

ON THE ECONOMIC DERIVATION OF SOCIAL CLASSES IN
PRE-CAPITALIST AFRICA: PRODUCTION, TRADE,
AND PROCESS IN THE BENIN KINGDOM,
1400 - 1897

by

UDO R. KRAUTWURST

A thesis
presented to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
in
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Winnipeg, Manitoba

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ABSTRACT

There has been a "revival" of Marxist inspired work in the social sciences in recent years. This literature is not uniform in the characterization of historical materialism, and has resulted in competing interpretations of the earlier texts. Two "schools" have come to dominate Marxist inspired anthropology: "dependency theory" and "articulation theory." My contention, following the lead of Brewer (1980) and others, is that these two approaches are not opposed to each other, but rather, they are broken moments of an original unity found in the earlier texts. Thus, both theoretical orientations are necessary for a full understanding of class structure and class dynamics in any society.

The Benin Kingdom is a valuable test case insofar as this state maintained its autonomy until 1897, was relatively well documented by European merchants and travellers, and has a rich and well preserved oral history.

Articulation theory provides a framework within which to examine the fundamental production relations and hence the modes of production operative within the kingdom. One conclusion is that a slave mode of production dominated a domestic mode of production, with a corresponding basic class structure of slave owners, slaves, elders, and women

and juniors. Dependency theory supplements the analysis of production by placing the Benin Kingdom in the regional and international trade networks within which it operated. Thus dependency theory adds a dynamic element to the analysis by showing how class struggles elsewhere affect the class struggle and conditions of production within the kingdom. As a result of applying the dependency model to slave production relations, it was concluded that a "secondary" class of "petty slavers" was formed by the articulation of the slave and domestic modes. Contradictions within the slave mode and economic conditions unfavourable to the dominant slave owning class were such that a transition to new productive relations was well underway when British forces invaded the kindgom in 1897. The pre-existing social structure thus aids in our understanding of how capitalism affected, and was affected by, African societies in earlier times and the present.

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Wendy Chappell's assistance and affection gave me strength when I felt weary. I cannot ever express how much this means to me.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The recent 'revival' of Marxist inspired work in the social sciences during the last twenty years has led to a profusion of literature that is often held to be contradictory, with rival 'schools' or individuals claiming to be more Marxist than others. One of the more prolonged and heated debates that has emerged is the 'dependency school' versus the 'articulation school.' While the polemic was waged between adherents of these two approaches, others began to question whether a reconciliation was possible. Brewer (1980: 272), for example, has written that the debate

is indeed a non-problem. There can be no question of choosing to analyse at one of these levels, and ignoring the others; any adequate account...must incorporate all of them, and their interrelations. There is only a problem if one asks the purely semantic question: to what kinds of entities can the adjectives 'capitalist,' 'feudal,' and so on be attached?

The debate began in the context of the transition to capitalism in present day societies, in particular, the exchange between Frank and Laclau on the nature of development in Latin America. Frank (1969a; 1969b) took the

position that Latin America has been fully capitalist since the Spanish conquest, although the capitalism that emerged there was of an order that led to 'underdevelopment,' rather than the 'development' experienced in Europe. Laclau's (1971) critique of Frank was essentially that analysis proceeded in the sphere of circulation to the exclusion of production relations. What Laclau suggested is that Latin America is fully capitalist in terms of exchange, but, in terms of production, capitalism was incomplete and still 'articulates' with previous modes of production.

The parameters of the debate were widened with the writings of Immanuel Wallerstein on the 'dependency' side, and the translation into English of various works by the 'French Structuralists' on the 'articulation' side. These authors and their followers began to pursue lines of enquiry for social systems historically prior to capitalism as well. With this development it was no longer exclusively a question of the transition to capitalism, but the question of transition itself, from one mode of production to another. This, of course, is a question with which anthropologists have long concerned themselves.

My primary objective here is to show that, at least in the case of the Benin Kingdom, the debate is indeed a "non-problem" which has often obscured issues as often as clarifying them. Brewer's choice of the word 'level' is particularly apt, since the matter, as developed in the

discussion so far, is posing a theory of exchange against a theory of production. Both are indispensable elements when examining concrete societies. However, it must not be forgotten that analysis is also taking place at different levels of abstraction. One need only to look at how Marx (1983) organized and presented Capital in order to understand this. Volume I examined the production process in order to understand the relations of production, Volume II focused on the exchange process in order to understand the distribution of the product, and finally Volume III examined how production and exchange interact in order for the entire system to reproduce itself and yet change as a part of that reproduction. In a sense, it is as if the current debate was between Volume I and Volume II, and Volume III never existed. Undeniably, Marx's purpose was to begin at the highest level of abstraction and to successively move to lower levels of abstraction, indicating, along the way, how various social institutions and social groups shape the processes operating at the different levels of abstraction.

1.2. PRESENTATION FORMAT

With this notion of successively moving from higher levels of abstraction to lower I feel I can adequately outline 500 years of history in a particular society in a

manner as yet rarely done by ethnographers and ethnohistorians of a Marxist persuasion since, for the most part, analysis has been conducted at only one level of abstraction. An example that readily comes to mind is the case of the Ivory Coast. Claude Meillassoux, a leading proponent of 'articulation,' has conducted research among these peoples since the late 1950's. In his relatively recent work, Maidens, Meal and Money (1981a), his only reference to Rodolfo Stavenhagen, a 'dependency' theorist who has also written on the Ivory Coast, was essentially to dismiss Stavenhagen's analysis. Stavenhagen (1969), on the other hand, does not even mention Meillassoux or any other 'articulation' theorists, even though their work was becoming available at the time of his writing. Clearly, while there has been no lack of criticism in the history of the debate, it is equally as clear that there has been an absence of dialogue.

My analysis will begin with an examination of the different modes of production operating in the Benin Kingdom for which there is sufficient historical material. In the process it will be possible to identify the primary relations of production and their inherent contradictions for each mode of production. In particular, the works of Godelier (1977), Meillassoux (1981a), and Terray (1983, 1979a, 1979b, 1975) will provide the theoretical background at this level of analysis. At this point I will posit that

between c.1400 and 1897 there were two modes of production in operation in the Benin Kingdom. 1) One was a mode of production corresponding to what Meillassoux and Terray would call a domestic or lineage mode of production. The defining features of this mode of production are that kinship serves as a basis for the division of labour within a relatively autonomous community. 2) The other was a mode of production corresponding to what Amin (1972) terms a 'tributary' mode of production which arose from the lineage mode. This mode of production 'mirrors' the first politically and ideologically in order to mask the new forms of exploitation economically. Although Amin and others regard a slave mode of production separate from a tributary mode of production, I will put forward an argument that the former is a variation of the latter. For the moment I consider it sufficient to suggest that modes of production can also be analysed at three different levels of abstraction. Briefly, there is 1) a universal level where the mode of production is either present or absent, such as a tributary mode where, for example, one class collects tribute or no tribute is collected and therefore there is no class of tribute takers; 2) a middle or regional level that contains variations of a universal level such as a feudal mode of production or an Asiatic mode of production, both of which are variants of a tributary mode, and; 3) a specific or particular level which contains variations on the middle

level such as English feudalism or French feudalism (cf. Halperin 1984, Wolf 1982).

This first chapter, since it is primarily based on the work of 'French Structuralists,' must also take into account the nature of structural analysis. Both Sahlins (1981) and Wolf (1982) note that structural analysis, while useful, is often at the expense of historical analysis. My attempt to overcome this limitation will be outlined in the chapter on class.

Chapter II will examine Benin's trade relations over time, both internally and externally, as far as the historical material permits. Wallerstein's (1978, 1979) discussions on precapitalist arenas of exchange, although meagre, provide a point of departure. He contends that prior to the rise of capitalism there were either "reciprocal mini-systems" or "redistributive world-empires," which, by definition, are mutually exclusive of each other. His basis for posing these systems is admittedly grounded in the work of Karl Polanyi as well as Marx. In this context a review of Polanyi's influence on Marxist anthropology would be in order. Wallerstein's amalgamation of Polanyi and Marx have led him to conclude that "the relations between modes of exchange and modes of production...are indential" (1978: 263). On the other hand, structural analysts, such as those outlined above, tend to reject many of Polanyi's arguments while remaining sympathetic to the object of his research.

Their emphasis on relations of production suggests that modes of exchange and modes of production, while related, cannot always be identical. This is precisely the point where the two 'schools' diverge. This is also why the efforts by Polanyi take on such importance.

At the heart of the matter, I believe, is confusion over the appropriate level of analysis. Wallerstein's formulations are conducted at what I have termed the universal level, where the mode of production and mode of exchange are equivalent. As others have noted (e.g., Laclau 1977, Brewer 1980), such a conception distorts or ignores the distinction between mode of production and economic system. I would argue that Wallerstein's formulations are best understood as an economic system, but that by themselves these formulations are not sufficient to understand the dynamics of an economic system. The 'articulation' approach rightly emphasises the relations of production but when the analysis proceeds to distribution there is a subtle shift of emphasis. Terray (1979), for example, suggests that relations of distribution correspond to, and are dominated by, relations of production in the Abron Kingdom. While I have no quarrel with this assertion it seems to me to be inadequate because it does not take into account that neighbouring societies are also subject to a similar structural design. However, neighbouring societies occupy different ecological zones, have different

productive bases, population sizes, technologies, and histories. In short, Terray, although at times coming close, is lacking 'dependency' relationships between and within societies. The assumption seems to be that until conquest occurs exchange is conducted between equivalent societies for goods desired by both societies. In actuality this is rarely the case.

A model proposed by Ekholm (1981) should hopefully provide a link between the two approaches outlined above. While I cannot wholly subscribe to the model, certain elements are particularly relevant to my objectives here, specifically the characterization of 'levels.'

The simplest description of a global system is one composed of two hierarchical levels each of which is characterized by a certain kind of 'totality.' At the lower level is production and local social structure, the 'social formation' and at the higher level the set of 'external' relations linking such localised sub-units. The logical interdependence of the two levels should be evident--production can only be local, exchange can only take place between local production processes (Ekholm 1981: 246).

The next logical step is to establish the 'center' and 'periphery' and the relationship between them. The 'center' requires raw materials (including labour) to manufacture products for export to the 'periphery,' and the 'periphery' exchanges raw materials for finished products.

The third chapter will examine the class structure and class dynamics of the Benin Kingdom. The first chapter on

production relations will have already provided the structural determinants of the various classes in the Bini mode of production. Exchange relations will have taken a step towards concrete reality by suggesting how internal and external trade and distribution reproduce production relations and, hence, class divisions in Bini society. In this chapter I will attempt an even further approximation of reality by examining how class conflict shaped the development of Bini society.

Considering that the historical materials available have little to say regarding the lives of the producers and the lower echelons of the aristocratic elite, the difficulty becomes a question of how the class struggle did manifest itself. Of course, the relatively recent ethnographic materials are suggestive, particularly in combination with the historical evidence that is available. Certainly this will require a certain amount of speculation and the degree of speculation increases the farther one goes back in time. The problem, obviously, is how to limit the guesswork given the paucity of data that exists.

My approach to overcoming excessive speculation will be to examine the oral histories of the Bini kings as presented by Jacob Egharevba (1968). While it is possible to study these oral histories in a number of ways, the tack utilized here has its roots in Marx. When Marx wrote *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* he suggested that "Men make

their own history, but they do not make it just as they please" (1977: 13). He correctly asserted that society, composed of individual social beings, can always choose to solve social problems using a variety of techniques, but the techniques at the disposal of society have their antecedents and thus limit the options available to society. Writing late in the nineteenth century George Plekhanov developed this notion further by examining the part a leading individual can play in solving social problems.

A great man is great not because his personal qualities give individual features to great historical events but because he possesses qualities which make him most capable of serving the great social needs of his time, needs which arose as a result of general and particular causes...He solves the scientific problems brought up by the proceeding process of intellectual development of society; he points to the new social needs created by the proceeding development of social relationships; he takes the initiative in satisfying these needs. He is a hero. But he is a hero not in the sense that he can stop or change the natural course of things, but in the sense that his activities are the conscious and free expression of this inevitable and unconscious course. Herein lies all of his significance; herein lies his whole power. (Plekhanov 1969: 176, emphasis added.)

At this point the connection to the Bini king lists becomes rather transparent; these oral histories serve as a condensed form of social development. Even if particular events are not recorded in history, the effects have been preserved in these court histories of famous, and infamous,

divine monarchs. So what we have then, is a compacted version of the class struggle ascribed to this or that king. If this is indeed the case, the result is a method to overcome the ahistorical nature of structural analysis alluded to earlier since the class struggle modifies the relations of production and hence the mode of production itself.

1.3. THE DATA

Data collection will consist entirely of available ethnographic and historical monographs and documents. While a complete collection of archival materials and a period of fieldwork is highly desirable, the current constraints and restrictions within which I am operating prevent me from realizing this ideal.

Operating with the materials at my disposal naturally entails a number of difficulties. The ethnographic material was written after British colonial intervention which entails the risk of mistaking an imposed institution for an indigenous one. Furthermore, the historical material available was written entirely by Europeans. Unlike other West African states further to the north where Muslim influence encouraged writing for documenting events, Benin and other forest/coastal states did not have writing systems. Thus, there is no African perspective to counter the European perspective. Also unfortunate is the fact that

archaeological research has not yet progressed to the point where we can substantiate or refute propositions put forward by historians and ethnographers. In all cases, personal bias, including my own, distorts the objective situation to greater or lesser degrees.

1.4. RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

For anyone interested in understanding contemporary African politics, economics, society, and culture one must begin in the past. Many authors have often noted the poverty that exists in most modern African states and that in former times this was usually not the case. Throughout the continent there was a time when cultures and societies were flourishing and vibrant. At the time of European contact, there was a meeting of societies and world views that regarded each other as "different but equal," to borrow Davidson's (1982) phrase. My own curiosity begs me to ask why this former equality has degenerated into poverty for the majority of African people today. I am not suggesting that former African societies were necessarily Gardens of Eden. What I am suggesting is that however difficult life may have been, it was far from 'nasty, brutish, and short.'

My own interest in West Africa began several years ago when the Western media began reporting a massive famine throughout this region of the continent. Images of distended bellies on the television, reports of murder over

morsels of food, reports of farmers selling or pawning their children so that they might be fed, etc., come to mind. If the appeal was originally emotional, it did not take long to be intellectual as well. If West African societies had experienced relatively more prosperous times, then it becomes of the utmost importance to understand what was lost, and more importantly, how ideas and institutions were lost and gained.

On an empirical level, this study has two aspects to contribute to the body of knowledge that already exists. On one hand, the extant material regarding Benin is quite limited in terms of extensive study. The neighbouring populations of the Yoruba kingdoms in the west, the Hausa and Fulani kingdoms in the north, and the stateless Ibo to the east have received considerably more attention. R.E. Bradbury was the last ethnographer to study the Bini people in detail, primarily in the 1950's and early 1960's. Unfortunately his mid-career death has deprived the academic community of his wisdom and open-mindedness. Prior to his work, H. Ling Roth published a major work in 1903, valuable in that the Benin Kingdom had only lost its formal independence in 1897. Alan Ryder, a historian who studied under Bradbury, published a comprehensive history of European contact with Benin in the late 1960's. Only a few journal articles, limited in scope, fill in some of the gaps. Thus, this study is both a reappraisal and extension

of these authors' contributions, a necessary step to deepening and broadening our understanding of the Bini people, and West Africa in general. On the other hand, by using a Marxist analysis, I hope to achieve a product that is useful not just to anthropologists and historians, but of value to any social scientists interested in African issues.

At the theoretical level my main objective, as I have already stated, is to attempt an analysis that incorporates a prominent Marxist theory of exchange and a prominent Marxist theory of production. If successful, a major advance toward the resolution of a debate will have occurred. However, there are other theoretical issues at stake here as well. How important was the slave trade? How important was the European trade compared to internal and regional trade (cf., Law 1978)? Finally, in examining the class structure, I will attempt to operationalize Plekanov's essay in the hope of overcoming the ahistorical nature of a structural analysis. Leslie White achieved a fair measure of success using similar ideas in the late 1940's, but for the most part this approach to interpreting oral history has been ignored.

II. RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION IN PRE-COLONIAL BENIN

2.1. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

2.1.1. THE LINEAGE MODE OF PRODUCTION

Maurice Godelier (1977) has argued that four steps are required in order to understand any social and economic formation. These steps are: 1) all modes of production must be identified along with the manner in which these modes articulate; 2) the social and ideological relations which correspond to these modes of production must be identified; 3) understanding the form and content of articulation in order to understand which mode is dominant and how the other modes are adapted to the functioning of the dominant mode; and, 4) examining how the social and ideological elements, which had their origins in different modes, are redefined in the process of articulation. My purpose here is primarily devoted to explicating points 1) and 3), although this in no sense is meant to belittle the role of ideology (and at any rate will have to be included in certain parts of the discussion anyway). I take it as axiomatic that the 'last instance' should be examined in the first place.

My analysis in this chapter is concerned to establish that Benin after 1400 was characterized by two modes of production--a subordinate lineage mode, and a dominant slave/tributary mode. Since empirical data is collected on the basis of pre-existing theoretical notions, I will follow this logical course in my presentation, beginning with the lineage mode of production as envisioned by the French structuralists.

Meillassoux has spent the longest period of time amongst the French structuralists researching what he terms the domestic mode of production. His analysis of the Guro of the Ivory Coast was the inspiration for many in refining their own conceptualization of what the domestic mode (or lineage mode or kin-ordered mode, etc.) should be. For these reasons it is worthwhile to pursue his argument as it appears in its most developed form in Maidens, Meal, and Money (1981a). To begin with, the domestic community is composed of individuals who, a) practice self-sustaining agriculture, b) produce and consume on communally held land, and c) are linked by ties of personal dependence arranged hierarchically. Let us look at each aspect in turn.

Self-sufficiency as a concept, Meillassoux argues, is applicable only to the sphere of production, while reproduction is dependent on the existence of similar domestic communities. These domestic communities overlap to a large degree with segmentary lineages, although he

maintains a separation in order to give the emphasis to residence rather than descent. The point is also made that self-sufficiency should not be confused with autarky. A goods trade does exist but the effects of this trade are 'neutralized' insofar as these products become prestige goods controlled by the elders. Should the elders lose control over the movement of these goods then the productive relations would be transformed. Self-sufficiency does not make allowance for specialization beyond the domestic unit but does, however, incorporate specialists such as iron workers. If I understand him correctly, he is advocating that specialists can in some way be incorporated into the domestic economy by dividing their time between agriculture and their craft with emphasis on the former. As in the case with trade, if craft production becomes separated from agriculture, i.e., a growing division of labour, then there must be institutional arrangements which maintain the integrity of the domestic community or transformations will occur. The possibility of domestic units combining for short periods, such as a village situation, is also added although these activities are considered secondary.

