility and concern for the welfare and wishes of the people in order to remain in office. Such a state of affairs has been the exception rather than the rule in far too many African nations since independence from colonial rule began more than a generation ago.

It is regrettable that democracy is being equated in many African minds with economic improvement. This is not the case—the keys to modernization are outside technical assistance and external investment in job-producing enterprises. All too often several thousand willing workers show up to apply for only a few hundred jobs.

Some countries are run by military men, many of whom have changed their uniform to a business suit or regional garb.

Others are civilians, but maintain their power only through the muscle of the armed forces. In either case, without military backing, African heads of state may be turned out of office in one day. Such a move is a *coup d'état*, ("seizure of the state") and usually means that a military government will be supreme until "free elections" can be held, or, indefinitely.

### Recent Changes . . .

From the time of their independence, beginning in the 1950s until 1989, new-born, independent African nations enjoyed the advantage of the Cold War. The Soviets and Chinese were highly interested in the friendship of these nations for a variety of reasons. Support in the United Nations was foremost among these goals.

Some African nations experimented with "communism" within their borders. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989–1991, financial assistance was no longer available from that source. China became frustrated by cultural differences in dealing with African nations and sharply curtailed its aid by the 1990s. Western nations, including the U.S. were willing to continue aid programs, but only through the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. France, which had so regularly supported its former colonies, chose the same method in 1994.

Both international banks have in the last decade increasingly imposed with aid and loans financial conditions that are highly resented. They are claimed by the African recipient nations to be invasions of their sovereignty, which to a degree is true. The terms and conditions have been imposed reasonably, and generally not abruptly. Certainly, no country can ask for external assistance when it has 35% of the population on the government payroll, directly or indirectly.

The people of those African nations which experimented with "communism" have, almost without exception, reached a correct conclusion: communism was no more than a jingoistic means to keep the "inner circle" in positions of power and wealth. The fact is, however, that communism itself, and communist-capitalist rivalry both have been costly to African nations. A prime example of this is mineral-rich Congo, which now is in shambles after more than three decades of rule by pro-western Mobutu Sese Seko.

### The International Monetary Fund . . .

Aid to African nations now is almost exclusively routed through the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Emphasis is on development and "good governance." Overcoming decades of corruption is tremendously difficult, particularly when government personnel tend to discuss everything in the passive tense: "it happened," instead of "I did it." There is a high degree of resentment of

conditions imposed on loans and grants since they are claimed to diminish the sovereignty of a given nation. When, however, sovereignty is exercised in an irresponsible and unresponsive manner, it should be diminished.

### **Corruption . . . a Comparison**

Americans tend to ascribe to themselves and their system a degree of purity that simply doesn't exist. In so doing, they look down their noses at African attempts at government. Corruption has been rampant in this country particularly in the last three decades, reaching deeply into all three branches of government. It is actually considered a virtue to those involved in it, and has cost taxpayers uncounted billions of dollars. This has been detailed in earlier editions of this book.

But African problems run much deeper than mere corruption. In Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Angola, Burundi, Rwanda and others, conditions of squalor, warfare and suffering abound. Even international aid is useless because it seldom reaches suffering people—it is siphoned off by the elite. The reasons: absolutely dreadful governance and a world oversupply of armaments.

### **Achievements Since Independence . . .**

It is necessary to use generalizations in this section, all of which have one or more exceptions depending upon the nation in-

volved. But the exception is just that, not the rule generally found in experience and history.

**Prosperity:** This is generally measured by increased income, expressed in the figure for per capita gross domestic profit, or in median income of the people of a nation. In dealing with Africa, these figures are misleading. Local goods and labor is always valued at a lower price than international imports. With the exception of some oil-producing nations and a small elite in most African nations, the rate of change has been negative. Lest there be any doubt about this, a March 1994 report, *Adjustment in Africa: Reforms, Results and the Road Ahead* issued by the World Bank states very plainly that unless there is change, it will take 40 years (2034) for sub-Saharan Africa to return to its pre-1973 per capita income! Since that year, sub-Saharan output has declined by 20%. The report made an embarrassing comparison between African and Asian nations, both of which had little growth from 1930 to 1960. It termed Asian growth since 1960 "stunning," but said African governments had followed policies which have been ruinous, and urged them to "give markets a chance to breathe." The need is for less intervention, less regulation, fewer subsidies, freer flows of trade and of money.

**Education:** Expressed by average levels of achievement, the results have been minimal at best and dismal in all too

many cases. Even more regrettable are those who were and are, at state expense, educated abroad and who fail to return to serve the people from where they came. Further, the educational process is retarded by a lingering racist outlook which looks inward instead of toward the sunshine of achievement based upon international standards and usages.

When revolution beckons, school doors close. Where strife has gripped nations, such as Angola, Mozambique, Liberia, Somalia, Guinea, Congo, South Africa and others, progress, particularly among Black people, has been *none*.

**Health:** Foreign assistance notwithstanding, general health levels in sub-Saharan Africa have fallen sharply. *AIDS* has claimed countless victims, most of whom don't know what they are dying of. The progress in health care: *none*.

**Communication:** Technical improvement has occurred in television broadcasting via satellite. However, the number of TV sets remains small, and programming is difficult since so much of it originates among predominantly White western sources which appeal little to the people. Political broadcasting, direct and indirect is too common (a statement true of the U.S.). The verdict: *none*.

**Housing:** Much of Africa remains in traditional housing in rural areas, punctuated by teeming shanty-filled slums in urban regions. Few governments have any



The homemade guitar—Zambia



housing policy or program and those, such as South Africa, which do, sponsor far less than needed by the general population. Progress in this respect has been *none*.

**Political Progress:** This is hotly disputed, since that which is progress to one is regression to another. Even though a ruler be chosen by a majority of the people in honest elections, if he does not have the support of the army, the bureaucracy and the small elite, he cannot last in office. Even if a ruler comes to power in an undemocratic manner, if he is skilled and is responsive to the needs of the great majority of the people, that is all that can be expected.

One of the tragedies of the African move toward a multi-party system is the promises that are made as to its meaning. Democracy is equated with wealth, which just isn't true, particularly in Africa. Wealth is a product of a combination of effort expended and brainpower used, both intended to make life easier by providing more items of comfort and convenience. Democracy, specifically a multi-party system, carries no guarantee that wealth will follow. All too often, it appears that those who are making extravagant promises are interested in achieving power in order to have an easier time stealing.

Progress in this respect should not be judged in the light of American experience (and lack thereof) over two centuries. One observer recently termed the U.S. governmental process as being one of "institutionalized thievery." To the extent that this is valid, little that is favorable can be said . . . either for it, or against African regimes. It is well known that U.S. Members of Congress start running for reelection the day they are sworn in; this tends also to occur in Africa where multi-party systems exist.

There is in all too many cases, evidence that two flaws exist in the efforts to achieve democracy. Faced with the inevitable, some one-party regimes have, silently or actively, encouraged the emergence of multiple political parties. The theory, which works in reality, is that a strong political organization has little to fear from a multitude of rivals which divide discontent among themselves so carefully it becomes diluted and powerless. The second shortcoming lies in election fraud. This may take the form of a simple requirement that voters line up for balloting, identifying themselves with a picture of the candidate they support. There is an implicit threat that they will be dealt with by the party in power in the months and years after the election if that picture is not the right one.

Or, cruder methods may be employed: stuffing ballot boxes, voting the graveyard, transporting the faithful to several precincts to vote, cutting off voter registration at an early date, thereby catching

the opposition off-balance, advancing the date for balloting to accomplish the same result and a multitude of other means to defeat the genuine will of the people. Progress: *none*, with a refreshing exception to that statement found in South Africa.

**Tribalism:** Although this was one of the most difficult problems in sub-Saharan Africa prior to independence, increased inter-ethnic contacts and communication have lowered the seriousness of this age-old heritage. Few Africans harbor ill will or hostility toward one another based upon tribal affiliation. It only becomes a problem when unprincipled leaders fan the flame of hatred in the name of tribalism. Thus, President arap-Moi of Kenya complained that a multi-party system would not work in his nation because of tribalism. But when there were multi-party elections in 1992, he exploited tribal differences without shame to secure his own reelection.

If there can be increased emphasis on education, this will go a long way toward reducing this possibility. The most direct measure of progress in this area is a lowered death rate associated with tribalism. Except in remote areas with little exposure to the world such as Burundi and Rwanda (where overcrowding, not tribalism, is the root cause of strife) progress in lowering tribal tensions has been *satisfactory*.

