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Underdevelopment and Dependence in Black Africa: Historical Origin*

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1. *Introduction: the unity and diversity of Black Africa*

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

The *unity* of Black Africa is nonetheless not without foundations. Beside the question of 'race' – which is no more homogeneous nor less mixed, since pre-historical times, than are the other 'races' (white, yellow or red) – a common or kindred cultural background and a social organization which still presents striking similarities, make a reality of Black Africa. The colonial conquest of almost the whole of this continent strengthened this feeling of unity of Black Africa. Seen from London, Paris or Lisbon, Black Africa appeared to the European observer as a homogeneous entity, just as North Americans have regarded Latin America.

From inside, however, Black Africa just as Latin America, evidently appears extremely *variegated*. The present States, which resulted from an artificial carving-up, do not constitute the sole or even essential basis of this diversity. However, this recent reality left its mark on Africa and is likely – for better or for worse – to consolidate itself. Even more of a reality are some 100 or 200 regions of varying size, crossing the frontiers of the present States. These regions constitute yet another aspect of the reality; they derive their definition not from their geographical position alone, but also and in particular 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. We propose to distinguish *three* such regions, and we shall discuss the basis for such a distinction.

1) Traditional West Africa (former French West Africa, Togo, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Liberia, Guinea Bissao), Cameroon, Chad and the Sudan together constitute a first region, *Africa of the colonial economy* (économie de traite). We shall have to give a precise definition of this concept which unfortunately is too often treated lightly. This integrated whole is clearly divisible into three sub-regions: the coastal sub-region, which is easily accessible from the outside world and which constitutes the 'rich' area; the hinterland, which mostly serves as a labour pool for the coastal areas and as a market for industries being established on the coast; and the Sudan, whose particular characteristics will be examined later.

2) The traditional Congo River Basin (Congo Kinshasa, Congo Brazzaville, Gabon and the Central African Republic) form a second macro-region, *Africa of the concession-owning companies*. Here also we shall have to explain how, over and above differences in policies of the French and Belgian governments and the forms these policies have taken, genuine similarities in the mode of colonial exploitation characterize the whole of the zone, justifying its demarcation.

3) The eastern and southern parts of the

continent (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, Malawi, Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwé, Botswana, Lesotho and South Africa) constitute the third macro-region, *Africa of the labour reserves*. Here also, we shall see that, apart from the varied nature of the countries, 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 macro-regions, although here and there one finds some aspects of one or other of the three systems. However, they were combined with another system which has played an important part in the actual development: the slavery-mercantilist system of the Cape Verde Islands, Reunion and Mauritius, the 'pseudo-feudal' systems of Ethiopia and Madagascar. Obviously, questions of frontiers between the regions remain: Katanga belongs to the area of labour reserves, Eritrea to that of the colonial trade, etc.

2. Towards a definition of the periods in African history

The proposed distinction is deliberately based on the effects of the last period in Africa's history: that of *colonization*. We shall thus have to study the organization of the dialectic between the major colonial policies, here divided into three categories, and the structures inherited from previous periods. To do so, we shall have to go back in time and distinguish between four separate periods.

1) The *pre-mercantilist period* stretched from the beginnings until the 17th century. In the course of this long history, relations were forged between Black Africa and the rest of the old world, particularly from both ends of the Sahara, between the Savannah countries (between Dakar and the Red Sea) and the Mediterranean. Social formations emerged which cannot be understood if they are not placed within the context of all the multitude of social formations in their relationship with

one another. During that period, Africa taken as a whole does not appear as weaker than the rest of the old world, also taken as whole. The unequal development within Africa was not any worse than that north of the Sahara, on both sides of the Mediterranean.

2) The *mercantilist period* stretches from the 17th century to 1800. It is characterized by the slave-trade, and the first retrograde steps date back to this period. Not only the coastal areas were affected by this trade: its effects spread throughout the continent through a decline in productive forces. There were two distinct slave-trading areas: the Atlantic trade, by far the most harmful due to the numbers involved, which spread from the coast to the whole of the continent, from St Louis in Senegal to Quelimane in Mozambique; and we have the oriental trade operating from Egypt, the Red Sea and Zanzibar towards the Sudan and East Africa. This second type of mercantilist trade continued after 1800 because the industrial revolution which shook the foundations of society in Europe and North America did not reach the Turkish-Arab world.

3) The *third period* lasted from 1800 to 1880-90. It is characterized by the attempt, at least with respect to certain regions within the area of influence of Atlantic mercantilism, to set up a new form of dependence between these regions and that part of the world where capitalism was firmly entrenched in industrialization. These attempts, however, had very limited backing and we shall see why. This period did not affect the area of influence of oriental mercantilism.

4) The fourth period, that of *colonization*, completed the work of the third period in the 'West', took over after oriental mercantilism in the 'East' and developed with ten-fold vigour – the present forms of dependence of the continent according to the three models mentioned above. The present throws light on the past. The completed forms of dependence, which appeared only 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 how African social formations were linked with those of other regions of the old world with which they had contact.

