Of Feathers and Trembling: 
MARXISM AND HOMOSEXUALITY

[N]o homosexual represents the revolution, 
which is a matter for men, 
of fists and not feathers, 
of courage and not trembling, 
of certainty and not intrigue, 
of creative valor and not sweet surprises


David P. Waggoner, J.D. 
M.A. Candidate, University of San Francisco 
Western Political Science Association 
Portland, Oregon, March 2012
I. An Introductory Anecdote

According to Marxist revolutionary Ernesto Che Guevara, “[T]he true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love” (Guevara 2003). However, the love which dare not speak its name\(^1\) was not included in his sentiment. Though Guevara has since become a worldwide symbol of liberation, there was no room for *maricónes* in his revolution (Lumsden 1996). A 1964 episode is a fitting metaphor for the historical relationship between orthodox Marxism and homosexuality. Guevara was visiting the Cuban embassy in Algiers. Upon noticing a book of plays, *Teatro completo*, by the renowned gay Cuban writer, Virgilio Piñera, on a shelf in the embassy, Guevara grabbed the book and flung it across the room with a flourish, exclaiming to all present\(^2\), “Who the fuck’s reading that faggot?” (Goytisolo 1990: 312).

In spite of his image as a universal symbol of liberation, Guevara was among the most virulent homophobic leaders of the Cuban revolution. Guevara’s homophobia, when considered in the context of his Marxist forbears, was not in any way exceptional. With Fidel Castro, Guevara formulated a theory of the “new man.” Adopted as the official policy of the revolution, this theory held that homosexuality was a contagious degeneracy (Infante 1995). In the language of historical materialism, the homosexual body was a product of capitalist bourgeoisie excess.

Part and parcel of a system that has never been able to dislodge itself (as government) from its revolutionary acts, the revolution categorized and consigned homosexuals as part of the officially tolerated or officially repressed ‘gusanera’ (literally, ‘worms,’ the term the revolution gave to all its disaffected elements) or,

---

\(^1\) “The love which dare not speak its name,” a line from a poem by Lord Alfred Douglas used in a trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895, has become a euphemism for homosexuality (Ellmann 1988).

\(^2\) Including the Spanish author, Juan Goytisolo, who was closeted at the time, and the Cuban Ambassador to Algeria, Jorge Serguera Riveri (Goytisolo 1990: 312). This anecdote, with minor variations in translation, is found in multiple works (Quiroga 1095; Lumsden 1996; Goytisolo: 1990; Young 1981; and Infante 1995).
in the same vein, as part of a lumpen proletariat that, in Marxist terms, was defined as nonproductive circulators of nonvalued goods (Quiroga 1997: 136).

Three years before Guevara demonstrated his disgust for Piñera, the Cuban government, possibly under Guevara’s direction, launched Operation P. The operation was a state campaign to arrest and imprison homosexuals and others deemed outside the parameters of appropriate proletarian masculinity. The accused were forced to wear a “Capital P: pederast, prostitute, pimp,” demonstrating, not unlike the Nazi pink triangle, that what might otherwise be a fashion accessory could easily be turned into a method to humiliate and degrade homosexuals (Franqui 1985). Piñera was among those arrested. Though considered a national treasure prior to the revolution, he was forbidden from publishing by the revolutionary government and received no recognition until his death in 1979 (Young 30).

II. Marxist Liberation Contra Homosexual Liberation

Neither the Communist Manifesto nor the three volumes of Capital mention the word, “homosexual.” Indeed, the word, “homosexual” was likely not known to Marx or Engels. However, as will be seen, Marx and Engels certainly had views on the subject. In the Manifesto, Marx and Engels speak in the broadest of terms: “The history of all hitherto existing society;” “Workingmen of all countries;” “Bourgeoisie and Proletariat” (Marx and Engels 1991: 60). All people are either bourgeoisie capitalists or proletariat workers. Communists, Marx and Engels tell us, are on the side of the proletariat workers. Presumably, lesbians and gay men are included in both categories, though Marx and Engels never explicitly discuss the homosexual experience of life, per se. One may presume that gay and lesbian proletarians, too, have “nothing to lose but their chains” (Ibid.).