**Racism:** Because the concept of racism arouses the passions and prejudices of mankind so acutely, it is hard for all to discuss in this day and age. No matter how carefully a thought is expressed, there now is a lingering fear that it will be construed as a racist remark. Even more tragic is the tendency of those with little knowledge to toss off something which is not understood with an accusation of racism. If there can be no statement regarding racism, there can be no objective study of Africa.

There is abroad in the U.S. the idea that somehow Black people (or even half-Black people) are somehow more knowledgeable about things concerning Black people. That is nonsense which need not be dignified, but very popular nonsense.

Racism is the conscious or subconscious classification of a person's ability and behavior based solely upon the color of his or her skin and other associated physical characteristics. A social corollary is blind allegiance based upon race, rooted in lack of education and political awareness on both continents. Thus, it would be unthinkable in the small mind of many for a White person to lead in an overwhelming Black nation of Africa. That would carry a connotation that Black people are unable to manage their own affairs.

The Russians faced a similar problem in the 9th century A.D. They were plagued by inter-clan rivalry, poverty and had very little self-esteem. Wanting to do something about their problems and

aware of Norse Vikings (Varangian) who had established trade routes through Russia to the Black Sea, and considering them superior to local talent, they invited the *Varangian Russes* to rule over the restless and hostile people. Not much is known of this period, but with prosperity that followed under the Varangians, things calmed down.

Good sense indicates that outside help would be of assistance in Black Africa. Insistence of Black leadership is crude racism and willingness to accept untalented leadership in preference to economic progress. The idea that White people don't understand the problems of Black people is silly. It is derived from decades of narrow, parochial beliefs which acquire the dignity of fact. This, however, has no roots in present realities.

Racism is most visibly rooted in stereotypes as stated above. Non-Blacks are regarded as exploitive, conniving, unscrupled and greedy people who, using a language and education system foreign to Africa, want to *use* the Black people. Black people are thought of as lazy, indolent, uneducated and untalented, to be relegated to only the most simple and demeaning tasks. Factually, these fixations are thankfully the *exception* rather than the rule in most cases. But, nevertheless, they all too often widely persist.

It was recently suggested to the author that this book is not suitable as a text because Black students did not find it "pleasant to read." Compared to other purported resources this may be true. The purpose is to provide facts and understanding that will enable others to help Africa—something which it desperately needs. Being "politically correct" does not equip one to do this. It further has been alleged that this book is "too opinionated." Most assuredly, it is impossible to write a book about so vast a subject without including conclusory material. Perhaps if 2,400 pages were available—which everyone would certainly find unpleasant—less "opinion" would be necessary.

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., widely respected in the U.S. and the world, is selectively remembered by many. To the militant Black his message "We shall overcome" has strong appeal. But basic to his teachings was the concept of a non-racial society in which all will be treated equally *based upon their own achievement* ("I have a dream"). The message of the militants has strong appeal to uneducated and untalented people. Their idea of overcoming connotes overwhelming the imagined oppressors by brute force. Violence, however, was not Dr. King's teaching or practice. On the contrary, he urged that adversity be overcome by achievement. Two columnists in a Washington liberal newspaper, disturbed by recent apparently lowered achievement of their fellow Blacks, have conclud-



Firewood

ed that efforts of Blacks to overcome this should be undertaken without delay—that people should begin *now*.

Interestingly, inner cities of the U.S. are witnessing an exodus to the suburbs of responsible Black families fed up with the high crime rate experienced where they have lived; this includes the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., where 55% of all male Black youths are now in one stage or another of being a criminal defendant following arrest.

The writer is concerned that both in the United States and Africa the teachings of the militants have been and are encouraging Blacks, linguistically and otherwise, to *relegate themselves* to poverty, disease, crime, under-achievement and general or-

dinariness. They appear secure in a vague promise that all shall be overcome by *someone*, for them, and are not very specific as to how this shall be achieved. Even middle and upper class African Americans appear to have forgotten their African brethren, as shown by the reluctance of many of such persons to contribute to the *African National Congress* during appearances of Nelson Mandela in Washington for inaugural festivities in January 1993.

It is well known that a person cannot think unless he can verbalize an idea or concept. The languages of the U.S. ghetto and native African societies are simply inadequate for this task in today's world. Thus, languages of thought, preferably

English, correctly spoken and written, should be the universal vehicle of education. This goal has been diminished in the name of racism in the U.S. and Africa. Why would anyone approve in this modern world of the teaching of Swahili, utterly useless outside of East Africa, in preference to correct English? What can be done with the ghetto "rap" talk idolized on MTV? The answer is obvious: nothing.

New developments on the horizon indicate world-wide use of educated English will explode during the next generation. The internet has arrived in Africa, and English is the almost universal vehicle of that medium of communication. New techniques are making the internet possible in tropical climates, where in past years, old-style electronic equipment tended to rot away.

### Afrocentrism

There has developed in the last two decades a school of education based on the concept of "Afrocentrism." The basic idea is that history is taught incorrectly because it is "Eurocentric", i.e. "White." Some of the teachings illustrate the purpose of this vividly. According to the Afrocentrists, the Greeks did not develop philosophy; Socrates raided the great library of the Egyptians at Alexandria and stole all of his ideas, incorporating them into his Socratic theories and philosophy. The library, however, wasn't built until a century after he died.

Egyptians lived on the African continent, but were never Black Africans—persons with broad noses, large lips and tightly curled hair who happened to be dark-skinned. Early Egyptians most probably had a Semitic-Cushitic heritage with aquiline features and light to moderately dark skin (see p. 179); those of the North intermarried with Middle Easterners with lighter complexions.

Professor Mary Lefkowitz of Wellesley College has recently published her book "Not Out of Africa" exposing these fairy tales for what they are: myths used in the name of "multiculturalism." She has been called a "racist" by those who want to perpetuate such untruths. Professor Frank Snowden of Howard University, in commenting on the book, said there should not be "indoctrination of any kind in schools."

All of this is caused by a continuing Black sense of need to develop an identity with a positive emphasis in America. Identity (esteem) is developed by individual achievement, not by ancestor worship. Ironically, White societies devoted to ancestor worship in the U.S. have an abundance of awfully ordinary people.

According to DNA (gene) tests a group migrated from Africa into the Middle East and Asia. In 1997, perfectly constructed spears were unearthed in Germany which are 500,000 years old. They have the precise balance of a modern javelin. This



would place a proposed migration from Africa at 600,000–800,000 years ago! The group split into segments which became the earliest ancestors of all humans on earth.

### Islamic Fundamentalism

The “back to Islam” movement has bloomed in all northern African countries to one degree or another. It is in reality not in favor of anything, including Islam, but rather the guise under which anti-westernism has acquired respectability. It spreads across national boundaries and openly courts the worst sort of terrorism as a tool to reach its goals. Islamic fundamentalism has become so threatening a movement that a conference of 16 North African and Middle East countries was convened in Tunisia at the beginning of 1993.

It served only to focus attention on this serious problem. Action was not possible because unanimity could not be obtained, particularly from Sudan, the military government of which is flirting with fundamentalists in order to exert at least minimal influence among them. Libya, under the unpredictable Qadhafi, has its own style of Islamic fundamentalism.

Those favoring the movement point out how well the traditional approach has worked in Saudi Arabia and the successes it has seemingly had in Iran (which finances much of the fundamentalist movement in other nations). Both are wealthy, it is observed; this overlooks that the wealth came from oil, not Islamic fundamentalism.

In an election ostensibly boycotted by Arab fundamentalists there was a 75% turnout. Even if they had won the contest, the fundamentalists in Algeria, as in other North African nations, are hopelessly fragmented. Observers judged the contest to be a free one, but various elements (fundamentalists, the liberal U.S. press) said it was rigged by the army.

### The Organization of African Unity . . .

After more than three decades as a not very unified body the Organization of African Unity will most probably close its doors shortly. The only visible purpose it had was an annual condemnation of Israel for aggression against the Palestinians and South Africa for the evils of its *apartheid* system.

Of the 53 member nations, only 15 have paid their dues in full. Twenty-eight nations are several years in arrears; the total of unpaid dues is \$70 million. Threats to withdraw voting rights of delinquent nations will not cure the situation.

