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Political Systems and Economic Performance  
in Some African Societies

Purpose and General Methodology

This paper seeks to identify some relationships between political authority systems in sub-Saharan African societies and the capacity of those societies to achieve economic growth.

The phrase "political authority system" is here used to refer to institutionalized arrangements whereby conflicts are resolved and communal policies are defined and implemented for groups of people larger than nuclear families. The phrase "political power" is used to refer to the ability to act effectively on individuals outside one's family - which ability is ultimately backed by force or threat of force.

The relationship between political power and economic activity is suggested by the fact that the polity - insofar as it is distinguishable from other subsectors of the society - may be conceived as allocating prestige and influence and controlling the distribution of facilities, benefits and rights in furtherance of the society's goals. (See Parsons and Smelser, 1956, pp. 16-28, 47-8.)

The relevance of systems of political authority to economic development in Africa is suggested by three historically separate groups of phenomena: (1) In the indigenous (pre-contact) societies there frequently was no institutionalized differentiation between economic and political roles. An understanding of economic capability in such circumstances, therefore, seems likely to entail an understanding of the characteristics of the political structures. (2) During the period in which the political functions of many African societies were controlled by Europeans, much of the activity of the colonial governmental apparatus was directed toward economic goals and was shaped by economic needs. (3) In the post-colonial era, political functionaries in many African states have become recognized controllers of both entrepreneurial energies and capital, and "political" events frequently have had a direct and far-reaching impact on the rate of economic change.

This paper extracts from anthropological accounts data regarding the nature of political systems and economic achievement in certain African societies. Some patterns of coincident occurrence are evidenced and some hypotheses are formulated regarding the nature of the interrelationship between political

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authority systems and the economy.

It is not presumed that changes in or characteristics of the political authority system constitute "causes" of economic (i.e. materially productive) phenomena. Economic change - especially in the sense of general economic development - results from an interplay of many factors. These include the character of resource availability and technology (the factors usually emphasized by economists) as well as the entire range of institutional and cultural circumstances in which a people find themselves.

The intent of the following pages is to set forth some characteristics of political authority systems which seem to accompany identifiable patterns of economic activity with some regularity. This is done in the hope that such coincident patterns may suggest interrelationships - and hence both problems and potentialities - which otherwise might not be apparent. It is suggested specifically that relatively high levels of political power have provided incentives for economic action and a favorable environment for the development of markets and economic accumulation. The final section of the paper briefly considers the impact of colonial rule in similar terms.

### Political Authority Systems

Systems of political authority may be described as varying according to several dimensions. For example, in geographic or demographic terms they might extend to narrow or distant limits and might apply to many people or to few. Temporally, a system of political authority might endure for the lifetime of an individual or family or might adhere only briefly as during the fighting of a war. In social scope, political power might affect only a limited range of human activity (such as punishment for major offenses or conduct in time of war) or might influence nearly every aspect of the members' lives.

One feature of the political systems of the traditional societies of sub-Saharan African has been extensively analyzed by anthropologists and political scientists. It is the degree to which political functions have been formalized in these societies and the degree to which political roles have been differentiated. In some societies the institutionalization of political power has produced far-reaching, formalized systems of control. In other societies there have been limitations on power tending toward the total absence of political control with strong social emphasis on individual self-determination.

There have been, for example, formally constituted hierarchies in which a king, a member of the royal family, a feudally appointed lord, or a hereditary chief had the ability to insure that a significant portion of his orders would be obeyed. Role differentiation in the political subsection necessitated that political power include the power to compel tribute. This insured an economic dimension to political activities. Frequently there were other direct economic consequences as well as when chiefs or kings maintained a monopoly of certain portions of their society's trade as with the Ashanti (Rattray, 1929, p. 109-11), the Benin (Bradbury, 1957, p. 25), and the Yao (Tew, 1950, p. 15).

The effectiveness with which such political power could be applied was likely to vary inversely with the geographical distance between the person exerting the power and his subject. E.g., the Ndebele (Kuper, et al., 1955, pp. 68-9), the Ngoni (Read, 1956, p. 50), the Swazi (Kuper, 1947, p. 66), and the Yoruba (Forde, 1951, p. 22). Moreover, political effectiveness varied over time depended in part on the personalities of the power holder, his associates and his subjects and in part on external pressures. E.g., the Mossi (Skinner, 1964, p. 64), and the Zulu (Krige, 1950, p. 222; Schapera, 1956, p. 149).

