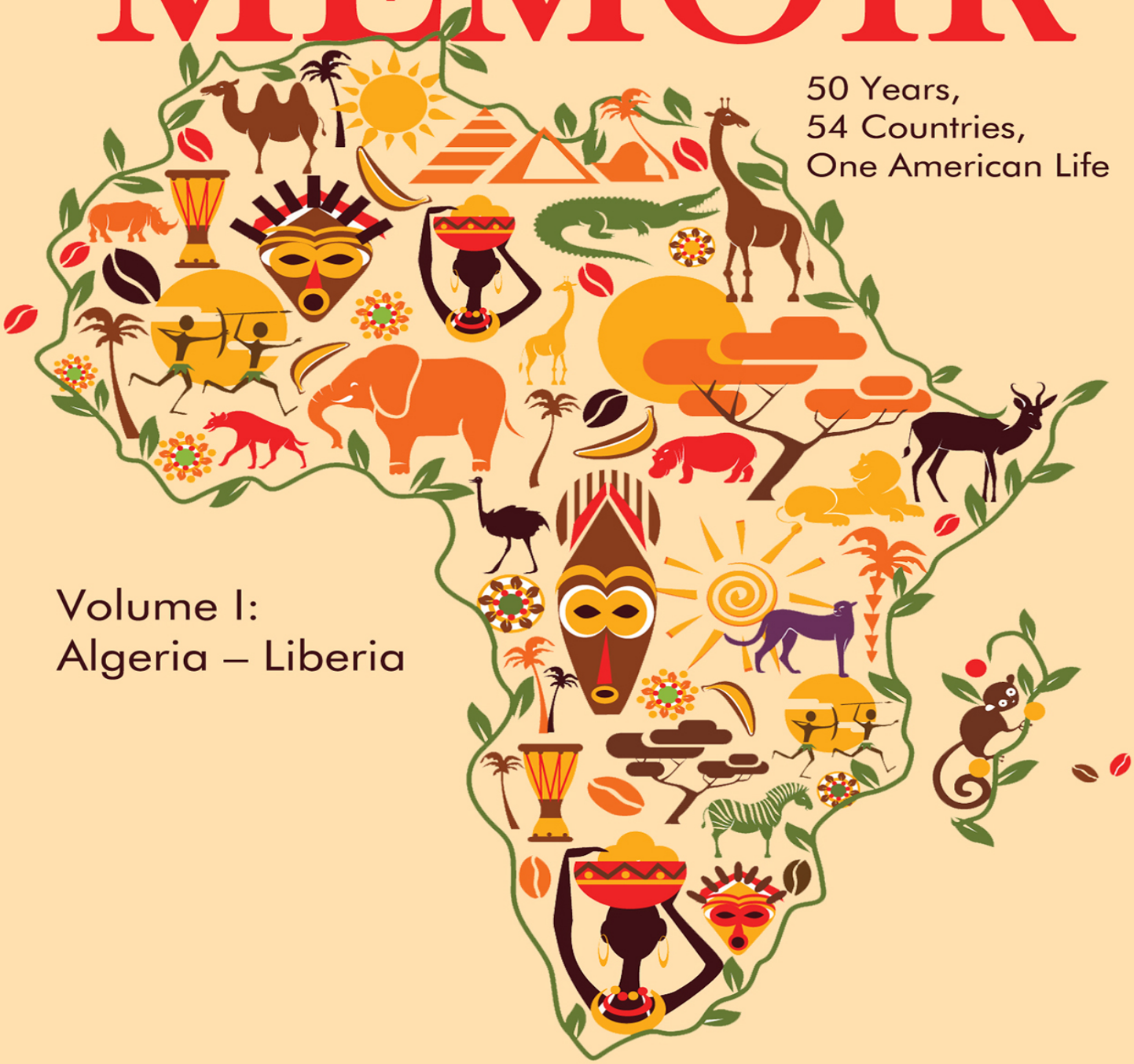
AFRICA MEMOIR

50 Years,
54 Countries,
One American Life



Volume I:
Algeria – Liberia

MARK G. WENTLING

Africa Memoir

50 Years, 54 Countries, One American Life

(Volume I)

Algeria – Liberia

by

Mark G. Wentling

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Dedicated to all those in Africa I Enjoyed Knowing
and All Their Descendants

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Uganda
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São Tomé and Príncipe*
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Seychelles
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*Comoros
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Angola
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Malawi
Mauritius*
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Zimbabwe
Namibia
Madagascar
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Foreword

THE CENTRAL PURPOSE OF this book is to share my lifetime of firsthand experiences in Africa. I also attempt to communicate my views about the many facets of the challenges faced by each of Africa's fifty-four countries. At the same time, I provide some basic information about each country and some comparisons with the United States.

This memoir may be considered as a three-volume reference book which can be read in its entirety or by selecting a chapter on an individual country. I have followed the alphabet in presenting a chapter on each African country. Therefore, I begin with Algeria and end with Zimbabwe. Some chapters are short, three to four pages, while others are long, like Niger and Togo. The length of a chapter usually depends on how much time I spent in a country.

I used the names of all fifty-four African countries by which most of them are commonly known. All the countries have their official names and most of them begin with 'Republic of." Some countries have also changed their names since I visited them. In those cases, I used as appropriate either name.

The fifty-four African countries I write about are those in 2020 which are recognized members of the African Union. In this regard, The Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and Northern Somalia (Somaliland) seek AU recognition. Other countries are sometimes considered part of Africa, but they are not AU members and are officially territories of European countries. These territories include Spain's Canary Islands, Ceuta and Melilla; France's Mayotte and Rйunion islands; Portugal's Madeira Islands; and, the United Kingdom's Saint Helena island group.

Part of my desire to write this book was to make sure some information and viewpoints are preserved. In this regard, I mention the names of many people, living and dead, whom I met in Africa. As I may have overlooked the mention of some people, I offer my apologies to them.

In order to jog my memory or to make sure I had accurate information, I consulted the Encyclopaedia Britannica and the CIA's Factbook for each country. On matters related to demographics, I referred to the reports issued by the United Nations (UN) Population Division. All statistics on displaced people and refugees are drawn from reports issued by the UN's High Commission of Refugees (UNHCR). With regards to the development status of a country, I relied heavily on the UN Development Program's Human Development Index (HDI). For health and HIV/AIDS matters, I consulted the World Health Organization's statistics and the UNAIDS data base.

With regards to World Heritage Sites, I retrieved information from the UN's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) website dedicated to

this subject. For all matters related to the impacts of climate change in Africa, I gleaned information from reports issued by the UN's Environment Program. I also consulted regularly as needed the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) timelines and World Bank data. All other information presented in this book is from my own memory and personal notes.

Some of the views I have expressed will not meet with the agreement of other veteran observers of Africa. One major advantage of writing a memoir is that I can write what I believe even if others think my views are twisted. I stand behind all the opinions expressed in this book, but I am open to considering the positions others may have on various subjects. In any event, I hope some of my insights and observations are of value.

It was only after careful thought and with a high regard for the African people that I drew any conclusions. And, all I write is based on a half-century of doing almost nothing except dreaming, thinking, reading, writing about and working in Africa. In a nutshell living Africa day and night for a lifetime.

I never planned to spend a lifetime so wrapped up with Africa. One thing led to another and most of the time I did not know what the next thing would be. Maybe my late mother's interest in Africa unknowingly rubbed off on me (she passed away in 2012 at the age of ninety-six). I know I possess an adventurous spirit and was affected by my reading at a young age the best-selling book, *I Married Adventure,* published in 1940 by another Kansan, Osa Johnson. When I viewed in 2006 the old black-and-white films of the African adventures which she and her husband, Martin, experienced in the 1920s at a museum dedicated in their honor in Osa's hometown of Chanute, Kansas, it dawned on me how much her experiences in Africa had influenced me.

A big thank you goes to my lifelong friend, Richard Feutz, for proofreading from his home in Mount Horeb, Wisconsin, every word of this book's manuscript. His hawk-eye ability to detect anomalies in my writing was valuable in producing an acceptable final draft manuscript. Every writer needs a proofreader and I was fortunate to have him read closely every word I wrote.

I am personally indebted to my Ethiopian wife, Almaz, for her forbearance as I used large chunks of what should have been our time together to complete this memoir of my Africa life. Her steadfast support over the couple of years needed to finish this ambitious project was essential. Having such a supportive African in my home kept me on track and helped me not overlook the desires and interests of the people of Africa.

I have tried to record faithfully my experiences, provide accurate information and share my views with regard to Africa. If any errors are found in this book, they are fully my responsibility. If this book serves to stimulate greater care for and interest in Africa, I will consider all my labors to produce this book to be well worth the while.

I realize the Africa of today is different than the Africa of decades ago, but I wrote about the Africa I knew. I hope the future holds much promise for Africa and its people. My greatest wish is for this book to contribute to a better understanding of where all fifty-four countries of Africa were and where they need to go in the future to improve the quality of life of all Africans.

Overview

IT IS A DAUNTING CHALLENGE to write a book about the huge and highly complex continent of Africa. My audience for this book is both people who know something about Africa and those who know little, if anything, about the continent. I assume both of these groups have in common a desire to know more about Africa. If the latter is true, this book is intended to be a good investment and an engrossing read.

I know most Americans know little about Africa. Since returning to the U.S. in 2015, I have not seen in the local newspapers any articles on events in Africa. It is also rare to see anything on TV about Africa. If Americans have some awareness of Africa, it is because of some dramatic headline in the news. For example, when I tell people I have been in Africa, their first reaction is 'Ebola.' It is as if the entire continent is defined by an outbreak of a disease which occurred in three small coastal countries in West Africa and isolated areas of Eastern Congo.

It is true that many of the news stories about Africa are negative because bad news sells better than good news and there is a very limited market for stories about Africa. I am sure the reader has seen occasionally media coverage of war, famine, terrorist attacks, HIV/ AIDS, malaria and Ebola somewhere in Africa in recent years. Africa does have its share, actually more than its fair share, of these negative events. I do not want to diminish the importance of these negative developments, but I would also like there to be some recognition that good things are also happening on this troubled continent.

Africa's Complexity

I try to keep Africa in perspective. It is a continent of fifty-four distinct independent countries, which is more than one-quarter of all members of the United Nations. Consequently, it is misleading to treat it as a single unit. Africa has an estimated total population of 1.2 billion people. This is more than three times the population of the U.S. Sub-Saharan Africa, but not North Africa, is experiencing the world's highest urbanization and population growth rates. Africa also has a youthful population structure, with fifty percent of its people below the age of nineteen. Yet it generally has the oldest leaders in the world.

Given its high fertility rate and its failure to achieve a demographic transition, Africa's population is projected to surpass that of China or India in 2022. This huge growth in Africa's population will be achieved in spite of infant and child mortality rates which continue to be far too high. The most populated country in

Africa, Nigeria, will have more people than the U.S. in 2050 when it will be the third most populated country in the world.

Africa is so large geographically that you can fit the United States, China, India, and all of Europe within its borders. It is three times the size of the continental U.S. Put another way, Africa is forty-three times the size of the U.S. State of Texas. Africa is also a complex mosaic of over 2,000 ethnic groups which speak a multitude of languages and dialects and practice a vast variety of customs.

Africa contains a large number of diverse ecological zones deserts, savanna, dense jungles and the snows of the lofty 19,341-feet height of Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain. It is the only continent which stretches from northern temperate to southern temperate climate zones. Perhaps, Africa is best known for its amazing variety of wildlife which cannot be seen anywhere else on the globe.

One should also keep in mind that the vast majority of African countries became independent in the late 1950s or early 1960s. The legacy of their previous colonial masters still has a large influence and European languages (English, French, Portuguese and Spanish) have become official languages for many countries. The artificial way the colonial powers created borders between countries is also a legacy that continues to be the cause of some tension. It is notable that most African countries have been independent for as long as the U.S. was independent before it experienced its Civil War. It may be said that after sixty years or more of independence, many African countries are still experiencing some growing pains and searching for a better way forward.

Except for oil, some minerals (chromium, cobalt, coltan, platinum, uranium) and the fight against terrorism, U.S. strategic interests in Africa are minimal. The U.S.' main interest has traditionally been a humanitarian one and linked to the fact that over twelve percent of its population can trace its origins to Africa. The practice of slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has left a heavy legacy on the U.S. as well as on large swaths of Africa. Of course, the whole world is interested in Africa because it is considered to be the cradle of humankind.

Africa: A Mixed Bag of Good and Bad

The negative events in Africa which have continued for long periods of time are concentrated in a few countries: a sporadic but very bloody conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, protracted war in Sudan and now South Sudan, and a failed state in Somalia since 1991 are notable in this regard. Some long-standing civil wars—Angola, Mozambique, Liberia, and Sierra Leone—ended years ago and these countries have progressively become largely conflict free. Some very deadly but short-lived conflicts—the brutal Ethiopia-Eritrea border war in 1998-2000, the Somali invasion of Ethiopia in 1977, the Biafra independence movement in Nigeria in the 1960s, the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, and the recently ended civil war in Ivory Coast (Сфтй d'Ivoire) are now hopefully becoming part of Africa's troubled past.

Continued terrorist activities executed by Al-Qaeda and ISIS affiliates in western Africa and Al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa, and more recently in far-northern Mozambique, are of real concern. Recent sectarian violence in the Central African Republic and the murderous actions of Boko Haram in Nigeria are also of serious

concern. In addition, the advent of organized crime and the international drug trade is also unsettling. Unfortunately, the Arab Spring in North Africa has resulted in conflict in Egypt, terrorist attacks in Tunisia, and a virtual failed state in Libya. Currently, Burkina Faso, a country dear to my heart, is suffering from the aftermath of a popular insurrection, an attempted military coup and an increasing number of violent attacks perpetrated by extremist groups. It is yet to be seen if these groups will take advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic and spread the virus, or if they will be held in check by it.

The number of African countries which have never experienced significant conflict since gaining independence should not be overlooked. Among these countries are Botswana, Namibia, Mauritius, Cape Verde, Senegal, Tanzania, Zambia, Ghana and Morocco. Their stability may have something to do with their generally higher levels of prosperity, good governance and education, and the peaceful nature of their people.

There is some good economic news in Africa. Over the past decade or so, African countries have on the average experienced an annual five percent Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate, even during the 2007-2009 economic recession in the West. During this same period of time, the annual GDP growth rate in the U.S was less than half this amount. This improvement in the economies of most African countries has led to an impressive rise in foreign investment, particularly from China, which is now playing a huge role in Africa. One country, Ethiopia, has enjoyed in recent years an economic boom with an annual GDP growth rate of over ten percent.

Sadly, in 2020, the international economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 virus pandemic and a fall in oil prices are likely to reverse this economic growth trend. Moreover, Africa is ill-prepared to deal with the devastating impact of the pandemic on its health, economic and political systems. The pandemic could deal something of a final knockout blow to the more fragile countries, especially those countries with already weak and overburdened health systems and those which are highly debt stressed.

Prior to the 2020 pandemic, there was already an urgent need for those in relevant decision-making positions to revisit the basic viability of each country, particularly the borders imposed upon some countries. These arbitrary borders are mostly the same as were inherited from the colonialists during the great scramble for Africa by colonial powers following their historic Berlin Conference in 1884-85.

There have been dramatic increases in the percentage of children attending both primary and secondary school. However, there is a pressing need to improve the quality of education and classroom conditions. History has shown that no country in the world can move to higher stages of development until a majority of its population has benefitted from a quality primary school education. Sadly, there are still too many people, especially women, in Africa who are illiterate.

Although Ebola and, before that, HIV/AIDS have dominated the health news out of Africa, there has been progress on many fronts. Polio, with huge financial backing from Rotary International, has been reduced to almost zero. Lesser known diseases such as Guinea worm are now confined to a small number of isolated locations, and progress is being made in rolling back Africa's biggest killer, malaria.

Much work remains to be done to ensure safe drinking water and good sanitation for millions of Africans.

The corner has been turned on HIV/AIDS, which has a declining infection rate and much lower death rate as compared to ten years ago. The average life expectancy in Africa in 1960 was forty years. An African born in 2013 can expect to live fifty-nine years, still the lowest age for any continent, but an improvement of nineteen years since 1960.

There have been enormous improvements in infrastructure, especially roads, railways, dams, ports, and public and private buildings. The African cities I knew in the 1970s are no longer recognizable because there has been so much new construction and growth in their size. Providing for the basic needs of this rapidly growing urban population poses huge challenges.

What Does the Future Hold for Africa?

But what about the future of Africa? As noted earlier, the part of Africa south of the Sahara Desert is predicted to have the most rapid population growth of any world region through the end of this century. This has huge implications for the continent. Having a younger population can be a good thing because it usually increases worker productivity. But if African countries are unable to create jobs for all of these additional people, you have high unemployment and large numbers of discontent young people. This 'youth-bulge,' therefore, can lead to greater political instability. It is often said that the real litmus test of development is job creation.

Africa is urbanizing rapidly, albeit from a low base. Some capital cities are doubling in size every ten years. Sadly, most of this urban growth includes the expansion or creation of slums. It is generally more cost efficient to provide social services such as health and education in urban areas rather than in rural areas. Larger cities are more attractive locations for economic and investment activity. Urban clusters tend to be the drivers of future economic growth. But, if too many Africans move from farms to the city without major improvements in agricultural production, this will put more pressure on the food supply. Most African countries are currently fast-growing net importers of food. A greater concentration of poor and unemployed people in urban areas also increases the probability of social and political instability.

The projections for the growth of religion in Africa are interesting. North Africa is overwhelmingly Muslim and will remain so. By 2050, in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), Christians will remain the largest religious group. But Islam is growing faster in SSA than Christianity. Muslims will number about 670 million by 2050. This means that by 2050, SSA will be about fifty-nine percent Christian and thirty-five percent Muslim. Of course, these percentages do not consider the millions of Africans who continue traditional ancestral worship and animistic practices.

While there are many unknowns about climate change, the average temperature in Africa has risen by just under 1 degree Celsius (1.8 F) and is projected to experience a further rise by the 2030s of 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 F). In general, experts believe the tropical areas of the world will be more impacted by climate change than the temperate zones. Even small increases in temperature are having

and will continue to have important impacts on agriculture in Africa. It is predicted these impacts will be more negative than positive.

Southern, Central, West, and North Africa may experience increasing droughts while East Africa may have fewer. Most parts of Africa will have greater variability in rainfall, which will pose a major challenge for farmers. The Indian Ocean has already warmed by one degree Celsius since 1950, which causes fish stocks to seek colder water. Pastoralists may have to move their livestock over greater distances to find greener pastures. These movements will undoubtedly increase the already numerous conflicts between pastoralists and agriculturalists. Traditionally, a big divide in Africa is between these two different livelihood groups.

African economies remain heavily dependent on the export of a single commodity such as oil, specific export crops and other minerals. To stay competitive in the future, African economies need to diversify. There is also a need to create regional trading-blocks. The agreement to create a single continental market for trading goods and services is promising. Tourism will remain important in a number of African countries and should become a growing industry.

It is important to note that Africa has an estimated sixty percent of the world's potentially agriculturally productive land. If properly developed and managed, and if Africa improves its use of agricultural inputs and increases crop irrigation, it has the potential to not only feed everyone on the continent but become a major food exporter. This will require major efforts to raise soil fertility so higher crop yields can be achieved. Africa as a region has the lowest average crop yields in the world and sixty-five percent of its soils are estimated to be degraded. At the same time, rapid deforestation and the overgrazing of pasture lands are major problems. It is difficult to build a rising standard of living on a falling level of soil fertility and land productivity.

In the meantime, too many Africans remain hungry and up to forty percent of the children in many African countries suffer the permanent damage caused by stunting. There are more hungry and malnourished children in Africa now than ever before and their number is growing. A major contributor to the cause of the death of children under five years of age is malnutrition. It is very difficult for a country to advance if a high percentage of its people is malnourished.

Large-scale illegal fishing by industrial-sized foreign vessels has helped result in the overfishing of Africa's coastal ocean waters. These illegal incursions into Africa's maritime zones have reduced food and income for Africans. They have also destroyed the livelihoods of African coastal people who depend on fishing. African governments generally do not have the capacity to control the entry of foreign-flag ships into their maritime zones.

Africa is using only eight percent of its hydropower capacity and has an estimated fifty percent of the world's potential renewable energy—hydropower, solar, and wind. Developing these power sources could give Africa a major economic advantage in the future. It is sad that in terms of the quantity of electrical lighting Africa remains a dark continent. I believe it is safe to assert that Africa is the most energy deficit region in the world. Much needs to be done to exploit fully Africa's high energy potential. Without affordable and reliable electricity, it is not possible to achieve Africa's full development potential.

The reliance of most Africans on charcoal and firewood for the cooking of their food is an unsustainable practice. An increase in the use of alternative cooking methods does not offer a sufficient solution. Meanwhile, the mass burning of charcoal and wood pollutes the atmosphere and contributes heavily to deforestation. At the same time, the ancient slash and burn methods of most African farmers help diminish the fertility of the soil and release massive quantities of pollutants into the air.

Africa is also well behind the rest of the world in information and communication technology. But it is making a serious effort to improve in this sector and is in a position to leapfrog much out-of-date technology and install the most modern equipment available. The use of the latest technological advances to reduce poverty in Africa is a much-welcomed trend.

There are numerous social problems that Africa must try to minimize. In addition to addressing high youth unemployment, it must work to avoid a rise in poverty in the rapidly expanding urban areas. African countries also have to deal with the challenges posed by serious income and gender inequality issues. It will be difficult for a number of African countries to move ahead as long as their women are held back.

Many African countries have not measured up when it comes to democratic governance, the development of civil society, building strong institutions, and combatting corruption. Internal political conflict and gross economic mismanagement have been too common in Africa. The continent will never fully succeed until more countries make the transition to good governance, social harmony and political stability.

As noted above, there has been a recent upsurge in terrorism and religious extremism and, sadly, this relatively new trend shows no sign of abating. These negative developments contribute greatly to an increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, and to more out-migration. This negative trend must be reversed. Currently, according to the UNHCR, there are more IDPs and refugees (about 20 million) in Africa than ever before. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic will hit especially hard the crowded IDP and refugee camps.

It is true that too many Africans are poor and today over forty percent of Africans live in extreme poverty (less than one dollar ninety cents per day). In the UN's 2019 Human Development Index, thirty of the thirty-five countries categorized as the least developed in the world are in Africa. Ten countries ranked (179 to 189) are at the bottom of the list are in Africa. These sad statistics underscore that Africa is the world's poorest and least developed continent. It is a chilling fact that far too many Africans are locked in a daily struggle for survival. One statistic shows the average African lives on about seventy U.S. cents per day.

These harsh facts underscore the many daunting challenges facing most African countries. A deep reduction in poverty and inequality is necessary if these challenges are to be overcome. There is much hard and difficult work to do and there is no time to lose. I believe, however, that with competent, honest leadership and much goodwill from the rest of the world, Africa should be able to advance quickly and achieve a higher stage of development in the decades ahead. I hope this book contributes in some small measure to increasing an understanding of

Africa and, hence, help accelerate the betterment of this complex and vast continent.

CHAPTER ONE

Algeria

AN OVERNIGHT STOP IN Algiers in 1978 does not allow me to say much about this large North African country. I knew little about the country where I was obliged to stop over so I could take advantage of a cheap air ticket to Paris. I did know back then that this mostly Arab country had been part of France for well over a century before gaining independence after fighting for years a bloody war against the control of the colonial power. I also knew that hundreds of thousands of French citizens had been born in Algeria and they were often referred to as 'Pied-Noirs' (black foots). For many French people, it was unimaginable that they would lose their Algeria Province of France. But, they did so when Algeria became independent in 1962.

My main impressions of this brief visit were gathered from my stay in the luxurious El Aurassi Hotel and the short trip I took into the city center with a taxi driver. I was told this huge five-star hotel had been built in 1974-75 by the Algerian government to host a summit conference of the Organization of Africa Unity, but the annual meeting that had been planned for heads of state from every African country never occurred. I was told there were over 500 rooms in the hotel, but I saw few other people. I note that the upper floors of the hotel offer beautiful views of Algiers and its sparkling coastal location on the southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

When I went for breakfast the next day, I was about the only person in the cavernous restaurant. I had the impression this well-intentioned hotel had become something of a white elephant and the government did not have the capacity to manage this modern mega-hotel. Anyway, I was happy if the lights stayed on and there was hot and cold running water.

I never intended to visit Algeria, but I thought I should get the most of the few hours I had on the morning of my second day in Algiers by driving to see something of this big city of several million people. I had arrived the night before and, therefore, I had seen very little of the city. My time was limited because my connecting Air Algйrie plane was scheduled later in the day to fly over the Mediterranean Sea to my destination in Europe.

I caught an aging cab parked in front of the hotel and negotiated with the driver for a couple of hours of driving about the city. On our way into the city, the relatively young taxi driver demonstrated a high energy level with nonstop questions and animated talking. Throughout my long sйjour in Africa, I have found that taxicab drivers are good sources of information. This driver appeared to be poorly dressed, unkempt and wild-eyed. For me, the sight of him was a little

scary, but since he was one of the taxi drivers at the hotel, I assumed he was okay.

Once I was seated in the back seat and we were on our way, the ebullient driver wasted no time in pummeling me with questions. He startled me by saying loudly, "Where you from?"

I timidly responded. "America."

After I uttered this word, I expected him to stop the taxi and ask me to get out because I knew Americans were not popular in Algeria at that time. On the other hand, I realized I had probably piqued the driver's interest because it was rare for an American to visit Algeria, especially alone. He quickly followed my reply with a feisty, "Which part of America? New York or California?"

I knew he was trying to show that he was not totally ignorant of the U.S. geography. I answered simply, "Kansas."

He looked quickly back at me before saying snappily in a twisted sort of way, "Kansas? Are you sure? Never heard of it. Do you live there now?"

His English was not good, but we had already concluded his English was much better than my few words of Arabic. I could speak with him in French, but he insisted on practicing his English. I tried to speak with him using only the simplest of English words needed to be polite and carry on a basic conversation. After a pause, I said. "No, I live and work now in Niamey, Niger."

When I mentioned Niger, a neighboring country bordering Algeria in the south, he almost swerved off the road before blasting out, "What? You live with black monkeys in Niger?"

I was hence subjected to a long monologue about how the blacks south of the Sahara were savage monkeys who had just come out of their trees. Given the circumstances, I had no choice but to remain silent as I suffered his racist rant. I did not dare mention that my wife was a black African from Togo. This was only one man, but I had to conclude there were many more Arabs like him who held the same racist views. Despite their religious ties via a common adherence to Islam, I wondered how the people living north of the Sahara will ever see eye to eye with black Africans living south of the Sahara.

I had not thought about getting out of the taxi, but the unsavory racial bent of the driver so displeased me that I asked him to stop and let me out for a short walk along a wide sidewalk with many outdoor cafйs. He parked and said he would wait for me. Despite being the object of many menacing stares, it felt good to get out and breathe fresh air. Obviously, the many people sitting in the cafйs and those walking along this scenic way were not used to seeing foreigners. I noticed that all the people sitting in the cafйs were men drinking hot green menthe tea in clear glass tumblers. I was struck by the observation that there were no women to be seen anywhere. I then reminded myself that I was in an Arab Muslim country where the custom was to keep women at home as much as possible. Nonetheless, this omnipresence of males disturbed my sense of gender fairness.

I investigated a few shops and found most of their shelves bare. I surmised that the severe form of socialism the government was promoting made it more difficult to buy the goods needed to stock these shops. Suddenly, I heard a loud honk of a car horn and looked to see in the street my taxi driver waving wildly for me to

get back into his car. In something of a panic, I did so immediately. Once I was safely in the back seat of the taxi, the driver said, "We have to go now. It is not safe for you here."

His words had my mind racing to figure out what he meant. Was the place unsafe for me, or was he just in a hurry to collect his fare? No matter. It was time for me to return to the hotel and get ready to go to the airport for my onward flight. I certainly did not feel welcome in the streets of Algiers. I just said calmly, "I have no more time. Please take me back to my hotel."

I inwardly sighed with relief when the taxi entered the vast grounds of the El Aurassi Hotel. As soon as the taxi came to a stop at the hotel entrance, I quickly jumped out of his old car and reached into my pocket for a twenty-dollar bill to give to the overactive taxi driver. My thinking was that he would be happy to be overpaid in a foreign currency that was probably worth a lot in local currency on the parallel street market. When I handed the twenty dollars to him, I thought he was going to cry. He withheld his tears and gave me a big bear hug, saying, "You a good man. My family and I thank you."

After saying these words, he ran to his car and took off quickly, as if he were in a hurry to tell everyone it had been his lucky day because he had transported a rich American. My reaction was that I better hurry and leave before more of his kind came looking for me. I rushed to my hotel room and finished packing my suitcase before checking out at the front hotel reception desk. The cost of my onenight stay at the hotel was part of the Air Algйrie deal. I was told to wait in the lobby until the airline shuttle arrived. I tried to take a seat where I could see the front door, but not be noticed by anyone else.

My trip to the airport and the boarding of my plane was uneventful. I was not thrilled about my brief encounter with the capital of Algeria, but I told myself at the time that someday I should return to this country, which is filled with historical sites and has a long history that dates back centuries. Sadly, after almost fifty years in Africa, I have never had the opportunity to return to Algeria.

Perhaps one reason I never returned to Algeria was that its internal political situation often was unsettled and in the 1990s I read they had a civil war that killed tens of thousands. I lamented such upheaval and a high level of bloodshed among Algerians. Yet, in spite of this deep turmoil, Algeria was able to continue exporting its huge natural gas and oil riches and became one of the handful of African countries on the annual UN's high human development HDI list. (I note that no African country is among the top thirty countries ranked in the very high human development category on this list.) The development status of Algeria is so far above most African countries that it is not easy to compare it with other African countries.

Geographically, Algeria is also one of Africa's largest countries. While it is about three and one-half times larger than the U.S. State of Texas, most of the southern part of its territory is covered by the Sahara Desert. This geographic situation has resulted in much of Algeria's current population of an estimated 44 million to be clustered in cities along its northern coast, making Algeria one of the most highly urbanized countries in the world. It is remarkable to me that when I visited Algeria in 1978 its national population was about 17 million. Therefore, its population has tripled in forty-two years.

One thing similar with countries south of the Sahara Desert is the long periods of time served by its presidents. I read that in 2019 the eighty-two-year-old President Abdelaziz Bouteflika was forced to step down by a popular uprising in the city streets after serving for twenty years. President Bouteflika was ill and confined to a wheelchair but wanted to continue to be at the helm of Algeria.

I have constantly reminded myself over the years to keep an open mind and not draw any firm conclusions from my brief Algerian visit. Although I have never lived and worked in Northern Africa, subsequent visits to each country in Northern Africa taught me that each country north of the Sahara is different. However, the divide between those countries north of the Sahara and those located south of the Sahara is wide and deep. It should therefore be of no surprise that most of my references to Africa mostly relate to Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

These days one can go online and find all there is to know about a country. Back when I passed through Algeria in the pre-electronics age, you could not do this. If there was someone around who had been there, you might ask them for advice and information. Other than that, you just went and saw for yourself what travel to your destination was like. At the time, I did not think much about where I was going. All I knew back then was Monsieur Ali at the Air Algйrie agency in Niamey, Niger offered a cheap flight deal to Paris that could not be refused. With such a low fare and a free night in Algiers, I was on my way to the unknown. Now, that was a true adventure!

CHAPTER TWO

Angola

ONE OF THE ODDEST chapters in Africa's history would be any attempt to describe Angola's confusing and tortuous path to where it stands today as a country. I have had sufficient experience in Angola; therefore, I should be able to write much about this complicated country. Yet, the more I know about Angola, the more confused I become. I am thankful this book is not about providing too many details on any country's background or history and focuses more on firsthand experiences and impressions which are explainable. I will be delighted if anything in this book pricks the reader's interest sufficiently to prompt a deeper dive into researching the complexity of the circumstances of any country covered in this book.

I was able to gain personal and up close glimpses of Angola in 1992, 2004 and 2018. I can say there is no other country in Africa like Angola. Much of this assertion is due to the political revolution Portugal underwent in 1975. One of the most startling outcomes of this tumultuous period was to grant independence to all its African colonies. Almost overnight Angola saw 500 years of colonial rule dissolve and its status as a resource-rich Overseas Province of Portugal come to a sudden and unexpected end. Angola is still trying to overcome the 'jolt' caused by this precipitous turnabout in its historical ties with Portugal.

Angola was ill-prepared to become an independent country. Almost everything in Angola had been owned and operated for generations by Portuguese settlers, but when independence was suddenly declared they, for the most part, quickly departed Angola. The economic and political vacuum left by the fast withdrawal of the Portuguese caused the country to grind to a halt, leaving its population in the lurch with an unpredictable future. The question of how to survive in the future became all that mattered.

Some Angolans did bear arms and fight sporadically against Portuguese troops for fourteen years for independence. Following independence, various armed Angolan groups fought a civil war for twenty-seven years to see which group would dominate. These forty-one years of war in some geographic areas of Angola increased the agony of the people as they struggled with an unpredictable and uncertain future. For most people, it was more about the survival of themselves and their families than any desire to adopt any ideology or take sides.

The many years of war ruined one of Africa's richest countries. The lengthy violent conflict was exacerbated by outside powers becoming deeply involved in Angola's civil war. The Soviets and the Cubans backed one side, and the U.S. and South Africa backed the other. These powers fought a proxy war for over a decade in Angola, culminating in the biggest battle in Africa since World War II at Cuito

Cuanavale in 1988. With nearly 50,000 Cuban soldiers and Soviet MiGs brought to bear in this battle, the tide of the civil war was turned, and the winning side was able to consolidate power and go on to control fully from that time until now the political and military scene in Angola. (Maybe much of these earthshaking events were missed in the rest of the world because they happened before the advent of CNN International.)

Years of war destroyed vital infrastructure, littered the countryside with thousands of landmines, displaced hundreds of thousands of people, killed as many people as there were displaced, and sent thousands more into refugee camps in neighboring countries. Also, tens of thousands of people fled for the safety of the cities. This mass migration to urban areas contributed to making Luanda, Angola's scenic coastal capital city, one of the largest, densest and fastest growing cities on the African continent with almost 9 million people (about one-third of Angola's population) today.

This emptying of rural areas disrupted agriculture production and created an urban-rural division in the civil war, making Angola today one of the most urbanized countries in Africa. In a few words, the country was devastated. After such a prolonged period of instability and suffering, all that Angola's people wanted was peace and an opportunity to rebuild their lives.

For sure, this war was all about gaining the power and the wealth that comes with political and military control, no matter where any assistance may have originated. The warring parties wanted to control Angola's remarkable natural resources, particularly oil. Somehow, the winning side managed to keep oil pumping throughout the prolonged conflict. Its opponents made efforts to destroy the oil fields and offshore drilling sites, but these attacks were thwarted, and the winning side was able to use funds generated by the constant and growing flow of oil to fund its pursuit of the civil war and feed the growing population in the urban centers it controlled.

One of the ironies of this war was that U.S oil companies were then, and still are, among the biggest producers of oil in Angola; therefore, U.S.' oil interests remain important. Also, the winning side in Angola was always ready to use capitalism to buy the socialist principles it expounded. Yet, Angola's flag continues to resemble the old Soviet flag with images that remind one of a hammer and cycle. Many streets in Luanda are also named after foreign communist leaders. One Angolan contact told me that one main problem in the war was that the losing side did not know how to choose its friends. The winning side chose Cuba and tens of thousands of Cubanos came to Angola. The losing side chose the U.S., but not a single American was ever seen at the battle fronts in Angola during its long civil war.

During the war, the U.S. government supported the opposing side, which sought to destroy these U.S. oil installations while they were often protected by Cuban troops. The U.S. oil companies received at the time loans from the U.S. EXIM Bank to develop Angola's oil fields. One way it was known that Cuban forces were guarding the U.S. oil company installations were aerial photos which showed the outlines of baseball fields. One of the first things Cuban troops did when they learned they would be stationed for months in one location was to lay out a baseball field.

The Cubans did more than fight in Angola's bloody battles. They also administered the services needed to keep cities functioning and concerned themselves with satisfying the basic needs of urban dwellers. They kept the country operating while war was waged. The Cuban contribution to making Angola what it is today was so great you would think a huge monument would be built to recognize the pivotal role Cuba played in Angola's history. There are few Cubans around these days, but a weekly direct flight by Angola's national airline to and from Havana indicates some desire to maintain links between the two countries.

I still ask myself what this destructive war was all about. I've already written that it was mainly a quest by opposing groups for total control and power. At the same time, there are some divisions that also need to be taken into consideration. I would leave ideological differences aside as they only came into play to obtain aid from one side or another. Perhaps geographical, ethnical and racial (skin-color) factors were to some extent more at play. Was it more a conflict between coastal people and those living in the interior of the country? I don't know. Was the war more about cleavages between educated elites? Maybe. What role did churches play in the conflict? Perhaps an interesting topic to explore. For certain, there is much room for speculation. Further research is needed to get closer to pinning down the truth about Angola's unusual case.

Angola's case is indeed confusing and complicated. What do I know for sure? Without Cuba's initial military intervention in Angola, the current ruling party would not have been able to gain power and continue to rule for the past forty-five years. The people of Angola are willing to put up with a lot to have peace and predictability in their lives. Sure, many Angolans are upset that the political and military elites in their country have grown incredibly wealthy through corrupt practices. There is corruption everywhere in Africa, but Angola's oil and diamond resources have enabled Angola's elites to amass fortunes worth billions of U.S. dollars that are beyond what any of the most corrupt people in other African countries can imagine. It is interesting that these elites have used their great wealth to colonize financially Portugal and invest heavily in Brazil, a country that received tens of thousands of slaves from Angola in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The military movement became the ruling political party and the head of that party, Josй Eduardo dos Santos, remained president of Angola for thirty-nine years and retired in 2017 at the age of seventy-five. He is reputed to be one of the richest men in African and the largest landowner in Brazil. His daughter, Isabel dos Santos, has been reported to be the richest woman in Africa with a fortune estimated at over 2 billion dollars. She is his oldest child from his first marriage to a Russian woman he met while doing his university studies as a young man in the Soviet Union.

President dos Santos and his daughter are only two examples of Angola's corrupt political and military elite who have enriched themselves at the expense of the Angolan people. The military have much power and have worked to have in Angola one of the largest, most expensive and effective military forces in Africa. These elites own almost everything of value in Angola and have invested heavily abroad.

While in Luanda in 2018, I purchased some books in English and Portuguese to try to expand my knowledge about its tumultuous history. For those who are interested, I cite below a couple of these books. I note that there are many books written about Angola, but some cannot be found in Luanda. The three books I read are: *Portugal's War in Angola, 1961-1974* by W.S. Van Der Waals (2011); *A Guerra Civil Em Angola* (English: The Civil War in Angola), 1975-2002 by Justin Pearce (2017); and *Em Nome do Povo – O Massacre Que Angola Silenciou* (English: In Name of the People – The Massacre that was Silenced by Angola), by Lara Pawson (2014).

The massive scale of corruption makes one wonder what Angola would be like today if all its resources had been well managed and used to develop the country. To a large extent, the gross diversion of the income derived from its resources to line the pockets of a few has resulted in the Angolan people being cheated out of a better future. There must be a sense of special disappointment among the tens of thousands of Angolans still living who fought in the civil war. Possibly, they wonder today what thousands of their fellow citizens sacrificed their lives for in Angola's lengthy civil war.

It is shameful that today Angola ranks in a relatively high per capita income bracket, but most of its people live in low levels of poverty. Its social welfare statistics are as low as people living in resource-poor African countries. On the UN's HDI list it is ranked in the medium human development category, between Cameroon and Zambia. Yet, the development potential of this vast country (twice the size of the U.S. State of Texas) is enormous.

Central Luanda, with its many high-rise buildings, is one the most impressive capital cities on the continent and its centuries-old coastal location is picturesque. Everywhere one looks there are construction sites. A closer examination reveals Chinese busy at work. I learned much of the construction in Angola has been done for years by tens of thousands of Chinese. In this regard, Angola, like several other African countries, appears to have 'sold out' to China. Angola has become part of what is referred as to as 'Chinafrica.' Africa had gone from no Chinese anywhere twenty-five years ago to Chinese everywhere today.

The Chinese are not the only Asians in Angola. There are also thousands of Southeast Asians. When a repairman came to fix my TV, I discovered he was from the Philippines. I wondered why Angolans could not do many of the jobs the Asians are doing. I also observed North Korean physicians working in several rural health clinics. I was told they were part of a medical assistance agreement that Angola has had with North Korea for years. I also encountered a few Cubans still working in health facilities. The Cubans managed Angola's health facilities for so many years, and so many Angolan health professionals had been trained in Cuba, that it was said the medical language in Angola was Spanish.

I did learn a couple of different things in Angola. I learned on one upcountry trip on a rough road that you did not stop and piss off the road, but in the middle of the road. I was instructed to do this because there had been cases where people pissing on the side of the road had set off landmines. I also learned about the importance of stop lights. We were driving through a war-wrecked town where there was no other vehicle or living thing in sight, but at its main crossroads was, unbelievably, a functioning stop light. My Angolan driver brought our battle-

scarred Land Cruiser to a full stop as the light changed to red, saying "It is important to obey the traffic rules and stop at a red light." I have pondered this statement for years, wondering if in a land where there are no cars, do you have to obey a stoplight? You tell me.

Many things puzzle me about Luanda. I try to understand why this is one of the most expensive cities in the world. I'm baffled by why numerous modern and newly built skyscrapers in Luanda are empty. I asked why this is so and was told there is a lot of money to be made in construction, but little money is to be made in occupying a building. Another answer I was given to the same question was that the slowdown in construction and the use of buildings was due to the persistent economic crisis caused by the fall in the international price of a barrel of oil. A telling indicator is that Angola is overdependent on the production of oil while neglecting excessively its high potential agriculture and maritime sectors. Without economic diversification, Angola will never realize its full potential and continue to be adversely affected by what is often referred to as the oil resource curse.

I asked more questions about many of the things I did not understand and the response I often heard was that if I really wanted answers to my questions, I would have to ask 'them.' I assumed that 'them' was a reference to the wealthy elite who controlled power in Angola. I could not help but note some reticence to saying anything that might be interpreted as reflecting a negative view of those who possess great wealth and power. Maybe the upcoming generation will change this stance. After all, most Angolans are less than eighteen years of age, have not experienced war and these days are well-connected via Internet with the world and each other.

Luanda is a big, historic city that offers for a price all the creature comforts one could desire. The coastal weather is mild and agreeable. If you can afford staying in Luanda, you should have no complaints. (Of course, this assumes you can obtain a visa to come to Angola. It remains difficult and expensive to obtain a visa.) Oddly, I feel at home anywhere in Africa, but I don't feel at home in Luanda. Maybe it is because hundreds of years of colonialism have worked to make the city one of the least 'African' places on the continent. The language spoken by all is Portuguese and most people have first and last Portuguese names. I sometimes feel as if I am in a big city in southern Europe. Of course, I realize that if I dared venture into Luanda's vast slums, I would encounter an entirely different reality.

A few days before my last departure from Luanda in November 2018, I went to a local barber for a haircut. My barber spoke French as did many Angolans from the northern part of the country who lived in neighboring Congo during the many years Angola was at war with itself. We had an interesting conversation, but it was the heated debate occurring in the chair next to mine that caught my attention. The other barber and his client were arguing over the truth about Angola's confusing past. I feared they were going to exchange blows. The client finally threw off his apron in disgust and rose rapidly from his chair, screaming, "The problem is that nobody wants to say the truth, even if they know the truth, and nobody knows the truth."

The irate client marched out of the barbershop, slamming the door behind him. I later thought about his final words, concluding that he had a legitimate point. The truth about Angola's history since it gained independence in 1975 is unknowable because those who know the truth prefer believing otherwise or they are dead. Maybe nobody will ever know the truth about Angola's post-colonial history and those who played an important role in that history.

If I applied my rule of thumb for the kind of leadership an African country needs, but rarely has, Angola would fail miserably. This rule calls for competent and honest leaders who put the best interests of their country and people ahead of their own personal interests. Beyond this requirement, African countries need leaders without blood on their hands and fortunes in offshore banks. Sadly, Angola is near the bottom of the pile of Africa's fifty-four countries when this rule is applied. But you tell this confused author if he is wrong on this point and others presented in this incomplete and informal rendering of this partial view of Angola.

CHAPTER THREE

Benin

WHEN I WENT TO Benin the first time in 1972 it was known as Dahomey. The latter name was derived from the ancient Dahomey Kingdom that is still based in the city of Abomey located in south-central Benin. The thinking behind the name change of this country in West Africa was that the name, 'Dahomey,' was too closely related to the name of the former kingdom of the Fon ethnic group and said nothing about the dozens of other ethnic groups in Benin. Thus, the belated name-change in 1975 of this country makes some sense.

Yet, there are complaints about the adoption of Benin as a country name because not too far away is the Benin State in the neighboring country of Nigeria. Historically, the Fon people and many other groups trace their origins to somewhere in Nigeria. Today, the influence of the much larger and populated Nigeria is so great that Benin is often referred to as its thirty-seventh state (Nigeria has thirty-six states). The shadow that Nigeria casts over Benin infiltrates all areas, especially economic. The role that the big port in Benin's coastal capital of Cotonou plays as a transit center for the cross-border smuggling of illicit goods into Nigeria dominates Benin's economy.

Benin is not a large country. It is slightly smaller than the U.S. State of Pennsylvania. Its fast growing, youthful population gives it a population density of nearly 300 people per square mile. Its current national population is nearly 13 million. When I first visited Benin in 1972, it had a population of around 3 million and most of its people lived in rural villages. Today, nearly one-half of its population lives in cities and towns.

A prominent economic feature in Benin is the illegal sale of old glass bottles filled with cheap fuel smuggled from Nigeria, where vehicle fuel is highly subsidized. The prevalence of the sale of this fuel undermines the Benin government's effort to collect the taxes it imposes on fuel at filling stations. Without this tax, the government's budget has been stripped of income that is an important revenue source in most countries. Given the porosity of Benin's border with Nigeria, there does not appear to be any solution to the gigantic and constant flow of goods from Benin into Nigeria. Also, many prominent Beninese officials have become wealthy off this bustling but illicit cross-border trade.

The Cotonou Port is an important gateway for the entry of merchandise destined for landlocked African countries north of Benin. In 1960, Benin gained independence from France. This was the year that most of France's former colonies in Africa became independent. At first, Benin put forth the novel idea of rotating the presidency of its new country among leaders from its various south-to-north

geographic regions, thereby giving different ethnic groups a turn at the presidential helm. This system did not last long and a military man took over the government.

The key role played by the military in the political life of Africa merits special attention. This role was so prominent in the early years of independence that some pundits said the future of many African countries was determined at St. Cyr in France or at Sandhurst in the United Kingdom. These are the top military training institutions in these countries and they are where a good number of Africa's early national leaders were trained. These same pundits added that if these leaders were not trained at these military schools, they were educated at the London School of Economics and, thus, exposed to the socialist, Marxist ideology they later attempted to apply in practice when they seized power in their own countries.

The extreme political ideologies adopted by Africa's early leaders prompted some analysts to say in the 1960s that Africa got off to a bad start under leadership that was radicalized in Europe and, therefore, they did not reflect the true leadership of their respective countries. This view has led others to say that once a country gets off to a bad start it is tough to get back on track.

In Benin's case, a military man, Mathieu Kйrйkou, staged a military coup in 1972 and ruled under a single party for nineteen years until 1991. He was elected in 1996 for ten more years, giving him twenty-nine years as Benin's president. He started as a Marxist-Leninist and evolved into a multiparty democrat. He had once converted to Islam and adopted the name of Omar. Toward the end of his life he was a born-again Christian and sought to provide every citizen of Benin with a Bible. These many changes in his life and political strategies prompted his nickname, 'Chameleon.'

In Kйrйkou's case, he had been a lieutenant in the French Army during World War II. He knew several other presidents in Francophone West Africa because they had all served previously in the French Army. This network of former African soldiers in the French Army was an important factor in the early years of several West African countries. Benin's president used the fact that he had been an officer in the French Army to cow other presidents who had occupied lower ranks in the French Army.

Kйrйkou went from touting Marist-Leninism to promoting capitalism. For a while, he was a Muslim and adopted, as noted above, the Arabic name, Omar. When he came to Sekou Tourй's funeral in 1984, everyone was watching to see if he entered the front door of the grand mosque as a Muslim, or if he entered the side door with non-Muslim mourners. I can confirm that he entered the side entrance because we bumped heads when we both bent over at the same time to remove our shoes in the crowded side room of the Mosque we had been jammed into by Guinean authorities.

Somehow this president became beloved by his people. He received high marks because he opened the way for multiparty democracy in 1990. (Uncannily, the 'chameleon' won the 1996 multiparty elections.) I participated as an observer of the 1991 elections and was surprised to see some violence in Parakou after the results were announced. Obviously, the 'northerners' in this centrally located Benin city did not like seeing a 'southerner' win the elections. There was so much violence that I hid under my motel room bed with a young U.S. legislative assistant, Tim Trenkle, who U.S. Senator Nancy Kassebaum sent to accompany me. This

disturbing incident reminded me of the troubling role ethnicity plays in African politics.

While observing at night the counting of votes in Parakou, I was shocked to see that the person in charge was someone I had met years earlier in Guinea. This man had been a Marxist firebrand and was the Minister of Ideology when Sekou Tourй was president. I thought he had been killed along with his fellow ministers when a post-Toure regime took over. I approached him with the greatest temerity. He immediately recognized me. I addressed him as Mr. Minister Behazin. He saw the shock on my face and tried to put me at ease by saying he had been saved from the fate of his former Guinean colleagues by Benin's late Roman Catholic Cardinal Bernadin Gantin and he was now working in the Parakou Region. Later, I was told that the Cardinal had saved him because he was a member of a royal Fon family.

One memory that stays with me about northern Benin are the high standards by which the Parakou-to-Malanville (Niger border) national highway was built in the late 1970s. This well-constructed highway was an exception in West Africa because it was built by an American firm. Its thick road base had never been seen before in this part of Africa. It is not uncommon in Africa to see roads built with the thinnest layer of asphalt because corrupt politicians skimp on road-building materials in order to increase their share of the contract cost. And little, if no thought, is given to follow-up maintenance. Too many new roads in Africa become worn out and full of potholes within a few years. One African told me if you want to win the hearts and minds of the people, build many roads like the Parakou-Malanville highway.

In 2017, I was able to visit some cotton farmers in central Benin. This visit reminded me that most Beninese are subsistence farmers trying to eke out a living by tilling the soil. Many of these farmers were trying to add to their meager incomes by cultivating cotton for sale to organizations which sell this commodity on international markets. There were few women in the village group that met with me. I was told other women were too busy harvesting soybeans to take time off to attend the meeting. I was surprised because I had never seen soybeans cultivated in Africa. The people assured me that soybean cultivation had been on the rise for about ten years. On that day, I began believing that soybeans is the crop of the future in West Africa.

When I visited this village, I had with me an African colleague who had been born and raised in the city and had never in his life visited a rural village. He was in something of a state of shock at seeing the level of poverty that engulfed rural people. I was instantly reminded that today many Africans know only their urban environments and, thus, have no idea of how most Africans continue to struggle to survive in the rural areas. He kept asking me how these people will ever be able to extract themselves from the grips of poverty and move on to a higher level of development. I did not have any good answers for him. After all these years in Africa, I still do not have any good answers to this fundamental question.

Just when I think I may have an answer, the African context changes. Some answers that may have applied thirty years ago, do not apply today. Africa's fast population growth rate and the youthful structure of its population make me feel

lost in some places that I knew forty years ago. As stated earlier, when I first went to Benin in 1972, it had an estimated national population of about 3 million people. Today, it has nearly 13 million people and half of these people are less than eighteen years old. Maybe there is a demographic dividend hidden in these numbers somewhere, but, for me, Benin and every other African country does not need more poor, unhealthy and unemployed people.

When I first went to Benin in the early 1970s, palm nuts and oil were among its major exports. Now, little oil palm is exported. I understand that Asian countries like Malaysia expropriated West Africa's oil palm and created their own plantations on an industrial scale. Therefore, West Africa can no longer compete well in the international palm oil trade. Sometimes I think Africa has lost several windows of opportunity while the Asians have exploited Africa's failure to take timely advantage of its natural advantages.

