

permanent military organizations, enabling states to conquer weaker neighbors and expand their frontiers. Trade led to the introduction of new ideas, tastes, and diets that transformed the lifestyle of the people. Towns expanded into large trading centers while clientele states developed to provide trade goods such as ivory, gold, slaves, and agricultural produce in exchange for protection. Thus, a complex relationship of interdependence led to the rise of centralized states and empires such as Kongo, Luba, and Loango, all in present-day Congo.

Religion (Christianity, Islam, and African indigenous religion) influenced states to expand into empires and kingdoms. Christianity was believed to have been introduced by two shipwrecks, *Frumentius* and *Aedesius*, to the Aksumite empire of Ethiopia in the fourth century.²⁸ The conversion of the Aksumite king, Exana, to Christianity, made it a state religion, thus marrying Ethiopia to the civilizations of the Christian world. Literature in the Geez language and trade in foreign goods propelled Ethiopia into the limelight and supported the development of an indigenous version of Christianity, the Coptic Church. Islam entered the African continent through East Africa in the seventh century and rapidly spread. Through trade, Arab merchants settled in East Africa. Mixing with the indigenes and different cultures, the Swahili culture emerged. In central Africa, the development of African religious cults gained such prominence that they sanctioned political power. The Luba invented divine kingship headed by the *balopwe*, who was revered as the living representative of their dead ancestors and the custodian of their shrines.²⁹ The divine status of Luba kings warranted their veneration after their death in shrines set up in their respective villages. The Lunda learned this practice from the Luba. The Mbundu farmers who founded Ndongo (in Angola) developed a rain and fertility cult, which gradually transformed into the religious and political authority.³⁰ Headed by the custodian of the Lunga (spiritual objects) shrine, the priests' power over rain gave them the right to tax the community. The effect of religion and the political leaders it produced closed all avenues for the leadership to be challenged. This ensured the security and stability of the states, hence their growth.

Leadership was one other deciding factor that enabled states and empires to rise in Africa. Kalal Ilunga, a Luba, founded the Sanga state and instituted succession by primogeniture.³¹ Another Luba, Cibunda Ilunga, also founded Lunda by marrying the Lunda queen, Rweeji.³² He established a "perpetual" kingship, whereby the new king adopts the entire family of the deceased ruler thus severing all familial relations with his family. This guaranteed unity and loyalty to the state. The availability of strong leadership empowered the military, promoted trade, and expanded territories. These factors worked interdependently to forge villages and hamlets into states.

East and Central African states and empires also gradually declined. Political instability caused by wars, internal disturbances, and Portuguese interferences in the politics of the states and empires paved the way for the demise of some east and central African states. Axum degenerated after 700 CE due to religious upheavals between the Muslims in the eastern and northern parts of the kingdom, and the Christians in the south and west. Internecine warfare, succession disputes, and conflicts over trade caused political unrest among the Swahili states. Sofala and Kilwa clashed over gold and ivory from Great Zimbabwe, Pate and Lamu competed over the control of the trade in the Tana Delta, and Malindi and Mombasa struggled for the control of trade with Mijikenda in the hinterlands and agricultural products from Pemba.³³ Some states and empires expanded beyond their ability to govern. The successors of Kalonga Mzura of Malawi did not have the military power to control the vast empire; consequently, by 1763, the empire began to degenerate, creating conditions for tributary states to throw off the yoke of vassalage.³⁴

Foreign intervention from European countries like Portugal contributed in no small way to the collapse of East and Central African states and empires. Portuguese activities undermined the authority of African rulers. This prompted two reactions from the African states: either they entered into alliance with the invaders against their local enemies as Malindi did against Mombasa, or they accepted a tributary status with respect to Portugal. Kilwa and Zanzibar paid tribute in 1502 and 1503, respectively, but when they defaulted, the Portuguese attacked Mombasa and Kilwa in 1505, Brava in 1506, and Mombasa again in 1529.³⁵ The apogee of this unrest was the city-states' invitation of the Omani Arabs to come to their aid against the Portuguese. Through solidarity of Islam, the Omani Arabs responded to the call by ousting the Portuguese from the coast in 1729 and replacing European dominance with their own. This war cost human lives, destruction of property, and the disruption of trading activities. The Portuguese invaded the Kongo kingdom in 1665 and paved the way for its decline by installing their own puppet monarchs. Portugal interfered in the politics of Bunyoro, and the British succeeded in exiling Kabarega to the Seychelles Island in 1899.

