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Summary: A class struggle that is anti-sexist, anti-racist, and against all forms of oppression is central to Marx's philosophy of revolution and the development of a new humanism. The force and reason of women of color are especially crucial to this process. First appeared in Knowledge Cultures 4:6 (2016) - Editors

## Women and Revolution: Marx and the Dialectic

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ABSTRACT. This article argues that Marxism is inherently anti-sexist, anti-racist, and against all forms of exploitation and oppression. As a philosophy of revolution, Marxism is more than about economic restructuring but rather argues for the development of a new humanity based upon a class-less mode of production. Dialectically, these changes must come simultaneously from changing relations of production, changes in the material conditions of families, and the development of values and ideologies related to freedom and equality. Women's liberation and anti-racism play a central role in this revolution. Working class women and women of color are especially roused to action due to the hyper exploitation and oppression they face around the world. Their voices, energy and commitment are necessary to class struggle and class struggle is necessary for women's liberation movements.

The struggle for a radical conceptualization of women – to be recognized as fully human – is not new phenomena. Throughout most of history we have been held down by the iron fist of men, subject to their demands in exchange for our right to survive. We live everyday with the mortifying knowledge that our lives are not our own, often feeling powerless to break free. This humiliating existence often feels as if we have spent an eternity held by the throat, unable to breathe. In fact for many women this chokehold is not a mere metaphor depicting our pain and humiliation but

an actual terrifying threat that defines their everyday reality. Consider that one in three women will be victims of sexual or physical abuse at least once in their lifetimes, usually by the men who claim to ‘love’ them (United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, 2008). These statistics, drawn from self-reports, are likely underestimated, hindered by the social stigma, ostracism, further violence, and sometimes even legal persecution that is often inflicted on women who *dare* to report. Although human beings are agentic, I would remind those who balk at any appearance of victimization that in our world breaking free often requires more than valor and determination. Extreme poverty or the threat of poverty, legal prohibitions, religious doctrine, and socially induced pressures against breaking with ‘family values’ prevent or discourage many women from escaping servitude and telling the men who think women are God’s gift to them to f---off. We have been made into the Other of man, wherein man is a referent to human being, rendering women subhuman – animalistic, irrational, emotional, and led by instinct.

Unbelievably, amidst the daily onslaught of injustices – workplace exploitation, free domestic labor, legal and social restrictions, and microaggressions (subconscious and conscious) that serve to control women, there remains a societal expectation that women continue to play the ‘happy wife’ (Valenti, 2014). We seem to prefer when women don’t

‘complain’ and direct their psychological trauma inward in the form of internalized oppression, battered women’s syndrome, anorexia and other women’s diseases. Of course, the ones who gain the most from this economic, social, and psychological war against women is the capitalist class who cash in on the billion dollar industries that both exploit working women and then develop magic pills and services to ameliorate their effects. This dehumanization is even more acute among indigenous women and women of color who experience an unparalleled hyper exploitation, including often extremely low wages and laboring under appalling working conditions (Bauer & Ramírez, 2010). Since women of color bear a colonial history that spans 500 years of domestic, sexual, physical, and psychological violence at the hands of the White man – the use and discarding of their bodies is just business as usual (Monzó & McLaren, in press). Still, across the world, now and in history, we as women have consistently and heroically fought against our subordinate position and have struggled to improve our lives and that of our children, to gain respect, and to live with dignity. We have not been broken.

Certainly we have made great strides in the last century, including in most countries the right to vote, the right to education, the right to marry by choice and to divorce, and we have seen a steady rise in women’s wage labor participation across the world. Yet according to a UN

Women's report (2015), still only half of working-age women across the world participate in the labor force, compared to three-quarters of working-age men. Of these women, two-thirds are 'contributing family workers,' which means they work in family businesses without direct pay. The same report indicates that on a global scale women work more hours than men each day (when combining waged and unwaged labor) yet earn significantly less than men. The gender wage-gap persists in every country in the world, with global figures indicating women earn 24% less than men for work of equal value. Taken over a lifetime, women's earnings are significantly lower. This is especially concerning given that women have longer life-spans and have less access to pensions, making them especially vulnerable during their senior years. For example, the report states that in Germany, where there seems to be strong support for women's rights, women earn only half as much as men during their life times. Women also lag behind men in access to adequate health care and education. Furthermore, the division of labor continues to be a significant factor across the world with women doing 2.5 times more unpaid domestic work than men, which means that women who work outside the home face a double shift of waged and unwaged labor as indicated above (UN Women, 2015).

However, this blanket approach to describing women's oppression is deceptive in that it does not illuminate the fact that poor women, overwhelming women of color, and especially in the so called 'developing' world, bear the worst economic conditions, while the oppression of women of the capitalist class and of the middle and upper-income working classes are buffered by their wealth and power and/or indirect access to it. The current neoliberal phase of capitalism has created a world that is wealthier but more unequal. The richest 1% of the world's population now owns about 40% of the world's assets, while the bottom half owns no more than 1%. This reality has arisen from the dispossession of the working masses through austerity measures that have left many unemployed or underemployed, making lower wages, and enduring harsher working conditions. This increased financial burden often falls on working women who are usually the first to be laid off of work, given the expectation that they may procure greater financial demands due to paid maternity leaves and childcare responsibilities (UN Women, 2015).

In countries where healthcare is not universally had, poor women's health suffers most since they have less access to paid medical benefits and fewer financial resources. A woman in Sierra Leone is 100 times more likely to die during childbirth than a woman in Canada. Among poor families and especially rural families in the 'developing'

world, girls have less opportunities than boys to access education since the perception (sometimes a reality) is that they may be less likely than boys to find paid employment as adults, making girls' education a greater financial burden to the family than boys' education. Thus, indigenous women in Latin America are twice as likely to lack literacy skills than a non-indigenous woman (UN Women, 2015).

In addition, poor women of color often have the most physically demanding jobs in the worst working conditions. Reports of labor law abuses in export manufacturing jobs abound. Consider the string of Bangladeshi uprisings in 2014 following the garment factory collapse that claimed over 900 lives and a subsequent fire that claimed 8 lives. Eighty percent of workers in the more than 5000 garment factories in Bangladesh are women who work for approximately \$38 dollars a month under sweatshop conditions, including excessive hours, unbearable temperatures, lack of bathroom facilities, and sexual harassment. The uprisings called for wage increases and better working conditions from such transnational corporate giants as GAP and Walmart (Gummow, 2014). These lived experiences among women of color demonstrate that class within the capitalist mode of production is both gendered and raced.