Benin's first multiparty presidential elections in 1991 were won by Nicйphore Soglo, who had previously worked for the World Bank. He said many things that people liked. One thing he said was that he would oblige everyone owning a huge villa to explain how they possessed sufficient funds to build their oversized, luxurious houses. This program was started with much fanfare, but in a short time nothing more was heard of it. Evidently, doing this inventory of villas rankled so many 'big fish' that it would have been political suicide to continue this investigation. It has been my experience over the past fifty years in Africa that no 'big fish' has ever suffered any consequences from corruption scandals. For the wealthy and influential in Africa, impunity from legal prosecution is generally the rule.

How can you really combat corruption if there are no sanctions against the most corrupt people? I have never seen a 'big fish' prosecuted and go to jail for the huge corrupt crimes they have committed. Yet, a young man can steal a cheap handkerchief from a roadside vendor, be pounced upon and killed immediately by bystanders. Where is the justice in this? I learned that the word "democracy" does not exist in many African languages, but the word "justice" does. Less corruption and more justice are usually what most Africans seek.

Religion is important in Benin, as it is elsewhere in Africa. I have always said if you could harness Africa's religion fervor to power developmental progress, Africa would be at the top of everyone's list of best performing countries. There are plenty of Catholics, Protestants and Muslims, but all its people are affected by its ancient indigenous religion, Voodoo. In Benin, Voodoo is an official religion. The old Abomey Palace is considered the birthplace of Voodoo and this African religion holds sway over the daily lives of the majority of Beninese, as well as many others living in neighboring countries.

I know well Benin, but I have never lived there for any length of time. I have done numerous short work stints there and crisscrossed the country in all directions many times. When I was based for four years (1987-91) in the neighboring country of Togo, I had to drive to Cotonou about every two weeks. The U.S. Ambassador, Walter Stadtler, insisted I travel to Benin at least twice a month. His successor, Harriet Isom, continued this practice.

In those years, a sense of dread overcame me when I entered Benin because there was a concrete arch built over the road at the Benin-side of the border with

human statues breaking chains. In the arch was inscribed the following bold words: "Through the bright light of Marxism-Leninism we shall overcome." At that time, I felt as if I were entering a dark tunnel into a country with little promise.

There were some interesting attractions along the road to Cotonou. You could stop and tour by pirogue the enchanting village of Ganvié that is built on stilts over an expansive lagoon. You could also stop in Ouidah and see the sacred pythons. I learned that pythons are big snakes that are worshiped. I also learned that a good way to keep rodents out of your granary is to keep a python in it.

There are many other sites in and around Ouidah, including the museum of Portugal's enclave which was not fully liberated until 1975. This enclave was an important departure point for the sale of slaves in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One can see the 'no return' arch built to recognize the tens of thousands of slaves who were shipped to their fate in the Americas. Visiting this monument reminds one of why this part of the 'Bight of Benin" of the eastern Atlantic Ocean is called the 'Slave Coast.' An interesting 1980 book on this Portuguese part of Benin's history is Bruce Chatwin's *The Viceroy of Ouidah*.

Perhaps I could say more about my experiences in Benin, but I still have fifty-one more African countries to cover. Maybe I will come back later to cover some points that are best noted in this Benin chapter. I do fear by writing too much about any single African country I will make this book less readable. I do want the reader to enjoy reading every chapter and be inspired to dig deeper into any topic skimmed over in this book. My main hope is that the reader will learn something in this book that he or she did not know before.

Postscript: I dedicate this chapter to Alan Miller who passed away in Parakou after living and working a lifetime in Africa. I first met Al in Niamey, Niger, in 1976. He had lived in Parakou since 1994 and died there at the age of seventy-six on May 29, 2018. I repeat below my words that were read by the U.S. Ambassador to Benin, Lucy Tamlyn, at his funeral in Parakou on June 23, 2018.

"Al and I debated many subjects about Africa over the years. He was an avid reader and critic of my books. We had not concluded some of our debates and now I do not know where to turn to get the kind of deep insights he provided me about all sorts of things. No words can describe how much I will miss Al. It saddens and upsets me to no end that he is no longer there to talk with me. Africa has lost an American who had dedicated his entire life to the continent."

CHAPTER FOUR

Botswana

THERE ARE SOME THINGS to see in Botswana, but I did not see them. My two visits in 2001 and 2005 to the sleepy capital, Gaborone, of this prosperous country did not allow me the time needed to see what I wanted to see. If I had had the time and money, I would have visited the marvels of the world-famous Okavango Delta in northern Botswana or the San people of the famed Kalahari Desert. The well-watered delta stands in stark contrast with the rest of this arid country. The Delta is a wonderland of African wildlife that attracts thousands of tourists annually from all over the world.

The San people are reputed to be among Africa's most ancient ethnic groups. To the extent they are allowed by the national government to continue their traditional lifestyle of wandering in remote areas of Botswana's vast desert lands, they practice hunter-gathering activities that have endured for a millennium. Perhaps one of the negative marks on Botswana is its questionable human rights practices as applied to its San 'bushman' population. The government appears to want to stop the San from following their traditional ways and oblige them to stay in permanent settlements where they can access services and become 'modernized.' Some observers fear that if the government has its way the San people and their ancient way of life will be doomed.

I was able to use my two short visits to Gaborone (Gabs) to meet up with two old American friends. In 2005, I was able to hook up with Joseph Huggins who was the U.S. Ambassador to Botswana at the time. Joe and I had served previously together in Guinea and Togo. In 2001, I was also able to meet with Robert Hellyer who was then working with USAID's regional office in Gabs. Bob and I served together in Guinea in the 1984-1987 period. I had also visited him in other years when he was a USAID Mission Director in Angola, Congo Kinshasa and Ghana.

Botswana is like other countries in Southern Africa in that it has experienced a high adult HIV/AIDS prevalence rate. When I was in Gabs in 2005, this rate was near twenty percent. One impact of this high rate was a fall in the average life expectancy to about thirty-five years. To its credit, the government of Botswana developed a model program to tackle the HIV/AIDS pandemic. I understand that Botswana's positive development profile has been restored.

One thing that appears to be still a challenge in Botswana and elsewhere in Africa is the high consumption of alcoholic beverages, particularly among its male population. I believe the high level of alcohol addiction in many parts of Africa is a huge problem. Widespread heavy drinking could possibly be Botswana's number

one social problem. Other than that, Botswana's development profile is one of the best in Africa and it is among a handful of higher income countries in Africa.

I have been asked several times why other countries in Africa cannot follow Botswana's good example. It has had a strong democracy since it was granted independence and been led by highly educated and enlightened leaders. It has all the hallmarks of a functioning democracy, including a free press and an independent judiciary. It has well-functioning institutions that would be the envy of any country. It stands out in Africa as a shining example, so why cannot Botswana's experience be replicated by other African countries?

To me, the answer to this question is relatively simple. As noted, it has had good leadership since gaining independence from Great Britain in 1966. Botswana's respected leaders have pursued policies and practices that have been in the best interests of the country and its people. Their job has been made easier by Botswana's low national population (around 2 million people) and the fact that it sits on one of the biggest sources of diamonds in the world. The wealth generated by the export of diamonds fueled a level of prosperity not known elsewhere in Africa. Good leadership, high education levels, full employment and impressive per capita wealth make it easier to implant democracy and make it work to the advantage of Botswanans.

The progress achieved by Botswana at every level makes it one of the few, if not the only, countries in Africa that has benefited from a demographic transition similar to what has occurred in the most developed countries in world. The total fertility rate is the lowest on the mainland continent. Many of its population statistics are akin to levels that prevail in the most advanced non-African countries. It is also notable that a majority of Botswana's relatively small national population is urbanized. Of course, the peaceful nature of Botswana and the absence of any violent conflict grant it the stability needed to stay on a consistent, predictable upward progressive track. In a few words, it can be said that Botswana enjoys all the factors and conditions required to develop.

I wish I could be so upbeat for other African countries. Botswana is such a good performing country it is almost as if it has nothing in common with most African countries. Of course, its close association with neighboring South Africa, which possesses one of Africa's biggest economies and its integration into the larger economy of the Southern Africa Region, enhances its enviable socio-economic situation. If other Africans want to see what is possible in Africa, they should visit Botswana.

I do not want to take away in any way from the positive views expressed above about Botswana, but the first thing a visitor to Gabs usually says is that it might be Africa's most boring city. I admit that Gabs is high on the 'boring scale,' but there are other capital cities in Africa that compete for the title of Africa's most boring city. Anyway, as long as all the creature comforts and basic needs are satisfied, and there is good security and health care, boring is better than the chaos of living on the edge of survival.

CHAPTER FIVE

Burkina Faso

MY FIRST ACQUAINTANCE WITH this landlocked country in West Africa was in December 1970 as I made my way across unknown territory to the capital city of Niamey in Niger, a neighboring country which is located on the edge of the Sahara in an even more northern location than Burkina Faso. It was one of those rugged overland trips you would have never undertaken if you had known in advance what trials awaited you in traveling over brutally rough roads alone through the constant dust to unimaginable destinations. For sure, this was not a trip that an older and wiser person would have ever attempted.

Much later, I would spend many years in this country. I last visited its bustling capital city of Ouagadougou (Ouaga) in March 2019. I was asked then to compare what I saw then with what I experienced in 1970. Doing this was a challenge because after forty-eight years my memory of that first ill-advised trip across Burkina Faso (then Upper Volta) is dim. I recall a sleepy, small town with many people on horses and men sitting on logs in clusters drinking calabashes of dolo (a local alcoholic beverage made from sorghum). Today, it is a large polluted city with thousands of noisy two-wheelers whizzing about. For me, these two different times in Ouaga are not comparable, especially when your memory of the distant past is not crystal clear.

This is a country that is dear to my heart and has left me with some indelible memories, both good and bad. One of the most unforgettable memories was a day in October 2014 when the people of Ouaga rose up in furor against a man who had been their president for twenty-seven years, obliging him to flee the country. I never thought I would ever see such a thing in Africa, but one historical day things reached the boiling point and Africa experienced a rare successful popular insurrection. The final straw for the people was the insistence of its long-serving president to amend the constitution so he could run for another term. For the people, this was too much and enough was enough.

The people could not accept a practice that is all too common in Africa, i.e., once president always president. In particular, the youth bulge in the population was against a president being like a village chief who occupied his position for life. As I struggled around tires burning in the street, the roadblocks and angry youth hurling threats, I worried for my safety and the well-being of my family which had hunkered down at home. More than once, I asked myself why what I was seeing had not happened elsewhere in Africa. Certainly, in other African countries there was the same or greater reason for a violent uprising. How did the people of

Burkina Faso (Burkinabй) achieve what others had failed to do in other African countries?

My cursory response to this question is the burgeoning youthful structure of today's population where many young people are educated but unemployed. Most of the people I saw in the street were less than twenty-five years old and they were joined by many children. The ability of these youthful mobs to mobilize to act in an orchestrated manner was enhanced by a couple of things not seen so much in Africa in previous years. Their mobility was increased by their possession of motorbikes and their communication to one another was enabled by cell phones. These two key elements did not exist in Africa twenty years earlier.

Sadly, a number of criminal elements associated themselves with the young rebels and they went about dismantling methodically hotels and other prominent buildings in the city. Everything was stolen and carted off, including TVs, air-conditioners and electrical wiring. The houses and businesses of anyone who was thought to have been part of the political party in power were targets of mob violence and meticulous thievery. When the smoke cleared and sanity restored, it was realized that the city had been ransacked and was in a shamble.

I made it home to find my family traumatized. As night fell, we made sure our doors were well-locked and all the windows were shut tight. Clashes between security forces and the mobs had engulfed our house in tear gas and, thus, we wore wet cloths over our faces to ward off the effects of residual tear gas that had penetrated our house. During our wakeful night, thieves tried to break into our house. Our fear level was high, but when day broke all was quiet. The president had left the country and key politicians were scrambling to put in place an interim replacement.

After these troubling events, my family decided it was time to leave Africa and return to the States. I resisted, but when the school year ended in June 2015, we did leave Africa. I later returned, but my children expressed their firm desire to stay in the States and benefit from all it had to offer. They said, "Africa is your thing, not ours." I did return to Africa alone several times and I am currently in Africa as I type these words. I'm afraid I have used up all my lives in Africa and, thus, I am living on borrowed time every time I set foot on the continent. All my family was born and raised in Africa, but they say I am more African than they are in spite of the fact that I was born and raised in Kansas, and the color of my skin is white.

Although Burkina never recovered from the popular insurrection and has subsequently been the target of a number of terrorist attacks, it still remains for me one of my favorite African countries. My family thinks my attachment to Africa has made me a bit crazy. They point to the people killed by a terrorist attack at a popular downtown eating place who were sitting in the same seats we would often sit in when we were still in Ouaga. They thank their lucky stars they left Burkina while I keep asking myself if I will ever get to return again to this fascinating country.

Certainly, violent terrorism executed by religious extremists and criminals in Burkina and neighboring countries did not exist in Africa before the start of this century. Africa is a much riskier and dangerous place than it was when I first arrived on the continent, especially when viewed from health and security

standpoints. One used to be able to sleep at night without locking one's door and go anywhere any time of the day or night without fear. Now, living in Africa has become akin to living in prison behind high walls and with a robust security system. And, if you get really sick, the health care you need requires that you be evacuated to a country with more advanced medical services.

I learned a lot in Burkina and, as is often the case, much of what I learned was from my personal driver. Yes, I had my own driver because driving in Ouaga's chaotic traffic was impossible. The city roads were jammed with motorbikes and they all competed to get ahead of one another by any means possible. Thrown into the vehicular mess were bicycles, donkey carts, big trucks and large numbers of pedestrians. There were accidents aplenty at all hours and traffic lights often did not function. Nobody accustomed to driving in the well-organized and regulated traffic of Europe or the U.S. could drive here.

A driver was a necessity. Also, when you arrived at your destination, parking was unavailable, so having a driver to drop you off was essential. It was also good to have a driver if you had the misfortune of having a flat tire or a breakdown and were placed at the mercy of an unruly crowd which would gather around you to offer its help. Furthermore, a knowledgeable driver was a good source of information and my conversations with my drivers in Burkina and elsewhere in Africa were indispensable to keeping a hand on the pulse of the country and the thinking of the local people.

I recall many exchanges with my driver in Ouaga. I once mentioned to him how pleasing it was to work with Burkinabй because they did all the work so well themselves. His reply was, "Yes, we are good, but we are still capable of killing each other." I have often pondered how much truth there was in his reply and how it applied to other African countries. Too often, I have found all to be good but realized belatedly that I had naively overlooked the capacity of people to kill and steal. Sometimes, I would write this off to the failure to develop a sense of nation among the diverse ethnic groups occupying the space enclosed by artificial national boundaries. People sometimes forget that most countries in Africa have been politically independent less than sixty years. In some respects, that puts them historically about where the U.S. was in 1840.

It still seems that too many Africans put first themselves, their families, clans and ethnic groups. The idea that they are citizens of a country with certain civic responsibilities is still a new concept. My experience is that Africans are very tolerant of others, but when it comes to protecting their own interests, they quickly divide into ethnic sides that are usually not clearly observed by an outsider. I saw a number of examples where if Africans had the opportunity to steal money to make themselves and their families wealthy, they would submit themselves to any sacrifice. Once wealthy, they became above any law and enjoyed impunity.

My Ouaga driver taught me other lessons I still ponder, but I have yet to figure out exactly what I was being taught. Once a dog passed in front of our car. My driver continued straight ahead and ran over the dog instead of easily swerving to avoid hitting it. I asked him why he did that, and he replied, "Any dog stupid enough to cross in front of a moving car deserves to die."

Another time I was once preparing to roll down my car window so I could give a begging Tuareg child a coin or two. He vigorously told me, "Don't give the child

anything. His people eat more meat than I do." My driver did not want to hear anything about how this child and his family had fled drought in the far north during this harsh dry time of year. For me, the reaction of my driver was clearly an act of racism against the lighter-skinned people from the edges of the Sahara. Yet, it was also expressed that his own ability to afford meat to eat was limited.

Like everyone else, my driver was prepared to do anything to make money. When I mentioned there was too much cross-border traffic of arms and drugs, he said, "I'm ready to drop everything and drive one of the trafficker's trucks if they pay me right." The fact that he would be committing a crime in doing so did not concern him in the slightest. After all, this was like stealing from the government and that was not really stealing. I was to learn that making money was a king to be worshiped even if you had to change your religion and God. And, you need money to afford to eat as much meat as you want. After all, Africans are carnivores par excellence. (I have never met a black African vegetarian.)

One interesting aspect of my driver was that he did not drink. He was something of an exception in this respect. Most Burkina men were known for their capacity to consume alcoholic beverages. If they could afford it, they drank bottled beer. If not, they indulged in the traditional male habit of drinking dolo on a daily basis. Studies have shown the majority of rural men in Burkina derive most of the calories they consume on a daily basis from dolo. Most of the harvest of Burkina's main crop and food staple, sorghum, goes to make dolo. My impression of some parts of the country was that most men were not functional in the afternoon because they had drunk too much dolo.

External development assistance managers were reluctant to criticize too much the overconsumption of dolo and the problems it presented to achieving progress because its fabrication was a woman's enterprise. In some parts of the country, you could see women busy making dolo for the men to drink. These parts of the country have often been denuded of trees because it takes a lot of wood fuel to make dolo. It also takes a lot of water and this can be a problem in some areas where good drinking water is scarce.

I asked my driver why in Burkina's hot climate nobody wore shorts. He said it would be culturally inappropriate to wear shorts and he did not own any shorts. He later added that he would rather be dead than wear shorts. I have often wondered why it was rare to see anyone wear shorts in tropical Africa. If you saw anyone in shorts, he or she was usually a foreigner or someone who had lived a long time abroad. Is it possible to relate the wearing of shorts or other forms of cooler clothes in a hot climate to the level of development or political outlook?

My office assistant noticed how stressed I could become when faced with sudden changes in plans. She would often remind me that one of Africa's main challenges was its "unpredictability." I thought about this and agreed that not being able to predict the future with any certainty was a limiting factor. I repeated this 'unpredictability' element to one prime minister of Burkina, and he said that part of his model for developing his country was to make it more 'predictable.' He said he hoped to share someday that model with me. I thought about this as I witnessed out my window a year later my neighbors participating in the popular insurrection by joyously dismantling brick-by-brick his luxurious three-story villa.

One of Burkina's well-liked religious leaders told me that he had developed a belief that Burkinabй were ungovernable. He was of the view that the deposed government had tried its best to govern, but the people refused to listen. He believed his fellow citizens were not amenable to good governance. He claimed that the government could ask the people to do what is right and good, but their reaction would be to do the opposite. He cited this popular contrariness as being the biggest obstacle to development.

During one of my last visits to Burkina Faso, I went deep into rural areas and tried my best to compare what I observed in the villages with what I saw forty years earlier. Of course, the main thing you note is there are many more people than before and small villages have grown into towns. I also saw more schools and health clinics than before. It was obvious that more kids were in school. I was uncertain of the quality of education, especially as I saw primary school classrooms crowded with over 100 pupils. I did observe that parents wanted their children educated, but they no longer possessed the same hope as they did years ago that education would result in landing a paying job. This fact decreased their willingness to sacrifice for their children's education.

The creation of jobs remains the true litmus test of development. Nothing is scarier to me than seeing mobs of educated young men who have their diplomas but no jobs. These men appear ready to follow whoever has the means to pay them. They are the foot soldiers of tomorrow who are easily swayed by the attraction of alternatives to living poor and unemployed. I am reminded that the huge population youth bulge in Africa is like a time bomb with a short burning fuse. For now, most of the pent-up frustrations of youth remain rumblings under the surface, but someday they will roar to the surface. The popular insurrection has already provided a taste of the potential ferocity of Africa's deprived youth.

I saw an abundance of undernourished small children and wondered how many are permanently stunted. I had read that nutritional levels among children under five years of age were as low as they were decades ago, making the problem of child malnutrition more challenging and complex than years ago because there were three to four times as many children now than there were when I arrived in Africa. I believe, as I did way back then, that it is not possible to build a better future in Africa as long as a large segment of the population has suffered from the lasting effects of childhood stunting.

I did see some progress in rural villages in the form of cellphones and some small solar panels. I also noted that much of the male population had more mobility because they possessed motorbikes. These things helped people be more in touch with the outside world, but their lives still hinged on the completion of age-old basic tasks. Women and children were still responsible for gathering firewood in the bush and hauling water to drink, wash and bathe. Cooking fires still involved, for the most part, the balancing of a metal pot on three stones while flaming sticks of wood were shoved under the pot. People were cooking and eating in the same way that they had done for generations. In brief, new technologies had not improved sensibly the quality of life at the rural level.

In Burkina there are many ethnic groups, but one group, the Mossi, is the most prominent and its traditional territory lies in the central part of the country where the capital city is located. The Mossi have also immigrated into other areas of the

country, establishing new villages and 'colonizing' other ethnic groups. This is only one example of how demographics are changing in Burkina, making predicting the future even more difficult.

Perhaps the most telling demographic factor in Africa is unprecedented rapid urbanization. For example, I was told that the population of Ouaga doubles every ten years. Urban slums and sprawl have become one of the most noticeable features of today's Africa. Rising poverty and hunger in urban areas represent new development challenges.

Burkina also has a number of religions. Most of the population is Christian, but a large percentage is Muslim. Burkinabй are generally religiously tolerant and there are many families which have both Christian and Muslim members. Members of both religions are buried in the same cemeteries. Of course, traditional African religions continue to influence many Burkinabй. I often hear that Burkina is sixty percent Christian, forty percent Muslim and one hundred percent animist. I was often astounded to see early in the morning offerings of food to the African spirits in the major street crossroads of Ouaga.

I delighted in joining the crowds gathered along the open street gutters in the evening to have a beer and eat some roasted chicken. I read in the local newspaper that an estimated 10,000 chickens are slaughtered every day in Ouaga. These skinny, but tasty bush chickens are usually transported into Ouaga in feathery bunches bound to a bicycle. So many chickens are hanging from a bicycle that it looks like a mound of chickens moving magically along by themselves. These chickens are quickly plucked, gutted and grilled over an open charcoal fire or roasted in ovens with windows. The former is called a 'bicycle chicken' and the latter a 'television chicken.'

The nearby street gutters are cluttered with trash and awash in wastewater, making a perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes and, thus, the spread of the biggest killer in Africa: malaria. The early evening hours when everybody is out socializing is the peak time for the female Anopheles mosquito to spread malaria by feeding off the blood of humans they bite. Poor sanitation is the cause of the spread of a number of diseases. A study was once undertaken on how much it would cost to clean up Ouaga. This study concluded it would cost an estimated $80 billion. Then, it would take several million U.S. dollars each year to keep the city clean. These colossal sums are more than any African country can afford.

One example of how sanitation is handled in Ouaga is the way my household trash was collected in my upscale neighborhood. An old woman with a donkey cart would come twice a week to collect the rubbish I had stuffed into my trash barrel. She would transport the trash she collected and dump it in a big empty lot located a few blocks from my house. This lot was full of foul-smelling trash. This same lot was used by the hundreds of people using vacant lots as open-air outdoor toilets. Trash collection and disposal is a huge problem in Africa. Ironically, in this case, hovering over the lot was a nearby five-star international hotel.

Dealing with frequent electrical power outages and cuts in the water supply required constant attention. Possessing a functional generator and having water pressure pumps were essential elements of any modern house in Ouaga. Also necessary were big black polyethylene water tanks on the roof which could collect water when it trickled through municipal pipes in the night for use in the day. I

practically had to have an electrician and plumber at my house all the time to keep things running. When there was a major electrical supply problem, I had to call on national electricity company workers, but they would not come until I agreed to pay a handsome bribe. I found all too often I had to pay petty bribes in Africa to get any government service.

There are many languages spoken in Burkina, but the colonial language, French, is the official language. I have always wondered how Africans would speak to each other and work without an adopted neutral foreign language. In Burkina, I noted much sensitivity practiced by the main ethnic group, Mossi, in the capital city (located in their traditional home territory) by speaking only in French at their workplaces. They were aware that other members of different ethnic groups were present in the workplace and, out of deference to them, it was best to speak in a mutually understood language.

All ethnic groups in Burkina were proud of their long histories and traditions. In particular, the Mossi held in the highest regard their Emperor, the Moro Naaba. For over 500 years they have had a line of Emperors and the current emperor maintained a palace in Ouaga. Every Friday this Emperor opened his palace to visitors. Under the Emperor were a number of lesser chiefs. One of these chiefs gave me one of my many African names, *Naaba Toega,* which translates into Chief Baobab. The latter is an odd tree which often lives to be well over several hundred years. This tree is venerated across Africa's arid bands and is considered sacred and a repository of knowledge and wisdom.

The Mossi and other ethnic groups evolved from a horse culture tradition. As a sign of prestige, many well-off people still keep a horse tethered in front of their houses. A number of stories were often repeated about the ancient feats of their cavalry heroes. I often thought it was this age-old horse culture that made many people well-adapted to riding motorcycles. The way they charged ahead with their motorbikes without slowing down for anything reminded me of how Mossi warriors must have charged furiously ahead on their horses.

When shopping for groceries or eating in a restaurant in Ouaga, you inevitably end up in a place owned and operated by a Lebanese. Like elsewhere in West Africa, the Lebanese control most commercial activity. I often wondered where we would buy our groceries if the Lebanese left the country. Even the locally owned stores procure their stocks from Lebanese wholesale outlets. This dependency on Lebanese entrepreneurship is worrisome, but everyone knows if they chase the Lebanese away, they would be in for tougher times. Such times are not what Burkinabй need. Easier and better times is what the people of Burkina Faso deserve.

As this chapter draws to a close, I think of many people whom I met in Ouagadougou. I met once a former PCV, Peter Wright, who has faded into Burkina's woodwork and I heard he adopted Burkina Faso citizenship. He remains active as a professional forester and has as his email address the Moorй name, Naaba Tiis (Chief of the Forest).

I also attended the wedding celebration of Steve Amodio, a former PCV who had stayed in Burkina Faso and married a local woman. They later had a son. Steve had set up a novel business importing rehabilitated used laptops from the U.S. by the container load. He sold the laptops at affordable prices and did a booming business.

I have to mention more than once in this book Don Clark. Don was a PCV over fifty years ago in the community of Matiakoali, which is located in the far northeastern corner of what was then Upper Volta, about thirty-five miles from the border with Niger. He went on to have a long career with USAID, rising to the highest levels of the U.S. Foreign Service. He started his USAID career in Ouagadougou, where he met his lifelong wife, a local woman named Constance. He is the only American I know who learned to speak two of Burkina Faso's major local languages, Gourmatchй and Moorй, and he has nicknames in both of these languages. Our paths have crossed many times over the past years with this impressive man. I was happy when I was in Ouaga in March 2019 to help him arrange to send funds to a friend in Matiakoali to repair his flood-damaged house.

I will add that Don liked to get people together at one of Ouagadougou's long-standing watering holes, Bar Boulougou. On April 25, 2014, he got some old Burkina USAID hands, Antoine Zongo and Edouard Tapsoda, together with an American friend of ours, Peter Persell, who had been a PCV at the same time as Don. Peter happened to be in Burkina Faso at the time. We had a great discussion. The beer flowed freely. We devoured plates of grilled chicken. At the time, I asked how long Boulougou had been in existence and was told it was established in 1955. I went by Bar Boulougou in March 2019 and found that similar to many other places in Ouaga, it had undergone some reconstruction to make the place more secure.

I also want to mention Diawara Unkonda Sawyer. I met her when she was sworn in as a PCV at the U.S. Embassy in 2008. I struck up a conversation with her because she had an African look. I was to discover her parents were from Liberia but emigrated to the U.S. She actively worked as a PCV to improve the marketing of popular clay handmade pottery produced by women of the community of Tcheriba, located in western Burkina Faso. Much later, I would attend her wedding to a local man. I learned the following year they had a son. Her case underscores the challenge of predicting the future course of any PCV.

If I am to dedicate this chapter to anyone, it would be John Schiller. He is the only American I know who had three children in Burkina Faso. He came to Burkina Faso in 1977 with his Congolese wife, Blandine, and they initially worked in Diapaga, located in the far northeastern part of Burkina Faso. Their first son, Bilikya, was born in 1978 in Fada N'Gourma. They had two more children, Mika and Zaina, born in Ouagadougou respectively in 1979 and 1981. They left Burkina Faso in 1984, but I was able to know John and his family well at his next posting in Togo when I was there in 1987-1991. By happenstance, I recently ran into John briefly in Ouagadougou in March 2019. He had missed his plane and returned to the hotel in which we were both staying. We had a great discussion and, as always, remain in touch via email.

I end this chapter by admitting that my initial ill-conceived, risky trip to Burkina Faso (then Upper Volta) in December 1970 was to see a friend, Dale Weimer, whom I met during our Peace Corps training at Estate Mandahl, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. She was assigned to Niger and I went to Togo. I never found her during my brief stay in Niger at that time. I had to hurry to take the tortuous return trip to Togo. I remain in touch with her until today. I visited her and her family with my two sons at her home in Mississippi in 2010. I hope to

visit them again at their new ranch in New Mexico in the near future. I was happy to stop in Birnin-Konni, Niger, in 2007 and take a photo to send her of her old PCV house across from the maternity.

Postscript: If I were sufficiently clever, I would write a brief ode to my walking shoes. These shoes finally became worn out during my last visit to Burkina Faso in 2019. I had used these shoes to walk daily almost two miles in a number of African countries, including Angola, Benin, Ghana and Mali. These shoes have seen too much to dispose of them, so I keep them for posterity purposes in my bedroom closet.

CHAPTER SIX

Burundi

I HAVE NOT SET foot in Burundi for over twenty years, but for all this time I cannot get out of my head the words said to me by a local acquaintance. He said, "We have to kill them before they kill us."

My reaction was, "Who are they?"

He looked at me with some incredulity and said, "I'm a Hutu and they are Tutsi."

I quickly inquired, "How do you know who is who? All of you look the same to me."

"We know. Don't worry about that. Sometimes we don't know immediately, but after we talk a while, we know," he responded with remarkable ease.

I have often pondered his words and wondered how any country could have any kind of a good future when its people believe their lives are constantly under threat. There's no doubt the history of this small, landlocked country located in Africa's Great Lakes Region is paved with blood and almost unbroken conflict. There has been no peace or stability in Burundi since it obtained independence from Belgium in 1962. Very difficult to make positive progress when most of the resources you have are devoted to security and neighbors are stubbornly pitted against each other. The deep ethnic conflict in Burundi has made one of Africa's poorest countries even poorer.

Books have been written by academic scholars who have devoted their lives to studying the complex intricacies of the history of the Great Lakes. All I can note in this book is what I experienced firsthand during my numerous visits to Burundi prior to 1998. I was told that about eighty-five percent of the population is Hutu, but the minority Tutsi had been the traditional rulers and usually controlled the army. The Tutsi had been accustomed to enjoying for decades many privileges. Naturally, they were not about to give up their prestigious position of power to a group they considered inferior, even if they were the majority.

Try as hard as I may, I could not distinguish a Hutu from a Tutsi. I was given a hint as to whom is which when I noticed that many of my local workers went home early. When I asked why they had to knock off by 4:00 p.m., I was told they were Hutu and they lived in the hills surrounding Bujumbura, Burundi's scenic capital, a port city on the north eastern shores of Lake Tanganyika, one of world's deepest lakes. Living in the distant hills meant it would take them more time to get home. They had to be home by dark to avoid the added dangers of the night. This visible late-afternoon mass exodus of Hutu from Bujumbura gave me a

better idea of what was unknowingly happening right before my eyes in this Tutsi-controlled capital city of nearly 1 million people.

I now understood better why I had received an anonymous letter threatening me with death if I continued to hire Hutu. I was open to hiring more Tutsi, but I was told they had a disdain for manual labor and did not like to work alongside Hutus. I was also told that Tutsi were not interested in the kind of small money I paid. I had heard that Tutsi were traditionally cattle herders and Hutu were agriculturalists. If true, this gave me the idea that maybe a lot which was happening in Burundi was because of the split often observed in Africa between farmers and herders. These occupations often fell along different ethnic lines.

I was told by a Burundian man, who claimed to be a Hutu, they not only represented the vast majority of the population, but they had been in the geographical space that had become Burundi long before the Tutsi arrived. Therefore, according to him, the Hutu had first rights to control Burundi. My reaction to his thinking was that the ethnic group with the longest history in Burundi was actually the small group of Twa pygmies, which represent a small fraction of Burundi's total population.

A prominent Tutsi lamented to me that his group had spoiled the paradise this patch of Earth should be. He also said that they were fortunate to have the Hutu to fight against. "Otherwise, we Tutsi would fight among ourselves."

He went on to note how the Tutsi were divided into competing clans and the royal class were often against the interests of Tutsi commoners. He also pointed out that the Tutsi monarchy had been disbanded by the Burundian government, which had been controlled for years by Tutsi military men who were from one area and clan within Burundi. He noted for my benefit that most local employees of embassies and international organizations based in Bujumbura were related to royal Tutsi families.

I learned something about Burundi's tortuous history from a Burundian man who picked up balls on the tennis court I frequented. About once a week I would play tennis with the American Ambassador, the late Morris 'Rusty' Nelson Hughes, on the clay court located at his residence. There was always this man who picked up our tennis balls. I asked the Ambassador if this man had worked for him for a long time. He laughed and explained that the man I was referring to had been the former Hutu president of Burundi, Sylvestre Ntibantuganya, who had taken refuge in his house after he had been disposed in a military coup led by the actual president, Pierre Buyoya.

This was surprising news for me. I immediately began showing this man much more respect and I thought I would impress him by speaking to him in Kiswahili. I had not even finished a sentence in Kiswahili when he sharply said in French that I should never speak to him again in that low-class language. I knew that Kiswahili was not spoken well in Bujumbura, but a corrupted form of this language was widely spoken by most of the people in the city. In any event, I quickly switched to my best French when talking with him.

I was to learn that he was a survivor of the 1972 genocide in Burundi when over 100,000 Hutus were killed by the Tutsi army. Educated and wealthy Hutu were targeted for slaughter. In these pre-CNN days little, if any, news was reported in Europe or the U.S. on this bloody massacre. My tennis court president

escaped being killed as a boy by fleeing with his family to a neighboring country. I later learned not to ask him too many questions because his answers could be lengthy. He would often respond to a brief query with an hour-long lecture. In the end, I wished we could have had a regular ball boy.

One of the major challenges for me when dealing with Burundi was pronouncing the last names of the people. Last names were typically spelled with ten or more letters and had at least three syllables. It took a lot of awkward practice to be able to pronounce correctly the names of the leaders of the country. Writing them also demanded much trial and error. If an expatriate said a Burundian name correctly, it was a sign that he or she had been in the country a long time.

The Greek man I changed money with not only could say effortlessly all the Burundian names, but he also spoke fluently the local language, Kirundi. He was a third-generation offspring of Greek immigrants who had lived in Burundi for decades. He had been born in Burundi. His presence reminded me that many Greeks had once settled in East Africa to do business and many were still around.

My Greek friend had a dilapidated auto spare parts shop with an old walk-in safe full of money. He would gladly take a personal check drawn on my bank in the U.S. He said he could send the check to his family members who lived in the States. I could not believe he had such a huge stock of money. I suspected he was also doing illicit trade in diamonds and gold with nearby Congo. I did not think it was possible to sell enough car parts in a land with few vehicles to fill his large safe with money.

When I was last in Burundi, it was under an international boycott and the only legal way in or out of the country was by UN flights from and to Nairobi. Bujumbura was considered a danger post and a nighttime curfew was imposed. Things became worse when rebel groups began placing landmines in the city streets. Seeing the damaged parts of blown-up cars dangling from tree limbs along one of Bujumbura's busy streets gave one pause and served to make looking over your shoulder a routine habit. I, too, began rushing back to my hotel room before nightfall.

One curious observation for me at the time was that in spite of all the difficulties caused by Burundi's violent conflict, the brewery on the outskirts of Bujumbura never missed a beat, operating twenty-four hours a day, seven days per week. I asked a Burundian friend how this was possible, and he said that it was because the brewery was a strategic installation. He continued by explaining that if the soldiers did not get their daily beers, there would be hell to pay. I did notice that every night many soldiers and policemen drank their fill of bottled beer.

In spite of the UN air boycott placed on Burundi, a healthy trade in coffee (Burundi's main export) and other items were making some people rich. Unmarked planes flew in and out of the Bujumbura Airport carrying their contraband. One thing they carried was bottle caps and hops for the brewery. The hotel I stayed in was full of businessmen making big money doing clandestine business in Burundi.

In general, it appeared to me that if a man could not afford to buy beer, he drank a local brew made from small bananas. Taken altogether, drinking excessively alcoholic beverages every afternoon and night by Burundian males seemed to be more the case than not. This national custom undoubtedly plays a

role in Burundi's unending conflict. I recall the horrendous experience of being stopped having the barrel of an AK-47 placed roughly against my face by drunken soldiers. Perhaps the most frightening thing that has happened to me during my many years in Africa is looking into the dilated wild eyes of a sweaty Burundian soldier who had his gun pointed at my head at close range. Drunkenness certainly makes your trigger-finger lighter. It would have been nothing for them to blow away this white-skinned foreigner.

I often think of what Pierre Buyoya told me in 1997 when we were talking on a veranda of his house located in a swank hillside suburb in Bujumbura, overlooking sparkling Lake Tanganyika. He said the solution to many of the troubling problems facing Burundi were actually quite simple to resolve. I was astounded by his statement. He went on to explain that we should come at night in a big plane with an elite military force and pick up all the Hutu and Tutsi leaders, including himself, and take them far away so they can never again have anything to do with Burundi. He went on to say that it was these leaders who were causing Burundi's problems and if they were removed, the people would get along just fine. I thought he had hit upon a winning idea and meekly asked if this plane could make some more stops in other African countries to do the same thing. We all had a good laugh over my half-serious statement.

Once I was able to wrangle a day ride out of Bujumbura with an international organization. We went to places in and around Gitega, the former colonial capital of Burundi. The purpose of the trip was to check on the welfare of Hutu families who were obliged to sleep in camps every night. We referred to these forced settlements as concentration camps. The idea was that the Hutus would go to their small farms to work during the day and return to the camps at night. In that way, they would be prevented from joining any rebel groups.

These camps were often located on the highest and coldest hills, far from any support structures. The people I saw in these camps were among the poorest and most suffering people I have seen in Africa. They were obviously undernourished, poorly fed and clothed in rags. My heart went out to see shivering hungry children crying. It was clear to me that if the Burundian government wanted to make enemies for life, it would continue its brutal practice of forcing rural Hutus into concentration camps. It was evident that these camps made a bad situation even worse.

Even with consistent peace and stability over a long period of time, Burundi will remain one of the poorest countries in Africa. Its lack of resources and the high density of its population do not leave any room for optimism about its future. Most Burundians are subsistence farmers who cultivate around one acre. This acre is often located on the slope of one of Burundi's many hills. The fast-growing population has almost led to the complete deforestation of this overcrowded Maryland-sized country. Burundi is dependent on external donors for its economic survival. The nutritional profile of most of its population has diminished greatly the human potential of its citizens. Burundi has run out of room for its burgeoning population. What do you do when you have nowhere to go and you cannot survive where you live?

Yes, it is difficult for me to be positive about Burundi's future. Burundi's dire condition forces me to question its viability as a country. I tried for the longest

time to be upbeat about Burundi's future, but I still do not see any light at the end of the tunnel for this long-suffering country. You cannot negotiate away deep ethnic hatreds and create prosperity by discussing Burundi's formidable development challenges. In particular, no start on much needed lasting peace and stability is possible without enlightened and unselfish national leadership. I weep for Burundi and the pitiful plight of its 11 million people. I search for hope for a better future for them, but I can find no hope. A terrible thing to write, but the cruel realities of Burundi's harsh development predicament need to be understood and bravely faced. Burundi could be Africa's unhappiest country.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Cabo Verde (Cape Verde)

THE MULTI-HOUR STOPOVER OF my flight at the Amilcal Cabral International Airport on the Sal Island of this tiny nation in the Atlantic Ocean was totally accidental. It was sometime in 1985 and I was on my way to Dakar, Senegal, about 400 miles farther east on the western side of the African continent when the plane I was on began experiencing technical difficulties. The decision was made to make an emergency landing on nearby Sal Island. If it were not for this brief landing, I could not say that I have been to Cabo Verde. (In English, Cape Verde, meaning Green Cape.)

Not much I can say about a country after only sitting for a few hours in its main airport. This is not to say that I didn't know anything about Cabo Verde back then. Being an Africa aficionado, I had read about this former Portuguese colony. I had also met a good number of Cabo Verdeans on the mainland, particularly in Dakar, Senegal. I knew for sure that I was not really in the Africa where I had lived and worked in for fifteen years.

Cabo Verde has all the development statistics of a more advanced country. In this regard and others, it does not have much in common with the African mainland. One thing that sets Cabo Verde apart is that more of its people and their descendants reside outside of Cabo Verde than inside this country, which is about the size of the smallest U.S. State of Rhode Island. I have been told there are more Cabo Verdeans living in the U.S. than in Cabo Verde itself. Many of these Cabo Verdeans and their offspring live in the State of Massachusetts.

Cabo Verde's small population of just over 500,000 is spread over the ten islands that make up this small archipelago. Like all other former colonies of Portugal, Cabo Verde gained its independence in 1975. Its people are mainly descended from a mixture of Portuguese and black African slaves. I understood that Cabo Verde had been a prosperous slave trade port a couple of centuries ago. I wanted to talk with people at the airport, but I had not yet learned Portuguese. I tried to use the Spanish that I had learned over fifteen years ago and found that my sparse words in Spanish were mostly understood. I was disappointed that I could not converse as much as I wanted with Cabo Verdeans in the airport, although I found that some of them spoke English or French.

I understood you can find many thousands of Cabo Verdeans in other former Portuguese Africa colonies. When Portugal was in control, it sent thousands of Cabo Verdeans to be indentured servants in its other colonies. As most Cabo Verdeans spoke Portuguese and were Catholics they easily fit into these other

Portuguese colonies. Today, the mixing with local populations makes it difficult to determine who is a pure Cabo Verdean.

One of the tests I use to judge the level of development of a country is how clean and functional its public toilets are. In this regard, I gave the restroom in the airport the highest marks. Everything was sparkling clean. Such a sight in mainland Africa is rare. Usually good sanitation is a huge problem for the continent. A large percentage of Africans do not have access to a modern toilet or clean drinking water. In particular, trash and garbage collection and disposal in Africa's fast-growing urban areas have become enormous challenges. Perhaps the most unclean cities in the world exist in Africa.

The smooth functioning of Cabo Verde's airport restroom made me think there must be some kind of central sewage system. Such a system is a rarity in Africa, which is mostly dependent on individual septic tanks. Of course, in Africa's rural areas most people defecate in the open. Some aid agencies award certificates to rural villages which no longer have to defecate in the bush. The gaining of such a certificate often requires building hundreds of pit latrines.

The Cabo Verde airport restroom had hot and cold clear running water. The water pressure was good so I thought that maybe some Cabo Verdeans might have an automatic clothes washer—a real sign of an advanced human development. Having running water is a rarity for most people in mainland Africa. Having hot water usually depends on also having an electrical hot water heater mounted on the wall in your bathroom or kitchen. Of course, all this and the pressure pipeline-pumps and elevated water storage units required to keep the water flowing bear mentioning. One of the shortcomings of living in most parts of mainland Africa are frequent electrical power and water cuts. Costly extra water storage tanks and a generator are standard equipment at every house if its well-off occupants want to enjoy electricity and running water.

While I was in the Cabo Verde airport, the electricity was steady. There were none of the spikes I have experienced on the mainland that can ruin your electrical devices and burn out your lightbulbs. The added expense of buying a stabilizer is a necessity if you want to protect anything that requires electricity to operate. I wondered how Cabo Verde generates electricity. Few African countries have hydro-electric power plants, so many depend upon huge diesel generators. Most Africans do not have these worries because they do not have access to electricity or piped water. Their worries are of a different sort and gravity.

I imagined that the average family income levels were boosted in Cabo Verde by remittances sent home to family members from Cabo Verdeans living abroad. Increasingly, poverty is being reduced in African by a constant and growing stream of remittances. When I first arrived in rural Africa the idea was to send an educated member of the family to seek employment in the capital city so they could send money back to the family in their village. Since there are now few, if any, jobs available in the capital city, the survival strategy now involves sending a family member to work abroad. Without remittances, a large percentage of African families would be poorer.

Another thought that passed through my head while sitting in the airport was maybe Cabo Verde had lost some of its most capable people to the call of greener pastures. Given that most Cabo Verdeans are living and working abroad, I

wondered about what this island nation had lost in terms of brain power. All over Africa the best and the brightest often go overseas to get a job and make money they could not make by staying home. This 'brain drain' affects most African countries. When I was once hospitalized in London to remove a kidney stone, all the doctors and nurses were from Africa. They missed home, but there were no jobs or decent salaries at home.

I first heard of Cabo Verde when I lived and worked for several years in Africa's Sahel Region. There were nine countries in the region and Cabo Verde was one of them. This dry region extends along the southern fringes of the Sahara Desert from Sudan to Cabo Verde, which was therefore also eligible for drought assistance.

Another time I heard about Cabo Verde was when Edward Brooke, a Republican from the U.S. State of Massachusetts, who became the first African American to be elected to the U.S. Senate in 1966. He served two six-year terms. I was told at the time that he may have descended from Cabo Verdeans. In any event, his election was assured by the tens of thousands of Cabo Verdeans residing in Massachusetts who voted for him. I also recall well Senator Brooke for the law he helped pass that amended the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act (referred to as 620q) so that no U.S. aid would go to any country which was in arrears in its debt payments to the U.S. for more than a year.

I suspected that Cabo Verde spent very little on defense. The percentage of national budgets that go for military and security services can often tell you much about a country. Since Cabo Verde was small, I assumed everyone had good access to health care and schools. There are many advantages that go with being a small country with a low and slow-growing population. For sure, you could not say that a rapid population and urbanization growth rate were outstripping efforts to achieve progress. Also, Cabo Verde, unlike other African countries, does not suffer from the youth bulge in its population pyramid graph.

Cabo Verde is not challenged by all the development problems that face mainland Africa. It shares most of the development challenges found in the higher income countries of the world and enjoys with them at the same life expectancy levels. Cabo Verde today is one of the most democratic and healthiest countries in Africa. Maybe, you can learn a lot about a country by sitting for a few hours in its international airport. I still need to explore why the airport is named after Amilcal Cabral.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Cameroon

I ALMOST DROWNED IN Cameroon. This is not something I want to write about. I have buried this awful experience for years in the deep recesses of my mind and digging it out now is not without some undesirable stress. Sometimes you can easily remember small things that did not cause you any harm but, on the other hand, dark moments are often put in a place where they can be lost to memory. Maybe the maintenance of my sanity over a half-century in Africa requires putting quickly behind me any bad experiences.

I was much younger and full of energy when I visited in 1975 a Peace Corps training camp near Mbalmayo, a town located about twenty-five miles east of Yaoundй, the capital city of Cameroon. The deep Nyong River flowed by this camp. Local fisherman invited us to go on a pirogue ride down the river. Their price was low and a boat ride on this big river appealed to my adventurous soul, so I and a couple of others joined the fishermen for a short ride down this fast-flowing, deep river.

We thought we were perfectly safe because we were with men who made a living by going out on the river every day. It was not my first time in Africa to be in a pirogue made by hollowing out a tree trunk. This previous experience in boats on African rivers made it so I was not alarmed in the least by the job of one of the two Cameroonian men aboard. This man kept dipping water with a rusty tin can that was seeping into the pirogue. For me, he was doing a good job of tossing water out of the pirogue that was accumulating in the bottom of this crusty old indigenous craft.

I began to notice that water in the bottom of the pirogue was rising faster than could be dipped and discarded overboard. More troubling to me were the worried looks on the faces of the two fishermen. All of a sudden, the slowly seeping water turned into a gushing fountain and the pirogue began to sink rapidly. In an unexpected life-threatening moment, you have no time to think. All your survival instincts take over. All we could think of was getting to the nearest bank. We were in a place where the river was rolling over rocks, thus making a desperate swim to the muddy riverbank more difficult.

I was afraid of drowning, but I also feared being eaten by a crocodile or crunched by an errant hippo. We finally made it to the bank and flopped exhausted face down in the slippery mud. Although we were still alive, we had no idea how we could return to camp, especially as the setting sun was enveloping us in murky darkness. We struggled to our feet and followed the fishermen through the thick riverside brush. I was scraped by bush thorns and bitten by bugs. I

thought for sure I would be covered by leeches and had probably picked up schistosomiasis in the river. There were thick swarms of mosquitoes buzzing around my head as we stumbled through the dark. I was sure I would get malaria. The thing I feared the most were snakes, which I knew came out at night in search of their prey and warmth.

By some miracle, after a couple of hours of hiking through the slushy, thick brush we made it back to the comforts of the camp. I did not want to talk about our ordeal. I just wanted to clean up, eat and go to bed. I began then trying to forget this terrible episode in my African life. I am thankful I survived to tell finally this scary tale. So much of what happened to me on that risky day makes me think of Cameroon, a country suffering from growing multiple crises. As a nation, Cameroon has been sinking for decades.

My disastrous river trip on that day also makes me think about a story I heard several times over the years in Africa. I believe this story is grounded in some truth that comes from colonial times. Perhaps the white man wearing a pith helmet in the story is German. Cameroon was initially one of the few colonies in Africa that Germany had been bequeathed by decisions made at the infamous Berlin Conference in 1884-85. It was at this conference that Africa was arbitrarily divided up by the colonial powers. Most European countries were assigned large swaths of African geography without any regard to, or consultation with, the Africans living there. The scramble for Africa was on and each European country rushed to its part of the continent to stake out its imperialist claims. By the early 1900s, over ninety percent of the continent had been colonized.

Germany lost its African colonies in 1919 as part of the settlement of World War I. Germany's 'Kamerun' became governed by a League of Nations mandate. Germany's former colonies were often attached to neighboring colonial territories, thereby further complicating the artificial division of African peoples. Perhaps the oddest part of this colonial division of Africa is the maintenance to this day of the national boundaries established by foreigners well over a century ago. One of the founding principles of the Organization of Africa Unity (OAU) was the inviolability of national borders inherited from colonial masters. These artificial and often porous borders continue to complicate the existence of a number of African countries.

Before I get too far off track, I want to get back to my instructive story. An old colonist had commandeered a boat to cross an African river and forced a local fisherman to take him to the other side of the river. When they were about half-way across the river, the white man started to berate the African by telling him how much more superior he was than him. He touted his high education and intellectual levels. The African boatman interrupted him by saying, "Yes, you know much more than me, but do you know how to swim?"

The white man became upset by the African's comments and shouted, "What does swimming have to do with anything I said?"

The African politely answered, "I see the boat is sinking and you will need to swim to survive."

This little story reminds me of what it took me years to learn in Africa, i.e. politeness is more important than intelligence. No matter how unrealistic and crazy an idea, being polite overrules intelligence and any rude behavior. I have seen village chiefs make decisions that are ridiculous and absent of any logical sense,

but it is unacceptable to express opposition to the chief 's decision. Opposing authority is culturally impolite; therefore, unacceptable.

Maybe this cultural trait helps explain in part Cameroon's downward spiral. One man, Paul Biya, has been the second president of Cameroon's for thirty-eight years. At the age of eighty-seven, he again won over seventy percent of the votes in the 2018 presidential election for his seventh seven-year term. Too often, it appears in Africa that heads of state believe they are like village chiefs who occupy their positions for life. The concentration of power in the hands of one greedy man and his crooked cronies for decades does not contribute to bridging the deep divides in Cameroonian society and addressing the pressing needs of a rapidly growing youthful population.

The average age in Cameroon is less than nineteen. A large percentage of its 25 million people have only known one president. Governance in Cameroon is one of Africa's worst examples, but it is not the only African country to be controlled by what is sometimes referred to as 'dinosaurs.' In Cameroon and in other African countries, old men have been in control for years and they strictly monopolize political power and the monetary gain that comes with that power. Large-scale corruption and gross mismanagement thrive in such an environment. And, the longer these men stay in power the wealthier they get and with their ill-gained fortunes comes more power. Thus, a vicious cycle continues, and poor role models are provided to young people.

Younger people represent the vast majority, but they do not have the wealth to contest power. Ruling political parties have had years to manipulate the population and pay off any serious opposition. Nobody dares rock the political boat or question the actions of those in power. Corrupt practices become ingrained at all levels of society and nothing short of a bloody revolution can right the ship of state and put it on a track that has the best interests of the nation and its people in mind. Africa is the most youthful continent on the planet, but the youth have no say about their future. And, even if young people are able to succeed in grabbing power, they do not know any other political system than the one in which they grew up.

