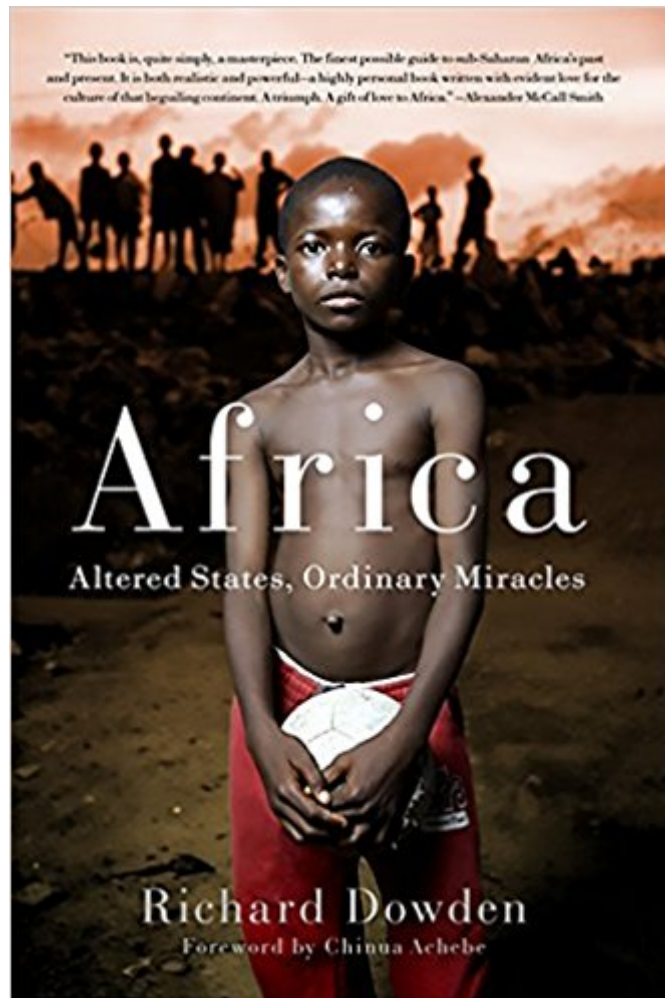




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# **Africa: Altered States, Ordinary Miracles**



## Synopsis

After a lifetime's close observation of the continent, one of the world's finest Africa correspondents has penned a landmark book on life and death in modern Africa. It takes a guide as observant, experienced, and patient as Richard Dowden to reveal its truths. Dowden combines a novelist's gift for atmosphere with the scholar's grasp of historical change as he spins tales of cults and commerce in Senegal and traditional spirituality in Sierra Leone; analyzes the impact of oil and the internet on Nigeria and aid on Sudan; and examines what has gone so badly wrong in Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Congo. Dowden's master work is an attempt to explain why Africa is the way it is, and enables its readers to see and understand this miraculous continent as a place of inspiration and tremendous humanity.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Times UK • "This book is anecdotal, engaging, realistic, and delightfully up-to-date."

Richard Dowden is director of the Royal African Society. He spent a decade as Africa Editor of the Independent, and then another decade as Africa Editor of the Economist. He has made three television documentaries on Africa, for the BBC and Channel 4.

This detail-packed book is a tough read but certainly worthwhile. The author describes how African country after country fell into disaster and calamity after each had become independent from their colonial powers, who had divided up the map of the continent into separate national units with zero

knowledge or understanding of the future (usually terrible) consequences. Leadership in country after country fell to the most ruthless and corrupt, and societies declined into truly horrible circumstances characterized by crumbling infrastructure, deepened poverty, wars, atrocities, and AIDS. Often self-serving interventions by outsiders, including even some aid organizations, only made matters worse. The really amazing aspect of African culture that the author portrays is the attitude of hope that permeates African societies living in circumstances that we in the West would consider unbearable. In the midst of incredible suffering, Africans retain their dignity and their love of family. This book, which is best read in small doses, leaves one with the feeling that if only Africa can put its political house in order, significant progress, maybe even miraculous progress, will be made.

Dowdens' insight and knowledge of Africa are impressive. Having traveled to most of the countries in Africa as an author, I found his account accurate—“a quality hard to find in some writers. His criticisms of 'big men', the militaristic Americans, and the Chinese gave me additional insight into the tragedy of Africans against the world. It's pitiful the African leaders care so little about their nations, preferring to bank away AID money in European bank accounts. If you have an interest in knowing the truth about American aid into Africa, this is a must read. I found this book to be highly engaging.

Absolutely a must read. Very informative, enlightening, and made me love Africa even more.

Dowden's knowledge of Africa excellent. His criticisms of colonialists, "big men', Chinese and militaristic Americans is spot on. But, what shines is the resilience and hope in the face of hopelessness of the long-suffering Africans. The vast amount of aid money that now sits in accounts in Europe and the Caribbean due to the greed of African leaders is tragic for donors and target recipients alike. Dowden knows that only Africans can determine how Africa works.

Only 100 pages in and I already love this book. It opens you up to a whole new way to look at the amazing continent of Africa.

Exceptional book as additionally to describing facts it asks two basic questions. One, why Europeans took the world around and adopted it to their needs and Africans adopt themselves to the world around. Two, why Asian nations facing the same challenges transformed their societies

and African nations did not. It does not provide the answers but to me the pure fact of asking the questions move your understanding of Africa forward.

Africa, called the dark continent because of our lack of knowledge. So many countries and so much turmoil. This book not only touches on some history but talks much about the people and how they respond to the turmoil and their lust for life in the midst of all of the turmoil (and death and destruction) and their incredible ability to forgive. It shows their ability to sing and rejoice in all of the circumstances and yes, it certainly shows the depth of their sufferings. An excellent writing style that is not dry history but alive in its telling.

An overview of several African countries that adds to an understanding of just how different each country can be despite the common idea that all African countries are alike. I enjoyed it except for a few bits that went on too long to hold my attention.

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