

# **PRESIDENT** **FOR A DAY**

**CORRUPTION**



**TOPIC - CORRUPTION**

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# OVERVIEW

Africa holds the potential to become the "food basket" of the world, the largest producer of foodstuffs, according to the UN. But at the moment, it is a different story, with many African nations plagued by droughts.

Just a few years ago, the peak of Mt. Kilimanjaro in Kenya was clad in a thick cap of snow. Today, this cap is melting, and the Sahara desert is spreading further south, creating barren desert where there was once savannah fit for grazing cattle. Great swathes of the African continent used to be covered by rainforest, now the rainforest is threatened by peasants who cut down the trees for firewood and to make room for crops. And the constant population growth means more mouths to feed.

## Famine

There are several reasons for this famine. The drought and climate changes are beyond the grasp of the Africans themselves, but they still have part of the blame. Most of the poor – and starving – Africans live in the countryside, dependent upon a neglected agricultural sector.

## Climate changes and drought

The continent of Africa is divided into various climate zones. To the far north, we find a Mediterranean climate similar to the one we know from Southern Europe. After that comes the Sahara desert, and south of this we find the belt known as the Sahel. The most rainy part of this zone is an area of savannah with tall grass, whilst the driest comprises dry steppes with scattered foliage. At the centre of the continent we find the tropical rainforest with plenty of precipitation, and then it is savannah, desert, and the Mediterranean climate of South Africa.

Sahel, in particular, is badly hit by the drought. Due to climate changes, the annual rainfall has shrunk significantly. In the summer, torrential downpours wash away the soil, turning once-fertile areas into barren desert or steppe. As an example, lions and elephants once roamed Eritrea and Ethiopia, today deserts with very few sources of nutrients for humans and animals cover large parts of these countries. Many inhabitants of the Sahel region are malnourished, lacking in vitamins.

***From time to time, this reaches such critical stages that the UN declares it a famine.***

This happened a few years ago in East Africa. In 2012, the situation in the eastern parts of the Sahel got to the point where more than 17 million people was faced with impending famine. The crisis was caused by a combination of drought caused by a lack of precipitation in 2011, insufficient granaries, an inflation in food prices and a large number of internal refugees – families who were evicted due to starvation. In Africa you find both peasants and nomad herders who wander the land with their cattles.



The nomads are often forced to put down their cattle, because they are unable to feed and water them. And if the crop fails, the peasants are forced to eat what can be used themselves, rather than sell it on the market. That means they cannot afford seed grain for the following year. It is a vicious circle that causes nomads and peasants to grow ever more impoverished.

Eventually, the family patriarch has to leave the village, and go seek employment in the city. The brunt of the labour is then left to the women of the village, who has to go to the city as well, and often spend entire days peddling at a market to sell a few tomatoes or ears of corn. According to the IPCC, Africa will be the continent that will suffer most from the climate changes. Soon, the great savannahs that are so popular with tourists, will become dry desert – a development that can already be seen in Kenya today.

## **The colonial heritage**

But it is not just the drought that causes famine. A part of the problem stems back to the time when the nations of Africa were colonies under European rule. The old powers such as France, Britain and Portugal simply laid claim to the soil the African peasants tilled and grazed their cattle upon, and erected grand plantations where they grew cash crops such as coffee and cocoa intended for the European market. The old self-sufficiency style of agriculture was neglected in favour of this system.

Another ancient problem is the insufficient infrastructure. The continent is sorely lacking in roads and railroads to effectively transport the foodstuffs around the countries. The Europeans did admittedly build both roads and railroads back in the day, but these always led from the interior of the country and out to the sea ports, from where the goods could be shipped.

## **Neglected agriculture**

Several African nations have neglected their agricultural sector. This, according to a 2012 UN report, is the primary problem facing the continent. The reasons for this are several. Firstly, the Africans have grown used to the idea of land being a free commodity, available in ample measures. Therefore, the workload has not been that great, as compared to the Asian continent where a shortage of arable land has meant a heavier workload to produce sufficient crops.

In Africa, many rural families go to bed hungry. The concept of starving peasants might seem odd, but the explanation is that the already minute tracts of land owned by each farmer has to be divided further each time the children inherit from their parents. Often, an African family only owns a single crop field.

Many years ago, a Danish scientist wrote a book on how to turn peasants into farmers. By this, she meant that the peasants had to change their way of thinking. It is not enough to grow enough crops and raise enough cattle to meet the needs of one's own family, what is known as self-sufficiency farming. Instead of consuming the harvest themselves, the peasants should sell their products to afford modern fertilizer, farming equipment and to afford the acquisition of more cattle.

Hardly any African peasants use fertilizer, and about 90% of the agricultural sector is heavily dependant on rainfall.

