

Feudalism in East Africa

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Feudalism has been a subject of debate among non-Marxist and Marxist scholars for a long time. The debate has centred not only on what it is supposed to be but also on whether it is a universal stage in man's history or an exclusively medieval west European phenomenon.

Among the non-Marxist scholars, there are two main interpretations on the issue. One school of thought regards it as a group of political and legal institutions which regulated the relationship between overlords and their vassals in medieval western Europe.¹ In this sense, feudalism is portrayed as being mainly "the story of baronial and knightly contracts of service",² that is, a decentralised system of government in which the relationship between free men was governed by a specific set of laws and property rights. This type of government is said to have arisen during the second half of the ninth century as the Frankish Empire of Charlemagne disintegrated.³ The Lord-vassal relationship or vassalage, associated with the granting of a fief in return for obedience and military service, is regarded by the advocates of this school as the core institution of feudal society.

This school of thought does not, however, believe that feudalism was necessarily bound up with any specific economic system. Its proponents point out, for example, that feudal institutions continued to exist even during the late thirteenth century when the natural economy was being superseded by a fast expanding money economy and that, instead of being given real estates, vassals were then money receiving fiefs.⁴ This school sharply distinguishes feudalism from manorialism too by pointing out that the former was a system of political and legal relationship involving free men, while the latter was an agrarian system involving dependent peasants.⁵

Furthermore, the advocates of this political-legal interpretation tend to be sceptical about the use of the term feudalism with reference to non-European history. In their opinion, as we have already pointed out, feudalism is a specific kind of political system which prevailed in western Europe from the mid-ninth to the thirteenth century. Therefore they consider it in appropriate to use such a concept for the analysis of non-European societies.

The second non-Marxist interpretation of feudalism is much broader than the first one. Its supporters use the term in a general way to describe the dominant forms of social, economic, and political organisation which prevailed in medieval western Europe. In other words, its supporters do not merely conceive of feudalism as the relationship between lords and their vassals or the system of feudal tenure but also a way of life centering on lordship. Feudalism in this sense was many things: it was a political system, an economic system as well as a system of values. One prominent scholar who has depicted feudalism

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in this way is Marc Bloch. In a book which has become a classic on the subject, he summarised the main characteristics of feudal society as he understands it as follows:

A subject peasantry; widespread use of the service tenement (i.e., the fief) instead of a salary, which was out of question; the supremacy of a class of specialised warriors; ties of obedience and protection which bind man to man and, within the warrior class, assume the distinctive form called vassalage; fragmentation of authority... such then seem to be the fundamental features of European feudalism.⁶

Those who lean towards this broad definition of feudalism tend to regard it as a stage in human history which has existed not only in medieval western Europe but also in non-European parts of the world such as Japan, China, India, Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Byzantium, and Russia, at different times.⁷ What all of them have done is to take the institutions of medieval western Europe as their model and then compare them with those of their specific case studies in the non-European world.

Marxist scholars, on the other hand, use the term feudalism to identify a particular epoch in the process of socio-economic development. In other words, they use it to characterise a particular mode of production in human history. In this sense, feudalism is regarded as one of the pre-capitalist stages of socio-economic development; one which immediately preceded the rise of the capitalist mode of production. One Marxist scholar has defined feudalism as follows:

It was a mode of production dominated by land and a natural economy, in which neither labour nor the products of labour were commodities. The immediate producer — the peasant — was united to the means of production — the soil — by a specific social relationship. The literal formula of this relationship was provided by the legal definition of serfdom... serfs had juridically restricted mobility. The peasants who occupied and tilled the land were not its owners. Agrarian property was privately controlled by a class of feudal lords, who extracted a surplus from the peasants by politico-legal relations of compulsion.⁸

Although this definition may not be exhaustive or adequate, it nevertheless indicates what feudalism is as a mode of production. Its essence in the Marxist sense, as Rodney Hilton has rightly pointed out, "is the exploitative relationship between landowners and subordinated peasants, in which the surplus beyond subsistence of the latter, whether in direct labour or in rent in kind or in money, is transferred under coercive sanction to the former".⁹ Other main characteristics of feudalism as a mode of production indicated in the above definition and which must be emphasised are the fact that the goods produced in this economic system are mainly for local consumption and not for sale, that the producers are still attached to the means of production but do not own them, that the means of production which may be land, a cottage industry, or something else are privately owned by individual members of the ruling class, and that production in this type of economy largely depends on family labour and not on wage labour. This then is how feudalism is generally defined by Marxist scholars.