2.1 *The pre-mercantilist period (up to the 17th century)*

Characteristic of Black Africa in this period were complex social formations, sometimes created by the state, almost invariably based on visible social differentiations which reveal the ancient nature of the process of degradation of the primitive village community. At that time, Black Africa was not more backward than the rest of the world. The great confusion arising in discussions of traditional African society is due to at least four main reasons: (1) the scarcity of documents and remains of the past, leaving only accounts of Arab travellers, (2) the confusion between the concept of mode of production and the concept of social formation, which calls for a basic differentiation, to which we shall return; (3) the confusion between the different periods of African history, particularly between the pre-mercantilist and the following mercantilist periods; and the justifiable concern of historians to relate concrete history, which is continuous, thus enhancing this confusion; and (4) ideological prejudices against Africa, clearly connected with colonial racism.

It is our wish to see our way clearly through this history, without claiming to recast its evolution but with the avowed intention of pinpointing the main differences between Africa of this period – the only true ‘traditional’ Africa (neither isolated nor primitive) – and that which followed. For this purpose, we shall formulate three groups of proposals as hereunder.¹

Firstly, a society cannot be reduced to a mode of production. The concept of mode of production is *abstract*. It does not imply any particular order in the chain of historical events with respect to the entire period of the history of civilizations from the first differentiated societies to the capitalist form of society. We propose to distinguish five modes of production: (1) the primitive community mode of

production, the only possible initial one, for obvious reasons, (2) the ‘tributary’ mode of production, which involves the persistent parallel existence of a village community and a social and political structure which exploits the former by exacting a tribute,² (3) the slave-based mode of production, which is less common but scattered, (4) the small-scale trading mode of production, which is quite common but never likely to form the main structure of a society, and (5) the capitalist mode of production.

We have already stressed the idea that social formations are *concrete* structures, organized and characterized by a *dominant* mode of production which forms the apex of a complex set of subordinate modes of production. Thus it is possible to have a small-scale trading mode of production linked to a dominant ‘tributary’ (or early or developed feudal) mode of production based on slavery or even to a capitalist mode of production. Likewise, the mode of production based on slavery need not be of the dominant type: this seems the rule when it is related to a dominant ‘tributary’ mode of production (or even a capitalist mode of production, as in the United States until 1865), and only in exceptional cases does it become dominant (as in the classical societies of ancient times).

Modes of production do not actually constitute historical categories, in the sense of occurring in a necessary historical sequence. 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 – e.g., between African or Roman slavery and that of 19th century United States.³

Secondly, social formations cannot be understood out of their context. Sometimes the relations between different societies are marginal, but often such relations are decisive. The problems connected with *long distance trade* are thus highly important. Such trade is obviously not a mode of production but the method of communication between *auto-*

nomous societies. This is the essential difference with internal trade (i.e. internal to a particular society). This internal trade is made up of exchanges between dealers, such exchanges being characteristic of the simple trading mode of production or the mode of production 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, a system by which the goods involved in this long-distance trade penetrate deeply within that particular society.

Long-distance trade brings into contact societies unknown to one another, by involving the exchange of products where each society is unaware of the other's production cost, 'rare' products 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. This monopoly often explains the 'special' nature of these groups – specialized foreign traders belonging to particular castes or ethnic groups, etc. This is a frequent case throughout history (Jews in Europe, Dioula in West Africa, etc.). In this trade, the subjective theory of value – meaningless when the cost of production of the goods is known to the respective partners in trade, as in the capitalist system of exchange – still had some meaning here. (See Amin 1970, chap. I)

This long-distance trade could, in certain societies, become a decisive factor. This is the case when the surplus the dominant local classes are able to extract from the producers in a particular society is limited. The reason for this restricted surplus may be low development of the productive forces and/or difficult ecological conditions, or successful resistance by village communities to extraction of this surplus. In such a case, long-distance trade enables, through its characteristic monopoly profit, the transfer of a fraction of the surplus of one society to another. For the receiving society, this transfer may be of vital importance and can serve as the principal basis of the wealth and power of the ruling classes. A civilization may then wholly depend on this trade, and a

shift of trading centres can cause one region to fall into decline or create conditions for it to prosper, without bringing about either a regression or a noticeable progress at the level of the productive forces. This in our opinion is the explanation for the ups and downs in the history of the old world and the Mediterranean, particularly with regard to the Greek miracle and the prosperity and decline of the Arab World.⁴

Thirdly, the African societies of the pre-mercantile period developed *autonomously*, although this development followed a course parallel to that of the Mediterranean world, both Eastern and European. As seen from El Kodszy 1970, the semi-arid zone which stretches diagonally across the old world, from the Atlantic coast to Central Asia, separates the three regions which are ecologically conducive to high agricultural productivity right from the primitive stages: 'monsoon' Asia, tropical Africa and the temperate zones of Europe. This belt of land has seen the birth of some brilliant civilizations, almost all founded on long-distance trade – particularly Greece and the Arab empires,⁵ whose vicissitudes followed the course of this trade. On either side of this belt, autonomous societies (those of feudal Europe and some of those of tropical Africa, particularly in the Sudan-Sohel region immediately south of the Sahara) have developed along parallel lines precisely because of the long-distance trade which linked them all. Thus this part of Africa is already fully intergrated, as much as Europe, into the history of the world.