### Devaluation of the CFA Franc

In early 1994, France devalued the CFA Franc (*Commaunuté Financière Africain*), a currency used by most of its former possessions in Africa which it had supported

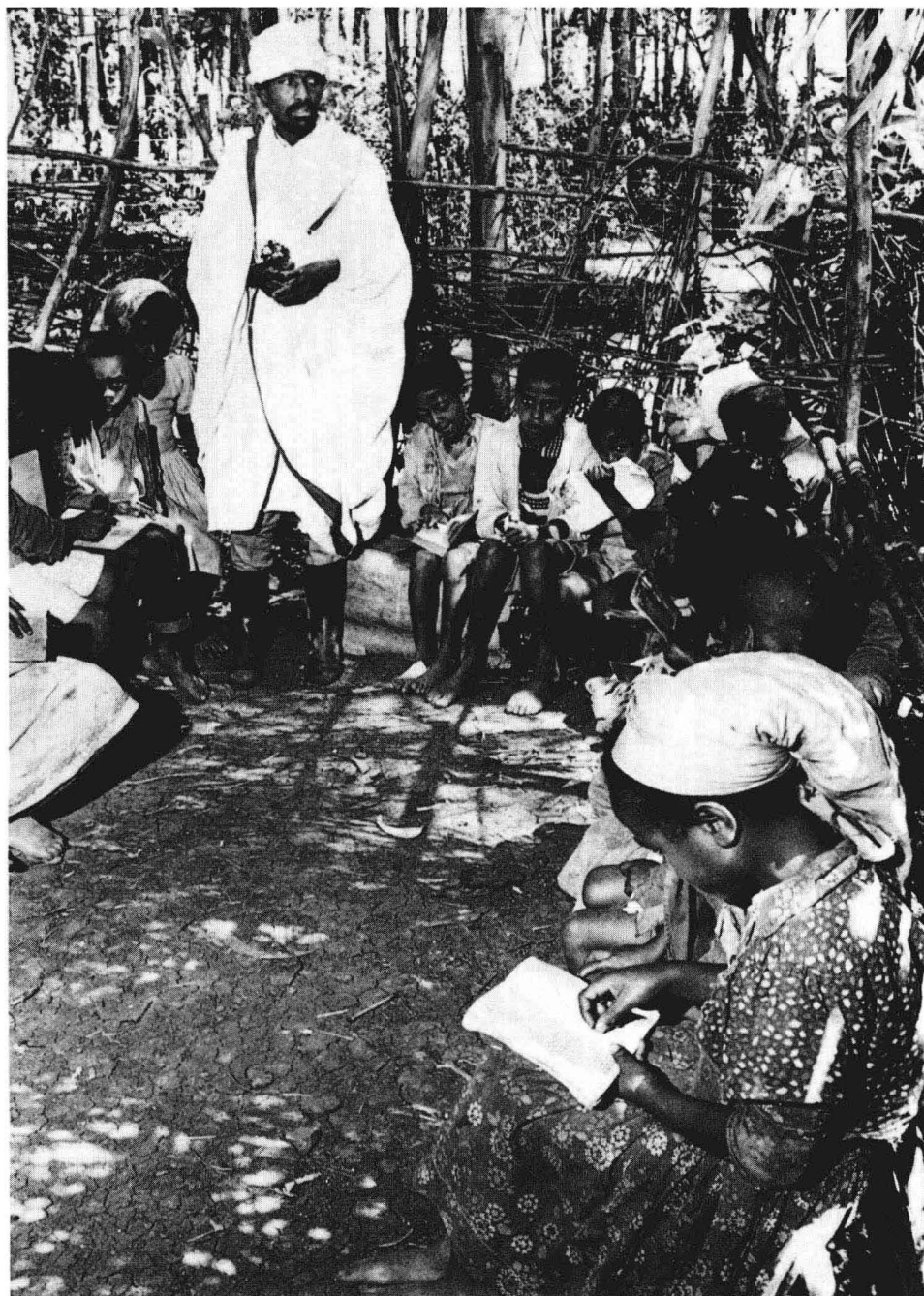
since the independence of these nations. The reason was simple: it was vastly overvalued (U.S. \$1 = 295 CFA Francs) because of profiteering by wealthy Blacks in Africa. Further, this currency was allowed to “float” by France—its value now is determined by its actual worth.

Almost overnight, the prices of imported goods more than doubled on store shelves. Those who suffered the most from this drastic alteration were the poor of Africa. The move also resulted in numerous strikes for higher wages to offset the increase in prices. The move was ini-

tially harsh but has proved beneficial in West Africa, where growth rates of 4–6% in 1995 were typical in French-speaking nations. Côte d’Ivoire led, with an estimated 7%. Central Africa has not fared as well, however.

### Foreign Debt . . .

Although staggering, Africa’s foreign debt (\$240 billion), is modest compared to Latin American obligations. No radical measures were taken to unilaterally reduce payments to creditor nations. The problem is extremely serious—about one-



A “private” school in the highlands of Ethiopia. A teacher holds classes outside his home and is paid the equivalent of \$0.20 a month by students.

WORLD BANK PHOTO by Kay Muldoon

third of the earnings of most African nations go to pay foreign debt. A UNICEF official commented that "as a result of our inability to put African economics back on track" 1,000 children are dying each day (the figure is now probably 5,000). Following the lead of France, European creditor nations and the U.S. have written off one-third of the external debt of some 30 of the poorest African nations.

In sub-Saharan Africa, foreign investment virtually dried up from 1980 to 1986 and now is only making a very hesitant comeback. Trade restrictions abound and dealing with local bureaucracies is all but impossible. Even when foreign enterprises show a profit, the act of getting it out of Africa to pay the sources of investment can prove to be all but impossible.

At the 1989 OAU conference, a message was sent to European and American creditors that a ten-year moratorium on repayment of principal and interest was urgently needed. Although sympathetic to the plight of the African nations, the creditors did nothing, lest any action be interpreted as a signal to Latin America.

But the latest development is an offer of the U.S. to forgive 50% of the debt owed it.

### The Killer Climate . . .

Although Africa is no stranger to drought, in early 1983 the climate turned "killer" with a savagery unknown in recent history. This time it was not just the Sahelian countries which were Nature's target—the drought spread its fiery fingers across most of the continent. Thousands died each day from malnutrition and continue to die. More than 240 million Africans live in the afflicted areas. Although tons of relief food continue to pour in from all over the world, officials have a difficult time with distribution. They are hampered by civil wars, poor roads and a shortage of trucks, as well as internal corruption of politicians. This catastrophe eased by 1985 particularly in southern Africa, but made an ominous reappearance since 1987.

Favorable rain conditions in sub-Saharan Africa boded well for the nations of the region, but this blessing was minimized when the same rains created ideal breeding conditions for countless hordes of a second generation of locusts in 1988–1989. The UN had spent more than a \$40 million dollars to fight the insects, a threat to the crops on 50,000 square miles of land.

A project is now underway in northern Nigeria with Japanese supervision and financing to farm lands in the Sahel (the belt of land just below the Sahara) in 250 acre tracts, intended to replace the traditional family plots of about five acres. A belt of trees (as in Algeria) designed to contain the expanding desert land is at the heart of the program. This will foster surpluses of food, hopefully, replacing subsistence farming traditional to the area and it is hoped to extend it all the way to Senegal.

The savage climate again revisited in 1992, and in the year 1993 the highest levels of starvation were seen in Africa in the absence of energetic foreign assistance. There will be no improvement until modern agricultural techniques overcome social and political backwardness, permitting the farming of large, economical tracts of land. Education will, of course, have to come first. In the 1890s in the U.S., about one of six workers labored to produce food; in the 1990s the figure is 1 of 98. In sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s, the number is one out of every two.

In the meantime, if all the money spent on becoming obese in wealthy nations



Street scene in the older part of Marrakech

Courtesy: Mr. Mrs. Schuyler Lowe



was combined with the money spent on weight reducing videos, diets, pills, machines, costumes, spas, doctors, clinics etc. and dispatched via CARE, immediate relief could be obtained.

#### **"Privatization" . . .**

The years 1985–86 saw the introduction of the concept of "privatization" in many nations of Africa. This simply means dissolving state-run farms and businesses by selling them back to private ownership from where they came. Although only a tiny beginning has been made in this direction, it is highly significant. It is a good move, particularly for food production. Collective or state ownership means no individual motivation, opportunity or ambition. All of these ideas are traditional elements of African life.

