

## XV. InkriT-Tagung 2011

### Keynote Address

by

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#### A NEW MOMENT OF PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION

Marxism has been declared dead from a variety of perspectives. Certainly the neoliberals were happy to see it fall along with the Berlin wall, the Soviet Union, and all of its hopes and failures. Postmodernists of all stripes warmly greeted the end of grand narratives pronounced by Lyotard. And even some Marxists themselves, such as Ronald Aronson said farewell to Marxism because the project itself, as a “celebration of human power” could not be sustained. Also, as he puts it, “Feminism destroyed Marxism.” Not alone, he states, yet, because of the influence of socialist feminism, Marxism became “one narrative among others” (Aronson, 1995, 124-139). Yet, Marxism remains far from dead, and indeed in some of its most classical forms has a great deal to contribute to understanding capitalism in the twenty-first century. I say this despite the fact that I am one of the feminists Aronson cites who supposedly contributed to the destruction of Marxist theory by demonstrating that it was not the total theory which could unproblematically subsume the oppression of women and others. I continue to have the problems with Marx’s theories which I articulated some twenty years ago, among them that: 1) class understood centrally as a relation among men is the only division that counts; 2) the analysis is fundamentally masculinist in that worker’s wives and their labor are presumed and left

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is a substitute for the paper Nancy Hartsock could not present at the Inkrit Conference 2011 because she was ill. It has been presented in an abbreviated version in German (by Frigga Haug).

unanalyzed; 3) homosocial birth images mark the analysis in important ways; 4) women come and go in the analysis and are profoundly absent from his account of the extraction of surplus value—the heart of his analysis (Hartsock, 1983, 1984, 145-152)

Still I continue to identify myself as a Marxist as well as a feminist, and refuse to reject Marxism as simply another form of masculinist or economic theorizing. I still find some versions of Marxism to be fundamental to understanding contemporary global capitalism. I recently taught The German Ideology and was once again struck by Marx's and Engels' stress on the importance of globalization of capital—which they saw as already existing in the middle of the nineteenth century.

I have found David Harvey's work very helpful in understanding the contemporary world of global capitalist domination. I was interested to read in their call for papers, that the editors of this volume noted that what made Harvey's work distinctive was that it advocated a very "classical" kind of Marxism. They also referred to his work as "unreconstructed". And they suggested that Harvey succeeded in showing "the continued explanatory power of an undiluted version" of historical geographical materialism. Many might find it a bit odd, therefore, to find him also grouped with Fredric Jameson as "perhaps" a postmodern Marxist theorist (Brubach, 1998).<sup>1</sup> It may seem hard to square these two readings of Harvey, but in fact they are both right. He does in fact follow Marx's own writings quite closely, but also reads and understands Marx dialectically. It is this latter quality which can allow him to be read as at once "classical" in the sense of returning to Marx's own texts and as a postmodern thinker<sup>2</sup>.

As Harvey describes his own work, he chose to see Marxism as a critique of "actually existing capitalism" which was "rampant" in the USA, and thus believed that the USA should be the appropriate focus of his attention. (Harvey, 2000d) I have learned and continue to learn a great deal from David Harvey's focus on

capitalism and most centrally on the processes of the accumulation of capital. His discussion of the significance of *The Limits to Capital* in his intellectual life is important. This was, he states, an effort to really understand Marx but also to discuss ‘the temporality of fixed-capital formation, and how that relates to money flows and finance capital, and the spatial dimensions of these....’ (Harvey, 2000d )

Indeed, I see his focus on the accumulation of capital as a fundamental, central and ongoing theme of his work. His emphasis on the accumulation of capital expanded in *The Condition of Postmodernity* where he laid out four different tasks which required “integration (with all kinds of open possibilities for transformation) into the understanding of capitalist dynamics.” (Harvey, 1992 b, 305, and Harvey, 1989b, 355) These tasks included the inclusion of issues of difference as theoretically fundamental, a recognition that representations are important rather than peripheral, a conviction that space and time should be better understood, and finally an insistence that a “meta-theoretical approach” could accommodate an understanding of differences, “provided that we understood the full potentialities and perpetual open-endedness of dialectical argumentation (Harvey, 1992b, 305). In short, one could read this formulation as an effort to include many dimensions. But Harvey does insist that “Anyone who in these times fails to situate themselves inside of the capitalist relations of domination is ...simply fooling themselves.” (Harvey, 1992b, 305). Thus, at its root, Harvey’s project is the analysis of capitalist relations of domination—but an analysis open to the inclusion of other forms of domination. Despite his efforts to accommodate difference, which go further than many other Marxists, he does remain committed to the Marxist project of accounting for class domination.

