

Trans-Saharan Exchange and the Black Slave Trade

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Some Preliminary Theoretical Considerations

The UNESCO research projects focusing on *The Silk Routes* and *The Slave Routes* were launched at just the right time to remind us that globalization is not a novel dimension of the history of humanity. Not only am I among those who analyze capitalism as a worldwide system from its very inception, but I have also found it pertinent to recall that prior to the sixteenth century, societies were not at all isolated from one another but rather competing within regional systems (and perhaps within one global system). To underestimate this fact is to condemn ourselves to a misunderstanding of the very dynamics of change within societies. At the same time, I maintain that in the history of the world, capitalism represents a qualitative rupture that had its beginnings around 1500. Accordingly I emphasize the distinction that must be made between the integrated structure of the worldwide capitalist system and the protocapitalist elements that are to be found in earlier societies; I also underline the specificity of the contrast between centers and peripheries, which is unique to global capitalism and which differs from previous forms of polarization.

It is in the same spirit that I offer the following reflections, which concern trade (including the black slave trade conducted by Arabs) over the Sahara and the Indian Ocean, through which sub-Saharan Africa had for eons been linked to North Africa, the Middle East, and tropical Asia, as well as the Atlantic slave trade during the age of capitalist mercantilism (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries). The theoretical framework within which I place these reflections is based on a system of conceptual propositions that

could be fruitfully restated in order to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings. Naturally, this theoretical framework can be accepted or rejected, but it is not within the scope of this paper to evaluate it.

(i) I believe that the development of human societies took place in three successive stages that I call communitarian, tributary, and capitalist. Elsewhere I have enumerated the conceptualizations that I propose in order to characterize these three families of social systems, particularly the dominance of kinship in the first, political power in the second, and economy in the capitalist stage.

(ii) According to this conceptual scheme, feudalism is only one particular form of the tributary family: an incomplete or "peripheral" form characterized by extremely fragmented political power, in contrast to the complete or "central" forms. In the case of Europe, evolution led gradually from the feudal form to the advanced tributary form that can be seen in the absolute monarchies of the *ancien régime*. But there was also an opposite trend whereby complete tributary forms regressed into feudal forms, which emerged in certain societies at times of decadence: the Arab-Muslim society is an example of this form that figures significantly in the matters to be discussed herein.

(iii) Slavery does not by itself constitute a stage in these general evolutions, but is rather a particular mode that takes shape within different formations – be they communitarian, tributary, or even capitalist – in close conjunction with the expansion of trade relations.

(iv) Commercial relations that are exercised within societies as well as those that join different societies in reciprocal ties not only modulate the communitarian and tributary formations in question, but also integrate them within regional systems (and even in the broader world system of the eastern hemisphere, consisting of Eurasia and Africa). The importance of these ties is greater than has often been believed, for such regional integration has at times played a decisive role by exerting differential effects on the evolution of its various constituents. This was the case in both the (Arab-Muslim) Middle East – a pivotal node of exchange connecting all the regions of the Old World (China, India, East Asia,

Southeast Asia, Europe, sub-Saharan Africa) – and the African region itself, which concerns us here.

If this theoretical framework is accepted, then the study of exchanges between sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, the Middle East, and tropical Asia, as well as the study of Arab and Atlantic slave trading, must distinguish between two qualitatively different periods: the period preceding European mercantilism and the period that will be marked by it.

The premercantilist period extends from the origin of these societies to the beginning of the seventeenth century. In the course of this very long history, ties were established between sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the Old World, on either side of the Sahara: between the savannah (from Dakar to the Red Sea) and the Mediterranean, and between the eastern coast of Africa, southern Arabia and India. The social formations that emerged cannot be understood unless they are placed within the entire constellation of social formations considered in relation to one another. At this time, Africa as a whole did not seem inferior to or weaker than the rest of the Old World, likewise considered as a whole. The inequalities in development within the African interior corresponded to the inequalities of development north of the Sahara, at either end of the Mediterranean.

