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# From Incidental Leaders to Paramount Chiefs: The Evolution of Socio-Political Organization<sup>1</sup>

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The article consists of three parts. In Section 1 the definitions of some key terms in political anthropology (chief, chiefdom, and early state) are presented and argued on the basis of recent literature. It is proposed to disconnect the terms 'chief' and 'chiefdom'. In Section 2 an overview of the evolution of socio-political organization is attempted. Evolution is a matter of structural change. Once the consequences of a certain change manifest themselves in many or all aspects of an institution, an evolutionary change has taken place. The direction of evolution is open. It is assumed that major evolutionary changes of society only started some ten thousand years ago, with the beginning of the Holocene. Then the climate became milder and it became possible to live together in larger, more permanent groups and to start food production. Section 3 discusses the theoretical considerations which form the underlying basis of evolutionary change. To this end I use the Complex Interaction Model, developed in earlier publications.*

## **1. DEFINITIONS**

A definition is never objective; its selection is always a strategic matter. Sometimes one needs a wide definition in order to bring as many cases as possible under its terms, and another time one may need a narrow definition in order to exclude a number of cases. The selection, or the formulation of a definition, thus, is a matter of scholarly preference (or prejudice) of the author. His or her schol-

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arly background plays a decisive role in the choice of the definition and thus should be known. In my case at least two theoretical approaches do play a role in their formulation. In the first place I am a comparativist. This means that my research is based upon the comparison of a number of cases, found in societies with different geographical backgrounds. My research is aimed at finding (and explaining) similarities and/or differences. Therefore, I formulate my definitions wide in order to make them applicable to as many cases as possible.<sup>2</sup> My second interest concerns evolutionism. In several publications I have laid down what type of evolutionism I adhere to. In my opinion evolution is a matter of structural change (Claessen 2000a: 2).<sup>3</sup> This means that once the consequences of a certain change manifest themselves in many or all aspects of an institution or organization, an evolutionary change has taken place. The direction of evolution is open. The developments can proceed in the direction of growing complexity (the traditional view), but also in the direction of decline, or collapse.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, evolution is a matter of stages *and* processes; both aspects being necessary to obtain a correct idea of the phenomenon and its eventual changes (Carneiro 2000).

After these preliminary remarks, I will now bring together data on which to build a definition of the political leader, the chief,<sup>5</sup> the first of the three concepts that will be defined in this article.

### **1.1. Chief**

Chiefs are socio-political leaders of a number of people. Their number is not quantified, though Earle (1997: 14; 2011: 28) thinks in terms of thousands. To distinguish a chief from other types of socio-political leaders, some additional characteristics are needed. In the first place a chief is an ascribed leader; he occupies a hereditary position (Service 1971: 146–147; Claessen 2011). His position represents, according to Kurtz (2001: 54; 2004), a *political office*, which means that the leader can transfer his authority and power without objections from the political community to his heir. Chiefship is usually the prerogative of a certain family. When a chief dies, his son (or sometimes a brother or cousin) will succeed him. In this way he is different from a big man or a president. These are leaders with a so-called achieved position. They are elected or appointed, on the basis of some form of accomplishment they

have delivered to get into that place. However, also chiefs cannot do without achievement; also they have to demonstrate their ability to rule their people and to fulfill the expectations his people have of him (Claessen 2011). A very powerful chief is sometimes designated a *paramount* chief. It is not quite possible to distinguish between a chief and a king; both being hereditary socio-political leaders. Perhaps, one should look for differences in the degree of power, but as the differences between a weak king and a strong chief are negligible, this offers no solution (*cf.* Claessen 2011: 6; Carneiro 1981: 47; Skalník 2004: 79–81). On the other hand, kings are found at the head of a state (an early state), and chiefs are not.

A second major characteristic of chiefs is that they in some way or another are considered to be sacred. It is believed that they have descended (usually in a rather unclear way) from gods, spirits or mythical forefathers and because of that are seen as a source of special powers, the most important of which is their alleged capacity to positively influence the fertility of women, cattle, and land. This ideology gives a strong legitimation to a chief's leadership.

There are, however, considerable variations in this ideological aspect. So it is believed in great parts of Africa south of the Sahara that long ago a man opened the earth for agricultural purposes. In doing so he made contact with the earth spirit. After some negotiation it was agreed that the man (and his descendants) in return for certain sacrifices would gain access to the fertility possessed by this earth spirit (Kopytoff 1999: 90–91; Claessen 2000b: 146–147). Other groups who settled into the area would have to come to an agreement with this new bearer of fertility. Neither subjection, nor war would play a role then, the newcomers just had to recognize the leader if they wanted to partake in his access to fertility. In the words of Kopytoff, 'the founding lineage-head finds himself to be a chief by simply remaining at the top of a pyramid that grows at the bottom' (Kopytoff 1999: 91). This custom is still found to play a role in several parts of Africa (recently: Zuiderwijk 1998: 92; Pels 2004). As the successor to the chief is not yet sacred, he has to be made so by extensive rituals (Muller 1980, 1996).

In Polynesia it was (formerly) held that the chiefly line had connections with a mythical forefather, who was related to the gods or spirits. Via an unbroken line of primogeniture this gave the chief

a direct connection with the first quasi-human deities. This connection was for the junior descent lines only indirect (see about Polynesian chiefship: Thomas 1990: 28–33). The access of ordinary people to the main deities was mediated by the chiefs. Food production depended upon certain rituals on behalf of the ancestor gods and these rituals were monopolized by the chief. Since the survival and regeneration of the group as a whole depended upon the work of the chief there was a sense that everybody was indebted to him – and, indeed, people paid heavily in labor, food, goods, and daughters.

It will be clear that this ideology gave a solid legitimation to the position of the chief, for it explained and justified the existing division of power. The system worked satisfactorily – as long as the chief fulfilled *his* part of the ‘deal’ by procuring fertility and well-being; this was a matter of reciprocity. Where this was not (or no longer) the case, the chief could be disposed as happened for example in Polynesia on the Marquesas Islands and Easter Island (Claessen and van Bakel 2006: 239, 248).<sup>6</sup> Sacred African chiefs and kings waited a different fate. When they grew old and gray, their subjects were afraid that they no longer would be able to fulfill the required rituals that guaranteed fertility. To prevent this disaster, the ruler had to die. He then was dutifully murdered by his wives or servants, or committed suicide. And a new and vigorous ruler, selected from his sons, would come in his place and would be made sacral with extensive rituals (Muller 1981; Claessen 2000b: 178–186).

In all cases chiefs collected masses of food and goods, which later were handed out again. Force may have played a role in the collection, but the legitimate position of the chief made enforcement usually unnecessary. The handing out of the goods should not qualify as redistribution, however, as most of the goods were used to support the chiefly hierarchy, or to finance the political activities of the ruling elite (Kirch 1984: 39). Part of the income of the chief was used for the construction of great works: a sacred place such as Stonehenge (Bradley 1991), the temples on the island of Gozo (Renfrew 1973), the statues of Easter Island (van Tilburg 1994), the towns of the Mississippi Valley (Steponaitis 1991), the pyramids of the Maya (Schele and Freidel 1990), the monumental grave mounds and temples in Tonga and Hawai’i (Kirch 1990).