Why and how, then, have gays and lesbians been chained by Marxist homophobia for the
past 150 years? That is the central focus of this paper. From the official policies of the communist governments of China, Cuba and Russia to the unofficial Marxist party lines, homosexuality, with a few notable exceptions, has been consistently linked, 

_\textit{a priori},_ by Marxist theorists to capitalism, fascism and totalitarianism. Given that defamatory and pernicious linkage, the queer, understood as a vestige of hegemonic, bourgeoisie ideology, was seen as something to be reformed or destroyed. Paradoxically, the possibility of universal liberation for all oppressed people is implicit in the call of Marx and Engels for the proletariat to throw off the chains of their capitalist oppressors.

How was it possible for radical leftist Marxists like Guevara to advocate for a universal theory of liberation while at the same time arguing that homosexuals were intrinsically inferior degenerates? Was it ever possible for a homosexual to be a communist? A revolutionary? Is the Marxist theory of liberation from oppression limited to oppression based on class and economic factors? Is there any correlation between class-based oppression and oppression based on sexual orientation, gender identity and/or a subaltern sexual ethos? What patterns emerge in an analysis of homophobia in and among Marxist theorists of the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries? And, to what extent do Marxist theorists remain homophobic in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century? Obviously, these questions are beyond the scope of this paper; rather, the aim herein is to legitimize these questions.

In the context of what is increasingly regarded as a failure of global capitalism, scholars, activists and politicians are once again considering the merits of communism and Marxist thought. Thus, the question of homophobia in Marxist theory emerges as a contradiction that has yet to be fully explored, explained or understood. A multiplicity of factors – economy, geography, religion, psychology, racism, sexism, philosophical influences, colonialism,
conceptions of masculinity, etc. – bear heavily on these questions. Given this renewed interest in Marxist theory, the time is ripe for further examination of what is perhaps one of the defining political philosophies of modernity and postmodernity. This paper accordingly suggests that the questions inherent in the contradictions of Marxism and homophobia be addressed in light of the aforementioned variables, in the context of changing world events and with renewed attention to the possibility of a communist homosexuality.

III. The Homosexual in Marxist Political Thought

The literature relevant to homophobia and Marxism can be broadly divided into the following categories: 1) the original primary texts of Marxist authors; 2) subsequent commentaries on those texts; 3) literature regarding communist state treatment of homosexuality; 5) gay and lesbian historical literature in relation to Marxism; and 6) contemporary Marxist theory in relation to homosexuality.

As mentioned, Capital (Marx 1992) and The Communist Manifesto (Marx and Engels 1991), are silent on the issue of homosexuality. In fact, there is a general dearth of primary or secondary texts on the subject of Marx, Engels and homosexuality, per se. Any overt discussion of the subject is limited to 21st century commentary on the 19th century primary texts. For example, a 2006 essay provides a feminist and queer reading (Klotz 2006) of Marx’s 1844 manuscripts (Marx 1964). However, such overtly queer readings of Marx are rare. Rather, other contemporary authors have highlighted the clear heterosexist views of Marx and Engels (Halle 2004: 107). Marx and Engels very much believed in a “natural relationship of the sexes” (Ibid.) where the “direct, natural and necessary relationship of person to person is the relation of man to woman” (Ibid., emphasis by Halle). Engels went on to condemn “boy-love” in ancient Greece as a sign of perversion and degradation (Ibid., 110).
While neither Marx nor Engels wrote about homosexuality in their main works, what few words they did put to paper on the subject in private correspondence and notes were uniformly negative and reflective of a deep-seated loathing and antipathy for homosexuality. Evidence of their homophobia is revealed in correspondence to one another about homosexuals known to them at the time (Hekma, Oosterhuis and Steakley 1995). Marx and Engels both repeatedly used anti-gay slurs and innuendo to refer to the German workers’ movement figures, Johann Baptist von Schweitzer and Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (Miller 1995; Kennedy 1995).

