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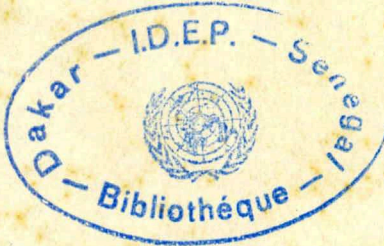
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MODES OF PRODUCTION, SOCIAL FORMATIONS,
INTERCONNECTION OF THE VARIOUS LEVELS OF
A FORMATION, CLASSES AND SOCIAL GROUPS,
NATION AND ETHNIC GROUPS: INTRODUCTION
TO THE CONCEPTS.

By

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FEBRUARY, 1972.

All scientific systems are based on a system of concepts. The concept of the mode of production is the most general and therefore the most abstract concept of social science. It will be seen that its operational power is exceptionally strong. It is related to the concept of social formation, located at a lower level of abstraction and therefore nearer the immediate concrete reality. The connection between the various levels determining a social formation (economic, political, ideological levels) is specific to each type of formation: it differs in the pre-capitalist, capitalist and socialist modes of production. The predominance of one level over the others, as distinct from the determination in the last instance, is specific to a mode of production. Social classes are in a similar way defined in relation to a social formation and the relations between them are specific to this formation. Finally the concepts of nation and ethnic group are clearly defined only if related to the specific characteristics of the different social formations.

I

The Modes of Production

It should be emphasized right from the beginning that a distinction must be made between modes of production and social formations. This distinction is unfortunately too often forgotten, thus leading to great confusion in social theory.

The concept of mode of production is an abstract concept implying no order of historical sequence with respect to the whole period of the history of civilizations extending from the first differentiated formations to capitalism. We have proposed distinguishing five modes of production: 1) the primitive community mode of production,

the only one which ante-dates all the others, for obvious reasons, 2) the tribute-paying mode of production, juxtaposing the persistence of the village community, and that of a social and political apparatus exploiting the latter in the form of exacting tribute; this tribute-paying mode of production is the most common and most general form characterizing pre-capitalist class formation; we propose to distinguish between a) the early forms, and b) the advanced forms such as the feudal mode of production in which the village community loses the eminent domain of the land to the benefit of the feudal lords, the community persisting as a community of families), 3) the slave mode of production, which is a relatively rare form although widely scattered, 4) the simple petty commodity mode of production, a frequent form but which practically never constitutes the dominant mode of a social formation, and finally 5) the capitalist mode of production.

In its "pure state", each of these modes of production has its own specific essential characteristics.

The community modes of production are the first production modes giving rise to an embryo class distinction. They ensure the transition from primitive communism to full class societies. As Guy Dhoquis clearly pointed out, this primitive communism is defined as the primitive negation (of the division of labour and of the surplus product). A distinction must be made between this necessary assumption and the community modes. Because this passage from the negative (absence of classes) to the positive (class society) is extremely slow and gradual, the community modes are varied and numerous, as Emmanuel TERRAY has established. Ecological conditions are obviously the origin of this society. Nevertheless, in spite of this variety, the primitive community modes of production are all characterized by: 1) an organization of labour partly on an individual basis (that of the "nuclear family"), partly on collective basis (that of the

"extended family" of the "clan", of the village), the essential means of labour - land - being the collective property of the clan, and its use free to all its members but according to specific rules (use of plots distributed to families etc); 2) the absence of commodity exchange and correlatively; 3) the distribution of the product within the community according to rules closely connected with the kinship organization.

All members of the community do not necessarily have equal access to the land. They obviously do, in the most primitive of these communities. In the more advanced communities, access to the land is based on a hierarchy, some families or clans having a "right" to better plots, larger and better located plots for instance. It is from that time onwards that an embryo class distinction is felt. Very generally, this hierarchy is closely connected with that of the political or religious power. A wide range of these modes of production can be found in Africa south of the Sahara, some of them relatively strong, only slightly graded particularly, by among the Bantus - others very inegalitarian, as among the "Toucouleurs" of the Senegal River Valley, the Ashantis of Ghana, the Hausas of Northern Nigeria etc. But in all these cases, the peasant, whoever he may be, has access to the land : by the mere fact that he is a member of a clan, he is entitled to a plot in the holding belonging to the clan. Consequently, the process of proletarianization, that is the process of separating the producer from his means of production (here, the natural means : the land) is impossible. Therefore it will be noticed that the integration of societies based on this type of mode of production into the world capitalist system - which is the case of almost all the African peasant societies to-day - leads to impoverishment without proletarianization.

The slave mode of production turns the worker-slave - into the essential means of production. But the product of this slave labour can either enter the circuit of non-commodity transfers specific to the community (patriarchal slavery) or into the commodity circuits (case of Graeco-Roman slavery).

In the feudal mode of production, in which the land is again the essential means of production - we have 1) the society organized into two class, that of the lords of the land (whose ownership is inalienable) and that of the serf-tenants, 2) the appropriation of the surplus by the feudal lords by right and not by virtue of commodity relations, 3) the absence of internal commodity exchanges in the "domain" which constitutes the basic cell of the society.

The so called "Asian" mode of production which we would prefer to call a tribute-paying mode, is very close to the feudal mode of production. It is characterized by the organization of society into two essential classes : a peasantry organized into a community and a ruling class which monopolizes of the political organization functions of the society and exacts (non-commodity) tributes from the rural communities. But while in the tributary mode of production, the feudal lord has the eminent domain of the land, the rural community has the actual ownership. The result is that the feudal mode of production - which only existed in its complete form in western and central Europe and in Japan - is always threatened with disintegration if for one reason or another, the feudal lord gets rid of part of his tenants, "frees" his serfs, that is proletarianizes them. It is from this disintegration, under the impulse of population pressure and of the effects of long distance trade (with its corollary, the changing of rent in kind into a money rent) that the urban proletariat arose - a condition for the emergence of the capitalist mode of production. On the other hand, the basic right of the peasant member of the community to

have access to the use of the land in the tributary mode of production makes this disintegration impossible. Nevertheless, the advanced tributary mode of production almost always tends (it was the case in China, in India, in Egypt) to become feudalized, that is, the community is replaced by the ruling class in the exclusive eminent domain of the land (although this type of feudalism may have secondary characteristics differentiating it from that of Europe or Japan).

In its pure state, the simple commodity mode of production is characterized by the equal status of free small producers as well as by the organization of commodity exchanges among them. No society has ever been based on the predominance of this simple commodity mode of production which remains purely an ideal one (the commodity relations involved here are internal to the society and not external relations. But very frequently, particularly in the formations based on the predominance of the slave, tributary or feudal mode of production, there was a sphere governed by simple commodity relations, especially the sphere of handcraft production when sufficiently dissociated from agricultural production (this is the case of urbanized societies).

The meaning to be given to our proposition that modes of production are not historical concepts, that they have no age, is now quite clear. It means that there is no necessary historical sequence, such as for example the famous sequence: community - slavery - feudalism.

On emerging from the community, the tribute-paying mode of production is in fact the most "normal" outcome, the rule. It is characterized by the following contradiction : permanence of the community/negation of the community by the State. It is, thereby also characterized by the confusion between the upper class which appropriates the surplus and the dominant political class. This fact makes it impossible to reduce the production relations to the legal relations of ownership and compels us to give to the production relations their full original meaning : social relations on the occasion of the organization of production. It will be seen later that the reduction of production relations to ownership relations is at the root of the confusion between socialism and state capitalism.

Since this tribute-paying mode of production, is the rule, we must no longer call it "Asiatic". In fact, we find it on the five continents, certainly in Asia (China, India, Indochina, Mesopotamia and the classical East etc.) but equally in Africa (Egypt and Africa South of the Sahara), in Europe (in the pre-classical societies : Crete and Etruria) and in the Indian civilizations of America (Incas, Aztecs etc.....)

The family of tribute-paying modes of production includes the feudal mode of production, which appears as a border line case, in which the community is particularly degraded, since it loses the eminent domain of the land. Because it is a border line case, we can understand why and how feudal formations are peripheral in relation to the central tributary formations. We can also understand why and how the capitalist mode of production emerged only in these frontier areas of the tributary civilization, the major form of precapitalist civilization.

Similarly it will be noticed that the slave mode of production is also on the borders of the tributary formations and appears only exceptionally in a sequence which is not central but peripheral.

Finally, it will be noticed that the simple petty commodity mode of production only flourishes in the peripheral formations. When we come to distinguish between the young centres (centres in formation) of the capitalist system and its periphery, the importance of this observation will be clear. This will be decisive when we deal with the question of North America as opposed to Latin America and that of the "white" Dominions (South Africa, Australia, New Zealand) as opposed to the colonies.

II

SOCIAL FORMATIONS

None of these modes of production ever existed in "the pure state" - historical societies being formations which combine these modes of production on the one hand (for example, village community, patriarchal slavery and simple commodity relations between heads of family of neighbouring communities) and which on the other hand, organize relations between the local society and other societies (manifested by the existence of distant trade relations). Obviously, distant trade is not a mode of production. But the more or less advanced degree of this trade gives the social formations, in the particular combination which govern their relations with the mode or modes of production on which the society is based, their special features.

Social formations are therefore concrete structures organized and characterized by a dominant mode of production and, interconnected with it, a complex set of modes of production which are subordinate to it. Thus, the simple petty commodity mode of production can be connected with a dominant tributary mode of production (early or advanced - feudal), with a slave mode of production or even with a capitalist mode of production. Similarly the slave mode of production may not be dominant, this being the rule when it is connected with a dominant tributary mode (or even with the capitalist mode, as in the United States until 1865), or exceptionally it may be the dominant mode (as in the formations of classical antiquity).

All these precapitalist societies are social formations combining the same elements, although the combinations of the elements may of course differ from one another. The infinite variety of these formations, the Asian and African formations in particular, has been outrageously reduced to the "Asian mode of production". We prefer to speak of "Oriental and African formations", characterized by 1) the

predominance of a community or tributary mode of production (more or less developing into a feudal mode of production), 2) the existence of simple commodity relations in limited spheres and 3) the existence of distant trade relations. When there is no feudal mode of production or when it is very embryonic, and when there are no internal simple commodity relations either, the formation, reduced to the combination of an undeveloped community or tributary mode of production and of distant trade relations, would be of the "African" type.

The introduction of distant trade in the explanation of social formations becomes necessary because these formations cannot always be understood when considered in isolation. While the relations which various formations entertain are sometimes marginal, these relations are very often decisive. The problems raised by distant trade are therefore essential. Distant trade is obviously not a mode of production, but a mode linking autonomous formations. This distinguishes it from internal trade, i.e. trade taking place within a given social formation. This internal trade is based on commodity exchanges characteristic of simple or slave (in this case slave-commodity) petty commodity modes of production which are the elements of the formation in question.

But it can also be the extension of distant trade, the way in which the goods with which the latter is concerned penetrate in depth into the formation.

Since distant trade brings together societies which do not know each other, that is commodities whose cost of production in each society is unknown to the other society, "scarce" commodities for which substitutes cannot be found, the social groups trading in these products have a monopoly position from which they derive their profits. Very often this monopoly justifies the "special" character of these groups - specialized foreign trading castes or ethnic groups etc. - so frequent in history (Jews in Europe, the Dioulas in West Africa etc.).

In this trade, the subjectivist theory of value - which is meaningless when the production costs of the goods are known to the partners engaged in the exchange, as is the case with capitalist trade, is still meaningful.

We shall see that distant trade may be decisive in some societies. This applies when the surplus which the local dominant classes can obtain from the producers within the formation in question limited owing to the less advanced level of development of the productive forces and/or to difficult ecological conditions or because of the successful opposition of the village community to the appropriation of this surplus. In this case, distant trade, by the monopoly profit it authorizes, makes possible the transfer (and certainly not the generation) of a portion of the surplus from one society to another. For the society which receives it, this transfer may be essential and may constitute the major basis of the wealth and power of its governing classes. The whole civilization may then depend on this trade, and the displacement of the trade circuits may lead to the decay of a particular region or, on the contrary create conditions in which it will flourish, without involving a marked regression or progression at the level of the productive forces. This is the explanation, in our opinion, of the ups and downs in the history of the Ancient and Mediterranean world, particularly as regards the Greek miracle and the flourishing and decay of the Arab world.

