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*Clouds are the Sign of Rain: a personal history of sub-Saharan Africa 1965-2005.*  
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## Prologue



Cuncue River base camp in Mozambique, 1972

The sun was almost down when the wheels of the small aircraft hit the grass. I had arrived in Luabo, a sugar estate and village along the Zambesi river in Portuguese East Africa. It was the 22nd of November 1965, three months after I had married Meta and three weeks before my 23rd birthday. In the small guesthouse I unpacked my suitcase and found a place for my typewriter and the few books I thought would be indispensable for my work. Later that night, sitting alone on the veranda and listening for the first time to the African crickets, my thoughts wandered to Amsterdam where Meta completed her internships and to the soil survey I would have to start. After completing my secondary education in the summer of 1961, I was not sure what to do next and swayed between taking up political sciences and enrolling for a degree in tropical agriculture. My colonial family background, a longing for adventure and the ring of some Dutch version of John Fitzgerald Kennedy's inaugural words "*My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man*"<sup>1</sup>, eventually clinched the decision and in the fall of 1961 I attended my first classes at the State College for

Tropical Agriculture. From the start, tropical agriculture had implied a career abroad and I had no reason to be surprised to end up in some backwater in East Africa. Pondering wearily on my wife, work and future, I suddenly felt the strain of two days of travelling and went to bed. That night, as it turned out, was the beginning of a life long and intimate relationship with sub-Saharan Africa.

On completion of her internships, Meta joined me in the summer of 1966. She transformed the small bungalow in which I had lived for six months into a home and found her way with my two servants who grudgingly accepted that the young *missus* was now in charge. The short rains settled the dust in the newly established garden and turned the lawn into a lush green and when we made love one night, Meta revealed that she was with child. In March 1967 she gave birth to a son. We enjoyed the baby, avoided the boring expatriate social life as much as possible and tried to catch up on our reading in the evenings. I designed a soil laboratory, supervised its construction and furnishing and started training the laboratory staff, most of whom had only attended primary school. Also the survey of 25.000 hectares of sugarcane land showed good progress. The work was challenging enough, but on more than one occasion I found that I lacked specialised knowledge. When the survey was completed, mid 1968, I sounded Meta out on enrolling for a post graduate study in Holland and eventually we decided that I would apply for a place at the International Training Centre for Aerial Survey and Earth Sciences in Delft. When I discussed the issue with our London directors, to my surprise they found that it would be to our mutual benefit if I were to return to Holland and take a M.Sc. degree. Exactly three years after I had touched down for the first time in Luabo, three of us landed at Amsterdam airport.

Back in Holland Meta took up practising medicine, enabling me to focus on my studies. In the fall of 1969 a second son was born and early 1970, thanks to a kind professor who understood my longing for Africa, I returned to Luabo to investigate the role of termite mounts in aerial surveys. In the months that followed, and accompanied by a small African survey crew, I travelled large parts of the remote Zambesi delta on foot and by boat. Out in the bush, my foreman Muluga became a close ally and friend and through him I gained a first hand knowledge of the small African communities in the delta, the abundant flora and the teeming wildlife. The writing up for my thesis took place again in Holland and there it did not take us long to decide to return to Luabo for another tour. Early 1971, four of us touched down on the small airstrip along the Zambesi river.

When I became Chief Agronomist, our secluded family life abruptly came to an end. From the small bungalow we moved to a sixty year old colonial mansion with a well developed garden and an African staff of eight, including a major domus in the person of the respectable Banna and a portly cook Chal. Both Meta and Banna ran an increasingly complicated household with business visitors, lodging guests and a multitude of social obligations. Chal firmly established his rule over the kitchen. It took me by surprise when Meta confided that she wanted another child and for some time reproduction featured prominently in our love making. In November 1972, a daughter uttered her first cry in the same bush clinic where our first son had been

born five years earlier. Before and after my daughter's birth, I surveyed a large new concession and, together with my African survey crew, spent much of my time in a remote base camp along the Cuncue river. Here, late in the afternoon when the work was done, I observed the magnificent grazing sable antelopes and watched with fascination how "our" leopard and her cubs drank from the river.

Occasionally, and always weary of crocodiles and hippos, Muluga and I would launch the canoe and catch bream and catfish, which were both plentiful in the Cuncue. When the survey drew to an end, I visited the camp less frequently and divided my time between the family, my office in Luabo and advisory work in South Africa, Rhodesia, Botswana and Swaziland. Africa by now had truly become our home and Holland was only at the periphery of our thoughts.