One finds here all the importance of the trans-Sahara trade. This trade enabled the whole of the Old World – Mediterranean, Arab and European – to be supplied with gold from the main source of production of the yellow metal until the discovery of America: the Upper Senegal and Ashanti regions. The importance of this flow cannot be stressed enough. For the societies of tropical Africa, this trade became the basis of their organizations. The mining of gold under the orders of the king provided the ruling classes of the countries concerned with both the means to obtain across the Sahara rare luxury goods

(cloths, drugs, perfumes, dates and salt), and the means to establish and strengthen their social and political power (horses, copper, iron bars, weapons). This trade thus encouraged social differentiations, the creation of States and Empires, just as it promoted the improvement of the productive forces (the improvement of instruments, the adaptation of techniques and products to suit local climatic conditions, etc.). In return, Africa supplied mainly gold and a few other rare products (gum and ivory) and some slaves.⁶ It is only recently that Europe, for obvious political reasons, has tried to confuse this trade between equal autonomous partners with the devastating slave trade of the mercantilist period: the small number of black people in the southern areas of the Maghreb – a few hundred thousand men compared with some hundred million Blacks in America – shows the futility of this confusion. On the other hand, the stock of gold built up in Europe and in the East throughout the centuries, originating from tropical Africa, clearly indicates the principal nature of this trade. After all, this is why the ideas which accompanied the trade were easily accepted – for example, the early acceptance 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. And, the reader will understand the admiration expressed in accounts of Arab travellers if he accepts that the development of North African societies and those of West Africa belongs to the same technological age: both were very similar in their structures, just as the place they occupied in the world system of the time was similar. (See El Kodsý 1970.) 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 often the case, organized in a sort 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 the one had quick repercussions on the others, just as glory and wealth reached them all simultaneously. Thus, the gradual shifting of routes from West to East found a parallel shift in the civilization and the power of the nations both in North Africa and in the West African Savannah lands (reflected in the successive might of Ghana – Mali – Hausa cities – Bornou – Kanem – Dar Fur...). This also explains why the change of centre of newly-born European mercantile capitalism from the Mediterranean towards the Atlantic was to cause a crisis in Africa. This shift, studied by Braudel (1949) with his usual talent and care for details, heralded the decline, in the 16th century, of the Italian towns which, since the 13th century, had opened the way for an evolution which was to become decisive for the future history of mankind. Similarly we can say that this change was to cause the downfall of both the Arab world and the Sudan-Sohel regions of Black Africa. Some ten years later, the presence of Western Europe along the coasts of Africa was to become a reality. The shift of centre of gravity of trade in Africa, from the Savannah hinterland to the coast was a direct consequence of the change of centre of gravity in Europe, from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. But the new trade between Europe and Africa was not to play the same rôle as that of the preceding period since henceforth it was to take place under mercantile capitalism.

2.2. *The mercantilist period (1600–1800)*

In *L'accumulation* I described the mercantilist period as that which saw the emergence of the two poles of the capitalist mode of production: proletarianization resulting from the decline of feudal relationships, and the accumulation of wealth in the form of money. (see ch. II, section III). When, during the industrial revolution, the two poles became united, money wealth turned into capital and the capitalist mode of production reached its completed stage. During this three-century long incubation period, 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: *periphery of the periphery*. Reduced to the role of supplier of 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 referred to, despite their slave-based form of organization, do not constitute autonomous societies (which would be slave-based). As we have mentioned before, the slave-based mode of production is here an element of a non-slave-based society, i.e. it is not the dominant feature of that society. The latter is *mercantilist*; and the trade monopoly – which under its control and for its benefit sells the products of these plantations on the European market, thus quickening the pace of disintegration of feudal relations – was the dominant feature of the plantation economy. 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 a few historians free from racist colonial prejudices. We would here like to mention one of the most recent and brilliant works in this field: 'Le royaume de Waalo 1659–1859' by Boubacar Barry,⁷ from which the following is drawn.

Firstly, whilst pre-mercantile trans-Sahara trade, in which the Waalo participated, had strengthened state centralization and stimulated progress in that autonomous Senegalese Kingdom, the Atlantic trade which replaced it when the French settled in Saint-Louis (1659), did not give rise to any productive forces. On the contrary, it caused them to decrease and brought about disintegration of the society and of the Waalo-Waalo state. This is why force had to be used by the French to cut off the trans-Sahara links, to subjugate that region of Africa and later its external relations to suit the requirements of the French trading post of Saint-Louis. African society obviously opposed this worsening of its situation: Islam served as

