

# CONCEPT OF TRIBUTALISM: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF S. AMIN, J. HALDON AND H. H. STAHL'S APPROACHES

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**Abstract:**

*By this article the author wants to revive the discussion about Marxist schemas of social development and their applicability for constructing models of universal history. The viewpoints of three scholars are presented in the current text: Samir Amin's who is known in the Western historiography tradition as the main creator and promoter of the concept of tributary mode of production, John Haldon's who has paid much attention to the above-mentioned concept and has dedicated an entire book to this issue, Henri H. Stahl's who created an original alternative approach to the issue of tributalism. The author rejects J. Haldon's concept of „mode of production“ as being too narrow. In fact J. Haldon identifies the mode of production with the mode of exploitation. The author proposes a wider definition of the mode of production which is based on the analysis of Karl Marx's texts. According to the author, the most important elements of mode of production are exploitative subject (it is defined by property of conditions of production, which realises as the social power) and productive/obligatory unit which can be manifested as a household of an individual direct producer or as a community. The author proposes the following classification based on his conception of a mode of production:*

- 1. A proprietor of land is a monarch/state and the productive/obligatory unit is the community (of Asiatic/Slavonic type);*
- 2. A proprietor of land is a monarch/state and the productive/obligatory unit is the household of an individual direct producer;*
- 3. Proprietors of land are private landowners and the*

*productive/obligatory unit is the community (of Asiatic/Slavonic type);*

4. *Proprietors of land are private landowners and the productive/obligatory unit is the household of an individual direct producer.*

*The most important conclusions of the author's are as follows:*

1. *H. H. Stahl's statement that there were alternatives in the social development of precapitalist societies are definitely reasonable.*
2. *Keeping in his mind the controversies between the conceptions of tributalism the author emphasizes that for the moment the question of the typology of antagonistic precapitalist societies remains open; so further researches and discussions are necessary.*
3. *As a point of departure for further researches and discussions the author proposes his classification of antagonistic precapitalist societies based on the criteria of an exploitative subject and a productive/obligatory unit.*

#### **Abstrakcija:**

*Šiuo tekstu autorius siekia atnaujinti diskusiją apie marksistinių socialinės raidos schemų pagrįstumą ir pritaikomumą modeliuojant visuotinę istoriją. Straipsnyje pristatomi trijų autorių požiūriai: labiausiai Vakarų istoriografinėje tradicijoje žinomo tributalizmo/tributarinio gamybos būdo koncepcijos kūrėjo ir propaguotojo Samiro Amino, išsamiai tributalizmo problematiką nagrinėjusio britų kilmės istoriko Johno Haldono (jis parašė visą knygą skirtą šiam klausimui), originalią alternatyvią tributalizmo koncepcijos versiją pateikęs rumunų sociologo Henri H. Stahlio. Autoriui nepriimtina pernelyg redukuota J. Haldono gamybos būdo samprata, kai gamybos būdas tapatinamas su eksploatacijos būdu. Remdamasis paties K. Marxo tekstų analize autorius suformuluoja platesnę gamybos būdo sampratą, kurios svarbiausiais komponentais yra eksploatacinis subjektas (jį nusako gamybos sąlygų nuosavybė, kuri realizuojasi kaip socialinė galia) ir gamybinis/prievolinis vienetas, kuris gali reikštis arba individualaus tiesioginio gamintojo ūkio, arba bendruomenės pavidalu. Remdamasis šia samprata autorius pateikia ikikapitalistinių gamybos būdų principinę klasifikaciją:*

1. *Žemės savininkas yra valdovas/valstybė ir gamybinis/prievolinis vienetas yra (azijinio/slaviško tipo) bendruomenė;*
2. *Žemės savininkas yra valdovas/valstybė ir gamybinis/prievolinis vienetas yra individualus tiesioginio gamintojo ūkis;*
3. *Žemės savininkai yra privatūs ir gamybinis/prievolinis vienetas yra (azijinio/slaviško tipo) bendruomenė;*
4. *Žemės savininkai yra privatūs ir gamybinis/prievolinis vienetas yra individualus tiesioginio gamintojo ūkis.*

*Svarbiausios autoriaus išvados yra šios:*

1. *H. H. Stahlio nuostata apie žmonijos ikikapitalistinės socialinės evoliucijos alternatyvumą yra visiškai pagrįsta.*
2. *Aptartų alternatyvių tributalizmo koncepcijų prieštarumas parodo, kad ikikapitalistinių antagonistinių gamybos būdo tipologijos klausimas ir XXI amžiaus pradžioje išlieka atviras, todėl visiškai galimos esamų koncepcijų revizijos, tolesnės diskusijos ir tyrimai.*
3. *Tolesnių tyrimų ir diskusijų išeities tašku siūlome mūsų pateiktą gamybos būdų klasifikaciją paremtą eksploatacinio subjekto ir gamybinio/prievolinio vieneto kriterijais.*

**Rezumat:**

*Cu acest articol, autorul își propuse să redeschidă discuția despre modelele marxiste de dezvoltare socială și despre aplicabilitatea acestora în construirea unor modele de istorie universală. Sunt prezentate și analizate, în acest context, viziunile a trei cercetători: Samir Amin, John Aldon și Henri H. Stahl. Primii doi au scris extensiv asupra conceptului de tributarism în relație cu mijloacele de producție, în vreme ce Stahl a propus o abordare alternativă, respingând conceptul de 'mijloc de producție'. Pornind de la aceste trei viziuni, autorul acestui articol avansează propria interpretare și abordare asupra conceptelor de 'tributarism' și 'mijloace de producție'.*

