

On Slavery and Slave Formations

What is slavery?^{*} How do we identify a slave formation or society? What do we mean when we say that a given society was based on slavery? Is there such a thing as a Slave Mode of Production? It is remarkable that after nearly a century and a half of modern scholarship on the subject these are still unanswered questions. At no time, however, were answers more urgently needed than now. Slave studies has become something of an academic industry. The industry encompasses a vast and growing body of works from Marxist and bourgeois scholars alike, and on the ancient, medieval and modern periods of every continent.¹ Yet, with a few notable exceptions, few scholars are concerned with both the theoretical and empirical aspects of the problem. An unhealthy specialization has therefore developed in current slave studies. On one side stands a legion of empiricists who pursue every conceivable detail of slave culture and economy, often in a theoretical wasteland; on the other side is a small but growing band of theorists who insist on defining the 'crucial issues' and weave theories which, by their own admission, bear no relation whatever to reality.

In order to understand slavery one must begin by making the critical analytic distinction between the relation of slavery, on the one hand, and, on the other, the systemic articulation of the institution. In social science jargon, the microsociological process must be distinguished from the macrosociological dynamic of the institution. It is quite legitimate to study the institution on either level. The main value of the first level of analysis is to define the nature of the institution, to differentiate it from closely related forms of bondage such as serfdom and helotage, to specify its forms, to understand the ways in which the elementary process is represented legally, culturally and ideologically, to explore the peculiar psychology of oppression and domination it entails and to clarify the circumstances under which the institution is individually terminated in the process of manumission.

Only after we have settled these issues can we proceed to the next level of analysis: the relation of the institution to the wider social order. Here we explore the manner in which slavery develops as a significant structural force. It is at this level that we ask questions such as the following: Does slavery ever become determinative in a given social order? What do we mean when we say that slavery is determinative, or that a society is based on it? How, specifically, does slavery influence the economy? How does it influence the superstructure. In what ways is it formative or reinforcing?

The second set of problems are by far the more interesting. But we neglect the first at our peril. Much of the confusion in current Marxian scholarship on the slave mode of production and the seeming incapacity to settle the problem of whether the slave systems of the Americas were capitalistic or pre-capitalist springs from the almost contemptuous disregard for the preliminary microsociological work of definition and specification of the elementary social process we call slavery.

Part One: The Nature and Inner Dialectics of Slavery

I

Slavery is what Marx called a 'relation of domination'. From the viewpoint of the slave it is, first, a condition of powerlessness in relation to another person. In the final analysis it may be true that all forms of powerlessness amount to the same thing, but the origins and character of a particular form of powerlessness can differ in significant ways from others. How, then, is the powerlessness of the slave distinctive?

The necessity for continuous, naked violence is a feature of the powerlessness of the slave. In a marvellous passage in the *Grundrisse* where the attitudes of former masters and slaves in post-emancipation Jamaica are discussed, Marx not only shows clearly that he understands that

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¹ For a review of the literature, see O. Patterson, 'The Study of Slavery', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 3, 1977, pp. 407-49.

slavery, on the institutional level, is first and foremost a 'relation of domination', but identifies the element of direct force which distinguishes it. Commenting on the fact that the Jamaican ex-slaves refused to work beyond what was necessary for their own consumption, he notes: 'They have ceased to be slaves, but not in order to become wage labourers, but, instead, self-sustaining peasants working for their own consumption. As far as they are concerned, capital does not exist as capital, because autonomous wealth as such can exist only either on the basis of *direct* forced labour, slavery, or *indirect* forced labour, *wage labour*. Wealth confronts direct forced labour not as capital, but rather as *relation of domination* . . .'.²

Observe that Marx is defining slavery from the viewpoint of the slave (the position I adopt). He is not saying, however, that the master interprets the relation this way, that he is in any way necessarily pre-capitalist. Indeed, the comment was provoked by a letter to *The Times* during November, 1857, from a West Indian planter who, in what Marx calls 'an utterly delightful cry of outrage', was advocating the reimposition of slavery in Jamaica as the only means of getting the blacks to generate surplus in a capitalistic manner once again. Force, of course, is necessary for both wage labour and slave labour, but while it is only a vital precondition for the former (a precondition we should never lose sight of, as we shall see later) it is both a precondition and a continuous part of the slave relation.³

A second characteristic of the slave's powerlessness is the fact that it is an individualized condition: the slave is usually powerless in relation to another individual. We may conveniently neglect those cases where the slave formally belongs to a corporation such as a temple since there is always an agent in the form of a specific individual who effectively exercises the powers of a master. In his powerlessness, the slave becomes an extension of his master's power and honour. He is a human surrogate, recreated by his master with god-like power on his behalf.

But perhaps the most distinctive attribute of the slave's powerlessness is the fact that it always originates as a substitute for death, usually violent death. Archetypally it is a substitute for death in war. The captive is the typical slave. But almost as frequently the death commuted may have been the punishment for some capital offence or death from exposure or starvation. The powerlessness of the slave, then, has the special quality that the slave is literally a person under sentence of death. The condition of slavery does not absolve or erase the prospect of death. Slavery is not a pardon, it is a conditional commutation; the execution is suspended only so long as the slave acquiesces in his powerlessness. It is this which accounts for the second quality of the slave's powerlessness: the fact that the relationship is maintained by and usually originates in violence. The master is essentially a ransom. What he buys or acquires by force is the slave's

² *Grundrisse*, London, 1977, p. 326.

³ E. Welskopf, 'Bemerkungen zum Wesen and Begriff der Sklaverei', *Zeitschrift Gesichtswiss*, 1957, pp. 296-313.

life. Thus in almost all slaveholding societies the master, in practice, has the power of life and death over his slave. The fact that in law constraints are sometimes found is irrelevant. The laws are usually inapplicable as it is usually impossible to prove that the master was not exercising his right to punish the slave. Furthermore, a legal restraint on the capacity to destroy one's belongings does not deny the fact of the belonging. My house belongs to me, but I break all kinds of rules if I set it on fire. Similarly the slave's life belongs to his master even though the latter may break some rules if he destroys the life.

Because the slave has no existence outside of his master he becomes a social isolate. He ceases to belong in his own right to any community. And this brings us to the second constitutive element of the slave's condition: this is his natal alienation. Both Lévy-Bruhl and, more recently, Moses Finley have emphasized the outsider status of the slave as the crucial element in his condition.⁴ There are, however, problems in claiming that the slave is quintessentially an outsider, for it emphasizes too much the external origins of the slave. It is indeed true that most slaves in most societies were originally recruited from outside the boundaries of the society in which they were enslaved or were the descendants of persons so recruited. But it is also true that there are a substantial number of societies in which the vast majority of slaves were internally recruited—China, Japan, Korea, Pharaonic Egypt almost certainly, and in all probability ancient Mesopotamia. Furthermore, in nearly all pre-capitalist societies where the majority of slaves were externally recruited a minority of slaves were also recruited from locally freeborn persons: criminals, the hopelessly indebted, the destitute, foundlings and the like.

More consistent with the facts is the conception of the slave as someone who has been forcefully cut off from the protection and demands of his natal group. Natal alienation is doubly pertinent for it refers not only to genuine outsiders but also to locally born persons who have been reduced to slavery. It also has the important nuance of a loss of native status, of deracination.

In small-scale, kin-based societies natal alienation immediately implies a loss of kinship ties. Hence there has developed a tradition among anthropologists of defining slavery as kinlessness. This is a reasonable approach if one is concerned only with such small, kin-based societies. Kinlessness, however, is in no way so determinative of the condition of slavery in complex social formations where many persons cut off from kinsmen do not, by virtue of this fact alone, suffer such a fate. It is certainly true that in all slaveholding societies slaves are denied legally enforceable custodial power over their children (which is not to say that they are prevented from having families) but this does not mean that the *crucial* feature of their condition is their kinlessness.

It is the forceful and (for locally born slaves) enforceable alienation of the slaves from all natal ties of 'blood' and sentiment and from any conception of having by right of birth any attachment to groups or localities other than those which the master chooses for him which

⁴ See M. I. Finley, 'Slavery', in *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 14, 1968, pp. 307–13.

gives the relation of slavery its peculiar value to the master. The slave is the ultimate human tool, as imprintable and as disposable as the master wishes. And this is true, at least in theory, of all slaves, no matter how elevated. Rycaut's classic description of the Janissaries as men whom their master, the Sultan, 'can raise without Envy and destroy without Danger' holds true for all slaves in all times.⁵

Slavery and Honour

The peculiar character of the powerlessness of the slave in relation to his master and the natal alienation of the former generates a third constitutive element of the slave condition: the fact that slaves are usually persons without honour. The slaves' loss of honour and manhood is the master's gain. The slave can have no honour because he has no independent social existence. In many kin-based and oriental societies absence of honour is the quintessence of slavery. Thus in China and Korea the slave was, above all, a 'base' or 'dishonourable' person as distinct from 'good' or 'honourable' persons. There is usually no word for, or concept of, freedom in many pre-capitalist, non-Western societies, the antithesis of 'slaveness' being a 'full' and 'honourable' membership of one's community with sources of protection or authority independent of one's immediate lord.

To say that the slave is a person without honour does not mean that he can be injured or debased by third parties with impunity. Quite the contrary: precisely because the slave is merely an extension of his master, including his master's power and honour, to insult a slave runs the serious risk of the injury being interpreted as an insult on the master's honour. To dishonour the slave is pointless—he has, in himself, no honour to be injured—so the injury must be aimed at the person for whom he is merely a surrogate. Among the primitive Germans an assault on a man's honour even in the form of a mild verbal insult invariably led to bloodshed. Only slaves could get away with open vilification of freemen. As long as the freemen felt that the insult came only from the slave he was prepared to laugh it off for 'the abusive language of a slave cannot injure anybody's honour'. However, if the slave was considered to be acting as the mouthpiece of the lord there would be immediate retaliation, not just against the slave but, more important, against the lord. The same attitudes prevailed in the Islamic empires and, indeed, in all slaveholding societies where the sense of honour was keenly developed, as we shall see later.

My claim that honourlessness is a constitutive element of the slave condition is likely to arouse the most controversy, so I had better make clear just what I mean by the term honour. I do not mean simply the granting of a privilege. Julian Pitt-Rivers, one of the leading authorities on the subject, observes that: 'It is a sentiment, a manifestation of this sentiment in conduct, and the evaluation of this conduct by others, that is to say, reputation. It is both *internal to the individual* and external to him—a matter of his feelings, his behaviour, and the respect he receives'. The way in which these different facets of the experience of

⁵ P. Rycaut, *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, reprinted 1971, p. 25.

honour are related is cogently put: '*honour felt becomes honour claimed, and honour claimed becomes honour paid*'.⁶ Honour entails a community of persons competing for status. Because it must be defended honour is closely related to, and yet quite distinct from, power. To be a client does not itself dishonour. On the contrary, it provides an opportunity to demonstrate mutual trust, inner courage and integrity, not to mention the promotion of mutual interests. Patron and client may have unequal power, but the relationship is freely established and they are moral equals. Honour differs from power in that the former involves 'the whole man', a personal quality rather than an instrument, and the 'essence' of this quality, as Pitt-Rivers tells us, is 'personal autonomy'. Honour is negated when a person is compelled to behave honourably.