Very few use artificial irrigation, high-yield grains are practically unknown, and about a third of the annual harvest is lost to pests and insufficient storage facilities. From 1961-2005, there has been no increase in crop yields whatsoever, whilst Asia has seen it more than quadruple and Latin America has seen its yield triple in the same time span.

### **Can't the government do something?**

The African governments prefer to cater to the city-dwellers rather than the farmers out in the sticks. They impose taxes on agricultural products, and keep the prices on them at an artificially low level, often spending four to five times as much on the military than they do on investments in the agrarian sector.

Even the more affluent countries with oil and mineral profits flowing through the coffers produce less foodstuffs than they used to. Because the middle class prefer high-quality imported foodstuffs to the locally produced ones. Countries with a high BNP per capita such as Nigeria and Angola has more poor people than ever before. The banking sector is not of much help either – they won't lend money to the peasants. If they do, and the crop fails, there is no way for the peasant to repay the loan.

### **The fight for resources**

A UN observer in South Sudan is sitting in his helicopter en route to a remote village, where a mass murder has been reported. A neighbouring tribe or local militia tried to steal cattle from corrals outside the village. The inhabitants found out, but were gunned down by the thieves, with many casualties as a result. The struggle for water and arable land can lead to tensions between ethnic groups, and in some cases to outright civil war. A typical family will spend almost three quarters of its income on food, for example 72% in Nigeria and 85% in Tanzania. As a comparison, only 15 percent of the income of an average Danish family is spent on food.

### **Foreign aid**

When hunger hits the continent, the wealthier nations of the world provide foreign aid, but often the help comes too late. We are not that keen on donating money until we see the footage of starving children on the evening news. Foreign aid is also not a good solution because it does not motivate the recipients to find long-term solutions themselves, and almost always leaves corruption and abuse in its wake: local officials and military demand a cut of the profits to let the aid pass through, trucks are raided, and the packages do not reach the remote parts of the country. But as the foreign aid organizations ask, what are the options – should we rather let the children starve to death?

### **Refugees**

Starvation and the lack of prospects in the rural areas create mass migrations throughout the continent. Peasants move to the city or to the coastal regions. Inhabitants of the Sahel migrate north to come to Europe, or south to reach more fertile lands. Inhabitants of the tropical regions migrate to the wealthier countries of the South. They are rarely welcomed with open arms. As an example, the Kenyans claim that the illegal Somali immigrants that come over the border are violent. The greatest influx of immigrants into Europe stem from Africa and the Middle East.

About 120.000 people try to cross the Mediterranean illegally every year to reach Europe. They come from impoverished countries with a large growth in population, and with policies that fail to provide employment for the young people. This raises an important question: Can the African countries stop this explosive growth in birth numbers, and feed themselves in the future?

## The population boom

Today, Africa houses roughly a billion, and estimates show that this number will grow to two billion by 2050. In 1950, Europeans outmatched Africans 2:1. Come 2050, this will have reverted.

Every year, the UN publishes a prognosis on population, World Population Prospects, and on its website you can pick any country and see estimates for how fast its population will increase in the future. As an example, take Eritrea. In 1950, the population was just over a million. Today, it is the same as in Denmark, 5.2 million. But come 2035, this will have doubled to 10 million – if the fertility rate remains unaltered. The fertility rate states the average number of children born to each woman in the country, and is a crucial element of these prognoses. If the average number of children is two, the population will remain stable in the long term.

*UN website shows virtually every demographic factors, we need to know if we are to assess demographics, including the birth rate, death rate, fertility, life expectancy and migration. Percentage of Africans still in extreme poverty in 2008 (under \$ 1.25 a day), and the UN says that 41 percent of African young children are malnourished.*

But there are still countries, for example Niger and Mali, where the women bear six or seven children on average. But why so many children?

The reasons are several. It can be due to tradition, large families are common throughout the continent and it can be a means of social security. When the parents reach old age, or if one of them dies, having children to support you is crucial in a society without the security net of the welfare state. On top of that, there is a lot of religious condemnation of and resistance against the use of contraceptives. Doing anything significant about poverty is an arduous task with such explosions in population numbers.

## Foreign interference, interventions, trade and foreign aid

In 1992, the US dispatched 30.000 troops to Somalia, a country that was at the time engulfed by both clan wars and famine. Wars that were reaching the point of civilian genocide. It is more common for neighbouring countries to invade African countries these days, with the central region comprising Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and DR Congo being the most volatile. Here you will find constant conflicts between nation states, local militias and multinational corporations over raw materials in particular – many African countries hold a wealth of oil, precious minerals and gemstones.

**But does the blame lie solely with the Africans, or are external forces the culprits? In the following segment, we will take a look at the meddling of foreign powers in the affairs of the continent.**

## Colonial heritage

To many Africans, the colonial era is to blame for what ails the continent. The European powers criss-crossed the continent with borders without any regard to tribal or ethnic relations. They forced the inhabitants to grow the crops that could be sold with a profit in Europe, leading to monocultural agriculture comprising crops like cocoa and peanuts.

