5. Critical contributions to world-systems analysis
5.2

The failure of the “Modern World-System” and the new paradigm of the “Critical Theory of Patriarchy”

The “civilization of alchemists” as a “system of war”

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Origins and potential of the new paradigm of the Critical Theory of Patriarchy

The Critical Theory of Patriarchy has been developed in the last 20 years (Werlhof and Behmann 2010). It is based:

- on the earlier feminist analysis of global capitalism/socialism as “capitalist patriarchy,” which showed that instead of proletarian wage labor it is the worldwide “housewifization” of women and their systematically low or completely unpaid labor in private and public that has been the human pre-condition for capitalist accumulation since the end of the witch-hunts (cf. Mies 1986; Mies et al 1988; later Federici 2004);

- on “ecofeminism” as it defines the relationship between society, women, and nature, shows the fundamental importance of nature in general and gives a definition of it as a living organism instead of supposedly “dead matter”; the latter has been suggested by the modern sciences responsible for the “death of nature” (Merchant) since the seventeenth century, following the death of women as “witches” (cf. Daly 1978, Merchant 1980; Mies and Shiva 1993);

- on the historical analysis of “patriarchy” as the “deep structure” of modernity itself; patriarchy is no longer defined as a merely “traditional” remnant of male domination that will sooner or later be abolished by modernity, a position held by most analysts, “gender” studies and the Left (Werlhof 2007a);

- on a different definition of “civilization,” comparing the original and in parts of the world still existing matriarchal civilizations to the patriarchal one that developed later. We reject the image of patriarchy as the first or general form of organization of human society and/or its first form of
“high civilization” and the simultaneous wrong definition of matriarchal civilization as women’s or mothers rule, or their denial altogether—like that of pre-modern indigenous cultures/civilizations. Matriarchy—mater arché—means “in the beginning the mother” and is based on the evidence of the origins of life in the mother (cf. discussion in Göttner-Abendroth 1988; Derungs 2003; Genth 2009; Werlhof 2009a).

Finally, our new paradigm is based:

– on an analysis of techniques (cf. Greek “techné,” meaning ruse, trick), as a means to develop patriarchy as a social utopia opposing the natural world, the world of mothers and of matriarchal civilizations. We therefore reject the idea that these techniques developed by patriarchy are “neutral” and the presumably necessary and inevitable “evolutionary progress” of humanity (cf. Genth 2002; Mumford 1977; Wagner 1970; Werlhof 1997a, 2001, 2007b).

Critical Theory of Patriarchy has developed into a new trans-disciplinary paradigm, which has also recently been explored philosophically (Behmann 2009). In contrast to most existing theoretical approaches, Critical Theory of Patriarchy is able to:

– explain the crisis of the West as the logical failure of the development of patriarchal civilization up to modernity; a failure that could not be understood as long as patriarchy was banned to the collective unconsciousness, wrongly defined, a “blind spot” and the apparently unspeakable “secret” of the Modern World-System;
– consider the existence of patriarchy and make us aware of the historical depth of the present global crisis and the strong interconnectedness of its different dimensions;
– discuss the logic for the alternatives to 500 years of the Modern World-System and 5000 years of different forms of pre-modern patriarchy;
– explain the tremendous difficulties of a general conscious and peaceful global change toward post-capitalist-patriarchal social relations, so urgently needed now.

Critical Theory of Patriarchy has identified the struggles of the Left for a new socialism as a project of industrial society and thus of patriarchy. The Left cannot present alternatives to the crises of today. This insight is one of the results of the cooperation with Immanuel Wallerstein, the founder of the Modern World-System theory, which began in the 1980s (cf. last time, Werlhof 2004). However, our concept of patriarchy, capitalist patriarchy, and the critique of modern technology as the “development of the productive forces,” and of “progress” as “patriarchal” have not yet been discussed by many Modern World-System theorists. 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” (cf. Frank and Gills 1999).