Agricultural production and craft techniques, at the level of the productive forces in this mode, require that social development has reached a stage that can support the domestic unit nutritionally and provide for the next agricultural cycle. This means that the number of active

workers at any given time exceeds what is technically necessary in order to provide 'insurance' should some members fall ill, die, etc. Fullest development of the domestic mode is reached in cereal agriculture rather than production in root crops and fruit. Land, in this situation, is an instrument of labour rather than a subject of labour. (The latter corresponds to a hunting and gathering mode of production presumably out of which the domestic mode arose.) Craft production can occur since the agricultural cycle, where the primary emphasis lies, has productive and unproductive periods based on the seasonal cycle.

The domestic community's social organization is built simultaneously on relations of production and relations of reproduction. "[T]he essence of the relations of production" are that "they create lifelong organic relations between members of the community; they support a hierarchical structure based on anteriority (or 'age'); they constitute functional coherent economic and social cells which are organically linked through time; they define membership, as well as a structure and a power of management which fall to the eldest in the productive cycle" (Meillassoux 1981a: 42). Relations of reproduction, however, are the dominant preoccupation (or 'instance') although subject to the constraints of production (which is determinant). The process of reproduction ensures that a

demographic balance is maintained between domestic units by exchanging pubescent women and claiming the offspring for the domestic community. The exchange of women is rarely immediate and is usually delayed for a number of reasons (e.g. demographic imbalances, differing ages of women, etc.) The end result is a series of multilateral exchanges over a 'matrimonial area.'

[T]he place occupied by the relations of reproduction in social organization and management explains the importance acquired by their juridico-ideological representation, i.e., kinship--even more strongly in that...the material foundations of authority tend to be undermined as authority increases and resorts more and more to ideology as a means of coercion. As this goes on, the relations of reproduction, although they remain subordinate to the relations of production, tend to dominate at the political level and to revamp the essential 'values' of the community toward a non-equalitarian class society (Meillassoux 1981a: 48).

Essentially, Meillassoux's argument is that the elders derive a position of privilege in the productive process, through the notion of anteriority, over juniors (young men), and they derive their domination over women through a process of social devaluation. These processes occur in the transition from a hunting and gathering mode of production to the domestic mode. Once this mode of production becomes dominant the elders' power shifts from a control over subsistence to a control over women. This shift occurs, Meillassoux argues, because matrimonial politics is more efficient than agricultural politics. It is more efficient

in the sense that control over women can be applied to a larger community than the control that can be exercised over subsistence.

Segmentation can now take place at the economic level of production and distribution by the formation of autonomous productive cells, while cohesion is maintained and reinforced at the matrimonial level which defines a larger exogamous political cell (the extended family, the lineage, the clan) (Meillassoux 1981a: 45).

Thus the relations of production have a tendency toward horizontal succession (from elder to younger brother) and the relations of reproduction have a tendency toward vertical succession (from father to son). The elders' power politically must be reinforced by ensuring endogamy is enforced as the community expands. Ideology is the principal means for maintaining social cohesion (i.e., endogamy).

As I indicated earlier, Meillassoux's model (as it has been developed over the years), has provided the theoretical basis for many French anthropologists, although most have modified the model to varying degrees for different purposes. An analysis of all the internal debates within this school of thought are certainly beyond the scope of what I hope to achieve here, but certain points which may have a bearing on the Bini social formation are worth raising.

The nature of kinship itself seems to be the fundamental question. In opposition to Meillassoux, Godelier (1977) contends that kinship operates both as 'infrastructure' and 'superstructure' since labour, as a purely economic activity, exists only in capitalism. Those who argue that kinship is purely superstructural are either being too abstract and/or doctrinaire. Meillassoux's position is that the infrastructure does not give rise to kinship but rather to relations of production. Kinship arises through the necessity of reproduction and therefore political relations assume the dominant feature of the domestic community. Dupre and Rey (1978) and Terray (1979a) both disagree with Godelier's notion of kinship and agree with Meillassoux insofar as kinship is considered a superstructural phenomena, but ideology, rather than politics, assumes the dominant role. However, ideology is dominant for Dupre and Rey because its function is to ensure reproduction, whereas for Terray ideology is the dominant instance in the lineage mode because of its function in production. Terray argues that the elders manipulate reproduction in the lineage mode precisely because they already control production and not vice versa. By assigning too much weight to social reproduction it often appears that productive relations are subordinate to reproductive relations, i.e., circulation determines production.

Related to the question of kinship is the debate surrounding whether exploitation and/or a class structure exists. Women constitute an exploited class for Meillassoux, because men appropriate both the products of their labour in agriculture and their children for purposes of social reproduction. The elder/junior distinction, on the other hand, does not constitute a class relationship, but is "[t]he mere exercise of authority" (Meillassoux 1981a: 81), since juniors, in time, become elders themselves. Dupre and Rey (1978) note that the elders' control over production is weak and that control over reproduction is strong. They are willing to admit that the juniors are exploited by the elders but will not go so far as to admit the existence of classes. What happens is that the elders perform a 'class function' without themselves constituting a class. In a later article Rey (1979) has modified his position to say that the elders do constitute a class in opposition to all juniors, including women who are perpetual juniors. Terray's (1975) approach to the problem is essentially the same as Rey's (their differences will be explicated elsewhere). Elders, he notes, are not defined by physiological age but by social age, which is to say that elders are men who exercise control over prestige goods, often as a household head. Membership in this class is restricted since "not all youths will become elders; some will die before reaching that goal, others will be preceded

by elder brothers throughout their lifetime; but all of them may legitimately think that they will one day cross that barrier" (Terray 1975: 111).

Universal applicability of the domestic mode has been questioned by O'Laughlin (1977). Her evaluation concludes that Meillassoux's analysis is too broad and that it does not take into account the variety of land use patterns found in precapitalist modes of production. While I would agree with her assessment, one must be cautious not to overextend land use patterns as constituting different modes of production. As Terray (1979a) has demonstrated, land use is intimately connected with the labour process as well as the mode of production. A potential confusion exists whereby each labour process becomes a mode of production. The applicability of Meillassoux's domestic mode, it seems to me, should be confined to sub-Saharan Africa since his data is derived exclusively from African societies where the availability of cultivatable land, generally speaking, is not a problem. Sahlins has also proposed a domestic mode of production, and, whatever vices and virtues it may have, does make the important point that "if one is nevertheless permitted to speak of a domestic mode of production, it is always and only in summary of many different modes of production" (1972: 77). This does not mean that there is no such thing as a domestic mode, but that a general form that is crosscultural has yet to be developed, although Eric Wolf

(1982) has taken tentative steps in that direction by positing a kin-ordered mode.

2.1.2. THE TRIBUTARY/SLAVE MODE OF PRODUCTION

"As far as we can tell from history there are two modes of production which, separately or together, ordinarily succeed the lineage mode: the tributary and/or slave mode of production" (Terray 1979b: 38). The difficulty, of course, is defining what the tributary mode is and the role of slavery in relation to it. Samir Amin, who developed the term 'tributary' mode of production, describes it as "the persistent parallel existence of a village community and a socio-political structure which exploited the former by exacting a tribute" (1972: 507). He goes on to suggest that when a tributary and a slave mode of production are found together within a social formation it is the former which will be the dominant mode.

Eric Wolf (1982) has taken Amin's idea and developed this notion to extend to all pre-capitalist state societies. His purpose is to lend coherency to the many modes of production which Marx posited, which, he notes, were not all based on equal criteria--some being only 'accessory' or 'supplementary' modes. For Wolf, the tributary mode is where the primary producer has access to the means of production, but is compelled to provide a surplus to the state by extra-economic means. Two poles of a continuum can

be envisioned from this definition: a) one where power over production and circulation is concentrated at the apex of a political system with little power devolving to the middle levels of the political system, and; b) the opposite where there is power over circulation invested at the top of the political hierarchy and production is controlled by the local surplus takers. These two polar situations correspond to the Asiatic and feudal modes of production respectively. In the situation corresponding to the Asiatic mode the rulers "will be able to curtail the power of traders, keeping them from access to the primary producers in the countryside and preventing them from financing potentially rebellious overlords on their own behalf" (Wolf 1982: 80). If power is concentrated in the hands of the local ruling class then they tend to retain a large portion of the tribute and to encourage trade with a minimum of restrictions. Competition amongst the local rulers often tends to weaken their position vis a vis the centre. This competition is what allows the centre to retain its position, i.e., the centre follows a divide and rule strategy. Wolf's position on slavery, like Amin's, is that slavery could never constitute an independent mode of production.

Unfortunately the present theoretical state of affairs in regards to a 'pure' tributary mode of production is rather dismal. In large part this is due to the fact that

social formations which were not European (feudal) or Asiatic were often forced to fit one of the two molds. Thus, for the case of West African states we find Godelier (1978) advocating them as an Asiatic mode, while Nzimiro (1979) contends that they are feudal. In all fairness to Godelier, though, it should be added that his reconceptualization of the Asiatic mode is meant to include all state level formations other than the feudal and capitalist modes, and is therefore in some respects similar to Wolf's concept of the tributary mode.

Since the theoretical status of a tributary mode is as yet not fully specified, the role of slavery becomes a tricky question. Terray's quote, with which I began this section, implies that the tributary and slave modes can evolve independently of each other. Contrasting this is Wolf's opinion that the slave mode cannot develop independently of the tributary mode. Put in other words, is slavery an independent mode of production or does it constitute a variation of the tributary mode? The answer to this question, I believe, must in large part be answered empirically. Godelier's (1977) analysis of the Inca Empire puts forward that a class of slaves (yana) was being developed after the tributary mode (Asiatic for Godelier) was established, while Terray's (1975, 1979b, 1983) data on the Abron Kingdom suggests that the two evolve simultaneously. Answering this important question fully and

satisfactorily is well beyond my intentions here (and possibly beyond my capabilities) but I can put forward some preliminary remarks.

Classical Greece and Rome were considered, by Marx, to be social formations where the slave mode of production was dominant. Ste. Croix (1984) has pondered over how these polities could be considered slave based. Class is his theoretical point of departure. He claims that the concept of "class", for Marx, referred above all to a relationship of exploitation; any other sense in which Marx used the term is derivative and should be placed in a wider context. Exploitation and resistance to exploitation is inherent in any class relationship (e.g., capitalist-proletarian, master-slave, lord-serf, etc.), although class consciousness is not. Exploitation is defined as the appropriation of surplus from the primary producer. Historically, two different types of exploitation can be discerned. First, exploitation can be thought of as direct and individual, where wage labourers, serfs, slaves, and so on, are exploited by particular employers, landowners, masters, etc. Indirect and collective exploitation occurs when a state, representing the dominant class or classes, 'burdens' a certain class or classes disproportionately in relation to other classes. 'Burdens' come in three varieties: a) taxation/tribute - which can be light or heavy, b) military service - which can be long or short, and; c) compulsory

services - consisting of corvee labour, intermittent levies, etc.

[T]he nature of a given mode of production is decided, not according to who does most of the work in production, but according to the method of surplus appropriation, the way in which the dominant classes extract their surplus from the primary producers...the propertied classes obtained the great bulk of their regular surplus from labour which was unfree (Ste. Croix 1984:107).

Thus, it was not necessary for slave societies to be composed primarily of slaves, nor does it mean that all unfree labour was supplied by slaves. The majority of the surplus could have been provided by another class. Slavery merely represents the most developed form of unfree labour which dominated in the social formation. Terray (independently as far as I can tell) comes to the same conclusion when he writes, "[t]o say a mode of production is dominant is not to claim that it organizes the majority of the available manpower or that the largest part of the total production is carried out within this mode" (1983: 121).

We can now return to the tributary mode of production advanced by Wolf. Clearly the premise upon which the tributary mode rests is in the indirect and collective exploitation that Ste. Croix mentions. Indeed, to include the individual and direct form of exploitation is to exclude the tributary mode as a general concept and have a multiplicity of modes of production reappear (feudal, Asiatic, etc.). It is also clear, however, that Wolf's

concept requires some redefinition on two related points. First, the notion that slavery cannot constitute an independent mode of production must be discarded entirely. It would be more accurate to suggest that slavery does not provide the entire surplus extracted by the ruling class. Second, the two polar situations Wolf describes need to be broadened to include the slave mode at one extreme and the Asiatic mode at the other. Why? My argument is as follows: in the Asiatic mode the state is the owner of the land and the community, as a whole, and holds all hereditary rights to land; in the feudal mode the state (or the local representative) is the owner of the land and the individual peasant family holds hereditary rights to certain parcels of land; in slavery the state is the owner of the land but the slave has no rights to use land or any other means of production because their access is controlled. For the moment I have advanced the argument as far as I can, which, incidentally, is consistent with Marx when he wrote:

Slavery and serfdom are therefore simply further developments of property based on tribalism. They necessarily modify all its forms. This they are least able to do in the Asiatic form. (1980: 91)

My position will be further elaborated in the next two sections on the transition from the kin-ordered (domestic, lineage) mode to the tributary mode, and on domestic slavery (as distinct from state slavery). One final comment on

terminology. In the pages that follow, particularly in reference to Benin, when I use the tributary mode, or slave mode, or tributary/slave mode it should be understood that I am referring to the same mode of production, but only in general and/or specific terms.

2.1.3. THE PROCESS OF TRANSITION

Returning to the domestic mode of production, Meillassoux (1981a) puts forward the idea that transformation, if it is to occur, can only arise if social reproduction benefits one group at the expense of another. That is, the productive and reproductive cycles must become dissociated. This can happen when the exchange of women becomes subordinated to an exchange of products and therefore allows accumulation to take place. The precondition of this dissociation is that reproduction must be controlled by one group. Meillassoux believes that this precondition can establish itself during lineage segmentation. When segmentation occurs without the accompanying matrimonial control, 'elder' and 'junior' lineages are formed. Once this hierarchy is established the community's social reproduction is organized by the senior lineage for its own benefit. Ideologically, the resultant inequality

...is expressed in the language of kinship even when it originates from outsiders. The ruling class, or the sovereign who represents

it is identified with the elder (senior or 'Seigneur'), or with the father. He is authorized to 'eat' his subjects as the father is authorized to receive the products and labour of his children. In return he is expected to protect them. Seemingly redistributive mechanisms are set in motion between the sovereign and his subjects, as between the elders and his dependents (Meillassoux 1981: 86)

Godelier (1977) correctly points out that with the emergence of the tributary mode kinship relations perform a new function without changing their form or structure. The tributary mode easily secures dominance over the kin-ordered mode simply because exploitation is couched in terms familiar to everyone. Oppressors and the oppressed share the same ideology of domestic unit reciprocity in order to conceal the unequal relations between senior and junior lineages. The Inca example Godelier utilizes to develop the nature of transition seems to indicate that the emergence of the state is intimately connected with the process of reproduction, i.e., the state is responsible for ensuring the reproduction of the new mode. Although I am only speculating, it seems reasonable to assume that the development of the state is a product of the transition from a 'formal' subsumption of the dominated mode to a 'real' subsumption, at least at the level of a 'pure' mode of production. This view would be in accordance with Wolf's position that chiefdoms "appear to be of two rather different kinds" (1984: 97). In the first situation the aristocratic lineage is still "embedded" and "bound" in

kinship arrangements whereas in the second situation the aristocratic lineage has become a class extracting surplus in the tributary mode. Clearly the transition from the formal to the real subsumption is crucial since this particular phase will largely influence the nature of the state and the manner in which the primary producers are exploited. In a period of transition from formal to real subsumption Rey (1979) puts forward that social relations which may have been relations of distribution or circulation became production relations. In order to demonstrate a real subordination of producers there must be a) appropriation, which b) structures the relations of cooperation throughout the division of labour, and therefore c) all technical change is determined by the relations of appropriation and cannot be developed unless they reinforce these relations. The first two parts, a) and b), represent a formal subsumption and become a real subsumption with the development of c), i.e., it is no longer possible to completely return to the previous mode of production. Anticipating the discussion in chapter two, I will advance for now that,

[c]ontenders for power must accumulate adequate 'funds of power' and redistribute them selectively to gain followers, rather than open resources to general redistribution ...Seen in this light, ...redistribution appears as a set of strategies in class formation, rather than as a general characteristic of chiefdoms as 'redistributional societies' (Wolf 1982: 97-98).

Earlier in the discussion O'Laughlin's criticism of Meillassoux's domestic mode was taken into account and I reached the conclusion that Meillassoux's model is best applied in an African context. Robin Horton (1971) has developed a model of how land use can affect the transition from a kin-ordered mode to a tributary mode. The analysis he presents does not conflict with Meillassoux's domestic mode but rather supplements it insofar as he confines his analysis to the West African case. In other words, Horton's analysis returns a regional specificity to Meillassoux's concept which, as was noted previously, overextended the data in an attempt to define a domestic mode globally.

Archaeologists, Horton says, have discovered that early settlements in the West African forest and savanna were dispersed, with village settlements emerging at a later point in time. Compound families are the basic unit of production, and expansion/fissioning creates new production units adjacent to the parent production unit. In Horton's scheme this situation is the first stage of settlement and corresponds to the domestic mode Meillassoux envisions. In the second stage land can become a factor in stratification when relative overpopulation leads to a lack of frontiers. Expansion is no longer occurring adjacent to the parent production unit but entails migration and obtaining permission to settle. Segmentary lineages in the first stage operate primarily on the principle of equivalence

(which agrees with Meillassoux's statements), while in stage two equivalence becomes a complementarity of functions between 'landowners' and 'latecomers'. At this stage settlement is still dispersed, but territorial co-residence replaces common descent politically while, at the same time, kinship remains the major organizing principle economically. This of course implies that the change in access to the means of production (land) manifests itself politically even though it is through the idiom of kinship.

Stages one and two correspond to relatively abundant land for expansion, but "[l]et us remember that in the sort of ecological conditions we are dealing with here, spatial distance is an important determinant of social distance" (Horton 1971: 98). Villages, which are the third stage, arise out of a need for defence. Historic sources and archaeology provide evidence that in precolonial times even the smallest villages tend to be fortified. Horton does not discern why defence was necessary but assumes that the motivation was to defend territory. This line of argumentation does not seem wholly satisfactory if he, amongst others, suggests that land was (and still is) relatively abundant. Meillassoux would have us return to the domestic mode's inner contradictions

which prevent marriage exchange from proceeding smoothly and which give ambiguity to the bridewealth system, the attempts to exploit these contradictions to the benefit of one fraction, plus the ever-present

possibility for each community to fall back upon its self-sustaining positions, all this keeps these societies in a permanent state of open or incipient conflict, in spite of alliances and arbitration, and the fact that they rest on an orderly system of marriage regulation. But the regulation of marriages between the different and sometimes numerous communities is left to the unco-ordinated decisions of the leaders of each community, which ceaselessly modify the matrimonial zone, and increase causes for conflict. In many cases marriage comes to be considered as a casus belli rather than an assurance of peace. (Meillassoux 1981: 84-85).