Sometimes the leader's power was reinforced by religious authority as with the Bemba (Whitely, 1951, pp. 25, 28) or Swazi (Kuper, 1947, pp. 72 ff.). But limitations to political power could always be identified. An appointment to office and tenure in that position frequently were dependent on satisfying the expectations of some subsection of the society. Thus the power of the office holder was circumscribed by the articulated will of that subsection. These restraining groups might represent broad segments of the community as with the Ashanti (Manoukian, 1950, pp. 36, 39), the Ewe (Manoukian, 1952, pp. 30-3), and the Swazi (Kuper, 1947, pp. 60-4). Or only small subsections might find their interests so protected as evidenced by accounts of the Bunyankole (Oberg, 1940, pp. 131, 147), the Ruanda (Maquet, 1961, pp. 124, 152), the Fulani Emirates (Smith, 1960, ch. V), or the Wolof (Gamble, 1957, p. 55).\*

\* Some pre-contact African states (e.g., the Ashanti, the Yoruba) were divided politically into segments with effective, formalized political power wielded within each segment, but with only weak and situational authority links between the segments. Such have been referred to as "segmentary states" in contrast with hierarchical states such as Buganda and Dahomey (see e.g., Southall, 1965, p. 126). This distinction is not utilized in the discussion of incentives, markets, and accumulation which follows. In respect to each of these topics concentration is on "formalization" of political control and differentiation of political roles. The concept of the "segmentary state" is referred to in the final section in relation to the adjustments undergone by traditional societies under colonial rule.

In sharp contrast to such societies where emphasis was on formalization and role differentiation in political function, there were societies in Africa in which the existence of political power was minimal.

Evans-Pritchard in his analysis of the Nuer (1940, pp. 181-2) makes the following statements:

The lack of governmental organs among the Nuer, the absence of legal institutions, of developed leadership, and, generally, of organised political life is remarkable. Their state is an acephalous kinship state and it is only by a study of the kinship system that it can be well understood how order is maintained and social relations over wide areas are established and kept up. The ordered anarchy in which they live accords well with their character, for it is impossible to live among Nuer and conceive of rulers ruling over them.

The Nuer is a product of hard and egalitarian upbringing, is deeply democratic, and is easily roused to violence. His turbulent spirit finds any restraint irksome and no man recognizes a superior. Wealth makes no difference. A man with many cattle is envied, but not treated differently from a man with few cattle. Birth makes no difference. A man may not be a member of the dominant clan of his tribe,

he may even be of Dinka descent, but were another to allude to the fact he would run a grave risk of being clubbed.

That every Nuer considers himself as good as his neighbour is evident in their every movement. They strut about like lords of the earth, which indeed, they consider themselves to be. There is no master and no servant in their society, but only equals who regard themselves as God's noblest creation.

Similarly, the Konkomba of Northern Ghana were said to possess "no legal institutions, in that there are no patterns for formal legislation nor for judicial decisions, nor are there any law enforcement officers of any kind" (Tait, 1958, pp. 186-8). Nadel says of the Nuba: "The law is enforced, not by the actions of an appointed authority, but by public approval of 'self help', and 'law and order' often covers only a small segment of social life" (1947, p. 146; see also Edel's description of the Chiga, 1957, p.112).

Gulliver's account of the Arusha contains the following statements: "Particular roles such as those of age-grade spokesman or lineage councillor were, and they still are, inherently ones of influence rather than authority". Coercive action was uncommon and was disapproved of by the social leaders. "Thus although their influence was marked ... if it tended to develop into authority it began to lose its efficacy, because there was no established basis for the effective maintenance of authority" (1963, p. 149).

The formulation of political policy in an Ibo village was described thus by Green: "The whole body of villagers can and do, if they so wish, take a hand in most practical affairs ... there is often a tendency for matters to be handled in an ad hoc fashion by a number of different groups or sections of society rather than by one recognised centre of hierarchy" (1947, pp. 73-4).

Societies evidencing lack of formalization of political authority and lack of differentiation of political roles which are referred to in this paper include the following:

Arusha	Iraqwa	Kpe	Songo
Bororo	Iteso	Lele	Tallensi
Bwanba	Jie	Lugbara	Tiv
Bulu	Karinojong	Nuba	Tonga
Chaga	Kikuyu	Nuer	
Chiga	Kipsigis	Nyinka(Northern)	
Ibo	Konkonbo	Pakot	

Such descriptions identify viable societies operating with negligible amounts of extra-familial power in the hands of constituent individuals or groups. Nor is the absence of such power balanced by extensive regulation within the family. On the contrary, societies lacking a significant degree of political power frequently seem to evidence a high degree of independence and self-determination within the family as well.

The following quotation is from Evans-Pritchard (1951, pp. 150-7):

A Nuer home is run by the combined efforts of all its members and the labour of running it is fairly distributed among them. One cannot but be struck by the camaraderie of the family as they assist one another in daily and seasonal tasks . . . . No work is considered degrading, no one is a drudge, all have leisure for rest and recreation, and all are content with their roles in the economy of the home. Indeed, the division of labour between sexes and ages accords with the social and personal freedom of women and children in Nuerland and with the recognition, so striking among the Nuer, of the independence and dignity of the individual.

Women know their duties and unless they are by nature lazy and slovenly, or wish to goad their husbands into divorcing them, they avoid domestic shortcomings. The husband, for his part, does not interfere with the wife's organization of her duties.

