Building from Marx:
Reflections on Class and Race

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I know I am not alone. There must be hundreds of other women, maybe thousands, who feel as I do. There may be hundreds of men who want the same drastic things to happen. But how do you hook up with them? How can you interlink your own struggle and goals with these myriad, hypothetical people who are hidden entirely or else concealed by stereotypes and/or generalities of "platform" such as any movement seems to spawn? I don't know. I don't like it, this being alone when it is clear that there will have to be multitudes working together, around the world, if radical and positive change can be forced upon the heinous status quo I despise in all its overwhelming power. — June Jordan, "Declaration of an Independence I Would Just as Soon Not Have," in *Moving Towards Home: Political Essays* (1989)

Introduction

IT IS CONVENTIONAL IN ACADEMIC AND POLITICAL CIRCLES BY NOW TO SPEAK OF "RACE" in the same breath with gender and class. It is more or less recognized that "race" can be combined with other social relations of power and that they can mediate and intensify each other.[1] This combination of "race," gender, and class is often expressed through the concept of "intersectionality," in which three particular strands of social relations and ideological practices of difference and power are seen as arising in their own specific social terrain, and then crisscrossing each other "intersectionally" or aggregatively.[2] It is a coming together of social issues to create a moment of social experience.

Yet, speaking of experience, nonwhite and white people living in Canada and the West know that this social experience is not, as lived, a matter of intersectionality. Their sense of being in the world, textured through myriad social relations and cultural forms, is lived or felt or perceived as being all together and all at once. A working-class nonwhite woman's (Black, South Asian, Chinese, etc.) presence in

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the usual racialized environment is not divisible separately and serially. The fact of her blackness, her sex, and gender-neutral personhood of being working class blend into something of an identity simultaneously and instantaneously.[3] This identification is in the eye of the beholder and in her own sense of social presence captured by this gaze. The same goes for a white woman, yet when confronted with this question of "being" and experience, we are hard put to theorize them in terms of a social ontology. What accounts for this inadequacy of conceptualization, which fails to capture such formative experientiality? If it is lived, then how can it be thought, and how can we overcome our conceptual shortcomings? My intent here is to suggest a possible theorization that can address these questions, or at least to grasp the reasons why we need to ask them in the first place. This is not a matter of simply responding to a theoretical challenge, but is also a political matter. It is a basic piece of the puzzle for the making of social democracy.

For democracy to be more than a mere form consisting of political rituals that only serve to entrench the rule of capital and sprinkle holy water on existing social inequalities, it must have a popular and actually participatory content. That content should be social and cultural demands concentrated in social movements and organizations that work through political processes aimed at popular entitlement at all levels. Such politics needs a social understanding that conceives social formations as a set of complex, contradictory, and inclusive phenomena of social interactions. A simple arithmetical exercise of adding or intersecting "race," gender, and class in a stratificatory mode would not do. Neither can it posit "race" as a cultural phenomenon and gender and class as social and economic. It must overcome the segmentation of the overall social into such elementary aspects of its composition. For example, a trade union cannot properly be said to be an organization for class struggle if it only thinks of class in economic terms, without broadening the concept of class to include "race" and gender in its intrinsic formative definition. Furthermore, it must make its understanding actionable on this socially composite ground of class.[4]

Outside the trade unions, which are explicitly "class" organizations, the usual practice in current social justice movements is to adopt "coalition" politics that do not discriminate against platforms on which these organizations have been put together.[5] Such coalitionist activism is a tactical matter that reflects the same pluralist aggregative logic of social understanding. Class-based organizations come together with those that are not because of a shared interest in certain issues. In "new social movements," issues of class and capital would be considered unnecessary, if at all.[6] So popular demands based on gender, "race," sexuality, identity, and so on must primarily be formulated in cultural terms, outside of class and capital. In this political framework, "antiracism" becomes more a question of multiculturalism and ethnicity, as the socially relational aspects of racialization embedded in the former is converted into a cultural demand. The sharp, recent decline in work on "race" that combines hegemonic/cultural commonsense with the workings of class

and state is thus not surprising.[7] The turn to postmodernism, away from Marxism and class analysis, has resulted in increasing valorization of cultural norms and forms, and made theories of discourse into vehicles for "radical" politics. If once positivist Marxists compelled us to deal with economism and class reductionism, now our battle is with "cultural reductionism." Neither of these readings of social ontology allows us to do justice to politics for social justice. Our theoretical journey must begin somewhere else to reach another destination.

