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Underdevelopment and Dependence in Black Africa – Origins and Contemporary Forms

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CONTEMPORARY Black Africa can be divided into wide regions which are clearly different from one another. But it is more difficult to analyse these differences – and to study their nature, origin, and effects – than to see them.

The unity of Black Africa is, none the less, not without foundations. On the contrary, leaving aside the question of 'race' – in Africa, they are no more homogenous nor less mixed, since pre-historical times, than are the other 'races', whether white, yellow, or red – the common or kindred cultural background, and the striking similarities of social organisation, make a living unity of Black Africa. This physical 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 Africa; on the contrary, they helped to assert and enrich the African personality. The colonial conquest of almost the whole of this continent strengthened this feeling of unity in Black Africa. Seen from London, Paris, or Lisbon, Black Africa appeared to European observers as a homogenous entity, just as the North Americans regard Latin America as a continent which extends south of the Rio Grande.

Looked at from the opposite point of view, that is to say from inside, Black Africa, like Latin America, evidently appears as extremely variegated. It is true that the present states are the result of an artificial carve-up, but almost nowhere does this constitute the sole or even the essential basis of their diversity. We would be wrong again to think that this pattern, 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. Of even more significance, per-

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haps, are some 100 or 200 micro-regions, varying in width, which readily cross the frontiers of the present states. They constitute yet another aspect of the reality; they do not derive their definition from their geographical position alone, but above all because of the homogenous 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. I propose to identify three, and shall discuss the basis for such a distinction.

Traditional West Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, Togo, former French West Africa), Cameroun, Chad, and the Sudan together constitute a first macro-region, which I wish to describe as *Africa of the colonial trade economy*. I shall give a precise definition to this term, which, unfortunately, is too often treated lightly. This integrated whole is clearly divisible into three sub-regions: (i) the coastal zone, which is easily accessible from the outside world, and which constitutes the 'rich' area; (ii) the hinterland, which mostly serves as a pool of labour for the coast, and as a market for the industries which are being established there; and (iii) the Sudan, whose particular characteristics will be examined later.

The traditional Congo River basin (Congo-Kinshasa, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, and the Central African Republic) form a second macro-region, which I wish to define as *Africa of the concession-owning companies*. Here also it is necessary to explain how, over and above the difference in the policies and practices of the French and Belgian Governments, genuine similarities in the mode of colonial exploitation characterise the whole of the region, and this justifies its demarcation.

The eastern and southern parts of the continent (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Malawi, Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, and South Africa) constitute the third macro-region, which I wish to call *Africa of the labour reserves*. Here also, apart from the varied nature of each country, the region was developed on the basis of the policy of colonial imperialism, according to the principle of 'enclosure acts' which were applied to entire peoples.

Ethiopia, Somalia, Madagascar, Réunion, and Mauritius, like the Cape Verde islands on the opposite side of the continent, do not form part of these three macro-regions, although here and there are to be found some aspects of each. However, they also display features of other systems which have played an important part in their actual development: the slavery-mercantilist system of the Cape Verde islands, Réunion, and Mauritius; and the 'pseudo-feudal' system of Ethiopia

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and Madagascar. Obviously questions of frontiers between the regions remain: Katanga, for example, belonged to the area of the labour reserves, and Eritrea to that of the colonial trade.

TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF PERIODS IN AFRICAN HISTORY

My proposed distinction is deliberately based on the effects of the *last* period in the history of Africa: that of colonisation. It will be necessary to study how the dialectic reveals itself between the major colonial policies and the structures inherited from the past. To do so, we have to go back in time, and to distinguish four separate periods.

The pre-mercantilist period stretches from the earliest days until the seventeenth 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 (from Dakar to 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 other social systems and their relationships with one another. During that period, Africa, by and large, does not appear as inferior, or weaker than the rest of the Old World. The unequal development within Africa was not any worse than that north of the Sahara, on both sides of the Mediterranean.

The mercantilist period stretches from the seventeenth century to 1800. It was characterised by the slave trade, and the first retrograde steps date back to this time. It was not only the coastal zone which was affected by this trade: there was a decline in productive forces throughout the continent. There were two distinct slave-trading areas: the Atlantic trade (by far the most harmful, due to the great numbers involved), which spread from the coast to the whole of the continent, from Saint-Louis in Senegal to Quelimane in Mozambique; and the Oriental trade operating from Egypt, the Red Sea, and Zanzibar, towards the Sudan and East Africa. This second type of mercantilist activity was carried beyond 1800, because the industrial revolution which shook the foundations of society in Europe and North America did not reach the Turkish–Arab part of the world.

The next period lasted from 1800 to 1880–90, and was characterised by attempts – at least in certain regions within the influence of Atlantic mercantilism – to establish a new form of dependence with that part of the world where capitalism was firmly entrenched by industrialisation. These attempts, however, had very limited backing, as we shall see why later. The area of influence of Oriental mercantilism was not affected.

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The fourth period, that of colonisation, completed the work of the previous period in Western Africa, took over from Oriental mercantilism in Eastern Africa, and developed with tenfold vigour the present forms of dependence of the continent according to the models of the three macro-regions mentioned above. The present throws light on the past. The completed forms of dependence – which only appeared when Africa was actually made the periphery of the world capitalist system in its imperialist stage, and was developed as such – enable us to understand, by comparison, the meaning of previous systems of social relations, and the way in which African social formations were linked with those of other regions of the Old World with which they had contact.

