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The Forgetfulness of Julia Kristeva: Psychoanalysis, Marxism and the Taboo of the Mother

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Abstract

Julia Kristeva is known both for her reinterpretations of psychoanalysis and her regular engagements with the Bible. What is less known is her earlier interaction with Marxist analysis, even though at times she draws upon Marx when she is in a corner. In this article the focus is on one of Kristeva's better biblical readings—the taboos in Leviticus, which ultimately rely on the taboo of the mother—where it can be seen that her dominant psychoanalytical reading can get her only so far. In order to go further we need the forgotten Marxist Kristeva. After finding this Marx in a number of her texts, this study suggests a way in which Kristeva's reading of Leviticus might be filled out with some social and economic analysis.

Keywords: Julia Kristeva, Levitical taboos, taboo of the mother, Karl Marx, sacred economy, fertility.

We may need to be slightly Marxist... (Kristeva 1996: 70).

Julia Kristeva's most well known reading of a biblical text is the one concerning the taboos of Leviticus in *Powers of Horror* (Kristeva 1982: 90-112; see also 1995: 116-17; 2000: 20-22). At the heart of all the various taboos that we find in Leviticus—food taboos (crustaceans, pigs, carrion eaters, and so on), menstrual taboos, taboos over skin diseases, to name but a few—lies what she calls the 'taboo of the mother'. I will have more to say about this in a few moments, but what is equally well known about Kristeva is that her preferred approach is psychoanalysis. Not so much a slavish disciple of Freud or Lacan, she has carved out a path of her own, reinterpreting and recasting the legacy of Freud for her own brand of analysis. There is, however, a third and less obvious side to Kristeva, and that is none other than Marxism. Some might suggest that she has forgotten Marx, or perhaps that she has passed over a youthful Marxist enthusiasm in favour of a therapeutic psychoanalysis. But there is more of Marx to Kristeva than might at first appear.

Three topics, then, are the concern of this article: the taboo of the mother, psychoanalysis, and Marx. In the end, I am less interested in Kristeva's psychoanalysis, except where it brings her reading of the taboos in Leviticus up short. What is far more intriguing is what the return of a repressed Marx might mean for her reading of those taboos. In a nutshell, my argument is that the recovery of Marx provides a far more comprehensive interpretation of the Levitical taboos than Kristeva's limited psychoanalytic interpretation. The present study moves in three stages: tracing the outlines of her initial argument regarding Leviticus 11-14, finding the repressed Marx within Kristeva's work, and then returning to Leviticus to see what it looks like with the help of Marx.

Taboo of the Mother

Kristeva's preferred method, one that she has been reworking consistently for more than three decades, is psychoanalysis. She practices it in her consulting rooms and in her writings, moving from individual to global society with ease, claiming that it offers, through a chance to restart psychical life, the only viable form of human freedom, indeed that it is the vivid, psychological realization of Christianity (Kristeva 2002: 242).¹

1. See also her translation of the biblical and theological elaborations on the death of Christ in psychoanalytic terms (Kristeva 1989a: 130-35).

The problem with this work is that it is at best patchy. There is some very good and there is some absolutely dreadful Kristeva. As far as the Bible is concerned, her readings of Ruth (1991: 69-76), the Song of Songs (1987: 83-100), or Hebrew language (1989b: 98-103) are ordinary and superficial, if not simply bad. She trots out conventional, even conservative positions as though they are blindingly new discoveries. If we thought that Kristeva's patchiness was restricted to her biblical interpretations—stretching herself a little too far perhaps—then we would be mistaken, for her theoretical work shows a similar oscillation between the good and the bad. Given her tendency to offer sweeping analyses of a single theme, too often her work betrays a certain thinness. Thus, we find a theme such as melancholia (Kristeva 1989a) or the stranger (1991) or love (1987) or the abject (1982) traced through signal points all the way from ancient Greece, via the Bible, and into the West. I find myself wanting the tangled materialist complexity of Marxist analysis, not least of which would be to trouble the assumed classicist narrative of such efforts. And like her biblical readings, some of Kristeva's statements are cringingly awful, notably her pronouncement that 'Love will save us' (Kristeva 1996: 121), as are her naïve political comments (see 2002: 255-68) or sweeping social analyses based on anecdotes and personal encounters, whether they be of France or Europe or America or Bulgaria—they represent efforts to pinpoint a global social malaise and offer a cure. When reading these analyses or those vast sweeping books, I find myself dubbing her 'The Analyst of the West', or indeed 'Earth's Analyst'.