The mercantilist period lasted from the seventeenth century to 1800. This period was marked by the slave trade; the first *regression* of Black Africa can be traced back to this period. The effects of the black slave trade were not limited to the coastal regions but rather were propagated throughout the continent, where they took the form of a regression in productive forces. Two zones of the slave trade must be distinguished: on the one hand, the Atlantic dependency, by far the most devastating in scope, which encompassed the entire continent, starting at its coasts – from Saint Louis in Senegal to Quelimane in Mozambique; and on the other hand, the zone of eastern dependency, which exerted its sphere of influence from Egypt, the Red Sea, and Zanzibar in the direction of the Sudan and eastern Africa. Trade in this second mercantilist zone continued beyond 1800, because the Industrial Revolution that overturned the very foundations of European and North American society did not affect the Turko-Arab sphere.

Two criteria enable us to establish the relative positions of the various regions of the old system of world trade: the proportion of world population contained in each region and the level of agricultural productivity. From this perspective, the long evolution of each of these regions is strikingly distinct.

Tributary Asia – to which China is clearly considered to belong, and India to a lesser extent – enjoyed superior agricultural productivity, which was maintained until the eighteenth century, allowing prodigious population growth and conferring a position of dominance until the advent of the European demographic revolution associated with nineteenth-century industrialization.

Barbarian Europe, beyond the central nodes of the former Roman-Byzantine Empire, remained on the periphery of the system until the end of the first millennium A.D. as did the whole of Africa (with the exception of Egypt). Both regions were agriculturally backward and accordingly dominated by social forms belonging to the communitarian, pretributary stage. Each contained only a small ratio of the planet's inhabitants, the populations of the two areas being approximately equal. But from the year 1000 to approximately 1500, feudalist Europe – the first, fairly undeveloped form of the tributary stage – took off in terms of both criteria: agricultural productivity advanced by leaps and bounds (though it did not catch up with China until 1700), as did the population. In Africa, on the other hand, the population increased between 1000 and 1500 without any significant growth in agricultural productivity; the most visible expression of this extensive mode of development in Africa was the expansion of the Bantu peoples.

During the mercantilist period (1500 – 1800), the gap between the two evolutions widened. Tributary Europe grew increasingly rich as it made the transition to capitalism, paving the way for its later triumph both in terms of productivity and in its increasing proportion of the world's population. In contrast, Africa regressed in terms of population – certainly proportionally and possibly even in absolute numbers (despite the demographic revolution that is taking place today, Africa has yet to regain the proportion of the world population that she once boasted), and agricultural productivity stagnated.

The Middle East region evolved differently from all the other regions. Along with China and India, this region had been the cradle of the oldest civilizations, and in ancient times (until the Christian and Islamic eras) the Middle East contained a larger proportion of the world's population than it was later to have: at the time the population was equal to that of China or India, whereas fifteen centuries later it was to form only one fifth to one tenth of the worldwide total. The Middle East, which was to become the Arab, Persian, and Turkish world – the heart of the Islamic world, the crux of the old world system, the region that monopolized trade with sub-Saharan Africa up until the year 1500 – was stagnant in terms of population and productivity practically up to modern times. In an earlier analysis of this history, I have emphasized the particularities of the tributary mode here and of its articulation in intensive commercial exchanges. The region is characterized by the stagnation of productivity and agriculture. The succession of brief moments of grandeur and long periods of decay coincides with the ups and downs of commercial functions in the old world system: periods of extensive expansion, manifested in parallel increases in population and cultivated (particularly irrigated) land area, were followed by periods of decreased population and reduced cultivation. Although this analysis exceeds the scope of the present essay, the importance of relations between the Arab and African worlds up until the age of mercantilism makes it worth mentioning in this context.