Slavery is the antithesis of honour. The slave may simulate honour and he may *outwardly* appear to behave honourably. But such slaves are in the position of soldiers who are forced to volunteer. One cannot know that this is what they would have done had they a free choice. Their courage, their loyalty, their integrity, can never be tested since the supreme test of the truly honourable person comes only when he has the choice to act otherwise, especially when acting otherwise would have been in his own interest. The slave has no free choice, and he has no interests other than those of his master. His honour, then, can never be tested and the good warrior knows that honour, above all, exists only to be tested.

This discussion of the nature of honour should already have indicated why it is that even such groups as the unmanumitted Mamluks and Janissaries of the Arab and Ottoman empires are justifiably classified as slaves and, in spite of all appearances, were indeed persons without honour. At the end of this section I shall present some evidence to show that this was in fact the case.

Before doing so, however, we must complete our discussion of the inner structure of slavery. We have seen so far that slaves are powerless in relation to their masters (their powerlessness being, however, of peculiar origin and character); that they are natively alienated; and that they are persons without honour. But no relationship exists in a social vacuum. A crucial dimension in the definition of any relationship must be its social and political context. This, to be sure, will not entirely rid our analysis of the charge of schematism (something of which we are only too aware and will correct shortly) but it is a step in the right direction. The master belongs to a community and needs it both to recognize his peculiar power and to support his own naked violence with the authority of legitimate state power. 'Why does a slave owner have nothing to fear from his slaves?' asks Plato in the *Politics*. 'Because all free citizens would give him all the help he needs. And what would his situation be if he, along with his slaves, were transported to the middle of a desert where no free help could hurry to him? He would be in the greatest of mortal danger'. If there is one thing we can say with certainty about the Greeks it is the fact that they had no illusions about their slaves. Never once did they commit the lamentable error

⁶ J. Pitt-Rivers, 'Honour', in *Encyclopedia*, op. cit., 1968.

of those modern bourgeois historians who confuse the aggressive duplicity of the oppressed with a psychology of servile conformity. The distinguished German classicist, Lauffer, has observed that 'all social unfreedom rests, in the final analysis, on a power relationship that is shaped unilaterally by the stronger, the free party, and which through the political and legal system is legalized as a rights-relationship (*Rechtsverhältnis*).'⁷ In the transformation of the elementary condition of slavery from one of naked power, natal alienation and honourlessness to a legitimate relationship, two social processes come into play and must be seen as part and parcel of this condition.

The Fiction of Property

The first of these is the transformation of the elementary relationship into legal form. Bourgeois social scientists, and not a few ill-informed marxists, have claimed that this legal transformation takes the form of the legal-economic category of ownership of the slave by the master. This is a gross error and is largely responsible for the common mistake of identifying slavery as primarily an economic institution. Slaves can and often are used as economic tools, but there is nothing necessarily economic either in the primary form of the relationship or in its secondary transformation as a legal relationship. The idea that the slave is a thing (*res*) that is *owned* by a master, quintessentially an object of property, is a specifically Continental legal fiction, the peculiar invention of the Roman legal genius which has persisted in Western legal and social thought on the subject. It is not that the idea that the slave is a form or object of property is wrong; rather it is sociologically, and in objective legal terms, irrelevant and misleading. To say that the slave is a form of property does not specify anything distinctive about the condition of slavery since all persons, free and slave, can be and are forms or objects of property. In objective legal terms property refers not primarily to a thing or object, but to the delimitation of relations between categories of persons with respect to some object which may be a person, an inanimate immaterial object or a capacity. The property relationship amounts to a legally enforceable power to prevent other persons from interfering with one's enjoyment of given objects, material or immaterial, or to require other defined categories of persons to ensure that one enjoys such objects. In this sense my wife is a part of my property and I am a part of hers. Should any man doubt that he is a part of his wife's property he should try divorcing her, especially in Massachusetts. He will then painfully discover that she has certain claims, privileges and powers on his person and his earnings. There is no qualitative difference between a wife or a husband as a part of his or her spouse's property, and that of a slave as a part of his proprietor's property. The difference is only one of degree: the master's proprietorial powers are nearly total while those of a spouse are restricted.

How, when and (more important) why did the view become so entrenched in the Western mind that the slave is *peculiarly* a form or object of property? The answer is to be found in Roman society

⁷ S. Lauffer, 'Die Sklaverei in der griechisch-römischen Welt', Int. Congr. Hist., Stockholm, 1960.

and the Roman law of slavery. Because of the overwhelming presence of slaves in their society, and because slaves were the typical chattel among the Romans, one of the most common forms of wealth, the Romans found it necessary to make a distinctive category of this form of property. In so doing they invented the fictive legal paradigm of *owner*, *ownership* and *thing*. Note that this paradigm was deliberately modelled on the master–slave relationship: master, slavery, slave. The development was not the other way around: there was no preexisting notion of ownership (*dominium*). The Greeks, for example, had no such concept.

By deliberately distorting the traditional and accurate conception of property as a relation between persons and by replacing it with the notion of property as a relationship between a person (owner) and a thing, the Romans created a legal fiction that neatly distinguished and identified the slave. From now on in the Western mind property came to mean ownership of a thing, and only one category of human beings could be so owned, could be a thing, namely slaves. Concurrently, the idea of a freeman being owned, being a form of property, came to be considered horrible, a form of debasement. It was an ingenious fiction, solving not only the legal problem of defining the slave, but many sociological and psychological problems as well.

But it was a fiction nonetheless. It worked fairly well in an economy characterized by simple commodity production such as that of Rome or Continental feudal Europe, but created enormous problems when applied to a capitalist economy, where most forms of property refer to relations between persons with respect to a wide range of complex non-material claims and powers. Thus it is to read history backwards and be totally mesmerized by the legal fictive genius of the Romans, to define a slave as someone who is owned or someone who is assimilated to the status of a thing. Rather, the reverse is true: it is the notions of ‘ownership’ and ‘thingness’ as legal and social concepts which must be explained and defined in terms of the idea of slavery.⁸ We are not Romans living in a simple commodity economy (whatever civil law jurists might think) and we are under no compulsion to abide by its thoroughly outmoded legal fictions. It is particularly important that we remember this when trying to come to grips with the institution of slavery in comparative terms.

And yet, property remains important in the transformation of the elementary form of slavery into its institutionalized form. It is not because the slave becomes a form or object of property relations, but because he is denied all possibility of being a *subject* of property relations, a proprietor, that property is so important in the transformation of slavery. The slave is distinct in being propertyless, in lacking any and all proprietorial capacities. And from this primary transformative disability flows all the other legal disabilities of the slave. Thus, because the slave is propertyless he lacks all patrimonial capacities and can

⁸ The position advocated here is supported by both the etymological and the historical data on the development of the Roman conception of ownership, as will be explored at greater length in my forthcoming work on *Slavery and Slave Formations*, Harvard, 1980.

claim no powers of custody over his children; he may cohabit and sometimes, by convention, his common-law wife may not be violated, but he has no proprietary claims or powers in her person, her earnings or her offspring, nor she in him. Even in Islamic law, which went further than most other legal systems in recognizing the unions of slaves, it is significant that slaves are not punished with the death penalty for committing fornication or adultery; nor can a freeman be stoned for committing adultery with a slave.

I am aware of the fact that in the *Grundrisse* Marx toyed with the idea of the wage-labourer as someone who was distinctively propertyless.⁹ Marx was simply on the wrong track here. The worker most certainly lacks proprietary powers in the means of production, and this is an all-important point. But the worker has proprietary powers not only in certain categories of persons such as his wife (conjugal powers) and children (parental or custodial powers) but also in commodities. Indeed, it is important for the capitalist system that the worker avidly acquires property in commodities not only because mass consumption is essential for the productive process, but also because an obsession with proprietary powers in commodities is an important agent of mystification in that it diverts attention away from the really important lack of proprietary powers over the means of production.

The slave, on the other hand, was wholly propertyless. The reasons for this, though, differ radically from those explaining the curtailment of the workers' proprietary powers. The propertylessness of the slave was the *consequence* of his powerlessness and not, as in the case of the worker, the cause of his real lack of power. The slave could not be the subject of property because he was not a subject, period. His being, his capacity to act, his will and his autonomy were all invested in another person. Having said all this, it is important to note that the disagreement here is minor. Besides, the *Grundrisse* is a notebook, and it is in our notebooks that we are permitted to make our mistakes.

Slavery as Social Death

The second way in which the elementary relation of slavery is socially transformed and contextualized is by means of cultural symbols and ideology. The slave, we have seen, is under sentence of death. While his physical life may be spared, his social life is not. Hence the condition of slavery is always represented as a form of social death. In Pharaonic Egypt the word for a captive meant, literally, a living dead. Among the Romans 'a slave is *pro nullo*, and . . . slavery is akin to death'.¹⁰ The idea finds expression in countless ways among kin-based societies. Perhaps the most dramatic case is that of the pre-Columbian Caribs of the Antilles among whom slaves were required to cut their hair in the manner of someone in mourning: the slave is a man who mourns his own death. This is true even of the capitalistic slave systems of the Americas. The social death of the black man in the American South lingers in the collective memory of his modern descendants.

⁹ *Grundrisse*, op. cit., pp. 514–5.

¹⁰ W. W. Buckland, *The Roman Law of Slavery*, 1908, p. 4.

'*Nobody Knows My Name*', cries James Baldwin a hundred years after the legal emancipation of his ancestors. '*The Spook Who Sat By the Door*', echoes another popular black writer; '*Invisible Man*', declares the most accomplished; and there is a deadly irony in the title of the most famous of all black American novels: '*Native Son*'.

The Egyptian sociologist Elwahed was the first modern scholar to draw attention to this universal cultural mode of representing slavery. This was the second corollary of his finding that slaves were always recruited from among persons menaced with death. More recently Meillassoux and his associate Michel Izard have emphasized the idea. Meillassoux sums it up as follows: 'The captive always appears therefore as marked by an original, indelible defect which weighs endlessly upon his destiny. This is, in Izard's words, a kind of "social death". He can never be brought to life again as such since, in spite of some specious examples (themselves most instructive) of fictive rebirth, the slave will remain forever an "unborn" being.'¹¹

We may summarize the argument as follows: slavery is an individualized condition of powerlessness, natal alienation and dishonour represented legally as a condition of propertylessness and symbolically as a state of social death.

