

Race, Gender, Class Structure of the Global Elite and World Capitalism

by Kapila

Let's put one lie to rest for all time: the lie that men are oppressed, too, by sexism – the lie that there can be such thing as 'men liberation' groups. Oppression is something that one group of people commits against another group specifically because of a 'threatening' characteristic shared by the latter group – skin color or sex or age etc. The oppressors are indeed fucked up by being masters (racism hurts whites, sexual stereotypes are harmful to men) but those masters are not oppressed. Any master has the alternative of divesting himself of sexism or racism – the oppressed have no alternative – for they have no power-but to fight. In the long run, Women's Liberation will of course free men, but, in the short run, is going to cost men a lot of privilege, which no one gives up willingly or easily. Sexism is not the fault of women; kill your fathers, not your mothers.

– Robin Morgan

I look at their faces, I see reflection and masks that sometimes repeat my own in a strange cyclic pattern of power. Because in here, I am but a wage-slave, condemn sweating and hurting for eight bucks an hour, forced to smile and accept condescend behavior from the all-smiling, ever merry elite of the capital. Out there, they might call me a brother, an equal. We are not.

Gender

In this essay, when referring to sexism, the concept, unless noted, incorporates issues like women's rights, women's position in the bottom of the scale of the capitalist society, homophobia and male violence against women.

Sexism – male dominance – is the less addressed and consequentially the most widespread system of oppression in the world. The roots of sexism in societies cannot be easily traced and I will not even attempt to dwell in its history to avoid any fallacy. However, in this essay, we shall analyze sexism in its relationship with global capitalism and the struggle for liberation.

The revolution of the capitalists was an economic and political revolution – not social. The French Revolution, the fall of the Absolutists in Europe, the social changes that followed were design to enforce the rule of the bourgeoisie and strengthen the influence and power of this rising class against outside forces. Representative democracy, liberty and freedom and all the other promises that the revolution made to the people were designed according to which form would create a favorable atmosphere for the establishment of capitalism.

It is interesting then to notice that the revolutionary leaders were quick to crush the women's movement that was born during the revolution. The establishment of Capitalism could not allow the development of such a movement, especially since, in order to satisfy what those women were demanding, a distribution of power was necessary. One pamphlet distributed by those women during the revolution was called Request for Women to be Admitted to the Estates-General, and had the following quote: "Man is born egotist... he reduces us to managing his household affairs and to partaking of his rare favors when he feels so inclined." Nothing could be more true and it exemplifies the relationship between the elite and women – the relationship of power and the need of a structure that 'justifies' and

Gouges understood that – because the culture of sexism – a structure that "embraced" men and women as "equals" would do nothing to actually satisfy women's need and desire for liberation. It would be a token act. The need of self-organization for women came from the realization that in a social structure, every single relationship is one of power, and if men constructed the social structure, it would be inherently sexist. Only women could devise a structure that would really benefit women.

Sexism always had a condescending tone to its rhetoric, a view that men's subjugation of women was actually a necessity for the welfare of women. What is interesting is that this view is deeply ingrained in the social fabric of our society, and to ensure this, it is necessary that all men participate consciously or unconsciously in terrorizing women – much like the State, the function of manhood is to terrify women into accepting men's 'protection' for the price of their total submission. As Susan Brownmiller puts it, rape "is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear." Domestic violence, violence against women and rape are forms of intimidation and bullying through which, firstly, male dominance is imposed, and second, male 'protection' is made 'necessary.' Culture reinforces the dominant role of the male and its 'need' of violence.

The cult of violent behavior by men, against women and against each other, is more than just assertion of power against the recipient of violence. It is part of the engine that feeds the terrorizing of women to keep them submissive. Is the double use of the rod – it can beat you up or beat someone else to protect you. And, as Susan Griffin notes in the book *Rape: The All-American Crime*, "if the professional rapist is to be separated from the average dominant heterosexual [male], it may be mainly a quantitative difference." The level to which dominance and violence are exerted to the domination of women may vary in quantity, but not in substance.

The idea of our social fabric reinforcing gender roles of violence/passivity is

to create an atmosphere of fear so overwhelming that the mere presence of the male becomes threatening. Male attitudes – tone of voice, way of sitting, conversation, clothing – everything is designed in order to keep women guessing and consequentially, afraid. Why is it then surprising that our movement and our spaces are normally male dominated if why do not critically analyze the balance of power in the attitudes and presence of men and women inside the movement.

A woman in a room full of men, no matter how strong, outspoken and determined she is, and no matter how much the men are determined to treat her as an equal – is definitively in a position of less power and thus will not have the same weight in her voice. And with the institutions are not conscious of this power imbalance and do not work actively in reverting this situation – the maintenance of the status quo is inevitable.