**Keywords:** Marxism, tributalism, mode of production, obligatory unit, exploitative subject

Discussions about the models of universal history based on Marxist conception of modes of production in the postcommunist countries' historiography have extinguished soon after the fall of the Soviet Union. The only obvious exception in this context is the Russian historiography where despite the fact that the conceptual crisis was honestly declared<sup>1</sup>, serious efforts have been made to renew the paradigm of modes of production. A quite different trend can be seen in the Western (at least Anglo-Saxon) historiography. The Marxist interpretations are still vivid among Western scholars and the discussions about the validity of the Marxist schema of human development have continued even after the Cold War was over<sup>2</sup>. I suggest that the above-mentioned radical shift in the post-

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<sup>1</sup> Look, for example: *Н.Н.Крадин, Кочевые общества (проблемы формационной характеристики)*, (Владивосток, 1992); *Л. Б. Алаев, История Востока*, (Москва, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Look, for example: J. Haldon, *The State and the Tributary Mode of Production* (London, New York, 1993); C. Wickham, *Land and power: studies in Italian and European social history, 400-1200* (London, 1994); T. Bottomore, ed., *Dictionary of Marxist thought*, Second

communist countries' historiography is due more to ideological reasons than to a real crisis of Marxist methodology (I refer here to creative Marxism not to its vulgar dogmatic version). One can find very original and persuasive solutions based on Marxist methodology in the post-communist Russian historiography. A case in point is Nikolay Kradin's conception of the exopolitarian mode of production<sup>3</sup> applied to nomad societies.<sup>4</sup>

The author of the current article by considering himself as a representative of post-communist countries' historiography wishes to revive the discussion about the validity of Marxist schema of social development and its applicability for sketching models of universal history. At the outset, I underline that I treat unilinear Marxist-Leninist schema of socioeconomic formations as entirely un-adequate to historical reality. Instead, I suppose that alternative ways of social development in pre-capitalist societies of various regions of the world are probable. Therefore, my purpose is to find alternative concepts which would help us to sketch more adequate models of social evolution. In this article, I will approach the concept of tributalism/tributal mode of production and consider its place in general Marxist models.

There is a suggestion that the Japanese Marxist Jiro Hoyakawa was the first to use the concept of tributary mode of production (TMP) but he has not published his texts in the Western languages so that his ideas have remained unknown in the West<sup>5</sup>. Instead, it was **Samir Amin** who has popularized the concept of TMP there, which is the reason why I want to assess his notion of the concept. A historian of British origin and a well known byzantologist, **John Haldon** was the one who has examined the concept TMP most systematically and who has dedicated an entire book to the concept<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, there is no doubt that Haldon's approach deserves attention.

During my studies of the Romanian historiography, especially concerning the discussion about the Asiatic mode of production and the

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edition (Oxford, Cambridge, 1991); J.W. Russell, *Modes of production in world history* (Taylor & Francis, 1989), and many others.

<sup>3</sup> In the case of this mode of production the main process of surplus product appropriation takes place outside society/state, i.e. the exploitation of other societies is the most important.

<sup>4</sup> Н.Н. Крадин, 1992; *Idem*, Кочевничество в цивилизационном и формационном развитии // Цивилизации. Вып. (5. Москва, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Look: S. Amin, *Class and Nation, Historically and in the Current Crisis* (New York, London, 1980) 68.

<sup>6</sup> J.Haldon, *The State and the Tributary Mode of Production* (London, New York, 1993).

alternative un-dogmatic conceptions of typology of social structure of Moldova/Valahia, I have found a more original notion of tributalism. The main ideas of this conception are expounded in two books published in Romanian<sup>7</sup>. Actually, the author of this conception was a Romanian sociologist called **Henri H. Stahl**. In this article I intend to briefly present his viewpoints, too.

I must also state that the British historian **Chris Wickham** has formulated an alternative conception of TMP in the 1980s<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, he has changed his opinion eventually<sup>9</sup> and therefore I am not going to approach his opinions separately. I shall consider Wickham's ideas only in the context of the critique of Haldon's conception.

I treat the concept of tributalism as a tool of typology of pre-capitalist societies' social structure. Keeping this in mind, I set the goal of estimating the validity of various notions of TMP and reveal stronger and weaker sides of every conception mentioned before. If it turns out that no one's attitude is acceptable, I shall try to sketch an alternative conception.

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Samir Amin's<sup>10</sup> field of academic (and not only) interest includes the causes of unequal economic development and the problems and perspectives of peripheral countries' development. He elaborates on the Marxist so-called dependency theory<sup>11</sup>. Amin distinguishes three stages in the development of productive forces and relations of production: tribal, tributary, and capitalist modes of production<sup>12</sup>. Tributary form of land property prevails in case of TMP and Amin considers property more as social control than as juridical and ideological forms<sup>13</sup>. The Egyptian scholar emphasizes that if one treats the process at the level of abstraction (i.e. at the level of modes of production) the development of humankind

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<sup>7</sup> H.H.Stahl, *Teorii și ipoteze privind sociologia orînduirii tributare* (București, 1980); M.Constantinescu, *Schița unei teorii marxiste a formațiunii social-economice tributare*. București, 1974.