Many anthropologists (and archaeologists) are convinced that chiefdoms are characterized by frequent wars (Carneiro 1981, 2000; Earle 1997; Wood 1994; Spencer 2000). The literature abounds with names of fighting and conquering chiefs and kings and there is no reason to deny their existence. Yet, there is also reason to conceive of chiefdoms as relatively peaceful organizations. This is explained by the concept 'State of Warre'. This concept (developed by the seventeenth century philosopher Hobbes) holds that in these societies no regulating force existed to curb eventual fights, and keep aggressive persons in check (as explained by Sahlins 1968a: 6–10). To protect themselves to such dangers, political leaders took care to make their settlements as impregnable as possible by building walls, moats, palisades, and ditches. This system worked relatively well as testified by Earle (1997) with regard to the Mantaro, or by Van Bakel (1989) with regard to the fortresses of Rapa. The defense works did not prevent the occurrence of fights and raids, but kept the inhabitants relatively safe.

After having summarized in the above the characteristics of chiefs as frequently mentioned in anthropological literature, it is possible now to formulate as definition:

*Chiefs are hereditary socio-political leaders occupying political offices, having the alleged capacity to influence positively fertility, the possibility to amass goods and food with which to support the chiefly hierarchy, and erect great works, and the power to eventually fight wars of defense or conquest.*

## **1.2. Chiefdom**

According to Carneiro (1981, 2000), the concept of chiefdom was introduced into anthropology (and archaeology) by Kalervo Oberg, who in 1950 'proposed a typology of cultural forms which focused on contrasting political structures' (Carneiro 2000: 54). Of these forms the concept of chiefdom soon became frequently used. As the most important characteristic Oberg stated that chiefdoms were multi-village structures, ruled by a paramount chief under whose control are districts and villages, ruled by subordinate chiefs (Carneiro 2000: 54). This political structure thus is characterized by the existence of two administrative levels: the local level, which comprises a number of villages, sub-tribes, or family groups, each under the rule of a lower ranked chief, and the central level where the paramount chief resides.

‘Chief’ and ‘chiefdom’, however, have different connotations. The term ‘chief’ is connected with a specific socio-political status and the term ‘chiefdom’ is connected with a specific type of political structure (organization). A chief is the leader of people and has an ascribed status. He or she can be found on different levels of political organization. They can be village heads, but also leaders of complex political structures. The term chiefdom is part of a system of political structures, based upon the number of tiers of the political administration. The simplest system consists of the local community only, characterized by one administrative level, that of the village chief or headman. The next system of organization is characterized by two levels of administration and is called *chiefdom*. Here a number of local communities are united under one leader, the (paramount) chief (Claessen and van de Velde 1992: 123; Kurtz 2001: 50, 168, note 4; Service 1971, 1975). The early state forms the third system, with at least three tiers of administration (Claessen and Skalnik 1978: 579).

Many cases are known of two-tier political organizations. Hagesteijn (1989: 14) describes in detail the early Thai *muang* which consisted of a central village where the (paramount) chief resided, and a number of connected villages subordinated to the center. These *muang* were quite stable political units, more so than the often short-lived efforts of ambitious rulers to create early states in the region. The two-tier towns in the Mississippi Valley have already been referred to above. Drennan, Hanks, and Peterson (2011) mention the Chalcolithic chiefdoms of the Tripol'ye, who lived in the Eurasian Steppe. Thomas (1990) points to the chiefdoms of the Marquesas Islands of Polynesia. Thus, it does not seem too far fetched to assume that a chiefdom is ruled by a chief, and a chief rules a chiefdom. However, the ethnographical record teaches differently. Among the Northwest Coast Indians of the USA and Canada there are found a number of local communities of which Drucker (1983: 87) states that ‘The basic and only political unit in Native Northwest Coast culture was the local group’. In each of these local communities a number of chiefs were found (*Ibid.*: 88). Those chiefs were hereditary socio-political leaders and thus fall under the definition of ‘chief’ developed above. Between the chiefs in a village, but also between the villages, strong feelings of competition existed (De Laguna 1983: 77). Blackman (1990: 249) in-

forms us that among the Haida several lineages, each with its own hereditary chief, lived in the same village. Clearly these multi-chief local groups cannot be classified as chiefdoms. Carneiro states with regard to the Kwakiutl that the many chiefs were ranked according to their ceremonial status, and that no one chief, not even that of the highest ranking village, could give orders to the residents of any other village than his own. He concludes rightly that 'For all their cultural elaboration, then, the tribes of the Northwest Coast never attained the level of chiefdoms' (Carneiro 2000: 55).

The connection chief-chiefdom, thus, does not always hold. Moreover, there are also found two-tier political organizations (thus, chiefdoms), ruled by leaders who rather qualify as big men. Examples of such structures are given by Vansina (1991: 96–105; 1999: 166ff.; Claessen 2000b: 141–142) for the Congo region in Central Africa. The village leaders as well as the 'district' leaders were a kind of big men, who built their positions themselves. They were achieved leaders, who tried to bind as many young men to their villages as possible. The whole structure was based upon a fiction of bilateral family ties. The leader of a group of families was called the 'father'; the heads of the families were his 'sons'. The village was a collection of families under the leadership of the big man of the most prominent family. A number of villages coalesced to form a 'district' under the leadership of the 'eldest brother': in fact, the strongest of the village heads (Vansina 1991: 137–139).

The term 'chief' thus should be reserved for the hereditary socio-political leaders as defined in the previous section, and the term 'chiefdom' for two-tier political organizations only. The concepts of chief and chiefdom should be disconnected (Claessen and van de Velde 1992).

*Chiefdoms are two-tier sociopolitical organizations (structures) consisting of a number of local communities (villages, hamlets, and families) with their own leaders, which are subordinated to the leader of the political center.*

### **1.3. The Early State**

The characteristics of the *early state* as presented here are based upon the summary in Claessen and Skalník (1978: 637–639).

The early state is an independent socio-political organization with a bounded territory and a center of government.<sup>7</sup> Its economy

is characterized by agriculture (and in some cases by pastoralism or a mixed economy), supplemented by trade and a market system, and the presence of full-time specialists. The surplus produced in agriculture, together with the taxes levied on trade and markets form an important source of income for the government, represented by full-time functionaries exempted from material production.<sup>8</sup>

The population is divided into at least two strata: an upper stratum comprising the ruler, his relatives and the aristocracy, and a lower stratum including, among others, smallholders and tenants living in small communities. The actual production of food is limited to only certain social groups, and the access to material resources is unequal. The upper stratum usually has tribute or taxation as its main source of income. Tax, however, is paid by all social categories, though varying from one category to another in quantity and quality.

