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STRUCTURE AND CONTRADICTIONS OF PRIMITIVE  
COMMUNISM IN PRE-SIXTEENTH CENTURY WEST AFRICA

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## INTRODUCTION \*

Historians have traditionally referred to early Wolof society as an inegalitarian tribal empire. This paper reconstructs Wolof society and its pre-sixteenth century history from a class theoretic perspective.<sup>1</sup> The analysis participates in a reformulation of Marxian social theory that seeks to develop and deploy the concepts of fundamental and subsumed class processes, nonclass processes, overdetermination, and contradiction in a nonessentialist manner.<sup>2</sup>

The Wolof lived in what is now Senegal from about the thirteenth century. My specification of Wolof society is that of a primitive communist social formation. This is because the majority of direct producers were involved in a fundamental class process that was itself primitive communist. As part of this class process, the performers and extractors of surplus labor were identical, and surplus labor was communally extracted in the form of ceremonial offerings.

The existence of the primitive communist fundamental class process required a variety of other economic and noneconomic processes that, together, constituted its conditions of existence. The paper proceeds with a brief

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elaboration of some of these conditions of existence, showing the complex interaction between them. As part of this analysis, I show that certain conditions of existence were performed by individuals who were neither performers nor extractors of surplus labor. Instead, they received distinct portions of already extracted surplus labor because of their performance of those conditions of existence. These individuals are designated as subsumed classes, thereby establishing the existence of a complex class structure within the apparent no-class society. Because subsumed classes were necessary to the existence of Wolof primitive communist society, I can then show the potential for class conflict between fundamental and subsumed classes as part of the reproduction and change of all aspects of social life.

As far as is known, this approach to the Wolof is a new way to study the development of a primitive communist society. At the same time, Marxist economic anthropologists and historians have encountered a logical dilemma when dealing with primitive communism in general and with the transition out of primitive communism in particular. Briefly, the problem has been to square Marx's basic notion that class struggles provide an indispensable key to social change and social transitions with the transition from primitive communism where, presumably, there are no classes and hence no class struggles. The present study of the Wolof permits a distinctively Marxian analysis of the transition from primitive communism, an analysis able to pinpoint the contributions of class struggles to that transition.

## THE WOLOF PRIMITIVE COMMUNIST FUNDAMENTAL CLASS PROCESS<sup>3</sup>

### Cultural Conditions of Existence

Cultural conditions of existence of the primitive communist class process included a complex set of beliefs in the spirits. Spirits were thought to have controlled the natural environment with which human beings had to interact in order to survive. An important effect of these beliefs was that all appropriation of nature required a knowledge of how to master the spirits. As a result, no use value could ever be produced without a knowledge of the specific spirits associated with the transformation of that part of nature nor without a knowledge of how to control those spirits.

The socially recognized ability to control the spirits, in turn, was constituted by cultural forms of family organization. Producing agents belonged to a particular lineage on the basis of their kinship descent to some distant ancestor. According to tradition, this ancestor had successfully appropriated some part of nature, thereby demonstrating the ability to control certain kinds of spirits. Since this ability was thought to have been genetically passed on to successive generations, the types of use values that an individual was allowed to produce depended upon his or her lineage membership.

While forms of family organization and religious belief comprised key cultural aspects of the allocation of labor, they also produced the effect that any agent who had the socially recognized ability to control the spirits was obligated to participate in the fundamental class process as a performer of surplus labor. This was due in part to the belief in the extraordinary powers of the spirits and to the fact that offerings to those spirits had to

be made in order to prevent them from unleashing their powers. Spiritual offerings thus represent a necessary allocation of surplus labor that helped guarantee that anyone having the recognized ability to transform nature actually do so.

#### Economic Conditions of Existence

Each lineage within the Wolof social formation was comprised of several extended family units which then constituted the basic unit of production. The combined effects of family and religion, however, were such that no one unit of production was able to control all of the known spirits of nature. Consequently, the Wolof fundamental class process was further constituted by an extended division of labor, an important economic condition of existence. While the majority of kinship families were involved primarily in the production of agricultural use values, a portion of social labor time was allocated to other producing units within specialized lineages of woodworkers, leather workers, iron workers, and pottery workers.

