

CHAPTER IV

Europe and the Roots of African Underdevelopment—To 1885

- The European Slave Trade as a Basic Factor in African Underdevelopment
 - Technical Stagnation and Distortion of the African Economy in the Pre-Colonial Epoch
 - Continuing Politico-Military Developments in Africa—1500 to 1885
 - The Coming of Imperialism and Colonialism
-

THE RELATION BETWEEN THE DEGREE OF DESTITUTION OF PEOPLES OF Africa and the length and nature of the exploitation they had to endure is evident. Africa remains marked by the crimes of the slave-traders: up to now, her potentialities are restricted by under-population.

—AHMED SEKOU TOURE,
Republic of Guinea, 1962

The European Slave Trade as a Basic Factor in African Underdevelopment

To discuss trade between Africans and Europeans in the four centuries before colonial rule is virtually to discuss slave trade. Strictly speaking, the African only became a slave when he reached a society where he worked as a slave. Before that, he was first a free man and then a captive. Nevertheless, it is acceptable to speak of the trade in slaves when referring to the shipment of captives from Africa to various other parts of the world where they were to live and work as the property of Europeans. The title of this section is deliberately chosen to call attention to the fact that the shipments were all by Europeans to markets controlled by Europeans, and this was in the interest of European capitalism and nothing else. In East Africa and the Sudan, many Africans were taken by Arabs and were sold to Arab buyers. This is known (in European books) as the “Arab Slave Trade.” Therefore, let it be clear that when Europeans shipped Africans to European buyers it was the “European Slave Trade” from Africa.

Undoubtedly, with few exceptions such as Hawkins, European buyers purchased African captives on the coasts of Africa and the transaction between themselves and Africans was a form of trade. It is also true that very often a captive was sold and resold as he made his way from the interior to the port of embarkation—and that too was a form of trade. However, on the whole, the process by which captives were obtained on African soil was not trade at all. It was through warfare, trickery, banditry, and kidnapping. When one tries to measure the effect of European slave trading on the African continent, it is essential to realize that one is measuring the effect of social violence rather than trade in any normal sense of the word.

Many things remain uncertain about the slave trade and its consequences for Africa, but the general picture of destructiveness is clear, and that destructiveness can be shown to be the logical consequence of the manner

of recruitment of captives in Africa. One of the uncertainties concerns the basic question of how many Africans were imported. This has long been an object of speculation, with estimates ranging from a few millions to over one hundred million. A recent study has suggested a figure of about ten million Africans landed alive in the Americas, the Atlantic islands, and Europe. Because it is a low figure, it is already being used by European scholars who are apologists for the capitalist system and its long record of brutality in Europe and abroad. In order to whitewash the European slave trade, they find it convenient to start by minimizing the numbers concerned. The truth is that any figure of Africans imported into the Americas which is narrowly based on the surviving records is bound to be low, because there were so many people at the time who had a vested interest in smuggling slaves (and withholding data). Nevertheless, if the low figure of ten million was accepted as a basis for evaluating the impact of slaving on Africa as a whole, the conclusions that could legitimately be drawn would confound those who attempt to make light of the experience of the rape of Africans from 1445 to 1870.

On any basic figure of Africans landed alive in the Americas, one would have to make several extensions—starting with a calculation to cover mortality in transshipment. The Atlantic crossing, or “Middle Passage,” as it was called by European slavers, was notorious for the number of deaths incurred, averaging in the vicinity of 15 to 20 per cent. There were also numerous deaths in Africa between time of capture and time of embarkation, especially in cases where captives had to travel hundreds of miles to the coast. Most important of all (given that warfare was the principal means of obtaining captives) it is necessary to make some estimate as to the number of people killed and injured so as to extract the millions who were taken alive and sound. The resultant figure would be many times the millions landed alive outside of Africa, and it is that figure which represents the number of Africans directly removed from the population and labor force of Africa because of the establishment of slave production by Europeans.

The massive loss to the African labor force was made more critical because it was composed of able-bodied young men and young women. Slave buyers preferred their victims between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five, and preferably in the early twenties; the sex ratio being about two men to one woman. Europeans often accepted younger African children, but rarely any older person. They shipped the most healthy wherever possible, taking the trouble to get those who had already survived an attack of smallpox, and who were therefore immune from further attacks of that disease, which was then one of the world’s great killer diseases.

Absence of data about the size of Africa's population in the fifteenth century makes it difficult to carry out any scientific assessment of the results of the population outflow. But, nothing suggests that there was any increase in the continent's population over the centuries of slaving, although that was the trend in other parts of the world. Obviously, fewer babies were born than would otherwise have been the case if millions of child-bearing ages were not eliminated. Besides, it is essential to recognize that the slave trade across the Atlantic Ocean was not the only connection which Europeans had with slaving in Africa. The slave trade on the Indian Ocean has been called the "East African Slave Trade" and the "Arab Slave Trade" for so long that it hides the extent to which it was also a European slave trade. When the slave trade from East Africa was at its height in the eighteenth century and in the early nineteenth century, the destination of most captives was the European-owned plantation economies of Mauritius, Réunion, and Seychelles—as well as the Americas, via the Cape of Good Hope. Besides, Africans laboring as slaves in certain Arab countries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were all ultimately serving the European capitalist system which set up a demand for slave-grown products, such as the cloves grown in Zanzibar under the supervision of Arab masters.

No one has been able to come up with a figure representing total losses to the African population sustained through the extraction of slave labor from all areas to all destinations over the many centuries that slave trade existed. However, on every other continent from the fifteenth century onwards, the population showed constant and sometimes spectacular natural increase; while it is striking that the same did not apply to Africa. One European scholar gave the following estimates of world population (in millions) according to continents:

	1650	1750	1850	1900
Africa	100	100	100	120
Europe	103	144	274	423
Asia	257	437	656	857

None of the above figures is really precise, but they do indicate a consensus among researchers on population that the huge African continent has an abnormal record of stagnation in this respect, and there is no causative factor other than the trade in slaves to which attention can be drawn.

An emphasis on population loss as such is highly relevant to the question of socio-economic development. Population growth played a major

role in European development in providing labor, markets, and the pressures which led to further advance. Japanese population growth had similar positive effects; and in other parts of Asia which remained pre-capitalist, the size of the population led to a much more intensive exploitation of the land than has ever been the case in what is still a sparsely peopled African continent.

So long as the population density was low, then human beings viewed as units of labor were far more important than other factors of production such as land. From one end of the continent to the other, it is easy to find examples showing that African people were conscious that population was in their circumstances the most important factor of production. Among the Bemba, for instance, numbers of subjects were held to be more important than land. Among the Shambala of Tanzania, the same feeling was expressed in the saying "A king is people." Among the Balanta of Guinea-Bissau, the family's strength is represented by the number of hands there are to cultivate the land. Certainly, many African rulers acquiesced in the European slave trade for what they considered to be reasons of self-interest, but on no scale of rationality could the outflow of population be measured as being anything but disastrous for African societies.

African economic activity was affected both directly and indirectly by population loss. For instance, when the inhabitants of a given area were reduced below a certain number in an environment where the tsetse fly was present, the remaining few had to abandon the area. In effect, enslavement was causing these people to lose their battle to tame and harness nature—a battle which is at the basis of development. Violence almost meant insecurity. The opportunity presented by European slave dealers became the major (though not the only) stimulus for a great deal of social violence between different African communities and within any given community. It took the form more of raiding and kidnaping than of regular warfare, and that fact increased the element of fear and uncertainty.

Both openly and by implication, all the European powers in the nineteenth century indicated their awareness of the fact that the activities connected with producing captives were inconsistent with other economic pursuits. That was the time when Britain in particular wanted Africans to collect palm produce and rubber and to grow agricultural crops for export in place of slaves; and it was clear that slave raiding was violently conflicting with that objective in Western, Eastern, and Central Africa. Long before that date, Europeans accepted that fact when their self-interest was involved. For example, in the seventeenth century, the Portuguese and Dutch actually discouraged slave trade on the Gold Coast, for they recognized that it would be incompatible with gold trade. However, by the

end of that century, gold had been discovered in Brazil, and the importance of gold supplies from Africa was lessened. Within the total Atlantic pattern, African slaves became more important than gold, and Brazilian gold was offered for African captives at Whydah (Dahomey) and Accra. At that point, slaving began undermining the Gold Coast economy and destroying the gold trade. Slave raiding and kidnaping made it unsafe to mine and to travel with gold; and raiding for captives proved more profitable than gold mining. One European on the scene noted that “as one fortunate marauding makes a native rich in a day, they therefore exert themselves rather in war, robbery and plunder than in their old business of digging and collecting gold.”

The above changeover from gold mining to slave raiding took place within a period of a few years between 1700 and 1710, when the Gold Coast came to supply about five thousand to six thousand captives per year. By the end of the eighteenth century, a much smaller number of captives were exported from the Gold Coast, but the damage had already been done. It is worth noting that Europeans sought out different parts of West and Central Africa at different times to play the role of major suppliers of slaves to the Americas. This meant that virtually every section of the long western coastline between the Senegal and Cunene rivers had at least a few years' experience of intensive trade in slaves—with all its consequences. Besides, in the history of eastern Nigeria, the Congo, northern Angola, and Dahomey, there were periods extending over decades when exports remained at an average of many thousands per year. Most of those areas were also relatively highly developed within the African context. They were leading forces inside Africa, whose energies would otherwise have gone towards their own self-improvement and the betterment of the continent as a whole.

The changeover to warlike activities and kidnaping must have affected all branches of economic activity, and agriculture in particular. Occasionally, in certain localities food production was increased to provide supplies for slave ships, but the overall consequences of slaving on agricultural activities in Western, Eastern, and Central Africa were negative. Labor was drawn off from agriculture and conditions became unsettled. Dahomey, which in the sixteenth century was known for exporting food to parts of what is now Togo, was suffering from famines in the nineteenth century. The present generation of Africans will readily recall that in the colonial period when able-bodied men left their homes as migrant laborers, that upset the farming routine in the home districts and often caused famines. Slave trading after all meant migration of labor in a manner one hundred times more brutal and disruptive.

To achieve economic development, one essential condition is to make the maximum use of the country's labor and natural resources. Usually, that demands peaceful conditions, but there have been times in history when social groups have grown stronger by raiding their neighbors for women, cattle, and goods, because they then used the "booty" from the raids for the benefit of their own community. Slaving in Africa did not even have that redeeming value. Captives were shipped outside instead of being utilized within any given African community for creating wealth from nature. It was only as an accidental by-product that in some areas Africans who recruited captives for Europeans realized that they were better off keeping some captives for themselves. In any case, slaving prevented the remaining population from effectively engaging in agriculture and industry, and it employed professional slave-hunters and warriors to destroy rather than build. Quite apart from the moral aspect and the immense suffering that it caused, the European slave trade was economically totally irrational from the viewpoint of African development.

For certain purposes, it is necessary to be more specific and to speak of the trade in slaves not in general continent-wide terms but rather with reference to the varying impact on several regions. The relative intensity of slave-raiding in different areas is fairly well known. Some South African peoples were enslaved by the Boers and some North African Moslems by Christian Europeans, but those were minor episodes. The zones most notorious for human exports were, firstly, West Africa from Senegal to Angola along a belt extending about two hundred miles inland and, secondly, that part of East-Central Africa which today covers Tanzania, Mozambique, Malawi, northern Zambia, and eastern Congo. Furthermore, within each of those broad areas, finer distinctions can be drawn.

It might therefore appear that slave trade did not adversely affect the development of some parts of Africa, simply because exports were non-existent or at a low level. However, the contention that European slave trade was an underdeveloping factor for the continent as a whole must be upheld, because it does not follow that an African district which did not trade with Europe was entirely free from whatever influences were exerted by Europe. European trade goods percolated into the deepest interior, and (more significantly) the orientation of large areas of the continent towards human exports meant that other positive interactions were thereby ruled out.

The above proposition may be more fully grasped by making some comparisons. In any given economy, the various components reflect the well-being of others. Therefore, when there is depression in one sector, that depression invariably transfers itself to others to some extent. Similarly,

when there is buoyancy in one sector, then others benefit. Turning to biological sciences, it will be found that students of ecology recognize that a single change, such as the disappearance of a snail species, could trigger off negative or positive reactions in spheres that superficially appear unconnected. Parts of Africa left “free” by export trends in captives must have been affected by the tremendous dislocation—in ways that are not easy to comprehend, because it is so much a question of what *might* have happened.

Hypothetical questions such as “What might have happened if . . . ?” sometimes lead to absurd speculations. But it is entirely legitimate and very necessary to ask “What might have happened in Barotseland (southern Zambia) if there were not generalized slave trading across the whole belt of central Africa which lay immediately north of Barotseland?” “What would have happened in Buganda if the Katangese were concentrating on selling copper to the Baganda instead of captives to Europeans?”

During the colonial epoch, the British forced Africans to sing,

*Rule Britannia, Britannia rule the waves
Britons never never never shall be slaves.*

The British themselves started singing the tune in the early eighteenth century, at the height of using Africans as slaves. “What would have been Britain’s level of development had millions of them been put to work as slaves outside of their homelands over a period of four centuries?” Furthermore, assuming that those wonderful fellows could never never never have been slaves, one could speculate further on the probable effects on their development had continental Europe been enslaved. Had that been the case, its nearest neighbors would have been removed from the ambit of fruitful trade with Britain. After all, trade between the British Isles and places like the Baltic and the Mediterranean is unanimously considered by scholars to have been the earliest stimulus to the English economy in the late feudal and early capitalist period, even before the era of overseas expansion.

