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## MODES OF PRODUCTION AND SOCIAL FORMATIONS

by

SAMIR AMIN

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### Introduction

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

### The Modes of Production

A distinction must be made between modes of production and social formations, if a great confusion in social theory is to be avoided. The concept of mode of production is an *abstract concept* implying no order of historical sequence with respect to the whole period of the history of civilizations extending from the first differentiated formations to capitalism. We propose to distinguish five modes of production: 1) the "primitive" community mode of production, the only one which antedates all the others; 2) the tribute-paying mode of production, juxtaposing the persistence of the village community, and that of a

social and political apparatus exploiting the latter in the form of exacting tribute; this tribute-paying mode of production is the most common and most general form characterizing precapitalist class formation; we propose to distinguish between the early forms, and the advanced forms such as the feudal mode of production in which the village community loses the eminent domain of the land to the benefit of the feudal lords, the community persisting as a community of families; 3) the slave mode of production, which is a relatively rare form although widely scattered; 4) the simple petty commodity mode of production, a frequent form but which practically never constitutes the dominant mode of a social formation; and finally 5) the capitalist mode of production. In its "pure state", each of these modes of production has its own specific essential characteristics.

The community modes of production are the first production systems giving rise to an embryo class distinction. Ecological conditions are the origin of this society. These modes of production ensure the transition from *primitive communism* to full class societies. As Guy Dhoquis clearly pointed out, this *primitive communism* is defined as the *primitive negation* (of the division of labour and of the surplus product). Because this passage from the negative (absence of classes) to the positive (class society) is extremely gradual, the community modes are varied and numerous. (Emmanuel Terray has established this.) In spite of this variety, the community modes of production are all characterized by 1) an organization of labour partly on an individual basis (that of the "nuclear family"), partly on collective basis (that of the "extended family" or of the "clan", in a village), and the essential means of labour -- land -- being the collective property of the clan, and its use, free to all the members but according to specific rules (e.g. the use of plots distributed to families, etc.); 2) the absence of commodity exchange; and correlatively, 3) the distribution of the product within the community according to rules closely connected with the kinship organization.

All members of the community do not necessarily have equal access to the land. In the more advanced of these communities, access to the land is based on a hierarchy, some families or clans having a "right" to better plots, larger and better located. It is from this time onwards that an embryo class distinction is felt. Very generally, this hierarchy is closely connected with that of the political or religious power. A wide range of these modes of production can be found in Africa south of the Sahara, some of them relatively strong, only slightly graded, particularly among the Bantus; others, very inegalitarian, as among the "Toucouleurs" of the Senegal River Valley, the Ashantis of Ghana, the Hausas of Northern Nigeria, etc.

But in all those cases, the peasant, whomever he may be, had access to the land. By the mere fact that he is a member of a clan, the peasant is entitled to a plot in the holding belonging to the clan. Consequently, the process of proletarianization, that is, the process of separating the producer from his means of production (here, the natural means: the land) is *impossible*. Therefore it will be noticed that the integration of societies based on this type of the mode of production into the world capitalist system -- which is the case with almost all the African peasant societies today -- leads to *impoverishment without proletarianization*.

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

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

The so called *Asian mode* of production which we prefer to call a *tribute-paying mode*, is very close to the feudal mode of production. It is characterized by the organization of society into two essential classes: a peasantry organized into a community and a ruling class which monopolizes the political organization of the society and exacts (non-commodity) tributes from rural communities. But while in the tributary mode of production the feudal lord has the eminent domain of the land, the rural community has the actual ownership. The result is that the feudal mode of production -- which existed in its complete form only in western and central Europe and in Japan -- is always threatened with disintegration if for one reason or another the feudal lord gets rid of part of his tenants.

If a feudal lord "frees" his serfs, he proletarianizes them. It is from this disintegration, under the impulse of population pressure and of the effects of long distance trade (with its corollary, the changing of rent in kind into money rent) that the urban proletariat arose, a condition for the emergence of the capitalist mode of production. On the other hand, the basic right of a peasant member of the community to have access to the use of the land in the tributary mode of production makes this disintegration *impossible*. Nevertheless, the advanced

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

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

The meaning to be given to our proposition that *modes of production are not historical concepts*, that they have no age, should now be quite clear. It means that there is no necessary historical sequence from community to slavery, and from slavery to feudalism.

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

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

The family of tribute-paying modes of production includes the feudal mode of production, which appears as a *border line* case, in which the community is particularly degraded, since

it loses the eminent domain of the land. Because it is a border line case, we can understand why and how feudal formations are *peripheral* in relation to the *central tributary formations*. We can also understand why and how the capitalist mode of production emerged *only* in these *frontier areas* of the *tributary civilization*, the major form of precapitalist civilization.