I. THE PRE-MERCANTILIST PERIOD: UP TO THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

During this time, Black Africa was not on the whole more backward than the rest of the world. The continent was characterised by complex social formations, sometimes accompanied by the development of the state, and almost invariably based on visible social differentiations which revealed the ancient nature of the process of disintegration of the primitive village community. The great confusion which arises in any discussion of traditional African society is due to a number of reasons, especially: (i) the scarcity of documents and remains of the past, leaving only the accounts of Arab travellers; (ii) the confusion between the concepts of 'mode of production' and 'social formation' which calls for clarification and a basic differentiation; (iii) the confusion between different periods of African history, particularly between the pre- and actual mercantilist periods – and the justifiable concern of scholars to relate history in all its continuous detail, enhances this confusion; and last but not least, (iv) the ideological prejudices against Africa, clearly connected with colonial racism.

This is why I have formulated three sets of propositions, so that we can see our way clearly through this history, without claiming to recast its evolution. My intention is to emphasise the main differences between the Africa of this period – the only true 'traditional' Africa, neither isolated nor primitive – and that which followed.

The first thing to make clear is that *a society cannot be reduced to a mode of production.* This is an abstract concept which does not involve the notion of a fixed historical sequence with regard to the progress of civilisation, from the first differentiated communities up to the capitalist form of society. It is feasible to distinguish five types: (i) the primitive

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community mode of production, the only possible one to come first, for obvious reasons; (ii) the 'tributary' mode of production which involved the persistent parallel existence of a village community *and* a socio-political structure which exploited the former by exacting a tribute – this, the most common pre-capitalist mode, developed sometimes from earlier into evolved forms, when the village family community lost the right of ownership of land to feudal masters; (iii) the slave-based mode of production, which was less common but scattered; (iv) the small-scale trade mode of production, quite common but never likely to form the main structure of society; and lastly, (v) the capitalist mode of production.[1]

It is necessary to emphasise that social formations are *concrete* structures, organised and characterised by a *dominant* mode of production which forms the apex of a complex set of subordinate modes. Thus it is possible to have a small-scale trading mode linked to a dominant tributary ('early' or 'developed feudal'), and even based on a slave or a capitalist mode of production. Likewise, the mode based on slavery may not be of the dominant type, and this seems to be the rule when it is related to a dominant tributary mode of production (or even a capitalist mode, as in the United States until 1865); and only in exceptional cases does it become dominant itself, as in the classical societies of ancient times.

Modes of production, then, do not actually constitute historical categories, in the sense of occurring in a necessary sequence of time. On the other hand, social formations have a definite age, reckoned on the basis of the level of development of the productive forces. This is why it is absurd to draw any analogy between the same mode of production belonging to societies of different ages – for example, between African or Roman slavery and that of the nineteenth-century United States.[2]

Secondly, *social formations cannot be understood when taken out of their context*. Sometimes the relations between different societies are marginal, but often they are decisive. The problems connected with long-distance trade are thus very important. This is obviously not a mode of production, but a method of articulation between autonomous societies. This is the essential difference from internal trade, which is made up of

[1] For further details, see my *L'Accumulation à l'échelle mondiale* (Paris, 1970), especially pp. 31, 165–8, and 341–72; also my article on 'La Politique coloniale française à l'égard de la bourgeoisie commerçante sénégalaise', in Claude Meillassoux (ed.), *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa* (London, 1971), pp. 361–76.

[2] This idea of the cumulative nature of technological progress, and the importance of the age of the social formation in assessing the significance of a mode of production to which it belongs, is stressed by H. S. Michelina, 'The Economic Formation: notes on the problem of its definition', I.D.E.P. paper, Dakar, October 1971.

exchanges between dealers in a particular society. Such exchanges are characteristic of the simple trading mode of production or that based on slavery (in this case a combination of both), which are elements of the society in question. But internal trade may also be an extension of long-distance trade, if the goods involved penetrate deeply within that particular society.

Long-distance trade brings into contact societies unknown to one another – i.e. it involves the exchange of products for which each is unaware of the other's cost of production, 'rare' goods for which there are no substitutes in the importing country. As a result, the social groups engaged in that activity enjoy a monopoly position from which they derive their profits. Such a monopoly frequently explains the 'special' nature of these groups, often specialised foreign traders belonging to a particular caste or ethnic community, for example the Jews in Europe and the Dioula in West Africa. In this kind of trade, the subjective theory of value still had some significance – but it is meaningless when the cost of production of the goods is known to the respective trade partners, as in the capitalist system of exchange.

This long-distance trade could, in certain societies, become a decisive factor. This is the case when only a limited surplus is able to be extracted from the producers in a particular society by the dominant local classes. The reason for this may be the low development of the productive forces, and/or difficult ecological conditions, or the successful resistance by village communities to the extraction of this surplus. In such a case, long-distance trade makes possible, through its characteristic monopoly profit, the transfer (not, of course, the generation) of a fraction of the surplus of one society to another. For the receiving society, this transfer may be of vital importance, and may serve as the principal basis of the wealth and power of the ruling classes. Civilisation may then wholly depend on this trade, and any shift of trading centres can cause one region to fall into decadence, or create conditions for it to prosper, without bringing about either any regression or any noticeable progress in the level of its productive forces. This, in my opinion, is the explanation for the ups and downs in the history of the Old World and the Mediterranean, particularly with regard to the so-called Greek miracle, and the prosperity and decline of the Arab world.[1]

[1] Cathérine Coquery-Vidrovitch, 'Recherches sur un mode de production africain', in *La Pensée* (Paris), April 1969, rightly emphasises the decisive role which long-distance trade played in the constitution of some African states. Cf. Ahmad El Kodsy, 'Nationalism and Class Struggles in the Arab World,' in the *Monthly Review* (New York), July–August 1970; and also Antoine Pelletier and Jean-Jacques Goblot, *Matérialisme historique et histoire des civilsations* (Paris, 1969), who suggest this for Greece.