The Premercantilist Period (up until the Seventeenth Century)

Sub-Saharan Africa, which as a whole was no more backwards than the rest of the world in this period, was already characterized by complex social formations, sometimes statelike and nearly always founded on visible social differentiations that attest to the longstanding process of decay affecting the primitive village communities. If a certain confusion prevails in discussions of traditional African society, there are several reasons for this, including at least four principal ones: (1) the poverty of documents and evi-

dence, almost exclusively limited to accounts by Arab travelers; (2) confusion between the concept of mode of production and that of social formation, a distinction that calls for clarifications that I have emphasized elsewhere; (3) confusion between the various periods of African history, particularly between this premercantilist period and the mercantilist period that followed it, a confusion promoted by historians' legitimate concern for accounting for concrete history; and finally (4) ideological prejudices, clearly connected to colonial racism, that put Africa at a disadvantage.

To trace a clear path through this history – without pretending to reconstruct it in all of its dynamics, but with the avowed intention of setting apart this Africa, the only truly “traditional” (but neither isolated nor primitive) Africa, from what was to follow – I shall articulate three propositions, as follows.

First, we can determine the *age* of a social formation on the basis of the level of development of the productive forces. This is why it is absurd to posit any analogy whatsoever between the same mode of production recurring as part of formations with different ages, for example, between African or Roman slavery and slavery in the United States in the nineteenth century.

Second, social formations cannot always be understood in isolation. While the relations between various formations are sometimes only peripheral, they are often crucial nonetheless. The problematic of *long-distance trade* is therefore essential. Clearly, long-distance trade is not a mode of production, but the mode through which *autonomous* formations are connected. This is what distinguishes it from internal trade, that is, trade internal to a given social formation. This internal trade consists of the commercial exchanges that characterize the simple small-merchant or slave-trading small merchant modes of production that make up the formation in question. But internal trade can also be an extension of long-distance trade, the mode by which commodities that are traded externally actually enter the formation to begin with.

Since long-distance trade brings into contact societies that were previously oblivious to each other – and thereby creates a relationship between products of which the cost of production is unknown to the other society, “rare” products for which there is no substitute – the social groups that engage in long-distance trade

hold a monopoly from which they derive their profit. Very often this monopoly justifies the "special" character of these groups – such as specialized foreign merchant castes or ethnic groups – which are so often encountered in history (for example, the Jews in Europe, the Dioula in West Africa). In this form of trade, the subjective theory of value – which loses its meaning when the cost of producing the commodities becomes known to the trade partners, as is the case in capitalist exchange – retains its significance.

This long-distance trade can in certain societies become decisive, as it does when the surplus that the local dominant class can derive from producers within the formation in question is limited because of less highly developed forces of production, and/or because of difficult ecological conditions, or because of successfully mounted resistance on the part of the village community opposing the removal of such a surplus. In this case, long-distance trade, by allowing monopoly-based profit, makes it possible to *transfer* (of course not to generate) a fraction of the surplus of one society to another. For the society that derives profit from it, this transfer can be essential and may constitute the principle factor in determining the wealth and power of the ruling classes. The civilization may then depend entirely on this trade and alterations in the trade circuit can cause a region to subside into decay or, on the contrary, to prosper, without any notable regression or progress in the forces of production. This, to my mind, explains the highs and lows in the history of the ancient Mediterranean world, particularly in the case of the Greek miracle as well as that of the flowering and decay of the Arab world.

Third, the African formations of the premercantilist period were *autonomous*, even though their development paralleled that of formations in the Mediterranean, Near Eastern, and European worlds. The semi-arid zone running diagonally across the Old World from the Atlantic coast to Central Asia isolated the three ecological regions that fostered high productivity in the early stages of agriculture: monsoon Asia, tropical Africa, and temperate Europe. This zone saw the birth of brilliant civilizations, nearly all of which were founded on long-distance trade – particularly Greece and the Arab Empire, whose fortunes followed those of the trade routes. On either side of this zone of development,

autonomous social formations (those of feudal Europe, as well as at least some formations in tropical Africa, particularly in the Sudan-Sahel zone located immediately south of the Sahara) developed in parallel, precisely because of this long-distance commerce that linked them. In this way, this part of Africa was already fully integrated into world history, as much as Europe was.

