

Africa A to Z: Africa's Evolving Role in the World

Dr. Robert J. Werner, Emeritus Professor of Geography, University of St. Thomas,
rjwerner@stthomas.edu, Sept. 22, 2014

A. Africa's physical geography

1. the physical geography of Africa

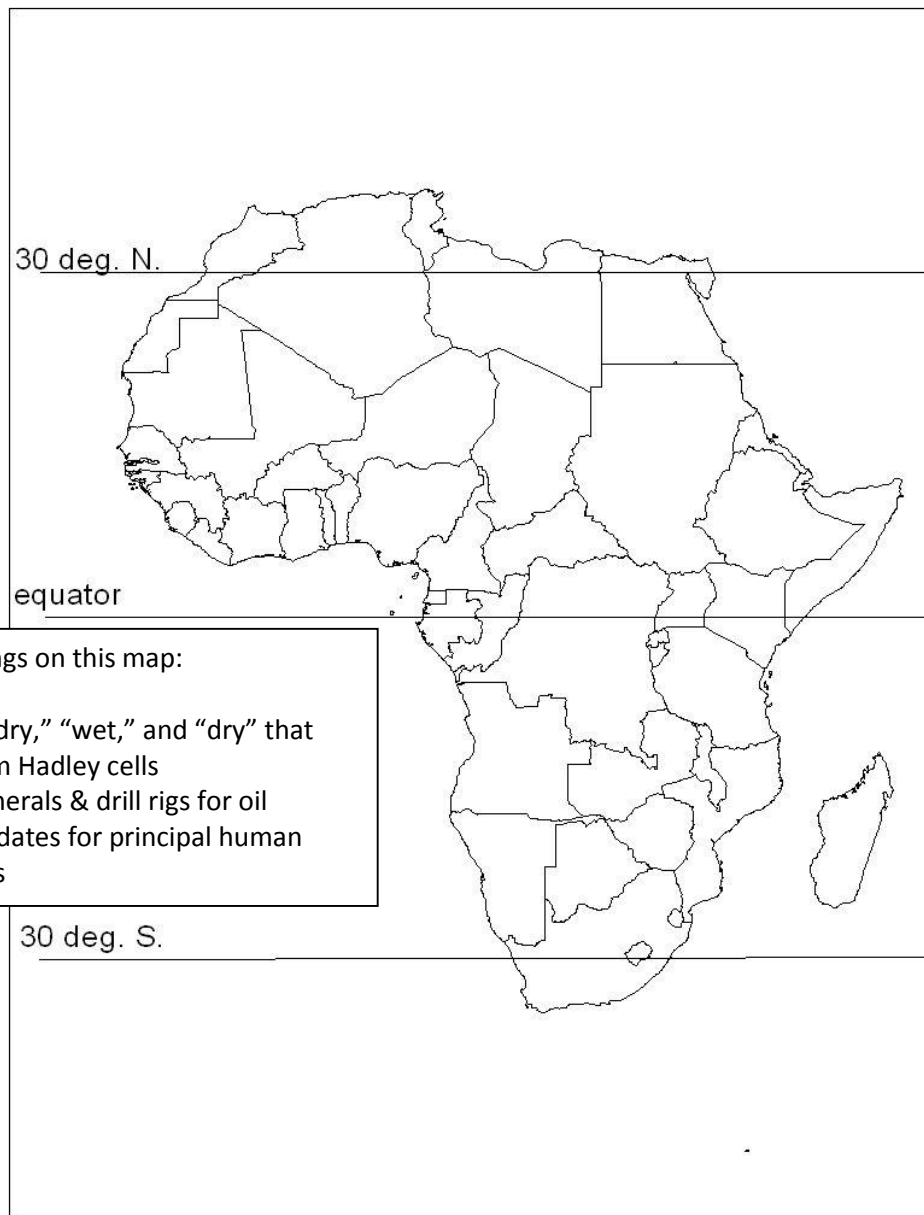
Hadley cells -> climate, vegetation, soils, agriculture: as world maps

