

AGAINST THE MANUFACTURE OF WASHING MACHINES:
MAOIST MATERIALIST DIALECTICS, POSTSTRUCTURALIST
FEMINISM AND THE LIBERATION FROM METAPHYSICS

by

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DEDICATION

For my parents. More is due to them than I can possibly give.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation attempts to contribute to the literature on the transformation of gender relations and patriarchy by creating a discursive nexus between two seemingly incompatible paradigms: materialist dialectics as interpreted by Mao Tsetung and poststructuralist feminism. Despite the important differences between the two traditions, it argues that they have important ontological similarities. This creates the potential for a fecund cross-fertilization, a potential which has been largely unrecognized by scholars. This dissertation argues that Mao's ontology of ceaseless transformation arising from universal and concrete contradictions provides an essential foundation for any progressive praxis of social transformation. It examines aspects of how the maoist approach to materialist dialectics was put into practice in revolutionary China, along with a summary of some of the recent contributions to this paradigm by Bob Avakian. It examines the historical experience of transforming patriarchal relations and ideas under Mao and argues that, though there were real shortcomings, the historical experience of revolutionary China remains an essential foundation and contribution to transforming patriarchal gender relations and identities. Focusing on the writings of Judith Butler, it discusses the contributions of post-structuralist feminist, particularly its thorough critique of essentialism and the deconstruction of the categories and conceptual foundations of feminism. Butler's emphasis on the cultural production of gender and sex, along with the need to destabilize the regulatory functions and frameworks which police them, are invaluable in developing the ability of maoist materialist dialectics to transform gender relations. The dissertation includes a

discussion of sexuality, violence and democracy as way of pointing towards a thoroughly materialist and dialectical method and approach which can move beyond the anchors of metaphysics while embracing thinking from a wide spectrum, including Queer theory. The dissertation concludes with a brief discussion on how such abstract theoretical concerns are relevant to current political realities.

PROLEGOMENA: THREE TUCSON VIGNETTES

One

Nancy came to Tucson as a young runaway in the early 1980s, fleeing a sexually abusive father who may well have adopted her with the purpose of molesting her. She arrived broke, with little education, little faith in people and an increasingly violent boyfriend. Stripping was the virtually the only legal work available for her, so she began performing at the Whistle Stop. The physical abuse at the hands of her boyfriend escalated to include such things as leaving her tied to a bed for days until she was forced to relieve herself where she lay. Finally, he drove her into the desert, put a gun to her head and said, “you’re going to die now, bitch.” But the gun misfired and she escaped. When he tracked her down some weeks later, she was prepared and shot him in the leg. She was arrested, and if she had not had the presence of mind to hide the gun, she would have been tried for attempted murder. Following the dissolution of a later marriage to a customer of the Whistle Stop, there were years of poverty, desperation, abuse and tragedy - periods of homelessness, a drug-dealer boyfriend whose form of control was to get her addicted to methamphetamines (which she never got over), a subsequent boyfriend who never missed an opportunity to emotionally abuse her for her addiction, the daily humiliations visited upon those who look too poor to be seen in public, the constant grind just to survive - more than could be recounted in a paragraph. Speaking of a suicide attempt with pills, she said, “I don’t know if I really wanted to die – I just wanted to sleep for a while, so maybe I could go one day without someone fucking with me.”

Two

Yemi was one of new generation of Indonesian activists, and visited Tucson in 2000 as part of national tour to raise awareness of the abuses and exploitation by US imperialism in her country. Her sister, a union organizer, had just recently been raped and murdered by company thugs – at a time when US State Department officials encourage US corporations to move their factories to Jakarta, saying with a smirk, “believe me, you don’t have to worry about unions.” Some three decades earlier, in October of 1965, Indonesian society was devastated by a US sponsored and organized coup, an horrific explosion of fascistic violence which killed a million people in a matter of months. Gerwani, the third largest women’s organization in the world, was destroyed with every thing else, and its members were thoroughly demonized, as outlined by the CIA script for the coup, as whores and man-hating torturers. Today, the grand-daughters of these women work in sweatshops where US corporations sub-contract out some of their worst work. In 1999, Yemi went on a spelunking expedition on Mt. Klotok with friends. They rappelled down into a cave, descending many meters. Reaching the bottom, they shined their lamps into the darkness – and realized they were standing not on the cave floor but on a vast pile of human bones, many meters high, which reached beyond the light of their lamps. In 1965, witnesses nearby reported convoys of army trucks packed with prisoners heading up the mountain: “We didn’t know what they did with them there. All we knew is that they went up full and they came back empty.”

Three

Lucrecia wished to create a better quality of life for her children, so she made the difficult decision to make the trip to El Norte. Operation Gatekeeper has forced immigrants to

cross the border in the most dangerous areas of the the deserts and mountains of the Southwest. No one knows how exactly many die in the Sonora, though it is at least hundreds each year. The tremendous desiccating heat soon reduces human bodies to bones, which are then eaten for their calcium by cows. These are mainly owned by Anglo ranchers, some of whom organize vigilante squads to hunt down "illegal" human beings and thus defend "their" country. On June 21, 2005, Lucrecia died in the arms of her son after literally being burned alive in the scorching summer heat of southern Arizona. Her son, forced to leave his mother behind, continued on alone until he was eventually apprehended by the United States Border Patrol. The Border Patrol made little effort to find his mother, and he was deported back to Nogales, Sonora. Her father Cesario was able to get a visa to come to the U.S. to search for her remains, aided by humanitarian volunteers from Tucson. After more than a week in the desert, her body was found. During the search, the remains of three other individuals were found. They remained unidentified, with their loved ones denied even the comfort of knowing their fate. Such bodies are buried in unmarked graves in a barren, rubble strewn area in Tucson, a short distance from beautiful graves carefully tended by some who survived the journey through the desert. At a memorial service a week after her death, Cesario said through a translator, "Excuse me for the pain in my soul, but I had to leave my home to come search for my daughter who died in the desert. I want to disappear."¹

These vignettes, which could be augmented endlessly, might be critiqued by Judith Butler, among others, as "litanies of victimization" (her characterization of the work of Dworkin and MacKinnon). I do not agree with this accusation. Though it would be a

1. I would like to thank Jessica Lee of Arizona IndyMedia for the background on this vignette.

mistake to remain at the level of detailing misery, grasping the human dimensions of the existing realities of patriarchy and imperialism is an essential starting point for any future work which attempts to theorize about their transformation. And as Mao would say, it is not enough to simply grasp, one needs to grasp *firmly*. To paraphrase from Bertolt Brecht's last poem, when one sees the world as it actually is, one's heart should be torn to shreds. Of course, I do not presume that any reader would need to be reminded of such realities. Given the theoretical nature of this dissertation, I merely wish to be a somewhat emphatic as to the basis for the following loquacious and often abstract discussion.

Further, though this dissertation makes clear that I am theoretically more in sync with Butler than with feminists such as Dworkin and MacKinnon, there is much I share with them. Their anger and intolerance of the realities of male supremacy (not to reduce their contributions to that) is something I welcome and wish there was more of. There is, I feel, a common assumption that cool indifference is the correct approach to scholarly work. I feel differently. In this regard, I take inspiration from the following quote from Pablo Picasso:

What do you think an artist is? An imbecile who has only eyes, if he is a painter, or ears if he is a musician, or a lyre in every chamber of his heart if he is a poet, or even, if he is a boxer, just his muscles? Far from it: at the same time, he is also a political being, constantly aware of the heartbreaking, passionate, or delightful things that happen in the world, shaping himself completely in their image. How could it be possible to feel no interest in other people, and with a cool indifference to detach yourself from the very life which they bring to you so abundantly? No, painting is not done to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of war.²

2. Attributed to Picasso in a pamphlet by the Artist's Network of Refuse & Resist.

CHAPTER ONE: UNITY, STRUGGLE, UNITY

Of course it was necessary to give women legal equality to begin with. But from there everything remains to be done. The thought, culture and customs which brought China to where we found it must disappear, and the thought, customs and culture of proletarian China, which does not yet exist, must appear. The Chinese woman does not yet exist either, among the masses; but she is beginning to want to exist. And then to liberate women is not to manufacture washing machines.

Mao (quoted in Malraux 1968, 373-4)

Introduction

This dissertation argues that maoist materialist dialectics (MMD)³, represents not only a viable project but an essential foundation for any progressive praxis for social transformation. This position runs sharply counter to the prevailing assessment. Mao, we are told, was the creator of a “neo-Stalin cult” (Kerry 1977, 72) who turned people into “obedient cogs in the Party-state apparatus” (Delyusin 68). He was responsible for the Great Leap Forward, “one of the greatest tragedies of the twentieth century,” (Teiwes 1999, 6) and the Cultural Revolution, “a decade of savagery and chaos ... a frenzy of mass violence so fanatical as to be scarcely credible” (Poole 1982, 19). Mao’s “simple dogmatic ideas [had] no rational basis” and only had appeal to “hotheads” (Marchant 1973, 48-9). He was “an exploitive tyrant ... drunk with power” who wrote “sophomoric essays” (Dunayevskaya 1977, 146), which had “near-zero philosophical value” (Mouffe and Laclau, 2001 64). In practice, he created “one of the most extraordinary examples of personal theocracy and mass ‘thought control’ in history” (Heilbroner 1980, 142), a country “frozen with fear, sunk into misery, [which] could hardly breathe under the cruel

3. In this dissertation, I also use the terms revolutionary communism and marxism-leninism-maoism (MLM). These terms should be understood to be interchangeable.

and cretinous tyranny of the Maoist Gang” (Leys 1983, 199). To top it off, Mao was a “nihilist with a literary flair” (Wei-Ming 1997, 153) and a writer of “apocalyptic” poetry (Terril 1999, 436).

This ubiquitous condemnation appears all the more compelling since the quotations above come from sources ranging from radicals and liberals to die-hard anti-communists. Yet, it is my opinion that, while not ignoring its limitations, failures and excesses, the praxis developed by Mao (and further developed by others) provides crucial analytical and theoretical tools, as well as organizational and practical forms, for the exposure and transformation of systemic oppressions. Thoroughly refuting the hegemonic depiction and justifying this counter-assessment is beyond the scope of this dissertation, though obviously this is a part of the project.⁴

On this basis, this dissertation attempts to navigate (indeed, create) a discursive nexus between two seemingly incompatible paradigms: revolutionary communism and poststructuralist feminism are grids of specificity with little in the way of obvious overlap. The intent of this dissertation is to: present my reading of the maoist approach to materialist dialectics, specifically with regards to ontology; make the case for marxism-leninism-maoism as a foundation for the revolutionary transformation of gender relations,

4. With respect to this, I have decided to include an Appendix to chapter four of this dissertation. This consists of an interview with Wang Zheng, professor of women’s studies at the University of Michigan. Among other accomplishments, she is the editor of *Some of Us: Chinese Women Growing Up in the Mao Era*. This important collection challenges what the editors call the “dark-age master narrative” of Chinese socialism and the Cultural Revolution in particular. As the book jacket describes, these writings “shatter our stereotypes of persecution, repression, victims, and victimizers in Maoist China.” As such, it is essential reading for students of China, marxism and gender studies. The interview with Wang was published in Revolution newspaper and is not widely available, but it summarizes some very important points about which most academics are not aware.

and; explore the ways in which poststructuralist feminism can further enrich MLM, in part because they share in important ways a similar ontology, that is, a conception of reality and the nature of existence.

It is likely that many people, whether academicians, feminists and maoists, would question such a project. The consensus in academia, even putting aside those who summarily dismiss all things communist or even marxist, is that this is not a fruitful area of study. For most, history suggests clearly that ‘authoritarian’ socialism was at best a failure, at worst as bad as what it fought against. Very few would think there was anything different about maoism or the experience of revolutionary China. Some feminists argue that a marxist theoretical foundation can not serve the liberation of women, and many feel that communists have simply used women’s struggles as a way of getting into power. Poststructuralists (and others) have argued that the time has come to move beyond theoretical paradigms which originated in the 19th century if one is to adequately grasp the complexity and fluidity of human social relations in the 21st century. These positions are amplified by the now old news of the “failure of socialism,” and augmented by the use of often rather flexible pejoratives as authoritarian, totalitarian, stalinist or, more benignly, state-centric. From the other direction, communists have commonly derided feminism as a bourgeois ideology which serves to divert work from the struggle against class oppression and imperialism,⁵ and which has more to do with the privilege of elite women than any real liberation. While maoists are better than most on this question, their distrust of intellectuals and academia, their focus on work within the

5. I define imperialism as the export of capital, with the corresponding need to create the necessary social conditions for its reproduction, along with the creation of parasitism in the imperialist countries and of superexploitation in the oppressed countries. See Lotta (1984) and Avakian (1986) for the best contemporary presentations of imperialism

ranks of the most oppressed, and a tendency to concentrate on exegesis of a canon have worked to isolate them from much of feminist thinking.

However, arguing that the two traditions despite their distrust have much to learn from each other is insufficient. There is still the question of whether this would be merely an historical exercise. After all, Mao has been dead for thirty years and China has long since stopped being a revolutionary nation. However, revolutionary communism is still very much a material force in today's world. There are currently maoist revolutions or significant movements involving tens of millions of people in more than a few countries. The fact that these people, and their supporters, are overwhelmingly ill-placed to publish in academic journals should not be used as a way to dismiss their importance. More importantly, what was developed by Mao has been taken further by contemporary maoists. Through the process of critically summing up the experience of revolution in China under Mao's leadership, they further enriched the tradition of MLM. It is far from a historical curiosity.

Though my main concern is with practicing revolutionaries, this dissertation is relevant to academia, particularly with regards to debates around questions of social transformation. I see this dissertation falling within the broad question of the relation between theory and practice, particularly critical theory and social transformation. Within this are more specific questions. Most broadly, how do we change the world, recognizing that this question is dependent on a particular understanding of "we," "change," and "world," which in turn rely upon specific epistemological, ontological and political commitments. Is marxism, however defined, up to this task? In the context of the "collapse/failure/

defeat/horrors" of communism, how does one deal seriously with questions of class and global oppression? How does one deal with the problematique of poststructuralism while still recognizing material reality? Is it possible, or even desirable, to build a revolutionary praxis in a context of post-industrial globalization?

All of these questions, their formulation and resolution, are bound up with different perspectives on theory. Some feel that existing theories are largely sufficient and should be developed, or perhaps reinterpreted. Others feel that new theories need to be created. Others argue for some form of *bricolage*. And of course, all of this is inseparable from conceptions of current reality and historical experience (for example, that something called socialism/marxism collapsed in the Soviet Union). This dissertation takes as a starting point the argument that before 'old' theories and practices are rejected in favor of something new, they should first be understood. This has largely not happened in the case of maoism.

Maoism As Marxism

There is a typical story of marxism from progressives and marxists in academia which goes something like this. Marx developed a far-reaching analysis and critique of capitalism and democracy through his adaptation of materialism and the inversion of Hegel's dialectics. Though his later work was marred by economic determinism, he established a significant and fruitful theoretical tradition. Engels, though he popularized Marx, put a positivist and mechanical gloss on his works. This in turn led to the determinism of Bernstein and others of the Second International. Unfortunately, the historical counterpoint to this was Leninism, which replaced Marx's declaration that the

working class must free themselves with the authoritarian and elitist model of the vanguard party. This betrayal of Marx became concretized through the Stalinist orthodoxy imposed throughout the communist parties of the world. However, a constructive response to this was developed, primarily by the Frankfurt School along with other writers such as Gramsci and Lukacs. Spurred by the degeneration of the Soviet Union and the publication of previously unknown works from Marx's early career, these scholars sought to bring Hegel and dialectics back into marxism along with expanding its scope to include more than just political economy. Though it has undergone various crises, this tradition of western marxism continues to be a valid research agenda, in contrast to "orthodox" marxism and communism, whose theoretical inadequacy and practical degeneration is now matched by its historical irrelevance.

Like all stories, this view is partial and ideological – or to put it more strongly, I argue that it is wrong. The presentation it gives is selective and serves particular interests. And like all stories, there are concrete consequences which arise from its particular reality. In this case, one result is the delegitimizing of the theories and practices associated with “communist” marxisms: whatever their specific perspectives, they all share the fundamental problems of “leninism” (authoritarianism, dogmatism, elitism, theoretical ossification and/or opportunism, etc.) and are therefore of use only as a foil. Thus, even academics who find inspiration or value in the marxist tradition usually draw a clear if implicit line of demarcation. This produces a strong tendency, regardless of the particular discourse used, to equate marxism with social democracy, along with its separation from concrete practice and reduction to an abstract critique.

This points to a very significant obstacle in the way of understanding maoism, and that is the extent to which it has been misinterpreted, attacked and demonized, both in its theory and its practice. While the distortion and ideological misinterpretation of any theorist is common enough, Mao particularly is subject to this. He has been the target of a systematic, and continuing, demonization campaign operating at many levels and through many hegemonic institutions in US society. These range from Hollywood movies, articles and documentaries in the popular media, as well as the “Mighty Wurlitzer” of the CIA, which has produced a wealth of ‘facts’ concerning maoist China. This is amplified by the pervasiveness of anti-communist ideology in US society, along with the fact that Mao is seen as fanatically anti-intellectual and thus commonly regarded with horror by Western intellectuals. The result is that Mao occupies a very different, and more fully ideological, position in the public imagination than that of, say, Foucault, Butler or Spivak. Virtually everyone ‘knows’ that Mao was a totalitarian dictator responsible for the deaths of tens of millions of people; outside of academia, few ‘know’ that poststructuralism is a trendy and nihilistic relativism propounded by elitist intellectuals. Scholars are not immune to this influence and its attendant assumptions and often reproduce them through ignorance and their own class biases.⁶

6. The reaction to the previous sentence, the intent of which was to present typical ideological constructions, is an effective illustration of this point. Most academic readers have misinterpreted it as a reflection of my own assessments and thus have taken offense at the characterization of poststructuralism. None, however, expressed indignation at the summation of Mao. It seems likely that the ideological view of Mao is so widely accepted that this made the interpretation of the sentence as reflecting my own assessment possible, despite the ironic quotes. Mao *truly is* a totalitarian dictator responsible for the deaths of tens of millions of people. Thus, assuming a parallel structure, I must be sincere in the comment on poststructuralism. Maoists who read this did not make the same mistake. They recognized the irony and recognized that perhaps they needed to be open to a different assessment of poststructuralism. I am not arguing that academics are closed-minded, simply that the view that Mao was a totalitarian dictator responsible for the deaths of tens of millions of people is commonly assumed to be Truth, in the sense of a fundamental assumption which does not need to be articulated, much less examined.

This point also applies to contemporary maoist movements and leaders, which are often dismissed, or more usually condemned, based upon a cursory and superficial analysis or simply upon manufactured facts. A good illustration of this comes from the treatment of the Communist Party of Peru (PCP, called Sendero Luminoso by commentators) and particularly its leader Abimael Guzmán. In 1988, Guzmán gave an extensive interview to sympathetic journalists. In it, Guzmán claimed that at a certain point the revolution led by the PCP would become so powerful that the US would militarily intervene. In its attempt to prevent the success of the revolution, the US would kill a million people and unleash a river of blood that the people of Peru would have to cross to liberate themselves. In light of what the US had recently done in Southeast Asia, this was a not an unreasonable prediction. The interview itself was not widely available in the US, but particularly in the early 1990s, when the success of the revolution seemed possible, this comment from Guzmán was consistently a part of US media coverage. However, it was completely turned on its head. It was widely and repeatedly stated that Guzmán had "bragged" in the interview that the PCP was going to kill a million people and create the river of blood on their way to seizing state power. Guzmán's comments were transformed from a reasonable and historically justified prediction of the consequences of US counter-revolutionary aggression into the repulsive ranting of a homicidal maniac. In this form, it became ubiquitous in the media coverage of the PCP and became part of an ideological barrage intended to undercut any support for the PCP in the US. And it continues to be used and stated as fact – a recent series from Al Jazeera, of all places, on Mao and his legacy had an article on the PCP which included it.⁷

7. "The Shining Path to Victory," by Rob Winder, Al Jazeera English Edition, Wednesday 13 September 2006.

Overcoming this hegemonic and ideological construction of maoism is difficult, the more so one is cut off from sharp class struggle. Further complicating matters is the fact that maoism is not a monolithic entity. There are self-identified maoists who are in sharp conflict with others, sometimes arguing not just for different policies but for a fundamentally different philosophical framework. Additionally, the language of maoism can appear impenetrable to outsiders (though, it should be noted, no less so than much scholarly writing). Just to make it more difficult, maoists and non-maoist marxists typically use the same terminology but do not always mean the same thing, something which is often not understood by readers.

A common assumption is that there was nothing significantly new or different in Mao's thinking and that therefore critiques of, say, the Soviet Union, apply equally to revolutionary China. Indeed, it is rare to find even a superficial attempt to deal with maoism, even in those areas in which it has obvious direct applicability, as I demonstrate in Chapter Four. The cursory dismissal of Mao and the implicit assumptions that there is nothing to be learned from him and that there was no liberation in China is widespread. The response to this would be a justifiable "so what," if this appraisal of maoism was accurate. I feel that this is far from true, for at least three reasons. First, there are a number of questions and analyses put forth from such diverse sources as feminists, the Frankfurt School, poststructuralists and others, that Mao dealt with in one way or another, though often in different terminology. On many occasions, I have read a recent academic work which, while supposedly on the cutting edge of theory, basically advocates a position similar to one advocated by Mao forty or even sixty years ago. Second, there

was real liberation in China, at a level and at a scale possibly unique in the modern world. That this liberation was not complete, that it was full of contradictions, limitations, and mistakes, that the revolution was defeated after Mao died, is important to fully understand in an all-round way, but neither should this result in a cursory dismissal. Third, and most important, Mao's thinking was not the product of one person, or even a handful. It was the product of the practice, of the lived experience, of literally hundreds of millions of people.⁸ And overwhelmingly, this was the lived experience of those who were very much at the bottom of society, who experienced direct and brutal oppression along class, gender, national and ethnic lines. This accumulation of the lived experience of those who have the most to gain gives maoism a dignity rooted in practice that much of critical theory in academia does not have. The cursory way in which this experience is often dismissed by these same scholars is something I find disheartening.⁹

Maoism and Gender

One ongoing problem with maoism has been the reductionist identification of certain people or approaches with apostasy (whether in the form of revisionism, subjective idealism, left hegelianism, etc.) and therefore the repudiation of everything associated with this person or approach. Along with this is the opposite, though this is less pronounced. That is, among maoists there is more willingness to accept that Mao made errors than to accept that Marcuse, Lukacs, etc., produced anything worthwhile. The

8. As Mao noted: "The Selected Works of Mao, how much of it is mine! It is a work of blood ... These things in Selected Works of Mao were taught to us by the masses and paid for with blood sacrifices." ("Remarks at a Briefing," March 1964, in MSW: IX.)

9. This is one reason why Chapter Four includes a critique of Maria Mies, despite the fact it is on the whole an important and exciting work. Intelligent people with a lot of training saying smart things is good, but one should be extremely cautious about dismissing the knowledge gained through so much sacrifice on the part of so many people. I feel there is a strong tendency to do this when the subject is the historical experience of socialism.

result has been the consolidation of a maoist canon of acceptable works. Thus, on the ‘woman question,’ as it is commonly put, there is the acceptance of Clara Zetkin (due to her loyalty to Lenin), but not Alexandra Kollontai (due to her association with the Left Opposition in the USSR). In developing theory, there is a strong tendency towards using only two sources - exegesis of the canon of MLM along with the deep investigation of the masses and their revolutionary practice interpreted through that theoretical lens. The maoist rules of discourse have tended to require adherence to this canon, even when one is going beyond or in opposition to it.¹⁰

This problem is demonstrated clearly in the reliance by maoists upon Engels to theorize about gender relations, while typically dismissing, ignoring or engaging superficially feminist literature. As one of the ‘hairy grandfathers,’ he occupies a prestigious place in the canon, and his *Origin of the Family* was very influential in determining Chinese policy with regards to women (Davin 1987). Yet, he left a problematic legacy (Pen 1997). On the one hand, he addressed the "woman question" far more directly than did Marx. His fundamental point concerning the family as an historical and social construct intimately bound up with property relations remains valid. However, his determinism (biological and otherwise), heterosexism and scientism have impeded further development.¹¹

10. Avakian has ruptured from these epistemological problems and in the process advanced MLM's ability to grasp and integrate thinking from even sharply antithetical traditions. See the discussion below and in Chapter Three.

11. As Firestone (1970, 4-5) notes, "Engels has been given too much credit for [his] scattered recognitions of the oppression of women. In fact he acknowledged the sexual class system [sic] only where it overlapped and illuminated his economic construct. Engels didn't do so well even in this respect. But Marx was worse: there is a growing recognition of Marx's bias against women." She warns against the dangerous implications of "freezing what were only incidental insights of Marx and Engels ... into dogma."

The canonical tradition of maoism has been a barrier preventing maoists from learning fully from feminists and others. Though in many respects maoists have done better than other communist trends, they have trailed behind the non-communist left in this regard. Kristeva (1986) argues that understanding the peasantry is what enabled Mao to creatively adapt and develop marxism-leninism. In Smith's (1987) terms, this allowed for the peasantry to become revolutionary subjects, instead of objects of the revolution as they were to a significant degree in the Soviet Union. However, Kristeva says the CCP, by not paying the same amount of attention to patriarchy and gender, missed a great opportunity to significantly advance marxist thinking. So the point of this dissertation is, in part, to take her critique seriously – to learn from contemporary feminists and grasp the significance of the gendering of contradiction.

Obviously, this is something which many scholars have addressed - the literature involving the integration and cross-fertilization of feminism and marxism is vast. What distinguishes this dissertation are its assumptions. The first assumption is that a consistent ontological foundation, while not essential, provides for a more fertile soil for any kind of cross-fertilization. Without this, there is tendency towards some form of eclecticism, in which aspects of one paradigm are simply grafted onto the other. The question then becomes one of identifying the appropriate ontological foundation, to which I give my answer in Chapter two.

The second assumption is that the integration of marxist and feminist perspectives should proceed from the most advanced conception of each. This is obviously a subjective

assessment, as different scholars have different ideas of what is the most advanced (while some would question the idea that some paradigms are more advanced than others). As one might assume, I feel that the most advanced form of marxism is MLM. Indeed, I would agree with the maoist claim that to be genuinely marxist one must be a maoist, a view commonly greeted with derision by non-maoists. Additionally, as I argue in Chapter 3, maoism, properly understood, anticipates many of the insights and analyses of poststructuralism.

The form of feminism I argue to be most advanced and to be (at least implicitly) ontologically compatible is poststructuralist feminism. The positive contribution of poststructuralist feminists have made is that they have problematized and demystified such feminist concepts as patriarchy and gender, and even men and women. Just as maoism does not hypostatize class and the proletariat, poststructuralist feminism rejects all forms of essentialism¹² and does not hypostatize gender and women. Despite their origins in traditions assumed to be antagonistic, both paradigms have a number of points of contact. These include the construction of identity and the subject, questions of truth and epistemology, the material impact of symbols and ideology, and the privileging of hidden knowledges. Of course, there are also crucial areas of difference which can not be bridged. As an example, most poststructuralist feminists would see the vanguard party, which from the point of view of maoism is essential, as creating more problems than it solves.¹³

12. Though, as Fuss (1989; xiii) notes, "there is no essence to essentialism; we can only speak of essentialisms." She also notes that essentialism may be more variable, and constructivist approaches more normative, than poststructuralists have been willing to acknowledge.

13. Though it should be noted that the typical understanding of the vanguard party reflects anti-communist ideology far more often than it does a serious grappling with the concept, particularly as

Ironically, both paradigms appear to have limited understanding of each other. Both have a tendency to assume the other is interchangeable with other paradigms that fall within the overall purview of marxism or feminism. To the extent that they are aware of one another, both also have a have a tendency to view, and judge, each other based upon their antecedents (which are often ideologically constructed). That is, maoists see the history in feminism of liberalism, idealism, inattention to class and imperialism, etc., and reject poststructuralist approaches based upon that. Or, more commonly, they assume that feminism means either liberal feminism or an essentialist radical feminism. Conversely, poststructuralist feminists see the history in socialism of economist, authoritarianism, inattention to gender, etc., and reject maoism on that basis. Instead of looking across to each other, they tend to look to each other's past and thus to cut themselves off from what is most advanced and exciting about each body of work. This is reinforced by a mutual tendency to merely build upon, rather than critically engage, earlier works critical of the other.

There are some examples of critical engagement. Two articles in this vein include "Women and the Maobaadi: Ideology and Agency in Nepal's Maoist Movement" by Judith Pettigrew and Sara Shneiderman, and "On the Question of Homosexuality" by the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA (RCP). Both show the potential fruitfulness of a serious critical mutual engagement, though in this aspect the paper by the RCP is the better of the two. While poststructuralist feminists would be quick to point out its limitations (such as the implicit acceptance of a hetero/homo dichotomy and the

heterosexist assumption that homosexuality is something that needs to be explained), it does have the aim of learning from other theoretical frameworks and embracing their knowledge and insights. The Pettigrew and Shneiderman piece, on the other hand, is a critical assessment of maoist practice in Nepal from a poststructuralist point of view. While it offers valuable critiques, along with some praise for the Nepalese revolutionaries, there is little in it that suggests that they have interest in learning from the maoists.

However, both are limited by the fact that there is no attempt to elucidate the foundations which give rise to this potential for fruitful integration. That is, the fact that they are engaging one another is almost incidental. Pettigrew and Shneiderman happen to be poststructuralist feminists focusing on a region where there is a maoist revolutionary movement, while the RCP are writing on a subject that poststructuralist feminists have dealt with very directly for some time. Neither dig systematically into the other to try and understand its foundations.¹⁴

I argue that much poststructuralist feminist work is non-dialectical, as well as explicitly anti-materialist and anti-revolutionary/communist. There is often a pronounced idealism and liberalism (although the latter is often disguised). It is also the feminism most identified with academia and assumed by some to be separate from the actual practice of the masses. However, I feel that the best poststructuralist feminism does what maoism

14. Had Pettigrew and Shneiderman done this, they might have recognized that their focus on “women’s multiple existing scripts for agency” is not dissimilar to the maoist view of contradictory and complex subjectivity arising from the ubiquity of contradiction. I discuss the question of subjectivity in Chapter Five.

does, grasp both the complexity and the concreteness of things, selves and their relationships. And in doing so, it often addresses areas which MLM historically has investigated with the same rigorous attention. And of course, it includes gender as an analytical category, and not merely women as an empirical category. There are real, I argue, real areas of compatibility where the insights of poststructuralist feminism can advance maoist thinking, without undermining the commitment to dialectical materialism and revolutionary internationalism. In other words, poststructuralist feminism provides the avenue by which the maoist dialectic can be gendered.

For example, the sexual division of labor and the concrete reality of relationships between men and women provides the material foundation for a particular consciousness, a gendered pattern of thinking in which the feminine is consistently denigrated. Recalling Mao's emphasis on *dialectical* materialism and Lenin's comment from the Philosophical Notebooks that "consciousness not only reflects the objective world, but creates it," this brings the recognition that thinking is not merely reflective but constitutive of such concrete realities.¹⁵ Thus, consciousness provides one of the areas which, if left uncritically examined, provides a material basis for systematic hierarchies and thus the restoration/perpetuation of capitalist/oppressive relations. Socializing the means of production does not in and of itself address such questions of consciousness; they must be directly politicized on their own terms. Maoists have addressed this question to some extent, in China, as critiques of 'feudal ideas' and in contemporary discussions of ideologies of male supremacy. But this has been limited in a number of ways. The relevance of this is largely restricted to the differences between unproblematically

15. LCW, Vol. 38, p. 165-238.

biologically sexed human beings. That is, there is sex, but no gender. But humans are the “ensemble of social relations” (Marx, MECW 3: 5) and these social relations are thoroughly gendered. Thus, so are subjectivities. Just as all thinking is stamped with the brand of class (Mao 1965c, 296), they are stamped with gender as well. Furthermore, the relevance of gendered thinking goes beyond the question of men/women relationships, but to questions of epistemology and methodology as well, which this dissertation can not delve into in depth. Instead, I focus on mainly on the conceptualization of social categories and how they are deployed.

Maoist works often deal seriously with questions of patriarchy and gender relations, but they also typically deal with them in a compartmentalized way. In party programmes and similar works, there is always a section on the ‘woman question’ (often including sexuality as a sub-heading), but there is rarely a systematic treatment woven throughout documents and analyses. An example would be *The Shanghai Textbook* (Lotta 1995), the principal book on political economy produced by the Chinese revolutionaries. As a distillation of the maoist understanding of socialist economy and the means by which capitalism is restored, the *Textbook* is a remarkable document and essential reading for anyone concerned with political economy. However, aside from a passing comment or two, there is no discussion of issues which contemporary feminists would consider to be crucial to questions of political economy, such as the role of reproductive labor, the denigration of the feminine, the sexual division of labor, etc. These limitations extend to Raymond Lotta's introduction to the book, even though it is itself an important contribution to the understanding of a revolutionary political economy.

Though Mao wrote extensively on women's liberation in the early part of his career, he did not produce a substantial work on the subject in the latter part of his life. Thus, much as the situation with Marx, this has left others to elaborate on what a maoist theory of liberation would be. Good examples of this are articles by Desai (1993) and Brahme (1990). These are both responses by Indian authors to what they saw as the limitations and problems with feminist approaches to women's liberation. Though they still rely heavily upon Engels, they represent good starting points for the development of a maoist theory of women's liberation. Additionally, Dunayevskaya (1996) addresses the relation between dialectics and women's liberation, though from a marxist-humanist and stridently anti-maoist position.

The Important Thing is to be Good at Learning

A certain amount of transformation in the content and even approach of a dissertation dealing with theory is inevitable during the process of its creation. This is even more the case when the dissertation in question began in a rather open-ended way, and when the process is interrupted by illness and other factors. This is not a bad thing – indeed, one possible measure of success of a dissertation would be that the author thinks differently at the conclusion of its writing. There are several important ways in which the thinking underlying this dissertation changed during the course of its production (with many of them deriving at least in part from the first).

The most important has to do with my deeper appreciation of the contributions of Bob Avakian to MLM. At the initiation of this dissertation, I understood Avakian as important in two respects. First, there is his practical application of maoism to the US as the leader

of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA (RCP). Second, his *Mao Tse-tung's Immortal Contributions* (1978a) remains the single best systematic treatment of Mao's thinking. One of the problems with fully grasping what Mao brought forward is that much of his later thinking, which is when he fully developed his most important ideas, is scattered about in directives, interviews and other ephemera. There is no equivalent of *On Contradiction* from the period of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR). Thus, it has been left to others to attempt to systematize Mao's overall thinking. Unfortunately, I feel most works which attempt this often reveal more about the author's assumptions than Mao's actual thinking.¹⁶ Avakian, more than anyone else, fully brought together the various strands of Mao's theorization in a way consistent with Mao's approach. In short, I saw Avakian as an invaluable systematizer and practitioner of MLM.

The insufficiency of this understanding was made quite apparent by engaging the veritable avalanche of material from Avakian in recent years. As I discuss in Chapter Three, in these works, he has brought forward a new synthesis which has revitalized the critical and self-interrogatory spirit of MLM. Significantly, it involves important epistemological and methodological ruptures with much of the received wisdom of the International Communist Movement (ICM) and critically engages Mao, as Althusser would say, from the left. The more I dug into these works, the less this dissertation became about Mao and the more it became fully maoist (though arguably insufficiently so). Prior to this serious engagement with Avakian's works, I was in danger of turning Mao and his thinking into its opposite, into a static dogma to be defended. To the extent

16. There are exceptions, of course, particularly Corrigan, Ramsay and Sayer's *For Mao* (1979, hereafter CSR) and Starr's *Continuing the Revolution* (1979), both of which were invaluable for this dissertation. However, even those which I find fundamentally flawed were important in developing an overall understanding of Mao.

that this was the case, it was a hindrance to learning and developing this dissertation. I thus found myself needing to problematize and trouble, as Judith Butler would put it, my understanding of a paradigm of which I had assumed I had a firm grasp.

Somewhat counter-intuitively, this led to an important change in the dissertation. It moved from aiming towards a synthesis of marxism and feminism on the basis of a dialectical ontology to being an attempt to enrich MLM. The more that MLM is fully and truly dialectical and materialist (and not some one-dimensional or superficial understanding of it), the more it can bring in and advance ideas, concepts, truths and approaches arising from other methods and approaches. This comes from the emphasis and elaboration by Avakian of a principle formulated by Mao, that Marxism "embraces but does not replace" different spheres of society and human endeavor. There are very important epistemological and methodological questions arising out of this which I wish I had a better grasp of when this dissertation was begun.¹⁷

17. Avakian (2004b) discusses it this way: "You are trying to change reality, and you are trying to grasp reality in its changingness, so to speak -- because it doesn't stand still and wait for you to understand it, it's moving, changing --and you are trying to mobilize people to grasp and to change reality ... How do you handle that contradiction -- between mobilizing people around what you understand to be true, while at the same time having a critical attitude and being open to the understanding that you may not be right about this or that particular, or even about big questions? That's a very difficult contradiction to handle correctly. It's something we have to sum up and learn how to do better on as well. And it's not easy. But we do have to do better. The essence of the problem is not, as people sometimes say, learning to think for yourself ... It's not "free thinking" in the abstract, or as some principle raised above everything else, but thinking in accordance with and by applying the outlook and methodology of communism in order to arrive, in the most comprehensive and systematic way, at an understanding of reality. Not all of reality -- that's never possible -- but the essential things that you can identify at a given time that you need to deeply go into, understand and transform, while having an open mind about both those things you're not paying attention to, and even those things you are. And you have to do this even while you are moving forward to change these things. So the essence is not free thinking, but what outlook and methodology you are thinking with ... In the history of the Chinese revolution, and in particular through the Cultural Revolution, they brought forward the principle of red and expert, with red leading expert. In other words, the communists and communist line should lead experts in various fields. Which is an important principle because otherwise other ideologies are in command, and they are leading away from the ability to actually synthesize correctly all that people are engaging and learning about, even to arrive most deeply at the truth about a particular sphere. So this is an important principle -- combining red and expert, and red leading expert -- but if you are going to lead in a sphere, the first thing you have to do is be good at

I also scaled down the ambitions of this dissertation, particularly as what I considered to be preliminary discussions assumed such large proportions. Where before the initial aim was to make a substantial contribution to a maoist theory of women's liberation, I now see it more as the opening of a door, of highlighting some largely hidden but still fruitful connections. I also made a significant change in a central claim of the dissertation. Originally, I argued that ontological compatibility was essential to any fruitful cross-fertilization or enrichment. I remain convinced that the ontological presuppositions underlying philosophical inquiry and political action need to be fully unveiled, that they can not remain at the level of axioms. And I still believe it is true that paradigms which share an ontology are more likely to be able to enrich one another. However, this can be turned into its opposite, a barrier against fuller understanding, if ontological consistency is seen as an epistemological prerequisite. This was an approach I realized I had fallen into to some degree, of essentially pre-reading works for their ontology and then judging the possibility of their theoretical contributions on that basis.¹⁸ Now, I would advocate the need to grasp the ontological questions while at the same time being fully omnivorous in one's investigations – which is essentially an application of Avakian's concept of "solid core with a lot of elasticity" discussed in Chapter Three.

Outline

learning. And you have to be good at drawing forward those people who are in that field who are also advanced ideologically and politically. People like that are a very important lever and link. Now, as Mao said, if you go to the opera -- which is a popular form in China -- if you go to the opera long enough you can become an expert, even if you can't sing or compose at all. But to be able to comprehensively understand something requires really being immersed in it."

18. This is a form of "proof-texting," an epistemological practice which has a strong and unfortunate tradition in the ICM.

Chapter Two (Dialectics and Ontology) is a presentation of dialectics, particularly as seen through a maoist lens, as a way of developing a dialectical ontology. It responds to some of the common criticisms and misconceptions of dialectics before turning to a consideration of materialist dialectics. It concludes with a brief presentation of how the ontology underlying poststructuralist feminism coincides (or does not coincide) with that of dialectics.

Chapter Three (Maoism and Materialist Dialectics) maps out aspects of a maoist approach to materialist dialectics and how it has been put into practice. It is not a complete overview of the subject but instead focuses on those aspects which are particularly relevant for making the argument for the salience of maoism to the question of women's liberation. Specifically, I focus on the centrality of dialectics to maoist praxis, the two-line struggle between maoism and the various forms of revisionism, and what this means for revolutionary practice and the building of socialism. The chapter concludes with a summary of some of the recent contributions to MLM by Avakian. There is also an appendix to this chapter consisting of an interview conducted by Revolution newspaper with Wang Zheng, professor of women's studies at the University of Michigan. Though placed at the end of the dissertation, I recommend that it be read before chapter four.

Chapter Four (Reassessing Feminist Critiques of Maoist China) focuses on the historical experience of transforming patriarchal relations and ideas in revolutionary China. Focusing on three important works by Maria Mies (1998), Judith Stacey (1983) and Margery Wolf (1986), it endeavors to show that feminist critiques of maoism (and more

broadly, socialism as conceived of by MLM) as a dead end are mistaken. Though there were real shortcomings and problems, the historical experience of revolutionary China remains an essential foundation and contribution to transforming patriarchy.

Chapter Five (Poststructuralist Feminism and the Subject) discusses the poststructuralist critique of essentialism and the deconstruction of the categories and foundations of feminism. It focuses on Judith Butler's works as a way of bringing forward poststructuralist feminism to address the shortcomings of MLM. Butler's emphasis on the cultural production of gender and sex, along with the need to destabilize the regulatory functions and frameworks which police them, are valuable in developing the ability of MLM to transform gender relations. The chapter includes a discussion of the question of subjectivity in order to demonstrate that revolutionary communism and poststructuralism conceive of the subject in ways that are much more similar than their respective discourses would indicate.

Chapter Six (The Metaphysics of Liberation or the Liberation from Metaphysics) focuses on sexuality, violence and democracy as way of pointing towards a thoroughly dialectical method and approach which can move beyond the anchors of metaphysics while embracing thinking from a wide spectrum.

Chapter Seven (What is to be Done? Be Reasonable: Demand the Impossible) is a brief conclusion which attempts to contextualize this dissertation within the current efforts by significant forces in the US ruling class to create an unchallenged and unchallengeable empire of unprecedented destructive power, while transforming the long-standing

consensus of rule in the US (that is, secular liberal democracy).

A Note on Terminology

The ontology of both dialectics and poststructuralism presents a writer with a particular dilemma, in that language is not well-suited for carrying the complexity of meaning that their concepts are intended to carry.¹⁹ The various terms which may be used to signify a concept or social category bring with them a seemingly inherent tendency toward reification. Poststructuralists are particularly attuned to this problem, given their attention to language and the role it plays in conditioning thought. In response, they have adopted a number of different strategies. One is the constant use of qualifying phrases, particularly with regards to central concepts and categories, as in "women, understood as historically conditioned and always already provisional and contingent." Another is the use of quotes ("women") or the creation of new word (or the radical redefinition of an existing one), with the intent of conveying the same qualifications. Others attempt to combine the resolution of this dilemma with a strategy designed to disrupt the logocentric logic underlying it, whether through word play, intentional obscurity or other means designed to force one to stop and critically consider the assumption that one "knows" what is being conveyed. None of these approaches appeal to me. Instead, I rest upon the ontology outlined in the following chapter and trust that the reader will understand that terms used

19. This is true at least for English – it may not be for other languages. See Holubnychy (1964) for an interesting discussion concerning the impact of the Chinese language on Mao's conception of dialectics. Holubnychy claims that the Chinese language in both the meaning of its terms and in its underlying logic is dialectical. For example, the Chinese words which correspond with the English "to be" do not carry the idea of existence, but rather of becoming. He concludes that because the Chinese language is dialectical, so is the Chinese way of thinking. This is not to say that Mao is therefore primarily a Chinese philosopher – besides the question of materialism, there is the profound difference between the Great Harmony of Chinese dialectics and Mao's emphasis on contradiction. However, any poststructuralist would recognize the value in being able to speak dialectically.

to signify a concept or social category are intended to express the full dialectical reality of them. This, of course, is not to suggest that there will be no mistakes or limitations in how dialectics unfolds in this dissertation.

The problems of language are heightened when the terminology of a particular paradigm is demonized, as is the case with MLM.²⁰ There is a strong tendency on the part of readers, when presented with terms like "masses," "dictatorship of the proletariat," "vanguard party," etc., to assume not only that they "know" what these terms mean but that they mean something negative. Interestingly, I have found this to be the case regardless of whether the reader is a poststructuralist or a dyed-in-the-wool positivist. The reification which language engenders, the pre-conceptions arising from anti-communism, as well as the contradictory history attached to communist forms and concepts, combine to form a substantial barrier to understanding. However, this problem is fundamentally unsolvable at this point in time. Inventing new terms, or adopting others with less negative connotations, will necessarily change the meaning being expressed. The terminology of MLM exists as it is because it has been shown to most accurately express the complexity and contradictions inherent in its forms and concepts. Further, to use a different terminology would be to abandon a particular arena of the struggle in the realm of ideas. It would in effect represent a surrender to the bourgeoisie, since one cannot bring about communism if one first agrees to not talk about communism.

20. Many times when discussing MLM with somebody I have been told a variation of "I'd agree with you 100% – if only you didn't call it 'communism.'"

CHAPTER TWO: DIALECTICS AND ONTOLOGY

In its rational form [dialectic] is a scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors because it includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary.

Karl Marx (Afterword to 2nd German Edition of Capital I)

Dialectics is [a word] I've never understood ... It seems to mean something about complexity, or alternative positions, or change, or something ... When words like 'dialectics' come along, or 'hermeneutics,' and all this kind of stuff that is supposed to be very profound, like Goering, 'I reach for my revolver.'

Noam Chomsky (2002, 228-30)

As all things change to fire, fire exhausted falls back into things.

Heraclitus (Haxton, 2001)

Introduction to Dialectics

Attempts at synthesis which share an ontology are the most theoretically consistent and successfully avoid what Foucault called "soggy eclecticism." Even if the consonance is implicit or inexact, this avoids a situation in which one paradigm is merely grafted onto another in a syncretic fashion. At the same time, not all ontological foundations are equally valid and useful for constructing critical social theory. In this chapter, I argue for the value of a dialectical ontology. I present the basics of dialectics, a tradition often ignored or derided in the social sciences, and outline what a dialectical ontology means. I then respond to the common criticisms and misconceptions of dialectics before turning to a consideration of materialist dialectics as the correct way to approach marxism. I conclude with a brief presentation of a poststructuralist ontology, comparing and contrasting it with a dialectical ontology.

This chapter cannot fully survey the historical development of dialectics or make detailed comparisons between different scholars' conceptions. Its primary aim is to construct a particular vision of dialectics and outline its relevance for ontology and theory building. While drawing upon numerous authors, its presentation is focused through the dialectical lens developed by Mao.²¹ A common assumption about dialectics is that it is synonymous with Hegel; that is, to study dialectics is to study Hegelian dialectics, even if by way of Marx's 'inversion.'²² But however much Hegel may be the dominant figure in the scholarly discussion of dialectics, neither he, nor Marx, represent the totality of the subject. There are other conceptions of dialectics. As Starr (1979) has noted, there is a long-standing Chinese tradition of dialectics, one which was very much a part of Chinese society and consciousness and which significantly informed Mao's conception.²³ Just as

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21. Strauthausen (2006) works from this assumption in his discussion of what he calls neo-left ontology (or what later in this chapter I refer to as poststructuralist ontology. For him, the "traditional marxist" ontology entails hegelian dialectics, which is simply dualism. Strauthausen contrasts this with the neo-left aim of leaving behind traditional metaphysics and essentialist thinking by dissolving all oppositions. Though a very interesting discussion, Mao and the maoist approach to dialectics is excluded.
 22. In addition to works by Mao, Avakian, Marx, Hegel, and Lenin, this chapter draws upon Afansyev (1987), Colletti (1979), Engels (1972), Gadamer (1976), Haxton (2001), Heilbroner (1980), Hook (1971), Lukács (1970), Marcuse (1982), Norman and Sayers (1980), Rosen (1982), and Williams (1989).
 23. See the first chapter of Starr (1979) for a summary of the Chinese traditions of dialectical thinking. Mao had noted the parallels between the development of dialectical thinking in China and the West, and one Chinese writer suggested that rebirth of dialectics after its demise at the hands of Aristotle and Descartes was due to Chinese influence. Beyond China, India also had its own tradition of dialectics (Starr 1979, 17) and there are also African philosophical traditions which are also quite dialectical (Coetzee 1998). Eurocentrism may be a factor in the focus on Hegel and is perhaps a reason why 'western' marxists have neglected Mao. Mao's understanding of Hegel was second-hand, by way of Engels and, and was sketchy at best. Indeed, while Lenin wrote about creating a "society of the materialist friends of the Hegelian dialectic." Mao would have agreed, albeit with the removal of the word "Hegelian." Given the importance of Hegel in the western tradition, this makes it that much easier to ignore Mao, not to mention other non-European theorists. There is also a hint of scholasticism demonstrated by such authors as Anderson (1998), Dunayevskaya (1989, 1996) and much of the Frankfurt School – that Mao's lifetime of daily concrete dialectical practice is unworthy of attention, not to mention the concrete wielding of it by millions of Chinese workers, students and peasants; what counts is a close study of Hegel.

Marx's approach to dialectics avoided Hegel's idealism and spiritual monism, Mao's approach to dialectics avoids the immanent teleologism of Hegel.

In the West, dialectics originates with the pre-Socratic philosophers, in particular Heraclitus. His surviving fragments (Haxton 2001) emphasize the complexity and mutability of reality, of how things are continually becoming what they are not through the "strife of opposites." Though Heraclitus' view of dialectics was idealist and served as a foundation for agnosticism and relativism, Marx favorably noted his contribution to the dialectical tradition. The dominance of Aristotle and the Platonic notion of Being brought about a decline of dialectics in the Western philosophy, a state of affairs subsequently reinforced by such thinkers as Descartes, Hume and Locke. This did not change until the revitalizing of dialectics in the hands of Hegel, the first Western philosopher to systematically develop a dialectical philosophy.

Hegel's philosophy brought about a resurgence of interest in dialectics, but by the time of Marx, this was already declining. Though Marx saw in Hegel an essential foundation in developing his own political philosophy, what Marx did with Hegel's dialectic was not simply an extension or application of it. It was also a radical rupture with Hegel (just as in the realm of political economy, Marx ruptured with the Scottish political economists who were the wellspring for Marx's thinking). Marx critiqued Hegel's dialectic for its idealist view that forces of the universe existed apart from and above their manifestations (which rendered his dialectic "upside down"). In addition, Hegel did not fully break from metaphysics, and he was an early proponent of "two into one" (similar to the way that

Taoist dialectics posits a metaphysical “great tao” where there is no contradiction).²⁴ Transforming dialectics through the combination with the materialism developed by Feuerbach, materialist dialectics became an integral, if often controversial, part of the marxist tradition. Today in the West, dialectics is thus associated with either the marxist or the hegelian traditions. To put it in different, and more general, terms, dialectics is to be found either in the realms of philosophy or critical social praxis.

However, in neither realm does dialectics play a central role, and when it does it is the mystical and idealist form of hegelian dialectics. The dominance of analytical philosophy has resulted in dialectics being treated largely as an historical oddity, largely of interest for those pursuing exegetical research on Hegel. Within political science, the dominance of positivism and quantitative methodologies, along with the increasing aversion to theory, and marxist theory in particular, means that dialectics is virtually unknown, or known only in the form of a simplistic gloss. An understanding of dialectics which goes beyond this is even rarer.

Recognizing this is important, for several reasons. First, to treat Hegel’s, or Marx’s, conception of dialectics as dialectics is to be eurocentric. It is worth noting that the overwhelming majority of writings on dialectics do this, and thus reproduce, however unwittingly, eurocentric ideology. Second, the failure to recognize this no doubt accounts for some of the postmodern aversion to marxism and dialectics. The hegelian dialectic is clearly a teleological metanarrative, in which history represents the pre-ordained

24. "Two into one" and the struggle around dialectics and metaphysics in the context of the Chinese revolution is discussed in the following chapter.

unfolding of a particular logic to a specified end. Though Marx is not as guilty as Hegel of teleology, there are still important aspects of it in his work. As I outline later, a fully maoist conception of dialectic does not fall into this particular trap (though as I note in the next chapter, Mao was not immune to forms of metaphysics and teleology).

Finally, there is the reality that for marxists, these are not simply academic questions, that is, philosophy in the narrow sense. Among scholars, the study of dialectics is concerned primarily with the works of professional philosophers – not the revolutionary leaders and theoreticians who have actually applied it by developing and developing-while-applying. This breaks the link between theory and practice, and reduces materialist dialectics to a node within the development of "western thought." For Marx, materialist dialectics is the philosophical outlook which corresponds to the interests and movement of the class conscious proletariat for communism. For marxists, understanding materialist dialectics, applying it and describing it, all happens best in the context of the communist movement, its line struggles and development. It is for all these reasons that this chapter builds most fundamentally upon Mao's *On Contradiction* as a milestone in the development of the marxist (not Marx's) dialectic.

I. Defining Dialectics

As many writers have noted, defining dialectics is difficult.²⁵ Its complex and diffuse

25. This problem is made worse by the common simplification that dialectics means the triad of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. See Williams (1989), for a discussion of how this misrepresents dialectics. Further, the schema of "thesis-antithesis-synthesis" is a revisionist, and not marxist, view of dialectics. It is another version of the "two into one," discussed in the following chapter. It denies the universality of contradiction, and posits a moment in the development of contradictions where opposites merge. New entities are envisioned as the dying of contradictions, as their mitigation. In fact dialectics is the science of "one becomes two" and synthesis is not "two into one" -- it means (as Mao said) "one eats up the other." And synthesis is itself a unity of opposites -- not the emergence of

nature both eludes concise explanation and elicits widely varying presentations, even within the marxist tradition.²⁶ Heilbronner notes that grasping dialectics almost requires dialectics, in that it has to be understood in a dialectical way. To attempt a summarization, in Engel's words (1939, 36), dialectics is about comprehending "things and their representations in their essential connection, concatenation, motion, origin and ending." The dialectical view sees the world as consisting of mutually constituting and interdependent elements in constant transformative motion driven primarily by internal contradiction. "Dialectics in the proper sense is the study of contradiction in the very essence of objects: not only are Appearances transitory, mobile, fluid, demarcated only by conventional boundaries, but the Essence of things is so as well" (Lenin, LCW 38: 251-2). Dialectics, in the context of MLM, instructs revolutionaries "to observe and analyze the movement of opposites in different things and, on the basis of such analysis,

some non-contradictory whole. For more on this see Mao's *Three Major Struggles on China's Philosophical Front* (CPC 1973).

26. This has led some to reject dialectics in the name of parsimony or, in the case of Chomsky, anti-elitism. However, outside of ideology, conceptual complexity is hardly sufficient grounds for rejection. Chomsky is widely considered to be the leading light of US radical intelligentsia, and his writings have considerable influence on critical social praxis, so he warrants some discussion. His discussion, or rather, dismissal, of dialectics in *Understanding Power* (2002) is problematic, especially given the title of the book. He takes a rather ideological position with regards to common sense and knowledge. In his view, there is no such thing as social theory. Analyses of society are either "obvious," "trivial," consisting of "interesting simple ideas" expressible in "monosyllables," or they are "incomprehensible" "fakery," "all fraud," created by intellectuals in the interest of maintaining their position in society. While there is certainly relevance in a critique of obscurantist jargon, this is a one-dimensional consideration of the role of power in epistemology. It seems that the concept of gender falls into the category of incomprehensible fakery, as it not a part of any of his numerous books. It is one thing for a radical intellectual in the middle of the 19th century to not deal seriously with gender. It is quite another for one to do it at the end of the 20th. Additionally, Chomsky claims that Marx never used the term dialectics and implies he did not use it in his writing. As Tucker (1978, xxi) notes, Marx makes plain his debt to Hegel's dialectic "in terms too clear for misunderstanding." This scholarly sloppy assertion is typical of how Chomsky deals with Marx, however much better it may be than his approach to Lenin. Generally, Chomsky's scholarship is impeccable and while I disagree with him on many things, he provides important information and analysis. But when it comes to the historical practice of socialism, and particularly Lenin, the quality of his scholarship declines considerably. In effect, he starts with a conclusion, cherry-picks quotes and facts which support this conclusion, and substitutes serious all-around discussion of the complexity of the situation with anti-communist platitudes which he assumes his audience will share. Unfortunately, this approach is typical when it comes to the subject of the historical experience of the ICM. Chapter four provides further examples.

to indicate the methods for resolving contradictions” (Mao, *On Contradiction*).

Explanations of dialectics, whether by Hegel or Mao, commonly contrast it with metaphysics. In the metaphysical view, which underpins the positivism dominant in western social sciences, “everything is what it is and not another thing” (Norman and Sayers 1980, 2).²⁷ Its law of identity is $A = A$. As Aristotle said, “it is impossible for something to be and not to be” (Metaphysics 1006 a1). That is, things are self-identifying, understandable as discreet, concrete and independent. But as Hegel notes, such self-identity is pure abstraction. A thing which is only self-identified is necessarily abstract, isolated, static and unchanging. An object, regarded on its own, by and in itself, is abstract, in the precise, literal sense that it has been abstracted from its context and viewed in isolation. Metaphysical identity regards things merely as what they are, as self-subsistent and autonomous. According to dialectical thought, nothing can be abstracted in this way. All things are embedded in the world, fundamentally related to other entities and in interaction with them. This interaction is not the interaction of separate discrete objects colliding, but constituting each other’s identity as well.

In Hegel’s terms (1991, 216), for the metaphysician, “different diverse things are each individually what they are, and unaffected by the relation in which they stand to each other. The relation is therefore external to them.” In contrast to dialectics, the metaphysical outlook arrests movement and development, and sees movement as originating externally. “An object characterized by mere self-identity is static. It is a mere

27. Their work is one of the better treatments of the role of dialectics in Marx and was crucial for developing this chapter.

positive existent thing, a given fact - it just is what it is; and the world, according to this view, is a mere collection or diversity of such things, indifferent and inactive in relation to each other" (Norman and Sayers 1980, 3). The metaphysician ends up understanding the world "as an indifferent diversity of merely positive things" (Norman and Sayers 1980, 17).²⁸

Flux and transformation

Motion provides a convenient starting point for understanding dialectics. Hegel refers to the conception by Zeno of motion as being paradoxical, indeed nonexistent, because a thing can not be both in a particular space and at the same time in motion. Hegel (1969, 440) responds by saying that motion is not paradoxical, but contradictory: "Something moves, not by being here in this 'now' and there in another 'now' - there where it is at any given time it is not in motion, but at rest - but rather only by being in one and the same 'now' here and not here, by being at the same time in the 'here' and not in it." Zeno's monist ontology rules out development and change while Hegel established motion at the foundation of his ontology (Williams 1989, 6). Hegel (1969, 440) argues that motion is

28. This is not to claim that such metaphysical approaches as positivism and formal logic are without use. To the extent that entities, relationships, institutions, etc., are relatively stable and definite, such approaches can get at aspects of reality. But while dialectics can incorporate the positivist moment, the reverse is not true. At the same time, compliance solely with the demands of formal logic, or remaining in the positivist moment is clearly insufficient to cognise reality, particularly human reality, which is complex, varied and constantly changing. As Lenin (LCW 32: 94) notes, while other approaches, such as formal logic, have value, "Dialectical logic demands that we go further. Firstly, if we are to have a true knowledge of an object we must look at and examine all its facets, its connections and 'mediacies.' That is something we cannot ever hope to achieve completely, but the rule of comprehensiveness is a safeguard against mistakes and rigidity. Secondly, dialectical logic requires that an object should be taken in development, in change, in 'self-movement' (as Hegel sometimes puts it). This is not immediately obvious in respect of such an object as a tumbler, but it, too, is in flux, and this holds especially true for its purpose, use and connection with the surrounding world. Thirdly, a full 'definition' of an object must include the whole of human experience, both as a criterion of truth and a practical indicator of its connection with human wants. Fourthly, dialectical logic holds that 'truth is always concrete.'"

thus a contradictory phenomenon which can be explained only dialectically. "The reason why dialectic first seizes upon motion as its object lies in the fact that dialectic is itself this motion; or, put another way, motion is the dialectic of all that is." Motion is thus not something that is done to what is moved, or a temporary condition. It is part of the determination of Being.

As a result, as Heraclitus put it, reality is not a collection of Beings, as metaphysics sees it, but a state of Becoming. Williams (1989, 11) notes that Hegel agrees with Heraclitus that "no aspect of the natural or social world should ... be taken as fixed or static. Reality is a continual process of change in any aspect of which each individual is but momentarily caught up."²⁹ To put it another way, reality is not a noun, but a verb. However, this is not to disperse reality into a formless flux, to deny the concreteness of the world. To do so would simply flip positivist metaphysics into a form of subjective agnosticism. Things³⁰ have their concreteness, but as a part of dialectical unity with transformation.³¹ Things move and things rest, but as Lenin put it (LCW 38: 360), rest is "conditional, temporary, transitory and relative," while "development and motion are absolute." Mao concurs, saying "imbalance is a universal, objective law. Things forever proceed from imbalance to equilibrium and again, from equilibrium to imbalance in a cycle, but each cycle brings about a higher plane. Imbalance is constant and absolute,

29. Williams (1989, 11) continues that this means that "in trying to depict reality accurately we set ourselves a highly elusive goal which requires a continually critical and open-ended approach. An analytical approach which sets out from definitions and seeks certainties can never be fully adequate to the task."

30. By 'things' I mean not just concrete, physical entities. It is a shorthand way of referring to entities, relationships, subjectivities, institutions, and so on.

31. As Lenin also noted in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, "nature is infinite, but it infinitely exists." (LCW 14: Chapter 5, Section 2) However much it is in flux, it still consists of a "concrete plurality of particular existents" (Gadamer, 1976, 9).

while equilibrium is temporary and relative.” (Mao, *On Contradiction*)

The net result of this is that dialectics sees the world as in constant motion and transformation, not only in its perception or appearance, but its essence as well. In short, the world, its objects, selves, relations, and institutions are all historical, enmeshed in a transformative (not merely cyclical) process. No thing, whether an individual, an idea, a social institution, etc., has a separate, abstract, ideal and eternal existence. Every thing is in motion, and must be understood as such, the more so the more complex a thing is. Dialectics argues that there is no state of final completeness and thus demands that everything be seen in continuous development. Engels (1972, 13) commented that with the development of dialectical thinking,

All rigidity was dissolved, all fixity dissipated, all particularity that had been regarded as eternal became transient, the whole of nature shown as moving in eternal flux ... the whole of nature, from the smallest element to the greatest, from grains of sand to suns, from protista to men, has its existence in eternal coming into being and passing away, in ceaseless flux, in unresting motion and change.³²

In contrast, metaphysics sees the objects of the world statically, abstracted from the context of transformation, both internally and externally. Even when taking an historical perspective of something that changes, it will tend to present it as a series of snapshots.

32. Yet dialectics does not deny the concrete existence of reality. It only insists that it be understood dialectically, as not merely positive existence. It is worth comparing this to a description by a modern physicist speaking of the insights arising from quantum physics: "In the world of quantum, particles are incessantly appearing and disappearing. What we would think of as empty space is a teeming, fluctuating nothingness, with photons appearing from nowhere and vanishing almost as soon as they were born, with electrons frothing up for brief moments from the monstrous ocean to create evanescent electron-proton pairs and sundry other particles adding to the confusion" (Hoffman 1959, 38).

Contradiction and the unity of opposites

Just as they differ on the importance of motion, metaphysics and dialectics differ on how they understand motion. To understand movement, dialecticians turn to the concept of the unity of opposites. Mao summarizes it thus:

As opposed to the metaphysical world outlook, the world outlook of dialectical materialism holds that in order to understand the development of a thing we should study it internally and in its relations with other things; in other words, the development of things should be seen as their internal and necessary self-movement, while each thing in its movement is interrelated with and interacts on the things around it. The fundamental cause of the development of a thing is not external but internal; it lies in the contradictoriness within the thing. There is internal contradiction in every single thing, hence its motion and development. Contradictoriness within a thing is the fundamental cause of its development, while its interrelations and interactions with other things are secondary causes (Mao, *On Contradiction*).

Lenin (LCW 38: 358) notes similarly that the two main conceptions of movement are a quantitative view focusing on repetition, decrease and increase, and a qualitative one focusing on the unity of opposites:

In the first conception of movement, self-movement, its driving force, its motive force, remains in the shade (or this source is made external - God, subject, etc.). In the second conception the chief attention is directed precisely to knowledge of the source of 'self-movement. The first conception is lifeless, pale and dry. The second is living. The second alone furnishes the key to the 'leaps,' to the 'break in continuity,' to the 'transformation into the opposite,' to the destruction of the old and the emergence of the new.

At the most fundamental level, there is a unity of opposites between Being and Not-Being. Being implies, more, contains and requires, Not-Being.³³ The struggle

33. "When we say of things that they are finite, we understand thereby that they not only have a determinateness, that their quality is not only a reality and an intrinsic determination, that finite

(antagonistic since both can not be realized) between these opposites is manifest as Becoming. Being is thus abstract; it exists only as Becoming, as motion. In this way, dialectics sums up the laws of motion of things at their most general level. As Engels noted, following Hegel, motion itself is a contradiction. It is the unity of two opposites, changeability and stability. The transformation of quantity into quality, in other words, the qualitative (and ruptural) transformation of reality is thus based on contradiction, and is only understandable from the position of dialectics. This shows that contradiction exists not just in consciousness or social relations but in concrete reality as well.

Contradiction within things, what is often called the law of the unity of opposites, is the foundation of the dialectical world view.³⁴ Lenin (LCW 38: 253-4) said, "Dialectics in the proper sense is the study of contradiction in the very essence of objects."

Contradiction is a universal. "There is absolutely nothing whatever in which we cannot and must not point to contradictions of opposite attributes" (Hegel, 1991, 169). From the standpoint of dialectics, existence, Being, and motion are all impossible without contradiction. "Life consists precisely and primarily in this--that a being is at each moment itself and yet something else. Life is therefore also a contradiction which is present in things and processes themselves, and which constantly originates and resolves

things are not merely limited ... But that on the contrary, non-being constitutes their nature and being. Finite things are, but their relation to themselves is that they are negatively self-related and this very relation drives them beyond their being. They are, but the truth of this being is their destruction. The finite not only alters, as anything does, but it ceases to be, and it is not merely a possibility that it ceases to be, as though it could be that it might not cease. NO, the nature of the being of finite things is that they have within them the seeds of their own destruction; the hour of their birth is the hour of their death." (Hegel, quoted in Williams, 1989 7)

34. Dialectics is commonly presented as consisting of three 'laws:' the unity of opposites, the transformation of quantity into quality, and the negation of the negation. Mao reduced it to one - the unity of opposites. He argued that the transformation of quantity into quality is simply a particular unity of opposites, while there was no such thing as the negation of the negation since all things contain both negative and positive. See *On Contradiction*.

itself; and as soon as the contradiction ceases, life, too, comes to an end, and death steps in” (Engels 1939, 133).

Contradiction is not something that exists only at a particular stage, that is, when forms of conflict or difference have reached a particular level. “Contradiction is universal and absolute, it is present in the process of development of all things and permeates every process from beginning to end” (Mao, *On Contradiction*). The characteristics of contradiction change during the process of Becoming, but contradiction itself does not flash in and out of existence. Finally, contradictions, like everything else in the world, are historical, in constant transformation and dependent upon context.

[U]nless we understand the universality of contradiction, we have no way of discovering the universal cause or universal basis for the movement or development of things; however, unless we study the particularity of contradiction, we have no way of determining the particular essence of a thing which differentiates it from other things, no way of discovering the particular cause or particular basis for the movement or development of a thing, and no way of distinguishing one thing from another” (Mao, *On Contradiction*).³⁵

As Lenin said, the essence of dialectics is the concrete analysis of concrete conditions, and to understand the particularity of contradictions is to grasp them in their totality, in

35. Mao continues: “The relationship between the universality and the particularity of contradiction is the relationship between the general character and the individual character of contradiction. By the former we mean that contradiction exists in and runs through all processes from beginning to end; motion, things, processes, thinking--all are contradictions. To deny contradiction is to deny everything. This is a universal truth for all times and all countries, which admits of no exception. Hence the general character, the absoluteness of contradiction. But this general character is contained in every individual character; without individual character there can be no general character. If all individual character were removed, what general character would remain? It is because each contradiction is particular that individual character arises. All individual character exists conditionally and temporarily, and hence is relative. This truth concerning general and individual character, concerning absoluteness and relativity, is the quintessence of the problem of contradiction in things; failure to understand it is tantamount to abandoning dialectics” (Mao, *On Contradiction*).

all of their mutually constituting interconnections.

