On Uganda and Africa: A Retrospective Essay After Forty Years

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1. Introduction

Moyo is a very small town in the remote rural area of Uganda just west of the Nile River near the northern border with Sudan in East Africa. Forty years ago, in January 1968, I was assigned to Moyo Senior Secondary School as a United States Peace Corps volunteer and spent three years at the school teaching mathematics. During the last school break of my final year in 1970, I stayed for a few days in the village of one of my students of the Madi people who inhabit that area of Uganda. I recall talking with Desiderio at that time about our visions of Uganda ten years into the future. He was optimistic about the development of the country. I was not. Unfortunately, in fact, my view proved to be more prescient. Indeed, as I was told a few years ago by the Uganda Deputy Vice-President and parliamentary representative for that district, Desiderio himself some years ago was a victim of the scourge of AIDS that has devastated Uganda and many other countries on the continent. Although unknown to Desiderio and me at the time of our conversation, AIDS came to be just one of the destructive forces that halted development in Uganda. In the month after I returned to the U.S.A., in January 1971 a coup d’etat led by General Idi Amin initiated a decade of horror for the country, which was followed by another half decade of civil war, massive killing, and ruined social and economic order that lasted to the mid-1980’s. Stability has been restored for some years and economic recovery attained in most parts of the country, particularly the southern portion, under President Yoweri Museveni, who assumed control of the government in 1986. Yet, the hopes, if not the expectations, of Desiderio and my other students and I forty years ago are still very far from realization for the people of Uganda. This short essay is a retrospective on that period of time in Uganda since my departure. It leads as well to a reflection on past and current failures throughout the continent of Africa and the hopelessness that is felt by many about its present and future prospects.

2. Uganda since independence

Uganda entered the era of its independence from Great Britain in 1962 with much the same colonial legacy as many other countries of sub-Saharan Africa, though, of course, given the immense size of the continent and its great diversity, the historical experiences and conditions of each country were different in many ways as well. [Note: throughout this essay the mention of Africa excludes the five countries of north Africa – Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco – whose histories, peoples, societies, and cultures differ significantly from the 42 countries of sub-Saharan continental Africa.] Despite the weight of its colonial legacy, Uganda started this period of history with high hopes, optimism and promise. Indeed, my own motivation in 1967, when I applied for the Peace Corps assignment, was to contribute to the task of national development through my work as a needed teacher within the expanding secondary school system.
Winston Churchill famously called Uganda “the pearl of Africa” because of its beautiful landscape and fertile land. The colonial borders that the British etched around the region to become Uganda included the historic kingdoms of peoples who speak Bantu languages in the south and west, along with chieftaincy-based and pastoral peoples who speak Nilotic and Sudanic languages in the north. In all, the borders of the state included about forty ethno-linguistic groups. British colonial policy favored economic development of the southern region of the country where greater educational opportunities were made available as well. At the same time, recruits for military and police forces were drawn primarily from the northern region. About 80% of Ugandans still live in rural areas where subsistence farming is the major source of food and income. The economy is predominantly agriculturally based and export earnings are from coffee, fish, cotton, tea, tobacco, and floriculture.

There were numerous obstacles to national integration that drove Uganda to political instability shortly after independence and then to national disintegration. Political conflict grew out of the incompatibility of the federal status of the kingdom of Buganda and Prime Minister Milton Obote’s plan for a republican constitution and a unitary state. In January 1971, with then President Obote’s declared political “move to the left”, increasing ethnic tensions within the country, and a personal rift between Obote and army chief General Idi Amin, while Obote was out of the country, his government was overthrown by Amin. Although at first he enjoyed widespread support, Amin soon became one of the most brutal and murderous dictators in post-independence African history.