Associated with the Wolof division of labor was an economic process of distribution of the means of production whereby access to the means was guaranteed. Since the effective capacity to set the means of production in motion was located at the site of the extended family, access had to be guaranteed to these producing units. However, since these units also comprised segments of the extended division of labor, different means of production were guaranteed to different family units. Thus, while each family was guaranteed access to certain means of production, a socially regulated form of exclusion from other of those means also existed.

Distribution of the means was generally performed within distinct territorial units by individuals known as lamén. However, the exclusive right

of the laman to distribute the means of production in no way constituted the basis for a fundamental class division. Their performance of this key economic condition of existence was in addition to their performance of necessary and surplus labor as part of the fundamental class process. Since the laman of each territory was chosen from the lineage able to trace its descent to the first family to have transformed the land to productive use, laman necessarily had the inherited ability to control certain types of spirits. They were therefore required to participate in the transformation of nature within their respective units of production. Like all other direct producers, laman occupied a fundamental class position that was primitive communist.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the distribution of the means of production, the primitive communist class process required the existence of an economic process of distribution of all other use values. This process involved distinct spheres of noncommodity circulation that were necessary to the realization of different portions of necessary and surplus labor. A portion of the subsistence needs of the direct producers was retained within the family units of each village. The remaining use values produced by each unit were turned over to a sphere of distribution that was supervised by the laman of each territory. In part because some of the use values that were necessary to the social existence of human beings of certain lamanal territories were not produced within those territories, numerous alliances between territories existed. In such cases, a portion of the use values that entered the lamanal sphere of circulation were turned over by these agents to a third sphere of circulation that was supervised by a chief laman, or alliance chief.



### Political Conditions of Existence

An example of the political processes that helped determine the primitive communist class process was the election of the Wolof chiefs. First, members of each extended family unit elected their own family chiefs. Family chiefs, in turn, elected their own lineage chiefs who then participated in the election of a laman of a particular territory. Where lamanal territories belonged to one of the Wolof alliances, the chief of that alliance was elected by a council of lamens from its member territories. At the same time, each council of electors served as an advisory council to the chief that it had elected, and each council had the right to remove that chief from his elected position at any time. Thus, a complex political hierarchy existed in which each chief was elected by and responsible to a council that consisted of agents who were similarly accountable to their own respective councils.

Because the tasks performed by different Wolof chiefs included the distribution of different portions of necessary and surplus labor, a key effect of this political hierarchy was to allow those portions of necessary and surplus labor to be allocated on the basis of a primitive communist form of planning. The planning process can be illustrated as follows. We know that the amount of necessary labor required to reproduce the direct producers in the  $i$ th unit of production was realized in the form of subsistence goods produced within that unit of production ( $sg_i$ ) as well as in the form of subsistence goods produced elsewhere in the extended division of labor ( $sg_{ij}$ ). The subsistence bundle of each family producing unit ( $SB_i$ ) can therefore be represented by the equation<sup>5</sup>

$$1) \quad SB_i = sg_i + \sum_{j=1}^m sg_{ij}$$

For expository simplicity, assume that the distribution of each  $sg_{ij}$  was performed by the laman of a territory from the ceremonial offerings made solely within that territory. Of course, as part of the political hierarchy, the advisory council of that laman would have then included lineage chiefs from each of the  $m$  segments of the division of labor. Thus, before any portion of necessary labor could be realized by the  $i$ th unit of production, a representative of that unit of production would have participated along with representatives of all segments of the division of labor in the determination of the relative needs of all producing agents. The appropriate quantities of use values were then turned over to or withheld from the lamanal sphere of circulation as part of the social realization of all portions of necessary labor. Furthermore, since the amount of labor time that was performed above and beyond the communally determined subsistence needs of the direct producers represents the expenditure of surplus labor by those producers, it should be clear how the representation of all groups of producing agents in the planning process helped secure the communal nature of the extraction of surplus labor.<sup>6</sup>

#### Subsumed Class Processes

In addition to the sorts of economic and noneconomic processes discussed above, primitive communist extraction of surplus labor required the existence of a variety of other social processes. Some of these differ from the ones already mentioned in that they were performed by individuals whose material support required the distribution of distinct portions of primitive communist surplus labor. Such processes, again, are called subsumed class processes, thereby establishing the existence of a very complex class structure within this apparent no-class society.