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The third point is that *the African societies of the pre-mercantile period developed autonomously*, although they followed a parallel course to that of the Mediterranean world, both Eastern and European. The semi-arid zone which stretches diagonally across the Old World, from the Atlantic coast to Central Asia, has always separated the regions which were ecologically conducive to a high productivity in agriculture: monsoon Asia, tropical Africa, and temperate Europe. This zone has seen the birth of some brilliant civilisations, almost all founded on long-distance trade, particularly Greece and the Arab Empire,[1] whose vicissitudes followed the course of this trade. On either side, autonomous societies – 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 was already fully integrated, as much as Europe, into the history of the world.

This is why the trans-Sahara trade was so significant. It enabled the whole of the Old World – Mediterranean, Arab, and European – to be supplied with gold from the main source of production in Upper Senegal and Ashanti, until the discovery of America. The importance of this flow can hardly be adequately stressed. For the societies of tropica Africa, this trade became the basis of their organisation. 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 (clothes, drugs, perfumes, dates, and salt), and on the other, and in particular, the opportunity to establish and strengthen their social and political power by the acquisition of horses, copper, iron bars, and weapons. This trade thus encouraged social differentiation, and the creation of states and empires, just as it promoted the improvement of instruments, and the adaptation of techniques and products to suit local climatic conditions. In return, Africa supplied mainly gold, a few other rare products, notably gum and ivory, and some slaves.[2]

Some European historians, for obvious political reasons, have tried to confuse this trade between equal autonomous partners with the later devastating slave trade of the mercantilist period. The small number of black people in the southern areas of the Maghreb – a few hundred

[1] Except for Egypt and Mesopotamia, and hence the frequent mistake of speaking of 'Arab feudalism' criticised by El Kodsy, loc. cit.

[2] The role and the nature of this trade were highlighted for the first time by E. W. Bovill, *Caravans of the Old Sahara* (London, 1933), later revised as *The Golden Trade of the Moors* (London, 1958).

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thousand compared with about a hundred million 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 these centuries, originating from tropical Africa, reminds us of the principal nature of this trade. After all, this is why the ideas which accompanied the traders were easily accepted – for example, the early adoption of Islam in the Senegal River areas. The important volume of this trade, its egalitarian nature, and the autonomous character of the African societies, are unambiguously described in the Arab literature of the period. Furthermore, one can understand the admiration expressed in the accounts of the Arab travellers if it is remembered that the development and structure of the societies of North and West Africa belonged to the same technological age, 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 Muslim traders, forms the basis of the structure of these societies. These traders were, as was very often the case, organised in a kind of caste system, and here belonged to a religious minority.

For centuries the Mediterranean societies and those of tropical Africa were united by a bond, for better or for worse. The vicissitudes of one area had quick repercussions on the other, just as wealth and glory reached them all simultaneously. Thus the gradual shifting of routes from west to east found a parallel shift in the civilisation and power of the nations both in North Africa and in the West African savannah lands – reflected, for example, in the successive might of the ancient Empires of Ghana and Mali, the Hausa cities, Bornu, Kanem, and Darfur. This also explains why there was a crisis in Africa when the centre of the newly born European mercantile capitalism moved from the Mediterranean towards the Atlantic. This shift, studied by Fernand Braudel with his usual talent and care for detail, heralded the decline, in the sixteenth century, of the Italian towns which, since the thirteenth century, had opened the way for a decisive evolution in the future history of mankind.[1] Similarly we can say that this change was to cause the downfall of both the Arab world and the Sudan-Sahel regions of Black Africa. Soon afterwards the presence of Western Europe along the coasts of Africa was to become a reality. This shift of the centre of gravity of trade in Africa, form the savannah hinterland to the coast, was a direct consequence of the change of commercial emphasis in Europe from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. But the new trade between Europe and Africa was not to play the same role as that of the

[1] Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris, 1949).

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preceding period; henceforth it was to take place under mercantile capitalism.

2. THE MERCANTILIST PERIOD: THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

As I have pointed out elsewhere, the mercantilist period saw the emergence of two poles of the capitalist mode of production: (i) the creation of a proletariat resulting from the decline of feudal relationships, and (ii) the accumulation of wealth in the form of money.[1] During the industrial revolution the two became united; money wealth turned into capital, and the capitalist mode of production reached its completed stage. During this long period of incubation covering three centuries the *American* periphery of the Western European mercantile centre played a decisive role in the accumulation of money wealth by the Western European bourgeoisie. Black Africa played a no less important role as the *periphery of the periphery*. Reduced to the function of supplying slave labour for the plantations of America, Africa lost its autonomy. It began to be shaped according to foreign requirements, those of mercantilism.

Let us finally recall that the plantations of America did not constitute autonomous societies, in spite of their slave-based form of organisation. As I have argued previously, this mode of production was here an element of a non-slave-based society, i.e. it was not the dominant feature of that society. The latter was mercantilist, and the dominant characteristic of the plantation economy was the trade monopoly which, under its control and for its benefit, sold the products of these plantations on the European market, thus quickening the disintegration of feudal relations. The peripheral American society was thus an element in the world structure whose centre of gravity was in Western Europe.

The devastating effects of the mercantilist slave trade for Africa are now better known, thanks to the works of several historians free from race and colonial prejudices. I wish here to mention a recent and brilliant study of the Kingdom of Waalo by Boubacar Barry,[2] from which two main points emerge.

First, while the pre-mercantile trans-Sahara trade, in which the Waalo participated, had strengthened state centralisation and stimulated progress in that autonomous Senegalese kingdom, the Atlantic trade which replaced it (as soon as the French settled in 1859 in Saint-Louis), did not give rise to any productive forces; on the contrary, this caused a disintegration of the society and of the Waalo state. This

[1] See my *L'Accumulation à l'échelle mondiale*, ch. 2, section 3.

[2] Boubacar Barry, *Le Royaume du Waalo, 1659-1859* (Paris, 1971, mimeo).

explains why force had to be used by the French to cut off the trans-Sahara links, to subjugate that region of Africa, and to alter its external relations to suit the requirements of the French trading post of Saint-Louis. African societies obviously opposed this worsening of their situation, and Islam served as the basis for their resistance.