A class analysis also reveals that economic exploitation, lack of opportunities, and dehumanizing experiences are and

have been a permanent feature of the working class – *men and women*. According to this UN Women’s report (2015) in some countries the narrowing gender gap is a result of a decrease in working men’s wages. This leveling down effect hurts working women as well as men since poor families often depend on the wages of both men and women for subsistence. As Marx and Engels (1969) declared in their majestic opening page, ‘The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.’ That is, history has involved different modes of production that have been based on a class distinction – a class of oppressors who dispose of the labor of an oppressed class of producers. How such class relations exist, however, differs across modes of production.

Of critical significance in the struggle against the oppression of women is recognizing its dialectical relationship to class. Here I develop a historical materialist perspective, based on Marx, that recognizes the productive and reproductive conditions of a given space and time as tantamount to a structure that creates specific contexts of possibilities from which specific relations are developed (Gimenez, 2005).

This historical materialism and dialectic that Marx developed allows us to understand the oppression of women as rooted in something beyond men’s misogynist views (which presupposes particular dispositions among men toward women and power as given) and helps us understand the roots of oppression and its manifestation in specific



historical context. From this we can begin to discern new conditions of possibility that may lead to our liberation.

A historical materialist approach to understanding the world we live in recognizes that the mode of production is also the mode of reproduction (Miranda, 1980). That is, the mode of production consistently reproduces the same social relations by which it is defined. Jose Porfirio Miranda argues ‘If a change is to truly change anything, then it must crystallize in the mode of production’ (102). This does not mean, as many have argued (Federici, 2004; Vogel, 2013), that everything is reduced to class or that consciousness and culture are merely secondary considerations (Cole, 2009). A historical materialist approach does not establish a causal relationship between the mode of production and other societal relations. Rather, the mode of production is said to establish certain conditions of possibility and therefore has a hand in shaping the manifestation of ideological formations and other social relations in their historical specificity, including gender and race relations (Ebert, 2009; Miranda, 1980). Thus, gender oppression must be understood as taking on particular forms that both result from and reinforce the current capitalist structure of society.

Indeed a careful class analysis reveals that across every sphere of oppression against working women there is a related prospect of capital accumulation. These are related to their productive and reproductive work, which creates

values (use and exchange) that lead to greater capital accumulation and to the preparation of the next generation of workers (Gimenez, 2005). For example, the commodification of women's bodies and their dehumanization as sexual objects produces capital for multi-billion dollar industries, such as sex industries that include prostitution, pornography, and sex trafficking, while also producing ideologies about the 'ideal good woman' as desexualized and domestic 'mothers' whose primary function is the well-being of their children (read the reproduction of the next generation of workers). While many women are understandably enraged at the men who use their privilege against us (rather than as our allies), I would argue that our greatest wrath (women and men's) should be directed at destroying the capitalist mode of production that has created the conditions that have placed women in this particular predicament. Working men, unfortunately, have played right into the machinations of capital by acquiescing to their privileges in the family that, while granting them some semblance of greater control, actually reinforces their own oppression as workers under capitalism.

I want to be clear that I recognize the woman/man binary to be socially constructed in the context of capitalism, which obscures the dialectical relation between them. Here, when I use the term woman, I am referring to anyone who has been

defined as such by society. Always I use the term woman to refer to ALL women or all working women, recognizing that when discussing oppression the most afflicted are always women of color. While, postmodernism has importantly problematized the practice of essentializing human beings, it is Marx's concept of the negation of the negation that we can potentially employ to liberate ourselves of such binaries. Until then, however, I believe that while recognizing, learning about and addressing our different interests in favor of justice, it is also imperative that we recognize our common experiences of oppression as working women and women of color toward our struggle.

In this paper, I argue that women's movements need to look to Marx and to his dialectical method to understand the oppression of women and to carve a path toward, not only women's liberation, but the liberation of humanity and all living organisms. I respond to the most widely held critiques that the feminist movement has, in my opinion, wrongly hoisted at Marx, but also acknowledge that feminist research has provided important understandings on the history of women's oppression that I believe can help us supplement Marx's theories to better attend to women's oppression and to move us toward a socialist alternative. In short I argue that women's liberation movements need class struggle and class struggle needs women's liberation.

## **The Foundational Role of Women to Marx's Theory of Revolution**

Much has been critiqued about Marx's brilliant and influential critique of political economy and his philosophy of revolution for failing to fully integrate the role of women. While it is true that Marx did not provide a thorough examination of women's oppression and the specific role of women in capitalist production, Heather Brown (2013) has recently engaged a thorough examination of all of Marx's available works that address gender and the family, including his notebooks on ethnology, some of which have yet to be published, that reveal Marx judiciously studying the history of women's oppression and the family in his later years. Furthermore, it is evident throughout his work that he not only recognized women's oppression as intricately intertwined with capitalist relations but that he recognized their liberation as integral to the goals of class struggle (Dunayevskaya, 1991). In his *Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx notes the different ways in which 'man' (human being) treats men and women and argues that our evolution as a species could be measured by the way in which we treat women, indicating that this should be no less than equal to the way in which we treat men. In his words:

'The infinite degradation in which man exists for himself is expressed in this relation to the woman as the spoils and handmaiden of communal lust. For the secret of the

relationship of man to man finds its unambiguous, definitive, open, obvious expression in the relationship of man to woman, and in this way, the direct, natural relationship between the sexes. The direct, natural, necessary relationship of man to man is the relationship of man to woman... From the character of this relation it follows to what degree man as a species has become human' (1959: 48).

Indeed Marx's concern for women's struggles can be evidenced in numerous ways throughout his life's work. Consider, as Dunaveskaya (1991) points out, that *Capital's* 'The Working Day' (Marx, 1906/2011) contains a full 80 pages devoted in part to a critique of the enslavement of women and children and that Marx fought for laws that were meant to shorten their workdays and better their working conditions. In a letter to Dr. Ludwig Kugelmann in 1868, Marx writes, '... great progress was evident in the last Congress of the American "Labor Union," in that, among other things, it treated working women with complete equality... Anybody who knows anything of history knows that great social changes are impossible without the feminine ferment' (Marx & Engels, 1968). Dunaveskaya argues that Marx politically favored and fought for the 'autonomous existence of women' and that as head of the First International Working Men's Association, he appointed women to leadership positions and also sent

Elizabeth Dmitrieva to set up a women's section of the first international in Paris. Dmitrieva was later to become an organizer for the Union de Femmes, which was highly involved in the first ever people's uprising – The Paris Commune. Indeed Marx closely followed the Paris Commune and applauded the tenacity and courage of the women of the Commune who were often vilified for proclaiming and fighting for their right to survival (Brown, 2013; Dunaveskaya, 1991).