With rare exceptions, I found Nuer women well content with their situation and that their husbands and other men treated them with respect. . . . They mix freely and with easy assurance with the men, and they do not hesitate to argue with them about matters in which they are interested as women.

The affection of children for their fathers is very striking in Nuerland. I have never seen a man beat his child or lose his temper with him . . . .

In respect to the politically uncentralized Bwamba we read (Winter, Bwamba, pp. 48-9, 68):

A woman, in theory, should be completely obedient to her husband . . . . However, it must not be inferred from this that the women in Bwamba are meek, downtrodden individuals. . . . Women are able to run away and when they feel that they have the support of their brothers, they can always threaten to divorce their husbands. . . . Very often women fight with their husbands and they do not always come out second best. The woman always wears a sharp knife at her belt which she can threaten to use.

The father's power (over his son) extends only so far as the son's willingness to submit to it. ... the son always can leave his father's home and live elsewhere if he desires to do so. The use of force upon the part of the father is very limited.

A similar degree of independence of wives and children is described for other similarly constituted societies, including the Konkomba (Tait, 1961, pp. 198,9), the Lele (Douglas, 1963, pp. 113-22) and the Tonga (Colson, 1958, pp. 137, 224-6), but not for the Chiga (Edel, 1957, pp. 34, 58).

Thus evidence exists of wide variation in the degree of formalisation of political authority structures in pre-contact African societies, in the degree of specialization of roles of political functionaries, and in the level of political power held by these individuals.

The suggestion is advanced in the following pages that the degree of formalization and differentiation of political functions correlates significantly with several critical economic variables. This relationship is examined in respect to (1) the allocation of human activity between effort and leisure, (2) the allocation of human effort between productive and non-productive occupations, and (3) the impact of some aspects of political transition on economic progress.

The Allocation of Human Activity Between Effort and Liesure

In African societies, even with levels of technology available before contact with Europe, the resources available to the people were generally sufficiently rich so that the means of human subsistence were obtainable with less than a maximum expenditure of humneffort. Under such circumstances, liesure provided a possible alternative to economically productive employment.\*

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\*Various indigenous groups faced periods of recurring privation, famine, and even starvation. But insofar as these were attributable to factors beyond the societies' capabilities of self defence, they would not provide an effective inducement to economic effort.

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It appears, moreover, that political power in African societies has provided a commonly utilized means of encouraging a rate of human endeavor which was greater than that which would have prevailed if individuals had been free to make independent choices between work and liensure.

The accounts of those indigenous African societies in which political power was formalized and hierarachically administered make universal reference to the use of such power to compel labcur or the products of labour from the citizenry. The beneficiaries (or at least partial beneficiaries) of this tribute were the holders of the political power who enjoyed consumption standards at least marginally above those of the general population.



For societies characterized by lack of formally exerted political power there is some evidence to suggest a comparatively low level of economic performance. Mary Douglas in her account of the Congolese Lele suggests that a lack of formalized political power was related to the meagre output of the society's economy. She notes the small size of the political units, the fact that chiefs have only "ritual and social powers" and the absence of offices for which age and experience qualify a man. All of which, she feels, contribute to economic mediocrity (1963, pp. 2,5,51; 1962, pp. 211 ff).

Audrey Richards describes the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia as a people indifferent toward agricultural pursuits despite their apparent physical ability to increase their output and despite their manifest state of physical deprivation. Faced with recurring shortages of food, they did not respond with harder work. She offers the following explanation (1939, p. 403):

Success in food production depends largely on leadership and a definite compulsion to work.

It is just this leadership (among the Bemba) which is no longer effective. The matrilineal kinship organization . . . is breaking down. The drive behind agricultural production is largely associated with beliefs in the authority of the Bemba chief, sentiments that have been inevitably weakened by contact with Europeanism.

The failure of non-centralized, non-specialized political power to engender high levels of economic incentive might seem predictable in view of the fact that holdings of power in such a system are intermittent and refer only to restricted sections of human activity. Thus the political power may not be sufficiently encompassing or sufficiently durable to force involuntary labour on an economically meaningful level. Moreover, the same social forces which prevent accumulations of political power in such a society may preclude economic accumulations as well since the latter may give rise to the former. (This suggestion is considered further in a subsequent section.)

Another possible explanation for the coexistence of low levels of political power and substandard economic activity may lie in a suggestion of Bert Hoselitz. He argues that in societies with institutionally unspecialized political authority, the administrative functions are performed within institutions whose primary function is integrative, i.e., concerned with the maintenance of group solidarity (1963, pp. 168-198). Such institutional emphasis on social solidarity, it would seem, may be incompatible with simultaneous pressure for involuntary economic achievement.

In early contact with African societies, Europeans often complained that the indigenous inhabitants performed less work than they were capable of. The colonial governments responded to this suggestion by applying political pressure. They frequently compelled labor and the adoption of new techniques and applied indirect pressure to this end through poll taxes and (less frequently) occupational restrictions.\*

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\*It is interesting to note that the continuance of such pressure was deemed necessary even after the introduction by the colonial government of a generally accepted medium of exchange. This suggests that the absence of a store of value, i.e., of a good capable of being accumulated, which would be provided by a medium of exchange, did not constitute the paramount handicap to private accumulation in these societies.