The decline in trade crippled the east African city-states and empires in the interior. The Portuguese interference in commercial activities weakened the states by cutting off their sources of wealth. Beginning in the fifteenth century, the Portuguese disrupted trade in the Indian Ocean by issuing passports to all merchant ships for the purpose of keeping records and taxing them.³⁶ Some merchants refused to acquire the passports, because it meant paying taxes to the Portuguese, thereby reducing their profits. The Portuguese patrolled the Indian Ocean and Red Sea with their warships and attacked merchant ships that did not possess the passports. Consequently, the number of merchant ships that sailed to the east African coast declined. The prestige of the states dwindled.

The introduction of the trans-Atlantic slave trade contributed to the fall of states and empires in east and central Africa. The lucrative trade in human beings gradually replaced the trade in goods such as gold, ivory, cotton cloth, aromatics, and spices. As early as the 1700s, the central African states and empires felt the impact of this trade. In addition to warfare, the slave trade was responsible for reducing human populations and other trading activities. Insecurity and mass flight from towns adversely affected socio-economic and political developments. The introduction of guns and ammunition through the Indian and Atlantic Ocean trade to African states had a two-edge repercussion on Africans. While it assisted the expansion of towns and villages into states and empires, it also contributed to their collapse. The new weapons made warfare more gruesome, intensified slave raiding and increased the volume of the trade in humans. It is estimated that East Africa imported about one million guns, four million pounds of gunpowder, and millions of rounds of ammunition between 1885 and 1902.³⁷ The lack of peace and unity was an advantage to the Europeans when they began the colonization of Africa.

Climatic changes also contributed to the fall of east African states and empires. In the sixteenth century, East Africa suffered a devastating drought that dried up most of its rivers, desiccated those that remained, and fostered land erosion.³⁸ The rains, which normally fell from April–May to September, afforded East Africans the luxury of planting and harvesting crops twice a year. Moreover, the farming techniques of terracing and irrigating the Ethiopian mountains depended on this rainfall pattern. Thus, the change devastated agriculture; plants and animals equally suffered. Only teff could be grown annually. The failure of crops, the death of livestock, and the scarcity of water and food culminated in famine and disease that ravaged the towns and states of its people. The severity of this environmental disaster caused several villagers to abandon their homes and relocate close to rivers. One consequence of this was interstate and ethnic wars between the Swahili, Mijikenda, Somali and Oromo pastoralist groups over farmlands, pasture, and water resources.³⁹

THE RISE AND FALL OF STATES AND EMPIRES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Agriculture supported the development of states and empires in southern Africa. The San and Khoikhoi hunter-gatherers transformed into a nomadic group by acquiring cattle and sheep from their neighbors. From their livestock, the pastoralists had meat, milk, butter, and hides, which they exchanged with their agricultural neighbors for iron products, pottery, crops, wild game, fruits, berries, and honey. The animals became the basis of their wealth in a system where they could be “exchanged, invested and inherited,” and used to contract marriage alliances.⁴⁰ By 1000 CE, Bantu agro-pastoralists from the Great Lakes region migrated and settled in the savanna grassland south of the Limpopo. These were the Nguni, Shona, and Sotho-Tswana groups. They grew sorghum, millet, cowpeas, and beans and kept goats, sheep, cattle; fished, and hunted for meat. More importantly, they possessed iron, which helped in food production as well as warfare. Food sufficiency led to population explosion, forcing humans and livestock, especially, cattle, to compete for space, farmland, water resources, and pasture. This sparked off a series of southward and westward expansions bringing them into contact with the San and Khoikhoi. The expansion forced stronger communities to annex weaker ones into states. The availability of food helped the Mwana Mutapa, Mapungubwe, Great Zimbabwe, and Zulu empires to grow.

Trade played a crucial role in the rise of precolonial southern African states and empires. By 1000 CE, the Nguni, Shona, and Sotho-Tswana village clusters were trading with Central, West, and East African states in foodstuffs, ivory, iron, copper, gold, and salt. Mapungubwe traded in iron products and gold in the Indian Ocean trade and procured glass beads, porcelain, and cloth. This brought wealth and prestige to the kings and facilitated the kingdom's rise to prominence. The rise of Great Zimbabwe was facilitated by its strategic position close to the Sabi River and its trade links with the Swahili traders at the east African coast. This allowed the

ruler to control trade goods and routes and to impose taxes that swelled up the state's coffers and subsequently expanded into a viable political entity. The Mwana Mutapa kingdom (1450–1760) also thrived on revenues from the gold and ivory trade with the East African coastal states. Changa, the king of Guniuswa, traded with the Swahili coastal towns, exporting ivory and gold and importing Indian cotton goods, Persian and Chinese porcelain and pottery. A clientele relationship developed between the actual producers of the gold and ivory and the middlemen who forwarded them to the ports. Through a series of cordial relationships, vassal and tributary relations, and wars of conquests, towns grew wealthy and expanded into empires.