During his regime, the death toll from his purges of targeted ethnic groups that had supported Obote and other groups of Ugandan citizens was estimated at about 300,000 people. Meanwhile, there was a total breakdown of the economy. After Amin’s forces crossed into Tanzania in 1978, Tanzanian troops and Ugandan exile militias responded and managed to oust Amin in 1979. Obote returned to power in an apparently fraudulent election in 1980. However, under the second Obote regime, detentions, torture, and killings went on as during the Amin years, although now the victims were mostly southerners. The estimated number of those slaughtered was another 300,000 people. Museveni, with his National Resistance Army, continued his military campaign against Obote. Eventually ethnic splits within the Ugandan army led to Obote’s overthrow again in 1985 and the following year, amid the political collapse of the state, Museveni took power and became president, as he remains today. For several more years, military operations continued against opposition insurgencies. The new Museveni government brought stability to most areas of the country except for a large region in the north which continues today to suffer after two decades from the insurgency of a mad warlord in one of the worst humanitarian crises on the African continent. While otherwise Museveni has brought to Uganda a period of steady reform and economic growth, only by the end of the century was Uganda able to re-establish the per capita income it had had in 1970 (Calderisi, 2006). Thus, three lost decades after my own departure from the country, the Ugandan economy arrived back at the point where it had been at that time.

3. Africa since independence

From fifty years ago, with euphoria and grand ambitions, the countries of sub-Saharan Africa gained their independence from colonial rule. Soon, however, the bright outlook for the future began to fade and eventually much of the continent descended into the depths of pessimism and despair. The colonial legacy itself left the new states with overwhelming, if not insurmountable, burdens. As Meredith (2006, p. 50) succinctly notes, “Africa was
the poorest, least developed region on earth." The land itself and the climate in much of the continent were harsh and the extent of disease profound. Some 80% of the population engaged in subsistence agriculture and the extent of education and skilled manpower were very limited. Rapid and uncontrolled population growth accompanied by enormous urban expansion compounded the stress on limited resources. Africa's share of world trade was no more than three percent and the stunted economies based on mineral extraction and commodity exports, along with distorted and limited infrastructure development, inherited from colonial rule, were daunting impediments to overcome.

Felix Houphouët-Boigny, the independence leader and president of Côte d'Ivoire from 1960 until his death in 1993, famously said, "We have all inherited from our colonial masters not nations but states." Political systems that were imposed within artificial boundaries that in most cases included a multiplicity of ethnic groups together with regional differences and inequalities were derived from authoritarian colonial regimes. As Davidson (1992) notes, in the 1950's and 1960's African nationalism was more an anti-colonial movement than one inspired by national consciousness that demanded a nation. In fact, African people wanted an end to European rule and expected in its wake better food, health, shelter, education, and employment. But "once the national sovereignties were declared, the arena was fixed for rivalry over the resources within that arena: and the rivalry was bound to become abrasive, and therefore divisive, if only because the resources were in short supply" (p. 185). Vickers (2005, p. 680) summarizes the predicament in a similar fashion: "Thus, for new African states, inheritors of disparate territories cobbled for colonial administrative convenience from myriad ethnic, linguistic and regional groups, the seeds of crisis, and from the very outset of independent rule, had been sown. There was to be no escape." Yet, as The Economist (2007, April 28) editors have remarked on the "colossal flop" of the post-colonial continent: "The excuse of colonialism wore out at least a generation ago – and Africans know it."

Calderisi (2006, p. 30) adds the following perspective: "Slavery, colonialism, the Cold War, international institutions, high debt, geography, the large number of countries, and population pressures all have had an effect on Africa. But none of these can explain why the continent has been going backward for the last 30 years. African economies were expanding after Independence. They have been contracting until very recently and are growing again only very slowly."

As in Uganda, throughout Africa soon after independence began a decade by decade chronicle of decline. From the 1960's, one-party, big-man regimes based on autocratic, corrupt, largely ethnically defined patrimonial systems came to rule across the continent. Soon military interventions occurred and became so prevalent that from 1960 to 2001 there were 80 successful coups plus 108 failed coups. 106 out of 180 changes in government leadership were the result of overthrow by coup, assassination, war, or invasion (McGowan, 2003). Always preceding and following were economic mismanagement and rampant corruption and plunder of state resources by the ruling elites. As Falola (2003, p. 143) notes and all scholars and observers of Africa concur, "Corruption is one of the most important obstacles to sustainable development in Africa," having devastating effects on economic growth and social and political development. Most African countries occupy the lower portion of the Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International (2006). In Nigeria alone, one of Africa's most corrupt countries, from independence in 1960 until 1999, an estimated $380 billion has been stolen or wasted by corrupt officials, the equivalent of about two-thirds of all the aid given to all of sub-Saharan Africa during that time (The Economist, 2007, April 28).
Ruinous economic strategies and failed governance have resulted in Africa being the only region in the world where food production per capita has declined since the 1960's. Along with falls in worldwide commodity prices and the rising need for imports, African governments borrowed heavily abroad and their external debts rose astronomically with calamitous impact on ordinary citizens. The Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank that subsequently were imposed on many countries in the 1980's and 1990's, though adding to the economic hardship citizens had to bear, in fact were never fully implemented and indeed promoted further corrupt patronage and crony capitalism among the leadership elite. By the end of the 1980's, three decades after the start of the independence era, per capital income across sub-Saharan Africa was lower than in 1960 (Meredith, 2006). The sense of pessimism and despair about conditions in Africa became more widely and deeply held.