Geo-social boundaries, in this instance, coincide with the matrimonial zone. Within the village, the complementarity of functions between 'landowning' lineages and 'latecomer' lineages solidifies economically. Horton goes so far as to argue that lineages as a whole were used for a village wide division of labour. Dominant lineages, or a single dominant lineage, sought to preserve ascendancy by turning the complementarity of functions, and the relative equality that implies, into new political institutions which cut across lineages, particularly the age grade system in order to ensure their higher status. Once petty states (the second type of chiefdom Wolf mentions) have come into existence warfare and/or voluntary incorporation can lead to the growth of state societies encompassing a relatively large area.

2.1.4. DOMESTIC SLAVERY

Slavery, as an institution, has a history in Africa going back hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of years. But this history does not mean that African societies were all based on a slave mode of production. Terray (1983) distinguishes between 'state slavery' and 'domestic slavery'; only in the former can we speak of a slave mode of production whereas in the latter slavery assumes an entirely different social role. Domestic slavery itself, however, displays a wide variety of forms throughout Africa (Curtin 1971). Despite the variety of forms, all the French structuralists agree that the slaves acquired were integrated into the lineage system as perpetual juniors and, in varying degrees, had certain rights and obligations. Meillassoux (1979) presents a case that domestic slaves, as adopted juniors, differ from juniors born into a lineage primarily in terms of the latter eventually acquiring dependents, either through children from marriage or importing slaves as juniors. It is precisely because domestic slaves were prevented from obtaining dependents that they can be considered as perpetual juniors. Meillassoux suggests that this situation leads to two levels of exploitation: 1) it is exploitation of the slave's society of origin insofar as it is a loss of a producer, and 2) the master appropriates that part of the product which

would have been used to raise the slave's offspring. This does not seem entirely correct since, as Rey reminds us, "all relations of appropriation which are not determinant in relation to the labour process are not relations of exploitation nor relations of production, but can be a pure relation of distribution, resulting from other relations of production or else an act of violence which occurs only intermittently" (1979: 43). In this sense one society can not exploit another. What does occur is a distribution of labour power to the benefit of one society at the expense of another. The fact that slaves must continually be imported from elsewhere means that, at the level of the domestic community, slaves only belong to the productive cycles because they are denied the possibility to reproduce. In other words, domestic slaves are exploited at the level of reproduction because they belong exclusively to the sphere of production.

Although this issue is further explored in the next chapter, one or two additional comments would be useful here in order to further distinguish state slavery from domestic slavery. Ruling classes in a slave mode of production live primarily from the unfree labour of others. With the exception of their own consumption, servile labour is devoted to long distance trade. Slaves in a slave mode of production never pass on their class position to their offspring since to do so would have increased the chances

for rebellion as time went on. Therefore it was necessary to continually obtain slaves either through trade and/or warfare. Historically, in West Africa,

we observe a phenomenon of settlement of slaves. They are allotted a companion, a piece of land, and the possibility of having offspring. But from the moment the slave is settled, the modality of his exploitation is modified. A part of his product will from now on be set apart not only for his upkeep,...but also for his reproduction through the upkeep of his offspring. That is the way toward serfdom. (Meillassoux 1979: 11)

Previous historical development will largely influence whether serfdom takes a feudal-like or Asiatic-like form, or possibly even oscillating between a slave form of the tributary mode and some other form or forms.

2.2. THE BENIN KINGDOM

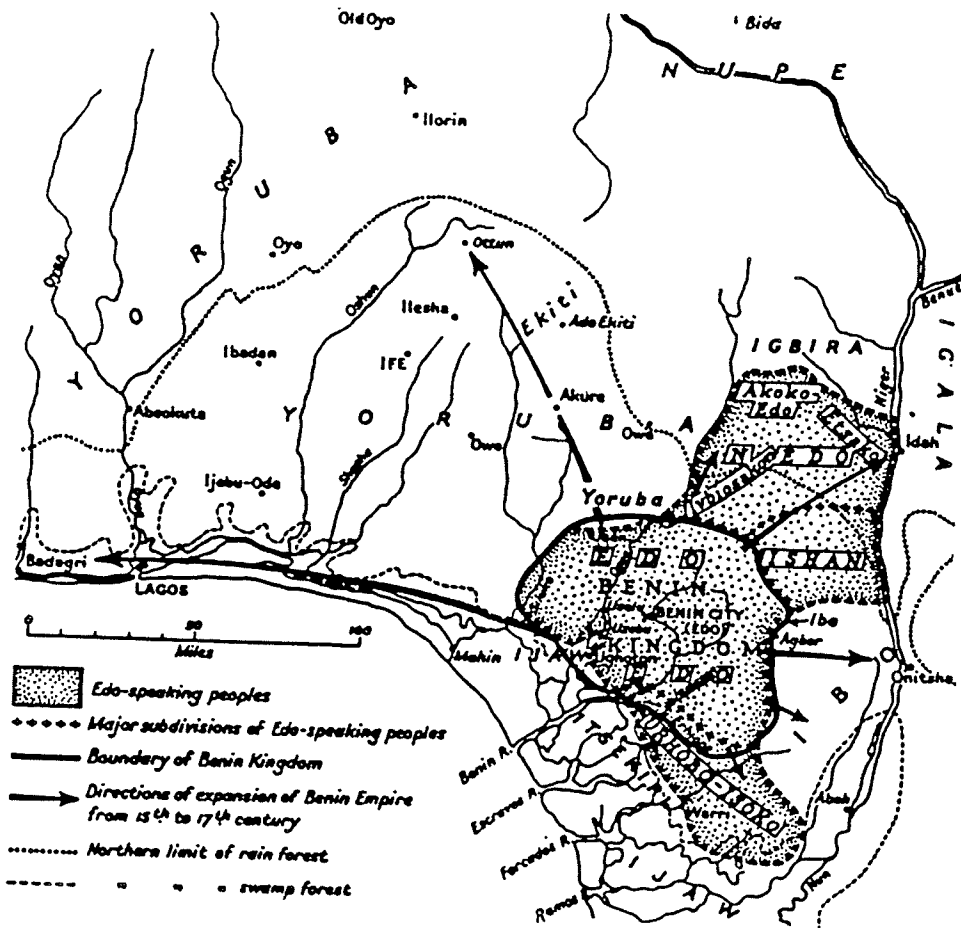
2.2.1. THE PERIOD PRIOR TO THE SECOND DYNASTY

The Benin Kingdom was located in the forest zone of what is now southwest Nigeria. The language spoken by the Bini is Edo, a subgroup of the Kwa family of African languages. Linguistic and archaeological research has begun to yield some results in the last few years although the majority of it is still speculative and tentative (Connah 1975, Roese 1984, Ryder 1984). The information gathered so far has, for the most part, provided a better chronological sequence of events with which to compare the oral history recorded by Egharevba (1968). Given the high mobility of

the African people and the equally high rate of material decomposition in the forest zone, it is not surprising that the research into this portion of Bini history is still in its infancy.

We do know that by the 5th century iron was in use throughout the forest zone of West Africa which permitted more intensive agriculture to take place and a resulting denser settlement pattern (Ryder 1984). Evidence indicates that Ibo, Edo, and Yoruba (see map) have a common ancestral stock which originated within the forest. Following Horton's model, Ryder (1984) believes that the search for good soil led to migrations, some being within the forest while others expanded into the savanna. These migrations, however, were not 'once and for all' phenomena. It is possible that some groups or subgroups were oscillating between the forest and the savanna. Two important consequences arise from this mobility: 1) a great deal of linguistic variability in a relatively short period of time, and 2) some groups remained within a domestic/lineage mode of production while others embarked on a course leading to the establishment of a tributary mode.

Linguistic analysis has shown that the Edo language has two major dialects, one in the north and one in the south. The southern group is associated with state formation. Fage (1969) has suggested that the Yoruba, Igala, and Benin polities were the result of contact with the Hausa states of



The Kingdom of Benin

Source: Bradbury 1967:4

the northern savanna. Some evidence exists to support this proposition in the form of similarity of political institutions. Ryder (1969) and Davidson (1966) note the similar political vocabulary between the Yoruba and Benin kingdoms while Bradbury (1957) has argued that Benin is politically comparable to the Yoruba and Dahomey kingdoms but exhibits features of Ibo social organization.

Roese (1984) agrees with Ryder's hypothesis that groups originating in the forest migrated to the savanna zone and returned to the forest. The fact that people came in migratory waves could explain why references to the Bini can be found in neighbouring societies. Bini folklore, although often contradictory and confusing, suggests that the Bini came in migratory waves from Nupe country and other areas of the Sudan. Legend relates that these migrants, upon entering the area that eventually became the Benin Kingdom, found a people named the Efa already living there. Based on various sources "Kann geschlossen werden, dass die Edo--oder eventuell eine Führungsschicht--vor 800 n. Chr. in die Gegend des heutigen Benin eingesickert sind" [it can be concluded, that the Edo--or possibly a migratory group--prior to 800 A.D. wandered into the present Benin region] (Roese 1984: 198). Roese implies that villages were already in existence prior to the establishment of the first dynasty of the Ogiso kings because the institution of the village headman preceded the dynasty (which lasted

approximately from 900 to 1150 A.D.). Ryder takes a more cautious approach saying that villages were probably well established by the 12th century although archaeological evidence cannot firmly establish whether the village (Horton's type 3) or the dispersed settlement (Horton's type 2) was the predominant settlement pattern during this time. "Über den genauen Zeitpunkt der Grundung der Ogiso-Dynastie lassen sich weiterhin nur Spekulationen anstellen, und so muss mangels anderer Vorstellungen bis auf weiteres Egharevbas Angabe von 900 n. Chr. akzeptiert werden" [Regarding the exact time period of the founding of the Ogiso Dynasty we can presently only speculate, and so until we have further information, Egharevba's date of 900 A.D. must be accepted] (Roese 1984: 198).

Little is known of the first dynasty. Ryder (1975) believes these "kings", as they are referred to in Egharevba's oral history, were paramount chiefs while the Uzama were hereditary chiefs. The Uzama had the role of 'king-makers' and originally wielded considerable political power; they will be discussed more fully in later sections of this chapter. Although some of the myths and legends collected indicate that the Uzama accompanied Oranmiyan (the founder of the second dynasty) from the Yoruba kingdom of Ife, Roese believes

[d]ass die Uzama in Begleitung Oranmiyans aus Ife gekommen waren, ist allerdings ein Irratum. Richtig ist vielmehr, dass die

Gruppe aus der Zeit der 1. Dynastie stammt.
[that the Uzama accompanied Oranmiyan out of Ife is certainly a mistake. It is much more likely that this group originates from the time of the 1st Dynasty] (1984: 202).

If the founding date of the first dynasty is accepted as 900 A.D., then the 31 "kings" who reigned were probably rulers over a petty state competing, often violently, with other petty states. Although little is known of the first dynasty even less is known about the 100 years or so following the collapse of the first dynasty c.1150 A.D. It should be clear that this was a period of intense social and political upheaval despite the pacific overtone found in Egharevba's oral history. From approximately 1100 A.D. onward some of these petty states began to expand, establishing linguistic and political hegemony over neighbouring petty states (Ryder 1984). Connah (1975) has concrete evidence that Benin City existed in the 13th century and may have been founded as early as the 11th century. Ryder (1984) believes the Benin Kingdom (i.e., the 2nd dynasty) may have existed already by the 12th century but is definitely established by the 13th century. The founding of the 2nd Oba Dynasty in legend tells of the Bini sending for a ruler from the Yoruba state of Ife. Crowder (1962), amongst others, has noted that the legend could be a true invitation that was accepted or a conquest which has since been concealed. Since both conquest and invitation occurred frequently it is difficult to ascertain which was

the real event. In whatever manner the second dynasty was founded, its institutional structure lasted several hundred years until the British conquest in 1897. Examining this structure, and the mode of production to which it corresponds, will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

2.2.2. THE LINEAGE MODE OF PRODUCTION IN BENIN

By the time of the second dynasty, it should be evident that the lineage mode of production in Benin had undergone several transformations and modifications. Distinguishing between internal developments and external impositions is perhaps the most difficult task for the researcher. In what follows, it will become clear that the lineage mode of production had, through internal developments, progressed at least to a chiefdom still "embedded" in kinship. Superimposed on these developments was the kingdom structure itself which is examined in the next section.

Before proceeding with the analysis both a word of praise and a word of caution are in order regarding the works of the late R.E. Bradbury, whose ethnographic materials provide the bulk of the data used below. Praise because he explicitly differentiates between pre-colonial and colonial contexts. Caution because even with this valuable historical element, his 'structural-functionalist' theoretical orientation prevented him from making the best

use of the historical element in the pre-colonial context. As a result, the data lack a chronological continuity due to an essentially static framework. The pre-colonial period is presented as a uniform and unchanging past, when in reality, the stage of social development Bradbury refers to best fits the late 19th century that some of his older informants lived in. For the moment, however, his material will more than adequately provide the information for the task at hand. Changes in the social structure over time will be presented in the next two chapters.

Benin, as elsewhere in Africa, never suffered from land shortages in a purely physical sense, although from a community's, or even a household's point of view there may have been land shortages in a social sense. Swidden horticulture was the primary agricultural technique employed with the usual fallow period being 7 to 8 years, occasionally being as high as 15 to 20 years in length. Yams traditionally were the main staple although Adams (1966) reports that some areas were increasingly cultivating maize. In the case of yams, a household head would direct his male dependents and slaves to clear and burn the agricultural sites, hoe the ground, and do the planting. Women were responsible for weeding the plot and both sexes participated in harvesting. All subsidiary crops were owned, planted, tended, and harvested by the wife/wives of the household head. They were obligated to provide these

crops for the household although any surplus could be traded and the proceeds were theirs. Juniors could also clear and raise some of these subsidiary crops for trade. Domestic slaves could also participate in this activity, occasionally earning enough to buy their freedom, or even their own slaves (Roth 1968).

In the village the household is the basic productive unit, composed, usually, of a nuclear or polygamous family and any slaves they may have acquired. Patrilineages tended to be small; the widest effective patrilineage consisted of the nucleus of the extended family together with any patrilineal descendants of the family head. Beyond this family grouping, obligations occurred on an individual rather than a corporate basis. Greater emphasis was placed on descent rather than corporate lineage groups largely as a result of the principle of primogeniture, which means essentially that effective descent rarely went beyond two or three generations before fissioning occurred. Upon a father's death, his eldest son becomes the ritual successor to the ancestors, thus all other family members descended from the father were obligated to worship him through the senior son. This course of events left the senior son considerable scope for manipulating his junior siblings, his mother, his children, and even, to a certain extent, his father's junior siblings if the father was a senior son. As a household head he became de jure, if not de facto, an

elder. Bradbury (1964) has expressed that, in this situation, each family is 'quasi-political' in that household authority was invested in the eldest male.

The evidence clearly suggests, as the French structuralists suspected, that the more developed the domestic community, the greater the reliance on ideology as a means of domination. Personal relations are conceived in master/servant terms, such as my wife which also translates as 'my servant/dependent'. Or "[c]hildren are thought of as the servants of their father, wives of their husbands, junior brothers of their seniors, and younger of older women" (Bradbury 1964: 29). Curiously, prestige goods for bridewealth seemed to play a minimal role for the elders control over junior men. A French captain in the late 18th century recorded "[a] young man desirous of getting married demands the girl from his parents, who rarely refuse; he gives them one or several pieces of cloth and takes his wife home" (Landolphe in Roth 1968: 38). Additionally, a short period of labour service was also provided to the man's new affines. Clearly, controlling the access to women was not the primary method of dominating the juniors, but seemed to be mostly achieved through controlling access to the ancestors. Certainly it is possible there were other mechanisms of domination at work, but too little is known of village life in the pre-colonial era (-reasons for this are given in the next chapter) to state with any assurance that

juniors were dominated by the elders primarily through religious ideology, or controlling access to women, or some other undocumented social mechanism.

Equally difficult to trace are the means of dominating women, although it is clear from historical records that they did hold a subordinate position in Bini society. They were excluded from participating in the state apparatus and their labour was socially devalued. However accurate or inaccurate the information provided by male European observers was, the common basis of all reports indicated a certain degree of oppression of women. In early 18th century Benin, one traveller remarked that the women are

as much slaves as in any place in this kingdom. They are obliged to keep the daily markets, look after their house-keeping and children, as well as their kitchens, and till the ground.
(Nyendael in Roth 1968: 104)

A late 17th century Dutch geographer adds:

When a woman has a son, and her husband dies, she becomes the slave of her child, and can not marry again without his consent. So that if any one wants to possess the mother, he has to make his request to the son, and, in order to obtain his consent, to give him a young girl in her place.
(Dapper in Hodgkin 1960: 125-126)

Missionaries travelling in the kingdom during the mid 17th century also noted that the women were obliged to work in the fields or the market for the benefit of their husbands. Throughout the pre-colonial period a common theme at the household level was that household heads devoted their time

to trading while the women, junior men, and domestic slaves were expected to perform the agricultural tasks and craft production.

Village level organization is perhaps the best indicator available to understand the extent to which the lineage mode of production had evolved in Benin. Individual households formed the basic economic unit in Bini society, but the fundamental political unit, probably predating the first dynasty, was the village. It was "the widest unit for age grade organization, the minimal land holding unit, the smallest group which can have a hereditary chief, the smallest tribute unit, and also the co-operative unit for housebuilding; most villages unite[d] in worship of a common deity" (Bradbury 1964: 31). Each village was separated into several wards, and each ward was composed of one or more extended families (households). The eldest household head in each ward was often formally recognized as an elder with special status; the eldest elder (or a hereditary chief) being given authority to represent the village in external relations (i.e., to the state).

Control of land holdings by the village elders as a group, rather than having control invested in the component lineages, as in the overwhelming majority of West African societies, is truly unique. The three tier age grade system and village ritual reinforced village solidarity over lineage solidarity continually. Initiation into the

youngest age grade began for boys in their teens, and they remained in this grade for 15-20 years. Their responsibilities consisted of cleaning the village, clearing paths and other communal tasks, as well as transporting the village's share of tribute to the capital. Membership into the second age grade occurred around the age of thirty and lasted also 15-20 years. This grade performed the heavier and/or more skilled communal tasks and provided the state with the warriors for military campaigns. Exempt from communal labour, the elders performed political and ritual affairs of the community through the village council. Bini women had no comparable age grade system, possibly due to their lack of political and economic functions outside the household.

The elders' domination and exploitation of the juniors and women occurred primarily at the village level rather than the household level. As a group they controlled access to the means of production (land) at the economic level, and controlled access to the collective ancestors of the village at the ideological level. Controlling social knowledge ensured their political ascendancy since they were the repository of law, customs, and traditions. Elders also had the advantage of accumulating wealth through fines for misbehaviour, gifts for ritual performances, and fees through age grade promotion. Justification for the elders domination was put forward in terms of a religious ideology.

Bradbury emphasized in all his publications (1964, 1967, 1973) that "[s]upernatural sanction for their authority came from their access to the spirits of past elders and from their collective superiority in magic" (1967: 9, emphasis added).

