

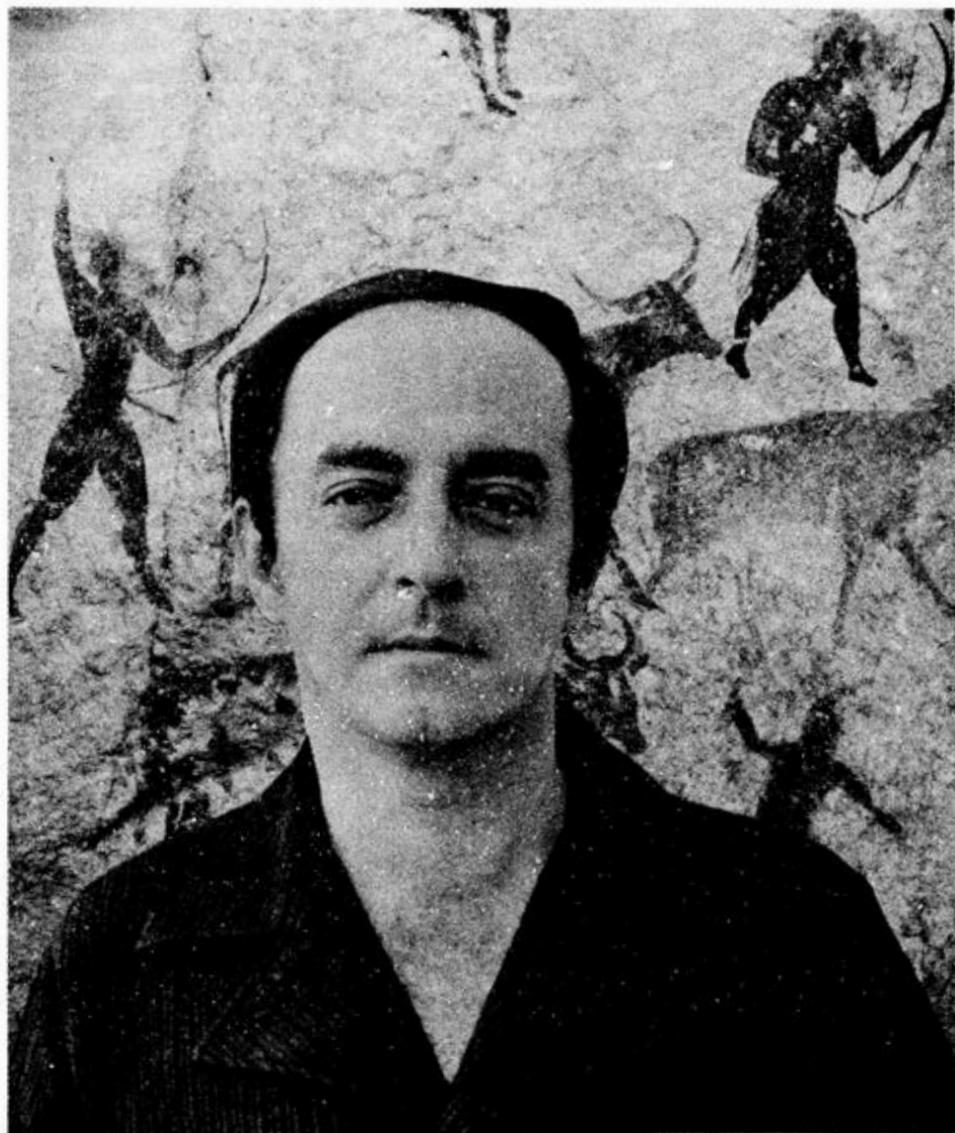
NOTES ON THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF BLACK AFRICA

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books
of today





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One of his recent tasks was to compile a six-volume selection of texts on Africa, offering information and analyses on the main problems facing that continent.

As the author states in his prologue, "The volume on the social and class structure is, in our opinion, one of the best." In view of its interest, *Tricontinental* offers its readers the first part of Volume 3 of this selection, dedicated to the social structure of black Africa.

PRACTICAL evidence of the growing importance of the anti-imperialist African revolution today, particularly in the last three years, obliges us to analyze the specific conditions in which revolutionary tendencies are developing in Africa — especially since such an analysis may help to speed the demise of imperialism's neocolonial system.

Our analysis might, involuntarily, imitate non-Marxist sociology and western Africanism by producing generalities that fail to penetrate even half a millimeter in any specific reality, much less pave the way for the slightest change; or we might make a class analysis which, on the basis of dialectical materialism's approach to history, brings us closer to the real processes, diagnoses them and even predicts the objectively possible historical tendency — one that could be promoted — in the field of sociopolitical relations.

In the case — or cases — of Africa, however, the socioeconomic and historical-political specifics make it absolutely necessary to provide a serious class analysis of **each concrete situation**, omitting those generalities which, however "learned" they may be, are nonetheless teleological in design, in order to concentrate on **more exact and precise determinations**. It might be useful to cite, from Kelle and Kovalson's **Historical Materialism**,¹ certain particularly healthy observations in approaching the study of black African society — or, rather, societies:

a) the concrete periods and forms of the original class structure have varied from people to people;

b) the class structure of society is usually distinguished by a certain degree of complexity which reflects the interlinking of the various relations of production; and

c) mere recognition of the objective existence of classes is not sufficient; the deep economic bases for their existence must be probed.