Political reality caught up with us when the first fighters of the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) infiltrated the delta from the north and the labour force revolted. On 7th September 1973, at the crack of dawn, workers armed with clubs and cane knives set fire to the Indian shops in Luabo and then stormed the office and residential areas. At the first clattering sound of automatic rifle fire from our two Portuguese militia men, Meta and the children fled in our Land Cruiser towards the sea, on their way picking up as many women and children as possible. When a second wave of workers overran the militia men who had run out of ammunition, the four of us left in the main office barricaded the radio room and called a "May Day" which was picked up by a small garrison 60 kilometres away. Three quarters of an hour later, half-a-dozen or so paratroopers were dropped from a light aircraft, the crowds dispersed and some sort of order restored without further serious bloodshed. When I finally managed to leave Luabo and gunned my Land Rover over the dirt track towards the Indian Ocean, I found Meta's yellow Cruiser and its terrified passengers hiding in a small gum tree forest a few kilometres away from the village. In the afternoon, after a further reconnaissance, we returned to Luabo where we found that the servants had barricaded the house and were preparing dinner (sic!) in case we would return. In the months that followed we became a community under siege. A civil defence force was established, most people went to work armed and after dark we stayed indoors. Chilling rumours concerning atrocities committed by the Portuguese Armed Forces and the FRELIMO added to an increasing feeling of insecurity. The BBC World Service became our only reliable source of information. Sitting around the radio on the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1974, and after hearing the familiar "This is London", we learned that earlier during the day troops of the Armed Forces Movement in Portugal had moved into key positions throughout Lisbon and had caught President Caetano's dictatorship off guard. The Carnation Revolution was on its way and we had little doubt that Mozambique's independence would follow in its wake. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of July this was confirmed when General António de Spínola, the former Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces in Guinea Bissau and now Portugal's new president, broadcasted his statement on the transfer of powers in Africa. His words were unambiguous: *"As I have often stated, the African peoples are perfectly capable of organising themselves politically and of defending their own freedom. Following this political line, it is therefore necessary to break the last barrier by drawing up a legal framework for the decolonisation process. The Constitutional*

*Law number 7/74, passed by the Council of State and published on 26<sup>th</sup> July, creates the necessary framework of constitutional legitimacy for immediately beginning the process of decolonisation of the Portuguese Overseas Territories”<sup>2</sup>.*

When the first FRELIMO "combatantes" finally marched into Luabo, life returned more or less to normal. We received our first lessons in Marxism-Leninism from the young FRELIMO officials and read in the *Diario de Moçambique* that Samora Machel would be the first president of a free Mozambique. Our earlier decision to leave for independent Kenya, however, could not be swayed and in November 1974, after almost nine years and in the pouring rain, we left Luabo.

As the small plane started its descent to the Mumias airstrip, the clouds broke and I had my first view of Mount Elgon, one of the highest mountains in Africa. Red dust trailed behind the aircraft when it landed and was met by the battered Landrover of my Kenyan counterpart Julius. Two days after I had seen the Zambesi river disappear in sheets of heavy rain, and said goodbye to Meta and the children, who preferred to spend some weeks in Holland, I had arrived in Western Province, Kenya. At an altitude of almost 1500 metres above sea level, the temperature in Mumias was a pleasant change from the hot and humid delta of the Zambesi and I took an immediate liking to the place. A sugar factory surrounded by a small nucleus estate and some 30.000 small farmers in the outlying districts, St. Mary's Mission Hospital, a small housing site and a guesthouse with an excellent kitchen. Kisumu, on the shore of lake Victoria, was within an hour's reach by gravel road and from there an excellent tarmac highway led to Nairobi in less than six hours.

Among my newly acquired duties in Mumias were the rehabilitation of two agricultural laboratories, the design and execution of soil fertility and cane breeding programmes and the further training of Kenyan staff. In addition, and under the auspices of the East African Agriculture and Forestry Research Organisation (EAAFRO), I had to advise the Ugandan and Tanzanian governments on issues related to the growing of sugar cane. When Meta arrived with two children, the eldest one had remained in Holland with my parents to attend school, we moved to a bungalow, made acquaintance with our Kenyan and Indian neighbours, and unpacked the crates which had arrived from Mozambique. After a long voyage, and quite miraculously, also our battered Land Cruiser turned up in the Mombassa docks and I went to fetch it. Driving it back through Tsavo National Park at sunset, I waited for a herd of elephants to cross the road, smoked a pipe and was content with life. Back in Mumias the yellow Cruiser was given a warm welcome by Meta and the children and when I parked her in the carport I could almost see her smile.