2.2.3. THE SLAVE MODE OF PRODUCTION IN BENIN

Bradbury (1967) has defined the Benin kingdom itself as the area over which the Oba (king) alone could inflict capital punishment; an area covering approximately 4,000 square miles. Suzerain territories exhibited social structural features that were essentially the same as the kingdom itself, thus giving the appearance of a larger and more politically uniform social formation than actually existed. These territories were expected to provide tribute, assistance in war, and facilities for Bini traders. Beyond these obligations these areas retained their political and, to some degree, economic autonomy. Benin City, the capital and site of the royal household, was divided into 40 wards, each of which had a special craft guild or ritual function such as blacksmithing, brass-smithing, carving (wood and ivory), leather working, drum making, lock smithing, and fine cloth weaving for export. City wards resembled the villages in their organizational structure, having the three tier age grade system and headmen (some of which were hereditary positions). Guilds

were provisioned by their own farms in surrounding villages worked by dependents and slaves. Of the guilds, the brass smiths, carvers, and possibly ironsmiths, were employed exclusively by the state for the state. In addition to these crafts there were two villages that supplied the kingdom with pottery. Organizationally it is evident that Benin City was the manufacturing centre of the kingdom: it produced the goods used in internal, but particularly external, exchange.

Understanding the relationship between the state and foreign trade is a necessary prerequisite to understand the functioning and development of the slave mode of production ('state' slavery to use Terray's shorthand) in Benin. In what follows I hope to show the state was based on a slave mode of production to the extent that membership in the ruling class was coterminous with membership in the state. I reserve the role of exchange for the next chapter. Although the origins of the slave-based economy are difficult to trace with the present state of historical knowledge, Fage has argued that the increasing volume of trans-Saharan trade during the 15th century "increased the need for the organization of labour in ways and in quantities which were foreign to the traditional organization of society in kinship groupings" (1969: 93). Law (1978) surveyed the role of slavery in pre-colonial West Africa and found that states employed large scale slavery

primarily for the production of foodstuffs. Bradbury has consistently maintained that:

In Benin great wealth was attained through fief-holding, control of political patronage, long-distance trade, and participation in war and slave raiding. Wealth was invested mainly in buying slaves, who were set down in villages to farm for their masters. (1967: 17)

...a wealthy chief with many slaves might clear virgin forest outside the control of any village and establish a camp there to house his slaves and other dependents. They...were allowed to cultivate on their own behalf. The slaves or their children would eventually purchase their emancipation and the camp develop into a village with the usual type of village social organization. (1964: 45)

Many villages were founded in the same way by the Oba themselves who sent out war-captives to cultivate the bush under the supervision of a trusted courtier. The status of these villages would, within a generation or two, be very little different from that of long-established settlements for, in principle, every man and woman in the Benin kingdom is the Oba's slave. The word ovien-Oba means both 'Oba's subject' and 'Oba's slave'; and it is significant that no stigma whatsoever attached to descendents of persons who were known to be war-captives sent out by the Oba to hunt or farm in the bush. (1973: 181)

Historical evidence and Bradbury's research certainly indicate the existence of slave farms in the past. The scale of slave holdings is difficult to ascertain. Some indication can be gleaned from a French captain in Benin during the late 18th century whose porters told of a prominent title holder who owned over 10,000 slaves (Ryder 1967). No doubt the figures are exaggerated, but if one

considers the average size of a village (400-500 people by Bradbury's (1973) estimation) and chooses a more realistic number, say 2,000 slaves, it is quite within the realm of possibility that this individual owned 4 or 5 village-sized slave farms. While it may be true, as Law suggests, that foodstuffs were the primary aim of production in order to support the state officials and their retainers, I would argue that cotton was as important a crop. Anticipating arguments further on, I will suggest, for the time being, that textiles were the major export of the kingdom. Slaves, metals, and various prestige items constituted the bulk of Bini imports. It would seem highly unlikely that agricultural produce would ever constitute a major export, since transport was slow and there was a limited market for foodstuffs (kola nut being an exception). Cotton production may well have been the primary, though not the only, agricultural product expropriated from the slaves on slave farms since village tribute within the kingdom was also in the form of agricultural products and the various craft guilds in the capital had their own slave farms. In short, state slavery was a self-sustaining system. Cotton produced by slaves was manufactured into textiles in the capital which was exported. More slaves and prestige goods were imported, the latter being an important component of the ideology which bound the domestic mode of production to the slave mode of production. Ideological domination over the

domestic mode was crucial since the state amassed its army from the villages; military campaigns provided war captives, the other major source of obtaining slaves. Through trade or war, slaves reproduced the conditions which made a new productive cycle possible. Thus in Benin slavery was the dominant mode of production, though the number of slaves in the Kingdom probably represented a relatively small fraction of the total population.

2.2.4. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BINI STATE

The Bini state can essentially be described as consisting of the Oba and three groups of titled officials; a) the Uzama ('kingmakers'), b) the Town Chiefs, c) the Palace Chiefs. All titled officials were obliged to reside in one of the kingdom's villages or the part of the capital that did not form part of the royal palace (roughly one third of the city). Dwelling in a village or the manufacturing and residential wards of the capital ensured that title holders were in contact with the rest of the population. These privileged positions were usually entitled to collect tribute from a 'tribute unit' composed of several villages dispersed throughout the kingdom. The dispersal of villages under the control of a title holder, the non-hereditary nature of most titles, and the fact that residence in tribute paying villages was discouraged, together prevented the concentration and consolidation of

political power for the individual officials in favour of the state. Furthermore, Obas dispatched trusted courtiers and messengers periodically throughout the kingdom and were entitled to redistribute tribute units if one or more officials became a threat. Power invested in the kingship was not unrestrained, however, since Obas were expected to make all major decisions in consultation with a full state council. Day to day administration was conducted by the Oba in conjunction with senior officials, usually from the Palace Chiefs. Smooth state functioning thus depended largely on institutionalizing conflicts and adjusting the political system as necessary.

Uzama titles predated the establishment of the second dynasty. During the first dynasty they were probably rulers over petty chiefdoms and represented the apex of the political and economic hierarchy as the domestic mode of production evolved. Incorporation of the Uzama into the Bini state disguised the continuity and full development of the domestic mode in Benin. By the end of the first dynasty there were five titles which had expanded to seven when the British invasion occurred in 1897. Uzama titles were all hereditary, probably due to their origins in the first dynasty. Each received tribute from one or more villages (all very close to the capital) and/or wards in Benin City. Of the three political organizations the Uzama was economically the weakest due to the relatively small number

of tribute units they were allotted and the paucity of administrative powers invested in their positions. Within their own villages their political power was totally autonomous of the state and they kept a court modelled after the centre. Their primary purpose in the state machinery was to install new Obas, also a continuity from the previous dynasty, and their consent was required in order to pass new laws. Originally they could exert considerable political influence through ritual, particularly coronation rites, but the change in succession rules to primogeniture in the 15th century forced a separation of their political and ritual power, greatly curtailing their political influence afterwards. As the centuries passed their political influence diminished, except on those occasions when the Town Chiefs and Palace Chiefs were divided on an issue.

Palace Chiefs have also been present since the beginning of the second dynasty although their origins are historically vague. The original number of titles is unknown, although probably less than ten; they mushroomed to 31 positions at the end of the 19th century, only one of which was hereditary. These positions were divided into three main hierarchical orders, and each main order was further sub-divided into two groups, the lower group consisting of untitled positions. Within the lower sub-divisions the age grade principle found in the villages was in operation. According to Bradbury (1967), the Palace

Chiefs as a whole performed three major political functions. a) they recruited and trained personnel for specific administrative, judicial, and ceremonial tasks, b) the hierarchy of positions within and between groups channelled competition for power, and c) they were a powerful centralizing and stabilizing force within the state. Aside from their duties in the palace and their administrative tasks, each senior title holder was also responsible for overseeing one or more of the craft guilds in the capital. In fact, within the state the only political sphere from which the Palace Chiefs were excluded was the military. There was a wide scope for accumulating wealth by performing the administrative tasks of the state, which was further enhanced by tribute collection for the senior title holders.

Every freeborn male in the kingdom had at least a nominal affiliation with one of the three major divisions. Most men never entered or served in the palace, but affiliation did give a personal relation to the state which helped mark and justify exploitation through tribute, military service, etc. For those who could pay the initiation fees (or have their fathers pay them), they began at the bottom of the untitled hierarchy. Advancement through the hierarchy was based on the ability to pay further fees and perform appropriate rituals. Once a candidate was promoted to the grade of elder, the candidate became an elder in his village as well. Then came the next

and highest grade in the untitled hierarchy, from which one could apply to the junior, and later senior, titled positions. Each promotion entailed progressively higher fees but gave greater opportunity to increase wealth. Potentially any man could reach the highest level of office. In reality, however, a high proportion of initiates were drawn from the sons of Palace and Town Chiefs, especially in the senior grades, because of their wealth and family histories of state service.

Organization of the Town Chiefs was similar to that of the Palace Chiefs, although not as complex. Founded by Oba Ewuare in the 15th century, the Town Chiefs were originally only four titles; these expanded to 19 titles four centuries later. Only one of these titles was hereditary (not of the initial four). Composed of a senior and junior order, together they formed a single hierarchical sequence, of which the initial four titles were the senior order. Composed entirely of 'commoners', that is, men who held no hereditary positions, they usually represented the 'peoples' interests against the Oba and Palace Chiefs. Politically they had two great strengths. First, the Town Chiefs had to approve of all the Oba's appointments and second, they were responsible for the military affairs of the kingdom.

2.2.5. THE ARTICULATION OF THE LINEAGE AND SLAVE MODES OF PRODUCTION IN BENIN

Discussion on the lineage mode of production earlier in this chapter indicated that village social organization was consistent with the development of the lineage mode and a logical outcome of that development. Historical evidence suggests that beyond a single village hierarchy, a group of villages under the authority of one person would create a petty chiefdom. A cluster of petty chiefdoms headed by a paramount chief corresponded to the period of the first dynasty. Village structure, as it was described earlier, with the eldest of the elders as village headman, is an incomplete description. In fact, only in the area immediately surrounding the capital and certain western parts of the kingdom did the head elders communicate directly with the capital. Typically, village elders shared their authority with a hereditary chief such that internal village affairs were conducted by the village elders and external relations were under the jurisdiction of the hereditary chiefs.

While not all villages had a hereditary chief, not all the hereditary chiefs had a village. Some of them only had jurisdiction over a large village ward while others held several villages, some of which themselves had hereditary chiefs. Generally speaking, the further they were from the capital, the larger the area controlled by hereditary

chiefs, and the greater the internal autonomy of the chiefs. Those farthest away from the capital sent slaves and livestock as part of their bi-annual tribute while those who were closer sent foodstuffs. A few of the hereditary chiefs predate the second dynasty (indicating that the domestic mode had indeed evolved to a chiefdom 'embedded' in kinship) but the majority were the result of patronage appointments by the Obas. Of these appointments, most were junior brothers of the Obas. Whether it was a petty chiefdom or village ward, hereditary chiefs kept a court modelled after the royal palace, by collecting tribute (half of this was sent to the Oba's palace) and conferring titles. The existence of a title system at the village level promoted inequalities at this level, breaking down some of the structural similarity of households (i.e., unequal access to resources other than land). A village level title system thus gave the opportunity for some people to amass enough wealth to enter (or have their sons enter) the state level title system or augment their farm's labour force with the addition of domestic slaves. As was noted earlier, the goal of trade was slaves. In this context Nyendael's comments, circa 1700, are illuminating:

And besides these Three [types], I know of no other Offices or Dignities, wherefore the Commonality takes place next, very few of which are laborious or industrious, unless it be those who are wretched poor; the others laying the whole Burthen of their Work on their Wives or Slaves, whether it be tilling

the Ground, spinning the Cotton, weaving the Cloaths, or any other Handicraft; whilst they have but the least stock, apply themselves to Merchandise alone. (Nyendaël in Hodgkin 1960: 151)

Potential conflict existed between the hereditary chiefs and the village elders of which the state was the ultimate mediator and arbitrator of disputes. Village elders and hereditary chiefs, although occasionally having access to the palace directly, usually were required to communicate with the capital through the title holder who held the village as part of his tribute unit. Various excesses by the hereditary chief could be neutralized or minimized by the village elders appealing to the administrator of the state. It was in the best interests of the title holder (and the state) to side with the village elders in such a situation since tribute destined for the hereditary chief strengthened his position vis a vis the title holder and the state. The ultimate sanction lay with the state because the Oba had the authority to depose a hereditary chief of his position in favour of someone else. On the other hand, title holders were dependent on hereditary chiefs to a certain extent. Title holders had to receive permission from village elders and hereditary chiefs to settle their dependents and/or slaves on village land-- permission from the village elders because they controlled land distribution, and permission from a hereditary chief because of his local political and judicial authority. Thus

a title holder had no formal political authority over his tribute unit although he often had indirect authority.

Articulation between a very developed lineage mode of production and the slave mode of production was primarily conducted through the mechanism or system of appointing hereditary chiefs. First and foremost, the hereditary chiefs were appointed by the state via the Oba, usually being his younger siblings. The village court was modelled after the centre and served to instill the ideology of domination as being appropriate and just. An ideology of achievement, through the title system at the local and 'national' level, operated to justify tribute, since a title holder at the state or village court could expect to receive more than he passed on. Thus, inequalities which occurred served to mask class distinctions by giving the appearance of a quantitative difference from rich to poor, rather than a qualitative difference of different production relations. It is important to recognize that the lineage mode of production developed to petty chiefdoms in the first dynasty largely through its own internal contradictions. Petty chiefs had probably developed on the principle of inter- and intra-lineage anteriority. The system of appointing hereditary chiefs was not the only mechanism for articulating the lineage and slave modes. Earlier I mentioned that all freeborn males had at least a nominal affiliation with one of the three Palace Chief orders. The

Town Chiefs were composed entirely of 'commoners', quite probably the result of the major re-organization experienced in the 15th century. Achievement, rather than ascription, would again serve to reinforce the belief that the exploitation and domination of the ruling class was appropriate and just, since every male could, in principle, reach a major title, although in practice this was rarely the case. This says something about the nature of the state itself, in particular, the institutionalizing and containment of conflict and contradiction. There is certainly much to be said in favour of the view that the state is the arena in which the class struggle is fought.

State slavery arose in the 15th century through a major reorganization of the political and economic structure of the Bini social formation. Whether this reorganization was a result of internal developments such as a civil war or an external imposition through conquest is still a matter of debate, although Ryder (1984) suspects it was a result of conquest. In either case, the development of a monarchic state was based and superimposed on the structures already present. This too presents an appearance of greater continuity of development than was actually the case. By now it should be quite clear that the ruling class (the king, title holders, hereditary chiefs) and the state were intimately connected with each other and if it were not for the need of military support, could exist quite

independently of the lineage mode of production. The structures already present, however, influenced the manner in which the slave mode could develop and dominate the developed lineage mode.

Tribute in one form or another would seem to predate the development of the state, but once the state was in existence the principle was extended to the higher political and ideological authority. This would go some way in explaining why half of any tribute collected would be passed on to the palace rather than all or none. If the tribute was not already in the form of slaves it would be used directly or indirectly to purchase more slaves.

2.3. ANALYTICAL COMMENTS

Bradbury (1964) has put forward five politico-economic factors which account for the 'poor' development of the lineage system in the Benin Kingdom. These are: 1) rights to land invested in the village as a whole rather than its component lineages or lineage segments, 2) age grades cross-cutting lineages, 3) low marriage payments, 4) primogeniture as a succession principle, and 5) a title system. Each of these factors will now be examined in relation to the empirical evidence and the theoretical proposals advanced earlier.

The fact that rights to land use were under control of a village rather than lineages would in the first place suggest that the development of the lineage mode of production was not 'poor' at all. Village organization as it was described appears to predate the founding of the first dynasty; thus the land use pattern was a result of the inner contradictions of the lineage mode and was expressed as the outcome of a class struggle. Both contradictions and class struggle are necessary to understand the nature of village social organization. Beyond this there are two further noteworthy points. One point is that Meillassoux is wrong in suggesting that the lineage mode of production reaches its fullest development in cereal agriculture. The case of Benin clearly indicates that horticulture based on root crops is not incompatible with the development of the lineage mode to an incipient tributary mode. The second point is a more general one. Quite simply, village control of land in an area where the overwhelming number of societies invest land use in lineages implies that the process undergone in Benin would have some heuristic value for understanding the origins of the village community in societies where the origins are somewhat more obscure (e.g., India or China).

Age grades also give the impression that the lineage mode was well developed rather than stunted in some manner. Horton's model is definitely useful in this respect, but

evidence does suggest that the age grade system strengthened the political and economic power of the elders without necessarily supporting a dominant lineage or lineages. Age grades, after all, are not completely divorced from notions of anteriority. The tradition of the eldest elder in a Bini village being the spokesman of the village could potentially evolve to a right and therefore present another avenue to proto-state or state development without recourse to a ranking of lineages.

Low marriage payments and the small circle of bride's kin to whom the payments are distributed certainly have a bearing on Meillassoux's position on the importance of the role of reproduction. Reproduction dominates at the political level, for Meillassoux, due to the elders' position of privilege emanating from matrimonial control; i.e., the elders dominate women and juniors through their control over reproduction. Whether this was the case at some early point in Bini history is difficult to determine, but by the time of the second dynasty matrimonial control was definitely not the primary basis of the elders' control. Both Meillassoux and Terray would appear to be correct that ideology as a means of domination increases as time goes on. However, the data favours Terray's interpretation that ideology is the dominant instance in the lineage mode because the elders already control production. The clearest manifestation of the elders' control of production was the

fact that rights to land were invested in the village. The elders achieved political dominance in the village, through ideology, to regulate access to the means of production. A related issue is that women and juniors together had undergone a long history of exploitation as a class in relation to the elders. The elders' control of production assured surplus labour from both women and juniors although the mode of ideological domination differed in each case. It should also be added that Terray was correct in suggesting that an elder is constituted by social age. Dapper's comments (page 48) and the rules for household succession should make this abundantly clear.

The role of primogeniture as a succession principle is certainly a complex issue in historical terms. We do know that primogeniture became the royal form of succession in the 15th century under Oba Ewuare. If his reign is the result of a conquest, as Ryder believes, then the important question becomes did primogeniture originate at the palace and spread outward to the rest of the kingdom or did the conquerors find primogeniture already widely used and apply it to royal succession in order to minimize conflicts over claims to the throne? My own inclination is that conquerors would build and solidify their control based on social relations and social structures already present, since historically this tended to be the case elsewhere. If this was indeed the course of events, then lineage relations of

production probably followed a trend of vertical succession (father to son) since at least the first dynasty, if not earlier, rather than horizontal succession (elder to younger brother) as Meillassoux advocates. This would again support Terray's notion that elders control reproduction because they already control production.