Identity and Diversity³⁶

As noted earlier, the metaphysical law of identity is $A = A$. In contrast, the dialectical formula of identity is $A = A$ and Not-A. Things are not just identified by what they are, but what they are not. “On the one hand they are opposed to each other, and on the other they are interconnected, interpenetrating, interpermeating and interdependent, and this character is described as identity. In given conditions, all contradictory aspects possess the character of non-identity and hence are described as being in contradiction. But they also possess the character of identity and hence are interconnected” (On Contradiction). Hegel notes that since there is “absolutely nothing” which does not contain contradictions, the abstraction made by metaphysics “therefore means a forcible insistence on a single aspect, and a real effort to obscure and remove all consciousness of the other attribute which is involved” (1991, 169). This is why he says, “It is important to come to a proper understanding of the true meaning of Identity; and, for that purpose, we must especially guard against taking it as abstract Identity, to the exclusion of all Difference. That is the touchstone for distinguishing all bad philosophy from what alone deserves the name of philosophy” (1991, 214). As a result, dialectics finds difference in identity: every phenomena is marked by both identity and difference. As Hegel put it, there is a necessary mediation of opposites; every determination is itself only through its Other.³⁷

36. This discussion of the dialectical conception of identity should be not be confused with identity politics and its underlying essentialism. See chapter 5.

37. For further elaboration, which focuses on Hegel, see Rosen (1982), particularly pp. 11-30.

Hegel notes that this is very different than metaphysical identity of $A = A$. The approach of metaphysics and positivism renders identity and diversity mutually exclusive, and thus makes change and development incomprehensible. Additionally, things are not marked simply by one contradiction. Particularly with regards to complex things, there are many contradictions, thus many unities of identity and diversity.

Contradiction and Struggle

The contradictions of dialectics represent something more than mere conflict, opposition or difference. Dialectical contradiction is “essential opposition; conflict within a unity; internal conflict - not mere external and accidental conflict. The dialectical law of contradiction asserts that conflict and opposition are necessary, essential and internal to things; whereas the point of arguing that only conflicts exist in nature is precisely to deny the necessity of these conflicts” (Norman and Sayers 1980, 16).

Understanding contradiction as essential conflict is important. Contradictions are not accidental, or avoidable. They are only resolvable through qualitative transformation - that is, the dissolution of the dialectical unity and its particular moments. Dialecticians argue that contradiction should not be thought of as an aberrant feature but should rather be seen as a normal and integral feature of reality, including human society. Hegel says

[I]t is not, so to speak, a blemish, an imperfection or a defect in something if a contradiction can be pointed out in it. On the contrary, every determination, every concrete thing, every notion is essentially a unity of different and distinctive moments, which by virtue of their clear and essential difference pass over into contradictory moments.” (Quoted in Williams 1989, 27)

Contradiction is thus inherent, essential. At the same time, while everything is contradictory, not everything represents a contradictory relationship. Mao asks,

Why can an egg but not a stone be transformed into a chicken? Why is there identity between war and peace and none between war and a stone? Why can human beings give birth only to human beings and not to anything else? The sole reason is that the identity of opposites exists only in necessary given conditions. Without these necessary given conditions there can be no identity whatsoever (Mao, *On Contradiction*).

Along with contradiction comes the struggle between the unities of opposites. While they create a unity, as Lenin notes, “The unity (coincidence, identity, equal action) of opposites is conditional, temporary, transitory, relative. The struggle of mutually exclusive opposites is absolute, just as development and motion are absolute” (1965b, 22). Returning to questions of motion and change, Mao says

There are two states of motion in all things, that of relative rest and that of conspicuous change. Both are caused by the struggle between the two contradictory elements contained in a thing. When the thing is in the first state of motion, it is undergoing only quantitative and not qualitative change and consequently presents the outward appearance of being at rest. When the thing is in the second state of motion, the quantitative change of the first state has already reached a culminating point and gives rise to the dissolution of the thing as an entity and thereupon a qualitative change ensues, hence the appearance of a conspicuous change. Such unity, solidarity, combination, harmony, balance, stalemate, deadlock, rest, constancy, equilibrium, solidity, attraction, etc., as we see in daily life, are all the appearances of things in the state of quantitative change. On the other hand, the dissolution of unity, that is, the destruction of this solidarity, combination, harmony, balance, stalemate, deadlock, rest, constancy, equilibrium, solidity and attraction, and the change of each into its opposite are all the appearances of things in the state of qualitative change, the transformation of one process into another. Things are constantly transforming themselves from the first into the second state of motion; the struggle of opposites goes on in both states but the contradiction is resolved through the second state. That is why we say that the unity of opposites is conditional, temporary and relative, while the struggle of mutually exclusive opposites is absolute (Mao, *On Contradiction*).

The unfolding, or resolving, of a contradiction is not merely the negation of one aspect, but its *aufheben*.³⁸ A dialectical ontology emphasizes struggle over unity. It stresses that the "struggle between opposites permeates a process from beginning to end and makes one process transform itself into another, that it is ubiquitous, and that struggle is therefore unconditional and absolute. The combination of conditional, relative identity and unconditional, absolute struggle constitutes the movement of opposites in all things" (Mao, *On Contradiction*).

The practice of dialectics focuses on correctly identifying and handling the immanent struggles brought about through the contradictions present in human society, while recognizing the constant re-emergence of new contradictions and new struggles.³⁹ As a result, dialectics, in its 'rational,' that is materialist, form, is a

philosophy of struggle and conflict. Nothing comes into being except through struggle; struggle is involved in the development of all things; and it is through struggle that things are negated and pass away. Conflict and contradiction are inevitable. Dialectical materialism does not regard struggle and contradiction with horror. Conflict for it is not merely nullifying. Struggle, and the negativity involved in it, are not merely destructive, but also productive. Struggle is a good thing, not a bad thing" (Norman and Sayers 1980, 23).

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38. The English language does not provide an adequate equivalent to this German word, which Hegel used. In German it can mean "to raise", "to preserve", but also "to abolish." Hegel used this dialectical meaning to describe the process whereby a higher form of thought or being supersedes a lower form, while at the same time maintaining its "moments of truth." See Williams (1989, 115-124) for further discussion.
39. Importantly though, "Contradiction and struggle are universal and absolute, but the methods of resolving contradictions, that is, the forms of struggle, differ according to the differences in the nature of the contradictions. Some contradictions are characterized by open antagonism, others are not. In accordance with the concrete development of things, some contradictions which were originally non-antagonistic develop into antagonistic ones, while others which were originally antagonistic develop into non-antagonistic ones" (Mao, *On Contradiction*). Mao expanded on these ideas in his lesser known but quite important piece "The Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People" (MSW V).

There have been various marxists who have argued for replacing dialectical contradiction with conflict, antagonism, or difference. As Norman and Sayers note, this is a reversion to metaphysics. It says that there is A, and there is B, and A is merely different than B - they may be opposed, but not necessarily.

Things which are merely positive, which merely are what they are, are abstract and dead. Nothing concrete and real is merely positive. Everything is contradictory and contains negative as well as positive aspects within it. The dialectical notion of contradiction is that such conflicts between opposed aspects are necessary and essential. Removing contradiction is a way to fundamentally remove struggle from the process of transformation. It necessarily becomes a manifestation of liberalism, or as Lenin would put it, revisionism.

To conclude, dialectics uncovers and emphasizes the inner contradiction within all things, as well as the interaction between different things, revealing "an endless maze of connections in which nothing remains what, where and as it was, but everything moves, changes, comes into being and passes away" (Engels 1972, 20). It stresses motion, complexity, change, upheavals, leaps, the transformation of things into their opposites, the supersession of what exists by new things, in opposition to the emphasis on settling down, gradual development, order, permanence, unity - in short, metaphysics. Dialectics insists that

identity, unity, equilibrium, rest and so on are only relative, while struggle, motion, change are absolute; and further, that after a certain points in the struggle of opposites, in the interpenetration with other things, there is a leap, a transformation of

the aspects into their opposites, and sooner or later a rupturing of the old identity and its replacement by a new relative identity (unity of opposites) (Avakian 1983, 24).

Dialectics is thus in opposition to a number of widely held positions in western philosophy: the laws of identity and non-contradiction, the dichotomization of body/mind, fact/value, etc., and the newtonian idea that objects at rest remain at rest unless acted upon by an outside force. This is perhaps one reason for the relative ignorance and dismissal of dialectics in the West - it is simply too much at odds with major assumptions of Western thought.⁴⁰ And as I discuss later, an ontology based on dialectics has much in common with a poststructuralist ontology.

Critical Views of Dialectics

Formal Versus Concrete Contradiction

Critiques of dialectics are legion and go as far back as Aristotle. Within the marxist tradition, Duhring and Bernstein have dismissed dialectics as incoherent, unscientific and incompatible with materialism. Popper (1962, 1966) agrees, arguing that dialectics violates the law of non-contradiction and thus commits the most elementary blunder of logic. The error is that they each equate dialectics and its concrete contradiction with a formal, logical contradiction. The resolution of the latter is simply negation - the logical contradictions merely cancel each other out. Equating this with dialectical concrete contradiction, they conclude that nothing results from contradiction, thus dialectics presents an incoherent view of the world. But the conflation of concrete with formal

40. A friend once told me a kind of dialectical riddle, or koan if you will. It illustrates both the nature of dialectical thinking, and how foreign it is, as I have found it to be rarely answered dialectically. Q: What do you need to put in a car you are building if you want to be able to drive from one side of the city to the other as quickly as possible? A: Brakes.

contradiction prevents them from seeing the “determinate negation” which comes from concrete contradictions. Hegel uses the word *aufheben* to indicate the resolution of a contradiction into a new contradiction. It is both positive and negative. Logical and concrete contradiction are two different things and to conflate the two is to confuse “cheese and chalk,” as Lenin put it. Norman and Sayers (1980, 14) conclude:

It is vital, then, to distinguish dialectical from formal contradiction; and to see that dialectical contradiction implies a concrete conflict of forces with a determinate outcome, and is not just self-annulment and abstract nothingness. When one understands this, one can see clearly that the standard criticisms of the dialectical concept of contradiction misunderstand it and treat it as though it were a formal contradiction.

Dichotomies and Spectrums

Dialectics is clearly distinct from any form of reductionism, which collapses opposing aspects into one another while denying the dominance of one. Monism is necessarily metaphysical and antithetical to dialectics. However, dialectics is often confused with dualism, which unlike reductionism emphasizes the difference of opposites but in a similarly “abstract and absolute fashion, to the exclusion of their identity or unity; it makes a complete separation between the opposed terms” (Norman and Sayers 1980, 76).⁴¹

Dualism is also a metaphysical view, illustrating what Hegel (1959, 32) called “the

41. For example, Jameson (1975, 120) saw the difference between binarism and the contradiction of dialectic as one of quantity, not quality. Binarism is simply a “paralyzed” or “arrested dialectic,” a static antithesis. “The binary opposition is dialectical insofar as it is dynamic, insofar as it involves differential perceptions.” Though he does not reduce dialectics to binarism, he erases the fundamental difference between the two and degrades the explanatory potential of dialectics.

tenacity which draws a hard and fast line between certain terms and others opposite them. We may see this clearly in the strict ‘either — or.’” Dialectics involves “the struggle to break up the rigidity to which [metaphysics] has reduced everything” (Norman and Sayers 1980, 68). Thus,

dialectic, properly understood, is incompatible with dualism and implies a profound and thorough-going critique of it. For dialectic, in all its forms, rejects the sort of rigid, either/or dichotomies upon which ... dualistic accounts are based. It stresses rather the unity of opposites and the contradictoriness of all concrete things.” The rigid dichotomization of either/or views is characteristic of abstract and metaphysical approaches, such as positivism, and is the very antithesis of dialectics, something Hegel, Lenin, and other writers on dialectics have stressed.⁴²

Dialectics conceives opposing aspects not in either/or, but both/and terms. They are not just mutually constituting but interpenetrating.⁴³ They exist in one another and this coexistence is what allows for one to change into another. As Mao put it, there is peace in war, there is death in life, or otherwise war or life would never end. Dialectics rejects such metaphysical separations as fact from value, subject from object, materiality from consciousness, etc, as well as any unidirectional conception of cause and effect.⁴⁴ At the

42. This presentation of dualism and dichotomies should be kept in mind in later discussions of two-line struggle, violence, proletarian state power, etc. These maoist concepts can, if separated from their dialectical reality, have the appearance of dualism. However, what they are actually expressing is the contradiction between simplicity and complexity. This contradiction, like all others, is in constant motion. While both mutually constitute one another and thus always exist in one another, there are also times when immense complexity is concentrated and expressed in relative simplicity. As Peterson (1992, 183) notes, "once the 'form' of dichotomies (imposed by objectivist metaphysics) is challenged, the meaning of [opposing] terms is no longer bounded by opposition." This grasping of the contradiction of simple/complex is I feel one of the important contributions which MLM makes, one which Avakian has turned to repeatedly in his recent works.

43. In addition, dialectics does not say that there is one single contradiction in a thing. Rather, as Mao notes in *On Contradiction*, things (and thus selves) are enmeshed in multiple contradictions, each of which is a part of the determination of the particularity of the other contradictions.

44. For examples expressing the dialectical unity of consciousness and materiality: Marx, “Material force must be overthrown by material force, but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses” (MECW 3: 182), and “Thinking and being, to be sure, are thus distinct but at the same time in unity with one another.” (MECW 3: 299); Lenin, “cognition not only reflects the

same time, it does not say the opposing aspects are equal. That is, in any given historical context, one will be dominant over the other.

The critique of dichotomies, particularly by Derrida, is foundational to poststructuralist approaches to feminism.⁴⁵ Derrida argued that much of western philosophy is based on a system of binarism in which one term is privileged at the expense of the other. It has been logocentric in that it is based on the assumed logocentric authority and primacy of speech and ‘presence’ over writing. It is also phallogocentric in that it assumes the transcendental male subject, which conceals its partiality under a claim to universality. Derrida’s project of deconstruction aimed to destabilize this phallogocentrism. He did this by privileging the subordinate aspects of metaphysical binarism, and to illustrate their interdependence and to prevent the original binarism from re-asserting itself. His methodology of deconstruction aimed to subvert and undermine dualisms and dichotomies and to create a space for multiplicity and difference, including sexual difference. The rejection of dichotomous thinking is integral to poststructuralist feminism, so it is important to note that dialectics is not a form of such thinking.⁴⁶

world, but creates it.” LCW 38:212); Mao, “once the correct ideas characteristic of the advanced class are grasped by the masses, these ideas turn into a material force which changes society and changes the world” (Where Do Correct Ideas Come From? in Mao 1968); and Chou En-lai “Once [marxism] is grasped by the masses, spritual force will turn into material force; and they will transform the objective world and, at the same time, their own subjective world.” (quoted in *CRS*, 145, f19).

45. See Kamuf (1981), Holland (1997) and Peterson (1992) for more on this.

46. Hekman (1990, 40) disagrees with this assessment of dialectics. "Despite its dialectical method Marxism remains a product of modernist thought in its search for truth and liberation ... although dialectical thought claims to transcend dualisms, it does so by positing a third term, a term that will necessarily create a new set of heirarchies and privileging. Dialectical thought does not displace the search for unitary truth, it merely moves that search to a different plane." Her discussion seems to me to be based on two erroneous assumptions: that there is no dialectics of nature, and that dialectics can be understood as thesis/antithesis/synthesis.

While dialectics is not based on dichotomies, it also rejects its "opposite," an ontology based upon a one-sided embrace of complexity in the form of spectrums. Such an ontology, common to postmodernism, denies the ruptures, the transformation of quantity into quality in particular and of things into their opposites more generally. It leads to an evolutionary perspective, of seeing (or desiring) only gradual change over time, rather than the existence (and desirability) of ruptures.⁴⁷

“Western” Marxism and the Dialectics of Nature

The question of a dialectics of nature may not seem immediately crucial for social theory. However, I argue that it is. First, without a dialectics of nature, there is no real basis for a dialectical ontology. Second, a dialectics of nature provides for a consistently dialectical and materialist theory.⁴⁸ Others, such as Lukacs, Sartre and members of the Frankfurt School rejected the idea of a dialectics of nature. Dühring also found the idea of contradictions in reality, as opposed to Hegel’s conception of dialectics existing only in the realm of thought, as the “apex of absurdity” (quoted in Engels, 1939, 164). Their basic point is that such concepts as negation and contradiction only make sense within the sphere of subjective thinking and human society. To project them into nature represents a form of idealist a priorism.⁴⁹ As a contemporary example, Williams takes a similar

47. As an aside, the evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould (1992) noted the parallels between his theory of "punctuated equilibria" and the transformation of quantity into quality. In *The Panda's Thumb*, he notes that: "that change occurs in large leaps following a slow accumulation of stresses that a system resists until it reaches the breaking point. Heat water and it eventually boils. Oppress the workers more and more and bring on the revolution." He also comments that, "If gradualism is more a product of Western thought than a fact of nature, then we should consider alternative philosophies of change to enlarge our realm of constraining prejudices."

48. This is not to say that dialectics in nature and in the human realm are necessarily identical. Following Mao, each would have their particularity in their expression of the universality of contradiction.

49. In academia, the tradition of “western” marxism is commonly counterpoised to “scientific” socialism. In this view, the former consists of Lukacs, Gramsci and the Frankfurt School, who are the legitimate heirs of Marx, while Engels, Lenin, and Mao are the ‘betrayers’ of Marx. For many,

position, arguing that while for Hegel dialectic is both a method of argument and an ontology, for Marx it is only his methodology:

Marx does not, in Hegel's fashion, see reality as dialectical but rather takes the view that reality can only be understood dialectically. This may seem only to be a minor distinction to make. But it has the implication that Marx does not devote his lifetime's work to demonstrating the identity of rational thought with reality, but, rather, to demonstrating the lack of identity between the two. For Marx, unlike Hegel, neither is the real necessarily rational nor is the rational necessarily real. Marx, on the contrary, comes to the conclusion that the real has to be made rational and the rational real (1989, x).

Williams suggests that to accept a dialectical ontology, that material reality is contradictory, is to accept Hegel's idea that what exists is rational - that is, that dialectics creates rationality. Thus, in his view, a dialectical ontology is necessarily idealist. He concludes (1979, xv) that "Dialectics is not to be found in existent things, it represents a means of comprehending those things and, above all, our relationship to them and to other human individuals."

This argument rests upon the assumption that the only conception of a dialectical ontology is Hegel's. However, outside of the Hegelian philosophical system, there is no reason to attach a dialectical ontology to the Absolute Idea or the argument that what

the central aspect which creates this opposition is the question of dialectics. However, as Anderson (1995) notes, the attention that Lenin pays to dialectics demonstrates clearly that the exclusion of Lenin from this group of dialecticians is arbitrary. Or, rather, it is ideologically based, as it allows for the creation of a marxist theorization radically separated from practice, from the complex, messy and often mistake-laden process of actually transforming the world and, importantly deepening and transforming one's understanding and grasp of materialism and dialectics. Unfortunately, Anderson makes the same error in including Mao in the camp of non-dialectical "orthodox" marxism. This no doubt rests upon his reliance upon Dunayevskaya's reading of Mao. She was one of the more vituperative marxist critics of Mao, though this is not to suggest that her critique was well-informed. By relying upon a critic of Mao, instead of Mao's actual body of work, Anderson presents another example of a very common practice, one which I will revisit in chapter 4.

exists is rational. While Hegel certainly conceived of his system as a coherent totality, this is not to assume that its parts necessarily imply the whole.

In William's conception, dialectics is reduced to little more than a method of argument which is attentive to transformations over time. In addition, this approach to dialectics ends up resting upon both metaphysics and idealism. For the former, if there is no dialectics of nature, in the concrete reality of all things, then the things of the world are not contradictory. Thus, this view ascribes to concrete things a metaphysical law of identity, of $A = A$. But, such abstract and absolute identity cannot exist. For the latter, if materiality does not contain contradictions, then it is incapable of self-movement. This then requires the intervention of some demiurge or prime mover beyond the material world. Failing that, it can not explain how a human society and consciousness, something dialectical, could have developed from a *non-dialectical* reality.

This is why Engels (1992, 211) insisted that "Dialectics, so-called objective dialectics, prevails throughout nature, and so-called subjective dialectics, dialectical thought, is only the reflection of the motion through opposites which asserts itself everywhere in nature, and which by the continual conflict of the opposites and their final passage into one another, or into higher forms, determines the life of nature." Dialectical thought is therefore not merely useful or convenient for understanding material reality, but accurate. A dialectical ontology is dialectical materialism.⁵⁰

50. There are other marxists who have argued against dialectics. Althusser (1970) wished to construct a marxism completely free of dialectic, while Colletti (1979) wanted to replace it with the concept of conflict, or oppositions. From the analytical marxist perspective, Roemer (1986) saw the dialectic as the 'yoga' of marxism which prevents marxists from becoming more like neo-classical economics (similar to Elster (1985) who wanted marxism to change so that it is more acceptable to mainstream social scientists by uniting it with rational choice theory and positivism). While a full discussion of

Marxism, Materialism and Dialectics

In the West, the modern conception of dialectics began with Hegel, and Marx was clear about his debt to his philosophical predecessor. However, as Marx famously noted, Hegel's dialectic was in a mystified form which needed to be put right-side up. Hegel felt that the Absolute Idea is the true reality and basis of all that exists. The Absolute Idea exists eternally and implicitly contains all possible phenomena of nature and society. It is capable of self-cognition and thus self-development during which it passes through different stages which more fully reveal its inner content. For Hegel, Being is Thought; thus materiality is secondary and foreign to the Idea. "The great flaw in Hegel's objective idealism is that it identifies changes in the state of our knowledge with changes in the world we observe" (Williams 44). Or, as Engels (1972, 26) put it, Hegel's idealism "is the source of the whole forced and often outrageous treatment; the universe, willy-nilly, is made out to be arranged in accordance with a system of thought which itself is only the product of a definite stage of evolution of human thought."⁵¹

For Marx, what was needed to demystify Hegel's dialectic was to transform it through the prism of materialism. To do so, he turned to Feuerbach, who had developed a version of materialism in opposition to idealism. However, Feuerbach's materialism was limited, in the tradition of pre-marxist materialism, which conceived matter as an immutable

these and other authors is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it should be noted that there are other traditions of marxism which reject dialectics.

51. Importantly, nature is infinite, not closed. Thus, truth itself is endless and cannot be summed up in a single all-embracing system. Dialectical processes, as Engels explains, are a kind of spiral of development, an open-ended system, not a closed circle. That is another fundamental difference with the Hegelian philosophy, which ultimately contradicted itself by attempting to express the dialectic as a closed and absolute System.

substratum to changing things. His anthropological principle treated human beings as a physiological and biological rather than a social creature. As a result, he viewed human beings in a metaphysical, not dialectical fashion. In other words, his materialism was mechanical, metaphysical. The bringing together of dialectics and materialism transformed both.

The resulting materialist dialectics views reality as matter in motion. Consciousness, reason and subjectivity are seen as particular - complex & highly developed - forms of matter in motion. In other words, they are not independent. Engels (MECW 26: 368) notes, "The material, sensuously perceptible world to which we ourselves belong is the only reality; and . . . Our consciousness and thinking, however suprasensuous they may seem, are the product of a material, bodily organ, the brain. Matter is not a product of mind, but mind is itself merely the highest product of matter. This is ... materialism."

As Lenin put it, "Marx and Engels laid the emphasis in their works rather on *dialectical* materialism than on dialectical *materialism*" (LCW 14: 329; emphasis in original). There is no question then, of a conception of reality which is entirely determined by the development of material conditions or which entails only quantitative and ultimately cyclical change. What is key about this is that it is in opposition to the mechanical materialism of "marxist" determinists in which political line, culture and human consciousness become merely effects of material changes.

It is thus crucial to grasp the importance of dialectics. Marxism is commonly assumed, even by critical scholars, including those who consider themselves to be marxist, to mean

simply materialism, or the various tenets of historical materialism. Introductory texts and surveys of political theory generally present marxism as such, limiting it to the materialist theory of history, the determination of consciousness by being, the base/superstructure model and so on. Only rarely do such works discuss dialectics, and usually it is in the inaccurate gloss of “thesis + antithesis = synthesis” which was discussed earlier. In addition, applications of marxism in the scholarly literature usually do not involve a discussion of dialectics. This situation, despite its pervasiveness, is strange, given the emphasis placed on dialectics by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao, indeed the majority of significant figures of marxism. However, it is also true that more than a few self-identified marxists and communists have been quite non-dialectical in their thinking and practice. In this regard, it is not "incorrect" to conclude that marxism does not involve dialectics.

More to the point, many, if not most, of the common criticisms of marxism build from the erroneous equation of marxism = materialism. Thus, they do not present accurate criticisms of marxism, regardless of how accurate their criticisms of materialism (or mechanical presentations of marxism) may be. Understanding marxism as dialectical materialism, and not simply as materialism, is crucial. Once dialectics is fully understood, it is clear that many common criticisms, including from feminists, of marxism are actually criticisms of materialism, specifically mechanical materialism. Charges of positivism, economic determinism, reductionism and scientism are not applicable to a fully dialectical materialism, however much they might be applicable to other manifestations of marxist theory and practice that build from positivism, reductionism,

etc.⁵²

Since practitioners from Marx to Mao have identified marxism as *scientific*, there is a tendency for critics (as well as some proponents) to equate it with positivist epistemologies, with *scientism*. However, this is assuming that what one person means by a word is the same thing as another person means. Marx referred to his methodology as scientific (as do the proponents of MLM), but I argue that what he means by that is an approach which is non-ideological, does not equate appearances with essence, is rooted in the daily life of human beings and based on the "concrete investigation of concrete reality." Most importantly, it is dialectical, which by now should be clear has nothing to do with positivism.⁵³

Dialectical materialism rejects foundationalism, the conviction that there is some immutable, ahistorical matrix or framework in which truth claims can be grounded. Beyond the ontological questions, this is further augmented by the commitment to

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52. Dialectics is not only crucial for understanding marxism. It is even more essential for its practice. The central problem that has haunted the historical praxis of socialism has revolved around the question of dialectics. The lack of a grasp and application of dialectics is the most important internal source of the errors, setbacks and disasters that have afflicted the project of socialist reconstruction of society. Marxism without dialectics, or in which dialectics is simple a gloss on an overall mechanistic foundation, is something quite different from a fully dialectical marxism. Additionally, as dialectics insists, everything can be turned its opposite. By the time Mao was writing on dialectics, the official philosophy of the Soviet Union had descended deep into scholasticism, metaphysics, dogmatism, non-critical thinking, and the multiplication of rigid (and byzantine) "categories" over time. All of which degraded dialectics and the centrality of contradiction to philosophy, and turned philosophy into an academic exercise, and not a revolutionary tool for thinking and doing.
53. Similarly, Finn (Quoted in Hekman 1990, 7) has written, on the utility of marxism and other "foundationalist" approaches that "You can not 'doctor' these theories with respect to women and at the same time save the theory. The philosophical system does not survive the doctoring. The exclusion or denigration of women is integral to the system and to give equal recognition to women destroys the system." This, of course, depends upon what exactly "these theories" are, or more precisely, how they are conceived. What is true of a positivist marxism might not be true of a dialectical marxism.

practice, specifically the concrete revolutionizing practice of the masses and its class conscious leadership. This necessarily means a foundation consisting of change, transformation and flux. In other words, a dialectical foundation involving contradiction. As Lenin (LCW 14:142) noted, “The standpoint of life, of practice, should be first and fundamental in the theory of knowledge.” Mao, as we will see in the next chapter, placed particular importance on this.⁵⁴ Because of this emphasis on practice, dialectics (Engels 1939, xv) “lays particular emphasis on the inter-connection of all processes, and the artificial character of the distinctions which men [sic] have drawn ... between the different fields of human knowledge such as economics, history, and natural science. As Lenin (LCW 38:146) notes “in order to embrace the world,” concepts should be “flexible, mobile, relative, mutually connected.” Lenin states further (LCW 14:262), “dialectical materialism insists on the temporary, relative, approximate character of all ... knowledge.”⁵⁵

This is where dialectical materialism makes an epistemological rupture from Hegel. From Marx on, the materialist dialectic is not an a priori deduction, but a summary of human knowledge, rooted in the context of historical experience and practice. Norman and Sayers note (Norman and Sayers 1980, 19) that Hegel’s dialectic is based on a priori assumptions, “attempts to deduce all the essential categories of reality, starting from the concept of mere abstract Being.” Williams agrees (1989, 44): “The great flaw in Hegel’s

54. The stress on practice goes at least as far back as Marx’s Theses on Feuerbach (MECW 3: 5): “All mysteries which mislead theory into mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and the comprehension of this practice.”

55. This is not to suggest that there were not aspects of positivism and metaphysics in all of these people - to think otherwise would itself be metaphysical. Engels had a rather naively pictorial interpretation of the role of consciousness. As for Lenin, while he changed his view and conceded that human consciousness was not simply passive, he never really abandoned a transcript theory of cognition.

objective idealism is that it identifies changes in the state of our knowledge with changes in the world we observe.”

Mao sums up materialist dialectics this way:

According to dialectical materialism, contradiction is present in all processes of objectively existing things and of subjective thought and permeates all these processes from beginning to end; this is the universality and absoluteness of contradiction. Each contradiction and each of its aspects have their respective characteristics; this is the particularity and relativity of contradiction. In given conditions, opposites possess identity, and consequently can coexist in a single entity and can transform themselves into each other; this again is the particularity and relativity of contradiction. But the struggle of opposites is ceaseless, it goes on both when the opposites are coexisting and when they are transforming themselves into each other, and becomes especially conspicuous when they are transforming themselves into one another; this again is the universality and absoluteness of contradiction (Mao *On Contradiction*).

Or, more succinctly, “dialectical materialism consists of the study of the particularity of contradiction in the concrete things confronting us for guiding the course of revolutionary practice.”

Materialist Dialectics as Foundation

This ontological foundation of imbricated contradiction and ceaseless transformation provides for the multiplicity of analytical categories. A fully dialectical marxism can encompass (though not replace) many streams of thought. It can recognize things, selves and their relations in both their complexity and their concreteness. As Engels (1939, 36) put it, “dialectics ... comprehends things and their representations in their essential connection, concatenation, motion, origin and ending.” This foundation allows for the fruitful interaction between marxism and feminism, specifically in what I argue are their

most advanced and compatible forms, maoism and post-modern feminism. Though the terms and categories employed are quite different, there is at times remarkable consonance between the two.

In his discussion of art and literature in the context of China's revolution, Mao said,

To study Marxism means to apply the dialectical materialist and historical materialist viewpoint in our observation of the world, of society and of literature and art; it does not mean writing philosophical lectures into our works of literature and art. Marxism embraces but cannot replace realism in literary and artistic creation, just as it embraces but cannot replace the atomic and electronic theories in physics" ("Talks on the Yen-an Forum on Literature and Art," MSW 3: 94).

Similarly, materialist dialectics which does not reify concepts and social categories can also embrace, in a non-reductionist manner, (a dialectical conception of) gender.⁵⁶ There is no immanent barrier within dialectics to this.⁵⁷ An illustration of Mao's relevance to

56. The parenthetical phrase is important, as I detail later. A clear and significant shortcoming in the history of maoism has been its integration of feminist concerns into its praxis. To put the problem simply, while maoist attention to patriarchy and 'the woman question.' has been regularly materialist, proletarian and revolutionary, it has also been regularly non-dialectical. That is, maoists have often employed reified conceptions of, say, patriarchy and sexuality.

57. This is not limited to the question of gender but applies to other areas as well. The following is a good example of a dialectical approach to the particular question racism and national oppression. It comes from a document (Revolutionary Workers League/US 1984) critical of the Black Nation Thesis, that Blacks in the USA constitute a separate nation, long a common position among US communists. The core criticism is that the thesis is undialectical in that racial categories are conceived of as natural categories, with the resulting view that racism is simply the "social misuse" of such categories: "The Marxist approach to racism would begin with the analysis of the dialectic of racial categories, then proceed to the investigation of the real relations which produced this form of thought; i.e., racism as the unity of race relations and racial categories. In this way, racial categories will be seen as the ideological reflection of those real relations which we now call, ex post facto, "race relations." Given this, the natural in the social of racial categories will be seen as nothing more than a vulgarized conception of human genetic variation, a conception which racism gives birth to and makes use of. Racial categories are racist categories. The failure to proceed with a dialectical analysis of racial categories puts us in the compromised position of rejecting the practical consequence of racism while simultaneously accepting the theoretical premise of racism. As a result, the pre-racist past and post-racist future are seen through the tinted glass of the present racist mode of thought, and the historical specificity of the origin and demise of racism becomes hopelessly obscured (28)."

questions of gender and patriarchy comes from bell hooks' *Ain't I A Woman* (1983). At the end of the book, she includes the following anonymous quote, which clearly came from someone well versed in dialectics and maoism.⁵⁸

In all these struggles we must be assertive and challenging, combating the deep-seated tendency in Americans to be liberal, that is, to evade struggling over questions of principle for fear of creating tensions or becoming unpopular. Instead we must live by the fundamental dialectical principle: that progress comes only from struggling to resolve contradictions (1983, 195).

Both marxism and feminism have had to struggle with the reproduction of ideology and emergence of new ideological forms within their respective traditions. These, whether heterosexism, reification of social categories, dogmatism, racism, etc., have reduced the liberatory and revolutionary potential of each. Consistent application of the principles of materialist dialectics helps to guard against the emergence of new ideological forms of consciousness and political praxis. In a very real sense, ideology is non-dialectical, and non-materialist. Ideology, in Marx's sense, serves to obscure, mystify or legitimize contradictions and the exploitation, oppression and hierarchies they represent. It seeks solutions apart from the concrete resolution of contradictions in social reality.

Metaphysics and idealism are ideological forms which serve the interests of ruling classes and dominant groups. As Mao notes,

It is only the reactionary ruling classes of the past and present and the metaphysicians in their service who regard opposites not as living, conditional, mobile and transforming themselves into one another, but as dead and rigid, and they propagate this fallacy everywhere to delude the masses of the people, thus seeking to perpetuate their rule. The task of Communists is to expose the fallacies of the reactionaries and metaphysicians, to propagate the dialectics inherent in things, and so accelerate the

58. Specifically, the quote is restating Mao's "Combat Liberalism," which is one of the key texts for maoists in how to approach political struggle among the ranks of the revolutionaries and their allies.

transformation of things and achieve the goal of revolution. (Mao *On Contradiction*)

Materialist dialectics, by highlighting contradictions and insisting on their resolution in material reality, works against what Mao called the unprincipled peace, the ideologically motivated acceptance of, or at least acquiescence to, things as they are.

To regard contradictions with horror and to refuse to recognize them is condemn ones to being, in Mao's words, 'handicapped & passive' in the face of them. Indeed, the denial of contradiction is ultimately a philosophy of reconciliation and of acquiescence to things as they are. The denial of contradiction is the philosophical basis of revisionism; for to abandon Marx's dialectic is to abandon the critical and revolutionary foundation of his thought (Norman and Sayers 1980, 23).

This is not to suggest that dialectical marxists understand dialectics the same way, or have applied it consistently and accurately in their writings and their practice. As Mao noted, mistakes are inevitable. Given the tremendous complexities and immediate concrete necessities involved in putting dialectics into the practice of the revolutionary transformation of society, mistakes in dialectics are equally inevitable – it is always entangled with positivism, reductionism, etc. The following chapter outlines the praxis, which includes both tremendous advances and mistakes, that Mao developed based upon this dialectical ontology of contradiction, struggle and ceaseless transformation.

A Poststructuralist Ontology

As outlined here, a dialectical ontology has much in common with that of poststructuralism. A complex and heterogeneous philosophical movement, poststructuralism offers a range of theories, critiques, concepts, and forms of analysis. It arose out of a number of key theoretical domains – the structuralist linguistics of

Ferdinand de Saussure, the psychoanalytics of Jacques Lacan, the rediscovery of Friedrich Nietzsche by Martin Heidegger and others, and the structuralist reading of Marx by Louis Althusser. Other key figures include Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, Luce Irigaray, Jean Baudrillard, along with many others. Given the heterogeneity and the fact that much of these different aspects are contested within poststructuralism, I can not give more than a very brief outline of poststructuralism. In addition, I focus on the poststructuralist conception of ontology, and do not discuss any number of other aspects of poststructuralism.

At the broadest conception, poststructuralism can be said to be a complex skein of thought embodying different forms of critical practice which focus on "decentering," whether of structure (in language or social formations), of the transcendental signified, of the sovereign subject, and of truth claims. As George and Campbell (1990, 280) summarize, the project of poststructuralism is

a search for thinking space within the modern categories of unity, identity and homogeneity; the search for a broader and more complex understanding of modern society which accounts for that which is left out – the "other," the marginalized, the excluded. The target of this dissent is the foundationalism and essentialism of post-Enlightenment scientific philosophy, its universalist presuppositions about modern rational man, its hidden metaphysics, its metatheoretical commitment to dualized categories of meaning and understanding, its logocentric strategies of identity and hierarchization, its theorized propositions about human nature, its dogmatic faith in method, its philosophies of intentions and consciousness, and its tendency toward grand theory and the implications of its imposition.

Poststructuralism rejects the rational, autonomous, self-transparent, subject of humanist thought, and is particularly concerned with the role of language. Whereas structuralism views language as the medium through which reality is created, poststructuralists seek to

problematize language and highlight the role it plays in the creation of meaning and the understanding of "reality." They emphasize the contingency and historical nature of the attachment between the verbal sign and the idea or concept to which it is supposed to refer. The resulting "play" of meaning breaks down the concept of signifier/signified in that the relationship can be compromised when everything becomes a signifier – a sort of chain effect with no beginning or end, or when there are multiple elements on either side of the relationship.

For Derrida, a fundamental part of language is its "surfeit" of meaning, and the subversions of these meanings that arise through iterations. Language does not just reproduce a set of established norms and conventions but will always reinterpret and resignify, modify, and discursively challenge them. Derrida notes (1988, 102):

I do not believe that iterability is necessarily tied to convention, and even less, that it is limited by it. Iterability is precisely that which – once its consequences have been unfolded – can no longer be dominated by the opposition nature/convention. It dislocates, subverts, and constantly displaces the dividing line between the two terms. It has an essential rapport with the force (theoretical and practical, 'effective,' 'historical,' psychic, 'political,' etc.) deconstructing these oppositional limits.

Since language is not transparent or controllable and since, in the structuralist view all meaning is derived through the system of language, the universe consequently is seen as uncertain and decentered due to the absence of fixed standards against which to measure anything.

I see many important similarities between the ontologies of poststructuralism and materialist dialectics as outlined in this chapter. For both, the central concept is

Becoming, not Being, and thus they are not forms of existentialism. They do not focus on the creation of transcendent categories but instead on the process of transformation of an existence in constant flux. Both ontologies are a-teleological and reject the assumption of an eternal, self-identical truth underneath the flow of history. They thus would essentially agree with Benjamin's view of history as a "pile of debris," with no inherent final cause or purpose.⁵⁹

Both also reject the dualistic assumption that the 'choice' is between progress towards an inherent goal or nihilism. Similarly, there is the mutual rejection of foundationalism, the assumption of some ahistorical, unchanging foundation upon which to ground truth claims. Both see it as a question of "turtles all the way down."⁶⁰ And while they recognize the resulting epistemological difficulties and confusion such a view entails, they reject the argument that therefore there is no basis for knowledge claims (or values, etc.).

While a poststructuralists may put it in terms of an infinite regression of signs, a marxist might point to (for example) the question of who will teach the teachers. This is also why both reject forms of essentialism and their manifestation in identity politics, because there

59. "A Klee painting named "Angelus Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress" (Benjamin 1969, 257).

60. This refers to a story involving a lecture on cosmology by Bertrand Russell. A woman in the audience dismissed Russell's presentation, saying that the truth is that the world was supported on the back of a giant tortoise. When Russell asked what the tortoise is standing on, the woman responded that "it's turtles all the way down." The introduction to Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* includes a version of this story.

is no stable identity in which such politics can be grounded. Both reject important assumptions underlying Western philosophy, such as the Aristotelian concept of identity and the dualisms of subject/object, fact/value and other dichotomies. Both ontologies reject empiricism (the view that the world can be directly observed, that observation is not theory-laden, and those observations evaluated in relation to facts), realism (the assumption that facts are out there just waiting to be discovered) and positivism (what I have discussed in this chapter as metaphysics).

On the other hand, there are differences. The mutual aversion to teleology has different origins. For poststructuralists, the primary concern is ethical, in that teleology is seen as reductive, exclusionary and harmful to those whose stories are erased through the imposition of a metanarrative.⁶¹ From the point of view of MLM, the ethical considerations are secondary; the principal concern is that teleology is an incorrect understanding, that it does not accurately capture the complex motion and development of existence.

Poststructuralists tend to reject all forms of realism and argue that there is no unmediated, prediscursive reality. In contrast, dialectical materialists could be seen as deploying a form of critical realism, but one which is not uniform. Like anything else in a dialectical ontology, it is always particular, always contingent. For example, if a gun is fired at you, how you conceptualize that bullet has no meaningful impact on its existence. In such a situation, a dialectical materialist view would give the appearance of a naive realism, in seeing reality as having an existence completely independent of one's thinking. On the

61. Deleuze (1995, 11) spoke to this when he said, "Arguments from one's own privileged experience are bad and reactionary arguments."

other hand, if one is considering, say, sexuality (or reality at the quantum level), how we conceptualize it has a tremendous impact on what it "is" (though dialectical materialists would tend to focus on the material foundations of these conceptualizations, while poststructuralists would tend to focus on the regulatory regimes underlying the conceptualizations). Though some poststructuralists may advocate a more consistent and radical subjectivist rejection of realism, I feel that many others would be in basic agreement with such a contingent realism.⁶²

Most fundamentally, though both see existence as flux, they originate this differently. Dialectical materialists locate the source of movement in contradiction in reality and consciousness, in interpenetrating opposites transformed through ruptures. Poststructuralists locate the source of movement in the realm of discourse. Derrida developed the concept of *différance* as a way of gesturing towards the paradoxes of textual meaning. He called *différance* a quasi-transcendental concept which serves as the condition of both the possibility and the impossibility of meaning. The symbols and signs of language can never completely bring forth what they mean and must always appeal to additional words. The result is that meaning is forever "deferred" through an endless chain of signifiers. In doing so, the differentiating of signs from one another engenders binary oppositions and hierarchies which underpin meaning itself.

Thus, complete meaning is always postponed in language. It is inherently paradoxical and

62. As an aside, revolutionary communists usually argue against the idea that there are different methodologies appropriate for the natural sciences and the social sciences. For them, a materialist dialectical methodology is correct for "both" realms. However, the *deployment* of the methodology differs according to the concrete circumstances of the investigation.

constantly produces "aporia." Derrida (1993, 21) has defined this as "the impossible, the antinomy, or the contradiction." Aporia "is a nonpassage because its elementary milieu does not allow for something that could be called passage, step, walk, gait, displacement, or replacement, a kinesis in general. There is no more path ... The impasse itself would be impossible." What is generated from this is what Derrida calls a "hauntology," characterized by Laclau as the recognition "that the condition of possibility of something is also its condition of impossibility" (quoted in Strathauseen 2006). This points to another difference I see between the two ontologies. For poststructuralists, the paradoxes engendered through discourse are constantly unfolding, inexhaustively producing ambiguity and aporia. While materialist dialectics shares this to a real extent, it also temporalizes this through the concept of rupture, the fundamental transformation in which an identifiable contingent essence becomes something different.⁶³

The differences between poststructuralists and dialectical materialists can take them to very different, even oppositional, places. And there are implications with regards to epistemology and methodology. For example, dialectical materialists will aim to go beneath the surface of things through the investigation of contradictions in concrete reality. Poststructuralists in contrast, will want to stay on the surface and deconstruct the regimes of truth and regulatory practices which produce particular understandings. However, I feel that the ontological consonance between the two creates a very fertile theoretical space, one which I feel is largely uninvestigated.

63. A difference here is that in my experience, maoists are less willing in practice to embrace such ambiguity and more likely to efface its more difficult emanations.

CHAPTER THREE: MAOISM AND MATERIALIST DIALECTICS

“Straw sandals have no pattern - they shape themselves in the making.”

Mao (quoted in Schram 1974, 94)

"Wind will not cease even if trees want to rest."

Mao, "The Objective Existence of Class Struggle" (MSW 9)

"My purpose is to get people to dare to speak out with vigor and invincible force ... freeing themselves from inhibitions."

Mao (quoted in Han Suyin 1976, 124)

“Whoever talks glibly about ‘transformation to a mass style’ while in fact he is stuck fast in his own small circle had better watch out, or some day one of the masses may bump into him along the road and say, ‘what about all this “transformation,” sir? Can I see a bit of it, please?’ and he will be in a fix.”

Mao, "Oppose Stereotyped Party Writing" (MSW 3: 64)

In this chapter, I map out some of the aspects of a maoist approach to materialist dialectics and how it has been put into practice.⁶⁴ This is not intended to be a complete overview of the subject. Instead I am focusing on those aspects which are particularly relevant for making the argument for the salience of maoism to the question of women’s liberation, and for responding to some feminist critiques of maoist China in the following chapter. Specifically, I focus on the centrality of dialectics to maoist praxis, the two-line

64. In addition to the Collected Works of Mao, the newspapers and journals of various maoist parties, and works on dialectics cited earlier, this draws extensively upon Avakian (1978, 1983, 1986, 1992), Lotta (1978, 1982, 1995), RCP (1978, 2001), Corrigan, Ramsay, and Sayer (1979) and Starr (1979). Other important sources are the first person and journalistic accounts of revolutionary China, such as Belden (1949), Hinton (1966, 1972a, 1972b, 1983, 1990), Horn (1969), Milton (1971) Myrdal (1965, 1970, 1984), and Snow (1938, 1971, 1974). Other works consulted, including some very critical of Mao, include Alexander (1999), Becker (1996), Bettelheim (1974), Bettelheim and Burton (1978), Brugger and Kelly (1990), Chang (1975), Chossudovsky (1986), Ch’en (1969), Deutscher (1978), Dirlik et al (1997), Evans (1978), Fan (1968), Foley (2002), Friedman et al (1991), Gurley (1976), Han (1972, 1976), Holubnychy (1964), Horn (1969), Hsiung (1974), Hunter (1986), Karnow (1972), Kerry (1977), Leys (1983), Macchiocchi (1972), MacFarquhar et al (1989), MacFarquhar (1966), Marchant (1973, 1975), Meisner (1980, 1996), Schram (1974), Selden (1971), Smith (1987), Solomon (1971), Terrill (1999), Tewes (1999), Wakeman (1973), Whitehead (1977), Wilson (1977), Wolff (1983) and Zheng (1996).

struggle⁶⁵ between (and within) maoism and the various forms of revisionism, and what this means for revolutionary practice and the building of socialism.

As throughout this dissertation, I navigate between conceptions of maoism in the abstract and in the concrete. In other words, while the principal concern is maoist theory, this is inseparable from maoist practice and the latter necessarily involves revolutionary China. The concrete historical experience of China is an essential aspect of maoism, but it does not exhaust the subject. Similarly, while obviously Mao is at the heart of maoism, his theorization and practice is not necessarily synonymous with maoism. Indeed, to treat maoism as simply the collection of policies and ideas of maoist China would be to reduce maoism into its opposite - a dead dogma. MLM is necessarily a constantly evolving and transforming worldview and ideology. With this in mind, I make use of the critical contributions of Bob Avakian.

There is a story related of a visitor to China during the height of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR). The visitor is talking with an elderly woman who tends pigs on a commune. Summarizing her attitude toward her work, the peasant says, "By correctly grasping and applying Chairman Mao's instructions on dialectics, I am raising

65. "Line" is a fundamental concept in MLM and is a short-hand for referring to one's overall conception of reality and the correct way to engage it. Two-line struggle refers to the struggle between opposing lines, and is a manifestation of the emphasis MLM places on consciousness. It is manifested in myriad ways and from the perspective of MLM is both continually re-emerging and essential to the development and revolutionizing of society. At particular times, the unfolding of contradictions brings two-line struggle to the fore as the dominant aspect of revolutionary struggle. Line struggles can be extremely complex, as lines are always to some degree, and at times greatly, entangled with one another, and are not personified. Indeed, part of two-line struggle is the exposure of the essential differences between lines, and even their existence. But they also are an expression of simplicity within complexity, which is not to be confused with dualism. Two-line struggle is thus a fully materialist dialectical concept.

these pigs in the service of the world revolution.” This anecdote, reflecting a very broad-minded and internationalist attitude once commonly expressed in China, reveals the heart of the maoist approach to materialist dialectics, and thus the heart of maoism. Dialectics is not just a subject for debate among scholars or something relegated to the realms of philosophizing (an activity which Marx and Mao both trenchantly criticized),⁶⁶ but is something to be consciously wrangled with and wielded by the masses in their daily lives.⁶⁷ It is an illustration of Mao's desire (Mao, quoted in CRS 14) to “liberate philosophy from the confines of the philosopher’s lecture rooms and textbooks, and turn it into a sharp weapon in the hands of the masses.” Accordingly, Mao wrote on dialectics in a colloquial language accessible to workers and peasants, augmented by pamphlets created for popular consumption such as “Philosophy is No Mystery.”

The raising of pigs, a typical manifestation of everyday life for China’s peasant masses, was not being done for her own or her family’s material gain, or to bring glory to her commune but rather as an integral part of the revolutionizing of all aspects of society, and beyond. "We're working for the world revolution. We aren't working for ourselves, we aren't only working for our own collective, we aren't only working for China: we're working so that all the people of the world shall be free, and other people's struggle is a struggle for our future" (Myrdal 1972: 185). Thus, her comment brings together not only

66. Mao chastised those who have "limited themselves to discussing ... documents with the aid of documents," that is, those who have not participated in class struggle but only in forms of book-learning (Han Suyin 1976, 409). He put it pointedly in his "Talk on Questions of Philosophy, when he said, "if you don't engage in class struggle, then what is this philosophy you're engaged in?" (Schram 1974, 215).

67. Maoists make a distinction between the vanguard party and the masses, but it is a *dialectical* distinction and based upon *dialectical* conceptions. It is a particular example of the leadership/led contradiction, which has many forms throughout society. It is not a metaphysical distinction but one which is to be conceived and approached in such a way as to transform the material conditions which require it and thus ultimately the distinction itself.

theory and practice, but method and goals (means/ends). Her practice is an example of the conscious transformation of the divisions in society, particularly between mental and manual labor. Dialectics becomes the means by which one can grasp the connection between the minutiae of daily life to the greatest structural transformations, of "the intimate, visible, and momentous connection between individual actions and general destiny" (Lukacs, 1970 13). It is not simply an explanation or methodology underlying one's investigations but an active and consciously applied principle of social transformation on the part of the masses.

Maoism is not first or foremost a collection of particular policies. Maoism builds upon the dialectical traditions inherent, however often ignored, in the theoretical praxis of marxism and leninism.⁶⁸ It insists on, as Lenin put it, *dialectical* materialism as opposed to dialectical *materialism*.⁶⁹ It is fundamentally a method, what Mao called a guide to action, which places primary emphasis on the universality, ubiquity and inescapability of contradictions in reality and in consciousness, on their ceaseless emergence, transformation through struggle and the subsequent emergence of new contradictions. Maoism is ruthless in its application of this view, seeing no thing, identity, institution, policy or relationship as existing outside of contradiction. There is nothing that overcomes or moves beyond contradiction, and thus everything is subject to its laws. "Of all things in this world, there are none which are not products of history [and] everything

68. While the dialectical aspects of Marx are widely known, the same is not true for Lenin. The latter is usually assumed, when not just dismissed as an elitist authoritarian, to have his roots in the positivist aspects of Marx and especially Engels. However, Anderson (1995) closely documents Lenin's attention to dialectics and Hegel, and how this informs his works dealing with imperialism and the vanguard party.

69. See "Conspectus of Hegel's book *The Science of Logic*" in LCW 38, 221-2.

which is produced by history will be destroyed by history.”⁷⁰ At the heart of its practice is the creation of the conditions which allow the basic masses to correctly recognize and resolve the contradictions of society so that they themselves more and more consciously, and concretely, revolutionize all forms of social hierarchy and oppression.

Dialectical questions are the essence of maoism and are not just, as Elster (1983) would say, another reflection of the shallow hegelianism afflicting all forms of leninism.⁷¹

Dialectics, notes Starr (1979, 44-5), "pervaded and permeated [Mao's] approach to virtually every question [and was] the central idea and central pole around which all other ideas in his political thought revolved." I argue that a deep understanding of China, while important, is not the most crucial foundation for understanding maoism. What is needed is a deep understanding of dialectics, and a recognition of how deeply Mao grasped dialectics and how consistently he applied it.⁷² In my view, this can not be emphasized

70. "On the Ten Great Relationships," in Schram (1974). Mao also noted that marxism, communism and even human beings will eventually disappear, to be replaced by something else. "Communism will last for thousands of years. I don't believe that there will be no qualitative changes under communism, that it will not be divided into stages by qualitative change! I don't believe it! ... This is unthinkable in the light of dialectics. Then there is the principle, 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.' Do you believe they can carry on for a million years with the same economics?" "Talk on Questions of Philosophy," in Schram 1974, 227. One implication of this is Mao's comment that, in 10,000 years, "all of us ... even Marx, Engels and Lenin, [will] probably appear rather ridiculous" (Mao quoted in Snow 1965, 222).

71. There are important differences between the maoism and other forms of leninism, both contemporary and antecedent. This is not the place to detail these, other than to mention that one crucial difference is the extent to which dialectics is taken up by the cadre and masses in a conscious way. A contemporary maoist has noted (Wolff 2003) that Lenin, though clearly well-versed in dialectics and Hegel, did not systematically attempt to educate the Bolshevik party or the masses in dialectics. Thus, they, including his successors, lacked dialectics, which could be partially responsible for the increasing mechanism and metaphysics in Soviet practice after his death. My own experience in discussions with non-maoist leninists is that dialectics has little significance in their praxis, and often makes only a perfunctory appearance in their literature.

72. The intellectual, cultural and personal origins of Mao's dialectics is a subject outside the scope of this dissertation. However, as noted earlier, China has a long tradition of dialectics which goes far beyond the handful of notable intellectuals that make up the tradition in the West. As Starr (1979, 18) notes, the "tradition of protodialectical thought in the Chinese setting is critical to an understanding of the way in which Mao assimilated and developed the dialectical ideas he found in Marxism. Where Hegel and Marx were able to argue with considerable reason that their ideas were a

too strongly. Unfortunately, scholars are often silent about dialectics when writing on Mao, and thus I feel end up distorting his philosophy, sometimes significantly, even when approaching it in an honest spirit. Usually, this involves extracting one aspect (or moment) from Mao's dialectal philosophy and treating it in a metaphysical, one-sided manner, as if that were the essence of maoism (as Hegel would put it, merely "understanding" maoism). The results from this are such descriptions of maoism as voluntarist subjectivism, empiricism, utopianism, peasant nationalism, chilialistic millenarianism, etc.⁷³ Without understanding dialectics, one cannot understand Mao or maoism, regardless of how much one is familiar with China. Only then can one understand the history of revolutionary China in a way that unites the practices with overall political line. A close reading of Mao reveals the centrality of dialectics and the problems with various misconceptions of maoism.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, those who are critical of Mao and revolutionary communism often take the approach of never explicitly

novel rejection and supercession of the Western philosophical tradition, Mao's development of these ideas of Marx in the Chinese setting took place in the context of the vital resonances with the Chinese philosophical and cultural traditions that these ideas struck. We can say of Mao that he was, by virtue of his familiarity with the protodialectical aspect of the Chinese philosophical and cultural traditions, a 'natural dialectician.'" As Mao himself noted, in a conversation concerning the permanence of contradiction, he was "a native philosopher." Similarly, there is also a tradition, rooted in confucianism, which emphasizes harmony and order. It seems that the current rulers of China have merged the materialism of marxism with confucianism to create a legitimizing ideology. For an example, see Wu Jie's *Systems Dialectics* (1996), which despite the title evacuates dialectics of any meaning in its focus to uphold the "two becomes one" position put forward by the capitalist roaders who opposed Mao (See below for a discussion of this crucial conflict of revolutionary China).

73. For examples, see Dunayevskaya (1977), Meisner (1980), Marchant (1973), Smith (1987), and Alexander (1999).
74. Coming from a variety of political positions, these include: Maoism is a theory of peasant revolution and thus is relevant only to considerations of revolution in primarily agricultural societies; Maoism equals whatever has been going on in China from the revolution to the present or, more often, until Mao's death; Maoism is whatever Mao thought or did; maoism did not exist but was simply a series of ad hoc conceptions and practices useful for Mao's personal dictatorship; Maoism is simply stalinism. The last is used primarily by those who wish to dismiss Mao through the use of the ultimate pejorative. There is also the charge that maoism is a class-collaborationist, voluntarist, petty bourgeois deviation from marxism-leninism, a charge typically coming from trotskyites or supporters of the Soviet Union.

defining what it is they are being critical of. This allows the writer to include virtually any line, idea or policy as demonstrative of maoism, even when these are mutually exclusive.⁷⁵

Maoist Dialectical Materialism

Mao's theorization was built upon the work of Marx, Engels and Lenin, and shaped by the historical context in which he existed. Philosophically, maoism rests upon dialectical materialism and the concept of contradiction. In many respects, Mao sharply diverged from previous thinking in the marxist and socialist tradition, in others he advanced the thinking in sophistication, and in others he merely upheld previous thinking in opposition to those who sought to revise it in ways which removed important principles. This is particularly the case with Stalin, with whom Mao is often uncritically grouped. Much of Mao's thinking was developing in the context of critically examining the practice of building socialism in the Soviet Union and the theorization of Stalin.

Mao's position on dialectical materialism is straightforward enough and has its obvious roots in the dialectical tradition of those earlier thinkers. Mao saw reality as not being determined in a linear fashion by the development of material conditions or entailing only quantitative and ultimately cyclical change. Mao's dialectical materialism is in opposition to mechanical materialism, in which political line, culture and human consciousness

75. For example, Franz Shurman, who has written for many years on China, argued that the Taliban of Afghanistan is a maoist party. (Pacific News Service, 1996 "Afghanistan's Taliban Rebels Blend Islam And Maoism") This despite the fact that there is a self-identified Afghan maoist party (a member of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement), which fought against the Taliban and now fights against the puppet regime installed by Operation Enduring Freedom (sic).

become merely effects of material changes, particularly technological development. Mao (1965a, 335) argued that while the productive forces and the economic base generally play the principal and decisive role, in certain conditions, such aspects as the relations of production and the superstructure in turn manifest themselves in the principal and decisive role.

From the perspective of maoist dialectics, human society is imbricated with contradictions, both internal and external. Human beings, in their actions, theories and organizations, do not, and can not, operate outside of contradiction; they reflect and are enmeshed in these contradictions. Therefore, their resistance, their attempts at progressive social change, necessarily flow from, embody and are enmeshed in contradiction. In Mao's view, to the extent this is consciously recognized by revolutionaries, the basis is provided for progressive social change. If this is not recognized and the implications understood and acted upon, the basis is laid for reversal, failure or defeat. One must recognize the complex and contradictory nature of any revolutionary response, but not shy away from what this entails or seek refuge in its opposite: the approach of metaphysics, which assumes to find some universal entity (the infallible Party), a mechanistic teleology (theory of productive forces), metaphysical, reified category (the industrial, urban proletariat as the revolutionary Subject), or one-sided critique/strategy (destroy the state/family/hierarchy). To put it another way, it is impossible to develop or discover a social form, methodology, or strategy which does not contain contradictions and thus inherent dangers.

Mao argued for the standpoint of the ceaseless emergence and resolution of

contradictions, as against all notions of absoluteness and stagnation. Contradictions are the source of change and are thus to be welcomed. Importantly, contradictions never simply fade away or disappear gradually, but are transformed through the struggle of the opposing aspects (and in the context of the multitudes of other contradictions). In this struggle, one aspect overcomes the other and then gives birth to a new contradictions. There are also different types of contradiction, which are dealt with and are transformed in different ways. Most simply, there are antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions.⁷⁶ The vast majority of social contradictions are fundamentally non-antagonistic and are correctly dealt with through the methods of debate, education and discussion. Others are fundamentally antagonistic and have to be dealt with through direct struggle, such as revolutionary war, in which one side "eats up" the other. Specific contradictions can be reconciled, or transformed, but contradiction itself is not reconcilable. Correctly handling an antagonistic unity can transform it into either a non-antagonistic form or a new contradiction which represents an advance for society. Indeed, the correct handling of contradictions, the subject of one of Mao's major essays, can be said to be the essence of revolutionary practice. Mao's attitude toward contradictions, that they are the source of change (and thus beneficial) and ubiquitous is clearly different from dominant attitudes in the United States. Forms of liberalism seek to avoid antagonistic conflict (what Mao called "the unprincipled peace") on the assumption that such conflict is harmful, or that there is no fundamental antagonism involved. Thus

76. See "The Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People," in *MSW*, Volume 4. What defines a contradiction as one or the other is not some eternal essence but its concrete existence. As an example, for Mao, the contradiction between the national bourgeoisie and proletariat in China could be non-antagonistic at one point (during the anti-Japanese struggle) and antagonistic at another point (during the period of civil war and socialist construction). Flowing from this is the recognition that there is not *a* correct approach to a particular contradiction in an absolute sense. All correct approaches are necessarily relative. This is not the same as radical agnosticism which would deny that there is a correct line altogether.

positive change can be best, if not only, made through “conflict resolution.” Similarly, forms of conservatism seek to suppress conflict (or more accurately, resistance) on behalf of the regressive aspect in order to prevent change. Both seek to manage conflict, on the assumption that conflict is an aberration to be avoided.⁷⁷

The maoist ontology based upon the ubiquity of contradiction involves not just ceaseless motion and transformation but also tremendous complexity. Contradictions within any thing are myriad and they can intersect in ways that overlap, counteract and intensify each other. Each thing contains opposing aspects and forms a unity with those contradictions, which leads to the transformation of the character of that thing. No thing, therefore, is a simple, unitary thing. The combination of dialectical materialism and Mao’s conception of contradiction stresses motion, complexity, change, upheavals, leaps, the transformation of things into their opposites, the supersession of what exists by new things, in opposition to the emphasis on settling down, gradual development, order, permanence, unity - in short, metaphysics. As Lenin (1965b, 360) put it, rest is ‘conditional, temporary, transitory and relative,’ while “development and motion are absolute.” Reality, in short, is a verb and is in constant, transformative motion. This motion is not mechanical, or evolutionary, but a much more complex motion generated through struggle. The more complex a thing, the more contradictions it contains, the more complex its motion. Han Suyin, author of an important two-volume history of Mao and the Chinese revolution (1972, 391-2), notes:

77. Radicals, at least in the United States, of the right or left, tend to pursue conflict in a metaphysical sense, that is, regardless of context and based on reified categories. For all these, the problem is a metaphysical approach to contradictions and the conflicts that arise from them.

Since the opposites in a contradiction are unequal, nonidentical and variable in more than one aspect, facet, or relationship to each other, within one and the same contradiction there are a dominant or primary aspect and a number of secondary aspects, so that 'opposites' become a multiplicity of interrelated and shifting situation aspects ... Mao thus not only broke from the 'harmony' circle which fettered Chinese thought, but also from the 'statis absolute' which hampered the study of contradiction in Russian thought. Mao has evolved contradiction from the 'linear motion' of Western dialectical thinking into a 'spiral route, forever open-ended,' which provides a polyvalence of possibilities; the fluctuant and unequal positions of the aspects, primary or secondary, of a contradiction providing built-in flexibility for each situation ... There is no rigid, closed, hermetic circuit in Mao's thinking.

Mao's insistence on contradiction is important. In my view, one of the most serious problems haunting marxism and the historical practice of socialism has been the non-recognition of the universality of contradiction and dialectics, with the resulting identification of some entity (particularly within the revolutionary movement) which is universal, outside of history, essential, or perfected. In other words, there is the recurring idea that there is some point, entity or institution, where dialectics and contradiction ends. An example is Kruschew's declaration of the Soviet Union as "the state of the whole people," as opposed to the dictatorship of the proletariat.⁷⁸ Similar to this is the substitution of reified categories for, as Lenin put it, "the concrete investigation of concrete reality." Mao once commented that the source of Stalin's "errors," the unfortunate term employed by maoists, was an insufficient understanding of contradiction, that he was good on materialism but not so good with dialectics. It is precisely Mao's consistent application of dialectics which allowed him to so significantly advance marxism beyond that of what the Soviet Union produced.

78. This repeats Hegel's erroneous view that contradiction had ended with the identification of the institutions of the Prussian state as "the awesome mansions of the spirit of reason." (Hook 1971, 20) This illustrates not only that both a materialist and an idealist dialectic can be transformed into a legitimizing ideology by those who have an interest in doing so, but that when history repeats itself, it is first as tragedy, then as farce.

This is not to imply that correctly applying dialectics means being correct in any absolute sense. One can still make errors, as Mao freely admitted about himself: "Marx's Capital started with the analysis of the dual nature of commodities... Our comrades likewise have a dual nature, correct and incorrect. Don't you have dual nature? I know I have."⁷⁹

Corrigan, Ramsay and Sayer (1979), authors of one of the better treatments of Mao, noted that Mao at times resorted to forms of "speculative metaphysics."⁸⁰ Additionally, in the concrete practice of continuing the revolution in China, they were innumerable mistakes committed by the communist leadership, a fact readily seized upon by those opposed to revolutionary politics (even when these mistakes were actually done by the opponents of revolutionary transformation). One common mistake during the GPCR was to overly personalize politics, and to treat capitalist restoration as simply a question of what specific opponents of socialism did. Mao repeatedly spoke against this tendency (as he did against the use of violence during the GPCR). Han Suyin (1976, 323) quotes a young cadre, that during the GPCR "We always thought the enemy was the other, or outside. Now we understood the enemy was not a stranger, an outsider, it was ourselves, our fellow comrades, our work colleagues, often people we had known for years, but above all ourselves." This sentiment, expressed repeatedly by Mao, is similar to that of Deleuze and Guattari (1983) concerning the 'little fascist' which lives in all of us. The crucial difference, to state it again, is that in maoist China the discussion of such

79. "Speech at Hangchow, in Schram 1974, 239. For an example of his own self-criticism, see his comments at the Lushan conference in Schram 1974, 131-146. For a maoist evaluation of another significant error, Mao's role in the development of the Theory of the Three Worlds, see Avakian (1981). There is additional discussion of some of the problems of Mao's thinking at the end of this chapter.

80. One example would be Mao's comment that "we should support everything the enemy opposes and oppose everything the enemy supports." To someone opposed to, say, US imperialism, the logical conclusion would be that one should support Islamic fundamentalism.

questions was not simply taking place in graduate student seminars but in society broadly.⁸¹

Maoism insists on the complete revolutionary transformation of all systemic forms of oppression and exploitation through the ruthless politicization of everything existing. While those directly associated with capitalism are crucial, and they reinforce most if not all others, they are not the only ones. This means that all social, cultural, political and economic relations must be revolutionized, with the understanding that people will not be fully liberated merely by the seizure of state power or socializing the means of production. Maoist revolution is thus a multi-faceted process which varies according to concrete conditions and which recognizes the need for the simultaneous struggle against diverse forms of oppression, including (and perhaps especially) within the ranks of the Party and its cadre. This revolution continues in various forms, in surges and waves, after the seizure of state power. Thus, seizing state power is the stepping stone, albeit an essential one, for a process which will last for a long time, and which will go through many twists, turns and reversals. As Mao said, proclaiming the birth of the PRC, “The Chinese revolution is great, but the road ahead is greater and more arduous.” In developing his understanding on the protracted nature of the struggle towards communism, Mao went back to the comment from Marx in *The Class Struggles in France* that the dictatorship means the “permanence of the revolution,” as the means for the abolition of class distinctions generally, the relations of production upon which these rest, all social relations that correspond to these relations and the revolutionizing of all ideas that result from all of this. Maoists refer to these as the “Four Alls.” They represent

81. I discuss the question further in Chapter Five.

the shorthand for the goals of the communist revolution.⁸²

Mao's approach to the peasantry is an illustration of the importance of understanding marxism as a methodology rooted in materialist dialectics. Just as Marx began *Kapital* not with the concept of commodity, but with the concrete "form in which it appears," Mao did not develop his understanding of China from the mechanistic application of mystified concepts crystallized by Comintern theorists. Instead, he began from the concrete realities of China's peasant masses, their actual lives and relations. It was this that led him to recognize the revolutionary, progressive and socialist potential of the Chinese peasantry in a society marked by semi-feudalism, imperialism and what Mao called bureaucrat capitalism.⁸³ This break with the dogma which ossified the arguments of Marx and Engels on peasant revolutions in Europe represented the first major Chinese battle between revolution and revisionism, between those who view marxism as a materialist dialectical method and those who see it as a collection of universal shibboleths.

