

Understanding Africa : a bibliography

Alison Morgan

There is a great array of books on the history, culture, religion and daily life of Africa. Reading is an immensely helpful shortcut to experience, and the list below includes books of many kinds written from many perspectives. The fact I've included them on the list doesn't mean I am comfortable with the views/approach of the author; but I have learnt something from each one I have read. Some are fictional, some historical, some autobiographical; some are easy to read, some scholarly and heavy going. The most useful are marked with an asterisk; a recommended shortlist is in blue.



Contemporary travel writing

- Baker, Rob: *Adventures in Music and culture – travels of an ethnomusicologist in West Africa*, Ambassador 2012
- Bell, Gavin : *Somewhere over the rainbow – travels in S Africa*, Little, Brown & Co 2000
- Butcher, Tim : *Blood River – a journey to Africa's broken heart*, Vintage Books 2008 (a journey down the R Congo)
- Bryson, Bill : *African Diary*, London 2002
- Burton, Peggy : *Tales from the Congo Forest*, King's Highway Books 2002 (medical missionaries)
- Dodwell, Christina: *Madagascar Travels*, Sceptre 1995
- Eveleigh, Mark : *Maverick in Madagascar*, Lonely Planet 2003
- Gallmann, Kuki : *African Nights*, London 1994 (expat in Kenya, poetic autobiographical works)
- *Gallmann, Kuki : *I dreamed of Africa*, Viking 1991
- Gallmann, Kuki : *Night of the lions*, London 1999
- Green, Toby : *Meeting the invisible man – secrets and magic in W Africa*, Phoenix 2002
- Guillebaud, Simon : *Dangerously Alive – African Adventures of Faith Under Fire*, Monarch 2011
- Hall, Richard: *Discovery of Africa*, Hamlyn 1970 (overview of colonial history)
- Harden, Blaine : *Africa – dispatches from a fragile continent*, London 1993 (individual stories and suffering)
- Hartley, Aidan: *The Zanzibar Chest – a memoir of love & war*, Harper Perennial 2003 (pushy young Reuters journalist in search of stories in Rwanda & Sudan, inter alia)
- Hofmann, Corinne : *The White Masai*, Arcadia Books 2005 (marries a Masai and joins the Masai community)**
- Hofmann, Corinne : *Reunion in Barsaloi*, Bliss Books 2006
- Jenkins, Mark : *To Timbuktu - a journey down the Niger*, London 1998 (in search of source of W Niger)
- Joyson-Hicks, P: *Tanzania – portrait of a nation*, Quiller 1998 (photographic)
- Kapuscinski, Ryszard: *The Shadow of the Sun*, Penguin 2002 (Polish journalist)
- Keenan, Jeremy: *Sahara Man – travelling with the Tuareg*, John Murray 2001
- Keller, W Phillip: *Africa's Wild Glory*, Jarrolds 1959 (author's life amongst Masai and the problems they face)
- *Matthiessen, P : *The Tree where man was born*, Picador 1984 (lyrical reflections on Kenya and N Tanzania)
- Middleton, Nick : *Klashnikovs and zombie cucumbers – travels in Mozambique*, Sinclair-Stevenson 1994
- *Marnham, Patrick: *Fantastic invasion - dispatches from Africa*, Penguin 1987 (wonderfully ironic overview)
- Murphy, Dervla: *Cameroon with Egbert*, Arrow 1990 (travels on foot/horseback through rural Cameroon)
- Murphy, Dervla: *Muddling through in Madagascar*, Flamingo 1999
- Murphy, Dervla: *The Ukimwi Road – from Kenya to Zimbabwe*, John Murray 1993 (by bike through AIDS country)
- *Naipaul, Shiva: *North of South – An African Journey*, Penguin 1980 (travelling through Kenya and Nyerere's Tanzania)
- *Nzenza-Shand, S : *Songs to an African sunset – a Zimbabwean Story*, Lonely Planet 1997 (rural Zimbabwe)
- *O'Hanlon, R : *Congo journey*, London 1997 (entertaining and gripping account of journey on R Congo)
- Palin, Michael : *Sahara*, Phoenix 2002 (travels in N Africa)
- Randall, Will : *Botswana Time*, Abacus 2005 (teaching in primary school)
- Read, David : *Barefoot over the Serengeti*, Arusha 1979 (childhood in Masailand)
- *Reader, John : *Africa*, National Geographic 2001 (photographic with commentary)
- *Ridgeway, R : *The Shadow of Kilimanjaro – on foot across East Africa*, London 1999
- Selby, Bettina : *Frail dream of Timbuktu*, London 1991 (travels with the Tuareg)
- Stevens, S: *Malaria Dreams*, Abacus 1989 (driving through W Africa; good on the difficulties/delights of road travel)
- *Tayler, Jeffrey : *Facing the Congo*, Little, Brown & co 2001 (well written account of trips up and down it)
- Theroux, Paul : *Dark Star Safari – overland from Cairo to Cape Town*, Penguin 2002

