

Making Africans

Labour and Language in African Society and History

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Prologue

I am happy to be part of the initiation of the idea of an annual NEW YEAR SCHOOL for the pan-African organization of Trade Unions, the ITUC, here in Lome. It will provide a forum for Trade Unionists to share ideas and discuss themes and topics of interest to them as members of organized labour in Africa today. The challenges faced are many and varied, but our education on the issue of the origins and role of labour in African history is crucial for our appreciation of the challenges of the present. I have elected to link in my discussion labour and language because these two historical realities of African society have been closely intertwined from the depths of time.

Introduction; Defining Keywords

Historically, in the social evolution of humanity, possibly the two most decisive factors in human progress have been labour and language; as humans we are unique in two ways, we are tool-bearing and talkative animals.¹ These two conditions have been however contingent on the production and reproduction of human life itself. But this relationship is dialectical, or more simply stated, interdependent. Labour has determined the material basis for the maintenance of human life and the proliferation of the species, while language has been the prime cultural product of humanity which has enabled the creation of a social communication system on which the rest of culture is constructed. Language carries and expresses culture.

Labour is purposive or goal-directed exertion to produce directly or indirectly means of sustaining life for the producer. In simple societies much of this process is aimed at producing immediately useful products for the labourer. As societies become more complex, purposes of exchange increasingly assume pre-eminence. But even then, its central or primary object remains the sustenance of life. Labour uses means of labour - tools and techniques - in the process of the expenditure of labour-power. In other words, Labour-power or the ability to produce labour (value forming labour) is materialized only by its exercise; it is manifested as labour only through work and this is invariably done in concert with other factors or forces of production like land, capital, immaterial inputs and congealed labour or value-added inputs. As

¹ F. Bodmer. *The Loom of Language*. George Allen and Unwin. London. 1943. P.17.

long as a given group barely produces enough to keep itself in life, there are of course no surpluses and it is impossible for a division of labour to emerge; under these conditions social differentiation is effectively impossible. Increases above subsistence level production yield surpluses. At this point, the question of the differential apportionment of surpluses becomes real. In other words, the production of surpluses opens the door to possible social differentiation not only in terms of the objects of labour, but also to appropriation and consumption. Social stratification, elites, classes and the state become with time and circumstance materially realizable. We can from this point on say that the labour of producers have two different destinations; firstly to satisfy the subsistence needs of the producers (necessary labour) and secondly to maintain the dominant groups or socially influential elements (surplus labour). Slowly and incrementally, as a long historical process, we have a situation in which in the process of production, humans are differentially located and engaged in relations of production independent of their will. These different positions we can describe as classes. The argument is that; once humans had constructed their cultural infrastructure and elevated themselves above the station of animals, their collective life became socialized in such a way that the surplus-labour or surplus-product of one becomes an enabling material condition for the existence of the other. As society evolved the productivity of labour was initially minimal but so also were the wants and needs to which such productivity was directed. Furthermore, in that early period, the portion of society that lived on the labour of other parties was very small in comparison to the mass of direct producers. Along with the progress in the productivity of labour, that small portion of society increases in both absolute and relative terms. Labour has thus been the main growth engine of human progress throughout history.

I share the view that the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of the immediate essentials of life. This has a dual character; firstly, the production of the means of existence, food, clothing, habitation and of the tools necessary for that production; secondly, the reproduction of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social organization under which the people of a particular historical epoch live is determined by both kinds of production. The lower the development of labour and the more limited the amount of its products, the more limited also the total product of the society. Early societies were dominated by extended kinship groups and notions of consanguinity. However, within this structure of society based on kinship groups the productivity of labour increasingly develops, and with it individualized property and exchange, differences of wealth, the possibility of utilizing the labour power of others, and hence the basis of class contradictions. Through the dynamics of the contention around social surpluses the solely kinship-based older society is slowly organizationally eroded. The state emerges as the totality of social organizational forms through which the elements of dominant and influential groups assert their shared interests and maintain the existing order for the apportionment of social surpluses.

As Weberian Ideal Types or conceptual models with which we measure and assess reality (to see how reality fits the model or the model fits reality), we can categorize historical epochs on the basis of the dominant forms of labour in the relations of production. In the earliest societies with little or no social differentiation and where production achieves only subsistence levels there is logically and consequently no class formation. In slave societies, the producer of labour is owned together with the other means of production by the master/mistress; in feudal societies the producer of labour is not owned but is obliged to alienate in part his/her labour to the owner of the means of production under customary practice or

tradition, in return the producer of labour may be given usufruct rights to some means of production, and enjoy the patronage and/or protection of the owner of the means of production, *corvée* or forced labour exacted by a social superior or local authority for little or no pay or *in lieu* of taxes is close to this. Debt bondage also called bonded labour, or peonage, bears on the use of people as pawns or surety against debt. The debtor or a succedaneum, frequently a child, provides labour and services to the bondsperson. Invariably, it was unusual for the debtor to extricate himself or herself out of the debt and oftentimes the debt is passed on to subsequent and succeeding generations. History, both in space and time, provides variations of this.² In capitalist society the producer of labour is free but obliged by circumstances of non-ownership of means of production to sell his/her labour as a commodity to the owners of means of production. An important implication of all of this is that we can say that in history, in time perspective, as we move nearer our times, the producer of labour is steadily freed but tied by force of historical circumstances to conditions of exploitation beneficial to the owners of the means of production. The above schema is however, broadly-speaking, theoretical. In practice societies are never wholly or purely one formation or the other, they have rather mixed features. This unevenness in social historical formations implies that features of different historical era invariably coexist at any given time in societies.

In much of Africa, in the last few centuries of the pre-colonial period, while all the above elements of labour production coexisted with some types slowly replacing others, we can say that Africans preponderantly worked in groups which were only limitedly market-oriented; short or long-distance. The traditional forms of labour were organized in families and lineages, age-sets and other types of collective labour under the direction and call of political institutions. The producers of labour carried out their obligations as dictated by custom and time-tested social practice.

Few thinkers have attempted to provide us with a coherent general typology of the social role of labour in early society and the evolution of its social organizational functionality as succinctly as Engels succeeded in doing in his; *The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man* (1876). I first read it in the 1960s and cannot recall that it made an unusual impression on me beyond the recognition of the philosophically perfect fit it made within the broad outlines of the body of ideas he and Marx were famous for, and which were intensely in vogue in the 1960s, before the onset of scholastic anti-Marxist reaction in the late 70s. His exposition was not intellectually presumptuous, abstruse, dense or detailed and never ventured beyond what was understandable by both *erudités* and the general reader. He reasoned that, in the earliest stages of human civilization, work was confined to simple undiversified tasks involving the most basic of human needs: food, child care, and shelter. A division of labour resulted only when some individuals exhibited skills in singular or particularized tasks, such as hunting or fishing.

He intellectualized the idea of labour as routinal and diurnal activities in which human beings not only transformed and appropriated the provisions of nature, but furthermore that these procedures also shape and condition the very formation and evolution, of the human species. He noted that, labour, much more than being the source of all wealth, is “the first fundamental condition of all human life, and to such an

² For African considerations see; Toyin Falola and Paul E. Lovejoy (eds). *Pawnship, Slavery, and Colonialism in Africa*. Africa World Press. Trenton. 2003.

extent that in a sense we must say; it created man himself.” In other words humans make themselves. His argument was that, “the decisive step in the transition from ape to man” occurred when tree climbing led to the differentiation between the functionality of the ape’s hands and feet, thus leaving the hands free when walking, i.e. the evolutionary emergence of bipedalism and hence the facilitation of an upright carriage. The hands in time became specialized for other purposes like eating, the fabrication of shelter, and physical defence; the ability to “grasp cudgels.” Yet most importantly, “no ape’s hand has ever fashioned the crudest stone knife,” Engels pointed out in his essay that;

The first operations for which our ancestors gradually learned to adapt their hands during the many thousands of years of transition from ape to man could have been only very simple ones. The lowest savages, even those in whom regression to a more animal-like condition with a simultaneous physical degeneration can be assumed, are nevertheless far superior to these transitional beings. Before the first flint could be fashioned into a knife by human hands, a period of time probably elapsed in comparison with which the historical period known to us appears insignificant. But the decisive step had been taken, *the hand had become free* and could henceforth attain ever greater dexterity; the greater flexibility thus acquired was inherited and increased from generation to generation. Thus the hand is not only the organ of labour, *it is also the product of labour*. Only by labour, by adaptation to ever new operations, through the inheritance of muscles, ligaments, and, over longer periods of time, bones that had undergone special development and the ever-renewed employment of this inherited finesse in new, more and more complicated operations, have given the human hand the high degree of perfection On the other hand, the development of labour necessarily helped to bring the members of society closer together by increasing cases of mutual support and joint activity, and by making clear the advantage of this joint activity to each individual. In short, men in the making arrived at the point where *they had something to say* to each other. Necessity created the organ; the undeveloped larynx of the ape was slowly but surely transformed by modulation to produce constantly more developed modulation, and the organs of the mouth gradually learned to pronounce one articulate sound after another. Comparison with animals proves that this explanation of the origin of language from and in the process of labour is the only correct one. ... First labour, after it and then with it speech – these were the two most essential stimuli under the influence of which the brain of the ape gradually changed into that of man, which, for all its similarity is far larger and more perfect. Hand in hand with the development of the brain went the development of its most immediate instruments – the senses. Just as the gradual development of speech is inevitably accompanied by a corresponding refinement of the organ of hearing, so the development of the brain as a whole is accompanied by a refinement of all the senses. The eagle sees much farther than man, but the human eye discerns considerably more in things than does the eye of the eagle. The dog has a far keener sense of smell than man, but it does not distinguish a hundredth part of the odours that for man are definite signs denoting different things. And the sense of touch, which the ape hardly possesses in its crudest initial form, has been developed only side by side with the development of the human hand itself, through the medium of labour.