Both Marx and Engels wrote extensively on the peasantry, particularly in the context of the development of European capitalism and bourgeois democracy. Their general view was that the peasantry will rebel, often violently and in large numbers, against the capitalist transformations in society which are undermining their position as small producers. However, their position as a class leads them to favor a restoration of their

82. See Chang (1975) and Avakian (1999) for further discussion of this.

83. Bureaucrat capitalism is capitalism which is tied to and dependent upon foreign capital and imperialism. As a result, bureaucrat capitalists can not as a class play the progressive role that the bourgeoisie played in societies not dominated by imperialism.

existence as peasants. Unlike the urban, industrial proletariat (which has nothing to lose but their chains), the peasantry are an ultimately conservative force which looks backward to a better, often imagined, past. Thus, they are unreliable allies for socialist revolution, and are as likely to support a regressive dictator as progressive or proletarian forces.

However, these concrete and dialectical observations by Marx and Engels were subsequently transformed by many marxists into ahistorical, reified categories which were applied in a formulaic fashion to very different situations. For example, Leon Trotsky's focus on the peasantry was based upon a metaphysical and ahistorical conception of a universal peasant subjectivity. Echoing Marx's comments on the idiocy of rural life, Trotsky (1931) said that the cities were the hegemon in modern society and thus would be the center of any revolution, and spoke of the "dull-wittedness" of the peasantry.⁸⁴ Thus, while the "peasantry can undoubtedly prove to be a tremendous force in the service of the revolution" (1931, 216), overall "nothing remains for the peasantry to do but to rally to the regime of workers' democracy. It will not matter much even if the peasantry does this with a degree of consciousness not larger than that with which it usually rallies to the bourgeois regime" (1931, 205). The view here is that peasants cannot really be revolutionary subjects. Instead, they must be the objects, those to whom the revolution is done rather than those who do the revolution.⁸⁵ Like other classes

84. Quoted in Fields 69.

85. Trotsky's views were usually combined with a eurocentric, not to mention elitist, viewpoint: "The workers and peasants not only of Annam, Algiers and Bengal, but also Persia and Armenia, will gain their opportunity of independent existence only in that hour when the workers of England and France, having overthrown Lloyd George and Clemenceau, will have taken state power in their own hands ... If capitalist Europe has violently dragged the most backward sections of the world into the whirlpool of capitalist relations, then socialist Europe will come to the aid of liberated colonies with her technology, her organization and her ideological influence in order to facilitate their transition to

besides the proletariat, they can not play much more than a passive role in transforming their lives and situations. Only the revolutionary subject of history, the industrial proletariat, can do that. This view of the peasantry is a perfect example of the depressingly plentiful stock of examples of supposedly marxist “speculative universalisms ... dogmatically generated and enforced as ‘the correct line’ when they are the reified and abstracted instances of a partly understood historical moment” (Corrigan, Ramsay and Sayer 1979, 104).

In contrast, Mao’s approach to the peasantry was both dialectical and scientific, and did not rely upon received wisdom or reified concepts. As he would later put it, “we must take life as our starting point,” particularly the lives of the most oppressed in any situation.⁸⁶ He lived among the peasantry, shared their experiences and learned directly among them. He did not attempt to understand them through books or by viewing them, as he would have put it, “as from a galloping horse.” More importantly, he approached them dialectically, with the emphasis on their hidden potential, their contradictory subjectivity. Additionally, he did not simply say that there is *a* historical revolutionary subject, i.e., the proletariat, but that the backbone or core of any revolutionary uprising is to be found amongst the most oppressed in any situation, which must be then united with the full communist outlook and methodology.

a planned and organized socialist economy. Colonial slaves of Africa and Asia! The hour of proletarian dictatorship in Europe will strike for you as the hour of your emancipation” (quoted in Fields 1988, 13). Thus, the source of global transformation is the class of relatively privileged industrial workers in the West, not the most oppressed of the world. Compare this with Mao’s insistence that history is always made by the most oppressed. While Trotsky’s views are outlined here, any number of other marxist theorists, particularly from the same period, expressed similar views. I have used Trotsky because his views on the peasantry underpin the arguments of Judith Stacey, which I critique in the following chapter.

86. “Talk on Questions of Philosophy,” in Schram 1974, 225.

Corrigan, Ramsey and Sayer (1979, 69) note that feudalism and imperialist capitalism create the appearance of a particular identity in the peasantry. “Mao, from the 1920s, had known that this appearance of sullen but constant passivity was simply that, an appearance, which concealed the potential for turning the world upside-down.” Their supposed powerlessness, stupidity or backwardness is a manifestation of this, and is as much a question of class rule as the relations of production. Mao “accurately grasps how extensive is the ensemble of social relations (that is, ways and modes of having, thinking, feeling, acting, seeing, being) which forms a ruling class’s social power, and thus maps the full dimensions for the struggle to overthrow that power” (Corrigan, Ramsey and Sayer 1979, 69).

This is an example of, as Corrigan, Ramsay and Sayer (1979, 3) put it, Mao’s ability to reveal “the myriad suppressions of alternative social forms and social development ‘buried’ within historical experience. People, in sum, can be more than they seem.” Whether in the factories of Shanghai or the vast semi-feudal countryside, all social formations have “concealed forms of energy, illumination, knowledge, and strength which can only be made visible through a new form of organization” (Corrigan, Ramsay and Sayer 1979, 60). Thus, the Chinese peasantry was not simply the conservative backwards looking force that so-called “orthodox” marxists saw. This was an aspect of their subjectivity, but grasping them in their contradictory, dialectical totality revealed much more. Such an approach laid the basis for seeing the peasantry, the vast majority of the Chinese population, as revolutionary subjects, and not merely unthinking foot-soldiers or things to whom the revolution is done. In this sense, he was being consistently

and fully marxist, in that he applied materialist dialectics as a methodology, and, as Lenin put it, relied upon the concrete investigation of concrete reality rather than reified social categories.

Far from being inherently passive, conservative or backwards looking, the peasantry was seen by Mao as having potentially boundless enthusiasm for socialist revolution. This came from their own historical experience and the realities of their socioeconomic position in a society marked by semi-feudalism, semi-colonialism and bureaucrat capitalism. Though he insisted that the Party must have faith in the peasantry (and masses generally) and wholeheartedly rely upon them, he did not conceive of them metaphysically or romantically. Mao emphasized that they, like everyone, are marked by the scars of the existing society and that they require transformation. One aspect (or moment) of this contradiction is that the “poor want to remake their lives,” while the other is that they are burdened with “old ideas reflecting the old system.”⁸⁷

However, he was equally insistent that the peasantry can, and must, carry out this transformation themselves. “Unless [the masses] are conscious and willing, any kind of work that requires their participation will turn out to be a mere formality and will fail ... There are two principles here: one is the actual needs of the masses rather than what we fancy they need, and the other is the wishes of the masses, who must make up their own minds instead of our making up their minds for them” (MSW 3: 236-7). “It must be the peasants themselves who remove the idols, who break the ancestral tablets, and who destroy the temple of women who did not wish to survive their husbands, and the shrines

87. Quotes from Mao’s introduction to *The Socialist Upsurge in China’s Countryside*, 138, 302.

built to honour chaste wives and faithful widows” (Mao quoted in Kristeva 119).⁸⁸ Mao repeatedly spoke of the need to work correctly so that the peasants themselves recognized the benefits of the new ways of living:

If instead of coercion and commandism, which are self-defeating because of their quest for quick results, we adopt a policy of patiently persuading people by setting them good examples, then it will be possible for the majority of the peasants to be organized into mutual-aid groups for agricultural and handicraft production in the next few years. Once such production groups become the usual practice, not only will output increase and kind of innovations emerge, but there will also be political progress, a higher education level, progress in hygiene, a remoulding of loafers and a change in social customs, and it will not take too long before the implements of production will be improved, too. With all this happening, our rural society will gradually be rebuilt on new foundations⁸⁹ (MSW 3: 241-2).

Similarly, he spoke against the use of administrative measures and coercion, what he called commandism, because such methods could not accomplish any real change. By treating people as objects it conceives of social transformation as merely manipulation from above by those who assume they have the Truth in their hands.

Two-Line Struggle & the Contradictions of Socialism

Mao fought numerous struggles during his life against those in the CCP who opposed this

88. This theme was repeated in innumerable variations throughout Mao’s life, whether during the period of civil war or the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. As will be noted later, this view does not logically contradict Mao’s insistence on the leadership of a vanguard communist Party. Here, it will suffice to note that the role of this leadership is to create the conditions which allow for the masses to be able to liberate themselves.

89. Quoted in Corrigan, Ramsay and Sayer (1979, 37). It is important to note that this overall situation of persuasion and debate enabling the masses themselves to adopt these forms and relations can take place only after the old state, military and ruling classes have been overthrown. And it is equally important to note that this overthrow does not happen through the forms of persuasion and debate but through the means of revolutionary class war, through coercion. Mao always emphasized that there are friends and enemies of the revolution and that each had to be dealt with through different means. Chapter Six discusses this question further.

approach, what Mao called the two-line struggle within the Party.⁹⁰ These struggles involved sharply opposed political perspectives, they nonetheless used the same marxist language, one reason non-marxists (and not just them) can have difficulty seeing the essential differences. Though these opposing lines took different specific forms at different periods, they tended to share basic characteristics. One was that their materialism was mechanical and not dialectical. This meant that it overemphasized developing production and underestimated the importance of culture, political line and human consciousness. It also meant that they tended to dogmatically apply the received wisdom of marxism and not grasp it as a dialectical and materialist methodology. They also would not analyze concrete conditions and base their theories on the practice and lived experience of the masses. Another consistency was the denial of the universality of contradiction. In one form or another, the argument was made that contradictions would die away (or had already), and that at some point, there are no longer any contradictions, but only differences within an overall harmony. Stalin did this when he proclaimed that there were no longer any classes in the Soviet Union. Liu Shao-chi and others did the same in China when they argued that the important aspect of contradiction was their complementarity (and therefore inevitable unity). Mao argued instead that overemphasizing the unity of contradictions is an error, rooted in hegelianism, which results in satisfaction with the status quo. "To talk all the time about unity is 'a pool of stagnant water;' it can lead to coldness. We must destroy the old basis for unity, pass through a struggle, and unite on a new basis. Which is better - a stagnant pool, or 'the inexhaustible Yangtse comes roaring past'?" (Quoted in Schram 1974, 108).

90. For a brief presentation of the history of these two-line struggles see "Summary of Chairman Mao's Talks with Responsible Comrades at Various Places during his Provincial Tour" in Schram (1974). For a more extensive history, see Han Suyin's two-volume history of revolutionary China, which is presented within the framework of the two-line struggle.

Mao made the importance of dialectical struggle for an understanding of socialism in general and Chinese socialism in particular explicit during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR), when he argued that the fundamental distinction between the revolutionaries and the revisionists rested upon their conception of contradiction. For Mao, “the one divides into two.” For the revisionists, “the two become one.” The resulting ‘teleological stagnation’ (Kristeva 1974, 205) of China under the revisionists is related to what Mao called vulgar evolutionism, or what others might characterize as the conjunction of liberalism and positivism. It collapses the dialectical unity of Being and Non-being into a metaphysical identity of Being with Becoming. Thus, Being is Becoming: we already are what we are going to become. The goal then is to perfect the status quo, not to transform it. Such revisionist ideologies, “which set forth a utopian vision of the future, but which counsel patience with the present, simply serve as ideological justifications for the existing state of affairs” (Meisner 1980, 22).

This struggle over two becoming one versus one becoming two may appear to be a fairly esoteric or merely philosophical debate. However, this is far from the case. It was at the foundation of the political struggle of the GPCR. Avakian (1978a, 181) notes:

The heart of this struggle in the realm of philosophy, is no mere academic debate but the struggle between two fundamentally opposed lines, the revolutionary line of resolving contradiction through struggle versus the reactionary line of attempting to reconcile contradiction through the subordination of the progressive to the reactionary, the advanced to the backward, the new to the old, the correct to the incorrect, etc.

Where Mao is granted credence and originality by scholars, he is usually considered to be

mainly a military strategist and a theorist of (peasant) revolution. However, beyond the question of dialectics, where Mao is most important is as a theorist of socialism. Marx and Engels never saw any successor stage to capitalism, except in the brief form of the Paris Commune. Lenin experienced it for only a limited period and most of his work during this time was directed towards the immediate practical concerns of the USSR. Mao was able for many years to directly observe and theorize about the actual concrete realities of socialism. Unlike other similarly placed individuals, instead of mechanically applying the existing, pre-socialist theories or transforming them into ideology (or alternatively, retreating from the complexities of concrete contradictions into new – and not so new – adaptations of social democracy), Mao made significant qualitative advances in theory based upon his grasp of dialectics and commitment to the Four Alls.

The early revisionists of the Second International saw socialism as "the evolutionary extension and rationalization of capitalism's tendencies towards socialization, centralization, and organization" (Lotta, xiv). Much of their view, as well of later revisionists, reflected a reliance upon Marx, as opposed to marxism: that is, a political line based on the specific pronouncements of Marx instead of using dialectical materialism as a methodology.⁹¹ Revisionist conceptions of socialism commonly rely upon Marx's naivete and profound under-estimation of the problems, complexities and protracted nature of socialist construction. Later, during the revisionist period of the Soviet Union, socialism was equated "with formal and legal state ownership, benevolent welfarism, technocratic efficiency, and political passivity" (Lotta, 1996 x).

91. Lukacs argued that the latter is the only form of marxism which should be considered "orthodox."

Mao's insistence on the centrality of dialectics is what allowed for his insight that socializing the means of production does not "solve" the problem of consciousness and social relations.⁹² Thus, raising the level of the productive forces under socialism does not result automatically in communism and thus should not be the principal task. Rather, primary attention must be paid, as Corrigan, Ramsay and Sayer (1979, 13) put it, to the continual "revolutionizing of selves and things." Nor does socializing the means of production mean the eradication of antagonistic internal contradictions. Though the existence of contradictions under socialism had long been recognized, these were considered to be non-antagonistic holdovers from the previous society which would gradually wither away under the building of socialism.⁹³ Mao argued instead that socialist society constantly generates new contradictions (and new classes) and that new and old contradictions can become antagonistic if handled incorrectly. These contradictions do not exist simply in one area, but throughout society, in the realms of economic production, political institutions, values and ideas, social relations, etc. Furthermore, in

92. Mao, of course, is not the only person, or the only marxist, who developed thinking along these lines. Gramsci, Lukacs, Althusser and the Frankfurt School did as well. There are two aspects which distinguish Mao from these writers. The first is that Mao did this on the basis of not only not abandoning but advancing such fundamental concepts and social forms as the dictatorship of the proletariat, the vanguard party, materialist dialectics, etc. The second is that Mao's development of this is thoroughly integrated with mass revolutionary practice. In the case of Gramsci, there are numerous similarities with Mao in some of his thinking, such as the importance of the superstructure and the role of ideas (compare his concept of war of position and the need to focus on ideological struggle in developing revolution in the imperialist countries with the RCP's analysis that the central task for revolution communists is the "build public opinion: seize power." Unfortunately, Gramsci's thoughts along these lines have commonly been taken by others and attached to illusions concerning liberal democracy to produce various forms of what is essentially social democracy). What I read in Gramsci are embryonic forms of such maoist concepts as the Mass Line and the need to continue the revolution after the seizure of state power. To be sure, there are differences, some of which can no doubt be traced to philosophical differences between Mao and Gramsci. But the key point is that what is sketched out in Gramsci is much more fully developed by Mao. This is not necessarily to slight Gramsci, as his writings were censored and he was after all imprisoned by fascists. But this does reveal a very important point; Gramsci was prevented from the practical exploration and development of his concepts. He was cut off from an essential aspect of the development of knowledge: revolutionary practice. In other words, he was stuck in one moment of the theory/practice dialectic.

93. Or alternatively, that any antagonistic contradiction was the result of imperialist machinations. This view was particularly a problem with Stalin.

an important break with hegelian and pseudo-marxist teleology, there is the materialist basis for contradictions which have been resolved to be reversed. Chang Chung-Chia (1975), one of the “Gang of Four,” put it this way:

We must realize that our economic base is not yet solid, that bourgeois right has not yet been abolished entirely in the system of ownership, and that it still exists to a serious extent in the relations among people and holds a dominant position in distribution. In the various spheres of the superstructure, some areas are in fact still controlled by the bourgeoisie which has the upper hand there; some are being transformed but the results are not yet consolidated, and old ideas and the old force of habit are still stubbornly obstructing the growth of socialist new things. New bourgeois elements are engendered, batch after batch, in the wake of the development of capitalist factors in town and country. The class struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie, the class struggle between the different political forces, and the class struggle in the ideological field between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie will continue to be long and tortuous and at times will even become very acute. Even when all the landlords and capitalists have died, such class struggles will by no means come to a stop.”

The main contradiction of socialist society involves the overall class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, which includes newly generated bourgeois forces. These develop out of the major social contradictions that still exist in socialist society— differences arising out of divisions of labor and the specialized roles of some, the differences in income, wealth and power, either pre-existing or arising out of the continued existence of bourgeois right,⁹⁴ the gaps between town and country, the

94. Bourgeois right means policies and laws that uphold formal equality in social and economic relations but which actually generate and reproduce inequalities. The prime example is the socialist formula for distribution, "to each according to their work." While formally an equal standard, not everyone has the same needs and responsibilities, or the same levels of training and overall productive ability. Yao Wen-yuan (1975), another of the “Gang of Four” which fought for Mao’s revolutionary policies, wrote that if these divisions were not narrowed, but were instead consolidated or even strengthened, “the inevitable result will be polarization, i.e., in the matter of distribution a small number of people will appropriate increasing amounts of commodities and money through some legal and many illegal ways; stimulated by ‘material incentives’ of this kind, capitalist ideas of making a fortune and craving personal fame and gain will spread unchecked; phenomena like the turning of public property into private property, speculation, graft and corruption, theft and bribery will increase; the capitalist principle of the exchange of commodities and money into capital and labour power into a commodity, will occur; changes in the nature of the ownership will take place in certain departments

differences between men and women, the Party and the people, and so on — as well as the general environment of commodity-money relations. For Mao, socialism is not simply a particular set of political institutions and economic policies that smoothly generate a better society. Rather, it is a tremendous struggle to transform society - to replace production for profit to production for social use, to revolutionize all social relations and institutions, to develop new norms and values throughout society and to narrow and ultimately abolish the Four Alls.

In this view, socializing the means of production is still seen as absolutely essential and a development which fundamentally changes many aspects of society. It opens the door for the successful resolution of other contradictions (though there is nothing inevitable about this).⁹⁵ Most importantly, Mao argued that under socialism, the solution to these contradictions lies fundamentally not in the realm of production but in the realm of politics, ideology and ideas. That is, under socialism, the primary aspect of the contradiction between the base and superstructure is the latter. Mao developed an approach to socialist development which was rooted in revolutionary struggle and mass participation. This means that class struggle is central to socialism. A contemporary maoist (Lotta 1995, xxv) comments that Mao:

and units which follow the revisionist line; and instances of oppression and exploitation of the labouring people will arise again. As a result, a small number of new bourgeois elements and upstarts will emerge from the Party members, workers, well-to-do peasants and personnel of state and other organs.” Yao then goes on to speak of the eventual emergence of the full political rule of the bourgeoisie which such a situation engenders. Like many others put out by the revolutionaries, this was a remarkably prescient analysis of the contradictions in revolutionary China.

95. As I discuss in Chapter Six, without the seizure of state power and the socializing of the means of production, such contradictions can not begin to be systematically addressed. They can only be addressed in partial ways which do not get at the roots of the contradictions. In addition, even this happens generally in pockets of social privilege or in marginal social spaces. And furthermore, the workings of capitalism will systematically undermine any positive gains.

developed a theory of classes and class struggle under socialism, grounding it in the material, social, and ideological contradictions of socialist society. And he approached the problem of the foundations of socialism rather differently [than the revisionists]. Technological advance and economic growth are not the fundamental guarantor of socialism and communism. The mere increase in productive forces (economic development) will not in and of itself eliminate exploitive relations and oppressive social and ideological relations (like patriarchy). There is, Mao emphasized, a dialectical relationship between economic development and ongoing and deep-going social and ideological transformation: "if a socialist society does not promote socially collectivistic aims, then what of socialism remains." The key issue confronting socialist society, and what determines its overall character, is the road on which it is traveling. Is society over-coming the relations of class society to the greatest degree possible? Is the labor of the working class serving this end? And does the working class through its state and political leadership have the overall initiative in carrying forward and persisting on this road? In short, what is key is whether the revolution is continuing and deepening on all fronts. If this is not happening, then the ground is being laid for the working class to lose state power, and capitalism to be restored. If the revolution is continuing, then working class power will be strengthened, and the struggle for communism will be propelled forward. There will be times when great leaps can, and must, be made in pushing the revolution forward; at other times, consolidation becomes the necessary emphasis; and there will be twists and turns. Through this wave-like process, revolution advances.

For the revisionists, the focus on increasing the national productive capacity (the theory of the productive forces) means modernization and industrialization. When combined with the insistence that under socialism antagonistic social contradictions are eliminated, modernization necessarily means de-politicization. Mao, in arguing that one must talk about class struggle every day, strove for what can be called the ruthless politicization of everything existing.⁹⁶ In his terms, this meant continuing the revolution under the

96. This refers to Marx's comment, in an early letter to his father, which summarized his position as the "ruthless criticism of everything existing." While a laudable sentiment, to remain at such a position would be idealist, as the assumption would be that once something has been negated in the realm of ideas, the struggle is over. Marx soon moved beyond the idealism which was common to intellectuals of his time (as it is to intellectuals today). As he noted, to overcome the idea of capitalism, all one needs is the idea of communism. But to overcome the actual reality of capitalism, one must wage revolutionary struggle. Maoism takes this basic viewpoint of materialism and insists on applying it throughout human society. This is, perhaps, one reason why maoism is marginalized. Because of its insistence on politicizing *all* relations and aspects of society through direct struggle, it makes everyone uncomfortable sooner or later, none more so than its sincere practioners.

dictatorship of the proletariat. This takes its most concentrated expression in the form of the two-line struggle within the Communist Party. Mao's understanding of the contradictory nature of the Party is what allowed him to identify it as the mechanism by which the unities of opposites existing in socialism can be reversed and capitalism restored. Particularly during the GPCR, Mao emphasized the need for "the center" to engage directly in revolutionizing society, including themselves, even if this was an unpleasant or dangerous process.

Sitting in offices listening to reports is no good. The only way is to rely on the masses, trust the masses, struggle to the end. We must be prepared for the revolution to be turned against us. The Party and government leadership and responsible Party comrades should be prepared for this. If you now want to carry the revolution through to the end, you must discipline yourself, reform yourself in order to keep up with it. Otherwise you can only keep out of it. There are some comrades who struggle fiercely against others, but cannot struggle with themselves. In this way, they will never be able to cross the pass. It is up to you to lead the fire towards your own bodies, to fan the flames to make them burn. Do you dare to do this? Because it will burn your own heads. ("Talk to Leaders of the Centre," in Schram 1974, 254)

For maoists, socialism is a transitory state of affairs which is permeated with contradictions, both antagonistic and non-antagonistic.⁹⁷ Mao was clear that the socialization of ownership following the revolution against the bourgeois state was just one, albeit an essential, step. As Lenin put it, the sources of inequality can not be eliminated by "the mere conversion of the means of production into public property, by the mere expropriation of the capitalists" (1970, 118). Though the socialization of production means that labor is no longer a commodity and that exploitive relations are

97. In his "A Dialectical Approach to Party Unity (SW V; 516), Mao said "some say that there are contradictions to be 'found' in socialist society, but I think that is a wrong way of putting it. The point is not that there are contradictions to be found, but that it teems with contradictions." He went on to note that "The concept of the unity of opposites, dialectics, must be widely propagated. I say dialectics should move from the small circle of philosophers to the broad masses of the people."

reduced, it does not mean that they are eliminated. Bourgeois right, commodity relations, the law of value, and various hierarchical social relations and ideas of dominance continue to exist within socialist production relations. These myriad aspects, which in essence represent the existence of capitalism and its relations within socialism, propel socialism forward through their contradiction with the socialist aspects. Socialism, like everything else, is a verb, and it moves in one direction or another. As Sweezy (1980, 95) has put it,

Post-revolutionary society contains not only contradictions inherited from millennia of class-riven society, it produces and reproduces its own contradictions. The revolution provides no final solutions. It only opens the possibility of moving forward in the direction of eliminating classes.

The contradictions which continue to exist means that class struggle still exists in socialist society. For Mao, the question of whether socialism or capitalism would be triumphant in China was not settled, and would not be for hundreds of years.

Socialist society will either move forward to communism or backward to capitalism. Two roads open up: the socialist road and the capitalist road. And what direction society goes in will be determined in the furnace of intense class struggle and upheaval. This is a struggle between the formerly oppressed who aspire to run society and reactionary forces, especially new bourgeois forces, who seek to re-impose the old order and restructure society according to capitalist principles."⁹⁸

Mao's view was that the contradictions moving Chinese society in one direction or

98. Quoted in Lotta (1995, xxxi). At another occasion, Mao wrote (Mao and Lin 1972, 429): "Socialist society covers a fairly long historical period. In the historical period of socialism there are still classes and class contradictions and class struggle, there is the struggle between the socialist road and the capitalist road, and there is the danger of capitalist restoration. we must recognize the protracted and complex nature of this struggle and we must tighten our vigilance ... Otherwise a socialist country like ours will turn into its opposite and degenerate, and a capitalist restoration will take place."

another would not die out on their own. There must be mass revolutionary struggle to transform them, because these are not just differences but antagonistic contradictions and exploitive relations. These exploitive and oppressive relations (“our dark aspect” as Mao called it) must be continually exposed and the capitalist elements underlying them restricted as far as possible. If one does not deal head-on and struggle with any contradiction, the repressive, reactionary aspect will become dominant. “Everything reactionary is the same; if you don’t hit it, it won’t fall. It is like sweeping the floor; where the broom does not reach, the dust never vanishes of itself” (MSW IV-19). This is true whether one is talking of class, gender, ethnicity or any other social relation. For Mao, the relevant question is the proper way to struggle with contradiction, not whether it exists or not.⁹⁹

Whereas most others in the CCP saw a paucity of contradictions in Chinese society, Mao saw something quite different. He saw a vast variety of bad social relations, magnified tremendously by the billions of concrete manifestations of these in daily life. Along with the fundamental contradictions involved in building a socialist economy on the base of an essentially agrarian society, this immensity of social relations provided a vast material foundation for capitalist restoration. The only way to deal with this was to struggle head on with these realities. As Mao put it (MSW 5: 392):

Many do not admit that contradictions still exist in socialist society, with the result that they become irresolute and passive when confronted with social contradictions; they do not understand that socialist society grows more united and consolidated

99. Though the maoists focused on class, the implications for patriarchy and gender relations are similar. A line which advocates the dying out of contradictions, of two combining into one, without any struggle or political mobilization, necessarily means the continuation of the status quo. That there is a material foundation for the exploitation of women under socialism makes this all the more likely.

through the ceaseless process of correctly handling and resolving contradictions.

As quoted earlier (Corrigan, Ramsay and Sayer 1979, 24),

to regard contradictions with horror and to refuse to recognize them is condemn ones to being, in Mao's words, 'handicapped & passive' in the face of them. Indeed, the denial of contradiction is ultimately a philosophy of reconciliation and of acquiescence to things as they are. The denial of contradiction is the philosophical basis of revisionism; for to abandon Marx's dialectic is to abandon the critical and revolutionary foundation of his thought.

With regards to economic production under socialism, Mao's basic position was encapsulated in the slogan "Grasp revolution, promote production."¹⁰⁰ Production is to be advanced and increased in order to meet the concrete needs of people, but only on the basis of continually revolutionizing society. That is, production is to be based upon and geared towards the political goals of eliminating exploitation and oppression. Opposing this is the revisionist view, in which socialism is seen as an end in itself whose purpose is merely to ensure order and the development of production. Contradiction is minimized or denied; instead, there are only differences, and the proposed way to deal with these differences is to find 'common' ground (which in the context of antagonistic contradictions does not exist). Political struggle, particularly in the form of the political mobilization and activation of the masses, is no longer necessary and is discouraged or actively crushed. The basic parameters of "communism" are said to have been set and there is only the need to continue to develop production so that the fruits of socialism are more fully realized. Thus, the role of the masses is merely to work hard and follow their

100. See CCP (1970a). Avakian (2002) has taken this concept and applied it more broadly to all aspects of political, and not just economic, work and struggle.

'leaders," and those with technical expertise. In the case of China, this view reached its nadir with Deng's slogan "To be rich is glorious," which was put forward shortly after Mao's death. Here, production is actively promoted through the intensification of exploitive relations.¹⁰¹

These two viewpoints represent the opposing sides of what was a real battle over what direction socialism is heading and who (and which class) is leading it. In a socialist society, power over the means of production as well as over distribution is concentrated in the power of political leadership. To the extent that this power is not in the hands of those seeking to further the transformation of society, capitalist relations of production can be generated and strengthened.¹⁰² Avakian (1978a, 302) argues that:

If the leading cadres do not take part in productive labor together with the masses; if at the same time they increase their income relative to that of the masses, through expanded wage differentials, bonuses proportional to wages, etc.; if they put profit in command; and if they monopolize management and planning while the masses of manual workers are effectively barred from these things rather than being politically activated to take part in them and supervise the leading cadres; then in essence how much different is the relationship between the leading cadres and the working masses from that between the workers and the capitalists in capitalist society?

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution

101. The maoist critique of the revisionists is similar to Marcuse's critique of Hegel. The argument for each is that at a certain point, dialectics is replaced by metaphysics by those who have a class interest in doing so.

102. This is of course an over-simplification. Maoism did not sprout fully grown from the head of Mao, but was developed over a period of many decades. Particularly in the early years, maoism had not clearly differentiated itself fully from revisionism on many issues, and therefor had a similar analysis. For example, his important essay "On The Correct Handling of Contradictions" from 1957 overall puts forth a conception of socialist as a gradualist, patient pursuit of perfection, not the arena of intense class struggle he emphasized later. As I note later, maoist theorization on women's liberation is still insufficiently differentiated from revisionism.

A very complex phenomenon, the GPCR is central to maoism, and is still the most advanced manifestation of it in mass practice in the context of building socialism. Particularly during the GPCR, two-line struggle was not just contained within the narrow realm of economic production but was seen as operating throughout society. At heart the recognition of the continuation of the revolution, the GPCR involved the masses grappling head-on and in an increasingly conscious way with these various contradictions in order to transform all social relations and institutions through revolutionary struggle. Mao described it as "a form, a method, to arouse the broad masses to expose our dark aspect openly, in an all-round way and from below."¹⁰³ It was the way "to bring the most diverse sectors together in wholesale slanging matches; to show up all the ideas, prejudices, good and bad, circulating in society; to prove that 'class struggle' was indeed still very acute; to educate Party and people in this mutual confrontation and exposure, to catalyze awareness" (Han 1976, 98). It was intended to strengthen the dictatorship of the proletariat, while unleashing initiative and providing a mass vehicle for the debate and discussion among the masses and the critical examination of every aspect of socialist society.¹⁰⁴

During the GPCR, the two-line struggle was manifested throughout society. In military matters, the two-line struggle was between those who emphasized professionalism, modern weaponry, clear hierarchies and decorations of rank, and those who wanted a politicized military integrated with and relying upon the people. In education, it was

103. Mao, cited in CCP (1969, 27).

104. However, it should be stressed that this does mean that the GPCR is the pinnacle of MLM. As Avakian has argued repeatedly, Mao's theorization and the practice of the GPCR are not without their problems, which I discuss later in this chapter.

between those who wanted to preserve the privileges of intellectuals and scholars, to separate them from the masses, to reinforce privilege and social hierarchy by relying upon tests for entrance and to maintain universities as mechanisms for the creation of a new mandarin class, and those who saw the role of universities and education more broadly as being a way to root out oppression and privilege, as a center for class struggle.¹⁰⁵ On the question of leadership, there was the view of the Party (as by Liu Shao-chi)¹⁰⁶ or specific leaders (as by Lin Biao)¹⁰⁷ as eternally correct, beyond criticism and leading the passive masses, and those who condemned such perspectives as “the docile tool” theory and insisted on the conscious mobilization of the masses and the subjection of the Party to criticism and struggle. In the realm of production, it was between those who wanted to rely upon administrative decrees and technocratic regulations and put profits in command and those who wanted to rely upon mass participation and who saw production as intrinsic to making revolution.

Mao felt that in many of these areas, it was the bourgeoisie’s line which was dominant.

105. Mao commented that for universities, “class struggle is [the] most important subject.” “Talks with Mao Yuan-hsin,” in Schram (1974, 246).

106. “Liu Shao-chi represented a way of thought far more prevalent than it seemed, not only in the Party but in society at large. For him the Party organization was the revolutionary line; the Party per se the vanguard of the proletariat and revolution a by-product of the Party's existence. This automatic view of the Party as superior, infallible almost, because it held the 'correct' theory, was itself a new Confucianism" (Han 1976, 56).

107. Lin Biao is an excellent example of the complexities of the two-line struggle. Held up during the GPCR as Mao's “close comrade in arms” in the struggle against the revisionists, he was later exposed as a counter-revolutionary when he tried to assassinate Mao and impose a form of patronizing, military dictatorship. With regards to leadership, Lin clearly held to a Great Man perspective, saying that “Mao Tsetung thought is an everlasting truth” and encouraging people to “resolutely carry out Chairman Mao's instructions whether we understand them or not" (Han 1976, 275). Han is another illustration of the complexities involved in all of this. Though her history of Mao's revolution is a cogent presentation of two-line struggle and falls squarely on the side of Mao's presentation of this, after Mao's death she upheld the coup by Deng Xiaoping. What this suggests is that she was fundamentally a nationalist, interested more in upholding China as opposed to upholding dialectical materialism, two-line struggle and the revolutionizing of the 4 Alls. When the latter were central to China, she upheld them. When they were not, she dropped them.

For example, he noted in 1965 that “The Ministry of Public Health is not a Ministry of Public Health for the people, so why not change its name to the Ministry of Urban Health, the Ministry of Gentlemen’s Health, or even to Ministry of Urban Gentlemen’s Health.”¹⁰⁸ John Horn (1967, 177), who practiced medicine in China for many years, illustrates the relevance of the two-line struggle in medical matters:

[I]n the attack on diseases such as syphilis and schistosomiasis, there was a clash between those who relied chiefly on the political consciousness and enthusiasm of the mass of the people, and those who attached first importance to experts and technique. In the synthesis of insulin there was clash between those who dared to aim high, give youth its head and boldly open up new paths, and those who advocated caution and gradual progress in the wake of others. In the orientation of medical services to the countryside there was a clash between those who wholeheartedly wished to implement the policy of Chairman Mao, and those who argued for first developing urban medical services and thereafter, step by step according to the availability - or non-availability - of personnel, supplying the needs of the countryside. In the policy of integrating traditional and modern medicine there was a clash between those who were willing [to examine] the strong and weak points of both schools with an open mind and had confidence that each had a contribution to make, and those who despised one or other school and favoured a policy of separatism. In medical education, there was clash between those who stressed the importance of the moral qualities and political outlook of students, and those who were only concerned with their medical knowledge; between those who appreciated the value of short-course training for medical auxiliaries in order to serve the people, and those who insisted on orthodox six-year courses for all medical workers; between those who regarded practical work and integration with workers and peasants as an essential part of medical education, and those who regarded it as a waste of time.¹⁰⁹

108. “Directive on Public Health” in Schram (1974, 232). Similarly Mao said that the Ministry of Culture “should be renamed the Ministry of Emperors, Kings, Generals, and Ministers, the Ministry of Talents and Beauties or the Ministry of Foreign Mummies” (quoted in Lotta 1978, 213). And of universities, he said, “This higher education, what a joke! From primary school to university, sixteen, seventeen, twenty years ... the students don't know how workers work, how peasants plow ... the more they learn, the more stupid they become” (quoted in Han 1976, 135).

109. Horn’s book is one many positive assessments of the GPCR and the PRC which came out during the 1960s and 1970s. Most of these are out of print and have been almost totally supplanted in the mainstream by GPCR horror stories, along with the praising of the pragmatism and modernization of Deng and his successors. A good example of this trend is Jan Myrdal's *Return to a Chinese Village*. Published in 1984, this was the third installment of Myrdal's 20 year study of one village. In this as in his other books, Myrdal himself steadfastly supports Mao and his policies, including the GPCR and presents an overall analysis that, even judged with the benefit of hindsight, is rather accurate and prescient. The publisher however, felt obliged to include an introduction which at best could be characterized as condescending. While “all of China had moved forward under Deng,” the editor writes, “Myrdal lingers in the past ... calling on China to return to ... those hyperradical policies that

There were innumerable real practical consequences of these differing approaches. Horn tells the story of a peasant woman who had developed a ninety-nine pound tumor. She had gone to a well-known hospital in the capital, where a doctor declared her condition inoperable, the whole time using words neither she nor her husband understood and showing little interest in her as a human being. Her condition was treated simply as a medical one, and understood as hopeless according to the privileging of current medical wisdom. As a result, she was simply sent home to die. A group of PLA soldiers took up her condition, but treated it primarily as a question of politics, not medical technology. One put it this way (Horn 1967, 181):

When I joined the People's Liberation Army at the age of thirteen, it was just such a poor peasant woman who led my donkey over the hills to where I could find the armymen. During the bitter years of war, it was just such poor peasant women who made shoes for us, carried stretchers, hid and nursed the wounded, shared our every weal and woe. Chairman Mao led us in fighting for decades precisely in order to liberate such people. Even if there is only one chance in a hundred of saving her life, we must strain every nerve to seize that chance. And if we fail, at least we must ensure that our class sister is comforted by our love for her. It is only counter-revolutionary trash like Liu Shao-chi who don't care a damn for the people. This is not a question of surgical technique. It is a question of which side you are on.

This gets at the heart of what Mao meant when he said to put politics in command, to have faith in the masses and to serve the people. This is the human side of the question of

brought it so close to chaos." Myrdal's is "an adolescent response," which "does not touch on the suicides, the murders, the killings, the torture." He has clearly failed to inform himself as to "what really happened" during the revolutionary period, particularly "the tremendous damage to the country's scientific and technological elite" (xvii-xviii). The point, repeated in many anti-GPCR texts, is clear: nothing must touch the privilege of intellectuals and the technocratic elite because these are the only modernizing force in a country like China, given the inherently conservative nature of the "rational peasant." By 1984, a work like Myrdal's could only be published with an introduction saying how mis-guided and wrong it is; today, it is unlikely it would be published at all. See the Appendix to Chapter Four in this dissertation for more discussion of this.

the two-line struggle, yet it was not simply a manifestation of humanism but a reflection of his dialectical approach to revolution. Mao's materialist dialectics presented the means to reveal "the myriad suppressions of alternative social forms and social development 'buried' within historical experience. People, in sum, can be more than they seem. This is what 'wagering on the people' (rather than on technology, cadre, economics, or gods) means" (Corrigan, Ramsay and Sayer 1979, 3).

The two-line struggle, particularly during the GPCR, was a battle between those who wanted to "lift the lid off of class struggle" and challenge all of China's "dark aspects," and those who, in the name of efficiency, rationality and in order to hide and expand their own privilege, wanted to push political struggle into the background. With regards to women's liberation, in the simplest terms, the revisionists saw the contradictions between women and men as being either solved, a reflection of "natural" differences, or subject to inevitable erosion as "socialism" was built. The revolutionaries saw it as a fundamental problem which must be met head on through mass revolutionary struggle as a part of the overall revolutionizing of society. The revolutionaries were always clear that the question of how to deal with patriarchy was bound up with the class struggle between the two lines, between the capitalist road and the socialist road.¹¹⁰ Thus it is a philosophical, political and concrete question. The following quote is an example of this kind of explicit

110. This is not to suggest that this struggle was always clear-cut, or that there was not development and transformation within the lines and interaction between them. As noted earlier, lines do not exist in pure form. They are always to some degree entangled with one another, at times to considerable degrees. However, an essential part of the concept of two-line struggle is the commitment towards untangling different lines. An editorial from Peoples Daily in 1971 (quoted in Macciocchi 1972, 322) put it this way: "In the mass movement various trends of thought exert their influence, various factions emerge, and various kinds of people take part. This is only natural. Nothing on earth is absolutely pure. Through their practice in struggle and repeated comparison, the broad masses of people will eventually distinguish between what is correct and what is erroneous." Though lines are concentrated within particular people or groupings, none should be seen as having a perfect grasp of a correct line.

connections being drawn between line-struggle, relations between men and women, and the overall future of Chinese society: “

We are today faced with acute, profound struggles between the two classes and between the two roads. All anti-socialist forces are doing everything possible to spread bourgeois thought and concepts. They are best accustomed to employing the magic weapon which is the theory of human nature, cause confusion deliberately, spread individualism and Epicureanism to women, constantly divert their attention with such questions as ‘domestic bliss,’ corrupt their socialist sense, harm their revolutionary will, and make them degenerate in the direction of capitalism and revisionism” (Croll 1980, 23).

As noted, the contradictions in socialism are concentrated within the Communist Party. There are those in the Party who support revolution and the transformation up to a point, but who later resist further transformations. This was clearly the case in China. For these bourgeois nationalists,¹¹¹ the goal of the revolution was to overcome China’s feudal backwardness and domination by imperialism. “Socialism” was seen as the most efficient and rapid way of turning China into a industrialized, modern country. While Mao pushed for the continuation of the revolution after 1949, they increasingly fought for the centrality of economic development and for this to take place along capitalist lines.¹¹² They did not want the revolution to advance further, to fully transform society, but instead for social relations to be stabilized and for production to be advanced on that

111. Exemplified by Liu Shao-Qui, Deng Xiao-peng, and others.

112. Here it is important to note again that Mao’s thinking developed over time. In the early years of the PRC, his thinking on political economy and socialism largely consisted of encouraging the emulation of the Soviet Union, which of course was basically following what he later called revisionist political economy. The Chinese revisionists now in control have thoroughly mined Mao’s comments from this period to justify their policies of capitalist restoration. As Lenin noted in *State and Revolution* (1970, 390) concerning revolutionary leaders, “After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonize them, so to say, and to surround their names with a certain halo for the ‘consolation’ of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping the latter, while at the same time emasculating the essence of the revolutionary teaching, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarizing it.” The Chinese revisionists have developed this tradition into a fine art.

basis. They resisted policies which threatened the gains they had secured, their privileged position and control over parts of the economy and the superstructure. The policies put forward by such people were based upon strengthening the capitalist and exploitive elements in socialism. While Mao called for the restriction of such things as distribution according to work, the law of value, the difference between mental and manual labor, and bourgeois right generally, the revisionists called for expanding them. Mao said they had "become high officials and want[ed] to protect the interests of high officials" (quoted in Lotta 1978, 372). As Mao warned the Chinese people, "you are making socialist revolution, and yet you don't know where the bourgeoisie is. It is right in the Communist Party - those in power taking the capitalist road."¹¹³ In essence, revisionism is the political line of the bourgeoisie within socialism, one which becomes increasingly openly capitalist as their control over society is strengthened. It is for this reason that Mao called on the Chinese people to "bombard the headquarters," that is, subject to the Communist Party to bold criticism. This is part of the overall perspective that "it is right to rebel against reactionaries."¹¹⁴

The contradictory nature of socialism, the persistence of remnants of exploiting class society and the continual generation of new exploiting elements and relations, means the

113. Quoted in "Great Historic Victory," Peking Review, 29 October 1976.

114. As Wakeman notes (1973, 15), the word used for "rebel" (tsao-fan) was once synonymous with treason." Mao was attempting to find the means to get the masses to rupture with, among other things, centuries of Confucian tradition. Comparing Mao's Quotations with the Edicts of Confucius, Wakeman notes (13), "While the Edicts commanded the individual to submit to a "natural" social hierarchy defined by Confucian tradition, the Quotations destroyed hierarchy boldly and urged every man to be his own master among a revolutionary mass whose regulating force is change, not tradition. Thus, both in physical form and in ideological content, the Quotations is inherently less stable than were the Edicts." Mao was also attempting to get the Party to rupture with this as well, to not fear the masses: "some comrades are afraid of the masses, their criticism, and what they say. Are there any grounds on which a Marxist-Leninist can justify this fear?" "Talk At An Enlarged Working Conference January 30, 1962" Peking Review, July 7, 1978.

continual rise of a new bourgeoisie, even if it has an outward commitment to "communism." To put it simply, left to spontaneity, socialism moves backward to communism and individuals come forward to lead this regression. Unless this movement is countered with a revolutionary line based upon the mobilization of the masses, this will ultimately mean the seizure of state power by this new bourgeoisie and the restoration countrywide of capitalism, however much it might be disguised by socialist trappings.¹¹⁵

The contradictions of the two-line struggle means that one must be careful to not assume that any particular Chinese policy during the years 1949-1976 is representative of maoism. The constant struggle between the two lines meant that aspects of revisionist lines were dominant at times. There were also regions in which revisionism was in control. There were times when, for various reasons including his own mistakes, Mao had to make a strategic retreat, such as following the Great Leap Forward, and allow the revisionist line to be put forward. There were times when much of the Party bureaucracy was controlled by the revisionists.¹¹⁶ And as noted, Mao's thinking developed over time and arguably did not become something which could be called 'maoist' until the GPCR.

To summarize, from the maoist point of view, socialism is not simply, as Lenin put it, 'the soviets plus electricity.' It is not the perfection or stabilization of a particular set of

115. This is precisely what happened in China following Mao's death. A good measure of the success with Mao has been demonized and marginalized is the widespread ignorance of this very accurate and prescient analysis.

116. For example, the publication of Yao Wen-yuan's article criticizing the play *Hai Jui Dismissed from Office* (commonly cited as the initial document of the GPCR), was blocked by the Party bureaucracy in the capital. It was finally published in a Shanghai newspaper. This is why Mao's "big character poster" which initiated the GPCR was called "Bombard the Headquarters." The masses were being called upon to criticize those in the Party who were taking the capitalist road. Recognizing the reality of the two-line struggle within the Party illustrates the problematic nature of the many analyses of maoist China which rely upon a simple dichotomy of the Party versus the people. This is usually put in the anti-communist terms of a monolithic party oppressing the people, who subsequently resist, sabotage or ignore the party.

social relationships through the raising of the level of the productive forces. It is a complex verb filled with contradictions, one aspect of which is the existence of exploitive, capitalist relations. It means class struggle. In China, the struggle over this contradiction was concentrated in the two-line struggle between maoism and revisionism. The former places the emphasis on transforming society by dealing with contradictions head-on through mass political struggle and on that basis promoting production. The latter intensifies those exploitive relations by depoliticizing them and one-sidedly promoting production. To the extent that the former is in command, socialism moves towards a liberated society. To the extent that the latter is, socialism moves backward. If revisionists have state power, the essence of the society is capitalist. From this perspective, the recent call by Jiang Zemin to allow capitalists into the Party is merely a question of officially recognizing what has long been the case: capitalists are in control of the CCP.¹¹⁷ As well, the corresponding social relations, ideas and productive relations are dominant once again in Chinese society.

What this means for China today is too large a subject to enter into here, but, as Lotta (1995, viii) notes,

The economy now shows all the earmarks of boom-bust cyclical development. It is also on an ecological disaster course. Short-term interests of growth and profit have resulted in the neglect and abuse of irrigation and flood works, the chopping down of much to the country's mature forests, and massive industrial dumping that is polluting clean water sources. china's external debt and dependency are mounting. Old social ills have reemerged: in the countryside, the killing of girl babies (since male labor

117. From the perspective of MLM, referring to contemporary China as a socialist country demonstrates a poor understanding of socialism. That the PRC today represents a fundamentally different form of rule, representing different class interests, is something not commonly understood by writers on China. While the differences between China today and China under Mao are too great to ignore, they are usually expressed as merely changes in policy or attitude by a consistent, supposedly communist, leadership.

power is now viewed as a vital asset in the every-family-for-itself economy that is being foisted on the rural majority) and clan violence; in the cities, unemployment, beggary, and prostitution. Culturally, revolutionary images of women "holding up half the sky" have given way to icons of women as dutiful housewives, "dressed-for-success" consumers, and sex objects. Corruption is so widespread in Chinese society that it no longer arouses shock.¹¹⁸

What is important about Mao is that, properly understood, his application of dialectics and materialism renders inapplicable many of the common critiques of marxism (or materialism). Indeed, he frequently surpasses those who argue for a "rethinking" of marxism. The point is not that Mao was a sort of poststructuralist before his time, or that other approaches do not have useful insights to offer. The point is simply that Mao had

118. Foley (2002) summarizes the capitalist reality in China this way: "One could cite any number of indicators that the PRC has become for all practical purposes a capitalist country, and that even the residual features of the socialist "iron rice bowl" are rapidly being eroded. Income disparities have widened at one of the most rapid paces in the world: where in 1981 Gini Coefficient poverty index was 0.33, in 1994 it passed the critical point of 0.4 and is now over .45, greater than in India or Bangladesh. Annual per capital income is \$900, but most people scrape by on about \$200, while there are already 1.2 million households with incomes of \$100,000 or more and the wealthiest 20 percent of the populations receive half the income. There are thousands of Mercedes-driving, mansion-building multimillionaires in China, and Forbes now compiles a yearly list of the super-rich. Although some 5 million jobs were created in China in 2001, most of these were in the export sector and in any event did not keep pace with rising unemployment. About half of the PRC's state workers have been laid off, with more to come, judging by the recent decision to sell off the country's top 500 remaining SOEs (State Owned Enterprises) to foreign investors. The official unemployment rate is nearly 5 percent--about 7 million--though this does not include the 12 million laid off from SOEs; many investigators in the West put the unemployment rate at 25 percent in the cities, and some think it may be double that figure. Twenty million urban workers lost their jobs in 2001 alone, and a recent government "white paper" predicts that another 20 million will lose their jobs over the next four years as unemployment rises to new highs. Moreover, there are 150 million "surplus" rural workers; between 80 and 100 million workers--displaced peasants without residency status, "illegal aliens" in their own country--roam the country looking for work; if they are lucky, they labor 11-14 hours a day for subcontractors who often do not pay them for months; they have no minimum wages or job safety protections. It is largely the labor of such a reserve army of unemployed that has raised the glittering monuments to progress in downtown Shanghai. Youth unemployment is particularly severe, having risen from 50 to 70 percent over the past two years; 70% of the jobless workers are now under the age of 35. While there were great gains for women from 1949-76, now the unemployment rate for women is about twice that of men and there is the highest women's suicide rate in the world. There has been a wholesale dismantling of the public health system, which is now one of the worst in the world, with barefoot doctors eliminated from the rural areas and public health facilities largely closed down in the cities. Safety conditions on the job have nearly disappeared, as has been witnessed by the explosion two years ago of a rural fireworks factory, masquerading as a school, in which scores of juvenile employees died. Ten thousand workers, it is estimated, perish in China's mines every year." For more on this from a mainstream perspective, see "The Return of the 'Four Olds.'" *Economist*, 04/08/2000, Vol. 355, Issue 8165.

already addressed some of the issues that poststructuralists focus on, particularly where it comes to their critiques of ‘marxism.’¹¹⁹ But Mao had done this in a qualitatively different, and, I argue, better, way. It involved, and was completely integrated with, mass revolutionary participation, not restricted to what the Chinese called the ‘meeting of the immortals.’ Mao took dialectics to the masses, so that they could grasp it and consciously employ it in their daily practice – which then reinforced Mao's thinking. It was more than a question of integrating the diverse experiences and lives of the masses into a philosophy, but of taking that philosophy back to the masses as well. He did it in a way that was intimately involved with the practice of hundreds of millions of people, the vast majority of whom had long been ruthlessly depoliticized. Maoism is thus a revolutionary praxis in the best tradition of marxism. As such, its relevance rests primarily upon the richness of its historical practice. Maoism, through the immense breadth and sophistication of its practice, represents an historical high point in the development of dialectical materialism.

Avakian's New Synthesis

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was a significant advance in unleashing the masses and practicing mass democracy on the basis of maintaining and strengthening the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is its essential aspect, however much that may be buried today. But to simply insist on that, or to point to the GPCR as a model to be repeated would be to turn what was a path-breaking advance and rupture into a dead

119. For the reasons noted earlier, academics are often unaware of this. For example, Hennessy (1993, 37) notes the “recent developments in marxist theory which stress the materiality of knowledges: how what we know shapes what we do.” Without dismissing the importance of recent systematic treatments of this, it is important to know that Mao specifically addressed this sixty years ago in “Where do Correct Ideas Come From?”

dogma – it would mean the ossification of thinking to the point that it would have little in common with the understanding of Mao. As Avakian pointedly has noted, "I uphold very firmly the experience of the socialist revolution so far, but I wouldn't want to live in those countries." This does not mean that bourgeois society or life in the imperialist countries is preferable to socialism but that even the furthest advance of socialism falls short of where humanity needs to be. From this perspective and with the hindsight of several decades, it is possible to identify some of the errors that were associated with the GPCR. Avakian, more than any other writer, has systematically gone through the experience of China, and has developed what he calls the "new synthesis."¹²⁰ Avakian has summed up his "new synthesis" as

dealing with real-world contradictions, summing up the end of a stage (the first stage of socialist revolutions) and what can be learned out of that stage, attempting to draw the lessons from that and dealing with real-world contradictions in aspects, important aspects, that are new. It is a synthesis that involves taking what was positive from previous experience, working through and discarding what was negative, recasting some of what was positive and bringing it forward in a new framework" (2006i).

This synthesis is very much rooted in the critical and dialectical approach first elaborated by Marx and Engels and further developed by Lenin and Mao. The point is that it is now more possible to see how the GPCR "divides into two," that is, to identify those conceptions, approaches and policies applied in the GPCR which did not contribute to solving the contradictions of the socialist transition, or which contained erroneous features which actually stood in the way of what Mao was trying to lead the masses in

120. This section presents some of the important points in Avakian's works published in the last few years, including (2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d, 2006e, 2006f, 2006g, 2006h, 2006i, 2006j). It is also based on many discussions with supporters of his party. Thus, this section should not be seen as an original contribution on my part but as an attempt at summing the thinking of Avakian and the many people who base their political work and investigation on Avakian.

China to accomplish.

A central concept of Avakian's new synthesis is the "solid core with a lot of elasticity," a concept which has application on many levels. As applied to the problem of socialist society, this means the contradiction around how to maintain the "solid core," that is the proletarian dictatorship, the leading role of the party and the ideology of MLM, and on that basis encouraging "elasticity," that is, the active involvement and initiative of wide sections of the masses and intermediate strata many of whom do not adhere to MLM, or at least not fully, who may object to aspects, even important ones, of the party's line and policy, and who may even differ over what transformations in society they hope to see. It is in this sense that Avakian has spoken of a "united front under the leadership of the proletariat" existing throughout the whole period of socialist transformation. This concept of united front under the leadership of the proletariat and "elasticity" also involves a conception of a wider scope to the debate and discussion in socialist society than has been generally practiced in previous socialist countries. This includes involving the basic masses in all aspects of political life but it also means that the opinions and viewpoints of non-communists and even opponents of the party and the socialist system must be part of the political debate and intellectual ferment in socialist society, incorporated into the framework of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is necessary to maintain a correct approach of unity and struggle with non-communist elements in the socialist society and, as I will examine later, it is linked to epistemological questions of how the proletarian masses themselves must be further "fitted to rule".

This represents both a continuation and a rupture with past views of socialism. Previous

socialist societies have had a “united front” aspect as it is necessary and unavoidable that large numbers of people who do not agree with the communist programme from different classes and strata will be united in the course of revolution and the socialist transformation. At the same time it is true that the failure to recognize this “united front” character of socialist society has resulted in mistakes made in how the contradiction between communists and the rest of society has been handled. These mistakes have had both a right and a left character. For example, if it is inaccurately believed that the overwhelming majority in a socialist society accepts or adheres to the proletarian outlook many wrong understandings will be overlooked, the need to wage ideological struggle underestimated and many revisionist notions will be allowed to pass themselves off as “Marxism” as long as their proponents support the socialist state or the leading role of the Party. On the other hand, requiring adherence to Marxism as a prerequisite for genuine participation in the ideological life in a socialist society would stifle the initiative of many who can and should be united in the process of socialist revolution. There have been both types of errors in the history of the socialist countries, often in combination – that is to say, a bureaucratic stifling of debate coupled with widely tolerated revisionism. One example of this would be Enver Hoxha's Albania, which was declared “the world’s first atheist state” while outlawing all forms of religious worship (excepting the peculiar form of dogmatism which Hoxha erected as a new state religion in Albania).

Avakian has noted the serious errors in the policies adopted in relation to artists and intellectuals in previous socialist societies, first in the USSR especially under Stalin and also, to a lesser but still significant degree, in revolutionary China. Mao was grappling with this problem in a serious way, for example when he initiated the campaign to “Let a

Hundred Flowers Blossom, Let a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend” and the more important GPCR. But even with Mao, there were problems in the handling of this. There was an aspect, particularly during the Hundred Flowers but even during the GPCR, in which debate and public wrangling was seen in a utilitarian sense, of providing the means by which counter-revolutionaries could be identified and then attacked. Combined with the numerous instances in which intellectuals and artists were unjustly persecuted (even if this was often actually done by opponents of Mao), this was in contradiction with the actual aims of the GPCR and led to a chilling of debate and initiative. To put it in other terms, there were times when the complexity of revolutionizing society became reduced to the aim of purifying society of counter-revolutionary elements. Mao did not provide the best theoretical tools for avoiding this substantial trap.

There were cases in the pursuit of the natural sciences in socialist countries where what was considered to be politically expedient or what narrowly corresponded to Marxism led to serious violations of the scientific method and to wrong conclusions. The most well known of these incidents was the Lysenko affair in the USSR under Stalin. This dispute in Soviet scientific circles was over whether genetic characteristics could be “acquired” and then passed along to descendants, as Lysenko argued. The Party was quick to conclude that Lysenko was correct and then threw its full authority behind him. The consequence was not only a wrong conclusion in genetics but a deep chill in the scientific circles more generally. In China, some mathematicians were attacked for working on theoretical problems (such as the Goldbach conjecture) because they had no known practical application, thus demonstrating a too narrow understanding of the relationship between theory and practice and the need for the work of intellectuals to serve the masses

of people. Avakian notes that it is correct and necessary to struggle to link scientific and technical personnel with the masses and for their work to meet the needs of the masses and society – broadly understood – but this dialectic is complex, and it must not be treated in a linear or mechanical “one-to-one” fashion.

This utilitarian view toward science and math sees this aspect of human knowledge only from the narrow viewpoint of how science and math can “serve” the proletariat, whether that be in the class struggle or the struggle for production. It is necessary for the proletariat to lead work on the scientific and technological front and this was one of the important arenas and contributions of the GPCR. For example, the Chinese revolutionaries developed the principle of “red and expert,” meaning that communist consciousness needs to be the principal aspect guiding work in these spheres – as opposed to the revisionist argument of putting a classless concept of “expertise” in charge – which, in reality, means that the old experts will direct these areas of social life according to the old bourgeois relations, habits and division of labour. But having established the need to lead, there remains the question of *how* to lead. Here again we see the importance of Mao’s comment that Marxism “embraces but does not replace” other schools of thought and arenas of knowledge – they are not and should not be considered “off limits” to the proletariat and its revolutionary ideology. But in carrying out the effort to revolutionize these sectors there was also a definite tendency in China to apply a mechanical one-to-one approach between work on the scientific and technological fronts and the immediate needs of the revolutionizing society – and to do this in a heavy-handed way.

In a similar vein, part of the new synthesis Avakian is developing involves distinguishing between the historic role of the proletariat as the vehicle for achieving communism (what he has ironically described as the “god-like position of the proletariat”) and the reification which arises from the fixation on the proletarians as they are at any point in time. This difference has everything to do with how the dictatorship of the proletariat and its relations to other classes and strata is understood. Both of these radically different conceptions of the role of the proletariat have been part of the history of the ICM, in different proportions and often entangled. The socialist revolution must replace the dictatorship of the exploiting classes with a dictatorship of the formerly exploited but the purpose must be to create, step by step, the conditions for humanity to transcend the whole era of class society and the division of labour that it incorporates. The goal is not to seek to create the “mirror opposite” of the existing society in which only the position of the oppressed and oppressor have changed places. The proletariat (not the same things as "proletarians") must rule – but not because it has been formerly oppressed or even because, together with its allies, it represents the majority of the population. The proletariat must rule because without its dictatorship, without its control over the political and economic levers of society (in broad unity with the allied classes and strata), it will be impossible to dig up the roots of capitalism and class society. If the proletariat is not trained and conscious of this, the proletarian revolution is quickly reduced to simply improving the lot of the formerly exploited (which many reformist regimes have accomplished to one or another degree) and, more importantly, the powerful spontaneous force of commodity production, the division of labour, and so forth will quickly lead to the re-emergence of a new bourgeoisie. Mao captured this dialectic well when he wrote that “the proletariat can only liberate itself by liberating all of humanity.”

Mao was very much focused on this problem during the GPCR, but this does not mean that he or the revolutionaries in China were immune from some of the previous wrong understandings in the ICM. This came out in many ways in the GPCR, for example the tendency of major red guard factions to restrict membership to youths whose families came from a “good class origin,” or tendencies to promote a sentiment of “revenge” against intellectuals (as well as other privileged strata),¹²¹ and thus not being able to unite and transform these sections to the degree that was possible. Indeed a progression can be seen within the decade of the GPCR to a better understanding of some of these questions. For example, the basis on which Liu Shao-chi was exposed included a significant effort to paint him as a capitulator from the early days of the Chinese revolution. This portrayal is probably inaccurate, another example of “political truth,”¹²² which in this case directed attention away from the real source of the bourgeoisie in China.

Similar errors of drawing a too direct “one-to-one” link between politics and other aspects of social life have been made in the artistic fields as well. In the USSR there were tendencies to leave some cultural spheres untouched by revolution or alternatively for approved critics to make hasty and sweeping judgments on cultural works, stifling creativity in the arts and promoting a one-sided understanding of the relationship between art and politics. During the GPCR, Mao stressed that class struggle finds expression in the

121. Avakian has spoken at length on this question of revengism, which is a strong current in the history of the ICM. Its ideology of “they had their turn, now it's mine” contrasts with the truly communist vision of liberating all humanity. However much it is wrapped up in marxist phrases, such a vision will at best lead back to capitalism and more likely result in crimes, even great crimes, against the people. See Avakian (2006b).

122. Political truths are “truths” put forward because they serve some perceived political interest. Again, this is another strong and unfortunate tendency in the ICM.

realm of literature and art and that these domains could not be left under the domination of the bourgeoisie. One of the advances of the GPCR (and not coincidentally, one for which it is consistently attacked) was for the masses to enter domains that were previously off limits to them. In the course of the GPCR, breakthroughs were made in creating high-quality “model works,” such as the opera *The Red Detachment of Women* or the film *Breaking With Old Ideas*. But there was also a negative, secondary, tendency to link too closely work on the artistic front with immediate political objectives. Model works were needed and played a key role in opening up these realms to the masses for the first time. But it is also necessary to allow and encourage other artistic endeavor as well and to realize that it is neither correct nor necessary for every work to be directly supervised by proletarian representatives in the cultural sphere. If proletarian leadership is misunderstood to mean that all artistic work must directly serve the political struggle the result will be a far too restrictive approach and serious mistakes will be inevitable. Furthermore, it is possible to see in *Breaking with Old Ideas*, for example, some of the one-sided understanding of what it means for the proletariat to guide intellectual work, such as criticizing the teaching of anatomy of horses because none were present in the region where the technical school, the subject of the film, was located. Similarly the film portrays the reading of foreign books simply as “doing reconnaissance on the enemy” as if there was nothing positive that needed to be learned and assimilated, as well as criticized, from such books.

Another example of some of the wrong approaches in the artistic sphere can be seen in both the USSR under Stalin and during the GPCR where there were tendencies to consider one or another cultural form as inherently proletarian or inherently bourgeois.

The nationalism in such an approach leaps out as well, as could be seen, for example, by ignorant remarks in the Chinese press about the “Western decadence” of jazz and rock & roll, when in fact much of the more progressive and even revolutionary currents in Western culture were found in those forms. There will be, and must be, a multitude of artistic forms that will flourish under socialism.

Here again we see the importance of the “solid core with a lot of elasticity” that Avakian argues for. There must be a leading proletarian centre and a direction to society but this centre cannot and must not seek to orchestrate each and every aspect of political, social and cultural life. There must be space for divergence, experimentation, opposing schools and dissent. There is the need, as Avakian puts it, for the proletarian state to have big arms that can embrace without suffocating. This problem has particular relevance in dealing with the intellectuals precisely because they are trained to “work with ideas” and crude or mechanical methods will have immediate negative consequences. But the necessity of a vibrant, invigorating atmosphere is also just as necessary for the masses as well. If they are to be truly the masters of society they must also be increasingly equipped to work with ideas in an all-sided and critical way. It is for this reason that Avakian says that dissent and debate should not be allowed in socialist society – it should be encouraged, fostered, and funded by the socialist state, so that it exists to a far greater degree than it does, or can, under capitalism.

Mao and the revolutionaries in China called on the masses “to be concerned with affairs of state,” to play an active role in the two-line struggle and create mass democracy on a hitherto unseen scale. But it must be recognized that it is not a simple matter to overcome

the disadvantage that education, culture and the division of labour of society have imposed on the masses and that there must be a whole process of “fitting themselves to rule” as Marx put it, and this process must include, as a central feature, mastering not only the particular conclusions reached through MLM but the more difficult task of mastering the critical approach and method of MLM as well.

Mao put forth a vision (and worked to create in reality) of socialism as a society of tumult, dissent and contradiction. Avakian has said that this needs to be taken further, that socialism needs to be an even more "wild and wooly" society than even Mao envisioned, and he has wrestled with the profoundly difficult question of how this society is to move forward. While, in an overall sense, this process must be led, it cannot be led in a linear mechanical way. Part of “leading” means unleashing a process whose course cannot be foreseen¹²³, to place the masses at the vortex of swirling debate and, together with the party, to be drawn into the process of discovering what is right and wrong and synthesizing a correct understanding of how the socialist transformation can advance at any given stage. It is with this context that Avakian has raised what he calls the “JS Mill principle” into the framework of the proletarian dictatorship, that is, of allowing the most persuasive and passionate opponents to present their arguments, participate in public debates and to publish some books. If, Avakian says, you want the full flowering of the debate and discussion amongst the people – and grasp the indispensable role of that in the complex process of the masses increasingly becoming masters of society – you must dare to expose the masses to and involve them in discussing a wide range of political and

123. Along these lines, Avakian has insisted upon a "post-inevitalist" view of communism, one which is in sync with a fully dialectical approach and which has considerable implications for how one conceives of socialism. See Avakian and Martion for more on this. Mao, on the other hand, agreed with the prevailing wisdom of the ICM and consistently spoke of the inevitability of communism.

ideological views. Experience has shown that it is difficult to carry out such a policy – reactionaries and counter-revolutionaries will always try to avail themselves of every opportunity and they will attempt to seize power. But revolution is full of difficulties and in Avakian's view, history has shown that there is no other way to ensure that socialism will advance for long.

The “solid core with a lot of elasticity” is a description of how socialist society can be led to advance amidst complex and changing contradictions towards communism. It represents a further rupture with past erroneous conceptions of the monolithic party and also clearly delineates itself from bourgeois pluralism and bourgeois democracy. As Avakian has pointed out, it is not difficult to argue for all elasticity, that is, pluralism (although the nature of class society makes it impossible to implement such a policy except as bourgeois pluralism, which hides the class rule of the bourgeoisie under the name of democracy). Neither is it difficult to argue for all solid core – and the history of the ICM is unfortunately rife with that.

The socialist state must be a transitional form, not seen as an end in itself, and it must exist not to maintain existing production relations (which would result in the restoration of capitalism) but to continually transform them, both systematically and through ruptures. It must be a society of ferment. Avakian stresses that on the one hand, state power must be held on to, on the other, it must represent something worth holding on to. Elaborating and relating this to his formulation of solid core with a lot of elasticity, he states (2006i) that there are four aspects of socialist state power:

- 1) holding on to power; 2) making sure that the solid core is expanded to the greatest

degree possible, and is not a static thing, but is continually expanding to the greatest degree possible at every point; 3) working consistently toward the point where that solid core will no longer be necessary, and there will no longer be a distinction between that and the rest of society; and 4) giving expression to the greatest amount of elasticity at any given time on the basis of that solid core.