Happily for the present study, the reading of the Levitical taboos in *Powers of Horror* (Kristeva 1982: 90-112) is much better and contains a distinct insight or two that have been noticed in biblical studies (Black 2007). Arguably, it is also one of Kristeva's better known interpretations of a biblical text and provides a major element in her theory of the abject. Although she cannot resist her temptation to sweep across vast slabs of biblical text, running all the way from Genesis to Malachi (following a distinctively Christian arrangement of the Hebrew canon), the best part of her discussion of the taboo is the analysis of Leviticus 11-14. Although Kristeva argues that a psychoanalytic reading goes all the way, far beyond those of the historian of religions (by which I suspect she means biblical critics of a historical bent), who stops at the point of identifying loathing as the key to the taboos, and the anthropologist (here she really means Mary Douglas [1966]), who stops a little further on the way by pointing to the role of symbolic systems as markers of social

boundaries, I want to argue that Kristeva's argument is merely the first step. Significant it might be, and I am willing to give her full credit for what is an astute observation about the logic of the Levitical taboos, yet she herself stops far too short.

Let us first see what she argues. The 'originating mytheme' of the Levitical taboos, she concludes, is the 'taboo of the mother' that manifests itself in the prohibition of incest (Kristeva 1982: 105-106). The key text is: 'You shall not boil a kid in the milk of its mother' (Exod. 23.19; 34.26; Deut. 14.21). Boiling a kid in its mother's milk is a metaphor of incest,² she argues, but incest itself points to the fundamental taboo of the mother, by which she means the abomination of the fertile female body. This is the foundation for her notion of the abject, that which is abhorred and vital, rejected and inescapable at the same time. There are, then, three steps, each one pointing to the next: the prohibition against boiling a kid in its mother's milk, the incest taboo, and then the taboo of the mother. Once there, we have the foundational taboo that provides the interpretive key to all the others.

How does Kristeva get to this point? Leviticus 11 contains the dietary regulations made famous by Mary Douglas (1966). Indeed, Kristeva's reading may be read in part as a response to Douglas. In Leviticus 11, the thoroughly carnivorous Israelites may eat the cud-chewing cloven-footers on land (Lev. 11.3, 26), the finned and scaled in the waters (11.9), four-legged winged insects with legs above their feet (11.21),³ but not those who break or mix these categories, such as camel, pig, and those swarming things with many or no feet (11.29-31, 41-43). Kristeva espies three overlapping and determining features of the taxonomy of the food laws: the extension of the commandment 'You shall not kill' to food laws (carnivorous animals are forbidden); admixture between the categories such as cud-chewing and cloven-footed; and then confusion between the fundamental elements of earth, water, and air (Kristeva 1982: 98-99).

The key to Leviticus 11, at least for Kristeva, is ch. 12, but before pondering her reading more closely, let me jump past them and consider

2. Unfortunately, Athalya Brenner's useful essay 'On Incest' does not refer to Kristeva. In fact, Brenner closes out most psychoanalytic readings since they are, she argues, inescapably androcentric (Brenner 1994: 125, 128). Her preference is for the theory of subject-object relations of Melanie Klein.

3. The birds do not gain a positive identification: all we find is a list of those banned, such as eagle, vulture, and ostrich (Lev. 11.13-19). One may imply that they are rapacious or carrion eaters, but the text gives no reason, unlike the other groups.

the obsession with skin diseases in chs. 13 and 14. In two long chapters we find all manner of swellings, eruptions, spots, boils, burns and itches (13.2, 18, 24, 29, 38-39), discussions of their colours, depths, whether they have hair in them or not and what colour that hair might be (Lev. 13.3-4, 19-20, 24-26, 30-31, 36-37, 43), whether they have raw flesh in them or not (13.10), whether they spread or not (13.6-8, 22-23, 27-28, 32-36), whether garments (13.47-59) or indeed houses are infected (14.33-53), and then the endless assessments, rituals, and sacrifices to be carried out at the direction of the priest (especially 14.1-32).