He added that; “thus the human hand is not only an organ of labour, it is also its product.” It is with the development of the hands through labour that man’s control over nature starts, for this enabled and

augmented human mental capacity since the routine use of both hands expedited the continual determination of “new, hitherto unknown properties in natural objects.” It permitted labour to be more productive and complex which, in turn, expanded the grounds for human association and cooperation; thus, “evolving human beings arrived at the point where they had something to say to one another.” In effect, for Engels, speech itself emerged out of and along with labour. His estimation was that; “first labour; afterwards, and then along with it, speech” contributed to the evolution of the ape brain into the human brain. The development of the human brain was in turn accompanied by the development of all the senses. These effectively contributed to the development of both speech and labour. For Engels, then, the key distinction between apes and the human race was not speech but labour. Labour really begins according to Engels, with the “fabrication of tools” for hunting and fishing. For Engels, it is the artefact ion and use of tools not thought which characterized human labour. It seems to me that, valid as the argument fundamentally is, the interaction of labour, tools, thought and speech, and the symbiotic and simultaneous development of these factors and their interconnectedness needs better emphasis; the interdependent nature of the relationship of labour to the other factors must also be underlined. It is the production of culture not simply tools which need emphasis.

Culture is the sum total of human creativity and labour and includes both intangible and tangible outcomes of human endeavour which are generationally learnt, altered, modified, transferred or abandoned. Cultural traits, artefacts and the knowledge to produce these are in many instances, societally, autonomously developed. But oftentimes such traits and artefacts are culturally adopted through interaction with other cultures. This ability for culture production and reproduction (including labour) remains the prime difference between humans and other animals. Instinctual impulses feature less in human behaviour than in the behaviour of the rest of the animal world, although to some extent some animals and lowly creatures have limited learning abilities. Thus culture makes humanity but dialectically the opposite is equally true, in that, humans create culture.

Thinking which is closely related to learning involves the ability on the bases of previously learnt responses to meet and resolve novel questions, problems and challenges without undue recourse to methods of trial and error. But human thought, rationalization in its most simple systematic form is inconceivable without language. Most higher animals especially *Mammalia*, produce sounds and use body-language which communicate to other individuals of their kind basic messages such as sexual drives, hunger, thirst, anger, fear, pain, pleasure or displeasure. But such signals are very rudimentary and dominated but instinct. No animal has thus far developed a system of communicative signals and vocal expressions, i.e. language, as complex and sophisticated as humans. In humans this skill has been developed to the point of producing abstract and ideational notions.

Language is the central feature of culture and has been with us since the emergence of *homo sapiens* and culture. It is a supreme cultural marker of our humanity. It is a technique, which shapes our understanding of the world around us and which permits us to socially communicate our perceptions and understandings. It captures our perception of the external world, itemizes and provides a historical record of the speakers. The languages we speak shape the way we think. Language does not merely express thought. Indeed, the structures in languages (without our knowledge or consent) shape the very thoughts

we wish to express. Language of course initially emerged as speech and only very much later acquired written representation. Its limits as an oral form are currently well appreciated by scholars.

However, some scholars tend to glorify orality. Orality as a predominant social condition cannot carry a modern, politically sophisticated, societally discerning, and intellectually empowered populace both at the individual or collective levels of social life. Historically, societies transit from predominantly oral cultures to literate ones. This process runs parallel to the shift from pre-modernity to modernity. In today's world, there are hardly any exclusively oral social or cultural systems except in very small and isolated corners of the globe. All societies are more or less in transition from orality to literacy. In this transition process, or proto-literacy as it is sometimes called, some achieve the transit much faster than others. The theory of the "Great Divide"; in simple terms the idea that literate and non-literate societies are separated by the gulf between civilization and pre-civilization has since the 1960s come under enormous critical scrutiny. I am of the view that mass-literacy as opposed to elite-literacy; mass-literacy - "the proletarianization of literacy" - in the languages of the masses is crucial for progress and modernity.

Writing African Languages

I have elsewhere argued that the emergence of the majority of African languages as written forms, as we know them today, have come through the agency and the work of Christian missionary groups.³ These written products were crafted in the service of evangelization, in order to win souls through the Christian biblical message in the languages closest to the hearts and minds of Africans. Much of this has taken place in the last 150 years. This work has been accomplished by a wide variety of Christian missionary groups. But, Christian missionaries have not been the only movers and shakers in this work. Islamic influences have also been significant as historical agents for the rendering of African languages into writing. This latter body of writing has come to us as *Ajami* and include historically work which goes back several centuries before the commencement of Christian missionary renditions of African languages into literary expression.

Any count of the record of writing and literacy in Africa in the early period must start with a recognition of the traditions of classical Egyptian hieroglyphs dating back to the 4th millennium BC. Proto-Ge'ez inscriptions or Ethio-Semitic representations in Ethiopia and Eritrea in Epigraphic South Arabian, an alphabet shared with contemporary societies in South Arabia have been dated to the 9th century BC. After the 7th and 6th centuries BC, variants of the script arose, slowly developing into the Ge'ez alphabet. The earliest inscriptions of Ethiopic/Ge'ez date to the 5th century BC. Ge'ez literature in a serious sense begins with the civilization of Axum and the Christian evangelization of Ethiopia in the 4th century AD, during the era of Negus Ezana 2nd. The script, in evolved form, continues to be used for Amharic and Tigrinya. Old Coptic emerged out of Late Egyptian and the Demotic variety of Late Egyptian.⁴ Egyptian began to be written using infusions of the Greek alphabet in the first century and transformed into Coptic. Coptic in turn blossomed as literary expression from the second to thirteenth centuries. Nubian script sometimes described as Meroitic script has been described as "the oldest written sub-Saharan

³ K.K. Prah. *Winning Souls Through the Written Word*. In, *The Role of the Missionaries in the Development of African Languages*. CASAS Book Series No. 66. Cape Town. 2009. P.1.

⁴ Egyptian began to be written using the Greek alphabet in the first century. The new writing system became the Coptic script, an adapted Greek alphabet with the addition of six to seven signs from the Demotic script to represent Egyptian sounds the Greek language did not have.

language” dating from the Meroe period from 300.BC to AD.450.⁵ The Meroitic script was an alphabetic script rooted in Egyptian hieroglyphs. It appears to have been developed during the Napatan Period (about 700–300 BC). The Meroitic script was used to write the Nubian languages of the kingdoms which succeeded Meroe and Napata. The Arabic script came with the Arab conquest of North Africa. Over the centuries it has been employed to write a number of African languages (*Ajami*). This latter tradition was fairly widespread from the Sene-Gambia area latitudinally across the Sahel to the East African coast where it was represented in Kiswahili. In Southern Africa, specifically in South Africa, the first Afrikaans literature was produced in *Ajami* by the descendants of Cape Malay slaves.⁶ In the Sahel proper, the old Tifinagh and Tamashek script is still limitedly used and so also are the Hodh magical alphabets, cave inscriptions in Kita and Bamako in Mali and specific Dogon and Bambara ideogrammes.⁷ There have been a number of other indigenously emergent scripts in the pre-colonial period. Some of them run into the colonial era (19th and 20th centuries). Currently, known ones count upwards of thirty scripts. They include, as better known cases, the Vai script and varieties of this for Loma, Kpelle, Bassa, and also Oromo, Hausa, Bete, Eghap, Fula, Nko, Masaba and Shumon.⁸

When is a Man/Woman a Man/Woman

Scholars have for long been wrestling with the question; “when is a man a man.”⁹ Most researchers agree that tool-making is the decisive criterion; but so is language. The memorable tangential response of Raymond Dart to this question has been that the earliest culture-creating hominids were “trembling on the verge of humanity.” To this response Bohannan asks; “when did they topple over?” Here he turns to L.S.B. Leakey who makes the argument that the tipping point was when tool-making was done to a pattern.¹⁰ But one can still query when this actually happened. Bohannan’s cogent answer to all of this and more is to suggest that, “we must begin to think of ourselves as part of a continuum.”¹¹ Furthermore, the answer does not lie in essentially biological, physical or “racial” determinants but in the application of labour in production to a pattern; knowledge which can be taught and learnt. The reasoning is pressed home with the rationale that; “... Man and the culture by which he lives evolved together. The development of one cannot be considered in the absence of the other. Man did not evolve a large brain and then discover culture ... Neither did pre-man first discover culture and then evolve because of the

⁵ See BBC news report; “Three ancient statues, engraved with a little-understood sub-Saharan language, have been unearthed in Sudan (November 2008). The ram statues symbolize the god Amun, and include the first discovery of a complete royal dedication in Meroitic script, only found before in fragments. It is the oldest written sub-Saharan language and dates from the Meroe period of 300BC to AD450. Archaeologist Vincent Rondot said it was “an important discovery”, but the inscriptions were hard to interpret. The statues were discovered three weeks ago at el-Hassa, a site close to Sudan’s 50-odd Meroe pyramids, about 200 km (120 miles) north of the capital Khartoum. Mr Rondot said: “It is one of the last antique languages that we still don't understand. ... We can read it. We have no problem pronouncing the letters. But we can’t understand it, apart from a few long words and the names of people.” Experts are working on deciphering the inscriptions, using previously found fragments. “It is absolutely essential to understand it... We only need to read the last words remaining on the inscription,” Mr Rondot, was quoted as saying by news agency AFP” From *BBC News*. 17Hrs GMT. 18th December, 2008. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7786361.stm>

⁶ K.K. Prah. Language, Literacy and Knowledge Production in Africa. In, Brian V. Street and Nancy H. Hornberger (eds). *Encyclopaedia of Language and Education*. Second Edition. Volume 2. Springer. New York. 2008. P.35.

⁷ See, Abdoulaye Barry. Language Development in West Africa. Paper presented at an International Seminar Concerning Current Problems of Linguistic Research in African and Caribbean Countries. UNESCO, Paris, 24-27 Sept. 1985. UNESCO,SHS-85/CONF.713/3. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0006/000664/066408eb.pdf>

⁸ K. K. Prah. Op cit. P.36.

⁹ Paul Bohannan. *Africa and Africans*. The Natural History Press. New York. 1964. P.48.