The oppression of women by the working class males is a phenomenon that can be traced back to almost every single culture. To see the feminist struggle as separate and a "division of forces" of the working class is a ludicrous statement – a reflection of a poor understanding of the nature of oppression and the nature of the working class.

Indeed, to separate these three fights is to divide the working class, but to set priority in any of them and have the others as a tag along is to destroy any hopes of liberation that the working class might have.

The gender-based oppression serves a political purpose too. It serves the elites that women have no political power for the same reason that it serves the elites that people of color do not enjoy political power. There is, however, a difference between the gender elite and the elite of color. The male-dominated elite of color is, globally speaking, fairly stronger and definitively more aggressive in its pursuit of power than the gender-elite. The gender-elite lives in a much more subordinate position (to their male counterparts) than the elite of color – thus putting them in a closer position

with the women of the working class. An abused woman will identify with the plight of another one – independent of class or race; a queer person can identify with persecution and prejudice.

It is however, very important to notice that, empathy and de facto equality are a far cry from each other, and while the bourgeois women might have in common with the working-class women their subordinate position, they are enemies of class and therefore not allies.

Conclusion

The union of the working class in one fight will not happen without the acknowledgment of the levels of oppression inside the working class itself and the actual facing and destroying of the power imbalance in the movement that proposes to change the reality of oppression lived by the working class nowadays. A forced union of the working class, with disregard of the real issues of gender and race except in a superficial way is bound to fail.

A world revolution is necessary – a complete change of structure, a social, economic and political revolution that destroys class, gender and racial oppression.

I disagree with the idea that the class struggle should take priority over the race and gender struggle. This centralist and elitist view of disregarding the concerns of women and people of color have been seen thousands of times before, and we have been betrayed and stomped on enough to realize that those with power will not relinquish it, it must be taken from them. Only the oppressed can liberate the oppressed, and it is vital that we understand people of color, women, queers and all the other oppressed people inside the working class have not only this motto repeated in their heads like a mantra, but that they actually need to exercise that line inside the movement and draw their own conclusions of where they want to go and what needs to be done.

I too disagree with the idea that race and gender should be taken a priority over the class struggle – the simple idea that race and gender issues could be solved inside the capitalist system in any frame is simply ludicrous. Inside the capitalist system, we have no real say in the affairs of business and very little (in the most optimistic of the views) in the affairs of the government. A feminist or a race movement that did not have as priority to smash the capitalist system would fall sort on its legs – gender and race justice are impossible inside the capitalist system. The capitalist system is not only a system based on class dominance, but one too that maintain women and people of color inside that class and oppressed inside of it.

The means must be coherent with the ends. A movement that disregards any of the oppression-systems is bound to be limited and to create a society based on elitism. Unless the movement is committed to be one that will be addressing those three issues seriously and not sidestepping it with "we are all equal" condescending behavior, its range is going to be limited and it will turn off people that see themselves as not only working-class, but feel other pressing form of oppression crushing them.

It is time to reevaluate the movements approach on issues of race, gender and sexuality – it is good to see there is a movement of people already working in that direction. It is time for us to have a revolution in ourselves to change our perception on what a real liberation of the people means.

I see their faces – their smiling brown faces – and there is nothing of me in there. We shall build a different world.

The system of class and the European system of white dominance and colonialism fused to become one single straight brute force, a giant juggernaut that tramples over the working-class worldwide and its two legs are racism and sexism.

Let us be realistic.

While I work at Stanford University, serving food for the sons of the elite and the future elite, it is increasingly strange for me to realize that this elite sometimes has skin darker than mine, accent thicker than mine, visible cultural roots sometimes more apparent than mine. The strength in which this realization affects me cannot be easily described – it is an eye-opener and is a mind narrower, it is both an epiphany as it is of such an obscurity. This multicolored, multicultural bourgeoisie is always the enemy and sometimes the most unexpected and always undesired ally, which forces its "diversity" and its "oppressed situation" down my throat, in an obscene mockery of the plight of the workers of the world.

Let us be realistic.

Racism – white dominance – is not an American phenomenon. The "white race" supports a global system of racial inequality and prejudice where, worldwide, the white male has a hegemonic dominance. It is the new capitalist model, and it is the old. Imperialism is a stream that never dried because it is vital for the World Capitalism.

The World Elite – World Capitalism

The capitalist globalization process that everyday kills and destroys the lives of millions and millions of people around the globe serves the political, social and economic agenda of a very well structured global elite. This global elite is composed essentially of capitalist white males, power-hungry and with no desire whatsoever of relinquish or divide power. It is

paramount to their institutions of power to ensure the security of the 'invisibility' of the fact that the elite of the world is composed of one class, one race and one gender. This elite controls the levels of government and the levels of business. They are the church (the moral authority) and they are the creators of culture. They are the philosophers, the educators. They are too the most pernicious and dangerous group of people.