While Kristeva notes that the issue of disease itself is a problem, she is more concerned with the type of disease, namely disease of the skin—the over-riding concern of Leviticus 13–14. And the problem here is that the skin is an ‘essential if not initial boundary of biological and psychic individuation’ (Kristeva 1982: 101). Break that boundary and we have, like the dietary taboos of Leviticus 11, the problem of admixture and the threat to identity. But what is really going on here, argues Kristeva, is that breaks in the skin become another version of childbirth. Like the various emissions from male and female bodies that must be assessed and treated in Leviticus 15, the eruptions, breaks and openings in the skin of Leviticus 13–14 indicate a much darker view of childbirth itself. In fact, these chapters present a decayed body that breaks forth, erupting in all manner of pustules, sores and strange-coloured substances. This abhorrence of the decayed body is a signal for Kristeva of her key category in *Powers of Horror* of the abject. Note carefully, however, that she does not rest with the simple point that giving birth is pathologized by being connected with disease and emissions. Rather, her point is that the generative power of women is the key to these other abominations and regulations. At the basis of the abhorrence of skin diseases and their different pusses (chs. 13–14), as well as the various emissions from female and male bodies (ch. 15), lies the abhorrence of the fertile, generative, offspring-emitting body of women.

Now we can see why Leviticus 12 is the key for Kristeva. Here we find the taboo of the mother manifested in the regulations concerning uncleanness and purification around childbirth:

Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Say to the people of Israel, If a woman conceives, and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean. And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Then she shall continue for thirty-three days in the blood of her purifying; she shall not touch any hallowed thing, nor come

into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying are completed. But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her menstruation; and she shall continue in the blood of purifying for sixty-six days' (Lev. 12.1-5).

In this brief account of the purity rules for childbirth, the birth of a male child produces uncleanness for seven days until his circumcision on the eighth day, whereas for a female child the initial uncleanness is two weeks. The doubling also applies to the period of purification, or 'the blood of her purifying', דְּמֵי טְהוּרָה (Lev. 12.4, 5), after this initial time: for the boy child it is 33 days, whereas for the girl child it is 66 days. At the completion of either period the mother is to offer a yearling lamb (a pigeon or turtledove if too poor) as a burnt offering and a pigeon or turtledove as a sin offering (12.6-8).

After pointing out that the mother is the one defiled rather than the child and that circumcision sticks out in this passage (the violent severance and thereby sacrifice and purification of the boy from the mother⁴), Kristeva moves to her main argument: the abomination of the fertile feminine body is the foundation of the other abominations.⁵ Or rather, the separation between the sexes enacted in this abomination is the primary cause that makes sense of all the other abominations, and even extends to the nature of language and social organization. The mother—fecund, archaic, and phantasmatic—must be separated, identified, objectified, and located in a distinct place.⁶ Through that act everything follows:

...that evocation of defiled maternity, in Leviticus 12, inscribes the logic of dietary abominations within that of a limit, a boundary, a border between the sexes, a separation between feminine and masculine *as foundation for the organization* that is 'clean and proper', 'individual', and, one thing leading to another, signifiable, legislatable, subject to law and morality (Kristeva 1982: 100, italics added).

4. The only point Exum (1993: 127) draws from Kristeva's discussion.

5. Kristeva assumes a universalizing function of these priestly texts, but see Ilana Be'er (1994), who argues that Leviticus provides a priestly ideology of purity at odds with a more relaxed approach to matters such as menstruation in wider Israelite society. The problem here is that her only evidence is other biblical texts, especially narratives. Rashkow, however, argues that the purity laws apply to the whole people (2000: 16).

6. Elsewhere Kristeva suggests that this 'abjecting' of the mother is 'an essential movement in the biblical text's struggles against the maternal cults of previous and current forms of paganism' (1995: 118). I am thankful to Judith McKinlay for pointing this out (2004: 91).