¹⁰ Ibid. P.49

¹¹ Ibid. P.50

benefits it conferred. Rather the development of culture and the evolutionary changes in the beast counteracted one another. Man and culture are indistinguishable historically ...”¹² In other words, it is the dialectics of nature; the evolutionary inter-complementarity of humans and culture which has underpinned the biological and cultural progression of humans.

Although anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* evolved somewhere between 100,000-150,000 years ago, humans did not exhibit developmentally modern behavioural patterns and display discernible thought processes until around 50,000-40,000 years ago. This cultural growth is described by some scholars as the “creative explosion.” It emerged as a dramatic manifestation and expression of symbolic thought; by which is meant the ability to identify, create and effectuate representations of things which are socially shared. This ability is unrealizable without the agency of language. Evidence of the development of modern human behaviour includes fishing, the production of bone tools and implements, the use and production of artwork for decoration and embellishment as individualistic representations and social signals. Evidence in several sites, of a flowering of the creative mind began to appear, in southern Africa south of the Zambezi River in the Middle Stone Age, about 70,000 years ago. These sites have sophisticated bone tools, backed blades, a carefully selected set of raw materials for stone tools and the use of a punch and chiseling technique. Since 1991, researchers led by Christopher Henshilwood have been working at the Blombos Cave site in the Southern Cape of South Africa. The treasure-trove of artefacts found there include sophisticated bone and stone tools, fish bones, and the extensive use of ochre. Ochre is universally used as a source of colour for ceremonial and decorative purposes. The Blombos Cave layers containing used ochre have also been dated to 70,000 to 80,000 years ago. More recently, in April 2004, a cluster of deliberately perforated and red-stained shell beads dating to the Middle Stone Age were found. These have been appraised and interpreted to be personal ornaments or jewelry for the occupants of the Blombos settlement. The best and most likely interpretation of these finds, and numerous others throughout Africa, is that the growth of the human symbolic thought was a slow process that continued throughout the Middle Stone Age in Africa.¹³

It has been suggested that arguably the Blombos Cave site is currently the location of the earliest potential evidence for complex human culture beyond the most elementary forms. Two pieces of ochre engraved with abstract designs were found. This can be regarded as the world’s first known art, along with shells pierced for use as jewelry and a complex toolkit including a range of finely crafted bone tools; subtly crafted bifacial stone points, ochre pieces engraved with thoughtful and deliberate designs, engraved bone fragments and evidence for what can be thought of as “modern” subsistence practices including fishing. The find is dated to around 70,000 years ago (over 30,000 years before anything equivalent is found in

¹² Ibid. P.50

¹³ V. Mourre, P. Villa and C. S. Henshilwood. Early use of pressure flaking on lithic artifacts at Blombos Cave, South Africa. *Science*. 2010. 330: Pp.659-662. Francesco d’Errico, Christopher Henshilwood and Peter Nilssen. An engraved bone fragment from c. 70,000-year-old Middle Stone Age levels at Blombos Cave, South Africa: Implications for the origin of symbolism and language. *Antiquity*. 2001. 75:309-318. C. S. Henshilwood, J. C. Sealy, R. Yates, K. Cruz-Uribe, P. Goldberg, F. E. Grine, R. G. Klein, C. Poggenpohl, K. van Niekerk, and I. Watts. Blombos Cave, Southern Cape, South Africa: Preliminary report on the 1992-1999 excavations of the Middle Stone Age levels. *Journal of Archaeological Science*. 2001. 28(4):421-448. C. S. Henshilwood, Francesco d’Errico, Curtis W. Marean, Richard G. Milo, Royden Yates. An early bone tool industry from the Middle Stone Age at Blombos Cave, South Africa: Implications for the origins of modern human behaviour, symbolism, and language. *Journal of Human Evolution*. 2001. 41:631-678. K. Kris Hirst. Blombos Cave: Anatomically Modern Humans of the Middle Paleolithic. <http://archaeology.about.com/cs/humanorigins/a/blombos.htm>

Europe).¹⁴ It has been suggested that this presence of complex culture indicates the use of modern human language.¹⁵ A report published in 2009 on an additional thirteen pieces of ochre states that the results “suggest that symbolic intent and tradition were present in this region at an earlier date than previously thought.”¹⁶ The engraved ochre plaques, from Blombos Cave are unequivocally symbolic objects, even if we cannot directly discern the significance of the geometric design that the plaque bears; and it is dated to around 70,000 years ago. To evidence such as this can be added suggestions of a symbolic organization of space at the site of Klasies River Mouth, also near the southern tip of Africa, at over 100,000 years ago. Deacon indicated the existence of cultural features of Middle Stone Age Southern Africa as including humans decorating themselves with ostrich egg shell beads and amulets, as well as shells from river banks and the sea; specialised equipment for fishing and hunting, like sinkers, hooks, and bows and arrows; formal scrapers, which would have been used primarily for skin-working; formal graves for the burial of the dead, sometimes accompanied by goods and/or being covered with ochre-painted stones and a range of tools used for making the above artifacts, e.g. adzes (woodwork) and borers (beads).¹⁷ Paintings on stone slabs, found in Namibia, date from nearly 30,000 years ago. Numerous rock and cave paintings survive from widely separated areas on the African continent. They range from those of the San people, in southern Africa, to others dating from about 8000 BC in what is now the Sahara.

Out of Africa

Africa is the cradle of humanity. *Homo sapiens sapiens* emerged in Africa around 40,000 B.C. Using, mainly the insights of modern genomics, archaeology, but also linguistics, the current scientific position is that human beings evolved in Africa and then scattered to different corners of the globe. The understanding is that a relatively limited number of early Africans ventured forth through West Asia/the Middle East and went on to populate much of the rest of the planet. Studies conclusively prove what is now often called the “Out of Africa” narrative of global dispersal. In sum, evidence points to a human configuration, sourced in Africa, which radiates out of Africa, through the Middle East, into Europe, South Asia, East Asia, Australia and then into the Americas. Science, especially mitochondrial DNA research, archaeology and linguistics have thus come to authenticate the view that the genesis of humankind was in Africa. For adherents of creationist Abrahamic religious mythology the hilarious implication, so to speak is that, Adam and Eve (*Mitochondrial Eve*) were Africans and the Garden of Eden was Africa.

We also now know that, Africans have more genetic variation than any other group on earth. Recent studies suggest that the location where humans first evolved, is somewhere near the Namibia-Angola

¹⁴ “Oldest human skeleton found in Egypt”. Nazlet Khater man was the earliest modern human skeleton found near Luxor, in 1980. The remains was dated from between 35,000 and 30,000 years ago. The report regarding the racial affinity of this skeleton concludes: “Strong alveolar prognathism combined with fossa praenasalis in an African skull is suggestive of Negroid morphology [form & structure]. The radio-humeral index of Nazlet Khater is practically the same as the mean of Taforalt (76.6). According to Ferembach (1965) this value is near to the Negroid average.” The burial was of a young man of 17-20 years old, whose skeleton lay in a 160cm- long narrow ditch aligned from east to west. A flint tool, which was laid carefully on the bottom of the grave, dates the burial as contemporaneous with a nearby flint quarry. A. Thoma. Morphology and affinities of the Nazlet Khater man. *Journal of Human Evolution*. Vol 13, 1984. See, <http://wysinger.homestead.com/badarians.html>

¹⁵ Blake Edgar. Letter from South Africa. *Archaeology*. 61.2, March-April 2008.

¹⁶ Christopher S Henshilwood, Francesco d’Errico and Ian Watts. Engraved ochres from the Middle Stone Age levels at Blombos Cave, South Africa. *Journal of Human Evolution*. May 2009.

¹⁷ J. Deacon. Later Stone Age People and their Descendants in Southern Africa. In, R.G. Klein. (ed.) Southern African Prehistory and Palaeoenvironments. Balkema. Rotterdam. 1984. Pp.221-328.

coastal border area.¹⁸ Basing themselves on the generally accepted view that the highest level of genetic diversity is in the oldest population - the one that has had the longest to evolve; a team under Sarah Tishkoff of the University of Pennsylvania has concluded that, this location which is the homeland of some indigenous San communities, is “not surprising but it’s a very neat finding because the San have already been shown to have the oldest genetic lineages, suggesting they may be descendents of a population ancestral to all modern humans.”¹⁹ Human genetic diversity decreases the further one gets from Africa. People of African descent are thus more varied genetically than people of the Middle East, who are in turn more diverse than either Asians or Europeans. By the time early human migrations reached the Americas across the Bering Straits, genetic diversity had narrowed even further.

Interestingly, and most recently (2011) Quentin Atkinson has produced corroborative evidence for this from the angle of historical linguistics. Examining phonemic structures of language and using mathematical methods, Atkinson has found a logical and consistent pattern in about 500 languages from different parts of the world. He posits that a language in historical time uses fewer phonemes the farther it is from the source historical language. This pattern of diminishing diversity with distance is very similar to the well-known finding of decreasing genetic diversity with distance from Africa. Atkinson suggests that the origin of modern human language can probably be traced to South Western Africa.²⁰ The confluence of genetics and linguistics is crucial and beneficial to the reconfiguration of the African past. Blench has also been pioneering vital work of synthesis of archaeology, linguistics and genetics.²¹

Mitochondrial DNA evidence suggests a date for the common ancestor of the Neanderthals and modern humans at around 465,000 to 600,000 years ago. The common ancestor of humans and Neanderthals lived in Africa and subsequently migrated to Europe and Asia. Our human ancestors, *homo sapiens sapiens*, however remained in Africa until about 100,000 years ago, and then went out of Africa to populate the rest of the earth. Neanderthals are supposed to have died out around 28,000 years ago. The logic of DNA tracings point to the fact that any humans whose ancestral groups developed outside Africa have some Neanderthal genetic material in them – between 1 and 4 per cent of their genome. Roughly, Neanderthal DNA is 99.7 percent identical to modern human DNA, in comparison to about 98.8 percent for modern humans and chimps. In other words, humans and Neanderthals mated and produced hybrid progeny. Vestiges and residues of that genetic cross-breeding remains in “non-Africans” today (Neanderthals did not live in Africa, which is why sub-Saharan African populations have no trace of Neanderthal DNA). Interbreeding is presumed to have occurred about 60,000 years ago in Middle Eastern areas close to Africa, where the two types for a time overlapped. This is where science stands now.