Theorizing the Social

The theorization and politics I suggest are not exercises in abstraction. They do not eschew thinking or organizing on specific issues relating to economy, culture, or politics. They can be highly specific or local in their scope, about neighborhoods or homelessness in Toronto, for example, or speak to cultural problems. But using these different entry points into the social, they have to analyze and formulate their problems in terms of political problematics that show how these particular or local issues only arise in a wider or extra-local context of socioeconomic and cultural relations. If they are "specific" issues, we must realize that it is because they are "specific" to a general, larger set of social, structural, and institutional relations.[8] For example, is the type of homelessness experienced in Toronto possible outside the way capitalist economic and social development has proceeded in Canada as a whole? Redressing the wrongs in this case, one has to think and ask on grounds beyond the immediate situation, go above and behind it. It would not do to think of "poverty" as an issue or problem by itself, only to be added to "race," class, or gender, or to conceive of these outside of capital.

Beyond the frequent lip-service to reflexive social theorization or even to some excellent works on class, slavery, colonialism, and imperialism, especially by historians, we need to venture into a more complex reading of the social, where every aspect or moment of it can be shown to reflect others, where each little piece of it contains the macrocosm in its microcosm—as "the world in a grain of sand" (William Wordsworth). What we have instead is a thriving theory industry that ruptures the integrity of the social and joyously valorizes "fragments," preferring to posit a non-relational inchoateness, or to add them whenever necessary. By such accounts, the social amounts to an ordering of regulatory parts—the old utilitarian arithmetic—and properly speaking, is inconceivable. Marxists and neo-Marxists have also succumbed to a ceaseless debate on modernism and postmodernism, allowing the aesthetic, moral category of the "modern" to distract them. Seeking to bypass the terms of this debate, I would like to come back to Marx' own formulation of "the social," the ontological or the existential, in different terms or concepts. Here I assume "the social" to mean a complex socioeconomic and cultural formation, brought to life through myriad finite and specific social and historical relations, organizations, and institutions. It involves living and conscious human agents and what Marx called their "sensuous, practical human activity."[9]

Here culture and society are not in a mechanical relation of an economic base and a cultural superstructure. All activities of and in the social are relational and are mediated and articulated with their expressive and embedded forms of consciousness. Here signifying and communicative practices are intrinsic moments of social being. Using such a formulation of the social, my primary concern is to perform a Marxist critique of what "race" means with respect to "class" and gender. In other words, I am trying to socialize the notion of "race."

Before articulating my theory of the social, I will consider the habit of fragmentive or stratified thinking so prevalent among us, which ends up by erasing *the social* from the conception of ontology. This same habit can also produce an evaluative gesture whereby "the cultural," for example, becomes secondary, apparent or illusory, and "class," understood as a function of "economy," becomes the "real" or the fundamental creative force of society. Culture as superstructure "reflects" or "corresponds" to the economic base. In the reverse conceptual habit, the formative power of discourse determines the social. By becoming primarily discursive, the social becomes a thought object. Epistemologies reach a proportion of exclusivity, which is not new and about which Marx speaks in his First Thesis on Feuerbach.[10] In both reductive modes, class politics can ignore "race" or gender, or politics based on any of these others ignores class. Positivist Marxism can also rank the importance of social issues of struggle by relegating gender relations to the status of "secondary contradictions," while "race" or caste are seen as mere "cultural" forms of inequality. Currently, the mainstream Western labor movements often dismiss issues of "race" as politics of discourse or ethnic/cultural identity. Conversely, "race" activists may dismiss class or anti-imperialist politics as "white" politics. Gender or patriarchy may be considered to be entirely redundant by both groups, while feminists who can theorize community on the grounds of being women may find both "race" and class to be redundant or of no intrinsic significance.[11] For all groups, that which they consider unimportant may also be what they find to be divisive and detrimental for the advancement of their movements. My primary concern is to bypass these conceptual positions and to offer an inclusive Marxist critique with a social interpretation of difference, especially in regard to what "race" means to class and gender. I address how class can be transformed from an economic to a social concept that constitutively implicates social relations and forms of consciousness. What I intend is best presaged by Edward P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class*, when he discusses class and class consciousness as active creations of social individuals.[12]