Of the five factors listed by Bradbury, the title system and the implication of the state would go the farthest in correctly emphasizing a 'poor' or stunted development of the lineage mode. This is due to the state being the structure that ensured the dominance of the slave mode over the lineage mode, adjusting the latter to facilitate the reproduction of the former. In this context it is worthwhile to determine whether the lineage mode had undergone a 'formal' or 'real' subsumption to the slave mode. Rey's comments on transition would seem to apply equally well to articulation in this particular case. The state did play a large part in subordinating the producers through appropriating surplus (tribute), and the state did to a large extent structure relations of cooperation by the title system and installation of hereditary chiefs (which gave the appearance of social mobility). However, the state could not advance technical change through the tribute system. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, if it were not for the need of military support and tribute, the structures emanating from the two modes of production would have the

appearance of existing independently of each other. For these reasons I must conclude that the slave mode of production had only formally subsumed the lineage mode of production.

Slave farms and slave villages gaining their freedom in the span of two or three generations lends credence to Meillassoux's proposition that state slavery is one avenue to serfdom. This seems also to support my position that slavery should form one end of the continuum in the tributary mode of production. Certainly it is obvious that some form of serfdom was not inevitable, although there was a strong tendency in that direction. Nor is it beyond the realm of possibility that slavery and serfdom could have eventually oscillated back and forth, similar to the feudal-like and Asiatic-like oscillation Wolf describes for China. The important point is that slavery, at least in this instance, is the extreme form of indirect and collective exploitation found in the Bini social formation based on tribute collected from all agricultural producers. The continuity of this system for approximately 500 years should dispel any notion that slavery is in some sense supplemental to a third mode of production.

III. RELATIONS OF EXCHANGE IN PRE-COLONIAL BENIN

3.1. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Implicit in the previous chapter was the assumption that in very general terms human societies can be grouped into three major modes of production: the kin-ordered mode, the tributary mode, and the capitalist mode. It was further argued that this typology, proposed by Wolf (1982), could only be valid in reference to the regional and specific local contexts from which it arises. In this chapter, where the relations of exchange corresponding to the relations of production are examined, the same condition is still applicable.

[I]t must be apparent at the outset that, no matter how differently distribution may have been arranged in different stages of social development, it must be possible here also, just as with production, to single out common characteristics, and just as possible to confound or to extinguish all historic differences under general human laws (Marx cited in Halperin 1984: 259).

In general the form of trade in products corresponds to the form of production. Change the second and the former will change as a consequence (Marx cited in Terray 1979: 316).

Now, given that exchange is subordinate to production, how are we to characterize the process and development of exchange systems? Wolf (1982) and Wallerstein (1978, 1979) have taken tentative steps in this direction by returning to the work of Karl Polanyi, and for that reason it is worth returning to his ideas here. Indeed, Wallerstein's three-fold typology lends itself well to the three general modes of production presented by Wolf. He speaks of 'reciprocal mini-systems', 'redistributive world empires', and 'world economies'. The first term relates to closed local economies corresponding to kinship societies, the second term coincides with societies where a central authority collects tribute, and the third term is connected to societies where market exchange is the dominant principle. Within Wallerstein's three types of economic systems we can easily pick out Polanyi's three modes of economic integration, i.e., reciprocity, redistribution, and market exchange.

Polanyi's ideas must be viewed as both an extension of and a reaction to Marx, although the political climate in the United States during the time of his writing often obscured the source of inspiration (cf., Halperin 1984). For both Marx and Polanyi it is social institutions which are the operative organizing principles in human societies, and not -- as many of their contemporaries and ours suggest -- individual behaviour. The economy must be analysed as

part of a larger cultural system, or, what amounts to the same thing, the economy per se is a segment, albeit the determinant segment in the last instance, of a mode of production. These institutions need not appear as economic in order to function as an organizer of production, distribution, and consumption.

The human economy, then, is embedded and enmeshed in institutions, economic and non-economic. The inclusion of the non-economic is vital. For religion and government may be as important for the structure and functioning of the economy as monetary institutions or the availability of tools and machines that lighten the toil of labour. (Polanyi 1957: 250).

From this it follows that the three modes of economic integration require an institutional basis rather than an individual basis. If we can return briefly to the kin-ordered mode of production, for example, we can see that kinship, at whatever level we choose, defines a corporate group and not merely an aggregate of individuals. Selecting a marriage partner does not take place on an individual basis but is first and foremost a negotiation between lineage segments. It is in this sense that we can speak of reciprocity. The domestic mode of production, for Meillassoux (1981a), only requires that similar communities are in existence to facilitate the exchanges of women and/or prestige goods. Similarly, "[r]eciprocity denotes movements between correlative points of symmetrical groupings" for Polanyi (1957: 250). Connections between Meillassoux's

analysis and Polanyi's, Wolf's, and Wallerstein's become clearer.

Empirically, reciprocity and redistribution tend to occur in all societies. The former corresponds to horizontal exchanges at the local level, the latter entails vertical exchanges between the local unit and the centre (cf., Vallensi 1981). The mode of economic integration that is dominant is the mode that organizes the productive resources. "Dominance of a form of integration is here identified with the degree to which it comprises land and labour in society" (Polanyi 1957: 255). Precisely because these two forms of integration can be found in virtually all societies, it is not possible to equate their appearance with evolutionary stages.

Before moving on, however, I must make clear that Polanyi's concepts, useful as they may be, cannot be accepted in their entirety. Attempting to provide a general framework for the economy in society, Polanyi at times gave his analytical concepts differing degrees of weight with the result that he often over-extended them. Halperin (1984: 263) notes the difficulty involved in relating "which concepts were meant to apply to all economies, which to a set of economies, and which to a particular type." Auge (1981), Godelier (1981), and Dupre and Rey (1978) recognize that the modes of integration posed by Polanyi risk analysis only in the sphere of circulation to the exclusion of

production relations. While Meillassoux (1981a) is sympathetic to his work, he cautions against overextending his concepts. As is noted above, Polanyi does recognize the primacy of production. He did not confront the interface between production and circulation though, and in fact tended to move away from it in the course of time. Redistribution as a concept requires three qualifications according to Wolf (1982): 1) it is necessary to distinguish the different kinds and the spheres to which they apply, 2) consideration should be given to what gets redistributed and to whom, and 3) recognition must be given to the purely political role it can assume through alliance or co-optation. Perhaps the most fundamental criticism of all is the fact that the surface appearances serve to mask the exploitation occurring in the productive sphere. In kin-ordered societies, the exchange between symmetrical kin groups masks the reality of the seniors exploitation of the subordinate class of juniors/women. In a transition from a kin-ordered mode of production to a tributary mode "[t]he reality of reciprocity is unequal exchange, even if political hierarchy has not already reduced it to a purely ideological representation" (Auge 1981: 62).

Evolution, for Marx and Polanyi, should not be confused with their respective concepts, i.e., their concepts were not intended to represent some form of unilineal and deterministic causality. In reality, many of their

adherents did tend to treat Marx's and Polanyi's concepts in such a manner. This is, in some senses, unavoidable, particularly in reference to social complexity and the development of productive forces. What should be made clear, though, is that in doing so the observer is taking a retrospective view of development and only examining the "high points" at that. Such a perspective is not invalid provided the observer bears in mind that, for any specific society under observation, the events that occurred in reality need not to have occurred (cf Moseley and Wallerstein 1978). Rather than society X reaching a high point, it may have been society Y. Ekholm (1981) attempts to provide a 'dependency' model applicable to all societies based on this notion of evolution. Continuity in evolution, within the model developed by Ekholm, does not occur at the level of society, but only at the level of a larger system of which a society is a part. In the context of a larger system individual societies experience an evolution followed by a devolution. The evolutionary development continues further within a neighbouring society in the larger system.

Ekholm suggests that economic growth occurs primarily by increasing export production. Without distorting Ekholm's model, I believe, with Marx, that all modes of production reproduce on an expanded scale. Therefore, by increasing production, either for internal use or export, entails an increase in consumption. The regional systems

(Ekholm refers to them as "global" systems) of all civilizations exhibit developed centres, underdeveloped peripheries, and undeveloped areas beyond the periphery. Industrial production (or more properly, manufacturing in our case) occurs in the centre while the periphery exchanges raw materials for manufactured products. The characteristic condition for development by local societies is access to resources outside the local system. Empirically we observe that centres within a regional system exchange goods with each other as well as with centres in other regional systems. In other words, the centre has a redistributive function in the local sphere and a reciprocal function in the regional/international spheres. When exchange with the regional/international sphere breaks down the centre experiences a collapse and devolution occurs. "Devolution in this sense is no more than a society's forced adaptation to its own environment" (Ekholm 1981: 250).

Peripheralization at the centre, however, is accompanied by the ascendancy of some part of the periphery. This seems to have been the case for Europe, as Wolf (1982) has shown.

Within Europe, the shift of trading centres from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic saw the rise of England and Flanders and the fall of Italian port cities. On an even larger level this process entailed the contraction of Byzantium and the expansion of African coastal ports.

In summing up the discussion of Ekholm's model it should be evident that this is, like Polanyi's model, based on exchange. If, on the one hand, the model does not discuss how relations of exchange are subordinate to relations of production, i.e., how exchange facilitates the reproduction of the production relations, it does, on the other hand, provide a basis for understanding how production at the centre is dependent on external exchange. Viewed in this specific manner we can understand Wallerstein's claim that modes of production and modes of exchange are identical. We can also see why he speaks of "redistributive world empires." It should be clear at this point that pre-capitalist states relied on external exchange networks to transform the surplus extracted from slaves and free cultivators into new means of exploitation and/or appropriation. What structural analysis fails to do is to incorporate the vulnerability of internal relations to external pressures. Either external relations are not considered at all (e.g., Dupre and Rey 1978), or trade is considered, but only as an invariant and steady input to transform surplus into new means of exploitation (e.g., Meillassoux 1981a, Terray 1979b, 1983, see also Roseberry 1985). Conversely, Polanyi (1957), Ekholm (1981), and Wallerstein (1978, 1979) consider the effects of exchange but not the causes. It is toward these causes that I will now focus my attention.

3.1.1. THE NATURE OF EXCHANGE IN WEST AFRICAN KIN-ORDERED AND TRIBUTARY/SLAVE SOCIETIES

Terray (1983) has suggested two general types of social formations in West Africa: 1) those formations where external trade played a peripheral role in the functioning of society, and 2) those formations where external trade played a primary role in "realizing" the generated surplus. The former is associated with lineage societies or states based on raiding, plunder, etc., and thus tended to tax foreign traders. The latter correspond to state societies where surplus is "realized" by exchange for products essential to the reproduction of the social system. These social formations did not tax foreign traders and encouraged their presence in order to obtain vital goods as well as luxury goods.

Dupre and Rey, in examining societies of the first type, suggest "exchange...is to be explained by the role of exchange in the reproduction of the conditions of production, i.e., at a level other than that of exchange itself" (1978: 188). They go on to elaborate several methods by which the place of exchange is defined. I will discuss them briefly below since much of this has been touched upon earlier. 1) Matrimonial exchanges are controlled by the seniors by virtue of their control over social knowledge (either real as in geneology, history, etc. or 'artificial' as in procedures for religious observances)

and elite goods essential to marriage. Control over elite goods in particular allows the seniors collective control over the juniors, thus, even groups of seniors who are antagonistic toward each other exchange their goods. In the long run this establishes control over marriage and therefore demographic reproduction. 2) Since domestic slavery exists at the level of lineage society there are various mechanisms by which slaves or their descendants can be incorporated into the lineage. The same mechanism can also work in reverse. Juniors accused of adultery, witchcraft, etc., had to rely on seniors to pay fines in elite goods. Those who repeated offences or proved to be recalcitrant lost support of their kin group, which meant that the 'purchase' of a junior could be accomplished by another kin group. In the long run this mechanism also could serve to adjust demographic imbalances. 3) All mechanisms which function to maintain a demographic balance in kin groups are essential preconditions to the reproduction of the conditions of production. 4) Elite goods most often require the highest degree of technical skill to produce, and thus involve the longest period of training. Whether these goods are locally manufactured or exchanged makes little difference, since the labour is provided by the juniors and women but they are controlled by the seniors. The final effect is a political act which

leads the juniors and women to perpetuate dependence by their own labour.

Turning to social formations of the second type, of which the Benin kingdom should be included, we find they are dominated by the tributary mode of production. The reason Amin (1972) and Wolf (1982) separate the slave mode from the tributary mode, Terray (1979) suggests, is that the role of long distance trade has been exaggerated. Most researchers, both Marxist and non-Marxist, consider trade, i.e., distribution, to be the determining factor in state formation. State slavery is accorded a supplementary role since numerically this class only represented a small fraction of the total population and thus the popular argument suggests that the majority of wealth was appropriated from the free producers and/or through control of trade routes.

Terray's position on the matter of controlling trade routes concerns the difficulty of attracting traders and not taxing them. Commercial routes could only be taxed where no alternative routes existed -- a rare occurrence. Where several routes existed, taxes on merchants would drive the trade away to less restrictive centres. The level of the productive forces in West African societies is generally low. The technology is simple and usually operated individually, therefore there is little variation in productivity. The prime ingredient in economic power rests

in controlling people. At the level of lineage society the control rests with the elders but the number of producers under their sway is quite limited. The development of the state could have been such that direct control over lineage segments provided the state with wealth in order to trade, but, since land was plentiful and technology was easily replicated, over exploitation would simply result in a migration. While it seems likely that the state arose on the foundation of lineage society, beyond a certain threshold it became more advantageous to invest in slaves who were settled on slave farms to provide the basis of surplus extraction for individual members of the ruling class.

Also, it is important to remember that surplus labour extracted from slaves was determined by consumption requirements, i.e., basic and luxury goods. Surplus provided by slaves was exchanged for goods used in production (e.g., iron, cotton, etc.) or reproduction (e.g., arms, more slaves). "The purpose of the transaction, for the purchaser, was not the desire to obtain an additional profit by reselling the merchandise, but the wish to acquire a certain product in the most advantageous conditions" (Terray 1979: 310). West African societies, like many others of the time period considered here, had economies where use-value, rather than exchange value, predominated.

This explains why African slavery did not develop into the intense and harsh forms found in the United States during the plantation era and the last centuries of ancient Rome. The predominance of use-value also restricted the expansion of slavery since a numerical balance between free and slave producers had to be maintained. Slaves themselves tended to be foreigners and were mixed ethnically on the slave farms to enable the owners to maintain control. Obedience also had its rewards, for slaves usually achieved freedom in their own lifetime, or their descendants did.

The two major methods of procuring slaves was either through trade or war, which brings us back to the tribute levied from the free producers. In the event of war, rulers relied on the support of their subjects. Religious ideology would not guarantee the willing support of their subjects if they were taxed too heavily. "In this sense, the slave mode of production seems to have been the chief element of the social formation since it subordinated the functioning of the other [lineage] mode of production, with which it coexisted, to the requirements of its own reproduction " (Terray 1979: 311). Long distance trade was essential because it was the only means for the ruling class to 'realize' the surplus the slaves generated and thereby obtain the luxury goods which symbolized authority, as well,

it was a means of obtaining more slaves to facilitate the regular reproduction of social relations. This is the only context in which long distance trade was essential to the state.

3.2. THE CASE OF BENIN

3.2.1. TRADE ORGANIZATION AND WARFARE IN BENIN

At first it may seem curious to present the organization of trade with warfare under the same heading. But their very nature divides them into polar opposites and that is precisely what interests us. Trade is best facilitated during peacetime, that is, periods of political stability, which ensure the safety of travellers and their merchandise. On the other hand, warfare is the most extreme form of maintaining political stability, either internally or externally, not to mention that captives can be traded or put to work. Thus war and trade, as Arnold (1957) notes, were both conditions of survival (i.e., reproduction). Both Arnold (1957) and Polanyi (1966) consider the conquest of Whydah (a coastal city in the modern nation of Benin) by the kingdom of Dahomey in these terms. This division between war and trade also manifests itself at the level of the state. In the early 18th century Barbot reported that Bini traders "are forbid under heavy mulots, or bodily punishment, to intermeddle in any manner of affairs relating

to war" (Barbot in Arnold 1957: 175). Although traders may or may not have been connected with the state, trade itself was regulated and controlled by the state, the opening and closing of "markets" being the predominant method of regulating foreign trade.

Although ethnographic and historical information does not provide us with much detail, we can reconstruct, to some degree, how trade was organized and what effects warfare had on trade. External trade, that is, trade with Europeans and other African states, was controlled by various trading associations, which, in turn, were controlled by various title holders within the state (Bradbury 1967). Bradbury was probably referring to the situation that existed just prior to the invasion of the kingdom by British forces in 1897. Historically, the trend seems to have been a gradual loss of power by the Oba (king) and his supporters in matters relating to trade. When the Portuguese first contacted the kingdom in the 15th century the Oba had a monopoly in virtually all external trade. Within these trading associations merchants paid an annual fee for the right to trade. Van Nyendael wrote in 1702 that "Duties or Tolls on imported and exported wares are not paid here; but everyone pays a certain sum annually to the Governor of the Place where he lives, for the Liberty of Trading" (in Hodgkin 1960: 152). Prior to this there is no indication that free men, because women were always excluded, could

engage in unrestricted trade. The title holders Bradbury refers to are probably the Fiadors and Mercadors (factors and brokers) who conducted trade on behalf of the state. Their original appearance seems connected with the Portuguese, as their titles indicate, although it is probable that Fiadors, or their equivalent, did exist prior to European contact. Merchants had, by the early 18th century, managed to whittle away at the Oba's monopoly of trade until it was reduced finally to a right of pre-emption (Ryder 1969). By the late 19th century state officials could, and did, wield considerable influence on their own.

The early and mid 15th century seems to be a period of turbulence in the eastern portion of West Africa. Yoruba, Nupe, and Igala kingdoms, as well as Benin, were all experiencing dynastic changes at this juncture of history. No conclusive evidence exists as to whether a foreign invasion or some other social calamity was responsible for this upheaval, but what is clear is that Benin emerged from this a stronger and expansionary state (Ryder 1969, Oliver and Atmore 1981). It is within this context that the Portuguese "discovered" Benin in the last three decades of the 15th century.

Oral history indicates that circa 1515-1516 Benin was at war with Idah, the capital of Igala (Egharevba 1968), and it is confirmed by Pires, a Portuguese ambassador at the court (in Hodgkin 1960). Oliver and Atmore (1981) consider

the control of the Niger waterway as the principal cause of this fighting. At the same time the Nupe kingdom and the Yoruba kingdom of Oyo were engaged in fighting for control over the southern portion of the West African Savanna. As the century progressed the Nupe managed to capture the Oyo capital, forcing the Oyo further south and thereby leading them into conflict with other Yoruba kingdoms. During the course of their exile from their capital the Oyo had learned cavalry warfare, and by the early 1600's had recaptured the former capital. The two most powerful expansionary states of eastern Nigeria had asserted themselves and delineated their respective spheres of influence. If, during the course of the 17th century, there was little conflict between these two states, it is because the Oyo dominated the open savanna by means of its cavalry and Benin dominated the forested areas west of the Niger, including the Owo, Ekiti, and Ondo Yoruba, by means of sword and European muskets (Ajayi 1971).