In an earlier formulation, the idea of human dispersal out of Africa was obliquely suggested in 1859 by Charles Darwin in his *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* and again in 1871 in *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*. Darwin’s contemporary and acolyte Thomas Huxley who was described by Darwin’s detractors as “Darwin’s bulldog”, in his; *Evidence as to Man’s Place in Nature* (1863) argued that based on the evidence of the distribution of primates, the gorilla and the chimpanzee, were probably the

¹⁸Victoria Gill. Africa’s genetic secrets unlocked. *BBC World News*. 1st May, 2009.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Q. D. Atkinson. Phonemic Diversity Supports a Serial Founder Effect Model of Language Expansion from Africa. *Science*. 15 April 2011: Pp. 346-349.

²¹ Roger Blench. *Archaeology, Language, and the African Past*. Alta Mira Press. Lanham. 2006.

last shared ancestor of people and apes that lived in tropical Africa. In the *Descent of Man*, Darwin postulated that human ancestors would be found in Africa. Darwin suggested that the progress of our earliest hominid ancestors were the consequence and combined result of bipedalism, freedom of the hands, reduction of the canine tooth and face, expansion of the brain, and last but not least, the increasing use of tools, in other words the application of labour. Darwin and Huxley were stridently and often virulently castigated. Indeed, the publication of *The Descent of Man* provoked a public uproar and oppositional din, and was roundly denounced from pulpits across Britain and beyond. This ecclesiastical animus in the 19th century to an idea that blatantly opposed the Creationist account in Genesis was to be expected. Till today, creationism has a loud and powerful constituency especially in the United States.

The Earliest Tool-making

The separation of humans from our ape ancestors is thought to have occurred about 15-20 million years ago and the split between humans and the common chimpanzee was only 6-8 million years ago. About 2.5 million years ago our hominid ancestors manufactured the first tools from stone. Without doubt, today, studying the African Stone Age helps us understand the cognitive, behavioural, and social changes that characterize the evolution of humans.

Some researchers periodize the early Stone Age in two components, the Oldowan (2.5 million years ago up until 1.8 million years ago) and the Acheulean. The Oldowan represents the earliest known evidence for the manufacture of stone tools beginning 2.5 million years ago. The period is characterized by the technology of flake production. Our human ancestors fractured stones with other stones (a technique called hard-hammer-percussion) to produce sharp edges that were used to cut and scrape meat and vegetable matter. The Oldowan has traditionally been attributed to the first member of the genus *Homo*, *Homo habilis*, who also appears in fossil records of a little more than 2 million years. There is some evidence, however, to support the idea that *Australopithecus* (about 4 to 1 million years ago) also manufactured stone tools. The Acheulean (1.8 million years ago to about 100,000 years ago) is defined by the presence of large bifacial tools, such as handaxes, cleavers, and picks. These tools are shaped by removing flakes from around the edges of a large piece of stone and the repetitiveness of their form suggests that they were intentionally crafted for a purpose – tool manufacture- and recognized conceptually as such by its users. Soft-hammer (wood or bone) percussion may have been used to shape these bifaces in the Late Acheulean. Such skilling, techniques and transfer is beyond the cognitive ambit of instinct and involves thought. The production of such implements, crude and rudimentary as they are to set patterns implies learning, a process which requires reflection, and there is no reflection without language.

Some paleoanthropologists argue that the elaborate shaping that is characteristic of handaxes in the Late Acheulean emerging about 600 thousand years ago represents shared styles; language was required to pass on the skills and knowledge required to create these repeated and routinized techniques. The Acheulean's earliest occurrence is dated to 1.8 million years ago in East Africa. In general, Acheulean technology and industry are attributed to *Homo ergaster/Homo erectus*.²² The later stages of this period was characterized by

²² This period is characterized by the absence of large bifaces, an emphasis on prepared core and/or blade technology, and the presence of points that may have been used as tips for hunting weapons. Dates for this period in both Eastern and Southern Africa seem to converge at about 300 thousand years ago. This period is also

microlithic technologies, first dates to about 40 thousand years ago, and represents hunter-gather populations of modern *Homo sapiens*. Stone inserts were crafted by initially creating small elongated and narrow bladelets and then shaping them into a variety of geometric designs. These pieces are described by archaeologists as “backed” because the shaped edge is blunt and used to haft the piece into a wooden or bone implement. Other technologies and skills which mark Later Stone Age peoples are artefacts and technical ingenuities such as carved bone harpoons, the bow and arrow, rock paintings and etchings.

Starting roughly about 10 thousand years ago, food producing communities began replacing and assimilating many hunter-gatherer populations throughout much of Africa and some other parts of the world. By about 3.5 thousand years ago, iron tools were superseding stone implements. Still, for much of human history there has been a preeminent reliance on stone as the medium for tools; not only for subsistence and the proliferation of humans, but also as technologies and techniques which constantly feature in knowledge production and social interaction. Technological changes in the tools of labour represented by lithic assemblages are important to study because they reveal details about human adaptation to environment, cognitive development and evolution, and shifts in social and cultural behaviour over time. The upshot of this discussion is that for most of the existence of *homo sapiens* Africa has been in the lead of culture production. Much of this period has technologically been based on the production of stone tools and implements but also the emergence of speech.

The Agricultural Revolution

Around 5000 B.C. the Agricultural Revolution occurred. This had profound consequences for humanity. In the subsequent millennia, agriculture transformed most of the small and footloose groups of hunter-gatherers that had hitherto dominated African history, into sedentary and pastoralist societies, with some developing built-up villages and towns, which increasingly overtime modified their natural environment as a result of specialized food-crop cultivation, increasingly sophisticated food storage techniques that allowed extensive surplus food production. Cumulatively, these developments provided the basis for the appearance of population densities and settlements. Some element of specialized and complex labour differentiation, trade, the development of art, centralized administrative systems and political structures, hierarchical ideologies and structured systems of knowledge and myth; in short more complex cultures and increasing social stratification became possible and indeed followed.

Once the agricultural revolution kicked in and started expanding, a variety of plants were slowly selected and bred. The domestication of plants and animals meant the “intentional manipulation of genetic material of select plant and animal species.” Plants that possessed undesirable features were abandoned. Three prime areas in Africa independently developed agriculture: Egypt, the Ethiopian Highland area and West Africa. Africans domesticated sorghum, teff, pearl millet, finger millet, earthpea, cow pea,

associated with many developments that might be characteristic of modern human behaviour, including the use of symbolic resources (ochre and beads), the structuring of living space, the exploitation of marine resources, and complex composite tool technology (which refers to the process of gluing and/or binding stone inserts into wooden or bone hafts).

groundnut, African rice, yams, oil palm, watermelon, ensete, okra, khat, noog, kola nut, coffee and other crops; the donkey, guinea fowl and the cat.²³

The transition to food production required considerable labour adjustment and diversification on the part of the domesticators. As hunters or foragers they could have followed the herds, or their movements to coincide with some aspect of herd behaviour or plant ripening. Once herd-keeping had been established as practice, there were attendant existential conditionalities attached, because it became variously personal or collective holding that had to be attended to, on a more or less continuous basis. In similar fashion, if you are selecting specific types of plant-life, and seeds and cultivating them it soon becomes necessary to protect them from eventual rivals, human or animal. In other words, once you take responsibility for the herd and the preparation/harvesting of plants, you become constrained by having to look after them. One of the major social consequences of plant domestication was an increase in the number and size of settlements. Another change would have been the apportioning of space in kinship or individual terms to meet perceived needs and requirements.

It is often argued that agriculture gave humans more control over their food supply, but this has been disputed by the finding that nutritional standards of early Neolithic populations were generally inferior to that of hunter gatherers, and life expectancy may in fact have been shorter, in part due to diseases. Sedentary groups were able to reproduce at a faster rate due to the possibilities of sharing the raising of children in such societies. The children accounted for a denser population, and encouraged the introduction of specialization by providing diverse forms of new labour. The development of larger societies seemed to have led to the development of different means of decision making and to governmental organization. Food surpluses made possible the development of social elites who were not otherwise engaged in agriculture, industry or commerce, but dominated their communities by other means and influenced collective decision-making. Blench writes that; "It is no accident that West Africa is the source of most of Africa's major domesticated species; the elaboration of agriculture took place in West Africa and was spread to the rest of the continent with the expansion of Niger-Congo speakers. Although there was an analogous but separate development of agriculture in Ethiopia, the rather special ecological conditions of the Ethiopian Plateau meant that its impact elsewhere in the continent was considerably less."²⁴

In ancient Egypt, the principle on which their agriculture depended was that the Nile flooded each year about the same time; the flood provided water for the fields; and as the water receded, a rich deposit of silt was left behind to renew the soil. Thus, the areas along the Nile were rich enough to support agriculture and settlements.

In the lower Nile valley, Egypt, and parts of Ethiopia, water tenure involved the creation of social organizational structures which managed water. But it is doubtful that these can be regarded as hydraulic societies in the total sense that Karl Wittfogel argued in his *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total*

²³ J. Clutton-Brock. Animal Domestication in Africa. In, J.O. Vogel. Encyclopedia of Precolonial Africa. AltaMira Press. Walnut Creek, CA. 1997. Pp.418-424. See, Roger Blench. Op cit. P.243. See also, H. Epstein. The Origin of the Domestic Animals of Africa. (2 Vols.) Africana Publishing Corporation. New York. 1971.

²⁴ Roger Blench. Ibid. P.203.

Power (1957); centralized states with elaborate agro-managerial bureaucracies. Water systems and basins attracted population concentrations because the achievement of subsistence levels was easier here than less-watered areas, and the labour threshold for surpluses were easier to reach. The differential apportionment of social surpluses in riverine basins therefore opened the way more easily to the emergence of stratified societies and state formation. But pastoral and sedentary societies with no abundance of water (Lacustrine or riverine) but regular rains also often reached surplus thresholds and slowly socially differentiated. Ceremonial, rituals and celebrations on large and increasing scale cannot be institutionalized without adequate social surpluses.