His concern for women's oppression was not merely a moral imperative. It seems appropriate to assume that he recognized that women's oppression was integral to capitalist production. Certainly, Marx maintained that social relations within the family encapsulated the broader social relations of capitalist society and that a socialist alternative would not be adequately conceived as long as women continued to be enslaved within the home. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels write:

‘The division of labour in which all these contradictions are implicit, and which in its turn is based on the natural division of labour in the family and the separation of society into individual families opposed to one another, simultaneously implies the *distribution*, and indeed the *unequal* distribution, both quantitative and qualitative, of labour and its products, hence property, the nucleus, the first form of which lies in the family, where wives and children

are the slaves of the husband. This latent state of the family, though still very crude, is the first form of property, but even at this stage it corresponds perfectly to the definition of modern economists, who call it the power of disposing of the labour power of others. Division of labour and private property are, moreover, identical expressions: in the one the same thing is affirmed with reference to activity as is affirmed in the other with reference to the product of the activity' (1998: 51–52).

When Marx states that private property and the division of labor are identical expressions he is referring to the identical process of disposing of the labor power of others, which defines the individual in society, including the woman, solely as worker, as commodity, and in which both the labor and the product of labor turns on the individual and confronts her antagonistically to confine her as a slave.

Dunayevskaya (1991) points out quoting Marx in 'Private Property and Communism' (1959):

'Marx's opposition to private property was very far removed from a question of "property." Rather his opposition...was due to the fact that it "completely negates the personality of man..."' (p. 81).

In this sense, the abolition of property relations involves a change in human nature, which Marx saw as not fixed but socially developed under specific historical materialist

conditions. The goal to change human nature, to develop a socialist consciousness among human beings evidences Marx's dialectical approach wherein an underlying relation of presumed opposites – material conditions and consciousness – exist as aspects of and in relation to the other (Allman, 1999). Indeed, the notion that human nature could be changed through social conditions also reveals the dialectical reasoning with which he viewed nature and humanity. As such women's liberation in the family (the dissolution of the first property relation) was recognized by Marx, not only as morally necessary (see Miranda, 1980) but as necessary for the development of what Che Guevara, described as the 'new [wo]man' – a human being who valued collective social responsibility above individual desires, who understood the value of sharing, social responsibility toward each other, and sufficiency so that everyone would be able to live beyond necessity and instead develop their creative labor for personal intellectual, social and moral development and that of society (McLaren & Monzó, in press).

### **Responding to Feminist Anti-Marxist Critiques**

Since the 70s and 80s, Marx has been subjected by the feminist movement to scathing attacks for undoubtedly being a man of his time. That is, we do not see in Marx's vast work the careful attention to non-sexist language that we currently support nor did he recognize, as we do today,



that gender neutrality is a form of exclusion. Yet, examining the totality of his work carefully reveals that his aim was the liberation of all humanity, including that of women.

Although his initial focus had been to develop a theory of capitalist production processes and a philosophy of revolution, he eventually did turn to carefully study women's oppression as evidenced in his ethnological notebooks, although he died before he was able to complete this work (Brown, 2013). More importantly, Marx's theory of capitalist production, the historical materialism and dialectical method that he developed, and his theory of revolution offer the building blocks for developing a strong critique of women's oppression and the rationale, impetus, and tools with which to work toward the liberation of women. Indeed, Marx's totalizing philosophy recognizes the oppression of women as instrumental to the development of a capitalist consciousness and therefore their liberation must be deemed necessary to developing the socialist consciousness necessary for a sustained socialist revolution and class-less society.

Brown (2013) argues that the failure to integrate feminism with Marxism is a result of the failure to deeply grasp Marx's dialectical method. Brown critiques feminists who mistook Marx's references to specific concepts, such as labor and materialism, from a singular and superficial vantage point, without recognizing that for Marx concepts

held an internal relation of presumed opposites that were actually each aspects of the other and only appeared to exist as binaries (and in constant tension) from the vantage point of the capitalist. From this capitalist standpoint, domestic labor, including the reproduction of the next generation of workers, emotional labor, and housework, were viewed as unproductive. Feminists, such as Federici (2004) argued that women's oppression 'should be interpreted as the effect of a social system of production that does not recognize the production and reproduction of the worker as social-economic activity, and a source of capital accumulation, but mystifies it instead as a natural resource or a personal service, while profiting from the wageless condition of the labor involved.' This argument that domestic and emotional labor are 'productive' as defined under capitalism affirms the goal of gender equality within an unjust structure that bases value on capital accumulation.

One of the major critiques from feminists, as well as those whose work focus on racial oppression, is that a historical materialist perspective reduces everything to class (Vogel, 2012; Federici, 2004). They argue that if this were the case then we would evidence gender and racial equality within sustained socialist states, which has not been the case. As numerous other Marxists and Marxist feminists have pointed out, this is a misinterpretation of historical materialism, which does not develop a causal relationship to gender or

racial oppression. Rather, historical materialism posits that the mode of production is the key enduring feature of any society, because it sets the conditions for its own reproduction through the material necessity of food, water, and other necessary resources (Miranda, 1980). However, consciousness is dialectically related to materiality. Gender oppression (and race oppression as well) take shape in specific ways within a given mode of production. Certainly gender oppression existed under previous modes of production, including feudalism, but as capitalism came into prominence as the dominant mode of production (although other modes co-exist), gender relations and women's oppression has become an important source of capital accumulation and tied to the control of women's bodies and socialization patterns for the development of the next generation of workers (Gimenez, 2005; Holmstrom, 2003).

The liberation of women (along with all of humanity) that may be brought about by establishing a class-less society would not be the sole result of changes in material conditions, rather it would be the result of the conditions of possibility set forth from the dialectical relation between material conditions and ideational reality. That is, this dialectical relation presumes that both ideology and material conditions work in tandem to develop into an alternative socialist reality. Marx's philosophy of revolution was not based solely on an economic restructuring but on a totality

that would develop into a socialist economic system and a socialist consciousness among the people. Indeed both material conditions and a socialist consciousness would be equally necessary for a socialist alternative to develop. This is not the deterministic materialism Marx has been accused of developing. Rather his philosophy of revolution and liberation was a dialectical one that encompassed material and ideational reality as equally important to the making of history. Thus, the argument that economic restructuring alone cannot account for women's liberation is an accurate one but one that does not challenge Marx's philosophy of revolution for his ideas of liberation went far beyond purely economic considerations. Indeed women have seen great gains in women's rights and gender equality under socialism but the goals for women's liberation and the development of a socialist consciousness have not been given the prominent role that I believe Marx's work calls for and this (along with other factors) have led to or at least contributed to, in my opinion, 'communist' regimes that eventually took on characteristics that had little, if anything, to do with Marx's ideas (Dunayevskaya, 1991; Holmstrom, 2003).