Included among the processes performed by subsumed classes was a cultural process of music. Before any human control over the spirits could be attempted, their attention had to be gotten. Attention of the spirits was obtained by music. Music, consequently, had to be performed as part of the ceremonies that were associated with a variety of class and nonclass processes that involved human interaction with the spirits. These included sowing and harvest ceremonies, land distribution ceremonies, age group ceremonies where knowledge concerning the spirits was taught, and funerals.

Music was performed by nonproducing agents known as griots. Their material support of food, clothing, musical instruments, and other use values is conceptually understood to have required the expenditure of surplus labor by the direct producers as part of the primitive communist fundamental class process. Indeed, if this amount of surplus labor had not been performed and then distributed to the griots, the reproduction of the primitive communist class process would have been problematic. Griots, therefore, comprised a subsumed class that was necessary to Wolof primitive communism.

Another example of a class process that was subsumed to the primitive communist fundamental class process was a process of military defense. The surrounding social formations of West Africa (out of which the Wolof formation itself probably emerged) imposed varying threats of aggression. Military protection was performed by specialized groups of warriors that were maintained by different lamana alliances. Support of the Wolof warriors required the allocation of arms, food, and other materialized forms of surplus labor to the alliance spheres of circulation. Warriors, therefore, comprised another subsumed class within this primitive communist social formation.<sup>7</sup>

## OVERDETERMINATION, CONFLICT, AND CHANGE

To this point, the concern has been to show how the primitive communist fundamental class process was constituted by a variety of other social processes including certain subsumed class processes. At the same time, each of these determining aspects of the primitive communist class process combined to overdetermine that class process, thereby imposing upon it its contradictions and its resulting dynamic. As part of this dynamic, we are forced to understand the possibility of class conflicts between fundamental and subsumed classes.

### Overdetermination and Class Conflict

One instance of overdetermination in the Wolof social formation was produced by the mutual and uneven effectivity of the primitive communist class process, religious processes, processes of family organization, and a variety of economic processes that comprised what are generally referred to as the forces of production. The significance of this instance of overdetermination is that it provides one example of how the potential for class conflict within this primitive communist society could be produced by the internal contradictions of that society.

At an abstract level of discourse, the forces of production comprise key economic conditions of existence of a fundamental class process within a social formation. An important effect of the forces of production is a technical productivity of labor that helps determine the quantity of use values that can be produced at any point in time as part of the fundamental class process. A change in the productivity of labor can thus change the relative and/or absolute quantities of use values produced through the

expenditure of necessary and surplus labor by the direct producers. In the case of a decline in productivity, any resulting change in the allocation of necessary and surplus labor might then threaten the reproduction of the direct producers at their socially determined level of subsistence as well as any number of subsumed class conditions of existence of the fundamental class process. Put differently, a decline in the productivity of labor has the potential to foster a variety of class (and nonclass) conflicts as part of the reproduction and change of all aspects of social life.

Of course, the forces of production, like all social processes, are themselves constituted by a complex variety of other economic and noneconomic processes. Within the Wolof social formation, the determining aspects of the forces of production included existing forms of religious belief and existing forms of family organization. At the same time, the uneven effectivity that these cultural processes exerted on the primitive communist forces of production on the one hand and on the primitive communist class process on the other hand combined to produce an important contradiction within the social formation.