We do not see how alternatives to the Modern World-System can emerge from it as the Modern, Capitalist World-System of Patriarchy. We are more related to indigenous alternatives in the global South that stem from pre-colonial, mostly matriarchal civilizations, which are still or again practiced worldwide (by the Zapatistas, cf. Werlhof 1997b, the Bolivian “Rights for Mother Earth” or “Pachamama” Movement, the Indian “Earth Democracy” Movement, cf. Shiva 2005, or Brazilian Liberation Theology, cf. Boff 2010). These alternatives can also be found in the pre-patriarchal history of the global North (cf. Derungs 2003; Eisler 1987; Gimbutas 1991).
Concepts

The Modern World-System as a failed utopia; the definition of patriarchy as an opposition to matriarchy; and the technological project of patriarchy as an opposition to nature

Western modernity can be characterized as a civilization that tries by all means to materialize the utopia of a supposedly “better” and “higher” life. Today, with the “globalization” of neoliberalism as the most advanced form of capitalist/modern world patriarchy, war, economy, and technology, it is evident that this project has failed. Instead of heaven, we are facing hell on Earth, already experienced by masses of people in the global South (Chossudovsky and Marshall 2010).

There exists no explanation for this “development of underdevelopment” (Frank 1967). The confusion can first be met by using a “larger telescope” (Mies 2003). This means to compare the two central forms of civilization in human history—on the one hand the egalitarian and co-operative matriarchal civilization in tune with nature and life, and on the other hand the hierarchical patriarchal one trying to dominate nature and life. The approximately 5000-year-old patriarchal society has reached its climax of material realization with modernity. Nearly all of the relationships of the original matriarchal civilizations of the world, including growing parts of nature itself, have been “replaced” by a “progressive” counter-world and counter-nature in the form of “capital” (the commodity, modern money, machinery, systems of domination). This destructive transformation—that could not have been realized with “tools,” but is based on continuous wars, processes of “primitive accumulation” inside and outside of Europe, and the development of the “natural” sciences—has been glorified as “peaceful,” “civilized,” “productive,” “humane,” and “creative.” It defines “capitalist patriarchy” or the Modern World-System, including “socialism.” It is futuristic and utopian as it proclaims the possibility to construct an alternative to life, matter, mothers, nature, and ultimately to the suppressed matriarchies.

The failure of western civilization as the Modern World-System can be observed today on a global level as well as on all levels of human, animal, and plant existence, including the elements themselves, though this is of course not really recognized “officially” and much less “explained,” neither by political and social groups and institutions nor by the sciences. On the contrary, in spite of the planetary crises in all aspects of life, which are developing their synergetic effects and may even lead to a general collapse of the fundamental conditions for the maintenance of life on earth as such, nearly all of those who comment on this system (atical) crisis still maintain the idea of infinite progress and development, of industrial society as the best form of civilization in history and of rationality as the highest form of intelligence (critiques by Jaeger 2008; Projektgruppe 2009; O’Leary 2010; Werlhof 2008).

In view of this paradox, we can use our new and newly defined theoretical concepts that are mutually interrelated and can explain the overall “logic” of the failure of modern civilization as a “necessary” one: in the long run, the “war logic” of destruction cannot be a success.

Our approach is based on a new and much broader as well as more complex concept of “patriarchy” that brings a new, “technical,” definition and “periodization” of it into the debate. This definition exceeds by far the usual understanding of patriarchy as the domination of the father or the man in the family, society and/or the state and leads to a new understanding of industrial society by linking it to the much longer global historical development of patriarchy.

By doing this, the patriarchal “project”—or delusion—of constructing a new world, which is opposed to the existing one, could be identified. This is the reason why patriarchy is so much occupied with techniques that would help in this respect only.
The utopian “New and Better World” Project that directly and deeply opposes the former matriarchal world and absorbs the whole of nature and Earth itself in the course of its development as a form of “divide, transform and rule!” has been propagated since the beginnings of patriarchy. Its main characteristic is: “Alchemy”!

