

## 10. STABILITY

### a) A patchwork of weak states

As the new millennium approached, a new question arose: how stable was Africa, really? Somalia had ceased to exist some years earlier and other states appeared to be heading in the same direction, either because state structures were losing whatever significance they had once had or because violence was tearing them apart. After the Cold War the number of conflict situations had at first declined, but it shot up again from 1997 onwards.<sup>1</sup> As mentioned in chapters 5 and 6, a massive conflict involving numerous countries flared up in Central Africa, a war broke out in the Horn of Africa between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and various other conflagrations (in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Angola and Sudan) proved difficult or impossible to extinguish. A particularly ominous sign was the spread of violence not just within states but between them. Since independence, African states had usually coexisted peacefully, but that period seemed to have come to an end. The sense of solidarity among African leaders was wavering in the face of increasing assertiveness and even aggression.

Below the surface, too, African society was changing in almost every respect. The ties between leaders and their people became looser. Governments saw their authority weaken. Corruption was rife, and in extreme cases entire states turned into hotbeds of crime. Ethnicisation was widespread, and in one or two places the fabric of society totally disintegrated. Children were becoming the majority; by the year 2000, one in two Africans was under eighteen. Life expectancy, which had been rising for more than fifty years, levelled off and then began to fall. Africa was the only continent where this happened, mainly owing to the devastating impact of the AIDS epidemic. More and more Africans migrated from rural to urban areas and, if they could, went abroad, preferably leaving Africa. All these dramatic changes were evidence of a society in flux, not to say turmoil.

It is hardly surprising, then, that some observers felt the changes in Africa were drastic enough to threaten the stability of its state system. This was a fundamentally new development, for Africa had been remarkably stable for the past century. Although the continent had been colonised and then decolonised, the process had not led to major violent conflicts as it had in other parts of the world. Despite major violent conflicts in the Horn of Africa and in Southern Africa, this relative stability persisted throughout the Cold War. After that, however, Africa was largely left to fend for itself and within a few years the stability of its states was being called into question. Though it had previously occurred to almost no one, it now became clear that African states were inherently very weak and might actually be incapable of surviving without outside assistance. What implications would this have? Would the stability that the continent had known for a century end in a great 'African world war' at the beginning of the twenty-first century? Only a few years earlier such a thing would have been inconceivable. Robert Kaplan, a well-known commentator, predicted increasing chaos and misery.<sup>2</sup>

All this is sufficient reason to look more closely at the stability of the continent. African states are undeniably weak – but does this mean that Africa's entire system of states is just as weak, or even on the verge of collapse? Weak components do not form a powerful whole, so Africa's regional and continental organisations are, perforce, weak and do little to promote stability on their own. African countries are only marginally interdependent. It may therefore make more sense to talk of a patchwork of separate, weak states than of a system of African states. This patchwork will persist as long as its components – the states – continue to do so.

Around the turn of the millennium, African states nevertheless appeared surprisingly resilient. Even the violent conflicts in the second half of the 1990s did not generally lead to state failure. People began to feel that the worst-case scenario – the end of several states and possibly the collapse of the whole system into utter chaos – would probably not materialise. No other countries had gone the way of Somalia. Around 2000 the worst of the dust began to settle. Ethiopia and Eritrea ended their bloody struggle, there was a period of relative calm in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and negotiations got under way in the Great Lakes region.

It was the colonial borders, which were thought to be so weak, that preserved order in Africa after the Cold War ended. Although colonialism was partly responsible for the weakness of Africa's present-day state institutions, since it had introduced forms of organisation that were alien and artificial in the African setting, it had also given the continent solid organisational boundaries by absorbing it into the international system. These boundaries were backed up by the global political and economic order and determined the thrust of political and military activity in Africa after independence. This gave the patchwork a certain strength which ensured that the whole, in fact, was stronger than the sum of its parts.

The facts speak for themselves. The only state to actually disappear, Somalia, was not colonial in origin but was a product of the decolonisation process in 1960, when Italian and British Somaliland were merged to form a single country. Various other attempts at cooperation or mergers between states were either a failure (an example being Senegambia) or led to nagging problems, such as the Zanzibar question in Tanzania or the Anglo-French conflict in Cameroon. The only new states to survive were those with colonial origins, such as Eritrea and, apparently, Somaliland (the former British Somaliland). Their success contrasted with failed attempts to secede by areas that had never been separate colonies, such as Biafra in Nigeria, Katanga in Congo (Kinshasa), Casamance in Senegal and the Caprivi Strip in Namibia. In general, British and French colonies had become the strongest independent states.

There was thus no fundamental change in the state system, which continued to be made up of more or less the same countries. The international community began making more vigorous efforts to help restore order in African countries that were in conflict or to reconstruct them afterwards. Although many had been indifferent to the fate of Somalia, war-torn Sierra Leone and Liberia received full international attention some years later. Large-scale rescue operations were launched to help these countries back onto their feet. A major driving force behind this renewed commitment to Africa was the United Nations. The global organisation did all it could to keep Africa on the world political agenda. One publication after another appeared, special conferences were held and so forth. The message was always that the rest of the world must not ignore Africa's distress. Africa was part of the world community, which had a moral duty to give the suffering continent a helping hand.

Significantly, the leader of the international community during this period was an African – and not just any African. In a post many described as impossible, the unassuming Ghanaian diplomat Kofi Annan became one of the brightest stars in the international firmament. He was universally praised. There were those who called Annan the rock star of diplomacy. Many considered him the best Secretary-General the United Nations had ever had and he had no difficulty securing a second five-year term in 2002. His prestige was considerable. He succeeded in reforming the UN's sluggish bureaucracy and producing critical reports on UN failures (during the genocide in Rwanda, for instance), and he mediated in countless international crises. In 2001, together with the UN, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Annan was seen as completely honest, with powerful moral authority. He was a natural leader who never seemed overbearing. His main themes were poverty reduction, the fight against AIDS, democratisation, respect for human rights, conflict prevention, and of course keeping Africa high on the international agenda.

Keeping Africa in the spotlight was important because in many respects it had drifted to the margins of the international community. Its share in the world economy was shrinking steadily. Politically and strategically, Africa had become utterly insignificant. Yet this did not necessarily mean that ties between Africa and the rest of the world had grown much looser. Chapter 9 pointed out how important Africa is to international organisations and the 'development industry'. Its institutional and financial ties – including debts – were considerable. The continent was also tied into the international system through the activities of transnational companies and its growing role in the international underground economy, especially the drug trade. However, the main thing that kept Africa anchored to the outside world was the personal contacts of the national elites. The international networks in which they operated were a stabilising factor. The only reason that Africans could be part of these networks at all was that they represented African states. Had it not been for this special role, they would have had no international contacts and hence much less status. This could have had all kinds of

serious implications for the individuals in question. Their international ties constantly forced them to think and act in national terms, and this enhanced domestic stability.

Yet African rulers' international ties did not determine how they behaved back in their own countries. Since independence, their domestic politics had developed in its own way, with considerable emphasis on patronage and oppression. At the same time, there were institutions whose outlook was entirely national – above all the armed forces, at least until they became ethnicised in many countries. The national language can also be seen as a unifying factor. Although usually European – French, English or Portuguese – it was still the only language that the leaders of a country's ethnic groups had in common. On the other hand, one can point to a number of factors that undermined national unity, such as the high degree of ethnic diversity, often accompanied by internal conflict which aggravated existing tensions. Their countries' failure to develop also made national identity less important to many Africans. This increased the incentive to try out alternative forms of organisation.

A crucial issue for state stability was whether most of the population identified with the country as a whole or with a subnational unit such as an ethnic group. Not only did ethnic loyalties and a sense of ethnic identity persist in Africa, they actually grew stronger in many places in the course of the 1990s. In a sense, states and ethnic groups were competing for the people's favours. This should not be seen as a struggle between natural ties to ethnic groups and artificial ties to the postcolonial states. What may at first appear to be natural ties nearly always turn out, on closer inspection, to have been artificially constructed by rulers earlier on. Whether these fabricated identities actually work mainly depends on the circumstances in which they are introduced. The question is whether potential supporters benefit from rallying behind the new leader, or whether other options are preferable. All states are born out of power politics, whether in Europe, in Africa or anywhere else.<sup>3</sup> Peoples, as they develop, tend to adapt to states rather than the other way round.<sup>4</sup>

Changing circumstances also cause group identities to evolve over time. Like states, ethnic groups come and go. The formation of ethnic groups (or 'tribes') in colonial times was essentially the same process as the creation of a sense of national unity after independence.<sup>5</sup> Yet from the 1960s onwards, the newly emerging feelings of nationhood displayed a different character from shifting ethnic identities. Ethnic groupings, whether or not 'frozen' during the colonial period, were almost always based on internal African developments. To take one important example, although the Hutu and Tutsi identities were largely determined by the Belgian authorities in the first half of the twentieth century, the Belgians had simply embroidered on pre-existing local affiliations. The same was true in other parts of Africa. However, things were different when it came to forming modern states. This development had entirely European roots (as far as Africans were concerned it came out of the blue) and was totally at odds with local tradition. That does not necessarily tell us anything about its ultimate impact but in the competition with ethnic sentiments it was definitely a disadvantage. The struggle between the two types of identity – ethnic and national – was later influenced by such factors as democratisation (which sometimes encouraged ethnicisation) and changes in international aid flows, more and more of which were channelled through states.

Interaction between different African states was an increasingly important factor in the continent's stability. This was a new phenomenon which was made possible above all by the decline in international involvement in Africa and the changing nature of that involvement. Major international powers were making increasing use of African countries and regional organisations to promote stability in the region. It was South Africa and Nigeria, the largest military powers on the continent, that benefited most. The buildup of African peacekeeping capacity enhanced their regional and even continental status. These 'pillars of stability' will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter (sections f and g).

The stability of states is ultimately determined by domestic rather than international factors. The most important of these was the way in which the apparatus of the state functioned in Africa. Much has already been said about this in connection with state failure. However, there is another major reason the machinery of state often failed to function properly, namely corruption, which spread continuously in the 1990s and was a major source of social problems.

## b) Rampant corruption and increasing crime

After the Cold War, African states were increasingly hampered by rampant corruption. Every discussion of corruption in Africa begins with the statement that it is not a specifically African phenomenon. Corruption is universal, and may always have been with us. Africans do not carry some special gene that makes them more susceptible to corruption than anyone else. Having said this, there is still every reason to look more closely at the phenomenon of corruption in Africa, for there can be no doubt that it has spread rapidly there in recent decades.

Back in the 1980s corruption was already recognised as a problem that had to be tackled. In the 1990s there was hope that democratisation would do away with corruption, by bringing greater openness and more effective monitoring of government. However, this did not happen – quite the contrary, in fact. In the 1990s corruption continued to spread in almost every part of the continent. This was reflected in the corruption index that Transparency International began producing in 1993. Over the years, more and more African countries were included, and they almost always ended up low on the list, among the most corrupt. By the turn of the century they were starting to rival Asian countries. In 1999 Cameroon was branded the most corrupt country in the world, and in 2000 that dubious honour fell to Nigeria. In 2001, 2002 and 2003, Nigeria finished second after Bangladesh. These lists made it clear that corruption was prevalent, and not just in Cameroon and Nigeria, but as a far more widespread African phenomenon. What was the explanation?

‘Opportunity makes the thief,’ as the saying goes, and this undoubtedly applies to corruption. But what is it in general – leaving Africa aside for a moment – that provides opportunities for corruption? What circumstances are most conducive to it? These have been neatly summed up in the following formula: power plus freedom of action minus accountability.<sup>6</sup> Whenever people find themselves in circumstances in which they can act as they see fit, without being accountable to anything or anyone afterwards, there is every opportunity for corruption. Such circumstances probably exist on a small scale all over the world, and hence so does corruption. On a large scale, things are different. In most countries, individuals do not have the requisite authority or freedom of action, and even if they do they can be held accountable afterwards. Only authoritarian systems in which the executive completely dominates the legislature and the judiciary are a breeding ground for large-scale corruption. These circumstances were well-attested in many Asian countries and became increasingly prevalent in Africa. Power was gradually centralised and state officials were not accountable to anyone.

African states have other features that encourage corruption. These have to do with the prevailing notion of power. Power in postcolonial Africa is not prepared to accept restrictions, but attempts to be all-pervading. Even in African countries where separation of powers has been introduced, there is pressure to reverse it and concentrate everything in the hands of the executive. The economy, like the rest of society, is usually in thrall to the country’s political leaders. No distinction is made between the public and private spheres. The personal nature of social ties in Africa is also a key factor. People with special relationships are expected to help each other even if this is inappropriate in Western terms. This reveals the cultural relativity of corruption; much of what is judged corrupt in Western countries is not seen by Africans as a crime or even a problem.

This should not be taken to mean that African cultures are inherently corrupt, even by Western standards. The cultural traits that encourage corruption are essentially a protective mechanism.<sup>7</sup> In societies that lack impersonal safeguards against unemployment, disease, violence or poverty, it is inevitable that people will ally themselves with powerful citizens in order to obtain help, in the form of money or other favours. However, all lasting ties are reciprocal – there must also be something in it for the benefactor. Apart from popularity and social status, this may be, for example, political support.