Here the role of trans-Saharan trade comes fully into relief. This trade enabled the entire Old World – Mediterranean, Arab, and European – to obtain gold from what was the essential source of gold production until the discovery of the Americas: the region of the upper Senegal and the Ashanti. This trade flow cannot be overemphasized. For the societies of tropical Africa, it constituted an essential core of their organization. The exploitation of gold by kings provided the ruling classes of the states with an important means of procuring, from across the Sahara, both rare luxury products (cloth, drugs and perfumes, dates and salt), but also and above all the necessary means for laying siege and for reinforcing their social power (horses, copper, iron bars, weapons). This trade fostered progress in the forces of production (e.g., improvement of tools, adaptation of techniques and products). In exchange, Africa provided principally gold, and additionally certain rare products (gum arabic and ivory) and a few slaves. It is only recently that Europe, motivated by obvious political goals, has sought to blur the distinction between this trade involving equal and autonomous partners and the devastating black slave trade of the mercantilist period: the modest black population of the southern Maghreb – only a few hundred thousand persons, compared to the hundred million blacks in America – proves the inanity of such confusion. In contrast, the volume of gold stores obtained from tropical Africa and amassed in Europe and the East through the centuries recalls the salient nature of this trade. Moreover, this is why the ideas, which circulate with the commodities, are easily received here: such is the case with Islam, which came very early to the Senegal River. Arabic literature of the period leaves no doubt as to the volume of this trade, its reciprocal nature, and the autonomy of African formations. The tone of admiration that characterizes the accounts of Arab travelers is easier to understand if we admit that the North African formations and the West

African formations are evidently of the same technological age, quite analogous in their structures as well as in the place they occupy within the world system at the time. The royal monopoly on gold mining and trade, dependent on the Muslim merchants who ensured its flow, defined the structure of these formations. These merchants are most often organized into a sort of caste, here the religious minority.

For centuries, the social formations of the Mediterranean and those of tropical Africa were to remain linked, for better and for worse. The vicissitudes of the first were soon echoed in the second, and likewise both enjoyed glory and riches at the same time. Thus the progressive displacement of routes toward the east found an obvious reflection in the parallel displacement of the civilization and powerful states both in North Africa and in the West African savannah (changes manifested in the sequence Ghana – Mali – Haoussa towns – Bornou – Kanem – Dar Four and so forth). This is also why the displacement of the center of emerging European mercantilist capitalism from the Mediterranean towards the Atlantic was to kindle a crisis in Africa. In the sixteenth century this displacement, which has been analyzed by Fernand Braudel with his usual talent and precision, spelled the end of the Italian cities that had since the thirteenth century led the way in an evolution that was to prove decisive for all of history to follow. Along the same lines of analysis, this displacement also brought to ruin the Arab world and the Sudan-Sahel region of Africa. A few dozen years later, Atlantic Europe was to make its appearance on the coasts of Africa. The displacement of the center of gravity of African trade from the inland savannah to the coast reflected the transfer of the European center of gravity from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. But the new exchanges between Europe and Africa were not to play the same role as those in the preceding period; henceforth they were conditioned by the framework of mercantilist capitalism.