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Centralized political power is, of course, not the only means for motivating an accelerated rate of economic output. The desire for increased levels of consumption or for economic accumulation also provides a motivating force sufficient to impinge upon the voluntary allocation of time for leisure. In indigenous African societies, however, as well as in those societies in early stages of European contact, demand for private consumption goods or for private accumulations often did not provide such an incentive (Ames, 1962, p. 58; Colson, 1962, p. 615; Edel, 1957, p. 107; Gamble, 1957, p. 74; Gulliver, 1962, p. 441; Reining, 1962, p. 553; Taylor, 1962, p. 113; Vansina, 1962, p. 195).

Thus formalized political power may have been necessary in the traditional and colonial societies to motivate a rate of economic performance compatible with goals of growth and development. If this is true, it implies that economic growth, which is regarded as a means of increasing man's freedom of action, might in its attainment stimulate forces likely to reduce (at least temporarily) such freedom.

The Allocation of Effort Between Productive and Non-Productive Activity

The Extent of the Market

The limits within which a man can exchange his economic output for the products of others directly influences the potential extent of his occupational specialization. The wider the boundaries, the greater the opportunities for specialization and hence the greater the potential efficiency of his efforts.

If exchange is to take place, it is essential that physical protection be available to the persons and property of the parties concerned. Hypothetically, the extent of trade might be viewed as a function of the degree to which such protection exists.

The family furnishes protection to its members and concurrently provides for the regular distribution of goods and services among them. The physical protection of goods and services of persons acting outside their families is a function of political power.

Some African societies, as we have seen are characterized by low levels of political power dispersed in the hands of political non-specialists. In such societies there is likely to exist a relatively high level of individual independence and the acceptance by society of "self help" over relatively broad areas of activity. Such an institutional framework would seem less likely to provide the sustained protection necessary for continuous exchange than a society in which political power is stronger and more formally organized.

Regularized patterns of trade existed widely in indigenous African societies. Markets - in the sense of "market places", where relatively large numbers of people engage in frequent economic exchanges at a fixed location - were not nearly so ubiquitous. The extent to which market places function in a society might be viewed as an indicator of the extent to which its trade has developed and a measure of the economic and social significance of that trade.

In general, the existence of market places seems to imply a breadth of political power which was not compatible with political informality and decentralization. This hypothesis is evidenced (indirectly) by accounts of an absence of markets in a

number of pre-contact societies characterized by low levels of political power. These include the

Bulu (Horner, 1962, p. 175)  
Iraqwa (Winter, 1962, p. 460)  
Kipsigis (Peristiany, 1939, p. 149)  
Kpe (Ardener, 1956, p. 48)  
Lele (Douglas, 1963, p. 51)  
Lugbara (Middleton, 1962, p. 561)  
Nuba (Nadel, 1947, p. 74)  
Nuer (Evans-Pritchard, 1940, p. 88)  
Nyiká (northern) (Prins, 1952, p. 57)  
Sonjo (Gray, 1962, p. 470)  
Tonga (Miracle, 1960, p. 40)

Where markets did exist in conjunction with a general absence of specialisation and formalization of political power, they indicated an elongation of political power in the social activities which accompanied them.

The markets of the Tiv provide an example. Tiv markets, like those in other societies, required police and judges. Individuals who through these offices could gain control of a market could achieve a degree of political power which was difficult to attain by alternative means in that segmented society. The Tiv market leaders received tribute, settled local disputes and sometimes acted as mediaries between tribal segments in a manner which superceded the power normally compatible with Tiv tribal organization (Bohannan, 1958, pp. 62-3).

For the southern Kikuyu, who were probably chiefless in pre-contact times, feuds and fighting were stopped on market day, and markets were policed by members of the warrior age grade. These markets formed focal points for inter-district combinations (Middleton and Kershaw, 1965, pp. 19, 31). Similarly, for the otherwise autonomous clans of the Konkomba, markets formed the basis for political ties between them (Tait, 1958, p. 183).

The Ibo probably constituted the most important example of political decentralization accompanied by highly developed market places. Ibo markets, we are told, became symbols of unity for this politically uncentralized people and effective links binding the society together. Certain individuals acquired power to offer protection for those travelling to a market, and laws were made at market places which were binding on these outside the immediate community (Green, 1947, pp. 12, 151, 210, 232).