the basis for this opposition. Saint-Louis traders paid with weapons for the slaves they bought. All this ruptured the former balance of power between the king (the *Brak*), who maintained a permanent army of captives under crown control (the *Tyeddo*), the council of elders which nominated him (the *Seb Ak Baor*) and which had a system of prerogatives superimposed over the *lamanat* (the collective clan-ownership of lands in the village communities) and the village communities themselves, based on the *lamanat*. The customary dues paid by the traders of Saint-Louis to the *Brak* encouraged a civil war which involved the *Brak*, the *Tyeddo* and the *Kangam* (leading citizens) and a ransacking of communities to obtain slaves. The Muslim priests (marabouts) tried to organize the resistance movement of these communities. Their aim was to *stop the slave trade*, i.e. the export of the labour force – but not to put an end to internal slavery. Henceforth, Islam changed its character: from being the religion of a minority group of traders, it became a popular resistance movement. A first war waged by the marabouts (1673–1677) failed 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 put a stop to 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, the Waalo case is of special interest because the slave trade took place parallel to the gum trade. However, the latter did not have the same effects on African society. The export of goods (instead of labour power) does not necessarily have a devastating effect and may, on the contrary, lead to progress. This type of export is not characteristic of the mercantilist period for Africa as a whole which almost exclusively supplied slaves. But here exceptionally it played an equally important role, because the slaves (like *Galam* gold) mainly followed the road to Gambia. However, gum was supplied by the Waalo but also by the Trarza Moors in particular. The latter

could export it 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* (first quarter of the 18th century). Such circumstances thus introduced into the region a certain contradiction of secondary importance between the Waalo and the Trarza. It is contradiction which explains the failure of the *war of the Muslim priests* (marabouts) of the 17th century, led simultaneously by those marabouts who were hostile to the slave trade and by the Moors who put increasing pressure on the Waalo in order to monopolize the gum trade.

The mercantilist slave trade had similar devastating effects wherever in Africa it took place. From Saint-Louis to Quelimane, along the coast, it affected almost the entire continent except the north-eastern area (Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and East Africa). The similarity between the Waalo history and that of the Congo Kingdom should be recalled.⁸ Here the slave trade also brought about the disintegration of the central authority and led to anarchy which opened the way for the Yaga raids. Such examples abound. Everywhere on the continent there were anarchy and wars, the flight of peoples towards shelter regions which were difficult to reach but also very often poor (such as the shelter zones of the paléonegritic peoples in the over-populated mountains of West Africa). It all ended with an alarming decrease in the population numbers. The processes of integration of the peoples and of the construction of large communities which began in the pre-mercantilist period were stopped. Instead there took place an incredible fragmentation, isolation and tangling which lie at the root of one of the most serious handicaps of contemporary Africa.

We feel it necessary to conclude this discussion with the question of the *Eastern mercantilist period*. We have hesitated to define in this way the relations of the Eastern World (Egyptian and Arab) with Africa of the Nile and the eastern coast (Red Sea and Indian

Ocean as far as Mozambique). Neither the Ottoman Empire nor Egypt under Mohamed Ali, and still less the South Arabian Sultanates, were mercantilist societies similar to those of Europe from the Renaissance to the industrial revolution. The disintegration of precapitalist relations which is the necessary condition for the formation of a proletariat, is almost non-existent. This was the obstacle which Mohamed Ali attempted to overcome by setting up an entirely new state apparatus. We do not propose to study this here, but are simply trying to bring out the main trends of the evolution of the Sudan which Mohamed Ali was to conquer in the second half of the 19th century.⁹ It was during the pre-mercantilist period that two Sultanates were constituted in the Sudan based on long-distance trade (with Egypt and the East): the Sultanate of Dar Fur, still powerful at the time of the Egyptian conquest; and the Sultanate of Fung, between the two Niles, weakened through the wars waged by Ethiopia. Mohammed Ali's aim was simple: by looting the Sudan, obtain gold, slaves, and a few products (ivory in particular) which he could export in order to intensify the industrialization of Egypt. That was a process of primitive accumulation similar to that of the mercantilist period in Europe. This is the reason for speaking of eastern mercantilism. With the exception that the industrial revolution had already occurred and was known to the Pasha of Egypt, the pre-mercantilist period and that of full industrial capitalism were mixed up in an attempt to industrialize Egypt by raising the finance through state taxation of the peasants, the monopoly of foreign trade and, when possible, the looting of the colonies.

Up to 1850, it was the Egyptian army itself which hunted for slaves and robbed the Sudan of its products. After that date, the army left the job to Sudanese nomad tribes (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 organization of the nomads concerned: the clan organization was succeeded by 'nomad feudalism' – para-statal, founded on

a territorial basis, and dominated by warrior nobles. In the conquered zones of secondary agriculture, 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 tax-collecting; they rapidly became rich by this means. Moreover, the best lands were taken from the communities and given to the Egyptian beys and to some of these Sudanese sheikhs. Peasants were taken from their villages and attached to these lands – as half-slaves and half-serfs – the farming of which went to swell the Egyptian Treasury. The peasants, hunted by the nomads and impoverished by the sheikhs, flocked to the market towns established by the army at crossroads and on the borders of the slave-raiding area. A craft industry distinct from agriculture grew up, while on the farms given to the beys and sheikhs, Egyptian farming methods, where the productivity was higher, were introduced. By 1870 a money tax, feasible as a result of the increased marketed surplus, replaced the tax in kind. The country was becoming unified, Islamized and Arabized.