The position of the ruler is based upon a mythical charter and a genealogy which connects him with the supernatural forces (gods, spirits, or forefathers). He is supposed to procure fertility of women, cattle, and land. He is also considered as a benevolent figure, namely as a source of gifts, remunerations, and offerings. He is surrounded by a court as well as a bodyguard. The ideology of the early state appears to be based upon the concept of reciprocity: all categories of subjects provide the ruler with goods and services (tribute and tax), while the ruler, for his part, is responsible for his subjects' protection, law and order, and the bestowal of benevolence. The benevolence, thus, does not appear to be balanced: the flow of goods and labor is reciprocated mostly on the ideological level, and in reality, a form of redistributive exploitation prevails. The sacred character of the ruler's position is the most important constituent of his leadership. As a result, he is the very pivot of the early state. The priesthood supports the state ideology. The aristocracy comprises members of the ruler's family, clan or lineage heads, and the incumbents of high offices. Private ownership of land seems rare, and does not seem to be of importance for the attainment of high social status in the early state.<sup>9</sup> Social inequality seems to be based first and foremost upon birth, with the relative distance from the ruler's lineage constituting the dividing principle. No direct kinship relations exist between the ruler and the common people.<sup>10</sup>



For the government of the early state a system of delegation of tasks is evolved. There are numerous functionaries fulfilling tasks in the governmental apparatus. 'General functionaries' are found especially on the regional and local levels, while 'specialists' are found rather more on the national level.<sup>11</sup> Though, ideally, only the ruler has the right to issue laws and decrees, many other people exercise a formal or informal influence upon affairs and developments. The government is oriented towards centralization and the establishment of centralized power, which is frequently characterized by the pursuit of a 'balance of power' policy and competition for important offices. The centripetal forces are seen to prevail over tendencies towards fission and separation. The central government's influence is decisive in all spheres of life. It seems, however, that only the ruler and the ruling groups are taking an interest in the state as such. For the commoners the state is far too remote to have much significance beyond the occasional call for taxation.

On the basis of the foregoing it is now possible to define the early state.

*The early state is a three-tier [supraregional (or national), regional and local level] centralized socio-political organization for the regulation of social relations in a complex, stratified society, divided into at least two basic strata, or emergent social classes – the rulers and the ruled – whose relations are characterized by political dominance of the former and the obligation to pay taxes of the latter, legitimized by a common ideology of which reciprocity is the basic principle (Claessen 2010: 16; adapted from Claessen and Skalnik 1978).*

The term 'common ideology' does not mean that the upper and lower stratum shared an identical ideology; only that there existed a sufficient overlap in ideas between the two to make mutual understanding possible. The reciprocal relation was asymmetrical. The commoners paid in goods and services, the ruler paid back in protection, law, order, fertility; an exchange of goods for Good.

## **2. EVOLUTION OF SOCIO-POLITICAL FORMS**

It is not possible in the course of this article to present a thorough analysis of evolution and evolutionism, and neither will it be possible to describe in detail the evolution of all kinds of socio-political organizations. It will suffice here to repeat that I consider

evolution as *structural change*: a change that affects in the course of time all or most aspects of a culture (a political structure, a society). This explains why evolutionary changes are often slow and sometimes hardly noticeable. Only after a longer period of time it can be established that a structural change has taken place (Claessen and Skalník 1978: 621–622; Claessen 2010: 17). There is one *caveat*. In the following sections I will refer to specific societies and developments that will be considered as evolutionary. An evolutionary development will be constructed with the help of these examples (illustrations). To what extent can these cases be considered as representative for evolution in general? There is no definite answer to this question. As, however, the evolutionary changes described did occur in different societies on different continents, they suggest a more general pattern. How many cases are needed for a proof? I refer here again to the considerations in Section 1 with regard to comparativism, where I pointed to the views of Nadel on this problem (see Note 2).

### **2.1. Beginnings**

It can be safely assumed that major evolutionary changes of society took place some ten thousand years ago. Till then life on earth was for long periods determined by cold and ice. Only small groups of humans lived together and survived by their skills as hunters and gatherers. This is not to say that their life was always sad and poor. Already in 1968, Sahlins showed that some of these groups could be characterized as ‘the first affluent societies’ (Sahlins 1968b: 85–89; see also Verhart and Groenendijk 2005). Such small groups, bands, varied in size between twenty-five and fifty people (Lee and DeVore 1968: 11, 245–248). As they expanded in size, the groups tended to split up, because the availability of food was insufficient. Another reason might have been the powerlessness of such egalitarian groups to deal with conflicts. The leaders did not have enough power either to bridge differences or to correct transgression of the rules.<sup>12</sup> Apart from these matters, there was not so much which made leadership essential. He (or she) was in fact an incidental leader; only when his (her) leadership was necessary, the leader could act (Nooter 1977). The members of the band were well able to fulfill their tasks without a leader having to play any part in this. The majority of the bands led a nomadic life, following the roaming herds

of animals. In some cases, however, bands founded more permanent settlements, such as in the caves and abris (overhanging rocks) in the Dordogne/Vézère region of France. Elsewhere, in the Russian steppes, shelters were built with the help of mammoth bones. The number of people in bands was too small to ensure their biological continuation; generally there were no marriage partners available within the group. Relations permitting the necessary marriage partners to be recruited had to be established and maintained with other small groups of hunters and gatherers, for example by the exchange of sisters or by agreements to return a marriage partner at a given time. Such networks possibly already played a role among the Neanderthals, and most certainly among the Cro-Magnons. In a sense these networks were a kind of tribes. Indeed, Tylor's adage that early man had the choice either 'to be married out or to be killed out' (Tylor 1889) was wholly applicable.

*Food production, villages, and chiefs*

It would take till the end of the Ice Age before human life really became different. Climatic changes enabled the production of food and the living together of larger groups of people; the era of the Holocene had begun (Cook 2003; Behringer 2007: 47ff.; van Gijn and Louwe Kooijmans 2005: 203ff.). People were not completely unprepared for this new way of living; for they had already some experience living in groups. These experiences in the course of time made further developments possible. The living in permanent groups led to the development of hamlets and later of villages. The growing number of people demanded regulations and leadership, as explained by Gregory A. Johnson (1978, 1982), who analyzed the relation between increasing numbers of people and the development of more permanent forms of government. He related this with problems of processing more and more information and problems of decision making. The ability of people to absorb information and then to transform this into decisions is limited. If no leadership should develop, the quality of interaction and the capacity to carry out tasks would decline and groups would split up. If the group would not split up, the need to develop more efficient forms of organization, and stronger forms of leadership arose. The evolution of more developed forms of socio-political organization had started – nay, had become inevitable.

Already in small agricultural villages, the forms of social inequality could be established. Pieter van de Velde (1986, 1990, and 1993) found this after a painstaking analysis of the archaeological remains of the *Bandkeramik villages* at Elsloo in the south of the Netherlands (5500–5000 BC) and by comparisons with similar villages in Germany. Differences in the size of the houses, differences in the findings in the waste pits, and differences in the adze distribution made clear that there existed differences in status and wealth. Especially the differences in house types played a significant role in his analysis. Moreover, these differences continued over a long span of time. ‘The ranked organization of society showed considerable stability’ (van de Velde 1990: 35). The data from the graveyards do confirm his conclusions (van de Velde 1993). On the basis of the continued existence of different house types van de Velde comes to the conclusion that here was found a hereditary leadership, in which a village chief and some ward chiefs played a role (*Idem.* 1986: 137–138; 1990: 37). The chief had entered history. A structural change had taken place.