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

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

### Capitalist Mode of Production

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

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

The expression *mercantilist capitalism* used to describe the period, in Europe, from the Renaissance to the industrial revolution (1600-1800) is perhaps responsible for many errors of analysis, the reason being that the expression is ambiguous: this period is in fact one of *transition* and after the event, we now see it as the period of transition to capitalism. In actual fact, the marked features of the period were 1) the continued supremacy of the feudal mode of production within the contemporary formations; 2) the flourishing of long-distance trade (mainly the Atlantic trade); and 3) the latter's effect on the disintegrating feudal mode of production. It is this third feature alone which qualifies it as a period of transition. Long distance trade could bring about the disintegration of the feudal mode because the latter is a particular tributary mode.

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

However, as soon as an important part of the surplus became concentrated in the hands of a powerful and privileged class (feudal lords, royal courts, etc.), it *was used* in long distance trade, mainly in exchange for other luxury goods originating from other societies. In such cases, a middleman stepped in and used his monopoly position to acquire a *profit* through his services as an intermediary. This profit, (*bénéfice*) based on the difference between the *subjective values* (social utilities) placed on the goods by the two societies who are *unknown to each other*, that is, societies which exchanged rare products of which they did not know the respective social costs of production, must not be confused with "profit" or a *return on merchant capital*. We place special emphasis on this latter point.

It was only under the capitalist mode of production that trade became a capitalist activity comparable with industrial production. The capitalist mode of production did not really come into existence until the industrial revolution. Merchant capital appeared as a fraction of the total capital stock. From then on, merchant capital contributed to the general equalization

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

In feudal Europe, the traders could do a great deal more in long distance trade, than their colleagues in the tributary formations. As from the 16th century, the Atlantic trade led to the formation, in America, of a periphery to the new mercantilist system. The trade not only involved *fetching the products* offered by the local societies but it also brought the latter under its control, organising the production of goods of which it ensured the sale in Europe. In order to attain this objective, centralized monarchies helped traders who in return, fulfilled their ambitions by giving them financial support to recruit standing armies and to centralize their

administrations. Following a period of straightforward plunder of the indigenous societies, a system of *cash crop* plantations was set up in this new periphery, using slave labour, with the products (cotton, sugar, indigo, etc.) going to the Atlantic traders for marketing.

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

Feudal agriculture therefore gradually developed into capitalist agriculture: either the feudal landlords became capitalist owners or the freeing of the peasants led to the emergence of a new class, the *Kulaks*. It is these important social phenomena which appear to confirm the view that the internal evolution of European rural society was at the root of capitalism, with the Atlantic trade not playing a decisive role.

In order to understand the nature of these transformations, it is essential to know how the capitalist formations *viewed* landed property, and changed its meaning. The "pure" capitalist mode of production implies only two classes (bourgeois and proletariat) and their corresponding incomes (profit from capital and wages) while the feudal mode implies two other classes (feudal landlords and peasant workers) with their corresponding incomes (rent and peasant income). Each of these modes has a different set of laws governing the generation and distribution of the various components of the social product. Profit implies the existence of capital, that is, the exclusive private ownership of *means of production which are themselves the product of social labour*, while rent is derived from the *exclusive control of the natural means of production by one particular class*, means which were not the product of social labour.

Capital implies wage labour, free labour, a labour market and the sale of labour power. Rent on the other hand implies the bondage of the peasant worker and the fact that he is tied to the land. This does not necessarily imply a legal restriction on his freedom but more generally that he is not allowed access to the *natural* conditions of production, i.e. ownership of land. Capital is, by its very nature, mobile and, from this,

*Marx* logically deduced the transformation of value into prices of production which ensure a uniform return on all private capital. On the other hand, the appropriation of natural factors of production is necessarily immobile and rent *varies* according to the quality of the land. The "pure" capitalist mode of production therefore implies free access of the natural means of production to the capitalists. However, capitalist formations do not develop in a vacuum, starting with a *clean slate*; at first, they start up within previous formations but in new sectors (industry) where the relations characterizing the previous modes did not apply. Later, by the time capitalism has reached a dominant position throughout the formation, it also has completed the transformation of agriculture where land ownership had constituted an obstacle to it. From then on, the landowner (or his function) loses his determining importance in agriculture in favour of the capitalist farmer (or his function when this is assumed by the owner himself). Later in the advanced capitalist formations, *there is no longer any "landowners"* (in the feudal, precapitalist sense of the term), *there is only agrarian capitalists.*

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

### Social Formations

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

Social formations are therefore *concrete* structures organized and characterized by a *dominant* mode of production which is interconnected with a complex set of other modes of production

that are subordinate to it. Thus, the simple petty commodity mode of production can be connected with a dominant tributary mode of production, with a slave mode of production or even with a capitalist mode of production. Similarly the slave mode of production may not be dominant, this being the rule when it is connected with a dominant tributary mode or even with the capitalist mode, as in the United States until 1865; or exceptionally, it may be the dominant mode, as in the formations of classical antiquity.