The main object of the new states, however, was to produce concentrations of wealth and power by imposing taxation and tribute over wide areas, and also the forced transfer of population into the neighbourhood of the new metropolises for agricultural and industrial as well as military reasons. It had long been the practice of the great Hausa city states to settle communities of slaves in agricultural villages around the urban areas. Benin strictly limited the sale of slaves from its metropolitan region to Europeans, because their labour was needed at home. The compulsory settlement on somewhat more privileged terms of skilled men, especially blacksmiths,

from conquered communities had been practised by many African states (Oliver and Atmore 1981: 100 - 101).

Benin, by the time Olfert Dapper published his accounts in 1668, was at the height of its expansion. Between the time that Dapper wrote and Nyendaël's visit in 1702, a civil war broke out within the kingdom. Ryder (1969) believes the outbreak occurred circa 1690, although the discrepancy between oral history and recorded history cannot fix a firm date, and that it lasted approximately twenty years, with intermittent periods of peace in between. These twenty years indicate a period of unusual internal stress. Indigenous history is vague for this time and European reports often present conflicting evidence. It seems plausible to believe that merchant associations, and the title holders who controlled them, were at odds with the Oba and his supporters. By the mid-17th century European traders were met at the coast by the Fiadors and Mercadors, rather than being sent for from the capital which had been the earlier practice. Price negotiations were now fixed by these officials without the consultation of the Oba, and a credit system was established. Trade, it would appear, was no longer exclusively under control of the state and probably meant a corresponding loss of revenue to the palace. What appears to have happened after this is an attempt by the Oba and his followers to reassert their monopoly privileges (Ryder 1969, Fage 1969). The ensuing

civil war saw the city destroyed, various vassal kingdoms and chiefdoms regaining their independence or at least greater political autonomy, and the lifting of restrictions on male slaves. Fage (1969) suggests that lifting the ban on male slaves was done in order to increase the royal treasury since the kingdom was becoming relatively poorer in relation to those kingdoms that did sell male slaves while Ryder (1969) contends that the ban was lifted in order to deport undesirables. It seems to me that both views are valid when one considers that; far to the north in the Hausa states, particularly the state of Katsina, had just emerged victorious in wresting control of the southern terminals of the trans-Saharan trade from the Songhay Empire; to the immediate north the Fulani had just conquered Nupe; and the Oyo kingdom had managed to control some access to the sea independent of Benin, which was formerly the intermediary between Oyo and the coast. The disruption in trade external, combined with politically dangerous and powerful leaders internally, resulted in the export of these undesirables. This view has its credibility strengthened by the fact that the export of male slaves was a royal monopoly (Ryder 1969).

During the rest of the 18th century internal problems exacerbated external pressures and vice versa, a process which continued well into the 19th century.

In the wake of the Fulani jihad came a fresh wave of Nupe attacks on the northern Edo areas; to the west, the break up of the Oyo kingdom led to fighting in Ekiti; on the coast a British presence gradually established the bases which demanded and made possible an advance into the interior. Not even at the height of its fortunes could Benin have resisted the forces which were now closing upon it, so the oft-aiired subject of its decline in the nineteenth century is irrelevant to the outcome (Ryder 1969: 22).

Discussion up to now should make clear that there is a connection between internal and external developments. However, to say that "decline" had set in is perhaps too simple a view of reality. Despite the internal problems, which are, after all, the result of class struggle, there was a movement underway to re-establish its former hegemony in the forest regions. Much of the Yoruba country lost earlier in the century had been recaptured and plans were underway to subdue a rebellion at Agbor in Ibo country. "At the end," Ryder says, "resistance to the punitive expedition of 1897 confounded all the British 'Benin experts' who had confidently predicted an ignominious surrender" (1969: 23).

3.2.2. PORTS OF TRADE

Polanyi (1957, 1966) was always forceful in separating notions of external trade and markets. A port of trade, for Polanyi and his followers, was an institution administered by the state for the state to facilitate foreign trade. It is these ports of trade, and not markets, that were the

growing points of the world economy since this is where many different societies contacted each other to exchange ideas and products. They tended to be found along coastal areas or at inland areas which bordered on different ecological zones, and they were anything from free city-states to cities or towns which were administered by a state. Politically, ports of trade were neutral for two reasons. First, neutrality guaranteed safety for the foreign merchants since they would not leave their own territory unless they were provided safety for themselves and their merchandise. Secondly, they provided security for the states that administered the ports of trade by preventing access to their interior and thus preventing any kind of military reconnaissance. The previous section discussed the contradiction between war and foreign trade; a contradiction overcome by a neutral area which provided safety in what was often a politically hostile environment. Furthermore, ports of trade were open to all foreigners, with the effect of inducing competition between merchants rather than trade rivalries between states.

The port of Whydah, of which Arnold (1957) has written, fits this description. Benin also fits this description well, as we shall see. In regard to the safety of foreigners, D.R. (believed to be Dierick Ruiters) wrote in 1602 that the Bini "are very conscionable, and will doe no wrong one to the other, neither will they take anything from

strangers, for if they doe, they should afterward be put to death, for they lightly judge a man to die for doing any wrong to a stranger" (in Hodgkin 1960: 122). State security is also alluded to by this very same D.R., suggesting "a man might write more of the situation of this Towne [Benin City] if he might see it, as you may the Townes in Holland, which is not permitted there, by one that alwaies goes with you, some men say, that he goeth with you, because you should have no harme done unto you, but yet you must goe no farther than he will let you" (in Hodgkin 1960: 120).

It is difficult to provide information regarding how many ports of trade existed in the kingdom, especially since foreigners all had their movement regulated. "There are four principal places where the Europeans trade" (in Arnold 1957: 185) in 1732 when Barbot visited. Beyond this we know that the king of Oyo and the king of Benin fixed a boundary at Otun in Ekiti, where Yoruba and Edo traders met to exchange goods (Ajayi 1971, Fage 1969). Beyond these centres one can only speculate that similar trading towns existed to the north-east to trade with the Igala kingdom and to the east to trade with the Ibo. Finally, examining the accessibility of these ports of trade, Ryder (1969) mentions two instances when a European nation wished to secure monopoly trading privileges. The first attempt was by the Dutch when tensions were rising with the Portuguese. The Oba signed a trade treaty with the Dutch, but article 10

stipulated "that no Portuguese, who may at any time be found in the King's territory, shall be attacked by the [Dutch] Company's ships or servants, since the king, being master of his land, wishes to extend to them, as to all other nations, free access to trade" (in Ryder 1969: 141). The second attempt was made by the French several years later in response to the growing hostilities of the English, and they in turn were denied for the same reasons.

3.2.3. INTERNAL MARKETS

Local markets were the institutional mechanisms which ensured the orderly exchange of local products just as the ports of trade ensured the supply of foreign products. Markets not only involve exchange, they involve exchange-value as a principle in societies that are otherwise dominated by use-value (cf., Polanyi 1957). One of the main reasons that exchange here does not become dominated by exchange-value (market exchange) in Polanyi's terms is because it is regulated, i.e., administered, at fixed rates and thereby prevents profit from becoming a motive in the course of exchange. Exchange is meant as an exchange of equivalents and nothing more.

Although market institutions, therefore, are exchange institutions, market and exchange are not coterminous. Exchange at set rates occurs under reciprocal or redistributive forms of integration (Polanyi 1957: 257).

The point Polanyi is making is that external trade and markets are separate phenomena that find their expression in the dominant form of integration, which for Benin was redistributive, i.e., controlled from a centre. Markets were held to provide one vital function which was to provide fresh food or utilitarian goods. This required that markets were held on fixed days, that some medium of exchange like the cowrie shell was available, that people to prepare food for sale (usually women), that there be some form of ritual or ceremony (which often defined the borders of the market), and that state functionaries regulate the trade and settle disputes (cf., Polanyi 1966). Furthermore, none of the goods found in a port of trade were sold in a market unless it was utilitarian.

The social distance between trade and market can be measured by the difference of status between those who engage in trade and those who go to market. The vendors in the market place are women. But trade, like war, is the affair of men, and more particularly 'the business of kings, rich men, and prime merchants, exclusive of the inferior sorts of Blacks', as Barbot says. Only women go to market 'loaded like horses' with the produce of the countryside, or the makers of common wares such as hoes or iron utensils, or slaves who traffic for their masters (Arnold 1957: 183).

Generally speaking, Benin fits this pattern very well. D.R. lists two main markets in Benin city which provided a wide array of foodstuffs, firewood, wooden utensils, cotton thread, agricultural tools, and weapons. He adds that these

markets "are held and arranged in a very orderly manner," and that "women are much employed as sellers, and even sent in mobs to the Gold Coast" (in Roth 1968: 132). Dapper describes the market at Gwato, one of Benin's ports of trade for the Europeans, in a similar manner. Even though it was a port of trade, the market remained quite separate. "Not everybody is allowed to bargain with the Dutch there, but only certain people whom the king licenses, and these buy the European goods from us and other white people in Arbon, and go and sell them again in Gotton [Gwato] (in Roth 1968: 132). In the event of a dispute the parties "are brought before the nobles and settled" (in Roth 1968: 133). The cowrie appears to have been the basic medium of exchange, although other equivalencies such as salt were used from time to time.

3.2.4. THE WEST AFRICAN TRADE AND BENIN

Examining the history of West African trade D.T. Niane has recently stated:

...we cannot say how much trade came from the savannah nor how much was sent from the forest regions to the Sudan. However, until very recently, the Mandingo and Hausa used to sell beads, salt, amber, copper pans and smoked or dried fish from Jenne and Mopti at village fairs in the forest (1984: 624).

This certainly gives a very good indication of how widespread trade, and traders, were in the pre-colonial era. Although the traders did not necessarily travel this far,

appearances indicate that the forest kingdoms were well integrated into the West African commercial network. Both Fage (1969) and Ryder (1984) believe that the Yoruba, Igala, and Benin polities sometime in the past were under Hausa influence and that this contact may have led to state formation and linked them to their own sphere of trade. Ajayi (1971) put forward the idea that the main southern extension of the trans-Saharan trade terminated at the city of Old Oyo. From there three subsidiary routes branched out, of which the Old Oyo (city)-Ekiti-Owo-Benin route is relevant here. Benin's trade with Nupe also followed this route. In pre-contact times this route brought the iron, copper, and other goods from the desert regions. The essence of the matter is that Benin had always looked north for goods, never seriously trying to establish themselves on the coast, and being content with bringing various coastal peoples into a tributary relationship.

We saw earlier in this chapter how the eastern portion of West Africa was in a state of flux just prior to the Portuguese arrival, and how ports of trade served as a mechanism to allow trade to continue despite the wars of expansion. Here I wish to examine the nature of the products exchanged. European trade along the coast from the 15th to the early 18th century was confined mostly to an intermediary position, bringing products from one section of the coast to another, thus bypassing the trading networks

along the coastal lagoons. Their role was relatively minor in this respect since they could not control the total volume of coastal trade anyway. Prior to their arrival Bini cloth and beads were reaching the Akan kingdoms via the Ga speaking people near modern Accra (Boahen 1967), and probably would have continued to do so even without the Europeans.

Slaves were being procured during the 15th century by a combination of methods including criminal sentencing, taking captives in war, and through trade in the interior. Fage (1969) has calculated that in the 16th century over 50% of the slaves Benin obtained were through capture in warfare, and the remainder were criminals, debtors, pawns, kidnapped persons, etc., although it is doubtful that this was done in order to satisfy Hausa demands. It seems more reasonable to conclude that the majority were used in the Bini economy, with perhaps only the criminals and other dissidents being exported, especially since the Hausa states were probably more concerned with gaining their independence from the empire of Mali (Hodgkin 1960). It is true that Benin was already involved in exporting slaves as early as 1505 (Pereira in Roth 1968), but the numbers were small and other goods such as cotton cloth, leopard skins, palm oil, and beads were also included in these transactions. As will be seen in the next section, even during the height of the Atlantic slave trade, the numbers exported tended to remain

small, the majority coming from coastal states who relied on European commerce much more than the inland kingdoms. Rather, during the 17th and 18th centuries slaves were imported from the Igbo area east of the Niger and north of the delta (Oliver and Atmore 1981), and during the 19th century from the delta states themselves (Roth 1968).

Salt was a product that continually was being imported into Benin either in the form of rock salt brought from the Sahara, or sea salt obtained from the people on the coast. Ryder (1969) suggests that expansion along the coast as far west as Lagos could be connected to an attempt at greater self sufficiency for this item, which continued to arrive from Lagos until the mid-16th century. By the end of that century Benin tended to get part of its supply from the neighbouring coastal kingdom of Warri. If the Bini became rather indifferent to the loss of vassal kingdoms along the coast over time it is because European traders could pick up some of the demand, although this demand did vary (Adams 1966). What is clear is that the demand in the kingdom was always satisfied and that any remainder was re-exported -- for considerable profit if we are to believe Roth (1968).

Slaves and salt appear to be two of the primary items imported into the kingdom, although some of the demand could always be met locally. A third primary import was metal, particularly copper, tin, iron, zinc, and later brass or bronze from Europe. Prior to European contact copper came

from the mines in Takedda near the Air Mountains and tin from the Jos Plateau. Alternatively, copper and zinc may have been available from Igala or Ibo areas. The amounts that came to Benin were probably quite small and expensive when one considers the distance involved. Greater amounts of brass became available from the Europeans early in the 16th century which afforded the brassmiths the opportunity for greater production and experimentation, and resulting in the court art for which Benin has become world famous. Iron, as we recall from the first chapter, had been imported into the forest since the 5th century and was used primarily in agricultural implements (Ryder 1984). The supply of this metal also seems to have originated near the Jos Plateau, which indicates that the Hausa states at least controlled the trade of this and the other two metals, and possibly production as well (Ajayi 1971).

Of course, other items of a utilitarian or prestigious nature were traded, but the three outlined above probably constituted the most vital goods in terms of social reproduction and production. Among the products already described, Ajayi also mentions leather products coming from the savanna, as well as horses -- the prestige symbol par excellence in the forest. Fishing villages along the coast and the Niger also provided Benin with fish and shellfish of various sorts. Unfortunately there is little evidence on what other items may have been imported, but there does seem

to be enough evidence to indicate that Terray's (1979b) hypothesis regarding the nature of the goods holds in the case of Benin.

Cloth, manufactured primarily by women on perpendicular looms, was one of Benin's primary exports, and was much esteemed by many societies throughout West Africa at the time of the Portuguese arrival. The history of cloth production provides some interesting insights into how the kingdom organized its productive resources. Already we have seen that cloth was exported as far away as the Akan kingdoms to the west and it seems probable that a large proportion was exported to the north. Many of the early chroniclers observed the large amounts of cotton grown and the corresponding weaving that goes with it (see Roth 1968: 140-141). Van Nyendael's brief description is indicative of the other travellers' reports as well: "That a large quantity of cotton bushes must grow here you may reasonable conjecture when I tell you that not only all the inhabitants are clothed with it, but they annually export thousands of woven clothes to other places" (in Roth 1968: 141). Ryder (1969) also confirms the large volume of cloth exported, particularly once the Europeans assumed their role as intermediaries along the coast. Inexplicably, over the course of time the amount locally manufactured for export seemed to decrease while cloth coming from Nupe and Hausa territories for re-export seemed to increase. Possibly the

internal stresses experienced in the 18th and 19th centuries, in the form of civil wars followed by population movements, disrupted production to the point where a full recovery was no longer possible; or, if recovery was possible, the demand had shifted elsewhere. Other products which were exported seemed to consist of forest produce such as kola nuts, gourds, calabashes, indigo, and various fruits which were sent north in return for savanna products (Ajayi 1971).

3.2.5. THE SLAVE TRADE AND THE EUROPEANS

The previous sections have already outlined the extent and nature of European involvement in Benin's trade. Other than the role of intermediary, Europe's involvement during the first two centuries after contact was rather negligible. Early on, there were several abortive attempts at establishing a pepper trade by the Portuguese, the British, and the Dutch. The pepper trade failed basically for two reasons; first, the Europeans always gave a preference to the Asian peppers; and second, Bini pepper always took a long time to collect because it had to be gathered from all parts of the kingdom in order to produce a quantity sufficient to export (Ryder 1969). The only item that was ever exported to Europe in any amounts over the four centuries of contact was ivory and this too tended to decline over the years (Graham 1965, Ryder 1969). The

decline in ivory and other exports to Europe is related to two factors; first, Benin's coastal port was not as accessible as those of the neighbouring coastal states which had, from about 1700 onward, defied Bini suzerainty; and second, after 1700 the Europeans were less interested in ivory than slaves.

Debates over the volume and impact of the Atlantic slave trade have been going on in academic circles for many years and most likely will continue to do so. Benin's participation in this trade is no exception. Crowder (1962), for example, considers Benin to have been the most important slave mart west of the Niger River, conducting raids into Ibo territory where the lack of political centralization and high population density made them attractive targets. Benin's decline was a direct result of the slave trade for Davidson (1961), although he modified his position considerably in later years (see Davidson 1966). Fage (1969) goes on to argue that European contact led to a restructuring of labour organization which had no precedent in previous social organization and suggested that Africans found labour itself had an economic value. The slave trade is also considered to have a negative impact on class structure by rigidifying it (Rodney 1967), and thus impeding social change to the benefit of the ruling class (Davidson 1961).

Opposing the above point of view Alagoa (1971), Hopkins (1973), Ryder (1969), and Graham (1965) maintain that European influence was never as strongly felt inland as it was for the coastal kingdoms. According to Ryder and Graham, Crowder has erred in his statement that Benin was a major slave mart, since Europeans often confused Benin with its neighbouring coastal kingdoms, and in other circumstances were simply referring to the Bight of Benin. While it is true that Benin did sell slaves throughout European contact, Graham points out that there is no evidence to believe that the numbers were extensive. Prior to c. 1720 there were no male slaves sold, nor could they be natives of Benin (see Nyendaël, and Landolphe in Roth 1968), since their labour was required within the kingdom. Reports of a Lt. King in approximately 1821 do support Rodney's claims that rulers created "criminals" on trumped up charges to sell in the slave trade. However, in Benin, and probably elsewhere, this was a political move in order to maintain stability and prevent rebellion. This indicates more of an attempt to control social change than to impede it.

It makes more sense to recognize that Benin proper did not adapt to highly dynamic external forces as rapidly as did Warri, Bonny, and Lagos. But Benin's very conservatism in such a fluid situation attests more to the depth of her traditional tenets than to any 'decline' (Graham 1965: 324 emphasis mine).