Implicit in paragraph a) is a factor we sometimes fail to take sufficiently into account: the **unequal** development of human societies and the fact that this does not occur by chance but is the result of concrete conditions that differ both in their origins and beginning stages and in the subsequent evolution of any social formation — an evolution that never follows a straight course from the most primitive to the most advanced, as shown in any specific analysis of the different stages of a given formation and in the comparative analysis of two or more social formations.

It is also true that ideological diversionism in Africa uses this undeniably **historically conditioned** uniqueness of social formation as an argument for the most absurd "ethnic ontologies." An example of this — which also shows the need for a serious class analysis of each specific case — is Senegalese President Leopold Senghor's deliberate distortion of racial factors — which, as Marx stressed in **Capital**, are internal factors in the evolution of particular social formations, characteristics

¹ Kelle and Kovalson, **Historical Materialism**, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1972.

specific to psychic formation on an ethnic scale: the way in which a people was formed in the past.

The political and ideological importance of a scientific analysis of social classes in black Africa is obvious. Such an analysis of the various groups and classes of this part of the world will help the revolutionary movements to evaluate their perspectives accurately and plan realistic strategies with a view to preventing those superficial judgments that sometimes lead to surprise, astonishment or discouragement due to unforeseen changes in the domestic and/or foreign policies of African governments.

Analysts who refuse to take unique or special factors into consideration in moving from the general to the particular — the particular with respect to the continent as well as to each African country — are almost always to blame for these superficial judgments, since "moving from the general" means not simply accepting the existence of these unique factors but also understanding them in a basic way and **explaining them in their reality — i.e. in movement.**

Any research methodology worthy of the name should approach the study of the social structure of the present countries of black Africa first on the basis of the preceding history within the African context in question and second on the basis of the form of colonialist economic exploitation and its accompanying politico-administrative characteristics.

A full understanding of the sociopolitical relations — policies — in these societies requires a study of the **synthesis of the processes of social differentiation of classes and national integration on the basis of the tribal ethnic complex.** Such a study would provide an explanation, in



each situation, of the predominance of either interclass or intertribal (interethnic or interclan) contradictions on the political scene. It would show that the historical origin of certain stages is very often linked to conquests and the "division of labor" among the tribes and to the deforming action of "retribalization" that colonialism itself carried out for its exploiting interests. Another "complication" that still carries great weight would also become evident: the "colony-metropolis" contradiction, that is frequently stronger than those of class (domestic) or tribe.

In the following notes, I propose to offer a compendium of specialized information and certain hypotheses concerning precolonial Africa, the regional forms of colonialist economic exploitation and their political-administrative characteristics in Africa south of the Sahara. I will then venture my own opinions and those of noted Africanist researchers concerning the class composition of present-day society in the newly independent states of black Africa.

The precolonial societies of black Africa

Let us first look at socioeconomic life and how it worked in classless (prestate) tribal society,² so we can then see how, theoretically, it made the transition — in African conditions — to a society with antagonistic contradictions, or what non-Marxist Africanism calls "state societies," whose predominant mode of production was generally close to the much-discussed "Asiatic" mode of production. We base our concepts and information concerning that period on the French Africanists Jean Suret-Canale³ and P. F. Gonidec.⁴ In many cases, what is presented here is a summary of their work.

1. At first, the basic economic unit was the human community itself, which, obviously, was the beginning and not a result of something else. At the most revolutionary stage in the neolithic period, man became sedentary and set up an agricultural community, in which the land was owned communally. Naturally, this sedentary life responded to the internal and external factors that affected the society. In Africa, the leap in productive forces came with the use of iron, which allowed the agricultural community to start producing a surplus. Jean Suret-Canale refers to the society that predominated in Africa prior to the 16th cen-

² I accept the convention of tribe as a fraction of the ethnic group. It practiced a primitive subsistence economy in a relatively nondifferentiated social context and had local autonomy with respect to neighboring groups. The tribe can be subdivided into clans (with a mythical common ancestor); clans can be divided into lineage (the same maternal or paternal ancestor); and lineage, into families, generally extended to include several generations grouped around the patriarch.

³ Jean Suret-Canale, "Les sociétés traditionnelles en Afrique Tropicale et le concept de mode de production asiatique," *Sur le mode de production asiatique*, Carnet CERM, Ed. Sec., Paris, 1969.

⁴ P. F. Gonidec, *Les systèmes politiques africains*, African and Madagascan Library, Paris, 1971.

ture as tribal, or tribopatriarchal; Samir Amin⁵ calls it premercantilist. During that phase, the basic source of social production was agriculture; cattle raising, which was already separate, was secondary. Crops were cultivated with iron hoes over fairly extensive terrain, sometimes intensively. In many places, hoes and other iron implements replaced tools made of stone or wood as early as the beginning of modern history, although iron tools apparently spread throughout most of the continent after the 10th century.