One tactic that is now being employed by certain European (including American) scholars is to say that the European slave trade was undoubtedly *a moral evil*, but it was *economically good* for Africa. Here attention will be drawn only very briefly to a few of those arguments to indicate how ridiculous they can be. One that receives much emphasis is that African rulers and other persons obtained European commodities in exchange for their captives, and this was how Africans gained “wealth.” This suggestion fails to take into account the fact that several European imports were competing with and strangling African products; it fails to

take into account the fact that none of the long list of European articles were of the type which entered into the productive process, but were rather items to be rapidly consumed or stowed away uselessly; and it incredibly overlooks the fact that the majority of the imports were of the worst quality even as consumer goods—cheap gin, cheap gunpowder, pots and kettles full of holes, beads, and other assorted rubbish.

Following from the above, it is suggested that certain African kingdoms grew strong economically and politically as a consequence of the trade with Europeans. The greatest of the West African kingdoms, such as Oyo, Benin, Dahomey, and Asante are cited as examples. Oyo and Benin were great long before making contact with Europeans, and while both Dahomey and Asante grew stronger during the period of the European slave trade, the roots of their achievements went back to much earlier years. Furthermore—and this is a major fallacy in the argument of the slave-trade apologists—the fact that a given African state grew politically more powerful at the same time as it engaged in selling captives to Europeans is not automatically to be attributed to the credit of the trade in slaves. A cholera epidemic may kill thousands in a country and yet the population increases. The increase obviously came about *in spite of* and not because of the cholera. This simple logic escapes those who speak about the European slave trade benefiting Africa. The destructive tendency of slave trading can be clearly established; and, wherever a state seemingly progressed in the epoch of slave trading, the conclusion is simply that it did so in spite of the adverse effects of a process that was more damaging than cholera. This is the picture that emerges from a detailed study of Dahomey, for instance, and in the final analysis although Dahomey did its best to expand politically and militarily while still tied to slave trade, that form of economic activity seriously undermined its economic base and left it much worse off.

A few of the arguments about the economic benefits of the European slave trade for Africa amount to nothing more than saying that exporting millions of captives was a way of avoiding starvation in Africa! To attempt to reply to that would be painful and time-wasting. But, perhaps a slightly more subtle version of the same argument requires a reply: namely, the argument that Africa gained because in the process of slave trading new food crops were acquired from the American continent and these became staples in Africa. The crops in question are maize and cassava, which became staples in Africa late in the nineteenth century and in the present century. But the spread of food crops is one of the most common phenomena in human history. Most crops originated in only one of the continents, and then social contact caused their transfer to other parts of the world. Trading in slaves has no special bearing on whether crops spread—

the simplest forms of trade would have achieved the same result. Today, the Italians have (hard) wheat foods like spaghetti and macaroni as their staple, while most Europeans use the potato. The Italians took the idea of the spaghetti-type foods from the Chinese noodle after Marco Polo returned from travels there, while Europe adopted the potato from American Indians. In neither case were Europeans enslaved before they could receive a benefit that was the logical heritage of all mankind, but Africans are to be told that the European slave trade developed us by bringing us maize and cassava.

All of the above points are taken from books and articles published recently, as the fruit of research in major British and American universities. They are probably not the commonest views even among European bourgeois scholars, but they are representative of a growing trend that seems likely to become the new accepted orthodoxy in metropolitan capitalist countries; and this significantly coincides with Europe's struggle against the further decolonization of Africa economically and mentally. In one sense, it is preferable to ignore such rubbish and isolate our youth from its insults; but unfortunately one of the aspects of current African underdevelopment is that the capitalist publishers and bourgeois scholars dominate the scene and help mold opinions the world over. It is for that reason that writing of the type which justifies the trade in slaves has to be exposed as racist bourgeois propaganda, having no connection with reality or logic. It is a question not merely of history but of present-day liberation struggle in Africa.

Technical Stagnation and Distortion of the African Economy in the Pre-Colonial Epoch

It has already been indicated that in the fifteenth century European technology was not totally superior to that of other parts of the world. There were certain specific features which were highly advantageous to Europe—such as shipping and (to a lesser extent) guns. Europeans trading to Africa had to make use of Asian and African consumer goods, showing that their system of production was not absolutely superior. It is particularly striking that in the early centuries of trade, Europeans relied heavily on Indian cloths for resale in Africa, and they also purchased cloths on several parts of the West African coast for resale elsewhere. Morocco, Mauritania, Senegambia, Ivory Coast, Benin, Yorubaland, and Loango were all exporters to other parts of Africa—through European middlemen. Yet, by the time that Africa entered the colonial era, it was concentrating almost entirely on the export of raw cotton and the import of manufactured cotton

cloth. This remarkable reversal is tied to technological advance in Europe and to stagnation of technology in Africa owing to the very trade with Europe.

Cloth manufacture in the world went through a stage of handlooms and small-scale craft production. Up to the sixteenth century, that was the general pattern in Africa, Asia, and Europe: with Asian cloth-makers being the most skilled in the world. India is the classic example where the British used every means at their disposal to kill the cloth industry, so that British cloth could be marketed everywhere, including inside India itself. In Africa, the situation was not so clear-cut, nor did it require so much conscious effort by Europeans to destroy African cloth manufacture, but the trend was the same. Europe benefited technologically from its external trade contacts, while Africa either failed to benefit or actually lost. Vital inventions and innovations appeared in England in the late eighteenth century, after profits from external trade had been reinvested. Indeed, the new machinery represented the investment of primary capital accumulated from trading and from slavery. African and Indian trade strengthened British industry, which in turn crushed whatever industry existed in what is now called the “underdeveloped” countries.

African demand for cloth was increasing rapidly in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, so that there was a market for all cloth produced locally as well as room for imports from Europe and Asia. But, directed by an acquisitive capitalist class, European industry increased its capacity to produce on a large scale by harnessing the energy of wind, water, and coal. European cloth industry was able to copy fashionable Indian and African patterns, and eventually to replace them. Partly by establishing a stranglehold on the distribution of cloth around the shores of Africa, and partly by swamping African products by importing cloth in bulk, European traders eventually succeeded in putting an end to the expansion of African cloth manufacture.

There are many varied social factors which combine to determine when a society makes a breakthrough from small-scale craft technology to equipment designed to harness nature so that labor becomes more effective. One of the major factors is the existence of a demand for more products than can be made by hand, so that technology is asked to respond to a definite social need—such as that for clothes. When European cloth became dominant on the African market, it meant that African producers were cut off from the increasing demand. The craft producers either abandoned their tasks in the face of cheap available European cloth, or they continued on the same small hand-worked instruments to create styles and pieces for localized markets. Therefore, there was what can be called “technological

arrest” or stagnation, and in some instances actual regression, since people forgot even the simple techniques of their forefathers. The abandonment of traditional iron smelting in most parts of Africa is probably the most important instance of technological regression.

Development means a capacity for self-sustaining growth. It means that an economy must register advances which in turn will promote further progress. The loss of industry and skill in Africa was extremely small, if we measure it from the viewpoint of modern scientific achievements or even by standards of England in the late eighteenth century. However, it must be borne in mind that to be held back at one stage means that it is impossible to go on to a further stage. When a person was forced to leave school after only two years of primary school education, it is no reflection on him that he is academically and intellectually less developed than someone who had the opportunity to be schooled right through to university level. What Africa experienced in the early centuries of trade was precisely a loss of development *opportunity*, and this is of the greatest importance.

One of the features associated with technological advance is a spirit of scientific inquiry closely related to the process of production. This leads to inventiveness and innovation. During the period of capitalist development in Europe, this was very much the case, and historians lay great emphasis on the spirit of inventiveness of the English in the eighteenth century. Socialist societies do not leave inventions merely to chance or good luck—they actively cultivate tendencies for innovation. For instance, in the German Democratic Republic, the youth established a “Young Innovators’ Fair” in 1958, calling upon the intellectual creativity of socialist youth, so that within ten years over two thousand new inventions were presented at that fair. The connection between Africa and Europe from the fifteenth century onwards served to block this spirit of technological innovation both directly and indirectly.

The European slave trade was a direct block, in removing millions of youth and young adults who are the human agents from whom inventiveness springs. Those who remained in areas badly hit by slave capturing were preoccupied about their freedom rather than with improvements in production. Besides, even the busiest African in West, Central, or East Africa was concerned more with trade than with production, because of the nature of the contacts with Europe; and that situation was not conducive to the introduction of technological advances. The most dynamic groups over a great area of Africa became associated with foreign trade—notably, the Afro-Portuguese middlemen of Upper Guinea, the Akan market women, the Aro traders of Mozambique, and the Swahili and Wanyamwezi of East Africa. The trade which they carried on was in export items like

captives and ivory which did not require the invention of machinery. Apart from that, they were agents for distributing European imports.

When Britain was the world's leading economic power, it used to be referred to as a nation of shopkeepers: but most of the goods in their shops were produced by themselves, and it was while grappling with the problems posed by production that their engineers came up with so many inventions. In Africa, the trading groups could make no contribution to technological improvement because their role and preoccupation took their minds and energies away from production.

Apart from inventiveness, we must also consider the borrowing of technology. When a society for whatever reason finds itself technologically trailing behind others, it catches up not so much by independent inventions but by borrowing. Indeed, very few of man's major scientific discoveries have been separately discovered in different places by different people. Once a principle or a tool is known, it spreads or diffuses to other peoples. Why then did European technology fail to make its way into Africa during the many centuries of contact between the two continents? The basic reason is that the very nature of Afro-European trade was highly unfavorable to the movement of positive ideas and techniques from the European capitalist system to the African pre-capitalist (communal, feudal, and pre-feudal) system of production.

The only non-European society that borrowed effectively from Europe and became capitalist is that of Japan. Japan was already a highly developed feudal society progressing towards its own capitalist forms in the nineteenth century. Its people were neither enslaved nor colonized by Europe, and its foreign trade relations were quite advantageous. For instance, Japanese textile manufacturers had the stimulus of their own growing internal market and some abroad in Asia and Europe. Under those circumstances, the young Japanese capitalist class (including many former feudal landowners) borrowed technology from Europe and successfully domesticated it before the end of the nineteenth century. The use of this example from outside Africa is meant to emphasize that for Africa to have received European technology the demand would have had to come from inside Africa—and most probably from a class or group who saw profit in the new technology. There had to be both willingness on the part of Europeans to transfer technology and African socio-economic structures capable of making use of that technology and internalizing it.

Hunting for elephants or captives did not usually induce in Africa a demand for any technology other than firearms. The lines of economic activity attached to foreign trade were either destructive, as slavery was, or at best purely extractive, like ivory hunting and cutting camwood trees.

Therefore, there was no reason for wanting to call upon European skills. The African economies would have had little room for such skills unless negative types of exports were completely stopped. A remarkable fact that is seldom brought to light is that several African rulers in different parts of the continent saw the situation clearly, and sought European technology for internal development, which was meant to replace the trade in slaves.

Europeans deliberately ignored those African requests that Europe should place certain skills and techniques at their disposal. This was an element in the Kongo situation of the early sixteenth century, which has already been mentioned. It happened in Ethiopia also, though in Ethiopia no trade in captives was established with Europeans. A Portuguese embassy reached the Ethiopian court in 1520. Having examined Portuguese swords, muskets, clothes, books, and other objects, the emperor Lebna Dengel felt the need to introduce European technical knowledge into Ethiopia. Correspondence exists between the emperor and European rulers, such as kings Manuel I and John III of Portugal, and Pope Leo X, in which requests were made for European assistance to Ethiopian industry. Until late in the nineteenth century, Ethiopian petitions to that effect were being repeated with little or no success.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, there were two further examples of African rulers appreciating European technology, and stating their preference for skills and not slave ships. When Agaja Trudo of Dahomey sought to stop the trade in captives, he made an appeal to European craftsmen, and he sent an ambassador to London for that purpose. One European who stayed at the court of Dahomey in the late 1720s told his countrymen that "if any tailor, carpenter, smith or any other sort of white man that is free be willing to come here, he will find very good encouragement." The Asantehene Opoku Ware (1720–50) also asked Europeans to set up factories and distilleries in Asante, but he got no response.

Bearing in mind the history of Japan, it should be noted that the first requests for technical assistance came from the Ethiopian and Kongo empires, which in the sixteenth century were at a level undoubtedly comparable to that of most European feudal states, with the important exception that they had not produced the seeds of capitalism. During the eighteenth century the great African states of Dahomey and Asante became prominent. They had passed out of the communal stage and had a somewhat feudal class stratification along with specialization in many activities such as the working of gold, iron, and cloth. Asante society under Opoku Ware had already shown a capacity for seeking out innovations, by going to the trouble of taking imported silk and unraveling it so as to combine the silk threads with cotton to make the famous *kente* cloth. In other

words, there would have been no difficulty in such African societies mastering European technical skills and bridging the rather narrow gap which existed between them and Europe at that time.

Well into the nineteenth century, Europe displayed the same indifference to requests for practical assistance from Africa, although by that period both African rulers and European capitalists were talking about replacing slave trade. In the early nineteenth century, one king of Calabar (in eastern Nigeria) wrote the British asking for a sugar refinery; while around 1804 King Adandozan of Dahomey was bold enough to ask for a firearms factory! By that date, many parts of West Africa were going to war with European firearms and gunpowder. There grew up a saying in Dahomey that "He who makes the powder wins the war," which was a far-sighted recognition that Africans were bound to fall before the superiority of Europeans in the field of arms technology. Of course, Europeans were also fully aware that their arms technology was decisive, and there was not the slightest chance that they would have agreed to teach Africans to make firearms and ammunition.