Civil wars and international conflicts between African states have engulfed at one time or another about half of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Millions of people have died in the battles themselves and much more often from hunger and disease in the appalling conditions of their flight from the conflict zones and in refugee and internal displacement camps. The Nigeria-Biafra civil war from 1967 to 1970 was among the early massive conflicts in the post-independence era. The estimated number of military and civilian casualties from the hostilities, starvation and disease was near three million. The genocide that raged for a hundred days in Rwanda in 1994 left slaughtered an estimated 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu people. Warfare in the Democratic Republic of Congo principally from 1998 to 2003 but still ongoing has left up to four million people dead. Currently the greatest humanitarian crisis in the world is in the Darfur region of Sudan where government-backed Arab militias with genocidal intent have annihilated perhaps 300,000 non-Arab Darfuri and displaced at least two million more since a rebellion that began in 2003. The numbers numb the mind and perhaps for many people outside of Africa the extent of human suffering is incomprehensible and beyond the capacity of their hearts to grasp.

Meanwhile, the human numbers related to the pandemic of HIV/AIDS are even more staggering. By the end of the 1980's the rampage of HIV/AIDS through southern and eastern Africa in particular was evident. Sub-Saharan Africa now accounts for about two-thirds of the more than thirty-three million people living with HIV/AIDS though it makes up just about 12% of the world's population. About 60% of cases are women, and even worse among young people, 74% of those infected are female. Almost three million children are infected. AIDS is now the leading cause of death in Africa. Although now about one million people are receiving anti-AIDS drugs routinely, the annual death toll from the disease in Africa is about 2.5 million people and more than 20 million Africans have already died from AIDS. South Africa is the richest country on the continent and accounts for about 40% of sub-Saharan Africa's GDP. It is Africa's most successful democracy and one of its most politically stable states. Yet, as many six million people in the population of 47 million are infected. Life expectancy is 47 years. A myriad of interconnected causes explain the spread and persistence of the disease in Africa. The impact on all aspects of life is enormous and the disease will continue significantly to impede development on the continent for generations to come.

The United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) “provides a composite measure of three dimensions of human development: living a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy), being educated (measured by adult literacy and enrolment at the primary, secondary and tertiary level) and having a decent standard of living (measured by purchasing power parity, PPP, income).... [It provides] a broadened prism for viewing human
progress and the complex relationship between income and well-being” (UN Development Programme, 2006). In the 2006 HDI ranking of 177 countries, the bottom 23, and 35 of the bottom 38, are countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The composite HDI value for sub-Saharan Africa at 0.470 (of a maximum 1.0) remains far below that of South Asia, the region just above in ranking, at 0.605 and the gap has been widening for the past 25 years as during that time sub-Saharan Africa’s index has remained flat while those of all other regions in the world have increased. (The value for OECD countries is 0.921.) In short, the state of Africa and is future prospects are as bleak as ever. Once again, Nigeria serves as a sad example. This country, the most populous in Africa with 140 million people, is the world’s eighth largest oil exporter and in the past eight years alone has earned about one-quarter trillion dollars in oil revenues. Yet, with corruption and mismanagement so vast and endemic, this windfall has been wasted and Nigeria remains ranked at 159 on the UN’s HDI (The Economist, 2007, August 4).