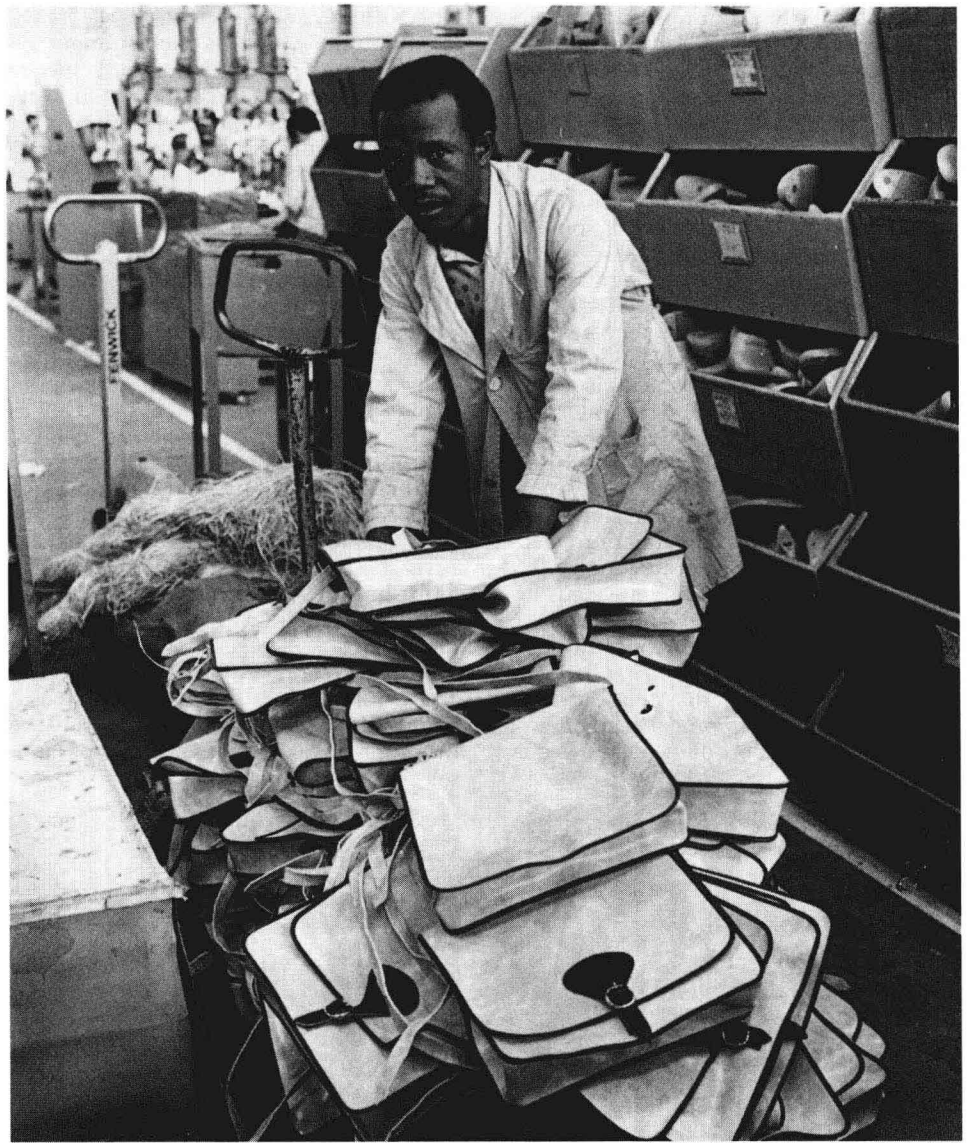
Even the Republic of South Africa has embarked on a vigorous program of privatization within the past three years.

#### **AIDS and Family Planning . . .**

The lack of family planning in Africa has traditionally been countered by a tremendous infant mortality rate. In spite of this, there has been widespread starvation in sub-Saharan Africa and children are the first to suffer. U.S. policy forbade provision of foreign assistance for family planning and has been totally unrealistic in this respect. If a human life is not conceived, obviously there will be no starvation or suffering.

In Africa, a life of want and misery is the rule, not the exception. The question facing world and African leadership is not whether suffering and hunger will occur, but when. Stated otherwise, how soon after birth will this happen? Most African societies do not have the technical or social wisdom to deal with the problem of overpopulation and they need help. Feeding starving children is humanitarian. Having fewer starving children is more humanitarian. Having no starving children is an ideal to be sought within reasonable and moral limits.

A cloud looms over sub-Saharan Africa (which may well invade North Africa): the rapid rise in the disease of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). In the areas most afflicted (cities) the toll among technical and professional citizens is alarming. Women have an average of almost seven children. The disease is spread through sexual intercourse, but is also transmitted at birth. Professionals estimate that as many as 10 million Africans will have perished by the year 2000. Uganda and Tanzania are particularly affected, where the disease is known as "slim," or "he/she get thin and die." The disease was prevalent in former years among professional, semi-professional and government personnel, but now is universal. The World Health Organization noted that although it has only 2% of the



**A pocketbook production line, Mahajanga, Madagascar**

world's population, Africa has 60% of worldwide AIDS cases. Uganda and Tanzania are particularly affected, where the disease is known as "slim," or "he/she get thin and die." By late 1987 the scourge reached into the highest political circles—President Kounché of Niger died in Paris and President Kaunda of Zambia publicly admitted that his son had been struck down by the disease. The World Health Organization recently noted that although Africa has only 2% of the world's population, it has 60% of worldwide AIDS victims.

The disease is the leading cause now of death in the sprawling city of Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. It is rampant in the Central African Republic where widespread sexual activity is socially acceptable. Unless a vaccine is developed, the disease will double the death rate among African women and wipe out about a third of able-bodied men by 2015. Millions of or-

phans will result. In just 25 short years, African life expectancy will be reduced by an appalling 19 years. Today in Tanzania one in three children are exposed to the deadly HIV virus at birth, almost always resulting in infection. South Africa is expected to lose 60% of its male workforce by 2004. Even if a vaccine is developed, which probably will occur, Africa will face the problem of a lack of coordinated family planning.

Recent research indicates that the prevailing African virus of AIDS is most readily transmitted through the cells of the vaginal wall as opposed to the virus so widespread in the U.S.

#### **Culture, Languages, Usages and Pronunciation . . .**

Because of severe space limitations, this book cannot more than touch upon a few of the multitude of fascinating cultural aspects of the people of this continent. Pho-

netic pronunciations follow most proper names to assist the reader.

The term *Negro* became unfashionable about two decades ago and the word *black* took its place. This was later modified by some to capitalize the word: *Black*. This further modification was adopted, but, in the interest of equality, the word *White* was also capitalized. Both were initially used in this book to indicate the word was a noun as opposed to an adjective. This then was changed to make the capitalization standard, rather than have students wonder whether they were confronted with a noun or an adjective. Now it is urged *African American* is an appropriate combination. That may perhaps be true, but is not what this book is about. Interestingly, the descendants of freed slaves in Africa refer to themselves as Americo Liberians.

Modern usages can be curious and troublesome. If material is military, then it becomes materiel. People don't use drugs anymore—they "do" drugs, in an apparent effort to get away from the idea that they are a user, with all of the negative connotations of that word. Such smoke-screens are illusory and temporary.

