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A CONTRADICTORY CLASS LOCATION? AN EXPLORATION OF THE POSITION AND ROLES OF THE AFRICAN CORPORATE MIDDLE CLASS IN SOUTH AFRICAN WORKPLACES AND COMMUNITIES

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Chapter 2
The Middle Class: A Contradictory Class Location for Black Managers

2.1 Introduction

The concept of the middle class has been characterised by debates concerning its sociological meaning within a discussion of social stratification or class. The aim of this chapter is not to review these debates, but to highlight imperative issues that should be considered in drawing analytical boundaries for African managers as the middle class in capitalist social relations. In particular, this chapter looks at the origin of the concept of the middle class so as to flag the source of confusion associated with it. It will further discuss how this concept has been utilised in South Africa and, in particular, in relation to the position of African managers within the class location of the middle class.

2.2 The middle class in social stratification

The conception of the middle class is a creation of modernity and became more prominent with the advancement of capitalism in Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Wahrman, 1995). In the literature of this period, the term is used to denote a class inserted between the aristocracy and “the masses” or “the commons” during the transition from feudalism to capitalism as a mode of production (Arnold, 1960).

The ideological inclination of this section of society had always been associated with the Enlightment ideals of the emancipation of humankind from the shackles of traditional life (Arnold,1960). Branded middle-class liberalism, this ideology

was felt in almost all spheres of life: in politics it was expressed through the proclamation of self-governance; in the social sphere there was free trade, unrestricted competition and the making of large industrial fortunes; and in religion, it gave rise to Protestantism and dissenting ideals (Arnold, 1960).

The centrality of this conception of the middle class during that time can be seen more clearly when one looks at how scholars interpreted the social causes of the French Revolution of 1789-1790.[2] In particular, one can identify two categories of interpretation of this event (Wahrman, 1995). The first interpretation asserts that the revolution occurred because of the lack of a strong middle class in France. The revolution "frenzy" found a fertile ground in France because there were two types of people – the landed aristocracy (including the monarchy) or the very highest, and the commoners or the very lowest (Wahrman, 1995). The latter group became highly vulnerable to the ideas of revolution and, thus, were easily mobilised against the monarchy or the very highest.

The second line of argument maintains that the revolution was carried out by the middle class itself (Warhman, 1995). Defined as "the monied men, the merchants, principal tradesmen and men of letters" (Warhman, 1995: 27), it was the expansion of this class in numbers, wealth and power that propelled the revolution. Given the political climate of the time – centred on the aristocracy and the commoners – further explanation suggests that the revolution occurred because of the suppressed spirit of capitalist ambition characteristic of the middle class. It is further postulated that the origins of the revolution can be traced from the fact that the middle class swelled beyond its proper proportions or because it was too negligible to be prevented.

The advancement of industrialisation or industrial capitalism increasingly rendered this conception of the middle class problematic, as it was accompanied

[2] The vast literature on this topic defies accurate classification. Nonetheless, there is a consensus that the French Revolution signifies a fundamental turning point that gave impetus to the capitalist system of the world (see Wahrman,1995).

by a rapid decline of the significance of the aristocracy as the upper class. It was this development that led one scholar to observe that:

> The commercial or monied interest has, in all nations of Europe, been less prejudiced, more liberal, and more intelligent, than the landed gentry. Their views are enlarged by a wider intercourse with mankind, and hence the important influence of commerce in liberalising the modern world (James Mackintosh, 1791, in Warhman, 1995: 24).

This conception became more problematic when used in other countries, where, for instance, bourgeois liberal ideas were readily acceptable (Blumin, 1991). In America, for instance,

> the term 'middle class' is a misnomer and is best understood as a somewhat inappropriate linguistic import from England, where a genuinely intermediate social group, located between a formally aristocratic upper class and a decidedly plebeian lower class, struggled on behalf of those bourgeois values that [in the USA] easily won acceptance that they became synonymous with the national culture (Blumin, 1991: 2).

The same observation can be made in other settler colonial countries. For instance, it would be inappropriate to assume that the bourgeois class is inserted between the aristocracy and "the commons" in Africa, since those who might be regarded as the aristocracy (i.e. the traditional authorities) were subjected to the interests of colonial rule (Mamdani, 1996). The emergence of the capitalist mode of production was facilitated by a need to meet the interests of the colonial empire, other than internal social needs in most African countries (Mamdani, 1996).