All the precapitalists societies are social formations combining the same elements although the combinations of the elements may of course differ from one another. The infinite variety of these formations, the Asian and African formations in particular, has been outrageously reduced to the *Asian Mode of production*. We prefer to speak of *Oriental and African formations*, characterized by 1) the predominance of a community or tributary mode of production, more or less developing into a feudal mode of production; 2) the existence of simple commodity relations in limited spheres; and 3) the existence of long distance trade relations. When there is no feudal mode of production or when it is very embryonic; and when there are no internal simple commodity relations; the formation, reduced to the combination of an undeveloped community or tributary mode of production and of long distance trade relations, would be of the *African* type.

The introduction of long distance trade in the explanation of social formations becomes necessary because these formations cannot always be understood when considered in isolation. While the relations which various formations entertain are sometimes marginal, these relations are very often decisive. While long distance trade is not a mode of production, it is a mode linking *autonomous* formations. This distinguishes it from internal trade: trade taking place within a given social formation. Internal trade is based on commodity exchanges characteristic of simple or slave (in this case slave-commodity) petty commodity modes of production which are the elements of the formation in question. But it can also be the extension of long distance trade, the way in which the goods with which the latter is concerned penetrate in depth into the formation.

Long distance trade brings together societies which do not know each other, and the cost of production of these commodities is also unknown to each society. Social groups trading in scarce commodities have a monopoly position from which they derive their profits. Very often this monopoly justifies the 'special' character of these groups -- specialized foreign trading castes or ethnic groups etc. -- so frequent in history (Jews in Europe, the Dioula in West Africa, etc.). In this trade, the subjectivist theory of value, meaningless when the production costs of

the goods are known to the partners, as is the case with capitalist trade, is still meaningful.

We shall see that long distance trade may be decisive in some societies. This applies when the local dominant classes can obtain a surplus from the producers within a social formation. In this case, long distance trade, by the monopoly profit it authorizes, makes possible the *transfer* of a portion of the surplus from one society to another. For the society which receives it, this transfer may be essential and may constitute the major basis of the wealth and power of its governing classes. The whole civilization may then depend on this trade, and the displacement of the trade circuits may lead to the decay of a particular region or, on the contrary, create conditions in which it will flourish without involving a marked regression or progression at the level of the productive forces. This is the explanation, in our opinion, of the ups and downs in the history of the Ancient and Mediterranean world, particularly as regards the Greek miracle and the flourishing and decay of the Arab world.

The analysis of a concrete social formation should therefore be based on that of the *mode of generation of the surplus* characteristic of a formation, of the possible *transfers* of surplus from or to other formations, and on the internal *distribution* of a surplus among the various recipients (classes and social groups). The very condition of existence of a class formation, as opposed to the "original negation", is that the development of the productive forces and therefore the degree of the division of labour accompanying it, is already enough to lead to a *surplus*, an excess of production over the consumption necessary to ensure the reconstitution of the labour power. This very general concept of surplus takes various forms according to the modes of production involved, either non-commodity (tribute, rent in kind etc.), or commodity. In these latter cases the term *surplus value* will be used, which contains the root *value* and therefore refers to commodity exchange. In the capitalist mode of production, profit is the specific form which the surplus value will take when it is redistributed in proportion to the capital advanced.

Since a social formation is a complex involving several modes of production, the surplus generated in this formation is not homogeneous: it adds together the surplus of various origins. The first essential question is to know what is the predominant mode of production, and therefore the predominant form of the surplus, for a particular concrete formation. A second point which is equally essential is to know to what extent the society lives on a surplus produced by itself and on a surplus transferred

from another society. In other words, what is that relative place taken by long distance trade for the formation in question? The distribution of this surplus among the social classes gives a formation its real face. Thus the analysis of a concrete formation demands the elucidation of the mode of predominance of one production mode over the others and of the mode of inter-connection between these modes of production.

The most common family of formations in the history of precapitalist civilizations is that of the predominantly tributary formations. On emerging from primitive communism, communities are constituted and then develop into the hierarchical forms of the latter. It is this general development which engenders the tributary mode of production. The slave and simple commodity modes of production interconnect with the tributary mode and occupy a more or less important place in the society according to the relative importance of the surplus extracted in the form of tribute. If the natural (ecological) conditions and the social conditions (degree of development of the productive forces) are favourable, a heavy tribute is paid. The state class collecting this tribute (the "Royal Court") redistributes a large part of it by providing a living for craftsmen who, in turn, supply it with the luxury goods it consumes. These craftsmen are often petty commodity producers. The handcraft industrial production can also be organized within the framework of enterprises using servile or free (wage-earning) manpower and producing for trading purposes. There is a class of traders between the state, the village communities, the craftsmen and the entrepreneurs (slave-owning or not) which organizes these trade circuits.