#### Maps . . .

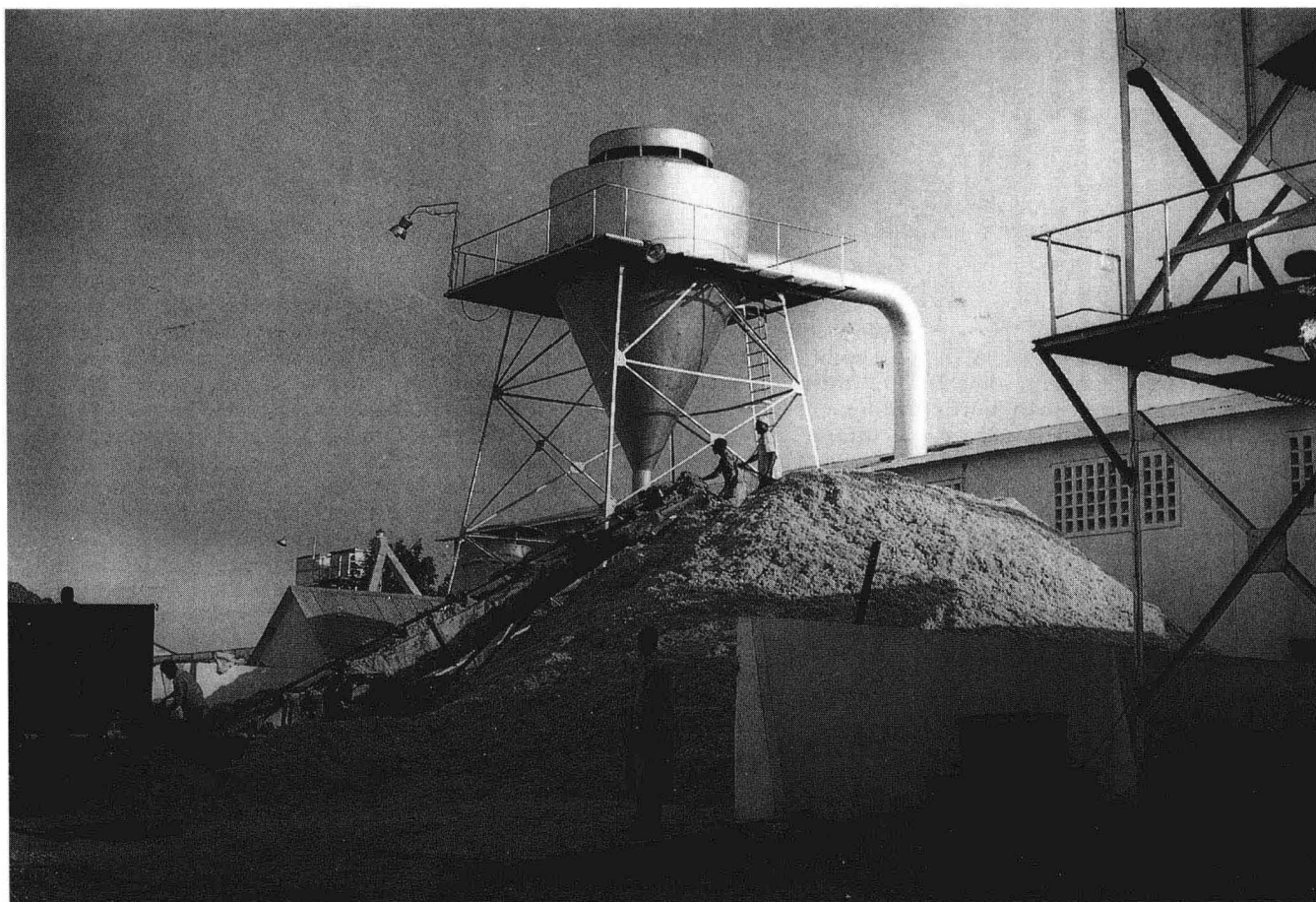
Designed to assist in understanding the text, the maps often omit cities, railroads, locations and rivers not covered in the text. Other more detailed maps are widely available, and at the *gentle* insistence of our geographer friends, all of the maps have been upgraded.

With the advent of the 1985 edition, we underwent a change in technology. I have been personally able to compose the typography on a computer, which is instant-

ly reduced to magnetic symbols on "floppy disks." They are transmitted to the capable hands of the personnel at Braun-Brumfield, Inc. in Ann Arbor, where they are the basis for the finished product. To this advance has been added another in technique: computerized page layout. In but one generation the art of producing a book has undergone a profound change difficult to imagine. When it is time to revise this book for the next edition, last-minute changes can be made simply by "calling up" the appropriate section onto a computer screen and making deletions, additions and alterations. If such speed and flexibility had been available to classical authors, the result would have been beyond imagination.

P.E.D.

Harpers Ferry, WV  
July 1997



Processing cotton in northern Cameroon



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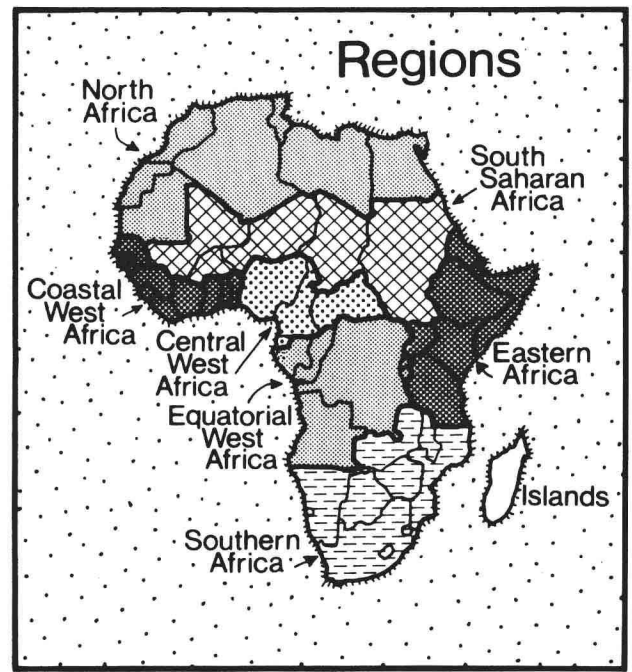
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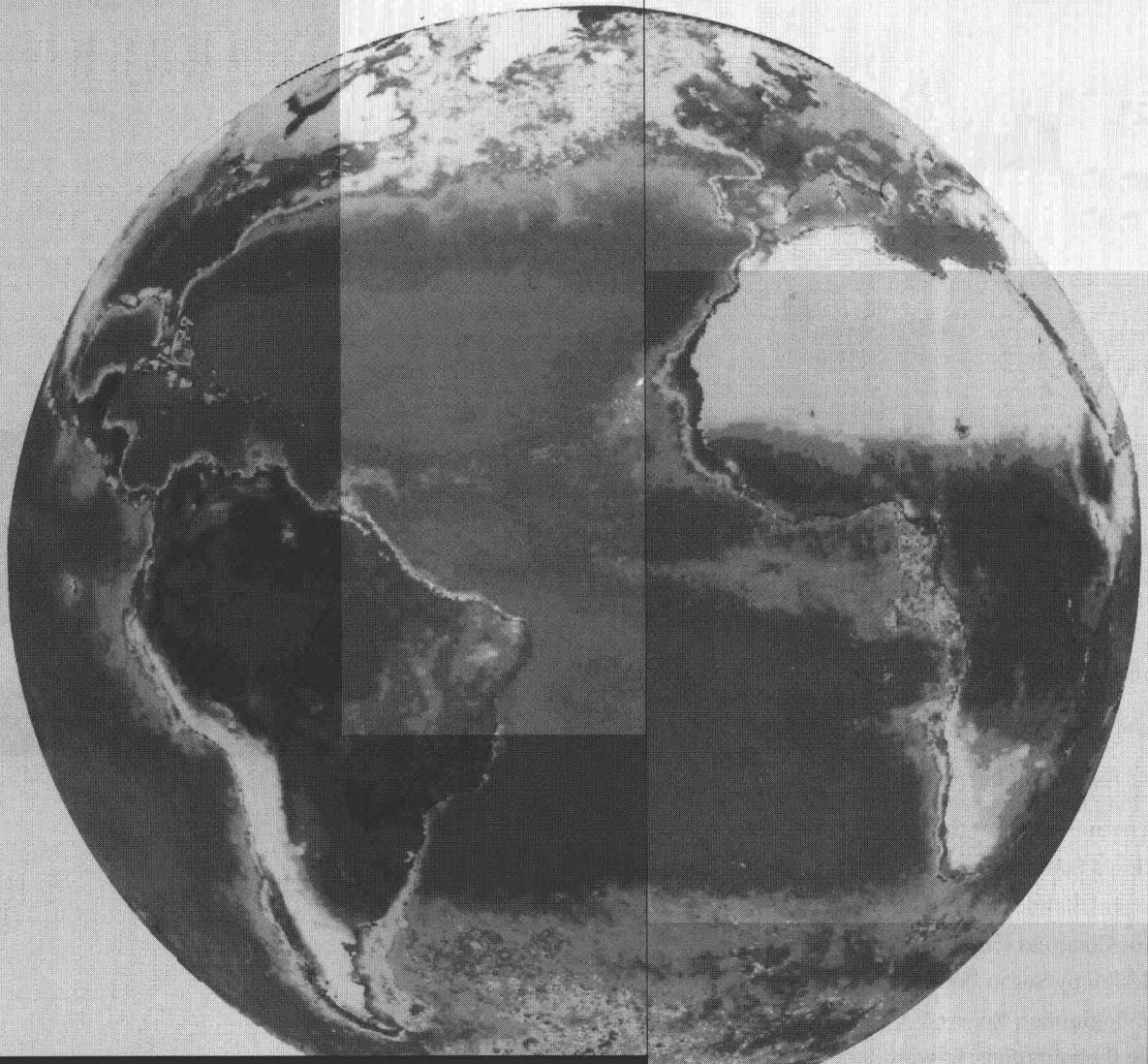
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# Africa 1997

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# Understanding the Tropical African Environment and Ways of Life



by Louis J. Mihalyi

Africa is a very large continent, some 2 million square miles greater than North and Central America combined, with an estimated population of 550 million in 1997. The landmass shows a very considerable diversity of the physical and cultural environments which, in a simplified approach, may be divided into two broad regions: North Africa, including the Sahara, and tropical Africa, including the Republic of South Africa.

