***SI Learning Outcomes***

**LO1: Describe the behaviors, practices, institutions, and/or systems that define a society or social group. [red bold]**

LO2: Identify and define basic concepts in social analysis. [blue underlined]

*LO3: Analyze social institutions and social interactions. [purple italic]*

***Sample Assignment: Final Essay Prompt and Paper***

**Prompt:** Building on your thematic response papers, use the readings we have covered so far to answer the following question: WHY AND **HOW DO STATES FORM**? *WHAT ROLE DO STATES PLAY IN “MEDIEVAL” AFRICA?* Papers should have a well-developed argument (NOT a descriptive thesis) and should use evidence and examples from the readings to support their argument. Papers should include citations for all information obtained or learned from other sources. Students are ONLY allowed to use readings assigned in class. You should not rely on lecture notes to make your argument. Your paper should be thoroughly rooted in the texts we have read together. No outside sources are allowed. Papers should be 4-5 pages (12-point font, double-spaced, 1" margins, Times New Roman). Due dates are listed in the syllabus Course Schedule.

**Student Paper: State Formation as a Means of Trade Stability in African Societies**

**State formation in Africa, like in other places in the world, has been a powerful tool employed by African societies throughout the course of history. The role that these states played, however, has expanded and changed as time went on. It seems reasonable to say that the reasons for state formation in early human history are most likely not the same reasons for state formation today, but the reasons for early state formation were built upon to provide the reasons for current state formation.** States, in general, form as a means to regulate and protect economies, trade interests, and provide overall domestic stability for a group or several groups of people within a region, whether to the advantage of one individual, often a king in centralized states, or to the state as a whole, as in the case of acephalous societies. Changes in the scale of trade and products available for trade, as well as political conflicts, often provided an impetus for new state formation. *In medieval Africa, from around 500 C.E. to 1800 C.E., this meant protecting newly expanded trade routes of gold, ivory, and other prominent African goods against European and other African forces attempting to redirect or subvert this trade through the means of political, religious, or military intervention. Early medieval African state formation is, quite obviously, characterized more by protection of trade from other African states rather than Europeans, but as Europeans became more influential in African trade, the need to protect trade from these foreign forces became more necessary.*

State formation at the beginning of the medieval African period was characterized by a need for domestic stability to allow for better utilization of resources. **This need for domestic stability often led to federations of villages that shared common cultural backgrounds.** *An example of this comes from the state of Bunyoro-Kitara. Bunyoro-Kitara was one of the first states to form in the Ugandan region and the most likely reasons for the formation of this state was to organize defences against potential invaders, settle disputes between villages, and divide pasture land between individuals for efficient and fair use of the land (Maxon: East African Interior 54). All these reasons for formation favor a centralized state, due to the greater ability of centralized states to respond to these factors. The degree of centralization varies between each African society. Many societies were acephalous, meaning they had no identifiable head of government (Nwaubani 277). These acephalous societies were often just as powerful as more centralized societies. However, as time went on, ambitious individuals tended to try to enforce their will and expand their power by further centralizing states, leading to increasingly more centralized states. An example of this comes from Buganda, a neighbor of Bunyoro-Kitara. The Kabaka Mawanda of Buganda is famous in Bugandan oral tradition due to how much he expanded the Bugandan state during his reign. These expansions were always accompanied by the Kabaka leaving the newly acquired land to one of his subjects, which would make the subject more loyal to the Kabaka (Maxon: East African Interior 85). This enhanced loyalty to the Kabaka allowed for greater control of his subjects and more power for the Kabaka and his family, since he was the one who handled all land allocations and could give it to whomever he liked. These more centralized states were better able to adapt to changes in their surroundings, which is demonstrated by Buganda's continued success and growth into the 19th century (Maxon: East African Interior 87).*

Regardless of the degree of centralization, another key factor for state formation was control of trade. **Many of the African regions that saw early state formation were characterized by long distance trade networks that passed through them. Control of shifting long distance trade networks became a key motive behind state formation as time went on. Even early on less developed long distance trade networks were important for early states because control of these fledgling long-distance trade networks brought considerable wealth.** *Ghana, which was arguably the first empire in Africa, was one such state that formed due, in part, to its manipulation and control of the trans-Saharan trade. Even in the early years of trans-Saharan trade, goods such as gold, salt, ivory, grains, hides, kola, copper and dates all were traded between North Africa and sub-Saharan west Africa (Gilbert/Reynolds 106). Manipulation of these early trans-Saharan trade networks brought so much wealth that the king of Ghana was considered to be the richest in the world by some (Gilbert/Reynolds 107). It's important to note that Ghana did not produce the majority of the products traded within its borders, but rather sat between the gold-producing region to the south and the salt-producing region to the north. Societies based around fledgling long-distance trade networks can be seen elsewhere in Africa as well. One such society was that of the Swahili. Swahili trade villages have been recorded as far back as the first century C.E. (Gilbert/Reynolds 122). These villages did not rely solely on trade, but trade was still a regular part of their lives. These early Swahili societies were Bantu speaking fanners that came from the hinterland and settled on the coast. Most of their trade goods, primarily ivory, frankincense, and myrrh, most likely came from the Bantu speakers in the hinterland, demonstrating that again these early states acted as intermediaries of trade and took advantage of long distance trade networks, no matter how well developed the trade network was (Maxon: East African Coast 38).*