The term, “homosexuality,” originated vis-à-vis an English translation of Kraft-Ebbing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1892 (Somerville 1994: 258). In contrast, Marx and Engels used the term, “pederast” (Kennedy 1995: 85). Though Marx and Engles made no distinction between an adult homosexual and a pederast, the epithets and crude language employed in their private writings can leave little doubt as to their feelings on the subject (Ibid.). While the introduction of the discursive categories of “homosexual” and “pederast” into the modern lexicon advanced social and state control of the subjects associated with those categories, it can also be argued that it was precisely those new categories that legitimized and empowered queer communities (Foucault 1978: 101).

Both Marx and Engels were heavily influenced by the German philosophers, Immanuel Kant and Frederick Hegel (Fromm 1961). It is thus not surprising then to learn that both Kant and Hegel predated and perhaps were key influences of the homophobia of Marx and Engels. Kant believed sexuality outside of a heterosexual marriage to be “unnatural” and “loathsome” (Halle 2004: 37). Hegel shared essentially the same view (Ibid., 107).
Later Marxist authors’ views of homosexuality were no more enlightened. Influenced by authors such as Wilhelm Reich (Reich 1970), the intellectuals of the Frankfurt School – including Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Jurgen Habermas – continued the conception of homosexuality as deviance from the natural patriarchal family (Halle 1996: 38-78). Reich himself viewed homosexuality as a perversion (Balbus 1982: 210) which would disappear after the communist revolution (Robinson 1969: 55). The Frankfurt School theorists took it a significant step further, however, in arguing that homosexuality was connected to fascism (Ibid.). “Totalitarianism and homosexuality belong together” (Adorno 2005: 46). In later writings, Adorno spoke out against laws criminalizing homosexuality (Adorno 1999: 79). Ultimately, however, Adorno declined to refute his earlier statements regarding homosexuality as pathology (Rycenga 2002: 362).

Another Marxist theorist, now frequently studied by leftist intellectuals, Walter Benjamin, was similarly not immune to making heterosexist, chauvinist remarks in his work. In his seminal essay, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Benjamin refers to the “women who could have given themselves to us,” and later to the individual who is “man enough to blast open the continuum of history” (Benjamin 1968: 254, 262). This chauvinism is reflective of the more general Marxist view of proletarian masculinity: the revolutionary man is always, already virile, sexually potent, and heterosexual (Hewitt 1996: 9). Homosexuality then, understood in the Marxist tradition, is a function of capitalist degeneracy and, as such, is ultimately counterrevolutionary (Beaver 1981: 108). These views were echoed by the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci (Forgacs 2000).
This level of profound homophobia continued into the mid-1950s and beyond with post-colonial Marxist theorist, Frantz Fanon (Fuss 1994). Fanon, like many of his Marxist predecessors, was disgusted by homosexuality (Ibid.). Fanon viewed homosexuality as a disease brought to colonized lands by the white capitalist colonizers (Ibid.). Fanon’s views regarding white colonization and homosexuality were echoed in the 1990s by Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe (Epprecht 2005). It remains unclear, in countries with a history of European colonialism, to what extent homophobia was a result of that colonialism. What seems certain, however, is that, whether colonizer or colonized, if Marxism was the prerogative of the state, homosexuality was to be expurgated with vigor.

IV. The Communist State and the Homosexual

When beat poet Allen Ginsberg had the nerve to remark, while in Cuba in 1965, that he wanted to go to bed with Che Guevara, and that Fidel Castro must have had homosexual experiences as a boy, he was promptly expelled from the country. Apparently, Ginsberg had touched a nerve. Ginsberg later commented, “[W]hat was the ideology they were proposing? A police bureaucracy that prosecutes fairies? I mean, they’re wasting enormous energy on that. Some of those ‘fairies’ were the best revolutionaries – people that fought at the Bay of Pigs…” (Young 1981: 25-27).

That same year, under the auspices of Guevara’s concept of the new revolutionary man, the Cuban government began rounding up perceived homosexuals and sending them to forced labor camps (Guerra 2010). Known as Military Units to Aid Production (“UMAP”), the motto of the camps in Cuba, “Work Will Make You Men,” was reminiscent of the motto of the Nazi
Waggoner

camps at Auschwitz and Terezin, “Work Will Make You Free (Molloy and McKee 1998). These mottos are worth significant exegesis alone; the camps made no one either a man or free.

