

The Origins of Capitalist-Patriarchy

Umaima Miraj
PhD Student
Department of Sociology
University of Toronto
725 Spadina
Toronto, ON M5S 2J4
umaima.miraj@mail.utoronto.ca

Abstract: Theories of the transition to capitalism are essential in understanding the nature of modernity. While some scholars levy these histories to critique the Eurocentrism of modernity, theories of transitions to capitalism have largely omitted gender. I show how seeing capitalism as gendered leads to a more accurate understanding of this crucial transition. Reading the transition to capitalism through a feminist perspective, I show how capitalism is inherently gendered, as it is not only a spatial but social transformation which is *superexploitative and overdetermined for women*. While critical scholarship continues to focus on the rise of the West and the underdevelopment of the Global South, I contend that by emphasising capitalism as inherently gendered, we can better understand of the essential role of women's bodies in our politico-economic system.

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Kristin Plys, Kanishka Goonewardena, Alissa Trotz, and Chanshri Pal for their helpful comments and feedback.

Gendered relationships do not meet world capitalism on the historical stage as though each are independent historical actors which, by virtue of their spatial and temporal co-existence, have the ability to influence each other.... [Rather,] gender has a world-historical character to it not because of some eternal patriarchy but because it is a part and parcel of world history [and...] both contains within itself the history of the world and is an expression of that history as it developed in all of its specific forms. (Smith 1993, 14 quoted in Feldman, 2007: 242)

If patriarchy has a specific beginning in history, it can also have an end. (Mies, 1986: 38)

Our current modern politico-economic system is gendered. Women in the Global South continue to be the superexploited and semi-proletarian labor for industries and the migratory labor in ‘global care chains’ (Moghadam, 2021: 700). Moreover, fascist regimes across the world-system continue to violate women’s bodies, by reversing *Roe v. Wade*, or killing those who resist against military Islamic regimes. However, while the global Left concerns itself with the polarization in the world-economy and underdevelopment, it continues to omit gender. Yet, not only has modernity meant an ever-increasing polarized world, but it has also made women the ultimate periphery. It is thus important to revisit the origins of our current capitalist-patriarchal system to show that women are not separate from capitalist structures, but are instead integral to it, on whose bodies these structures are built, and which women continue to resist as historical actors.

But while modernity is gendered, theories of the transition to modernity continue to be gender neutral. Macro historical research in general, and on the transition to capitalism, “with its center of gravity in the macro-political,” (Adams, Clemens, and Orloff, 2005: 51) claims to be more concerned with nations, states, and big history, where women do not make an appearance (Frank, 1978). While some scholars levy these histories to critique the Eurocentrism of modernity, theories of transitions to capitalism have largely omitted gender. However, a more accurate analysis would not only ‘include’ women in this history but show how the development of our modern world is *gendered*, where capitalist institutions have been created through the exploitation and appropriation of women’s bodies in uneven and overdetermined ways, which continues today. In this essay, I ask how does thinking about the transition to capitalism as gendered lead to a more accurate understanding of this crucial event? Male-dominated studies of the transition are important to correct not only because a gendered analysis is the more accurate account, but also for its implications for feminist politics and praxis, whereby women are seen as historical actors who have always resisted exploitation against their bodies. Thus, tracing the origins of capitalist-patriarchy as one is not “limited to the search for the moment in history or prehistory when the ‘world-historic defeat of the female sex’ (Engels) took place,” but instead is to search a dialectical,¹

¹ I borrow Mao’s definition of the materialist dialectics to understand what it means to trace a dialectical history of the rise of capitalism that includes women. He claims: “As opposed to the metaphysical world outlook, the world outlook of materialist dialectics holds that in order to understand the development of a thing we should study it internally and in its relations with other things; in other words, the development of things should be seen as their internal and necessary self-movement, which each thing in its movement is interrelated with and interacts on the things around it. The fundamental cause of the development of a thing is not external but internal; it lies in the contradictoriness with the thing.” (Mao, 1968: 26) It would be undialectical, thus, to understand the external event of the transition to capitalism without accounting for its contradictions, those that lie in the change in social relations between men and women, and the exploitation of women’s bodies by the state and the Church, as they are the pivots to its development, and women’s resistance to it.

materialist, and historical understanding of these relations and to note that patriarchy is not the thing of the past (Mies, 1986: 48). Beyond this, it is to show that by gendering the transition to capitalism, we understand it as an uneven and overdetermined process.

While feminist scholars have critiqued the broader transition literature for ignoring gender (Federici, 2004; Mies, 1986; Adams, 2005; Adams, Clemens, and Orloff), in this paper, I borrow from and critique world-systems analysis for its gender-neutral understanding of the transition to capitalism, which is symptomatic of this larger problem. While the transition to capitalism has been the subject of much debate to understand the nature of capitalism and theorize its future (Plys and Lemert, 2022) in many schools that I will discuss below, world-systems scholars show that the transition was always a global and polarizing phenomenon, and would not have been sustained in Europe, where it began, without the incorporation of the non-West (Wallerstein, 2011; Frank, 1978; Amin). World-systems analysis thus provides a useful lens to understand this essentially polarizing nature of capitalist modernity and to push forward an anti-imperialist perspective that explains the polarizations among cores and peripheries we see today historically and negate stagist and linear explanations of the West's dominance, or as something intrinsic to Europe's specific virtues. However, despite its theoretical prowess, it continues to ignore gender as essential to this event and the development of capitalism. In this essay, I claim that seeing capitalism as gendered leads to a more accurate understanding of this crucial transition. Reading the transition to capitalism through a feminist perspective, I show how capitalism is inherently gendered, as it is not only a spatial but a social transformation which is *uneven and overdetermined for women*. Through this theoretical inquiry, I hope to remedy the one-sided, male perspective that scholars have typically taken when it comes to theorizing the transition to capitalism.

To this end, I first go over the transition to capitalism and the 'Rise of the West' debates. I hone in on world-systems analysis as the most useful lens to study the transition as it shows how it was an uneven process of collusion, conquest, and colonialism. However, I argue next that it is limited because it *degender*s (Dunnaway, 2001) the transition. Instead, I bring in feminist scholars who have critiqued macrohistorical research and the transition literature, and argue that we need to center them, yet move beyond, to highlight how the transition was an uneven and overdetermined process for women. By going back to the transition to modernity, I conclude, we can better understand how women's bodies continue to be the site of contestations in our current politico-economic system.

Theories of the Transition to Capitalism

Theories of the transition to capitalism are essential in understanding the nature of modernity (Emigh, 2005: 188; Adams, Clemens, and Orloff, 2005: 1). Therefore, scholars have extensively debated capitalism's origins and logics. While by no means exhaustive, two key chapters, Kristin Plys' "The Confusion of Capitalist Structures" (2022) and Rebeccan Jean Emigh's "Transitions to Capitalism," lay out some of the major trends among political economists, economic historians, and historical sociologists debating this event, which I summarize below. From the natural unfolding of "truck, barter, and trade" (Smith, 1961: 13) to the development of cities (Pirenne), to the land available for rent, and the ability to trade (Ricardo) have all been lenses to understand this transition. Marx linked modernity to the creation of class conflict, where the bourgeois controls the labor of the proletariat to extract maximum profit, i.e., surplus value that then cycles back for creation of more capital, leading to the endless cycle of accumulation. Moreover, he argued that this economy was sustained by the creation of the New World through

primitive accumulation. While the economic nature of the transition has been important to understand, another trend prevalent in the theoretical literature is its spatial origins. In this section, I show how scholars have debated the origins as a Europe- or Asia-centered event to explain the Rise of the West. I will demonstrate that while it has been important to provide a non-Eurocentric history, these scholars have continued to omit gender, ignoring that the transition was not only a spatial but also a social transformation.

