A political geography of
AFRICA
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To my wife Evelyn
Contents

List of maps xi
Foreword xiii
Preface xvii

PART I PRINCIPLES OF POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY 1
1 The meaning and scope of political geography 3
2 Elements of political geography 10
   Territorial base 10
   Resident population 18
   Systems of government 23
   Economic base 29
   Transport and communications 33

PART II INTRODUCTION TO THE POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY 37
   OF AFRICA
3 Africa: general introduction 39
   Location, environment and human interactions 44
4 Colonialism in Africa 54
   Colonial policies of the European powers 60
   Changing concepts of colonialism 70
   The colonial balance sheet 73
   Neo-colonialism 77

PART III THE STATES AND THEIR PROBLEMS 81
5 North Africa 83
   Modern evolution of North African states 92
   The post-war independence movement and subsequent 96
      developments
   Territorial and strategic aspects 97
   Boundary problems 100
6 West Africa 102
   Definition of West Africa 103
   Political evolution 105
## CONTENTS

Problems and challenges of colonial rule 111  
Emergence of independent states 117  
Contemporary problems of nation building 121  
Territorial and strategic aspects 125  
Population and resources 128  
Closer union and inter-territorial cooperation 130  

7 Central Africa 134  
Modern political evolution 136  
Problems of administration and economic development 139  
Emergence of independent states 142  
Special problems of emergent nationhood 144  
The former French Equatorial Africa and Cameroon 145  
Zaire 146  
Rwanda and Burundi 152  
The former Portuguese and Spanish territories 154  

8 Southern Africa 157  
European colonisation and the political evolution of South Africa 158  
Land policies in South Africa 164  
The policy of apartheid 168  
Tribal Homelands 168  
External relations 170  
The former British protectorates of Southern Africa 175  
The future outlook of the former British protectorates 176  
South Africa’s northern neighbours 177  
The abortive Central African Federation 180  
The special problem of Rhodesia 187  
Zambia’s search for outlets to the sea 190  
Angola and Mozambique 191  

9 East Africa 199  
European colonisation and settlement 202  
Emergence of independent states 210  
Closer union in East Africa 213  
Strategic considerations 217  

10 North-East Africa 218  
Evolution of the present pattern of states 220  
Sudan, the Nile and Ethiopia 223  
Independence and nationhood 225  
Somali irredentism 227  
Problems of internal unity in Ethiopia and Sudan 229  
Economic and strategic aspects 232
CONTENTS

11 Islands of the Indian Ocean 234
   Madagascar (Malagasy Republic) 236
   Comoros, Réunion, Mauritius, and the Seychelles 238

12 The Organisation of African Unity and the future prospects of the new Africa 248
   The Organisation of African Unity and the African independence movement 249
   Aftermath of independence 254

APPENDICES

I Basic data on African countries 262
II Charter of the Organisation of African Unity 264

Bibliography 272
Index 280
List of maps

1 Examples of certain special territorial configurations:
   (a) enclaves; (b) enclaves; (c) corridors; (d) glaci
2 Vegetation and minerals in Africa
3 Relief map of Africa
4 Africa: political and regional divisions, showing landlocked states
5 Africa in its global relationships
6 Lowland and Highland Africa
7 Distribution of European forts along the Gold Coast between the
   fifteenth and nineteenth centuries
8 British possessions in Africa at the end of the First World War
9 Political divisions of North Africa, showing the distribution of
   coastal plains, mountains and desert
10 North Africa: minerals and communications
11 West Africa: political divisions and communications
12 Contrasted impressions of British and French West Africa
13 West Africa: ‘the pattern of Nature’ versus ‘the pattern of Culture’
14 West Africa: distribution of minerals
15 Nigeria: the three regions at independence
16 Nigeria: the twelve states (1967)
17 Nigeria: the nineteen states (1975)
18 Central Africa: political divisions, communications and mineral
   resources
19 Rail and river communications in Zaire
20 Zaire: internal administrative divisions
21 Southern Africa: political divisions
22 The Cape folded ranges and the plateau of South Africa
23 Distribution of Tribal Homelands in South Africa
24 Southern Africa: mineral resources and communications
25 East Africa: political divisions and communications
26 East Africa: minerals and areas of white settlement
27 The major African kingdoms in Uganda at the turn of the
   nineteenth century
28 North-East Africa: relief, political divisions, railways and minerals
29 Ethiopia: relief and internal regional and provincial divisions
LIST OF MAPS