It is not news that the culture of positivist thinking that pervaded the 19th-century European, especially English intellectual world and the prestige accorded to a measuring scientifism changed the tenor of social thought from the earlier philosophical tone. Notions such as "knowledge" and "science" took on a definitely technological and quantitative aspect, to which were added strict notions of causality and the idea of social "laws," parallel to "natural laws"—an offshoot of

the study of human evolution. If we look at the later work of Frederick Engels, for example, we can see how later Marxism absorbed this culture of utilitarian positivism and scientifism (e.g., Engels, 1969). As economics emerged as a science, since it could lend itself most fully to quantification, Marxism changed from a "critique" of political economy, as attempted by Marx, to political economy. The notion of economy came to substitute notions of the social. As such, social organization and society became enunciations or functions of the economy. Lived social relations and experiencing subjects became subjected to one-dimensional views of the social, that is, of economic relations or structures. This habit of scientifism has endured, erupting in Louis Althusser's claim, for example, regarding an "epistemological break" in Marx' opus — periodizing it into philosophical and scientific.[13] The concept and practice of "scientific" Marxism or socialism became a credo of Communist Parties throughout the world.

Interestingly, this scientific or positivist Marxism, with its truncated and reified understanding of the social, relied much more on certain characteristics of 18th-century liberal thought than on Marx' own writings. Not the least of these is a compartmentalizing way of thinking that ruptures the formative, complex integrity of the social whole and creates segments or spheres of "the economic," "the political," and "the cultural," which are in reality ontologically inseparable. This separation of social spheres was essential for the rising bourgeois state and society. In bourgeois or liberal democracy, despite its universalist claims, equality could only be *formal* and thus the notions of "liberality" and "democracy" could not be actually realized. But this way of thinking in self-contained spheres has become hegemonic or naturalized enough that programmatic, political Marxism can, unconsciously perhaps, fall back upon the same separation of spheres. Broadly speaking, "class" thus becomes an overarching economic category, gender/patriarchy a social one, while "race," "caste," or "ethnicity" are categories of the cultural. It is not difficult to see how class struggle or class consciousness can be theorized and acted on minus "race" and gender, or vice versa. Not all Marxists submitted to this liberal/bourgeois fragmentary and economistic reading of the social, however. Dubbed for their difference from others as "cultural Marxists," Georg Lukács, Walter Benjamin, or Raymond Williams, for example, actively explored the formative relations between culture and society in their broadest sense, while Antonio Gramsci theorized on relations between these and the institution of the state and civil society.[14]

Socializing "Race"

The social phenomenon I refer to as "race" is not a biological distinction that inheres in people themselves. It is a way — a power-inscribed way — of reading or establishing difference, and finding a long-lasting means for reproducing such readings, organization, and practice. When people say that "race" is a construct, this is roughly what they are signaling. The non-existence of "race" as a physi-

cal entity has been remarked on by critical Darwinians, such as Stephen J. Gould (1981), for example. This is why I use double quotation marks around the word, hedging the term from the danger of becoming considered as an actual fact of nature. "Race," therefore, is no more or less than an active social organization, a constellation of practices motivated, consciously and unconsciously, by political or power imperatives with implied cultural forms—images, symbols, metaphors, and norms that range from the quotidian to the institutional. This is the view I wish to sustain through my theorization.

If we consider "race" to be a connotative, expressionist cluster of social relations in the terrain of certain historical and economic relations, and class to be an ensemble of property-oriented social relations with signifying practices, it is easy to see how they are formatively implicated. From this standpoint, one could say that modern "race" is a social culture of colonialist and imperialist capitalism. "Race," therefore, is a collection of discourses of colonialism and slavery, but firmly rooted in capitalism in its different aspects through time. As it stands, "race" cannot be disarticulated from "class" any more than milk can be separated from coffee once they are mixed, or the body divorced from consciousness in a living person. This inseparability, this formative or figurative relation, is as true for the process of extraction of surplus value in capitalism as it is a commonsense practice at the level of social life. Economic participation, the value of labor, social and political participation and entitlement, and cultural marginalization or inclusion are all part of this overall social formation.

This integrity of "race" and class cannot be independent of the fundamental social organization of gender, that is, sex-specific social division of labor, with mediating norms and cultural forms. Various proprietorial relations, including of bodies, productive and reproductive labor, normative institutional and commonsensical cultural, are thus in a reflexive and constitutional relation.[15] This is what multinational corporations fall back on in the Third World when they hire an overwhelmingly female labor force to raise their profit margin. In every social space there is a normalized and experiential as well as ideological knowledge about whose labor counts the least. The actual realization process of capital cannot be outside a given social and cultural form or mode. There is no capital that is a universal abstraction. Capital is always a practice, a determinate set of social relations and a cultural one at that. Thus "race," gender, and patriarchy are inseparable from class, as any social organization rests on inter-subjective relations of bodies and minds marked with socially constructed difference on the terrain of private property and capital.