Many of Africa's biggest problems are political and not technical. Poor governance is at the root of Africa's problems and has caused Africa to lose precious time and misuse its resources. Democracy is a sham in Cameroon and other African countries where it has been turned on its head to keep power in the hands of the aging few. It has been said that democracy in Africa is a mile wide and an inch deep. In Cameroon, democracy has even less depth.

How can you achieve progress if there is no consensus among the people on how to move forward with building their country? How can you move forward to a better future if the elites are willing to kill and plunder to maintain their positions? The ruling elites hold on to power by promoting divisions among the people. The people are mostly well-educated and urban dwellers, but they have allowed themselves to be misguided and manipulated by their politicians.

Cameroon needs a new vision of its future that the majority will want. The elaboration of this vision should not involve in any senior politicians running for office or working to hold onto their privileges and positions. An alternative to

Cameroon's current expensive electoral system that elects the same president for a consecutive forty-five years needs to be found.

In spite of all the injustices in Cameroon and the incongruities in its warped electoral system, its heavy-handed dictator-president probably holds the record among African heads of state for the number of visits to the White House. It thus appears he can do as he wants and still remain friends with the United States. When will it be time for the tough love needed to wake up many African leaders to the realities of the present and the future their countries must build to avoid the worst consequences of wrongful acts of the present?

Maybe Cameroon is not governable. Its California-size geography stretches from its southern shores on the Atlantic Ocean to the banks of Lake Chad in its far north. Its strangely shaped territory cuts through dozens of ethnic groups and ecological zones. I sweltered in Cameroon's largest city of Douala, which is located in the hot and humid south. This port city is the gateway to Cameroon and landlocked countries located north of Cameroon. One can go about 700 miles from the sandy ocean beaches of Kribi, through dense equatorial forests and the northern savanna region before arriving at the southern fringes of the Sahara Desert. How do you govern such a mosaic of people and diverse environments?

Cameroon would be a huge challenge to govern even if it were stable and peaceful. Sadly, Cameroon has never known a calm period in its history. It has too many divides and lacks the leadership it needs to bridge divides. For years, the rebellious English-speaking western side of Cameroon has felt discriminated against by the French-speaking central government based in Yaoundй. This discrimination has risen to the level of a long litany of human rights abuses committed by Cameroon's security forces. Some say that the scale of these human rights violations and extrajudicial killings has risen to the level of genocide in Western Cameroon. Meanwhile, Western Cameroon has been laid to waste by warring factions.

This western part of Cameroon had been taken from Germany after WW I and managed by the British from its bordering Nigerian colony. When Cameroon gained independence in 1960, this English-speaking part of old German Cameroon was attached to the newly independent Cameroon. The constitution of Cameroon states that it is a united republic and bi-lingual, making both English and French official languages. In reality, French is the ruling language and English-speakers are discriminated against. This language divide is sometimes exacerbated because it often falls along ethnic divides. The chaos and violence in Western Cameroon worsen as I write these words. I would not be surprised if a full-scale civil war breaks out in Cameroon.

The squelching of news reports and the cutting of Internet service to this troubled region by the central government does not help. I guess I should not be surprised by how the international community mostly ignores the conflicts in Cameroon. Thousands are being killed and many more thousands are being obliged to flee their homes, but few people outside of Cameroon are aware of these mass atrocities. Where do you go when you no longer have a home? What do you do when you do not have anything to eat? It is not as if your government is really capable of doing anything to help you. There are no social nets. It is almost like one humanitarian worker told me, "Nobody really cares about Africa."

There is also a worsening trend in Cameroon's far, Muslim north (the south is mainly Christian). The terrorist group, Boko Haram, is making cross border incursions from its bases inside Nigeria to raid Cameroonian villages. The resulting violence has led to a brutal Cameroonian military response. The whole geographic area bordering the southern parts of the Lake Chad Basin are in an upheaval because of armed strikes by members of Boko Haram. It could be said that Cameroon is at war in the north and the west. But the tragedy caused by these wars is not something you read about in your Sunday newspaper or see broadcast on your nightly TV news.

Yes, these are serious situations that demand high priority attention on the part of Cameroon's leaders. It appears that Cameroon's dinosaur president is doing little to address these tragic situations. With the political and military elites firmly in his pocket, he exceeds even the wildest dreams of his fellow African dictators by being absent from his country for a good part of the time. He has a penchant for spending months in European hotels, paying often times over $30,000 per day for the lengthy stays of his entourage.

Many of the recollections recounted above were gathered firsthand when I was a frequent traveler to Cameroon in the mid-1970s. At that time, I was based in neighboring Gabon and Air Cameroon had a daily flight that went from Libreville to Doaula, Yaoundй and Bangui. This was a long time ago, but I have followed closely events for many years in Cameroon and most other African countries. I guess after eating, sleeping, reading, and dreaming about Africa for fifty years you can refer to me as something of a maladjusted Africanist.

On one of my trips from Libreville to Yaoundй, I was obliged to spend a night in very hot and humid Douala, in southern Cameroon. I arrived in the morning and was taken by the airline to a hotel in this big city. The first thing that got my eye at the entrance of the hotel was the bevy of scantily clad young women who were obviously practicing the oldest profession in the world. I had seen in other Africa cities similar scenes of young ladies of the night, but this was my first time to see the same commercial sex business happening in the middle of the day.

Don't get me wrong. I have great admiration for the people of Cameroon, but I feel sad for them because their potentially wealthy country has failed to offer them the kind of future they deserve because of poor national leadership. I have fond memories of Hotel Mont Fйbй located in the mountains on the outskirts of Yaoundй. I also enjoyed the restaurants and nightlife offered by this vibrant capital city. I never met a Cameroonian who did not impress me. My hope is that every Cameroonian will someday be able to benefit fully from the great richness their country possesses.

CHAPTER NINE

Central African Republic

IT IS NOT A SIMPLE TASK to write about a country that is not really a country. Lines were drawn in colonial times by the foreign white conquerors to mark the boundaries of an artificial conception of a territory in the landlocked heart of Africa. In 1960, they made this random geographical space independent and gave it the name of the Central African Republic (CAR). In my view, this action was all very premature because CAR was not (and is still not) capable of functioning independently as a country.

If CAR were a meteoric crater, it would be soaked with the blood of the thousands of people who have died because of incessant violent conflict. One could make a long list of unhinged politicians and military strongmen who have plundered their country and killed anyone who got in their way. The constant violence among political, ethnic and religious groups have spelled the death of any chance of CAR joining the international community as a legitimate country. Over a half-century of persistent turmoil and trouble for CAR's long-suffering people defy adequate description. Currently, it is estimated that the CAR has less than 5 million people spread thinly over a land slightly smaller than the U.S. State of Texas. During this long period of desperate chaos, there has been almost an unending succession of French and UN peacekeeping missions.

I spent three months in Bangui, the sleepy capital of the CAR, in 1975. At that time, a former French military officer, Jean Bedel Bokassa, led a military coup and declared himself president for life. He had fought in World War II for the French and was promoted to the rank of captain. He was not alone. A number of presidents in Francophone Africa had served with the French Army in Europe, Indochina and Algeria. All these presidents knew each other and often pulled their rank in the French Army on one another.

In my mind, all the African presidents who were formally in the French Army and used military force to become presidents in their home countries contributed greatly to the bad start of these new countries. Once you get off to a bad start and continue on the wrong track for years, it is exceedingly difficult to make the necessary course corrections. It is like being one inch off when firing a rocket at the moon. When the rocket arrives at its destination, it is many miles away from its target. This begs the question as to whether or not a number of countries in Africa will ever have the leadership needed to get on a more positive track.

CAR and other African countries would have been better off if they had taken the time needed to develop the capacity to govern a nation. Many of the seventeen African countries granted independence in 1960 by France were not prepared to

manage in any reasonable way their respective countries. A more progressive path to independence with clear benchmarks for satisfying all the criteria for self-governance would have been a preferable track to follow. But there was no stopping the bandwagon for granting independence in the late 1950s or early 1960s for most countries in SSA. This can be called a historic mistake of monumental proportions with deathly consequences for the CAR people. If there is blame to spread around, maybe the colonial powers should also be given some responsibility?

There is no doubt in my mind that CAR's people would have been much better off if independence could have been postponed until when it had been certified as capable of managing competently its affairs. Perhaps a better path in terms of lives and money saved would have been the administration of CAR by the UN. At the very least, a lasting peace and stability should be established as a pre-condition to independence. Moreover, independence requires having strong institutions and a large cadre of trained civil servants. CAR has neither and even under the most favorable conditions, it will be a long time before the CAR satisfies the minimal requirements of gaining genuine independence. I hope these CAR realities can be widely recognized. Otherwise, CAR will continue to be one of the worst countries in which to live and its people will be without a future by remaining in such a failed state.

So many people have been killed in the CAR or fled the country that CAR probably has the lowest population growth rate in Africa. For sure, when I was there in 1975, there were not many people around and not much to do. A main pastime was to go to the river port on the wide and deep Ubangi River and watch ships unload their cargo. It was impressive to see such large ships so far inland (over 600 miles). I understood that the cargo on these ships first arrived in Pointe Noire, Congo Brazzaville's Atlantic Port, and then it was offloaded onto sizeable smaller ships that navigated the Congo River until turning onto one of its major tributaries, the Ubangi River, and then going on to Bangui. Such a shipping transit journey can take up to two weeks. I was also attracted by my lush green surroundings and the fact that I could see the town of Zongo in the Republic of Democratic Congo (Congo Kinshasa) on the other side of this wide navigable river.

The landlocked geographic position of the CAR made me sympathize with the natural disadvantages its distance from the nearest seaport poses. It is much more expensive to import and export if you do not have a seaport or good transport access to a port. I have always thought that CAR and other landlocked countries should be given some kind of discount so they could import goods at a reasonable price and export commodities at competitive prices.

Overland transport in Africa is the most expensive and time consuming in the world. It is fraught with corrupt practices and delays caused by excessive border and roadside controls. In many ways, transportation is a huge constraint to Africa's development. The joke in Africa is that there are not any skinny customs agents. They all get fat from the bribes they receive for allowing trucks full of goods to pass without any hassles. Their bosses often times build huge villas in the capital city. The ways things stand now, one of the biggest obstructions to Africa's development is the high cost of overland transport and mismanagement at its seaports.

I have always thought that a good way to address this constraint would be to eliminate border-crossing tariffs. I realize that doing this would spell the end of a major source of revenue for central governments, but it would be a boon to economic activity. Maybe it would be better for donor countries to offer budget support in exchange for abolishing customs than to give the kind of external aid they commonly offer.

I note that CAR is one of the few countries in the world that never has had a railway. I think it now has a bottling plant. Having a railroad and a bottling plant were considered at one time as hallmarks of a progressive developing country. If a country is without a railway and a bottling plant, it's future is in doubt.

I whiled away much of my time trying to learn the national language, Sango. It was interesting that besides French, this local language was also an official language. This local language made it possible for the dozens of ethnic groups in the CAR to communicate with each other.

Sometimes, I would go to what was called 'kilomйter five.' This was a place five kilomйters from the center of town where makeshift bars and local restaurants lined the road. I recall eating big plates of rice and drinking lukewarm beer at low wooden tables covered with gaudy plastic tablecloths. Loud Congolese music blasted away on oversized speakers. There were also plenty of local ladies with too much cheap makeup and perfume hanging around who were willing to sell their favors to men. It was hot, muggy and full of flies. I told myself I would rather be sitting in my air-conditioned hotel room reading a book. I was surprised that the electricity in Bangui never cut and my aging window AC in my hotel room kept chugging along.

When I was ready to leave 'kilomйter five', I was told that I should come back at night because these places were most active after the sun went down. I never went there at night. In general, I never go out in Africa at night. Too many risks. And, especially, I never drive in Africa at night. The biggest threats to your life in Africa are malaria and vehicle accidents. Both of these dangers usually happen at night.

I drove just beyond 'kilomйter five' to the edge of town. All I could see was a vast openness of the rolling, dry savannah plains. This view reminded me that a high percentage of the CAR's population resided in Bangui and the country was mostly empty of people. For me, it was as if the CAR's boundaries ended at the city limits of Bangui. I told myself then that if I ever got a long-term job offer to work in the CAR, I would have to sit down and have a serious talk with myself. These days the main criteria I apply before agreeing to work somewhere in Africa is whether or not there is adequate medical care and security. CAR has always failed in these two categories. I will leave CAR for someone younger than me and much more adventurous than I am now.

During my three months in CAR in 1975, I never left the capital city of Bangui because transport to the interior was too difficult. I was working as the acting Peace Corps Director (PCD) for CAR. There were only a handful of PCVs in the CAR at the time and most of them were working far upcountry to establish from scratch a game park. All the PCVs assigned to this daunting challenge had been educated at universities in the U.S. in wildlife management. They were thankful for

the opportunity to create a new game park in CAR because they would never be given such a job in the U.S.

These PCVs I saw rarely when they could make it into Bangui. There was one PCV teaching English in Bangui and I was in close touch with him. He created a problem that took up a lot of my time. The small ground floor apartment in which he resided had been vandalized several times. Thieves continued to break though the iron bars on one window of his apartment. To prevent further thievery from occurring he somehow hooked up electric current to run through the iron bars. The thief came again and as soon as he touched the iron bars he was electrocuted and died.

The PCV did not mean to kill the thief. He only wanted to prevent him from entering his apartment. In any event, everyone thought the thief had received his just deserts. However, the family brought legal suit against the PCV for the wrongful death of one of their members. In order to avoid complicated legal proceedings and probable imprisonment of the PCV, I worked with the U.S. Embassy to have the PCV leave the country.

I hope the reader can keep in mind that back in those pre-electronic times there were not any cellphones or laptops. I do not recall any TV. There were radios. Phone calls on landlines were difficult to make and not worth the trouble. (Elsewhere in Africa, I once went three years without making a phone call.) Reading was a major outlet. Books were precious and valuable commodities.

If you wanted to communicate, you would have to write a letter, mail it, and hope that after some weeks in transit it would arrive at its destination. Getting a written reply to your letter was almost impossible. Back then, letter writing was a great art. You were much more alone and disconnected from the outside world. Believe it or not, I miss the old days in Africa. I guess the writer is permitted to express some nostalgia for the old days in Africa. Yet, in some ways the 'past' is still alive in rural Africa because millions of Africans have been left in the digital dust.

The main topic of our hushed conversations in those days was about what zany Jean-Bedel Bokassa ('Papa Bok') was up to. I can recall a rumor going around that he was planning to change the name of CAR to the Central African Empire (CAE). His ambition was to imitate Napoleon and crown himself as the Emperor of the CAE. I was later to learn that he spent several millions of U.S dollars in the following year on a huge, lavish ceremony to become CAE's Emperor. For the occasion, he had imported from Europe an expensive royal throne and all the highest quality accoutrements needed for his crowning ceremony. He built a palace of extraordinary luxury. Doing all this required a level of sheer madness on the part of a head of state not previously observed. He sucked the national treasury dry and used to the hilt his country's diamond wealth.

His realization of CAE did not change his bizarre habits and gross violation of human rights. One story I heard was that he participated in the beating to death of dozens of school children because they refused to buy expensive uniforms from a factory owned by one of his seventeen wives (he had over fifty children with them). There were also rumors that he was a cannibal and kept human parts in the freezer at his palace for cooking and consumption.

The French finally got fed up with his lunacy and sent a well-armed military contingent to dethrone and remove him from the country in 1979. The French put their handpicked man in the presidency, and he changed the official name of the country back to the CAR. Everyone thought then that things would get better, but things got worse. Today, CAR is one of the most frightening and unhealthy places to live in Africa. Yet, ultimately, Bokassa died in peace at his residence in Bangui.

In case you are thinking to check out anything I write above by traveling to the CAR, I provide below the October 2018 travel advisory from the U.S. Department of State:

> *"Do not travel to Central African Republic due to crime and civil unrest. Violent crime, such as armed robbery, aggravated battery, and homicide is common. Large areas of the country are controlled by armed groups who regularly kidnap, injure, and/or kill civilians. In the event of unrest, airport, land border, and road closures may occur with little or no notice. The U.S. Government has limited ability to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens in the Central African Republic as U.S. government employees must obtain special authorization to travel outside the Embassy compound."*

It is obvious from this travel warning that little has changed in the CAR in over forty years and, if anything, conditions in the CAR are worse now than when I knew them before. Why doesn't the international community stop wasting its time and resources by trying to rehabilitate the CAR? I believe the bleeding can best be stopped in the CAR by making the UN responsible for administrating the CAR. It is only in this way that CAR can be prevented from destroying itself further. For the sake of the CAR people, put the CAR house under the management of the UN or a consortium of developed countries.

Maybe it is the Bangui Magnetic Anomaly that has thrown this poor country so far off track. Nobody really knows why, but the usual magnetic field bends in Bangui. Some local people think that Bangui has been bewitched. For sure, witchcraft is active in the CAR and it is not uncommon for women accused of witchcraft to be stoned and burnt to death. One thing most people who know the CAR can agree on is that it is a country which has been cursed.

CHAPTER TEN

Chad

FORTY YEARS AGO, I did not know much about Africa. I did not know then that many of my schemes were hair-brained and wacky in nature, reflecting my youth and ignorance. If I had had any good sense back then, I would have never acted on my youthful impulses and traveled overland around the northern and eastern shores of Lake Chad. I should have known that nobody in their right mind would attempt such an impossible overland trip. If you asked me today if such a trip was possible, I would answer, "Absolutely not."

We were in Nguigmi, Niger, in 1978, on the northwest shore of Lake Chad and we had a couple days of slack, so I jokingly said in French to my driver, Ibrahima, "Let's go to Ft. Lamy." He opened wide his eyes, laughed and replied, "Sure. Why not? Only it is now called N'Djamena."

I knew that Ft. Lamy had been renamed five years earlier as Chad's capital city and was now known as N'Djamena, but plenty of people still called it by its old name, Ft. Lamy. My driver went on to say that we should leave at first light in the morning because it would take us most of the day to get there. He also said there were no roads to N'Djamena on the north side of the lake, but he knew that sometimes traffickers used this desert area as a smuggling route. He added that there were no border controls, so we would have no problem crossing into Chad.

If I had known in advance how arduous this overland trip would be, I would have torn my adventurous soul to pieces and tossed it to the four winds. It was slow-going and we suffered mightily. We became mired in deep sand countless times and had to use our metal sand tracks to travel repeatedly short distances. Hours in the hot sun passed as we stopped over and over again our trusty four-wheel drive Land Rover. We got out to wedge dozens of times our six-foot track runners beneath the front wheels. We moved ahead six feet at a time as we slowly and painfully circumnavigated damp flat land on the north side of the shallow lake, one of biggest wetlands in Africa.

There was nothing to see and no people to talk to as we trudged through this desolate no-man's land. I feared a vehicle breakdown would result in us being marooned in this vast wasteland. It was really stupid and life-threatening to do what we were doing. The pace picked up as we left deep sands and were able to drive more quickly over unimproved roads as we neared N'Djamena. We were fortunate there had not been any heavy rains to make the roads impassable. It took us most of the day to drive about 100 miles under the cloudless sky and extreme heat.

I note that in those days there was no air-conditioning in cars. The big argument on bush trips like this one was whether or not to keep the car windows closed. Proponents of closed windows preferred being unbearably hot and not covered with road dust. Supporters of open windows liked being a little cooler, not caring about the blinding dust. I admit that I belonged to the open-window category.

We arrived in N'Djamena just as the sun was going down and crashed at a cheap hotel. At that time, N'Djamena impressed me as a large mud village of around 100,000 inhabitants. (Today, over 1 million Chadians live in N'djamena.) When we arrived, we drank our fill of bottled water, ordered food and took cold but refreshing calabash baths in open-air outdoor, roofless shower stalls. We sat at low tables on simple wood stools to eat our dinner of fried Guinea fowl and limp potato slices which had been served on well-used, cheap Chinese tin plates. The Guinea fowl were caught, killed and grilled on a small charcoal grill after we ordered dinner. Really a very tasty meal for hungry men who shuttered at the thought of getting up early the next morning to make the same exhausting trip in the opposite direction.

We slept soundly on deluxe straw mats in a hot room full of mosquitos with large rats running about above us in the rafter boards. The mats were covered with layers of cloth to make them softer. The pillows were stuffed with straw and hard as a rock. The mosquitoes kept me awake by buzzing in my ears, but I did not feel any bites from them. Their presence did remind me to take my weekly two-pill dose of 500 milligrams of my anti-malarial (aralen, chloroquine phosphate). I made sure the tips of my fingers and toes were clean so the rats would not be tempted to nibble on them.

The Spartan conditions of our room made getting up at the crack of dawn easier. Hot green tea and instant Nescafe awaited us. French baguettes had been sliced and toasted over charcoal on the same grill used the night before. I spied a metallic butane gas container sitting off to one side, so I asked why they were using charcoal and not cooking gas. The reply I got was there was a shortage of cooking gas bottles in town because their shipment from the distant coastal ports had been interrupted. This reply reminded me that Chad was the largest landlocked country in Africa and the nearest Atlantic coastal port was over six hundred miles away.

I would learn later about the necessity in Africa of always keeping a good backup stock of cooking gas containers, but, at the same time, also keep a good stock of locally made charcoal in the case cooking gas was not available. It is still something of a miracle to me to experience the wonders of natural gas which is piped into all American homes. I also marvel in the U.S. of how mail and packages are delivered to your house six days a week. If home gas and mail delivery were key development indicators, few countries in the world would be highly ranked.

We only stayed long enough in N'Djamena to refuel our vehicle. We got a lot of stares and we did not want to talk to anyone. We certainly did not want to reveal that we had been foolish enough to travel to Chad the way we did. We feared there were secret police around and we might be seen as smugglers. It was not the kind of place that encouraged trusting anyone; all you wanted to do was to leave before anyone knew you had been there.

The trip back around the lake felt easier. Maybe this was because of our eagerness to get back safely to where we started on the Niger side of the lake and the fact that yesterday's experience showed us what to expect and what to do. We had certainly learned how to travel over a sandy surface. We both swore ourselves to secrecy to never utter a word about this unauthorized overland trip to Chad. We both hoped that nobody noticed that we had been gone. Even after N'Djamena was practically destroyed during its 1979-1980 civil war, I did not want to mention our furtive quick trip to N'Djamena.

There you have it. The secret is out about my quick and arduous overland trip to Chad. This brief visit a long time ago does not mean I do not have more to say about Chad. After all, I am a student of Africa and I lived next door to Chad (in Niger) for a decade. Much of what I wrote about the CAR can be repeated for Chad. But Chad is a different country in many ways. First, it is big, almost three times the size of the U.S. State of California. Yet, it is mostly empty with only 15 million people and one of the lowest population densities in Africa. In terms of the absolute poverty level of its people, it is in the same neighborhood as the CAR.

One thing it has in common with the CAR is that it shares the same currency, the CFA franc. All of France's former colonies in Central and Western Africa use the same currency. Since independence, this currency was linked at a fixed rate to the French franc. Since France adopted the Euro in 1999, the CFA Franc has been tied to the Euro at a fixed rate and guaranteed by France's Treasury. In 1994, France devaluated the CFA franc. This event caused such an economic blow that a number of countries proposed developing their own currencies. This devaluation also reinforced the cries of those who were fond of saying that their countries had gained political independence but not economic independence. These cries may be answered in the current efforts of West African leaders to adopt an independent currency and name it the ECO.

Chad's history since gaining independence from France in 1960 is one of violence and more violence. Chad might be one of the most unstable and volatile countries in the world. It has suffered a succession of rebellions and wars with Libya and Sudan. The bloody fights fueled by a diversity of ethnic-based, well-armed rebel commanders fighting for supremacy resulted in the killing of tens of thousands, the torturing of thousands and much destruction. The displacement of a large percentage of Chad's population because of recurring violent conflict was horrific. The involvement of foreign powers in some of these conflicts provides examples of how outsiders can sometimes support the worst leaders who do some of the worst things to their people.

My impression over the years from a distance was that much of the conflict in Chad was between hot-headed rebel leaders from Muslim ethnic groups in northern Chad and splits in rebel movements that originated in northern Chad. A major dividing line in Chad was between the Muslim north and the Christian south. People living in the southern, much less arid and more populated part of Chad feared the murderous excesses of the northerners. Some observers express the opinion that Chad would be better off if it were divided into two countries—one country for the northern Muslim half and another for the southern Christian half.

The northerners are mostly nomads and herders while the southerners are mostly farmers. The fact that these groups also represent different ethnic and racial groups

with different customs and cultures points to a huge divide in Africa. This divide is between those who till the soil and those who raise livestock. Conflicts between these two groups over the use of land and water sources are common in many areas of Africa, particularly as the population grows and there is no longer enough space for farmers and herders to coexist as before. These days it in not uncommon for these groups to arm themselves and form their own militias.

There has been less talk of dividing Chad into two countries since oil was discovered in its southern half in the early 2000s. The northern presidents of Chad were not about to lose the financial bounty offered by international oil companies. The main challenge faced by these companies was how to transport oil to coastal ports. This problem was solved by the building of a pipeline from Chad through bordering Cameroon to the distant southern Atlantic port of Kribi on the Gulf of Guinea, over 600 miles away. The stationing eleven miles offshore of a floating oil terminal for this pipeline is an impressive technological feat. The fact that this pipeline has functioned well for fifteen years is remarkable.

The most interesting aspect of Chad's success in exploiting its substantial oil reserves has been the involvement of the World Bank and other donor agencies in the drafting of an agreement with the Government of Chad to avoid falling into the 'oil curse' trap which other oil-rich countries in Africa had experienced. This agreement was put into place so that the added oil revenue would go to improve Chad's deplorable health and education statistics. I was not surprised to learn years later that this agreement had not worked as planned because Chad's current despot and long-term president, Idris Dйby, from northern Chad, who has been president since 1990, used a large amount of oil revenue to buy modern arms for his troops.

It has been said that Chad's oil bonanza enabled its president to prolong his time in office. He has been able to amend Chad's constitution to eliminate term limits. Oil revenues have also allowed him to buy off competing rebel commanders and political opponents. This novel approach to maintaining much needed peace and stability may have its own payoffs. Certainly, as warped as this approach may be, it is better for the people to have their corrupt president pay a few million dollars to his opponents than engage in another much more costly and destructive war.

The warrior spirit of many Chadian ethnic groups is well noted across Africa and by any foreigners working with the Chad military. These groups evolved from a culture that is fearless and fierce, and every man is proud to show off his bravery. Chadian forces have proven their effectiveness in battles against terrorist groups like Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin area and in the fight against terrorists in the Malian part of the Sahel. When you want to defeat militarily your enemies, if you can, you call for the help of the Chadians because they fight well and like to fight without hesitation.

I have talked to people who have been involved with the training of Chadian soldiers. They said they were afraid of the volatility and high-tempered nature of their trainees. One person told me how disagreements would occur over nothing in the classroom and would result in serious fighting among members of the class. Brother could fight brother. Chadians have demonstrated over the past decades that if they do not have an exterior enemy to fight against, they will fight among

themselves. There is no place for cowardice in the cultures of northern Chad. Never dare or upset a northern Chadian warrior.

There have been many episodes of serious fighting in Chad. At least a couple of times, N'Djamena was the site of fierce fighting. It was reported once the president piloted his own helicopter to fight off rebels advancing on the capital city. Another report I read cites the president's order to cut down all the trees in N'Djamena because the rebels used them to hide behind to shoot their guns. This same report claimed that temperatures in hot N'Djamena were ten degrees higher without the shade the trees had provided.

Many of us thought the impoverished plight of the Chadian people would improve after oil began pumping and huge sums of money started flowing into the Chadian treasury in 2003. Yet, sixteen years later Chad remains mired in the lowest country ranks of the UN's human development index. Chad has thus become another African country where its people could be much better off if they enjoyed good governance. Without good and honest national leadership, and competent and uncorrupted management of government institutions, poor countries cannot get ahead. Unfortunately, Africa has too few presidents who put the best interests of their country and people ahead of the selfish interests of themselves, their families and cronies.

Postscript. I dedicate this chapter to Leslie McBride. I assume he is still alive and well in N'Djamena. He arrived in Chad in the mid-1970s as an American Peace Corps Volunteer and has resided through thick and thin in Chad ever since. He has proven himself to be a genuine survivor. He married a local woman and they have had several children, all of whom have served in various branches of the U.S. military. I believe they now have grandchildren. He knows Chad, its people and speaks their languages. No living person knows more about Chad than Leslie. I salute him for his many years of living and working in Chad. I hope he writes one day a book about his lifetime in Chad.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Comoros

I DID NOT KNOW the Comoros existed until 1994. Of course, I had heard talk of the Comoros, but it seemed more like an imaginary place than a real country. I only began thinking of the Comoros as a country when I was on a flight from Paris to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. I overheard a group of colorfully dressed women speaking in a language that I thought was Kiswahili, but it was something else. I asked the passenger sitting next to me what language they were speaking, and he replied, "Shikimoro."

His reply heightened my interest. I had already lived and worked in Africa for twenty-four years, but I had never heard of this language. I could not resist asking my fellow passenger a follow-up question. "Where are these women from?"

He quickly but softly replied, "The Comoros. After our stop in Dares Salaam, this plane goes on to Moroni, the capital city of the Comoros."

I decided at that moment I would someday catch this same flight for a brief visit to the Comoros. And, that is just what I did in the following year.

In the meantime, I began doing some homework on the Comoros and asking those who might know something about this small island archipelago in the Indian Ocean, which was located a little over 200 miles from the East African coast on the northern end of the Mozambique Channel. All this was well before I decided to try to go to all African countries. My thinking at the time was that the Comoros was so close to my base in Dar es Salaam, and there were frequent flights to Moroni, thus I should go there. At least, a weekend visit seemed in order. It was more about adventure back then than adding to my list of African countries visited.

Some of the people I asked for information about the Comoros warned me not to travel to this tiny country. They said it was unstable and prone to have a violent presidential coup every few years. They also said that this Muslim country was a haunt for the infamous French mercenary, Bob Denard. This talk caused me to search to see if the U.S. Department of State had issued a travel warning for the Comoros. I did not find anything that discouraged me from traveling to Moroni. I did learn that the U.S. Embassy in Antananarivo, Madagascar, also covered the Comoros.

I had heard a number of stories about Denard's military excursions into a number of African countries, but I had forgotten that he had made his home for many years in the Comoros as he enriched himself and supported the government in power. It was rumored that Denard was part of the shadowy Jacques Foccart network deployed to maintain France's influence in its former colonies. For many years, Foccart was the head of the Africa office in France's Foreign Ministry. The

covert exploits of the secret Foccartien network in Africa are worthy of several books. I suspect that all these exploits did more harm than good.

In 1995, I took off from work to spend a long weekend in the Comoros. I arrived in Moroni without a hiccup. The taxi man took me to a hotel in town. When I checked in, I was told that it was probably best that I did not walk around alone in the daytime and I should not go out at night. Maybe there was a nighttime curfew I did not know about. I asked if it would be okay for me to tour the main Island of Njazidja in a taxi. I was told that would be acceptable and the hotel would arrange a taxi to take me out the following morning.

I checked into my room and took care to exercise my normal security precautions. I set the room safe, but I did not put anything in it. I locked my money and travel documents in my suitcase and put my suitcase on the opposite side of the bed so I could cover it with the top bedspread. I never trust anyone, especially in an unfamiliar hotel located in an unstable country where the likes of Bob Denard could still be lurking about.

I spent the rest of the afternoon sitting in the reception area watching a few people come and go. The hotel was homey but seedy, but it was clean enough. At the same time, the hotel had its own exotic charms and a veil of mystique. I always found an interest in such off-the-beaten track places that I had never before visited. I was once told a long time ago by some of my work colleagues that they could send me to the middle of the desert, but I would find interesting sand grains and write a voluminous report about them. I was now feeling overwhelmed by all there was to write about in my surroundings.

Here, in this hotel in central Moroni, I was sitting in a tropical paradise that merited all the attention I could give it. I delighted in being surrounded by tropical plants. The women who came through the hotel possessed for me a powerful mystique. They were covered from head to toe in ample gowns required by this Muslim society. But the colorful cloth used to make their dresses was different from what I expected. In the other African Muslim countries, women would dress the same, but the cloth would be black.

I also noticed the elaborate designs stained on their feet and hands by the application of henna dye. These were works of art to observe and the person who applied these designs was a true artist in every sense of the word. I know that fresh henna designs were usually done for special occasions like marriage ceremonies. No self-respecting woman with any means would show up for a big social occasion without having her hands and feet covered with attractive henna designs. I once had a small henna tattoo put on my upper arm to see how long it lasted. It faded away in about six weeks.

There was local music playing over the loudspeaker system in the hotel lobby. It sounded like the music I had once heard in Zanzibar. I asked about this music and was given a long response that not only related to me the most popular songs and singers, but repeatedly reminded me that this kind of music is called ‘taarab.’

While sitting for a couple of hours in the hotel lobby, I did notice I was the only white person around. I noted that the Comorians I saw were all shades of black and brown. I concluded these various skin coloring shades reflected the Comoros past history as being something of a crossroads of peoples from all directions. Historically, Comoros had been a port for ships from various parts of the

world, trading in slaves and spices, and a place for ships to prepare for their onward journeys. Arab Sultans from Oman had firmly implanted Islam and made their presence felt in the Comoros for over a century.

I ate dinner in the hotel restaurant and was pleased by the French cuisine. The quality of the meal reminded me that the Comoros had been a French colony for many years, only acquiring independence from France in 1975. Independence was slow to come for the Comoros because of the serious disaccord among the four main islands that compose the Comoros. No island gets along with another island and one island, Mayotte, voted to be part of France and is now an overseas province of this distant European country. The feuds among the remaining three islands have been a constant source of the instability in the Comoros.

Although any newcomer can learn a lot without leaving the hotel, I was eager for my island tour. I reconfirmed my reservation for a taxi early the next morning to drive me around the island. One thing about small island nations is that you can drive and see everything important in a few hours of time. Of course, much depends on where the drivable roads allow you to go. In the Comoros' case, there was a tarmac road that circumvented the outer limits of the island.

I returned to my room to get a good night's rest before rising early for breakfast and my much-anticipated taxi trip around the island. I made sure to lock my hotel room door and, for added security, I placed a chair against my inside door handle. I looked out the one window to check the perimeters, but I only saw a concrete wall about five feet away from my window. I made sure my window was shut tight. I took a risk and brushed my teeth with water flowing from the bathroom sink tap. I left the bathroom light on, but the erratic supply of electricity indicated I should keep my flashlight handy to my bed. I wondered from where Moroni received electricity. I set my miniature travel alarm at 5:00 a.m. In this eerily quiet and warm environment, I tried to get a much-needed good night's sleep. The quietness disturbed me, but the warmth was welcome.

I was up before my alarm sounded. I was happy there was a working hot water unit bolted to the wall for my morning shower. I rushed to the dining room and quickly devoured my sparse continental breakfast. I then walked rapidly to the lobby to see if my taxi driver and his car had arrived. I did not find anyone in the lobby and waited over an hour before anyone showed up. I waited another hour before my taxi driver arrived.

The first thing the driver wanted was money. He wanted half now and half later for his over-priced tour of the island. I paid him half and he showed me to his old Peugeot 404 jalopy of a taxi parked in front of the hotel. I got in the front seat next to him and before I said a word he took off and started his half-intelligible, long-winded monologue. I barely understood what he was saying. He mostly spoke in a mixture of Arabic and Shikimoro. Sometimes he would insert a French phrase. My knowledge of French and Kiswahili helped me understand some of what he said.

It was hot and humid. My first impression when I looked out the car window was there were people everywhere. I recalled reading before my trip that the Comoros is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. It was obvious that the Comoros population of about a half million people in 1995 was crowded into a space about half the size of the U.S. State of Rhode Island. I had

heard that hundreds of thousands of Comorians had migrated to Europe in search for jobs and a better life. Consequently, many of the poor inhabitants of this archipelago depended upon remittances sent to them by their relatives living abroad. These remittances probably provided more funds to the Comoros than funds granted by external donors, although the high poverty level of the Comoros meant it was dependent on donor aid.

The driver drove around the island. On the northern side, I saw beautiful white sand beaches. When we got to the eastern side of the southern part of the island, he left the main road to a place where I could get a clear view of the tall Mount Karthala, an active volcano that could explode again at any time. He said some words I did not understand, but it really did not matter. I don't know why, but I thought of Malcolm Lowery's famous 1947 book, *Living under the Volcano*.

I looked around and all the land was cultivated. The driver repeated some words enough times that I understood that the main exports were crops like vanilla, cloves and ylang-ylang. I had never heard of the latter crop, but my communication problem with the driver discouraged me from asking more information about it. (Later, I was to learn that ylang-ylang is a tree flower from which an essence is extracted. I read where this essence is a major ingredient of the famous Parisian perfume, Chanel No. 5.)

As we drove around the scenic island that was sometimes called in French the 'Grande Comore,' I noticed the traditional dress for men was a skirt and a white shirt. Sometimes I felt as if I were more in Asia than Africa. We returned to Moroni and I was shown the Grand Mosque du Vendredi (of Friday). We stopped briefly and I saw a sign in French that stated this mosque was originally built in 1427 when the Comoros was under Omani rule.

After visiting the mosque, we drove a short distance to the old part of Moroni called the 'Medina.' The taxi driver parked the car and accompanied me on a short stroll through this fascinating part of Moroni. I considered this visit to the Medina as the high point of my short trip to the Comoros. I did not understand much of what my driver said, but it was obvious he knew what foreign visitors wanted to see.

I could see a number of fishermen in their small boats offshore as we drove slowly around this small island. This almost unbroken sight helped me realize that fishing over the nearby reefs of the ocean surrounding the Comoros was an important livelihood for many Comorians. Before I expected it, the driver took me back to my hotel. As soon as the taxi stopped, the driver, Moussa, started to demand his final payment and a big tip.

Our conversation became so heated that I signaled to a hotel employee to come to my aid. With the help of hotel staff, I was able to understand that the driver was hoping to receive a big tip because he was trying to save up enough money to do his big marriage. It was explained to me that in the Comoros there were two types of marriage: the small one and the big one. The main difference between these two types of marriage is the large amount of money needed to finance a 'big marriage.' A small fortune was required to fund a big marriage. Accumulating enough money to do this socially prestigious marriage could take many years, if ever.

I learned that the biggest achievement in Comorian society was being able to do a big marriage. To me, this was an unusual form of the widely practiced bride price traditions in continental Africa. About all of a family's lifetime savings would go toward funding a big marriage ceremony. Almost no money was left over for productive investments and families incurred a heavy debt. I wondered if it were possible to impose a legal limit on the cost of big marriages.

In spite of my opposition to the payment of bride prices, I paid the driver more than I should have. I returned to my hotel and began preparing for my departure the next morning. Maybe there was more to see, but I did not think there was anything more for me to get from my short trip to the Comoros. I began to wonder why I ever came in the first place. Of course, I did not know then that I would be writing this book.

I do not know why, but I left the Comoros with the thought that it might provide a haven one day for Islamic extremists. After all, it had once served as a haven for pirates, slave ships and foreign mercenaries, so why not terrorists? I still think that is possible. I am also almost sure, but saddened by the prospect, that by the time this book is published, the Comoros will have experienced another coup or two.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Congo (Brazzaville)

IN 1975, I WAS Peace Corps Director in Gabon when my agitated ambassador, the late Andrew Steigman, communicated to me some alarming news. He said he had heard from the French embassy that some of my PCVs were in Congo-Brazzaville, a relatively small country east and south of Gabon. Congo-Brazzaville is not to be confused with the much larger Congo-Kinshasa that is the subject of the next chapter. This huge Congo-Kinshasa is almost seven times larger and shares the mighty Congo River which separates these two neighboring African countries.

They are also separated by a different colonial history. The Congo-Kinshasa giant was a former colony of Belgium, while Congo-Brazzaville was colonized by the French. Kinshasa is the capital city of the big Congo while Brazzaville is the capital city of the much smaller Congo. Both these cities are located across from each other on the Congo River. It is estimated that Kinshasa has over 12 million people while Brazzaville has just over 2 million inhabitants. Thus, together these two neighboring cities have a total of 14 million people, representing one of the largest population conglomerations in Africa. It has been planned for years to connect these two cities by building a rail and road bridge over the almost two-mile wide Congo River that separates them. This unfinished key bridge is a symbol of what prevents much of Africa from achieving its full potential.

Brazzaville's population represents about fifty percent of Congo-Brazzaville's total current highly urbanized total population of about 5.5 million. (Congo-Kinshasa has an estimated population of over 90 million.) This country is one of the most urbanized in Africa. For comparison purposes, it is about twice the size of the U.S. State of Florida. It is also a country located in the humid tropics with a consequent high disease burden. The latter made me fear the errant PCVs would fall ill.

Ambassador Steigman insisted vigorously that I needed to do something fast to bring the PCVs back into Gabon because the U.S. did not have relations with Congo-Brazzaville. Evidently, the U.S. had cut off relations with this Marxist, oil-rich country some years previously because of the high levels of insecurity caused by almost constant post-independence civil strife. As long as the PCVs were in neighboring Congo Brazzaville their lives were in danger and their presence in such a rogue country could cause a serious diplomatic incident.

I immediately asked for embassy assistance to charter a small plane to take me to Ndende, Gabon, which was on the border with the Congo. Then, it would be a rough one or two-day overland trip to the capital city, Brazzaville, about 350 miles to the east. It was costly to rent a plane to and from Ndende, and it would also be costly for me to rent a car with a driver to go to and from Brazzaville. The

more money we had to spend on recovering these missing PCVs, the more upset I became with them.

It was beyond me how these three PCVs could just leave their assigned posts in Gabon and go on an adventure to Congo-Brazzaville. I assumed they were so naпve and young they did not realize how much danger they courted by entering the Congo. I did not know how I would even begin to find these PCVs. All I knew was I had to find them and bring them back to the safety of peaceful Gabon.

My less than two-hour flight in a small plane was uneventful. Finding a car and driver to rent and talking my way across the busy border took more time than my flight. Although this event occurred forty-five years ago, I recall it helped to have a diplomatic passport in dealing with border formality hassles. I breathed a sigh of relief when we made it through the onerous and unpredictable border controls and, thus, we were able to start on our way into the tumultuous Congo-Brazzaville.

I was scared to be going deeper inside Congo-Brazzaville. I had heard stories about the violent conflicts in this country and it worried me that I did not have an embassy to call upon in case I landed in trouble. No American in their right mind would venture into a foreign country in upheaval that did not have an official American presence. Again, I could not believe that a few of my PCVs had taken the high risk of entering violence-prone Congo-Brazzaville. I could only assume they were ignorant of the risks they were taking and following their youthful impulses. I guess this was a case of ignorance and bliss.

We were well inside of this menacing country when we encountered a bush taxi pickup bumping along in the opposite direction. I spied some rare white faces in the taxi and immediately reacted by telling my driver to turn around. The perplexed driver balked at first, but when I told him the people I sought were probably in the taxi we had just passed, he grudgingly turned our car around, mumbling something about losing the fare he had counted on making by taking me to Brazzaville. I assured him if those were the people I was looking for, I would pay him the full fare.

I caught up with the missing trio of PCVs at the border. They were shocked to see me. I bit my tongue and did not scold them. My main desire was to make sure they were okay and had made it safely back inside Gabon. Once we were on the Gabonese side of the border, I read them the riot act. They knew they were in big trouble and accepted my harsh words without comment. They expected to be terminated on the spot for their fun-filled adventure. To their surprise, I asked them to return to their sites and their jobs of teaching English in their respective secondary schools. I wanted to talk with my ambassador before making a final decision on their case.

I told the PCVs to return to their sites and jobs as quickly as they could and never do anything again as stupid as going to Congo-Brazzaville. Deep down I was happy they were alright, safe and sound. I stayed overnight in Ndende and arranged to fly back to Libreville the following day. Soon after I arrived, I went to see Ambassador Steigman and gave him my verbal report on the missing PCVs. He expressed happiness over having them back in Gabon and was pleased they were all healthy.

I told him that what they did was inexcusable and under Peace Corps rules I was obliged to terminate their service and send them back to their homes in the U.S. He objected to their termination because it would upset relations with the Gabonese government and throw the spotlight on their illegal entry into Congo-Brazzaville. He instructed me to act as if nothing had happened and to carry on as before. I did as he instructed and buried deeply this incident inside me. In all these years, I have never mentioned until now the reasons for my quick foray into Congo-Brazzaville.

In 2005, thirty years later, I was on the other side of the Congo River in Kinshasa looking at Brazzaville across the wide Congo River, and I thought about the time long ago when I was headed on a rough road to this bustling large city to search for three PCVs. I was with a colleague from the U.S. Embassy in Kinshasa and he was showing me the nice cabin cruiser the embassy justified procuring because in the case of general upheaval they could use it to evacuate key personnel from the U.S. mission. My colleague said they mostly used the boat to fish. They used to go to Brazzaville, but the frequent mayhem in this riverine sister city was such that going there now was prohibited.

I had tried to follow events over the years in Congo-Brazzaville, but its history since independence from France in 1960 was so complex that it was almost impossible to follow. My colleague and I discussed Congo-Brazzaville, and he tried to fill in some blanks I had about this country's violent history. In spite of his efforts to teach me something about Congo-Brazzaville, I was more confused after speaking with him than I was beforehand.

While I am reluctant to say much about a country with which I have had minimal firsthand experiences, I repeat here what I heard that day from my colleague and what I have learned since that day. As noted earlier, Congo-Brazzaville is an oil-rich country and, thus, offers a lucrative prize for its corrupt leaders. My colleague basically told me the leaders of the three political factions formed their own private, well-armed militias and they fought against each other, killing tens of thousands of civilians and destroying a good part of the country, including the capital city of Brazzaville.

With the help of Angolan military forces, one of these leaders, Denis Sassou-Nguesso, became president and has held that office through thick and thin for thirty-seven of the past forty years. Under his tutelage, Congo-Brazzaville has been ranked by Transparency International as one of the most corrupt countries in Africa. He and his family members have been accused of gross corruption, syphoning off government funds to procure expensive properties in France and of opening big bank accounts in Europe. This reminds me it has been said that if Africa could recover and put to good use all the funds its leaders have sent abroad its people would enjoy a better quality of life. A case can be made that more funds illicitly leave Africa annually than enter the continent as external aid and private investment.

As for President Sassou-Nguesso, he was honored for his crooked and murderous ways in his home country by being named chairman of the OAU for the 1985-1986 year. Again, the OAU, which became the African Union (AU) in 2002, demonstrated its disturbing habit of honoring the most corrupt and venial people to lead an Africa-wide organization. The AU should care about good governance as

well as the competency and honesty of the people who lead individual African countries. However, it communicates the opposite message by naming country presidents to head its organization who have blood on their hands and millions of dollars stashed away in foreign banks. Nobody can respect such an organization.

I have often wondered why Congo-Brazzaville has preserved the colonial name of its capital city. Brazzaville is taken from the name of an early French-Italian explorer, Pierre Savorgnan Brazza, who claimed this side of the Congo River for France in the 1880s. He thus beat the Belgium King Lйopold and his agent, Henry Morgan Stanley, to the punch because the King was also hoping to add the territory on the right bank of the Congo River to his personal vast fiefdom on the left bank of this long, 3,000-mile river. This was all part of the great European 'Scramble for Africa' which evolved from the 1884-85 Berlin Conference that formally carved up Africa among European powers. In many ways, this conference sealed unilaterally in the most racist manner the fate of hundreds of millions of Africans.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Congo (Kinshasa)

WHEN I FIRST WENT to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 1975 it was called Zaire (a local language name for the Congo River). I was making a quick trip to Bukavu in the Kivus in the Eastern DRC to visit the Peace Corps' regional training center. A previous encounter with the DRC was mainly via a classic book that millions of people have read, Joseph Conrad's famous 1898 novella, *The Heart of Darkness*, which this Polish-British man authored based on his own experiences of working on the Congo River. The shocking nature of Conrad's book made me afraid my first venture into the DRC would be a bad experience. I was therefore pleasantly surprised to find Bukavu to be a beautiful town situated in an idyllic setting along the banks of sparkling Lake Tanganyika.

In high school, I was also affected by the required memorization of the long rhythmic poem, *The Congo*, published by the American traveling bard, Vachel Lindsay, in 1914. In this poem, he refers to Belgium's King Lйopold II and his brutal personal ownership of the DRC in the late part of the last century. More recently I read *King Lйopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa* published by Adam Hochschild in 1998. This engrossing book describes the gross exploitation of the DRC and the mass atrocities committed in the name of the king and civilization in the 1885 to 1908 period.

In that first brief visit to the Peace Corp's regional training center in Bukavu, I met in passing the Kiswahili language coordinator, Tulinabo Mushingi. Twenty-eight years later in 2013 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, I was honored to meet the new American Ambassador who had the same name. After talking with the ambassador for a short while, I learned he was indeed the same Tulinabo Mushingi I had met briefly in Bukavu in 1975. He related to me quickly his history since our first meeting. He married a PCV in the DRC, came to the U.S. with her and did advanced university studies. He became a U.S. citizen, joined the Department of State and worked his way up in the foreign service to become an ambassador. After serving three years as ambassador in Burkina Faso, he went on to be the U.S. Ambassador in Senegal.

On my second visit to the Eastern Congo twenty-one years later in late 1996, I was obliged to downgrade sharply my initial views of the DRC. I was with a humanitarian appraisal team. We entered the DRC on its eastern side from Gisenyi, Rwanda, crossed over the border to Goma and drove south to Bukavu and Uvira. When we arrived in Bukavu, it was unrecognizable to me. Many buildings had been destroyed and those that were left standing were occupied by large numbers of displaced people. The old trees that had graced the streets of Bukavu had been

cut down and used as firewood. The whole town had been wrecked. It was not a place to tarry. Quite the contrary, I felt like fleeing as fast as I could.

We prepared to drive farther south to Uvira, but we received a warning alert about the retreating national troops coming north and stealing all the cars they encountered. Fearful of losing our cars and even worse, we rapidly turned around and high-tailed it back to Goma. Before we left, I heard many horror stories from the destitute local people. The unimaginable brutalities they had suffered at the hands of the rebels or the government troops were heart rendering. They told us that we better leave because the only thing worse than the rampaging rebels was Mobutu's retreating soldiers.

The use of the name, Mobutu, was reference to the man who had been the DRC's strong-armed dictator for thirty-two years, 1965 to 1997. It would take a separate book to attempt to describe all the weird and costly shenanigans of this African strongman. But you cannot write about the DRC without mentioning his name. For decades, his name and the history of the DRC were indistinguishable. I knew at that moment I needed to learn more about Mobutu and his gigantic country.

We learned later that what we were observing was the end of the DRC's first civil war. This bloody war was followed by a second civil war (1998-2003), which is referred to as Africa's World War because of the number of countries involved and the millions of people who lost their lives. In this latter war, nine African countries were involved and over 5 million people were killed. This was the biggest and bloodiest war since World War II, but little notice of it appeared in the international news. I am not sure yet whether or not this war is finished.

Much of this war was about taking control of the DRC's rich mineral resources (e.g., diamonds, cobalt and coltan). Until this day, neighboring countries export minerals which are sourced from the DRC. Importantly, the DRC has the world's largest deposits of cobalt, which is necessary for the manufacture of electric batteries needed to fuel electrical cars. It might therefore be said that unless the DRC's cobalt resources are well-managed, there is no future for electric vehicles. Currently, the DRC's cobalt and other resources are managed inefficiently in a haphazard and chaotic fashion.

If only its natural resources are considered, the DRC can be considered to be the wealthiest country on Earth. Besides its impressive mineral resources, its water resources and natural flora and fauna elevate it to a special place on the world stage. The Congo River is the deepest in the world and the second longest. It is reported that if the construction of a series of Inga Dams on this river were completed, enough electricity could be generated for all of Africa. Regarding electrical lights, Africa is the world's darkest continent at night. A majority of Africans do not have access to electricity.

Perhaps the cost and quantity of kilowatt hours of electricity generated per person per year should be a level of development indicator. I imagine the application of this indicator would show the most advanced country in Africa only generates a small fraction of electricity per person that the U.S generates. The huge electricity deficit in Africa is a serious limiting factor.

