

**RIJKSUNIVERSITEIT GRONINGEN**

**THE DISINTEGRATION OF STATES IN AFRICA:  
THE INTERACTION OF POLITICS, ECONOMICS,  
CULTURE AND SOCIAL RELATIONS, 1957-2003**

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## Foreword

In 1995, after six years as an Asia specialist, I was transferred by my employer, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to the Sub-Saharan Africa Department in The Hague. I knew almost nothing about the region and went looking for a book that would give me a rapid introduction to Africa's recent history and problems. There is a great deal of fine writing about the continent, but I was never able to find a book that provided a digestible review of what had happened in Africa in recent years and why.

So I wrote the book I thought was missing, under the title *Afrika: Van de Koude Oorlog naar de 21e eeuw* ('Africa: From the Cold War to the 21st Century'), which was – thanks to the Directorate-General for International Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands - translated into English under the title *What Went Wrong With Africa: A Contemporary History*. The central theme of the book was the process of state formation, or rather state disintegration, which has taken place in Africa since independence. I took the analysis in this book as the basis for this dissertation.

I would like to thank my supervisors Doeko Bosscher and Jan Geert Siccama for their stimulating and kind support for this project. Many friends and colleagues also made valuable contributions to this work, which have considerably improved the text or otherwise had a substantial impact. I would especially like to mention David McKay for his assistance with the translation, Sandra Debets for the documentation and Reggy Agerbeek for the cover design.

Roel van der Veen

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### *Nederlandse samenvatting*

Our ship of state is today sinking! A few are manipulating the system to their advantage, but our intellectuals, our women, our youth, the masses are being flushed down the drain.

Ken Saro-Wiwa <sup>1</sup>

The Grande Hotel [in Beira, Mozambique], a three-part concrete behemoth full of glorious evanescence, is a first-rate destination for a bicycle trip. In the sixties, it was a grand establishment with 110 rooms and eight suites, so ambitious it was doomed to fail. Now it is a haven for squatters, teeming with life and death, where whole families live in the hotel rooms or in huts of straw and clay on the balconies. Fruit trees grow on the roof.

I park my bicycle, lock it up and ascend the broad staircase, which has been transformed into a market and a playground. Peanuts, onions, tomatoes, candles, bug spray and little fish are on display along the steps.

Inside, there is a vast hall full of empty space with huts in the corners. It is just like the Tropical Museum in Amsterdam. More stairs lead up to a room with a huge round hole in the floor where a chandelier once hung. The children running around it keep a safe distance, for there is no railing. Nearly all the wood in the Grande Hotel has been used for cooking fires; only the doors of the hotel rooms remain.

Mary-Ann Sandifort <sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

The image of buildings from Africa's colonial days – mansions, office buildings, railway stations or hotels – that have succumbed to their surroundings is quite familiar, mainly from films and literature. Decades after the original owners abandoned it, the structure still stands, a mere skeleton, the wood stripped away, trees growing through the roof. Its physical remains are just a shell concealing a new function, one better suited to its tropical setting. Africa has taken possession of the alien intruder. Whole families live in what were once hotel rooms, clay huts have appeared on the balconies, the entryway has become a marketplace.

This process – call it 'Africanisation' – has affected more than just the material legacy of colonialism. The architecture of the state was also left in an African environment at the time of independence, and has undergone a similar process. The remains of colonial institutions – ministries, parliaments and courts – are still standing, but over the years they too have become mere shells, concealing an African reality that has taken possession of them and turned them to its own purposes. Outsiders dealing with African states would do well to remember: what you see is not what you get.

This book examines the Africanisation of the colonial states that the departing powers left behind, and how that process affected living conditions on the continent. The greatest obstacle to Africa's development is that its states work in their own peculiar way – or, by today's standards, fail to work altogether.

### a) Getting our bearings

The last fifty years have seen unprecedented changes in people's standards of living all over the world. Despite explosive population growth, it proved possible to dramatically elevate the quality of life. Though poverty was the norm throughout human history, for many people a degree of prosperity came within reach. Some even began to take it for granted. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, mass production and consumption emerged, first in North America and then in Europe. After World War II, these innovations spread to the non-Western world. In the current period of globalisation, the percentage of the world's people living in extreme poverty, on less than one dollar a day, has continued to drop. From 30 percent in 1990, it fell to 23 percent by 2000, albeit of a much larger world population.<sup>3</sup> However we define poverty, it is clear that on average, over the past two decades, people's lives have improved, all over the world, on every continent.

Except Africa. Africa (more specifically, sub-Saharan or 'Black' Africa) is the only large, contiguous region left out of the worldwide rise in prosperity over the past fifty years. The percentage of Africans living in poverty has not dropped but risen. In nearly all African countries, the average income has fallen since decolonisation, which took place around 1960 in most cases. Even a confirmed optimist would hesitate to predict that life in Africa will get better in the years ahead. Alongside poverty, the troubling hallmarks of the continent today are misrule, violence, corruption and AIDS. The human development figures speak volumes.<sup>4</sup> So do the tales of travellers who returned to Africa in the early twenty-first century after visiting around the time of independence. The writer Paul Theroux, revisiting many parts of the continent after forty years, wrote: 'Africa is materially more decrepit than it was when I first knew it – hungrier, poorer, less educated, more pessimistic, more corrupt.'<sup>5</sup>

Many people think it surprising that prosperity has not come to Africa. In the heady years following independence, around 1960, the continent seemed to be making a fresh start, free at last of slavery and colonialism. On the face of it, Africa seemed no worse off than the other non-Western continents, Asia and Latin America. All three were made up of ex-colonies and were poor in comparison with the rich West. In France scholars invented a collective term for them: *Le Tiers Monde*, the Third World, as opposed to the West (the First World) and the Soviet-dominated Eastern Bloc (the Second World). His emphasis on vast political blocs and their interactions was typical of the times. Until the 1980s the vast differences within the Third World went largely unnoticed. All poor countries, it was felt, were in the same boat; they all had similar potential for development.

The first general theories about the future of the poor, newly independent countries were developed in the 1950s and 1960s in the United States, which had promoted the decolonisation of

Europe's colonial empires. Officially, the postwar world order accorded 'sovereign equality' to all states, old and new, though in practical terms they were anything but equal; for one thing, most new countries were a good deal poorer. They seemed likely to succumb to the enticements of the socialist Eastern Bloc, which was locked in an ideological struggle with the United States and the rest of the Western world, a struggle that came to be known as the Cold War. In response, American scholars and politicians put forward the theory the path to prosperity was the same for every country. If they would just let go of their 'traditional' ways of life, they could metamorphose into 'modern' societies. The most persuasive advocate of this 'modernisation theory' was Walt Whitman Rostow, whose book *The Stages of Economic Growth: a Non-Communist Manifesto* (1960) described the stages of the modernisation process that countries had to traverse in order to become 'developed'.<sup>6</sup> Poor countries became developing countries, countries on the road of development.

But modernisation theory soon fell out of favour in the development debate. Many felt it was too convenient for the West. In the 1960s and 1970s, there was real hope that many roads would lead to prosperity, or development. Why should Asian, African and Latin American countries follow the Western model? Was the socialism of the Eastern Bloc not an equally attractive paradigm? Or, it was thought, if countries wanted to stay out of the confrontation between the two blocs, they could pursue their own roads to a better future. Modernisation theory seemed to imply that there was just one, Western blueprint for escaping poverty; that was seen as an insult to the newly independent countries, with their very different cultures. Within the new international system emblematised by the United Nations, all countries were said to have equal status. The corollary, in many people's minds, was that they all had equal opportunities for development, and could choose whatever path suited them, just as they had chosen independence. Modernisation theory was abandoned not because it was shown to be scientifically incorrect; in fact, the jury was still out, since development had not yet reached the non-Western countries, with the exception of Japan. Rather, the theory fell from grace because at that time its conclusions and predictions were widely felt to be unacceptable.