It has already been shown that a key effect of religion was that all appropriation of nature required that control over the spirits be exercised. It has also been shown that the right of any human being to attempt the control over one or another type of spirits was determined on the basis of socially regulated patterns of ancestral descent. At the same time, since control over the spirits was understood to have been an exceptionally difficult and precarious task and since ancestors had in fact demonstrated particular successful ways of controlling the various spirits, the techniques used by the ancestors tended to be reproduced from generation to generation.

The contradiction, then, can be specified as a tendency toward stagnation in existing forms of economic technique as custom and tradition became an important part of the transformation of nature. The significance of this internally generated contradiction was that the absence of any change in the forces of production produced a corresponding tendency for the productivity of labor to decline.

It should be noted that the tendency for the productivity of labor to decline was unevenly generated between both geographic regions of the social formation and segments of the extended division of labor across those regions. From a careful reading of existing data on the Wolof, however, it is clear that this tendency did exist. An example was in the production of agricultural use values in the Djollof, or eastern region of the social formation. There, the natural and economic processes of land renewal did not include the annual flood of the Senegal River and depended, instead, on a two field system of crop rotation. Over time, the fertility of land declined and a subsequent tendency for the quantity of agricultural use values per unit labor to decline was produced.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, a decline in the quantity of any agricultural or nonagricultural use values produced would necessarily mean that the reproduction of any class or set of classes at a constant level of material wealth would have required an increase in the allocation of necessary and/or surplus labor to that class or set of classes. This, again, is because the production of the entire social bundle of use values required the expenditure of necessary and surplus labor by the direct producers. At the same time, an increase in the allocation of labor time to this class or set of classes would have necessitated a corresponding decrease in the allocation of necessary and/or surplus

labor to some other class or set of classes. Changes in the social allocation of labor time that resulted from the internally generated tendency toward stagnation in the forces of production, consequently, had the potential to set in motion class conflict between primitive communist fundamental and subsumed classes over the allocation of that labor time.

#### Class and Nonclass Conflict

The foregoing analysis, again, is intended only as an example of how the potential for class conflict was produced through the internal contradictions of Wolof primitive communist society. The point now is to show how it was in fact possible for class conflict to erupt even though a variety of social processes, including those conditions of existence of the primitive communist class process already discussed, were articulated in such a way as to prevent the eruption of such conflict.

As part of this analysis, it is my theoretical and empirical concern to show that class conflict could erupt and be resolved as a result of changed conditions of existence of the primitive communist class process. It is a further concern to show how these changed conditions of existence could be the result of nonclass conflicts that were possible because of the fact that all social processes, and not just the fundamental class process, were overdetermined by their constituent aspects. The analysis, finally, allows me to establish a particular effectivity between class and nonclass conflicts as part of the reproduction and change of all aspects of primitive communist social life.

In addition to the economic, political, and cultural conditions of existence of the primitive communist class process discussed in this paper, it has been argued elsewhere that a further condition of existence of the class

process was that the different portions of necessary and surplus labor be determined on the basis of particular notions of equality.<sup>9</sup> Primitive communist notions of equality were themselves produced by a variety of class and nonclass processes and were part of the complex set of beliefs in and through which human beings understood their individual existence, their social existence, and their historical past. The constitutive aspects of Wolof notions of equality, however, also combined to overdetermine those notions of equality, thereby rendering them the site of potential conflict. Equality, therefore, can be used as a discursive example of the relationship between class and nonclass conflicts within the Wolof social formation.

One of the ways that Wolof notions of equality were overdetermined by other social process can be seen from the combined effects of class, family, religion, and the extended division of labor. An important feature of the extended division of labor was that no single unit of production was allowed to produce all of the use values necessary to its own material survival. This, again, was because the ability to transform nature required the ability to control the spirits and because the ability to control the spirits depended upon forms of ancestral descent and related forms of family organization. The combined effects of family and religion, therefore, were such that at any point in time, families having the socially recognized ability to control certain types of spirits were simultaneously prohibited from attempting the control over other types of spirits.

The socially regulated form of prohibition from the production of different types of use values as part of the extended division of labor produced an important effect on the primitive communist class process. This was that the reproduction of each family of direct producers at its socially



determined level of subsistence required the expenditure of necessary labor not only within that family unit of production but also within other family units across the extended division of labor.