Corruption is a method of accumulating wealth, for rich and poor alike. In combination with patronage networks, it is also a means of redistributing both public and private resources. In some cases this was more or less deliberate government policy. The state helped redistribute resources by spending state funds on public and semipublic enterprises, which usually operated at a loss.

Employees who ought to have been fired were not, and enterprises survived even though there was no longer any financial or economic basis for their existence. The government kept them going for political and social rather than economic reasons. In addition, there was voluntary redistribution by rich and powerful Africans to maintain the loyalty of their clientele. Public resources were used for this purpose wherever possible.

This redistribution mechanism came into action when people had power over others, for example because they held government posts which enabled them to extort money from those who needed services ('ordinary' corruption). Corruption depended on power rather than wealth. Even poor people could indulge in it whenever they found potential victims who were unable to defend themselves. For example, foreigners arriving at the border of an African country were sometimes robbed by the local population before being allowed to pass through.<sup>8</sup> Other vulnerable groups included white farmers in Southern Africa and, above all, foreign-born entrepreneurs who had settled in Africa, such as Lebanese and Syrian shopkeepers in West Africa and Asian businessmen in East Africa. They could not count on the authorities to protect them and were often forced to part with their money in all kinds of illegal ways.

Not only did corruption have serious personal consequences for the victims, but it also made it difficult for states to improve their policies, for example by liberalising their markets. Africa lagged well behind other parts of the world in this respect, and even more so in practice than in theory. For example, businesses in Tanzania complained about being pestered with demands for types of tax that no longer officially existed. Government tax collectors clung to their confusing tangle of rules for as long as they could in the hope of collecting more revenue, part of which went straight into their own pockets. These 'public servants' fought against any attempt to simplify the system.

It was above all the adverse impact of corruption on the development of African countries that made international donors press for anticorruption campaigns in Africa. In the 1990s, anticorruption measures were taken in numerous African countries. Perhaps the most vigorous campaign was launched by the IMF. The main target was Kenya, whose government agencies were so utterly venal that in 1997 the IMF decided to suspend all aid to the country. Ties were re-established in 2000. The IMF said it would grant new loans only if anticorruption reforms were carried out. Curiously enough, the person the IMF had to negotiate with was the well-known white Kenyan Richard Leakey. He had spent years investigating the origins of man in East Africa, but had since gone into politics. The Kenyan government had unexpectedly made an offer to put him in charge of the civil service, which he accepted. His first task, boosting the country's economy, could only be accomplished by improving relations with the international financial institutions.

It was agreed that Kenya would only embark on new development projects with the consent of the IMF, which also compelled the government to introduce a new financial system, with a key role for the finance ministry. Only this ministry was henceforth authorised to spend money at the district level – even the powerful Office of the President could no longer do so. This drastically reduced the number of officials who could embezzle, making monitoring easier. All Kenyans in government service were required by law to declare their assets. Only the president was exempted from this requirement – his ministers were not. However, the large number of ministerial posts (and hence plum jobs under the president) remained unchanged, although the number of ministries was halved. The IMF paid weekly visits to the Central Bank to check the books. Its tough stance helped Leakey and his team of fraud-busters to clean up some of Kenya's state-owned enterprises. A number of corrupt senior officials were dismissed. However, there were limits to what the cleanup could achieve; the president and his entourage were left untouched. They had sufficient power and political skill to delay and frustrate the anticorruption campaign.

Many Africans greatly welcomed efforts to fight corruption in their continent. They also felt that things had gone too far. There were limits to what was acceptable. Some things were universally acknowledged to be excesses or even crimes. Over the last quarter of a century, as a result of political changes, the generally accepted social system began to break down in many African countries. Normal social behaviour degenerated into corruption. The patronage system, though its original function was to preserve social stability, gradually became a basis for criminal activity.

Crime was on the increase all over Africa, especially in urban areas. This often reflected a rise in small-scale offences committed by individuals or small groups, from pilfering to armed robbery. Within a frighteningly short time African cities became much less safe, and some societies, such as South Africa's, became thoroughly crime-ridden.

Large-scale organised crime also grew rapidly after 1990, partly owing to the changing international situation. Globalisation, with its porous frontiers, deregulation and better communications, made it ever easier for international networks to operate more or less unnoticed. Illicit trade expanded swiftly and covered a variety of commodities, from weapons and protected animal species to people (who were usually smuggled to Western Europe) and drugs. Illegal traffic in drugs became a lucrative activity for groups in West Africa, with their hub in Nigeria.<sup>9</sup> These networks consisted not only of Africans, but also of Latin Americans, Arabs and Asians living in Africa. Although local use of substances such as amphetamines, heroin and cocaine was rapidly increasing in West Africa and elsewhere on the continent, most of the trade involved drugs in transit to other parts of the world. Heroin from the Golden Triangle in Asia was shipped on to the United States and cocaine from Colombia and neighbouring countries found its way to Western Europe via West Africa.

Organised criminals sometimes operated independently from states but in other cases had links with them. In the 1990s many government officials became more willing to engage in lucrative illegal activities because of the financial distress brought on by structural adjustment programmes, economic problems and dwindling foreign aid. It was increasingly difficult for them to continue funding their networks of domestic clients. Crime, with or without the use of state power, was a way to replenish shrinking financial reserves. It was usually a sideline, but in some countries illegal transactions started to become a mainstay of the regime. Once again, in some circles this was not necessarily seen as unacceptable. Political and moral codes of conduct based on family, ethnicity and other ties left a good deal more latitude than in many non-African cultures. In some circumstances deceit could be a valued social skill and if it resulted in a glamorous lifestyle, people were even more inclined to condone it.<sup>10</sup>

Some regimes were a tissue of corruption and crime. The most extreme example was probably the Taylor government in Liberia (1997-2003), which can only be described as a bandit regime. Liberia was involved in various kinds of illicit trade. Its leaders placed themselves and their relatives in positions from which they could control the revenue. Ministers sat on the boards of humanitarian organisations and Taylor's own wife was put in charge of Liberia's emergency relief agency. Some donors decided to stop giving emergency aid to the destitute country because the money was certain to end up in the wrong hands and would never reach the people it was meant for.

### c) Reassessing the role of the state

Back in the 1980s, the international financial institutions were the first to be confronted with the serious problems besetting African countries. One state after another went bankrupt. How were these institutions to respond to the constant requests for financial support? In the structural adjustment programmes that were subsequently introduced, new loans were granted only if the government in question agreed to change its policies. This nearly always involved reducing the budget deficit, liberalising trade, privatising state enterprises and letting the currency float. The aim was to put state finances in order and improve the economic situation. However, this goal was not fully realised. The measures often conflicted with rulers' interests, and they did what they could to subvert reform. Even if measures were adopted in theory, there were complications in practice. Simply emphasising better policies was not enough.

The crucial problem was the dysfunction of African states. The only chance for improvement would come through a change in African policies and governance. The unexpected wave of political liberalisation after the Cold War got things moving, and for a number of years economic and political liberalisation went hand in hand. International support for this trend was known as the Washington consensus. However, the relative successes of the mid-1990s did not last. The outbreak of major new violent conflicts made instability another serious problem for African states. Their weakness was a

threat to domestic security, and after the Al Qaeda attacks on the United States in 2001, failed states were also considered a threat to international security.

The role of the state had to be thoroughly reassessed. The international development community was slow to recognise that African state structures were an obstacle to development. For a long time, donors did what they could to avoid criticising African politicians and political systems, feeling that because Africa was now independent, its politics were its own business. Western countries had generally assumed that African political systems were up to their task. By the 1990s this view was no longer tenable. The all too conspicuous malfunctioning of African states was making aid ineffective.

This development ran roughly in parallel with new international thinking about the role of the state. All over the world, in accordance with the neoliberal orthodoxy that emerged just after the Cold War, the state was being rolled back. The smaller, the better, where government was concerned. This conveniently overlooked the tasks that the state did have and that could not be assumed by private institutions. The most important one, of course, was maintaining law and order, but the state also turned out to be indispensable to the economy. Business could only run smoothly in a climate of political and economic stability, physical safety and good infrastructure – things that only the state could provide. The state and the private sector were thus not only rivals, but allies as well. For markets to function properly, states were needed to draw up and enforce the rules. Without sufficient government intervention, the most that could be achieved was a wild-west economy based on chaotic, unbridled capitalism, rather than a flourishing private sector. On closer inspection, the state and the market turned out to be highly interdependent.

States might have been expensive to maintain compared with private companies, but they were nevertheless essential. Without effective states, society would pay an increasingly high price in terms of the economy, living standards, public safety, international security and so on. The state was a house that not only had to remain standing but also needed maintenance. This was something the market would not provide. All this led to a rediscovery of the importance of institutions and a new appreciation of the state.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, in the numerous cases in which the development of the private sector had gone together with a general rise in prosperity, the state had nearly always played a major part.<sup>12</sup> This was true of both the rich industrialised countries of Europe, with their mixed economies and their ‘social market capitalism’, and the countries of East and Southeast Asia, which had developed under the guidance of strong governments.<sup>13</sup> However, whereas in many Asian countries the state had been a powerful force for development, in Africa it had almost invariably been an obstacle to it.<sup>14</sup>

The new emphasis on the importance of the state in developing countries was a faint echo of what Gunnar Myrdal had said back in the 1960s. The Swedish economist had asserted that a key feature of states in developing countries was that they were ‘weak’ – or, as we now say, prone to ‘failure’. Poor countries could not develop unless these weak states were strengthened. These views were several decades ahead of their time. In the international development policies of the 1970s and 1980s, the state played only a subordinate role. It was not until the 1990s that attention was focused once more on the operation of the state, both with a view to preventing violent conflict and in connection with development. Some even argued that instead of poverty reduction, the main goal of development cooperation should be to improve administrative structures – or, as we now put it, to promote good governance.<sup>15</sup>

Yet this too would have been too one-sided. What mattered was not just effective administration, but also what exactly it was meant to achieve; in other words, not just good governance, but good policies as well. Both were needed. Myrdal underestimated the importance of the right policies. He noted that the communist states of the Eastern Bloc were strong and concluded that they would therefore contribute to development, overlooking the possibility that poor policies might lead to total failure. This blind spot of Myrdal’s was typical of the time, when it was fairly widely assumed that there were various roads to prosperity. However, the many failures of the 1970s and 1980s showed that this was not true in practice.

A final comment about Myrdal’s intriguing work concerns his assertion that the chief characteristic of a weak state was its lack of control over the public. People could easily evade the

law. It was everyone for himself, and the overall impact in terms of development was minimal. Strong states, he claimed, had to 'capture' or discipline their citizens; in short, influence their behaviour. Myrdal thereby linked the state and politics with culture, something almost no-one has attempted since. 'Culture' had become almost sacred and untouchable. On the assumption that many roads led to Rome (i.e. to prosperity), hardly anyone noticed that certain cultural characteristics of developing countries were obstacles to progress. Even after 2000, culture still appeared sacrosanct. States were supposed to maintain law and order, provide services, 'facilitate' and do any number of things, but at no time did anyone say that they were supposed to influence their people's behaviour, i.e. their culture. The only exception to this was perhaps the fight against corruption. Even in the fight against AIDS, attempts to influence people's behaviour were effectively taboo.

The only international donor that consistently paid attention to African states was France. Other countries tended to take a cynical view of this, since the French approach, which involved maintaining cordial relations with the most notorious African leaders, mainly served French national interests. Yet there was also a historical element. The state as an organisation has traditionally played a larger role in France than in other Western countries. Napoleon formulated the reasons for French *étatisme* as follows: 'Men are powerless to secure the future; institutions alone fix the destiny of nations.'<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, at the end of the Cold War, when the special relationship between France and the Francophone African countries was no longer so self-evident, France was the first Western country to press strongly for more democracy in African politics (see chapter 3, section d).

The new general emphasis on Africa's states showed that Africa's state system and individual state structures, which had become increasingly ineffective since independence, would not be abandoned without a struggle. The interests of Africa's national elites, in particular, were far too great. Without states, all they would have left would be their foreign bank accounts. Other African groups, such as NGOs pressing for social change, also had an interest in the continued existence of Africa's states, albeit with improvements. There was support from this quarter for international policies aimed at good governance and for restoring stability in countries racked by violent conflict. The robust UN operation in Sierra Leone was the best example of this. International intervention put an end to the chaos that had engulfed the country, and gave the Sierra Leonean state a new lease on life. However, the full commitment of the former colonial power, Britain, was required. Sierra Leone became an unofficial British protectorate. This shows just how dependent some parts of Africa had become on international support for the stability of their state structures.

In countries that were still stable, the emphasis shifted to the political aspects of the state: democratisation, human rights and good governance. Efforts were made to increase states' administrative capacity by encouraging better governance. There were several criteria for 'good governance'. First of all, government had to be physically present, which was by no means the case everywhere. Secondly, it had to be effective, goal-oriented, transparent and well-monitored, and not corrupt. If the conditions were met, donors felt they should channel aid through state structures. They provided funds for direct use by the recipient states. Many states had not reached this stage in every respect, but this direct form of aid was often feasible in specific sectors, such as education or health care. In such cases, donors spoke of a sector-wide approach.

