

NOTE

- 1: *African Arts* magazine presents a column, "Caveat Emptor", which documents recent looting from collections and the continent. However, this is only a small part of the problem. The biggest source of illegal exports are archeological sites, many of whose locations are unknown to African governments (Eyo, 1986; Moore, 1988; Burnham, 1975).

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Marxism, Social Class, Ethnic and Gender Inequalities in Contemporary African Societies

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Introduction

The paper aims to develop theoretical explanation for the prevalence of class, gender' and ethnic/racial inequalities in contemporary African societies. The controversy in development literature as to the relevance of the Marxist concept of social class in the explanation of inequality in developing countries is echoed in the discourse on inequality in Africa. This controversy oscillates between ethnic reductionism and class reductionism, virtually omitting gender inequality.

Ethnic reductionists such as African Socialists' tend to reduce all forms of inequality to ethnicity, presenting social class as "a simple empirical entity" unsuitable for the analysis of African societies (Katz, 1980: 13). They contend that the penetration of capitalism into Africa, while providing a common platform for economic interaction among various ethnic groups, fails to transform the allegiances and identities of the diverse ethnic entities. This school of thought substantiates its stance by pointing to the fact that the deepest cleavages in Africa have been, and still are, between ethnic/racial groups and occasionally religious groups, but not between economic entities. Africa is, therefore, projected as a classless society. Class reductionists, on their part, emphasize that ethnic/racial relations are an ideological construct reflecting class relations. Ethnic/racial, gender and other forms of inequality are, in this sense, perceived as class inequality in disguise. They stress that Africa is class-structured like any other society of the capitalist world, only that the formation of classes in Africa has been slowed down by colonialism and neocolonialism (Nkrumah, 1970; Amin, 1977; Onimode, 1988). My stand is that classes exist in Africa, and they interact with ethnicity and gender. However, by using the classical Marxist class model to analyse the African class structure, classes become obscure. Onimode (1988) postulates that social classes exist in Africa although they may be in their embryonic stage of formation because of the articulation of pre-capitalist and capitalist modes of production, with the latter occupying a dominant position. Although he does not make any distinction between mercantile and industrial capitalism, it is implicit in his analysis that the contemporary African social formation is dominated by industrial capitalism. He states:

Then, between c. 1750 and the scramble for Africa, Africa was incorporated into a second phase of an increasingly unified world capitalist system through what Rosa Luxemburg defined as exploitation of pre-capitalist (Africa and other Third World) societies by industrial capitalism (emphasis mine) (Onimode, 1988: 99).

The question then is, if industrial capitalism is dominant in Africa, why is it that the African class situation is so different from that of the developed capitalist countries? For example, why is it that contrary to Marx's postulate 1) the African bourgeoisie

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is not production oriented? 2) there is such a large petit-bourgeois class and a very small proletariat class? and 3) ethnicity and gender are more salient than class as organizing principles of contemporary African societies? Against this background, I argue that 1) there is perpetuation of the myth of classlessness in Africa because of the application of the Marxist class analysis in its classical, theoretical form to the African situation; and 2) ethnic and gender inequalities are salient in Africa because of the existence of a plurality of modes of production articulated by mercantile capitalism. Certainly, Bade Onimode and other social scientists using the Marxist framework of class analysis recognize the existence of plurality of modes of production in Africa. However, their model fails to adequately account for the persistence of the myth of classlessness and the reality of the salience of ethnicity and gender in contemporary Africa because of the dominant position they accord industrial capitalism.

The first section of the paper briefly deals with the conception of class in Marx's discourse. Section two discusses the class structure of contemporary Africa, addressing the question as to whether or not from Marx's conception of social class, classes do exist in African societies. In the third section, I tackle the issue of developing a theoretical explanation for the discrepancy between the classical, theoretical Marxist model of class and the nature of classes in Africa, taking the mode of production approach. The last part of the paper attempts an explanation of the salience of ethnicity and gender as principles of social organization in contemporary African Societies.

The Conception of Class in Marx's Discourse

Karl Marx did not develop any concise and comprehensive theory of social class. Nevertheless, he investigated and analysed social classes, highlighting the nature of their relationship to "particular historical phases in the development of production" (Marx, 1963: 139). Marx's investigations into social classes can be discussed within three broad frameworks: historical, political and theoretical.

In the historical analysis Marx uses class in a very broad sense to present the long-standing social conflict between the "oppressors" and the "oppressed", the exploiters and the exploited. This conception of class is what is presented in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight (Marx and Engels, 1975: 32).

Classes, in the above sense, assume a very general character and appear to have existed, and do exist, in most diverse societies. Despite the great differences, at least in terms of modes of production, between the slave society and the capitalist society, between the feudal and the capitalist societies, etc., they are all subsumed under "class societies". In Marx's historical writings, therefore, the concept of class is used so nebulously that its usefulness as an analytical category becomes quite limited.