This is in accordance with and gives further expression to the view of the socialist state being a new kind of state, different from previous forms of state, which exists not just to exercise dictatorship over the bourgeoisie, but to bring about a classless society, eliminating itself and the need for a state in the process. In doing so, Avakian says, those leading this process have to be willing to be "continually taken to the brink of being drawn and quartered." The problems of socialist revolution are many and complex, but the question of handling dissent correctly does concentrate to an important degree the contradiction between ensuring that the society continues to revolutionize and transforms all aspects, mobilizing and unleashing all of the potentially positive forces in society toward that end while being able to maintain domination over the forces for capitalist restoration which will inevitably try to profit from and pervert the kind of widespread socialist democracy that is being called for.

Three Alternative Worlds

In regards to this, Avakian has spoken of the three alternative worlds. The first is the world as it is, which Avakian quickly dispenses with as intolerable. The second corresponds with what is typically thought of to be socialism but is actually revisionism, however much it accurately portrays many of the societies which called themselves socialist. This second world means almost literally turning the first world upside-down (2005b, 12):

In other words, people who are now exploited will no longer be exploited in the same way, people who now rule this society will be prevented from ruling or influencing society in a significant way. The basic economic structure of society will change, some of the social relations will change, and some of the forms of political rule will change, and some of the forms of culture and ideology will change, but fundamentally the masses of people will not be increasingly and in one leap after another drawn into the process of really transforming society

This is a vision of a social welfare society, in which the role of the masses of people is not fundamentally different than it is under capitalism, and which does really rupture onto a whole new path for society. A current illustration of this would be Venezuela under Hugo Chavez. In recent years among left and progressive circles, Venezuela has become a focus of some excitement, both because he is sharp (and sometimes amusing) in his criticisms of US President George W Bush, and because of his policies of radical distribution of wealth. In doing so, his policies have brought real benefit to some of the most desperate people in Venezuela. However, it fundamentally represents a dead end. It is not a rupture in any way with commodity production, or even with imperialism. It relies fundamentally upon using a particular, and probably ultimately momentary, advantage with regards to commodity exchange in order to fund the creation of a welfare state, a society along the lines of the second model. In its essence, what is being done in Venezuela represents a capitulation to imperialism and its global relations.

And it is far short of the third world, in which (2005b, 13) "in every respect, not only economically but socially, politically, ideologically, and culturally, it really is superior to capitalist society. A society that not only meets the needs of the masses of people, but really is characterized increasingly by the conscious expression and initiative of the masses of people." This is a much more fundamental transformation than simply creating

a welfare state, a society socialist in name but capitalist in essence. In one, the role of the masses of people is still largely reduced to being producers of wealth, while in the other people thrash out all the larger questions of affairs of state, the direction of society, culture, philosophy, science, the arts, etc. One is a narrow, economistic view of socialism, which reduces the people to simply the economic sphere of society, and in a limited way at that (2005b, 13):

It doesn't even think about transforming the world outlook of the people as they in turn change the world around them. And you cannot have a new society and a new world with the same outlook that people are indoctrinated and inculcated with in this society. You cannot have a real revolutionary transformation of society and abolition of unequal social as well as economic relations and political relations if people still approach the world in the way in which they're conditioned and limited and constrained to approach it now. How can the masses of people really take up the task of consciously changing the world if their outlook and their approach to the world remains what it is under this system?

The third alternative is a radical rupture in every sphere, much as identified by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto, that the communist revolution represents a radical rupture with traditional property relations and with traditional ideas. These ruptures are not possible without the other – they are mutually reinforcing. Avakian uses the example of male supremacy to illustrate this (2005b, 13):

If you have a society in which the fundamental role of women is to be breeders of children, how can you have a society in which there is equality between men and women? You cannot. And if you don't attack and uproot the traditions, the morals, and so on, that reinforce that role, how can you transform the relations between men and women and abolish the deep-seated inequalities that are bound up with the whole division of society into oppressors and oppressed, exploiters and exploited? You cannot.

To Avakian, the third alternative is a society and a world that the great majority of people

would actually want to live in (2005b, 14):

One in which not only do they not have to worry about where their next meal is coming from, or if they get sick whether they're going to be told that they can't have health care because they can't pay for it, as important as that is; but one in which they are actually taking up, wrangling with, and increasingly making their own province all the different spheres of society. Achieving that kind of a society, and that kind of a world, is a very profound challenge. It's much more profound than simply changing a few forms of ownership of the economy and making sure that, on that basis, people's social welfare is taken care of, but you still have people who are taking care of that for the masses of people; and all the spheres of science, the arts, philosophy and all the rest are basically the province of a few. And the political decision-making process remains the province of a few.¹²⁴

Without this kind of society, and the methods and forms necessary to bring it about, there cannot be the kind of desperately needed transformations in the relations between men and women, in the realm of sexuality, in all of the thinking, traditions and moralities that bring so much oppression down on women around the world.

“The Important Thing is to be Good at Learning”

As noted in the previous chapter, the dialectical ontology underlying maoism is remarkably in sync with (some) contemporary feminist theorizing, particularly those informed by poststructuralism. As developed by Mao and taken further by Avakian, MLM presents a fertile foundation for the creation of a liberatory praxis that goes beyond class in a narrow sense. By refusing to reify the proletariat and recognizing the complexity of contradictions, it recognizes a diversity of revolutionary subjectivities and

124. Along these lines, feminists (such as Brodie 54) have critiqued the limitations of welfare states, whether capitalist or ostensibly socialist, as "deeply inscribed with patriarchal assumptions including, among others, the family wage, women's dependence upon men, the gendered division of labor, women's primary role as carers, and women's access to self-determination. There is a strong body of feminist thought, therefore, which interprets the development of the welfare state as merely a transition from 'private' to 'public' or state patriarchy."

avoids forms of class reductionism. As a methodology fully rooted in dialectics, it can embrace, without replacing, other strains of thought. By not adhering to a mechanistic, technology driven conceptions of socialism, it avoids economism and presents a very different view of a vibrant, visionary and viable socialism. By insisting that the masses are the source of revolution and relying upon their conscious, collective and diverse enthusiasm and creativity, it creates a non-elitist revolutionary praxis, which at the same time recognizes the contradictory nature of such a praxis.¹²⁵

Unfortunately, it has generally stayed at the level of a foundation when it comes to questions of gender and sexuality. The crucial oversight in maoism is that, for all the attention paid to patriarchy and the oppression of women, both by Mao and contemporary maoists, there is little understanding of the significance of gender as an analytical category and even less grappling with its significance in practice. Nor is there much of substance that seriously investigates the implications of a ruthlessly dialectical conception of, say, sexuality, the family, and other subjects that poststructuralist feminists have long since deconstructed.

Much of Mao's early organizing involved revolt against family tradition, and encouraging and supporting women revolutionaries.¹²⁶ And though Mao wrote extensively on women's liberation in the early part of his career, he did not produce a substantial work

125. As Mao put it, "We must have faith in the masses and we must have faith in the Party. These are two cardinal principles. If we doubt these principles, we shall accomplish nothing. "On the Question of Agricultural Co-operation" in the Red Book, Chapter 1.

126. Han (1972, 26, 51) notes that Mao's "indignation at the shameful treatment of women in China was to become an integral part of his resolve to change the world," and that he viewed the domination of women as one of the "evil demons of the empire." See chapters 2-4 in her book for more on Mao's early attention to these matters.

on the subject in the latter part of his life. Thus, much as the situation with Marx, this has left others to elaborate on what a maoist theory of liberation would be (for example, the articles noted earlier by Desai (1993) and Brahme (1990)).

Still, maoist theorization on women's liberation is partial, undeveloped, and exists largely as elaborations on existing marxist theorization. It is also one of the few areas that tends to be treated in metaphysical terms.¹²⁷ As such, maoist theorization in these areas is insufficiently distinguished from other marxist approaches, even those completely integrated with the Theory of Productive forces. Theory has fallen behind practice in terms of its sophistication, and while the practice of revolutionizing relations between men and women is arguably central to maoism and has made significant concrete contributions, theorization of women's liberation exists in its penumbra. Specifically, maoism is gender-blind and needs to integrate gender, and not just add women as an empirical categories or patriarchy as a social formation. There is the need to address this limitation, in part through learning from feminists, but also from consistently applying its own understanding of dialectics.

Despite their insistence that they have addressed the 'woman question' better than anyone else,¹²⁸ maoists have not fully developed a distinctive theory of women's liberation. In works that address the issue, the usual method is to summarize Engels, cobble together

127. This is particularly the case with sexuality. There has been a strong tendency among maoists (when not ignoring the issue) to, on the one hand, assume that there is a natural sexuality (not surprisingly, monogamous heterosexuality) and therefore treat anything else as a deviation or distortion. Or, on the other hand, to politicize sexuality but to do so on the assumption that there exists a proletarian, revolutionary sexuality (again, not surprisingly, monogamous heterosexuality). This question is discussed further in Chapter 6.

128. See, for example, Desai (1990) and Brahme (1986).

comments by Lenin and Mao and conclude with a ringing endorsement of maoist China. As such, there is little to distinguish it from more traditional marxist theorization. In fact, it exists largely at the level of slogans and policy. Clearly, more needs to be done. As noted in the introduction, poststructuralist feminism presents the best avenue for the elevation of maoist theorization, as it has a similar ontology. In the next chapter, I turn to an analysis of the experience of women's liberation in China, as a way illustrating the accomplishments of maoisms, the problems with some feminist critiques, and the insights that poststructuralist feminism can bring.

CHAPTER FOUR: REASSESSING FEMINIST CRITIQUES OF MAOIST CHINA

We have to enrich this heritage of struggle on the question of women in concrete situations by our practice, while grasping the basic approach. If the movement has failed, any of us feel, to pay adequate attention to the women's question to date, our task is to set about giving that attention --not to abandon the dialectical-materialist class perspective on the question of women.

Desai 1990

In this chapter, I turn to feminist appraisals of maoist China. For many feminists who study China, the question of whether the revolution liberated women was largely settled by a series of works published in the 1980s. Though the arguments and approaches varied, these works generally concluded that China represented a dead end, another example of marxism failing to deliver on its promise of women's liberation through socialism. This chapter is a critical review of this literature, focusing on three important works. I aim to show that these works fall short of justifying the dismissal of maoist China. In fact, after one corrects for a particular error in the focus of analysis, these works often end up inadvertently creating an argument for maoism. However, they almost all make concrete contributions, as do more recent works that do not share the limitations of earlier feminist critiques.¹²⁹

129. The literature on women in China is massive. Works consulted for this chapter include Andors (1983) Ayscough (1975), Bingham and Gross (1980), Broyelle (1977), Chao (1977), Chi-hsi (1974), Ch'iu (1974), Croll (1980, 1984, 1985, 1992, and 1993), Curtin (1975), Cusack (1986), Davin (1980), Davis and Harrell (1993), Dunayevskaya (1977), Evans. (1999), Fan (1997), Gilmartin (1995), Gilmartin, et al (1994), Hemmel and Sindbjerg (1984), Honig and Hershatter (1988), Johnson (1983), Judd (1994), Kazuko (1989), Kerr and Delahanty (1996), Kristeva (1986), Lee (1998), Moudud (1980), Parish and Whyte (1978), Peck (1985), Petty, et al (1987), Pollit (1973), Rai (1994), Robinson (1985), Sidel (1972), Siu (1981), Smedley (1976), Smith and Padula (1996), Stranahan (1984), and Witke (1977). Other important sources are the first person narratives of Chinese women, including Cheo Ying, Esther (1980), Ji Li Jiang (1997), Jung Chang (1991), Pruitt (1967), Yue and Wakeman (1985) and Zhang (1992). As an aside, I find it interesting that such a large majority of the anti-GPCR narratives are by women. Perhaps this has something to do with the pervasive masculinist ideology of women as vulnerable and needing protection. Thus, their persecution would provoke that much more anti-communist outrage. Of course, another possibility is that women were particularly attacked during the GPCR, but this does not appear to be the case.

I divide the works examining the question of maoist China and women's liberation into three periods, which I label the Laudatory, the Critical and the Post-Critical. Laudatory publications were prevalent up through the 1970s and were favorable both in their view of ongoing practices and transformations and in what was seen for the future. In many ways, this was a reflection of the way many progressives viewed the People's Republic of China at the time. Even many who had long been disenchanted with the Soviet Union felt that something new and exciting was taking place in China. The view that the extent and quality of women's (and human) liberation was progressing remarkably under Mao was widespread, at least among progressives. Many of these are general works which do not deal in depth with gender issues but when they do, they are generally quite positive. Such works include Belden (1948), Snow (1938, 1971, 1974), Hinton (1966, 1972a, 1972b, 1983), Mrydal (1965, 1970), Milton (1976), Chan (1984), Strong (1960), Selden (1971), among others. Though these works are overall exciting and provide useful information and analysis, they suffer from consistent shortcomings. They usually focus on description and lack theoretical sophistication when dealing with gender issues, a reflection of the paucity of self-identified feminists among this group and the state of feminist theory at the time.

However, these works laid the foundation for early feminist writing which fit within the overall pattern of positive assessment. Many feminists had turned away from the question of socialism, disillusioned by the degeneracy and failure of the Soviet Union and what was seen as the failure of marxists to deal seriously with the concerns raised by feminists.

But, as Stacey (1983, 2) puts it:

Maoist China seemed to open new possibilities. Far from seeking the calcifying stability of other postrevolutionary societies, its leaders had launched the Cultural Revolution, which Europeans and Americans of the New Left embraced as the revolutionary antidote to the bureaucratic conservatism of socialist practice elsewhere. Under conditions of 'permanent revolution,' all varieties of further transformation were imaginable, and sexual equality appeared high on the Chinese agenda. Reports of the progress of women in the People's Republic of China ... inspired feminists then to renew their interest in socialist revolution.

Typified by authors such as Witke (1975), Broyelle (1977), Sidel (1972) and Croll (1980), feminists, even those unsympathetic to communism, were impressed by the ideas, policies and transformations in revolutionary China. However, following the death of Mao, feminists became increasingly critical of Chinese policies. By the 1980s, Western feminists, while usually acknowledging the substantial advances for women that the revolution brought about, largely felt that these advances were only partial. Many felt these had been reversed as concern with liberation of women was sacrificed for other objectives. In these works the common theme is either that the Chinese revolutionaries were ultimately not fully committed to women's liberation or, due to their marxist roots, they were incapable of theorizing women's oppression in a fruitful way. Some even pointed to China's accomplishments in other areas, such as the restructuring of class relations, as evidence that they would not or could not actually achieve women's liberation. Most of the works from the Critical period end up rejecting the praxis of revolutionary China as insufficient, or even detrimental, to the cause of women's liberation.

The Post-critical phase is less distinct than the other two. I use the term post-critical not

to suggest that these works are uncritical in general, but merely that they generally assume the validity of works from the critical phase. That is, they tend to accept at least in general terms those assessments of the historical experience of women's liberation in Chinese and proceed upon that basis. Many, but by no means all, of these come from some form of poststructuralist approach and are part of a larger trend of wanting to move past or beyond the assumptions and epistemologies rooted in the Enlightenment and modernity.

This chapter focuses on three important works from the Critical phase: Judith Stacey's *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China* (PSRC), Margery Wolf's *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China* (RP), and Maria Mies' *Patriarchy and Accumulation at a World Scale* (PAWS). Each presents major critiques of the line and practice of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) concerning the liberation of women. The first two are major treatments of the subject, while the section in PAWS on China is part of a larger project of examining the historical interaction and mutual development of patriarchy and capitalist accumulation. Together, they provide three distinct critiques of maoist China. All three come, for different reasons and from different perspectives, to the conclusion that socialism and patriarchy are compatible and therefore socialism does not provide the basis for women's liberation.

These works were not chosen at random. Their similar conclusions arise from distinctly different arguments and methodologies and thus represent a wide range of feminist critiques. Wolf works largely within the framework of liberal feminism. Though she occasionally uses the terminology of radical feminism, her overall focus is on equality,

not systemic transformations. She also does not connect gender and patriarchy to other social systems and relationships in a systematic way. Stacey approaches China from the perspective of radical feminism. Her concern is patriarchy as a social system and the transformation of this system, not the creation of "equality" within it. Mies considers herself a materialist feminist, and explicitly connects her critique of patriarchy to questions of production and political economy on a world scale. Each work, therefore, makes contributions particular to their perspective, as well as demonstrating their limitations. In one sense together they represent a considerable section of the spectrum of theoretical approaches of second wave feminism. In addition, what I see as the problematic aspects of these works are common to other works of the Critical period.

All three works have a particular value: PAWS for its analysis of China in the context of a broader analysis of patriarchy and capitalist accumulation, RP for its first-hand investigation and empirical information, and PSRC for its ambitious theoretical critique of the CCP and marxist approaches to political economy. All three are recognized as enduring and important works, and continue to influence feminist scholarship. The books by Wolf and Stacey are often featured in bibliographies of literature on women in China and used in classes on the subject. And Mies, though not usually mentioned in feminist literature in China, has long been recognized as a classic of feminist international political economy and is essentially required reading for students of the subject. These works were chosen because of this influence, as well as their representativeness, not because they were convenient targets.¹³⁰

130. After completing an early version of this chapter, I discovered a critique of both Stacey and Wolf published in India by the journal of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement, *A World To Win* (cited as YB/AWTW). The approach of the anonymous article differs from my own, but I quote from

Mies: Patriarchy and Accumulation at a World Scale (PAWS)

PAWS only has one section on China and thus is not an in-depth analysis of gender and China. Mies' argument in this regard is part of larger concern of using a feminist lens to reconceptualize the global historical accumulation of capital. However, she puts forth an important critique that is all the more compelling for being tightly integrated into a broader argument. She sees her project as falling within the purview of materialist feminism, though as I argue below her materialism is mechanical, not dialectical.

Mies argues that feminist analyses of reproductive labor, politics and violence against women have demonstrated the inadequacies of existing theories of women's liberation. The sexual division of labor and the resulting dominance relationship between men and women did not develop as a result of biological or economic determinants. Rather, male monopolization of weapons led to exploitive sexual divisions, which then formed the basis for an overall division of labor, including internationally. Along with colonial exploitation, the destruction of women's autonomy (what Mies refers to as the creation of the "inner colony") provided the basis for the primitive accumulation of capital in Europe, a process which is a continual and necessary part of capitalism. The tremendous global violence against women is a primary mechanism through which this accumulation occurs. Patriarchal violence and direct coercion over women are not therefore remnants from a feudal past or merely a cultural manifestation but part and parcel of capitalism and, further, of the process of modernization and industrialization. In this process, women are defined as dependent housewives, with the resulting integration of women into the

accumulation process into the low wage, informal sector.

Mies' final argument deals with the question of marxist theories of, and the consequences in practice for, women's liberation. She focuses on the promise of women's liberation explicitly made during struggles for national liberation led by marxists (she does not deal with movements that have been narrowly focused on ending colonialist or imperialist domination). She concludes that these promises have turned out to be hollow. Instead, she finds the persistence and even intensification of patriarchal attitudes, institutions and relationships in these countries. Mies locates the source of this in the marxist understanding of women's liberation, as well as in such fundamental marxist concepts as productive labor, materialism and socialist accumulation.

Mies presents what she argues is the basic marxist theory of women's liberation. In this theory, women as women are oppressed but not exploited, which means that women's oppression is fundamentally an ideological issue, not one of production relations. Women must enter into waged labor in order to achieve liberation and should join the class struggle on that basis. The fight for women's liberation is subordinate to the class struggle and women should not form independent organizations. After the revolution, reproductive labor should be socialized and relations between men and women democratized. The latter is achieved through ideological struggle, as there is no longer an economic basis for women's oppression.

These assumptions become crucial in the context of actual socialist economic practice. Mies argues that, following their mobilization during the national liberation struggle,

women are pushed back due to the fundamental material requirements of socialist accumulation. Socialist countries base their policies on Marx's conception of labor as that which is done by male proletarians and the assumption that human liberation follows from the advancement of production. This leads to an industrialization model similar to that of capitalism, as "orthodox" marxists do not recognize the relation between waged and non-waged labor required for this model. Lacking external colonies, it falls to women in socialist countries to provide the necessary primitive accumulation. Defined as dependent housewives, women are pushed into the informal, subsidiary, family-based sector. The exploitation of women is the foundation of socialist accumulation and thus no amount of ideological struggle can result in true equality. This pattern is fairly consistent, from the Soviet Union to Cuba to China.

To put Mies' argument into marxist terminology, the socialist program of advancing the forces of production necessarily involves an exploitive relation of production in the form of the exploitation of women. Not only does this mean a contradiction in the economic base, but it means that efforts towards women's liberation will inevitably fail if they are kept within the confines of an "orthodox" approach. As she puts it (223),

the maintenance, or the creation, of the bourgeois, patriarchal, sexual division of labor and of the nuclear family is the apparently insignificant gate through which reactionary forces can again find entry into a society which tried to free itself from the clutches of imperialism and capitalism.

Mies concludes that marxism/socialism does not critically engage patriarchal relations and thus not only perpetuates the patriarchal status quo, but also fails to transform class relations and society in general.

Wolf: Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China (RP)

RP is based upon interviews with Chinese women conducted in 1980. In contrast to Mies' focus on the relations of production, Wolf argues that it was the CCP's lack of attention to patriarchy as an ideology which prevented women's liberation. Wolf credits the CCP for having eliminated or reduced many of the most painful and oppressive expressions of Chinese patriarchy. At the time of her visit, Chinese women were in a better position to defend their interests since "the old patriarchal structures [had] been badly mauled by the state" (221). But through her interviews and review of other sources, Wolf concludes that Chinese society at the time she was writing was still deeply marked by patriarchal thinking and relations, and that China "proves beyond a doubt that socialism and patriarchy can exist in stable harmony" (261).

Wolf attributes this to two basic causes. The first was the failure of the overwhelmingly male CCP leadership to seriously examine their own patriarchal blinders. As a result the CCP, when faced with an important policy decision regarding gender relations, consistently choose the path that was the least disruptive to patriarchal thinking. The second was the failure to understand the significance of patriarchy as an ideological phenomenon that will not simply disappear with the socialization of the economy. Through the process of the revolution, Wolf argues that the CCP went from saying that the position of women would be improved through revolution and class struggle to saying it would come about through participation in production. As a result, the women's associations established by the communists were primarily designed for mobilizing women and not for challenging family relations. She sums up her argument (189) by

saying that because of their adherence to “standard” marxist assumptions:

Social planners in China, alas, have ignored the fact that patriarchal thinking, the ideology of the men's family system, pervades every aspect of Chinese society and continues to inhibit women's full participation in political as well as economic life. Although there were brief spurts of ideological retraining in 1953 during the Marriage Law campaign, and again in 1974-75 during the Anti-Confucius campaign, the restructuring of the Chinese family has been left to the natural erosion expected to result from other societal changes. Of more concern to the CCP was the destruction of the power of the lineages and of the landlord class controlling that power. The ideological basis of male supremacy on which the power rested has largely been ignored, or at least discounted as of no further threat to the state.

Wolf argues that the CCP was prevented by its adherence to marxist materialism from giving due importance to ideological questions. They ended up putting forth an "automatic" line on women's liberation, that the development of socialism through the advancement of the productive forces will inevitably bring about real, and not just formal, equality for women. This then allowed them to largely drop the "woman question" as a topic of discussion and political struggle. Wolf concludes by arguing that, in China, women still need to make their own revolution.

Stacey: Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China (PSRC)

In PSRC, Stacey presents an argument which combines Mies' focus on relations of production with Wolf's focus on ideology. Stacey covers similar ground to Wolf and both argue that though the position of women in Chinese society improved, this progress was never meant or allowed to challenge the domination of men and their superior position in the division of labor, especially in the home. Stacey's conclusion is more critical, as she argues that the CCP consciously intended to merely reform patriarchy, not eliminate it. As Wolf puts it (260-1),

Stacey and I disagree only on the extent to which China's revolutionaries intended to model their new society on the patriarchy of the old. Whereas Stacey believes and argues cogently that the CCP used the concepts of patriarchy to win a revolution and transform a society, I would argue, using the same evidence, that the leadership did hope to relieve women and young people of the patriarchal burden but were defeated because they did not recognize their own cultural blinders. Despite their good intentions, their patriarchal lenses ruled out alternatives that might have changed China's history and the future of international feminism.

Using a “feminist historical materialism which integrates the objects and methods of feminist and Marxist analyses” (10), Stacey focuses on the family, identifying it as a dynamic element in any process of social change, one which has a substantial impact on how that change unfolds. The family is enmeshed within the dialectical relationship between the economy and the superstructure and must be analyzed as such. Stacey rejects Mao’s analysis of China as semifeudal and argues instead that the mode of production of late imperial society was a “patriarchal family economy in which the individual family served as the basic social and economic unit of a social formation characterized by an unusually explicit system of patriarchal authority” (14). This system intersected with international developments to give rise to a revolutionary situation. The originally urban-based CCP, she argues, was initially heavily influenced by the feminist concerns of the May 4th Movement, but as they moved to the countryside to organize the People's War, they dropped their "feminism" to win support from the peasants. These were "looking backward to revolution," meaning that the peasants were mainly motivated by a desire to restore the "Confucian patriarchal family system," not to transform it. She attempts to show that throughout the subsequent development of the revolution, anti-patriarchal policies were invariably subordinated to the need to mobilize the CCP's main ally in the countryside, the "patriarchal peasants," and that this was reflected in what she calls a

patriarchal political line.

Indeed, the “reconstruction of patriarchy” was the ‘hidden core’ of the Chinese revolution (114), and as a result “always the Communists took care not to threaten unduly rural patriarchal sensibilities” (250). Because the CCP “fought exclusively in the name of national and class struggle,” its policies of family reform “never confronted the root patriarchal structures in China’s rural family system” (252). Stacey traces this in part to the theoretical limitations of marxism, which leaves it incapable of theorizing effectively about the process of family transformation. Along with this was the particularities of the Chinese revolution and the policies of the CCP. She argues (194):

The Chinese Communists never intended to wage a feminist revolution; nor did they possess a theory of family transformation adequate to the task. Believing patriarchy derivative of ‘feudal’ social structure, regarding gender oppression as a nonantagonistic contradiction, the CCP did not seek to eliminate patriarchs as a class, but merely to eliminate a particular class of patriarchs.

The result was not the elimination of patriarchy, but merely its reorganization into what Stacey calls “new democratic patriarchy.” This “provided Chinese patriarchs a new, democratic basis for their unity - one that future Chinese feminists would find intensely difficult to challenge” (194). The CCP, ironically enough, turned out to be the “savior” of “traditional Confucian familial values” (194), and “[f]ar from abolishing the family, the communist revolution in China rescued peasant family life from the precipice of destruction” (108). Whatever quantitative improvements women made were at the cost of sacrificing the opportunity to achieve “real emancipation” and full equality with men, an opportunity which she feels the CCP consciously threw away.

Stacey concludes by generalizing from China, saying that socialist countries “provide a weak basis for the development of an autonomous feminist movement that is strong enough to play an independent role in the revolutionary process” (262). As a result, “[p]atriarchy may even be more compatible with socialist than with capitalist development processes” (266). She concludes, “[w]hile capitalism has not liberated women, many capitalist societies have been able to provide richer soil for the growth of feminist consciousness and an independent feminist movement” (266).

Responding to the Critiques

As noted, despite their different approaches, these works come to a similar conclusion; the theory of practice of maoism, as demonstrated in China, represents a dead end for the liberation of women. Thus, feminists should look elsewhere for a model to transform patriarchal realities. In this section, I respond to these critiques. The aim is not to debunk the entirety of their arguments, evidence and analysis. There is much to be learned from them, either in their critiques of specific CCP policies or with regard to broader questions.¹³¹ Its more modest aim is to demonstrate that this basic conclusion is

131. One example from Wolf is her discussion (106) on the lessons to be learned from the fact that women were so reluctant to participate in communal work but instead focused on sideline production. Here, she is specific about the effects that systematic gender discrimination has on socialist production and consolidation. More broadly, there is Stacey’s view that the CCP’s practice on women’s liberation surpassed its theoretical acumen, an observation which serves as a fundamental point for this dissertation. Of course, there is also much to learn from other works not reviewed here, such as Johnson (1983), who focuses on how patrilocal marriage reinforced women’s oppression (and which was not targeted even by the revolutionaries until the Anti-Confucius campaign of the early 1970’s). This custom meant that a woman left her village to live in her husband’s village. The result is that families resisted the idea of educating their female children since the husband’s family was seen as the one receiving the benefit of the education. Thus, female children were kept at home so that the family could benefit from their domestic labor while they could. Not dealing with this and the underlying gendered and commodified form of thinking for 25 years meant that a tremendous number of women were kept from formal education and thus a significant obstacle was placed in their ability to achieve positions of power - economic, political or social. This is one reason why, even after a quarter century of socialism, there were still relatively

unwarranted. In short, that the rejection of revolutionary China in the Critical phase of feminist works represents what maoists call the "reversal of a correct verdict."

Though different in many ways, these three works share a common flaw; a failure to grasp and apply dialectics and to understand how it operated in Mao's thinking and the historical experience of China. The result is that all of the authors operate from an implicitly metaphysical standpoint. This prevents them from either seeing the problematic aspects of their analyses or having an accurate grasp of their subject. It means that none of the authors actually try to grapple with maoism, or have an understanding of the existence and implications of the two-line struggle. It also means that questions of class are given, at best, a superficial treatment, which is important given that each has an implicit class standpoint.¹³²

few prominent women leaders, though there were considerably more at lower levels of the Party. Many of these prominent women, such as Chiang Ching, were wives of prominent cadre. However, such recent examples of Nepal and Peru indicate that maoists have learned how to develop women leaders better, though there continue to be problems. See Onesto (2005) and in particular Pavarti (2003), which is a frank discussion by a leading comrade in the CPN(M) on the question of developing women leaders..

132. There is another common flaw shared by these works; the quality of the scholarship. As noted earlier, the demonization of Mao has a real impact on how he is dealt with in academia. To put it in simplified terms, when one is critiquing a demonized subject, the necessity to adhere to accepted standards of scholarship is relaxed. As a result, the literature on Mao and revolutionary China is filled with questionable readings of texts or history, assertions without citations or real evidence, selective use of facts, generalizations based upon uncritically examined received wisdom, and so on. All areas of scholarship suffer from this to one degree or another. But the ideology of anti-communism and the demonization of Mao in the US, from which academia is not exempt, makes it all the more prevalent in the case of Mao. Even where scholars have not fully internalized this, there are negligible consequences for academics doing careless scholarship which reinforces hegemonic ideas about demonized figures. To varying degrees, the three works critiqued here suffer from this common problem. One obvious concern is the sources used by the authors. A common problem among the works, and among much feminist writing on China, is a failure to study Mao. Both PR and PAWS rely *exclusively* on secondary sources, largely from feminists critical of Mao, and have no citations for any of Mao's writings. This is particularly a problem for Mies, since she is explicitly critiquing what she feels is the underlying theoretical foundation for Maoist China. Critiquing a particular theoretical praxis without having read the original documents of that theoretical praxis is an obvious serious shortcoming. Not studying Mao prevented Mies from recognizing that she was actually critiquing revisionism, not Maoism, as I note below.

These works illustrate some, though not all, of the basic problems of the Critical period works. Some of these are reflections of the limitations of the particular feminist lens, usually liberal or radical feminism, used by the authors. From the liberals there is the emphasis on formal, numerical equality versus the transformation of societal relations and consciousness, the tendency to see either undifferentiated masses or individuals, and the assumption that the experience of middle-class western women is the model for the experience of all women. From radicals there is the use of ahistorical and uncontextualized conceptual categories, such as "woman" and "patriarchy," and a marked tendency towards what maoists would call left-adventurism (discussed below). Both PSRC & PR share a number of other general problems: idealist assumptions (such as that the revolutionaries could have eradicated patriarchy in a couple of decades; the fact that they did not proves they did not really want to); a lack of attention to national oppression and imperialism; and anti-communist assumptions, which often significantly color their interpretations.¹³³ All of the authors, but particularly Stacey, implicitly accept the spurious dichotomy of feminists and communists (or marxists).¹³⁴

Finally, there is the tendency to ignore, or dismiss the importance of, the concrete historical problems and immense complexity of the contradictions facing China during the revolutionary period. These include the need to: transform 70 million opium addicts, solve the problems of feeding such a large country, overcome a century of foreign

133. As an example, when communists put forth policies in line with feminist concerns, they are accused of merely appropriating feminism. When they did something different from what the authors feel is feminism, they are accused of being consciously patriarchal. The result is a catch-22, a situation in which the communists are wrong regardless of what they did.

134. That is, you can be one or the other, but not both. Gilmartin (1995, 4) notes that "the dominant conceptual framework employed by historians for examining women's roles and the articulation of women's issues in Communist revolutionary movements was the incompatibility of Marxism and feminism."

domination in the economy and millennia of feudal thinking and social organization, transform the contradictions of city/countryside, Han/minority nationalities, mental/manual labor, peasants/workers and so on, educate a largely illiterate population while transforming the nature of the education system, provide health care for the population, deal with the very real threat from first one then both nuclear superpowers – all this in a society with limited resources and damaged from decades of war, and without relying upon the convenience of a super-exploited and oppressed population. If one abstracts the struggle against patriarchy (or any struggle) out of the entire matrix of social contradictions, it is not difficult to present how it could be done better. However, it would be precisely that – an abstract argument. An attempt to construct theory or make policy recommendations on the basis on such an abstraction will be problematic, as the other contradictions impact and condition the concrete reality of the question being considered. Stacey in particular falls into this trap. The more difficult, and correct, thing to do is to deal as much as possible with the struggle in all its complexity and inter-relatedness, and on that basis figure out how it can be handled better.

But the main problem is an insufficient grasp of maoist theory and practice, whether of the concept of contradiction or two-line struggle, or of the basic analysis of class struggle under socialism and the continuing emergence of a new bourgeoisie. As such, the criticisms are often quite wide of the mark and are usually in fact criticisms of the theory of productive forces, which was in direct opposition to maoist theory. Indeed, it is more common than not for these authors to end up making arguments that are very much in line with Mao's.

Wolf

Wolf's *Revolution Postponed* is primarily a presentation of empirical data culled from interviews and research done in the PRC in the late 1970s. Though the data, and some of her analysis, is revealing, RP is limited by the lack of an explicit theoretical foundation and serious engagement with the complex praxis of the Chinese revolution. Wolf's assumption is that a theory can be disproved if enough facts are accumulated.

Unfortunately, she is not particularly clear as to what theory she is critiquing, or from what theoretical perspective she is arguing. At the most basic level, the arguments of Wolf and Stacey are similar and straight-forward: the Chinese revolution did not lead to fundamental changes in women's position, much less achieve full equality between women and men, therefore this must have been the result of the patriarchal policies of its leaders, intentional or not. But while Stacey concludes that the CCP failed because it treated family reform and patriarchy as an "exclusively superstructural" problem, Wolf argues that the CCP failed because it did not deal with patriarchy as superstructural question. What neither recognize is the dialectical heart of Mao's thinking, or the immense complexity of the contradictions in the Chinese Revolution.

Of the three authors, Wolf is the most anti-communist and with the most explicit class bias. In some ways, this bias is clear, for example, when she speaks critically of the drab houses of the poor (143) but glowingly of the ornate houses of the old privileged classes (while making no comment that such pretty houses were based on tremendous exploitation of peasants), or when she calls "commonly traveled" the strategies of well-to-do, small landlords to find a wife, even though they account for a small minority of the peasantry. Another example of her class position is her characterization of the efforts to

bridge the gulf between mental and manual labor as nothing more than “anti-intellectual campaigns”¹³⁵ (133). It is clear she is not concerned about the contradiction between mental and manual labor, and the privileging of the former. Thus, she can not see the difference between anti-intellectual and being anti-elitist. Her attitude towards the serious grappling with this contradiction (that is, deny it exists or its importance while attacking those who try to change it) is roughly similar in content and motivation to men who dismiss feminism as being "anti-male." In short, Wolf is concerned with transforming patriarchy but is content to leave other systematic oppressions intact. Mostly though, her class position is subtle and is only obvious when examined through the lens of dialectical materialism.

For example, Wolf says (78) in the Maoist era child care and related services were provided by the state, but have now been severely reduced for economic reasons. However, the decision to curtail this is not merely an economic, but also, and primarily, a *political* decision, one reflective of a particular class outlook. Specifically, it reflects an essentially bourgeois position that economics is separate sphere from politics, one which should be ruled by concerns of productivity, profit and rationality. This is clearer when seen in connection with the other post-Mao factory changes – the promotion of one-person management, individual incentives, etc, along with the ending of political study groups and other maoist efforts intended to make factory production serve the overall revolutionizing of society. The decision to make the profitability of factories the dominant concern (what maoists call "putting profit in command") is thus a political

135. As noted, transforming this contradiction is a fundamental concern of maoism. Mao identified the contradiction between mental and manual labor as one of the “three great difference” in China. Wolf’s response to this is unfortunately typical.

decision, which then requires decisions to enforce that profitability. In other words, what is going on here is an illustration of the essence of the two-line struggle in the realm of economics – politics in command versus profits in command. Wolf also assumes that "economics" means bourgeois capitalist economics, that there is no other kind of economics.

This class bias is important because it significantly colors Wolf's analysis. Her perspective is that of the middle class, the essence of which is the conflation of privilege with freedom and the failure to recognize that in exploitive class society the material conditions which provide for the relative privilege of some require the exploitation of the many. She is thus caught in a quintessential *petit bourgeois* trap, for example, praising the efficiency and productivity resulting from the "economic hardheadedness" of the new technocrats while on the other hand bemoaning the "unintended consequences" of this emerging economic rationality. In other words, she does not see the contradictions inherent in her position, nor can she understand the position of those who are attempting to eliminate all oppressions and not keep some hidden away.

Like the other authors, Wolf does not discuss two-line struggle and its significance for the Chinese revolution. Though RP is less explicitly theoretical than the other works, it rests upon assumptions and generalizations almost exclusively based upon critics of Mao and marxism. As such, she repeatedly distorts Mao's thinking. For example, she says (64) that

According to Mao's interpretation of Marxist theory, when women become full partners in the economic life of the family instead of being unpaid household workers or unpaid laborers in their husbands' or fathers' shops, they will receive equal

recognition in their families and in society.

While there were definitely members, including prominent members, of the CCP who held this view, it was certainly not Mao's. It goes against the entire thrust of his thinking concerning the need to continuously to revolutionize all areas of life. It is also explicitly contradicted by a number of quotes from Mao, of which the first epigraph to this chapter is just one example.¹³⁶ Though of course there are always different interpretations, Wolf's is simply not supported by the evidence. Additionally, Wolf presents no citation for this characterization of "Mao's interpretation of Marxist theory," an unfortunately typical problem with her book.

RP also suffers from methodological problems, which are related to Wolf's anti-communism. Her sample is arbitrary and unsystematic, and while this is partly due to the many restrictions placed on her by the Chinese government, some of it is her responsibility. For example, she dismisses the responses by all of the women interviewed in Shandong on the basis that they were not expressing their own opinions but were merely parroting CCP propaganda (254). She does this elsewhere as well. Besides being methodologically dubious, there are a number of other problems with this. First, there is the problematic assumption in her assertion that she knows their "real" opinion, meaning in essence that she reads off of her own experience as a western, privileged woman onto the lives of Chinese women.¹³⁷ Second, this displays considerable naivete about

136. As another example: "When women all over the country rise up, that will be the day of victory for the Chinese revolution" (Peking Review No. 14, 1974).

137. This problem is further indicated when she repeatedly "suspects" someone's true feelings or motivations. See pages 46, 61, 77, and 146 for some examples. These "suspicions" consistently coincide with her own assumptions and conclusions.

epistemology and the construction of the individual. Third, it reflects a common thread of anti-communist ideology, in that the CCP, like any communist party, could not educate but could only indoctrinate. Throughout PR, if there is a correspondence between women's opinions and government policies, Wolf dismisses it as mere parroting of propaganda. However, if women say things similar to her own beliefs, they are presented as speaking their own mind.

These problems are important given the atheoretical nature of Wolf's book. Her argument rests upon her empirical evidence, and her conscious manipulation of the evidence leaves it unpersuasive. We simply do not know whether the evidence she is presenting is accurate, whether the anecdotes she relates are typical or exceptional, and thus have no way of making generalizations based on them. In addition, several times (21, 266) she rejects findings by earlier scholars when contradicted by hers, even when her *N* is substantially smaller, and less inclusive. Not only is Wolf limited by her positivism, it is a positivism which is problematic even on its own terms.

To the extent that Wolf deals theoretically with the inequality she documents in China, she attributes it to the "automatic" line of the CCP and the failure to deal with patriarchy as an ideology. According to Wolf, and Stacey, the CCP felt that bringing women into production would "automatically" lead to women's liberation, a view which would serve to justify ignoring the overall struggle for liberation and equality.¹³⁸ Both authors present numerous quotes from Chinese leaders to this effect. The YB/AWTW article responds:

138. Stacey makes a similar claim (162): "The base-superstructure model and the general underdevelopment of Marxist theory on the dynamics of family transformation led the Communists to assume that family reform would be an automatic by-product of the revolution."

[N]o revolutionary would want to challenge all the quotes they found saying such things, for there were powerful forces in the CCP who promoted such revisionist lines, and even held sway in the party, for instance, during much of the 1950s, and this is also a line which has had influence in the international communist movement historically. But once again Stacey and Wolf try to "disappear" Mao and the revolutionary headquarters in the CCP who fought this thinking tooth and nail and mobilized the masses in the Great Leap Forward and especially the Cultural Revolution to defeat exactly this kind of "production first" line and the revisionist headquarters behind it.

In other words, what Wolf is critiquing is revisionism, not maoism, a distinction she cannot see because she (along with the other authors) views China and the revolutionary process through a metaphysical (not to mention anti-communist) lens. Throughout, Wolf makes no distinction between the different class lines, and ends up conflating radically opposed ideas and forces under the label "Mao and his revolutionaries." The result is the consistent attribution of views to Mao which were actually quite different from what he actually professed. For example, she states (188),

Mao and his revolutionaries were convinced that the old family system was the source of women's oppression. Only when private property ceased to exist, household tasks were socialized, and women were fully engaged in social production would the problem of women be solved.

Again, this is a form of mechanical materialism, which leaves aside questions of consciousness and ideology, is an expression of revisionism not maoism. Critiquing this was a consistent theme in Mao's thinking going back at least to *On Contradiction*, one of the most important of Mao's philosophical works and which none of the three authors cite. In specifically arguing against mechanical materialists who make a universal out of the materialist argument of the overall primacy of productive forces, Mao says (1965a):

When the superstructure (politics, culture, etc.) obstructs the development of the economic base, political and cultural changes become principal and decisive. Are we going against materialism when we say this? No. The reason is that while we recognize that in the general development of history the material determines the mental and social being determines social consciousness, we also--and indeed must--recognize the reaction of mental on material things, of social consciousness on social being and of the superstructure on the economic base. This does not go against materialism; on the contrary, it avoids mechanical materialism and firmly upholds dialectical materialism.”

As noted, Wolf’s central claim is that the CCP as an institution was ignorant of the importance of ideological questions in social transformation. However, consider the following quote:

There must also be revolution in the families: we must penetrate there with revolutionary criticism aimed at destroying the five old conceptions and giving rise to the five new ones -we must destroy the thesis of the uselessness of women and ensure the triumph of the thesis that women must courageously conquer half the sky; we must destroy the feudal ideals of a submissive woman and a good housewife and implant in their place the ideal of revolutionary proletarian women; we must destroy the mentality of dependence on and subordination to men, and reinforce an iron determination to fight for liberation; we must destroy bourgeois ideas and implant proletarian ideas; we must destroy the ideal of narrow family interests so as to create in the family an openness to the whole nation and the world.¹³⁹

Many more similar quotes could be presented, though one would have to go outside of Wolf’s sources to find them. What is important is not just that the revolutionaries did in fact deal with the ideological aspects of patriarchy, but that they also consciously

139. Quoted in YB/AWTW (1987). This was related to an Italian visitor to China in early 1970s, M.A Macchiocci, at the time a member of the Italian Communist Party. She notes that these five theses were often cited in the Chinese press. Incidentally, this was at a time when Wolf says there were no significant efforts at family reform. Kristeva (1986, 71) quotes a scholar during the Anti-Confucius campaign (which she characterized as a "tremendous" effort) as saying, “We can understand the stakes and the ambition involved in the current campaign against the Old Sage. It must do no more and no less than transform the mental structure of the Chinese, and make him something other than Chinese” (1986, 74).

addressed the material foundations, as well as the ideology, of patriarchy. And they did this not by treating them dichotomously but as a dialectical unity enmeshed with other contradictions, both within and outside the party.

Besides attributing revisionist thinking to Mao, Wolf also does not give him credit for ideas she endorses. For example, Wolf says (268) what is needed in China are "radical steps to socialize housework." This was a fundamental position of the revolutionaries, one which is easily traceable throughout the history of the ICM, though it is also a particular arena of struggle and controversy among the ranks of communists.¹⁴⁰ In addition, efforts to socialize housework were abandoned after Mao's death, with the emphasis turning, as Wolf notes, to efforts by the state to ensure that women had enough time to tend to their houses and children.¹⁴¹

Though Wolf emphasizes ideology, she does not examine the obvious differences

140. Consider this quote from Lenin: "Unfortunately, we may still say of many of our comrades, 'Scratch the Communist and a philistine appears. To be sure you have to scratch the sensitive spots, such as their mentality regarding women. Could there be any more palpable proof than the common sight of a man calmly watching a woman wear herself out with trivial, monotonous, strength- and time-consuming work, such as her housework, and watching her spirit shrinking, her mind growing dull, her heartbeat growing faint, and her will growing slack? The domestic life of the woman is a daily sacrifice of self to a thousand insignificant trifles. The ancient rights of her husband, her lord and master, survive unnoticed. Objectively, his slave takes her revenge. Also in concealed form ... I know the life of the workers, and not only from books. Our communist work among the masses of women, and our-political work in general, involves considerable educational work among the men. We must root out the old slave-owner's point of view, both in the Party and among the masses. That is one of our political tasks, a task just as urgently necessary as the formation of a staff composed of comrades, men and women, with thorough theoretical and practical training for Party work among working women" (Quoted in "My Recollections of Lenin, an Interview on the Woman Question," by Clara Zetkin, in Lenin 1966).

141. However, even among communists who advocated the socialization of housework, there was still the further question of how this socialization was done. There remained, even in revolutionary China, a strong tendency for this to be done on the basis of a sexual division of labor. That is, housework was done, collectively, but by women. More consistent work to transform the sexual division of labor has been undertaken by contemporary maoists. See Onesto (2005) for examples from the Nepalese revolution.

between the revolutionaries and the revisionists in dealing with patriarchal ideology. Wolf mentions (134) the "good daughter-in-law, good mother-in-law" campaign undertaken by the revisionists after they seized power, without commenting on the difference between saying that women hold up half the sky (a popular saying by Mao), and encouraging women to excel in their relations with men. She also discusses how the current emphasis on pretty wives with fair skin and delicate features is a far cry from the GPCR posters of sturdy, sun-darkened peasant women (169), without making the obvious connection to the two line struggle.

Wolf attributes the continuation of patriarchal relations and ideas in part to the patriarchal blinders of the mostly male CCP. In her study of Chinese feminism in the 1920s, Gilmartin agrees with this assessment (1985, 8):

The founders of the Chinese Communist party were committed to challenging many aspects of their own culture, including male-female relations, the patriarchal family structure, and the social and legal status of women. At the same time that they formulated a radical program of gender transformation that challenged the dominant culture, however, they reproduced and reinscribed central aspects of the gender system from the larger society within their own party organizations.

I feel that there is real truth in this argument, but it leaves out two considerations. The first is whether there were substantial differences within the CCP, and what the basis was for those differences. Second, even if true to some degree of the revolutionaries, this says nothing about whether or not there is anything inherently patriarchal about the theoretical foundations of the Chinese revolution and more specifically of the thinking of Mao. Documenting the existence of patriarchal blinders in the CCP, while crucially important for understanding concrete Chinese policies, their consequences and limitations, is not in

and of itself a critique of theory.

Wolf's lack of clarity with regards to class and the two-line struggle is particularly apparent in her discussion of the post-Mao "reforms." She clearly welcomes the transformations in economic policy, though she does not fully grasp their significance. As she puts it (264), "none of these changes seems particularly threatening to women workers." Her main problem with these new policies is that the move to capitalism is

accompanied by a profound shift in official documents, speeches and Women's Federation propaganda about women's place in society. Women are again being told that though they may be workers, their primary role is that of wife and mother. Sympathy may be expressed for their double burden, but patience and hard work are all that they are being offered (264).

Wolf does not see a connection between this and the move towards capitalism. Wolf thus reduces patriarchy to ideological questions, separate from any relation to production and other social relations. Her concern is changing ideology through education. As a result, she welcomes, with only muted criticisms, the creation of the material conditions which would (and have) increase the subordination of women. For example, Wolf notes favorably that factories can now advertise and that workers can search for new jobs "more appropriate to their skills and training" (263). This does not take into account the question of who gets to have such skills and training, and what the results will be of emphasizing such skills apart from the question of transforming society. Simply put, those who have had the opportunity to gain skills and training will get the better jobs. This will then heighten existing disparities, including those around gender, since (as Wolf documents) men had had greater access to training and education.

Both Wolf and Stacey provide evidence that the trajectory of women's liberation following the death of Mao was going backwards. In Stacey's view, China was moving from socialist-patriarchy back to new democratic patriarchy. Wolf speaks of public campaigns urging women to be good wives and mothers, the emphasis on the physical attractiveness of women, the end of socialized reproductive labor, and concludes that "the new economic arrangements in the countryside are returning women to their pre-Liberation position" (268). However, neither make the obvious connection, that this significant transformation corresponds with the rise to power of the capitalist-roaders and the defeat of the revolutionaries – and the subsequent moves to reintroduce capitalism and its relations and ideas.

Wolf has some conception of the implications for women, but does not connect this with the idea of putting profits in command, and without understanding how it is all wrapped up in a political question - the class stand of those putting forth the policies. As Mao had said, if the revisionists came to power, they would bring back all of the old things that socialism struggled against. Wolf is, consciously or not, taking a quite pro-revisionist position, one aspect of which is to deny the relevance of the two-line struggle.¹⁴² For example, she sums up the accomplishment of the CCP and Mao by saying they were able to "unite and bring to modest prosperity one of the largest and poorest nations on earth" (272). This says nothing about revolutionizing society, unearthing and transforming systematic oppressions, serving as a base area for world revolution, etc. Her view here is

142. Wolf comments (63) on "efficiently profitable organization," praises "competent administrators," and overall comes across as a technocrat, much like the revisionists.

very similar to the bourgeois nationalist line of the revisionists: the important thing was to make China a powerful developed country, free of feudalism and imperialism. Like them, she accepts commodity production and relations, the mental/manual division and the dominance of experts. In my view, because Wolf's understanding of capitalism and socialism is both narrow and deficient, she ultimately prefers capitalism in China (despite the increasing problems for the majority of women) over socialism (and decreasing problems for women). Though she does not express it in these terms, what she seems to want is revisionism, a form of reformed capitalism, which somehow liberates women.¹⁴³

Once the various problematic aspects are cleared away, the essential criticism of RP boils down to this: there existed in China, thirty years after liberation, systematic inequalities between women and men which weighed heavily on women in many ways. Even with the methodological and other problems, Wolf convincingly establishes this as true.¹⁴⁴ But, as YB/AWTW puts it:

the kind of continuing sexual inequality that [these] authors all amply document were not unimportant matters, and in fact these links in the chain holding down women also hold down all the oppressed. But socialism is exactly a transition. It is not some

143. She concludes her book by saying (272) that if the CCP had only done things better, "women might now be valued members of the workforce, sharing leadership positions in the countryside, earning as much as their brothers, and being as much or more of a blessing to their parents in their old age." The idealism here is extraordinary. The assumption is that if only the CCP had had the right ideas, they could have completely transformed patriarchy in a few decades, a remarkably ahistorical, decontextualized critique. As YB/AWTW states: "This appears to be very radical: seeming impatience with the continued inequality of women is the first line of attack. In fact, in their case it is a smokescreen for avoiding the tumultuous struggle that is the indispensable condition of proletarian revolution and women's liberation. How could thousands of years of the subordination of women be done away with in a mere 27 years?! Or the elimination of classes, for that matter? If anyone has discovered how to do this, they should let the world know, and now."

144. Mao actually agreed with Wolf's assessment that the women in China needed a revolution. He stated emphatically that "as long as there is a single woman in the world who has not been liberated, no one will really be liberated," and, shortly before his death, that "the next cultural revolution will be made by the women, for the women" (Quoted in YB/AWTW).

static utopia achieved by passing a few new laws or even reorganizing a particular institution like the family, it is indeed the "declaration of the permanence of the revolution." If these authors had left their critique at simply saying that there was still inequality, that it was still severely marked by patriarchy, that there was still commodity production and elements of private property, and still many barriers to the full liberation of women, including from powerful capitalist-roads in the top ranks of the CCP itself, and hence the Chinese Revolution had a long path yet to travel, there could be no disagreement ... Mao was fully aware that socialist revolution was a long protracted battle. But there was a change. The proletariat, led by its communist party, had seized power, and ownership had been socialized; based on this, the masses were being led to restrict the inequalities and break down the divisions society, through continuing revolution. And as for the masses of women, including China's hundreds of millions of peasant women, they too went further along the road of challenging every link in this chain of oppression, breaking the centuries-old divisions in society, than has ever been done before.

It is unlikely that the documentation of gender inequality in Wolf's book would have been news to Mao or the revolutionaries as a whole. They were both aware of it and committed to dealing with it head-on, viewing this as a fundamental and essential part of moving society towards communism. This was a continuation of a process that had already brought about significant transformations in the gender relations of society. When viewed in isolation and abstracted from overall context and the motion and development of Chinese society, the realities which Wolf documents strongly suggest a patriarchal situation. Seen historically and in context, they are aspects of a contradictory transformation which had a very real identifiable motion. Neither Stacey nor Wolf have a grasp of this motion and transformation, and what this motion means.

In summary, Wolf fails to provide a convincing critique of revolutionary communism. Her work is limited by her positivism, liberalism and anti-communism. Most fundamentally, she does not have a clear grasp of what she is critiquing and as a result, her most accurate critical assessments are actually of revisionism, which Mao fought

strenuously. The charge she levels of having an "automatic" line and of failing to address patriarchal ideology is true of revisionism, not of Maoism. Ironically, her position is much more in line with the revisionists who seized power after Mao's death. A political programme built upon her thinking would actually have a lot in common with the revisionist approach to "building socialism." The realities of China today reflect what the results would be from the "revolution" that she argues for. The irony is that following the massacre at Tienanmen Square, Wolf abandoned writing on China in disgust at its current rulers.

Stacey

Stacey covers similar ground than Wolf's, though it is far more substantial and theoretical work. As a result, it requires significantly more space to address her far-reaching claims, though for practical reasons not all of them will be discussed. According to Stacey, China was a peasant family economy pushed into a crisis by foreign domination. The CCP, moving away from the feminism of the May 4th Movement, averted this crisis by using the Mass Line and appealing to the interests of the patriarchal "class." The CCP's efforts at family reform were feeble, because they felt that the contradictions between men and women were non-antagonistic, and treated the family as both exclusively superstructural and a sacred, eternal institution. After Liberation, the CCP then created the New Democratic Patriarchy, which democratized patriarchy and gave it a nearly unassailable foundation.

Unlike Wolf and Mies, Stacey references some works by Mao and other revolutionaries, though the list is insufficient for a book claiming to be a critique of theory. Stacey quotes

considerably from these works, which gives her analysis a certain face credibility. Unfortunately, looking carefully at how she uses and interprets these quotes reveals significant problems. One example of these is fairly simple, but is worth examining closely. Citing the 1927 *Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan*, Stacey claims (127) that Mao “explicitly condoned” rape as a revolutionary tactic and that he “felt that rape was a just punishment for the crime of being a landlord’s daughter.” Obviously, this is a significant accusation, particularly given the subject of Stacey’s book. While the charge fits in well with Stacey’s argument that Mao and the Chinese communists were consciously implementing a patriarchal revolution, it does not accord well with the evidence. First, there is the whole question of whether Mao’s Report is condoning the behavior he depicts or merely describing it. While it is clear that he strongly supports the peasants and their struggles, supporting the rebellions of the oppressed is not the same thing as supporting every act carried about by members of the oppressed. To do otherwise is to treat the oppressed in a metaphysical way, as an idealized type, and not recognize their contradictions and internalization of backward ideologies. The history of the Chinese revolution illustrates clearly the care with which Mao addressed this issue. While Stacey may treat the peasantry as an undifferentiated whole, Mao did not.

Second, Mao says *nothing* explicit about rape in his report. The relevant passage, which Stacey quotes, says that when the peasants rise up against the landlords they, among other things, “even loll about for a minute or two on the inlaid beds of women.” It is simply wrong to claim that this is an explicit condoning, or even description, of rape. However, one could still claim that Mao is speaking euphemistically of rape, which is apparently what Stacey is arguing. There are a number of reasons why this is unlikely. Mao is

known for being a straightforward and plain speaker. Though he was fond of using traditional Chinese stories and sayings, he rarely spoke in euphemisms. There is nothing else in the report which appears to lend itself to a euphemistic reading. Further, the other actions described in the paragraph include the confiscation and consumption of the landlord's grain and pigs, the smashing of his sedan chairs, and the public humiliation of the landlords. Most of these acts are directed towards property and none of them involve violence towards people. It is unclear why Mao would give a straightforward depiction of such acts and then throw in a very euphemistic account of the rape of the landlord's daughter. This is particularly the case given that Mao never shied away from the reality that the revolution necessarily involved the killing of landlords and other reactionaries.

Importantly, reading the passage this way puts it in sharp opposition with everything else Mao ever wrote about women and revolution. This includes the many articles Mao had written up until that point detailing and condemning the specific oppression that women in China experienced. It includes the fundamental points of discipline for the Red Army which specifically forbid taking any liberties with women. It includes the constitution of the Kiangsi Soviet which Mao founded soon after the *Report* was written. It also includes the *Report* in question, which begins by explicitly stating that patriarchy is one of the four systems of oppression in China. Finally, Mao's Report was sent to the then urban based Party, which Stacey argues was at that time still influenced by the feminism of the May Fourth Movement and which was largely led by veterans of that movement. Since the intent of the *Report* was to convince the Party leadership of the need to support the peasant rebellions (something which represented a rupture with the prevailing wisdom and directives of the Third International), it would not have been likely that would Mao

to explicitly, or even implicitly, “condone” acts of rape by the peasantry. In short, there is little to indicate that Mao meant anything other than what the passage explicitly says, that the peasants take a moment to experience the luxuries that the landlord has accumulated from their exploitation and oppression.

I have perhaps labored this rather simple point because it has real significance. It gives considerable weight to Stacey’s overall argument, since how can one seriously believe that Mao could have brought about the liberation of women if he condoned rape? Unfortunately, even though her assertion is wrong and its weight therefore illegitimate, it is unlikely that many readers would realize this. Few students, feminist or otherwise, have read much, if any, Mao. Unless they were students of China, they probably have read little which portrayed Mao and the revolution in a positive light. The view of Mao as an apologist for rape would fit in well with the dominant view of Mao as a murderous dictator, and is therefore likely to be easily accepted.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, Stacey’s reading of this quote is typical. Throughout her book, she distorts the meaning of quotes, takes others out of context, and ignores those that contradict her arguments, even when these are virtually ubiquitous. A close reading shows that on nearly every crucial theoretical point, her argument rests upon problematic readings of history and the relevant texts. Along with this are questionable assumptions and broad generalizations which gloss over fundamental differences and which provide a poor foundation for her arguments. The result is that what appears at first glance to be a careful and sophisticated argument is revealed to be an orrery of errors.

145. This view was substantiated by showing the passage by Stacey, without editorial content, to a number of women's studies students. All expressed disgust, but little surprise, that Mao would express such an opinion.

Stacey's main focus is on the role of the family. While she makes an excellent case for the importance of the family in the reproduction and transformation of society, her claim that China was dominated by a peasant family economy is problematic. The category of peasant family economy says nothing about class relations between families, or anything about property relations in general, except within the family. It makes no distinction between powerful landlords and peasants without land. It cannot explain the material basis underlying the decision of parents to sell their children, or why starvation would be endemic even when there was sufficient grain. Stacey further elides any class analysis of the peasantry by focusing almost exclusively on the middle peasants (those who have enough land to feed themselves and perhaps hire one or two laborers), while portraying their material conditions as typical. This is further accentuated by her dichotomous depiction of rural peasantry versus urban elite. While the former ostensibly consists of everyone in the countryside, in her discussion it in effect means simply the middle peasantry. And while the latter ostensibly means everyone in the city, what Stacey actually discusses is primarily educated intellectuals. Thus, though Stacey claims to be a materialist, class is virtually absent in her analysis, as she assumes that the experience of the middle class is the experience of humanity. Her conception of China as a peasant family economy ultimately explains far less than Mao's understanding of China as semi-feudal, semi-colonial and dominated by imperialism.¹⁴⁶

Stacey seems to agree with Mao to some degree that China was semi-colonial, though she

146. For a quick presentation of the CCP's view on the family and the Chinese economy, see the selection in Croll (1980, 50-7). It demonstrates the problems with Stacey's view. It is also, contrary to Stacey's implication, very explicit about exposing the patriarchal nature of the feudal family.

does not use the term. However, her conception is less fruitful than Mao's. Stacey attributes the crisis in the Confucian family to the impact of colonial powers, first the US and Europe, then the Japanese. While true as far as it goes, it is a one-sided argument, one which Stacey needs to make because she has presented the peasant family economy as a relatively stable social form. By obscuring the tremendous class contradictions, she constructs rural China as a metaphysical unity, one which can not change except through external pressure. Besides being an orientalist argument, Stacey effectively rules out the oppressed (in the form of the peasantry) as being a motive force in their own liberation. Instead, they merely react to circumstances forced upon them by external pressure.

Overall, Stacey's view of the peasantry fits in with a common, if not dominant, position, both in mainstream social sciences and much of marxism.¹⁴⁷ In this view, the peasantry are conservative, rarely looking beyond the horizons of their family. They are usually politically apathetic, and when they are not, their actions are directed towards the restoration of an imagined past. Thus, they are merely the conduits of tradition and not a source of innovation. This view of the peasantry, while long prominent in academia, has been effectively challenged by a number of works.¹⁴⁸

While deficient from a theoretical point of view, Stacey's argument also does not accord

147. As noted in the previous chapter, Stacey is clearly indebted to Trotsky in her analysis though she never mentions him by name (for example, in her reference to the "thermidor" in socialist societies).

148. See, for example, Smith (1989) who writes in opposition to the idea of the natural passivity and apoliticalness of the peasantry, and concludes that political struggle is an essential part of the lives of peasants and that incidents of intense political struggle are inseparable from their daily struggle for a livelihood. Also Stern (1987) who argues against the parochial character of peasants as political actors and that they are diverse continuous initiators of political relations. See also Migdal (1974), as well as Skocpol (1982) who specifically argues that the kind of broad speculation on the nature of the peasantry engaged in by Stacey is fruitless.

with Chinese reality. While she correctly identifies certain aspects, she elides the full and contradictory nature of the peasantry, which Mao understood, partly due to the fact that he lived amongst them. The peasantry, like anything, were a complex and contradictory reality. What Mao recognized is that there were important ways in which they were genuinely revolutionary and that they could, indeed must, form part of the basis of the Chinese revolution. In doing so, he did not romanticize them or treat them as an idealized type, but worked consistently from the point of view of dialectical materialism.

Stacey is putting forth a line which would have resulted in the peasantry being treated merely as the object of the revolution. For her, they are too backwards, uneducated and parochial to be part of a progressive revolution. However, the experience of the Soviet Union, which Mao was aware of and deeply critiqued even as he learned from it, demonstrates clearly what is problematic about this approach. To carry out such a line in China, with an overwhelmingly peasant population would have been at best authoritarian, and possibly disastrous. While Stacey is clear in arguing that the peasantry were a backward force in China, she does not present a convincing alternative, other than to say that the best feminist perspectives existed among (certain) urban intellectuals. Centering women's liberation among the urban intellectuals, no matter how overtly feminist they might have been, would not have advanced the cause of women's liberation as much as Mao's revolution, which brought together a broad united front of different classes under the leadership of the proletariat. As Wolf notes (13), "the demands being made by the students and urban intellectuals of the May 4th era were realistic for students and urban intellectuals but were hopelessly irrelevant to the lives of rural or working class women." Much of the early feminist Chinese activism was elitist and offensive to rural and

working class women, threatening “not only their sense of propriety but their very survival”(14). Not only did they have a political perspective that left them isolated, their small numbers meant that they could not have supplied the primary material basis for a revolution.¹⁴⁹

Stacey does not discuss the question of why the urban feminist movement ended. The reason helps to elucidate the question of primary and secondary contradiction. Following the first United Front period of the 1920s, the Koumintang (KMT), becoming more and more dependent upon the landlords, big bourgeoisie and the imperialists, launched a bloody terror campaign against the CCP and progressives generally. The result was the decimation of progressive forces in the cities and rural areas controlled by the KMT, and the creation of the explicitly confucist New Life Movement. This continued throughout the civil war through the use of political police, terror and spies until liberation in 1949. While Stacey covers this period, she does not draw the obvious conclusion: “feminism” was destroyed through the use of military terror because it did not have sufficient means to defend itself and because its principal enemies were too powerful.¹⁵⁰ What was needed, and what Mao recognized, was the radical transformation of the material forces in China by uniting "real friends" against "real enemies" on the basis of correctly grasping the dialectical relationship between primary and secondary contradictions.

149. As Mao said (MSW 3: 117-22), “However active the leading groups may be, its activity will be transformed into fruitless effort by a handful of people unless combined with the activity of the broad masses.” Kristeva notes (117) that early feminist action was rather unsuccessful, and led many to turn from feminist themes in favour of the political struggles of working men and women. Some early feminists tried to forcibly bob peasant women’s hair, a clearly left-adventurist action (see below).

150. As Gilmartin (1995, 9) notes, “the defeat of the women’s movement was due less to public opposition or internal weaknesses than to the collapse - in blood - of the first United Front.”

What was not needed was the reification of some ideal form of revolutionary ideology, whether feminist or marxist, which was divorced from the material conditions of China. In other words, the aim of revolution is not the creation, and imposition, of the "perfect" ideology, but instead the transformation of actual social relations. The best theory for doing this is one which corresponds with the existing conditions in their movement, development and contradictory reality, and deals with them in a way which provides the best foundation for moving forward, not one which corresponds with some preconceived dogma.¹⁵¹ This is essentially Stacey's position – the best theory, period, to guide women's liberation is her conception of feminism. Thus, it is this "feminism" which is good, and anything else is not only deficient but explicitly patriarchal. However, in the context of a revolution, an essential aspect of dealing with the concrete conditions is dealing with the military power of the reactionaries. The best feminist organization in the world will not liberate anyone if it is destroyed and its leaders killed. As Hinton (1966, 160) put it in discussing the Women's Associations during the period of the civil war: "Without the successful transformation of society, without the completion of land reform, without a victorious defense of the Liberated Areas, it was impossible to talk of liberation of women."

Stacey feels that Mao's concept of the Mass Line was in part responsible for the CCP turning away from dealing with women's issues as it moved first from the cities to the Kiangsi soviet then to the more conservative area of Yen-an. In her view, the leadership

151. In developing his own views of how the Chinese revolution should proceed, Mao struggled against the "marxist" form of this, particularly as put forward by the Comintern and the "28 Bolsheviks" (Chinese communists trained in the Soviet Union who were leading the CCP until the Long March).

style of the Mass Line resulted in not just the reproduction of traditional patriarchal values but the placing of them in the leading role in the revolutionary struggle. The CCP thus took the "scattered, unsystematic" and patriarchal ideas of the masses, "through study systematized them," took them back to the masses and conducted propaganda until the masses embraced them as their own. As Stacey puts it (113):

The role of leadership was first to articulate the experience, needs, and goals of the masses, then to generate grassroots discussion and decision making so that policies could be implemented with widespread support. Through sustained, intimate contact, cadres were to fuse their consciousness, concerns, and aspirations with those of the people they led. In this way the Chinese peasants' interest in resolving the crisis in the family economy was to be married to the CCP's desire to attain national power and construct a socialist society.

Thus, in Stacey's view, the foundation was laid for new democratic patriarchy, a more advanced, more sophisticated and more defensible form of what existed already among the peasant masses.