Another factor behind the opposition to modernisation theory was the widespread opinion that Third World countries would probably never have a chance to develop, because the rich countries were maintaining an international system that worked against them. Until that changed, it was claimed, poor countries would never be able to move forward. The critics of modernisation theory, and of the international system, who advanced this argument were mainly Spanish-speaking and their conceptual framework was called dependency theory, after the Spanish word *dependencia*.<sup>7</sup> The most influential attempt to apply dependency theory to Africa was made by William Rodney, from the Caribbean country of Guyana, in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972). However, the heyday of dependency theory, like that of modernisation theory, was short. In this case, it was clear that the theory failed to capture reality. Some poor countries, especially in East and Southeast Asia, proved perfectly capable of development. Apparently, the oppressive influence of the international system should not be overestimated.

Still, dependency theory was revived around the year 2000 by the antiglobalisation movement, which fiercely opposed the growing influence of capitalism on the international system after the collapse of the socialist Eastern Bloc. The movement claimed that capitalism's dark side was most evident in its dealings with poor countries. This new species of visceral aversion to capitalism formed the basis of an antiglobalist vision in Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (2000) and Noreena Hertz's *The Silent Takeover* (2001). These works predicted that as capitalism expanded its influence through globalisation, wages in poor countries would fall due to competition for international investment, in a race to the bottom. The result, the antiglobalists argued, would be growing poverty. Furthermore, open markets would let in a flood of foreign products with which domestic producers could not possibly compete. Finally, a narrow-minded focus on money would distract attention from environmental and social issues, causing living conditions to deteriorate further for many inhabitants of poor countries. According to the antiglobalist camp, fighting globalisation was the only way to give the poor of the world a chance at a better life.

The ideas of the antiglobalists are open to the same objections as dependency theory. They cannot explain why some parts of the world have succeeded in escaping the grip of capitalism and moving forward – or, more accurately, have moved forward thanks to capitalism – while other parts of the world, especially Africa, have not. Over time, Africa seems to have become utterly

marginalised. Wages there are not lowered to attract international investment, nor do transnational companies make much effort to exploit what has become the world's least developed region. Africa's main problem is not that it is in a race to the bottom, but that it has not even managed to get into the game. Dependency and antiglobalist theories offer little insight into Africa's situation, aside from the thesis that an insufficiently competitive economy and open markets are a disastrous mix. Those theories will therefore not often be mentioned in the pages ahead. What I will discuss is the general significance of the international economy for Africa. Even though the continent has become ever more marginal to the world economy since independence, because of its internal weakness the international environment remains crucial. When examining the reasons for the continent's decline, international economic factors should be taken into account.

As some postcolonial regions pulled themselves out of poverty while others remained stuck or sunk even further, the Third World came apart. The contrast was so great that many researchers began to focus on regions or groups of countries, rather than the developing world as a whole. Africa (more precisely, sub-Saharan Africa) became a frequent object of scrutiny.

The issue then arose of why Africa was lagging behind the rest of the world. In the 1980s, a new school of thought put its finger on the sore spot: the poor performance of the African state. At the head of this school was the British scholar Basil Davidson, who made African history accessible to a wide public. In 1992, he published a book arguing that the European model of statehood which the colonial powers had brought to Africa – a model he called the nation-state – had become an obstacle to postcolonial development. The title of Davidson's work, *The Black Man's Burden*, summed it up neatly. His contention was that European state structures did not fit into African culture and society, and therefore stood in the way of development instead of promoting it. Africa's 'modern' states, he claimed, were making it impossible for the continent to move ahead.

Other scholars have emphasised different aspects of African states. The next section reviews their work, on which I build in this book. The diverse aspects of Africa's recent history, not the least of which is its failure to develop, can in my view best be understood and integrated when we start from the role of the state. In this introduction, I will limit my discussion to more general studies on statehood in Africa. There is also much relevant work on individual African countries, which will be explored in later chapters. Within the category of general studies, I have focused on books and articles that have made a major contribution to the literature about the state in Africa, for instance by introducing a concept that has since been adopted by others.

## b) Review of the literature

What is a state? Since there are many definitions, a better question is, what do I mean by 'state' in this book? To keep it simple, I will define a state as the most powerful organisation in a society.<sup>8</sup> The work of the nineteenth-century German sociologist Max Weber is also of importance, since he is seen as having described the 'ideal type' of the modern state. Weber's essentially Western model consists of a political institution with a written constitution and a rationally organised legal system, managed by competent public servants on the basis of rational rules.<sup>9</sup> This ideal state has a monopoly on ownership of weapons and on violence (through its armed forces and police).

I should emphasise that the task before us is anything but a dry analysis of structures. The human element is crucial. Who runs these states? How do those leaders interact with the other members of the elite, and the other inhabitants of their countries? Why do they have not designed states that work for the benefit of the people?

One natural way to start would be to compare state formation in Africa with the same process on other continents. Europe would be a good choice, since it was the first continent to witness the emergence of modern states. Most schools, from Marxists to modernists, postulate a linear model of state development with multiple stages. The question then becomes: which stage in the European model is most applicable to the current, postcolonial state in Africa?

Different characteristics of postcolonial African states are associated with entirely different periods in Europe. Let us look at a few examples. Most interpersonal networks in Africa, whether inside or outside state structures, are based on patron-client relationships (patronage or, stressing the other end of the relationship, clientelism). The same could be said of Europe in an earlier period, after

the fall of the Western Roman Empire. In the absence of other, more formal ties, the many vulnerable members of society had no choice but to seek the aid and protection of those with power and wealth. In the Middle Ages, this social system developed into the formal institution of feudalism. When the feudal system broke down during the transition to modernity, patronage re-emerged. In Europe's early modern period, the Renaissance, patron-client networks again played a fundamental role.<sup>10</sup> The analogy to the situation in Africa is clear; contemporary Africans, like the Europeans of the early Middle Ages and the early modern period, have no recourse to more codified forms of social organisation. In present-day Africa, as in Europe's past, many people are vulnerable and have no choice but to seek powerful protectors.

Another striking feature of African societies since independence is the emergence of two 'classes'. The first is the postcolonial national elite, the rulers who have taken advantage of their control of the state to seize everything of value. The second class is made up of the masses who have next to nothing. The people have yet to exercise control over the state, as the European bourgeoisie did through revolution in the days of the *ancien régime*. Africa's elites often run their continent in a manner reminiscent of Europe's *anciens régimes* of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which lost their hold on power because bourgeois revolutions democratised the state, strengthening its legitimacy. There is a crucial difference, however; Africa hardly has a middle class, or bourgeoisie, to leave its mark on the state and society as Europe's did. It is precisely the absence of a middle class in almost all African countries that makes the prospects for state development look so shaky. Incidentally, the unexpected wave of democratisation that swept over Africa soon after the Cold War ended in many ways resembled late twentieth-century transitions to democracy in other regions. Samuel Huntington has spoken of the world's 'third wave' of democratisation.<sup>11</sup>

African leaders and intellectuals have often placed themselves in the Marxist tradition, inspired by dependency theory and the work of William Rodney in particular.<sup>12</sup> But if we move beyond the rhetoric, how do African societies fit into the Marxist framework? Rodney believed that until the Europeans arrived, they had been in more or less the earliest, pre-feudal stage of development.<sup>13</sup> But even after that point, there was no significant degree of industrialisation, and so no proletariat emerged, even though African societies can certainly be divided into haves and have-nots. Paradoxically, it was the haves who often advertised themselves as Marxists.

We have now seen how difficult it is to draw even rough parallels between the situation in Africa and linear models of developments elsewhere. The continent cannot easily be forced into a general conceptual mould. Let us leave this broadbrush approach behind us and start focusing on the development of states in Africa itself, though without losing sight of the international context. Many scholars, such as Robert Jackson and Christopher Clapham, have emphasised the importance of international factors.<sup>14</sup> Today's African states were imposed by European colonial masters who drew fairly arbitrary borders, with little attention to physical geography or the ethnic makeup of the population. In fact, the origins of Africa's states were entirely independent of local realities and even today, it is very much an open question how real they are. Jackson and Clapham have concluded that the international environment was primarily responsible for creating Africa's states and ensuring their survival.