Nonetheless, modernist scholars were not deterred from taking up the challenge to explain the social stratification emerging with industrial capitalism. The most prominent and influential in this scholarship are Karl Marx and Max Weber.[3] For Marx (1949), modern society can be seen as having two primary classes – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Tracing the development of these classes from the notion of dialectic movement, Marx (1949) argues that the only difference

[3] According to Berman (1982), both Marx and Weber were appalled by the rapid social changes coming with modernity. Indeed, Berman argues that they both praised the bourgeoisie for realising what modern poets and intellectuals could only articulate. However, they were troubled that the modernisation project was accompanied by massive destruction of what had been established through tradition. Hence, Marx saw the alienation of the working class and Weber saw the emergence of an iron cage of bureaucracy (Berman, 1982).

between the two is that the bourgeoisie owns the means of production while the proletariat owns nothing but their labour power. This, argues Marx, is the basis of conflict and antagonism between these two classes.

Accordingly, the direction of all other classes in society depends on the pushes and pulls of these two principal classes. Hence, the concept of the middle class was equated with a class stratum referred to as the *petite-bourgeoisie* in Marxist literature (Marx, 1949), but more commonly referred to today as the "petty bourgeoisie". Inserted between the bourgeoisie and the working class, this class comprises small manufacturers, workshop owners, small landowners, shopkeepers, artisans and so forth (Marx, 1949).

This conception was challenged in the twentieth century by the growth of a new class in the form of professional, managerial and executive personnel (Nzimande, 1991). A debate ensued within Marxism regarding the boundaries of this class. While some argue that this class constitutes a segment of the working class, others see it as part of the bourgeoisie, since people belonging to this class are not exploited like the working class (Nzimande, 1991).

The emergence of this debate is particularly indicative of two key things about the Marxist conception of class. Firstly, it does not sufficiently account for other classes in society such as the aristocracy, the middle class and the unemployed.[4] In his discussion of the centrality of class struggle in the history of societies, Marx (1949) suggests that the bourgeoisie's victory over the aristocracy signalled the disappearance of the aristocracy. However, history has shown that this class remains visible, if not the core lubricant of most capitalist societies in the world. For instance, it was with the assistance of the traditional authorities that the growth of the capitalist mode of production was facilitated in most colonial countries (Mamdani, 1996).

[4] Although there is a belief that these classes are always in a state of flux, and that one way or the other individuals end up in one of the two classes, research indicates that this is not always the case. Indeed, there is a debate in South Africa about whether to classify self-employed people as part of the petty bourgeoisie or of the reserve army of the working class (Webster and Von Holdt, 2005).

Furthermore, the radical change in the structure of capitalism has a major effect on Marxist conception of class. According to Southall (2005: 180-1), most capitalist economies have long evolved from industrial economies to a stage of monopoly capitalism. This is a situation in which the means of production are predominantly owned by small group of large-scale companies which have shares in other companies. In his discussion of the possibilities for democratising South African capitalism, Southall (2005: 180) suggests that there is an emergence of shareholder capitalism in which "all those who commit their resources or labour to enterprise" have a saying in the running or decision making of the company. Although there are doubts about whether the latter can be distinguished from monopoly capitalism, the discussion of the evolution of capitalism makes it difficult to categorically identify who the capitalists or the bourgeoisie are in society.

Secondly, the conception of class location as dependent upon ownership and exploitative relationships propels us to classify people in terms of a political consciousness which is always in conflict with the next class. Therefore, all class-related concepts associated with Marxism trace their origin to an ideology which sees workers in terms of their duty to emancipate themselves from exploitative relationships of capitalism (Southall, 2005). However, there seems to be a consensus among neo-Marxists that the "new middle class" constitutes a contradictory class location (Nzimande, 1991; Wright, 1997).

The first-hand experience of the problem of the "new middle class" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries partly encouraged Weber to deviate from a Marxist conception of class and to come up with what may be regarded as an alternative approach to the study of social stratification. Although he agrees with Marx that economic position plays a major role in determining one's social stratification, Weber (in Gerth and Mills, 1948) argues that it is too simplistic to see social stratification only in economic terms. According to Weber social

stratification should be seen as divided into class, prestige or social status and party.

For Weber (in Gerth and Mills, 1948), class is not a community, since this presupposes that each class has its own interests to pursue. Indeed, Weber totally disagrees with Marx on the notion of class interests and false consciousness. Although it is a historical fact that people in the same class situation react in mass actions in order to alter their situations, argues Weber (in Gerth and Mills, 1948: 185), it is incorrect to assume that "the individual may be in error concerning his interests but that the 'class' is 'infallible' about its interests". He rather sees class as "a group of people that are found in the same class situation … and … represent possible and frequent bases for communal action" (Gerth and Mills, 1948: 181).

Weber further argues that class situation refers to a situation in which a group of people have a common component causal of their life chances. This component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income under the conditions of the commodity or labour market (Weber, in Gerth and Mills, 1948). In other words, class situation can be differentiated by two factors, that is, (a) according to kind of property exchangeable for returns, and (b) according to the kind of services that one can offer in the market.