Kristeva's distinct insight is that this logic finds its most succinct formulation in the texts I noted earlier, Exod. 23.19; 34.26; Deut 14.21: 'You shall not boil a kid in the milk of its mother'. Initially, we might object that Kristeva has used a text from outside, from Exodus and Deuteronomy, to make sense of Leviticus 11–14. Yet such an objection would miss the psychoanalytic move that the key lies with what is excluded—with the constitutive exception no less. In the same way that the taboo of the mother is the hidden logic of these chapters, so also a text found outside the chapters of Leviticus reveals the logic of those chapters. Now, all of this is insightful and swift, and, as far as I can tell, the first time such connections have been made.⁷

However, I did emphasize the phrase 'as foundation for the organization' in the quotation above for a reason. Indeed, what we have here is another version of the primary cause, the first mover, and all the appropriate suspicions of mono-causal explanations come to the fore at this point. The terms are telling: the ban on boiling a kid in its mother's milk is the 'unconscious foundation' of the logic of separation that runs not merely through the Levitical abominations, but through the 'whole biblical text' (Kristeva 1982: 105). The text from Exod. 23.19; 34.26; Deut. 14.21 is the key, and its taboo is the cause of all the others. In fact, the taboo of the mother is dietary, incest, and maternal taboo all in one. The main problem with this mono-causal explanation is that it marks an analysis that stops far too short. It is merely a first step—an insightful one, but a first step all the same. It is possible to take such an analysis much further, above all to situate it within a wider context, but for that we need Marx.

Flushing Out Marx

There is no need, however, to add Marx to Kristeva's analysis, to bring him in as *deus ex machina* who can resolve all the difficulties of her interpretation. Rather, he lies hidden within her work, half-forgotten and buried in a dark corner of her mind. In this section I track the strategies

7. Kristeva gains a crucial hint from Jean Soler (1979) concerning the connection between eating and sex in the ban on boiling the kid in its mother's milk. I find it strange, however, that Rashkow's psychoanalytic reading (2000: 38–42), which follows Soler as well as Eilberg-Schwartz (1990), makes the same point without any reference to Kristeva, whose work predates hers, even in translation.

by which Kristeva sidelines, conceals, and bypasses Marx while never really being able to get rid of him.⁸

We need to work backwards to find Marx in Kristeva, a little like her native Bulgaria that she claims to have all but lost (Kristeva 2002: 242-43). Here I would like to focus on a key essay written in 1968, 'Semiotics: A Critical Science and/or a Critique of Science' (Kristeva 1986: 74-88), an essay that is an extended engagement with Marx. At the end of the article we find a Marx who is trumped by Freud. Although Kristeva remains faithful to Marx's critical perspective, she needs to move past him, to show where he falls short.

As far as her 'Semiotics' essay is concerned, two parts of her argument interest me. First, Kristeva identifies what she sees as Marx's great insight, namely, the immanent method. Secondly, she argues that for all his insight, Marx falls short when he comes to discuss the key categories of production and work. At this point, according to Kristeva, Freud provides a far better analysis.

I deal with these two points in reverse. Marx falls short, argues Kristeva, by focusing on the questions of production and work. This is fine as far it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. Freud's great insight was to draw attention to the realm of *pre*-production, and that is located in nothing other than the unconscious. To bring home her point, Kristeva focuses on Freud's category of the 'dream-work'. Here Freud reveals a different type of work that precedes and pre-conditions Marx's notion of work. In the dream-work, where the unconscious and scattered patterns of the dream take on a definite narrative sequence, where the unconscious and conscious intersect, semiotics takes root in the dream's play on signs. And for Kristeva, at this point in her thought, a semiotics indebted to Freud is the way forward from Marx.

In this early essay, Kristeva trumps Marx by identifying a more original cause—the dream-work—that lies beneath Marx's categories of work and production. Now, while we might suspect that she has fallen into the trap of identifying original causes, at least with Marx she is not content to rest with such an argument. In her later work she asserts time and again that psychoanalysis outruns Marx in the final stages, providing a more comprehensive answer than he ever could. Thus, Freud achieves

8. Here she has much in common with Slavoj Žižek, for both of them reflect in their personal and intellectual trajectories the recent history of Eastern Europe (see Boer 2007a).