Hadley cells -> climate, vegetation, soils, agriculture: effect in Africa

Hadley cell migration causes rainy seasons (ITCZ)

landforms – the continent is often described as tableland or plateau

minerals – historically important deposits in W. Africa, arc of minerals in southern Africa, SE Congo



Draw these things on this map:

1. Hadley cells
2. the words "dry," "wet," and "dry" that result from Hadley cells
3. stars for minerals & drill rigs for oil
4. arrows and dates for principal human migrations

B. The history of Africa

Early human migration-the Bradshaw Foundation maps: <http://www.bradshawfoundation.com/journey/>

Probably all *Homo sapiens sapiens* evolved from a single woman and man in East Africa.

The next big migration is of Bantu people from East Africa to the area around Nigeria and Cameroon. Bantus are most of black Africans. "Bantu" is shorthand for the Congo-Benue linguistic group (in eastern West Africa) or the Niger-Congo group (in West Africa). This migration happens from 1000 BCE to 500 CE.

Great empires of Africa (also see the maps on the next page):

Dynastic Egypt: 3,000 BC – 300 BC

Aksum: 400 BC – 100 AD

West African empires: 8th-19th centuries

Central and northern empires: 16th – 19th centuries

Great Zimbabwe: 1100 – 1450 AD

Asante Empire (Ghana) 18th and 19th centuries

Jared Diamond argues that the reason Africa did not have enormous empires like the Mongols, Romans, Greeks, or Muslims, is that agriculture can't be moved across Hadley cells. In other words, dryland agriculture in the Sahara can't be transplanted into the wet forests of central Africa and vice-versa. The upshot is that kingdoms in Africa stayed where they were born and never spread across huge areas of the continent. So, pre-European Africa had lots of empires, but because of no written language (not quite true) and the localized nature of the kingdoms, the world knew very little about them.

European exploration

This happened very rapidly about 1500 CE, with explorers named da Gama, Cabral, Diaz, Columbus, Magellan, Cabot, and others. The earliest explorers in Africa were Portuguese, but all early European influence was coastal because of inland diseases and that native people often didn't want Europeans inland. It wasn't until the Berlin Conference that Europeans really moved strongly inland.

The slave trade

The largest number of slaves were within Africa. In parts of inland West Africa, it is estimated that half the population were slaves. Estimates for the whole continent are between 30 and 60% of the entire population. We all know there were large numbers of slaves in the Atlantic slave trade. While about 11 million slaves were transported in the Atlantic slave trade over 400 years, few know that about 12.5 million slaves were shipped to Asia over 1,100 years. Most of this slaving was Arab and Muslim. (See chapters 14-16 in the Collins & Burns reference at the end for the sources).

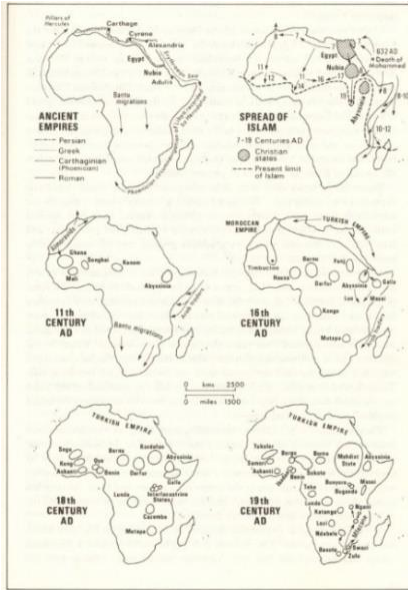
Berlin conference 1884-85 led to the scramble for Africa, 1884-1914

The most important thing about the Berlin Conference is that a rule was articulated that for a European country to claim land in Africa, that country must actually occupy the land. This set off the

