Preface

For there is a real sense in which the problems of politics are perennial. . . . Nothing is today more greatly needed than clarity upon ancient notions. Sovereignty, liberty, authority, personality—these are the words of which we want alike the history and the definition; or rather, we want the history because its substance is in fact the definition.

—Harold Laski[1]

This study is about attempted state formation and the state-society struggle in contemporary Zaire examined from a variety of theoretical and comparative perspectives. In looking at politics in new countries today, we need to focus on some concrete unit or structure. A focus on the multidimensional aspects of "modernization," "development," even "political development" tends to be too diffuse. The same point holds for the often overly macrostructural, abstract, and deterministic notions of the more recent underdevelopment and dependency literatures, despite their proper emphasis on domination and extraction, which were so ignored by the earlier literature. The center of attention here is the state and the processes of state formation, and I believe there is need for a more historically, theoretically, and comparatively grounded view of state formation.[2] The state, as Laski would heartily have agreed, is another one of these ancient notions to which we need to pay more attention. Until the mid-1970s, the notion of the state had not been a common focus of attention among political scientists, particularly Americans, for many years. With the rise to prominence of various forms of systems theory and structural-

functionalism in the field of comparative politics in the mid-1950s, the concept of the state and its use as a key element in comparative analysis were looked upon with suspicion and generally neglected.

In 1953 David Easton reviewed the use of the concept by political scientists and decided that "after the examination of the variety of meanings, a critical mind might conclude that the word ought to be abandoned entirely." He emphatically declared that, henceforth, in his work, "the word will be avoided scrupulously."[3] I would strongly agree with Easton about "the inadequacy of the state concept for depicting *in general terms* what it is the political scientist studies that distinguishes him from other social scientists. It defines by specifying instances of political phenomena rather than by describing their general properties."[4] I am not interested in using the concept of the state as a definition of the subject matter of political science; my concern is with one specific type of political phenomenon that becomes salient in certain historical conditions, particularly where political order and control are uncertain.[5] The state is one type of political organization which seeks dominance over a population in a particular territory. In this sense the term emphasizes separation, control, and autonomous power. If one is interested in the relationship of societal groups and external actors and forces to a dominant form of territorial political authority, then the concepts of the state and state formation become very useful and not, as in Easton's view, barriers to research.

Concern with broadening the analytic focus of political science became evident with increased interest in the politics of the "developing" countries after the demise of European colonial empires in Asia and Africa in the 1950s and early 1960s. Particular attention was given, and rightly so, to nonstate forms of political phenomena. This was especially true for those interested in Africa, as social anthropologists demonstrated that societies that did not possess state forms of political organization were nonetheless highly useful for a general understanding of political life. It is my belief that the concept of the state, if carefully specified in analytic and historical usage, can be very fruitful for empirical work concerned with the processes of the establishment of political domination or control and unification by territorial rulers or

their attempts to establish them. The state does not appear out of the blue to perform the *function* of maintaining social order; neither is it necessarily the pliant tool of a dominant economic class. It is created by political groups interested in establishing domination and control, and this involves struggles with other political and socioeconomic groups having different interests.

In a 1968 article that discusses the state as a conceptual variable, the late J. P. Nettl declared that "there are probably good reasons why no idea of the state is likely to develop from the increasingly unique and particular political experience of these developing countries. As they develop their own autonomous traditions in coping with particular problems, which in turn are very unlike those of historical Europe, it seems improbable that any adequate concept of the state will appear."[6] Contrary to this position, I believe that the processes of state formation are the crucial aspects of politics in African countries today and that in many ways they can usefully be compared with those of historical Europe and early postcolonial Latin America. A false and dangerous belief in the uniqueness of the events of particular areas often accompanied the growth of "area studies" as fields of study for academics and as programs of instruction in universities and colleges. Initially the study of Africa greatly benefited from a multidisciplinary "area studies" approach, but a clear consequence of this approach as it developed was that social and political events, and, to a lesser degree, economic ones, were analyzed as if they were something unique to that area and had no relation to events in other areas of the world or to events in other historical periods. Thus, the contention was that in order to understand African politics, one should study primarily African sociology, anthropology, history, linguistics, etc. and ignore historical and contemporary situations in which these problems were dealt with in similar ways by ruling groups in different parts of the world. This tendency was reinforced by leaders of the new states themselves in their attempts to create new, separate identities and loyalties for their countries. I believe that, in an analytic sense, the state formation experience of other areas and periods is indeed germane to the study of state formation processes in Africa and that the use of comparative perspectives helps to highlight key aspects of politics in African countries today that have been ne-

glected or inadequately conceptualized. It is also my belief that a clear concept of the state is being developed by African ruling groups and that many of them do approach their problems and develop their strategies from the perspective of a search for sovereignty and increased state power.