A second major critique hoisted at Marx has to do with a presumed linear determinism to his work. Federici (2004) argues, 'there can be no doubt that he [Marx] viewed it [capitalism] as a necessary step in the process of human liberation' because he indicated that capitalism created the

capacity for large-scale production that would rid humanity of scarcity and necessity. Peter Hudis, following Kevin Anderson (2010) has argued vehemently that Marx outlined a ‘distinctive multilinear view of development.’ He explains, ‘Marx wrote in the first German edition [of Capital], “The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future” (1867), he later clarified this statement in the French edition (1875: 785) stating “The country that is more developed industrially only shows, *to those that follow it on the industrial path*, the image of its own future” (Hudis, 2015). He also stated in the French edition that the analysis of the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation referred only to Western Europe. In other writings he discusses Russia as possibly “shorten or even bypass the capitalist stage, if a peasant revolution was supported by a revolution in Western European countries”” (2015: 2).

Challenging this myth is of specific importance to our time since this misrepresentation has led to the embrace of capitalism among socialist and communist party politics in numerous contexts, including Africa, Bolivia, and China. It is also guiding the feminist movement against Marx and among many who reject his very important ideas that challenge class society and capitalism specifically.

Determinism has been a long-standing misunderstanding of Marx’s philosophy of revolution. Yet, it is, in my opinion,

the most evident of misunderstandings. Marx's philosophy is above all else about human agency, about a philosophy of praxis that would create the conditions of possibility from which class consciousness could develop and lead to revolution. Jose Porfirio Miranda (1980) demonstrates with example after example in his important work, *Marx against the Marxists*, that Marx professed a strong sense of morality and he viewed human values, strengths, and weaknesses as critical to what would come to be. He viewed human beings the protagonists of history. This is clearly evident in his resistance to lay out a blueprint for socialism, recognizing that the revolution would develop along that path set forth by those who took the necessary revolutionary steps together. Indeed Raya Dunayevskaya has professed his work a Marxist humanism.

A third major feminist critique against Marx was his failure to recognize domestic labor as 'productive,' which they argue renders women and their labor power 'irrelevant' to capitalist production (Federici, 2004). Vogel (2011) points out that one way in which to conceive of women's participation in the structure of capitalism is by way of their reproductive capacity. That is, women reproduce the next generation of workers and their labor power. This involves birthing, nursing, and socializing children to the necessary work habits to continue the capitalist mode of production through the next generation. As stated previously, Marx

wrote about productive labor from the standpoint of the capitalist, which he defined as labor that produces surplus value. That the capitalist characterizes women's work as 'unproductive' given that it does not produce surplus value since it is a use value and not an exchange value, does not mean that the capitalist saw domestic labor and the reproduction of the worker as irrelevant. It means only that the capitalist sought to maximize productive labor and its surplus value. Marx says nothing of how domestic labor and women's reproductive work serves capitalism and this is certainly an area that needs investigation and theorizing. However to claim that 'women's work' was seen irrelevant is to relegate all women to the domestic and reproductive sphere alone, thereby excluding the majority of poor women and women of color who do engage in surplus value producing work. It seems to me, as I will develop further a little later, that domestic and reproductive work serve a different but as important a function in support of capitalism, and that this function is secured through the control of women, such that the devaluation of domestic work (wageless) is important to their control. Given Marx's value for human consciousness, agency, and morality, that I established earlier, it seems evident that Marx would hold the socializing and emotional labor that is presumed 'women's work' highly relevant. Furthermore, had Marx given women's labor and their oppression little credence, he would not have spent so much of his time in his later years

attempting to understand the history of the family and women's roles within it.

Rejecting Marxism, many feminists turned to postmodernism and poststructuralism to explain gender oppression. From this perspective class is taken to be an essentialized identity that confines human beings into narrow binaries that fail to capture the multiplicity of experiences among humans and the singularity of each individual's experiences and world views. Ontologically founded on the idea that truth is based on individual experience and subjectivities that are necessarily diverse but equally worthy, these posts reject totalizing theories and therefore fail to connect experience to broader sociohistorical structures. Here, gender oppression is relegated to the cultural sphere, including values, beliefs, and desires. Again the failure to grasp the dialectic obscured for feminist that while individuals have a multitude of diverse experiences, there are also commonly shared experiences among specific groups of people and that these experiences do not just happen but necessarily develop out of diverse conditions of possibility related to broader totalizing structures. Peter McLaren clarifies this dialectical relation beautifully and captures the egregiousness within one-sided and simplistic explanations of relative truths or universalities:



‘... our subjectively conceived experience mediates reality such that we can never know it objectively but only approach it through systems that form an insuperable barrier – a necessary wall of mystification.

This has led to a passive theory of knowledge via a doctrine of experience that rejects understanding the world as a whole and resembles an empty solipsism where reality is reduced to a set of formal or logical statements... We can see this position reflected in the views of vulgar cultural relativists who believe that there is no real truth when it comes to values and there is no basis of judging the values of one culture over another... such vulgar relativism leads to the imposition of Western subjectivism that can lead to what Grosfoguel (2005) calls epistemic genocide, or epistemicide...

My position is Hegelian/Marxist in the sense that I believe that we can't understand isolated bits of experience adequately without the whole – the absolute. We need to ask what makes experience possible, why do certain experiences count more than others, and what are the conditions of possibility for certain types of experiences. We read this dialectically against the absolute.

...Quijano warns us that when thinking about totality, we need to avoid the Eurocentric paradigm of totality. We can do this by thinking of totality as a field of social relations structured by the heterogeneous and discontinuous

integration of diverse spheres of social experience, every one of which is in turn structured by its own historically heterogeneous, temporally discontinuous, and conflictive elements. Each element, however, has some relative autonomy and can be considered a particularity and singularity. But they move within the general tendency of the whole. We can't think of totality as a closed structure.

