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MARXIST APPROACHES IN ANTHROPOLOGY

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to provide an introduction to the basic concepts and methods of historical materialism for anthropologists interested in applying this framework in their own work. It is not possible to cut out certain aspects of Marxism—such as the study of culture or of “primitive” societies—and assign them to anthropologists; Marx’s emphasis on integrated historical analysis of social totalities precludes the isolation of anthropology as a distinct discipline within the social sciences. I have instead used anthropological work, by way of illustration and contrast, primarily to elucidate Marxist theoretical constructs and methodological principles.

A good deal of this essay is therefore devoted to criticism of conventional anthropological theoretical practice. I do not wish to apologize for this emphasis. Contrary to some peculiarly academic preconceptions, historical materialism is not a fully articulated dogmatic grid (or structural theory) to be mechanistically imposed on any problem. Rather it is a working scientific tradition, struggling to develop theoretical understanding of specific historical problems in a world dominated by class conflict. Critical theory, seeking to penetrate the mystifications of our own ideology, is therefore an essential aspect of this process of scientific development.

I do, however, wish to stress that my presentation does not encompass the full breadth of perspectives in the Marxist tradition. The views expressed here have developed in the groups with which I have worked,¹ but there are other Marxist anthropologists—often working in small groups and publishing in radical journals—whose progress is not adequately reviewed. This paper, then, should be taken as a working approximation—an attempt to clarify certain fundamental issues—and as a very limited introduction to Marxist concepts and methods.

¹Critical discussion and research presented by the participants in the Political Economy Seminar at Stanford has been particularly helpful for this review. I should especially like to thank Duncan Foley, Jens Christiansen, Michelle Rosaldo, David Howard, Talal Asad, James Faris, and Renato Rosaldo for discussion, reading, and criticism of this paper. Pressed for time and space, I was not able to incorporate all of their comments into the paper, but each gave directions for rethinking and new work.

In the first section of the paper, "Dialectical Materialism," the philosophical premises which underlie Marxist approaches are summarized and contrasted with some prevailing epistemological stances in anthropology. The second section, "The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism," describes the ways in which the principles of dialectical materialism have been developed in the scientific study of human society.

In the third section, "Modes of Production," I concentrate on basic methodological problems. This section is divided into two parts: a critical review is followed by a more constructive presentation of the "state of the art." These two parts are interdependent; it may be necessary to return to the first after reading the second. The conclusion deals very summarily with the situation of the Marxist anthropologist working in advanced capitalist society.

DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

Historical materialism is a science, and like all sciences, it is based on certain ontological and epistemological principles that describe what the world is and how we can know it. The philosophical underpinning of historical materialism is dialectical materialism, Marx's materialist reconstruction of the Hegelian dialectic of Mind. In this first section, I will discuss the basic premises of dialectical materialism and then show how its methodological consequences contrast with some familiar anthropological modes of analysis.

Basic Premises

Marx insisted that there are real material structures or regularities in nature, structures which are neither imposed by the human mind nor its epiphenomenal expression:

Hegel fell into the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of thought concentrating itself, probing its own depths, and unfolding itself out of itself, whereas the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is only the way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind (43, p. 101).²

Since structures are not simply the product of Mind, then critical theory and demystification are not enough to change the world. Marx's rejection of Hegelian idealism in the *1844 Manuscripts* (38) was based on his recognition of the necessary link between theory and political praxis.

Yet in rejecting idealism, Marx did not posit an opposition between the material and the ideal. He saw that thought could only be the product of real, sensuous activity of human subjects and thus that the laws of thought must be part of the material structures of nature. In his first thesis on Feuerbach, Marx wrote: "The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (that of Feuerbach

²Citations of Marx always refer to easily available current editions. As will be clear from the pattern of citation, I take the *Grundrisse* (43) to be part of the corpus of Marx's mature work.

included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively*" (41, p. 121). Marx abolished the false dichotomy between ideal and material and thus provided an epistemological basis for a materialist science (thought *can* appropriate the concrete; material structure is knowable).³

Thought is therefore part of the material world and governed by the same law of dialectical movement that characterizes nature. The laws of the material world do not, however, reduce to the laws of thought; thought can never replicate nor apprehend all of material reality. Scientific knowledge of the world is apprehending the essential determinations and suppressing the unimportant. Since the material world is constantly and irreversibly changing, the significance of particular theoretical categories and questions will change as well.

The structural regularities of the world are material, but they are also dialectical and therefore constantly evolving. Since all structures are dynamic processes—relations between being and becoming—they cannot be known positively through their phenomenal surface form. Structure can only be known when relations are dialectically conceptualized: ". . . in general, relations can be established as existing only by being *thought*, as distinct from the subjects which are in these relations with each other" (43, p. 143). Reality cannot be understood on the surface of things.

Anthropological Methods of Analysis

The methodological consequences of dialectical materialism contrast with modes of analysis practiced by many contemporary anthropologists. Here I will discuss only three anthropological approaches: the recording of positive facts, mapping onto logical structures, and synchronic analysis of systems. None of these, of course, is a complete methodological framework, nor are these modes mutually exclusive. Lévi-Strauss is criticized at disproportionate length, primarily because his emphasis on unconscious structure has for some disguised the basic incompatibility between structuralism and Marxism.

THE RECORDING OF POSITIVE FACTS Positivist approaches that take their categories from the concrete itself are of two types in anthropology: cultural materialist (*etic*) strategies that observe and measure fact in the material world; and ethnoscientific (*emic*) methods designed to discover the cognitive categories "inside of peoples' heads" by recording of essentially linguistic behavior. Whether one accepts the primacy of the *emic* realm or that of the *etic*, positivism becomes the only alternative to transcendent idealism once one accepts the ideal/material dichotomy.

From the viewpoint of dialectical materialism, there are two principal errors in positivism. First, the concrete must be understood through conceptualization of those dialectical relations that determine it, not through its momentary surface form. Second, thought cannot replicate the structure of the real world. Since knowing consists of recognizing and organizing some "facts" and not

³For further discussion of this point, see Lenin (33) and Engels (19).

others, we never simply record reality. If we cannot be theoretically explicit as to why we have noticed some facts but not others, asked some questions but not others, then we are merely hiding from ourselves the implicit basis of our choice.

MAPPING ONTO LOGICAL STRUCTURES Like Marx, Lévi-Strauss insists that to understand is to analyze those structural relations that underlie empirical reality. But Marx's notion of dialectical structure is materialist and his method of analysis quite different from Lévi-Strauss's mapping of relations onto invariant logical oppositions. Lévi-Strauss sees history much as Hegel described it: the dialectic realizes itself harmoniously in the movement of logical opposites. But Marx finds irreversible dialectical movement—discontinuous, uneven development and qualitative change.⁴

While Lévi-Strauss (34, p. 566), then, describes structure metaphorically as a stable cylinder extending itself infinitely through time but analytically isolable from it, Marx finds historical structures constantly altering themselves. For Lévi-Strauss all contradictions are of the same quality; all are oppositions reducible in the last analysis to the universal dimensions of the order of orders. For Marx, contradictions vary in quality with their material development in history, both in antagonism and in significance (in Althusser's terms some are overdetermined). There can therefore be no universal structural oppositions.

SYNCHRONIC ANALYSIS OF SYSTEMS In both Lévi-Straussian structuralism and structural-functionalism, analysis of a system requires that a methodological distinction be made between synchronic and diachronic modes of analysis. No claim is made that systems exist outside of time, only that knowing such systems requires their synchronic description. If all relations are of the same order and if the dimensions of the system are specified, then the emergent properties of a system can always be analyzed synchronically—either as a rearrangement in the elements of the system or as a process of quantitative adjustment (15).