The European interference began centuries ago, when the European powers established trade stations along the coast, from where slaves were also shipped out to both North- and Mesoamerica. Denmark had a colony on the "Gold Coast" from 1658-1850, in what is today known as Ghana.

By the 19th century, most of Africa was in the clutch of the European powers. Ripe with minerals and tropical crops unsuited for the European climate, the continent was divided in a "peaceful" manner between the colonial powers in 1884-85, without anyone paying any mind to the Africans and what they thought of it. By 1900, only a few independent nations remained, the rest was gobbled up by the Europeans.

These days, all the former colonies are sovereign nations in their own right. Portugal was the last country to give up their African dominions in 1975 – but the mismanagement of the colonial era has left its mark.

DR Congo is one of the worst examples. It was formerly a Belgian colony, but the Belgian overlords hardly educated any of the indigenous population, and raided the country's resources. In 1960, they finally gave the country, then known as Congo, its independence. The story goes that when this occurred, there were only six Congolese-born doctors in the entire country.

In other words, the country was virtually unprepared for independence. Ever since, the country has been plagued by fighting between tribes and warlords, all employing mercenaries and child soldiers. These struggles are not so much political as they are driven by a desire to lay claim to the valuable minerals that the country holds, with foreign businessmen and neighbouring countries fanning the flames to get a share of the riches. With its vast natural wealth, the DR Congo ought to be one of the most wealthy nations in the world. Instead, the UN lists it as one of the most impoverished.

## Multinationals

Even today, many countries are dependant upon a single crop, such as cocoa in Ghana, peanuts in Gambia or copper in Zambia. Foreign corporations have an ever increasing influence on the production of these raw materials, buying mines and great tracts of land where they erect farms producing sales crops such as flowers or palm oil.

But primarily, the big get is the minerals for the European, US and Asian industries. The continent is a treasure trove of gold, uranium, coltan, bauxite and oil, and if you look at natural wealth alone, Africa is the richest continent on the planet. Zaïre and Zambia, for example, has precious gemstones, cobalt and copper.

Throughout West Africa you find great oil fields dominated by foreign corporations, and the foodstuffs and minerals are shipped off unprocessed because the African industry is technologically outdated.

## Foreign investment

Today, the investment of foreign corporations in Africa matches the foreign aid investments of the international community. Although this is the case, a Danish or US company is more likely to invest in Asia despite the profit margin being better in Africa. This is due to factors such as rampant corruption, unrest and lacking infrastructure. Although labour is cheap, it is also badly educated – and as a result, only about 2% of international foreign investments are placed in Africa, primarily in countries with oil or precious minerals.

The African nations themselves are eager for more investments, and try to entice potential investors with tax benefits, duty exemption, lax environmental legislations and so on. Often, a foreign mining or oil corporation will be offered monopoly status, which in turn has led to many companies, particularly in the oil trade, openly bribing leaders, making African presidents some of the wealthiest people in the world, their fortunes placed in Swiss or American banks. When a foreign corporation invests in Africa, it is to get access to the precious minerals and oil that is found in the underground.

Critics claim that the profit is piped out of the country and is reliant upon imported labour, barring African labourers from getting acquainted with modern technologies. Those in power take bribes, leading to division rather than development.

Lately, a new form of investment has caused a lot of anger in the continent. The more affluent developing countries of the world along with European corporations have begun buying up or renting arable land in Africa, in a process known as land grabbing. Often, the buyers are Middle Eastern or Asian countries lacking in arable land.

## The Chinese Invasion

The Chinese are investing large sums in Africa. Often it is mining projects, power plants, refineries and infrastructure for the purpose of easing the shipping of goods from the continent to China.

The PRC calls their foreign aid "cooperation", a term that reverberates well with the Africans. Another positive aspect in the eyes of the natives is that there are no political criteria attached to the aid packages, as opposed to the development we see with Western corporations,, who have begun looking into the plight of the labourers, if basic human rights are respected etc.

The Chinese corporations bring their own workforce, their own machinery and raw materials when a compound is constructed, meaning that the country sees no gain in employment or scientific progress. Such has been the approach since the days of Chairman Mao, when the Chinese built a railway from Tanzania to Zambia, a line that is manned by Chinese drivers to this day.

## Blood Diamonds

Foreign corporations often support local warlords to get their hands on precious minerals. The supermodel Naomi Campbell admitted back in 2011 that she had received a small pouch full of "very small dirty-looking stones" after a dinner party in South Africa.