The traders of Saint-Louis paid with weapons for the slaves they bought from the king (*Brak*). This ruptured the former balance of power between (i) the *Brak* who maintained a permanent army of captives (*tyeddo*) under crown control, (ii) the council of elders (*seb ak baor*) which nominated him, and had a system of prerogatives superimposed over the collective clan-ownership (*lamanat*) of lands in the village communities, and (iii) the village communities themselves, based on the *lamanat*. The customary dues paid by the traders of Saint-Louis encouraged a civil war which involved the *Brak*, the *tyeddo*, and the *kangam* (leading notables), and a ransacking of communities to obtain slaves. The muslim priests (*marabouts*) tried to organise a resistance movement: their aim was to stop the slave trade, i.e. the export of the labour force, but not to end internal slavery. Henceforth, Islam changed its character: from being a religion of a minority group of traders, it became a popular movement of resistance. The first war led by the *marabouts*, 1673–7, failed in its attempt to convert the people of the Fleuve region and to stop the slave trade. A century later, in 1776, the Toorodo revolution in Toucouleur country overthrew the military aristocracy and ended the slave trade. But in the Waalo Kingdom, being too near to Saint-Louis, the attempt by Prophet Diile in 1830 failed in the face of French military intervention in support of the *Brak*.

Secondly, a study of the Waalo case is of special interest because the slave trade took place parallel to the trade in gum. However, the latter did not have the same impact on African society. The export of goods (instead of labour) does not necessarily have a devastating effect and may, on the contrary, lead to progress. This type of export was not characteristic of the mercantilist period for Africa as a whole, which almost exclusively supplied slaves. But here, rather exceptionally, it played an equally important role, because the slaves, like the Galam gold, mainly followed the road to Gambia. However, gum was supplied by the Waalo, and also in particular by the Trarza Moors. They could export this either via Saint Louis to the French alone, or via Portendick which was open to competition between the English and the Dutch. To cut off the Portendick route, the French helped the Trarza to settle in the Fleuve region, and to cross it during the 'Gum War', in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Such circumstances thus introduced

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a contradiction of secondary importance between the Waalo and the Trarza. It was this which explains the failure of the 'War of the *Marabouts*' in the seventeenth century, led simultaneously by those who were hostile to the slave trade, and by the Moors who put increasing pressure on the Waalo in order to monopolise the gum trade.[1]

The mercantilist slave trade had similar devastating effects on all the regions of Africa where it took place. Along the coast, from Saint-Louis to Quelimane, it affected almost the whole of the continent, except the north-eastern area of the Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and East Africa. The similarity between the history of the Waalo and that of the Kongo Kingdom should be recalled.[2] The slave trade here also brought about the disintegration of the central authority, and led to anarchy which opened the way for the Yaga raids. Such examples abound. There were wars and anarchy almost everywhere on the continent, and the flight of peoples towards regions of shelter which were difficult to reach and also very often poor – such as those of the paleo-negritic peoples in the over-populated mountains of West Africa. It all ended with an alarming decrease in the population. The processes of integration were stopped, as well as the construction of large communities, begun in the pre-mercantilist period. Instead there was an incredible fragmentation, isolation, and entanglement of peoples, and this, as we know, is the root cause of one of the most serious handicaps of contemporary Africa.

It is necessary to conclude this section with the question of the Oriental mercantilist period. I have certainly hesitated to define in this way the relations of the Near East (Egypt and southern Arabia) with Africa of the Nile and the eastern coast, from the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean as far as Mozambique. Neither the Ottoman Empire, nor Egypt under Mohammed Ali, and still less the southern Sultanates, were mercantilist societies similar to those of Europe from the renaissance to the industrial revolution. The disintegration of pre-capitalist relations – the necessary condition for the formation of a proletariat – was almost non-existent. This was the obstacle which Mohammed Ali attempted to overcome by setting up an entirely new state apparatus. I do not propose to study this here, except to bring out the main trends in the evolution of the Sudan, which Egypt was to conquer in the second half of the nineteenth century.[3] It was during the pre-mercantilist period

[1] Ibid.

[2] See Jan Vansina, *Introduction à l'éthnographie du Congo* (Brussels, 1967), and G. Ballandier, *La Vie quotidienne au royaume du Congo du XVI au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1965).

[3] See, inter alia, R. Hill, *Egypt in the Sudan, 1820–81* (London, 1959), P. M. Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881–98* (Oxford, 1958), and J. S. Trimingham, *Islam in the Sudan* (Oxford, 1949).

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that two Sultanates were established here, based on long-distance trade with Egypt and the East: the Sultanate of Darfur, still powerful at the time of the Egyptian conquest, and the Sultanante of Fung, between the two Niles, weakened through the wars waged by Ethiopia. Mohammed Ali's aim was very simple: to loot the Sudan of gold, slaves, and ivory, and to export them in order to intensify the industrialisation of Egypt. This was a process of primitive accumulation similar to that of the European mercantilist period, and this is the reason for speaking of Oriental mercantilism. The industrial revolution had already occurred, and this was known to the Pasha; consequently the pre-mercantilist period and that of the capitalist system were mixed up in an attempt to industrialise Egypt by raising finance through state taxation of the peasants, the monopoly of foreign trade and, whenever possible, the looting of the colonies.

