

7/Advanced Horticultural Societies

*The king should not eat with his brothers
lest they poison him.
Zulu proverb*

WHERE AND WHEN the first advanced horticultural societies appeared are questions which still remain unanswered. On the basis of available evidence it appears that they had their beginnings in the Middle East more than 6,000 years ago.¹ For our purposes, however, this is far less important than the subsequent spread of this type of society through diffusion or independent invention to all of the five major continents.

¹ Archaeological research clearly indicates the practice of irrigation in the al' Ubiad period in Mesopotamia, which dates back to the end of the fifth millennium B.C. See, for example, V. Gordon Childe, *New Light on the Most Ancient East*, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 1952); or *Social Evolution* (London: Watts, 1951); or Robert Braidwood, "The Agricultural Revolution," *Scientific American*, 203 (1960). See also William F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine* (London: Penguin, 1956), chap. 4, or *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, 2d ed. (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1957), pp. 137-146 on the Chalcolithic Age, which may have begun as early as the middle of the fifth millennium B.C.

Though advanced horticultural societies were superseded by agrarian societies long ago in many parts of the world, in a few areas they survived into the modern era, thus affording opportunities for direct observation of their daily life by persons able to record what they saw. In some instances these observers have even been trained anthropologists or ethnographers. This has been true chiefly in the advanced horticultural societies of sub-Saharan Africa. In the case of those in the New World, in the region from Peru to Mexico, reports by *trained* observers are lacking, since these societies were effectively destroyed at the time of the Spanish Conquest four centuries ago. Nevertheless, there is considerable documentary evidence from early Spanish explorers, missionaries, and officials which makes clear at least the basic characteristics of most of these societies.

As a consequence, our analysis of stratification in advanced horticultural societies must be based chiefly on those found in sub-Saharan Africa and, to avoid the complications of too extensive diffusion, those which are non-Islamic.² To a lesser degree we can also draw on evidence from South and Central America and from the archaeological record, though such sources will be used chiefly for the purpose of checking generalizations suggested by the African evidence.

These limitations are not so serious as they might at first seem. For one thing, there are a very large number of advanced horticultural societies in Africa and they are scattered over a wide variety of environmental settings. Thus, we are not forced to limit our inquiry to a handful of societies in a highly homogeneous environment. Furthermore, in recent decades the volume of research on these societies has increased greatly and the quality has also improved. The resources available, therefore, seem adequate for our purposes, even though they are not as extensive as one might desire.

Common Features of Advanced Horticultural Societies

When one compares the advanced horticultural societies of sub-Saharan Africa with the simple horticultural societies of North and South America or New Guinea, one quickly discovers a host of striking and important

² Usually I shall omit the areas in the northern portion of the western Sudan, which have been subject to substantial Islamic influences for approximately a thousand years, as well as those in the eastern Sudan and Horn areas, where the influence of Middle Eastern peoples and pastoral tribes has been very strong. Thus I hope to minimize the influence of direct and pervasive diffusion from more advanced societies, though I realize that the influence of diffusion cannot be completely eliminated in any part of horticultural Africa.

differences. These begin in the realm of technology and extend into almost every other sphere of life.

As we have already noted, the basic instrument of cultivation in simple horticultural societies is the digging stick. Among the Boro, for example, "the same tool serves as spade, hoe and rake."³ By contrast, African horticulturalists almost without exception employ *metal hoes* of various designs. As the English anthropologist Forde puts it, such hoes "are far superior to the digging sticks of [simple horticulturalists] and, wielded by men, they turn up the soil to a much greater depth."⁴ This is of great importance in societies which do not employ fertilizers and hence quickly deplete the nutrients in the surface soil.

Metal can also be used in a variety of other tools to increase their efficiency. This is especially true of tools such as axes and knives, which quickly lose their cutting edge when made of stone. Metal also increases the efficiency and deadliness of weapons.

The advanced horticultural societies of Africa have enjoyed other advantages over simple horticultural societies. By virtue of their relative proximity to the great centers of civilization, African horticulturalists were able to acquire a great number of edible plants which had their origins in far distant places. For example, bananas, taro, and yams, which constituted the staple crops along most of the West African coast when the first Portuguese explorers arrived, apparently were imports from Southeast Asia, having been introduced in East Africa over a thousand years ago.⁵ According to one authority, "Africans grow approximately nine-tenths of all the cultivated plant varieties known to man."⁶ Of course, some of this is due to recent European influence, and furthermore only a part of the total is available in any given society. Nevertheless, the advanced horticultural societies of Africa generally have a much wider variety of cultivated plants at their disposal than have the simple horticultural societies of the Americas or New Guinea.

Diversity is a great asset in any society for two reasons. First, it permits the utilization of a wider range of soils or land areas, since different crops require different conditions. Second, it permits a more sustained use of a given piece of land, since it facilitates crop rotation (whether consciously or unconsciously practiced). In either case, food production is increased.

In the New World, the technological superiority of the advanced

³ C. Daryll Forde, *Habitat, Economy and Society* (London: Methuen, 1934), p. 136.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁵ See George Peter Murdock, *Africa: Its Peoples and Their Cultural History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), pp. 222ff.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

horticultural societies is again clearly evident, especially in the case of the Incas. The greatest achievements of the Incas in the area of food production were probably those associated with irrigation and terracing. In order to make the best possible use of their water supply, they built huge systems of canals and ditches that served not only entire valleys, but in some cases carried water to several adjoining valleys. One canal was 75 miles long, and one aqueduct linked with it consisted of an earthwork four-fifths of a mile long and 50 feet high. In addition, these people terraced mountainsides thousands of feet high and made trips off the coast to obtain guano to fertilize their fields.⁷

The technological superiority of the advanced horticulturalists can also be seen in the tools they used. The Incas, for example, used both the *taclla* and *lampa*. The former was a protoplow, about 6 feet in length with both a footrest and shoulder rest for greater leverage; its point was frequently made of bronze.⁸ The *lampa*, or hoe, resembled an old-fashioned adze more than a modern hoe; it was used for breaking up clods, weeding, and general cultivation and it, too, had a bronze blade.

In the Circum-Caribbean area and in Mexico, techniques of food production were not as highly developed as in Peru, but even there one finds irrigation, terracing, and fertilization.⁹ The greatest achievement in this area was probably the *chinampa*, or floating garden, a system of horticulture developed by the Aztecs.

It is very easy for members of modern industrial societies to underestimate the importance of developments such as these. Careful study makes it clear that the shift from hunting and gathering to horticulture, and the advances in horticultural technology, made possible revolutionary changes in human societies. One of the best indications of this comes from an agricultural survey of the Yucatán, the home of the Maya, undertaken some years ago by the Carnegie Institution. This study indicated that the average Maya corn farmer, using traditional techniques, could raise enough corn with forty-eight days' labor to supply his family for an entire year.¹⁰ Even if it takes another forty-eight days' labor to supply his family's other essential needs, it is clear that the Mayan farmer has a consid-

⁷ See Julian Steward and Louis Faron, *Native Peoples of South America* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), pp. 87-88. For a more detailed description, see John H. Rowe, "Inca Culture at the Time of the Spanish Conquest," in Julian Steward (ed.), *Handbook of South American Indians*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 143 (1946), vol. II, especially pp. 210-233.

⁸ For pictures of this tool, see Steward, *Handbook*, vol. II, p. 213.

⁹ See, for example, Steward and Faron, pp. 180-184 or Victor von Hagen, *The Ancient Sun Kingdoms of the Americas* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1961), pp. 61, 68-69, 81-86, 128-129, and 246-252.

¹⁰ Sylvanus G. Morley, *The Ancient Maya* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1946), pp. 154-155.

erable amount of free time which he can devote to other kinds of activities. As one student of the Maya has pointed out, it was just this surplus time which made possible the building of the famous Mayan pyramids, temples, palaces, colonnades, ball courts, dance platforms, courts, plazas, and causeways.¹¹ He could have added that this surplus time also made possible the expansion of the state and the high incidence of warfare found in advanced horticultural societies the world over.

As might be expected, these technological advances also had *demographic consequences*. Above all, they made possible the enlargement of societies both by geographical extension and by increased density. As seen in the last chapter, the populations of simple horticultural societies seldom rise much above 15,000 and usually fall far short of this. In advanced horticultural societies the upper limit is raised at least two hundredfold. The Inca Empire, for example, is estimated to have had a population of about 4,000,000 at the time the Spaniards arrived, and the Maya are thought to have numbered 3,000,000 in the ninth century.¹² Even a less advanced group, the Chibcha of what is now Colombia, is estimated to have numbered 300,000 at the time of the Conquest.¹³ In Africa no horticultural society seems to have reached the size of Incan and Mayan societies in the precolonial era, but many apparently numbered 100,000 or more and a few may even have passed the million mark.¹⁴

In part this growth potential is simply a reflection of advances in agricultural technology which make possible substantial increases in population density. Densities of 100 or more per square mile are found in many advanced horticultural societies, and in the case of the Ibo of Nigeria, 1931 census figures reveal an overall density of 260 per square mile, with figures for certain areas even higher.¹⁵

In the main, however, the size of advanced horticultural societies is a reflection of an important new development in human affairs which is seen clearly for the first time at this level of economic development, namely,

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-156.

¹² See Steward and Faron, p. 121 on the Inca, and von Hagen, p. 221 on the Maya.

¹³ Steward and Faron, p. 212.

¹⁴ See Murdock, "World Ethnographic Sample," *American Anthropologist*, 59 (1957), pp. 675-677, which records numerous peoples in the sample as having "political integration in large independent units averaging at least 100,000 in population" (see col. 15). One of the largest societies was that of the Ganda, which in the nineteenth century was reported to number from 500,000 to 1,000,000. See Margaret Chave Fallers, *The Eastern Lacustrine Bantu* (London: International African Institute, 1960), p. 52.

¹⁵ For figures on the Ibo, see K. M. Buchanan and J. C. Pugh, *Land and People in Nigeria* (London: University of London Press, 1955), p. 60. Some years ago L. Dudley Stamp of the University of London calculated that southern Nigeria could maintain a population of 144 persons per square mile, indefinitely and without damage to the soil, using slash-and-burn cultivation and hoe culture. See "Land Utilization and Soil Erosion in Nigeria," *Geographical Review*, 28 (1938), pp. 32-45.

empire building. In simple horticultural and hunting and gathering societies empire building seems to be impossible. To begin with, the resources of these societies are insufficient to build the necessary military and political machines. In addition, the surplus produced by potential victims is too meager to justify the effort. Conflicts between these societies, therefore, are limited to raiding and plundering.

With the emergence of advanced horticultural societies, it becomes both possible and profitable for ambitious and warlike peoples to establish relatively permanent control over other groups. The economic surplus is sufficiently great to sustain the necessary military and political machine and to justify the necessary expenditure of effort. As a consequence of this process of empire building, peoples of diverse cultural traditions are often brought within the framework of a single political system.

There are numerous indications that most of the larger societies in sub-Saharan Africa today developed in this way. For example, in writing of the Yoruba of Nigeria, one of the most populous groups in that part of the world, Forde states, "there is little doubt that the Yoruba state was built up by a process of military expansion, and that many of the Yoruba-speaking peoples of today are the descendants of subject groups who have adopted the speech and customs of their conquerors."¹⁶ A similar situation prevailed in the New World. The Incas seem to have been a very small and insignificant group a century before the Spanish Conquest. During that century, however, they conquered a great number of other peoples, who were speedily absorbed culturally as well as politically.¹⁷ Thus, on both continents, conquest and empire building were important factors in societal growth and expansion.

As these examples indicate, political organization reached a fairly high level of development in many parts of horticultural Africa and America before contacts were made with Europeans. States covering thousands of square miles were governed by strong central authorities. In a number of instances, dynasties were established which lasted for several centuries.¹⁸ In writing of these states, one leading anthropologist maintained that "in the thoroughness of their political institutions and in the skill with which social institutions were utilized to lend stability to the political structure, they far exceeded anything in Europe prior to the six-

¹⁶ Forde, *Habitat*, p. 164.

¹⁷ For a summary of these developments, see Rowe, in Steward, *Handbook*, vol. II, pp. 203-209; Steward and Faron, pp. 112-188 and 133; von Hagen, pp. 404-429 and 576-579; and Joseph Bram, *An Analysis of Inca Militarism*, Monographs of the American Ethnological Society, 4 (1941).

¹⁸ See, for example, John Roscoe, *The Baganda* (London: Macmillan, 1911), p. 214.

teenth century."¹⁹ Although this is clearly an exaggeration, it can at least be said that they compared favorably with their European counterparts of the early Middle Ages.

Not all the horticultural societies in Africa engaged in empire building, by any means. Those that did not, however, often fell victim to those that did. Hence it appears that prior to European contact and domination, the majority of the population of horticultural Africa below the Sahara were either members or subjects of expansionist states. Nevertheless, some escaped this fate, so that it would be a mistake to suppose that all advanced horticultural societies are of this type. This is one of the important variable features of advanced horticultural societies.