The DRC's huge tropical forest reserves are the second largest in the world, just behind the Amazon. The wide variety of animals living in this vast forest include

several species which are on the endangered list. Poaching and the reduction of the habitat of these animals by the encroachment of humans is upsetting the natural balance. Decades of warfare have resulted in the killing of many animals and the destruction of thousands of acres of rain forest. A traditional taste for game meat and protein deficiency among the growing population has resulted in the decimation of a few animal species. Many of the millions of people displaced have no choice but to consume wild game.

Deforestation in the DRC continues unabated and over a thousand square miles of virgin rain forest are destroyed every year. The destruction of the natural habitat by loggers and the eating habits of an expanding population have most likely aided the spread of new diseases. For example, many believe that AIDS and Ebola originated in the DRC. Starting in 2018, a new outbreak of Ebola is being combatted in the North Kivus. Given that this part of the DRC still harbors several rebel groups, it is difficult to respond to this outbreak. It is also difficult to change the habits of the people who live in this area. For example, bats are known to carry Ebola, but they are widely consumed.

The DRC harbors so much that is important to the world it is probably not prudent for the world to stand by and leave the management of the DRC solely to its citizens. The DRC's biodiversity must be protected and preserved. The DRC is as large as Western Europe and about one-fourth the size if the U.S. It also has a high population of over 90 million people. Its capital, Kinshasa, has over 12 million people, making it the second largest French-speaking city in the world, after Paris. Of course, there are hundreds of languages spoken by the over 200 ethnic groups in the DRC. Kiswahili is the main language in the Eastern Congo while Lingala dominates in Western Congo. Kinshasa is located across the wide Congo River from Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of the Congo, making these two national capitals the closest in distance in the world.

We drove as fast as we could back to Goma and hustled across the border. We then continued driving over the next two days to Kampala, Uganda. While in Goma, I felt a different tempo. It was as if the beat picked up in the movement of people when compared with East Africa. I heard from the people ugly horror stories about what happened to them and their families and communities in the wars. I was also awed by the site in the far northern distance by smoke rising from Mount Nyiragongo, an active volcano. In 2002, I read that this volcano erupted, and lava flowed twelve miles into parts of Goma, destroying all in its path. When reading this, my first thought was that the worst possible situation had just become worse. War, disease, starvation and atrocities of all kinds and now a volcanic eruption. Was this Hell on Earth?

Human rights violations abound in the DRC. In particular, the rape of women is widespread and has been developed into a tactical weapon of war. Every kind of rape imaginable was committed. It hurts me to write these words, but the truth is that the mass raping of women was committed by all sides. Soldiers and rebels regularly gang raped women in front of their families. They also required fathers to rape their daughters and brothers to rape their sisters in front of an audience. If you did not do as commanded, you were killed, dismembered and members of your family were obliged to eat your flesh. So bad and rampant was mass raping and sexual slavery that it is feared the fabric of modern Congolese society has been

permanently shredded. Maybe the savagery described in Conrad's 120-year old novella has been surpassed today and the 'horror' expressed in his short book is still applicable. There is no 'heart' in the DRC's darkness. Today, the DRC is considered to be the most dangerous country in the world for women.

When the DRC gained independence from Belgium in 1960, it was reported it had only one college graduate. It therefore should be of no surprise that this ungovernable huge piece of geography fell apart. The corrupt legacy of over 100 years of exploitation and greed continued to cast a heavy shadow over the DRC. Foreign mining interests and the Cold War played important roles in the division of the DRC. Its first Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, did not last long as outside forces conspired to have him killed. He sought help from the Soviets after the West turned him down. He paid with his life for seeking Soviet support. When asked why he asked the Soviets for help, he is reported to have said, "When you are in a deep, dark hole and a hand reaches down to help pull you get out, you grab it."

I need to point out that the DRC endured a harsh form of colonialism under Belgium. Initially, following the famous mad European scramble for Africa, the DRC became in 1885 the personal fiefdom of King Lйopold II of Belgium. The king supported inhuman practices in his Congo Free State as he sought to enrich himself with ivory, rubber and other products from his vast new private African domain. Forced labor and the death of millions of local people did not deter him from exploiting as much as possible his African realm. This harsh harvest of DRC natural resources included participating in the buying and export of tens of thousands of slaves to the New World in the cruelest of conditions. He engaged the famous Henry Morton Stanley to assist him to gain greater control over the Congo and further enable him to plunder this huge country. The king's excessive cruelty and disregard for the lives of the Congolese resulted in an international outcry that led to the Belgium state taking over his free state as a colony in 1908.

Things improved under the rule of the Belgium government, but the local people continued to suffer as they were discriminated against and treated as subhuman beings. Belgian mining interests played an important role as they exploited the rich copper-cobalt fields of the Katanga Province. Belgium and other western powers conspired to make Colonel Joseph Dйsirй Mobutu president of the DRC in 1965. He became the poster child as the prototype for a classical corrupt African strongman. He went about erecting a one-party state and wasting state resources extravagantly on his own personal whims. His thirty-two-year reign made an already bad situation in the DRC worse.

Given the atrocities committed under Belgium rule and the crooked governance exercised since independence in 1960, a protracted crisis in the Congo should not be surprising. There are many stories I could retell about the Mobutu regime. One of his hallmarks was his 'authenticitй' campaign he started in 1966, which forbade the people from using western names, dress, etc. He adopted the name of Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga. A rough translation in English of this fabricated name is something like: "the all-powerful warrior who goes from conquest to conquest, leaving fire in his wake." He also changed the name of the country to Zaire and the names of all the major cities. For example, Lйopoldville became Kinshasa. He quickly consolidated his power by killing his rivals and elevated his military rank to the level of Marshal.

The government he ruled was referred to as a 'kleptocracy.' He did not distinguish between his personal resources and the state's revenue. The income of the DRC was mostly generated by mineral exports and he pocketed a sizeable percentage of this income. He rotated often his government ministers. He is reported to have said that he had three kinds of ministers: an actual minister, a former minister who was in jail and a former minister who was in exile. He went on to add that he purposely rotated these three types of minister every year.

He often went on expensive holidays and buying sprees abroad with his family. He could spend millions of dollars on himself and his family while the vast majority of the Congolese lived in abject poverty and his country was in a frightful mess. He was supported by the U.S. and other western nations because of his strong position against communism. He was welcomed into the White House by several U.S. Presidents. It was remarkable that this bloody African despot was a frequent visitor to the halls of power everywhere in the world. He also served as the chairman of the OAU for two years, 1967-1968.

Mobutu spent billions of dollars on building what has been referred to as the 'Versailles in the Jungle' at Gbadolite, near his birthplace in the far north of the DRC. He carved out of the dense rain forest a place to establish from scratch a new city containing several ultra-modern palaces with the most expensive imported fixtures along with conference halls, hotels, well-stocked supermarkets and an airport that could handle his own private Concorde jet plane. He would host lavish dinners and parties catered by European firms. No expense was spared to make Gbadolite a wonder of wonders.

When Mobutu was chased from power in early 1997 by armed groups involved in the DRC's second civil war, his Gbadolite palace complex was roughly looted by waves of marauding soldiers. I understand that Gbadolite now lies in ruins and is overgrown by the tropical forest. Mobutu first fled to Togo and ended up dying of natural causes in 1997 in Morocco at the age of sixty-six. Victorious troops, including soldiers from Rwanda and Uganda, replaced Mobutu with Laurent-Dйsirй Kabila, a well-educated rebel fighter from the Eastern Congo who was known for his massive use of child soldiers. The way he acted as the new president of the DRC prompted some people to say he was a second Mobutu, particularly as he tried to promote a personality cult to enhance his stature among the people.

Whatever course President Kabila was following ended abruptly in early 2001 when he was assassinated by one of his bodyguards. There are various stories about why his bodyguard killed him. One rumor was that a rich Lebanese diamond trader paid the bodyguard to kill Kabila. In any event, in less than ten days after his death his thirty-year-old son, Joseph, was brought to Kinshasa to replace him. There was much opposition to his son becoming president, especially as he did not speak French (he was mostly raised and educated in Tanzania). It may be the first case in history where a president did not speak the official language of his country. Somehow, Kabila Junior overcame widespread opposition and was still the DRC president in 2018. Giving in to international pressure, he did step down from power when the next elections occurred in December 2018. Many believe he is still controlling the government from behind the scenes.

As long as I can remember, the UN has had a large contingent of peacekeeping forces in the DRC. At one time, the UN's peacekeeping mission in the DRC was the most expensive in the world and had in the field up to 20,000 troops. After the multi-year service of tens of thousands of UN troops and expending billions of dollars, there is still no peace in the DRC. I doubt if any peace can be achieved for all the DRC.

The UN's involvement started shortly after its independence when the mineral rich Katanga Province tried to secede by the force of arms. The Secretary General of the UN, Dag Hammarskjold, was killed in a plane crash in 1961 over northern Zambia when he and others were on their way to the DRC for peace talks. There are reports that allege his plane was shot down by people paid by mining companies working in Katanga.

No chapter about the DRC would be complete without writing a few words about the 'Rumble in the Jungle' that Mobutu orchestrated in 1974. This historic international boxing match was between the world heavyweight champion, George Foreman, and his main challenger, Muhammad Ali. The bout took place in a chaotic atmosphere at night so it could be broadcast around the world and avoid the high daytime temperatures of Kinshasa's climate. Ali won in a knockout in the eighth round and then hustled to leave as fast as he could the DRC. Millions of dollars exchanged hands, and this is still regarded as one of the top ten sporting events in history. While I am loath to repeat what Ali is purported to have said as he rushed out of the DRC immediately after the big fight, I heard he said, "Thank God my grandpappy caught the boat."

Work took me to Kinshasa for a weeklong visit in 2004. I could see that the DRC was still a difficult place in which to live and work. I was driven around town by a colleague. Many of the city streets were in total disrepair and not useable. The heavy tropical rains had taken their toll on the roads and other infrastructure that had not been maintained in years. The wad of local currency I received at the airport when changing money was disintegrating into ragged pieces and a bundle of it was needed to buy the smallest thing. In many ways, Kinshasa reminded me of how much of Africa was thirty years earlier.

At the end of the day, I sat down at one of the many outside bars where white plastic picnic tables were placed under shady mango trees. A waitress appeared and asked me if I wanted a beer. I agreed that a beer would be good. There was Congolese rumba music booming loudly out from some nearby speakers. My body could not resist being agitated by this joyous music that flowed in long throbbing bursts. The waitress returned with my big brown bottle of beer and noticed my body jerking with the music. She said, "Oh, I see you like our music. You know we invented this music to fight our misery."

I thought to myself that she had got that right. Until this day, when I get down, I turn on my Congolese music. I find this music a sure cure for whatever ails me. And, thanks to Kevin Ray, an American born and raised in Africa, I have plenty of rumba music. He gave me during my 2004 visit to Kinshasa an USB full of popular rumba tunes.

When I first came to Africa in 1970, the most popular music in West Africa was made by the Congolese Franco's OK Jazz Band. Franco was referred to as the 'Colossus of Africa' because he and his music were bigger than life itself. Others

like Papa Wembe and Koffi Olimide followed in Franco's footsteps. And, rumba and soukous music rolls on loudly in its DRC birthplace and throughout Africa. As long as there is human suffering in the DRC, this genre of music will remain popular. Perhaps, one of the DRC's most important exports is its music.

My work put me in touch with several American missionary men who had been born and raised in the DRC. I learned a lot from them. American protestant missionaries had been working in the DRC for several generations. Their mission stations and those of the Catholic Church were key providers of education and health care services in the DRC. As there were practically no decent roads upcountry and no developed infrastructure, I was advised that if I travel overland upcountry, I should arrange my trip so I could go from one mission station to another.

I could not believe that the upcountry road network was so bad, but my missionary friends assured me that the little infrastructure which existed before the wars had been destroyed. They also said that flying from the Kinshasa Airport to the eastern part of the country was a risky proposition and took two hours or more. Going overland by road was almost impossible. Going from Kinshasa to Goma by road was about 1,600 miles and required two to three long days of rough, hazardous driving. And, forget about trying to navigate upcountry roads in the rainy season. Of course, the missionaries have their own small planes and private airstrips, and twoway radio communications.

I wanted to go to Mbandaka, a town in the western part of the DRC near the Congo River that straddles the Equator. One reason I wanted to do this was that I had an American friend who once lived in Mbandaka. He swore that when he flushed his toilet, it first swirled clockwise then swirled counterclockwise. He said this was due to being located on the Equator. He informed me that toilets swirl counterclockwise north of the Equator and the opposite way south of the Equator. I wanted to go to Mbandaka myself to see if this were true, but time and travel constraints prevented me from doing so.

I was pleased during this 2004 visit to Kinshasa to visit with my former USAID colleague and old friend, Robert Hellyer (Bob), who was serving as USAID's country director. Bob and I had served together in Guinea in the 1980s. He and his wife, Ada, invited me to their nice house in an upscale neighborhood located along the Congo River. I had to pass through security checks to enter this neighborhood because near Bob's house was President Kabila's house. Much of our discussion on that day was about Bob's old Mercedes Benz which he took everywhere with him. I recall he drove this Benz from his post in Bamako, Mali, when he was assigned to Conakry, Guinea, in 1984.

While I was visiting with Bob and Ada, he said he had invited the American Ambassador over to join us. The ambassador lived next door, so it was only a short walk for him. I was surprised to see the ambassador was someone I had worked with many years earlier at Peace Corps Niger. Ambassador Roger Meece had been the associate Peace Corps Director in Niger for administration in 1976 when I was Peace Corps Director for this country. I was delighted to see Roger again. I heard later that following his retirement from the Department of State, he was hired as the UN's Special Representative to the DRC, overseeing the UN's large and complex peacekeeping efforts in the DRC.

During this same visit, I participated in a workshop on the design of a new health project. This workshop was led by a U.S.-trained but DRC-born American health specialist, Dr. Larry Sthreshley, who has dedicated his life to improving health care in the DRC. At that time, he headed the Interchurch Medical Assistance (IMA) which is one of several NGOs working in the DRC to improve health services. At the conclusion of the workshop, an African man I had not met before came up to me to shake my hand. He said, "I'm glad you are here. My colleagues and I have heard about you and we know that wherever you go project funding is soon to follow. We call you 'rainmaker.'" Henceforth, I added this moniker to my growing list of African nicknames.

After a week in Kinshasa, I was ready to go to the airport and leave this hardship post. I had been warned that getting through the airport was a real hassle. The requests for bribes and unneeded help began in the airport parking lot and continued at every point within the airport terminal. I was proud that I managed to talk my way through all the airport corruption. I breathed a sigh of relief when I reached the entrance to the passenger waiting lounge. I was going into the lounge when a uniformed man stepped in front of me, saluted and said loudly and clearly in French, "I am Commandant Wakulu. I've heard that you have made it through the airport without paying anything. That is not right. You cannot take another step without paying me twenty U.S. dollars."

His firm words convinced me he was serious. With my exit from this unpredictable country only a few yards in front of me, I succumbed to his strong command and dug a twenty dollar bill out of my pocket and handed it to him. He saluted me and graciously opened the way for my passage into the waiting lounge. I said some silent prayers to myself about getting on the plane and taking off without any more glitches. I boarded the plane and it flew smoothly away from Kinshasa. I mumbled my thanks to God and began to breathe more easily when we left the DRC's airspace. I said to myself that I wanted to return to the DRC when it was peaceful, stable and its people were more prosperous. When will that be?

Maybe that time will be when this country is pared down to a manageable size but doing that may require dividing the DRC into three or four countries. Perhaps it would be best to make a part of the DRC a world heritage site which would be an international protectorate so that its irreplaceable natural biodiversity is preserved for the sake of the all who live on the planet. Much of humanity's future hinges on what happens in the DRC. It behooves all of us to pay more attention to the importance of the DRC.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Djibouti

IN 1993, I FOUND myself in an old but recently refurbished DC-3 plane with turbo-prop engines on a flight from Mogadishu in southern Somalia to Hargeisa, capital city of Northern Somalia. For security reasons, we had to fly along Somalia's lengthy coastline, making the trip longer. If we had flown directly to Hargeisa, the distance is about 520 miles. Flying along the coast to Djibouti is nearly 675 miles.

The flight to Djibouti exhausted our plane's fuel and we arrived about noon. A decision was made to refuel and stay overnight in Djibouti at the Sheraton Hotel. I reacted to this decision positively as it would be nice to wallow in the luxuries afforded by the Sheraton. I was also excited about the prospect of having the afternoon to walk around Djibouti town.

I quickly checked into the hotel, dropped my bag in my room and dashed out to hit the streets of this busy city of over 400,000 people. I was delighted to walk all over town alone without an armed escort. One of the first questions that came to mind was why Somalis in Somalia could not run their country as peacefully and competently as Somalis were doing in Djibouti. In other words, why was war-torn Somalia in such a shamble when neighboring Djibouti functions efficiently as a country, although both countries are basically populated by the same people?

I thought at the time maybe the striking difference between the two countries was their pre-independence history. Different than Somalia, Djibouti was colonized by the French and they maintained for many years a garrison of legionnaires at Camp Lemonier in Djibouti. The legionnaires called Djibouti the "French Hong Kong of the Red Sea." I could see everywhere the lasting results of French colonization. The use of the French language was widespread and there were many inviting French restaurants. French is one of this multiethnic country's three official languages; the other two are Arabic and Somali.

The French are popular in Djibouti. A referendum was held in 1967 and the Djiboutians voted to remain a French Overseas Territory and named their country the French Territory of the Afars and Issas. The Afars belong to a separate ethnic group that mostly resides in neighboring Ethiopia. The Issas are a clan originating in northern Somalia and a subgroup within the larger Dir clan family, which predominates in the Somali Region of Ethiopia. The Issas represent over half of Djibouti's almost 1 million people. Both the Afars and the Issas have adhered to Islam since almost the advent of this religion.

In 1977, the Djiboutians voted overwhelmingly in another referendum for independence from France and renamed their country the Republic of Djibouti. I was told that in the 1991-2000 period a civil war ensued that pitted Afar rebels

against the Issa-dominated government, but during my brief visit in 1993, I did not notice any instability. I did see French soldiers everywhere and their contributions to the local economy were notable. I could not resist and entered a restaurant where I enjoyed French culinary arts at their best.

While I was in the restaurant, I spoke at length with the local waiters. I told them this was my first visit to Djibouti. They told me I should go and see Lake Assal, located about seventy-five miles west of Djibouti City. I could see they were very proud of this lake. They referred to it as a 'national treasure' and provided me numerous details about this famous lake. They noted its location on the north end of the Great Rift Valley that cuts through East Africa. They also informed me that at over 500 feet below sea level it is the lowest point in Africa.

They could not say enough about their impressive saline lake which contains the world's biggest source of salt. For them, the salt reserves of this lake were Djibouti's major export. I was warned not to go there during the hot season when temperatures soared to over 120 F degrees. The lake was in the Danakil Desert, which is the driest and hottest part of this sunbaked tiny country.

The geothermal resources in this same area of Djibouti were also touted. They hoped to see these resources harnessed one day to help reduce the shortage of electrical power. One restaurant employee lamented that his country must import almost everything. He recited a long list of things Djibouti imported, including food, water and fuel to generate electricity. He expressed the wish that Djibouti could be less dependent for its survival on the outside world.

The head waiter said if I did not have time to visit Lake Assal, I should see their port. He underscored that Djibouti would not exist if it were not for its deep-water port and its strategic location at the wide mouth of the Red Sea on the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb. From this location on the Gulf of Aden, it also overlooks access to the Suez Canal and shipping lanes to the Indian Ocean. A good port and its geographic location were the reasons for the presence of the French military for decades and the more recent arrival of American, Chinese and Japanese military contingents.

The Americans took over Camp Lemonnier in 2001 and currently bases the largest number of U.S troops it maintains on the African continent at this camp. The tens of millions of dollars the Government of Djibouti receives annually for leasing military bases to foreign countries represents an important part of its national budget. These bases and its position as a key refueling stop on some of busiest shipping lanes in the world are the main underpinnings of Djibouti's economy. Also, of economic importance is the transshipment of goods to and from Ethiopia from its port.

Although Djibouti is a small country (about half the size of the U.S. State of New Jersey) the future bolds well for its people. A review of its development indicators places it high among Africa's fifty-four countries. In particular, its high literacy rate and low total fertility rate rank it high in terms of human developmental progress. One rule of thumb is that for a country to make good progress, its annual economic growth rate needs to be at least two percentage points above the population growth rate. Djibouti's economy has been growing by about six percent per year for a decade while its annual population growth rate

currently hovers around 1.5 percent. This latter rate is the second lowest in Africa, with South Africa being the lowest.

It is impressive that Djibouti's demographics have long stabilized in spite of the heavy flow of migrants into the country in past years. Djibouti's population has almost doubled over the past thirty years. The urbanized portion of today's population is nearly seventy-five percent and half of its national population lives in Djibouti City. Djibouti's population structure is less youthful than most African countries. Its median age is just over twenty-four years, which is way above the median age that prevails in many African countries.

Djibouti is well on its way to being one of the most advanced countries in Africa. With continued good governance, peace and stability, its future prospects are promising. Its strategic location and its collaboration with foreign military forces permit it to play an important role in the maintenance of world peace.

I walked slowly for over a mile to return to my hotel. I did not have the time to see Lake Assal and I could not see the port. My main concern was to get back to my hotel before dark and prepare to rise before daybreak the next day for an early start to our Hargeisa destination. I looked about myself and tried to imagine how my surroundings in this arid land was a thousand years ago when it was the part of the ancient Land of Punt and the Kingdom of Axum. Those olden days of warfare, disease and famine were long gone. Today, the quality of life of the general population is better now than ever before and the future of this once impoverished country holds much promise for its people.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Egypt

AS A KID GROWING up in Kansas, I did not know anything about Africa. I was living then in the pre-electronics age and if I wanted to learn something about Africa, I would have to go to the Carnegie Public Library located near the center of our small town of El Dorado. There was no good reason for me to learn anything about this faraway continent. It was only when I helped my mother join me in Africa in 1974 that I began to realize she may have had something to do with my interest in Africa.

My mother was a lover of pets and was particularly fond of raising and caring for Basenji show dogs. She had a close attachment to her three Basenji dogs. I insisted that she could not travel to Africa with all three of her dogs. We finally reached a compromise whereby she would give away two dogs and take her favorite dog with her.

She told me then if I were truly an Africanist, I would take all her dogs. I began to doubt her sanity when she said, "You should have more respect for the Pharaoh's dogs."

I immediately shot back, "What do you mean by that?"

She laughed and said, "Don't you know that these dogs of mine originated from Africa and are depicted on the walls of the tombs of Egypt's ancient Pharaohs?"

I was perplexed by her comment, but I took a hard look at her nearby dogs and I could see they resembled the African bush dogs which were observable everywhere I had been in Africa.

My mother pulled a big book from one of the stacks of books that littered her living room, opened it and said, "Look here and you will see what I mean."

I looked and saw photos clearly depicting dogs in wall murals on the inside walls of Egyptian tombs. I began reading this book and was captivated by it. After I finished perusing this book about ancient Egypt, I took it back to where my mother had fetched it and found there many more books about Africa. I never knew my mother had such an interest in Africa. It suddenly dawned on me that maybe my mother's lifetime of reading about Africa somehow rubbed off on me. I have no other explanation for my lifelong affair with Africa.

This eye-opening exchange with my mother in 1974 brought to mind an earlier brush with Egypt. It was June 1967 and I happened to be in a crowded bar late at night in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. I had no idea at that time what was happening on the other side of the world. The night wore on and the inebriated patrons of this popular drinking hole divided into two rowdy groups which climbed on top of the tables and began jumping up and down while they chanted loudly on one

side “Egypt,” and on the other side, “Israel.” I did not know what to think at the time. Back then, I was a young twenty-one years of age and so naпve I thought when I was given the opportunity to go to Honduras that I was going to some country in Africa.

Later in the night, when the tables fell apart and the shouting match turned into a violent brawl, the bar owner took me to a small storeroom behind the bar and told me to stay there and not come out. I did as I was told, but at daybreak nobody had come to show me the way out, so I dared to venture outside. I was shocked by the scale of the destruction I witnessed. The bar was in a broken shamble. All the streets in the neighborhood had been trashed and there were numerous lifeless bodies lying in the street.

Later, I asked what possibly could result in such violence. The answer I got was it was all about the deadly Six-Day War between Egypt and Israel. I was told that Israel won the war and many people were not happy about that. I lived in a world without any international news, so I was unaware of this big event and everything else going on in the world. My biggest connection with the outside world at that time was capturing infrequently the Voice of America or British Broadcasting Company (BBC) international news on my shortwave radio.

Much later I was to learn how this brief war changed profoundly the composition of the conflicting interests in the turbulent Middle East. I also learned this war was followed by a second war of short duration in 1973, which had farther consequences for this troubled region of the world. These destructive wars have contributed to Egypt maintaining one of the largest and strongest military forces in Africa.

Still, over the years, Egypt was not in my thoughts. This country in Northern Africa with a natural bridge, Sinai Peninsula, to the Middle East was not on my Africa radar screen. Of course, like a lot of people, I wanted to go there and visit some of the historical sites of this ancient cradle of civilization. In 2000, thirty years after my first arrival in Africa, I was given the opportunity to participate in a conference in Cairo, a bustling capital city of over 10 million people. Cairo is now considered the largest and richest city in the Arab World.

Before I took this trip, I was able at that time to go online and learn about the Arab Republic of Egypt. I was overwhelmed by its written history, which is among the longest in the world, going back over 3,000 years, and it is the world’s oldest nation. This ancient country sets a record for having the oldest of almost anything in the world. Much of this rich and lengthy heritage is due to its geographic location. It has been and still is a world crossroads. It has been occupied at different points in its long history by a number of outside forces. The legacies left by the lengthy occupations of the Greeks, Persians, Romans, Arabs, Turks, French, British and others are too many and weighty to cover adequately in this book.

One important change occurred when Egypt was Islamized in the seventh century by invading Arab armies, supplanting to a large extent the Christian religion which dated from shortly after the time of Christ. Since that time, Islam has been Egypt’s official religion and Arabic is its official language. Yet, a sizeable minority of Egypt’s over 100 million people continue to adhere to the orthodox Coptic Christian Church, which maintains the oldest church in Africa in Alexandria, founded by St. Mark in the year 42 AD.

Alexandria is an ancient city in the Nile Delta on the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea's coast that is reputed to be founded by Alexander the Great. For centuries, it was a foremost center for the Christian religion, advanced learning and world trade. Today, it is a major tourist attraction. There are environmental fears that it will be partially submerged in the decades ahead because of the level of the sea. Rising seas have already destroyed many coastal areas in Africa, and they remain a menace.

One important turning point for Egypt was its revolutionary period when it ended British control of the Suez Canal in 1952. Today, revenues generated from the operation of this canal, tourism and remittances from the millions of Egyptians working abroad represent the biggest sources of income for the country. Also, the about $2.2 billion provided to Egypt annually by the U.S. government since the signing of the Camp David accords in 1978 is another key source of national income.

Egypt's long history is largely due to the ability of its population to exploit agriculturally for thousands of years the Nile, the world's longest river. Without this spectacular river, Egypt would have never been a cradle of civilization. The Nile and its fertile delta region enabled Egypt to develop early in history and remain for hundreds of years one of the most important centers for humanity. The Nile provided Egypt with the fertile soils needed to prosper and attract other powers in the world. The fertile soils of the Nile Delta prove an age-old maxim that you cannot build a rising standard of living on a falling level of soil fertility.

Most of Egypt is desert and has little rainfall. Almost ninety-eight percent of its over 100 million people reside in the densely populated Nile Valley, which represents less than six percent of Egypt's total area. For comparison purposes, Egypt is about twice the size of the U.S. State of New Mexico which has a population of about 2 million. It appears that Egypt is running out of room for its fast-growing population. Where will all its people live in 2040, when Egypt is projected to have an estimated national population of 137 million?

Given the importance of the waters of the Nile to the survival of Egypt, it is understandable that it wanted to improve the control of these waters by completing the High Aswan Dam in 1978. Egypt's concerns about other countries building dams on the sources of the Upper Nile are also understandable. There is a high degree of certainty that disputes among African countries about sharing the Nile's waters will be a future flashpoint.

Egypt's population has one of the best development profiles in Africa, but its progress is stymied by episodes of political turmoil and social upheaval. Perhaps its biggest challenge is creating jobs for its large unemployed population. For Egypt and other African countries, job creation remains the true litmus test of developmental progress. In particular, creating jobs that pay livable wages to Africa's youthful population is necessary to maintaining the peace and stability required for moving to higher stages of development.

Job creation is also necessary to reduce growing out-migration from Africa and the serious loss (brain drain) of its most educated citizens. The high youth unemployment rate (over thirty percent) in Egypt is a source of instability and makes many young people (ages fifteen to twenty-nine) more susceptible to joining radical or terrorist groups. If too little is done to employ Africa's huge population

'youth bulge,' it is difficult to see how Africa can advance to a higher stage of development.

I did this minimum of homework before arriving in Cairo in April 2000 for the first and last time. I was excited. I could not wait to find the time to explore this huge city. On the top of my to-do list was to get my photo taken on a camel in front of the famous Pyramids of Giza. As soon as the first day of my weeklong conference was over, I ran out of the hotel and caught a taxi to the Great Pyramids of Giza and easily found a tour guide with a camel.

I was thrilled to see the pyramids up close and hear all about them from my guide. I was delighted to get my photo taken on the camel in front of the pyramids, one of the existing seven wonders of the ancient world. That photo now sits proudly in a special frame above my mantle in my living room at my home in Texas. I pass this photo almost daily and it almost seems like a dream. I do wonder how many other tourists have had their photo taken on the same camel in the same spot. I am sure the answer is in the thousands.

I found my guide to be a fountain of information about Egypt's long history. He also gave me advice on what else I should see during my short time in Cairo. In this regard, he considered it a must that I spend at least a few hours visiting the Egyptian Museum of Antiquities. He said that everything to know about ancient Egypt was inside this great museum. He convinced me that I could not leave Cairo without going to this museum.

I was happy to learn that our conference would end on Friday at noon. I immediately made plans to go to the Egyptian museum as soon as the conference concluded. I would have the afternoon free to visit the museum and then go to a social gathering of conference attendees at an outdoor restaurant adjoining Tahrir Square. I skipped lunch and grabbed the first taxi available at the hotel, going directly to the museum.

My disappointment was great when I found the museum closed when I arrived. I should have known that this Islamic country closed down for Friday prayers. I waited until it reopened early in the afternoon and eagerly entered with a throng of people. I did not know which direction to take first in the huge museum. I read all the postings. One notice on the wall said there were 120,000 ancient artifacts in the museum. I saw more mummies than I ever imagined I would see in my lifetime. The time zipped by and, before I knew it, the museum was closing for the day. I had spent over five hours in the museum and only scratched the surface of what there was to see. I could have easily passed another week examining closely all there was to see in this magnificent museum.

I exited the museum to find it was already dark. I searched for a taxi to take me to Tahrir Square to join my colleagues for dinner. I stumbled around the place I thought we were supposed to meet for dinner, but I did not recognize anyone. There were dozens of tables set outside on the cobblestone streets, but I could not find my group. I wondered around and was about to give up my search in the shadows when a voice called to me to come and sit down. It was a relief to find some of my fellow conference participants. With hunger pangs, I gladly sat down, ready to order as quickly as possible.

I did not recognize any of the dishes offered on the menu, so I asked an Egyptian woman in our group to order for me. Our food came with lots of tea to

drink. I did not know any of the foods that covered my plate. I could see there were a variety of well-cooked vegetables. I was so hungry I ate everything on my plate and found it to be very tasty. I also consumed several pieces of pita bread that accompanied my dish. My Egyptian colleague laughed when she observed how I ate local food with so much gusto.

I certainly did not have any room in my stomach for dessert, if there were desserts. I believe there was no harm in drinking tea as it was probably made with water that had been boiled. In my many years in Africa, there were only two countries (Kenya and South Africa) where I confidently drank water from the tap. I wondered if it were safe to drink the city water in Cairo.

Through the dim lighting I saw the waiter coming with something I had not seen before. He set by us an apparatus with hoses to smoke. My Egyptian colleague, Leila, told me it was a local custom to smoke from a hookah-shisha water pipe after having dinner. She went on to say, "Egyptians like smoking a lot." I had noticed that many of the men did smoke cigarettes. I was a nonsmoker, so taking turns at the shisha water pipe was awkward for me.

We paid our bill and Leila insisted that we pile into a mini-bus taxi to take a nighttime stroll along the Nile River. I thought it was getting too late to take a walk, but Leila said it was quite normal to walk along the banks of the Nile on a Friday night. When we arrived at a parking place along the Nile, I was amazed at the large number of people who were out and about. It was almost midnight and families were picnicking and their children were playing. I had the impression that most of the inhabitants of Cairo were enjoying their Friday night as usual next to the mighty Nile River. This was the start of their weekend, as the work week in Egypt is Sunday through Thursday.

Seeing the Nile flow north before me reminded me to read Alan Moorehead's books when they were scheduled to be released later in 2000. I understood then that he had written two books about the Nile. One book was entitled, *The Blue Nile*, and the other companion book, *The White Nile*. These books were advertised as containing everything a person would want to know about the Nile and its tributaries.

I noticed in the shadows some homeless street children on the lookout for opportunities to beg. This observation made me wonder about how many street children there were in Cairo. I knew there were millions of street children in Africa's major cities and that their number was growing rapidly. When I arrived in Africa in 1970 the concept of orphans and homeless street children was unknown. Today, the millions of children abandoned by their communities and families represent a heavy burden on African societies.

I awoke early on Saturday morning to catch the hotel shuttle to the Cairo Airport, the second busiest in Africa after Johannesburg, South Africa. I had been forewarned to get to the airport several hours before the departure of my flight because it was always congested. This forewarning was correct because the airport was crowded, and it took all the time I had to make my way through the crowds. I overheard that an expansion of the airport was planned. I told myself I would return to Egypt one day when the expanded airport had been built and do all I could not do during this short stay in Cairo. I am still waiting for that day.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Equatorial Guinea

IN 1975, I WAS in northern Gabon visiting some school construction PCVs. One of them noted, "You know, you can walk less than a hundred yards that way and you are in Equatorial Guinea."

I quickly replied, "Let's go to Equatorial Guinea."

We trampled through the rain forest, crossed the unmarked border and entered one of Africa's scariest countries. The thick foliage that flourished on the floor of the damp, dark jungle slowed our forward progress. We were on the alert for snakes and other forest varmints. We could not avoid getting a few scratches on our arms as we forged our way into this forbidding country.

Following closely behind us at a safe distance were the half dozen laborers the PCVs used to build three-room elementary school buildings. The laborers began immediately shouting warnings to us not to cross into Equatorial Guinea. To my surprise, their shouts were in Spanish.

I understood Spanish, so their warnings did not fall on deaf ears. It was not their use of Spanish that bothered me, but it was the visible fear they displayed when they shouted. It was apparent they were afraid of entering Equatorial Guinea and they were horrified of what would happen to us if we entered this backwater country. When they stopped following us and remained standing a safe distance from where we thought the border was, it became obvious to me they believed we were in danger.

We began to share their fear and after brief looks at each other, we ran as fast as we could to join the laborers, who rejoiced at our return, thanking God for keeping us safe from the evils of Equatorial Guinea. When I heard them talking, I learned they were among the tens of thousands of people who had fled Equatorial Guinea in order to escape the murderous rampages of the president of their country who was reported to have killed up to one-fourth of his country's population. They were among another one-fourth of the population who had fled for their lives.

I was puzzled by overhearing a couple of the volunteers speaking Spanish to the laborers. I asked, "Why are you speaking Spanish? Isn't Gabon a French-speaking country?"

"Yes, they speak French in Gabon and that is the language we studied in our training for this assignment, but we can't find any Gabonese workers, so we hired readily available 'Equatos' and they only speak Spanish."

I learned then that 'Equatos' was the name given to the thousands of people who had entered Gabon to escape the cruelty of the bloodthirsty regime which

wielded absolute power in Equatorial Guinea. I spoke at length with the 'Equatos' and learned much about the horrors they and their families and friends had experienced in their home country. I came away from that conversation convinced that Equatorial Guinea was an African country I would never want to visit.

The fact that we spoke in Spanish reminded me that this small (about the size of the U.S. State of Maryland) artificial country on the coastal West African Equator had once been Spain's only colony in Africa. It was granted independence from Spain in 1968. Its first president, Francisco Macias Nguema, appeared to become mad and acted in a particularly savage way, turning his country into the worst example of an independent country in Africa.

People celebrated in 1979 when his nephew overthrew and executed him in a bloody coup. The population's jubilation did not last long because the nephew proved to be almost as cruel and corrupt as his heartless uncle. Nonetheless, the nephew, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasengo, has continued until this day for forty-one years his strongarm autocratic rule over the more than 1 million poor inhabitants.

The discovery of large offshore oil fields in 1995 by American companies provided him with the bonanza he needed to become one of Africa's wealthiest persons, as well as enabling him to stay in power for life. This is another sad case of American oil and gas companies coddling up to a bloody African dictator in order to reap huge profits. The most tragic part of this deplorable relationship is that the people of Equatorial Guinea have not benefitted from this resource curse. The venial man running their country with an iron fist was taking most of his country's oil income for himself and his family while bankrupting his country.

This greedy situation points out that in Africa a country president's act more like a traditional village chief who does mostly what he wants (rare to find a woman chief) and stays in his position for life. Traditionally, in Africa, family always comes first, no matter what the consequences for the nation. The notion of 'nation' is not a concept that is well-entrenched in Africa. It is rare for an African to choose the interest of his or her country over the interests of themselves and their families.

Too often, important decision-making follows the following priorities: self, my family, my community, my ethnic group and my geographic region. Concepts of 'nation' and 'democracy' represent for many Africans alien philosophies and thus are given low consideration. If any decision will be good for you and your family over the long term, you accept willingly any punishment that may be in store for you. Cultural values and traditions do matter to all members of the local society. Sometimes these values and traditions are not helpful to building a more modern society and making people less predisposed to adopting imported ideas.

Equatorial Guinea's oil boom caused its economy to grow by almost twenty percent per year for a decade. The country is frequently called the El Dorado of Africa. It is reported, thanks to its petroleum resources, that Equatorial Guinea has the highest per capita gross domestic product in Africa. It is one of Africa's smallest countries, but it occupies third place in terms of oil exports in Africa. Its immense oil and gas wealth and a relatively small national population make it theoretically a rich country. Yet, corruption and gross mismanagement made it one of Africa's most highly indebted countries.

Yet, Equatorial Guinea's immense resources have not been used to improve the quality of the lives of the people of Equatorial Guinea and, thus, for the most part they remain gripped by unhealthy levels of absolute poverty. Most of the population does not have access to safe drinking water or electricity. Adding to this physical misery in the midst of immense wealth are the lack of basic civil freedoms and political rights.

Before oil, cocoa was the main export. Most of the cocoa plantations were owned by foreigners and field hands were brought in from other African countries. At that time, trafficking of people, including women and children, to work in the plantations, sex slavery and other positions of servitude were common. Even today, Equatorial Guinea is known as a center of human trafficking. Equatorial Guinea is not alone in Africa in participating in the trafficking of humans. Sadly, this violation of basic human rights is a growing problem in many African countries, especially as more jobless Africans and their destitute families are more willing than ever before to take the added risks involved with searching for a better life for themselves.

This hot, humid country has an awkward geographic formation. It is composed of five islands and a mainland. Its capital city, Malabo, is on the Island of Bioko, which is closer to Cameroon than its mainland, Rio Muni, where its largest city, Bata, is located. The population of Bata and Malabo make up almost half of the population of Equatorial Guinea. I do not believe such a random collection of pieces of geography deserve to be considered a country.

The OAU's 1963 founding charter states that borders inherited from the colonial powers are inviolable. Therefore, in spite of the artificial nature of many of Africa's national borders and the problems caused by this artificiality, colonial borders in Africa remain unchanged. Consequently, Africa is stuck with the borders bequeathed to it by its colonial masters. I wish in some instances there could be a way to make some exceptions to this hard-and-fast border rule.

For me, Equatorial Guinea does not qualify to be called a country. It is a unique accident of Spanish colonialism in Africa. Its harsh rule since independence by two brutal dictators and the extreme disparity in the distribution of its oil wealth make it a shameful member of the African community of nations. I believe the African Union should have a mechanism for the banning of such deeply corrupted kleptocratic countries from its membership. As long as countries like Equatorial Guinea are respected members of the AU, it is more difficult for the world to respect Africa. There is no doubt for me that maintaining Equatorial Guinea as a full member of the African Union tarnishes its image.

Not long ago, I related to an old friend the experience I had forty-three years ago in northern Gabon when I spoke with some 'Equatos,' as well as my feelings about the existence of Equatorial Guinea as a country. My friend said he was not surprised by my feelings because Equatorial Guinea was a source of madness. He went on to tell me a story about his time in Gabon in the early 1970s when he heard a bizarre story about one U.S. diplomat who was driven to madness by the antics of Equatorial Guinea and the savagery of its cruel dictator. He said this diplomat became so deranged that he stabbed and killed one of his American colleagues.

I guess his main point was that Equatorial Guinea was a place that could drive you stark raving mad. I think that in some roundabout way he was trying to tell me to not allow Equatorial Guinea's bad reputation to get under my skin and knock me off my rocker. Good advice, but my few steps across the unmarked border into Equatorial Guinea was as far as I wanted to go to gain firsthand experiences in such a rogue country.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Eritrea

WHEN I WAS LENDING A temporary helping hand to a massive drought relief effort in Ethiopia in 1983, Eritrea was part of Ethiopia. Does that mean I was in Eritrea? I have often pondered this question, but since I did not put a foot inside of what would become in 1993 the State of Eritrea, my answer is maybe a "no."

Eritrea has a long story that dates to the beginning of recorded history. The strategic location of this ancient land in the Horn of Africa that adjoins the Red Sea attracted many foreign powers over centuries past. Following the European scramble for Africa at the turn of the past century, Italy grabbed Eritrea as its colony and made it into the center of its East African empire until its own defeat in World War II. After being administered for about eight years by the British, Eritrea was turned over to Ethiopia in 1952.

Many people in Eritrea did not like being under Ethiopian rule. Not long after its attachment to Ethiopia, a liberation movement developed and began to use violent means to fight for the independence of Eritrea. To make a long story short, a long bloody and destructive fight between Eritrean liberation fighters and the Ethiopian military ensued for thirty years, ending in 1991. A referendum was held in 1993 and the Eritrean people voted overwhelmingly for independence.

While the Eritreans were happy to have their own independent country, they did not enjoy the peace and prosperity they expected. Much of the failure to achieve their expectations was because of the harsh policies enacted by their authoritarian president, Isaias Afwerki, the same man who had led the liberation forces and remains Eritrea's president until this day. Many of the policies adopted by Eritrea's president were due to the deep enmity that continued to prevail between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Both countries continued to be on a war footing with regard to one another. In some ways, the intense dislike between the leaders of these two countries is surprising because Ethiopia received help from Eritrea's liberation fighters during its long fight to liberate itself from a bloody dictatorial communist regime. The Ethiopian liberation movement's success in 1991 set the stage for the independence of Eritrea. Furthermore, the leader of the Ethiopian liberation movement was of the same ethnic group as the leader of the Eritrean liberation movement. Some go even farther and say they are cousins. For certain, the Ethiopian leader was born in an area of Ethiopia near Eritrea and his mother was from Eritrea.

This close affinity between Ethiopia and Eritrea's Tigrayan populations make it even harder to understand the terrible war that occurred between these two countries in the 1998 to 2001 period. This costly and cruel war has always been

difficult for me to understand. Upon reflection, this bloody war probably represents one of the greatest tragedies that ever occurred on the African continent.

Purportedly, this senseless war was over a border demarcation dispute. Neither side agreed as to where the border between their two nations should be drawn in a relatively isolated area of no real value to either country. Both countries are poor and have numerous development challenges, but each spent millions of U.S. dollars on this war effort. More than the money spent, tens of thousands were killed on each side, valuable infrastructure was destroyed and hundreds of thousands of people were displaced. The slaughter of the thousands of soldiers involved in the intense trench warfare was reported to be akin to what occurred in Europe in World War I. The war ended with only minor changes in the border and a final peace treaty was not signed until 2018.

This war was also a blow to regional cooperation. The eight-country Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) was started in 1996 and it was hoped that this regional organization would advance trade and development in the region. The disastrous war between two of its key member states, Ethiopia and Eritrea, upset IGAD and donor agency assistance plans for the region. The prime minister of Ethiopia and the President of Eritrea were considered renaissance strong men who could, along with other similar leaders in the region, advance the development interests of their respective countries.

For me, such 'realpolitik' thinking was deeply damaged by the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Also, it does not help that the presidents of key countries in this region have not changed in more than twenty years and they continue to act with impunity. As long as Africa has the same people and political parties running their countries, it will be much more difficult to overcome the many development challenges facing Africa. Poor national leadership and governance in many African countries makes progress in Africa advance more slowly than is possible. If Africa had competent leadership which always put the interests of their respective countries first, it would advance more rapidly.

This war supported the Eritrea's president's decision to maintain for two decades a national state of emergency and apply rigorously a compulsory conscription policy to all adult citizens, men and women, when they turned the age of eighteen. It is notable that Eritrean women fought alongside men in the liberation movement and all its battles. The harsh conditions of military conscription and the poor human rights record of Eritrea's one-party state are among the reasons behind the clandestine exodus of a large number of Eritreans out of the country every year. This big wave of out-migration has resulted in many Eritreans living abroad. The remittances sent home to their families by the huge Eritrean diaspora represent a sizeable portion of Eritrea's national income.

An important percentage of those who flee Eritrea's poverty and lack of fundamental freedoms perish as they try to make their way to Europe. Many of those who were reported in the news to have drowned as they try to make their way across the Mediterranean Sea are Eritreans. When so many are willing to risk their lives to leave their country, it is hard to say anything good about such a country.

I have spoken with a couple of Eritrean men at my home in Texas. I asked them to relate to me how in the world they got out of Eritrea and ended up in Texas.

They told me that it took them two years of suffering before they were granted asylum in the U.S. They said they left their homes in the middle of the night and did not tell anyone they were leaving Eritrea. If anyone knew they planned to leave the country, they feared they would be imprisoned and tortured.

They first stayed for some months in a refugee camp in Ethiopia before taking a long and hazardous trek through Sudan to Uganda where they were eventually accorded refugee status by the UN. From there, they applied for asylum in the U.S. They both considered themselves indeed fortunate to still be alive. They could not wait until they could work and earn money to send to their families in Eritrea. For them, all the horrible things they experienced along their tortuous path from Eritrea were well worth it.

At first glance, Ethiopia, which is twenty times larger than Eritrea and has twenty times Eritrea's population of about 5 million people, should not have had much of a problem in having its way with Eritrea, which is about the size of the U.S. State of Pennsylvania. However, after years of warfare with Eritrea's capable military forces, which are reputed to be among the most effective in Africa, after bloody trench warfare for several years they fought to a stalemate.

Eritrea's case exemplifies the alarming financial situation that exists in a number of African countries. Rising external public debt and importing more goods than a country exports does not provide a sustainable foundation for building a viable country. The value of Eritrea's imports are a multiple of the value of what it exports. At the same time, its external debt load is more than its annual government budget. Such significant fiscal and trade imbalances constrain making developmental progress.

In 1996, a program called Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) was developed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. This program was used to arrange for the forgiveness of external debt to over thirty countries. It was firmly believed that these low-income countries needed to stop using their limited financial resources for debt management if they were to have the sufficient means to devote to the development of their respective countries.

HIPC allowed for some of the least developed countries to erase all their external debt and regain the creditworthiness needed to attract private investment. Sadly, some of these same countries which benefitted from this debt forgiveness program are now highly indebted again. The lack of fiscal discipline by these countries has placed them again in the same financial bind they were in about ten years ago. Excessive debt stress leaves less money in a country's national budget for the development and the provision of essential public services.

In June 1993, I was evacuated from Mogadishu, Somalia, to Nairobi, Kenya. I went to the U.S. Embassy to eat in its cafeteria. I sat down with a group of people excitedly talking about the U.S. Government's recognition of the newly independent country of Eritrea. They were discussing plans to be among the first to travel to Asmara, the capital of Eritrea. Now that the U.S. had diplomatic relations with Eritrea, they could visit the new country. One of them turned to me and said, "You want to go to see how Italy was in the 1930s?"

I replied, "For sure, I would like to go, but I am on standby to return to Mogadishu. By the way, what did you mean about seeing old Italy in Asmara?"

"Don't you know? Asmara is a lovely city of over half million people located in the Eritrean highlands. It is an agreeable place because of its large assortment of well-kept modernist art-deco buildings built by the Italians in the 1930s and early 1940s. I can't wait to go to Asmara to see for myself."

I could only say, "That sounds really interesting. I wish I could go. Give me your number and I will call you if there is any change in my situation."

This boisterous group went on to talk about the scramble by a number of U.S. diplomats to position themselves to be named the first ambassador to Eritrea. There seemed to be a lot of competition among senior U.S. diplomats to be the first to represent the U.S. in Asmara. Robert Houdek was successful in being named the first U.S. Ambassador to Eritrea. Expectations were running high then about the promising future prospects of a newly independent Eritrea. Nobody knew then that all hopes for the good future of Eritrea would be shattered.

Unhappily, my duties in Somalia prevented me from joining this trip to Asmara. I am still waiting for an opportunity to travel to Asmara, but few today are still as excited now as they were in 1993 about traveling to this city, which now has about 650,000 people. I do feel my firsthand experiences in Ethiopia and northern Somalia give me a good idea of what Eritrea is like. Maybe with recent renewed collaboration between Ethiopia and Eritrea, it is time for me to visit what was once Ethiopia's fourteenth province.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Ethiopia

I HAVE BEEN TO this country several times and I have learned much about it from my wife, who was born and raised in Ethiopia. This abundance of knowledge about Ethiopia does not, however, make writing this chapter any easier. I live with Ethiopia every day, but it has taken me the longest time to even attempt a draft of this challenging chapter.

I really do not know where to start in trying to convey a few of my experiences and share some of what I know about this exceptional country. I fear that anything I write below will come across as an oversimplification and I will leave large gaps in the knowledge of what one should know about this unique country in Africa and in the world. Ethiopia and its long history really defy any acceptable description in a short chapter.

I did not know anything about Ethiopia when I first arrived there in 1983. All I knew then was I was going to the capital city, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to join a team which was mandated to come up with a scheme for providing thousands of tons of U.S. food aid to tens of thousands of Ethiopians who were on the verge of starvation, following a serious period of drought. I had already been in Africa almost thirteen years, so I thought I did not need to know anything more to do my job. I was wrong in thinking like this. I found myself totally unprepared for what confronted me in Ethiopia.

At that time, Ethiopia was like a different planet to me. It was unlike anywhere else I knew in Africa. Certainly, the poverty and hunger of many of the Ethiopians I observed was like I had seen elsewhere in Africa, but the Ethiopians looked different and their customs and language were unlike anything I had known heretofore. I felt lost on a continent I thought was my new home.

This first visit to Ethiopia lasted less than two weeks, but I was obliged to be a quick study and learn something about Ethiopia. I knew very well that the government of Ethiopia was under the iron fist of an unfriendly Marist-Leninist military dictator, Haile Marian Mengistu, who came to power in 1974 by violently overthrowing a world-renown man, Haile Selassie, who had been emperor of Ethiopia since 1916. This bloody dictator was backed by the Soviet Union, which had helped turn the tide in the 1977 Ogaden War against Somalia in south-eastern Ethiopia. This tide was turned in this war in favor of Ethiopia by the Soviet deployment of 15,000 Cuban combat troops.

I learned that one of the challenges of providing food to tens of thousands of Ethiopians on the verge of dying from causes related to extreme hunger was finding ways to deliver food to them without experiencing diversions by the

government for their own needs or its sale to generate income to buy weapons. Airdrops of palettes of food grains were scrutinized. This was the most expensive way to deliver food, but it had at least the advantage of being received by some of the people who desperately needed food. It also had the advantage of not being diverted for purposes unrelated to providing food relief to the needy population.

Sometimes it came down to saving starving people by this costlier food delivery method because the government was unwilling to cooperate. I had been involved in the past with assistance efforts because governments were not capable of providing aid, but I had never been involved with a government which was unwilling to help. For years after that, I would always ask myself if a government were limited in what it could do to help because of incapacity or unwillingness, or both.

