THE COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FEMINISM AND MARXISM BY PHIL SHARPE

The work of the two Feminist theoreticians, Gibson-Graham is inspired by the philosophical standpoint of the importance of discourse: “In this book we focus on the practices and preoccupations of discourse, tracing some of the different, even incompatible, representations of capitalism that can be collated within this fictive summary representation.”(1) This standpoint does not mean that the importance of reality is subsumed by discourse instead what is implied is that discourse forms the most dynamic and significant aspect of how we interpret reality. It is not possible to understand reality without its ideological significance as an expression of competing views. In this context the conception that reality is reflected by consciousness in an uncomplicated manner is disputed and instead reality cannot be known independently of the competing claims about it. (2) Hence the question of what is capitalism is understood in terms of the prevailing ideological claims made about it. This does not mean that capitalism does not express definite economic activity but rather this activity becomes interpreted in a manner that upholds the dominant power of the capitalist class. The most important discourse is the dynamic projection of the interests of the class that aims to perpetuate the capitalist system. This means that capitalism cannot be known and recognised outside of its relation to market ideology. However what is subversive about this philosophical approach of the Feminists is that it is entirely possible for opposing ideologies to become hegemonic and therefore provide challenges to what has been the apologetic justification of the existing system. This development would not in and of itself bring about the demise of the capitalist system but it would mean that it would be possible to promote alternatives that undermine the logic of existing economic activity. Primarily it would be possible to provide convincing arguments in favour of the standpoint of socialism.

Orthodox Marxism would challenge the idealism of this standpoint and argue that capitalism represents structures that cannot be reduced to consciousness. However the proponents of discourse theory do not necessarily adopt this voluntarist approach. Instead what they are suggesting is that capitalism is ascendant because it is ideologically dominant. This is why we have to develop a counter-ideology that is able to oppose and undermine the ideology that upholds the existing system. In other words discourse theory attempts to recognise the dynamic role of ideas without supporting any philosophical system like Hegelianism. Instead it is considered to be compatible with Marxism and the aim of socialism. This is how it is understood by the two Feminist theoreticians and their goal is to challenge the domination of bourgeois ideology in terms of the aims of socialism. In this context we can recognise the progressive character of this form of Feminism even if we do not necessarily generally support its philosophical justification and conception of the relationship between reality and ideas. At its most absurd reality becomes reduced to tension between competing discourses but we can argue that reality is more complex than this viewpoint would suggest. However what is ambitious about the authors approach is that reality becomes fluid and so is potentially changeable and this means that the possibilities for socialism emerge. This is a refreshing alternative to the pessimism of some Marxist thinkers. Any attempt to argue that capitalism is not omnipotent and can be transformed is most welcome in a period of reaction and the decline of support for socialism. However we still have to assess the approach of the Feminists and evaluate whether it provides a credible perspective for change from capitalism to socialism. It could be argued that the standpoint of discourse underestimates the complexity involved in bringing about socialism. On the other hand discourse theory may be considered to be a refreshing change from Marxist materialism and so provides new and imaginative ideas about the prospects for socialism. Whatever conclusions we reach it is necessary to recognise the principled character of this attempt to reconcile Feminist themes with the aims of socialism.

The two Feminist theoreticians have argued that Marxism has adapted itself to the domination of capitalism and so has resulted in the inability to conceive of alternatives to the existing system: “It becomes difficult to entertain a vision of the prevalence and vitality of non-capitalist economic forms, or of daily or partial replacements of capitalism by non-capitalist economic practices, or of capitalist retreats and reversals. In this sense “capitalist hegemony” operates not only as a constituent of, but also as a brake upon, the anti-capitalist imagination.”(3) This comment is valid to the extent that refers to those Marxists who have become sceptical about the prospects of social transformation. However it would be unfair to describe any description of the power of capitalism as an expression of adaptation to its hegemony. For example David Harvey describes the dynamism of capitalism in the following terms: “Capital is a process and not a thing. It is a process of reproduction of social life through commodity production, in which all of us in the advanced capitalist world are heavily implicated. Its internalized rules of operation are such as to ensure that it is a dynamic and revolutionary mode of social organization, restlessly and ceaselessly transforming the society within which it is embedded.”(4) If this was the only message that Harvey was defending it could be argued that he was adapting to the apparent supremacy of capital but Harvey also wants to indicate the contradictions of the system in terms of his conception of time-space compression. (5) However the point is powerfully made by Gibson-Graham that the criticism of capitalism does not necessarily result in the articulation of an alternative to capitalism by orthodox Marxism. The challenge they make to Marxism is to suggest that it should reject its prevailing conceptions of capitalism if alternatives are to be established: “The argument revisited: it is the way that capitalism has been “thought” that has made it so difficult for people to imagine its supersession.”(6) Hence it is necessary to imagine capitalism without the omnipotence of domination as its natural condition. This will enable a vision of the future to be created and a conception of non-capitalist politics to be developed.