It is, however, precisely the assumptions underlying the conditions of synchronic analysis that are challenged by the notion of material contradiction in Marxist analysis. The genesis of structure is indeed—as Lévi-Strauss (34, p. 560) told Piaget—in structure, but that structure is itself diachronic and constantly evolving. The link between the assumptions of structuralist and structural-functional anthropology and the teleological idealism of its nineteenth century evolutionist precursors is exposed by Mao:

The metaphysical or vulgar evolutionist world outlook sees things as isolated, static and one-sided. It regards all things in the universe, their forms and their species, as eternally isolated from one another and immutable. Such change as there is can only be an increase or decrease in quantity or change of place. Moreover the cause of such an increase or decrease or change of place is not inside things but outside them, that is, their motive force is external (36, p. 25).

⁴Althusser's (2) and Nicolaus's (47) somewhat divergent analyses of the relation between Marx and Hegel should be consulted here.

Thus structuralist readings of Marx (52) that accept a methodological opposition between structural and temporal modes of analysis and relegate dynamics to a lower level of abstraction are false. Structural regularities are always processual and should be conceptualized as such in understanding any particular concrete historical situation. I do not mean that synchronic description of a system may not be a necessary step in analysis. Marx, for instance, heuristically traces out a synchronic model of simple reproduction of capital in order to clarify the essential determinations of his dynamic model of qualitative change in expanded reproduction.

The latter theory of expanded reproduction is not, however, less abstract than the model of simple reproduction. Rather it is conceptually more complex. As such it is the only adequate model of capitalist development, since the assumptions of the theory of expanded reproduction (unlike those of simple reproduction) correspond to the material conditions of the historical reality that it purports to understand.

Failure to understand this essential aspect of Marx's method of analysis in *Capital* has led to persistent misinterpretation of his formulation of the law of the falling tendency of the rate of profit. This law should not be read as an historical description or prediction, but as a dynamic analysis of the significant systemic variables underlying the course of capitalist development. Similarly, "mode of production" is a dynamic concept for Marx, not a static type. This digression into the logic of *Capital* shows that the methodological differences between historical materialism, structuralism, and teleological evolutionism as modes of explanation appear even before one specifically addresses the analysis of human society.

In discussing the last two modes of anthropological analysis, I have emphasized the idealist elements in Lévi-Strauss's work. Yet structuralist anthropologists have consistently refused to accept the charges of Hegelianism addressed against their work. Strictly speaking, they are correct. Lévi-Strauss's preoccupation with the logical structures of the mind does not stem from any transcendent attachment to Spirit, but from his analysis of the essential determinant of human material existence—Man's triumph over Nature through the symbolic representations of Culture.

The fact that structuralism looks Hegelian in practice should not disguise the similarity between Lévi-Strauss's basic proposition and discussions of human nature by such anti-Hegelian anthropologists as Geertz (22) and White (57), who emphasize the importance of symbolization in human evolution. The Marxist position here cannot be clarified at an epistemological level, for the central question is not the nature of knowing but the nature of human society. The validity of the assumptions of dialectical materialism is established through the scientific analysis of human history.

THE BASIC CONCEPTS OF HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

In this section, I will discuss certain basic concepts of historical materialism and show how they contrast with the constructs of more conventional anthro-

pological viewpoints. The place to begin is the dialectical relationship between people and nature that Marx saw as fundamental in the process of human social evolution.

Marx began his search for an understanding of the laws of evolution of human society by emphasizing both the unity and opposition between people and nature. In his often quoted comparison of the worst of architects and the best of bees, Marx (39, p. 178) recognized the importance of human imagination. Yet language and representation are themselves derived from peoples' social reproduction of the conditions of their own existence: "Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence" (41, p. 42). In production people oppose themselves to nature by acting on the external world and changing it; but at the same time they are dialectically one with nature, for in changing it they change themselves as well (39, p. 177).

The central proposition of historical materialism is, therefore, that social production and reproduction are the basis of human history. In order to draw out the theoretical meaning of this proposition, I have isolated its two basic premises: first, that production is a social process; second, that production and reproduction determine the dynamic structure of human society. These two premises will be elaborated and contrasted with anthropological views of society in the two following sections.

Production is a Social Process

Historical materialism is concerned with the evolution of people as a social species, not as individual organisms. Thus although preoccupation with "Man the Tool-Maker" might seem to be an understandable consequence of Marx's emphasis on human production of the means of subsistence, search for a chimpanzee who will break straws to fish out termites is, in terms of human evolution, a meaningless exercise. It is not the intentionality of production that defines human activity, but rather its necessarily social character. To be human is to be social, for we can reproduce ourselves only through cooperative production of our means of subsistence. Robinson Crusoe alone on his island was nevertheless a product of a particular society (and preoccupation with his plight the ideological product of another).

Since people exist only in society, individuals are never autonomous units. Quite to the contrary, people can individuate themselves only in society, and each individual is determined by a particular set of social relations. Society cannot be understood as a population or aggregate of individuals, but only as a totality of social relations (43, p. 100). It is therefore always methodologically unsound to assume that an ethnic group or political unit (the Nuer, United States society) is an adequate unit of analysis. One must begin by reconstructing the social relations that determine particular subjects or groups.

Since people can individuate themselves only in society, there is no natural opposition between individual and society. The problem of order should not,

therefore, be the central question of social theory, nor should equilibrium be assumed as the reproduction condition of all societies. Structural-functionalist concern (of both the Parsonian and British versions) with the maintenance of systemic compatibility presupposes inherent atomistic tendencies in all societies. As ideology, the illusory individualism of capitalist society is confirmed through universalization in structural-functional writing (5, 35).

Marx, by contrast, exposed the class relations that underlie the appearances of individual freedom in capitalist society and showed that societies need not be harmonious equilibrium systems. Precisely because people are socially interdependent in production, societies can reproduce themselves continually despite conflict and contradiction. Since one cannot assume that any movement out of equilibrium annihilates the system, explanations of social facts that rest on the maintenance of functional integration provide no explanation at all.

In more specifically anthropological terms, it is only legitimate to root the exchange of women or goods in the maintenance of social solidarity if one has first shown why the exchanging groups are antagonistic. Defining exchange as the basis of social order is therefore either at best an absurd reduction of conceptual vocabulary (all social relations are by definition relations of exchange) and at worst a naive acceptance of a universal egoistic psyche.

I have emphasized the implications of Marx's discussion of the the social nature of production because of the frequent misrepresentation of Marxist theory in the dichotomy between consensus and strain theories of society. Historical materialism is not a strain theory; it does not in any way assume that conflict, hierarchy and stratification are universal in all forms of society. Exploitation and class conflict are historically specific, not general social phenomena.

Utopian idealization of preindustrial societies was often both an ideological support for the supposed evolutionary inevitability of classes in technologically complex societies and an artifact of particular colonial policies (6, 55). Thus anthropologists tended to overlook class development and class conflict in the societies they studied. Marxist anthropologists have tried to redress this bias, but not by assuming that class relations are universal.

Marx's insistence on the social definition of the individual has important consequences for theories of culture as well as for theories of society. Since there are no autonomous individual subjects, there is no such thing as the basic natural man, stripped of the accidental accoutrements of culture and history. Malinowski's basic self-aggrandizing man, the universal maximizer of neo-classical economic theory, Ardrey's aggressor, and McClelland's universal *n*-achievement motivation are therefore all illusions, again mystifications appropriate in expansive periods of capitalist society (35) (though less appealing when you cannot really get what you want). People are material, sentient beings, of course, and as such are affected by their own physiology, but these affects can only have particular historical and social expressions: there is no general psychophysiological content in human existence.

Confirmation of Marx's insistence on the importance of flexible social adapta-

tion in the evolution of human existence seems to me to be the strongest side of contemporary primate studies (their worst is the search for the universal ape). The implications of such studies for theories of culture are most clearly drawn in the anthropological literature by Geertz (22): we cannot have a theory of culture in general; we can only interpret particular cultures. Such a stance is methodologically possible only if we have a general theory through which to analyze the ways that cultural representations are socially organized and reproduced.

Here Geertz and Marx radically diverge. Though Geertz rejects the notion of a universal subject of any innate or constant nature, he still maintains that there are universal existential situations—common to all societies—that permit intersubjective entry into systems of meaning. Such phenomenological approaches that begin with the existential situation of the subject clash with Marxist methods of cultural interpretation. To show why this is so, we must return to the relationship between consciousness and social existence through the Marxist concept of ideology.