I would like to say, in passing, that I consider the question of whether the use of iron in Africa originated "inside" or "outside" the continent — a discussion associated with the theory of "cultural loans" — to be a secondary problem (and sometimes even a pseudoproblem, used to disguise other completely unscientific intentions).

2. The basic social unit of this process in Africa was the so-called enlarged or extended family, a kind of fraction of the clan, according to Walter Rodney.⁶ Patriarchal in nature, it consisted of a group of relatives traced through the maternal or paternal line, tied or linked to the land and including "outsiders," both through marriage and through association. This last factor is uniquely African. Because it provided the framework for agricultural production, the extended family was the basic socioeconomic unit.

The family of the first occupants of an area was the collective "owner" of the land; this right was inalienable. There was no private ownership of land, in the sense of Roman law or the Napoleonic code. Nor was there any vacant land. All the land — whether under cultivation or lying fallow, pasture or woodland — was collectively owned and clearly delimited, though quarrels could arise. Nevertheless, a carefully detailed analysis of the communal structure of the tribe shows that, in practice — according to some writers — land exploitation was largely in the hands of families and individuals.

The "dean" or head of the extended family parceled out the land and guaranteed its fertility through certain rites. The periodic redistribution of the land was a necessity — and, therefore, technical-religious in function. The need for crop rotation and other social requirements meant that the patriarch distributed the collectives or family shares for the benefit of the community and its members. Tradition established the size of each share and the number of work days for each.

As a general rule, the extended family was isolated and self-sufficient in every sense. The camps in the brush or forest regions and on the Sudanese plains are examples of this.

How did the village emerge from this process? The founding family became associated with other, "guest" families. The patriarch continued his function of dividing up the lands, now in a broader framework, and became the "chief of the land" — a confusing title when it appears in

⁵ Samir Amin, *Le développement inégal*, Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1973.

⁶ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, TPH Ltd., Dar es Salaam, 1972.

French colonial literature, since he had a responsibility rather than authority. There was a chief of the land in each village — which was simply the aggregate of associated extended families that, through a slow centralizing evolution (held back economically by the low level of production and socially by the predominance of the extended family's patriarchal ties), became the basic socioeconomic unit, over and above each family.

A division of functions began to take place in a natural way among the different families, with specialized functions responding to economic needs. In addition to the chief of the land, there was the lord of the water, who acted as the arbiter of fishing; the lord of the brush, who made decisions concerning the fallow and hunting lands; and the lord of gold, who controlled the gold nuggets — that were subject to rigid restrictions (the people had access only to the gold dust). All of these positions carried with them religious prerogatives and material compensation. Nevertheless, the framework in which they functioned continued to be egalitarian and democratic-communitarian as in the primitive community. Those who held these positions were generally the oldest family members.

This classless patriarchal tribal status was very common in clearings in the brush or the forests. J. Maquet⁷ has called them the "civilizations of the clearings"; they were always threatened with being overrun by the forest, and agricultural nomadism was common in them. Evolution could continue in this very same environment until it reached the stage of class society (as in the kingdom of Benin), or development could be delayed and never reach the stage of kingdom or empire (as on the Sudanese plains).

This was pure primitive democracy, without governed or governors. Even though there were no governors, however, the society was "governed" in the sense that its members were expected to conform and behave according to a certain social order, following specific rules which, while they reduced change to the smallest possible limits, guaranteed cohesion and relative security for the collective and each of its members. Evans-Pritchard⁸ calls them "ordered anarchies."

The "leader" organized and directed the common activities: hunting, migration, war, trade with other communities. He had absolutely no legislative or judicial role; he couldn't command obedience or punish criminals or lawbreakers. Julius Nyerere has said that the men held long meetings (the interminable palaver) until they came to an agreement. This conference or discussion was essential in traditional African society. It was required in making any decision, and the decision — according to some — had to be a unanimous one. In practice, however, it was based on consensus rather than unanimity.

3. As the productive process developed, a number of differentiations other than those based on sex and age began to be made in tribal society. For instance:

⁷ J. Maquet, *Civilizations of Black Africa*, Oxford University Press, 1972.

⁸ Evans-Pritchard, *African Political Systems*, Oxford University Press, 1962.

a) the prisoner of war: When general labor productivity was low, the captive was integrated in the extended family as supplementary work force; when labor productivity was important, the captive was truly exploited by being assigned a very small plot of land and fewer days to work it than the free man; moreover — only in black Africa, apparently — the surplus products he produced were confiscated by the family that owned him;

b) differentiations among families based on their wealth: Hierarchy based on position (chief of the land) could be paralleled by one based on wealth (chief of the prosperous family) or even subverted; (relative) wealth then became, first, a source of prestige and, later, a source of authority — for example, C. Balandier⁹ cites the competition of wealth, almost always expressed in banquets held by the extended families of the fans in Cameroon and the fons in Dahomey; and

c) differentiations at the level of the patriarchal family, the village or more extended groupings: The chief of the land or the chief of war took over both functions and benefited from certain loans or contributions to his personal title from within his own family, then began exploiting the family or the village (or a more extended grouping), while his family or his village collectively exploited another family or village by right (tradition) of first occupancy or of conquest. This development naturally led to a more complex and progressive social state, completely different from that of the simple tribe.