This was my main “discovery” when I tried to find out which category would define the transformation process from the patriarchal past into capitalism as the patriarchal present (Werlhof 1997a, 2001, 2004, 2009b).

“Alchemy” as the link between the past patriarchy and the present, “capitalist” one: The Modern World-System as a patriarchal “civilization of alchemists” and a “system of war”

In Critical Theory of Patriarchy, “alchemy” is understood as a world view and an “interdisciplinary science,” technique, ideology, religion, and psychology in the form of a quest for patriarchal male identity and “individuation.” Alchemy—one of its translations being “black mud of the Nile”—has its origins in the matriarchal garden-civilizations of the so-called Paradise (the Persian word for garden). After their conquest by war, the method of the beginnings of patriarchy as a societal order (Dieckvoss 2003), the alchemical tradition is passed over to patriarchs and experiences big changes and perversions. The purpose of alchemy under more or less patriarchal conditions is no longer related to a cooperation with nature and a good life of the community, but defined by trying to realize the “Gnostic” utopia of a “male creation” that is supposed to be higher, better, and more divine than the natural or female, matriarchal one.

The new, alchemical idea of a creation under male control, or even as an independent male “creation,” is based on the negation, transformation, destruction, and “replacement” of the female creation, of nature in general, and ultimately of the human being itself. Destruction is becoming the pre-condition of “creation” or “production,” and a conscious deterioration the pre-condition for a supposed “improvement”!

Starting in the wars of conquest of matriarchal civilizations and in the laboratories of single alchemists, the idea of a male “creation by destruction” was developed, using the warriors experience and justification, his techniques, the enrichment as a result of war as plunder and experiments on the basis of still pre-patriarchal knowledge. Alchemical experiments were in the beginning very much related to those of shamans, blacksmiths, and metallurgy in service of war (Eliade 1980). These experiments have been meditative and immaterial as well as material and practical. They are systematically separating and dissolving living matter, trying to overcome time by speed and generally aiming at surmounting nature and her cycles, life and death. Alchemy under patriarchy intends to become independent from mothers and nature in bringing death to life/matter—“mortification”—as well as in “creating” life, and in becoming active in transforming the origins and “Gestalt” of existing matter by re-combining separate matters in the alchemist’s final “Opus Magnum” (Schütt 2000). The result of the procedure is supposed to be the “philosopher’s stone,” a symbol of ultimate power over nature.

Alchemy, however, is starting its general and global career only with modernity, embracing in the end the whole world and finally our planet. Most of the literature on alchemy argues that alchemy was a failure already in antiquity, not to speak of the Latin middle ages, as it did never succeed in producing gold and life and has therefore allegedly been abolished until the end of the eighteenth century. My concept of alchemy as a violent patriarchal technique and general method of an artificial male creation, however, proves not only its ongoing existence but also its final “success” insofar as it has become the ideological, religious, psychological, and practical basis of
modern technology (machinery), science and “progress,” and of capitalism in general, extending to a sort of economic, social, and political alchemy (Werlhof, man.).

In the texts and justifications of modern progress, it is argued that all matter/life has to be appropriated, brought to the laboratory, cut into pieces, put together with other materials, and transformed into something supposedly higher, better, and more civilized. This is nothing else than the alchemical form of destruction—“mortification”—which is followed by the intended “Opus Magnum” of a male creation of matter/life, which is not necessarily born but made—today through machine technology—and which is supposed to be much “higher” than the supposedly “low,” bad and uncivilized, if not sinful, creations of mothers and Mother Nature.

This generalization of modern alchemy does not mean, however, that it has not failed at the same time. The project of dominating living nature as a whole, on a micro as well as on a macro-level, its exploitation, dissection, and transformation into “dead capital,” and the intents to replace it by a “second nature” (Bruiger 2006) of a “new life” or “industrial society” cannot work. The times of “ostrich policies” are over as the effects have become planetary in their dimensions.