The main difference between Marx's historical and political analysis of class is that in the latter he emphasizes the concept of "social formation". He therefore recognizes the simultaneous existence of many classes instead of only two classes. For example, in *The Civil War in France* (1968) and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis*

Bonaparte (1963), Marx refers to a multiplicity of social classes. According to him, this is a flection of a social formation comprising capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production. What can be learned from the Marx's political analysis of social classes is that class analysis in concrete societies cannot proceed simply on the basis of a "pure" mode of production. But Marx (1959) neglects this in his theoretical analysis of classes in capitalist society by proposing a two class model (he dismisses middle and intermediate strata as "immaterial for our analysis") which may be a characteristic of an ideal capitalist social formation. The concept of "class" takes on a specific meaning when Marx uses it in his theoretical analysis of the capitalist society. Here, he makes a connection between the rise of capitalism and the emergency of social classes. The implication is that "classes" did not simply exist in "all hitherto existing society" as portrayed in the Manifesto of the Communist Party. In the capitalist society Marx sees a single dominant mode of production, the capitalist (industrial) mode, which produces two principal classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Although he recognizes that the stratification of classes in the capitalist social formation remains complex, with lines of demarcation often blurred by "middle" and "intermediate" strata, he dismisses them as immaterial. His reason is that the class structure created by the capitalist mode of production has continual tendency to crystallize into proletariat (labour) and bourgeoisie (capital) (Marx, 1959: 885). In his discussion of capitalist mode of production in *Capital Vol. II*, Marx emphasizes that "there are here only two classes: the working-class disposing only of its labour-power, and the capitalist class, which has a monopoly of social means of production and money" (1907: 425). The capitalist class is what Marx designates as the bourgeoisie: the class which owns and controls investment or industrial (production) capital and the physical means of production, and also employs and controls the labour power of others. In between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat classes is the transitory class which Marx terms petit-bourgeoisie (middle class). This class comprises independent self-employed producers who employ very few or no wage labour and who produce for the market. According to Marx, this "middle strata" is bound to melt into the proletariat class with the maturation of the capitalist mode of production. Thus, Marx's theoretical analysis of social classes is based on a "pure" mode of production, and the two principal classes are delineated on the basis of "possession of" and "separation from" the means of production. In analysing the development of the capitalist mode of production, Marx makes a clear distinction between merchant capital and industrial capital. He emphasizes that it is the transformation of mercantile into industrial capitalism which brings the capitalist mode of production into existence. Marx specifically states:

Industrial capital is the only form of existence of capital, in which not only the appropriation of surplus-value or surplus product but also its creation is a function of capital. Therefore, it gives the production its capitalist character (Marx, 1907: 63).

The capitalist social formation is, therefore, the one in which industrial capital dominates over merchant capital. This becomes manifest when Marx pinpoints that England become a capitalist society only after the sixteenth century when merchant capital lost its dominance to industrial capital (Marx, 1907). In essence, mercantile "capitalism" is a prelude to the rise of capitalism. In other words, mercantile capitalism is a transitional social formation between feudalism and capitalism. Thus,

when Marx uses "capitalism" he means industrial capitalism a social formation dominated by the industrial capitalist mode of production. It is this mode of production which is capable of proletarianizing a large section of society's population, thus polarizing capital (bourgeoisie) and labour (proletariat). Mercantile capitalism, in a large measure, involves the purchase of commodities/raw materials and selling them in a worked-up form. In the words of Marx, "merchant's capital is penned in the sphere of circulation, and...its function consists exclusively of promoting the exchange of commodities" (Marx, 1959: 325). Put differently, merchant capital appropriates a good deal of surplus value without giving concern for investment of capital in "depth" production technology. Usually merchant capital mediates between pre-capitalist economies in the periphery and industrial capital in the metropolis. In a nutshell, Marx's theoretical discovery of the "laws" governing the development of the capitalist mode of production gives the concept of class a distinctive meaning, and associated only with the industrial capitalist social formation. It is this conception of class which subsumes all forms of social inequality and conflict structures under class structure.

The Class Structure of Contemporary African Societies

Many social scientists see contemporary African societies as class structured. In their analyses they usually delineate three principal classes (and their various fractions) corresponding to Marx's bourgeoisie, petit-bourgeoisie and proletariat (working class). The works of Nkrumah (1970), Amin (1977); and Onimode (1988) are most typical of this class analysis of African societies. They explain the African structure in terms of the penetration of capitalism into the traditional social structures of the various African societies. For example, according to Nkrumah (1970: 55), "in Africa, under colonialism, capitalist development led to the decline of feudalism and the emergence of new class structures." He points out that it would be a distortion of the African reality to suggest that "the class structures which exist in other parts of the world do not exist in Africa" (Nkrumah, 1970: 10). Nkrumah emphasizes that since the colonial era there have been at least two broad classes in African societies: "privileged classes" (bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie) and "oppressed classes" (workers, peasants, small farmers and traders). However, he indicates that class divisions became blurred during the pre-independence period when all classes had to sink their differences to join forces against colonial domination.

Samir Amin and Bade Onimode, like Kwame Nkrumah, think that a class structure similar to that in developed capitalist countries exists in contemporary Africa, only that they, unlike Nkrumah, highlight the embryonic nature of the African structure. Nkrumah, Amin, Onimode and others like them come to the conclusion that Africa is a class society because of their conviction that contemporary African social formation is an articulation of an industrial capitalist mode of production and varying "remnants of pre-capitalist modes" or "relics of feudalism". It is, therefore, not surprising that they delineate class categories similar to what Marx associates with industrial capitalism in his theoretical analysis of social class.

The bourgeoisie in Africa, according to these authors, is composed of mainly foreign capitalists who have lived on the continent for many generations. They are, in the words of Onimode (1988: 100), "technically a fraction of the imperialist

bourgeoisie in the metropolitan countries, the Middle East and India." Because of its importance this class attaches to import and export trade, I think that they are, in the main, merchant capitalists mediating between metropolitan industrial capitalism and the sprawling African mercantile capitalism. The African section of the bourgeoisie which is described as "national", "bureaucratic" or "state" (Nkrumah, 1970; Onimode, 1988; Nafziger, 1988) like their "foreign" counterparts, show a marked absence of industrial capitalists in their ranks. This makes the bourgeoisie in Africa quite different from the bourgeoisie in the developed capitalist societies or as described by Marx. The latter comprises mostly industrial capitalists investing in actual production and technology rather than dealing with distribution and exchange of commodities.