Life took its course and with some effort we got accustomed to the small bungalow, the one maid who helped Meta out, a residential area patrolled by security guards and doors that had to be kept securely locked all the time. When visiting a labour housing area for the first time, and remembering how much effort we had put into labour housing in colonial Luabo, I realised that independence does not automatically mean progress. The resident doctor being on sick leave in Europe, in



the summer of 1975 Meta accepted an offer to become deputy "daktari" at St. Mary's Mission Hospital and was issued with an East African Medical Practitioner's Licence.

She ran the clinic and dispensary and twice a week instructed the Kenyan nurses. The latter to the chagrin of the Sisters Ursulines who thought it improper, much to Meta's dismay, to mention any part of the anatomy between the belly and the knees.

As usual I travelled a lot, by car and air, and had been lucky so far to escape any serious accidents, accidents I had dreaded from the very first moment I set foot on African soil. Sooner or later, however, one's luck runs out and in October Meta was informed that the twin-engine aircraft I had hired had failed to report to its base on a flight over the wilderness of southern Somalia. While Meta courageously digested this news, Jim and I had made an emergency landing on a riverbank, decided that the burst oil-cooler was beyond repair, and had started to walk in the direction of what we thought might be an inhabited part of the Juba river area. Just before nightfall, and without meeting a single soul all day, we stumbled into a small Russian military camp where we were met with surprise, great hospitality and lukewarm vodka. Next morning a young Russian lieutenant drove us to Juba town where we established radio contact with Nairobi again. Shortly afterwards, Meta was informed that I was safe and well. Sheila, Jim's wife, flew their second plane from Nairobi to Juba with spare parts and 100 cans of aviation fuel and later that day, after over-flying the crash site twice, she expertly landed on the grass covered riverbank. When she nudged her plane alongside the grounded one, my shirt stuck to my back and I felt sick. We ate some cold meat, had a few bottles of Tusker and settled for the night. When I woke up at the first light, I heard goats bleating and saw that herdsmen had gathered around the planes. While Jim and Sheila changed the oil-cooler and checked the undercarriage, Sheila creating quite a stir among the herdsmen with her loose blond hair and white flying overall, I cut some bushes and levelled the small termite mounds on our projected take off route. Filling up took another two hours of hard work and the herdsmen were delighted with the empty cans. Finally, after a bone rattling take off, we were air-born.

Once back in Mumias the discussion about our future flared up again and, like so many who withered their first ten years in Africa, we were reluctant to take a decision. We both liked our work, knew that challenging jobs were to be had almost anywhere on the continent, and had fallen in love with Africa and its peoples. On the other hand there were the children to consider. The eldest boy was with my parents in Holland and the other two would soon have to follow if we decided to remain expatriates. Since we wished my parents an old age in peace and good health, and shied away from sending the children to boarding school, we eventually decided to repatriate. Early summer 1976 we bid Kenya farewell with a magnificent trip through Masai Mara National Park and back again in Mumias sold the Land Cruiser. When I patted her bonnet before I left her with uncaring strangers, I almost felt a traitor. I rounded up my work in the laboratory and Meta handed over her duties to a

colleague returning from Europe. Like in Luabo almost two years earlier, it was pouring rain when we left Mumias for Wilson Airport in Nairobi. Sitting in the plane, soaked to our skin, we unpacked the two gifts we received from our Kenyan friends: Karin Blixen's "Out of Africa" and Kamanthe's "Longing for Darkness". Both books could not have been more appropriate! When we landed in Amsterdam 24 hours later we felt estranged and lost.