...The current pedagogical concern with “experience” conceals from human beings that men and women are themselves that creators of these social facts, and there are no supportable reasons why we should accept the naive but perhaps historically inevitable illusion of the inviolability and necessary persistence of capitalism as the truth.

...I agree that Marxism may be misapplied... If it is driven by the spirit of self-assertion and totality such that it marginalizes, demonizes and excludes cultural others, then this is deeply objectionable... then we need to get beyond it. And many trajectories of Marxism, such as the Marxist-humanist tendency have done so.

To reach for freedom is not an act of transcending reality but of actively reshaping it...’ (pp. 235–237).

An important point that McLaren argues is that the cultural turn of the postmodern era, which fails to connect our lived experiences with the objective structural reality of our time that is capitalism has rendered human beings passive and

apathetic by obscuring what exactly and according to whom is socially just and unjust and how such different people can possibly come together to agree on and work together toward social change.

Interestingly poor women and women of color have come out against feminists using the same postmodern critique of essentializing to argue that they have been excluded from feminist theories that address only the needs of middle-class White women. Indeed they have shown how the interests of middle-class White women often come into conflict with the interests of poor women and women of color. For example, the long-fought battle for women's equal pay, is recognized among poor women as doing little to support them, since men of color often make very low wages. In like vein, issues affecting communities of color, including specifically men of color, such as the recent terror against Black communities and Black young males is of primary interest to women of color and these concerns have traditionally been of little interest to the feminist movement. The increasing recognition that any one group has multiple intersecting identities, including gender, race, sexuality, ability, religion, etc., is making some feminists question how many categories can be included without the movements being so divided that they can no longer function together. This has led to some feminists rethinking their original critique of Marx for excluding women, recognizing that a more

generalist theory that can be taken up by different groups to explain how their own experiences of oppression are historically situated in capitalist production may be more useful (Holmstrom, 2002). Indeed this ongoing struggle between the nature and extent to which particular identities, cultural affiliations, and experiences can be encompassed to form one group while still claiming their right to difference, reveals the need for a Marxist-humanist dialectical reasoning.

### **A Marxist Analysis of Women's Oppression Under Global Capitalism**

Although Marx did not develop a theory of women's oppression or how it took shape under capitalism, his development of historical materialism and the dialectic are critical tools in helping us flesh out the material conditions that created the contexts under which women became and continue to be hyper-exploited as well as providing some direction for how we may move toward a class struggle and the emancipation of all workers, including women and people of color. Clearly the foundational role that women play in the development of our human consciousness within the family, and therefore toward a new consciousness, as discussed above, leads to the conclusion that developing a theory of women's oppression under capitalism is particularly important to revolution and to developing a socialist alternative. Feminist historical research can be very

useful here in understanding how women's lives were structured prior to and later under capitalism and the processes that shaped women's roles and gender relations.

Engaging a dialectical approach, women's exploitation under capitalism can be recognized in both material and ideological domains – work and family. As workers, women are hyper exploited through the division of labor, a devaluation of wages, and oppressive working conditions that can be traced to capitalist production processes, which are based on the goal of capital accumulation and the production of value. As women's labor power is given lesser value due to a host of material and ideational factors that include the greater cost to employers who bear the cost of maternity leave and their need for greater flexibility due to childcare responsibilities, as well as the persistent belief in biological determinism, women's wages have remained significantly lower than men's, making it difficult to set up material conditions that would turn this around. For example, families with small children and without adequate access to childcare may need to have one parent remain at home due to sometimes childcare cost being greater than their earnings. With few exceptions under these circumstances, it would be the parent who earns less that would remain home, creating the material conditions that keep traditional ideologies about gender roles intact and presumably justifying the gender pay gap. This gender pay

gap has thus resulted in what is being termed the feminization of poverty which makes women especially needy for employment and subject to a host of workplace exploitation and abuse.

Women are also hyper exploited in the family, engaging in the work of reproduction – that is in the production of the next generation of workers and their labor power. Domestic work also involves the physical and emotional care of the workers (usually men and in some contexts working children) so that they may be physically, emotionally, and mentally better able to continue their productive labor the next day. This work is as crucial to capitalist production as is women's wage labor force participation. However, from the perspective of the capitalist, domestic labor is not directly productive. Consider that women who work a double shift do not have anyone to provide them with this emotional labor.

As explained, both the spheres of work and family interact to keep women subjugated in ways that support the process of capitalist production. Women's labor (both waged and unwaged) support capitalist production directly and indirectly to support capital accumulation and the division of labor keeps them from having sufficient means by which to challenge the trend in expansive ways. Indeed as Marx pointed out the division of labor is the first form of property, making women into men's property. The depressed wages

of women make them, in many cases, dependent on men and the law and other control mechanisms in society also wage a war against women's ability for self-actualization, therefore maintaining a structure in which women's oppression functions in the service of both men and capital.

Interestingly, however, is that men's wages are also depressed as a result of the devaluation of women's work and their unequal participation in wage labor. This is especially hidden in capitalist and gender relations as it can potentially upset the presumed notion that women's oppression substantially benefits men. While in general women are more oppressed than men, poor working class men often do not fare much better off than women.

However, this is a fact that must be well hidden under capitalist ideologies for it could potentially become a point around which men and women could come together across gender differences to develop a class consciousness that could destroy capitalism.

While these Marxist arguments explain the current state of women's oppression, few have explored closely the historical processes by which women's oppression became possible. This absence in Marxist literature has allowed for feminist to take up the ahistorical approach that Marx cautioned against, the attribution of specific characteristic to human nature without evidence of changing social and material conditions. Indeed this has been a common

approach among those who argue that a patriarchal structure exists as a parallel to class and that its basis lies in men's position of privilege and power and their desire to maintain it. Here the feminist critique against a biological proclivity to reproductive work among women is taken up to explain men's domination. However, the domination that is the focus of critique is taken as *a priori*, resulting in a circular reasoning from which Marx' dialectical method rescues us, making evident that what we perceive to be "natural" is always influenced by material and ideological forces.

However, some critics of Marx and Marxism have recognized the value of engaging a historical materialist analysis and provided important insights into the development of women's oppression. For example, numerous authors have pointed out that industrialization was key to the development of the nuclear family and to the division of labor. This shift in the economy pushed working class people off land subsistence and into waged-work. This created a much starker contrast between women of the working classes who necessarily had to find waged work and bourgeois women who remained in the home. Given the brutal working conditions (see Marx, 1906/2011, 'The Working Day') that women were subjected to in the factories and the difficulties that having to work away from home presented for women who were pregnant or lactating, women whose husbands made sufficient income for the



whole family generally opted to stay at home tending to housework and children. The division of labor was not created by industrialization or waged work. It already existed. However the separation of work into separate physical spaces made performing non-gender specific work more difficult and more strictly delineated the division of labor, which in turn devalued work that was presumed to be ‘women’s work.’