All this has become obvious to the many people who have started a search for an alternative world and relationship to nature, also on a technical level. However, as they do not generally have an analysis of alchemy from the point of view of patriarchy, they even think of pre-modern alchemy as an alternative to modern science and technology! (Wilson et al 2007) Such illusions do not solve our dilemma.

The belief in alchemical principles is a very old and religious one, based on the patriarchal idea of the “Creator” as a male God beyond nature, mothers, the Goddess, and Earth. Following this period (Assmann 2003), apparently only this God was able to “make” matter and life exist, and not only in the beginning, but also afterwards; from the perspective of progress, Man thinks it is his calling to improve creation in a supposedly divine manner as if He could act like God on Earth. This is what alchemy and science or progress are about: the alchemists/scientists/capitalists trying to become divine creators on Earth, godly “Fathers” of a “pure” and better matter—like gold—and of a better life—a “new” human being, or today even a “post-human” one (Rifkin 1983; Schirrmacher 2001; Weizenbaum 1976; Werlhof 2010).

Patriarchy as a utopia can be materially realized only via a successful male “creation by destruction.” From this perspective, modernity with industrial society is the huge worldwide intent spreading from Europe by means of colonialism, imperialism, war, and “globalization,” in order to develop a “pure” patriarchy without any matriarchal remnants and dependencies, be they related to women, mothers, or Mother Nature.

I therefore call the developed Modern World-System of today the “civilization of alchemists,” since nearly everybody has become a part of this “Great Transformation” (Polanyi 1978) of the world into a machine for the globally growing “creation” by destruction: commodity production, modern money, machinery, and command—capital. Capital, as the most important result of modern alchemy, is indeed regarded as the new gold (cf. Binswanger 1985) and even “life.” But the alchemical production process, not to mention its most modern forms, is not peaceful at all, though the system tries to hide its systematic violence. Hence I call it a “system of war.” This war is occurring every day and does not have to be “declared.” “Life,” nevertheless, cannot be created by alchemy, neither in earlier times nor today. On the contrary, under the regime of alchemy, life is dying out. This shows that it is possible to kill life, but not to bring it into being artificially. In alchemical terms: mortification is working, but the Opus Magnum is not, and the idea of the philosopher’s stone is vanishing into the nowhere!

The West’s failure is due to the “alchemical” destruction of the world and the so-called natural “resources”; a destruction that is thought of, theologically proclaimed, and fetishized as “creation.” Wherever and whatever alchemy is used for, it is applied by following the same principles.
However, the counter-productivity of the patriarchal project’s “necessary” violence can neither be recognized nor given up by its “elites,” most of the men and always more women in this world. It would mean the renunciation of not only 500 but 5000 years of patriarchy and patriarchal civilization! The utopian dream of modern civilization to finally become detached from history, nature, and the female part of the species will not become reality.

Critical Theory of Patriarchy helps to leave behind the confusion, ideologies, illusions, belief systems, and propaganda about “the West” and the Modern World-System. It allows for a completely new insight into the real, long-term character of modern civilization at the very moment of its failure, and it is therefore necessary for all those who want to move forward to real, “deep” alternatives. Patriarchy or Life! This has become the question of today.

The war system as a planetary one: A new “military alchemy” and the threat for planet Earth; explaining the existence of technologies using the whole planet as a weapon