In Africa, as noted by Nkrumah (1970) and Onimode (1988), the "bourgeoisie" is basically petit-bourgeoisie. In the main, the African petit-bourgeoisie is comprised of intellectuals, civil servants, professionals, police and army officers, politicians, compradors, chiefs, landlords, capitalist farmers, petty artisans, traders and entrepreneurs (Nkrumah, 1970; Amin, 1977; Onimode, 1988; Nafziger, 1988). All these fractions of the African petit-bourgeois class owe their emergence to the rise of the colonial and postcolonial state, and they all rely on the state to create their individual wealth (Fanon, 1967). Together, they appropriate the biggest portion of the resources of contemporary African states. They are not investment-oriented. Rather, they "devour" state funds. Many of them loot state money and deposit in their personal accounts in overseas countries as has been happening in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Zaire and Tanzania (Onimode, 1988). They also use state funds to import luxury consumer goods for their own benefit (Nafziger, 1988). For example, since the 1960's, the Francophone African countries have been spending six times as much importing alcoholic beverages as fertilizers, and twice as much on perfume and cosmetics as on machine tools (Markovitz, 1977). The situation may be similar, if not more grave, in other African countries, considering the mercantile nature of their economies. One other prominent characteristic of the African petit-bourgeois class, in contradistinction to the petit-bourgeoisie in Marx's analysis, is that it is politically the dominant class in Africa. It practically controls and manages all state political apparatuses (Onimode, 1988).

The above characteristics of the African petit-bourgeois class distinguish it from the petit-bourgeoisie as conceived by Marx and as it exists generally in the developed capitalist countries. The latter is mainly independent self-employed group investing mainly private capital in productive ventures for their property accumulation. A major portion of the African petit-bourgeoisie is, therefore, not petit-bourgeoisie in the strict Marxian sense. Rather, they can be grouped under Poulantzas' (1975) "new petty bourgeoisie".

Nkrumah, Onimode and Nafziger put the African proletariat and peasants into a single class category -- "the working class". While Onimode puts this heterogeneous groups together under the umbrella of "the working people", Nkrumah and Nafziger brings them under the umbrella of "the working class". For example, Nkrumah (1970:75) describes the African peasantry as "by far the largest contingent of the working class". Nafziger (1988:84) makes the "working class" represent "industrial and service labourers, small landlords, share croppers, tenants". The three authors point out that modern proletariat, that is workers relying solely on wages, already

exists in Africa, though its size is very small. It must be noted that when Marx uses the concept "working class" he means the proletariat. In this light, it is confusing to place a group such as the African peasantry under the working class as Nkrumah, Onimode and Nafziger do. African peasants actually own their farm lands and their capital. They are not a free wage labour. To describe the peasants as "workers", therefore, contradicts Marx's conception.

Many industrial and service labourers, school teachers, nurses, etc., who are classified among the "working class" by Nkrumah, Onimode and Nafziger, following Marx's working class model also creates confusion. This is because many of them own some means of production – land and capital – apart from their labour power. They engage in farming and petty trading along-side their wage employment. In most contemporary African countries, wages are not enough even to provide food. How then do wage earners survive? Many of them farm and trade to supplement their wages (others make money out of stolen property of the workplace or rely on bribes). The greater majority of African wage earners are, therefore, not proletarians in the Marxian sense, for they own and control some means of production. Although Onimode thinks empirical evidence does not support this claim, he provides no empirical evidence to prove otherwise. This analysis in this section shows that there is a clear lack of fit between the classical, theoretical Marxist class model and the class structure of contemporary African societies despite the dominance of the "capitalist" mode of production. But does this discrepancy mean that Africa is classless? That is, is class inequality nonexistent in Africa as African socialists and some bourgeois social scientists would like us to believe? To answer this question in the affirmative is to misrepresent Marx's analysis of social class or to unnecessarily limit its scope. From Marx's historical conception of classes discussed in the last section, it is clear that the fundamental criteria he employs in delineating classes – slave and master, serf and lord, journeyman and guildmaster, oppressors and oppressed – are people's relationship to the production process of society and the existence of conflict between such groups.

In Africa, although the "imperialist bourgeoisie", the petit-bourgeoisie" and the majority of the "working class" own or control some means of production, they are differently related to the production process. Moreover, a small number of Africans do not own or control any means of production. The numerous strikes of African "workers", attempted revolutions in Ghana and other parts of Africa suggest a conflict between the "working class" and the "bourgeois classes". At a general level, therefore, contemporary Africans could be grouped under "oppressors" and "the oppressed", "haves" and "have nots". The former exploit the latter economically, politically and ideologically, usually generating conflict, "now hidden, now open". The question, however, still remains as to why, notwithstanding the dominance of the capitalist mode of production in contemporary African societies (as claimed by Onimode and others), the nature of the African class structure is a far cry from what Marx associates with this mode of production. This pertinent question is addressed in the following section.

