

HISTORY ONE

TOPIC NO ONE: PRE COLONIAL AFRICAN SOCIETIES THE PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN SOCIAL FORMATION.

Background

This topic will concentrate on tracing the development of pre-colonial African social formation since time immemorial and how they evolved through different types of economic, social and political development. The history of pre-colonial African societies is very complex and with contradictions in the narrations given by historical scholars of the world.

The pre-colonial African society refers to the African social formation before the coming of the intruders especially the white colonizers. Various historians have got various views about the African society before the coming of the whites, the dominant schools of thoughts are two i.e. the Afro-centric historians vis-a-vis the Euro-centric historians the latter are very negative about the African societies as they are too biased and in favor of the Whites (European Imperialists).

Euro-Centric View.

This is an outlook of European historians, how they interpret and view the pre-colonial African social formation in idealistic way of thinking of stereotype, it's mostly advocated by conservative bourgeoisie concepts.

It approaches African history in a racist way. Africa has been portrayed as strange barbarous and sub-human creatures, for example Herodotus the father of European History referred to Africans as "barbarous" and characterized the people of Africa saying their speech resembles the shrieking of bats rather than language of men.

Benjamin Jonah a merchant of 12th century described the Africans as there people who like animals eat of the herbs that grow on the banks of the Nile and in the field, they go about naked and have not the intelligence of ordinary men. They co-habit with their sisters and any one they find these are son of Ham the black slave.

Solinus in his book collection of wonderful things he described African as dragon and other wild beasts, that can describe their monstrous shape and juxtaposing them this was indeed stage whom European could easily consider sub-human or at most could regard them less worthy than them.

A most decisive derogatory racial tradition stems from the biblical interpretation of Noah's curse of Ham the idea of race later became attached to the decedents of Ham. It holds that the

descendants of I-lam were cursed because of being Black “it must be Canan your first born whom they enslaved Canaan’s children shall be born ugly and black your grand children’s hair shall be twisted into kinks..... (their lips) shall swell men of this race are called negroes their forefather Canaan commanded them to love theft and fornication, banded together in hatred of their masters and never tell truth.

The image of Africans as inferior was reinforced further by the Christian missionaries ministers, who explained that Africans were better off a slave in a Christian society than free in African savagery.

James Houston in his book “some new and accurate observation of the coast of Guinea” he asserted “Africans exactly resemble their fellow creatures and natives the monkeys another European writer in 1732 said “it was kindness to ship African in the new indies because the situation in Africa was appalling and a lot they will reap to convert into Christianity.

Robin Hallet in the “penetration of Africa wrote in 1761” it’s true that the continent is filled with burning sands ,savage beasts and almost uninhabited desert .the scarcity of water forces the different pieces of animals to gather in the same place to drink water they have intercourse one with another without paying regard to the difference between species.

Thus produced such monsters which are to be found there in greater number than in other part of the world. Hugh Murray a popular geographer of 19th century described the African continent as an area of mystery with wild and strange aspects of man and nature .Africa was a strange place inhabited by strange men where monsters dwelt and strange things happened a place where creatures less than men survived in order less than civilized.

Philosopher David of Scot lamented; I am apt to suspect the negroes to be naturally inferior to the white there never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even an individual eminent either in action nor ingenious manufacture amongst them no arts no sciences and no history of their own their living in darkness and darkness is not a subject of history. The Germany philosopher George Hegel in his book “Philosophy of History its manifest that want of self control distinguishes the character of the Negro. This condition is capable no development or culture from Negro it has no historical part of the world it has no movement or development to exhibit

Content of Euro-Centric View.

In the nutshell all the European writers they seem to say before the establishment of colonialism in Africa all the African societies were classless, with no political, social and cultural development of any kind. What existed was only darkness and darkness is not a subject of history that implies that nothing can be written from African history than its darkness. On top of that they say African were cursed by God [grandsons of Ham] and supported the act of slavery that deserved them after all the bible their divine book talks about slavery but never condemned it.

The life in Africa was stagnant and static with no change of any kind, no any level of development, backwardness of all sorts like living naked, eating raw food, Stateless, barbaric, chaotic, and uncivilized disorder was the order of the day.