Each of these different approaches to feudalism has been used by different writers for analysis pre-colonial African regimes. In the interlacustrine region of East Africa, for example, the term feudalism, and the vocabulary usually associated with it, has been used implicitly and explicitly to describe the states which emerged between the 15th and 19th centuries in Buganda, Busoga, Bunyoro, Nkore, Rwanda, Burundi, Buha and other areas. Among the writers who have made indirect reference to the existence of feudalism in these states

are Roscoe, Mair, Faller and Oberg,¹⁰ and those who have explicitly described, them as feudal include Beattie, Maquet, Tawney, Hall and Cory, and Gravel.¹¹ Beattie in one of his earlier writings on Bunyoro, for instance, described this kingdom in this way:

Although it is changing rapidly, it still presents many of the characters of a centralized, "feudal" state, oddly reminiscent in many ways of the feudal kingdoms which existed centuries ago in Europe and elsewhere. I use the word "feudal" here in its simplest sense, to refer to the kind of political system which is based on the relation between a superior and his inferior or vassal, where the latter holds lands, and authority over the people living on these lands, "in feud" from the former. This means that the vassal must render homage and services of various kinds ... to the superior lord from whom he holds his lands and authority. Traditional Bunyoro has many features in common with such a system....

These references, which have been made mainly by social anthropologists, have tried to compare the social and political institutions of these kingdoms with those of medieval western Europe as the above quotation clearly shows. In some of the kingdoms, it is the existence of a clientage system based on cattle ownership which these different writers regarded as the basis for feudal relations, while in others it is the existence of a patronage system based on land ownership.

Such analogies, however, have attracted a lot of criticism for those who adhere to the political-legal interpretation of feudalism. Their contention, as we have already explained, is that feudalism was essentially a medieval west European phenomenon, and for that reason, it should not be applied to Africa and other parts of the non-European world. This is the position which Jack Goody has taken. According to him, most of the studies which have described some pre-colonial African states as feudal have done so on the basis of superficial resemblances between their social and political institutions and those of medieval European states.¹³ Hence he concludes that the term feudalism and the vocabulary associated with it should not be applied at all in describing them because it has little or no meaning in their case.

Even those who support Marc Bloch's broad definition and accept the use of the term for comparative purposes have tended to be sceptical about its use in the analysis of pre-colonial African societies. This has been the case because they have tended to regard only certain aspects of the medieval west European social formations as the determining factors of feudalism. Paradoxically, one of these sceptics was Beattie who in the 1950's had explicitly described Bunyoro as a feudal state. After the publication of Goody's article on feudalism in Africa in 1963, however, he seems to have changed his mind completely on the issue and decided to support the former's position. His new conclusion was based on the fact that when Bunyoro's political institutions are tested against Bloch's essentials of feudalism, they fail to match two of the most important of them, namely the existence of a specialised military class and the existence of a decentralised state system.¹⁴ He regards the last named characteristic as being the most important apparently because European feudalism in its beginnings implied the weakening of the state and the distribution of powers formerly held by the central authority among private individuals, while in Bunyoro and other African states there has been no such weakening or breakdown. As a matter of fact, many, if not most, of the policies which have been described as feudal in Africa represent, in his opinion, a trend towards centralisation of power.

Another important point of difference which Beattie now stresses between the European feudal states and those of the Interlacustrine Region "relates to

the question of which categories of persons were linked as subordinate and superordinate. In Europe the characteristic feudal bond was between the tenant or fief-holder and a nearby chief or lord, from whom he held his fief and to whom he looked for protection; there was no direct link between the fief-holder and the king" at the top.¹⁵ In Bunyoro and other similar states, however, virtually all political authority was vested in the *omukama* or king, and the people could appeal directly to him. Moreover, even the chiefs who were appointed by the *omukama* to administer regions of the kingdom were in those areas as administrators and not as fief-holders or landlords, and the tribute which they received from the people was a form of taxation and not a share from their estates as lords. He suggests also that the chiefs in the regions were there in order to strengthen the position of the central government vis-a-vis the local clan communities which stood in opposition to it. So, as far as Beattie is concerned, all these factors show clearly that Bunyoro was not a feudal state despite the fact that it had several of Bloch's essentials of feudalism in common with the European feudal states.