The Mercantilist Period (1600–1800)

The mercantilist period saw the development of the two poles of the capitalist mode of production: on the one hand, the proletarianiza-

tion that resulted from the decay of feudal relations and on the other, the accumulation of wealth in the form of money. When the two poles came together again with the Industrial Revolution, money wealth became capital and the capitalist mode of production acquired its full-fledged form. During this long incubation period of three centuries, the *American periphery* of the European Atlantic mercantilist center fulfilled a critical function in the accumulation of money wealth by the Atlantic merchant bourgeoisie. Sub-Saharan Africa played a role that was no less important: that of the *periphery of the periphery*. Reduced to the role of supplier of enslaved manpower for the American plantations, Africa *lost its autonomy* and began to be shaped by strictures external to the continent, the dictates of mercantilism. Let us recall finally that the American plantations in question, despite their organization based on slavery, did not constitute autonomous social formations that were defined by slavery. The slave-based mode of production was here an element of a social formation that was not essentially based on slavery. That is, this was not the dominant mode of the formation, which was mercantilist; the plantation was *dominated* by monopoly trading, which controlled and profited from the flow of commodities produced by the plantation onto the European market, thereby bringing about the deterioration of feudal relations. The peripheral American formation was therefore an element of a global structure with its center of gravity in Atlantic Europe.

Thanks to the work of historians freed from racist colonial prejudice, there is now less ignorance of the devastating effects of the mercantilist trade in black slaves upon Africa. The example of the Senegambian region, one of the few cases that has been thoroughly studied, will enable us to make several observations that are of general application.

First, whereas the trans-Saharan trade engaged in by the Waalo during the premercantilist period had reinforced the centralized power of the state and stimulated the progress of this autonomous Senegalese kingdom, the Atlantic trade that supplanted the earlier form of trade when the French settled in Saint Louis (1659) *did not release any productive forces*, but on the contrary ended up causing these forces to *regress* and ultimately resulted in the fragmentation of the society and State of the Waalo-Waalo. This is why the French

had to use force in order to break down pre-existing trans-Saharan relations, to subjugate this region of Africa and to orient the region's external relations according to the demands of the Saint Louis trading post. For the society obviously attempted to stem the decay to which it was condemned, and the framework for mobilizing this defensive reaction was Islam. The merchants of Saint Louis bought slaves, making payment in the form of weapons. The result was a disruption of the balance of power that had previously existed among the king (the *Brak*), who had at his disposal a permanent army of captives of the Crown (the *Tyeddo*); the assembly of notables who appointed him (the *Seb ak Baor*), who enjoyed a system of privileges that paralleled and overlapped the *lamanat* (the village communities' collectively held clan properties); and the village communities themselves, founded upon the *lamanat*. The customs paid to the *Brak* by the merchants of Saint Louis fostered a permanent civil war waged by the *Brak*, the *Tyeddo*, and the *Kangam* (important notables) and the pillaging of communities in order to procure slaves. The Muslim marabouts attempted to enlist these communities in organized resistance efforts with the objective of prohibiting the slave trade, that is, the exportation of the work force (but not of prohibiting slavery internally). In the process, Islam evolved from the religion of a minority merchant caste to a popular defense movement. The marabouts' first war (1673 – 1677), waged to divert the river and to prohibit the slave trade, was a failure. A century later, in 1776, the *Toorodo* revolution overthrew the warrior aristocracy in Toucouleur lands and put an end to the black slave trade. But among the Waalo, too close to Saint Louis, the prophet Diile's efforts foundered in 1830 when they met with French military intervention come to the aid of the *Brak*.

Second, the study of the Waalo case is of particular interest because here the trade in gum arabic, practiced alongside the slave trade, had entirely different effects on African society. The export of products (as opposed to the export of manpower) does not necessarily have disastrous results: it may on the contrary promote progress. This type of export was not typical of the mercantilist period for Africa as a whole, which supplied slaves almost exclusively. But here, exceptionally, the trade in gum arabic played an equally important role, because slaves (like gold in

Galam, besides) were usually transported via the Gambian route. Gum was supplied by the Waalo, but also and especially by the Maures Trarza, who could export it either via Saint Louis exclusively to the French, or via Portendick which was open to English and Dutch competition. To cut off the supply via Portendick, the French therefore helped the Trarza to settle along the river, then to ford it during the "gum war" (in the first quarter of the eighteenth century) between the Waalo and the Trarza. This contradiction explains the failure of the *marabouts' war* of the seventeenth century, fought both by marabouts who were hostile to the slave trade and by the Moors who increasingly exerted pressure on the Waalo in an effort to gain a monopoly over gum arabic.