Marx's program of trying to unite the increasingly fragmented fields of human activity, or at least those separated fields of theory and action (Kristeva 1996: 151, 198). Further, Freudian social analyses and solutions outperform an exhausted socialism (1995: 209-10). For Kristeva, then, psychoanalysis is not merely more comprehensive than Marxism, but it also provides the personal, social, and political healing that socialism fails to provide (1996: 24-25).

I am, however, reading Kristeva's 'Semiotics' essay backwards. Earlier in the essay she identifies Marx's great insight, what she calls his crucial 'epistemological break' (Kristeva 1986: 79). And that is, quite simply, the immanent method, a method that emerges from the item or work in question rather than from outside. It also means that criticism must arise from the object under criticism. Thus, if we want to interpret the work of someone, say, like Kristeva, it means that we will use their own methods to interpret them. For Kristeva, Marx is 'the first to practise' this method (Kristeva 1986: 78).⁹

Kristeva's interest, at least at this moment in her thought, is on the implications of Marx's insight for semiotics. Thus, 'No form of semiotics, therefore, can exist other than as a critique of semiotics' (Kristeva 1986: 78). Or, in the dense detail of her early writing, semiotics is the very act of producing models. Let me quote Kristeva again, according to whom semiotics is 'a formalization or production of models. Thus, when we say semiotics, we mean the (as yet unrealized) development of *models*, that is, of formal systems whose structure is isomorphic or analogous to the structure of another system (the system under study)' (Kristeva 1986: 76).

Marx, it seems, could not be more important, marking a fundamental break in the history of knowledge. In effect, Marx subverts 'the terms of a preceding science' (Kristeva 1986: 80) in the terms of that science itself. So he overturns economics by means of economics. For instance, he takes the term 'surplus value' from the mercantilists (Smith, Ricardo *et. al.*) and shows how the term means not the 'addition to the value of a product' but the extraction of profit in the wage-relation of work. The key is that he does so *from within* the theories of the mercantilists. Like their own noses, they simply cannot see the proper origins of surplus

9. In her early *Revolution in Poetic Language*, she also gives Marx his due for pointing out that the signifying process lies outside the sphere of material production (1984: 105).

value. Once this is done, we get the generation of a whole new set of terms that marks the rise of a new science.¹⁰

Marx is even more important for Kristeva than might at first appear. This essay on semiotics is not the only place where Kristeva must rely on Marx. Let me give a few examples where Kristeva cannot dispense with Marx, especially at a sticky spot in her argument. The first is historical, the second political, and the third deals with feminism. In an effort to deal with the rise of the avant-garde in literature—the moment of modernism from the end of the nineteenth century and embodied in the work of Lautréamont, Mallarmé, and Bataille—Kristeva is able to mix good Marxist social theory with the best of them. At moments like these, her efforts to depict the big picture with a few firm, rapidly drawn lines, work extremely well. Thus the avant-garde is a signal and effort to deal with the massive changes that took place with the comprehensive onset and spread of capitalism: ‘A new phenomenon has arisen since the rise to power of the bourgeoisie, the onset of the free market, the inflation of capital permeating relationships of production and reproduction and dominating them, and the crisis of the patriarchal family’ (Kristeva 1996: 96). At this moment of crisis in state, family, and religion, capitalist excess and restructuring take precedence over restraint and structure. Everything must give way! Here, of course, she is paraphrasing the famous statement concerning the constant revolutionizing of capitalism in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*—‘All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind’ (Marx and Engels 2004).¹¹ Psychoanalysis then becomes one of the new

10. Kristeva herself is rather well-known for a series of new terms—‘semanalyse’, ‘abjection’, ‘intertextuality’, and so on—at the emergence, or even the hint or semblance of an emergence, of a new method or idea.