Explaining the Discrepancy Between Marx's Class Model and the Class Structure of Contemporary Africa

As noted in the first section, Marx, in his political analyses of classes in concrete societies makes reference to the existence of the plurality of social classes in a social

formation in which pre-capitalist and capitalist modes of production are articulated. According to him, even in England where the capitalist mode of production is "most highly and classically developed... intermediate and transitional strata obscure the class boundaries" (Marx, 1959: 443). In this light, therefore, Nkrumah, Amin, Onimode and Nafziger are logically right in suggesting the applicability of the three class model in Africa, because in Africa there is the articulation of pre-capitalist and capitalist modes of production. Their emphasis on the dominance of the capitalist mode of production in contemporary African social formation, however, raises the following questions: 1) why is it that the composition and characteristics of the three classes in Africa do not reflect those Marx associates with these classes in developed capitalist countries (where the capitalist mode is dominant)? 2) why is it that some categories of Africans do not come under any of Marx's three classes? and 3) why is it that the African proletariat does not include the majority of the exploited Africans on the continent?

I do not think the contradiction is created by Africa's colonial and neocolonial experiences *per se* as postulated by Onimode and others. Rather, I see the contradiction in terms of the fact that the type of capitalist transmitted to Africa from the metropolis is different from what Marx associates with England and other developed capitalist countries. Certainly, in contemporary African societies the capitalist mode of production is dominant. However, the type of capital central to this mode of production in Africa is merchant capital. In other words, capitalism in contemporary Africa (apart from South Africa) (2) is predominantly mercantile capitalism, and not industrial capitalism as prevails in Western Europe, North America and Japan. It would, therefore, be surprising if contemporary African societies exhibit the kinds of class structure found in the developed capitalist countries. A survey of the modes of production in various African countries would reveal the predominant nature of mercantile capitalism as a unifying force of a plurality of modes of production in their social formations.

In Africa, through the pre-colonial trade with Europe and also through colonialism, the capitalist mode of production has attained a dominance over the pre-capitalist modes. This gives support to Marx's (1907) observation that in the majority of cases the interaction between the capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production produces effects which establish the dominance of the former. In all contemporary African countries, with the exception of South Africa, almost all forms of production have been transformed into petty commodity production.

Mamdani (1975, 1976), notes the articulation of communal, petty commodity, feudal and capitalist modes of production in the Ugandan social formation, with the capitalist mode dominating. Amin (1974, 1977), identifies four modes of production in contemporary Africa – the community mode, the tribute paying mode, the simple commodity mode and the capitalist mode. Here, too, the capitalist mode is seen as occupying a dominant position. Magubane (1976), using the mode of production approach to explain the complexity of the African social formation, highlights the domination of capitalism over the various pre-capitalist modes of production. Thus, although research on modes of production in Africa is scanty, the little evidence provided here is suggestive of the fact that Africa exhibits a plurality of modes of production, with the capitalist mode dominating. As Onimode (1988: 100) maintains: "The social formations of the African societies have thus been transitional – in most of

Africa, they are *transitional neocolonial capitalist formations*, dominated by the capitalist mode of production."

All the authors mentioned who analyse the modes of production in Africa and their relationship with the class formation stress that the present nature of the African social formation is the result of its incorporation into the global industrial capitalist system. However, they fail to recognize that in the process of its incorporation, the type of capitalism transmitted to African societies is different from what exists in the metropolitan countries. De-Silva's (1982: 426) observation gives a clue to the type of capitalism transmitted to Africa:

Merchant capital, having lost out politically and economically to industrial capital in Europe, expanded its operations in the overseas empire. Its relationship here to production was in many ways analogous to that which existed in Europe before the industrial revolution. It played an independent role, mediating between pre-capitalist forms of production in the periphery and capitalism in the metropolis.

It is implied in this quotation that the type of capitalism exported to the colonies, and for that matter, Africa, during pre-colonial trade, colonialism and at the present time through neo-colonialism, is predominately mercantile in nature. Mercantile capitalism only performs management and mediation functions in petty commodity production and distribution of commodities in the periphery countries. In the process, it stunts the development of indigenous production or industrial capital. It does this by allying itself with the reactionary elements of the indigenous pre-capitalist and post colonial ruling class. This class (usually the aristocracy and the petit-bourgeoisie) is not interested in the total transformation of the production base of society because it would erode its economic and political power base. Through its activities, therefore, the emergence of capitalist (industrial) relations of production is blocked (Kay, 1975). Marx specifically argues that, merchant capital "is incapable by itself of promoting and explaining the transition from one mode of production to another", and "this system presents everywhere an obstacle to the real capitalist mode of production" (Marx, 1959: 334). As noted above, merchant capital is, by its very nature, limited to the distribution and exchange spheres of the economy. In this sense, it cannot determine a mode of production. Rather, what it does in developing countries such as in Africa is articulating the pre-capitalist mode of production and the small-scale industrial capitalist mode with the industrial capitalist formation of the metropolitan countries. In the process it creates a social formation dominated by petty commodity production and distribution, a reflection of the dominance of mercantile capitalism.

In contemporary African societies, the predominant production system is petty commodity production (Kitching, 1977; Mamdani, 1975 and 1976). Merchant capital supervises this system of production and ensures the distribution of the commodities produced (and those imported). The predominance of petty commodity production in contemporary Africa is evident in the following: small farmers produce about 90 percent of all export and food crops (Onimode, 1988); there is a large informal sector engaged in the production of detergents, simple farm implements, cooking utensils, etc., for the local market (Mathews, 1987); the modern industrial sector is insignificant, and it tends to concentrate on the production of consumer goods rather than capital goods (Onimode, 1988); petty trading is so pervasive; etc.