<sup>8</sup> C. Wickham, *The Uniqueness of the East // Feudalism and Non-European Societies* (London, 1985) 166-196.

<sup>9</sup> Look: *Wickham 1994*, 74-75.

<sup>10</sup> Samir Amin was born in Cairo, the son of an Egyptian father and a French mother (both medical doctors). In 1947-1957 he studied political sciences, statistics and economy in Paris. In 1963-1970 he worked in African Institute For Economic Development And Planning, in 1970-1980 he was a director of the Institute, in 1980 became director of Forum du Tiers Monde in Dakar. He has published more than 30 books in French and Arabian.

<sup>11</sup> For more comprehensive reference about this theory look T. Bottomore, ed. *Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Harward University Press, 1983) 114-117.

<sup>12</sup> *Amin 1980*, 48-50.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 49-50.

should be defined as universal. Amin opposes to the British sociologist of history Perry Anderson who does not distinguish between mode of production and social formation and in this context he speaks about a variety of formations and negates the unifying principle<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, I will classify Amin's approach as unilinear. Amin regards TMP as the universal form of pre-capitalist societies<sup>15</sup>.

According to Amin, in case of TMP the surplus product is extracted by non-economic means, the essential organization of production is based on use value and not on exchange value. The latter means that the product has a value of direct consumption for the direct producer as well as for the exploiting class<sup>16</sup>. Commodity exchange also exists at some scale but it is not the main feature and function of the economy of a tributary society<sup>17</sup>. Amin argues that in case of TMP the superstructure is a dominant element and it takes the form of ideology (Christianity, Islam etc.). This is a consequence of the dominance of use value in the economic base<sup>18</sup>. The latter factor also determines stability and stagnation in the development of TMP type societies (including European feudalism, which Amin treats as a peripheral and undeveloped case of TMP). Those societies make progress but this does not imply qualitative change in the tributary relations of production<sup>19</sup>. According to Amin, there is no doubt that societies of TMP type are class societies and that class struggle takes place in the TMP. Victories of the exploited class weaken the exploiting tributary class in favor of a nascent class, the bourgeoisie, and thus open the way to the capitalist mode of production<sup>20</sup>. All the characteristics enumerated are common to all pre-capitalist formations<sup>21</sup> slave and feudal modes of production included. Amin also insists that slavery as a mode of production was an exceptional phenomenon because it affected a small number of societies. According to Amin, two main reasons explain why slavery did not spread wider: everywhere it was linked with commerce and commodity production (the latter was the exception in pre-capitalist world) and its reproduction of labour force needed external sources<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 50.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 69.

<sup>16</sup> Look for more about political economy based on „use value“: G.A.Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History – a Defence* (Oxford, 1978); Bottomore, ed. 1983, 504.

<sup>17</sup> Amin 1980, 51-52.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 52-53.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 53-54.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 54.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.. 56.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 58-60.

Amin regards feudal mode of production (FMP), as I have already mentioned, as a primitive undeveloped form of TMP. It means that all general characteristics of TMP can be applied to feudalism. Yet, according to Amin, some additional characteristics should be formulated: the lord organizes the process of production within the framework of domain and he also enjoys political and jurisdictional prerogatives, that implies one more peculiar feature, i.e. political decentralisation. Eventually, feudalism tends to evolve to a more developed form of TMP (for instance, absolute European monarchies)<sup>23</sup>.

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As I understand it, John Haldon<sup>24</sup> is the scholar who has elaborated the concept of TMP most thoroughly. According to him, FMP should be treated as a basic and universal mode of production of the pre-capitalist societies. These are the most important characteristics of FMP: 1) the extraction of rent in the political economy sense, under whatever institutional or organisational form it appears; 2) the non-economic coercion is the basis for appropriation of surplus by a ruling class or its agents; 3) the relationship between the rulers and the ruled is exploitative and contradictory in respect of control over the means of production<sup>25</sup>. Haldon also emphasizes that the term „feudalism“ is quite confusing since historians of various views attributes it different meanings. Consequently, Haldon proposes to change term „feudal“ into „tributary“ whenever one talks about modes of production<sup>26</sup>.

The scholar of British origin defines a mode of production as an ideal-type of a set of economic relationships consisting of a specific combination of forces and relations of production<sup>27</sup>. Despite the fact that the definition was his construct, Haldon is nonetheless inclined to reduce the concept of mode of production to a mode of surplus appropriation. In this sense Haldon and Wickham's attitudes are akin: both historians treat mode of surplus appropriation as the most important element of mode of production and as a sufficient criterion to distinguish one mode of production from another<sup>28</sup>. In the 1980s Wickham suggested the idea that rent and tax (tribute) should be regarded as different modes of surplus

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 60-62.

<sup>24</sup> Professor of Princeton university (from 2005), Senior Fellow of the Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies (in Washington D.C.; from 2007).