Most developing countries had pledged, in general international declarations such as the Millennium Declaration of 2000, to promote democratisation, human rights and good governance (see chapter 9, section e). Further details were laid down in more specific agreements. The most important of these was the Cotonou Agreement of 2000 (the successor to the five Lomé Conventions), in which the EU's partner countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific undertook to promote democracy, human rights and good governance and to fight corruption. If in the EU's opinion a country was doing little or nothing in these areas, it had to hold talks with the EU. These talks became known as article 96 consultations (on democratisation, human rights and good governance) and article 97 consultations (on corruption). If partner countries failed to respond adequately to EU criticism, sanctions could be imposed. From 2001 onwards, a number of African countries had Cotonou consultations with the European Union. The first of these were Taylor's Liberia (under both articles 96 and 97) and Mugabe's Zimbabwe (under article 96).

Owing to the new emphasis in international aid on improving governance both indirectly (through pressure brought to bear in article 96 consultations, for example) and directly (through institution-building), the goal of poverty reduction faded somewhat into the background. In most African countries, governance and policy were simply not good enough to make poverty reduction an immediate option. Too many preliminary steps had yet be taken on the road to full statehood. Ironically, just as international agreement had been reached on poverty reduction goals (the seven pledges focusing on developing countries), they were becoming rather irrelevant to development cooperation in Africa. Given the way in which African political systems worked and the quality of state structures, the seven pledges could not be fulfilled in the foreseeable future. Instead of small, neatly-defined projects, development cooperation began to focus on more abstract efforts to improve structures.

Development cooperation also proved rather ineffective in promoting private enterprise, which most poor people saw as the best way to escape from poverty.<sup>17</sup> Donors searched hard for ways to strengthen the business sector in developing countries in ways that would particularly benefit the poor.<sup>18</sup> Examples included improved market access, freer markets, development of the financial sector, knowledge development and capacity-building, special support for women and improvements to physical infrastructure. Above all, the private sector also had an interest in better state structures. The private economy could not manage without support from the public sector. It was the state's job to provide an 'enabling environment' for businesses of all sizes. Here again, the focus was on somewhat abstract structural improvements.

However, structures only function properly if they are linked to people in the right way. African states had few positive ties with their people. Patronage systems did allow elites to interact with their supporters, but the latter had practically no influence on the state. It was hoped that democratisation would change all this by turning citizens into co-owners of the state. Another problem was the distance – physical as well as figurative – between the strongly centralised African states and their citizens. The further people were from the centre of power, the looser their ties with the government. The answer was sought in decentralisation.

#### d) Attempts at decentralisation

A limited degree of decentralisation took place in one or two parts of Africa even before the end of the Cold War, with powers, tasks and funds being transferred from central government to local authorities. This became a key component of the democratisation process in the early 1990s. Democratisation and decentralisation went hand in hand and were mutually reinforcing. Both were needed in order to get ordinary Africans more involved in public affairs and make them citizens rather than subjects. This, it was hoped, would strengthen both state structures and people's sense of national identity. Decentralisation could also help reduce tension between groups in different parts of the country by granting them more local autonomy. This was an important aspect of the decentralisation that followed the genocide in Rwanda, as well as in Mali after fighting with the Tuaregs came to an end.

There were also more general administrative arguments in favour of decentralisation. It would reduce the burden on central government. Cutting red tape would speed up decision-making. Administration, coordination and monitoring would be easier. A decentralised government would be better at providing public services than a centralised one, for instance. These services would improve in both quality and quantity and would also be cheaper. Leaders who were close to the public would be more aware of their needs and wishes. This could serve as a basis for local policy, which the local population would not only support but would also have an incentive to help implement.

People would thus be well informed of what was happening, which would make it easier for them to monitor their leaders. Groups that had always been on the fringes, remote from government decisions and services, would have the opportunity to make their lives better. People who had never been able to take action to improve their lot could now do so in cooperation with the local authorities. Local government could cooperate or even merge with local activist groups. In general, decentralisation was expected to improve the social and economic conditions in which people lived and to strengthen local democracy.

However, not everyone in central government was eager to see this happen. The far-reaching centralisation of African states had a logic of its own, and, as this book has emphasised at various points, the national elites did well out of it. Improved local government and living conditions were not sufficient reason for the rulers in the capitals to relinquish any of their power or influence. They only would do so under pressure. Similar pressure was needed to get democratisation going – pressure from both African society and international donors to improve the often miserable conditions in African countries.

Accordingly, those with vested interests attempted to limit the decentralisation process. Almost nowhere did a general transfer of powers, tasks and funds take place. Often the process got no further than what is known as deconcentration, with the local authorities remaining under strict central government control. Decentralisation may involve various ways of dividing authority between the central government and local authorities or civil-society organisations. These include deconcentration and delegation, in which the central government still retains statutory authority over the specific responsibilities that have been transferred. Another form is devolution, in which statutory authority and responsibility are transferred to lower tiers of government. Finally, there is privatisation, which can be seen as an extreme form of decentralisation. When privatisation took place in Africa, informal links with government usually remained, because the companies were taken over by holders of state offices, such as ministers.

The decentralisation process in Uganda was one of the first and most successful of its kind anywhere on the continent, and is therefore often taken as a model for the rest of Africa. President Museveni, whose National Resistance Movement came to power in 1986, wanted a clean break with the past. This included decentralisation of the highly centralised Ugandan state. The idea was to make local communities self-governing. Local ‘resistance councils’ were set up, primarily to protect law and order and public safety from village up to district level. They were also expected to mobilise the population to take part in development projects, and succeeded fairly well in doing this. The populace gained confidence in the councils, partly because they had access to funds from central government. The councils oversaw numerous local initiatives and soon came to be seen as agencies of the people. They also formed the lowest tier of the court system, and monitored the performance of office-holders.

Despite their rather bureaucratic structure, the resistance councils had considerable freedom in matters of policy. There was very little control from the top. As a result, they were somewhat distrusted by central state institutions such as the central judiciary and the police. By the mid-1990s their status had gradually been codified, which confirmed the success of political and administrative devolution; the local authorities had their own legal powers and responsibilities, separate from those of central government. From 1992 onwards the entire decentralisation programme was overseen by a Ministry of Local Government in the capital, Kampala. The decentralised system was finally incorporated into the Ugandan constitution in 1995. Local government became responsible for such things as primary education, health care, water and roads. This decentralisation process was successful because it was part of a broader process of administrative reform in Uganda. However, the disadvantage of giving the resistance councils formal bureaucratic status was that it turned them from instruments of the people into fully-fledged state institutions which, by their very nature, were at a slight remove from the public.

In any case, decentralisation in Uganda was only relatively successful. There were plenty of difficulties along the way. Similar, but even more extreme, problems arose elsewhere in Africa. In general, very few funds were transferred to lower tiers of government. There were also too few people at local level capable of drawing up and implementing policies. Such people were hard enough to find in the capital, let alone at the district or village level. It has sometimes been claimed that decentralisation in Africa was due not so much to a wish to organise things better, as to the poor performance of central government - ‘decentralisation by failure’. Central problems became local ones. An example was corruption. Simply shifting the problem did not solve it. Corruption at lower levels, where people were at the mercy of local political bosses and away from the gaze of the national press, was often much harder to fight than in the capital. Decentralisation also distributed financial authority among more people, which increased the probability of corruption. Government

funds were particularly prone to leak away at lower levels. One important measure in the fight against corruption was therefore to limit the number of officials allowed to handle funds. This clashed with the campaign of decentralisation.

There was considerable variation in local government in Africa, sometimes even within countries. In some regions modern local institutions such as town councils were set up, in others traditional chiefs had considerable authority, in still others there was a mixture of these forms. The traditional chiefs tried to use decentralisation and democratisation to enhance their political status. They presented themselves as the true leaders and representatives of the people. Unofficially they often had a great deal of influence and authority, but officially – with a very few exceptions – there was no place for them in the independent African states. If they managed to acquire important local positions as a result of decentralisation, it in a sense meant a return to the indirect rule of the colonial period, except that now the chiefs were answerable to their own national elite rather than a European colonial administration. However, this did not happen on a large scale, for traditional authorities were rivals of the modern African states. Relying too much on them would have posed an unacceptable risk for Africa's new leaders, who preferred to try and build up local government on more modern lines. In the rapidly growing cities, which mostly had no traditional power structures, the development of local institutions lagged far behind what was needed. In a metropolis such as Lagos, in Nigeria, neighbourhood services were usually provided by informal networks that had no connection with the state. In both urban and rural areas, local government sometimes had fierce competition from NGOs. Thanks to their links with international donors, NGOs often had access to funding that left local government in the shade. Prior to decentralisation, they had stepped in to fill the gaps left by failing states. In Kenya, for instance, about half of the country's health care was provided by NGOs. They had got used to going their own way, free from state authority, which they often saw as an obstacle or an adversary. Decentralisation brought them back under the government umbrella, which they did not always like.

In general, decentralisation only slightly improved people's lives. There were no resounding successes as there had been in some parts of Asia; in the Indian state of Kerala, for instance, more kilometres of roads were constructed, more latrines built and more schools opened after decentralisation than in all the years before it.<sup>19</sup> The problems of local government in Africa were too great for this to be possible. Decentralisation had no real impact on the nature of development projects. The emphasis was still on building physical infrastructure, such as schoolhouses and roads, which were then left to deteriorate for want of funding, motivation or organisation.

Although local government was sometimes just as hierarchical, secretive and corrupt as central government, decentralisation did encourage progress in some areas. The continent gradually became more democratic. Until about 1980, scarcely any part of Africa held local elections, but by the mid-1990s they were being held in fourteen African countries.<sup>20</sup> Decentralisation proved a major catalyst for democratisation, since its purpose was not only to give citizens a say in the development of their country and their local area, but also to provide them with the necessary institutions, such as local elections and councils.

#### e) Democratisation around the turn of the millennium

Almost everywhere in Africa, the relationship between citizens and the state is one of distrust. As citizens see it, the state has no legitimacy. There are no strong material ties between the state and its citizens; the state provides almost no services and citizens make little or no financial contribution to the state. An important way to create healthy ties between the state and its citizens is democratisation. Since the end of the Cold War, attempts have been made to breathe new life into African states in this way.<sup>21</sup> Between 1989 and 1994, as described in chapter 3, Africa's political systems rapidly became more democratic. Democratisation then stagnated for a few years. In Central Africa the obstacles were too great for political reform to have any chance of succeeding. Autocratic regimes in major countries across the length and breadth of the continent continued to resist change, for instance in Nigeria (where the military had been continuously in power since 1982), Cameroon (run by President Paul

Biya since 1982), Zimbabwe (run by President Robert Mugabe since 1980) and Kenya (run by President Daniel arap Moi since 1979).

In 1998, however, the tide again turned in favour of democratisation, with the unexpected death of the Nigerian dictator General Sani Abacha. Suddenly change was in the air in Africa's largest dictatorship (see next section). Other countries also made progress. By the turn of the century it was clear that Africa was still perfectly capable of further democratisation. Some familiar old hands left the scene peacefully, the most prominent being President Abdou Diouf of Senegal, President Jerry Rawlings of Ghana and President Daniel arap Moi of Kenya. Only ten years earlier, peaceful transitions of this kind would have been unthinkable in Africa. They showed that, despite the apparent standstill in the mid-1990s, in many places democracy had been making steady progress beneath the surface.

Senegal was known as a relatively democratic country, but that did not mean that the transfer of power went off easily. Since independence in 1960 the country had had only two presidents: Léopold Senghor (1960-1981) and Abdou Diouf (since 1981). They were leaders of the same party, known since the 1970s as the Socialist Party. Two other political parties were allowed by the Constitution; the rest had no official status. One of the official opposition leaders was Abdoulaye Wade, who gradually gained in popularity through long years in opposition. In the 1988 elections, Diouf's Socialist Party won over seventy per cent of the vote, but by 1993 this figure had fallen to fifty-eight per cent (with Wade capturing one third of the vote). This was a sign that the party's power was waning. It allowed members of the opposition to join the cabinet, ostensibly to give the opposition a greater say, although some said the real purpose was to absorb it into the system. This led to a curious situation in which opposition ministers could, and did, openly criticise government policy.

In the 2000 presidential election, Diouf again stood for office. This time his share of the vote fell to forty-one per cent, which was not enough to be elected in the first round. In the second round Diouf lost to Wade. The handover of power was surprisingly smooth. The country's mood was euphoric when Wade, who was by then seventy-four and had spent his whole life fighting for democracy in Senegal, acceded to the presidency without difficulty. In the 2001 parliamentary elections, his coalition won a majority in parliament. For the first time ever, the Socialist Party went into opposition. A new constitution was immediately adopted in order to institutionalise the changes that had taken place in the country. It stipulated that a president could not remain in office for more than two terms.

In Ghana, the media played an important and perhaps even decisive role in the democratisation process. Free, independent media are often seen as essential to democracy. Freedom of speech is the criterion; the freer the media, the more respect there will be for human rights and the more democratic the country will be. Free media give the public more information and a clearer picture of how government operates. This makes it possible to hold authorities accountable for their acts. In Ghana, the new constitution of 1992 gave the media a chance to be independent after years of authoritarian control. It emphasised their responsibility for monitoring the government. In 1994, private businesses and individuals gained access to radio and television. In the runup to the 1996 election, the candidates were allotted almost equal amounts of broadcasting time. However, it was the strongman, Rawlings, who won again.