4. The analysis of the basic relations between production, distribution, exchange and consumption is the starting point for studying the transition to class society.

In the neolithic classless societies of the primitive community, the cycle of communal production, distribution and consumption was fulfilled. Such communities existed in Africa well into the 19th century, not only in the tropical forests but also on the plains.

We all know that the essential element in the emergence of a class society is the appearance of a permanent excess or social surplus. The question here is how this surplus was produced, what methods were used for appropriating it, how it was distributed and how it was consumed.

A permanent surplus permitted social differentiation in specialized jobs — and this, in turn, led to trade or exchange with neighboring peoples, in a network that was often both intricate and widespread; to the maintenance of reserves to offset a bad period, for celebrations, etc.; and to the appropriation of this surplus by certain families or individuals, in detriment to the collective. **This possibility had already appeared in the course of carrying out functions and fell within the relations of exploitation.** The Africans' first artisanal jobs or activities included forging metal, creating metal objects, making ceramics and weaving. In social terms, the metal forger belonged to a caste that had magical powers, precisely because of his key role in production.

⁹ Quoted by Suret-Canale in footnote 3.

With the introduction of the hoe in agriculture, it became possible to have a more or less permanent surplus and cross over from the natural to the social division of labor. In Africa, this change was largely conditioned by habitat. This does not mean geographic determinism in Africa or anywhere else — just as the concept of ethnic determinism is inadmissible; rather, it is a question of internal and external conditions or factors. To confuse these factors with the determinisms or prejudices of bourgeois historiography inevitably leads to the invention of impossible geographic and “ethnic ontologies” (such as negritude). Nevertheless, in the case of Africa, the weight of certain geographic factors should be stressed.

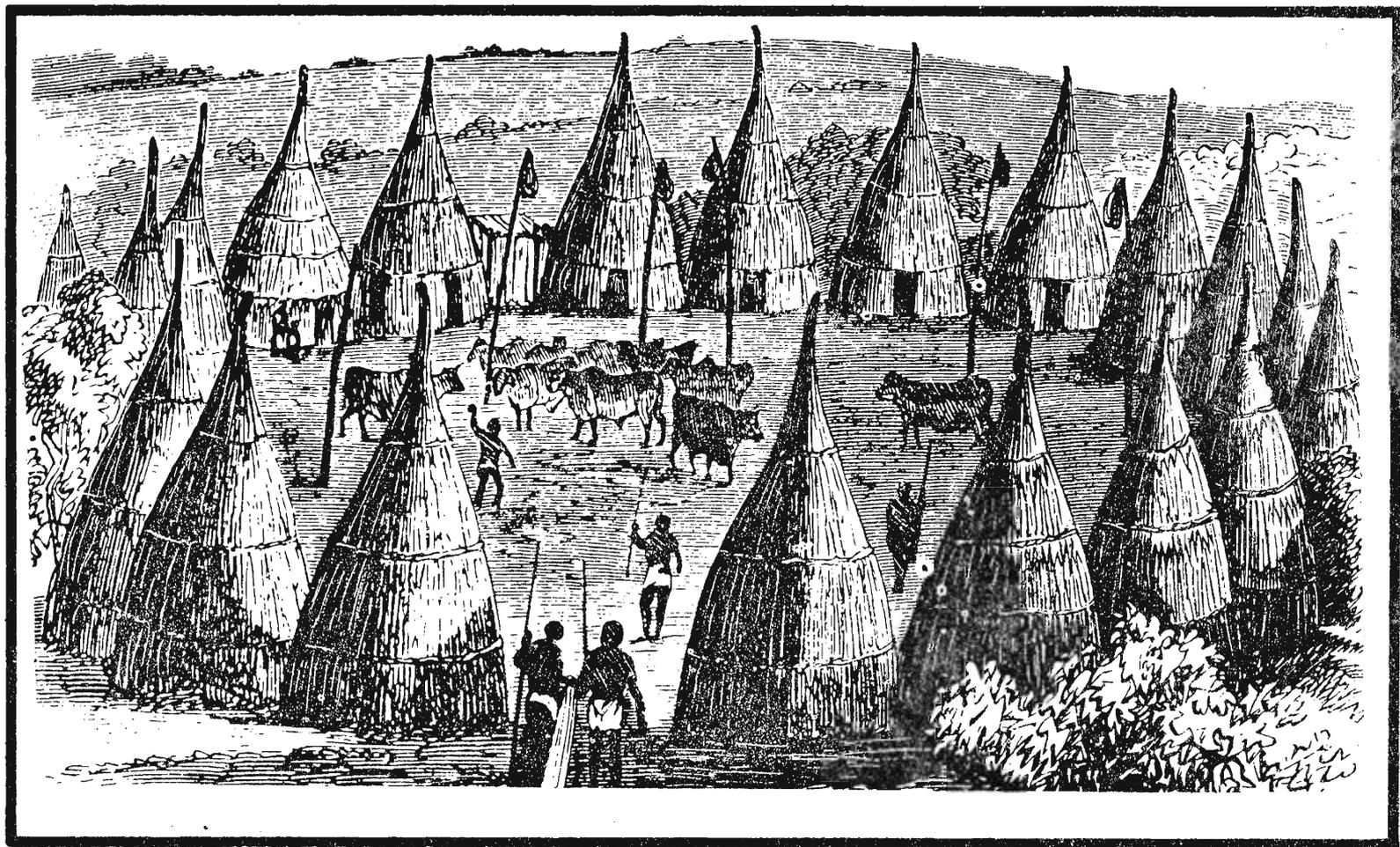
At the same time, the changeover from a classless tribal society to a class society can assume many forms. Thus, the many forms of transition that have given birth to the various class societies necessarily make them multiform in nature, even though the essential social differentiation in all of them is that between exploiters and exploited and the methods of exploiting the labor force are, basically, those that appear in the general framework of progressive modes of production that Marx discovered in the history of socioeconomic formations prior to the predominance of the capitalist mode of production.