<sup>25</sup> J.Haldon 1993, 64-65.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 67-68.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 56.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 77; Wickham 1985, 167-168.

extraction and this distinction has separated two different modes of production (feudal and tributary) correspondingly<sup>29</sup>. According to Haldon, a difference between tax and rent means only a difference in the level of superstructure. Therefore, there exists no different modes of production<sup>30</sup>. Referring to Marx<sup>31</sup>, Haldon states that Marx itself did not differentiate tax and various forms of rent as a basis for distinguishing between different modes of production<sup>32</sup>. The scholar also rejects the argument that private landowners intervene in the process of production in a larger scale than state (or its agents)<sup>33</sup>. Besides, the structure of state's taxes and services usually was intermingled: taxes in kind and in cash as well as various labour services. So in this case there is no any essential difference between tax and rent either<sup>34</sup>. According to Haldon, in both cases the object of surplus extraction is the class of peasants and it does not matter what is their status (free holders or dependent tenants) and whether they are grouped in independent communities or not<sup>35</sup>.

Elaborating his arguments, Haldon implies that if one suggests that tax and rent represent different modes of production one should expect to find two contrasting ways of combining the direct producers with the means of production and, respectively, two different types of surplus appropriation. That would mean that the state and the ruling class make entirely independent socio-economic categories. That, in turn, implies that wherever one finds the state and the class of landowners one deals with a case of combined feudal-tributary mode of production which contains permanent contradiction. The members of the fiscal apparatus, on the one hand, and the provincial agents to whom the function of tax-raising is delegated, on the other hand, should make a different class which is not the case. There are only different groups of the same ruling class. These factions can function as a unity but they may also contradict each other. The character of relation between the above-mentioned factions determines

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 166-196.

<sup>30</sup> Haldon 1993, 77.

<sup>31</sup> „Should the direct producers not be confronted by a private landowner, but rather [...] under direct subordination to a state which stands over them as their landlord and simultaneously as sovereign, then rent and taxes coincide, or rather, there exists no tax which differs from this form of ground-rent.“ *Marx K.* Capital Vol. III Part VI: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch47.htm> (accessed 23 September 2009).

<sup>32</sup> Haldon 1993, 78-79.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 79-80, 82-84.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 82.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 77.



not a different relation toward the direct producer but in respect of the degree of their control over the means of distribution of surplus product. According to Haldon, this is an internal contradiction and not a confrontation between different modes of production<sup>36</sup>.

Conversely, although Haldon does not imply any crucial differences between FMP and TMP. He underlines that slave, ancient and capitalist modes of production differ from TMP essentially. In case of the slave mode of production direct producers themselves are a private property of their owners; direct producers are totally separated from the means of production. When the capitalist mode of production prevails, hired workers dispose only of their labour force, which they are forced to sell to the owners of the means of production because of the economic pressure. Under the ancient mode of production state controls the privately owned means of production only on a limited scale: as much as it appropriates of surplus product in a form of taxes which is necessary to maintain political, juridical and military structures. They are indispensable to guarantee the security of citizens and their property. On the other hand, Haldon adds that then the division of labour develops the ancient mode of production and evolves eventually toward TMP or to the slave mode of production<sup>37</sup>.

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The Romanian sociologist Henri H. Stahl (1901-1991) was a partisan of historical materialism as he emphasizes in many of his texts. He often refers directly to the works of Marxism founders. Stahl gives a clear exposition of his methodological attitudes and creates an original conception of socioeconomic formation in his late works<sup>38</sup>.

The Romanian scholar has distinguished five „classic“ formations (primitive communal, slave, feudal, capitalist, socialist)<sup>39</sup>. Additionally, Stahl tends to differentiate one more: oriental despotism<sup>40</sup>. The Romanian sociologist strictly opposed the unilinear approach to social development. He also criticised determinist attitude to social evolution, i.e., the statement that every society moves by the only possible way toward capitalism<sup>41</sup>. According to Stahl, the fact that feudalism is located chronologically exactly before capitalism does not mean in itself that feudalism is pre-

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 84-85.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 77-78.

<sup>38</sup> H.H. Stahl, *Teorii și ipoteze privind sociologia orînduirii tributale, Probleme confuze în istoria socială a României* (București, 1992).

<sup>39</sup> Stahl 1980, 26.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 191.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 52-56.

capitalist, i.e. that it evolves toward capitalism inevitably<sup>42</sup>. In Stahl's opinion this course occurred only in some regions of the world (Western Europe) and under specific circumstances which are external in respect of feudalism (industrial revolution, colonial policy, primary accumulation of capital)<sup>43</sup>. Therefore, he supports the view that there are alternative ways of social evolution<sup>44</sup>. If one wants to interpret social history adequately from the point of view of historical materialism, one should research every case as thoroughly as possible and separate technological processes from relations of production (modes of exploitation)<sup>45</sup>.

Stahl states that mode of production should not be identified with socio-economic formation. The Romanian scholar underlines that there are three social phenomena which should not be merged: mode of production (mod de producție), mode of production's exploitation (mod de exploatare a producției) and type of formation (tip de orânduire)<sup>46</sup>. In case of capitalism, mode of production and mode of exploitation are connected in an indistinguishable way but in other cases they are separate phenomena<sup>47</sup>. For example, according to Stahl, in case of tributalism „tributal mode of production“ does not exist (the communal mode of production prevails instead<sup>48</sup>) – there is only a „tributal mode of exploitation“<sup>49</sup>. The Romanian scholar also argues that even several modes of production coexist within the same formation but one of them is dominant<sup>50</sup>. The mode of exploitation of the dominating mode of production determines the type of formation. In some cases the prevailing mode of production remains the same despite that modes of exploitation change<sup>51</sup>.