At the same time I read his work as motivated by two texts which have been very important to my own work—both theoretical and political. The first is the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, “the philosophers only interpret the world in various ways, the point is to change it.”(Marx-Engels, 1976, 3) The second is Engels’ graveside eulogy for Marx. Engels stated that Marx had “discovered the special

law of motion governing the present day capitalist mode of production and the bourgeois society that this mode of production has created.” But more important is the fact that he continues by noting that “this was not even half the man...for Marx was before all else a revolutionist” (Engels, 1978, 681-682). Thus, he stresses the importance of Marx’s political legacy, his role as a revolutionary committed to change the world for the benefit of the working class. Harvey too emphasizes the “pressing need to understand both the possibilities and the potential sources of truly transformative and revolutionary changes in social life (Harvey, 1992b, 30)

Harvey has always been an activist as well as a scholar. When I first met him, we were both teaching at The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Md, and he was working with activists in South Baltimore; his activism has continued—in Baltimore, in England, and now, I am sure, in New York. The struggle for justice is, then, also an important aspect of Harvey’s theoretical commitments. He notes that Marx understood ideas of justice as simply versions of redistribution, but argued that there were indeed other ideas of justice involved in Marxist theory. (Harvey, 2000d ) In this, as well as in his dialectical reading of Marx I regard him as a kindred spirit and a continuing inspiration.

It is important that Harvey reads Marx not as a theoretical authority to be followed but as a theorist who provides invitations; he focuses on the possibilities that Marxism opens for both theory and practice. Therefore, here I propose to read Harvey himself as providing an invitation to think about important contemporary issues which come to a head under the overused and ill-defined term, globalization. In doing so, it is important to say something about how Harvey approaches the topic of dialectics in general and the concept of moment in particular as he theorizes the contemporary moment of informational or globalized capitalism, because it is his understanding and use of Marxist dialectics which I believe accounts for the perceptions of his work as both “classical” and “postmodern.” And it is just this dialectical understanding which is essential to any understanding of the variety of forces and processes which come together in

the contemporary moment defined by the term “globalization.”

My own work has in recent years paralleled some of Harvey's, as I have begun to look at the global accumulation of capital to retheorize these processes as a new moment of primitive accumulation. I want to take Harvey's work and his ongoing focus on the accumulation of capital an invitation to invoke my contention that the globalization of capital should be re-understood as a moment of primitive accumulation which is very significantly marked by gender, that is, a moment which has very different consequences for men and women and which opens different possibilities for both economic and political participation by women and men. Briefly, what I mean (what has been meant) by primitive accumulation comes from Marx's account of primitive accumulation as the series of processes by which capital became concentrated in fewer and fewer hands in Western Europe between roughly the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. These were violent, though often legal, processes of dispossession, removal of people from the countryside, forced labor, theft, and sometimes murder. The emblematic practices included the Atlantic slave trade, the Enclosures in England, Ireland and Scotland, the extraction of gold and silver from the Americas and the destruction of the indigenous populations in these places. As Harvey does in *The New Imperialism*, I see some different mechanisms but similar processes at work in contemporary global capitalism.

However, I will argue that these processes contain important gender dimensions: First, contemporary processes of capital accumulation are not gender neutral but are built importantly on the backs of women—in terms exploitation of women, harm done to women, but also in possibilities opened to women; second, it is important that women, historically, have been more theoretically alert to many of these processes; and third, the gender and indeed “feminized” dimensions of contemporary capital accumulation may, as Harvey himself very interestingly notes, allow for the development of different agents of political transformation (Harvey, 2000a, 46). Unfortunately he does not follow up on this

idea and his inattention to gender leads him to miss one of the central features of the processes now driving the global accumulation of capital.

### Feminist Critiques vs. Feminist Critiques

The hasty reader might view my argument as yet another feminist trashing of Harvey's work. I however, endorse only a few of the criticisms made by authors such as R. Deutsche, D. Massey and M. Morris. As a group they both fail to understand Harvey's project and also present a partial and one sided image (not account) of feminist positions. Harvey's project is a dialectical historical geographical materialism which focuses on the processes which constitute and shape the accumulation of capital. But his focus on political economy is not a simple one, devoid of issues of gender, race, class, sexuality and, for his critics, the infamous "etc." My current project is very similar to his, but I emphasize more than he has that accumulation carries marks of gender, race, and nationality as well as class.

Let me describe three errors made most clearly by Deutsche (and to a lesser degree by Massey and Morris. (Deutsche, 1991, Massey, 1991, Morris, 1992) As a group, these critiques engage in several moves which are contrary to my purpose here. First, they misunderstand the dialectical epistemology which underlies Harvey's historical geographical materialism. Second, they dismiss Harvey's project of a focus on accumulation of capital as economic and monistic and thus abandon the terrain of political economy. Third, they unify feminist perspectives under the banner of postmodernism and thus dismiss and ignore a wide range of feminist positions. Two slippages are involved in these moves: first, Harvey's Marxism is translated into a form of positivism, and second, feminist theory is reduced to a variant of postmodernist thought. I want to differentiate my views from theirs in order to more clearly lay out Harvey's project and also to locate my own feminist critique not in work on images and representations or on the terrain of postmodern theories but as one centered at the core of his own project—understanding the accumulation of capital. I should state

that I found his critique of postmodernism to be both wonderfully written and essentially correct.