The circumstances of African trade with Europe were unfavorable to creating a consistent African demand for technology relevant to development; and when that demand was raised it was ignored or rejected by the capitalists. After all, it would not have been in the interests of capitalism to develop Africa. In more recent times, Western capitalists had refused to build the Volta River Dam for Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah, until they realized that the Czechoslovakians would do the job; they refused to build the Aswan Dam for Egypt, and the Soviet Union had to come to the rescue; and in a similar situation they placed obstacles in the way of the building of a railway from Tanzania to Zambia, and it was the socialist state of China that stepped in to express solidarity with African peasants and workers in a practical way. Placing the whole question in historical perspective allows us to see that capitalism has always discouraged technological evolution in Africa, and blocks Africa's access to its own technology. As will be seen in a subsequent section, capitalism introduced into Africa only such limited aspects of its material culture as were essential to more efficient exploitation, but the general tendency has been for capitalism to underdevelop Africa in technology.

The European slave trade and overseas trade in general had what are known as "multiplier effects" on Europe's development in a very positive sense. This means that the benefits of foreign contacts extended to many areas of European life not directly connected with foreign trade, and the whole society was better equipped for its own internal development. The opposite was true of Africa not only in the crucial sphere of technology

but also with regard to the size and purpose of each economy in Africa. Under the normal processes of evolution, an economy grows steadily larger so that after a while two neighboring economies merge into one. That was precisely how national economies were created in the states of Western Europe through the gradual combination of what were once separate provincial economies. Trade with Africa actually helped Europe to weld together more closely the different national economies, but in Africa there was disruption and disintegration at the local level. At the same time, each local economy ceased to be directed exclusively or even primarily towards the satisfaction of the wants of its inhabitants; and (whether or not the particular Africans recognized it) their economic effort served external interests and made them dependent on those external forces based in Western Europe. In this way, the African economy taken as a whole was diverted away from its previous line of development and became distorted.

It has now become common knowledge that one of the principal reasons why genuine industrialization cannot easily be realized in Africa today is that the market for manufactured goods in any single African country is too small, and there is no integration of the markets across large areas of Africa. The kind of relationship which Africa has had with Europe from the very beginning has worked in a direction opposite to integration of local economies. Certain interterritorial links established on the continent were broken down after the fifteenth century because of European trade. Several examples arose on the West African coast down to Angola, because in those parts European trade was most voluminous, and the surviving written record is also more extensive.

When the Portuguese arrived in the region of modern Ghana in the 1470s, they had few commodities to offer the inhabitants in exchange for the gold coveted by Europe. However, they were able to transship from Benin in Nigeria supplies of cotton cloths, beads, and female slaves, which were salable on the Gold Coast. The Portuguese were responding to a given demand on the Gold Coast so that a previous trade must have been in existence between the people of Benin and those of the Gold Coast, particularly the Akan. The Akan were gold producers, and the people of Benin were specialist craftsmen who had a surplus of cloth and beads which they manufactured themselves. As an expansionist state with a large army, Benin also had access to prisoners of war; while the Akan seemed concerned with building their own population and labor force, so the latter acquired female captives from Benin and rapidly integrated them as wives. When the Portuguese intervened in this exchange, it was subordinated to the interests of European trade. As soon as Portugal and other European nations had sufficient goods so as not to be dependent on the

re-export of certain commodities from Benin, then all that remained were the links between the Gold Coast and Europe on the one hand and between Benin and Europe on the other.

Probably, Benin products had reached the Gold Coast by way of the creeks behind the coast of what is now Dahomey and Togo. Therefore, it would have been more convenient when Europeans established a direct link across the open sea. As pointed out earlier, the superiority of Europeans at sea was of the greatest strategic value, along with their organizational ability. This was illustrated in several places, beginning with the Maghreb and Mauritania. After the Portuguese took control of the Atlantic coast of Northwest Africa, they were able to secure horses, woolen goods, and beads, which they shipped farther south to West Africa for gold and slaves; up to the early sixteenth century, the most important article brought by the Portuguese for trade in Senegambia was the horse. In exchange for one horse they received as many as fifteen captives. North African woolens and beads were also utilized by the Portuguese in buying gold on the river Gambia and as far south as Sierra Leone.

It needs to be recalled that the Western Sudan had links with the West African coast and with North Africa. Long before the European arrival, horses were moving from North Africa to be interbred with local West African stock. Long before the European arrival, the Arabs and Mauritians traveled to the river Senegal and farther south to meet the Mandinga Djola traders and hand over to them products such as beads made in Ceuta and cloth spun from the wool of North African sheep. With the advantage of rapidity of transport by sea as opposed to overland across the desert, the Portuguese were in effect breaking up the economic integration of the region. As with the Benin-Akan example, the point to note is that after the Portuguese became middlemen they had the opportunity of developing a new trade pattern by which both Northwest Africa and West Africa looked to Europe and forgot about each other.

A similar situation came into existence on the Upper Guinea coast, and this time the European exploitation was aided by the presence of white settlers in the Cape Verde Islands. The Portuguese and the Cape Verde settlers broke into the pattern of local Upper Guinea trade as early as the 1470s. They intervened in transfers of raw cotton and indigo dye from one African community to another, and the Cape Verdean settlers established a flourishing cotton-growing and cotton-manufacturing industry. They used labor and techniques from the mainland, and exported the finished products along the length of the coast down to Accra.

The Portuguese also took over the trade in cowries in the Kongo and its offshore islands, the trade in salt along the Angolan coast, and the trade in

high-quality palm cloth between northern and southern Angola. In some instances, they achieved dominance not just because of their ships and commercial skills but also by the use of force—provided they were operating on the coast and could bring their cannon into use. In East Africa, for instance, the Portuguese used violence to capture trade from the Arabs and Swahili. The disruption of African commerce between the Ivory Coast and the Gold Coast followed that pattern. A strong coastal canoe trade existed between these two regions, with the people of Cape Lahou (modern Ivory Coast) sailing past Cape Three Points to sell their cloth as far east as Accra. The Portuguese set up a fort at Axim near Cape Three Points to service gold trade with the hinterland; and one of its functions was to chop the east-west coastal African trade. They banned Axim residents from going to Cape Lahou, and they stopped canoes from Ivory Coast from traveling east beyond Axim. The purpose was obviously to make both areas separate economic entities exclusively tied to Europe.

The above-mentioned African commerce proved to have deep roots. The Dutch found it still going on when they took over Axim in 1637. The servants of the Dutch West India Company which was operating on the Gold Coast wanted to put a complete stop to the African trade; and when that was not achieved they tried to force the people of the Ivory Coast to buy a certain amount of Dutch goods. The Dutch ruled that each Axim canoe-man going to Cape Lahou should carry Dutch goods worth at least four ounces of gold. The purpose was to convert a purely inter-African exchange into a European-African trade.

What was doubly detrimental to African attempts to integrate their own economies was the fact that when Europeans became middlemen in local trade networks, they did so mainly to facilitate the extraction of captives, and thereby subordinated the whole economy to the European slave trade. In Upper Guinea and the Cape Verde Islands, the Portuguese and their mulatto descendants engaged in a large variety of exchanges involving cotton, dyes, kola nuts, and European products. The purpose of it all was to fill the holds of slave ships. In Congo and Angola, the same picture emerges. The salt, cowry shells, and palm cloth that came in Portuguese hands made up for their shortage of trade goods and served to purchase captives on different parts of the coast and deep in the interior.

The element of subordination and dependence is crucial to an understanding of African underdevelopment today, and its roots lie far back in the era of international trade. It is also worth noting that there is a type of false or pseudo integration which is a camouflage for dependence. In contemporary times, it takes the form of free-trade areas in the formerly colonized sections of the world. Those free-trade areas are made to order

for the penetration of multinational corporations. From the fifteenth century onwards, pseudo integration appeared in the form of the interlocking of African economies over long distances from the coast, so as to allow the passage of human captives and ivory from a given point inland to a given port on the Atlantic or Indian Ocean. For example, captives were moved from Congo through what is now Zambia and Malawi to Mozambique, where Portuguese, Arab, or French buyers took them over. That was not genuine integration of the economies of the African territories concerned. Such trade merely represented the extent of foreign penetration, thereby stifling local trades.

The West African gold trade was not destroyed, but it became directly dependent on European buyers by being diverted from the northward routes across the Sahara. Within the savannah belt of the Western Sudan, the trans-Saharan gold trade had nourished one of the most highly developed political zones in all Africa from the fifth century onwards. But it was more convenient for Europe to obtain its gold on the West Coast than through North African intermediaries, and one is left to speculate on what might have occurred in the Western Sudan if there had been a steady increase in the gold trade over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Nevertheless, there is something to be said in favor of African trade with Europe in this particular commodity. Gold production involved mining and an orderly system of distribution within Africa. Akan country and parts of Zimbabwe and Mozambique sustained flourishing socio-political systems up to the nineteenth century, largely because of gold production.

Certain benefits also derived from the export of ivory. The search for ivory became the most important activity in several East African societies at one time or another, sometimes in combination with the trade in captives. The Wanyamwezi of Tanzania were East Africa's best known traders—acquiring their reputation through carrying goods for hundreds of miles between Lake Tanganyika and the Indian Ocean. When the Wanyamwezi gave their attention to the export of ivory, this sparked off other beneficial developments, such as increased trading in hoes, food, and salt between themselves and their neighbors.

Yet, ivory was an asset that was rapidly exhausted in any given region, and the struggle to secure new supplies could lead to violence comparable to that which accompanied the search for human captives. Besides, the most decisive limitation of ivory trade was the fact that it did not grow logically from local needs and local production. Large quantities of ivory were not required by any society inside Africa, and no African society turned to elephant hunting and ivory collection on a big scale until the demand came from Europe or Asia. Any African society which took ivory

exports seriously then had to restructure its economy so as to make ivory trade successful. That in turn led to excessive and undesirable dependence on the overseas market and an external economy. There could be growth in the volume of commerce and the rise of some positive side effects, but there was decrease in the capacity to achieve economic independence and self-sustaining social progress. Besides, at all times one must keep in mind the dialectical opposite of the trade in Africa: namely, production in Europe or in America under European control. The few socially desirable by-products of elephant hunting within Africa were chicken feed in comparison with the profits, technology, and skills associated with the product in Europe. In that way, the gap between Africa and Europe was constantly widening; and it is on the basis of that gap that we arrive at development and underdevelopment.

Continuing Politico-Military Developments in Africa—1500 to 1885

Modern African nationalist historians correctly stress that Africa had a meaningful past long before the coming of Europeans. They also stress that Africans made their own history long after coming into contact with Europe, and indeed right up to the period of colonization. That African-centered approach to the continent's past is quite compatible with one which equally emphasizes the transformatory role of external forces, such as overseas trade in slaves, gold, ivory. The reconciliation of the two approaches is facilitated by bearing in mind the following three factors:

- (1) The external (and mainly European) impact up to 1885 was very uneven in geographical terms, with the coasts being obviously more exposed.
- (2) Commerce with Europeans affected different aspects of African life in varying degrees, with the political, military, and ideological apparatus being virtually untouched.
- (3) Dynamic features of independent African evolution and development (as illustrated in Chapter 2) *continued* to operate after 1500.

It has already been argued that it would be misleading to try to compartmentalize Africa into areas that were affected by slave trading and those which were not, for the continent as a whole had to bear the costs. However, for present purposes, it is enough to make the crude distinction between those parts of Africa which were directly caught up in European-generated activities and those parts which to all appearances continued in the traditional manner.

Developments continued in certain areas such as south Central Africa, because the population there was free to pursue a path dictated by the

interplay between African people and the African environment in the particular localities. Besides, there were achievements even in those societies under the heaviest bombardment of slaving. Slave trading led to the commercial domination of Africa by Europe, within the context of international trade. In very few instances did Europeans manage to displace African political authorities in the various social systems. So African states in close contact with Europe in the pre-colonial era nevertheless had scope for political maneuver, and their evolution could and did continue.

Military conquest of Africa awaited the years of the imperialist Scramble. In pre-colonial centuries of contact with Europe, African armies were in existence, with all the socio-political implications which attach to an armed sector in society. Equally important was the fact that direct imports from Europe in the cultural and ideological spheres were virtually nil. Christianity tried sporadically and ambivalently to make an impact on some parts of the continent. But most of the few missionaries in places like the Congo, Angola, and Upper Guinea concentrated on blessing Africans as they were about to be launched across the Atlantic into slavery. As it was, Christianity continued only in Ethiopia, where it had indigenous roots. Elsewhere, there flourished Islam and other religions which had nothing to do with European trade. As before, religion continued to act as an element of the superstructure, which was crucial in the development of the state.

So long as there is political power, so long as a people can be mobilized to use weapons, and so long as a society has the opportunity to define its own ideology and culture, then the people of that society have some control over their own destinies, in spite of constraints such as those imposed as the African continent slipped into orbit as a satellite of capitalist Europe. After all, although historical development is inseparable from material conditions and the state of technology, it is also partially controlled by a people's consciousness at various stages. That is part of the interdependence of base and superstructure alluded to at the outset.

Revolution is the most dramatic appearance of a conscious people or class on the stage of history; but, to greater or lesser extent, the ruling class in any society is always engaged in the developmental process as conscious instruments of change or conservatism. Attention in this section will be focused on the political sphere and its power companion, the military. In those areas, Africans were able to excel even in the face of slave trading.