In 2000 the United Nations established Millennium Development Goals, targets for advancing welfare in the developing countries. The Economist (2004, Sept 11) summarized the annual assessment report of progress toward these goals. “The moribund economies of sub-Saharan Africa, taken together, have met or are on track to meet not a single target…. No progress at all, or less than no progress, on poverty and hunger: on secondary school enrolment for girls: on infant mortality or immunization against measles: on maternal mortality: on malaria: on forests, drinking water and sanitation…. The regions’ millennium development outlook is a worsening economic catastrophe.” Subsequent reports hold much the same conclusions.

Extraordinary amounts of aid have been delivered to sub-Saharan Africa. In the past forty years donors have contributed a staggering $580,000,000,000 ($580 billion), yet as the UN Conference on Trade and Development (2006) reported, in that period “growth had been slow and poverty had increased.” Indeed, African studies scholars have increasingly questioned and challenged the ineffective and inefficient aid regimes that have overspread sub-Saharan Africa. Van de Walle (1999, p. 189), for one, has comprehensively examined contemporary African political economy and states:

“As the region’s international marginalization has increased, with its international trade, foreign direct investment, and global economic activity all shrinking to negligible proportions, it has come to receive historically unprecedented amounts of foreign aid…. In economic terms, the aid regime has actually slowed down the process of policy reform and has helped sustain the old policies. In political terms, it has served to protect and sustain weak governments in the region and has actually exacerbated neopartimonial tendencies in decision making.”

Easterly (2006) takes issue strenuously and persuasively with the approaches and programs of aid organizations and particularly with the prominent economist Jeffrey Sachs who has made a deep commitment to fighting global poverty and who calls for massive and rapid increases in aid, arguing that African countries are stuck in a “poverty trap” from which they can extricate themselves only with outside help.

“Poverty in Africa is the outcome of much deeper factors such as political elites who seek mainly to protect their own position, dysfunctional institutions like corruption and lack of property rights, and a long history of exploitation and meddling from abroad…. Poverty never has been ended and never will be ended by foreign experts
or foreign aid. Poverty will end as it has ended everywhere else, by homegrown political, economic, and social reformers and entrepreneurs that unleash the power of democracy and free markets” (Easterly, 2006, Jan. 11).

Over the past decade, to fuel its ever-booming economy, China has been buying up oil, metals, minerals, timber, and farm produce throughout sub-Saharan Africa. China now buys over 10% of sub-Saharan Africa’s exports. The volume of trade between China and Africa soared to more than $50 billion in 2006 and at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation held in Beijing in November, 2006 the two sides agreed to double that trade to $100 billion by 2010 (Bello, 2007). World market prices for these commodities have risen to high levels due to this demand which has been beneficial for most of Africa as overall economic growth on the continent has been sustained at close to 6% in recent years. Indeed, according to the IMF (The Economist, 2007, November 17), “Africa is enjoying its best period of sustained economic expansion since independence” with real GDP expected to rise to 6.8% in 2008. China’s direct investment in resource production and extractive infrastructure has been enormous and will continue to grow. However, it is not certain whether this surge in economic involvement will bring much promise to Africa or lead to further harm.

This investment is often not sustainable and this kind of economic growth does not necessarily lead to development (Amosu, 2007). It does not employ or train a sufficient number of Africans nor process these raw materials within Africa itself. Commodity trade typically stifles diversification of economies. In addition, commodity prices are notoriously variable and should China’s economy falter, Africa’s economies likewise will tumble. More than 800 Chinese companies operate throughout the continent, yet Chinese employers often are notorious for paying low wages and allowing harsh and hazardous working conditions. In many cases, too, the flood of cheap products made in China undercuts local African industries, such as textiles. Furthermore, Chinese investment in Africa may facilitate corruption and undermine efforts to advance democracy, good governance, and respect for human rights. As Taylor (2007) points out:

“For many elites in Africa, wealth generation and survival does not depend on productive development on a nationwide scale. Elite survival depends on access to rents to distribute to patronage networks... The advancement of policies that bring in revenue for the elites but that also benefit broad swathes of the population...is not required. Consequently, China’s economic and political support could offer African politicians increasing leeway in misusing public funds and manipulating institutions to preserve their own power. In addition, Chinese diplomacy and activities in engaging with certain African regimes not only clash with the advancement of universal norms of human rights but actually helps to further undermine development.”