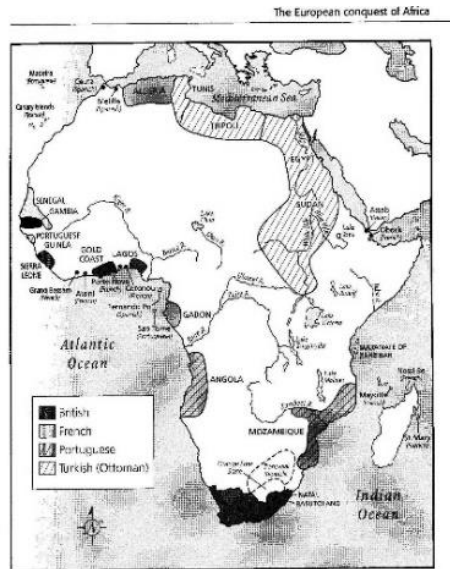
Scramble for Africa. Prior to the Berlin Conference, Europeans had only coastal toeholds, but between 1884 and 1914 was the time when Europe claimed all of inland Africa.

Independence

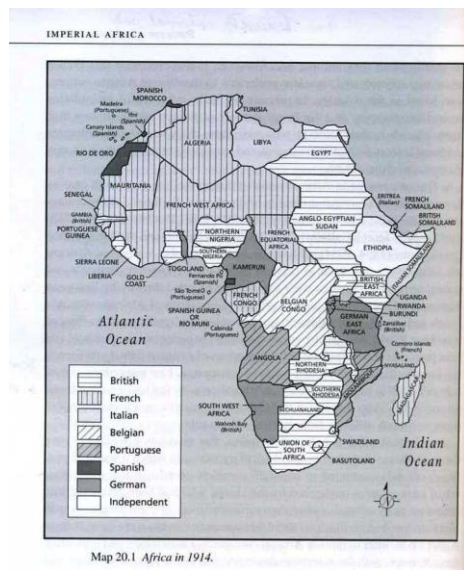
Almost all African countries became independent of Europe in the 1960s. The exceptions were Portuguese and Spanish colonies who did not gain independence until the mid-1970s. The least-colonized country was Ethiopia. Liberia shows on the map below as independent, but really were colonized by former African slaves from the New World.