The connection of these secondary modes of production with the dominant tributary mode of production must therefore be analysed in terms of *circulation of the original surplus*, a circulation on which is grafted the possible generation of secondary surpluses (in the case of enterprises whose manpower is slave or wage-earning). It is also on this circulation of surplus that the transfer from the outside world may be grafted, if there is a long distance trade dominated by the traders of the particular formation. In a case where the tribute (of internal origin) is low, the tributary society should be relatively poor. But this society may, exceptionally, be wealthy if it benefits from a large external surplus. This is the case of societies depending largely on the *control of long distance trade circuits*. The existence and the prosperity of these societies will therefore depend, to a great extent, on this monopolized control of the relations which other formations (where an originally transferred surplus is generated) entertain through it. We will then have *tributary - trading formations*: the addition of the adjective "trading" marking the determinant

relative place of the surplus of external origin (profits from the monopoly of the long distance trade) over the surplus of internal origin (tribute). The relations may even be reversed here: at the level of the formation the transferred surplus supplies the secondary circuits of simple commodity production and a tribute may be levied on this surplus transferred by the dominant state class.

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

The slave based dominance does not have any general vocation and is practically nowhere the origin of class differentiations. The slave mode of production was only widespread in connection with the flourishing of commodity exchanges in Greece and Rome. Long distance trade was the origin of Greek civilization. The profits accruing from this trade supported a slave based commodity production. The major surplus was of external origin at the beginning: with the development of slavery the internal surplus occupied an increasingly important place and part of the slave-produced commodities were exported. Alexander's empire and then his Roman successor widened the geographical space of this exceptional formation. It is characteristic that its extension to the East, where it was checked by solid tributary formations, was difficult and limited. The centre of gravity of this formation shifted towards the north and the west where the tribute levied remained lower than in the east. The dependence of the formation on the outside world, from which it drew its slaves, shows its weakness. But even in this imperial area where slavery, simple commodity production and internal and external trade were exceptionally extensive, the community (in the West) and the tributary (in the East) modes of production persisted. The small Roman slave millennium is short compared to the millennia of the Egyptian and Chinese civilizations. From the ruins of its destruction by "Barbarians" there re-emerged a tributary formation, that of feudal Europe.

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

It should now be clear what we mean when we say that the concept of social formation is a historical concept. As emphasized by *Darcy Ribeiro* and recalled by *Silva Michelena*, technological progress -- the development of productive forces -- is *cumulative*. This progress takes place within the framework of a formation (for example the tributary or the capitalist formation) and makes it possible to date history. The *same* formation at two different ages always consists of production modes combined in a certain way, specific to that formation. Two formations of the same technological age, characterized by the same development level of productive forces, combine different modes of production. Hence although production modes do not constitute historical sequence of their emergence -- formations *have an age* and this age is given by the level of development of the productive forces.

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



The historical sequence of formation, added to the necessary absence of sequence of the modes they combine, means that it is absurd to draw any analogy between the same mode of production integrated into formations of different age: it would not be useful to compare the African/Roman slavery with that of the nineteenth century United States.

Capitalist formations are all characterized by the predominance of the capitalist mode of production. This predominance which is common to all capitalist formations does not exclude a great difference between its modes of expression according to whether the *capitalist formations are central or peripheral*. Compared with all the former modes, the capitalist mode of production has this particular characteristic: *all its products are commodities*, whereas only the products in which is incorporated the surplus of the former modes can assume the form of a commodity. In all the precapitalist modes, subsistence does not form the object of exchanges and the surplus is sometimes the object of a non-commodity circulation (tribute, rent in kind) and sometimes of commodity exchanges. The generalization of the commodity form of the product gives the capitalist mode of production the power to disintegrate the other modes of production which it confronts.

While precapitalist formations are characterized by a *stable co-existence* of different, inter-connected and graded modes, *the capitalist mode destroys the others*: It has a tendency to *become exclusive*. The condition of the tendency to exclusiveness is that it is based on the widening and deepening of the *internal market*. [This applies to central capitalist formations and not to peripheral formations.] In the peripheral formations, it will be seen that the dominant capitalist mode subdues and transforms the others: it disfigures them, deprives them of their functionality and subjects them to its own, without however radically disintegrating and destroying them.

The predominance of the capitalist mode of production is also noticeable on another level. At the *world system*, the central and peripheral formations are organized into one graded system. The disintegration of this system -- the formation of socialist or so called socialist states -- expresses nothing but the assumption that the system is superseded not from its periphery but from its centre. Nevertheless, it is only possible to attain full socialism at the world level, if, from this as from all other points of view, socialism cannot but be superior to capitalism which is *already* organized into a world system. Therefore, socialism cannot be the juxtaposition of national socialisms, which would be a step backward with respect to the integrated but not egalitarian world character of capitalism. Thus, there cannot be a socialist system other than a world-wide

one. That is also the reason why we do not have *two* world markets: the capitalist market and the socialist market; but a single one -- the former -- in which Eastern Europe participates marginally.