Another scholar who has rejected the existence of feudalism in the Interlacustrine States during the pre-colonial period is E.M. Chilver. Her premise is that the most important features of European feudalism, namely feudo-vassalage and the dispersal of political power, were absent in the Interlacustrine States.¹⁶ She elaborates this by pointing out that, unlike the medieval European states which arose from the ruins of larger highly centralised political units, which were linked by a universal church, the Interlacustrine States did not arise out of a similar situation. In fact, the historical situation from which the latter, and other African states which have been described as feudal, arose did not lead to decentralisation of political power as was the case in medieval western Europe. Therefore, unlike in medieval western Europe, where the feudal states were confederations or paramountcies, the Interlacustrine Kingdoms and other African states which have been referred to as feudal were highly centralised whether they were big or small.

Having shown that the dispersal of political power in the medieval west European sense was absent in the Interlacustrine Kingdoms, Chilver, like Beattie, criticises those who have equated the ownership of estates or portions of land by appointed chiefs to fief-holding. She has rejected this equation because the chiefs were given their estates by the kings without entering into legal bonds of dependence with them as lords and their vassals as in Europe. A similar view has been taken by Edward Steinhart who regards feudo-vassalage as the essence of feudalism.¹⁷ Steinhart explains that the chiefs in states such as Buganda and Bunyoro did not offer themselves as vassals; they were nominated officials whose prime function was to exercise delegated authority in their areas. Therefore there was no feudo-vassalage here in the medieval west European sense, which in turn means that feudalism did not exist either.

Professor Samwiri Karugire is another scholar who has participated in this debate on feudalism in the Interlacustrine Region. Writing specifically on Nkore, he has categorically stated that pre-colonial Nkore was not a feudal society in which the Bahima rulers were the feudal lords and the Bairu agriculturalists were the serfs. "Feudalism", he says, "is not an economic system, but a form of government. That being so, an analysis of Nkore's traditional institutions of government tends to show that Nkore was not even remotely feudal, if by the expression one means, a form of government in which political authority is monopolized by a small group of military leaders but evenly distributed among

the members of that group, and in which the king, at best, can merely keep peace among the lords and usually is unable even to do this."¹⁸ To begin with, he argues, there is nothing in Nkore's history to show that a group of chiefs or individuals ever challenged the authority of the *Mugabe* or king. Secondly, neither the *mugabe* nor his chiefs could stop anyone from moving in and out of the country at will. Moreover, although he admits that Nkore was a class society in which the Bahima pastoralists constituted the upper class while the Bairu agriculturalists constituted the lower class, he does not think that the former exploited the latter economically. Actually, he maintains that the economic relations between the Bahima and the Bairu were based on mutual exchange of the goods produced by each group. Even the tribute which the *mugabe* and his chiefs appropriated from their subjects is said to have been presents given in exchange for other benefits such as assistance in times of hardship and protection against internal and external enemies.¹⁹ In view of all this, to speak of feudalism in the context of Nkore, according to Karugire, seems to be a mistaken superimposition of the classical patterns of European feudalism on an African tribal structure.

It is evident, from their own arguments, that all these scholars view feudalism as a set of certain social and political institutions and not as an economic system in which people belonging to different classes play different roles. I think they do this because they have no conception of feudalism as a mode of production. That is to say, they fail to distinguish between the feudal mode of production and the social formations which constitute it as Mamdani has correctly observed.²⁰ This lack of understanding of the difference between the two applies also to the other non-Marxist scholars who have asserted that feudalism existed in some of the Interlacustrine Kingdoms on the basis of similarities between their social and political institutions and those of medieval European states. Feudalism as a mode of production can exist across time and space. In other words, it can exist in different places or countries at different times. The feudal social formations, on the other hand, cannot be expected to be the same or uniform throughout the world because each one of them is a product of specific historical and prevailing material conditions. For this reason, they are bound to differ from country to country. Even in medieval western Europe they differed from one country to another.²¹ Hence to deny the existence of feudalism in the Interlacustrine States or in any other states on account of the differences in social and political institutions between them and those of medieval European states, as these scholars have done, is definitely wrong.

