

African history and the ideological reproduction of exploitative relations of production

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There are many Marxist-Leninist scholars who cannot open their mouths without citing ancient Greece ; but as for their own ancestors — sorry, they have been forgotten. There is no climate of serious study either of current conditions or of past history.

(Mao Tse-Tung, « Reform our Study », *Selected Works*, vol. III, Peking 1967, p. 19).

It is the revisionists who have long been asserting that colonial policy is progressive, that it implants capitalism and that therefore it is senseless to « accuse it of greed and cruelty », for « without these qualities » capitalism is « hamstring »... We say : capital devours you, will devour the Persians, will devour everyone and go on devouring until you overthrow it... *Resistance* to colonial policy and international plunder *by means* of organizing the proletariat, *by means* of defending freedom for the proletarian struggle, *does not retard* the development of capitalism but *accelerates* it, forcing it to resort to more civilised, technically higher methods of capitalism. (Lenin's emphasis) Lenin, Letter to M. Gorki, January 3, 1911 in *Collected Works*, vol. 34, pp. 438-9, also in *The National Liberation Movement in the East*, Moscow, 1969, p. 50).

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to analyze how the writing of African history has been ideologically determined by the structure of specific relations of production that developed between capitalist (European) formations and pre-capitalist (African) formations. Initially, the paper was going to focus only on a document entitled « Inequality in Africa : report on a Seminar » (1) and show how 1) this report mystifies the reality obtaining on the continent with regard to relations of pro-

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duction and 2) how it thoroughly misrepresents Marxist methodology. This critique has now become only a section of the paper. The reason for this being the realization that the language used in the report is not exceptional and falls into a long pattern of historical writing which can be traced (at least) all the way back to the philosophers of the Enlightenment. The main contention of the paper is that the categories, terms, methods, definitions used by social scientists in general and historians in particular have been determined by the specific structure of relations of production that were imposed or are now predominating on the continent.

It is not the purpose of this paper to investigate the concept of ideology. Its purpose is limited to an identification of the processes used by the ruling classes in order to propagate the dominant ideology. For the sake of analysis it is possible to distinguish two levels at which this dominant ideology operates :

- 1°) ideology which is the direct product of a state apparatus (e. g. ideology produced by royal lineages in pre-colonial Africa, or ideology produced by the colonial state) ;
- 2°) ideology which was the direct product of a state apparatus, but is no longer reproduced by that particular state apparatus (e. g. pre-colonial ideologies or colonial ideologies reproduced in the « age of imperialism » for the benefit of imperialism through — among others — social sciences).

Both types of ideological productions being the result of ruling class practices, they may sometime coincide and they will always falsify the concrete reality. The paper will examine how both types can mislead (for a time) those who are the victims of oppression and exploitation and prevent them from understanding the historical process they are going through.

I

That there is a connection between the relations of production and specific « productions » of history is difficult to deny. More specifically, the most outstanding feature of the last four centuries of African history having been the continuous process of economic and political subjugation by international capital, it stands to reason that the particular language which will be used by social scientists or historians cannot claim to be innocent or divorced from this larger historical process. Such language, such practices of social science, in spite of its alleged diversity and pluralism has been the language of the dominant classes. Pluralism in bourgeois social theory means basically that historical processes are explained by « multiple » causes. With regard to African history a pluralist approach rests on the postulate that historians like Gann/Duignan and T.O. Ranger « have all contributed something ». A true liberal would probably reject this equation out of

subjective reasons. And yet, it is because of the premises he adheres to that histories produced by the likes of Gann/Duignan are still being reproduced.

For this reason, the popular distinction that is so often drawn between so-called progressive and reactionary historians is really not a distinction at all. The historical practices of historians like Gann/Duignan produce exactly the same results as those of, say T.O. Ranger or J. Iliffe. The choice of these names may be unduly polemical, but it will serve to illustrate a phenomenon which has often mistaken « progressive » interpretations of African history for a more scientific comprehension. Indeed, the very distinction between the two seems to have constituted the main object of African history. Put differently, the object of African history — especially in the 1960s — became a matter of choice, i. e. of producing either Afro-centric or Euro-centric history. Afro-centric or nationalist history was considered to be more progressive than Euro-centric or colonial history. Epistemologically, there is no distinction between the two approaches. The conceptual apparatus (if one may call it such) used in both cases is essentially the same. The manner in which historical problems are posed are determined by a subjective problematic which calls for idealist categories of analysis, for posing the problems of African history in moralistic and humanistic terms. Ultimately, such historians as Gann/Duignan on the one hand and Ranger/Iliffe on the other are determined by their ideological practices, namely of objectifying African history and of comprehending it through a set of « values » rooted in European philosophy. The object of African history was reduced to a question of morals and ethics (2).

Because of the apparent polemical nature of the comparison between Ranger/Iliffe and Gann/Duignan, it is necessary to elaborate and explain why the problematic of these historians is essentially the same. While more and more historians are willing to accept the similarity between Ranger and Gann/Duignan, the same historians will argue that Iliffe cannot quite be put in the same category. Their argument is as follows : basically, Ranger poses the same questions as the ones posed by Gann/Duignan, but for reasons of his own he comes up with different answers. As for Iliffe, he is seen as a very careful researcher without any pre-conceived answers. Some historians even consider his « Agricultural Change in Modern Tanganyika » as an example of materialist history. And yet, underlying all of Iliffe's writings, one finds the same ideological presuppositions as those found in Ranger : subjective moralism and idealism. Thus, explaining why there were no extensive rebellions after 1907 in Tanganyika, Iliffe suggests that the reason lies less in European initiatives than in changes taking place within African societies at this date... Attempts to restrict or resist European intrusion were superseded by a widespread desire to utilise western techniques in order to transform African societies (3). Because they have no conception of class relations and relations of production,

Ranger/Iliffe and Gann/Duignan are bound to produce essentially the same kind of history. Their histories differ, to be sure, but the differences are those of the faces of the same coin (4).