Stahl is also inclined to emphasize the importance of mode of exploitation from another point of view. He insists that to explain the rotation of formations only by a shift of corresponding modes of production means a vulgarization of materialistic approach to historical development. He gives an example of such an interpretation. Since the base of peasant's exploitation is their bounding to ground, tithe and corvée some historians treat the society as feudal. The Romanian scholar produces a

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 190.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 51.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 56-58.

<sup>45</sup> Stahl, 1992, 58.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 173.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 59-60, 173.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 173-174.

counterargument stating that these forms of exploitation can also be found in the ancient Roman and in late Byzantine societies (i.e. so called colonatus) but, according to Stahl, one does not treat these societies as feudal. In case of the genuine feudalism, in Stahl's opinion, the forms of peasant's exploitation already mentioned coexist with a ruling class which is consolidated in a shape of feudal ladder based on seignior-vassal relations. These feudal lords have their own economic base which should be differentiated from the mode of production. According to Stahl, it is this structure which constitutes the mode of exploitation in case of feudalism. This is a social aspect of formation which should be treated as an element of superstructure<sup>52</sup>.

In addition to the six „fundamental“ formations<sup>53</sup> that have been mentioned before, the Romanian scholar distinguishes one more which he names as tributal (orînduirea tributale). Stahl treats it as a variation of oriental despotism<sup>54</sup>. The latter differs from tributalism, first of all, by the functions of state. In case of oriental despotism, state interferes more into the life of direct producers by organizing large scale public works (building and maintaining irrigation system etc.). On the other hand, communities of direct producers in both cases are exploited by raising a tribute<sup>55</sup>. This characteristic is common for both subtypes of the formation. Nevertheless, in case of tributalism the communities of direct producers are considerably less controlled by state (ruler). This is the main difference between oriental despotism and tributalism.

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I have already represented here three concepts of tributalism and now I will proceed to a critical comparative analysis. I begin with Haldon because I suppose that his approach deserves most critique in this context.

To begin with, as I have already mentioned, according to Haldon the mode of exploitation is the core of mode of production. The main characteristic of TMP as a class society is raising a tax (rent or tribute) in a way of non-economic violence. Among the others, Haldon also differentiates the ancient mode of production. In the latter case, the state appropriates a part of surplus product in the form of taxes raised from the proprietors of the means of production in order to maintain political, juridical and military system (these structures defend interests of the proprietors themselves). In what way does the appropriation of surplus

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>53</sup> I.e. primitive communal, slave, feudal, capitalist, socialist and oriental despotic/Asiatic.

<sup>54</sup> *Stahl 1980*, 191.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 156-160.

product take place? According to Haldon, at first it takes place on the basis of internal clan and tribal reciprocity, later on formalized and contractual basis<sup>56</sup>. Haldon's statement shows clearly that here we are dealing only with redistribution of surplus product and not with a mode of exploitation. I argue that to distinguish the ancient mode of production defined in this way is wrong<sup>57</sup>. Haldon himself recognises later in his book that the so-called ancient mode of production he distinguishes is rather an intermediate stage between primitive (tribal) society and class (antagonistic) society<sup>58</sup>.

The second Haldon's statement which in my opinion is not acceptable is related to his notion of productive forces and its accordance with relations of production. The theoretician of British presents an excessively generalized definition of the level of forces of production which corresponds with TMP. It can be applied not only to every pre-capitalist society but also to some primitive/tribal societies. It does not reveal sufficiently dialectic relation between productive forces and relations of production. According to Haldon, the level of productive forces emerged with Neolithic revolution, and comprises field cultivation based on organic energy plus hands implements, capable of sustained surplus production as reproduction of peasant family. Wherever these conditions and relations of production are based on raising of rent in a way of non-economic violence we have a case of TMP<sup>59</sup>. First, let's remember that Haldon speaks also about slave and ancient mode of production. It means that the level of forces of production characterized before does not correspond only with relations of production of TMP type. On the other hand, as we already know, Haldon treats ancient mode of production as an intermediate stage between modes of production rather than a self-sufficient mode of production. As a matter of fact, he interprets slave mode of production as a marginal phenomenon, too<sup>60</sup>. It sounds like my critique is not sufficiently well grounded. Nevertheless, if one considers an issue of productive forces level in a wider context, one should notice that Haldon's definition do not even answer to the question why some societies become antagonistic (class) and others do not. For example, in Africa south of Sahara (the only clear

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<sup>56</sup> Haldon, 1993:78.

<sup>57</sup> C. Wickham has suggested another and more persuasive conception of Ancient mode of production, look: C. Wickham, *The Other Transition: from the Ancient World to feudalism // Past and Present* (1984, № 103): 3-36.

<sup>58</sup> Haldon 1993, 90.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 89-90.

exception is Ethiopia) despite the early using of iron tools and agriculture the societies did not evolve to TMP except for a few ephemeral exceptions<sup>61</sup>. In this context, one should remember that Karl Marx himself wrote that „community itself appears as the first great force of production“, which on its turn is determined by conditions of production (the structure of branches of production, farming methods etc.) as mode of production itself<sup>62</sup>. In the meanwhile Haldon entirely ignores the factor of communities in his typology of modes of production<sup>63</sup>.