But a greater degree of political formalization seems more compatible with the development of markets. Thus, there are accounts of the existence of markets in pre-contact times among various

societies which were politically formalized and hierarchical. These include the

- Ashanti (Lystad, 1958, p. 131)
- Bamum (McCulloch, 1954, p. 62)
- Buganda (Mair, 1934, p. 130; Roscoe, 1911, p. 456)
- Busoga, (Fallers, 1960, p. 49)
- Dahomey (Herskovits, 1938, vol. 1, pp. 51-58, vol. 11, p. 4)
- Digo (Prins, 1952, p. 57)
- Ewe (Manoukian, 1952, p. 19)
- Igala (Forde, et. al., 1955, p. 84)
- Kossi (Skinner, 1964, p. 111)
- Nupe (Nadel, 1942, p. 377)
- Ruanda (Maquet, 1961, p. 22)
- Swahili-Speaking, East Coast (Prins, 1961, p. 64)
- Yoruba (Biobaku, 1957, p. 5; Forde, 1951, p. 8)

It seems relevant that despite the widespread occurrence of markets throughout West Africa, the Nomadic Fulani are said to have established none (Dupire, 1962, p. 335). Nor do there seem to have been markets among the acephalous Tallensi of northern Ghana (Portes, 1945, p. 12) or the Kpe of the coastal Cameroons (Ardener, 1956, p. 48).

Outside West Africa there are accounts of markets in pre-contact times among the politically centralized Buganda, Busoga and Ruanda, and there is evidence of a high level of internal trading activities suggesting the possible existence of markets among the Lozi of Northern Rhodesia (Gluckman, 1941, pp. 71-78) and the Nyasaland Ngoni (Read, 1956, p. 105). Among the coastal tribes of North-eastern Bantu, markets are reported to have functioned among the politically formalized southern groups (Digo) but not among the uncentralized northern (Duruma, Giryana). (Prins, 1952, p. 57).

Markets were by no means found in every society with a highly developed political system, however, as evidenced by the absence of markets among the Basuto, Bemba, Bunyankole, Bhaca, Toro, and Wolof. The meagre development of markets in South and Central Africa is particularly evident. The absence of markets despite the existence of formalized patterns of external and internal trade under such circumstances might be explained in part by social emphasis on warfare and predation, and by well developed substitutes for market distribution such as "feudal-type" or kinship exchange systems.

#### The Accumulation of Capital

Accumulations of economic output can be used to facilitate man's productive efforts. This applies potentially to the environment of the traditional society as well as to more economically advanced communities. For an agriculturalist the possession of surplus food makes possible the creation or expansion of a centrally controlled labor supply. This may occur through the extension of his family or through transfers to unrelated workers. The control of many workers can lead to specialization and to the creation of durable capital in the form of fences, shelters, canoes, and works of irrigation. Similarly a surplus of cattle for a herdsman can make possible selective breeding.

The absence of a surplus, on the other hand, may force continuation of relatively unproductive forms of subsistence agriculture.

But the accumulation of economic output necessarily facilitates further accumulations. And control over wealth provides potential control over human activity both within and beyond the family. Such economic control, therefore, constitutes a potential ingredient for political power.

In societies which lack centralized political power various means are evident whereby the ability to accumulate wealth in private hands is restricted. The Nuer, for example, are constantly called upon to share their possessions (Evans-Pritchard, 1940, p. 91):

A man does not acquire more objects than he can use. Were he to do so he could only dispose of them by giving them away. It is true that cattle can be amassed, but . . . when a herd has reached a certain size the owner - if one may speak of an owner of a herd in which many people have rights of one kind or another - is morally bound to dispose of a portion of it by either himself marrying or by assisting a relative to do so.

Similarly, for the politically uncentralized Lugbara, it was a basic duty of those who grew food to share it with others, and today wage earners in that society are held to a similar obligation to share (Middleton, 1962, p. 568). Of the Tiv it was said "It is dangerous for any man to become prominent; he is immediately the target of mystical and physical malice. Tiv egalitarianism is more

concerned with whittling everyone down to the same size than in giving everyone the same chance" (Bohannon, 1953, p. 31).

Nadel writes of the many institutionalized demands upon the property of Nuba men. He notes that expenditures for kinship obligations "may well reduce a large inheritance to practically nothing." In respect to combined levies for kinship and ceremonial obligations "the scale of expenditure corresponds in every case to the wealth of the individual . . . ." The "repeated dissipation or destruction . . . tends to prevent the emergence of permanent economic inequality" (1947, pp. 67-8).

Of the Karimojong it is said that "the immediate use of surplus cattle is repeated marriage," and a large herd is usually fragmented in a single generation (Dyson-Hudson, 1966, pp. 50-1, 84). Among the Tallensi, greater than average wealth is used, it is said, to acquire many wives "thus progressively increasing the drain on its resources" the balance being "eventually distributed by inheritance" (Fortes, 1940, p. 250). Of the Ghiga, where inheritance is divided among all of a man's sons, it was noted that the richest man in the area had 18 living wives and more sons "than anyone had accurate count of" (Edel, 1957, p. 110).

Accounts of the Kipsigis (Manners, 1962, p. 494), the Pakot (Schneider, 1959, p. 152), the Tonga (Colson, 1951 p. 138), the Nomadic Fulani (Dupire, 1962, p. 342), the Jie (Gulliver, 1955, ch. 3), and the Bulu (Horner, 1962, p. 185) seem in accord.