### Inter-Connection of Social Formations

The analysis of a social formation consists in elucidating the problems of the generation and circulation of the surplus in a formation. Each class mode of production determines a pair of antagonistic-united classes: state class and peasants in the tributary mode, masters and slaves in the slave mode, feudal lords and serfs in the feudal mode, and the bourgeois and proletarians in the capitalist mode. Each of these classes is defined by its functions *in production*. This essential reference to the production process cannot be reduced to the "ownership" of (title to) the means of production. The state class in the tributary mode does not own the land; the land belongs to the community. The feudal lord only enjoys eminent domain of the land, the community retaining a *right* (the right of use) over it. But both the state class and the feudal lords, organize and plan production, and hence *dominate* the productive process. The community as well as the simple commodity modes of production, determine a *class of producers*, since they are undifferentiated modes from the point of view of classes. Nevertheless, this is a social class: a group defined with reference to the process of production. With reference to the process of circulation of the surplus, we can define a class of traders. It is obvious that when the circulation of the surplus is not a commodity circulation, the dominant class of the mode assumes the function of levying tribute or direct payments from peasants.

Since a formation is a complex set of production modes, it is not surprising that every society has the aspect of a complex set of more than two classes: feudal lords, serf peasants, free peasants, trading craftsmen, traders, etc. A society cannot be reduced to its base. The organization of its *material life* requires that political and ideological functions be fulfilled in relation to the dominant mode of production and to the interconnection of modes specific to its formation. These functions may either be fulfilled directly by the classes defined above or by *social groups* depending on them. The real concrete social structure of a society will be marked by these groups to a very large extent. The most important among them is certainly the bureaucracy, which ensures the functioning of the state: the civil bureaucracy (tribute collectors, police and judges), the military, the religious bureaucracy, etc. Great progress will have been made when the bureaucracy thus defined (even in its broad sense) is no longer confused with the *state class* of the tributary mode or with the *state bourgeoisie* of a capitalism.

The bureaucracy does not fulfill the functions of direct domination of the productive process. On the other hand, the state class does control it directly: it plans and regulates (as is seen in China and Egypt). The same applies, *mutatis mutandis* to state capitalism in which the state bourgeoisie directs the enterprises, decides what to produce and how, etc. The domestic struggles between the "clan of technocrats" and that of the "bureaucrats" in Russia clearly reflect this distinction between the state bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy which is supposed to serve it.

This latter example of the conflict between a (ruling) class and the *group* which is supposed to serve it shows that a problem remains to be elucidated: the problem of the relations between the various *levels* of a mode of production. Since, as we have already pointed out, society cannot be reduced to its base, how do we determine the relations between the *economic level* and the superstructure (the politico-ideological level)? These relations differ from one mode of production to another. It is true that, whatever may be the mode of production, it is the economic level which is *determinant, in the last resort*, of the productive forces of a civilization. But it is important to distinguish this determination in the last instance from the *dominance of the economic or politico-ideological level*.

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

In the capitalist mode of production and in it alone, the generation of the surplus is obscure (opaque). As Marx himself pointed out, this is certainly the essential contribution of *capital*: the transformation of surplus value into profit. Narrow minded "economists" saw in this transformation a formal contradiction, the so-called contradiction between volumes I and II of *capital*. This simply shows that they are victims of the same alienation as their society: the *economistic alienation*. For this transformation makes the origin of profit (the surplus value) apparently disappear; it makes "capital", a *social relation* appear as a *thing* (the capital equipment into which this social power is incorporated); and endows this thing with a *supernatural power*: the power to be "productive". The term *fetichism* which Marx attributes to this process is very appropriate. Capital appears as productive, just like labour; the wages appear to be the "fair" remuneration of labour (whereas it represents the value of the labour power) just as profit appears to be the compensation for "services" rendered by capital (risk, savings, abstinence etc.). This opacity of the generation of the surplus engenders a particular form of alienation, different from the precapitalist forms of the latter, *economistic alienation*. The economic level is mystified while the political level is demystified. The society no longer controls the evolution of its material life: the latter appears as the resultant of "laws" which are imposed on it as physical and natural laws. The "economic laws" -- the supply of and the demand for goods, labour, capital etc. -- bear witness to this alienation.

That is why "economics" is an ideology, an ideology of universal harmonies; it reduces "social laws" to the status of laws of nature, independent of the social organization. Politics on the other hand is demystified; it is no longer a religion. The true religion of the capitalist society is "economism", in vulgar terms "the purse", in less shocking but equivalent terms the *consumismo* (the cult of consumption for its own sake without reference to needs). The entire crises of the contemporary civilization can be found here, because this ideology shortens the *time horizon* of society, makes society lose sight of its view of the future. At the same time, demystified politics becomes the sphere of an asserted rationality. Consequently the social groups which fulfill functions at this level are naturally and obviously *at the service* of the society; they are not at any time against their masters. Bureaucrats and soldiers must justify their functions in civilian terms.