While Stacey accurately quotes Mao and logically draws out conclusions based on a metaphysical reading of the quote, she misrepresents the Mass Line as whole by abstracting it from its historical context and from Mao's thinking on the revolution as whole. Mao conceived of the Mass Line in opposition to the leadership practices of the leading group of cadre trained in the Soviet Union, known as the 28 Bolsheviks. Along with their dogmatic approach to applying marxism-leninism to China, Mao criticized their authoritarian, or commandist, style of leadership. Also called left-adventurism, this leadership style assumes that the Party is the sole source of correct knowledge. The focus of leadership is simply a question of leading the masses regardless of whether or not the masses are really supportive, or even aware, of where they are being led and why. It

implies a dualistic separation between the Party and the masses, and a one-way and hierarchical relationship between the two. It is authoritarian, unmindful of the support, awareness and participation of the masses, and dogmatic, unconcerned with the actual concrete conditions.¹⁵² The result is the alienation of potential allies, the isolation of revolutionaries, and ultimately the defeat of the revolution in one form or another.¹⁵³

The "opposite" of this is what is called tailism, or right opportunism. This consists of following (or "tailing") after the masses, letting their consciousness determine not only the content of policies but their foundations. This is basically what Stacey is accusing Mao of – that he was essentially a form of populist. But a full reading of Mao makes clear that he was opposed to this as much as left adventurism. Indeed, one could do the opposite of Stacey (as many have) and selectively quote Mao to “prove” that he believed in the unassailable supremacy of the Party. Stacey, a metaphysician to the core, does not see the dialectics in Mao’s thinking. She abstracts one "moment" out of Mao’s dialectical grasp of the leadership/led contradiction, between, on the one hand, providing the most advanced and revolutionary leadership while, on the other, opening the space for the masses to consciously liberate themselves. Or as maoists put it, grasping the dialectic between leading and learning (thus taking seriously the *responsibility* involved in leading). What Mao addressed, and which Stacey ignores, is the question of how to bring

152. One example of this in operation would be the forced collectivization in the Soviet Union. For another, commonly misunderstood example, see the AWTW assessment of Cambodia’s Khmer Rouge (F. G. 1999). Though frequently identified as a maoist party, it is clear that the Khmer Rouge was not, either in terms of its self-identification or its policies. The Khmer Rouge have been used repeatedly as a rhetorical strategy to end any discussion of revolution or maoism – "Revolution? Khmer Rouge. Enough said. Next topic."

153. The latter half of Hinton (1966) is basically detailed presentation of the dangers of a too radical a policy, in this case one which based itself entirely on the position of the poor peasantry and thus put the middle peasantry in the class of enemy.

about a progressive revolution in a country which is 90% peasantry. One consequence of seriously grappling with this means that any pre-conceived notions about revolution, whether marxist or feminist, must be transformed. Part of this is the dialectical question of leading the peasantry but at the same time transforming them through mass revolutionary struggle.¹⁵⁴ Stacey pushes aside these very complex questions and falls back on an idealist position which upholds the primacy of a particular dogma.¹⁵⁵

The result is that Stacey is working from a marked left adventurist position. She is putting forth a line which would have put nearly everyone except for a handful of urban feminist women into the category of enemy. The extent of Stacey's left adventurism is revealed by looking closely at her claim that, due to its conscious adherence to a patriarchal outlook, the CCP "rescued the family from precipice of destruction." In her view, instead of alleviating the family crisis by stabilizing it as an institution, the Party should have pushed the family over the precipice. The literature on China, including that cited by Stacey, makes it quite clear what the family crisis meant for actual people living in China. Combined with the other crises unfolding in Chinese society, it meant tremendous, almost unfathomable misery. As YB/AWTW puts it:

[F]amily life undoubtedly was stabilized after Liberation. But what were revolutionaries supposed to do? Join in with all the oppressive realities that had decimated the ranks of masses, that had driven them, starving, from one end of China

154. Sidel (1972, 13) presents a brief example of this approach. "In 1942, in the liberated areas, the Communists issued a proclamation abolishing foot-binding. But they found that simply issuing the order, and even fining the families of women with bound feet, was not effective; they then rescinded the order and instead educated the people about foot-binding. Gradually, the practice was abandoned."

155. It is worth noting that a wide variety of marxists upbraided Mao for this as well, though from the perspective that he deviated from "genuine" marxism. See, for example, Kerry (1977) for a trotskyist critique of maoism.

to other, wrenching families apart; a poverty so grinding, a social order so cruel that husbands even sold their wives and parents their daughters as child brides or, failing this, sometimes drowned them in desperation at their inability to care for or protect them; where hundreds of thousands of women turned to prostitution to survive, and rape by landlords and feudal gangsters the order of the day. This is what Stacey's "family crisis" looked like in the real world, and damn right the revolution abolished all this, practically immediately too. Is this evidence of "patriarchy" - or of eliminating oppression? In these conditions, Stacey's analysis that the family was "on the precipice of destruction" and so should have been pushed over the edge amounts to a demand to intensify the ruin caused by the workings of class society; however much Stacey may want, radical leaps are not shortcuts made by intensifying oppression, they are instead the product of mobilizing masses in revolutionary struggle against oppression so that they themselves consciously create and forge new, higher forms of organization - including by struggle in their own ranks.

What Stacey argues for is not a dialectical analysis of concrete conditions in all of its contradictory complexity, but a one-sided march abstracted from context and under the banner of destroying the family, regardless of the effects, even on women.¹⁵⁶

Stacey consistently fails to follow the logical consequences of her arguments. For example, in discussing the changes in family policy during the first part of the civil war, she notes (171) that the majority of the peasantry, including women, were opposed to the very radical reforms. The subsequent moderation of policies, in response not just to male but female demands, she calls patriarchal. But given the concrete circumstances, to have forced the peasantry to accept the more radical policies would have undermined virtually all, not just male, support for the Kiangsi Soviet, thus leading to its destruction and the imposition of KMT domination and policies (which Stacey makes clear were horrific in their effects on both women and men).¹⁵⁷ In such a context, the use of the Mass Line

156. Not only does Stacey put forth a line doomed to failure, she also fails to provide a reason why destroying the family should be the primary or immediate goal, or even a goal at all.

157. Gilmartin notes (1985, 212), for example, that the Nationalists would carry out the public execution and ritualistic sexualized mutilation of women activists.

requires the transformation of existing policies (which does not necessarily mean their "moderation") but without undermining their fundamental content.

Stacey attributes considerable responsibility to the CCP's failure to fully address women's issues to Mao's identification of the woman question as a non-antagonistic contradiction. She feels that this is an indication of the unimportance that the communists attached to women's issues, as opposed to the struggles against landlords, the KMT or the Japanese, which were all identified as antagonistic contradictions. This in turn led to a largely passive approach to women's liberation. This view is echoed by, among others, Gilmartin (9) who sums up the Chinese policy with regards to women by saying that gender inequalities "were assumed to be 'non-antagonistic' contradictions which would gradually diminish as socialism flourished under the leadership of the party."¹⁵⁸ Stacey argues that instead of reducing patriarchal relations to the level of a non-antagonistic contradiction, it should be raised up to the level of an antagonistic contradiction, where it will then be given its due.

On the surface, this appears reasonable. Between foot-binding, female infanticide, legitimized sexualized violence and other anti-woman norms and practices, the degree of oppression and brutality existing in Chinese gender relations at mid-century is staggering. Both Stacey and Wolf effectively present the realities women in China had to live with.

158. Gilmartin, like authors examined here, conflates the revisionist and revolutionary line on women's liberation. While Mao did call gender inequalities a non-antagonistic contradiction, the idea that they would just fade away on their own is the exact opposite of Mao's view. An essential aspect of maoism is that all social contradictions must be resolved through the appropriate form of the conscious, revolutionizing practice of the masses. The resolution of any contradiction, even a primary contradiction, does not on its own resolve any others, though it may open the door for their resolution - as did the victory over Chiang Kai-shek.

Certainly, it would seem that all this must involve more than a non-antagonistic contradiction. But the problems with this view are made clear by a close reading of what Mao meant in making the distinction between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions. As Mao states in “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People,”¹⁵⁹ antagonistic contradictions are those between “ourselves and the enemy,” and are resolved through fundamentally coercive means, whether revolution or dictatorship. Non-antagonistic contradictions are those “among the people,” and are resolved through the democratic means of education and persuasion. The first is transformed only when “one eats up the other,” that is, one is destroyed by the other. For example, the contradiction between the landlords and the peasants is resolved through new democratic revolution until, primarily through expropriation but also through selective execution, landlords as a class cease to exist.¹⁶⁰ In contrast, the resolution of non-antagonistic

159. Stacey does cite this, but does not discuss any of the obvious implications. In fact, she gets it exactly wrong. In a footnote (194), she claims that “identifying the relations between men and women as antagonistic would require eliminating men as a class, that is, the transcendence of gender as a basic organizing principle.” Putting aside the first part, which I address below, the second part is not inconsistent with Mao’s thinking, though of course he did not use such terminology. Stacey is not only unaware of this, she replaces Mao’s dialectical thinking with a metaphysical approach. For Mao, the contradictions of patriarchy are both antagonistic and non-antagonistic. In general terms, the contradiction between patriarchal consciousness and socialist consciousness is antagonistic, while the contradiction between concrete men and women is non-antagonistic (but, true to dialectics, these basic positions interpenetrate - see Desai 1993). It is this, and not making a universal antagonism out of the relations between men and women, which will result in the “transcendence of gender as a basic organizing principle.” Stacey’s comment reveals much of what is problematic with her argument. Not only does she fundamentally misunderstand Mao, she does not understand class either. Men do not form a class – they do not have a consistent relationship to the means of production. They do form a consistently privileged group. To state that they form a class, an important part of Stacey’s argument, is not an example of bringing together materialism and feminism but of distorting materialism. Using Stacey’s approach, any identifiable group could thus be identified as a ‘class.’

160. But here, too, there is the need to look at this dialectically, as Mao did. During the stage of civil war (the revolutionary period prior to the Japanese invasion), Mao identified this contradiction as antagonistic and an expression of the primary contradiction in China at the time. After the Japanese invaded, Mao said that the primary contradiction was now between China and Japan. Thus, the contradiction between landlords and peasants was now overall non-antagonistic (a position attacked by a wide variety of dogmatists). Following the defeat of Japan, the contradiction became again antagonistic. Importantly, Mao and the revolutionaries did not simply decide that the situation had changed automatically. As Belden (1949) notes, (see chapter 32) there was a long period of investigation and summation before the CCP announced a new policy and orientation with regards to

contradiction results in a higher level of dialectical unity for each. An article from the People's Daily puts it this way:

The overwhelming majority of the contradictions in the realms of marriage and family life are contradictions among the people. The struggle against the bourgeois thoughts and feudal thoughts in these realms is a very demanding and complex task. While we must see the class substance of these bourgeois thoughts and feudal thoughts and realize that the struggle against them is another side of the class struggle on the ideological front, we must also see that these struggles occur within the ranks of the people and are matters of right and wrong among the people. For this reason, we must settle the contradictions by means of democratic persuasive education.¹⁶¹

The distinction between the two types of contradictions is not the same as Heilbrunner's (1980) distinction between contradiction and conflict. The latter does not fundamentally involve a dialectical unity, while both forms of contradictions take place within such a unity of opposites. For Mao, both forms of contradictions encompass conflict, even sharp conflict. As a contemporary Indian maoist notes, defining a contradiction as overall nonantagonistic does not mean that particular instances within it are not antagonistic and need to be dealt with accordingly.¹⁶² Accounts of the Chinese revolution give many

the landlord/peasant contradiction.

161. The full article is in Croll (1980), which is in Stacey's bibliography. Stacey's approach is an unfortunately typical way of dealing with communist theorists. This involves (accurately) quoting which uses jargon unfamiliar to the general reader, without explaining its full argument and context. This is an easy way of making an argument look ridiculous, without having to deal with it in a serious way. Of course, critics of feminism and poststructuralism often use this tactic as well.
162. Desai: "[O]ur fight against the landlord the moneylender, the employer, etc., is primary. It is our main fight. It is antagonistic, in that without demolishing their present status, their control of the means of production and therefore control over our lives, our lot cannot improve. Our struggle with the men who live with us and stand with us in -that fight is non-antagonistic, in that, both we and our men would gain by we women winning a better status and a greater freedom to fight side by side with them. This difference, and this inter-relation, we should never forget. Our main fight is against our exploiters and it is an antagonistic fight. Part of that fight is against the patriarchal culture that the ruling classes employ to keep us suppressed. In order to carry on this fight, we must also struggle with the men and the women of our own class who are made into instruments of this patriarchal culture. While this struggle in individual cases can assume fierce and bitter forms, at the general level it is non-antagonistic. It is non-antagonistic because all of us exploited and oppressed would commonly gain when we win each step in this second kind of fight. However, while this second is non-antagonistic and secondary, it is a very necessary struggle. Because it will free half the fighting

examples of the CCP treating individual situations as such.¹⁶³ It also does not mean that the contradiction between patriarchal/feudal and proletarian ideas about women is not fundamentally antagonistic. But identifying an idea or particular individuals as the enemy is quite different from identifying half of humanity as such. At best, such a move would result in a separatist strategy in which men have no role in the liberation of women.

Stacey claims that the CCP viewed the family as an eternal institution which was entirely part of the superstructure. In support of the first claim,¹⁶⁴ Stacey quotes (4) from a regional Chinese newspaper as a summary of the predominant CCP approach to the family:

The breaking down of the system of patriarchy will not and cannot lead to 'destruction' or 'elimination' of the family . . . The family as a form of joint life of two sexes united in marriage, we may definitely say, will never be eliminated. The existence of this form of joint life is dictated not only by the physiological differences of sexes but also by the perpetuation of the race. Even in the communist society we cannot perceive any objective basis and necessity for the 'elimination' of the family.

force of working people for participation in the main fight. If we put the main contradiction and the subordinate one on par, not only do we lessen the chances in practice of bringing the subordinate one onto the path of resolution through proper struggle. We do worse. We equate the worker and the capitalist, both as "exploiters". We invest the worker within his meagre wage, his wretched means, with the power to change an equation without the means to do so. Insofar as we do this we divert attention from the principal antagonistic exploiter with whom the women have no common interest. We defuse part of our striking force against the main enemy and divert its striking capacity on to our ally. Men--working men--do need to free themselves on the question of their women. But the point is they can do this only when they realize (through class struggle) that they need to free their women and themselves from ruling-class, patriarchal, family norms, so that both they and their women can fight the ruling classes and world imperialism directly."

163. See, for example, Belden (1949, 275-307).

164. As for the 'superstructural' claim, as the discussion of Wolf shows, the revolutionaries clearly conceived of the family as being part of both the base and the superstructure. Additionally, the revolutionaries do not conceive of the base/superstructure in dichotomous terms but as part of a mutually identifying, inter-penetrating dialectic.

There may be a very good reason to cite a provincial newspaper as expressing the line of the CCP, as opposed to its Chairman, its first constitution, its Central Committee, its national newspaper or its theoretical journal. Unfortunately, Stacey does not provide such an explanation, and we are left to wonder why she would ignore the voluminous evidence that demonstrates clearly that her quote is not an accurate summary of the CCP's position on the family. Consider the following quote from Mao:

Under socialism private property still exists, the small group still exists, the family still exists. The family, which emerged in the last period of primitive communism, will in the future be abolished. It had a beginning and will come to an end ... Under the present system of distribution of 'to each according to his work,' the family is still of use. When we reach the stage of the communist relationship of distribution of 'to each according to his need,' many of our concepts will change. After maybe a few thousand years, or at the very least several hundred years, the family will disappear. Many of our comrades do not dare to think about these things. They are very narrow-minded.¹⁶⁵

To be clear, a metaphysical view of the family was put forward at various times and was held by any number of leading cadres of the CCP. But what Stacey is glossing over is that there was a very different position as well, one which was consistently put forth by the revolutionaries. While Stacey is careful to open up the family and reveal its contradictions, she treats the Party as a monolithic unit. She does not see any fundamental contradictions, only changes in policy which never veered from a patriarchal foundation. Stacey also does not fully grasp that even when lines were being put forth which aimed at stabilizing the family, this was being consciously done as a particular stage, not as an end

165. "Talks at Chengtu: Against Blind Faith in Learning" (Schram 1974). The CCP constitution of 1931 provides another example: "Freedom of marriage is recognized and measures for the protection of women will assure them the necessary material means to dissolve the family bond stage by stage, and fully participate in cultural, political, and economic life." Stacey quotes this (121), but only to make the point that this was during the period of "feminist" influence on the Party, which was later eliminated.

in itself. As a result of her metaphysical dogmatism, Stacey cannot see the possibility that the best way to fully transform and eliminate the family might be to stabilize it in the short term.

A significant part of Stacey's argument is that, as part of New Democracy, the CCP created the New Democratic Patriarchy. She claims that while New Democracy which the Chinese revolution created in 1949 was conceived of as a transitional stage, the same was not true of the new family. As she says, the post-liberation family "can be characterized as 'transitional' only in the broadest, and unenlightening sense that all family and social systems are transitional between one historical form and the next" (260). However, Stacey notes that the later Great Leap Forward and the communes brought about the end of New Democratic Patriarchy and a new family form, what she calls socialist patriarchy. This she says took place over a period of a decade or so. It would seem to be an historically unique situation that a particular family form was in existence for such a short time. Clearly, it *was* a transitional form, and the evidence suggests that for Mao and the revolutionaries it was intended to be the case, that they did not treat the family as a metaphysical sacred institution. That it was incompletely transformed, and that it was then moved backwards is best explained by, not a consistent patriarchal intent, but by the fundamental conflict between class lines. Simply put, the revisionists treated the family created after liberation as an end in itself, but this was not the revolutionary position.

Though a metaphysician, on occasion Stacey uses the word dialectics, but what she means by this is merely some form of feedback effect, a common, but inaccurate,

conception. The lack of a grasp of dialectics hamstrings Stacey's argument. Instead of seeing things dialectically, Stacey flips from one metaphysical position to another, based largely on its usefulness for her argument. She consistently takes one aspect of a contradiction, emphasizes it to the exclusion of other aspects, and then accuses Mao or the CCP of doing the same thing. She does this even when she has to switch from aspect to aspect to try to make her point. For example, despite her earlier identification of the Mass Line as tantamount to right opportunism, she brings out the charge of 'state coercion' when it is convenient. Simply put, where Mao brought a grasp of dialectics, Stacey (and the other authors) brings a problematic and limited metaphysics.

For example, Stacey calls the Red Army patriarchal, despite the well-established fact that contrary to historical Chinese experience, they did not participate in mass rape, or even the use of prostitutes.¹⁶⁶ The point here is that not that there is not anything patriarchal about the Red Army. There is a patriarchal aspect of preventing rape when the intent is to ensure exclusive access to one's "own" woman. And an army that is almost exclusively male, as the Red Army was, obviously has a patriarchal aspect.¹⁶⁷ But what Stacey is doing is highlighting and abstracting these aspects to the extent that they become dominant. In effect, her approach means that anything which has aspects about it identifiable as patriarchal *is* patriarchal. She carries this to impressive lengths when she dismisses the fact that life expectancy was increased so significantly after Liberation as

166. In making her argument, Stacey cites the Eight Rules of Attention, which was a basic guideline for the behavior of soldiers in the Red Army. Characteristically, she notes the only version which did not include instructions on how to relate to peasant women. The final version included the line, "Do not take liberties with women" (SW IV, 155).

167. As one indication that maoism is not a static dogma, the maoist armies in Peru and Nepal are almost totally sexually integrated. See Onesto (2005).

another expression patriarchal because it helped bring about the long-desired multi-generational Confucist family. When the point is reached that doubling the life expectancy of hundreds of millions of people is seen as just another manifestation of patriarchy, it is clear that Stacey's position is so dogmatic and purist that virtually nothing could satisfy it.

At another point, Stacey explicitly compares the Party after the Marriage Law to Confucian emperors, calling them "public patriarchs of the new democratic state," (186) To Stacey, a government which intervenes to ensure that a husband does not beat his wife is the equivalent of a state which intervenes to ensure that he can. Stacey, usually concerned about patriarchal content, is here only interested in the form. Finding an interventionist state in each case, she equates them. She leaves aside the content of the intervention, the reality that they express fundamentally different class positions, or even that they have fundamentally different consequences for women.

PSRC's strength as a theoretical argument thus rests upon systematic distortions. As noted, Stacey's problematic use of quotes and examples is consistent throughout her work. It is worth returning to this to demonstrate the extent of this problem. For example, she refers to Hinton's *Fanshen* (159) to support the statement that in Yenan cadres argued that "wife beating should be discouraged by reminding peasant men that it was so difficult for a poor man to find a wife that he should not risk driving the one he had to divorce him" – that is, wife-beating is a problem because it could harm a man's interests. Stacey's summation of this is accurate, and this is indeed a very narrow view, but this is only one tactic used with regards to one man in the context of transforming the gender

relations of an entire village. As the original source makes clear, there was a lot more to that struggle. To imply that it represented the entirety of policy is disingenuous at best. In addition, Fanshen recounts the events in Long Bow Village during the last stages of the civil war - not, as Stacey implies, in Yen-an during the anti-Japanese struggle. She does the same thing with foot-binding, implying the CCP combatted the practice solely because it was “harmful to health and production,” and not because it had anything to do with the oppression of women.¹⁶⁸

Stacey is very quick to use a quote from one particular cadre as exemplifying the entirety of the party’s line. However, the revolutionary period of Chinese history lasted some fifty years. It involved as active participants hundreds of millions of people, the vast majority of whom were not in the CCP. And particularly before liberation, CCP policies were often carried out by very inexperienced cadre, or simply by supporters. Given this basic reality, along with the many thousands of books on the Chinese revolution, there is an inexhaustible supply of potential quotes and examples at hand to ‘prove’ almost anything. Unless one’s intent is merely to note the existence of a particular strand of thinking, the task of a scholar is to grapple with all relevant quotes and other material. Stacey does not do this – she selectively uses quotes and examples to make a categorically inclusive assessment. When looking at an extraordinarily complex phenomenon as the Chinese revolution, one must deal seriously with these contradictions. Stacey does not, consistently ignoring, or downplaying, the differences within the CCP and, more

168. Other times, Stacey draws dubious conclusions from quotes, as in (185). “[F]amily reform sometimes was promoted as a means of increasing productive efficiency. In 1951, for example, the investigation teams evaluating the success of marriage law campaigns claimed that production fared best in areas with a high percentage of successfully reformed marriages.” There is no basis to draw the causal link that Stacey does. Just because cadres *later* found a correlation between family reform and production does not prove that there was a *previous* conscious intention.

importantly, their foundation in theory and class position. Stacey's problem lies not in identifying the limitations and errors of the CCP's policies (which she at times accurately criticizes), but in not understanding them on their own terms, and not grasping them as a reflection of the battle between two fundamentally opposed class lines.

She often makes nods to the complexity of the revolution at each stage, but usually only in a paragraph or two and rarely with any supporting documentation which puts forth a different view from hers. Anyone familiar with the literature on China (much of which is in her bibliography) could find a wealth of quotes and examples that contradict her assessment. However, the only quotes and examples used are those which support her view.

Stacey's treatment of the Women's Federation is a good example of her, and Wolf's, selectivity. Stacey cites comments from the leaders of the Federation as examples of the patriarchal thinking in the Party. However, she also cites the disbanding of the Federation during the GPCR as *further* evidence of the Party's patriarchy. Though she mentions this three times, she never explicitly says why the Federation came under attack during the GPCR. The implication is that it was disbanded because of the patriarchal moves by the men in the Party, who felt threatened by an organization of women. But the reality is something quite different, and is easy to discover by looking at one of the books in Stacey's bibliography, Croll's *Feminist Movement in China*, which compiles original documents from China's revolutionary period. As Croll notes (1980, 24), the Federation, particularly its chief editor, "were criticized for encouraging women to dwell on their personal problems to the exclusion of wider social and political interests and applying

false standards of excellence in writing thereby discriminating against the publication of contributions from peasant and working women.” Revolutionaries attacked positions put forward by the Women's Federation, such as “women live for the purpose of giving birth to and raising children,” or that for women, “children, husband, and a nice little family constitute happiness.” One Chinese critic of the Federation made the connection between patriarchy and class struggle explicit:

Displaying the signboard of solving so-called personal problems of women, [the Women's Federation] published revisionism and tried to make the women's class viewpoint blurred and lead the women to show no concern over major state affairs but merely to show concern over the life of their individual families and go after so-called happiness of husbands and children. It tried to dissolve the women's revolutionary fighting spirit and make a breach in China for the comeback of capitalism, ... the individual and the personal (Croll 1980, 27).

As the historical record makes clear, the Federation was disbanded, not out of patriarchal spite, but because it was putting forth a patriarchal line which overall served the interests of revisionism by depoliticizing important contradictions in Chinese society.¹⁶⁹

This is all the clearer when one is aware that many institutions were disbanded, partly or completely, during the GPCR. This included many of the universities, which were critiqued because of the class line dominating them, with the result that their graduates were technocrats and intellectuals more concerned with their individual careers than with the continuing revolutionizing of society. It also included entire branches of the Party, such as in Shanghai, where the Party apparatus was dissolved and replaced with

169. As AWTW puts it: “Stacey is determined to defend the Women's Federation simply because it is the organization of women and covers over the fact that its central staff was promoting the capitalist-restoration line of Liu Shao-chi which widened the divisions and inequalities in society, and pushed a very backward approach to the woman question.”

revolutionary committees. Stacey leaves all this out, including that many women's associations continued to exist at the local level and that the national organization began to be reorganized in the 1970s, a process interrupted by the revisionist coup. Under Deng, the reconstituted Federation slid back to the positions attacked by the revolutionaries, until its national magazine resembled nothing so much as *Cosmopolitan* and other so-called "women's magazines" in the West. In Stacey's hands, this history is so distorted that an explicitly anti-patriarchal action is turned on its head and called patriarchal.

To summarize, the key points in Stacey's argument rest upon problematic assumptions, distortions of the thinking of Mao, broad and unwarranted generalizations concerning the practice of the CCP and a selective and disingenuous reading of history. As such, her work, despite its initial face validity, is the least persuasive of the three reviewed. And if a political programme was constructed and implemented based on her analysis, it probably would have been disastrous. Unable to unite real friends against real enemies, it would have been isolated and dogmatic. If not viciously crushed by the KMT or imperialists, it would have faded into irrelevance.

Mies

Mies puts forth a substantial argument, particularly in the context of PAWS and its wealth of corroborating evidence and analysis. There are, unfortunately, numerous problems with this argument. Some of these come out not so much in the argument itself but in how it is applied to historical examples, particularly with regards to China. The primary problem is an insufficient theoretical understanding of what she is critiquing, whether national liberation wars, socialist transformation or the historical experience of

socialism. Flowing from this is a strong tendency to make broad generalizations, and condemnations, based upon this problematic understanding. These problems do not invalidate her argument, though they do necessitate restating it. But they do prevent her from recognizing that in what she is critiquing, both in theory and practice, which would support and indeed strengthen her argument. In other words, what Mies presents as an encompassing critique is actually a specific critique, one which is accurate as far as it goes but which elides fundamental differences in the theory and practice of what she is critiquing. This is demonstrated in her section on China.¹⁷⁰ By mistakingly conflating sharply divergent theoretical approaches under the label of “orthodox” marxism (or scientific socialism), Mies renders herself blind to the differences between mechanical materialism and the dialectical materialism of Mao.

As with the other authors, there are problems in scholarship of varying importance, but

170. Though I focus on her section on China, there are a variety of problems with the other sections as well. For example, the section on the USSR rests entirely upon one source. What Mies is arguing may be completely correct. However, using one unpublished article to dismiss 70 years of historical practice is not very compelling. Additional critiques can be made of her last chapter, particularly her discussion of the marxist conception of labor. She argues that marxists see the realm of freedom as existing only outside socially necessary labor, which leads to a one-sided drive to increase production and advance technology in order to reduce the amount of labor. Thus, Mies draws a straight line from Marx’s analysis that raising the level of the productive forces is an essential part of human liberation to the economic policies carried out by the so-called socialist countries, implying that this results in a situation not that similar from that of capitalism. Unfortunately, Mies ignores Marx’s concept of alienation and his rather lengthy discussions on the difference between production for use values and production for exchange values. While for Marx the transformation of necessity through the raising of production (that is, reducing the quantity of necessary labor) is essential, equally, if not more, so is transforming the content of that labor, both with regards to what that production is for and the social relations in which it takes place. For Marx, labor under capitalism is a tremendously distorted experience, determined by the exchange values of commodities and interests of capital and not by human needs, taking place in a social environment rife with contradictions, exploitation and oppression, and which alienates workers from themselves and each other. The goal for Marx is that of freely associating human beings collectively laboring to create use values to meet human needs. In other words, almost exactly what Mies argues for. While Mies’ stress on the reconceptualization of labor to include reproductive labor is important, her basic point that Marx was concerned only with the quantity of labor is simply wrong. In effect, Mies ends up repeating the erroneous and mechanistic reading of Marx done by the “socialist” leaders she criticizes.

none of them are fundamental. Mies' basic problem is a limited grasp of both of the concept of contradiction and of dialectics. This is an important problem for someone critiquing socialist practice from a point of view sympathetic to materialism and marxism. What would have aided Mies considerably would to have had a grasp of maoist theory and practice, particularly since she devotes most of her time to critiquing China. That she does not is clear throughout, but this is particularly evident when, in summing up her discussion of socialist practice, she states (198) that, just because:

a national government has captured state power and that certain sectors of the economy have been socialized or are state-owned does not yet mean that all production relations have been revolutionized so that some sections of the people are not exploited for the benefit of other sections of the people.

With a grasp of maoism, the problems in Mies' argument can be clearly seen. The first problem is a question of dialectics. Mies takes a materialist approach in her critique of socialism, as in when she says that the cultural approaches to eradicating gender inequality could not work under socialism given that the economic base involves the exploitation of women. However, while this is materialist, it is a fairly mechanical materialism. It seriously downplays the role of the superstructure and particularly the conscious role of human beings in the transformation of the forces and relations of production. While Mies would seem to be marxist in that she regards as primary material relations, she ignores Marx's analysis, emphasized by Mao, that ideas are a material force.¹⁷¹ Importantly, Mies is evidently unaware of the maoist analysis which emphasizes the crucial role of political line in determining the direction and content of socialist society. While Mies' point here is largely correct, it is too one-sidedly materialist. In

171. See CCP Central Committee (1970b).

addition, Mies is not a consistent materialist, as demonstrated in her conclusion where she puts forth various ideas with no consideration of their relation to material relations.¹⁷² It is unfortunate that Mies, in advancing critical theory through new content derived from feminism, ends up moving backwards past the dialectical materialism developed by Marx to the mechanical materialism of Feuerbach.

The second problem is that her analysis is limited in its scope and seriously underestimates both the existence of contradictions in socialist society and the material foundation for the rise of reactionary forces. Maoism is clear in analyzing socialist society as permeated with various contradictions at all levels and in all areas. Maoists identify all relationships of both domination and exploitation as creating the material basis for the restoration of capitalism. This includes not only the relationship of men over women, but the city over the countryside, the party over the masses, those who work with their minds over those who work with their hands, religious and clan authorities over the people, etc. Of course, the criticism that Mies focuses on the exploitation of women to the exclusion of all others is not a damning one. In the context of the historical neglect and blindness to this question, her focus on it is understandable and not in itself particularly problematic.

However, this does prevent her from locating her argument within a broader and more fully developed analysis. Doing so would have several benefits. It would give more

172. For example, Mies critiques Marx's conception of capitalism and the proletariat as being blind to their dependence upon external and internal colonies. She then argues that one can not expect revolution from the industrial proletariat from core countries since that would involve acting against their material interests. However, she makes no such argument in her argument for a consumer revolt among women in the imperialist countries.

strength to her argument by showing that women's exploitation is not something that exists in isolation and opposition to other relations in socialist society. In maoist terms, women's exploitation is a particular example of a general contradiction, one with its own salience and characteristics but which is not something unique and alone. The argument for its existence is strengthened by the recognition that there are similar relations of production in socialist society. It would also give her argument a deeper theoretical background, particularly with regards to ontological questions.

The third problem, is that Mies' argument rests upon a seriously deficient analysis of socialism. It is clear that, within the limitations outlined above, Mies' analysis is quite correct. However, what it correctly applies to is not socialism, but actually to revisionism. That historically revisionism has been largely identical to what is called socialism and that it is based upon (distorted) aspects of marxism is not irrelevant. However, neither is the fact that there exists a substantial body of praxis based upon the same marxist foundations that Mies criticizes and which stands in sharp contradiction to revisionism.

To put it simply, Mies' argument is persuasively accurate with regards to revisionism, but not when it comes to maoism. Putting revolutionary politics in command means that the goal of the transformation and elimination of all systemic forms of oppression is not sacrificed in the drive to advance production. In other words, production serves revolution, which for maoism includes the elimination of patriarchal relations. Upon this foundation, there are the policies of laying the basis for women's inclusion into productive labor, men's inclusion into reproductive labor and the socialization of all labor. At the same time, unlike the revisionists, maoists recognize the continuing

existence of exploitative relations under socialism and seek to restrict and eventually eliminate them. Thus, there is in maoism little, if anything, of what Mies identifies as the sources of women's exploitation under socialism. Though Mies of course provides a much more detailed and elaborated understanding of women's exploitation under revisionism, Mao provided a much more precise and encompassing theoretical framework in which to grasp the significance of Mies's argument.¹⁷³

None of this is to argue that Mies' argument is thus unnecessary and that it says nothing that was not said by Mao. This is actually far from the case, for several reasons. First, it explains why, to the extent that a revisionist line is in control, women's autonomy and economic and political power declines. Mies explains why revisionism is necessarily patriarchal.¹⁷⁴ Second, Mies convincingly argues that patriarchy and women's exploitation in capitalism and socialism deserve a much more central place than even Mao gave. When the policy of eliminating the "three great differences" in China was put forth during the GPCR, the inequality of men over women was not one of them.¹⁷⁵ The more sophisticated analysis of patriarchy which Mies makes demonstrates the extent to which even some of the most revolutionary of the Chinese leaders reproduced patriarchal assumptions and relations. In other words, patriarchal relations of power conditioned

173. There are also numerous factual errors in Mies' section on China. Mies claims that the communists did not consider peasant women to be involved in productive work. However, Mao states clearly that this is the case (Mao 1965d, 44-46). Mies also states that the maoists did not talk of 'patriarchy' but conceptualized women's oppression as being merely a remnant of feudalism. But again, in Mao (1965d), which was written in 1927, women's oppression is both stressed and specifically called patriarchal. It is hard to not come to the conclusion that Mies' understanding of China is limited, due in part to her reliance upon secondary sources.

174. However, a maoist understanding of revisionism would explain to Mies why the gains that women made in China from 1949-1975, however partial, have been thoroughly reversed since the revisionist seizure of power.

175. See Avakian (1978a, 295).

their perception and analysis of “facts.” For one clear example, Mao uncritically reproduced the dichotomy of productive and reproductive labor, while very much privileging the former.¹⁷⁶ Clearly, the understanding of gender of even the most revolutionary Chinese maoist, however much better than revisionism, is deficient by the standards of current feminist scholarship.

Mies presents an essential argument, one which considerably deepens the understanding of global capitalism, patriarchy and the relation between the two. She accurately outlines the limitations of existing, marxist views of women’s liberation. Most importantly, she provides a clear analysis for explaining why revolutions are reversed and why it is that women typically benefit the least from revolutions and are the first to lose what they have gained. However, Mies does not provide a sufficiently precise and developed theoretical framework for her argument. This blinds Mies to the limits of her argument, both with regards to its breadth and its application. A more useful framework is that provided by maoism. Though by focusing on gender Mies goes beyond, and adds to, what has been developed within this framework, maoism provides for a much more precise elucidation and application of her argument. It also illustrates the extent to which what Mies is arguing for has already existed. This gives the weight of historical practice to an important theoretical contribution. Mies significantly advances the answering of the all-important question of what is to be done about the status quo of the global political economy. Unfortunately, she is a little too quick, as are many, to categorically dismiss the

176. See Mao (1955), in particular the introduction. Another good example would be the anonymous essay reproduced in Lotta (1978), entitled “Working Women’s Struggle Against Confucianism in Chinese History.” This essay reproduces many of the problems Mies identifies with marxist theories of women’s liberation, though it should be mentioned that it is not typical of maoist writing on women.

hard-won theory and practice that has come from previous answers to that question.

Conclusion

“Two roads were posed in China -yet the authors, bereft of any real class analysis, are unable to distinguish between them.”

YB/AWTW

Of the three authors, Mies provides the most cogent theoretical critique, one which is crucial to understand. The others do not fare as well. While Mao was clear that women's liberation was an inextricable part of the overall transformation of society, Wolf and Stacey want to look at it in isolation, abstracted out of the myriad contradictions in which it was enmeshed and which gave it its particular identity and reality. They assume that the question can be understood, and solved, based on the resulting abstract, idealist analysis. The result is a metaphysical critique, abstracted from the concrete historical circumstances. The point here is not just that Mao and the CCP were dealing with solving the contradictions of patriarchy and feudalism and economic development and national liberation and imperialism, etc. It is not just that along with addressing the 'woman question,' there were attempting to correctly handle the myriad of other pressing concerns. The point is that all of these, and innumerable more, were a part of women's oppression - they gave it the particular (though always moving) character it had. Thus, it meant there was a particular character to it, one which does not necessarily correspond with the preconceptions of Western feminists.

Gilmartin notes that much of the previous work on women in China had been through a particularly western and privileged conception of 'feminism:'

Recently, some scholars have raised strong objections to the use of the Western definition of feminism as the sole yardstick to determine whether social-change movements in the third world have a feminist character. In contesting the very meaning of the term ‘feminism,’ these scholars draw attention to the fact that feminist movements in the non-Western world have been compelled by their localities to address the intersection of gender oppression with imperialist, racial and class oppression. ... In other words, modern feminist movements in the third world have been compelled by the realities of western hegemony to broaden their agendas by connecting their effort to end gender oppression with struggles for national liberation (1995, 6-7).

The books by Wolf and Stacey can be seen expressing the limitations of second wave feminism, as Gilmartin suggests.¹⁷⁷ Mies, fortunately, is largely free of these problems, though she would benefit from an understanding of dialectics.

But the fundamental problems with both Stacey and Wolf can be expressed more sharply. In a chapter on the process of doing research in China, Wolf uses the phrase ‘speaking bitterness’ in describing the constant unnecessary problems created by the Chinese authorities in the process of conducting her research. “Speaking bitterness” refers to a fundamental revolutionary form which the masses developed and the CCP encouraged and used extensively throughout the revolution. These were public meetings in which peasants would talk of their experiences, of what had been done to them by the landlords, Japanese collaborators and the Nationalist army. These were often combined with “struggle sessions” in which popular retribution was taken against the most horrific

177. In some ways, they deviate from western feminism. Both Stacey and Wolf (RP 58; PSRC 177) seem dismayed that the Party and the community would become involved in the “private” matters of marital difficulties; other feminists might welcome this as an aspect of dissolving the dichotomy of public and private, and making the personal political. Of course, there still remains the question of how that public/private divide is transformed, a question to which I return in chapter six. Here, I will note that while a private sphere of protected patriarchal privilege and authority should be uprooted, it should not be done in a way in which the state largely assumes the same rule as the patriarch.

enemies of the people. Belden (1949) provides numerous examples of these experiences and the tremendously liberating effect of literally millions of people, men and women, “speaking bitterness.”¹⁷⁸ One example of this “bitterness” is the story of Third Blossom (1949, 30-34). Her husband, an anti-Japanese militiaman, was captured by a traitorous landlord, who had already killed over a hundred villagers. As related by a fellow villager (1949, 31), Third Blossom

went into the prison all shaking and asked: ‘Will you let me see my husband,’ And Mu Shih-an’s dog leg says: ‘Go out on the street and you’ll see him.’ Well, naturally, she thought he’d been released and she rushed into the street. She saw him, all right. Up on a pole, on the wall of a strong point that Mu had forced us to build with our scratched and bleeding hands – there he was. His head, anyway. All blood and his eyes half gouged. Crazy – that’s what she went. Tried to climb on the strong point and get the head, but everyone pulled her off and took her home. That night it rained and the head fell down on the road. The next morning, at cock crow, she was out on the street. She found her husband’s head and took it home with her. Three days and three nights she lay on the kang with the head clasped in her arms, kissing and fondling it, as if he were still alive. Like a tiger she was, or a bitch with her pups, she wouldn’t let any of us near her. Nothing we did or said made any impression on her, she wouldn’t let go of that bloody head for a moment.¹⁷⁹

178. See, for example, pp. 159-64. For an example involving women, one which demonstrates clearly the centrality of family reform during the civil war period, see 275-318.

179. Later, when the revolution reached the village, Mu was brought before a struggle session in front of twenty thousand people. Another villager relates (Belden 33): “I’ll never forget Third Blossom on that day. She’d walked thirty li to the meeting. Walked half the night before. What a shy girl she used to be. Never went out of her house alone. But that day – save us! – what a woman! I can still see her as she went right onto the stage before Mu Shih-an. ‘Well, how are you Traitor Mu’ she asked. The crowd had grown still when they saw her – everyone knew her story. In the silence we could all hear his reply. ‘Badly, as you can see.’ ‘Tell the people how you killed – ‘ she choked and clutched at her breast. I don’t know, her next words were a whisper, but they carried to the very edge of the crowd: ‘a member of the anti-Japanese resistance, my husband.’ ‘No, I didn’t kill him.’ ‘Then who was it sent him out of this world?’ Third Blossom raised her voice. ‘Who was it?’ ‘The Japanese.’ ‘It was you! You killed him ...’ She had taken off her leather belt from her waist and she began to beat that traitor there in front of us all. ... To see that girl taking her revenge ... Well ... What a sight ... She beat Mu Shih-an to his knees ... Oh, I shall never forget it.” While there is a strong element of revengism here, it helps to show the real content involved in speaking bitterness and the struggle against patriarchy in China, as well as the question of the transformation of women into revolutionary agents. To put it simply, the revolution led by the communists created the conditions through which a shy woman who previously could only lament the devastating horrors she faced could become fearless in fighting for herself and a different world. At the risk of stating the obvious, this is a good thing, particularly as such transformations were repeated by the millions. That this is not recognized reveals much. I am reminded here of Lenin’s rebuttal (LCW 23: 82) to a critic of the Paris Commune, who deplored the participation of women in the armed defense of the Commune

This is the kind of experience about which the Chinese peasantry "spoke bitterness." To equate a frustrating, even exasperating, encounter with a sexist bureaucracy with experiences like this is problematic, to say the least. It trivializes the heart-rending tragedies of untold millions and elevates the tribulations of the privileged.

It also exposes the fundamental class position of Wolf, which she shares with Stacey. Having no critique of imperialism, they want to build a feminism based upon the experiences of privileged women in the imperialist countries.¹⁸⁰ As such, it is not only a bourgeois feminism, but an imperialist feminism. Both Wolf and Stacey want to place their bets, not on the masses of oppressed (female or otherwise) but only the sufficiently educated and enlightened few who share their perspective – which particularly for Stacey is revealed to be a dogmatic and objectively imperialist feminism that places ideological purity and the well-being of the privileged over the transformation of the systemic oppressions from which they benefit. YB/AWTW concludes, focusing on Stacey:

Having belittled every step forward the masses of women took in rural China, Stacey now concludes that, really, there is not much hope for these backwards peoples, that the real prospects are in the imperialist countries. Isn't it evident that what Stacey is interested in is not at all the liberation of all the oppressed and exploited, and not really even the masses of women – who after all are still mostly peasants in today's world – but a bourgeois women's movement? It is for this kind of women's movement that the imperialist citadels offer the best soil – whereas the strides made in unleashing the hundreds of millions of China's women, the steps they took towards emancipation and the lessons learned in the course of the unprecedented debates and

and said "If the French nation consisted entirely of women, what a terrible nation it would be!" Lenin's response was to call for an international league of such "terrible nations." In other words, what one considers to be horrible can expose a lot about one's overall class outlook (one of the points of Mao's *Investigation into a Peasant Movement in Hunan*.)

180. Recall Stacey's conclusion that capitalism (and by this one should understand imperialism) provides a better basis for women's liberation.

struggles over how to accomplish this – the struggle of these poor backwards step-sisters of Stacey's bourgeois women's movement is pooh-pooed and even attacked as just new forms of patriarchy. To rest complacent with Stacey's conclusion that the cause of women's liberation is essentially hopeless in peasant societies stamps her feminist theory with a hideous imperialist chauvinism which does not aid the masses of women anywhere, anytime.

Stacey laments (173) that “[F]eminism had long been labeled bourgeois and divisive by the Chinese revolutionaries.” While any number of marxists and communists have claimed this on the wrong basis, in her case the charge is true. Typically, she does not explain the reasons why the CCP would see Stacey’s “feminism” as divisive and bourgeois. As the revolutionaries explained (quoted in Croll 19), bourgeois feminism “looks at the question of women merely as a matter of sex distinction, obliterates the class distinction of women, and [severs] the ties between the emancipation of women and the integral cause of the proletariat.” This feminism was indeed criticized and rejected, but not because it focused on women or patriarchy. This was done because it focused on an idealist and metaphysical abstraction, the category of “women,” and because its aims and goals were separated from and much lower than the revolutionary communist goals of transforming the 4 Alls. It was criticized most fundamentally because it could not liberate women as successfully as revolutionary communism.

The aim of this chapter is not to suggest that there are not essential and important criticisms to be made of the historical experience of women’s liberation in maoist China. Indeed there are, and the best maoists have taken them seriously (though there is a strong tendency to reject them merely on the basis of having come from those seen as middle class liberals). Rather, it is merely to demonstrate that existing feminist critiques fail to support the argument that maoism as it existed in China represents a dead end for the

cause of women's liberation. The best of these feminist critiques are useful and important in highlighting limitations and blindspots in the Chinese experience of socialism and women's liberation. However, they certainly add up to less than the persuasive rejection of maoism that they present themselves as. All of the authors are correct in that, as Wolf puts it (261), beyond a doubt that socialism and patriarchy can exist in "stable harmony" – if what one means by socialism is revisionism. But none of the authors present evidence or a substantial argument that the same is true of patriarchy and maoism.

To a considerable degree the incompleteness of women's liberation under Mao is explained well in his terms; certainly the change in women's status since Deng is. I feel the evidence is overwhelming that there was real liberation of women in revolutionary China, and that this has been reversed to a significant degree. The available evidence and analysis, including by some of the vociferous critics of Mao and revolutionary China, shows that tremendous changes took place. Basic rights were established (not through fiat, but through mass struggle), inequalities were reduced, sexual divisions of labor were transformed, sexist attitudes were systematically challenged, women were encouraged to become active leaders, and so on. Given the extent to which gender relations in mid-century China were marked with brutality and subjugation, the extent to which it was all supported by virtually all social institutions and reinforced by a deeply entrenched ideology, the changes that the revolution brought are impressive. Yet, there were still considerable transformations which needed to be made: there were systematic inequalities and chauvinist attitudes were stubbornly held onto, even amongst much of the leadership of the CCP. It would be quite idealist to think that the CCP could have

ended millennia of patriarchy in such a short time, but what was accomplished was both real and substantial, and laid the basis for further transformation. This concrete practice gives that much more what to the underlying theoretical basis.

Thus, revolutionary communism represents a foundation to be built upon, as opposed to a dead end, in the pursuit of women's liberation, particularly when fully connected with its theoretical foundations. Similarly, maoist theory does a better job of explaining the twists and turns of women's liberation in China than do any of the writings examined here. This means that the post-critical feminist writings, for all their value in other regards, rest, at least in part, upon a faulty foundation. Together, these authors have helped to create the widespread impression among feminists that there is little, if anything, to learn from the experience of China. They have brought about the unwarranted rejection of verdict from the Laudatory period, a verdict which was essentially correct.

In conclusion, the most 'feminist' policy is not the one which corresponds best with some preconceived notion of 'feminism,' but the one which has the most positive impact on the position of women and which has the best foundation to continually and fundamentally transform, not in one place but everywhere, not only patriarchy but all the oppressive relationships with which it is intertwined. Maoism, despite its historic gender blindness, still stands as providing the best foundation for women's liberation which has been developed. What needs to be done is to build upon that foundation by learning from feminists, particularly those whose insights and critiques are compatible with MLM, the task to which I turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: POSTSTRUCTURALIST FEMINISM AND THE SUBJECT

I understood myself to be in an embattled and oppositional relation to certain forms of feminism, even as I understood the text to be part of feminism itself. I was writing in the tradition of immanent critique that seeks to provoke critical examination of the basic vocabulary of the movement of thought to which it belongs. There was and remains warrant for such a mode of criticism and to distinguish between self-criticism that promises a more democratic and inclusive life for the movement and criticism that seeks to undermine it altogether (Butler (1999, vii).

In this chapter, I discuss how poststructuralists have critiqued essentialism and deconstructed the categories and foundations of feminism. I do this in part by focusing on the question of subjectivity. I endeavor to show that revolutionary communism and poststructuralism conceive of the subject in ways which are quite similar despite their different terminology and analytical concepts. I focus on Judith Butler's works as a way of bringing forward poststructuralist feminism and setting the stage for the final chapter.

Revolutionary communism has developed both as part of a particular tradition and in response to what experience had demonstrated were the limitations of that tradition. This is due not simply to a normative position which privileges self-critique. Rather, it flows from the very nature of dialectics. Self-reflective critique is immanent in dialectics. It is not merely a question of a certain periodicity, as might be gathered from the common and inaccurate simplification of thesis–antithesis–synthesis. That is, the critique does not arise at particular points in a process but exists continuously, though to be sure critique is not constant or even but instead manifests in waves and ruptures, including sharp ruptures. This is all the more the case if a dialectical methodology is connected with an ontology in which ruptures and transformation (critique) are also immanent.

The immanent critique of maoist materialist dialectics provides an essential foundation for a critical theory.¹⁸¹ If MLM is to be gendered, it must be on that basis, and no other. Even if not explicitly dialectical, a feminism that is integrated in a transformative way into MLM must also contain an immanent critique in order to be consonant with it. Note that this is not the same as saying that revolutionary communists can only learn from those who share a fundamental outlook or methodology. To paraphrase Mao, MLM embraces but not replace the many fields of study. And Avakian has stressed that even those who are not only non-dialectical but who are explicitly reactionary can put forward important truths which can aid in the overall process of revolutionizing society. But providing truths and insights, however important, is something different than enriching and transforming MLM itself, that is, advancing it even further as the overall theory and methodology for guiding the revolutionary transformation of the world.

Outline of Poststructuralist Feminism

Feminism has developed in a contradictory fashion and has never been a monolithic phenomenon. It has encompassed and incorporated diverse positions, methodologies and outlooks, particularly in recent years, to the extent that it is now common to refer to

181. Calhoun (1995) puts forth four defining characteristics of a critical theory, which she argues are defining characteristics of feminist theory as well:

- “a critical engagement with the theorist’s contemporary social world, recognizing that the existing state of affairs does not exhaust all possibilities, and offering positive implications for social action.
- a critical account of the historical and cultural conditions on which the theorist’s own activity depends.
- a continuous critical re-examination of the constitutive categories and conceptual frameworks of the theorist’s understanding, including the historical construction of those frameworks
- a critical confrontation with other works of social explanation that not only establishes their good and bad points, but shows the reasons behind their blind spots and misunderstandings and demonstrates the capacity to incorporate their insights on stronger foundations.”

“feminisms.” The current plethora of feminisms have their origins in the criticisms by poor and working-class women, women of color and the global South, and lesbians of feminism. bell hooks, for example, felt that the early "feminist emphasis on common oppression in the United States was less a strategy for politicization than an appropriation by conservative and liberal women of a radical political vocabulary that masked the extent to which they shaped the movement so that it addressed and promoted their class interests" (1984, 4-5). More and more, feminism was seen to have reproduced a marginalizing discourse which created universalisms which were based upon the experience of white, western, heterosexual middle class women. In seeking to valorize the feminine "Other," they had constructed an "Other" which also had as its basis its own excluded "Others." Feminism, as Susan Bordo (1992, 135) put it, “turned to its own narratives, finding them reductionist, totalizing, inadequately nuanced, valorizing of gender difference, unconsciously racist, and elitist.” This forced a critical re-examination, an internal critique of feminism.

As a result, many feminists turned to poststructuralist theories as a way of addressing the limitations of existing feminism without simultaneously abandoning its political commitment.¹⁸² For example, Nicholson argued that “feminism and postmodernism, while wary of one another, are actually concerned with a "common nexus of problems" (1990, 19), and could work well together. poststructuralism revealed the essentialism of

182. The following discussion draws upon the following texts, which should be consulted for a fuller presentation: Agger (1993) Assiter (1996), Benhabib, et al (1995), Bordo (1992), Diamond and Quinby (1988), Feder, et al (1997), Ferguson (1993), Flax (1987), Fuss (1989), Grewal and Kaplan (1994), Hekman (1990), hooks (1983), John, (1996), Marchand and Parpart (1994), Marshall (1997), McNay (1993), Nicholson (1990), Ramazanoglu (1993), Sawicki (1991), Weedon (1987), and Yeatman (1994). This is not meant to be taken as an inclusive or representative list of poststructuralist feminism.

feminism while the latter help alleviate the androcentrism and political naivete that the former can produce. As one author puts it, "One of the strengths of poststructuralist approaches is that they enable us to attend to the practical implications of particular ways of theorizing women's oppression and to recognize that feminist politics are crucial in determining which existing theories might be useful in the fight for change" (Weeden 6). Third Wave feminists aimed to create a different conception of feminist theory, which rejected the false extrapolations inherent in metanarratives.¹⁸³ These were seen to hamper rather than promote the goals of feminism as they elide differences among women and among the forms of patriarchy to which women are subject. Poststructuralism reinforced feminism's skepticism about "linear, teleological, hierarchical, holistic, or binary ways of thinking and being" and how these have conditioned conceptions of the self, gender, knowledge, social relations, and culture" (Flax 1987, 622). They argued that attempting to create A feminist theory would create more problems than it would solve and argued for an approach to feminism which "would look more like a tapestry composed of threads of many different hues than one women in a single color" (Nicholson 1990, 35).

They also drew upon the ontological insights of poststructuralism outlined in Chapter 2. Thus, the fundamental categories of feminism, "women," patriarchy," "gender," etc., were problematized. It is worth noting that poststructuralist feminists have not generally focused their critique on marxists, however conceived. Rather, they developed their ideas as an internal critique of feminism, often particularly responding to the radical feminist view of "women" as united by biology, experience and political interests. They argued that assuming universal female experiences and interests had buried and perpetuated

183. See Lyotard (1984) for the critique of metanarratives and grand theory.

other forms of power based on 'race', class, sexuality and disability. "Although academic postmodernism has contributed to a destabilization of overly dichotomous and generalizing conceptions of gender, an equally (if not more) important impetus has been the political failure of such understandings of gender to illuminate the complex material realities of sexuality, race, and class as they are constitutive of gender categories" (Marshall 2000, 13).

Though there are many aspects of poststructuralist thought which feminists have incorporated into their theoretical work, the one I am most concerned with is the sustained critique of foundationalist thought and essentialism. Essentialism means the assumption of the existence of certain inherent or "natural" facts, rather than socially construed ones, that there is an unchanging substance or essence that constitutes the true identity of people and things upon which social theory is or should be based. Essentialism thus involves the reification of social categories. In feminism, this has been reflected in the treatment of "women," or "sex," as a self-explanatory category, often defined by biology. When applied to gender, essentialism is the belief that, because biological differences exist between women and men, women and men are "naturally" different in terms of character and personality as well. In this view, a woman is somehow truly, deep in her core, identifiable as a woman; being a woman is not simply the result of different attributes and behaviors. Essentialism is also linked with the problem of false universalisms, in which over-generalizations or unstated reference points implicitly attribute to all members of a group the characteristics of a dominant subset of that group.

Essentialist views of gender have long been used to naturalize a patriarchal status quo,

that is, for anti-feminist ends. Sayer (2004) notes that the term "essentialism" has many different, sometime contradictory meanings, so that "anti-essentialism" has a number of different targets. He suggests that there are two main concerns driving the critiques of essentialism. First is the fear of epistemological dogmatism, meaning claims to absolute truth or of inherently privileged access to the world. Second is the fear of "an ontological assumption of determinism, according to which, what objects, including people, actually do, is completely determined by their nature."

Though many feminists have argued against turning towards poststructuralism, feminism has a number of points of contact with poststructuralist approaches. They both contain a radical critique of the fundamental assumptions and epistemological foundations of modernity and the Enlightenment tradition. Both argue for a fundamental rethinking of knowledge acquisition and knowledge claims, though feminism has an ambiguous relationship with modernity since it is historically and theoretically associated with modernity. The principle contribution that feminism makes to a poststructuralist analysis is to reveal the gendered nature of the hierarchical dichotomies existing throughout the positivist/Enlightenment tradition. The binary opposition which poststructuralists criticize corresponds with the dichotomy of masculine/feminine, which is then mapped upon male/female – and "if all the feminisms have anything in common it is a challenge to the masculine/feminine dichotomy as it is defined in Western thought" (Hekman 1990, 2). These gender hierarchies are part of an androcentric epistemology and metaphysics which consistently denigrate the feminine. This in turn helps to explain/reproduce the position of women as an excluded/oppressed other in a patriarchal society. As Judith Halberstam (1991, 439) suggests: "In our society, discourses are gendered, and the split

between mind and body ... is a binary that identifies men with thought, intellect, and reason, and women with body, emotion, and intuition."

The gender polarization clearly separates men and women, describes the appropriate identities and ways of knowing and being for each, makes sex difference *the* important dividing line in society, and strongly punishes those who deviate. These asymmetrical dichotomies rest upon and are reinforced by (often unexamined) masculinist ideologies, particularly biological essentialism, which states that differences between men and women rest upon basic and unchanging natural/genetic characteristics, as opposed to being socially determined and therefore mutable. These gendered dichotomies (Object/Subject, Fact/Value, Culture/Nature, Rational/Emotional, etc) exist throughout every area of social life.

Some feminists, particularly those who identify themselves as radical or cultural feminists, have raised concerns about (or outright rejected poststructuralism, particularly with regards to the deconstruction of women's agency.¹⁸⁴ They feel that the point of feminism is to denaturalize and transform the existing order, and question whether poststructuralism can offer a satisfactory political program or whether the risk of relativism or loss of coherent political agency is too great. But what poststructuralism

184. See Bell and Klein (1997) for examples. Some attack or reject poststructuralist feminism for reasons similar to Chomsky's dismissal of dialectics. As Peterson (1992) notes, poststructuralist feminist approaches can be difficult to grasp, because they require fundamental transformations in how we understand reality – with the result that they are often dismissed as incoherent or (perhaps intentionally) obscurantist and relevant/understandable only to intellectuals. Even if such a generalization were to be true, and obviously I feel it is not, the accusation itself is typically the means by which an epistemological excuse is created for the accuser. That is, once the accusation is made, they feel absolved of any responsibility of trying to understand and learn from what they are critiquing.

offers feminism is an understanding of how a culture of marginalization is reproduced in many centers and in many ways, while there are also many differing identities and centers of resistance. The recognition of a multiplicity of voices, identities and truths and the corresponding wariness of universalizations based on a specific, limited (and usually privileged) identity/voice/truth helps to keep feminism from reproducing the very things that it is critiquing. Poststructuralism thus constantly undermines the emergence of a new totalizing orthodoxy (essential female nature, feminine epistemology, etc.) by denying the need for, and possibility of, an ahistorical framework in which to ground claims of knowledge/reality/truth. Poststructuralism "reveals the futility of the attempt to define an essential female nature or to replace the masculinist epistemology with a feminist epistemology" (Hekman 1990, 8).

Poststructuralist feminists argue that while a feminism rooted in modernity may be able to make certain strides in empowering and addressing the position of women, it will ultimately perpetuate an epistemology which devalues women. Poststructuralism feminists take further the idea that the personal is political, that everyone in society is embedded in the structures and power relationships of various kinds which exist in society. This greatly conditions what (and how) people think and do, including the making of knowledge claims. Societal context (a context created by power relations) conditions all aspects of the pursuit of knowledge (problems addressed, resources used, methods used, emotional [& professional] commitment, etc.). No inquiry is, or could be, value free, or somehow extracted/abstracted from this matrix of power relations. As a result, knowledge can not be separated from power, which means that there are power relations enmeshed in knowledge claims. Theories and knowledge claims are always for

somebody and for some purpose, and what is claimed to be reality (or the most appropriate theory, avenue of research, methodology, etc.) is often what those in power say it is. This is the case even if those making the knowledge claim have no conscious intention of making knowledge claims on behalf of those with power. Poststructuralist feminists thus began to critically examine the assumption that existing epistemologies and methodologies were appropriate for feminist research. Among others, Harding (1986, 1998) argued that epistemologies guided by assumptions of objectivity and the dualisms inherent in western thought would, even if used by feminists, systematically exclude women as "knowers" or agents of knowledge.¹⁸⁵

Troubling Gender

Since the publication of *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler has greatly influenced the development of feminist and queer theory, as well as literary work in the humanities. Her work is very much a critique of identity politics and foundationalist assumptions, and thus the resulting complication involved in constructing political strategies. She argues, though, that her work is not about getting rid of foundations, but about reinvigorating them and asking what they could mean.

Though there are certainly differences between her work and MLM, she often attempts to negotiate similar tightropes that MLM does, and often in similar ways. This is perhaps a reflection of her early work on Hegel and her continued use, if not always explicit, of hegelian dialectics. Throughout her work, there is an implicit dialectical foundation. For example, in *Undoing Gender* she comments (1999, 100), "not only does one need the

185. Feminist literature on epistemology is huge and varied, so I make no attempt here to summarize it.

social world to be a certain way in order to lay claim to what is one's own, but it turns out that what is one's own is always from the start dependent upon what is not one's own, the social conditions by which autonomy is, strangely, dispossessed and undone."

The preface to the 1999 edition of *Gender Trouble* provided another example of this. Butler states that 'universality' has 'important strategic use precisely as a non-substantial and open-ended category.' In other words, she does not simply replace 'universality' with 'not universality,' but rather connects them in a complex and remarkably dialectical way. Compare this with Avakian's discussion of absolute/relative knowledge. In the context of discussing a dialectical epistemology and the constant transformation of a complex and contradictory reality, he states (2005b, 86):

This is not to argue that 'everything is relative,' and that it is impossible to really arrive at an understanding of objective truth. No, things can be known, and some things can be determined with absolute certainty - relatively. In other words, as Lenin emphasized in his philosophical writings, there is an element of the relative in the absolute (and vice versa), but that is different than saying there is only relative and not absolute knowledge of things – and that difference, as Lenin pointed out, represents a fundamental dividing line between Marxists and relativists, who deny any possibility, or any aspect, of absolute truth, and therefore ultimately, and at least objectively, deny the possibility of knowing anything with any degree of certainty.

In both cases, there is the rejection of a metaphysical, either/or dichotomy, though without replacing it with a liberal relativism. Though, as I argue below, Butler is insufficiently materialist, she uses an ontology similar to that of dialectics, which provides her work with a foundation similar to MLM.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler presented her theory of gender performativity while critically

deconstructing existing feminist notions of gender and sex. She radically de-essentialized gender, arguing that it is not a signification of an interior essence but an effect of specific power structures, a stylized repetition of acts that are always negotiated within collective social contexts. In the subsequent *Bodies That Matter*, she took the critique of foundationalist categories even further, saying that sex and the body are not blank slates upon which gender is performed, but are themselves produced and reproduced through the same power structures that produce gender.

Gender Trouble challenged the radical distinction between sex and gender (nature and culture), which was foundational to feminist theory and praxis in the 1970s and 80s. This distinction viewed sex (and nature) as the unconstructed, the passive surface upon which the social was constructed. Butler instead argued (1993, 5) that sex is always already gendered, that “‘sex’ is itself troubled terrain.” “Sex” is the rubric under which reproductive functions, desire, pleasure, etc. become unified in a way that naturalizes heterosexuality. Sex and the body, both of which appear as natural facts, in fact have a social (and not simply natural) history. Butler also introduces the notion of gender as “performative reiteration”, that is, as the subject’s constant attempt to embody hegemonic norms. She argued that there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; identity is constituted by and through the very “expressions” that are said to be its results. Gender is thus a question of doing and its effects as opposed to an inherent or intrinsic attribute.

Thus, to Butler, gender is not a thing, an attribute or a relation between men and women but a performance, one which is never stable or absolute, but which is contradictorily

made both powerful and tenuous through its constant repetition. The reification produced by reiteration naturalizes the performance and both reflects and reproduces the self/other hierarchical dualism permeating discourse. Butler wants to unravel this reification of gender, this attribution of 'thinghood' to a performativity, in short, to take seriously the assertion that gender is a social construct. Additionally, she wants to go further than just exposing it as a socially construction based on the relation between men and women, as feminists before her tended to do. For to do that is to rest gender upon the heterosexual imperative, the assumption that (heterosexual) sex is the foundation upon which gender is built. She draws upon Michel Foucault's argument that sex and the body are constructed through power relations.

In *Undoing Gender* Butler defines gender as a "practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint," one that is always within a social context, and never outside of ideology (2004b, 1). One does not author one's gender, for its terms are always negotiated within collective social contexts. She argues that (2004b, 3), "If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility."

For Butler, gender and desire are not rooted in any stability – they are free-floating in the sense that they are not eternally connected with a metaphysical essence. Not only is gender neither a reflection of an essential self or a social construction arising from some stable foundation; there is no essential self, no stable foundation to be reflected or constructed upon. For Butler, gender is not just a social category that greatly conditions

human relations. It is not just an analytical category that transcends relations between men and women to constituting every area of human existence. Gender is a process of categorization, one which is constructed as it constructs. Gender is not just an attribute of a resulting subject, and is not just an aspect of the process of subject formation. It is part of the modalities of power, of the repetition of norms that create the possibility of subject formation.

But as she argues (1993, xi):

“It is not enough to argue that there is no prediscursive ‘sex’ that acts as the stable point of reference on which, or in relation to which, the cultural construction of gender proceeds. To claim that sex is already gendered, already constructed, is not yet to explain in which way the ‘materiality’ of sex is forcibly produced. What are the constraints by which bodies are materialized as ‘sexed,’ and how are we to understand the ‘matter’ of sex, and of bodies more generally, as the repeated and violent circumscription of cultural intelligibility.”

Butler continues (1993, 1):

“The category of ‘sex’ is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault has called a ‘regulatory ideal.’ In this sense, then, ‘sex’ not only functions as a norm, but is part of regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce - demarcate, circulate, differentiate - the bodies it controls. Thus, ‘sex’ is a regulatory ideal whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices. In other words, ‘sex’ is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize ‘sex’ and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms.”

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler attempts to link the question of the materiality of the body to the performativity of gender. She makes the claim (1993, x) that “the materiality of sex

is constructed through a ritualized repetition of norms.” Materiality is an effect of power, and is in fact (1993, 2) “power’s most productive effect.” As she notes, this is hardly a self-evident claim, but it is a logical continuation of the argument from *Gender Trouble*.

The process in which bodies are rendered thinkable and livable also renders other unthinkable, unlivable – in Butler’s terms, abject bodies that are subjected to violent reconfiguration and normalization. However, these in turn subvert the existence of the normalized sexed subject. Butler goes on to say (1993, 2), in language reminiscent of Marx’s argument that capitalism creates its own gravediggers: “this disavowed abjection will threaten to expose the self grounding presumptions of the sexed subject, grounded as that subject is a repudiation whose consequences it cannot fully control. The task will be to consider this threat and disruption not as a permanent contestation of social norms condemned to the pathos of perpetual failure, but rather as a critical resource in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility.” This leads to her argument that sex and the body, both of which appear as natural facts, in fact have a social (and not simply natural) history.

Butler resists the urge to impose norms of desire and gender upon others in a movement that emerged precisely to resist the policing of 'deviant desires'. This is why she reclaims drag as feminist and democratic subversion of gender, in opposition to those who argued that drag and camp belittle women and thus reproduce a male supremacist outlook (see the next chapter). Drag, in effect, makes visible what is performed all the time – gender performances are parodies from the outset. Though the tendency to see them as natural runs deep, masculinity and femininity are fake, whatever the sex of the person who is

acting masculine or feminine, because types of behavior do not naturally belong to either sex. We are always 'doing' gender, one way or another.

In her most recent work, Butler is concerned with how to "undo" gender. Butler focuses on drag because it disrupts the superficial coherence of sex, gender, and sexuality/desire (in which sex produces gender which in turn produces desire), revealing that they can never be coherent. Butler argues that although we think that acting in a way defined as masculine or feminine expresses a person's inner-sexed-essence, gender exists only in the performance of it. The act creates the illusion of a person behaving in accordance with their true nature; the behavior itself constructs the fiction of a true nature.