No other group of unfree persons can be so defined. The serf does not differ from the slave in being tied to the land as is commonly thought. This entrenched piece of conventional wisdom is simply not supported by the facts. For, on the one hand, there are numerous cases of slaves being tied to the land (throughout the Sahel and Sudan for example) and, on the other hand, there are a significant number of cases where serfs could be torn from the land and even sold (18th century Russia, various periods of Chinese history, and certain categories of serfs in pre-Norman Britain). The serf differs from the slave, first, in not being totally powerless: he always has some powers in law, vis-à-vis his lord. It is rare to find a lord who can kill his serf with impunity. Second, though nearly powerless, the quality of the serf's lack of power differs radically in origin and social meaning from that of the slave. The serf does not arrive at his condition as a substitute for death and he does not live under sentence of death. The lord is not a ransomer: he is in real terms an economic parasite, in ideological terms a protector. The serf—thirdly—is capable of being a proprietor. He exercises proprietorial powers not only in objects that are things but also in other persons. His marriage is legitimate and he has custodial powers over his children, however circumscribed. Fourth, in structural terms serfdom is always *primarily* an economic institution: the serf is first and foremost an exploited worker who, nonetheless, is not alienated from the means of production. Slavery is not primarily an economic institution. The majority of persons who were ever enslaved were not enslaved mainly in order to extract a surplus from them. Fifth, there is a fundamental difference in the cultural representatin of both institutions. The serf is always an integral member of his community and

¹¹ C. Meillassoux, Introduction to *L'Esclavage en Afrique précoloniale*, Paris, 1975, p. 22.

shares fully in its cultural and symbolic life. He is never an outsider; indeed, it is usually the lord who is the outsider and who finds it necessary to develop rationalizations for his right to 'belong' and to rule. The serf has a name. He is extremely visible, however down-trodden, and very much aware of a living heritage, language and tradition which he knows in his heart, and with stubborn pride, that he has largely created.

The Ottoman Problem

As an analytic aid a definition is of most value not only in what it allows us to exclude but in helping us to determine which of the borderline cases we are to include. It is in this sense that the élite slaves of the Caliphate, the Ottoman and other Islamic empires—the *ghilman*—present us with a crucial test. Were these *ghilman* really slaves? What could a favoured Turkish *ghulam* in 9th century Iraq have in common with a lowly *Zandj* toiling in the dead lands of lower Mesopotamia? What could a Grand Vizier such as Ibrāhīm Pasha have in common with an Ethiopian domestic slave in the household of a common merchant? We are here clearly at the limits of the institution of slavery, if not well beyond it, and it might seem more prudent simply to exclude such difficult cases. Such an approach would be wholly inadmissible. For it is precisely at the limits that one tests the sharpness of one's constructs. And there is something else of value in the limiting case: it often raises issues of analytic value not immediately apparent in, yet applicable to, the less problematical cases. We must pause then for a brief assault on what may be called the problem of the *ghilman*.

The *ghilman*, it may be strongly contended, were above all honoured and powerful persons. Inalçik is typical of most historians when he writes that: 'In Ottoman society, to be a slave of the Sultan was an honour and a privilege'.¹² That they exercised great power on behalf of their proprietors and rulers, there can be no doubt. On this basis, many commentators have gone out of their way to stress the difference between the *ghilman* and other slaves. It would be absurd to deny that there were indeed great differences. Slaves were no more homogeneous a category of persons than, say, soldiers or merchants or women. But in emphasizing the differences the commentators often go to contradictory extremes. Thus, in his article in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (1965) Inalçik claims that 'there is no resemblance at all between these (i.e. ordinary slaves) and the *ghulam*s belonging to the military class'. If there is 'no resemblance at all', then clearly the *ghilman* were not slaves. So why do all the commentators insist, nonetheless, on calling them slaves? Clearly something is wrong here and it does not get us very far to suggest, as Inalçik does in his work on the Ottoman empire, that the issue is semantic.

The semantic issue largely arises from the fact that alongside the master-slave relationship there existed throughout the Islamic world a highly developed and structured patron-client relationship. We have already observed that honour is closely tied up with the latter. As Shaw, in

¹² H. Inalçik, *The Ottoman Empire*, London, 1973, p. 87.

his study of the Ottoman empire notes: 'Many of the dealings between individuals in the Ottoman system involved the practice of *intisap*, a tacit relationship *established by mutual consent* between a powerful individual and a weaker one. . . . It was considered to be in extremely bad taste—in fact a violation of one's personal honor—for either party to break the relationship or fail to live up to its obligations when required.'¹³ It was inevitable that the master–slave and patron–client relationships should influence each other. This largely accounts for the semantic confusion. The *intisap* was sometimes *metaphorically* expressed as a master–slave relationship and vice versa. A zealous client might declare to his lord, 'I am your slave'. Indeed even today in parts of the Middle East a person will formally address another, especially a respected social superior as 'your obedient slave'. But it would be as ridiculous an error to confuse such formalities with genuine expressions of slavishness as it would for an Islamic observer of the British to decide that bureaucrats are literally servants because of such formalities as 'your obedient servant' at the end of letters. The point is that a clear distinction was always made between the *intisap* or, more generally, patron–client relationships, and the master–slave relationship.

How, then were they distinguished? First consider the origin and character of the two relationships. The *intisap* was established 'by mutual consent'; while the slave was a conquered person, forced into the master–slave relationship. The threat of naked violence was the ultimate basis for the latter; freely recognized mutual benefit was the support for the former. Second, the slave was always a natively alienated person, one who, by definition, came from an alien society and preferably was originally an infidel. Deracination was the very essence of the *ghulam*'s existence. Hardy notes of Muslim India: '*Deracinated*, the Turkish *ghulams* of the period of the *Ghurid* conquest found membership of the conquering élite *the only satisfying role possible* in a compartmentalized society from which they were divided by religion and the attitudes of caste'.¹⁴ The client, on the other hand, was anything but deracinated. He had many other satisfying roles in his society, among the most important being the familial relationships of which he was always intensely proud. Indeed, it was precisely because of the intensity of familial loyalties that the *ghulam* relationship became necessary. Not only was the *ghulam* ruthlessly separated from his kinsmen but every effort was made to minimize or even prevent such ties of kinship developing after their transformation. The most effective way of preventing such kinship ties later developing, of course, was by means of castration, and it is therefore no accident that some of the most successful *ghilman* were eunuchs. Indeed, there are cases of such slaves voluntarily having themselves castrated in order to ensure promotion. Related to this, too, is the fact that homosexuality was almost the norm among *ghilman* all over the Islamic world. Finally, it is significant that even where they had families their status was never passed on to their children, and this remained true (with one or two exceptions, always strongly disapproved of) even in the Mamluk

¹³ S. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, 1976, p. 166.

¹⁴ P. Hardy, 'Ghulam India', in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1965, p. 1085 (emphasis added).

kingdom of Egypt. The *ghilman* (unlike clients) were in theory socially dead persons. They had no independent existence outside of their masters. For this reason they were both feared and resented. Feared because they were so identified with the all-powerful Sultan or Caliph that to injure them was to injure him; but resented because they had no respect as independent human beings, no roots in the families that created the empires.

Does all this mean that the *ghilman* were powerless in themselves and without honour? Let us take first the question of power. It cannot be denied that the *ghilman* did indeed exercise power of their own accord. This was certainly true of the provincial governors, and even some of those at the imperial centre, especially where the Sultan was weak. And it is also true that in many cases they were able to make and break Sultans and, in the case of Egypt, even usurp power. Clearly, any purely schematic conception of the slave as powerless is insufficient.

And yet, this does not necessarily entail as drastic a revision of our conception of slavery as would seem at first sight. For the revision we must make is not substantive but one of method. The question we must now ask is not whether the master was always all powerful and the slave powerless; rather, we must enquire into the dynamics of power and powerlessness in the master–slave relationship of Sultan and *ghulam*. Power is not a static entity, it is a dynamic process between persons. Nowhere is this more evident than in the dialectics of power between master and slave. The Sultan asserts total power over his *ghulam* and demands from him total obedience. But to what ends does he employ his power? Does he have other sources of power? Through his slaves he can control others, but can he control his slave? And how do his slaves react to his claims? Do they come to see that without them the master is really powerless? Is the Emperor naked without the clothes they provide him? Is the reality of power the very opposite of its appearance? Do they dare to test their strength? That of course will depend on whether the Emperor has other clothes tucked away in the closet. Clearly, there is a vast range of possibilities. But the relationship between Sultan and slave comes close to one end of this range, the end which we may call parasitic domination. If the master's power is absolute vis-à-vis other members of the society and if the master depends solely on his slaves to maintain such absolute power, then the relationship between master and slave must immediately be sublated. It is not possible to dominate another when that other is the only source of one's power.

What do we conclude from all this? The *ghilman* were indeed powerless in relation to their master, but in their powerlessness lay their strength. We can only understand and accept the view that the *ghilman* were powerless when we view their position dialectically. Powerlessness is usually what it appears to be: weakness and submission. But powerlessness can become the basis of power. It all depends on how powerful the master is; on how powerful other masters are; and how much the power of the master is invested in his control of his slaves. The theoretical basis of this approach will be examined more closely in the next section.

Further proof of the fact that the *ghilman* were indeed genuine slaves comes from the data on their manumission. We know that the Mamluks were formally manumitted at their passing out ceremony, the *kbarj*, and while there is some controversy as to whether the corresponding ceremony of the janissaries, the *çikma*, amounted to a manumission, the crucial point for us is not when they were manumitted, but the fact that manumission was considered necessary. For if being a slave of the Sultan was an honour, then it follows that manumission should have been a loss of honour. The evidence strongly confirms this. Thus when, in 1444 Sultan Murad II rewarded several of his janissaries for their valour at the battle of Varna, the manumission document explicitly stated that they were being granted 'the honour of freedom'. There is considerable independent evidence which confirms that the enslaved condition of the *ghilman* was a dishonourable state, but space permits me to cite only one case, perhaps the most dramatic. During the reign of Sulayman the Magnificent, his favourite, the Grand Vizier İbrâhîm Pasha (1523 to 1536), who had not been formally manumitted, attempted to intervene in a case being heard in the imperial *dîwân* by the celebrated Mulla, Ibn Fenârî. The Mulla refused to accept the Vizier's testimony on the grounds that he was still a slave, his word as such having no authority in a court of law. Mortified, Pasha ran to the Sultan, wept at being 'dishonoured and disgraced' and pleaded for action against the Mulla, arguing significantly that 'the honour of your slaves, the Viziers, is as the honour of your exalted person'. The Sultan, however, accepted the judgement of the Mulla and argued that the only comfort he could offer was to manumit him so that he could return and give evidence.