The situation is fundamentally different in societies characterized by more formally developed political authority. There, the provision of economic goods for the power holders at a level at least marginally above that enjoyed by their subjects is universal. In the kingdom of Ruanda, though the society's economic surplus was small, a highly developed system of compulsory labor, tribute, and taxation made possible the establishment of a centralized administration. Maquet writes that the function of the administrative system, and the recognized aim of Ruanda

society, was to provide the rulers with consumption goods (1961, pp. 104, 145).

In the Lozi kingdom of Northern Rhodesia, the monarchs administered an efficient system of tribute collection and utilized the proceeds to construct a network of canals (Gluckman, 1951, p. 63). In Buganda a portion of the royal revenues were used to build and maintain roads (Hair, 1962, pp. 139-41). Kuper's account of the Swazi presents a comparable situation (1947, pp. 144-8).

In between the politically uncentralized and the formalized hierarchies, examples of intermediate positions of accumulation potential might be identified. The Alur is characterized by Southall as an "embryonic state" with a blend of lineage segmentation and political specialization. Among the Alur there were chiefs who became economic risk bearers in the sense that reciprocity obligations might lead them to financial loss, and their success was dependent on their ability to balance receipts and disbursements (1953, pp. 7, 80-2, 150). The Mandari also were characterized by a sort of semi-centralization. They lacked a highly developed hierarchy but recognized chiefs who held hereditary office. These chiefs could make enforceable claims on their subjects for labour, and they held a majority of the community's cattle. But it is stated that they were obliged to give economic assistance to the needy to the extent of their ability to do so (Buxton, 1958, p. 82).

Although accumulation potential seems necessarily to accompany an effective holding of political power, it is by no means assured that such a potential will be used to increase human productivity. More frequently the power to control the labour and possessions of others has been used for luxury consumption by the political elite and for warfare. Military aggression although it shifts ownership rights is not likely to increase per capita output. It could do so if subject populations were brought under a sufficiently centralized control so as to raise the incidence of



specialization and, hence, overall output per person. Mere raiding for chattels would not accomplish this. Nor would slave raiding as long as the captives were widely dispersed among the conquerors as was common in sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, the destruction of life and property accompanying warfare and the use of military power to support a relatively unproductive officer class would both militate against increases in human productivity.

A few instances were noted above in which the creation of public works accompanied the centralized direction of political power. Even these, however, were largely the by-products of military needs. The real potential for economic growth in African societies lay in the period in which military goals were suppressed and when trade and accumulation could be turned toward economically productive ends.

The Imposition of External Political Rule

Various economic advantages accrued to African societies as a result of the seizure of political control by European powers: (1) There were improvements in human productivity through medical aid, public health services, and educational programs. (2) Political pressure was applied in varying degrees to force a greater amount of productive activity from the population than would probably have been forthcoming in its absence. (3) Market areas were extended as pacification programs replaced the slave trade and as emphasis was placed upon the creation of transportation facilities. (4) An increased rate of saving was forced upon the inhabitants, part of which was made available for the creation of productive capital. (5) Improved productive techniques were introduced and cultural impediments to economic change were in varying degrees removed. (6) The colonies were often provided with at least some privileged treatment in their trade with the metropole.

It was simultaneously possible for the colonial government to deprive the indigenous population of land, natural resources, and rights to engage in specific occupations. The metropole also could impose upon the African population unfavorable (i.e., less than competitively determined) terms of trade for their labour or the products of their labour. These could offset to varying degrees the economic advantages enumerated above.

When the colonial powers established political control over the societies of Africa they endeavored to suppress activities which violated their standards of justice or expediency, and they demanded administrative efficiency -- especially in respect to revenue collection. To pursue these ends with the limited means at their immediate disposal, the European powers sought to exert political control through relatively unambiguous lines of authority over areas which were almost always larger than those which had been

controlled by indigenous political authority. Simultaneously, new judicial institutions were established to provide for enforcement of new laws and punishment of new offenses.

Thus, contact with Europeans affected both the "goals" of the traditional societies and the administrative apparatus which operated to facilitate the attainment of these goals. Warfare, slavery and territorial expansion were examples of goals proscribed by colonial rule; while the expansion of per capita income through new technology, wider markets, and guarantees of peaceful possession of property became more readily attainable.

Some of the African societies brought under the control of European power possessed systems of political authority in which power holdings were diffused, intermittent and applicable to relatively few areas of daily life. In such societies political rights, powers and privileges were held by individuals and collectivities which were not political "specialists." Traditionally, these individuals or groups had interacted on a non-hierarchical basis to define the community's goals, allocate prestige and resources to facilitate attainment of those goals, and control deviant behavior. Independent expressions of self-help had been permitted to control areas of activity which in most societies are directed by the polity.