The analysis of a concrete social formation should therefore be based on that of the mode of generation of the surplus characteristic of this formation, of the possible transfers of surplus from or to other formations, and on the internal distribution of this surplus among the various recipients (classes and social groups). The very condition of existence of a class formation (as opposed to the "original negation" - primitive communism -) is that the development of the productive forces (and the therefore the degree of division of labour accompanying it) is

already enough to lead to a surplus, that is to an excess of production over the consumption necessary to ensure the reconstitution of the labour power. This very general concept of surplus takes various forms according to the modes of production involved, either non-commodity (tribute, rent in kind etc.), or commodity. In these latter cases the term surplus value will be used, which contains the root value and therefore refers to commodity exchange. In the capitalist mode of production, profit is the specific form which the surplus value will take when it is redistributed in proportion to the capital advanced. As a social formation is a complex involving several modes of production, the surplus generated in this formation is not homogeneous : it adds together surplus of various origins. The first essential question is to know what is the predominant mode of production, and therefore the predominant form of the surplus, for a particular concrete formation. A second point which is equally essential is to know to what extent the society lives on a surplus produced by itself and on a surplus transferred from another society, in other words, what is the relative place taken by distant trade for the formation in question. The distribution of this surplus among the social classes defined in relation to the various modes of production characteristic of the formation and the social groups whose existence is related to the modes of inter-connection between the different production modes in question which are specific to the formation, gives the formation its real face.

Thus the analysis of a concrete formation demands the elucidation of the mode of predominance of one production mode over the others and of the mode of inter-connection between these modes of production.

The most common family of formations in the history of pre-capitalist civilizations is that of the predominantly tributary formations. On emerging from primitive communism, communities are constituted and then develop into the hierarchical forms of the latter. It is this general development which engenders the tributary mode of production.

The slave and simple commodity modes of production interconnect with the tributary mode and occupy a more or less important place in the society according to the relative importance of the surplus extracted in the form of tribute. If the natural (ecological) conditions and the social conditions (degree of development of the productive forces) are favourable, a heavy tribute is paid. The State-class collecting this tribute (the "Royal Court") redistributes a large part of it by providing a living for craftsmen who, in turn, supply it with the luxury goods it consumes. These craftsmen are often petty commodity producers. The handcraft industrial production can also be organized within the framework of enterprises using servile or free (wage-earning) manpower and producing for trading purposes. There is a class of traders between the State, the village communities, the craftsmen and the entrepreneurs (slave-owning or not) which organizes these trade circuits. The connection of these secondary modes of production with the dominant tributary mode of production must therefore be analysed in terms of circulation of the original surplus, a circulation on which is grafted the possible generation of secondary surpluses (in the case of enterprises whose manpower is slave or wage-earning). It is also on this circulation of surplus that the transfer from the outside world may be grafted, if there is a distant trade dominated by the traders of the formation studied. In a case where the tribute (of internal origin) is low (for economic reasons for instance) the tributary society should be relatively poor. But this society may, exceptionally, be wealthy if it benefits from a large external surplus. This is the case of societies depending largely on the control of distant trade circuits. The existence and the prosperity of these societies will therefore depend to a great extent on this monopolized control of the relations which other formations (where an originally transferred surplus is generated) entertain through it. We will then have tributary - trading formations: the addition of the adjective "trading" marking the determinant relative place of the surplus of external origin (profits from the monopoly of the distant trade) over the surplus of internal origin (tribute). The relations may even

be reversed here : at the level of the formation the transferred surplus supplies the secondary circuits (of simple commodity production etc.) and a tribute may be levied on this surplus transferred by the dominant class-state.

The first sub-family of tributary formations, that of wealthy tributary formations (based on a large internal surplus) is that of all the great millenary civilizations, particularly that of Egypt and China. They have a remarkable stability, precisely because the tribute of internal origin is voluminous. The second sub-family, that of poor tributary formations (characterized by the low volume of the internal surplus) is that of the great majority of ancient and medieval civilizations. The third sub-family, that of tributary trading formations, appears here and there for periods which are more or less long depending on the vicissitudes of the trade routes : Ancient Greece, the Arab world in its flourishing era, some states of the Savannah region in Africa south of the Sahara, are the most striking examples. In relation to this series of formations with tributary dominance (and marginally tributary - mercantile), the formations with a slave and simple commodity dominance only appear as exceptions.

The slave based dominance does not have any general vocation and is practically nowhere the origin of class differentiations. The slave mode of production was only widespread in connection with the flourishing of commodity exchanges in Greece and Rome. Distant trade was the origin of Greek civilization. The profits accruing from this trade supported a slave based commodity production which transferred the centre of gravity of the formation. The major surplus was of external origin at the beginning; with the development of slavery the internal surplus occupied an increasingly important place and part of the slave-produced commodities were exported. Alexander's empire and then his Roman successor widened the geographical space of this exceptional formation. It is characteristic that its extension to the

East, where it was checked by solid tributary formations, was difficult and limited, while the centre of gravity of this formation shifted towards the north and the west where in fact the tribute levied remained lower. But even in this imperial area where slavery, simple commodity production and internal and external trade were exceptionally extensive, the community (in the West) and the tributary (in the East) modes of production persisted. The dependence of the formation on the outside world, from which it drew its slaves, shows its weakness. The small Roman slave millennium is short compared to the millennia of the Egyptian and Chinese civilizations. From the ruins of its destruction by Barbarians there re-emerged a tributary formation, that of feudal Europe. We shall see later on where the roots of the specific features of this formation are to be found, since they account for the genesis of the capitalist mode of production.

Still more exceptional is the predominance of the simple commodity modes of production. It was only found in New England (from 1600 to 1750) in Boer South Africa (from 1600 to 1880), in Australia and in New Zealand (from the origin of the white colonization to the development of contemporary capitalism). These societies of small farmers and free craftsmen in which the simple commodity mode of production is not grafted on a tributary or slave production, but constitutes the major organizational mode of the society, could not be explained if we did not know that they are the by-product of the disintegration of feudal relations in England (and secondarily, in the Netherlands and in France). The emigration of the poor - proletarianized by this disintegration - and the ideal model they constituted on the new lands, reflect this exceptional affiliation. We shall have occasion to see that the transformation potential of these exceptional formations into full capitalist formations is extraordinary.

It is now clear what we mean when we say that the concept of social formation is a historical concept. As emphasized by DARCY RIBEIRO and recalled by SILVA MICHELENA, technological progress - the

development of productive forces - is cumulative. This progress takes place within the framework of a formation (for example the tributary or the capitalist formation) and makes it possible to date history. The same formation at two different ages always consists of production modes combined in a certain way, specific to that formation. Two formations of the same technological age - characterised by the same development level of productive forces - combine different modes of production. Hence although production modes do not constitute historical categories (in the sense of a necessary historical sequence of their emergence) formations have an age and this age is given by the level of development of the productive forces.

The formations succeed one another historically, but not the modes that they combine. However, this historical succession is not unique. The major, predominant, line witnesses the succession of community formations, then of tributary formations. This major line - central to the precapitalist formations, we would say - is relatively "blocked" in that technological progress may take place within the tributary formation even if slowly. The second line, a marginal line, first witnesses the succession of community formations and then that of feudal formations (which are an extreme type of the family of tributary formations), with a marked commodity connotation (slave commodity and/or simple non-slave commodity) which shows its originality or, we might say its peripheral character. Here again, the development of the productive forces again enters into conflict with social relations and culminates in the capitalist formations.

The historical sequence of formation, added to the necessary absence of sequence of the modes they combine, means that it is absurd to draw any analogy between the same mode of production integrated into formations of different age, for example between the African or Roman slavery and that of the nineteenth century United States.

Capitalist formations are all characterized by the predominance of the capitalist mode of production. Without encroaching upon the later part of this study, we should point out that this predominance, which is common to all capitalist formations, does not exclude a great difference between its modes of expression according to whether the capitalist formations are central or peripheral. Compared with all the former modes, the capitalist mode of production has this particular characteristic, that all its products are commodities, whereas only the products in which is incorporated the surplus of the former modes can assume the form of a commodity. In all the precapitalist modes, subsistence does not form the object of exchanges (hence the character of "subsistence-economy" character of precapitalist formations) and the surplus is sometimes the object of a non-commodity circulation (tribute, rent in kind) and sometimes of commodity exchanges. The generalization of the commodity form of the product gives the capitalist mode of production the power to disintegrate the other modes of production which it confronts. While precapitalist formations are characterized by a stable co-existence of different, inter-connected and graded modes, the capitalist mode destroys the others. It has a tendency to become exclusive. As will be seen however, the condition of the tendency to exclusiveness is that it is based on the widening and deepening of the internal market. This applies to central capitalist formations and not to peripheral formations. In the latter formations, it will be seen that the dominant capitalist mode subdues and transforms the others - disfigures them - deprives them of their functionality and subjects it to its own, without however radically disintegrating and destroying them.

The predominance of the capitalist mode of production is also noticeable on another level. The world system is a level of contemporary reality. At this level, the (central and peripheral) formations are organized into one graded system. The disintegration of this system - the formation of socialist or so called socialist states - expresses nothing but this assumption, that the system is superseded not from its periphery but from its centre. Nevertheless, it is only possible

to attain full socialism at the world level, if, from this as from all other points of view, socialism cannot but be superior to capitalism and the latter is already organized into a world system. Therefore, socialism cannot be the juxtaposition of national socialisms, which would be a step backward with respect to the integrated (but not egalitarian) world character of capitalism. Therefore, there cannot be a socialist system other than a world-wide one. That is also the reason why we do not have two world markets : the capitalist market and the socialist market; but a single one - the former - in which Eastern Europe participates, marginally indeed. We shall have the opportunity to discuss further the nature of transitional formations -- transition towards socialism or towards state capitalism --, to discuss whether these formations already (or do not yet) form part of the world capitalist system, or whether they show a trend towards a different path which excludes their reintegration into the system involved.

III

SOCIAL CLASSES, THE INTER-CONNECTION OF THE VARIOUS LEVELS

If the analysis of a social formation consists in elucidating the problems of the generation and circulation of the surplus in this formation, this analysis immediately throws light on the question of classes and social groups. Each class mode of production determines a pair of antagonistic-united classes : state-class and peasants in the tributary mode, masters and slaves in the slave mode, feudal lords and serfs in the feudal mode, bourgeois and proletarians in the capitalist mode. Each of these classes is defined by its functions in production. This essential reference to the production process cannot be reduced to the "ownership" of (title to) the means of production. The State-class in the tributary mode does not own the land, which belongs to the community. The feudal lord only enjoys eminent domain of the land, the

community retaining a right (the right of use) over it. But both the state-class and the feudal lords, organize and plan production, and hence dominate the productive process. The community as well as the simple commodity modes of production, also each determine a class of producers, since they are undifferentiated modes from the point of view of classes. Nevertheless, this is a social class, that is a group defined with reference to the process of production : the class of community peasants and that of free petty commodity producers (peasants and craftsmen). With reference to the process of circulation of the surplus, when it is a commodity circulation, we can define a class : that of the traders. It is obvious that when the circulation of the surplus is not commodity circulation it is the dominant class of the mode which directly assumes this function : levy of tribute by the agents of the state-class or direct payment by peasants of a rent in kind to the lord.

Since a formation is a complex set of production modes, it is not surprising that every society has the aspect of a complex set of more than two classes : feudal lords, serf peasants, free peasants, trading craftsmen, traders in Feudal Europe; Imperial Court and gentry of civil servants, community peasants, free small scale handcraft producers, wage earning craftsmen, trading entrepreneurs and merchants in Imperial China, slave-masters and slaves, free or community-based small peasants, traders in the ancient world, bourgeois, proletarians and small commodity producers in the modern capitalist world etc....

A society cannot be reduced to its base. Its organization, that is the organization of its material life, as we shall see, requires that political and ideological functions be fulfilled in relation to the dominant mode of production and to the interconnection of modes specific to this formation. These functions may either be fulfilled directly by the classes defined above or by social groups depending on them. The real concrete social structure of the society will be marked by these groups to a very large extent. The most important among them is certainly the

bureaucracy, which ensures the functioning of the state : civil bureau-
cracy (tribute collectors police and judges) military, religious
bureaucracy etc.. Great progress will have been made when the bureau-
cracy thus defined (even in its broad sense) is no longer confused
with the state-class of the tributary mode or with the state bourgeoisie
of state capitalism.