For example, those who own property can belong to the class of renters or to the class of entrepreneurs since they have properties to offer in the commodity market. Similarly, those who have no property can belong to the middle class or the working class depending on their ability to offer services in the labour market. This situation exists as long as an individual's possessions have value in the commodity or labour market. In effect, this means that falling into the working-class situation does not necessarily mean that you are supposed to articulate a working-class consciousness. There are people in the working-class situation aspiring to be in the middle class or the capitalist class. Indeed, with the right

properties or qualifications, these people are able to move to the next level of occupations and thus another class position.

Weber (in Gerth and Mills, 1948: 187) also argues that status can be associated with style of life, as it is "determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of *honour*". Accordingly, while class is stratified according to the principles of accumulation of income, status is stratified according to the principles of a group's consumption of goods as represented by special styles of life. While it is closely related to one's class situation, honour is connected with any quality shared by a group of people. In other words, a member of a certain status group is expected to behave in a certain way to be fully accepted into the group. According to Weber (in Gerth and Mills, 1948), it is often in periods of technological and economic transformation that class situation is significant in determining one's social status. Although they do not always have to form a community, status groups have the potential to evolve to a caste having a strong belief in itself while disregarding individuals outside the group.

While classes are found in the economic order and status groups in the social order, parties can be seen in the political order (Weber, in Gerth and Mills, 1948). These, argues Weber, are structures which always strive for domination. It is important to note at this point that these do not only involve political parties, but can also include church groupings, trade unions, non-governmental organisations and so on. In his discussion of classes, status groups and parties, Weber shows that these are always tied to power.

He defines power as "the chance of a man or of a number of men to realise their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action" (Weber, in Gerth and Mills, 1948: 160). Although it is closely related to class and honour, power is not by any means dependent on any of these: "Quite generally, mere economic power, and especially naked money power, is by no means a recognised basis of social honour. Nor is power the only

basis of social honour" (Weber, in Gerth and Mills, 1948:160). Power is often guaranteed by legal order as an additional factor.

According to Weber, these three categorisations of social strata are autonomous, although they may be interdependent. For example, while one can belong to the upper class, it might not be possible for him/her to occupy a top social status. In spite of this, class may serve as a determinant of social status and power, or vice versa. Indeed, some people are given certain positions because of their power, while others gain their power in the workplace because they are given certain positions. In this situation, the legal order or the policies of an organisation guarantee or enhance one's power in relation to one's position.

In his analysis of the middle class in a capitalist class structure, Wright (1997) combines the Marxist and Weberian views of class stratification to come up with a more comprehensive understanding of the new middle class. It is well known that Marx and Weber are coming from different meta-theoretical assumptions, but these differences do not have any significant effect on their conceptualisation of class (Wright, 1997).

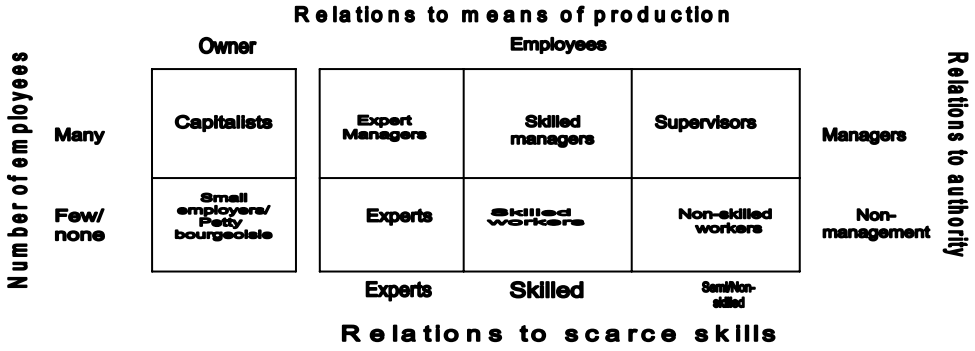
According to Wright (1997), to put Marx and Weber as opposites in an analysis of social stratification is misleading for several reasons. Firstly, both Marxist and Weberian analyses of class define class position in relation to other classes – that is, a given class location is defined by virtue of the social relations which relate it to other class locations. Secondly, both traditions define the concept of class in terms of the relationship between people and economically relevant materials or resources – Marx utilising the means of production and Weber utilising market capacities. Thirdly, both traditions see the relevance of class as partly operating through the ways in which these relations shape the material interests of actors – that is, one's materials and/or resources facilitate opportunities and impose constraints on what one can do to get what one wants in life.

For Wright (1997: 19), therefore, the middle class consists of "people who sell their labour power on a labour market, and yet do not seem part of the working class".[5] He argues that the middle class can be seen when two dimensions of dividing employees is used – that is, relationship to authority and possession of skill and expertise. The middle class can be separated from the working class by the fact their possession of skills and expertise gives them a higher position in the labour market (both internal and external) and that their relationship to authority within production is relatively higher. Although these two dimensions are related, they do not depend on each other. Indeed, it is possible to have authority without having skills or vice versa (see Table 2.1 below).