“[T]hey rounded up anyone who looked like a homosexual and shipped these people off to UMAP…” (Llovio-Menéndez 1998:156). The following passage bears witness to the little known experience of UMAP victims:

[Homosexuals] were segregated in their own camps, where they were subjected to the full ferocity of revolutionary rehabilitation… They were in deplorable physical condition. Many were covered with insect bites, some so severe that they had become infected. Extreme sunburn, eczema, and several types of fungal infections were evident too. Most appalling were their bruises from the beatings they’d received… They told me of petty brutalities, such as suspension of their visitors privileges, public humiliations, and interference with their mail. More serious were their stories of being denied meals, forced to work at night by lantern light, and the requirement that they go to the fields even when sick. Then I heard about the ugliest abuses. They said they were routinely beaten in the cane fields, were made to stand at attention in the sun for eight hours, or were placed overnight, naked, in pits of foul water while the mosquitoes fed on them. Several gave me very accurate descriptions of the rope punishment [torture involving a horse]… UMAP was Fidel’s brainchild…” (Ibid., 157-8).

The camps, having become an international disgrace, were closed in 1968, not because of official admission that there was anything wrong with them, but because of international pressure from leftist intellectuals including Graham Greene, Jean Paul Sartre and Gian Giacomo Getrinelli (Epps 1995). Following the closure of the UMAP camps, there were systematic purges of homosexuals from the arts, theater and universities. Cuba’s first National Congress on Education and Culture made the persecution of homosexuals official state policy in 1971.

Viewing homosexuality as a disease in need of eradication, the Cuban government also had a policy of removing effeminate boys from school lest they infect the other children (Leiner 1994: 33). Thus, effeminate boys were targeted for ostracism, renowned homosexual artists and writers were arrested and silenced, and the average homosexual could be expected to be tortured
in a forced labor camp. As late as 1980, homosexuals were singled out as targets (as “gusanera”) in mass demonstrations directed against those who opted to leave in the Mariel boat lifts (Lumsden 1996). Unsurprisingly, Cuba also conducted a military-run quarantine for people with HIV from 1986 until 1993. In 2010, Fidel Castro finally apologized for sending gays off to forced labor camps (Hemingway 2010). Despite the well-documented historical record of the homophobia of the Cuban government, many leftist authors continue to ignore or gloss over the unpleasant aspects of the revolution’s history (Hernandez-Requant 2004).

Cuba inherited its virulent homophobia from the Stalinist policies of the Soviet Union (Epps 1995: 237). Stalin, following his ideological mentors, Marx and Engels, also viewed homosexuality as a function of imperialist degeneracy. Male homosexuality was criminalized by Stalin in 1934 (Ibid., 239). The same year, Soviet cultural spokesman, Maxim Gorky, following the Frankfurt School, published an essay equivocating fascism and homosexuality (Healey 2001: 189). Gorky’s view was succinct: “Destroy the homosexuals – Fascism will disappear” (Ibid.).

Interestingly, this position was in stark contrast to what happened in Russia between 1905 and 1917. After a 1905 popular uprising, Czar Nicholas II was forced to get rid of the nation’s strict censorship laws. As a result, homosexual artists, writers and intellectuals began to publish accounts of their subjective realities with a sense of dignity (Duberman, Vicinus and Chauncey 1989: 354). However, the newfound liberation for homosexuals was short lived. Vladimir Lenin’s October revolution of 1917 amounted to a rollback of the gains of the prior revolutions (Ibid., 357), even as the Bolsheviks initially abolished the Czar’s anti-gay laws (Miller 1995: 204; Plant 1986: 39). While not attacking homosexuals directly like Gorky, Leon Trotsky instead simply ignored the homosexuality of famous writers (Ibid., 359). The de facto erasure
and/or de jure persecution of homosexual men reached a crescendo with Stalin’s outright re-criminalization in 1934.