The bureaucracy does not fulfill the functions of direct domi-
nation of the productive process. On the other hand, the state-class
does control it directly : it is the state-class which plans and regu-
lates as is seen in China and Egypt. The same applies, mutatis mutandis
to state capitalism in which the state bourgeoisie directs the enter-
prises, decides what to produce and how, etc.. the domestic struggles
between the "clan of technocrats" and that of the "bureaucrats" in
Russia clearly reflect this distinction - which has become a conscious
one - between the state bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy which is sup-
posed to serve it.

This latter example of the conflict between a (ruling) class
and the group which is supposed to serve it shows that a problem re-
mains to be elucidated : the problem of the relations between the
various levels of a mode of production. Since, as we have already
pointed out, society cannot be reduced to its base, how do we determine
the relations between the latter (the economic level) and the super-
structure (the politico-ideological level)? These relations differ
from one mode of production to another. It is true that, whatever may
be the mode of production, it is the economic level which is deter-
minant in the last resort, if we accept this plain obvious and unques-
tionable reality, that material life conditions all the other aspects
of social life - "first we have to eat" - that is, the level of
development of the productive forces - by determining the relative
volume of the surplus - conditions civilization. But it is important
to distinguish this determination in the last instance from the dominance
of the economic or politico-ideological level.

In every pre-capitalist mode of production, the generation and the use of the surplus are transparent. The producers therefore cannot accept the extraction of this surplus they produce and of which they know they are the producers unless they are alienated so consider this extraction necessary for the survival of the social and natural order. The politico-ideological level therefore necessarily takes a religious form and dominates the social life : it is the dominant level. In such cases moreover, if the surplus extorted is no longer used "correctly", i.e. to maintain, reproduce and develop the state and civilization, if it is "wasted" by plundering invaders or by a "bad king", the producers revolt in order to impose a "just government" because the natural order and the divine laws have been violated. This explains the alienated forms of social movements and the re-establishment of the order of classes. Moreover, when the maintenance and the development of this social order demands the smooth functioning of particular social groups such as the civil or military bureaucracy or the theocracy at the service of the tributary **state class**, these groups occupy a central place in the political history of the society. The empiric observer of history, falling a victim to appearances, may then see in the latter the resultant of ideological struggles (religious conflicts) or political struggles (conflicts of clans) struggles : he falls a victim to the same alienation as the society studied.

On the other hand, in the capitalist mode of production and in it alone, the generation of the surplus is obscure (opaque). As Marx himself pointed out, this is certainly the essential contribution of capital : the transformation of surplus value into profit. Narrow minded "economists" saw in this transformation a formal contradiction (the so-called contradiction between volumes I and II of capital). This simply shows that they are victims of the same alienation as their society : the economic alienation. For this transformation makes the origin of profit (the surplus value) apparently disappear, it makes "capital" (a social relation) appear as a thing

(the capital equipment into which this social power is incorporated), and endows this thing with a supernatural power : the power to be "productive". The term fetichism which Marx attributes to this process is very appropriate. From the point of view of appearances, in the capitalist mode of production, capital therefore appears as productive, just like labour; the wages appears to be the "fair" remuneration of labour (whereas it represents the value of the labour power) just as profit appears to be the compensation for "services" rendered by capital (risk, savings - abstinence etc.). The opacity of the generation of the surplus therefore engenders a particular form of alienation, different from the precapitalist forms of the latter, economistic alienation. The economic level is mystified while the political level is demystified. The society no longer controls the evolution of its material life : the latter appears as the resultant of "laws" which are imposed on it as physical and natural laws. The "economic laws" - the supply of and the demand for goods, labour, capital etc. - bear witness to this alienation. That is why "economics" will be an ideology - the ideology of universal harmonies; it will reduce "social laws" to the status of laws of nature, independent of the social organization. Politics on the other hand is demystified; it is no longer a religion. The true religion of the capitalist society is "economism", in vulgar terms "the purse", in less shocking but equivalent terms the consumismo (the cult of consumption for its own sake without reference to needs). The entire crises of contemporary civilization can be found here, for we shall see that this ideology shortens the time horizon of society, makes it lose sight of its view of the future. At the same time, demystified politics becomes the sphere of an asserted rationality. Consequently the social groups which fulfil functions at this level are naturally and obviously at the service of the society; they are not at any time against its masters. Bureaucrats and soldiers must justify their functions in civilian terms.

Thus the analysis of the interconnection of level supplements that of social formations. Considered together, those two analyses alone enable us to understand the dynamics of classes and social groups. Without this analysis we have nothing but meaningless appearances. Empirical analysis detects social "categories" of arbitrary number : two (the "rich" and the "poor") or three (the "intermediaries between the rich and the poor), or 15 or 20 (occupational categories or with arbitrary income brackets), at the extreme one category per individual! (where we find again the individualistic requirement of the ideology which replaces social science). It is obvious that the dynamics of the society then becomes incomprehensible or - which amounts to the same thing - arbitrary. Here again the historian is the victim to the same alienation as the society he studies.

IV

Nations and Ethnic Groups

The study of a social formation necessarily raises, whether we like it or not, the problem of the nation, of the definition of this social unit with definite contours which constitutes a given social formation. Conventional social science evades the problem: the mysterious mystical basis of the natural fact does not take us very far. STALINE reduces this social reality to the modern capitalist world by laying down as one of the requirements of the nation the existence of an integrated capitalist market. The reduction of this social phenomenon is unacceptable: for it is obvious that throughout the millenia, Imperial China and Egypt do not constitute conglomerates of peoples - be they by their language and culture heterogeneous or homogeneous - and that they are from this point of view quite different from barbarian Gaul or Germania as well as from civilized India.

Moreover, the reduction in question entailed a political conclusion which was perhaps at its origin: that nationalism is a bourgeois ideology, and that the ideology of the proletariat must be national. Here, as is often the case, Trotskyism does not differ, being the twin brother of Stalinism, and both of them being the true children of Leninism, even if they happened to be "cursed" children. The acknowledgement of the inadequacy of social science in this field must therefore be the starting-point of an operational conceptualization.

Two concepts will therefore be defined: that of Ethnic groups and that of nation. The Ethnic group - and obviously not the race - presupposes a linguistic and cultural community and a homogeneous

geographical territory and above all the consciousness of this cultural homogeneity. The latter may indeed be imperfect and the dialectal variants as well as the religious cults may differ from one "province" to another. But in order for there to be an ethnic group, it is enough that there should be awareness of kinship, and that there should not be such variety that communication is impossible. A nation presupposes an ethnic group but goes beyond it. In what? The nation appears if, in addition, a social class which controls the central machinery of the State ensures an economic unity to the life of the community. This is a broader definition than that based on the capitalist market. Consequently, the class in question is not necessarily and exclusively the bourgeoisie. The dominant class - by definition - always controls the State. But the latter is either an Empire (ethnically homogeneous or not) or a nation according to whether the formation constitutes an economic unity, that is whether the organization of the generation of the surplus as well as that of its circulation and distribution interlink the fate of the provinces.

This function is exercised by the dominant State-class in some tributary formations. This State-class transforms the Empire into a nation if it is already ethnically homogeneous, particularly in regions where irrigation control requires administrative centralization and production planning at the level of the country as a whole. The case of China (in spite of its marked regional variants) or better still that of Egypt, are no doubt the most convincing ones. If the condition of ethnic homogeneity is not fulfilled, or/and if there is no economic unity, there is an Empire and not a nation, as in India.

The State class in question is certainly not the only pre-capitalist class which we find at the origin of the national phenomenon. That of merchants in tributary-commercial or slave-commercial formations may fulfill this function. Unity is ensured here by the circulation of the surplus which this class controls. Ancient Greece

or the Arab world are very good examples of nations of this type.

In Greece itself, there was a nation in spite of the absence of a central political power but only the embryo of the latter which takes the form of the Confederations and Alliances of the Greek Cities. In the Arab world, the ethnic homogeneity, that is the common Arab language (in spite of dialectal variants) and the common culture it conveys (Arabs - Islamic) - except for enclaves of minorities in the national Empire, is reinforced by the economic unity which was manifested in the era of greatness in the circulation of goods, ideas and men: of the ruling class of merchants and military courts, merging into a single class of merchant-warriors. The Arab nation in this period existed in this sense and for this essential reason.

Nations thus based on the merchant class are fragile when the tributary substratum is fragile. Such is the case of the Arab world. That is why we shall submit that if the nation is a social phenomenon which may appear at every historical stage, if it is not necessarily and exclusively correlative with the capitalist mode of production, the national phenomenon is reversible, it may develop and be strengthened or, on the contrary decline and disappear according to whether the class in question reinforces or loses its unifying power. In such a case the society regresses towards an ethnic conglomerate of ethnic groups which are more or less related, and which are then liable to become increasingly differentiated. Here again the case of the Arabs world is illustrative. Because the major part of the surplus here, comes from the profits of long-distance trade, and is therefore not generated within the society, the vicissitudes of this trade will be those of the Arab civilization and nation. The latter has therefore only really existed for a short period of its history. The decline of trade entails that of the merchant warriors and, as we shall see later, a feudalization - moreover in a poor version. A

series of major historical events mark this national regression: the Crusades and the shifting of the centre of gravity of the trade in question from the Arab towns to Italian towns, the fall of Bagdad to the Mongols in the 13th century, then the Ottoman conquest in the 16th century, the shifting of trade from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic in the same period and - consequently - the direct contact established by Europe with Monsoon Asia and Africa south of the Sahara, thus taking away from the Arabs their role of middlemen.

Almost strictly similar phenomena will be found in Africa south of the Sahara. In all the Savanna area on the southern fringe of the Sahara, we find tributary - commercial formations at the origin of the Great historical States (Ghana, Mali, Songhay, the Hausa cities). The embryo at least of the formation of nations can be found here. But we shall see later, these were rapidly disintegrated with the end of the Saharan trade and the Atlantic Slave Trade.

In the case of the Arab world, the disappearance of the Arab nation injected a new life into that nation which could survive by only producing a large surplus internally: the eternal Egyptian nation. The social class responsible for the revival of the Egyptian nation is the landed bureaucratic aristocracy. From the 18th century with Ali BEY, but mainly in the 19th with Mohamed ALI, this State-class again assumes the direction and the planning of the tribute levied, that is the nation's forms of economic unity.

This national phenomenon will be more clearly seen in the Egyptian case of the Egyptian formation is compared with that of the other regions of the Arab world or with those of the regions of the savanna south of the Sahara. Elsewhere, in the Arab world, particularly in Morocco and Tunisia from the 15th century in Algeria with

ABDEL KADER in the 19th century, in the Sudan with the Mahdism, in Yemen and in Lebanon, attempts to constitute a nation did not go very far, not only because at least in certain cases they were overcome by foreigners (in Algeria and the Sudan for instance), but also and above all - and this applies to every case - because the development level of the local productive forces did not make possible the extraction of a surplus adequate to establish a class which could undertake the constitution of a nation. The fate of this class therefore depended to a great extent on its capacity to tap - through large scale trade - a surplus of external origin; hence thus fate finally depended on circumstances external to the society. This surplus, being small, did not demand any economic unification; it circulated little, and the society remained a conglomerate of regions insufficiently integrated to be national. That is why these national attempts remained embryonic, incomplete, while in the case of Egypt, there was the renaissance of a millenary nation whose fate did not depend on external relations.

It is this same reason - smallness of the surplus of internal origin and its limited circulation - which prevents the States in Africa south of the Sahara from surviving, even as embryonic nations, when the Saharan trade came to an end.

Similarly, the formations of feudal Europe were unaware of the national phenomenon. Here the surplus of internal origin is relatively large but does not circulate (or hardly at all) outside the fief, at least during the height of the Middle Ages.

That is why the European societies of this era did not go beyond the stage of an ethnic conglomerate. But from the 13th century, and particularly from the 16th, in Atlantic Europe (England, France, Spain and Portugal), long-distance trade increased the volume of the surplus by adding to it the transfers of external origin and above all it ensured a wider circulation for it.

Rent in kind yielded place to rent in money; the latter stimulated a prosperous simple (handcraft) commodity production which was grafted into this trade. Conditions leading to the constitution of nations were thus created. The absolute monarchies of the four countries mentioned were characteristic of this process: they centralized an ever increasing part of the surplus, ensured its circulation by relying on the merchants of the mercantilist era and grouped the lands of the Kingdom into a nation.