The most important aspect to be considered on authority is that managers and supervisors exercise authority or domination on behalf of the capitalists, while at the same time they are employees because they are controlled by the capitalists and thus exploited in the process. Furthermore, in addition to the skills/expertise, having authority suggests that managers enjoy a relatively higher level of independence from surveillance than other employees. In what he terms *privileged appropriation location within exploitative relations*, Wright (1997) argues that their position should stimulate meaningful participation to give effect to the goals of the organisation. The most important way of doing this on the part of companies is to generate a high level of commitment of the middle class within production. This is done by provision of high earnings linked to careers and promotions in the hierarchy of the corporate ladder (Wright, 1997).

[5] It is important to note at this stage that Wright (1997) looks strictly at class relationships in corporate class structures.

Table 2.1: Location of managers in the capitalist class structure[6]



In his diagram of the class structure of capitalist social relations, Wright (1997) puts the petty bourgeoisie within the layer of those who own the means of production and suggests that employees can be divided into two, namely, the middle class and the working class.

As shown in Table 2.1, the petty bourgeoisie are those who own the means of production with few or no employees. According to this table, those in managerial/supervisory positions can be seen in three categories – expert managers, skilled managers and supervisors.

The category of expert managers is occupied by the top management in most big companies. According to Van Aardt (2002), these are people who are in control of an organisation through establishment of goals, strategies and policies. The category of skilled management is occupied by people in middle and senior management. These are people who oversee the implementation of the goals, strategies and policies of the organisation. This is followed by supervisors, who supervise and co-ordinate the task completion of operating employees. Nonetheless, it is possible to find a management position that can be classified between the skilled management and the supervisory class location.

A row for non-management employees includes experts. Often called "consultants", these are people who "exercise delegated authority or specialised

[6] This table is adapted from Eric Olin Wright (1997) for the purpose of this report. Class categories represented here should be regarded as schematic representations, as occupational categories depend much on the nature and structure of a particular organisation.

knowledge and expertise in the interests of their employing organisation" (Goldhorpe and Erikson, 1993, quoted in Wright, 1997: 25). Furthermore, a column for non-skilled personnel – supervisors and non-skilled workers – is not meant to undermine the acquisition of tacit skills, but to classify employees in terms of formal acquisition of scarce skills within the labour market.

Table 2.1 suggests that there are different levels of a contradictory class location in capitalist class relations (Wright, 1997). Indeed, it may be argued that the higher one's occupational category is in the corporate hierarchy, the closer one becomes to the category of capitalists. Nonetheless, this may be different when one considers other social dimensions. According to Peck (1996), the labour market functions in terms of achieved and ascribed status. The former means the possession of certain qualifications and skills which, in return, give one a related class and social position in the labour market. Ascribed status refers to the fact that characteristics such as race, gender, ethnicity and so forth give one certain class, status and power in the labour market.

Therefore, the major weakness of Wright's (1997) conception lies in the fact that it relies to a greater extent on achieved status as a major determinant of social stratification than on ascribed status. However, this conception's weakness should be seen as building on the omissions of both Marx and Weber. Indeed, as it is the case with many modernist thinkers, there is little, if any, attention to the significance of ascribed status (or discrimination) in the labour market. It is not clear how class-related theoretical tools would help to unpack the situation in colonial countries (Appiah, 1992; Gilroy, 1996; Winant, 2001).

Nevertheless, several studies in South Africa have tried to expand the notion of a contradictory class location to include extra-market forces operational in the labour market. For instance, this notion was used by Nzimande (1991) to study the position and role of black managers in the struggle against the apartheid regime. Buhlungu (2006) uses this notion to look at the position of white trade unionists in black-dominated trade unions during the apartheid era.

This shows us the instrumentality of the notion of a contradictory class location in looking at relations within class position. Nonetheless, it is shown here that the concept of the middle class originates from the context of a class structure based on societies in transition from feudalist to capitalist mode of production. The advance of the capitalist mode of production gave effect to a conception that sees the bourgeoisie as the upper class and thus the middle class as the petty bourgeoisie. The growth of "the new middle class" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the emergence of a debate about social stratification of the middle class within Marxist literature. Partly because of this, Max Weber developed what might be regarded as an alternative view of social stratification.

In an attempt to reconcile the Marxist and Weberian views, Eric Olin Wright maintains that industrial capitalist social relations are characterised by two principal classes; business owners and employees. He uses Max Weber's conception to give the middle class a special category, which becomes more conspicuous when one explores their power and status in the labour market. Wright's conception is the one adopted in this study, since it gives us better tools to study the middle class in the relations of production. Furthermore, it is used in this study because it has been used by several scholars to look at racial relations in South African society.