The control of such a society by the colonial regime required the establishment of new channels of administration and adjudication. It was also likely to require an extensive restructuring of social objectives. The implementation of such political innovations necessarily disrupted the fragile balance previously maintained in the traditional patterns of power limitation and authority distribution. The apparatus whereby political power had been exerted from within kinship, village or age-set structures was impeded and ultimately destroyed as individuals were deprived of traditional rights, duties and powers. Other individuals (indigenous or foreign) were appointed to wield power and administer new procedures. These other

sought to attain new objectives through the utilization of new means. Hence the scope and character of their authority could not be tailored to fit compatibly with the complicated web of inter-related social structures of the traditional society. The fragile pattern of traditional institutional interrelationships which had been based on common acceptance of social values rather than on formal legal sanctions underwent widespread and thorough disruption. (See Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, 1940, p. 16 and Middleton and Tait, 1958, pp. 25-6).

In purely economic terms the result of such disruptive contact was likely to prove advantageous. The extensive destruction of traditional institutions could remove major impediments to the acceptance of new educational standards, the adaptation of new techniques, and the acquisition of new goals for occupational performance, status, and consumption. This might be evidenced from accounts of rapid economic change among the Chagga (Gulliver, 1962, p. 443); the Ibo (Forde and Scott, 1946, p. 74), the Iteso (Burke, 1964, p. 124), the Kipsigis (Manners, 1962, p. 500f) and the Tonga (Colson, 1962, A, p. 219).

On the other hand there are examples of politically uncentralized societies which maintained militant resistance to the intrusion of European culture. When permitted by circumstances to remain in relative isolation, such societies represent some of the most economically backward communities on the continent (see Schneider, 1959).

In other African societies a formal apparatus for the administration of political authority existed at the time of European arrival. In such societies significant political power was held by designated individuals who functioned as political and administrative specialists and operated according to prescribed channels of authority. Where such a political apparatus existed it could be utilized by the colonial government to facilitate pacification and to assist in the collection of revenue.

Instead of encouraging the suppression of such institutions, they could be adapted to the new political and administrative needs. The British developed the most formal conceptualization of this process in their system of "indirect rule" which was adopted, for example, in parts of Nigeria and Uganda. (See Perham, 1937, p. 346).

In most instances the European powers chose to administer their colonies by more "direct" means. Indigenous institutions were viewed as obstacles to development, rather than as means for the accomplishment of new ends. But some assistance of indigenous personnel was everywhere needed to supplement the efforts of expatriate civil servants. When individuals with influence in the traditional societies were available and willing to cooperate, their services were utilized. (See Duffy, 1959, p. 287; Mair, 1936, pp. 209, 235, 242; Skinner, 1964, p. 157, p. 157; Thompson and Adloff, 1960, p. 348.)

Sometimes the traditional political system could be of substantial aid to the colonial power in terms of economic achievement. In the kingdom of Buganda, the officials of the indigenous monarchy were retained by the British as salaried administrators. The native system of compulsory labour was preserved, though it was required that workers be paid for their services, and labour obligations were made commutable into cash. Land was made freely transferable. Under these circumstances, the exertion of power by traditional chiefs assisted the colonial government in their search for both labour and funds for public works. The Ganda, infused with the merits of economic achievement, travelled widely to trade and in search of employment. Later they became frequent cultivators of cotton for export and efficient employers of labor in their own right (Powersland, 1947).

The Mambwe of Northern Rhodesia have been credited with more rapid economic advance under British rule than their neighbors, the Bemba, Lozi and Ngoni. To a significant degree this achievement might be associated with the substantial success with which a coordinated system of "indirect rule" was implemented among the Mambwe. By contrast, much less success seems to have been evidenced in efforts towards integrated indirect rule among the Bemba, Lozi and Ngoni (Gann, 1958, p. 73; Gluckman, 1951, pp. 59-60; Gluckman, 1958; Richards, 1939, pp. 19-26; Tew, 1950, p. 113; Watson, 1958, pp. 36-8, 174-5).

On the other hand, traditional political systems left in full or partial operation presented problems for the colonial administrations. These problems might be principally "political" in nature as when traditional rulers, backed by European power and freed from customary restraints, became autocratic or excluded efficient and deserving groups of the population from participating in the government (Ashton, 1952, p. 220; Coleman, 1960, pp. 161-2; Lloyd, 1966, pp. 388-90, 397-8). But economic dimensions were entailed in the retention of indigenous political institutions, as well. Nepotism, the conservatism of an entrenched aristocracy, excessive emphasis on hereditary rights of office holders, the preservation of a caste system or feudal land tenure patterns constituted potential obstacles to efficiency and change (Burke, 1964, pp. 94-7; Gluckman, 1951, p. 60; Kuper, 1947, pp. 138-9; Richards, 1960, ch. xv; Smith, 1960, pp. 291, 306; Taylor, 1962, p. 70).