H.M.Stanley a European explorer reports that he found the Ngoni killing left-right during the Mfecane period and it was him who saved the society from total collapse by introducing colonialism. The outlook goes further by asserting that colonialism is a blessing in Africa because it brought social transformation and development in Africa. They do argue that if colonialism had not taken place Africa was at the verge of total collapse.

That Africans were savages, beasts, had nothing like culture, custom they sexed with their sisters and other animals and produced strage creatures like them instead of walking others were crawling, they were dragons.

ANALYSIS OF THE EURO-CENTRIC VIEW

At the level of analysis the Euro-centric outlook is misleading the view has no similarity to the truth about the reality of the pre colonial African society; it hides the reality about the pre-colonial social formation.

The outlook is just rubbish undermines the concept of motive force i.e. change which is the foundation of human struggle which enabled the pre-colonial African societies to obtain political, social and economic development.

One of the reasons given by Europeans nations for colonizing Africa was the responsibility of whites to civilize the backward people of Africa, such answer lacks historical support they aim at only justifying their barbaric act of colonizing Africa but not spelling out the actual truth that propelled to do so.

The explanations offered by Euro-centric scholars are explanations which suit the interest of countries which exploited the rest of the world through trade and investment. It tries to justify the presence and the exploitation of African societies.

The Euro-centric outlook is not correct, it's just sheer nonsense and it cannot be a relied upon in explaining the pre-colonial social formation in Africa. It should be made clear that Africans were not static as the white men are trying to deceive the world so as to justify their barbaric act of colonialism.

The fact is that almost by then the level of development of the world was almost the same, because development is guided by the law of nature which forces man to embark on the struggle for self survival through taming the nature this law does not apply alone to European nations but to the whole of humanity including the black man.

Afro-Centric Views

It is an outlook which interprets the pre-colonial African social formation in a Marxist way of thinking, and it is advocated by the Marxist historians mainly of African origin. e.g. Walter Rodney, Prof. Nabudere, V.T Kimombo, Franz Fanon etc. The outlook is traced from the 1960s when many African countries were achieving political independence. In this period the view was further integrated by nationalistic leaders and historians to counter attack the Euro-centric historians who were not giving the Africans a place below the sun.

The Content of Afro-Centric View.

At the level of analysis the Afro-centric outlook is correct since it is objective. It is right and useful outlook. African societies before colonialism were dynamic, changing and some had obtained big political and economic development, as we shall expand all the social economic and political fabric of the pre colonial African societies in the following chapters.

EVIDENCE SHOWING THAT THE PRE COLONIAL AFRICAN SOCIETIES WERE NOT STATIC

1. Modes of production, refers to the relationship between production and productive forces. The pre colonial African society passed through various modes of production which started with primitive communalism where people lived in small communal groups and slept mainly in rock shelters did not keep domestic animals or cultivated the land they ate wild roots and vegetable, then developed to advanced communalism where man begun domestication and agriculture practicing, and lastly feudalism where private ownership started, all these are signs that shows African societies were changing from the lower stage to the tipper stage, hence were not static as the Eurocentric historians assert. Note Each of these modes of production were as a result of a long process of historical development not immediate events and it was not uniformity across all Africa society the degree of change varied from one society to another.
2. Existence of education. The pre-colonial African society had education in their societies both formal and informal but informal was more dominant that largely depended on the environment of a given society. It was largely for self survival for the members of each Society, most of the education in the pre colonial African society was informal that varied from one society to another something that shows that the pre colonial African Societies were not static or Un - changing they were moving forward.
3. Occurrence of Neolithic revolution. This was a significant age, the discovery of iron whereby man discovered iron and it application, this occurred about 1500 B.C iron provided a better cutting edge than copper or bronze agriculture increased using iron hoes, domestication of animals, migration, population growth and trade were all as a result of Neolithic revolution the Bantu speaking people were the first of all smelted the iron in the long trenches in the ground then in the hand blown clay furnaces using charcoal as fuel, the iron was then made into arrows head and Spears head axe and hoes small trinket and razors. Thus the pre colonial African societies were changing.
4. Importance of Neolithic revolution