At the next election, in 2000, Rawlings had completed the two four-year terms of office he was allowed under the 1992 constitution, and so he could not take part. He abided by the constitution and stepped down, though he did back the ruling party's candidate to succeed him. The election was a contest between two fairly unknown and inexperienced candidates, and the ruling party's man enjoyed the support of the government apparatus. However, journalists were no longer blind to dirty tricks, and mercilessly exposed cases of vote-buying, forged identity cards and secret voter registration. The preparations for the election were discussed in public, building public confidence in the fairness of the proceedings. On the two election days, when armed groups came to the polling stations, ostensibly to maintain order but in reality to intimidate voters, the media called on the security forces to defend the constitution and appealed to voters not to let themselves be intimidated. The result was a relatively fair election which was unexpectedly won by the opposition candidate. The

ruling party acknowledged its defeat and went into opposition, and President Kufuor succeeded Rawlings as Ghana's leader.

The third major country to undergo further democratisation was Kenya, which has only had two presidents in forty years of independence. Jomo Kenyatta, known as the father of the nation, ruled until his death in 1978, when he was succeeded by his deputy Daniel arap Moi. Moi has since completed five terms of office and would undoubtedly have become president for life were it not for the democratisation of the early 1990s, which made his political life much more complicated. Like many other African countries, Kenya adopted a constitution providing that a president could not remain in office for more than two terms. This meant that Moi would have to stand down in 2002. All the members of the political elite, from which his successor could be expected to come, were dependent on the president. A shrewd political strategist, Moi took his time designating an heir apparent so that he could keep a firm grip on the large ruling party. The opposition was easily divided.

Kenya's political system was stuck fast. Its rulers took a hard line, especially in the 1992 and 1997 elections, which the government was determined to win. Violence broke out on both occasions, and in total about three thousand people were killed. Between elections, on the other hand, force was not usually necessary. The country's steady decline over the previous twenty years had left its people dejected and apathetic. Most Kenyans had given up any hopes for the better, including the hope that Moi would go. Rather than revolt, they tried to leave the country or waited for the problem to go away naturally when Moi died. Meanwhile, most people's standard of living was deteriorating. The population continued to swell rapidly, but the economy did not grow.

That was the situation when Kenyans went to the polls in late 2002. Under great pressure, Moi had decided not to stand for election again, but it seemed as though he had taken the necessary measures to ensure that he could continue pulling the strings from behind the scenes even after the transfer of authority. He had chosen a successor from within the ruling KANU party: Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of Kenya's founding father Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. In elections that were generally taken as a sign of Kenya's political coming of age, Kenyatta and KANU lost unexpectedly to the united opposition parties under the leadership of Emilio Kibaki. The traditional dominance of KANU, which had ruled the country continuously since independence, came to a sudden end. For Kenya, a new era was beginning.

During the first wave of democratisation, following the end of the Cold War, many African countries had adopted new constitutions setting a two-term limit for the presidency. In countries where people were protesting against entrenched dictators, this took some of the pressure off, since it opened up the prospect that they would be succeeded by someone else after a clearly defined period (usually two five-year terms). This gave the sitting presidents ten years to think about how to deal with the problem. By no means all heads of state were prepared to accept the term limit, as Rawlings had done in Ghana. In most countries, the president's second term of office was scheduled to expire in the opening years of the new century. Leaders who wanted to keep on running things in the same old way, such as President Conté of Guinea, President Eyadéma of Togo and President Nujoma of Namibia, held referendums in an attempt to get the restriction removed from the constitution. They asked the people to support them on the grounds that the country would get into serious difficulties if they were not re-elected. What was actually taking place was a crucial battle between the old political system and a newer, more democratic one. If the restrictions on the length of time a president could remain in office were lifted, this would be a serious blow to the democratisation process.

In 1991, bowing to both domestic and international pressure, President Conté of poverty-stricken Guinea, who had been brought to power by a military coup in 1984, was persuaded to adopt a new constitution. It restricted the length of the presidency, prescribed that the president must not be older than seventy (Conté was almost that age) and allowed more than one political party. In 1993 and 1998 there were elections, both of which were won by the president, but only with the help of massive fraud and a good deal of bloodshed. Even so, Conté's presidency was due to end in 2003. As early as 2001 the president – who attempted to avoid the age limit by claiming to have been born 'around 1934' – began making clear public statements that the country could not manage without him, and organised 'spontaneous' demonstrations by supporters begging him to stay. A chaotic referendum held later that year was boycotted by the opposition. It was accompanied by serious intimidation of

the electorate (including arrests, torture and disappearances) and protests from the European Union and other quarters. The results were unsurprising. The system – which was gravely harmful to everyone in Guinea but a small group in the immediate vicinity of the president – carried on as before.

Togo had the same problems as Guinea; in this small West African country too, the political situation was a serious obstacle to development. In 1967, just three years after independence, General Gnassingbé Eyadéma seized power in a military coup. For decades he ruled Togo harshly, indeed cruelly. Until 1991, when the wave of democratisation reached Togo, it was officially a one-party state. In that year other political parties were allowed for the first time. The new constitution of 1992 limited the number of terms that the president could remain in office. In reality, however, Togolese politics were not liberalised in the 1990s. The regime remained authoritarian and oppressive. The country was dominated by the army, which in turn was dominated by the president. Even so, elections were held in 1994 and 1998. The people badly wanted a change, but the country's rulers just as badly wanted to stay put. As a result, both elections were accompanied by extensive violence and fraud. Especially in 1998, the government and the army made it quite clear that voting was not meant to change anything. Numerous people were summarily executed during the election period, and the European Union suspended aid to Togo in protest.

In 1999 the president reached an agreement with the opposition in which he promised to abide by the constitution and not to stand for re-election. However, in the run-up to the 2003 elections he changed his mind. On the very last day of 2002, when most people's attention was focused elsewhere, the government and parliament amended the constitution to allow the president to remain in office. All major opposition candidates were barred from running against him, guaranteeing him an easy victory over a little-known opponent. It seemed that Eyadéma's political style was the same in the twenty-first century as it had been since the 1960s. Togo fell into gradual decline and observers started to wonder whether it could remain stable.

Political developments in Namibia – where President Nujoma was in the same awkward position – will be described in more detail later in this chapter (in section g). For now we will round off this brief survey of African countries with Togo's neighbour, Benin. What happened to the fledgling democracy that had led the way in Africa's democratisation process? The answer was rather unexpected. Democracy survived, but General Kérékou, who had ruled the country with an iron hand from 1972 until his fall in 1991, made a startling comeback in the 1996 election. The presidency of the technocrat Nicéphore Soglo, who had worked outside Benin (at the World Bank) for years, had not been a success. Having been abroad for so long, he lacked the domestic support on which African leaders' power is based: the pyramid with the president/patron at its apex and numerous tiers of clients underneath. Nor could Soglo build up such a network quickly, for he had little money to spend. What was worse, he immediately took painful structural adjustment measures to bring the country's economy back under control. This made him highly unpopular. The devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994 did not help either. The 1996 election was once again a contest between Soglo and Kérékou but this time the winner was Kérékou (who still had a good deal of backing from his former clients). Soglo went into opposition.

In his second period in office, Kérékou was no longer the Marxist dictator he had been in the 1970s and 1980s. During the riots at the end of the Cold War he had renounced Marxism and at the close of the national conference he had even publicly converted to Christianity as a repentant sinner. Kérékou's new image was that of the pious Christian, which made him acceptable to the people of Benin once more. With the help of his extensive domestic network, incomparably more powerful than Soglo's (which scarcely existed), he made a successful political comeback at the head of a coalition of numerous small parties. International donors continued to support Benin and Kérékou pursued a policy of economic reform. He also tried not to curtail democracy and freedom in the country. In stark contrast to neighbouring Togo, Benin enjoyed freedom of speech and freedom of the press. The army had withdrawn from politics and there were no political prisoners. Its macroeconomic policy was sound and its government budget almost balanced. The economy slowly began to grow. In 2001 Kérékou and Soglo contested the presidential election for the third time. Kérékou won again, this time realising that this would be his last term of office as president. He promised to abide by the constitution.

How firmly had democratic ideas and ideals taken root among the people of Africa ten years after the Cold War? Very firmly, according to a study by the American political scientists Michael Bratton and Robert Mattes, who also concluded that, for Africans, the meaning of democracy had undergone a clear change in the 1990s.<sup>22</sup> During the Cold War, Africans were made to associate democracy with the dictatorship of a single party and the promise of economic development. The 1990s saw a shift towards a much more liberal notion of democracy. To the majority of those interviewed (nearly seventy per cent), democracy was mainly a matter of politics, especially political procedures such as protection of human rights, participation in decision-making and voting in elections. Yet it was not just a question of procedures. A considerable number of Africans also felt that democracy would have to produce results; above all, economic results. Apparently they were confident that it would, for a full three quarters of the people interviewed said they preferred democracy to any other political system – a higher percentage than on some other continents.

In countries where democratisation had taken place, people were strongly opposed to the idea of a return to undemocratic politics, even if the new democratic system was far from perfect and there were major economic and other problems. Dictatorial regimes, whether civilian or military, were categorically rejected. Even the more traditional African authorities – chiefs or councils of elders – were not popular, at least in countries where people were familiar with them, such as Ghana or Botswana. Advocates of traditional forms of government were mainly to be found in countries where those forms had never existed.

This widespread support for democracy in Africa raises questions about the link with education, since levels of education tend to be low across the continent. In Western countries, support for democracy increases with people's level of education. In Africa, the opposite would seem to be the case. Educated Africans often had their doubts about granting political influence to the illiterate, ignorant masses, whom they feared would behave rashly and irresponsibly. The highly educated were also the most critical of how African democracies worked in practice. This meant that the strongest support for democracy came from the broad mass of citizens with little or no formal education. Bratton and Mattes concluded that 'although popular support for democracy is almost a mile wide, it may be only an inch deep.'<sup>23</sup>

With the spread of democracy across the continent, the number of peaceful changes of government increased. Until the early 1990s, almost no former African presidents were still living peacefully in their own countries. Of the 180 changes of government that occurred in the four decades between 1960 and 1999, more than 100 were violent, the result of a coup, invasion or war. Sixty to seventy per cent of the heads of state involved came to a bad end.<sup>24</sup> The turn of the century was the first time that Africa had a group of former presidents who could feel safe in their own countries and elsewhere in Africa and the world. This meant that, like other continents, Africa could at last avail itself of the experience and wisdom of what were often 'elder statesmen', for example in connection with regional or continental cooperation or conflict prevention.

Quite apart from the expectation that democracy would have a favourable effect on the quality of policy and governance, the democratic system had a positive psychological impact. Heads of state or government who live in fear of their lives mainly focus on the short term and on what decisions mean for them personally. This naturally conflicts with the long-term interests of society. By reducing the personal danger to rulers, democracy allows them to serve broader interests. The American scholar Arthur Goldsmith demonstrated a link between the degree of threat posed to rulers by their political environment and the extent to which, for example, they took steps to liberalise the economy. The more peaceful the power struggle, the more open countries were in economic and other respects. Heads of state in democratic systems were also less inclined to embezzle state funds.<sup>25</sup>

Elections were a recurring source of uncertainty. In the first few decades after independence, they were not intended to give the opposition (if there was one) any illusion that it might assume power. Until 1980, elections had never led to a change of government anywhere in Africa. The situation then gradually began to change, gathering momentum after the end of the Cold War. Almost eighty elections were held in the 1990s and a quarter of them were won by the opposition.<sup>26</sup> This was a signal that the elites in African countries were no longer an unbreakable bloc.

But was it a sign that the structure of African societies was changing? Hardly.<sup>27</sup> Individuals remained linked through vertical patron-client relationships. Although the size and density of clientelist networks did decrease as a result of economic problems, they were not replaced by horizontal links between people with common interests, as had happened in rich countries in the past (first in the guilds, and later in the socialist movement). Instead, the result in Africa was individualisation and social disintegration. Basically, however, the social structures of African countries remained unchanged during the years of democratisation. Patronage was still the main social nexus.

This seriously restricted the new parliaments' room for manoeuvre. They were not mouthpieces for emerging social forces. The importance of parliaments in the early days of Western democracies had lain not so much in the fact that they monitored the government as in their right of initiative; that is, the right to propose legislation. There were far more ideas, and a far broader range of ideas, circulating in the early Western parliaments than in their governments, which were above all bastions of the elite. Parliaments opened up politics, bringing democracy to life and opening the way to better legislation. Only later, in more mature democracies, once the differences between parliament and the government were no longer so great, did it become parliament's main task to monitor the government.

The inexperienced African parliaments were unable to make effective use of their right of initiative. Governments usually left members of parliament out of the loop when important issues were discussed. Undoubtedly in response to pressure from international donors, African governments were often more interested in talking to nongovernmental organisations than to the official representatives of the people. In Tanzania, for example, parliament never succeeded in acquiring any influence. Important political decisions were cooked up at meetings of the largest party (the former single party) – no other parties were involved. This was effectively a continuation of the one-party system, with parliament as a kind of low-ranking advisory committee. The old political tradition of keeping differences of opinion out of public view was maintained. Only occasionally did a representative of a small opposition party risk voicing criticism of any kind.