At the same time, the primitive communist class process produced its own effects on the division of labor. Since surplus labor represents the amount of labor time performed above and beyond the amount necessary to reproduce the direct producers at their socially determined level of subsistence, it can be specified that the communal extraction of surplus labor required the communal determination of the magnitude of necessary labor. As mentioned, this presumed certain notions of equality. These notions included reciprocal obligations of the individual producer to society and of society to the individual producer, producing the effect that individual labor within segments of the Wolof extended division of labor was understood in and through its relation to social labor across segments of that division of labor.

Of course, the reproduction of the primitive communist class process required the reproduction of its conditions of existence. In the case of the extended division of labor, the reproduction of this economic condition of existence involved precise forms of social regulation of marriage that generally forbade the marriage of individuals not possessing the same genetic characteristics vis a vis the spirits. Due to the extraordinary powers that spirits were thought to have exerted over nature and perhaps out of fear that intermarriage would weaken or even threaten society's future capacity to transform nature, marriages thus tended to be predominantly endogamous within each segment of the extended division of labor.<sup>10</sup>

The endogamous nature of the various segments of the extended division of labor produced an important contradiction within the Wolof social formation.

In spite of the fact that primitive communist notions of equality required that individual labor be understood in and through its relation to social labor, thereby helping to produce a particular kind of class consciousness, the possibility existed for individual producers to identify themselves as members of a group within the extended division of labor rather than as members of a class encompassing all segments of that division of labor. A tension between class consciousness and group identity was thereby produced from within Wolof primitive communist society.

An important part of the tension between class consciousness and group identity was the potential for conflicts over the very notions of equality to erupt at any point in time. Nonclass conflicts over primitive communist notions of equality could be set in motion by a variety of other conflicts including, of course, class conflicts.

To elaborate, class conflicts within a social formation can involve both inter class divisions and alliances and inner class divisions and alliances. Within the Wolof primitive communist social formation, the possibility for such inner class divisions existed, in part, because of the tension between class and group identity. It was therefore possible for class conflicts over the distribution of necessary and surplus labor to feed upon this tension and produce a particular set of divisions within the fundamental class of primitive communist producers together with a particular set of alliances between divided groups of producers and various subsumed classes. It would then be possible for these inner and inter class alliances to have struggled over existing notions of equality. The outcome of these struggles would have had an important effect upon any subsequent allocation of necessary and surplus labor by the Wolof planning councils and, consequently, upon the resolution of class conflicts over that allocation of labor time.

Of course, there is never any necessary outcome of any given conflict within a social formation. Struggles over primitive communist notions of equality could result in the reproduction of existing notions of equality, or they could change those notions of equality. Changed notions of equality, in turn, could involve notions of equality different from those previously held by individuals, groups, and classes, or they could involve new notions of inequality between those individuals, groups, and classes. Finally, since equality was a necessary aspect of the communal extraction of surplus labor and since inequality was one of the necessary conditions for the transition out of primitive communism, it should be clear from this example how a variety of class and nonclass conflicts might or might not combine to produce a transitional conjuncture from within primitive communist society.

#### CONCLUSION

The examples of overdetermination, contradiction and conflict developed above are by no means intended to reduce all conflicts and all change to class conflicts. The point simply was to show that class conflicts within Wolof primitive communist society were indeed possible but that they were only possible because of the potential for nonclass conflicts as well. In showing how class conflicts could foster nonclass conflicts, the analysis only established a particular effectivity between class and nonclass conflicts. My analysis of primitive communism does not fail to recognize, and in fact stress, the mutual effectivity of class and nonclass conflicts. Because all social processes, and not just the primitive communist class process, were overdetermined by their constituent aspects, class conflicts were both cause and effect of nonclass conflicts within this social formation.