From the early 1990’s a wave of democratic movements swept across Africa as dictators came under greater internal and external pressure to hold elections. Between 1990 and 1996, for example, 37 out of 48 states in sub-Saharan Africa (including the island nations around the continent) held multi-party elections (Meredith, 2006). However, as Apter (2002) recognizes, “Apart from Ghana, Senegal, Botswana, and a few other countries, democracy is mostly a façade.” Dictators have manipulated the reins of power and in almost all cases elections are held without competitive democratic processes and based on the continuing system of corrupt patronialism. Thus, most of the former dictators have remained in office with little if any change in the political institutions, civil society, and critical economic conditions in these countries. Nigeria held nationwide elections in April 2007 that
included a presidential poll for the first civilian-to-civilian transfer of power since its independence in 1960. The elections, however, were universally viewed as a meaningless charade that “lacked even a pretense of democratic plausibility” (The Economist, 2007, May 26).

In 2001, led by South African President Thabo Mbeki, the African Union (AU) launched a plan called the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) which includes among its aims promotion of democracy, human rights, good governance, and sound economic management through accountability and transparency by peer review of member countries. Although South Africa, in its largely successful transition from 1994 in the post-apartheid era, has earned its role as the great hope for the entire continent, NEPAD has largely failed to impress in carrying out its mission. The most egregious betrayal of its aims has been the lack of response to the ruination of Zimbabwe under President Robert Mugabe, which has led South African Bishop Desmond Tutu to lament: “We Africans should hang our heads in shame.”

Fundamentally, African states face a crisis in leadership. For fifty years, African leaders throughout the continent have failed to provide effective government. “Africa has long been saddled with poor, even malevolent, leadership: predatory kleptocrats, military-installed autocrats, economic illiterates, and puffed-up posturers” (Rotberg, 2004, p. 14). Examples of good leadership in Africa are few and far between. Botswana has had sound leadership since independence. Nelson Mandela brought visionary leadership as the first president of the new South Africa in 1994. Other examples are less impressive or less proven yet. Good governance is an absolute necessity for the countries of Africa to move toward successful economic development and social advancement in health, education, and other aspects of human development.

4. Uganda: at present and future prospects

Uganda, in its own circumstances, has been through all of the experiences outlined above for post-independence sub-Saharan Africa. Uganda currently is ranked at 145 in the UNDP Human Development Index. Life expectancy is 48 years. AIDS has killed more than one million Ugandans while an even greater number are presently infected with HIV. Uganda was one of the first countries hit hard by the disease and the epidemic spread very fast to all parts of the country. By the early 1990’s the prevalence rate among the adult population was estimated at about 18%. (Estimates of more than 30% for that time, though still claimed by the Uganda government, are now widely accepted as overstated and perhaps twice as high as the reality [de Waal, 2006]). The Uganda government has been recognized for its early acknowledgement of the wide prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the country and for addressing and alleviating the spread of the disease, bringing the prevalence rate down to around 6% in 2003. However, it seems that the campaign now is losing ground amid ineffective policies and financial mismanagement, and infection rates have risen to 7% for men and 9% for women (The Economist, 2005, Sept 10).

The adult literacy rate in Uganda is 67%. In 1996, school fees for primary education were abolished. Yet even such positive steps toward furthering human development have limitations. The explosion in the numbers of children attending school has come at the expense of a decline in the quality of instruction with a shortage of teachers and thus severely overcrowded classrooms and lack of a sufficient number of textbooks.
Access to free primary school education for more than seven million children has been made possible with generous overseas aid to Uganda. Since 1986, foreign donors have poured more than $11 billion into the country. Foreign aid now makes up about half of the government’s annual budget. In recent years, however, donors have become disenchanted with the pervasive corruption in Uganda and estimates of between $100- $175 million annually are diverted in this way (The Economist, 2005, July 2).

The population of Uganda forty years ago was about 10 million. Now it is about 28 million and growing at a rate of 3.3% per year, with almost 50% of the population below the age of 15. The population is projected to triple to more than a staggering 80 million by 2050 (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2005). This unrestrained population growth will continue to put enormous pressure on government spending for schools, clinics, sanitation and other social services as well as agricultural production. Its impact will check any meaningful gains in economic growth and the development of human resources for coming generations.