Hence, it is argued that managers occupy a contradictory class location in society. Indeed, a Weberian conception of social stratification as based on class, status and power is well equipped to understand the social relations of the black middle class as embodied in a post-colonial society. This is because the apartheid system stripped black people not only of their economic power, but also their authority and social status in the workplace and society at large (Nzimande, 1991; Luhabe, 2002; Webster and Von Holdt, 2005).

The next section traces the origin of the concept of the middle class in South Africa. This culminates in the discussion of a case of African managers as part and parcel of the black middle class in post-apartheid South Africa.

2.3 The middle class and transition in South Africa

South African society has been based on ethnic and racial segregation since its inception in the seventeenth century (Terreblanche, 2002). This ethnic and racial segregation can be well seen when one looks at the succession of three groups of the middle class in South Africa – that is, the English-speaking middle class, the Afrikaner middle class and the black middle class. According to Terreblanche (2005), the rise of the middle class in South Africa can be traced to the emergence of industrial capitalism in the late nineteenth century (see Figure 2.1).

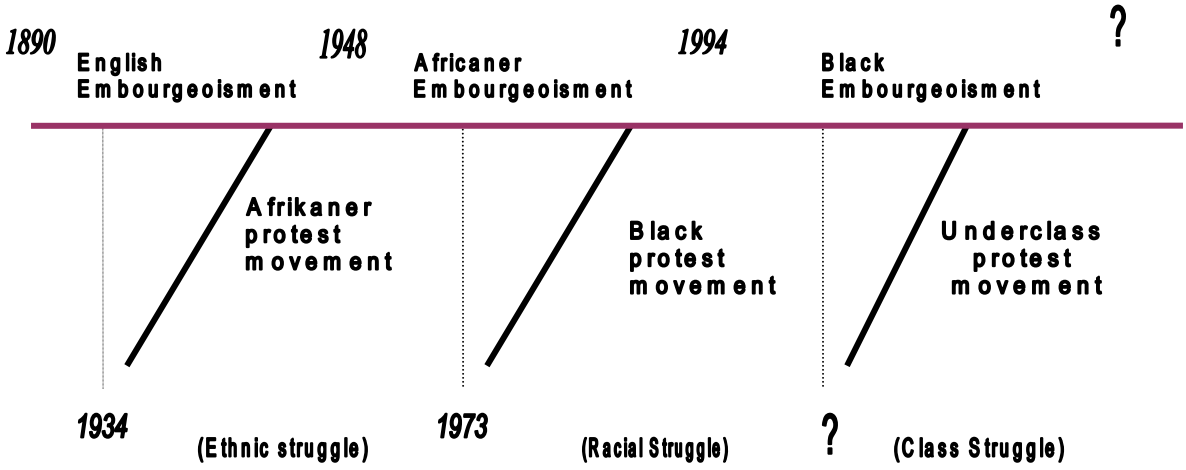


Figure 2.1: The history of the middle class in South Africa[7]

As Figure 2.1 shows, the growth of a specific ethnic or racial middle class is tied to three phases of embourgeoisment in the history of South Africa – (English embourgeoisment, Afrikaner embourgeoisment and black embourgeoisment. The middle class was the preserve of English-speaking whites in South Africa from the late nineteenth century until 1948. Although there was co-option of small elites of Afrikaners, the growth of the English-speaking middle class came as a

[7] This figure is adapted from Sampie Terreblanche's speech presented at the BMF conference (12 October 2005), and is used with the permission of the author.

result of the systematic oppression of black people and the indifference of English-speaking whites towards the majority of poor white Afrikaners (Terreblanche, 2002). This served to evoke protest movements by Afrikaners against English dominance, starting in the early 1930s. Known as Afrikaner nationalism, this movement was fuelled in the 1940s by a perceived threat to the existence of Afrikaners because of the advancement of black people into higher occupational positions in the South African economy (Nzimande, 1991).

Afrikaner nationalism resulted in the adoption of the apartheid regime after the National Party came to power in 1948. The apartheid regime gave momentum to the growth of the Afrikaner middle class in the country. Tied to the notion of white supremacy, the apartheid system hindered the growth (or even the emergence) of the black middle class through three elements – job reservation or the colour bar, influx control and Bantu Education (Nzimande, 1991). Although these were more intensive during the apartheid regime, they had their roots during the phase of the English embourgeoisment in the early twentieth century. For instance, the seeds of segregation and influx control were first sown in the Natives Land Act of 1913 (Wardon, 1994).