11. The full paragraph reads: ‘The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind’ (Marx and Engels 2004).

modes of dealing with such profound social and economic changes, especially the relationship between the unconscious and the social restrictions Freud argued were crucial for any society to function.¹²

Secondly, on a more political note, Kristeva's definition of the 'left' is a moment of sheer insight. Rather than seeing it as one side of the eternal shifting binary of left and right in our current political landscape, she sees the left as 'the locus where the question of politics, and above all of the limits of the political (from the viewpoint of symbolic formations, that is, the acquisition of culture and knowledge), can be formulated and dealt with' (Kristeva 1996: 174). A psychoanalytic version, if you will, of the Marxist notion of the 'withering away of the state'. But it is also an extraordinary recognition of the Marxist point that politics is, after all, part of the domain of culture and religion and knowledge and ideology, *and* the point that this is what Lacan's notion of the Symbolic—of language and society and culture—is really on about. In the crossover, then, between Lacan's Symbolic and Marx's superstructure we find politics. It is not only a point where political battles are fought, but where the left identifies itself by identifying the limits of politics and thinking beyond them.

Finally, and crucially for my engagement, when she faces difficulties in her dealings with feminism, Kristeva reverts occasionally to Marxism. She has, infamously, kept feminism at an arm's length, especially American liberal feminism. She teases such an audience with comments like the one concerning the phallus, which, as 'numerous scholars' have shown, is indeed the basis of signification and religion (Kristeva 2000: 88). More substantially, in her trilogy, *Female Genius*, she focuses on three women who were independent from and placed themselves, like Kristeva herself, above and beyond feminism as well as Marxism—Hannah Arendt, Melanie Klein, and Colette (Kristeva 2001, 2004a, 2004b). From this perspective, Kristeva can then view feminism in terms of three overlapping stages: the demand for political rights by the suffragettes; the assertion of ontological equality; and, since May '68, the search for sexual equality. The problem, as far as Kristeva is concerned, is that feminism is trapped between two dogmatisms (Kristeva 1996: 7), either the dogmatism of 'leftism', as she tends to call it, or a conservative dogmatism of patriarchy and the right. Feminism tends

12. For other examples, see Kristeva's argument for a different social context for gender relations in China (Kristeva 1996: 100-101), or the analysis of the dilemmas faced by Mitterrand's socialism in France (Kristeva 1996: 154).

either to mirror this second dogmatism, the one that it opposes, or take up communist dogmatism in its drive for liberation for all women. Caught between a rock and a hard place, it will not be long before she trots out the conventional argument that we need to avoid the two totalitarian extremes of Fascism and Stalinism—a refrain from her earliest texts (Kristeva 1980: 23)—by means of some mythical middle way. Otherwise, feminism finds itself slipping into either form of totalitarianism.

Her answer to this problem is as important as it is intriguing. In response to feminist agendas for social change based on gender, she states:

...what is happening now, in Eastern countries, is that the collapse of the Marxist and socialist idea is showing something else. It shows that we can arrive at a better society not before bourgeois individualism but after. I think they ought to revise their ideas, seeing what is happening in the East now. Because many feminist ideas were unconsciously calculated and modeled on the image of communist and Marxist countries, as if a progressive and communitarian ideology could produce the economy of bourgeois society. *Now one realizes that one cannot just make the system of a society from the model of ideology. It is necessary to transform it.* But not on this side of it, but by passing to the other side (Kristeva 1996: 45, emphasis added).

Just when I began to suspect that Kristeva was yet another liberal in disguise, or perhaps even a conservative who bemoans a supposed religious crisis generated by the deterioration of belief (Kristeva 1995: 221) and thereby the end of viable revolt (2000: 24), she produces an extraordinarily central Marxist point. Too often Kristeva invokes terms such as freedom and democracy (without any qualifiers), or ‘plurality of consciences’ (1996: 51) or the importance of the individual, and dismisses communism as inherently totalizing. But here she produces a statement that would have been heresy in the countries of ‘actually existing socialism’ such as Bulgaria, but one that is deeply faithful to Marx. First, against any notion of idealism, she states bluntly that an ideology—here feminism—cannot a society make. Secondly, feminism, understood as a progressive and communitarian ideology, is incompatible with bourgeois society.¹³ You cannot just take a Marxist ideology and graft it onto a capitalist one. Thirdly, the society desired by feminism *and* communism must come *after* bourgeois individualism—i.e. liberal-