History/biography

- Achebe, Chinua : *Home and Exile*, Canongate Books 2000 (autobiographical; emergence of African literary writing)
- Bennun, Neil : *The Broken String – last words of an extinct people*, Penguin 2005 (bushmen of S Africa)
- Blixen, Karen : *Out of Africa*, Jonathan Cape 1964 (written 1937; settlers' Africa)
- Blixen, Karen : *Shadows on the Grass*, Penguin 1984, first pub 1960 – extra material from *Out of Africa*.
- *Conrad, Joseph : *Heart of Darkness*, Edinburgh 1927 (horrifying account of Congo in Belgian times)
- Courtemanche, Gil: *A Sunday at the pool in Kigali*, Canongate Books 2003 (fictionalised account of the Rwandan genocide by a Canadian journalist)
- Debenham, Frank : *Nyasaland – the land of the lake*, HMSO London 1955
- Dugard, Martin : *Into Africa – the dramatic retelling of the Stanley-Livingstone story*, Bantam Books 2003
- Equiano, Olaudah : *Sold as a slave*, Penguin 2007 (extract from his memoirs pub 1789)
- Fuller, Alexandra : *Don't let's go to the dogs tonight – an African childhood*, Picador 2002 (farming in Zimbabwe)
- Gide, A: *Voyage au Congo*, Paris 1927 (along same lines as Conrad)
- Greene, Graham : *Journey without maps*, Vintage Books 2006 (1936)
- Hanley, Gerald : *Warriors – Life and Death among the Somalis*, Eland 2004 (1971) - author's experience in WW2
- Huxley, Elspeth : *Out in the midday sun – My Kenya*, Chatto & Windus 1985 (story of the settlers)
- Huxley, Elspeth : *The Flame trees of Thika – memories of an African childhood*, London 1959
- Huxley, Elspeth : *The Mottled Lizard*, Chatto & Windus 1962 (sequel to Flame Trees of Thika)
- Kingsley, Mary : *The Congo & the Cameroons* (from *Travels in W Africa*, 1897), Penguin 2007
- Kingsley, Mary : *Travels in West Africa*, 1897, National Geographic 2002
- Lamb, Christina : *The Africa House* (story of Stewart Gore-Browne, in N Zambia before independence)
- Maitland, Alexander: *Wilfred Thesiger in Africa – a unique collection of essays & personal photographs*, HarperCollins 2010
- *Mathabane, Mark : *African women – three generations*, Harper Collins 1994 (portrait of 3 S African women)
- O'Brien, B : *She had a Simple Magic – the story of Mary Slessor*, Jonathan Cape 1958
- Paice, E : *Lost Lion of empire – the life of 'Cape-to-Cairo' Grogan*, Harper Collins 2001 (colonial period)
- [Park, Mungo: *Travels in the interior of Africa, \(1795-1805, and still in print!\)*](#)
- Patterson, Lt Col J H : *The Man-eaters of Tsavo*, MacMillan 1914
- Pifer, Drury : *Innocents in Africa – an American family's story*, Granta Books 1994 (mining childhood in South Africa)
- Saitoti, Tepilit ole : *The Worlds of a Maasai Warrior – an autobiography*, André Deutsch 1986
- Schlee, Ann : *Laing*, Black Swan 1989 (hist. novel about Alexander Laing, and his 1825 journey fr Tripoli to Timbuctoo)
- Speke, John H: *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, Dent 1906 (1863)
- Stock, Sarah G : *Missionary heroes of Africa* LMS 1897, (Victorian children's book, fascinating)
- *Van der Post, Laurens : *The Lost world of the Kalahari*, Penguin 1962 (tracing the last Bushmen) and *The Heart of the Hunter*, its sequel, 1965
- *Van der Post, Laurens : *Venture to the Interior*, Hogarth Press 1952 (philosophical explorations of Malawi mountains)
- *Wallace, Kathleen: *This is your home – a portrait of Mary Kingsley*, Heinemann 1956