Up to 1850 it was the Egyptian army itself which hunted for slaves and robbed the Sudan of local products. After that date, the soldiers handed the job to Sudanese nomads, particularly the Baqqara, who sold the slaves they seized to Turkish, Copt, Syrian, and European merchants established under the aegis of the Khedive. These operations quickly entailed changes in the social system of the nomads concerned; their clan organisation was succeeded by 'nomad feudalism', founded on a territorial basis, and dominated by warrior nobles. In the zones of agriculture that had been thoroughly conquered, the Egyptian army destroyed the old chiefdoms and subjected the villagers to a tax in kind – livestock and grain – for the purpose of feeding the administration and the army of the conquerors. *Sheikhs* were created by the Egyptians and made responsible for the collection of taxes; they rapidly became rich by this means. Moreover, the best lands were taken from the communities and given to Egyptian *beys* and to some Sudanese *sheikhs*. Peasants were taken from their villages and attached to these lands as half-slaves and half-serfs; the proceeds of their commercial farming went to swell the Egyptian Treasury. Other peasants, hunted by the nomads and impoverished by the *sheikhs*, flocked into the market towns, established by the army at cross-roads, and on the borders of the slave-raiding areas. A craft industry grew up, distinct from agriculture, while on the land given to the *beys* and *sheikhs* Egyptian farming methods were introduced with higher productivity. By 1870 it was feasible to replace the tax in kind with a money tax, because of the increased marketed surplus. The Sudan was becoming unified, Islamised, and Arabised.

The Mahdist revolt, 1881–98, was a rebellion of those oppressed by that system: the people of the village communities, the slave-peasants of the estates, and the craftsmen, slaves and beggars of the market towns. The successful revolt drove out the Egyptian army, the *beys* and the *sheikhs*. But after the Prophet's death, Khalifa Abdullahi changed the power structure of the Sudan. The military leaders of the revolt, whose origins were in the people, and the Baqqara warrior chiefs who joined it, reorganised to their advantage a state similar to that of the Egyptians; they seized the estates and levied taxes on their own account. It is true that the export of slaves was prohibited, but this had largely lost its old importance at the beginning of the conquest, because that labour force was now used on the spot. But the new state intended to continue exploiting the masses to its advantage and, for that purpose, destroyed the popular elements surrounding the Prophet. His family was imprisoned and several of the people's military leaders were executed. Furthermore, the Mahdist state resumed the export of slaves, but this time for its own benefit: the Khalifa organised slave raiding among the neighbouring peoples of the Upper Nile, Darfur, and Ethiopia; he kept a large number to strengthen his army and his economy, but authorised Sudanese merchants to export some of them. The Khalifa's army, which had lost the popularity which made up its strength at the time of the revolt, did not resist the British colonial expedition at the end of the century.

The slave trade organised from Zanzibar in the nineteenth century certainly falls within a mercantilist framework. For centuries, Arab trade on the coast was carried out in a pre-mercantilist context, which brought these regions of Black Africa into contact with India, the Indian archipelago, and even China. Here products were more important than slaves, as is shown by the very small black population of southern Arabia and the countries bordering the Indian Ocean. There would seem to be one exception, at the time when the Khalifa of Abbasside was organising sugar-cane plantations in Lower Iraq for which he imported black slaves. This short period ended with the Qarmat revolt.

From 1850 the slave trade suddenly became much more intense. There were in fact two new markets: the island of Réunion which was supplied in this way – although the slaves were disguised as 'contract labour' since the British had abolished the slave trade – and the island of Zanzibar itself. In 1840 the Sultan had transferred his capital from Oman, and gradually established a slave plantation economy producing the cloves for which European trade now offered a market. Zanzibar, hitherto a trading post, now became a plantation on a model very similar to that of the West Indies, Réunion, or Mauritius – the Arab West Indies. Thus we once again see that integration into the world capitalist

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system was responsible for a devastating slave trade which had no resemblance to the long-distance trade of the pre-capitalist period.

3. INTEGRATION INTO THE FULL CAPITALIST SYSTEM: THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The slave trade disappeared with the end of mercantilism, that is to say essentially with the advent of the industrial revolution. Capitalism at the centre then took on its complete form; the function of mercantilism – the primitive accumulation of wealth – lost its importance, and the centre of gravity shifted from the merchant sector to the new industry. The old periphery of the plantation of America, and its African periphery of the slave trade, had now to give way to a new periphery whose function was to provide *products* which would tend to reduce the value of both constant and variable capital used at the centre: raw materials and agricultural produce. The advantageous terms under which these products were supplied to the centre are revealed by the theory of unequal exchange.[1]

However, central capital had only very limited means of achieving that goal, until the end of the nineteenth century. It was only when monopolies appeared at the centre that large-scale exports of capital became possible, and when henceforth central capital had the means of organising directly in the periphery, by modern methods, the production which suited it under appropriate conditions. Until then the centre could only rely on the ability of local social systems to adjust 'spontaneously', 'by themselves', to any new requirements. The Americans could do this in their own country; the British imperialists could impose this in India, as could the Dutch in Indonesia. In certain Eastern countries, notably the Ottoman Empire and Egypt, the joint efforts of 'spontaneous internal adjustment' and external pressure produced some results. This is not the place to trace that history. Even in tropical Africa some new crops were produced, exclusively due to the internal adaptation of African societies. There are a number of studies which are highly informative on the mechanism of these adjustments.

I wish again to refer to the exciting research work of Boubacar Barry. The project of establishing a colonial agricultural settlement in Waalo, making plantations for cotton, sugar cane, and tobacco, was first formulated by the British Governor of Saint-Louis at the end of the eighteenth century; but it was put on the agenda again after the French Revolution, as a consequence of the slave revolt of Santo Domingo.