It is possible to have sympathy with the standpoint of the authors without supporting important aspects of the approach. Firstly it is not possible to ignore the unpleasant fact that the ascendency of capital is because of its domination. However the dialectic of Marx established the relationship between the very ascendency of capital and the very possibilities for its transformation: “Nevertheless, he based his critical anticipations on the two solid pillars of (1)the realistic assessment of the historical achievements and immense practical force of the capital system, and (2) the identification of the structural antagonisms which tended to undermine it as a viable system of social metabolic reproduction or ‘social life process’.”(7) It is the tendency to dilute this dialectical understanding that results in either pessimism, or the effective rejection of the relationship between structural contradictions and the prospects of change. The latter standpoint results in voluntarism or the underestimation of the difficulties that could undermine the possibilities for social transformation. Hence it is necessary not to forget that capital is an immense structure that continually undermines the development of revolutionary change. However it is also important to remember that capital is a system of contradictions that continually destabilise the system and promote the prospect of an alternative. The very unrest generated about the domination of capital expresses the potential of an alternative. Socialism is being created within capitalism: “For the present embodiment of the capital-relation in an economically advanced material basis is no more than a mere potentiality for the creation of the projected new, radically different, mode of control of socially metabolic reproduction.”(8) Hence it is effectively to reject Marxism if the perspective of the suppression of the relationship between the critique of capitalism, and the historical actuality of the alternative that is being created within it, is justified. However it is a serious accusation of the authors that this act of separation is what is being upheld by many critics of capitalism. The present system is being analysed at the expense of the imagination that can outline the alternative of socialism. This is because of an implicit accommodation to the domination of capital. The alternative of the authors is to establish why capitalism is not as powerful as people consider it to be. In contrast, I would suggest that the most important revolutionary task is to undermine capitalism despite its present omnipotence. Pessimism does not result from recognition of the ascendency of capitalism but is instead the result of acceptance of the power of capital as eternal, and the connected ideological support for the view that no social agency can transform this situation.

The approach of the authors would seem to uphold Meszaros’s dialectical approach. They outline how the emphasis on the dynamism of capital is to ideologically repress the validity of alternatives: “Capitalism’s others fail to measure up to it as the true form of economy: its feminized other, the household economy, may be seen to lack its efficiency and rationality, its humane other, socialism may be seen to lack its productivity; other forms of economy lack its global extensiveness, or its inherent tendency to dominance and expansion….Thus despite their ostensible variety, non-capitalist forms of economy often present themselves as a homogenous insufficiency rather than as positive and differentiated others.”(9) But the point is that this standpoint is not merely an ideological construct which would suggest that capitalism is capable of promoting false appearances that delude people about its capabilities and dynamics. Instead we can argue that capitalism is a system of expansion and so has become a global system, and it is this material reality that generates the ideology that it is an economic system that cannot be surpassed. This is why the issue of defending an alternative to capital is based on the very contradictions that are created by the process of expansion of the system: “Neither the degradation of nature nor the pain of social devastation carries any meaning at all for its system of social metabolic control when set against the absolute imperative of self-reproduction on an ever-extended scale. This is why in the course of historical development capital not simply happened to fatefully overreach itself on every plane – even in its relationship to the basic conditions of social metabolic reproduction – but sooner or later was bound to do so.”(10) The point is that until these limits of expansion were reached the system of capital was superior to any alternative. But the destructive character of the absolute aspiration for expansion meant that capital was creating the prospect of alternatives as the only resolution of this contradiction.