Democratisation did not bring economic progress to Africa. The general relationship between democracy and prosperity is fairly complicated. It is true that all countries where prosperity is widespread have democratic systems. But the reverse is not true; there are plenty of countries with democratic systems that are still underdeveloped and poor. Democracy thus by no means guarantees economic success. Moreover, there are countries with undemocratic systems that have made considerable economic progress and reduced poverty substantially, such as Indonesia under Suharto (except in his final years) and China after Deng Xiaoping's reforms. But here again, the reverse – that authoritarian regimes always bring greater prosperity – is not automatically true either. In numerous historical instances, political, social and economic conditions were all equally dreadful. The creation of prosperity can coexist with democracy, dictatorship or any other political system.

#### f) Winds of democratisation in Nigeria

In many African countries, the desire of much of the population for political change, along with international pressure for reform, met with resistance from the established order. At the end of the Cold War, this confrontation culminated in political transformation almost throughout the continent. This second liberation of Africa, this time from its own despotic rulers, occurred at different times for different countries, depending on numerous, sometimes unpredictable factors. For example, Nigeria's army appeared to have Africa's most populous country in a firm and dispiriting grip, but things suddenly changed when the dictator General Abacha died in 1998.

The first attempt to establish a democratic system in Nigeria, immediately after the Cold War, had been suppressed by the military. In 1993 there was a chaotic election which was suspended by the country's generals halfway through. To the extent that one could talk of a result, it was clear that Chief Moshool Abiola, a wealthy businessman, had won. However, the defence minister General Sani Abacha seized power, and Abiola (who claimed to be the lawful president) was flung into jail, along

with many others. The army subsequently held the country in an iron grip ('ruled' or 'governed' would be too flattering). As democratic, civilian rule rapidly gained ground in the rest of Africa, Nigeria's military rulers became increasingly anachronistic. Oddly enough, they were quite willing to support democratisation through peacekeeping operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone, two small countries in the region that had fallen prey to violence and anarchy. Nigeria was exporting a commodity – democracy – that it did not have at home.

This was not the only curious contrast. Nigeria's policy of subsidising domestic oil consumption (to keep the price of petrol artificially low) led to another bizarre situation. So much oil was being smuggled abroad to be sold at a profit that Nigeria, an oil exporter and a member of OPEC, could not satisfy domestic demand for petrol and often had to import oil from its neighbours. The military rulers had other strange policies. They largely ignored their duty as a government to provide the public with services such as education and health care, but they did get involved in commercial ventures such as shopping centres and cinemas. Bowing to strong international pressure, the main foreign oil companies with operations in Nigeria gradually began providing social services for the people of the Niger delta (where the oil wells were situated). Private corporations such as Shell thus ended up providing for the public, while the government engaged in private enterprise.

These anomalies were symptomatic of the consistently unbalanced development of the Nigerian state. Since intervening to preserve the unity of the country in the Biafran war (1966-1969), the army had felt utterly superior to civilian politicians. Military leaders continued to dominate national politics, using harsh, repressive measures to keep the numerous conflicts in this ethnic and religious powder keg from escalating into wholesale violence. Their methods included widespread violations of human rights, which reached their nadir when protests by inhabitants of the southern Niger delta were crushed. The area supplied the bulk of Nigeria's oil, but received very few public services of any kind in return. Instead, the environment was seriously contaminated, by the oil wells, by sabotage and above all by theft; holes were drilled over the entire length of the pipelines and the leaking oil was drawn off illegally into receptacles ranging from buckets to full-scale lorries. The pollution was horrendous and a smouldering cigarette butt could spark off a disaster that left dozens dead. The internationally renowned author Ken Saro-Wiwa spoke up on behalf of the small Ogoni group in the delta region, but his protests displeased the country's rulers, and in 1995 he was hanged along with eight others.

The international community was shocked, and the Abacha regime gradually became a pariah. Quite apart from its human rights violations, it was criticised on almost every other count. The military were doing nothing to improve the lives of ordinary people. The economy was on the brink of collapse. Debts piled up despite plentiful oil earnings. Corruption spread like wildfire, and Nigeria became one of the most corrupt countries in the world. The higher up people were in the hierarchy, the more public revenue they embezzled. President Abacha himself is believed to have stolen about ten billion US dollars. Senior Nigerians became involved in illegal international trade, particularly in drugs. In 1998, just as everyone was wondering how the country would ever get out of the mess it was in, Abacha unexpectedly died.

He was succeeded by his second-in-command, General Abdulsalami Abubakar. The new ruler immediately came under strong pressure to seize this opportunity for a fresh start. Realising that he would be well advised not to follow in Abacha's footsteps, he announced a new election and a return to civilian government. Abubakar would later mainly be remembered as the man who ensured a successful transition to democracy, but in other respects his hands were far from clean. Some say the new military leader had a hand in the unexpected death in prison of Chief Abiola, the winner of the 1993 election. If released, Abiola would immediately have laid claim to the presidency. Getting rid of him allowed the army to keep control of the transition to a new regime. It also bought Abacha's successors the time they needed to embezzle state funds. Confirming Goldsmith's aforementioned theory drawing a link between the degree of threat to rulers (Abubakar knew someone else would take his place in a few months' time) and the degree of corruption, the military used the year between Abacha's death and the advent of a civilian regime to feather their own nests as lavishly as they could. General Abubakar is said to have ended his one-year term of office a full four billion US dollars richer.

Yet the tide of democracy could not be turned. The 1999 election was a contest between the leaders of three new political parties. The winner was Olusegun Obasanjo, a former general with an impressive record. In 1960 he had been an officer with the UN peacekeeping force in Congo. Some years later he had played a decisive role in the federal army's victory over Biafran separatists. In the 1970s he had briefly been the head of a military government. Under Abacha he had been jailed for criticising the state of the country. His death sentence had been commuted to fifteen years' imprisonment. When Abacha died, Obasanjo was released and immediately went into politics as a civilian. While in jail he had felt a religious (Christian) calling to pull his country and the rest of Africa out of the quagmire. He set about this task as soon as he was elected. Even before appointing his team of ministers, he announced measures to tackle human rights violations and corruption and to improve the situation in the Niger delta. Obasanjo clearly wanted to make a clean sweep.

The country received plenty of international aid and oil prices were high, so there was no shortage of government revenue. Gradually, however, it became clear how difficult it was to change Nigeria's deep-rooted habits and structures. With a growth rate of four to five per cent a year, the economy appeared to be recovering, but this was entirely due to the rise in oil prices. When they fell in 2001, the government immediately found itself in trouble once more. There was no growth in other economic sectors. One of the greatest problems was the country's bureaucracy. On paper it looked capable of getting something done but in practice precious little was achieved. One main reason was corruption. A census of government officials revealed no fewer than 40,000 people on the payroll who had no business being there. They were no longer working for the government but were still receiving their wages. In fact, some of them had never even existed.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, government institutions were simply not equipped to make policy changes. Civil servants were only trained to carry out projects, not to draw up and implement policies or create a healthy climate for business.

Moreover, Nigeria's political and social system did not put the country's abundance of natural resources to good use. Oil earnings were used not to improve living standards but to support a relatively large and immensely rich elite which had been fragmented by the federal system and Nigeria's ethnic diversity. This wealth allowed the emergence of numerous parallel networks of clients which competed with each other and so undermined domestic stability.

In his fight against corruption, President Obasanjo attempted to establish a new culture in the country. All new ministers were required to follow a course organised by Transparency International, an international NGO set up to tackle corruption around the globe. Despite his efforts, however, it took a long time for significant measures to be adopted. In fact, the growth in oil earnings probably caused corruption to spread. Ironically, although the president had been a faithful supporter of Transparency International for years, the organisation had no choice but to keep Nigeria on the list of most corrupt countries during his term of office. Corruption had a huge impact, ranging from a poor international image for the country to poverty in many areas.

Obasanjo also attempted to improve human rights practices. A new committee was set up to investigate human rights violations under his military predecessors. Not surprisingly, the former dictators did little to cooperate, but the president did succeed in somewhat reducing the role of the army in politics and society and expanding civil rights. However, there was a dark side. With its numerous ethnic groups and its religious divisions, Nigeria was probably the most difficult country in Africa to hold together in a single state. A sense of nationhood failed to materialise, and as the years passed religious affinities, in particular, grew stronger. Many new mosques and churches were built and religious radicalism was on the rise. If religious or ethnic groups did not clash of their own accord, there were always politicians ready to exploit day-to-day tensions for their own purposes. Hostilities between groups could break out at any moment, anywhere in the country. Under military rule they had been firmly suppressed and the media had not been allowed to mention the subject. In the new climate of openness, the press was now able to describe in detail not only the (usually harsh) measures by the army to restore order, but also the clashes between groups. This often triggered reactions elsewhere in the country, sometimes leading to further hostilities. Under Obasanjo, Nigeria found itself trapped in a downward spiral of violence that threatened its stability.

Religion – above all, the dividing line between Muslims and Christians – began to figure even larger in the violent incidents. Half of Nigeria's people are Muslim, and the rest are mainly Christian.

The Muslims mainly live in the dry northern part of the country, while most Christians (and animists) live in the humid south. For centuries there was almost no contact between these extremely different zones, but British colonialism brought them together in a single country. Since independence, distributing power among the representatives of these two groups had proved a very tricky balancing act. The last military rulers had been Muslims from the north, but Obasanjo was a Christian from the south. As a result, the democratic revolution gave some northerners the feeling that they were being left behind by the south. Religion was seized on as a means of opposing the central government through the northern states, in which the northern Muslims still formed a clear majority. Nigeria was constitutionally a secular federal state, but around the turn of the century Islamic *sharia* law was introduced in one northern state after another. In a sense it was being reintroduced, for in colonial days the British had tolerated Islamic law in the northern states as an extreme form of indirect rule.

Introduction of *sharia* not only led to friction between some national leaders and the states concerned, but also heightened tensions between Muslims and Christians, especially in the northern and central parts of the country. In areas where *sharia* had been introduced, thieves could have their hands chopped off and people found guilty of sexual misdemeanours could be stoned to death. In some places women had to be veiled whenever out of doors, and ideally were expected to remain indoors. Christians living in these areas were horrified, especially as it was not clear where the upsurge of Islamic fundamentalism would end. Some northern leaders were calling openly for Nigeria to become an Islamic state. There were scattered outbreaks of violence. Precisely in this period came the Al Qaeda attacks on the United States of 11 September 2001, which aggravated the existing antagonism between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. Several thousand people were killed in religious conflicts in the course of 2001. Many Nigerians who were in an ethnic or religious minority in their area were expelled, or fled. Hundreds of thousands of people were displaced. Democratisation had not done Nigeria's stability as a nation any good.

Yet – and this is the final Nigerian paradox – none of this stopped Nigeria's rulers under Obasanjo, who was re-elected in 2003, from continuing with peacekeeping activities in West Africa and taking similar initiatives in the rest of the continent. As instability mounted at home, Nigeria was helping to promote continental stability. The new capital, Abuja, became a familiar venue for peace negotiations. Nigeria again sent troops to Liberia (in 2003), Nigerian observers took part in the UN peacekeeping mission in Congo (MONUC), and Nigeria even wanted to help resolve the crisis in Zimbabwe.

#### g) Delayed decline in Southern Africa

The crisis in Zimbabwe around the opening of the twenty-first century ushered in the final stage of a steady deterioration. This slide had begun in the 1980s but only really got going in the following decade. The cause was President Mugabe's government. The head of state became increasingly dictatorial. The government's policies, economic and otherwise, were unsatisfactory by general standards and the country was governed in an increasingly chaotic fashion. There was less and less room for criticism in the press or from the opposition, and it was sometimes harshly suppressed. More and more jobs went to thugs in the service of political leaders. Mugabe and his clientele ever more egregiously abused their power, shamelessly lining their pockets.

The result was that by the 1990s what had once been a fairly prosperous country by African standards was on the verge of collapse. The economy, wrecked by bad policies and looted by the country's political elite, was shrinking by several per cent a year. The consequences for the man in the street were only too apparent; by the year 2000 he was earning thirty per cent less than when apartheid had ended in 1980. Inflation was high, the currency was worthless and there was widespread unemployment. Nor was the country much better off in political and moral terms. Although several political parties were officially authorised, in practice Mugabe's ruling party ran Zimbabwe very much like a one-party state.

The separation of powers (the executive, legislature and judiciary) also gradually degenerated. Parliament no longer had any say in how the country was run, and the judiciary, which had had previously some independent influence, came increasingly under attack. Decisions by the Supreme Court or other courts that were not to the government's liking were simply ignored and the judges who had ventured to make them were replaced by people with a clearer understanding of what the government wanted. Freedom of the press was curtailed. With the exception of the vast tracts of land owned by white farmers, the political elite was now in control of everything in the country that still brought in any money. A model African nation until the 1980s, Zimbabwe had by the 1990s degenerated into a textbook predatory state.

Plenty of other African states displayed similar behaviour, yet many others had changed for the better since the Cold War. In the 1990s, political freedom increased in many African countries, the powers of the executive were reduced, economic policies improved, political leaders loosened their hold on the economy somewhat and corruption was tackled. The results were seldom very satisfactory, but at least the trend was clear. What Zimbabwe went through from the 1990s onwards instead seemed more like a repeat of developments that had taken place in other African countries a decade or two earlier.