This elite has across the centuries used the divisions and social inequalities in society. In fact, they are the creators and the maintainers of this oppressive structure, and the sole beneficiaries of it. Through a structured and systemic misogynist, racist, homophobic, brutal capitalist protocol, they ensure the maintenance of their global empire and especially, the maintenance of their privilege domain over the majority of the people on earth.

It is, it always was, in the interest of that elite that we, the people, do not understand their affairs and could have no access to their domains. The institutions of race, class and gender are notably set to the advancement and comfort of these people and the exploitation of others.

This elite maintains nowadays a global system of exploitation, a structure that interlocks racism, sexism and "traditional" capitalist exploitation, which, for lack of a better word, I shall call World Capitalism.

Traditional Marxist and class struggle analysis have always had a very bad understanding of the race and gender – the concept that those two systems of exploitation were a "fruit" of capitalist society and would be eliminated when the class struggle is resolved fails to analytically criticize a culture based in racism and sexism – both of which came into the picture way before capitalism was around – and how the power structure of privilege does not have to be ratified by the police, the capitalists or even the State. Culture alone can be a catalyst of exploitation and submission, and the change and the complete revolution in the bourgeoisie social fabric cannot be done by simply taking the bourgeois out of the picture.

The understanding of the concept of privilege and how privilege imposes itself is necessary to understand why is that racism and sexism are so strong in our societies, why is that we to fight for the "right" of getting jobs (not goods jobs, just jobs in general), why it is two or three times scarier for us to walk at night, why is that, even when economically would make sense to alleviate the tension around race and gender – our society is adamant in keeping those tensions alive and burning.

This elite benefits threefold from the system of World Capitalism – the system devised, planned and structure around the white male bourgeois privilege, a system that connects the different levels of exploitation in one single machine.

Race

Different from others, I firmly believe that the structure of the World Capitalism could not do without racism and sexism. The reasons for the existence of this two can be slightly different but the end result is the same – the submission of the oppressed levels of the people to the elite of the capitalist society.

For the purpose of this analysis, racism and sexism shall be broadened to comprehend a multitude of other correlated subjects that are intrinsically

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tied to and share the same roots of those concepts. Racism, in this essay, refers (unless noted) to race dominance and privilege, national identity, nationalism, imperialism, colonialism and cultural repression. All those share a basic identity of a dominating ethnic/national group and a subordinated one.

To understand race and capitalism in a broader sense of the American concept of race, it is paramount to us to analyze race in its historical context.

Racism in Europe started before Capitalism. The feudal lords and the crown of Spain (absolutist and mercantilist) already obsessed over the concept of "limpieza de sangre," the purity of blood. This concept became strong in Spain in the 1400s, when the Spaniards fought against the Moors invaders. A national liberation struggle, if you like.

These concepts of race and the purity of blood, however, were deeply ingrained in European culture. Europe was a continent driven by conquest and tribal wars. The Romans regarded the tribes of Germans and Franks to be barbarians, brutes of low intelligence and destined to be submitted to the rule of the Roman *fasciae*.

Examples run back in history ad nauseam, in demonstrating a racist culture and a racist system as an integral part of the European culture. Why should we be shocked that they, when spreading their empire, spread too their racist system?

It is sometimes a fairly common misconception that other cultures had no racist background until the arrival of the Europeans. That is not true. The African tribal wars that to this day plight the people in that continent are a living proof that race (identity) has been an issue long before Capitalism.

What seems then to be the purpose of racism? In classical dialectical materialistic analysis, the constant struggle over power between forces of

society shapes the format of the future and the present of the said society. In the case of the disappearance of race and gender in our society, the only struggle to be faced would be the class war – and against a united working class, the capitalist are bound to lose. The need of a different struggle, the need of race and gender inequality for the capitalist is to engage the working class in different battles, to divide and conquer it.

Based on that, one could argue that, in the long run, racism has always been a structure designed to maintain the power of a certain class over another by creating a platform of "equality" of sorts, making them "brothers" of the oppressed class. This definition of racism carries more weight than we can initially imagine, but it fails to recognize that racism can outlive class oppression – and be still the source of power to a few that would dominate the hierarchy that from that would emerge.

Racism and Sexism are more culturally rooted in the world than Capitalism, more than the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Some cultures are feudal systems, other monarchic dictatorships (But I deny the Marxist evolutionism of societies in the sense of feudal-to-capitalist-to-communist-to-free-socialist as being an evolutionary process that is absolute to any society). Racism and Sexism are two paramount structures of domination with which the world dominant class maintains its power, and, without them, the structure of World Capitalism would collapse.

It is part of the strategy of the global elite to actively support and maintain white dominance worldwide.

The idea that white supremacy is an American phenomenon, that it is a national issue to be dealt nationally, and that racism in the U.S. have origins in American Capitalism is, in essence, a very American idea. At the same time, the complex aspects of race in the U.S. and the current debate on racism and classism might be the catalyst for the change in the perception of race and white dominance.