The varying production of African history have tended to reflect a preoccupation with settling ideological or ethical scores among historians and not with efforts to understand how their « reactionary » or « progressive » way of writing history was precisely part of the reproduction process of a specific ideology. The positions of the so-called progressives and reactionaries, their apparently diametrically opposed interpretations and conclusions had one fundamental common characteristic, namely of mediating African history through European history. Whereas the reactionaries would draw a picture which ejected Africans out of history and hence out of « civilization », the so-called progressives and reactionaries, their apparently diametrically opposite : Africa had a history, Africans were civilized.

The point is : from the moment slaves began to be taken away from the continent, the history of its peoples was no longer determined by internal forces alone. And yet, in the name of « resurrecting African history », in the name of « nationalist » history or « African initiative » this fundamental fact was not acknowledged. Indeed, Vansina in his *Kingdoms of the Savanna* tells us, with regard to the Kongo kingdom history, that

« Here was a fully sovereign state which, of its own volition, attempted to incorporate Christianity and many other elements of European culture into its own fabric » (5).

Further down one reads that « acculturation and Kongolese hegemony are therefore the main themes» (of this chapter) (6). Interestingly, from Vansina's own evidence, there is no way one can arrive at the above characterization of the Kongo kingdom's history. If there was a hegemony or a volition to speak of, it was that of the Portuguese slavers-traders *cum* missionaries. T.O. Ranger may be known as the founder of the « African initiative » school of African history, but, as the above example shows, he had at least one outstanding precursor (an inevitable fate of all founders ?).

If the production of various histories of Africa is seen as closely related to the process of reproduction of capital, what may appear as « different » approaches will tend to reflect different historical phases and hence the different requirements for the reproduction of capital or different forms of confrontation between capital and African formations. It is not the purpose of this paper to fit every single history book according to some sort of preconceived structuralist grid. On the contrary it is to show that the shifts, trends and phases of the study of African societies have corresponded and continue to correspond to correspond to specific phases of the requirements for the reproduction of capital.

The abolition of slavery at the end of the 19th century has been shown to have been concomitant with the realization by the most « advanced » capitalists that slave labour was not as productive as free labour (7). But how would one explain that the most virulent attacks against slavery came from men of the Church or men of « high morality ». When Las Casas denounced the eradication of entire populations in the Indies, it was not only because of the unchristian nature of the genocide, but also because his particular understanding of spreading civilization was not geared toward the expansion of capital, but toward the expansion of catholicism (8). However, Las Casas may or may not have realized that expansion of catholicism could only take place through and with the expansion of capital. Subjectively, Las Casas was an antagonist of Spanish practices, but objectively supported enlightened expansion of capital.

As said earlier, the reaction of historians and other Africanists to the so-called Euro-centric tendencies was characterized by cultural relativism, itself predicated on the alleged universality of humanity. And it was these idealistic presuppositions that led to the attempts to equalize, so to speak, European and African histories. Hence, the points about African civilizations, African history, African great cities, all of which were at one point or another denied (9). With writers like Leopold Sedar Senghor and Cheikh Anta Diop the uniqueness of the West found a parallel in some sort of « uniqueness of Africa » (10). Histories of different formations cannot be reduced to common denominators such as civilization, states or culture. Furthermore, denial of humanity or human dignity by one formation of another does not mean that these will be restored by simply affirming the opposite (11). Humanity having been denied through a process of subjugation and exploitation, it will be regained only through the overthrow of the oppressors and exploiters.

Because of their inability to use rigorous objective analytical concepts, bourgeois historians will perceive equality and inequality wherever and whenever it is suitable or opportune. Looking at Kongolese history again, one sees that although the evidence demonstrates that deception and force were instrumental in subjugating Dom Affonso (King of the Kongo from 1506 to 1541) to the will of the Portuguese king and his agents, he is nevertheless made to appear as acting independently. Such independence did not and could not exist except within the boundaries permitted by the class alliance between the Kongolese rulers and the Portuguese traders, slavers, missionaries. The quasi-hagiographic literature surrounding a person like Affonso resulted first of all from the self-serving interests of the missionaries who depicted him as a farsighted monarch, farsighted meaning here the acceptance and encouragement of Portuguese traders to plunder his kingdom (12). In their own parochial way, the missionaries perceived the kingdom as an opportunity for converting new members to their church (13). By the time Georges Balandier and Jan Vansina, among others, re-

examined the personage, the farsighted king had been turned into a « modernizer » *avant la lettre* because the requirements of 20th century capitalist expansion are no longer to become civilized, but to « modernize », to develop (14).

II

Interestingly, the process of recognizing and accepting African societies as « non-barbarians » coincided with the long and arduous process (still under way and far from completed) of proletarianization of the continent. The more the latter was under way the more difficult it became to use a name that applied to a different phase of capital accumulation. Furthermore it was argued that humanity was not the privilege of one class or one race. This was simply a reflection of the fact that capitalism had appropriated humanity and turned it into its opposite. It is precisely on the issue of slavery (another form of inequality) and its abolition that one also encounters one of the grossest mystifications. Abolition of slavery has been interpreted in certain quarters as a triumph of christian values. A triumph it certainly was, but or deception since one of the tenets of christian religion is submission to authority. It was not so much a triumph of christianity as one of capital (15).