- It led to surplus production of agricultural commodities
 - It influenced population expansion
 - It led to domestication of animals for meat, milk, cloth and trade
 - It led to emergency of social classes
 - It led to specialization in iron melting and agriculture as well as animal husbandry.
 - Paved way for another mode of production
 - Barter trade developed (exchange of commodities for commodities)
5. Existence of strong political system, The pre colonial African societies had centralized and decentralized political set up which were able to expand and build strong empires like Buganda, Ethiopia, Nyamwezi, Bunyoro, Asante, among others that were even able to resist the intruders' bravery. Such centralized societies had standing army with outstanding leaders like Kabaka Mutesa of Buganda Theodore of Ethiopia among others; these were clear signs that the African societies were organized and moving forward
 6. Development of science and technology, The pre colonial African society were developing various science and technology which began with the discovery of fire, iron smelting, mining, bark cloth making etc that was enough to show that African societies were changing from one level to another.
 7. Changing of stone ages The pre colonial African societies changed from Early Stone Age to Middle Stone Age where hunting and fruit gathering were the common activities up to the Modern/New Stone Age then Neolithic revolution occurred that made agriculture and Pastoralism to be the major economic activities, these are clear indications that African societies were on the move, not stagnated as the European assert

NOT BARBARIC.

1. They kept law and order through age-set and Ntemi system where the elders were the leaders and the younger were supposed to be obedient, such a system kept law and order. Through such system democracy was evident and this was especially in decentralized societies like the Maasai of East Africa, the Ibo in West Africa.
2. Existence of strong Kingdoms and kings. Existed which had their way of governance that many of their subjects had agreed upon e.g. in Buganda Kabaka was the final man and all powers were vested in him, e.g. He had a parliament called the Lukiiko which advised him,
so their acts were concessions with their subjects a thing which shows that Africans were not barbaric
3. Existence various culture norms and taboos The pre colonial African societies had their various norms, culture, traditions, taboos which guided them, any-body who went against them was punished, such acts shows that the pre colonial societies were organized and not barbaric.

NOT UNCIVILIZED AND UN DEVELOPED

1. They practiced agriculture as their major economic activity; it was mostly for subsistence such agriculture included permanent Agriculture, mixed agriculture, shifting cultivation, Pastoralism which acted as the back bone of their livelihood.
2. Trade also existed in the pre colonial African societies. It is enough evidence that African societies were neither uncivilized nor undeveloped. Long distance trade was dominant in the East and Central Africa, Trans-Saharan trade in Northern and Western Africa the medium of exchange was through barter system.
3. Existence of states, Some pre colonial African societies had already formed strong states that had standing armies, permanent borders and strong leaders who were responsible for the security and expansion of the society some of such societies included Buganda, the Zulu kingdom etc.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS.

1. *Pre colonial African societies were stateless, static, and barbaric. How far do you agree with this statement?*
2. *With concrete examples refute the euro centric view about the pre colonial Africa societies that were barbaric with no history of their own and with no development of any kind.*
3. *“Before the advent of colonialism in Africa the African society were in total confusion chaos with no any kind of development what existed was darkness and darkness is not a subject of history” react fully on the above Eurocentric perception.*
4. *With vivid example disprove the fallacy that the pre-colonial African societies were barbaric static and unchanging*
5. *With vivid evidence disprove the European perception on the pre-colonial African society.*
6. *The upper Paleolithic era witnessed the emergence of Neolithic revolution among the African societies analyse the significance of the revolution.*
7. *“Barbarous and savage their speech resembles the shrieking of a bat rather than language of a man”. Herodotus father of European history. With clear argument disprove such euro- based derogatory*

PRE-CAPITALISM MODES OF PRODUCTION IN AFRICAN SOCIETIES.

This refers to modes of production that existed in Africa prior to the advent of colonialism, sometimes is referred to as antagonistic mode of production because of their nature of absence of exploitation of man by man

Mode of production in short refers to the relationship between production and productive forces, and basically there were only four modes of production that existed before colonialism in Africa namely;

- Primitive communalism
- Advanced communalism

- Slave mode of production
- Feudal mode of production

Note: For slave mode of production according to Marxist/Afro-centric view did not exist in Africa due to lack of evidence, slavery as a mode of production never existed in Africa but slave trade as an institution was introduced in Africa as a result of Capitalism demand in Europe, Walter Rodney how “Europe underdeveloped Africa” said; “here was no Epoch of slavery in Africa elements, African slavery disqualified it today complete mode of production” because:

The period of slavery in Africa was the same era when feudalism was stronger, no any other period in the historiography of Africa, were slave as mode of production dominated, so never existed in Africa what existed was slave trade. The so called slaves in Africa were captives of the war from the neighboring societies, but developed with the society itself, as in case of Europe and Asia.