The mercantilist black slave trade had similarly devastating effects wherever it was conducted in Africa. Moving inward from the coasts, it affected almost the entire continent from Saint Louis to Quelimane, with the exception of the northeastern region (Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, East Africa). The analogy between the history of the Waalo and that of the Kongo kingdom, for example, is worth recalling. Here too the black slave trade provoked the collapse of centralized power, and the resulting anarchy left the area vulnerable to Yaga raids. Many more examples could be mentioned. All over the continent, anarchy and war, and the flight of refugees toward other regions whose safety was often in direct proportion to their wretched living conditions (as illustrated by the paleo-Negritic refugee zones of the overpopulated mountains of West Africa), resulted in a dire reduction in population. The premercantilist development process involving the integration of peoples and the construction of vast networks was supplanted by a process of exaggerated fragmentation, isolation, and entanglement which we now know to be at the root of one of the most serious handicaps of our day.

This chapter cannot be closed without broaching the question of the *Near Eastern mercantilist period*. We might hesitate to apply this term to relations between the Near Eastern world (Egyptian and Arabic) and Africa of the Nile and eastern coastal regions (Red Sea and Indian Ocean to Mozambique). Neither the Ottoman Empire, nor the Egypt of Mohamad Ali, and still less the southern Arabian sultanates, were mercantilist formations analogous to that

of Europe from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution. The disintegration of precapitalist relations, a condition for the constitution of a proletariat, was virtually absent in the case of Africa: Mohamad Ali's original attempt to organize a state, which cannot be analyzed within the scope of this article, was undertaken to overcome this obstacle. What I will attempt to uncover are the lines of force in the evolution of the Sudan, which Mohamad Ali was to conquer in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was in the course of the premercantilist period that two sultanates were formed in the Sudan, founded on long-distance trade (with Egypt and the East): the sultanate of Dar Four, still solid at the time of the Egyptian conquest, and the Fung sultanate between the two Niles, which was weakened by the wars waged by Ethiopia. Mohamad Ali's objective was very simple: to pillage the Sudan to obtain gold, slaves, and certain other products (particularly ivory) that he could export to shore up the industrialization of Egypt. This was a primitive process of accumulation, comparable to that of the mercantilist period in Europe. It is for this reason that it is possible to speak of Near Eastern mercantilism – with the qualification that, since the Industrial Revolution had already taken place, as the pacha of Egypt well knew, the mercantilist period and the period of advanced industrial capitalism were in this case merged in the attempt to industrialize Egypt with financing the state obtained by commandeering the peasants' stores, by monopolizing external trade, and, where possible, by pillaging colonies.

Until 1850, it was the Egyptian army itself that carried out the hunt for slaves and for pillaged goods from the Sudan. After this date, the army yielded to the Sudanese nomadic tribes (in particular the Baqqara), who sold the "harvested" slaves to Egyptian, Turkish, Syrian, and European merchants operating on behalf of the *khedive*. These transactions rapidly brought about transformations in the social organization of the nomads: clan organization gave way to a form of organization known as "nomadic feudalism," quasi-states established on a territorial basis and dominated by a noble warrior class. In the conquered areas of sedentary agriculture, the Egyptian army destroyed the old chieftainries and subjected the villages to taxes in kind (livestock and grain) that were used to feed the conquerors' army and administrative personnel.

