

Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*
April 2009

Key points

- Mies's revision of Marxism and feminism
- The housewifization of labor

I. Mies's revision of Marxism and feminism

A. The classical or **orthodox Marxist position** states that class is the "primary contradiction" and race and gender are only "secondary" ones. James and Mies challenge this orthodox Marxist position. You can't see the "woman question" as subordinate to the class question. Nor can you just add women to the class analysis and stir. You have to **explain women's specific position** in global capitalism.

B. At the same time, the **orthodox feminist position** states that the goal is to make women equal to men.

1. **Q:** What's wrong with this objective?

2. Which men are women to be equal to? Middle class white men, usually. Orthodox feminism thus ignores questions of class and race. Mies challenges this orthodox feminist position. Calls for "sisterhood" are not enough to actually bring women together. We need to **understand how class and race (colonialism) shape women's circumstances.**

3. Orthodox liberal feminism also gave **feminism a bad reputation internationally.** In underdeveloped countries, people derided it as a "bourgeois" or "Western" idea, i.e. that feminism was simply another form of colonization. (You saw this charge leveled by Afghani men against the 300 women who marched in Kabul to protest a new law legalizing rape of the wife by the husband, April 2009.) This made it harder to approach the problem of women's subordination, since it now has become a "Western" thing.

B. **Mies's main question** is what is the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism.

1. **Patriarchy:** Rule of the brothers, "the league of men." Patriarchy extends patriarchal right to all men as a fraternity (Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, 102, chap. 4 generally). It's a system in which men share a common interest in legitimizing male domination over women for men's material and psychological benefit. (adapted from Pateman 113)

2. **Capitalism:** [go over overheads again]

3. **Accumulation** means accumulation of surplus value.

C. Mies takes a **materialist approach** to answer this question. To understand the position of women today it's necessary to place women in the context of global capitalism and the global division of labor. How are women related to the means of production? Specifically, how is labor divided by sex, race, and nation? We need to take a **global perspective** on this.

D. Her **basic argument** is that **women's unpaid work** in the household caring for children and the husband **subsidizes wage labor and also capitalist accumulation**. Further, women's **waged labor** is considered merely **supplemental to men's wages**, who are the real "breadwinner."

1. **Women's unpaid work in the household is invisible** and "naturalized" but is really a key aspect of capitalist accumulation, and **women's waged work is devalued**. The result is **capitalist patriarchy**.

2. Women's unpaid work is a form of **ongoing primitive accumulation** that is secured through **violence** against women: domestic violence, emotional and physical abuse, rape, etc.

3. **The iceberg economy**: Capital and wage labor form the part of the iceberg that's above the water, but housework, work in the informal sector, work in the colonies, and childraising form the underwater part of the economy—unrecognized, unprotected by a labor contract or other social contract, and therefore vulnerable and subject to violence. (xi)

II. The housewifization of labor

A. **Q**: What is housewifization?

B. **Formal and informal sectors**

1. The increased automation, computerization, and rationalization of the economy since the early 1970s has **restructured capitalism**. Breaking with the deal many industries had made with unions in the 1930s-1960s, these new capitalist logics insisted that labor be "flexible."

2. Labor in this new capitalism is increasingly divided into **two sectors**. On the one hand, there is a **formal sector** with relatively stable jobs that are relatively well paid and have good benefits, sometimes protected by unions. These are the "breadwinner" jobs. But on the other hand, capital increasingly creates an **informal sector** of the labor market, consisting of part-time, temp, "independent contractor," working from home, underground, etc. labor. This sector is defined by low wages and insecurity. In other words, it's very "**flexible**."

3. **Flexible labor**: What flexibility means is moving people out of higher wages, secure positions into low-wage, less stable positions in which they can be hired and fired more quickly. Union positions go out and part-time and temp positions come in. Flexible labor is **much easier to exploit**. 15-16

B. Women are among the **first group** to be pushed into these "flexible" positions. But even more, **women's labor becomes the model** of this new flexible labor structure. The notion of unpaid labor added to insecure, low-waged labor becomes the model for the entire economy, men and women. **The "housewife" spreads beyond the home** to the informal sector of the economy.