The very existence of African states led to a new view of what statehood is, or should be. Previously, states had needed to prove themselves in order to gain recognition by the outside world. The main criterion was effective control, or sovereignty, over a fixed territory and its population. States that failed to gain or maintain such control simply vanished and were removed from the rolls of the international system. Presumably, the new African states could not have met this criterion. According to Jackson and Clapham, they lacked the strength to establish and maintain authority over their territory on their own. While war had been the only means of survival for Europe's states, Africa's were too weak to fight each other.

Most African states had been handed decolonisation and membership of the United Nations (a badge of sovereignty) on a silver platter. In particular, France, Britain and the United States watched over the fledgling states. The modern state system embodied by the UN was founded on the premise that the entire surface of the earth was partitioned among states. It was almost unthinkable that any area might not fall under the authority of a UN member.

In contrast to the traditional system of 'positive sovereignty' – in which states were

responsible for maintaining their own authority – the new system in Africa has sometimes been referred to as one of ‘negative sovereignty’, because of the decisive importance of international support, and the participants in it as ‘quasi-states’. In extreme cases of weak sovereignty, a faction was recognised as having sovereign authority over a state simply because it controlled the capital. Such recognition yielded important international contacts. For instance, the capital was where letters from the UN were received. This kind of ‘letterbox sovereignty’ existed for many years in Angola.<sup>15</sup>

Much has been written about the impact of the Cold War on Africa. Most writers have used the fact that the superpowers propped up existing regimes to explain violent conflict, the militarisation of politics, the growing authoritarianism of Africa’s leaders and the diversion of funds originally intended to promote the well-being of the general population.<sup>16</sup> What they have generally overlooked is that, during the Cold War, violent conflict only broke out in a few places. How did the international environment affect the African countries that remained free of civil war? This question is all the more important because it could help us determine to what extent the Cold War (and international factors in general) are responsible for developments within African states. The alternative is that internal factors were largely decisive. Most commentators have never tried to assess the relative influence of internal, African factors and international ones. The attempt would certainly be worthwhile, in the light of issues such as the militarisation of politics and the lack of development in the living conditions of the general population.

In 1992, Basil Davidson addressed the link between international and internal factors in *The Black Man’s Burden*. He discussed a number of negative consequences of Africa’s externally imposed states. First of all, their borders had been drawn by Europeans, often without sufficient attention to the situation on the ground. As a result, an ethnic group could find its territory suddenly split by the border between two new states. Natural economic areas might also be carved up in this way. Since many of the postcolonial states had no natural unity, a new, artificial brand of nationalism was needed to hold them together. Suddenly, Africans were supposed to feel Guinean, Zambian or Gabonese, but this new notion of unity came at the expense of the local affinities and identities that until then had been dominant. The ideology of the nation-state thus suppressed Africa’s wealth of cultural diversity.

But what mattered even more, according to Davidson, was the use or abuse of the state by politicians and civil servants. Public employees are only human and the temptation for them to exploit their positions for personal gain is quite normal. In the Northwest European model of state development, that tendency is restrained or prevented by checks and balances built into the system over time. For instance, modern states have a large middle class which has an interest in good state performance and uses many mechanisms (such as elections and the free press) to promote it. Through the years, the working class has also managed to organise and to find means of defending its interests. One key feature of modern nation-states is balance within the state (through the separation of powers) along with balance between the state and the rest of society. In such systems, individuals cannot hijack the state and exploit it for personal gain. Furthermore, corruption is a serious crime, because it conflicts with the impartiality and incorruptibility that should characterise public servants.

In postindependence Africa, however, these features were largely absent. Colonialism had wiped away the checks and balances of many precolonial African states and communities. The continent’s people had not managed to organise themselves from the bottom up, in order to protect their interests. On the contrary, the populations of the new African states had low levels of organisation and development. How were they to protect themselves from the inheritors of the colonial states? Who was to set limits on the conduct of Africa’s new leaders? Davidson believed that the origins and structure of Africa’s independent states made them easy prey for ‘pirates’ out to exploit them for personal gain. The general population was powerless to stop them.

Davidson also dealt with the rise of clientelism after independence, distinguishing it from pre-existing ethnic affiliations. He argued that, in fact, patron-client networks were the driving force behind the postcolonial African state, and not ethnicity, as is often supposed. He also showed that the exploitation of rural Africa had continued under the postcolonial governments and even grown worse, with a stronger bias towards the cities. For the ruling elite, low food prices were a major part of the strategy to keep the urban population docile. The disastrous impact of this policy on the countryside was a mere side issue.

*The Black Man's Burden* was published soon after the Cold War ended. It is instructive to extend some of Davidson's lines of thought into the decade of accelerating globalisation and growing unipolarity. Davidson himself was fully aware that the times were changing. He was enthusiastic about the beginnings of democratisation in Africa around 1990 and believed that participatory democracy would give Africans more influence over their own states and their own lives.

By far the biggest problem with Davidson's book was that he blamed all of Africa's misfortunes on colonialism. As a result, 'African reality', which according to his theory interacts with the states left behind by the European powers, remains largely out of the picture. Most African states have now been independent for almost half a century, or at least two generations in African terms. Theories identifying colonialism as the cause of Africa's problems are looking less and less convincing. We must give at least some attention to Africa itself.

In *Predatory Rule: State and Civil Society in Africa* (1992), Richard Fattou addressed the dichotomy between the leaders of the state and the general population. He adopts a Marxist approach, calling the two groups classes, with the leaders as the exploiters and the general population as the exploited – a distinction that has also been made by many non-Marxist scholars (and I will also use it when appropriate). The strength of Fattou's analysis lies mainly in his central concept of predatory rule. The leaders use the state as an instrument of exploitation, turning it into a predator that feeds on the production of the oppressed class. Far from being a neutral, technocratic organisation, the state thus becomes a tool in the hands of the ruling class.<sup>17</sup>

Fattou also raised an important question about civil society, which began taking shape in Africa in the 1980s. How did it fit into the dichotomy between the oppressors and the oppressed? Fattou had his doubts about the common Western interpretation of civil society in Africa as the emerging opposition to the ruling class. He felt it was much too simplistic to think that civil society in some way embodied the liberation of the oppressed masses. In his view, it was primarily a vehicle of expression for counterelites. For many people, who did not feel entirely at home in the high-powered but stifling world of the ruling class, civil society offered a way out, a means of enjoying prestige and prosperity, as well as greater freedom than in government circles. African civil society is a new, complex world that presents the prospect of a degree of liberation for the oppressed. However, it primarily represents a reorganisation within the ruling class and therefore, according to Fattou, has no potential as a revolutionary force.

The Nigerian scholar Peter Ekeh, in 'Colonialism and the two publics in Africa' (1975), also examined the two starkly contrasting domains of the elite and the masses. Rather than adopting Fattou's Marxist approach, he tended towards an African viewpoint. In his eyes, the new elites were products of colonialism, detached in many ways from Africa's past. Their social conduct was not only *bourgeois* but above all amoral. They thus contrasted with the second domain, the general population, which was still rooted in the past and its own surroundings. Ekeh contended that this second domain was communally oriented and authentically African, with a true normative and ethical dimension.

In *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (1995), the Ugandan historian Mahmood Mamdani also postulated a dichotomy within African society, but of a different nature. He distinguished between the urban world of citizens (which he referred to collectively as civil society) and the rural world of subjects. Mamdani identified colonialism as the source of this division and, in striking contrast to Ekeh, characterised the rural world with its traditional chieftains and its emphasis on ethnicity as a colonial contrivance.