Even as the Stalinists were rounding up homosexuals and imprisoning them, the Soviet Union welcomed openly gay Andre Gide in 1936 (Pollard 1995). Gide was a well-known French writer and erstwhile comrade who eventually penned a gay manifesto, *Corydon* (Rowse 1977: 187). Thus, the U.S.S.R. was not above using certain international homosexual figures for its own propaganda. Stalin even occasionally protected some homosexuals for reasons which are not entirely clear (Miller 1995). Nonetheless, of his experience in the U.S.S.R., Gide wrote: “the Soviet state had betrayed all our hopes” (Rowse 1977: 192). Unfortunately, little is known about state treatment of homosexuals in the U.S.S.R. after the Stalinist regime.

Even less is known about the policies of Communist China and East Germany on homosexuality. After the Communists took power in China in 1948, the government treated homosexuality as if it were non-existent (Miller 1995: 486). Male homosexuality was decriminalized by East Germany in 1968 (Hillhouse 1990: 588). In contrast, while Cuba decriminalized sodomy in 1979\(^3\), Russia did not decriminalize sodomy until 1993 (Healey 2001: 184). In each of these countries, lesbian relationships were typically not seen as a threat to proletarian masculinity and thus did not warrant state sanction (Miller 1995: 201). Ultimately, however, gay men and lesbians have been persecuted, whether under color of law or not, in every country in which Communists have been in power. While many Communist countries have gradually reformed their policies and repealed their overtly anti-gay laws, homosexuals continue to live in the margins of Marxist states.

---

\(^3\) It is important to note, however, that Cuban police were systematically harassing homosexuals as late as 2004 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/spanish/latin_america/newsid_3926000/3926441.stm accessed March 15, 2012).
V. Contemporary Marxism

Notwithstanding the historical nature of Marxist homophobia, many gay and lesbian activists have nevertheless taken up the mantle of Marxism since the 1950s. Some of these activists have been more challenging to the communist party line than others. Declaring, “gay liberation is inherently revolutionary,” Gay Liberation Front Chicago turned the fascist rhetoric of Gorky and Adorno on its head (Jay and Young 1972: 252). Bob McCubbin’s The Gay Question: A Marxist Appraisal, makes little to no mention of Marxism’s homophobic roots (McCubbin 1976). In contrast, another gay Marxist text, Pink Triangles: Radical Perspectives on Gay Liberation, offers significant criticism of the anti-gay positions of dominant communist organizations of the day (Mitchell 1980: 117-135).

The gay Marxist, Harry Hay, founded the United State’s first gay organization, the Mattachine Society, in 1950 (Hay 1996). By that time, Hay had been a longtime member of the Communist Party, having joined in 1934 (Ibid.). However, the Party continued to have homophobic views, and Hay resigned from the Party in 1951 (Ibid.). Ironically, Hay and his gay compatriots organized the Mattachine Society so that its members could remain closet communists (Miller 1995). Another famous gay Marxist, Bayard Rustin, despite being the architect of the 1963 March on Washington, was forced to remain in the shadows due to both his Marxism and his homosexuality. Remaining in the straight closet until 1997 but an early Marxist and student of Herbert Marcuse, Angela Davis was fired from the University of California for her politics (Out 1997). In the minds of many anti-communist and anti-gay crusaders, an association with Marxism necessarily equated with homosexuality (Comstock 1991: 20).
Many gays and African Americans were not welcoming of the communist views of Hay and Rustin, just as many communists were not welcoming of their homosexual inclinations (D’Emilio 1983; D’Emilio 2004). The irony of Marxist homophobia in the context of the Marxist quest for universal liberation is echoed in the irony of the first homosexual rights organization in the United States being founded by a Marxist homosexual and the first national march on Washington being organized by a homosexual Marxist.

It is important to note that many lesbian Marxists, many of color, have not received anywhere near the attention of their white and male counterparts. While Communist states have criminalized and persecuted homosexual men, lesbianism has scarcely been recognized at all. Similarly, though lesbians often played a significant role in the early struggles of queer leftist liberation, Marxist theorists – gay and straight alike – typically ignore the experience of women altogether. For example, the writers Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa have paved the way for an entire generation of young lesbians of color to come into their own over the last 25 years (Lorde 2007; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1984), but their work is rarely if ever mentioned in contemporary writing about queer Marxism. This pattern and practice of ignoring the realities of the lives of women, of lesbian women and women of color, in particular, must be explored further in light of Marxist notions of gender, race and ethnicity.