The remaining months of 1976 and the first half of 1977 turned out to be an inter bellum. Meta secured a job with a municipal health service in the eastern part of Holland, we bought a house and the children went to a local school. I moved to London office as Senior Agronomist in charge of monitoring our agricultural projects world wide. Leaving Holland every Monday morning at six-fifteen, I would arrive at Heathrow just in time to be trapped in the traffic entering the City. On Friday afternoon I would suffer the same fate in reverse. After a first two leisurely months in London, I was off again checking on projects in Belize, Mauritius, Nigeria, Mauritania and Senegal. Driving back alone through the desert from Richard Toll to Dakar airport one morning, in an open Citroën Mehari, choking on the fine red sand and trying to avoid collision with reckless oncoming lorries, I decided that my travelling adventures had to come to an end. In Dakar, with minutes to spare, I caught the plane to Brussels and from there drove home. Arriving just after midnight, I surprised Meta with the news that I had come home for good. When I informed our directors of my decision, Meta and I were summoned to London. Dining in "The Taming of the Shrew" in Soho we were almost talked into a last assignment in Somalia and a permanent posting in the United Kingdom afterwards, but at the end of the evening we declined all offers and parted as good friends. In Holland a new job, which I had secured only a few days earlier, was waiting. On a Friday in August 1977 I cleared my London desk of all the paper litter and the following Monday began my work as Head of the Development Co-operation Office and General Secretary of the Committee for International Co-operation Activities of Eindhoven University of Technology in the southern part of the Netherlands. After almost 12 years, the chapter "Africa" in our life appeared to be closed.

The development co-operation projects of Eindhoven University of Technology were all in South East Asia and endless committee meetings played an important role running them. The projects themselves, and the bureaucracy surrounding them, did not appeal to me and my first six months at university were as dull and undemanding as I had feared they would be. The bright side of my new work was that I had time left to modify and redecorate our house and take up drawing and water colouring again. When Meta started her specialist training, these pleasant past times were complemented with some serious cooking and child raising for the first time since we married. Early 1978, the Dutch embassy in Tanzania complaint to the University Board that a student action group had shipped obsolete equipment to a small co-operative and I was asked to investigate the matter. Within a week I found myself in Dar es Salaam trying to convince the belligerent chairman of a co-operative manufacturing kitchen knives that the university would fulfil its commitments, but that I could not conjure new equipment out of my safari hat. Back in Holland again I set out to find funds for a new production line for the kitchen knife co-operative, but endless meetings with almost all Dutch non-governmental aid organisations were, for

some time, the only tangible result. In the meantime, I learned that the Netherlands' University Foundation for International Co-operation had launched a new project programme and that proposals were expected from the Dutch universities. Blood was thicker than water and by the end of 1978 I had negotiated collaboration agreements with the Universities of Zambia and Dar es Salaam. A little more than a year after I started my work at university, the African connection had been re-established.

In 1979 my request for an assistant was granted and after I had allocated our South East Asian projects to her, I tried to extend our African network and embarked on a number of visits to universities in Burkina Faso, Kenya and Zimbabwe. My visits to Zambia and Tanzania became more frequent and time consuming. Visiting Dar es Salaam once again, I brought the chairman of the kitchen knife co-operative, Remigius Mbawala, the good news that we had secured funds for a new production line and that our university was willing to become a partner in a project. A little later a contract was signed in Holland between our university, a Dutch non-governmental aid organisation and the kitchen knife co-operative. In the years that followed, the kitchen knife adventure featured prominently in our project activities and Remigius and I became friends. At our home in Holland and in Mbande village, when work was done, there was almost no issue which we did not heatedly discuss and disagree on. One night, sitting under the old mango trees around Remigius' house in Mbande, discussing family matters and watching the bright African stars, I promised that I would send our two boys to Africa when they would become of age and that "the girl" would marry in Mbande if she would ever find a boy to share her life with.

Mid 1980, I became director of the faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences and combined my managerial chores with research in the field of the interaction between technology and society and teaching in our newly established Technology and Society M.Sc. programme. "Living and Working in Developing Countries" and "Problems of Development" were among the first lectures I gave to students who specialised in International Technological Development Studies. This specialisation, being the only one in the Netherlands preparing engineers for a career in developing countries, attracted young people from all quarters and soon we had an enrolment of about 30 students per year. Occasionally also Meta made her appearance at university as a guest lecturer to teach "Preventive Health Care in the Tropics". In 1988 our eldest son became of age and I had little choice but to honour the promise made to Remigius almost ten years earlier. Both boys got their backpacks from the attic, secretly cursing their mad father and his portly black friend, and flew to Tanzania to find their African roots. In Dar es Salaam they spent their first days in a small corrugated iron guesthouse of the Salvation Army before travelling to Mbande village to stay with the Mbawala family. Once adapted to some aspects of village life - waking up with the chickens, fetching water from a muddy pond, washing in a bucket, eating maize porridge and turning in with the chickens again - they travelled extensively and on their way back to Holland stopped over in Arusha to climb Mount Kilimanjaro.