While I was there, I heard some awful stories about how the reign of the man, Haile Selassie, who had been emperor for over fifty years had ended. This eighty-three-year-old man was allegedly strangled to death in his bed by henchmen who were under the orders of the brutal dictator. Later, I heard his body had been found under a slab of concrete that covered a latrine. This ghastly death of Ethiopia's last emperor marked the end of a line of emperors that traced its lineage back over a thousand years or longer. It is commonly accepted in Ethiopia that its original monarchs descended from a relationship between the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon.

I heard much about how the communist 'Derg' regime had killed many people with the violent unleashing of its bloody 'Red Terror' campaign. Initially, this campaign started with the execution of people involved with the imperial government and then spread to all those in the capital and everywhere else in Ethiopia for those who were suspected to oppose the cruel regime. The mass killings conducted by the Derg numbered in the tens of thousands.

The regime also used the famine in the northern part of the country to weaken the opposition that existed in this part of Ethiopia. It is estimated that tens of thousands of people died from starvation because of the restrictive policies and actions taken by the Stalinist government. Some estimates show that up to a half million people died in direct Red Terror killings or from food scarcity purposely caused by the Derg.

For security reasons, I was not allowed to go upcountry or walk around in the capital city during this first brief stay. I, therefore, had to rely on local Ethiopian employees for answers to my questions and information about Ethiopia. They said most Ethiopians are rural farmers who eke out a living by cultivating small farms of less than five acres. Agricultural productivity was low, and the rich soils of the densely populated highlands were being depleted by continuous cultivation. Mixed farming was practiced, but plentiful cow manure was not used to enrich fields but for cooking fuel.

The latter assertion made me think of other African countries where accessing cooking fuel is a major problem, particularly in the fast-growing urban areas. What fuel do you use to cook your food? Traditionally, trees were cut, and their wood was used for cooking fuel, or their wood was processed into charcoal that was used as cooking fuel. Rapid population growth has led to a steep rise in the use of

firewood and this has resulted in accelerated deforestation. Increasingly, the distance between urban centers and dwindling forests or woods is becoming longer.

The alternatives to using wood or charcoal are limited and more expensive. Many urban dwellers do procure small containers of propane gas for cooking, but that option is more expensive and gas bottles are not always available on the open market. Solar cookers have been tested, but the answer to how the masses can cook their food without the continued removal of trees from the landscape has not yet found an adequate response.

Most of Ethiopia's rural population live in impoverished conditions. Usually, entire families of six to eight people live in one round mud house and sleep inside with their animals. Children sleep on the earthen floors of these houses. At night, in the vast highland regions (often over 7,000 feet in altitude) of Ethiopia, temperatures average in the 40s F. These cold and damp conditions contribute to several childhood illnesses.

Many children are more susceptible to illness because of their low nutritional status. In general, Ethiopia's children suffer from one of the highest childhood stunting rates in Africa. I have always questioned how far Africa can advance if a high percentage of its children are physically and mentally permanently diminished by stunting. Good nutrition of a country's population is the foundation upon which long-term developmental progress is built.

During this first short stay in Ethiopia, I did learn about the importance of coffee in Ethiopian society. I was an active participant in what is referred to as an Ethiopian coffee ceremony. It is difficult to disassociate coffee from the Ethiopian way of life. Arabica coffee originates in Ethiopia and has for centuries been an almost daily part of an elaborate Ethiopian coffee ceremony enacted regularly by families and social groups. Coffee continues to reign supreme in Ethiopia and is its biggest export.

I also learned a bit about Ethiopian food which is different than anything I had experienced elsewhere in Africa. Key to Ethiopian culinary arts is a large, round and type of flat, spongy bread made from teff flour called injera, which is eaten and used to scoop up the spicy stews that are placed on top of it. Teff is a cereal crop mainly found in Ethiopia. Most Ethiopians eat injera every day. There is an Ethiopian saying, "If you have not eaten injera, you have not eaten."

The traditional dress in Ethiopia is made from white handspun cotton that is often beautifully embroidered. I noticed that many Ethiopian women wear daily this clothing. I asked one of my Ethiopian colleagues why women wear these clothes more than men and he said, "Women want to be beautiful."

I replied, "There are sure many beautiful women in Ethiopia."

He then ended our conversation by firmly saying, "All Ethiopian women are beautiful."

I left Ethiopia before the 1984-85 famine had reached its height. I later read that groups of musicians raised money for the hungry in Ethiopia by releasing records for sale. Famous singers contributed to the best-selling works referred to as "We Are the World" and "Live Aid." Millions of U.S. dollars were raised by these efforts to alert the world to Ethiopia's serious famine. There was some controversy over whether or not all the money raised benefited those suffering from hunger or if

part of this money was diverted into the coffers of the state to buy weapons so it could further suppress Ethiopia's population.

In 2005, I happened to watch on TV a BBC documentary about a group of journalists revisiting the same places in Ethiopia where they had observed firsthand the horrendous effects of famine on the local population twenty years earlier. They met several people who claimed to have been saved from starvation by food relief. They also met people they had spoken with twenty years previously. I continue to be struck by the concluding statements of this interesting documentary. The journalists were asking each other whether or not many people had been saved from starvation only to become beggars. This conclusion still hits me like a low blow in the gut.

In March 1993, I was able to return for a few weeks to Addis Ababa (flower), Ethiopia's bustling capital city which was founded in 1881 by Emperor Menilik I. Many of the observations of Ethiopia ten years after my first visit are recorded in a few chapters of my book, *Dead Cow Road*, which was published in 2017. I, therefore, refer readers to this book for more information about Ethiopia.

Before this 1993 visit, I was able to do the homework on Ethiopia I should have done before I quickly went there in 1983. I learned this was an ancient country whose history goes back several millennia before Christ. It was also predominantly a Christian country with about two-thirds of the population adhering to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. I read that Christianity had entered Ethiopia in the early times of Christianity and became the official religion of Ethiopia in the fourth century.

Our local Ethiopian priest told me that Ethiopia (or its ancient names of Abyssinia or Kush) is mentioned forty-four times in the Bible and that Ethiopia had Christianity long before Europe. It is not possible to disassociate Orthodox Christianity from Ethiopian culture and society. One important thing that distinguishes Ethiopia is the widespread practice of the Orthodox Christian religion. The fact that there are more Christians in Ethiopia than there are people in almost any other African country is remarkable. There are only three countries (Nigeria, Egypt and Congo-Kinshasa) out of Africa's fifty-four countries which have a total national population higher than the estimated 75 million Christians in Ethiopia.

The ancient language, Ge'ez, used by the Ethiopian Church is among the oldest languages in the world still in use. It is from this language that Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia, was developed, using an ancient script that is difficult for foreigners to master. It is a Semitic language which in terms of the number of speakers is in second place behind Arabic, another Semitic language.

Another way Ethiopia distinguishes itself is in its use of a solar calendar which is derived from the ancient Egyptian calendar and akin to the Coptic calendar. This calendar is about seven years and three months behind the Gregorian calendar in use in most of the world. Also, Ethiopians use a different way of telling time. They mostly use a twelve-hour clock where dawn to dusk is one to twelve and this sequence is repeated for the dusk to dawn period. All this can be confusing for someone coming from outside Ethiopia.

I was happy that a rebel movement dominated by a northern Ethiopian group ousted militarily the Marxist-Leninist dictator in 1991 and was fully in control when I was in Addis Ababa in 1993. Unfortunately, this change in regimes did not

translate into peace. Some parts of the country and their ethnic (Ethiopia has over eighty ethnic groups) occupants were protesting the policies of the new government, its human rights violations and contesting the nomination of Ethiopia's new Prime Minister (in Ethiopia this position is much more important than its nominal president).

One action particularly disliked was the government's periodic shut down of local media and the Internet. Many Ethiopians were having difficulty accepting the rebel movement which overthrew their hated dictator because it was led and dominated by a northern ethnic group which represents less than six percent of Ethiopia's total population.

It is ironic that during all this political and social upheaval, the former communist dictator was living peacefully in exile in Zimbabwe. This bloody dictator, Mengistu, had been sentenced to death in absentia by Ethiopian courts years ago, but he has yet to be extradited by the Zimbabwean government. There are some hopes that with the death in 2019 of Zimbabwe's long-term president this former Ethiopian dictator will be extradited and tried for the crimes he committed against humanity.

My reading of the long history of Ethiopia was that it was one filled with a succession of violent conflicts, wars, protests, rebellions, recurrent droughts and resulting famines. One war was against an invading Italian army in 1896. Ethiopia won this war, but a part of the fascist Italian army invaded Ethiopia and cruelly occupied it with much bloodshed for five years (1936-45) until the end of World War II. Italy intended to create an East Africa colony composed of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Northern Somalia. This occupation by the Italians did not detract from the fact that Ethiopia is one of two countries in Sub-Saharan Africa which has never been colonized. (The other country is Liberia.) Fighting so many battles has contributed to Ethiopia having today one of the largest and most effective military forces in Africa.

When other African countries gained independence from various European countries in the 1950s or 1960s, they often adopted the colors of the Ethiopian flag for their own new national flags. The Ethiopian flag has always had three horizontal bands of different colors. The top band is green, representing Ethiopia's fertile land. Next under this green band is a yellow band that reflects national wealth. On the bottom of the flag is a red band, indicating peace and faith of the nations. In the center of the current flag is a round blue circle. The blue color is for peace. Imposed on the blue circle is a golden star symbol for diversity and unity. Emanating from the star are golden rays that symbolize prosperity. I hope Ethiopia can achieve what its flag communicates.

I also learned during my March 1993 visit that besides its 'black gold' coffee resource, Ethiopia also prides itself over its 'white gold.' The latter refers to its massive water resources, including Lake Tana which is the source of the Blue Nile. It is estimated that Ethiopia's rivers provide about eighty percent of the water in the Nile. It is noteworthy that Ethiopia has been trying for years to build a dam across the Blue Nile before it enters Sudan on its way south to Egypt.

When this 'Renaissance' dam is completed and the lake behind is filled, it will provide more electricity than any dam in Africa. The Ethiopian government plans to make money by exporting electricity to neighboring countries. Of course, Egypt,

which depends on the flow of the Nile, is much concerned about how this dam in Ethiopia will affect the flow of the Nile into Egypt.

My readings also informed me that most of Ethiopia's people were among the poorest in the world despite recent double-digit economic growth for more than a decade. As noted earlier, I always thought that if an African country's annual gross domestic product could grow by two percent or more above the national population growth rate for years, there would be enough economic growth to lift the poorest people in a society. Given the high annual population growth rate for most countries in Africa, it is a challenge to grow an economy on a per capita basis at a faster rate for the length of time needed to reduce poverty.

I have recently concluded that high economic growth is required consistently over many years before most of the poorest people realize any gain. This can be especially the case if there is high inflation and balance of payments problems. High inflation alone in the prices of essential items can move millions of people below the poverty line. In this regard, Ethiopia's performance has not been desirable, and it recently had to obtain a large amount of U.S. dollars from the United Arab Emirates because its banking system was almost depleted of its foreign exchange reserves.

There are a couple other negative factors which prevail in Ethiopian society despite efforts to the contrary. In this regard, it is not much different than some other African countries, but its large population translates into more cases. The factors include female genital mutilation (FGM) and obstetrical fistula. The ancient FGM practice is now illegal and the number of cases is declining, but millions of female children are still forced to undergo this risky surgical procedure to remove all or part of the clitoris. This traditional practice is considered a violation of women's rights and a health hazard.

Obstetrical fistula frequently occurs when the woman is too young to conceive. This situation often results because of the practice of child marriage when young girls are forced into marriage when they are not fully mature. In rural Ethiopia, it is not uncommon for a girl to be abducted for marriage and have her first baby before the age of fifteen. The life of the mother and baby are put at high risk when fistula occurs, leaving the mother with perforated interior organs that prevent her from controlling her bladder.

The medical and social consequences caused by fistula for thousands of women are too ugly to describe. Women who suffer from fistula are often rejected by their husbands and shunned by their communities. Ethiopia and northern Nigeria have more fistula cases than any of the other countries in Africa. A special hospital in Addis Ababa is devoted to the surgical repair and care of girls and women who have suffered from fistula.

I visited Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's mountainous, bustling capital city of nearly 4 million people, again in 2004, 2007, 2011 and 2018. I was amazed each time at how much the city had grown. It is never warm or dry enough for me in Addis, which like most major cities in Ethiopia is nestled in the highlands. The average high temperature in Addis is around 60 F. Addis is located at an altitude of 7,900 feet, making it the highest capital city in Africa. The Ethiopian highlands stretch across the country and are the longest range of mountains in Africa. Ethiopia is

sometimes called the "Rooftop of Africa." I learned this is a country where you need high altitude balls to play tennis.

The highlands have fertile soil and ample rainfall, permitting in the past three harvests per year. The high fertility of the soil in the highlands is one reason that this region of Ethiopia is densely populated today, and farm size is consequently small. The Ethiopian government has attempted to decongest the highlands by forcefully resettling people to the lowlands, but these kinds of mass resettlement programs have not worked well. In the meantime, Ethiopia continues to lose valuable topsoil. One friend of mine was fond of saying that Ethiopia could not advance unless it would be able to increase the amount of its topsoil. I have always been stumped by what he said, but I do know it is difficult to build a higher standard of living in an agrarian country on the widespread decline in soil fertility.

While most of mountainous Ethiopia enjoys spring-like weather, it does also have some of the hottest places in the world. Its Danakil Depression in the far eastern part of the country, near Eritrea in Ethiopia's Afar Region, is reputed to have the highest year-around average temperature in the world. It is also one of the lowest places on Earth. It is where the northern end of the great East African Rift Valley is located. It has volcanoes and the underground clash of tectonic plates make it one of the geologic wonders of the world.

I last visited Addis in July 2018 with my Ethiopian wife and 20-year-old daughter. I did not get out of Addis, but I was able to devote time to visiting ancient churches and several museums. I was happy to see in one of the museums a replica of the remains of one of the oldest (over 3 million years old) hominids, baptized 'Lucy,' ever discovered. Lucy was found by an American paleoanthropologist, Donald Johnson, in 1974 in the Awash Valley in Eastern Ethiopia, near Djibouti and the Danakil Depression. I was also able to see many artifacts from Ethiopia's imperial periods, as well as gain much information about many of Ethiopia's ethnic groups spread over a country with a geographic size about twice that of the U.S. State of Texas.

I was amused when my wife and daughter were called 'diaspora' by their friends and Ethiopian family members. The use of this word in reference to them reminded me there were millions of Ethiopians living abroad and this sizeable 'diaspora' population remitted millions of U.S. dollars each year to their families in Ethiopia. It is estimated that the total annual amount of remittances sent to Ethiopia is greater than the money generated for the national government by exports and donor assistance funding.

Harnessing the financial power of these remittances and the 'diaspora' experiences could present a new avenue for aiding Ethiopia and other African countries which also have many of their people residing abroad. The 'diaspora' provides more than money. They also often provide their countries with the expertise needed for faster development. Many members of the 'diaspora' return home and invest in their homeland and start businesses they learned to operate while abroad. Also, many Africans attend schools of higher learning in Europe and the U.S. and come home to apply what they learned. Perhaps one of the best actions which donor agencies can do is to sponsor the studies of Africans to attend universities abroad.

In 2004, I had just landed in Addis Ababa and was waiting for the shuttle to take me from the airport to the Hilton Hotel. Waiting next to me was a young Ethiopian woman from Washington, DC. It was clear she was a member of Ethiopia's large U.S. diaspora group. She asked me what I was doing in Ethiopia I responded that I worked for a humanitarian assistance agency. My gentle response obviously struck an argumentative nerve in her and she unloaded on me a nasty heap of heated criticism in the most impolite manner.

She told me in no uncertain terms that Ethiopia did not need any external aid; therefore, I should leave Ethiopia as soon as possible. She loudly condemned all aid and people like me who worked for the agencies which provide aid. I tried to defend aid, but she would not listen to me. She firmly believed that no aid was the best aid, and Ethiopia is capable of progressing without using external assistance. She vehemently added that the U.S. should keep its aid money to help its own poor people. She continued haranguing me until we arrived at the hotel. I was relieved to be able to escape at the hotel from her scathing critique of aid.

Although this personal clash with one of Ethiopia's own occurred many years ago, I still reflect on her harsh tone and cutting words, especially the phrase, "no aid is the best." In recent years, I have begun to think that she may have been more right than wrong. Certainly, aid creates a dependency on the part of the host country and introduces recurrent costs which the country can ill afford. Maybe it is partly for this reason that little, if any, trace of the impact of most of the billions of U.S. dollars of aid given to Africa over the last half-century can be detected today.

During this last visit to Addis, I was asked by a friend, John Coyne, who had taught high school in Addis in the 1960s as a PCV to take photos of his old school. I hired a taxi and we finally found his old school had grown substantially over the years and it had evolved into a college. I was surprised to find tall skyscrapers next to the school, casting long shadows over what was once a small education institution. I was told that these tall buildings were built by the Chinese.

This statement reminded me that China was heavily involved with many projects in Ethiopia and had lent huge sums of money to the government of Ethiopia. Included in these projects is a critical rail line to Djibouti Port, giving Ethiopia a much-needed outlet to the seacoast. Ethiopia is the largest landlocked country in Africa. Also, the Chinese built and funded an inner city electric light-rail service in Addis, which is the only overhead rapid urban train in Sub-Saharan Africa. I also understand that many Ethiopians have been given scholarships to study in China. I read recently that more Africans are studying in China than any other country in the world. The high number of China-educated Africans will impact on Africa's future.

The growth in the number of people in Ethiopia always impresses me. I am always struck in Ethiopia and elsewhere in Africa by the youthful structure of the population. In this regard, some comparisons with the U.S. may be useful. The median age in Ethiopia is around nineteen years, whereas in the U.S., it is nearly thirty-eight years. In Ethiopia, about twenty-one percent of the population is urbanized, while in the U.S. about eighty-four percent of the population is urbanized. This statistic on urbanization leads me to believe that Ethiopia has one of the most rural based populations in Africa.

When I first went to Ethiopia in 1983, it had an estimated national population of nearly 38 million people. In 2018, about thirty-five years later, its population is over 108 million, making it the second most populous country after Nigeria in Sub-Saharan Africa. (Compared to the U.S. State of Texas' population of about 22 million.) This fast population growth rate and the youthful structure of the population of Ethiopia and other countries in Africa is indeed worrisome. I always ask myself how Africa will feed, clothe, shelter, educate, care for and employ so many people. And, the 'youth bulge' of Africa's population is of great concern. Africa does not need more poor and unemployed people, but current projections point to a situation where the world's poverty will be mainly concentrated in Africa in the future.

During my last visit to Ethiopia in 2018, I made a list of all the places I wanted to see in Ethiopia if I ever had the opportunity to do so. On this list is the Sol Omar Caves which is the largest cave system in Africa. This is one of many places in Ethiopia designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. UNESCO reports that it has designated more World Heritage Sites in Ethiopia than any other country in Sub-Saharan Africa. My dream is to be able one day to visit all these sites and see all the natural beauty and diversity that Ethiopia has to offer.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Gabon

I LANDED AT LIBREVILLE'S Lйon Mba International Airport at night in February 1975. I was taken by an U.S. Embassy driver to an apartment used for new arrivals and temporary duty personnel. I traveled to Gabon's capital city and its largest urban center from Lomй, Togo. I had already spent over four years in Togo and my map of Africa showed Gabon as not being too far away on the same West African Atlantic coast, near the Equator. The geographic proximity of Gabon to Togo made me think it would not be too much different than Togo. Consequently, there was no need to prepare for my assignment to Gabon. In retrospect, I could not have been more wrong in thinking that greater West Africa was one big homogenous whole.

Once I was in the apartment, I immediately put my sleep-deprived body into bed and fell into a deep slumber. I was rudely awakened at dawn by a loud clanging sound I had not heard before in Africa. I quickly arose and looked out the window of my two-story apartment to see what was making such a clamor. I was surprised to see a real garbage truck collecting trash from metal barrels that had been set neatly on the side of the well-paved street. I was further surprised to see white men in spiffy uniforms collecting the trash. I did not know then that this unusual sight was the first indication of how strong France's influence still held sway over its former colony, which had theoretically gained independence from France in 1960.

I was assigned to Gabon to facilitate the reentry of the Peace Corps after an absence of over seven years. I had heard the French were wary of any American presence in Gabon and had worked to have the Peace Corps expelled from the country in 1968. The U.S. Department of State was pleased with the re-invitation to the Peace Corps to return to Gabon. The outgoing U.S. Ambassador, the late John A. McKesson, to Gabon considered the negotiating of the return of the Peace Corps to Gabon as a real feather in his cap.

My views on this subject were different. I had mixed feelings about the reentry of the Peace Corps because Gabon was very expensive compared to any other country in Africa. Moreover, the reopening of the Peace Corps in Gabon came at a time when budget constraints were obliging the Peace Corps to reduce its presence in other African countries. The cost of supporting a PCV in Gabon was a multiple of what it cost to support a PCV in any other African country. It did not seem right to me that the Peace Corps was limiting its presence in other countries much poorer than Gabon, one of the wealthiest countries in Africa.

I concluded later that the Peace Corps was not needed in Gabon and the quality of the PCV experience in this country was inferior to what I had known in other African countries. I sent a detailed telegraphic message to my regional director in Washington, justifying my recommendation for terminating the Peace Corps program in Gabon. I received a one-line response to my lengthy message which simply but clearly said, "I agree, but I cannot fight Kissinger on this issue."

The reference to Kissinger told me that the Peace Corps was not going to tangle with the U.S. Secretary of State on this matter and, therefore, I should forge ahead with preparing for the arrival of the first group of thirty-four volunteers who had been assigned to Gabon to work in the areas of primary school construction and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in some of Gabon's secondary schools. Much of what I write in this chapter is based on the eighteen months I spent reluctantly in Gabon in 1975-76 pursing the reestablishment of the Peace Corps. I assume the Gabon of today is different than the Gabon I knew over forty years ago.

It appears that conditions for the Peace Corps in 2005 were not different than what I knew in 1975. In 2005, the Peace Corps program in Gabon was closed for reasons similar to those I cited in 1975. The 2005 closure of the program was motivated by its high cost. It was estimated that the cost of maintaining a PCV in Gabon was three times the average PCV cost in other countries. Also, the problem of finding host country counterparts for PCVs were cited. In 1975, most PCV counterparts were people from other countries that the Gabonese government had hired. It is ironic the reasons I gave in 1975 for closing the Peace Corps program were about the same given thirty years later for its closing.

The closing of the Peace Corps program in Gabon fifteen years ago pales against what has happened to Peace Corps operations in other countries. For example, the Peace Corps closed its long-standing programs in Niger (2011), Mali (2015) and Burkina Faso (2017) because of security concerns. This means the only country in the Sahel Region of Africa that still has a Peace Corps program is Senegal. Of course, in April 2020 the operations of all Peace Corps country programs were suspended and all PCVs returned to the U.S. because of concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic. It remains to be seen how the Peace Corps will recover from this unprecedented decision.

One of my overall impressions of Gabon at the time was the stranglehold France continued to have on it. France ran everything and all that it did not control was mostly in the hands of foreigners. Such blatant neocolonialism reminded me that most African countries had obtained on paper political independence, but they had not yet gained economic independence. Many African countries continued to be dependent on external funding and assistance. Aid dependency is a factor that should be examined for every African country. Of interest should be the annual per capita levels of donor funding.

My job obliged me to dress in a suit and tie and see the private advisor of Gabon's president once a week. This advisor was the president's nephew. He had an office in a wing of the luxurious presidential palace. Every week I gave him in French a summary oral report on how things were going with the reintroduction of the Peace Corps into Gabon. He only listened and never commented other than

to thank me for my visit. I admit that it was a real nuisance for me to make these protocol visits every week.

Even worse for me was the placement of my name on the president's list of diplomats who were invited to every state function. Normally, my position with the Peace Corps should not have required me to honor such invitations, but it would have been a serious faux-pas for me not to honor these frequent invitations. At the time, it seemed I was at the presidential palace for one reception or another almost every week. This was real drudgery for me and not what I considered a good use of my time.

I did get to meet the diminutive president at several of these events. He wore suits and ties that had been custom-made for him in Europe. He always wore dark glasses. Perhaps the most interesting part of his expensive debonair garb was the high platform shoes he wore. These shoes made him two to three inches taller than his actual height. He was very short and above all he did not want to be accused of being a pygmy. In this part of Africa, pygmies were looked down upon and occupied the lowest rung of the social pecking order. I once heard that the social status of pygmies was even lower than that of dogs.

The champagne flowed in every reception hosted by Gabonese officials. Large glasses were repeatedly filled with champagne. I heard later that Gabon has the highest per capita consumption of champagne in the world. I did notice that all the Gabonese I knew drank excessively. Once I invited a group of Gabonese to my house in Libreville and they would not leave until every drop of alcohol I possessed was consumed. This incident taught me to hide any stocks of alcoholic drinks I had before inviting again any Gabonese to my house.

Many years later, I was in a duty-free shop in the Abidjan airport and spotted a small sign saying they did not sell alcohol to Gabonese. I found this curious and asked a worker in the shop why this was so. I was told this prohibition against selling alcohol to Gabonese was because they would drink until they became drunk and disorderly. After several rowdy incidents with intoxicated Gabonese, airport authorities had decided to prohibit the sale in the airport of alcoholic beverages to them.

For the average Gabonese, a favorite alcoholic drink was mixing gin with sugared milk which came in a small tin can. It appeared for those on a low budget that cheap Algerian red wine was consumed in high quantities daily. In my three-person office, I had a young Gabonese man do janitorial work and run errands. He regularly showed up at work at 8:00 a.m. already drunk by the overconsumption of red wine.

Some days he did not show up for work and I should have fired him, but Gabon's labor laws make it very difficult, if not impossible, to terminate a Gabonese employee. Gabon's consumption of alcoholic beverages is notorious, but it is not the only country in Africa with a mass male-drinking problem. There are a number of parts of Africa where drinking by men of local or imported alcoholic drinks makes it impossible to get any work done in the afternoon or later.

In general, educated Gabonese can obtain funding from the government to study abroad. When they return to Gabon, they usually take a job with the government. Gabonese who have not completed their studies easily find jobs in the private sector because of the obligation to hire any Gabonese who asks for work. In this

regard, it may be said that Gabon has full employment. I once met a Gabonese man who had worked for over twenty different companies. Like many other Gabonese, he would work a while for one company and leave with the money he was paid to return to his home group in the forest. When his money was finished, and he wanted to work again, he would return to Libreville or the commercial capital of Gabon, Port-Gentil, and get another temporary job, whether he worked or not.

The other person in my small office was a very competent French woman, Jaqueline Wintenberger, who not only did her job but insisted that I speak and write French correctly. I thought my French was good enough, but she had other ideas and obliged me to repeat in correct French anytime I made a spoken error and to redraft multiple times any letters we had to write in French. I learned that the standards for French were higher in Gabon than I had previously known in other countries in Francophone Africa, especially as many Gabonese only spoke French and not any local language.

As far as I was concerned, my local French assistant deserved her high local salary, which was higher than what I was paid. Gabon may have been at that time the only country in Africa where local employee salaries were higher than those established in the American salary schedule that had been calculated in Washington. Local salaries were based on the high cost of living in Libreville, one of the highest living costs in the world. One reason for these high costs was that Gabon did not produce any food and all consumables had to be imported, including the clandestine import in unmarked planes of meat from Southern Rhodesia, for which trade had been prohibited under an international embargo.

Housing was hard to find and very expensive, if available. The house I was able to find had a monthly rent five times my previous rent in Lomй, Togo. Everything was much more expensive in Gabon. We hoped for things to get better with regards to food when an expansive new French supermarket, Mbolo, was opened, but it was rapidly sold out within hours of opening its doors as thousands of Gabonese crowded into this modern supermarket, partly to buy food and partly just for the novelty of the experience. I later heard that some Gabonese got sick because they consumed raw the meat they bought at this store. They thought if the meat was wrapped tightly in clear plastic film that is was safe to consume. Never before had they seen fresh meat for sale wrapped in such sanitary packaging.

The usual way to shop was to go to one of the open markets in Libreville. The vendors in these markets were generally Africans from Dahomey (Benin) or Togo. These people were called Daho-Togos. There was a large community of Daho-Togos in Gabon. Despite the difficulties of entering Gabon, they had flocked for decades to Gabon to do the work that Gabonese were unable or unwilling to do. It was rare to see a Gabonese do manual labor or hold any job for a longtime. The Daho-Togos were apt at doing marketing work and many other jobs. They were also well organized.

I once attended one of the monthly meetings of the Daho-Togo Association. The elderly head of this association was originally from Dahomey. He told me many other people from his country arrived during colonial times to help the French administer Gabon since there were few educated Gabonese available to do this

work. He said he was the first African to build a modern concrete block house in Libreville. He added this was when most Gabonese lived in scattered groups in the dense forest. Different from other African countries, most Gabonese never had villages and lived mostly from scavenging in the forest and hunting wild game. It was only during the French colonial period that Gabonese were gathered together in centers to facilitate the administrative tasks of the colonialists.

While I was in Gabon during the 1975-76 period, violent disputes arose between the Gabonese and Daho-Togos. Tensions between the two communities reached a boiling point, prompting the Gabonese government to order the mass expulsion of all the Daho-Togos. Mayhem ensued as thousands of Daho-Togos were rounded up and taken back to their home countries in chartered aircraft. This caused chaos for many people because they had mixed with Gabonese families and many of them were adults who had never been to Dahomey or Togo. The sudden deportation of this many people was decried far and wide.

The effects of the expulsion of the Daho-Togos were immediately felt by the Gabonese. Although, in general, most Gabonese were happy to see the departure of the Daho-Togos, they missed their labor and all the services they provided. The markets were closed because there was no longer anyone to occupy the vendor stalls. Silently, many of the expelled Daho-Togos found their way back to Gabon. Those who opposed them acquiesced to their return because they were able to do the jobs they did not do and much of the local economy depended on the services they provided. Maybe it was a case of not wanting to live with them, but also of not being able to live without them.

The high rainfall in Gabon and the thick tropical forest that covers most of the country prevented doing agricultural cultivation. It rains over 100 inches per year in Libreville and there is little let up in rainfall throughout the year. I was regularly wet and wore out several umbrellas. It was too hot to wear a raincoat. It was almost impossible to dry our clothes after washing them. At the time, I had a one-year-old child who required cloth diapers (this was before disposal diapers were available) and we could not get her diapers to dry. I needed a clothes dryer, but this item was not an allowable expense for the Peace Corps. I finally obtained a waiver to buy a dryer which caused a substantial increase in our already high monthly electric bill.

Next door to my house in Libreville lived one of the president's mistresses from Cфte d'Ivoire with her three children. They resided in a luxurious three-story house with all the latest features. Clothes and toys were in abundance. They had more money and things than they needed except one vital thing: food. There was always a shortage of food in Libreville and no amount of money could buy you enough food on the local markets.

They had plenty of champagne and caviar, but they did not have food the children could eat. The kids would come to my house to beg for food. They would arrive dressed in their ski outfits despite the hot and humid tropical weather. I would feed them whatever food I had in the house and they would most often talk about their latest trip to a ski resort in Switzerland. They said their father (the president) liked so much the hotel they last stayed in that he bought it. I would later learn that their father was one of the richest men in Africa and owned valuable properties all over Europe.

The children he was able to conceive with his Ivorian mistress may have encouraged him to say one night on public TV that the Gabonese should try to have babies with the thousands of foreigners who were working in Gabon. I knew then that Gabonese authorities were concerned about Gabon's low population growth rate because Gabon had one of the smallest national populations in Africa. Back then, Gabon, which is about the size of the U.S. State of Colorado, had about 600,000 people. Today, almost forty-four years later it has around 2 million while the U.S. State of Colorado has 4.5 million. Gabon's dense forest has caused most of its people to be crowded into urban areas and this has contributed to it having one of the lowest population densities and highest urbanization rates in Africa.

I am still mystified as to why so many Gabonese women were sterile. Some said it was due to the hydrochloric acid contained in the raw cassava that was a major food staple. Others said it was due to the high level of venereal diseases caused by rampant sexual promiscuity. I did note that about every Gabonese woman I met with multiple children had had each child with a different man.

When they discovered evidence near Gabon's uranium mine, at a site called Oklo, of the occurrence 2 billion years ago of a natural nuclear fission reaction, rumors started flying around that attributed the high sterilization rate among Gabonese women to high levels of natural radioactivity. This unique discovery did result in the gathering of world scientists to observe and discuss how it was possible for a nuclear reaction to occur in nature. Nowhere else on Earth had any evidence ever been observed of the occurrence of such a natural nuclear event.

My first contingent of PCVs arrived from three months of training in neighboring Cameroon. The TEFL volunteers were easy to assign to their secondary school sites in the capital city and upcountry because the schools had housing for teachers. The school construction PCVs presented additional challenges because they were based in Libreville and the government did not have housing for them as previously agreed.

I complained to the Minister of Education, Martin Bongo, the president's brother, about the lack of housing for the construction PCVs. He acted quickly to provide housing for as many PCVs as possible and for those he could not find housing, he booked them rooms at the luxurious five-star hotel, Okume Palace, in Libreville. Those PCVs who got rooms in the hotel were delighted, but they could not afford to eat at the hotel or take advantage of any of the hotel's services. Incidentally, the name, 'Okume,' is the local word for the valuable indigenous hardwood tree which is harvested for export.

The day came when the site for the building of the first three-room school had been identified, but we had no idea about who would pay for all the building materials and labor needed to construct the school. I raised this issue with the minister, and he asked me how much money was needed. At the time, the cost in CFA francs was about the equivalent of $30,000. When I told him the amount, he promptly wrote a check to me for the full amount.

He went on to ask me if I planned to import 'Dodges.' He saw that I did not understand what he meant, so he explained that when the Peace Corps was in Gabon years ago, Dodge Power Wagons were imported for the school construction program. The ability of these vehicles to navigate Gabon's impenetrable forest and muddy backroads impressed the local population and provided the basis for many

legends about the previous Peace Corps program. He went on to say that these vehicles were so strong that the word, "dodge," had entered the local language to indicate a powerful vehicle or person.

I replied that we would need vehicles to transport the PCVs and construction materials. He said he would arrange with the local Toyota dealer to provide all the vehicles I needed. He also said I should be pleased with the new four-wheel drive Land Cruiser that Toyota had just introduced. I thanked him for all his help, but I left our meeting perplexed about his way of doing business. And, I especially did not know what to do with the big personal check he had written out to me.

This check caused me to make one of my rare phone calls to my bosses in Washington, DC. To make a long story short, I was required to open a special account in a local bank in the name of the Peace Corps and deposit this check into it. Nobody had ever heard of a local host country official writing a check like this before. This was a new experience for the Peace Corps, which was willing to bend its rules so as not to rock diplomatic relations.

A few days later I went to the Toyota dealer and told them what the minister had said. I was immediately shown the vehicles they had for me. All they wanted to know was the name they should use to register the vehicles. I told them I would have to check with the embassy on this question and return. Within days, the PCVs and I were driving new Toyota vehicles. The minister had given us a letter that allowed us to use our U.S. drivers' licenses and stated we were doing the business of the state and, thus, covered by the government's insurance.

My new Toyota Land Cruiser car was a marvel to me, as were the four Land Cruiser pickups provided the PCVs. Up until that time, I had mostly used robust but not too comfortable Land Rovers. One big difference between these two types of vehicles was that the new Land Cruiser came with air-conditioning while the Land Rover did not. The main challenge for me with having such a nice new fourwheeled vehicle was that I really had nowhere to go outside of Libreville. There were few passable roads to go anywhere upcountry.

The only passable road was the main national highway to the northern part of the country. Therefore, my first driving trip out of the capital city was to visit TEFL PCVs in northern Gabon. I almost did not complete my overland trip north because of numerous potholes and deep muddy stretches. At one point, the tires of my Land Cruiser became trapped in a muddy rut and I had no choice but to drive recklessly over several miles before I got out of a scary road situation. I made it to my destination and back to Libreville, but I learned then that even the best upcountry roads in Gabon were dangerous and not worth the stress and risks. I did find that having air-conditioning made this very trying trip less tiring.

All my other trips upcountry to visit PCVs were done by small plane. I would send a telegram to the PCVs to let them know when I was scheduled to arrive, and they would arrange for a car to pick me up. I would lodge with the volunteer, sometime sleep on a cot, couch or on the floor. I was always impressed with how well most of the PCVs were doing.

On my many flying trips upcountry, I got a good look at the dense tropical forest cover below me. I once asked the French pilot what would happen if we had technical problems and fell into the forest. He said nothing would happen because we would either die on impact or die slowly thereafter because it would

not be possible for anyone to reach our location, if known, in the forest. I replied that I hoped we did not crash. The pilot responded with a wry smile on his face, "I have not crashed yet."

On one of my visits upcountry, I joined a group of Gabonese who were going into the surrounding forest to forage. I asked to join them and was readily accepted into the group of about a dozen people. They wanted to honor me by allowing me to lead the way. I agreed, but I could not see where to go. They said just follow the path in front of me. I told them I could not see any path. My statement gave them a good laugh and one man stepped forward to lead the way along the 'path.'

We went deep into the dark and dank forest interior. I did not like what I felt. For me, this was an evil place. It was darker inside the forest since few sun rays found their way through the multilayered canopy of foliage. I could not wait to return to the sunlight in the opening we had left somewhere behind. All along the way they were busy chatting as they collected natural items from the trees, bushes and the mushy floor of the damp forest floor. I was trying to observe closely everything they did, but I only wanted to return to where we had begun our meanderings into the gloomy forest. After several hours of wandering around inside the musty green jungle, we suddenly stepped out into the same sunny place where we had started. I was surprised by our quick exit from the forest, but I was internally joyous of being freed from the verdant belly of this small section of Gabon's massive rain forest.

In general, all the PCVs did well their jobs and caused no problems. There were a couple of cases that caused me some added stress. One PCV was a strict vegetarian, but he could not find in Gabon the foods he needed to consume to stay well nourished. He was constantly sick because he was anemic. He refused to eat any meat and his health deteriorated to the extent that he had to be early terminated and evacuated back to the U.S.

Another PCV in Libreville presented me with a much different problem. She had received a request from the president to give him English lessons. We received approval from the late Ambassador Andrew Steigman for her to do these lessons. All was going well, until one day she paraded into my office to tell me she had some exciting news. She happily blurted out that the president had given her a new car. She seemed oblivious to the fact that she, as a PCV, could not accept such a gift. I instructed her to give the car back, but I was never sure she did.

There were hopes that the 400-mile Trans-Gabon Railway being built across Gabon would open the interior of the country and allow for the more efficient transport of minerals from upcountry mines. The construction of this railway through the dense forest was something of an engineering miracle. One of the weirdest sights I had ever seen was hundreds of Pakistanis toiling away in the middle of the jungle to build this ambitious rail line. This swarm of foreign workers was joined by other nationalities; most notable were men from Burkina Faso.

One of the biggest constraints to building this railroad was the lack of local labor. Another obstacle to its construction was obtaining enough funding for its completion. Its construction took longer than expected and the massive amount of funding expended (over 4 billion U.S. dollars) almost bankrupted the country. The

main construction of this ambitious project took almost four years (1974-78) to complete, but the rail line did not reach its destination, Franceville, until 1987. I hope all this work and expense was well worth it.

When I lived in Libreville, the entire city was like one big construction site because the government was sparing no expense in hosting in 1977 the next summit of the OAU (later to become the AU, African Union). Heavy rainfall caused construction work to go much slower than planned. Gabon's president was determined to pull all stops to show off to his African counterparts by making this the most spectacular OAU summit ever held. He did not care how many millions of dollars he spent to make this summit a memorable one.

Omar Bongo was the second president of Gabon, and he ruled with the support of the French for forty-two years until his death in 2009. In 1973, to the surprise of everyone he converted to Islam during a visit to Libya and changed his name from Albert-Bernard Bongo to Omar Bongo. Some say he did this to encourage the Arab members of the Organization of Petroleum Countries (OPEC) to give him some of their petrodollars. He was replaced by his son, Ali Bongo, who is president until this day. As the father of over thirty children with his wives and other women, there should be no shortage of future presidential candidates.

The repeated election of the former president and his son make a mockery of the multiparty democracy system which has existed in Gabon for years. Gabon is another example of an African country that holds elections regularly and spends a lot of money on democratic processes, but the outcome is nearly the same as it would have been without a democracy. This sad situation gives credence to the assertion that democracy in Africa is a sham.

I once visited a PCV living and working on the island of Lambarйnй which is located in the middle of the huge, 750-mile long Ogoowй River. This is where the famous hospital of Dr. Albert Schweizer is located. This famous Alsatian missionary founded this hospital in 1913 and it still functions today as a state institution. I visited the tomb of Dr. Schweizer and paid my solemn respects. I mumbled over his grave some words which expressed something about how my imperfect knowledge of Gabon and its people had given me a better understanding of his much-criticized paternalistic treatment of Africans.

Despite all its quirks, Gabon may be one of the most prosperous and stable countries in Africa. Its relatively small population combined with a rich bounty of natural resources (oil, manganese, uranium, iron, timber, gold and diamonds) and French interests, give it some advantages that many other African countries do not have. It has one of the highest per capita income levels in Africa and is among the top ranked African countries on the UN's Human Development Index. It also has one of the smallest military forces in Africa and, thus, spends a relatively modest amount for national security. Leaving politics aside, maybe all Gabonese should be more thankful for their enviable development status.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Gambia

MY TRAVEL OVERLAND IN 1998 from Dakar to Ziguinchor, Senegal, in West Africa was rather straightforward. I was on contract with the USAID to design an assistance project for the Casamance Region of Senegal. I hired a four-wheel drive vehicle with a driver who suggested we take the shortest road to Ziguinchor. I replied, "The shorter the better."

I did not know then that I was agreeing to cross the smallest country, The Gambia, in mainland Africa. (Gambia is about twice the size of the U.S. State of Delaware.) My experienced driver explained that we could drive through Gambia or we could take a longer route by driving around it. He said by going through Gambia we could make our trip several hours shorter because the road went straight to Ziguinchor. If we drove around Gambia, it would add over 200 miles to our trip.

I still ask myself what in the world this small sliver of a country is doing embedded entirely inside Senegal. Perhaps Gambia is an odd chapter of a colonial legacy that froze in place the artificial borders of many African countries. Gambia hugs the banks of the big river for which it is named. It has a fifty-mile wide coastline with the Atlantic Ocean, but most of the country averages about thirty miles in width.

This mighty river and its banks form the outline of this tiny elongated country. This 700-mile long river starts in the Fouta Djallon highlands in Guinea and runs through part of Senegal before entering Gambia. About 350 miles of this river flows west inside Gambia before exiting into the Atlantic Ocean. About 175 miles of the section of this majestic river which lies inside Gambia is navigable inland from its maritime outlet. It was the navigability of this river and its wide mouth on the Atlantic Ocean which made it an attractive stopping place for seafaring colonialists in centuries past.

We made good time as we followed south the Trans-Gambia road to the Gambian border. The border crossing formalities on both the Senegal and Gambia sides were surprisingly quick. We drove a short distance to the Farafenni toll booth to arrange for our passage on the river ferry. We parked in a long line of cars and trucks which were waiting for the ferry to take them across the river to the road that led back into a southern strip of Senegal. Although we were over 100 miles from the Atlantic coast, the river was over an estimated 1,000 feet wide at this point and flowed swiftly west toward Gambia's capital city, Banjul.

I was told prior to my departure from Dakar that Banjul, with a population of around 30,000, was the smallest capital city in Africa. In 1998, when I was passing

through Gambia, it had a population of about 1 million. Today, it is reported to have well over 2 million people. Therefore, its population has doubled in twenty years. This fast growth in its population gives Gambia one of the highest population densities in Africa. Most of Gambia's population is crowded into urban areas, giving it also one of the highest urbanization rates in Africa.

It was steaming hot in our car and there was no shade in the parking area. We waited in our sweltering car much longer than expected for the ferry to arrive from the southern side of the river. I was thirsty and desperate to find shelter in a shady spot until the much-delayed ferry arrived. I got out of the car and walked around in search of shade, but there was no shade. All the trees had been cleared from the fenced-in open space reserved for the parking of vehicles waiting for the ferry.

The only shade I could find was beneath a big flatbed truck. I crawled under the bed of the truck and found some shade that protected me from the unrelenting hot rays of the burning sun on a cloudless day. I found other people camped under the truck. Obviously, they had the same idea I had. They were surprised to see a middle-aged white man join them under an old truck. The man nearest me extended a welcome and offered me part of a cardboard sheet upon which he was lying. He could see that I was thirsty and yelled to a passing woman something in one of the local languages, Mandinka or Wolof.

The perspiring woman was selling potable water in sealed clear plastic wrap containers. He bought two flimsy water containers, one for himself and one for me. He showed me how to bite off one corner of the pliable container and suck the water into my mouth. It was obvious to me that he was trying to strike up a friendship with the strange white man in his midst. I was thinking that maybe he had never in his life had the opportunity to talk to a white man. I had had many experiences like this over my many years in Africa. It was sometimes a real nuisance to be judged by the color of my skin.

His actions prompted me to reflect on my long experience in Africa of being often the only white man in a sea of various shades of black people. I don't know why, but I have always been attracted to people with dark skins. Some people have said that I was like this because I had grown up with black people, but that was not the case. I went to high school in rural Kansas where there was not a single black student. The first black person I ever knew well was when I was attending Wichita State University. It was also at that time, 1965-67, that I met my first African, an international student attending the same university. At that time, there were few Africans in the U.S. Now, Africans are everywhere. Sometimes, I regret that Africa lacks the racial diversity I prefer, but its ethnic diversity is mind-blowing.

The man lying next to me under the truck said something like, "I guess you came to see the Kinta Kunte stuff in Juffure and now you are going to the touristic Casamance."

There was no doubt that he thought the only reason a white man would be in this place was because he was a tourist. I vaguely knew what he meant by his reference to Juffure, which was located many miles downstream from Farafenni. Juffure had been made famous by the 1976 book, *Roots*, by the African American author, Alex Haley, who had traced his ancestry to a Kunta Kinte. He told a story

about Kunta Kinte being captured by African slave hunters near Juffure a century and a half ago. Kunta was shipped to the U.S. and sold as a plantation slave. Since the publication of that book, and the making of a movie and TV series based on it, Juffure had become a place visited by thousands of U.S. tourists.

I politely told the man, "No, I am not a tourist. I am going to Casamance for work."

He replied, "Oh. You speak French well. We liked the *Roots* story because it reminded everyone of the evil of slavery and all the bad it did to our countries many years ago. I probably have relatives in the U.S. and don't even know it."

His reply made me think that his ancestors had belonged to a former slave caste. I wondered what it meant to him today to be a member of a caste that descended from former slaves. Such castes were found in many places in Africa. For example, blacksmiths and jewelers often belong to a caste. Usually, marriage outside this caste is not allowed. I have heard Africans jokingly greet one another as their former slaves and then teasingly argue over who was really descended from former slaves. Sometimes, what is referred to as a 'joking-relationship,' is cultivated by this kind if joviality.

I wanted to pass the time by continuing our conversation, but I did not know how to respond to his comment about slavery. I simply said, "I agree. Slavery was and is bad and a terrible blemish on world history. It should be abolished forever in all its forms."

I really wanted to avoid this big and troubling subject because, as with so many things in Africa, I did not have a good answer as to why slavery occurred and how it impacted Africa's history and development. I did know that in this part of Africa over 3 million Africans were captured during the 1700 to 1900 period, herded together like animals, shipped to the New World in risky subhuman conditions and sold to the highest bidder. The same could also be said of other parts of Africa. No words can be crafted to express the horror of such an inhuman practice, and certainly nothing can justify it.

Although the atrocities committed in the name of slavery and during Africa's long colonial period merit concern and study, I prefer to focus on the time since Africans became masters of their own destinies when their countries became independent over a half-century ago. I always ask myself what the leaders of Africa's independent countries have done over this relatively long period since independence to right past wrongs and create the conditions for improving the lives of their citizens.

I explained to the man lying beside me about my long experience in Africa and what I was going to Casamance to do. He told me he was a Senegalese Wolof driver on his way to pick up a load of mangoes in Casamance. He also said, "I'm glad you are not a tourist. Gambia has too many tourists."

I agreed with this statement because I had previously read that thousands of Scandinavian tourists fled their cold winters every year to bask in the sun at the many resorts constructed to cater to them near Banjul. (I note that when I first came to Africa, Banjul was named Bathurst, its old colonial name.) I had also read that tourism was Gambia's biggest income earner and it was a country devoid of any natural resources, although there are recent reports that oil deposits exist off its short shoreline.

As we both lay under the rusty old truck, with beads of sweat forming on our brows, the temperatures rose, making the stifling heat under the truck even more unbearable, I asked, "Why is your country divided by the existence of such a small sliver of a country."

My comment provoked him to go on at length how his country, Senegal, had tried multiple times to adsorb within its boundaries the tiny Gambia riverine strip. He spoke of when Senegal had the upper hand and both countries agreed to create a single sovereign territory called Senegambia. He lamented the fact that this unified territory lasted only seven years (1982-89). He went on to say that he would probably get into trouble if he said anymore.

I interpreted his final comment to mean he was fearful that an agent of Gambia's repressive regime would overhear our conversation. In general, everyone was afraid of Gambia's president who led a military coup in 1994 to seize power and became an oppressive, corrupt dictator of doubtful sanity. I was happy to read later that this cruel man, Yahya Jammeh, was forced from power and fled Gambia in 2017 to ultimately take refuge in Equatorial Guinea. Before he left Gambia, he raided the national treasury of millions of U.S. dollars and hauled away as much money and goods as he could. He was not interested in stealing any of the local currency, dalasi, that carried his image.

Just a few years before this notorious criminal fled Gambia, he was received like royalty in the U.S. White House. It has always stumped me as to why such bloody African dictators are welcomed into the White House. As far as I am concerned, African leaders with blood on their hands and wealth illegally gained should not be honored by being received by a U.S. president in the White House.

My new shade-sharing friend beneath the truck did say, "Gambia is here today because it was a British colony and it did not gain independence until 1965. Otherwise, it would logically be a part of Senegal."

His statement prompted me to recall a proposal to form one country out of Gambia, Casamance and neighboring Guinea-Bissau. Such a country would bring together closely related Mandinka families into a more viable geographic unit. The name of this proposed new country was to be something like Gamboa. The creation of this new country made good sense to me, but I knew it would never happen.

Our long miserable delay in waiting for the ferry led my friend to lament that a bridge had not been built as planned over this section of the river. He said, "If the governments of Gambia and Senegal had followed through with the plan they had made years ago, a bridge would have been already built and we would already be in Ziguinchor."

As soon as he completed his phrase, the loud clamor of vehicle horns was heard. This could only mean the ferry was at long last coming. I quickly said goodbye and ran back to our car. My driver jockeyed aggressively to make sure we got onto the arriving ferry. The ferry docked, and we drove onto it and parked in a place indicated by a ferry worker. We thought we would be in Ziguinchor within the hour. However, this was not to be. The ferry had motor problems about halfway across the river and we drifted down the river.

The ferry motor was fixed, but the ferry struggled to return upriver so it could dock at the designated place. The ferry finally docked in the right place to take the road to Casamance. We zoomed away from the river and Gambia as quickly as

we could. It was dark by the time we arrived in Ziguinchor. Our trip from Senegal had taken six hours longer than we had planned. This experience contributed to our decision to take the longer route through Tambacounda, Senegal, when we returned to Dakar by driving around Gambia.

It may be wishful thinking on my part, but maybe the bridge my shade-sharing friend spoke about in 1998 could become a reality by the time I finish writing this lengthy book. In any event, it will take a good bridge before I travel across Gambia again. The absence of any bridge is an example of Africa's infrastructure deficit. One colleague once told me that if much of the infrastructure constructed years ago in Africa had been maintained, Africa would be much better off today. Maybe one thing Africa needs is to rehabilitate old construction works instead of funding new construction projects.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Ghana

THE FIRST TIME I came in contact with Ghana was when I was in neighboring Togo. When I arrived in Africa in 1970, I was assigned as a PCV to a village in Togo which was ten miles from the border with Ghana. I worked in several rural communities that straddled the artificial border with Ghana. In fact, one of the villages was legally in Ghana. Sometimes, I was on the 'Ghana-side' without knowing it.

At that time, everyone in the village was going to and from Ghana. One got the sense then that Ghana was a kind of superpower which was a source of wealth and well-being. Indeed, most Togolese I worked with then viewed Ghana as a model to follow if true economic independence were to be achieved. For them, Ghana was forging the path that would lead to the development and prosperity for the entire subregion of West Africa.