Deutsche states that Harvey wants to ‘unify’ all social relations and political practices ‘by locating their origins in a single foundation.’(1991, 6). Moreover, “the subject of Harvey’s discourse generates the illusion that he stands outside, not in the world. His identity then owed nothing either to his real situation or to the objects he studies.”( 1991, 7) Massey echoes this point, as does Morris (Massey, 1991,46; Morris, 1992, 274-275) Deutsche goes on to suggest that Harvey sees his approach as “disinterested, because it has been determined solely by objective considerations of social justice and explanatory adequacy.” (1991, 9) and suggests that Harvey might see knowledge as neutral.(1991, 10) Since she lists a concern with justice as a part of Harvey’s efforts at analysis, it is difficult to understand how she can see his work as positivist.

Deutsche translates/rewrites Harvey as a positivist who assumes an “ultimate visibility and knowability of an autonomous reality” (1991, 10)She goes on to characterize him as an “unfragmented, sovereign, unsituated” subject who understands an “objective reality” which exists solely for him, and tellingly states that the “objective theorist is a masculine, not universal subject....” She asks quite rightly, “Whose subjectivities are the casualties of epistemologies that produce total beings? (Deutsche, 1991,12). She is right that it is masculine subjectivities who are threatened (Hartsock, 1987; Hartsock 1989) Massey takes a similar position and concludes that Harvey takes a view that is “white, male, heterosexist, Western: and one in which the male is not recognized as gendered (1991,43). I am familiar with the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere but this is not the Marxism I or Harvey know. These claims/charges turn a dialectical understanding into a positivist one, and therefore I must spend some time in describing the dialectical epistemology/ontology which underlies Harvey’s work Harvey’s response to their arguments very effectively locates his work as a form of situated knowledge (1992b, 302) This is the subject of the next section of this article.

Second, these critics object to Harvey's focus on the accumulation of capital and see it as a as a form of economic reductionism. I think it is useful here to quote in full Harvey's paragraph from *The Condition of Postmodernity*. One of the areas of theoretical development which he lauds is

“The treatment of difference and ‘otherness’ not as something to be added onto more fundamental Marxist categories (like class and productive forces), but as something that should be omni-present from the very beginning in any attempt to grasp the dialectics of social change. The importance of recuperating such aspects of social organization as race, gender, religion, within the overall frame of historical materialist enquiry (with its emphasis upon the power of money and capital circulation) and class politics (with its emphasis upon the unity of the emancipatory struggle) cannot be overestimated.” (1989b, 355)

Deutsche quotes only the second sentence of this paragraph in her critique and is then more easily able to characterize Harvey's argument as one of ‘class only’ politics. While I would not go as far as she and the others, there is a sense in which Harvey may not appreciate the profoundly revolutionary character of feminist, anti-racist and lbgt work.<sup>3</sup>

Yet one emerges from reading their critiques with the sense that they see no connection between the accumulation of capital and issues of gender or feminist critique. Thus Deutsche objects that Harvey wants to look at a single foundation for understanding both social relations and political practices and asserts that economic relations are the origins of contemporary social conditions. (Deutsche, 1991, 6, 13). Massey makes a similar point when she argues that Harvey's lack of recognition of the feminist literature leads to a conclusion that “the only enemy is capitalism,” (Massey, 1991,31). Morris argues that Harvey is engaged in a form of “class fundamentalism.” and is involved in “economic determinism.”(Morris, 1991, 256-257), and objects that political economy is not “the queen of the disciplines”



(Morris, 1991,273). But in putting forward these arguments they have both limited the field of political economy to masculine actors, thinkers, and concerns and then abandoned it as an area of study central to feminist theory. As I will argue, both the field of political economy and the accumulation of capital have definite gender and race components as well as class.

Third, these arguments support an integration/equation of feminist theory and postmodernism which leaves major segments of feminist theory off the map. Thus, Morris responds to Harvey's suggestion that "if there is a meta-theory,...why not deploy it" by stating with certainty that it is "a feminist claim that there is no such meta-theory."(Morris, 1992, 258). Instead "feminist and psychoanalytic critique" claims that meta-theory is simply a "fantasy projected by a subject who imagines that his own discursive position can be external" to historical "truths" (Morris, 1992, 274-275). And Harvey is accused of searching for unity when fragmentation is the reality (Deutsche, 1991, 29) Certainly not all feminist theorists would agree with this dismissal of meta-theory or with the claim that the only alternative to accepting postmodernist claims about fragmentation, complexity, and unknowability require a retreat to positivism and the view from nowhere. The first corrective to these rewritings/translations of Harvey's work that I propose here is an examination of his understanding of dialectics.