When alien peoples are conquered and absorbed by advanced horticultural societies, their identity is not invariably lost or destroyed. On the contrary, they often take their place as a distinctive subunit within the dominant society. This transition is often accomplished quite easily and naturally, especially in those societies which maintain distinctions on the grounds of descent. In such societies a newly conquered group, or one which requests annexation (a not uncommon practice), is likely to become simply another clan or descent group, frequently retaining its own internal organization. This has clearly happened in the case of the Azande of east central Africa and the Ndebele of Southern Rhodesia.²⁰ In many other African societies, clans or other descent groups are reported to be concentrated in certain localities, which strongly suggests that before the days of empire building they were autonomous local groups.²¹

In the New World the evidence is less clear, chiefly because of the early disintegration of the advanced horticultural societies. Nevertheless, there is good reason to believe that most of the lesser "clans" in both Inca and Aztec society were the descendants of once independent peoples.²²

¹⁹ Ralph Linton, *The Tree of Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), p. 170.

²⁰ For the Azande, see P. T. W. Baxter and Audrey Butt, *The Azande and Related Peoples* (London: International African Institute, 1953), p. 11; for the Ndebele, see A. J. B. Hughes and J. van Velsen, *The Ndebele* (London: International African Institute, 1954), pp. 71-72. Among the latter, these descent groups, known as "tribes," have grown so large that their functions have been transferred to subunits formed within them, though the larger groups are still identifiable by their common names and strongly influence the status of individuals.

²¹ See, for example, Hilda Kuper, *The Swazi* (London: International African Institute, 1952), p. 20, or Melville Herskovits' comments on the Dahomean sibs, in *Dahomey: An Ancient West African Kingdom* (Locust Valley, N.Y.: Augustin, 1938), chap. 10. These are but two of many such examples. See also Linton's comments on the relation of clans and state in Buganda, which suggest a similar origin for these clans (*Tree*, p. 175).

²² See, for example, Rowe, in Steward, *Handbook*, vol. II, pp. 253-256, or Bram, pp. 22-29 on the Inca *ayllu*, and von Hagen, pp. 68-70 on the Aztec *calpulli*.

Many of the more aggressive and expanding states contain ethnic minorities which, even today, are still only partly assimilated. For example, the Ngwato tribe of Northern Bechuanaland, with a population of 101,000, contains 10,000 Bushmen, 23,000 Kalaka, 1,000 Herero, 1,000 Rotse, and 700 Yeei, none of whom are Southern Bantu like the Ngwato, and all of whom differ from one another and from the Ngwato in language and customs.²³ Similar examples could be cited from many other parts of Africa and the New World.

Discrepancies between the boundaries of societies and ethnic groups also develop because conquest states themselves sometimes undergo a process of fission or fragmentation, leading to the division of the group into a series of minor principalities or kingdoms. At this level of societal development, central authorities frequently find it impossible to prevent schismatic movements in the more remote provinces.

Sometimes both of these tendencies, i.e., conquest and fission, are evident in a single tribal group. For example, it is reported that "towards the periphery of Zande power there are many groups which have been only partially 'Zandeized' and others which have kept their own culture and language."²⁴ At the same time, the Azande themselves are divided into a considerable number of petty kingdoms, not unlike those into which many European peoples were divided in the Middle Ages.

The growth of the state appears to have a number of important consequences for the communities within advanced horticultural societies. To begin with, it contributes to the growth in size of those which serve as royal capitals. Many of the residents in these communities live off the economic surplus of the land as a whole and therefore the community's growth is not limited by the resources of the immediate area. Audrey Richards reports that during the 1930s the villages in which chiefs of the Bemba lived commonly had 300 to 400 huts and in earlier times were "evidently very much larger," while other villages had only thirty to fifty huts.²⁵ Elsewhere in Africa, notably in Nigeria, still larger communities emerged as a result of the process of empire building. For example, as early as the fifteenth century, a Portuguese explorer reported that Gwato, which was the port town for the town of Benin, had a population of 2,000,

²³ I. Schapera, *Government and Politics in Tribal Societies* (London: Watts, 1956), p. 19. For a good discussion of this subject see also Schapera, *The Tswana* (London: International African Institute, 1953), pp. 34-35. See also Bram, chap. 2, on the Inca.

²⁴ Baxter and Butt, p. 11.

²⁵ See Audrey I. Richards, "The Bemba of Northeastern Rhodesia," in Elizabeth Colson and Max Gluckman (eds.), *Seven Tribes of British Central Africa* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1951), p. 171, and also Richards, "The Political System of the Bemba Tribe of North-Eastern Rhodesia," in M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard (eds.), *African Political Systems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 91.

suggesting that Benin itself was substantially larger.²⁶ A little more than a century later a Dutch traveler described the town of Benin in the following fashion leaving even less room for doubt about its size:

The towne seemed to be very great, when you enter into it, you goe into a great broad street, not paved, which seemeth to be seven or eight times broader than the Warmoes street in Amsterdam; which goeth right out and never crooketh, and where I was lodged with Mattheus Cornelison, it was at least a quarter of an houres going from the gate, and yet I could not see to the end of the street, but I saw a great high tree, as farre as I could discern, and I was told the street was much longer. Then I spake with a Netherlander, who told me he had been as far as that tree, but saw no end of the street; . . . so that it is thought that that street is a mile long [a Dutch mile was equal to about four English miles] besides the Suburbs.²⁷

Even in the eighteenth century, after Benin had entered a period of decline, an English visitor reported that "The town of Benin is large and populous, and contains probably 15,000 inhabitants."²⁸

Benin was but one of a number of towns which flourished as capitals of small kingdoms in southern Nigeria during the last thousand years. Just how large they were we may never know, but numerous reports suggest figures of 20,000 or more in the pre-European period. While these communities were probably the largest to develop in non-Islamic Africa south of the Sahara before modern Western technology began its work of transformation, other kingdoms were widely scattered over much of the area from the Guinea Coast to South Africa, and the capitals of these kingdoms seem often to have had populations of several thousand or more.²⁹

Urban tendencies were no less developed in the advanced horticultural societies of the New World. Even in the least advanced, the chiefdoms of the Circum-Caribbean area, towns of up to 3,000 are reported.³⁰ Mayapán, the Maya capital, is thought to have had a population of more than 20,000, and Cortes estimated that Texcoco, one of the leading cities of pre-Columbian Mexico, had a population of 30,000.³¹ Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital, and Cuzco, the Inca capital, seem to have been even larger.

²⁶ From Duarte Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, edited by R. Mauny and translated by G. H. T. Kimble and reprinted in Thomas Hodgkin, *Nigerian Perspectives: An Historical Anthology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 93.

²⁷ From *A Description and Historical Declaration of the Golden Kingdom of Guinea*, reprinted in Hodgkin, pp. 119-120. Quoted by permission.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

²⁹ See, for example, Schapera's comments on the capitals of the Southern Bantu groups, *Government and Politics*, p. 15.

³⁰ Steward and Faron, pp. 184-185, etc.

³¹ von Hagen, pp. 134 and 308.

Spanish officials reported that there were seventy to a hundred thousand houses in the former and a hundred thousand in the latter, but both reports are almost certainly greatly exaggerated. Although their exact size may never be known, sixteenth-century Europeans certainly found them both impressive.

Communities in advanced horticultural societies tend to be more permanent than those in simple horticultural societies. In part this is due to advances in agricultural technology which make it possible to utilize the same plot of ground for a longer period of time. The metal hoe, for example, helps replace exhausted soil by turning over the ground to a greater depth, reaching nutrients which the simple digging stick could not reach. Equally important, the discovery of schemes of crop rotation slows down the rate at which the soil is exhausted, permitting longer continuous use. Herskovits reports, for example, that in Dahomey it is not uncommon for fields which are worked carefully to be kept continuously in cultivation for fifteen to twenty years.³² In Ganda, where it is reported that rather high standards of cultivation were maintained, some plots of land could be occupied permanently under a regime of crop rotation.³³ The same seems to have been true of the irrigated, terraced, and fertilized fields of certain of the advanced horticulturalists of the New World.

A second factor which made possible greater permanence of certain communities was the development of kingdoms and empires. As we have seen, the residents of the capitals of these states were at least partially freed from the necessity of supplying their material needs from the immediate area. To the extent that this was true, the drain on local resources was reduced, and the possibility of permanence increased.

In the realm of occupational specialization, differences between simple and advanced horticultural societies are even more marked. A far greater number and variety of specialists are encountered in the latter. Although, as in many other comparisons, there is some degree of overlap, the upper limits of the two types of societies are quite distinct.

Clearly the most important single factor in the growth of occupational specialization has been the growth of state power. All the larger and more powerful kingdoms required complex governmental systems with numerous officials and soldiers. For example, one reliable English observer of the late seventeenth century reported that the king of Dahomey had a thousand tax collectors alone.³⁴ Other kinds of officials were even more numerous.

³² Herskovits, pp. 33-34.

³³ Fallers, p. 38.

³⁴ Herskovits, vol. I, p. 109.

In the largest and most centralized states it was common to find hierarchies consisting of three to five levels of officials ranging from the king at the top to the local village headman at the bottom.³⁵ Each of these officials, especially those at the higher levels, was surrounded by his court, which included a great variety of specialists—magicians of various types, priests, tax collectors, advisers, military men, common soldiers, wives and concubines usually by the hundreds, eunuchs to guard them, entertainers of many kinds, and artisans of unusual skill and talent. In some societies full-time craftsmen were found only at the king's court and the various tools, weapons, and other things the common people needed were made either by the people themselves or by part-time specialists.³⁶ This indicates again the influence which political developments have in stimulating the growth of occupational specialization.

Contrasted with politically advanced groups such as the Incas, Aztecs, Dahomeans, and Ganda are other groups such as the Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia, who closely resemble the more advanced simple horticultural societies with respect to the level of occupational specialization. Among these people specialization was, till recently, limited to part-time work in a few fields of activity.³⁷ Similarly, among the Swazi of southeastern Africa it is reported that "a certain recognition of individual aptitude has led to a limited specialization within the general skills expected of each person. Thus a few men specialize in tanning hides, cutting shields and carving; a few women in basket-ware and pottery."³⁸ These are all part-time occupations. The only full-time occupation not of a religious or political character is that of smith. Among the Swazi, as among most peoples of Africa, this is a highly honored, full-time occupation.

As would be expected, the volume of trade and commerce in advanced horticultural societies is closely linked with the extent of occupational specialization. In those societies in which specialization is highly developed, there is also considerable trade. In fact, in such societies one finds the development of organized markets open for business on regularly appointed days, and supervised and regulated by public officials.

³⁵ Most hierarchies contained only three levels, as in the case of Dahomey (Herskovits, vol. II, pp. 23ff.) or Buganda (Fallers, pp. 61ff.). However, in describing the Kongo empire, which was destroyed in 1569, Murdock reports that it was divided into six provinces which in turn were subdivided into districts each containing a number of villages, indicating a four-level hierarchy (Murdock, *Africa*, p. 298). The Inca represent the extreme, with five levels of officials ranging upward from "foreman" to emperor (Rowe, in Steward, *Handbook*, vol. II, p. 263).

³⁶ Fallers, p. 43.

³⁷ E. Colson, "The Plateau Tonga of Northern Rhodesia," in Colson and Gluckman, p. 104.

³⁸ Kuper, p. 31.

There are even the beginnings of systems of currency and specialization in the merchandising of goods.³⁹ At the other extreme, in societies with little specialization, trade is limited, and formal markets, standardized currency, and middlemen are wholly absent.

One factor restricting trade and commerce in the advanced horticultural societies of both Africa and the New World is the primitive character of transportation. The wheel, for example, was unknown in both areas. Draft animals were also lacking. So were pack animals, except among the Incas, who used the llama. Though many African tribes had cattle, they never used them as beasts of burden. Similarly, though the horse was introduced into the Sudan and Nigeria from northern Africa prior to European contact, its use seems to have been limited entirely to military operations.

As a consequence, except in Inca society all goods which had to be moved overland were transported on the backs or heads of human porters.⁴⁰ Even though good porters were capable of carrying loads of 50 to 100 pounds for extended distances, much of their labor was expended in carrying their own supplies, appreciably reducing the net volume of goods moved.⁴¹

The most efficient means of transportation found in most advanced horticultural societies was the canoe. Unfortunately, navigable streams and rivers were frequently lacking.

The inefficiency of techniques for moving men and goods also had important political implications. In the first place, since tribute and taxes

³⁹ Along the Guinea Coast and as far east as Buganda, cowrie shells long served as a form of currency. See, for example, Michael Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria* (London: Faber, 1962), pp. 66, 186, etc., or Fallers on the Ganda, p. 49. In Africa, the development of middlemen, or merchants, seems to have developed most fully on the Guinea Coast. In reports from this area there are scattered references to women buying goods in one market to sell in another (see Herskovits, vol. I, p. 56) and to men working as merchants, though usually as agents of the king [see George Peter Murdock, *Our Primitive Contemporaries* (New York: Macmillan, 1940), p. 577]. In Buganda, in east Central Africa, it is reported that "markets within easy walking distance of each other were usually held on different days, forming a cycle, so that itinerant merchants, at the close of one market, could pack up their wares and move on to the next" (Linton, *Tree*, p. 173). Probably the greatest development of mercantile specialization occurred in the New World, where full-time merchants are reported among both the Aztecs and Mayas (von Hagen, pp. 174-175 and 268-273). Aztec records indicate that this was a very late development, dating from 1504, or less than a generation before the Spanish Conquest. It is interesting to note that Aztec merchants, like those sent out by the Dahomean kings in Africa, were accused of being warriors in disguise, sent to spy out enemy lands. There may well have been some truth in these charges.