Thus the analysis of the interconnection of levels supplements that of social formations. Considered together, these two analyses alone enable us to understand the dynamics of classes and social groups. Without this analysis we have nothing

but meaningless appearances. Empirical analysis detects social "categories" of an arbitrary number: two (the "rich" and the "poor") or three (the "intermediaries between the rich and the poor), or 15 or 20 (occupational categories or with arbitrary income brackets), at the extreme one category per person! (where we find again the individualistic requirement of the ideology which replaces social science). It is obvious that the dynamics of the society then becomes incomprehensible or arbitrary. Here again the historian is the victim to the same alienation as the society he studies.

### Obstruction of Trading Formations in Black Africa

Black Africa shows that long distance trade does not itself engender capitalism.

Contemporary Black Africa can be divided into regions 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. On the contrary, beside the question of "race" -- which is no more homogeneous nor less mixed 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 the feeling of unity in Black Africa. Seen from London, Paris or Lisbon, Black Africa appeared to the European observer as a homogeneous entity. Looked at from inside, Black Africa is extremely diverse. This diversity emanates not only from the artificial colonial legacy of state boundaries but also from a reality of some 100 or 200 *regions* which still readily cross the frontiers of the present states. These regions do not derive their definition from their geographical position alone, but also from the homogeneous nature of their social, cultural, economic and even political conditions.

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

do so, we have to go back in time and distinguish between four separate periods.

The premercantilist period stretches from the beginning until the 17th century. In the course of this long history, relations were forged between Black Africa and the rest of the old World, particularly between both ends of the Sahara. Social formations emerged and they cannot be understood if they are not placed within the context of all the multitude of social formations. During that period, Africa taken as a whole does not appear as inferior or weaker than the rest of the Old World, also taken as a whole. The unequal development within Africa was not any worse than that north of the Sahara, on both sides of the Mediterranean.

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

Africa, during premercantilist period (up to the 17th century), had 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, Africa was not on the whole more backward than the rest of the world. The great confusion which arises in the discussions on the traditional African Society is due to a number of reasons of which there are at least four main ones: 1) The scarcity of documents and remains of the past, leaving only the accounts of Arab travellers; 2) the confusion between the concept of mode of production and the concept of social formation which calls for clarification and a basic distinction which we have already stressed; 3) the confusion between the different periods of African history, particularly between the premercantilist and the following mercantilist period; and 4) the ideological prejudices against Africa, clearly connected with colonial racism.

African formations of the premercantile period developed *autonomously*, although this development followed a parallel course to that of the formations of the Mediterranean world, both Eastern and European. In the Sudan-Sahel region immediately south of the Sahara one finds all the importance of the trans-Saharan trade. This trade enabled the whole of the Old World (Mediterranean, Arab and European) to be supplied in gold from the main source of production of the yellow metal in the Upper Senegal and Ashanti regions. For the societies of tropical

Africa, this trade became the basis of their organization. The mining of gold under the orders of the king provided the ruling classes of the countries concerned with the means of obtaining from across the Sahara, rare luxury goods (cloths, drugs, perfumes, dates and salt), and with the means of establishing and strengthening their social and political power (horses, copper, iron bars, weapons) within their countries. This trade thus encouraged social differentiations, the creation of States and Empires just as it promoted the progress of the productive forces (the improvement of tools, the adaptation of techniques and products to suit local climatic conditions, etc.).

In return, Africa supplied mainly gold and a few other rare products (gum and ivory) and some slaves. It is only recently that Europe, for obvious political reasons, has tried to confuse this trade between equal autonomous partners with the devastating slave trade of the mercantilist period: the small number of black people in the southern areas of Maghreb -- a few hundred thousand men compared with some hundred million Blacks in America -- shows the futility of this confusion. On the other hand, the stock of gold from tropical Africa built up in Europe and in the East throughout the centuries reminds us of the principal nature of this trade. Indeed, this is why the ideas which accompanied the goods were easily accepted (e.g. acceptance of Islam in the Senegal river areas).

The large volume of this trade, its *egalitarian* nature and the autonomous character of the African formations are unambiguously described in the Arabic literature of the period. Furthermore, one can understand the admiration expressed in the accounts of Arab travellers if one accepts that the development of North African formations and those of West Africa belong to the same technological age. They were very similar in their structures just as the place they occupied in the world system of the time was similar. The link between the royal monopoly of the mining of gold and its marketing by Moslem traders forms the basis of the structure of these societies. These traders were, as was very often the case, organized in a sort of caste system, and here, belonged to a religious minority.