### Dialectical Thinking

One of David Harvey's most important contributions to contemporary discussions of Marxist theory is his insistence that the world is composed not of "things" but of "processes." In addition, things do not "exist outside of or prior to the processes, flows, and relations that create, sustain, or undermine them." (Harvey, 1996a, 49)<sup>4</sup> But there is more to dialectics than this . While Marx developed and used a dialectical method, he never wrote a companion to Hegel's logic. So one must look at the substantive work and explore the method and epistemology contained within it. A few scholars have taken on this project.

Ollman's Dialectical Investigations is perhaps the most systematic.(Ollman, 1993). Harvey, however, presents a very succinct and important account.(Harvey, 1996a, 46-68). He argues that Marx foregrounds the importance of thinking in terms of processes and remembering that every historical form is constituted by its fluid movement. Rather than thinking about things in motion, Marx urges us to think instead about a series of processes which sometimes crystallize into “permanences” which are of course never really permanent. In addition, he makes very clear the ways in which human possibilities as well as “permanences” such as institutions and structures are socially constructed, but not just as we choose.

Harvey develops the concept of moment as a particularly useful way of gaining purchase on a world which must be understood as a series of processes in motion. How to abstract, how to develop concepts which can recognize the embeddedness of processes in a totality, concepts which can recognize the complexity involved is an important issue. Marx constructed categories of analysis for particular purposes, to isolate elements of the social structure without removing them from the structure as a whole. The concept of moment is most provocatively (and evocatively ) illustrated in a passage from Marx's Grundrisse, one to which Harvey refers and worth quoting at length here.

“The conclusion we reach is not that production, distribution, exchange and consumption are identical , but they all form members of a totality, distinctions within a unity. ...A definite production thus determines a definite consumption, distribution and exchange as well as *definite relations between these different moments*. Admittedly, however, *in its one-sided form*, production is itself determined by the other moments. For example if the market, i.e. the sphere of exchange, expands, then production grows in quantity and the divisions between its different branches become deeper. A change in distribution changes production, e.g. concentration of capital, different distribution of the population between town and country, etc. Finally, the needs of consumption determine production. Mutual interaction takes

place between the different moments. This is the case with every organic whole.”(Marx, 1973, 99-100 italics in original)

This statement provides a lot of information about what Marx means by moment--some of which Harvey takes up and some of which I would like to flesh out. The most fundamental point is to understand power relations-in Marx’s case, power relations centered on the development of capitalism and the commodification of ever greater areas of human existence. But the point of understanding power relations is to change them. And to this end, Marx's categories (and Harvey’s) move and flow, enacting the fluidity that many contemporary postmodernist theorists find attractive. ( It is perhaps for this reason that some have been able to characterize him as “perhaps “ a postmodern Marxist.) Thus to take the idea of moments seriously is to notice that capital can be seen as existing in several different moments when different features of capital become central to the analysis. For example, at different points, capital is described as “raw materials, instruments of labor, and means of subsistence of all kinds which are utilized to produce new raw materials, new instruments of labor, and new means of subsistence," as "accumulated labor," as "living labor serving accumulated labor," as "a bourgeois production relation,” “a social relation of production," as "an independent social power.”(Tucker, ed., 1978, 176,207,208) Capital is all these things at various moments and for various analytical purposes. Thus, when Marx wanted to call attention to the specifics of the production process, he was likely to refer to capital as raw materials and instruments of labor. But when he wanted to point to the power of capital to structure society as a whole he was more likely to refer to capital as an independent social power.<sup>5</sup>

The concept of moment, as Harvey points out, reminds us that social processes must be understood as flows in which a “thing” that dialectical analysis has dissolved into flows of processes can assume at one point and from one perspective the form of money, and can at other points and from other

perspectives take the form of an independent social power. Harvey suggests that moments are linked to but not bounded by time or space in any simple way: they are instead conceptual tools which can help to address complex and overdetermined social relations. Perhaps another term that would capture the meaning would be the term “nodal points” .

I would like to think of moments as translucent filters through which one can view the totality of social relations. The filter will determine which features of social life will come to the foreground, and which will recede. The filter can be changed as one moves analytically among different moments. And then different aspects of social relations will be revealed. Second, one must pay attention to historical processes to understand how each moment plays a role in determining others. For Marx, production creates a particular kind of consumer who then requires certain products. One might think as well about the ways in which relations of gender domination produce persons who are comfortable with and even demand the continuation of these relations. Despite the sense of a still picture that the term “moment” suggests, the link with time pushes analyses to explore both the past and the future possibilities the moment contains. Third, the concept of moment, with the added claim that the processes that we ordinarily call “things” are better understood not only as moments but as moments which profoundly structure each other, reminds us of the interconnections among social relations. Thinking in terms of moments can allow the theorist to take account of discontinuities and incommensurabilities without losing sight of the presence of a social system within which these features are embedded.. Thus, incommensurability and differentiation need not be recast as incomprehensibility. The concept of “moment,” then, can be analytically very useful in both separating out the social relations the theorist wants to concentrate on while at the same time reminding us that these social relations are in fact connected with and defined by other social relations and with their own pasts and future possibilities.