Now I do not see how we can draw any but one conclusion from this extraordinarily revealing incident: that slavery was a deeply dishonourable condition. The most important officer in the world's most powerful empire at the time could not give evidence in his country's most important court of law because, being a slave, his word was without integrity. He was without honour in the eyes of the group of persons most qualified to judge and confirm honourable status. Being a slave, he lacked personal autonomy which, as we have seen, is the essential precondition for making the claim of honour and having it confirmed.

What have we learned from this brief examination of the problem of the *ghilman*? First, it should now be clear that whatever problems they may present, the *ghilman* were indeed slaves, however exalted. The origin and character of their relationship clearly place them in the same category as the meanest domestic slave. At the same time, the *ghilman* reveal the basic limitation of our conception of slavery as we have presented it so far: its schematism. Such schematism has its place in any comparative science of society and we make no apologies for it. It is the heavy plough which we must first use to clear the ground, turn the rough soil and define our boundaries. An analysis becomes defective not by its use, but by its exclusive use; by a failure to recognize what it reveals: that the ground underneath differs from the pebbles and rocks above. Power, we have seen, is no static element which we can use along with others to define a stationary social set. Nor, by implication,

can the social process with which we are concerned—slavery—be viewed in static terms. The problem of manumission, which we have only touched on, makes this clear. Enslavement implies the possibility of disenslavement. Like all other social processes, slavery is fluid, transitory and antithetical.

And not only does it move, but it moves in context. There is an inner dialectic by which the basic forces of slavery are revealed: master against slave; power against powerlessness; alienation against dis-alienation; social death against social life; honour against dishonour. This inner dialectic, however, works itself out as part of a wider, outer dialectic: that of the dynamics of the relationship between slavery, seen as a single process, and the total complex of processes which we call society or the social formation. It is this outer dialectic which, in the last analysis, determines the outcome of the struggle within the inner dialectic. It determines, for example, whether master or slave wins; whether powerlessness is what it appears to be or something else.

Part Two: The Structural Articulation of Slavery

In a recent work Meillassoux has remarked that: 'Slavery always appears in association with other relationships of production, so that it does not constitute the only or even the dominant mode of production, and the ruling class cannot be defined strictly only in relationship to it.' He adds, rightly, that 'far from revealing the inability of dialectical materialism to analyse slavery scientifically', the argument leads one to 'reject any proto-Marxist shuffling of prefabricated Modes of Production summarily borrowed from this or that writing or remark of Marx or Engels'.¹⁵ This is good advice, and it is a great pity that recent Marxist writings on the theory of slave society have not heeded it. Marx, it must be emphasized, never developed a theory of slave society, nor of the slave mode of production. I am also convinced that it is not possible to develop any consistent conception of what he might have meant by the term 'slave mode of production' from his references to slavery. It is now fifteen years since Hobsbawm pointed out the very sketchy nature of Marx's discussion of the ancient 'slave mode of production' and the fact that in Marx's own terms 'even *before* the development of a slave economy . . . the ancient form of social organization is crucially limited'.¹⁶

Three recent attempts to define the slave mode of production have received much attention, those of Anderson, Padgug and Hindess and Hirst.¹⁷ Anderson's analysis is by far the most informed. He tells

¹⁵ C. Meillassoux, *op. cit.*, 1975, pp. 20–21. Note that this departs somewhat from his earlier position where a slave mode of production is clearly implied, in e.g., the Introduction to *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa*, 1971.

¹⁶ E. J. Hobsbawm, Introduction to Marx, *Precapitalist Economic Formations*, London, 1964, p. 39.

¹⁷ P. Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* London NLB, 1974, Chapter 1; R. A. Padgug, 'Problems in the Theory of Slavery and Slave Society', *Science and Society*, 1976, pp. 3–27; B. Hindess and P. Hirst, *Pre-capitalist Modes of Production*, London, 1977, Chapter 3.

us that 'the slave mode of production was the decisive invention of the Graeco-Roman world, which provided the ultimate basis both of its accomplishments and its eclipse', and that the juridical polarization between slavery and freedom was 'the social and ideological correlate of the economic "miracle" wrought by the advent of the slave mode of production'. He notes further that the 'historical and social totality' of Antiquity had a combination of different modes of production of which, however, the dominant and articulating mode was that of slavery. Anderson is persuasive in showing how slavery was important in the development and character of ancient civilization, but he is far less effective in demonstrating precisely how the ancient economy was dominated by the slave mode of production and we are left in the dark as to what exactly is meant by a slave mode of production. On the one hand, he observes, correctly, that 'agriculture represented throughout its history the absolutely dominant domain of production, invariably furnishing the main fortunes of the cities themselves', that the urban civilization had 'no urban economy in any way commensurate with it'; but, on the other hand, he makes no attempt to disprove the well established position that, at any rate in Greece, slaves were overwhelmingly concentrated in the urban economic sector, with the exception of mining. I am fully aware of the fact that slaves were employed in the more specialized areas of the rural economy and that a greater proportion of them than is usually acknowledged worked the home farms of the urban aristocracy and as supplementary *oiketes* on small farms. I am persuaded, too, that slaves had a disturbing effect on areas of the economy in which they were not directly involved, all of which is simply another way of saying that I am fully convinced that Greek civilization was indeed based on slavery. But to accept this, as I shall make clear later, is not necessarily to accept the view that there was a slave mode of production, still less that this mode was dominant.

I want to know what the mode *was*; and I wish to be shown just *how* it was dominant. A mode of production, if it is to mean anything, must refer to a specific productive process with specific relations of production. I have already pointed out that there is nothing in the nature of slavery that implies a given economic organization, therefore it is not enough to indicate the location of slaves in an economic sector to claim that a slave mode of production exists. Most workers in Washington, D.C. are women; Washington does not have a female mode of production, nor do the many African economies in which women demographically dominate the productive work force. We immediately recognize the absurdity of talking of a female mode of production; yet it is just as untenable to claim the existence of a slave mode of production simply on the basis of the existence of slaves in an economic sector, or even in an entire economy. Anderson is not unaware of these problems. His main response is to argue that there was a direct link between slavery and the technological stagnation of the ancient world. Were this true we would indeed be getting somewhere in the search for a link between slavery *per se* and the productive process. Alas, it is simply not the case that there is any proven link between slavery and technological retardation. Recent studies of modern slavery

have strongly questioned the traditional view on this subject.¹⁸ With respect to the ancient economy K. D. White, in his comprehensive study of Roman farming states categorically that slaves 'must be ruled out as an impediment to progress'.¹⁹ And Harry W. Pleket, in an exhaustive review of the literature on technology in the ancient world also comes down firmly against the view that slavery encumbered the application of technology in any way.²⁰ Along with Moses Finley he emphasizes the abundance of cheap labour (free and slave) and the mentality of the élite groups, as well as the values that informed economic thinking, as the crucial factors in explaining the technological backwardness of the ancient economy.

The 'Slave Mode of Production'

Hindess and Hirst deserve some attention if only because they address directly the problem of what exactly is the Slave Mode of Production. The SMP, they argue, is 'theoretically possible', but crucial aspects of the construct they end up with 'are not consequences of the institution of slavery as such' (p. 148) which is very puzzling, to say the least. Nonetheless, a critique of Hindess and Hirst may serve as a vehicle for making an important point: namely, that slavery is often used quasi-capitalistically, even in pre-capitalist settings and, within the context of modern capitalism it is merely a variant of the capitalist mode of production.

Hindess and Hirst begin by defining slavery in traditional legal and economic terms and, as such, quickly arrive at the position that slaves are essentially persons separated from the means of production. As we have already seen, there is nothing in slavery that implies this. When slaves are used economically and are separated from the means of production they become capitalistic or quasi-capitalistic workers, pure and simple. More important is the argument that 'there is no division *apparent* within the mode between necessary labour and surplus labour: the reproduction of labour power *appearing* as a cost of production' (p. 128, my emphasis) and this, we are told, is 'one of the greatest differences between the Capitalist and Slave Modes of Production'. There are several objections to this assertion. First, there is no slave society in which, in practice, slave-owners are not fully aware of the distinction between the labour input of their slaves and other factors of production, and in which, further, there is not a clear calculation made on the basis of this distinction between the maintenance costs of a slave and the revenue he generates. These distinctions are used by the slave owner to make calculations as to expected rates of profits in exactly the same manner as does a capitalist operating in a 'free' labour market. The slave's maintenance cost is his wage; the worker's wage is,

¹⁸ See, e.g., S. Engerman, 'A Reconsideration of Southern Economic Growth, 1770–1860', *Agricultural History*, XLIX, 1975, pp. 343–61; R. W. Fogel and S. Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, Boston, 1974, vol. 1; R. S. Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South*, New York, 1970.

¹⁹ K. D. White, *Roman Farming*, 1970, p. 446.

²⁰ H. W. Pleket, 'Technology in the Greco-Roman World', *Proceedings of the IVth International Conference of Economic Historians*, edited F. C. Lane, 1968, especially p. 321.

from the systemic point of view, his maintenance costs. Systemically, there is no qualitative difference between the two. The occasional *appearance* on the books of the slavemaster-capitalist of slave labour as a fixed capital cost is an accounting procedure resulting from the fact that the slave belongs to an individual capitalist whereas the worker belongs to the capitalist class as a whole. Their argument that, with respect to the forces of production there 'is a contradiction between the slave as a form of property (with a value in circulation) and the slave as direct producer', simply makes no sense to me. What they are getting at is that the slave is a form of fixed capital, 'unlike the wage laborer'. This is trivial. A buoyant internal market for slaves usually exists, and is theoretically always possible. The purchase of a slave does involve the risk of the slave dying before his earnings compensate for these costs. But there is absolutely no difference between these risks and those taken, say, by a model capitalist firm such as I.B.M. which invests huge outlays in training graduates to become efficient salesmen of their machines only to find that they quit their jobs before their earnings compensate for the cost of training. As with I.B.M. the risks are always well worth taking if, *on average*, slaves live long enough for the master to realize the enormous profits to be made by exploiting the slaves in a context where the economies of scale and high labor intensity make a rigidly controlled labour force desirable. Incidentally, it should be noted that there are many highly capitalistic enterprises and entire capitalist formations where the labour force is far more 'fixed' than was ever the case in either the proletarianized sectors of the ancient economies or those of American slave capitalisms. The case of the relation between labourers and capitalists in most large Japanese firms immediately comes to mind.