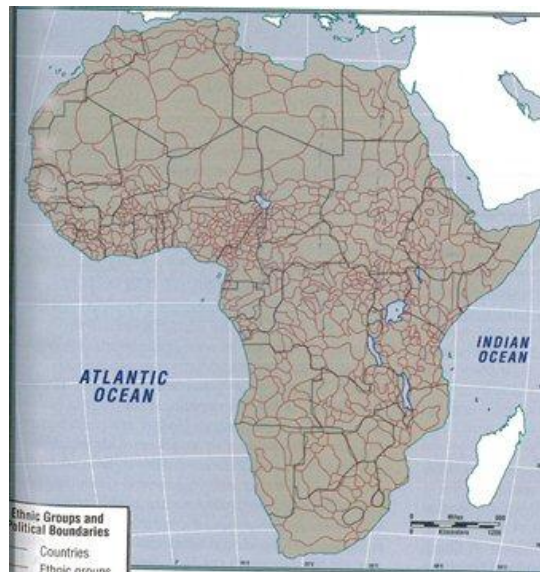
Pre-European empires



Map 1K.2 Europe in Africa on the eve of the partition. ¹



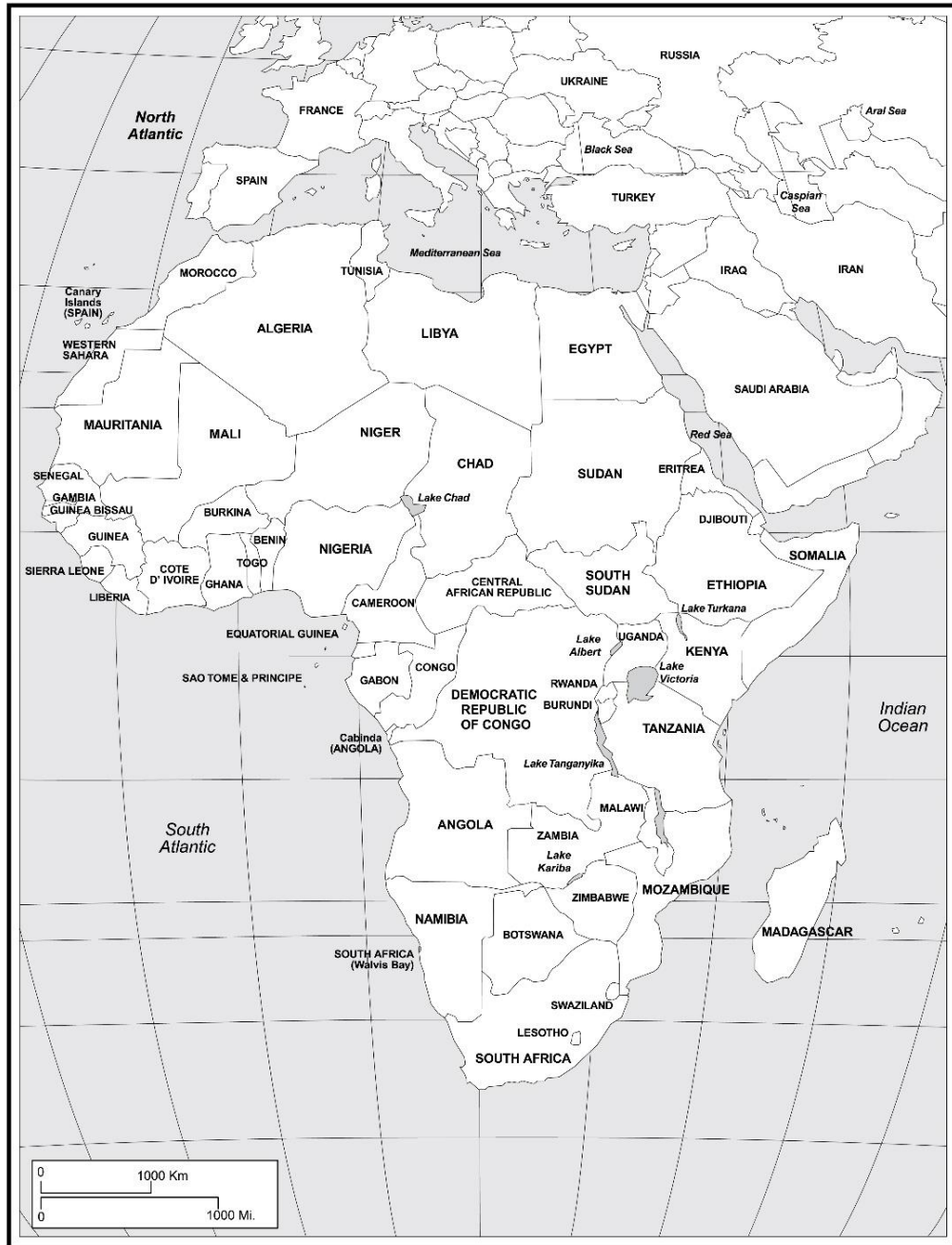
Map 20.1 Africa in 1914. ¹



Tribes and country borders

¹ maps from Collins & Burns (see references at end)

AFRICA



Produced by the Cartographic Research Lab
University of Alabama

B. Present-day Africa, one by one (in a counter-clockwise direction):

Egypt – The third country to experience the Arab Spring. The Muslim Brothers won the election in 2012, but in yet another iteration of modern Egyptian history, the military will not allow Islamic government, so retook power in 2013. Egypt has yet to emerge from the power of military rule.

Libya – The second country of the Arab Spring is now factionalized among tribes and regions. Libya risks greater chaos. A weak central government and tribal/regional factions will probably continue to haunt Libya.