The Malidist revolt (1881–1898) was a revolt of the people 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 Malidi's death, the state, organized under the Caliph Abdullah, changed its structure. The military leaders of the revolt, whose origins were in the people, and the Baqqara warrior chiefs who joined it, reorganized to their advantage a State similar to that of the Egyptians; they seized the estates and levied taxes on their own account. True, the Malidist State prohibited the export of slaves, which had in fact largely lost its original importance because that labour force was now being used on the spot. But the Malidist state intended to continue exploiting the masses to its advantage and, for that purpose, destroyed the popular elements surround-

ing the Malidi's family. The prophet family was imprisoned and 13 of the people's military leaders executed. Furthermore, the Malidist state resumed the export of slaves, but this time for its own benefit: the Caliph Abdullah organized slave raiding among the neighbouring peoples foreign to this state – the Upper Nile, Darfur and Ethiopia; he kept a large number of them to strengthen his army and his economy but he authorized the merchants – now Sudanese – to export some of them.

The Caliph'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 organized from Zanzibar¹⁰ in the 19th 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 evident from the very small black population of southern Arabia and the countries bordering on the Indian Ocean. There would seem to be one exception, at the time when the Abassid Caliphate was organizing sugar-cane plantations in Lower Iraq for which he imported black slaves. This short chapter ended with the slave revolt (the Qarmat revolt). In the 19th century, the slave trade suddenly became much more intense. There were in fact two new markets for it. First there was Reunion Island which was supplied in this way (the slaves being disguised as contract labour since the British had abolished the slave trade). Then there was the island of Zanzibar itself. In 1840 the Sultan had transferred his capital from Oman to Zanzibar, where he gradually established a slave plantation economy producing the cloves for which European trade now offered a market.

Zanzibar, hitherto a trading post, became a plantation on a model similar to that of the West Indies, Reunion or Mauritius: Arab West Indies. Thus we once again see, in this case of the slave trade from Zanzibar, that integration into the world capitalist system is responsible

for a devastating slave trade which has no resemblance to the long-distance trade of the pre-capitalist period.

2.3 *Integration into the full capitalist system: the 19th century*

The slave trade disappeared with the end of mercantilism, i.e. essentially with the advent of the industrial revolution. Capitalism in the centre then took on its complete form; the function of mercantilism – the primitive accumulation of wealth – lost its importance, the centre of gravity shifted from the merchant sector to the new industry. The old periphery – America of the plantations – and its periphery – Africa of the slave trade – had to give way to a new periphery. The function of the new periphery was to provide *products* which would tend to reduce the value of constant capital and that of variable capital used at the centre: raw materials and agricultural produce. The terms which made advantageous the exchange supplying the centre with these products are the precisely terms revealed by the theory of unequal exchange. (See Amin 1970)

However, until the end of the 19th century central capital had only very limited means of achieving that goal. Only when monopolization appeared at the centre did large-scale exports of capital become possible; henceforth central capital had the means of organizing directly in the periphery, by modern methods, the production which suited it, under conditions which suited it. Until then it could only rely on the ability of local social formations to adjust 'spontaneously', 'by themselves', to the new requirements of the system. America could do it; in India the British colonial power could impose it as did the Dutch in Indonesia; in certain Eastern countries (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 results were obtained which were exclusively due to the internal adjustment of the African societies. There exist a number of studies which are highly informative on the mechanism of this adjustment.

The research work of Boubacar Barry is one of these. Here again we refer the reader to this exciting book. The project of establishing a colonial agricultural settlement in the Waalo region, making it plantation country (for cotton, sugar cane, tobacco etc.), first formulated at the end of the 18th century by the British Governor of Saint-Louis, was put on the agenda during the Revolution and the Empire as a consequence of the Santo Domingo slave revolt. When the Waalo was 'bought' in 1819 by Governor Schmaltz, the experiment began. Barry analyses its failure. The first cause of failure was 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. The second cause was 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 workers which to all intents and purposes were slaves: long-term recruits (*engagés à temps*). But the settlement colonization could only use 'tinkering' methods. It was not until the colonial conquest that ample resources opened the way for proletarianization: taxation, pure and simple dispossession, forced labour – in short, all the methods used in Africa after 1880, very 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 its aristocracy and prepared for its conversion to Islam: outside the official authority, Muslim communities organized themselves defensively around the *Sérigne* to whom they paid tithes. When Faïdherbe conquered the Waalo between 1855 and 1859 with the intention of starting up the agricultural settlement again and procuring for French industry the cotton which it needed, the vanquished aristocracy embraced Islam. A new chapter opened, and we shall see later how the new production came to be organized in accordance with the requirements of the centre. Thus Islam changed its structure a sec-

ond time: instead of being a resistance ideology it was to become a powerful means of integrating the new periphery and subordinating it to the project of the centre.

Other African societies made an effort to adjust themselves to this project even before they were conquered. Walter Rodney (1966) 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 the export products which Europe demanded. Catherine Coquery (1971a) has analysed in these terms the prodigious development of Dahomean palm groves. Onwuka Dike (1965) shows how the Ibo society, which was unable to have recourse to slaves, nevertheless adapted itself for the production of export palm oil. Here again many more examples could be cited.

The constitution and subsequent destruction of Samory's empire reveals another aspect of integration mechanisms.¹¹ The collection of export products and the conveying of imports received in exchange, strengthened the position of the Dioula Moslems, a minority inherited from the remote days of pre-mercantilism. With the 'dioula revolution' they were able to set up a state which they controlled. But this late episode occurred just at the beginning of the colonial period. The state of Samory had scarcely been founded when it had to face the conquerors. The latter were to destroy that state, reorganize the channels of trade in the direction which suited them and reduce the Dioula to the subordinate functions of colonial trade.