Wars of conquests helped states to emerge. Leaders embarked on wars of expansion to gain control of trade routes, trade goods, rivers, mineral resources, and land. In the fifteenth century, the Shona, led by Mutota of the Rozui clan, waged wars against their neighbors and incorporated them into an empire that bore his title, Mwana Mutapa, "lord of the plundered lands."⁴¹ When he died in 1450, Mutota's empire covered modern Zambia and Zimbabwe. Beginning in 1790, the threat of Dutch farmers forced Dingiswayo, a Mtetwa Nguni, to embark on a series of wars to unite the villages and tribes. Shaka the Zulu, who succeeded him, created the Zulu empire to achieve Nguni unification.

Military organization was one unique factor that aided some empires in South Africa to rise. One such development was the new military structure introduced by Shaka. He reorganized the Nguni military by regimenting the fighting forces into age-sects. His greatest innovation was the inventions of two new weapons, the *asagai* and the long iron-tipped spear. These weapons ensured that when the soldier threw the long spear, he always had the *asagai* to continue fighting. His military forces went through long arduous training sessions and lived in military camps away from civilian settlements. The fighting machines that Shaka created were fearless warriors. The success of their warfare was the expansion of the Nguni ethnic groups to form the Zulu empire by 1825.

The collapse of southern African states can be attributed to political volatility caused by foreign interference in local politics, succession disputes, and persistent fighting. The relationship between the African states and European countries, especially Portugal, was that of trade and friendly coexistence in return for annual tributes to the African sovereign states. However, beginning from the seventeenth century, this was invalidated when the Portuguese in the hinterland grew more independent of their commanders at Mombasa. They refused to pay their tribute in addition to constantly interfering in local politics. Kaporize exercised punitive action against them for failing to pay their tribute. In 1628–1629, the Portuguese responded by attacking the Mwana Mutapa with a force of thirty thousand Africans and two hundred and fifty Portuguese, deposing the king, and installing a stooge.⁴² They continually interfered in the new Mwana Mutapa's political affairs. The Portuguese pitched one state against another by supporting them in their local rivalries and providing them with guns and ammunition. In 1917, the Portuguese deposed the last of the Mwana Mutapas, Chioko, and colonized them.

Succession disputes contributed to the decline of the Mwana Mutapa kingdom. After the death of Matope, there were many contesters to the throne. The kingdom disintegrated into fragments. This instability created the opportunity for some powerful vassal rulers like Changa and Togwa, who had grown rich from trade, to seize their independence. In 1490, the kingdom split into two, Mwana Mutapa in the north and Great Zimbabwe in the south. The Zwangendeba Nguni, fleeing from the Zulu wars of conquest, plundered Great Zimbabwe in the 1800s, killing many and instilling such terror in the people that many deserted their towns. This marked the demise of Great Zimbabwe. The Zulu empire suffered a series of defeats, British interference, and disintegration, all culminating in its demise.

Lack of unity and collaboration among states is the underlying factor that prevented them from fighting off foreign interferences. The Mwana Mutapa seized the opportunity created by the Portuguese attacks on their neighbors to cripple the Urozui (Karanga) when the latter were occupied with a war with the Portuguese in the east. The Mwana Mutapa attacked the Urozui in the west as opposed to allying with them to fight the Portuguese.

The disruption of trade weakened the economies of the states and empires. The Portuguese sought to take over the commercial activities in the interior. To do this successfully, they sought the permission of the rulers to build trading stations at Tete, Sena, Dambarare, Masapa, Luanze, and Bokoto. These trade posts enabled the Portuguese to directly deal with the clientele, thus breaking the cartel of the Mwana Mutapa rulers. Not only was the rulers' source of wealth cut, but their authority was also undermined. Furthermore, the Portuguese

wars with the Mwana Mutapa crippled trade because several people died in the expedition and most survivors fled. The states therefore declined and remained at the mercy of the European powers.