This has resulted in not just a renewed focus on gender, but a reformulating of gender, and not just with Butler but among feminists more broadly. Ingraham (1994) warned against simply treating gender as "an established concept in a discipline which need only take it more seriously as a central category of analysis." Since such notions as "female" and "women" are not stable, but troubled and unfixd there is the need to more fully and radically focus and de-center gender and the relational analysis it suggests. As Butler (1999, xxix) puts it:

"it is no longer clear that feminist theory ought to try to settle the questions of primary identity in order to get on with the task of politics. Instead, we ought to ask, what political possibilities are the consequence of a radical critique of the categories of identity. What new shape of politics emerges when identity as a common ground no longer constrains the discourse on feminist politics? And to what extent does the effort to locate a common identity as the foundation for a feminist politics preclude a radical inquiry into the political construction and regulation of identity itself?"

As Rosemary Hennessy comments (2000, 52), “claiming a queer identity is an effort to speak from and to the differences that have been suppressed both by heteronorms and the homo-hetero binary: the transsexual, bisexual, and any other ways of 'experiencing' and expressing sensuality and affect that do not conform to the prevailing organisation of sexuality.”

Butler questions the distinction between sex and gender that permeates feminist discourse. "Does being female constitute a 'natural fact' or a cultural performance, or is 'naturalness' constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex?" (1990, x). She argues that once the binary of man/woman is cut, "cultural configurations of sex and gender might then proliferate" (1990, 149). Thus, the possibility of questioning the binary of man/woman, of doing away with two sexes allows for the possibility of more options.

Not all feminists welcome this destabilizing approach to gender. “Deconstruct gender, they fear, and we’ve deconstructed any political possibilities that feminism might have. After all, past experience has demonstrated time and again that, in either theory or politics, where gender has not been insisted upon as a category of analysis, gender-blindness is the result” (Marshall 2000, 67). Fine and Gordon suggest (1991, 24) that we should, "understand gender as a relational concept full of power and possibilities;.... we need to disrupt prevailing notions of what is inevitable, what is natural, and what is impossible. We need, therefore, to invent and publish images of what is not now, and what could be." Marshall (2000, 46) continues:

“the debates about gender within feminism have raised questions about both the ways

in which gender is used and the very distinction between sex and gender upon which the concept is based. The questions raised are not simple questions of the truth or falsity about the sex/gender distinction, or the 'real' meaning of 'gender,' which can be answered through the accumulation and evaluation of 'evidence.' Rather, they are questions about its continuing utility, and the implications of how we conceptualize 'gender' for advancing the various political interests of feminism. The political efficacy of gender-analysis for advancing the interests of women, then, must be seen as one of the backdrops to these debates. They are also animated by feminist encounters with a set of academic and theoretical debates about postmodernism and poststructuralism."

Many are concerned that the linguistic turn in most of poststructuralist work gives up too much, that the shift "from things to words" (Barrett, 1992) opens the door to a complete descent into discourse and thus leaves the material reality of women's oppression untouched. Benhabib, for example, is worried that the poststructuralist dissolution of the subject "may eliminate not only the specificity of feminist theory but place in question the very emancipatory ideals of the women's movement altogether" (Benhabib 1995a, 20). She sees debilitating implications for feminism because the autonomous, self-directing subject is replaced with a fractured, opaque self (1992, 16). In a patriarchal context in which women's sense of self and ability to control their lives is already fragile, Benhabib feels that this fractured conception of agency will only give women a more fragmented and fragile vision of themselves (1992, 16). She specifically critiques Butler's theory of performativity, saying that it cannot give us "a sufficiently thick and rich account of gender formation that would also explain the capacities of human agents for self-determination" (1995b, 110). Benhabib argues that it relies upon a deterministic view of individuation and socialization and cannot "do justice to the complexities of the ontogenetic origins of gender in the human person" (Benhabib et al. 1995, 108). Her

conclusion is that, as a political project, female emancipation is unthinkable without recourse to a regulative principle on agency, autonomy, and selfhood (1995, 21).

Considering Agency/The Subject

In this section I address the question of agency or the subject, as a way of demonstrating the commonalities and tensions between PS/M feminism and revolutionary communism.

How are human beings conceived as subjects? On what basis do they exist, act and know? How do they (or can they) become political subjects that act to transform their circumstances and themselves? Such ontological considerations are not usually explicitly addressed in political science literature, a fact which might lead some to the conclusion that such investigations are not relevant to the understanding of political realities.

However, it is clear that some conception of subjectivity is inherent in any work dealing with politics. Rational choice scholars, for example, build their models upon a cartesian subject whose identifying characteristic is instrumental rationality. Simply put, there can be no theorization of politics without a corresponding conception of a subject. To the extent that the conception of the subject is made explicit rather than merely assumed, political theory has a stronger foundation. Thus it is a particularly important topic to investigate in determining how different traditions can be brought together.

What I attempt to show is that, despite their different philosophical foundations and terminology, feminist poststructuralist and revolutionary communist understandings of the subject end up in similar territory, where the distinctions rest upon nuances rather than substantive dissimilarities. Specifically, they share a similar ontological basis.

Importantly though, it is possible that one could carry out the same project and conclude

the opposite, that the two traditions are sharply at odds in their approaches to subjectivity, as well as many other areas. The point here is that there is no singular poststructuralist feminist or revolutionary communist conception of subjectivity - it depends on how you conceptualize these paradigms. Obviously, in this dissertation I am arguing that particular conceptualizations are more accurate and/or productive.

To demonstrate this, I present a possible conception of the subject as considered by the poststructuralist and the historical materialist, focusing on the works of Marx and Foucault. What I present is simplified and exaggerated to the point of caricature, and I am not arguing that my summaries accurately reflect the depth and nuances of those authors' works. Often, such an approach is used as a tactic to create a strawman which can be easily destroyed. However, my intent is not to do that but to bring into sharper focus the (potential) contrast between the two.

Michel Foucault is the primary figure in poststructuralism, particularly with regards to the question of the subject. Foucault drew upon an anti-Enlightenment tradition that rejects the equation of reason, emancipation, and progress, arguing that an interface between modern forms of power and knowledge has served to create new forms of domination. An important part of his focus was the effect of these new forms of domination on the subject (1983, 208-209): “[T]he goal of my work during the last twenty years ... has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects.” In *The Order of Things* (1972, 55), Foucault argues that the conception of man as a “thinking, knowing, speaking subject” is a particular “enunciative modality,” which seems given and natural but in fact is a contingent sociohistorical construct of

power and domination. In its most extreme form, poststructuralism argues that the question of the relation between subject and object, between consciousness and reality, is an irrelevant point. There is no subject that signifies, there is no object which is signified, there is only the practice of signifying.

This is essentially the position Foucault takes in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972). Arguing for a post-Saussurian analysis of discourse, he argues that the subject is dispersed into the totality of discourse. Whereas structuralists like Saussure view language as the medium through which reality is created, poststructuralists see the total dependence of reality and meaning upon language as problematic. Since we cannot control language and since, in the structuralist view, all meaning is derived through the system of language, the universe consequently becomes uncertain and de-centered due to the absence of fixed standards against which to measure anything. Given the philosophical origins of poststructuralism there is a great dubiousness toward an Aristotelian epistemology that believes in the discovery of reliable/concrete truths through the use of the scientific method, system, and reason. In other words, the existence (or not) of reality is besides the point. What is relevant is discourse, and in discourse the subject is not the center. Discourse refers to a complex relationship between power and knowledge and a radical reading of subjectivity in the sense that through discourses individuals become "subjects." Discourse for Foucault (1972: 33), is "the interplay of the rules that make possible the appearance of objects during a given period of time". Thus discourse involves more than just texts and includes a whole range of representational practices through which knowledge is generated, communicated and transformed. In *The Order of Things* (1994), Foucault argues that 'man' is a recent invention and that it, like

God, will soon pass from the scene. That is, the conception of man as a “thinking, knowing, speaking subject” (1972, 55) is a particular “enunciative modality,” which seems given and natural but in fact is a contingent sociohistorical construct of power and domination. In a nutshell, there are only the passing concretizations arising out of power/knowledge, transitory figures drawn in the sand, continually washed away, continually re-drawn afresh. In this reading of poststructuralism, there is no transformative subject.¹⁸⁶

Marx did not directly address the question of the subject to the extent that Foucault did. This is particularly true in his later works, such as *Capital* (1967) which focus on the analysis of the laws of capitalism and the structures and relations of the economy. Indeed, these works have been identified as being of a substantially different character than his early, more hegelian writings by such scholars as Marcuse (1964) and Althusser (1976). Very different marxist conceptions of subjectivity have been developed by various theorists (such as Marcuse or Althusser) depending on which works they choose to focus.

These changes in nuances notwithstanding, it is easy enough to come up with one simplistic marxist representation of the subject, one associated most particularly with Second International, Althusserian and other non-dialectical traditions. In the 1859

186. Interpretations and uses of Foucault, of course, vary widely. Condor (1991) says, for example, "Foucault argues, our experience of 'having' needs, desires, selves and erotic orientations, our experiences of love and fear are themselves constructed through relations of power ... The construction of 'self', and attempts to analyse and manipulate 'self', are not a path to 'liberation', but a central feature of the form of social regulation which he terms 'discipline'. Thru potent discourses we construct our selves, our desires, our erotic orientations and our possibilities. It is precisely this interpretation of Foucault which Butler seems to arguing against in *Bodies that Matter*, as it assumed that there is a pre-discursive self which “constructs,” or as Butler (1993, x) prefers it, “performs;” “a willful and instrumental subject, one who decides on its gender, is clearly not its gender from the start and fails to realize that its existence is already decided by gender. Certainly, such a theory would restore a figure of a choosing subject - humanist - at the center of a project whose emphasis on construction seems to be quite opposed to such a notion.”

Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (MECW 16: 466), Marx states, "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness." Essentially an elaboration of Feuerbach's materialist critique of religion, what this means is that it is the material conditions in which human beings exist which determines their specific subjectivity. For Marx, this meant in particular the social relations corresponding to the existing dominant mode of production. Subjectivity is thus a question of class consciousness, which exists to the extent that class conflict makes the irreconcilability of opposing classes evident. Though there have been others, the current historically transformative subject is the proletariat, whose historical mission of the eradication of all classes they, and they alone, are capable of.

So, in these readings, historical materialism and poststructuralism mark out particular conceptions of the subject. For the historical materialist, the subject is marked by material conditions, what I would call the determinist position. The subject is unproblematically made manifest and acts according to the relations of production in which it is immersed. The transformative subject is the proletariat. For the poststructuralist, the subject is dispersed into discourse and its power relations. The subject, lacking any foundational basis, is problematized into non-existence, what I would call the liquidationist position. The transformative subject does not exist. Though obviously different in how they approach and define agency, these readings end up sharing a conception of the subject as an effect, either of the social relations of production or the matrices of power/discourse.

Feminists have for some time been looking to Foucault, despite his silence on the subject

of women. What they find useful in Foucault is his reconceptualization of power, his focus on the body and his critique of modernity and Enlightenment discourses. Feminists have particularly found him useful in addressing the limitations of a feminism that rests upon totalizing universals which obscure the differences between women and marginalized lesbians, women of color and working class women (Sawicki 1991). bell hooks (1989, 110) urged feminists to "challenge the notion of identity as static and unchanging and examine how we are gendered critically and analytically from various standpoints."

However, feminists also have important questions about poststructuralism, most specifically relating to the fact that feminism is an explicitly political project. As McNay (1993, 3) puts it, the problem with Foucault is that his thinking

results in a reduction of social agents to passive bodies and does not explain how individuals may act in an autonomous fashion. This lack of a rounded theory of subjectivity or agency conflicts with a fundamental aim of the feminist project: to rediscover and re-evaluate the experiences of women.

As Carol Gilligan (1982) has said, "Life can't just be continually reconstructed ... There is a complex reality, yes, but there is something called reality, and there is something called a you." The major charges against postmodernism concern its "indifference" to the suppression of women's voices, and thus the self. The point of feminism is to politicize/denaturalize the existing order, specifically with regards to the gendered nature of the asymmetrical dichotomies of positivist/Enlightenment thinking. They question whether poststructuralism can offer a satisfactory political program or whether the risk of relativism is too great. Since feminism is explicitly political, it helps to rescue

poststructuralism from a tendency to reject/ignore political activity (Sawicki). Thus, while feminists have adopted much from Foucault, they have not been willing to give up the question of agency and the subject. Thus, they have conceptualized a poststructuralist feminist subject which is complex and transitory but which is still capable of transformative action.¹⁸⁷

One of the important aspects which is retained from Foucault is the stress on language.

As Derrida put it:

I have never said that the subject should be dispensed with. Only that it should be deconstructed. To deconstruct the subject does not mean to deny its existence. There are subjects, 'operations' or 'effects' (*effets*) of subjectivity. This is an incontrovertible fact. To acknowledge this does not mean, however, that the subject is what it says it is. The subject is not some meta-linguistic substance or identity, some pure cogito of self-presence; it is always inscribed in language. My work does not, therefore, destroy the subject; it simply tries to resituate it (Quoted in Kearney 1994, 125).

Elsewhere (1983), Derrida says that the subject is not some meta-linguistic substance or identity, some pure cogito of self-presence. As Butler summarizes it (1990, p. 143): "If identity is asserted through a process of signification, if identity is always already signified, and yet continues to signify as it circulates within various interlocking discourses, then the question of agency is not to be answered through recourse to an 'I' that preexists signification."

187. For example, Ferguson (1993, 154) refers to "mobile subjectivities" – which move "across and along axes of power (which are themselves in motion) without fully residing in them. [They] are relational, produced through shifting yet enduring encounters and connections, never fully captured by them. They are ambiguous: messy and multiple, unstable yet persevering. They are ironic, attentive to the manyness of things. They respect the local, tend toward the specific, but without eliminating the cosmopolitan. [They are] politically difficult in their refusal to stick consistently to one stable identity claim."

This has important implications for poststructuralist feminists as they seek to expose the ways in which women are discursively constructed. This is directed towards both the existing hegemonic discourse as well as those of feminism. Thus, poststructuralist feminists criticize such basic feminist assumptions as “the disastrous and oppressive fiction” of “women” as a category or the “totalizing” notion of patriarchy (Jones 158), arguing that these elide the contradictions and complexities in women’s experience. The poststructuralist rejection of metanarratives and the corresponding stress on the specific and the category of difference is seen as correcting the essentialist and totalizing aspects of contemporary feminism.

Jones (1993) argues that, rather than inviting a paralyzing ambivalence, poststructuralist feminism involves a ‘positive’ uncertainty through a focus on complexity and diversity in thinking about the subject, in her case, girls’ subjectivity. In their concern with subjectivity, they seek to understand how children are both ‘made subject’ by/within the social order and how they are agents/subjects within/against it: “People are seen not as passively shaped by active others, including ‘social structures’; rather they actively take up as their own the discourses through which they are shaped” (1993, 159). She goes on to say that

the point is that the social order within which femininity is discursively constructed (i.e. structured through the various meanings historically given to ‘girl’, for instance) is not seamlessly consistent; girls--within and between class and ethnic groups--cannot simply be seen as uniformly repressed. It is in the gaps opened by this unevenness that the possibilities for resistance and change can be developed.

Explicitly bringing in Foucault, McNay (1992) argues that his later work on the ethics

and practices of the self parallels efforts by feminists to reconstruct the subjectivity of women in terms other than that of passive victims of patriarchy. Just as the works of Marx are used by revolutionary communists to combat the determinist view of the subject, she points towards Foucault's late writings as representing a fundamental shift from the conception of individuals as "docile bodies in the grip of an inexorable disciplinary power," to one of "self-determining agents who are capable of challenging and resisting the structures of domination in modern society" (1992, 4).

Similar to Derrida, Davies (1997, 270) argues that the point of poststructuralism is not to destroy the humanist subject nor to create a new "anti-humanist subject," but rather to enable us to see the subject's fictionality, whilst recognizing how powerful fictions are in constituting what we take to be real. She sees agency as a conjunction of the traditional humanist subject and the "reflexive awareness of the constitutive power of language that becomes possible through poststructuralist theory." She explicitly argues (1997, 270) for a contradictory conception of the subject, since "[l]inear forms of logic are too constraining for those of us who wish to embrace the rich complexity of life lived through multiple and contradictory discourses."

Sawicki (1991) is a good example of an attempt to lay out a Foucauldian framework that is compatible with the emancipatory and radical politics of feminism. Using Foucault's rather undeveloped remarks on resistance in his later works (i.e., 1983), she argues for a radical, pluralist conception of the subject. She rejects the traditional and dominant view of pluralism which she argues depicts political power as dispersed and decentralized among competing interest groups which have a relative stable identity and contend on an

equal basis for political power. Instead, she proposes a relational and dynamic model of identity, one which is constantly in formation and which is imbedded in hierarchical power relations. In other words, she recognizes both plurality between and within subjects, while focusing on the power relations which intersect both. She also brings in the poststructuralist take on language, but focuses on Foucault's view that language is ambiguous and plurivocal. It is therefore a site of contestation, where women can adapt and adopt language for their own ends. She does this as an explicit response to theorists such as Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray who have argued that the univocally masculinist Western discourse leaves women with no way to speak. While Sawicki is wary of Foucault's tendency to efface the subject, a tendency which for him including self-effacement in denying his own author(ity), she finds in him a tension similar to feminism, in which praxis is continually caught between the recognition of victimization and appeals to a free subject.

Returning to Butler, she also critiques foundationalist notions of the subject, arguing that such theories fall prey to the metaphysics of substance, the idea that there is an essential core, origin, or substance to being. This leads people to read off a false 'essence' from appearance. A recurrent theme in Butler's work is the foucaultian notion that the autonomous subject is instituted through constraint. While others prefer a unified feminist identity for the purposes of political action, Butler instead celebrates (1993, 22) the "essential incompleteness" of the subject: as "an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure." Agency, like gender, is constructed through power and discourse, through the repetition of norms. Butler (1993, 185) locates agency "...within the

possibility of variation on that repetition.” She is clear that she is not arguing (1993, 182) that “...to be constituted by discourse is to be determined by discourse, where determination forecloses the possibility of agency.” Such a linguistic monism presumes that (1993, 7) “construction operates deterministically, making a mockery of human agency.” She adds (1993, 187) that “construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible.”

One reading of the poststructuralist framework, particularly as put forward by Butler in *Bodies That Matter*, suggests that intentional subjects exist only as imaginary side-effects of discourse. It is only language and practices that give us the impression that we are active agents in the world. There is no subject ‘acting’ gender. Butler insists (1990, 143) that, "There is no "I" who stands behind discourse..., the "I" only comes into being through being called, named, interpolated." As she summarizes it: "If identity is asserted through a process of signification, if identity is always already signified, and yet continues to signify as it circulates within various interlocking discourses, then the question of agency is not to be answered through recourse to an 'I' that preexists signification."

Instead, it is the gendered performances which create the appearances of coherent, gendered people. Butler argues, however, that gender performances always fail, continuing subverting themselves and producing incoherent subjects (1993, 7):

“To claim that the subject is itself produced in and as a gendered matrix of relations is not to do away with the subject, but only to ask after the conditions of its emergence and operation. The ‘activity’ of this gendering cannot, strictly speaking,

be a human act or expression, a willful appropriation, and it is certainly not a question of taking on a mask; it is the matrix through which all willing first becomes possible, its enabling cultural condition.”

Her critics have argued that Butler's foucaultian analysis of how power structures re-incorporate attempts at resistance leads to a convenient pessimism that all resistance is already hopelessly compromised, particularly when coupled with her deconstruction of agency.¹⁸⁸ First, I do not believe this is an accurate reading of Butler and the implications arising from her work. Second, Butler, like Foucault, is not just a theorist but an activist as well - she is clearly concerned about concrete action which makes a difference to people's lives. More, she has been willing to exceed the boundaries of 'safe' activism, for example, explicitly critiquing zionism and the widespread assumption that to raise criticisms of Israel is to engage in anti-semitism. Perhaps, if she were not politically active in such a way, this tension over the question of agency would not be there and her work would be one-sided and much less interesting. In other words, Butler's commitment to concrete and uncomfortable engagement works against both the charge of pessimism and any tendency towards a conception of agency which renders political transformation impossible.

This repetition of the dominant norms circulating in society comes before the emergence of the subject and is in fact what allows it to come into being. However, to be able to

188. Critics include feminists who largely share Butler's theoretical perspective. For example, Benhabib (1999, 339) felt that *Gender Trouble* put forward an "overly constructivist view of selfhood and agency that leaves little room for explaining the possibilities of creativity and resistance." She suggests a narrative model of subjectivity instead of Butler's performativity model, which she feels captures the surfeit of meaning, creativity and spontaneity of iterative performativity but also explains the mechanisms by which agency and subversion can occur.

remain intelligible within a symbolic order, the subject must reproduce, or as Butler would put it, perform the very norms that created its intelligibility in the first place. If, following Foucault, norms are understood to be regulatory ideals, and if the subject's existence as a subject is dependent on performing existing gender norms, then accommodation or identification with these norms actually compels bodies to behave, even exist, in ways that constantly strive to embody the fantasy of a coherent and "natural" gender core. Thus, the process of signification occurs through the constant performative reiteration of norms, and this reiteration actually materializes a set of effects on the body. Or, more precisely, the intelligible body is a materialization or sedimented effect of these discourses. Thus, when Butler writes of undoing gender, she is referring to performative resistance at the level of both ideology and the body.

Davies (1997, 274) sums up this view of the poststructuralist subject this way:

The subject of poststructuralism, unlike the humanist subject, then, is constantly in process; it only exists as process; it is revised and (re)presented through images, metaphors, storylines and other features of language, such as pronoun grammar; it is spoken and respoken, each speaking existing in a palimpsest with the others.

For the poststructuralist feminists, the subject is complex and contradictory; it is a verb in constant, transformative motion. It is also immersed in a complex and contradictory discourse. Within this discourse, the subject forms part of the overall complexity of human interaction. The subject does not act autonomously as a unitary entity, but in a manner which mutually constitutes both the subject and discourse. It is in this context that agency, the consciousness of human subjects, arises and transforms itself.

Revolutionary communism does not have a tradition of explicit theorizing about the subject at the same level as poststructuralist feminism. Instead, one must extract a conception of the subject from the theoretical and philosophical raw material in the writings of Mao and his predecessors. The earlier presentation of the ontological foundations of revolutionary communism provides a basis for an MLM conception of the subject. The subject is complex and contradictory; it is a verb in constant, transformative motion. However, it is also immersed in a complex and contradictory material reality. Within this reality, the subject forms part of the overall contradictions of human society. Thus, its contradictory relationship, whether to the forces or relations of production or to the associated ideas and values, ensures that it pushes the development of society forward. It does this through a complex relationship between existing ideas and relations as they unfold in their contradictoriness. The subject does not act autonomously as a unitary entity, but as a contradictory complexity in dialectical relation to material conditions and as a complex manifestation and reaction towards those conditions. It is in this context that agency, the consciousness of human subjects, arises and transforms the material conditions in which it exists. This particularity of consciousness is not something dissolved into the universality of flux.

Both the dialectical materialist and the poststructuralist subject, as outlined here, actually and perhaps somewhat counter-intuitively place a greater emphasis on and indeed valorize the question of consciousness and agency more so than the humanist subject, certainly more so than any form of determinist subjectivity. This is because both force the full-on recognition and wrangling with the contradictions of subjectivity by the subject, in an all-round way while (particularly for MLM) engaging in concrete struggle.

This involves considerably more than the praxis suggested by the humanist (and ultimately idealist and metaphysical) subject. In other words, it is one thing to assume a coherent, cartesian agency and on that basis critically engage the world and one's thinking. It is another to bring that critical examination to one's subjectivity. Indeed, the poststructuralist and dialectical materialist views of agency, criticized as fundamentally undermining human intervention in the world, actually present a subject which is more 'human' than the humanist subject. As Marx said, the closest thing to a 'human nature' is that human beings are conscious producers - how much more human to be conscious of all this, the construction of agency, than just assuming that which consciously interacts with the world?

The question which arises from the poststructuralist and MLM perspectives is how to proceed with a transformative and liberatory political project without a metaphysical ontological foundation. On one level the answer to this is the same answer Avakian provides to the question of morality from the perspective of atheism: can we be good without god? Avakian's response is that we have to, because there is no god. Similarly, we have to proceed with politics without a metaphysical ontological foundation because there is none, even in the question of agency (and as Foucault would say, even one's body). The recognition of this brings considerable complexity and the possibility of failure, but the non-recognition of this ensures failure. To locate the source of morality in a non-existent metaphysical being is to limit and distort morality. The attempt to construct a transformative and liberatory political project on a non-existent metaphysical foundation will inevitably limit and distort that project because that metaphysical foundation will necessarily reflect and reproduce the very status quo that is being

struggled against. Any ontological claim or assumption that is based on metaphysics will inevitably reflect and reproduce existing power relations, one way or another. It will work on behalf of those who benefit from existing power relations.

We see then that revolutionary communism and poststructuralist feminism arrive at a fairly similar theoretical location. Their conceptions of the subject correspond in many ways. Both argue against a metaphysical, ahistorical and autonomous unity, and for a complex, contradictory, socially situated process of subjectification. They argue, in different ways, that the subject is both self-constructed and constructed by external factors. But there remains a crucial difference. For the poststructuralist feminists, this complexity and contradictoriness is situated in discourse. The insight that there is no unmediated contact with reality forms the basis of a particular conception of the subject which is in the final analysis rooted in idealism, even as it attempts to transcend the distinction between materialism and idealism. For the revolutionary communists, complexity and contradictoriness is situated in material conditions. The Marxian insight that material reality exists prior to conception forms the basis of a particular conception of the subject which is thoroughly materialist and social. This difference has crucial importance for what each conception of the subject is capable of.

To grasp what these subtle differences mean, I turn to Bertolt Brecht's *Galileo* (1952). In it, there is an exchange between Galileo and his assistant, a monk. The latter urges Galileo to renounce his work, arguing that it will have unsettling effects on society:

[The peasantry] scrape a living, and underlying their poverty there is a sort of order. There are routines. The routine of scrubbing floors, the routine of the seasons in the olive orchard, the routine of paying taxes ... They draw the strength they need to

sweat with their loaded baskets, to bear children, even to eat from the little church and Bible texts they hear there on Sunday. They have been told that God relies upon them and they the pageant of the world has been written around them and they may be tested in the important or unimportant parts handed out to them. How could they take it, were I to tell them that they are on a lump of stone ceaselessly spinning in empty space, circling around a second-rate star? What, then, would be the use of their patience, their acceptance of misery? What comfort, then, the Holy Scriptures, which have mercifully explained their crucifixion? The Holy Scriptures would be proved full of mistakes. No, I see them begin to look frightened. I see them slowly put their spoons down on the table. They would feel cheated.

What is expressed in Brecht's piece is, among other things, the moment out of which arises the self-creation of subjectivity. It is this creation with which both revolutionary communism and poststructuralist feminism are concerned, for the disciplined subjectivity engendered by the status quo is one which reinforces the status quo. As such, it acts less as a subject and more like an object.

Though the revolutionary communist and poststructuralist feminist conceptions of the subject can be seen as having considerable congruity, there are still differences, and these have important implications. This becomes clear in those special times when identity, the self-consciousness of subjectivity, is paradoxically both most crystallized and concrete, and most transitory and open. Those moments come when structures and relationships are in fundamental crisis, when the material conditions no longer allow for the systemic reproduction of the status quo, its relations and associated subjectivities. In short, times when "revolution" becomes not just a topic for scholarly enquiry but a reality. To put it in different terms, times when the dominant aspect of the simplicity/complexity dialectic is the former – which is not to say that everything is *simply* simple.¹⁸⁹

189. As an example, Russia in the period leading up to the Bolshevik revolution was certainly a complex society. At the same time, there was an increasingly emerging simplicity, what Lenin called a

Subjectivity is most crystallized and concrete in such times because it is then that ideology becomes exposed, and much that is obscurantist and mystifying is swept away. The societal relationships in which one is embedded can come into clear focus. Therefore, so does the self-consciousness of subjectivity, because identity does not exist endogenously, as some inherent, ahistorical individuality, but only in relation to other human beings and material reality. The ontological question of what am I, meaning what am I in relation to what I see around me, becomes clear, and not just for an individual but for many who are similarly structurally situated (and not just those). Subjectivity is also most transitory and open because it is then that there is the greatest possibility for transcending and transforming the subjectivity that existing relations have worked to create. The relations, social structures, discourses and ideologies that stabilize subjectivity on behalf of those who have a vested interest in the status quo lose their ability to exercise power.

What the poststructuralist feminists do, and do very well, is show how such moments of crystallization in individuals, in various guises and various levels of intensity, are continuously emerging. Changing circumstances, experiences and thoughts can engender different conceptions of identity. A man who said "I am Timorese and this is my country" on the eve of the Indonesian invasion, may have the year before thought of himself as an inhabitant of the village of Ailieu, or as an object of derision from *assimilados*, or as the head of his household, or whatever. What I feel they can not do as well is explain how

revolutionary conjuncture, which the Bolsheviks addressed through the slogan "Land, Bread and Peace." Grasping this simplicity and the ways it was reflected in the consciousness and objective needs of millions of peasants and workers is an important reason why the Bolshevik revolution succeeded in bringing socialism to Russia.

such moments can arise largely simultaneously and in a similar, and even organized, fashion throughout society. And I argue that they also lack a way of analyzing society which allows for the anticipation, and even hastening, of such moments.

The most important reason for this is the insufficient attention they pay to material conditions, particularly their contradictory nature, their transformation through ruptures, and their relationship with other aspects of society. This in turn is a result of the fact that the foundations of poststructuralist feminism, and its understanding of the subject, lie in an analysis of discourse. One could argue that they can not pay real attention to material conditions, just as those mired in 19th century marxism can not pay attention to gender. Along with the poststructuralist rejection/wariness of meta-narratives and generalizations, this leaves them theoretically ill-equipped to analyze and anticipate fundamental crises, crises which can affect fairly uniform, if still contradictory and complex, crystallizations of subjectivity throughout a society. They can not see to the same degree that revolutionary communists can the systemic driving forces which, as Engels put it (MECW 26: 389), “set in motion great masses, whole peoples and again whole classes of people; and which create a lasting action resulting in great transformation.” By maintaining the marxist critical understanding of the contradictory unfolding of material conditions, revolutionary communism holds the key to an understanding of the subject which can transform not just the individual subject but the society in which it is immersed and which has produced it.

To state the difference in simple (and exaggerated) terms, feminist poststructuralists have a theory of everyday subjectivity, while revolutionary communists have a theory of

revolutionary subjectivity. This is not to argue that there is no value in the former. In fact, there is just the opposite, as the paths to human liberation are navigated in substantial part through innumerable tiny steps. poststructuralist-feminism provides for the understanding of those innumerable tiny steps, particularly in how they can have unintended and/or unfortunate consequences. But human liberation also takes place in great leaps taken collectively (however contradictorily), which both arise from the tiny steps and create tremendous space for many more.¹⁹⁰ poststructuralist-feminism can not understand, anticipate and adequately respond to such leaps, to those situations when quantity is transformed into quality, and matter into consciousness, on a mass scale. As such, it will inevitably work against the full flowering of something rare and precious: those moments when the expansion of self-conscious subjectivity is at its greatest; those moments, in William S. Burrough's (admittedly hyperbolic) words, "when everyone sees what is on the end of every spoon," (1959, xxxvii); those moments when, in a great mass, they slowly put their spoons down on the table.

Early in his work, Mao, feeling that the Comintern directives concerning the strategies for the Chinese revolution did not take into account the realities of people's lives, went into the countryside to learn from the peasantry. His report to the Central Committee¹⁹¹ remains one of the most prescient and powerful political documents of the twentieth century. He introduced his report (1965d) thus:

190. One can draw analogy between these two conceptions and the contrasting conceptions of biological evolution. The classic Darwinian model is based on gradual, step-by-step development. The model of punctuated evolution adds the idea of quick, fundamental changes that drastically transform a species. Similar to what I argue below, punctuated evolution encompasses, and is thus superior to, Darwinian evolution.

191. This report is the *Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan* discussed in the previous chapter.

[T]he present upsurge of the peasant movement is a colossal event. In a very short time, in China's central, southern and northern provinces, several hundred million peasants will rise like a mighty storm, like a hurricane, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to hold it back. They will smash all the trammels that bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation. They will sweep all the imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local tyrants and evil gentry into their graves. Every revolutionary party and every revolutionary comrade will be put to the test, to be accepted or rejected as they decide. There are three alternatives. To march at their head and lead them? To trail behind them, gesticulating and criticizing? Or to stand in their way and oppose them? Every Chinese is free to choose, but events will force you to make the choice quickly.

It is such rare and precious moments that poststructuralist feminism can not fully see, and thus not grasp. This is not just a question of attention to the contradictory unfolding of material conditions but the basic ontological reality which materialist dialectics sees. In this case, it is the unity of opposites of simplicity and complexity, that one is always in the other and the great simplicity that is revolution comes out of great complexity. And if one does not see this, on whatever basis, they will be like those whom Mao characterized as trailing behind, gesticulating and criticizing. poststructuralist feminists are wary of such periods.¹⁹² This has consequences for political action. I argue in the next chapter that in the case of Butler's consideration of the post-9/11 violent reconfiguration of the world, she falls into what is essentially a pluralism based on a reified conception of classless democracy.

192. This is in part due to the skepticism feminists have towards parsimonious explanations and theoretical models (Elshtain 1987: 90-1): "women and the sphere with which they have been historically linked remains an absence that helps to make possible the much cherished 'parsimony' of the preferred model, or framework, or simulation, or analysis in the first place." The consistent gender-blindness of parsimony uncritically reproduce gender dualisms through their (Bordo 1992, 161) "delusions of purity – delusions that are particularly galling (and self-contradictory) when they claim to be 'beyond' dualisms and hierarchical thinking." Parsimonious answers to "how do we change the world?" are usually gender-blind – the "we" ends up meaning (elite) men. To the extent that answers are gender blind, moves toward liberation on that basis will result in the continued marginalization of women.

And yet this brings up another crucial difference between how MLM and poststructuralist feminism approach the subject, a difference which is in part a reflection of the different spheres in which the two generally operate. At the most general level, poststructuralist feminists generally exist within academia, while maoists exist outside of academia in the trenches of class struggle (usually literally). Here I am not attempting to create hard and fast dichotomy, or to privilege one sphere over the other, or to suggest that there is no overlap/interpenetration. But this basic difference conveys certain advantages and disadvantages on each. I focus here on two of these.

Academia in the US is, like anything else, a contradictory institution. Its primary aspect, as Althusser, Chomsky and others have noted, is to give correct training to the next generation of managers and leaders, and to serve as a significant repository and distributor of the ideological glue to maintain class society and imperialism. At the same time, it has a contradictory aspect. Universities, more so than any other institution in capitalist society, are spaces for investigation, for debate and discussion over ideas, values, and policies. As scholars, poststructuralist feminists have the opportunity, the training and the community to wrangle with ideas at a high level, to tease out nuances, to fully investigate difficult questions – to, as it were, intellectually stretch out. The advantage this conveys is obvious when looking at the question of the subject.¹⁹³ As *critical* scholars, poststructuralist feminists endeavor to take full advantage of the secondary aspect of universities. The result is that the variety, sophistication and depth of

193. There is also a negative aspect to this, the danger of descending into scholasticism. Though a real concern, I mention it here to note that maoists have tended to be far too concerned with this danger and to take a narrow and instrumentalist approach to scholarly inquiry.

their investigations into the question of agency is tremendous.

This suggests a corresponding disadvantage for maoists, in that they do not operate in such a luxurious space. This is amplified by the fundamental orientation of MLM to effect concrete political change by continually wrenching the greatest possible transformation out of any situation. Arising from this, I see two consequences, which reinforce one another. One is that, as noted, the explicit writing on agency by self-identified maoists is sparse. There is simply nothing remotely like the literature produced by poststructuralist feminists. The maoist conception of subjectivity is thus largely latent, implicit in the ontology of materialist dialectics or in, for example, Mao's discussions of the Chinese peasantry or Avakian's discussions of the proletariat in the United States.

The other is that the necessity to meet urgent political needs necessarily involves a need to conceptually simplify in order to act. To illustrate this, consider an example of an all too common experience, in which a woman is having her life threatened by an abusive partner. In a context in which a woman is alone with a violent man who has a gun pressed to her head, there is the need to conceive of one's agency in a *very* simplified form, as an aggressive valorization of exaggerated Self.¹⁹⁴ In fact, this will be in a way virtually indistinguishable from a very cartesian, positivist and dualistic conception of subjectivity. And this will be the case not simply in a strategic or ironic sense, but because it accurately corresponds with the reality of the situation. It is a space in which the phrase "life and death" is not a cliché. Maoists, as revolutionaries and communists, have a responsibility to inhabit this space, both materially and intellectually. This has real

194. This phrase is adapted from Sylvester (1994: 53).

consequences on how maoists approach any question, as it is difficult to keep a full grasp of the ubiquity and interconnectedness of contradictions in such a space.

One way of putting this is that poststructuralist feminism and MLM tend towards different moments of the simplicity/complexity dialectic (which is another way of expressing the theory/practice dialectic). Poststructuralist feminists tend to live in the moment of complexity, while maoists tend to live in the moment of simplicity. Maoists, in attempting to manage this difficult contradiction, have a tendency to adopt a kind of "close enough" approach in their theorization and construction of social categories. They tend to "read off" from simplicity and create reified categories based on it, which damages their ability to recognize and handle the complexity of social reality. There is also the problem of making *a priori* assumptions about the specific nature of that simplicity, or assuming that the contradictions are simply obvious and that one's understanding does not need to be troubled.

The result of this is that maoists, in opposition to a dialectical ontology, in their practice (and writing) tend to have a conception of agency which takes the subject in the moment of simplicity as an abstraction, as *the* model for agency. Putting aside difficulties arising from different terminology, if one were to look *from* poststructuralist feminism *into* maoism one would generally see a rather cartesian, positivist and dualistic conception of agency. This is one reason why, for example, Pettigrew and Shneiderman (2004) are critical of Onesto's (2005) writing on the Nepalese revolution. They see an unproblematized conception of political agency (and of Nepalese women) in Onesto's work in part because it is there. Though there is more to this question than this, it speaks

to a fundamental and deep contradiction in MLM, that the urgency of political demands tends to create a separation between the dialectical ontology (and the corresponding methodological and epistemological questions) and the concrete things which are to be done. Or in other words, theory and practice. This is a fundamental reason why Mao talked so incessantly about the universality of contradiction and worked to get the masses engaged in philosophical discussions. There are real life and death consequences in not grasping the dialectic between simplicity and complexity, in failing to recognize that complexity and simplicity are both always already existing, always already in flux and transforming from one into the other.

Returning to Mao's *Report*, this highlights the negative possibility in recognizing and focusing on the periods of revolutionary conjuncture which “set in motion great masses, whole peoples and again whole classes of people; and which create a lasting action resulting in great transformation” (MECW 26: 389). This negative possibility, one of the fundamental fears of poststructuralists, is that such a conjuncture will result in the creation of a Grand Reification based upon that period in which simplicity is the dominant aspect. Avakian has spoken to this question (2006i), what he calls "the parachute point." He notes that during a conjuncture, a period when state power can be seized, "things become 'compressed' politically." The multitude of political trends and identities which oppose the status quo become either politically paralyzed or "become compressed in and around the one core that actually embodies the means for breaking through what needs to be broken through to meet the immediately, urgently felt needs of broad masses of people who are demanding radical change:"

Things tend to become compressed at that point, as when a parachute closes up. And

one of the things that has not been sufficiently understood—and has led to mistakes, in its not being correctly understood and dealt with—is the fact that, while this is a very real and important and necessary ingredient, in an overall sense, of actually being able to have the alignment that makes it possible to go for revolution, this is something that comes into being at the concentration point of a revolutionary situation but not something that will continue in the same way after that point has been passed, regardless of how that situation is resolved—not only if the revolutionary attempt fails or is defeated, but even if it is successful and results in the establishment of a new, radically different state power. Even then, after that situation has passed, and as things go forward in the new society, the “parachute” will “open back up” and “spread out” (2006i).

Avakian stresses that revolutionaries have done serious damage by not recognizing this, in attempting to force the inevitable post-conjunctural diversity into a false coherence. While specifically a problem in the overall conception of socialist society, this question of correctly handling the contradiction between simplicity and complexity is a broader problem – one which poststructuralist feminism has much to offer in terms of analysis and orientation. In the next chapter, I examine one particular example of this dangerous trend which, ironically, involves Avakian's party.

Materialism and Idealism

Bodies that Matter was in part a response to critics who felt that Butler was inattentive to material conditions, that she reduced politics to a merely symbolic level. In doing so, she references what she called Marx's ‘new kind of materialism,’ (1993, 250) and criticizes those who posit materialism and idealism as a set of metaphysical oppositions. While her take is certainly dialectical at heart, it is also fundamentally idealist. Here it is necessary to quote at length:

If materialism were to take account of praxis as that which constitutes the very matter of objects, and praxis is understood as a socially transformative activity, then such activity is understood as constitutive of materiality itself. The activity proper to

praxis, however, requires the transformation of some object from a former state to a latter state, usually understood as a transformation of an alienated social state to a non-alienated social state. In either case, according to this new kind of materialism that Marx proposes, the object is not only transformed, but in some significant sense, the object is transformative activity itself and, further, its materiality is established through this temporal movement from a prior to a latter state. In other words, the object materializes to the extent that it is a site of temporal transformation. The materiality of objects, then, is in no sense, spatial or given, but is constituted in and as transformative activity.

I argue that this is a mis-reading of Marx, which makes him an idealist, not a materialist. What Marx contributed was not just a 'new kind of materialism,' but a dialectical materialism, and definitely not a materialism which is constructed through discourse. But, she does correctly grasp that transformation, process, is at the heart of Marx's materialism, that reality is a verb - but again, for Marx and MLM, the motion originates out of contradiction, while for Butler it originates out of language. This is consistent with her ontology of the subject, which is brought into existence through discourse. It is also eclecticism, the flipping of primary and secondary aspects of contradiction. It is also ultimately a metaphysical eclectics, because she puts the primary aspect on the side of "socially transformative activity," elsewhere on "discourse."

Butler, like many poststructuralists, often speaks of conflict, tension, paradox, ambivalency and the like. MLM sees these differently, as contradictions, as unities of opposites. Yet often the content is remarkably the same. In other words, both see that the contradictions underlying political struggles inherently contain the possibility of challenging the limits of their original premises. Often these tensions/contradictions arise out of the complexities inherent in negotiating between two extremes, whether an essentialist notion of gender vs the elimination of any foundational metaphysics, or the

humanist subject vs the erasure of subjectivity in a web of power. I do not argue that materialist dialectics provides the 'solution' in a narrow sense to these complexities – there is more to it than that (as Lenin said, the essence of dialectics is the concrete investigation of concrete conditions). What it does do is provide a consistent methodological and ontological foundation from which to proceed.

Both Butler and maoists negotiate the complicated interaction of those two and in some form see them as mutually constitutive - one through the language and the other through an ontological focus on contradiction. But even as they both work to break down a metaphysical distinction between materiality and consciousness, they have their feet, so to speak, in one area more than the other, with each therefore putting forth a particular emphasis with regards to political praxis. To put it in simplified and exaggerated terms, poststructuralist feminism seeks most fundamentally (not exclusively) to change how we *think*, while MLM seeks to change how we *exist*.

I feel that Butler, like many other poststructuralists who work from a critical analysis of discourse/power, ultimately remains rooted in idealism. Though she seeks to open up the metaphysics of materiality, she does so by presenting it as being constructed through language. She is careful to make clear that she is not making the subjective idealist argument that materiality only exists through language, but still implies that it is through language/discourse/power that materiality becomes something other than metaphysical. Materiality in and of itself is metaphysical, and only becomes something different (that is, something which is "materialized," or in motion) through the intervention of language/discourse/power. Butler argues that there is no materiality outside of

construction because to identify something as being outside of language is therefore to construct that thing.¹⁹⁵ I find this unpersuasive and as close as she gets to a subjective idealist position, or what was called in Lenin's time empirio-criticism.¹⁹⁶ It is also demonstrates the underlying idealism of her argument. A fundamental principle of materialism is that you can have materiality without consciousness, but not the opposite.

Butler, and many other poststructuralist feminists, can be seen as positing a dialectical relation between conscious and materiality, as being contradictory and mutually constructive. But I argue that for her, the dominant aspect is ideality. She sees materiality as contradictory only insofar as it is imagined, as it exists in relationship with ideality. Thus I feel that she has an inconsistent ontology, one which leaves her, like the marxists who deny the dialectics of nature, faced with the problem of explaining the development of consciousness. It marks off a place as metaphysical - that which happened before consciousness developed or what happens outside of any consciousness now. Ultimately her perspective rests upon the need for a demi-urge, something outside of materiality to give it motion, to transform it. It thus opens the door in another way for more explicit manifestations of idealism and metaphysics, since if one does not have a consistent

195. "[T]o 'refer' naively or directly to such an extra-discursive object will always require the prior delimitation of the extra-discursive. And insofar as the extra-discursive is delimited, it is formed by the very discourse from which it seeks to free itself" (1993, 11).

196. These differences between that of revolutionary communism and poststructuralist feminism are similar to that of materialism and empirio-criticism at the turn of the century. Lenin's polemics against empirio-criticism is also similar to that of many who critique the various strands of post-modernism (1965a, 89): "We have seen that the starting point and the fundamental premise of the philosophy of empirio-criticism is subjective idealism. The world is our sensation--this is the fundamental premise. . . . The absurdity of this philosophy lies in the fact that it leads to solipsism, to the recognition of the existence of the philosophizing individual only." In this work, Lenin tended to treat materialism and idealism in a rather positivist way. Following his study of Hegel, he moved more fully towards dialectical materialism.

ontology which demands something else, it is easy for them to slip through.¹⁹⁷ This leads, or more accurately, provides the grounds for, Butler's metaphysical conceptions of 'democracy' and 'violence' that I address in the next chapter.

“We can't know everything ...”

Putting aside the various revisionist positions which are often conflated with MLM, what have been the limitations of MLM and the ICM with regards to women's liberation? In general terms, they are these: a failure to deal with gender as an analytical category, beyond a narrow, fairly positivist sense; a focus on the relations between (unproblematically sexed) male and female bodies; a reliance upon essentialized conceptions of sex, desire and the body; while highlighting male supremacy and the oppression of women and not reducing to this a narrow conception of class, a tendency towards reducing all questions of sexuality and desire to this contradiction; and more broadly, an instrumentalist attitude toward intellectuals and truth, and a failure to consistently apply communist standards to themselves.

I argue that such limitations, failures and mistakes are rooted in failures to be consistently and fully materialist and dialectical, and not the result of inherent limitations of MLM (though, to be clear, these would be the result of inherent limitations in other conceptions of marxism). In other words, the most fundamental mistake around issues of gender and

197. To explain, maoists argue that the dominant approaches under capitalism are idealism and metaphysics. As part of the ambient philosophical culture, there is a tremendous pull towards using them in one form or another. Maoists commonly make an analogy to peasants going off to war and grabbing whatever weapons are at hand. Similarly, there is a tendency to grab whatever theoretical weapons are at hand, regardless of their appropriateness. In the case of capitalist society, what is typically at hand are forms of idealism and metaphysics.

sexuality on the part of communists has been the failure to be consistently communist, that is, consistently materialist and dialectical.¹⁹⁸ Such a fully materialist and dialectical approach, which Avakian has done the most to systematize, would have, on the one hand, prevented some of the more fantastic problems with revolutionary communist praxis (particularly regarding sexuality) and, on the other, provided a foundation sufficiently solid and flexible from which to learn from others.

In the next chapter, I turn to this question - how can poststructuralist feminism enrich a dialectical materialist approach to women's liberation? Or, to put it another way, what does it mean, concretely, to ask how can communists, as communists, do a better job of transforming the world? As stated earlier, it is not necessary for someone to share in fundamental or indeed any terms an MLM outlook to be able to put forward insights and truths of value. But precisely because poststructuralist feminism not only closely examines things that MLM traditionally has not, but also examines them in a very similar way, it provides a way to more systematically critique the errors and limitations and thus enrich an MLM praxis. With regards to the more significant errors, poststructuralism can perform a sort of ideological debridement to allow for the growth of something new and better.

198. As Avakian has put, "most of the time, most communists are not really communists."

CHAPTER SIX: SEXUALITY, VIOLENCE AND DEMOCRACY – THE METAPHYSICS OF LIBERATION OR THE LIBERATION FROM METAPHYSICS?

In writing this chapter, it occurred to me that there is a central question I have been dealing with throughout this dissertation, without specifically articulating it – how does one maintain a consistently critical perspective? Asked with a grasp of materialist dialectics, the daunting nature of this question is obvious. Given the immense complexity and changedness of reality, the ubiquity of contradictions, their interconnectedness and mutual identification, how does one wrap one’s mind around all of this without (intentionally or not) leaving something (or many things) uncritically examined, without preserving it as a metaphysical foundation upon which to rest? And further, how to do this if one’s intent is not simply to explain the world but to change, and not a bit, or here and there, but thoroughly and for real? And further, how to do this when the most powerful state in human history is intent on silencing, arresting or even killing you?

To paraphrase Mao, it is rather easy to do this once in a while or around a particular question with which one is primarily concerned or has expertise. It is much more difficult, as difficult as anything in the world, to do this with regards to all the aspects of human existence. Failures and mistakes are inevitable, whether one is taking about individual scholars or the collectivity of a party. In a commentary on Avakian's role as a communist leader, Lenny Wolff (2003) spoke of the need for critical engagement to oppose the “almost gravitational pull of spontaneity:”¹⁹⁹

199. By spontaneity, maoists mean the unfolding of contradictions without conscious, critical engagement on the basis of dialectical materialism. It is another form of the argument *against* mechanical materialism or any kind of teleology, and *for* the centrality of consciousness, or line.

It's worth thinking about the huge percentage of one-time revolutionaries--both parties and individuals--who've come crashing down on those rocks. They almost all came into things with genuine revolutionary convictions. But one day, after years or even decades of battle, they somehow find their name at the bottom of a contract for a sell-out, maybe without even being conscious of how they got to that point, or even having signed it. That's the strength of spontaneity--quite apart from your convictions, unless you find the ways to divert the natural stream of things, you're gonna end up drifting downstream to a place you once swore you'd never go.

Another way of approaching this is that what one does not consciously critically engage is in effect pulled out (not literally) of existing power relations, whether thought of as the hegemonic symbolic order or the material relations of society. And since one can not actually pull them out, they are still lodged back in the status quo, reflecting and reproducing it, acting as an anchor to drag one down, regardless of the sincerity of intentions.²⁰⁰

And pretty much by definition, what allows you to critically engage something that you have previously just assumed must come from 'outside' your existing framework. As Avakian (2005b, 84) puts it:

Here is a funny way to look at it--you know the thing about how Marxism has to be brought 'from the outside'?--from outside the realm of people's direct experience²⁰¹--

200. While the anchor is something conceived as a metaphysicality, it is not simply a question of ideology, and therefore the response is not simply a matter of transforming thinking. As Marx noted in the German Ideology, ideology is not simply upside-down thinking, but thinking that is a reflection of an upside-down world. The adoption of a consistently critical perspective at a societal level is not possible unless (and until) the material conditions that give rise to its opposite are transformed. Until then, there will be innumerable pulls in that direction. In other words, capitalism and the social relations it engenders creates the need for ideological anchors. An important manifestation of this is the rise of religious fundamentalism in the world today. See Avakian (2006d).

201. This argument, which many critical theorists would agree with, is at the heart of Lenin's *What is to be Done?* (1969). Commonly characterized as a primarily a work focusing on organization (and an

well, I am also arguing that there is, at least at this stage of history, a certain role for things to be brought from outside Marxism, which Marxism then integrates to a deeper level than the non-Marxist people who bring them forward can ever do.

But at the same time, what is brought in (or allowed in) from "outside" is often metaphysically conceived. There is the trap of, say, simply adding "class," or "gender," and stirring when moving to engage new areas. That is one of the common ways of newly engaging things, along with mechanically applying what is already critically engaged - that is, bringing in new things by using the old thing as a cookie-cutter, trimming off that which does not fit, to reduce it to the conceptions already understood. It is difficult, if not impossible to study/grasp/know critically specific subjects that others focus on exclusively as their area of expertise. But one can develop a methodology which allows for the incorporation of their expertise into an overall revolutionary perspective. This was referred to in revolutionary China as "combining red and expert," with the former leading the latter. This is also reflected in the view of materialist dialectics as capable of embracing, without replacing, many schools of thought.

The failure to critically engage, to relax in the face of the gravitational pull of spontaneity, to rely on metaphysic and idealism, is a significant source of mistakes. In this chapter, I look at two of these. The first deals with the changing position on homosexuality by the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, led by Bob Avakian. The

authoritarian one at that), Lenin's work is, as Martin (Avakian and Martin) notes, fundamentally a work on epistemology (as well as a key text against reification). Lenin's key insight, that a theoretical grasp of *all* the realities of class society and the subsequent need for revolution and communism does not spring spontaneously from the purely economic struggle of classes, is commonly attacked as an argument that the workers are incapable of understanding their own situation and have to be told what to do by privileged intellectuals. This view is not very different from the position by some feminists opposed to poststructuralism that the reality of women's oppression does not require theorizing.

second concerns recent writings by Judith Butler on violence and democracy. This chapter was originally conceived as an imaginary but literal dialogue between Judith Butler and Bob Avakian. While a real conversation between the two would no doubt be of interest, I decided that such an approach would be too much of a gimmick.

In the previous chapter, I examined the overlapping but contradictory conceptions of subjectivity of MLM and poststructuralist feminism. As a way of returning to how these approaches, and in particular Avakian and Butler, can come to sharply divergent positions, I consider the phenomenon of drag. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler identified drag as a phenomenon which held out the possibility of subverting the performances of gender. In her view, drag disrupts the assumption that a "natural" sex causes a person's gender, which then produces a particular sexuality. Drag reveals sex, gender and sexuality as incoherent, and thus creates the slippage necessary for grasping that they can never be coherent. Drag exposes the illusion of a person behaving in accordance with their true nature and the reality that the behavior itself constructs the fiction of a true nature. There is no original or primary gender a drag imitates – gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original. Drag, then, is the conscious dramatization that all gender performances are in fact parodies (1993, 125):

To claim that all gender is like drag, or is drag, is to suggest that 'imitation' is at the heart of the *heterosexual* project and its gender binarism, that drag is not a secondary imitation that presupposes a prior and original gender, but that hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations. That it must repeat this imitation, that it sets up pathologizing practices and normalizing sciences in order to produce and consecrate its own claim on originality and propriety, suggests that heterosexual performativity is beset by an anxiety that it can never fully overcome. that its effort to become its own idealizations can never be finally or fully achieved, and that it is constantly haunted by that domain of sexual possibility that must be excluded for heterosexualized gender to produce itself.

Importantly, drag helps to highlight that sexuality and gender cannot be separated (1993, 125): “Drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality’s claim on naturalness and originality.”

Butler was careful to emphasize the *potential* destabilization of the heterosexual matrix by drag, and that she was not offering it as a political strategy for the subversion of gender (though some supporters, particularly those who conflated her concept of performativity with performance and thus as simply voluntarism, adopted it as such). Butler later questioned whether drag is not itself a vehicle by which the norms of hegemonic discourses can be reconsolidated. As Butler puts it (1993, xxi), “Just as metaphors lose their metaphoricity as they congeal through time into concepts, so subversive performances always run the risk of becoming deadening cliches through their repetition and, most importantly, through their repetition within commodity culture where ‘subversion’ carries market value.” Martin, in his conversation with Avakian, refers to this as the “massive recuperative apparatus” of capitalism in which countervailing currents end up becoming part of the game (Avakian and Martin, 296).

Though expressed quite differently, this has similarities with the position of the RCP as expressed in an interview with a spokesperson (Greenberg 1992).²⁰² For her, the question was much more simple. Drag queens (drag kings were not discussed) were seen as a

202. While this interview was not with Avakian, Greenberg was speaking as a spokesperson for his party and putting forward the line of the party.

manifestation of the denigration and belittlement of women, analogous to the black-face minstrels and their parodies of African-American culture. This assessment, as will be discussed below, was made in the context of an analysis of homosexuality as a negative phenomenon.

That Butler and Avakian's party can come to such different conclusions I find interesting. On the one hand, they operate from viewpoints which have substantial differences. On the other hand, they share some fundamental assumptions, specifically that sex and intimate relations and their expressions are not natural but constructed. The central question here is whether drag fundamentally involves the subversion or the reinforcement of hegemonic norms of gender identity and construction. Another way of putting this is to ask if reality has an independent existence or is it dependent upon our conception of it. That is, can we simply decide what things are abstractly? This is what Butler does, to a certain extent, in *Gender Trouble* (and what her voluntarist supporters do to a considerable extent). She does not consider gender and its construction in connection with the material production and reproduction of society, but only the ideological production/reproduction. On the other hand, the RCP reduces the question first to male/female relations and then to production relations.

A discussion into which view of drag is 'right' is beyond this chapter. The point is to highlight that the differing views reflect their philosophical roots. Another interesting point which serves to highlight the difficult nature of grasping the nature of a complex phenomena is that while Butler's approach to this question was ultimately idealist, her conclusion was much more correct than that of the RCP's, which from a genuinely

maoist perspective reflected not dialectical materialism but a vulgar reductionist materialism.

Communism and the Metaphysics of Sexuality

A meaningful survey of communist praxis dealing with sexuality is beyond the scope of this section. But at best, it is inconsistent. This can be seen with Engels, who on the one hand condemned homosexuality as an abomination but on the other had this to say:

when a new generation has grown up: a generation of men who never in their lives have known what it is to buy a woman's surrender with money or any other social instrument of power; a generation of women who have never known what it is to give themselves to a man from any other considerations than real love, or to refuse to give themselves to their lover from fear of the economic consequences. When these people are in the world, they will care precious little what anybody today thinks they ought to do; they will make their own practice and their corresponding public opinion about the practice of each individual--and that will be the end of it (MECW 26: 189).

Communist praxis around sexuality has been riddled with metaphysics, idealism, reductionism and no small amount of institutionalized prejudice and outright bigotry.²⁰³

In this section, I focus on how the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA has understood sexuality. Though by its own admission sexuality has not been a central focus of its theoretical work, its analysis is useful to focus on. First, it is the party of Bob Avakian, whom I have referenced throughout this dissertation. Second, the egregious mistakes and subsequent reversals in its line on homosexuality, as well as its subsequent self-criticism

203. I do not know of any work by Mao where he even tangentially addressed sexuality, though criticism of “petit bourgeois sexual decadence” were common in China. It is widely reported that homosexuals were targetted as counter-revolutionaries during the revolutionary period in China and that the Chinese communists had quite a puritan view of sexuality and endeavored to keep it in the private realm. See Evans (1997) for a detailed discussion of this.

and discussion of methodology, provide examples, both negative and positive, of dialectical materialism and a communist stand, viewpoint and methodology. Third, the current position, while much better than in the past and with a much better foundation for advancement, is still problematic – there is still the need to learn from others on this question. However, the exposures of methodological mistakes by the RCP have laid a better foundation for future advancement.

The Original Line of the RCP

When the RCP published its programme, its original line (OL) on the "homosexuality question" was, to put it mildly, controversial. Included in a section on "moral decay under capitalism," it stated (RCP 1981, 77):

“As for homosexuality, this too, is perpetuated and fostered by the decay of capitalism, especially as it sinks into deeper crisis. This is particularly the case because of the distorted, oppressive man-woman relations capitalism promotes. Once the proletariat is in power, no one will be discriminated against in jobs, housing and the like merely on the basis of being a homosexual. But at the same time education will be conducted throughout society on the ideology behind homosexuality and its material roots in exploiting society, and struggle will be waged to eliminate it and reform homosexuals.”

Homosexuality was seen as a negative phenomenon, part of the corruption brought about by capitalism and the social and property relations it generates, and particularly the decay and parasitism of imperialist society. The metaphysical thinking here, though not explicitly expressed, is clear. There is a "natural" sexuality, one which pre-exists the social relations of class relations (or at least capitalism). This sexuality is the foundation subsequently distorted and corrupted by capitalism, with homosexuality being a concentrated expression of this. Implicit in this is the idea that what is to be done is to

rescue and recreate this natural sexuality that existed prior to formation of classes.

The RCP's line was not a call for anti-homosexual pogroms, as some of its critics charged, though in a societal atmosphere rife with homophobia, the call to "reform homosexuals" is certainly chilling. In the full context of its programme, it is clear that the education and struggle mentioned is conceived of as a non-antagonistic contradiction. And the RCP, in its programme and practice, opposed and organized resistance to any moves to demonize or discriminate against homosexuals. The RCP drew (and continued to draw for some time) an analogy between homosexuality and religion, as negative phenomena which would be handled non-antagonistically through education and debate, along with the transformation of the economic base of society, until the practice and its associated ideas would "wither away." As Avakian put it (Avakian and Martin 256), homosexuality was seen as "a phenomenon that should disappear, or that people would voluntarily give up, when we transformed oppressive relations, and waged ideological struggle, in socialist society, although we said homosexuality in various forms might reemerge in communist society."

Regardless, the underlying assumptions of this line do not lay the basis for a correct handling of any contradiction involving homosexuality (or sexuality in general). It represents an attempt to force a complex dialectical reality into a simplistic metaphysical conception, which would inevitably transform a non-antagonistic contradiction into an antagonistic one – if not overall at least in many particular instances. Given the metaphysical underpinnings of the line, it seems likely that homosexuals would end up being treated antagonistically, that is, as the enemy. The conceptual violence in this case

would lead to actual violence (of a negative character – more on this below).

The Revised Line of the RCP

The OL was broadly criticized by people, both inside and outside the Party, especially as it led to the policy of not allowing homosexuals into the Party (with again an analogy being made with religion, that you could not be in the Party and believe in god either). Internally, criticism was raised (Avakian and Martin 2005, 241) that the line was "way too crude, a vulgarization, an incorrect analysis of a very complex phenomenon." In the late 1980's, the RCP published a substantial article revising its line (RCP 1988). In this revised line (RL), homosexuality was tied to the "woman question," with the view that sexuality and intimate relations should be evaluated primarily in terms of how they related to and what effect they had on the oppression of women.

The conclusion was similar to the OL, in that homosexuality *per se* was assessed as negative, but the assumptions and overall analysis were different. Though capitalism still is seen as distorting intimate relations, the assumption of a natural sexuality is dropped (though not fully – homosexuality was seen as a conscious choice with ideological content. Heterosexuality was not.) Male homosexuality was concluded to be a concentrated manifestation of the male supremacy which capitalism generates, something which is a part of, and reinforces, the oppression of women. It thus constitutes a form of hatred of women. Female homosexuality was seen as a form of separatism, a way for women to remove themselves from the oppressive reality of male/female relations without transforming them. While the former was seen as basically reactionary, the latter was seen as an understandable, but flawed and inadequate, response to male supremacy.

To a certain extent, these changes are perhaps a reflection of Marx's own changes on this question. In his early writings, Marx speaks of men's relations with women as a measure of the state of society, a common theme throughout the history of the ICM. For him, the realities of these relations, particularly with regards to prostitution, reveals the extent of capitalism's destructiveness and corrupting influence. His metaphors for capitalism are often sexualized in one way or another – he speaks of capitalism as a site of perversion. This view is modified in his later writings. Capitalism is still seen as distorting sexuality, but it is a part of the process towards something better, a social situation in which relationships are more freely chosen. For Marx, the concept of species being (a concept with hints of essentialism in it) sets a baseline of naturalness to measure violations. Capitalism perverts the species being of humans with regards to sexuality (and of course more broadly).²⁰⁴

The revised RCP line represented a change from the initial position, which was quite untheorized and was little more than an expression of prejudice. The reasoning behind the RL, though still fundamentally flawed, was explained in depth and is thus worth examining in some detail. Drawing inspiration and grounding from Engels, it argued for an "historical and materialist analysis of the origins and development of various human sexual practices, especially in relation to the development of class divisions and class struggle." Human sexuality should be analyzed and evaluated as a social practice within

204. Others writing in the marxist tradition have seen things differently. Marcuse, for example, saw sexuality in different terms. For him, non-hetero-normative sexuality represented a site of liberation, something liberating in and off itself. However, Marcuse is not part of the tradition with which the RCP identifies and draws upon.

the context of existing social context and the overall social relations. "There is no such thing as "natural" or "inherent" outside of this context" (1988, 42).

Continuing, the RCP argued that human sexuality of any kind cannot be analyzed as something which stands apart from or above class society, or simply in terms of individuals and their desires and choices (1988, 41):

"[I]t must be recognized that all forms of human sexuality - including homosexuality - are manifestations of underlying social relations and products of social conditioning. Like all other social practices, they have a past historical development and a current material basis. And they at one and the same time concentrate some aspects of existing social relations and in turn affect these in one or another direction. Approaching the question of homosexuality by attempting to evaluate it in an idealist way, by ripping it out of historical context and conditions of existing class society or by citing individual motivations to explain what is objectively a social phenomenon, can only lead to an incorrect analysis. The Party Programme, on the contrary, correctly identifies the decay of capitalism and the distorted, oppressive, woman-hating relations capitalism inherited, upholds, and thrives on as the material basis of homosexuality today."

The idea of any natural or inherent sexuality is denied (1988, 42): "sexual morality and sexual practices are social constructs, not mere manifestations of the underlying biology."

It even argues that heterosexuality was not destined to become the dominant form of sexuality, but that the material basis for this was provided by creation of private property and exploitive divisions of labor which it created.²⁰⁵

205. "For instance, in the absence of the development of property relations, an exploitative division of labor, and a patriarchal framework through which these relations are realized and reproduced, it is possible to imagine a society in which heterosexual matings have been institutionalized (perhaps even highly ritualized) for the purposes of producing children, but where men and women engage to an equal or even greater degree in various alternate forms of sexuality, for recreation or whatever other purposes. Who can say for sure what the sexual practices of our earliest ancestors were? (1988, 44)."

However, the development of private property and the division of society into classes brought into being the patriarchal family as a basic unit for the production and reproduction of property relations while laying the material basis for the social dominance of heterosexuality. Since then (1988, 43), "heterosexual relations have in fact been male supremacist relations and have been permeated through and through with the corresponding male supremacist ideology necessary to maintain the subordination of women which is essential to the functioning of such a system. Heterosexuality has never again been free of that stamp of oppression."

While welcoming the questioning of all areas of sexuality and human relations, which were seen as representing the breakdown of the sanctity of existing, traditional morality, (that is, the morality which exists to justify and reinforce existing relations), the RCP noted (1988, 41) that "these changes are taking place under the still dominant male-supremacist relations of society and that they bear the stamp of these dominant relations." In other words, one should not assume that something which opposes existing morality or social relations in some way is necessarily an overall positive development.

The RCP also felt that studies which attempted to show a biological basis for homosexuality were flawed methodologically or otherwise did not prove their claims. Thus, the question of homosexuality was seen by them as entirely a question of ideology, that it represented a conscious decision to differ from the heterosexual norm, and "a means of expressing and concentrating an ideological outlook and worldview." The question for the RCP was therefore (1988, 45), "what is the content of that statement? To what extent does it rupture with prevailing relations between men and women or to what

extent does it do the opposite?"

The conclusion was that, at this historical point, male homosexuality not only does not rupture with male supremacy but is in some ways a concentration of the misogyny and male domination which are rooted in the material relations of society, regardless of the conscious intent of the individuals engaging in it. A homosexual orientation or the practice of homosexuality *per se* by men was seen as something which constituted an impediment to the emancipation of women and the abolition of all oppressive and exploitative relations.

In contrast to those who would analyze gay men and lesbians together, the RCP argued that lesbianism was a very different social phenomenon. It was seen as an attempt by women to avoid or reject the domination of men in their intimate relations. That is, it was basically a form of separatism, an incomplete and essentially reformist response to the oppression of women.

Though the metaphysics of the OL was explicitly repudiated in the RL, the eclecticism of that analysis left the door open for its re-emergence. I once had a conversation with a supporter of the RCP who in defending the RL put forward the assertion that there is a natural sexuality, one rooted in the biological need to propagate the species. As Avakian has noted (Avakian and Martin 2005, 260),

when you have a line that is erroneous, and people are seeking to defend it ... they are going to find themselves making arguments that don't stand up, because they're having difficulty trying to justify a position that's not correct. ... And some of them may be more than just wrong – they may be actually be insulting and offensive or

whatever.