At the dinner, she had met the former Liberian dictator Charles Taylor, and was woken up in the middle of the night by two people knocking on her door, and with the words "A present for you" handed her a small pouch of diamonds. She claimed not to know that they were from Taylor, a man who was later accused of rape, murder, and employing child soldiers; he was sentenced to a 50-year sentence in 2012.

The eight-year civil war in Liberia was in a large part financed by the trade in "blood diamonds", with more than 200.000 dead. The blood diamonds stem from areas of conflict, which means that most legitimate diamond dealers and jewelers will not accept them. Impoverished Africans dig them out of mines, and they are smuggled out to be sold on the black market or mixed in with legally extricated diamonds from for example South Africa.

The profits go straight to warlords and dictators in countries like Angola, DR Congo, Zimbabwe and Sierra Leone, who either pocket them or spend them on arms deals.

## Inequality

The largest country in Africa, when measured in population, is Nigeria. It is also the main oil producer in the region. Despite the enormous profits reaped from this trade, a profit that accounts to more than \$325 per capita, more than 90 million Nigerians are living below the poverty line according to a South African author. This inequality can only be maintained because the international community shows little regard as to where the aid money ends up.

With booming oil profits, the president does not have to show any consideration towards his populace or show any sort of proper leadership. The UN HDI ranks the nations of the world in a welfare index, and shows that the wealthy oil nations of Africa are matched on indicators like education, median life span and infant mortality rates by their more impoverished neighbours.

## Intervention

When the international community meddles in the internal affairs of a country, we call it intervention. If it is an outright military action, we call it invasion. The old colonial powers, particularly the French, are still very keen on intervening in the affairs of their former dominions. Where the English colonizers were primarily businessmen bent on profit, largely let the indigenous population keep their tribal tradition and employed natives in the colonial administration, the French colonies were run by French officers and officials who turned the colonies into "provinces" with a French system of government.

They remained in the continent after their former colonies achieved independence, and as a result their former dominions today share a common currency, an African variety of the now-defunct franc.

The French dependency on the natural wealth of Africa is significant. 100% of the uranium used in France stems from Niger and Gabon, 90% of the bauxite from Guinea, 60% of the copper from Zaïre and Zambia, and 31% of the iron from Liberia and Mauretania.

The French Foreign Legion still maintains three bases in Africa, and this could be to maintain law and order and human rights, but could also be to protect the economical interests of the French nation.

In the last 40 years, the French have intervened more than 30 times by way of armed forces in their former African colonies, a fact that leaves the natives feeling a bit ambiguous about their former colonial lords. In cases like Rwanda and Burundi, the intervention was clearly humanitarian, whereas at other times the French picked sides in a local conflict, often to help a formally and legally elected president against rebels.

## United Nations - UN

One of the key principles of the UN is the principle of non-intervention, which stipulates that every nation has absolute sovereignty over its own land. It is forbidden for another state to meddle in its affairs, a point that causes a great amount of dilemma if an internal conflict is growing into something more serious, for example genocide or famine.

Therefore, the Security Council can come up with a resolution that allows the deployment of UN armed forces or authorizes other countries to deploy forces to ensure that peace is maintained. This could be in the case of war between two nations, a civil war or a genocide.

More often than not, this intervention occurs at the behest of the country itself. As a result, the UN has had numerous operations in Africa, with Danish soldiers being deployed three times on peace-keeping missions. In these cases, the belligerent parties have accepted the deployment of UN soldiers. After the latest war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the UN successfully brokered an armistice, after which several UN countries (including India) deployed armed forces, and the white UN 4x4's are a common sight in many African nations.

In 2011, the Security Council approved that France could send troops to the Ivory Coast, a former colony of theirs. The incumbent president refused to step down after losing the general election, leading to civil war between the supporters of the president-elect and the incumbent.

With the aid of the French forces, the president-elect and his supporters stormed the capital of Abidjan where the defeated president and his supporters had holed up. The general impression is that operations such as this are justifiable, although some see it as neocolonialism, seeing how a main motivation is to secure French interests in the region. In cases like these, it is quintessential for the UN to get the African Union, the continent's pendant to the EU, in on the operation and support the criticism of one of its member nations. In the case of the Ivory Coast, the AU openly condemned the defeated president for refusing to step down.

## ETHNIC CONFLICT

### Tribes

When the tourists on safari traverse the Kenyan savannah, they come upon the tall, slender Masais with their spears, herding their cattle on the plains. They also see the Kikuyu and the Chagga, tilling their small plots. The tourists probably do not give much thought to the great contrasts between these tribes.

With a history as a proud, warlike nomad people, the Masai often clashed with the other agrarian tribes who did not want their fields trampled and grazed by cattle.

Africa is ripe with these tribes or ethnic groups. An ethnic group comprises people with a distinctive look, language and lifestyle, in a way that discerns them from other groups. The continent holds more than 2000 of these, with 800 languages between them and a kaleidoscope of cultures and traditions. As such, the number of tribes far outnumber the number of sovereign nations.