The introduction of the slave trade and its impact on societies weakened the states and kingdoms in southern Africa. The trade depopulated states like Ndongo, Matamba, Mbundu, Ovimbundu, and Imbangala. By the close of the nineteenth century, the once-vibrant empires and kingdoms of southern Africa were nothing but pale shadows of their former selves. Basil Davidson sums up Portuguese activities in Africa as:

... Arriving in the name of Christian civilization, the Portuguese had brought misery and ruin, whether by their ceaseless claim, demand for captives or by their many wars of conquest. Disunited, with the strong among them preying on the weak, African states lost their independence. And, with it, much of the vigor of their own civilization.⁴³

THE RISE AND FALL OF STATES IN WEST AFRICA

Trade was one of the prominent factors that conditioned the flourishing of states and empires in precolonial West Africa. The most important trade that linked West Africa with other parts of the continent was the Trans-Saharan trade, which began in 1000 BCE. The introduction of camel in the fourth century BCE by Arabs into the western Sudan increased the volume of the trade. The ancient empires of Ghana, Mali, Songhay, the Hausa states, Kanem-Bornu, Asante, Oyo, and Dahomey were all strategically positioned to engage in trade. They all benefited from playing the intermediary role in the trade between the North Africans, the Indian Ocean, and the Atlantic Ocean. These empires at different times controlled the trade routes that carried gold from south of the Sahara and salt from the northern part of the Sahara.⁴⁴

States strove to control territories with resources for trade. Ancient Ghana conquered the copper mines at Taghaza and Mali and expanded its influence to the gold and salt mines and copper mines at Takedda. Rulers imposed taxes on the goods that passed through their territories. For instance, “each donkey-load of salt” that entered ancient Ghana attracted a tax of a gold dinar while a tax of two gold dinars was levied on “each donkey-load of salt” that left the empire.⁴⁵ The Sudanese empires exported dried fruits, leather tassels, wheat, sheep, cattle, honey, and imported red and blue blouses, gum Arabic, cowries, shells, copper, ivory, and pearls. The wealth gained afforded the rulers the funds to purchase lavish goods such as guns, ammunition and horses and to keep elaborate courts. Villages and small towns expanded their territories, grew powerful, established schools, specialized in arts and crafts, and gradually emerged into states and empires.

The advent of Europeans added another impetus to the rise of states in the forest regions. The trans-Atlantic trade assisted previously small villages to grow rich and powerful as well as expand their frontiers into towns and cities. In the Niger Delta region of modern Nigeria, rivers such the Niger, Benue, and Cross, with natural harbors for ships to anchor and offload merchandise, was the center of trade between the Europeans (British, Portuguese, Dutch, and French) and the indigenes. In the sixteenth century, coastal communities like the Igbo, Edo, Jekri, Ibibio, and Efik expanded their villages into states due to the middlemen position they played in the trade between the hinterland and the Europeans. The Asante of modern Ghana exported kolanuts, gold, elephant tusks, animal skins, and other forest products to the Sudan through the trans-Saharan trade, and gold and slaves to the Atlantic coast. In addition, they played the middlemen for goods entering Asante from the Atlantic coast and leaving to the Sudan. In 1701, the Asante conquered Denkyira to gain direct access to the trade at the coast with the Europeans. The Atlantic trade was also the main premise on which the Asante fought the coastal towns of the Assin and Fante for direct access to European goods, especially guns and ammunition.⁴⁶ Trade and economic activities brought enormous wealth thus empowering rulers for expansion.

Leadership influenced the rise of states in precolonial West Africa. A recognized leader whose authority was obeyed by all the sections of the society was necessary for governance, trade, peace, and safety of people and their properties. Sundiata Keita (a Mandingo warrior) of ancient Mali provided good leadership and led his warriors to expand their territory in 1230. Under his leadership, his soldiers were employed in farms to produce food, but it could also be inferred that it was to occupy the soldiers. The Yoruba prince, Ewuare (1450–1480), united the Benin villages and towns and instituted succession by primogeniture.⁴⁷ In Kano, the Saifawa dynasty united a number of agro-pastoralist autocratic states into the Kano state.⁴⁸ The Hausa States, originally a number of enclosed villages known as *Birni*, came together under the leadership of the *Sarki*. Osei Tutu and his

legendary priest, Okomfo Anokye, united the seven lineage-villages of the Asante into the Asante union with the Oyoko clan as the royal lineage. These leaders embarked on wars of expansion and successfully evolved into formidable empires and kingdoms.