Hence the pessimistic ideological view was to believe that the expansionary impulses of capital could be resolved without the transformation of the social system. Some commentators that define themselves as Marxists become ideologically dominated by this process of expansion, like Frederick Jameson: “In other words what is open about capitalism is its dynamic of expansion (of accumulation, of appropriation, of imperialism). But this dynamic is also a doom and a necessity : the system cannot not expand; if it remains stable, it stagnates and dies; it must continue to absorb everything in its path, to interiorize everything that was hitherto exterior to it.”(11) Thus it is the contrasting recognition that the dynamic of expansion is flawed, and results in contradictions, that can articulate alternatives. It is comprehending the objective and real character of capitalist development which enables us to envisage alternatives. In contrast it is the false and ideological interpretation of the expansion of capitalism which results in the justification of the view that socialism is not possible. This view is based on the implicit assumption that expansion can be perpetual and without contradiction. In contrast, the authors suggest that in order to theorise socialism we require an approach that can generate the importance of plurality, difference and can subvert the stability implied by capitalist hegemony. This approach may have much to recommend it in terms of flexibility and the ability to envisage a vision of socialism. However it is questionable whether the basis of these alternatives is truly created by the limits of the contradictions of the capital system or is instead the result of the application of the imagination – utopian socialism: “Narratives and social representations of existing and potential alternatives to capitalism may begin to resonate, to generate affect, to interpolate subjects, to ignite desire. In other words, they may become compelling, just as so many representations of capitalism now are.”(12)

This criticism does not mean that the approach of Gibson-Graham is being defined as idealist in which the relationship of ideas to reality is inverted. It is not being asserted that the views being expressed have little relationship to political economy. Instead their approach is based on a critique of the common sense understanding of capitalism and as a result a philosophical conception of socialism is being outlined. This standpoint may have value in how we define an understanding of alternatives but the relationship to capitalism is still problematical. This is because what is primary is the emphasis on utopian imagination. What is the major problem is that the emphasis is on the tensions between the discourse of heroic capitalism and the suppressed alternative of socialism that is being repressed by the ideological hegemony of the former. Hence we have a conflict between two conflicting ideological images and the relationship to reality becomes obscured. Consequently is the approach of socialism an expression of what is possible within reality or is it the logical outcome of the tensions within the dominant discourse? This question is never resolved by the authors because they utilise both theory and reference to the empirical. For example, on the one hand they portray the dividing issue in terms of the opposition between essentialism, and its reduction of reality to the dominant cause of capitalism, and the alternative of over-determination that allows for plurality, openness, the role of the political, and the rejection of primary causes. (13) On the other hand they provide empirical examples of the diversity of the class structure. (14)

The conclusion from the approach of Gibson-Graham is that there is not a monolithic class structure and homogenous class struggle but instead society is a site of plural conflicts and diverse oppositions, but the conclusion that results is problematical because it implies that the outcome of these oppositions need not result in revolutionary transformation in order to be of a principled character: “Because class exists is understood as a process that exists in change, the class “structure” constituted by the totality of these positions and sites is continually changing. Projects of class transformation are therefore always possible and do not necessarily involve social upheaval and hegemonic transition. Class struggles do not necessarily take place between groups of people whose identities are constituted by the objective reality and subjective consciousness of a particular location in a social structure. Rather, they take place whenever there is an attempt to change the way in which surplus labour is produced, appropriated and distributed.”(15) In its favour it could be argued that this fluid and open approach enables us to understand the significance of struggles by women in the family to control the terms of the conditions of domestic labour, and the importance of self-employment and causal labour. It is possible to utilise this flexible approach in order to establish forms of struggle and possibilities for socialism that may not have been recognised by the more restrictive methodology of essentialism that reduces all forms of struggle to the primary expression of the opposition between capital and labour. The alternative to essentialism is able to indicate that within capitalism there can be many different forms of the mode of production and that the economic system cannot be reduced to one singular dominant type of economic activity. In other words it is possible to indicate multiple agencies of change on the basis of a standpoint that rejects primary causation and monolithic models of social reality. But there are controversial aspects to this standpoint such as the repudiation of the importance of social structure and the denial of the importance of strategies of revolutionary change. Is it possible to accept the pluralism of this Feminist approach whilst also rejecting the reformist political conclusions?