Eurocentric notions of the origins of capitalism have existed within and outside Marxism. For Max Weber, the development of rationality was the epitome of modernity (Weber, 2010). In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber sought to “work out and to explain genetically the special peculiarity of Occidental rationalism, and within this field that of the modern Occidental form.” (2010; 29) For Weber, “Capitalism [could] not make use of the labour of those who practise the doctrine of undisciplined *liberum arbitrium*, any more than it can make use of the business man who seems absolutely unscrupulous in his dealings with others.” (2010; 48) Other theorists who attribute this to a capitalist orientation are Werner Sombart and Joel Mokyr who conclude that the rise was due to a capitalist spirit or a pre-existing capitalist culture specific to Europe respectively.

While some scholars attribute the European take off to a capitalist orientation, others claim that it was an intrinsic condition specific to Europe because of the breakup of feudalism (Dobb, 2008; Wood, 1999), or because of its institutions. For example, economic historians Maurice Dobb and Paul Sweezy debated whether the rise of capitalism was the result of the breakup of feudalism and the accumulation of capital within England in the 16th century (Dobb, 2008: 18) or due to international trade. Another school of thought, the Neo-Institutional School draw from neoliberal theory to claim that efficient institutions and organizations led to the European take off (North and Thomas, 1973; Plys, 2022: 14-15). They argue that “[e]fficient economic organization is the key to growth; the development of an efficient economic organization in Western Europe accounts for the rise of the West.” (North and Thomas, 1973: 1)⁴ In 1977, Eurocentric Marxist Robert Brenner claimed in his essays (cite), that capitalism began with the agrarian class struggle that took place specifically in England in the 15th century. Beyond stating this as the origin of capitalism, he also takes on “‘Third-Worldist’ deviations” in his essay, “The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism,” (Blaut, 2000: 159). He claims that scholars such as Wallerstein who focus on trade and exchange and the commercialisation of the economy as central to the transition are more Smithian than Marxist as they do not focus on commodity production and class struggle. For Brenner, long-distance trade-turned-colonialism was irrelevant to the rise of capitalism (Blaut, 2000).

However, the California School, another set of economic historians, argues against the neo-institutionalists and claim that there was nothing specific to European institutions that led to its rise before the Industrial Revolution and instead finds ‘surprising similarities’ between the two regions (Pomeranz, Frank, Rosenthal and Wong, Goldstone; for a succinct summary of the California School’s argument and its critique, see Vries, 2010; Plys, 2022: 15-16) They are theoretically different than world-system as they begin in the 18th and 19th centuries, and also focus on the internal politics (Rosenthal and Wong, 2011: 6) or circumstantial reasons (Pomeranz) that led to the different routes China and Europe eventually took instead of seeing the connections within the world-economy. Kenneth Pomeranz argues that there was nothing demographically, technologically, or ecologically superior that set Europe to a specific route of rise in comparison to China, until the 18th century. He also critiques the neo-institutionalists to argue that there was

⁴ Mokyr is also part of the neo-institutional school but sticks to more cultural explanations (Plys, 2022)

nothing unique about Europe's institutions. Instead, it was epidemics and the Atlantic slave trade that led to the European take off. Before that there were "surprising similarities" between Europe and China. Pomeranz claims "the world's first "modern" core and its first "modern" periphery were created in tandem—and this global conjuncture was important in allowing western Europe to build something that was truly unique upon the base of an advanced market economy whose main features were not unique." (Pomeranz, 25; Rosenthal and Wong, 2011: 6)

Extending Pomeranz, Jean-Laurent Rosenthal and R. B. Wong, however, argue that it is not so much the locational or circumstantial factors that gave rise to the European modern economy but instead, it was the different political factors in Europe and China, especially war. Constant warfare in Europe, according to them, led to the development of different economic structures as compared to the more stable China. They argue "that the chronic threat of war in Europe produced unanticipated positive conditions for economic change, and its absence allowed the Qing dynasty to implement policies favorable to Smithian growth but unlikely to produce industrialization." (Rosenthal and Wong, 2011: 230) Another scholar from the California School, Jack Goldstone argues that instead of "self-sustained" growth leading to the rise of Europe, there were periods of "efflorescence," in both China and Europe, but it was the development of the steam engine that eventually led to the rise of the West only in the 18th century (Goldstone, 2002).

World-systems scholars take us out of the hidden abode of the mode of production and into the world-economy to explain the transition to capitalism and show that it was a global phenomenon, although beginning in Europe, sustained by an unequal division of labor and polarization on a world-scale since its inception. Following the Braudel tradition, they "[place] importance on the role of the state and finance as fundamental constituents of the capitalist world economy." (Plys, 2022: 11) While capitalism did emerge in Europe because of the specificity of its conditions, it was not because of the "immanent virtues unique to Europe" (Amin, 2011: 144). In *The Modern World-System I* (1979 [2011]), Immanuel Wallerstein notes that "it was in the sixteenth century that there came to be a European world-economy based upon the capitalist mode of production" however, it did not fully develop until the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century (2011: 67; See also Moore, 2003: 99).⁵ Andre Gunder Frank, in *World Accumulation*, also notes that "the sixteenth century witnessed the first long, sustained, and widespread quantitative and qualitative development of capitalism in its mercantile stage and the first period of capital accumulation in Europe." (1978: 52)

World-systems scholars show that this new system was unique in its logic of endless accumulation, its fetishization of commodities and labor processes, its ever-expanding nature, and its polarization. Before the development of this world-economy, there were world-empires, according to Wallerstein, where the latter was bound up in systems of tribute and taxation linked directly to the emperor (2011: 15). Moreover, in *Unequal Development* (1974), Samir Amin also traces the different social formations that existed in the Arab and Black world versus the European world (Amin, 1974: 27-30). Tracing the specificity of the origins of the European world-economy, he notes that the

the conditions needed for the development of capitalism are essentially two in number: proletarianization and the accumulation of money-capital. While accumulation of money-capital occurred in all the trading societies of the East, of Antiquity, and of the feudal world,

⁵ For Arrighi, capitalism did not begin in "territorial Europe. Rather, [capitalism] originated in the interstices [the city-states] that connected territorial organizations to one another." (Arrighi, 1998: 126, quoted in Moore, 2003: 103)

it never led to the development of capitalist relations, because a supply of free and available labor power was lacking. This process of proletarianization... is explained, so far as Europe is concerned, by the breakup of feudal relations. But these two conditions must *both* be present, and it is the absence of this conjunction that forbids us to speak of “capitalism in the Ancient World,” or “capitalism in the Oriental Empires.” (Amin, 1974: 31)

Amin’s argument is important because although he argues that capitalism could only begin in Europe, he does not define the non-West through the lens of the Asiatic mode of production. This is crucial to not understand the non-West as having no history or that it would only be a recipient of capitalism through colonialism. Instead, Amin complicates his analysis and uses the term the “tributary mode of production” to situate previous social formations that had protocapitalist tendencies (*Global History*) but did not develop into capitalism. This was because, he claims, the tributary modes of production of the East were “fully-fledged,” in that they had more concentrated power, whereas the “incomplete” peripheral mode of productions of Europe—feudalism—were much more fragmented and had more potential to develop into capitalism proper (Amin, 2011: 155; Frank also challenges the application of the Asiatic mode of production, see Frank, 1974: 31).