Soon after the boys returned from Africa, I gave up my position as director of the faculty to focus on my research and teaching. The University Board kindly granted me a sabbatical and in our apartment in Sibratsgfall in Austria, overlooking

the snow covered mountains bordering the Klein Walsertal, I drafted the first outline of a PhD thesis and prepared a new series of lectures. When I returned to the university our students bullied me into organising a study tour to Kenya and after lengthy preparations, 20 students and four supervisors flew to Mombassa and from there travelled to Nairobi by train in the summer of 1990.

We played the Nairobi University soccer team and were beaten seven to two, admired Joy Adamson's watercolours of the peoples of Kenya in the National Museum and finally got caught up in serious street riots. When we left Nairobi for Naivasha, Mumias and Masai Mara National Park, in a Bedford safari truck loaded with backpacks, suitcases, cooking gear and tents, special army units still patrolled the streets and occasional gunfire could be heard. After visiting various factories and development projects, and after spending two days in Mumias to visit "my" old sugar cane project and "Meta's" St. Mary's Mission Hospital, we struck camp in Masai Mara. Sitting there around the campfire at night, we tried to change the world and discussed almost all important issues of life and mankind. Sooner or later, however, the conversation would turn to Africa, its development problems and the fact that we knew so little about them. It was on one of these occasions that the idea was born to create a permanent base in Africa for our students to conduct their M.Sc. research. After five tiresome but exiting weeks, we were back in Holland again.

In the months that followed, the idea to create a permanent base for our students in Africa was further explored and eventually we decided to build a student house in Tanzania. Through Remigius we acquired a plot on a hill top along Kilwa Road, some 30 kilometres from the centre of Dar es Salaam, and when I finally took my PhD in 1992 the house was almost ready. From 1992 onwards, every year some 20 students spent six months in Tanzania to conduct their M.Sc. research and usually I managed to be in the house for a month or so to supervise them and find suitable new research projects. In the course of building up and structuring our research network, I established close contacts with a host of Ministries, governmental bodies of all kinds, industries, service organisations and aid agencies. For the first time in my life I had the idea that I gained a real insight in the intricate problems with which an African country, its politicians, managers and citizens are confronted.

In 1994, our usually unassuming daughter surprised us in two ways. First when she ditched her boyfriend - or was abandoned by him, we never found out - and introduced us to a new one. The introduction was somewhat spectacular when he, sitting down for the first time in our living room, crashed through my favourite smoking chair. Otherwise he appeared a decent enough boy. Then she caught us off-guard with the spontaneous announcement that she had arranged a nursing internship of five months in St. Mary's Mission Hospital in Kenya. After the first shock, we grew accustomed to the idea and in the summer of 1994 she travelled with Meta to Tanzania, where both joined me in the student house, before continuing the journey to Kenya. Remigius learned about the new boyfriend when we walked through his plot in Mbande one afternoon and he did not hesitate to remember me of my promise, 15 years earlier, to have "the girl" married in Tanzania. When I explained to him that sleeping with a boy does not necessarily mean that you have to



marry him, he grudgingly agreed and the matter was left. Two weeks later Meta and I delivered our daughter to St. Mary's Mission Hospital in Mumias and used the opportunity to look up old friends, some of whom we had not seen for well over 15 years.

Family events had played a modest role in my life, but from the summer 1994 onwards that changed. In October my daughter's boyfriend, probably at his wit's end, flew to Kenya to see "the girl" again. From the few letters we received, we gathered that both enjoyed a travelling holiday and made an attempt to climb Mount Kenya. When they were back in Holland again, early 1995, it was obvious to us that our daughter had found her true love. Staying at our home once again that same year, and putting up his tribal chief act, Remigius interrogated the two lovers and then solemnly announced that they were fit to marry. As an afterthought, he was wise enough to add that the decision was of course theirs. And theirs it eventually was when Remigius visited us a year later. On a Sunday morning an excited daughter, dressed in a skirt instead of the customary faded jeans I intensely disliked, rang the doorbell and asked us to step outside. Meta and I were astounded: a cattle truck blocked the street and the boyfriend, dressed in his best black suit, pulled a scared and unwilling cow over the ramp. Minutes later he informed us that he would marry our daughter, that the ceremony would be held in Tanzania and that he hoped the cow would be a sufficient dowry to satisfy the head of the Mbawala family. One look at Remigius' beaming face told us there would be no problems from that quarter. A date for the ceremony was set and in the summer of 1997, 15 of us set out for the Tanzania wedding safari.