The way they talked optimistically about their promising future gave me the impression that I was working myself out of a job. They believed in about five years they would not need any more external assistance because their country would have graduated into the ranks of developed nations. As naïve as I was at the time, I joined them in their optimistic outlook.

Currently, in 2020, I am still waiting for the best performing low-income countries in Africa to be weaned off external assistance. Many of the lowest ranked African countries have been ranked near the bottom of this list since the creation of this index in 1990. Some of these countries have been held back by protracted conflicts while others have not known any widespread violent conflict but have been devastated by national mismanagement and corrupt leadership.

In my work in primary school construction, I noticed many of my skilled technicians had learned their trade in Ghana, or what they still called 'Gold Coast.' My masons (bricklayer or simply, 'bigler,' in the local Ewe language) and carpenters (car-pin-ter in Ewe) had all worked for years in Ghana following its independence from the United Kingdom (UK) in 1957. They told me much about Ghana and how it went from boom to bust, from an African star on the world stage to a shameful example of what happens when a country's affairs are mismanaged under misguided leadership.

It was painful for them to explain to me how they had placed all their hopes on the success of Ghana, but they were obliged to leave with tens of thousands of other foreigners when its first president was ousted in a military coup in 1966, and the consequent steep economic decline experienced by Ghana under a succession of national leaders after that glorious period. Ghana had been once for them a 'black

star' they worshipped and somehow it had fallen from the heavens and left a huge void in their lives. They did not understand how a new country with so much promise could have failed.

I agreed and sympathized with them. The Gold Coast gained independence relatively early in 1957 because the colonial power (UK) was confident that it had the qualified people, strong institutions and financial resources to manage well its own affairs. It had highly educated civil servants and a large bank account generated by the export of cocoa when international prices for this cash crop were at a record high. It also had a long history of various kingdoms which were ably ruled before and after the colonists arrived.

The new country of Ghana had also the advantage of adding a sizeable and rich chunk of territory to its national patrimony. Following World War I, Germany lost its model colony Togoland, and it was divided into two parts. Its western one-third was administered by the UK and its eastern part by France. In 1956, the year before Ghana gained independence, a popular referendum was held to determine the status of British Togoland. Most of the people voted to join Ghana. Therefore, it was attached to Ghana and became mostly known as Ghana's Volta Region.

The outcome of this plebiscite did not surprise many at the time. Everybody was excited about the possibility of joining economically booming and independent Ghana. The leaders of Ghana also helped sway the vote in their favor by providing free transport to the polling places and drinks to all the voters willing to cast ballots in favor of joining Ghana. There was some opposition to being annexed by Ghana. Some people did not want to see the Ewe people divided by a border. Others argued that the natural border was the Volta River, and this should not be changed.

In any event, the addition of British Togo added over 500,000 people to Ghana's 1957 population of about 6 million, and 13,000 square miles to its existing 79,000 square miles. This addition gave Ghana control over the Volta River, thus enabling it to complete construction in 1966 of a huge hydroelectric dam which created the world's largest manmade lake, Akosombo. It also generated cheap and plentiful electricity.

I would often look from Togo into Ghana and every dwelling had at least one electric lightbulb lit. This nighttime brightness stood in stark contrast with the darkness on the Togo side where household kerosene lamps and candles dimly lit the night. This experience and others over the years often reminded me that it is difficult to achieve progress if you do not have inexpensive and reliable electricity. Many countries in Africa do not have anywhere to build a hydro-electric dam. In most African countries, electricity is not widely available and when available it is prohibitively expensive and unreliable. In this regard, recent satellite images confirm that Africa is indeed a dark continent at night.

The building of the Volta Dam and many other grandiose projects helped drain the Ghanaian treasury. At the same time, the political leadership increasingly alienated Ghana's strong traditional chieftaincy system and members of the educated elites. Tensions grew, and Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, was removed by a military coup in 1966 while he was on an official visit outside Ghana.

From that point on, Ghana had a succession of coups and entered a downward economic spiral, accompanied by social upheaval, for nearly fifteen years. When I visited the capital, Accra, in 1972, the city was falling apart. Stores were empty, buildings had not been maintained, the city streets were full of potholes and Ghana's currency, Cedi, was almost worthless. I was able to cope well because I had brought with me CFA francs from Togo. There was a severe shortage of foreign exchange and everyone wanted CFA francs. It was sad to see how the once mighty and proud Ghana had been brought to its knees.

I attributed Ghana's economic and political nosedive as the result of the vigorous application of radical ideas and polices enacted in an increasing authoritarian manner by its first president. In many ways, imported noble ideas did not work well in practice in Ghana. Again, it appeared that foreign ideas brought home to Ghana by a man who had lived for years outside the country collided with the nature and structure of the country.

I was reminded of the oft-quoted best-selling book, *L'Afrique Noire est mal Partie* (*False Start in Africa*)," published in 1962. This book by the renowned French agronomist, Renй Dumont, is available in French and English. His book supports the premise that newly independent Africa started on the wrong track because its first leaders did not come from the class of Africans who were best suited to lead their new countries in the initial years of independence. He claimed that once a country begins following a false path, it is almost impossible to shift to a better path which leads to higher levels of development and prosperity for its people. There is probably no better example of this convincing premise than Ghana. There is no substitute for competent and honest leadership which puts the interests of the nation and its people first.

Before reading Dumont's famous book, I had read long before coming to Africa John Gunther's 1955 book, *Inside Africa*. The hefty book (over 900 pages) gives some good insights into pre-independent Africa. Gunther traveled all over the continent and talked with Africans in all stations of life. In some ways this old book is still relevant and thus worthy of careful read. However, it does not provide an accurate forecast of what Africa would become. The title of the first chapter is "Dark Continent Becomes Light." This chapter title has been proven in the sixty-five years since the publication of this book to be misleading.

I also traveled by bus 125 miles northwest to see Kumasi, capital of the formidable traditional Ashanti Kingdom. I wanted to see for myself the kingdom which had won battles in the 1800s against the British. At its height, the Ashanti Kingdom was recognized in the nineteenth century as the strongest and best organized indigenous kingdom in SSA. The impressive status of several ethnic states in Ghana was a factor that helped it gain independence before any other colony in SSA.

In 1972, I observed that Kumasi suffered from the same instability, decline and decay that was occurring in the capital city of Accra, located on the Atlantic Coast. I am not sure which of these two main cities in Ghana is the most populated today. Each city has around 2 million people, which is probably double their population when I first visited them in 1972.

One incident occurred in Kumasi in 1972 which can give the reader an idea of the conditions which prevailed in Ghana at the time. I wanted to eat my usual on-

the-road food, consisting of a can of sardines spread on bread. I found the scarce roadside bread sellers eager to take my CFA francs. I had difficulty finding a can of sardines. Stores and market stalls were almost denuded of any goods. After spreading the news far and wide that I wanted to buy a can of sardines, a woman showed up with an old can of sardines. I negotiated a price with her. I handed her some CFA francs and she handed me the can.

I found a place to sit down and quickly opened the can, so I could spread the sardines on my loaf of bread. As soon as I opened the can, I was yelled at by all the people around me. They were upset that I would dare open the can. I could not understand their reaction. The woman who sold me the can shouted at me. She loudly explained that they used the can of sardines as a medium of exchange and it was not for eating. I felt ashamed because I had just consumed one of the rare cans they used to trade for something else. For them, the can of sardines was not for consumption but for trading. She said if she had known I was going to open the can and eat the sardines, she would not have sold it to me.

Despite the penury of many essential goods, one item seemed to be in plentiful supply. Bottled beer was readily available, and I was impressed by the capacity of local men to drink great volumes of beer. I wondered how so much beer was flowing almost nonstop when everything else was in short supply. I guessed it was a matter of demand and priorities. I expressed my puzzlement on this subject to a local man who was enjoying drinking a bottle of beer. He did not hesitate to reply, "Beer is a strategic material and if its supply were to fail, there would be chaos."

I thought Ghana had enough chaos and instability and, thus, it did not need anything which would further complicate its dreadful condition in the early 1970s. It was agonizing for me to see a country with such great potential failing all expectations. I found Ghanaians were also concerned and upset by how low their country had fallen. In 1979, a small group of young military men decided they needed to act to put a stop to Ghana's decline.

This idealistic group boldly dared to attempt another coup and rid the country of a misguided and corrupt leadership. To the surprise of many, their coup was successful, but their brutal follow-up to seizing power was even more shocking. They rounded up all those who they believed had committed crimes against the well-being of Ghana and had them executed. Among the hundreds killed were three former military presidents (Generals Akuffo, Acheampong and Addo). There was a large international outcry over these extrajudicial killings, but the coup leaders were adamant about the necessity of these drastic acts in order to rebuild their country.

The coup leaders were intent on reversing the decline of their country and waking up its people to a new reality. They declared there would be no more corruption. To make their point, they took the extreme step of destroying the historic central market of Makola in Accra. Perhaps more than anything else this unbelievable action served to wake up the population and change the course of Ghana's history.

I have always wondered what it would take to change deeply ingrained habits and human nature to the extent that the course of history would be moved onto a track more beneficial for the future of all. I have read that historically bloody revolutions and deathly pandemics could change the course of history, but I was

not aware of a relatively small group of men being able to create a new destiny for their country.

These men found they could not change the path their country was on without external financial assistance. They received the outside help they needed and turned power over to duly elected officials. While I lament all the killings and the destruction of Makola Market, I believe if this group of soldiers and its overzealous leader, Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, had not gone to such extremes, Ghana would not have succeeded in digging itself out of a deep hole and regaining its place among high-performing African countries.

I was most impressed by the firm establishment of multiparty democracy in Ghana and the high qualities of its well-educated presidential candidates. Ghana has now had a series of presidential elections which serve as a model for other African countries. I do not believe there is any other country in Africa where the opposition candidate can win by a thin margin and the country moves forward peacefully. I would not have thought during my visit to Ghana in 1972 that the Ghana of today would be a highly respected democratic model for all countries.

I do not mean to convey that today's Ghana does not face important challenges. Ghana has come a long way in the last forty years, but still faces many problems. This country of nearly 30 million people is about the size of the U.S. State of Oregon, which has a population of 3.5 million, a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of over $225 billion and an annual per capita GDP of over $50,000. In a telling contrast, Ghana has an annual GDP of about $47 billion and a per capita GDP of about $1,800.

While this comparison with the U.S.' twenty-sixth wealthiest state conveys the wide gap between Ghana and one of the world's most developed economies, it needs to be stated that Ghana is currently one of Africa's best economic performers. Ghana is among the top ten countries in SSA in terms of its GDP and per capita GDP. Yet, Ghana remains dependent on external funding and has a high national debt which it struggles to service. It is difficult to get ahead when its debt burden is too high, and the revenue and tax base is lower than needed to sustain financially the government and its work.

I visited Ghana many times over the 1972-2019 period and had the privilege to see firsthand its ups and downs. Although I feel at home almost anywhere in Africa, Ghana has always been a special home base for me. The last time I was in Accra I was in one of the many taxis I took around this bustling big city. The taxi's radio was playing loudly old-time country western music from the U.S. There appeared to be one local radio station devoted to this genre of music. I asked the driver why such old-fashioned U.S. music is being played. He replied, "We Ghanaians love this kind of American music because the songs tell nice stories."

I thought about what he had said and concluded that his reply fit well with the well-honed African tradition of storytelling and oral history. The traditional art of telling stories is part and parcel of many African cultures. Traditional leaders are required to be articulate speakers who can weave cleverly proverbs and stories into their public speaking. If you were not a gifted speaker, you could not be a leader.

In my usual fashion, I struck up a conversation with the taxi driver. I asked him if he knew when Ghana gained independence in 1957 it was at the same economic level as South Korea, the country where his small car had been

manufactured. I went on to say that Ghana should be manufacturing cars and not importing cars from South Korea. His reply was, "No, I did not know that. I agree. It is sad, but Ghana fell backward for many years and is still trying to catch up."

His reply made me think about the condition of other African countries which had failed to take advantage of their comparative advantages in the international market when profitable opportunities existed for them. When the 'Asian Tigers' were developing and eagerly pursuing market opportunities, Africa was mired in poor governance and instability which impeded getting its own house in order. I always thought that too many African countries had lost too much time and to catch up they had to run very fast. In some cases, I believed they needed to run forward as fast as they could just to stay in the same place.

I was in a hurry to get to one of my favorite local 'chop' places to eat some fufu with a good peanut sauce. I told the driver about my love for West African food and he said, "I never met a white man who liked our food and knew so much about us."

I told him, "Thanks. Everything I know I learned by living for three years in a rural Ewe village just inside Togo on the border with the Volta Region."

As soon as I said this, he fidgeted and acted in a way that told me in ways I cannot describe he was an Ewe. I said a few words in Ewe and he almost ran off the road. Obviously, he could not believe that a white man was speaking to him in his maternal language. After he settled down, he said his parents were from the Volta Region and they spoke Ewe at home. He went on to say he had been born and raised in Accra and he had never visited his parents' village.

He did say he was proud of his Ewe heritage. He claimed Ewes had done a lot to make Ghana the strong country it is today despite of their relatively low numbers in local society. He pointed out that Accra's international airport was named after an Ewe general who had played an important role in Ghana's history. More than anything else, he expressed his pride over the role played by the young flight lieutenant, Jerry Rawlings, who led the application of the draconian measures that put Ghana back on a more promising track. He pointed out that this half-caste man was half Ewe. His mother was pure Ewe, but his father was from Scotland. In several countries in Africa, half-castes form something of an elite group which plays an outsize role in business and politics.

His comments prompted me to think about the growing split between urban and rural Africans. It used to be that if you did not know rural village life, you could not possibly know how most Africans live and work. With rapid urbanization, this is all changing now. I can find today Africans born and raised in the city who know nothing about rural African life. I read where Ghana is now almost sixty percent urbanized. When I visited for the first time in 1972, Ghana was about thirty percent urbanized. Rapid urbanization in Africa is a pressing development topic, especially as it entails the rapid growth of huge urban slums where a vast number of poor people live. In the future, there will be more poor Africans living in sprawling city slums than in rural areas.

It does appear that Ghana may be at the start of some sort of a demographic transition because it is reported by the World Bank that the total fertility rate (TFR) of Ghanaian women between the ages of fifteen and forty-nine is slowly declining from an average of about seven children per woman of childbearing age in 1970 to

near four children today. This decline in the TFR is reflected in the increase for the same age group of women in the calculation of the contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR), which increased in Ghana from about five percent in 1988 to over thirty percent today. The TFR and CFR are key demographic statistics to consider when examining the development prospects of any country. For comparison purposes, I note that the TFR in the U.S. is 1.9 and its CPR is nearly seventy percent.

The unmet demand among women of this same age group for modern contraceptives is also a factor that deserves attention. There are a number of social and cultural barriers to meeting this demand. The elimination of these barriers may not result in the satisfaction of this unmet demand. It will take millions of dollars and advanced management capacity to enable the delivery of modern contraceptives on a regular basis to women who want them. There is also the challenge of providing poor women with modern contraceptives they can afford.

Perhaps one thing that injects additional vitality into Ghanaian life is the large number of Ghanaians who live abroad and share their money, ideas and experiences with their home country. It has been estimated that over 3 million (more than ten percent of Ghana's national population) live abroad and send over 3 billion dollars home every year. This amount of money is many times the annual funds received by the Government of Ghana from foreign aid agencies and it is a sizeable portion of Ghana's GDP.

I learned about the importance of Ghana's diaspora after I stood in line for hours at a Barclay's Bank in Accra to send an urgent Western Union money order to my daughter in the U.S. I waited patiently for a couple of hours and was happy when I arrived at the teller's window. I asked for the form to send money and I was told by the teller, "Oh, I'm sorry. We only receive money. We don't send money. Nobody sends money. We are far too busy receiving money."

I was flabbergasted by her words. Obviously, there were so many Ghanaians sending money from overseas to their family members in Ghana they could not serve the rare foreigner who wanted to use Western Union to send money outside of Ghana. This experience told me more than any article that remittances from Ghanaians living abroad are pouring into the country. I assumed that a large percentage of Ghanaian households were making ends meet by receiving regularly remittances from their relatives living in Europe, the U.S. or other foreign countries.

Ghana has a multitude of ethnic groups and languages. A dozen local languages of more than 200 have been designated for support by the government, but English is the only official language. I often thought if many African countries had not inherited a colonial language it would be much more difficult for Africans to communicate with one another or receive an education that reflected international standards. The use of English and an imported education system from a former colonial power is awkward for a country that wishes to be fully independent, but realistically there is no other good choice.

There is one thing I recall about Sundays. When I was taking a Sunday walk in a residential area of Accra, I searched for the usually abundant street stalls with women selling fresh fruits. I looked everywhere, but I could not find in operation any stall. I asked a passerby why the women were not selling fruits and vegetables like the usually do. He laughed and looked at me with his head cocked to one

side and said, “Don’t you know this is a Christian country and everyone is in church.”

I thanked him for this reminder. Indeed, most of the people in Accra are fervent Christians and practice their faith by going to the church of their choice. I had observed widely people reading their Bibles, quoting Bible verses to one another and singing in unison popular church hymns. I cannot recall seeing anywhere else in Africa such a widespread and outward display of Christian devotion. Again, I thought if religious fervor could be harnessed in Africa for development purposes, the continent would achieve rapid progress.

Obviously, the power of the Christian religion was seeded deeply in Ghana by hundreds of zealous foreign missionaries in colonial times. From what is observable today, these missionaries succeeded beyond their biggest dreams. Not only did the missionaries spread the Christian religion, they also built schools and health clinics. Perhaps the work of the missionaries represents another form of colonization, but Africa owes much of the way it is today to the persistent work of missionaries over many decades prior to gaining independence from colonial powers. I have often thought that the lifetime and multigenerational dedication of missionaries is the kind of development approach that was needed. If you want to be sure to make lasting positive changes in Africa, a serious marriage with the continent should be considered.

In one of my last visits to Accra in 2017, I sat for a long time in a modern, upscale shopping mall that South Africa’s private sector had helped develop and watched a myriad of people pass in front of me. I tried to compare what I was seeing with what I saw in Accra forty-five years ago, and what I had experienced in other African countries. One of my most prominent impressions was that the people I observed and spoke with were well educated. I concluded that once a country reaches a point where most of its people have benefited from a good quality primary school education, it is in a takeoff position. I asked myself what country in the world could develop without most of its people being educated.

My experiences have shown me that it is much easier and effective to work with Africans who are functionally literate. When rural Africans can read and write, knowledge is more readily transferable. Working through an interpreter is awkward and less effective. One of the better approaches to increasing the adoption of improved practices is to have high-performing Africans communicate the benefits of adopting a new practice to their peers. In this day and age, Africans should be leading across the continent the fight against negative practices and all assistance efforts designed to improve the quality of life and make Africa more prosperous.

Another memory from that day was the dress of the people. In bygone days, I always enjoyed seeing the colorful clothing worn by Ghanaians. Where were all the batik designs, kente cloth and adinkra prints? What I saw that day was almost all the people dressed in western clothes, mostly blue jeans and t-shirts. I even saw a rarity in West Africa: people wearing shorts. When I arrived in Africa in 1970, wearing shorts in public was a real no-no. I did not like what I saw, but I accepted this was how Accra looked today. Maybe I was seeing the future and I did not know it. I concluded that maybe what I was seeing that day in Accra was better than any future many African countries could possibly ever have.

On that day, I also noticed a number of African American tourist groups. These groups reminded me that Ghana had built up its tourist industry. Among the many sites in Ghana visited by tourists are the string of colonial forts along its 300-mile Atlantic coastline. A study of the fascinating history of these forts illuminates what life was like in Ghana during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A spotlight is particularly placed on the main slave trading function of these forts. Millions of slaves were shipped in unimaginable inhuman conditions from these forts to the plantations of the New World. Many African Americans have found their original roots in Ghana. I certainly have seen several African Americans who look just like people I have seen in Ghana.

More than its rich gold resources (second in Africa behind South Africa), cocoa and diamond exports, and its recently discovered offshore oil reserves, Ghana's future may lie in narrowing the digital divide in Africa. Ghana was one of the first countries in Africa to pioneer with cellphones and the use of Internet. In general, much of Africa has experienced fast growth in the use of cellphones and the Internet, but many places in Africa still lag behind the rest of the world in terms of the widespread use of Internet, especially reliable high-speed Internet. My children tell me that one reason they cannot return to Africa from the U.S. is the lack of high-speed Internet. Maybe the way Ghana is moving ahead with the development of Internet services, it can be an African country they will be glad to visit.

One thing I never quite figured out about Ghana is why it changed its name from the Gold Coast to Ghana. Historically, the Gold Coast was named after the vast quantities of gold found within its boundaries. Gold is still one of Ghana's major exports, along with cocoa and, more recently, oil from its offshore fields.

Ghana was named after the great, ancient African Soninkй kingdom that existed in the sixth to thirteenth centuries, 300 miles northwest of present-day Ghana on the edge of the Sahara Desert. The Soninkй called their kingdom Wagadu, but the Arabs called it 'Ghana.' Maybe the name choice of Ghana is confusing, but I believe the intentions of its pre-independence leaders were noble. In any event, I wish the Ghana of today lasts as long and prospers as much as the ancient kingdom for which it is named. Ghana has proven that stability and good governance make an important positive difference in the development trajectory of a country.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Guinea

I DID NOT KNOW what to expect when I went to Guinea with my family for the first time in November 1983. As we were required to 'fly American' across the Atlantic Ocean, we took the Pan American flight from New York to Dakar. From there, we hopped on an Air Afrique flight to Guinea's capital city, Conakry, arriving at night. I later thought it was good we arrived at night because what we would see more clearly during the day would be worse than what we saw at night.

The Conakry Airport was dark and forbidding. There was no lighting on the runway. I tripped on weeds growing through the cracks in the old tarmac as we headed toward the dilapidated colonial terminal. Once we entered the terminal we could barely see. There was only one small lightbulb lit and it was hanging from a high ceiling rafter that was full of dust and cobwebs. There were poorly dressed agents telling us in gruff voices what to do and where to go.

We arrived at one point inside the dreary terminal where a filthy blanket was hung over the passageway. The agent in charge commanded us to pass by the blanket one by one. I protested that it was not right to separate family members. I was harshly told, "In our country, we say what is right and what is not right."

I happily found my family safe on the other side of the nasty curtain that blocked my view of what lay before me. On the other side, people were scrambling to-and-fro in search of their suitcases. Some people had flashlights. I stuck with them as we struggled through the crowd to find our baggage. We were coming to Guinea on a two-year assignment, so we had a number of suitcases. I was afraid they would be stolen before we found them. Every time I located one of our suitcases, I would take it and deposit it with my family. We were fortunate. All our suitcases arrived in good condition.

We were eager to exit the front of the terminal with our baggage as we expected an embassy driver and vehicle to be waiting for us. It was quite a chore to exit with all our luggage and three small children who were already sick and weak from the arduous long trip. We were encouraged by the warm welcome given to us by the driver and his helper. They carried our luggage and forged a way through the crowd to two embassy vehicles with diplomatic plates. Another driver was waiting for us next to the parked vehicles.

Our suitcases were loaded into one vehicle and we were whisked off through the darkness to our new home in a city that was jammed with people and indescribable vehicles. I was surprised to find at our house a Lebanese man, Zicki Zaidan, who had come to welcome us and tell us to call upon him if we needed anything. He said everybody in Conakry knew him, so he was easy to find. He

showed us around the house and explained he was the owner and explained how tough it was to build anything in Guinea.

I was later to learn that this young man belonged to a third generation of Lebanese who resided in an old but prominent three-story house near the central marketplace in downtown Conakry. I did not know then that he would become a good friend and source of information. I never figured out how his family had become wealthy, but I am sure the $3,000 per month (payable one year in advance) rent on our poorly constructed three-bedroom house helped him and his family get by, especially as my house rent was a small part of their businesses. I suspected they were involved in the illicit trade of diamonds or some other crooked business.

Before our Lebanese landlord left, I asked him why there were so many people out this time of night. He replied there was not enough housing in Conakry, so people had to sleep in shifts. I also asked him about all the strange vehicles I saw in the streets. He reminded me that it was very difficult to import vehicles into Guinea, so they were obliged to mix parts of the old cars that had been brought into Guinea previously by the French, Russians and Eastern Europeans. He told me he could not say any more, but I should remember that Guinea was, until recently, a Marxist country and all private sector activity had been prohibited.

All we wanted to do that first night in Conakry was to sleep and rest up from our long and tiring trip from the U.S. It was hot and humid, and a loud generator was running behind our house so we could have the electricity needed to run our wall unit air conditioners. I later learned there was one guy permanently assigned to our house to maintain the generator and the water tanks needed so we would have running water in our house. The embassy had furnished well our house, including the extra freezers we would need to keep meat and other edibles we would have to import regularly from Europe.

I could not sleep that first night despite my physical exhaustion. Jetlag and the words of my landlord about Guinea being a Marxist country kept me awake. I knew that Guinea had gained independence early in 1958 from France because its autocratic leader had dared be the exceptional French colony to say “no” to France’s offer of independence to all its African colonies. With this offer, France made it clear that any colony opting for independence would no longer receive any aid from France. Guinea was the only francophone colony to say “no.” Furthermore, the political leader of Guinea, Ahmed Sйkou Tourй, said loud and clear in a speech in Conakry in the presence of France’s Prime Minister, General Charles De Gaulle, something like the following: “It is better to be poor and free, than to live in opulence and be a slave.”

This arrogance of this blatant and exceptional “no” was costly to Guinea because France not only ended almost seventy years of colonization in Guinea, it withdrew from Guinea with a vengeance. Many French people saw Guinea’s “no” as an insult to their country and prime minister. When the French left, they took everything. All French citizens living in Guinea left. The French stripped offices and businesses of anything of value, including the telephones and lightbulbs. France was determined to teach Guinea a lesson for its ungrateful “no.”

With the departure of French and of everything of value, Guinea almost came to a standstill. Of course, Guineans were not to be without any response to the way France had abandoned their country, so they broke all ties with France and turned

to the Soviets and their allies for assistance. In the years following its abrupt independence, Guinea became a Marxist bastion of West Africa and the welcome sign was put out for all those with communistic beliefs. Many people from all parts of Africa and the world rallied around Guinea's president who was determined to demonstrate that through the light of Marxism-Leninism, Guinea would overcome any adversity and become one of the most developed countries in Africa. Guinea's first president was fond of saying during the initial years of his twenty-six years in office, "Guinea prefers poverty in liberty to riches in slavery."

My first day in Conakry was an eye-opener. My family and I were given a tour of the town. It took us a long time to drive down the congested single street that followed the narrow peninsula to its end. Our embassy and the main government buildings were located at the end of this skinny strip of land that was surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean on both sides. We could see the ocean on either side of us as we slowly moved forward through the heavy traffic made of assorted old mongrel vehicles. I would later discover I would have to take this same route every day to work and going one-way could take over an hour in the dry season and more time in the heavy downpours of the rainy season.

It rained 150 inches during the annual six-month rainy season (May to September), making it so that I thought I needed a boat more than a car to go to work. The heavy rainfall made everything more difficult. The lack of building and road maintenance was exacerbated by rivers of rain. Sanitation and drainage became impossible. The city crumbled at a faster rate during the rainy season.

We did have a nice cabin cruiser boat that had been provided to the embassy by the Department of State for evacuation purposes. We never used this boat for an evacuation by sea, but we did enjoy its use for outings to the attractive beaches on small Loos islands which were a short distance offshore from Conakry. The mainland shores were rocky and, thus, not suitable for beach outings. We also used this boat to go deep sea fishing in Guinea's rich maritime waters.

My children were all eyes. They could not believe the poor condition of the buildings and asked me if the people thought buildings can take care of themselves. There had not been any new buildings or maintenance done in Conakry since the French left. The only new structures were the People's Palace and Prime Minister's office building. Both of these buildings had been built by North Koreans. The city was basically living off the 'fat' inherited from the French colonial period. Everything looked to be in a ruinous state and the city was littered with rubbish. We could easily see why Americans who have lived in Conakry referred to the city as 'Gonna-cry."

I learned to adapt to the long drive every workday to my office in the embassy. This was not difficult because a driver would pick me up and I could read in the car. Most of the time I was mesmerized by the chaotic world I could see from my car window and the lively narrative provided by my driver about everything in our path. We passed every day under an overpass that was named the 'Castro Bridge.' My driver explained to me that the president would hang the dead bodies of political opponents off this bridge as a reminder to all of what would happen if you opposed his brutal regime.

There were signs with government slogans posted along the streets. Near the Castro Bridge were a couple of big signs I contemplated every day. The first sign

before going under the bridge proclaimed in huge letters, "Development = Culture." The second sign stated, "Culture = Development." Until this day, I contemplate what was the intended meaning of these two signs.

We also passed by the infamous Camp Boiro on our way into town. I was amazed that such a notorious center of torture and imprisonment would be situated in a populated area near the national hospital. We would pass every day by this camp and I would wince when I thought of what was going on in such a frightening place. I recalled that a famous Guinean, Diallo Telli, who was the first leader of the OAU, and a candidate to be Secretary General of the United Nations, had been tortured and put cruelly to death in this dreaded camp.

According to all accounts, he was killed in 1977 by subjecting him to what was called the 'diet noire' (black diet). In other words, he was locked in his cell, not given food or water and ultimately starved to death. I could never believe that the OAU never said a word about this ignominious end to its highly respected leader. I have always regarded this silence on the part of the OAU to be an ugly stain on its reputation and credibility. I continue to ask myself, "How could the OAU not say anything about the death of its leader and one of Africa's leading lights?"

Years later, I met one of Diallo Telli's children, Rougui, and she described to me how she had escaped from Guinea by hiding as a child in a sack of potatoes transported by truck across the country into Senegal. Her story reminded me that an estimated ten to twenty percent of Guinea's population had fled in the 1970s to other countries. It was said they had voted with their feet.

Her story reminded me of a book circulating clandestinely in Conakry after it was published in 1985. This book, *La Vŭritй du Ministre*, (*The Truth of the Minister*) by Alpha Abdoulaye Diallo was about his ten years in prison in Conakry and his perilous escape on foot through the bush to the northern neighboring country of Guinea-Bissau, about 450 miles from Conakry. The title of his book derives from the repeated torturing he endured to extract from him a true confession. Each time he would tell the truth, but his torturers said, "We don't want your truth. We want the minister's truth."

They wanted him to confess according to the orders they had received from their minister. They would record satisfactory confessions which met the approval of their minister. Almost every night you could hear on national radio the recordings of these kinds of forced confessions. The iron-fisted dictatorial president would use these confessions to demonstrate to the people there was a "complot permanent" (a permanent conspiracy) afoot to overthrow him.

Guineans became fearful of being accused of being part of the 'complot permanent' and, thus, became artful in saying anything that would show they were faithfully obedient to the president, no matter what he said or did. I often thought this caused Guineans to forget how to say the truth. Lying had become so prevalent that nobody could trust anyone. Everyone was afraid of the regime's secret spies and it was not unusual for these spies to be family members.

My main job was to reintroduce USAID into Guinea and support the host government's new policy to move from state-owned farms to privately-owned and –operated smallholder farms. It was important diplomatically for U.S. interests to have USAID re-invited to Guinea after it and the Peace Corps had been kicked out of the country following the famous 1966 Pan American flight incident in Accra,

Ghana. Somehow, Guinean authorities blamed the U.S. when the Ghanaian government detained the Addis Ababa-bound Guinean OAU delegation on this flight because Pan American was a U.S. airline.

Not only were USAID and the Peace Corps expelled from Guinea, the U.S. Ambassador in Conakry was put under house arrest and later a huge crowd of Guineans ransacked the ambassador's residence. It took many years to repair the relationship between the U.S. and Guinea. This re-invitation of USAID in 1983 was thus a big deal for both countries.

The main thing that encouraged both countries to renew their relationship was the huge bauxite (aluminum ore) reserves in Guinea. It is estimated that Guinea has up to fifty percent of the world's bauxite. Since 1973, American aluminum companies had invested heavily in the exploitation of a major bauxite mine near Kamsar, Guinea (about 150 miles north of Conakry). This American-run enclave mine and its adjoining town and port operated like a state within a state. It functioned entirely independent from the Guinean government, except to pay its share of the profits. The income gained from this mine, the largest bauxite mine in the world, by the Guinean government largely supported its oppressive regime.

A ship from Wilmington, North Carolina, would arrive at this mine's seaport about once a month with needed supplies, including food and other household items. Many of the U.S. products leaked into the open market. I was always on the lookout to buy American ketchup and laundry detergent on the streets of Conakry. The director of mining operations was usually an American and the last director I knew was a former U.S. Ambassador, the late Rush Walker Taylor, Jr., who I worked with in Togo. I understand this mine has expanded and continues to operate around the clock. I cannot use today a roll of aluminum without thinking of this mine and what it means to Guinea.

My initial two-year assignment to Guinea was provoked by a front-page newspaper article in Washington, DC. This article was entitled, "Black Hole at USAID: Guinea Ag I Project." My initial job was to make sure that anything negative about this USAID-funded project never appeared again in the U.S. press and to respond to the project's bad audit report. This construction project had a bad audit because of its excessive cost and the misuse of building materials. The project represented a breakthrough because it supported Guinea's new policy decision to do private agriculture, but it was fraught with practical implementation problems.

Explaining this project and its complicated audit findings defies description. Two U.S. firms were hired to implement this project and fears of using materials originating from the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe obliged these firms to order all their supplies from the U.S. One of a number of problems concerned a gross mistake that had been made in the quantity of form lumber ordered. Way too much of these wood slats had been ordered. So much, that it leaked into the local economy. I observed local people happily using this lumber as firewood.

It was not an easy task to clean up this project and get it back on track. One drawback was going to court with one of the U.S. contractors. I was sworn to secrecy about USAID settling outside the court the contractor's complaint. In any event, by some miracle agricultural training schools were opened in the upcountry towns of Kindia and Faranah (of course, the town where the president was born).

I note that Faranah, deep inside Guinea's bending geographical crescent, is also the source of the Niger River which makes a long northward curve around West Africa before flowing south to empty into the Atlantic Ocean near Lagos, Nigeria.

Traveling the 350 miles overland to Faranah from Conakry required a specially equipped all-terrain vehicle. The obligation to procure U.S.-made vehicles made matters worse for us. We used Jeep Wagoneers. We had to have racks welded on top to carry two big barrels of gasoline. We also took as many jerry cans full of gasoline as we could carry. Taking all this fuel was necessary because there were not any filling stations upcountry. Of course, we were taking a lot of risks by carrying so much fuel.

Our drivers also had to be trained on how to open and bleed the vehicle's fuel lines. We could not go more than 100 miles without draining the fuel lines because the fuel bought in Guinea usually contained a high percentage of water. Fuel sellers in Conakry increased their profits by adding water to the fuel they sold.

This project aimed to begin the exploitation of Guinea's huge agricultural potential. During French colonial times, Guinea was France's wealthiest African colony. It produced food surpluses and exported sizeable quantities of cash crops. This agricultural abundance ended with independence and the restriction of production to state-owned farms. Small-scale cultivators would be punished if caught farming their own crops. Guinea became a net importer of foodstuffs instead of a net exporter of food and cash crops.

I was once so amazed to see two farmers cultivating a field on one of my upcountry trips that I had the driver stop the car so I could talk to them. Their first reaction was to run away and hide. I called to them, saying they had nothing to fear from me. I asked then what they were planting. They said they were cultivating a little bit of the corn they needed to survive. We ended up having an enjoyable conversation. Before I got into my car, one of them said, "When will independence end? We suffered under colonialism, but we are suffering even more under independence."

I did not have the heart to tell them that 'independence' was a permanent condition. I simply told them, "Don't be discouraged, things will get better."

I understood their logic. Truly, Guineans had suffered severely since it had become independent and Guinea had not been able to realize its full potential. I would often start reports by using the following words, "Guinea is gorged with natural resources and has the potential to be one of the wealthiest countries in Africa, but it has been limited by excessive corruption and mismanagement." I wonder how today, over thirty years later, if there were now a way to make this statement more positive.

Besides having much agricultural potential, Guinea's Forest Region is one of West Africa's last tropical forest reserves. Unfortunately, these reserves are being deforested rapidly and represent one of the most threatened forests in the world. I have a friend who served as a PCV in Guinea's Forest Region in the mid-1960s. He returned to the region thirty years later and was shocked to see only sparse grass where there had been once a thick tropical forest. In a span of thirty years, the huge forest he knew was only a fraction of what it once was.

In addition to bauxite, Guinea has always possessed rich deposits of other minerals, high hydroelectric potential and a wealth of maritime and fishing

resources. It has diamonds, gold, iron and maybe offshore oil deposits. Its rich fishing waters created by a wide coastal sea shelf are well known. Its Fouta Djallon Highlands are regarded as the Water Tower of West Africa because key rivers—Gambia, Niger and Senegal—originate in this elevated area.

Despite all these natural riches, most Guineans remain classified among the poorest people on the continent. I have always asked myself how Guinea and other African countries can be gorged with natural resources and so much potential, yet their populations remain poor. Resolving this fundamental incongruity has been a high priority for decades, but Africa has never progressed as much as expected. For me, it is up to Africans to address this large gap between what is possible and their actual situation.

Nothing worked well in Conakry while I was there in the 1983-87 period. It was tough to get used to the financial predicament in which Guinea found itself. Its local currency, the Syli (elephant in the local Sousou language) was practically worthless and if I ever used it, I would have to fill a flight bag to purchase a small item. My pile of Sylis was usually never counted. The height of a stack of ragged bills was judged by the vendor to be enough or not.

I learned there were private taxis and restaurants called 'clandos.' Since any private sector activity was prohibited, taxis, restaurants and other businesses operated clandestinely. There were no signs or anything to indicate their presence. They usually operated only at night. You had to know how to find them. If anybody threatened to tell the authorities about them, they would bribe them to keep quiet.

A highlight of this parallel economy was the gross difference between the exchange rate in the streets for foreign exchange and the official rate, which was a fraction of the street rate. We were discouraged by the embassy to exchange money at the street rate. We were required to cash a check with the embassy cashier for a specified amount every month for Sylis at the low official rate.

This requirement did not prevent departing American employees from selling all they owned, including bedsheets, clothes and towels, and use the Sylis they received to buy gold, which was plentiful in Guinea and a store of wealth for many Guineans. I do not know why, but crude gold and attractive gold jewelry were sold at the same price per gram.

Maybe it was a rumor, but it was said at the time that the weight of gold bracelets and necklaces on departing official Americans was sometimes so heavy they could barely lift their arms or necks. I lost thousands of dollars by accepting an extension of my assignment until a time when this twisted financial situation no longer existed. I wrongly hoped that Guinea would experience an economic boom under the new national leadership that took over in 1984.

The prohibition against private sector activity made is so nothing was available on the local market. We were obliged to order all the food, including fruits and vegetables, from Europe. Sourcing food from Europe was expensive, but we had no choice. At the time, I recall using this system to buy tomatoes at about one dollar apiece. We all looked forward to the weekly arrival of the Belgian air carrier, SABENA, the only international airline serving Guinea at the time. It was this carrier that brought us from Europe all the items we had ordered. We made a joke back then that SABENA stood for "Such a Bad Experience Never Again."

We also relied on the diplomatic pouch and our consumable allowance to receive many key survival items. One problem with using the pouch was that our orders were frequently misdirected to another 'Guinea.' There is the country of Guinea-Bissau just to the north of Guinea Conakry. There is also the other West African country of Equatorial Guinea. In addition, on the other side of the world, there is the country of Papua New Guinea. I note that "Guinea" was the word used hundreds of years ago by explorers and historians to refer to Africa.

I expected when the Grand Syli, Guinea's first president, Ahmed Sйkou Tourй (AST), for twenty-six years, died suddenly in March 1984 that Guinea would finally be able to start realizing its promising potential. In hindsight, many Guineans believed there were several unusual events that indicated something significant was about to happen. First there was an unprecedented earthquake in northwest Guinea that killed 300 people, injured 1,500 more and destroyed about 5,000 houses. Not long after this earthquake, there was a lunar eclipse. Many Guineans believed these were precursor events to the death of the Grand Syli.

Others said half-seriously that it was his visit to Abidjan, Ivory Coast, that caused him to have a heart attack. It was said that when the Ivory Coast gained independence in 1960, he made a bet with his friend, Fйlix Houphouлt-Boigny, the President of the Ivory Coast, that his country would pursue a socialistic course and move quickly ahead of the Ivory Coast, which adopted a capitalistic system.

Over twenty years after they made this bet, the Grand Syli visited Abidjan, the capital city of the Ivory Coast, and was shocked to see how developed the city had become. At the time of independence, Guinea was ahead of the Ivory Coast, but the shiny new skyscrapers of Abidjan made Conakry look like a dump. It was said the shock of seeing how advanced Abidjan had become was when he began to have heart problems.

There was much confusion over the Grand Syli's demise. It is known that he had a severe heart attack and was evacuated in a Saudi Arabian plane to a hospital in Cleveland, Ohio, in the U.S., where he died on an operating table. An U.S. Department of State employee, Nancy Morgan, was one of the people on the plane to Cleveland.

The news of AST's death was slow to leak out. When people first heard that he had died they could not believe it. They were scared and stayed in their houses. They thought that maybe this was another of his 'complot permanent' ruses intended to throw them off balance. They knew if he were still alive and anyone expressed happiness over his death, they would be detained, tortured and maybe made to disappear.

It took some time before Guineans accepted that the Grand Syli had truly died. When they were sure he was dead, there was dancing in the streets and widespread joyous celebrating. People quickly chiseled away the large number of frescos of the Grand Syli which had been mounted at every turn in Conakry. The same treatment was given to anything related to his political party. The many volumes of his written works were piled up and set afire. The popular euphoria I observed reminded me of the scene in *The Wizard of Oz* where there was much joyous celebrating when the wicked witch was confirmed dead.

The burning of all the Grand Syli's books made me wonder what young people would study at school. I had heard the main course in all school grades, including

the national university, was to study his books. Somebody told me the quality of education was abysmal. University classes were taught by Eastern Europeans through interpreters. Many students would graduate from the university unable to write a short letter in French.

Hearing this and related things made me wonder how a generation of young people who had known no other national leader and his policies was equipped to contribute to building a new Guinea. I expressed my thinking to some colleagues. They told me to stop thinking like this. They believed any generation which had grown up under such a maniacal president, who had spoiled his country as he pursued his own egotistical agenda, was lost.

By maintaining his political party (PDG – Democratic Party of Guinea) as the only party, the Grand Syli and his cronies were able to exercise strong control over the population. A core part of this control was a food rationing system. To obtain food from state-owned neighborhood stores, you had to have your monthly ration card. Everybody received a ration card from the precinct leaders of the party. Even I received a ration card, which I gave to my driver. If the party wanted to punish anyone, they would not be issued a ration card.

The pyramid organization of the political party enabled the Grand Syli to assemble thousands of people in Conakry on short notice. He frequently would send an order though the party network for all the people to come to the huge public place in front of the People's Palace within a couple of hours. I once attended one of his lengthy extemporaneous speeches.

Everyone who was there to hear the Grand Syli speak had to stand and pay attention. There were men with whips to ensure that all were attentive to what their great leader was saying. The Grand Syli could speak for hours. His speeches were dubbed 'discours fleuve' (river of words). Seeing and hearing one of his speeches was more than enough for me.

I could see that the Grand Syli did have some charisma. He lived in and maintained his offices in the old French governor's colonial palace. He practiced an open-door policy and encouraged people of all walks of life to come and see him. One incident in front of his office displeased and frightened him.

Market women in Conakry were furious over the government's prohibition of the private sector. They protested in front of his office and gave him the ultimate cultural insult by lowering their dresses and exposing their bare butts in his direction. People thought this extreme action on the part of hundreds of market women would lead to their arrest and torture. But this time nothing happened. This made the people believe that the Grand Syli had met his match and, thus, would back off from some of his more draconian controls placed on the private sector.

During this time in Guinea, something like an Orwellian 'big brother' system was followed. I could not leave our embassy on work matters unless I was in the company of a host government official. My two Guinean caretakers became good friends. It was a pleasurable learning experience to travel about town with them.

One of them was a young man working at the Ministry of Cooperation. We became close enough that he asked me to help him go to the U.S. Years later (1998) on a separate six-week job in Conakry, I was told the Minister of Finance wanted to see me at his house. I could not fathom why the minister wanted to see me. To

my surprise, the minister, Ibrahima Kassory Fofana, was the same man who twelve years earlier had been one of my caretakers. He lived in a huge house with all the amenities. It was good to see him doing so well, but I wondered if any of his apparent wealth had been obtained by engaging in corrupt activities.

His house was located near the U.S. Ambassador's residence. The ambassador had been informed of my visit to the Minister of Finance's house and, consequently, he summoned me to his residence. I dutifully went to his house and explained to him why I had visited the Minister of Finance. I discovered in this meeting that the ambassador, Tibor Nagy, was a Department of State friend whom I had known previously when he was the Deputy Chief of Mission in Togo. We had a great reunion and conversation.

I learned many years later that my Minister of Finance friend asked for asylum in the U.S. where he undertook the course of university studies he had discussed with me in 1986. I now understand that he has returned to Guinea and was named Prime Minister. He is one of many examples of young African men I once knew who eventually occupied important positions in their home countries. These examples make me happy that I was on good terms with them when they were young.

My other Guinean caretaker, Bangoura, drove an old Mercedes Benz. We enjoyed long conversations. He had a patent government-approved answer to my many queries. I told him that Guineans were poor people, so how could they afford to buy a Mercedes? His response was that poor people should buy a Mercedes because it lasts a long time. He added that this was why the only car dealership in Guinea was Mercedes Benz.

I told him that Guinea was one of the rare countries in the world that did not have a bottling plant. His reply was, "So, who needs a bottling plant?"

I thought not having a bottling plant was a genuine sign of the low development status of a country. I had the same thought about countries without a railroad. Guinea had railroads to evacuate bauxite to the port. I knew for sure that the Russians had built a railroad from their bauxite mine to the port in Conakry. But it did not have any freight or passenger rail lines.

My Mercedes-loving handler said a few things which are embedded in my memory. When I expressed my disappointment about the lack of building or road maintenance for many years, he had ready for me one of his pat answers, "You need to fall back a long way in order to make a big leap forward."

I told him I knew other countries where if conditions were as bad as those in Guinea, the people would revolt. He looked at me and almost laughed when he said, "One important thing you need to know about us Guineans. That thing is we know how to submit ourselves to authority."

I have thought about what he said many times over the years and concluded he may have had a point. Certainly, my experience with African village chiefs supported what he said. A chief could make a decision that made no sense at all, but he was obeyed, and it was considered impolite to criticize anything the chief did or said. I sometimes thought the heads of countries acted in many ways like a village chief who is above criticism and occupies his position for life.

We went together to a government office to obtain a letter I needed to request formally assistance for which there had already been bilateral verbal agreement.

This was my first time to visit civil servants in their office. Everything I saw in their office were leftovers from colonial times. Desk and chairs were in short supply and in poor condition. There were no paper or any typewriters to write a letter. Trash was piled up in one corner of the office. They did not have any printed letterhead.

To obtain the letter I needed, I had to go to a printer to get the letterhead format made, type the letter myself and return to their office with my pen for them to sign it. When I returned to the office for the signature, I could not restrain myself in expressing my negative views about the poor state of their work environment. To my surprise, they laughed when I made my negative remarks. One of them said, "Yes, we cannot work much, but why work? We pretend to work, and the government pretends to pay us."

Later I thought about what had been said. The more I thought the more profound I found their words to be. If civil servants were paid at all, they were paid in worthless local currency (sylis), but they stayed on the job to continue being eligible to receive their monthly ration card. They knew that to receive this card they had to be on good behavior and politically correct.

I note that during this time in Guinea you had to be wary of being spied upon by the Russians or their Eastern European allies. The Russians had a large presence in Conakry and one of their largest listening stations. One of the jobs I had while in Conakry was to take turns monitoring how many big Russians planes landed, refueled and took off at the airport. At that time, there was an almost constant stream of Russian flights ferrying large numbers of Cuban soldiers to fight in Angola's civil war. Conakry was a refueling stop for planes coming from Havana.

The low value of Guinea's local currency reminded me of my dealings with Stokley Carmichael. Stokley had been a well-known civil rights activist in the U.S. in the 1960s. He ran afoul of the law and fled to Guinea in 1969 where he and his views were welcomed by the Grand Syli. He also became close friends with Kwame Nkrumah who had also fled to Guinea after being overthrown as President of Ghana. Nkrumah was welcomed by the Grand Syli and named 'Co-President.'

Many people from around the world flocked to Guinea after its independence in 1958 in support of the Grand Syli and his new country. (I already mentioned in chapter three that his Minister of Ideology was from Benin.) I once talked to the mechanic who maintained his official vehicle, an American Cadillac. He was an African American from the southern part of the U.S. He admitted that he was struggling to get by in his adopted country, but he was happy to be in a country run by black people and to serve the leader of a newly independent African country.

I dealt with Stokley when he came to the embassy to settle his case with the U.S. Government. It had been decided to exonerate him of any offenses he had committed previously in the U.S. He was also allowed to pay his fine to the U.S. Government in local currency at the low official rate. Doing the latter meant he had to pay very little. We issued him a U.S. passport in the name of Kwame Ture. He had changed his name to adopt the first name of the former president of Ghana and the last name of the Grand Syli.

I had an interesting conversation with Stokley in 1984 in Conakry. He tried to explain to me what it was like to live poor in Africa. He had in his hand an

orange and he talked about how he bought this orange off the street. He explained how he lived by his wits and what he could scavenge. He talked in a way that I could not understand. By the time we had our conversation, I had already been in Africa fourteen years and my wife was African. Therefore, I did not think he had much to teach me about living in Africa.

At the time, Stokely was married to Miriam Makeba, the famous South African singer. I vaguely recall he asked for embassy assistance when her daughter died in Conakry. Although Stokely returned to the U.S., he remained attached to Guinea. He spent his final days in Conakry, dying after a long battle with prostate cancer in 1998 at the age of fifty-seven.

The funeral of the Grand Syli exceeded all expectations. Dozens of heads of state from other African countries and many high-ranking officials from other countries around the world came to Conakry to attend his funeral in late March 1984. The delegation from the U.S. government was headed by Vice President George H. W. Bush. This delegation arrived with a huge entourage and stayed overnight in the luxury villas built by Moroccans for an OAU summit that never took place. There were so many planes landing at the Conakry airport with funeral delegations that some planes had to takeoff as soon as their passengers debarked because there was no space left to park any more planes.

The death of Ahmed Sйkou Tourй caused the OAU summit to be canceled. The local textile mill had already produced samples of a red cloth with Toure's image under the OAU banner. I was able to obtain some of this cloth and, today, I still have this commemorative cloth with me in my house in Texas.

I could write a book on all that happened on the day dedicated to the burial of the Grand Syli at the Grand Mosque in Conakry. The mosque itself is worthy of some words. It was at the time the largest mosque in SSA. It was funded by Saudi Arabia and constructed by Moroccans. It opened in 1982 and is a major landmark in Conakry. The mosque reminds us that the main religion practiced in Guinea is Islam.

I published an article in the February 2011 edition of the *Foreign Service Journal* about this funeral and my day of escorting the U.S. Vice President. This article was entitled, "The Grand Syli's Funeral." The main reason I wrote this article was because I could not find anything written about this memorable historic day. For any reader who wants to know more about this topic, I refer them to this article.

There is one thing about this bizarre funeral that I will write in this chapter. The entire funeral was tightly controlled by Moroccan Imams and officials. Nobody could get near the body or the burial place. It was not known to any of the visiting delegations the actual moment the Moroccans had buried AST. We were told that his grave had been covered with cement and we could go home. It is because of the weird way the funeral was handled that until this day I, and many others, believe AST was not buried as planned in the kiosk near Conakry's Grand Mosque. I and others believe his body was spirited away to Morocco, where his wife and family had already taken refuge. Morocco had always had a close relationship with Guinea and over the years has helped numerous African leaders in distress.

I have often thought of this funeral and how the Grand Syli was honored by so many African leaders and other dignitaries from outside Africa. I have asked

myself many times how a man who was responsible for the killing of an estimated 50,000 people and ruining his country could be given such a high tribute. I was surprised that so many African leaders held the Grand Syli in high esteem and considered him to be one of the founding fathers of independent Africa. I believe the well-respected president, Lйopold Senghor, of the neighboring country of Senegal got it right when he said something like the following: "Yes, he was a founding father of independent Africa, but he will be remembered as a bloody dictator."