Tunisia – The first of the Arab Spring, Tunisia is the one to watch. If any Arab country can become democratic, it will be Tunisia. A Muslim party called Ennhada won elections and softened its position that Sharia should be the basis of government, yet the opposition leader was recently assassinated. Tensions exist among Islamists and pro-democracy groups.

Algeria – The central thing to understand about Algeria is that the political vacuum after their brutal war of independence from France was filled by the military, who then repressed Islamic and socialist political parties, leading to sporadic violence that scares away investment and keeps this country isolated.

Morocco – One of the few pro-American Arab states, there is low-level tension between the monarchy and pro-democratic groups, yet this does not result in violence. Perhaps at present, Morocco is the only safe and accessible North African country for Americans to visit. A long-simmering conflict exists in the south because Morocco occupied Spanish Sahara when the Spanish left in 1975. The native people of Western Sahara, as Spanish Sahara is now known, have a political organization called Polisario and they call their country the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic. They live in (and are supported by) Algeria. Hence, the Moroccan/Algerian border is closed and the two countries do not get along.

Mauritania – A desert country subject to even more desertification, the failure of rural agriculture has created intense urbanization pressure in the capital, Nouakchott. Fears of Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb have halted the Paris-to-Dakar car race. (“Maghreb” is Arabic for “where the sun sets” and refers to three countries: Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia).

Mali – The northern part of Mali is under the control of remnants of Gaddafi’s Libya, and consists of Muslim Tuareg tribes in the arid north declaring an independent Islamic state from the black African tribes in the south. Stalemate, at present, with France supporting her old colony.

Niger – Present again is the border between ethnic/racial Berber Tuareg people of the north (nomadic, white, Muslim) and the largely black, Christian south. With a lot of meddling by Libya’s Gaddhafi over the last few decades, Niger is presently stable and propped up by France.

Chad – Also presently stable and supported by France after a lot of Gaddhafi’s interference, Chad is helping in the war against Tuareg Islamist militants in southern Libya, SE Algeria, and northern Niger.

Burkina Faso – Ruled by a president who took power in a coup in 1987, Burkina has seen only two elections since independence from France in 1960. Coups and military governments are more common than elections; instability prevents investment that could lead to greater economic development.

Senegal – Despite political stability and support from France, Senegal has not yet delivered higher economic development to its citizens. Stable and with tourism, learn some French before you go.

Gambia – This country is shaped like it is because it is the distance a British gunboat could shoot from the Gambia River. A former Portuguese, then British colony and slaving capital, the economy is almost wholly agricultural, producing low value-added farm products.

Guinea-Bissau – A model of why not to be colonized by Portugal. Portugal left nothing to the country at independence, including no government infrastructure, so Guinea-Bissau emerged from colonialism to dictatorship and civil war. Deep poverty and very poor governance.

Guinea – With a history of political instability since independence in the 1960s, Guinea possesses mineral riches that aren't developed because of tribal strife and coup after coup. Guinea opted for independence from France and France made an object lesson out of Guinea (like the French did with Haiti), stripping doors, light bulbs, chalkboards, and everything else it could in order to send the message to other African countries not to go it alone from France. Guinea has profound corruption among army officers, who get rich transiting cocaine from South America to Europe and selling fishing licenses to foreign countries.

Sierra Leone – Just understand Liberia (next) and then know that Sierra Leone is Britain's case of Liberia.

Liberia – The country was created by the USA when American religious people thought there should be some place in Africa to which American blacks could return if they wanted. Few did, but those few became black American colonialists, lording it over native groups. A coup ended their rule and Liberia descended into tribal violence conducted by warlords and their drugged child soldiers. Surprisingly, Liberia today has one of two female African presidents (Samba-Panza in the CAR is the other) and is politically stable in spite of the legacy of severe recent political upheaval. Minnesota has resettled 30,000 Liberian refugees. The population of Brooklyn Park is 10% Liberian.