The spread and expansion of capitalism has gone hand in hand with the production of mystifying ideologies. To be more precise, ruling classes have historically sought to produce egalitarian as well as inegalitarian ideologies which transform reality into a mirage. The ultimate function of these ideologies is to reproduce exploitative relations of production as well as relations of domination. The use of one does not exclude the use of the other. In fact, they complement each other. A few examples will illustrate this.

In the Eastern part of Zaïre (adjacent to Rwanda and Burundi) there are social formations which have gone through a historical phase where cattle ownership determined the form of surplus appropriation (16). Specifically, the cattle owners resorted to a mechanism of cattle contract — *ubugabire* — which had the ultimate result, not of redistributing wealth, nor of creating « friendly relations », but of reproducing their ruling position over the agriculturalists/peasants. Typically these relations of domination were reinforced by an ideology which at the same time proclaimed the natural right of the more powerful clans to rule while conveying the notion that these relations of domination were somewhat compensated for by a principle of reciprocity. According to this principle, *ubugabire* was not a mechanism of appropriating surplus labour and surplus product, rather it was a form of redistribution which allowed those who did not have a cow (necessary in bridewealth payment) to acquire one without paying anything. However, the cattle owner would usually not give a cow until the

« seeker » had presented various gifts and made his labour power available to the owner. Indeed, unless gifts and labour prestations were maintained by the receiver (even after the actual exchange), the giver could seek compensation through the courts. In spite of these concrete relations, the class which is the source of exploitation ideologically presents itself as the one which is concerned about reducing its intensity. The reality is different : the reproduction of the exploiting class is predicated on the intensification of exploitation. Such mystifying ideology can also be found in societies based on subsistence agriculture where the ideology of communal ownership of land is still reproduced in spite of the fact that the real property relations no longer fit the legal description (17).

A similar mystification occurred during colonial rule. Because productive forces were developed during this phase, apologists have described it as having been beneficial, forgetting that the development of the productive forces was as necessary to capital as the separation of the producer from his means of production and his products. However, this mystifying ideology had worse effects in that colonial ideology (exemplified by racism) itself became the target of the rising petty bourgeoisie and not the relations of production upon which it was founded. Ironically, the colonizers themselves realized as early as World War II that new methods based on cooperation rather than on coercion would be more successful in expanding the economic base of capital (18). Furthermore, other colonized peoples had also shown that, as early as the 1920s, the main enemy was no longer just colonialism, but imperialism, i. e. not just a colonial state, but a whole system of economic exploitation of which the colonial state was only one of the visible expressions (19). This fact is often lost because of the parochial tendency among African historians to analyse the colonization or decolonization processes only from the European and African points of view. Colonialism and its demise were world-wide phenomena. An understanding of it in any part of the world would therefore require a global analysis. While lessons can be learned from the struggles that took place in Europe, still better ones can be learned from studying the histories of China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Latin America. Getting out of the Euro-Afro dilemma would also have the advantage of getting rid of the notion according to which decolonization was the result of the impact of western education. Of course, it is true that to some extent each mode of production destroys itself as it expands, but to attribute the determining factor of the struggle for self-determination to the principles of freedom « taught » by western education is to forget that those who actually carried out the struggle did not even know how to read the language of the colonizers. Here it is worth recalling how Mao Tse-Tung dealt with the « impact of the West » theory. His refutation is valid for Africa as well.

« What is the « impact of the West », as Acheson calls it ? It is the effort of the Western bourgeoisie, as Marx and Engels

said in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* of 1848, to remould the world after its own image by means of terror. In the process of this impact or remoulding, the Western bourgeoisie, which needed compradors and flunkeys familiar with Western customs, had to let countries like China open schools and send students abroad, and thus « new ideas were introduced » into China. At the same time the peasantry was bankrupted, and a huge semi-proletariat was brought into existence. Thus the Western bourgeoisie created two categories of people in the East, a small minority, the flunkeys of imperialism, and a majority which is opposed to imperialism and consists of the working class, the peasantry, the urban petty bourgeoisie, the national bourgeoisie and the intellectuals coming from these classes. *Those in the majority group are all grave-diggers of imperialism, who were created by imperialism itself, and the revolution originates from them.* It was not that the so-called influx of ideas from the West stirred up « ferment and unrest », but that imperialist aggression provoked resistance » (20).

In his famous essay on ideological state apparatuses, Althusser argued that schooling and education must be considered as an essential part of the ideological state apparatus in that they convey and impose through apparently non-repressive mechanism the assumptions and views necessary for the reproduction of the dominant ideology (21). As a part of the educational process, the teaching and writing of history can be said to play a similar role. With regard to African studies, there have been numerous publications to show how, for example, anthropology served the ends of the colonial states throughout the continent (22). However, there is more to it than this simple empirical explanation.

III

Although further investigation would reveal a complex network of determination, for the moment it shall be argued that there are two basic explanations for the directions in which African history has moved. First and foremost the process of confrontation between the colonized peoples and the colonizers which resulted in political and economic subjugation of the former. Secondly, the conditions surrounding the confrontation required the use of formidable coercive apparatuses in the form first of slave raiding, and then of military and police operations to transform — forcibly if need be — the former (real and potential) slaves into free labourers. By its very nature a coercive apparatus is self-defeating. It must be used as a last resort. Hence the development of a supportive non-repressive ideology

not only in the form of legal texts, colonial education, but also of social sciences aimed at « explaining » African societies precisely in those terms which would make them more receptive to the establishment of capitalist relations of production.