At the same time that the division of labor was becoming solidified as appropriate, necessary and even ‘natural,’ the nuclear family was developing as a result of families moving to the industrial city for waged work. Given that prior to wage work, working class families had pooled their resources for subsistence, taking money from wage-earners to pay for domestic work would have merely distributed funds among the same family unit. ‘Women’s labor power,’ thus, became devalued as unpaid labor. Only over time did it become clear that women’s unpaid labor under capitalism left them without the financial means by which to care for themselves.

Here we see the material conditions that led to a dichotomous interpretation of women and men – with women expected to stay at home. Since the ruling class sets the norms and expectations for society, the bourgeois definition of womanhood became ‘normalized’ and women became seen as ‘naturally’ nurturing, caring, gentle, delicate

as opposed to men whose presumed strength and aggressive character were perceived more appropriate for outdoor work.

Brown (2013) demonstrates that Marx's notes on the history of women and the family from his ethnological notebooks concur with this interpretation. His notes indicate that his research had led him to discover that women's oppression throughout history took on specific characteristics that differed according to family conditions. Indeed Marx's notebooks point to shifts in the family, from clan to patriarchy to nuclear, developing alongside economic changes. According to Marx, shifts in family type increased the isolation of women, making them more vulnerable to the abuses of husbands, which gave men greater control over women and secured their reproductive roles within the family and within capitalism.

A Marxist interpretation of women's oppression, thus, is dialectical, recognizing their exploitation within both work and family and in the productive and reproductive spheres. The division of labor, women's depressed wages, and their free domestic labor secures cheap labor for the capitalist and also keeps women under strict control by men and families, in order to secure what Marx called the special commodity, the production and reproduction of the next generation of workers, including their labor power and the attitudes and values necessary for a society that functions off their

exploitation. Although women's workforce participation has grown significantly over the years, their cheap wages and the entrenched ideologies that their "place is in the home" position women as caretaker and inhibits the transformation of gender ideologies.

Federici's work (2004) adds a new dimension to this examination of the material conditions that led to women's exploitation. She explains that under capitalism women came to be ascribed a 'naturally' domestic role and the body became redefined as a work machine. According to Federici, before capitalism became the mode of production women lived more open and sexual lives and they were viewed as holding natural powers of love and sexuality (as a result their child-bearing abilities) that could be used to sway men to challenge the capitalist order. In an era of changing economic conditions, older women were increasingly facing land enclosures that left them begging for subsistence on the streets. As older women who held the collective memory of pre-capitalist times, they presented a strong threat to the new economic order. Western Europe launched a crusade against women who they believed to be 'witches' that left hundreds of thousands of women dead and slowly changed their ways of life, relegating them to the safety of the home and to develop a repressive attitude toward sexuality, creating negative associations to women displaying their sexuality, becoming monogamous, and

further entrenching the woman to a space of servitude under the nuclear family. Clearly, while ideologies about women and women's 'nature' were an important part of this massacre, it was the economic conditions that set the stage for these witch hunts and the subsequent changes to 'women's nature.'

An important misconception is that Marxism does not explain the current global capitalist economy and that it only speaks to the experiences of the middle and upper middle-class women of the industrialized world. There is some validity to this because few Marxists in academia have engaged a thoughtful Marxist understanding of women's oppression in the 'developing' world nor have they engaged in analyzing the role of working class women and women of color in the 'developed' world. However, in my opinion, this is not due to the limits of Marxism to serve the theoretical articulation of the oppression of poor women and women of color. Marx was clear that historical materialism was not an attempt to document phenomena from its inception or to develop universal theories. Rather, while historical materialism could be applied universally to understand the underlying processes and contradiction inherent in any abstraction of a concept that too often was taken simplistically, the specificity of the material conditions developed in particular time and space would lead to different conditions of possibility. Further, he argued that

while capitalism could be clearly documented to have generally followed feudalism historically, this did not mean that there were strict delineations of when one economic system began and another ended. Indeed his study of the history of the family evidenced multiple economic systems operating simultaneously in diverse contexts. Thus, the manifestation of women's oppression among the working class would necessarily differ from that of the oppression of middle class working women in the industrialized world and even more so with women of the capitalist class. For working class women of color in the United States the trajectory that has led to their oppression is significantly different from that of White working women.

For example, Black women's experiences of oppression can be directly related to the material conditions of the plantation era that imported approximately 500,000 slaves from Africa to what is now the United States between 1619 and 1807 (Mintz, 2015). The horrific experiences that women, men, and children endured under slavery cannot be over-emphasized. To speak of women's oppression without recognizing this very different history endured by Black families is to give mere lip service to the ideals of equality and social justice. Black women's oppression in the family cannot be understood without considering how gender relations among them were dictated by White plantation owners who determined almost every aspect of their lives,

including their familial relations and their reproductive practices. Consider that enslaved women bore an average of 9.2 children at the demand of plantation owners who used them to breed more children that would become their property (Mintz, 2015). In the concept of ‘spirit murder,’ Paricia Williams (1992) develops a striking depiction of the legacy of pain and humiliation that the slave era left on Black families. It is a concept that must be addressed for the liberation of the Black woman.

The material condition that developed the slave trade also had further material repercussions for Black men and women, who upon their emancipation needed to find waged employment amidst racialized ideologies that had been developed to justify slavery and then continued to define the value of their labor power and access to jobs during the following Jim Crow era (Callinicos, 1993). We continue to see evidence (finally made more public in the media) that Black women’s oppression cannot be isolated from the oppression of Black men, and more generally, Black communities, who continue to be terrorized and targeted for death and incarceration, increasingly at younger ages through the school-to-prison pipeline, in what is now being recognized as, ‘the new slavery’ (Dubois, 2013).

Certainly, the oppression of Black women is not merely related to their economic necessity, although the loss of income that is felt when family members are killed or

incarcerated among poor families that depend on multiple incomes cannot be underestimated. However, the middle class experience of women serving as a reserve labor force for men and this being an aspect of their labor power depreciation and subsequent dependence on men is not typical in poor communities of color, where men are more often than in middle-class communities to be absent, unemployed, or underemployed. Furthermore, Black women's oppression also results from the senseless loss of loved ones and the lack of opportunities, discrimination, and trauma of racism. To attempt to address the oppression of Black women without addressing the oppression of their entire communities, including their fathers, husbands, and children, and to perceive their interests to be only tied to 'equal pay' in the face of impending genocide is to reveal a feminist movement that is really not committed to the liberation of all women, much less to that of all human beings.