Another founding father of world-systems, Giovanni Arrighi also notes in *The Long Twentieth Century* that, although, capitalist tendencies existed in other trading systems, it was in Europe that “these elements of capitalism coalesce into the powerful mix that propelled European states towards the territorial conquest of the world and the formation of an all-powerful and truly globalist capitalist world-economy.” (1994: 14, emphasis mine) This, he argues, comes from the “fusion of state and capital,” the concentration of power in the upper layer, when “capitalism is the state.” (Arrighi, 1994: 14, Braudel, 1977: 64-5, quoted in Arrighi, 1994: 14, emphasis original). This is important to analyze given the diverging paths taken by Europe and China in the development of capitalism despite similar tendencies present amongst both before the 16th century. While Europe had a more “decentralized structure” of power, China’s “huge territorial and demographic size... combined with the power it exercised through the tributary-trade system, created a fundamental underlying imbalance and centralization of power.” (Arrighi, Hui, Hung and Selden, 2003: 280) Moreover, these different balances of power and the more peripheral position Europe occupied in the previously existing East-West trade, led to more room for an intense inter-state competition than in China (Arrighi, Hui, Hung and Selden, 2003: 266, 269, 271, 285). This inter-state competition meant that capitalism was internalized in Europe, while it remained externalized in China to a large degree, despite the presence of a flourishing market economy (Arrighi, Hui, Hung and Selden, 2003: 277-278).⁶

For many world-systems scholars then, “to claim a European-centered approach [to the origins of capitalism] is not Eurocentric given that capitalism originated in Europe.” (Plys, 2013: 43) However, it is important to underscore that the development of this system did not emerge in a vacuum. As Janet Abu-Lughod notes, there already existed an Afro-Eurasian world system around the 13th and 14th century with complex networks of trade and exchange (1989). She claims: “Although it is true that the “West” eventually “won,” it should not be assumed that it did so because it was more advanced in either capitalistic theory or practice. Islamic society needed no

⁶ Noting these divergences, they note, however that this meant that in East Asia there was a “deepening of the division of labor within households and micro-regions rather than between metropolitan core regions and overseas peripheral regions...” (Arrighi, Hui, Hung and Selden, 2003: 283) However, this begs the question: was this division of labor absent in Europe at the time, despite the increasing polarization and the totality of capitalism?

teachers in these matters.” (Abu-Lughod, 1989: 216) She traces the complex systems of business and exchange within the Islamic world and, outlining the similarities between the Arab traders and the “Champagne fairs or the Consul houses of Italian merchants at Bruges and Antwerp,” she argues that “Neither a religious explanation nor the concept of “diffusion” is needed to account for these parallels. Common needs apparently gave rise to common solutions. The same was true with respect to money and banking, although here there was some important differences between the two culture areas.” (Abu-Lughod 1989: 222) Instead, this world-system broke up because of the impact of depopulation and other factors that impacted the Islamic world at the time. To the question, “Did the West rise or the East Fall?” Abu-Lughod claims “the East had already substantially “fallen” before the Portuguese men-of-war appeared in the Indian Ocean. That weakened world was a plum rope for the taking. No special “virtue” inhered in the conquerors; they took control of the remnants of a preexisting world system, one they then ruthlessly honed to serve their own ends.” (Abu-Lughod 1989: 260) Thus, for Abu-Lughod, the subsequent rise of Europe does not automatically mean that the rest of the world was a passive recipient until capitalism eventually diffused to it from the center.

Yet for others, it is not enough to situate or negate the rise of capitalism in Europe and not elsewhere. For Ravi Palat, for example, it is Eurocentric to map the features of European capitalism to other parts of the world to show the peculiarity of the rise of capitalism *in* Europe (2015). In his book, *The Making of an Indian Ocean World-Economy*, Palat argues that counter to the assertions made by Wallerstein and others who claimed that capitalism began in Europe and incorporated the rest of the world through core-periphery relationships (2015: 220-221), the wet-rice cultivation area of South Asia, South China, and Japan did not *intend* to accumulate capital “because there was no advantage to capitalism in societies based on wet-rice cultivation,” and thus the question of why capitalism did not begin in India or China is “misplaced.” (2015: 222) Instead, in these areas, because of the high population density and the techniques of cultivation, the focus was more on labor than labor-saving technology, and there was little dependency of the state on mercantile and financial elites.⁷

While many scholars have thus debated the rise of the West and the origins of capitalism, the most controversial theory comes from Frank in *ReOrient* (1998). Frank argues that there has always been one global system, with its center Asia, with horizontal links across the world. This system was flat and horizontal, cyclical, and never truly underwent a transition to capitalism (1998). He negates both the spatial and temporal arguments of the origins of the capitalist world system, by claiming that capitalism has existed since time immemorial and arguing that the earlier world system was centered around Asia, and it was the Asian crisis after which Europe bought a seat on the Asian train. Instead of a world-system that incorporated other regions through an unequal international division of labor, colonization, and imperialism, for Frank, there seems to exist no polarization or contradictions. This world system is global and cyclical, as Frank contends Asia will be dominant once again, yet in its horizontality Frank neglects the essential features of the capitalist world-system: its polarizing spatial and social relations at an unprecedented scale.

The problem with denying the origin of capitalism, however, is that Frank fails to acknowledge that the transition to capitalism was a transition of social relations at a world scale. I claim that denying this origin also ignores the relationship of patriarchy with capitalism. A horizontal and flat world does not acknowledge the polarity inherent in the horizontal system of capitalism. This is shown in Frank’s introduction to *ReOrient*, where foreseeing a feminist “resistance” or “obstacle,” he claims:

⁷ However, he does note the *eventual* incorporation of these regions in the capitalist system after colonization.

Feminists may charge, and rightly so, that this perspective [of a one global world economic system] and analysis does not sufficiently rattle at the cage of the patriarchal gender structure of society, which disadvantages women to say the least. That is true, although this approach is no less amenable to genderization than received theory is; *except that it does not deal with women per se, nor with men for that matter. Indeed, this structural analysis does not seem to deal with any people at all.* (Frank 1998: 41, emphasis mine)

While Frank's thesis in *ReOrient* has been critiqued and complicated by scholars, the omission of gender hasn't been critiqued. This is reflective not only of Frank's work, then, but the broader literature that I have reviewed in this section. Not only has this literature remained gender neutral because it deals with big history, even when scholars have discussed demography, family size, marriages, and reproduction (Hajnal, 1965; see Wallerstein's critique of Frank, 351), the analysis has ignored gender. In the next section, I will show that while scholars have traced the underdevelopment of the Global South to the origins to show the transition to capitalism was polarizing, it is still limited and inaccurate because it does not show how women were in integral in this transition.

The Origins of a Polarized World-System

World-systems analysis is a useful lens to analyze the transition to capitalism because it argues that it was "global encounter" (Plys, 2022) based on violence, collusion, and unequal exchange. As Frank rejects these essential characteristics in *ReOrient*, he has been critiqued and his argument complicated by other world-systems scholars. For example, Plys complicates Frank's analysis by arguing that world-systems should reorient itself from arguing that the origins of capitalism lay in the transition from feudalism to capitalism within Europe because of internal reasons, to showing that it was actually the transfer of power from Asia to Europe, backed by the rise of haute finance in the latter, the networks of silver that led to crisis in China and India, that instead led to Europe overtaking dominance from Asia (2013: 63, 76-77) While she reorients the transition to capitalism, she refutes Frank's assertion that there was one single global world economy (Plys, 2013: 69). Moreover, she asserts the importance of class struggle during the transition in the Italian city-states, again negating Frank's assertion of macro-historical perspectives not dealing with people. Instead, she claims that "Frank oversimplifies the complexity of the world economy and negates the existence of any social relations of production, particularly the capitalist relations of production that form the basis of exploitation and alienation within the capitalist world-system." (2013: 44) However, while Plys critiques these important aspects, her analysis neglects to theorize gender as central to the transition to capitalism (Plys, 2013: 60). Amin also calls Frank's claims "impotent" and instead shows that characteristic to the world-economy is polarization (1999). Arrighi critiques Frank for logical inconsistencies and incoherencies (1999),¹³ and Wallerstein questions the novelty of his argument (1999). In this section, I show that

¹³ It is worth noting that, and Arrighi mentions this in the last paragraph of his review of *ReOrient*, Abu-Lughod already showed that there existed a sufficient world-system before the rise of the Europe-centered world-system, yet Frank has determined that insufficient: "It would nonetheless be a serious mistake to throw the baby of Frank's painstaking reconstruction of global commodity and money flows in early modern times out with the bath water of Frank's claims to be the purveyor of the only valid representation of the early modern world. The publication ten

world-systems scholars emphasize that the transition to capitalism was based on violent unequal exchange. I hone this argument, missing from this literature, to claim that this event was gendered through its incompleteness, i.e., through *semi-proletarianization* (Wallerstein, 1983), and overdetermined through its *super-exploitation* of women (Jones, 1958), which were fundamental for the development of capitalism. Therefore, all accounts of the transition should be gendered, giving due credence to these incomplete and overdetermined processes.