Meszaros is adamant that change that enables capital to remain dominant will not bring about emancipation: “Thus given the established conditions of hierarchy and domination, the historic cause of women’s emancipation cannot be successfully pursued without asserting the demand for substantive equality in direct challenge to the authority of capital, which prevails not only in the all-embracing ‘macrocosm’ of society but equally in the constitutive ‘microcosms’ of the nuclear family.”(16) In other words the self-imposed limitation of reforms means that ultimately the system of capital is not challenged and so the basis of domination over all aspects of society is not overcome. Any process of partial change must be restricted and ultimately still accepts the logic of the capital system. This means that aspects of hierarchy are not transformed even if they can be modified and provide some form of important change. However the two Feminist authors seem to suggest that partial change that prepares the prospect of systemic change may be realistic when compared to the alternative of total totalising or revolutionary change. This point of view is not entirely invalid in that any serious change does not simply occur as a leap that lacks any pre-conditions. Meszaros argues that what is crucial to the prospects of revolutionary change is the development of an era of structural crisis that creates the impulse for the possibility of revolutionary change: “On a historically relevant scale, an age of transition is initiated the moment the dominant forms of the old order are forced by an acute crisis to adopt remedies which would be totally unacceptable to them without that crisis, introducing, thus, an alien body into the original structure, with ultimately destructive consequences, no matter how beneficial the immediate results.”(17) This standpoint would be an expression of determinist thinking if we were content to rely on objective processes for bringing about change. The point is that these developments can only enhance the pre-conditions for change but cannot express the consciousness and activity that is necessary if revolutionary type action is to occur. In this context what is vital is the role of strategy that can inspire a mass movement to act in order to oppose capitalism. This development cannot become effective without a mass movement adopting a socialist perspective with the aim to overcome the domination of capital. In this context partial changes are not irrelevant but what is crucial is that the forces realising limited developments acknowledge that they are not enough and what is required is continual progress towards the realisation of socialism. In contrast the two authors in an ambiguous manner imply that partial change may be sufficient to bring about the emancipation of socialism from domination by capital. This is an illusion and the actual result will be restricted change that is still subordinated to the logic of the imperatives of capital.

However the authors are making a powerful point when they suggest that the process of change is not determined by a supposed mystical imperative of the class structure. It is not location within the class structure that will result in inevitable action in order to oppose the domination of capital. Instead they argue that it is the process of surplus appropriation that generates class struggle. This view has merit but we could extend it and suggest that the intensification of the class struggle has many complex economic and political reasons. It is entirely possible that the prospect of war can result in social unrest and the radicalisation of subordinated class forces. However what Gibson-Graham also implies is that Marxism has underestimated the role of women and other social forces as an oppressed expression of the class struggle. This is an important point but it is over-optimistic to then claim that these struggles can bring about the partial victory of socialism within capitalism. This point may be accurate but it has to be clarified in terms of outlining how these struggles advance the overcoming of the logic of capital. The actuality of struggles by the oppressed is not sufficient in and of themselves to bring about this type of success instead what is necessary is to indicate how the balance of class forces have changed in favour of the forces of labour and the oppressed and have correspondingly undermined the power of capital. This standpoint of the revolutionary character of partial change could be part of an interstitial conception of the relationship of limited to totalising transformation: “There are two principal ways that interstitial strategies within capitalism potentially point the way beyond capitalism: first, by altering the conditions for eventual rupture, and second, by gradually expanding the effective scope and depth of their operations so that capitalist constraints cease to impose binding limits.”(18) The approach of Gibson-Graham could be understood as compatible with this perspective but they also make concessions to reformism in that they consider limited change as sufficient and able to bring about socialism within capitalism.