Going Back to Marx

> In all modes of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence

to others. It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours
and modifies their particularity. It is a particular ether which determines
the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it (Marx,
1973: 106–107).

To perform a reflexive theorization of the social, it helps to go back to some
key concepts used by Marx himself. Of the many he used, I will primarily con-
centrate on three: the "concrete" (*Grundrisse*), "civil society" (*The German Ideol-
ogy* and *The Communist Manifesto*), and "ideology" (*The German Ideology, The
Holy Family,* and *The Jewish Question*). Relatedly, we could use notions such as
"mediation," "reification," and "fetishism," which though partially articulated by
Marx himself, were further developed by later Marxists. Of these Marxists, such as
Lukács, Benjamin, Althusser, Dorothy E. Smith, Frederic Jameson, to name a few,
none were political economists. As critical social and cultural theorists, they sought
to break free from an economistic or class reductionist and cultural reductionist
understanding of the social as elaborated in particular by capital.

Marx adapted the Hegelian concept of "the concrete" in his notes on *Capital*
compiled as *Grundrisse*. It seems to me that his treatment of this concept holds the
correlates of reflexive epistemology earlier outlined as historical materialism in *The
German Ideology*. About this notion he makes the following remarks:

> The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determi-
> nations, hence the unity of the diverse. It *appears* in the process of think-
> ing, therefore, *as a process of concentration, as a result, not as a point of
> departure, even though it is the point of departure in reality,* and hence
> also the point of departure for observation (*Anschauung*) and conception
> (Marx, 1973: 101; emphasis added).

The "concrete" as the social, we can see, has a dual character for Marx. It is a
mental or conceptual category, and an existing specific social formation. Thus, it
is "a point of departure" (as the social) and "a point of arrival" (as theory). Some-
thing that is "concrete" is not like an "object" that is visible, as a table or a chair,
but nonetheless its "concreteness" is a determinate form of social existence. It is
concretized by specific social relations, with mediating and expressive as well as
reproductive forms of consciousness and practices. In fact, this "concrete" social
form is to be seen in contrast to a fact or an "object," because it is not reified/fixed
or hypostatized. It is a fluid, dynamic, meaningful formation created by living
subjects in actual lived time and space, yet with particular discernable features that
implicate it in other social formations and render it specific. From this perspective,
then, "race" is a connotative cluster of social relations, implicated in others coded
as "economic" and "social," that is, class and gender. If one were to broaden "class"
into a sociological category, thus making it stand for an entire ensemble of social
relations, signifying practices, and organizations, it could not be articulated within

specific socio-historic formations such as ours without "race." For this reason, one could say that "race" is the ideological discourse and cultural commonsense of a patriarchal colonial and imperialist capitalism. In such an existential historical terrain, disarticulating "race" from "class" is impossible. Denuded of its metaphysical trapping, the notion of the "concrete," then, in Marx' usage, becomes one of social formation signaling a constitutive complexity. Social relations and organization, both complementary and contradictory, with historical accretion and inflection, go into the making of social ontology of the subject-agent. But it also has a capacity for conceptualizing these in a non-mechanical, non-serialized way.

It is sensible to move from the concepts "concrete" and "the social" to the notion of "civil society," which is crucial to Marx' critical epistemology,[16] and to note its intimate connection with the notion of "mode of production." Marx' emphasis here is on the *mode*, the organizational and social ground for production, as well as reproduction and their entailed politics, administration, and cultures. *The German Ideology*, in which he presents his ideas on the making of the social and social change, is a rich source for understanding the complexity of modes of production as articulated by Marx. Breaking free of the qualitative and ontological separation between civil society and the state, economy, and culture, the political and the public sphere from the private and the familial, he presents in this text an integrated, constantly elaborating historical/social space. It is the theater of class struggle and revolution. This historical and social movement is not presented as evolutionist and teleological, and is shot through with resisting and dominating forms of consciousness. Here are examples of his thoughts on civil society, the ground for "the mode" or style and fashion for organizing an everyday life for the production of private property and related moral and cultural propriety. For Marx, "civil society is the true source and theatre of all history, and how absurd is the conception of history held hitherto, which neglects the real relationship and confines itself to high sounding dramas of princes and states" (Marx and Engels, 1970: 57). He also treats civil society as "social organization...which in all ages forms the basis of the state and of the rest of the idealistic superstructure" (*Ibid.*).