Social stratification did emerge sometimes practically unnoticed by the people concerned – a development described by Conrad Kottak (1972). He tells how in a distant past – some 3,000 years ago – a limited number of people lived at the shores of Lake Victoria in East Africa. The climate was good, the land fertile, and the lake provided water, fish and possibilities for trade. Under such favorable conditions population increased and as time passed the whole shore of the lake became inhabited. The unabated population growth forced the societies involved to look for more areas of settlement and found these in the hinterland. There have not been found indications for war or conquest – as Carneiro's well-known circumscription theory (1970) prescribes – the developments were peaceful. Those who went (or were sent) to the hinterland were mostly younger sons of younger sons and their dependents. They were certainly not banned to a wilderness. Also there the land was fertile and the climate was good. The only disadvantage was that they had no direct access to the lake any longer and consequently not to the fish and the trade. If they were to share in the benefits offered by the lake, they were dependent on the generosity of the dwellers at the lake shore: their elder brothers, uncles, and cousins. There had evolved a situation in which not eve-

rybody of the same age and the same sex had equal access to the means of livelihood. There had developed what Fried (1967: 186) defined as a *stratified society*. Kottak's model shows how a society, virtually without a ripple, can glide in a situation in which terms as 'rank' and 'stratified' are applicable; so simple can evolution be. These developments in time would easily lead to the emergence of chiefs and chiefdoms; the building blocks were there. In the development of a stratified society the production of bananas played a role as these provided a secure and plentiful source of food, which could be used by lineage heads in redistributive networks (Kottak 1972: 367). In this way their position as leaders of the society was strongly promoted and the most competent – or ambitious – of these leaders evolved into chiefs over chiefdoms.

A somewhat similar situation was found in the early states and chiefdoms of traditional Tahiti. Here the social structure was based upon the *ramage*, large, hierarchically organized family groups in which the order of birth determined rank. The family group owned land, houses, canoes, and other properties. Within the *ramage* some smaller groups existed. These groups were also hierarchically ranked. The chief of the highest ranked group was the *ari'i rahi*, the head of the senior descent line tracing its origin directly back to the eponymous ancestor, which provided him with a sacred legitimation and the alleged capacity to influence fertility and the well-being of his people. His authority comprised all the settlements of the *ramage* that had spread itself over the region. He thus ruled a multi-village society, a chiefdom. The corollary of this hierarchical structure was that some of the family groups were low-ranked. As claims on land and goods were based on the position within the family, the members of the lowest groups, the *manahune*, had but limited claims. Some authors consider them as landless, basing that view on the fact that most *manahune* worked as tenants on the land of the nobles at the coast. In reality, however, they had claims to land far in the mountainous interior of the island – but this land was the most unattractive. Therefore, not to be distant of the sea, they preferred to go to the coast and accepted that they had to work as tenants the land of the higher placed members of the *ramage*. Their position was low, indeed, not far removed from those of slaves or other servants (Oliver 1974: 254–256, 766).

For *Mesoamerica* David Freidel (1995) relates how people had been living in the north of Mesoamerica for about ten thousand years. Gradually their lifestyle of hunting, gathering and fishing, made way for agriculture and they began living in villages. This could happen only when some plants 'responded to human use by becoming domesticated' (*Ibid.*: 3). After 5000 BC, some villagers of the Tehuacán Valley started to look for volcanic glass and trade routes developed. There are also indications that already in that early stage a form of religion developed in which human sacrifice played a role (*Ibid.*: 3). According to Grove and Gillespie (1992: 25), for most families in this region the more valuable lands were the river levees, which could produce extremely high yields. Control of the prime lands by one family or a group of people provided the stimulus in acquiring economic, political, and social control over other groups. It seems probable that the dependence on agriculture led to the development of a belief in the necessity of interference of the gods. Some families (occupying the most fertile lands) appeared in the eyes of less fortunate farmers to be more favored by the supernatural forces than others. This belief lay at the basis of the development of sacred chiefs and chiefdoms. At the location of some chiefdoms a kind of altars were found, showing seated personages, sitting at the entrance to the underworld which displays their pivotal position in the cosmos as mediators between society and the supernatural forces associated with rain and fertility. These monuments make explicit the pan-Mesoamerican concept: 'the chief was elevated above society by his sacred quality' (Grove and Gillespie 1992: 27). Growing population sometimes led to pressure on food production and increasingly the farmers succeeded in influencing plant reproduction, and in developing hybrid forms of maize, the staple food. Moreover, also the network of travelers and traders could provide food in times of scarcity (Freidel 1995: 4) and these societies showed a considerable population growth.

For *Sri Lanka* Leslie Gunawardana (1981) presents a detailed overview of the evolution of social inequality and the formation of villages and hydraulic works. Here, as in other cases, ecological factors played an important role in creating social inequality, for the quality of the land and the availability of irrigation water quite naturally favored some villagers but also some villages more than others. This in the long run created not only inequality, but also so-

cial stratification in which not all members of the same sex and equivalent age status had equal access to the basic resources that sustain life (Fried 1967: 186). This social stratification was maintained for several centuries, though a constant competition for status took place. In an effort to counter the status hungry, the dominating families created by matrimonial ties a close-knit endogamous network of political relations, and thus formed an inner circle to which outsiders had but limited access. In these developments the possession of irrigation facilities (sluices) played a critical role. The use of sluice mechanisms enabled the owners to regulate strictly the issue of water and thereby promoted the accumulation of the agricultural surplus handed over as payment for the water. Moreover, by the presentation of plots of land and the transfer of small-scale irrigation works to Buddhist monasteries the donors won a wealth of *karma* which could legitimate their material advantages over others (Gunawardana 1985). Also here a connection between agricultural success and the religious ideas comes to the fore.<sup>13</sup> The endogamous inner circle was a good starting point for the evolution of chiefdoms.

As the cases mentioned above were mainly based on archaeological data, the addition of an anthropologically researched case might be useful. The *Kachin of Highland Burma* (Leach 1954; Friedman 1979) had an economy in which agriculture was the principal means of livelihood. They lived in villages the inhabitants of which were related to each other by means of a segmented lineage structure, in which marriage relations took the form of a circulating connubium – that is to say that lineage *A* provided brides for lineage *B*, lineage *B* provided brides for lineage *C*, and so on, till in the end lineage *X* provided brides for lineage *A*. The bride prices, naturally, circulated in the opposite direction. Under the prevailing ideology the giver was more highly placed than the receiver. As, however, all lineages were simultaneously bride-giver and bride-taker, the system did not lead to any far-reaching changes in the distribution of power and prestige. The only possible source of disturbance of the balanced situation was the agricultural system. Generally speaking, the small plots did not give a high yield, but every so often there were abundant crops to be harvested. Since the crop could not be stored, it was the custom to organize a feast for all villagers. The host of the feast derived great prestige from this action. However, as each family was every so often in the position of organizing such a feast, this caused little structural change in the so-

cial order. But it might so happen that one of the lineages was able to give several feasts one after the other. This did affect the egalitarian structure of the village, for the fortunate lineage accrued a more permanent prestige for itself. As a consequence, the daughters of the prestigious lineage became more expensive, and the higher bride prices increased its prosperity. If this trend continued, the girls became too expensive for the boys of the village. They then constructed a new marriage circuit and the prosperous lineage had to find another bride exchange circuit in which the nobles – the rich – of a wider area participated. Quite often here the story of prosperity ended, for the fields lost their fertility, the crops became less, and the prestige of the prosperous lineage dwindled down. The former egalitarian structure became restored. However, if the prosperity of the lineage continued, the less fortunate lineages would seek an explanation for these uncommon developments. This explanation was found in religious terms: the fortunate villager apparently had a better access to the ancestors or the spirits than ordinary mortal beings. Now the developments reached a crucial phase. Up to that point the position of the notable lineage had been based on distribution: the giving of feasts and the handing out of gifts. But once the villagers understood how matters really stood, the stream of gifts changed direction. The villagers began to offer the head of the well-to-do lineage small gifts with the request that he put in a good word for them with his ancestors. Naturally the request was acceded to and within the shortest time *material goods* were directed to the notable and he reciprocated with *immaterial matters*. A society strongly resembling Marx's *Asiatic Mode of Production* (Claessen 2000b: 60) had developed. The head of the notable lineage soon became the hereditary leader, the chief. After some time the voluntary gifts became obligatory – they changed from presents to taxation, and pressure was exerted when payment was not in time. The first steps in the direction of an early state were set, characterized by taxation and enforcement.