### A New Moment of Primitive Accumulation

The moment I want to address here is the present moment, one that David Harvey has recently characterized as a moment of accumulation by dispossession. In The New Imperialism Harvey takes the position, supported he argues, by the work of Arendt and Luxemburg, that the process of primitive accumulation that Marx described in Volume I of Capital did not end but remains “powerfully present within capitalism’s historical geography up until now. Displacement of peasant populations and the formation of a landless proletariat has accelerated in countries such as Mexico and India in the last three decades, many formerly common property resources, such as water, have been privatized (often at World Bank insistence) and brought within the capitalist logic of accumulation, alternative (indigenous and even , in the case of the United States petty commodity ) forms of production and consumption have been suppressed. Nationalized industries have been privatized. Family farming has been taken over by agribusiness. And slavery has not disappeared (particularly in the sex trade).”(Harvey, 2003a, 145-146)

Harvey argues there are a number of “wholly new mechanisms of accumulation by dispossession.” First, he argues, the credit system that Lenin, Hilferding, and Luxemburg noticed at the beginning of the twentieth century has become a far more important means of accumulation through corporate fraud, raiding of pension funds, speculation by hedge funds, etc. Second, Harvey cites many new ways in which the global commons are being enclosed in both the advanced countries and the global South: among them, 1)the development of intellectual property rights, especially patenting of genetic material, and seeds that are then used against the very populations who developed those materials; 2 )the depletion of the global environmental commons (land, air, and water) that now require capital-intensive agriculture; 3) the corporatization of previously public assets such as universities, water, and public utilities 4) the rolling back of regulatory frameworks so that “common property rights” to a state pension, to

welfare, to national health care are under attack .(Harvey, 2003a, 147-148)

I agree with Harvey in general, as well as the several other theorists who have argued that primitive accumulation has been an ongoing feature of capitalism rather than simply a pre-capitalist phenomenon.

Yet Harvey's project is different from mine. He is interested in what he terms accumulation by dispossession because it might help solve the theoretical and practical problem of the over-accumulation of capital. I am agnostic on the question of over-accumulation versus underconsumption. Instead, my focus is on the gender dynamics of accumulation. In addition, Harvey points out that primitive accumulation or accumulation by dispossession is not extrinsic to capital as theorists such as Luxemburg have argued, but intrinsic. I believe that the gender dimensions of these processes make it both intrinsic and extrinsic.

My argument about primitive accumulation, then, is both parallel to Harvey's and different from his. First, I argue that primitive accumulation is not gender neutral but involves important differential treatment of women and men. Second, I see these processes as both internal to the accumulation of capital ( as does Harvey) and external, since women worldwide exist to a certain extent outside the capitalist market. Women are involved in social reproduction to a greater extent than men. But third, I think his conclusion about political action is correct: accumulation by expanded reproduction is "dialectically intertwined" with new social movements' stress on accumulation by dispossession. And so it may be that accumulation by dispossession is the "fulcrum of what class struggle is and should be construed to be about" (Harvey, 2003. 176-178). This would fundamentally change understanding of what class struggle so that class struggles would become indistinguishable from those of new social movements; It would firmly shift the focus away from any even remotely "economistic" understanding—something I would applaud.

However, I think that Harvey misses several important points about the

contemporary moment of globalization. First, what is going on at present is remarkably similar in basic pattern if not in exact empirical form (in the nature of the processes themselves, rather than the mechanisms used) to what went on from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in Western Europe: the global poor, now located more substantially in the global South are being systematically deprived of their ability to provide subsistence for themselves and being forced to seek work in factories and to find other employment possibilities in major cities around the world. The term, ‘primitive accumulation’ is still apt because it marks the coercion and violence involved, whether it takes legal form or not. Thus, while Harvey and I agree on much of the substance, my focus is more on the recapitulation of the processes by which capital is able to become concentrated in few and fewer hands, and his more on the new mechanisms by which a variety of tools for dispossession feeds accumulation of capital.

Second, Harvey has missed the gender dimensions of what is happening in this moment of capitalist accumulation. He is of course not alone in this matter, and indeed pays more attention to gender than many theorists who have addressed contemporary global capitalism. It is very striking that neither Michael Hardt and Anthony Negri’s monumental book, Empire, nor Samir Amin’s less ambitious Capitalism in the Age of Globalization contain even an index entry for “women.” Castells, in his sweeping three volume treatment of ‘informational capitalism’ devotes one chapter to “The Fall of Patriarchy” where he covers the status of women worldwide, and the feminist, lesbian and gay rights movements. It is noteworthy that the volume is entitled *The Power of Identity*. Issues of gender are hardly mentioned in the sections of his work on the reshaping of the global economy. (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Amin, ,Castells, 1997)<sup>6</sup>