Firstly, by intensifying job reservation in the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1956, the apartheid government ensured that black people were not allowed to occupy skilled and managerial jobs in the workplace (Nzimande, 1991). Secondly, through the Native (Urban Areas) Amendment Act of 1955, the apartheid government created influx control, meant to prevent black people from entering certain urban areas without permission from government. In effect, this made it difficult for Africans to get employment in the cities, let alone skilled or supervisory positions in workplaces. Thirdly, the Bantu Education Act of 1953 was enacted to prepare Africans for employment other than supervisory and managerial positions or positions with authority in the workplace.

These attempts to deliberately block the advancement of black people changed in the early 1970s because of a perceived need to facilitate black advancement in the

country (Nzimande, 1991; Webster, 1985; Crankshaw, 1994). Three factors that influenced this move can be identified. Firstly, there was a realisation that the apartheid ideology of white supremacy intensified the skills shortage experienced during the heyday of monopoly capitalism in the 1960s (Nzimande, 1991). By employing black people in skilled positions, capital hoped to cheapen labour costs as a measure to alleviate the effects of economic crisis in the 1970s. Secondly, there was a need to train black managers in order to be able to handle the political environment in the aftermath of the 1973 Durban strikes. Thirdly, the discourse of black advancement was recognised by most South African companies because of the Sullivan Code's aims to facilitate equal opportunities for everyone in the workplace (Nzimande, 1991; Luhabe, 2002). Founded by Reverend Leon Sullivan of General Motors, the Sullivan Code stipulated that all United States of America's (USA) multinational companies implement Equal Employment Opportunities programmes to facilitate the mobility of black people in recognition of human rights (Nzimande, 1991; Luhabe, 2001).

Despite the black advancement discourse in the 1970s and 1980s, there was little growth of the black middle class in the country until 1994. As Figure 2.1 shows, the period from 1994 can be regarded as black embourgeoisment. Indeed, this was a period in which the black middle class was being encouraged through the Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment strategy (Southall, 2005).

In an attempt to capture the behavioural pattern of a *nouveau niche* middle class starting from the English middle class, Terreblanche (2005: 6) argues that:

> As soon as a population group's middle class status becomes consolidated, the majority of them are inclined to forget about the 'lucky break' and the 'extra-economic' factors that propelled them (or their parents) into the middle class. Then they are inclined to think that their progress and wealth is the result of their own efforts and virtues. They claim to be self-made men (and women). At this point, a new middle class tends towards greediness. This is when they are inclined towards arrogance, thinking that they are smarter and endowed with more talents than the less fortunate. They start leaning towards short-termism and short-sightedness by being reluctant to extend the same 'artificial' opportunities - that enabled them (or their parents) to climb the bourgeois ladder - to the poor.

One can deduce a number of lessons about the middle class in South Africa from this observation. Firstly, the middle class have a tendency to be conservative in their behaviour. This can be seen by their tendency to attribute their achievements to personal endowments and by their indifference to the advancement of the poor. Because of the history of segregation in South Africa, the poor have always been another group other than that of the beneficiary. Indeed, the emergence of a group's middle class is accompanied by that group's improvement in social status and power. While this is ensured by government policies, there is evidence suggesting that the middle class plays a major role in facilitating the development of the members of their ethnic and racial groups (Terreblanche, 2002).

Secondly, the growth of the middle class is facilitated by deliberate political mechanisms beside formal qualifications. For instance, the apartheid regime facilitated the growth of the Afrikaner middle class, and affirmative action (AA) and BBBEE facilitates the growth of the black middle class. It is important to note that these mechanisms do not systematically exclude the racial groups that previously enjoyed the benefits of middle-class status (Terreblanche, 2005). Indeed, the apartheid system did not exclude English-speaking whites from its benefits. Similarly, a strong case can be made that BBBEE does not exclude white people from the benefits of the country's economy. This provides a solid basis for a view that sees class as becoming more significant for social stratification and protests than ethnic and racial variables (Crankshaw, 1994).

Nonetheless, this conception of the middle class has its limitations as well. Firstly, it tells us little about the behaviour of the black middle class in the country. This is precisely because of the fact that South Africa is a democratic country in which oppression of one group by another is not allowed (see, for instance, the Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment Act of 2003 (RSA, 2004). Indeed, the question that arises from this is what is the position and role of the black middle class in a democratic South Africa?

Perhaps one can draw from the literature of other colonial countries in order to identify a pattern of the position and role of this class in post-liberation regimes. The most influential scholar in discussing this matter is Frantz Fanon. Commenting on the developments of post-colonial situation in Algeria, Fanon (1968) argues that there is little change in colonial countries after independence. Instead, argues Fanon, there is a tendency for the development of layers of the black middle classes which pursue the interests of the *national bourgeoisie* at the expense of the peasants and the working class. However, the emerging black middle class remains in a stagnant position not only because of the inferiority complex internalised during the colonial period, but also because they are concerned more with their immediate interests of being fully incorporated into their new class than seeing a need to facilitate change in the country.[8]

In what one may regard as the corroboration of Frantz Fanon's observations about post-colonial countries, there is evidence that these policies do not achieve the goals they purport to achieve. For example, in an analysis of the impact of these policies, the Kenyan government concluded that "although after more than two decades of independence considerable progress has been made in Kenyanisation of the economy … most (black) *(sic)* Kenyans are still unable to participate in the ownership and control of large-scale industrial and commercial enterprises" (Himbara, 1994: xiii).