Since cultural representations exist only when they are socially organized, consciousness is always subsumed in existence, never autonomous from it: "It is not the consciousness of man which determines his existence, but his existence which determines his consciousness" (40 a, p. 21). People can and do hold all sorts of conflicting representation without changing the conditions of their social existence. Cultural representations are not logical systems straining toward consistency, for they are ultimately ordered by their social contexts, not by the logic of mind.

Yet precisely because existence is not determined by consciousness—thought is part of social reality but does not exhaust it—forms of consciousness not only represent but may also systematically misrepresent the social relations through which they are formed. Such misrepresentations constitute ideology, forms of consciousness that are quite real but nonetheless false. Ideology has no history of its own nor universal content; it can only be functionally defined in relation to a particular historical society.⁵

There are certainly forms of consciousness that are not ideological. Culture and ideology are not the same in Marxist terms. Nevertheless, if consciousness does not faithfully represent the social conditions of existence, then we can never fully understand these conditions through the representations of subjective consciousness. The intersubjective entry of phenomenological approaches to cultural interpretation is therefore illusory, for the subject's view (whether conscious or unconscious) is quite likely to be a mystification of underlying social relations.

If we misunderstand the social relations through which culture is organized, then we misinterpret culture as well, for meaning is in its referents. One should therefore begin cultural interpretation with an historically formed social system and not with subjects. People ultimately define themselves through their social relations, not through the symbols they use.

⁵Althusser (3) provides a controversial and theoretically advanced discussion of the concept of ideology.

Production and Reproduction Determine the Dynamic Structure of Society

Marx's conception of a social system is that of a dynamic totality composed of relations between people and between people and nature. The relations of this social totality are of different qualities; since production and reproduction of human subsistence constitute the basis of society, the determinant aspects or moments are the technical forces of production and social relations of production. The productive system, with corresponding forms of consumption, distribution, and exchange (the base), ultimately determines the form of juridical-political and ideological relations (superstructure).

Marx never claimed that history merely expresses productive relations; such economism is antithetical to his understanding of the dialectical relationship between base and superstructure. In the last instance, however, the importance of particular institutions is determined by the mode of production:

. . . the middle ages could not live on Catholicism, nor the ancient world on politics. On the contrary, it is the mode in which they gained a livelihood that explains why here politics, and there Catholicism, played the chief part. For the rest it requires but a slight acquaintance with the history of the Roman republic, for example, to be aware that its secret history is the history of landed property. On the other hand, Don Quixote long ago paid the penalty for wrongly imagining that knight errantry was compatible with all economic forms of society (39, p. 82).

In positing the determinance of the base, Marx was not, therefore, reducing all social relations to relations of production; religion, politics, and chivalry are not primarily economic institutions. Quite to the contrary, he wished to show that the relations of the social system were of different qualities, with those of the base ultimately determining the structure of the whole.

To understand the determinance of the base, it is necessary to comprehend the importance Marx assigns to the concept of reproduction. In social production people not only produce but also reproduce the conditions of their own existence. Since all production is production within a particular form of society, this means reproduction of labor, reproduction of the means of production, and reproduction of the relations of production (3).

In the dialectical working out of the relationship between forces and relations of production in time and space, antagonistic contradictions may develop within the system—think, for instance, of conflict over access to land arising in certain conditions as a swidden system becomes in time a system of intensive cultivation (20). Or, as in capitalism, antagonistic contradictions may be contained within the productive system from its outset in the essential class contradiction between labor and capital.

The system reproduces itself, despite these contradictions, through the mediation of superstructure—juridico-political and ideological relations that suppress, displace, or misrepresent basic conflicts. These relations may be themselves contradictory, and certainly they do not strain toward any necessary functional integration or consistency. Nor do mediating structures annul contradictions;

they merely permit their reproduction often in more antagonistic forms. It is thus the concept of reproduction that establishes the necessary links between base and superstructure within the social system.

The development of antagonistic contradictions between the forces and relations of production has historically led to crisis and to eventual qualitative changes in systems of production:

The moment of arrival of such a crisis is disclosed by the depth and breadth attained by the contradictions and antagonisms between the distribution relations, and thus the specific historical forms of their corresponding production relations, on the one hand, and of the productive forces, the productive powers and the development of their agencies on the other hand. A conflict then ensues between the material development of production and its social forms (40, p. 883).

The immediate historical cause of the crisis need not be economic, but its functional importance is always determined by the conditions of the base and its resolution is always economic—a basic change in the system of production.

The basic movement of human history is, therefore, the dialectical development of the forces and relations of production. Marx did not see this movement as an even, progressive, and harmonious development of the division of labor, but as uneven, periodized, qualitative change, marked by revolutionary transition from one epoch of production to another. The new system of production emerges historically from the old, but not as the synthetic resolution of its contradictions. The dialectic between forces and relations of production in the new mode of production differs in its terms from that of the preceding epoch of production. To understand history is therefore to be able to define these historically specific terms.

METHODS OF ANALYSIS: MODES OF PRODUCTION

In the preceding section, some of the basic concepts of historical materialism were discussed and contrasted with prevalent anthropological views. In this section, I will consider in closer detail the methods of historical materialism, and particularly the construct of a mode of production. In general terms most Marxist social scientists agree that societies should be analyzed as social formations—relational systems composed of superstructure and a determinant economic base which may itself be a complex articulation of more than a single mode of production.

From this conception of a social formation follow certain basic methodological principles. First, that in analyzing any institution, such as kinship or the family or the state, one should break it down to the relations that define it and link these systemically to the base.⁶ Second, the analysis of the social formation as a whole is prerequisite to understanding; the current fragmentation of the social sciences into isolated disciplines is antiscientific.

⁶Berthoud's (9) critique of Fortes's analysis of kinship includes a good methodological discussion of this point for anthropologists.

Beyond this general accord, however, there is an awesome diversity of opinion on the implementation of the methodological framework. Before presenting a tentative outline of the method of analysis of a mode of production, I will discuss some crucial conceptual issues and try to specify errors that have been made. Most of the writers discussed consider themselves Marxists, but for the purpose of clarification I will also refer to the work of anthropologists who have been significantly influenced by Marx or whose work has been confused with Marxist approaches (Goody, Worsley, Harris, Sahlins). The issues addressed include: 1. the problem of general vs specific categories of analysis; 2. the dialectical conceptualization of forces and relations of production; 3. the articulation of modes of production; 4. concepts of transition.

Conceptual Issues

GENERAL VS SPECIFIC CATEGORIES Social production of the means of subsistence is the basis of human existence. Thus all epochs of production have certain common elements; labor and its means of production—the object and instruments of labor (43, p. 85). If we analyze a particular arrangement of these traits as a technical process, we describe the forces of production. If we analyze this same arrangement of traits in terms of relations of appropriation between persons, we describe the relations of production. In each instance, the relations analyzed are both social and material, but we see different aspects of social reality.

Viewing production as a labor process, we could thus define a mode of production through a rather mechanistic specification of each of the common traits of all production. Here is the rub: production is not a general process, but the “appropriation of nature on the part of an individual within and through a specific form of society” (43, p. 87). All systems of production may have invariant elements, but these provide only a tautological framework of analysis which says nothing of historically specific *social* forms of production: “To the extent that the labour-process is solely a process between man and Nature, its simple elements remain common to all social forms of development. But each specific historical form of this process further develops its material foundations and social forms” (40, p. 883). Since the purpose of theory is to develop those abstractions through which the concrete (always historically specific) can be understood, a set of universal concepts cannot define any particular mode of production. Analysis of a mode of production must be movement from abstract general determinations to observation and conception at the level of the concrete and then back to the theoretical articulation of general and specific categories.