Ivory Coast – Long known as an African stability story, the country rather came apart in 2010 when tribal/racial violence split Ivory Coast along the lines of a Muslim north (largely immigrants), and a black, Christian/animist south, precipitating another of what might be hundreds of cases of African leaders not stepping down when they lose an election. Eventually, the loser left office and politics is settling down.

Ghana – One of Africa's most interesting stories, Ghanaian independence from Britain was led by Kwame Nkrumah, a father of pan-Africanist socialism, but his socialism failed because Ghana couldn't afford it. The resulting crash was followed by a coup and a dictator, but then by four successful, democratic elections. One of the few English-speaking countries in West Africa, Ghana has a tourism industry partly based on black African-Americans who wish to learn about slavery. High crime, but stable and accessible as an English-speaking country.

Togo & Benin – separate countries, but both have the thread of making a transition from coup-ridden socialism to greater democracy. Speak French before you go.

Nigeria – Economists recently recalculated Nigeria's economy to include small businesses, informal sectors, and other sectors previously undervalued (like telecoms and Nigeria's movie industry). The results put Nigeria as the biggest economy in Africa. Nigeria is important for other reasons too, such as the continent's largest population (by far). With four principal ethnic groups (but with some 250 more),

the north is Muslim, the south largely Christian – hence the current problem of Boko Haram attacking Christians. While Boko Haram didn't start out as an Islamic terrorist organization, the brutality of the Nigerian security forces helped drive them to extremes. Other significant problems include widespread corruption, an insurgency in the southern oil-rich delta, and typically chaotic transportation. Public education is of low quality. Despite all these profound problems, the country has a dynamic and growing economy.

Cameroon – Also divided into about 250 ethnicities, Cameroon is relatively stable, but poor. Infrastructure is also poor, with bribes at roadblocks, broken bridges, and plenty of potholes and mud. You rarely hear about Cameroon in the news, which is good because the news from Africa is typically bad, but the country did make the news lately for killing a hundred Boko Haram fighters in the north.

Central African Republic – The CAR is yet another country that straddles the Muslim/Christian border (get a map of that and study it because almost all countries along that border have religious problems), so is paying the price with an invasion over the last two years by a group called Seleka. Seleka threw out the president (I think he's in Cameroon) and is clueless about how to govern.

Democratic Republic of the Congo – There are several good books written about Congolese history (Hochschild, Wrong, Kingsolver, Devlin). If you had a choice of what European country colonized you, you would not choose Belgium (or Portugal). Congolese history includes colonialism at its worst, Mobutu, Cold War Africa, U.S. meddling (Devlin), and most recently, the spillover of the Rwandan genocide which still destabilizes eastern Congo. Political instability prevents this land of mineral wealth from developing.

Republic of the Congo – A different country than the DR Congo because France wanted a piece of the Belgian colonial expansion in central Africa. It is difficult for me to think of unique things about this Congo – it seems to have all of Africa's problems, exacerbated once again by poor governance.

Gabon – Gabon is an oil-rich country mismanaged first by Omar Bongo and now by his son. Read about Omar Bongo if you like stories about zany African leaders (though he has lots of competition).

Angola – Portugal made little effort to develop her African colonies (Angola, Mozambique), so that independence in Angola happened when the government of Portugal was overthrown in 1975 and Portuguese generals refused to continue fighting in Angola. At independence, the country descended into 26 years of civil war, whose sides were supported by Cold War principals. In a stunning turn of events, large amounts of oil in Angola, coupled with a poor economy in Europe, is driving Angolans to buy property in Portugal and Portuguese to go to Angola for jobs.

Namibia – Scene of a German genocide, Namibia is a desert country that also became a Cold War theater because white South Africa and the USA supplied their factions in Angola through Namibia. Now stable, with large quantities of diamonds, Namibia has an intriguing tourism industry that includes safaris and desert elephants.