For centuries the Mediterranean social formations and those of tropical Africa were united by a bond, for better or for worse. The vicissitudes of the one had quick repercussions on the others, just as glory and wealth reached them all simultaneously. Thus, the gradual shifting of routes from West to East was obviously reflected in the parallel shift of the civilization and of the powerful states both in North Africa and in the West African Savannah lands (reflected in the successive might of Ghana, Mali, Hausa cities, Bornou, Kanem, Dar Fur, ...). This also explains why the shift of centre of the newly born

European mercantilist capitalism from the Mediterranean towards the Atlantic was to cause a crisis in Africa. This shift, studied by *Braudel* with his usual talent and care for details, heralded the decline, in the 16th century, of the Italian towns which, since the 13th century, had opened the way for an evolution which was to become decisive for the future history of humanity. Similarly we can say that this shift was to cause the downfall of both the Arab world and the Sudan-Sahel regions of Black Africa. Some decades latter, the presence of Western Europe along the coasts of Africa was to become a reality. The shift of the centre of gravity in trade, from the Savannah hinterland to the coast was a direct consequence of the change of the centre of gravity in Europe. Africa was not to play the same role as that of the preceding period since henceforth it was drawn into mercantilist capitalism.

It is *impossible* to know what the African formations would have become if they had continued to evolve by themselves after the 17th century. Integrated at an early stage in the emerging capitalist system -- like the American Indian formations -- the African formations were really crushed and, as we shall see later, *retrogressed*. It is however possible to *diverge* that the large-scale premercantilist African trade, which was brilliant in some regions, was interlinked with relatively poor communal or tribute-paying formations, and that, as such, it was unable itself to generate the capitalist mode of production.

#### Obstruction of tributary formations: Uneven Development

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



obstruction of tributary formations to the persistence of the community and to its exceptional resistance to deterioration.

The development of civilization in the Ancient World seems to have occurred in four places and during the same period if not strictly at the same time: in Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley and the Yellow River Valley. It is not a mere coincidence that these places happen to be river valleys in comparatively hot regions. It is clear that ecological conditions were a determining factor at the beginning. Irrigation made possible both a higher productivity (the annual output per peasant family) and a higher population density. It is therefore responsible for the first real concentration of people, for the circulation goods, men and ideas.

In all four cases, the civilization took an identical form. It occurred in a tributary form: a theocratic/bureaucratic ruling class emerged from among the communities and asserted itself in the role of organiser of the state rule and economic structure of the society. Again, this is no mere accident. From this we must draw the conclusion that the first type of social class formation was not a slave society but a tribute-paying society.

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

These two centres of tributary civilization (China and Egypt) call for some remarks. Firstly, they were truly central in the sense that they formed a very high proportion of the total population of the globe. There were nearly 10 million people in Egypt as early as the year 2000 B.C. while China rapidly reached a population of 100 million owing to the possibilities for expansion, when the rest of the world population was hardly as big and was scattered over millions of square miles, with a density 10 to 100 times less. Secondly, in these two civilizations, the village system weakened quite early and almost disappeared as state authority rapidly became powerful. The community itself survived as a *community of families* but it lost the absolute right of ownership of land in favour of a wider and superior community which soon became a *nation*. Thirdly, the ruling class organized at national level was not particularly "despotic", as it is too rashly and too glibly stated by westerners. As a national state class, it had the national interest at heart and organized useful national construction works. The Pyramids are not its main achievements, they pale into insignificance in comparison with the harnessing of the Nile waters which involved an amount of work several hundred times greater! The state ruling class was comparatively open and social mobility in access to it was much greater than in many other civilizations. In contrast with the severity of European feudalism, the abuses of those societies were limited; and it can be said that the central tributary civilizations do not really deserve to be called despotic. They only occasionally became so when "barbarian" invaders overran the country, and even then the barbarians were soon assimilated and civilized. They also became so during troubled times when the state power gave way to feudal autonomies very similar to those of feudal Europe. Fourthly, the state absolute power characteristic of these fully-developed formations provided the tributary mode with a clearly dominant role. Long distance trade, free or slave-based handcraft production and wage-labour sector production were all subjected to close control by the state which taxed them. The society was therefore despotic only with respect to those sectors and not with respect to the peasants. In feudal Europe, the situation was exactly the reverse: the state, being too weak, allowed the towns to flourish "unhindered" while the feudal lords, being in close contact with the peasants were free to oppress the rural masses. Fifthly, these two fully-developed modes of tributary formations were later to *internalize* the progress achieved by the productive forces. The production relations laid down by the tributary mode adapted themselves to cope with a wide range of development levels of the productive forces. Conflicts between them only occurred when the capitalist mode was introduced from outside. The historical *duration* of the completed tributary mode was therefore a long one and this seems quite natural. However, the fact of retaining the progress

within the society meant future *destruction*: comparatively speaking, progress in the less-developed and partially complete formations forced relations between production relations and productive forces to *supersede* the precapitalist stage.