In the North African region, aside from the mountains of the Atlas, Ahaggar and Tibesti ranges, the terrain is characterized by a low topography in the Sahara, often appearing as an "endless" desert landscape. Part of the Sahara is covered with sand while in other areas it has large expanses of exposed gravel and rock. Due to the prevalent trade winds from the northeast, the finer sand and surface soil is generally carried westward and south-westward; this accounts partly for the advance of the desert into the zone of the *Sahel*, greatly affecting life and livelihood in that region.

The climate of North Africa ranges from semi-aridity to aridity with only a narrow strip of Mediterranean climate north and northwest of the Atlas ranges. The environment imposes considerable limits on cultural activities. Below the Mediterranean coastal zone all agriculture requires irrigation; the arable area is limited due to the presence of a single river—the Nile—with a sufficient volume of water year round, although parts of the northern Sahara do contain significant amounts of water in deep-lying bodies which occasionally surface as oases in the otherwise bone-dry landscape.

Dependence on irrigation is aggravated by the ever present danger of soil salinization due to high evaporation and the use of improper irrigation techniques. In addition, the slowly moving waters provide favorable conditions for the spread of *bilharzia*; this disease is transmitted by the microscopic larvae from fresh water snails which penetrate the body while a person may be either bathing or simply wading in a river or stream. Its effect is to sap human energy permanently, since proper treatment seldom reaches the poor and the isolated who are its principal victims.

In the delta of the Nile, this disease affects at least 60% of the rural population with no medicine or vaccine available.

In the Sahara proper, the livelihood aside from the few oases is limited to the practice of nomadic pastoralism by tribes like the Tuareg, formerly a feared group preying on the caravans crossing the desert. The major income earned for the countries is limited to few resources: oil and natural gas in Algeria and Libya, phosphates in Morocco, and tourism—especially in Egypt, in addition to tolls derived from the Suez Canal.

Historically, North Africa was closely associated with the Mediterranean region and the Middle East—not with tropical Africa, due to the barrier of the vast Sahara. This alignment is reinforced by two major unifying cultural factors of the region: the religion of Islam and the Arabic language. Since Greek and Roman times, people from North Africa worked and moved around the Mediterranean basin; presently well over a million Algerians are located in France. These trends are projected to be continued in the future.

The tropical African region, as defined earlier, includes about 8.5 million square

miles, with a population of about 390 million in 1985. Topographically, the simplest division would indicate two major parts: "low" Africa in the west, including the Congo basin, then northward from Lake Albert (Lake Mobutu) along the watershed of the White Nile to the Red Sea, and "high" Africa containing the rest of the continent and the island of Madagascar, with an average elevation of 3,000 feet or above. On the average, temperatures decrease 3.3°F. per 1,000 feet of elevation. In both areas, volcanic peaks and ranges rise to great heights like the Cameroon mountains, the Mitumba mountains along the west side of the great African lakes, Mt. Elgon in Uganda and Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

The Great Rift Valley, an immense fault more than 3,000 miles long, runs from the Dead Sea through the Red Sea and Ethiopia to the mouth of the Zambesi River. It has actually two branches in East Africa, with the western branch occupied partly by the immense lakes of several thousand feet deep. Lake Victoria, the largest of them, is not part of the Rift system, but it received great attention in the early exploration of East Africa by Europeans searching for the source of the Nile.

The low, humid coast of West Africa, the extensive swamps of the Niger delta, the marshy areas along the river, and the "inland delta" of the Niger, are ideal environments for the spread of many diseases like malaria, yellow fever and river blindness. As the early European expeditions often attempted to use the rivers as "highways" to the interior, numerous attempts were made to penetrate West Africa along the Niger. Losing most, if not all their explorers, the European powers gave up the idea of establishing settlers in West Africa. Conversely, the cooler highlands of East and South Africa were favorable to European settlement; partly through government support the lands were seized from native holdings with little, if any compensation. All over tropical Africa the cities were founded by European invaders. Cities on the coast were generally established for easy access, trade or partly military considerations; those founded inland were along a railroad or in a mining area for the most part.

The climate of tropical Africa across the region has basically two traits in common: warm temperatures and a marked seasonality of rainfall, aside from the areas covered by tropical rainforests. Outside the areas with high elevations where the temperatures are lower, the indigenous people are able to survive without constructing substantial, permanent dwellings or producing heavy clothing. The year-round warm temperatures also make it possible to pursue agricultural activities accordingly, *provided there is sufficient rainfall for the crops*. The diverse physical setting supports a great variety of natural

vegetation and provides the opportunity for gathering native plants for food during much of the year.

The rainfall pattern in tropical Africa deserves special attention—it is the underlying cause of many of the problems affecting daily life and livelihood. Every day is warm or hot with little exception; but not every night is rainy, even in the most humid regions. The striking features of the rains are the great seasonal differences, their intensity and poor reliability.

The savanna region, an extensive area of grassy woodland, is the largest climatic area in tropical Africa, with a very distinct wet and dry season. The rainfall controls the responses of plants and animals and influences greatly human activities. Where the yearly rainfall is below 25 inches or so, the rains can be very erratic in both arrival and total amount. The areas of Africa affected by famine, the extent of which increased greatly in 1984–1985, are heavily concentrated in the low rainfall regions, like the Sahel zone south of the Sahara, where crop and animal losses can be devastating in any particular year.

Even when the rains come on schedule, they may cause severe problems. Tropical rains often arrive as very heavy showers or thunderstorms. Up to 4 inches of rain *per hour* may fall, causing swift run-off and erosion. Temperatures in the rainforest region are not excessive, practically never over 90°F. Water cannot evaporate rapidly due to the saturation of the air with its vapor; that is the reason for the great discomfort in humid tropical or subtropical climates. In tropical Africa a minimum of 60 inches of rainfall annually is necessary for thick forests; in the high latitudes of the temperate zone, the forests of the "taiga" exist with a precipitation of only 15 inches.

The ecology of the African savanna is remarkable. This area was in the past unexcelled for immense numbers of game which made Africa famous, and due to the favorable habitat, may well have been the location of emergence for *homo sapiens*, suggested by the large number of pre-human remains found in East and South Africa. However, the long dry season promotes the spread of fires, and for centuries the savannas have been burned by accident or design; the existing vegetation is characterized as a "fire climax."

A problem of immense proportions has emerged in the late 1980's in the East African savanna. Game poachers are killing the rhinos and elephants for their horn and tusks, respectively, at unbelievable rates. The 17,000 elephants of Kenya in 1970 now number fewer than 5,000. Uganda, seized by lawlessness, is a poachers paradise. Of all the Black African nations, only Tanzania has a reasonable anti-poaching program, but it is being swiftly undermined by desperately impoverished Zambian poachers. These game thieves

have become so bold they assault game wardens sent to protect animals.

In 1989 there was a world pact to end all trade in ivory. Nevertheless, the activities of the poachers continued. In spite of their activity, present estimates of the African elephant population are 573,000–598,000. Zimbabwe, South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Malawi have asked that the restrictions be relaxed, but there is wide resistance to the move. The argument they use is increased human population needs. The argument used by their opponents is that (1) the population should naturally be controlled and (2) there are a number of other substances which can be suitably substituted for ivory. This item will remain very controversial.

Another continuing problem is that of the chimpanzees. Monkey flesh is regarded as a delicacy in most parts of Africa. The slain animals are singed to remove the hair and then roasted. This is regarded as virtual cannibalism in other parts of the world, where the similarity of the chimpanzee to humans is recognized. Perhaps the worst part is the sale of their young children as pets. Young chimps are cute and adorable. When they pass maturity, they are not. Raucous, generally quarrelsome and wanting to live in their own society, they become very combative and frustrated.

Many "pet" chimpanzees wind up chained to a tree, spending the rest of their lives in misery. They bite (yes, people) and are tremendously strong. It takes four strong men to hold an adult down in laboratories where they are used for testing. (Their genes are about 99% comparable to those of humans.) The old *Tarzan* movies, with their amusing "Cheetah" were not realistic. Ten times as much film as was used in them was thrown in the wastebasket—the female, the more docile of the species, simply would not behave. As adults, they defecate and fling the results with dreadful accuracy. If one goes to Africa and is offered a cuddly youngster, forget it.