Politico-military development in Africa from 1500 to 1885 meant that African social collectives had become more capable of defending the interests of their members, as opposed to the interests of people outside the given community. It also meant that the individual in a politically mature and militarily strong state would be free from external threat of physical

removal. He would have more opportunities to apply his own skill in fields as diversified as minstrelsy and bronze-working, under the protection of the state. He could also use his creativity and inventiveness to refine the religion of his people, or to work out a more manageable constitution, or to contribute to new techniques of war, or to advance agriculture and trade. Of course, it is also true that the benefits of all such contributions went mainly to a small section of African society, both within and without the zone of slaving; for, as communalism receded, the principle of egalitarian distribution was disregarded. These various points can be illustrated by concrete historical examples drawn from all over the continent during the pre-colonial period in question.

The Yoruba

In a previous discussion, the Yoruba state of Oyo was merely listed as one of the outstanding representatives of African development up to the eve of European arrival in the fifteenth century. The remarkable fourteenth- and fifteenth-century artistic achievements of Oyo, of its parent state of Ife, and of the related state of Benin have been well studied, because of the preservation of ivory, terracotta, and bronze sculptures. It is clear that the earliest bronzes were the best and that there was a deterioration in execution and sensitivity from the sixteenth through to the eighteenth century. However, politically, states such as Oyo and Benin did continue to prosper for a very long time after the arrival of Europeans on the West African coast. Since Oyo and the Yoruba people were within an intensive area of slave trading, their fate between 1500 and 1885 is of considerable significance.

The kingdom of Oyo kept fairly clear of any involvement with slave trading until the late eighteenth century. Instead, its people concentrated on local production and trade, and on the consolidation and expansion of the trade. Indeed, although the nucleus of the Oyo kingdom had already been established in the fifteenth century, it was during the next three centuries that it expanded to take control of most of what was later termed Western Nigeria, large zones north of the river Niger and the whole of what is now Dahomey. In effect, it was an empire, ruled over by an Alafin in conjunction with an aristocracy. It was in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries that the subtle constitutional mechanisms which regulated relations between the Alafin and his principal subjects and between the capital and the provinces were crystalized.

In so far as Oyo had an interest in the coast, it was as an outlet more for cloth than for slaves. Being some distance inland, the Yoruba of Oyo concentrated on relations with the hinterland, thereby connecting with the

Western Sudanic trading zone. It was from the north that Oyo got the horses which made its armies feared and respected. Oyo is a prime example of that African development which had its roots deep in the past, in the contradictions between man and environment. Its people continued to develop on the basis of forces which they did not consciously manipulate, as well as through the deliberate utilization of political techniques.

Early in the nineteenth century, Oyo and Yorubaland in general began to export captives in considerable numbers. They were obtained partly by military campaigns outside Yorubaland, but also through local slave procuring. Local slave procuring involved kidnaping, armed raids, uncertainty, and disunity. Those features, together with internal constitutional tensions and an external threat from the Islamic north, brought about the downfall of the Oyo empire by about 1830. The famous Yoruba ancestral home of Ife was also despoiled and its citizens turned into refugees, because of quarrels among the Yoruba over kidnaping for sale into slavery.

But it was testimony to the level of development in that part of Africa that within a few years the inhabitants were able to reconstruct new political states: notably those of New Oyo, Ibadan, Ajaye, Abeokuta, and Ijebu—each centered on a town, and with enough land for successful agriculture. Until the British arrived to kindly impose “order” in Nigeria, the Yoruba people kept experimenting with various political forms, with heavy emphasis on the military, and keeping to the religion of their forefathers.

Being conscious of territorial boundaries, the inhabitants and rulers of any given state invariably become involved in clashes with neighboring states. The state in the feudal epoch in Europe and Asia was particularly concerned with its military capacity. The ruling class comprised in whole or in part the professional fighting forces of the state. One rationalization by which they justified their enjoyment of the major portion of the surplus of society was that they offered armed protection to the ordinary peasant or serf. This generalization was as true of nineteenth-century Yorubaland as it was of Prussia and Japan. Without a doubt, Africans in that region were proceeding along the line of development leading to social organization comparable to feudalism in Europe, Asia, and such parts of Africa as Ethiopia and the Maghreb, which had been at that stage some centuries earlier.

In the Oyo empire, the civil power was dominant, and the military generals were servants of the king. Subsequently, however, the military took over effective political power. For instance, the Ajaye state was founded by Kurunmi, said to have been the greatest Yoruba general of those troubled times following the fall of Oyo. Kurunmi established a per-

sonal military ascendancy in Ajaye. Ibadan was slightly different, in that there it was a group of military officers who collectively formed the political elite. Efforts to put civilians back in power were half-hearted and unsuccessful. After all, the town itself grew out of a military encampment.

The city-state of Abeokuta perhaps made the most consistent effort to make the military an arm of the civil state. But, what mattered most was the defense of the townships within the fortified walls of Abeokuta. Abeokuta's fortified walls became famous as the place where many a rival army met disaster; and, under those circumstances, the *Ologun*, or war-chiefs, were the social and political powers.

While the militarization of politics was going on in Yorubaland, changes were taking place in the structure of the society, which brought about sharper class stratification. Numerous captives were taken in war, most of whom were sold to Europeans, so that Yorubaland became notorious as a slave-supplying region right up to the 1860s. But many war prisoners were retained locally, in conditions approximating either to slavery or to serfdom, depending on whether or not they were first-generation captives. Sometimes, refugees fleeing from destroyed towns also had no option other than to become clients or serfs of other free Yoruba. Such refugees were made to give service to their new overlords by farming the land, in return for armed protection. However, serfs were also used as soldiers, which means that they had access to the means of production (the land) only through meeting an obligation in military labor. That is a measure of the extent to which the principle of kinship had been weakened, and it indicates that, in contrast to the typical communal village, states such as those in nineteenth-century Yorubaland allocated roles and rewards to their citizens on the basis of reciprocal obligations characteristic of feudalism.

During the period under discussion, the division of labor among the Yoruba was extended with the rise of professional soldiers, or "war-boys," as they were called. The professional soldiers, who were sons of aristocrats, left farming disdainfully to prisoners and serfs—the large number of whom insured agricultural plenty. Other branches of economic activity also flourished, notably the making of cloth and palm oil and the trade in various products. These things were true, in spite of the fact that by that time some labor was being lost both in the form of slaves exported and in the form of labor power devoted to capturing people for export. European visitors to Yorubaland in the middle of the nineteenth century could still admire the level of its material culture, along with the highly colorful and impressive aspects of its non-material culture such as the annual "Yam Festivals" and the ritual of the religious cults of Shango, Ogboni, and others.

One item of European technology that was anxiously sought by Africans and that was fairly easily obtainable from Europeans was the firearm. From the 1820s onwards, the Yoruba acquired European firearms in large numbers, and integrated them into the pattern of trade, politics, and military strategy. On the eve of colonial rule, Yoruba generals were reaching out for breech-loading rifles and even rockets; but Europe stepped in too quickly for that move to get very far. Through a series of actions which started as early as 1860 in Lagos (and which included missionary infiltration as well as armed invasion) the British managed to bring that part of Africa under colonial rule.

Economic development is a matter of an increasing capacity to produce, and it is tied up with patterns of land tenure and class relations. These basic facts were well brought out both positively and negatively in Yoruba history, in the decades before independence was lost. So long as agricultural production was not disrupted, then for so long any given Yoruba state remained in a strong position. Ibadan was once the greatest military power in Yorubaland, selling captives as well as retaining many for use as laborers for its own benefit. But Ibadan's farming areas were hit by war, and Ibadan's rulers also started removing prisoners farming the land and selling them instead to Europeans. That became necessary because Ibadan needed firearms, and those could be obtained only by selling slaves. It was at that point that the undermining effect of the presence of European slave buyers on the coast became really paramount.

By selling its own captives and serfs, Ibadan was undermining its own socio-economic base. If the prisoners were to develop into a true serf class, then those prisoners would have had to be guaranteed the right to remain fixed on the soil and protected from sale. This was one of the reasons why slavery as a mode of production in Europe had to give way to serfdom and feudalism; and, under normal circumstances, Yoruba society did rapidly guarantee the irremovability of those captives who were integrated into the local production pattern. But, forces unleashed by the European presence as slave buyers were too great to be withstood, and any hope of solving the problem disappeared with the loss of political power under colonialism.

Too often, historians lay undue emphasis on the failure of nineteenth-century Yoruba states to unite and produce an entity as large as the former empire of Oyo. But, firstly, the size of a political unit is not the most important criterion for evaluating the achievement of its peoples. And, secondly, a given people can disintegrate politically and later integrate even more effectively. The Yoruba states of Ibadan, Abeokuta, Ajaye, had populations of up to 100,000 citizens—as large as most of the city-states, principalities, and palatinates of feudal Germany. That is a comparison

which is worth bringing to light, and it is one that struck European observers who happened to visit Yorubaland in the middle years of the nineteenth century.

Germany has long had a common culture and language, and there was a form of political unity under the Holy Roman Empire from the twelfth to the fifteenth century. However, after the Reformation and the breakup of the Holy Roman Empire, the German people were divided into as many separate political entities as there are days in the year, some of them being hardly bigger than a public park. Yet, the internal class relations and productive forces continued to develop throughout Germany, and ultimately by 1870 unity was again achieved, with feudalism giving way to a powerful capitalist nation-state. Similarly, the Yoruba were a widely spread cultural entity with a single language. After the fall of the Oyo empire, the developmental processes were slowed down by both internal and external factors, but they were not stopped. It took the arrival of European colonialism to do that.

Within the sphere of West and Central African slaving, state-building continued with varying degrees of success. For instance, the Akan state system grew up in a manner as impressive as that of the Oyo empire. Fortunately for the Akan, slave exports reached alarming proportions only during the first half of the eighteenth century. By that time, a state such as Asante had sunk roots deep enough to withstand the adverse effects of slaving. It continued to be incorporated with the heartlands of the Western Sudan, and by the 1870s when the British tried to dictate to Asante, these famous African people did not give up without heroic armed struggle.

Asante's connection with the export of slaves in the eighteenth century led its rulers to concentrate on expansionism of the type which would bring in captives through wars, raids, tribute, and as articles of trade from regions where they had been made prisoner. Besides, since the fifteenth century, Akan country was building up rather than exporting its human resources. Captives were incorporated locally into the society; and on the eve of colonialism a substantial proportion of Asante society was made up of *Odonko-ba*—the descendants of one-time captives, who were the laboring population on the land. Development had come not through exporting and losing labor but by increasing and maximizing it.

Dahomey

Asante's eastern neighbor beyond the Volta River was Dahomey. Since Dahomey was more deeply involved in the European slave trade and for a much longer period, its experiences shall be cited at a greater length.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Dahomey had a stagnant if not declining population, and an economy that had virtually no props other than slave exports. What Dahomey succeeded in doing in spite of all that is a tribute to the achievements of man inside the African continent. It should be made clear that the groundwork for the socio-political development of the Aja or Fon people of Dahomey was laid down in the period preceding the influence of Europe on West Africa. By the fifteenth century, the Aja states of Allada and Whydah were already in existence, having a loose connection with the Yoruba of Ife. Dahomey was an offshoot from Allada in the sixteenth century, and by the early eighteenth century it expanded to incorporate both Allada and Whydah.

The kings of Allada and Whydah had made the mistake of either failing to protect their own citizens from enslavement or of actually conniving at their enslavement. Dahomey never followed such a policy, which was directly antagonistic to the very maintenance of the state. Instead, Dahomey eventually became the classic raiding state of West Africa, after failing to get Europeans to accept any products other than human beings. To achieve that, Dahomey had first to build up a tightly organized military state, whose monarch came much closer to an authoritarian or despot than did the Alafin of Oyo or the Asantehene of Asante. Secondly, Dahomey invested a great deal of time and ingenuity on its army, so as to protect its own citizens and wage war abroad.

Within European history, the state of Sparta stood out as one that was completely dedicated to the art of war. Europeans in Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries invariably referred to Dahomey as a black Sparta. Throughout the eighteenth century, the cavalry of Oyo was more than a match for Dahomey's foot soldiers, and Dahomey remained a tribute-paying portion of the Oyo empire. But with the fall of Oyo, Dahomey became the supreme military state in that region, and indeed wreaked vengeance on its former Yoruba overlords. Warfare was necessary for securing slaves *outside* of Dahomey and for obtaining firearms. It was in fact essential for survival.

Dahomey's profound preoccupation with militaristic activities can be illustrated in many ways. Their value system rewarded the brave and the victorious, while ruthlessly despising and even liquidating the cowardly and the unsuccessful on the battlefield. The two chief ministers of the king were the commanders of the "Left" and "Right" armies, and other military officers held political appointments. Then, too, the artistic media constantly harped upon the theme of war. Beautiful mosaics and paintings appeared on the walls of the palaces of Abomey—all dealing with military victories. Historical accounts, as rendered by professional reciters, reflected

the same bias; and the cloth workers busied themselves making emblems, "colors," and umbrellas for the generals and the regiments.