The evolution of the Kachin from egalitarian villagers to participants in an *Asiatic Mode of Production* showed in many respects the same evolutionary elements as the developments in the other cases presented above. Also here surplus was the starter and an aristocracy began to develop. An explanation for the developing inequality was found (or given?) in ideological terms. The prosperous man must have good connections with the gods or spirits, and



because of this people started giving him presents and finally became bounded by taxation rules. As in Africa, Polynesia and Mesoamerica, they could partake of the supernatural relations of the rich, powerful man, in exchange for obedience, taxation, and services. An interesting aspect of the evolutionary developments sketched above is that they came about without subjection, enforcement or war. In order to profit of the alleged influence on fertility of the chief, people obeyed and delivered goods, services and daughters in exchange for protection, well-being and order; in short an exchange of goods for Good.

This is not to say that village societies – with or without a chief – always were peaceful. A good example of a society in which violence dominated life are the *Yanomamö*, living in the Amazon jungle (Chagnon 1968) whose existence was characterized by endemic conflicts. Although the actual number of victims was small, the whole life of these people was permeated by fear and strife. Such endemic warfare was apparently quite common in the jungle regions of South America, as appears from the detailed and copious illustrated journal of Hans Staden, who was a prisoner of the aggressive *Tupinamba* from 1550 till 1555 (Maack and Fouquet 1964).<sup>14</sup> Other cases of societies living in a permanent State of Warre are the North American *Iroquois*, who formed a sort of league, of which the main purpose was to maintain internal peace and to take up arms against the outside world (Morgan 1851: 58, 313–350), and the *Hurons* who were finally more or less exterminated in these fights (Trigger 1969). According to Heidenreich (1978: 385) ‘any man could plan and organize a war party if he got enough support’. There thus were no professional soldiers, nor organization by the tribal leaders. Also in (European) prehistory sometimes violence occurred, as appears from the finding in the Netherlands in 1987 of a burying place containing no less than twelve persons, killed in one action (Louwe Kooijmans 2005).

## **2.2. From chiefdoms to early states**

In the previous section chiefdoms were mentioned several times. This is not so surprising, for the dividing line between well-developed local level communities and emerging small chiefdoms is rather thin. The identification of local communities is sometimes difficult, for they may consist of clusters of dispersed households, as was the case in traditional *Tahiti*. Here such clusters were led by

*raatira*, lower members of the nobility. A number of such clusters formed a kind of district, headed by a *toofa*. At first sight the district here might be considered as a chiefdom. As, however, such districts were part of an early state, the term chiefdom does not seem wholly appropriate (Oliver 1974). Generally speaking, chiefdoms evolved from agricultural centers with a rich production of food. People, who felt attracted to the rich environment, had to come to a kind of agreement with the chief of the central village, to settle there, and the evolution of a chiefdom was well underway. Sometimes other means had developed with the help of which a chief could enlarge his domain. In the *Tonga Islands* the system of ‘strategic marriages’ existed, that is, marriages occurring when younger sons or younger brothers of leading chiefs at Tongatapu went, or were sent, to distant villages or islands, to marry the daughter(s) of local headmen. The son of the immigrant aristocrat and the headmen's daughter usually succeeded to the leadership position. In this way Tongan influence was spread, without war, occupation, or defeat (Bott 1981: 42; Kirch 1984: 235).

Chiefdoms were usually quite stable structures. And, as long as the relative prosperity continued, there were no reasons to abandon the organization, or to topple the chief. When, however, the food production no longer was sufficient to feed the population, problems were at hand, as mentioned already in Section 1.1 (Note 6). This situation might even end the chiefdom, the remains of which fell easily under the sway of neighboring chiefdoms. Though many authors connect the origin of chiefdoms with war (Carneiro 1981; Earle 1997, 2011), there seems in our data to be no great support for this view. When, however, after some time, there had emerged a number of chiefdoms, and the possibility to expand in a peaceful way no longer existed, war between chiefdoms might occur. One should not overestimate the chances of warring chiefdoms to fight decisive battles. Therefore, they usually lacked the offensive means, and the defensive works of the other party were usually insurmountable. Such warfare could take years with continuing losses of people and wealth, till in the end one of the parties was exhausted (or exterminated) and fell victim to the greed of the ‘victor’ (Trigger 1969). Little value should be attached to the creative force of conflict and war as such. Hallpike (1986: 233–235) has argued that military activities generally had but few constructive

consequences. He adds, 'Mere violence, however, cannot lead to permanent institutions of political authority, and to my knowledge there is no instance of military activity by itself ever having led to the emergence of chiefly authority' (*Ibid.*: 235). Yet, there were several regions where warring chiefdoms occurred frequently. Renée Hagesteijn (1989) describes in detail the situation in Southeast Asia, where a number of quite stable *muangs* were found to exist (see also here Section 1.2). Ambitious chiefs sought to enlarge their influence by subjecting neighboring chiefdoms. As the mountainous terrain made effective war and conquest practically impossible, they sought to enlarge their influence by concluding marriages with the daughters of the defeated chiefs, and by concluding treaties. These binding forces were quite unstable. The death of the daughter ended the bond, or the death of the concluding chiefs ended the contracts. As far as there had developed a kind of early states (three-tier polities), these were most unstable and disappeared soon after their construction. One of the reasons Hagesteijn gives for this instability was the lack of legitimacy of the conqueror, who had in fact the same kind of legitimacy as the defeated one. Only when under the influence of Indian ideas some of the chiefs succeeded in developing a new form of legitimacy, they could hope to construct a somewhat more stable early state. 'Along with trade and agricultural techniques Buddhist monks and Hindu Brahmans provided local Southeast Asian rulers with legitimizing concepts like *devaraja*, *dharmaraja*, *cakravartin* and the like' (Hagesteijn 1986: 107; 1996). As, however, too many local political leaders had access to these titles, this inevitably led to a devaluation of their value. So they had to bolster their position with other means of which the handing out of presents was the most important. This soon depleted their means and another ambitious ruler took over his position – and had to counter the same unsolvable problems (see also Hagesteijn in Note 6).

Fortunately for the adherents of positive effects of war and conflict on the evolution of socio-political organization, there are cases in which a capable, ruthless chief succeeded in building a permanent state by defeating and submitting neighboring chiefdoms. Mention should be made here of the successful exploits of Pachacuti, the creator of the Inca state, who in 1438 defeated the competing chiefdom of the Chanca (Brundage 1967; Patterson

1991). He was so well established in his rule that he even survived the great drought which hit the Inca state forcefully, ‘but for the system of state ware houses already instituted by Pachacuti, the whole Inca edifice of rule would have toppled incontinently’ (Brundage 1967: 105). Another such successful conqueror was Clovis, the chief of *the Franks* (481–511), who, after succeeding his father, set out to defeat and subject the other Frankish chiefdoms (Wood 1994: 41–51). He is said to have defeated the invading Alamanni after his conversion to Roman Catholicism – but Wood is rather skeptical about the effects of his conversion, ‘Catholicism is unlikely to have been the key to Clovis' success’ (*Ibid.*: 47).