Hindess and Hirst further argue that the slave, unlike the worker, is not *forced* to labour in order to reproduce himself, because his proprietor is obliged to do so. This is the closest thing to a truly metaphysical statement that I have read in contemporary Marxian discourse. It deserves to be cited fully: 'The absence of a compulsion for the direct producers to reproduce themselves internal to the structure of the mode, the absence of any necessity to work for another and the absence of the *means* to work for oneself, generates the problematicity of the relation of the labourer to the process of production we outlined above.'²¹ They hasten to add that 'this does not mean that the slave realizes he does not have to work', but to bring in the human subject and his consciousness 'has no place within the Marxist problematic'. The statement reveals not only an ignorance of the ultimate role of organized force in the maintenance of the capitalist system, in all its forms, but of the necessary play of economic force in the maintenance of any advanced slave system. By economic force is meant presumably a withdrawal of the means of subsistence: wages in the case of the worker, maintenance in the case of the slave. Now let us consider the hypothetical case of a slave workforce which refuses to work. Brute force is likely to be the least effective means of getting the slaves back to work. Precisely because force is normally used against the slave the marginal utility of this means rapidly approaches zero in a crisis of

²¹ Hindess and Hirst, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

insubordination. The whip is hardly a menace if it is an everyday occurrence. Further, the master quickly reaches the point where he will be cutting off his nose to spite his face if further beating results in irreparable damage or death to his slaves. Far more rational and effective would be the simple withdrawal of the slave's consumption basket, or, where provision grounds are provided, access to these grounds. Precisely because slaves do not *normally* have to worry about their maintenance, the marginal utility of this means of compulsion will be that much greater. The exact reverse is likely to be true of the wage earner. Because he is used to the problems of looking after himself but is not normally exposed to naked force, a few blows from a policeman's truncheon or a night in jail works more effectively in breaking up strikes or picketing than does economic force. Thus, at the moment of crisis, it is the capitalist system which is more likely to use non-economic compulsion, whereas it is the slave capitalist system which is likely to use economic force.

But this distinction really amounts to a quibble. The real point is that both variants of the capitalist system rely on both forms of compulsion. It is as absurd to argue that the worker in the slave variant of capitalism is not under economic compulsion as it is to argue that the worker in the free variant is *only* under such compulsion.

A final criticism of Hindess and Hirst is purely internal. That is, their argument can be shown to be specious from their own most important assumption. That assumption is the validity of the labour theory of value. Let me come clean and say that I do not accept this theory, but that I concur with the view posited by Joan Robinson many years ago that a rejection of the labour theory of value does not imply a rejection of what is most important and radical in the Marxist method and theory.²² From the viewpoint of the labour theory of value, however, it may well be asked of Hindess and Hirst what exactly is the significance of the fact that under capitalism labour is sold to the capitalist in a free market whereas under slavery it is not? The answer: in real terms, none whatever. The representation of labour as a free commodity is, in orthodox Marxian terms, part of the mystification of the capitalist system. The reality behind this mystification is that all capital is the product of labour, whether variable or constant, and the whole point of Marx's economics was to expose this underlying reality. Thus the only difference between the slave master and the capitalist is the fact that the former is either less hypocritical about the labour force he exploits or less self-deluded. The slave variant of capitalism is merely capitalism with its clothes off. This is clearly what Marx had in mind when he repeatedly referred to capitalism as wage slavery. At the same time there seems to have been some ambivalence in Marx as to whether the free labour market was purely mystificatory or in some ways structural in its effects. To the extent that he took the latter position he came to find the existence of slavery in the midst of capitalism an 'anomaly'. By failing to recognize this problem and by unduly concentrating on the free labour market in developing their construct of

²² Joan Robinson, *An Essay on Marxian Economics*, London 1966, pp. 1-22.

the slave mode of production Hindess and Hirst end up with a construct that is really no different from the capitalist mode of production.

Slavery and Capitalism

My own position is partly implied in the above criticisms and I shall now clarify and expand on it. I shall discuss first the relation between slavery and capitalism and then, in the final section of this paper, take up the problem of slave societies or the macrosociological problem of the role of slavery in socio-economic formations. I said earlier that slaves are unique in that they can be exploited and used in every possible way. It is for this reason that when there is a quasi-capitalistic invasion of a predominantly pre-capitalist formation slaves are often employed. Most attempts to define a slave mode of production really amount to efforts to build a model from the observed process of articulation of a quasi-capitalistic sector into a pre-capitalist formation. Previously, an ideal-type approach was used in which modern slave formations such as those of the British and French Caribbean were taken as the 'classic' type but a recognition of the essentially capitalistic nature of these formations, especially with the growing popularity of 'world system analysis', has led to a hasty retreat from such Weberianism. The problem is that there is not one but several pre-capitalist modes resulting in considerable variation in the articulation of the slave-based sector with the productive base. And when it is considered, further, that any given precapitalist mode of production may generate as many distinct superstructures as the formations for which it provides the base and that the structural innovations of slavery are not only mediated through the economy but also through these superstructures, it must be immediately recognized that no single model of a slave formation will do and that no such thing as a slave mode of production exists. It is a failure to recognize these basic issues which leads Padgug to the extraordinary conclusion that slave society existed only in Graeco-Roman antiquity.²³ This is model-fitting by means of arbitrary definition with a vengeance: if you can't get the rest of your universe to fit your model you declare it irrelevant by calling it something else. This simply will not do.

Yet another complication is that while the quasi-capitalistic invasion of a pre-capitalist formation is often wrought by the use of slaves, the latter are also often used as a means of structurally invading one kind of pre-capitalist mode by another equally pre-capitalist mode. Capitalism or quasi-capitalistic processes simply do not enter into the picture. The use of slaves as tenant farmers in the Islamic states of the Sahel and Sudan where the traditional dominant mode was what Sahlins calls 'domestic' is a case in point; so too is the use of slaves in the semi-manorial *shoen* of Japan between the 8th and 10th centuries within the context of the dominant Asiatic mode of production.²⁴

²³ R. A. Padgug, op. cit.

²⁴ See C. Meillassoux, Introduction to *The Development of Indigenous Trade*, etc., op. cit., 1971; on Japan, H. Jiro, 'The Position and Significance of the Slave System after the Taika Restoration', 1972 (in Japanese, privately printed); for a review of the literature, see the *Comité Japonais* of the 11th International Congress of Historical Sciences, Uppsala, 1960.

The terms ‘capitalist mode of production’ and ‘quasi-capitalistic invasion’ as I understand them must now be clarified. By the CMP I mean a system of production in which producers are separated from the means of production; the means are monopolized by a class of proprietors or capitalists; commodities are produced for the market by the application of labour power to the alienated means; from the surplus generated an exploitative rent is extracted by the capitalists, most of which is reinvested in an escalating process of capital accumulation. The centralization of the means of production, the growing monopolization of proprietorial powers in them, the specialization of all aspects of the economic process itself, the concurrent differentiation of the social from the economic aspects of life and of the symbolic and sacred from both, resulting in the personal alienation of all—workers and capitalists alike—and their polarization into two major classes, all add up to a system which is inherently unstable and self-contradictory, experiencing periodic crises which may result in its downfall. I do not know how exactly the system will crumble, although I strongly suspect it will, and I do not quite know what will replace it, although like everyone else I have my visions. Marx, who laid bare all the basic elements of this system, attempted to specify the dynamics of its contradictions by means of an economic theory founded on two basic sub-theories: the labour theory of value and the theory of the declining rate of profit. I reject these sub-theories both on logical and empirical grounds which cannot be entered into here. This rejection, however, in no way vitiates the validity of the CMP outlined above, since Marx was wrong in thinking that his analysis of capitalism was logically founded on these sub-theories.

Capitalism exists wherever the capitalist mode of production is dominant. However, one often finds many of the processes outlined above operating within the context of social formations in which the dominant mode of production is pre-capitalist. Where this is found, and where the processes in question add up to a significant complex that impinges upon the dominant mode and the wider social formation in clearly discernable ways, we will speak of a ‘quasi-capitalistic sector’ and will refer to the process of articulation involved as the ‘quasi-capitalistic invasion’ of the dominant mode of production or of the wider social formation. I am aware of the fact that strong feelings surround the issue of the application of the term ‘capitalistic’ to pre-modern social formations. I fully understand and sympathize with such misgivings. But I am not using the term ‘capitalistic’. I am using the term ‘quasi-capitalistic’ which describes perfectly what I want to say.

Capitalism, which is exclusively a product of the modern world, has had two major variants: the ‘free’ variant characterized by the sale of the worker’s labour on the labour market; and the slave variant found in the Americas up to the closing decades of the 19th century, in the Banda Islands south of Ceram in the Dutch East Indies between the late 17th and mid-19th centuries, and in the Indian Ocean slave colonies of the 18th and 19th centuries.

It is clear from what I have said above that I do not hold free labour to be an essential component of the capitalist mode of production but

only of one of its variants (admittedly the most advanced). A capitalist class can reap considerable profit, under the right circumstances, if it can control the supply of labour, and slavery is only the most dramatic and historically the most significant means of so controlling labour by the capitalist class.²⁵

Both variants of capitalism are historically and structurally tied: they are not types but variants of a single, worldwide process, a view that was perfectly clear not only to Marx but to every student of imperialism from Wakefield through Hobson, Lenin, Luxemburg and Leonard Wolf, all of whose arguments are revived and developed in the current school of neo-Marxian 'world system' and dependency analysts. With Wallerstein's assertion that slavery in the Americas was part of the capitalist mode of production I am in obvious agreement. But his arguments that the slave zone of capitalism was necessarily more backward, that the dynamic thrust in the emergence of capitalism moved only in the direction from core to periphery, and that slaves 'are not useful in large-scale enterprises wherever skill is required' are seriously open to question.²⁶ After the work of Fogel and Engerman, not to mention a large number of current economic historians, it can no longer be confidently maintained that the U.S. South was, in terms of the world historical development of capitalism, a backward economic zone. Recent studies suggest, for example, that the West Indian plantation up to about the middle of the 18th century was, as a socio-economic unit, perhaps more complex and advanced than the typical British firm of the time.²⁷ In short, at the microeconomic level the so-called periphery may well have been in advance of the core up to about the middle of the 18th century. It was at the macro-economic level, and of course, in terms of political dominance that the core was ahead of the periphery. Wallerstein fails to recognize these issues partly because, as Theda Skocpol has so ably demonstrated, his political sociology is too crudely reductionist and his model too monocausally dependent on unexplained market forces, and partly because of empirical weaknesses in his discussion of the so-called periphery.²⁸

Eric Williams' thesis in its original statement (*Capitalism and Slavery*, 1944) is no longer tenable, but reformulated it remains just as powerful once we recognize the existence of what I have called elsewhere the sociopolitical multiplier, by which I mean the explosive effect of new wealth concentrated in the right hands at the right time. From this point of view it really matters little whether the West Indian slave trade and slavery contributed 1% or 20% to the growth of national

²⁵ W. Kloosterboer, *Involuntary Labour since the Abolition of Slavery*, 1960; B. Lasker, *Human Bondage in South East Asia*, 1950, Chapter 5.