African city-dwellers, Mamdani argued, had been confronted directly with colonialism, but were excluded from the world of the colonial rulers by their race. Meanwhile, the countryside (where, until recently, the bulk of the population lived) was largely subject to a system of indirect rule, in which local leaders took care of business for the colonial authorities. In many cases these leaders were not traditional chieftains, but instead had been installed by the European rulers. The crucial point is that African leaders were in no way accountable to their own people. Precolonial checks and balances were swept away, because the new 'chieftains' were no longer dependent on their subjects, but on their colonial masters. If there was trouble with the locals, the full repressive power of the European rulers could be called on to maintain order. Mamdani calls this form of indirect rule a system of decentralised despotism. The colonial powers were quite despotic themselves, but Africa's rural population never saw them at their worst, because the dirty work was delegated to local African

leaders. The authoritarian potential of African cultures was exploited to the fullest by the colonial powers.

In other words, Mamdani argued, what the Europeans introduced in Africa were not at all nation-states, as Basil Davidson would have us believe, but multicultural, multiethnic entities. The independent African states inherited societies split between cosmopolitan citizens and agrarian subjects. For the citizens, the main question was how to make the rulers acknowledge their rights (through democratisation), while for the subjects, split into tribes by colonialism, culture was the heart of the matter. Mamdani describes the single parties that emerged in almost all African countries soon after independence as a potential tool for achieving national unity, primarily through the integration of the cities and the countryside. However, the party heads, originating from urban civil society, instead adopted the same strategy as the colonial rulers, consolidating their power over the countryside through local leaders. The decentralised despotism of the colonial period remained, though it was now African elites that were exploiting the rural population. The single-party experiment had clearly failed. The spread of customary law and nonrepresentative 'traditional leaders' in independent Africa laid the groundwork for a patrimonial system (see below), in which urban politicians forged bonds with the rural population through patron-client relationships. As Mamdani saw it, widespread clientelism was a result of the way African authorities wielded their authority.

In a sense, Mamdani inverted an argument advanced by the French political scientist Jean-François Bayart, who saw clientelism and patron-client networks as an explanation, rather than a product, of the way power was wielded in Africa. In *L'État en Afrique. La politique du ventre* (1989), translated into English under the title *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, Bayart had described a complex of factors determining how Africa was governed. Borrowing a Cameroonian expression (heard in other forms in many parts of Africa), he dubbed this complex the 'politics of the belly'. The phrase has several meanings, the first of which is the accumulation of wealth through the exercise of political power, as referred to in the expression, 'Goats eat where they are tethered.' The term 'politics of the belly' is also a symbolic reference to lineage and family relations, as well as magic. Finally, the phrase quite literally denotes the round bellies that are expected of powerful African 'big men'. The accumulation of wealth is felt to follow naturally from political power. Politicians who redistribute a part of their wealth are seen as honourable men. For powerful figures, material prosperity therefore tends to be regarded as a political virtue rather than a reprehensible, antisocial practice.<sup>18</sup>

Bayart's politics of the belly was not limited to Africa's leaders; in fact, he saw the phenomenon as present throughout Africa's cultures, an African way of life with a far-reaching impact on the way African politics and African states work. Due to the politics of the belly, African states are very different from the Weberian ideal type. Bayart did not consider that to be a major problem. He regarded it as only natural for independent African states to adopt characteristically African traits, becoming less 'modern' as a result. Modernity, he argued, was simply not where their path of development was headed. Bayart was optimistic about the potential for institutionalising African political processes in the future, even though their nature was largely personal rather than bureaucratic in the Weberian sense. In his view, domestic instability and tribalism were primarily reflections of social struggle, a normal aspect of state development, rather than signs that African states were still 'exogenous' in nature. In Europe, it had taken centuries before states began to approach the Weberian ideal, and so, he reasoned, why should it not take longer than a few decades in Africa? The important thing was that Africa had reshaped its states to suit its own requirements. Bayart concluded that by the late twentieth century African states had moved beyond their origins as alien, European bodies in an African context, becoming authentically African structures. As he put it: 'The state in Africa rests upon autochthonous foundations and a process of appropriation of institutions of colonial origin which give it its own historicity; it can no longer be taken as a purely exogenous structure.'<sup>19</sup>

In *Personal Rule in Black Africa* (1982), the American political scientists Robert Jackson and Carl Rosburg dealt with the personal nature of authority in Africa. As they saw it, the departure of the colonial powers brought an end to Africa's bureaucratic states, which had been politically dependent on distant European capitals. Independence was therefore a major political transition (much more than an economic or social one). Because the state structures that were left behind were no longer in good

working order, the exercise of power became a largely personal matter. The personality of the leader moved to the foreground. In a sense, the palace politics of yore, with its plots and rivalries, came back to life. That did not mean that the system of personal rule, as Jackson and Rosburg called it, did not have its own rules and customs. They identified several kinds of personal rule in Africa, each with its own special features: princely rule (by leaders such as Léopold Senghor in Senegal and Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya), rule by autocratic 'lords' (like Félix Houphouët-Boigny in Ivory Coast and Omar Bongo in Gabon), prophetic leadership (by Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana and Julius Nyerere in Tanzania) and tyrannical rule (by Francisco Macías Nguema in Equatorial Guinea and Idi Amin in Uganda).

Insofar as they are stable, systems of personal rule are located about halfway between a civil society regulated by institutions and the state of nature described by the sixteenth-century political philosopher Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan*. Personal rule is often seen as the opposite of a constitutional system in which the exercise of authority is constrained by formally established rules. In systems of personal rule, the leaders make the rules, and not the other way round. The rules say nothing about how leaders will behave, since leaders can depart from them at will.

Jackson and Rosburg take a political science approach, leaving aside domains such as the economy, as well as developments outside Africa. This may be one reason that they arrive at the somewhat optimistic prediction that a gradual process of institutionalisation will take place. On the other hand, their approach has the advantage of bringing order to Africa's often chaotic political realm. For instance, their approach clearly shows why the public and private domains can almost never be kept separate. The result is states without a clear public character; in other words, the state is the private property, the patrimony (or paternal inheritance) of the ruler. This can be seen not only in African monarchies – the Ethiopian Empire being an extreme example – but to some degree in all African states, even those that are formally republics.<sup>20</sup>

The patrimonial character of the African state has been described by many commentators, such as the French scholar Jean-François Médard, in a chapter entitled 'L'État néo-patrimonial en Afrique noire' (The neo-patrimonial state in Black Africa) of a book he edited entitled *États d'Afrique Noire* (States of Black Africa), published in 1991. According to Médard, African states are not ideal types of patrimonial states as described by Max Weber, but have nonpatrimonial features as well. Because African states blend classic patrimonial characteristics such as personal rule with a quite unique way of accumulating political and economic resources and developing their own symbolic systems, Médard considered 'neopatrimonial' to be a more appropriate term. He contended that, starting from a shared, patrimonial core, each African state develops in its own way, depending on the additional factors at work in the individual case.

In *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone* (1995), the American political scientist William Reno introduced a new concept in the analysis of African states: the shadow state. He develops this concept through a discussion of Sierra Leone, but it is relevant to all of Africa. Reno emphasises that, while the formal state system in Sierra Leone (read 'Africa') did indeed disintegrate as a result of bankruptcy and structural adjustment, the country's rulers, with the president leading the way, found new ways of securing personal prosperity and authority, even in the absence of effective state institutions. The decline of the formal economy led to the contraction of the state, but there were other roads to power and fortune – in Sierra Leone's case, rich diamond fields. The same people who held the state in their grip also controlled the informal economy, which was growing as the formal economy shrank. For them, that informal economy was a source of new power, which due to its informal and often illegal nature generally escaped the world's attention.

The new power structures formed shadow states alongside the formal ones. This made formal states, with their Western-style institutions and separation of powers, less and less relevant. Many leaders relied more heavily on informal authority and networks than on their official roles within state institutions. The old adage, 'What you see is not what you get.', described African states perfectly. The true contest for wealth and power took place behind the scenes, in the shadow of the formal, visible world.

