

## *SAMPLE ESSAY FOR STS300, 2002*

### **The ghosts and the movement**

by Essie Ist

*Scene:* Early 2002 at the gathering of the 20C great ghosts. In attendance are the ghosts of the twentieth century's most influential public figures from a dozen major countries. Adolf Hitler is present from Germany and Winston Churchill from Britain. This is the third annual meeting and everyone knows everyone else.

Ghost of Mao Zedong (1893-1976): "Hello Gandhi! I can always recognise you from a distance by your white loincloth. I always wanted to ask you, is it true that you were once asked by a journalist 'What do you think of Western civilisation?' and you answered 'I think it would be a good idea!'"

Ghost of Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948): "Well, lots of people have repeated that story. To be honest, I can't really remember whether I said it. I talked to dozens of people every day and, like you, produced a vast quantity of writing."<sup>1</sup>

Mao: "Well, it's a good line. But, alas, one thing we have in common is that our countries have pursued the western capitalist road after our deaths — even if we differ about the alternative."

Gandhi: "That's right. My successors such as Vinoba and JP<sup>2</sup> tried to promote swaraj, sarvodaya and satyagraha,<sup>3</sup> but the Indian government has created massive industrialisation, inequality and nuclear weapons."

Mao: "Well, I must say that your picture of harmonious village democracy with everyone sitting around producing khadi<sup>4</sup> is idealistic. What was needed was leadership from a party to carry forward the revolution in the name of the proletariat."<sup>5</sup>

Gandhi: "With all respect, look where that got China: a dictatorship and the capitalist road combined!"

Mao: "We've been through this debate before! Let's agree to disagree. One thing I wanted to ask you: what do you think of the environmental movement? Of course the second wave only

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<sup>1</sup> Mahatma Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1958-1991).

<sup>2</sup> Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan, the two most prominent figures in the Gandhian movement after Gandhi.

<sup>3</sup> Swaraj means self-rule, sarvodaya means "welfare of all" and satyagraha means "truth-force" or nonviolent action.

<sup>4</sup> Khadi: hand-spun cotton cloth.

<sup>5</sup> The proletariat is the working class, which sells its labour power to employers, in opposition to the ruling class. See

developed in the 1960s, long after you died, but I never paid much attention in my later years, being too preoccupied with the Cultural Revolution.<sup>6</sup>”

Gandhi: “Production should be the minimum required for human needs. If everyone is involved in bread labour,<sup>7</sup> the environmental impact will be minimal. The village self-government would deal with local problems as they arise. The Bhopal disaster<sup>8</sup> would not be conceivable under swaraj. A separate environmental movement should not be necessary.”

Mao: “Well said. We agree on one thing: the initiative should come from the grassroots, though I think the party should take the lead. But let me tell you my worry. Back in the late 1950s when I launched the Great Leap Forward as a process of village-led industrialisation, there were thousands of backyard steel-producers. That was, I now recognise, very polluting.<sup>9</sup>”

Gandhi: “China definitely needed an environmental movement!”

Mao: “I would never have allowed an independent environmental movement. The leading role of the communist party must always be maintained. If environmental problems actually hindered the progress of the revolution, then as leader I would have fostered environmental awareness in the party leadership.”

Gandhi: “But isn’t the whole point of the environmental movement the fact that leaders were not taking the problems seriously? The old Soviet Union had the most horrific environmental record,<sup>10</sup> worse even than most capitalist countries. Rachel Carson triggered the rise of the environment movement in the 1960s with her book about pesticides.<sup>11</sup> I’m sorry her call was not taken more seriously in India — that might have prevented Bhopal.”

Mao: “There you go about Bhopal again. A few sacrifices must be accepted to achieve the revolution.”

Gandhi: “I beg to differ. We should judge a society by the welfare of its weakest member. Sacrifices should be made first by the leadership, not the suffering masses.”

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<sup>6</sup> Mao stimulated the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s as a way to reinvigorate the revolution. It ended up causing immense damage to the society with millions dead.

<sup>7</sup> Bread labour is work to produce the necessities of life.

<sup>8</sup> In 1984, a massive release of chemicals from a US-owned pesticide plant in India killed thousands and injured hundreds of thousands, the worst industrial accident in history. See, for example, T. R. Chouhan and others, *Bhopal: The Inside Story. Carbide Workers Speak out on the World’s Worst Industrial Tragedy* (Goa, India: The Other India Press; New York: Apex Press, 1994); Sanjoy Hazarika, *Bhopal: The Lessons of a Tragedy* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1987); Paul Shrivastava, *Bhopal: Anatomy of a Crisis* (London: Paul Chapman, 1992, 2nd edition).