The reason for this anachronism may lie in the fact that the end of apartheid in Rhodesia – and the emergence of an independent black Zimbabwe – came some twenty years later than the decolonisation of most African countries, in 1980 rather than around 1960. Only then did Zimbabwe embark on the same processes of Africanisation that had already taken place elsewhere on the continent. There appeared to be a fixed pattern which African countries were unable to escape, however late they became independent. African political and cultural characteristics, which had of course been profoundly influenced by colonialism and apartheid over the years, still had much the same impact and results everywhere. Whereas most African countries became politically, economically and morally bankrupt in the 1980s, Zimbabwe did so twenty years later.

Rulers who find themselves under pressure often look for external foes to distract attention from domestic problems. In the 1980s, Africa's rulers could only take out their anger and frustration on the World Bank and the IMF. These institutions were seen as neocolonial powers and came to symbolise the big bad outside world. Many rulers did not suffer the political consequences of their countries' decline until after the Cold War, when democratisation could no longer be held in check. Zimbabwe's President Mugabe, who had been under similar pressure since the end of the 1990s, had other ways of distracting the public. Interaction between African states had increased to the point where it was thinkable for one African country to mount a military campaign in another. Zimbabwe's extensive involvement in the fighting in Central Africa, which had the potential to generate additional revenue for the country's political and military leaders, was also designed to whip up nationalistic feelings and support for the government back home.

However, a more effective target was the domestic legacy of colonialism: the white Zimbabweans. About five per cent of the population was white. Most were farmers, who still owned the best land. At the time of Zimbabwe's independence, 250,000 out of 300,000 white farmers had left the country. The 50,000 who remained did so at the explicit request of the Zimbabwean government, which told them 'Zimbabwe needs you.' They were the linchpin of the country's economy. When sovereignty was transferred in 1980, it was agreed that the good agricultural land would be redistributed in order to narrow the huge socioeconomic gulf between whites and blacks. However, this was on condition that the white farmers would receive financial compensation for the loss of their land. As the years passed, less and less money was available for this purpose. The economy was going downhill fast and the country's leaders preferred to put whatever money was left in their own pockets. For years the white farmers were protected by the continuing independence of the judiciary and the watchful eye of foreign powers, especially Britain.

All this changed when Mugabe began to feel his authority was under threat. He decided to make the struggle against the white farmers his new front, and began calling them enemies of the state. If they refused to voluntarily surrender their land without compensation, they would have to be driven off it by force. To do this, the government employed gangs of thugs who for nationalistic reasons were dubbed 'war veterans' – a reference to the independence struggle against Rhodesia's white rulers in the 1960s and 1970s. Most of these 'war veterans', however, had not even been born at

the time. The results of their intervention were dramatic: thousands of farmers were dispossessed, dozens of whites were killed together with many hundreds of blacks working on the farms (who realised that the seizures would destroy their only chance of a decent income) and the independent judiciary collapsed (after initially daring to declare the land grab illegal). There was fierce criticism abroad and growing chaos at home. The benefit to the black population was nil. Many more jobs were lost, and all the land seized went to the president's cronies. The army chief received more than ten farms.

It was clear that Mugabe had his back to the wall and was desperate. But how was Zimbabwe to rid itself of this tyrant? The country still had elections. A large section of the black population, fairly well educated but now reduced to poverty, turned a deaf ear to Mugabe's bloated nationalism and anticolonialism. Despite intimidation and other forms of violence against the opposition, a movement arose with the aim of taking over the leadership of the country. The army, whose leaders were inextricably tied to Mugabe, expressed its unwavering support for the president, and made clear that a change of leadership as a result of the 2002 election would not be tolerated.

It was in this political climate that Zimbabweans went to the polls in March 2002. The many ways in which the government made it difficult or impossible for people to vote, the acts of intimidation and the irregularities, both minor and major, made it one of the most fraudulent elections in the history of Africa. Opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai, who had a strong lead in all the opinion polls, was briefly arrested on charges of high treason just before and again just after the election. His party's head offices were looted and burnt to the ground by government thugs. Assuming the votes were actually counted, it was done in the absence of independent observers. To no-one's surprise, Mugabe was officially proclaimed the winner. While the president talked of a victory over imperialism, a dumbfounded world looked on at the ruling elite's unabashed refusal to relinquish its power. Zimbabwe was suspended from the British Commonwealth and became an international pariah.

Events in Zimbabwe naturally made people wonder whether the same thing could happen in its larger neighbour, South Africa. South Africa's history and population were very similar to those of Zimbabwe. However, everything in South Africa happened on a much larger scale than in Zimbabwe, and so events there had a much wider impact. The South African economy, for instance, was twenty times the size of Zimbabwe's. This was due to the far stronger colonial (i.e. white) presence in South Africa, as a result of which apartheid was not abolished there until much later (in 1994, fourteen years after Zimbabwe). Would South Africa go into decline just like Zimbabwe (and the rest of Africa before it), but with a similar time lag?

Hardly anyone dared speculate about this, for fear of being politically incorrect.<sup>29</sup> Any suggestion that South Africa might not be able to achieve widespread prosperity under black rule could all too easily be interpreted as racist. Scant attention was paid to the adverse impact on the state, and hence on society, of an ANC government policy that was generally held to be unavoidable and indeed just – namely, discrimination in favour of blacks (for example, when taking on new government staff) to counterbalance discrimination in favour of whites under apartheid. In the apartheid era, whites had on average received a far better education than blacks. The logical result of appointing more blacks to government posts was therefore a decline in quality and capacity. This was sometimes manifested in surprising ways. From about 2000 onwards, for example, the South African government no longer had the capacity to spend all the funds allocated for reducing the poverty of the black population (a key policy goal).

There were other problematic developments, although they could hardly be blamed entirely on the ANC government. They were chiefly due to South Africa's complex history. First among them was the growth in crime, which was increasingly prevalent in the cities. The country had the highest peacetime murder rate in the world. More than half of its people were afraid of falling victim to crime in their own communities. Some neighbourhoods were controlled by armed gangs.<sup>30</sup> People with material assets to protect took refuge behind high walls, complete with barbed wire and guards. A veritable bunker mentality took hold among South Africa's citizenry. There was also a rapid expansion in more organised forms of crime, from drug trafficking to money laundering.

During the isolation of the apartheid regime, the South African police had never had to deal with transnational crime. When South Africa opened up in the post-apartheid era, criminal organisations more or less had a free hand. The causes of the equally rapid growth in smaller-scale crime – from theft to murder – are harder to understand. Again, the police had not traditionally been concerned with fighting these types of crime, since their work under apartheid was above all political. Apartheid-era perpetrators may have seen apartheid as a justification for crimes committed against whites, and this attitude did not essentially change after apartheid was abolished. However, this does not explain the often equally vicious crimes committed by blacks against blacks. The cause may lie in factors found elsewhere in Africa, such as weakening social ties and respect for norms, combined with reduced government capacity to fight crime.

South African society was plagued not only with crime, but also with racism. There was a universal tendency to view the country's social problems in racist terms. The abolition of apartheid had not put an end to this. Many whites tended to explain the black government's problems by saying 'they just aren't up to it'. Conversely, criticism from whites, even if they had supported the abolition of apartheid (and did their utmost not to appear racist), was dismissed by black leaders because of the colour of the critics' skin. Black South Africans also discriminated against 'real blacks' (black immigrants from neighbouring countries), whose skin colour was supposedly different.<sup>31</sup> Racism was especially persistent in rural areas, but was also found in cities. Real life in South Africa contrasted starkly with the official ideology of the rainbow nation in which people of all colours lived together in harmony.

These serious problems came to the surface even before the ANC government launched its Africanisation policy. During Nelson Mandela's term as president from 1994 to 1999, however, there was no sign of the phenomena that are now familiar to us from the recent history of the rest of black Africa. The situation began to change under President Mbeki, very gradually. Political leaders began to behave as though the ANC were the only party in a one-party system. There was less tolerance of press criticism, and the opposition was largely ignored. The powers-that-be became increasingly arrogant, often dismissing criticism on the grounds that it came from 'suspect' (i.e. white) quarters. The general policy of discrimination in favour of blacks often went too far, leading to embezzlement and corruption. Policies were sometimes good (like the policy on social housing) but often unpredictable, and sometimes just plain bad (a prime example being the policy on AIDS). The bureaucracy was swollen with officials who were not always qualified for their tasks. More and more often, there were remarks to the effect that criticism by the free press, or the decisions of an independent judiciary, should not always be accepted.

The ANC leadership (whose political power in the country is absolute) will find it difficult to avoid the temptation to make money out of the system and to hand out government funds to their supporters. As we have seen elsewhere in Africa, misconduct of that kind diminishes a government's authority in society, trading it in for strong support from a small entourage. This ties the rulers and their supporters into an inextricable patron-client relationship, for patrons cannot manage without their clients and vice versa.

In many African countries, this system only came under pressure when countries went bankrupt and rulers could no longer cater to their clients' needs. In South Africa, however, such a scenario is inconceivable. The country's economy is far too large (as large as those of the rest of the continent put together) and is moreover largely in white hands. The ANC leadership will be unable to gain control of substantial parts of the economy without major crises, as in Zimbabwe under Mugabe. Yet the South African government will be tempted to go at least some way down this path. President Mbeki has said that if economic empowerment were to remain beyond the reach of those who gained power when apartheid ended, the ANC would continue to function as a liberation movement. This raises the spectre of Zimbabwe once more.

However, things need not reach that stage. Present-day South Africa has a number of advantages over Zimbabwe and the rest of Africa. The world is now more aware of the ways in which the political situation could veer out of control. International interests in South Africa – political as well as economic – are substantial enough that other countries will be inclined to respond faster.

There is an international consensus that South Africa's transition to the post-apartheid era must not be allowed to fail.

Another question is whether neighbouring Namibia, which has been independent since 1990, will follow the same political and economic path. The official policy of the government in Windhoek is to promote national reconciliation and build up a democratic, market-oriented society. There is little social tension in the country. However, there have been some less encouraging signs. The Namibian government, which is dominated by the former liberation movement SWAPO, is displaying growing intolerance towards a variety of groups it has accused of undesirable conduct, including critical journalists, Afrikaans-speakers and homosexuals. The behaviour of the president and his SWAPO party is increasingly imperious. The worst sign, however, is SWAPO's amendment to the constitution in 1998, which allowed the president to remain in office for an additional, third term. President Nujoma may even stay on for a fourth consecutive term.

It appears as if South Africa, with Namibia in its wake, is just setting out on the path travelled by the vast majority of African countries since independence. It is hard to predict just how far down that path the two countries will go. However, there is a distinct likelihood of substantial political, economic and social decline. This will in turn have implications for other countries in Southern Africa, which are largely dependent on the South African giant for trade, investment and stability. If South Africa's economy is weakened, this will impair the overall development of the region, including such relatively distant countries as Zambia and Malawi.

#### h) The road to statehood: disappointment and determination

In this section, we will briefly turn to recent trends in the decline and emergence of state structures. Obviously, we cannot look at every single country. However, that will not be necessary, for the crucial factors are the same throughout Africa: the creation of 'modern' states in the colonial era and their Africanisation since independence. Still, there are significant variations on this theme, and sometimes major differences even between neighbouring countries. This is possible because neighbouring countries often have very little to do with one another. There is little infrastructure linking them, and regional organisations are too weak to encourage uniformity. Both ends of the state formation spectrum are to be found within a single region, the Horn of Africa, where Africa's strongest states, Ethiopia and Eritrea, are right next door to its weakest one, the 'non-state' of Somalia.

In the northern part of the former Somalia, particularly in Somaliland but also in what is known as Puntland, there have recently been developments that suggest the emergence of new state structures. However, they have not received international recognition, which (as always when it comes to Africa) is entirely focused on the possible revival of a state of Somalia, controlling all of its former territory. Around the year 2000, on the basis of agreements between clans, a number of prominent Somalis set up a transitional government in a few buildings in Mogadishu. The idea was that it would develop into a true Somali government. The transitional government received diplomatic and financial support from various countries outside Africa. This included help setting up an army and a police force that could stand up to the militias of the warlords, each of whom held sway over his own piece of the country.

At the other end of the spectrum were Eritrea and Ethiopia. Both countries' state structures had emerged fairly unscathed from the war between them in 1998-2000. The indecisive outcome had prevented collapse. However, the leaders of both countries came under fire from political opponents, who wondered aloud whether the war had achieved far too little in the light of the huge sacrifices people had made. The feeling in Eritrea was that this small nation's considerable energy should now at last be directed towards more pacific goals. This 'African Sparta' should transform itself – as Germany and Japan had done in the past under international pressure – into a country whose industrious people would improve their living standards by the sweat of their brow. In the mid-1990s President Isaias Afwerki had dreamt of turning Eritrea into the Horn of Africa's financial centre and international port (rather like Singapore in Southeast Asia), but as a result of the war with Ethiopia this dream faded into the background.