African slaves were integrated by the society members after staying for a long time, they were free to marry within the society regardless of their status, unlike in slave mode of production where a slave remains a slave forever and son of a slave is also a slave.

On top of that it's only a few places where slaves existed in the entire Africa. Egypt in building the pyramids, Zimbabwe, and parts of coast of East Africa, well as mode of production must spread every part in a particular period.

African slaves were used in domestic activities, not in economic activities as should be a case for slave mode of production where slave's are productive forces to produce surplus production so slavery as mode of production did not exist in Africa.

COMMUNAL MODE OF PRODUCTION

Basic needs such as food shelter and clothing are essential for man's survival. In order to get such needs it requires forces of production such as human labor, surplus production, instruments of production like tools, economic activity objects of labour and people all those make up the mode of production. By the 19th century many African societies had attained various modes of production, almost all societies in Africa had attained communal mode of production while others were under slave mode. Each of these modes of production was as a result of a long process of historical development.

PRIMITIVE COMMUNALISM

This is the first antagonistic mode of production, through which all Societies passed. It's called primitive” because of the low level of productive forces and communalism because of sharing each and every thing that man produced, called non antagonistic because there was no exploitation of man by man, this mode of production existed for much longer period than any other mode. It ranged from the emergence of man more than one million years ago.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PRIMITIVE COMMUNALISM

1. Low level of production: with crude tools and little knowledge, man hardly mastered his surroundings. Man managed to get basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter.
2. Equally to all members; communal societies were not stratified. All the commodities produced were shared equally; No Exploitation of man by man.
3. Collective ownership. Members of the community jointly owned the major means of production including land; implements, tools and animals .The clan leader headed the members of the clan.
4. Subsistence economy; Due to low level of development in science and technology people produced food for their day to day life/immediate use.
5. There was no surplus production people were vulnerable to natural disasters such as drought.
6. Absence of specialization; People were obliged to do all the jobs including making tools, hunting, looking for food preparing shelters and clothes.
7. The division of labor was based on sex and age; Men hunted and collected food while women were responsible for cooking, taking care of the young, sick and old people.
8. Low level of development of productive forces: at first the only tools available were made of stones.
9. People lived together according to blood relation (kin relations.)
10. Lived in small groups, by tracing their origin from the same ancestor. Each group was separated from the other by large tracts of land.
11. Full democracy, all decisions were arrived at by all adult members of the group regardless of their sex.

TRANSITION FROM PRIMITIVE COMMUNALISM TO ADVANCED COMMUNALISM.

During primitive communalism all the time man largely depended on nature so as to increase his labour productivity. This finally led to domestication of animal and plants or emergence of Neolithic revolution in the latter age of the Stone Age. This was the greatest revolution made so far for the first time by man.

- Secondly people now developed permanent settlement. Even with nomadic pastoralist or shifting cultivation the area of operation became limited as the number of people increased due Neolithic revolution permanent shelter was inevitable
- The production increased with the population, now there was enough food because even the productive tools were developed further.
- Land continued to belong to the community but agriculture became the major economic activity.
- Emergence of fishing societies that fish became another production that even would be exchanged for other products with another society
- Rise of pastoralist society that depended largely on rearing animals was another factor for that transition to advanced communalism.

TRANSITION FROM COMMUNALISM TO FEUDALISM MODE OF PRODUCTION.

The African societies were not static but they underwent transformations, which were influenced by the environment, climate and soil fertility, the growth of population and the increase of productive forces paved way for a new mode of production.

Such factors made some societies to experience changes in the transition from communalism to feudalism .By the 19th century some societies were practicing feudalism. However societies such as Tindiga of Tanzania, Khoisan of Kalahari, maintained their communal mode of production.