If we scrutinize Marx' statements, two issues grab our attention. First, the "mode" of the social is a dynamic and integral one. In its character as a formative process, it cannot be an aggregative one. This processual nature requires temporal and spatial aspects, where it is here and now a specific form that will move on to something else in the future. Some aspects of this formation that lie in the now will, therefore, be in the past as well. You cannot tear this live social way of being and its formational journey into component parts and expect it to live and move. Just as a dismembered and dissected human body does not yield up the secret of a conscious evolving life, a "mode" of production does not reveal its live social being when considered as segregated, though "intersecting," social relations and forms of consciousness. This is precisely the error of "the intersectional method." In this, one must agree with the 19th-century romantics with whom Marx shared

much of his *Weltanschauung* or worldview—that the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

The second issue of note is that of culture and consciousness. It is clear from explicit statements that consciousness is not an afterthought of existence. All activities are "sensuous practical human" ones and, as such, of conscious agents and subjects. Hence Marx' need to put forward the notion of "practical consciousness"[17] as a fundamental moment of all aspects of "concrete" forms of existence. In this learning, changing, and transmitting process, life goes on, history moves on, and is made—consciously and subconsciously. The gesture of forging a primitive tool, adding two sticks together, or judging the seasons by the stars becomes the science and technology of our present times. In this schema, no apple falls out of sight of a conscious eye. Not surprisingly, ways of establishing propriety and reproducing difference that are based on private property are a basic part of social existence, involving consciousness and institutionalization. Viewed thus, "race" is no more or less than a form of difference, creating *a mode* of production through practical and cultural acts of *racialization*. "Race" *is* such a difference and it cannot stand alone.[18]

If this formative integrity or "unity" of the social is "ruptured" (to use another of Marx' phrases in *Grundrisse*), then we have phenomenal object forms or thought objects that are fetishized. The work of Marxist theorists is to deconstruct this object form and return it to its concrete, diverse social determinations. As Lukács (1980: 99–137) puts it, an ontology of social being can only be appropriately understood with an epistemology that connects thought to its material socio-historical ground. As such, empiricist or positivist versions of Marxism will not do, because they tend to depict the concrete as no more than a "thing" or an "object," as a dead "fact."

Attempts to rupture mutually constitutive and diverse determinations and present this as reality lead to the problems that bedevils social movements that, to be effective, ought to integrate "race," gender, and class. Unintentionally, we produce reified thought objects that defy social understanding and are occlusive or truncated. We confuse the specificity of social forms or figurations with disconnected particularities. Thus, culture becomes nonmaterial, asocial, and solely discursive, while economy or polity lack mediatory forms of consciousness. As noted, this fractured reading results in ideology, in bourgeois democracy's claim to offer equality of citizenship or rights while legally preserving and enhancing actual social relations of inequality and ruling. In criticizing this bourgeois political economy, Marx repeatedly elaborates his theory of a mode (as style, fashion, ensemble) of production. In opposition to liberal/bourgeois thought, he shows how each specific social form serves as the microcosm of the social macrocosm, just as each physical cell of the body holds the entire genetic code. Such a mode of understanding is anti-dualist and anti-positivist. The mode of production, as Marx (1973: 97) puts it in the *Grundrisse*, is not "linearly, causally organized." By employing the notion of mediation, between social relations and forms of consciousness, both practical

and ideological, he shows how an entire significatory/communicative and expressive social ensemble must obtain for any specific economy and polity to operate and be effective. Seen thus "socially," class cannot be genderless or cultureless, or culture genderless and classless.