There is a close correlation between the ideological practices of the ruling classes in the capitalist metropolises and the material conditions prevailing at the various stages of the history of the continent, and it was (still is) these ideological practices which have determined the boundaries of scholarly research as well as the methods and concepts used in it. These ideological practices constitute an integral part of the process of reproduction of those conditions which are most conducive to the penetration and accumulation of capital. Unless such a close relationship is understood, it becomes difficult to understand the rise of anthropology itself. Anthropology must be conceived of as a colonial science through and through. Through its systematic investigation of the subjugated peoples anthropologists developed another form of appropriating the productive forces of the continent. In view of this, it is difficult to understand Thomas Hodgkin's praise of anthropologists who are seen as having « contributed to African renaissance » by exposing « the curious muddle of meanings associated with such terms as civilised and primitive, advanced and backward » (23).

The ideological appropriation (via anthropology) went hand in hand with material appropriation by capital which treated Africa and its inhabitants as a natural preserve which could be simply plundered. In its early days on the continent, capital operated like the hunting band: it did not require the reproduction of the conditions of its existence on the continent itself. The continent and its inhabitants were reduced to a state of Nature. This point was not peculiar to the African continent. When the Spaniards brought primitive capitalism to the « New World » they created unprecedented destruction. The magnitude of the genocide still staggers the imagination. Genocide on such a scale can only be understood if the population of a particular geographical area is treated as a mere extension of Nature (supported by a racist ideology), i.e. as objects that can be appropriated and manipulated like the natural environment (24).

Although the above argument may sound metaphorical, to philosophers of the Enlightenment it was not, as can be seen from the titles of their work as well as from their basic assumptions about non-European peoples (25).

The very label — the Enlightenment — used to describe a specific phase of European history is deceptive if looked at from the point of view of the history of colonization. Deceptive because it was in the writings of the Diderots, Voltaires and Rousseaus that one can also find the germs of colonial ideology in the form of the European mission to carry the light of civilization to the savages (26). In the history of Europe these philosophers played an « enlightening » role,

but one must be cautious in seeing this role as having universal applicability. That two men as diametrically opposed as Senghor and Castro could attribute a determining influence to Rousseau's writings must be seen more as an indication of the ambiguity of Rousseau's philosophy than a proof of its revolutionary character — *with regard to the colonial experience* (27). There is ambiguity in the sense that while providing a profound critique of society (namely by displacing the philosophical problematic from religion and metaphysics to politics), he was also providing an outlet for adopting the ideological discourse to the material and social development of society in the 18th century. Hence his unwavering support for petty commodity production (28).

It is important to look at the ideological discourses produced by European formations in historical perspective. They have tended to prevent a concrete understanding of the process of subjugation by the victims of that process. That colonial and imperialist ideologies have confused historical understanding can best be seen by the manner in which African history has been approached through moral, ethical or racial terms rather than through an examination of production relations. In fact, it could be argued that this is a characteristic of all phases of African history, including the post-colonial period.

Many of the institutions that were created after independence can be seen as simply an ideological response to colonial ideology. Ironically, this response often suited the aims and goals of imperialist ideology. Colonialism and imperialism were not the product of ideology alone, and it is not ideology alone which will get rid of them. The early phase of imperialism required the political parcellisation of the continent, its later phase (neo-colonialism) required economic and political integration into large regional units. Balkanization having been identified with colonialism, the ideological opposite — Pan-Africanism — was seen as the prerequisite step toward decolonization (24). The OAU was the child of this ideology. The concept of African unity is an empty one as far as the working classes and peasants of the continent are concerned. Its only meaning has been one of continued oppression. If any unity has been forged or furthered, it has been the unity of the ruling classes of each of the neo-colonies. When antagonisms emerged they were reduced to a conflict between « progressive », « moderate » and « reactionary » regimes, or — worse — between the « friends » and « enemies » of Africa. What does Africa mean? The answer, if there is one, would probably be found in metaphysics — an area which is beyond the scope of this paper.

It is sometimes argued that with political independence, at least the former colonies can decide on who is going to exploit them. It is very doubtful — judging from experience — that such freedom actually exists. Furthermore, by pointing out the reactionary nature of the OAU it is not intended to negate and deny that struggles have been waged and a few have been won. On the contrary, but it is

important to remember that in most cases those who struggled were not the ones to reap the benefits of those battles.

Ever since World War II, the principal preoccupation of capital has shifted from the creation of a proletariat to that of creating a class of managers capable of maintaining and reproducing capital. The strategic question to be solved by capital was the reproduction of conditions favourable to its expansion. Fifteen years after many countries had gained independence, sporadic and dispersed armed struggles have increased the pressure on the capitalists. These pressures are not being felt only in the southern part of the continent where the stakes are highest. It is clear that one of the reasons why so many regimes are wary of liberation movements stems from the awareness that they could be the next targets. The solution, therefore, is to present the contradictions that occur as basically revolving around distribution relations both at the economic and political levels.

IV

The report by the Social Science Research Council (SSCR) — « Inequality in Africa : Report on a Seminar » — is a perfect illustration of how, again, bourgeois moralistic social science is attempting to distort the reality of what is happening on the continent (30). Before discussing the most salient points of the report, it is essential to clarify the concept of inequality itself. It is a thoroughly bourgeois one on at least two counts. First of all it presupposes that equality is basically a problem that can be resolved through a manipulation of distribution processes. As Marx pointed out in *Critique of the Ghota Programme*, distribution cannot be dissociated from the mode of production which actually determines it :

« Vulgar socialism (and from it in turn a section of the democracy) has taken over from the bourgeois economists the consideration and treatment of distribution as independent of the mode of production and hence the presentation of socialism as turning principally on distribution » (31).