Distinguishing general and specific categories is necessarily a central problem in scientific analysis, a problem which cannot be resolved entirely within theory itself. Marx recognized that it is a common task of ideology to represent particular social processes as the expression of constant universal laws—natural social charters. Thus a considerable portion of Marxist scholarship on non-capitalist systems is concerned with determining the extent to which concepts

that Marx developed for the analysis of capitalism can or cannot be applied to all modes of production.

The only scientific solution to this problem is the movement back from theory to data in order to see how well the concrete can be determined by the abstractions one has developed. This movement is particularly important for anthropologists, whose discipline has so often assuaged contempt for capitalist society with the conservative assurance of cultural universals through which we "see ourselves" other than as we are. Here I find it particularly central for Marxist anthropologists to sort out: (a) the analytical status of value theory, and (b) that of the construct of precapitalist modes of production.

Value theory As an abstraction from production, the concept of labor value is applicable to the analysis of any mode of production. But the concept of value is often theoretically articulated with other concepts in analytical constructs that are specific to particular modes of production. In a recent article, for instance, Jonathan Friedman (21, p. 446) suggests that the social relations of production determine the rate of surplus (s/v) and the rate of profit [$s/(c+v)$] in all forms of society, whether or not that society has categories corresponding to s , (surplus-value), v (variable capital), and c (constant capital). While I agree that the application of theoretical categories does not depend on their presence in the minds of informants, Friedman's extension of concepts Marx developed for the analysis of capitalism to all modes of production is a fundamental methodological error.

In the capitalist mode of production, surplus is appropriated as surplus-value by capital from labor in the process of production. The value produced by labor is greater than the value of those commodities that make up the wage-bundle of workers (V) and the value of the means of production used up in production (C): this surplus-value (S) is appropriated by capital. The appropriation of surplus as surplus-value depends on particular historical conditions: the existence of wage-labor as a commodity; the separation of workers as a class from their means of production; a complex division of labor reflected in widespread use of machines that hold only in the capitalist mode of production. Applying the categories C , V , and S to other modes of production can tell you nothing about their specific dynamics.

A second issue in the use of value-concepts is the analytical status of the law of value. Unlike the classical economists, Marx never argued that the law of value held (i.e. that articles be exchanged in relation to their labor-values) in all modes of production. Only when production is organized for exchange rather than use—in petty-commodity production and most fully in capitalist production—do commodities exchange in relation to their labor-values (through their prices of production):

Prices are old; exchange also; but the increasing determination of the former by costs of production, as well as the increasing dominance of the latter over all relations of production, only develop fully and continue to develop even more completely in bourgeois society, the society of free competition (43, p. 156).

Commodities exchange in relation to their labor-values only when the law of value regulates their production.

Persistent misreading of Marx's analysis of the law of value stems from the assumption of the primacy of exchange in bourgeois ideology. This assumption is similarly reflected in the explanatory power assigned to the concept of "spheres of value" in economic anthropology [see Barth (8), Bohannan (12), and Berthoud (10), the latter for an excellent critique of Bohannan]. The central theoretical question should not be why some goods are traded for some goods and not for others, but rather why one thinks it "natural" that all exchange against all. The latter is true only when people produce primarily for exchange rather than for their own use:

When production is oriented towards immediate subsistence not every article can be exchanged for every other one, and a specific activity can be exchanged only for specific products. The more specialized, manifold and interdependent the products become, the greater the necessity for a general medium of exchange (43, p. 199).

The construct of spheres of value is used to analyze transition from traditional to modern economies—spheres break down and an all-purpose money is introduced. As Dupré & Rey (18) have pointed out, however, concepts of transition restricted to the level of distribution can provide only tautological explanation of the displacement of precapitalist modes of production by capitalism and draw attention away from the mechanisms through which basic changes in productive relations are accomplished.

The specificity of precapitalist modes of production Difficulties in establishing the analytical range of particular concepts recur in the Marxist characterization of precapitalist economies. Are there properties common to all precapitalist economies—e.g. "natural economies," or economies dominated by personal dependence—such that they can be analyzed by a common set of theoretical concepts? Or can we establish a subset of precapitalist economies—primitive, classless, "cold," or dominated by kinship—and in doing so establish a restricted object of knowledge? These questions are clearly important ones for Marxist anthropologists concerned with delimiting their discipline, and there is no unanimity among Marxists in their responses to them.

Throughout most of his life, Marx was concerned with the development of an analysis of the capitalist mode of production that would provide a theoretical framework for the revolutionary class-struggles of the proletariat. He insisted that this analysis had to be historically specific, but he denied that it was necessary to develop historical knowledge of all modes of production in order to understand the essential relations of capitalism. Quite to the contrary:

Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historic organization of production. The categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also allow insights into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations out of whose elements and ruins it built itself up (43, p. 105).

In the ethnological reading he did just before his death, Marx (42) tried to apply the concepts developed in his analysis of bourgeois economy, but I have not found it possible to interpret the excerpting, interpolations, and omissions in his notebooks in such a way as to yield any analysis of precapitalist modes of production. When Marx characterizes precapitalist modes of production in his analytical works, he is almost always doing one of two things: (a) analyzing the transition from feudalism to capitalism; (b) establishing the essential relations of the capitalist system by specifying in a dialectical manner what they are not.

The principal lesson one can learn from Marx's work on precapitalist modes of production therefore seems to be that they are the same only insofar as they are not capitalist; there is no positive basis for distinguishing them as a theoretical object of knowledge. Given Marx's analysis of the historical specificities of capitalism, we should be able to determine which categories should not be extended to precapitalist modes of production, but we cannot thereby establish a set of concepts amenable to the analysis of the specific dynamics of all precapitalist modes of production. To say that societies are classless or characterized by a low level of development of the productive forces tells us what they are not but not what they are. To speak of precapitalist economies as dominated by relations of personal dependence tells us nothing of what these particular relations are.

Some work that cannot be summarized here has been done on the analysis of particular precapitalist modes of production, particularly in Africa (44, 48, 50, 56, 58). Murra's (46) work on the Inca and Godelier's (25) reanalysis of it are also very helpful. In general, however, any analysis of precapitalist modes of production must be rooted in the broad methodological framework of historical materialism. This brings us to the second and central issue in the analysis of a mode of production—the conceptualization of the dialectical relationship between forces and relations of production.

THE DIALECTIC OF FORCES AND RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION Analysis of any problem requires a specification of the mode of production, understood as a dialectical unity of forces and relations of production. Technical relations between people and nature always imply corresponding forms of social relations. Forces and relations of production cannot therefore be analyzed in isolation from each other, yet the difference between them must be conceptualized as well. The basis of this dialectical relationship is the unity of people with nature and the opposition of people to nature in production. Production and reproduction of human existence requires appropriation of nature by human labor; Marx criticized those who placed human activity outside the laws of nature: "Labor is not the source of all wealth. Nature is just as much the source of use-values and these, certainly, form the material elements of wealth as labor, which is itself only the expression of a natural force, human labor-power" (37, p. 19).

This dialectical relationship between forces and relations of production is the key to the uneven, periodized, and nonteleological process of human evolution. No understanding of social change can be analytically separated from technological change, for in acting on the external world and changing it, people at the

same time change their own nature (39, p. 177). Marx's view is therefore quite different from that of most of the cultural materialists and cultural ecologists who insist that the ultimate meaning of history lies in technological processes. The problem here is that technological change then becomes an exogenous independent variable: ways in which social relations of production affect the development of the productive forces are systematically left unanalyzed.

Leacock (32) has very neatly criticized the reductionist and ultimately idealist tendencies inherent in the cultural materialists' rejection of the dialectic—between forces and relations of production and between consciousness and existence (see also Friedman 21). Yet the same problems recur in less positivistic approaches to cultural evolution. I will therefore discuss at greater length the revisions in evolutionist theory introduced by Marshall Sahlins, whose interest in French structural Marxism has done much to resuscitate interest in Marx among anthropologists.