2.4 *Integration into the full capitalist system: colonization*

The partitioning of the continent, complete by the end of the 19th century, multiplied the means available to the colonialists to attain the target of capital at the centre. This 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 organize production on the spot and there exploit both the natural resources (by wasting

them or stealing them, i.e. paying a price for them which did not enable alternative activities to replace them when they were exhausted)¹² and cheap labour. Moreover, through direct and brutal political domination it could limit the incidental expenses of maintaining local social classes as conveyor-belts¹³ and could use direct political methods of coercion.

However, although the targets was the same everywhere, we can see that different variants of the system of colonial exploitation were developed. These variants did not depend – or depended only slightly – on the nationality of the colonizer. The contrast between direct French rule and indirect British 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', carried out an earlier and more thorough development than French capital.¹⁴ Belgium, as small power which had been forced to come to terms with the great powers and had to accept the competition of foreign goods in its Congo, did not have the direct colonial monopolies which France used and abused to its advantage. Portugal similarly agreed to share its colonies with major Anglo-American capital.

3. *The macro-regions of Africa in the colonial period*

3.1 In the region which we have called *Africa of the labour reserves*¹⁵ (l'Afrique des réserves), 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, copper in Northern Rhodesia) or an untypical settler agriculture in tropical Africa (old Boer colonization in South Africa, new British settlement of Southern Rhodesia and, in the extreme north of the region, of Kenya which until 1919 was separated from the southern part of 'labour reserve Africa' by German Tanganyika). To obtain this proletariat quickly, the colonizers dispossessed the African rural communities by violence and drove

them back deliberately into small regions. Furthermore, they kept them in these poor regions with no means of modernizing and intensifying their farming. Thereby they forced the 'traditional' society to be a supplier of temporary or permanent migrants on a vast scale, thus providing a cheap proletariat for the mines, the European farms, and later for the manufacturing industries of South Africa, Rhodesia and Kenya. Henceforth we can no longer speak of a traditional society in that region of the continent, since the labour reserve society had a function which had nothing to do with 'tradition': that of supplying a migrant proletariat. The African social formations of this region, distorted and impoverished, lost even the semblance of autonomy: the unhappy Africa of the Bantustans and apartheid was born: it was to supply the greatest return to central capital. The 'economistic' ideological mythology of the 'laws of the labour market' under these circumstances, formulated by Arthur Lewis, has been subjected to merciless criticism in which Giovanni Arrighi restored political violence to its true place. (See Lewis 1954; Arrighi 1968)

Until very recently there was no known large-scale mineral wealth in West Africa likely to attract foreign capital, nor was there any settler colonization. On the other hand the slave trade, very active on that coast, had given rise to and developed complex social structures which we have analysed above. The colonial powers were thus able to shape a structure 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 labour they involved were so small that these products cost less than any possible substitutes produced in the centre itself.

3.2 The total of these procedures and the structures to which they gave rise constituted the colonial-type trade (*économie de traite*).¹⁶ These procedures were, as always, as much political as economic. The main procedures were: (1) the organization of a dominant trade monopoly, that of colonial import-export houses, and the pyramidal shape of the trade

network they dominated, in which the Lebanese occupied the intermediate zones, and the former African traders were crushed and had to occupy subordinate positions; (2) the taxation of peasants in money which forced them to produce what the monopolists offered to buy; (3) political support to the social strata and classes which were allowed to appropriate de facto some of the tribal lands and the organization of internal migrations from regions which were deliberately left in their poverty so as to be used as labour reserves in the plantation zones; (4) political alliance with social groups which, in the theocratic framework of the Muslim brotherhoods (*confréries*) were interested in commercializing the tribute they levied on the peasantry; and (5) 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 unrecognizable: it lost its autonomy, its main function was to produce for the world market under conditions which, because they impoverished it, deprived it of any prospect of radical modernization. This 'traditional' society was not, therefore, in transition (to 'modernity'): it was *completed* as a dependent society, a peripheral one, and hence a dead end. It therefore retained certain traditional appearances which constituted its only means of survival. The colonial-type trade covered all the subordination-domination relationships between this pseudo-traditional society integrated into the world system and the central capitalist society which shaped and dominated it. Since it has too often been made commonplace, the concept of '*économie de traite*' has been reduced to a mere description: the exchange of agricultural products against imported manufactured goods.¹⁷ 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 the colonial-type trade have varied according to different regions of

this 'Afrique de la traite'. To give honour where honour is due: it was British capital which initiated a perfectly consistent formulation of aims and procedures. When, at the beginning of colonization, Lever Brothers asked the Governor of the Gold Coast to grant concessions which would enable it to develop modern plantations, the latter refused because 'it was unnecessary'. It would be enough, he 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, we shall see why later.