Urban entities in early Egypt grew out of the development of agriculture and the emergence of the state as the unifying and predominant form of political organization. However, even as early as 3500 BC, human concentrations were linked to the population centers of smaller administrative districts. Prior to about 5000 BC, the inhabitants of the Nile Valley were mostly foragers who practiced fishing, fowling, hunting and collecting wild plants. Historical and social memory was chronologized early in Egypt. We are reminded that the Egyptians observed the approximate coincidence of the reappearance (just before dawn) of Sirius or Sothis, the Dog Star after a period of invisibility, with the beginning of the Nile inundation and chose the date on which this phenomenon occurred in that year (July 19th of the Julian Calendar) as their calendrical New Year's Day. The initial date was deduced backwards from A.D. 139, when the synchronization again occurred, by a logical computation which was generally accepted.²⁵ The Egyptian calendar, recognizing the factual incompatibility of the lunar months with the solar year, divided the latter into artificial calendar-months each of thirty days, and added on five feast-days in an attempt to make up and reach the required total. These inter-calary periods, however, still fell short of the Sothic year (approximately the same length as the solar year) by one day in four years (hence our Leap Year); with the result that the synchronization was exact only once in 1460 years. But what seems likely that the calendar was already in use in the time of the Pyramid-builders of the Egyptian IVth dynasty, who were computed on the basis of native annals to have lived before 2775 B.C.; which of course took the calendar back to an initial Sothic synchronism not later than 2781 B.C. and more probably not later than 4241 B.C.²⁶ It is interesting to note that the Dogon people of the Bandiagara Plateau in Mali are connected to this Egyptian lore. Their oral astronomical traditions held and transmitted by their priesthood appear to date back to 3200 BC. The Dogon have long held that the star Sirius, some 8.7 light years away, has a companion star which is invisible to the human eye. They state that this companion star, which rotates on

²⁵ Mortimer Wheeler. *Archaeology from the Earth*. Penguin Books. 1954./1956 edition. P.41. Wheeler observes that; "In recent years this view has been modified; on cultural grounds (the absence of writing) so early a date as 4241 is now regarded as impossible." Ibid. K. Marx notes that; The necessity for predicting the rise and fall of the Nile created Egyptian astronomy, and with it the dominion of the priests, as directors of agriculture. "Le solstice est le moment de l'année ou commence la crue du Nil, et celui que les Egyptiens ont du observer avec le plus d'attention.... C'était cette année tropique qu'il leur importait de marquer pour se diriger dans leurs opérations agricoles. Ils durent donc chercher dans le ciel un signe apparent de son retour." [The solstice is the moment of the year when the Nile begins to rise, and it is the moment the Egyptians have had to watch for with the greatest attention ... It was the evolution of the tropical year which they had to establish firmly so as to conduct their agricultural operations in accordance with it. They therefore had to search the heavens for a visible sign of the solstice's return.] (Cuvier: *Discours sur les révolutions du globe*, ed. Hofer, Paris, 1863, p. 141.) In, Karl Marx. *Capital*. Volume One. Part V: The Production of Absolute and of Relative Surplus-Value. Chapter Sixteen: Absolute and Relative Surplus-Value. Footnote 6.

²⁶ M. Wheeler. Ibid.

its axis, has a 50-year elliptical orbit around the visible Sirius. They also have some knowledge of the rings of Saturn, Jupiter's satellites and other detailed astronomical data.

Early Egyptian village settlements date to around 3800 BC. By about 3600 BC, some of these villages began to develop into towns. Low Nile flood levels prompted consistently some location of village communities in closer proximity to the river. Such demographic concentrations developed into urban settlements with linkages to religious institutional cults and shrines. These latter institutions became centers for inter and intra village solidarities and were possibly structured on kin-based lineages and clans. Such centres developed into early administrative areas, where food exchanges and trade transactions among the villages and more distanced trade were organized. Many of these centers were related through trade with Nubia, the Western Sahel and south to the region of the Great Lakes in Eastern Africa.²⁷

Craftsmen and artisans in ancient Egypt were often trained and skilled labourers. Corvée and slavery were the prominent forms of labour. Regarding corvée, due to the use of a census, the Pharaonic state could make useable estimates of the potential labour force available and required all able men to work on state projects for a period during the annual inundation. Although the corvée was a feature of life throughout much of the Pharaonic period, it appears to have reached a peak of organization during the Middle Kingdom. This system also provided rations for considerable numbers. Thus, the potential for discontent was also reduced. Custom also allowed a man to pay another to undertake the corvée obligation on his behalf, or provide labour from his own estate. Some state and temple owned estates were under special exemption decrees. Slavery appears to have gained prominence in ancient Egyptian labour relations during the Ptolemaic period. Forced labour was used in quarrying and mining. Such labour, frequently in quarrying and mining was explicitly spelt out as a punishment reserved for criminals. The prospect of

²⁷ "Egypt was connected with the lands to the south by three main routes: *Darb el-Arbeen*; The Forty Days' Road links Asyut in the Nile Valley to El Fasher in the Dar-Fur Province of Sudan, a journey of 1,082 miles (1,721 km). It was the shortest and safest distance to travel into western Africa. The route was strung along several green and lush oases such as El Kharga. Dozens of towns, forts, and way stations spread over the depression floor. From El Fasher, another route led west through Dar-Fur, toward Lake Chad, ending in the area of Kano (northern Nigeria), at the upper reaches of the Niger River Basin. *Sunt (Elephantine) Road*; It began at Sunt (Aswan), and went to El Fasher in Dar-Fur, by way of the oases of Selima and Bir Natrum. *Sunt (Elephantine) Road* also branched off to Semna West, where the caravans and expeditions transferred to ships in order to continue the journey to beyond the trading post established at Kerma, above the Third Cataract. In the same way, protective escorts and merchandise bound for Egypt from the south disembarked at Semna, where the fortress of Semna South was built (during the Middle Kingdom) to protect the travelers. During the time of the New Kingdom (1550-1070 BCE), this highway was in continuous use all the way throughout the Roman Era, as many inscriptions on the Rock of Offerings at Sunt (Elephantine) testify. *Nile Valley to The Red Sea*; There were also several trade routes to the Red Sea from the Nile Valley, which allowed trade with Asian countries. Some of these ports along the Red Sea were: Suakin, Massawa, and Zeila. Other routes led south from the Nile Valley towns of Asyut, Qus, Sunt (Aswan), and Dongola, via the oases of Kharga, Dakhla, and Dunqul, to Kufra, Dar-Fur (western Sudan), and Kordofan. Another route led from the western oases of Egypt to Bilma and Gao, but this seems to have fallen out of use by the 10th century. In Sudan, the main transversal route, running from east to west, started from Suakin, to Sennar or Qerri, and continued across Kordofan to Darfur and on to the countries in West and Central Africa. The whole African continent was known to the people of Egypt, as confirmed by Herodotus, who reported that Necho, King of Egypt, c. 600 BCE, sent an Egyptian ship with Phoenician sailors to circumnavigate Africa, and that they returned safely and reported of their endeavour. The cast of the scene from the temple of Ramesses II at Beit el-Wali in Kush, shows clearly what the Egyptians were accustomed to importing from interior Africa. They brought leopards, leopard-skins, giraffe-tails, giraffes, monkeys, cattle, antelopes, gazelles, lions, ebony, ivory, ostrich-feathers and eggs, fans, bows, and shields made of fine hides. The other African products that Egypt bought included: wood, gum, incense, carnelian (a stone prized both as jewelry and for arrowheads), haematite (red ochre), amazon stone, perfumes, oils, selected cattle, and dogs." See, <http://www.egypt-tehuti.org/articles/interior-africa.html>

such punishment eventually led to the oath “If I am lying, may I be sent to the quarries.” As well as criminals, wartime captives could also end up in forced labour, and their roles were more varied, including personal, agricultural and, quite often, military service. Talented men, however, were not bound to menial roles, and a few foreigners, descendants of these captives, rose through the ranks over time, the military being one Egyptian institution where social mobility was possible. The first strike in recorded history apparently took place during the reign of pharaoh Ramses III’s 29th year.²⁸ In the latter part of the 20th Dynasty, due to deteriorating economic conditions labour became restive, several other strikes also occurred. Nile Valley urbanization continued apace and this led around 3200 BC, to the emergence of some sub-national unity. About 3100 B.C. Egypt developed a centralized government. The states of Upper and Lower Egypt were unified, and the civilization of Pharaonic Egypt emerged. The Sahara was in its last wet phase, before it became a desert. Around 1800 B.C. Agriculture, urbanization, and centralized political authority were now established in many parts of North Africa. In the period around 1720 B.C. the Hyksos invaded the Middle Kingdom (2100-1720 B.C) and governed Egypt until about 1500 B.C. They introduced the horse (*Equus caballus*). The Berber civilization arose in North Africa around 1000 B.C.

It was not only human beings that evolved in Africa. Goods, objects, and tools developed there as well. Africa also provides evidence of how early people struggled to control their environments, moving beyond a gathering economy to domesticate and herd animals and cultivate food crops. Agriculture created the basis for what can be called the beginning of civilization. Humans could live in settlements, domesticate animals, cultivate plants, and develop ideas about political institutions. Associated with the development of agriculture was a greater knowledge of the environment, the use of more efficient tools, even when they were originally made of stone, and the formation of religious ideas shaped by nature.

In sum, three major characteristics defined the agricultural revolution. Firstly, plants and animals were domesticated. The ability to domesticate animals led to pastoralism, a dependence on animals as sources of food, notably milk and meat. Secondly, the revolution entailed the use of improved tools and led to the shift from stone to metal. Thirdly, society was transformed in many ways: The increased availability of food led to population increases; complex societies that had to be managed; and division of labour allowed many people to devote themselves to agriculture and other occupations. The development of farming and the domestication of animals enabled a number of Neolithic groups to establish settlements that grew into villages and towns. This led to the abandonment of a peripatetic lifestyle and the formation of settled village communities and states.