Mostly unnoticed by the public and academics, the latest developments in military technology since World War II (Bertell 2000) show that the Modern World-System of Patriarchy has reached its ultimate goal: the intent to subject, change and control not only nature and (wo)man, but also the planet itself. The military tries to convert it from a living “Mother Earth” into a “system” that can be switched on and off like a machine (Werlhof 2011). The Earth is irresponsibly and criminally put at risk by the purposeful use of technologies that are transforming the planet itself into a weapon of mass-destruction: instead of nuclear armament—“nuclear alchemy” (Bertell 1985; Wagner 1970)—the new non-nuclear one is working with “plasma weapons, weather wars and geo-engineering” (Bertell 2010; Hamilton 2010). It seems as if the biblical, lightning-and-thunder-throwing God Jahwe has become incarnated! In “Slowly Wrecking our Planet,” Bertell describes the negative effects on the order of life on planet Earth which can be identified in the partial destruction of the atmosphere and atmospheric layers, the ozone hole, a wobbling of the planet’s course, and the dangerous interferences in its magnetic field inside as well as outside of it (Bertell 2010). Most of these realities, which we experience as climate change or natural catastrophes, are already undermining the oldest experience of (wo)mankind: our deep confidence in Mother Nature. Is this loss occurring in anyone’s interest? For Europeans, this has happened once already, namely, at the beginnings of modern society, when nature—like woman—was presented as a bad and violent, demonic and dangerous stepmother instead of a caring, peaceful, and nurturing mother of all beings (Merchant 1980). In fact, the program to dominate nature by modern science was developed at the same time. The realities we are facing today, on the other side, cannot simply be explained as nature’s “revenge” against carbon emissions, though they are presented as such in the climate change debate. They are also, to an unknown percentage, produced by the use of artificially created super-powerful electromagnetic waves through “ionospheric heaters” in installations like HAARP in Alaska, “Woodpecker” in Russia, and in at least ten further places on the globe, known originally as Nicola Tesla’s (1856–1943) inventions (Tesla 1997). They were the result of an alternative view of the earth and the solar system as a living—“electromagnetic”—interconnected entity, and were opposed to the mainstream of scientists who since the sixteenth century have had a mechanistic understanding of the planetary system as a dead mechanism. Instead of using the peaceful potential of Tesla’s inventions for the urgently needed alternatives (O’Leary 2010), the military in the East and the West took over the patents and used them for the opposite. They seem unable to imagine anything other than seizing power as if “might is right” (Bertell 1985), destroying life and appropriating the “global commons,” establishing control over everything by violent transformation, now
of the planet itself—and propagating this procedure as a “progress” in the domination and “improvement” of nature and Earth! The entire scale of the negative effects of these experiments is unknown, at least to the public, which is not allowed access to the information. This ignorance is leading the public to the wrong conclusion once again, namely, that even more domination of nature is required! The ultimate step to gain power over humankind is at stake; the totality of the planet and its “alchemical” transformation into a “better” one, or rather, into a destroyed one.

Today, the military and related economic and political interest groups are on the way to establish a literal “system of war”—the totalitarian “New World Order”—as the last outcome of the modern “civilization of alchemists.”

At this point of the apparent “success” of the powerful, behind which hide the catastrophes that are already under way and will accumulate further if not stopped in time, the general failure of western civilization as the Modern World-System can be observed on a last dimension, the planetary level. The unimaginable mega-crimes to which the Earth and all living creatures on it are more and more exposed, for instance by a steadily growing number of experiments with the planet and their cumulative effects, could even lead to an overall “Omnicide” (Bertell 1985) or “Terracide” (Hoags 2010). Who can speak of “success” in face of these incredible dangers?

We founded the “Planetary Movement for Mother Earth” in Germany in May 2010, and we are hundreds of women and a minority of men strong. We have to do something about the situation of our planet and we will—together with other already existing social movements—try to inform and mobilize as many people as possible worldwide!

Conclusions

I do not know of the existence of any other theoretical approach that is able to explain the unimaginable horror and megalomania of the new “military alchemy.” For Critical Theory of Patriarchy it is “easy,” but we do not consider this to be a triumph. We would prefer to be wrong! (cf. Klein 2007).

Our approach has widened the analysis and added something to it, which was necessary in order to fully understand the crisis of today and the existing alternatives that require discussion and practice. The crucial difference between our approach and the Modern World-System analysis is our critique of modernity as “patriarchal,” which is why we do not recognize its capacity to lead to the required alternative. On the contrary, we are looking for remnants of our matriarchal past and present as a “second culture” (Genth 1996) underneath patriarchy. This is the source of our endeavors for today and the future.

References

The failure of the "Modern World-System"