At the same time, the examples of overdetermination, contradiction, and conflict developed above are not intended to provide a concrete history of the uneven development of the Wolof social formation. Given the distinction between class and nonclass conflicts as part of the reproduction and change of all social processes, the concern here would be to analyze the effects of each conflict and each change on the primitive communist class process and to then specify the altered conditions of its reproduction. It is within this context that I have researched the available data on the Wolof to locate actual conflicts, to examine their impact on the development of primitive communism within this social formation, and to analyze their role in the social formation's transition out of primitive communism. I would like to conclude with a brief summary of some of the important findings of this research.

Class conflicts within the Wolof social formation involved conflicts between fundamental and subsumed classes over the social allocation of necessary and surplus labor. These conflicts were both cause and effect of a complex variety of nonclass conflicts. The latter included political conflicts over the conditions for election to and removal from office as well as over the forms of participation of different classes in the planning process. They also included military conflicts with other social formations that were associated with an internally generated expansionary dynamic of lamanal alliances. Nonclass cultural conflicts included conflicts over existing forms of religious belief and conflicts over the kinship form of family organization, and conflicts over existing notions of equality within and between classes. Other nonclass conflicts included economic conflicts over the types of use values that were necessary to reproduce the social existence of different classes of human beings.

One important and highly contradictory effect of these conflicts was to transform and enlarge the subsumed class structure of Wolof primitive communist society. Military conflicts fostered an increase in the size of the subsumed class of alliance warriors. Religious conflicts resulted in the penetration of paganized forms of Islamic belief and the related discovery of new spirits, thereby creating the conditions for the emergence of a new subsumed class of Islamic preachers as well as for the expansion of the subsumed class of griots. Political conflicts resulted in a subsumed class of officeholders who were appointed by certain chiefs to represent different subsumed classes in the planning process. Economic conflicts, finally, created some of the necessary conditions for the penetration of exchange between the Wolof and other West African social formations and the articulation of a subsumed class of merchants who performed this long distance exchange process.

The changed class structure of Wolof primitive communist society, in turn, helped generate a major social crisis in the fifteenth century. The class aspects of this crisis were that primitive communist demands for surplus labor exceeded the socially determined limits of primitive communist extraction. From this crisis, a whole new set of class and nonclass conflicts erupted, the resolution of which could have produced the necessary conditions for a transition out of primitive communism to take place. At the same time, no social transition is ever guaranteed. The class and nonclass conflicts of the 15th century crisis could also have been resolved in such a way as to prevent such a transition.

In point of fact, the actual resolution of these conflicts cannot be analyzed independently of the historical process of interaction with various

feudal social formations of Western Europe that began in the latter half of the fifteenth century. As part of an expansionary dynamic of those social formations, European merchant/explorers fed upon the internal contradictions and conflicts of the Wolof primitive communist social formation. In so doing, they served as the final catalyst for this social formation's transition out of primitive communism.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>My understanding of the Wolof is based largely on an alternative reading of existing texts. These include Wolof oral histories such as Oumar N'Diaye Leyti, "le Djoloff et ses Bourbas," Bulletin de l'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire, 28 ser. B (1966), pp. 966-1008; Raymond Rousseau, "le Senegal d'Autrefois. Etude sur le Oualo, Cahiers de Yoro Dyao," Bulletin du Comite Etudes Historiques et Scientifiques de l'Afrique Occidentale Francaise, 12 (1929), pp. 133-211; Amadou Wade, "Chronique du Walo Senegalais," Bulletin de l'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire, 26 ser. B (1964), pp. 440-98. Some of the important early European accounts include Hakluyt Society, The Voyages of Cadamosto (London, 1937); d'O. Dapper, Description de l'Afrique (Amsterdam, 1686). In addition, I have found Raymond Mauny, Tableau Geographique de l'Ouest Africain au Moyen Age (Amsterdam, 1967); Paul Pelissier, Les Paysans du Senegal (St. Yrieix, 1966); Boubacar Barry, le Royaume de Waalo (Paris, 1972); Pathe Diagne, Pouvoir Politique en Afrique Occidentale (Paris, 1967); "Contribution a l'Analyse des Regimes et Systemes Politiques Traditionnels en Afrique de l'Ouest," Bulletin de l'Institut Fondamental D'Afrique Noire, 32 ser. B (1979), pp. 845-87 to be especially useful texts on the various political, cultural, and economic aspects of Wolof society.