In the early morning hours of 5th August, the wedding party was met at Dar es Salaam airport with the beating of drums and the welcome songs of our Ngoni friends. Then we moved to the student house which, for this special occasion, had been vacated by all but two of our students. Some hours later, at the breakfast table, I realised that the complete family had gathered in Africa again for the first time since 1975. Looking at the bridegroom and his friends and my two daughters in law, all being in Africa for the first time, and watching the air of the ceiling fan ruffle Meta's greying hair, it finally dawned on me that our out of Africa years had begun to count. However, there was little time for reflection and following Ngoni custom, immediately after breakfast, the bridegroom was separated from his bride and transferred to the home of one of his new African family to reflect on his sins for a couple of days. The bride and her mother were whisked away to Mbande village to prepare for the ceremonies that were to follow. Together with my sons, their wives and the other guests, I remained at the student house. The traditional "kitchen party", only attended by women, took place on 7th of August and was followed by the "send off party" a day later when some 200 guests gathered in Mbande to eat, sing, dance and speech. In the afternoon of 9th August, in the small mission church in Mbagala, "the girl" and "the boyfriend" were joined in holy matrimony by father Bart and a few hours later the overwhelming "wedding party" in the Village Museum in Dar es Salaam began.

Before we left Holland our young guests had negotiated a trip to Zanzibar and two days after the "wedding party", we sailed to the island I had always so much disliked because of its uncouth tourists. Whilst the young people explored the island, haggled with the hawkers, swam with the dolphins and laid the basis for a variety of stomach disorders, Meta and I made the arrangements for the final part of the programme: a safari to the remote Selous National Park along the Rufiji river.

There we spent some marvellous days bird and game watching until our stomachs caught up with us and we had to return to the student house to recover. When the last guests had finally left, Meta and I, accompanied by the newly wed couple, fled to our traditional refuge: the small Badego Motel in Bagamoyo, right along the Indian Ocean and next to the ancient German boma<sup>3</sup>.

Here, long last, and far from the maddening crowds, I had time to reflect. Whilst the two young people strolled along the beach collecting shells and Meta held a siesta, I secured some fresh lobsters from the fishermen who had just beached their small lateen rigged boats, arranged a birthday breakfast and a bouquet of purple bougainville flowers for Meta next morning, set down, smoked a pipe and sipped an early whiskey. So far my life, for better and for worse, had been intertwined with Africa. Africans throughout the continent had been kind to me, many had become friends and some even family and now my children were befriending a new generation of Africans. The vigour of African rural life, the astounding survival skills in hard times, the warm hospitality and the omnipresent sense of humour had never failed to amaze and impress me. I had reconnoitred remote tributaries of the Zambezi river and mapped large parts of its delta on foot, stood in awe on the edge of the escarpment looking down on the Rift Valley and watched the sun go down over the hazy deserts in north-western Somalia and Mauretania. I had haggled with village headmen over land and water rights and, in sharp contrast, made my acquaintance with high ranking government officials and politicians including men like Joaquim Alberto Chissano, Siyaad Barre, Leopold Sédar Senghor, Julius Nyerere and Kenneth Kaunda. However, the ring of John Fitzgerald Kennedy's inaugural words, *"my fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man"*, with which I set out for Africa more than 30 years earlier, had almost become inaudible.

The sugar plantations in Luabo, where I started my married life, had long been abandoned and civil war and ill conceived ideas of a Marxist-Leninist garden of Eden had killed hundreds of thousands in the decade and a half following the independence of Mozambique. Somalia, where I had been instrumental in establishing a sugar plantation providing work and income for thousands of peasants, had disintegrated as a state and become a conglomerate of warring clans oblivious to the needs of the rural populace. Kenya's initially bright economic and social future, had slowly but steadily become bogged down in a mire pool of corruption and political conservatism. Severe draughts and floods had affected the lives of millions all over the continent and the unspeakable horrors of genocide and war in Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Angola, the Sudan and other places, had traumatised a young generation that had embodied the hope for Africa's future.