Over the last two decades, since the collapse of the U.S.S.R. in 1989, communism has fallen out of favor on the left. LGBT activists in the United States have focused on obtaining normative rights: the right to get married, raise children, join the military and/or become religious leaders. The concerns that earlier gay activists had around racial and economic justice and class oppression have largely faded from view. The leftist Gay Liberation Front has been
replaced by the assimilationist Human Rights Campaign. This shift of a queer liberation movement with radical Marxist roots to a mainstream movement for assimilation has not gone unnoticed by leftist and Marxist queer writers (Cutrone 2010). While former National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Executive Director Urvashi Vaid was an early voice recognizing the shift (Vaid 1996), the queer activists Ryan Conrad and Matthilda Bernstein Syamore have offered more recent critiques of the gay marriage equality movement (Conrad 2010; Sycamore 2012).

However, there are signs the pendulum may be swinging back in the direction of a queer politics of radical economic justice. The Occupy movement has focused the world’s attention on the problems inherent in capitalism. Simultaneously, Marxist intellectuals are attracting significant attention from the public (Badiou 2010; Zizek 2010). However, like Trotsky, contemporary Marxist theorists typically make little or no mention of homosexuality (and lesbianism is all but nonexistent). A quick survey of the works of a few of the most renowned contemporary Marxist theorists, Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, and Terry Eagleton, will produce almost nothing regarding homosexuality. This absence is remarkable in that these theorists, especially Žižek, tend to exhaust any other subject with aplomb⁴.

While some queer theorists have never shied from Marxism (Floyd 1998; Floyd 2009), others are discovering, critiquing and/or reinvigorating Marxism (Halberstam 2011). Of particular note, the French theorist Monique Wittig offered a compelling critique of Marxism in The Straight Mind (Wittig 1992). Wittig explains in detail why Marxism denies the subjectivity of historically oppressed classes; there is no room in Marxism for an independent, subjective experience of oppression (Ibid.). “The ‘masses’ did not fight for themselves but for the party or

⁴ To be fair, Žižek did offer a 2-page discussion of Muslims and homosexuals in Living in the End Times (Žižek 2010).
its organizations” (Ibid., 17). Homosexual identity (Wittig brings home this point in reference to women) thus undermines the party, and thus, the people.

Queer theorist Michel Foucault was a Communist in the 1950s and a Maoist into the 1970s, though he rarely touched on politics in his philosophical writings (Halperin 1995: 130). Still others are interrogating what it means to be queer in the context of the political (Blasius 2001). In a more original move, Rosaria Champagne has compared anti-queer Marxists to gay conservatives (Champagne 1998). In a coup de grace, queer film critic Matthew Tinkcom has applied the queer concept of camp to Marxism. Following Marxist theory, one might say Tinkcom has extracted the surplus value from bad taste (Farmer 2002).

One relatively recent episode in the annals of queer Marxism is particularly revealing. In 2002, the filmmaker Bruce LaBruce made a feature length movie, “The Raspberry Reich,” about a queer version of the 1970s German, leftist terrorist organization, the Baader-Meinhof Gang. The protagonists in the film, “The Raspberry Reich,” set out to destroy bourgeois, heterosexual monogamy by forcing young men to have gay sex. LaBruce used enormous, blown-up images of famous revolutionaries as back-drops in the film. In one scene, a character named Che masturbates in front of a giant image of the world-famous photograph of Che Guevara, taken by Fidel Castro’s personal photographer, Alberto Korda.

Korda’s estate sued LaBruce in 2005 on a theory of copyright infringement (LaBruce 2006). The irony of the situation was not lost on LaBruce, who was forced to pay upwards of 30,000 euros to resolve the lawsuit. The film is now available only as a bootleg. “[T]he real lesson gained from the ordeal is embedded in the final irony of the capitalist exploitation of a communist icon. In its capitalist incarnation, the image, ironically, becomes heroic, unassailable:
the essence of idealism and socialist revolution. What gets lost is the real Che Guevara behind the photograph” (Ibid.). 21st century artists and theorists such as LaBruce demonstrate that, notwithstanding Marxism’s homophobic roots, many queers have nonetheless recuperated something of value from Marxism. Whether their heterosexual counterparts see them as more than gusanera remains to be seen.