Early African Civilizations

Besides Egypt, there were other prominent civilizations in the Nile valley. While Egypt grew in the Lower Nile valley, other states flourished in the Upper Nile valley in present-day Sudan. Both Kush and Aksum emerged in the regions of the Upper Nile and Ethiopia. The Kush kingdom, centered successively at Napata and Meroë, was created by Nubians on the upper reaches of the Nile. This area was very closely connected with Ancient Egypt. Trade relations began during the Old Kingdom (ca. 2700-2180 B.C.). However, by 1500 B.C., Egyptian rule had been extended over the Nubian hinterland, as far as the fourth

²⁸William F. Edgerton. The Strikes in Ramses III’s Twenty-Ninth Year. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*. Volume X, Number 3, July 1951, pp. 137-145.

cataract, in order to establish greater control of trade. Egyptian control lasted for about 500 years, during which time Egyptian temples, towns, and influence emerged in the region. The Nubian ruling class also adopted Egyptian culture, especially religion and art. When the Egyptian dynasties of the New Kingdom (1570-1100 B.C.) collapsed, Egypt withdrew from the Nubian area. Starting from about 1000 B.C., the Nubian rulers began to build a new kingdom that the Egyptians called Kush. The Nubian rulers of Kush continued to use Egyptian ideas and culture.²⁹ By 730 B.C., they had become independent and powerful enough even to invade Egypt and establish unified control at Thebes. Known as the Ethiopian dynasty, the Nubians governed Egypt for sixty years. This political control did not translate into any cultural change, as the Nubian leaders worshipped Egyptian gods, used the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, and even inscribed their names on Egyptian temples.³⁰

The Nok culture appeared in Nigeria around 1000 B.C. and died out around 500 AD. Iron use, in smelting and forging for tools, appeared in Nok culture in about 500 BC. The Nok people who created the sculptures were agriculturalists who smelted iron and lived in villages on the Jos plateau between the Benue and Niger rivers. It has been suggested that the society eventually evolved into the later Yoruba Kingdom of Ife and possibly other formations in the area. Considerable artistic similarities exist between Nok art and early Yoruba and related art forms. Indeed, later brass and terracotta sculptures of the Ife and Benin cultures show significant similarities with those found at Nok area.³¹

The Aksumite Empire emerged around the 4th century BC and achieved prominence by the 1st century AD. It became a major player in the commerce of the Ancient world. Aksumite rulers facilitated trade by minting their own currency. The state dominated the Kush kingdom in its twilight years and had a regularly hand in the politics of the kingdoms of southern Arabia. Aksum extended its dominance in the

²⁹ The pharaonic tradition persisted among a line of rulers at Meroe, who raised stelae to record the achievements of their reigns and erected pyramids to contain their tombs. These objects and the ruins of palaces, temples, and baths at Meroe attest to a centralized political system that employed artisans' skills and commanded the labour of a large work force. A well-managed irrigation system allowed the area to support a higher population density than was possible during later periods. By the first century B.C., the use of hieroglyphs gave way to a Meroitic script that adapted the Egyptian writing system to an indigenous, Nubian-related language spoken later by the region's people. Meroe's succession system was not necessarily hereditary; the matriarchal royal family member deemed most worthy often became king. The queen mother's role in the selection process was crucial to a smooth succession. The crown appears to have passed from brother to brother (or sister) and only when no siblings remained from father to son. http://www.shsu.edu/~his_ncp/Sudan.html

³⁰ By the sixth century, three states had emerged as the political and cultural heirs of the Meroitic kingdom. Nobatia in the north, also known as Ballanah, had its capital at Faras, in what is now Egypt; the central kingdom, Muqurra, was centered at Dungula, the old city on the Nile about 150 kilometers south of modern Dungula; and Alwa, in the heartland of old Meroe in the south, had its capital at Sawba. In all three kingdoms, warrior aristocracies ruled Meroitic populations from royal courts where functionaries bore Greek titles in emulation of the Byzantine court. The earliest references to Nubia's successor kingdoms are contained in accounts by Greek and Coptic authors of the conversion of Nubian kings to Christianity in the sixth century. According to tradition, a missionary sent by Byzantine empress Theodora arrived in Nobatia and started preaching the gospel about 540. It is possible that the conversion process began earlier, however, under the aegis of Coptic missionaries from Egypt, who in the previous century had brought Christianity to the Abyssinians. The Nubian kings accepted the Monophysite Christianity practiced in Egypt and acknowledged the spiritual authority of the Coptic patriarch of Alexandria over the Nubian church. A hierarchy of bishops named by the Coptic patriarch and consecrated in Egypt directed the church's activities and wielded considerable secular power. The church sanctioned a sacerdotal kingship, confirming the royal line's legitimacy. In turn the monarch protected the church's interests. The queen mother's role in the succession process paralleled that of Meroe's matriarchal tradition. Ibid.

³¹ It is not known what the people called themselves or identified themselves, so the culture was named after the town of Nok where the first art/archaeological object was found.

region with the conquest of the Himyarit kingdom. Aksum became the first major empire to convert to Christianity and was regarded as one of the four great powers of his time along with Rome, Persia and China. The glory of Aksum was restored in the central highlands of the Ethiopian interior during the twelfth century. Before 1150 A.D. Ethiopia was an isolated Christian state; a farming feudalistic society dominated by a landed aristocracy. It was militarily fragile and incapable of contending with its southern neighbours in the Shoa plateau. However, from the early eleventh century, its fortune began to change, partly on account of the reestablishment of the Red Sea trade. The Ethiopian economy now broadened to include participation in regional and international trade, as it established trade links north of Adulis (the old port of Aksum) through which it reached the islands of Dahlak. Two resourceful dynastic lines emerged as the Zagwe and the Solomonid. The recrudescence of Ethiopia was due to the emergence of the Zagwe dynasty, founded by Takla Haymanot. The Zagwe overthrew the Aksumite line, centralized power, established a new capital at Adefa, built a large army, promoted Christianity, and embarked on aggressive territorial expansion that led to the creation of the Ethiopian kingdom.

Next in importance to the Agricultural Revolution was the revolution involving the use of iron. One of the early centers of iron production, in about 500 B.C., was Meroë, the capital of the powerful kingdom of Kush in the area of modern-day Sudan. Other major centers for iron metallurgy during this period in Africa include areas around Lake Victoria. Other than in the Nile valley, Africa did not experience a Bronze Age as an intermediary period between its Stone Age and Iron Age. The jump to an Iron Age was a spectacular technological innovation. More advanced weapons and tools were produced. State formations were created and dominance over the neighbouring Stone Age cultures was effected. The use of metal accelerated the pace of the growth of civilization, contributing in no small measure to the improvement of the techniques and methods used to farm and to domesticate animals. Iron is far superior to stones for making tools, ornaments, and weapons. It is also more pliable and flexuous than stone. It provided a way for producing a wider variety of items of various shapes and sizes used in combination with wood, sharpened to a desired edge, decorated, and refined.³²

It is generally currently assumed - with contention and dissension - that the Bantu as an ethno-linguistic group originated in West Africa.³³ The supposition is that the earliest speakers were riverine people who cultivated yams and oil palms. With mobility by canoe and population growth on account of successful agricultural practices, Bantu speakers began to spread across Africa and, by 1000 B.C. they inhabited most of the regions south of the equator. Their progress was not in mass migrations but rather incremental and intermittent spurts of migration. The cause of this movement is related to population increase, superior

³² Both copper and bronze were used in Ancient Egypt. Copper was mined in Sinai, in Egypt, as far back as 4000 B.C.

³³ R. Blench. Op cit. Pp. 135-136 summarizes the situation as follows: "Bantu, far more than other groups of Niger-Congo, has been the subject of conflicting attempts at historical interpretation. Guthrie (M. Guthrie. *Some developments in the prehistory of the Bantu languages. Journal of African History* 3 (2):273:82. 1962 and *Comparative Bantu: An Introduction to Comparative Linguistics and Prehistory of the Bantu Languages*. 4 vols. Farnborough. UK: Gregg International Publishers. 1967 – 1971) considered it to have originated somewhere in present-day Zambia. Greenberg (J.H. Greenberg. *Studies in African Linguistic Classification*. Branford. Con.: Compass. 1955) situated its homeland in northwest Cameroon, a view previously espoused by Johnston (S. Johnson. *A Comparative Study of the Bantu and Semi-Bantu Languages*. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1919 – 1922). These disagreements created problems for archaeologists and in the 1960s, various compromise models were developed to try and incorporate both views (R. Oliver. *The problem of the Bantu expansion. Journal of African History* 7:361-76. 1966). Guthrie is now considered simply to have been wrong, and the northwestern origin is generally accepted.

technological culture based on the emergence of the Iron Age, greater labour efficiency; the introduction of new crops, plant and animal domestication allowing increased food production; in short, greater surplus production. Societies typically depended on subsistence agriculture or, in the savannahs, pastoralism. Political organizational forms were typically stratified kingdoms or chiefdoms, both matrilineal and patrilineal forms obtained. Some of these became large and aggregated lesser political units. Early in their history, it is assumed, they split into two major linguistic branches, the Eastern and Western language branches. The Eastern branch migrated through present-day Zimbabwe and Mozambique, down to South Africa. The Western branch moved into what are now Angola, Namibia, and north-western Botswana.