[1] For further details, see my *L'Accumulation à l'échelle mondiale.*

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When Waalo was 'bought' in 1819 by Governor Schmaltz, the experiment began. Barry analyses the causes of failure: the resistance of the village communities to their dispossession in favour of European planters, which had been agreed to by the aristocracy in return for extra 'customary' benefits; and the lack of manpower, since there was no reason why the peasants should leave their communities and become proletarians on the plantations. The *Brak* provided some warriors who to all intents and purposes were slaves – long-term recruits, *engagés à temps*. But the French settlement could only use 'tinkering' methods. It was not until the colonial conquest that ample resources enabled a proletariat to be created: by taxation, by pure and simple dispossession, and by forced labour – in short, by all the methods used in Africa after 1880, which were similar to those used earlier by the British in India, the Dutch in Indonesia, the French in Algeria, and the Egyptians in the Sudan.

The fact remains that the Waalo agricultural settlement ended in failure in 1831. But the attempt had accentuated the people's hatred of the aristocracy, and had prepared the way for their conversion to Islam: outside the official authority, Muslim communities organised themselves defensively around the *sérigne* to whom they paid tithes. When Faidherbe conquered the Waalo between 1855–9, with the intention of restarting the agricultural settlement, and at last procuring for French industry the cotton it needed, the vanquished aristocracy embraced Islam.[1] A new chapter opened, and we shall see later how the new production came to be organised in accordance with the requirements of the centre. Thus Islam changed its structure a second time since instead of being a resistance ideology, it was now to become a powerful means of integrating the new periphery and subordinating it to the design of the centre.

Other African societies made an effort to adjust themselves to this project, even before they were conquered. Walter Rodney points out that throughout the Benin coast the slaves who were still raided, but who could no longer be exploited, were put to work inside the society to produce, among other things, the exports which Europe demanded.[2] Cathérine Coquery-Vidrovitch has analysed in these terms the prodigious development of Dahomean oil-palm groves.[3] Onwuka Diké shows how another society, that of the Ibo, unable to have recourse to

[1] Boubacar Barry, op. cit.

[2] Walter Rodney, 'African Slavery and other Forms of Social Oppression on the Upper Guinea Coast in the context of the Atlantic Slave Trade', in *The Journal of African History* (Cambridge), III, 3, 1966.

[3] Cathérine Coquery-Vidrovitch, 'De la traite des esclaves à l'exportation de l'huile de palme et des palmistes au Dahomey, XIXe siècle', in Meillassoux, op. cit. pp. 107–23.

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slaves, nevertheless adapted itself, again for the production of palm oil for export.[1] Here again many more examples could be cited.

The constitution and subsequent destruction of Samory's Empire reveals another aspect of the mechanism of integration. The collection of products for export, and the conveyance of imports received in exchange, strengthened the position of the Dioula Muslims, a minority inherited from the remote days of pre-mercantilism. The 'Dioula revolution' enabled them to establish a state which they controlled.[2] But this late episode occurred just at the beginning of the colonial period. The Empire had scarcely been founded by Samory, when it had to face the conquerors who destroyed it; they reorganised the channels of trade in the direction which suited them, and reduced the Dioula to the subordinate functions of colonial trade.

4. INTEGRATION INTO THE FULL CAPITALIST SYSTEM: COLONISATION

The partitioning of the continent which was completed by the end of the nineteenth century multiplied the means available to the colonialists to attain capital at the centre. We must remember that their target was the same everywhere: to obtain cheap exports. But to achieve this, capital at the centre – which had now reached the monopoly stage – could organise production on the spot, and there exploit both the cheap labour and the natural resources, by wasting or stealing them, i.e. by paying a price which did not enable alternative activities to replace them when they were exhausted.[3] Moreover, through direct domination and brutal political coercion, incidental expenses could be limited by maintaining the local social classes as 'conveyor belts'. Hence the late development in Africa of the peripheral model of industrialisation by import substitution. It was not until independence that the local élites who took over from the colonial administration constituted the first element of a domestic market for 'luxury goods', according to inter-linkage relationships which I have discussed elsewhere.[4] Hence also the markedly bureaucratic nature of the 'privileged classes'.

However, although the target was the same everywhere, different variants of the system of colonial exploitation were developed. These

[1] K. Onwuka Diké, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830–85* (Oxford, 1956).

[2] See Yves Person, *Samori* (Dakar, 1970), 3 vols.

[3] This problem of the looting of natural resources is beginning to be studied with the present-day awareness of 'environmental problems', although the term is ambiguous.

[4] See my paper on 'Le Modèle théorique de l'accumulation dans le monde contemporain, centre et périphérie', I.D.E.P., Dakar, 1971.

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did not depend, or only slightly, on the nationality of the coloniser. The contrast between French direct and British indirect rule, so frequent in the literature, is not very noticeable in Africa. It is true that a few differences are attributable to the nationality of the masters. British capital, being richer and more developed, and having additionally acquired the 'best pieces' of land, carried out an earlier and more through development than French capital.[1] Belgium, which had been forced to come to terms with the Great Powers, and had to accept the competition of foreign goods in the Congo, did not have the direct colonial monopolies which France used and abused to her advantage. Portugal similarly agreed to share her colonies with major Anglo–American capital.

In the region which I have called 'Africa of the labour reserves', capital at the centre needed to have a large proletariat immediately available. This was because there was great mineral wealth to be exploited (gold and diamonds in South Africa, and copper in Northern Rhodesia), and an untypical settler agriculture in the tropical Africa of Southern Rhodesia, Kenya, and German Tanganyika. In order to obtain this proletariat quickly, the colonisers dispossessed the African rural communities – sometimes by violence – and drove them deliberately back into small, poor regions, with no means of modernising and intensifying their farming. They forced the 'traditional' societies to be the supplier of temporary or permanent migrants on a vast scale, thus providing a cheap proletariat for the European mines and farms, and later for the manufacturing industries of South Africa, Rhodesia, and Kenya.[2]

Henceforth we can no longer speak of a traditional society in this part of the continent, since the labour reserves had the function of supplying a migrant proletariat, a function which had nothing to do with 'tradition'. The African social systems of this region, distorted and impoverished, lost even the semblance of autonomy: the unhappy Africa of *apartheid* and the Bantustans was born, and was to supply the greatest return to central capital. The economists' ideological mythology of the 'laws of the labour market' under these circumstances, formulated by Arthur Lewis,[3] has been subjected to merciless criticism, and Giovanni

[1] Thus the structures established in the Gold Coast in 1890, which have characterised Ghana up to the present day, made their appearance in the Ivory Coast only from 1950, after the abolition of forced labour. See R. Szereszewski, *Structural Changes in the Economy of Ghana, 1891–1911* (London, 1965), and Samir Amin, *Le Développement du capitalisme en Côte d'Ivoire* (Paris, 1967).