30 Islands of the Indian Ocean: railways and minerals
31 Colonial possessions and independent states in Africa 1939
32 Progress of independence in Africa 1957–68
33 Independent states in Africa 1976
34 Population densities in Africa 1975
Foreword

As a branch of geography, political geography has never flourished in Britain or the Commonwealth as much as might have been expected. This is particularly surprising in view of the fact that one of the subject’s great pioneers in Britain – the first Reader in Geography in the University of Oxford, Sir Halford J. Mackinder – was the author of a very significant book published towards the end of the First World War, Democratic Ideals and Reality, and was for several years a Member of Parliament. During the 1920s, British geography was considerably influenced by the comprehensive book, The New World: Problems in Political Geography (1921), written by an American, Isaiah Bowman, who had been closely associated with the American delegation to the Versailles Peace Conference; while a few years later C. B. Fawcett’s A Political Geography of the British Empire (1933) might have laid the foundation for studies in depth of that remarkable institution, the British Empire, whose influence and role in world affairs were for a time at least so very important.

Then the Second World War broke out and was followed by a period during which the Empire was increasingly replaced by a Commonwealth, in which all but a minority of states enjoyed political – though not necessarily economic – independence. Meanwhile the range of geography was widening and the approach was being modified. But of the much greater number of professional geographers, only a relatively small, though distinguished, group has concentrated its attention upon political geography, despite the undisputed importance of what the author of this book calls ‘the study of those aspects of the geography of politically organised areas that are relevant to the existence and effective functioning of such areas both internally and in their external relationships’. Very few focused their attention upon the continent of Africa although two of them, B. W. Hodder and D. R. Harris, edited Africa in Transition: Geographical Essays (1967); but useful and stimulating though the contributions to the volume undoubtedly are, the two editors and their three collaborators were ‘expatriates’ and
FOREWORD

therefore tended to express the outsiders’, as opposed to an African, point of view.

With the emergence of Africa from colonialism to independence during this second half of the twentieth century there has been a real need for an over-view of the whole continent as it is in the 1970s; and it is important that such an assessment should be undertaken by one person and that he or she should be an African. Few could be better qualified for this task than Professor E. A. Boateng, a Ghanaian geographer with a very considerable academic record and a person with extensive administrative, and indeed political, experience. My acquaintance with Amano Boateng goes back to 1946 when I first met him in Ghana (then the Gold Coast) shortly before he came to Britain to read geography in the University of Oxford. I was his tutor and he selected as his Special Subject the one for which I was responsible, ‘the social and political geography of British tropical Africa and the Caribbean’. Subsequently I was his supervisor for the research degree of B. Litt. On returning home he joined the staff of the newly created Department of Geography in what was then the University College of the Gold Coast and rose to become Professor and Head of the Department of Geography in the University of Ghana before moving to the University of Cape Coast as Vice-Chancellor. Since 1973 he has been Executive Chairman of the Environmental Protection Council of Ghana.

Despite his many administrative and other preoccupations Professor Boateng has managed to maintain close contact with geography and has enriched his understanding of its practical aspects through extensive foreign travel in Africa and elsewhere as his country’s representative on a number of official delegations to important international conferences and meetings, including the United Nations General Assembly. Thus he is in a particularly favourable position to see his own continent in its global context and to appreciate the political problems of its many diverse countries in their continental setting.

Not everyone will agree with everything that the author has written in this book. But what is important is that he expresses a point of view and sustains an argument about African affairs in general and in depth that must be respected because of his academic approach and his very wide experience of affairs both in his own country of Ghana and in Africa as a whole. He brings to these studies the trained mind of a geographer, and he paints on a broad canvas with due attention to detail as and when necessary. I am honoured to be asked by the author to write a foreword for his book and am happy to commend it to a wide range of readers who will be helped by it to a greater understanding of the complexities of the African scene and to a deeper knowledge of the xiv
FOREWORD

challenges which this most fascinating of the continents presents to the world at large.

September 1977

Robert W. Steel
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formerly Fellow of Jesus College, Oxford,
and John Rankin Professor of Geography,
University of Liverpool
Preface

One of the most fascinating yet bewildering features of the contemporary African political scene is the rapid rate of change all over the continent and its generally unpredictable character. This presents anyone attempting to write a book on the political geography of the continent with the very difficult problem of choosing a suitable time-frame for his work and deciding how best the essential features of the ever-changing kaleidoscope of events can be captured and conveyed to the reader in a coherent and intelligible form, since nothing that is written about the present seems likely to remain valid for any great length of time. Recognising the problems posed by this state of affairs, what I have tried to do in this book has been to select what I consider to be the really salient political and socio-economic problems and issues facing the continent and its various regions and countries today and to examine them within their geographical and historical context in the hope that this will facilitate an understanding of their real import and provide a reasonably sound basis for assessing future developments and trends.