It was also in the same *Critique* that Marx attacked the notion of an equal right taken out of its historical context, ignoring the class origin of the term. Secondly it is bourgeois because the political practice it calls forth is bourgeois politics (Marx's vulgar socialism). To use the term inequality is to engage in an ideological exercise which ultimately results in the falsification of the prevailing relations of production on the continent. These are based on exploitation. Inequality is not similar or comparable to exploitation. Neither do they have anything in common. And yet, it seems to be one of the premises of bourgeois social scientists that there is a common ground on which they and their Marxist antagonists could meet. Indeed the report cited

above does convey this erroneous notion according to which Marxists and non-Marxists could agree on some common definition of the concept of inequality. That part of the report reads :

« A narrow definition of inequality as the distribution, at a given point in time, of various social resources or attributes (wealth, power, status and prestige are those most commonly considered) among individuals or groups of people. Such distributions may, of course, change over time. Also, material resources at least are distributed through space, so that people's access to them at any point in time may depend in part on location. If inequality is defined in this way, then it is fair to say that seminar participants did agree on one point — viz., that stable or changing patterns of distribution may be regarded as symptoms of underlying social forces or relations, which must be studied in conjunction with the distributional patterns themselves » (32).

Further down possible disagreements are explained thus :

« One important area of difference, both among seminar participants and in the literature dealing with inequality, has to do with ideology or, more precisely, scholars, assumptions about the ends of social research. In part, this involves the old debate over the scholar as observer or perpetrator of social change, but it also raises the question of the kind of change one sees as desirable and/or probable » (33).

For a Marxist it is absolutely impossible to agree with the definition given above, still less with the symptoms. As pointed earlier, the definition conveniently avoids addressing itself to relations of production. Furthermore, the insinuation in the definition of some sort of geographical determinism according to which inequality may also result from the location of resources introduces one of the most favourite ideological slogans of the capitalist ruling classes : some regions are naturally better endowed for producing some goods than others. The distribution through space of material resources is thrown in as an unalterable given. It is not difficult to see where this leads : the natural division of labour among the exploited areas and people of the world and the exploiters. Inequality stands in opposition to equality and presumably the task of the social scientist is to show how inequality could be wiped out. The concept of inequality belongs to the arsenal of social scientists who were attributing the unrest in the former colonies to the « revolution of rising expectations », suggesting thereby that there was actually something which could be reaped by the working class of the continent if only it could repress its anger and demonstrate more patience. This perception of the inequality/equality equation is closely tied in with the work of a whole school of sociological thinking, especially in the U.S., which, starting

from Galbraith's *Affluent Society* seeks to give the impression that no matter what the ills and evils attributed to capitalism, capitalism itself is capable of resolving these problems and of bringing affluence to all. « In the meantime the poor must be prevented by coercive measures from revolting, and by relief, from reaching a stage of destitution that would make them socially menacing » (34). Capitalism cannot survive without exploitation (inequality). It is therefore illusory to believe that capitalism will lessen or wipe out inequality.

« In real life capitalisms it has taken the utmost efforts of the 90 % of the population to prevent their share of the national product from falling, and so to enable their standard of life to rise with the rise of productivity... capitalism has in fact an innate tendency to extreme and evergrowing inequality. For how otherwise could all these cumulatively equalitarian measures which the popular forces have succeeded in enacting over the last hundred years have done little more than hold the position constant ? » (35).

Now to the second point, i.e. the differences of opinion must be attributed to ideological differences. Here, the underlying assumption (as can be seen in the text) is that the differences have to do with subjective choices. Ideological differences do exist, but to attribute the differences to ideology alone is to display a very simplistic understanding 1) of what ideology is and 2) of what are the premises of Marxist methodology. The misconceptions about Marxist methodology are further compounded when it is asserted that « Marxist-oriented scholars tend to emphasize changing sources and consequences of social conflict » (36). This is a typical bourgeois, liberal reading of Marx. It is within a bourgeois problematic, i.e. empiricist, idealist and ideological. It is the kind of formalist understanding which makes even solid Marxists say that Marx did not have a formal definition of social classes, ignoring that the *Capital* is the most exhaustive and most profound analysis of class relations in the capitalist mode of production.

When one sees such a conference being sponsored, one question immediately comes to mind : what for. The report provides part of the answer by suggesting the areas of research in which « more attention could be directed » (p. 11). Clearly, the authors had in mind the southern part of the continent : « specifically, it was proposed that in research on Africa, more attention be directed toward :

1. Cases of resistance or organized struggle against oppression : labor unions, millennialist religious movements, political protest movements, violent resistance, guerilla warfare, etc.
2. Criminal or extra-legal behavior : this could serve as a heuristic device for identifying and understanding changing lines of social division and conflict.
3. Studies of groups of people at different levels of a social hierar-

chy, including variously defined elites and underclass groups. In this case, studies might be directed toward tracing the formation of these groups over time and changes in their membership, as well as in their relations with one another and with other elements in their societies through the collection of individual and collective histories and genealogies ».