In a like vein, the globalization of capitalism has created economic shifts that have been especially hard on the 'developing world.' Consider that immigration has grown to a world-wide phenomena with movement from peripheral countries to industrialized nations in order to escape poverty and violence, often induced by senseless wars and endless wars that are tied to corporate economic interests and their ability to buy off government allies in the Western world,

especially in the United States (Robinson, 2013). For example, immigration to the United States from Mexico and Central America is often characterized as ‘people wanting to take our jobs and resources,’ with even high-profile political figures such as United States President-elect Donald Trump unbelievably and astonishingly labeling them ‘criminals and rapists’ (Moreno, 2015). employing the well-orchestrated strategy of ‘blaming the victim’ even though it has been the corporate plundering of their natural resources (facilitated by NAFTA) and the U.S. led war on drugs that has created the conditions of economic necessity and fear that has pushed them across the border in search of a better life (McLaren, 2015; Monzó, McLaren, & Rodriguez, in press). Many of these immigrants are increasingly women and girls who endure a journey of violence that often continues beyond their entrance into the U.S. Although difficult to ascertain, various reports suggest that as much as 80% of women who cross the border undocumented have been raped during their journey and women are now being urged to take birth control because they should expect to be raped – yes, *expect* (Goldberg, 2014). Once in the U.S., many women find that their American dream turns to a nightmare, as their undocumented status becomes a tool for exploitation, sexual abuse, forced prostitution, and other forms of abuse and indignities from not only employers but sometimes from spouses or partners (Bauer & Ramírez, 2010). These patterns of migration, expected or actualized



rape and other forms of gender violence, undocumented status, and extended geographical separations from spouses and/or children is likely to have significant bearing in future family patterns. Indeed we are already seeing shifts among women who learn to fend for themselves either in their new immigrant context or when left behind as their spouses migrate north (Institute for Latino Studies, 2009). But these changes cannot be understood without examining numerous other factors at play. Women cannot become emancipated no matter how confident or critically astute they may become about gender oppression as long as they cannot subsist independently. Working class families of color in the United States depend on family members (both men and women) for economic subsistence. The family may also serve as a refuge against the racial violence people of color experience living in a dominant White world.

In the ‘developing world’ women are often employed in export manufacturing factories owned by transnational corporations that can pay next to nothing for female workers. Women’s perceived docility makes them especially sought after in these jobs, especially since low monitoring and/or buy offs of labor regulations in foreign countries allow the corporations to skimp on policies that secure the safety of their workers. Given the increasing poverty experienced in the developing world, the competition for waged work is especially fierce, which brings down wages

and secures greater surplus value for the corporations. In the context of poverty, lack of social services, and lack of other support structures, the nuclear family (typical in the industrialized world) is not as viable an option. Living with extended families is more common and although the extended family can be an important source of support for women, parents may also sometimes prove to enforce traditional gender roles and/or frown upon changing gender attitudes and relations. Again differing family structures may not necessarily result in more egalitarian gender relations. A historical materialist perspective does not predict or determine the gender relations of specific family types, rather it allows us to recognize that the material conditions create possibilities. Which possibilities and how these possibilities take hold has much to do with other related factors and individual agency.

The implications of this differentiation among the particular experiences of women's oppression is not that it makes Marx's philosophy a-theoretical but rather that Marxism as a philosophy of praxis and revolution must be applied to make sense of the particulars. Herein lies a promising way to approach a praxis for a class struggle that will both draw on women's contributions and also make their liberation integral to its goals.

### **Creating Conditions of Possibility**

Of critical importance to class struggle is incorporating more women into our organizations and social movements.

Working women and women of color across the world have been especially roused to action in favor of class struggle and women's rights. Indeed in all major socialist revolutions, women have played a significant part, loudly staking their claim to a better world in protest, agitating, organizing, and even taking up arms against the establish capitalist order. This was true in the Russian Revolution, the Cuban Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, the Sandinista Revolution, and more recently the Bolivarian Revolution in addition to countless rebellions and demonstrations.

Working women across the world have stood up against all forces of inhumanity for their right to be treated as a human being and to live with dignity. History has shown that women have been critical to the success of socialist movements (Muñoz and Woods, 2000).

Upon the installment of socialist governments, women have been able to secure numerous benefits and laws in their favor that had previously been denied them (Monzó, 2015). Unfortunately, the majority of women doing revolutionary work are never recognized. Their names and faces are absent from much of recorded history and even more so from popular consciousness. Yet continued progress seemed to wane after the initial momentum spurred by revolutionary victory. Women revolutionaries have seldom reached the top

levels of decision making due to men's entrenched ideologies regarding women's roles and their inability to trust in women's capacity to lead and/or to forego the privileges associated with male superiority (Randall, 1994, 2009). Margaret Randall gives voice to this frustrations in the Sandinista Revolution:

'First we needed to unite the working class; only then would we be able to rout the dictators. Later there would be time to attend to the "fine points" of social equality, including residual sexism, racism, and, much later, heterosexism. The word "residual" was such a frequently used adjective; it trivialized our concerns as it shamed us for bringing them up.' (1994: 3).

This pervasive sexism has undermined not only women's progress but class struggle as well.

In Russia, for example, Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky (Trotsky, 1970) recognized the importance of bringing women into the labor force and of socializing housework and child care in order to spare women of what Trotsky termed 'drudgery.' However, they argued that the Russian economy was too economically vulnerable to make this happen and that they needed to wait for greater economic prosperity to be able to implement government subsidies that would support women and begin to challenge traditional family roles (Trotsky, 1970). An interesting aspect of their plan is that it neglected Marx's clear assessment that the first

division of labor was based on gender and that it spawned the first form of private property and thus must be eliminated under socialism. Whereas the socialization of 'women's work' would favorably affect women while maintaining men's lives intact, eradicating the division of labor would mean the loss of privileges for men.