Two unique innovations set Dahomey off from its African neighbors and even gives it a special claim within the context of feudal or semi-feudal military organization. Firstly, Dahomey encouraged young boys to become apprentices of war. By the age of eleven or twelve, a boy would be attached to a veteran soldier—helping to carry his supplies and observing battle. The second innovation (and the one that was more widely commented upon) was Dahomey's utilization of its female population within the army. Apparently, the wives in the royal palace started off as a ceremonial guard in the eighteenth century, and then progressed to become an integral part of Dahomey's fighting machine, on terms of complete equality of hardship and reward. Dahomey's population in the nineteenth century was probably no more than two hundred thousand; and the state consistently managed to send twelve to fifteen thousand actives on its annual campaigns. Of those, it was estimated in 1845 that some five thousand were women—the so-called Amazons of Dahomey, who were feared for their ferocity in battle.

In the long run, the trade in slaves cast a blight on Dahomey. Slaving campaigns were costly and not always rewarding in terms of captives. European buyers failed to turn up during certain years, depending on European conditions (e.g., during the American War of Independence, the French Revolution, and the subsequent revolutionary wars, there was a lull in Dahomean slave exports, because far fewer European ships could be spared for the trade in slaves). Without selling captives to get firearms to carry on more warfare for slaves, Dahomey felt its glory and military honor was slipping. Resort to human sacrifice was one attempt to compensate for the diminishing reputation of the state and its monarch, as was the case with the *Oba* of Benin in the nineteenth century.

Even so, the story of the reputed savagery of Dahomey was exaggerated incredibly. The Dahomean state created such refinements as a population census; it conducted diplomacy far and wide, with all the niceties and the protocol that one usually hears of only in connection with "civilized" European states; and it built up a system of espionage and intelligence as an essential ingredient in its own security. Above all, attention should be focused at least briefly on the role of the artist in Dahomean society. Much of African art springs from elaboration of things functional, such as pottery and cloth. However, both religion and the state power also stimulated art. For instance, the brasses and bronzes of Ife were executed on behalf of the religious cults and were associated with the *Oni* of Ife and the royal family. Indeed, it is a most widespread phenomenon that the feudal ruling class

gave its protection to artists, along with sustenance and recognition. This was true in Mandarin China with pottery-makers and theatre artists; it was true of sixteenth-century Italy of the Renaissance; and it was true of Dahomey from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.

No one now knows which Dahomean is to be credited with any given artistic achievement of the independent pre-colonial period. However, in that time, particular individuals were being given the opportunity for self-discovery and self-development and of serving the society as a whole. Their task was to give pleasure and to capture the hopes and ambitions of the people in palace wall-paintings, in wrought-iron sculptures, in the stamped patterns of handwoven cloths designed for royalty, in the intricately carved heads of the safe-conduct staffs of the king's ambassadors, and in the lively tales of how the founder of the Dahomean kingdom came out of the belly of a leopard. It was art that centered around royalty and noble families, but it was also a national product and a point of identification for the people as a whole. Subsequently, such artistic skills either disappeared or became debased to serve the curiosity of philistine colonialists.

It is still held in some quarters that Dahomey's development in certain spheres must be credited to slave trading. To demonstrate conclusively that African political and military development through to the nineteenth century was an extension of groundwork already laid in an earlier epoch, it is best to turn to zones where foreign influence was non-existent. The inter-lacustrine zone of East Africa is one such.

The Eastern Interlacustrine States

In an earlier discussion, attention was directed to Bunyoro-Kitara as the most advanced socio-political formation in East Africa up to the fifteenth century. Its ruling dynasty, the Bachwezi, declined for reasons that are not clear, and they were overwhelmed by new immigrants from the north. While there is some doubt as to whether the Bachwezi had an Ethiopian origin, it is clearly established that the sixteenth-century immigrants were Luo peoples from a section of the Nile that flows through the Sudan.

Following upon Luo migrations, a new line known as the Babito dynasty was placed in power over Bunyoro proper. Other branches of the same dynasty were enthroned in several places, sometimes breaking off from the main line. As late as the nineteenth century, a separate Babito kingdom was carved out in Toro. Meanwhile, the Bachwezi or Bahima had staged a comeback in regions to the south, in the form of a clan known as the Bahinda. The Bahinda were one of the pastoralist clans of the old Bunyoro-

Kitara state, and in the period from the sixteenth century onwards their stronghold was in Ankole and Karagwe.

Obviously, the new Babito ruling class immediately sought to take control of the land, but in accordance with settled African customs, they later tried to project themselves as the original owners of the land, rather than usurpers. In Busoga, where there were several small Babito kings, a researcher reported the following dialogue about land between a member of a royal clan and a commoner:

Royal clan member—We found this place empty and made something of it. You fellows later came round begging for land, so we were generous and gave you some. Naturally you're now our slaves.

Commoner—Oho! What a lie! We were here *long* before you. You took your power by trickery. You princes have always been scoundrels!

At no stage in the independent history of these interlacustrine states did land become purely a personal possession, to be monopolized by a given class, as in the classic European feudal model. Scholars frequently demand this feature before they concede that feudalism has arrived; but they fail to take into account the reality of the fact that distribution and usufruct (or produce) of the land may be in the hands of a few, and they fail to realize that where cattle were a dominant form of wealth, then private ownership of herds was also part of a process by which producers were separated from the means of production. To be specific, those who owned the herds were usually the Bahinda or other Bahima or the new Babito families, while those who tended them were clients and virtually serfs of the owners. As far as land was concerned, the peasant who farmed it paid a heavy tax in crops to the clan heads and ruling authorities to allow the latter to live without resort to agricultural work.

It is necessary to recall that in the process of independent evolution on all continents, the increase in productive capacity was accompanied by increasing inequality at all stages except socialism. To say that the interlacustrine zone continued developing uninterruptedly up to the eve of colonialism is to highlight the expanded productive capacity of the states and at the same time to recognize frankly that it was the result of increased exploitation not only of natural resources but also of the labor of the majority. The latter were disenfranchised and oppressed to get them to toil in the interests of a few who lived in palaces.

The interlacustrine kingdoms fell mainly in what is now Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi. Only in the northeast of Tanzania are there representatives of the interlacustrine complex of states. Northeast Tanzania was the most developed portion of the country in the pre-colonial epoch, be-

cause the rest of mainland Tanzania comprised numerous small kingdoms that had not decisively left behind the communal stage. But northeast Tanzania was also the corner of the country in which problems arose when a new ideology of egalitarianism was being preached after the end of the colonial era, because there was already a regime of inequality in the distribution of land and produce and in the rights granted to individuals. In fact, in any meaningful political sense, the area was feudal.

There is some disagreement as to the origins of the important interlacustrine state of Buganda. Some traditions give it the same Luo origin as Bunyoro, while others tend to hold that it was a Bachwezi survival. Its social structure certainly paralleled that of Babito Bunyoro closely. Contrary to the situation in Ankole, in Buganda the Bahima did not have the reins of political power. They were only associated with the cattle-owning ruling class, very often in the junior capacity of herdsman. In any event, Buganda's history was one of gradual expansion and consolidation at the expense of Bunyoro and other neighbors. By the eighteenth century, it had become the dominant power in the whole region.

The Baganda state had a sound agricultural base, with bananas as a staple and with cattle products being available. Their craftsmen manufactured barkcloth for export, and local production of iron and pots was supplemented by imports from neighboring African communities. Their lack of salt was a big stimulus to the extending of their trade network to obtain necessary supplies; and, as was true of the Western Sudan, such an extension of the network of commerce was in effect integrating the productive resources of a large area. Carl Peters, the advance agent of German colonialism in East Africa, remarked that "in estimating the political and commercial affairs of East Africa too little stress is laid on this internal trade among the tribes. The barter trade of Buganda defies all direct calculation." In Buganda's case, the absence of slave trading must have been important in expanding internal production and trade, and therefore providing a sound base for the political superstructure.

The kings of Buganda set up a small permanent armed force, which served as a bodyguard; and the rest of the national army was raised when necessary. The political administration was centralized under the Kabaka, and district rulers were appointed by the Kabaka and his council, rather than left to be provided by the clans on a hereditary family basis. Great ingenuity went into devising plans for administering this large kingdom through a network of local officials. Perhaps the best tributes to the political sophistication of Buganda came from the British, when they found Buganda and other East African feudalities in the nineteenth century. They were the best tributes because they were reluctantly extracted from white

racists and culturally arrogant colonialists, who did not want to admit that Africans were capable of anything.

Actually, Europeans were so impressed with what they saw in the interlacustrine zone that they invented the thesis that those political states could not possibly have been the work of Africans and must have been built at an earlier date by white "Hamites" from Ethiopia. This myth seemed to get some support from the fact that the Bachwezi were said to have been light-skinned. However, in the first place, had the Bachwezi come from Ethiopia they would have been black or brown Africans. And secondly, as noted earlier, the cultures of East Africa were syntheses of local developments, plus African contributions from outside the specific localities. They were certainly not foreign imports.

Assuming that the Bachwezi or Bahima were from Ethiopia, then they lost their language and became Bantu-speaking like their subjects. The same thing happened to the Babito dynasty of Luo extraction, indicating that they had been absorbed by the local culture. Furthermore, the Babito and the Bahima/Bahinda also forged close connections from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. In effect, out of different ethnic groups, castes, and classes, a number of "nationalities" were emerging. The "nationality" group is held to be that social formation which immediately precedes the nation-state, and the definition applies to the peoples of Buganda, Bunyoro, Ankole, Karagwe, and Toro, as well as to those in Rwanda and Burundi.

Rwanda

The westernmost portion of the interlacustrine zone comprised the kingdoms of Rwanda and Burundi. The two countries which today bear those names are centered around the old kingdoms. The experiences of Rwanda will be cited here.

Like the old Bunyoro-Kitara kingdom and like its northeastern neighbor state in Ankole, Rwanda was split into two major social groups. Though the great majority of the population were cultivators known as the Bahutu, political power was in the hands of Batutsi pastoralists, comprising about 10 per cent of the population. An even smaller minority were the Batwa (about 1 per cent), who were at a very low level of pre-agricultural social organization.

The relative physiques of the three social segments in Rwanda offer an interesting commentary on the development of human beings as a species. The Batutsi are one of the tallest human groups in the world; the Bahutu are short and stocky; and the Batwa are pygmies. The differences can be explained largely in terms of social occupation and diet. The Batwa were

not living in settled agricultural communities; instead, they wandered around in small bands, hunting and digging roots, thereby failing to assure themselves of plentiful or rich food. At the other extreme, the Batutsi pastoralists were subsisting on a constantly accessible and rich diet of milk and meat. The Bahutu were more socially advanced than the Batwa; they ate more, and more regularly, than the latter because Bahutu agriculture meant that they did not live entirely on the whims of nature, following scarce game like the Batwa. However, the quality of their food fell short of the protein-rich Batutsi diet. Thus, the development of man as physical being is also linked in a broad sense to the expansion of productive capacity and the distribution of food.

In any event, it was their political and military achievements rather than their height which distinguished the Batutsi from a historical viewpoint. Their contribution to the kingdom of Rwanda goes back to the fourteenth century, to a period contemporaneous with the Bachwezi. There were indeed striking parallels and actual links between Rwanda and Ankole and between Karagwe and Burundi. But unlike Bunyoro-Kitara, Rwanda in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was far from being a single political entity. There were several small chiefdoms, and it was the expansion of a central Rwanda Tutsi clan which gradually created a small compact state in the seventeenth century. Later still, that central Rwanda state extended its frontiers; and it was still doing so when the colonialists arrived. For instance, rulers in Mpororo (Ankole) were already paying tribute to Rwanda, which was growing at Ankole's expense.

At the head of the Rwanda kingdom was the Mwami. As with so many other African rulers, his powers were sanctioned by religious beliefs and his person surrounded by religious ritual. Feudal kings in Europe often tried to get their subjects to believe that royal authority emanated from God and that the king therefore ruled by "divine right." Subjects of African kings like those of the Mwami of Rwanda often accepted something quite close to that proposition. Of course, in addition, the authority of the king had to be based on real power, and the Mwami of Rwanda did not overlook that fact.

Rujugira was a famous Mwami of the eighteenth century, and the last of the independent line was Rwaabugiri (known also as Kigeri IV), who died in 1895. Gahindiro is another whose praises were sung by the court musicians and historians. Each of them was associated with one or more contributions to refining and elaborating the power structure of the state, which meant that they each embodied certain historical, class, and national forces.

The Mwami Rujugira in the eighteenth century took the step of placing

his frontier zones under the exclusive authority of a military commander, and stationing strong contingents of soldiers there. The move was significant because in any young and growing state the most uncertain areas are those on the frontiers, known as the “marches provinces” in European feudal terminology. Rujugira was in effect placing the marches provinces under military law, and he also put permanent military camps at strategic places.

Early in the nineteenth century, Mwami Gahindiro overhauled the civil administration. In each province, there was created both a land chief and a cattle chief—one being responsible for farm rents and the other for cattle dues. Besides, there were smaller district authorities or “hill chiefs” within all the provinces, all members of the Batutsi aristocracy. Whether by accident or design, it turned out that administrators responsible for different areas and different matters were jealous of each other, and that kept them from uniting to conspire against the Mwami. The “hill chiefs” were for a long time hereditary within given Batutsi clans or lineages; but under Rwaabugiri they became appointive—another move which strengthened central government. Meanwhile, the civil servants and councilors (collectively known as Biru) were given grants of land which were free from the intervention of the land and cattle chiefs, thereby cementing the loyalty of the Biru to the throne.