I ask myself today why the U.S. went to so much trouble and expense to send a high-ranking official delegation to this funeral? My answer to this question obliges me to consider U.S. interests in Guinea currently and how those interests related to sending in 1984 such a high-powered delegation. The only U.S. interest in Guinea was the big American bauxite mine. I still resist accepting that this U.S. delegation and our presence in Guinea was because of bauxite. The reluctant lesson I learned was that U.S. interests usually trump any humanitarian sentiments when it comes to the U.S. government involvement with a country.

There was much turmoil in the weeks that followed the death of AST. Leaders of the only political party, including the AST's younger brother, met to decide who would be named to be the new president. I heard that while they were meeting, one of the few officers in Guinea's small army was sweeping the floors of the barracks. The army never amounted to much in Guinea because AST had observed in other African countries how the military had overthrown sitting presidents. AST downgraded the military and elevated the status of the people's militia.

The man in the barracks, Lansana Contй, and his associates forcefully arrested all those in this heated party meeting and put them in jail. The former political power structure was turned on its head, but nobody thought its new leader would last long. Yet, he surprised everyone by lasting almost as long as his predecessor. His regime only came to an end when he died in 2008 after a long illness at the age of seventy-four. It is remarkable to note that Guinea had been independent for fifty years and during that time it had known only two presidents.

History proved wrong the report I wrote in 1987 about this new Guinean president. In this report, I stated that the new president would not last more than a year because he was from a minority coastal ethnic group (Sousou) and spent all his time on his farm outside of Conakry watching pornographic videos. He was also a diabetic and a drunkard. His health was so poor that he was not expected to live too much longer. I was more surprised than anyone when he managed to remain president for twenty-four years.

The new president appointed a prime minister (PM) from the same major ethnic group, Malinkй, of the previous president. Many people from another major ethnic group, Fulani, thought it was their turn to rule. They continue to wait their turn despite being the largest of Guinea's dozen or so ethnic groups. Nobody thought any person from the new president's ethnic group could not rule the country and stay in power so long. I, too, thought it was the turn of the Fulani to rule. I did sense while I was in Guinea much ethnic tension.

I accompanied members of the embassy to pay an official visit to the new PM, Diarra Traorй. It was an odd meeting. The PM sat in a big, elevated chair and we sat in smaller chairs in a semi-circle at a lower level in front of him. He wore thick

dark glasses and was dressed in a long traditional African robe. He held firmly in his right hand a carved wooden cane. He had draped around his neck large gaudy necklaces from which dangled numerous amulets in small leather pouches. Such amulets traditionally contained written Islamic prayers intended to protect an individual from any harm. Seeing the PM dressed like this sent chills down my spine. I found myself wondering why he was dressed as if his life needed protection.

Our ambassador, James Rosenthal, opened the meeting with the usual pleasantries and extended an invitation to the PM to our upcoming Fourth of July American Independence Day reception at Conakry's best hotel. We waited patiently for the PM to respond, but he never did. We then heard a silent snore that told us he was asleep. We guessed that he had participated all night in some sort of African occult rituals and drank a powerful protection potion. We did not know what to do. After ten minutes of waiting, we quietly withdrew from this mysterious encounter with the PM. We were all disturbed by this weird encounter. I was scared by the PM's trance and what this could mean for Guinea.

At our fancy July 4th reception at the Hotel Independence, we waited to see if the PM would come. He did arrive and appeared to be a totally different person. By that time, he held a different government position. He was Minister of Education. He was well dressed in a suit and tie and in good diplomatic form. We were pleased because most of the ministers and top military brass had also honored our invitation. On the long drive that night back to my house, I was feeling better about Guinea's prospects.

At the reception, I was able to have a private conversation with the PM. He seemed to be a very different person from the PM we had seen a few days earlier. He did not recall our courtesy visit. I tried to steer our conversation to happier topics, but the PM wanted to talk about how he had suffered under the previous regime. He said that during the harsh reign of AST he and many other Guineans were kept off balance on a daily basis. They did not know whom to trust. He mentioned there were spies everywhere and even your own family members could report on you. He said there were times he did not know if he were closer to going home or going to prison.

When I returned home, I followed my usual habit and tuned my radio to a local station to hear what it had to say and whether or not our Fourth of July reception would be mentioned. Instead of hearing the usual local news broadcast, all I heard coming from my radio was nonstop marshal music. I became alarmed and used my two-way security radio to contact Ambassador Rosenthal and advise him of the ominous music I was hearing. He told me he was getting ready for bed, but he would also listen to the local radio broadcast.

Within minutes, my ambassador radioed back to me with the instruction to come to his residence. I immediately informed my wife to stay inside with our children and took off in our car. I arrived at the ambassador's residence to find him waiting for me in his official vehicle with the flags mounted on its front fenders. He instructed me to drive us to the embassy. He said we were safer if we used his official car. I agreed and drove as fast as I could in the direction of the embassy.

When we arrived at the first major crossroads, we encountered a roadblock manned by armed soldiers. We were stopped and told to lower our car windows.

When we lowered our windows, the soldiers stuck their rifles in our faces. By the soft glow of their flashlights, I could see they had a mad look on their faces and their eyes were dilated. I assumed they had been drinking heavily or they were drugged. We were able to convince them of our harmlessness and all we wanted was to go to our embassy. It was with great relief that we were allowed to pass. At the time, I thought we would be shot, and our bodies would be made to disappear. Yes, I was scared on this dark, moonless night in Conakry.

We arrived at our embassy and found our communications technician already there and prepared to send any reporting cables we drafted. We learned that the ambassador's deputy, Kay Clark Bourne, had tried to go to the embassy but had been stopped and detained at a local police station. Informants advised us that the PM was trying to lead a coup to overthrow Guinea's president. It appeared that he and others had used our Fourth of July reception to help disguise their intentions. They left our reception and began immediately carrying out their plans to overthrow the government.

We stayed in the embassy all night to monitor the situation. I was designated to take out in the morning one of our unmarked vehicles to see what was happening. I observed utter mayhem. People were running in all directions with stuff they had stolen. There was fighting among several groups. I saw one guy get out of a car and fire a pistol. When he fired a couple of rounds, people carrying stolen goods dropped their bags and fled the scene. He picked up the bags and tossed them into the trunk of his car and zoomed off. It was difficult to distinguish between who were the aggressors and who were the victims.

The coup failed and all suspects were apprehended and put in jail. The PM was found hiding and treated roughly in front of national TV cameras. He and the other previously jailed associates of the former president were summarily executed. All the key people I had worked to convince that opening the economy to the private sector was a good thing for Guinea had been killed. I was in shock and felt as if I were starting over from scratch.

I was responsible for seeing the Minister of Justice, Jean Traorй, to put the U.S. government on record as being strongly against the extrajudicial killing of these former Guinean leaders. I knew the Minister of Justice and we were on friendly terms. He received me and as I sat in a chair in front of his desk, I read our official statement that expressed the U.S. government's displeasure over the killing without due process of these people. When I finished reading the statement, he looked me straight in the eyes and said, "Where was your government when most of the members of my family were killed by our previous president."

I had no response to his troubling words. He quickly rose from his seat behind his desk and coldly said, "I knew you were coming, and I knew beforehand what you were going to say. Goodbye."

Despite these radical changes in the host government, we kept plugging away with our new project to promote private U.S. investment in Guinea. There was much interest on the part of U.S. investors, but they withdrew in a huff when it came time to sign a deal. They could not accept the high level of corruption and bribes requested by Guinean officials. I related our experience to a friend from France's embassy and he agreed that corruption was a big problem. He told me about two French companies which had bought rights to the same natural water

source near Conakry. Both had paid off different ministers to obtain exclusive rights to exploit this source.

There was one U.S. investment that appeared to be on a successful track. This was the establishment of a U.S. private bank. All the former bankrupt government banks had been closed. The French were scrambling to set up new banks. Guineans expressed a preference for putting their money and gold in a U.S. bank. This new American bank worked out a scheme so that Guineans could take out of hiding their gold and put it in the bank. It was a win-win situation for the American investors and Guineans.

I escorted one group of Guinean businesspeople to the U.S. so they could see firsthand how the private sector works. This trip was an eye-opener for them as they had never seen a private business before. They could not understand how one family could own and operate a business. They wanted to know how the U.S. government was involved. They could not believe the government was not involved.

It was easy to know to which ethnic group Guineans belonged. In Guinea, you could usually tell if a person was a Fulani, Malinkй, Sousou or from one of the many groups from the Forest Region by hearing or seeing their last names. I was told the Fulani, who represent forty percent of Guinea's population, have only six last family names to use. I was also told that it was good to have as a last name, 'Camara,' because this name cuts across many ethnic lines and nobody could be certain of your ethnicity by simply knowing your last name.

I never made a phone call while I was in Guinea. I did not have a phone at my house. The government phone service was weak and rarely worked. If I really needed to make an international call, I would wait until a U.S. ship docked at the port and I would use its phone system. I heard that you could go to the national postal office late at night and bribe people working there to make a phone call. The bribe usually consisted of a bottle of whiskey.

If my work phone at the embassy did ring, I learned to get used to the usual greeting, "Prкt pour la Rйvolution" (Ready for the Revolution). After the change in governments, these kinds of customary greetings fell into disuse. However, old habits were difficult to stop, and it took some time before people stopped addressing each other as 'comrade.' I attended a meeting with Guineans and one of the participants mistakenly addressed them as 'comrades.' He was immediately pounced on by other participants. This incident demonstrated to me it would take time for a population that had been brainwashed for more than a quarter of a century to find new ways of talking and thinking.

Part of our deal with Guinean authorities to open its economy to the private sector was to give them 20,000 metric tons of U.S. long grain rice, the main food staple of Guinea. It was said that if Guineans had not eaten rice, they had not eaten. And, they certainly consume great quantities of rice. When I was served rice, the plate was always piled high and I could never eat all that I was served. My Guinean colleagues easily consumed all the rice on their plates and some of them asked for more rice.

Their preference for long grain rice distinguished them from other countries along this part of the West African seacoast which is referred to as the "Rice Belt." The people in other "Rice Belt' countries preferred broken rice. Long or broken rice,

the growing quantity of rice imported into several West African countries has become alarming. The high cost of increasing rice imports and West Africa's dependence on Asian rice are important concerns.

The two ships carrying this tonnage of U.S. rice in fifty-kilogram bags arrived as scheduled. As soon as the first ship docked, Conakry's port tuned into something akin to a wild, open marketplace. People flooded into the port and tried every way they knew to steal rice. Some people were not satisfied with stealing rice from the trucks it was loaded on, so they boarded the ship to steal rice. The level of mayhem reached a point where the captain of the ship lifted anchor and headed out to sea.

I complained to the Minister of Cooperation about the loss of rice, explaining that we could not unload the rice in such a rowdy atmosphere. He said he would talk to the president and try to get him to assign Guinea's special presidential guard to protect the rice. When the military troops showed up, the people ran away from the port. The soldiers searched the port and gathered into one place all the rice that had been dropped or hidden. They piled up a substantial quantity of rice in a port warehouse.

I was satisfied the involvement of military forces had been effective and we restarted off-loading the remainder of the rice that was still on the ships. But, when I returned the next day, all the rice which had been piled up in the warehouse was gone. Upon further investigation, I learned the soldiers had returned in the night with trucks and hauled away all the rice.

I concluded the soldiers stole more rice than the people and, therefore, there was not much we could do to keep substantial quantities of rice from leaking into the local environment. One local government official chided me, saying not to be too upset because the main purpose of the rice was to keep rice prices low and that purpose was being achieved.

I heard later that an international private firm had offered to manage the port. This firm said it would only charge the government ten percent of the money they saved by eliminating thievery and pilferage at the port. By introducing strict security and good management, this firm expected to stop losses and, thus, save a huge amount of money.

When I first went to Guinea in late 1983, the national population was estimated at about 5 million. Today, it is well over 13 million and a large percentage of this population resides in the capital city of Conakry. The demographic challenges facing Guinea, a country slightly larger than the U.S. State of Oregon, are like other countries in Africa. Too many young people and too few jobs are key characteristics of these countries and their fast-growing populations.

More alarming are the projections that their growing populations are steadily raising their rankings in terms of their respective percentages of total world population. For example, Guinea was ranked 101 in 1980 in the world in terms of its total population. In 2019, this ranking is seventy-five. While the population of most of the world is shrinking, it is increasing in most countries in Africa.

In 1998, I returned to Guinea on a six-week assignment to write a paper describing early warning factors that could contribute to Guinea descending into the same chaos and violence that neighboring Liberia and Sierra Leone were experiencing. I visited refugee camps, many organizations and discussed in depth

the triggers for a similar crisis in Guinea. One trigger could be an upward spike in the rice price. There were other destabilizing factors, but Guinea seemed to have accustomed itself to them and somehow maintained its balance.

I concluded that the main factor preventing Guinea from going over the edge was the strong prevalence of the Islamic religion. Most Guineans were Muslims and their faith had been deeply rooted in Guinea for hundreds of years. Many Guineans were devout and, therefore, would avoid any conflict that would put them at odds with the Quran. I was impressed by the finding, but I wondered why this Islamic conviction had not prevented all the atrocities and corruption that had occurred in Guinea since it gained independence in 1958.

During this 1998 visit I was able to meet and talk with people I had known over ten years earlier. I met with my former Lebanese landlord. He now had a small supermarket. I also visited with one, Bobo, of the Guineans who belonged to a wealthy group we had worked with to encourage private investment in Guinea. He owned a large supermarket. He and other close associates were of the Fulani ethnic group, and they had amassed fortunes while doing business for many years in Congo-Kinshasa when the Grand Syli had been president.

He and his associates had never been to school. I have always been amazed at how some of the richest people in Africa had low education levels. In particular, unschooled Guineans impressed me by their ability to speak French fluently. I had always been told elsewhere in Francophone Africa that you could not speak French unless you had gone to school. In general, Guineans impressed me as being clever and able people. This impression further made me question the lack of progress achieved in Guinea.

I was also pleased to see in 1998 that the Peace Corps was functioning well. I had helped the Peace Corps restart its activities in Guinea in 1985. I was able to assist with the placement of the first two volunteers at their sites in the highlands. These volunteers had been transferred from Burkina Faso when the Peace Corps program in that country had been closed. The first PCD was the late Jerry Pasela who had been a PCV in Togo. Of course, with the onset in early 2020 of the COVID-19 pandemic, all Peace Corps country programs have been closed.

After the Grand Syli had died, I thought Guinea would really takeoff. One thing that made me think like this was well-educated Guineans who had lived abroad returned to help rebuild their home country. The people who had stayed put and suffered under two decades of tyranny did not appreciate these Guineans coming back to occupy important positions. They called these usurpers “imported Guineans” and discouraged their presence and work. They believed that the Guineans who had stayed home should be the ones to run their country. They paid the price, so they should reap the benefits of regime change.

One such Guinean was the new Minister of Plan, Edouard Benjamin, who had come from his home and family in the U.S. and a position at the World Bank. I rushed to see him about his ideas for assisting with Guinea’s development. He responded that all Guinea needed was roads and bridges. He believed that with good infrastructure Guinea could achieve good progress on its own.

We supported this view by using a vast amount of local currency that had accumulated for years at the central bank under previous U.S. food aid programs to help build roads and bridges. One drawback of doing this was the only private

enterprise available to do this kind of work was owned by a national from an Eastern European country. This enterprise had problems because its laborers did not want to be paid in local currency because there were no stores upcountry to buy anything. We resolved this problem by paying the workers in kind in items they needed like cement and corrugated roofing tin.

Most of the imported Guineans left after a year or two. I asked one why he was leaving, and he explained that the people did not want him, and he could not get on the same wavelength with the people. He also said it was a hardship for him to remain in Guinea. His family was in Canada and he could not bring them to Conakry because there were no decent houses or schools. He said he did not expect other Guineans to return. He went on to say that it was one thing to return to be a minister, but quite another to return as a regular citizen. His final complaint was about the absence of any good place to get a decent cup of coffee.

After it was confirmed that the Grand Syli had died and a new, more lenient, government had taken over, our embassy was flooded by Guineans desiring to be able to say they had been inside the U.S. Embassy. This was something they could never have dreamed of doing during the days of the despotic regime of the Grand Syli. I rarely accepted to see any of those thronging the embassy, but one day I made an exception to receive in my small office two Guinean gentlemen who had been living abroad for over twenty years.

They were good friends from the same Fulani highlands area of Guinea. One was a professor at the University of Chicago and the other was a professor at the University of Dakar. We had a good conversation. They told me there were two kinds of countries in Africa: countries that looked like they had been in a war and had been in a war, and countries which had never been in a war, but they looked like they had been. They both affirmed that Guinea was in the latter category.

When they left my office, they said their next stop was Camp Boiro. Since the change in regimes, it had been open house at the former urban torture and death camp. People were flocking to see this notorious camp. They wanted to see the cell in which Diallo Telli perished. Before the two professors left, I informed them that I had already visited Camp Boiro and it was quite a depressing experience.

My last visit to Conakry was in March 2014 to attend a conference. We were lodged in a Lebanese-owned and managed motel. As often the case in Conakry, there was no electricity, but they seemed to have a good generator that I could hear cranking away. Night had fallen when the generator stopped working. We thought it would be quickly fixed by the owner, but the owner informed us that it needed serious repairs. I slowly found my way to my room, using the light from my laptop screen. Given that there was nothing to do, I went straight to bed and slept soundly.

I woke up early the next morning and went to the motel restaurant to eat breakfast with other conference participants. The restaurant was empty. I went to the front desk to ask where everyone had gone. I was told they had checked out of the hotel and moved into another hotel because the generator could not be fixed. The receptionist also told me they had checked out early because they could not sleep without air-conditioning. I rarely used air-conditioning, so I slept through the commotion.

I arranged to be taken to the hotel. It was the same hotel where we had our Fourth of July reception in 1985. Everything went fine for a couple days, then we learned of an outbreak of Ebola in the distant Forest Region. At first this news did not bother us, mainly because the Forest Region was nearly 950 miles away from Conakry. Then, more cases of Ebola were reported, and the hotel cook suddenly died. We were afraid the government would close the airport in order to try to control the outbreak. We panicked. The conference ended early and we all rushed to the airport to try to book a flight out of Guinea.

Later, I experienced being shunned by people when I told them I had been in Guinea when the Ebola outbreak began. This reaction caused me to stop repeating my story. Years later I was in the U.S. and when I mentioned I had come from Africa, the immediate reaction I got was, "Oh, Ebola."

I found in the U.S. that most people associate Africa with Ebola. True, the Ebola epidemic that started in Guinea and spread to Liberia and Sierra Leone was terrible and killed many people. But, these three countries represent a very small percentage of Africa's total surface area. I believe many Americans think of the continent of Africa as one country. I used to give a talk to schools and charitable organizations in the U.S. entitled, "Africa is Not a Country."

The big Ebola scare in Guinea in March 2014 forced me to hustle back to where I was working in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. There is not enough space to describe the unusual connection between Burkina Faso and Guinea. Suffice to say that after Guinea's second president died, a looney military man led his military buddies to carry out a military coup and take over the government.

These military lunatics ruled Guinea in a chaotic fashion for over a year and were responsible for one of the worst atrocities in Guinea's history at the Conakry stadium on September 28, 2009. On this date, many women were corralled and raped, and hundreds of men and women were killed in the stadium. A couple of months later this erstwhile deranged military president was shot by another soldier. To make a long and convoluted story short, Guinea's bizarre military president was exiled to Ouagadougou where I spied him in 2014. As far as I know, he is still in Ouagadougou.

Writing about Guinea has taken many more words than I expected. This chapter is too long and will probably have to be pared down. My final words on Guinea are it would probably be a failed state if it did not have such a rich natural resource base. At the same time, its wealth of natural resources has permitted gross corruption and mismanagement. The big lesson Guinea has taught me is having an abundance of natural resources is something of a double-edged sword in Africa. Too often, greedy, misguided and incompetent national leadership has made Africa's rich natural resource endowment more of a curse than a blessing for its people.

Just before I was scheduled to leave Guinea in June 1987, I made one last visit to the American bauxite mine. Most of the people operating the mine were Guineans. Many of them had studied and received diplomas from the University of Pittsburg in the U.S. State of Pennsylvania. I met with many of these U.S-trained Guineans and they bid me a sincere farewell. They asked me what I could recommend to them to get their country on an improved upward development track. I replied that they should run their country in the same way they capably

operated the mine. If they could manage the mine without a hiccup twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, they could and should manage their country in the same way.

Seeing this group reminded me that far too often the wrong people are leading African countries. Every African country has plenty of competent, honest and well-educated people, but they do not have any power, money or the political inclinations needed to lead their respective countries. It is telling that the average age in most African countries is less than eighteen years of age, while in many cases the political leadership is among the small percentage of the population who are above sixty-five years of age.

The current president of Guinea, Alpha Condй, was elected in 2010 under questionable circumstances. He wants to amend the constitution so he can remain president for another five-year term. He is eighty-two years old. I have waited for a half-century for the younger generation to lead Africa to a better future. I am still waiting.

I was ill when I departed Guinea in June 1987 for my new assignment in Togo. My illness was mostly due to Guinea's failure to take advantage of its rich natural endowment to improve the quality of life of its population. Words from David Lamb's 1982 book, *The Africans*, thundered in my head. Some of these words are quoted as follows: "Africa is a continent hell-bent on destroying itself, and of people who are as courageous as they are long-suffering."

Postscript. I dedicate this chapter to my much-missed friend, David J. Gould. David was the founder and manager of the University of Pittsburg's Francophone Management Institute. He was responsible for training at his institute many Africans from across French-speaking countries. Many of the Guineans working at the Kamsar bauxite mine had been trained at his institute. He was one of the most dynamic and hardworking people I have ever known. Sadly, on the return from one of his many trips to West Africa, he took a plane, Pan American flight 103, that was blown out of the sky over Lockerbie, Scotland, on December 21, 1988, by a bomb placed on board by a Libyan terrorist. David and 269 other people perished in this horrific airline tragedy.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Guinea-Bissau

DURING MY LONG STINT in Guinea-Conakry, we often said that the only thing worse would be an assignment to its northern neighbor, Guinea-Bissau. This tiny West African country was that bad in the 1980s. Today, from all I hear and read, it is in an even worse state, going from a fragile country to what could qualify as a failed state.

In my opinion, making Guinea-Bissau (GB) a recognized independent country following its independence from Portugal in 1975 was a mistake. Just because Portuguese colonists had anchored their ships offshore and built a slaving fort on the coast of what was then called Portuguese Guinea was not enough reason to create a new country. Yes, the Portuguese maintained a presence in GB for 500 years before it granted independence to all five of its African colonies in 1975, following a socialist-military revolution in Portugal.

I do not believe that having been a colony qualifies an arbitrary geographical space to become a viable country. More thought should have been given to what constitutes a viable country before dividing up the continent according to former colonial boundaries. GB, like some other African countries, is an accident of history. As such, our expectations should be lower, and we should not be surprised by the development predicament faced today by these countries.

GB inherited little of what a country needs to function. The mass murder of thousands of local citizens because of their alleged collaboration with the Portuguese did not help GB get off to a good start. The widespread massacres in the years following independence helped pave the way for GB to become a dysfunctional state. For its initial forty years as an independent country, GB suffered one wave after another of political upheaval and was in almost constant turmoil. I believe GB holds the record in Africa for the number of military coups and changes in government.

This crippled country was attractive to the wrong kind of people. Traffickers of people and drugs found GB an ideal place to engage in their lucrative illicit businesses. South American drug cartels turned GB into one of their major transit routes for channeling cocaine to Europe. Their multibillion-dollar business made it easy for traffickers to bribe local officials and entice many people in GB to do their bidding. The UN and others refer to GB as a narco-state.

I have often thought that with a few million dollars I could cause a lot of grief in many African countries. I could easily arm a small militia and take over vulnerable parts of a country and exploit any resources it may have. It may be possible to expand and train this militia to take over a country. A little money goes

a long way in very poor countries like GB, which is classified among the thirteen (twelve in Africa) poorest countries on Earth at the bottom of the UN's Human Development Index.

Security forces in GB are collaborating with the traffickers. They are bribed to turn a blind eye to their illegal activities. This observation prompts me to express a view about Africa's national military forces. Often national governments expend a sizeable percentage of their annual budgets to maintain a military force. In many cases, I never understood the role of such military forces. I thought the military's role was to defend its country from exterior enemies. But most African countries are not threatened by exterior enemies.

Sometimes I perceive the main role of African military forces as being there to prop up inept and corrupt government leaders. It is not unusual for African presidents to have their own well – equipped, trained and paid contingent of guards. There are many tasks the military could do to help local communities, but it is rare to see the military doing any community development work. For me, all the money spent on maintaining a military force could be better used to help develop a country.

If a poor country is threatened by an external force, it can call upon better endowed countries to assist with meeting any threats. I believe if most African countries have a good police force, local and national, it does not need expensive military forces. I believe a review of military forces and customs agents in Africa would put the spotlight on the misuse of funds and power.

In GB, conflicts among corrupt security forces have been the source of fighting that has destroyed valuable infrastructure and resulted in the killing of thousands of people. Initially, some of this fighting was over the control of the cashew harvest. Cashews continue to be GB's major legitimate export, but the advent of the drug trade is a more recent source of conflict. In many ways, GB is at the mercy of the wealthy drug traders.

I was in the Casamance region of southern Senegal in 1998 when I was told that I was standing in Guinea-Bissau. We had stopped our car to relieve ourselves. I walked about twenty yards into the sparse bush. When I returned to our car, the driver asked me, "How did you like Guinea-Bissau?"

There is nothing to distinguish northern Guinea-Bissau from this part of southern Senegal. There is the same landscape and ethnic group. There are no boundary marks to tell you in which country you are. The undetectable boundary was telling me this is not a geographical space that should be divided. For certain, I could see nothing worth any fighting.

GB is devoid of rich resources and under the thumb of crooked but wealthy and capable Colombian drug cartels. It is rife with corruption and easy pickings for any well-organized group with money. This small wedge of country (about three times the size of the U.S. State of Connecticut) is squeezed in between Guinea in the south and Senegal in the north and has a swampy coastline along the eastern Atlantic Ocean.

There are a half dozen ethnic groups living in GB, but they do not share a national identity. There is no sense of belonging to the same nation and no effort to work for the building of a sovereign nation. Anyone from GB who can leave the country does so. I wish I had something good to write about GB, but I cannot

think of anything positive. GB needs to start over as a country or join with another country to form a more viable geographical unit. It is difficult to see a promising future for the 2 million people living in this permanently damaged country.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Ivory Coast (Cфte d'Ivoire)

DURING MOST OF MY many visits to the Republic of Cфte d'Ivoire (RCI) it was known as the Ivory Coast. Since 1985, the government of the RCI requested that its French name, Cфte d'Ivoire, be recognized in all languages as the official name of its country. I estimate I have visited the capital of the RCI, Abidjan, over thirty times during the 1972 to 1991 period. I was in the Abidjan airport in March 2019. I also note that in 1983, coastal Abidjan was joined as a capital city by Yamoussoukro, which is located in the middle of the country over 130 miles north of Abidjan. Today, Yamoussoukro has a population of about 350,000, while coastal Abidjan has over 5 million people.

The number of people residing in Abidjan is about one-fifth of RCI's total national population of just over 25 million in this highly urbanized country (over fifty percent). The RCI is about the size of the U.S. State of New Mexico, which has 1.9 million people. I was quick to notice during the many times I passed through the RCI that it was rare to meet someone who had deep roots in the country and was a member of one of the over sixty ethnic groups spread throughout the RCI. Many of the people I met were born in the RCI, but their parents came from another country in the West Africa region. They and their forbearers came to the RCI for the economic opportunities offered by this relatively prosperous country. It is estimated that up to thirty percent of the RCI's population hails from another country.

RCI's path to prosperity was set by its first president, Fйlix Houphouлt-Boiny, the founder of the RCI and president from the time of its independence from France in 1960 until he died in 1993. During his thirty-three years as president, he pursued a capitalistic course and maintained close relations with France. He also had an open-door policy and welcomed people from all countries to help build his country. I have heard that it was foreigners who built the RCI into a modern and an economically successful country. Many of these outsiders helped make the RCI the world's biggest exporter of cocoa and an important exporter of other agricultural products such as coffee, pineapples and palm oil.

Houphouлt realized that to build his country he needed laborers from neighboring countries. He also recognized that bigger markets were needed to support a growing economy. He knew that the market offered by the RCI alone was not big enough to drive his national economy. His idea was to tap into regional as well as international markets. He was one of the first national leaders in Africa to promote regional integration.

Most countries in Africa do not have large enough home markets to support a thriving economy; therefore, opening their borders to free trade and movement of people is necessary for their economic growth. Yet, many countries have resisted this concept in practice because they are not competitive in larger markets. They fear they would lose the revenue generated from customs receipts. Also, they apply high tariffs on imports to protect their own industries.

Local industries are often small, catering to small markets in low-income countries where the majority of people have a low purchasing power. A more efficient small factory in the U.S. can supply the markets of several countries in Africa. Regionalization is part of the answer, but what country should be bestowed the factory to supply other countries? Development in Africa is often stymied by the inability of individual countries to compete in regional and international markets. Moreover, many African countries have lost too much time to be able to compete with Asian countries that previously advanced to dominate international markets where Africa was once a strong player. In my opinion, the 'Rising Africa' view is more of a myth than a reality. In any event, Africa is no match for the mature and well established 'Asian Tigers.'

For a decade or more, the RCI's economy grew annually at ten percent or more and it was recognized as the dominating economic powerhouse in the subregion. Certainly, the other fourteen countries in Central and West Africa that use the same currency, the CFA Franc, could not do any monetary reforms unless the RCI agreed to do so. Of course, the agreement of France would also be needed because its treasury guarantees the value of the CFA Franc. Moreover, these other countries are dependent on the role the RCI plays as an economic growth engine for the region. When the RCI has any difficulties, all West Africa suffers.

This golden era of the RCI began to fade after the death of its long-term first president in late 1993. Officially, he was eighty-eight years old at the time of his death, but his birth record was of doubtful origins; some people thought he was about 100 years old. I did hear that in the months leading up to his death that his hand had to be held and guided for him to sign official documents. His advanced age at his death prompted some other much younger 'Presidents-for-Life' in other West African countries to brag about having fifty more years at the helm of their respective countries if they lived as long as Houphouʌt.

He was buried in his beloved hometown of Yamoussoukro in the huge Catholic Basilica (The Basilica of Our Lady of Peace) he had spent a fortune on building. He not only turned Yamoussoukro into a twin capital city, he also invested heavily in turning it into a new and modern city. The downside in all his efforts to reconstruct Yamoussoukro so it could serve as one of RCI's capital cities was the heavy debt load it created for the RCI. Also, while he spent hundreds of millions of dollars on his ultra-modern Basilica and the makeover of Yamoussoukro, most of the people living there were among the poorest of the poor.

Houphouʌt was proud of his Basilica and the fact that it was reluctantly inaugurated in 1990 by Pope Paul II. He had purposely made his Basilica one meter larger than the Basilica of Saint Peter in Vatican City, which it resembles. At the time, it was said to be the largest indoor air-conditioned space in Africa, as well as the world's largest church. He satisfied some critics by donating his Basilica to the Catholic Church. The rumor mill also reported that he had to satisfy the chiefs of

his Baoulй ethnic group by undergoing secret traditional burial rites. Under traditional rules, he was considered the son of a Baoulй chief and, thus, a chief himself after his father died.

In addition to the wonders provided by the 'Basilica of the Bush,' Houphouлt promoted the building in Abidjan of one of Africa's biggest and most modern hotels. I stayed many times in the magnificent Hotel Ivoire in its best days. I understand this African miracle hotel continues going strong today. When it was built in 1963, it was considered as one of the most wondrous places in Africa. I was always blown away by its modernity and the impeccable service of this gigantic hotel when I stayed there in the 1980s. This hotel had over 200 rooms and contained everything you could imagine and more, including a vast network of swimming pools and a bowling alley. Perhaps its most awesome facility was its ice-skating rink. More than once, I marveled over the fact that people were ice-skating in the middle of tropical Africa. At the time, nobody in Africa had ever seen such a vast and spectacular hotel complex.

I believe the first time I went to Abidjan was in 1978. I was working with USAID's Regional Development Office at the time. This office covered most of West Africa. I was sent to the RCI because I had impressed USAID people working at the Conseil de l'Entente based in Abidjan with my review of its project proposal to make the raising of the ubiquitous West African short-legged 'dwarf' goat more productive. The 'Conseil' promoted and funded development projects in five West African francophone countries. My assistance was wanted to help finish the design of this novel project.

I added my two cents worth as to how one could increase the production of meat and milk from this indigenous animal, but I had doubts about improving much on what was already working well. These goats were everywhere and seemed to be resistant to common animal diseases. They were an important source of income for many rural families in coastal West Africa. Personally, thanks to their goats, I learned to like eating goat meat. Before I went to Africa, I had never eaten goat meat.

I enjoyed my many trips to Abidjan. I still think it has one of the most fantastic skylines of any city in Africa. At times, during my visits to Abidjan I thought I was in a tropical Paris. Everything was so neat and clean compared to many other places I knew in Africa. The stores, bars and restaurants were the best I had found in Africa. In the 1980s, I could go with friends to the big market and attractive nightclubs in the popular neighborhood of Treichville without the slightest concern for my safety. The last time I was in Treichville was in 1991. At that time, I had to walk in the middle of the street at night to avoid the muggers who were lurking inside alleys or following me along the sidewalks.

Sadly, living today in Abidjan, or almost anywhere else in Africa, is akin to living in a prison.

When I arrived in Africa in 1970, there were no walls around your house and maybe you did not lock your door at night. Now, you can trace rising security concerns in Africa by the growth of walls. Short walls grew progressively into tall walls topped with broken glass or razor wire. Professional security services and guard dogs were engaged. Electric fences were erected, and sophisticated alarm systems were installed. Extra metal gates and window grates became added features

to your house. Getting into and out of your house increasingly became an extra chore to accomplish.

Security is now a prime concern everywhere in Africa. Forty years ago, you could go anywhere day or night without any worries. It upsets me that I cannot do that now. Security services have evolved into big and costly businesses. But, your safety anywhere in Africa cannot be guaranteed 100 percent. If you had invested in a company providing security services twenty years ago, you would be rich today. I realize there is no going back, but I think the reader can forgive me for harboring some nostalgia for those safe and carefree days I knew when I first arrived in Africa.

The RCI proved me wrong. I always thought a prosperous country that created jobs would generate the peace and stability needed to make progress. I always believed a booming economy would make people happy and averse to doing anything to upset law and order. Despite the RCI's booming economy, the RCI viciously tore itself apart in the years following the death of its founder. As often is the case, when a strong leader passes from the scene, the natural divisions he held in check eventually unravel.

In the RCI's case, the divisions were numerous and murderous. There were violent splits within the military and between ethnic groups. There were also bloody clashes between those who claimed to be full citizens of Cфte d'Ivoire and the millions of residents who traced their ancestors to other West African countries. The country was cut in two with rebel forces controlling the more Muslim northern part of the country and a variety of armed forces controlling the more Christian southern half of the country. The chaos and mayhem were accentuated by the involvement of armed groups from neighboring countries.

There was a military coup, the first civil war and then a second civil war. It took the involvement of French armed forces to help reestablish peace in the country. A former president was captured and ended up being detained in jail at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, the Netherlands. A U.S.-educated former RCI Prime Minister, Allasane Ouatarra, who was a source of the conflict because he was a Muslim and had parentage from a neighboring country, became the elected president. A long book could be written about this troubled and complex period in the RCI's history.

Economic growth was reversed and hundreds of thousands of people became refugees in neighboring countries or displaced within the RCI. Expatriate residents were evacuated. International organizations moved their regional headquarters to other countries. For example, the African Development Bank moved its offices to Tunis in 2003 and did not return to Abidjan until late 2013. Businesses came to a standstill and exports plummeted, largely because cocoa fields were unattended. The entire subregion suffered from a pronounced economic decline and scrambled to deal with the return of tens of thousands of its citizens. The conflict in the RCI was a shameful blackeye for all of Africa.

The cost of the destruction of property and infrastructure caused by all sides to this complicated conflict is incalculable. The loss of life numbered in the thousands. All sides committed atrocious human rights violations. Many people were made homeless in Abidjan as the military bulldozed several shanty towns around Abidjan to rid the capital city of foreign dissidents. Cocoa farmers lost the workers they

needed to tend their fields and businesses ran short of the employees they needed to operate.

Underlying this chaotic and unpredictable situation were other contributing factors. One factor was that the RCI's economy was overly dependent on cocoa exports and the revenue generated by these exports was subject to the vagaries of the international market. In other words, there was a downturn in the RCI's economy because the international price for cocoa declined. This classic example highlights the situation of a number of African countries which are at the mercy of international markets for the sale of the crops and minerals they produce. A national economy that is highly dependent upon the export of a single commodity is particularly vulnerable in this regard.

Unfortunately, several African economies have failed to diversify while they had the funds generated from the export of a single commodity to do so. In this regard, those countries depending upon the export of exhaustible minerals like oil, diamonds or gold have failed to diversify their economies. Therefore, when their main export resources are depleted, they will be dealt a serious economic blow. This over-dependence on the export of one or a few commodities is often referred to as a 'curse.'

Another major contributing factor is the unorganized state of a formal land tenure system. The absence of legal land tenure systems is a huge problem across Africa, particularly with the growth in population densities. Many cocoa fields in the RCI are owned by a local ethnic group but farmed by migrants, some of whom have been residents for decades. Usually, the local owners do not have legal deeds to their land. This raises the question about whom the land belongs: those who have traditionally possessed it or those who farm and care for it? Weak or nonexistent land tenure laws in Africa represent a major development constraint.

The Abidjan Port is a major entry point for goods going to and from landlocked countries north of the RCI. The protracted upheaval in the RCI wreaked additional havoc on these countries because they could not export or import. RCI lost their businesses because these countries were obliged to shift to other ports along the Eastern Atlantic coast. Even before the chaos in RCI, the cost of receiving goods in the Abidjan Port and trucking them to their inland destinations was the highest in the world. It is well-documented that the unreasonably high transport costs and innumerable roadblock delays in West Africa represent a serious obstacle to development. Overland transport costs in West Africa are a multiple of what it costs in the U.S. to deliver goods over the same distance.

For a number of years, the RCI has been on the road to recovery, but the wounds opened during a prolonged period of violence have left many scars. There is no guarantee these scars will not turn into open wounds again in the future. Nonetheless, investor confidence has been regained and economic activity is again thriving. The large French community in Abidjan is growing and this bodes well for the economy. Like elsewhere in West Africa, commercial activity is dominated by the Lebanese community and they appear to be expanding and reinforcing their connections with their brethren in neighboring countries. The 'RCI's economic miracle' has always greatly depended on the entrepreneurial talents of its resident French and Lebanese communities.

I am glad that the RCI is well on the road to recovery, but it will never be again the country I once enjoyed. The last time I was passing through Abidjan in 2007, there were impolite soldiers guarding all the passageways inside the airport. I was confused as to which direction I was supposed to go, so I asked one of the soldiers for directions. Instead of responding to me, he jabbed me sharply in the belly with the butt of his rifle and pushed me in the direction I was headed. This incident left a bad taste in my mouth and added to my reluctance to return to the RCI.

I hope the terrible times experienced by all the people living in the RCI have made it so what happened in the RCI will never happen again. I believe these destructive times taught many tough lessons which will prevent them from repeating such a bad experience. The people living in the RCI deserve avoiding a return to the chaos and violence they experienced. Without peace, stability, good governance and high level of 'predictability,' no country in Africa can fully realize it's potential.

Yet, there are always selfish groups of people who profit from chaos and, thus, they sometimes seek to create chaotic situations in order to increase their profits. Such profiteers and opportunists hold Africa back for their own personal gain. Mixing the greed of power-hungry politicians and businesspeople with ethnic and religious tensions results in turmoil and instability which profit a few but leave the masses mired in poverty. This is not a recipe for advancing the interests of the African people. Africa deserves much better.

If nothing else, the RCI has proven that an African country can recover after experiencing the worst kind of horrors. The RCI experience may offer all of us important lessons. Africa countries ridden with conflict should examine closely the RCI's comeback. If I am given the opportunity, I will return to the RCI to learn more firsthand about its remarkable recovery. I expect the RCI to continue its role as one of the main engines of economic growth in West Africa. Yet, Allasane Ouatarra's decision to run for a third term in the late 2020 presidential elections could upset the RCI's favorable prospects.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Kenya

I DID NOT KNOW in August 1982 that my second one-night stopover in Nairobi, Kenya's capital city, would drag on for several days. I was on my way to a meeting in Zimbabwe and I was scheduled to stay one night in Nairobi before taking another flight to Harare. At that time, flights from West to East Africa were rare and you had to go to Europe first. My stopover in Nairobi was therefore the second night of my trip from West Africa to East Africa via Paris.

I was staying at the Hilton Hotel in central Nairobi. I received a call on my room phone that instructed me to stay inside because there were some disturbances in the streets outside the hotel. I did as I was told, but I did try to catch a glimpse from the window of what was occurring in the streets many floors below my room. I later learned that looking out the window was not a good idea because the military group that was trying to overthrow the government fired shots in the direction of the hotel and some of their bullets had pierced the outside windows of a few rooms.

I never understood what this brief coup attempt was about and who were the perpetrators. Years later I heard stories in Nairobi about the looting and rioting that took place in the aftermath of this attempted coup. These stories led me to believe that many Kenyans used the aborted coup as a reason to loot what they referred to as Indian shops on Biashara Street in downtown Nairobi. They retold happy stories about acquiring new household appliances and other goods from these shops.

When I returned to Nairobi in 1993, I still heard these stories and the wish expressed that something could happen again to give them a reason to plunder the Indian stores. Some people said they really needed to replace the items they stole in 1982, but they could not afford to do so. They saw looting as the only way out of their predicament.

It was only during my many stays in Nairobi in the 1993-94 period that I began to learn something about Kenya. I would learn more about this hub of East Africa in the years after this period, but I already knew more about this country than I had ever expected to know. I hope this chapter does justice in relating my many experiences in Kenya.

I was assigned to Somalia in 1993-94, but I was frequently in Nairobi on security evacuations from Somalia or for meetings. I stayed at the Hilton, which was located across the street from the USAID office and not too far from the U.S. Embassy on Moi Avenue. I learned how to survive in bustling central Nairobi, which was called by many expatriates, "Nai-robbery." It was given this sobriquet

because of the high density of active thieves and pickpockets who preyed upon the swarms of people who thronged during the day to this vital part of this large metropolis of over 4 million people.

This was a noisy area of Nairobi because there was a 'matatu' stop across the street from the Hilton. A matatu was a sort of a customized minibus that rapidly plied set routes in Nairobi. Matatus were usually wildly decorated and they played loud music. They are the most popular means to travel cheaply about Nairobi. They were always crammed with passengers clamoring for a seat. They had hawkers who would holler to passengers wanting to take the matatu's route. We were warned to never travel in a matatu because they had a risky reputation.

One day in 1994 I was on my way to work and passed by the rowdy matatu passenger crowd. I was surprised to notice in the crowd a white man whom I had known in West Africa. I walked up to him and said, "Charlie, is that you?"

It was indeed the Charlie Biddle, an American man I knew previously in Lomй, Togo, on the other side of the continent. This American man had once been a big moneychanger and businessman in Lomй until he got on the wrong side of the Lebanese and ran afoul of local authorities. I asked him what he was doing in Nairobi and he said he was now a boxing promoter. That was the last time I saw Charlie, but I have always wondered about him and his life in Africa. His story would make a fascinating book.

The first word I learned in Kiswahili, a national language along with English, was 'mwizi' (thief). I was told if I ever had an encounter with a thief, I should yell this word at the top of my lungs so people could hear and run to help me. I never had to yell this word, but I observed other people do so and what happened after they used this word. Mob justice was instant. People would come running from all directions to catch the thief and pound him into a pulp. Frequently, the thief was killed (guilty or not guilty). The people hated thieves. I was very careful in avoiding the use of the 'mwizi' word because I did not want to be the cause of such a cruel punishment.

One of our pastimes at work across the street in USAID's offices at the Union Towers Building was to step out on our balcony and look down at the wide, crowded sidewalk along Moi Avenue below us to watch the thieves at work. They were experts at snatching bags and cutting pockets with a razor blade without their owners knowing what was happening. Sometimes they made mistakes and the owner would yell 'mwizi' and the police would rush to their aid and chase the thieves across Moi Avenue. Once they crossed Moi Avenue, the police did not go farther because on the other side of the street there were more thieves than police. Everyone seemed to know the Riverside area on the other side of Moi Avenue was a high-risk area. I learned to never walk on the north side of busy Moi Avenue.

I also learned never to walk in Central Nairobi with anything of value. All rings, necklaces and watches had to be removed. If I had anything to carry, I put it inside a simple black plastic bag. I was also told to always keep at least a twenty-dollar U.S. bill in my pocket in case I was accosted by a thief. It was emphasized to me that there is nothing a thief dislikes more than to hold up a 'muzungu' (white person) who has no money or nothing for him to rob.

Petty thievery was rampant in Nairobi and those caught in the act of stealing were dealt with in the most brutal manner. But such thievery was peanuts

compared to frequent cases of grand-scale robbery and mega-cases of government corruption. I had American colleagues who lived in plush neighborhoods in Nairobi who had everything stolen from their house while they and their families were held at gunpoint. The bandits would enter their walled compounds late at night by drilling big holes in their concrete walls, subduing the security guards and driving a truck up to the front entrance to haul away as much as they could from their houses.

There were times I had to work late at my office and could not return to the Hilton until after dark. I learned to run from the front door of my office building to the front entrance of the Hilton to stay ahead of thieves. One time in 1994, I was waiting in front of the Hilton early in the morning for colleagues who were going with me to Wilson Airport to catch a flight to Mogadishu. They had stayed at a cheaper hotel on the north side of Moi Avenue. I watched helplessly as they were robbed of their laptops and stripped of all their belongings by a gang of thieves.

While in Nairobi, I was given another nickname, *mwasawali mingi*. The English translation of these two Kiswahili words is "many questions." I was called this name because as a curious American I asked many questions. I thought this was better than the common Kiswahili phase I often heard, "*Maneno mingi, matendo kidogo*." Meaning in English something like, "Many words, little action."

By the way, Moi Avenue was named after Kenya's sitting president, Daniel Arap Moi. His image also adorned Kenya's currency, the Kenyan Shilling. In Kenya, like elsewhere in Africa, his portrait was prominently displayed in most buildings. Africa seems to be the exception from other countries in the world because it names roads, buildings and important landmarks after living presidents. In the U.S., this honor is usually reserved for presidents who have died and served their country well.

Car hijacking in Nairobi was a frequent event. I had one American colleague who had two cars stolen at a stoplight in downtown Nairobi. She had been threatened by children with syringes. They said they would inject her with the human excrement or the AIDS virus, then the thieves came to rob her car. Sadly, in 2007, I also had a well-respected Kenyan friend, Geoffrey Chege, killed by a car hijacker when he was coming home from church on a Sunday night in Nairobi with his wife. He was stopped and shot by car hijackers. His body was thrown in the street, his wife was chased away, and they fled with his car.

The kids wielding the infectious syringes were among the thousands of children living a tough life of heart-rending hardship in Nairobi's streets. While the number of street children is high in Nairobi, perhaps 60,000, this is a widespread problem in Africa's major cities. Nobody is quite sure how to address the magnitude of the shameful and desperate status of street children. When I first came to Africa in 1970, the concept of being an orphan was unknown and I never saw any street children.

If you needed a car, I found it best to buy an old used car that did not attract the hijackers. I imported a small used car from Japan, which was a popular source for cars in Kenya because Japan and Kenya both use right-hand drive vehicles to circulate on the left side of their roads. I never had a problem with my old, beat-

up car in Kenya. The hijackers were more interested in stealing upscale, four-wheel drive vehicles.

There were plenty of jokes in Nairobi about criminal activities. One was about two white guys who presented themselves at a police station to say that their Land Rover had been stolen and the police should hear about it shortly. They had left a bottle of whiskey laced with cyanide poison. This bottle was intended for any thief who dared steal their vehicle. They knew that Kenyan thieves would begin drinking the whiskey almost immediately, become quickly ill and die. Sure enough, the police received word about a Land Rover fitting the description of the one stolen from the two men who had just skidded off the road and hit a big tree.

Another joke that provides some insights into life in Kenya was about a hit-and-run driver. When the police appeared on the scene of the incident, bystanders informed them that they believed the fleeing driver was drunk. When the police asked them how they knew the driver was drunk, all the witnesses said it was because he was driving straight. Everybody in Nairobi knows you cannot drive straight because of the many potholes in the streets.

Nairobi was always a delightful city for me to visit or reside. Of course, I had to take certain precautions, but Nairobi was a thriving crossroads for East Africa with all the amenities and lots to do. I learned that Nairobi had always been an important staging point for many operations in East Africa and it is the biggest economy in this part of Africa. From World War II until now, many businesses and organizations have established their regional offices in Nairobi. It is also a popular spot for tourists and their numbers make tourism an important segment of the Kenyan economy. I think Shiva Naipaul got it right in his 1997 book, *North of South*. In this book, 'north" stands for Kenya and 'south' is for South Africa. His intention was to convey the notion that Nairobi was the best city in Africa north of Johannesburg.

I have always thought Africa has three major development poles: Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. If any one of these poles declined substantially, the continent would fall to new lows like a three-legged stool with one missing one leg. I raised this issue once in Nairobi, and I was assured that despite Kenya's almost continual ethnic and political turmoil, it would never become a failed state. I was told the country was too wealthy and there was a growing middle class which had too much to lose by any national economic failure.

Nonetheless, over the years I have observed in Kenya much social upheaval, ethnic strife and violence. Ethnic tension is deep and palpable, and it is often related to political power. Kenya has over a dozen main ethnic groups and dozens of indigenous languages. The violence that takes place in Kenya among political parties is notorious. High levels of unemployed young people contribute heavily to this violence and crime. It is estimated that more than forty percent of adult Kenyans are unemployed.

For a while, I lived in Norfork Apartments, located across the street from the University of Nairobi. I frequently encountered university students and they told me many interesting stories. One story they were fond of telling was about how the top university graduate of ten years ago was still looking for a job, but the student who graduated at the bottom of his class landed a job immediately because his uncle was a minister. This story pointed out that in Kenya and elsewhere in

Africa a merit-based system does not exist. Who you knew and were related to was more important than what you knew or how well you had done in school. I was told the university was one big factory for manufacturing the unemployed.

I once met with a group of Kenyan students to discuss the rights embedded in the U.S. constitution. I emphasized the first ten amendments, the bill of rights, of this constitution. I stressed the importance of these same rights in Kenyan society. At the end of my talk, I was loudly thanked for my brilliant talk about the "bill of rice." One student thanked me for underscoring the importance of food for the people. I was aghast. The students had totally misinterpreted my talk because they thought I was saying "bill of rice" instead of "bill of rights." I learned from this incident that many Kenyans had difficulty pronouncing 'r' and 's' in English.

There is one group in Kenya which occupies a peculiar niche. This group is composed of descendants of the thousands of Asian indentured servants who were brought to Kenya from India in the 1890s by the British colonizer to build a railroad from Mombasa, Kenya, to Kampala, Uganda. After the completion of the railroad, many of them stayed in Kenya and progressively became members of Kenya's wealthy, professional and well-educated class. Although they represent less than two percent of Kenya's population, it is estimated that Asian-Kenyans control eighty percent of the Kenya's commercial activity.

Their economic prowess and the manner they have maintained a separate social-cultural niche in Kenyan society rubs black Kenyans in a negative way. Despite their presence for well over 100 years, I have never seen any evidence of intermarriage between Asian-Kenyans and black Kenyans. Also, it does not appear to me the great wealth of this community is used much to contribute to activities that benefit Kenyan society. I heard many times that Asian-Kenyans prefer keeping to themselves and they treat their black Kenyan employees poorly and pay them low wages.

One night I was with a group of Kenyan colleagues to go out for dinner at a local Nairobi restaurant. We stopped in front of one restaurant and one of my colleagues said to wait while he checked to see if there were any seats for us. He came out of the restaurant and said, "Let's look for somewhere else. There are no people inside."

I was puzzled by his words and said I would go inside and look for myself. I went inside and saw plenty of people and available seats. I came out and said, "Hey, there are plenty of people and seats inside. Let's go in. I'm hungry."