Note that the groups to be studied are identified in terms of their struggle against oppression. Who is or are responsible for oppression and exploitation is conveniently left in the dark. Oppression may be an abstract concept for armchair academics, but it does have very concrete forms and sources : it is based on social, political and economic relations between classes which confront each other in production relations. One would expect a conference on inequality to encourage research on the causes and sources of exploitation and not on those actors who are trying to struggle toward the abolition of exploitation and oppression.

The second point is even harder to understand. « Criminal » with regard to whom or what ? From reading the report, one cannot help think that the criminal or extra-legal behavior is in fact referring to the list of people in point 1. If so, it is legitimate to ask what is so criminal about struggling against oppression and exploitation. And how it could serve as a heuristic device totally escapes me.

The third point is simply a repeat of the first two points with an emphasis on individuals and on the collection of specific data. Again one cannot help but ask oneself : collection of data for whose benefit ? Just for the sake of knowledge ? (as suggested at the beginning of the report).

The future of the wealthiest part of the continent is uncertain, and that part of the continent also happens to be the area which epitomizes exploitation and oppression. It has been a characteristic of imperialist powers to prepare themselves for change (even if they do not look forward to changes). For example, while the US was heavily backing the Portuguese regime in Africa through the Atlantic Alliance, it was also providing funds and material support to pseudo-liberation movements (COREMO among others) with the explicit goal of putting in power a group of people who would be indebted and infeodated to the US. This policy nearly succeeded in Angola, and has of course greater chances of success in South Africa where the stakes are much higher and therefore will automatically call for more resources and more careful planning. It is clear that social scientists will be called upon to participate in this effort.

It is reasonable to ask oneself if this conference is not part of the effort to undermine the liberation struggles that are now going on. The very title of the conference is a blatant mystification of what is really going on : oppression and exploitation. Inequality and social stratification are euphemisms which hide a reality which liberal scholarship is

not only unwilling to confront, but also incapable to analyze, incapable because it does not have the conceptual and analytical apparatus to deal with the process of exploitation in a non-subjective non-moralistic manner. By characterizing exploitative relations of production as inequality, scholars avoid posing the fundamental question, namely the one which is responsible for generating inequality. Through this term — inequality — exploitation is seen as a problem that can be resolved by better management, better distribution, etc. It leaves out completely the question of eradicating the source of the reproduction of inequality, because discussing it would entail questioning the whole basis upon which capital has been reproduced on an ever expanding scale.

Because of its very simple acceptance, over which most people would agree, some may wonder why this overly repetitious objection. Besides the theoretical reasons already given there are also political ones especially for opposing the « proposed areas for further research ». First of all there is the fairly well documented history of attempts to penetrate the liberation movements (37). These attempts were clearly not aimed at providing support, but rather at undermining the effectivity of these movements. Furthermore, previous efforts of studying inequality in South Africa, such as Gwendolen M. Carter's *Politics of Inequality* cannot be seen as a positive or encouraging precedent. If anything, the research projects initiated by Professor Carter have led *not* to a better knowledge of the oppressor and how to overcome him, but instead to further investigation of liberation movements. Through these studies (usually unsympathetic to armed struggle) the oppressor and exploiter in general has learned more about its antagonist than the other way round. This has resulted in a more sophisticated arsenal of exploitative and repressive mechanisms combined, today, with a strong dose of « détente » aimed at undermining and destroying the liberation movements.

One can only conclude by quoting *in extenso* from a study by Robert Molteno on « The role of certain North American Academics in the struggle against the liberation of Southern Africa » where it is persuasively argued that attempts to study liberation movements or freedom fighters must be opposed for the following reasons :

- « 1. The liberation movements themselves oppose being studied (except by sympathetic solidarity workers) for obvious reasons. It ought to follow from liberal ideology that if a subject of research refuses to be researched it is the subject's democratic right to have his wish respected by the researchers.
2. The kinds of studies intended (above) can endanger not only liberation movements and the populations they are responsible for, but also the governments and populations of frontline states.
3. The (above) research proposals were not studies of the past of

a nationalist movement, as is standard historical procedure. Instead they were to be ongoing studies of unfolding present events. Why ?

4. Regardless of the motives and intentions of the researchers, the information they would generate could damage the cause of liberation and cause loss of precious freedom fighters' lives if that information were published or in some other way got into the hands of the former Portuguese and the present South African and Rhodesian governments.
5. The United States was an open ally, via NATO and bilateral agreements of the former Portuguese Government. It is now collaborating militarily with the South African Government in Angola. Yet (these) researchers... were... in no way opposed to (the US) Government's growing collaboration with racist capitalism's suppression of the liberation movements » (38).

Although some of these points would need some updating (they were written at the end of 1975), in essence they are applicable to the current situation.

NOTES :

