

Reading Guide for *The Age of Walls* by Tim Marshall

Chapter 6, Africa

“Fences & walls are not necessary. Mostly they are manifestations of superficial thinking.”

This chapter explains and analyzes the cultures and histories that created modern Africa, which has resulted in numerous border walls, berms, and barriers nations are building for self-defense and to prevent illegal immigration. It explains the basis of so many African nations’ struggles to develop economically and stabilize themselves politically: European Colonialism and the nation-states they created, the borders of which “bore no relation at all to the nations [tribes] that were already there.” These nation-states’ arbitrary border lines divided tribes & forced other peoples together who had little affiliation to each other beyond geographic proximity. It is this colonial legacy, Marshall argues, that hinders Africa’s development, and it is the challenge of balancing “the rediscovery of its precolonial senses of nationhood with the realities of the current functioning nation-states,” which the Africans themselves had scant little part in creating.

p. 157-159 *The Moroccan Wall*, “the Wall of Shame,” exemplifies the tensions that exist in Africa due to various independence movements. “The longest continuous minefield in the world.” The *Sahrawi* people want independence from Morocco to establish the *Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic*.



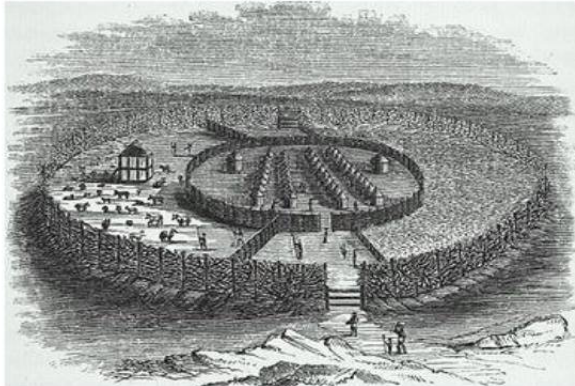
158. As we have seen with other peoples who occupy lands once colonized by Europeans, the Sahrawi are “victims of the lines drawn by others.” So, too, in *South Sudan* and the *Democratic Republic of the Congo*.

159. The idea of the *nation-state* is a European one—“a nation of people—a group who to some degree share a historical, ethnic, cultural, geographical, or linguistic community...But European colonialists created nation-states in Africa that bore no relation at all to the nations [tribes] that were already there.”

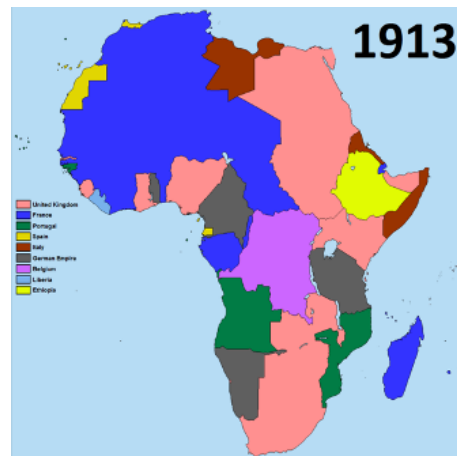
159-161. An important discussion of *tribalism* in Africa and how the nation-states’ boundaries created by Europeans have created problems on a continent where peoples’ identity with their tribes is greater than their allegiance to the nation-state.

162-172. These pages provide a summary of the history & the subsequent impact of European colonialism on Africa, & in particular how the legacy of colonialism has impeded various African nations' political and economic development today. Some facts of note:

BENIN CITY: NIGERIA



The Great Wall of Benin
(Constructed between 800 – mid-1400s AD)
The largest man made structure in the world



1913 After “the Scramble for Africa”

162. *Benin City* -- A World Heritage Site destroyed by British troops in 1879

164. Colonial Legacy’s Double Contradictions that are the roots of current conflicts

1. Creation of *single nation-states* out of *multiple nations*
2. Simultaneously bequeathing ideas of *democracy* and *self-determination*

166. An invented country called *Angola*

167 Civil wars & separatist movements due to internal divisions caused by the legacy of colonialism:

- Cameroon & Nigeria
- Casamance & Senegal
- Kenya & the Mombasa Republican Council
- South Sudan
- The tragic history of Nigeria and Biafra, 1967-70 – 3 million killed
- Rwanda & the 1994 genocide of Tutsis by Hutus
- The civil war in Congo – as many as 6 million dead since 1996.

<https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/dr-congo-5-questions-understand-africas-world-war-1524722>



A DR of Congo Soldier, ca 2013



Border fence that separates South Africa from Zimbabwe.

170-172 Tribalism's encouragement of favoritism/corruption

172. Some success stories:

Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah

Tanzania under Julius Nyerere

172-180 Growing Inequality in Africa

- 173 The *percentage* of those living in poverty has declined from 56% in 1993 to 43% in 2012; the *absolute number* of poor has grown as the population has grown.
- 173 The case of **Zimbabwe** – Fenced in to prevent its impoverished people from migrating to richer neighboring countries
- 173-174 Growing opposition to high levels of immigration -- taking jobs, spreading crime...
- “Crime isn’t linked to immigration, but it is linked to poverty...”
- 175-180 The emergence of **gated communities/fortified communities** threatening to weaken social cohesion and shrink civic engagement.
- A new form of tribe? Other studies suggest that **fortified communities** encourage a sense of social cohesion & community neighborhood that transcends tribe and ethnicity.

179-180 The challenge many African nations have is to rediscover its precolonial sense of nationhood (before the Europeans colonized Africa) with the realities of the current functioning nation-states. It is no small challenge.

“The need to constantly balance the competing claims of overlapping groups is a distraction from the development of the state as a single entity.” (172)