C. This is **housewifization**: The spread of unwaged and low-waged, "flexible," highly exploitable labor throughout the economy. [ok?]

x. **Housework is typically considered "unproductive labor."** It doesn't count in the GDP of nations, it's unpaid, it's not valued. All it does is produce use values, not exchange values. It's also **typically women's work**.

x. But Mies, Maria-Rosa Dalla Costa, and Selma James argue that the housewife also **produces a very important commodity**: labor power. In other words, taking care of the home and the family is the precondition for (male) wage labor. The home is like a factory that produces the wage laborer: comforting, resting, caring for, feeding, cleaning up after, washing the worker (male, but also the female). 31

x. The housewife is not outside the process of capital accumulation, therefore. She is the very *basis* of capitalist production.

x. Further, all of this work is unpaid. It's informal sector work. It's called nonproductive work and it's treated as such, but it's essential.

x. Housewifization embodies the domination of the informal sector over the formal sector. People who work in the **informal sector of the economy are like housewives**.

x. **Read 16**

x. **Housewifization as primitive accumulation**

x. This strategy of creating formal and informal, or visible and invisible, sectors of the economy is essentially a form of **primitive accumulation**. As Marx argues, primitive accumulation hid the violent means by which it accumulated capital through theft, murder, rape, and colonization. This form of accumulation was hidden from the "real" economy by the political economists.

x. **Read 431 and 432** in Tucker if time

x. Housewifization is like an "internal colony." Housewives and others in the informal sector are a valuable source of cheap or free labor that supplements and sustains labor in the formal sector, just like colonized labor sustained colonizer labor.

x. Further, their labor is **appropriated through violence**.

x. Women are thus not just oppressed. They are exploited.

x. **Making the 1st world into the 3rd**

x. The implications of housewifization is that it's the means by which the conditions of the colonies gets imported into the metropole. It's the means by which the First World is increasingly turned into the Third.

x. Further, women are hit the hardest by this process.

x. **Read 17**

x. **Q:** Does this argument make sense? Is she explaining political economy today?

x. Feminist theory, then, needs to start from this materialist analysis of the changes in capitalism since the 1970s, i.e. since the **rise of globalization**.

x. The political task for feminists and Marxists, then, is to **reject this cleavage** between waged and unwaged labor, formal and informal sectors.

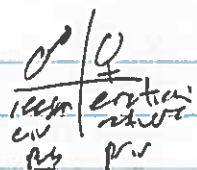
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Integrate Dalla Costa discussion (31-32) into type notes



- Public/private split - explain
- 1 fem approach - fight for ϕ 's inclusion in pub sphere.
- ~~the~~ ~~tried~~ to be ~~unilateral~~ struggle - inspired by i.c. consciousness, inc. access to n.c. politics, ex. 18-22
- But ~~the~~ ~~new~~ ~~order~~ approach emerged in 1970s. focus on women's bodies + the private sphere. ϕ 's struggles took place in the sphere they'd been relegated to. 24
 - "Personal is pol", abortion, domestic violence, rape
 - consciousness-raising group - creating a "sex-for-itself"
 - "In short, the hidden reality of ϕ 's lives became a public issue" (25)
 - Central one ϕ in private sphere is done thru violence + intimidation
- the paradox of cap. patriarchy is that unlike other patriarchy, it alone claims to have eliminated "barbaric" treatment of ϕ . It does claim to believe in ϕ 's city. 27 Yet law + force continue to oppress ϕ . 27
- ~~the~~ ϕ are + just oppressed by male chauvinism + domination, they are also exploited by bureaucratization
 - gen. deb. of exploitation - 36
 - Exploited in a triple sense - 37
 - 2nd Antichem + 2nd 2nd nature - 10-41

- "pol. ϕ in the 1st person" - direct action, autonomy,

x. **Material origins of the fundamentalist right**

x. Right wing religious fundamentalism is the ideological “superstructure” of this new “flexible labor” and “housewifization.” Ironically, its emphasis on the patriarchal family, motherhood (anti-abortion), heterosexuality (no gay marriage), and its hatred of feminism reflect the effort by the capitalist class to push women into the informal sector of the economy, and for the informal sector to become the model for structuring the division of labor. It holds up the 1950s mother as a model even as it implicitly supports those practices by capital that make this mother increasingly impossible.

x. **Public/private split**

[type up and incorporate your handwritten notes here]

chapters 2 and 3

Key points

- Predatory mode of production
- Colonization, witches, housewifization
- Rise of the nuclear family and romantic love
- Materialist feminist strategy

I. The predatory mode of production

A. The **origins of the sexual division of labor** do not lie in biology (men are stronger than women, which leads to them performing different tasks). Rather, they lie in **predation**.

B. **Predators:** Those who don't produce but appropriate what others produce.

1. As women develop technologies to help them produce (gather) such as the hoe, the digging stick, and baskets, men develop technologies that help them hunt. These technologies are premised on the destruction of life rather than production (61). **Hunting** is not necessarily exploitative, but it opens up the possibility for a relationship of domination of man over nature. This violence against and domination over nature is easily transferred to violence and domination over other humans—tribes, women. 62

2. The rise of **pastoral** ways of life (tending domesticated animals) turns this potential dominance into actual dominance. Men have a monopoly over the means of violence due to hunting. Further, under pastoralism the knowledge of how to coerce and manipulate female animals to facilitate breeding was transferred to women, and women become forms of property, chattel, to be exchanged between clans to facilitate breeding, improve clan relationships, etc. With the rise of pastoral society you have the **emergence of patriarchy** (63).