13. Kristeva makes a very similar point concerning the incompatibility between Mitterand’s socialist agenda and France’s capitalist economy in the context of the European common market (1996: 154).

ism—and not before. This flies in the face of the argument that became increasingly common in former communist countries, namely, that it was possible to bypass fully fledged capitalism and move straight to communism.¹⁴ Here Kristeva calls on the Marx who argues that the full run of capitalism must be experienced first before anything different may come into being. One might argue that with globalization, brought about by the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, we are only beginning to glimpse what a full capitalism might be, what a fully commodified world might look like.

This is the Marxist Kristeva who interests me. There are four points that may be drawn from the quotation above: no gender without political economics; no ideological change without social and economic change; no mismatches between bourgeois ideology and feminism; a communitarian rather than an individual feminism focused on rights. In short, she argues for Marxist feminism rather than bourgeois feminism, but a Marxist feminism willing to bide its time and let capitalism run its course. It is the first and last of these—no gender without political economics and a communitarian rather than individual feminism—that I wish to bring with us when we return to reconsider Kristeva's interpretation of Leviticus 11–14 and the taboo of the mother.

The Sacred Economy, or the End of Monocausality

To reiterate, Kristeva's main point in the above interpretation is that the various taboos in Leviticus 11–14, especially those relating to food, skin diseases, bodily emissions, and to purification after childbirth, may be understood in terms of the ban on boiling a kid in its mother's milk (Exod. 23.19; 34.26; Deut. 14.21). As a metaphor for the incest taboo, its underlying logic is the taboo of the mother, or the abhorrence of the fertile female body.

If we allow Kristeva's repressed Marxism to speak, then the argument begins to look somewhat different. In particular, I would like to pursue the implications of the two elements in her work that I identified in the previous section: no gender without political economics and a preference for communitarian over against individualist feminism. Indeed, in light of these principles, Kristeva's mono-causal argument concerning the

14. In a further twist that echoes Chinese arguments, it is sometimes asserted in post-communist countries that there are many capitalisms, and that there a gentler form might grow.

taboo of the mother becomes decidedly untenable. The problem with mono-causal explanations such as the one proposed by Kristeva is the first half of the term, the 'mono'. In isolation the taboo of the mother takes on an over-arching role, but such a mono-causal approach is not consistent with that dimension of Kristeva's feminism that I am stressing here, namely, the communitarian agenda and the connection with economics.

What happens to the taboo of the mother when it is understood in a wider context? To begin with, that taboo of Leviticus 11–14 is closely connected with the obsession over the womb. Time and again Yahweh closes and then opens wombs, whether in Pharaoh's court when Abram and Sarai visit (Gen. 12), Sarai's own womb, and those of Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel (Gen. 24–25; 29). This obsession over the womb, along with the taboo of the mother, is part of a wider concern with fertility, not only of a woman's body, but also of the soil and domestic animals. The over-riding metaphor that links them all is one of a receptacle for seed, whether that is a woman for a man's seed, the ground for crop seeds, or female animals with the seed of male animals. The catch is that, at an ideological and deeply patriarchal level, Yahweh in his various names ultimately is seen to control and thereby *allocate* such fertility, as the legislation that separates the producing mother indicates (Lev. 12), as do the narratives of opening and closing wombs of both women and animals, as does the fear of famine and celebration of plenty.