Capital is obviously a social practice, not just a theoretical abstraction. As such, its reproductive and realization processes are rooted in civil society, in its cultural/social ground. Class in this sense, for Marx and others, is a category of civil society.[19] The exploitation of labor is not simply an arithmetic ratio of labor to technology in the terrain of means of production. Social and cultural factors, for example of gender and "race," enter into it and with their implied norms and forms organize the social space that comprehends capitalism as a *mode* of production, an organization of civil society. We enter a realm of extensive and subtle mediations that determine forms, values, processes, and objects of production.[20] Therefore "class," when seen concretely, relies upon and exceeds what we call economy. The once vocal debates on household labor of women, wages for housework, and the relationship of slavery to capitalism revealed the far-flung sociocultural roots of economy. Thus, we might identify "race" and patriarchy/gender with the so-called extra-economic or cultural/discursive, but nonetheless social, moments of the overall mode of capitalist production that has its own social ontology. Marx (1973: 94) signals this formative relation between production and reproduction when he speaks of mediation as "the act through which the whole process again runs its course." Therefore, as modes of mediation, gender or "race" help to produce the constant devaluation of certain social groups' embodiment and labor power, and create a "color coded" cultural commonsense for the state and the society as a whole (see Backhouse, 1999; Razack, 2002).

In *The German Ideology,* Marx identifies as "ideology" the epistemology that ruptures the integrity of the socially concrete at a conceptual level and posits this as a property of the social. In contrast to much familiar Marxism, ideology for Marx encompasses more than its thought content and includes the very form of knowledge production that generates content that desocializes, depoliticizes, and dehistoricizes our social understanding. Though Marx' primary concern is with the precise method that produces ideology, he is also deeply concerned with the thought content or ideas that are generated. As they are ideas of ruling, they must be specifically addressed by our political organizations. Thus, racializing discourses need to be considered in these terms. In a section entitled "Ruling class and ruling ideas," Marx states:

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of

mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those
who lack the means of mental production are subject to it (1970: 64).

After offering this cryptic, though highly suggestive view of how a "cultural
commonsense" for domination is created that legitimates and reproduces the overall
relations and institutions of ruling, Marx (*Ibid.*: 64) states categorically that "ruling
ideas," or what we call generally prevalent ideas, "are nothing more than the ideal
[i.e., cultural/formal] expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant
material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the
one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance." It is not surprising
that the dominant relations of patriarchal colonial capitalism would produce racist
patriarchal discourses of physical, social, and cultural differences. This is exactly
what happens when the discourses or ideological categories of "race" or "human
nature" are employed to "explain" social behavior or cultural characteristics, when
in actuality, they no more than interpret them.

Most important, the question is how such occlusive, substitutive, or displac-
ing discourses of ideological categories are generated. In *The German Ideology,*
Marx outlines this epistemological practice, connecting it with the social division
of manual and mental labor. He exposes the disciplinary practices of metaphysi-
cians whereby everyday ideas, events, and experiences are decontextualized,
over-generalized, or over-particularized from their originating social relations and
interests. Then these empirical bits of de-grounded ideas are reconfigured into dis-
cursive systems or interpretive devices that take on a semblance of independence
and substantiveness. It is helpful to paraphrase and quote Marx here. Considering
ideology to be an epistemological device employed in decontextualization and
extrapolation, Marx offers a disclosure of the method. He calls them "tricks" and
identifies three of them. We can begin by "considering the course of history" by
"detach[ing] the ideas of the ruling class from the ruling class itself and attribute
to them an independent existence" (1970: 65). Having detached them from their
specific social and historical locations, we now "confine ourselves to saying that
these or those ideas were dominant at a given time, without bothering ourselves
about the condition of production and the producers of these ideas..." (*Ibid.*: 65).
Now we have a set of ideas or discourses independent of their social ontology. They
appear to generate each other, appear even *sui generic*, but are claimed to be shap-
ing, even creating, the very social realities that gave rise to them in the first place.
Thus, consciousness gives rise to existence, rather than existence to consciousness,
understood as conscious existence. Life imitates or illustrates theory. Only "if we
ignore the individuals and world conditions which are the source of these ideas,"
says Marx (*Ibid.*), then we truly produce "ideology." We can blithely forget that
notions such as honor and loyalty came into being in the time of aristocracy and
the dominance of the bourgeoisie produced concepts of freedom or equality (*Ibid.*).
So, "increasingly abstract ideas hold sway, i.e., ideas which increasingly take on

the form of universality" (*Ibid.*). Hiding behind abstract universality, time-honored metaphysicality, ideas of ruling, for example, of "race" or gender, represent their interests "as the common interest of all members of society..." (*Ibid.*).

Intellectuals or ideologues organic to a system of ruling, guardians of property relations, then take upon themselves the task of development and systemization of these decontextualizing concepts. We know well of the amount of philosophical, "scientific," and cultural labor that have gone into the production of "race," and of practices that have gone into racialization of whole legal systems and polities.[21] Needless to say, diverting attention from power-organized differences in everyday life, history, and social relations can only be useful for the purpose of ruling, of hegemony, not of resistance.