In analyzing the development of political chiefdoms, Sahlins (51, p. 101) argues that such political structures evolve from a contradiction between forces and relations of production. This sounds like a Marxist argument, but Sahlins' contradiction is immanent rather than material: there is a difference between what people could produce and what they actually produce. Political structures therefore evolve as a means of realizing the surplus that is implicit but unactualized in the system. In fact, the contradiction that Sahlins finds lies within the forces of production, that is, within the technological system itself. Unless one ahistorically assumes the teleological rationalization of economic efficiency as the essence of human evolution, there is no way of moving from this supposed contradiction to the emergence of political hierarchies. In other words, there is a distinct continuity between Sahlins's early evolutionist work and that of his recent Marxian stage.

Within British social anthropology, Goody and Worsley have continually challenged the structural-functionalist assumption (by Radcliffe-Brown and Fortes at least) of the autonomy of kinship in primitive societies by arguing that productive organization determines the form of kinship relations. As with the American cultural materialists, however, productive relations tend to reduce to technological systems. According to Goody (28), for example, it is the absence of the plow and concomitant aspects of intermediate technology that has largely determined the significance of military organization in African state development. In a similar fashion, Worsley (59) has argued that the particular forms that Tale kinship takes are determined by the fixed farm and the need for cooperation in agricultural labor.

In the case of Goody and Worsley, it is probably a strong dose of logical positivism (relations between persons that do not appear on the surface of things are less real somehow than relations between persons and things), rather than a well-articulated evolutionist position, which leads to the reduction of relations of production to technical relations.

From a Marxist perspective, the presence or absence of the plow cannot be an independent parameter in a productive system, for social relations of production condition its use, development, and acceptance. So also patterns of labor

cooperation and forms of the family are interdependent in societies where the household is a basic unit of production. The weaknesses of technological reductionism are not particularly apparent in a synchronic analysis, but they are devastatingly obvious when one tries to analyze the dynamics of social change. In both Goody's and Worsley's work the expansion of capitalism is viewed as an almost automatic process of technological change and market involvement. The necessity of forcibly displacing noncapitalist relations of production cannot be clearly conceptualized within their theoretical framework. And so almost the entire state apparatus of colonial rule, including the small functional position of the anthropologist, is shrouded from analytical view.

On the other side of the fractured dialectic stand a number of Marxist anthropologists—preeminently P.- Ph. Rey—who generally maintain the dialectical unity between forces and relations of production, but who argue that in the last instance the social relations of production must be determinant. Ultimately the forces that make history lie within people themselves, not outside them, but people exist only in dialectical relationship with nature. Therefore, social relations only exist materially in correspondence with technical conditions of production. If a particular set of social relations is viewed as relatively autonomous, then the material basis for this autonomy must be specified.

Rey's (49, 50) work on transition and articulation of modes of production has opened important new directions of analysis, but his failure to specify the basis of the autonomy of social relations somewhat distorts his study of both capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production. In his work (50) on a "lineage mode of production" in Central Africa, for example, he argues that a class of elders is able to extract surplus labor from junior men through control over the reproduction or regrouping of productive groups. The basis of this argument is a familiar one to Africanists (28, 56): shifting cultivation is predominant in Africa, land is not a scarce resource, land is not owned, therefore it is control over people rather than land which is important. The problems here are: 1. that regardless of property relations, land continues to be the basis of agricultural production; 2. that "scarcity" is socially as well as technologically defined. The autonomy of the social process of recruitment to productive groups is illusory and therefore does not describe the material basis of exploitation.

The presumed autonomy of the social relations of production also appears in Rey's analysis (50) of the transition from noncapitalist to capitalist modes of production. Rey suggests that the determining relation of production under feudalism—land-rent—continues to play a transitional role during the period of primitive accumulation of capital. One can therefore expect, he argues, a similar role to be played by the specific relations of exploitation (e.g. control of prestige-goods) of another mode of production of transition. This argument depends on the assumption that capitalism is a system of social relations that is largely autonomous from its material referents. This analysis corresponds neither to Marx's view of the contradictions inherent in the material expansion of capitalism nor to any empirical referent in the contemporary articulation of non-capitalist and advanced industrial capitalist modes of production (13).

Three alternative positions on the conceptualization of forces and relations of production have been discussed: one can insist on the dialectical unity but difference between forces and relations of production, or one can fracture the dialectic and then insist on the determinance of either the forces or relations of production. A fourth alternative is logically possible: one can fracture the dialectic conceptually yet straddle both sides at the same time. This is in fact what Maurice Godelier (23, 24, 27) and Jonathan Friedman (20) have done in suggesting that the forces and relations of production should be conceptualized as two separate structures within a functional system. Contradiction between the two structures is thought of as a kind of limiting condition, functional incompatibility between structures within a system.

Godelier argues that the evolution of the mode of production in class societies depends on the play of two antagonistic contradictions—one within the relations of production and one between the forces and relations of production (25, p. 238). The material conditions for the resolution of the class contradiction within the relations of production can only exist outside of it since the productive forces are a reality that is distinct from the relations of production.

Such an interpretation can lead to a mechanistic theory of revolution in which class struggle can be resolved only when the antagonism between forces and relations has evolved to a certain level.⁷ Godelier suppresses Marx's analysis of cyclical crisis and of the distinctive coincidence of class and material contradictions in capitalism. The principal thesis of *Capital* is precisely that in the clash between capital and labor, class conflict expresses the contradiction between the forces and relations of production: there is one central contradiction, not two. This is true under slavery as well as in capitalism (43, p. 463), hence the particular vulnerability of these two systems, but it does not hold in all class societies.

Looking at precapitalist societies, Godelier (24, pp. 364–65; 26) argues that the central problem of primitive societies is controlling access to women and equilibrating their circulation. The importance of this problem derives from the central role of kinship structures in these societies; kinship is at the same time both infrastructure and superstructure (23, pp. 94–95). The economist can easily distinguish productive forces in these societies; but cannot isolate autonomous relations of production. Rather the multifunctionality of kinship structures acts as a limit to the development of the productive forces and explains the generally slow rhythm of their development. Godelier's method of analysis therefore focuses attention on the extent to which kinship relations constrain the independently determined technological system (23, p. 290).

This mode of analysis is carried to its extreme in Friedman's (20, 21) reworking of *Political Systems of Highland Burma*. Friedman very convincingly shows that the materialist conception of irreversible structural evolution more exactly describes the distribution of *gumsa*, *gumlao*, and Shan systems than

⁷The problems in Godelier's conception of forces and relations of production as two distinct systems are discussed by Sève (53); Sève is in turn answered by Godelier (25).

does Leach's Paretian notion of structural oscillation. In his alternative analysis, however, Friedman reverts to a kind of technological determinism quite reminiscent of cultural evolutionism.

Friedman locates the central contradiction of Kachin society in the clash between the system of exchange of valuables (women and bridewealth) and the "potential productivity" of an expansive technological system. Friedman is thus directly applying Godelier's interpretation of capitalist contradiction to the Kachin, despite very different levels of development of the productive forces in the two cases. But Marx (so also Godelier, in principle) is always concerned to show that the real development of the forces of production is contingent—inextricably bound up with the relations of production. Friedman, by contrast, takes the production function as given, and simply assumes: (a) that population will grow, and (b) that the system will expand up to a certain limit with population growth. These are assumptions that Durkheim might have permitted, but never Marx. Thus for both Friedman and Godelier conceptual dissection of the forces and relations of production has unfortunate analytical consequences.

ARTICULATION OF MODES OF PRODUCTION IN A SOCIAL FORMATION A particular conceptualization of a mode of production is analytically useful only as long as it describes the essential forces and relations of production of the economic base in a particular form of society. The base, furthermore, is not self-reproducing; it only can be realized within a social totality. In that sense every mode of production describes not only a base but corresponding forms of superstructure.

In early Marxist-structuralist work (e.g. 56) there was a tendency to assume that the concept of a social formation simply described a combination of the elements of a mode of production, including both base and superstructure. Only if there is more than a single mode of production will the concept of a social formation have any analytical meaning in this line of reasoning. Thus Terray (56, pp. 161–62), in analyzing Guro ideology, tries (unsuccessfully) to identify certain cults with one mode of production and other rituals with another. There is a confusion here of concepts and concrete reality. All phenomenal forms have multiple determinations. If I wanted to interpret the meaning of a Christian parable told by an African pastor, for example, I would look for allusion to both capitalist and precapitalist relations of production.