I would like to stress, particularly, that the differentiation between a chief of the land who is also a chief of war and his group, and that between this group and other conquered groups seems to have been a generalized process that preceded class society in Africa. These differentiations would have taken place simultaneously except for the fact that, because of the low level of development of the productive forces, the differentiation of greater weight would have been the conquest of other groups not very different in a socioeconomic sense from the conquering group, which would generally have adopted a structure of exploitation similar to what Marx, in his studies of cases in Asia, termed “generalized slavery.”

On the threshold of the evolution from tribal to class society — which Suret-Canale, transferring Engels’ military democracy to Africa, calls elementary monarchy — the newly proclaimed king was a chief of chiefs with very restricted powers, closely controlled by the council of “subordinate” chiefs. Each chief had his own council of elders and other controls, arising from the society of function, which hadn’t been anywhere near buried, but the nature of the controls had been altered by the very decisive factor of wealth and war.

This elementary monarchy was an embryo of the state, especially as far as legality was concerned. Its monarch was the arbiter between the minor litigating chiefs, and, although this wasn’t quite the same simple function of the preceding period, he still had very little power of physical coercion, rather acting as a moral authority: ancestral, religious — in short, **ideological**.

Since transition always depends on the status of the productive forces, geographic conditions and specific historical circumstances, the agricultural community was contradictory by nature; once it had a permanent appropriable surplus and the “functionary” lords had appeared in response to the technical-social needs of production, a class society that could be said to fall generally within the mode of Asiatic production could arise from it — or the agricultural community might stay within the classless tribal or tribal-patriarchal context for a long time, as long



as the appropriation of the surplus remained more of a social possibility than an economic necessity. Moreover, numerous reverses or regressions could — and did — occur.

5. Generalizing on the economic and social aspects of class societies in Africa in the 15th and 16th centuries, or at least prior to the 19th century, we note that, since the mode of slave production was based on private ownership of the slave work force and the mode of feudal production was based on private ownership of the land by the aristocracy, situations of more or less sharp class conflict in precolonial black Africa can and should be approached on the basis of the controversial and generally protofeudal "Asiatic" mode of production, which lies somewhere between the African primitive community and "complementary" capitalism, which introduced the colonizer.

The land and men were still the main productive forces. In certain cases, the attainment of a surplus gave rise to a social division of labor, with the appearance of artisans in metal, ceramics, textiles, etc., who produced iron tools for use in agriculture and war, and this, in turn, led the agricultural community in Africa to make a revolutionary leap forward. Earlier, we noted that the metal worker was an indispensable artisan with magical powers, a caste apart.

The surplus and the artisans made trade possible, and finally a universal equivalent — cattle; salt; and, lastly, money cowrie and metals — appeared. Limited urbanization, with political capitals and commercial centers, took place, in the sense that Marx analyzed it in the Asiatic societies; there were more royal camps that depended on agriculture than cities.

The social effect, or the class differentiation, was not automatic, but private appropriation of the surplus was possible, which meant exploitation.

a) The legal system of land was not modified, however. Every community or extended family was a basic economic unit, and the land belonged to the family; there was no individual property. The village was the basic cell, a homogeneous unit of related individuals or a heterogeneous unit of separate families, a self-supporting and nearly autonomous unit, with family and communal land shares.

Certain Western jurists are still discussing the royal statute. In his work on *The System of Land Ownership in French West Africa*, Dareste wrote that "It was neither ownership nor the negation of ownership, but something else." The land, according to traditional legal systems, could not be appropriated individually. It was a collective asset that belonged to a specific social group, and the only right the individual had was to the produce raised on it — and this, based on his membership in the social group. Collective rights to the land were established wholly by occupying it — peacefully or otherwise — and by exploiting it.

b) The lords in the societies of functions could appropriate the surplus, in which case they would be governors rather than administrators; divide the lands; and act in ritual functions as intermediaries between the ancestral dead and the living. Since they had been performing these functions as far back as man could remember, the fact that they had

become exploiters was hidden. Distinctions appeared between the chief and his family — the aristocracy — and between the free men and the slaves in the village communes.