⁴⁰ Even in Inca society, men shared the burden of transporting goods with the llama and were actually more effective. (See von Hagen, p. 554.) This is a good indication of how inefficient the llama was.

⁴¹ The figures are from Forde, *Habitat*, p. 167.

were usually in the form of goods, and since the costs of shipping the goods varied directly with the distance covered, the net gains resulting from conquests of remote areas were likely to be limited.⁴² Second, since the movement of men and goods was so difficult, kings found it extremely difficult to maintain effective control over their outlying provinces. Thus, the primitive character of transport was a major factor contributing to the recurring revolts against central authority and the frequent breakup of empires.⁴³

Introduction to Distributive Systems

The outstanding feature which emerges from any comparison of simple and advanced horticultural societies is the striking development of social inequality evident in so many of the latter. In many of the advanced horticultural societies of Africa, inequality is carried to a level far beyond anything ever observed in technologically less developed societies. The contrast is so pronounced that it seems as if some kind of threshold had been crossed, opening up a whole new range of possibilities.

In some of these societies one finds individuals who are regarded virtually as gods and treated accordingly. For example, even the highest ministers of state in Dahomey had to grovel in the dust when in the king's presence, and throw dirt on their heads and bodies.⁴⁴ No one could appear in his presence with his shoulders covered, or wearing sandals, shoes, or hat. No one could sit on a stool in his presence; if they sat, they were obliged to sit on the ground. The king's wealth was enormous, as suggested by the fact of his thousand tax collectors. In theory, though not in actual practice, he was regarded as the owner of all property in the land.⁴⁵ Any woman of his realm whom he fancied, whether married or not, could be taken by him and put in his royal harem. The exact number of royal wives is unclear, chiefly because it was so great, but apparently there were hundreds, and perhaps as many as two thousand.⁴⁶ The king was even

⁴² See Baxter and Butt, p. 62.

⁴³ The Ganda seem to have been unique among the horticultural peoples of Africa in developing good roads and this may well have contributed to the stability of their political system (see Linton, *Tree*, p. 173 or Murdock, *Africa*, p. 355). The situation was much better in the New World. Even the lesser chiefdoms of the Circum-Caribbean area built roads, and the Incas and Mayas built excellent ones. See, for example, Morley, pp. 339-341; Rowe, in Steward, *Handbook*, vol. II, pp. 229-233; Bram, pp. 36-37; and Steward and Faron, pp. 198-199. These roads may also have been a factor in the relative political stability of some of these groups.

⁴⁴ Herskovits, vol. II, p. 33. Lucy Mair reports that in Ganda it was claimed that one of the kings required his subjects to kneel on iron spikes. See *Primitive Government* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1962), p. 181; see also pp. 197-205.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 78.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 45, or Murdock, *Contemporaries*, p. 582.

permitted to contract incestuous marriages, a practice forbidden to all outside the royal family.⁴⁷ All prisoners captured in war became his slaves.⁴⁸ Through the medium of his subordinates, the king "held close control over happenings of all kinds in his domain."⁴⁹ For example, he controlled all appointments to public office, and sib-heads and even the heads of extended family groups could assume their offices only if confirmed by him. He also exercised considerable influence over the various religious groups and approved the inheritance of all property. Finally, he held in his hands the powers of life and death over his subjects, and those who provoked his displeasure, even members of the royal family, could be sold into slavery or put to death.⁵⁰

Though the king enjoyed the greatest measure of power and privilege, his chief ministers and subordinates were also men to be reckoned with. For example, the chiefs who ruled the various provinces, while humble in the royal presence, exercised despotic power in their own jurisdictions. As one writer put it, "when outside the palace, these high potentates expect the commonalty to kneel, to kiss the ground, and to clap hands before them, as if they were kings."⁵¹ Each maintained his own court and harem, both of which were essentially scaled-down replicas of their royal models.

At the other extreme from these exalted figures was the much more numerous class of slaves.⁵² These slaves had no legal rights. The majority were herded onto the king's plantations, where they were obliged to work long and hard under the control of overseers whose duty was to get the utmost yield from the fields. Another category of slaves was even more unfortunate; their function was to serve as human sacrifices in various religious ceremonies. Every morning, for example, the king dispatched two of these unfortunates as messengers to his ancestors to express his thanks for having been permitted to awaken to a new day on earth.⁵³

While Dahomey is not typical of all the advanced horticultural societies of sub-Saharan Africa, it is reasonably representative of the many societies in which there were centralized governmental systems. In most of these the rulers were regarded as divine or semidivine and were the objects of extreme acts of deference, owned immense wealth, and wielded

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 339.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 95ff.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 36ff.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, various sections of chap. 23 and elsewhere.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 29-30.

⁵² *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 99ff.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 53 and vol. II, p. 100. It should be noted that generally the situation of slaves in horticultural Africa was somewhat better than that in Dahomey, though their position should not be idealized.

great power.⁵⁴ Typically they asserted and enforced far-reaching claims over the time, energies, and wealth of their subjects. Subjects were usually obliged to turn over a significant portion of all they produced and in addition were usually liable for labor and military services, the benefits of which accrued chiefly to the king.⁵⁵ Sometimes it seems that the more powerful rulers of these African kingdoms laid claim to almost the entire economic surplus of their people.

One of the striking features of the advanced horticultural societies of Africa is that wherever governmental institutions developed beyond the level of local village autonomy, they tended toward a common pattern. Meyer Fortes called attention to this almost a generation ago in his pioneering analysis of African political systems. He argued that sub-Saharan political systems can be divided into two basic types. One he called Group A, consisting of "those societies which have centralized authority, administrative machinery, and judicial institutions—in short, a government—and in which cleavages of wealth, privilege and status correspond to the distribution of power and authority."⁵⁶ The second category, Group B, contains all those tribes in which local village autonomy still survives. As Fortes put it, it consists of "those [tribes] which lack centralized authority, administrative machinery, and constituted judicial institutions—in short, government—and in which there are no sharp divisions of rank, status, or wealth." In the latter, kinship systems fulfill most of the necessary political functions.⁵⁷

More recently George Peter Murdock undertook an ambitious ethnographic survey of all the peoples of Africa. This survey led him to a conclusion which closely parallels that of Fortes. As he put it:

⁵⁴ With respect to wealth, Max Gluckman reports that a recent Zulu chief owned 30 per cent of all the cattle in his tribe. See "The Kingdom of the Zulu in South Africa," in M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard (eds.), *African Political Systems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 45n. Schapera reports that in the 1930s a chief of the Kgatla owned 4,000 head at a time when few other men owned as many as several hundred (*Government and Politics*, pp. 101-102).

⁵⁵ See Schapera, *Government and Politics*, chap. 4, "The Privileges and Powers of Office," for an excellent summary of the rights of southern Bantu chiefs and kings. Oberg provides a very good summary of the powers and privileges of the kings of Ankole (in Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, pp. 128-150). See, also, Mair on East Africa. Good descriptions of other African kingdoms and chiefdoms can be found in various ethnographies.

⁵⁶ Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, p. 5.

⁵⁷ More recently several other anthropologists have suggested that Fortes's scheme of classification oversimplifies things. See, for example, Aidan Southall, *Alur Society: A Study of Processes and Types of Domination* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1956), especially chap. 9, and particularly pp. 248-249; or John Middleton and David Tait (eds.), *Tribes without Rulers: Studies in African Segmentary Systems* (London: Routledge, 1958), especially pp. 2-3. It should be noted, however, that these criticisms indicate the need for amplification of Fortes's scheme, rather than its replacement. Hence, for purposes of the present analysis, Fortes's basic distinction still seems a useful one.

Specialists steeped in the African literature commonly discern wide differences among the complex political systems of different areas. To the present writer, coming to the subject after a survey of another continent, such differences appear superficial in comparison with the extraordinary resemblances in fundamental features and even in external forms. . . . It is almost as though all of Africa south of the Sahara were permeated, as it were, by a mental blueprint of a despotic political structure, transmitted from generation to generation as a part of traditional verbal culture, and always available to be transmuted into reality whenever some individual arises with the imagination, enterprise, strength, and luck to establish, with the aid of his kinsmen, an authoritarian regime over people residing beyond the limits of his local community.⁵⁸

Murdock then lists eighteen characteristics, most of which he says are found in all of the highly developed states of Africa, with the exception of a few East African states influenced by the Galla and neighboring Eastern Cushitic tribes of southern Ethiopia. These characteristics form the basis of a system of government which Murdock labels *African despotism*:

1. Monarchical absolutism. Each king or independent paramount chief enjoys absolute power, at least in theory.
2. Eminent domain. All land, livestock, and wild game in the state belong in theory to the monarch, providing a basis for his right to derive an income from them.
3. Divine kingship. Either the ruler himself is divine or he has unique personal access to the dominant divine powers.
4. Ritual isolation. The king is isolated from physical contact with all except a few attendants and intimates. Often he eats in private or must be fed by others, or his feet may not touch the ground, or he is concealed by curtains because his glance is considered dangerous.
5. Insignia of office. Royal status is symbolized by the possession of distinctive regalia, among which stools, drums, and animal tails are especially common.
6. Capital towns. The ruler resides in a capital town along with his attendants and ministers. Typically each new monarch founds a new capital or at least establishes a new royal residence.
7. Royal courts. The monarch maintains an elaborate court with pages, guards, entertainers, personal attendants, treasurers, and a variety of chamberlains with specialized functions.
8. Protocol. Behavior at court follows detailed rules of protocol, of which abject prostration in the presence of the monarch is a nearly universal ingredient.

⁵⁸ *Africa*, p. 37. Quoted by permission. For a similar conclusion, see Linton, *Tree*, p. 181. Southall's study of the Alur and Mair's work on East Africa suggest, however, that it may be a mistake to suppose that conquest was the only means by which the more complex political systems developed.

9. Harems. The ruler is invariably surrounded by a large number of wives and concubines.
10. Queens. At most royal courts a queen mother, a queen consort, and a queen sister, or at least two of the three, enjoy extraordinary prestige, even sometimes technically outranking the king himself. Queens are commonly endowed with independent estates and often exercise restricted political authority.
11. Territorial bureaucracy. For administrative purposes each state is divided into a territorial hierarchy of provinces, districts, and local communities with bureaucratic officials at each level responsible for maintaining order, collecting and transmitting taxes, and levying troops and *corvée* labor. Even where bureaucratic posts are hereditary rather than appointive, their occupants are firmly subordinated to the central authority.
12. Ministers. Resident at the capital as assistants to the ruler in the exercise of centralized authority are always a number of ministers of state, the most important of whom form a supreme advisory council. They are distinguished by specialized functions, e.g., a vizier or prime minister, a military commander in chief, a royal executioner, a custodian of the royal tombs, a supervisor of royal princes and princesses.
13. Duality of ministerial roles. Almost universally, the ministers combine their specialized functions at the capital with offices as provincial governors in the territorial organization.
14. Titles. Characteristic of African states is a great proliferation of titles. Although a few or many may be hereditary, there are always a large number bestowable by the monarch in return for loyal services, and competition for these is often keen.
15. Security provisions. To prevent palace revolutions a king's brothers, as the most likely usurpers, may be killed, blinded, incarcerated, or banished from the capital. To prevent revolts in the provinces, positions as governors are commonly filled, not by members of the royal lineage, but by persons of categories ineligible to succeed to the throne, e.g., commoners, elevated slaves, eunuchs, or, where succession is patrilineal, sisters' sons.
16. Electoral succession. Although the ruler often designates an heir presumptive, and may even invest him with ministerial authority, succession to the throne is almost never automatic. The decision usually rests in the hands of a committee of ministers with constitutional electoral powers, who are free to follow or ignore the late king's wishes. Not infrequently the succession shifts regularly from one to another branch of the royal lineage.
17. Anarchic interregnums. Since there is always a plurality of candidates with strong supporters, and considerable political maneuvering may be necessary before the electors can agree upon a successor, a period of several days or even weeks usually intervenes between the death of one king and the selection of the next. During this interregnum laws are relaxed and social disorder prevails, often accentuated by a resort to arms by the partisans of rival claimants.

18. Human sacrifice. In many Negro states the funeral of a king is accompanied by human sacrifices, sometimes on an extravagant scale.⁵⁹

It is impossible to say precisely what percentage of the horticultural peoples of Africa belong to Group A societies and what percentage to Group B. On the basis of Murdock's survey, however, it appears that about 65 per cent of the population is in the former.⁶⁰

Despite the fact that there was no cultural contact between the advanced horticultural peoples of Africa and the New World, there is a striking similarity in patterns of political organization. For the most part, Murdock's characterization of the leading African states can be applied to the leading states of the New World, such as those created by the Mayas, Aztecs, and Incas. The chief differences seem to involve secondary features, such as the ritual isolation of the monarch, the exalted status of the queen mother, queen consort, or queen sister, the threat from kinsmen, the movement of capitals, and the anarchic interregnums, all of which, though prominent in Africa, are largely missing in the New World.⁶¹ These differences are more than offset by the striking similarities in more basic matters. In the New World, for example, the rulers of advanced states were regarded as demigods and treated as such.⁶² They enjoyed immense power and privilege and their subjects were compelled to display extreme deference.⁶³ They had at their disposal a complex and highly developed retinue of ministers, courtiers, and officials, who saw to it that their slightest order was executed and who formed a privileged class set apart from the mass of commoners.⁶⁴ Similarities even extended to the widespread practice of human sacrifice (though the Incas seem to have been abandoning this, probably because of the difficulty in obtaining foreign victims after the Empire became so inclusive), the presence of royal harems, and the practice of electoral succession.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-39. Quoted by permission. Compare with Linton, *Tree*, especially p. 181.