Elites could use this cloak of shadow to hide activities that could not have withstood the light of day. Jean-François Bayart (mentioned above), Stephen Ellis and Béatrice Hibou saw this taking place not just in isolated instances, but in many African states. They gave the phenomenon a name,

which became the title of their 1999 book: *The Criminalisation of the State in Africa*. Criminalisation goes one step beyond the well-attested intermingling of the public and private domains and the attendant corruption. It is the use of state instruments by elites for criminal purposes. Examples include smuggling, committing large-scale fraud, plundering a country's natural resources (such as its tropical forests), trading in toxic substances, hiring private armies or teams of thugs, and collaborating with international criminal networks (in the drugs trade, for instance). Bayart, Ellis and Hibou argued that, while these criminal activities are in a sense a logical extension of corruption and the many other abuses of power that take place in African states, since the 1990s they can be regarded as a separate problem.

Members of the elite make use of the many young people who have no real prospects in the formal sector. The resulting networks are much like the Mafia, headed not by a government, but by leaders in their individual capacity. They make it possible for powerful individuals to amass great wealth. Some have linked this phenomenon to the historical relationship between illegal economic activity and primitive capitalist accumulation. In Europe, this kind of relationship existed in the sixteenth century, when maritime trade was controlled through force and privateering. That brings us to the link between war and state formation. Charles Tilly, in his 1985 article 'War making and state making as organised crime', drew an analogy between sixteenth-century Europe and the illegal economic activities, primitive capitalist accumulation, war-making and state formation observed in contemporary Africa.<sup>21</sup> He claimed that these developments would continue to be strongly encouraged by trends such as the globalisation of markets and, within Africa, the dominance of military power (or simply of brute force) over other social currents.

Tilly thus compared the criminalisation of state power in contemporary Africa to an early modern form of state development. In my view it could also be considered as a new, advanced phase in the degeneration of Africa's postcolonial states. The way power is wielded in African states stands in ever sharper contrast with contemporary notions of how states should operate. In some countries – Liberia, Sierra Leone, Congo, Somalia – the idea of a 'public interest' seems to have died out entirely at some point, raising the question of whether any sort of state remains. Was Charles Taylor the president of Liberia or the boss of a criminal organisation that happened to be based in the city of Monrovia on the West African coast?

As Africa's postcolonial states drifted further and further from Max Weber's ideal type of the modern state, the international community began to re-examine what it meant to be an effective, legitimate state in the period of globalisation. The World Bank, bombarded with accusations that its structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s and 1990s had played a part in undermining African states, attempted to redefine the modern state in its 1997 World Development Report, *The State in a Changing World*. The model it presented was not the leanest possible state; instead, the World Bank acknowledged that alongside protective activities such as law enforcement, the state has an important contribution to make to the development of society. This was strikingly close to what Weber had said about the ideal type of the modern state. Effectiveness, which Weber would probably have called rationality, was a fundamental issue. Of course, the World Bank could not express a preference for a particular kind of state, but it did clearly emphasise what have become known in international circles as good governance and good policies. The report eschewed academic reflection on theories of state formation, instead taking a practical approach, with examples of countries that had made impressive progress through reform, in fields ranging from power supply to education. The idea was that other countries should learn from these 'best practices'.

The World Bank was realistic enough to see that many developing countries (not just with Africa, but the developing world in general) did not have the capacity to operate effectively in every field. First, they had to set priorities, determining what activities they would and would not engage in. States had to identify their key tasks, taking development as their main objective. In the longer term, they had to expand their capacity by breathing new life into public institutions. Most importantly, public servants had to be motivated to do their jobs better and to show more flexibility. The report also proposed measures to combat corruption and the arbitrary exercise of power.

Another, entirely different approach to African states also deserves mention. Back in the 1960s the American anthropologist Robert F. Stevenson showed, in his book *Population and Political Systems in Tropical Africa*, that Africa's very low population density had shaped the process of state

formation. It was easy for individuals to escape the authority of local rulers simply by going elsewhere. Control over people therefore became more important for leaders than control over territory, which had been the main priority in European history. Controlling territory meant little in Africa, because the population could always move on. Mass migration has been quite common in Africa for this reason. The bonds between leaders and their people were crucial. The possibility of migration thus set a fairly low limit on the accumulation of power. The costs of controlling a population were higher in Africa than on other continents.

Others have followed in Stevenson's footsteps, most notably the American political scientist Jeffrey Herbst.<sup>22</sup> In *Power and State Control in Africa* (2000), Herbst began by focusing on the same fundamental issue of low population density. He identified traits that precolonial, colonial and postcolonial African states had in common. Building on Stevenson's observations, he noted that, since people had the option of going elsewhere, it was natural for states to engage in looting, conducting sudden raids on their own people, rather than practising ongoing exploitation that would probably drive people away. This effect was seen after independence in rural parts of many African countries, where farmers escaped the stranglehold of the state and took up subsistence farming in more remote areas. This in turn contributed to economic underperformance.

The postcolonial African leaders were less fortunate than their predecessors. The colonial authorities, thanks to their much greater power, had been able to control a very large territory with fairly arbitrary borders. The postcolonial leaders inherited these borders but did not revert to the precolonial system in which states expanded or contracted as their authority waxed or waned. Because the new, independent African elites were fairly weak, that would presumably have meant giving up some of their territory. After all, the new leaders had great difficulty making their authority felt in every corner of the former colonies. Still, they agreed in the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) that in the postcolonial era the colonial borders would be sacrosanct. Any attempt to change them would meet with their collective repudiation. This arrangement neutralised potential external threats to their territory.

Through this decision, the new African leaders eliminated territorial competition between their states and negated the collective right of peoples to self-determination, exploiting the artificial colonial borders to buttress their own authority. This was a departure from African state traditions; in precolonial times, states' borders had reflected the power of their rulers, but in the postcolonial era the link between borders and power was severed. Vast territories could house weak, fragmented societies with a single, albeit beleaguered, centre of state authority. From this perspective, the future of Africa's states looks quite uncertain. New factors have gradually come into play, such as decades of rapid population growth and urbanisation. They will undoubtedly influence the way states work, though it is not yet clear what their impact will be.

That brings us back to the relationship between leaders and the people; in other words, the domestic workings of African states. In 1999, Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz published a remarkable book on this topic, entitled *Africa Works: Disorder as a Political Instrument*. Chabal and Daloz went further than other theorists, such as Bayart in *The State in Africa*, contending not only that Africa's states had adapted to their surroundings, but also that they were more or less working satisfactorily. In their view, the idea that African states are malfunctioning, or failing, is the product of a non-African perspective. True, African states operate in a manner completely unlike what we are used to in the West, but by African standards they are in fact functioning properly. As far as the direction in which African states were headed, Chabal and Daloz argued that growing disorder was the likeliest outcome, likelier than development along Western lines in view of their characteristic mode of operation. It struck them as improbable that the informal type of political activity in African states would lead to the formation of institutions. What this tells us about Africa's chances of attaining better standards of living they did not say.

Even *Africa Works*, the most extreme example of an 'Africa-centred' approach, does not posit a stable situation or any kind of 'timeless Africa'. Africa is changing fast and in very many ways. However, all too often the changes taking place do not improve the performance of African states. In several cases, state performance has hit bottom; take Somalia, Liberia or Congo (Kinshasa). The question is: what general lessons does the collapse of these states teach us about state development in Africa? Are they exceptional cases or are the forces of disintegration at work in all African states?

Some do prophesy the demise of today's African states and, with them, any hope for promising developments on the continent in the foreseeable future. One prominent example is Robert Kaplan, who published an article called 'The coming anarchy' in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1994 and a more detailed book with the same title in 2000. Kaplan sketched certain trends in West Africa, which he explicitly said he had observed elsewhere on the continent as well, and even in other regions. As he sees it, weak states will be overcome by powerful social forces. Examples include the rapid degradation of the environment as a result of logging, which leads to mass migration into the cities, as well as the emergence of an ever larger group of young people without prospects and the total inadequacy of facilities in the rapidly swelling metropolises. He predicts that states will lose their grip on these megacities entirely. There will be nothing to hold back young people and their illegal, often violent attempts to provide for themselves. Lawlessness will become the norm. Despite continuing prosperity in the global North, the South, especially Africa, will sink into anarchy and the law of the jungle will prevail. The role of African states, in the form familiar to us since independence, will be played out.