The transition to capitalism to the creation of a layered international division of labor. World-systems scholar Eric H. Mielants argues that “[w]hat made the world-system from the 16th century onward *modern*, when compared with mini-systems or world-empires, was precisely its emerging single division of labor between large geographical areas interconnected by trade.” (2001: 17) Instead of a linear development of capitalism with the rest of the world catching up, Immanuel Wallerstein viewed the European world-economy incorporating zones through an international division of labor and differentiation. These zones—the economically advanced core states, the middle range semi-peripheries, and the exploited peripheries—sustained the functioning of this self-contained world-system through a “skewed distribution of the [capitalistic] rewards.” (Wallerstein, 2011: 348, 349) While within Europe, enclosures dispossessed peasants from their lands, and women from their bodies, enclaves in other regions did that in the rest of the world. From its inception then, capitalist exploitation was both spatial and social. As Frank notes in *World Accumulation*,

[This] same process extended far beyond Europe to those regions or “enclaves” which were integrated into the process of world capital accumulation at this stage, especially the New World sources of gold and silver. During this sixteenth-century secular and cyclical upswing, Western Europe experienced a sharp acceleration of the process of capital accumulation based on the concentration of capital through a sharp rise in prices and profits, and, notably, a concomitantly sharp decline in real wages. (Frank, 1978: 53)

In its polarization, the new system was unmatched. Frank argues that “[t]he dawn of the sixteenth century witnesses marked continuity with past developments, and yet during this century the world was to be revolutionized. (1978: 31) The peculiarity of these conditions and how they played out in Europe and not elsewhere underscores Amin’s assertion that “the capitalist mode of production represents a qualitative rupture with systems that preceded it (including Europe of course.)” (1999: 293) Frank further notes that the “structural inequality and temporal unevenness of capital accumulation...are inherent to capitalism.” (1978: 239) For world-systems analysts, this qualitative transformation is based on the ever-rising expansion of the system (Arrighi, 1994; Bunker and Ciccantell, 2005). Amin notes that “The ancient (tributary) epochs had nothing comparable to the polarization on a global scale of the modern capitalist world. The earlier systems, despite significant levels of exchange, were not trading on a world scale, even if they were on a regional scale to the benefit of the centers of the regional systems” (Amin, 2011: 27) He notes further,

years ago of Abu-Lughod’s *Before European Hegemony* initiated the reorientation of the historical social sciences in general, and world-systems analysis in particular, that Frank now so passionately advocates.” (1999: 353-354) For Frank to claim novelty of his argument is reflective of the minimal role women have occupied within world-systems analysis as a field as well.

The establishment of a new system of core-periphery relations between Atlantic Europe and America is not the repetition of the extension of trade in the earlier periods. America does not ‘trade’ with Europe; *it is moulded to be integrated as a periphery economically exploited by mercantilist Europe...*¹⁴ [T]he extraordinary importance of this exploitation, which found expression in, among others: a considerable flux of gold and silver, reinforcing the social position of the new merchant capitalists in European society and giving them a decisive advantage over their competitors (they could offer better prices worldwide); and secondly, in a huge volume of profits drawn from the American plantation. In 1600 the exports of sugar from Brazil represent twice the total exports of England. (Amin, 2011: 141, emphasis mine)

Within these core-periphery relationship which was a spatial expansion and transformation of relations, Wallerstein pioneers the idea of the international division of labor in the first volume of *The Modern World-System*. As the world became divided into the core, peripheral, and semi-peripheral areas, they also constituted a “*multilayered format of layers within layers*,” as there “was the differential of the core of the European world-economy versus its peripheral areas, within the European core between states within states between regions and strata, within regions between city and country, and ultimately within more local units.” (2011: 86). He shows the division of labour amongst people in the 16th century, during the process of transition: “slaves who worked on sugar plantation,” “serfs’ who worked on large domains where grain was cultivated and wood harvested,” “tenant’ farmers” and “wage labourers,” and also supervisors and ruling classes (Wallerstein 2011: 86). He further shows, however, that these class divisions were not limited to Europe but constituted an *international* division of labor. There was

a slave class of African origins located in the Western Hemisphere, a “serf” class divided into two segments: a major one in eastern Europe and a smaller one of American Indians in the Western Hemisphere. The wage-workers were almost all west Europeans. The yeoman farmers were drawn largely even more narrowly, principally from northwest Europe. The intermediate classes were pan-European in origin (plus mestizos and mulattoes) and distributed geographically through the arena. The ruling classes were also pan-European, but I believe one can demonstrate disproportionately from Western Europe. (Wallerstein 2011: 87; see also, Dunnaway 1996: 455)

The convergence of the spatial and social relations is shown by Bunker and Cicantell who note how each world-hegemon accentuated their extractive capacities at a world-scale, beginning with the Portuguese who:

conducted their slave raids as if they were extractive enterprises—that is, as if the Native Americans were forces of production that they could appropriate from nature. Because indigenous societies had adapted their subsistence to the ecosystems that the Portuguese were harvesting for commercial profits, the depletion of the extracted resources paralleled the decimation of indigenous populations. (2005: 36)

¹⁴ This is true for gender relations as well. So, while there existed exploitative relations based on gender differentiation earlier, my argument is that with the rise of capitalism, it materialized at an unprecedented scale.

This is most significant for the purposes of this essay, as Frank notes these structural inequalities derived from primary accumulation, the accumulation of noncapitalist relations that sustains capitalist accumulation during the “so-called primitive accumulation.” (1978: 242) For him, these ““noncapitalist” sources and relations of production were essential to capitalist accumulation” (Frank, 1978: 243):

The seven “useful” years of a slave’s life in many parts of the New World, the decline in Indian population in Mexico from 25 million to 1.5 million... in little more than a century after the Conquest [of the New World], not to mention the total decimation of the indigenous population of the Caribbean in half a century, the increases incidence and depth of famine in Bengal after its rape by the British, and many less massive failures of the population to reproduce itself after being incorporated into the process of capital accumulation, all testify to the superexploitative character of these relations of productions, social formations, and the process of accumulation in its preindustrial stage. (Frank, 1978: 243)

Frank thus argues how these capitalist processes were assisted by non-capitalist processes, such as slavery, as well as the work of the bourgeois housewives.¹⁵ However, I contend that it is incorrect to bifurcate these processes as capitalist (assuming a waged-male proletariat) and non-capitalist (slaves, women, nature) when they are *integral* to the capitalist process. In other words, they are not outside the sphere of capitalist production but vital to it, as one overarching system. This incorporation is based then on a *transformation* of previous relations, or “relations of production” or the “utilization of preexisting forms of production.” While there is both a spatial and social transformation noted in Frank’s argument, it is again ignorant of the gendered nature of these transformations. So, while “[T]he world capitalist system is qualitatively different from all previous systems,” (Amin, 2011: 15), world-systems analysts do not show the gendered transformation of these relations.¹⁶