Africa is, in effect, a multi-coloured patchwork. Although there are lingua francas, Swahili in the east and Hausa in the west. Add to that the fact that a lot of people either speak French or English, depending on under which dominion the country formerly was, and you have quite the melting pot. You often read about tribal conflict, but to claim that these discrepancies between tribes are the main reason for what ails the country is not wise. It is also a struggle for raw materials, a struggle for land, religious struggles, and the effects of over-population. All these ingredients thrown together makes for a heady, volatile cocktail.

In the case of South Sudan and Darfur, the region has seen almost constant civil war since the Sudan achieved independence in 1956, the reasons being many: in the north, the population is Muslim – in the south, they are Christians.

In the north, the population is mainly comprised of Arab ethnic groups, in the south you find mainly “native” or “black” groups. The area is heavily overpopulated and very impoverished because it is so arid, and the major oil finds right on the border between the two groups have fanned the flames further. Another new concept in Africa is the many militias, that is armed groups led by a warlord. They have seemingly innocuous names like The Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy” and The Lord’s Resistance Army, but it is neither democracy or compassion that drives these armies, it is pure greed, nourished by the abject poverty of most of the soldiers.

## The colonial heritage

60 years ago, the national states of Africa that we know, were non-existent. They were colonies under European rule. The colonial lords created the myth, that prior to the arrival of the white man, there was nothing but scattered tribes surviving on hunting and primitive farming. The truth, however, was that Africa had known extensive empires and monarchies of varying size for centuries, if not millennia before the arrival of the Europeans.

The most widely known of these is of course Egypt with its pharaohs and a highly developed culture, but others consisted of migrating tribes who moved from place to place with their livestock and their slash-and-burn farming techniques. But that they were “Africans” was not part of their mindset. They had no concept of the maps being drawn up by European cartographers and entrepreneurs.

When the European colonial powers divided the continent between themselves in the 19th century, they did so without any regard for tribal or ethnic background. In Nigeria you have the Ibo and the Hausa, and in Ghana the population is divided in a Christian south and a Muslim north. But already before the colonization of the continent, Arab and European slave traders flourished along the coastlines of Africa.

This lead to conflict and unrest, as it was often left to the Africans themselves to supply the slaves by raiding neighbouring tribes – so even without the careless border-drawing of the colonizers, conflict would have erupted.

Only a select few places has it been possible to divide the nations according to ethnicity. In 1980, a long and bloody civil war was concluded when Eritrea achieved independence from Ethiopia, and in 2011, South Sudan achieved the same from the government in Khartoum after many years of war and negotiations. Even in the new Eritrea you find many different tribes, but they generally get along.

## Ethnic differences

In Denmark, the general consensus is that the multicultural society is enriching to the nation as a whole. In Africa, this is not quite the case. The ethnic diversity makes the process of building a modern state tough, the process is also referred to as nation building. The causes are myriad: the tribes live separated from each other, and no help is received from the government. Many people have no access to radio or television, and the leader of the country always reserves special treatment for his own tribe or ethnic group.

*Other groups may be lacking in loyalty towards the government.  
As such the government holds very little legitimacy.*

## Religion

South of the Sahara, 60 pct. are Christian and 30 pct. are Muslim. The remainder stick to their tribal/ancestral religions where the spirits of the deceased and the forces of nature are revered through a number of complex rituals that are often spiced with elements of Christianity.

The acclaimed Pew Research Center has done inquiries into how Africans view their religion, and the result speaks for itself. 9 out of 10 of the subjects in the inquiries stated that religion plays a big part in their lives, when a Christian, African football player runs onto the pitch for a Champions League-game, you see him do the sign of the Cross, and many Africans believe that the Second Coming will occur in their lifetime.

Likewise, many Muslim Africans would like to live in a state run according to Sharia law. Eritrea holds an equal amount of Christians and Muslims, who live peacefully side by side, whereas Nigeria sees constant conflict between the Christian south and the Muslim north, but this might also have other causes than purely religion.

## Overpopulation

Overpopulation has led to several conflicts between farmers and cattle herders, and the theft of livestock is commonplace. The nomads, such as the Masai in Kenya and Tanzania, are under pressure.

The farmers fence in their fields – something that used to be unheard of – and great tracts of land are converted into national parks reserved for wealthy tourists – Masais not allowed.



## THE STRUGGLE FOR RESOURCES

The scope of natural resources is quite diverse. Minerals and gems are excavated in mines, oil is hauled up from the ground by way of oil wells, water can be regulated by rivers, canals and dams, and finally you have precious timber and particularly fertile plots dotted around the continent.

As seen in the part on foreign intervention, European and Asian interests in the resources of the continent are significant.