3.3. ANALYTICAL COMMENTS

We must now return to the theoretical considerations with which we began this chapter. Beginning with Wolf's three qualifications on the concept of redistribution, it appears that as far as the reproduction of the conditions of production are concerned the two primary redistributive spheres are the port of trade and the market. While it should be clear that the port of trade corresponds closely to the type of social formation where the surplus generated by slaves and the surplus appropriated from the free producers must be "realized," the role of the market is somewhat harder to define. The heavy emphasis on foodstuffs sold in the market would suggest that its development is related to an increasing differentiation in the division of labour. Of course, there are many kin-ordered societies that develop markets without having to develop a state structure, but the important point in the case of Benin is that the slave mode of production had at least formally subordinated the lineage mode. In doing so it would have subordinated markets to its own functioning and thus transformed the character of the market to some degree. That this was actually the case can be seen in several ways: 1) iron imports were controlled by the state through the ports of trade; thus, the production of agricultural and

military implements was also either directly or indirectly controlled by the state as well; 2) the physical presence of state officials to regulate the markets themselves were a politico-ideological representation of relations of domination; 3) the fact that women tended to be market vendors is an ideological representation of the subordinate place of the market in relation to external trade which was controlled by men; and, 4) goods vital to the reproduction of the dominant slave mode of production were never for sale in the market, particularly slaves. Considering what was distributed to whom also incorporates the political element to which Wolf referred. In Benin most of the title holders occupied non-hereditary positions. The titles were ranked hierarchically with successively higher orders offering greater scope to amass wealth through trade and thus purchase more slaves in order to repeat the process again on an expanded scale. When a title became vacated applicants had to be able to pay the necessary fees for advancement. Of those who could do so, promotion depended on political alliances with those in the higher orders who chose the successful applicant (see Bradbury 1964, 1967).

Ekholm's dependency model also seems to have some applicability to the Benin case. The 'centre' could be defined as the capital of the kingdom. Benin city was the most metropolitan area in its sphere of influence, it was the political hub of the kingdom proper and the subject

territories, and it was the primary manufacturing site of weapons and prestige goods. The 'periphery' would correspond to the remainder of the kingdom and suzerain areas. Raw materials came from the periphery either through slave farms or the twice yearly tribute that was collected. Tribute collected within the kingdom proper was delivered in kind (yams, livestock, etc.), while tribute collected from vassal areas was paid in slaves or ivory (Bradbury 1964). Tribute in kind fed the court, while slaves imported from the outlying regions enhanced the productive capability of the centre. This simultaneously impoverished, or at least minimized, the productive capability of the periphery.

Ekholm also recognizes the important function of trade with other centres; when this trade fails the centre suffers a decline. We saw earlier that ports of trade could still facilitate trade even through warfare. Other parts of the discussion indicated that warfare does have an impact on the volume of trade. These two points do not contradict each other if we take into account the type of warfare involved. Wars of expansion, which do not lead to sources of supply, such as was indicated for the eastern region of West Africa early in the 15th century, do not affect production within the expanding states and thus external trade can still take place relatively smoothly. Civil wars, or wars of expansion which do lead to sources of supply (such as the Oyo conquest of Dahomey for a direct route to the coast), do have an

effect on production. Ports of trade are still operative but the disruption of production leads to a pre-capitalist "realization crisis" which in turn affects production and reproduction. Such may have happened to Benin in the case of cloth export. At any rate the nature of the warfare involved should be empirically determined to see how production is affected, which in turn will have some bearing on whether peripheralization is a temporary or long term phenomenon. Graham (1965) is thus correct when he suggests that the Bini state should not be seen as a rise and decline but as going through cycles of rise and decline. However, given the developments that occurred elsewhere in the 19th century it would not be unreasonable to speculate that, had the British (and the other colonial powers) not intervened in Africa, the 'down' cycles would have occurred more often than the 'up'. The export of Benin cloth is a good indicator since it was being replaced by Nupe and Hausa cloth. Both these territories had recently been incorporated into the Fulani Empire which dominated the eastern portion of the West African savanna. At the same time Benin was trying to regain some of its former periphery. In terms of Ekholm's model we can see a decline in manufactured exports and a corresponding increase in manufactured imports -- a classic case of peripheralization. It is worth reiterating that the European influence on Benin was negligible. Oliver and Atmore consider that

...the states of the southern savanna were two or three centuries behind those of the north. They were less aware of the outside world. They were less adaptable to change. Nevertheless, when these systems at last yielded, it was, with the exception of Benin, to influences of the Muslim north and not to any emanations from the Atlantic trading frontier to the south (1981: 102).

Finally, brief mention must be made regarding the articulation of modes of production. Unfortunately there is no historical material that would provide information to substantiate or refute the four points Dupre and Rey put forward concerning exchange in lineage societies (see pages 76 - 77). Bradbury's (1964, 1967) ethnographic material lends some support to the first three points but is vague and very brief in regard to the fourth (elite goods). From a logical point of view it would be the control of elite goods that would be crucial for the dominant mode of production since this would control the seniors, where the locus of power lies in the lineage mode. If this could be demonstrated then it would be an easy step to argue that the mode of exchange in a 'pure' lineage society was reciprocity and that the developments which lead to a tributary/slave mode would also be the developments which give rise to redistribution. Since we can find the germs of a tributary/slave mode in the lineage mode it follows that we can find the germs of redistribution in reciprocity. This would explain why we tend to find reciprocity and redistribution together empirically.

IV. SOME REMARKS ON CLASS STRUCTURE AND CLASS DYNAMICS IN BENIN

4.1. CLASS STRUCTURE

If we are to believe that the class struggle is the motor of history, then it is worthwhile, if only briefly, to examine what the concept 'class' means to the French structural anthropologists. While my intention is not to provide a history of anthropology in France, a few comments on intellectual heritage are in order. Quite simply, the pedigree of these anthropologists can be traced to Saussure's linguistic model via Levi-Strauss and Althusser's interpretation of Marxism (cf., Bloch 1983, Kahn and Llobera 1981, Sahlins 1981). The intersection of these two schools of thought occurred in mid 1960, according to Bloch (1983), when Godelier published Structure and Contradiction in Capital (1977). In essence, Godelier argues that Marx was a structuralist, in the Levi-Straussian sense, before his time, i.e., structures are largely unconscious. The implication of such an approach have been neatly summarized by Wolf.

I have learned much from the structuralists; at the same time, I see limitations in their approach. Since they believe that Marx was a

systems theorist before his time, one who used Hegelian language because he could not speak Althusserian, they have eliminated the Hegelian dialectic in Marx. This does away with Marx's interesting (and, to me, valuable) effort to build a philosophy of internal relations, in favor of a mechanistic systems approach that deals with elements-in-relation instead of elements-of-relation. The structuralists, moreover, have endowed the structure or system with an absolute teleology ("structural causality"), which moves people as carriers of the system but leaves no room for human consciousness or history. In their anthropology they consequently show a tendency to collapse all culture and cultural diversity into the elements of the mode of production. Furthermore, they reify the mode of production concept into timeless essences, which are then allowed to reproduce themselves or conjugate ("articulate") with one another without reference to historical time or circumstance. (Wolf 1982: 401, emphasis added)

Here we have arrived at both the strength and the weakness of a structural materialism: its ahistoricity. Or, rephrasing the issue in Bloch's (1983) terms, the French structuralist project is not only successful, but too successful. In separating structure and history "one has gained in overall cogency" (Auge 1982: 111) while losing sight of the fact that people do make their own history. Structural analysis has always been more preoccupied with explanations as to why people do not make their history as they please. The implications of this for class analysis is only too obvious: classes are easily identified but have no power to change the structure (cf., Connell 1982).

Clearly the problem that confronts us here is how to transform class structure into class dynamics. The issue at

hand could not be dealt with in Chapter I because of the problems outlined above. Only with the information provided in the chapter on exchange can we begin to analyze class dynamics, even if only in an indirect way. It is in the process of reproducing the conditions of production that the class structure itself is reproduced. But the reproduction is not a carbon copy. In varying degrees the availability of resources and their allocation modify the existing structure of production and hence the class structure. The cumulative effect of the many small changes undergone reflect themselves in trends which can in the long run lead to new classes and new productive relations.

From the arguments presented in the first chapter it is possible to elucidate four fundamental classes in the Bini social formation that correspond to two modes of production. These are women and juniors dominated by elders in the lineage mode of production, and slaves and slave owners in the slave mode of production.

Terray (1975) employs an essentially Leninist conception of class in his analysis of the Abron Kingdom but is sure to point out that Lenin's broad and general definition of class is not a universal one. In particular, if "a class is characterized in a differential manner by its position within a determinate mode of production, it conversely follows that a specific definition of class corresponds to each particular mode of production" (Terray

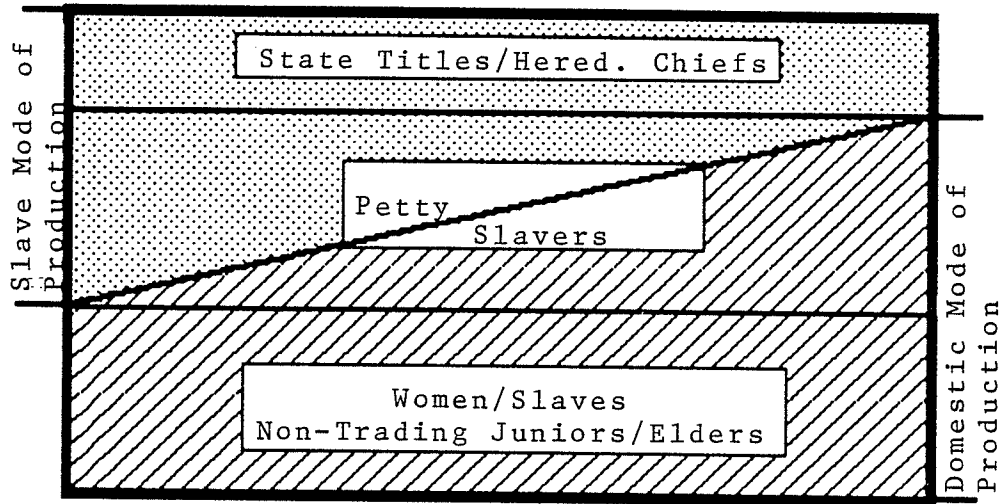
1975: 87). The important consequence of this is that it makes non-capitalist definitions of class possible. Terray's position is that analysts who are seeking "classes for themselves" in a non-capitalist mode of production will not find any. Both Terray (1975) and Ste. Croix (1984) recognize that class consciousness does not define a class. Rather, the position of a class within a mode of production depends on the level of the productive forces (producers versus non-producers), and the level of the relations of production (i.e., the relationship to the means of production). Keeping in mind the level of the productive forces and relations of production, Terray concludes that there are four possible types of class:

- 1) Producers disposing of the means of production (self subsistent community production, petty commodity production).
 - 2) Producers separated from the means of production (slave, serf, worker).
 - 3) Non-producers disposing of the means of production (slave-owner, feudal lord, capitalist).
 - 4) Non-producers separated from the means of production (social classes and categories said to be unproductive).
- This last type provides a precise definition of what might be called secondary classes. Even if secondary classes of a specific nature are found in each mode of production, their specificity is but a derivative effect of the specificity of the fundamental classes, i.e., the classes that have an actual relation to the means of production at one or the other level (1975: 88).

The final class category that Terray suggests will assist in completing the class structure of the Benin

Kingdom. Hints of a secondary class were noted in the first chapter when it was indicated that the majority of household heads in the villages (some were elders, some were not) engaged in trade and the title system. Thus, to varying degrees, this segment of the population engaged in activities corresponding to both the lineage and the slave mode of production. Analogous to this situation is the process leading to what Carchedi (1977) terms the new petty bourgeoisie, whereby members of this class spend part of their time performing the tasks of labour and another part performing the tasks of capital. As a heuristic device, Carchedi's (1977: 87-92) model and diagrammatic representation shed some light on a class of petty slavers (for lack of a better term) in Benin (see Figure 1). While some important differences exist between Carchedi's presentation of class in capitalism and mine in slavery (outlined by Terray, see also Marx 1982), the same basic principle is operative. For Carchedi, agents in the new petty bourgeoisie are distinguished precisely by their role in the production process. They are not capitalist since they do not own the means of production nor are they workers since, in varying degrees, they perform management tasks on behalf of the capitalists. Thus the new petty bourgeoisie, "in terms of production relations are a sort of 'hybrid', a mixture of the two 'pure' classes" (1977: 5). Because it is not possible to perform the tasks of labour and capital

FIGURE 1



The Class Structure of Benin

simultaneously, a hierarchy develops whereby some agents perform the tasks of capital more frequently than the tasks of labour or vice versa. It is this basic idea which I find analogous to the situation in Benin. The hierarchy in the village and state level title systems produces a situation where increased participation in trading (slavery) means a corresponding decrease in time spent on agricultural activities (domestic/lineage relations). One can now better understand why the system of hereditary chiefs and their miniature courts are so important as a mechanism of articulation. In terms of state slavery, the titles of the Town and Palace Chiefs were bestowed upon members of this secondary class and not upon the "commoners" as Bradbury and Ryder have suggested. The very nature of advancement in the system by the ability to pay the appropriate fees would preclude any agriculturalist from entering the state level title system without first going through the village level system.

Before concluding this section on class structure I would suggest that Terray's notion of secondary class needs revision on two points. First, a secondary class need not be entirely unproductive, as Carchedi has already shown with the new petty bourgeoisie, although the productive/unproductive ratio varies. Second, and perhaps more important, is that classes need not be derived

exclusively from within a mode of production, but can be derived from between modes of production, i.e., their articulation.

4.2. CLASS DYNAMICS

An examination of class dynamics in the Bini social formation is difficult partly due to the ahistorical nature of French Structuralist Marxism, and partly due to the restrictions on the early European chronicler's movements. Historical information that we do have comes primarily from the collection of oral court history collected by Egharevba (1968). Each Oba's deeds are very briefly described along with any innovations or events said to have occurred during his reign. Some of these Obas are barely mentioned while others receive relatively more attention. While a detailed examination of class dynamics cannot be presented, the information provided in the first two chapters supplemented by theories on the individual in society, by G. Plekhanov (1969) and L. White (1949), should give us a fairly clear indication of class trends.

Plekhanov's and White's theories are worthy of attention because the oral history collected by Egharevba is primarily a history of certain individuals (mostly Obas). Can past Obas policies and decisions be attributed solely to them? Plekhanov and White would answer with a resounding

"no". "The effect of personal peculiarities", writes Plekhanov, "is undeniable; but no less undeniable is the fact that such an effort could occur only in the given social conditions" (1969: 161). Social organization has a very large influence on the role and social significance of any individual. Thus White has criticized Boas in particular for suggesting that "Negro rulers" had some inherent, inborn ability, "whose genius for organization has enabled them to establish flourishing empires" (Boas in White 1949: 194). Personal qualities of an individual make the individual more or less able to fulfill certain social needs which have arisen from social relations of production. In addition, no event, discovery, invention, etc., can take place until a certain stage in the productive forces has been reached. In other words, certain social conditions call into existence certain events. White provides a compelling example when he discusses parallel discoveries in science (e.g., 1949: 209).

White has argued that people labelled "great" are at the pinnacle of some strand of social development, i.e., at a time when the elements of a synthesis are possible. Similarly, Plekhanov argues that great individuals do not create trends, but rather, they are the product of trends and merely its best representatives. Trends are put in motion by a class or classes, and classes in turn depend on their relation to other classes and the state of the

productive forces. As Ste. Croix (1984) noted, classes can and do struggle without necessarily having a class consciousness. Class is also an important determinant of the rate of change for technological advance, particularly in non-capitalist societies. This is so because the dominant class has privileged access to resources, information, etc., but is composed of few individuals in relation to other classes.

The state of the productive forces and the social relations that exist within a nation are what Plekhanov termed "particular causes". The sum of particular causes within an area, i.e., relations among several nations, create the general cause or trend. In the area and time I am examining the general cause is unfree labour, the extreme form of which is manifested as slavery. The extent of production depended on available human labour because of the low level of productive forces. Some of these trends have already been discussed in Chapter II. Particular causes are supplemented by individual causes. General and particular causes determine the trend and limit the influence of individual causes, but the individual causes provide the specific features exhibited. It is in this sense that White could assert "we can predict the course of evolution but not of history" (White 1949: 230). Thus, "great" people are those who can best perform the social tasks emanating from general and particular trends.

We are now in a position to reconstruct the trends put in motion by various classes in West Africa with particular reference to the Benin Kingdom. The French structuralists aid in understanding the particular causes through their analysis of production relations within the Bini social formation and the resultant class structure. Dependency theorists provide some assistance through their analysis of the movement of surplus within and between social formations (general and particular causes). Polanyi's analysis forms a connection between the two theories by relating the movement of surplus back to the institutional (i.e., social) structure which governs the conditions of reproduction (also general and particular causes).

Having said this we can now turn our attention to the king lists provided by Egharevba. Right from the beginning we can state that the formation of the second dynasty, which was related to state formation and the ascendancy of slave relations of production, could only have occurred because of the developments reached in the first dynasty through the full development of the lineage mode into a petty chiefdom. For this reason I had suggested earlier that it was inconsequential whether the founding of the second dynasty was a conquest or an invitation. In either case the state was built on elements from the petty chiefdom.

The first monarch, Eweka I, ascended the throne at an early age, c. 1200 A.D. Since he was young, his advisors

took charge of the state administration. During this early period the Town Chiefs had not yet been formed; only the Palace Chiefs had, and the Uzama were formally incorporated into the state machinery. This is an interesting period because it set the stage for Bini politics for approximately 250 years. The incorporation of the Uzama is simultaneously the incorporation, politically, of the old mode of production into the state based on new and ascending slave relations. Thus representatives of two dominant classes were to struggle within the state structure; the Palace Chiefs (and Oba) represented the interests of a slave-owning class, and the Uzama were spokesmen for the elders of lineage relations (keeping in mind they were probably at odds with elders as well). Ewedo succeeded Eweka I as Oba c. 1255 A.D. Noteworthy during his reign is the fact that the Uzama were denied the authority to confer titles in the state system, this right being solely invested in the Oba. While the Uzama, as representatives of their class, no doubt resisted such a policy, the fact that they lost this right should not be surprising. The general trend in West Africa at that time was a move toward slave relations, although the trend had probably originated in the northern savanna states. The success of the Palace Chiefs and the Oba over the Uzama was merely a manifestation of this general trend as it moved southward.

Of course the class which was represented by the Uzama did not cease to struggle. While the oral history is vague, it is almost certain that the Uzama attempted to reverse the trend toward slavery in favour of their own class interests (which we might reasonably suspect to be some other form of tributary domination). Events were slowly coming to a head. By the time Egbeka was crowned c. 1370 he had inherited a kingdom filled with dissent. "Tradition says that he had several civil wars with the Uzama Nihinron...Egbeka died unmourned by his subjects" (Egharevba 1968: 13). Clearly the trend toward slavery was not without resistance, but equally clear is that the trend continued unabated, both within and outside the kingdom.