VI. Questions for Future Inquiry

Have key Marxist thinkers of the 21st century abandoned the homophobia of their predecessors in the 19th and 20th centuries? Is homosexuality no longer understood by 21st century Marxists to be concomitant with capitalism? Was the original homophobia of 19th century Marxism a byproduct of Marxist notions of the ideal man rooted in 18th century Kantian and Hegelian notions of sexuality and the family? Do 20th century gay Marxists overlook the fundamental homophobic origins of Marxist ideology, philosophy and theory? What is the relationship between homosexuality and commodity fetishism? To what extent is Marxist homophobia simply a reflection of misogyny? To what extent are other variables (e.g., Christian missionaries in China; German romanticism and/or idealism) relevant in an analysis of Marxism and homosexuality?

Additionally, different potential variables may not be applicable across the board; Kantian conceptions of sexuality will apply to some Marxists, and not others; religious considerations may be present for Walter Benjamin, but not Leon Trotsky; many key Marxist theorists were German; many gay Marxists are or were from the United States, etc. Also, as mentioned, the literature is significantly more robust with regard to Soviet Russia and Cuba than with regard to China, North Korea, North Vietnam, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany.
Perhaps more importantly, in the areas of Marxist theory and queer theory, there is a growing body of literature in both discursive arenas that has called for ongoing interrogation of the connections, de facto or de jure, explicit or implicit, as between these specific theoretical discourses and the politics of race, ethnicity, citizenship, gender, sex, (dis)ability, and other historical axis of oppression (Valdes 2009). This call for the engagement of race and ethnicity and other signs of identity with sexual orientation and queer theory is in recognition of the claim that none of these markers exist independently of the others; that all are constituted by and imbued with multiplicity and multivalence (Ibid.). Accordingly, this paper is limited by definition in its focus on homosexuality and Marxism. While the current paper does not seek to interrogate those relationships here, such questions certainly merit further inquiry.

Further research into the texts of Immanuel Kant and Frederick Hegel may be key to understanding why and how Marx and Engels themselves either: 1) ignored any explicit discussion of homosexuality in their key writings on capital, communism, culture or the family, and/or 2) always referred, in private notes and correspondence, to homosexuality in pejorative ways. Another subject warranting further analysis is how and why later communist governments employed heterosexist paradigms, to an extreme degree, in their own juridico-legal frameworks, when none was ever called for by Marx or Engels, per se. For example, revolutionary Cuba was perhaps the most egregious (outside of Stalinist Russia) in their persecution of homosexuals. Such persecution may have been unique to Cuba because of Che Guevara’s writings on the “new man.” On the other hand, the Bolsheviks initially repealed laws criminalizing sodomy in 1917, only for Stalin to later reinstate such laws in 1934. What led the Bolsheviks to repeal such laws, and why did Stalin’s government reinstate them? Such questions imply that any simple rubric
will likely prove problematic. To wit, the advent of gay Marxists in the United States in the 1950s through today further illustrates the complexity of arriving at any causal explanations of the origins of Marxist homophobia.

The role of religion, the pathologizing of homosexuality as capitalist degeneracy, the role of misogyny and patriarchy, racism, colonialism, fascism – all of these variables and more call for further investigation. One is tempted to offer a critique of Marxist ideology – or any ideology for that matter – grounded in one’s own identity and experiences of alienation and liberation. However, queering research – if it means anything – means examining such methods for traces of implicit or explicit bias. Both qualitative and quantitative methods, while containing their own gendered, race-infused, and identity-based assumptions about what is meaningful and valued, are nonetheless tools which can help us advance certain truth claims about identity, power and politics. The queer question of who owns the means of production of knowledge is every bit as important as the Marxist question of who owns the means of material production. Ultimately, can homosexuality and Marxism be reconciled? The question will only become more relevant with each passing protest, riot and revolution.
REFERENCES


Naved, Shad. 2007. “Note: Gayatri Spivak’s Critique of Marxist Value(s).” *Social Scientist* 35(1-2):76-88.