The savanna landscapes located in the proximity of the cities and large settlements show a considerable decline due to extensive deforestation. Aside from the small middle and upper class residential areas, the vast majority of Africans use wood or charcoal for cooking. The method used for converting the wood to charcoal is especially wasteful; only about 8% of the total wood piled into the "clamp," i.e. kiln, will actually end up as charcoal.

The environment of the savanna presents a number of hazards to humans and animals. The foremost among them is the presence of the tsetse fly, which excludes the raising of good quality domestic animals in the affected regions. Game animals are immune to the disease *trypanosomiasis* carried by the insect, but domestic



animals are generally killed by the "nagana," and humans fall victim to the "sleeping sickness."

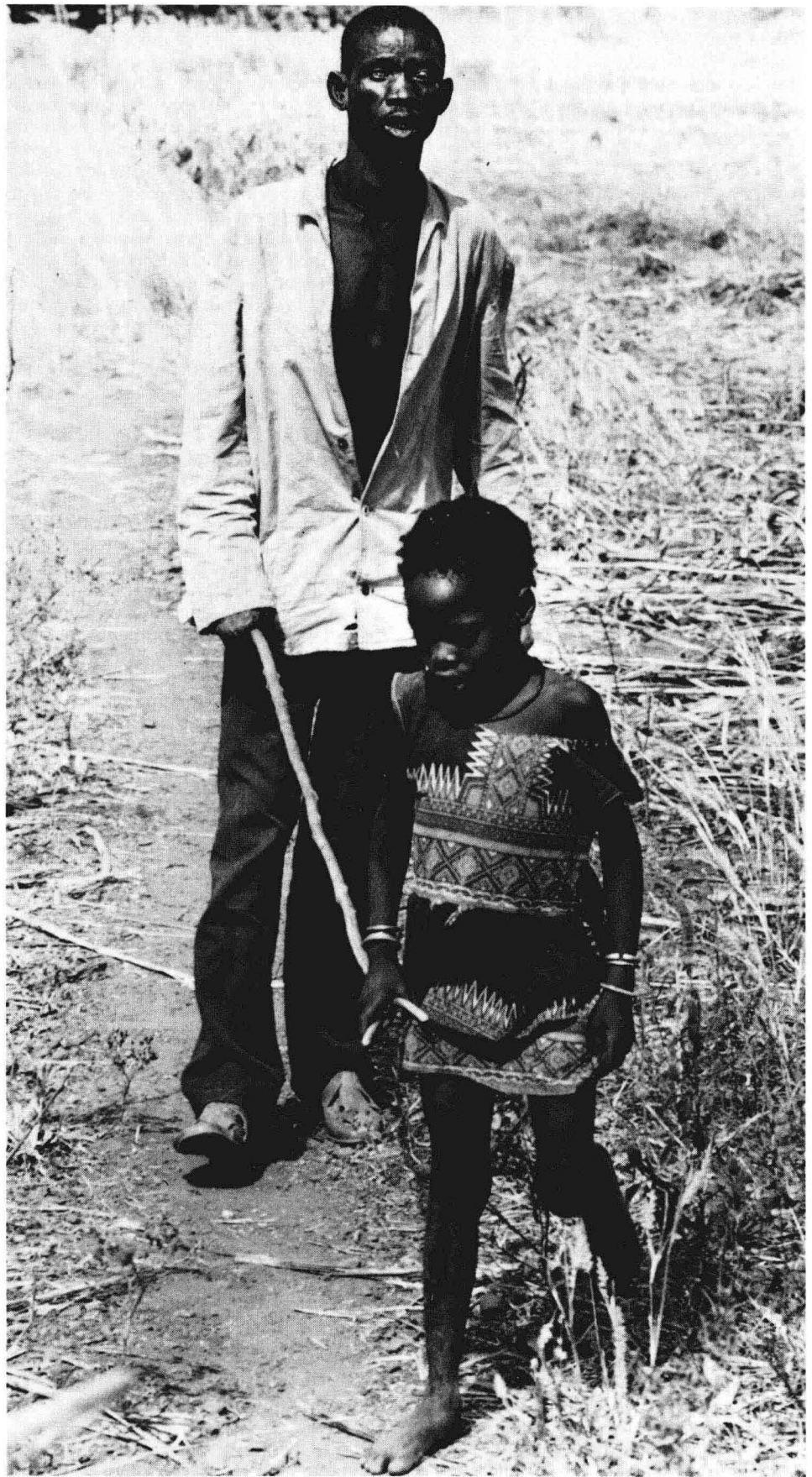
Getting rid of the fly permanently requires both the killing of the game which is resistant to the "nagana," but still is host to the disease and the cutting of the brush and other vegetation for the conversion of the area to permanent, intensive farming to prevent natural revegetation and return of the game. Presently, perhaps 1/3 to 1/4 of the entire savanna area may be infected by the tsetse.

Of the biological dangers affecting the crops are the presence of a large variety of ants and insects, the occasional flight of hordes of locusts and many grain-eating birds. Due to poverty and the low level of technology, the African farmers have no defense against these enemies. In addition, poor storage techniques result in a yearly crop loss estimated to be from 15% to 30%.

In the semi-arid grasslands of tropical Africa the pastures are reasonably good for animal husbandry and the tsetse fly is seldom a problem. But the prolonged dry season causes great hardships, especially in terms of the water supply. Overall, the wildlife, cattle and other livestock walk long distances for grass and water under the hot sun and show only a small weight gain during the year. In addition, ticks spread a variety of diseases, some of them fatal. However, perhaps the main handicap to proper animal raising lies in the traditions and customs of the pastoral people, especially those of East Africa. The monetary value of cattle is not as important as the *social* one; the prime consideration is to increase numbers for *status*, prestige or dowry. Little concern is given to the carrying capacity of the range; this overgrazing is one important factor in the spread of the desert in the Sahel region.

In tropical Africa good soils are the exception. The fast growth of the rainforest is based not so much on the soils but the rapid recycling of the nutrients from the plants' fast decomposition. The year round warm temperatures provide a perfect setting for the rapid decay of organic material and, with the warm waters carrying dissolved chemicals, essential elements for growth penetrate the soil deeply. The minerals carried downward can be reached by the long roots of the large, long-lived plants; but when these are replaced by short-cycle, 3-5 month crops, plant growth is stunted. This factor, among others, led to the practices of shifting, slash-and-burn cultivation with the ashes from the burned vegetation providing reasonable fertility for a period of 2-4 years.

In the savanna region, coarse sand, rock and clay particles remain after the soluble materials have been carried away by waters rapidly leaching the soil; this gives rise to a hard, unyielding surface, often



A child leads a victim of river blindness. A vaccine is now being provided without charge by a U.S. firm which will eradicate infection by this disease as of 2002.

WORLD BANK photo



forming laterite—reddish in color and generally hard enough to be used for road surfacing. Applying mechanized farming techniques to any part of tropical Africa requires a careful approach and study of the existing conditions to avoid failures such as occurred in Tanzania after World War II.

Often called the “peanut scheme,” the British government attempted to raise peanuts on a large scale (for edible oil). The area selected had an erratic rainfall of 6 to 25 inches each year, and the dry soil was extremely hard. The machinery used was mainly war-worn bulldozers and caterpillar tractors from U.S. surplus in the Philippines; they broke down rapidly. The project folded in a few years with a loss of millions of dollars. However, in some parts of tropical Africa, such as on the highlands of Kenya, in Zambia and Zimbabwe, properly established modern farming techniques have proved to be successful.