Botswana – To me, one of Africa's most interesting countries for these reasons. Diamonds were discovered after British colonialism and the diamond money was spent building social infrastructure instead of being wasted by politicians. This country has some of the best governance on the continent, in part due to being a rare African case of a dominant ethnicity of Tswana people and thus not having

the ethnic strife that plagues so many other African countries. They have preserved some native governance, a rarity. Terrific tourism easily accessible from Johannesburg.

South Africa – Obviously, the big story here is race. The Dutch-descended Afrikaners authored institutionalized white supremacy since 1948 called apartheid (but whose racism stretched back the Dutch arrival to 1652). This was overcome from 1990-1994 when Nelson Mandela became president. The African National Congress has dominated elections since, but has not delivered higher standards of living for blacks, leading to frustration, high crime, and white flight.

Zimbabwe – The lead story here is Robert Mugabe. Taking black majority rule in 1980, Mugabe initially was a moderate, but within five years became one of the continent's most despotic leaders. A country blessed with a wonderful climate, good soils, and many minerals, Zimbabwe should be one of Africa's richest countries except for abysmal governance.

Zambia – Rich in copper, landlocked, and with limited resources, Zambia has adopted IMF-compliant economic policies such as limiting government spending, instituting a wage-hike freeze, promoting private industry, and increasing taxes. Elections have been democratic over the last two decades. Indians and Chinese have invested in Zambia, and moved there too.

Malawi – Resource-poor Malawi produces tea and tobacco, which have little value added. Lacking minerals and oil, with limited soil fertility and a large population relative to its size, Malawi's income is very low, along with education and health levels. The country deserves its slogan, The Warm Heart of Africa. A wonderful place to visit. Rather bitter politics recently resulted in the electoral loss of one of two women heads of state on the continent (Joyce Banda, along with Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in Liberia).

Mozambique – The other major Portuguese country in Africa (with Angola), again Portugal did not make an effort to develop her colony, so when Portugal abruptly left, Angola sank into 15 years of civil war, whose factions were backed by the USSR vs. white South Africa and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Fighting ended in 1992 and elections were held in 1994. Mozambique has ditched its Marxism and moved to a market economy, but is rising from a very low level.

Madagascar – Oddly known by the name of the island (the country's name is the Malagasy Republic), this country has an unusual ethnicity: Austronesian people who sailed west to Africa, plus black Africans. (There are also East African, Arab, and Indian influences). There is considerable ethnic tension. Politics follows ethnic lines. Political instability frightens away investment.

Tanzania – Known for its leader at independence, Julius Nyerere put the country on a socialist path. An interesting man personally, an ascetic, clean-living, modest man, his socialism resulted in very low economic output. This country too changed economic gears over the last decade, adopting conservative IMF-compliant policies. There is an Arab influence on the island of Zanzibar and an independence movement there.

Rwanda – Known for the 1994 genocide that pitted majority Hutus against Tutsis and moderate Hutus, the war ended in 1993 but spilled into neighboring Congo, where it still simmers. Investment has picked up in Rwanda and it even has a genocide-tourism industry. Read the chapter of Kapuchinski's book (see list at the end of these notes) to understand this country (then Gourevich's book).

Burundi – With the same ethnicity as Rwanda (about 85% Hutu and 14% Tutsi, plus 1% Twa or Pygmy), my own view of this country is that it could explode into genocide at almost any time. Keep your eye on this place.

Uganda – I think of Uganda as Africa's success story against HIV/AIDS. Instead of sweeping the problem under the rug the way most African countries did, Uganda went public. The president endorsed HIV/AIDS education campaigns, religious institutions bought in, the public education system took part, everyone got tested, and every Ugandan knows their HIV/AIDS status. Infection rates dropped from 15% to 5%. Not a very well-governed country, Uganda has lurched from one extreme leader to another, from Idi Amin to Milton Obote and now to the continent's longest-standing president, Yoweri Museveni.

Kenya – Everyone thought Kenya was one of Africa's most stable countries until elections in 2007 split politics along ethnic lines. Key leaders of Kenya's present government are under indictment for fomenting ethnic violence associated with elections. Kenya, along with Uganda and Burundi, hosts African Union peacekeepers in Somalia, so is subject to attacks by Islamic extremists from Al Shabaab.