Since the mid-1970s there has been a major and exciting resurgence of interest in the state and in state formation among both Marxist and non-Marxist writers.[7] Much of the debate generated by this resurgence has centered on the nature and capabilities of the state and on the potential for and actual degree of the autonomy of the state from both societal groups and classes and from external actors and forces. I trust this book will be a useful addition to this new literature and the issues raised by it.

The focus of analysis here will be the *attempt* at state formation and the resulting state-society struggle by the regime of Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire. Many of the problems faced and strategies adopted by African rulers are similar to those that appeared during the formation of the modern state in Europe from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries and in early postcolonial Latin America. In all of these cases the major area of conflict is the location and distribution of political power and economic resources; it is a struggle between an emerging state structure and societal and external groups for power, sovereignty, and resources. Although concern for "development" or mass welfare may be a factor, even an important one at times, in the state's struggle for increased power, it is certainly not the primary focus of concern in most cases. Mass welfare concerns tend to become important only insofar as they directly affect the level of state power vis-à-vis external actors and in the consolidation and extension of political control throughout the territory.

While doing preliminary reading and thinking about a major research project on Zaire, I reread Crawford Young's *Politics in the Congo*—the most impressive study of early Zairian politics. Writing before Joseph-Désiré Mobutu took full power in November 1965, Young noted that "the very nature of the Congolese political community is not entirely defined," and as a result, "at the present stage of knowledge . . . the primary challenge to the student of Congolese politics remains the basic task of providing a conceptual framework adequate to order the mass of disparate data

available."[8] I have tried to provide one such framework. In doing so, I have used a combination of comparative historical and contemporary analysis, Weberian political sociology, and selected notions from organization theory. This approach has its roots in older European traditions of political and social thought, and, in stressing comparative and historical analysis, it downplays the uniqueness of African events, but does so without removing them from their own historical context. From the earlier modernization and development perspectives it maintains a central role for ethnicity and other forms of particularism, personalized politics, and the importance of several key noneconomic social processes. Like the newer underdevelopment and dependency perspectives, it stresses domination, conflict, the clash of interests, the emerging importance of class factors, and linkages with international actors and structures. To provide a conceptual framework for Zaire is much easier now than when Professor Young wrote; the basic patterns are much more clear. The Mobutu regime will be portrayed here as an early modern absolutist state with a "democratic" facade of single-party corporatism and departicipation.

The main field research in Zaire for this study was carried out between June 1974 and August 1975. We resided in Kinshasa, where I collected documentation and interviewed central officials and others knowledgeable about the regime. During three months as a staff assistant for the local representative of the Rockefeller Foundation, I had daily contact with the central Zairian state—a most instructive activity. Living in Kinshasa gives one a good feel for the hub of the Zairian absolutist state and its king—Mobutu Sese Seko. But, being particularly concerned about the nature of the state-society struggle in the "provinces," I also spent considerable time in three areas outside Kinshasa. For over six months I made weekly two- or three-day trips to Mbanza-Ngungu, the headquarters of the Cataractes Subregion in Bas-Zaire Region, between Kinshasa and the coast. I did some interviewing of administrative officials, but most of my time was spent in the relatively well organized archives or records room of the subregion. I was able to see almost anything I wanted, including classified material and daily cables and correspondence. The records were nearly complete for the 1967–1975 period, but uneven for the colonial and 1960–1966 periods. They covered all aspects of

politico-administrative life and all jurisdictions. From these documents a rich, detailed, and complex picture of the state-society struggle and rural absolutist administration emerged. Like Tocqueville in his study of Old Régime France, I have "given much time to studying records that, while less known . . . , throw perhaps more light on the true spirit of the age."