From the little I know as yet it is clear that what happened to women and men differed importantly during the periods the Atlantic slave trade, the various enclosures in England, Ireland, and Scotland, during the period covered by

Luxemburg's accounts of the importance of non-capitalist surroundings for capital accumulation—(the destruction of the Indian cotton weaving industry), etc. I want to add that in the present moment of globalization, women are being made to serve as models for the more generally feminized, 'virtual' workers demanded by contemporary globalized capitalism and flexible accumulation. That is to say, as women have been increasingly drawn into the wage labor force worldwide men have been increasingly forced to work under conditions which were formerly only enforced for women—conditions which include the increasing flexibilization of labor, part time work, the absence of job ladders, etc. Thus, I want to suggest that the contemporary moment of globalization should be retheorized as a moment of primitive accumulation which is simultaneously a moment of the feminization of the labor force wherein workers are denigrated, made powerless, invisible,<sup>7</sup> and unreal.

Third, it is significant that there is a remarkable theoretical lineage of women theorists who have given attention to these sometimes substantially non-market processes.<sup>8</sup> I would like to suggest that it is perhaps women's structural position as differently and more complexly both connected to the market and barred from it that may have allowed women theorists to more easily notice some of the links with non-market contexts in the context of capitalist reproduction and accumulation, whether or not they were interested in accounting for women's roles in the social division of labor. This has some significance for understanding contemporary globalization.

#### Primitive Accumulation: Then and Now

If we go back to Marx's chapter on primitive accumulation we find that he writes that "the methods of primitive accumulation are anything but idyllic," and that "conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, briefly force, play the great part."(Marx, 1967, 714) Primitive accumulation is by definition, "nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of



production.’ Marx goes on to state that “it appears as primitive, because it forms the pre-historic state of capital and of the mode of production corresponding with it.”(Marx, 1967,714-715) As Marx described the process, what was required was the expropriation of the agricultural population from the land. In Europe the expropriation of the small farmers and peasants was aided by the Reformation which took church properties and gave them to royal favorites or sold them at cheap prices to speculators who then drove out the tenants.(Marx, 1967, 721-722) As Marx tellingly put it, “The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation , the enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signaled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation.” (Marx, 1967, 751) He goes on to say , “The spoliation of the church’s property, the fraudulent alienation of the state domains, the robbery of the common lands, the usurpation of feudal and clan property, and its transformation into modern private property under circumstances of reckless terrorism were just so many idyllic, methods of primitive accumulation.”(Marx, 1967, 732-733)

While Marx held that these forms of accumulation occurred prior to and were the preconditions for capitalist development, I want to argue following Rosa Luxemburg and Maria Mies, that these forms of accumulation represent an ongoing part of capitalist accumulation itself. Harvey himself has argued that Marx’s account needs supplementation. Thus, he suggests that predation and fraud continue within contemporary capitalism; the processes of proletarianization are more complex than Marx allowed for and required an appropriation of local cultures; and some of the mechanisms of primitive accumulation (e.g. credit) have become much stronger than in the past.(Harvey, 2003a, 144-147) Yet we both agree that “the features of primitive accumulation that Marx mentions have

remained powerfully present...up until now.” (Harvey, 2003a, 145) Harvey presents a sophisticated account of the workings of these processes, and I am largely in agreement with him. But rather than suggest that there are wholly new mechanisms at work, I want to stress first, that the fundamentals are being reprised in remarkably similar ways, and second, that there are important gender dimensions to be examined. As Marx looked at England from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries he saw, and documented in the pages of Capital roughly seven processes which I see being repeated literally in the contemporary moment of globalization of capital, each with differential consequences for women and men. These are:

1. The expropriation of the land and the disconnection of workers from the soil, coupled with laws against the expropriated. Part of the old expropriation laws were also vagrancy laws, in some cases specifying branding on the forehead for a second offense. Now, as women are becoming 50% of the world’s migrants we are seeing a tightening of the world’s immigration laws, higher penalties for being illegal in the global North, yet more pressure on women in some countries in the global South to emigrate in order to both support their families and to earn foreign exchange for their countries.
2. The depopulation and abandonment of some regions, as first enclosures were converted to sheepruns and then to deerparks. Some of the parallels in the US can be seen in places such as the rural midwest, Detroit, or in places simply abandoned by capital and subjected to social exclusion, well documented by Manuel Castells and labeled as Fourth World areas. It is telling that he uses as examples both sub-Saharan Africa and South Central Los Angeles. (Castells, 2000, Chapter 2) As these parts of the world are abandoned, it is sometimes only the women who can either migrate to earn money to send home or who must take up work in informal sectors in Africa or in service sectors in Los Angeles to keep families going.<sup>9</sup>
3. The rise of a new religion/the Reformation in England. I am tempted to/will point to the rise of neoliberalism and market fundamentalism as semi-religious

forces that have reshaped the lives of the vast majority of the world's population over the last thirty years. Yet others have stressed to me the importance of Christian, Islamic, and Hindu fundamentalism in shaping very different visions of the world. I believe all are important in reallocating resources in important ways. And each of these regimes has been important in depriving women of access to resources, respect and power. Whether the tools have been structural adjustment policies administered by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, welfare reform laws in the U.S., the application of fundamentalist readings of Sharia legal systems in some Muslim countries, or the teachings of the Catholic or evangelical churches around the world the results have been the exploitation and disempowering of women and have contributed to the creation of a new generation of female illiterates worldwide.