From the detailed descriptions by Michal Tymowski (1981, 1987) of the emergence of the Central African states of *Kenedugu* and the *State of Samori*, it appears that the formation of these states was greatly promoted by military activities. First, however, he points to a number of conditions that the formation of these states actually made possible.

In both cases we have to do with communities which began producing an economic surplus capable of maintaining a ruling group much earlier than the states actually developed. In both cases, too, the communities had knowledge of state organization. It proved, however, neither to be the economic surplus nor the readily available organizational models that automatically caused states to emerge (Tymowski 1981: 428).

There were factors hampering this process such as periods of economic stagnation and a lack of external threat that would force these societies to organize in self-defense. Promoting state formation rather were such factors as population growth in the early nineteenth century, and the development of trade. ‘The need to ensure security on trading routes was one of the stimuli for the development of the state’ (Tymowski 1981: 429). Trade led to growing social differentiation and to growing commercial opportunities for the ruling groups. The interests of the trading and ruling groups began to merge. To better exploit the population another socio-political organization was necessary, and to enforce the new system an army was needed (*Ibid.*: 430). The army was used in these polities to protect trade, and to keep their own population in check. Though there certainly was violence, there was no war connected

with the formation of these two states. The army acted as a kind of police force.

The states described by Tymowski certainly were not the only ones whose development was connected with trade and economy. This holds also for the old desert state of *Ghana* (for a general background see Bovill 1986; Connah 1987). The origins of Ghana are since the fourth century AD connected with caravan trade. Several families dominated the caravan trade in the region of Ghana and the most powerful of these vested some dominance over the other families. Connah (1987: 114) suggests that 'a continuing process of the accumulation of social wealth and power' led to the growth of the indigenous kingdom of Ghana already before the eighth century. To quote Bovill (1986: 55),

such empires had no precise boundaries, for the ruler was not interested in dominating territory as such, but in relationships with social groups upon which he could draw to provide levies in time of war, servants for his court and cultivators to keep his granaries full.

Only in the course of time the loosely knit early state of Ghana developed into a stronger organized one. Levtzion (1973: 22) states that by the end of the eighth century Ghana was known in the Muslim world as 'the land of gold'. The gold of Ghana (won nearby) was bartered for salt, cloth, and slaves. Salt especially was crucial as trade good, as many peoples of the Sahara had a serious shortage of it. Ghana had a 'double' capital, Koumbi Saleh. One part was a large Muslim town where trade and markets played a central role. The other part was the royal town where the king and his court lived in an entourage of gold and splendor (Levtzion 1973: 24). He was, as all rulers of early states in Africa, considered as sacred, which legalized his position. It can be safely said that the early state of Ghana evolved out of the wish and the need to protect and monopolize the caravan trade, the markets, and the goldmines. There are not found connections with earlier states in the region; Ghana was the first.

One should not underestimate the role of the economy in early states and chiefdoms. In the foregoing it became evident several times that the central rulers – whether chiefs or kings – were well aware of the necessity of a guaranteed income in view of the high

costs of governing. Elman Service (1975: 293) pointed out that chiefs, as well as other high-ranking officials did not so much maintain their position by physical force, but via continual gift exchanges with their followers (also Grove and Gillespie 1992: 19ff.).<sup>15</sup> Already in the Bandkeramik villages an association was established between wealth and status; the word 'power' might be too heavy for the social relations here. Some early states, such as the empire of the Incas, or the state of the Aztecs, depended greatly on a continuing supply of food and goods to their respective capitals, Cuzco, and Tenochtitlan. In both cases a never ending stream of food, goods, and luxury articles was needed for the maintenance of the enormous royal households, the numerous households of the aristocracy, the numerous priests and temples, the feeding of the great mass of the population (the workers, the artisans, the women, and children) and, perhaps even more importantly: for the many gifts and remunerations with which the rulers reciprocated the gifts and services of their followers. The never ending requirements were a heavy burden on the population and an extensive network of tax collectors plundered towns, villages, and peasants. Not surprisingly the very uneven reciprocity between the sacred rulers and the suppressed population caused great unrest and dissatisfaction. The continuity of the states even became endangered and the arrival of the Spaniards who defeated the Aztecs and the Incas was, perhaps, but an incident in the downfall of both polities which already had set in before that time (D'Altroy 1992; Conrad and Demarest 1984; Hassig 1985).

The evolution of a simple agricultural society into an early state sometimes happened as a consequence of external influences. This happened, for example, with the *Betsileo*, a people living at the east side of Madagascar in small villages, where they cultivated rice in the coastal plain on irrigated terraces (Kottak 1980). Their existence was threatened when in the early seventeenth century slave-hunters tried to capture people. To protect themselves against this danger, they erected hill top forts, and defended themselves from these forts successfully against the slave hunters. In this way they were able to stay near their rice fields. Because of the relative safety of the hill top forts great numbers of people sought refuge there. This led to population pressure in these settlements, and more and more administrative measures became necessary to maintain law and order

within the forts. This demanded stronger leadership than was customary among the Betsileo (as pointed out by Johnson 1978, 1982; summarized in Section 2.1 above). In Betsileo society there were already clan leaders, endowed with some form of sacred legitimacy. From their midst persons came to the fore who took the necessary measures to organize social life in the forts and they soon became considered to possess the sacred quality in stronger measure than other leaders, and were elevated above all others. The influence of the most powerful of them soon reached the other hill forts, too. The growing complexity of the society made it inevitable to develop measures to ensure that rules and regulations were carried out, if necessary by force. In this way a reasonable degree of order in the overcrowded forts was reached and safety as well as a sufficient flow of goods was ensured. At the end of these developments the Betsileo fulfilled all criteria for an early state organization, a consequence of decisions made long ago and which were never intended to create a state (*cf.* Claessen and Skalnik 1978: 624). It can be added here that the way in which the Betsileo created a state was not unique. Ronald Cohen (1981) describes similar developments among the agricultural *Pabir* and *Biu* living near to each other in the Sahel, south of the predatory state of Borno. To protect themselves against the raids from Borno, the Pabir built walled towns, and within these walls the Pabir and Biu took refuge and were relatively safe. Increase of population within the walls necessitated stronger forms of government, and gradually the most sacred and powerful head of one of the Pabir lineages grew into the sacred king.

### 3. DISCUSSION

In the sections above a number of cases were brought together in which the development of villages, chiefdoms, and early states was described. The data of these cases will be grouped here in three large categories. The order in which the categories are presented is not meant as an evolutionary sequence. It is an effort to create some order in the multitude of data. After this exercise it may be possible to draw some general conclusions about the evolution of socio-political organization.