3. Slavery and class domination (of men and women) stem from this original male domination over women (64).

4. This creates a **predatory mode of production**, in which the predator produces a surplus by appropriating it (stealing it) from others: women, other tribes/peoples, slaves, lower classes. Pillaging, looting, robbing, and conquest, which then turn into or get disguised as trading.

5. **Q:** Is this analysis persuasive? [It seems rigid and simplistic to me, and ignores that hunting is productive and is consistent with an ethic of living with nature rather than dominating it.]

C. The predatory mode depends on **separation** and **subordination**: separating the dominant from subordinate groups, and subordinating the latter to the former. Thus women are separated from and subordinate to men, nations to nations, nature to men, etc. One group gets defined as existing outside of civilized society, and thus are made part of the invisible part of the **iceberg economy**. 74, 77 [But white women were not pushed outside of civilized society; women in Europe weren't, either.]

1. The predatory MoP is the basis of patriarchy, slavery, class, and colonialism.

2. **Read 66.**

3. It's also the basis of the capitalist class: **Capitalist are not producers but predators** who appropriate the surplus produces by others (68). The predator (hunter) becomes the paradigm of wealth accumulation under capitalism.

4. **Predation** or parasitism is essentially a **form of primitive accumulation**.

II. Colonization, witches, and housewifization

A. Primitive accumulation, predation, women, colonialism

1. **Women, nature, and colonies** share a structural similarity in a predatory mode of production: All are **sources of primitive accumulation**. All are central yet unrecognized aspects of capitalist production.

2. This implies **expanding our understanding of primitive accumulation**. P.A. is not just a historically bound form of accumulation, acquired in the 15th and 16th centuries before capitalism fully started. Rather, **capitalism perennially depends on primitive accumulation** as a key source of wealth, and **women's unpaid labor is a key source of P.A.**

3. **Read 48.**

4. Women's unpaid labor in the industrialized world and colonized people's labor—and **unpaid and underpaid work in general**—are a constant, necessary form of wealth accumulation under capitalism. **Capitalism constantly needs P.A.** to function.

5. **Q:** Is this "in contrast to Marx"?

- centralization of state & church power:
- Colonization → witch-hunting as
control for that.

B. Witches and modernity

1. **Q:** What does the persecution of witches have to do with Mies's argument, especially regarding primitive accumulation and the sexual division of labor?

2. Mies argues that the rising bourgeoisie used witch-hunts from the 12th to the 17th centuries "to control and subordinate women ... who in their economic and sexual independence constituted a threat for the emerging bourgeois order" (81).

3. Independent women ("witches") constituted such a threat because their autonomy threatened bourgeois power and would make it difficult to breed enough workers for the emerging capitalist system (88).

4. **Q:** Is this a convincing argument?

5. Witch hunts as a **source of primitive accumulation**

a. The enormous fees the state charges for witch trials (including charging for the firewood used to burn them at the stake!) broke the peasantry and filled feudal coffers (85). Also the property of condemned witches was confiscated. Witch-hunting became big business (86).

b. They also encouraged the **professionalization of law** by creating a bureaucratic legal process in prosecuting witches and by creating a market for lawyers, judges, and others in the legal profession (84).

6. Witch hunts as the **paradigm for modern science and rationality**

a. **Witch-hunting helped create the scientific method.** Science sought to force nature to reveal its secrets like people forced witches to reveal theirs: through torture, destruction, violence. The methods of extracting confessions from witches was adopted by Francis Bacon and others as the method for extracting knowledge of nature. 87-88

b. The torture chambers of the witch-hunt were like **laboratories** where the emerging sciences could study and experiment on bodies (83).

c. Thus, the witch-hunt didn't just subordinate women to men, it **enabled the subordination of nature to men.**

d. The witch-hunt didn't just control women's reproductive behavior, it established the superiority of men's production and forms of knowledge over women's. 70

III. Rise of the nuclear family and romantic love

x. The rise of the "lady" that culminated in Victorian sexual mores in the 19th century was directly related to the enslavement and subordination of women in the colonies. Colonialism stripped local women of power and independence, and at the same time elevated middle class women to "ladies" (95Q). Colonialism enabled **domestication** for "ladies" and provided them with **luxuries** that were paid for in the blood and sweat of "beastly" colonized women.

x. The creation of the **bourgeois nuclear family** and the notion of **romantic love** depended on the disruption of family relations in the colonies, and had to basically be forced on working class families (98, 104-106).

IV. Materialist feminist strategy

A. As this system of capitalist patriarchy develops, **working class men develop an interest in maintaining it.** This has infected even socialist politics, such as the demand for the “family wage.”