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

In the western part of the Ancient World, Egypt - and, with their own vicissitudes, Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley -- provided the inspiration and the impetus. The trade between the three western poles of tributary civilization led to the creation of peripheral trading formations: Phoenician, Syrian and Arab cities. The semi-nomad tribal Kingdoms of ancient Asia and of Southern Europe attempted to copy the Egyptian model or that of Mesopotamia or the Indus Valley without success because of their fragile material basis. They could extract only a small surplus and for this very reason, the communities remained strong. State centralization was poor and all the time threatened by local autonomous groups. Greece, after copying from Crete, one of the Kingdoms inspired by Egypt, developed to the full the peripheral nature of its formation. The exceptional expansion of its commercial roles together with its restricted ability to extract a domestic agricultural surplus-- for obvious ecological reasons -- led that country to adopt a *new* and *unorthodox* approach: the extensive recourse to slavery. That pool of slave labour, supplied essentially from raids on other territories, made it possible to increase commodity production, to make the society more than a mere trade intermediary and created the conditions for its own reproduction, the production from slave labour being in turn used as a means to obtain new slaves. Later, Rome extended this formation to embrace the whole of the Mediterranean basin.

This slave-based formation did not have the flexibility of the tributary formations because it assumed the existence of a periphery from which it obtained its manpower. For, the strong tributary societies with which it entered into trade relations even of domination *did not sell their men*. So the periphery from which slaves were obtained was the "barbarian" periphery of Europe, Celtic, Germanic and Slav. But once again, it will be noted that the replacement of this slave system did not start at Rome, the centre, but at its periphery. It was not the revolts by the slaves but the attacks by "barbarians" which led to the Empire's crumble. The "barbarians" building on the ruins of the Empire superseded the slave system and established

the feudal mode, a variant of the tributary mode. The tributary mode, like its feudal variant, was therefore *superior* to the slave mode. From its inception, it occurred where ecological conditions were favourable; and where they were not so, it emerged with difficulty, and through a stage of slavery.

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

One point remains to be clarified: the societies serving as periphery to the tributary mode did not all give rise to capitalism although some of them did. The Byzantine Empire followed by its successor, the Ottoman Empire, were groups of formations peripheral to the tributary system. They were peripheral formations in the sense that the tributary mode never managed to establish itself there in its completed form. Some regions of these empires, particularly in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Syria and North Africa, remained very *well-organized* communities and they constantly threatened to revolt over the payment of tribute to Constantinople and later to Istanbul.

Other communities stagnated because the slavery and trade on which their former prosperity rested had become considerably reduced. Such was the case of Greece and the Oriental cities. Moreover, the commodity production of these regions was transferred to the capital city to which Greek, Egyptian and Syrian craftsmen were deported by the thousand. It was only in the capital city that the centralized collection of tribute levied over a vast empire could sustain the commodity production.

In fact, we are here dealing with a tributary formation trying to maintain itself against a substratum of the population of a more ancient civilization which kept resisting it.

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

The genesis of central capitalism therefore constitutes the *first main manifestation* of the *law of uneven development of formations*. We express this law in the following way: a formation is never superseded from its centre but from its periphery. The main contradiction of a formation which defines the dominant mode characterizing it is not the main aspect of a contradiction. That is to be found in another *field*: the periphery of the system. The reason is that the existence of a periphery enables the centre *to transfer* to the periphery the effects of the main contradiction. Therefore it becomes easier for the centre to overcome this contradiction by shifting it onto the periphery which becomes the *weak link* of the system, hence the link which will ultimately become the point at which the system is superseded, if the conditions are ripe.

We have also shown that the precapitalist formations, in their varied forms, comprise a dominant formation -- the tributary formation -- and a series of peripheral ones -- the slave, feudal, and mercantile formations. The tributary formation is essentially explained by itself, through its specific internal dynamism. It is *self-centred* and constitutes the "normal" channel of evolution. In contrast, the peripheral precapitalist formations do not reveal their nature through their own internal dynamism, but through the interaction of that dynamism with the action of the completed tributary formations. In that respect, they are not self-centred and constitute "unusual" channels. There is a striking parallel between this dialectic and that of the centre and the periphery of the capitalist system. Obviously the time-span and the related geographical span are not identical for both the genesis of capitalism and that of socialism. There was no world system during the precapitalist era. There were multiple *systems*; and in the Ancient World, there were two early fully-developed tributary centres: Egypt and China, and a third, India, set up in a later period. Around these centres, a multitude of varied peripheries sprang up and came into contact with one another along their changing frontiers

We can therefore distinguish between the different peripheries, the Mediterranean and European ones (Greece, Rome, Feudal Europe, Arab and Ottoman World), those of Black Africa, etc. It was capitalism which, for the first time, became a unique world system while history accelerated at a logarithmic rate.

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*Le Développement du Capitalisme en Afrique Noire, L'Homme et Société, 1968 (1968);*

*Du Congo Français à l'UDEAC, 1880-1968 (1968);*

*Le Monde des Affaires Sénégalaises, 1969; and*

"Development and Structural Change: The African Experience, 1950-70," *Journal of International Affairs*, XXIV, 2 (1970).

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