In the South African context, there are observations that the benefits of these policies are concentrated in the hands of rapidly growing black middle class groups who are well connected to the ruling African National Congress (ANC) (Southall, 2003). Meanwhile, argues Southall (2003), a widening gap of inequality of incomes characterises South African society today. In an observation similar to the one made by Fanon (1968), Southall (2003) terms the current period in South Africa the "Embourgeoisment of the National Democratic Revolution". In other words, although they claim to benefit all the previously oppressed groups, black empowerment and affirmative action policies benefit the few

[8] See also Onyiani (2000), for current debates about African countries' independence.

individuals who are well-positioned to take up the opportunities in South Africa, while the poor are becoming poorer. Furthermore, Southall (2005) argues that we need to be cautious in concluding that the BBBEE strategy serves to legitimise capitalism and entrepreneurship for the majority of South Africans.

Although this discussion provides a framework to look at the developments in post-independent countries, it says little to answer questions about South Africa, since it is the latest in the camp of democratisation. Furthermore, South Africa is different from other colonial countries in Africa in that it is regarded as having had internal colonialism or colonisation of a special type (CST) (Wolpe, 1988). Originating from the decolonisation of South Africa after the passage of the South Africa Act of 1909 by Britain, the CST theory was meant to interweave both liberal and Marxist views regarding the relationship between the apartheid state and capitalism so as to provide necessary tools for the development of a new conception of the relationship between race and class in South Africa (Wolpe, 1988; Posel, Hyslop and Nieftagodien, 2001).

In particular, argues Wolpe (1988: 29), this view "defines the co-existence and articulation of a colonial relation between black and white people and a development of capitalist economy within the confines of a single national state". According to this view, the fact that there were two relatively different societies - in which non-white South Africa was the colony of white South Africa – gave the country different dynamics and dimensions compared to other colonial countries (Wolpe, 1988).

This conception was used by liberal scholars in the 1950s to justify the detachment of capitalism from the apartheid project. This was because of the intensification of racial segregation in the 1950s after decades of industrial advancement in South Africa. Thus, apartheid was regarded as a response to the equal allocation of resources to different people regardless of racial status by the markets (Wolpe, 1988). For neo-Marxists, however, it was the inter-penetration of

racial oppression and capitalist exploitation that meant that the struggle against the apartheid regime took both a racial and a class form (Wolpe, 1988).

In effect, the growth of the black middle class in South Africa may represent differences in terms of behavioural trends. As the above discussion shows, this is because (a) the growth of this class happened in a democratic context, and (b) South African colonisation was different from that in other African countries. Although similar trends have been identified by scholars such as Southall, there is lack of research looking at the experiences of this class to explain their ability to facilitate deracialisation of the society.

Although it helps to illuminate the history and the debates around the concept of the middle class in South Africa, the second weakness of the conceptualisation presented above is that it does not help us to delineate the unit of analysis for this report. A closer look at this conception shows that it is based on a view of the middle class as being inserted between the aristocracy and the masses or the working class. As has been shown above, it is difficult to use the conception of the middle class in its original form in most colonial countries, since there is evidence to suggest that there is little significance of the aristocracy in colonial countries (see Section 2.2)

Perhaps a better view of the middle class in South Africa can be represented when one considers the debate about the status of the middle class under the apartheid regime. To further their argument about the interdependence of apartheid and capitalism, neo-Marxists argue that the system produced a class structure that represented the superiority of white people over black people within classes. Although the class structure of these two racial categories were not monolithic, the racial divisions served to create differences within what might otherwise be regarded as coherent classes defined in terms of the relations of production (Wolpe, 1988). Because of the asymmetrical nature of the class structure

underpinned by these racial divisions,[9] black classes that emerged were inferior to the corresponding white classes on whatever criteria of measurement were employed – in terms of class, power or *prestige*.