<sup>2</sup>This theoretical information of Marxian theory stems from important debates currently underway both in this country and in Western Europe. It is most closely identified with the work of two American Marxists, Stephen Resnick and Richard D. Wolff. For a detailed elaboration of the concepts of fundamental and subsumed classes, overdetermination and contradiction by these authors, see "The Theory of Transitional Conjunctures and the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism in Western Europe," Review of Radical Political Economy, 11 (Fall, 1979) pp. 3-22, and "Classes in Marxian Theory," Review of Radical Political Economy, 13 (Winter, 1982) pp. 1-18. For a critique of essentialist readings of Marx by the same authors, see "Marxist Epistemology: The Critique of Economic Determinism," Social Text, (Fall, 1982). In addition, this reformulation is heavily indebted to the work of Louis Althusser, even though it represents a significant elaboration, modification, and in some cases rejection of the concepts developed in his work. [Louis Althusser, For Marx (New York, 1970), Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, (New York, 1972), Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx (London, 1972), Essays in Self-Criticism (London, 1976); L. Althusser and Etienne Balibar, Reading Capital (London, 1972).] It is similarly indebted to other participants in these debates, notably Barry Hindess, Paul Hirst, and many of the French Marxist anthropologists. [Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst, Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production (London, 1975), and Mode of Production and Social Formation (London, 1977); Maurice Godelier, Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology (Cambridge, 1977), and "Infrastructures, Society, and History," New Left Review, 112 (1978) pp. 84-96; Claude Meillassoux, "Essai d'Interpretation du Phenomene Economique dans les Societes Traditionnelles d'Auto-subsistence," Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines, 1 (4, 1960) pp. 38-67, and "From Reproduction to Production," Economy and Society, 1 (1972) pp. 93-105; Georges Dupre and Pierre-Philippe Rey, "Reflections on the Pertinence of a Theory of the History of Exchange," Economy and Society, 2 (1973) pp. 131-163.

<sup>3</sup>For a more detailed theoretical and empirical elaboration of the economic and noneconomic conditions of existence of the primitive communist class process discussed below as well as of the contradictory articulation of these conditions of existence within the Wolof social formation, see Rolf Jensen, "Development and Change in the Wolof Social Formation: A Study of Primitive Communism" (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, 1981). I also refer readers to that text for an analysis of the sometimes sharp differences that exist between my understanding of the Wolof as primitive communist and traditional understandings of the society.

<sup>4</sup>Of course the existence or nonexistence of a primitive communist fundamental class process did not depend upon whether or not lamen occupied a fundamental class position of performers of surplus labor. The performance of any economic or noneconomic condition of existence of the fundamental class process forces us to examine the possibility that such a condition of existence may have existed as a subsumed class process. While lamen may therefore have occupied a subsumed class position in addition to their primitive communist fundamental class position, we do not currently have enough evidence to determine whether or not they were entitled to a cut of primitive communist surplus labor because of their performance of the distribution of the means of production.

<sup>5</sup>If we assume only two types of use values food and iron, then (1)  $F = FNL + FSL$  where the total amount of food produced ( $F$ ) can be conceptualized as the amount of food resulting from the expenditure of necessary labor ( $FNL$ ) and the amount of food resulting from the expenditure of surplus labor ( $FSL$ ). Similarly, the total amount of iron goods ( $T$ ) can be expressed by (2)  $T = TNL + TSL$ . Let  $sg_f$  and  $sg_{ft}$  represent the amounts of food and iron goods respectively that were necessary to reproduce the food producers. Also let  $sg_t$  and  $sg_{tf}$  represent the amounts of iron and food goods necessary to reproduce the iron producers. Then, (3)  $FNL = sg_f + sg_{tf}$  and (4)  $TNL = sg_t + sg_{ft}$ . Finally, the realization of necessary labor by the food producers can be represented by (5)  $SB_f = (FNL - sg_{tf}) + sg_{ft} = sg_f + sg_{ft}$ . Also (6)  $SB_t = (TNL - sg_{ft}) + sg_{tf} = sg_t + sg_{tf}$ .