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Now, we can return to Haldon's call for rejecting FMP/TMP dichotomy. As it has already been mentioned, the scholar argues that Marx himself has not made any essential difference between raising of rent by private proprietors and raising of taxes by state<sup>64</sup>. In fact, I agree that Marx treats the extraction of state taxes as one of the possible variations of rent in the above-mentioned context. This confirms Marx's statement which could be found in the same text: „The direct producer, according to our assumption, is to be found here in possession of his own means of production, the necessary material labour conditions required for the realisation of his labour and the production of his means of subsistence. He conducts his agricultural activity and the rural home industries connected with it independently. This independence is not undermined by the circumstance that the small peasants may form among themselves a more or less natural production community, as they do in India, since it is here merely a question of independence from the nominal lord of the manor“<sup>65</sup>.

Here is the case to formulate the question which is the most important in the context: if Marx treats the state tax raised in some Asian countries as a specific sort of rent does it mean that he ascribes these countries to the same mode of production with countries in which prevails the sort of rent extracted from direct producers by private proprietors? In order to answer

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<sup>61</sup> There is a Russian theoretician of history Yuri Semenov which elucidated connection between productive forces and relations of production consequently and persuasively, look: Ю. И. Семёнов, *Об особенностях развития производственных сил докапиталистических классовых обществ // Философские науки* (1985, № 1).

<sup>62</sup> K. Marx, *Pre-capitalist Economic Formations*' ed. E. Hobsbawm (London, 1964), 94-95.

<sup>63</sup> Haldon 1993, 77.

<sup>64</sup> „Should the direct producers not be confronted by a private landowner, but rather [...] under direct subordination to a state which stands over them as their landlord and simultaneously as sovereign, then rent and taxes coincide, or rather, there exists no tax which differs from this form of ground-rent.“

<sup>65</sup> K. Marx, *Capital* Vol. III Part VI <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch47.htm>> (23/08/2009).

this question properly I need to consider the Marx's concept of mode of production itself more thoroughly.

I would like to remind again that Haldon defines mode of production in substance as a mode of exploitation, i.e. as a mode of surplus product appropriation. Such a definition of mode of production is quite popular among Western Marxist historians<sup>66</sup>. There is no doubt that both Haldon and other Western Marxist scholars refer to the same Marx's statement from the same paragraph: „The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and, in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows up out of the production relations themselves“<sup>67</sup>

Nevertheless, one can raise the question: is it such a narrow definition fully adequate to Marx's concept itself? According to the quotation cited above, the founder of Marxism understands mode of production, first of all, as relations of production. And what are relations of production, according to Marx? The answer can be found in Marx's work in the sentence following the one quoted above: „It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers – a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity“<sup>68</sup>. And how do these direct relations between the owners of production conditions and the direct producers (i.e. relations of production) manifest? In this case one can find the answer to the question in another well-known passage of Marx: „At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto“<sup>69</sup>. And how, according to Marx, these relations of production are manifesting? It is the quotation of „Das Kapital“ vol. 3, which gives the answer: „the property relationship

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<sup>66</sup> Look: Bottomore, ed., 1983, 353.

<sup>67</sup> K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III Part VI <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch47.htm>> (23/08/2009).

<sup>68</sup> K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III Part VI <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch47.htm>> (23/08/2009).

<sup>69</sup> K. Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political economy* <<http://www.marxistsfr.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/appx2.htm>> (23/08/2009).

must simultaneously appear as a direct relation of lordship and servitude, so that the direct producer is not free<sup>70</sup>. Thus, I can conclude that the aspect of socioeconomic power and not the juridical one is the most important aspect of property for Marx<sup>71</sup>.

Let me summarize some essential things. I can draw two important points:

1. The aspect of exploitation of mode of production is manifesting as a direct relation between owners of production's conditions and direct producers;
2. Relation of subjugation and domination (mode of exploitation) is manifested as property relation which, in its turn, should be understood as socioeconomic power (which permits to realize one's title toward any property).

Keeping in mind these two points, I can return to the main question formulated before: does Marx ascribe those Asian societies in which state is owner of land and sovereign simultaneously to the same mode of production as those societies in which rent is extracted from direct producers by private owners. Before answering to this question, I would like to produce a passage from Marx's works in which he describes the case of the Asian societies considered here: „Should the direct producers not be confronted by a private landowner, but rather, as in Asia, under direct subordination to a state which stands over them as their landlord and simultaneously as sovereign, then rent and taxes coincide, or rather, there exists no tax which differs from this form of ground-rent [...] The state is then the supreme lord. Sovereignty here consists in the ownership of land concentrated on a national scale. But, on the other hand, no private ownership of land exists, although there is both private and common possession and use of land<sup>72</sup>.

In this case which Marx describes quite clearly, unlike the societies in which rent from direct producers is extracted by private owners, one can not find:

1. direct relation between private owners of land (i.e. of conditions of production) and direct producers;

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<sup>70</sup> K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III Part VI <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch47.htm>> (23/08/2009).

<sup>71</sup> Amin treats property in the same way. Wickham also emphasizes that if one wishes to compare precapitalist modes of production then power is more important aspect of property than juridical one, look: *Wickham 1985*, 184.

<sup>72</sup> K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III Part VI <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch47.htm>> (23/08/2009).

2. private owners of land themselves; it means that socioeconomic power is concentrated in the hands of ruler (personifying the state) and not of private owners which do not exist at all.