Like their non-Marxist counterparts, Marxist scholars have differed too in their use of the term feudalism with regard to Africa and other non-European areas. First there are those who believe in what has been referred to as "the five member scheme"²² or "the traditional unilinear scheme",²³ which is a model of development founded on the five modes of production scheme sketched out by Marx and his close associates to show the historical stages of development through which Europe has passed up to the twentieth century. This European model of successive stages of development from primitive communalism through slavery, feudalism, capitalism and socialism or communism has been taken by orthodox Marxists since the 1930's to be the general path through which man kind everywhere must historically pass.²⁴ It is thus taken as an obligatory schedule of development for all mankind. Those who subscribed to it consider feudalism to be a necessary universal stage in human historical

development. Such scholars have therefore been able to apply the concept of a feudal mode to the analysis of some pre-colonial African state forms without any hesitation. A good example is Potekhin.²⁵

The unilinear model, however, has been found unsuitable by some Marxists for the analysis of many non-European social formations apparently because it tends to oversimplify the Marxian theory of development and is a mechanistic way of viewing development. Adherence to it meant also a rejection or a total disregard of the Asiatic Mode of Production formulated by Marx after discovering that nineteenth century Asian social formations could not be easily integrated into the European model. The essence of this mode, according to Godelier, is "the existence of primitive communities in which ownership of land is communal and which are still partly organised on the basis of kinship relations, combined with the existence of state power, which expresses the real or imaginary unity of these communities, controls the use of essential economic resources, and directly appropriates part of the labour and production of the communities which it dominates".²⁶ This mode of production differs from the feudal mode in two main respects. One of the differences between the two is that the means of production in the former are owned by the state and not by private individuals as is the case in the latter. Secondly, in the Asiatic Mode of Production the state mobilises the producers to engage in major economic undertakings and exploits them directly by appropriating part of their labour and produce, while in the feudal mode a class of independent small producers is exploited by a class of independent owners of the means of production.

When some Marxists started questioning the European-centred development model, particularly since the 1960's, they reasserted also the Asiatic Mode of Production, a concept which had originally been devised for the analysis of Middle Eastern and South Asian societies. But its use was now extended to Marxist scholars working at the *Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Marxistes* in Paris such as Maurice Godelier, Jean Suret-Canale, and Jean Chesneaux.²⁷ Suret-Canale, for example, is reported to have stated that "After having ourselves spoken of African 'feudal societies' we feel compelled to abandon the term. The mode of production in traditional Africa is never 'feudal' and to use the word in a purely political sense may cause confusion".²⁸ Instead, he advocated that "the most common mode of production in the more advanced areas of traditional Black Africa can be compared to the Asiatic mode".²⁹ Godelier was even more explicit on this issue:

In our view, this hypothesis allows us to understand why the concept of Asiatic mode of production is referred to more and more to illuminate the periods and societies of ancient Europe ... for Black Africa ... and pre-Columbian America ... A common element appears throughout these many specific realities — a common structure which combines community relations and the embryo of class and is related to the same situation of transition to class society. Because of this relation between the situation it is possible to explain the geographical and historical universality of the form of social organisation which emerges when the conditions for the transition to class society develop; maybe at the end of the fourth millennium B.C. in the case of Egypt ... or in the nineteenth century with the birth of the Bamoun Kingdom in the Cameroons. By providing many examples of societies in the process of transition to class organisation, the archaeological and ethnological knowledge accumulated since the nineteenth century provides the concept with a field of application which Marx or Engels could not have envisaged. In becoming more and more widely applicable both in time and space, the concept no longer applies exclusively to

Thus the Asiatic Mode of Production was elevated to a universal mode of development covering not only class societies in the Middle East and Southeast Asia but also in pre-Columbian American and pre-colonial Africa.