Global white dominance appears in two different aspects: privilege and de facto ruling.

The privilege of the white race is an absolute in the world's politics and economics; nowhere in the face of the world are people of European descent the oppressed minority (or majority) to an elite of color. The "white race" enjoys a privilege that does not falter by geographic means.

The white colonial/imperial power stretched itself through the process of capitalist globalization. The consolidation of global capitalism is not only rooted in racism but dependant on it. From Brazil to India to Mexico, the lighter skin carries a lighter burden and occupies the higher place.

The de facto ruling of a white elite that controls the global capitalist state enforces the privilege of the "white race." Transnational corporate forces are massively concentrated in the U.S. and Europe and so are the powerful nation-states. The "white race" enjoys a position of privilege in these two segments.

Token gains on race and gender are not so much to pacify race and gender struggles, as it is to foment further struggle. The idea is to give the exploited a little taste of what they could get, but to make it clear that would have to carry a certain burden in order to get it. Just like a mule that tasted a piece of the carrot once is bound to want to eat the whole carrot, and will work with all its strength to reach the unreachable carrot, and carry the weight of the cart in its back. But, apparently contradicting themselves, the capitalist class shows its contempt by race and gender equality by openly attacking any form of improvement in the situation of the oppressed genders and races. This makes the structure, in the eyes of people of color, a racist one, instead of a purely classist one. It is necessary to keep people thinking that a) gains can be achieved inside the structure and b) racism is everywhere (which is true, but it needs to be really thrown at people's faces all the times). The objective of this exercise is to demon-

strate both that power is in the side in the elite; and that the oppressed's situation can improve if only they submit enough so the elite do not seem them as a threat, but as something they can thoroughly control. At the same time, they need to keep the distance between those that have privilege, and those who do not.

It is interesting to see that the elite of color too benefits from the racist structure, and if racism were to simply be wiped out of the whole scenario, they would be in bad waters. It is of their interest that the white elite dominates – that would eagerly try to take over if they thought that they could do it without tearing the fabric of social control that the white capitalist elite maintains.

The racist structure of the system allows the elites of color to maintain their power and give them other possibilities. Imperialism has been used as a shield by every single dictator that had power threatened by the bigger shark, from Castro to Hussein to Milosevic. This dragged into direct or indirect the defense of their oppressive regime millions of people of color, working class people and anti-imperialist militants. This is not a justification to the U.S. actions, but an example of how the racist structure benefits not only the white elite and therefore supports directly or indirectly by the elites worldwide. It is a case of opportunism, where oppressors assume an "oppressed" mask to defend themselves against the taking of dominance against another.

A very concrete example of that is the role that Brazil plays now in the FTAA meetings. Lula and the PT (Brazilian Worker's Party) have been repeatedly trying to sell this image of a defiant Brazil, which is concerned with the imperialist role that the U.S. would play in South America in case the FTAA gets approved. What they are concerned about is that Brazil might lose its hegemonic dominance over the South American market; and then, if the U.S. does not open its market to Brazilian products, the Brazilian elite of landlords would lose power. They are not concerned with

the effects of the FTAA on labor, environment and the people. It is just very convenient that those issues show up so they can rally public support.

This pattern repeats itself around the globe. Besides, the majority of this "elite of color" are actually descendent of Europeans. Just look at South America, the diversity and richness of races and cultures in it – then look at the elite of South America, a very white and European class of bourgeois. The elites of Africa, while not European in skin, are mostly educated and raised in Europe or the U.S. The pattern repeats itself.

In maintaining the white supremacy, the elites of color try to escape guilt-free. In the fight for racial and gender equality, the working class remains bound. It is not that these fights are not important; if anything, alongside with class, they are the most important ones. It is only that, without the fall of the capitalist system as a whole, any fight becomes just filler.

Other parts of the elites of color take a more aggressive position in the defense of the interests of the world capitalist elite. The elites of Japan thrive over the complete subjugation to the American empire. Make no mistake: this is hardly a submissive elite – they were imperial forces for centuries and held an elitist racial position over their neighbors. However, in this game they play, the subordinate elite because is very much in their interest to keep the status quo, and the rest is inconsequential. Japan, defeated on WW II, is reborn as a global potency. But in submission to the white empire. Their pop culture, their dream, their means of production – everything about modern Japan cries – slave, but this condition of slave to the elite of world capitalism asserts its hegemony and dominance over other nations. More than that, it asserts the dominance of the Japanese elite.

The left worldwide have, for decades now, struggled with race and class and gender – which liberation should take precedence over another – without realizing that if any take precedence, the whole fight in itself is almost a moot point. Racism is not only a pillar of class oppression. It is one of the single bases of oppression itself.