⁶⁰ This figure is based on my own tabulation of Murdock's summary descriptions of over 500 tribal groups south of the Sahara. These tabulations showed that about 60 per cent of the tribal groups were in Group A and that those in Group A were slightly larger on the average than those in Group B.

⁶¹ See, for example, von Hagen, pp. 119-124, 297-304, and 493-506, or Rowe, in Steward, *Handbook*, vol. II, pp. 257-260.

⁶² See, for example, von Hagen, pp. 119-124 and 493-506.

⁶³ See, for example, A. L. Kroeber's statement that the Chibcha "overlords were shown every respect which native imagination could conceive. Even chiefs never looked them in the face, but turned their 'shoulders' away or bent far down in their presence. The Spanish soldiers were thought shameless because they spoke to their own commanders eye to eye." See "The Chibcha," in Steward, *Handbook*, vol. II, pp. 902-903; see also Rowe, p. 259, on the Inca emperor.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Rowe, pp. 263-264, on the Incas, or Morley, pp. 168-170, on the Mayas.

In the New World, as in Africa, there were variations in the degree of political development. Not all societies attained the level of the Incas and Aztecs, or even of the Mayas and Chibchas. This was especially true in most of the chiefdoms of the Circum-Caribbean area.⁶⁵ As in Africa, these variations in political development were closely related to variations in the nature and extent of social inequality. In fact, it appears to be a basic principle that *among societies at an advanced horticultural level of development, the separation of the political and kinship systems and the resulting development of the state are necessary preconditions for the development of marked social inequality*. As a corollary of this we may add: *in Group A societies at this level of economic development, the power, privilege, and prestige of individuals and families is primarily a function of their relationship to the state*. In short, the institutions of government provide the key to the solution of the major questions concerning distribution and stratification in societies at this level.

The Causes of Variation in Political Development and Inequality

Before proceeding in our analysis, it may be well to stop and ask why some advanced horticultural societies developed centralized governments of the type described by Fortes and Murdock and others did not. Unfortunately, this problem has not yet received the systematic attention it deserves. There are, of course, numerous references in sociological and anthropological writing to the conquest theory of the state and considerable evidence to indicate that the more highly developed political systems of sub-Saharan Africa have, in fact, largely developed in this way. Still this does not answer the question of *why* some groups embarked on a career of conquest while others did not.

Murdock, in the first quotation cited above, suggests that the crucial factor may be the presence or absence of an individual with the requisite imagination, enterprise, strength, luck, and family connections. Although one cannot doubt that this is a factor, it seems unlikely that it is the major one, since the technological basis for the development of these African states has been present in most parts of the continent for centuries. It is difficult to believe that in those areas where the less developed systems were never supplanted, no individual was ever born who possessed the necessary traits.

Our general theory suggests that *environment* should be a more fruitful variable, and available evidence supports our expectations. If one plots the location of the more complex states on a map of Africa, it quickly

⁶⁵ See Steward and Faron, chaps. 6-8.

becomes evident that none were located in the heart of the rain forests. Using Murdock's ethnographic survey, it is possible to make a systematic check of this relationship. The results, in slightly simplified form, are shown in Table 1. The correlation between these two variables, using Kendall's tau, is .19.⁶⁶ If it were possible to obtain accurate information on environmental variations among the great majority of societies outside the rain forests, the correlation would undoubtedly be higher.⁶⁷

Table 1 Level of Political Development by Environmental Conditions in Horticultural Africa, in Percentages

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS	LEVEL OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT					TOTAL	NUMBER OF SOCIETIES
	MAJOR STATES AND LESSER STATES	INTER- MEDIATE OR UNCER- TAIN	PARA- MOUNT CHIEF- TAINS	INTER- MEDIATE OR UNCER- TAIN	LOCAL HEAD- MEN ONLY		
Rain forest areas	3	0	34	22	41	100	96
Other areas	35	6	22	2	36	101	416

⁶⁶ The value of the relationship shown in Table 1 is only .15, but using the further details not shown in the table, the value rises to .19. While there are certain methodological difficulties involved in constructing such a table, they are not serious enough to justify a rejection of this finding. Among the difficulties, the following deserve note. First, Murdock's data are organized in terms of tribes, i.e., cultural and linguistic units, rather than societies, i.e., socially and politically autonomous units. It does not appear, however, that this introduces any systematic bias into Table 1. Second, the data are organized in terms of tribes rather than people. If people were used, the relationship would be slightly stronger than that shown, since Group A tribes tend to be a bit larger than Group B (as shown by special tabulations I have made which are not reported here). Third, Murdock's statements about the level of political organization are not as standardized as one might desire for coding purposes. This leads to uncertainty in classification in some cases, but this only involves adjacent levels. Thus, while it is sometimes difficult to determine from Murdock whether a given tribe has paramount chiefs or only local headmen, it is always clear that they do not have a highly developed state system. Finally, while some errors may have crept into Murdock's statements, no one can survey hundreds of societies without this happening occasionally. Hence, all things considered, it seems unlikely that this table is seriously in error.

⁶⁷ For example, Murdock reports that only one of the sixty-one tribes in the Nigerian Plateau area ever developed "a genuinely complex state" (*Africa*, chap. 13). From other sources, it appears that this is a very unfavorable environment (see Buchanan and Pugh, especially chaps. 1-3). The Tallensi are another non-rain-forest people who have remained quite primitive politically. Of their environment, Fortes states "the hazards of agriculture are enormous" and food is "chronically insufficient" (see "The Political System of the Tallensi of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast," in Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, p. 249). He reports that even in an excellent season few people produce a surplus sufficient to lay up supplies against a future disaster. Under such conditions it is not surprising to find that their political system falls into Fortes's Group B.

The virtual absence of complex political systems in the rain forests of Africa reflects the difficulties such societies encounter in transportation. A complex state presupposes the ability to move both men and goods easily and cheaply. Warriors must be able to move rapidly in order to control potentially rebellious subjects and protect the state's borders. Goods must be moved from the many scattered villages where they are produced to the capital of the state, where the political authorities reside. In the rain forests of Africa, these conditions could not usually be met by horticultural societies. It is no coincidence that the three advanced states which did develop in the rain forest area were *all* on the fringes, and none in the interior portion where the obstacles to movement were more severe.⁶⁸

A much more important factor in the variation in political development in horticultural Africa seems to be the *level of technology*. Though all of horticultural Africa belongs in the category of *advanced* horticultural societies, there are internal variations. In a pilot survey of twenty-three societies chosen from the nine major regions of sub-Saharan Africa, a correlation of .63 (Kendall's tau) was found between the level of technological development and the level of political development.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ The exceptions were the Edo, the Ijaw, and the Itsekiri, all on the northern fringe of the rain forest in southern Nigeria. See Murdock, *Africa*, chap. 31.

⁶⁹ The nine regions chosen are those in Murdock's "World Ethnographic Survey," pp. 675-677. Wherever possible, three societies were chosen from each region, representing high, medium, and minimal political development, as reported in col. 15 of Murdock's code. In four regions it was not possible to find one or the other of the political extremes. Where choices were possible, those societies were selected for which the most and best ethnographic reports were available. The regions and societies were as follows:

Western Sudan: Mossi, Susu, and Tallensi
 Guinea Coast: Yoruba, Mende, and Ibo
 Nigerian Plateau: Jukun and Tiv
 Eastern Sudan: Shilluk, Azande, and Lugbara
 Upper Nile: Alur and Luo
 Equatorial Bantu: Ganda, Luba, and Fang
 Northeast Bantu: Chagga and Kikuyu
 Central Bantu: Lozi, Yao, and Ila
 Southern Bantu: Zulu and Mbundu

The review of the literature and the coding were done by Thomas Brownlee, a graduate student.

Level of technology was based on the following code:

High: many full-time craft specialties, advanced metallurgy, trade, quasi money economy

Medium: a few full-time craft specialties, some metallurgy

Low: at most one or two full-time craft specialties

Level of political development was coded as follows:

High: many specialized officials, considerable bureaucratization

Medium: some specialized officials, some bureaucratization

Low: few specialized officials, no appreciable bureaucratization

Unlike environment, however, level of technology probably stands in a reciprocal relationship with level of political development, and therefore we cannot assume that the technological factor is quite as potent as this coefficient suggests. In other words, although advances in technology undoubtedly facilitate political advances, the converse is also true to some extent. This can be seen in the case of occupational specialization, which often increases once a political elite gains control of the economic surplus and begins to use it for its own purposes.

A third factor found to be associated with the level of political development in the societies in this survey was *the nature of their social environment*. Those societies which had been most threatened by neighboring societies tended to have a higher level of political development than the others. Evidently such threats force societies to respond politically, or to risk being conquered and absorbed by aggressive neighbors. The correlation between level of external threat and level of political development, using Kendall's tau, was .36.⁷⁰

As might be expected, these three variables were interrelated to some extent. Hence, when their combined influence was measured, it did not equal the sum of their separate effects. Nevertheless, it did produce a correlation coefficient of .71, suggesting that at least half of the variance in levels of political development can be accounted for in terms of these three variables.⁷¹ This fact is especially important in view of the strong relationship between levels of political development and the nature of distributive systems. As Fortes pointed out, social inequality is much more pronounced in the politically advanced Group A societies than in their less developed Group B counterparts. This is clearly evident in the societies and tribes in our pilot study sample. Of the fourteen Group A societies, twelve or possibly thirteen had a high or medium degree of social inequality by horticultural African standards; of the eight Group B tribes, only two had a comparable degree of stratification.⁷² *This strongly suggests that variations in the level of political development are the chief proximate cause of variations in the level of social inequality in advanced horticultural societies.* Data from the New World also appear to support this conclusion.

⁷⁰ The code used here was: (1) society constantly threatened by neighboring societies; (2) sometimes threatened; and (3) rarely or never threatened.

⁷¹ This "multiple correlation" was based on an equal weighting of each of the independent variables. In each instance a three-level, high-medium-low, code was used with highs scored 2, mediums 1, and lows 0. Once again, Kendall's tau was used. It should also be noted that when the cases involving uncertain coding were eliminated, the value of tau rose to .78.

⁷² The correlation, using Kendall's tau, was .60 for this 2 × 2 classification, and .67 for a slightly more complex 3 × 3 classification.

Government and Inequality

From the theoretical standpoint, Fortes's Group A societies are much more important than his Group B tribes. One finds in them the first clear examples of substantial social inequality and the first clear evidences of institutionalized political tyranny and despotism. From the theoretical standpoint it is vitally important to explore the inner workings of these "new" societies, which differ so radically from the hunting and gathering and simple horticultural societies examined previously. Hence, for the remainder of this chapter we shall be concerned chiefly with these most advanced horticultural societies, which account for 65 per cent of the population of horticultural Africa and about the same percentage in South and Central America.⁷³

One question which inevitably arises in any analysis of African despotism, to use Murdock's term, is how this system of government is related to the governmental systems of simple horticultural societies. Were these despotic governments created *de novo* by members of advanced horticultural societies, or did they evolve out of the older, more republican forms which generally prevail in simple horticultural societies? Though this question can never be answered *definitively*, it deserves attention because the answer has important theoretical implications. Also, though we lack direct evidence relevant to this question, there is considerable circumstantial evidence which points rather consistently in one direction.

In all primitive societies some system of redistribution or reciprocity is necessary. The uncertainties of production make it essential that those who have, share with those who have not. In the simplest hunting and gathering societies the logic of this practice is inescapable, since *every* family experiences periods when it is unable to obtain the necessities of life and is obliged to turn to others. Under these circumstances, those who respond generously are rewarded by being accorded special respect, and the skilled and generous hunter often becomes the leader of his community.