[2] See Ralph Horwitz, *The Political Economy of South Africa* (London, 1967); Richard Gray, *The Two Nations* (Oxford, 1961); Serge Thion, *Le Pouvoir pâle* (Paris, 1969; and above all, Giovanni Arrighi, *The Political Economy of Rhodesia* (The Hague, 1967).

[3] Arthur Lewis, *Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour* (Manchester, 1954).

Arrighi has restored the role of political violence to its true place.[1]

Until recently there was no known large-scale mineral wealth in West Africa likely to attract foreign capital, nor was there any settler colonialisation. On the other hand, the slave trade was very active on this coast, and caused the development of complex social structures which I have analysed above. The colonial powers were thus able to shape a system which made possible the large-scale production of tropical agricultural products for export under the terms necessary to interest central capital in them, i.e. provided that the returns to local labour were so small that these products cost less than any possible substitutes produced in the centre itself.

The net result of these procedures, and the structures to which they gave rise, constituted what I have called 'Africa of the colonial trade economy' or, *l'économie de traite*.[2] These processes were, as always, as much political as economic, and included the following: (i) the organisation of a dominant trade monopoly, that of the colonial import-export houses, and the pyramidal shape of the trade network they dominated, in which the Lebanese occupied the intermediate zones while the former African traders were crushed and had to occupy subordinate positions; (ii) the taxation of peasants in money which forced them to produce what the monopolists offered to buy; (iii) political support to the social strata and classes which were allowed to appropriate *de facto* some of the tribal lands, and to organise internal migrations from regions which were deliberately left in their poverty so as to be used as labour reserves in the plantation zones; (iv) political alliance with social groups which, in the theocratic framework of the Muslim brotherhoods, were interested in commercialising the tribute they levied on the peasants; and last but not least, (v) when the foregoing procedures proved ineffective, recourse pure and simple to administrative coercion: forced labour.

Under these circumstances, the traditional society was distorted to the point of being unrecognisable; it lost its autonomy, and its main function was to produce for the world market under conditions which, because they impoverished it, deprived the members of any prospects of radical modernisation. This 'traditional' society was not, therefore, in transition to 'modernity'; as a dependent society it was complete, peripheral, and hence at a dead end. It consequently retained certain 'traditional' appearances which constituted its only means of survival. The Africa of the colonial trade economy included all the subordination/

[1] Arrighi, op. cit.

[2] I have analysed this colonial trade in my *L'Afrique de l'Ouest bloquée* (Paris, 1971). See also Osende Afana, *L'Economie de l'ouest africain* (Paris, 1966); and André Vanhaeverbeke, *Rémunération du travail et commerce extérieur* (Louvain, 1970).

domination relationships between this pseudo-traditional society, integrated into the world system, and the central capitalist economy which shaped and dominated it. Unfortunately the phrase 'colonial-type trade' has been used so frequently that its meaning has been reduced to a mere description: the exchange of agricultural products against imported manufactured goods.[1] Yet the concept is much richer: it describes analytically the exchange of agricultural commodities provided by a peripheral society shaped in this way, against the products of a central capitalist industry, imported or produced on the spot by European enterprises.

The results of this colonial-type trade have varied according to different regions of this part of Africa. To give honour where honour is due, it was British capital which initiated a perfectly consistent formulation of aims and procedures. At the beginning of colonisation, when Lever Brothers asked the Governor of the Gold Coast to grant concessions which would enable them to develop modern plantations, he refused because 'it was unnecessary'. It would be enough, the Governor explained, to help the traditional chiefs to appropriate the best lands so that these export products could be obtained without extra investment costs. Lever then approached the Belgians and obtained concessions in the Congo, as we shall see why later.

I have analysed elsewhere the conditions for the success of this colonial-type trade,[2] but these may be summarised as follows: (i) an 'optimum' degree of hierarchy in a 'traditional' society, which is exactly the case in those zones formed by the slave trade; (ii) an 'optimum' population density in the rural areas of 10–30 inhabitants per square kilometre; (iii) the possibility of starting the process of proletarianisation by calling upon immigrants foreign to the ethnic communities of the plantation zone; (iv) the choice of 'rich' crops, providing a sufficient surplus per hectare and per worker, at the very first stage of their development; and (v) the support of the political authority, making available to the privileged minority such resources – political and economic, especially agricultural credit – as would make possible the appropriation and development of the plantations.

The complete model of this colonial-type trade was achieved in the Gold Coast and German Togoland by the end of the nineteenth century, and was reproduced much later in French West and Equatorial Africa. This lateness reflected that of French capitalism, and was attributable to the attempts at quasi-settler colonialisation even under

[1] As Suret Canale does in *L'Afrique noire, l'ère coloniale* (Paris, 1960).

[2] See my *L'Accumulation à l'échelle mondiale*, pp. 347–8.

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unfavourable conditions – for example, French planters in the Ivory Coast and in Equatorial Africa – and the corresponding maintenance of forced labour until the modern period, after World War II.