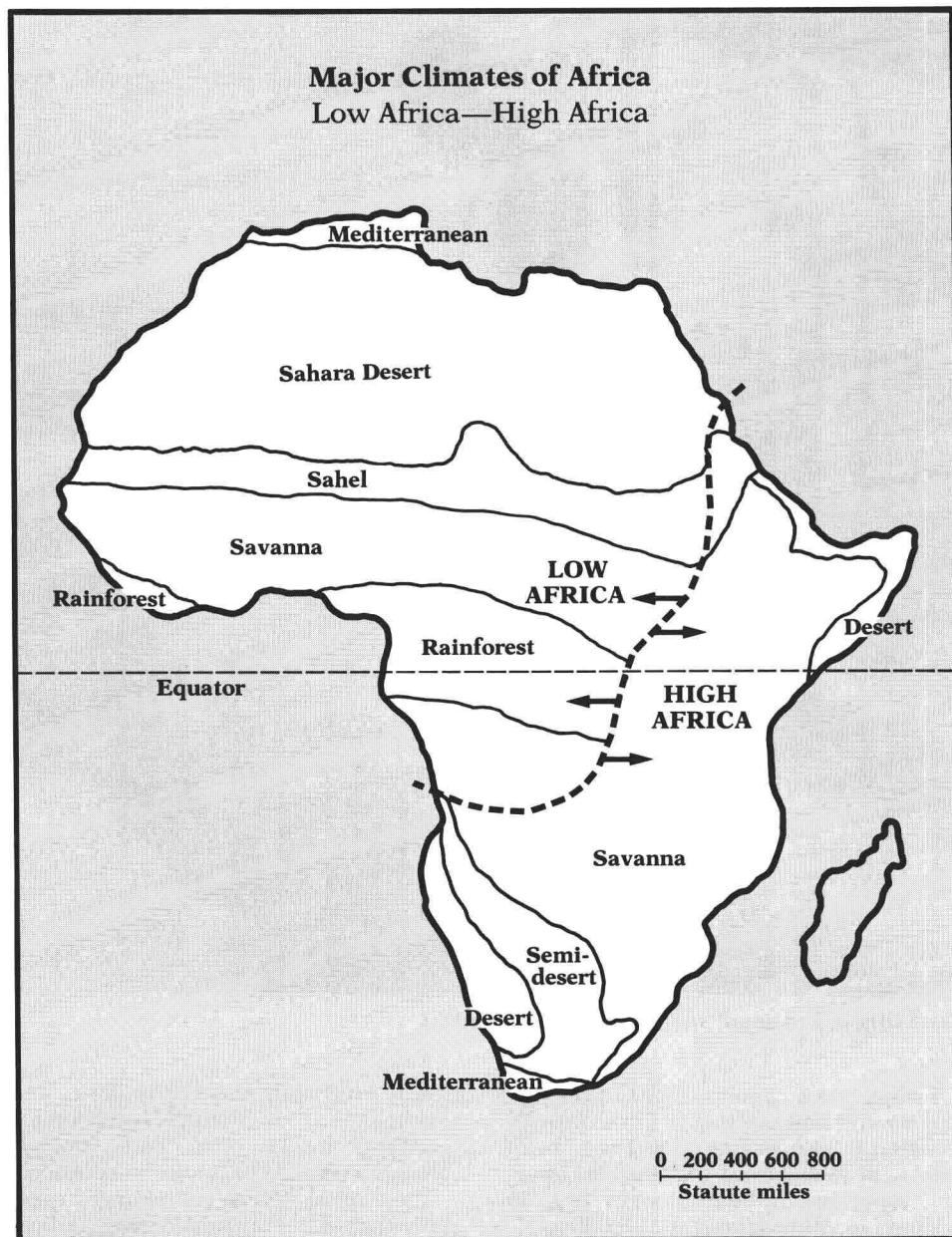
African cultivation is of two types: (1) permanent, or (2) shifting—slash and burn. The first appears in areas generally limited to good soils, near cities and in parts of the coastal strip. Aside from crops, a variety of fruit trees are also planted.

Far more widespread is the second approach; shifting cultivation developed hundreds of years ago when land was free and plentiful—and there was a relatively low population density. Farming is simple; the major tools are the axe and the hoe. The trees and brush are cut, then burned, and the seeds are sown in the ashes. Animal power is very seldom used, so these farmers, in general, are at the stage which existed in Europe about the time of the Roman conquests. Upgrading such farming techniques is a very difficult task; great leaps forward into mechanized farming have generally resulted in a disaster.

One percent of sub-Saharan African farming is mechanized, draft animals are used in another 10%, but human labor accounts for 89%. Although the men occasionally help out with the heaviest tasks, the burden falls almost exclusively on women to produce food. Yields are modest, being the product of a hoe and hour upon hour of grueling labor. Surpluses are seldom produced and there are large losses due to insufficient storage facilities. However, Africans are very talented farmers, using local plants for food or medicine, and are able to survive even in spite of crop failures.

Partly to overcome the numerous biological hazards, the average family may cultivate several plots at scattered locations. However, in spite of these efforts, food is often in short supply before the harvest of the major staple crop; the children are the first to suffer.

The diet of the African population is



usually inadequate. Carbohydrates represent most of the food supply while meat consumption—of very poor quality—is at most about 6% of that in the average American’s diet. Malnutrition is widespread, especially among the children, and heavily affects women during pregnancy. The majority of families is limited to one daily meal—in the evening. Even in the cities, the drinking water is polluted by a variety of organisms, but little is done to tackle the problem.

Ideally, western, and in particular American, mechanized agricultural techniques should be supplied to Africa, particularly legumes (peas, beans, particularly soybean growing should be taught) to raise the bulk, adequacy and protein of the African diet. But this is impossible because of present conditions. National, state, tribal and local leaders usually de-

mand a “piece of the action.” Under the circumstances, no capitalist from the more industrially advanced world could be attracted to participate in such an effort. Thus, the people are relegated to their routine, starch-laden diets.

The Republic of South Africa possesses the capacity to change things, and is making efforts in this direction. Western economic measures directed against that nation in the name of racial righteousness, have hampered it in its efforts, as well as deprived thousands of Black South Africans of something even faintly resembling a decent standard of living.

Because of widespread poverty and the absence of electricity in all but the urban areas, refrigeration equipment is extremely limited. Leftover food spoils rapidly. Where food preservation is practiced, like in the case of fisheries along the lakes and



Spraying to kill small snails that cause Bilharzia

WORLD BANK photo

streams, it is a common sight to see fish cut up and laid out to dry in the open—covered with flies and dust. The same is true with animal carcasses after slaughtering, especially in the rural areas. In Lake Victoria man introduced the Nile Perch—a fish that can grow six feet long and weigh several hundred pounds. It ate almost all of the native, much smaller Tilapia fish which was preserved by drying in the sun. Oily and too large for sun-drying, the Nile Perch has to be smoked to preserve it. Thus, forests in the region are suffering from excessive wood loss. Further, the Tilapia ate algae and the snails that transmit *bilharzia*—both are spreading. Ironically, Tilapia are now being farm-raised in ponds here in the U.S. and are proving to be a real seller in supermarket fish counters.

The recent spread of “modernization” led to the availability of Coca-Cola and other soft drinks popular among the younger generation, but with “empty” calories in terms of proper nutrition. Africans in general consume a considerable amount of beer, originally produced from some staple foods—millet, maize or bananas—although bottled, manufactured

beer is gaining increased popularity and prestige. “Kat” is a widely-used opiate (excitant) in Ethiopia, and “dagga” (bhang) is smoked by adults on occasion.

The tropical African environment, especially that of the savanna region, harbors a large variety of diseases affecting the human population. Aside from *bilharzia*, which is estimated to affect at least 80 million Africans, amoebic and bacillary dysentery are very widespread and are a major factor in high childhood mortality. Malaria is spreading again, especially in the more humid areas—mosquitos having increased resistance to sprays. *Filariasis*, a disease due to parasites, often causing swelling in the limbs, is commonly found in mosquito-prone areas. Hookworm affects many children who generally go barefoot. *Yaws* and *leishmaniasis* (carried by the parasite which forms ulcers on the skin) are frequently encountered in the region of the equator. *Onchocerciasis* (“river blindness”), spread by black fly eggs, is prevalent along streams in West Africa.

Fortunately this will become a problem of the past. An American pharmaceutical company has developed a serum which, if made widely available, will eliminate

the disease. The company has agreed to furnish the medicine at no cost.

To the list must be added Guinea Worm Disease which exists in a belt of the Savanna-Sahel stretching clear across Africa. It is spread by contaminated water. The ovum of the worm is consumed by drinking and locates itself within the human body, most usually in the legs. It grows to a length up to three inches and immediately seeks exit from its victim, a process that is excruciatingly painful, taking several weeks. Seeking relief from the pain of a worm half in and half out of the body, infected persons soak in nearby ponds and streams. The worm exits and starts the cycle again by producing more eggs. This causes substantial loss of work and productivity.

Overall, much of the population and especially the children suffer from widespread incidence of multiple vitamin deficiency. *Kwashiorkor*, an almost always fatal disease among youngsters, is caused by a protein-deficient diet and . . . starvation. Ironically, improved vaccination availability against measles and other childhood diseases in the last decade have led to lowered infant and child mortality, result-