### c) Topic of inquiry and rationale

Can anything be added to the array of literature on the state in Africa? More to the point, should anything be added? What is missing from our picture of the impact of Africa's states on development? Clearly, it is important to specify the exact characteristics of African states at the time of independence, the origins of those characteristics and what happened to them in the decades that followed. That last issue, in particular, has been underemphasised in scholarly work. We are fairly familiar with the starting point: the legacy of the colonial states, those foreign bodies lodged within an African reality. And we all recognise what is going on now: state failure, the inability of states to fulfil their basic responsibilities with any degree of effectiveness. But we need to take a closer look with the path Africa's states followed from there to here.

With that in mind, this historical study will be, above all, an attempt to discern the mechanism driving Africa's independent states towards failure. In a sense, this means filling in the details of the collision between the continent's colonial legacy and contemporary reality that Basil Davidson so clearly identified in *The Black Man's Burden*, but did not explore in historical detail. Other authors have also left aside the issue of changes over time, both within Africa and in the international environment, such as the transition from the Cold War to a more unipolar world in the first years of the twenty-first century. Because the period since the end of the Cold War has so far received the least attention, I will concentrate on that.

What approach will I take? First of all, I will place events in a broader historical context, a context that extends beyond Africa. If we limit our field of vision to events within Africa's geographical boundaries, then we lack any such context. Is Africa following its own path? If so, what path is that? Is Africa undergoing its own form of modernisation? If so, what is the essence of modernisation there? Such questions cannot be answered satisfactorily unless developments in Africa are compared with those elsewhere, in the light of a general theory.

That general framework will be provided by modernisation theory, which I believe is in need of rehabilitation. Since the 1960s, more and more countries in what used to be called the Third World have made great advances (especially in East and Southeast Asia), while others have lagged behind. We now have enough hard data to test scientifically whether modernisation theory is tenable. In the case of Africa, modernisation theory tells us that, if the continent remains stuck in the premodern stage, internal factors are probably to blame for its stagnation. Incidentally, those factors need not be economic. As Rostow put it, society should be seen as an organism, in which economic growth can result from noneconomic factors, such as political and social changes.<sup>23</sup>

At this point, we can shift to what in recent years has been identified as Africa's main problem: state failure. The state is by definition a society's central organisation. If it does not work properly, or at all, then it throws up obstacles to development and poses a threat to stability and social cohesion. If the failing state is not replaced by another, stronger one – an option that does not exist in Africa, at least not at this time – then chaos and anarchy are very likely to ensue. There have been plenty of instances of this chain of events since the end of the Cold War.

I will draw a link between the mechanism of state decline which we seek to identify and Africa's failure to achieve modernisation. It will be necessary to explicitly determine Africa's status within modernisation theory. That theory is often applied to the continent in an implicit, and perhaps flawed, way; constant references to African states as 'developing countries' show the powerful grip of modernisation theory on our thinking, but at the same time it must be pointed out that in most of Africa no development as understood in modernisation theory is in fact taking place. African countries are indeed poor countries, but they are not developing countries in any literal sense.

Meanwhile, the question arises of how 'modernisation' should be defined. The definitions supplied in the early literature – note 6 lists the foundational works – are variations on the theme of 'conditions conducive to economic growth'. In later years, however, 'modernisation' acquired quite wide-ranging connotations, creating a gap between later writing on modernisation and the term as originally used by Rostow and others. I will adhere to the original approach, in which the central issue was how a society can move from poverty to wealth. Tellingly, the final stage described in Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth* was 'the age of high mass consumption'. In that spirit, I will adopt the following definitions. By a poor society, I mean a society with low production and low consumption and by a rich society, I mean a society of high production and high consumption. By modernisation, I mean the process of societal transformation required to move from poverty to wealth, from low to high production and consumption.<sup>24</sup>

Societies that have not embarked on this process of change, of economic growth, are by definition premodern. The term 'premodern' suggests a static society to many people, but that image is inaccurate. The pace of change is probably faster in modernising societies than in premodern societies, but premodern societies have a dynamism of their own. The difference between premodern societies and modernising ones is not their level of dynamism, but the result of that dynamism. In modernising societies the result is a structural (as opposed to incidental) increase in production and consumption, while in a premodern society the economy remains at the same level. Changes in premodern societies have no significant impact on the general standard of living.

If we look at African history in these theoretical terms, we see a premodern society in which production and consumption slowly rose in the early decades of the 20th century. That upward trend was interrupted by the global recession of the 1930s, but it resumed after World War II, at which point Africa compared favourably to the other parties involved in the conflict (and, later on, in reconstruction). The 1950s and 1960s, in terms of the standard of living of the general population, were probably the best years Africa has ever had.<sup>25</sup> That was reflected in the states that emerged when the colonial period drew to a close. Around 1960, the first leaders of independent Africa inherited state institutions which, though they came from another continent and made use of mechanisms that were inextricably tied up with colonial oppression, did in fact function as an engine of economic and social progress. From the perspective of modernisation theory, those states could be described as modernising influences, and in that period almost everybody, both Africans and non-Africans, described them in those terms.

Looking back now, in the early years of the 21st century, we must conclude that those states did not live up to their early promise. A great deal has happened in Africa since independence, but production and consumption have not undergone a structural increase. In other words, Africa has not modernised. Whatever it was about African state structures that made them modernising influences is gone. Africa's states are now failing, and we must recognise that they no longer have the same potential to act as a force for progress. In short, our investigation of the mechanism of state failure in Africa will also be an investigation of how African states lost their ability to drive the process of modernisation. I will first look at the role of the elites; why didn't they show greater responsibility and more often act in the general interest? Then I will turn to the general populace and, finally, the ties between the elites and the populace.

Secondly, in addition to providing a broader historical context, I will emphasise the nexus of politics, economics, social relations and culture. There is nothing new about concentrating on political or socioeconomic relationships (perhaps drawing a distinction between social and economic relationships). They form the basis for historical work in the liberal and Marxist traditions, respectively. I will add the cultural dimension, the importance of which should not be underestimated in a study of the interaction between European state structures and African realities. Furthermore,

modernisation theory ascribes the failure to achieve modernisation to country-internal obstacles, which include cultural issues. It has been said that ‘culture is the mother, institutions are the children.’<sup>26</sup>

I define culture as ‘the values, attitudes, beliefs, orientations, and underlying assumptions prevalent among people in a society’.<sup>27</sup> Obviously, these factors impact on the way a country’s people live.<sup>28</sup> However, my chief interest is in the overlap between culture and the other domains mentioned above: political culture, economic culture and social culture. This approach has been underappreciated in previous work; in fact, it has been taboo. If one assumes that many (or all) roads could lead to prosperity, one tends to ignore countries’ domestic circumstances. Any country-internal situation, and therefore any culture, is assumed to have the potential to generate prosperity. In theory, no culture is better, or more capable of modernisation, than any other. Now that Africa’s development has fallen so far behind that of the rest of the world, there is good reason to question this assumption. In fact, some scholars have already stepped up to the plate. In 2000, Lawrence Harrison and Samuel Huntington coedited *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*, which argued in favour of a renewed emphasis on culture in the development debate and suggested that culture is connected to political and economic development. Another noteworthy book positing a strong relationship between culture and economic performance is Francis Fukuyama’s *Trust: the Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, published in 1995.

Of the domains to be examined in this study – politics, the economy, social relations and culture – culture is in no way subordinate to the others. I will not try to establish any order of importance or search for an ‘ultimate cause’. This means I will disappoint liberals, who consider political factors to be crucial, socialists, for whom social and economic conditions take primacy, and conservatives, who tend to see culture as the ultimate source of success or failure. My interest is in the interaction between the four domains; changes in any one of them have an impact on the other three. This interaction can lead to large-scale transformations and start the engine of modernisation.