4. Creation of a new class of landless free laborers. Many forces are at work at present which are creating new classes of, especially, women workers. The number of women wage workers worldwide has vastly expanded over the last twenty years. Moreover, the skills required by the new networked, informational economies tend to draw on women's relational skills. One can point as well to many specifics that push/pull women into the labor force: the fact that in many places women cannot own land, the pressures that lead women to migrate in search of jobs to support their children, the worldwide traffic in persons, especially women and girls, the impact of welfare reform in the U.S., with its work requirement for recipients, etc.

5. Collaboration of political and economic leaders to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor. The recent U.S. tax cuts, provide an important example, with most of the benefits going to the top 1% of tax payers. Or one could think about the astronomical growth in U.S. CEO salaries over the past fifteen years, or even recent reports that two thirds of large U.S. corporations paid no income taxes at all during the past year.

6. The disappearance of "old fetters on usury" and "enrichment of royal favorites."

The literal repetition of this aspect of primitive accumulation can be found in the increase in the debt the global South has come to owe the North. The ways in which risky loans by private banks to private businesses in poor countries came to be public debts managed under conditions of structural adjustment policies dictated by the IMF and World Bank have been succinctly described by a former officer of the Bank itself. (Stiglitz, 2003, Chapter 8). And of course we are seeing the enrichment of “royal favorites” such as Halliburton, Bechtel and others in Iraq reconstruction projects..

7. The slave trade, accompanied by the witch trials which were part of the dissolution of the previous mode of social reproduction/subsistence. Here we need to look at the new slavery—especially the increased traffic in women and children. (Bales, 1999) This traffic is now the number two source of profit for organized crime around the world. The sale of women and children is second only to the sale of guns and or drugs (I believe that guns are number one at this point) as a source of profit.<sup>10</sup> Harvey takes from Luxemburg the idea that capitalism has a dual nature—including both peaceful reproduction and looting (Harvey, 2003a, 137-138 citing Luxemburg’s Accumulation of Capital, np.)

### Women, Primitive Accumulation and Social Reproduction

I would like, however, to reformulate the central issues involved in primitive accumulation, and to suggest first, that although an ongoing process, it proceeds in uneven waves that are related to the strength of capital relative to that of labor in general, but that this strength depends on many processes and factors working both together and against each other.. The last thirty years have marked an important expansion of these processes on a global scale. In this most recent round of primitive accumulation (as probably in earlier rounds) I would argue that there are really four dialectically interrelated processes at work: first, the breaking of the previous social contract means that expectations about social relations generally are being renegotiated or refought. These include employer/employee

relations, what can be expected from the commons—whether from public universities, social security, rights to social welfare programs, water, etc. Second, there have been changes in religion/ideology which in the present cycle have meant the rise of neoliberalism, and fundamentalist Christianity and Catholicism in the West and Muslim and Hindu fundamentalism in other parts of the world. Third, primitive accumulation has increased inequalities which have left the poor no options but to accept the terms the rich are offering: the past thirty years of primitive accumulation have witnessed a broad increase in inequalities worldwide and the increasing impoverishment of masses of people. As Manuel Castells notes, “The poorest 20% of the world’s people have seen their share of global income decline from 2.3% to 1.4% in the past 30 years. Meanwhile, the share of the richest 20% has risen from 70% to 85%.”(Castells, Vol III, 78)

Fourth, and most fundamentally, primitive accumulation involves a transformation in social reproduction. As Isabella Bakker has put it “Social reproduction can be defined as the social processes and human relations associated with the creation and maintenance of the communities upon which all production and exchange rest.”(Bakker, 2001) She goes on to specify three aspects of social reproduction –biological reproduction, reproduction of the labor force, and reproduction of provisioning and caring needs. Thought of in this way, primitive accumulation is very clearly and perhaps at its very core a gendered set of processes, a moment which cannot be understood without central attention to the differential situations of women and men. I want to suggest that this may be true of capital accumulation more generally.