<sup>9</sup> Mao neglects to mention that censorship combined with demand for favourable reports of production increases allowed a great famine to ensue, with 20 to 30 million dying. See Article 19, *Starving in Silence: A Report on Famine and Censorship* (London: Article 19, 1990); Jasper Becker, *Hungry Ghosts: China’s Secret Famine* (London: John Murray, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Boris Komarov, *The Destruction of Nature in the Soviet Union* (London: Pluto Press, 1981).

<sup>11</sup> The key was Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

Mao: “That sounds very noble, Mr Gandhi, but not many other leaders have followed your example. That includes leaders of environmental groups who go jetting around the world. In fact, the early environmental movement grew out of the self-interest of the bourgeoisie.<sup>12</sup>”

Gandhi: “Well, the left was certainly hostile to early environmentalists,<sup>13</sup> but I notice that left-wing parties have long since hopped on the environmental bandwagon. Just look at any issue of *Green Left*, for example.<sup>14</sup>”

Mao: “That’s reasonable. The early movement was more a defence of upper class privilege. Once the movement gained mass involvement, especially by the working class, then left-wing involvement was appropriate. Need I remind you that the early leaders of the famous green ban movement were members of the Communist Party of Australia?<sup>15</sup>”

Gandhi: “You make it sound like the party is always right. Surely some of the left’s involvement is opportunistic.”

Mao: “Perhaps some sections of the left, but with a rigorous Marxist-Leninist line that is not a problem.”

Gandhi: “Pardon me. I’m sorry that my comment about opportunism seemed like point-scoring. I think that both of us can rise above that. My approach of satyagraha is above all about searching for the truth and I understand that Marxism is based on a rigorous analysis of objective conditions. Let us proceed to assess the role of the environmental movement with our best intellectual skills.”

Mao: “You are always so high-minded, Mr Gandhi, and I’m pleased to accept your gesture of good intention. To qualify my earlier comments, I would say that the environmental movement has mass elements, but its membership is still drawn largely from privileged sectors of the population — especially well-off people from the rich countries.”

Gandhi: “I thank you for joining me in a quest for truth. It is hard to be sure what to think of the environmental movement, since most of the criticisms come from vested interests such as corporations.<sup>16</sup> I did discover, in a journal published in my own country, some criticisms from within the environmental movement.<sup>17</sup>”

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<sup>12</sup> The bourgeoisie normally means the middle class, but for a Marxist like Mao it means the ruling class, namely the capitalists. But this is inaccurate since the movement was largely middle class.

<sup>13</sup> Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “A critique of political ecology,” *New Left Review*, No. 84, March-April 1974, pp. 3-31; James Ridgeway, *The Politics of Ecology* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970).

<sup>14</sup> See, out of many examples, Peter Deerson, “Errinundra—whose forest is it anyway?” *Green Left Weekly*, 10 April 2002, p. 11, and Jim Green’s many articles critical of nuclear power.

<sup>15</sup> Green bans are trade union bans against environmentally damaging and other socially undesirable projects. See Jack Munday, *Green Bans and Beyond* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1981); Richard J. Roddewig, *Green Bans: The Birth of Australian Environmental Politics* (Montclair, NJ: Allanheld, Osmun, 1978).

<sup>16</sup> See Sharon Beder, *Global Spin: The Corporate Assault on Environmentalism* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Hazel Notion, “Greenpeace—getting a piece of the action,” *Philosophy and Social Action*, Vol. 16, No. 3, July-September 1990, pp. 33-36; Timothy Doyle, “Environmental movement

Mao: "Tell me more!"

Gandhi: "The basic point of these articles is that the people with the most power and influence in environmental groups are serving their own interests, which often means selling out the environment. At the very least, ordinary members are disenfranchised."

Mao: "Which goes to show that the leading role of the party must be maintained."

Gandhi: "Surely it shows the danger when anyone gains a position of power. We must promote grassroots democracy."

Mao: "You are truly an anarchist."

Gandhi: "As you know, I believe the means must reflect the ends. To achieve a nonviolent society, we must use nonviolent means. So perhaps you could call me a nonviolent anarchist.<sup>18</sup>"

Mao: "We've gone off track again. What does this imply about the environmental movement?"

Gandhi: "The environmental movement should use means that reflect its ends. That means that environmentalists should have the purest motives and live exemplary lives. They should be environmental satyagrahis.<sup>19</sup>"

Mao: "We all know how hard that is. I know from your autobiography that even you struggled through your life to live a life in accordance with your principles.<sup>20</sup>"

Gandhi: "True. I know that communist leaders are always bound to keep the interests of the proletariat uppermost in their minds."

Mao: "That's too much of a psychological approach to the issue. The party by its very organisation and ideological line embodies the interests of the proletariat."