The "bourgeoisie" and "petit-bourgeoisie" are the embodiment of mercantile capitalism in Africa. The characteristics of these classes (see Nkrumah, 1970; Amin, 1977; Onimode, 1988; and Nafziger, 1988) give support to this claim. The "imperialist bourgeoisie" are the principal intermediaries between the bourgeoisie in the metropolis and the African petit-bourgeoisie" in the import and export trade. The various components of the "petit-bourgeois" class— the politicians, bureaucrats, the military/police brass, top academics, chiefs, landlords, capitalist farmers, import-export merchants, the professionals, artisans, etc., do not engage in investment of capital in production methods and technology. They mainly supervise petty commodity production and the distribution of commodities. Even the capitalist farmers are more involved in land allocation to tenants than actual production of crops. The only fraction of the African "petit-bourgeoisie" which is real petit-bourgeoisie in the classical Marxian sense is that small indigenous group of business persons engaged in small scale extractive and industrial enterprises employing some labour. The African "bourgeois" and "petit-bourgeois" classes, because they are composed mainly of mercantile capitalists, are incapable of transforming petty commodity production to industrial production. If the bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie who control contemporary African societies economically, politically and ideologically are mercantile capitalists, then there is less doubt that the African social formation is that of mercantile capitalism. The rural and agricultural nature of contemporary African societies constitutes other evidence of the predominance of mercantile capitalism. As the analysis of Marx (1907) on capitalism in England shows, until about the sixteenth century, the population of England was largely rural and agricultural. It is the rapid ascendancy of industrial capitalism which transformed the English society into an urban and industrial one. In the process of the transformation, the rural and agricultural population of England was proletarianized, as it lost its attachment to land and the rural social structure. In Africa, the introduction of capitalism has not altered the rural and agricultural base of the society in any significant way. For example, "in 1980, for all of Africa, the average percentage of the urban population was 25.4" (Onimode, 1988: 118). About 74 percent of the population of Africa, therefore, lie in rural areas. Even with those Africans living in towns and cities, many still maintain their rural links/roots. Many of them attend funerals, festivals, etc., in their rural communities. A substantial number of these urban dwellers spend their Easter and Christmas holidays, and their annual leaves in the villages. Moreover, as Little (1974) observes, the interaction patterns, value orientations, etc., of many African city dwellers exhibit rurality. Hence, his description of African cities as "large villages".

With regard to the agricultural dominance, Nkrumah (1970) for instance, shows that about 80 percent of all African "workers" are peasants. The population censuses of specific African countries support this observation of Nkrumah's. For example, the latest (1984) population census of Ghana indicates that of the 12.2 million Ghanaians, 70 percent are in agriculture. The picture of other African countries would not be much different. With such a large rural and agricultural population it should be expected that there would be more adherence to traditional practices— upholding patriarchal institutions of marriage and family; loyalty to lineage and ethnicity; etc. These factors interact with mercantile structures such as petit-bourgeois ideology and practices to hinder the transformation of African

societies into industrial capitalism – a social formation which would make class more salient than ethnicity and gender in Africa. It must be noted at this juncture that South Africa presents somewhat a different picture, in terms of the level of industrialization. Unlike the rest of Africa, South Africa has a large and expanding industrial base. Capitalism in South Africa is, therefore, more of industrial than of mercantile capitalism. In this sense, it is expected that the greater percentage of its working population would be urban proletariat. But it has not happened this way mainly because of the operation of the “split labour market system” (3) based on apartheid. The demands of the capitalist class interests for cheaper labour and the demands of the white workers for the privileges of a labour aristocracy mean that racist policies (exclusiveness) must be used by the South African state. Such policies forcibly retain the subordinate racial/ethnic groups in the rural areas where they are compelled to till the land to supplement their incomes. Thus, their proletarianization is prevented or greatly slowed down.

Through legislative instruments such as the Natives Land Act of 1913 and the Group Areas Act of 1950, black South Africans are settled away from the urban centres in the “independent homelands” (Denmark and Lehman, 1984: 146). Even blacks concentrated in “white” rural regions are removed under the same acts of parliament. According to Carter (1980), between 1960 and 1970 alone 996,000 African tenants and squatters were forcefully removed and resettled in the homelands. Black South Africans are, in this way, turned into a migrant labour force. They are, therefore, still attached to the land and rooted in the rural areas. They have the “privilege” to work in the industrial urban centres but are not allowed to reside there. This system is maintained mainly by repressive pass laws, the cornerstone of the South African state repression aimed precisely at controlling the movement of black labour. In effect, had apartheid not been in place, the greater majority of South African “workers” would be proletarianized because of the dominance of industrial capitalism in its social formation.

The Salience of Ethnic and Gender Inequalities in Africa

Increasing ethnic and gender inequalities are a reality in contemporary Africa, yet social scientists such as Nkrumah, Amin, Onimode and others play down the significance of these aspects of Africa’s structural inequality because of their assumption that the social formation of African societies is dominated by industrial capitalist mode of production in which class is central.

Onimode (1988) in his discussion of structural inequality in Africa, concentrates on income inequality with respect to class differences. It would be interesting to know how the pattern would change with the superimposition of ethnicity and gender as component variables. For example, what is the ethnic and gender composition of the 62.8%, 52%, 51% and 73.7% poor of Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Liberia respectively? In another vein, what ethnic groups and gender constitute the majority of the 1.1% rich of Nigeria, 6.1% rich of Ghana, 1.8% rich of Sierra Leone and the 3.9% rich of Liberia? Nafziger (1988) attempts to address this issue by examining the distribution of income, education and health facilities from ethnic/regional and gender perspectives.

Wayne Nafziger’s study reveals that in Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya and Tanzania ethnic and regional disparities in income, education and health are pervasive.