> In a country where a strong central administration has gained control of all the national activities there are few trends of thought, desires or grievances, few interests or propensities that do not sooner or later make themselves known to it, and in studying its records, we can get a good idea not only of the way in which it functioned but of the mental climate of the country as a whole.[9]

In addition to the administrative archives, I was able to observe the day-to-day operation of the administrative offices and to get to know the clerks and lower-level officials—both very enlightening activities. I also observed mass popular meetings, "animation" sessions, and Salongo (collective work) activities. I was able to travel to various areas of the subregion, including Matadi, the Bas-Zaire regional capital. Finally, in the Hotel Cosmopolite, where I regularly stayed, I was able to observe the social mixing of the local state, private, and religious elites.

I also made three trips to the Kivu Region—to Bukavu, its capital, to the Nord-Kivu Subregion and its headquarters in Goma, and to three of its six zones. Total time spent in Kivu was about six weeks. In Goma I started to do the same things I had done in Mbanza-Ngungu but was cut short after about three weeks of full-time work. I was, however, able to collect sufficient data to write knowledgeably about Kivu.

In addition, I also made two trips to Lubumbashi, the regional capital of Shaba (Katanga). Altogether I spent about six weeks in that region. In addition to personal observation, I spent most of my time systematically inspecting *mémoires* (theses) on the central and local administrations written by university students. A total of about three weeks was also spent during this period in Brussels and Paris collecting documents.

Between 1978 and 1983 I spent considerable time interviewing officials of Western governments, international organizations, and private banks in New York, San Francisco, Washing-

ton, D.C., London, Brussels, and Paris, focusing primarily on the regime's external linkages and its economic and debt crises. Although the end product of this work will be a book on Zaire's debt crisis as a way of showing how the Mobutu regime has related to external actors and forces, the results of it are clearly reflected here, both substantively and theoretically. Finally, I paid a brief research visit to Kinshasa in July and August 1982.

The focus here will be on the nature of the Mobutu regime, with particular emphasis on the state-society struggle in the rural periphery. The external factors affecting this struggle are also treated, both theoretically and substantively. Thus I will examine the nature of patriarchal patrimonial rule in an early modern state and the extension of central control over a complex and turbulent society using a patrimonial-bureaucratic administrative apparatus of a prefectoral type. An administrative monarchy is engaged in a search for sovereignty, centralized control, and a more direct, unmediated state-subject relationship and pursues what I term a coverover strategy of state formation. In the coverover process, prefects struggle against local particularisms, societal groups, and emerging classes by seeking to emasculate the power of all intermediary authorities, usually, however, without being able or willing to abolish them fully. The coercive and extractive nature of this absolutist form of domination and its ultimately limited character are stressed.

The organization of this study is as follows: part I addresses several analytic concerns. Chapter 1 examines the Mobutu regime in Zaire as an authoritarian, early modern, patrimonial administrative state from both theoretical and comparative perspectives, using Latin American and African experience as principal referents; chapter 2 discusses state formation processes and strategies using concepts from political sociology and organization theory; and chapter 3 introduces the concept of absolutism and uses seventeenth-century France as the comparative referent. I will use "the European experience as a guide and correction"[10] to an analysis of the Zairian state. One compares in order to discover general properties of the items compared and to grasp more clearly the singularities of each case.[11] The absolutist model is presented as a conceptual framework for the Zairian case that may help to bridge the gap between the abstractness of struc-

tural-functional development and modernization theories, as well as the underdevelopment and dependency literatures, and the concreteness and minutiae of descriptive political history. Chapter 4, the first one of part II, presents a brief political history of the Mobutu regime, including its colonial and postcolonial roots and early development, and an analysis of the nature and structure of the absolutist state, its ruler or "presidential-monarch," his ruling class, which I characterize as a political aristocracy, and how they relate to external actors. Chapters 5 through 7 present a detailed examination of the state-society struggle in Zaire today, with particular emphasis on territorial administration and the coverover strategy of state formation. The conclusion delineates the major differences between the two cases of absolutism, assesses the normative consequences of absolutist domination, and speculates on the future of Zairian absolutism.