Food production is another element in the evolution of states in West Africa. The foundations of the economy and political development of the Sudanese states were farming and animal rearing. The savanna climates of the Sudan supported pastoralists and farmers. The Niger River and Lake Chad facilitated agriculture. Audaghost cultivated dates, wheat, millet, vines, and gourds, and kept cattle, pigs, and sheep because the area had water in abundance. The Songhay Empire constituted three groups of people: Gow (hunters), Sorko (fishermen), and Mossi (farmers). These socioeconomic groups ensured food sufficiency. The Oyo cultivated yams, and fished to supplement their diet. The abundance of food helped the Oyo communities to specialize in brass work, iron-smelting, terracotta, and cloth weaving. The Asante of Ghana, living in the forest zone of West Africa that is watered by Lake Bosomtwi, the Pra and Ofin rivers, were mainly farmers who supplemented their food with fishing and hunting. Through the Atlantic trade, the Portuguese introduced new food crops (cassava, cocoyam, maize) from the New World. These new crops were most suitable to the forest soil and changed the diets of the people. Fulani nomads in the Senegal valley provided milk, meat, and manure to refertilize the land of their farming neighbors in the symbiotic relationship that existed between them. The availability of food led to population explosion, competition for land and water, movement of people, and the founding of towns. Leadership became a necessity, society begun to be stratified, and specialization in arts, crafts, and metalworking flourished to make empires like Mali, Songhay, and Asante.

Religion was an important factor in the rise of states in West Africa. African traditional religion and Islam were the two religions that occasioned the rise of states. The spiritual and political head of the Oni of Ife, for instance, united the Oyo villages in the seventeenth century. The cult of Oduduwa, a hero god, sanctioned the office of the Oni and other state rulers, thereby creating a binding relationship between states, and religion.⁴⁹ In Asante, Okomfo Anokye, a legendary priest, united the seven Asante towns into a union by conjuring the golden stool from the sky. The golden stool, according to the legend, embodied the souls of all the Asante. This engendered great loyalty to the stool and monarch that was unprecedented in the history of the people.

Islamic revivalism in the eighteenth century created states and empires in West Africa. In the eighteenth century, the Islamized Fulani in Futa Jallon waged a series of holy wars for some fifty years at the end of which they established a theocratic state led by the Imam with the political title of Almamy.⁵⁰ The Futa Toro and Bondou regions in the Senegal Valley saw the rise of similar theocratic states in the eighteenth century. The Sokoto empire was the creation of Uthman dan Fodio, a Muslim Fulani Torodbe of the Maliki school from Futa Toro, who waged jihads to spread and reform Islam beginning in 1804. The jihads paved the way for the extensive spread of Islam in West Africa, and encouraged Arab traders and missionaries to travel into the interior and find their way into the courts of the Asante empire, Hausaland, and other states as diplomats, clerics, accountants, spiritual leaders, and the founders of Islamic schools.

Incessant wars also conditioned the rise of states and kingdoms. In the fourteenth century, the Bulala forced the Kanem to flee their homes. The Kanem founded the Bornu empire by subduing the So, who inhabited east of Lake Chad where they fled.

One of the causes of the collapse of the precolonial states in West Africa was political instability caused by succession disputes, interstate rivalries, and European interference. Ancient Mali suffered from this canker after the reign of Mansa Musa, who is famous for his pilgrimage to Mecca. Mansa Maghan, the successor of Mansa Musa, could not keep a firm hold on his kingdom, thus encouraging their vassals and neighbors to invade or secede. The Fulbe, the Mossi and Tuareg in Upper Senegal, resiliently forayed Malian territory. The reign of Mansa Suleyman offered a strong governmental interlude for Mali, but after his death in 1359, the empire of Mali was set on a degeneration trail beginning with the escape of two Songhay princes in 1363.⁵¹ The Songhai Empire also went through a series of ineffective rulers after the death of Askia Mohammed in 1538. When the empire weakened, secession from vassal states became a common occurrence. Kanem Bornu's sovereign power collided with the rising power of the Hausa states over the control of trade routes. These political rivalries disrupted economic activities. The Sokoto caliphate became so big that it could not be administered adequately; consequently, it suffered systemic revolts from their subjects. All these weakened the states and kingdoms.

Invasion by foreign forces and wars between the precolonial African states also contributed, and in some cases, caused the demise of the states and empires. Religion, economic, and political reasons were the forces