When Meta joined me after her siesta I had a faint headache which soon disappeared when we had our lobster dinner under the thatched roof of the dining room and the four of us shared the last two bottles of white wine left in the pantry. That night I could not catch my sleep. The sound of the surf blended with Meta's regular breathing and when I turned around, the sheets felt damp.

Finally I got up and set on the old and weathered corral stone wall separating our bedroom from the Indian Ocean. There, watching the incoming tide, and very conscious of my ambiguous feelings towards the continent I had been involved with for so long, the idea was born to write a book on sub-Saharan Africa.

In the many years that followed, I re-established contacts with colleagues involved in research on Africa, sorted out my archives, built up an extensive data base of social and economic indicators and started prolific reading. Gradually the structure of the book took shape. At an early stage I decided to exclude the Muslim Arab countries of northern Africa and the island states of Cape Verde, the Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mayotte, Reunion, Sao Tomé and Príncipe and the Seychelles and to focus on the sub-Saharan mainland in stead. Next, I restricted myself to the period between 1960-2000. These 40 years, for most of the 42 sub-Saharan countries I focused on, cover the events immediately prior to independence, independence itself and the lives of two generations of Africans managing, by and large, their own affairs. In this period I also was, sometimes literally and sometimes in a more metaphorical sense, eyewitness to the vicissitudes of the continent. The most difficult part came when I had to amalgamate my ambiguous feelings towards Africa in a balanced and accountable way. On the one hand, I was fully aware of the richness of the cultural history of the continent and its prominent roll in the critical stages of global human evolution, I had enjoyed living and working there, I had made lasting friends and I had observed and admired the almost miraculous survival skills in times of misfortune and disaster. On the other hand, my growing knowledge of the pre and post colonial history of the selected countries, and the trends that emerged from my data base, did little to lessen my concern and to buttress my hopes for the future. Many pages of Africa's history between 1960-2000 are chilling examples of what people are capable doing to one another when ruthless exploitation and self interest take over from long-term regulation and good governance, when the notion of public and individual accountability is swept aside and the promise of future development is hidden by the taxing trials of surviving in the present.

In the end I decided that the book would have six parts. Part I – *Bird's Eye View of African History* – covers the period from the dawn of mankind to the early 1960s. Parts II, III, IV and V each consist of a historically oriented overview, an analysis of the social and economic situation, and a personal account of my life and work in Africa. Part II – *First Dance of Freedom* – covers the period from 1960 to 1969, part III – *Dreams of a Better World* – the period from 1970 to 1979, part IV – *Nightmares of the Real World* – the period from 1980 to 1989 and part V – *Waking up in Cold Sweat* – the period from 1990 to 2004. Part VI – *Crystal Ball* – surveys some development paths African societies could explore and looks at the possible

role of South Africa in the development of the sub-Saharan part of the continent. It was the part I found most difficult to conceive because of my European origin and the complacency resulting from it. I was brought up with a humanist range of thoughts embedded in an European cultural tradition. A tradition not necessarily relevant to the peoples of Africa, but one from which, at times, I found it hard to separate myself. Nevertheless, my involvement with and deep concern about sub-Saharan Africa enticed me to look in the crystal ball.

When preparing the historical overviews I took care to consult European as well as African sources, the latter being facilitated by the enthusiastic collaboration and intervention of my colleagues and friends in Africa. An extensive data base of social and economic indicators made it possible to present quantitative data and draw conclusions from them. The personal account of my life and work in Africa required not only the consent of my family, but also that of some of my close colleagues and friends. Their consent I obtained and I am grateful for their trust. Those I could not trace and consult should remember that I was always outspoken in my opinions and I ask them to be lenient once again. Many of those I worked with in Africa have died. Too many by malaria and aids or in the armed conflicts that ravage the continent, too few of old age. Their descendents will, I trust, forgive me for trespassing on their family's privacy now and then.



## Notes and references

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- <sup>1</sup> Inaugural address John Fitzgerald Kennedy on 20th January, 1961
- <sup>2</sup> General Spínola's statement on transfer of powers in Africa, broadcasted by the Portuguese National Broadcasting Corporation on 27<sup>th</sup> July, 1974. By courtesy of the Contemporary Portuguese Politics and History Research Centre, University of Dundee, United Kingdom
- <sup>3</sup> Boma in Swahili means administrative centre. The German boma, built from coral stone in 1897, was one of the first stone buildings in Bagamoyo but is now almost reduced to rubble