#### 3.1. Economy

The term 'economy' here regards in fact 'dominance and control of the economy'. Under this heading data on food production,

transport, gifts, tributes, and taxation, remunerations and technology (roads, irrigation works) are brought together. Food production was essential for a population. Agriculture developed soon after the beginning of the Holocene. Fertile soil was in great demand but was unfortunately not abundant. People who occupied good land did soon attract followers. The agricultural successes were ascribed to the better relations between the fortunate family – and especially its head – and the gods, spirits or forefathers. Those who wanted to settle in the fertile region had to come to an agreement with the family head and in exchange for recognition of his leadership – in other words obeisance – they could start planting and harvesting. This type of relations was found in great parts of Africa south of the Sahara, but also in Mesoamerica (Tehuacán Valley), on Sri Lanka, and among the Kachin.

Also elsewhere it was assumed that the sacred position of the ruler guaranteed fertility and a high yield. In return the farmers had to serve the ruler, and pay in goods and services for his blessed presence. This situation was found in Africa, the Polynesian islands as well as in ancient Egypt.

In some cases (Incas, Aztecs) the ruler in the center depended on a permanent stream of food, goods and services which enabled him to maintain a large capital and to feed the many households of the notables and temples. In the state of the Incas a large road system was built to enable the transport of food, and soldiers. Warehouses in the provinces were used for the storage of food and goods. In the case of the Aztecs the needs of the capital were so great that the rulers had to conquer land in the neighborhood and to ruthlessly exploit the subjected peoples. In both cases the rulers also had a great need of prestige goods to reward their followers and officials, and thus an endless stream of precious objects went to the capital, where the goods were handed out. Elsewhere, as in Sri Lanka, large irrigation projects were developed to cover the need for arable land. On Hawai'i dry taro fields were constructed as well as fish ponds to supply the necessary food (Claessen and van Bakel 2006: 236).

### **3.2. Ideology**

Ideology is a coherent system of ideas that has a directional influence on human behavior. From the case studies presented, it appeared that ideological notions played a crucial role in all of them.



Everywhere the ruler was a sacred person, who had descended from the gods, spirits or eponymous forefathers. In most cases the role of ideology was a double-edged one. On the one hand, it was the ruler who played a pivotal role in the ideology – and this ideologically based position provided him with a solid legitimacy and claims on food and goods. On the other hand, it was the people who profited of the alleged powers of the ruler who provided them with protection against dangers and evil, and he procured them the fertility of women, land and cattle. In cases that the ruler could (or did) not meet the expectations of the population he usually lost his position and sometimes even his life.

In great parts of Africa it was believed that the man who opened the earth gained access to the fertility possessed by the earth spirit. This made him sacred and people depended upon his authorization to till the fertile land. In the Polynesian islands it was believed that food production was depending upon certain rituals on behalf of the ancestor gods. These rituals were monopolized by the chief. The whole construction of society here was based upon the ideological notion that everybody's position depended upon his/her order of birth, the youngest being the lowest, as appeared from the position of the *manahune* in Tahiti. This type of notions also played a role in the Lake Region of Africa, where younger sons and brothers were removed from the shore of Lake Victoria.

The successes of the fortunate farmer among the Kachin soon became ascribed to good relations with the forefathers and the less fortunate farmers started to give him presents to get his intercession. In Mesoamerica the family with the highest yields (the best soil) soon got the reputation that they were more favored by the gods than others. On this belief they soon got social and economic control over others and they became chiefs, who guarded the entrance to the underworld.

In the Sri Lanka case, the dominance of certain families was based on the possession and exploitation of the better lands – which often meant also access to water. By large donations to Buddhist monasteries the families accrued much good *karma* which legitimated their material advantages.

The ruler of the Incas was a son (great-great-grandson) of the Sun god, and yearly ploughed ceremonially a furrow, and then handed the ploughing stick to his nobles, who in their turn ploughed some furrows. In this way the Inca ruler demonstrated his

influence on agriculture (Brundage 1967). One of the foremost tasks of the Aztec ruler was officiating at sacrificial ceremonies. Countless humans were sacrificed to the god Huitzilipochtli, and Aztec armies were sent out to make prisoners to be offered. This policy made the Aztecs lose all support in the realm and in the end they stood alone against the Spaniards (Claessen 2000b: 109).

### 3.3. Format of the society

This term indicates the number of people in relation to the arable surface and their spatial distribution. In this way it is possible to estimate the agricultural possibilities of the society. As there are, however, insufficient data available on surfaces and fertility, we have to take recourse to other indications. The best possible seem to be data on population growth and/or population pressure. The case studies present some evidence on these subjects.

In the surroundings of Lake Victoria there was certainly population growth and most probably also some population pressure, for younger members of the group were sent to the hinterland, away from the lake shores. Elsewhere in Africa there was apparently a shortage of arable land so that those who had to cope with that shortage went to the leaders of better off groups and got, in exchange for obedience, entry to better land. For Polynesia the situation varied per island. On Hawai'i there was a certain population pressure which induced the political leaders to have built fish ponds and have extended the available taro fields. On Tahiti, on the other hand, the low-born *manahune* could refuse to work the unfavorable land in the interior and rather preferred to till as tenants the land of the high-born at the coast. For Polynesia a close correlation was established between the socio-political organization, on the one hand, and the (estimated) number of people and the (estimated) surface of arable land, on the other (see table in Claessen and Van Bakel 2006: 254).

There are no reasons to expect population pressure in the case of the Kachin. The case of Mesoamerica is not clear. There certainly was some population pressure, but it seems that improving agricultural techniques made it possible to take care of this.

The fact that in Sri Lanka irrigation works played a great role and that the distribution of water provided considerable political power seems to indicate that the availability of arable land was limited, so that some population pressure did occur.

In both African states of Kenedugu and Samori an economic surplus was produced, but in later years population pressure was felt and trade became necessary to cover the needs. For the gold state of Ghana it seems that the own production was sufficient, for food is not mentioned among their trade goods.

In order to keep their irrigated rice fields the Betsileo fled to the hill top forts to withstand the attacks of slave hunters – to return to their fields in times of quiet. Within the forts population pressure played a role, which led to the development of a stronger form of government.

In a recent article Charles Spencer (2010) defended the position that there exists a causal connection between territorial expansion and state formation. As, however, there are known early states where expansion did not play a role in their formation, and there are chiefdoms where expansion did not lead to state formation, expansion thus seems neither a necessary, nor a sufficient condition to explain state formation (see Claessen and Hagesteijn 2012).

### **3.4. Complex Interaction**

In the foregoing sections the data have been placed under different headings. It must be emphasized, however, that the developments did not take place separately or in isolation, but in close interaction. The one enabled, or necessitated, the other and together a whole train of events was set in motion which in the end produced a structural change of society. The evolution of these societies thus was the result of the complex interaction of a number of factors. The three general factors (dominance and control of the economy, ideology and format of the society) form the essence of the *Complex Interaction Model*, as we baptized it (Claessen and Van de Velde 1987; Claessen 2000b). The complex, mutual, reciprocal interactions of the three factors created the circumstances under which socio-political organizations emerged, or triggered off the development of more elaborated types thereof.

One may ask what place is given to *war* and *conquest* in this model. Without underestimating the influence of war and conquest on the development of socio-political organizations, as stated already in Claessen and Skalník (1978: 626), these phenomena are much more likely to have been the consequences of disturbances in the ideological, economic, political, or demographic situations than forces in themselves. Thus, they cannot be considered inde-

pendent factors. They are derivatives. Naturally, sometimes war or conquest is clearly involved in developments towards a state organization, but neither war, nor conquest should – speaking in general terms – be considered a sufficient or necessary factor. War, certainly, promoted stronger leadership and a better organization, but it did not create a state. Well-known examples of war being a dominant factor in the development towards statehood are the states of the Incas and the Aztecs (as mentioned above). The same holds for early France, where the Frankish chief Clovis defeated and conquered all neighboring tribes (also mentioned above).