If as we have just seen, the national phenomenon comes before capitalism, the fact remains that the capitalist mode of production raises the national level to a plane far higher than that known to the precapitalist formations. The reason is that here the degree of economic centralization is raised to a higher level through the generalization of the commodity form of the entire product (and no longer of the surplus only), by the commodity form acquired by labour, ensuring - through the mobility of the population - a greater human integration, and finally by the commodity form taken by capital itself, thus ensuring the integration of the market (including, as we shall see, the centralization of the monetary management of the society) and the circulation of wealth. This is no doubt the essential reason why marxists thought they must reduce the national phenomenon to one concomitant with capitalism; especially since in Europe, as we have already seen, the precapitalist - feudal - society had not been national.

Nation therefore means that the dominant class can aspire to a national hegemony in the society; that it constitutes an integrated class at national level, organized and hierarchized at this level, as opposed to dominant classes consisting of juxtaposed and autonomous equals. This integration applies to the State-class of the rich.

tributary systems, it applies exceptionally to the class of merchants in the periods of great prosperity of the societies it dominates, and it applies particularly to the bourgeoisie. We shall have the opportunity later to define the necessary conditions for the bourgeoisie to have this national character. We shall see that this is the case for central capitalist formations, but not for the peripheral formations because these are externally oriented and dependent. The peripheral bourgeoisies do not assume the functions of direction and centralization of the economies of the periphery: this direction is assumed by the dominant central bourgeoisies, of which the peripheral bourgeoisies are only an appendage. The weakness of the bourgeoisie will mean therefore the absence of a bourgeois nation and the non national character of the local bourgeoisie. We shall see that this will apply both to the latifundiary - comprador bourgeoisies and to the dependent State bourgeoisies of the periphery.

It is then obvious that the national questions will no longer arise for the peripheral formations in terms similar to those defining the formation of central bourgeois nations. The domination of the centre over the periphery, the superseding of the capitalist system from its periphery and not from its centre, will also and simultaneously transfer to the new class which has the mission of operating this ~~supersession~~-the proletariat - the vocation for the national hegemony. Nationalism from this point of view will no longer appear ~~as~~ the ideology of the local bourgeoisie (which is not nationalistic) as opposed to the proletarian non-nationalism; but as one of the facets of the liberation ideology which can only be simultaneously socialistic and nationalistic. We shall have the opportunity to come back to this important point.

V

The genesis of the capitalist mode of production in Europe :
distant trade and the break-up of the feudal relations.

The origins of capitalism is certainly the subject of one of the most passionate - and most absorbing - debates ever. Two schools or groups of schools continue to oppose one another in their arguments, and the results of their researches and discoveries. One group believes that the origins are to be found mainly in the effects of the great discoveries of the 16th century and in those of the Atlantic trade. For the other group, they are to be found in an entirely different setting : the disintegration of feudal relations.

These approaches seem to us to be based largely on a pseudo-problem. Our interpretation of the first set of results concerning the theory of the transition to central capitalism relates to the conditions that are necessary for the development of capitalism. There are two essential conditions : proletarianization and the accumulation of money capital. Although the accumulation of money capital occurred in all the oriental trading societies of ancient and feudal times, it never led to the development of capitalist relations because there was no available labour; this proletarianization process which, in practice, meant the exclusion of a part of the rural population from the village community, can be explained - in the case of Europe - in terms of the break-up of feudal relations. The combined fulfilment of these two conditions is essential and it is its absence which makes it impossible to speak of "ancient" or "oriental capitalism".

The expression mercantilist capitalism used to describe the period, in Europe, from the Renaissance to the industrial revolution (1600-1800) is perhaps responsible for many errors of analysis, the reason being that the expression is ambiguous : this period is in fact one of transition and after the event, we now see it as the

period of transition to capitalism, hence the name given to it. But the capitalist mode of production did not really come into existence until the industrial revolution. In actual fact, the marked features of the period were 1) the continued supremacy of the feudal mode of production within the contemporary formations, 2) the flourishing of long-distance trade (mainly the Atlantic trade) and 3) the latter's effect on the disintegrating feudal mode of production. It is this third feature alone which qualifies it as a period of transition. And distant trade could bring about the disintegration of the feudal mode because the latter is a particular tributary mode.

Money and trade have been in existence long before capitalism. They came into being, as we have already seen, in certain conditions, as soon as producers acquired a surplus and when the division of labour made possible the exchange of goods which incorporated this available surplus. However, not all exchanges are commercial exchanges: in precapitalist times, the bulk of exchanges and particularly those between small producers (as a community or individually) within a single society (of peasants or craftsmen of the same village) generally took place without recourse to the services of specialist middlemen and very often without the use of money as a medium of exchange.

However, as soon as an important part of the surplus became concentrated in the hands of a powerful and privileged class (feudal lords, royal courts, etc), it could be used for distant trade, that is mainly in exchange for other luxury goods originating from other societies. In such cases, a middleman stepped in and used his monopoly position to acquire a profit through his services as an intermediary. This profit, (bénéfice) based on the difference between the subjective values (social utilities) placed on the goods by the two

societies who are unknown to each other, that is, societies which exchanged rare products of which they did not know the respective social costs of production, must not be confused with "profit" or return on merchant capital.

We place special emphasis on this latter point. It was only under capitalist mode of production that trade became a capitalist activity comparable with industrial production and that consequently, merchant capital appeared as a fraction of the total capital stock. From then on, merchant capital contributed to the general equalization of profits. The return on merchant capital therefore sprang from the re-distribution of the surplus-value into its specific form: return on capital. The precapitalist trader derived his "bénéfice" (not "profit", which is a specific category of capitalism) from his monopoly position. In distant trade, this monopoly enabled a transfer of surplus to take place from one society to another. It was precisely because it was a monopoly that this activity was mostly carried on by one particular social stratum: specific castes or ethnic groups ("peoples-classes") such as the Jews in medieval Europe or the Dioula in West Africa. Whole cities could make up the societies which carried out the function of intermediaries between the different formations whether they happened to be near or distant: the Phoenician or Greek towns, those of Italy from the 12th to the 16th centuries and the Hanseatic towns are some examples. When the traders were not grouped in independent towns or castes, or differentiated by their ethnic group, or religion, they organized themselves into closed groups - necessary condition for monopoly -- such as the European guilds or the Merchant Adventures, similar to the Corporations found in China.

This monopoly was all the more secure since the trade was distant, in the geographical sense of the term, and concerned scarce goods. This explains why any trade exchanges internal to the formation and passing through the hands of specialist traders equally tended to take the form of monopolies. However, these remained precarious and did not bring in the fabulous profits obtainable from the distant trade.

Distant trade always led to the concentration of money wealth, the centralization was not capitalism. Here again, conventional history creates its own difficulties. It confuses money with capital, trade with capitalism. It finds "capitalism" everywhere: in ancient China, among the Phoenicians, Greeks and Romans, among the Arab societies of the Middle Ages, etc. Then it asks the question why "European capitalism" alone has succeeded. Religion (protestantism according to WEBER) or the race (the specific attributes of democracy among the Germans or - put more subtly - the "Greek heritage" exclusive to the Europeans) are the only means of helping it out of the difficulties in which it has placed itself.

The concentration of money wealth in the hands of the traders did not "automatically" bring about capitalism. That required in addition, a proletarianization to be brought about in the wake of the disintegration of the dominant precapitalist mode within the formation to which distant trade is attached. By proletarianization is meant the separation of producers from their means of production, hence the opening up of a free labour market.

This disintegration took place in Europe and this seems an exception rather than the rule since it did not occur either in China, the Arab world or elsewhere. Why and how did this happen?

The answer to the first question calls for a deeper analysis of the specific nature of the feudal mode of production, seen as one of the many types of tributary modes. Since barbarian Europe was backward in relation to the ancient civilized regions, it was unable to establish a completed tributary mode of production; hence feudalism rested on an embryonic and incomplete form of that mode of production. The absence of a powerful central authority to centralize the surplus left the local feudal lords with a more direct power over the peasants. Hence the eminent domain of land belonged to them whereas under the completed tributary mode existing under the great civilizations, the State protected the village communities and forbade its agents from taking over their lands. In these formations, society became feudalistic only during the periods of decadence when the central authority weakened. This lapse into feudalism appeared as a regression and a deviation in relation to the ideal situation; revolts by the peasants restored the tributary mode by reinstating state centralization through the destruction of the "feudal landlords", bringing their abuses to an end.

The backward nature of this type of tributary formation, i.e. the feudal society, had the additional effect of leaving the trading sectors with a greater autonomy. The peasants who fled from the feudal tyranny and later those who were driven away by the landlords in order to modernize the production system, came into the free towns and formed a proletariat at the disposal of the traders in control of those towns. Cottage industry commodity production and commodity production using wage labour - both dominated by the traders - flourished side by side. Whereas in the complete tributary mode, the dominated State class exercised control over the traders and subjected them to taxation, the latter enjoyed a greater freedom of manoeuvre under the feudal mode.

In feudal Europe, the traders could do a great deal more, in the field of distant trade, than their colleagues in the tributary formations. As from the 16th century, the Atlantic trade led to the formation, in America, of a periphery to the new mercantilist system. The trade not only involved fetching the products offered by the local societies but also brought the latter under its control, organising the production of goods of which it ensured the sale in Europe. In order to attain this objective centralized monarchies, helping them, in return, to fulfil their ambitions by giving them financial support - being itself a flourishing enterprise - to recruit standing armies and to centralize their administration. We shall later analyze the nature and forms of this new periphery, its functions and its mechanisms; we shall see that following a period of straightforward plunder of the indigenous societies, a system of cash crop plantations was set up, using slave labour, with the products (cotton, sugar, indigo, etc.) going to the Atlantic traders for marketing.

The opportunity to acquire new wealth arising from that trade - which took advantage of the dependent nature of American production - in turn reacted on the feudal sectors of the formation. It accelerated the break-up of feudal relations. In order to acquire these products, the feudal masters were forced to modernize their own production to obtain a larger surplus which then had to be converted into money. This modernization led them to drive away from the land the excess population, such as happened in England under the Enclosure Acts. Rent in kind was gradually replaced by money rent.

Feudal agriculture therefore gradually developed into capitalist agriculture: either the feudal landlords became capitalist

owners or the freeing of the peasants led to the emergence of a new class, that of the Kulaks. It is these important social phenomena which appear to confirm the view that the internal evolution of European rural society was at the root of capitalism, with the Atlantic trade not playing a decisive role.

In order to understand the nature of these transformations, it is essential to know how the capitalist formations viewed landed property, and changed its meaning. The "pure" capitalist mode of production implies only two classes (bourgeois and proletariat) and their corresponding incomes (profit from capital and wages) while the feudal mode implied two other classes (feudal landlords and peasant workers) with their corresponding incomes (rent and peasant income). Each of these modes has a different set of laws governing the generation and distribution of the various components of the social product. Profit implies the existence of capital, that is, the exclusive private ownership of means of production which are themselves the product of social labour, while rent is derived from the exclusive control of the natural means of production by one particular class, means which were not the product of social labour. Capital implies wage labour that is, free labour, a labour market and the sale of labour power. Rent on the other hand implied the bondage of the peasant worker and the fact that he was tied to the land. This did not necessarily imply a legal restriction on his freedom but more generally that he was not allowed access to the natural conditions of production, i.e. ownership of land. Capital is, by its very nature, mobile and, from this, MARX logically deduced the transformation of value into prices of production which ensure a uniform return on all private capital. On the other hand, the appropriation of natural factors of production is necessarily immobile and rent varies according to the quality of the land. The "pure" capitalist mode of production therefore implies free access by capitalists to natural means and MARX

positively maintains the non-capitalist nature of landed property. However, capitalist formations do not develop in a vacuum, starting with a clean slate; at first, they started up within the previous formations; in the new sectors (industry) where the relations characterizing the previous modes did not apply. Later, by the time capitalism had reached a dominant position throughout the formation, it had also completed the transformation of agriculture where land ownership constituted an obstacle to it. From then on, the landowner (or his function) had lost his determining importance in agriculture in favour of the capitalist farmer (or his function when this is assumed by the owner himself). Later in the advanced capitalist formations, there were no longer any "landowners" (in the feudal, precapitalist sense of the term), there were only agrarian capitalists.