Another significant aspect of world-systems perspective I noted earlier is that, following Braudel, they see capitalism as *anti-market*, where the state is one with capitalism, thus expanding the former beyond the factory (Braudel, 1984). Capitalism thus becomes an all-encompassing phenomenon. Thus, there was a new *totality* of the capitalist system, something that was not seen before. So, when Frank refuses to acknowledge a beginning of the capitalist system, Amin argues that “[h]aving deliberately removed from his research concerns everything that has to do with politics and ideology, social relations and social issues, everything that is outside economics, Frank refuses to see the magnitude of the changes in question.” (2011: 144) But while, as Amin states, the “law of value controls not only economic life, but indeed the entire social system of the modern

¹⁵ This point was also emphasized by Rosa Luxemburg who argued that Marx

ignored peasants and other non-capitalist strata of non-waged labourers. [She] wrote that Marx’s model of ongoing accumulation of capital was based on the assumption that capitalism was a closed system in which only wage labourers and capitalists existed. She wrote that capitalism always needed ‘non-capitalist milieu and strata’ for its extension. According to her thesis these strata were peasants, colonies and the imperialist system. (Mies, 2014: xvii)

¹⁶ Plys also notes the rupture from previous modes and the capitalist relations of production (2013: 46), and so does Moore (2003: 133).

(capitalist) world,” how this economic logic exploited women needs to be considered to present a true account of these transformations (Amin, 1999: 300).

The theoretical advances made by world-systems analysts, then, show how the transition to capitalism was both spatial—through its externalization from Europe and the creation of different dependent and extractive regions—and social—through the creation of ‘layers’ of laborers and exploitation of the people of different zones—transformation at an unprecedented scale. World-systems perspective expands the Marxist framework from purely labor relations constituted in the factory to incorporate the nuances of capital accumulation. However, despite these provocative theoretical advances, how these social transformations and ruptures impact the gendered non-waged labor of production, reproduction, and sustenance performed by women during this period of accumulation is not tackled by these authors. Yet, Frank claims—and this highlights my argument that it is within world-systems that we can find the tools of analysis of these gendered inequalities despite its macro unit of analysis—that

Extending this argument to its logical conclusion (i.e., the capitalist accumulation of capital partly on the basis of primary accumulation through “noncapitalist” relations of production) is the unrequited production and reproduction performed by the wife and mother within the bourgeois and working-class families! For, if capital had to pay the housewife for the total contribution she, like the family of the African migrant worker, makes to the ability of the worker to produce surplus value, and if capital did not have her as a further underpaid labor force and reserve army of labor to boot, capitalist accumulation would be difficult, if not impossible. (Frank, 1978: 247)¹⁷

As noted earlier, my contention is that the *appropriation* (Moore, 2014) of the ‘wife’ or the ‘mother’ or the ‘African migrant worker’ are not *outside* capitalism, but very much integral to it, and thus need to be centralized in world-systems analysis. It is a misrecognition on Frank’s part of the necessity of non-waged labor and extra-human work which sustains capitalism through its superexploitation and appropriation which I will center in the next section. Thus, while world-systems scholars have importantly highlighted the rupture and polarization significant in the capitalist system, which as an all-encompassing system introduced something new and at a scale never seen before, its expansion and extremity needs to be understood as gendered to understand the rise of patriarchal capitalist modernity.

When Frank in *ReOrient* does away with a polarizing, ever expanding system based on the logic of endless accumulation, he leaves us looking for answers not only for the creation of an unequal world, but also differentiation amongst genders. If the world is horizontal then there would be no beginning of patriarchy and racialization just as there is no beginning of capitalism, because the two are inherently separate. And lastly, if there is no contradiction, it would be difficult to see how the system move forward and how we imagine a liberatory future. I have shown in this section

¹⁷ Mies points out how this non-recognition of those who were considered outside capitalism was prevalent in earlier feminist debates also. These “other areas of non-wage work which are tapped by capital in its process of accumulation. This is particularly all the work performed by subsistence peasants, petty commodity producers, marginalized people, most of whom are women, in the underdeveloped countries. Thus, most people involved in the discussion on housework did not transcend the Eurocentric view of capitalism. According to this view, these other areas of human labour are considered to be lying outside of capitalism and society proper. They are called ‘pre-capitalist’, ‘peripheral-capitalist’, ‘feudal’, or ‘semi-feudal’, or simply underdeveloped or backward. Sometimes referred to as areas of ‘uneven development’.” (Mies, 1986: 33) See Amin who provides a much more nuanced argument about uneven development, but misses gender. For Frank, women’s work is non-capitalist.

how it is important to focus on exploitation and polarization inherent in the transition to capitalism, as argued by world-systems scholars. Moreover, I have shown that despite these provocative arguments, as exemplified by Frank, women, slaves, and most non-waged people are considered *outside* capitalism for world-systems scholars. So, while they were integral for primitive accumulation, they still lay outside the sphere of capitalist relations proper. This is ignorance, however, is not limited to this perspective and is reflective of the broader literature on the transition. In the next section, I will show how feminist scholars have corrected these histories broadly, and levy those to argue that the transition to capitalism was gendered.

The Origins of Capitalist-Patriarchy

What I have outlined so far is characteristic of the theoretical literature on the transition to capitalism, and historical sociology in general.¹⁸ As Julia Adams, Elisabeth Clemens, and Anna Orloff claim, “Women and the work they do—care giving, housekeeping, sexual labor, varying modes of political activity—and gendered signification have been troublesome categories for sociological analysis of politics, capitalism, and modernity.” (46) Gender has thus been considered irrelevant to otherwise naturalized categories. As Claudia van Werholf notes, “André Gunder Frank, for example, did not want to consider the category of patriarchy, even if it had enriched his far reaching intent to understand not only 500 but 5000 years of “World-Systems.”” (2012: 173)

And so has been the case for analyzing the transition to capitalism. Feminist scholars have challenged this universal elimination of women in accepted stable categories. For example, in the late 20th century, many feminist scholars argued that the transition to capitalism—viewed as industrialization, modernization, and urbanization—and the changing family dynamics separated wage labor from domestic labor (Minge-Kalman, 1978; Thomas, 1988). Many feminist scholars have also made the male-centric Marxist framework more accurate to the lived experiences of historical capitalism, especially as experienced by gender (Fernandez-Kelly, 1989: 617-624). They refute Marx’s assumed male-waged proletariat and argue to see the subjugation of women’s bodies in capitalist development (Hartmann, 1981; Armstrong & Armstrong, 1987: 11; Mies, 1986; Federici, 2004). Feminist-Marxist historian, Mallon has argued through the case of the transition to capitalism in Central Peru in the late 19th and early 20th century that households should be analyzed through a gender lens first and should not only be seen as an economic unit, or as an outcome of an incomplete transition (1987). While modernist theorists viewed the rise of capitalism as favorable to women because of their inclusion in work, feminist scholars showed how this process was based on the devaluation of women’s work, the introduction of the family wage, and the increased sexual division of labor (Thomas, 1988).