Post-independence Uganda has witnessed a dramatic change from non-Baganda dominance in business, government and education to Bagandan dominance. In 1965, Nigeria’s regional distribution of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita shows the following picture: 19 Nigerian pounds in the North, 25th in the South, 31 in the Midwest, and 123 in Lagos. The Nigerian Government Expenditure per capita from 1969 to 1976 indicates that Lagos and Kwara States had 4 to 5 times as high as Kano, North-East, West, and North-West States. In terms of education, the regional distribution of primary, secondary and university enrolment demonstrates that the rates are ten times higher in Mid-West (Bendel State) than in North-West and other states (Diejomaoh and Anusionwu, 1981a and 1981b; Ayeni, 1981). The distribution of health facilities also exhibits similar regional differences. In 1972 there were 13 beds per 10,000 people in Lagos State, and only 1–2 in Kano, North-western and North-eastern states (Diejomaoh and Anusionwu, 1981a and 1981b).

The African “bourgeoisie” in post-independence Kenya come mostly from the Kikuyu ethnic group, and they tend to hire their fellow Kikuyu for wage employment (Nafziger, 1988). Since the 1960’s, the distribution of educational facilities and opportunities has varied markedly among the various ethnic groups in Kenya. It ranges from about 56.0% for the Kikuyu, 51.0% for the Nandi to 15.0% for the Mijikanda, and 13.0% for the Massai (Nafziger, 1988). The lopsidedness of the distribution of the Kenyan government recurrent expenditures of 1973–74 among the various provinces is revealed by the following figures in Kenyan pounds: Nairobi 70.76, Coast Province 13.07; Western 4.09; North-Eastern 3.54; and Nyanza 3.28 (Bigsten, 1977).

Despite the “Ujamaa” Socialist policies, the distribution of government and private secondary educational institutions in Tanzania still shows a great regional disparity: there is a concentration in Kilimajaro and Mbeya regions at the expense of Lindi, Rukwa, Kigoma, and Singida regions (Nafziger, 1988). Although the distributions discussed here concentrate on “regional” rather than “ethnic” inequality, in reality it is ethnic inequality which is revealed in both cases. This is because in most parts of Africa, regions/states/provinces usually coincide with ethnic boundaries. The salience of ethnicity in contemporary Africa is amplified by Smith (1986: 216–217):

Thus far, since independence none of these (African) states has experienced internal violence as an expression of conflict between economically distinct and contraposed groups, however strenuous such interpretations are advocated by certain scholars, politicians and news commentators... their [classes] nature and articulations are confused and overlaid by a variety of cross-cutting structures such as ethnicity, cult, regional and national allegiances.

Although this conclusion may be overdrawn, it portrays the pervasiveness and salience of ethnic inequality which produce conflicts and antagonisms throughout Africa. I contend that the continued salience of ethnic inequality in many contemporary African countries is due to the untransformative nature of the mercantile capitalism they operate. As de Silva (1982) points out emphatically, merchant capital has, at best, very limited transformative power/capacity. To quote him directly,

Merchant capital, while having a more or less dissolving influence on the precapitalist mode of production, is ‘incapable, by itself, of promoting the transition’ to [industrial] capitalism. In fact, it strengthened and prolonged the precapitalist mode of production even in Europe... (de Silva, 1982: 420).

This observation of de Silva's supports the persisting or increasing ethnic inequality in Africa illustrated above. Mercantile capitalism has imposed common educational, legal, political, economic, etc., systems on the various ethnic entities in African countries. However, because mercantile capitalism's generally limited transformative power, it has failed to radically change the value systems of the African ethnic groups; values which constitute crucial determinants of Africa's pervasive ethnic inequality. It is important to remark here that the differences in the periods of the introduction of western education, cash crop farming, merchant activities, etc., to the various ethnic groups, and the differences in the degrees of intensity of their operation created the material conditions for the ethnic inequality in many African countries. However, the untransformed value systems/orientations of the various ethnic entities which led to unequal utilization of the opportunities presented by mercantile capitalism are very pivotal in the determination of ethnic inequality in contemporary Africa.

The ethnic differences in value systems or orientations forming an important basis for ethnic inequality in many African countries became evident in the following scenarios from Ghana: 1) western education was introduced to the people of the coast – Nzima-Ahanta, Fante, Ga-Adangbe, Ewe—at almost the same period, but is only the Ewes, because of the importance they attach to professional and civil service careers, which have so far been able to use education to create a political/economic hegemony; 2) the Kwahu, Ashanti and Brong groups of the Akan, though they have been introduced to western education since the 1900's yet generally take education less serious because of their business orientations (trading, cash crop farming, working abroad for capital, etc.); 3) the Kwawus and the Gas are both principal trading ethnic groups in Accra (capital of Ghana), but the latter are wealthy mainly because of their adherence of principles similar to the classical Protestant ethics; and 4) the Northern ethnic groups have been given free access to western education since the 1960's, but still many parents prefer their children caring for their livestock and going through Arabic education to Western education.

Turning to the salience of gender inequality in Africa, it could be said that mercantile capitalism has distorted rather than transformed the pre-existing conditions of gender inequality. The patriarchal system of pre-capitalist Africa which thrived on the ideology of male supremacy has not been transformed by the penetration and subsequent dominance of the mercantile capitalist mode of production. For example, the interpretation of many African traditional religions and Islam (and later Christianity) to rationalize the subordination of women, both in marriage and other areas of society, has not witnessed any transformation. What has rather occurred, contrary to the precapitalist situation, is that the ideology of male superiority-female inferiority, is used by the mercantile capitalist system as a basis for unequal allocation or distribution of socio-economic and political resources (education, employment, health care, agricultural inputs, political appointments and participation, etc.).