Hence, the two elements - distant trade and the break-up of feudal relations - interacted with one another to give rise to the capitalist mode of production. The concentration of money wealth at one particular pole gives rise to a certain potential capital: originally that concentration took place in the hands of the traders, later, among the new rural capitalists, and it gradually achieved decisive proportions. However, this potential capital only became real capital because the disintegration of feudal relations freed the labour force and forced the peasants into a proletariat. The latter became wage earners employed by the new industrialists as well as by the landowners and rural capitalist farmers.

VI

The obstruction of the trading formations : the Arab world

It will be easier to see the significance of the process of interaction between long-distance trade and the break-up of pre-capitalist relations if we compare the European evolution to that of other pre-capitalist formations.

The Arab world is a good example of a formation whose main feature is the exceptional importance of long-distance trade in it, but which nevertheless has not engendered an indigenous capitalism. Why?

The Arab world extends over several thousand kilometers, in the semi-arid borderland that stretches like a belt across the Old World, from the Atlantic to Monsoon Asia. It occupies a precise, clearly delimited zone within this region, cut off from Europe by the Mediterranean, from Black Africa by the Sahara, from the Turkish and Persian worlds by the mountainous massifs of the Taurus, Kurdistan, and Western Iran. It is not identical with the Islamic world, which, broadly speaking, occupies the whole of this semi-arid belt, and is divided between four groups of peoples: the Arabs, the Turks, the Persians, and the Indo-Afghans. This Islamic world has overflowed the semi-arid belt only to a very marginal extent, in the direction of Monsoon Asia (Bengal, Indonesia) and, in comparatively recent times, into certain parts of Black Africa. It is not the case, either, that the Arab world is to be identified with some ethno-racial phenomenon, for Arabization has mixed together in this region a variety of peoples of differing origin and racial composition. The Arab world constituted a relatively centralized political entity only during a very short period of its history -

two centuries. Further, at the time (the age of the Omayyads and the first Abbasids, between 750 and 950 A.D.), linguistic unification was very much less advanced than it is today. The Arab world then broke up into relatively stable regional political entities which were not brought together again (and even then only very superficially) until they were subjected to the Ottoman yoke, that is, to a foreign ruler.

As regards their pre-colonial social formations, the Arab countries do not constitute a homogeneous whole. The picture, widely accepted not only among many foreigners but also among too many Arab Marxists, of an Arab world which is rural and feudal, is one of those commonplaces without any scientific basis which arises from an oversimplified kind of Marxism. In reality, the Arab world was very different from the Europe of the Middle Ages. Within the Arab world, moreover, one can still distinguish, today as always, three zones that differ widely from each other in social structure and in political and economic organization: the Arab East (in Arabic called Al Mashraq) embracing Arabia, Syria (meaning the present-day states of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel), and Iraq; the countries of the Nile (Egypt and the Sudan); and the Arab West (called in Arabic Al Maghreb), stretching from Libya to the Atlantic and including the present-day states of Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania. In this group, Egypt alone, which divides the Arab world in two, has always been and still is a peasant civilization (I do not say a feudal one), whereas the social formations of the Mashraq and of the Maghreb alike have not been, essentially, formations based on the cultivators of the soil. In this semi-arid zone, agricultural activity continues to be very precarious, a fact which is too often forgotten. Except in Egypt, therefore, the surplus that can be taken from the cultivators remains, broadly speaking, very meager. The techniques of agricultural production are necessarily backward, the productivity of agricultural labor very

slight, the standard of living of the agricultural community very close to subsistence level, and so the forms of social organization of this community are inevitably characterized by primitive collectivism. There is no adequate basis for a surplus to be extracted such as would make possible a "feudal" class structure or even a brilliant civilization.

And yet - and this is the source of many of the confusions that exist about the Arab world - the Mashraq (especially, but also the Maghreb as well, though to a lesser degree) has been the seat of civilizations that were brilliant, wealthy, and moreover extremely urban in character. How could this "miracle" have occurred? How are we to explain this apparent "anomaly" that rich Egypt, the only large and authentic agricultural oasis in this arid zone, has always been a peasant country, relatively little urbanized until our own time, even in the great periods of its ancient civilization, whereas the Mashraq, which has some equally brilliant periods in its no less ancient history, has always been an area of great cities?

In fact there is nothing mysterious about it, if we try to understand the Arab world not in isolation but in its real context, as a great zone of passage, a sort of turntable, between the major areas of civilization in the Old World. This semi-arid zone, inevitably poor as regards agriculture, divides the Old World like a belt, as I have already pointed out, and thereby it separates three areas of civilization based on agriculture: Europe, Black Africa, and Monsoon Asia. The Arab zone has therefore always fulfilled a commercial function, bringing into contact, through its role as the only middleman, agricultural communities that had no direct awareness of each other. The social formations on the basis of which its own civilizations were erected were always commercial in character. By this I mean that the essential surplus on which its great towns lived did not

come from exploitation of the area's own rural inhabitants (except, of course, to a subordinate extent), but from the profits of the long-distance trading activity which its monopoly role as intermediary ensured to it - that is, an income derived, in the last analysis, from the surplus extracted by the ruling classes of the other civilizations (the ones linked together by the Arab world) from their own peasantries.

This pattern of a "trading" society has been characteristic of the Mashraq right down to our time, to the war of 1914-1918. Subsequently, the integration of this region of the Arab world into the imperialist sphere (something that had begun only very superficially in the Ottoman period) was to bring about decisive changes in the class structure of Iraq, but only minor changes in Syria and Palestine. At the other end of the Arab world, in the Maghreb, this pattern of society was typical of the region until its colonization by France. This colonization, however, which began earlier and went deeper than that to which the Mashraq was subjected, was to bring decisive changes to the Maghreb of today. Between the two regions, Egypt was to continue to constitute the absolute exception of a tributary peasant society integrated into the world capitalist system in a way that was not merely different but was infinitely firmer.

Islam was born in Arabia, in the desert, among a population of long-distance nomads who were organized to carry on **large-scale** trade between the Eastern Roman Empire and Persia on the one hand, and South Arabia, Ethiopia, and India on the other. It was the profits obtained from this trade that made possible the existence of the urban merchant republics of the Hejaz. The domination wielded by these towns over small rural oasis areas, which they exploited on a semi-serf basis, was not at all the main source of income for the ruling merchant classes.

As for the pastoral subsistence economy of the nomads, this existed side by side with the commercial activity, for which it supplied men and animals, but contributed no surplus to it. The desert civilization thus presupposed the civilizations of the Roman East and the Monsoon countries, which it linked together. If, for one reason or another, the surplus that fed the springs of the long-distance trading activity dried up, or if the trade-routes changed, the desert would die. This happened many times in the course of history, and on each occasion the men of the desert endeavored to survive by becoming conquerors. Islam offers an example of such a movement, as has been shown by Maxime Rodinson in his analysis of the historical conditions of the region in the seventh century A.D.

The first region of the "civilized world" to be conquered by the Arabs was the Fertile Crescent (the countries of Syria and Iraq, along the northern edge of the Arabian Desert). There the Arabs were in familiar territory, for the societies of the Ancient East had been very largely commercial communities of the same type as their own. There were mountain peasants, clinging to the hillsides of the Lebanon, the Jebel Ansariya, the Taurus, and Kurdistan, where there was sufficient rainfall to ensure their wretched existence. These rural areas were poor, however, too poor to provide the surplus needed for a brilliant civilization. For this reason they had remained "primitive," organized in village communities, and relatively isolated, defending their independence very jealously and very effectively. Civilization had arisen there in two exceptional zones - Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean coast. Mesopotamia had seen the development of the first genuine agricultural civilization, thanks to the exceptional natural conditions provided by the Tigris and the Euphrates. Here a civilization similar to that of Egypt had been created, based on the surplus levied by the cities from the neighboring countryside. Like all agricultural civilizations

situated at the edge of the desert, it lived under the constant threat of destruction by the barbarians. It was indeed to be destroyed by them, definitively after the Turco-Mongol invasions of the tenth and eleventh centuries, to arise again only after 1918, under the aegis of the Pax Britanica. To the West, beside the Mediterranean Sea, since the **agricultural miracle was not** possible, the coastal states of Phoenicia and Syria were never anything but states that drew their revenues from long-distance trade, by ship or caravan. The Arabs who had come out of the desert thus found themselves quite at home there and, by establishing their new capital, that of the Omayyads, at Damascus, they shifted northward the trading civilization of Medina. Having thus recovered control of the lines of communication they could again draw profit from large-scale trade and in this way revive their civilization.

The unity of the Fertile Crescent was not to be really broken until after the First World War. But it was a unity in diversity - a diversity, however, that was never truly "cultural" and still less ethnic. The mixture of peoples goes back so far in this region that it is useless to try to contrast one people with another on so fragile a basis. What is characteristic of a zone of civilization like this, the essence of which is its commercial function, putting in touch with each other the zones which it separates, is that it **is** dialectically unifying and dismembering. Unifying, because it causes men to move around ceaselessly, so that customs and religions are passed on, and a travellers' lingua franca becomes the predominant speech. Dismembering, because it is based on competition between rival merchant cities.

The detailed course of events is not the main thing here: what is significant is the imposition or the absence of a single formal political authority. If this authority is strong it will set limits to the competition between the merchant cities, and

often will ensure the pre-eminence of the capital city. Of this order was the state of the Omayyads, centered on Damascus, and then that of the Abbasids, centered on Baghdad. In order to guarantee its authority, the state was obliged to maintain an army of mercenaries, which was easily recruited from among the neighboring nomads. As for the peasants, they endeavored to remain isolated in their mountains, and fell seriously into semi-serf dependence on landowners, who were always townsmen and absentees (merchants, courtiers, etc.), only in the areas near the towns, or, by way of exception, in Lower Iraq, which was organized into commercial, slave-worked plantations of the "Roman" type. During twelve centuries the Fertile Crescent was thus at once united and divided. During these twelve centuries, between 700 and 1900, it knew some brilliant periods and other periods of decadence, depending on the fate of the trade circuits that joined Byzantium and Western Europe to India and China.

The Fertile Crescent was rapidly Arabized. It had always been accustomed to one lingua franca or another. Already, as a Christian region on the eve of the Islamic invasion, it was linguistically united through the triumph of Aramaic. Being itself a Semitic language, Aramaic could give way to Arabic without much difficulty. The linguistic unity of the region has been practically complete for centuries, if we do not indulge in a false "purism," treating as different languages ways of speech that differ only in accent and in a few popular expressions. It is a very pure form of Arabic, moreover, that is spoken in this region, and from Jerusalem to the borders of Turkey the same accent, called the "Syrian" accent, is characteristic. Palestine is a fragment of this Mashraq, nothing more. The feeling that the peoples of this region have of belonging to the same cultural entity is a very strong one.

The profound cultural unity of the Mashraq does not imply the absence of diversity, as between the various cities and the various little rural worlds. The country areas are here, indeed, as they have been for twelve centuries, isolated one from another and of little weight economically or politically. To the imperial authority striving to subject them they oppose resistance both armed and religious. This is why the only really rural parts of the Mashraq are all "dissenting" areas from the religious standpoint: the mountains of Lebanon, divided between Maronite Christians and Moslems of the Shi'a sect; the Jebel Ansariya, home of the Alaouites (Alawiyin), and the Jebel Druse, in Syria; and Lower Iraq, with its Shi'ite population. The Shi'a heresy, which divided the Moslem world very early on, found favorable soil in the free communities of the mountains. It developed in these conditions a much freer, more critical, and even egalitarian spirit than that of the "official" Sunni doctrine. This is likewise why it was the ideology of the peasant slaves who revolted in Lower Iraq (the Qarmathian rebellion).

We cannot speak of "feudalism" here; the idea that the Arab East is feudal does not correspond to reality in the least. "Semi-feudal" forms developed, in periods when large-scale trade was in decline, in the flat country areas which the townsmen could dominate more easily and which they thus used to make up, by tribute extorted from the peasants, their loss of income from long-distance trade. The plains of the Bekaa, of Palestine, Homs, Hama, and Central Iraq were in this way sometimes brought under control by greedy landowners, especially during the Ottoman period (from 1500 onward) which was a long period of commercial decline. Much later, starting in the 1930s, the modern-style exploitation of agricultural areas, made possible by irrigation works, was to spread wider the zone occupied by latifundia.