This colonial economy took two main forms. Dominant in the Gulf of Guinea, where conditions enabled this kind of trade to develop, was the *kulak* class of indigeneous planters of rural origin, who employed paid labour, and secured virtually exclusive appropriation of the land. On the other hand, in the savannah zone from Senegal through Northern Nigeria to the Sudan, the Muslim brotherhoods permitted another type of colonial trade: the production and export of groundnuts and cotton in vast areas subject to a theocratic power – that of the Mourid brotherhoods of Senegal, the Emirates of Nigeria, and the Ansar and Ashiqqa in the Sudan. They kept the form of a tribute-paying social system, but this was integrated into the international system, because the surplus appropriated in the form of tribute levied on the village communities was itself marketed. It was the Egyptian colonisation in the Sudan which created the most advanced conditions for the development of this type of organisation, which in that country tended towards a pure and simple latifundia system of large estates. The British merely gathered the fruits of this evolution. The new latifundia owners accepted the colonial administration after 1898, and grew cotton for the benefit of British industry. Powerful modern techniques were made available to them, notably large-scale irrigation in the Gezira.

There was a 'second transformation of Islam' in West Africa, after the colonial conquest opened the way to the same kind of evolution, although less definite and slower. We have already seen that Islam in this region underwent a first transformation: from being the religion of a minority caste of merchants in the pre-mercantilist period, integrated into an animist society (hence similar to Judaism in Europe), it became the ideology of popular resistance to the slave trade in the mercantilist period. This second transformation made Islam – 'restored' by the aristocracy and the colonial authorities – the guiding ideology of peasant leaders for the organisation of the export production which the colonisers desired. The Mourid phenomenon of Senegal is probably the most striking example of this second transformation. The fact that the founders of the brotherhood, and some short-sighted colonial administrators, felt hostile to each other for some time, does not matter. Ultimately the brotherhood proved to be the most important vector for the expansion of the groundnut economy, and for the submission of the peasants to the goal of this economy: to produce a large amount, and to accept very low and stagnating wages despite progress in productivity.

To organise this colonial-type trade it was necessary to destroy the pre-colonial pattern, and to reorganise the flows in the direction required by the externally orientated nature of the economy. For there had been, before, regional complementarities with a broad, natural forest-savannah base, strengthened by the history of the relations between the West African societies. The domestic trade between herdsmen and crop farmers, and in kola and salt, as well as the outflow of exports and the dissemination of imports, constituted a dense and integrated network, dominated by African traders. The colonial trading houses had to gain control of these flows and to direct them all towards the coast; that was why the colonial system destroyed African domestic trade and then reduced African traders – when they were not eliminated – to the role of subordinate primary collectors. The destruction of the trade of Samory, like that of the people of mixed blood in Saint-Louis, Gorée, and Freetown, like that of the Hausa and Ashanti of Salaga, and of the Ibo of the Niger delta, bear witness to this other crippling socio-economic effect of *l'économie de traite*.

Thus the colonial trade necessarily gave rise to a polarisation of dependent peripheral development at the regional level. The necessary corollary of the 'wealth' of the coast was the impoverishment of the hinterland. Predisposed by geography and history to a continental development, organised around the major inland river arteries (thus providing for transport, irrigation, electric power, and so on), Africa was condemned to be only 'developed' narrowly along the coast. The exclusive allocation of resources to the latter zone, a planned policy of colonial trade, accentuated this regional imbalance. The mass emigration from the hinterland to the coast forms part of the logic of the system: it made cheap labour available to capital where capital required this, and only 'the ideology of universal harmony' can see in these migrations anything other than their impoverishment of the departure zones.[1] The culmination of the colonial trade system was a balkanisation, in which the 'recipient' micro-regions had no 'interest' in 'sharing' the crumbs of the colonial cake with their labour reserves.

[1] Elliot J. Berg, 'The Economics of the Migrant Labor System,' in Hilda Kuper (ed.), *Urbanisation and Migration in West Africa* (Los Angeles, 1965), reflects better than anyone else this non-scientific ideology. The conventional assumption is that migrations 'redistribute' one factor of production (labour) which originally was unequally distributed. If that were so, migrations would tend to equalise the rates of growth of the economies of the various regions. But we can see that they are everywhere accompanied by a growing disparity between rates of growth: the acceleration of growth *per capita* in the immigration zones, and its reduction in the emigration zones.

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Thus the bounties of the colonial trade were highly relative. However, it was impossible to implement this system in Central Africa, the third micro-region of the continent. Here, ecological conditions had to some extent protected the peoples who took refuge from the ravages of the slave trade in zones unlikely to be penetrated from the coast. The low density of population, and the lack of sufficient African hierarchies, made the colonial-trade model non-viable. Discouraged, the colonial authorities gave the country to any adventurers who would agree to try 'to get something out of it' without resources – since adventure does not attract capital. The misdeeds of the concessionary companies have been duly denounced: between 1890 and 1930 they ravaged French Equatorial Africa with no result except a trivial profit. As for the Congo, it will be remembered that Levers Brothers were welcomed by the Belgians, after the firm's unsuccessful attempt to establish itself in the Gold Coast. But it was only after World War I, when the solution was adopted of having industrial plantations established directly by the major capitalists, that a small-scale colonial-type trade infiltrated as an extension of the plantation zones belonging to foreign capital.[1] As for French Equatorial Africa, this area had to wait until the 1950s before seeing the first symptoms. Thus the negative impact of this period, still omnipresent, justifies the name which I have given to the region – 'Africa of the concessionary companies'.

In all three cases, then, the colonial system organised the African societies so that they produced exports – on the best possible terms, from the point of view of the mother country – which only provided a very low and stagnating return to local labour. This goal having been achieved, we must conclude that there are no traditional societies in modern Africa, only dependent peripheral societies.

[1] Cathérine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Le Congo française au temps des compagnies concessionnaires, 1890–1930* (Paris, 1971, mimeo); and R. Merlier, *Le Congo, de la colonisation belge à l'indépendance* (Paris, 1965).