The conclusion that the authors make is that the monolithic conception of the struggles between capital and labour has become anachronistic and has been replaced by a more fluid and plural understanding of the importance of class: “Instead the role of class as a social process may be recast in different social and social and theoretical settings, ones in which new political opportunities emerge.”(19) This comment may be a perceptive point about the prospect of new forms of struggle around changing class solidarities. For example, the previously ignored role of women can be outlined as crucial to the class struggle, but the point is that however we define the changing class composition of the working class its struggles can only be effective if the aim is to overcome the domination of capital. In this context what have historically been single issue movements can only realise their role in human emancipation by becoming part of the struggle to overcome the domination of capital. This point also means that the reformist perspective of the labour movement has to be replaced by a strategy that aims to end the existing situation of the hegemony of capital: “Single issue movements, even if they fight for non-integrable causes, can be picked off and marginalized one by one, because they cannot lay claim to representing a coherent and comprehensive alternative to the given order as a mode of social metabolic control and system of societal reproduction. This is what makes focusing on the socialist emancipator potential of labour more important today than ever before For labour is…..the only feasible structural alternative to capital – can provide the comprehensive strategic framework within which all ‘single issue’ emancipatory movements can successfully make their common cause for the survival of humanity.”(20) It could be envisaged that Meszaros is supporting the traditional call for support of the strategic importance of labour but the point is what is important is the aim of the class struggle. What is vital is the strategic aim which represents the conscious attempt to overcome the domination of capital, and in order to realise this aim it could be entirely appropriate that new social forces become the dynamic expression of the perspectives of class struggle. The point is that it is entirely plausible that we recognise the changing social composition of labour, and acknowledge the importance of new layers of the working class, but the aim of emancipation remains the same which is the overcoming of the domination of capital.

The authors argue that the essentialist and organic conceptions of the totality of the capitalist economy has underestimated or ignored the development of the diversity of economic forms such as self-employment, domestic labour and the possibility that these sites of non-capitalism could also express possibilities for alternatives to capitalism: “This feminist attempt to re-theorise and displace the “economy” has powerful and potentially far-reaching implications. It effectively decentres the discourse of economy from the capitalist sector without at the same time establishing an alternative centre for economic theory. At the same time, its emphasis on the diversity of household forms of economy and exploitation opens the possibility of theorizing class diversity in the non-household sector. Once that possibility exists, we may begin to produce a knowledge of diverse exploitations in “advanced capitalist” social formations. Such knowledge is one of the conditions of a politics of class diversity and the absence of such knowledge is one of the conditions that renders such a politics unthinkable and obscure.” (21) This approach is immensely useful if it is able to genuinely indicate the importance of forms of economic activity that have been ignored by Marxism. In this context it could be argued that Marxism has traditionally underestimated the significance of the role of the domestic and household economy. However what is more problematical is the issue of the relevance of these neglected economic forms to the potential for socialism. It could be argued that what is being indicated is the role of diverse economic forms that are subordinated to the dominant mode of production of capitalism. The point that is not established by the authors is the ability of these diverse forms to challenge the prominence of capitalism. Instead it could be suggested that the domestic economy has an important role in upholding the functioning of capitalism. Indeed Gibson-Graham does not dispute this point. Hence it is uncertain what represents the precise status of the forms of economic activity that are not defined as capitalist. This is the issue that has to be clarified if the ontological status of these forms is to be established and their capacity to challenge capitalism is to be indicated.