Nowhere was this more conspicuous than within the South African middle class or "petty bourgeoisie". According to Slovo (1976, quoted in Wolpe, 1988), "In the case of the black middle class strata … class mobility cannot proceed beyond a certain point; and, again, this point is defined in race rather than in economic terms". Although he agrees with the inferiority of black classes during the apartheid era, Crankshaw (1994) shows that there was an unperturbed growth of the black middle class into routine white-collar jobs in the commerce and financial sectors and in the semi-professional jobs of nursing and teaching in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

Indeed, while this advancement allowed some groups within the black communities to enjoy the occupational benefits (such as wages) of the middle class, it was offset not only by the lack of recognition of their political and social status both in the workplace and in communities (Luhabe, 2002), but also by growing unemployment in their communities (Crankshaw, 1994). In other words, although their wages were dramatically increased, the family income did not allow them the status of the middle class in the social class structure. While this position meant that the black middle class enjoyed limited benefits, it gave them reasons to play a progressive role in the struggle against apartheid (Nzimande, 1991).

A better view is the one given by Nzimande in his discussion of the black middle class under the apartheid regime. According to Nzimande (1991), the African middle class in South Africa was historically divided into four strands – the

[9] According to Wolpe (1988: 30), "[white society comprised] all classes of the advanced capitalist society – an economically powerful capitalist class, with both monopoly and competitive capitalist fractions, a large class of small producers and businessmen, a large middle stratum of clerical, administrative, white collar and tertiary sector employees, as well as a skilled manual workforce. [Meanwhile], among black people, there was virtually no capitalist class, few skilled workers, and a small and relatively under-developed petite bourgeoisie."

bureaucratic petty bourgeoisie (BPB), the trading petty bourgeoisie (TPB), the civil petty bourgeoisie (CPB), and the corporate petty bourgeoisie (COPB).

The bureaucratic petty bourgeoisie comprised the rural, bantustan and urban township-based fractions employed by government to oversee the running of government in different areas. This includes heads of districts, chiefs and headmen, and councillors in townships. This stratum was fully co-opted and proved functional in providing cheap labour during the heyday of monopoly capital in the 1960s. It was not until the 1980s that this stratum became militant against the apartheid regime. This was marked by the formation in 1987 of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Contralesa) as an organisation representing the chieftaincy in the struggle against apartheid (Nzimande, 1991).

The second strand, the trading petty bourgeoisie, consisted of traders, both in the Bantustans and in urban areas, and the autonomous TPB, which has been connected to the National Federated Chambers of Commerce (NAFCOC) (Southall, 2003). Although it had links with the BPB, this stratum was generally opposed to apartheid (Southall, 2003), largely because of the perception that the intervention of the apartheid state in the markets served to block business opportunities for this stratum.

Thirdly, the civil petty bourgeoisie consisted of civil servants and state employees, mainly nurses, teachers, clerks and so forth. This section was highly active in the struggle against apartheid (Southall, 2003).

Lastly, there is the corporate petty bourgeoise, which consists of the African managers in corporate South Africa. While it supported capital, this stratum was frustrated by limited opportunities underpinned by the ideology of white supremacy in the workplace (Southall, 2003). Hence, this stratum had no choice but to identify with the working class, both in the workplace and in communities. It was the Marxist discourses engulfed in the struggle that rendered their position

as a contradictory class location in both the workplace and their communities. It is this strand of the middle class which is the concern of this study.

However, the single most important weakness of this categorisation is that it is much influenced by the Marxist approach to class stratification at the expense of the Weberian conception. As is shown above, this view runs the risk of seeing class position in terms of ideological consciousness meant for the emancipation of the working class from the shackles of capitalist exploitative relationships.

In view of the discussion presented above, this study proposes that African managers in the corporate world be seen as an African corporate middle class. As Wright (1997) argues, the defining element of the petty bourgeoisie is ownership of the means of production rather than their ideological inclination. While this does not downplay the importance of the ideological orientation of the corporate middle class, it is meant to appreciate the position of this stratum of the middle class without unnecessarily pushing them into the camp of the bourgeoisie.

In his discussion of the concept of class formation, Wright (1997) argues that collective class solidarity can range from strong to weak solidarities. Indeed, this allows us the flexibility to categorise the middle class without the baggage of their ideological inclination as being towards either the bourgeoisie or the working class. Hence, it is maintained that studying the middle class using a Weberian lens of social stratification as being based on class, status and power gives us sufficient tools to look at the position of this class.

The discussion of the evolution of the concept of the middle class and how it is used in South Africa shows that the understanding of the corporate middle class in a capitalist class structure can be well understood through a combination of Marxist and Weberian conceptions of class. The interrogation of the concept of the African petty bourgeoisie in South Africa results in the adoption of the concept of the African corporate middle class as a way of looking at African managers in South Africa. Given the fact that the dramatic growth of this class in

the country was preceded by suppression under colonial and apartheid regimes, this lays a sufficient foundation to interrogate the significance of its growth in South African society.

In view of this, this research attempts to answer the following research questions:

- Can the position of the African corporate middle class be described as a contradictory class location, and do they experience their position as such?
- Does the African corporate middle class play a transformatory role in their workplaces and communities?
- Is the role of the African corporate middle class related to their structural contradictory class location?