Moreover, scholars have also analyzed state and sovereignty during the transition. For example, by showing the integration of the family to the state in early modern Europe through the ‘Family-State-Pact’ which was “designed to bring family formation under patriarchal control.” (Hanley, 1989) Left Weberian, Julia Adams, in *The Familial State* also illustrates through the case of early modern Netherlands how there was a nexus of patrimonial, familial, and corporate power. Challenging macro historical narratives that pin down the transition as a predominantly economic or military phenomenon, Adams claims that “The early modern patrimonial state and its sovereign arms or extensions would not have existed without the concept of father-rule and associated patriarchal practices of power.” (Adams, 2005: 200) As Dutch regents and men of elite families sought to procure state power through familial networks and kin, Adams argues that “Women’s

¹⁸ For an excellent review of feminist debates on historical sociology, see Adams, Clemens, and Orloff.

work was a precondition of male family heads' capacity to act on their version of patriarchal family values, mortgaging their own and their family's futures for a dynastic vision and trying to use the state to that end." (Adams, 2005: 92) Thus, Adams shows that "patriarchy cannot simply be added as an asterisk to fiscal-military preoccupations that remain otherwise undisturbed." (Adams, 2005: 200)

Feminist world-systems scholars have also critiqued the naturalized male categories in studies of the global economy. In a paper presented at the American Sociological Association in 1984 entitled, "World-Systems Theory and Feminist Scholarship," Joan Smith called to integrate world-systems perspective and feminist theory as "each have a great deal to offer the other," especially the historical outlook that the former could provide the latter (1984; see also, York and Ergas, 2001 for another effort at integrating the two perspectives) Moreover, Wilma Dunaway writes that "the tendency in world-system analyses is to speak about the reproduction of laborer households as though these entities are ungendered." (2001: 4) By reviewing articles in two leading world-systems journals, *Journal of World-Systems Research* and *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, she found an "embarrassing lack of women in analyses of global processes" (Dunaway, 2001: 3-4). Instead, she argues, world-systems should focus on the gendered nature of households, processes of semi-proletarianization, and commodity chains to reveal women's integral role in the development and sustenance of the world-economy (Dunaway, 2001; see Dunnaway, 2014 for a volume of gendered analysis of commodity chains). Kathryn B. Ward notes, however, that world-system scholars often study gender *only* in relation to household structures "rather than recasting world system to put gender at the center of analysis." (52) Fernandez-Kelly has also made efforts to gender studies on development. By showing the process of *maquiladoras* which are export processing plants that provide jobs to women at low costs, she shows the "specification of gender as a contradictory process that allows for the maintenance of a substratum of labor, predominantly female, outside market exchanges." (1989: 613) This is akin to 'noncapitalist' processes that sustained capitalist development since its transition as I have discussed earlier in the paper. Analyzing globalization by drawing on "world-systems, Marxists, and feminist frameworks," Valentine Moghadam has also shown how "[a]cross historical time... what has remained constant is the subordination of women, their responsibility for childbearing and childrearing, their domestic labor, and – under capitalism – their role as part of the 'reserve army of labor' as well as paid and unpaid labour in production and reproduction," and that "neoliberal capitalist globalization [is] a class-based project for private capitalist accumulation imbued with masculinist bravado" (2021: 702-703). Others have also underscored the intersection of race, class, gender, and nationalist projects (Brewer, 2012) and women's cooptation by anti-systemic movements historically in the capitalist world-system (Miraj, 2022).

These feminist scholars have thus done excellent work to highlight the importance of gendering Marxist, Weberian, and political economic perspectives, whereby gender is used as a 'concept' to show the contradictory nature of capitalist processes, and women are not just 'added and stirred.' While this list is exhaustive by no means, it does show the task feminist scholars have taken to unsettle accepted and naturalized abstract social categories. However, while, indelible, these works have not primarily focused on the transition to capitalism as a polarizing phenomenon at a world scale. Marxist Feminists have largely understood capitalism as industrial capitalism, Weberian scholars have emphasized the gendered state and not so the contradictory processes of exploitation and class formation at the level of the world-economy, and political economists have largely focused on development and globalization. By an analysis of the transition of capitalism as it was based on the exploitation of women, nature, and the colonies (Mies, 1986: 14), I hope to

highlight that in order to understand women's overdetermined superexploitation today, it is important to see how the transition of capitalism was gendered. As Maria Mies argues, "*capitalism constitutes the most recent and most universal manifestation [of the patriarchal civilization as a system].*" (Mies, 1986: 13, emphasis original)

The polarization and rupture inherent in the transition to capitalism was not gender-neutral. Just like world-systems scholars (except for Frank, 1998) note the creation of "something new" in the transition to capitalism, from a shift from more even trade relations, the use of force and violence, and the involvement of the state, to a system exploitative, violent, and expansive like never before, a feminist reading entails these aggravations and differentiations that exploited women also to a scale never seen before. This is especially important to argue against the liberal feminist understanding of modernity-equals-women's freedom which assumes that patriarchy can be explained through cultural explanations. As Adams, Clemens, and Orloff claim:

"Women" represents a key category of modernity's Others, and liberal and autonomous individuals, citizens, workers, and soldiers—the categories of modern subjects—are defined in opposition to what is "woman," even when actual women are making decisions, working, or fighting. Their absence helped to constitute the modern bourgeois public sphere and citizenship. *Later, their inclusion signifies that modernity has arrived, even if the structures themselves retain a masculine character.* (2004: 47, emphasis mine)

Modernity has, on the contrary, meant the superexploitation of women at the world scale, and has been so since its arrival. I contend then that the transition was not only a spatial transformation, in the creation of different economies, and a social transformation as it created a layered labor force, as shown by world-systems scholars, but especially a gendered social transformation because it would not be possible to create a waged proletariat without the creation of the non-waged and semi-proletarian women. In this regard, the social transformation was both incomplete and overdetermined.

It is not as if patriarchal relations suddenly emerged with capitalism. Nor was it a universal process, as Mies argues:

Patriarchy was not developed universally all over the globe but by distinctive patriarchal societies. They include the Jews, the Arians (Indians and Europeans), the Arabs, the Chinese, and the respective great religions. The rise and the universalization of all these civilizations, *but particularly the Judeo-European one, is based on conquest and war.* Europe was not invaded by Africans, but Africa was invaded by predatory Europeans. This also means that a concept of a unilinear, universal process of history that evolves in successive stages everywhere from Primitive Communism over Barbary, Feudalism, Capitalism to Socialism and Communism may have to be given up in our analysis of patriarchy. (Mies, 1986: 66, emphasis mine)

She further notes that

This does not mean that earlier patriarchal systems did not know violence against women (cf. the Chinese, the Indian, the Jewish patriarchies), but these systems never claimed that they had done away with direct violence, that they had 'pacified', 'civilized', 'domesticated', 'rationalized' all direct aggression of men against men and men against

women. But modern or capitalist patriarchy, or ‘civilization’, has risen particularly with this claim: it has proclaimed itself superior to all other ‘savage’, ‘barbaric’ systems precisely because it claims to have banned all direct violence in the interaction of its citizens and handed it over to the overall sovereign, the state...” (Mies, 1986: 27)

Werlhof has similarly pointed to how “Western modernity can be characterized as a civilization that tries by all means to materialize the utopia of a supposedly “better” and “higher” life.” (Werlhof, 2012: 174) Thus, it is not as if patriarchal relations did not exist before the rise of capitalism, and of course, the rise of capitalist-patriarchy cannot be explained through successive stages but through colonization, exploitation, and conquest. Moreover, Mies notes that this transformation did not emerge in a vacuum suddenly with the transition but was instead based on previous predatory modes of appropriation, formed on violence and conquest of women’s bodies (1986: 66-68). In the transition then, “[previous forms of labor control were] rather transformed and dialectically preserved, in the sense that [they] reappeared under new forms of labour control.” (Mies, 1986: 66) Here, she connects the externalization of exploitative relations from Europe to the New World as they simultaneously also occurred on women’s bodies everywhere:

When capital accumulation became the dominant motor of productive activity in contrast to subsistence production, wage labour tended to become the dominant form of labour control. Yet these apparently ‘peaceful’ production-relations, based on mechanisms of *economic coercion* (structural violence), could be built up only on the base of a tremendous expansion of the predatory mode of acquisition. Direct and violent acquisition of gold and silver and other products, mainly in Hispanic America, and of producers—first the Indians in Latin America and later African slaves—proved to be the most ‘productive’ activity in what has been described as the period of ‘primitive accumulation’.