Women in Africa face many disadvantages because of their gender. In almost every sphere of contemporary African societies there is a gender cleavage, a cleavage which works to the disadvantage of women. There are a number of cases to substantiate this claim. Possession of land, in Africa where farming is the dominant economic activity, is very crucial in determining the socio-economic status of the greater majority of people, especially rural dwellers. That women have marginal or

no land titles is, therefore, an important evidence of their inequality with men. Land reforms in Ethiopia in the 1970's and in Mozambique in the 1980's (both countries claim to be socialist) failed to consider women's right to land. Farm plots are allocated to male heads of households (Nafziger, 1988). Even in matrilineal African societies where women are supposed to have equal rights with men in terms of land ownership, women's actual access to land is rather limited. In most cases they have to depend upon their relationships with men--husbands, fathers, uncles, brothers to gain access to land (Allison, 1985; Lewis, 1988). In spite of the fact that in Cameroun and many other countries of Africa women are the ones who grow most of the food crops, governments' agricultural extension assistance to women is very meagre (Allison, 1985; Nafziger, 1988). According to House and Killick (1983), Kenyan women enjoy only few advantages although they constitute the backbone of the Kenyan economy. Concerning cash crops, it is noted that East African women contribute substantially to the production of coffee, but the cash derived usually go directly to husbands, fathers, etc. (Allison 1979). The number of African females who pass through various stages of the formal education system has been growing steadily since the 1960's. Yet the majority of African women remain illiterate, semi-literate or lack educational experience (United Nations Commission for Africa, Research Series, 1980). Nafziger (1988) points out that the literacy rate of African women is about 50 percent that of men. He emphasizes that this is an evidence of educational discrimination against women, a situation which tends to limit their economic and political opportunities to the minimum, even in the socialist African countries. In Nigeria, female education lags behind that of males, and moreover, the chances of educated women to get lucrative jobs are limited indeed (Dennis, 1983). The Kenyan situation is not different. Kenyan women obtain a substantially lower return on training and education than men because of gender discrimination against them (Bigsten, 1984). In most contemporary African societies, female students are usually concentrated in traditional "female" subject areas such as education, nursing, dress-making, home science, etc. (Allison, 1985). Thus it is hardly surprising that, for example, in Ghana "educated women are primarily in teaching, nursing, and clerical work, with very few in professional, administrative and managerial jobs" (Nafziger, 1988: 126).

With regard to income distribution in Africa, female and male disparity is also evident. For example, in Northern Nigerian rural areas, average female earnings is 23 percent of that of males (Matlon, 1981). Where women become wealthy through trading and other ventures they undergo harassment in many ways. For instance, in Ghana, in the early 1980's, Fl. Lt. Jerry Rawlings' "revolution" attacked Ghanaian women as symbols of wealth while many wealthier businessmen and male bureaucrats escaped (Nafziger, 1988). In much of Africa, the informal sector is the fastest growing segment of the economy. About 50 to 60 percent of the labour force is employed in this sector. Many women in Africa, unable to get higher level formal-sector employment, turn to self-generated employment such as petty trading, prostitution, production of handicrafts, etc. in the informal sector. Women are disproportionately represented in this usually low-paying, low-mobility informal sector employment. In Botswana, for example, about 80 percent of the female labour force is self-employed in the informal sector (Sundar, n.d.). According to Shields (1980), at least 53 percent of Tanzanian female labour force is located in the informal sector. The picture in other Sub-Saharan African countries would not be very different

From the little evidence given so far, there is less doubt that ethnic and gender inequalities are very salient in the structure of social inequality in Africa. It must be noted here that mercantile capitalism, like industrial capitalism, creates interconnections among class, ethnic and gender inequalities which make the privileged of society simultaneously upper/middle class, people from specific ethnic backgrounds and men. However, mercantile capitalism more than industrial capitalism tends to sharpen inequalities against the underprivileged mainly because of the low production capacity associated with it. For example, unlike their counterparts in the industrial capitalist countries, most women in Africa have to do without modern labour-saving devices (electric and gas cookers, microwaves, blenders, dishwashers, piped water, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, etc.) in the home. Women in Africa therefore tend to endure more drudgery in their daily activities than most western women. Although in both the mercantile capitalist and industrial capitalist systems men do not help very much in household chores (See Meissner et al, 1977), the burden of women in the latter society is lightened by their access to labour-saving devices.

Summary and Conclusion

There are attempts to debunk the myth of "classless Africa" by scientists such as Nkrumah, Amin, Onimode and Nafziger. However, by using Marx's classical, theoretical class analysis they rather contribute to the perpetuation of this myth and, in addition, render ethnic and gender inequalities less visible. These authors postulate that contemporary Africa is a class society with a class structure different from that theorized by Marx or that existing in advanced capitalist societies only in degree rather than in kind. Their postulate is premised on their conviction that the African social formation is an articulation of pre-capitalist and industrial capitalist modes of production, with the latter dominating. The authors, therefore, see the three principal classes identified by Marx as existing in contemporary Africa: the bourgeoisie, petit-bourgeoisie and the working class. But there are actually marked differences, both in terms of composition characteristics, between the African classes and those delineated by Marx, after which these authors fail to highlight. These differences, however, by no means render African societies classless as believed by African socialists, for at least there exist exploiters and the exploited in the Marxian sense.