That brings me to the third element of my approach: the interaction between the internal and the international. This study puts strong emphasis on processes internal to African states but would not be complete without consideration of international factors. The wave of modernisation that is sweeping the globe (now generally referred to as globalisation) has its origins in the West but spread to other regions some time ago. It has reached country after country, region after region, with widely varying results. To explain why development has not come to Africa, it is necessary to explain why international influences on the continent did not have a modernising effect. Why did the interaction between international and internal African forces not set some form of modernisation in motion, as it did in other parts of the world?

As the above overview of the literature has shown, many authors have looked at Africa’s state system within its international environment. They have often emphasised the dependence of African states on the international system. In its most extreme form, this dependence is referred to as negative sovereignty; African states are said not to be capable of ensuring their own stability or even survival. Another group, composed mainly of Africanists, has taken an entirely different perspective on the stability of the independent African states, focusing on the ties between the elite and the general population. They believe that internal, African factors, rather than the international environment, are primarily responsible for the continued functioning of the continent’s state system.

It is not especially useful to view the development of Africa’s independent states from just one perspective, whether international or internal. Most authors consider both perspectives, but fail to make it clear how they interact. Thus far, a systematic way of connecting the two has been lacking. In this study, I will make use of a model in which African state elites form the bridge between the two worlds: the continent’s internal dynamics and the international environment. The status of African elites and the role they play are crucial. When the colonial powers departed, fairly small groups of people inherited the state structures and everything that went with them. As the continent’s new leaders, they needed to forge bonds with the general population and to keep up relations with the international community. Modern African elites thus bring together diverse and often conflicting interests, traditions, objectives and ideals.<sup>29</sup>

The elites were like spiders in two webs at once: the internal network of their own African society and the external, international system. The questions that tie this study together are how they

managed to defend their position in both of these webs successfully (in so far as they were in fact successful) and what impact that had on Africa. I will examine a variety of situations using the same basic model (diagram 1, see next page), in which the elites are always central. This model assumes that the suspension of the elites between the general population and the outside world strongly influenced their countries' stability and political systems. Domestic changes probably affected foreign relations and vice versa. My intention is to shed more light on the interaction between the two worlds.

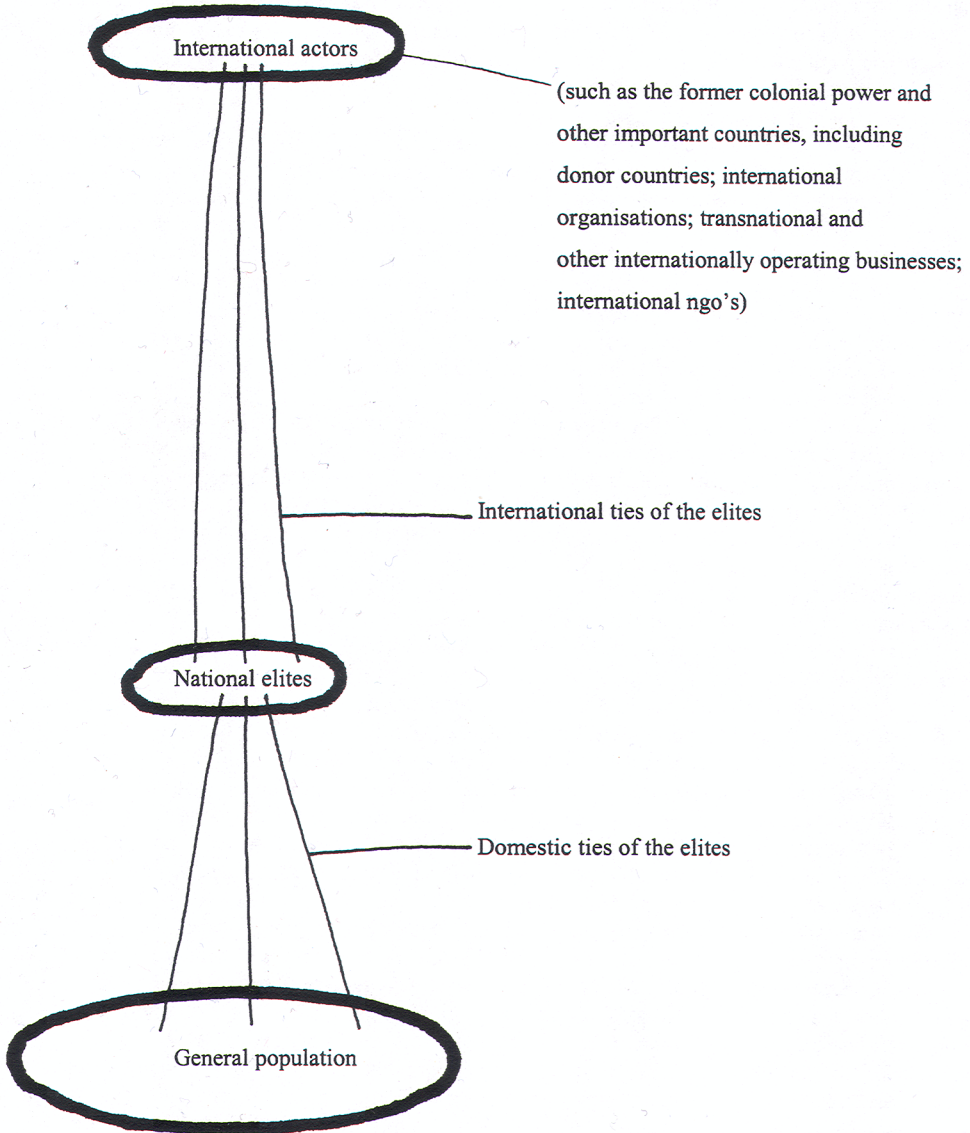
This approach makes it possible to examine all major facets of Africa's independent states as they relate to each other: internal and external factors, the political, cultural, economic and social domains, and the larger context of modernisation. This study will not be strictly limited to events during and after the Cold War but, where necessary, will also look back at the colonial period, since the predecessors of today's African states came into being then. Sometimes it will delve even further back in time, because the historical structure of Africa's societies and cultures bears on the performance of its contemporary states. While acknowledging the many differences between African societies, I will focus mainly on what they have in common.

Underlying this effort to explain the path Africa's states have taken since independence are several distinct groups of questions. The first concerns the fortunes and misfortunes of present-day African states. What are their problems, how did they arise and what impact do they have? What is the relationship between the elites and the general population? How does the state influence society and vice versa? In other words: what is the interaction between politics, economics, culture and social relations, and how does this interaction influence both the states and the societies? What are the consequences for the chances of development?

Another group of questions relates to the international context. What are Africa's relations with the outside world, and how have those relations changed over the years? How do external factors affect the continent?

In addition, there are questions which, though not always directly related to African states and their elites, are of great relevance to them. How are the problems of the state linked to Africa's failure to develop economically and socially? How has the size, composition and density of the population changed, and what does this mean for African societies? What cultural, religious and ideological changes have affected Africa's states and their development? How do violence, lawlessness and instability fit into the picture? Other questions that arise concern remedies for the shortcomings of the state. What efforts have been made to get African states to function more effectively? What was the main focus of these efforts and what results have they had? Finally, how does state development in Africa differ from that in other parts of the world, and what will happen to African states in the near future?

Diagram I: The model



#### d) Approach

The structure of the book is as follows. The first two chapters deal roughly with the period 1960-1990, from the beginnings of independence to the end of the Cold War. Although African countries were formally independent in this period, there was still considerable international influence on the African state system. The first chapter focuses on political topics and the second chapter on economic ones; however, this should not be seen as a sharp dividing line, for major trends almost always affect the state and the population politically, economically, culturally, socially and in other ways. Moreover, as indicated, developments in Africa's international environment are always outlined and assessed in parallel with those within Africa.