²⁶ I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, London, 1974, pp. 43-4 and 86-104; see also his review of Genovese in 'American Slavery and the World Capitalist Economy', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 81, 1976. For all its eloquence, Genovese's pre-capitalist conception of the Old South is no longer tenable.

²⁷ Fogel and Engerman, op. cit., 1974; for a review of other economic literature, see Engerman, 'Marxist Economic Studies of the Slave South', *Marxist Perspectives* No. 1, Spring 1978.

²⁸ T. Skocpol, 'Wallerstein's World Capitalist System: a Theoretical and Historical Critique', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 82, 1977.

income in Britain during the late 17th and 18th centuries. More important is the fact that the wealth generated was monopolized by a new entrepreneurial class at a time when it could use it to seize control of the critical levers of economic and political power.

Why from Africa?

Let us now move to a consideration of the more important differences between the free and the capitalist variants of the capitalist mode of production. Both variants of capitalism can be and have been highly efficient, highly profitable and, in the Marxian sense, highly 'progressive'. Apart from the fact that the capitalist is often (though not always) able to extract a higher level of surplus from the slave (by forcing him to produce more than he would were he free, and by reducing his costs of reproduction) the slave variant of capitalism emerged primarily to exploit conditions of high labour intensity and economies of scale. These, however, are the necessary conditions for the emergence of the slave variant of the capitalist mode; they are not sufficient.

The following factors provide a more complete explanation. First, there is the plantation system, the monocrop production of staples for export. The significance of the plantation for the development of slavery has been frequently noted, but no one has specified just what it was about the plantation that so alienated free labour and made slave labour necessary. Sid Mintz has remarked, rightly, that the use of enslaved Africans on the plantations of the Americas 'remains less than self-explanatory'.²⁹ Climate alone could not be the answer, as anyone who has observed the Redlegs of Barbados, or the blonde and blue-eyed peasants of Mount Morritis, Grenada, and the dirt poor and lily-white sweet potato farmers of St. Vincent, will testify. Why, then, slavery, and why Africans?

First, the plantation system involved a radically new relation of man to the land that was totally alien to the traditional conception of farming. Almost all peoples from the neolithic revolution were dependent on the land in one form or another. As a result, human beings developed elaborate and deeply held views about the proper relation between man and land. Some of the most deeply felt conceptions of morality and human dignity are related to man's dealings with the earth. This is true even among swidden (slash-and-burn) farmers, in spite of their shifting pattern of land use. Thus, among the Northern Ibos, the most important spirit in the pantheon of gods created by the supreme being, Chukee, is Ani, 'the personalized Earth'. Ani is not just ruler of the earth, the land of the dead, the farming cycle, and the source of all fertility, but significantly, she is 'the guardian of the community's moral code', so that 'many socially condemned acts are regarded as direct offences against Ani, and it is said of an offender . . . "He pollutes the sacredness of the earth"'.³⁰

²⁹ S. Mintz, 'The So-called World System', in *Dialectical Anthropology*, 1977, vol. 2, no. 4.

³⁰ W. R. Horton, 'God, Man and the Land in a Northern Ibo Village-Group', *Africa*, vol. 26, 1956, p. 23.

Long after the Romans and Greeks became thoroughly urban their definition of dignity, manhood and the virtuous life harked back to this primeval relationship. The story of Cincinnatus is 'hardly credible' as Peter Garnsey recently observed, nor did the peasant patriarch of Cato and Virgil 'set the moral tone of society or provide crucial political and military leadership in early Rome', but it is nonetheless significant that at the height of Republican Rome the 'myth of the peasant' and the concurrent 'doctrine of agricultural labour' persisted.³¹ With the barbaric impulse this primitive conception of the relationship between man, land and god not only persisted but was forcefully rejuvenated throughout medieval Europe. The medieval estate was not just an economic unit, but a 'jurisdictional unity' and a religiously sanctioned moral and social order. The lord was more like a tribal chief, and in almost no sense of the term a manager. However harsh the economic realities for the serf, the fact remains that the prevailing religious ideology was both powerful and meaningful, and that ideology dictated that land was 'the sole foundation of the social order'.

The slave plantation and the ancient latifundia violated this near sacred relationship in every conceivable way. The farmer is removed from the means of production. The farm is *managed*. The soil is owned by an absent mortal who replaces god. Its fruits become commodities. The plantation defiles farming with all its secular profanity. It pollutes the earth by turning it into mere capital; it destroys the harmony of man with space and with the natural rhythm of the farming cycle; it offends the gods by denying the ultimate sacredness of property in land; it alienates the soul; it threatens all social and moral life.

It is because it so violates every traditional valuation of the relation between man and land that only by means of slavery can originally free men and women be made to work on the plantation or latifundium. Note how this argument differs from the conventional view of the relationship between slavery and the attitude to labour. It is held, I think correctly, that slavery debases labour, that it is the *cause* of the devaluation of manual work. The argument I am presenting here argues, in addition, a causal link in the opposite direction. The debasement of labour inherent in ancient latifundia and modern plantation farming causes slavery, for only this category of persons can be made to work on such units of production.

The important difference between the plantation and the industrial versions of capitalism is the fact that the latter involved a wholly new method of organization applied *to a wholly new method of production*. Men and women had no preconceptions about the modern factory as they had about the farm. They could be more easily deluded into taking, freely, a chance on the first, which is not to deny the grief and outrage when they discovered, too late, what it was all about. A pre-capitalist farmer could surmise at a glance what a plantation entailed as free white yeomen farmers did when they fled in droves the

³¹ P. Garnsey, 'Non-Slave Labour in the Roman World', *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Economic Historians*, Edinburgh 1978.

plantations of the Caribbean for the mainland toward the end of the 17th century. Only by means of naked force could the plantation be manned.

A second factor making for sufficiency in the explanation of African slavery in the slave plantation variant of capitalism was the timing of the introduction of the plantation. So often historians of slavery forget that they are historians and neglect what should be central to their discipline: the element of historicity. Is this perhaps because so many students of slavery are not really historians? Never mind, let it be noted that none of the European states had a genuine world empire during the 17th or early 18th centuries when the plantations were being introduced on a significant scale. Indian labour was simply not available in the abundance required, quite apart from cultural factors that might have created resistance to slavery and (more important) the fact that it is extremely difficult to enslave a native population. The cost of transporting European labour was prohibitive, in addition to the equally important fact that Europe needed them where they were for its new industrial mills. And while whites are capable of working as hard as any other group of people in the tropics, their resistance to tropical diseases at that time was obviously much lower than groups of persons native to this geographical zone: more white seamen than slaves died on the middle passage; three out of five whites died in their first year in Africa, and overall, perhaps as many as ninety per cent of whites who went there never returned.³² The mortality rate for whites was better in the Caribbean, but still high, and would undoubtedly have been much higher had they been the workers in the fields. Other tropical peoples were, at that time, out of the question: it was neither politically, economically, nor technically feasible to capture and transport East Indians to be used as slaves during the late 17th and 18th centuries. Africans were literally the only source of labour that was politically weak enough, geographically accessible enough, epidemiologically suitable enough and (quite simply) known enough to be captured, transported and enslaved in the New World.

Other reasons further explain the choice of Africans. One of these is rather controversial, but I think is worth considering especially if we are still bothered by the fact that the Indians of the Americas were not more enslaved. This is the fact that West Africans were familiar with the institution of slavery. There is no need to get into the debate here concerning the role of Europeans in the introduction of significant levels of slavery to Africa.³³ The debate refers to the role of slavery in the social formation of West African societies. That slavery on the institutional level existed in pre-European Africa there can be no doubt; though there is a world of difference, in terms of structural articulation, between the domestic slavery of Africa and the slave formations of the Americas or of the post-colonial Upper Guinea Coast. But as I have already argued, on the institutional level slavery is the same

³² K. G. Davies, 'The Living and the Dead: White Mortality in West Africa, 1684–1732', in S. Engerman and E. Genovese, *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere*, Princeton, 1975, pp. 83–98.

³³ See, e.g., W. Rodney, 'African Slavery and other forms of social oppression on the Upper Guinea Coast', *Journal of African History*, 1966, vol. 7, pp. 431–43.

everywhere and, more important, has certain continuous subjective meanings. The institution of slavery was *known* to almost every West African: it was a culturally meaningful institution even if never actually experienced by the great majority of Africans, in much the same way that, say, the Christian ritual is culturally meaningful to me although I am not a practising Christian.

This, of course, worked in two ways. The knowledge of slavery meant that the African captive had a special aversion to the institution. But at the same time the African understood that enslavement was one of the risks of wars and raids: if only one per cent of Africans were enslaved by fellow Africans in domestic African slavery, it is highly probable that over eighty per cent of all Africans would have had a close relative who had been at some time enslaved, given the nature of African kinship systems. This, I repeat, is not in any way to underestimate the shock and psychic damage of capture and enslavement. However, one must accept the fact that a captive whose cultural and emotional experience includes the enslavement of relatives and the probability of his own enslavement in the event of captivity was less likely to cave in under the impact of slavery than a captive such as, say, the typical East Coast American Indian in whose cultural experience the institution was completely absent. In this regard, it is not without significance that the Caribs, who were unusual in practising slavery, both put up a stronger resistance to the European conquest and also survived much better under slavery than the other Indians of the Antilles or on the mainland.

Slavery and Trauma

The cultural experience of the institution might have prepared Africans better to survive enslavement psychologically, but nothing in their experience prepared them for the capitalist socio-economic formation of which the plantation was the base. Africans had to be enslaved if their labour was to be exploited in the New World. Late 19th and early 20th century racism required the counter-reaction and correction of modern liberal anthropology and history in making clear the true nature of African cultures. We all know now that Africans too, had their kings and queens and empires; that Africans too, conquered other peoples and had ruling classes that extracted surpluses. More important, we have now a thorough grasp of the richness, vitality and depth of traditional African culture and arts. But such an understanding should not be acquired at the expense of underestimating the sheer vastness of the social, economic and technological gulf between the typical African and the typical West European social formation between the 16th and 18th centuries. Anthropological relativism can be taken too far. It is surely no longer necessary to flog the dead horse of Victorian ethnographic racism. Once we recognize the simple, stark truth that the typical African who ended up in the New World came from a pre-literate, small, kin-based community with a neolithic technological base and was then required, within a period of six months, sometimes less, to become a rural proletarian in an agro-industrial firm that was part of a world-wide socio-economic network, his enslavement ceases to be problematic.