In many simple horticultural societies the redistributive process becomes more institutionalized and centralized, with the village headman or tribal chief functioning as the custodian and dispenser of the group's surplus. Though he controls its collection and distribution, he does so essentially in the capacity of trustee. He is not the owner of what he distributes; it is the property of the group. In some of these societies, how-

⁷³ For the New World, see Steward and Faron, table 2, p. 53, omitting the hunters and gatherers.

ever, there is evidence of the beginning of a lack of clarity on this point, fostered by the tendency of such groups to view their chiefs as the primary or sole symbol of tribal unity.⁷⁴ Since he is the symbol of the group, and the group is the owner of the surplus, he is its owner, or so the "logic" seems to run. As a protection against the dangers inherent in this, simple horticultural peoples usually insist that their leaders be men noted for their generosity. In fact, at this level, generosity is virtually a prerequisite for leadership. Since the powers of the chieftainship are so limited, the people are able to exercise considerable control over the office, both through their selection of those who fill it and through their control over the incumbents' continuation in office.⁷⁵

One of the striking features of African despotism is that kings, paramount chiefs, and other high officials are expected to be generous. In other words, the "Redistributive Ethic" is still present. This is evidenced in various ways. In describing the duties and responsibilities of the Southern Bantu chief, for example, Schapera writes that "one quality always expected of him is generosity, and should he fail in this respect he soon becomes unpopular."⁷⁶ Though he is the wealthiest man in his tribe, he cannot use his wealth solely for the satisfaction of personal needs and desires. He is obliged to provide for the support of his ministers and courtiers. He must entertain all those who come to visit him. On great public occasions he is expected to slaughter many of his cattle and provide beer and porridge for all who gather at his village. He lends cattle, supports destitute widows and orphans, sends food to sick people and newly confined mothers, and in time of famine distributes corn from his own granaries or, if this is insufficient, purchases supplies from neighboring groups. Because of such activities, the Tswana say that "the chief is the wife of the tribe," and the Zulu refer to him as "the breast of the nation."⁷⁷

Similar reports come from many other parts of Africa. Richards reports that Bemba chiefs were expected to provide food for their officials and courtiers and to support their villagers in time of famine.⁷⁸ She adds that one of their most important political tasks was to maintain their reputation for generosity.⁷⁹ Oberg reports that the kings of the Ankole used the cattle brought to them as tribute as "a savings fund, a surplus upon

⁷⁴ See Schapera, *Government and Politics*, p. 106, for a good discussion of the symbolic function of chiefs in advanced horticultural societies.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁷⁷ All this material on the Southern Bantu is taken from Schapera, *ibid.* See also V. G. J. Sheddick, *The Southern Sotho* (London: International African Institute, 1953), pp. 47-48.

⁷⁸ Richards, "The Bemba of North-Eastern Rhodesia," p. 170.

⁷⁹ Richards, "The Political System of the Bemba Tribe," p. 105.

which herdsmen in distress could draw.”⁸⁰ In the case of the Azande it is reported that a chief was “expected to be generous and to entertain lavishly, to assist his needy subjects with subsistence and to acquire wives [i.e., to assist in obtaining the bride price], to hold feasts and dances, while any Zande who visited court expected a substantial free meal.”⁸¹ The report goes on to say that a stingy chief knew his subjects would show their diminishing respect by lessening their gifts to him, and that the chief’s reserve was “a sort of relief store.”

In the New World a similar situation prevailed. The rulers of the Incas, for example, maintained storehouses throughout the country, from which supplies could be drawn in time of famine or disaster. In addition, whenever the supplies were judged to be sufficient, the ruler ordered a general distribution, sending the products of one province to another which, because of climatic differences, could not produce them. The government also maintained large herds of llamas and alpacas, whose wool was distributed to the entire population for clothing.⁸² In the case of the Aztecs, the ruler distributed much of the vast store of tribute obtained from conquered peoples immediately on receipt on a per capita basis.⁸³

As these examples indicate, the Redistributive Ethic flourishes in advanced horticultural societies, just as in hunting and gathering and simple horticultural societies. In politically centralized societies, however, the king or chief is usually in firm control of the redistributive process—at least so long as he meets the essential needs of his people and maintains his reputation for generosity. Compared with the tribal chiefs of simple horticultural societies, he has much more to work with, owing to the advances in productivity. This becomes extremely important when viewed in conjunction with certain other aspects of the situation. To begin with, in nearly all of these societies *there is no clear distinction made between the personal wealth of the king or chief and the people’s surplus with which he is entrusted.*⁸⁴ The public treasury and the king’s personal wealth are usually mingled indiscriminately.⁸⁵ Confusion is further com-

⁸⁰ Oberg, “The Kingdom of Ankole in Uganda,” p. 148.

⁸¹ Baxter and Butt, p. 59.

⁸² Rowe, p. 267.

⁸³ von Hagen, pp. 172-173.

⁸⁴ Schapera indicates that the beginning of such a distinction was made among some of the Southern Bantu, but they were clearly an exception to the general rule (*Government and Politics*, p. 102).

⁸⁵ This became especially evident when Western colonial governments replaced these African monarchies and sought to rationalize the system of public finance. See Schapera, “The Political Organization of the Ngwato of Bechuanaland Protectorate,” in Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, p. 78; Richards, “The Political System of the Bemba Tribe,” also in Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, p. 116; Schapera, *Government and Politics*, p. 109; or Sheddick, p. 48.

pounded because these societies rarely, if ever, differentiate between the king's role as "wife of the people," and his role as self-interested individual. This may be inevitable in a society in which the king is regarded as the visible symbol, even the physical embodiment, of the nation, but it has far-reaching consequences none the less.

Under such circumstances, one would predict that rulers, as self-seeking individuals, would seize the opportunity to use a portion of the public wealth for private purposes. This would be especially easy in an expanding economy (as during the transition from simple to advanced horticulture), since this could be done without reducing the absolute quantity of goods and services redistributed to the people. In fact, while increasing the *absolute* quantity of goods being redistributed but reducing the *relative*, a chief can enhance his reputation for generosity at the same time he retains more in both relative and absolute terms for his own personal use.

Finally, if a portion of the appropriated surplus is then used to provide a comfortable living for a staff of dependent officials and retainers, who will do his bidding while ostensibly acting on behalf of the public interest, the last serious threat to such appropriation is removed.⁸⁶ *By creating an organization of persons with a vested interest in the new system, the means for silencing possible critics is prepared.* This is especially true if the chief or king himself is able to appoint and remove such persons at will (see item 11 on Murdock's list of characteristics of African despotism). The only remaining threat to royal power comes from the officials themselves, since the common people lack the organization necessary to overthrow the king and his retainers.⁸⁷

Another factor which provides further stability to the system in many cases is the policy of conquest and imperialism. If a society organized along the lines described successfully brings neighboring groups under its control, the surplus of the group is substantially increased, and the king is in a position to enlarge his personal following. Not only can he now draw an even greater percentage of his fellow tribesmen into his retinue, but he can share his more generous bounty with many others, strengthening their ties of allegiance as well.⁸⁸ At this stage, the dangers of popular

⁸⁶ For a similar point of view concerning the rise of despotic governments, see Richard Thurnwald, *Economics in Primitive Communities* (Oxford: International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, 1932), pp. 12 and 106-108, or Mair, especially pp. 108-109 and 160-165.

⁸⁷ See Schapera, *Government and Politics*, pp. 108-112; Baxter and Butt, pp. 62-63; Oberg, p. 144; or Herskovits, vol. II, chap. 25.

⁸⁸ This could lead to a substantial revitalization of the old Redistributive Ethic for his own people *at the expense of the newly conquered groups*. This is, in fact, exactly what happened in the case of both the Incas and Aztecs.

revolt from his own people are virtually eliminated, though not the dangers from envious or ambitious individuals in his own establishment.

While it is impossible to prove that African despotism developed in this manner, as a natural evolutionary outgrowth of the modest tribal governments of simple horticultural societies, both theory and the evidence of ethnographic studies point this way. Considering the many significant similarities between the governmental systems at these two levels of economic development, it seems unlikely that the despotic pattern of government was created *de novo* by some act of genius. Rather, the means of effecting the transformation appear to have lain ready at hand in the older, more primitive system.⁸⁹ Thus, if this analysis is correct, *an institution which began primarily as a functional necessity of group life became, in many advanced horticultural societies, an instrument employed primarily for self-aggrandizement and exploitation.* Thus there appears to be some truth in the theories of *both* conservatives and radicals!

The Powers of Rulers

Considering the great powers concentrated in the hands of a ruler, it is hardly surprising to find that the most important single factor influencing the status of individuals and families is their relationship to the king and his subordinates. By virtue of his massive wealth and extensive powers of appointment, the king can raise men from the humblest backgrounds to positions of immense power and privilege; conversely, he can destroy men of great wealth and power. For example, it is reported that "in Yorubaland [in southwestern Nigeria] slaves of the Oba attained great power and were much feared by his subjects."⁹⁰ On the other hand, kings often mutilated, exiled, or killed their own brothers and other close relatives whom they feared might be motivated to attempt a palace revolution.⁹¹

A nineteenth-century visitor to Dahomey provides a vivid illustration of the crucial importance of royal favor. This writer described an occasion

⁸⁹ For a very similar analysis, which did not come to my attention until after this was written, see Mair, *op. cit.* It should be added that in some, perhaps many, societies, the new system was established by diffusion. Clearly this happened many times. However, this still begs the critical question of how the *original* transitions were made. This is the problem with which I am concerned here. The recurrence of the pattern in the New World suggests that more than diffusion must be involved.

⁹⁰ Crowder, p. 65.

⁹¹ See Murdock's list of characteristics of African despotisms, item 15. See also Schapera, *Government and Politics*, pp. 157ff.

on which the king suddenly called for one of his officials, the Benazon, or treasurer.

Contrary to the usual custom in such cases—when the name of the officer is scarcely out of the king's lips ere the customary answer of "Wae" is made, and the person asked for is seen running to the king—the Benazon did not put in an appearance. His name was called out by the heralds, and at last a messenger was despatched to his house to make inquiries. The king then made a speech, and said that it was not a good thing for a monarch to ask for any person and find that he was not in the presence; everybody ought to wait and see if the king wanted them. In about ten minutes the delinquent treasurer made his appearance with his hands bound before him, hurried along by two of the Ajkayaho's guards. When he approached the platform he fell on his knees, and began to throw dust on his head. The king then asked where he had been. He said that he had been home preparing his house for the princess whom the king had promised him in marriage. Thereupon the king ordered him to be taken to prison, and this high dignitary was hurried off as if he were one of the rabble, and ignominiously thrown into the Ajkayaho's gaol. The law in Dahomey evidently knows no distinction of persons.⁹²

Another nineteenth-century visitor to Dahomey reported that if a private citizen "brings more soil under cultivation, or in any manner advances his family to riches, without the license of the king, he not only endangers his fortune, but his own life and the lives of his family; instead of becoming a man of property and head of a family, he is condemned to slavery."⁹³

Obviously kings could not exercise direct supervision over the entire population. A rough approximation of this was achieved, however, through the hierarchical organization of the government which subdivided kingdoms into several levels, the head of each unit being answerable to the head of the larger unit of which his was a part, with all ultimately answerable to the king. Thus the status of the average individual was a function of his relationship to his local village headman, who was dependent on some district or provincial chief who was in turn one of the king's ministers.⁹⁴ In this way, everyone was in a direct or indirect relationship with the king.⁹⁵ For the great majority of individuals, the crucial factor in their

⁹² A. J. Skertchly, *Dahomey As It Is: Being a Narrative of Eight Months' Residence in That Country* (London: 1874), p. 375, quoted by Herskovits vol. II, p. 43. Quoted by permission. See also Mair, p. 181, who states that "the near vicinity of the powerful was obviously dangerous."

⁹³ F. E. Forbes, *Dahomey and the Dahomans: Being the Journals of Two Missions to the King of Dahomey, and Residence at His Capital, in the Years 1849 and 1850* (London: 1851), pp. 36-37, quoted by Herskovits, vol. I, p. 99n.

⁹⁴ As noted previously, in some cases there was still another intermediate layer. See Mair, pp. 146-151 and 173ff., for a good description of the hierarchy of territorial officials in East African societies.

⁹⁵ For example, see Rowe, pp. 263-264 on the Incas, who established what was probably the most complex hierarchical system of any advanced horticultural people.

lives was their relationship to the authority figure directly above them, whether he was the village headman or the district chief. Such men exercised a power over their subordinates almost as great as that which the king exercised over them. For example, another nineteenth-century visitor to Dahomey wrote that the governor, or viceroy, of one of the provinces of Dahomey "is at once council, jury, and judge . . . [with] unlimited powers of imprisonment and bastinado."⁹⁶ Comparable examples could be cited from most of the other politically advanced horticultural societies in both Africa and the New World.⁹⁷

Though they enjoyed great power, neither the king nor his officials could indulge every passing fancy in their relations with their subjects. To do so would invite anarchy or revolt. As Herskovits points out in reference to the king of Dahomey, "Despite his capriciousness . . . the King was not without a realization of the importance of having the whole-hearted support of these men whom he had elevated to positions of rank."⁹⁸ This realization undoubtedly served to stabilize the situation both in Dahomey and elsewhere, since no monarch or minister could destroy valuable officials without good reason and long remain in power.⁹⁹

Another highly privileged segment of virtually every African despotism was that made up of the king's relatives and those related to former kings. Such persons constituted the nobility and usually formed a leisure class. Rank usually varied directly with the recency of the reign of one's kin, with those related to the current monarch enjoying the highest status.

Because of the practice of polygyny, the noble class was often quite large. In fact, Herskovits wrote that in the city of Dahomey it seemed as though almost everyone were descended from royalty in either the male or female line (either line of descent entitled one to membership in the royal sib).¹⁰⁰ In writing of the king's court, which included only those members of the royal sib who had some special claim on the king's favor, he says that they "played an essentially parasitic role. They lived lives of pleasure, often stimulating their jaded senses by sexual excesses."¹⁰¹ He

⁹⁶ Capt. Sir Richard F. Burton, *A Mission to Gelele, King of Dahomey* . . . (London: 1893), vol. I, p. 63, quoted by Herskovits, vol. II, p. 28.