Most political units in pre-contact Africa which have been referred to as states (because of their possession of formalized and differentiated political authority) have been described in the literature as "segmentary" or "pyramidal", rather than hierarchical. Such states are divided into relatively autonomous components with comprehensive political power exerted within each segment but with relatively weaker administrative ties between them. In a segmentary state each segment retained considerable autonomy except during unusual circumstances such as a war. Such an authority structure was less adaptable to pressures for general economic change applied by the colonial administrators than a hierarchical state (such as Buganda). The preservation of the political institutions of the segmentary state (in modified and more flexible form) would have required relatively large numbers of expatriate officers and high levels of administrative skill and patience on the part of the colonial administrators.

In most instances, the destruction or near destruction of the traditional political institutions was effected. Indigenous systems of political authority were replaced by bureaucracies designed and controlled from overseas. There have been various repercussions to these changes. Perhaps the most significant has been the elimination of traditional controls exercised over political power holders by the members of the affected societies. Under colonial regimes the definition of societal goals, the distribution of rights and privileges in support of those goals, and the control of deviant behaviour were placed under expatriate authority and frequently were isolated from any effective articulation of the will of the African citizenry.

Independence meant that political power in the new African states was to be based on a totally different foundation. The post-colonial regimes received initial support from widespread popular sentiments of nationalism and anti-colonialism. But such bases for support were not sufficient for the continuing legitimization of political leaders in countries whose heterogeneous social components had been united only on artificial grounds by the colonial regimes.

The new political leaders, finding it difficult to maintain effective support from such a diverse base, used their control over administrative positions as the basis for a continuation of this power (see Pye, 1966, p. 20). The political parties which had been created during the independence campaigns were awarded monopoly status and were allowed to decline. Voters were called on less and less frequently to give their approval to the acts of the office holders. As a widening gulf appeared between the people and the holders of political power, centrifugal tendencies were evidenced by manifestations of tribalism, and the military coup became a commonly used technique for the changing of governmental personnel.

In economic terms several problems were manifest in these developments. Racial minority groups, including some of the most active participants in economic affairs, frequently found themselves outside the new nationalistic movements and their economic potential thereby impaired. Moreover the weakening of ties between leaders and the general citizenry precluded an effective public voice in respect to proposed changes, and, hence, prevented effective public control over the official holders of widespread economic power.

Simultaneously, the mobilization of popular support for the economic policies of the government was prevented. Finally, the invasion of the bureaucracies by holders of political power gave reason to fear a decline in the administrative efficiency of the governments (see Eisenstadt, 1964; Riggs, 1963).

To an important degree the basis for these problems may be traced to the nature of the traditional political systems and to the nature of the political changes wrought by the colonial administrators. There was a level of non-formalization of political functions which, when present in a traditional society, precluded modernization without extensive destruction of indigenous institutions, including the political institutions. Elsewhere political institutions could be modified (albeit with patience and difficulty) to provide vehicles for change. Such institutional modifications, when achieved, could provide a basis for popular acceptance and stability. Even where effective ties between the power holders and the citizens were allowed to deteriorate, the elements of the old political apparatus might in some instances still provide the key to new and more viable instruments of coordination and communication in African political activity.

#### Summary and Conclusions

In the societies of sub-Saharan Africa in pre-contact times there were significant differences in the degree to which political authority was formalized, in the degree to which political roles were differentiated, and, consequently, in the degree to which political power existed and could be utilized.

A relatively high degree of formalization of authority was likely to have been accompanied in the pre-contact society by (1) political pressures limiting leisure, (2) facilitation of the operation of market places, and hence encouragement of greater efficiency with regard to economic activity, and (3) institutions overriding redistributive mechanisms and thus facilitating economic accumulations.

In many instances the economic potential of politically formalized societies seems to have been offset by high levels of non-productive expenditure on warfare and luxury consumption. In the absence of political formalization and differentiation, however, the potential for growth in per capita income in the



indigenous environment would seem to have been relatively low. In societies organized without political formalization there was typically a strong social emphasis on redistribution and equality. Under such circumstances, such growth of total output as did occur would seem likely to be accompanied by proportionate increases in population rather than in per capital wealth.

The nature of colonial rule affected the long run economic growth potential of the African society. The imposition of administrative procedures and new societal goals could prove widely disruptive in a traditional society in which political authority had existed without formalization and role differentiation. Such disruption could create a situation favorable to rapid change (but involving, presumably, a relatively high psychic cost to the generations experiencing the change).

Where differentiated institutions of formalized political authority pre-existed the colonial administrators, the attitude of the administrators to these institutions influenced the direction and impact of the societies' economic change. The adaptability of the indigenous institutions, the durability of traditional prerogatives and powers, the nature of expatriate commitments to the preservation of existing institutions, and the skill with which the forces of change were applied by the colonial administrators determined the nature of the impact.

The widespread failure to provide for the adaptation of traditional governmental apparatus may have contributed to the existence of national governments in Africa today which are relatively weak both in respect to an acceptable basis for their own legitimacy and in respect to effective means for implementing the policies (including economic policies) which they believe warranted.

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