Previously I noted in Chapter II that the early and mid 15th century was a period of upheaval in eastern West Africa where the Yoruba, Nupe, and Igala kingdoms as well as Benin were experiencing dynastic changes. Events that occurred during the reign of Ewuare the Great c. 1440 were a reflection of the general trend culminating and entrenching itself in the Bini social formation. During his reign the power of the Uzama and their class interests were further reduced partly by the installation of primogeniture as the rule for royal succession, and partly by the establishment of the Town Chiefs. With the creation of the Town Chiefs the incorporation of a secondary class of petty slavers into the state was achieved. Petty slavers as a class would have

formed sometime during the previous 250 years while the trend toward slavery was consolidating. Their incorporation into the state was important for two reasons. First, at that time their interests would have coincided to a large degree with the Palace Chiefs and slaving class in opposition to the Uzama and their supporters. Secondly, since petty slavers had reasons to support the class in favour of the slave mode and the class in favour of the lineage mode, in the long run their interests were ultimately in neither and thus a new trend was set in motion--a trend that was in favour of trading without, or at least with minimal, state regulation and intervention. This, however, is a generalization. Some of the Town Chiefs would side with the Palace Chiefs and vice versa, but for the most part each class was represented by a title group. Again, the view put forward by Ryder that Ewuare's rule may have been a conquest is of little importance, since the historical trend and not the particular event is what is of concern.

A period of expansion that lasted approximately 150 years was set in motion after the restructuring of the state during Ewuare's reign. During this period and beyond the principle of primogeniture in the royal household did not ease succession disputes but exacerbated them. Although the first born son was to be crowned Oba upon his father's death in the ideal situation, in practice the reigning Oba never

named his successor until late into his rule. Sons who were born within a close period of time often claimed to be the eldest. Each of the claimants would gather a political following during their father's lifetime so that when he died long or short periods of civil war often ensued. In other words, rival classes and/or factions had a stake in ensuring their candidate gained the throne.

By approximately 1600 Benin had reached the heights of its expansion. Slavers and petty slavers had expanded their fortunes together (though not necessarily in harmony) and politically minimized the Uzama and their supporters. From this period onward the slavers and petty slavers were increasingly at odds with each other as their interests began to diverge. Ahenkpaye, coronated c. 1675, was dethroned within a period of ten years. Although the oral history is unclear, the dethronement was a result of his alleged greed. Whether he was pre-empting the rights of one class over another, simply pre-empting rights of all classes due to personal selfishness, or some combination of both, is unclear. My own opinion is that the petty slavers had begun to mount a successful challenge against the slave-owning class. My position is based on Egharevga's discussion of the next monarch, who "took serious precautions not to provoke the chiefs to anger, and ruled in accordance with the wish of the people" (1968: 36). "The people" or the "commonality" as I argued earlier, is none other than the

class of petty slavers. It was also shortly after this time, during the reign of Oreoghene (crowned c. 1689) that Nyendaël made one of his first of two stays (1699 and 1702) in the kingdom. He wrote that the

natives here seem very civil to each other, and omit no opportunity of offering their mutual services; but this is bare compliment, for they will not trust one another, but are jealously prudent, and very reserved, especially in the management of their trade, which they dispatch with the utmost secrecy, out of fear of being represented as great traders to their governors, who, upon such a discovery, would certainly accuse them of some crime or other, in order to possess themselves, though never so unjustly, of the efforts of these rich merchants (Nyendaël in Roth 1968: 46).

Furthermore, it was within the period lasting from approximately 1690 to 1710 that the kingdom was in a protracted state of civil war.

The result of this civil war, according to Ryder (1969) was that the merchant associations had overcome the resistance of the Oba and his supporters. In other words, the petty slaving class had wrested some control of commerce from the state (dominated by the slave-owning class). An economic trend was underway which sought to separate trade from the state. The prolonged period of civil war had in all likelihood slowed export production (particularly cloth), and had definitely caused a loss in the size of Benin's periphery. There was a short period of relative prosperity and peace that lasted for approximately 40 years.

Akengbuda's reign (c. 1750 - 1804) saw a resurgence of disputes as the slave owning class sought to recover lost privileges from the petty slavers. For a time it appeared that the slave owning class would be in a position to halt or reverse the trend. There were plans to recover much of the lost periphery and there was a resurgence of slave-based production. This counter trend seemed to have reached its peak during the reign of the penultimate Oba before the British invasion. This Oba (Adolo) "purchased many slaves and founded many towns and villages for them to dwell in" (Egharevba 1968: 47). Oba Ovonramwen, the final ruler before British intervention, would have carried on where his predecessors left off. It is, of course, a moot point as to whether the trend of commerce being separated from the state would have carried on or whether the counter trend would have prevailed. In January 1897, several title holders had nearly all of a British political and trade mission massacred. By mid-February British troops began their march on Benin.

4.3. ANALYTICAL COMMENTS

The discussion on class structure in Benin has implications for our understanding of the articulation process. While Terray may be absolutely correct in suggesting that tribute was light in order to facilitate the

reproduction of the dominant slave mode, the existence of a secondary class of petty slavers adds additional reasons. Participation in the village level title system was just as good a guarantee of the agriculturalists' support of the state level system, since ideologically and economically they felt they were participating in the social system. Tribute in addition to the fees paid for advancement in the village and state level title systems, ensured that a large proportion of the surplus produced in the kingdom found its way into the state coffers anyway. Thus, petty slavers, who were operating within two modes of production, acted to transfer surplus from the lineage mode of production to the slave mode of production.

We have also seen that one of the dominant economic trends in the social formation was the drive, especially on the part of the petty slavers, to separate control of external trade from the state. This trend, however, is a contradiction to the state needing control of trade in order for smooth reproduction of slave relations to take place. Following the civil war of the late 17th and early 18th centuries, it was noted that cloth production for export was reduced for several reasons. Although attempts were made to reverse this situation on the part of the slave owning class, the damage was done, so to speak, and Benin had experienced some peripheralization. This peripheralization was balanced to some degree, however, by the mercantile

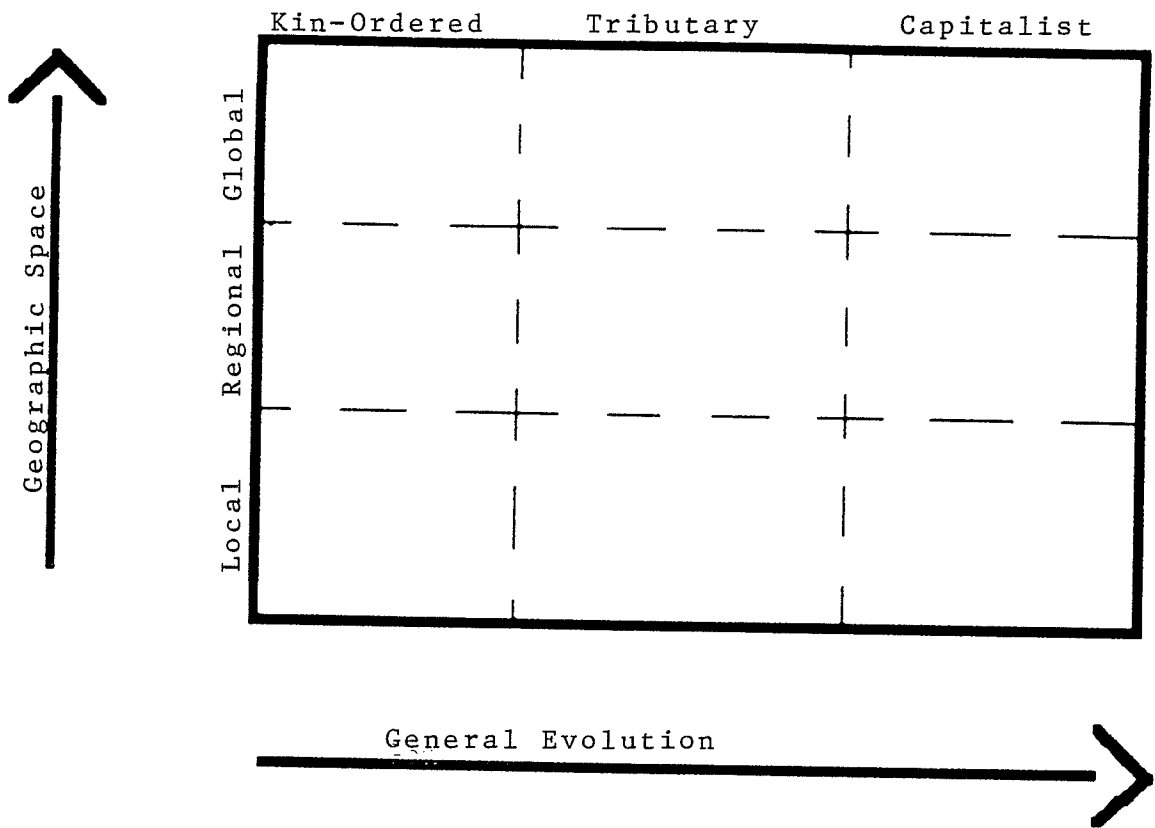
activities of the petty slavers who resisted transferring wealth to the state and the slave owning class. If Meillassoux is correct in postulating that slavery is an avenue to serfdom, then one can hypothesize that the conditions that create serfdom may also create a merchant class. Here, I would suggest, is where we may find the class dynamic, at least in the case of Benin. In this regard it is important to recognize the fundamental effects of secondary classes on the whole social formation and the possibilities they present in the transition of one mode of production to another.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Broadly speaking, in the remaining pages I will address two issues, namely theory, as presented here, and, its applicability to current practice. First, I will focus on theory.

At the outset, I argued that if 'dependency' theory and 'articulation' theory are to be synthesized in some fashion, then an appropriate characterization of 'levels' was necessary. Throughout the course of the presentation an attempt was made to synthesize these two schools of thought in theoretical and empirical terms. A diagrammatic representation of my efforts, based on Wolf's (1982) mode of production scheme and Ekholm's (1981) model of evolution/devolution, even if only of heuristic value, can now be presented (see Figure 2). What such a model implies, first of all, is that local kin-ordered modes of production are varied from the beginning. Some archaeological evidence exists to support this by way of the great diversity of neolithic tool assemblages. Homogenization of traditions occurred in time and space. As social systems become more complex, i.e., evolve into tributary modes of production, they tend to cover more geographic space. Local situations,

FIGURE 2



Modes of Production in Time and Space

in this context, will vary due to the developments of the centre and periphery, and, in regional terms, several related but distinct centres and peripheries. This is as far as I ventured in the case of Benin, although a full understanding would require an examination of the Benin Kingdom's incorporation into the capitalist world economy at the turn of the century (which was violent and as a periphery) and the subsequent development of capitalist production relations.

Another feature of the model is that I have attempted to incorporate spatial and temporal elements into the mode of production concept. This notion is most clearly manifested in the context of exchange. As social systems become more complex, trade extends ever outwards while increasing in volume. The nature of exchange is modified by the development of the state and tributary production relations, as Polanyi has demonstrated. Terray, from a different vantage, has argued that the state develops to ensure the reproduction of tributary production relations by controlling the trade of essential products. Both authors are conveying the same message. Ekholm's model as adapted here does not contradict this position but adds a spatial dimension by suggesting a centre and periphery. In the case of Benin, external and internal trade was to the benefit of the centre more than to the kingdom as a whole. In class terms, the ruling class was situated in or near the centre

for the most part. Ekholm adds a temporal component through the notion of local evolution followed by devolution. At the local level the local ruling class which formerly extracted surplus from its periphery is replaced or overshadowed by a ruling class from elsewhere. The removal of the local ruling class leads to reliance on the local productive base, and thus reproduction of the former production relations can no longer take place on an extended scale, if at all. This process occurs on an ever extending scale because production occurs at the various ascendent centres on an ever extending scale. Hence in the late 20th century we can truly speak of global crises as new centres begin to peripheralize older centres on an international scale.

This notion of 'levels' is not new to Marxist or anthropological thought. Clearly Plekhanov demonstrates similar ideas when he discusses general and particular causes. Alfred Kroeber (1963) held some similar ideas (which greatly influenced White) when he presented the 'culture area' concept half a century ago. The importance of space-time factors, and the emphasis on examining the social whole as well as its constituent parts were advocated by these authors. Kroeber long ago noted that the points in time and space during which culture growth reaches its peaks coincides with territorial expansion, wealth, aesthetic achievement, scientific achievement, etc. Like others

before and since his time, he took into account ecology without a deterministic bias. He was also well aware that devolution followed evolution. In fact Kroeber and Ekholm are very similar in many respects. For example,

...the very concept of climax, or, if one will, culture center, involves not only the focus of an area but also a culmination in time. Through the climax, accordingly, geography and history are brought into relation; or, at any rate, the areal and temporal aspects of culture cannot be really related unless consideration is accorded to climax (Kroeber 1963: 228, emphasis added).

If one were to substitute the words 'political economy' for 'culture' it becomes easy to grasp my meaning. For those who would reject the equation of culture and political economy in this instance, recall that the human economy is embedded in economic and non-economic institutions; after all, the middle ages could not live on Catholicism...

A third implication of the model is that transitions from one mode of production to another are gradual and that the old mode may be dominated and transformed but not immediately eradicated. This comes across clearly in the discussion regarding secondary classes. The 'articulation' of modes of production can result in the formation of secondary classes. Their formation can potentially lead to a new social dynamic (i.e., contradiction) by binding the two modes together while simultaneously generating a trend to new relations of production. A modern example found in

the advanced capitalist formations are the 'old' petty bourgeoisie, resulting from the articulation of the feudal and capitalist modes. In peripheral capitalist formations migrant workers may be a good example of a secondary class that spends part of their time in capitalist relations and part in domestic/lineage relations. Given the model outlined by Ekholm and the class dynamics of the primary and secondary classes struggling today, there is some historical support for Amin's position that the Third World (or parts thereof), as the periphery, will be the future centre and locus of change.

Having said this, let us examine what I mean when I say 'levels'. From the very first chapter I rejected using the French structuralist notion of economic, political, and ideological 'levels' derived from Althusser in favour of Marx's own approach in Capital (i.e., successive approximations to reality). Scott Cook best exemplifies my meaning when he wrote:

While the social relations of production might be a valid departure point for a synchronic analysis of a given formation, an understanding of the formation's dynamics or of its historical trajectory --what it was and what it is becoming-- must depart from and return to a concern with the productive forces, or at least to their necessary articulation with the 'relations' and the critical role of the labour process in social reproduction. (1977: 369)

For the case of Benin, I did begin with a synchronic analysis. 'Articulation' theory provided a useful method for understanding the basic class structure and how surplus is produced and appropriated. The development of the productive forces, in a technical sense, over the time period considered was quite minimal, relying largely on human labour. However, both theoretically and empirically I argued that state slavery was held by the contradiction of denying and providing rights to the means of production. Thus a tendency toward serfdom and maintaining slave relations. The third and fourth chapters attempted to incorporate what is valuable in 'dependency' theory by examining the movement of surplus on a local and regional scale and how this maintains, dissolves, or creates contradictions. It should be noted that the concept of surplus in 'dependency' theory is based not on Marx, but on Baran (e.g. 1973). Baran's category of actual surplus focuses on the movement, i.e., circulation, of already existing surplus rather than the way it was produced and appropriated. As I have maintained, the movement of surplus has a direct bearing on the reproduction of social relations and therefore is an important component in understanding social dynamics.

To summarize, by 'levels' I refer not only to the degree of abstraction at which analysis takes place, but also, and simultaneously, to a spatial and temporal

referent. The lower the degree of abstraction, the greater the importance of time and space, and vice versa. Although there is nothing new in such a statement, it is nonetheless worth underscoring to ensure that both Marxist and anthropological theories are not unilineal in the conceptualization of human social evolution, past, present, or future.

Thus events that are strikingly analogous, but taking place in different milieu, lead to totally disparate results. By studying each of these developments separately, and then comparing them, one can easily discover the key to this phenomenon. (Marx 1982: 110)

Turning now to current practice, what is really at stake is the issue of 'development' in Africa, which has again caught the attention of the Western media as the 1980's have progressed. Debt burdens for African nations are far beyond the expectations envisioned by development agencies and donor nations. The rural domestic economy is once again the focus of 'development.'

This concern with family and household is a preoccupation of development literature and of development practice as well. Anthropologists are, in repetition of an earlier day, once more in demand on the African continent. In the face of the failure of development agencies, particularly those concerned with agriculture, to have their new seeds, crops and techniques adopted by African cultivators, the anthropologist is rapidly being ascribed a position equivalent to that of a shaman. This shamanism on the part of the development bureaucracy is the direct result of the belief

that this particular branch of social science can break the code of peasant household and family behaviour. (Dutkiewicz and Shenton 1986: 112 - 113)

As the authors imply, many anthropologists still attempt to understand and evaluate peasant societies to find the secret of household 'irrationality.' Once this mysterious and evasive truth is known, development agencies can step in and herald the onset of a capitalist never-never land. All one must do is work hard and wait. It is unfortunate that the advanced capitalist nations left no space in their mythology for a character found throughout the rest of the world, the Trickster.

When a chapter of this thesis was presented to an economics seminar I was posed with the question, 'what is the relevance of this material to development issues?' My answer then, and now, must be that historical social development has a direct relationship to how people in 'developing' countries respond to 'development.' Here I can take the opportunity to elaborate on a few points. At least for the case of Benin, although probably applicable to other African societies, the precolonial state had fostered an ideology of social mobility, which possibly even has its roots in the domestic community. Similarly, the precolonial state encouraged patronage within the state itself. Both of these historical developments suggest that certain features of precolonial states are either pre-adapted, or a wholesale

carryover into modern nation states. This may go some way toward explaining the peculiarities of African states, since capitalist penetration would follow the lines of least resistance in order to establish itself.

A second observation is that men still dominate not only in the capitalist and domestic modes of production, but in the secondary classes as well. Historically, men dominated external exchange through ports of trade while women dominated the internal trade of the market place. Pine observed that in modern Ghana "[m]en dominate the two most lucrative areas, those of wholesale original supply and of large-scale importing and wholesale, while local sellers, regional bulk buyers, intermediaries, and small-scale urban retailers tend to be women" (1982: 398 - 399). The external/internal dichotomy still operates today along with the attendant social and economic devaluation of women. The difference between then and now, Pine suggests, is that formerly trading was done to augment subsistence while today it is the basis for the survival of many.

Finally, there is the issue of 'development' itself. The failure of earlier large scale 'development' projects and schemes can potentially be repeated with the recent accent on development. Donor countries and agencies seem in favour of adopting the Berg Report prepared for the World Bank. Essentially, the report recommends increasing and mechanizing production of export crops and that prices

should be determined by market forces with a minimum of state intervention. Curiously, small-scale development projects initiated after the Sahel drought and famine of the early 1970's were quite successful. Franke and Chasin (1980) proposed that these projects were successful because they were small, independent of the major agencies, and insulated to some degree from the dominant classes and corporate interests. To this can be added that small-scale projects are more successful due to the integration into the local economy rather than export oriented integration into the global economy which people cannot control. In short, large scale projects contradict a use-value ideology, while small scale projects can incorporate it to some degree. The high degree of internal linkages that existed within and between the economies of precolonial African societies should amply demonstrate how history can inform 'development' planning. Which path of 'development' is chosen today -- internal reconstitution or externally oriented -- is of major importance. The future of an entire continent hangs in the balance.

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