⁹⁷ See, for example, Schapera, *Government and Politics*, p. 113.

⁹⁸ Herskovits, vol. II, p. 43.

⁹⁹ Schapera and others make it clear that African rulers were often overthrown by rivals. See Schapera, *Government and Politics*, especially pp. 157ff., and more especially p. 165 including the footnotes.

¹⁰⁰ Herskovits, vol. II, p. 38. Bram notes a similar rapid growth in the Inca nobility because of polygyny (p. 73).

¹⁰¹ In the case of the royal princesses, there were apparently no restrictions on their sexual freedom. They could divorce their husbands at will and, married or not, take lovers as they wished. Even the incest taboo did not apply to them.

concludes that they were a heavy burden on the social and economic resources of the country, and became increasingly so as their number multiplied.

The king's close male relatives, especially his sons and brothers, usually occupied a very ambiguous position in traditional African societies. On the one hand, by virtue of their close relationship to the king, they were entitled to high honor and numerous privileges. On the other hand, they were generally regarded by everyone, including the king, as the chief threat to his position and even to his life. When revolutions occurred in these societies, as they often did, one of the king's close relatives was likely to be involved in a major way. This led to the Zulu proverb that "the king should not eat with his brothers lest they poison him," and to the Swazi saying that "nobles are the chief's killers."¹⁰² Because of this, African kings often turned to men outside the noble class, even slaves, to fill many high public offices. In Dahomey, for example, "tradition holds strongly that no king ever appointed a prince to any position of power," for "had a brother of the king been appointed to an important post, his desire for power, thus whetted, might have tempted him to cast envious eyes on the throne itself, while his office would have given him an opportunity to gain the adherence of the king's subjects in the interest of intrigue."¹⁰³ Among the Ankole of Uganda the problem was solved by having all of the king's sons engage in a struggle to the death at the time of their father's death. The one that survived became king, free of further worries about sibling rivalry.¹⁰⁴ Where such traditions were lacking, African kings sometimes took matters into their own hands. The famous Zulu king, Dingane, systematically exterminated all of his family, relatives, friends, and former comrades, with the exception of his half brother Mpande, "a quiet and inoffensive youth."¹⁰⁵ His generosity proved a serious mistake; Mpande eventually led the revolution which overthrew Dingane and resulted in his murder.

Royal fratricide was not an inevitable feature of life in politically advanced horticultural societies, however. There was little evidence of this in the New World, though the Spanish conquest of the Inca Empire was preceded and perhaps facilitated by a bitter struggle for the throne between two sons of the deceased emperor.¹⁰⁶ Usually, however, the process of succession took place peacefully and the emperors relied on their

¹⁰² For an excellent discussion of this subject, see Schapera, *Government and Politics*, pp. 157ff.

¹⁰³ Herskovits, vol. II, p. 39.

¹⁰⁴ Oberg, pp. 157-159.

¹⁰⁵ Schapera, *Government and Politics*, pp. 158-159.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, von Hagen, pp. 581-582.

closest relatives to fill the highest offices of state.¹⁰⁷ Even in Africa there were numerous examples of kings employing their kinsmen and other nobles as advisers and even putting them into responsible offices, though if Murdock is correct (see item 15 in his list of characteristics), this was the less common pattern.¹⁰⁸ Thus this seems to be a variable feature in these societies, and not a pattern dictated by either economic or political necessity.

As a result of the exercise of royal power on behalf of kinsmen or officials, three basic classes developed in every African despotism. At the top of the system there was a small minority of powerful and privileged individuals who, by virtue of royal favor, lived off the surplus produced by others. Beneath them was a more numerous, though still small, class of officials and specialists of various kinds who either catered to the whims and fancies of the governing class or performed the lesser, but often vital, tasks of government. Finally, at the bottom were the great majority of common people, who produced the surplus on which the two more privileged classes depended.

Usually each of these classes was further divided into various subclasses. For example, as we have already seen, both the nobles and officials were differentiated into various ranks and grades. Similarly, the class of technicians and specialists and the class of producers were often subdivided into two or more levels. For example, there was usually a distinction between free men and slaves, with the latter denied many important rights enjoyed by the former. Sometimes there were further distinctions, such as the substratum in Dahomey which ranked between the slaves and free men, and was composed of persons born in Dahomey of slave or mixed parents. Such persons were compelled to live on the estate of the owner of their parent or parents, and most of what they produced went to their overlord. Unlike slaves, however, they could not be sold or separated from their parents. Even the substratum of slaves was internally divided into three basic categories which, in descending order of fortune, were (1) household slaves, (2) field slaves, and (3) slaves set apart for human sacrifices.¹⁰⁹

The structures of the advanced horticultural societies of the New World were strikingly similar.¹¹⁰ In each case there was a class of nobles

¹⁰⁷ See Rowe, p. 263.

¹⁰⁸ For examples of the use of royal relatives and nobles, see Schapera, *The Tswana*, pp. 52-53, or *Government and Politics*, especially pp. 58-59 and 112-113.

¹⁰⁹ Herskovits, vol. I, pp. 99-101.

¹¹⁰ For good descriptions of these structures, see Morley, chap. 9 on the Maya; Steward and Faron, pp. 132-138 on the Incas, and pp. 186-188 on the Circum-Caribbean tribes; and von Hagen, pp. 119-134, or Eric Wolf, *Sons of the Shaking Earth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), chap. 7 on the Aztecs.

which shared the responsibilities of government with the king or chief, though in definitely subordinate roles. This class tended to be hereditary in nature, especially in the more advanced states.¹¹¹ However, even in the latter, hereditary rule was apparently relaxed during periods of rapid imperial expansion when enlargement of the ruling class was necessary.¹¹²

The other major class consisted of the masses of common people, whose labors supported the privileged noble class. Usually there was a slave class as well, though not many apparently were born into it.¹¹³ As in Africa, they were frequently prisoners of war, and many were destined to be slain as human sacrifices. A secondary class found in the New World, as well as in Africa, was that made up of artisans and minor officials freed by the nobility from the responsibility of food production so that they might render more specialized services.¹¹⁴ This class appeared only in the most advanced societies.

Probably the most significant structural difference between Africa and the New World was that involving the realm of religion. In most of Africa, religious and political leadership tended to be combined, with the result that there was no distinct priestly class. In the few cases where it did exist, as in Dahomey, its power and privileges were not comparable to that of the noble class. By contrast, in much of the New World the priests constituted a distinct and powerful class within society and were, in effect, on a par with the nobility. As one student of the Mayas has put it, "the great temple establishments in the ceremonial centers of the Old and New Empires . . . [were] almost as big business for those days as directing the ship of state."¹¹⁵ The status of the priests, like that of the nobility, was usually hereditary.

In many, if not most, advanced horticultural societies of the despotic type, a person's status is a function not only of his *personal* relationship to political authority, but also of his *collective* relationship. Because these societies are imperialistic and expansionistic, they typically include people of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Though conquered peoples might in time be assimilated culturally, these ethnic distinctions often linger on in the forms of clan distinctions. Thus in many, if not most, of these societies distinctions are made on the basis of the ethnic or lineage group to which a man belongs.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ See, for example, Steward and Faron, p. 187.

¹¹² See Rowe, p. 260, or Bram, pp. 33-44 and 71-75.

¹¹³ See, for example, Morley, pp. 176-179 on the Mayas.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Steward and Faron, p. 138 on the Incas.

¹¹⁵ Morley, p. 72.

¹¹⁶ See Mair, pp. 134-137 for a number of examples from East Africa.

The Ndebele of Southern Rhodesia provide a good illustration of such a pattern of organization.¹¹⁷ Since pre-European days this group has been divided into three major status groups which the natives call "tribes," but the English call "castes." In descending order of status, they are the Zansi, the Enhla, and the Lozwi. They constitute approximately 15, 25, and 60 per cent of the population respectively.

The relative status of these groups has been shown to be a function of their historic relation to the Ndebele state and monarchy. The Zansi are descended from the founders of the state, a group of Swazi tribesmen who were conquered by the great Zulu king, Shaka. After rising to a position of power in the Zulu state, they revolted and fled with many of Shaka's cattle. For a time these rebels settled in the Transvaal, where they conquered resident Sotho and Tswana natives whom they forced to work for them. In the middle 1830s the founders of this new nation came under the attack of both Boers and Zulus and were obliged to flee once more, this time to their present home in Southern Rhodesia. Many of their recently conquered Sotho and Tswana subjects accompanied them. When they arrived in Southern Rhodesia they were again obliged to overcome the natives, the Lozwi, and were aided in this by their Sotho and Tswana subjects, the ancestors of the present Enhla. The three status groups in the Ndebele nation are thus the result of these two conquests, and their relative status is a function of the historic relation of each of these groups to Mzilikazi, the first king and founder of the nation.¹¹⁸

Until British rule was established, status group membership was a matter of major importance among the Ndebele. Even today it is said to be of considerable importance, though British refusal to enforce the rules of the system led to a gradual decline. In older times, however, certain important privileges were reserved to members of one or both of the two higher status groups. Only Zansi could wear the ostrich feather headdress of a warrior, for example, and only Zansi and Enhla could wear the kilt made of twisted monkey and wildcat skins and tails. Intermarriage was forbidden, and choice political and military appointments were usually reserved for Zansi. Apparently there were some exceptions in the matter of appointments, however, which created inconsistencies in status, a phenomenon which emerges whenever more than one principle of distribution is employed.

¹¹⁷ See Hughes and van Velsen, especially pp. 44-45 and 71-75, or Schapera, *Government and Politics*, p. 130.

¹¹⁸ According to Schapera, *ibid.*, p. 132, status group distinctions between conquerors and conquered developed in South Africa only when the two groups were culturally distinct.

Not all societies handled the problem of assimilating aliens in the same way and a variety of patterns have developed both in Africa and the New World.¹¹⁹ In most instances in which alien peoples were incorporated into a state by conquest, the conquered and their descendants, *as a group*, occupied a position inferior to the conquerors and their descendants. These group distinctions were maintained even though as individuals some of the former enjoyed greater power or privilege than some of the latter. In fact, the unique inferiority of members of these status groups of alien origin often made them attractive sources of recruitment for high officials of state, strange as this may seem. The theory underlying this practice in Africa was the same one which led Turkish rulers, for several centuries, to use the sons of Christians in the army and in other posts of major importance (as in the case of the notorious Janissaries). Because of their status group connections, such persons could never aspire to the throne, and by virtue of their abrupt elevation from slavery or other inferior status could not fail to appreciate their complete and utter dependence on royal favor. Thus they were likely to be more reliable if revolution or rebellion should occur.¹²⁰

Sometimes the conquerors accepted selected members of the conquered groups into their own ranks. This was the practice of the Incas, and may have been a response to the special problems created by the extremely rapid expansion of their empire.¹²¹ Since the original Inca population was so small, it could not produce nearly enough administrators and officials. Hence they accepted into their ranks those who spoke their language, as well as cooperative chiefs and rulers from other conquered groups. Together, these Incas by blood and Incas by privilege formed the dominant status group which ruled the empire.

In this connection, there is an interesting and tremendously important contrast between these advanced horticultural societies with their centralized political systems and the more primitive hunting and gathering and simple horticultural societies discussed in the last two chapters. Among the latter there are many instances of men striving to avoid appointment to political office since the rewards apparently do not compensate for the added responsibilities (much as in many offices in voluntary organizations in our society today). In advanced horticultural societies of the type with which we have been primarily concerned there is no such

¹¹⁹ For a much more flexible system, see Max Gluckman, "The Lozi of Barotseland in Northwestern Rhodesia," in Colson and Gluckman, p. 6.

¹²⁰ See Karl A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957), pp. 360-362.

¹²¹ See Rowe, pp. 260-261, or Bram, pp. 33-44 and 71-75.

problem: *men avidly seek political office, even at the risk of their lives, a clear indication that a marked imbalance has developed between the responsibilities and the privileges of office, especially the office of king.*¹²²

Other Bases of Power

Although the primary determinant of status is the relationship of the individual or group to the king and his political apparatus, it would be a mistake to suppose that this is the only determinant, or that it operates in a simple manner. The status of an individual or family is also influenced by forces to which the king is indifferent or opposed. To ignore these other forces would give an inaccurate picture of the distributive process.

To begin with, though the king and his ministers and agents have many common interests, their interests are not identical. Hence, even though these officials may never oppose the king openly, they have ample motivation for doing so covertly from time to time. Furthermore, though the king's powers are immense, he is neither omnipotent nor omniscient. As a result, he is often the victim of ministerial deception.

A classic example of this was reported by an eighteenth-century visitor to Dahomey. In writing of the fiscal practices of the kingdom, he stated that "there is nothing so mean in the whole Kingdom, that the King hath not Toll for it; which, indeed, if all honestly paid to him, would make him very rich; but the Gentlemen Collectors so largely fleece it, that the King scarce receives one fourth part of the whole."¹²³ Oberg reports the same pattern in the kingdom of Ankole in Uganda; tribute collectors frequently exacted more than the king authorized and kept the surplus for their personal benefit.¹²⁴ Such practices were probably common in most of the kingdoms.