One can talk about private possessors not owners of land. They acquire power only when they become state's (ruler's) agents (i.e. members of state administrative or fiscal apparatus). It means that their relation to power (as a real expression of property) is determined by status. This is an essential difference between the two types of societies considered before. I argue that this is a sufficient reason to talk about different modes of production.

In addition to the essential point revealed before, if a state/ruler as an owner of production conditions correlates with a community during the process of tax/rent raising that means that there is no direct relation to the direct producer. Consequently, I can conclude that a question of productive/obligation unit (cell) is no less important. In turn, it means that the typology of communities elaborated by Marx<sup>73</sup> is also fundamental when one envisages to define mode of production in a proper way. Next, I can conclude that the statement about TMP as a universal pre-capitalist mode of production is baseless because it is grounded on a too narrow conception of mode of production. Apart from the fact that TMP and FMP should be distinguished, one can also formulate even more complicated classification based on exploitive subject (owner of productive conditions) and productive/obligation unit criteria:

1. Owner of land is a ruler/state and productive/obligatory unit is a community of Asiatic/Slavonic type;
2. Owner of land is a ruler/state and productive/obligatory unit is an individual household of direct producer;
3. Owners of land are private and productive/obligatory unit is a community of Asiatic/Slavonic type;
4. Owners of land are private and productive/obligatory unit is an individual household of direct producer<sup>74</sup>.

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I have already contrasted my arguments with Haldon's concept of universalistic TMP. Now I can pass to the critical analysis of Amin's approach. First, I must emphasise that in my opinion Amin and Haldon's attitude toward TMP are very akin, no serious differences separating their viewpoints. Both scholars treat TMP as an universal pre-capitalist stage of

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<sup>73</sup> Marx, 1964.

<sup>74</sup> Compare Robert's Brenner's classification based on very similar criteria: R. Brenner, 'The Social Basis of Economic Development', *Analytical Marxism* (Cambridge, 1986), 51.



humankind development. However, Amin makes a specification that FMP was a peripheral, undeveloped case of TMP and as such FMP was more favourable for the genesis of capitalism; nevertheless he does not treat feudalism as entirely autonomous mode of production). Accordingly, we can reckon both Amin and Haldon among partisans of unilinear Marxist scheme of historical development. Conceptions of both authors are not acceptable to me.

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Now we can proceed to the critical analysis of Stahl's conception. We are going to enumerate and discuss the main points where the approach of the Romanian sociologist differs to those of Amin and Haldon.

The first. Stahl recognizes the existence of alternative ways of social evolution. The Romanian scholar criticizes deterministic unilinear formations/modes of production scheme consistently. According to Stahl, only under certain circumstances (and it is not inevitable) one formation evolves into the other. In contrast, Amin underlines that development of humankind is strictly unilinear (in the sense of development of productive forces and relations of production, respectively). As regards Haldon, he treats TMP as a basic and universal pre-capitalist mode of production so that he denies possibility of alternative precapitalist social development too.

The second. There is a difference in the usage of main concepts between Stahl and Amin/Haldon (especially as regards the term mode of production). There is the concept of formation (orînduire) which is the widest one in Stahl's works. It includes both mode of production (mod de producție) as technical processes of production (this is what I tend to name productive/obligatory unit) and mode of exploitation, i.e. mode of surplus product extraction, as well as some social structures which, according the Romanian sociologist, are no less important when one wants to identify a type of formation (for example, feudal hierarchy based on seignior-vassal relations in case of feudalism<sup>75</sup>). The latter are elements of superstructure<sup>76</sup>. Mode of exploitation, according to Stahl, determines a type of formation since mode of production is able to endure for a long time without any changes, but meanwhile modes of exploitation change.

As a result I can summarize that the basic unit of societies' typology for Stahl is the formation (orînduire). Meanwhile, there is a mode of

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<sup>75</sup> The approach to feudalism as to hierarchic structure based on seignior-vassal relations was criticized very convincingly by British medievalist Susan Reynolds, look: S. *Reynolds, Fiefs and Vassals: the Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford Univeristy Press, 1994).

<sup>76</sup> About importance of this element look: *Stahl 1992*, 62.

production which is a category of the same rank for Amin and Haldon. The latter defines mode of production as an ideal type: a set of certain economic relations (some combination of productive forces and productive relations)<sup>77</sup>. It means that the British theoretician uses the concept of mode of production as a tool of typology procedure which is abstracted from historical reality. In the meanwhile, Haldon understands social formation as an expression of a historical society, i.e. a particular expression of some mode of production in a given space and time (it includes political, cultural and institutional aspects).

As much as I know, Amin does not define the difference between mode of production and formation in a precise way but, according to some hints which one can find in his book, his attitude is very similar to Haldon's. As already mentioned, Amin criticizes Anderson for not separating mode of production from social formation and denies the universality of humankind's development on that base. Meanwhile, Amin emphasizes the conceptual difference between the concepts („To the extent i emphasize this conceptual distinction“) and rejects arguments based on the variety of immediate reality<sup>78</sup>.