- (1) The first sentences of the report describe the rationale behind the seminar : « For some time, the Joint Committee has been interested in the theme of inequality and social differentiation in Africa, both as a matter of interest and concern to many Africans and as a fruitful area for interdisciplinary and comparative research. In recent years a considerable body of research has accumulated on this theme, undertaken from different disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. Thus there is at present considerable scope for comparison and synthesis of existing studies, which should in turn help identify areas for further research. To explore these possibilities, a seminar was held in New York, on September 19-20 (1975), in which a number of guests met with committee members (a full list is supplied in a footnote) to discuss the « state of the art » and directions for future analysis and research. A background memorandum was prepared by members of the committee and circulated to participants in advance ; otherwise, participants did not present papers to the seminar but engaged instead in an informal and wide-ranging discussion ».
- (2) This is not peculiar to historians of Africa. Professor Gordon Wright (French History) concluded his presidential address to the AHA (1975) with the following words : « Our search for truth ought to be quite consciously suffused by a commitment to some deeply held human values. The effort to keep these two goals in balance may be precarious : but if we can manage it, perhaps we will be on the way to re-establishing the role of history as one — and not the least — of what we might fairly call the moral arts ». See G. Wright, « History as Moral Science », *The American Historical Review*, vol. 81, 1, February 1976, p. 11.
- (3) J. Iliffe, *Tanganyika under German Rule, 1905-1912*, Nairobi : East African Publishing House, 1969, p. 8. See also his introduction to *Modern Tanzanians*, Nairobi : East African Publishing House, 1973, edited by himself. The categories used by J. Iliffe are descriptive not analytical as can be seen from the argument behind his *Agricultural Change in Modern Tanganyika* (Historical Association of Tanzania paper, n° 10, Nairobi ; East African Publishing House, 1971). Concluding his study he wrote : « The paper has argued that the main trend of change has indeed been towards social differentiation and inequality, and it has stressed the complexity of the forces which have caused this : the precolonial background ; the impact of capitalism, producing both a plantation sector and the growth of African commercial farming ; the emergence of a pattern of structural underdevelopment, evidenced by dependence on external economic forces and the growth within the country of regional inequalities ; the intensification and modification of this pattern by population growth ; and finally the special

circumstances of the 1950s which consolidated the whole structure ». Note how capitalism is seen to produce — among other things — social differentiation and inequality, and — more importantly — how capitalism is seen as a separate factor from the emergence of a pattern of structural underdevelopment. These two are obviously dialectically linked.

- (4) For this discussion I am indebted to remark made by F. Bernstein, E. Ferguson and St. Feierman. They do not necessarily share my conclusions. For a more detailed study of Ranger's approach, see Jacques Depelchin, « Toward a Problematic History of Africa », *Tanzania Zamani* (mimeo), n° 18, January 1975, pp. 1-9.
- (5) J. Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savanna*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1968 (second printing), p. 37.
- (6) *Ibid.*, pp. 38-9.
- (7) See for example, K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, London: Penguin Books, 1973, pp. 325-6.
- (8) In the literature, Las Casas and Juan Gines de Sepulveda are often opposed, the former being considered the defender of the natives and the latter the « champion of civilisation and religion against a cruel and superstitious barbarism ». With regard to colonial ideology there is not much difference between the two. See J. H. Parry, *The Spanish Seaborne Empire*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970, pp. 142-3 and also Michèle Duchet, *Anthropologie et Histoire au siècle des lumières*, Paris: Maspero, 1971, pp. 195-9.
- (9) This tradition owes a great deal to the popularization of African history by Basil Davidson who finds himself in complete agreement with Ranger as exemplified by the following quote from his *In the Eye of the Storm: Angola's People*, Doubleday, New York: Anchor Books, 1973, p. 40: « The 'typological' method of analyzing African history, and of thereby moving toward a coherent understanding of the African historical situation, notably since 1800, owes much to the pioneering work of T.O. Ranger and some others. I would like to acknowledge my debt to them here; and I have tried to suggest some of the fruits of this approach in *The Africans*, London: Longmans, 1969 ».
- (10) C.A. Diop, *Nations nègres et culture*, Paris: Présence Africaine, 1964, 2^e édition.
- (11) It is precisely this point that G. Backford did not understand when he wrote that « the point is that change must begin in the minds of people, relating to the concept they have of themselves. (Black power has made an important contribution in this connection by the emphasis it places on black beauty and black dignity) ». Black beauty and black dignity became advertising slogans for the cosmetic industry. A contribution to capitalism. See his *Persistent Poverty*, London: Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 233.
- (12) It is sometime argued that the African kings were unaware of what was happening to their kingdoms. In the case of Affonso, even if that were the case, once he knew that benefits could be derived from the slave trade, he appealed to the king of Portugal for ships so that he could participate himself in the trade. See G. Balandier, *Daily Life in the Kingdom of the Kongo*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1966, p. 62.
- (13) Some of these new members « achieve celebrity: Dome Henrique, who became a bishop, and Dom Afonso, a nephew of the king, who became a professor... ». See G. Balandier, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
- (14) G. Balandier, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-62.
- (15) Rousseau on christianity: « Christianity preaches only servitude and dependence. The spirit of Christianity is too favourable to tyranny for it not to benefit from it. True christians are made to be slaves. They know it and are undisturbed; this sort of life has too little value for them ». As quoted from L. Colletti, « Rousseau as critic of civil society » in L. Colletti, *From Rousseau to Lenin*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972, p. 176.
- (16) For a more complete discussion of this form of cattle exchange see (for Eastern Zaire) J. Depelchin, « A contribution to the Study of Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production: Uvira zone (eastern Zaire), c. 1800-1937 », *The African Economic History Review*, vol. II, 1, Spring 1975, pp. 1-6.
- (17) On this see P.M. Van Hekken and H.V.E. Thoden Van Velzen, *Land Scarcity and Rural Inequality in Tanzania*, The Hague: Mouton, 1972.
- (18) The Brazzaville Conference of 1944 can be seen as a turning point.
- (19) On how other colonized peoples assessed their situation see for example the « Political Theses of the Indochinese Communist Party » (October 1930) in *Viet Nam: A Historical Sketch*, Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1974, pp. 288-301.