Ideological forms masquerade as knowledge. They simply produce discursivities, incorporating bits of decontextualized ideas, events, or experiences with material consciousness of a practical kind. The modus operandi of these "ruling knowledges" relies on epistemologies that create essentialization, homogenization (i.e., de-specification), and an aspatial and atemporal universalization. Since the most powerful trick of ideology is to sever a concept from its originating and mediating social relations, used in such a way even critical and resisting concepts, such as "class" or the feminist category of "woman," can become occlusive and serve the interest of ruling relations through exclusion and invisibility of power in relations of difference. Struggles that have riven the world of feminist theory reveal that the category of "woman" in its desocialized (class/"race") and dehistoricized (colonialism and imperialism) deployment has helped to smuggle in the political agenda of middle-class, white women and hidden the relationship of dominance that some social groups of women hold with regard to others.[22]

Conclusion

> Men [*sic*] make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past (Marx, 1972e: 437).

Various consequences ensue from the ideological practice by Marxists and non-Marxists of dissociating "race," class, and gender. Social movements have largely ignored the task of fashioning a fully socially informed politics. Marxists have at best created compromised petty bourgeois politics due to their ideological/economistic reading of class and habit of separating class from culture and social relations of gender/patriarchy. By making "race" a non-class or anti-class issue, they have marginalized the most dispossessed sectors of people, the expendable ingredients for capital in the West and elsewhere. Thus, issues of "race" and gender have become mainly identified with liberal politics, with those of rights

and citizenship, not of socialist struggles. Labor movements and the remains of the women's movement are thus unrepresentative and incomplete social or anti-capitalist movements, and as such participate in the replication of the organization of capital and bourgeois rule.

Another consequence has been a promiscuous mixture or coalition of class, gender, and "race"-based politics that lacks a common understanding and internal constructive grounds, thus creating tenuous possibilities of association and acrimonious relations. This inability to create socialized class or anti-capitalist movements has created space for the development of culturalist "race" groups that, with the help of *official* multiculturalism, have held social movements hostage to "identity" and fundamentalist politics. Oppressions created by unequal, dominating social relations do not disappear in actuality by being rendered invisible. Denuded of their full socio-historical concreteness or reality at the levels of civil society and the state, they surface in ideological forms of reified "race" and ethno-nationalist identities, or in acts of basic despair and desperation.

To best understand the destructive politics of ideology, recall Marx' *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in which he speaks of displaced, substituted cultural identities that accomplish the work of class rule on the stage of hegemony. The masks of god worn by current fundamentalist political agencies only serve to remind us of the Roman masks worn by successive protagonists of the French Revolution — until the excluded, unintegrated, class-based sociocultural forms and identities abetted a form of fascism instead of social emancipation. Present-day nationalism, imperialism, and official multiculturalism resort to "identity" politics and unleash wars, genocide, and general social oppression and surveillance. Bush's and Blaire's civilizational or Christian utterances, their capitalist and militaristic ambitions, which masquerade behind the masks of democracy and freedom, and their collaborating feminist discourses of rescuing Muslim women are devastating ideological identity projects. Such legitimating, unificatory sleights of hand, which have drawn a large section of North Americans (mostly white) to identify with various myths of domination, can only be challenged through "concrete" social analysis.

Marxists in the West, particularly because they call for a *social* politics, must acknowledge their implication in undercutting class struggle. They do so by furthering "identity" politics through their defensiveness or "tolerant" liberalism with regard to "race." Their quick dismissal of much popular anger at social injustice as peripheral to anti-capitalist or class struggle leads them down a path that cannot bring "real" social transformation. An inability to regard colonial capitalist and imperialist politics as racist and colonialist "identity" politics of the last 500 years has rendered Western Marxists politically ineffectual. If antiracist feminist movements that challenge hegemony have an element of recuperation of erased cultural identity in them, that is not necessarily disastrous. The point is to assess which standpoint this "identity" elaborates upon and what cultures, histories, and social

relations it evokes. Whose identity are we talking about: that of the oppressors or the oppressed? Theorists of the Left or Marxists have no reason to fear "identity," because there is enough ground in Marx' works to create social movements that need not choose between culture, economy, and society or "race," class, and gender to organize politics of social revolution. Going beyond gestures of intersectionality, coalition, and social cohesion, Marxists have recourse to a non-fragmentary understanding of the social that could change the world as we know it.