A more serious problem from the standpoint of the king was the widespread tendency on the part of governors of outlying provinces to usurp various royal powers. For example, another visitor to Dahomey wrote of the governor of the important province of Whydah that "he maintained a great number of domestics and attendants, whom he attached to his person by his liberality; and to his interest by protecting them in their villainies, and screening them from justice *in defiance of the king.*"¹²⁵ This writer added that the king was naturally eager to remove

¹²² See, for example, Schapera, *Government and Politics*, pp. 157 and 220.

¹²³ William Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, 2d ed. (London: 1721), pp. 336-337, quoted by Herskovits, vol. I, p. 109.

¹²⁴ Oberg, pp. 147 and 150.

¹²⁵ Robert Norris, *Memoirs of the Reign of Bossa Ahadee, King of Dahomey* . . . (London: 1789), pp. 40-41, quoted by Herskovits, vol. II, p. 27. Emphasis added.

this minister but, fearing to attack him openly, was waiting for an opportunity to get him into his hands by some stratagem. Schapera mentions that Southern Bantu kings were usually reluctant to appoint their kinsmen as governors of outlying areas for fear that they would be encouraged to seek independence by splitting off to found their own tribes.¹²⁶ Because of the primitive character of transportation in most advanced horticultural societies, control of distant territories was bound to be less effective than of areas close to the capital.

If some men acquired special powers and privilege through fraud and in defiance of royal wishes, others advanced themselves in more acceptable ways. Though kings and chiefs often made sweeping claims against the surplus product of their peoples, a careful examination of ethnographic reports indicates that they did not claim it all. Some portion of the economic surplus was left with the producers, perhaps as an incentive to promote continued industry and effort.

There are various indications that this was the case. For one thing, if a king were to appropriate all of the surplus for himself, one would find only the minimum necessities of life in the hands of the common people, and all of the surplus in the hands of the king, his ministers, and his relatives. However, this was not usually the case. To illustrate, the provincial chiefs of the Azande usually followed the practice of appointing some local man of wealth, a commoner, to serve as the equivalent of village headmen.¹²⁷ This indicates that royal taxes and tribute did not drain off all the surplus or reduce all the common people to the same subsistence level. Even in Dahomey, where the royal family and officials of state were noted for their rapaciousness, it is clear that the common people were able, by their own efforts, to increase their wealth and share in the surplus.¹²⁸ In fact, Herskovits reports that "a constant struggle to increase patrimony, and to earn property for one's self is therefore an outstanding aspect of the Dahomean attitude toward life." Clearly this could not be such a widespread pattern if the elite monopolized the entire surplus. One could multiply such examples almost indefinitely, but these suffice to indicate that, despite the great powers of most advanced horticultural rulers, some substantial portion of the economic surplus remained in the hands of the producers.

Finally, it should be noted that in some parts of Africa, especially West Africa, and in most of the New World, a portion of the surplus was

¹²⁶ *Government and Politics*, p. 172. It was perhaps no coincidence that the one fratricidal war which developed among the Incas involved a half brother with strength in an outlying province pitted against his sibling in the national capital.

¹²⁷ Baxter and Butt, p. 50.

¹²⁸ Herskovits, vol. I, chap. 5, especially pp. 86ff.

used to maintain temples, shrines, and other religious centers, and the priestly class who controlled them. The status of priests, and the privileges which accrued to them, cannot be viewed in the same light as the status and privileges of governmental officials and other specialists in the employ of the regime. Priests normally enjoyed a considerable measure of independence since the powers they exercised were not delegated by the state and its leaders. Rather, they exercised powers believed to be of supernatural origin conferred on them directly.

In many parts of Africa these supernatural powers fell into the hands of the political leaders. How this happened we do not know. It is not unreasonable to suppose that sometimes these divine and semidivine kings had evolved from religious, rather than political, functionaries, and that in some cases the combination of priest and ruler represents the displacement of the original political authorities by religious authorities rather than the reverse. (As startling as this may seem to secularly oriented moderns, it is not such a wild hypothesis when viewed in cross-cultural perspective.)¹²⁹ Regardless of how this union of powers was effected, however, the result was the development of a role with unique power, and the elimination of a potential source of countervailing power.

In some parts of Africa, notably West Africa, and also in the New World, this union was not fully effected. In Dahomey, though the king is a priestly figure of considerable importance, he does not exercise monopolistic control over the supernatural powers and hence has important priestly competitors.¹³⁰ Apparently these persons are of middle-class origin, but by virtue of the position they occupy can be considered a part of the privileged or leisure class.¹³¹ They are freed from all manual labor and supported by gifts and services rendered by cult adherents. Though fairly prosperous, they do not compare with the king and his chief ministers; rather, they resemble the more prosperous of the common people. In the New World the position of the priests was more favorable. As noted previously, they constituted a distinct class and were apparently the equals of the nobles.¹³² In some societies the priestly offices were

¹²⁹ See, for example, the earlier discussions of the power of priests and shamans in simple horticultural societies in chap. 6. See also Bertrand de Jouvenal, *On Power: Its Nature and the History of Its Growth*, translated by J. F. Huntington (New York: Viking, 1949), pp. 83-84.

¹³⁰ In many other parts of Africa divine kings have "competitors" in the form of magicians and witch doctors, but such individuals are rarely organized and do not have enough power to make them serious competitors with the king. Hence they are ignored in this discussion.

¹³¹ Herskovits, vol. I, p. 102.

¹³² This was true of at least the upper ranks of the priesthood. See, for example, Morley, pp. 170-174 on the Mayas; Rowe, pp. 298-299, or Steward and Faron, pp. 128-130 on the Incas; Steward and Faron, pp. 191-194 on the Circum-Caribbean tribes; and von Hagen, pp. 159-162 on the Aztecs.

hereditary; where they were not, the sons of nobles often filled the major offices. In most instances the king or emperor was regarded as the high priest, or head of the priesthood, as well as chief of state.

In West Africa the relationship between priest and king tended to be ambivalent, much as in the case of the king's relationship to his own brothers. Rulers often viewed the priests with suspicion, and on occasion the latter joined forces with dissident members of the royal house in plotting rebellion.¹³³ On the other hand, they sometimes conspired with the king to exploit their followers, using their priestly influence to gain information concerning wealth which the people had kept hidden from the king's tax collectors.¹³⁴ Thus, depending on the circumstances, the priests of West Africa might be either allies or opponents of the king. In the New World, by contrast, the priestly class usually remained his faithful ally.¹³⁵

Force, Ideology, and Utility

As the foregoing indicates, the economic surplus of the politically advanced horticultural societies of Africa and the New World was distributed in accordance with two quite distinct sets of principles. On the one hand, the king and his ministers, together with the priestly class, based their claims to a share in the surplus on *an impressive combination of force, ideology, and utility*; in other words, they offered the group essential services whose value was greatly inflated by ideology and enforced by armed might. On the other hand, those who were not a part of the elite or allied with it were forced to base their claims to rewards chiefly on the grounds of *utility*.

One of the great failures of traditional theories of distribution stems from their failure to take into account this *dual* character of the distributive process in societies where the state is highly developed. Conservative theorists generally analyze these societies as though utility were the sole, or dominant, factor governing the distribution of all power, privilege, and honor. Radical theorists usually focus on the other two factors, force and ideology. Our analysis of African despotisms and their New World counterparts indicates that both approaches are half-truths which yield but a partial view of the total process. The ethnographic record clearly indicates the need for a theoretical synthesis.

Considering the superior strength of the resources available to the elite in the struggle for the surplus, one might well ask why this group

¹³³ Herskovits, vol. I, pp. 175-177.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

¹³⁵ Even here there was some suggestion of a struggle between the priestly and noble classes, at least in the case of the Incas. See Steward and Faron, p. 128.

does not completely monopolize it. A careful examination of the matter suggests that several factors are responsible. To begin with, no regime is omnipotent or omniscient, nor are the common people ever wholly convinced by the more extreme formulations of official ideologies. This means that *the resources of a regime are never great enough to locate every last increment of surplus and compel its producer to hand it over*. At some point the costs of further search exceed the returns.

If this were the only principle governing the actions of heads of states, however, they would obtain more of the economic surplus than they apparently do. Other factors must also be at work, limiting their acquisitive tendencies. Evidence from Africa and elsewhere indicates that the problem of motivation is involved here and that enlightened self-interest requires the elite to respect it. If rulers appropriated all of the surplus they would destroy *incentive*, one of the two basic sanctions by which they control the actions of their subjects. This would leave only fear and, as noted in an earlier chapter, fear alone has not proven nearly so effective as when it is combined with incentive. At the least, those who rule by fear alone are denied honor and respect, and few men are willing to sacrifice them entirely, simply for the sake of slightly increasing already abundant material benefits. *By allowing the producer to retain some of his surplus, the amount being in proportion to his efficiency, the king and his ministers give him the incentive to increase production*. Even though a producer does not reap the full benefit of his greater efforts, judging by the record he gets enough to generate the desired response.

Another reason for the elite's willingness to allow the more efficient producers to keep a portion of the surplus may be the divisive effect this has among the masses. *When differences of wealth exist among the common people, it is less likely that they will unite against their rulers than if they were all reduced to the same subsistence level*. While I know of no evidence which shows that horticultural rulers ever *consciously* thought in these terms, such an arrangement may well have evolved through an unplanned process of selection. Rulers who ignored this principle were probably overthrown, while those who followed it, for whatever reason, survived, thus establishing the pattern.¹³⁶

Finally, there is reason for thinking that *ideology functions as a two-edged sword*, in these societies as in others. On the one hand, it renders the common people vulnerable to royal demands; on the other hand, it

¹³⁶ While there were no popular revolutions in advanced horticultural societies, popular unrest manifested itself, in Africa at least, by the common people's throwing their support behind the king's rival among his own kinsmen. Thus when a king encroached on the portion of the surplus left to the common people, he probably produced this pattern of reaction.

renders the rulers vulnerable to the wishes and desires of their subjects. All official ideologies incorporate the thesis that the existing system serves the common good. Since no ideology can long survive if there is *no* substance to back up this claim, a ruler must make some delivery on the promises inherent in it. Actually, in advanced horticultural societies as elsewhere, ideologies are never merely instruments of exploitation; they are simultaneously instruments for the protection of the common people.¹³⁷ In those societies which combine political stability with economic prosperity, they play a major role in the strengthening of constitutional government and the promotion of a somewhat more egalitarian distribution of power, privilege, and honor.¹³⁸ In advanced horticultural societies, as elsewhere, ideologies have often been taken seriously by rulers and hence have redounded to the benefit of their subjects. Rulers have taken pride in being called the benefactor of their people, the breast of the nation, the father or wife of the tribe, and in striving to maintain this reputation, have often gladly yielded a portion of the surplus to their people.

The Hereditary Transmission of Power and Privilege

One of the important developments associated with the rise of advanced horticultural societies is the substantial growth in both the number and value of transferable assets or resources. This development has significant implications for status mobility, since it facilitates the transfer of power and privilege from one generation to the next. So long as the primary resources in a society are personal qualities such as strength, bravery, speaking ability, and so forth (as is the case in hunting and gathering societies and even to a considerable degree in simple horticultural societies), it is extremely difficult for fathers to pass on to their sons the benefits they have won. In fact, it is sometimes difficult for a man of advanced years to preserve these gains for himself. Such problems can be very serious, particularly in hunting and gathering societies.

By the time the level of advanced horticulture has been reached, however, the means for overcoming this problem are readily available because of three important developments: (1) the development and formalization of the concept of "property rights," (2) the development and formalization of the concept of "office," and (3) the development of

¹³⁷ Gideon Sjoberg makes this same point with respect to agrarian societies. See *The Preindustrial City* (New York: Free Press, 1960), p. 226.

¹³⁸ Here again the older theoretical traditions have been guilty of a one-sided approach to the problem with the radical tradition stressing the exploitative aspects of myth, and the conservative the protective.

"transferable forms of tangible assets." Because of their importance, each deserves consideration.

With respect to property, it will be recalled that in primitive hunting and gathering societies, individual or family rights are generally recognized only with respect to personal items and artifacts such as clothes, tools, weapons, and so forth. The land and its resources are almost always the common property of the local community, and only when a resource is appropriated and used, i.e., an animal killed for meat, a nut tree harvested regularly, does it become private property. Even then there are usually obligations incumbent upon the user to make a portion of the product available to others, especially in the case of food in short supply.

With the emergence of simple horticultural societies there is some extension and elaboration of the concept of private property, but the pattern is not radically different. Land and other key resources sometimes come to be the property of clans or, in a few instances, of individual families. Furthermore, it is a generally accepted principle in these societies that an individual has special rights in the piece of land he is currently cultivating. This is not a major consideration, however, since there is always an abundance of land. Perhaps the most important development at this level is the increasing utilization of wives as an income-producing form of property, notably in certain parts of New Guinea. This and the raising of small livestock such as pigs provide certain resources which can be used throughout the whole of a man's life. Some of these assets can even be transmitted to his heirs.

With the appearance of advanced horticultural societies, we find another important development in the area of property rights, one which provides a much more effective solution to the problem of the transmission of power and privilege from one generation to the next. This is the development of the institution of slavery. For the first time in human history, it becomes a common feature of social life for men to regard other men as a form of property and exercise enforceable claims on the products of their labor.