We have analysed (in Amin 1970, pp. 347-48) the conditions for the success of the 'économie de traite'. These are: (1) an 'optimum' degree of hierarchization of 'traditional' society, which exactly corresponded to that of the zones formed by the slave trade; (2) an 'optimum' population density in the rural areas - 10 to 30 inhabitants per square kilometre; (3) the possibility of starting the process of proletarianization by calling upon immigrants foreign to the ethnic groups of the plantation zone; (4) the choice of 'rich' crops providing a sufficient surplus per hectare and per worker at the very first stage of their development; and (5) support of the political authority and 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 the 'économie de traite' was achieved in the Gold Coast and German Togoland by the end of the 19th century, and was reproduced much later in French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa. We have explained that this lateness, which reflected that of French capitalism, was attributable to the attempts at quasi-settler colonization even under unfavourable conditions (French Planters in Ivory Coast and in Equatorial Africa...) and the corresponding maintenance of forced labour until the modern period, after World War II. (Amin 1971)

The 'économie de traite' took two main

forms. Kulakization, i.e. the constitution of a class of indigenous planters of rural origin, the virtually exclusive appropriation of the land by these planters, and the employment of paid labour, was the dominant form in the Gulf of Guinea, where conditions enabled colonial-type trading to develop. On the other hand, in the savanna, from Senegal through Northern Nigeria to Sudan, the Muslim brotherhoods permitted another type of colonial trading: the organization of production and export (groundnuts and cotton) in the context of vast areas subject to a theocratic political power - that of the Mourid brotherhoods of Senegal, the 'Sudanates' of Nigeria and Ausar and Ashiqqa in the Sudan - which kept the form of a tribute-paying social formation, but 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 colonization in Sudan which created the most advanced conditions for the development of this type of organization, which in that country tended towards a latifundum system pure and simple. The British merely plucked the fruits of this evolution. The new latifundia-owners, who after 1898 accepted the colonial administration, had cotton grown for the benefit of British industry. Powerful modern techniques (large-scale irrigation in the Gezira) were made available to them. But the '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, into the guiding ideology of peasant leaders for the organization of the export production which the colonizers desired. The Mourid phenomenon of Senegal is probably the most striking example of this second

transformation. That the founders of the brotherhood and some short-sighted colonial administrators felt – for a time – hostile to each other does not matter. Ultimately the brotherhood proved to be the most important vector for the expansion of the groundnut economy and the submission of the peasants to the goal of this economy: to produce a large amount and to accept very low, stagnating wages despite progress in productivity.

To organize the 'économie de traite' it was necessary to destroy the pre-colonial trade and to reorganize the flows in the direction required by the externally-oriented nature of the economy. For there had been, before the conquest, regional complementarities with a broad natural bases (forest-savanna), strengthened by the history of the relations between the West African societies. The domestic trade in kola and salt, trade between herdsmen and crop farmers, the outflow of exports and the dissemination of imports – all this constituted a dense and integrated network, dominated by African traders. The colonial trading houses had to gain control of these flows and direct them all towards the coast; that was why the colonial system destroyed African domestic trade and then reduced the African traders to the rôle of subordinate primary collectors, when it did not simply eliminate them. The destruction of the trade of Samory, like that of the people of mixed blood in Saint-Louis, Gorée and Freetown, that of the Hausa and Ashanti of Salaga and that of the Ibo of the Niger delta, bears witness to this other devastating socio-economic effect of the 'économie de traite'.¹⁸

Thus at regional level, the colonial trade necessarily gave rise to a polarization of dependent peripheral development. The necessary corollary of the 'wealth' of the coast was the impoverishment of the hinterland. Africa, predisposed by geography and history to a continental development, organized around the major inland river arteries (thus providing for transport, irrigation, electric power, etc.) was condemned to be 'developed' only in its narrow coastal zone. The exclusive allocation of resources to the latter zone, a planned policy

of colonial trade, accentuated the regional imbalance. The mass emigration from the hinterland to the coast formed part of the logic of the system: it made (cheap) labour available to capital where capital required it, and it is only 'the ideology of universal harmony' which sees in these migrations anything other than migrations which impoverish the departure zones.¹⁹ The culmination of the colonial trade system was balkanization, in which the 'recipient' micro-regions had no 'interest' in 'sharing' the crumbs of the colonial cake with their labour reserves.

3.3. Thus the bounties of the colonial trade were highly relative. However, it was impossible to implement this system in *Central Africa*, the third macro-region of the continent. Here, ecological conditions had to some extent protected the peoples who took refuge from the ravages of the slave trade fleeing into zones unlikely to be penetrated from the coast. The low population density and the lack of sufficient hierarchization 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 who, between 1890 and 1930, ravaged French Equatorial Africa with no result except a trivial profit, and those of Leopold's policy in the Congo, have been duly denounced.²⁰ So, in the Belgian Congo it was only after World War I when the solution was adopted of having industrial plantations established directly by the major capitalists (it will be remembered that Lever, which was not permitted to establish itself in the Gold Coast, was welcomed by the Belgians) that a small-scale 'économie de traite' infiltrated as an extension of the plantation zones belonging to foreign capital. As for French Equatorial Africa, it had to wait until the fifties before seeing the first symptoms of the 'économie de traite'. Thus the (negative) impact of the period of concessionary companies, which is still omnipresent, justifies the name of *Africa of the concessionary companies* which we give to the region.