In relation to the above issue after a discussion of the possible vulnerability of globalisation to the actions of trade unions and other social forces to establish alternatives, the authors comment: “Globalization might be seen as liberating a variety of different economic development paths.”(22) This standpoint is not defined in concrete terms of forms of economic activity that really do challenge the domination of capital and promote alternatives. Instead the issue is reduced to an ideological issue of challenging the sexism of the conception of globalisation, but this approach does nothing to actually promote the modification of economic forms: “Drawing upon feminist re-theorizations of sexual identity, the naturalness of capitalist identity as the template of economic identity can be called into question. We may attempt to make globalization less genital, less phallic, by highlighting various points of excess in its inscriptions – places where the inscription can be seen as uncontrollable or indeterminate, or as potentially inscribing non-capitalist identity.”(23) This complex and ambiguous view actually evades the important issue of strategy in terms of the prospect of establishing the importance of non-capitalist economic forms as an alternative to capital. Instead capitalism is defeated in terms of discourse or ideology but actual power relations are left unaltered. Thus capitalism is defeated in terms of philosophical imagery but it is actually not challenged in terms of the movement of real social forces. What is urgently required is a perspective that can in real terms make progress in relation to the task of weakening capitalism and strengthening the forces of socialism.

Thus it is not surprising that whilst being rightly critical of the Marxist commentators who conceive of capitalism as an un-problematical process of accumulation the actual policies recommended by the authors are fairly modest. They amount to a type of community capitalism: “Certainly it might be possible (in either union or government negotiations with a firm) to arrange that distributions from the surplus be made to a fund that is allocated to local economic initiatives, the class nature of which is not specified but is potentially diverse. Thus, for example, a local development fund might be generated, supported by the company and matched by the union, but administered by the community, which could support a range of different businesses, employment possibilities, industries and class processes.”(24) In a vague and unexplained manner this type of economic form is equated with non-capitalist economic forms and it is asserted that post-Fordist types of production are encouraging economic diversity and the prospect of alternatives to big business. What is not explained is how these changes would undermine capital and result in the advance of socialism. Instead in a dogmatic manner it is assumed that: “All may participate in constituting the economy and the larger society; all harbour various technologies and organizations of production; all are the sites of class processes. And all are subject to change on a continual basis.”(25) But this reference to participation does not amount to workers control of production and the genuine transformation of the relations of production. The mistake being made is that forms of capitalist economic activity are being equated with non-capitalism, and the result is a programme of fairer and more just capitalism.

The authors quite rightly contend that: “Non-commodity production and exchange haunt capitalism as some of its many conditions of existence, for example non-capitalist production of goods and services in households and non-market exchanges both within households and within corporations.”(26) The problem is that they do not elaborate this conception of importance in terms of establishing the prospect of making progress towards socialism. Indeed the issue of what is socialism is evaded by the authors. It seems that the authors are reticent to define what is meant by socialism if that would mean justifying traditional Marxist dogmas about class and capitalism. Instead they are content to reduce socialism to the progress of community capitalism. Where they are genuinely radical is in the realm of discourse, and so are able to defeat capitalism at the level of philosophical terminology and therefore refute its justification of sexism and other reactionary ideologies. What is not established is a strategy that would effectively promote progress in relation to the task of bringing about the demise of capitalism and so ensuring the success of socialism. In this context the feminism of the authors is inferior to the orthodox Marxism of Meszaros. The result of this effective absence of strategy is to advocate reformist perspectives of the modification of capitalism and to reject ‘systemic’ attempts to transform capitalism as dogma. (27)

However possibly the most important problem in their work is caused by the influence of discourse theory. This means the objective reality of capitalism is minimised and instead it is conceived as an ideological construction: “The question is, how do we begin to see this monolithic and homogenous Capitalism not as our “reality” but as a fantasy of wholeness, one that operates to obscure diversity and disunity in the economy and society alike?”(28) This standpoint results in a tragic underestimation of the difficulties involved in bringing about the demise of capital and the success of socialism. If capitalism is primarily an ideological image all that is required to change it is to promote a transformation of consciousness. But this approach is not sufficient to end the domination of capital. Capitalism is a definite reality and so is durable and resilient. Hence changing capitalism cannot be reduced to developing new ideas about its discourse. Instead what is primary is that we develop a strategy that can connect collective mass action to the role of a conscious aspiration for revolutionary change. In contrast the authors consider that it is sufficient to conceive of the plural character of economic activity and consequently imply that change to the domination of non-capitalist economic forms is imminent. This is an illusion. Ultimately it requires the marriage of theory with revolutionary mass practice in order to create a challenge to the power of capital. We cannot avoid this complex task if capitalism is to be truly overthrown. The politics of discourse can only create illusions in relation to these complicated issues.