Owing to the immense size of Africa and the great diversity and complexity of its problems, I have felt obliged to be highly selective in the choice of topics and issues for discussion, especially in Part III of the book, which deals with the individual states and regions of the continent, the nature of the topics and issues selected depending on the special circumstances of each particular area. This is in conformity with the definition of political geography which I give in the book as the study of those aspects of the geography of politically organised areas that are relevant to the existence and effective functioning of such areas both internally and in their external relationships. I feel that to have attempted a wider coverage of material would not only have made my task immeasurably more difficult but would have presented the reader with an account far too lengthy and detailed to provide the focus and perspective necessary for a proper understanding of the really significant problems. I have no doubt that with the passage of time new problems and new issues will emerge, but it is my hope that this will serve to underscore rather than diminish the relevance of the facts and viewpoints set forth in this book.
PREFACE

The book is divided into three parts. Part I deals with the general principles of political geography, Part II with certain broad topics which constitute an essential background to an understanding of the politico-geographical problems of the African continent, while Part III examines in some detail what are considered to be the major problems and issues facing the individual states and regions of the continent in the field of political geography.

The idea of writing this book first suggested itself to me some twenty years ago when I began teaching a course on the political geography of Africa as one of the options for the honours degree in geography at what is now the University of Ghana. The idea took more concrete shape in the 1965–66 academic year when I had the good fortune to be awarded a Smuts Visiting Fellowship in the University of Cambridge with the freedom to research and write in any area of my choice. The tenure of a visiting professorship in the University of Pittsburgh, USA, during the summer trimester of 1966 gave me further opportunities for research and, even more important, for trying out some of my findings and ideas on various groups of highly enthusiastic but refreshingly critical students taking my course on the political geography of Africa. The response I obtained from these students and, later, from my own students at the University of Ghana further strengthened my conviction that there was a need for the kind of book I was planning to write, and but for a number of quite unexpected administrative responsibilities that subsequently came my way I might have completed the work long before now. But in a way the delay has proved beneficial; for it has allowed time for many of the important political developments in the continent which were then only in their initial stages to unravel themselves, thus making it easier to discern their implications and trends.

In writing this book I have derived invaluable assistance from a large number of people and organisations to all of whom I feel deeply grateful, although only a few of them can be mentioned here by name owing to limitations of space. First and foremost, I wish to thank the Trustees of the Smuts Memorial Fund in Cambridge for making it possible for me to embark on the initial research for the work, free from the preoccupations of teaching and administration. Next, I must express my appreciation to the staffs of the various libraries, especially the Cambridge University Library, the University of Pittsburgh Library, the Balme Library, University of Ghana, and the Padmore Research Library in Accra, where I did the bulk of my research, for the assistance they gave me with the collection of my material.

Of the many academic colleagues who gave me the benefit of their knowledge and advice or assisted me in other ways I should like to make special acknowledgement to Professor R. J. Harrison Church of the
PREFACE

London School of Economics, Professor George Benneh of the University of Ghana and Professor Hibberd V. B. Kline, Jr, Chairman of the Department of Geography in the University of Pittsburgh. Above all, however, I feel I owe a special debt of gratitude to Professor R. W. Steel, Principal of the University College of Swansea, and formerly my tutor at Oxford, who gave me my first insight into the political geography of Africa at a time when the idea of political independence for Africa, especially black Africa, was as yet only a distant dream. He made many valuable comments on my manuscript and has placed me further in his debt by agreeing to write the Foreword to this book.

All the maps contained in the book have been drawn by Mr J. F. Antwi of the National Atlas Project of Ghana with the assistance of other members of the cartographic staff. I feel all the more grateful to them because of the tremendous pressure under which they had to work in order to complete the task on time. I feel especially indebted to my Private Secretary in the Environmental Protection Council, Miss Margaret Warden, as well as to Mr Joseph Adjei also of the same Council and to my former Secretary in the Vice-Chancellor’s Office at the University of Cape Coast, Mr John Kuofie, for typing my manuscript during its various stages.

Finally, I wish to express my profound gratitude to my wife and our daughters for their forbearance and understanding throughout the long period during which this book has been in preparation. But for their cooperation and encouragement I know that I could never have accomplished the task.

Accra
February 1977

E. A. Boateng