### 3.5. Conditions for state formation

For many scholars the evolution of the (early) state is the most important development of socio-political organization. From the early state in the course of time more developed forms of the state emerged, and nowadays the political scene of the world is dominated by states. These obvious facts should not blind us for another fact, practically as important, namely that from the numerous chiefdoms and large big man systems but only a limited number ever reached the level of the (early) state. There are, apparently, conditions that must be present before the development towards the state was possible. On the basis of the conclusions in the previous sections it is possible to summarize these necessary conditions as follows:<sup>16</sup>

1. *There must be a sufficient number of people to form a complex, stratified society.*

The necessary number of administrators, servants, courtiers, priests, soldiers, agriculturalists, traders, and so on can only be found in a population running in the thousands. Even the smallest early states on Tahiti numbered at least some 5,000 people.

2. *The society must control a specified territory.*

In the long run such a territory is not necessarily sufficient to maintain the population. In such cases conquest or trade are the obvious means to amend for its shortcomings. In other cases the government is not so much interested in a certain surface of land, but rather in the domination of people(s).

3. *There must be a productive system yielding a surplus to maintain many specialists, privileged categories, and not productive people.*

4. *There must exist an ideology, which explains and justifies a hierarchical administrative organization and socio-political inequality.* If such an ideology does not exist, or emerges, the formation of a state becomes difficult, or even outright impossible.

As a consequence of the lack of a favorable ideology, either a society will remain on the initial level, or other types of socio-political organization will develop such as heterarchies, or early state analogues. A discussion of these types of society remains outside the scope of this article.<sup>17</sup> A good example of a society that by lack of a favorable ideology did not evolve to a higher level of organization is the *Mbundu*, of Angola. Here a large population lived under favorable economic conditions, and there were several efforts to organize overarching religious or socio-political structures. None of these efforts succeeded; the egalitarian ideology of the population was too strong to accept the domination by a centralized administrative apparatus (Miller 1976). Only after the subjection of the Mbundu by a neighboring state society an overarching socio-political organization was created.

It seems reasonable to assume that the four conditions, summarized above, also held for the formation of the so-called primary or pristine states, a concept launched by Morton Fried (1967: 231ff.). In his opinion, the pristine states were very special for they had evolved without having had examples on which to orient themselves. Recently Bronson (2006: 140), discussing the possible revival of a collapsed state, coined the term 'template regeneration' when there is a case of revival of a state organization that 'adheres closely to a fully understood, well-recorded model' in the past. Yet, only when the conditions mentioned above are found together and at the same time, the formation of a state – early, pristine or revived – could have been possible, whether there were examples or not.

The occurrence of the conditions is in itself not sufficient to cause state formation. To come that far some event(s) that trigger the development into statehood are necessary. If that does not occur, further development is hampered. From historically known cases of state formation it appears that an event such as a shortage of food and goods, population pressure, threatening neighboring peoples, war, the introduction of new ideas, and the necessity to protect trade routes and/or markets can play such a role. In short, some ex-

pected or unexpected fact occurs and induces the leader(s) to act and come up with an innovation. Thus, there seems no reason to consider the origin of the pristine states as a phenomenon fundamentally different from the origin of other early states. Pristine states and all other early states show resemblances in their organization and law-giving for the type of problems met by central governments (taxation, communication, defense, *etc.*) was everywhere the same. And since quite few solutions proved to be effective, there is also great similarity in the solutions applied by successful early states – those that did not work well disappeared for, analogue to the views of Darwin, it was also here a survival of the fittest.

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#### NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> On comparativism see Köbben 1967, 1970; Nadel (1969: 113ff., 248ff.) states that a limited number of carefully chosen and carefully studied cases should be sufficient to provide relevant data concerning the problem under study; Claessen and Skalnik 1978: 533–537 on the difficulties with the comparison of early states.

<sup>3</sup> This view is based on Voget 1975: 862, who states that ‘evolution is the process by which structural reorganization is affected through time, eventually producing a form or structure which is qualitatively different from the ancestral form’.

<sup>4</sup> I refer here to Claessen 2000a, 2002, 2010, 2009b.

<sup>5</sup> The journal *Social Evolution & History* 2011, volume 11, number 1 is devoted to the study of chiefs and chiefdoms.

<sup>6</sup> A similar fate befell the Egyptian pharao Pepi II when after a prolonged drought hunger and unrest hit the country. His fall meant the end of the Old Kingdom (Morris 2006: 60). Hagesteijn (1987) relates how in ancient Angkor a king who no longer could finance his obligations to the Buddhist temples lost his legitimacy and thus his throne.

<sup>7</sup> This statement does not hold true for all cases. The West-African early state of Dahomey, for example, was for several years tributary to the neighboring Oyo

state. Large parts of the early state of France fell for a number of years under the sway of the king of England. In several cases the governmental center was regularly moved. The size of the territory often meant the subjection of a number of tribes and not so much the number of square kilometres (Claessen and Skalník 1978 *passim*).

<sup>8</sup> In some cases the (food) production of the state was not sufficient (*e.g.*, Aztecs, Old Norway) and in such cases plunder, trade or territorial expansion were the means to solve the shortages.

<sup>9</sup> In early France, however, private ownership of land was important (Claessen and Skalník 1978: 246ff.).

<sup>10</sup> In several cases (Kuba of the Congo region, Jukun of Nigeria, and Benin in Nigeria) the biological parents of the ruler were killed, so that the ruler symbolically no longer did belong to his people.

<sup>11</sup> It is not possible to qualify the governmental apparatus of an early state as a bureaucracy, for most of the requirements that have to be fulfilled to qualify as such are lacking. The illiterate early states had neither the economic means to finance a bureaucracy, nor the technology to execute it.

<sup>12</sup> This view is based upon ethnographical data, collected among present hunters and gatherers. Examples and literature can be found in Claessen 2000b: 86; Lee and DeVore 1968.

<sup>13</sup> Though in many cases the construction of irrigation works is an activity of rulers, in some places it is the local community that builds and maintains these works as, for example, on Bali (Grader 1984).

<sup>14</sup> The powerful Incas did not succeed in subjecting the fierce Indians in the jungle of the Amazon region. The Spaniards had the same experience. A group of survivors of the Spanish expedition fled by boat over the Amazon River and had to fight along the whole route against attacking Indians, a history related by the Spanish survivor Orellana.

<sup>15</sup> Maurice Godelier (1978) emphasizes that rulers of chiefdoms and early states did not need to take recourse to force to rule their subjects, for they were very well legitimated. On the other hand, according to Bruce Trigger (1985), the power of the state was based upon generalized coercion. For both views illustrations can be found. Anatoly Khazanov (1978: 87–89) forcefully rejects the idea of despotic governments for early states. Jianping Yi (2008) describes the non-autocratic forms of government in Pre-Qin China.

<sup>16</sup> Summary based on Claessen 2002: 103, 107–109.

<sup>17</sup> See for detailed analyses of these phenomena: Grinin *et al.* 2004.

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