FACTORS FOR TRANSITION FROM ADVANCE COMMUNALISM TO FEUDALISM

1. Some societies were favored by the nature of environment with good climate and fertile soils. Such societies included the Mandika and the Yoruba in the forest of Savannah regions, Bunyoro, Buganda. Ankore, Toro, Tutsi, Haya, Hutu and Waha of East Africa, the Zulu and the Nguni in South Africa such a factor led such society to transform their mode of production from communal relation to Feudal were land and agriculture were the major activity hence feudal mode of production.
2. The reliable rainfall and fertile soils allowed the expansion of agriculture and the cultivation of permanent crops e.g. bananas in Buganda. The cultivation of permanent crops led to the growth of permanent settlement which ensured surplus production for the society, such activities killed communal and led to the rise of feudalism which largely based on agriculture.
3. The advancement of science and technology led to the discovery of iron. From iron they made strong and sharper tools than stone tools which made the production high, surplus production was got and paid back to the owners of land and tools that became to be known as Feudal rent thus the rise of feudalism in Africa.
4. The growth of population led to increase of food and standard of living. The population increase resulted into shortage of land and people overcrowded in small areas this also led to the rise of highly centralized states that developed standing armies which later carried out constant raids.
5. The Rise of the population led to the shortage of land and its increase in value contributed to the development of productive forces since they were conditioned to produce everything in a small area. Such factors threatened communal mode of production and led to feudalism, since land was privately owned by people. This created classes of land controllers and landless within the community. The organization of labor was then reorganized by land controllers at the expense of the landless, the landless worked for the controllers of land in order to be paid.
6. The emergence of social economic classes the distribution of products was not equal; land controllers took the highest share than the land less. The life of the societies underwent into the transformation from communalism to feudalism, due to that some societies became strong and conquered weaker societies.
7. The emergency of specialization, brought new professional people with various skills like blacksmith, rain makers farmers, hunters and many others, this paved way for the rise of new mode of production that based on various activities but majoring in agriculture.

8. Mastering the environment by 15th century African societies had mastered their ecology and was able to tame and control the environment, animal husbandry was highly advanced, new forms of agriculture that favoured environment like crop rotation, terracing, mixed farming, swamp regulation and flood control could be done by man, thus the change to the mode of production.
9. Trade and exchange of goods for goods and services was another factor that led to the rise of new mode of production that called the absorb the new changes like trade, thus the rise of feudal mode of production that encouraged surplus production which was conducted in trade.

FEUDALISM

It was the third mode of production but the second in exploitation of land. Feudalism is derived from the *Latin word feudum*, which means a piece of land; it's so because this mode of production was largely based on land as a major means of production. According to Marxist feudalism in Europe came from the womb of slavery mode of production because it bases on exploitation of the lower class.

FEATURES OF FEUDALISM

1. Existence of feudal rent: It was based on inequality; the feudal lords exploited the peasants through the payment of rents. This was paid in kind and in labor.
2. Private ownership of productive forces which included Land, tools, cattle and women were privately owned by the feudal lords.
3. Agriculture became the major economic activity following the discovery of iron technology that improved the productive forces.
4. In Africa kingdoms such as Buganda and some forest states of West Africa, the major means of production centered on either land or livestock especially cattle, peasants could use the land freely but they were required to pay rents.
5. Existence of prognostic social classes that based on exploitation of one class i.e. feudal lords and tenants or peasants.
6. Direct subordination of the lower social class to the upper class of feudal lords who were absolute.
7. Existence of division of labor and specialization, which based on sex and age.
8. Existence of inheritance as a means to determine one's position in the society which was based on birth, it determined the leader and the subject.
9. There was improvement of productive forces especially tools that were applied for agriculture and military warfare this was brought about by iron technology.

FEUDAL MODE OF PRODUCTION AMONG AFRICAN STATES.

In African society's feudal mode of production existed in different forms depending on the place in which it existed. In the interlacustrine area, the power of the ruler depended on the ownership and the control of land. This system of feudal relation was called Nyarubanja in Karagwe, and Buhaya.