This was complemented by the parallel process of one people's conquering another (neighboring or exogenous groups). Under the specific existing geoeconomic conditions, appropriation of the surplus provided a very strong motive for establishing broader political units, so chiefdoms, kingdoms and empires appeared. This process did not change the relations of production in any basic way, however. **The conqueror did not acquire ownership of the land that he conquered;** rather, the title of the first occupant and his descendants continued. The conqueror had to respect the chief of the land — who became, in fact, an administrator.

c) **Village organization continued**, because it was a convenient form for handling tributes, head taxes and loans. The chief of the village acted as intermediary between the population of the subjugated or enslaved commune and the higher authorities.

On a state level, the African variant to the Asiatic mode of production was what Gonidec has termed **limited monarchy**; in it, power became separated from society and was held by an individual who stood apart from the masses, as chief or monarch; the African concept of government was **personal, not institutional**. Nyerere has explained that, when the African speaks of government, he thinks of a chief rather than a chamber of deputies. At the same time, this monarch held **limited**, rather than absolute, power in terms of his freedom of action and his authority to make and impose decisions.

Myths such as the one describing the origin of Oduduwa among the Yorubas explained the individualization of power in order to delimit reality. Nevertheless, the real origin of this individualized power is simple and universal: **the head chief appropriated the surplus for himself to gain power and, by gaining power, was able to augment his appropriations.** The chief and the embryonic state were one and the same; through the state, using extra-economic coercion, the chieftain class grew wealthy. Religion tended to affirm the "immutability" of the established order and provide ideological justification for exploitation.

The following is a quote from a work by Roberto González: "In this beginning phase, classes seem to have developed, not out of private ownership of the land but rather through the private appropriation of surplus goods by means of the evolution of the power of function that the chiefs and other dignitaries exercised in the primitive community until it was removed from the rest of the community, turned into a public power and used as a means of extortion against the rest of society."¹⁰

This process might be limited to one village, but it could also include vast territories and, through conquest, create kingdoms or empires. Relative stagnation, or retarded development, which the structuralist Yves Lacoste¹¹ terms "structural block," slowed the process of evolution toward a higher formation.

¹⁰ Roberto González, "En torno al modo de producción asiático," Vol. I.

¹¹ Yves Lacoste, *Ibn Khaldoun*, F. Maspero, 1966.

The chief or monarch was always a sacred figure — a god-king, a king with divine or deified attributes, as was apparently the case among the Dahomeys and Yorubas. He was always considered an exceptional being, a mediator between the dead and the living, endowed with supernatural powers; thus, with his charismatic power, he could use his public relations ceremonies to impose numerous interdictions. This sacred quality obviously buttressed his political and economic position to a great extent.

Power was transmitted to the sacred being through inheritance; there was competition of a sort among those of noble lineage, members of the privileged class whose rank made them possible candidates for king, however, and this presented problems that only the Egyptian Pharaohs managed to solve theoretically.

Power was also a nonsocial entity: Montesquieu's separation of powers did not exist in black Africa. The chief, monarch or emperor was executive, legislator and judge; traditional law existed, but the monarch could establish new laws, as well — except in the Muslim areas, where law was of divine origin (the Koran) and could not be altered by anyone.

The leader was a religious, political and judicial chief; there was no separation of "spiritual" and "temporal" power, just as there was no division between social and political power. **Everything was political in the sense that the chief or monarch embodied all of society.**

In spite of this monocracy, power was neither absolute nor arbitrary but had **moderating mechanisms**, such as

a) **advisers, the aristocracy.** These consist of nobles in lineage, in war, in function and in work — including those of humble origin. Theoretically, the king could ignore these advisers, but in practice he had to take them into account;

b) **respect for the first occupants** of the land subjugated by conquest, their descendants and "lords of the land." Political sovereignty and land ownership were not mixed together, as in European feudalism. In Africa, there was dualism. The chief or monarch could demand tributes, a head tax, etc. but could not change the system of land ownership, even though the tributes were comparable to what existed under feudalism. As the proprietor, in charge of the means of production (the land), he ran his state — chiefdom or kingdom — and regularly engaged in exploitation on the basis of common tribal ownership, but the land in each division of this chiefdom, kingdom or empire belonged to the clan of that division, which was its **sovereign owner**;

c) **the local authorities.** They were another mechanism for counterbalancing the central power, for each territorial subdivision retained great autonomy. The Yoruba kingdom of Oyó limited its centralized activities in the societies dependent on it to those of a civil administrator and a propagator of the cult of Shango; and

d) **the monarch's obligations.** These were simply a reordering of the ancient functions of preclass society, functions that continued to carry weight and could be manipulated by certain members of the aristocracy in order to overthrow the monarch. There were no revolutions involv-

ing changes in the system — only palace rebellions against “mistaken chiefs.” The essence of the system continued with everyone’s acceptance (the political torments of which Marx spoke in referring to the Asiatic mode of production). The system didn’t “make mistakes” — just the chief or monarch. Even if one state broke up and another replaced it, the new state reproduced the model of the old one. The economic structure remained almost immutable.

It should be noted that, with the spread of the slave trade through vast regions of Africa (especially along the western coast) beginning in the 16th and 17th centuries, the number of slaves in those societies increased — for export. That is why it is difficult to judge the new relations of slavery on their own. Moreover, we would have to answer the question of what importance slaves had in domestic production. Tentatively, it can be said that a) the relations of slavery were not automatically progressive in comparison with the earlier state, and b) the domestic slave was not a Roman slave in the economic, social and legal sense.