In all three cases, then, the colonial system organized the society so that it produced on the best possible terms, from the viewpoint of the mother country, exports which provided only a very low and stagnating return to labour. This goal having been achieved, it must now be analysed in theoretical terms.²¹ For the present discussion, we have to conclude that there are no traditional societies in modern Africa: there are only dependent peripheral societies.

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NOTES

* Revised and translated version of a working document originally prepared for the UN African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, Dakar, Senegal.

1 For further details see Amin 1970, esp. pp. 31, 165-68, and 341-72. See also Amin 1968 and Amin 1971b; see also recorded in the latter book our further development of the subject in the discussion of the theme of the Freetown colloquium.

2 This mode of production is the most common one found in the formation of the pre-capitalist classes; we here distinguish between (1) the early forms and (2) the forms which have evolved like the feudal mode of production (by which the village community loses the right of ownership of the land to the feudal masters, the community retaining a family one).

3 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 which belongs to it is stressed by Hector Silva Michelina 1971.

4 Coquery 1969 rightly emphasizes the decisive role which long-distance trade played in the constitution of some African formations; El Kodsý 1970 does the same for the Arab world. Pelletier & Goblot 1969 suggest it for Greece.

5 Except for Egypt and Mesopotamia (see El Kody 1970); hence the frequent mistake of speaking of 'Arab feudalism', criticized by Kodsý.

6 This role, and the nature of this trade, were highlighted for the first time by Bevill 1933.

7 Barry 1971, mimeographed. The qualities of this research, both in rigorous method and in presentation, make it superfluous to 'summarize this history, for which we refer the reader to the work concerned.

8 See, *inter alia*, Varsina 1967, 1962, and 1963; Ballandier 1965; and Ranger 1968.

9 See, *inter alia*, Hill 1959; Holt 1958; and Trimmingham 1949.

10 See, *inter alia*, Oliver & Mathew 1963, esp. Vol. I, Ch. IV, V and VII.

11 Person 1970; the expression 'dioula revolution' is from Person.

12 This problem of the looting of natural resources is beginning to be studied with the present-day awareness of 'environment problems' (although the term is ambiguous). See Amin 1970, postscript to the second edition, pp. 594-95.

13 Hence the late development in Africa of the peripheral model of industrialization by import substitution. It was not until independence that the local elites who took over from the colonial administration constituted the first element of a domestic market for 'luxury goods' according to the interlinkage relationships which we discuss later on (The theoretical model of accumulation in the modern world, center and periphery: Amin 1971c). Hence also the markedly bureaucratic nature of the privileged classes'.

14 Thus the structures set up in the Gold Coast in 1890, which have characterized Ghana up to the present day (Szereszewski 1965), made their appearance in the Ivory Coast only from 1950, after the abolition of forced labour (Amin 1967).

15 See Horwitz 1967; Gray 1961; Thion 1969; and above all Arrighi 1968.

16 We have analyzed this colonial trade (Amin

1971a). See also Szereszewski 1965; Amin 1967; Afana 1966; and Vauhaeverbeke 1970.

17 As Canale does (Canale 1960), in the chapter on the 'économie de traite'.

18 See my contribution to the discussion of this problem in Amin 1971b.

19 Berg 1965 reflects better than anyone else this non-scientific ideology. The conventional approach which it develops assumes that migrations 'redistribute' one factor of production (labour) which originally was unequally distributed. If that were so, migrations would tend to *equalize* the growth rates 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 (per capita) growth in the immigration zones and its reduction in the emigration zones.

20 Coquery 1971b; Merlier 1965; Amin & Coquery 1969.

21 See Amin 1971c for a further discussion.

SUMMARY

Keeping in mind the variety of social, cultural and economic conditions distinguishing African Societies, the author divides the continent into three macro-regions: (1) Africa of the colonial economy (enlarged West Africa) (2) Africa of the concession companies (Congo Basin) (3) Africa of the labor reserves (East and South Africa).

The dialectics between colonial policies and social formations and modes of production internal to the regions are seen as a major determinant in shaping the history of underdevelopment in Black Africa.

On this basis, four historical periods are analyzed: (1) The pre-mercantilist period (2) The mercantilist period (3) The preparatory phase for colonization (4) The colonization period.

Concluding the discussion of the colonization period, the author points to the necessity of viewing African societies as dependent, peripheral ones, shaped according to the needs of dominant, capitalist societies.

РЕЗЮМЕ

Имея в виду разнообразие социальных, культурных и экономических условий, отличающих африканские общества друг от друга, автор данной статьи делит черный континент на два крупных района: 1) Африка с колониальной экономикой (расширенная Западная Африка), 2) Африка, основывающая свою экономику на концессиях компаний (Бассейн Конга), 3) Африка с большими ресурсами трудовой силы (Восточная и Южная Африка).

Внутренняя диалектика колониальной политики, социального формирования и способы производства в этих районах являются решающим фактором в создании истории малоразвитой Африки. Основываясь на этом, анализируются четыре исторических периода: 1) период до системы меркантилизма, 2) период меркантилизма, 3) предворительная фаза колониализма, 4) период колониализма.

Заключая анализ колониального периода, автор указывает на необходимость рассматривать африканские общества как зависимые периферийные общества, которые созданы по потребностям господствующих капиталистических стран.