

WORLD CULTURES II

NAME _____

Learning Unit No. 9

Africa - Africa Today

UNIT OUTCOMES:

1. Examine the problems faced by African countries after winning their independence.
2. Recognize those factors that have led to government instability in many African nations.
3. Understand the economic constraints in many African countries.
4. Examine the impact of tribalism and other societal factors in modern African nations.
5. Examine the continent-wide trends concerning education, urbanization, population growth and economic development.

READINGS

A = Africa (Burke/Kublin)

B = Africa: South of the Sahara (Clark)

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| 1. 204-213 (A) | Impact of Independence |
| 2. 214-225 (A) | Nation-Building in West Africa |
| 3. 226-246 (A) | Other Independence Movements |
| 4. 255-265 (A) | Struggle for Stable Government |
| 5. 265-272 (A) | Economic Obstacles to Development |
| 6. 273-278 (A)
113-118 (B) | Societal Issues |
| 7. 184-186 (A)
247-251 (A)
101-109 (B) | South Africa: Background |

PUTTING DOWN NEW ROOTS

Out on the plains of Africa a mighty tree grows. It is known as the baobab. Despite its massive size, the baobab never gets too far off the ground. Its sturdy, wrinkled trunk inches upward like so many slats in a barrel. Its sprawling branches reach outward, instead of upward, as if to protect the land which gives it life.

As guardian of its surroundings, the baobab is a very patient tree. By day it allows itself to be used as a scratching post by elephants and other beasts of the African plain. Once the sun goes down, the baobab becomes a home for the creatures of the night. Bats and owls hide among its branches, gazing out on a world that was old when recorded time began.

Experts guess that some baobabs have existed for 2,500 years. If so, the trees are among the oldest living things on earth. Rocked by the wind and teased by the rain, these great gray trees have held fast to the grassy earth. In the earth they have found a way to endure.

In some respects the story of the baobab is the story of Africa itself. Like the branches of the "barrel tree," most Africans have sought to protect the land which gives them life.

To a herder or farmer, this is merely a matter of common sense. The land, after all, is a provider - a producer of food. But to most Africans, the land has a much deeper significance. It is the resting place for ancestors, a home for the living, and a promise of life for those yet unborn.

And so the land has been respected. It has been celebrated in song and story. It has been depicted in many dances and worshipped in many prayers. This is an attitude of sincere devotion. As South African novelist Alan Paton has written about the land: "Keep it, guard it, care for it, for it keeps men, guards men, cares for men. Destroy it and man is destroyed."

Now for the first time, some Africans believe that this devotion is imperiled. They say it is in danger of being swallowed up in the tides of modern life. These people claim that too many giant dams abuse it. They fear that the land itself is about to be destroyed.

Sometimes the fears are even broader. For not only the land is threatened. In the past half century, changes on the continent have been overwhelming. New cities have sprouted, new nations have been created, new school houses have been built. Old ways of life based on a close relationship with the land have been tossed and buffeted by the winds of change. New ways are taking hold, but some wonder if the new will prove as durable as the old.

Will the future bring new dignity to the African family system? Will it provide a place for the customs and traditions of the village? Will it help Africans to protect the many things which they have made enduring? Or will it merely bring disruption, sweeping away all the remnants of the past?

There can be no final answers to these questions. Rather the answers are up to the Africans themselves. In the course of the present century, many of the roots have been upended. Now they are facing the challenge of putting down new roots without destroying those old ones which remain.

Boyd and Nickerson, Tropical and Southern Africa