After the war, Ethiopia's prime minister Meles Zenawi ran into considerable opposition from students, as well as from his former allies in the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), who accused him of insufficient perseverance in the final stages of the struggle with Eritrea. This group, which had strong revanchist feelings towards Eritrea, felt that the Ethiopian army should have completed its march on the Eritrean capital Asmara. These former socialists also felt that, by pursuing a policy of liberalisation, Meles was letting the United States and the IMF call the tune. The prime minister responded to this erosion of his Tigray power base by strengthening ties with non-Tigray groups in the ruling EPRDF coalition, so that he could build up an image as a national Ethiopian statesman. These changes had the potential to diversify, and hence to strengthen, national politics.

The Horn of Africa also included the special case of Sudan. This country displayed a variety of instability that was exceptional in Africa; the problem was not that state structures were being eroded from within, as elsewhere on the continent, but that there were two fairly distinct groups which in the long run would probably be better off living separately than within a single state. But in 2003, there were finally signs that the civil war between the north and the south might be coming to an end. Under strong international pressure, the Khartoum government looked willing to abandon its policy of Islamic expansion.

Even after decades of fighting, by no means all southerners were convinced that secession would be the best alternative. Although the southern peoples had a common enemy (the Khartoum government), they were not united. Many southerners were well aware that the thinly populated expanse of southern Sudan lacked the physical or social infrastructure it would need to survive as an independent state. There was also a fear of possible domination by the numerically strong Dinka people, who formed the core of the SPLA. Accordingly, there were always southern leaders who were prepared to negotiate with representatives of the north or international mediators on the future form of the Sudanese state. The main issue was the relationship between religion and the state. To southerners it was essential that these be separated. According to the 1998 constitution, however, Sudan was a theocracy where God held supreme authority. The second crucial point was how much autonomy the south could be granted. These were exactly the same issues as half a century earlier, when the British had left Sudan. In 2003, it looked as though they might finally be resolved.

The situation in the rest of Africa was more uniform. The main exception was Southern Africa, where the impact of colonialism was deeper and slower to fade. The region's geographical position – halfway to the Indies and hence for centuries an ideal staging post for European vessels en route to Asia – had always had a major influence on South Africa in particular. European-style state structures were more strongly developed there than anywhere else on the continent. The transfer of power from the colonial state to the Africans took place later in South Africa than elsewhere (with the abolition of apartheid in 1994), and the aftereffects of this change were similarly delayed. The same was basically true of Zimbabwe and Namibia (see the previous section).

In Angola and Mozambique, both situated further up the coast, the independence struggle against Portugal had left deep scars. In both countries there were two competing armed groups which were unable to come to terms. The basic problem was the tradition of winner-takes-all ('all' meaning the state structures and the associated financial benefits). This encouraged the weaker party to keep on fighting. In Angola the result had been an endless civil war, which was impossible to resolve until rebel leader Jonas Savimbi was murdered in 2002. When peace was made in Mozambique soon after the Cold War ended, there was an attempt to resolve the tensions between the two camps by democratic means, but this was again thwarted by the winner-takes-all principle. The RENAMO movement, which at that stage represented a substantial part of the population, was not allocated a proportionate share of power. Although peace had officially been made, the situation in Mozambique was still extremely tense, with the chance of new outbreaks of violence. Angola and Mozambique remained divided, which was a threat to their unity as states.

This brings us to Central, East and West Africa. Of the states in these three regions, those in Central Africa are the weakest. There is, effectively, a political void in the heart of Africa, in Congo (Kinshasa). The repercussions this has had in the Great Lakes region and far beyond Central Africa are discussed in detail elsewhere in this book. Stability will not return to the region until Congo is

revived as a state. The further development of Central Africa and the surrounding countries will depend on this process, which in turn will depend on massive international support.

The problems in Congo have captured the world's attention because of that country's economic and strategic importance. However, the political situation in the countries to the north and northwest of Congo (known jointly in colonial times as French Equatorial Africa) is similar. In the Central African Republic, in particular, the state has been steadily disintegrating and has now practically ceased to exist. Nothing in the country works. A series of attempted coups were motivated by general disaffection, particularly among the military, some of whom had not been paid for two years. After the attempts in 1996 and 1997, in which hundreds were killed, the United Nations dispatched a peacekeeping force which was replaced by a special UN peacebuilding institute in 2000. However, there was not much the UN could do. Tension persisted between the various groups, especially between northerners and southerners. Nor could unpaid government employees and soldiers be expected to show much enthusiasm for their work. The Central African Republic was a seething cauldron in which everything that could go wrong did.

The situation on the other side of Congo, in East Africa, is substantially different. There are relatively strong states right on Congo's eastern border. Developments in Rwanda and Burundi are still dominated by fierce clashes between the two main population groups, the Hutu and the Tutsi. Uganda is calmer, but has its own civil war in the north. Thanks to a mixture of relatively good policies and good governance, the country is continuing to make progress. The rate of economic growth is five per cent a year, and poverty is on the retreat. The years of utter misery when Uganda was ruled by Idi Amin and Milton Obote are now fading memories under President Museveni. Yet Ugandan politics remains unpredictable. Political parties are still banned. There were presidential elections in 1996 and 2001, both won by Museveni. However, according to the constitution (which prescribes that a president may not stay in office for more than two terms), the Museveni era is due to end in 2006. This will be a critical juncture for Uganda, which has not had a peaceful change of government since it became independent.

Neighbouring Kenya finally made a fresh start with the 2002 election, which led to a change of power. Emilio Kibaki, the new president, launched reforms aimed at reducing poverty, unemployment, crime, corruption and mismanagement. Kenya's relatively strong civil society, which was instrumental in toppling the Moi regime, may also do a great deal to keep the current government on track. Even after decades of decline in all areas, Kenya is one of the few African countries likely to make progress in the near future. Though Kenyan society is extremely diverse, it has the potential for greater balance than most other countries on the continent.

Things were also going quite well in Tanzania. Admittedly, the ruling party lorded it over the divided opposition, but internally it had a culture of pluriformity. The presidency had already changed hands peacefully on two occasions, in 1985 and 1995. The expectation that this was the start of a lasting tradition brought political stability to the country. That had a positive impact on the economy, which grew faster than the population each year. Tanzania's main problem was the Zanzibar question – the relationship between the mainland and the island off the coast, which was very different. Members of Zanzibar's opposition, who had never accepted centralised Tanzanian rule, wanted to have the island's status within the union changed. The central government usually responded harshly, leading to clashes and human rights violations.

We will now cross the continent to look at our last region: West Africa. Poverty is more extreme here than in other regions; of the fifteen poorest countries in the world, no fewer than nine are in West Africa. The twenty or so countries in the region span the entire range of political development, from those that have been consistently stable (such as Senegal, and to a lesser extent Mali and Ghana) to those that have almost completely disintegrated under the impact of violence (especially Liberia and Sierra Leone). There are countries where governments change peacefully and more or less democratically (Senegal, Mali and Ghana once more) and ones whose rulers ruthlessly cling to dictatorial power (such as Togo and Guinea).

Yet West Africa appears to be in the grip of a steady, fairly general trend towards instability. Ethnic and religious tensions are on the rise, in small countries as well as in huge Nigeria. Here and

there, unrest erupts into violence which can easily spill over into other parts of the region, starting with neighbouring countries. Refugees cross borders, as do rebel groups. The war in Liberia around the millennium spread to Sierra Leone, and later on Guinea, further to the north, also became involved. Traditionally stable Ivory Coast, to the east of Liberia, was not spared either. The country, which already had huge numbers of economic migrants from the Sahel within its borders, was flooded with refugees. In the 1990s the question of who was and was not an Ivorian became increasingly important, in daily life and in the political arena.

President Houphouët-Boigny, who had effectively ruled the country as an absolute monarch from independence until his death in 1993, was succeeded, in accordance with the constitution, by the speaker of the country's parliament, Henri Bédié. However, the incumbent prime minister, Alassane Ouattara, also laid claim to the post. After Bédié won the 1995 presidential election, the government adopted a new constitutional provision that residents whose parents were not both nationals of Ivory Coast could not run for president. The ruling elite claimed that Ouattara was a national of Burkina Faso. Tension over the nationality issue, together with financial mismanagement and corruption, posed an increasing threat to the country's stability. On Christmas Day 1999 the army staged a coup, the first in the nation's history. Bédié was deposed and General Robert Gueï assumed power. The transitional military regime promised to restore order and then hand over power to an elected civilian government once more. Another new constitution laid down even more stringent criteria for the presidency. In 2000 there were new presidential elections, in which only four selected candidates were allowed to take part. The turnout was extremely low. The proclaimed winner and new president of Ivory Coast was Laurent Gbagbo, who was entrusted with the task of restoring stability.

He did not succeed. In 2002 there was another coup attempt, which threw the whole country into turmoil. The territory of Ivory Coast was effectively divided into a northern part controlled by the Muslim 'New Forces', and a southern part controlled by the traditional Ivorian elite under President Gbagbo. The situation became even more complicated when armed groups of Liberians crossed the border into western Ivory Coast and new, brutal hostilities broke out.

France came to the rescue of its former colony. Its military stabilised the chaotic situation, and heavy pressure was brought to bear to find a political settlement. However, once an agreement had been reached none of the Ivorian parties to the conflict felt it was in their interest to implement it and restore national unity. The French were caught in the middle, able to prevent further bloodshed but not to hold the country together.

As for Liberia's role, commanders were said to have told their armed followers, 'Go and get your salaries across the border, in Ivory Coast.' This plan soon backfired, as the Liberians were pushed back into their own country by Ivorian groups. This increased the pressure on the Liberian government in Monrovia, which was already under attack by rebel groups. In mid-2003, the Liberian state collapsed once again. There was fighting all over the country and Monrovia, in particular, became a humanitarian nightmare.

The regional organisation ECOWAS – which over the years had built up quite some experience in conflict management – responded quickly. West African troops were again sent to Liberia to try to restore order. Again, Nigerian forces formed the core of the operation. Charles Taylor had no choice but to flee the country. He received political asylum in Nigeria. After several months the ECOWAS peacekeeping force was joined by the first UN troops, from countries around the world. It was hoped that the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) would do the same job as UNAMSIL in neighbouring Sierra Leone; that is, give the country a future.

Developments in Ivory Coast and Liberia reveal several phenomena that are of broader significance to Africa as a whole. First of all, there is the fact that countries' domestic spheres are subject to increasing influence from neighbouring states. The surrounding region is of ever greater relevance to domestic politics. Interaction between African countries, which was minimal until the 1990s, is increasing, and this will have all kinds of consequences in the years to come. A second phenomenon is the remarkably rapid decline in stability. Better policies and better governance can improve the overall situation in a country fairly quickly, as Uganda under Museveni and Ghana under Rawlings have shown, but overall decline (for political, economic or other reasons) can set in even faster. Although there is a great deal of stability in Africa's patchwork of states, the states that make up that

patchwork are individually fragile. Throughout Africa they face similar problems, which none of them can solve easily or quickly. Sometimes, things improve for a while only to deteriorate again. When development is as fragile as this, we cannot assume it will last. Recent developments have highlighted the variations on state development, but common underlying themes will determine the entire continent's future. For the time being, African countries will not move forward without disappointments.

#### i) International uncertainty

How did the international community (more specifically, Western countries) react to the stalled process of state development in Africa and to cases of state disintegration in the early twenty-first century? To answer that question, we will first examine the new international phenomenon of Islamic terrorism and the fight against it. Its impact has been felt all over the world, including Africa.

On 11 September 2001, attacks by Middle Eastern terrorists brought death and destruction to New York and Washington. For the United States, it was a rude awakening from dreams of a possible new isolationism. The George W. Bush administration, which had been in power only a few months, found it could not ignore the world beyond the United States' borders. Without taking too much notice of other countries' opinions about how to take on the terrorist threat, Washington lashed out with the overwhelming might of its military. The regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq were ousted. The latter country was occupied by a coalition led by American and British troops. The 'war on terrorism' became the first major chapter in the history of the twenty-first century.

How did all this affect Africa? The attacks of 11 September obviously raised the issue of whether African countries or individuals might be involved in terrorism. The African authorities were unanimous in condemning the attacks. President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal called for an African pact against terrorism and his appeal was echoed by many African leaders. The attacks were even condemned by the government of Sudan, which Washington had suspected of villainy for years.

The official African response was thus positive, but the reaction from African Muslims was less unanimous. Emotions ran high in countries where there were large Islamic populations or tension between Muslims and Christians, above all in West Africa. Thousands died in confrontations between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria.

The attacks triggered off a debate about a possible connection between terrorism and poverty. Just as in the past there were those who suggested that outbreaks of fighting, intercontinental migration, environmental degradation and so forth were linked to poverty, some now attempted to link poverty and terrorism. This view simplistically divided the world into good and evil, with all the evil on one side under the heading of poverty and everything good on the other. One reason for making such a crude distinction was probably to give the rich an added incentive to eliminate poverty, lest they experience at first hand the adverse effects of poor people's misery. However, there was no substantive link between poverty and terrorism. Whatever the terrorists' problems were, lack of funds was certainly not one of them. Nor were there any known terrorist movements among Africa's poor.