Theology/sociology

- *Alagiah, George : [A Passage to Africa](#), London 2002 (excellent journalist's overview of issues in Africa, by country)
- Anderson, Dick: *Fire in my bones*, Christian Focus 2001 (missionary to the Turkana, Kenya)
- Baker, R and H: *There is always enough*, Sovereign World 2003 (missionaries in Mozambique, working with children)
- Cheru, F: *The Silent revolution in Africa – debt, development and democracy*, London 1989
- *Cutrufelli, Maria Rosa: *Women of Africa : roots of oppression*, London 1983
- Davidson, Basil: *The Africans – an entry to cultural history*, Penguin 1969
- *Donovan, V J : *Christianity rediscovered – an epistle from the Masai*, SCM 1978 (compulsory reading!)
- *[Dowden, Richard: *Africa – altered states, ordinary miracles*, Portobello Books 2008](#)
- Ela, J-M : *African cry*, Paris 1980 / Maryknoll 1986 (Catholic theologian from Cameroon; church and culture)
- *Ela, J-M : *My Faith as an African*, London 1989 (tensions between African and European culture in expression of faith)
- *Freeth, Ben: *Mugabe and the White African*, Lion 2011 (one man and the spiritual battle against injustice)
- *Gibellini, R (ed) : *Paths of African theology*, SCM 1994 (overview of contemporary African theology)
- Gifford, P : *African Christianity – its public role*, Hurst 1998 (Ghana, Cameroon, Zambia, Uganda)
- Green, M : *Priests, witches and power – popular Christianity after mission in Southern Tanzania*, CUP 2003
- *[Guest, Robert : *The Shackled Continent – Africa's past, present and future*, Pan Book 2005 \(Africa editor, Economist\)](#)
- *Hall, J : *Sangoma – my Odyssey into the Spirit World of Africa*, Tarcher Putnam 1994
- Hastings, A: *Church and mission in modern Africa*, London 1967 (fascinating for background of modern church)
- [Holland, Heidi: *African Magic – traditional ideas that heal a continent*, Penguin SA 2005](#)
- Kassanda, Gaspar: *"An exegetical analysis of some Luke-Acts passages on discipleship and its relevance to the contemporary East African church as remedial model to the current discipleship crisis"*, dissertation 2005.

Mather, William : *Cry for Sudan*, Terranova 2004, (SOMA missions in S Sudan)

McDougall, David - *Go to Grow: why every believer would benefit from a participating on a short term mission* - Onwards & Upwards Publishers 2012 (learning about control, contentment with what we have, laughter)

Middleton, J and EH winter (eds): *Witchcraft & Sorcery in East Africa*, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1963

Naipaul, VS: *The Masque of Africa – glimpses of African belief*, Picador 2010

Richardson, D: *Peace child*, Regal Books 1975 (missionaries in PNG, but vg on challenge of cross cultural mission)

*Shorter, A : *The Church in the African city*, London 1991 (on the need to combat secularism in growing cities)

Shorter, A : *Prayer in the religious traditions of Africa*, Nairobi OUP 1975

Spear, T and R Waller (eds) : *Being Maasai – ethnicity and identity in E Africa*, London 1993 (history/culture of Masai)

Spear, T and I N Kimambo : *East African expressions of Christianity*, Oxford 1999 (on different Christian movements)

Swartz, L: *The Medicine man among the Zaramo of Dar es Salaam*, Uppsala 1990 (background on witchdoctors)

Taylor, M: *Not angels but agencies – the ecumenical response to poverty*, SCM 1995 (informative on aid strategies)

Van Binsbergen: *Religious change in Zambia –exploratory studies*, London 1981

Van Koevering, H: *Dancing their dreams – the Lakeshore Nyanja women of the Anglican Diocese of Niassa*, Zomba 2005

Fiction

*Achebe, Chinua: *The African Trilogy - Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease, Arrow of God*, Picador 1988 (novels set in Nigeria chronicling the lives of 3 generations, before, during & after the coming of whites)

*Huxley, Elspeth: *Red Strangers*, Penguin 2006 (1939) (fictional account of cultural change for Kikuyu)

*Kingsolver, Barbara: *The Poisonwood Bible*, Harper Collins 1998 (novel about how not to be a missionary)

Lessing, Doris: *Nine African stories*, Longman 1968 (fiction; insight into daily life)

Naipaul, V S : *A Bend in the river*, Penguin 1980 (life of an Asian shopkeeper in changing central Africa)

Ben Okri: *The Famished Road*, Vintage 1992 (novel set in Nigeria about a spirit child; winner Booker 1991).

*Laurens van der Post : *A Story like the Wind*, 1972 (Francois, his childhood in the bush at Hunter's Drift)

*Laurens van der Post : *A Far-Off Place*, 1974 (sequel to *Story like the Wind*; story of Francois + Nonnie, escaping from uprising with Bushmen Xhabbo + Nuin-Tara)

Laurens van der Post : *In a Province*, 1934 (story of Kenon, from the Bambuxosa tribe, and his attempts to fit into the white world)

Laurens van der Post : *The Hunter and the Whale*, Hogarth Press 1967 (novel about whaling off S Africa)

Photographic

Murray, Jocelyn : *Cultural Atlas of Africa*, Checkmark Books 1988

*Salgado, Sebastiao : *Africa*, Taschen 2007 (stunning b/w portrait of a troubled continent)

Haas, Robert : *Through the eyes of the Gods – an aerial vision of Africa*, National Geographic 2005

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* - recommended
 Highly recommended