The African bourgeoisie is foreign in origin and lacks industrial capitalists. The petit-bourgeoisie is a disproportionately large class which depends mainly on state resources rather than on private capital investment for accumulation of property. Moreover, this class is the dominant class monopolizing economic and political power. The proletariat is numerically and politically insignificant in Africa. Many of the groups—peasants, industrial and service workers, teachers, nurses, etc. considered under "the working class"—own some means of production (land and or capital). The lower classes in Africa are absolutely poor because of the low production capacity of mercantile capitalism. Nkrumah, Amin and Onimode recognize some of these discrepancies between social classes in Africa and those in Western countries (especially England) on which Marx based his class analysis. However, they do not see them as fundamental and try to explain them away. They propose that these features of the African class system are transitory mutative influences of colonialism and neocolonialism. What they fail to realize is the fact that the type of capitalism existing

in the developed capitalist countries is different, not merely in degree but in kind, from the type operating in contemporary African societies, and therefore the differences in their class systems might be fundamental. My contention is that the discrepancy between the classical Marxist class model and the African class structure is fundamental, and is related to the structural difference between these two forms of capitalism.

The social formation of contemporary Africa (except South Africa), in contradiction to that of the Western world, is that of mercantile capitalism. This type of capitalism, unlike industrial capitalism which is the social formation of the developed capitalist countries, thrives on petty commodity production and the distribution of goods and services. Investment in actual production process, especially in industries and modern technology is relegated to the background. This form of capitalism is the dominant one in Africa, a fact manifest in the predominance of: 1) the distribution sector of the economy; 2) the informal segment of the economy; and 3) agricultural and other petty commodity production. Mercantile capitalism is incapable of transforming the above characteristics of African economies so as to expand their production capacities in a substantial way. It is this same limited transformative power of mercantile capitalism which mainly accounts for the salience of ethnic and gender inequalities in many contemporary African societies. As is found within the industrial capitalist formation of the metropolitan countries, in the mercantile capitalist social formation of African societies there is an articulation of class, gender and ethnic inequalities which are linked to real material aspects of life—economy, polity, family, etc. Every contemporary African thus simultaneously experiences class, ethnicity and gender. However, mainly because of the low production levels allowed by the mercantile capitalist social formation, the lower classes, the underprivileged ethnic groups and most women experience more severe inequalities than these categories in the industrial capitalist countries.

NOTES

1. African socialists are mostly political leaders who emerged in the 1960's. They articulate an image of conflict-free African traditionalism with socialism to produce an ideology of *African Socialism*, aimed at reducing the potential effects of ethnic and class conflicts. Examples of African socialists are Sekou Toure of Guinea, Leopold Senghor of Senegal, Tom Mboya of Kenya and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania.
2. Even in the socialist African countries, mercantile capitalism, with its preponderant petit-bourgeois ideology, is the prevailing social formation. The petit-bourgeoisie in these countries, however, have to operate under cover because of the socialist rhetoric. The Tanzanian case is typical (see Issa Shivji, *The Silent Class Struggle in Tanzania*, Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1973, for a detailed discussion).
3. This system is premised on a three-way conflict structure in which the dominant racial/ethnic group (the capitalist class and the "labour aristocrats") monopolizes the means of production and the skilled, higher paid jobs, while the subordinate group is restricted to semi-skilled and unskilled, lower paid jobs (and marginal lands as in South African homelands). (For a detailed discussion, see Edna Bonacich, "The Split Labour Market Theory", 1972 and 1975).

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The Gulf Crisis: Impact, Implications and Lessons for Africa

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Introduction

The Gulf war¹ is now almost nine months behind. However, its repercussions will linger and be felt not only in the countries of the Middle East region but beyond. This is particularly true for Africa. While the crisis lasted, several analyses² had shown the short and medium-effects of the conflict on various regions, Africa included. The various reports focussed almost exclusively on the economic impact of the crisis.

The purpose of this paper is to sketch an analysis of some long term repercussions of the conflict for Africa from a foreign policy perspective. To do so one has to deal with such questions as: what are the major policy changes that the Gulf war has brought to the fore of the international agenda; and what are their implications for Africa. By identifying and examining five such policy changes³, the paper argues that though a few of these policy changes might appear, at first glance, to have positive effects for African nations; on balance the consequences would be negative. It is important to understand why and to draw the appropriate lessons.

This paper is divided into five parts. Part one gives a brief analysis of the short term impact of the crisis on African countries. Part two examines the sources and nature of the policy changes brought by the war. The implications of five major policy changes for Africa are set out in part three. The last two parts deal respectively with the lessons of the crisis and the issues that the conflict points up for African countries.

II. Short Term Impact

The crisis had two rather different repercussions on African countries in the short term. First were the immediate adverse consequences. These included a sharp rise in oil price between August and December '90 which increase the import bill of oil deficit in African nations. At the prices prevailing in the second half of 1990, it has been estimated that Africa's oil import bills rose to \$9.5bn, about \$2.7bn more than the previous year⁴. A large number of African migrant workers mostly from Egypt, Sudan, Somalia and Mauritania returned from some Gulf states exacerbating unemployment in those countries but also leading to loss of foreign exchange earnings from their remittances. The tourist industry in many African countries, notably, Comoros, the Gambia, Kenya, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Tanzania as well as North Africa suffered substantial losses.

The combination of lost workers remittances, lost trading opportunities with Gulf countries and lost tourism revenues as well as resettlement costs for returning migrant workers and high oil import bills – all of these had a very severe impact, albeit with varying degrees, on the growth, balance of payments and exports of various African nations particularly the oil importing and the severely indebted⁵. The conflict's "overall impact on the world economy seems in the end to have been smaller than feared"⁶, however.

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