Gandhi: "Let's not debate the theory of the vanguard party just now.<sup>21</sup> I know your reservations about reducing objective conditions to psychological factors. But can we focus on the environmental movement?"

Mao: "For that, I don't mind looking at psychology. So, what should be uppermost in the minds of leaders of the environmental movement? The environment? Or social change to lay the foundation for better treatment of the environment? Or the health of the movement itself?"

Gandhi: "That's a tough question. Let me think. From my viewpoint I'd have to say that serving the welfare of all is the foremost consideration, as a method and as a goal. That means

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power brokers," *ibid.*, pp. 37-52; Lorna Salzman, "The decline and fall of Friends of the Earth in the United States," *ibid.*, pp. 53-64.

<sup>18</sup> As indeed some commentators have done. See for example Geoffrey Ostergaard and Melville Currell, *The Gentle Anarchists: A Study of the Leaders of the Sarvodaya Movement for Non-violent Revolution in India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

<sup>19</sup> Satyagrahis are those who promote satyagraha.

<sup>20</sup> Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1927).

<sup>21</sup> Gandhi knows some critical works on Marxism, such as Michael Albert, *What is to be Undone: A Modern Revolutionary Discussion of Classical Left Ideologies* (Cambridge, MA: Porter Sargent, 1974).

social change towards sarvodaya. That will lay the foundation for adequate treatment of environmental problems.”

Mao: “From my viewpoint, creating a communist society is the central goal. Once that is achieved, environmental goals will be achieved as a by-product. So we agree: social change is the key.”

Gandhi: “I think we are both from a generation that placed priority on people. I can’t easily get my head around these greenies who want to protect forests or even rocks for themselves, not just as a means to serve human interests.”

Mao: “You’re right. I tried reading about deep ecology<sup>22</sup> and it’s totally alien.”

Gandhi: “I managed to get an inkling of what deep ecologists are on about when I listened in on a conversation by some earnest young activists. They said that wilderness could be valuable even if no one ever went there. It was sort of as if they believed the wilderness was a person.”

Mao: “That hardly accords with the labour theory of value. But I suppose that’s why it’s hard for me to understand.”

Gandhi: “My friend, I think it’s time for us to mix with some of the others.”

Mao: “Yes, I should say hello to Comrade Stalin. It’s strange that no one has yet appeared from the United States at one of these gatherings.”

Gandhi: “I’m hoping that it will be Martin Luther King, Jr., a satyagrahi after my own heart.”

Mao: “Just as long as it’s not Ronald Reagan!”

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## **Brian’s comments on Essie’s essay**

### **Criterion 1: knowledge of case study**

You have a good knowledge of the history of the environmental movement and its susceptibility to the blandishments of power. You’ve done very well in focussing on how to achieve environmental goals (namely through an environmental movement or through sarvodaya or the party), avoiding the temptation to carry on about problems and their causes.

To improve, you could give more indication of the diversity of the movement in terms of goals and methods, especially orientations relevant to Gandhi and Mao.

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<sup>22</sup> Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology* (Salt Lake City, UT: G M Smith, 1985).

## **Criterion 2: understanding of theories**

You show an excellent understanding of Gandhian theory, especially by the way your characters refer to key concepts such as sarvodaya and satyagraha. Also, you use Marxist theory with confidence.

To improve, try to introduce distinctions between Mao's particular brand of Marxism-Leninism (often called Maoism) and a more generic Marxist-Leninist approach.

## **Criterion 3: use of sources (including conversations)**

You've used an excellent array of classical sources about the environmental movement. Also, your references about Gandhism are very well deployed.

While you've used a variety of sources from left-wing commentators, it would be helpful to include some references on Maoism and/or Marxism-Leninism. How about Mao's *Little Red Book*?

Most importantly, you could expand your use of conversations as a source of information and make the conversations more integral to the discussion rather than tacked on to the end.

## **Criterion 4: quality of the dialogue**

Your precision of writing is very high: the text is almost entirely error-free. The dialogue is engaging and sometimes amusing. The meeting of ghosts is an innovative approach.

To improve, you might consider moving out of the rigid drama-style format into something freer, perhaps like the text below. You might also think about occasional interactions with other characters.

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Gandhi responded, "That's right. My successors such as Vinoba and JP tried to promote swaraj, sarvodaya and satyagraha, but," — he grimaced at this point — "the Indian government has created massive industrialisation, inequality and nuclear weapons."

"Well, I must say that your picture of harmonious village democracy with everyone sitting around producing khadi is idealistic." Mao started to lecture: "What was needed was leadership from a party to carry forward the revolution in the name of the proletariat."

"With all respect," said Gandhi as he gestured in the direction of China and didn't sound entirely respectful, "look where that got China: a dictatorship and the capitalist road combined!"