Meanwhile, President Museveni has reverted to increasingly authoritarian rule and his regime has become more and more reminiscent of those of the corrupt big men which covered the continent for decades and still survive in several countries. Having seized power in 1986, Museveni was elected president for the first time in 1996 and re-elected in 2001. He then had the constitution amended in 2005 to allow unlimited presidential terms of office and was elected once again in 2006. He has long opposed and suppressed multi-party politics (Ocitti, 2000). Challenges to his authoritarian rule are suppressed and Uganda, under the National Resistance Movement, is effectively a one-party state. De Waal (2006) aptly states that Museveni “gained legitimacy by bringing peace, stability and relative prosperity to most of the country. But his second decade in power has been marred by foreign wars, corruption and an increasingly despotic style of government” (p. 105). “Like many liberation leaders in government, his energy and ideals dissipated, but the centralized political-military nexus of power remained intact along with undiminished militaristic commitment to crushing his opponents” (p. 103).

For the past 21 years a rebel group called the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), led by a mad warlord, Joseph Kony, has terrorized the wide area of northern Uganda that is inhabited mainly by the Acholi people. As many as two million of them, 90% of the population in the affected districts, have fled their homes and live in terror as internally displaced persons (IDP) in squalid, predatory camps which have staggering death rates from insufficient food and water, sickness and disease, and violence (The Economist, 2005, May 7). As many as 25,000 children have been abducted and enslaved by the LRA as child soldiers and sex partners. Tens of thousands of people have been killed and others raped and mutilated. “There are almost no inhabited villages outside the major towns in large areas of northern Uganda” (Rice, 2004). Many of my students in Moyo were Acholi and during one vacation period I stayed for some days in the village of one of my Acholi students near the town of Atiak. The daily life I experienced there has been annihilated. Museveni’s army has not been able to crush the rebellion and many wonder about the effort to do so in an area where he enjoys little support and whose people would largely vote against him. Museveni is from southwestern Uganda. The north/south divide has its roots in the colonial period as mentioned earlier in this essay. In 2006, the LRA and the Uganda government signed a truce which included provisions for the LRA forces to assemble in camps in the southern Sudan in exchange for amnesty. The LRA has shifted its operational base to the northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Sporadic insurgent attacks have continued, however, as the on-again,
off-again peace process at least has reduced the previous levels of horrific violence. Meanwhile, Joseph Kony has been indicted on war crimes charges by the International Court of Justice at The Hague.

While most parts of Uganda have experienced a degree of social, political, and economic progress under the Museveni regime since 1986, it is still a very poor country with a long list of problems and significant constraints on further gains. Although the economy now is growing at about 5% per year, it is still short the 7% to 8% growth that is necessary to reduce poverty noticeably and, indeed, Museveni’s “legacy…has begun to look threadbare” (The Economist, 2007, March 17). The people and their government face a tremendous challenge to expand stability, reform, and development and prevent their reversal.

5. Conclusion

Many scholars and reporters have noted that most African states have been hollowed out. Conditions are simply very bad and beyond the capacity of most states to deal with them. Between one-third and two-thirds of education and health services, for example, now completely bypass the state and are delivered by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private aid organizations (van de Walle, 2001). As for the future, Meredith (2006), for one, notes that five decades after Africa entered its era of independence its prospects now are bleaker than ever before. “The sum of Africa’s misfortunes – its wars, its despotisms, its corruption, its droughts, its everyday violence presents a crisis of such magnitude that it goes beyond the reach of foreseeable solutions” (p. 686). Yet Africans must find their own solutions.

For the past eight years I have taught a university course in African Studies that is part of the curriculum of the English as a foreign language (EFL) program and thus taught entirely in English. After some study of the continent’s geography and environment, early history and colonial period, contemporary topics, and country focuses such as on Uganda and South Africa, the final weeks of the course include an inquiry into the grave problems that exist throughout sub-Saharan Africa – in the interconnected spheres of politics, economics, society, and environment. How is it that Africa remains the poorest and most desperate continent on the face of the earth? The issues are complex and are shadowed with a sense of hopelessness. It takes care for me to describe, explain, and discuss them with my classes of EFL learners, but they achieve a degree of understanding and, even more importantly, at least the sense to ask discerning questions, in the manner Desiderio and I discussed the issues many years ago.

References

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