The same thing had happened in the ancient world, only the contrast was perhaps less extreme. Slavery was the only structural means by which such an incredible transformation could have taken place. It is the peculiar nastiness and value of this institution to a ruling class that it makes possible such catastrophic transformations. Because, on the institutional level, it is not tied to any particular socio-economic formation, and because it is socially and emotionally meaningful to all peoples, *it can be used as the mediating agent between two worlds*. The essentially social and psychological nature of the institution now becomes critical. To the African his enslavement meant powerlessness, debasement, kinlessness and social death. Anything was possible, including—let us be candid—being eaten. It is indeed a fact that many Africans were convinced during the middle passage and their first days on the New World that they were going to be eaten, and given the almost cannibalistic savagery of the planters' behaviour during their auction, they could hardly be blamed for so suspecting. The plantation that eventually greeted them was no tea-party, but given the African newcomer's commitment to life in exchange for 'freedom'—and to have survived the middle passage was the most extreme testimony to such a commitment—it was not the worst that they had anticipated. The slave's traumatic social experience was the master's golden economic opportunity. The deracination of the African, his alienation from the means of community wrought by slavery, paved the way for his alienation from the means of production and for his reintegration into the capitalist social formation as a proletarian.

Slavery then was an individually transformative and structurally catalytic force in the colonial–slave variant of the capitalist mode of production. Without slavery this variant of the mode would not have been possible, but slavery was nonetheless not an integral part of the economic process: at the formative level it was preconditional and catalytic, but in no way constitutive.

The Modes of Slavery

We must now move from the specific problems of New World slavery to a consideration of the wider issues posed by the outer, structural dialectics of slavery: the nature and dynamics of social formations in which slavery is critical. From what has gone earlier it should be clear that while I reject the notion of a slave mode of production I nonetheless fully accept the idea of slave formations. By these I refer *partly* to all societies that are based wholly or in part on the institution. But this begs the question. What does 'based on' mean here? I begin by emphasizing one point that is now firmly established: a slave society is not necessarily one in which slaves are in the majority or do all or even most of the work.³⁴ Degler has remarked that 'the really significant question about the place of slavery in antiquity is not, "Did slaves do most of the work?" but "What role did they play in the economic process?"'

³⁴ C. Degler, 'Note: Starr on Slavery', *Journal of Economic History*, 1959, vol. 19, p. 273.

This is a good start, but it does not go far enough. For it may even be true that a slave formation exists where slaves do almost no productive work, or at any rate constitute a minor element in the productive process. Most of the medieval Islamic formations, for example, would fall into such a category. In developing a framework for the study and understanding of slave formations we must ask three basic questions: first, what was the nature of the dependence on slavery? second, what was the degree of dependence on slavery? and third, what was the direction of the dependence in causal and systemic terms? The answer to these three questions, taken together, will determine what may be called the modes of systemic articulation of slavery. A mode in this sense conceptually integrates all three aspects of the problem of determination in the macrosociological relation between slavery and social formation. Analytically I am assuming that all societies with significant levels of slavery will tend to fall into a series of clusters in terms of empirically determined configurations of these three variables. Each such configuration will constitute a mode of articulation of slavery and the cluster of societies will be examples of the mode.

There are two advantages to this approach. First, it does not approach the data on slaveholding societies with totally artificial conceptual constructs created in an armchair which turn out to have no application whatever to the real world (Hindess and Hirst), nor with models of slave society so completely informed by a given area of experience that the model remains confined only to that area (Padgug). Secondly, this approach avoids the two main dangers of bourgeois empiricism: first, the attempt to sort the cases by theoretically 'blind' inspection or, worse, by some computer-aided technique such as factor rotation which end up with spurious classifications, the theoretical significance of which satisfies only the artificial intelligence that concocted them; and second, the use of an explicitly stated or (more commonly) implied neo-evolutionary schema, within which all slaveholding societies are classified.

In the approach I am here advocating, the analysis is informed by a dynamic theory operationalized in the three variables mentioned above. At the same time, the relevant data is classified for in-depth analysis, not in terms of an externally superimposed schema, but in terms of the critical nature of the *relation* between slavery and society. It is not a classification of societies in which slavery existed, it is rather a classification of the *dynamics of the relation* between slavery and society, what earlier I have called the outer dialectics of slavery. In the rest of this paper I shall attempt to illuminate the nature and operation of the three variables that determine the modes of articulation of slavery in social formations.

Regarding the first problem, comparative data show a wide range of kinds of dependence on slavery. We think most often in terms of the relation between slavery and the economic base of given social formations. We have seen that slavery never constitutes a distinct mode of production but that it can be used to create and support a new mode. The socio-economic costs and benefits of the imposition and mainten-

ance of slavery have been already suggested in our discussion of the slave variant of modern capitalism. On a more general level, the economic cost-benefits of slavery have been discussed by Stanley Engerman in perhaps the most important general statement on the economics of slavery.³⁵ There are, he observes, three kinds of costs. Those of imposing the slave system and of acquiring slaves, which are closely related to the presence or absence of an international slave trade; there are the costs of enforcing the slave condition; and there are 'the costs imposed by the slave condition upon worker productivity'. The benefits accrue from lower maintenance costs and a greater and more constant supply of labor. Greater output than is possible with free labour is obtained through ignoring the non-pecuniary aspects of labour, through higher participation rates (not only in forcing more hours of work per day but through the use of women and children), through the exploitation of conditions that favour greater labour intensity and economies of scale, and by avoiding one of the major problems of agricultural labour—the 'backward sloping labour supply curve' (still the bugbear of Third World planners, this is the tendency of rural labourers to take higher earnings in the form of leisure).

Beyond these effects explored by Engerman are others of a more macro-socio-economic nature which I now wish to take up. Where slavery makes possible a capitalistic invasion of a pre-capitalist social formation, we find a tendency toward rapid sectorialization in both economic and non-economic spheres of life. There is, indeed, a striking structural parallel with the sectorialization of Third World economies in the fifties and sixties under the disastrous impact of modernization programmes. In classical Greece and Rome, in late medieval Sicily, in the pre-Russian Khanates of Central Asia from late medieval times, and in several of the Sudanic states as well as the Arab Sultanates of East Africa, one finds the same pattern emerging of a dual economy with a 'modern' slave-based sector and a traditional sector occupied by free and/or semi-free labour, the same pattern of unbalanced and invariably destructive 'growth' of total product. Commercially oriented masters use slaves in large scale agricultural organizations, in mining, in urban industries and in the blossoming state bureaucracies. The new commodities produced are invariably traded both internally and externally. The surplus extracted goes entirely to a growing urban élite consisting partly of the old establishment, partly of a new élite of merchants and professionals anxious to transform their 'new' money into the trappings of 'old' money by buying up land and marrying into the aristocracy.³⁶

Through the wealth it accumulates by the quasi-capitalistic use of slaves the urban élite consolidates its hold on the levers of power and extends its economic control over the traditional economic sector. Marx saw clearly that the fundamental structural conflict in the ancient

³⁵ S. Engerman, 'Some Considerations Relating to Property Rights in Man', *Journal of Economic History*, vol. XXXIII, March 1973.

³⁶ On the dual economy thesis see A. W. Lewis, *The Theory of Economic Growth*, London 1955; the thesis is applied to the ante-bellum South by M. Rothstein, 'The Ante-bellum South as a Dual Economy: a Tentative Hypothesis', *Agricultural History*, vol. XLI, 1967.

world remained that between landowners and small freeholders. Slavery, however, supports the ruling class not only in economic terms but in direct political terms as slaves become used as agents of state power—police and sometimes soldiers—and as administrators. Quasi-capitalistic slavery influences the superstructure in other more direct ways. By making a relatively large urban élite possible it allows for the development and infusion of new tastes, styles of life and ideas that undermine not only the traditional economy but the traditional culture. We find too a similar pattern of overurbanization, the 'bright lights' of the city pulling the young from the land, in addition to the push factors, also partly stimulated by slavery. And there is, finally, the influence of slavery on attitudes toward labour, a shift from disdain for working for others to a disdain for all forms of manual work.

Non-economic Slavery

But, as I have suggested earlier, a society may become highly dependent on slavery in completely non-economic ways. This was particularly true of the early Islamic social formations. Military slavery was the essential foundation of the rise and spread of Islam. The political might and administrative structures of the great empires were inconceivable without this all-important institution. 'The practice of using purchased slaves as the mainstay of the military forces of various Muslim dynasties', writes Forand, 'is one which was characteristic of the Islamic Near East from the early ninth century A.D. until the end of the Mamluk period in Egypt.'³⁷ Not just the political structure but the very style and character of Islamic civilization during the middle ages were based on slavery. Samuel Haas has written: 'When the brilliance of the culture of Islam from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries is compared with its desert simplicity in the time of Muhammad the contrast is striking. The cause is not hard to find. The leading elements in this cultural transformation were derived from the peoples conquered by the armies of Islam.'³⁸ From its inception to the end of the Umayyad period, 'slaves made important contributions and exerted strong influences in the realm of politics and public administration, warfare, religion, arts and crafts, music, poetry, grammar and learning in general'. And further, he continues, 'the downfall of the Umayyad caliphate and the rise of the Abbasid regime was mainly brought about through the untiring efforts of the slaves who had enlisted in the latter's cause'.

Finally, slavery may become indispensable for a social formation in purely ritual ways. Although the slave population of pre-colonial Maori was estimated to reach proportions as high as 15 per cent, the economic role of the slaves was marginal. Maori men, however, had strong taboos against performing certain kinds of tasks—tasks which were none the less vital, such as carrying water and handling food. The whole ideological structure of this social formation was predicated

³⁷ P. G. Forand, *Military Slavery in Ninth Century Bagdad*, unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 1962.

³⁸ S. S. Haas, *The Contribution of Slaves to and their Influence upon Early Islam*, unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 1942, I, ii.

on the avoidance of vital tasks which endangered a man's taboo. Slaves and women solved the problem. It has not gone unnoticed that the taboos might well have been developed to rationalize the exploitation of women and slaves, but Raymond Firth stoutly rejects this view and we cannot lightly dismiss the objections of such an authority.³⁹

We can deal more quickly with the second variable which determines the modes of articulation of slavery: the degree of dependence on the institution. By discussing kind of dependence we naturally take account of degree of dependence. Even so, the two issues should be kept separate, for two slaveholding societies may have the same kind of dependence on slavery yet differ considerably in degree of dependence. Thus several of the western Anglo-Saxon states had a by no means insubstantial dependence on slavery of a kind very similar to that of Visigothic Spain, but the latter undoubtedly exhibited a much greater degree of dependence than the social formations of the former. One obvious test of internal dependency on the institution is to examine what happens when slavery is abolished. Unfortunately, the institution usually goes out along with the social formation it supports, not with a bang, as in the New World, but with a whimper, as in Rome. Even so, careful analysis can usually tease out suggestive estimates of the degree of dependence on the institution.