Thus capitalism did not do away with the former ‘savage’ forms of control over human productive capacity, it rather reinforced and generalized them... This institution was also based on the monopoly over effective weapons and existence of breeding grounds of enough ‘human cattle’ which could be hunted, appropriated and subjugated. *This involves a re-definition of the rising European bourgeoisie’s relation to nature and to women.* (1986: 68, emphasis mine)

Silvia Federici also notes how women in Europe did better before the transition. The devaluation of women’s labor, their increased dependence on men, their elimination from what was considered “real work,” and the control on their bodies, all conjoined with the logic of endless accumulation of capital. This was new and at a scale never seen before. She claims:

[t]he fact that unequal power relations between women and men existed even prior to the advent of capitalism, as did a discriminating sexual division of labor, does not detract from this assessment. For in pre-capitalist Europe, women’s subordination to men had been tempered by the fact that they had access to the commons and other communal assets, while in the new capitalist regime *women themselves became the commons*, as their work was defined as a natural resource, laying outside the sphere of market relations.¹⁹ (2004: 97, emphasis original; see also, Mies, 1986: 27)

¹⁹ It is interesting to see how this idea has translated into social scientists, as Frank considered women’s work ‘noncapitalist’ as well, outside of market relations, as discussed above.

Federici has been critiqued for valorizing the commons, yet, I contend that her major argument remains intact in that the capitalist take off did constitute a gendered social transformation. Mies also claims that “The cities, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries did not exclude women from any craft or business which they wanted to take up.” (1986: 79) In the colonies, also, this meant a new level of dispossession of women, as Walter Rodney notes that women in Africa did better before the arrival of the colonizers (1978; Mies, 1986: 94; See Miraj, 2022, for a lengthier discussion).

This dispossession, exploitation, and appropriation did not result because of some inherent sadism in European men but it was rather the consequence the logic of endless accumulation of capital. This can be seen as the social transformation constituted different levels and was at one with the spatial transformation that took place during the transition. As the capitalist world-economy expanded outward from Europe, and created ‘layers’ of labor within Europe, the process became overdetermined and superexploitative in places, and was thus not linearly polarizing. Within Europe, this constituted the witch-hunt, especially made up of the poor women who formed part of the ‘vagabonds,’ and to whom belonged “[m]ost of the radical and utopian ideas of the time.” (Mies, 1986: 80) Mies notes that these women “earned their living as dancers, tricksters, singers, and prostitutes” and only began to be condemned around the 14th century (Mies, 1986: 80)

A significant period in this “capitalist take-off,” the 17th century depression is also noted by Frank in *World Accumulation*, whereby population decline, and violence accelerated with the dissemination of the Indigenous population in Mexico and the subsequent rise of the British as the leader of these relations, as opposed to Spain and Portugal (1978). One consequence of this depression that Frank misses, however, and that underscores the polarization that was accelerating not just within regions, but within people, was the “launching of a true war against women clearly aimed at breaking the control they had exercised over their bodies and reproduction.” (Federici, 2004: 88) This was stimulated by population decline not only in the colonies, but also in the metropolis as “none of this transformation in the mode of production, development of the division of labor, and accumulation of capital was or could be limited to the narrow confines of any single national economy.” (Frank, 1978: 79) This *rupture* in women’s position in Europe, but also elsewhere, is similar to the qualitative transformations that world-systems scholars have argued above as, while in the Middle Ages, women had more control over their bodies and reproductive activities in Europe, with the capitalist take off (Federici, 2004; Frank, 1978: 78), “[women’s] wombs became public territory, controlled by men and the state, and procreation was directly placed at the service of capitalist accumulation.” (Federici, 2004: 89)^{20 21}

While world-systems scholars and other economists have calculated the trade, exchange, and plunder in at the global scale, Federici and Mies have shown the capital accumulated within

²⁰ Palat argues, as noted above, that in India, South China, and Japan at the time, the state did not have the same relations with the mercantilist and financial elites as their European counterparts because of the conditions and necessities of wet-rice cultivation. Federici notes, that in Europe, the crackdown on women’s bodies was especially stimulated by the mercantilist elites, who were notorious for extracting from labor to their ultimate capacities (Federici, 2004: 87). It is important to then ask, what does this say about the origins of patriarchy in Europe vs the peripheries? Did these ruptures and subsequent polarizations not take place in the Indian world-economy, and so capitalism does not equal freedom, but regression, and uneven at that, for women, especially women of the peripheries?

²¹ While Federici compares this exploitation of European women’s bodies to African women exported as slaves, with serious limitations, it is further important to point out the resultant superexploitation of colored women in primitive accumulation, which is not comparable to European women (Federici, 2004: 89)

Europe through the witch-hunts and policing of women's bodies which was accentuated in this period of transition. Mies claims, "The blood-money of the witch-hunt was used for the private enrichment of bankrupt princes, of lawyers, doctors, judges and professors, but also for such public affairs as financing wars, building up a bureaucracy, infrastructural measures, and finally the new absolute state." (1986: 87) Slavery was similarly based on cost-benefit calculations, where slave women's worth was determined around pregnancy and breast feeding (Mies, 1986: 91). Since "[c]ommercial expansion [into the colonies] from the beginning was based on monopoly," (Mies, 1986: 89) and women themselves were made to be the colonies of the state, the Church, and men, this begs a gendered analysis of monopoly capitalism and the role of the exploitation (and resistance) of women in the systemic cycles of accumulation.

While the direct torture on women's bodies, both in the metropole and colonies, helped finance wars, conquest, and trade, there is another significant aspect in how women are integral in the transition. This was the process of proletarianization of men and the simultaneous semi-proletarianization and commodification of women, not just in Europe, but also in the colonies, which world-systems scholars need to analyze better. Amin noted in his analysis of why proletarianization happened in Europe and not elsewhere (see discussion above), that it was the particular conditions of feudalism and accumulation of money-capital in Europe. However, this begs the question of why it was possible for men to be fully proletarianized in Europe but women's work to be completely devalued in this transition, and why this does not make appearance in his analysis. Instead, Mies and Federici show that while men were disadvantaged as proletariats, the differentiation created within the world proletariat also had no match in the past. Thus, the break from the past exploitative and polarizing practices was gendered and in this process of the transition (Federici notes from feudalism to capitalism, but I would argue through also peripheral capitalism and colonization and the creation of the core-peripheral relations, as seen through a world-systemic perspective), "women suffered a unique process of social degradation that was fundamental to the accumulation of capital and has remained so ever since." (Federici, 2004: 75) Mies argues that while through the proletarianization of workers in Europe they "acquired their 'humanity, were humanized', or 'civilized', the workers—men and women—of the peripheries, that is, Eastern Europe and the colonies, were naturalized." (Mies, 1986: 68) It is worth bringing Amin's argument on peripheral capitalism, whereby the process was transition was overdetermined and truncated in the colonies with how this impacted women as well.