Ultimately, the revised position is less a re-thinking of homosexuality and sexuality more generally than a torturing of dialectical materialism to create a theoretical construct in order to justify a line created a priori and for instrumentalist reasons. This approach was raised to the level of fine art in the Soviet Union, even before capitalism was restored in the mid-1950s. Though there were elements that were correct in the piece (though these did not represent a real advance on what was said by Engels a hundred years earlier), it was on the whole quite erroneous and even dangerous, in that the wrong conclusion had not only been maintained but placed upon a large theoretical foundation. Avakian recently commented on this and warned of the implications (Avakian and Martin 2005, 252): "There is a bad history of this in some aspects of the international communist movement ... If you make an error and then not only persist in it but seek profound justifications for it, it can become truly monstrous."

Self-Criticism of the RCP

When the RCP initiated the process of rewriting its Programme in the late 1990's, this was seen as an opportunity to not just revisit the question of homosexuality but also to undertake a serious examination of questions of methodology. The conclusion was that the line on homosexuality represented a serious error, not just in its conclusions but in the underlying methodology behind it. Accordingly, a draft of the new programme put forward a new line (RCP 2001). Subsequent pieces, including a Position Paper on homosexuality from the RCP (2002) and various comments from Avakian, further developed the line. These works have also gone into the question of why a seriously

erroneous line was arrived at in the first place and why it was held onto for so long.

While a finalized version of the line (as well as the overall Programme) has not been presented publicly, the various documents available give a fair idea of what it is.²⁰⁶ The identification of homosexuality as a negative phenomenon *per se* has been abandoned. The RCP continues to see the oppression of women as a fundamental social relation in US society and foundation for imperialism more broadly.²⁰⁷

206. As noted, the line in the Draft Programme is a draft and more recent comments from Avakian have made it clear that certain parts of it have been superceded. In particular, the defensiveness around the old line and the phrasing that suggests that it was not totally mistaken have been changed. However, a fully developed and final line on sexuality is not yet available. The parts of the Draft Programme (RCP 2001, 106: from the appendix "The Proletarian Revolution and the Emancipation of Women") dealing with homosexuality state: "As for intimate relations, socialist society will promote values of, and create the conditions for, personal, family, and sexual relations based on mutual love, respect, and equality. The revolutionary proletariat is staunchly opposed to the attacks on homosexuality by reactionary forces such as religious fundamentalists, and to all physical assaults on, discrimination against, and government repression of homosexuals, which is so widespread and vicious in the U.S. today. In the new society, discrimination against homosexuals will be outlawed and struggled against in every sphere of society, including personal and family relations. Sexual and intimate relations between men and women in bourgeois society are largely reflective of and dominated by the ideology of male supremacy and "male right"; they exist within and are influenced by the overall framework of social relations in which the oppression of women is an integral and fundamental part. All this is something that the proletariat will be mobilizing the masses to radically transform in the process of uprooting the oppression of women and all oppression and exploitation. In the realm of intimate relations, socialist society will encourage people to strive for standards that are consistent with and contribute to uprooting the oppression of women ... Under socialism people will not be stigmatized because they are homosexuals or because of their sexual orientation. Discrimination will not be tolerated, and the repression and violence against homosexuals that has been so prevalent in capitalist society will be firmly opposed and dealt with. At the same time, it is important to grasp that same sex relations do not escape and do not exist outside of the prevailing family and sexual relations and the corresponding ideology of male supremacy that oppress women in this society. In many ways the outlook that characterizes male gay culture in bourgeois society is not a departure from--and in fact there are elements in which it is a concentration of--male right. Lesbianism is in many ways a response to the oppression of women in class society, but in and of itself it is not a fundamental solution to this oppression. The outlook that one partner in an intimate relationship must be devalued, dominated, abused, or owned is a reflection of the oppression of women in society; and forms of male right, in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships, will be targets of criticism and transformation.

207. As maoists, the RCP has consistently advocated that the struggle to transform patriarchal relations and thinking is an intrinsic and essential part of the revolutionary process at every stage. They have never claimed that such attention would be divisive or must wait until "after the revolution," which other marxist groups have claimed.) And while this is seen as pivotal to intimate relations generally, it now completely rejects the reductionist argument that male homosexuality (or any expression of sexuality) derives one to one from this reality. (Avakian and Martin 2005, 245)

One of the principles of MLM is that mistakes require self-criticism. This means not just reversal and a *mea culpa*, but a full investigation into the causes of the mistakes, and a public presentation of this investigation as part of training the masses to wrangle with questions of methodology and approach. This is all the more important when the mistake is serious. Accordingly, in recent works, Avakian and the RCP have critiqued their earlier line on homosexuality and attempted to dig into the reasons for it being adopted and held onto in the face of considerable criticism.²⁰⁸ These works are, however, primarily concerned with assessing mistakes, of clearing away the theoretical debris, so to speak, and not with actually developing new theorization or a fully developed line.

As Avakian has noted, one reason for the previous lines was the uncritical acceptance of the conventional wisdom in the international communist movement. In developing the line of the RCP (2004c),

We went back to the history of the international communist movement, which taught us a lot of good things. It taught us about the need for revolution, for socialism, advancing to communism, that we needed a Party, that we needed an ideology to lead that. But there were also many things about it that weren't correct, and in fact were really wrong and led in the wrong direction. The position on homosexuality is one such thing."

The conventional wisdom in the ICM was that homosexuality was "unnatural" (no less a foe of patriarchy than Engels, in *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, refers to homosexual sex as an "abominable practice"). This view of homosexuality as

208. These works include (Avakian and Martin 2005), RCP (2002), and a question and answer session by Avakian in 2004.

social problem, as deviation, as decadence, as petty–bourgeois individualism – has been the dominant framework of understanding and practice in the ICM. The last charge is a very common move in the ICM (particularly in China) – an individual's deviation from the norm in which that are not seen as not having a one-to-one relationship with the revolutionary process are characterized as "petite-bourgeois individualism" – of putting the purely subjective interests of an individual ahead of the overall needs of society. In revolutionary China, this became a catch-all charge, encompassing everything from tastes in music to hairstyles, sometimes going to lengths which would be simply ridiculous if not for the unfortunate consequences.

Seen in this context, the RCP's line could be seen as "upholding communism." Despite this, the RCP concluded, I feel correctly, that the essence of their error was that they were actually doing the opposite, that they were "bad Marxists" on the homosexuality question. Even though what they were saying, particularly in the RL, sounds very "marxist" and was in sync with existing "communist" praxis, it was fundamentally at odds with the conception of marxism as a critical scientific methodology based on materialist dialectics.

Avakian notes that the RCP's thinking on sexuality was marked by considerable instrumentalism and a priorism. The conclusion of their investigation was decided upon beforehand and their explanation was made an instrument of this desired end. The methodology involved not relying on grasping reality but on twisting and torturing it. This involved (Avakian 2004c) "starting off in advance with what you want to discover about reality and then proceeding to actually discover, lo and behold, what you set out to discover in the first place. And that's a lot of what we had to step back from and discard."

As an example of this, in the RL particular expressions of misogyny seen in male homosexual culture were taken as "proof" that all individual homosexual relationships were marked and marred by those expressions of male supremacy which are prevalent in broader society. Avakian notes that this kind of "political truth" is also common in the ICM and is another epistemological barrier to liberation.

Avakian notes that the party was not interrogating itself sufficiently, that it tended to assume that it had a monopoly on truth, another reflection of instrumentalism and a priorism. Instead of an approach informed by the "Marxism embraces but does not replace" orientation discussed earlier, the party closed itself off from criticism (Avakian 2004c): "It's not that we refused to listen to the criticism; it didn't penetrate. We evaluated it according to a wrong methodology so we rejected it."

There was also considerable reductionism in their thinking, another legacy of the ICM which has not been fully ruptured with. There was a failure to recognize the particularity of things, and to simply proceed from a general phenomenon in society, in this case the oppression of women, and reduce that down to each individual case as the sole determinant. But simply proceeding in a linear, one-to-one fashion from larger social relations to any particular relation is a reductionist and incorrect method.

In both the Revised Line and the Position Paper, there is considerable attention paid to the question of whether there are biological roots to homosexuality. The conclusion was that the attempts to show genetic influence on sexual orientation were flawed (for example in attempting to find a "gay gene"), and did not demonstrate what they were

trying to show. This conclusion is fair enough, but here again, reductionism reared its head. Avakian notes (Avakian 2004c), "we reacted to that by going to the opposite pole and saying ... since we can see social influences that exert themselves, that have an effect within any individual relation, therefore we can pretty surely say that all sexual preferences are socially determined and not biologically determined." Methodologically, this is a leap that does not follow, and Avakian concludes that there is not a basis at this point to make firm conclusions one way or another about the relation between biology and sexual preference. There is also the reductionism in assuming that the only relevant social factor in understanding sexuality is the male supremacy engendered by capitalism.

Another important factor cited by Avakian, particularly with regards to the OL, was the prevalence of male chauvinism and homophobia in the revolutionary movement of the 1960s (from which the RCP originated). These attitudes were embedded in broader society and were carried into the RCP without being transformed in any kind of radical way. Avakian notes (Avakian 2004c):

Especially among men, even among people who were revolutionaries, there was a view that comes from a sort of macho outlook, that there is something fundamentally wrong with, quote/unquote, men who don't act like men. And when you're in a communist organization, what you tend to do is give a communist coloration to whatever it is you think. So therefore, the position of the international communist movement historically became in effect a rationalization for that kind of an outlook that dominated things.

There are aspects in the DP that are remnants, or holdovers, from the RP. There continues to be a focus on the whether a homosexual orientation or the practice of homosexuality constitutes an impediment to the liberation of women. A better understanding, as spelled

out in the Position Paper, is that homosexuality, like heterosexuality, is neither good nor bad in and of itself. That it would take a revolutionary organization almost 30 years to officially conclude that homosexuality *per se* was not a negative phenomenon would no doubt elicit considerable derision and sarcasm from Butler (and not just her). And there is still the heterosexism in the entire idea that it is homosexuality (and not sexuality in general) which needs to be explained and understood.

The heterosexism of the RCP is less a specific problem of maoism than a general tendency in the communist movement that maoism has reproduced through lack of critical engagement.²⁰⁹ Heterosexism necessarily rests upon the idea that there is a natural, inherent human sexuality which exists outside of history and the contradictions of human society. It is thus a representation of metaphysical and anti-dialectical thinking. It is usually claimed to be a materialist position based on the need for humans to materially reproduce themselves. However, it is actually very idealist in that it implies that there is an idea of sexuality that exists before, and is superior to, actually existing sexuality. Thus, there is the claim that homosexuality is unnatural, a result of bourgeois corruption, while the true proletariat can not be anything besides heterosexual. While this recognizes to some degree that sexuality is a social construction, it posits one sexuality as Truth while all others are in one form or another manifestations of ideology. Heterosexism effectively prevents an oppressed population from becoming revolutionary subjects. They will inevitably be treated as objects of the revolution, a situation which history strongly suggests can only result in disaster. It is also an ideological apparatus. Colette Guillamin argues that sex is an arbitrary system that has no "natural" status at all,

209. For more on the role of Engels in promoting heterosexism in the ICM, see Pen (1997).

and its categories reflect the interests of those who hold power. It is politically determined which of the various physical differences exist between people are chosen as important or definitive. Although people are divided into the supposedly natural categories of sex or race, categories are not natural but are instead purely conceptual.²¹⁰

One reason for the RCP's intransigence is that some of the critiques of the RCP's line were, and still are, seen as themselves incorrect. One example of this is the view that in intimate and sexual relations among people, "anything goes" and nobody has a right to pass judgement on what anybody does. This liberal individualism reproduces the private/public dichotomy by putting forward that one's body and sexuality is entirely a private sphere. As noted, the RCP rejected this, saying that human sexuality cannot be analyzed in a vacuum, or solely in individual terms. As in every other sphere of human life, sexuality does not somehow stand apart from or "above" the question of classes and class society.

The RCP says that a liberal attitude essentially represents the abandonment of socially relevant questions to spontaneity. It argues that a correct approach to the homosexuality question is founded on the duty and responsibility to analyze all social relations from the perspective of leading the masses to carry forward the abolition of the "4 Alls." In its *Position Paper* (RCP 2002, 4), it argues that the

210. Following this, Monique Wittig and others have argued that the feminist goal is to eliminate sex and/or gender as a category entirely. Not unlike the proletariat in Marx's analysis, women are to constitute themselves for the sake of overthrowing the system that allows "sex" to exist. One is not born a woman, except in the same sense that one is born a proletarian: being a woman denotes a social position, and certain social practices, rather than an essence or true identity. The ultimate political goal of a woman, for Wittig, is to not be one.

there is a basis—and that we have a responsibility—to try to sort out what kind of larger social impacts and effects different social practices among the people may be having, and to help distinguish what may be relatively socially insignificant from what may actually be objectively harmful, or objectively helpful, to the overall struggle to fundamentally transform and thoroughly revolutionize society in line with the objective interests of the revolutionary class in society, the proletariat, and with the whole of humanity.”

The contradiction the RCP was attempting to navigate entails avoiding two traps. One is the liberalism of saying that "anything goes," that society has no responsibility for, and no interest in, understanding sexuality and developing standards around it. The other, which the RCP was frequently accused of, was the authoritarian response of an intrusive state, operating like a "bedroom police." In rejecting the latter, Avakian says this would lead to “real tyranny over people in ways that are very intimate – are right where they live, so to speak" (Avakian and Martin 2005, 252). As Martin puts this contradiction (Avakian and Martin 2005, 255):

How do we respect freedom in this area but without creating another hallowed private-public distinction and especially without putting ourselves in a position where we can't really raise the real brutalities of patriarchy and the ways patriarchal relations shape people in ways that are very limited, mean, violent, etcetera.

In all of its writings on sexuality, the RCP comes close to presenting a totalizing view of sexuality. This is one of the most common poststructuralist critiques of marxism, that it attempts to explain all phenomena under one explanatory concept. In the both the OL and the RL, capitalism takes the form of a foundation, upon which one can then "explain" sexuality. The result is a rather teleological and linear cause-and-effect explanation.

Though in their practice, the RCP consistently opposed repression and discrimination against homosexuals, their line was still working to reinforce the phobic abjection of homosexuality, albeit for different reasons. Put into full practice, it would have worked to recreate the reality of abject, unlivable bodies, with all the real violence and repression and denial this entails - and it would have done this in the name of liberation, of communism. Homosexuals, and all who would identify themselves as outside of the domain of heteronormativity, would not have been part of the "we" which would change the world.

Even though the RL viewed sex as unconnected with any essential self or as arising from or itself a stable foundation, it ends up in a similar place which Butler critiqued - the assumption that heterosexual sex is the foundation upon which gender is built. Though this foundation is presented as historical and contingent, it is far more foundational than contingent, given that the relevant historical period covers the entirety from the earliest formation of classes to the full emergence of communism.

Another problematic aspect of the RCP's approach is the suggestion that gender arises out of and is reducible to, the oppression of women. Butler's critique (1991, 92) of MacKinnon's idea that gender is the result of a system of sexual oppression is relevant here: "Gender is not a site of contest here, no site of ambivalence, no problematic convergence of class and racial and ethnic and geopolitical relations. When these relations are not subordinated to, or rendered symptomatic of, a primary sexual oppression, they are erased from view altogether."

Queering MLM

One way of looking at the RCP's past approach to sexuality is that they have been trying to impose a false coherence upon sexuality and its relation with gender and desire. And in doing so they have cut, twisted and deformed a very complex reality in order to fit into a linear logic, as well as relied upon a construction of a normalized sexed subject. The RP ended up creating a new "communist" ideological edifice which relied upon and worked to reinforce compulsory heterosexuality and stable gender identities. This is *precisely* the kind of coherence which Butler sees as illusory (and damaging) and which she wants to expose as such.

In his discussions with Avakian on this subject, Martin (Avakian and Martin 2005, 239) questions how

an organization (such as the party) could have a doctrine or a line on homosexuality without really having any kind of developed analysis of sexuality or embodiment or desire generally except at the most general level of saying that these are historically conditioned phenomena, they relate to classes, to class struggle, class interest, etcetera."

He suggests that simply going back and unearthing methodological errors is insufficient, and he is concerned that the thinking behind the old line has not really changed.

The RCP has broken with some of the shortcomings noted in the previous chapter: the use of essentialized conceptions of sex, desire and the body; an instrumentalist attitude toward intellectuals and truth, and a failure to consistently apply communist standards to themselves; and the tendency towards reducing all questions of sexuality and desire to

male supremacy and the oppression of women. Still, in all of the RCP's writings on sexuality there is a failure to deal with gender as an analytical category, beyond a narrow, fairly positivist sense. There continues to be a narrow focus on the question of biological origins of sexual preference and relations between (unproblematically sexed) male and female bodies. And while there is some sense of a connection between gender and sexuality, it is not all clear what they see this to be.

Fortunately, they have made one other important leap. As Avakian noted (2004c):

one of the most important methodological things out of all of this is to learn that there are times when it is important not to reach conclusions. That it is important to know what you do know at a given time and what you can say with a great deal of certainty is true, and what you do not have the basis to say that about. And when you don't, not to jump to conclusions and form opinions and then develop a whole line and policy and campaign around things which you have insufficient basis for really understanding correctly."

This expression of a positive value in ignorance and the clearing of methodological barriers, the re-assertion of materialist dialectics. the rejection of narrow conceptions of sexuality, of concerns about what "real" men and women are about, of the social conventions that determine the differences (and importance/ relative worth) between masculinity and femininity etc. - all of this has left the RCP with a better foundation to develop a line on sexuality that is fully marxist (and maoist), rather than the grotesque caricature of its previous lines.

Combined with the conception of subjectivity outlined in the previous chapter, it also creates the space for a useful and coherent intervention by queer theory. The ontological

and epistemological foundation has been laid to divide Engels (as an example) in two, to queer MLM. Queer theory, with which Butler is associated and often cited as germinal figure, focuses on analytical models and expressions which expose the incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between sex, gender and desire. A "natural" sexuality is seen as impossible and it resists models of stability which claims heterosexuality as its origin, when it is more properly its effect. While queer theory developed out of lesbian and gay studies, its analytic framework has expanded to include such topics as cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity and gender reassignment surgery.

For Halperin (1995, 6), as for Butler, queer theory is a way recognizing the constant recreation of identity, as a site of Becoming, not Being. "It describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance" and is a way of pointing ahead without knowing for certain what it is pointing at. It is thus a critique of identity, and of a politics based upon it. Queer theory rejects the idea that some identities are somehow more authentic while others are deviant, lacking or compromised. It is a critique of normalization, of the idea that one has to be (or become) normal to become legitimate, and disavows the construction of sex as a norm. Though MLM would reject moves towards a liberal, anything goes approach to sexual identity, or any tendency to simply understand the meaning/significance of any expression of sexuality from the individual out, this does not require the construction of a coherent set of sexual identities.

To further this point, of the possibility and fruitfulness of queering MLM, I now consider the work of another prominent figure of queer theory, Eve Sedgwick. She has described

her project as the exploration of tools and techniques for nondualistic thought and pedagogy, in order to help shift the foundations for individual and collective experience. She is interested in finding "new ways to think about lesbian, gay, and other sexually dissident loves and identities in a complex social ecology where the presence of different genders, different identities and identifications, will be taken as a given" (1993, xiii). Sedgwick uses the word "queer" to refer to "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically." As she notes, this is of value not just to questions of sexuality (1993, 8-9): "a lot of the most exciting recent work around 'queer' spins the term outward along dimensions that can't be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these and other identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses."

In an early work, Sedgwick (1985) argued that male-male bonds have structured the modern family and capitalist state and have placed men into a double-bind. On the one hand strong masculine relationships are required, but these are also continually crossing over into homoeroticism, which produces a "homosexual panic." This requires strict obedience to masculine gender roles while producing an intense homophobia – the modern masculine identity requires the scapegoating of same-sex male desire.²¹¹ One result of this is that, while straight married people get to enjoy the privilege of privacy, gays are forced into secrecy, into the closet. For Sedgwick, homophobia and heterosexism are not simply prejudices but are historically developed and woven into the

211. In a later work (1990, 94), she notes that male-male desire is deployed "as the glue rather than the solvent of a hierarchical disciplinary order."

entirety of modern social relations and institutions. Without an analysis of homophobia and specifically the hetero/homo dichotomy any critique will be incomplete. Therefore, it must be understood that a part of the gravitational pull of spontaneity involves the ambient heterosexist culture of Western societies.

Sedgwick took this analysis further in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), one of the key texts of queer theory, Sedgwick argues that binary oppositions restrict understanding and freedom, particularly with regards to sexuality. Limiting sexuality to homosexual or heterosexuality, in structured binary opposition, is just too simplistic, according to Sedgwick.²¹² Writing in opposition to what she sees as re-naturalizing of identity categories in mainstream gay cultures, Sedgwick the most import aspect of understanding homosexual identity is that it is, at its core, contradictory and incoherent, a reflection in part of the incoherence underlying all sexual desire and identity. Sedgwick holds that the incoherence is based on several contradictions. The first is the combination of the minoritizing view, which states that there is a distinct population of persons who really are homosexual, and the universalizing view, which states that sexual desire is an unpredictably powerful solvent of stable identities and thus that heterosexual persons are marked by same sex desires. The second is that same-sex relationships provide structural boundaries on the one hand and advance separation on the other. In gender construction for gay people, Sedgwick also sees the combination of two contradictory ideas. The first is one of gender inversion (the notion of a "woman trapped in a man's body," and vice

212. Sedgwick sees the term homosexuality as loaded (1990, 17): "... it has always seemed to have at least some male bias -- whether because of the pun on Latin homo = man latent in its etymological macaronic, or simply because of the greater attention to men in the discourse surrounding it."

versa which allows for the maintenance of an “essential heterosexuality” within the homosexual desire itself. The second idea is that of gender separation. In this view it is more natural for people of the same gender to be grouped together because people whose economic, institutional, emotional, physical needs and knowledges are so similar should bond together on sexual desire as well.

Sedgwick does not attempt to sort out this incoherent state of affairs. Rather than to try to develop a way of reconciling the incoherences or coming up with new definitions, the most promising course of action is to study the incoherences themselves. She says that the current debate between “constructivist” and “essentialist” understandings of sexuality “is the most recent link in a more enduring chain of conceptual impasses, a deadlock between what I have been calling more generally universalizing and minoritizing accounts of the relation of homosexual desires or persons to a wider field of all desires and persons” (1990, 91). She concludes that the continuation of this debate is itself the most important feature of recent understandings of sexuality. “This deadlock has by now been too deeply constitutive of our very resources for asking questions about sexuality for us to have any realistic hope of adjudicating it in the future. What we can do is understand better the structuring, the mechanisms, and the immense consequences of the incoherent dispensation under which we now live” (1990, 91).

The consequences are immense because “many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured—indeed fractured—by the now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century” (1990, 1). She argues that the incoherent

and unstable homo/hetero dichotomy is connected with a range of dichotomous definitional discourse underlying modern society, such as masculine/feminine, health/illness, knowledge/ignorance, public/private, natural/unnatural, etc. She asserts that a true understanding of the force of the opposition of these terms must be grounded in the realization that the content of these terms was determined towards the end of the 19th century amidst the anxious questioning over who was homosexual. These opposing terms all present a residue of the homo/hetero definitional crisis. Incoherent ideas about homosexuality inform the way people are acculturated in the modern West, and, since this is so, this incoherence has come to mark society generally. According to Sedgwick, the dichotomous defining of homo/heterosexual is as intense as it is precisely because of this lasting incoherence and its significance.

Sedgwick is thus arguing that the hetero/homo divide structures even those relations, texts and social formations which do not seem to have anything to do with sexuality (similar to feminist claims that the masculine/feminine dichotomy structures aspects of human society that do not directly relate to male/female relations). The homo/hetero distinction obtains with gender, class and race in conditioning all modern Western identity and social organization. Sedgwick's claim is that "an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition" (1990, 1). Further, she argues (1990, 34) that exposing the hetero/homo dichotomy provides a particularly fruitful avenue for deconstruction since "an essentialism of object-choice is far less easy to maintain, far more visibly incoherent, more visibly stressed and challenged at every point in the culture than the essentialism of

gender."²¹³

There are not only immense consequences arising from the incoherence of sexuality, there are immense consequences in attempts to force it into a false coherence. As

Sedgwick notes (1990, 26):

To alienate conclusively, definitionally, from anyone on any theoretical ground the authority to describe and name their own sexual desire is a terribly consequential seizure. In this century, in which sexuality has been made expressive of the essence of both identity and knowledge, it may represent the most intimate violence possible.

Avakian's comments indicate that he grasps something of the significance of this and the philosophical debridement throughout his recent work has opened the possibility of grasping this even more deeply. This clearly needs to be done. In looking over the RCP's material on sexuality, what one sees is a significant amount of work and study in order to achieve a frankly banal conclusion – that homosexuality is not a bad thing.

What Sedgwick (and Butler and poststructuralism more broadly) is concerned with is challenging *identity* as part of resisting the logic of regulatory regimes of all kinds which have been historically produced. And this is something which I feel is both compatible with MLM and something which MLM needs. Here I think it needs to be stated clearly – maoism has a strong tendency towards producing and imposing narrow regulatory

213. Sedgwick questions the assumption that sexuality theory is a subset of feminist theory and suggests dislodging feminism from the center of lesbian and gay theorizing. She notes the "rather amazing fact that, of the very many dimensions along which the genital activity of one person can be differentiated from that of another (dimensions that include preference for certain acts, certain zones or sensations, certain physical types, a certain frequency, certain symbolic investments, certain relations of age or power, a certain species, a certain number of participants, etc. etc. etc.), precisely one, the gender of object choice, emerged ... as the dimension denoted by the now ubiquitous category of "sexual orientation" (1990, 8).

regimes, the consequences of which are not always grasped well. The RCP's line on homosexuality is only one example, but many others from the GPCR and elsewhere could be presented. In my view, this does not arise from its philosophical roots but in its commitment to revolution, the need for urgent, concrete and far-reaching social transformation. While continually deepening one's grasp of materialist dialectics helps avoid such problems by exposing their epistemological, methodological and ontological roots, this is insufficient. This is why I argue for the importance of poststructuralist feminism. It provides essential analytical tools and viewpoints precisely because it focuses on the mechanisms and consequences of regulatory regimes and the identities they produce.

Seen from this viewpoint, even in its most recent form which ruptures from the more overt forms of reductionism and positivism, the analysis by the RCP is problematic. It relies upon the deployment of discrete and unproblematized categories, even as an attempt is made to place them in the context of historical development. It uncritically reproduces the homo/hetero dichotomous hierarchy. And even as they argue that male supremacy affects every area of human society and that sexuality has to be understood as a fully social phenomenon, their discussion of homosexuality is still contained – within these categories, within a particular section of their Programme, and within a discursive regime which places little emphasis on discourse.

Wrangling with poststructuralist feminism and queer theory can assist those committed to materialist dialectics to further rupture with these limitations. The perceived need for a stability, even one seen as contingent and dependent upon particular material context and

historicity, can be abandoned. The fear of incoherence in gender and sexuality which particularly underlies the OL would be seen as a hindrance, as would the need for the imposition of coherence between gender, desire and sex. MLM can do this without abandoning the responsibility of understanding the resulting (or rather, now recognized) complexity this entails for the need for humanity to advance beyond the 4 Alls and the narrow horizon of bourgeois right.²¹⁴

Further, this complexity, what Butler calls the troubling of the settled terrain of gender, should be seen as beneficial, and not just in the general sense of contributing to the ferment and wrangling of society. Particular expressions, or identities, which disrupt this stability should be seen as potentially positive, not just something to tolerate, or warily observe while quickly categorizing as good, bad or other. They work to undermine part of the ideological structures which maintain oppressive relations and status quo. Stable gender (and sexual) identities are a necessary component of patriarchal relations and male supremacy. As long as they are insisted upon or treated in some way as naturalized and seemingly self-evident categories of identification, these relations can not be fully transformed. The intervention of queer theory with regards to gender, identity and sexuality are largely consistent with and a logical extension of materialist dialectics and its approach to social categories and the commitment to the transformation of the 4 Alls.

214. In Lenin's words, "dialectical materialism insists on the approximate, relative character of every scientific theory of the structure of matter and its properties ... [and] insists on the temporary, relative, approximate character of all milestones in the knowledge of nature (LCW 14: 261). The same point holds with regards to the study of human society. Dialectical materialism, in opposition to all metaphysical, absolutist or ahistorical approaches, rests upon (Mao 1965a, 307) "ceaselessly open[ing] up roads to the knowledge of truth in the course of practice." What this proscribes is any simple or dogmatic application of existing concepts and theories.

The RCP's work on sexuality up through the RL can be seen as a monument of modernism, as creating precisely the kind of totalizing and exclusionary explanatory framework which poststructuralism works to oppose. This is amplified by the RCP's insistence during the period of the original and revised lines that its conclusions were fully scientific. Poststructuralism seeks to problematize the answers promoted by modernist methodologies and epistemologies. Where the modernists see truth, poststructuralists see intolerance of ambivalence and incommensurabilities along with an arrogance which even refuses to grasp the consequences of its exclusionary naivete. The more seriously the RCP recognizes this, the more deeply they recognize that they can and should learn from poststructuralist feminist approaches, the more they can fully leave such approaches behind and finally let the dead bury their dead.

From the perspective of MLM, there are potential problems with queer theory. It can appear as the "critical criticism" that Marx rejected early on in his development of materialist dialectics. In content it can advocate simply the individualistic transgression of boundaries or little more than "fighting the good fight" against the constantly recuperative ideological apparatus (what MLM critiques as the idea that the "movement is everything, the final goal nothing)" This cynicism around the possibility of substantial change is perhaps an indication of its roots in Foucault. In terms of what it advocates it can resemble liberal pluralism with a very different and at times somewhat impenetrable vocabulary. But, this is not necessarily so. For example, most queer theorists would argue that the point is not to simply say that "it's okay to be X" but instead to posit a critique of identity itself and the need or desirability for the delineation of X as a stable category

which precedes and then creates political intervention.

Similarly, there are numerous potential (and actualized) problems with Marxism, and communism. It CAN assume forms fraught with inevitablism, reductionism, foundationalism, economism, positivism, etc. But again, not necessarily. Along these lines, in 2004, the RCP changed the name of its newspaper from Revolutionary Worker to Revolution. Attacked by some "marxists" as representing the abandonment of the workers, what it actually represented was the final abandonment of essentialism, of the reification of the proletariat. This "marxist" version of identity politics rests upon a metaphysics of the "workers" and sees the goal as simply the creation of a "worker's state." This view has been the mainstream of the ICM, particularly in the US and the Communist Party, USA (but not just them). For many outside of the ICM, this "identity politics marxism" is often assumed to be what marxists and communist are all about. Though the analogy is not perfect, there is similarity in the difference between poststructuralist feminism and essentialist feminism, and that between MLM and what maoists call "workerism."

On Violence

A concern with violence, broadly understood, has long been a part of Butler's work.²¹⁵ In particular, she has investigated how it emanates from the matrix of heteronormativity, whether as the surgical violence directed against intersex children, the forcing of human

215. For the remainder of this chapter, I continue to focus on Butler. I am aware that there are poststructuralist feminists who are grappling with the questions I address in ways which differ from Butler, and which might not share what I see as her limitations. For example, Wendy Brown has addressed the question of the state and liberal democracy and its underlying values (Brown 1995, 2003, and 2006; Brown and Halley 2002).

beings into dichotomous categories, homophobic violence, etc. Indeed one way of looking at her work is that she labors to find the connections between the forms of categorization in consciousness with the material violence visited upon human beings. In *Precarious Life*, Butler focuses specifically on the question of violence and its effects on society and on human beings. Written in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent US attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq, she argues for an ethics of non-violence, particularly in the chapter "Violence, Mourning, Politics." She emphasizes the interdependence that arises from the simple fact that human beings are vulnerable – subject to loss of various kinds and subsequent mourning, and dependent upon others, many of which are anonymous.

For Butler, this simple fact provides the basis for a reimagining of community based upon an ethic of non-violence and the "decentering of the narrative 'I'" (2004a, 7). The terrorist attacks of 9/11 represented (2004a, xi) a "dislocation from First World privilege" which provide the opportunity to reflect on the fact that "we can be injured, that others can be injured, that we are subject to death at the whim of another," and further, to imagine a world which minimizes violence, "in which the inevitable interdependency becomes acknowledged as the basis for global political community." Grasping this, we should (2004a, xiv) "endeavor to produce another political culture and another public policy in which suffering unexpected violence and loss and reactive aggression are accepted as the norm of political life."

The US, through its unilateral response to 9/11, has missed "an opportunity to redefine itself as part of a global community." Instead of working with the UN and institutionally

established routes of consensus-building, it has "heightened nationalist discourse, extended surveillance mechanisms, suspended constitutional rights, and developed forms of explicit and implicit censorship" (2004a, xi). We, both as individuals and as states, should participate in the social transformation of our world "in such a way that non-violent, cooperative, egalitarian international relations remain the guiding ideal" (2004a, 17). Moving beyond the question of the 9/11 attacks and the response by the United States, Butler argues for the end of violence by both Palestinians and Israelis (what she calls the "cycle of revenge") (2004a, 17) and public debate on Palestine/Israel which is free of intimidation.

This, and other recent writings, represent something new for Butler. She is considering global relations directly and she makes some of her most explicit programmatic recommendations. Interestingly enough, *Precarious Life* deals with gender in only a passing way. There are some consistencies with regards to method and approach but she does not attempt to directly link her thoughts on gender with these writings on violence and international politics. Perhaps she is wary of making an explicit connection which she does not feel is warranted. Or perhaps she does not want to be equated with essentialist claims of women as inherently non-violent. She does integrate her Foucaultian concerns about the subject, saying (2004a, 44) that "speculations on the formation of the subject are crucial to understanding the basis of non-violent responses to injury and, perhaps most important, to a theory of collective responsibility." In this section, I consider Butler's thoughts on violence and attempt to connect it directly with the question of transforming patriarchal gender hierarchies.

On Non-Violence

The promotion of non-violence is hardly unique to Butler. Among activists and scholars who consider themselves progressive or radical, non-violence is not so much argued for as assumed as correct. Whether expressed as a principle or on pragmatic/realistic grounds, non-violence is commonly presented as self-evident and indisputable. For many, adherence to non-violence is seen as essential to any feminist politics. For some, the connection between the two was made through essentialism, the argument that women inherently tended toward or incorporated non-violence. Such an argument is not commonly expressed in academia today, though it still has some currency in popular discussions. For poststructuralists, violence is often rejected because it is seen as the epitome of the kind of dichotomous, hierarchical and coercive social relations which they seek to transform, or at least undermine. The question is seen as settled, much as the question of whether communist revolution is the path to women's liberation has been settled. My aim in this section is to unsettle this question, to show that non-violence as a principle is actually in opposition to any political project which seeks to fundamentally transform the realities of male supremacy and patriarchy.

There are many different articulations of non-violence but for the sake of concision I deal primarily with Butler's. I make use of writings by Ward Churchill, particularly his *Non-violence as Pathology*. Though Churchill is not a maoist and he does not explicitly make an ontological argument, his arguments on this question are largely consistent with an MLM perspective, though they are infused with his own indigenist form of identity politics and anarchism. I also use Churchill as an expression of solidarity since he has been singled out for attack by those who wish to both homogenize political discussion

and eliminate critical thinking and dissent in academia.²¹⁶ The battle against the Horowitzian attempt to transform universities into uncontested sites of indoctrination is linked to the larger epistemological battle in society on "faith-based vs reality-based" approaches to the world and is crucial toward any movement which would thoroughly transform existing social relations.²¹⁷

Butler's opposition to violence/revolution is based on a moral argument concerning what is good, not on the nature of reality and what is required to transform it. Still, it rests upon an ontology - a clear hierarchical dichotomization of "good" (non-violence) and "bad" (violence), based upon metaphysical and idealist conceptions of both. This dichotomous, hierarchical and metaphysical ontology is sharply at odds with her approach in other areas. Butler's discussion of violence and mourning is fundamentally idealist and metaphysical, and involves a discursive strategy as authoritarian and foundationalist as those as she has critiqued in her work on gender. Despite her clear, and even moving, commitment to radical transformation and social justice expressed in *Precarious Life* and elsewhere, what she creates in her advocacy of non-violence is a dead-end. Worse, following Churchill, it elides and reproduces a racist/colonialist praxis of privilege and unwarranted self-congratulation. Later, I connect this with her similar conceptions of democracy, which use an uncharacteristically "untroubled" ideological terrain as a basis.

216. To elaborate, this is a specifically maoist form of solidarity. Churchill has repeatedly and sharply attacked the RCP. Despite this, the RCP has been at the forefront of the struggle to defend Churchill and his right to speak and do research as he sees fit. The easy thing to do would be to let Churchill face these attacks alone, something unfortunately many who have faced Churchill's often sharp critiques have done. From the maoist perspective, however, the correct thing to do is to defend him, to treat as objectively on the same side overall and a potential ally, even though he might identify himself as an enemy.

217. See Avakian, "'Balance' Is The Wrong Criterion – And A Cover for a Witch-hunt – What We Need is the Search for the Truth: Education, Real Academic Freedom, Critical Thinking and Dissent."

Together, Butler's idealist and metaphysical conceptions of violence and democracy are quite solid barriers to the kind of transformation she desires, both with regards to gender and more broadly.

One problem, arising primarily out of Butler's idealism, is that despite her efforts to contextualize her discussion within the realities of imperialism (a word she does not define but which she seems to mean simply the domination of one country by another), she ends up flattening the terrain upon which mourning takes place and removing what is essential to understand violence. By this I mean she treats vastly different violences, with vastly different content and effects, as equivalent. She condemns, for example, Israeli as well as Palestinian violence, the violence of Al Qaeda and that done by the US.

First, there is the quantitative aspect in which Butler's approach to violence is problematic. Mark Twain, in his *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, had this to say about this question:

There were two "Reigns of Terror" if we would but remember it and consider it; the one wrought murder in hot passion, the other in heartless cold blood; the one lasted mere months, the other lasted a thousand years; the one inflicted death upon a thousand persons, the other upon a hundred millions; but our shudders are all for the "horrors" of the minor terror, the momentary terror, so to speak; whereas, what is the horror of swift death by the axe compared with lifelong death from hunger, cold insult, cruelty, and heartbreak? What is swift death by lightning compared with slow death by fire at the stake? A city cemetery could contain the coffins filled by the brief Terror which we have all been so diligently taught to shiver and mourn over; but all France could hardly contain the coffins filled by the older and real Terror - that unspeakably bitter and awful Terror which none of us has been taught to see in its vastness or pity as it deserves.

Twain was speaking to the overwhelming attention paid to the violence of the revolutions

that brought about bourgeois democracy and capitalism and comparing it to the violence inherent under feudalism.²¹⁸ In this quote and his discussion that follows, Twain is highlighting the tremendous disparity, quantitatively and qualitatively, between the two.²¹⁹

Obviously, Butler is not unaware of this, nor how violence is gendered and unequally distributed on that basis, whether this means the construction of subjects through heteronormative discourse, the everyday violence of things, or the explosions of violence inherent in the enforcement and expansion of oppression, whether at the personal or state level. She speaks to it directly, but in her search for a commonality upon which to build community, she ends up minimizing it, in effect flattening the terrain of violence. More importantly, she elides the question of qualitative differences entirely.²²⁰

Consider a different historical situation – violent resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto. Under the Nazi occupation, the Ghetto was turned into a walled urban reservation for Jews where thousands of slaves produced goods for the German war machine (and for simple

218. Twain was also involved in the Anti-Imperialist Society and denounced in very uncompromising terms the US attack on the Philippines, in which as many as a million people were killed by the US military. However, as Avakian notes (2006g), "Lenin pointed out that [Twain's] opposition came from the standpoint of the petty bourgeoisie, which wants to get rid of the excesses and atrocities which they can recognize but doesn't see the need to transform the material foundation of all this, the material basis in which all these atrocities and excesses are rooted and from which they emanate—the imperialist system itself and its grounding in the capitalist mode of production."

219. He is also implicitly arguing for the idea that certain social realities are better than others, that to move from one to another is an improvement and thus are worth fighting for. I note this merely because there are some poststructuralist approaches that deny this, that there are only shifting webs of power.

220. This may have its roots in the Nietzschean cynicism underlying Foucault's idea that transformations in society are simply reorganizations of power and how it acts. However, this is in opposition to Butler's obvious desire and belief that something fundamentally different is both desirable and possible.

German capitalist profit). A deliberate food and water shortage turned a great many others into walking skeletons who died of typhus by the tens of thousands. The destruction of human life was so great that the Ghetto population of around 550,000 at the beginning of the German occupation had been reduced by 1942 to around 360,000. During the summer of 1942 the Germans systematically destroyed 300,000 more people. They were piled into trains bound for the nearby death camp at Treblinka or shot on the spot. The Germans and their allied soldiers often targeted children to particularly horrific effect. It was in this context that in 1943, Jews in the Warsaw ghetto launched a violent uprising against the Nazis.

I do not use this example with the intention of suggesting that there is an exact equivalence between this situation and any that Butler discusses. I use it because, seen from Butler's perspective, something which should be recognized, and celebrated, as an inspiring and heroic resistance to literal genocide is seen as essentially equivalent to what it was fighting against. The question of the profound differences in content between the two violences are erased, and resistance is seen as simply part of the same problem. But from the perspective of MLM, the only problem with the Warsaw Uprising is that it did not happen sooner (along with the fact that many so-called communists opposed it).

One might argue that this is an extreme example from which generalizations cannot be made. However, it illustrates the problems with a metaphysical conception of violence. In the specific case of the Warsaw Ghetto, in what way could one speak of women's liberation without the use of violence, since without violence there would have no women to be liberated? Ward Churchill, speaking in general about the example of the justice of

violent resistance to the Nazi regime, notes (1999, 38) that "it is precisely this extremity which makes the example useful; the Jewish experience reveals with stark clarity the basic illogic at the very core of pacifist conceptions of morality and political action." He also quotes (1999, 36) Bruno Bettelheim (a former concentration camp inmate), who said: "Rebellion could only have saved either the life they were going to lose anyway, or the lives of others. Inertia it was that led millions of Jews into the ghettos that the SS had created for them."

So the question is, what exactly is wrong with violence? There are a number of common arguments against violence as a part of a praxis of liberation. It is said that violence only leads to more violence, that it works to create a descending cycle of retaliation and destruction. Another argument is that to employ violence is to descend to the moral level of the oppressors and to, sooner or later, become them. This argument is often put in the terms of Audrey Lourde's comment that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." Other arguments include that violence represents a narrow conception of power as simply "power over," that it reproduces masculinist hierarchies of domination and thus is antithetical to the process of transforming gender hierarchies. Finally, violence is seen as simply too destructive, materially and psychologically, to be of use.²²¹

Arguments for non-violence as a principle are usually expressed in metaphysical terms, and Butler is no exception. That is, violence is simply violence, regardless of context. The assumption is that violence has an inherent content, an essential identity which

221. There are other arguments within progressive activists, such as that violence is counter-productive, and that it would undercut support of progressive action in the broader community. As Butler focuses on ethical and not pragmatic concerns, I will not address these concerns directly.

transcends any particular manifestation or context. This $A = A$ conceptualization is common even among writers, such as Butler, who otherwise work from an ontology which goes beyond and even explicitly rejects the Aristotelian law of identity. From the dialectical perspective, nothing is simply what it is – it is also what it is not. It is enmeshed in contradiction and is itself contradictory, and its identity is contingent upon this context of ubiquitous, multi-dimensional and constantly changing contradiction. Violence is not simply violence – abstract, metaphysical and self-identifying. The meaning, significance and content of violence, like anything else, is determined by context, particularly the social relations in which it is embedded.

To put it simply, the violence of the oppressors against the oppressed is something different than the violence of the oppressed against their oppressors. They have a very different content. To respond that reality is not so simple, and therefore the distinction is not so easy to make, does not obviate this point. It merely points to the complexity involved. But the simple point, that violence does not equal violence must be grasped – the question of how to determine the exact content of any violence is a further question with which to grapple.

These quantitative and qualitative aspects expose the problems in Butler's equal condemnation of Israeli and Palestinian violence. It would be similar to condemning both homophobic violence and "heterophobic" violence. In this regard, had Mathew Shepard managed to kill one, or even all, of his attackers, would that suggest the need to condemn both acts of violence? Equally condemning two forms of violence that happen in vastly

disparate numbers and for vastly different ends, elides this reality.²²² Further, if one condemns "both" Israeli and Palestinian violence, or any other situation of oppression and resistance, the result will be victim-blaming of the oppressed in one form or another.

Violence is not simply a necessary evil, an unfortunate means to get to a better end. Violence can be profoundly liberating for those who are weighted down by the immense oppression that is part and parcel of social reality under imperialism. The violence of oppression under imperialism is not simply a question of the violence of people (or their institutions) against other people, but the violence of things against people. Simply put, it is the violence of capital, which includes the wars it requires, the daily, often invisible violence which results in millions dying of starvation, up to the catastrophic violence of potentially rendering the planet uninhabitable. The problem is not that there is too much violence in the world. The problem is that far too much of the violence is reactionary, directly or indirectly in the service of creating, furthering or maintaining horrific oppression and exploitation. What is needed is therefore not "less violence," and certainly not "non-violence," but more revolutionary violence.

As Thoreau, responding to those who condemned the rebellion led by John Brown and called for non-violent methods to oppose slavery, said:

We preserve the so-called peace of our community by deeds of petty violence every day. Look at the policeman's billy and handcuffs! Look at the jail! Look at the gallows! Look at the chaplain of the regiment! We are hoping only to live safely on the outskirts of this provisional army. So we defend ourselves and our hen-roosts, and maintain slavery." In Thoreau's view, Brown's rebellion meant that "for once the

222. None of this is to suggest the uncritical acceptance of any particular form of violence used by the oppressed. See below for further discussion.

Sharps rifles and the revolvers were employed in a righteous cause. The tools were in the hands of one who could use them. He added, "the question is not about the weapon but the spirit in which you use it."²²³

Foucault has noted, transposing Clausewitz, that politics is the continuation of war by other means. The power dynamics of social relationships have their basis in violence, often spectacular violence. The connections and ramifications of this are such that no one should be cavalier in assuming that they are acting in a non-violent manner, simply because they are not personally engaging in violent behavior. As was noted, just as violence is also what it is not, so is non-violence. To act non-violently in a privileged space created through tremendous violence, both spectacular and everyday, is not possible. Butler verges on realizing this when she says (2004a, xvii) "aggression is not eradicated in an ethics of non-violence; aggression forms the incessant matter for ethical struggles." But ultimately, she creates an inside/outside dichotomy, in which violence provides the context in which non-violence operates but does not determine its content.

Another common argument against violence is that of "the slippery slope," or, to put it in Mao's terms, that even admitting its necessity, revolutionary violence opens the door to excesses, and further, to its transformation into its opposite, a means to create a new set of social relations built upon brute force. This is true enough, but from the point of view of dialectics, every means opens many doors, both positive and negative. For example, Mao said that the successful completion of the New Democratic stage of the Chinese revolution opened the door to capitalism but it opened the door wider to socialism.

223. Henry David Thoreau, "A Plea for Captain John Brown (paragraphs 57 and 58).

The insistence on non-violence has a real authoritarian dimension to it. People have the right to fight back against oppression and reactionary violence, and no one (particularly those in a position of relative safety) has the right to tell them they can not, that their use of violence would render them ethically abject. To refer to the example used in the previous chapter, when a woman is facing imminent death from a violent partner, she has the right to fight back with whatever means necessary, even if this means shooting and killing him. The full commitment to a metaphysical claim for non-violence falls apart here, as almost all who hold a pacifist position acknowledge. Non-violence is qualified at this point (even if the claim is made that they themselves would not use violence in any circumstances). Thus, the question turns to one of understanding in what context is violence justified, or further, correct. Here the distinction is often made between violence used to defend oneself or others from immediate threat and the use of violence to transform society, with the former (but not the latter) seen as a valid exception to the non-violence principle. However, as Churchill details, this distinction, or rather its moral content, is not valid.

Churchill and Pacifism as Pathology

The argument that violence only leads to more violence is not substantiated historically. The example of Nancy surviving an attempted murder is one example, which could be multiplied innumerable times. On a broader scale, there are many examples in which massive violence stopped or prevented further violence and created a better situation, such as the US Civil War or any number of wars of national liberation. Similarly, the positive argument in favor of pacifism as a effective methodology for transformative praxis is also historically unsubstantiated. Churchill (1999) argues that pacifists have

constructed an inaccurate, revisionist history of such things as the US Civil Rights Movement and the national liberation struggle in India to back up their positions. He argues (1999, 45) that the historical reality is that "there simply has never been a revolution, or even a substantial social reorganization, brought into being on the basis of the principles of pacifism. In every instance, violence has been an integral requirement of the process of transforming the state." Thus, he says that pacifists must begin to realize that there is not just an option to accept violence as a method of social change, but an imperative.

Churchill also argues, in typically uncompromising fashion, that the pacifism engaged in today in the imperialist countries, even by those who explicitly base themselves upon Gandhi, is actually far different from what Gandhi actually practiced (1999, 49):

The question central to the emergence and maintenance of nonviolence as the oppositional fundament of American activism has been, by and large, not the truly pacifist formulation, 'How can we forge a revolutionary politics within which we can avoid inflicting violence on others?' On the contrary, a more accurate articulation would be, 'What sort of politics might I engage in which will both allow me to posture as a progressive and allow me to avoid incurring harm to myself?' Hence, the trappings of pacifism have been subverted to establish a sort of politics of the comfort zone, not only akin to what Bettelheim termed the philosophy of business as usual and devoid of perceived risk to its advocates, but minus any conceivable revolutionary impetus as well. The intended revolutionary content of true pacifist activism of the sort practiced by the Gandhian movement, the Berrigans and Norman Morrison, is thus isolated and subsumed in the U.S., even among the ranks of self-professing participants.

For Churchill (2004), non-violence is put forward by people "preoccupied with the sanctity of their own personal security [who], like an alchemist, ... repeat the performance often enough to make [themselves] feel good in the face of an undisturbed continuation of the horror." It is a reflection not of an attempt to really grapple with what is necessary

to effect substantive change but "to bear moral witness, to make the person feel good, to assuage their conscience [so] they can then posture as good and decent people, while engaged in active complicity in the crimes they purportedly oppose." But the point, Churchill says, is not to attempt to create a situation in which one can feel positive about their personal purity but to effect real change.

He puts the question of privileged refuge of pacifism in the imperialist countries sharply in an interview (2004):

Hey those brown-skinned folks dying in the millions in order to maintain this way of life, they can wait forever for those who purport to be the opposition here to find some personally comfortable and pure manner of affecting the kind of transformation that brings not just lethal but genocidal processes to a halt ... Third world opposition on the other hand understands this dynamic much more clearly. You have to have an eradication of the beast, not a retraining of the beast's performance. I can give a talk to a university in North America, to students and professors, and they are fundamentally confused about things that are automatically self-evident to people when you go to a village in Latin America, where the average educational attainment is third grade. Now why can these "peasants" automatically grasp concepts that are just beyond the reach altogether of your average university audience in North America?

Churchill argues that any genuine struggle to transform the realities faced by oppressed people will result in very real social harm, whether bodily, financial, in infrastructure, etc. He argues (1999, 38) that an approach to social change which makes a philosophical principle out of non-violence results in a delusional, ineffective "pseudo-praxis." It fosters "view of social conflict as a morality play" in which the idea that violence can be transcended through purity of purpose, moral superiority and non-violence. The 'play' rests upon a simplistic presentation of good (non-violence) and bad (violence - of all kinds), with the former triumphing because of its moral superiority. He feels (1999, 30)

that "pacifists, with seemingly endless repetition, pronounce that the negativity of the modern corporate-fascist state will atrophy through defection and neglect once there is a sufficiently positive social vision to take its place." In his companion essay to the Churchill piece, Ryan agrees, saying (1999, 139) that pacifism "has become a form of catharsis, a practice that allows us to cleanse our souls of the guilt of our white skin privilege for ourselves and for each other without posing a threat either to the state or ourselves. We create a theatre of pseudoresistance in which everyone has their part."

Churchill notes that many proponents of non-violence have deep and radical aspirations, that they reject the present social order and wish to see its total abolition and replacement. He notes (1999, 103) that "the desire for a non-violent and cooperative world is the healthiest of all psychological manifestations." Regardless of their intent however, the insistence upon non-violence will end up either being useless or reinforcing a status quo of exploitation and destruction (1999, 62): "Massive and unremitting violence in the colonies is appalling to right-thinking people but ultimately acceptable when compared with the unthinkable alternative that any degree of real violence might be redirected against 'mother country radicals'." By intentionally avoiding state violence themselves, non-violent activists ensure that the brunt of it is borne by those who already disproportionately experience all forms of violence. Churchill argues that this form of imperialist pacifism is a pathology, filled with "delusion, the aroma of racism and the sense of privilege" (1999, 101), and is more like a religious dogma than a political ideology. This religiosity makes it difficult to argue against this mindset (1999, 93); "hegemonic pacifism in advanced capitalist contexts proves itself supremely resistant- indeed virtually impervious-to mere logic and moral suasion."

Ryan argues sharply that those whose radicalism means the piously expressed and self-congratulatory reaping of the privileges created by genocidal oppression need to look at themselves squarely, and see how others see them. He quotes (1999, 142) an indigenous leader: "[If] it is true that whites want struggles without pain — and we say that it is — then it's because they don't want new life, don't really want a new order. It means they ain't really dissatisfied with the present arrangement of power and property relations." Ryan concludes (1999, 143) that "we must also recognize that there is a dialectical relationship between Third World liberation and international struggles of all other types, that the speed and effectiveness of decolonization in the Third World is in part determined by the effectiveness of our resistance in the asshole of the beast."

The Metaphysics of violence

Arguing against the absolute prohibition of violence is not an argument for its indiscriminate application or a grant of absolution to any manifestation. This is a common straw-man response to a criticism of non-violence as a principle, and it is often put in caricatured terms. The overwhelming majority of social contradictions are correctly resolved through non-violent methods. Here again, Mao's distinction between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions is essential. The transformation of the former will often involve violence at some point. The latter will be transformed essentially through non-violence, though there may be particular instances which require violence, or at least coercion. In either case, what is required is the application of materialist dialectics, through the concrete investigation of concrete reality, from a revolutionary communist outlook.

However, there have been many self-identified revolutionaries, RC and otherwise, who have put forth some form of metaphysics of violence, a position that suggests that it is violence *per se* which will liberate the masses, rather than their conscious revolutionary actions. One particularly relevant example would be the Communist Party of Peru (PCP, called Sendero Luminoso by others), for some time the most important, or at least visible, maoist party in the world. Abimael Guzmán, the leader of the PCP, quoted Marx, Engels, and Lenin (Guzmán 1991, 32) to justify the need for revolutionary violence, and emphasized Mao's view that revolutionary violence is a universal law, that without revolutionary violence, one class cannot replace another. He also quoted Jose Mariátegui (Guzmán 1991, 15), the Peruvian revolutionary which the PCP claimed as their originator that "power is seized through violence and defended with dictatorship," and "revolution is the bloody process through which things are born."

The difference between these writers and Guzmán is the characterization of violence. Moving beyond the view of violence as a necessary and essential aspect of revolution, violence for Guzmán took on an almost mystical character, as a heroic part of an ongoing creation myth for the New Democratic State. This is particularly shown in his speech initiating the People's War, which supporters described as a "lyrical poem of war" (Guzmán 1991, 104). Violence *per se* (as opposed to the overall revolutionary process), is not only what creates the New Democratic State, but is also what creates the cadre of the PCP and steels them to effectively lead the revolution. Violence was not presented as simply necessary, but as the very life spring of the revolution. There is reason to believe that some of the more spectacular expressions of the PCP's violence were not simply the

result of mistakes or excesses by the masses but flowed from this characterization.

The romanticization of violence, and its metaphysical conception, served as the wellspring for these expressions, such as the massacre at Lucanamarca (even though Guzmán basically blames the masses for this by saying, "in war, the masses engaged in combat can go too far and express all their hatred . . . what we needed was for the waters to overflow, to let the flood rage, because we know that when a river floods its banks it causes devastation, but then it returns to its bed.") (Guzmán 1991, 44). When something (whether violence or democracy) is conceived of metaphysically, and as a necessary and universal method, it is a logical leap to conclude that more of that thing is good. Thus, if it is correct to assassinate a civilian who is actively working to militarily oppose the revolution and who has caused the death of many cadre, it is just as correct to blow up her body with dynamite in front of her children.

The PCP also raised the question of a People's Army, that is, the need for a military, to the level of metaphysics as well. In their analysis, the Party needed to be militarized. Further, their understanding as to why socialism was defeated in China despite the GPCR led them to two conclusions. The first is that socialist society as a whole needs to be militarized. The second was encapsulated in the slogan "People's War Until Communism." The combination of the two, one has to say, presents a vision of socialism as a militarized forced march – a vision which is not very inspiring, to put it mildly.

These points require comment given the extent to which the PCP was vilified. The popular perception of the revolution in Peru during its period of greatest impact, to the

extent that there was one, was of a small group of incredibly violent and fanatical terrorists, overseen by a Peruvian Pol Pot, attempting to force an extreme and alien ideology upon the people of Peru through fear and force of arms.²²⁴ Official "commissions" to the contrary, the violence of the PCP paled in comparison to both the violence of the Peruvian state and its imperialist backers and the everyday violence in which the Peruvian masses were (and unfortunately still are) stuck. The PCP made no apology for the fact that its revolution was violent, but, according to a US intelligence expert, Sendero's violence constituted a very small part of their revolution (McCormick 1992, 12). The rest was taken up with very painstaking organization, education and development. Many analysts, in particular those associated with the U.S. Defense Department, have said that Sendero's success was less the result of their violence than their ability to provide a more effective substitute to the Peruvian state. As McCormick (1992, 12) put it shortly before Gonzalo was captured,

The often heard claim that Sendero Luminoso is nothing more than a 'terrorist' organization that does not and cannot pose a viable threat to the central government of Peru is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the insurgency and the underlying dynamics of Shining Path activities. Sendero's operations, which have increased regularly since 1980, are the product of a much more extensive set of political and social networks that exist beneath the surface of large segments of Peruvian society. Between 25 and 40 percent of Peru is now estimated to have come under either open or shadow Sendero administration. Collectively, their administration represents an attempt to build an institutional alternative to the state. It is this presence, which serves as the basis of the guerilla military position, rather than their militant actions per se, that poses the greatest long term threat to the central government.

Since it is the job of such analysts to analyze the revolution objectively so that it can be

224. See, for example, Poole and Renique (1992), Strong (1992), Degregori (1990), Kirk (1991), Palmer (1992), Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs (1992a, 1992b), and Nicksch (1992).

better attacked, such an observation should be taken seriously (along with noted how different it is from the public comments of US officials and the "Senderologists" of academia. It also coincides well with a quote from Lenin that Guzmán uses in the interview which says essentially the same thing, albeit with slightly different language: "Long live the pioneers of the people's revolutionary army! It is no longer a plot against some detested individual, no act of vengeance or desperation, no mere 'intimidation' - no, it was well thought-out and well prepared commencement of operations by a contingent of the revolutionary army. Fortunately, the time has passed when revolution was 'made' by individual terrorists, because people were not revolutionary. The bomb has ceased to be the weapon of the solitary 'bomb thrower,' and is becoming an essential weapon of the people (Guzmán 1991, 33)."

Violence and militarization are not the only examples of metaphysics which Sendero put forward. Another one was their concept of *Jefatura* or Great Leadership, the idea that there are leaders who represent, in a direct and essential fashion, the correct line. In Sendero's case, this was Abimael Guzmán, or Chairman Gonzalo. Other examples include their view of communism as a "great harmony," and Guzmán's view that communism was predestined, as in his 1979 speech 'For the New Flag', where he says, "They say that this part of the cosmos structured itself as Earth over 15 billion years, billions of years in order to develop Communism." Overall, the PCP tended towards a rather hegelian view of dialectics, envisioning an inevitable stage of development in which contradictions are no longer operative. It is a closed system in which contradictions work themselves out to the point of ceasing to exist – in thought processes, contradictions unfold toward absolute knowledge (what the PCP called Gonzalo

Thought) and social contradictions unfold toward an ideal society.²²⁵

Despite the very important contributions of the PCP and Guzmán (one of which was the substantial moves to transform a gendered division of labor within the Party and the People's Liberation Army)²²⁶, these and other manifestations of metaphysics and idealism were crippling for the revolution in Peru. Unfortunately, some of their supporters internationally (as well as others) have taken these tendencies to the extreme and have put forward a version of MLM that is sharply at odds with what is presented in this paper. They have built, in the name of MLM, organizations and thinking which resemble nothing so much as religious cults.²²⁷

The Dialectics of Violence

From the point of view of dialectics, the method of opposing something with its metaphysical opposite is erroneous. One cannot oppose "violence" with "non-violence," because there is no "violence" (that is, violence as abstract, self-identifying with an essential nature) which can be opposed. There are only the specific concrete expressions of violence, which has a content determined by the overall societal context and the matrix of relations in which it takes place. That, and only that, can be opposed – not an abstract idea of "violence." (The same reasoning, by the way, applies to arguments put forward that the problem is the State, or hierarchy, etc.) In the same sense that the State is not the

225. For more on the ideology of the PCP and the revolution it led, see Central Committee, Communist Party of Peru (1986a, 1986b, 1990), Committee to Support the Revolution in Peru (1985, 1992), Committee Sol Perú (1991), and Spalding (1992).

226. See Andreas (1985, 1990) and Central Committee, Communist Party of Peru (1976) and (2000). For a liberal feminist critique, see Kirk (1997).

227. See for example, MPP-USA (1996). There are many other examples which are easily available on the internet.

problem and cannot be negated by "non-state," one can not somehow negate violence by non-violence. This can be done, of course, but only in the realm of consciousness. And there is the rub, the underlying idealism of the pacifist position. Marx wrote in the German Ideology that all that was necessary to negate the idea of capitalism is the idea of communism, but actually negating it in reality requires something else, specifically revolutionary practice.

The MLM insistence upon the need for violence is not based on a subjective and individualist perspective. It is not a question of a personal desire for violence or perceived need to take revenge (though in any revolutionary situation there will be many people from the ranks of the oppressed who are moved by such motivations). Neither is it violence *per se* which brings about the transformation of the proletariat as being "fit to rule," in Marx's phrase. Violence is needed based upon a dialectical materialist analysis of class society, its state and what is needed to transform current realities, a subject to which I will return.

Revolutionary violence is something far removed from any kind of individualistic and infantile posturing, as the RCP explains:

Revolution is a very serious matter and must be approached in a serious and scientific way, and not through subjective and individualistic expressions of frustration, posturing and acts which run counter to the development of a mass revolutionary movement which is aimed at—and which must be characterized by means that are fundamentally consistent with and serve to bring into being—a radically different and far better world. Revolution, and in particular communist revolution, is and can only be the act of masses of people, organized and led to carry out increasingly conscious struggle to abolish, and advance humanity beyond, all systems and relations of exploitation and oppression ... In the absence of a revolutionary situation—and in opposition to the revolutionary orientation and revolutionary political and ideological work that is actually needed—the initiation of, or the

advocacy of, isolated acts of violence, by individuals or small groups, divorced from masses of people and attempting to substitute for a revolutionary movement of masses of people, is very wrong and extremely harmful.²²⁸

At the same time, maoists do not reject the violence of the masses in response to their oppression (often superficially prompted by a particularly egregious outrage) simply because it lacks coherence, attacks the wrong targets and so on. In the words of Fanon, maoists support "all revolts, all desperate actions, all those abortive attempts drowned in rivers of blood." This is the same thing as Mao saying that "it is right to rebel against reactionaries." He did not say, "it is only right to rebel against reactionaries at a time and in a way some Authority declares."

A recent example of this would be the uprising by mainly second-generation immigrant and proletarian youth in France in the Fall of 2005. As in the 1992 Los Angeles rebellion, reactionaries (pretty much by definition) saw this uprising as mass criminal behavior, while liberals largely condemned it as an unfortunate if predictable response to the racism and injustice in French society. Both called for the re-establishment of "order," that is, the status quo which preceded the uprising. What is interesting is that much of what is usually called the Far Left (various French revisionist "communist" parties) also condemned the uprising, even arguing for the introduction of troops. Meanwhile, the French maoists (Communist Party [Marxist-Leninist Maoist]) wrote, "So do we want a revolution or don't we? Struggle is a fact and those who would prefer that it be "different" are simply showing how they fear it, or that they do not even want it. ... these seven nights of rebellion already have their place in the revolutionary history of France.

228. Revolution #55, July 30, 2006.

They are the proof that the class struggle is not over, even though certain people tried to suffocate it with electoralism."²²⁹

The task of revolutionary leadership is not simply to laud such uprisings (and certainly not uncritically) but to divert the spontaneous forms of violence inherent in popular uprisings into methods which can actually take state power. Under class society, the polarization underlying violence is inevitable. What is not inevitable is the particular alignment of that polarization. If one (specifically, a maoist vanguard party) works with this understanding, one can have an effect on this in the context of society-wide polarization (that is, a revolutionary situation).²³⁰ If one does not, the polarization will fall out a different way, one more than likely antithetical to the interests of the vast majority.

Butler ignores the ways in which previous violence has set the bounds of what is permissible or "realistic," and the fact that it all takes place in the context in which one side has the lawful monopoly on the use of force. This is another way in which the insistence on equality, meaning a metaphysical conception of violence falls apart. An illustration of how this would be played out in reality is revealed in the original motivation for Churchill's essay. He gave a workshop at the Midwest Radical Therapy Association's annual conference in 1981 entitled "Demystification of the Assault Rifle." In it, Churchill explained and demonstrated how assault rifles functioned by displaying

229. From a translation provided on a listserv in possession of the author.

230. How this is done is, obviously, a very complex question, the answers to which are not always obvious. A full discussion is beyond this dissertation, but I would point the reader to Avakian's recent works, particularly (2005c), *The Coming Civil War and Repolarization for Revolution in the Present Era*, which is a concrete illustration of how such a repolarization might be effected.

and breaking down two of them. The organizers subsequently passed a resolution censuring Churchill and barring anyone from carrying weapons into the conference. When Churchill asked how they would apply this rule if police were to show up, an amendment was quickly passed to exempt the police from having to surrender their weapons. The resulting hypocrisy and the obviousness of how non-violence ended up ensuring that only those who have a legitimate monopoly of violence (i.e., the bourgeois state) would continue to be able to use it compelled Churchill to speak on this issue. Simply put, you cannot make a principle of non-violence without contributing to the maintenance of oppression and exploitation. It will always be a strategic question.²³¹

The use of violence necessarily involves sharp contradictions, and the correct grasp and resolution of these is not always obvious. Many of the contradictions will be quite gendered. As an example, anyone one with experience in radical movements has probably witnessed many instances of machismo on the part of self-identified revolutionaries. However, as in every other question, the existence of contradictions in a method or action is not an argument against it. If it was, it would be impossible to argue *for* anything.

As in every case, a dialectical and materialist conception of violence merely (!) creates the possibility for success. An idealist and metaphysical conception, on the other hand,

231. Another example would be the massive marches in April 2006, during the nation-wide upsurge of immigrants. In Tucson (and other places) "non-violence" was promoted by the organizers. When racist counter-demonstrators began provoking the crowd, the "peace-keepers" became part of the means by which the police acted violently. Those committed to "non-violence" helped the police, and not just discursively but physically, act violently against immigrant youth, who were pepper-sprayed, beaten and arrested – during a pro-immigrant march they had organized.

ensures failure – at least by any standard that matters. This is one reason for the lengthy chapter on China. The experience of revolution in China, which involved immense amounts of violence, demonstrates clearly that this is not in opposition to the process of liberation for women. The use of revolutionary violence is not only not antithetical to a vision of society in which gender hierarchies and oppression are transformed – such violence is actually a necessary component. There are many complexities to this. Revolutionary violence is needed at the level of the particular in order to defend those under immediate attack. It is needed at the level of the general in defeating the forces upholding the current state and creating a different state (and a different people) which does not simply allow but encourages a full transformation – and not just for a privileged minority but for everyone. Without the violence necessary to seize state power, the real transformations will be an illusion, a privilege extended to the already relatively privileged.