But it is now evident that some of the scholars who originally advocated the universality and necessity of the Asiatic Mode have discovered that they were making the same mistake as the supporters of the Euro-centric unilinear model. Melotti intimates that the main problem with them is the fact that "they ignore the historical and geographical peculiarities of the Asiatic mode of production ... and arbitrarily elevate it to a universal 'stage' in a model of historical development still seen as a single path".³¹ One of the first to realise this mistake was Chesneaux who is reported to have retorted that "there is no question of replacing the dogma of the universality of slavery and feudalism with a new dogma of the universality of the Asiatic mode of production".³² This implies that pre-colonial African states and those of pre-Columbian America were based on a structure which was entirely different from oriental despotism and therefore cannot be included in the Asiatic mode. A similar position has been taken by Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch who, along with others at the *Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Marxistes* in Paris, has introduced the concept of an 'African Mode of Production'.³³ This African Mode of Production is supposed to deal with the specific state forms of this continent which, according to her, cannot be adequately analysed under the Asiatic Mode of Production. She argues against including the African state forms under the Asiatic Mode of Production because the only thing common between them and Asian state forms was the existence of self-sustaining village communities. Otherwise the two state systems differed fundamentally from each other because there existed a bureaucratic regime with absolute power in the latter which directly exploited the subject communities under it through major production works, while in the former abureaucracy without despotic power exploited the subject peasantry under it only indirectly by appropriating surplus labour or produce.³⁴ In other words, she disagrees with Godelier's proposition that there could be an Asiatic Mode of Production "with major works" and despotism or true AMP, which existed in Asia itself, and another one "without major works" and despotism, which existed in Africa and elsewhere.³⁵ Such a proposition, in her opinion, not only deprives the Asiatic Mode of Production of its dynamic element by eliminating its economic basis of major works but also denies the African states their specificity and dynamic elements.

The implications of these arguments are very progressive in themselves because, as Rodney says, they are concerned with the concrete conditions of Africa rather than with pre-conceptions of development brought over from Europe.³⁶ But the scholars concerned seem to be bent on trying to find a single concept to cover the analysis of a variety of social formations which existed in Africa from the beginning of the iron age to the eve of European colonial rule. This may lead to difficulties should some of the social formations fail to fit into the proposed African Mode.

Rather than be rigid on this issue of modes of production in the African situation, flexibility seems to be the way out. It is now evident that the modes of production outlined for Europe were not reproduced in Africa and other non-European areas in the same sequence. This does not, however, mean that they were not reproduced at all in Africa, for there are probably cases where either slave or feudal relations of production or a combination of both followed

the disintegration of communalism. It is also possible that there were some social formations which could be fitted either in the Asiatic Mode of Production (e.g., Ancient Egypt) or in the proposed African Mode of Production (e.g., the Sudanic Empires of West Africa). We are, in other words, not arguing against the possibility of having an African Mode of Production. We are simply suggesting that, given the existence of a large variety of social formations following the collapse of communalism in Africa, there might have been some that could be adequately included in each of the modes mentioned.

The Interlacustrine Kingdoms of East Africa, for example, do not fit into the Asiatic Mode of Production because they were not based on major production works. Nor do they fit into the proposed African Mode of Production because they were not based on long-distance trade as the ideal type state forms of this mode were — the Sudan Empires of West Africa. What seems to have happened is that the social formations which emerged in this region following the collapse of communal relations of production acquired feudal relations of production. This means that the state which emerged in the region between the 15th and 19th centuries did not go through a slave mode of production before acquiring feudal characteristics as was the case in medieval western Europe.

In order to understand how these Interlacustrine Kingdoms became feudal, we must first examine how some of their social formation developed after the 15th century. And in order to do this, it is useful to divide the region into two economic zones, namely the banana culture zone and the cattle culture zone. The former included, among others, the kingdoms of Buganda, Busoga and Buhaya, and the latter included the kingdoms of Bunyoro, Nkore, Karagwe, Mpororo, Buhweju, Rwanda, Burundi and Buha. In the banana culture zone, the basis of production relations was land on which the plantain banana, which was the main food crop, could thrive. This banana economy forced people to live in permanent settlements because the banana was a perennial crop and thrived only in certain areas of the zone. In other words, the plantain banana economy prevented people from changing their settlements from time to time as was the case in pastoral and grain-producing areas. As a result, this type of economy led to the development of relations of production in which one group or part of the population became dominant because it seized political power and control of most of the productive land and the other became subordinate because it lost control of both.