What is essential here, however, is not the country but the town. Huge cities arose, which appeared to be of monstrous size when trade began to decline; cities that were among the most populous in Antiquity, in the Middle Ages, and in modern times before the capitalist period, were much more important than the cities of the West. Aleppo, Damascus, Baghdad, Basra, Antioch, and others, had hundreds of thousands of inhabitants. In their best periods they embraced the majority of the population of the region, which exceeded five million inhabitants, a larger number than it was to contain at the beginning of the twentieth century. These were cities that were always centers of courts and merchants, with a crowd of craftsmen and clerks around them. They were merchant cities, like those of Italy which echoed them in the medieval West, or like those of the Hanseatic League. The accumulation of wealth in money in these cities expressed the brilliance of their civilization. But this accumulation did not lead to capitalism, precisely because the country districts, isolated as they were, had not been made "feudal," and therefore the processes of proletarianization, essential for the rise of capitalism, could not occur. Retaining thus their mercantile but not capitalist character, the cities of the Mashraq formed a group of little worlds competing with each other; the outlet for their very advanced craft production were the distant markets to which their merchants traveled. The cultural unity of this dominant urban world was certainly very pronounced: these cities were the centers of Arabo-Islamic culture, the citadels of Sunni orthodoxy.

At the other extremity of the Arab world, in the Maghreb, exactly the same structures were to be found. There, nomads and cultivators had struggled since time immemorial for possession of a narrow strip of territory squeezed between the sea, the mountains, and the great desert. The Pax Romana, by setting

up a series of fortified posts all along the limes, the imperial frontier, had advanced farther to the south, the zone of the Berber cultivators, encroaching upon the lands over which roamed the nomads and semi-nomads who were also Berbers. Already before the coming of the Arabs, the decline of the Roman Empire had enabled the nomads to encroach in their turn upon the cultivated land. When the Arabs arrived, they encountered the same resistance among the cultivators that others had experienced before them. But the Arabs were not particularly interested in subjecting the cultivators. They skirted the mountain massifs, the places of refuge of the cultivators, and established cities. These, as in the East, could not have survived and prospered if they had not found in large-scale, long-distance trade the resources that were denied them by the difficulty of extracting surplus from the cultivators. The search for income from trade led the Arabs farther and farther afield, across the Mediterranean, and across the Sahara too. Toward the south they encountered the Berber nomads who clearly had the same interest as themselves, that of becoming the caravan-merchants of a flourishing commerce. Hence these Berber nomads became, to a large extent, Arabized much more thoroughly and more quickly than was the case with the peasants, who had little interest in the urban civilization of the Arabs. Ibn KHALDUN, that amazing scientific mind, in whom we must assuredly see the founder of the social sciences, gave a perfect analysis of the nature of these social formations of the "medieval" Maghreb. With an intelligence and an exactitude that might be envied by many historians and sociologists of the Arab world of today - both bourgeois and also, alas, even Marxist ones - he analyzes these formations as being based not on a surplus levied from the peasants of the region but on the profits of large-scale trade. It was in this way that all the great states of the Maghreb were founded upon the trade in gold, the gold in question coming from West Africa. For centuries, down

to the discovery of America, West Africa was indeed the chief supplier of the yellow metal to all the western part of the Old World - to the Roman Empire and to medieval Europe, to the Ancient East and to the Arab world. The trade in gold nourished, to the north of the Sahara, the states of the Almoravides, the Almohades, and others, and, to the south of the great desert, the states of Ghana, Mali, Songhay, and others. The structures of these social formations were so alike that Ibn KHALDUN - and the Arab travellers of the time, such as Ibn BATUTA - correctly assimilated them all to the same pattern.

The alliance between the cities and the nomads, together with the exclusion of the peasantry from the civilized state, are characteristic features of the civilization of the Maghreb, as of that of the Fertile Crescent. Ideologists of the French colonization of the Maghreb sought to explain these features in terms of the conflict between races - Berbers (peasants) and Arabs (nomads) - and to account for the decline of the Maghreb by the ravages of the Arab nomads, who had destroyed agriculture and the works that made it possible. Similar "explanations" have been given in relation to the Arab East, where decline was also ascribed to the devastation wrought by nomads. However, this argument will not do, for the brilliant ages of Arab civilization, in the East as in the Maghreb, were not marked by great achievements in the agricultural field but by the prosperity of trade and the cities, and often, in connection with prosperity of trade, by the rule of great nomadic tribes, to the detriment of the peasantry, who never counted for much in either of these regions.

Decline came to the Maghreb with the shifting of the trade routes. As these were displaced from West to East, we note a shift in the centers of civilization, both to the north of the

Sahara, and to the south, from west to east. Thus, in the earliest period there were the states of Morocco in the north and Ghana and Mali in the south; later, the gold routes shifted toward Tunis, and later still toward Egypt, while the south saw the flowering of the Songhay and Hausa states. And in the Maghreb the peasant redoubts upheld their autonomy by clinging to the Berber language and culture, just as in the Arab East the peasants, having been Arabized so far as language was concerned, sought to maintain their autonomy through religious dissidence.

Egypt's history was quite different. This country was always, both before and after its Arabization, a land of peasants. This fabulous oasis of very great fertility supports one of the oldest peoples in the world. A huge surplus could be tapped by the ruling classes from this peasant people, thus providing the basis for civilization. State centralization imposed itself here, early and in an extreme form, both for "natural" reasons (the need to organize large-scale irrigation works) and in order to protect the Egyptian oasis against the danger from the nomads. In order to survive, Egypt has always tried to live retired within itself, relying on numbers to beat back the onslaughts of the nomads. When Egypt conquered territory outside the Nile Valley, this was done in order to better defend its peasant civilization by installing garrisons in the heart of the lands of the nomads and semi-nomads - to the east in Sinai and Syria to the west in Libya. In Egypt, however, there were never, until the Hellenistic period, really great trading cities. The capitals of the Pharaohs were set up in the midst of the fields, in the densely populated countryside.

The very type of the "traditional" social formation in Egypt was thus constituted on foundations that were very different from those of the Mashraq and the Maghreb. The peasant redoubts of both of the latter were autonomous, not much integrated into civilization, and with a very low level of development of the productive forces. They also remained to a large extent organized in village communities. The Egyptian peasantry left that stage behind them over four thousand years ago! The Egyptian formation was not of the type in which the towns and the merchants are predominant, but of the rural type, with a tribute-paying peasantry. This tribute-paying formation, in which the peasants are not oppressed in "groups" retaining the relative autonomy of their village community, but "individually", in small family units, thus evolves on its own toward a form of genuine feudalism. The latter, resembling the feudalism of China, to which Egypt offers most analogies, and which I would prefer to call a developed tribute-paying formation, differs from the feudalism of the West only in its state centralization, the ruling class which levies the surplus being strongly organized in a state.

After Alexander's invasion, Egypt became a province forming part of empires based on large-scale trade: this was its situation in the Hellenistic world, then in the Byzantine world, and eventually in the Arab world. During the brilliant periods of these empires, when long-distance trade was flourishing, Egypt experienced mercantile urban civilization. But this civilization, and this is very typical, remained something "foreign", established in cities of courts and merchants which did not really become Egyptianized until the long-distance trade by which they lived began to decline. Such was Alexandria in the Greek period, Fostat, and later Cairo, in the Arab period. The world of rural Egypt remained outside all that. So far as it was concerned, the only change was that the surplus it had paid to the national ruling class around the Pharaoh was now paid to foreign courts.

Nevertheless, Egypt became Arabized in the matter of language. This happened belatedly, however, just when the trading empire of the Arabs was beginning to lose its *raison d'être*. The country had then to turn in upon itself once more, and the Arab ruling classes had to Egyptianize themselves, taking more "interest" in the peasants. The latter adopted Islam, though this happened slowly, and the Arabic language, also slowly (several centuries had to pass before the Coptic language disappeared). In becoming Arabized, however, the Egyptian people kept a very firm sense of their distinctness. They never called themselves "Arabs", a word that remained for them synonymous with "barbarians", but always "Egyptians". And Egypt has retained its originality, not on the linguistic plane - the spoken Arabic of Egypt differs little from that of the Mashraq, except in accent - but on that of culture and values, which in Egypt are peasant values.

Southward from Egypt, the Sudan belongs both to Black Africa and to the Arab world. In its northern part, nomadic Arab tribes who came from the East, from the shores of the Red Sea and not from Egypt, and who evidently intermarried with the black natives of the area, established a civilization of nomadic stockbreeders. In addition, these nomads, who not only became Moslems but also adopted the Arabic language, functioned as trading middlemen between Egypt and the lands to the south. The central regions of the Sudan, however, retained their traditional agrarian civilization, based on the village clan community common to all Black Africa. By way of exception, these black people adopted the Arabic language, though elsewhere, in West Africa, similar groups merely adopted Islam without becoming Arabized. This Arabization was doubtless due to the prolonged and thorough ascendancy exercised by the Arab nomads of the north over these communities. Later, in the nineteenth century, the Egyptian conquests, from the time of Mehemet Ali (1810-1848) to

that of the Khedives who succeeded him, and down to the British occupation (1882) and the revolt led by the Mahdi (1882-1898) superimposed upon this ascendancy the domination of the Egyptian military bureaucracy. Here, however, the subject Arabized black peasants retained down to our own day their autonomous village organization, long since forgotten in Egypt. Only very much later, in certain areas of colonial exploitation, during the British period, especially in the Gezireh, was a real agrarian capitalism created, to the benefit of the nomad chieftains to whom the colonial power granted the lands brought under cultivation by irrigation works, the peasants being proletarianized in this region. Altogether it was a process similar to what went on in Iraq in the same period (the period of the British Mandate), giving rise to an agrarian economy which was modern (capitalist) and alien to tradition, both African and Arab.

The southern part of the Arabian peninsula is made up of a group of social formations which truly belong to the Arab tradition. Agriculture never played a decisive part in the development of civilization here: except on the heights of the Yemen, where the monsoon rains enabled a peasant community to exist, even if under rather arduous conditions, civilization in this area was urban and mercantile. The maritime "empire" of Muscat and Zanzibar provides the very pattern of it: a trading state, urban and drawing its revenues from its role as intermediary between the Mediterranean world, the eastern shores of Black Africa, and India. Encircled by nomads in the service of the maritime traders, the peasants of the Yemen, like those of the Fertile Crescent, safeguarded a limited degree of autonomy by taking refuge in religious dissidence: like the Alacuites in Syria they are Shi'ites.

This, then, is the Arab world: basically a commercial grouping, with Egypt as the only great "peasant" exception. In this world the ruling class is urban, made up of court officials, merchants, religious leaders, and around them that little world of craftsmen and petty clerks which is typical of Eastern cities. The ruling class is the cement that binds the whole grouping together: everywhere it shares the same language and the same profoundly Islamic culture, which, moreover, is orthodox (Sunni). This class is highly mobile, being able to move from Tangier to Damascus without ceasing in the slightest to feel at home. It is this class that has created "Arab Civilization". Its prosperity is bound up with that of long-distance trade. The latter is the basis of its alliance with the nomadic tribes, its caravan escorts. This explains the isolation of the agricultural areas, which retain personalities of their own, either linguistic (Berber) or religious (Shi'a), but play no important part in the civilization of the Arab world. Except in Egypt the peasantry enters little into the system, and is subjected only episodically and slightly to the levying of tribute. This Arab world is thus both diverse and profoundly unified - by its ruling class. It is not to be compared to feudal Europe of the Middle Ages, which was thoroughly "peasant" in character. This is doubtless why Europe was to evolve toward the formation of separate nations, for the ruling classes of Europe, living as they did on the surplus taken from peasant communities, were bound to emphasize the diversity of the peoples of Europe. In contrast to this, in the Arab world, because the peasants did not play this role, unity was preserved. For the same reason, however, Arab civilization was a fragile affair. It was enough for trade to fall off for the states to perish, along with the cities on which they were based, and for the wretchedness of a world of poverty-stricken nomads and of small isolated peasant communities, also very poor, to present a picture of decay. This is what actually happened when the trade routes

between Europe, the Far East, and Black Africa no longer ran across the Arab world, when the Atlantic sailors learned to go around it.

In this brittle grouping Egypt alone remained "eternal." Here, the very high density of population and the peasant character of the country favoured unity: it is possible to speak of an Egyptian nation at every stage of history, but hard to speak of an Arab nation in the same sense of the word.