The system of social relations which emerged in Rwanda was more completely hierarchical and feudal than in most other parts of Africa. Hierarchy and socio-legal interdependence of classes and individuals were features found in the army, in the civil administration, and in the social fabric itself. The key to everything else was the control over cattle, through an institution known as *ubuhake*. This meant that the poor (in cattle) and those of low status (by birth) could approach anyone with more cattle and more respected status, and offer his physical labor services in return for cattle and protection. The cattle were never given as outright property, but only the usufruct was handed over to a client. Therefore, the client could have the use of the cattle for so long as he reciprocated by handing over milk and meat to his overlord, and for so long as he remained loyal. Of course, the peasant on the land also had to perform labor services and provide tribute in the form of food.

The Batutsi aristocracy fulfilled their function of offering “protection” partly by making representations at the Mwami’s court or by defending their dependents in legal cases. Above all, however, the protection came through specialization in the military art. Ever since the fifteenth century, there had been compulsory military service for certain Batutsi lineages. Sons of the Batutsi aristocracy became royal pages, receiving all their educational training within a military context. Each new Mwami made a fresh

recruitment to add to existing forces. Some Bahutu were associated with particular regiments to provide supplies, and the Batwa were also incorporated as specialist archers (with poisoned arrows).

Of course, the protection which the Batutsi gave the Bahutu was a myth, in the sense that what they were guarding was their exploitation of the Bahutu. They defended them from external enemies, so that the population became dense and plentiful. They conserved the Bahutu, so that the latter could exercise their highly developed agronomical knowledge to produce surplus. Furthermore, the top stratum of Batutsi were the cattle owners, and they left their cattle to the lesser Batutsi to tend, thereby exploiting the labor and profound empirical knowledge which the common cattle herders possessed. As in Europe and Asia, such was the socio-economic base which supported a life of leisure and intrigue among the Batutsi aristocracy.

There was little intermarriage between Batutsi and Bahutu, and hence they are regarded as castes. The Batwa, too, can be similarly categorized; but since the castes were hierarchically placed one over the other, it was also a situation of class, and there was upward and downward mobility from one class to another to a certain extent. At the same time, Batutsi, Bahutu, and Batwa together evolved as the Rwanda nation, having common interests to defend against even the Batutsi, Bahutu, and Batwa who comprised the kingdom of Burundi. The people of Rwanda were not unique in developing a state and a sense of national consciousness, while at the same time experiencing the rise of more sharply differentiated classes and castes in society. The important thing is that they were free to develop relatively unaffected by alien influence, and certainly free from direct ravages of slave trading.

Ama-Zulu

The same freedom from slave trading was operational in South Africa, for West African exports of captives began in Angola and East African exports came from Mozambique and zones farther north. The area south of the Limpopo was one that had some of the simpler social formations in Africa up to the fifteenth century. The eastern side was sparsely peopled up to a late date by the Khoi Khoi herdsmen, who were slowly edged out by Bantu speakers. When European ships touched on the Natal coast in the sixteenth century, it was still a region of widely scattered homesteads; but in the years to come the population became denser and important politico-military development took place.

Anyone with a nodding acquaintance with the African past would have heard the name of Shaka, the Zulu leader who most embodied the social

and political changes which took place in the eastern portion of South Africa. One biographer (a European) had this to say of Shaka:

Napoleon, Julius Caesar, Hannibal, Charlemagne . . . such men as these have arisen periodically throughout the history of the world to blaze a trail of glory that has raised them high above the common level. Such a man was Shaka, perhaps the greatest of them all.

The above praise-song appeared on the back cover of the biography in question; and, since capitalist publishers treat books just like boxes of soap powder, one has admittedly to be suspicious of any advertisement designed to sell the book. Nevertheless, all commentators on Shaka (both African and European) frequently compare him favorably with the "Great Men" of European history. It is therefore appropriate to examine Ama-Zulu society up to the nineteenth century with a view to understanding the role of the leader in relationship to the development of society as a whole.

Shaka was born about the year 1787, and the impressive achievements attributed to him in his forty-year life span can only be briefly enumerated here. By 1816, he was head of a small Ama-Ngoni clan, the Ama-Zulu. Within a few years, he had reorganized it militarily—both in terms of weapons and the tactics and strategy of war—so that the Ama-Zulu clan became a feared fighting force. Through warfare and political maneuvering, he united and commanded the Ama-Ngoni who had previously been divided into dozens of independent or semi-independent clans. At one point, it seemed as though Shaka was about to unite under one rule the whole of the region that is now Natal, Lesotho, and Swaziland. That task was not accomplished when he met his death in 1828, nor were his successors able to maintain Shaka's sway. But the territory belonging to the Ama-Zulu nation in the late nineteenth century was a hundred times greater than the 100 square miles of the original patrimony of the Ama-Zulu clan as inherited by Shaka in 1816. It was a diminished and less powerful Ama-Zulu that was still capable in 1876 of inflicting upon the British one of the most crushing defeats in their history of overseas adventuring—at the battle of Isandhlwana.

Shaka grew up at a time when the questions of unity and of effective armies were being posed seriously for the first time among the Ama-Ngoni. Previously, the clans (which generally coincided with chiefdoms) displayed a tendency to segment or break into smaller and smaller units. As the eldest son of a clan head grew to adulthood, he went off to settle his own kraal; and a new junior clan was born, for his father's clan remained senior and its headship passed to the eldest son of the "great wife." That pattern of segmentation was possible so long as population density was low and land was plentiful for farming and grazing. Under those circumstances, there

was little competition for resources or political power; and wars were hardly any more dangerous than a game of football in Latin America. Usually a clan had traditional rivalry with another given clan. They knew each other well, and their champions fought in a spirit of festivity. One or two might have been killed, but then everyone went home until the rematch.

Early in the nineteenth century, the casual tempo of Ama-Zulu life and politics had changed considerably. A greater population meant less and less room for junior members to “hive off” on their own. It meant less grazing land for cattle, and disputes over cattle and land. As the Ama-Zulu began to fight more frequently, so they began to feel the necessity to fight more effectively. At the same time, senior clan heads began to recognize the need for a political structure to insure unity, the maximization of resources and the minimization of internecine conflict.

Shaka addressed himself to both the military and the political problems of Zululand, which he saw as two sides of the same coin. He thought that the centralizing political nucleus should achieve military superiority and demonstrate it to other sectors. That would generally lead to peaceful acceptance of the greater political state, or else the dissidents would be thoroughly crushed.

The era of conflict and warfare in Zululand in the early nineteenth century brought troops face to face much more often, but the pattern of military encounter still remained that of the long-distance hurling of light umkhonto, or spears. For close fighting, a weapon grasped in the hands is much more damaging—as feudal armies discovered in Europe and Asia and therefore resorted to sword and pike. Shaka, while serving as a young soldier, came up with the solution of devising a heavy short assegai, which was used purely for stabbing rather than throwing. In addition, he discarded the loose sandals so as to achieve more speed in closing with the enemy and more dexterity at close quarters. Through experience, Shaka and his fellow youths then discovered the specific techniques of using their shields and assegais to best effect.

Of course, warfare comprises not just the encounter of individual soldiers, but (more importantly) a pattern of tactics and strategy in relationship to the opposing forces taken as a whole. This aspect of war also attracted Shaka’s attention, and his outstanding innovation came in the form of *izimpi* (regiments) deployed so as to allow for a reserve behind the fighting vanguard and for two wings or “horns” capable of encircling the enemy’s flanks. Finally (and most importantly), an army has to be trained, disciplined, and organized so that it is a meaningful unit in peace and in war. Shaka created new regiments to include men up to forty years

of age. He kept his izimpi on constant exercises and “fatigues,” so that the individual soldier was fit and proficient, while the army as a whole synchronized in accordance with the wishes of its commanders.

The Zulu army was more than a fighting force. It was an educational institution for the young, and an instrument for building loyalties that cut across clans and could be considered as national. Promotion came through merit, and not through clan or regional origin. The enforced use of the Zulu branch of the family of Ngoni languages also worked in the direction of national consciousness. Over an area of twelve thousand square miles, citizens came to call themselves Ama-Zulu, and to relegate their clan names to second place. Over a much larger area still, Zulu influence was profoundly felt. Policies such as curbing the excesses of witchcraft diviners (izanus) and the fact that Zululand became free of internal struggles led to an influx of population from outside its boundaries—a positive contribution to the resources of the Zulu state.

European travelers who have left written accounts of Zululand in Shaka’s time were impressed by the cleanliness (as they were in Benin in the fifteenth century) and they were equally struck by the social order, absence of theft, sense of security (just as were the Arabs who traveled in the Western Sudan during its period of imperial greatness). In actual fact, both the cleanliness and the security of life and property were part of Zulu life from long before, and under Shaka what was impressive was the scale on which these things extended, owing to the protective umbrella of the state. The people being impressed were Europeans; and European evidence is the best evidence in that it can scarcely be said to have been pro-African propaganda. One white visitor who saw a march-past of fifteen of Shaka’s regiments wrote that “it was a most exciting scene, surprising to us, who could not have imagined that a nation termed ‘savages’ could be so disciplined and kept in order.”

A great deal more could be added concerning Ama-Zulu political institutions and its army. But what is relevant here is to understand why a Shaka was possible in Africa in the nineteenth century, before the coming of colonial rule.

Had Shaka been a slave to some cotton planter in Mississippi or some sugar planter in Jamaica, he might have had an ear or a hand chopped off for being a “recalcitrant nigger,” or at best he might have distinguished himself in leading a slave revolt. For the only great men among the *unfree* and the oppressed are those who struggle to *destroy* the oppressor. On a slave plantation, Shaka would not have built a Zulu army and a Zulu state—that much is certain. Nor could any African *build* anything during the colonial period, however much a genius he may have been. As it was,

Shaka was a herdsman and a warrior. As a youth, he tended cattle on the open plains—*free* to develop his own potential and apply it to his environment.

Shaka was able to invest his talents and creative energies in a worthwhile endeavor of construction. He was not concerned with fighting for or against slave traders; he was not concerned with the problem of how to resell goods made in Sweden and France. He was concerned with how to develop the Zulu area within the limits imposed by his people's resources.

It must be recognized that things such as military techniques were responses to real needs, that the work of the individual originates in and is backed by the action of society as a whole, and that whatever was achieved by any one leader must have been bounded by historical circumstances and the level of development, which determine the extent to which an individual can first discover, then augment, and then display his potential.

To substantiate the above points, it can be noted that Shaka was challenged to create the heavy stabbing assegai when he realized that the throwing spear broke when used as a stabbing weapon. More important still, what Shaka came up with depended upon the collective effort of the Ama-Zulu. Shaka could ask that a better assegai be forged, because the Ama-Ngoni had been working iron for a long time, and specialist blacksmiths had arisen within certain clans. It was a tribute to the organizational and agricultural capacity of the society as a whole that it could feed and maintain a standing army of thirty thousand men, re-equip them with iron weapons, and issue each soldier with the full-length Zulu shield made from cattle hide.

Because the scientific basis and experimental preconditions were lacking in Zulu society, Shaka could not have devised a firearm—no matter how much genius he possessed. But, he could get his people to forge better weapons, as explained above; and he found them receptive to better selective breeding practices when he set up special royal herds, because the people already had a vast fund of empirical knowledge about cattle and a love of the cattle-herding profession.

In the politico-military sphere, Shaka was following in the footsteps of his original protector, Dingizwayo, and to some extent in the footsteps of Zwede, who was a rival to both Dingizwayo and Shaka. Dingizwayo opened up trade with the Portuguese at Delagoa Bay in 1797 (mainly in ivory), and he stimulated arts and crafts. His most distinguished innovation was in the army, when he instituted a system of recruiting regiments according to age-grades. Previously, each locality tended to dominate within a given regiment; and, in any event, people were accustomed to fighting side by

side with members of their own kraal, locality, and clan. However, when all men in a given age-grade were brought into the same regiment, this emphasized a greater national feeling and also increased Dingizwayo's power vis-à-vis the smaller clan heads.

Dingizwayo was head of the important Ama-Mthethwa clan, and he succeeded in establishing his paramountcy in what later became the southern portion of Zululand. In the north, Zwide of the Ama-Ndwandwe was also engaging in political consolidation. Shaka served in one of the junior age-grade regiments of Dingizwayo, and remained faithful to the latter's centralizing power, until Dingizwayo met his death at the hands of Zwide in 1818. Thereafter, Shaka took up many of the military and political techniques of Dingizwayo and greatly improved them. That is development. It is a matter of building upon what is inherited and advancing slowly, provided that no one comes to "civilize" you.

The regions of Yorubaland, Dahomey, the interlacustrine kingdoms, and Zululand, which have so far been discussed, are examples of leading forces in the political development which was taking place in Africa right up to the eve of colonization. They were not the only leading forces, and even where the states were territorially much smaller, there were observable advances in political organization.

Areas of Africa that were most advanced by the fifteenth century generally maintained their standards, with few exceptions such as Kongo. In North Africa and Ethiopia, for example, feudal structures remained intact, though there was a noticeable lack of continued growth. In the Western Sudan, the Hausa states were heirs to the political and commercial tradition of the great empires after the fall of Songhai in the seventeenth century; and early in the nineteenth century there arose the Islamic Caliphate of Sokoto with its center in Hausaland. The Sokoto empire was one of the largest political units ever established on the African continent, and it suffered from many internal schisms through lack of adequate mechanisms for integrating so vast a territory. Experiments to deal with the problem of unity were continued in the Western Sudan, with Islam as the hoped-for unifying factor. An Islamic theocratic state was established across the Niger bend by Ahmadu Ahmadu in the middle of the nineteenth century, while another was created by Al Haj Omar on the upper Niger. Most outstanding of all was the Mandinga state carved out under the leadership of Samori Toure by the 1880s. Samori Toure was not scholarly like the renowned Uthman dan Fodio and Al Haj Omar, who before him had been creators of Islamic states; but Samori Toure was a military genius and a

political innovator, who went further than the others in setting up a political administration where a sense of loyalty could prevail over the above clans, localities, and ethnic groups.