A recent genetic study reports that; firstly, there was a displacement of male and female Khoisan-speaking groups in the southwest, since both the maternal and the paternal genetic pools were composed exclusively by types carried by Bantu language-speakers; Secondly, a clear bias in the admixture process towards the mating of male Europeans with female Sub-Saharan Africans; Thirdly, the assimilation of east African lineages by the southwest (mainly mtDNA-L3f and Y-chromosome-B2a lineages); and fourthly, signatures of recent male and female gene flow from the southeast into the southwest. The data also indicate that the western stream of the Bantu expansion was a more gradual process than the eastern counterpart, which likely involved multiple short dispersals.³⁴ In my view, the degree of physical migration of Bantu language-speakers may be exaggerated at the expense of the expansion of the culture of Bantu language-speakers. More plausibly, the more advanced cultures of the Bantu language-speakers assimilated the more primeval Khoi, San and related groups. This view will in time be tested for evidence. Ostler makes useful observations in respect of language but the points can be stretched to the wider area of culture including language; “Migration where a language community moves bodily, bringing a new language with it; Diffusion, where speakers do not actually move in large numbers but where speakers of one community come to assimilate their language to that of another with whom they are in contact; and Infiltration, which is a mixture of the former two.”³⁵

Great Zimbabwe is an Iron Age settlement and dry-stone monument near the town of Masvingo in central Zimbabwe. Great Zimbabwe is the largest of about 250 similarly dated mortarless stone structures in Africa, called collectively Zimbabwe Culture sites. The site of Great Zimbabwe covers an area of some 78 acres, with an estimated population of some 18,000 people at its heyday in the 15th century AD. The area has seen human settlement from farming communities from as far back as 500 AD. Great Zimbabwe is part of the Chifumbaze culture complex. The Chifumbaze complex is a widespread Iron Age culture, covering much of southern and eastern Africa. The earliest Chifumbaze sites are located near Lake Victoria, about 500 BC; the persistent pottery styles are considered to have lasted until about the tenth century AD. The famous terracotta Lydenburg head is an example of the distinctive Chifumbaze pottery style. The Chifumbaze people were mainly cattle-herding pastoralists, with subsidiary hunting and sedentary cultivation of some crops including millet and sorghum. The extent of the culture roughly parallels the extent of modern Bantu language, and so archaeologists generally believe that the

³⁴ S. Beleza, L. Gusmão, A. Amorim, A. Carracedo, A. Salas. The Genetic legacy of Western Bantu Migrations. *Human Genetics*. 2005. Aug; No. 117(4): Pp. 366-75. Epub, 2005, Jun 1.

³⁵ N. Ostler. *Empires of the Word: A Language History of the World*. Harper Perennial. London. 2005. (2006 Edition). P. 19.

Chifumbaze complex sites were built and occupied by Bantu speakers and thus representing the “great Bantu migrations.”

Not too far from the Nok area of Nigeria, another more recent culture of striking significance Igbo Ukwu (near Onitsha in southeastern Nigeria) flourished around the 9th and 10th centuries A.D. The site was first discovered in 1938 by a local resident villager Isaiah Anozie, but excavated by Thurstan Shaw in the late 1950s and 1960s. Elaborately cast bronze vases, bowls and ornaments were discovered, made with the lost-wax technique. The bronzes are among the earliest cast bronzes in sub-Saharan Africa. The bronzes were locally produced, but glass beads also found on site indicate that the society was connected to long-distance trade. Altogether, three sites have been excavated, revealing hundreds of ritual vessels and regalia castings of bronze or leaded bronze that are among the most inventive and technically accomplished bronzes ever made. They are among the earliest groups of West Africans to employ the lost-wax casting technique in the production of bronze sculptures. Evidence suggests that their metalworking techniques were characterized by unfamiliarity with techniques such as raising, soldering, riveting, and wire making, though these techniques were used elsewhere on the continent.³⁶

The culture and history of Jenne in present day Mali is also of special interest. It is generally supposed that the city developed at the same time as Timbuktu in the mid-thirteenth century as a consequence of the trans-Saharan trade. Archaeological excavations at Jenne-jeno have established that iron-using and manufacturing peoples were occupying the site in the third century B.C. The settlement proceeded to grow rapidly during the first millennium A.D., reaching its zenith sometime between A.D. 750 and 1100, at which time the settlement exceeded 33 hectares (82 acres) in size. The archaeological data are supported by the results of site survey within a 1,100-square-kilometre region of Jenne’s traditional hinterland. During the late first millennium A.D., several nearby settlements comparable in size to Jenne-jeno existed, and the density of rural settlements may have been as great as ten times the density of villages in the hinterland today. Evidence from excavation and survey indicates that Jenne participated in inter-regional exchange relations far earlier than previously estimated. The stone and iron in the initial levels at Jenne-jeno were imported from outside the Inland Delta; levels dated to c. A.D. 400 yield copper, presumably from distant Saharan sources. The importance of the abundant staple products of Jenne’s rural hinterland, including rice, fish and fish oil, is examined in a reassessment of the extent of inter-regional commerce and the emergence of urbanism during the first millennium A.D. Jenne-jeno may have been a principal participant in the founding of commercial centres on the Saharan contact zone of the Bend of the Niger, rather than a product of the luxury trade serviced by those centres.³⁷

All these kingdoms, states, empires, chiefdoms and principalities (Egypt, Kush, Aksum, Nok, Igbo Ukwu, the Bantu kingdoms, Dahomey, Benin, Fulbe/Pulaar, Yoruba, Ashanti, Ghana, Songhay and Mali etc) were socially stratified with varying state structures. Social surpluses were variously extracted through taxation, tributes, slavery, corvée or forced labour, quasi-feudal relations and on the coasts forms of hired labour.

³⁶ Alice Apley. Igbo-Ukwu (ca. 9th century). In, *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. 2000. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/igbo/hd_igbo.htm. October 2001.

³⁷ See, Roderick J. McIntosh and Susan Keech McIntosh. The Inland Niger Delta Before the Empire of Mali. Evidence from Jenne-Jeno. *The Journal of African History*. Vol. 22, No. 1, 1981. P.1-22.

The Arab Encroachment of Africa

One of the most important events in African history was the spread of Islam from the seventh century onward. Today, so deep and prevalent is the Arab impact on North Africa that it is seldom remembered that the region earlier on witnessed the penetration and spread of Persian, Hellenic, Phoenician, and Roman cultures before the advent of Islam in the seventh century A.D.³⁸ With each successive invasion, the African cultural core has been overlaid and further buried. The Greeks established a dynasty in Egypt in 332 B.C. that lasted till the Roman conquest in 30 B.C. Both, the Greeks and subsequently the Romans had varying degrees of influence in other parts of North Africa. Ptolemy, a Macedonian, was the first of the fifteen Greek-speaking pharaohs who ruled Egypt during a period of 300 years. Trade was of paramount importance to the Greeks. Egypt was regarded as an important part of the international trading network: It was strategically located to tap the products of the Indian Ocean and the African interior in exchange for those of Mediterranean Europe. The Egyptian Nile basin also had the fertile land to produce sufficient food for a large number of administrators and merchants stationed and operating in the region. So important was the interest in trade that by 250 B.C. the dynasty had assembled a huge trading fleet of almost 4,000 ships. To maximize its trading advantages, the dynasty established Alexandria, a trading city suitably located in the Nile Delta, on the Mediterranean coast.³⁹ Between them the Greeks and Romans ruled Egypt for 975 years. Under the Arab general Amr bin Al-Aas, Egypt was conquered between 639-642 A.D.). In association with the Arab invasions of the Nile valley and the Maghreb (North Africa), Islam and Arabic culture reached the region. The consequences of the spread of Islam and Arabic culture have remained important to this day.

In my view, one of the most daunting challenges facing Africans today is the reality of Arabization. Having entered Africa in the 7th century, today practically almost a third of the continent has been Arabized; in other words, Africans have been culturally changed to become Arabs. Not only is the entire North African region predominantly Islamic, but Islam has also spread remarkably well in sub-Saharan Africa. Islam and Christianity have become the two major universal religions in Africa, although there are more Muslims than Christians.

In West Africa along the desert fringe, three great kingdoms flourished between about A.D. 1000 and 1600, becoming powerful and wealthy from trans-Saharan trade. The earliest was Ghana (750 to 1076 AD), followed by Mali (700- 1591 AD), and then Songhay. There were considerable socio-structural similarities between them. They were all Iron Age societies, which had access to metal to fashion agricultural tools and weapons to fight wars. These empires controlled trans-Saharan trade in gold, salt and other precious commodities. All were characterized by strong leadership (matrilineal) and kin-based societies. Islam was introduced to them. These empires maintained order through centralized political

³⁸ The last pharaoh of the Twenty-Sixth dynasty, Psamtik III, was defeated by Cambyses II of Persia in the battle of Pelusium in the eastern Nile delta in 525 BC. Egypt was then joined with Cyprus and Phoenicia in the sixth satrapy of the Achaemenid Empire. Thus began the first period of Persian rule over Egypt (also known as the 27th Dynasty), which ended around 402 BC. The history of Persian Egypt is divided into three eras: an initial period of Achaemenid Persian occupation when Egypt became a satrapy, followed by an interval of independence; a second period of occupation, again under the Achaemenids; and a final occupation by the Sassanid Empire, immediately before the Muslim invasion of AD 639.

³⁹ Two other cities were equally famous: Naucratis, a Greek emporium, and Ptolemais. In addition, the Greek dynasty created the new port city of Paraetionium. The various projects to promote trade achieved their desired results. A merchant class was established in Egypt, Alexandria grew into an important city.

systems of kingship working with limited selected bureaucracies. Their military and state reach represented also the extent of the empire. The monarch operated from the capital while the rest of the empire was placed under regional overlords. Taxation and tribute accrued to the centre and provincial seats of power.

Between the tenth and fourteenth centuries A.D, a number of city–states emerged and flourished along the coast of East Africa. A new culture, including a language, developed. It became known as the Swahili culture, and it has survived till today. Due to their location, the Swahili states and principalities became the gateway to the African interior. The Omani Arabs and Shirazi Persians established their power in this area along the coast. Further inland, the areas of the north, west and southwestern shores of Lake Victoria as far as Lake Kivu and the eastern parts of Congo were inhabited by a collection of kingdoms where the languages spoken were closely related varieties of Bantu (the region bounded by Lakes Victoria, Kyoga, Albert, Edward, and Tanganyika). The largest was Buganda, followed by Rwanda and Burundi. In addition to these three large kingdoms were several smaller ones; Ankole, Bunyoro, Butoro, Buhaya (in Tanzania).