Not surprisingly, as Marx would have predicted given his clear warning that the state of humanity could be measured by the way women were treated, revolutions could not be maintained indefinitely without the emancipation of women and we have seen this over and over. The feminist anti-Marxist movement gained credence when they were able to show that even after decades of revolution, for example in the Soviet Union, China, and in Cuba, women have not been able to significantly gain greater emancipation than they have in the capitalist industrialized world. While many legal provisions are included in socialist constitutions in support of gender equity, racial equity has often lagged, leaving indigenous and racialized women disaffected (Randall, 2009). However, much inequality exists at the informal level and in areas where laws cannot govern, such as beliefs and values, which impact work and family spaces. The division of labor has persisted across socialist states, with women being brought into traditionally male profession but the reverse, men taking up traditionally female roles, particularly in domestic work, has not occurred. It seems no

matter what the economic structure of society, the association of women to domestic care persists. I would argue that this has not been due to a failure of a Marxist philosophy of praxis and revolution but a failure of challenging women's oppression in step with class struggle.

I would argue that what we need is a clearer implementation of Marx's dialectic, which recognizes the internal relation between materialism and idealism and their continuous interaction wherein each influences the other. While materialism recognizes that in the final analysis relations of production set boundaries of possibilities, this does not mean that the cultural sphere must wait for material conditions to be just right. Further, there are multiple levels at which material conditions can be altered to support the development of a new socialist consciousness, one in which private property is recognized as the basis of class and where collective association becomes valued for its potential for freedom and love.

In socialist states, women's liberation cannot wait for the right economic conditions to exist to begin implementing policies that challenge the gender division of labor. Indeed the socialization of 'women's work,' which would likely be one of the most expensive government subsidies, is not a remedy to the division of labor because it doesn't challenge the notion that housework, cleaning, and childcare are 'naturally' suited to women. This ideology will change

when it becomes evident that men too can perform these tasks equally well and are recruited (with a raise in status) to take up jobs that are associated with domestic work.

Similarly, in capitalist countries, we cannot wait for the revolution that will topple capitalism. We must begin to create the material conditions that encourage women to rise up against the structure that subjugates us, materially and culturally. We must also create the material conditions that challenge the division of labor in all families. Policies that raise the standard of living for all communities – not just create equity between men and women (as in the equal pay for men and women) – give all women more freedom to challenge the structures within work and family.

Organizations that work for women's rights as well as those that work against class must *also* work toward *human* rights, and see these as central to their aims. These organizations can begin to challenge the division of labor that makes the family the ideal context to instill capitalist values such as private property and individualism instead of collectivism. As Alexandra Kollontai argued a century ago, the transformation of the family to one that is based on mutual love, equality, freedom, and respect for each other, unencumbered by property relations, economic necessity, or the division of labor, and relieved of moral or religious codes that have historically been aligned to capital – is absolutely necessary (Ebert, 2014; Kollontai, 1921).

Education plays a prominent role in class struggle and in the liberation of humanity. As dialectical reasoning would have it, we must recognize that material conditions influence and are also influenced by ideologies. Education is the realm of what Gramsci (1970) called the war of position – an ideological war waged against the masses to challenge the hidden ideologies that support the ruling class.

In schools and classrooms, factories and other work spaces, churches and local clubs, and in our homes we can begin to question and create conditions that allow women to be heard and seen as equally valuable members of society and to question not only traditional gender roles but rather to challenge the institutions that set up conditions within which sexist practices and ideologies persist.

Critical pedagogy is a philosophy of praxis that interrogates and creates conditions that challenge existing capitalist relations and the antagonisms that support capitalist relations, including sexism, racism, and other oppressions. Based on the work of Paulo Freire (1970) and others who have developed his ideas (Darder, 2002; Giroux, 2011; McLaren, 2015) critical pedagogy engages our ability to read the world and recognize conditions of inequality, both material and social, and to examine how these have come about and who they benefit. Critical pedagogy is a thoughtful, self-reflexive praxis of our social conditions in the world and a challenge to commit to social justice and



solidarity with our brothers and sisters. Critical pedagogy also recognizes the dialectic as it seeks to dissolve the often perceived binary of theory and practice, creating a process in which action-theory-action are continuously interconnected. A critical pedagogy must interrogate the hypocrisy in movements that retain what Freire (1970) characterized as 'false generosity,' by maintaining the direction of liberation movements in the hands of those in dominant social positions, under the assumption that working women and/or people of color do not have the experience or skills to lead our world's most persistent struggles. A true and authentic search for liberation involves placing one's unconditional trust on the oppressed to take us to revolutionary victory. It is this trust that liberates the oppressed from the internalized oppression that keeps us in a space of complacent subjugation so that we can begin to see ourselves as fully human agents of history.

A Marxist revolutionary critical pedagogy as developed by Paula Allman (2001) and Peter McLaren (2012, 2015) brings the Marxist roots and goals for a socialist alternative back into the folds of critical pedagogy. This approach is insistent that capitalism cannot be reformed and must be eradicated for our liberation. I would insist that this approach is especially relevant to women since our emancipation cannot be achieved without dismantling the social relations of property that define both capitalism and

gender. McLaren (2015) remarks that revolutionary critical pedagogy is like the ‘night shift’ of critical pedagogy, less valued and in constant need to defend its existence as a viable force for creating a better world. I would argue, following this vein, that a revolutionary critical pedagogy that addresses the emancipation of women as a necessary conjoined effort to class struggle is the ‘second shift’ of critical pedagogy and of the feminist movement. Yet, precisely for this positioning, this work is of crucial significance to our plight for liberation.

A revolutionary critical pedagogy can also engage us in the practice of dreaming and hoping. We are unlikely to take the necessary risks of revolution without an imagined alternative, beyond class, and the belief in possibility. As Freire often noted hope is essential to the process of liberation. This is not a hope rooted in abstract wishful thinking but concretized in the evidence of ongoing praxis, in the actualization of small scale changes that lead to greater changes and in the knowledge that the steps we take today take us to the future of tomorrow.

What we need is a pedagogy of solidarity, such that the revolution we build involves the conjoined efforts of class struggle and women’s liberation. These should be, in my opinion, one and the same struggle, for each necessitates the other. I dream of a world where all women and men can soar to their greatest human heights. For me this means the all

human beings can practice loving and feeling compassion for each other and all life forms; that every person lives with dignity and can develop their creative and intellectual capacities; and that collectively we can establish a class-less, democratic world, founded on social responsibility, equality, and real freedom for all; that every individual counts and that socially constructed binaries that establish relations of power and domination are eradicated in favor of a complex process of becoming. Marx described this collectivist society as embodying the ideal, ‘from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.’ For me, as a Marxist critical pedagogue and a Latina woman, it is the possibility of this communist utopia that I aim for. Nothing less will do.

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