Slavery is vastly superior to polygyny as an institutional basis for the transmission of status between generations. The ties between master and slave are not complicated by the requirements of kinship norms. A son's relation to his inherited slaves can be as simple as his father's relation to them was. This could hardly be the case were the father's wives involved. Nor could a man inherit his own brothers and sisters, though the mores of his tribe are not likely to prevent his inheriting the offspring of his father's slaves. Finally, whereas polygyny is likely to generate internal unrest, since wives are usually taken from the limited supply within the

tribe, slaves are usually obtained from foreign groups. In all these ways, slavery provides a more efficient basis for the intergenerational transmission of power and privilege, and the inheritance of power and privilege is thus much more easily accomplished in advanced horticultural societies than in simple.

Closely related to the development of slavery is the development of the rights of kings and chiefs to exact tribute from conquered peoples. While such people, unlike slaves, may be technically free, the fact that others have an enforceable claim on a considerable share of what they produce indicates that functionally their status is not so very different. Considering the tremendous numbers of people who have been brought into a tributary status in advanced horticultural societies, this development is probably far more important than the development and spread of slavery. It yields far more lucrative rewards and, as in the case of slavery, tributary rights are property rights, easily transmitted from kings to their sons.

A second development facilitating the transmission of power and privilege from one generation to the next is the expansion and elaboration of formal offices, which occurs in all of the politically advanced horticultural societies. Where offices are firmly established, the importance of personal qualifications is substantially reduced, and it becomes much easier for a son of mediocre abilities to inherit benefits won by an outstanding father. Even where some controls are exercised in the transmission of office, as where, for example, the normally eligible son is passed over owing to the lack of personal qualifications, the office nearly always remains in the same family, and it is simply another son who inherits.¹³⁹

Third, and finally, the transmission of power and privilege is facilitated by the development of new types of tangible assets which are readily transferable. Two in particular deserve note, money and cattle. In most of Africa, one or both of these forms of wealth were present and played a major role in the economy long before the first European contacts. Money, in the form of cowrie shells, was more important in West Africa, cattle in East Africa. Both provided a medium of exchange in which considerable value was concentrated and in a readily transferable form. Unlike the products of the hunt or garden, there was no storage problem. Both cattle and shells could be kept easily until needed. These storable and transferable qualities, combined with their substantial value, greatly facilitated both the accumulation of wealth and its transfer from father to son.

¹³⁹ See, for example, Schapera, *Government and Politics*, pp. 51-52, or Rowe, pp. 257-258 on the Inca in the New World.

If we assume that men regard their children, particularly their sons, as an extension of their own ego, and if advanced horticultural societies provide more efficient means for transmitting power and privilege, a decrease in the rate of both inter- and intragenerational mobility would be expected. Judging from the ethnographic record, this is what we find. In fact, *in these societies one finds for the first time the development of fairly well defined, hereditary classes.*

This is true, of course, only in the politically advanced horticultural societies of Africa and the New World, those which Fortes classified as Group A. It is not applicable in those groups in which political organization does not extend beyond the village. This indicates again the crucial importance of political institutions in the whole distributive process, and, as the analysis developed in this chapter makes clear, the character of political institutions is not a simple function of the level of development of productive institutions and their technology. This will become even more evident when we consider the variable of constitutionalism in the final section of this chapter.

Before turning to that topic, however, we must look at the other side of the stability-mobility coin and consider briefly the nature and extent of vertical mobility in these politically advanced horticultural societies. To begin with, despite the increase in opportunities for the maintenance of status throughout a lifetime and for its transmission to one's heirs, mobility is by no means eliminated from the scene. In this chapter, we have seen numerous examples of shifts in status, sometimes of a very dramatic nature. One factor which undoubtedly stimulates vertical mobility in advanced horticultural societies is *the instability of political systems.* Sooner or later most chiefdoms, kingdoms, and empires are toppled. When this happens, a host of new positions is open to the victors. A classic case of this can be seen in the rapid expansion of the Inca Empire in the fifteenth century.¹⁴⁰

To a considerable degree the rise and fall of individuals and families in advanced horticultural societies depends on the same qualities which govern the rise and fall of men in simpler societies. However, as Wittfogel noted in his study of Oriental despotism, an additional factor enters the picture wherever despotic governments hold sway. This is the quality of "total and ingenious servility."¹⁴¹ Once a new regime has established itself, talent and ability alone are not enough for a man to rise at court. He must also be willing and able to be submissive, cringing, and fawning in the presence of superiors and skilled in the subtle arts of manipulation

¹⁴⁰ See Rowe, pp. 260-261.

¹⁴¹ Wittfogel, p. 364.

and dissimulation. One who masters such skills can sometimes rise to great heights. In this respect these societies differ appreciably from simpler societies, where the cultivation of such skills yields few rewards.

Constitutionalism and Its Constraints

In our analyses of hunting and gathering and simple horticultural societies, the variable of constitutionalism played a very minor role. Tyrannical government is extremely difficult to establish and maintain in such societies; the nature of the economy makes constitutional government almost inevitable. What variation there is occurs within a very limited range and hence is not very important.

With the appearance of advanced horticultural societies, at least those in which the institutions of government become elaborated and kings and chiefs acquire large numbers of dependent retainers, the situation changes. It now becomes possible for leaders to ignore the traditions and rights of their people and to govern more by force. In effect, leaders can become rulers.

Judging from the reports of ethnographers and anthropologists, two basic generalizations may be made concerning the extent of constitutionalism in the politically advanced societies of sub-Saharan Africa. (Unfortunately, the comparable record for the New World is too sparse to justify its inclusion in these generalizations.) First, *there is considerable variation in the degree of constitutionalism among such societies.* Second, *tyrannical governments are more common than constitutional.*

With respect to the first generalization, a few simple comparisons may suffice to indicate something of the range of variation. On the one hand there are a number of societies like the Lozi of Barotseland or the Tswana of Bechuanaland. In these groups there are institutionalized restraints on kingly or chiefly powers for the protection of the rights of the common people. For example, in the case of the Lozi, it is reported that the common people "do not feel themselves in the least exploited by the king's rights; they look on the king as a father who generously gives them the means of sustenance."¹⁴² This report goes on to say that the king does not exercise his rights rigorously, and often foregoes them when crops are poor or fishing catches small. Even more significant is the statement that once a king has given land to a member of the group, the new owner's rights are protected against all comers, "including the king himself." These rights are protected by "a well-established and defined system of law, administered by an organized judiciary and executive, who are alert to protect

¹⁴² Max Gluckman, "The Lozi," p. 63.

this security and its premises." A crucial feature of the Lozi system of government is found in the institution of Ngambelaship.¹⁴³ Every official, including the king, shares his authority with another official, known as his Ngambela, who is in part his deputy but even more a counterbalance or check. One of the chief functions of the king's Ngambela is to represent the common people, and even though he is the second most powerful individual in the nation, he cannot be of royal blood.

The various Tswana tribes are another group which has often attained a high level of constitutional government.¹⁴⁴ In these tribes it has long been customary to have national assemblies at which the people may voice criticisms of their chief.¹⁴⁵ Though it is reported to be dangerous to criticize the chief at such assemblies (since there are likely to be subsequent reprisals), nevertheless when conditions are serious, men dare to do so. On several occasions, chiefs have been severely criticized, and this public denouncement has been the catalyst which triggered their downfall. In the early nineteenth century, for example, a Tswana chief came to be greatly disliked because he took away the people's cattle and seduced their wives. When an assembly was called to discuss whether he should be banished, the chief fled the country. Others have been assassinated as an aftermath of such assemblies. In writing of the Tswana, Schapera states, "The relative frequency of the assemblies, and the fact that all tribesmen may attend and are sometimes compelled to, helps to explain why Tswana chiefs are seldom autocratic; they are directly and often in contact with the mass of their people, and it is therefore difficult for them to remain indifferent to a publicly expressed threat of opposition."

At the other extreme there are numerous examples of ruthless tyranny and high-handed autocracy. One of the classic examples is the famous Zulu king and empire builder, Shaka, of whom it is reported that "he had literally thousands of his own subjects put to death for no apparent reason except sheer personal whim."¹⁴⁶ Another famous tyrant was the great Christian chief of the Ngwato, Kgama III, whose motives were ideological and idealistic rather than materialistic and selfish, but who was none the less dictatorial. Another chief once rebuked him in a letter saying, "Chief, the proverb says: 'The lion said I am strong when

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-49.

¹⁴⁴ Schapera, *Government and Politics*, pp. 150-152.

¹⁴⁵ The Ashanti of West Africa went a step further, and the common people had their own separate organization to represent their interests. This served as a powerful check on a chief's tyrannical tendencies. See Madeline Manoukian, *Akan and Ga-adangme Peoples of the Gold Coast* (London: International African Institute, 1950), pp. 39-40.

¹⁴⁶ Schapera, *Government and Politics*, p. 149. See also Mair, pp. 197-205 on the rulers of Ganda.

alone; the man said, I am strong through the help of others.' If you have governed by *Absolute Monarchy*, that is through the luck that God has given you, but I deny to you that Sekoma [Kgama's heir] will ever be able to maintain a government like yours unless he relies on consulting his people and on ruling constitutionally."¹⁴⁷ This rebuke probably reflects the fact that Kgama ruled a part of the Tswana group which, as noted previously, had a strong tradition of constitutional government. By contrast, tyrannical rule was taken for granted in many other groups.

With respect to the second generalization, the numerical dominance of tyrannical regimes relative to constitutional ones is hardly surprising, at least not after one discovers the instability of most advanced horticultural regimes. If the primary factor in the unfolding of the political cycle and the growth of constitutional government is the absence of internal or external threats to the security of the existing regime, as hypothesized in Chapter 3, the surprising thing is that constitutional governments were *ever* established, not their relative scarcity. As we have noted, rebellions initiated by royal kinsmen were a common feature of life in most African societies. In addition, the frequent migration of whole societies together with other conditions led to a chronic state of warfare between tribes and nations. This situation almost certainly promoted authoritarian and tyrannical tendencies, and inhibited the development of constitutional government.¹⁴⁸ Conditions in the New World were not greatly different.¹⁴⁹

At the same time, however, it is clear that other factors were at work checking and limiting the degree of tyranny.¹⁵⁰ To begin with, despite the elaboration and expansion of the machinery of government in many of these advanced horticultural societies, this institution is still far from a perfect instrument of political control. For one thing, the system cannot provide the ruler with very effective protection against assassination; even the great empire builder, Shaka, eventually died at an assassin's hand. In addition, the system cannot usually prevent desertion by disaffected individuals and groups and, since the power and strength of a ruler depends on the size of his following, the threat of desertion is an important check on his actions. Finally, the inevitable dependence of the chief on his advisers serves as an added check on autocratic tendencies.

These same factors arise in any attempt to explain variations in de-

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 146-147.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹⁴⁹ See, for example, the history of the Aztecs who have been described as "wanderers, a landless, 'wanting' tribe who came out of the north of Mexico," frequently involved in battles (von Hagen, p. 59).

¹⁵⁰ For a good discussion of this subject, see Schapera, *Government and Politics*, pp. 149ff.

gree of constitutionalism. Thus, *the less the danger of rebellion or foreign attack, the greater the opportunities for assassination or desertion, and the greater a king's dependence on advisers, the greater the probability of constitutional government.* Schapera argues that the last factor is one of the most important. Furthermore, he sees the dependence of the king on his advisers as often being a function of his age and length of rule. When a new king comes to power as a very young man, he usually inherits his father's advisers and is highly dependent upon them. With the passage of time, however, he gradually gains greater knowledge and replaces these older ministers with men of his own choosing, on whom he depends less. Thus, Schapera finds it no mere coincidence that Kgama, the famous Nguni autocrat, lived to the ripe old age of ninety-three, and apparently became increasingly autocratic with each passing year.¹⁵¹

Turning from the causes of variations in the level of constitutionalism to their *consequences*, the most important one, so far as the distributive process is concerned, is their effect on the extent of social inequality. Inequality seems to increase roughly in proportion to the degree of tyranny, at least when a materialistic, rather than an ideological, ruler is in control. The Lozi, who were cited earlier as an instance of a group with a strong constitutional government, provide a good example. According to reports, living standards were very similar throughout the group, and even the king's material possessions did not differ markedly from those of his subjects.¹⁵² In the case of the Tswana, where constitutional government also flourished, inequality was more marked than among the Lozi, but even here there were none of the extremes found in most African societies dominated by tyrannical and materialistic rulers and elites.¹⁵³ In societies where constitutional government was reasonably well established, much more of the revenues which accrued to the king and his ministers seem to have been used for public, rather than private, purposes. Hence, a greater proportion of the total surplus found its way back into the hands of the producers, and the extremes of inequality were avoided.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 145-146 and 148.

¹⁵² Gluckman, "The Lozi," p. 14.

¹⁵³ Schapera, *The Tswana*.

¹⁵⁴ In thirteen of the fourteen Group A societies in the pilot study sample referred to earlier (see p. 162), there was a correlation of $-.53$ between the degree of constitutionalism and the degree of inequality which supports the conclusions arrived at separately by a nonquantitative review of the ethnographic literature. Data were lacking on the degree of constitutionalism in the fourteenth society in the sample.