NOTES

1.   For the beginning of theorization on the relationship between "race," gender, and class—the departure point for this essay—see Davis (1983), Bannerji (1993, 1995), B. Smith et al. (1982), and Silvera (1983).

2.   The notion of "intersectionality" is the most common one used in critical race theories and legal theories. See, for example, Crenshaw (1989) and Collins (1998).

3.   See Terkel (1992) and Bannerji, "In the Matter of X" (1995: 121–158).

4.   There needs to be an examination of Canadian labor history or texts of labor studies to see how "race" in its various forms has been incorporated into theorizing class, labor, or class politics. It would be interesting to see if, in that domain, there are texts comparable to Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness* (1992), or Li and Bolaria's *Racial Oppression in Canada* (1988). This is an invitation to further research. Black feminist historians have started the project, but it must go deeper.

5.   For example, Metro Network for Social Justice.

6.   For a classic example of this formulation, see Laclau and Mouffe (2001).

7.   By this I mean anthologies such as *The Empire Strikes Back* (Birmingham Centre, 1982).

8.   For an understanding of my use of the term "specific," see Bannerji, "Introducing Racism" (1995: 41–54).

9.   Marx and Engels (1970: 121). Additionally, my use of the notion of "the social" needs a note to acknowledge the debt I owe to Marx' work and that of Dorothy E. Smith, who in all her works, but primarily in *Writing the Social* (1999), has offered a relational and constitutive view of it. In essays such as "Ideological Practices of Sociology," D. Smith (1990) has elaborated on Marx' and her own "reflexive" method. See also Bannerji, "But Who Speaks for Us?" (1995).

10. In his First Thesis, Marx (1970: 121, emphasis added) says: "The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism...is that the thing, reality, sensuousness is conceived only in the form of *the object or contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice,* not subjectively...[and] the *active* side was developed abstractly by idealism—which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such."

11. Two interesting formulations of this exclusionary method are to be found in the now classic texts, Spelman (1988) and B. Smith et al. (1982).

12. In this book, Thompson (1974: 9) *socializes* the concept of class, thus retrieving it from economism. He introduces into the social relational aspect the element of conscious subjectivity. "Class" for him is an "active process that owes as much to agency as to conditioning. The working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present in its own making." Also, I coincide with this statement that class is "a historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness" (*Ibid.*).

13. See Althusser and Balibar (1973: 48–70), especially Althusser's considerations on science and theory, in part 1, "From *Capital* to Marx' Philosophy."

14. Gramsci (1971). Especially attend to his treatment of the relationship between the state and civil society in the different essays.

15. For the implication of "proprietorial" or moral notions, as well as familial relations, and for a reflexive/constitutional view of the social, see classic statements by Marx (1970: 26, 44, 49, 52), where discussing the family as a moment of property he says, for example, it is "the first form...where wife and children are the slaves of the husband." See also Marx and Engels (1972a) or Marx and Engels (1972b). Later theorizations retain the core of their insight. In the North American context, Angela Davis (1983) is a good example.

16. For an expanded discussion of "civil society," see Marx (1970: 57–60), and also "History: Fundamental Conditions" (1970: 48–52). Both involve discussions on the construction of the social, where the organization of social relations involves all basic aspects of life, including that of consciousness. Here production and consumption are unthinkable in separation and without an intrinsic, active, and material form of consciousness.

17. Along with discussing "primary historical relationships," Marx speaks of "consciousness... which here makes its appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short, of language. Language is as old as consciousness, language *is* practical consciousness that exists also for other men, and for that reason alone it really exists for me personally as well; language, like consciousness arises, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men" (1970: 51; emphasis added).

18. For a clear understanding of the concept of difference, Gates (1985) is particularly useful. Though the authors of the essays are not Marxists, they provide examples of cultural materialism with a strong basis in cultural history.

19. See, for example, Hegel's view of "civil society" in C.J. Arthur's introduction to Marx (1970: 5).

20. On the importance of the concept of mediation, see Marx (1973: 331–333).

21. This ideological process that Marx talks about is addressed in different ways by, for example, Harding (1993) or Dua and Robertson (1999).

22. This issue has also been addressed in postcolonial feminist writings. See Midgley (1998), Ware (1993), and McClintock (1995).

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