Colonialist forms of exploitation in black Africa. Colonial economic areas

Following the methodological order which we established at the outset, we must now determine the different forms that colonialist exploitation took in black Africa. These occurred within specific regions that can be formally differentiated from one another economically and which are



more or less "complementary" to one another on a continental level, in terms of the metropolises' needs and possibilities. At first, these different regions of monopoly capitalist exploitation in Africa were determined by the development that the precolonial African society had attained; preimperialist Euro-African contacts; and the climate, geology and topography of the territories occupied.

Specialized economists agree on **three regions**, or formations, in a general sense; but, when all is said and done, the convention includes a number of cases (countries) that were hybrids of two or more forms or were on the borderline between two regions or are simply atypical and unclassifiable. All this shows that the value of these classifications, though undeniable, is relative.

1. The first formation apparently came about because of the difficulties in and/or lack of incentives for proceeding to the colonization or population and subsequent large-scale exploitation of West Africa. That region failed to attract big capital investments in the mining sector and white colons in agriculture. Instead, its exploitation took place through the mechanism of monopoly control of the colonial import-export trade — especially the purchase and export of basic products obtained by traditionally indigenous methods, under the supervision of imperialist agents:

In that region, African society had "given birth" to protofeudal "Asiatic" formations such as the "Sudanese state" type (Ghana, Mali, Songhay), that non-Marxist British historiography and African intellectuals who idealize the precolonial past have so frequently manipulated. In other words, it was a region halfway between the *sui generis* Arab-Berber area of North Africa and the tribal society, barely differentiated internally, that existed in most of the Bantu subdivisions of southern Africa.

West Africa was also that continent's oldest mercantile point of contact with Europe and America, for it included both the intermediary chiefs and slave traders of Senegal and Nigeria and the Afro-abolitionists and local beneficiaries of "legitimate trade."

This is where "trade economy" was established, whereby the small agricultural producers were exploited by colonial commercial companies whose superprofits came from buying cheaply from the African producers and selling at high prices on the world market. Hosea Jaffe¹² considers that this system of superexploitation of a cheap work force disguised as "proprietary producers" — who owned their own land but starved to death on it, providing profits for the big overseas monopolies — made European "direct government" unnecessary; the most convenient solution was to establish an "indirect government" composed of "native authorities" (tribal chiefs selected by Europe). When money taxes were imposed on the "independent" African peasant, he was forced to raise "commercial crops," progressively abandoning subsistence farming in order to sell his labor force. When this device failed, the coercive colonial machine resorted to the system of forced labor.

The European trade monopoly was complemented with the presence of Syrian and Lebanese intermediaries, a situation that inevitably stim-

¹² Hosea Jaffe, *Del tribalismo al socialismo*, Siglo XXI, Mexico, 1976.

ulated the African merchant at the lowest level of the trade pyramid. At the same time, this monopoly favored certain rural African social sectors in the private appropriation of tribal lands, as occurred in the Gold Coast, southern Nigeria, the Ivory Coast and Togo, and stimulated the Muslim theocratic trade guilds to commercialize the tributes they received from the peasants, as in Senegal and northern Nigeria.

Partly out of convenience and partly because it was inevitable, certain forms of "traditional" (tribal or protofeudal) Africa were retained. Even though the society lost all economic and political autonomy when it was made subservient to the capitalist international market, it was "retribalized" to a certain extent so some of the native chiefs — who then became "native authorities" — would help guarantee the flow of peasant production and the labor force. These "native" authorities were in charge of collecting taxes from the peasants and recruiting workers for the mines, plantations and public works of the colonial regime, among other things.

The slave trade led to the development of a class of indigenous planters, who became private landowners, employing a paid work force. These planters usually, but not always, came from the tribal aristocracy. In spite of the big foreign commercial firms and the Levantine intermediaries, the small African trader arranged things for his own survival. Thus, this Africa of the colonial trade monopoly forced a great variety of intermediary sectors or middle-level groups (traders and shopkeepers, small farmers and the small rural bourgeoisie, moneylenders, speculators, small-scale transportation owners, artisans, professionals, wage earners, the clergy — in short, all the small agromercantile bourgeoisie and its associated groups) to live badly.

The system of "native authorities" and "peasant producers" resulted in a qualitative and quantitative reduction in both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat of that area. In Nigeria, for example, only a half million workers — 7 percent of the population — were really wage earners when British colonial domination ended.

The inevitable result of these socioeconomic conditions was a fairly classical petit bourgeois "black" nationalism, clearly Afro-American in its ascendancy and nonviolent in practice, that played an undeniable decolonizing role in history.

2. The second formation appears to have taken place first and foremost in southern Africa, thanks to a specific correlation of factors: great mining wealth (gold and diamonds), that was discovered early and put to use immediately, and the need to exploit this wealth with a native work force and to establish a settlers' colony in which the whites would act as social mediators and as the political delegates of the metropolitan imperialist power. Moreover, the colons found the climate "more bearable" than in the Nigerian-Congolese regions. They came when the major exports of capital were made and stole the best tribal lands for their settlements, thus semiproletarianizing (and greatly impoverishing) the tribes as they endeavored to solve the pressing need for manpower in the mines, on the plantations, on the farms and in the industries which they established to meet the demands of the colonial population's internal "import" market. The most frequent expression of this enmeshing on a socioeconomic and institutional level was the establishment of

"native reserves," whose fascist extreme is the "bantustan" of South Africa's apartheid system.