I suggest, then, that the theme of fertility operates according to a logic of allocation—indeed, that it can only be understood within the framework of what I call an allocative economics. For such an economics, the primary problem was twofold: accounting for production outside human control and knowledge, and ensuring adequate allocation of such production.¹⁵ The key issue then becomes the allocation of what produces on its own. How does one account for production outside human control? By the action of the deity, who is responsible for the fertility of the soil, rains, open wombs and so on. How does allocation take place? Through the decisions of the deity, a process that now stands in as a code for those with power to make decisions concerning allocation—chieftains, foreign emperors, and other sundry tyrants. Since the deity is central to the process of accounting for productive capacities and to the allocation of such producing items, I would suggest we use the term *theo-economics*

15. For this reason 'allocation' is a better term than 'distribution', since the latter is based on the perspective of the object produced.

or the *sacred economy* to designate the economic logic behind such an allocative economics.¹⁶

In this light, the taboo of the mother is hardly an isolated element, nor indeed is it a primary cause: it is but one part of a larger item, that of fertility, within an even broader context, that of theo-economics or the sacred economy. There are, of course, other items—or what we might call ‘regimes of allocation’—in the sacred economy such as land, family, war, patron–client relations, and the judiciary. For instance, in regard to the allocation of land and agricultural technology, there was no legal category of ‘private property’. Rather, what we find is an over-riding ideology that land is allocated by the deity. Thus, in the political myth of Genesis–Joshua, Yahweh allocates land to Israel in the long-delayed promise of a land that runs as a thread through the whole story.

Or, in the case of the family, the structures of kinship determine the allocation of a whole series of items, including land, women, and animals. Kinship patterns determine the allocation of women in terms of endogamous or exogamous partnering, and thereby the allocation of children, especially sons. But kinship also sets the way inheritance passes on through the clan, in terms of land and animals, as well as the booty of war (kinship structures are intrinsic to the nature of the militia). The whole kinship structure, no matter how shifting and artificial it might be, justifies itself by referring to the role of the deity.

Further, the militia, or the regime of the war machine, provides another mechanism for the acquisition and allocation of land, animals, and women. The narrative of the conquest of Canaan, however fictional it might be, indicates the way such allocation—or rather, *re-allocation*—was understood (Josh. 13–21). Along with kinship and the war machine, the patron–client regime is another, overlapping way of dealing with the distribution of land, women, animals, and booty, but also more intangible items such as protection and service. And then there is the judiciary, whose prime role in the ancient Near East was to oversee the workings of allocation. It is not for nothing that many of the laws in the Hebrew Bible—of which Leviticus 11–14 is a small section—deal with the allocation of land, the control of women, the patterns of kinship and inheritance, and the nature of patron–client relationships. The fact that

16. The brief description here is only a thumb-nail sketch of a reconstruction of the sacred economy. It is a summary of a much more comprehensive presentation, where the reader may find all the appropriate references (Boer 2007b).

these laws are presented as given by the deity is yet another signal of the dominance of the sacred in an allocative economics.

A sacred economy, as I have sketched it all too briefly, is not determined by a unique item or two, but by the way the various elements combine to make a whole. Thus, while kinship, war, patronage, and the judiciary are found in other economic systems, it is their combination as modes of allocation that makes the sacred economy unique. And the purpose of these different 'regimes of allocation' is to ensure the allocation of that which produces apparently of its own accord, namely, land, animals, and women.

Conclusion

This, I would suggest, is the context in which Kristeva's taboo of the mother operates. Rather than the prime cause of the system as whole, the taboo of the mother is but one element in a wider concern of fertility, a concern that includes those of animals and land. The key is that all of them produce by themselves, and so we find an over-riding effort to control that auto-production. Of course, that economic system is threaded through with all manner of contradictory patriarchies that ultimately cannot hold the system together. If the ideology is one of sacred control, where the deity is the one responsible for controlling fertility and for allocating the products, then the economic system relies on kinship structures, warfare, the patron-client system and the judiciary to ensure such allocation. That ideology may be called a 'sacred' one, and its purpose is to justify an economic system of (re-)allocation—hence the 'sacred economy'.

I have sought to bring a repressed Marx out in Kristeva's work and then to bring a more Marxist Kristeva back to what is probably her most influential reading of the Bible, the taboo of the mother in Leviticus 11–14. Her psychoanalytic reading of this text brings to the fore that taboo as the key to the text, if not the whole Hebrew Bible. However, when Marx returns to Kristeva's analysis, we find that her delineation of such a taboo is but the first step. For it turns out that the taboo is merely part of a wider socio-economic system.

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