*The trade regions of East and West Africa were to continue to develop considerably as innovations in travel would allow for transport of more goods and quicker travel. Ghana and the Swahili were precursors to the more powerful trade intermediary states of Mali and Kilwa, both of whom took advantage of these growing long distance trade networks. Ghana itself was the result of a growing long-distance trade network. Ghana formed around 300 C.E., which is around the same time camels were introduced into the trans-Saharan trade. Since camels were so well adapted to desert travel, they significantly expanded the trans-Saharan trade and provided more resources to be available to the newly formed Ghana state (Gilbert/Reynolds 106). However, as trade shifted to the east of the Ghana state, Ghana began to weaken and would eventually fall. The fall of Ghana allowed Mali to form, whose borders extended farther east and allowed for better control over the trans-Saharan trade (Gilbert/Reynolds 110). Again, the region would see trade shift farther east and deprive Mali of needed resources. This would attribute to their eventual fall of Mali and its replacement by Songhai, who was again better positioned to take advantage of the newly shifted trade (Gilbert/Reynolds 112). Kilwa was also an important and powerful state that acted as a trade intermediary. Almost a millennium after the Swahili began utilizing the Indian Ocean trade to support state formation, Kilwa became a powerful state based around this same concept. Kilwa, like its predecessors, controlled trade between the Arabs, Indians, and Chinese and the Bantu farmers of the interior (Maxon: East African Coast 41). Kilwa differed from its predecessors considering they traded in several more products than its predecessors, such as Indian glass beads, Chinese porcelain, and gold from Sofala (Maxon: East African Coast 41). In fact, this new gold trade was so valuable to Kilwa that the loss of access to this gold is seen by many historians as the final event resulting in the downfall of the state (Maxon: East African Coast 42). Both Kilwa and Mali demonstrate how shifting trade networks can lead to further state formation or the fall of a state, depending on the nature of the trade shift.*

**One of the major trade shifts to occur in Africa was the arrival of Europeans at the end of the 15th century. As expected, the arrival of Europeans gradually caused trade shifts and these trade shifts would cause several states to either form or fall. However, states took on a slightly different role during this period. States no longer were formed just to help facilitate and take advantage of trade, but rather to protect trade interests. Europeans, on arriving to the African continent, sought to redirect trade around the expanding Islamic empire to gain access to resources the Islamic empire had cut them off from (Gilbert/Reynolds 179). This redirection of trade would result in the formation of the** **trans-Atlantic trade network, one of the first globalized trade networks in existence.** This trade shift caused Africans states to need to protect their interests, whether militarily or diplomatically, as Europeans sought maximize their own profits. *Many characterize medieval Africans as being inferior to Europeans, but this is not the case. Africans were relative equals to Europeans on first contact, exemplified by the numerous defeats the Portuguese suffered to local African populations when they attempted to raid the West African coast for slaves (Gilbert/Reynolds 156).*

**As equals, African states sought to protect their trade from Europeans trying to interject, resulting in African states having a lot of control over the early trans-Atlantic trade network.** *This meant that Europeans had to convince African states to trade with them, which they did in several ways. One technique the Europeans used was to try to convert African states to Christianity in an attempt to foster good relations with the African states, something they did successfully in the Kongo. But their approach to Kongolese conversion was unique in that it required an inclusive approach rather than the exclusive approach they utilized against the native Americans, who were technologically inferior to the Europeans (Thornton: Kongo 154). Another advantage the African states had was control over the trade markets that the Europeans wanted access to. The rulers of Benin were known to close or open the trade markets at will, giving them immense control over the trade within their state (Thornton: Commerce 69). This control requires that the Europeans make special deals with the African kings, oftentimes giving them special prices to curry their favor (Thornton: Commerce 68).* **Overall, even with the arrival of Europeans to the African trade networks, African states still functioned to promote trade within their states, but a new element of protection of African state trade interests was added.**

As demonstrated, African states formed as a source of stability. Whether this was domestic political stability or economic stability depended on the circumstances of each state. **Early medieval African state formation was characterized by centralization of power to provide political stability and utilize long-distance trade networks present within the region. Asthese trade networks expanded and shifted, states would either expand or fall, depending on the nature of the shift. Even large shifts in trade, such as the arrival of Europeans, would see subsequent shifts in states to control and protect trade.** *State formation on the African continent throughout the medieval times was a tool for utilizing and facilitating trade and some of the states became incredibly rich from their clever manipulation and utilization of these complex, long-distance trade networks. African states actively adapted to changes in the trade networks present on their continent to put themselves in the best position for success, whether the trade network changes were caused by them or not. African utilization of and adaptation to these trade networks helps to demonstrate how connected African societies were to the rest of the world throughout history, which is a fact that is often overlooked in modern, western societies.*