There is an essential difference between Stahl's notion of mode of production and Amin's/Haldon's. According to Stahl, there are, first of all, technical processes which include the concept mode of production (also labour organization since Stahl talks about mode of production of villages possessing common property [sat devălmaș], i.e. productive/obligatory unit). Haldon considers such a notion of mode of production as misleading. I tend to agree with Haldon. It is a so called fetishizing of organizational forms. The conception of mode of production of this kind includes only a productive unit and excludes any wider set of relations of production<sup>79</sup>. As already mentioned, Stahl treats mode of exploitation as the most important element of *formation* which determines the type of formation. Conversely, Haldon considers mode of exploitation as the most important element of *mode of production* which determines the type of mode of production. The latter conception of mode of production, as my analysis of Marx's concept of mode of production has showed, is more similar to the conception of Marxism founder's himself.

Conversely, as Stahl attributes some structures which should be treated as elements of superstructure to the set of components of formation, I

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<sup>77</sup> Haldon 1993, 56.

<sup>78</sup> Amin 1980, 50.

<sup>79</sup> Haldon 1993, 53.

consider Stahl's conception of formation as the second case of incorrect conception of mode of production distinguished by Haldon. In that case, conception of mode of production as an ideal type is intermingled with conception of mode of production as a particular society at a particular historical time. In this case, particular institutional forms are treated as important attributes of a certain type of production mode<sup>80</sup>.

At this point, I want to pass on to the comparison of the conceptions of tributalism/TMP itself. Stahl considers tributalism as a variation of „fundamental“ formation - Oriental despotism (i.e. Asiatic mode of production). On the contrary, Amin does not recognise the conception of Asiatic mode of production at all (he considers it not as scholarly but as mythological). As regards Haldon, he does not distinguish any differences between TMP and FMP since he regards TMP as an unified pre-capitalist stage of humankind's economic development. Stahl's conception of tributalism is more akin to Wickham's. Once upon a time this British medievalist historian considered TMP and FMP as two different but coexisting modes of production because they were based on different methods of surplus product extracting (state tax and private rent respectively)<sup>81</sup>. Thus, TMP is an universal pre-capitalist mode of production in Amin/Haldon's unilinear scheme of universal history. Tributal formation is one of alternative variations of pre-capitalist development in Stahl's bilinear scheme of universal history.

The Romanian sociologist produced a wider definition of the tributal mode of exploitation in his main theoretical work. These are its main characteristics:

1. Ruling class appropriates surplus product from villages possessing property in common (satele devălmașe) in a centralized way;
2. Appropriation of the surplus product has a form of tribute since quantity of extracted product and terms are fixed in advance and extracted products go directly to ruler's treasury at first;
3. Rights of ruling class are entirely fiscal and exploitation is purely parasitic because exploiters do not intervene into process of production at all<sup>82</sup>.

Let me consider now to what degree Stahl's definition of tributal mode of exploitation is acceptable. We should keep in mind the conclusions

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<sup>80</sup> Haldon 1993, 53-54; Haldon even gives an example analogical to Stahl's statement (feudalism is authentic only in case if institutions are analogical to those of medieval Western Europe).

<sup>81</sup> Wickham 1985, 166-196.

<sup>82</sup> Stahl 1980, 192.

drawn after reconstructing Marx's conception of mode of production (which includes mode of exploitation as an essential element of it). First, I can make out the relation between exploitative subject and productive/obligatory unit from Stahl's definition. Second, I can make out the relation between means of production and a direct producer: the relation is not direct but mediated by community. Third, a ruling class consists of ruler's agents entirely; their social power is determined by status. Thus, according to my classification of modes of production, one can find all necessary characteristics of mode of production in Stahl's definition of tributal mode of exploitation.

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From the considerations above, I can draw conclusions as follows:

1. I define Amin and Haldon's conceptions of development of pre-capitalist societies as deterministic unilinear evolutionism; they are totally not acceptable to me.
2. I regard Stahl's attitude about probability of alternative ways of pre-capitalist social evolution as well-grounded although it is based on some vagueness in using some essential categories.
3. Stahl's conception of process of universal history which I define as bilinear do not reflect entire the spectrum of pre-capitalist modes of production in a fully adequate way.
4. Haldon's definition of mode of production as an ideal type of a set of economic relations (some combination of productive forces and productive relations) is totally acceptable.
5. I also regard as acceptable Haldon's distinction between mode of production and social formation as between an ideal type of a set of economic relations and a particular manifestation in society which has really existed.
6. I reject Haldon's idea that the essence of mode of production should be understood only as a method of exploitation.
7. In my opinion, these are the most important elements of mode of production:
  - a. Exploitative subject; it can be identified by its relation toward property of means of production which in its turn should be understood as social power;
  - b. Productive/obligatory unit; it can be manifested as an individual direct producer's household or community.
8. Stahl's conception of mode of production is too narrow and therefore unacceptable.

9. I regard Stahl's conception of formation as too ambiguous (in a sense of intertwining meanings of ideal type and particular historical case) and therefore not enough conceptualized.
10. I reject Haldon/Amin's conception of TMP as an universal pre-capitalist mode of production.
11. I treat Stahl's definition of tributal mode of exploitation as acceptable in general although it needs some reformulation.
12. Contradictions of alternative conceptions of tributalism proves that even at the beginning of the 21st century the issue of typology of antagonistic pre-capitalist modes of production is not yet solved; so revisions of existing approaches, further discussions and researches are relevant.
13. I propose a classification of modes of production based on exploitative subject and productive/obligatory unit as a starting point for further discussions.