Federici, moreover, shows that these polarizing processes constituted a demise of the "unity of production and reproduction" during this transition period (2004: 74) She notes,

In the new monetary regime, only production-for-market was defined as a value-creating activity, whereas the reproduction of the worker began to be considered as valueless from an economic viewpoint and even ceased to be considered as work. Reproductive work continued to be paid – though the lowest rates – when performed for the master class or outside the home. But the economic importance of the reproduction of labor-power carried out in the home, and its function in the accumulation of capital became invisible, being mystified as a natural vocation and labelled "women's labor." In addition, women were excluded from many waged occupations, and when they worked for a waged, they earned a pittance compared to the average male wage... These historic changes – that peaked in the 19th century with the creation of the full-time housewife – redefined women's position in society and in relation to men. The sexual division of labor that emerged from it not only fixed women to reproductive work, but increased their dependence on men, enabling the

state and employers to use the male wage as a means to command women's labor. In this way, the separation of commodity production from the reproduction of labor-power also made it possible the development of a specifically capitalist use of the wage and of the markets as a means for the accumulation of unpaid labor. (Federici, 2004: 75)

The proper process of proletarianization, whereby men became workers and gained political concessions from the state thus did not mean

the male worker's participation in the democratic process, his rise to the status of a 'citizen,' but his sharing the social paradigm of the ruling class, that is, the hunter/warrior model. His 'colony' or 'nature', however, is not Africa or Asia, but the women of his own class. And within that part of 'nature', the boundaries of which are defined by marriage and family laws, he has the monopoly of the means of coercion, of direct violence, which, at the level of the state, the ruling classes invested in their representatives, that is, the king and later the elected representatives. (Mies, 1986: 69)

Moreover, this privatization of what was common before, and the subsequent creation of the commons for taking also brought together the appropriation of women, land, and extra-human resource as life making-capacities (Moore, 2014, Mies, 1986: 67). The Anthropocene, the white man, who had the animals, land, indigenous populations, slaves, and women for taking, where, for working men women became "the substitute for the land lost to the enclosures." (Federici, 2004: 97) This privatization and extraction happened at a world-scale, not only in Europe (see, Bunker and Cicantell, 2005: 36 quoted above). Thus, although this rupture was built on previous exploitative relationships, it was novel in its scale and extremity. As Mies (1986) and Moore (2014) argue:

Whereas under pre-capitalist production-relations based on ownership of land, women and peasants were defined as 'earth' or parts of the earth, as nature was identified with Mother Earth and her plants, under early capitalism slaves were defined as 'cattle' and women mainly as breeders, not of labour power, but of male heirs mainly... Whereas the ruling classes among the pastoralists and the feudal lords were still aware of their own dependence on nature, including women... the capitalist class saw itself right from the beginning as master and lord *over* nature... (Mies, 1986: 68)

Long before capitalism came around, civilizations had been remaking natures on a large scale: feudal Europe, the Greek city-states, the Romans, successive Chinese empires, the Sumerians, and many others... What change after 1450 were the relevant units, and organization, of time and space. Capitalism transformed regional landscapes in mere decades. Through the capacities of monetary capital to command, and indeed to produce, space, there emerged a fundamentally globalizing mode of producing wealth, nature, and power, centered on the commodity form... In contrast to the view of early capitalism as technologically or socially inert, every movement of global occupation and transformation signaled a new phase of social organization, technical deployment, and landscape discipline. Never before had any world-ecological regime moved so fast, so far. Something decisive had changed. (Moore, 2014: 59-60)

This generalization, thus, was not limited to man-woman relationship, which expands this analysis and makes it integral for a world-system perspective. The creation of this sexual division of labor was mapped onto the international division of labor as well, where “certain parts of the world [were defined] as ‘nature’, that is, as savage, uncontrolled and therefore, open for exploitation and civilizing efforts, and others as ‘human’, that is, already controlled and domesticated.” (Mies, 1986: 68) Further, while Amin notes the uneven and contradictory processes of peripheral capitalism in the colonies, Mies notes also the accentuation of patriarchal rules based on the logic of accumulation in the colonies as well as the equality of the sexes was seen as “backward” and the men were pushed toward sexism as the civilizing mission (1986: 93).

Women were thus integral for the capitalist take off, through the witch-hunts, the devaluation of their work, and their role in the slave trade and colonies, yet are ignored at worst, or considered the non-capitalist component to capitalist accumulation (Frank) at best. I argue, instead, that the above analysis shows these processes were very much capitalist. The fact that women’s work was *non-waged* should not mean that they are considered non-capitalist in world-systems analysis. As Mies argues, “the exploitation of colonies, as well as that of women and other non-wage workers, is absolutely crucial to the capitalist accumulation process, and not only accidental or peripheral. Without the exploitation of non-wage labour, wage-labour exploitation would not be possible.” (Mies, 1986: 200) While WSA scholars have shown the externalization of exploitation from Europe to the peripheries, Mies shows how this process was gendered, and based on the exploitation of women, nature, and the colonies.²⁴ She notes:

The modern European patriarchs made themselves independent of their *European Mother Earth*, by conquering first the Americas, later Asia and Africa, and by extracting gold and silver from the mines of Bolivia, Mexico and Peru and other ‘raw materials’ and luxury items from the other lands. They ‘emancipated’ themselves, on the one hand, from their dependence on European women for the production of labourers by destroying the witches, as well as their knowledge of contraceptives and birth control. On the other hand, by subordinating grown African men and women into slavery, they thus acquired the necessary labour power for their plantations in America and the Caribbean. (Mies, 1986: 76)

My contention in this essay is then that the transition to capitalism was at once a spatial and gendered social transformation, and that it was uneven, superexploitative, and overdetermined. This is important to recognize not only to show the lived experiences of women but that they also resisted this exploitation. The contradictions of capitalism lay in the female networks, across racial lines, created amongst slave and white women in the New World (Federici, 2004). Mies also notes that the “women were not passively giving up their economic and sexual independence, but that they resisted in many forms the onslaught of church, state and capital.” (1986: 81) Thus, “[it] seems plausible that the whole fury of the witch-hunt was not just a result of the decaying old order in its confrontation with new capital forces, or even a manifestation of timeless male sadism, but a reaction of the new male-dominated classes against the *rebellion* of women.” (Mies, 1986: 81) Women thus have a historical presence in the development and resistance to capitalism which should be recognized yet is ignored by macrohistorical scholars in general, and scholars of the transition to capitalism as well.

²⁴ See Mies’ discussion on Mother Earth as a woman (Mies, 1986: 75-76).

Conclusion

The transition to capitalism is important to understand in order to understand modernity. Instead of viewing our world as the epitome of linear progress, it is important recognize the violence and collusion it has been built on, in order to work towards a more liberatory future. While scholars have undertaken the task of analyzing the transition to capitalism in many fields, common across them is the assumption of a gender-neutral, but predominantly male worker. In this article, I have argued that the process of the transition was actually uneven and overdetermined for women. Today, we see this historical reality materializing at an accelerated pace when women of the Global South continue to be semi-proletarian labor, superexploited in global commodity and care chains, and whose bodies continue to be the site of contestation. It is thus important to note that modernity has not meant progress but has instead meant violence and exploitation for women, although they continue to be ignored by the analysis of the transition and development of capitalism.

In this essay, I have argued that the transition to capitalism was uneven and overdetermined for women. I have claimed that while theories of the transition are important to understand the nature of modernity, scholars have continued to omit gender in their analysis, even when they recognize the collusion and violence inherent in the transition, such as world-systems scholars. This is symptomatic of the larger macrohistorical literature, but also the Global Left in general, which, in its analysis of underdevelopment, continues to ignore gender. I have shown the how many feminist scholars have conducted important research and shown how women were in fact integral to the transition, and I claim that they need to be recentered. But as a closing, it is important to also argue to move beyond to note how these processes became accentuated in the colonies and the New World and do so today.

Feminism is not separate from microhistory as history is built on women's bodies. And so, it is important for scholars of the transition to capitalism to show how this event was gendered.

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