In real life, the boundaries between legitimate revolutionary violence and reactionary violence are never clear cut, and every revolutionary upsurge will inevitably have some of the latter. The masses will commit excesses, opportunists and backwards elements will take advantage of the chaos and uncertainty, even the best and most sincere of revolutionaries will make mistakes, even grievous ones – and some will have their revolutionary spirit corrupted and commit crimes, even horrors, against the people. Yet, that is not an argument against the need for violent revolution. Of course, the tactical or strategic mistakes of those who have used violence in the pursuit of revolutionary aims are very commonly used as a metaphysical argument against all violence.²³² And the

232. See, for example, "The Limits of Violence," By Richard Huffman (Satya March 2004), who uses

complexity of making distinctions is hardly an argument for not making them – those who want a better world have an obligation to do so. And this must be done on the basis of materialist dialectics and making distinctions based upon the contradictory motion of reality - not on metaphysical and idealist conceptions which reflect convenience and ideology more than they do reality.

Here, brief comments on the relationship between means and ends is warranted. The argument that violence will lead to bad ends often involves an explicit call for means and ends to be consistent. MLM would agree with this but would insist that the connection needs to be dialectical not metaphysical. That is, the argument is not that there is no

Baader-Meinhoff as a foil. It should be stressed that the methods and political analysis of the Baader-Meinhoff (along with other similar organizations) are a form of terrorism, and that this very different from revolutionary violence. Avakian notes (Revolution, #55, July 30, 2006), "[terrorism is] a very wrong attempt at a solution, wrong in many dimensions, to the very real contradiction of technological disproportionality, if you will, or in the terminology of the imperialist military, the asymmetrical nature of the technological component of the contending sides. It is in every dimension a wrong, and worse than wrong, ultimately a reactionary response to that real phenomenon, and it is bound up with a whole ideological and political viewpoint and program which aims for things which are not fundamentally an alternative to, and insofar as they are an alternative to imperialism, are not a positive one. They are not a fundamental alternative, and insofar as they represent any kind of alternative, it is not a positive one. So this is an expression, terrorism is an expression overall, of an incorrect outlook and methodology serving a program and interests other than a thoroughgoing revolution leading to the abolition of all exploitation and oppression and ultimately the emancipation of all of humanity. It doesn't aim for that and it's not capable of achieving it. And both things are important. And that is why increasingly, as I said, it ends up targeting not the actual source of oppression of the people, but even sections of the people themselves, and it aims for something which would not lead to the emancipation of all of humanity. And the two are bound together: For the same reasons that the military approach, if you will, is wrong-headed, it is also part of an overall ideological viewpoint and program that is not in the final analysis emancipatory and cannot be emancipatory. Even if this were applied by people with a different outlook than, say, religious fundamentalism, there becomes, in the application of this approach, too much of a fundamental divide and contradiction between professed aims and actual means. And it's important to distinguish terrorism from a genuine people's war—where that is possible and the appropriate strategy. This is an important point to stress because the imperialists deliberately set out to obliterate that distinction and to declare every kind of armed struggle against them, even one that has massive popular support and participation, to be a form of terrorism. And that's particularly true in these days, so it's very important to actually draw the objective distinction, to recognize and to emphasize the objective distinction and to combat the attempts of the imperialists to obliterate that distinction and to equate any kind of a revolutionary struggle, even that with massive popular support and involvement, as being an act of or a form of terrorism."

connection between the two, or that it is justified on *realpolitik* grounds to divorce the two (the "you have to break some eggs to make an omelette" argument). Rather, that the connection must be made based on dialectics and materialism. That is, not the assumption violence plus non-violence equals the end of violence, but rather that reactionary violence met with revolutionary violence equals the creation of new situation, the building of a path to an end to systematic violence. This is counter-intuitive, as is much of programmatic recommendations that arise out of materialist dialectics. Just as you need specific forms of violence to overcome other specific forms of violence in order to get to a new situation in which the latter has been overcome, the same needs to be done with regards to hierarchies, the state, etc.

A praxis founded upon any kind of metaphysicality will eventually founder upon material reality (again, at the risk of repetition, understood dialectically). When it does, the results will only be positive by the sheerest of accidents. More often, the assumptions underlying that metaphysicality will reinforce that much more adamantly its perceived 'truth' in the face of its independence from reality – as the example of the RCP's immunity from criticism over its line on homosexuality indicates. Sooner or later, and more likely than not sooner, this will result, if indirectly, in real violence, and those putting forth that metaphysicality will bear some responsibility for its consequences.

In the context of the violence of imperialism/capitalism, the reality of the dictatorship and the democracy that provides its ideology cover, the 'community' of non-violence that Butler envisions would be an enclave of the privileged. It would be, speaking both metaphorically and literally, a gated community. Her desire to construct a community of

non-violence is essentially the same as that condemned by Marcel Peju (quoted in Fanon, 103) as "the wish to build up a luxury socialism upon the fruits of imperialist robbery."

An Epistemological Aside

Before moving to a discussion of the widespread advocacy of democracy, which Butler engages in, an epistemological aside concerning her article "Merely Cultural" (MC) is warranted.²³³ The points raised here do not directly relate to gender, but they do involve the question of having an all-around consistent approach. MC, as well as other pieces by Butler, presents an epistemological flaw which is not particularly harmful as an individual expression, but if followed as a principle, would be quite at odds with a vision and overall process of transforming society.

The chief target of MC is what she calls (1997, 268) a resurgent, orthodox Left, "a new and eerie political formation of neo-conservative Marxisms." Brandishing an anachronistic materialism and nostalgic for previous hegemony, its goal is the redomestication and resubordination within a false and exclusionary unity of the new social movements (whose vitality it resents). My aim in discussing this article is not to defend those whom Butler critiques. Indeed, I cannot, as she declines to name them (the

233. Merely Cultural is rather revanchist, which is unfortunate if understandable. When a one's position or identity is consistently under attack, there is a tendency to develop a kind of bunker mentality, particularly when the attacks are widespread, pointed and unprincipled, as is the case when one is working from a position sharply critical of dominant assumption. The resulting us/them position can lead to a variety of problematic tendencies. Attention to nuance and complexity fades, shortcuts are taken with regards to method and approach, hard and fast distinctions are made, and so on. As someone working from a revolutionary communist outlook, I am very familiar with this. The development of a bunker mentality is a consistent problem in the history of the international communist movement, in part because the attacks are not just metaphoric but literal. In the ICM, this has resulted in what is called dogmato-revisionism. This has taken many different forms but the essence of it is always involved taking the shortcut of replacing dialectics with metaphysics and of replacing principle and theory with *realpolitik* and pragmatism.

relevance of which I discuss below). I would hazard to guess that I largely agree with her critiques. And it is not to argue against her basic point concerning the materiality of sexuality, that it is not "merely cultural." I am in fundamental agreement with this position. Similarly, Butler's citations and quotes from what she considers the positive legacy of marxism with regards to understanding sexuality and the family are ones which I would make as well.

In one sense, there is no problem with what Butler does in MC. Identifying a problematic tendency within a diverse group of authors and subjecting this to critique, even sharp critique, is fine. Indeed, it is an essential part of scholarship and, more broadly, the search for truth. The problem lies with her refusal to cite, or even name, any member of this resurgent, orthodox Left. Butler argues that she does this because she does not want to identify individuals holding such views as that would deflect attention from the meaning and effect of the views to "the pettier politics of who said what, and who said what back." In an earlier article, she states that "the standard practice of putting well-known names within parentheses is one way in which feminist theorists are canonized by name, a convention taken from less savory traditions, and one which, I think, erases from view the academic and nonacademic constituencies for these views" (1991, 87).²³⁴ I do not find this to be a compelling argument. And given her dismissive language, it does not come across as sincere. At any rate, regardless of her intent, there are significant problems with this which go beyond questions of scholarship.

234. I am aware that there is a certain humor in the parenthetical citation of a quote that expresses opposition to the practice of parenthetical citation.

Avakian, as part of the rupturing with much of the established wisdom of MLM and the ICM, has spoken at length about the principle advocated by John Stuart Mill regarding the contestation of ideas – that it is crucial, indeed essential, that people be able to hear arguments not just as they are characterized by those who oppose them but exactly as they are put forward by those who strongly believe in them.²³⁵ He argues that this should be a basic principle of a just society, including in particular a socialist one (a view which is in opposition to other conceptions of socialism by communists – including arguably the dominant view).²³⁶ The reasoning is not that of the liberal opposition to censorship, but that the point cannot be reached where the masses are voluntarily and consciously transforming the world if they are prevented from engaging in the debates and struggles that will give them the capacity to do so. Herding people into communism, one of the hallmarks of the "second model" of socialism, will not work.

In speaking of the "resurgent, orthodox Left" in negative and dismissive terms, while at the same time denying the possibility for those interested to learn about their views *from them* (while also identifying someone Butler feels it is appropriate to engage, i.e., Fraser), Butler is unfortunately engaging in the kind of exclusionary practice she consistently and eloquently attacks throughout her works. As she put it in *Bodies That Matter* (a quote also relevant to her discussion of violence) (1993, xx), "One way a hegemonic

235. Avakian's thoughts on this build upon Mao, who placed importance on this question but tended to treat it as a tactic. For example, during the polemics with the Soviet Union, the Chinese communists would publish the full texts of the Soviet contributions and made them widely available to the Chinese people. This, of course, was not done by the Soviets, with the result that the people of the Soviet Union only knew a grotesque distortion of maosim.

236. I for one would welcome the firm establishment of such a principle, if for no other reason than it would make my life more pleasant. The assumption that one can learn everything one needs to know about communism from those who *oppose* communism is deeply held and very widespread, even among scholars.

understanding of politics is achieved is through circumscribing what will and will not be admissible as part of the public sphere itself.” In MC, Butler ends up playing the role of an ideological gatekeeper. She creates a category of things which she feels do not deserve attention, one effect of which is to cut herself off from important areas of learning. And, much more importantly given her status, she is training others to think the same way.

There are other epistemological problems reflected in MC and find expression in Butler's writings as well. She comes close to arguing that diversity is an end in itself – as opposed to a means for the search for truth. There is the pragmatism evidenced in her argument concerning the "vitality" and the (quite non-foucaultian) characterizations of the newness and anachronisticness of different arguments and social movements. The important thing is not whether any particular idea is popular or whether a particular movement has "vitality." It is whether that idea accurately represents both an understanding of reality and the means to change it in a progressive direction. In many cases, the popularity of a particular idea or the vitality of a movement represents not this, but its accordance with the prevalence of backwards ideas and interests – after all, heterosexism has a lot of vitality. There are many areas of the world where the most vital social movement is based around reactionary and quite brutal Islamic fundamentalism. In a country like the US, which has a population that is generally sharply opposed to anti-imperialism and welcomes national chauvinism, such ideas are welcome. Tailing after such ideas, which is called right-opportunism by maoists, is prevalent enough - the Communist Party, USA has decades of practice under its belt doing precisely that.

The point of addressing this is not to heap calumny upon Butler. Any number of other

writers, including those writing in the marxist and even MLM traditions, could have been used to illustrate these questions. It is a question of the need for a fundamental consistency in one's ontology, epistemology and methodology, instead operating from a form of pragmatism, cherry-picking different aspects of conflicting methodological or epistemological approaches based on how they serve one's perceived immediate needs or goals. One's method and approach should not be either one-dimensional or a form of dry, dogmatic drivel, but if one's epistemology is fundamentally at odds with one's ontology (or if one's ontology is inconsistently conceived), it will work against whatever ends one has envisioned.

Power, the State and Democracy

In this section, I turn to the question of democracy and its relation to the transformation of gender hierarchies. Butler argues (or more precisely, puts forward as axiomatic) that democracy is an essential goal (and means) for any liberatory project. At times, this means the need to develop a radical, pluralist democracy and at other times as the extension of democracy. In other words, the advocacy of democracy involves attention to its forms separate from questions of content (the dominant preoccupation of political science as a discipline), or attention to content but in a classless conception. In doing this, Butler is putting forth a very common view in the US, which is shared not just by progressives or radicals but by people across the spectrum. Indeed, to argue otherwise typically provokes an incredulous response. Yet, this is precisely what I do in this section. "Democracy," as conceived by Butler and others, represents one of the most profound, yet invisible, metaphysical anchors preventing not just the complete transformation of society but even the kinds of changes Butler would like to see. As with

violence, her metaphysics and idealism around democracy, reinforced by a foucaultian conception of power, create a fundamental conceptual barrier.

Power and the State

Butler has taken inspiration from Foucault's reconfiguration of power, as have many others, and feels that it presents a productive conception for the understanding and transformation of gender hierarchies. Foucault decentralizes power and argues that it does not operate simply through class but through mechanisms and strategies. Foucault argues that power should be understood in terms of its operations, techniques, tools (“What does power do?”) rather than in terms of simply what it is. Power is not owned by the state, nor is it specific to any particular organization. It is a machinery which no one owns. Its application points are multiple, dispersed throughout all social institutions. Power, according to Foucault (1980, 98):

must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization ... [Individuals] are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation ... Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application.

Foucault speaks of the historical transformation to disciplinary society, from a society where power is identified with the sovereign body and the sovereign power which is exercised through spectacular acts of punishment to one where mechanisms of discipline automatize and disindividualize power, infinitesimally distributing power to the most distant elements. This disciplinary power is based on surveillance, regimentation, categorization, dividing practices, and the “bio-power” involved in the controlling of

bodies and regulation of population. His archetype of this is the panopticon and the prison reform it represented. The goal is "the obedient subject, the individual subjected to habits, rules, orders; an authority that is exercised continually around him and upon him and which he must allow to function automatically in him" (1997, 129).

Foucault further articulated his concept of Power in the *History of Sexuality*, saying (1983, 92-3) that:

Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization: as the process which, through ceaseless struggle and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or even reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies ... [An understanding of power] must not be sought in a unique source of sovereignty from which secondary and descendent forms would emanate; it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the later are always local and unstable.... Power is everywhere not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. And "Power," insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities, the concatenation that rests on each of them and seeks in turn to arrest their movement ... power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.

This is a much more insidious and complex view of power than one gets from the view of power as domination, as an attribute a person or institution possesses. Though Foucault tends to present this as a ubiquitous and unavoidable power, what is useful in this is that it presents a much more complex understanding of power than one gets from a conception which sees power as a commodity which one group has and which others do not, or which flows top-down. Foucault allows for a fuller understanding of how power

relations are reproduced and maintained, that there is more to it than the “negative and emaciated form of prohibition” (1983, 86). Awareness of the multiplicity and self-production of power is necessary to transgress and transform it. Butler feels that the liberatory possibility of Foucault comes from this conception: if power is fluid and does not exist in rigid identities or locations, it can be utilized by a number of people in a number of ways.²³⁷ Foucault points out the huge limitations involved in emancipatory projects that focus solely on state power, that there is a vast area in which power operates and thus must be transformed. Thus, he greatly expands the realm of the political, much as feminists have done.

Along these lines, Butler has argued for:

a dynamic and more diffuse conception of power, one which is committed to the difficulty of cultural translation as well as the need to rearticulate "universality" in non-imperialist directions. This is difficult work and it's no longer viable to seek recourse to simple and paralyzing models of structural oppression. But even here, in opposing a dominant conception of power in feminism, I am still "in" or "of" feminism. And it's this paradox that has to be worked, for there can be no pure opposition to power, only a recrafting of its terms from resources invariably impure (quoted in Osborne and Segal 1994).

237. Foucault has also been criticized by feminists because his works are not seen as providing a basis for transformative political change. Feminists have pointed out the masculinist assumptions in Foucault's work, while various scholars have critiqued Foucault's denial of a normative foundation. Nancy Hartsock (1990) argues that systemic power relations ultimately vanish in Foucault's work, that his conception of power makes it very difficult to locate domination, including domination in gender relations. Sawicki (1991), among others, has criticized Foucault's conception of power being everywhere as rendering resistance futile or at best individual and transitory. McNay (1993), again, among others, points out the problems that Foucault's deconstruction of the unified subject has for the question of agency and the transformation of society. Ramazanoglu (1993) argues that Foucault disintegrates collective political strategies and provides for the basis for the legitimation of political pluralism and the denial of global emancipatory movements. Trombadori, like many other marxists, says that Foucault's attention to the local, to the microphysics of power, leaves power at the general level of social domination alone to do what it does (Foucault 1991). In particular, this means the state, which serves to enforce the social relations that benefit the ruling classes.

I have gone into Foucault's reconfiguration of power in some detail for two reasons. Dividing him in two, as maoists put it, there is both a positive and a negative aspect to his contribution. On the one hand, I feel his work on power has had negative consequences on the theorizing and practice, both in academia and more broadly. In much of the work influenced by Foucault I sense a virtual collective sigh of relief – "phew, we don't really have to worry about state power anymore. We can leave it out of our praxis and still be as radical as ever." Putting aside whether or not this is an accurate lesson to take from Foucault, the result is that the state, and its very real power, is left to the bourgeoisie.

On the positive side, I feel that the foucaultian conception of power is very fruitful and has much to say about the complexity of transforming the 4 Alls. It is also, I think, not antithetical to a dialectical and materialist conception. As presented in chapter 2, the dialectical materialist ontology has important implications for the consideration of power. Contradiction necessarily is a question of power, a struggle between mutually constituting but mutually negating aspects. The ubiquity of contradictions, their endless emergence, resolution, convergence and overlapping means that human society can be seen as a vast, complex 'web of power.' The phrase is not Mao's but Foucault's, of course. But I see considerable similarity between the maoist and foucauldian conceptions of power, though Mao never specifically wrote on power to the extent done by Foucault.²³⁸

Since everything involves power relations, there is nothing in human society that is

238. Indeed, the original inspiration for this dissertation came about as a result of recognizing these similarities. As Macey's (1995) biography of Foucault notes, maoists were one of the few communists that Foucault was willing to work with by the late 1960s.

simply 'natural,' that is, a reflection of processes operating outside of power. All aspects of human existence, whether it be social institutions, relationships, or identities, are bound up in relations of power. It is for this reason that maoists put so much emphasis on the question of struggle. For maoism, of course, this is not seen as power in an abstract sense but as bound up with and concentrated in material reality, particularly through the production and reproduction of human society. Power needs to be understood not as an abstraction, but as rooted in material relations. Particularly for this epoch and for some considerable amount of time, this means the material relations which are rooted in commodity production. This is what sets the bounds and determines the particular character and manifestations of power.

In short, I think that due to its ontology, a fully dialectical materialism can take a "both/and" approach to Foucault's conception of power. MLM can "embrace" Foucault, at least to some degree.²³⁹ On the one hand, power is everywhere, and all things involve and are produced through power and its resultant struggles. On the other hand, this is not separate from the relations and structures of society (that is, MLM would reject the suggestion that power only arises from below and the corresponding necessity of theoretically cutting off the king's head, as Foucault put it).²⁴⁰

239. Another potentially useful point of interface involves the contradictions of the Mass Line and Foucault's concept of power/knowledge. In his view, all knowledge is the effect of a specific regime of power *and* forms of knowledge constitute the social reality which they describe and analyze. Related to this are his distinctions between *savoir* and *connaissance*. The former is a "movement of knowledge" which involves the modification of the subject and the construction of the object, while the latter involves a determinate subject and object and the centralizing and institutionalizing of an organized discourse (which then works to subjugate inferior knowledges). What is useful in this for political struggles is an understanding of the power relations embedded in discourse and truth claims. Foucault traces the ways in which *savoir* (say, the lived experience of the proletariat under capitalism) becomes *connaissance* (say, the promulgation of *diamat* in the Soviet Union). In other words, Foucault helps to illustrate how that which resists, transgresses and transforms is implicated in power relations and their continuation.

240. Of course, maoism does not merely highlight this reality of power. It insists on its concrete

Despite the positive aspects of Foucault's theoretical toolkit, I feel it leaves the backdoor open for a form of liberal reformism which is wrapped up in revolutionary terminology. His emphasis on the individual subject and transgression, the elision of differences in power relations, the de-emphasis of the state and his explicit arguments against revolution can and have lead to the articulation of political projects which, for all their theoretical sophistication, are not all that dissimilar to liberalism. To point out just one example, Sawicki uses Foucault to argue for a “radical pluralism,” in which, among other things, reform and revolution are collapsed together into a “radical incrementalism.” Her argument is basically that as the microphysics are dealt with, the larger social structures, like the state, will then correspondingly transform. This is essentially the flipside of vulgar marxism, that following the seizure of power of the state and the nationalization of the means of production a just society will naturally evolve. Foucault’s analysis allows for (but, I stress, does not necessitate or inevitably lead to) an individualistic politics which serves to mask the exercise of privilege as a form of revolutionary practice, thus allowing practitioners to imagine themselves as a radical without suffering the consequences of those who actually do labor to fundamentally transform social relations. In other words, he allows for liberals to pretend they are something they are not.

transformation through mass revolutionary struggle, since the point, as Marx noted, is to change the world not merely explain it. It is thus far from sufficient to win the battle of ideas, to critique erroneous or ideological conceptions and thus transform thinking and conscious. There is the need to transform society. And more, this transformation needs to involved the conscious participation of the broad masses, not merely those whose privileged position allows them the opportunity to engage in political struggle. From the maoist perspective, this is crucial. To put it in overstated terms, a mass movement that is not ‘correct’ in all aspects, or that makes even significant mistakes is better than a correct position which is cut off from the masses, which the masses do not, or perhaps can not, take up in their own lives. Without that conscious engagement by the masses and the ferment in which this would necessarily take place, they cannot fully grasp the reality of those power relations and their significance for their lives.

Many writing from a post-marxist perspective (which is variously defined but which usually involves an incorporation of poststructuralism in an attempt to problematize or expand [vulgar] materialism) stress the need to go beyond the dichotomy of revolution and reform. (for example, Mouffe and LaClau, whom Butler references) From the perspective of MLM, this is fine, but recalling the discussion from chapter four, for maoists this would mean the continuation of the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat. For those who advocate going beyond the revolution/reform dichotomy but do not rupture with the narrow horizon of bourgeois right, this results in is the erasure of revolution, or its dissipation into rhetoric. Instead of the MLM dialectical unity of revolution and reform, there arises a metaphysicality of reform. And this is then often assumed to be part of I see as a rather positivist and linear process – that is, reforms plus more reforms plus more reforms equals full social transformation – and even revolution.

Despite the avoidance of dealing with the state, the state continues obstinately to assert its material existence (in varying ways depending upon the contradictions in which a particular state is enmeshed). One result of this is that poststructuralist feminists (and not just them) tend to vacillate between two problematic positions. The first is the advocacy of the use of the bourgeois state (perhaps as is or with the idea of changing it, or as something to be pressured to change) as another "site of power." The other is to basically ignore the state, either intentionally or otherwise. The first basically represents an accommodation to some conception of the bourgeois state as democratic and pluralist, even if this is in sharp conflict with other theoretical positions. At times, this is done through explicit appeals to pragmatism (usually phrased as being "realistic"). The second

is often more theoretically informed, whether from a foucauldian or an anarchist position. That is, the state is seen either as irrelevant, or unnecessary, even an impediment, to social transformation, or sights are lowered so much that local "autonomous" action (such as transgressing boundaries) is deemed sufficient.

Foucauldian approaches have tended to dismiss revolutionary viewpoints to social change as being "state-centric," of having an unsophisticated understanding of power. The earlier discussion showed that Mao's conception of power relations, while not exactly foucauldian, is certainly far more complex than that. However, taking the state seriously is not the same thing as being state-centric, in some narrow sense. Further, MLM argues that being "state-centric" (again, understood dialectically and materially) is precisely the point. That is, state power in the hands of the imperialists will always not just work against real transformation but seek to crush those attempting to carry it out. However, as the chapter on MLM emphasized, the seizure of state power is not the end-all and be-all, but represents the "first hump" that needs to be gotten over. State power and the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and other reactionary forces is what prevents the potential for real societal transformation (for which there is a real material basis – that is, it is not simply a reflection of pious wishes) from coming to the fore. The seizure of state power by the proletariat and the institution of its dictatorship is what creates the space for this potential to exist in anything more than hamstrung forms or in the margins. Indeed, I would argue that it can not fully be conceptualized until then.

Furthermore, the question of reactionary violence, whether at the level of the individual or organized by the state, can not be disregarded. I would argue that one of the clearest

lessons of history is that attempts at significant social change provoke reactionary violence from those who benefit from existing power relationships. If they do not, they have either been effectively marginalized or they are primarily operating in a privileged sphere or manner, however contradictory or disguised that privilege may be.²⁴¹ And when fundamentally threatened, those with power respond with terrible violence, unless somehow constrained. They will attempt to teach a lesson to those who would dare rise up, even if this involves slaughtering people in horrific quantities.²⁴² This is why Mao insisted that "without state power, all is illusion." Without defeating the armed mechanism which maintains existing productive relations, these and the social relations, ideas and class relations which correspond to them, can not be fundamentally changed, except in limited ways.

I would argue that attempts at social change which do not take the reactionary violence seriously are not just suicidal. They are criminal, because they are essentially leading people into a slaughter. This is true whether it is a question of a woman who wants to end a physically abusive relationship or peasants who want to change their neo-colonialist government. Just as the most dangerous time for a sufferer of domestic violence is when her batterer knows that she is leaving for good, the most dangerous time for any social movement is when power relationships are on the verge of being thoroughly overturned. MLM, by taking this question very seriously, has developed an advanced military theory, one which is completely integrated with its social theory (a point often misunderstood by

241. Discussion of this point is beyond the scope of this chapter. I would point the reader to Lotta (1984), Wolf (1983) and the newspaper *Revolution/Revolutionary Worker* as a starting point for an investigation of history which would substantiate this view.

242. Unfortunately, one could point to many, many examples: Indonesia in 1965, Guatemala in 1954, Haiti repeatedly, Vietnam for decades, etc.

critics opposed to militarism). While the varieties of poststructuralism sometimes ascribe a particular theoretical space to the state, there is little in them that deals directly with its concrete reality. While one-sided attention to state power is insufficient, it should not be replaced by a one-sided focus on the microphysics of power. Again, the key lies in dialectics, not metaphysics. It is also a question of really taking responsibility for the change one advocates (that is, doing what is necessary and demanded by existing contradictions, and not falling into methods, forms or ideas simply because they are safe, convenient, easy, etc.).

Democracy and Dictatorship

The common verdict on socialism, as a disaster or dead end, leads to the rejection of the marxist understanding of the state as a form through which class dictatorship is maintained, as well as the conceptual analysis behind this conclusion. In MC, Butler argues (1997, 267) that "a materialism based in an objective analysis of class ... presumes that the distinction between material and cultural life is a stable one." Making a distinction between the base and superstructure (or materiality and consciousness, or anything else) on the basis of metaphysics is indeed a problem and will lead to any number of mistakes (and the history of marxism and the ICM is rife with such mistakes). But, without rehashing the arguments from Chapter 2, this is something very different than making such a distinction on the basis of dialectics. Understood dialectically, the base/superstructure distinction is not just a useful heuristic device - it is essential for the understanding and transformation of social reality. Without it, one will make any number of fundamental mistakes concerning social reality and how to change it.

One of the most fundamental of these is the promotion of classless conceptions of democracy.²⁴³ Avakian responds to this by saying (2004b):

In a world marked by profound class divisions and social inequality, to talk about “democracy”— without talking about the class nature of that democracy and which class it serves—is meaningless, and worse. So long as society is divided into classes, there can be no “democracy for all”: one class or another will rule, and it will uphold and promote that kind of democracy which serves its interests and goals. The question is: which class will rule and whether its rule, and its system of democracy, will serve the continuation, or the eventual abolition, of class divisions and the corresponding relations of exploitation, oppression and inequality.

This gets at the heart of what is wrong with the advocacy of democracy. It cannot be abstracted from productive and property relations, and treated as a separate sphere. In reality, democracy and dictatorship exist not as opposing metaphysics, but as a dialectic unity inextricably bound up with class relations.

Engels, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, made a concise summation, not on a priori basis but flowing from deep historical analysis, that the state is an instrument of class rule. The state is the means for the suppression by one class of the other classes it rules over, and that the state arises with, and is a manifestation of, the division of society, not only into classes in general, but into antagonistic classes – into exploiters and exploited. The state is an expression of a certain division of labor in society, and this gives the state its particular class character. In other words, the state in

243. Besides referencing classic marxist texts, my discussion here draws extensively upon Avakian's writings and talks on democracy and related subjects: Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?; The Basis, Goals and Methods of the Communist Revolution; Views on Socialism and Communism; Communism and Jeffersonian Democracy; On Proletarian Democracy and Proletarian Dictatorship; Dictatorship and Democracy, and the Socialist Transition of Communism; Democracy: More Than Ever We Can and Must Do Better Than That; and Elections, Democracy and Dictatorship.

general has the character and role of being an instrument of class suppression – or, another way of putting it, an instrument of dictatorship – but being an expression of a certain division of labor in society gives expression to the particular character of a given state. In a fundamental sense, the state is an expression of the overall production relations in society; it and other superstructural forms reflect that and in turn serve to reinforce that. This is why Marx said in the critique of the Gotha Programme (MECW 24: 87) that "right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and the cultural development conditioned by it."

These arise from definite production relations which are not determined by individual will, but which are historically evolved and generally correspond to the character of the productive forces and which confront each generation as an alien force. On the basis of such productive relations, there arises a superstructure which expresses that, and which reinforces it – not in a one-to-one or narrowly deterministic way but in an ultimate sense. There cannot exist a superstructure which is fundamentally in opposition to the economic base. The result, sooner or later, would be chaos and the quick reconfiguration in order to bring the two into alignment. Avakian uses the example of a "right to eat." If such a right were to be implemented in the context of capitalism, the result would be chaos because such a right would fundamentally conflict with the over-riding freedom of bourgeois democracy – the freedom of the bourgeoisie to exploit.

A common position (though not commonly stated directly) is to say in effect that there is something different about democracy that allows it to transcend this reality. However, this argument founders both in reality and in theory. Democracy is an expression of

particular production and social relations, and has a definite social and class content—in reality it is bourgeois democracy and is the outer form whose inner essence is bourgeois dictatorship. Simply put, democracy is one form that class dictatorship takes in the context of commodity exchange. Lack of clarity on this leads to, as Lenin put it (LCW 5: 384), "people's spontaneous striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie." In the US, this leads to radicals and progressives voting for or even putting considerable work into the Democrats, however much this might get expressed as "holding one's nose." Or, in other words, a manifestation of a dualism, in which theory and practice operate in different spheres rather than as a firmly and dialectically connected unity. Even if there was some way of starting from scratch and "extending democracy" to society as a whole, as long as there is the underlying foundation of commodity production and exchange, then the profound inequalities and class divisions, the emergence of monopolies, and the other aspects of capitalism, would all reassert themselves rather quickly. And since male supremacy and its stabilized gender identities and hierarchies can not be separated from this foundation (which is not to say that they flow in a linear way from this) the same applies in that sphere.

The dialectical relationship between democracy and dictatorship also has a crucial international dimension as well. The relative expansion (now under siege in the US) of civil rights and freedom in the imperialist countries is directly linked to the realities of imperialism. Avakian argues that the "worm-eaten platform of democracy" in the imperialist countries comes not from the Bill of Rights but rather the military dictator, the torturer, and other forms of openly tyrannical rule throughout the Third World. In other words, democracy as it exists in the US is primarily a reflection of the material relations

of imperialism, and not the conceptions of democracy. This relation between bourgeois democracy and imperialism applies not only to the U.S., but to imperialist countries in general. Avakian (2006i) sums up this relationship:

Just as in the economic sphere, to the degree that concessions are made and spoils are dribbled out to sections of the labor aristocracy and broader sections of the working class at times, and to the petty bourgeoisie, so too, in the superstructure, in the political sphere, to the degree that certain strata are able to not feel immediately the sting of dictatorship in an imperialist country, it is because of imperialist plunder throughout the world and imperialist relations of domination and exploitation on an international scale—even though, for the intermediate strata in the "home" imperialist country, as soon as they do anything, politically or otherwise, that would pose any threat in the eyes of the political operatives of the ruling class, they would, indeed, feel the sting of dictatorship coming down on them. But to the degree that this can be mitigated and modified at times, particularly for more intermediate and more privileged strata within "the home country," this has to do with the relationship between imperialism and the Third World, and it has to do with the relationship between imperialism and bourgeois democracy.²⁴⁴

Here the analogy of a slave plantation is useful in understanding the problem with the idea of the extension of democracy. On the one hand, there are the slaves in the field –

244. Another particularly prescient presentation of this was the 1990 appeal to the people of Eastern Europe by the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement: "Western propagandists tell you to forget the evidence from Poland and Hungary of what more Western penetration will mean for you; look instead to Germany, Scandinavia or France--if you adopt democracy and join Europe, someday you too will live like this, they claim. What poison pours from their lips! Of course the West is richer--it has been more successful than its Soviet-bloc rivals in building a worldwide empire. Their exploitation fields stretch from Chile's copper mines to South Africa's gold mines up through the Middle East oil fields through South Asia and into the Far East, where tens of millions produce textiles and electronics for pennies an hour. Because the West is richer and has a relatively large middle class, it can allow some of its people to say what they want (some of the time) and go abroad (if they can afford it). The West is not rich because it is democratic, it is democratic because it is rich and it is democracy for the rich; the secret of its riches, and hence of its democracy, lies in its empire built on bloody conquest and maintained through savage wars like Vietnam, continual invasions of little countries like Panama, Grenada or the Malvinas, and perpetual misery and suffering for hundreds and hundreds of millions under apartheid regimes and military juntas, including within the borders of the imperialist countries themselves. If you want to know what Western democracy is really about, turn off Radio Free Europe and find the way to ask South Africa's blacks, or Palestinians in the Gaza strip, ask the Arab dustmen in Paris or Turks in Hamburg, ask England's coal miners or Chicago's ghetto inhabitants - get them to tell you about the "marvels" of Western democracy. Or you can just wait to find out for yourselves" A World to Win #15, 1990.

brutally exploited, oppressed and experiencing negligible freedom. On the other, there is the plantation house, with its attendant comfort, privilege and relative freedom for its inhabitants. There is a dialectical relationship between the two – the particularities of each are dependent upon its relationship with the other. In such an antagonistic relationship, it is clearly impossible to *extend* the social realities of the plantation house into the fields. The only possible solution is the complete transformation of this dialectical relationship into its opposite, which should not be understood in the sense of the first shall be last and the last shall be first, but in the sense outlined by Mao and particularly Avakian.

None of this is obviated by the fact that transforming the 4 Alls has turned out to be far more complex, difficult and contradictory than was thought by marxists. Marx, in his naivete, assumed that with the seizure of state power, the superstructure would be transformed relatively quickly. Many mistakes and problems have arisen out of this assumption and the kind of narrow and mechanical materialism it represents. However, Avakian stresses that the seizure of state power remains the door through which any movement which aims to fully transform male supremacy and the realities of gender hierarchies must pass.²⁴⁵ Avakian emphasizes the necessity of gaining state power by

245. This is not an absolutist statement. It is consistent with dialectical materialism and reflects the dialectic between absolute and relative. That is, within particular historical circumstances, certain things can be absolutely true, relatively speaking. As an analogy, gravity is not an Absolute. It exists to a different degree on the Moon. It operates in a very different way on the event horizon of a black hole or at the quantum level. However, on the Earth right now, if one wants to build a plane to fly across the Pacific Ocean, one absolutely has to take gravity into consideration. Similarly, given the division of human society in classes, the nature of the State, and the fact that currently all states are in the hands of the bourgeoisie, it is absolutely true, relatively speaking, that the seizure of state power is necessary (though, as I have continually stressed, not sufficient). Here I am not suggesting that one can make an exact analogy between physical laws and the contradictions of human society. It is merely to make it clear that the dialectic between relative and absolute is both always in motion, and always particular.

referring (2006i) to the "balance sheet" of the contributions and shortcomings of revolutionary China:

Does it *matter* that masses of people were not starving by 1970 in China, that for the first time in centuries and millennia, China had solved its food problem in basic terms, in the socialist society that had existed for just 20 years? Does it *matter* that for the first time, tens and hundreds of millions of peasants had health care? Do these things *matter* to anybody? Does it *matter* that masses of people could get up in the morning and walk down the street and not fear the police—or even each other, for that matter—because a new state power was making possible the creation of new social relations? Does it *matter* that, for the first time in the history of China—and, on the scale it happened, really this was something new in the history of the world—the masses of people were encouraged and led to take up affairs of state and to involve themselves in wrangling with the direction of society and the situation and struggles of the people in the world? Does that *matter*?

Continuing, Avakian says (2006i):

Why do we want state power? Because it's absolutely necessary to get to the next stage of human history, because it's essential for the liberation of the overwhelming majority of the people on the earth and ultimately for humanity as a whole. It's absolutely essential. And, if you want to really deeply understand this, just think about everything that frustrates you, that you can't do anything about right now. Whether it's what happens to people crossing the border into the U.S., what happens to people in the inner cities, what happens to people in the sweatshops, what happens to children working in Pakistan or Haiti, what happens to people in Africa, starving or being mutually slaughtered for the interests of exploiters and oppressors, whether it's women being brutalized and raped and abused and degraded. Go down the line and think about everything that you're frustrated about and why you became convinced of the need for radical change in the first place, and then you'll know what state power is good for and why we should want it—and, yes, in the correct sense, with a correct understanding of what and whom this is all for, why we should crave greatness in this respect too.

The axiomatic acceptance of a classless conception of democracy is so deeply held, and deeply connected with similar views of freedom, that it is difficult for many to see that this critique of democracy means something very different than the advocacy of arbitrary

and capricious authority – that is, the widely propagated caricature of the dictatorship of the proletariat as simply totalitarianism. Here I refer the reader to the discussion in Chapter 3, as well as Avakian's writings on socialism.

Butler as Democratic Intellectual

Butler, in arguing for democracy, is taking the position of what Marx called the Democratic Intellectual. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, he wrote (MECW 11: 129) of them in the context the petite bourgeoisie and their intellectual representatives:

One must not form the narrow-minded notion that the petite bourgeoisie, on principle, wishes to enforce an egoistic class interest. Rather, it believes that the special conditions of its emancipation are the general conditions within the frame of which alone modern society can be saved and the class struggle avoided. Just as little must one imagine that the democratic representatives are indeed all shopkeepers or enthusiastic champions of shopkeepers. According to their education and their individual position they may be as far apart as heaven from earth. What makes them representatives of the petite bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter do not get beyond in life, that they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drive the latter practically.

These quite profound comments get to the heart of the problems of thinking about democracy in a classless way. The argument is not that there is a mechanical connection between the shopkeeper and the democratic intellectual. Nor is it to interpreted as a cursory dismissal of the importance of intellectuals in general. Marx is saying that in their daily life and in many ways, democratic intellectuals and the shopkeepers may be tremendously different – but in their conception of how society ought to be and what are the driving forces in society, the democratic intellectuals do not get farther in that realm than the shopkeepers get in everyday practical life. In the same work, Marx says that

these intellectual representatives of the petty bourgeoisie want to be above classes, but they are actually being buffeted by the contest of the two major classes, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, in between which they find themselves.

Marx's comments are quite to the point with regards to Butler. Clearly, her thinking, both in what concerns her and how she conceptualizes these concerns, is far removed from the everyday humdrum exchange of commodities which characterizes the life of the shopkeeper. Her approach is instead quite lofty. And yet she and other democratic intellectuals do not rupture out of the framework conditioned by commodity production and exchange. To use another phrase of Marx which Mao recovered and emphasized, they do not go beyond the narrow confines and horizons of bourgeois right. This is evident in her classless conception of democracy.

If one looks at the actual history of, say, the US, one can make the argument that democratic intellectuals typically take democracy more seriously than the bourgeoisie does. But it should not be forgotten, or elided with theory, that bourgeois democracy *is* bourgeois dictatorship. It is a means of political rule which corresponds most appropriately to the interests of the bourgeois ruling class and its forms of exploitation – that is its essence. In the case of capitalism, exploitation means the relation in which someone hires the labor power of another (or in reality many others) and extracts surplus value from the employment of that labor power. This is the quintessential freedom under capitalism, the freedom to exploit. And for the democratic intellectuals there is a failure to recognize the fact that this involves a fundamental negation of the freedom of the many whose labor power is controlled and used in this way by a force that stands over

and above them as an alien and oppressive, and repressive, force.

Given a generalized commodity system, which is characteristic of capitalism and its "freedom," the principles and operation of commodity production and exchange will lead inexorably to the reduction of labor power itself to a commodity, to a situation where the majority of people are forced to sell their ability to work to someone else in order to be able to live. Even with the establishment of socialism, unless there is continually movement towards uprooting commodity production and exchange, and its reflection in the superstructure, society will move back to a situation where labor power once again becomes a commodity, that is, the restoration of capitalism. As Engels put it, in a very important observation in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (MECW 26: 207): "No society can retain for any length of time the mastery of its own production and the consequences of its process of production unless it abolishes [commodity] exchange between individuals."

Appeals to or reliance upon either bourgeois democracy or a classless conception of democracy, even in the face of those who oppose or would destroy them (such as the ruling forces grouped around Bush or Islamic fundamentalists) will serve as a barrier to any effort to transform the destructive realities of patriarchy and male supremacy – even if this is done, as with Butler, in the context of a radical destabilization of gender, desire and the body. I would argue that what is needed instead is a firm grasp of and commitment to the transformation of the 4 Alls, and in that context work to rupture with the thinking, practices, assumptions and identities involved in patriarchy. If one does not grasp this and seriously reflect on its implications, it will not matter how sophisticated or

"correct" one's conception of gender is, how deeply and radically its stabilities are deconstructed. The goal should not be to construct an understanding of gender and sexuality which allows one to ignore, or rhetorically elide, the question of state power, but instead grasping gender and sexuality in a way which is fully consistent with and integrated into a program and vision for actually revolutionizing the world. In the same regard, attention to the latter can not become an excuse for theoretical shortcuts, for reductionism and positivism taking the place of the difficult task of attempting to thoroughly and critically examine all aspects of human existence.

If careful attention, theoretical and practical, is not given to patriarchy and the complex oppressions related to gender at every step of the way in a revolutionary process, it will not only limit the ability to systematically deal with these areas of human reality, it will undermine the achievements in other areas – even if the complete transformation of male supremacy is a state goal. If attention, theoretical and practical, is not given to the realities of state power and the destructive capacity of reactionaries (and their willingness to use it), efforts at systematic transformation will either be an illusion or restricted to a marginal expansion of privilege – regardless of the theoretical sophistication and nuance of those most ardently desiring it.

CHAPTER SEVEN: WHAT IS TO BE DONE? BE REASONABLE – DEMAND THE IMPOSSIBLE!

Living in the US is like living in the house of Tony Soprano. You know that all the goodies you get to enjoy have something to do with what the master of the house is doing out there in the world. But you don't want to look too closely at all of this because it might upset a pretty comfortable situation and turn the ire of Tony Soprano onto yourself. But the difference now is that some of the people 'out there' are not nice – and they have figured out a way to hurt those in the house. Everything depends, and much is revealed, on how the people inside the house respond to this situation.

Anonymous US maoist

The preceding discussion has been at times quite abstract – some may even say rarified. Some, committed to Marx's view that the point is to change the world and not merely to explain it, might question how "marxist" such a document could be. Putting aside the tremendous volume and often theoretical nature of Marx's writings, I argue that such a view of marxism is actually that of mechanical marxism, and not a dialectical materialist, and therefore revolutionary, marxism. In a very real sense, MLM could be seen as making a profoundly materialist argument for the importance of theory, and for the centrality of line. Maoists are fond of making the following analogy. Peasants under feudalism go into battle grabbing whatever weapons they have at hand; axes, sticks, rudimentary guns, etc. Similarly, there is a strong spontaneous pull on those heading into political struggle to grab whatever *theoretical* weapons are at hand. The outcome of any particular struggle, including outright warfare, is always the result of the complex interaction between material forces and ideas. Though of course material conditions in their motion and development provide for an overall framework in which struggle takes place, and therefore must be deeply understood, there is nothing in them *per se* which determines any particular outcome. A correct line (understood as a dialectical materialist

concept), will not ensure a positive outcome, but it is essential. To conclude, I turn to a brief consideration of how this dissertation may relate to current realities. This discussion is necessarily tremendously condensed. It rests upon an MLM analysis of the unfolding contradictions of US imperialism, as developed in Avakian's writings over the last five years.

Much has changed in the world since this dissertation was begun. While millions worldwide reacted in horror to the terrible scenes of 9/11/2001, others, grouped around President George W. Bush, also saw it as an opportunity to push forward a program of endless wars abroad and repression domestically. Though they are not a homogenous group, they seek to create an unchallenged and unchallengeable empire of unprecedented power, while uprooting the traditions of secular, liberal democracy in the US. Their aim appears to be the creation of a kind of high-tech Dark Ages, where advanced technology is joined to a theocratic and even fascist vision of society. This is being carried out step by step, such that yesterday's outrage is today's codified and institutionalized reality. What was once inconceivable is now normalized.

Core principles such as the separation of church and state, due process, presumption of innocence, freedom of speech, and habeas corpus have been discarded – and with little opposition in the halls of power. International law and world opinion are held in contempt. Torture has been legalized, rationalized and openly acknowledged. Hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent to create detention camps for tens of thousands of immigrants, protesters and other people deemed "undesirable." The border with Mexico is increasingly militarized, while immigrants, particularly but not only those from

Mexico, have been constructed as a pariah class. An intolerant and backwards form of Christian fundamentalism is more and more underlying government policy and attempting to drive a wedge between spiritual experience and scientific truth.

Discrimination and prejudice against gays and lesbians is close to being enshrined in the Constitution. Science and critical thinking are under attack in various arenas, particularly in academia. The abandonment of the poor and people of color in New Orleans shocked even those already cynical about the realities of US democracy. Environmental regulations are dismantled, while the science underlying the reality of global warming is dismissed – even while more and more resources are devoted to developing the most sophisticated mechanisms and technologies of surveillance and control.

Nowhere is this trend clearer than around the realities of patriarchy and male supremacy. Twenty years ago, some of the people currently implementing this program were blockading abortion providers. They were seen as dangerous, but marginal. No longer on the margins of power, this extremist movement aims to deny women reproductive rights, to stoke hatred of gays and lesbians, and to reverse the gains brought about through decades of mass political struggle. Though it has a social base, it is not simply the "same old" expressions of prejudice and ignorance but a concerted effort organized at the highest levels of society. Roe vs. Wade hangs by a thread, and has already been seriously undermined by a systematic campaign against abortion providers. US senators have called for executing doctors who perform abortions. Leading religious figures are hailing the situation in El Salvador as an example to be brought to the US. There, abortion is completely illegal, and anyone having or performing an abortion is charged with murder. To aid in this, the El Salvadoran police force employs "forensic vagina inspectors" to

determine if a woman has ever had an abortion. Banning birth control is now being put on the agenda, and theocratic lawyers are backing up a movement of fundamentalist pharmacists who refuse to fill women's prescriptions for birth control. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) now defines the 62 million women in the U.S. of childbearing age as "pre-pregnant," as future fetal incubators. Simply put, a regressive and oppressive patriarchal morality and authority based on a literal interpretation of the Bible is being made into law and policy – with the complicity of many who see themselves as opposing all this.

The "reasonable" opposition (i.e., the Democratic Party and similar forces) keeps giving more and more ground, capitulating entirely at times and at others putting forward their own "alternative" vision which actually incorporates much of the fascist agenda. Many in the Democratic Party essentially agree with the religious reactionaries who claim that fetuses are the same as born children and that abortion is murder. Hillary Clinton and others speak of abortion as a "tragedy," a regrettable practice which should be made "safe, legal and rare." The unscientific misinformation being spread about abortions by anti-choice forces is unchallenged on the national stage. And when a friend of mine travelled across several states to help build opposition to a bill which would have banned all abortions in South Dakota, she was told by "pro-choice" organizers that she had to take off her t-shirt, which said "Abortion on demand and without apology."

The international side of this agenda is no less appalling, as the leaders of the US have announced a new normalcy of endless wars which will last generations. Though this international agenda has not gone the way they had hoped, there is not an easy way out

for them. However, it is likely they will continue to go on the offensive. Having leapt over any meaningful discussion of torture, there is now rational discussion of launching a nuclear attack on Iran. All of this is most fundamentally rooted not in the character flaws of the personalities involved but in the needs of US imperialism – needs which are not understood in the same way by all those in the ruling class and their representatives. I will not attempt here a full discussion of this – I would point the reader to Avakian's writings on this subject, particularly (2005c), (2006a), (2006e), (2006f), (2006h), and (2006j).

Here I would like to make some comments with regards to the two "sides" of this international conflict – the resurgent imperialism of the US neo-cons and Islamic fundamentalism (or McWorld vs. Jihad), and how they relate to the questions of gender and the transformation of patriarchies. Butler, along with many other progressives, rejects this dichotomization and its logic of "you're either with us or you're against us." As the homophobic and anti-women policies of each are well documented, this is clearly a correct position. And yet, in much of the writings by Western radicals and progressives there is a strong undercurrent that one side is still "better," that one is fundamentally wrong in essence while the other represents a corruption of what is in essence good, i.e., liberal democracy. Though expressed in many different ways, this logic is woven through much of the post-9/11 literature and is shared even by many of those who are outraged, heart-sick and frightened at the policies of the Bush regime. And, though the conclusion is not always explicitly made clear, this logic leads to expressions of "if I had to choose one side, I'd choose McWorld." But as Avakian notes (2006j):

What we see in contention here with Jihad on the one hand and McWorld/McCrusade

on the other hand, are historically outmoded strata among colonized and oppressed humanity up against historically outmoded ruling strata of the imperialist system. These two reactionary poles reinforce each other, even while opposing each other. If you side with either of these 'outmodeds,' you end up strengthening both.

And while the barbarism of fundamentalist Islam should not be downplayed or, worse, heralded uncritically as a legitimate expression of resistance to imperialism, one should be very clear as to which of these outmoded strata has done the worst historically and poses the greater threat to humanity. After all, the Islamic fundamentalist forces would not have a sizable social base to draw upon and the ability to do what it now can do if not for what imperialism and US imperialism in particular has done in the world – the same could not be said about US imperialism. I feel that history shows clearly that the actions and nature of US imperialism are not fundamentally a question of *responding* to outside attacks. US imperialism exists as it is because of the material contradictions, both internal and external, which give rise to it. It would be a mistake to respond to the theocratic fascism of Al Qaeda and similar forces by trying to discover or promote a "US foreign policy" which is somehow separate from imperialism and which is based on values which most people in the US and the world would uphold – and not simply because the forces which are offering a "realistic" or liberal alternative largely share the assumptions and viewpoints of the forces grouped around Bush.

These forces have unleashed a cauldron of contradictions, many of which are not under their control, and the resolution of which can not be foreseen. But it is clear the stakes are quite high, as high as they have ever been. I feel it should be realized that we are already, whether we want to be or not, in the midst of an historic struggle. We cannot turn a blind eye or hope that all of this will simply go away. To keep one's head down and seek refuge

in one form of privilege or another is unacceptable – and any such "safety" would be quickly shown to be illusory if the full reactionary program is implemented.

Instead, there must be resistance commensurate with the dangers we are facing – a resistance which encompasses people from a diverse range of political positions and from all walks of life but who are united in their determination to resist and defeat those whose vision is a form of police state in the US combined with endless wars. For our own sake, for the sake of the world and future generations, we cannot be the 21st century version of “good Germans.” We have to be reasonable and demand what is impossible.

The resistance needed has to have both a resolute will to resist along with the refusal to tie this into some metaphysical anchor, in absolutism in any form. It has to grasp the complexity and enormity of the situation, as well as the urgency. There is a *strong* tendency in such a situation to utilize theoretical shortcuts, to deploy unexamined assumptions, or to seek easy means in the name of practicality or immediate needs. In other words, the dialectic of theory/practice is replaced by a dichotomous view in which practice is privileged and theory is seen as something which gets in the way of "doing something." While history will judge us sharply should we fail to act decisively in this situation, the judgement should be no less harsh if our theorization fails to rise to the levels demanded by current contradictions. We must not rush off into battle chained to metaphysical anchors. Science can not be defended through the promotion of positivism and scientism. Critical thinking can not be defended through the promotion of relativism. The intensification of patriarchal norms and relations can not be reversed through reliance upon forms of essentialism or reductionism. Fascism of any kind can not be defeated by

retreating into forms of liberalism, relying upon condescending 'leaders,' or staying within the accepted bounds of political action as defined by liberal democracy. A just international order cannot be constructed on the basis of national chauvinism (commonly called "patriotism") or any identification with a "we" which is based on US imperialism in *any* form. With full respect to Audre Lourde, Tony Soprano's house can not be dismantled if we insist on living in it.

It is insufficient to simply repeat the battle cries of the past or to assume that it is enough to "fight the good fight." Moral and ethical arguments, though essential, are not enough. The assumption that reason and truth will prevail is wrong and dangerous. There is no referee, in any form, to which an appeal could be made.

A friend who shares my overall political commitments called me on the morning of September 11. As we watched the towers collapse, the same thought went through our heads – that all bets were off, that the existing framework for political action was going to be irrevocably changed in ways which we could foretell. Indeed, we both thought of the line from *The Internationale* – "'Tis the final conflict. Let each stand in their place."

If one is to enter into such a struggle, there is no reason to do it on the basis of fighting for a return to "the way things used to be" before it all started. As the *Prolegomena* to this dissertation tried to make clear, "the way things used to be" was intolerable. More importantly, those periods in which "the way things used to be" are no longer tenable also involve the possibility of breaking out the existing bounds and creating something both historically new and better. I have read that the Chinese character for danger and

opportunity is the same, and, indeed, Mao deeply grasped this and repeatedly wrenched something better out of dangerous situations. We can, and must, do the same now.

"Keep being dissatisfied; the world belongs to the dissatisfied."

Mao Tse-tung

**APPENDIX: "WE HAD A DREAM THAT THE WORLD CAN BE
BETTER THAN TODAY"**

The following interview with Wang Zheng was conducted by the Setting The Record Straight (SRS) project. Wang Zheng is a professor of women's studies at the University of Michigan. She is the author of *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories* and numerous research papers, including *State Feminism? Gender and Socialist Formation in Maoist China*. Wang Zheng brings a feminist perspective to her work.

Wang Zheng is an editor of and contributor to *Some of Us: Chinese Women Growing Up in the Mao Era* (Rutgers University Press, 2001), a collection of memoirs. The nine contributors reflect on family relationships, school, neighborhood, workplace, popular culture, and going to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution, and the impact of, as the introduction puts it, "the Mao era's gender equality policies." The essays challenge what the editors call the "dark-age master narrative" of Chinese socialism and the Cultural Revolution in particular. As the book jacket describes, these writings "shatter our stereotypes of persecution, repression, victims, and victimizers in Maoist China."

SRS: There are many memoirs being written by people who lived in China during the socialist years, or "the Mao era" (1949–1976), especially about the Cultural Revolution decade. What compelled the writing of *Some of Us*?

Wang Zheng: This book is collective memoirs by nine authors, all from the People's Republic of China. We were all graduate students in this country, and then most of us got teaching positions here. The motivation to do this is that we were amazed by many memoirs published by the Chinese diaspora, people from China. Those memoirs that were promoted or that achieved the most market success were the ones depicting Mao's era in China as the "dark age": terrible, nothing but persecution and dictatorship and killings, all the horror stories, just a one-sided voice.

Even though I cannot say they are telling lies, a lot of the stuff is fictional. Like Anchee Min's *Red Azalea*, which was widely used here, even in universities. She claimed it's autobiographical when she was in the U.S. But when she went back to China, among all her friends and relatives, all the people who knew her, lived there in that setting, when people asked her about this book, she said it's fiction. So that's one point.

That type of autobiography achieves the most market success due to the politics of publication in this country. What kind of books are they promoting in this country? You see that pattern there. They play into this Cold War mentality, still in the U.S., in the West, that capitalist countries are wonderful lands of freedom, socialist countries are terrible, Communist China, red China was awful, like hell. So they are telling all these horror stories to you. Those books always have the widest circulation, always receive a lot of media attention.

My point is not that persecution disasters did not happen. Our point, I just want to say, is

that China is so big, with a population of one billion. We have different social groups, and different social groups experience even the same historical period differently. As Chinese, when we read those memoirs, we don't share a lot of their experiences. Whatever their experiences, even if it's true, it's not our experience.

I found out in my peer group of all these Chinese women that we shared the same sentiment towards those memoirs. So we wanted to do something. At least we can raise our voices. If they're telling their stories...what about our stories and our experiences? But our experiences didn't get told. So we feel, especially I myself as a historian, that the important thing is not to vindicate anybody; rather, it is to present a complicated picture of history.

Also if you look at who wrote all this "condemnation literature," they are usually people from elite classes. You really don't hear the voices of workers, peasant class, those who are in the lower classes, the bottom of society. How did those people experience Mao's China, or Communist China?

The Communist Party was very complicated, with different factions with different visions of China, different visions of socialism even. People had different visions in the Communist Party. In those years, there were all kinds of people involved in different things and the policies proposed by different people within the Party had different effects.

It was an extremely complicated situation. But in this country, what you hear is just one single voice, condemnation—how the people from the elite classes suffered during those

years. That's a terrible distortion of the larger picture if you believe that's the truth, the only truth.

SRS: Why did this "condemnation literature" get such play?

Wang Zheng: There was a mass movement to produce victim narratives in the late 1970s and early 1980s in China, a line that was later largely transported to the West along with those Chinese who found an especially lucrative market in the capitalist "land of freedom" to claim the status of "victims" emerging in the post-Mao era.

"Thoroughly negate the Cultural Revolution" was a scheme by Deng Xiaoping to pave the way for his dismantling of socialism while consolidating political power. It was a way to whitewash or shift attention from his and his associates' crimes.

After Deng Xiaoping's call to thoroughly negate the Cultural Revolution, being a victim of the Cultural Revolution was a hot status symbol in China. Chinese intellectuals jumped on this bandwagon to produce narratives of victims. This was sanctioned by Deng Xiaoping, and helped him clear the ideological ground for staging neo-liberalism and social Darwinism to accompany the rise of a capitalist market economy. In the process, they have retrieved their power and privileges that had been reduced in the Mao era, especially in the Cultural Revolution. Those who dare to deviate from the design of the new architect Deng Xiaoping have been excluded from the privileges enjoyed by the new elite if not punished with imprisonment.

SRS: One of the stories in your memoir is about when you first came to the U.S., you heard a woman describe her daughter as a cheerleader and your reaction to that.

Wang Zheng: Yeah, well, it was after Deng Xiaoping initiated condemnation of Mao and the Cultural Revolution. In my essay, I also talked about that. I was confused by all this, because everybody was talking about how they were victimized by the Cultural Revolution, by the Communist Party, but I couldn't find any examples in my life to define myself as the victim or victimizer. It was kind of a confusing period. I didn't even know how to figure out the situation because in China at the time, a lot of intellectuals were talking about that, producing these kinds of "victim narratives."

Then my experience in the U.S. made me see more clearly in a sense the significance of the Chinese revolution, the changes the revolution had made—because I had this comparative perspective that enabled me to compare the mentality of women here with the mentality of women in the Mao era, in the socialist period.

One example from my life here, staying with an American family, was when my landlady's friend came and she talked about her daughter. I asked her, "What is your daughter doing?" She said very proudly and thrilled, "Oh she's a cheerleader," in a spirited voice. I didn't know this word "cheerleader," and I thought what kind of leader is that? I was very interested and when she explained that to me, I was not just shocked, I had contempt in my heart. I thought, wow—you're feeling so much pride in that kind of stuff? I thought this woman has never imagined her daughter being a leader cheered by men.

So it was little things that brought into sharp contrast my experience as a young woman being raised in red China, socialist China, with the experience of women generally in this large society here, their mentality, their views about what they can do and their view of their life—there was a sharp difference.

SRS: It's a strong theme that emerges from the various memoirs in the book.

Wang Zheng: The gender issue, that's a point I have been making in my writing actually. I would say that the Communist Party, since its inception, incorporated a feminist agenda and attracted feminists, even though in the Party's long history, in the war, in other critical struggles, gender equality had not always been high on the Party's agenda. My research has demonstrated that all the policies related to women and gender equality have been promoted by feminists within the Party. The Party has never been a monolithic body but always including people with diverse political visions and interests. Each policy is a result of negotiations and contentions among different interests. In this sense, Communist feminists have been quite successful in promoting policies for gender equality.

SRS: What were some of the policies?

Wang Zheng: Marriage laws. Because all these women worked very hard from day one, from 1949, to promote gender equality, equality between men and women became the official dominant ideology. Not now, but in those years, dominant through all kind of cultural production, literature, movies, posters, everywhere. Everywhere. Women broke

gender barriers in all the occupations—female pilots, militia, train drivers, all kinds of things. Anything previously regarded as male occupations and professions...women were encouraged to break into all these male dominated fields.

So my generation, we were all born into this kind of cultural atmosphere or political culture, So we took gender equality for granted. Of course, equal opportunity to education, to employment, equal pay—that was our experience, especially during the Cultural Revolution. The socialist system had embraced the egalitarian idea that worked to women's benefit, and also the socialist economic system tried to equalize their share of the resources and that also worked to women's benefit. Maternity leave, you were guaranteed if you worked in state enterprises, and also in employment, education, there was no gender discrimination.

But I have to say that many of those benefits were limited mostly to urban women. In rural settings, there were different economic policies. Even during the commune period in the rural areas, it was very difficult for women to gain equal pay for equal jobs, because in rural society resistance to gender equality is so strong, even if women were doing the same work, women were often paid less, unlike in the urban setting.

It's a lot more difficult to promote equality in China today because now all the gaps, gender, class, everything, regional, all the gaps are widening. Of course before—especially during the Cultural Revolution when Mao wanted to reduce the urban and rural gap and the worker-peasant gap—the Party adopted some policies, such as barefoot doctors and rural teachers promoting rural education, and made efforts to do those things

during those years.

SRS: We often hear that all the schools closed down during the Cultural Revolution, books were burned, and everyone's education suffered.

Wang Zheng: Yeah, that's one of the myths. During the Cultural Revolution, the first two years, the schools were closed but that doesn't mean we were not able to read. Actually we read a lot because the books from libraries were circulated. The Red Guards took the books from the libraries and circulated them.

We were reading a lot of books. Actually a lot of young people had talent and had the time, didn't have to go to school, so they were developing their talents. People who wanted to play the violin, or if their interest was math or physics, just did that. So a lot of people didn't go to school but kind of immersed in their own talent. Actually the majority of people were doing that. You only hear about the terrible violence done by the Red Guards, that in that generation of young people, everyone was Red Guards. No! Statistically, the Red Guards were a small minority of my generation. I never joined the Red Guards. Many of us didn't. We were called "Xiao Yao Pai." We didn't like violence, we didn't like all those struggles, we just dropped out. We didn't participate in violence, we didn't do any of those things. We would just go home, doing whatever we wanted to do.

My critique of the film *The Morning Sun* by Carmelita Hinton, which I told her, was that I liked the first part but I didn't like the second part because the second part focused on

Red Guards violence. First of all, not all the Red Guards were involved in violence. Second, the Red Guards were a small percentage of our generation. Why do the stories of the lives of the majority never get told? There were the Xiao Yao Pai who dropped out to develop their own interests during those years. Her [Carmelita Hinton's] response was that this is a documentary film, we want footage, and she didn't have footage of the Xia Yao Pai. If you are smashing something, people will shoot a picture of you. If you are staying home reading, that's boring, no one wants to shoot a picture of you reading. The representation of the Red Guards in those footage is of them smashing things, beating people. Yes, many Red Guards did that, but I am afraid that may not be the majority.

SRS: From our research, it's very clear that the Red Guards played a highly positive role in the Cultural Revolution. They were a kind of catalyst. They raised people's awareness of what was going on in society. Their spirit of criticizing and challenging reactionary authority emboldened workers, peasants, and others to lift their heads and raise their voices about the problems in society. Violence was not the main trend of the Red Guard movement. And much of the violence that did occur was fomented by leading capitalist roaders coming under criticism who were trying to discredit the movement. The Cultural Revolution was aimed at preventing the revolution from getting turned back, and it was aimed at transforming society more deeply and changing people's thinking.

Wang Zheng: The issue is that at a time for my generation, there was a goal. We knew that we wanted to be different human beings, new kind of human beings, to create a different society so there's some vision, some purpose there and these different human beings were not just craving material possessions, houses, cars, consumer goods.

We wanted to make contribution to the common good, we were concerned about human beings as a whole, society as a whole, not only just China, the whole world, how the whole world can be peaceful, happy without exploitation and oppression. In a sense we can say that's a utopian dream starting from long, long time ago. Whether utopian or not, we had a dream that the world can be better than today.

I would never condone any violence. However...a revolution to achieve an egalitarian society did involve some drastic measures, like land reform to confiscate landowners' land, to redistribute among all the landless people. So, if you go to interview the landlord, their children, they would tell you that the landlord's land had been confiscated, the landlord had been executed—if you hear that story, of course, they are full of hatred. But if you go to interview the landless class and they got land from the communists, you will hear a very different story. So that's why it's important to have a fuller picture of what's going on. The relationship of the poor peasants to the communist revolution is drastically different. But those poor peasants cannot write their memoirs in English. That's why you have never heard a peasant talking. Or even those peasants' children who can write English—their writing can never be promoted in this country because the people who control the publishing market, they will not promote these kinds of stories.

The world should have equality and justice. We wanted to improve ourselves internally so that we can build that kind of world. I don't see anything wrong with this dream. I still don't see anything wrong in this dream, even though people may say that's naive. But I think the human race needs to have something beautiful in our mind, otherwise we will

all become ugly animals. What's the point to live in this world that's dog-eat-dog, an ugly world? What's the point? Meanwhile, possessing so much material wealth while destroying this earth. What's the point? We could live in a different way, that's why dreams are important.

SRS: It's an important point that the world doesn't have to be like this, and during the socialist period in China, those changes started to happen because it wasn't just a utopian dream. I want to talk about the mass movement of urban youth like you that were sent to the countryside. That's one of the things being attacked.

Wang Zheng: Yes, yes. There are a lot of debates in terms of why Mao and the Party did that in terms of motivations. Even today, I don't think it's wrong to ask the urban educated youth to make a contribution to the poor areas even though we may not have to use that kind of drastic measure. Still I think it is necessary for educated people to go to the poor places, to contribute their knowledge to develop those areas.

Even though I was sent to the countryside, I never shed a tear all those years when I was on the farm. If you read all those memoirs talking about how terrible it was for "sent down girls," like in *Wild Swans* for example, where she [Jung Chang] talks about her "sent down" experience, her countryside experience...oh, she felt so wronged. Because she was from this high Communist cadre official family—how can she be sent to work on the farm like a peasant? She just couldn't work as a peasant. It's horrible! When I read that part, I was so offended by her sense of entitlement, her sense of being elite, how can she do that kind of work? So when her parents went through the back door and got her

out of the countryside, oh, she was so elated. And even to the time when she was writing, she never reflected on that privilege.

Why couldn't you be a peasant where some 90 percent of Chinese were peasants at the time? On what ground could you not work as a farmer? Do you have a crown on your head? I just don't see it. If you read all those condemnations, they are all complaining, saying that we are urban people, we are educated, my parents are professors or high officials and I had all these talents, now I have to work as a peasant. What is wrong with that? You can contribute your talents to the peasants, to the rural community. I still don't know what is wrong with that.

SRS: The Setting the Record Straight project is also working to take on the distortions and lies and to bring out the true history of socialism. Given your own interest in this history, how do you see amplifying our work?

Wang Zheng: Yes, they have the whole machine behind them to promote. We don't have that. Yes, how to increase our volume in a sense. We have been trying to raise our voice to be heard, but always kind of overshadowed or suppressed by the market. That's a huge issue because we do live in this capitalist market economy.

Maybe one important thing for scholars is not to just produce academic works confined to academic circles. I just came from a conference in the China field. Many scholars think that Jung Chang's new book [*Mao: The Unknown Story*] and their story of Mao is a piece of shit. These scholars do research, study history and documents, and they know this

book cannot be held against academic standards. I think that academics in the China field, all my colleagues, as far as I know, have been trying to inform their students. But you know in this country, a lot of the students are not interested in anything besides America. So our classrooms are not large. A few are informed, but not many. Conferences are not a venue to inform the large public. That's the big issue, the big problem here. How to make your work accessible to the larger audience, and circulate among them? It is actually who can promote you. So these are political issues in this country, because the mainstream has an interest to demonize socialism.

Let me just say, how much does the U.S. government invest in the Iraq war, more than \$70 billion now, right? Okay, so in this system you can invest so much money to kill people with another religion, rather than offer free education, college education, to make your citizens an informed citizenry. Is this system better than China when it was socialist when many people were informed through free education? Are there any efforts made in this country to offer free medical care, free education instead of so much money to kill innocent people? This is evil. If you talk about evil, this is evil.

If the practice of Chinese communist revolution had been thwarted by various mistakes or various forces, we need to explore new ways. Whatever the Chinese Communist Party's mistakes, it doesn't prove the superiority of capitalism.

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