My Kenyan colleague gave me a penetrating look and said, "Those are not people. Those are Indians."

I concluded from this exchange that my Kenyan colleagues preferred not going to places frequented by Indians. Later in the evening I suggested that we go to a popular dancing bar. They exclaimed loudly, "No way!"

I asked why they did not want to go, and they explained that Saturdays was what they called 'Bombay Night' and the place was filled with Indians. Some weeks later I went to this place on a Saturday night to see for myself what they meant. It did not take me long to see why they called this 'Bombay Night." The dance floor was crowded with young Indian males dancing with one another. I learned later that Indian women did not go out. I, too, later avoided this place on Saturday nights.

The entrepreneurial ability of the Indian community has made them the proud owners of many businesses and fancy shopping malls in Nairobi. Although there is constant tension between the Indian community and the African masses, Kenyans have learned to coexist with them in order to benefit from what they have to offer. They also observed how the economy collapsed in neighboring Uganda when the Indians were forced out of this country.

For me, in some ways it looked like the Indians in East Africa were playing the same role that Lebanese businesspeople play in West Africa. Without these non-African entrepreneurial groups, there would be a dearth of shopping malls, supermarkets, restaurants and stores of all types. Many stores operated by Africans would be hard-pressed without this entrepreneurial class because their stores were stocked with items received from members of this class.

I have always thought the welcome mat should be out in Africa for any foreigners who had something to offer in terms of building a country and creating jobs. If everyone plays by the rules and obeys the laws, everyone should be welcome along with their money and skills. The problem is that too many wealthy people do not play by the rules and become involved in corrupt activities. Unfortunately, their greed for garnering illicit profits overcomes any sense of fair play.

Kenya also had a minority population (less than one percent) of 'whites.' Most of these whites were from the UK and their families had lived in Kenya for generations. They opted for Kenyan citizenship when Kenya gained independence in 1963, and they and their descendants remained in Kenya. Many of them remain owners of large tracts of land, particularly at the higher elevations, and old luxurious residential properties. Among the most famous white Kenyans are the world renown paleoanthropologists, Louis and Mary Leakey, and their son, Richard.

Sadly, one of the main things holding Kenya back is gross corruption. There is corruption in every country, but in Kenya it has too often reached new heights. Kenya has the shameful reputation of having had one big corruption scandal after another since it was granted independence by the UK. These scandals most often involve high government officials and wealthy businessmen.

Kenya has had many huge corruption scandals that merit attention, but the one I read about the most in the 1990s while in Nairobi in its local newspapers was the infamous Goldenberg scandal. It is estimated that this complex scandal lost Kenya an estimated ten percent of its annual GDP, over 100 million dollars. This gigantic scandal involved a cast of dozens of government officials, including Kenya's president and a few of his ministers, and local businesspeople, especially a wealthy Indian. It was a complex scandal that had something to do with supporting the exports of gold, although Kenya produces almost no gold. As with numerous other corruption scandals in Kenya, nobody was ever successfully prosecuted and incarcerated. A local newspaper aptly had as its front-page headline, "War on Graft is Indeed Lost."

As long as impunity exists in Africa for crimes committed by government officials and wealthy businesspeople, progress in Africa will be limited. I have never observed any senior government officials jailed for wrongdoing unless they found themselves on the wrong side of the political fence. Corruption eats at the heart of

Africa and contributes to the poverty of its people. If Kenya could recover all the money lost through corruption and illicit capital flight, it would be much more advanced than it is. Hopes for Africa should be limited until corruption is sufficiently curbed.

A corrupted court system in Kenya is an obstacle to bringing excessive graft under control. I was told that things were rotten in the court system because judges could be easily bribed. Some judges would allow you to draft the judgement of their court ruling and would sign it in exchange for an agreed upon amount. The key here, as in other areas, was to possess the amount of money needed to corrupt the system. Money talks and the justice system fails, making a mockery of the rule of law.

Adding to the economic drawbacks of excessive corruption is the lack of fiscal discipline exercised by the Kenyan government which spends much more money than it receives. Kenya has a record of spending a multiple of the revenue it receives. This excessive spending is the cause of much borrowing which creates a level of debt that is difficult to service. The debt load of Kenya and other African countries is not manageable in the long term. The high cost of debt service reduces the amount of money available for development activities. The consistent exercise of fiscal responsibility by African governments should be a strict condition of providing external assistance.

Kenya's fast-growing debt to China is particularly alarming. China has loaned money to Kenya hand over fist over the past ten years to build key infrastructure projects and now that debt is estimated to be almost a whopping seventy percent of Kenya's GDP. It is difficult for me to understand, but it looks like China has placed Kenya in some sort of debt trap from which it can never exit. Such deep debt obligations to China make Kenya beholden to China in unforeseen ways. I understand that China is now threatening to take over the ports, roads and railroads they have funded and constructed. Kenya is another example of an African country that has sold out to China. So far, there appears to be no exit from this relationship of financial dependency. Maybe China is purposely conducting debt trap diplomacy in Africa as part of its global strategy to gain control of countries with assets it needs.

Thirty years ago, it was rare to see a Chinese anywhere in Africa. Today, they are everywhere, and China has heavily invested in Africa. There is no going back, but the future relationship with China is unpredictable. One of my African colleagues once told me that a major challenge in Africa is the high level of unpredictability. How can anyone invest in the continent if they are not reasonably certain of which circumstances will prevail in the near future? Evidently, the Chinese have bet on Africa and thrown any cares about its 'unpredictability' out the window.

Post-independence Africa suffered because some of its best leaders were forced to the political sidelines. Kenya's case in this regard is perhaps more glaring than other African countries. For example, Tom Mboya was a popular and talented figure in Kenya before and after Kenya gained independence in 1963. He was admired in Kenya and around the world. He appeared on the cover of *Time Magazine* in the U.S. in 1960. He worked with Senator John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to send hundreds of Kenyans to the U.S. so they could

undertake their university studies. Among the students going to the U.S. were Barrack Obama, Sr., a close friend of Mboya and the father of a future U.S. President, and Wangari Maathai, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 for her environmental protection work in Kenya.

This rising African star was assassinated at the young age of thirty-eight in 1969. Most observers believe this was a political assassination to remove him from contention as a presidential candidate. The elimination of this promising person changed the course of Kenya's history. Much of the same happened in other African countries. The removal of Africa's most promising post-independence leaders helped a number of African countries get off to a wrong start and stay off course for decades.

In Kenya and other African countries, it is difficult to separate politics from ethnic rivalry, which are always at work to cause some rumbling beneath the surface. Political power means more money and land for your ethnic group. In Kenya, Mboya belonged to the Luo ethnic group, but the most votes were held by the Kikuyu ethnic group, the largest group in Kenya. A Kikuyu has been the president of Kenya for thirty-two of its fifty-six years of independence. Only one of five Kenyan presidents since independence in 1963 has been a non-Kikuyu.

Kenya's first president was Jomo Kenyatta. He remained in office for fifteen years until he died in 1978 at the age of eighty-one. He had been a pre-independence fighter and was accused of being associated with the notorious Mau-Mau uprising that fought against British colonial rule. In many ways, the liberation movement led by Kenyatta remains a powerful political force in Kenya. As is the case in a number of African countries, pre-independence movements became the ruling political parties that continue to monopolize power until this day. I have often thought that Africa would have been in a better position if pre-independence movements had been banned and new political parties were created so there would be a fairer competition for power.

When Kenyatta died, many people were surprised to see his vice president, Daniel Arap Moi, replace him. Moi belonged to the Kalenjin ethnic group (the third or fourth largest ethnic group in Kenya). He was named president after considerable infighting with Kikuyu leaders. He surprised everyone by remaining in office for twenty-four years until 2002, when he stepped down at the age of seventy-eight (median age in Kenya is nineteen). His long reign at the helm of the nation shifted wealth from the Kikuyu to the Kalenjin and their allies. This is often a common way in Africa for redistributing wealth.

Before Moi had been named president, most Kenyans had not heard much of the Kalenjin ethnic group, which has its home area in northwest Kenya far from Nairobi, north and west of Lake Victoria. After seeing how members of the Kalenjin group benefited from the Moi regime, I met Kenyans who adopted Kalenjin names and began to identify themselves as Kalenjin so they could increase their chances to get a bigger slice of the national pie. I was amazed at how many Kalenjins gained a higher education during the Moi regime and how his cronies became owners of expensive highland farms and properties in Nairobi. Moi's long presidency further changed Kenya's power structure and historical trajectory.

With the death of Mboya, the Luos (maybe the third largest ethnic group in Kenya) were shut out of the corridors of power. I always thought this was

unfortunate because some of the most educated and competent people I met in Kenya were Luos. I once thought a prominent Luo politician, Jaramogi Odinga, had a chance of winning Kenya's 1992 presidential election. My Asian-Kenyan assistant told me he was very popular, but he could never win a presidential election.

When I asked her why she believed he had no chance of winning, her answer surprised me. She said, "Everybody knows Luos do not practice male circumcision as do most other ethnic groups in Kenya, and, therefore, he could never be elected. The people would never elect and follow an uncircumcised leader."

I continued my conversation with my assistant by noting that many Luos I had met had first names like Kennedy or Jefferson and were prominent in many professions requiring a high level of education, such as physicians and attorneys. She said, "Yes, this is because Luos like education too much."

I concluded from this brief conversation that some of Kenya's most educated and accomplished males are excluded from important political positions because they are uncircumcised. I could be wrong in my thinking on this, but I will maintain my views on this subject until I see a Luo elected president of Kenya. Meanwhile, the Kikuyus retain power and the wealth that comes with power because the man in the presidency since the retirement of Moi in 2002 is a Kikuyu. Currently, Kenya's president, Uhuru Kenyatta, is the son of its first president. His first name is Kiswahili for 'independence.'

It is of interest to note that one of Jaramogi's sons, Raila Odin ga (one of his seventeen children), vied for the presidency in 2007 against President Mwai Kibaki and almost won a hotly contested election for which there were a number of disputes and a violent aftermath. Raila later served as Kibaki's prime minister. In 2017, Raila continued as a leader of the opposition and ran again for the presidency against Uhuru Kenyatta. The results of this election were contested before Kenya's Supreme Court and it rejected them, calling for new elections. Raila withdrew his candidacy from this second round of presidential elections.

It makes me sad to remember my competent Asian-Kenyan assistant. She and her family went to coastal Mombasa for a holiday. The road from Nairobi to Mombasa was not then in good condition. This road had a bad reputation for the number of vehicle accidents that occurred daily on this treacherous key national transport artery from its main seaport to the interior and neighboring countries. Her car was involved in a terrible vehicle accident and she and members of her family were killed. Nearby villagers rushed to the scene of the accident, but instead of attending to those injured or killed, they busied themselves with absconding with all the victims' belongings.

I have visited Kenya and lived in Nairobi several times. I have crisscrossed Kenya overland in every direction. I once took the old night train from Nairobi to Mombasa and traveled on to the famous Lamu Island. I cannot think of anything anyone would want to see or do in Kenya that I have not seen or done. I have enjoyed its Indian Ocean beaches, game parks and Mt. Kenya (over 17,000 feet), second highest mountain in Africa. Many Kenyans believe that Africa's highest peak, Mt. Kilimanjaro (over 19,000 feet) should also be within Kenya's territory.

They say that Queen Victoria of England wanted to give her German grandson, Kaiser Wilhelm II, a gift for his birthday so she allowed the southern border of her

Kenya colony to be modified in 1896 to place Mt. Kilimanjaro within the boundaries of the German colony, Tanganyika (later named Tanzania). I often heard if you want to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro you had to go to Tanzania, but if you wanted to see it, you had to be on the Kenya side of the border. In my many flights from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to Nairobi, I would always try to sit on the side of the plane that gave the best view of the top of Mt. Kilimanjaro. I, and many others, have observed over the years dwindling amounts of snow on the peak of this magnificent mountain.

One thing I always admired about Kenya was that following its independence in 1963 it joined with the neighboring countries of Tanzania and Uganda to form the East Africa Community (EAC). I thought this was a brilliant idea. Under the EAC, these three countries shared the same currency, airline and customs union. This was exactly the kind of 'regionalization' I believed was needed in Africa in order to constitute a viable economic block. Unfortunately, the EAC fell apart in 1977. The reasons for its demise are ascribed to the demands of Uganda's deranged dictator, Idi Amin, and the acquiescence of greedy Kenyan politicians who saw opportunities to line their pockets if the EAC were abolished. Economies of scale were an attractive concept for Kenya but not helpful to greedy individuals.

I stayed often at the Hilton in central Nairobi, sometimes for weeks. I learned to stay on the ground floor to avoid the problems caused to the elevator when there was one of the frequent power outages. Initially, I found myself walking up and down from near the top of the seventeen-floor hotel to its ground floor every time there was an electrical power outage.

It was in Nairobi that I learned to fear taking elevators (called lifts in Nairobi). I was trapped in stalled elevators a few times. If possible, I would always take the stairs. One time I had to go to a meeting on the twenty-sixth floor of the impressive Kenyatta International Conference Center, but the elevator was not working. Walking up and down the stairs to this floor was the most physically demanding task I did in Kenya.

My idea of a good day in central Nairobi was to go to the famous and nearby New Stanley Hotel outdoor Thorn Tree Cafй for lunch. This is the oldest hotel in Nairobi and has been in use for well over 100 years. Many celebrities, including one of my favorite authors, Ernest Hemingway, have stayed at this hotel in past years. I always examined closely the old acacia Thorn Tree in the middle of the garden for any messages from anyone I knew. There were dozens of messages tacked to the trunk of the tree by people passing through this Nairobi crossroads. Back then, this was an important way of communicating your whereabouts and onward travel plans. Consulting the Thorn Tree was a necessary ritual for anyone traveling through Nairobi.

When I ordered a beer to drink at the New Stanley or elsewhere in Kenya, I was always amused by being asked if I wanted my beer cold or warm. I knew several Africans who preferred their beer warm. One elderly African told me he always drank warm beer because you should not drink anything colder than your blood temperature. Despite all my years in Africa, I still prefer my beer cold.

I did find, as elsewhere in Africa, that Kenyans like their beer as well as a variety of home-brewed alcoholic concoctions. A wide variety of alcoholic drinks which are consumed by many Kenyans are illegal and potentially poisonous. I read

reports in the local newspapers about people dying and becoming gravely ill by drinking forms of wood alcohol which contained toxic chemicals like methanol. The high consumption of prohibited alcoholic beverages is a big problem in Kenya.

I refer the reader to six chapters on Kenya in my 2017 book, *Dead Cow Road – Life on the Frontlines of an International Crisis.* Although the characters in this book, which is mainly about Somalia, are fictionalized, the places described in the book are deeply rooted in reality. There are many details in these chapters about Kenya which I do not repeat here.

I was on another overnight stopover in Nairobi in 1983 and had the morning free before returning to the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport to continue to my destination. I was with a group of colleagues who were arranging to go to Nairobi Park on the outskirts of the city to see wild game. I told them my priority was to see how Kenyans lived. They went to Nairobi Park and I arranged for a driver to take me to see Africa's largest slum, Kibera.

The taxi driver was reluctant to take me. He claimed if you did not live there it was not safe to go there, especially if you were a 'muzungu.' I insisted and he relented and took me to the edge of this vast slum. I was appalled by what I saw. People crammed into a crumbling warren of rickety rooms built mostly on piles of refuse. The living conditions were the worst I had seen in Africa. The population density of this sprawling slum had to be the highest I had ever observed. I had been told that nobody really knows how many people live in Kibera, but it is speculated that over 500,000 people are packed into a relatively small space. The highest population density in Africa could possibly be in Kibera.

I have thought many times about what I saw many years ago in Kibera and wondered if more deplorable Kiberas were not forming in Africa. With fast urbanization in Africa, slum growth has accelerated. Most of the new arrivals in Africa's rapidly expanding cities are slum dwellers. I will not be surprised that more poor Africans will soon be living in urban slums than in Africa's rural areas.

The greatest concentration of poverty in the world is in Africa and much of this poverty is increasingly found in Africa's fast-growing cities. Currently, it is estimated that about one-third of Nairobi's 4 million population resides in slums. Yet, millions of rural inhabitants continue to occupy the lowest rungs of poverty. Most of these people are farmers practicing subsistence agriculture on small farm plots. I have often believed if you cannot increase the productivity of rural farmers, you cannot increase their incomes. Thus, the reduction of nationwide poverty depends upon higher incomes and the increased buying power of the rural population.

I also believe it is difficult to have a functioning democracy if the rural population has not benefitted from a basic formal education. Participatory democracy works poorly when a large percentage of the people are illiterate. Uneducated people are more easily manipulated by powerful politicians and local authorities, particularly in societies steeped in a traditional allegiance to village chiefs who practice age-old customs of patronage and tribute. I will venture to state that democracy is not possible in an agrarian society. In any event, I believe the practice of democracy in Africa is only good to the extent that it reduces widespread poverty.

One other thing I liked to do in Nairobi was to read its interesting and well-established local newspapers. I could often spend hours in one of Nairobi's friendly coffee shops reading these newspapers and the books I had purchased at one of a handful of bookshops I frequented. I learned at one or two of these bookshops you could obtain books that had been banned by the Kenyan government if you discreetly asked the store manager for them. The banned book would be given to you in plain brown paper wrapping at your table when you were ready to leave. You would then walk away, making sure you were not followed by any secret police. I recall one book I obtained in this way: *Rogue Ambassador: An African Memoir*, published in 1997 by a controversial man, Smith Hempstone, who had been an outspoken noncareer U.S.' Ambassador to Kenya in the early 1990s.

One of the most incongruous sights I had ever witnessed was at the corner of Moi and Haile Selassie Avenues in 1980. I stood along the latter avenue to watch an official parade that featured Haile Mariam Mengistu, the President-Dictator of Kenya's northern neighbor, Ethiopia. I was upset when Kenya accepted him for an official visit. It was disgusting to me that he was paraded down an avenue named after the former Emperor of Ethiopia whom he had brutally killed after taking over Ethiopia in a bloody Marxist-Leninist revolution in 1974. His killing of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1975 ended the Solomonic Dynasty that had endured without rupture since the thirteenth century. Again, I look forward to the day when Africa no longer praises the worst examples of its leaders.

The U.S. Embassy was located on this same corner. I spent many hours meeting with Department of State colleagues and friends in this embassy. I was moved to tears in Zambia on August 7, 1998, when I received the news that the embassy had been the object of a terrorist attack. A huge truck bomb had been detonated near the embassy, causing great damage to the embassy and nearby buildings. Several of my former embassy colleagues and hundreds of Kenyans in nearby buildings and in the streets at this busy corner were killed or injured. Nairobi was never the same for me after this horrific bombing.

Perhaps I should save these words for the chapter on Tanzania, but on the same day our embassy was bombed in Nairobi, our embassy in Dar es Salaam was also struck by a bomb. My former residence (1994-96) was damaged because it was located next to the embassy. These bombings were a reminder to me that survival in Africa depends sometimes on being far from the wrong place at the right time, or, in other words, at times it can be a matter of a few minutes and dumb luck. Sadly, the potential to be placed in harm's way in Africa is much greater today than it was when I first set foot on the continent in 1970.

I thought that after the horrific destruction of the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, USAID would begin to build a new office building on the property it had owned for years on Bishops Road. USAID has already moved from its location in central Nairobi to the swank Westlands suburb. The embassy moved in with USAID. Later USAID moved to another part of Nairobi to share part of the International Center of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) complex. Later, a newer and much bigger embassy was built near the UN's complex in the Gigiri District of Nairobi and USAID was obliged to move into this new embassy building. I wonder whatever happened to USAID's property on Bishop's Road.

In 1997, I was astounded by the sight of the biggest refugee camp in Africa. This complex of refugee camps called 'Daadab' was located near Garissa in eastern Kenya. I had been in refugee camps before in Africa, but this camp disturbed me because I did not see any future for its residents, nearly 250,000 people. Most of the people in the camp had fled violence in Somalia or South Sudan. Besides this large camp, there are other refugee camps in Kenya. Some of the residents of these camps have resided there for years. Altogether, Kenya may be harboring the largest number of refugees in Africa, if not the world. One of the most famous of its former Somali refugees is Ilhan Omar who is currently a U.S. Congress member from Minnesota. She spent several years in a refugee camp in Kenya before emigrating to the U.S.

In 2007, I was in Nairobi helping design a project to reduce the dire effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Kenya was one of a dozen countries in Africa with a relatively high adult HIV prevalence rate. When I arrived in Africa in 1970, HIV/AIDS was unknown. It is now a major health threat which is taking a great toll on African lives, society and economies. There have been so many deaths caused by AIDS that the average age of life expectancy in many African countries has declined to shockingly low levels. One of the harshest consequences of the HIV/AIDS pandemic are the millions of orphans it has created.

I am happy that HIV/AIDS did not exist during my early years in Africa. This deadly disease has changed the landscape in Africa and damaged in many cases the fabric of society. While in Nairobi, one of my Kenyan colleagues died from AIDS and I attended his funeral at the city cemetery. I was really struck to see in this large cemetery the heavy consequences of AIDS in Africa. It appeared that half the graves in this old cemetery were of recent origin and they were mostly for young people. A Kenyan colleague said, "Look at all the new graves. The best of Kenya's youth has been killed by AIDS."

Kenya may be one of the few countries in Africa on the cusp of a demographic transition. Although its national population has doubled to about 52 million since my 1983 visit, its TFR has declined from an average of nearly eight children per woman of reproductive age in 1977 to less than three children today. This impressive decline in Kenya's TFR is closely related to the rise in its CPR, which is around sixty-two percent, one of the highest rates in Africa. I have always found that the TFR and CPR rates can tell much about the development status of a country. Another key development indicator is the nutritional stunting rate of children under five years of age.

At the same time, Kenya's growing population is outpacing its resource base. In this regard, Kenya's case is not much different than the less developed African countries. Fast growing populations mean there are more people than a country can properly care for and serve. Everything becomes smaller on a per capita basis. And, no matter how much population growth is slowed, the global population rankings of most Africa countries increase. There will be a long lag time before the impacts of a demographic transition are effective.

It is perhaps not fair to compare any African country with a U.S. state, but such comparisons can be instructive. Kenya is about twice the size of the U.S. State of Nevada, which has a little over 2 million people, about four percent of Kenya's population. The per capita income level in Nevada is about $30,000, and in Kenya

it is around $1,200. Over fifty percent of Kenyans live below the international poverty line of one dollar ninety cents. Yet, Kenya is one of the better-off countries in Africa.

Lately, the Al-Shabaab terrorist attacks in Nairobi on some of its upscale shopping centers are an ugly reminder that some parts of Africa are less safe than ever before. The cost of added security in Africa is significant. Living in Africa these days is often akin to living under house arrest. Africa is no longer a place you can go out night or day without fear. The continent is a far cry from the Africa I knew in the 1970s when I did not lock my house door at night. It saddens me to no end that staying safe in Africa these days has become a major preoccupation.

I have spent most of my life in sunny countries in Africa. I have never used suntan lotion or sunglasses. I was surprised to have a severe case of sunburn in Nairobi. I was so happy to get out of icy, freezing weather in the U.S. when I arrived in my hotel in January 1997 in Nairobi that I could not wait to bask in the sun on the balcony of my hotel room. I fell asleep in the recliner chair on my small balcony and woke up with bad burns on my face and shoulders. I had forgotten that at Nairobi's altitude (about 6,000 feet) it was easy to get a sunburn.

Many people in the U.S. with whom I am acquainted know Kenya because of its famous long-distance runners. Kenya has consistently produced for many years champion marathon runners who usually hail from, and practice in, the thinner air of Kenya's highlands. The high performance of these runners is respected around the world. Kenya needs to perform as a country like its champion runners. Kenya's leaders need to be the champions of their people and stop being their own worst enemies.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Lesotho

WHEN I WENT TO the Kingdom of Lesotho in 2003, I did not know I was in a distinct African country. I took a flight from Johannesburg to Bloemfontein, a major city in South Africa, and drove about ninety miles uphill on a well-paved highway from there to Maseru, the small capital city of the tiny mountainous enclave of Lesotho. I did not understand how I could be in a separate country when I was still well within the boundaries of South Africa. Lesotho is a small highland island of a country located entirely within the confines of South Africa.

Given the location of Lesotho within the national boundaries of South Africa, it is not surprising that it is totally dependent upon South Africa. Most wage earners from Lesotho are men who work in the gold mines in South Africa. The economy of Lesotho consists mostly of the remittances of these men. Other key components of the Lesotho economy include the collection of custom duties, diamonds, and the provision of electricity and water to South Africa.

Lesotho is often referred to as South Africa's water tower. South Africa has constructed a complex of dams and reservoirs within Lesotho to collect rainfall and water runoff from Lesotho's mountainous terrain. The water collected and electricity generated by hydro-electric dams is transported to South Africa. The water is particularly important for use in South Africa's largest city, Johannesburg, which is about 260 miles north of Lesotho.

My first impression of Lesotho was when I checked into a big international hotel in Maseru and there were Chinese everywhere. If I were not mistaken, there were people working in the hotel who were part Chinese and part Basuto (name for people from Lesotho). I have never been among so many Chinese. I made my initial inspection of the hotel. I opened the door to the big casino and was amazed that during the daytime it was packed with Chinese. Most of the Chinese were smoking cigarettes. I may have come away from that moment with the wrong impression of Chinese, but to this day I think that in general Chinese men like gambling and smoking.

I arrived late in the day and took a brief nap in my hotel room. I was thinking about taking an evening stroll, but when I stepped out of the hotel's front entrance, I was stopped in my tracks by the lightning show in the low mountains on the outskirts of Maseru. I had never seen such lightning without any thunder or rain. Yet, dancing before my eyes was a spectacular display of dry lightning bolts. I continued to be mystified by how nature could stage such a fantastic performance.

The next morning, I decided to take a tour of the country before starting the job I had been sent to do. I always believed you could not help well a country if you did not know a country. I found a taxi driver parked in front of the hotel. I asked him how long it would take to drive around the whole country. He told me we could circumnavigate the entire country in about one-half day. We negotiated a price for this tour of Lesotho and off we went.

The taxi driver was talkative and could not wait to tell me his story. I asked him how long he had been driving a taxi and got a much bigger response than I expected. He said in excellent English, "I am new at driving a taxi. I used to own and manage my own store, but I sold out to a Chinese man."

I asked him, "Why did you do that?"

He laughed before saying, "I could not compete with the Chinese. They work hard, live poor and sacrifice everything to get ahead in their business."

He went on to say, "The Chinese are taking over our country. They are everywhere and doing everything. They are speaking our language, Sotho. They are mixing with our women and producing a whole new generation of people. I would not be surprised to see this new mixed race start a new political party and take over our country."

For me, his words were breathtaking, but I did not know enough about Lesotho to refute anything he said. As we passed through numerous small towns, I noticed Chinese shops in every place we passed. I had heard Chinese had come to Lesotho in large numbers to operate textile mills that could take advantage of world trade agreements that allowed poor countries to export without imposing entry duties on garments. Some of these agreements have expired, causing the textile mills to cease operations. But, instead of leaving Lesotho, the Chinese remained.

The driver brought me back to Maseru. He showed me his former store and other parts of Maseru, a city of around 330,000 people. (Lesotho has a total population of nearly 2.3 million and is smaller than the geographical size of the U.S. State of Maryland.) The driver also showed me a school the Chinese had built to teach Mandarin to the local people. The driver dropped me at my hotel and I paid him for a great guided tour of Lesotho.

I was in Lesotho to design a project which would help poor households living with HIV/AIDS to produce nutritious food for their consumption. Lesotho has one of the highest adult AIDS prevalence rates in the world. Many of the men who had worked in the mines in South Africa returned home infected with this deadly virus and one or more of its opportunistic infections, e.g. tuberculosis. They were too weak to do any of the field work needed to grow food crops in the traditional way.

The project I designed was called LEAP—Lesotho Emergency Agriculture Project. This project involved building from the plentiful stones of the natural terrain a short-walled structure. This structure was filled with the rich soil needed to cultivate vegetables. These enclosed planting stations were referred to as keyhole gardens. The idea was that a household could grow the vegetables they needed to eat to maintain their health.

Good health was necessary to avoid the toxic effects of the anti-retroviral drugs people with AIDS took to avoid succumbing to this disease. LEAP is one of dozens of projects I designed, implemented or evaluated over my many years in Africa.

Perhaps, it was one of the more successful projects with which I was involved. I feared that careful and comprehensive post-project evaluations would reveal that little of the tens of millions of U.S. dollars invested in these projects achieved lasting results.

The excess mortality caused by the high adult AIDS prevalence rate in Lesotho lowered its average life expectancy to nearly fifty-three years of age. The average life expectancy in Africa is sixty-one. For comparison purposes, average life expectancy in the U.S. is about seventy-nine years of age.

With a large percentage of Lesotho's men working in South Africa, the women of Lesotho run many of the country's institutions. Girls and women are in the majority in the schools, helping give Lesotho one of the highest female literacy rates in Africa. This observation does not mean that spousal abuse directed at women was not a problem in Lesotho. Throughout Africa, wife beating is a critical problem and part of the general gender-based violence that occurs too often in Africa. Issues surrounding women's rights loom large in Africa and should be considered when examining factors that impede development progress in Africa.

Perhaps it is the high adult AIDS prevalence rate in Lesotho that contributes to it having one of the highest suicide rates in the world. Maybe another factor is its cold winters (it is winter from May to September in the southern hemisphere). Lesotho is the most elevated country in Africa, with an average elevation of over 3,000 feet and high mountain peaks of more than 4,500 feet. In the winter, snow skiing is a popular sport for visiting tourists.

While working in Mozambique, I had a British colleague who had previously worked in Lesotho. I asked her why she wanted to work in Lesotho. She quickly said, "I have three small children and Lesotho is the only country in Africa without malaria."

She had a good point. Lesotho's elevated cool climes prevented the breeding of the female Anopheles mosquito that spreads malaria. I did not see any mosquitoes or flies in Lesotho. Being free of the threat of malaria was a big bonus offered by this tiny country.

One of the risks of living and working in Africa is the greater exposure to disease. Malaria is a special health concern. This disease is endemic in all of Sub-Saharan Africa, except Lesotho. It infects hundreds of millions of Africans each year and kills over a half million people each year in Africa, mostly the more susceptible children under five years of age and pregnant women. Over ninety percent of the malaria cases in the world occur in Africa. Malaria contributes importantly to holding Africa back.

Over the years, I have contracted many tropical diseases in Africa. I have been hospitalized four times with malaria. These firsthand encounters with malaria make me hypersensitive to malaria and the obstacles it presents to moving Africa ahead. I used to do everything possible to avoid contracting a case of malaria. About twenty years ago, I gave up trying to avoid malaria. If I suspect I have malaria, I test rapidly and if this test is positive, I take the recommended treatment. When I travel, I always carry with me the pills needed to treat malaria. I do not know why, but it appears that mosquitoes no longer bite me. I note that I have not had malaria since 1998. I do agree that the Anopheles female mosquito is the most dangerous animal and the biggest killer in Africa.

Writing about Lesotho is awkward because of its size and location. No other country in Africa is a landlocked enclave located entirely within another country. In some ways, Lesotho is more an accident of history than it is a real country. Moreover, it is not located within just any other African country. It is located within one of Africa's wealthiest and most developed countries.

South Africa is one of Africa's leading economic powerhouses. It is one of the most highly ranked African countries on the continent on the UN's HDI. It is ranked in eighth place in the high human development category, while Lesotho is ranked twenty-sixth in the low human development category. I do not understand how there can be such a disparity between Lesotho and South Africa when the former country is fully embedded within South Africa.

This situation reminds me of American Indian reservations in the U.S. For example, the Navajo Indian Reservations in the U.S. are more than twice the geographical size of Lesotho. I once explained Africa's development challenges to a group of visiting Americans by telling them to explore the disparity between the quality of life on a Navajo Indian Reservation and life in U.S. territory that surrounds it. There is more to development than attempting to raise the capacity of a country by injecting funding and technology. Culture and traditional values matter too. Coming to grips with these slippery factors remain difficult subjects to understand.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Liberia

SMALL LIBERIA IS AFRICA'S biggest curiosity. Founded by former black slaves from the U.S. in the 1800s and independent since 1847, it is historically unlike any other African country, except Ethiopia, by not having been colonized by a European country. It could be said that it was colonized by black elites from the U.S. who brought with them the only life they previously knew in the American antebellum South. Liberia is the only country in Africa that falls squarely within America's orbit.

I thought I was transiting Liberia in 1977 and would only have a stopover of a couple hours at its Roberts Field Airport, but my flight to neighboring Abidjan, Ivory Coast, had technical difficulties. We were bussed the thirty-five miles into Monrovia for an overnight stay in a nondescript hotel. I was all eyes and ears because this was all very different from the other countries I knew in West Africa.

I did not like what I saw. It was as if Africans were trying to act like Americans. Everything American was exalted and anything that was truly African was treated with disdain. Liberia's flag was like the American one and its currency was also called a dollar. The Americo-Liberian elites who ran Liberia were proud to trace their lineage back to the U.S. while they held in low regard anything African. I did not like seeing such a small percentage (less than five percent) of the population consider Liberia's masses of diverse indigenous people as inferior beings.

Years later, when I was in Guinea next door to Liberia for four years, I learned more than I wanted about Liberia. One of my jobs at the U.S. Embassy in Conakry was to read almost daily the situational reports churned out by our embassy in Monrovia about what was happening in Liberia. I mentioned to one of my colleagues about not liking Liberia during my brief stopover in Monrovia six years earlier. He said, "Well, if you did not like it then, you certainly will not like the hideous monster it has become."

Reading reams of reporting cables about Liberia helped me understand better what my colleague meant. The status quo in Liberia was preserved under the control of the imported Americo-Liberians and their single political party, 'True Whig Party,' from 1847 until 1977. In 1980, the status quo was shattered, and 133 years of Americo-Liberian hegemony was brutally terminated by a violent military coup by a group of soldiers who identified with inland ethnic groups. This bloody coup was led by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe.

The oppressed majority was fed up with the Americo-Liberians controlling everything and decided not to take it anymore. The leaders of this majority cut in the most deep and dreadful way the power reins held for over a century by the

descendants of American slaves and other blacks imported into Liberia in the last century. Doe's well-armed crew stormed the presidential palace and killed Liberia's twentieth President, William Tolbert.

Tolbert's ministers and colleagues were rounded up, beaten, stripped of their clothing and paraded naked through the streets of Monrovia to be heckled by the local people. They were then marched to the beach, tied to posts and executed by a firing squad. Their bodies were dumped in a common grave and crowds of people came by to hurl insults on their dead bodies before they were covered by dirt and sand. Much of this horrific scene is embedded in my mind because these revolting acts were filmed and the video was distributed internationally.

The shock of this bloody overthrow had everyone scrambling to figure out what to do. Thousands of Liberians, particularly Americo-Liberians, fled the country. Many Liberians requested asylum in the U.S. This initial wave of Liberian immigrants resulted in the growth of the sizeable Liberian community in the U.S. Today, it is estimated that around 300,000 people are in the U.S. who can trace their origins to Liberia.

I was befuddled by the U.S. government's acceptance of Doe and his presidency. However, I should have known better. At that time, the Cold War was not over and, thus, the U.S. supported a number of African despots because they claimed to be anti-Soviet. Any enemy of our enemy is our friend, no matter how disgusting he or she may be. This was a time when the level of aid provided by the U.S. to any African country was often determined by its stance vis-a-vis the Soviet Union or the way it voted in the United Nations. I have always wondered if the U.S. were inadvertently propping up failed countries in Africa or was it blind to what was going on behind the scenes in the countries it was assisting.

Somehow Doe was able to hold the top political reins of power for nine years before the chaos initiated by him turned into genuine terror and national destruction. A power struggle, as elsewhere in Africa, that fell typically along ethnic lines ensued in Liberia. Doe belonged to the Krahn group. But armed rebel groups were forming and aligning themselves with one or more of Liberia's dozen ethnic groups.

In odd and unexpected circumstances, armed men aligned with a new warlord, Prince Johnson of the Gio group, captured Doe while killing all his guards. It was 1990 and Doe thought he was safe while visiting a base of the troops that had been sent by other African countries to help stabilize Liberia. Doe was taken to Prince who oversaw his torture, mutilation and beheading. This prolonged torture session was videotaped and distributed around the world. It was alleged that part of this slow torture session was to extract from Doe his Swiss bank account numbers. It is also alleged that Prince's men later ate Doe's body. If you don't want unimaginable scenes of absolute brutality and barbarian savagery permanently etched on your memory, do not watch the repulsive video.

Prince was not new to the increasingly troubled scene in Liberia. Previously, in 1983, he accompanied Thomas Quiwonkpa when he tried to topple Doe. Quiwonkpa failed in his coup attempt and was captured, executed and dismembered so his body parts could be dragged about Monrovia for ridicule. Prince fled the country but came back to Liberia to oust Doe as described above.

With the removal of Doe, Liberia's first civil war was triggered, and the worst was yet to come with a second civil war.

It is interesting to know that despite having much blood on his hands and having been a criminal warlord, Prince is today an elected Senator, representing his home Nimba County. It is also of interest to note that Prince received military training in the U.S. I wonder how many coups in Africa have involved Africans who have received military training in the U.S.

This is not a book for tracing in detail Liberia's bloody recent history. I hope it suffices to note that it had two terrible civil wars which lasted seventeen years (1989-2003). These wars were filled with uncountable inhuman atrocities. Liberia was destroyed during these wars. Hundreds of thousands were killed, thousands were maimed and injured, and over a million people fled into neighboring countries. Many of the fighters were child soldiers. It was as if the intent of the various warring groups was to erase Liberia from the map, to exterminate its people and decimate any goodness left in the fabric of society of this bedeviled country.

One of the major participants in the destruction of Liberia was the notorious warlord, Charles Taylor, who had escaped from a U.S. prison in 1985 and mysteriously ended up in Libya. He had military training in Libya and received backing to enter Liberia from Cфte d'Ivoire in late 1989. Once inside Liberia he gained adherents and they went about wrecking the country. He was able to use corruption and intimidation to win the presidential elections of 1997 by a wide margin. Some people said they voted for him because they were afraid of what he would do if he lost the election. Across West Africa people mocked his campaign slogan, "He killed my ma, he killed my pa, but I will vote for him." People were worn out by years of war and suffering and were willing to try anything to have peace.

Taylor was forced to resign from the presidency in 2003. His previous war crimes and his involvement with the civil war in neighboring Sierra Leone were among the factors that forced him from office. He went into exile in Nigeria and disappeared for a while, but he eventually ended up at the ICC in The Hague, the Netherlands.

In 2012, Taylor was sentenced at the ICC on all counts, including terror, murder and rape, to fifty years in prison. (As he is over sixty years old, it is expected that he will die in prison.) The presiding judge over his trial pronounced some memorable words: "The accused has been found responsible for aiding and abetting, as well as planning, some of the most heinous and brutal crimes in recorded human history."

Taylor was the first former head of state convicted by the ICC. I believe the ICC does serve the purpose of deterring others from committing crimes against humanity. It therefore pains me to see some Africa countries work to withdraw as members of the ICC. Several African countries complain that thus far the ICC has targeted Africans. It would be an eye-opening exercise to review why so many of those accused by the ICC are from Africa. I also find it unhelpful that the U.S. government has never been a member of the ICC because it resists any attempt to try U.S. citizens by a non-U.S. body.

Part of the crimes committed by Taylor involved trafficking blood diamonds from Sierra Leone in exchange for providing rebels in that country with arms. It is

alleged that arms were received from Burkina Faso and its president, Blaise Compoarй, was paid in diamonds. It is also rumored that troops from Burkina Faso assisted Taylor in the fighting in Liberia. Taylor also kept a house in Ouagadougou. I can recall when I was in Ouagadougou having Taylor's house pointed out to me.

Burkina Faso was not the only country in West Africa to be affected by Liberia's protracted conflict. The entire region was destabilized and, therefore, several countries worked to end the conflict. There was fear in the subregion that the Liberian wars would spread to neighboring countries. Already, similar violence was raging in Sierra Leone. I went to neighboring Guinea in 1998 to assess whether or not such violence and chaos could also take place in this country. I learned much about the troubles in Liberia and Sierra Leone by talking with refugees from these countries who had fled across Liberia's borders to Guinea.

After Taylor, Liberia had peaceful elections and transition to two more presidents, Ellen Sirleaf Johnson and George Weah. The elderly Johnson was a survivor of previous Liberian regimes, Harvard-educated, a Nobel Peace prize winner and the first woman president in Africa. Weah was a former star soccer player in Europe. Maybe after more than fifteen years of relative peace, Liberia has a new lease on life and can begin to behave like a functional country.

Of course, the maintenance of stability in Liberia has been helped greatly since 2003 by thousands of UN peacekeeping troops. In Liberia and elsewhere in Africa, the international community pays huge sums to keep Africa stable by the deployment of multinational troops under the auspices of the UN. I often thought that fielding UN troops was a recognition of the failure of colonization and the incapacity of some African countries for self-governance. After such a long history of violence and mayhem, I am not convinced that Liberia will remain stable for a long time after the last of the of UN troops has withdrawn.

Unless good and competent governance is practiced by Liberia's leaders, I believe Liberia could slip backwards again. Perhaps, the main question is: Can Liberia maintain its own peace? The answer to this question bears watching over the next decade.

Much could depend on controlling the level of corruption. In the past, official whole-scale corruption had been one of Liberia's biggest enemies. Its extractive-dependent economy makes it ripe ground for corrupt activities. It possesses gold, diamonds, timber, iron and rubber to export and all these items can be fraudulently trafficked or traded by unscrupulous invoicing. In addition, like elsewhere in Africa, the illegal trade in drugs is a growing concern.

The little I saw in 1977 from our bus window as we drove from the airport to our Monrovia hotel at the end of the day left me with negative impressions. In particular, there was even more a lack of sanitation than I had observed in other African countries. There were high piles of rubbish and raw sewage was observable in several open canals.

The high annual rainfall (180 inches) experienced by Monrovia, mostly during its May-to-October rainy season, compounds its sanitation crisis and adds to the spread of disease. Here, and elsewhere in tropical Africa, poor sanitation contributes heavily to the spread of water-borne diseases and provides ideal locations for the breeding of vectors like the Anopheles mosquito which communicates malaria.

Humid, hot, tropical Africa provides the perfect environment for diseases to propagate. Urban Africa will be a hotbed of disease as long as poor sanitation persists.

Cleaning up Africa's cities would cost billions of dollars and keeping Africa clean would cost millions of dollars each year. One indicator of progress in African cities is a regular system for the efficient collection and disposal of garbage. Regrettably, such systems are rare.

I also observed that Monrovians were cooking their food like elsewhere in West Africa. They were using locally made charcoal or wood to cook. I knew this mass dependence on cooking fuel derived from trees was creating a growing problem. With rapid population growth, trees were becoming increasingly scarce. Remaining trees which are suitable for firewood or charcoal-making could only be found by traveling longer distances from the cities. I have often wondered what Africans will use for cooking fuel when there are no more trees. Some Africans use canisters of natural gas to cook their food, but this more expensive option remains beyond the economic reach of most Africans.

I had read in Liberia's case that the search for wood had resulted in the cutting of mangrove trees along its coast on the Atlantic Ocean. These trees provide places for fish to reproduce and they protect the coast from erosion by the sea. I was told that Liberia, like other countries in coastal West Africa, was suffering from serious and extensive coastal erosion and already much land had been lost to the sea.

Liberia's remaining tropical forests have also been greatly diminished by legal and illegal logging of valuable wood species. Illegal logging has been reported as one of the biggest corrupt activities occurring in Liberia. The Liberian penchant for the consumption of bushmeat has also accelerated the decline of several protected forest animal species. Of course, the years of war exacerbated this unhappy situation.

No chapter on Liberia would be complete without the mention of the word, 'Firestone.' The U.S. company, Firestone, has had a gigantic natural rubber plantation in Liberia since 1926. If you have ever used Firestone tires on your car, you probably were benefitting from Liberia's natural rubber. This plantation has basically operated like a country within a country. The income paid to the Liberian government for many years helped the Americo-Liberians to stay in power and maintain their hegemony over the original inhabitants of Liberia who mainly lived in the interior of this small country (about the size of the U.S. State of Virginia).

A few more words about the Americo-Liberians. The return to the continent of their ancestors in the nineteenth century was not easy. It is estimated that half of them died of tropical ailments and a good number returned to the U.S. after a short time in Liberia. Those who remained in Liberia did so with the assistance of the various abolitionist groups which had promoted their return to Africa. These well-meaning groups thought it was best for blacks in America to return to the land of their forefathers, although Liberia was not the geographic origin of their ancestors.

Liberia is an interesting case because it is so exceptional. Maybe its case does provide some useful lessons. In hindsight, it appears that what was widely accepted as the right thing to do in the 1800s by shipping ex-slaves back to Africa, really only planted the seeds for some of the worst violence ever observed in the

twentieth century on the African continent. Times change and what was right long ago may not be so good today.

The reality of today is that almost every Liberian who can do so is leaving the country. Liberia lost much of its population during the wars and out-migration continues to such extent that it has one of the lowest national population growth rates in Africa. This does not mean its population is not expanding. When I was observing Liberia closely in 1985 from Guinea, Liberia had about 2 million people; today, it has nearly 5 million people. Liberia's population has almost tripled over the past forty years, and over half of this population is under the age of nineteen years. Also, over fifty percent of Liberians are crowded into urban areas, especially the greater metropolitan area of Monrovia where it is estimated that over twenty percent of Liberia's population lives.

I can recall reading in disbelief the reporting coming from our embassy in Monrovia. I never thought in my wildest imagination that the U.S. government (USG) would allow Liberia to tear itself apart. After all, Liberia is the only country in Africa that is truly under the USG's wing. All the other countries have attachments with their previous colonial masters. Moreover, besides the U.S.' historical ties with Liberia, the U.S. had many official assets in Liberia which it could not abandon.

I kept telling myself we could easily intervene in 1985 to stop the mayhem and destruction. We had a couple thousand U.S. Marines sitting in ships offshore raring to go onshore and settle quickly the conflict. I was surprised they sat offshore in U.S. Navy vessels for six months.

Years later, in 1992, I was part of a seminar at the National War College to study the Liberian conflict. One participant in this group was a crusty Marine Colonel who had been on the ships sitting off the Liberian shore in 1985. He started his comments by saying that the one thing Marines disliked the most was sitting for a long time on a Navy ship. He ended his vigorous comments by saying, "We could have done much more than take candy bars to the U.S. Embassy in Monrovia."

I have often thought about his comment over the years and wished more than ever that the U.S. would have intervened in Liberia. I wholeheartedly believe 2,000 Marines with air support could have quickly restored order and sanity in Liberia. Instead, the USG stood by and watched the loss of its assets and the demise of a country it had helped create and supported for over 130 years. The inaction on the part of the USG resulted in not only the destruction of Liberia, but the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives. The USG had the opportunity to save a country and its people but declined to do so. Where is the honor in such inaction? If we cannot be a reliable partner in Liberia, why should any country in Africa rely on USG assistance?

I did complain during this time when I was next door in Guinea that Liberia was getting all of the USG's attention and assistance funding while all the other countries in West Africa were being neglected. I told the director, Julius Coles, in Washington of USAID's Office of Coastal West Africa that he should change the name of his office to the "Office of Liberia" because he spent all his time on Liberia. The dire situation in Liberia siphoned resources from other needy countries in West

Africa. At one point, Liberia had the highest per capita U.S. assistance funding level in Africa.

Sadly, no amount of assistance could prevent Liberia from tearing itself to shreds. I guess that if you added up all the funding provided to Liberia since its founding as a country in 1847, the amount would be higher than what the USG provided to Europe under the Marshall Plan after World War II, particularly if calculated on a per capita basis.

Another income-generation activity which has helped Liberia financially is being a source of registration for several thousand ships that ply the world's oceans. I have seen many times ocean-going ships flying the Liberian flag, which mimics the U.S. flag. I have always doubted the legality and appropriateness of the use of international flags of convenience, but this unusual practice is continued around the globe by several countries.

Given the large percentage of its population living abroad, an important income source of Liberia is the high amount of remittances sent to the families of the Liberian diaspora. On a percentage of GDP basis, Liberia has the highest rate of remittances in SSA. Perhaps, one-third of Liberia's annual GDP is composed of remittances. The level of remittances provided annually is more than the total in external aid received by Liberia from donor agencies. This large funding stream points to the important role the diaspora from an African country can play in the development of their home country.

UN and African troops, and external assistance, were key factors in helping Liberia get back on its feet after years of bloody turmoil. Liberia will need more assistance if it is to remain stable and realize its full potential. One priority in my view should be the funding of projects to tap its huge hydroelectric potential. (Without electricity, how can a country progress?)

Our plane left Monrovia in 1977 before dawn and all I could think about was how dark and foreboding a place it was. I understand the lights are still off in most of the country despite its vast hydroelectric potential. I hope that one day all Liberians have reliable and economic electric lights, and with more light a brighter future can be built for the long-suffering Liberian people.

Interview with the Author

How did your journey to Africa begin?

It began by becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) in 1967. I asked to go to Africa, and I was sent to Honduras. After two years of serving as a PCV in Honduras, I repeated my request to go to Africa and to my surprise I was sent as a PCV to Africa in 1970.

What are some of the challenges of working in Africa?

I found that staying healthy to be among the many challenges of working in tropical Africa. Coming from outside the continent, you are more disposed to be infected by the many bacteria and viruses that dwell in Africa's warm climate. I survived many tropical ailments, but the most fearsome of these was malaria. I am still wary of contracting malaria. I am also wary in some parts of Africa of increased security and safety concerns.

What was the first country you visited?

I was sent to Togo as a PCV and lived and worked in rural Togo for three years (1970-73) as a school construction and gardens PCV. Do you have a favorite country?

I feel at home anywhere in Africa. My preference is to live and work in a country that is more like Africa was fifty years ago. Of course, today's Africa is different than the Africa I knew decades ago. For various reasons, I would not mind living in Ghana or Tanzania. As I get older, I appreciate more good health services and an acceptable level of security.

What are the top five reasons to visit the African continent?

1. To be immersed in Africa's vast mosaic of different people, cultures, food, music, and languages.
2. To see first-hand Africa's natural scenic beauty.
3. To see Africa's unique wildlife.
4. To learn about the impoverished living conditions of most of Africa's people.
5. To know that Africa is not one country, but a diverse collection of fifty-four countries.

What led you to write this three-volume memoir?

At first, I thought I would write about my experiences in a few African countries. Then, it dawned on me that to be fair I should write about each of the African countries with which I have had contact. I then found myself writing about all fifty-four African countries.

How long did it take to write?

I began writing in my spare time my three-volume memoir in Luanda, Angola, in August 2018. I finished the first draft of this lengthy memoir in December 2019. I spent the early months of 2020 editing what I wrote.

Do you prefer writing in one genre over another?

I found that writing a memoir easier than writing my previous books of fiction because no imagination and plot formulation were required. In my memoir, I could write about factual situations and state my views as I best saw fit.

What book most influenced your life?

This is a tough question to answer. Perhaps, I was subtly influenced as a child growing up in Kansas by a book written in 1940 (year of my birth) by another Kansan, Osa Johnson. The worldwide best-selling book was entitled *I Married Adventure*. It was only when I visited in 2006 a museum dedicated to her and her husband, Martin, in a converted old railway station in her hometown of Chanute, Kansas, that it dawned on me that her book had in some unknown ways influenced me.

Where do you write?

At first, I had to be at my home desk and far from any distractions, but I found that my writing progress was slowed too much by waiting for these conditions. So, I forced myself to learn to write anywhere and under any circumstances. Now, it seems I write best on planes, trains, in airports, and coffee shops. And the more distractions the better. A writer will write, no matter what.

Is there any one thing that especially frustrates you about the writing process?

For me, the most frustrating thing is not having enough time to write about all the subjects I would like to write about. There are words inside me that are clamoring to pour out on the page. Sometimes, I dream about things to write and I am very frustrated when I do not have the time to jot these things down.

Any advice for novice writers?

I have been asked this question before and I have found that I have little to offer other writers. My style and life's experiences tend to give me an unorthodox approach to writing and, therefore, my way of writing is probably not of use by anyone else. All I know, if you are born to be a writer, you will write.

What's next?

I keep telling myself that at the age of seventy-five I should retire and take it easy. But there are more books hammering at the inside of my skull, begging me to write more words that will result in their creation. Perhaps, my next book will be about growing up in a small town in Kansas in the 1950s.

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