Yet Terray's error is also related to the order of analysis he prescribes—the analysis of the social formation follows the analysis of modes of production:

In the first place, the various modes of production realized in these formations must be listed, using as a guide a census of the forms of cooperation in use. This is what I have tried to do for the Guro. The next step should be to construct the theory of the modes of production identified; each socioeconomic formation would then appear to be composed of such and such modes of production combined in such fashion that one or other of them is dominant. Like a chemical molecule, a socioeconomic formation would then be defined by its structure, by the nature of its component elements as well as by the way they are organized within the whole (56, p. 179).

This molecular order of analysis strays, unhappily I think, from Marx's method of investigation.

It is sometimes assumed that Marx's analysis of the capitalist mode of production was to be followed by complementary works on superstructure, since *Capital* contains so few references on the state and class struggle. But the analysis of the mode of production presented by Marx in *Capital* presupposes his analysis of bourgeois society as a whole, an historical analysis which exposes the essential role of the state and class conflict in the development of capitalism. Thus in analyzing contemporary societies, it is a methodological error to attempt, as Terray does, to isolate the analysis of a precapitalist mode of production from the analysis of the social formation as a whole. Distinguishing the determinations of capitalist and precapitalist modes of production is part of the process of identifying a mode of production analytically, not methodologically subsequent to it.

THEORIES OF TRANSITION The faulty order of analysis established by structuralist molecular theories of social formations has posed severe methodological problems for the analysis of transition. The concept of a mode of production is used both to define conceptually a particular dialectical (and therefore dynamic) unity of forces and relations of production and, at a different level of abstraction, to delimit a period of history dominated by a particular mode of production. At this second level we may choose to distinguish certain periods or stages of development of the mode of production.

When the analysis of the mode of production precedes the analysis of the social formation, as it does in the molecular theories, then periodization and transition must be analyzed at the first level of abstraction as well. Otherwise one falls back onto a structuralist set of invariant elements that cannot describe any historical specificities at all. Thus some structural Marxists (16) search for a general theory of transition, applicable to the analysis of all social formations. They have suggested, for example, that historical transformations can be understood in terms of a "displacement of the dominant instance" (16, p. 73).

Such general theories, however, are either tautological or misplaced efforts to make concepts do one's analytical work. Historical processes do not arise from the machinations of a model; rather we use models to understand historical processes. There can be no general theory of transition precisely because ". . . each historical 'transition' is different, materially, and therefore conceptually (7, p. 69)." We do not have to explain historical development, for that is constant; what we do have to explain are its structural regularities. These can be understood only by consistently relating the mode of production to the social formation in the process of the analysis.

Alternative Formulations

There is then no general method of analyzing all modes of production in historical materialism. We begin with the *most general elements of production and* begin to formulate the concepts that will allow us to describe an historically specific unity of forces and relations of production. We take as our aim Marx's

own goal—the tracing out of the relationship between forces and relations of production as “a dialectic whose boundaries are to be determined and which does not suspend the real difference” (43, p. 109).

We know that forces and relations of production can be conceptually distinguished, but in analysis there must be a constant dialectical movement between them. Similarly the conceptualization of a mode of production does not permit a narrow focus on productive process; eventually the entire social totality must be encompassed. Since we are analyzing a mode of social reproduction rather than a simple labor process, patterns of consumption, distribution, and exchange within the base, as well as the role of superstructure, must always be considered in any analysis of a mode of production.

There are a number of conceptual difficulties and methodological problems (demonstrated in the preceding section) that follow from these very general directives as soon as one tries to implement them in analysis. I have already discussed these questions in a critical way; here I will try to present a more constructive alternative formulation. There are four texts that seem to me particularly helpful: Marx's (40a, 43) “1859 Introduction,” Balibar's essay on the basic concepts of historical materialism in *Reading Capital* (4), with his response (7) to Cutler, and Terray's (56) *Marxism and Primitive Societies*.

In presenting the constructive framework, I will consider separately the conceptualization of forces and relations of production, then discuss the dialectical unity of the two, and finally move to the analysis of social formations.

FORCES OF PRODUCTION To analyze the forces of production in a particular mode of production, we begin by looking at relations between people and relations between people and their means of production in the productive process. This means describing the various productive units, the tasks performed, tools used, the demographic and ecological contexts, etc. Marx assumes that “In all states of society the labour-time that it costs to produce the means of subsistence must necessarily be an object of interest to mankind” (39, p. 71); thus the sequencing and duration of various productive activities should also be noted.

In describing the forces of production, it is important for a number of reasons not to remain at the level of immediate production. First, since production is a social process, there is always some interdependence of producers which may be manifest only at the levels of consumption and distribution. Focusing narrowly on productive process, one has a tendency to see such a multiplicity of modes of production that it becomes extraordinarily difficult to relate the dynamics of the productive base to the rest of society. This is more or less what happened in early attempts to apply the concept of a mode of production to precapitalist societies in Africa (44, 56, 58); hunting became identified with one mode of production, agriculture with another. Looking only at immediate production also makes it difficult to distinguish exploitation from productive cooperation once one moves to the analysis of the relations of production. This problem is particularly crucial in understanding the basis of sexual asymmetry in different forms of society.

The second reason for not limiting analysis to immediate production is that human social production requires reproduction—of labor and of the means of production. Tools must be replaced, seed kept for a new planting, land renewed through fallowing or fertilization, children borne and nourished, new units of production formed. What appears to be surplus from the point of view of immediate production may in fact be necessary for social reproduction. At the same time, Rey's (49, pp. 35 ff.) criticism of Terray (56) has shown that a narrow focus on immediate production may also lead one to overlook the fact that control of *reproduction* may be a mechanism for the extraction of surplus labor.

As the above discussion indicates, the analytical specification of the forces of production cannot be separated from the analysis of the relations of production. I have emphasized this methodological principle because I have found in my own work that the absence of landed property in Africa is often taken to be derived exclusively from technological parameters; changes in land tenure are then related too narrowly to technological change. Such approaches do not deal satisfactorily with the importance of control over land in the evolution of precapitalist modes of production nor with the articulation of these modes of production with capitalism.

In discussing the method of analyzing forces of production, I have not been as precise as I would like to be. One of the reasons for this vagueness is that there is a paucity of conceptual language for describing the technical relations of non-capitalist modes of production; such concepts are underdeveloped in both the Marxist and the conventional anthropological literature. We have a language that tells us a bit about what precapitalist societies *are not* (minimal division of labor by sex and age, production for use, simple technology, small-scale economy) but that language is distinctly unhelpful in analyzing what they are. Forms of kin-groups that have productive functions in noncapitalist societies for instance, are quite variable; it should be important to describe and analyze them.

The poverty of concepts for analyzing the forces of production in precapitalist societies is of course related to the exclusion of technology from the economy and the corresponding focus on distribution and allocation in economic anthropology. Excellent criticism of the distributive focus of both the formalists and the substantivists are developed by Godelier (25), Dupré & Rey (18), and Meillassoux (45), and I expect the work of Marxist anthropologists on production to redress soon this problem of conceptual lag. Meanwhile one can hold on to Marx's (39, p. 180) own advice: in describing the forces of production it is not a list of articles that is important but the ways in which the articles are made.

RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION In the fundamental human social process—appropriation of nature in production—Marx saw a natural unity of labor and its means of production, the latter consisting both of nature and of its instruments of production that are themselves embodied labor. This position contrasts with that of Hegel, for whom all forms of objectification of labor constitute alienation of the human essence. Marx nevertheless argued that the possibility of true alienation (as opposed to objectification) is inherent in the development of the social division of labor; labor becomes separated from the means of production,

from its own product, and ultimately—in capitalist production—from itself. In looking at social production from the point of view of the social rather than technical side of the division of labor, we are therefore looking at relations of appropriation between persons that are based on the relation of the workers to their product and means of production.