However there is a constructive aspect of discourse politics. The authors maintain: “To step outside the discourse of Capitalism, to abjure its powers and transcend the limits it has placed on socialist activity, is not to step outside of Marxism as I understand it. Rather it is to divorce Marxism from one of its many and problematical marriages – the marriage to “the economy” in its holistic and self-sustaining form.”(29) It is one thing to recognise the importance of capitalism but it is something else to accommodate to this alienating power and to become pessimistic about the prospect of socialism. The standpoint of discourse theory has carried out one important progressive task: it has opposed the conception of the omnipotence of capitalism and so contributed to the standpoint of revolutionary politics. It represents a welcome alternative to the many justifications of pessimism made by contemporary Marxist theorists.

In conclusion it could be perceived that Feminism contributes little to the development of Marxism. This would be an erroneous viewpoint because the fresh perspective of Feminism is able to outline some important limitations within Marxism. As a result it is possible to understand why Feminism and Marxism can be compatible partners rather than being rivals. However many of the Marxist groups can only conceive the significance of so-called bourgeois Feminism and refuse to acknowledge the socialist aspects of this standpoint. In contrast some other Marxist groups capitulate to Feminism in an uncritical manner but this means that they assimilate its ideas in a crude manner and therefore do not acknowledge the genuine contribution that is being made to socialist theory and practice. The purpose of this review is to outline a friendly critique of Feminist ideas about socialism and as a result indicate that Marxism has been enhanced by the intervention of this approach. Indeed it could be argued that this is a one-sided dialogue because Marxism does not seem to contribute much to the development of Feminism.

Nevertheless despite being praised the book by Gibson-Graham is ultimately disappointing because it does not realise its promise to indicate the importance of non-capitalist economic forms within capitalism. If this promise had been realised it is possible that a major contribution to the Marxist understanding of society could have been established. Despite this disappointment the contribution of the authors is constructive because they have outlined important criticisms of the Marxist understanding of capitalism. Furthermore they have established a philosophical approach that can enable us to recognise the diverse economic forms within existing society. Marxism and Feminism can only enhance each other by developing a process of dialogue in which they elaborate what is meant by oppression and the question of socialism. The success of this interaction would mean that it would be possible to promote an understanding of society that was based on contemporary ideas. It would also meant that the very ideas of socialism had been re-invented for present generations and the result would be the strengthening of socialist culture against the influence of bourgeois ideology. Unfortunately Marxism and Feminism have generally kept a distance from each other and the result has been detrimental for each trend of thought. This review attempts to contribute to the development of dialogue between Marxism and Feminism which is vital for our understanding of society and the struggle for an alternative future.

FOOTNOTES:

(1)J-K Gibson-Graham: The End of Capitalism, Blackwell, Oxford 1996 p3-4

(2)John R Searle: Making the Social World: Oxford University Press, 2010 p17-18

(3) Gibson-Graham op cit p3

(4)David Harvey: The Condition of Post-modernity, Blackwell, Oxford, 1993 p343

(5)David Harvey: The Limits to Capital, Blackwell, Oxford 1982

(6)Gibson-Graham op cit p4

(7)Istvan Meszaros: Beyond Capital, Merlin Press, London p131

(8) ibid p131

(9)Gibson-Graham op cit p7

(10)Meszaros op cit p173

(11)Frederik Jameson: Representing Capital, Verso, London, 2011 p146

(12)Gibson-Graham op cit p20-21

(13) ibid p24-45

(14) ibid p59-63

(15) ibid p59

(16)Meszaros op cit p 190-191

(17) ibid p458

(18)Erik Olin Wright: Envisioning Utopias, Verso, London, 2010 p328

(19)Gibson-Graham op cit p 70

(20)Meszaros op cit p40

(21)Gibson-Graham op cit p118

(22) ibid p139

(23) ibid p146

(24) ibid p166

(25) ibid p173

(26) ibid p245

(27) ibid p256

(28) ibid p260

(29) ibid p264