The Egyptians created sheiks responsible for collecting the taxes, who also managed to grow rich off of them. Moreover, the best lands were confiscated from the community collectives and given to the Egyptian beys and to certain Sudanese sheiks. Some peasants were removed from their villages and assigned to work these lands as half-slaves, half-serfs, with the produce – primarily cash crops – enriching the Egyptian treasury. The market-towns, created by the army at crossroads and at the limits of the raided zone, swarmed with peasants, who were hunted down by the nomads and impoverished by the sheikhs. A class of craftsmen separated from farming communities was established, whereas on the farms given to the beys and sheiks highly productive methods of cultivation were introduced from Egypt. Beginning in 1870, taxation in kind was replaced by taxation payable in money, made possible by the growth in trade of surplus produce. The country was unified, Islamized, and Arabized.

The Mahdist revolt (1881 – 1898) was mounted by the people who were oppressed by this system: the people of the village communities along with the peasant-slaves of the agricultural domains and the artisans, and the slaves and beggars from the market-towns. The victorious revolt routed the Egyptian army, the beys and the sheiks. But after the death of Mahdi, the state, which formed around the caliph Abdallah, changed in nature. The military leaders of the revolt, who had come from the people – such as the *baqqara* warriors – set up a state along the same lines as the Egyptians', appropriating the farmlands and imposing taxes for their own profit. Because of the increased value of this labor force internally, the Mahdist State did prohibit the export of slaves (who by this time had in any case lost much of the importance they had had at the start of the conquest); but the State was bent on perpetuating the exploitation of the masses for its own benefit, and to attain its goal destroyed populist elements rallied around the Mahdi family. The prophet's family was imprisoned and thirteen of the popular military chiefs were executed. Gradually, moreover, the Mahdist State resumed the export of slaves, but this time for its own benefit: the caliph Abdallah organized slave hunts among neighboring peoples – foreigners in the eyes of his State – of the upper Nile, Dar Four, and Ethiopia; he retained a large number of

his quarry to reinforce his army and his economy, but he authorized merchants – by this time the traders were Sudanese – to export some of them. The Caliph's army, which had lost the populist leaning that had been its strength at the time of the revolt, was unable to repel the British colonial expedition at the turn of the century.

The black slave trade conducted from Zanzibar in the nineteenth century can also be situated within a mercantilist framework. For centuries, Arab trade on the East coast took a premercantilist form, bringing these regions of sub-Saharan Africa into contact with India, the Indian Archipelago, and even China. In this exchange products were more important than slaves, as borne out by the very low representation of blacks in the population of southern Arabia and the countries bordering on the Indian Ocean. A single exception, perhaps, was the importation of black slaves organized by the Abassid Caliph to work on sugar cane plantations in lower Iraq. This brief chapter came to an end with the revolt mounted by these slaves (the Qarmate revolt). In the nineteenth century, the black slave trade suddenly took on dramatically larger proportions. Indeed two new outlets opened up to it: the first was the Ile de la Reunion, which obtained slaves in this way beginning when the British banned the slave trade; the second was the island of Zanzibar itself. In 1840, the Sultan had moved his capital there from Oman; he gradually established a slave-based plantation economy on the island to produce cloves, which European merchants offered to dispatch. Zanzibar, which until then had been an *entrepôt*, became a plantation, in much the same way the West Indies, Reunion, or Mauritius had: the Arab West Indies. Thus, as seen once again in the case of the Zanzibar slave trade, integration in the worldwide capitalist system was responsible for a devastating black slave trade that cannot be compared to the long-distance trade of the precapitalist period.

Translated from the French by Jennifer Curtiss Gage.

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Theoretical Foundations:

For a synthetic presentation of the theoretical foundations of the analyses put forth in this article, the reader is referred to my earlier work, *Class and Nation, Historically and in the Current Crisis* (New York, 1990), chapter 2 for communitarian formation, chapter 3 for tributary formations. For a presentation of my theses concerning pre-capitalist regional systems, the reader is referred to my recent work, *Les défis de la mondialisation* (Paris, 1997), chapters 1 and 2 and the bibliographies on the questions raised in these two chapters.