Zimbabwe, too, progressed, with only slight interference from Europeans. Locally, the center of power shifted from Mutapa to Changamire; and eventually in the nineteenth century Nguni groups (fleeing from the power of the Zulu) overran Zimbabwe. So long as the Nguni were warrior bands on the march, they obviously proved destructive; but by the middle of the nineteenth century the Nguni had already spread their own *state-building* techniques to Mozambique and to what is now Southern Rhodesia, and had joined with the local population to establish new and larger kingdoms—infused with a sense of nationality, as was the case in Zululand.

Meanwhile, across vast areas of Central Africa, striking political change was also taking place. Up to the fifteenth century, the level of social organization was low in the area between Kongo and Zimbabwe. Precisely in that area, there arose the group of states known as the Luba-Lunda complex. Their political structures rather than their territorial size made them significant; and their achievements were registered in the face of constantly encroaching slaving activities.

On the large island of Madagascar, the several small states of an earlier epoch had by the late eighteenth century given way to the powerful feudal Merina kingdom. More often than not, Madagascar is ignored in general assessments of the African continent, although (both in the physical and the cultural sense) Africa is writ large on the Malagasy people. They, too, suffered from loss of population through slave exports; but the Merina kingdom did better than most slaving states, because more intensive cultivation of high-yielding swamp rice and the breeding of cattle offset the loss of labor. This situation should serve as a reminder that development *accompanied by* slave trading must not be superficially and illogically *attributed to* the export of the population and the dislocation attendant upon slave raiding. The bases of the political development of the Merina kingdom and of all others (whether or not engaged in slaving) lay in their own environment—in the material resources, human resources, technology, and social relations. So long as any African society could at least maintain its inherited advantages springing from many centuries of evolutionary change, then for so long could the superstructure continue to expand and give further opportunities to whole groups of people, to classes, and to individuals.

At the beginning of this section, attention was drawn to the necessity for reconciling a recognition of African development up to 1885 with an

awareness of the losses simultaneously incurred by the continent in that epoch, due to the nature of the contact with capitalist Europe. That issue must also be explicitly alluded to at this point. It is clearly ridiculous to assert that contacts with Europe built or benefited Africa in the pre-colonial period. Nor does it represent reality to suggest (as President Leopold Senghor once did) that the slave trade swept Africa like a bush fire, leaving nothing standing. The truth is that a developing Africa went into slave trading and European commercial relations as into a gale-force wind, which shipwrecked a few societies, set many others off course, and generally slowed down the rate of advance. However, (pursuing the metaphor further) it must be noted that African captains were still making decisions before 1885, though already forces were at work which caused European capitalists to insist on, and succeed in taking over, command.

The Coming of Imperialism and Colonialism

In the centuries before colonial rule, Europe increased its economic capacity by leaps and bounds, while Africa appeared to have been almost static. Africa in the late nineteenth century could still be described as part communal and part feudal, although Western Europe had moved completely from feudalism to capitalism. To elucidate the main thesis of this study, it is necessary to follow not only the development of Europe and the underdevelopment of Africa, but also to understand how those two combined in a single system—that of capitalist imperialism.

The European economy was producing far more goods by making use of their own resources and labor, as well as the resources and labor of the rest of the world. There were many qualitative changes in the European economy, which accompanied and made possible the increase in the quantity of goods. For example, machines and factories rather than land provided the main source of wealth; and labor had long since ceased to be organized on a restricted family basis. The peasantry had been brutally destroyed and the labor of men, women, and children was ruthlessly exploited. Those were the great social evils of the capitalist system, which must not be forgotten; but, on the issue of comparative economics, the relevant fact is that what was a slight difference when the Portuguese sailed to West Africa in 1444 was a huge gap by the time that European robber statesmen sat down in Berlin 440 years later to decide who should steal which parts of Africa. It was that gap which provided both the necessity and the opportunity for Europe to move into the imperialist epoch, and to colonize and further underdevelop Africa.

The growing technological and economic gap between Western Europe and Africa was part of the trend within capitalism to concentrate or polarize wealth and poverty at two opposite extremes.

Inside Western Europe itself, some nations grew rich at the expense of others. Britain, France, and Germany were the most prosperous nations. Poverty prevailed in Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and southern Italy. Inside the British, French, and German economies, the polarization of wealth was between the capitalists on the one hand and the workers and a few peasants on the other. The big capitalists got bigger and the little ones were eliminated. In many important fields, such as iron and steel manufacture, textiles, and particularly banking, it was noticeable that two or three firms monopolized most of the business. The banks were also in a commanding position within the economy as a whole, providing capital to the big monopoly industrial firms.

European monopoly firms operated by constantly fighting to gain control over raw materials, markets, and means of communications. They also fought to be the first to invest in new profitable undertakings related to their line of business—whether it be inside or outside their countries. Indeed, after the scope for expansion became limited inside their national economies, their main attention was turned to those countries whose economies were less developed and who would therefore offer little or no opposition to the penetration of foreign capitalism. That penetration of foreign capitalism on a world-wide scale from the late nineteenth century onwards is what we call “imperialism.”

Imperialism meant capitalist expansion. It meant that European (and North American and Japanese) capitalists were forced by the internal logic of their competitive system to seek abroad in less developed countries opportunities to control raw material supplies, to find markets, and to find profitable fields of investment. The centuries of trade with Africa contributed greatly to that state of affairs where European capitalists were faced with the *necessity* to expand in a big way outside their national economies.

There were certain areas of Africa in which European investment was meant to get immediate superprofits. The mines of South Africa, the loans to North African governments, and the building of the Suez Canal also insured the greater profitability of European investment in and trade with India. However, Africa's greatest value to Europe at the beginning of the imperialist era was as a source of raw materials such as palm products, groundnuts, cotton, and rubber. The need for those materials arose out of Europe's expanded economic capacity, its new and larger machines, and its increasing wage-earning population in towns. All of those things had developed over the previous four centuries; and again it needs to be repeated

that one of the important factors in that process was the unequal trade with Africa.

Imperialism is essentially an economic phenomenon, and it does not necessarily lead to direct political control or colonization. However, Africa was the victim of colonization. In the period of the notorious "Scramble for Africa," Europeans made a grab for whatever they thought spelled profits in Africa, and they even consciously acquired many areas not for immediate exploitation but with an eye to the future. Each European nation that had these short-term and long-term economic interests ran up its own flag in different parts of Africa and established colonial rule. The gap that had arisen during the period of pre-colonial trade gave Europe the *power* to impose political domination on Africa.

Pre-colonial trade in slaves, ivory, gold, and other things was conducted from the coasts of Africa. On the coasts, European ships could dominate the scene, and if necessary forts could be built. Before the nineteenth century, Europe was incapable of penetrating the African continent, because the balance of force at their disposal was inadequate. But the same technological changes which created the need to penetrate Africa also created the power to conquer Africa. The firearms of the imperialist epoch marked a qualitative leap forward. Breech-loading rifles and machine guns were a far cry from the smooth-bored muzzle loaders and flintlocks of the previous era. European imperialists in Africa boasted that what counted was the fact that they had the Maxim machine gun and Africans did not.

Curiously, Europeans often derived the moral justification for imperialism and colonialism from features of the international trade as conducted up to the eve of colonial rule in Africa. The British were the chief spokesmen for the view that the desire to colonize was largely based on their good intentions in wanting to put a stop to the slave trade. True enough, the British in the nineteenth century were as opposed to slave trading as they were once in favor of it. Many changes inside Britain had transformed the seventeenth-century necessity for slaves into the nineteenth-century necessity to clear the remnants of slaving from Africa so as to organize the local exploitation of land and labor. Therefore, slaving was rejected in so far as it had become a fetter on further capitalist development; and it was particularly true of East Africa, where Arab slaving persisted until late in the nineteenth century. The British took special self-righteous delight in putting an end to Arab slave trading, and in deposing rulers on the grounds that they were slave traders. However, in those very years, the British were crushing political leaders in Nigeria, like Jaja and Nana, who had by then ceased the export of slaves, and were concentrating instead on products like palm oil and rubber. Similarly, the Germans in

East Africa made a pretense of being most opposed to rulers like Bushiri who were engaged in slave trading, but the Germans were equally hostile to African rulers with little interest in slaving. The common factor underlying the overthrow of African rulers in East, West, Central, North, and South Africa was that they stood in the way of Europe's imperial needs. It was the only factor that mattered, with anti-slaving sentiments being at best superfluous and at worst calculated hypocrisy.

King Leopold II of Belgium also used the anti-slavery excuse to introduce into Congo forced labor and modern slavery. Besides, all Europeans had derived ideas of racial and cultural superiority between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, while engaged in genocide and the enslavement of non-white peoples. Even Portugal, an impoverished and backward European nation in the imperialist era, could still presume that it had a destiny to civilize the natives in Africa!

There is a curious interpretation of the Scramble and African partition which virtually amounts to saying that colonialism came about because of Africa's needs rather than those of Europe. Africa, they say, required European colonization if it were to advance beyond the stage it had reached in the late nineteenth century. Clearly, they do not appreciate that such a line of reasoning was suggesting that Africa would develop if it were given bigger doses of the European concoction that had already started its underdevelopment—that it would develop if it lost the last remnants of its freedom of choice, which had clearly been seriously undermined by the pre-colonial trade—that it would develop if its economy became more integrated with Europe's on terms that were entirely dictated by Europe. Those implications and their fallacies would be plain to anyone who tries to understand the development process before making pronouncements on any particular epoch of human development in Africa.

Throughout the fourteenth century, African rulers were displaying great initiative in pursuit of the broadest forms of cultural contact with Europe. In the case of West Africa, that meant seeking substitutes for trade in slaves. Dahomey, one of the most embroiled in slave trading, was among those states that used many of the last years of its independence to find a healthy basis for cultural exchange with Europeans.

In 1850, the reigning Dahomean king, Gezo, proclaimed an edict whereby all young oil palms were to be freed from parasites surrounding them, and severe penalties were to be imposed for cutting palm trees. Gezo, who ruled from 1818 to 1857, was a reformer, and he made sincere efforts to meet criticisms of his policies by groups such as missionaries and anti-slavery campaigners; but it soon became clear that Europeans were not bent on seeing Dahomey re-emerge as a strong state, but were rather

creating excuses and the subjective conditions to justify their proposed colonization of the people of Dahomey. Under those circumstances, the last Dahomean monarch, Glele, fell back on his capital at Abomey, and pursued the policies which he considered most consistent with the dignity and independence of Dahomey. Glele raided Abeokuta, which contained converts who were already "British protected persons"; he told the French to get the hell out of Porto-Novo; and he generally resisted until defeated militarily by the French in 1889.

African groups who had little or nothing to do with slave exports also intensified their efforts to integrate into a wider world in the nineteenth century. Gungunhana, the Nguni ruler of Gaza in Mozambique, asked for a Swiss missionary doctor and maintained him at his court for several years until the Portuguese conquered his kingdom in 1895. After the Portuguese imposed colonial rule, it was a long time before Africans saw another doctor!

It is particularly instructive to turn to the example of Egypt under Mohammed Ali, who ruled from 1805 to 1849. Capitalist Europe had left feudal North Africa behind over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Mohammed Ali was aware of that, and consciously aimed at catching up with Europe. He instituted a series of reforms, the most important of which were of an economic nature. Egypt grew and manufactured its own cotton, and it made glass, paper, and other industrial goods. Egypt was not to be used as a dumping ground for European goods which would undermine local industry, so that protective tariff walls were set up around Egypt's "infant industries." That did not mean that Egypt became isolated from the rest of the world. On the contrary, Mohammed Ali borrowed experts from Europe, and he increased Egypt's foreign trade.

The ideals of Mohammed Ali could be related in the idiom of modern social science as being the creation of a viable, self-propelling economy to provide the basis for national independence. Such ideals were diametrically opposed to the needs of European capitalism. British and French industrialists wanted to see Egypt not as a textile manufacturer but as a producer of raw cotton for export, and an importer of European manufactures. European financiers wanted Egypt to be a source of investment, and in the second half of the eighteenth century they turned the sultan of Egypt into an international beggar, who mortgaged the whole of Egypt to international monopoly financiers. Finally, European statesmen wanted Egyptian soil to serve as a base for exploiting India and Arabia. Therefore, the Suez Canal was dug out of Egyptian soil by Egyptians, but it was owned by Britain and France, who then extended political domination over Egypt and Sudan.

Education is undeniably one of the facets of European life which had grown most appreciably during the capitalist epoch. Through education and extensive use of the written word, Europeans were in a position to pass on to the others the scientific principles of the material world which they had discovered, as well as a body of varied philosophical reflections on man and society. Africans were quick to appreciate advantages deriving from a literate education. In Madagascar, the Merina kingdom did a great deal to sponsor reading and writing. They used their own language and an Arabic script, and they welcomed the aid of European missionaries. That conscious borrowing from all relevant sources was only possible when they had the freedom to choose. Colonization, far from springing from Malagasy needs, actually erected a barrier to the attainment of the “modernization” initiated by the Merina kings in the 1860s and 1870s. A similar example can be found in the history of Tunisia before the ax of partition fell.