Yet that was not the end of the matter – for there *was* a link between the operation of terrorist networks and certain types of country. In some failing states, terrorists had a free hand. Africa's most extreme example – Somalia, which had ceased to be a state – was probably the only 'country' in Africa that was used as a base by Al Qaeda fighters. It therefore seemed clear that there was a link between failed states and terrorism. Failed states not only harboured crime and instability within their borders but were also a threat to international security – a fact brought home to the world in no uncertain terms on 11 September 2001. Nearly every African country had features that made infiltration by terrorist networks relatively easy: a weak, ineffective state that in many cases did not even control the entire territory, porous frontiers, corruption (with ample opportunities for bribery and possibly even connivance by the authorities), the presence of religious fanatics and other malcontents, and international indifference. The attacks on the US were one more reason to stop ignoring problem states.

The George W. Bush administration, accordingly, turned its attention to Africa quite soon after the attacks. It realised that in recent years the US had become less and less aware of what was going on in Africa, including potentially threatening developments. American intelligence services

started making up for lost time. In the meantime, continuing unrest in the Middle East was giving West Africa (Nigeria and the surrounding area) new importance as an oil supplier to the United States. Bush decided the time was ripe to make an appearance in Africa. In June 2003, he set out on almost the same tour of the continent that his predecessor Bill Clinton had taken in 1998, visiting South Africa, Botswana, Uganda, Nigeria and Senegal, in that order. (Unlike Clinton, he did not stop in Rwanda.) The entire visit took only a few days and produced little that was new. Ties with the large, strategically significant countries of South Africa and Nigeria were strengthened.

Entirely in the American tradition, efforts to improve standards of living in Africa were left largely to private organisations, rather than government. Still, the US did pledge additional aid for well-performing African countries and set aside fifteen billion dollars (to be paid out over a five-year period) for a new campaign against AIDS in Africa. Due to the ties between the Bush administration and the religious right, most of this aid was offered to African countries that took the ABC approach: first sexual *abstinence* before marriage (A), then *be faithful* (B) to your partner after marriage and if that isn't manageable, use *condoms* (C). This last element sparked off heated debate in the United States, because many politicians were opposed to recommending the use of condoms. They were joined by the Roman Catholic church, which announced with medieval zeal that condoms were not effective against AIDS, because the virus was too small and could slip through the rubber. In Africa and around the world, the quality of the measures against on AIDS remained shockingly low. As a result, millions more died.

The United States had no new approach to failing and failed states, though these states had formed the main motive for its renewed interest in Africa because of their possible connection with terrorism. In 2003 the US refused to lead an international peace operation in Liberia, to the chagrin of the African countries that were sending troops there and the European countries with a military presence in the region (the UK and France were playing a central role in Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast respectively). Saddled with numerous military commitments around the world, Washington stuck to its policy of not sending ground troops to Africa. Without the military support of the world's only superpower, confronting Africa's major crises head-on became quite a complex proposition. Western countries trained and funded African countries and organisations so that they could take part in peace operations; the West African regional organisation ECOWAS was especially active in this area. In addition, Western powers sometimes sent troops of their own. The UN also played a prominent role in African peace missions.

These efforts were generally hampered by limited appreciation of the problems afflicting states in West and Central Africa (as well as Somalia). In areas where state structures were meagre or absent, the international community usually pinned its hopes for renewed stability and state development on forging agreements between local leaders through the right mix of pressure and support. However, these leaders could best be compared to warlords. Each one had his own band of young people, supplied with weapons and bereft of prospects. The leaders aimed chiefly to enrich themselves and to defend or expand their own authority. Their impoverished supporters had little on their minds but survival. Concepts such as the public interest played no role at all.

Most warlords were glad to take part in a peace process and a transitional government, as long as it gave them access to the public purse and international aid. But after the elections that every peace agreement called for, some leaders stayed in government and others had to go. Around the same time, the flow of international aid started to slow down. The losers of the elections would find themselves cut off from their sources of income and unable to appease their supporters. The obvious thing for them to do was to take up arms again. A state that has been destroyed can probably only be rebuilt with much deeper and longer-lasting commitment from the international community. Ordinary economic activity must be set in motion before elections are held, so that legitimate sources of income are available. In reality, international donors were not prepared to make this kind of commitment, though they had recently realised that they needed to be intensively involved in reconstruction for at least three to five years to set a country on the right track.

The international community was also uncertain how to approach African countries that were doing fairly well. The Millennium Development Goals supposedly made it clear where these countries should be headed (see chapter 9, section e). There was also some theoretical consensus about how to

help them along; donors had agreed to work within the general framework of the so-called Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers that each African country had drafted. However, there was pervasive doubt about whether the millennium goals were realistic for Africa. In practice, development assistance took almost every conceivable form.

One of donors' aims was to gradually improve Africans' access to rich-country markets. African production levels were sometimes responsive to these measures. The American trade initiative mentioned above boosted textile production in Africa, and when Europe became more open to African exporters, production of sugar increased. Even so, poor countries in other parts of the world often drew much greater benefit from new trade opportunities than the relatively uncompetitive African countries. This was especially true when it came to products with added value.

Direct aid to African countries, which had been provided in various forms since the 1960s, had achieved many small-scale successes. Its effect, however, was often quick to fade. Activities aimed at long-term improvement of the standard of living seemed prone to failure in the African environment, for numerous reasons discussed elsewhere in this book. The main hurdles included the policies and governance of African authorities, which were as poor as ever. Africa's state institutions worked badly, if at all. Moreover, there was little reason to expect that African leaders would do much to improve the lives of their people, since any significant reform would eat into their own status and income.

The fundamental obstacle posed by the elites became clearer and clearer as time went on. But what was a donor to do? Try to make African states work better? Or try to manoeuvre around the state entirely, in an attempt to tap into forces more favourable to development? The latter course might involve promoting local NGOs and creating new opportunities for the private sector in Africa. Some thought that civil society and business could counterbalance the power of the state, forcing it to do its job better and perhaps bringing greater balance to African societies.

This theory is intimately bound up with the role that the middle class had played in European state formation, and later in Asia. While European elites pursued their own narrow interests and the impoverished masses could not make themselves heard, it was the middle class that was able to represent the national or public interest, being made up of reasonably educated people who earned a living independently of the state. Taxes on their income funded state activities, and in exchange they demanded that the state perform its basic tasks adequately, because the continued prosperity of the middle class depended on public services: law enforcement, the protection of legal certainty, the provision of physical infrastructure, education, health care and so forth. In almost every part of the world that had achieved true development, the middle class and the state had spurred each other on to greater achievements.

This has not happened in Africa, because almost no countries have a powerful middle class. What are the chances that a 'civil society' promoted and funded by external forces could play such a role? The previous chapter (section g) noted the contrast between African and Western civil-society organisations. There is an equally stark contrast between African civil society as a whole and the middle classes that played a role in the development of the wealthy Western countries. In the West, the middle class formed the foundation of the state by virtue of the taxes it paid, while Africa's civil-society organisations are not fundamental in any sense. And because these organisations often receive at least part of their income from non-African sources, their ties to their own states are fairly casual.

A final point: civil society is fragmented and, in Africa, often divided along ethnic or religious lines. African founders of civil-society organisations (and, after democratisation, new political parties) have tended to have other goals in mind than strengthening the fabric of their nation. They sometimes even pose an additional threat to stability, especially in states that have fallen into severe decline. In West Africa in particular, states may be endangered by the rise of Islam, including radical Islamism, along with fanatical Christian sects. If Africa's current state system continues to weaken, the dividing lines between Islam and Christianity may well determine where new national borders are drawn. Religious organisations in Africa are more likely to undermine than uphold existing states, especially if international tensions between radical Islam and the West continue to rise.

For all these reasons, it is probably wiser to look to the private sector as the basis of an African middle class. Substantial growth among businesses could allow people to escape patronage networks by providing an alternative source of income. Taxation of that income could also keep the

state going. To protect the private sector and expand it where possible, businesses would then start demanding that the state provide public services for the benefit of society as a whole.

This rosy picture seems unlikely to become a reality any time soon. Apart from a few multinationals dealing in oil or other primary commodities, the international business community has kept its distance from Africa. It is difficult for African entrepreneurs to make much progress on their own, since they are caught between their family and friends on one side, clamouring for their share of any profits, and political and military leaders on the other, as eager as any mafioso to collect 'protection' money. Under such conditions, it would be difficult for anybody to build up an economically sound business of any real magnitude.

Still, Africa's civil-society organisations and businesses should not be entirely dismissed. Since the Cold War, African societies have been exceptionally dynamic, and many of the changes have been promising. Civil society has grown rapidly and the economic trend has improved, from decline in the 1970s and 1980s to stagnation since the 1990s. International support has stimulated both the economy and the expansion of civil society. It is too early to say whether this will lead to new social patterns and ultimately to better state performance. Nor is the verdict in on direct international support to African states, aimed at improving policies and governance. The global community can influence African societies by giving aid, but we cannot expect external forces to play a decisive role.

Since the continent's independence, the centre of gravity in Africa's patronage networks has gradually shifted from the international to the domestic sphere. If, as I suggested in the introduction, we should see Africa's elites as spiders in two webs, then it is the strength and the shape of their domestic webs that determine the fortunes of their states. Across Africa, those webs are extremely fragile and have been known to give way entirely. Relations with rich countries affect African states and their internal webs in both intended and unintended ways, for better and for worse. One unintended effect of international aid to states, for instance, is to stabilise patronage networks. We can see it in a positive or a negative light; it fends off total chaos, but perpetuates structures that hinder development. The power of good examples should be kept in mind, along with the more general need for African countries to exchange information and keep in close contact with representatives of the modern West. The effects of such activities vary from country to country and can probably never be fully enumerated, let alone measured. What is at stake is the drastic, qualitative transformation of African societies, in ways that encourage lasting increases in production and thereby set true development in motion.

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<sup>1</sup> SIPRI *Yearbook 1999*, pp. 15-17.

<sup>2</sup> Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy*.

<sup>3</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>4</sup> For details of how this happened in that classic nation-state, France, see Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*.

<sup>5</sup> John Iliffe demonstrated this with reference to newly independent Tanganyika (later Tanzania) in Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika*, especially pp. 324-325.

<sup>6</sup> See De Kadt's chapter of the advisory report by the Dutch Advisory Council on Government Policy entitled *Ontwikkelingsbeleid en goed bestuur (Development Policy and Good Governance)*, pp. 255-257.

<sup>7</sup> Gross, *The Civic and the Tribal State*, p. 106.

<sup>8</sup> See for example Kaplan, *The Ends of the Earth*, pp. 86-87, for his experiences on the Togolese-Ghanaian border.

<sup>9</sup> Bayart, Ellis and Hibou, *The Criminalisation of the State in Africa*, p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> Bayart, Ellis and Hibou, *The Criminalisation of the State in Africa*, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> The World Bank played an important part in this. A milestone in the reassessment of the role of the state was the World Development Report 1997, entitled *The State in a Changing World*.

<sup>12</sup> In the field of political economy this leads to Wagner's law, which states that, as the level of development rises, so does the state's share of the expanding gross national product.

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- <sup>13</sup> For the role of the state in the modernisation of Asia, see the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs memorandum *Het Aziatisch groeimodel (The Asian Growth Model)*, especially p. 43.
- <sup>14</sup> The state was also necessary in order to compete internationally in the globalising world. See the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs memorandum *Effecten van economische globalisering (Effects of Economic Globalisation)*, p. 21.
- <sup>15</sup> Dutch Advisory Council on Government Policy, *Ontwikkelingsbeleid en goed bestuur (Development Policy and Good Governance)*.
- <sup>16</sup> World Bank, *The State in a Changing World*, p. 29.
- <sup>17</sup> World Bank, *Voices of the Poor*; World Bank, *Can Africa Claim the 21st Century?*, p. 85.
- <sup>18</sup> In the Netherlands this led to a memorandum on economics and development entitled *Ondernemen tegen Armoede* (English version: *In Business against Poverty*) (2000, with additions in 2002).
- <sup>19</sup> Thomas Isaac and Heller, 'The Campaign for Democratic Decentralisation in Kerala.'
- <sup>20</sup> Goldsmith, *Donors, Dictators and Democrats in Africa*, p. 419.
- <sup>21</sup> Villalón and Huxtable (eds.), *The African State at a Critical Juncture*.
- <sup>22</sup> Bratton and Mattes, 'Africans' surprising universalism'.
- <sup>23</sup> Bratton and Mattes, 'Africans' surprising universalism', p. 120.
- <sup>24</sup> Goldsmith, 'Risk, rule and reason: leadership in Africa'.
- <sup>25</sup> Goldsmith, 'Risk, rule and reason: leadership in Africa', p. 84.
- <sup>26</sup> Goldsmith, 'Donors, dictators and democrats in Africa', pp. 419-422.
- <sup>27</sup> Van Walraven, 'Of canvassing and carnival'.
- <sup>28</sup> Transparency International, *The Global Corruption Report 2001*, p. 88.
- <sup>29</sup> The first people to bring this to public notice in the Netherlands were probably the journalist Hans Moleman (in the daily newspaper *De Volkskrant*), with his article 'Ook het ANC kan een monster worden' ('Even the ANC could become a monster'), 30 August 2000, and politician Frits Bolkestein in 'Het stilzwijgen rond een gevallen held' ('The silence surrounding a fallen hero'), 4 September 2000.
- <sup>30</sup> Bayart, Ellis and Hibou, *The Criminalisation of the State in Africa*, pp. 49-68.
- <sup>31</sup> Moleman, 'Racisme is nog overal in Zuid-Afrika' ('Racism still rife in South Africa').