One area which shows clearly how these relations of production came into being in the banana zone is Buganda. Buganda emerged as a state in about the 15th century consisting of a number of clans which were still very powerful and owned the land in their respective areas. In subsequent centuries, however, a vigorous struggle for power ensued between the *kabaka* (king) and the various clan leaders or *abataka* (chiefs). Eventually the *kabaka* was able to reduce the power of the hereditary *abataka* chiefs in the regions of his kingdom by appointing people of his own choice as regional heads who became known as *abakungu* chiefs. This means that, instead of appointing clan leaders as regional heads, he now appointed any individuals whom he thought would be loyal to him. These appointed *abakungu* chiefs were rewarded with estates of productive land by the *kabaka* as he gained control of it from the clan leaders. The second step which the *kabaka* took in order to consolidate his position was to eliminate competition from princes of the blood known as *abalangira*.³⁷ Instead of giving them political offices, he gave them estates of productive land.

Thirdly, the *kabaka* gave out land to his favourites and supporters in exchange for raising armies, supplying bark-cloth and performing ritual services. Estates given to loyal supporters of the king as rewards for service were known as *ebitongole* and their owners as *abatongole*.³⁸ All these land owners, including clan leaders who retained control of portions of land in their areas, had full control of their estates and the peasants who were living in them. What this means is that, as the *kabaka* consolidated his political position after the 15th century, a land-owning class of chiefs or *abami* consisting of the *kabaka*, the *abakungu*, *abalangira*, *abatongole* and *abataka* emerged which depended for its subsistence on the subject peasantry known as *abakopi*.³⁹ This land-owning ruling class lived partly on what was produced by the *abakopi* in their estates. It also received tribute annually from peasants living in clan-owned land in the form of agricultural products, crafts and services.

Similar developments took place in the Buhaya states in which the *abakama* seized control of most of the banana-producing land and divided it up into large estates known as *nyarubanja*. The *nyarubanja* estates were then given by the *abakama* to people whom they appointed as *abakungu* chiefs and to their relatives and friends as rewards for their service and loyalty.⁴⁰ The landlords of the *nyarubanja* estates became known as *abatwazi* and the tenants in them as *abatwarwa*. When clan lands were seized by the *abakama* and given to the *abakungu* and other supporters, their former owners became tenants and clients of the new owners — the *abatwazi*. Through the creation of these estates, the *abakama* of Buhaya were ultimately able to break up clan-held lands so that a fragmentary land tenure pattern emerged on which the new relations of production were based. The development of these new relations of production has been described by Schmidt:

The development of *nyarubanja* was a device employed by the *Bakama* to fragment clan land and to undermine the social unity of the clans. The creation of a *nyarubanja* estate out of clan-held land inevitably led to the creation of a new loyalty. No longer was a clansman directly answerable to the elders (*Bagurusi*), but his primary obligation as a tenant lay to his immediate superior, his *Mutwazi*. Furthermore, the landlord as superior and as patron had judicial rights over disputes within his limited domain...

As tenant and clients, the people living in *nyarubanja* estates stopped paying tribute directly to the *abakama*. They now provided goods and services to their landlords, the *abatwazi*. In this way, the various officers of each *omukama* were maintained in office. The *abakama* themselves continued to receive tribute from peasants who were still living on clan-owned land.

From these two examples, it can be seen clearly that relations of production based on control of land developed in the banana zone after the formation of states. The peasants, be they *abakopi*, *abatwarwa* or those living in clan-held land, remained attached to the land as before but they were now subject to the domination of landlords who extracted goods and services from them in return for some form of protection. In other words, exploitative relations developed between the land-controlling ruling class and the subject peasantry in which the surplus beyond the subsistence of the latter was transferred to the former under coercive sanctions in return for some form of security. Goods in this economy were produced by individual families mainly for the satisfaction of local consumption needs and not for sale or profit-making. This means that even the tribute paid to the ruling class was in kind and its primary object was consumption, not accumulation. The existence of an agricultural surplus and the expansion of regional trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led to the formation of a group of artisans patronised by the kings. But even the

development of trade with the east coast during the nineteenth century did not change the basic relations of production in the zone because all major business transactions were monopolised by the kings. It only provided more surplus and luxury goods for the ruling class. In Buganda, for instance the central authority was enhanced by the importation of guns from the coast. Since only the *kabaka's* army was equipped with firearms, he was able to use them to exercise more control over the population, which in turn led to a more efficient collection of surplus from within and from without. Therefore, whichever way one looks at it, the dominant mode of production which prevailed in this zone during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was without doubt, feudal.