The "failure" of the Arab world to evolve towards capitalism therefore is in no way mysterious. The rule is that long-distance trade does not engender capitalism. Indeed, in the case of the Arab world, the surplus transferred from outside by this trade was very small. In Europe the surplus was strengthened by that of the feudal formations which were rich. In the Arab world, the rural formations were not feudal: they were too poor, except in Egypt. In the European case, the long-distance trade, reinforced by small-scale commodity production, was interlinked with the feudal mode which was dominant. In the Arab case, long-distance trade was interlinked with a varied range of pre-capitalist modes in which the tribute-paying mode was only dominant in Egypt, while elsewhere the community modes predominated.

In fact the Egyptian exception had consequences which we will study later: in the 19th century, with Mohamed Ali, Egypt nearly became capitalist by itself. The peasant community, which had been disintegrated for thousands of years, facilitated this evolution. At the same time the state centralism gave Egypt its own particular aspect. But the European aggression was to put an end to these potentialities.

VII

The obstruction of trading formations : Black Africa.

Black Africa is a second example which shows that long-distance trade does not itself engender capitalism.

Contemporary Black Africa can be divided into wide regions which clearly differ from one another. But it is more difficult to pinpoint the difference, to study their nature, origin and effects that to see them.

The unity of Black Africa is nonetheless not without foundations. On the contrary, beside the question of "race" - which is no more homogeneous nor less mixed, since pre-historical times, than are the other "races" (white, yellow or red) - a common or kindred cultural background and a social organization which still presents striking similarities, make a reality of Black Africa. It is true that this living reality, extensive and rich, did not wait for colonial conquest to borrow from or give of itself to the other wide regions of the old world, the Mediterranean in particular but also Europe and Asia. The image of an ancient, isolated and introverted Africa no longer belongs to this age : isolation - naturally associated with a so-called "primitive" character - only corresponded to an ideological necessity born out of colonial racism. But these exchanges did not break the unity of the African personality. On the contrary they helped to assert and enrich itself. The colonial conquest of almost the whole of this continent strengthened this feeling of unity of Black Africa. Seen from London, Paris or Lisbon, Black Africa appeared to the European observer as a homogeneous entity, just as the North-Americans regard as Latin-American, a continent which extends south of the Rio Grande.

Looked at from the opposite point of view, i.e. from inside, Black Africa, just as Latin America, is obviously extremely variegated. It is true that almost none of the present States, which resulted from an artificial carve-up, constitutes the sole or even essential basis of this diversity. We would be wrong again to think that this reality, however recent, has not yet left its mark on Africa and is not likely - for better or for worse - to consolidate itself, at least as far as the foreseeable future is concerned. Even more of a reality are some 100 or 200 regions more or less wide, which often still readily cross the frontiers of the present States. These regions constitute yet another aspect of the reality; they do not derive their definition from their geographical position alone, but also and in particular because of the homogeneous nature of their social, cultural, economic and even political conditions.

Between these two extremes - African unity and micro-regional variety - the continent can be divided into a few wide macro-regions. We propose to distinguish three such regions and we shall discuss the basis for such a distinction: the Africa of the colonial economy, the Africa of the concession - owning companies and the Africa of the labour reserves. The proposed distinction is deliberately based on the effects of the last period in the history of Africa: that of colonization. We shall thus have to study how the dialectic between the major colonial policies, here divided into three categories, and the structures inherited from previous periods, was organized. To do so, we have to go back in time and distinguish between four separate periods.

The pre-mercantilist period stretches from the beginning until the 17th century. In the course of this long history, relations were forged between Black Africa and the rest of the old world, particularly from both ends of the Sahara, between the Savannah countries (between Fokar and the Red Sea) and the Mediterranean. Social formations emerged, which cannot be understood if they are not placed, here as elsewhere, within the context of all the multitude of social formations in their relationship with one another. During that period, Africa taken as a whole does not appear as inferior or weaker than the rest of the Old World, also taken as a whole. The unequal development within Africa was not any worse than that north of the Sahara, on both sides of the Mediterranean.

From the 16th century, Black Africa was integrated into the world capitalist system, first as the periphery of the mercantilist system (1600-1800), and then - after a century of trade, the century of "licit trade" (1800-1880) - as the colonial periphery of the completed capitalist system. It was during the latter period that Africa acquired its definitive configuration.

What we are concerned with here is the evolution of Africa during its first, pre-mercantilist, period (up to the 17th century). Complex social formations, sometimes created by the state, almost invariably based on visible social differentiations which reveal the ancient nature of the process of degradation of the primitive village community, were characteristic of Black Africa which, at that time, was not on the whole more backward than the rest of the world. The great confusion which arises in the discussions on the traditional African Society is due to a number of reasons of which there are at least four main ones: 1) The Scarcity of documents and remains of the past, leaving only the accounts of Arab travellers, 2) the confusion between the concept of mode of production and the concept of social

formation which calls for clarification and a basic distinction which we have already stressed 3) the confusion between the different periods of African history, particularly between the pre-mercantilist and the following mercantilist period, the justifiable concern of historians to relate concrete history, which is continuous, enhancing this confusion, and 4) last but not least, the ideological prejudices against Africa, clearly connected with colonial racism.

The African formations of the pre-mercantile period developed autonomously, although this development followed a parallel course to that of the formations of the Mediterranean world, both Eastern and European. As we have already shown for the Arab world, from the Atlantic coast to Central Asia separates the three regions which are ecologically conducive to a high productivity in agriculture right from its primitive stage : "monsoon" Asia, tropical Africa and the temperate zones of Europe. This belt of land has been the birth of some brilliant civilizations, almost all founded on long-distance trade, particularly Greece and the Arab empire whose vicissitudes followed those of the trade routes. On either side of this belt, autonomous social formations (those of feudal Europe and at least some of those of tropical Africa, particularly in the Sudan-Sahel region immediately south of the Sahara) developed along parallel lines precisely because of the long-distance trade which linked them all. Thus one can say that this part of Africa is already fully integrated, as much as Europe, into the history of the world.

One finds here all the importance of the trans-Sahara trade. This trade enabled the whole of the Old World - Mediterranean, Arab and European - to be supplied in gold from the main source of production of the yellow metal until the discovery of America : the Upper Senegal and Ashanti regions. The importance of this flow can never be adequately stressed. For the societies of tropical Africa, this trade became the basis of their organization. The mining of gold under the orders of the king provided the ruling classes of the

countries concerned with the means to obtain, across the Sahara, on the one hand, rare luxury goods (cloths, drugs, perfumes, dates and salt), and on the other and in particular, with the means to establish and strengthen their social and political power (horses, copper, iron bars, weapons). This trade thus encouraged social differentiations, the creation of States and Empires just as it promoted the progress of the productive forces (the improvement of tools, the adaptation of techniques and products to suit local climatic conditions, etc.) In return, Africa supplied mainly gold and a few other rare products (gum and ivory) and some slaves. It is only recently that Europe, for obvious political reasons, has tried to confuse this trade between equal autonomous partners with the devastating slave trade of the mercantilist period: the small number of black people in the southern areas of Maghreb - a few hundred thousand men compared with some hundred million Blacks in America, shows the futility of this confusion. On the other hand, the stock of gold built up in Europe and in the East throughout the centuries, originating from tropical Africa, reminds us of the principal nature of this trade. Indeed, this is why the ideas which accompanied the goods were easily accepted, for example, the early acceptance of Islam in the Senegal river areas. The large volume of this trade, its egalitarian nature and the autonomous character of the African formations are unambiguously described in the Arabic literature of the period. Furthermore, one can understand the admiration expressed in the accounts of Arab travellers if one accepts that the development of North African formations and those of West Africa belongs to the same technological age, they were very similar in their structures just as the place they occupied in the world system of the time was similar. The link between the royal monopoly of the mining of gold and its marketing by Moslem traders forms the basis of the structure of these societies. These traders were, as was very often the case, organized in a sort of caste system, and here, belonged to a religious minority.

For centuries the Mediterranean social formations and those of tropical Africa were united by a bond, for better or for worse. The vicissitudes of the one had quick repercussions on the others, just as glory and wealth reached them all simultaneously. Thus, the gradual shifting of routes from West to East was obviously reflected in the parallel shift of the civilization and of the powerful states both in North Africa and in the West African Savannah lands (reflected in the successive might of Ghana - Mali - Hausa cities - Bornou - Kanem - Dar Fur). This also explains why the shift of centre of the newly born European mercantilist capitalism from the Mediterranean towards the Atlantic was to cause a crisis in Africa. This shift, studied by BRAUDEL with his usual talent and care for details, heralded the decline, in the 16th century, of the Italian towns which, since the 13th century, had opened the way for an evolution which was to become decisive for the future history of mankind. Similarly we can say that this shift was to cause the downfall of both the Arab world and the Sudan-Sahel regions of Black Africa. Some decades later, the presence of Western Europe along the coasts of Africa was to become a reality. The shift of centre of gravity of trade, from the Savannah hinterland to the coast was a direct consequence of the change of centre of gravity in Europe and Africa was not to play the same role as that of the preceding period, since henceforth it was to take place under mercantilist capitalism.

It is impossible to know what the African formations would have become if they had continued to evolve by themselves after the 17th century. Integrated at an early stage in the emerging capitalist system - like the American Indian formations - at the mercantilist stage, they were really crushed and, as we shall see later, retrogressed. It is however possible to observe that the large-scale

pre-mercantilist African trade, which was brilliant in some regions, was interlinked with relatively poor communal or tribute -paying formations, and that, as such, it was unable itself to generate the capitalist mode of production.

VIII

The obstruction of tributary formations -
A first manifestation of the law of uneven
development of civilizations.

The examples of the Arab World and of Africa South of the Sahara illustrate our point that large-scale trade was not the source of capitalism and still less was itself already of a capitalist nature. They were in fact formations characterized by an extensive development of long-distance trade and by a comparatively small volume of the surplus generated within the agrarian society. Such was not the case of China or Egypt whose civilizations had never depended on trade. The first attempt to explain the obstruction of these civilizations was made by MARX in his notes on the Asian mode of production ("generalized slavery", etc.). These notes reveal a very deep insight, but were unfortunately not used as a starting point for more exhaustive studies. People have simply quoted them ad nauseam, not even bothering to correct their errors and shortcomings for which the state of knowledge of the time was responsible. Today, we know that the village community of ancient Egypt, like that of China, were no more constraining to their members than those of Europe during the Middle Ages. We know that the Egyptian and Chinese societies have been, for thousands of years, at least as backward as those of Europe a few centuries ago. We also know that examples of communities that are still strong are to be sought in sub-Saharan Africa rather than in China or Egypt, even of ancient times. We cannot therefore attribute the obstruction of tributary formations to the persistence of the community and to its exceptional resistance to deterioration.

The development of civilization, in the Ancient World at least seems to have occurred in four places and during the same period if not strictly at the same time : in Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Indus valley and the Yellow river valley. It is not a mere coincidence that these places

happen to be river valleys in comparatively hot regions. It is clear that ecological conditions were a determining factor at the beginning. Irrigation made possible both a higher productivity (the annual output per peasant family) and a higher population density. It is therefore responsible for the first real concentration of people, for the circulation goods, men and ideas.

In all four cases, the civilization took an identical form. It occurred in a tributary form : a theocratic/bureaucratic ruling class emerged from among the communities and asserted itself in the rôle of organiser of the state rule and economic life of the society. Again, this is not mere accident. From this we must draw the conclusion that the first type of social class formation was not a slave society but a tribute-paying society.

These same ecological conditions were to cause these first tributary civilizations to suffer a different fate. Mesopotamia and the Indus valley were extremely vulnerable : surrounded by populated areas which, although less dense, were nevertheless active, their wealth brought upon them attacks from the poor nomads, semi-nomads and sedentary highland peoples from the rainfall-irrigated farming areas. Destroyed, often several times in succession, they were unable to achieve a systematic and continuous progress in terms of technological development of irrigation and industry as well as of state and administrative organization. In contrast, Egypt and China had extremely favourable conditions. Egypt is protected by deserts on both the West and the East. China, unlike the other three regions is not situated at the centre of the Ancient World, but at its eastern extremity. On the West, it is comparatively cut off by mountain barriers difficult to cross, high rugged plateaux and deserts. Egypt was therefore able to develop a tributary civilization, in a closed and sheltered environment. It very soon reached the completed form of that type of formation. China had an additional advantage : it could spread southwards by driving back the primitive inhabitants who, being also cut off from the West, could not be a threat to the Han peoples as the Indo-Europeans were to Mesopotamia and India. Like Egypt, China also soon achieved the

heights of the completed form of tributary civilization but in addition, it was able to spread its wings and set up, on the banks of the southern rivers, new zones of agricultural civilization identical to its original zone.