1. **Read 109.**

2. Working class men have an interest in this system, but it ultimately harms them.

3. **Read 110.**

B. The result is that we tend to view “men’s labor” as working with hands and head and as “real” productive labor and “women’s labor” as working with womb and breasts and as natural, non-productive (or reproductive) labor. 46-47.

C. To fight this, we need to consider **all of women’s labor as productive labor**, whether it be hunting, gathering, wage labor, child raising, or housework.

1. The activity of women in bearing and raising children, for example, needs to be seen as **creative labor**, as conscious, social activity that **reflects our species-being.** 53-54 (good discussion)

chapters 4 and 7

[go over these chaps again next time]

x. Strengths of Mles’s analysis

x. I like how she brings in a theorizes gender in globalization via an analysis of the sexual division of labor and the international division of labor.

x. I like how she analyzes the “flexibility” of labor under globalization as a gendered concept.

x. I like how she analyzes women’s work in the home as a form of primitive accumulation that makes possible the production of labor power. Powerful point.

x. I like her argument that we need to see women’s unpaid work as productive labor, not simply creating use values.

x. The concept of housewifization has value; see next point below.

x. Weaknesses and questions

x. **Housewifization:** One advantage of the concept of housewifization is that it reveals the gendered nature of "flexible" labor under globalization. I think she's right that women's work is not valued the same as men's, and that it's undervalued (domestic work) or undervalued (supplementary to the male "breadwinner."). I also think she's right that this sort of informal sector, un/undervalued "flexible" labor is becoming generalized throughout the economy. (See 126-127 for a good summation of this central part of her thesis.) However, I don't think the concept of housewifization is the best way to understand flexible labor and women's structural location in globalization.

x. One major reason for this is that it's hard to see how women in the 1st world are being "housewifized." They are instead moving into professional positions, more women are now in the formal labor sector than men, and more women are in college than men. She doesn't anticipate this but even more, she doesn't provide any way to analyze it. Her theory can't account for it. Further, women in the 3rd W who are in the factories are becoming wage workers. Thus, contrary to her analysis, they are becoming **proletarianized** to an extent she doesn't acknowledge (see 118). It's not the "typical" kind of proletarianization, granted. Even she argues that it's a "mystification" not to see these women as being proletarianized, as performing necessary labor under capitalism. Yet the concept of housewifization *perpetuates* this mystification. See 119-120 for this and your critique.

x. Related, the dichotomy of Western women as consumers and 3rd W women as producers is too simplistic. Both sets of women are both, though obviously in qualitatively different ways.

x. Also, Black women and other women of color in the 1st world are ignored and don't fit her analysis.

x. Why does international capital view women's labor as inherently more docile (see 117)? Is it? Why? She never provides an analysis of this. It seems that a key feminist strategy should be to challenge this docility, or this perception of docility. Mies doesn't consider this.

x. Her anti-Marxism in chapter 7 is knee-jerk and based on a strange interpretation of Marx regarding labor. Marx always regards labor as not just boring but necessary but *creative*. So her argument that we need to rethink the very nature of work is actually consistent with Marx.

x. The analysis in chapter 4 is pretty top-down and not really dialectical.

x. The focus of a feminist conception of labor should not be oriented toward the "production of life" (217) but toward the creation of the *good life*. The difference matters.

x. The consumer boycott strategy is weak.

x. Lack of agency of W.

x. Is her strategy a "white women's burden"?

x. Roundtable questions

1. How does Mies provide us with a way to understand globalization and women's role in it? What are the strengths and weaknesses of her analysis?
2. Does Mies have a sufficiently dialectical (i.e. twofold) analysis of women's role in capitalism?
3. How would a "feminist concept of labor" advance our understanding of global capitalism?
4. What is Mies's argument for a middle class feminist movement and is it convincing? Is it consistent with a Marxist analysis?
5. Is Mies a Marxist or does she go beyond Marxism?
6. What are the best aspects of Marxist theory? What are its weaknesses?
7. What was the most and least important thing you learned in this class? Any suggestions for improvement?
8. What does the persecution of witches have to do with Mies's argument, especially regarding primitive accumulation and the sexual division of labor?
9. Are women the optimal labor force in capitalism?
10. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Mies's concept of "housewifization" for explaining global capitalism and the role of gender in it?

Capital: Assets, “surplus value,” wealth used to make more wealth. A social relationship in which wealth/surplus value is acquired through the exploitation of labor in the production of commodities.

Capitalism: A social system in which the production of capital is the predominant form of production. (Capital is older than capitalism.)

Patriarchy: A system in which men share a common interest in legitimizing male domination over women for men’s material and psychological benefit. Rule by the brothers, the “league of men.”

Working class: Those who have to sell their capacity to work to survive and who have little effective control over the means of production.

Capitalist class: Those who assert effective control over the means of production.