Unlike in the banana zone, where land was used as the chief means of establishing control over the population by the ruling class, it was cattle which was used for the purpose in the western part of the Interlacustrine Region. Here, unlike in the former, where agriculture predominated, there was a dual economy of pastoralism and agriculture. Each of these sectors of the economy was the monopoly of one social group — pastoralism was carried out by the Bahima in Bunyoro, Nkore, Mpororo, Buhweju and Karagwe and by the Batutsi in Rwanda, Burundi and Buha; agriculture was the monopoly of the Bairu in the former group of states and of the Bahutu in the latter. But besides being cattle-owners the Bahima/Batutsi, formed the ruling class and the Bairu/Bahutu the subject peasantry in their respective areas.

Like their counterparts in the banana zone, the kings in the cattle zone appointed their favourites to senior administrative and military positions in order to consolidate their own political power. All senior chiefs and military commanders were recruited exclusively from the Bahima/Batutsi socio-economic group. In Nkore, for example, the Muhima king or *mugabe* consolidated his political position by appointing some of his supporters, friends and relatives as regional military leaders known as *emitwe* and as civilian administrative officials and tribute collectors, all of whom were generally referred to as *abakungu*. In order to make them entirely dependent on him, he gave them cattle. He was able to do this because he was theoretically the owner of all cattle and land in his kingdom. Having given them political positions and cattle, these appointed officials were expected to serve the *mugabe* faithfully and had to demonstrate their loyalty to him by attending his court as often as possible and by occasionally giving him "presents" of cattle, lion or leopard skins, honey or beer. This giving of "presents" to one's superiors was known as *okutoija*.² It applied to ordinary people as well as officials of the *mugabe* and it was not a voluntary act as the word 'presents' seems to suggest because as Karugire explains, "it was essential for every head of family to keep himself 'visible' to the authorities" in order to secure more reliable protection against sudden hardships and internal and external enemies. This means that it was an obligation and not something which people could choose to do or not to do without facing serious consequences. This applied to the officials of the *mugabe* too, for if anyone of them 'stopped giving these gifts or attending at court for a lengthy period, it was usually assumed that he had 'rebelled' and, in such a case, he lost his position and, often, his property at the orders of the *Mugabe*.³

Thus the king in Nkore, and elsewhere in this zone, was a giver and a receiver of goods. He distributed benefices and received more goods and services from his subordinate officials and subjects. This means that he practised what is known as patronage, the giving of favours and privileges to one's subordinates in exchange for service and loyalty. This system is sometimes referred to as clientage. But it was not only the king who used cattle as a means of establishing patronage in Nkore and in the other kingdoms of the cattle zone. All people who owned cattle used it for acquiring clients. Officials of the *mugabe* at different levels gave cattle to their juniors as rewards in exchange for loyalty just as he did at the senior level. They also loaned cattle to poor people, both

Bahima and Bairu, in exchange for service. Ordinary cattle-owners acquired their clients by loaning and giving cattle to poor people in exchange for service and other benefits. This means that the clientage system was used by all cattle owners to exploit non-cattle-owners, especially the agriculturalists. This clientage system existed in various forms throughout the western Interlacustrine Region and reached its most elaborate form in Rwanda where it was known as *buhake*.⁴ Apparently, the *buhake* was so wide spread and so elaborate that the only person in Rwanda who had no patron or lord above him was the *mwami* or king, and the only people without clients were the poor or cattleless Bahutu or Batwa. Given the way society was organised, it was imperative for everyone to have someone rich and powerful as a protector and provider of trouble. "To live without a lord", as Maquet has pointed out, "was to invite trouble."⁵ because when faced with a lawsuit, a famine or some other misfortune one could be quite helpless. But to have one was equally cumbersome because it meant being subservient to him throughout one's life. It also meant providing labour, military service, crafts, agricultural products and so on from time to time.