Sometime before the middle of the 2nd millennium A.D., some of the most interesting developments were occurring in this interlacustrine area. Accounts of rulerships in various parts of this area date from the first half of the 2nd millennium A.D. The Middle Iron Age period, saw the introduction of cattle herding on a large scale and the extensive exploitation of the interlacustrine grasslands. Cattle-holding became socially valued as an economic asset and ownership of stock and the defence of the pastures became interests which commanded prestige, patronage and influence, with attendant social and political implications. This opened up the division of labour with opportunities for other specializations, including the production of salt for local and long-distance trade. The persistence of traditions concerning gods, spirits and myth-making and the celebration of popular *chwezi* cults, enriched cultural life and reflected the cultural and economic importance of iron and its working among these agricultural populations from before the expansion of pastoralism in the area.⁴⁰

From the early period of the social organization of humans, land has always held a central position in the production process. The communal economy of pre-colonial Africa relied entirely on an efficient land-labour combination for its success. In Africa where agriculture had for a long time (post-hunter-gathering) become the dominant economic activity, land directly accounted for the survival of generations. However, as a result of European penetration and conquest of Africa, the land tenure system in Africa changed significantly. Under colonial rule, land became ultimately an object for sale; a simple object of economic value. Under British colonial rule for example, African land was partitioned into three categories – Crown land, Native land and Reserves. The consequences of this was directly and indirectly, white settlerism, labour migration, African land tenancy, reservations, segregation, African impoverishment and African wage labour.⁴¹

⁴⁰ J.E.G. Sutton. The Antecedents of the Interlacustrine Kingdoms. *Journal of African History*. 1993. No. 34. Pp. 33-64.

⁴¹ As Bridglal Pachai makes the point, “a study of colonialism is, in large measure, a study of the fate and fortunes of colonial land.” See, Pachai’s contribution in Melvin E. Page, Penny Sonnenberg and James Ciment (eds). *Colonialism: An International Social, Cultural and Political Encyclopedia*. Santa Barbara. ABC – CLO. 2003. Pp.330 – 331.

Slavery and After

The United Nations deems slavery to be “the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised” and slave as “a person in such condition or status.”⁴² Slavery has historically been a labour organizational feature of many societies in all parts of the world at one point or the other in time. Discussing slavery as forms of marginality Miers and Kopytoff draw attention to what can be regarded as the hallmarks of slave practices in Africa. They argue that; “We see the roots of these servile institutions in the need for wives and children, the wish to enlarge one’s kin group, and the desire to have clients, dependants, servants and retainers. Outsiders can fill these wants. War and brigandage can be one method of acquiring outsiders, but they are no more the mainspring of such rights-in-person than they are of other forms of wealth.”⁴³ Some societies treated slaves as property, but most saw them as dependents who eventually might be integrated into the families of slave owners. In some other societies slaves could attain positions of political, military or administrative power.

An outstanding feature about the history and demographics of people of African descent is that today, we are distributed practically across the whole globe, in uneven concentrations of numbers. We are everywhere. The largest numbers are in Brazil, where in various shades of colouring, Afro-Brazilians form about half of the population. People of African descent are also to be found in Surinam, French Guyana, British Guyana, Colombia, Venezuela, and in fewer numbers in Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. African descendants are also in the whole of Middle-America, Mexico, the United States, Canada and the whole of the West Indies. Over the centuries, large numbers have ended up in Western Asia and, indeed, a steady trickle has found its way into India, Central Asia, the Balkans and beyond. It is noteworthy that, the African presence in Asia, Europe and the Americas is hardly recent. Africans were present in ancient Greece and Rome; we have been in Arabia and other parts of Asia centuries before the rise of Islam. Africans have for centuries been taken into Europe. The international trade in African slaves expanded that presence so that it became essentially global. Except for some of the migration, mainly to Europe and North America which have taken place over the last century, in almost all these parts of the world where Africans find themselves today, they have, for the most part, been taken there as labour in bondage and pain. During the era of the Atlantic slave trade, so many Africans were taken out of the continent that by 1850, about a third of the people of African descent lived outside Africa (not counting the numbers lost through Arab-led slavery). For almost four and a half centuries (1441 – 1888) the trans-Atlantic slave trade created a Diaspora of about 15-20 million people landed, from many parts of Africa, particularly the West Coast. The whole process of the Atlantic slave trade was genocidal. Slave raids and slaving wars were devastating not only for the human lives lost, but also for the extended sociological dislocations they produced for 450 years on African society, and the legacy of all of this. More slaves lost their lives in the transportation process, both on the continent and the trans-Atlantic journey - “the middle passage.” Between 10% and 20% of the slaves died within a year of their landing in the Western hemisphere. The majority of the bonded Africans taken across the Atlantic, some 42%, became slaves in the sugar plantations of the Caribbean. Brazilian sugar plantations and mines had about 38%, and about 15% became plantation and mining slaves in different parts of Latin America. About 5% were sold into North America. European colonialism, as an

⁴² United Nations Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, as adopted by a Conference of Plenipotentiaries convened by Economic and Social Council Resolution 608(XXI) of 30 April 1956 and done in Geneva on 7th September 1956.

⁴³ Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff. *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*. University of Wisconsin Press. Madison. 1977. P. 67.

economic system, was founded on African slavery, and most historians have long been in agreement about this. The emergence of capitalism, as an economic system, was directly linked to the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the wealth generated by the slave trade and labour of those enslaved peoples.⁴⁴

As Muslim Arabs conquered their way westward across North Africa in the 7th and 8th centuries, they took Berber captives, most of whom were eventually enrolled in Muslim armies. Over time, large segments of North Africa's Berber population converted to Islam. Muslim Arabs and Arabized Berbers expanded this trans-Saharan slave trade. From the Northern ports, most of these slaves were exported to far-off Asian destinations such as the eastern Mediterranean, Anatolia (in present-day Turkey), Arabia, Persia (present-day Iran), and India. The trans-Saharan slave trade grew significantly from the 10th to the 15th century, as vast African empires such as Ghana, Mali, Songhai, and Kanem-Bornu developed south of the Sahara and marshalled the trade. Arab slave raiders also penetrated south, up the Nile River to present-day Ethiopia, capturing thousands of slaves and sending them down the Nile to Egypt. Over the course of more than a thousand years, the trans-Saharan slave trade saw the movement of at least 10 million enslaved men, women, and children from West and East Africa to North Africa, the Middle East, and India.

Also, by the 9th century, Omanis and Shirazis from Arabia and Persia were travelling down coast of East Africa, for African slaves in ports from Mogadishu to Sofala and taking them to western Asia. Between the 7th and the 15th century, the trans-Saharan and East African slave trades accelerated the expansion of slavery within Africa. The slave trades contributed to the development of powerful African states on the southern fringes of the Sahara and in the East African interior. The economies of these states were dependent on slave trading. Neighbouring states competed with one another for trade, leading to wars, which in turn led to the capture of more slaves. Slave raiding in West, East, and Central Africa became more common and wide-ranging.

In 1807, the slave trade was outlawed in Britain and the United States. Britain outlawed the practice of slavery in all British territory in 1833; France did the same in its colonies in 1848. In 1865, following the American Civil War, the U.S. government ended slavery in the United States. The Atlantic slave trade continued, however, until 1888, when Brazil abolished slavery. While the Atlantic slave trade was dying down around 1850, the trans-Saharan and East African slave trades were at their peaks. In the 1850s the Ottoman Empire nominally outlawed slavery in much of the Islamic world, but this had only a minor effect on the slave trade. One of the putative justifications European powers gave for colonizing nearly the entire African continent during the 1880s and 1890s was the desire to end slave trading and slavery in Africa. Although colonial authorities began outlawing slavery in some African territories as early as the 1830s, the complete legal abolition of slavery in Africa did not take place until the first quarter of the 20th century. It was indeed, not until the 1930s that slavery in Africa was almost totally eliminated.

The ending of the slave trade and slavery in Africa had wide-ranging effects on the African continent. Many societies like Benin, Yoruba states, Ashanti and Dahomey that for centuries had participated and thrived in an economy based on slave labour and the trading of slaves had difficulty finding new ways to

⁴⁴ See, K. K. Prah. Introduction; Back to Africa (Vol.1): Afro-Brazilian Returnees and their Communities. CASAS Book Series, No. 69. Cape Town. 2009. Pp. 1-3.

organize labour and wealth. Meanwhile, colonial governments in Africa still needed cheap labour for agriculture, industry, and other labour-demanding activities. With the connivance of some African leadership and colonial officials, methods including various types of taxes were developed by the colonial state to coerce Africans to work without pay or the barest reward. Proletarianization and peasantization were developing apace by the end of the 19th century.

Closing Remarks

The Atlantic slave trade had begun in the mid-fifteenth century with a small number of slaves acquired by the Portuguese. By about 1870, when the slave trade ended, what had started as a small traffic had led to the forced enslavement of millions of Africans. Africa was partitioned in the closing decades of the 19th century. The abolition of the slave trade brought in theory an end to the acceptance of slavery as a means of exploiting labour. Henceforth the preference was for “free labour” but the producers of labour were only free to sell their labour. Labour and capital were brought into a new long-lasting death-dance. Labour has become freer than ever, since the beginning and emergence of social classes. Even after the abolition of the slave trade in Africa, Colonial powers used forced labour. Some of the worst and most cruel examples were; King Leopold’s Congo Free State and the Portuguese plantations of Cape Verde or Sao Tome and Principe.

Between the Arab and European slavers, while some castrated Africans, others never spared the rod nor the branding iron; masters who drove Africans as they did beasts of burden. The labour producing base of African society has been steadily haemorrhaged for over a millennium in the case of Arab slavery and about half a millennium in the case of Europeans. Although there is relative silence about Arab-led slavery of Africans, in comparative terms, Arab-led slavery of Africans has been an equally horrendous forced migration of Africans from their homelands to foreign lands.

The idea of free trade is sometimes presented as an altruistic view advanced by the European powers for ethical or moral reasons. Arguably, the real reason for the inauguration of the era was that western industrial society needed markets caught up in the cash nexus with the ability of individuals to purchase western industrial goods. This was the fundamental rationale for the “Free Trade” era at the close of the 19th century.