The struggle can often lead to coups or a warlord taking control of a resource-rich but remote part of the country. The latter is particularly the case in "frail" states, where the government holds no real control of the rural areas. Nations like Congo and Sudan has seen lengthy, greed-driven civil wars.

Other reasons can be local conflicts like the right to harvest firewood or grazing spaces for cattle – in effect, a shortage of resources. These can often grow to violent levels if they coincide with ethnic or religious struggles in the region.

### Coups and civil war

Africa is the continent of conflict. In the years between 1960-2004, the continent saw no less than 105 coups, more than the number of elections that have led to new governments. In recent years, thanks to the African Union's growing influence, these have become more rare.

The border town of Bawku is situated in northern Ghana, and a citizen tells the following story about the beginnings of a civil war.

*"The day before, the birds suddenly stopped singing. The town went quiet, and we knew that something was wrong once more. The next day, the violence started early, and before the military could intervene, more than 70 people were dead in the town centre. Houses were ablaze, and shops looted".*

It was an old ethnic struggle that reignited, between two tribes who used to stick together because they were attacked by a third tribe from neighbouring Burkina Faso.

When Ghana achieved independence in 1957, the president appointed a new chief for the area. He came from the farmer tribe, as opposed to the old chief who came from the tradesman tribe. And that spelled the end of amicable relations between the two. The story comes from the Danish foreign aid NGO Ibis, an organization that works in the area. That being said, Ghana is far more peaceful than, say, Nigeria.

### Nigeria

This kind of conflict is commonplace in Africa, and in recent years, Sudan has seen a similar one.

In this case, the result was the creation of a new sovereign nation, recognized by the UN, with both oil, tribal conflicts and religion playing a part. Most wars in Africa are civil wars, where ethnic groups clash, and the continent sees more of these than the rest of the world combined. They fight for control of the capital, airport, the media and the army bases.

Other times, a local warlord wants to control a part of the country to get his hands on precious minerals or oil. He is not seeking to carve out a sovereign state, but is purely driven by personal enrichment. In Africa, the countries with precious minerals and oil has seen more dictators, less development and more civil unrest than other states.

This odd circumstance is referred to as the resource curse. These countries need not raise taxes, the state income comes from the companies allowed to exploit the resources.

A large part of these sums, however, goes straight into the pockets of those in power. The president, governors and top-brass generals place these funds in offshore bank accounts, leading to the situation where several African leaders are now ranked among the wealthiest in the world. Let us take a look at a case comprising both civil war and a coup.

## **Mali**

In the West African nation of Mali, things have been peaceful for more than 20 years. But in early 2012, Islamists in the north joined forces with Touareg tribes and rebelled against the state.

According to Amnesty International, killings, gang rapes, torture and the use of child soldiers has been the disorder of the day since a rag-tag band of Touareg separatists, jihadists and criminal terror groups in the north revolted against the state in January 2012.

A month later, the Islamist rebels declared that they would form a new state in the north. The Amnesty report stated that

*"the entirety of the north has been taken over by armed bands run amok. In Gao, where the Islamist group Ansar Dine is in charge – and is trying to enforce Sharia – violent demonstrations have broken out after the group forbade the youth of the city to play football, video games and watch "un-Islamic" television".*

The question, then, is what the future will bring? Aid relief packages have already been shipped to the north, but the convoys of doctors, aid workers and journalists have been denied entry to the city of Timbuktu, with tons of food and medicine being confiscated by the rebels, the reason being – according to Amnesty – that women took part in the welcome committee for the aid. Will the neighbouring countries recognize those behind the coup? Will they accept the division of the country? Will we see military intervention? Or would it be plausible that the French special forces thought to be stationed in Burkina Faso, will intervene?

## POLITICS AND DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

In the old days, the parlay tree at the centre of the village was the meeting hub in African society. Today, institutions like these are lacking, and everything moves along at a snail's pace. With the myriad problems that have faced and are facing Africa, diseases like AIDS and malaria, and the threat of drought and overpopulation, this becomes even more critical.

The common consensus is that these problems are not man-made, but they have caused frail societies. From time to time, the term failed states is even used. But this is largely due to the fact that the "natural" calamities have been followed up by those caused by mankind, such as oppression, violence and corruption. Africa is lacking in democracy, capable officials, infrastructure and a modern industrial sector.

A Danish consultant working in an African country had once imported a brand-new Volvo, but could not get permission to drive it, as the officials refused to give it an environmental certificate – in a country where ancient wrecks sputter around on the roads, engulfing them in thick black fumes. This could be because the officials are corrupt, slow, or just unfit for their position. As is often the case, in Africa it is probably a combination of these.

### Democracy

Europe is a democracy, because we at regular intervals have free and open election between numerous parties, who can conduct an electoral campaign without government intervention. All citizens above the age of eighteen has the right to vote – and influence can be gained by joining a political party or union, and of course by voting on election day.