Along side the *buhake*, *okutoija* or *ubugabire* in Buha and Burundi,⁶ was the state administrative machinery which was also used for the appropriation of goods and services from the dominated class. In the case of Rwanda, every district had a land-chief and a cattle-chief for administrative purposes. The land-chief controlled the agricultural population and was responsible for the collection of tribute in agricultural products and required labour service from every household, while the cattle-chief was responsible for administration among the Batutsi pastoralists and for collecting jars of milk from them for the state. All administrative officials involved in tribute collection at hill and district levels retained a portion of the goods and services for their own use and forwarded the rest to court or wherever the king wanted them to be sent. Thus the king and his officials exacted tribute in the form of goods and services from both peasants and common cattle-owners.

As a result of the development of political institutions and a clientage system based on the control of cattle by one social group, two classes emerged in this zone, a cattle-owning Bahima/Batutsi aristocracy and a Bairu/Bahutu subject peasantry. This was not simply a division of labour between pastoralists and agriculturalists with status distinction between them; it was a class division in which the pastoral aristocracy appropriated a large share of the surplus produced by the agriculturalists in the form of tribute. 'Ethnic' distinction between the two groups led to the development of a more rigid class system here than that which emerged in the banana zone. In fact, it almost became a caste system, a factor which reduced the possibility of assimilating members from the subject peasantry into the ruling class.

The origins of the system of social inequality as well as the political imbalance must have had their roots in economics, and cattle caused it. The sense of inequality was something that developed gradually from social contacts. It was promoted by the distribution of goods highly prized in society. The distribution differences were themselves the result of an earlier acquaintance with cattle by one group. The prestige that goes with property easily spread to the physical features which were then held to be proof of superior qualities of anatomy. With the use of hindsight the theory and practice of inequality one sees as a clever manipulation of a ruling class to perpetuate their hold on political power.⁷

Thus the ownership of cattle by the Bahima/Batutsi played a very significant role in determining their relationship with the agriculturalists. Cattle was important because its products such as milk, ghee, meat, skins and manure were required by the agriculturalists too. It is, therefore, evident that by the eve of colonial rule there existed in the cattle zone a socio-economic and political system in which one class controlled both politics and the major means of produc-

tion, land and cattle, and in which the dominated class, which was still attached to the means of production, laboured for itself and for the subsistence of the former.

It would therefore appear that contrary to the denial by Beattie, Karugire, Chilver and Steinhart that feudalism did not exist in the precolonial states of the Interlacustrine Region of East Africa on the basis of lack of similarities between their social and political institutions and those of medieval western Europe, the relations of production and the nature of exploitation which prevailed indicate clearly that they were feudal. In other words, when one examines the way the means of production were controlled, how the goods were produced and the purpose for their production, how the producers were related to the means of production, and how the surplus was appropriated in the different examples discussed, one is bound to conclude that these societies were feudal in the Marxist sense of the term. It is my considered opinion that the concept of feudalism is more appropriate for the analysis of these states than either the concept of the Asiatic or the African Mode of Production.

NOTES

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2. M.M. Postan, foreword, in M. Bloch (trans. L.A. Manyon), *Feudal Society*, Routledge and K. Paul Ltd. London, 1962, p. xiii.
3. G. Fourquain (trans. Iris and A.L. Lytton Sells), *Lordship and Feudalism in the Middle Ages*, Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1970, pp. 19-29, 39-60.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
5. The proposition that manorialism was an agrarian system involving dependent peasants is supported by many writers. See, for example, Bloch, *op. cit.*, pp. 242-248; Vinogradoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 305-369.
6. Bloch, *op. cit.*, p. 446.
7. One classic example is the Coulborn symposium, which includes a comparison of feudalism in different parts of the world. See Coulborn, *op. cit. passim*: see also J. S. Critchley, *Feudalism*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1978, *passim*.
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13. J. Goody, "Feudalism in Africa", *JAH* IV, 1 (1963), pp. 9-13; *idem*, "Economy and Feudalism in Africa", *The Economic History Review*, 2nd series, XXII, 3 (1969), pp. 393-405.
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28. Surer-Canale, quoted in Melotti, *op. cit.*, p. 163, note 8.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 202, note 32.
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43. Karugire, *op. cit.*, p. 65.
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