Most of Marx's analysis of relations of production dealt with class societies. He showed that the dynamics of class were rooted in the appropriation of surplus-labor—as either living or embodied labor—by a class of non-producers:

The essential difference between the various economic forms of society, between, for instance, a society based on slave-labour, and one based on wage-labour, lies only in the mode in which this surplus-labour is in each case extracted from the actual producer, the labourer (39, p. 217).

Following the work of Balibar (4), a number of Marxist anthropologists, such as Terray (56) and Rey (49), picked up on this citation from Marx and applied it to their analysis of precapitalist societies. They argued that Engels' tendency to define class in terms of a property relation—ownership of the means of production—is a distortion of the essential determination of class, i.e. the exploitation of the producer by the nonproducer. Rey specifically tried to show that in the "lineage mode of production" in Africa surplus-labor is extracted by elders from dependent junior men.

Rey's emphasis on the category of surplus-labor has been analytically fruitful for anthropologists since it centers attention on the dialectical determination of surplus in a Marxist framework. Whereas cultural materialists and the classical political economists insist that surplus is defined uniquely by technological parameters (productivity and the minimum subsistence requirements necessary for the biological reproduction of labor), Marx, in his analysis of capitalism, argued that the subsistence bundle of workers is socially, not biologically, determined. Both its composition and its size vary with the use-values that workers demand, and can therefore express the outcome of workers' struggle for a larger share of their own surplus product.

This dialectical determination of surplus by the forces and relations of production holds in precapitalist as well as capitalist modes of production, but when no accumulation takes place, when neither labor (in slavery) nor labor-power (in capitalism) has become a commodity, and when workers are not separated from their means of production, surplus is somewhat difficult to define. I am not fully convinced, for example, that exploitation best describes the relationship that Rey analyzes between elders and junior men in African lineages. The analytical difficulties here are related to those Marx discusses in his analysis of communal recruitment of labor for road maintenance.

This is certainly surplus labour which the individual must perform, whether in the form of forced labour or in the indirect form of taxes, over and above the direct labour necessary for his subsistence. But to the extent that it is necessary for the commune and for each individual as its member what he performs is not surplus labour, but a part of his necessary labour, the labour necessary for him to reproduce himself as

commune member and hence to reproduce the community which is itself a general condition of his productive activity (43, p. 526).

A number of important methodological directives can be inferred from this passage and other work of Marx's on precapitalist formations (42). First, the absence of social surplus, and consequently of social relations which can properly be called exploitative, does not mean that there are no conflicts and contradictions within the prevailing division of labor—between sexes, between old and young, between communal head and members. We should in fact expect to find such conflicts and see them mediated in juridical-political relations and in ideological representations. Nor should we expect that such contradictions will never develop into antagonistic class conflicts, for the latter always come from somewhere:

It must be kept in mind that the new forces of production and relations of production do not develop out of nothing, nor drop from the Sky, nor from the womb of the Self-positing Idea; but from within and in antithesis to the existing development of production and the inherited traditional relations of property (43, p. 278).

Another methodological inference that one can draw from Marx's precapitalist work is that in defining surplus one cannot assume that the individual is an independent unit of production. Human production is social; surplus must be defined in relation to a particular social division of labor, not the activities of an individual subject. Third, surplus must be defined in relation to the necessary reproduction of the means of production. These latter two inferences are of course exactly those which were discussed in relation to the definition of the forces of production, and they have brought us full-circle back to Balibar, Terray, and Rey's definition of the relations of production.

Recent reconstructions of Engel's work on evolution are based both on a reading of Marx and a clear look around the empirical world: there are quite evident forms of exploitation that do not depend on ownership of the means of production—taxation, pillage, perhaps absorption of surplus-value in exchanges between systems dominated by different modes of production (43, p. 729). The Balibar/Terray/Rey reformulation leaves us in a logical impasse, however: the relations of production are defined by the extraction of surplus; the existence of surplus is dialectically defined by the forces and relations of production.

The solution to this problem is to return to Marx's narrow definition of the relations of production in terms of relations between persons based on the alienation of workers from their means of production and/or their product. The products of labor are use-values, either objects of a specific form or living-labor ("services") appropriated in production. Surplus-labor may be extracted from people who are not alienated from their means of production, but if so it must be done by noneconomic means, such as the use of political force. Only when labor is separated from its means of production are class conflicts subsumed within the productive base.

The essential difference between the various forms of class-society then does depend on the mode of extraction of surplus-labor; but the mode of extraction of

surplus-labor is determined by the mode of production—the dialectical relationship between technical relations and relations of appropriation between persons. This reformulation of Balibar's position seems to me true to Marx's constant concern with the relationship of people to their means of production as well as to their labor, a concern illustrated in the following discussion of surplus-labor.

The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and, in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows up out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form. It is always the relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers—a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity—which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence; in short, the corresponding specific forms of the state (40, p. 791).

It should be evident from the preceding discussion that if social relations of production are defined as relations of appropriation between persons, then it should be possible to specify relations of production in classless as well as class societies. In fact, deciding whether or not a particular society is a class society depends on a prior specification of both forces and relations of production. The argument by Deluz & Godelier (17) that anthropology studies classless societies in which the social relations of production merge with kinship relations is therefore methodologically unsound. They are clearly correct in suggesting that the concept of a mode of extraction of surplus-labor and the category of a nonproducer are not analytically helpful in classless societies where everyone works, but not in deducing that such societies have no relations of production analyzable apart from kinship structures. There is thus no analytical basis for isolating "primitive societies" as a distinct object of knowledge with distinct methods of analysis.

THE DIALECTICAL UNITY OF FORCES AND RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION In outlining methods of specifying forces and relations of production within a mode of production, I have argued that defining a mode of production is necessarily an analytical process in which one must move dialectically between forces and relations of production. There are no all-encompassing typological schemes through which all possible modes of production can be described. These analytical difficulties are further compounded by two more conceptual choices: (a) it may be necessary to describe the articulation of more than a single mode of production within the base; (b) one may wish to speak of dominant and accessory relations of production.

The articulation of modes of production Marx (43, pp. 106–7) suggested that in any particular form of society there could be more than one branch of produc-

tion, but that in this case one of these branches would be dominant. This aspect of the analysis of modes of production was elaborated in the work of Althusser & Balibar (4), who analyzed all social formations as complex articulations of more than a single mode of production. The analytical status of this claim was never made very clear, but it was used by Terray and others (44, 56, 58) to describe dual modes of production in precapitalist formations in Africa.

The notion that there *must be* more than a single mode of production is based, I think, on a confusion of concepts and concrete reality. In so far as all concrete reality is dialectical, then yes, there are always at least two modes of production—the being and the becoming. But analytically the dialectical concept of a mode of production is intended precisely to describe a dynamic evolving system. Only systems with distinctly different technical relations and relations of appropriation should be analyzed as separate modes of production.

The base need not, therefore, contain more than a single mode of production, but it may do so. Such is the case, for example, when peasants become dependent on the production of export-crops and the purchase of manufactured tools, even though techniques of production do not resemble those of agrarian capitalism. In the present historical context capitalism is the dominant mode of production on a world scale.

Since modes of production are historically specific, there can be no general theory of articulation of all modes of production. Looking specifically at the articulation of capitalism with precapitalist modes of production, we can see that linkages within the sphere of circulation of capital and political domination tend to precede the development of wage-labor relations. The exact nature of these linkages will depend, however, both on the historical stage of capitalist development and on the character of the precapitalist mode of production.