**Europe has independent courts of law, and a free press.**

In Africa, the picture is very different. When a nation achieved independence, you would often only have the political party that had conducted the resistance fighting. The president either had strong ties to the army, or was a general himself. The class system was also a foreign concept – people were preoccupied with surviving from day to day, making your local tribe or clan all the more important. Today, most countries on the continent have democracies, although there are exceptions. Congo's only election took place in 1960 when the country achieved independence, and Eritrea has never held an election.

### Corruption

Democracy in the form of parties that have differing opinions on values and the distribution of resources, is very foreign to the African mindset. In this, the loyalty to your family and tribe supercedes everything when voting. And if you gain political power, you are expected to help your home region and family – it is considered good conduct.

Known as a patron-client relationship, it comprises a person who gives special benefits to his friends. In Africa, a patron is a person with enough power to help his family, friends, and perhaps even tribes. The help stretches from a cushy government job for his cousin, or a government contract for his uncle's firm. It could also be a strong hint towards admitting the girl next door to university. In return, the patron expects his beneficiaries to vote for him at elections, a sort of insurance.

On the grand scale, it is corruption when a politician demands a bribe under the table to let a foreign oil company drilling rights. On the smaller scale, it could be a border guard demanding a bribe of two eggs from a woman crossing the border to get to a market to sell the eggs, even though she has all the papers in order.

**Transparency International** is an NGO that fights corruption, with offices in more than 100 countries. Every year, it lists the nations of the world by corruption levels, with New Zealand, Denmark and Finland ranking as the least corrupt nations in the world.

Africa, on the other hand, is not doing so great. Low wages for government officials means more corruption. The official essentially demand bribes to do his or her job, as if they were part of her pay.

## African norms

The American sociologist Talcott Parsons has done extensive work on the differences in culture and norms from country to country, in effect the social codexes on behaviour. He has attempted to organize these by comparing them with each other.

**In the following, we have used a few excerpts:**

*Where one culture might stress the necessity of preferential treatment of one's family or friends (particularism), another culture might stress the more universalistic approach of equal treatment, for example at an exam.*

*In the same manner a culture might endorse that you assign status, for example by conferring special rights upon the children of the leader, whilst other cultures might stress the necessity of being a "self-made" citizen.*

*In Africa, paying special mind to your family is common, and that you automatically achieve higher standing socially if you are on friendly terms with someone in high places (like how some people would claim that being friends with royalty confer status upon themselves).*

*The rights of women are very different in Africa to those in Europe. They have low status as citizens, and despite 70 percent of African farmers being female, they cannot even take out loans in banks by themselves.*

## A deficit of national feeling and institutions

Although the inhabitants of an African nation were capable of fighting side by side against the foreign oppressors, it is in no way a certainty that they felt like a united nation. Old tribal differences could easily and quickly escalate into outright civil war.

Ethnic identity is the feeling that you belong to a people with a distinctive culture. In this concept, the national narrative holds great importance. Even though a number of new states assign great importance to national symbols and traditions, and even though many Africans show pride in their respective national football teams, they do not have any common ancient history.



In Europe, the first nation states emerged as early as the 16th century. Within the next couple of centuries, the geographically specified state aligned with the nation in the sense of the common cultural denominators. When young people in Europe are taught history, it is with emphasis on what we have in common.

In 1976, African-American author Alex Haley published the book "Roots", that became a bestseller the world over. It tells the story of a young West African man, Kunta Kinte, who was born in 1750. Kinte is captured by white slavers and taken to the United States. But the book is also about his descendants and their struggle for liberty in the US, as well as a tale of Haley's own past, and as a result came to mean a lot to a large number of African-Americans, because they suddenly had a history, a common background.

***African schoolchildren have Social Studies and History lessons as well, but the curriculum is coloured and aimed at glorifying the government and the state.***

Other institutions missing from the common power structure of most African nations, institutions that we would find common, are things like a tax office, statistical office, environmental agencies etc.

They do exist, of course, but they are ineffective bordering on obsolete or defunct. In the capital of Eritrea a grandiose national statistics office was erected. Today, it stands unused. If you enter, you are told by a guard that any inquiries about Eritrea has to be made with UNDP, the UN's office in the country.

## **Civilian community**

The civilian community comprises the part of a society that surrounds the power structure. Associations, churches and local communities. In a healthy society there is mutual trust between the citizens, and the citizens can to a wide extent solve the problems that may arise themselves. In Africa, where the communities are weakened, while at the same time an attempt is made to create a modern society.

Back when the populace was united in the struggle for freedom from the white colonial overlords, the community was stronger. You still have the local chief, but his influence is dwindling in favour of officials with degrees and a better education, hired by the government. The free market where goods can be bought and sold has strengthened individualism, as opposed to back in the day, when the peasants helped each other out. Some churches and Muslim brotherhoods seem to have been able to build strong communities.