In many parts of the world, capitalism in its imperialist form accepted that some measure of political sovereignty should be left in the hands of the local population. This was so in Eastern Europe, in Latin America, and to a more limited extent in China. However, European capitalists came to the decision that Africa should be directly colonized. There is evidence to suggest that such a course of action was not entirely planned. Britain and France up to the 1850s and 1860s would have preferred to divide Africa into informal “spheres of influence.” That means that there would have been a gentlemen’s agreement that (say) Nigeria would be exploited by the British merchants while Senegal would be exploited by Frenchmen. At the same time both Englishmen and Frenchmen would trade in a minor way in each other’s informal empire. But, firstly, there was disagreement over who should suck which pieces of Africa (especially since Germany wanted to join the grabbing); and, secondly, the moment that one European power declared an area of Africa as a protectorate or a colony, it put up tariffs against European traders of other nationalities, and in turn forced their rivals to have colonies and discriminatory tariffs. One thing led to another, and soon six European capitalist nations were falling over each other to establish direct political rule over particular sections of Africa. Make no mistake about it, gentlemen like Carl Peters, Livingstone, Stanley, Harry Johnston, De Brazza, General Gordon, and their masters in Europe were literally scrambling for Africa. They barely avoided a major military conflagration.

In addition to the factors that caused the chain reaction of the Scramble as described above, Europeans were also racially motivated to seek political domination over Africa. The nineteenth century was one in which white racism was most violently and openly expressed in capitalist societies, with

the U.S.A. as a focal point, and with Britain taking the lead among the Western European capitalist nations. Britain accepted granting dominion status to its old colonies of white settlers in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand; but it withdrew self-government from the West Indies when the white planters were ousted from the legislative assemblies by black (or brown) people. As far as Africa is concerned, Englishmen violently opposed black self-government such as the Fante Confederation on the Gold Coast in the 1860s. They also tried to erode the authority of black Creoles in Sierra Leone. In 1874, when Fourah Bay College sought and obtained affiliation with Durham University, the *Times* newspaper declared that Durham should next affiliate with the London Zoo! Pervasive and vicious racism was present in imperialism as a variant independent of the economic rationality that initially gave birth to racism. It was economics that determined that Europe should invest in Africa and control the continent's raw materials and labor. It was racism which confirmed the decision that the form of control should be direct colonial rule.

Africans everywhere fought against alien political rule, and had to be subdued by superior force. But a sizable minority did insist that their trade connections with Europe should remain unbroken, for that was a measure of the extent to which they were already dependent on Europe. The most dramatic illustration of that dependence was the determination with which some Africans fought the end of the European slave trade.

For most European capitalist states, the enslavement of Africans had served its purpose by the middle of the nineteenth century; but for those Africans who dealt in captives the abrupt termination of the trade at any given point was a crisis of the greatest magnitude. In many areas, major social changes had taken place to bring the particular regions effectively into the service of the European slave trade—one of the most significant being the rise of “domestic slavery” and various forms of class and caste subjugation. African rulers and traders who found their social existence threatened by the earliest legal edicts such as the 1807 British act against the trade in slaves found ways of making contact with Europeans who still wanted slaves.

In sub-Saharan Africa and especially in West Africa, the export of slaves declined most rapidly where Europeans were prepared to buy other commodities. As soon as inhabitants of any region found that they had a product which Europeans were accepting in place of the former slave trade, those inhabitants put tremendous effort into organizing the alternatives: namely, ivory, rubber, palm products, groundnuts. Once more, those efforts demonstrated the determination of a small but decisive proportion of Africans. It was a determination based on the desire to obtain European

trade goods, many of which had ceased to be mere curiosities or luxuries, and were regarded instead as necessities.

The first four centuries of Afro-European trade in a very real sense represent the roots of African underdevelopment. Colonialism flourished rapidly from a European viewpoint, because several of its features were already rooted in Africa in the preceding period. One of the most decisive features of the colonial system was the presence of Africans serving as economic, political, and cultural agents of the European colonialists. Those agents, or “compradors,” were already serving European interests in the pre-colonial period. The impact of trade with Europe had reduced many African rulers to the status of middlemen for European trade; it had raised ordinary Africans to that same middleman commercial role; and it had created a new trading group of mixed blood—the children of European or Arab fathers. Those types can all be referred to as “compradors,” and they played a key role in extending European activity from the coast into the hinterland, as soon as Europeans thought of taking over political power. One outstanding example of the above is the way that the French colonialists used Africans and mulattos on the Senegalese coast as agents for the spread of French control for thousands of miles into areas now covered by Senegal, Mali, Chad, Upper Volta, and Niger. Those particular blacks and mulattos were living in the trading ports of Gorée, Dakar, St. Louis, and Rufisque; and they had had long-standing links with Atlantic trade.

Africans conducting trade on behalf of Europeans were not merely commercial agents, but also cultural agents, since inevitably they were heavily influenced by European thought and values. The search for European education began in Africa before the colonial period. Coastal rulers and traders recognized the necessity to penetrate more deeply into the way of life of the white man who came across the sea. The mulatto sons of white traders and the sons of African rulers were the ones who made the greatest effort to learn the white man’s ways. This helped them to conduct business more efficiently. One Sierra Leone ruler in the eighteenth century explained that he wished “to learn book to be rogue as good as white man”; and there were many others who saw the practical advantages of literacy. However, the educational process also meant imbibing values which led to further African subjugation. One West African educated in this early period wrote a Ph.D. thesis in Latin justifying slavery. That was not surprising. The Reverend Thomas Thompson was the first European educator on the Gold Coast, and he wrote in 1778 a pamphlet entitled, *The African Trade for Negro Slaves Shown to be Consistent with the Principles of Humanity and the Laws of Revealed Religion*.

One of the most striking features of nineteenth-century West African history is the manner in which Africans returned from slavery under European masters and helped in the establishment of colonial rule. This was especially true of Africans who returned from the West Indies and North America to Sierra Leone or who were released from slave ships and landed in Sierra Leone. To a lesser extent, it also applied to Africans who were once in Brazil. Such individuals had assimilated capitalist values, and like most European missionaries, promoted the kinds of activity that went along with colonial rule. In a rather different context, it can be argued that the Arabs of Zanzibar and the East African coast were also transformed into agents of European colonialism. At first, they resisted because European colonialism affected their own expansionist ambitions on the East African mainland, but they soon came to an arrangement which gave Europeans the ultimate powers. The Europeans reduced the small Arab clique into political and economic instruments of imperialism.

European superiority over the Arabs in East and North Africa and in the Middle East demonstrates conclusively that modern imperialism is inseparable from capitalism, and underlines the role of slavery in the context of capitalism. The Arabs had acquired Africans as slaves for centuries, but they were exploited in a feudal context. African slaves in Arab hands became domestics, soldiers, and agricultural serfs. Whatever surplus they produced was not for reinvestment and multiplication of capital, as in the West Indian or North American slave systems but for consumption by the feudal elite. Indeed, slaves were often maintained more for social prestige than for economic benefit.

The major exceptions to that rule were nineteenth-century Zanzibar and Egypt under Mohammed Ali. In both those instances, African labor was being exploited to produce profit on a plantation basis; and this may also have applied to date-palm production in Arabia. But, Europe had already been exploiting African labor to maximize surplus for three centuries previously, and the contribution which the plantation system made to the European capitalist development was so great that Western Europe in the nineteenth century had engulfed the lesser exploitation of Zanzibar and Arabia, and it secured a firm grasp on Egypt's economy after the death of Mohammed Ali in 1849. In other words, the cloves, cotton, and dates produced in Zanzibar, Egypt, and Arabia, respectively, previous to colonization were already going to strengthen European trade and production. Eventually, it was no problem for the capitalist slave traders of Europe to extend political domination over the feudalist Arab slave traders and to use the latter as agents of colonialism in East Africa.

Returning to the question of indigenous African agents of European

colonial rule in Africa, it should be recognized that Europeans recruited Africans to serve in the armies that actually conquered Africa in the bloody period from the 1880s through the First World War started by Europeans in 1914. It is a widespread characteristic of colonialism to find agents of repression from among the colonial victims themselves. Yet, without the previous centuries of trade between Africa and Europe, it would have been impossible for Europeans to have so easily recruited the askaris, porters, and others, who made their colonial conquest possible.

African residents of the Senegalese ports already referred to were the ones who were put in French army uniform and fought to establish French rule in the interior and other parts of the coast such as Dahomey. When the British defeated Asante in 1874, they had in their forces African troops from the coastal towns around the Gold Coast forts. Those Africans had been in contact with Europeans for so long that from the seventeenth century they identified themselves as “Dutch,” “Danish,” or “English,” depending upon whose fort gave them employment. They had fought battles for one European nation against another, and by the late nineteenth century it was an easy matter to get them to fight against fellow Africans on behalf of the conquering colonial power of Britain.

In the Portuguese territories, the origins of the black colonial police and army also went back into the “pre-colonial” trade period. Around the forts of Luanda and Benguela in Angola and Lourenço Marques and Beira in Mozambique, there grew up communities of Africans, mulattos, and even Indians who helped “pacify” large areas for the Portuguese after the Berlin Conference. Traders in Mozambique and in the rest of East, West, and Central Africa who had experience with Europeans previous to colonialism were the ones to provide porters to carry the heavy machine guns, cannons, and the support equipment; they were the ones who provided the would-be European colonialist with the information and military intelligence that facilitated conquest; and they were the interpreters who were the voice of the Europeans on African soil.

Of course, it is true that many Africans who had little or nothing to do with pre-colonial trade also allied themselves with European newcomers. In that respect, the gap in levels of political organization between Europe and Africa was very crucial. The development of political unity in the form of large states was proceeding steadily in Africa. But even so, at the time of the Berlin Conference, Africa was still a continent of a large number of socio-political groupings who had not arrived at a common purpose. Therefore, it was easy for the European intruder to play the classic game of divide and conquer. In that way, certain Africans became *unwitting* allies of Europe.

Many African rulers sought a European “alliance” to deal with their own African neighbor, with whom they were in conflict. Few of those rulers appreciated the implications of their actions. They could not know that Europeans had come to stay permanently; they could not know that Europeans were out to conquer not some but all Africans. This partial and inadequate view of the world was itself a testimony of African underdevelopment *relative* to Europe, which in the nineteenth century was self-confidently seeking dominion in every part of the globe.

Political divisions in Africa were no evidence of innate inferiority or backwardness. That was the state in which the continent then found itself—a point along a long road that others had traversed and along which Africa was moving. Commercial impact of Europe slowed down the process of political amalgamation and expansion, in contrast to the way trade with Africa strengthened Europe’s nation-states. When European capitalism took the form of imperialism and started to subjugate Africa politically, the *normal* political conflicts of the pre-capitalist African situation were transformed into *weakness* which allowed the Europeans to set up their colonial domination.

Altogether, it is very clear that to understand the coming of colonialism into Africa, one has to consider the previous historical evolution of both Africa and Europe and in particular one has to consider ways in which their trade contacts influenced the two continents mutually, so that what was called “pre-colonial” trade proved to be a preparatory stage for the era of colonial rule.

It is widely accepted that Africa was colonized because of its weakness. The concept of weakness should be understood to embrace military weakness and inadequate economic capacity, as well as certain political weaknesses: namely, the incompleteness of the establishment of nation-states, which left the continent divided, and the low level of consciousness concerning the world at large, which had already been transformed into a single system by the expansion of capitalist relations.

Brief Guide to Reading

The section of this chapter dealing with African society is a continuation of Chapter 2; and general books cited there are also relevant to this context. More African writers are involved in this recent pre-colonial period, which is of course one aspect of a national struggle. There are also more and better monographs on given areas and subjects. But, the coming of imperialism has not yet been seriously pursued from an African viewpoint, and there is a marked absence of theory linking together the numerous

facts that are now well established about events taking place in Africa between 1500 and 1885.

J. B. WEBSTER and A. A. BOAHEN, *History of West Africa; the Revolutionary Years—1815 to Independence*. New York: Praeger, 1967.

BASIL DAVIDSON with J. E. MHINA, *History of East and Central Africa to the Late Nineteenth Century*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Book A 677.

These two should be added to the list of general texts which provide regional surveys over a long period of time. They have the advantage of being coherent interpretations and not just collected essays.

WALTER RODNEY, *West Africa and the Atlantic Slave Trade*. Nairobi: Published for the Historical Association of Tanzania by the East African Publishing House, 1969.

E. ALPERS, *The East African Slave Trade*.

I. A. AKINJOGBIN, *Dahomey and Its Neighbours*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967.

The first two are short accounts of the impact of slave exports on the African regions concerned. The third is a detailed account by a Nigerian scholar of Dahomey's involvement with Europeans.

JACOB U. EGHAREVBA, *A Short History of Benin*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1968.

B. A. OGOT, *History of the Southern Luo*. Nairobi: East Africa Publishing House, 1967.

ISARIA KIMAMBO, *A Political History of the Pare of Tanzania*. New York: International Publications, 1971.

JAN VANSINA, *Kingdoms of the Savanna*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966.

The first three are good examples of scholarship by Africans concerning historical developments starting before contact with Europe. They are characterized by the use of African oral traditions as a basis for interpretation. The fourth (by a European) was a pioneering work which drew heavily on oral traditions in reconstructing Central African history.

J. ADE AJAYI, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1845–1891*. New York: International Publications, 1971.

E. A. AYANDELE, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria*. New York: Humanities Press, 1967.

One aspect of the imperialist epoch that has been probed by African historians (and many non-Africans) is that of the Christian missionaries, as evidenced by the above works.