Most of the book is devoted to the period since the end of the Cold War – the 1990s and the opening years of the twenty-first century. Chapters 3-10 discuss major themes from this period and the links between them. Chapter 3 looks at the democratisation of African politics and chapter 4 examines the idea that, as a result of all the changes Africa has been through, it may be on the eve of a renaissance. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the collapse of state authority and the condition of the state system, covering such topics as civil and interstate war, the disintegration of the social fabric and outright genocide. Chapter 7, on globalisation, turns to the international context once more, with particular emphasis on economic developments. Chapters 8 and 9 discuss major changes affecting the population, including international aid. Finally, chapter 10 looks at the stability (or otherwise) of Africa's states and its entire state system.

If the states – or indeed the state system – that we have observed in Africa over the past century were to become so unstable as to disintegrate altogether (as has already happened in Somalia), what would fill the gap? Is Robert Kaplan right to predict chaos and anarchy or could Africa embark on a new phase of state development? Will the continent develop novel state institutions of its own or will the European legacy survive? My thoughts on these questions are summed up in the concluding chapter, which examines why Africa's states, originally a force for modernisation, are now in many cases in the process of failing. The book concludes with a forecast of what Africa and its states will look like in twenty years' time.

I have mentioned that the term 'Africa' does not generally refer to the entire continent. When African countries gained independence (around 1960) there was still a feeling of Pan-African solidarity, but by the end of the Cold War this sense of unity had largely evaporated. North Africa showed a growing tendency to turn north to Europe, or east to the Arab and Muslim world, and was less concerned with the areas south of the Sahara. By the end of the twentieth century, the subcontinent known as sub-Saharan Africa had emerged as a natural unit. The countries of this 'Black' Africa share a number of material and cultural features, alongside their shared disappointment at the lack of progress since independence. It is sub-Saharan Africa that is the subject of this book, and accordingly the term 'Africans' will be used here to mean the inhabitants of Africa south of the Sahara.

Sub-Saharan Africa is made up of more than forty countries. Of course, there are considerable political, economic, cultural, social and other differences between them. It is precisely this enormous variation that is said to characterise Africa, and so generalisations about the entire subcontinent often meet with scepticism. Nevertheless, guides to Africa also describe striking resemblances between peoples that are in other respects far removed from each other. According to the authoritative work *Africa*, edited by Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara: 'While a hallmark of African civilisations is their stunning cultural pluralism and tremendous diversity, there is also a basic traditional continuity that provides, simultaneously, a surprising degree of similarity between even widely separated societies.'<sup>30</sup>

Many of those similarities relate to state development, the topic of this study. I believe they provide a sufficient basis for generalisation. Unifying elements of this kind include the African physical environment, which has produced a low population density in almost all areas. This has in turn shaped Africa's political geography. In addition, African societies have quite similar (though, of course, not identical) demographic structures, degrees of technological development and levels of material welfare. Yet another common feature is their shared experience of colonialism and the post-colonial world. The methods of the colonial powers and of Africa's post-independence leaders have

left their mark on the organisation and operation of African states.<sup>31</sup> This leads me to believe that it is just as reasonable – if not more so – to speak of a general African mode of state development as it is to speak of European or Asian modes.

Where appropriate, differences between regions (and in some cases between countries) will be indicated topic by topic. Generally, I will refer to the following regions: West Africa (made up of some twenty countries, almost all of them former French or British colonies), Central Africa (the Democratic Republic of Congo and its neighbours), the Horn of Africa (the area around Ethiopia), East Africa (the smallest region, consisting of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) and Southern Africa (all the countries south of Central and East Africa). Maps of each region and of sub-Saharan Africa as a whole are included in the book. I occasionally refer to different groupings joined by a common history, such as the Anglophone or Francophone countries.

The islands off the coast of Africa will not be discussed here. With the exception of Madagascar, they are all very small and have had little or no impact on developments on the mainland. Most of them have mixed populations, for example of Asian, Arab, African and European descent. Almost nowhere is the African element politically or culturally dominant. I should mention that inclusion of the islands would have skewed in a positive sense the overall picture of Africa painted here. Some of the islands are tourist paradises, and so have fairly high standards of living.

Almost all the statistics in the book are from international organisations such as UN bodies, the World Bank and the IMF. With a few exceptions, the notes are limited to bibliographical references.

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary*, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Sandifort, *De cholerafabriek (The Cholera Factory)*, p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2003*, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Note the low ranking of most African countries on the Human Development Index, which is compiled annually by UNDP.

<sup>5</sup> Theroux, *Dark Star Safari*, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Rostow also edited *The Economics of Take-off into Sustained Growth*. Other major works on modernisation are Apter, *The Politics of Modernisation*; Levy, *Modernization and the Structure of Societies*; Black, *The Dynamics of Modernisation*; and Sinai, *In Search of the Modern World*. For a survey of modernisation theory, see Gendzier, *Managing Political Change*. Palmer and Colton, *A History of the Modern World* (many editions), is a general work of world history from the perspective of modernisation theory. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, is similar but focuses on the discrepancy between wealth and poverty.

<sup>7</sup> The leading representative of dependency theory was André Gunder Frank. His works include *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* and *On Capitalist Underdevelopment*.

<sup>8</sup> In other words: ‘whatever structure of power exists in a large, contiguous population’. For a brief discussion of definitions of the state, see Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990-1992*, pp. 1-2. Tilly, who conducted extensive research into states, the largest and most powerful organisations in the past five thousand years of human history, opted for an organisational definition: ‘coercion-wielding organisations that are distinct from households and kinship groups and exercise clear priority in some respects over all other organisations within substantial territories’.

<sup>9</sup> Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (3 vols.). (English translation: *Economy and Society. An outline of interpretive sociology*.)

<sup>10</sup> Jackson and Rosberg, *Personal Rule in Black Africa*, pp. 5 and 14.

<sup>11</sup> Huntington, *The Third Wave*.

<sup>12</sup> Bossema, *De trots van Afrika (The Pride of Africa)*, pp. 28-30.

<sup>13</sup> Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>14</sup> Jackson, *Quasi-states: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World*; Clapham, *Africa and the International System*.

<sup>15</sup> Clapham, *Africa and the International System*, p. 20.

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<sup>16</sup> One example of this approach is Fred Marte's doctoral thesis, *Political Cycles in International Relations: The Cold War and Africa, 1945-1990*.

<sup>17</sup> This idea has also been explored by the Dutch author Siep Stuurman in *Kapitalisme en staat (Capitalism and the State)*.

<sup>18</sup> Bayart, *L'État en Afrique* (English translation: *The State in Africa*), p. 296.

<sup>19</sup> Bayart, *L'État en Afrique* (English translation: *The State in Africa*), p. 317. The quote is taken from the English translation.

<sup>20</sup> See the description of Emperor Haile Selassie's leadership style in Kapuscinski, *The Emperor*.

<sup>21</sup> Tilly, 'War making and state making as organized crime', p. 186.

<sup>22</sup> Marina Ottaway's work on Ethiopia deserves mention as a detailed application of this form of political geography to an individual country.

<sup>23</sup> Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth*, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Chapter 9, the chapter on poverty in Africa, discusses various definitions of the phenomenon.

<sup>25</sup> Fieldhouse, *Black Africa 1945-1980: Economic Decolonization and Arrested Development*.

<sup>26</sup> Harrison and Huntington (eds), *Culture Matters*.

<sup>27</sup> This is the definition given in Harrison and Huntington (eds), *Culture Matters* (p. xv).

<sup>28</sup> This comes close to the influential, broad definition used by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz: culture as an entire way of life. Of course, countless other definitions can be found in scholarly writing. For a survey, see Breetvelt, *Dualisme en integratie (Dualism and Integration)*.

<sup>29</sup> On the question of how African elites coped with two entirely different cultures, see Breetvelt, *Dualisme en integratie (Dualism and Integration)*.

<sup>30</sup> Martin and O'Meara (eds), *Africa*, p. 78 (third edition).

<sup>31</sup> Herbst, *Power and State Control in Africa*, p. 4.