- (20) Mao Tse-Tung, « The Bankruptcy of the idealist conception of history » (September 16, 1949) in *Selected Works*, vol. IV, Peking, 1967, p. 455 (emphasis added).
- (21) L. Althusser, « Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses » in L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, New York : Monthly Review Press, 1971, pp. 127-189.
- (22) For a more *ad hoc* treatment of the relationship between colonialism and anthropology see J. Depelchin « A Merriam World », Review article of A.P. Merriam's *An African World: The Basonge Village of Lupupa Ngye*, Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1974, to appear in *International Journal of African Historical Studies*. For this essay I am indebted to Ed Ferguson for drawing my attention to the following references : A. Gidiri, « Imperialism and Archaeology » *Race and Class*, vol. XV, 4, April 1974 ; J. Stauder, « The relevance of Anthropology to colonialism and Imperialism », *Race and Class*, vol. XVI, 1, July 1974 ; G. Cooper, « An interview with Chinese anthropologists », *Current Anthropology*, October 1973, vol. 14, 4, pp. 480-3 ; D. Lewis, « Anthropology and Colonialism », *Current Anthropology*, December 1973, vol. 14, 5, pp. 581-602.
- (23) Th. Hodgkin, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa*, New York : New York University Press, 1957, 1971 (eleventh impression), p. 177.
- (24) This paragraph and the following one are based on Michèle Duchet's work. See footnote 8.
- (25) *Ibid.*, especially, pp. 114-25.
- (26) *Ibid.*, several passages, but especially, pp. 211-26 and 459-63.
- (27) L. Colletti, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-4. The ambiguity, however is underplayed : « And though French authors may not agree, I do not think that Castro disowned this last statement (that he had fought Batista with the *Social Contract* in his pocket) when he added, « that since then, he has preferred reading Marx's *Capital* ». On the relationship between the Enlightenment and colonial ideology see also M. Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*, New York : Crowell Company, 1969 (second printing), especially chapter 2.
- (28) I am indebted for this remark to Mahmood Mamdani.
- (29) On the limitations of Pan-Africanism see the excellent introduction by Azinna Nwafor (« The Revolutionary as Historian : Padmore and Pan-Africanism ») to G. Padmore's *Pan-Africanism or Communism*, New York : Anchor Books, 1972.
- (30) While skilfully presenting constantly the Marxist and the non-Marxist view, the report gives the impression that it is neutral. Note for example the following statements with regard to methodology : « However, a basic problem of synthesis remains. There is no universally accepted theory of the effects of social forces on attitudes, or of perception on behavior, from which to build socio-economic models incorporating both types of evidence. The two approaches most commonly employed by social scientists to deal with this problem both leave something to be desired ». (SSRC report, p. 9). Within the present context of bourgeois social science, a « universally accepted theory » is bound to be a bourgeois theory (My emphasis).
- (31) K. Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Peking : Foreign Language Press, 1972, p. 18.
- (32) SSRC report, p. 2.
- (33) *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- (34) As quoted from C. Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution*, New York : Schocken Books, 1967 (second printing), p. 221.
- (35) J. Strachey, *Contemporary Capitalism*, 1956, pp. 150-1. On the same point, see R. Milliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, London : Quartet Books, 1973, p. 24.
- (36) SSRC report, p. 4.
- (37) Most of the information on which this section of the paper is based comes from Robert Molteno's paper « The Role of certain North American Academics in the Struggle Against the Liberation of Southern Africa » presented at the United Nations African Institute for Economic Development and Planning Conference on Socio-Economic Trends and Policies of Southern Africa, Dar es Salaam, 1-8 December, 1975.
- (38) *Ibid.*, pp. 21-2.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article a pour but d'analyser les travaux effectués sur l'histoire africaine et d'en démontrer les bases idéologiques en fonction de la structure particulière des rapports de production entre formations capitalistes (européennes) et pré-capitalistes (africaines). L'auteur établit un lien entre les rapports de production et la « production » d'œuvres sur l'histoire africaine, la différence entre historiens dits progressistes et historiens réactionnaires relevant plutôt du mythe que de la réalité. L'approche européocentrique à l'histoire africaine est voisine de celle plus récente dite afrocentrique par l'abstraction qui en est faite des rapports de classe et des rapports de production ; les deux approches sont influencées par le même moralisme et le même idéalisme subjectifs.

L'avènement et l'expansion du capitalisme nécessitaient la production d'idéologies mystificatrices. L'idéologie de mystification coloniale allait succéder aux idéologies des classes exploiteuses des formations pré-capitalistes en Afrique avec des conséquences beaucoup plus désastreuses. La petite bourgeoisie naissante menait son combat contre l'idéologie coloniale et non contre les rapports de production.

Les pratiques idéologiques des classes dominantes dans les métropoles capitalistes font partie intégrante du processus de reproduction des conditions favorables à la pénétration et à l'accumulation du capital. C'est dans ce cadre que les sciences sociales jouent un rôle idéologique, et l'anthropologie notamment doit être considérée comme une branche de la science coloniale. Pour étayer son argument, l'auteur fait mention d'un séminaire organisé par le « Social Science Research Council » des Etats-Unis et dont le rapport « L'inégalité en Afrique » fut publié récemment (1975). Il met en garde contre les risques de telles conférences, notamment en ce qui concerne les mouvements de libération, ceux de l'Afrique australe en particulier, et il conclut :

« Pour des raisons évidentes, les mouvements de libération eux-mêmes se refusent à être étudiés (exception faite cependant pour ceux qui travaillent en solidarité avec leur cause). Selon les normes mêmes de l'idéologie libérale, si un sujet de recherche refuse à se soumettre à la recherche, les chercheurs ont le devoir de respecter ce droit démocratique du sujet ».