Dominant and accessory relations of production Deciding whether or not the base of a particular social formation is best described as an articulation of two modes of production is an analytical choice: it depends on what it helps you to understand. An alternative to the formulation of plural modes of production may in some cases be provided by the concepts of dominant and accessory relations of production, suggested by Pollet & Winter (48) in their analysis of Soninke slavery. They argued that it would be analytically sterile to describe Soninke slaves either as a class or as simply incorporated into family groups; rather the slave relation was an accessory relation in a mode of production defined by the low level of productive forces and access to land for all members of the society. I do not want to deal with the adequacy of Pollet & Winter's analysis of this particular case, but only to suggest that the concept of dominant/accessory relations may be analytically useful, particularly in the analysis of the place of the household in advanced capitalist society.

In a capitalist system of production, the relations of production are defined in terms of the appropriation of surplus-value from labor by capital in the process of production. Forms of labor which do not correspond to the wage-labor relation cannot therefore be analytically assimilated to capitalist relations of

production. But neither can those forms of labor, such as that of women in the household, that produce necessary use-values be relegated to superstructure. One analytical alternative is to describe the household as a non-capitalist mode of production, articulated with capitalism.

There are clear analytical advantages to this formulation (30). For anthropologists, a coherent analysis of women as a class from whom surplus labor is exploited would facilitate a clean break from the vulgar economism of the Brown (14) approach that attempts to relate ahistorically the status of women to the importance of their productive contributions.

Nevertheless, I suspect that such a formulation has unfortunate analytical consequences. First, it clouds the class dynamics of capitalist society: Third World workers and women moving out of the household do not have the same long-term position within the labor-force and should not have the same analytical status; capital, not men, appropriates the surplus-labor of women in the household; contradictions within a particular sexual division of labor need not have the same antagonism as class conflicts. Second, it glosses over the role the household plays in mediating the contradiction between use-value and exchange value *within* the capitalist mode of production. Third, it is consistent with (though need not imply) theoretical constructs—such as the public/private dichotomy—that universalize expressions of women's subordination in capitalist society as explanatory concepts in all societies.

Thinking of the household as a subordinate mode of production does not therefore seem to be the most analytically useful way of understanding the relation between household labor and capital. The concept of dominant/accessory relations of production could perhaps be an alternative. There is, in fact, an analog for such a construct in Marx's notion of remnant forms of production: ". . . since bourgeois society is itself only a contradictory form of development, relations derived from earlier forms will often be found within it only in an entirely stunted form, or even travestied" (43, pp. 105–6).

The order of analysis I have discussed the problem of analyzing the household in capitalist society at length, first because it is an important issue for Marxist anthropologists, and secondly to make a methodological point. The reconstruction in theory of the relations between modes of production within the base is a process of analytical choice—deciding what constructs best help us to understand a particular concrete historical situation—not an empiricist naming and typing of concrete relations.

So if one studies, as I did, a rural village in Tchad, then what one sees is not the precapitalist sector, but the material expression of two dynamic systems—capitalist and precapitalist modes of production. There is therefore no inner nor outer system; radical anthropology should not consist of showing how the "exogenous" structures of the wider capitalist system impinge on isolated traditional communities or marginal groups, but rather of locating these groups and communities within that structure itself.

Moreover, in analyzing the structure of such systems it is important not to isolate one's analysis of the precapitalist mode of production from the dynamics

of capitalist development, lest one ascribe to tradition that which is in fact determined by the articulation of capitalist and precapitalist modes of production. This methodological flaw, I think, is what underlies Terray's inadequate discussion of the Dioula trade in his reconstruction of Guro modes of production, and Rey's underestimation of the effects of mercantile capital on the evolution of African societies.

THE SOCIAL FORMATION The concept of a mode of production describes a statement of systemic tendency, the dialectical working out of the relationship between forces and relations of production over time. At a more historically precise level of abstraction, the mode (or modes) of production must be analyzed as the base of a social formation that includes juridical-political and ideological relations as well. The elements of this system must always be conceptualized as relations, not as institutions such as kinship or the state. If we wish to understand racism in contemporary American society, for example, we do not immediately assign it to the level of ideology, but instead define the relations—economic, political and ideological—that determine it.

The preceding methodological discussion of analyzing modes of production has hopefully already made clear that one cannot construct a social formation in thought by analyzing modes of production, finding their contradictions, and mechanically assembling the whole. In fact, the mode of production can only be analyzed in relation to the social formation as a whole; superstructural relations allude to the base and often specify its essential contradictions. Since all relations are both dialectical and material, superstructural relations may have their own quality and movement (autonomy) and cannot be reduced to relations in the base. In the last instance, however, the relations of the base determine the form of the whole (1, pp. 200 ff.).

Methodologically the determinance of the mode of production within the social formation poses some analytical difficulties: one must avoid both reductionist economic determinism and arbitrary assignment of preeminent roles to superstructure. It has therefore been suggested that the "determinance in the last instance" of the base be distinguished from the "dominance" of superstructure in a particular historical context (e.g. 56, p. 147). I find Marx's distinction between the order of analysis and the order of presentation or exposition more helpful: in analyzing any problem one must begin with a specification of the mode of production; in presenting one's analysis, however, economic factors need not be particularly important, *if* an analytical grounding for the autonomy from the base of the phenomena discussed is provided.

Knowing is necessarily organizing and specifying the essential determinations and suppressing the nonessential. Social formation is a theoretical construct designed to help us know. It should therefore be obvious that the way in which we analyze the social formation depends not only on the nature of the real world but also on the specific problem we are posing.

The contemporary world can be understood as a single social formation, dominated by capitalism in the base, yet determined by other modes of production and a multiplicity of superstructural relations as well. We can never,

however, specify all of these interrelationships, nor would we know anything if we did. What is important is finding the essential determinants of the phenomena we wish to understand. The constructs mode of production and social formation provide no automatic discovery procedures; they do specify the direction of analysis and help us to organize what we know.

CONCLUSION: THE ANTHROPOLOGIST IN ADVANCED CAPITALIST SOCIETY

In the development of this paper, I have argued that from a Marxist perspective there can be no autonomous discipline of anthropology. We cannot construct an anthropological mirror in which to find the reflection of the basic universal Man, for all individuals are determined by particular historical social relations. Nor can we find theoretical unity by limiting ourselves to the study of precapitalist or primitive societies, for their similarity lies in what they are not rather than in what they are.

Yet there is still a further reason for the necessary unification of anthropology with history and the other social sciences. If we are to understand others, then we must understand ourselves in our social world—as researchers and teachers producing both science and ideology in the context of advanced capitalist society. We cannot exclude the capitalist mode of production from our analytical universe; all societies that we find to study must be understood as an articulation of capitalist and noncapitalist modes of production; all knowledge that we produce must cut through the misrepresentations of our own ideological mystification.

Many anthropologists today are very critical of the functional connections between their discipline and repressive state-apparatuses during the colonial period (29, 54). What we must come to terms with, however, are both the ambiguities of the position of the colonial anthropologists (31) and a politically relevant analysis of our own roles as imperialist facilitators and ideological mystifiers.

When Marx wrote of ideology, he suggested that we find mythical charters for contradictory social practice in historical precedent and natural laws. The quests for origins and for biological universals have both had their place in the development of anthropological theory. But we have also elaborated another ideological genre—explaining historical social conflict in terms of social universals. Class becomes only a manifestation of the stratificatory tendency in all social systems; racism in American society is just a subset of ethnic boundary problems.

Critical theory, the unmasking of ideological mystifications, is therefore an essential aspect of a Marxist anthropology, and it is being done extraordinarily well by people such as Talal Asad (5, 6). Yet, as Marx insisted in the *German Ideology*, critical theory is not enough to change the world. The sense of a Marxist approach to anthropology emerges only when historical materialism is

linked to the revolutionary aims of Marxism-Leninism. Scientific knowledge of our world should inform those political struggles that transform it.

Science is always asking some questions and not others. In Marxist terms these questions should not be derived simply from the play of theory, but rather from the application of theory to concrete and constantly changing historical situations. The current foci of Marxist work in anthropology—imperialism, ideology, racism and ethnicity, women and the household—are all areas where theoretical clarification is needed to understand contemporary political problems. To some extent then Marxist anthropology must be applied anthropology, the university and classroom a locus of political struggle, and praxis an essential aspect of verification.

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