- a) In Buganda it was known as *Nvunjo* and **Busulu**. The Kabaka was in charge of all productive forces which included women, cattle, land and tools and his subject paid feudal rent to him known as *Nvunjo* or *Busulu* in case of land.
- b) *Ubugabire* developed between the Tutsi and Hutu in Rwanda, Burundi, and Buha. The feudal relationship in these areas depended on cattle ownership. The Tutsi could transfer some of their cattle to Hutu. The donor thus became the master (**SEBUJA**) of the recipient (**BAGABIRE**) the *Omugabire* and his family was obliged to perform duties for the master by cultivating and governing the property of the master.
- c) **Umwinyi**. It existed along the Coast of East Africa. The Wamwinyi controlled land, tenants and serfs, monopolized economic and political power. The tenants and the serfs lived on the land of feudal lords in return for labor; services and tribute. The Wamwinyi were political and religious leaders.
- d) In Zanzibar the relationship of Umwinyi based on racism and religion. The society was divided into Arab, Shiraz, and Africans in decreasing order of autonomy. The religion of Islam divided people into different categories, heathen (*Washenzi*) the non African Muslims and civilized (*Waungwana*) Arabs, Shiraz, and Muslim Africans.
- e) The Wanyamwezi and Wasukuma; the power of the leader was based on the control of the producers themselves. The ability to control and mobilize labor was ideologically based. The Mtemi led the people to new land (*kuterna*) wherever it was available. In Ethiopia tenant rented houses and were subjected to land lords.
- f) Among the Zulu feudalism developed on agriculture and Pastoralism. People acquired land and cattle in the exchange of agreement that they would remain loyal to the king and work for him for number of days in a year.
- g) In Egypt feudalism developed in conjunction with the building of the pyramids and in the serving of Pharaoh, while in West Africa feudalism was associated with trade and mining activities.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. *With concrete examples, discuss the features of the pre-capitalist mode of' production in African societies.*
2. *Using specific examples show how African societies evolved from communalism to feudalism before 1900.*
3. *According to Marxist view "slave trade existed in Africa but slavery as a mode of production never existed" give at least six evidences to support that view.*
4. *Analyse at least eight (8) factors that enabled some societies in Africa to transit to feudal mode of production and others not.*
5. *Analyse at least four (4) forms of African feudalism*

POST COLONIAL MODE OF PRODUCTION

CAPITALISM

It is a social-economic and political system based on private property and private profit. Here individuals and companies own and direct most of the resources used to produce goods and services, resources included land, factories, equipment and money used in business activities.

Capitalism as mode of production in Africa was brought by the contact between African and the European imperialist especially during the period of mercantilism, a trade that based on unequal exchange between Africa and Europe, capitalism in Africa was introduced as means to exploit the African resources by the imperialists, as early as in 15th century. It did not develop by internal dynamism or changes like other pre colonial modes of production.

Capitalism divides a society into two groups: the capitalists and the proletariat .The former own the means of production and the latter are the waged earners and the toilers. They are deprived from the major means of production; hence they sell their labor as waged workers. Capitalism stresses private economic choices. People are free to decide how they will earn and spend their income. Companies may choose which goods and services to produce and how much to charge for them. They also compete with one another to sell products e.g. in the U.K, U.S.A, Japan, German etc.

HOW CAPITALISM OPERATES

- Five factors comprise the major economic influences in a capitalistic society. These include individuals, businessmen and the law of supply and demand, trade unions and the government.
- Individuals influence the economy as consumers, workers and investors. For instance if the consumers show by their purchases that they prefer small cars to large cars, dealers will order more small cars and fewer large cars.
- Businessmen decide what to produce and where to conduct their activities .To succeeds he must sell enough of his products at a higher price to enable the business to survive.
- The market forces prices to fall when supply exceeds demand and rise when demand exceeds supply. Income in capitalist economy depends chiefly on supply and demand for the skills that the society values most. People who have valuable skills that are scarce in supply can attract high income.
- Trade unions also influence wages in many capitalist societies. Trade unions bargain with employers to establish wage scales and working condition acceptable and convenient to their members.
- Some government has established minimum wages for workers. Government agencies also enforce safety standards .The government allows individuals to use property and companies to set wages, issue money, supervise public utilities and enforce business contracts. Governments also pass laws to protect competition and forbid unfair business.