<sup>6</sup>The following set of equations concerning the allocation of social labor time can now be developed. First, the available social labor time (SLT) can be written as

$$2) \quad SLT = NL + SL$$

where  $NL$  represents the amount of necessary labor and  $SL$  the amount of surplus labor performed by the direct producers. Since

$$1) \quad SB_i = sg_i + \sum_{j=1}^m sg_{ij}$$

requires the expenditure of necessary labor within and between family units of the  $m$  segments of the extended division of labor so as to reproduce the  $i^{\text{th}}$  family unit at its socially determined level of subsistence, then



$$3) \quad NL_i = nl_i + \sum_{j=1}^m nl_{ij}.$$

where  $NL_i$  represents the amount of labor time necessary to produce the subsistence bundle of the  $i^{\text{th}}$  family ( $SB_i$ ). Letting

$$4) \quad \sum_{j=1}^m nl_{ij} = a_i$$

then,

$$5) \quad NL_i = nl_i + a_i$$

where  $nl_i$  represents the amount of labor time performed by the  $i^{\text{th}}$  family unit so as to produce that portion of its own subsistence bundle ( $sg_i$ ), and  $a_i$  represents the amount of labor time performed elsewhere across the  $j$  segments of the extended division of labor so as to produce the remaining

portion of the  $i^{\text{th}}$  family's subsistence bundle ( $\sum_{j=1}^m sg_{ij}$ ). Since

$$6) \quad NL = \sum_{i=1}^n NL_i$$

the equation for the allocation of social labor time can be rewritten as

$$7) \quad SLT = \sum_{i=1}^n (nl_i + a_i) + SL.$$

Finally, since surplus labor was necessary to the reproduction of a variety of subsumed class conditions of existence of the primitive communist fundamental class process,

$$8) \quad SLT = \sum_{i=1}^n (nl_i + a_i) + \sum_{h=1}^k scp_h$$

where  $scp$  represents the portion of surplus labor allocated to each of the  $k$  subsumed class processes within the social formation.

<sup>7</sup>Prior to the social distribution of surplus labor to primitive communist subsumed classes, representatives of these classes generally participated on the advisory councils of the appropriate Wolof chiefs. This had the effect of securing the representation of each class in the determination of its own needs as well as the needs of all other classes. Such representation, however, in no way produced any inherent tendency toward the mitigation of class conflict over the extraction and distribution of surplus labor within this social formation. Indeed, as I point out below, the very forms of participation in the planning process became the object of intense political conflicts, thereby affecting the outcomes of class conflicts as well.

<sup>8</sup>There was, of course, no necessity for the decline in agricultural productivity to set in motion class conflicts of the sort described below. Other contradictory changes that were partly fostered by this decline at different points in time included an increase in the size distribution of land plots to agricultural producing units, lineage segmentation, and territorial expansion. cf. Jeanne Audiger, "Les Ouolofs du Bas-Ferlo," Cahiers d'Outre-Mer, 14 (1961), pp. 162 ff.

<sup>9</sup>R. Jensen, "The Wolof Social Formation," pp. 16-100 passim.

<sup>10</sup>As mentioned above, traditional literature on the Wolof sees this society as highly inegalitarian. One of the ways it does this is to seize upon the endogamous marriage patterns of the Wolof as an empirical index of distinctly nonMarxist concepts such as stratification and caste. These theoretically and empirically developed concepts are then combined with other theoretically and empirically developed concepts such as privileged access to resources, goods, and positions of political office, thereby producing a knowledge of Wolof society in terms of an inegalitarian social hierarchy. For a fuller discussion of how the class theoretic approach to the Wolof used in this paper differs radically from the concepts of caste, stratification, and inequality used in traditional literature, see R. Jensen, "Wolof Social Formation," especially pp. 37-43.

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