Finally, there is the problem of the direction of the dependence. It cannot be assumed that slavery, even when existing on a substantial scale, is the active and causal element in its articulation in the total social formation. The institution is not always transformative and, indeed, may operate in very conservative ways. Thus, among the Indians of the North-west coast of America where among certain tribes the slave population was as high as twenty per cent, slavery was the *consequence* of a high level of surplus easily procured from the rich fishing beds and was in no way its cause; if anything, they were a drain on the surplus. The institution was used mainly for conspicuous display of wealth, as a means of reinforcing the incipient class distinctions, and as commodities to be exchanged and destroyed in the redistributive ceremony of the potlatch. Averienka, in her fine study of slavery among these Indians, observes that 'the decisive influence is not any particular kind of production but the level of development of the productive forces'. She is too much of a Marxist to suggest any functionalist interpretation of slavery and she clearly recognizes the dynamics of change among these peoples when she writes: 'The clan principle of election of chiefs had yielded place to the principle of property, to the principle of succession within the limits of certain families. This initiated the principle of clan mobility. The existence of trade and the institution of the potlatch enhanced inequality of property and undermined still further the clan structure.' At the same time she rejects the view of 'bourgeois' anthropologists such as Henshaw that slavery had been the cause of the emergence of the notion of rank and caste. Rather she argues, quite correctly, that slavery was reinforcing of 'the development of society along the path of class division and the

³⁹ Raymond Firth, *Primitive Economics of the New Zealand Maori*, N.Z. Government, Wellington, 1959.

destruction of clan organization', an influence that was most evident in the 'sphere of social relations' and in 'religion, art and mythology'.⁴⁰

The Korean Example

Perhaps the most dramatic case of slavery relating to the wider social formation in a passive way is that of late medieval and early modern Korea. The institution persisted in this society on a significant scale and for a longer period of time than in any other part of the world except Egypt. At times during the Yi dynasty the slave population, according to some estimates, reached as high as a third of the entire work force. And yet, the influence of slavery on either the economic base or the superstructure is hard to measure or even identify. The institution was certainly never the catalyst for the invasion of a quasi-capitalistic sector, and although slaves were to be found in almost every occupation in both rural and urban areas it is difficult to maintain that either the polity or any other area of social formation was decisively influenced by it. In spite of a slave ratio at times similar to, if not higher than the U.S. South, we cannot say that Korean civilization either during the Koryo or Yi periods was based on slavery; it would seem, rather, that slavery on a large scale was embedded in the Korean social formation.

A comparison of the five centuries of the Yi dynasty with the rise of slavery during the centuries following the Solonic reforms in Athens is most revealing. At no time can one detect in Korea the same close association between the rise of slavery and the sectorialization of the economy, the shift to commodity production for trade, the rise of an urban élite and the urbanization of the population. I am not suggesting that some such changes did not take place in Korea; rather, my present reading of the literature suggests that slavery was in no way the cause of any structural changes that occurred during this period; instead, I get the impression that slavery was adapted to such changes. The reforms of Yi Sung-gye at the beginning of the Yi dynasty, for example, took place quite independently of the institution of slavery. More telling were the effects of the more drastic changes introduced during the reign of T'aejong (1401–1418). The official shift in favour of Confucianism, the restriction on the number of Buddhist temples and the number of slaves and land each priest could own, resulted in the expropriation of some eighty thousand slaves. These, as well as the lands seized, were then given to favoured royalists, in this way increasing the concentration of ownership in land and slaves. Note, however, that slaves here were in no way the cause of the concentration of proprietorial powers, but its consequence. Nor was this concentration and monopolization of slaves used to invade the traditional mode of production with a sectorialized quasi-capitalistic mode. Slaves, instead, were incorporated into the traditional mode of production.

But perhaps the most dramatic contrast between Korea and Graeco-Roman antiquity is the difference in the impact of the Punic wars on Rome and that of the Japanese invasion of Korea at the end of the

⁴⁰ S. Averienka, *Slavery Among the Indians of North America*, mimeographed text circulated by the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 1957.

16th century. While in Rome this led to a serious assault on the traditional mode of production, the introduction of the latifundia worked by slaves, the outmigration of a significant proportion of the free rural population and the intensification of class divisions and political disruptions, in Korea, as Hiraki Makoto has shown, the invasions had the very opposite effects: the war was the opportunity for large numbers of slaves to become commoners and even enter the lower echelons of the *yangban* class.⁴¹

The answer to the puzzle of the passivity of slavery in the social formation of pre-modern Korea is to be found in the centralities of its peculiar mode of production and socio-political development. In his recent critique of that Marxian shibboleth, the 'Asiatic mode of production', Perry Anderson has rightly observed that 'the modes of production of any pre-capitalist social formation are always specified by the politico-juridical apparatus of class rule which enforces the extra-economic coercion peculiar to it'.⁴² Of few formations is this more true than pre-modern Korea. 'Smallness of dimension (in Asian terms), stability of boundaries, ethnic and religious homogeneity, and exceptional continuity mark Korea', writes Henderson.⁴³ Within this context emerged a political system that was exceptional for its centralism, the control of the military by the bureaucratic and royal élite, and the dominance of authoritarianism in almost all social relationships. There were few marked regional differences either in cultural or economic terms. In this system, the economy was totally subordinate to the polity and official interests and reflected the highly centralized nature of the formation. 'There was no real theory of private property.' Land was, in theory, owned by the state, but was in practice monopolized by the bureaucratic and aristocratic classes. Henderson adds: 'Economic status was based exclusively on political power. The monarch and his officials had first claims on all and could, in theory, distribute and re-distribute as they saw fit. Bureaucracy was increasingly a self-serving, not a public serving instrument, seeing the state and its population largely as a farm to be "eaten" and exploited.'⁴³ Capital accumulation and private initiative in the exploitation of the land was wholly alien to this system. As such, a quasi-capitalistic invasion of any kind was both inconceivable and unworkable.

There were many similarities between the Korean and Chinese social formations, the result of both structural parallels and direct borrowings. In cultural meaning, social definition and socio-economic usage there are also striking parallels between the institutions of slavery in both formations. Korea also possessed many of the qualities which account for the 'truncation' of any large-scale development of slavery in China: intensive agriculture, a large peasant population, the use of *corvée* labour, the reluctance to enslave prisoners of war, the weak development of trade and commerce, a tenaciously provincial culture and government control of industry.

⁴¹ H. Makoto, *Slave Manumission during and after the Japanese Invasion of 1592–1598*, Seoul University, 1967 (privately translated from the Korean).

⁴² P. Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, London, NLB 1975, p. 543.

⁴³ G. Henderson, *Korea: the Politics of the Vortex*, Harvard, 1968, p. 33.

And yet, in marked contrast with the arrested growth of slavery in China, we find a remarkable growth and economic utilization of slaves throughout Korean history. Why, then, did the institution develop to the degree that it did in Korea? The answer, in the broadest terms, is that Korean slavery was a non-capitalistic, and, as such, compatible means of temporarily solving some of the contradictions inherent in its social formation. The excessive demands of an overcentralized, top-heavy and corrupt state apparatus on the work force in the forms of taxes, tribute, *corvée*, and military draft, led to disruptions in the production of wealth which most sections of the ruling class itself, not to mention the peasants, resented. Slavery papered over and delayed the full implications of these problems because slaves were exempt from such taxes and compulsory services. Slavery was to the dominant pre-capitalist mode of production in Korea what the imperial export of capital and internal reforms such as the trade union movement were to modern capitalism: a structurally congruent reform, internal to the mode, which postpones but does not fundamentally resolve the transformative implications of its contradictions. Slavery was a means of privatization of property, in a system where state control of property undermined the production of wealth; it was a means of extracting more surplus from the worker using the same mode of production; it was the means by which one section of the ruling class could seize power from another without running the revolutionary risk of involving the peasants, and, once in power, it was a means of consolidating control over the traditional means of production and the state machinery. In other words slavery gave the traditional system a measure of suppleness and structural flexibility that permitted its survival and extension.

Korea, then, fully exemplifies the large-scale articulation of slavery in an entirely passive way. It illustrates dramatically, too, that the presence of a large number of slaves is no more indicative of a *slave-based* civilization or social formation than is a small proportion indicative of its absence. This is not to say that slavery was not very important in Korea. It is not a slave society, but it is a vitally important case of one mode of articulation of slavery in society. More than any other case it reveals why our analytic focus should shift from slave society to the dialectics of the *relationship* between slavery and social formation. It is the structural articulation of the institution that should be the focus of our study, not the formations that result from these articulations.

Each mode of structural articulation of slavery will be a special ordering of the three basic processes I have discussed above. That is, a mode of articulation will be a particular configuration of the kind, degree and causal direction, in structural terms, of the relation between slavery and a determinate set of social formations.

Angus Walker, a recent bourgeois critic of Marx, in his discussion of Marx's response to Mikhailovsky's criticism of his theory of history, cites a crucial passage in Marx's rejoinder which he (Walker) found 'somewhat obscure'. The passage runs as follows: 'Events of striking similarity, but which are played out in different historical circumstances, thus lead to quite different results. If these developments are

studied for themselves and then compared with each other the key to these phenomena is easily found, but not by using the universal key of a general historiosophical theory of which the chief virtue lies in its suprahistoricity.⁴⁴

We can neglect Walker's main reason for citing this passage (in order to gloat in Oxford Union glee that the passage contradicts a statement in *Capital*); more interesting is the fact that he found it 'obscure'. Any approach to history which compares societies as static entities, or even misguided Marxian approaches which reject the bold, world-wide comparativism which Marx advocated in favour of the increasingly fashionable overemphasis on the particularism of given social formations as dynamic end-states, will find the above-cited passage obscure. What Marx had in mind, I submit, is the approach to comparative socio-historical analysis I have sought to follow in this paper. It is an approach which rejects the vain bourgeois search for general laws of static social orders. But equally it rejects the particularism which the 'pure history' school of bourgeois scholarship has always embraced and which an increasing number of Marxists are now finding attractive. The 'striking similarity' of the event of slavery in 'different historical circumstances' we have seen 'lead to quite different results'. By studying these *developments* (that is, these articulations; note Marx did not repeat the use of the term 'circumstances') in themselves: in Greece, Rome, Korea, Wessex, Visigothic Spain, 9th-century Iraq, 18th-century Khiva, the pre-European North West Coast of America and the indigenous formations of Africa, as well as the slave variants of capitalism in the Americas—to cite some of the more important cases—and then by comparing these articulations with each other, 'the key to these phenomena' is easily found.

⁴⁴ A. Walker, *Marx: His Theory and its Context*, London, 1978, p. 207.