Somalia – Perhaps the world's most failed state, Somalia had a dictator until 1991, Siad Barre. Since he was thrown out, the country has suffered clan warfare. Although everyone speaks Somali, unity evades the country because of distinct clan affiliations. Ethnic Somalis live in Ethiopia and northern Kenya. Al Shabaab is held in check by African Union soldiers, slowly gaining ground in the south. The north and northeast are functionally different countries: Somaliland in the north and Puntland in the northeast.

Ethiopia – Long known as Abyssinia, Ethiopia is Africa's first Christian kingdom, dating all the way back to the first century AD, though there is presently a slight majority of Muslims because of Saudi money building mosques and madrassas. Politically stable only in the last decade, the country seems poised to see real economic growth because of investment from China and India. Look for future meddling in Somalia.

Eritrea – The African Union (formerly the Organization for African Unity) has refused to consider a single case of re-drawing country borders, for fear of opening a Pandora's Box (see the map of tribes and country borders on page 2). Eritrea was the only new African country since 1975 (until South Sudan) because Eritreans fought a war of independence from Ethiopia, and won. Unfortunately, since becoming their own country, the man who led the independence movement has become a despot. Isias Afwerki's government since 1993 is repressive and despotic. Minnesota hosts 14,000 immigrant Eritreans.

Sudan – Sudan is governed by yet another dictator, Omar al-Bashir. Generally, Sudan is ethnically Arab, Arabic-speaking, and Muslim, though centuries of slaving leave dark-skinned people there too. Decades of war between this Muslim Arab north and Christian/animist black south ended in 2011 when South Sudan voted for separation.

South Sudan – This is the world's newest country. The world was hopeful for South Sudan, but soon after independence, South Sudan dissolved into tribal strife, principally between Nuer and Dinka but with many other tribes involved too. Don't look for this to settle out soon. There are large oil deposits between Sudan and South Sudan, but conflict prevents full exploitation. All the pipelines go north, leaving Sudan with a stranglehold on its old enemy, so there is a project to build a new pipeline to Kenya but this will take a long time. Strife does not attract investment.

C. Africa's future

1. Real increase in GDP/capita (from trade within Africa, increases in oil and farm output, telecoms, minerals, construction)
2. Investment from China and India
3. Increase in democracy: from about 4 or 5 countries in 1990 to almost half of Africa's countries
4. Decline in HIV/AIDS
5. slow resolution of conflicts in Egypt, Liberia, Western Sahara, Mali, Ivory Coast, Central African Republic, eastern Congo, Somalia, Eritrea, Somalia, South Sudan
6. expansion of Islamic extremism and continued troubles along Muslim/Christian borders
7. climate drying in the Sahel (southern border of the Sahara Desert) and consequent migration
8. future trouble spots: Burundi (the next Rwanda?)

Suggested reading:

Any of Kapuchinski's books. Ryszard Kapuchinski was the leading Polish newspaper correspondent in Africa for many years. He published four books which have various chapters on many African countries, plus two books with single-country topics of Angola and Ethiopia. He has the best explanation of the 1994 Rwandan genocide in his chapter "A Lecture on Rwanda" (in *The Shadow of the Sun*).

Meredith, Martin. *The Fate of Africa: A History of the Continent Since Independence* (Sep 6, 2011). At 700 pages, this book has wonderfully broad coverage of post-WWII Africa.

Collins, Robert O. and Burns, James M. *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa*. 2007. Terrific A-to-Z history of Africa. It is hard to find a book whose historical coverage is so complete. It is also very difficult to find a book on Africa that addresses pre-colonial Africa in such detail. 400 pages.

Moyo, Dambisa and Ferguson, Niall. *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa*. (2010). Written by a Zambian economist, this book gives interesting current ideas about how Africa can develop economically.