As stated above, the countries with the greatest amount of natural wealth have it the worst in this context. The leadership is corrupt, and is spending the money on importing luxury goods for their own use. All that matters is to look the part of a kingpin.

In 2003, it was revealed that US oil firms had transferred more than 1,5 billion USD to the account of the President of Equatorial Guinea.

A rough estimate says that 1800 billion dollars has been moved out of Africa illegally by wealthy Africans between 1970-2008, in effect 50 billion a year – or roughly the total annual foreign aid given to Africa.

Even worse off are the countries where political activities are outright banned, as they are in for example Eritrea, also known as the “North Korea of Africa”. Here, any opposition to the autocratic president is outlawed. Journalists and members of the opposition are jailed, and leaving the country without the consent of the government is forbidden.

If you are caught trying to flee across the border to Sudan illegally, the border guards have standing orders to shoot on sight. In democratic nations we have independent courts of law, with the possibility of pleading your case if you are persecuted by the police or another government authority. In Africa, the judges are often appointed by the president, and are as such not independent.

Prosecutor and the defense lawyer often speak English or French when conducting their cases, languages not spoken by a large part of society. So rather than seeking the help of the courts of law, a lot of people seek the counsel of the tribal chief or elders when dealing with divorce/marriage, property issues etc. It might strike us as odd, but is actually a crucial element of society.

## Human rights

In 1948, the UN general assembly approved a declaration on universal human rights. Among other things, it stipulates that every citizen of the world has the right to freedom of speech and freedom of religion. The right to work and an education is also secured. Discrimination based on sex or race is also not allowed. Everyone is equal under the law, and torture is illegal. It is required of the member states that they maintain and secure these rights .

It is also expected of the state that they adhere to the code of good governance, comprising of independent courts of law, that the income and expenditure of the state is monitored and kept in check, and that corruption is clamped down upon. International donors, such as the Danish programme DANIDA, has begun linking foreign aid donations with requirements that the recipient states employ the same principles of human rights and good governance.

Many African nations, however, are very critical of these principles and see them as a Western concept alien to African culture, a point of view endorsed by Russia and China in particular. It is seen as just and fair that you, when you have won election to a government office, that you pay special consideration to friends and family, be it a cushy government job or a government contract. Anything else would be considered impolite.

Not to mention that the concept of equality of the sexes is utterly alien to African culture. The primary purpose of a woman is to be obedient towards her husband, and it is him who has the final say in all major family matters. “The African view of human rights is very like the ones held by the Chinese”, a Chinese ambassador to an African nation once stated, “I believe it should be the decision of the African people as to how good governance and democracy is to be implemented in their own countries. We have no visions of exporting ideology”.

## Humanitarian intervention

In the UN charter it states that neither the UN nor other states are allowed to interfere in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation. But what if a sovereign nation transgresses against the charter of human rights?

The answer is not definite, but the charter also states that the Security Council has the authority to approve the intervention of the UN or member states, if the Council finds that a member state is in the process of, say, ethnic cleansing, and as such is jeopardizing the peace. This is referred to as humanitarian intervention, and is defined as one or more states, by way of armed forces, try to prevent human rights atrocities.

The UN has intervened in several of the weaker African states over the last few years. At the moment, UN troops are stationed in 7 nations, and heavy emphasis is put on getting the nation in question to accept the deployment of peacekeeping troops. But more often than not, the troops are sent into countries where the government has been so weak that it held no real control of the country.

If a country launches an assault on its neighbour, or a dictator commits genocide, the UN can decide to move in without the consent of the official government. Not only has the UN helped separate warring factions, they have also helped build up democratic organisations. You can find more info on the current operations in Africa on the UN website . Denmark gives foreign aid to African countries for the purposes of promoting development, but we prefer to support countries that adhere by the charter of human right, and are democratic in nature.

This, however, can mean that you do not help the countries that are the most impoverished. In these cases, the countries will only receive privately funded relief packages and aid, but the aid assigned to these "frail states" has increased in recent years. Another common argument against demanding that democracy is upheld and human rights respected is that there is no clear line from behaving properly and financial growth. Nor is there any assurance that the growth will benefit the nation as a whole. Non-democratic nations match democratic ones in growth, and some of those that flourish the most economically, have a huge amount of social inequality. As an example, 47% of the population in the "miracle nation" of Botswana are living beneath the poverty line, in effect living for less than USD 1,25 a day.

You can find more info on welfare on a global scale in the UN Human Development Report, conducted annually. The report contains an index that ranks the nations of the world, from which one can see how the African nations are doing. The bottom 15 are all from Africa, but it is also evident that the individual differences from country to country on the continent are significant.



# PRESIDENT FOR A DAY

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