Moreover, as I said in explaining the first formation, all this occurred in the part of Africa that had the least social differentiation, where most of the subdivisions of the Bantu "trunk" and of the Khoi peoples existed, with little or none of the protofeudal characteristics.

The two most important components of the social structure in these territories were the "contracted" migratory worker in a European mine or industry, who lived cyclically, with one foot in his native land, and the white colon, particularly in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, but also in Kenya and parts of Angola, Mozambique, Namibia and other countries. Even though it was not a "compact," monoclassist colonization, it was quite homogeneous from an ideological point of view. It used its "white nation" and fascist nationalism to oppose the messianic-agrarian movements and, later, the nationalist and workers' movements that began to emerge among the Africans following World War I.

As Hosea Jaffe has pointed out so acutely, the "political" side of this system meant that, while the Europeans continued to win — or were granted — ever greater bourgeois democracy, the Africans were gradually "retribalized" in bantustans and reserves at the same rate that their real society was being detribalized.

When the communal lands were divided up into "reserves" — land that belonged to the European government, in the last instance — only the eldest son was allowed to own it, and then only on a restricted basis. The other children, who had no land, were forced to look for work.

Less than 5 percent of the African farmers owned any land at all, and that amounted to only 1 percent of the total land area, according to 1970 statistics. Ninety percent of the rural workers were landless serfs working on the colons' farms, and the remaining 10 percent were migratory workers from the reserves. In 1910, around 45 percent of the work force in the mines was composed of migratory workers; in 1970, the figure had risen to 70 percent. They produce three times as much as they are paid for and earn only a fifth as much as the white miners.

At present, the main characteristics of the social structure in this region, according to Jaffe, are as follows:

a leadership class that owns the mines, factories, farms, banks, commercial companies, etc. It consists of only 4 percent of the population (half a million people, including the owners' families), which receives 60 percent of the national income;

a "workers' aristocracy" of white workers and state bureaucrats — 16 percent of the population (about 3 million people), receiving 25 percent of the national income — and

the African, Hindu and mestizo (Coloured) workers, who represent 80 percent of the population (some 15 million people) and receive 15 percent of the national income. Forty percent of them are serfs on the colons' farms; another 40 percent are migratory workers from the reserves or bantustans and from neighboring countries; the remaining 20 percent are "established" in the cities.

In southern Africa, whose structures were imposed — however unequally — from Nairobi to the Cape and from Luanda to Maputo, imperialism tried to promote three federated systems of “complementary” economies: British East Africa, which failed with the Mau Mau revolt of the '60s because of the relatively weak white colonization in Kenya and almost none in Uganda and Tanganyika; the Central Federation of the two Rhodesias and Nyasaland, which lasted from 1953 through 1963, failing in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and in Nyasaland (Malawi) when black governments took over in 1964 and reduced in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) to a “rebellion” against London after 1965; and, the most important of all, a kind of South African Commonwealth under the leadership of the Anglo-Boer bourgeois racist government, that still integrates the work force of Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique and its own internal bantustans, mainly because of the development of the “subimperialist” system of apartheid. This regime has experienced a major crisis since Angola and Mozambique became independent in 1975, a crisis that has led it to seek Kenyan-type solutions for the cases of Zimbabwe and Namibia.

We will return to this Africa of the “reserves” later, when we concentrate on the African working class.

3. The third formation took place in the geographical area known as the “conventional basin” of the Congo River, with its well-known system of concessionary companies for the large-scale exploitation of raw materials, in an area where the climate was “anti-European” and where



there was thought to be little wealth when colonialism first emerged. At that time, the area wasn't considered economically profitable and therefore failed to attract either large amounts of capital or significant numbers of colons. Instead, its waterways were protected for imperialist interests by establishing the "Free State of the Congo" under the rule of Leopold II of Belgium, which failed even before World War I. These territories were handed over to a few concessionary companies whose managers ran the plantations, almost all of which produced rubber or wood. The French colony of the Middle Congo, or Congo-Brazzaville, for example, was completely divided up among 40 of these concessionaries, and forced labor became the chief way of recruiting the native work force.

This feeble complementary capitalism was reflected in the class structure and both were reflected in the generally backward anticolonial movement, usually initiated by a chain of groups of elders, or prophets, from Simon Kimbangu to Simon Mpadi, somewhere between the first and third phases of the general crisis of capitalism.

Finally, it is always customary to classify as "atypical cases" those that don't fall within any of the previously mentioned regional formations. This would seem to be true of the territories of the so-called Horn of Africa, which harbored the extremely sui generis Ethiopian feudalism and felt the great influence of the Arab Muslim complex across the Red Sea; the plantation economies of the Indian Ocean (Madagascar, Mauritius, the Comoros, etc.); and those of the Atlantic (Cape Verde, São Tomé, Fernando Poo and others).■