These two centres of tributary civilization (China and Egypt) call for some remarks. Firstly, they were truly central in the sense that they formed a very high proportion of the total population of the globe : nearly 10 million people in Egypt as early as the year 2000 B.C. while China rapidly reached a population of 100 million owing to the possibilities for expansion, when the rest of the world population was hardly as big and was scattered over millions of square miles, with a density 10 to 100 times less. Secondly, in these two civilizations, the village system weakened quite early on and almost disappeared as state authority rapidly became powerful. The community itself survived as a community of families but it lost the absolute right of ownership of land in favour of a wider and superior community which soon became a nation. Thirdly, the ruling class organized at national level was not particularly "despotic", as it is too rashly and too glibly stated by westerners. As a national state-class, it had the national interest at heart and organized useful national construction works. The Pyramids are not its main achievements; they pale into insignificance in comparison with the harnessing of the Nile waters which involved an amount of work several hundred times greater! The state-ruling class was comparatively open and social mobility in access to it was much greater than in many other civilizations : the mandarin class in China is an example. In contrast with the severity of European fendalism, the abuses of those societies were limited ; and it can be said that the central tributary civilizations do not really deserve to be called despotic. They only occasionally became so when barbarian invaders overran the country, and even then the barbarians were soon assimilated and civilized. They also became so during troubled times when the state power gave way to fendal autonomies very similar to those of feudal Europe. Fourthly, the state absolute power characteristic of these fully-developed formations provided the tributary

mode with a clearly dominant rôle. Long-distance trade, free or slave-based handcraft production and wage-labour sector production were all subjected to close control by the state which taxed them. The society was therefore despotic only with respect to those sectors and not with respect to the peasants. In feudal Europe, the situation was exactly the reverse: the State, being too weak, allowed the towns to flourish "unhindered" while the feudal lords, being in close contact with the peasants, were free to oppress the rural masses. Fifthly, these two fully-developed modes of tributary formations were later to internalize the progress achieved by the productive forces. The production relations laid down by the tributary mode adapted themselves to cope with a wide range of development levels of the productive forces. Conflicts between them only occurred when the capitalist mode was introduced from outside. The historical duration of the completed tributary mode was therefore a long one and this seems quite natural. However, the fact of retaining the progress within the society meant future obstruction, comparatively speaking, that is, in relation to possible progress in the less-developed and partially complete formations where conflicts between production relations and productive forces appeared sooner and forced relations to supersede the precapitalist stage.

Compared with the fully-developed tributary formations which we will call central formations and which were limited in number, all other civilized precapitalist formations appeared as peripheral. Egypt and China remained the two original models, the basic sources of science, technology, ideology and organization.

In the western part of the Ancient World, Egypt - and, with their own vicissitudes, Mesopotamia and the Indus valley - provided the inspiration and the impetus. The trade between the three western poles of tributary civilization led to the creation of peripheral trading formations: Phoenician, Syrian and Arab cities. The semi-nomad tribal Kingdoms of ancient Asia and of Southern Europe attempted to copy the Egyptian model or that of Mesopotamia or the Indus Valley without success because of

their fragile material basis. They could extract only a small surplus and for this very reason, the communities remained strong, state centralization was poor and all the time threatened by local autonomous groups. Greece, after copying from Crete, one of the Kingdoms inspired by Egypt, developed to the full the peripheral nature of its formation. The exceptional expansion of its commercial rôles together with its restricted ability to extract a domestic agricultural surplus - for obvious ecological reasons - led that country to adopt a new and unorthodox approach, that is, the extensive recourse to slavery. That pool of slave labour, supplied essentially from raids on other territories, made it possible to increase commodity production, to make the society more than a mere trade intermediary and created the conditions for its own reproduction : the production from slave labour being in turn used as a means to obtain new slaves. Later, Rome extended this formation to embrace the whole of the Mediterranean basin.

This slave-based formation did not have the flexibility of the tributary formations because it assumed the existence of a periphery from which it obtained its manpower. For, the strong tributary societies with which it entered into trade relations even of domination did not sell their men. So the periphery from which slaves were obtained was the barbarian periphery of Europe, Celtic, Germanic and **Slav**. But once again, it will be noted that the replacement of this slave system did not start at Rome, the centre, but at its periphery. It was not the revolts by the slaves but the attacks by Barbarians which led the Empire to crumble. The Barbarians building on the ruins of the Empire superseded the slave system and established the feudal mode, a variant of the tributary mode. The tributary mode, like its feudal variant, was therefore superior and not inferior to the slave mode. From its inception, it occurred where ecological conditions were favourable; and where they were not so, it emerged with difficulty, and through the stage of slavery.

The feudal variant remained weak in relation to the original completed mode. It was this weakness - this peripheral nature - which was to become its strength. At this point, we must analyze the nature and significance of this weakness. In the early periods of feudal Europe, it clearly meant a very limited surplus; but it also meant a limited political, administrative and economic centralization; and the two went hand in hand. It was this weak centralizing capacity which freed the trading sectors, even in their embryonic forms. Under the latter's impact, agriculture took great strides forward and surplus from agriculture reached increasing proportions. At that stage, ecological conditions were favourable and hence responsible for this progress. That was never to be the case either in the Arab World (excluding Egypt, of course) or in the negro-African world. As we saw, in those cases, the agricultural surplus remained small and distant trade became confirmed as the centre of gravity of the formation. During the golden age, that trade was the mainstay of imperial centralization, providing the royal courts with the bulk of their resources. We have already seen how, in the West, the characteristic features of the feudal mode and of the formation derived from it gave rise to a dialectic : expansion of trade/break-up of feudal relations, leading to the emergence of capitalism.

One cannot help noticing the parallel between this singular pattern of evolution at the western end of the Ancient World and that which emerged at its eastern extremity. Unfortunately, the problem of the Japanese "miracle" was never analyzed in terms of centre/periphery relations. And yet there is a striking similarity between them. In that region, China represents the completed model in all respects. Wherever ecological conditions were suitable, that model was faithfully copied: in Vietnam, in Cambodia during the Khmer rule and in Korea. However, in Japan, the ecological conditions raised serious obstacles : the separate feudal entities and the autonomy of the trading towns kept state centralization within such bounds as to create a striking similarity between Japan and Europe, separated from one another by thousands of kilometres. It is true that that society only became capitalist after being influenced from the outside. But it did so with the greatest of ease. However, we

shall see that that evolution could have failed if Japan had been unfortunate enough to be integrated into the capitalist system as its periphery. It was not so because it was poor. In contrast China, possessing a considerable centralized surplus, aroused European and American cupidity. Equally true is the fact that, external influences having triggered off the process of genesis of capitalism, Japan acquired characteristics of its own, in particular, the widespread rôle of the state.

The evolution of the Indian sub-continent also belongs to the explanatory model, of inequalities of development we have outlined. The tributary civilization of the Indus Valley had been destroyed centuries before. However, the Indo-Aryan invaders slowly rebuilt it, at the same time spreading their influence over a wider geographical area. The process was a slow one in view of the extensive area involved, covering the Ganges Valley, which had to be slowly conquered from nature and from the primitive peoples forming its inhabitants. Furthermore, the process was hindered by the opening up of India to the West and the successive waves of invasion which followed in its wake. Tributary formations gradually sprang up in the cul-de-sac of Southern India. Hence it was at a very late stage, shortly before its colonization, that India finally acquired the tributary mode. In a few regions where the process was still in its infancy, there was the exceptional situation where the village communities remained very active. It was the continued existence of such communities which often led to the belief that they were a prerequisite of the tributary mode. On the contrary, the latter appears to us as the most widespread and the most developed form of precapitalist societies. Its connection with "irrigation", which appears to be the root of the most ancient civilizations, was not a necessary condition. As for its "Asian" tag, there is still less reason for it.

One point remains to be clarified : the societies serving as periphery to the tributary mode did not all give rise to capitalism although some of them did. We have already noted the reasons for this as regards the Arab World and sub-Saharan Africa. The Byzantine Empire followed by its successor, the Ottoman Empire, were also formations - or more precisely groups of formations in view of the heterogeneity of these vast empires - peripheral to the tributary system. They were peripheral formations in the sense that the tributary mode never managed to establish itself there in its completed form. Some regions of these empires, particularly in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Syria and North Africa, remained very well-organized communities and they constantly threatened to revolt over the payment of tribute to Constantinople and later to Istanbul. Other communities stagnated because the slavery and trade on which their former prosperity rested had become considerably reduced. Such was the case of Greece and the Oriental cities. Moreover, the commodity production of these regions was transferred to the capital city to which Greek, Egyptian and Syrian craftsmen were deported by the thousand. It was only in the capital city that the centralized collection of tribute levied over a vast empire could sustain the commodity production. In fact, we are here dealing with a tributary formation trying to maintain itself against a substratum of the population of a more ancient civilization which kept resisting it. It is understandable that that formation was never able to give rise to capitalism. In other parts of the Globe also, in Iran and in Central Asia, the tributary formations remained too poor - for ecological reasons - and too threatened by barbarian invaders to achieve the completed stage.

In analyzing the second manifestation of the law of uneven development of civilizations - the genesis of socialism - we shall see that the same situation applied as for the first one - the genesis of capitalism. We shall see that while socialism attempted to break through, starting at the periphery and not the centre of the capitalist system, not all the formations peripheral to capitalism did actually give rise to socialism. There were also historical "failures" which are here referred to as state capitalism.

In this chapter, we have not dealt with the pre-Colombian civilization in the Americas for the simple reason that the American Indian formations were too suddenly integrated into the nascent capitalist system. However, as in the Ancient World, the class formation which appeared in America was of the tributary type. Such was the case among the Incas, the Aztecs, the Mayas, etc... Evolving within a closed society without external threat in view of the continent's small population, these formations appear to have reached a high level of sophistication as in Egypt and China, which were exceptional cases in the more populated and complex Ancient World. It is difficult to imagine how they would have evolved since as from the 16th century, they were violently overpowered by the Spanish conquest, then broken up to give rise to very specific peripheral formations of mercantilist capitalism, which we shall deal with later.

As regards the specific formations of the new territories set up without the presence of a substratum, by European emigrants (New England, Canada, Boer South Africa, Australia and New Zealand), they evolved in abstraction from either the question of the periphery or of the tributary system or - as we shall see - of capitalism. They were formations of a unique type set up from the beginning in close association with the genesis of central capitalism (European). That is why we shall refer to them as young centres.

The genesis of central capitalism therefore constitutes the first main manifestation of the law of uneven development of formations. We express this law in the following way : a formation is never superseded as from its centre but as from its periphery. The main contradiction of the formation, that which defines the dominant mode characterizing it, is not the main aspect of contradiction.

That is to be found in another field, that of the conflict between the centre about the periphery of the system. The reason is that the existence of a periphery enables the centre to transfer to the periphery the effects of the main contradiction. Therefore it becomes easier for the centre to overcome this contradiction by shifting it onto the periphery which becomes the weak link of the system, hence the link which will ultimately become the point at which the system is superseded, if the conditions are ripe.

We have also shown that the precapitalist formations, in their varied forms, comprise a dominant one - the tributary formation - and a series of peripheral ones - the slave, feudal and mercantile formations. The tributary formation is essentially explained by itself, through its specific internal dynamism. In that sense, it is self-centred and constitutes the "normal" channel of evolution. In contrast, the peripheral precapitalist formations do not reveal their nature through their own internal dynamism, but through the interaction of that dynamism with the action of the completed tributary formations upon them. In that respect, they are not self-centred and constitute "unusual" channels. There is a striking parallel between this dialectic and that of the centre and the periphery of the capitalist system. Obviously the time-span and the related geographical span are not identical for both the genesis of capitalism and that of socialism. There was no world system during the precapitalist era. There were multiple systems; and in the Ancient World, there were two early fully-developed tributary centres : Egypt and China, and a third, India, set up in a later period. Around these centres, a multitude of varied peripheries sprang up and came into contact with one another along their changing frontiers. We can therefore distinguish between the different peripheries, the Mediterranean and European ones (Greece, Rome, Fendal Europe, Arab and Ottoman World), those of Black Africa, the Japanese Periphery, etc... It was capitalism which, for the first time, became a unique world system while history accelerated at a logarithmic rate.