It is in the context of suspecting that primitive accumulation has always been highly gendered process but certain that this moment of primitive accumulation is definitely built on the backs of women that I want to focus on issues of accumulation and social reproduction. And it is in this context that women theorists can be particularly important. While Luxemburg did not focus her

analyses on gender, it is significant that she did focus on issues of consumption, social reproduction, and non-market social relations—areas in which women tend to be more involved.<sup>11</sup>

Luxemburg argues that capitalism needs new arenas of consumption, new market areas into which it can expand. (Luxemburg, 1951, 345) She argues that Marx's original diagram of social reproduction included only two parties, where workers and capitalists were the sole agents of capitalist consumption. In terms of this diagram, the "third class"—"civil servants, the liberal professions, the clergy, etc.—must, as consumers, be counted in with these two classes, and preferably with the capitalist class." (Luxemburg, 1951, 348) She however, argues that the surplus produced by capitalist production must be sold to social strata whose own mode of production is not capitalist—either non-capitalist strata or countries, and cites the expansion of the English cotton industry which supplied textiles to the peasants of Europe, India, Africa, etc. (Luxemburg, 1951, 352ff)<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Luxemburg is alert to the fact that even within capitalist economies, "there is no obvious reason why means of production and consumer goods should be produced by capitalist methods alone." And she cites the imports of corn raised by peasants to feed industrial labor as an example (Luxemburg, 1951, 357). She notes that the capitalist mode of production constitutes only a fragment of total world production, and while that is no longer true, we should still remember that a very large proportion of the world's women are still engaged in small scale agricultural production.

Second, she adds a great deal to what Marx had to say about the industrial reserve army. In Luxemburg's view, the (male) capitalist waged proletariat cannot provide an adequate industrial reserve army (Luxemburg, 1951, 361) I read her as arguing that the need is too vast and the requirements too flexible and variable for this labor force to be able to supply. Instead, labor must be recruited from "social reservoirs outside the dominion of capital." As she puts it "only the existence of

non-capitalist groups and countries can guarantee such a supply of additional labour power for capitalist production. Yet in his analysis of the industrial reserve army Marx only allows for (a) the displacement of older workers by machinery, (b) an influx of rural workers into the towns in consequence of the ascendancy of capitalist production in agriculture, (c) occasional labour that has dropped out of industry, and (d) finally the lowest residue of relative over-population, the paupers.”(Luxemburg, 1951, 361). Because capital requires labor power that is involved in pre-capitalist and indeed non capitalist forms of production, Luxemburg notes the variety of peculiar combinations of modern wage systems and primitive authority that may arise in colonial systems.<sup>13</sup> .

At the same time Luxemburg makes several claims which I find extraordinarily interesting in the context of contemporary global capitalism. For example,

“[C]apitalism in its full maturity also depends in all respects on non-capitalist strata and social organizations existing side by side with it. ...Since the accumulation of capital becomes impossible in all points without non-capitalist surroundings, we cannot gain a true picture of it by assuming the exclusive and absolute domination of the capitalist mode of production. ... Yet if the countries of those branches of production are predominantly non-capitalist, capital will endeavour to establish domination over these countries and societies. And in fact primitive conditions allow of a greater drive and of far more ruthless measures than could be tolerated under purely capitalist social conditions.”(Luxemburg, 1951, 365).

Yet for Marx, Luxemburg notes, these processes are ‘incidental.’(Luxemburg, 1951, 364). Perhaps this is a bit too strong, but colonization and the extraction of labor from areas which are not a part of the male labor-capital nexus are not really central to Marx’s project. I have problems with Luxemburg’s claim that capitalist accumulation requires consumption in non-

capitalist strata or countries, etc.. Certainly at present the global South contributes more to production than consumption. And obviously her arguments were not generally persuasive to other Marxist theorists. For my purposes, however, it does not matter so much whether or not capitalism requires consumption and markets in non-capitalist sectors. It certainly does require interchange with these sectors and needs the availability of labor and other resources from these sectors on a very flexible and variable basis.

Harvey however, makes an important modification to both Marx's and Luxemburg's arguments. Thus, he insists that accumulation based on "predation, fraud, and violence" should not be seen as outside of capitalism, and suggests that an analysis of these processes as ongoing is very much in order. (Harvey, 2003a, 144) He is certainly right. But the complications introduced by giving attention to women—their work and activities—requires an account of these processes as both intrinsic to and extrinsic to capital to the extent that women's lives are to at least some extent structurally defined as outside of capital.

Luxemburg's sensitivity to non-capitalist surroundings and contexts can potentially highlight the fact that the accumulation of capital requires actors other than simply capitalists or workers—both presumed to be men by Marx himself. That is, the accumulation of capital requires women as well as men, and the colonies of the global South as well as the metropolises of the global North, especially during the contemporary moment of primitive accumulation.

Maria Mies built on Luxemburg's analysis of the importance of non-capitalist strata for capitalist accumulation to develop an explicit analysis of the importance of women's labor. She connected the sexual division of labor and the international division of labor, and argued that these too needed to be included in an analysis of women's work under capitalism. Mies argues that contemporary capitalism needs both colonies and housewives to serve as nonmarket sectors for its expansion. She argues that "the division of labor in general, and the sexual



division of labor in particular was/is not an *evolutionary* and peaceful process, based on the ever progressing development of productive forces (mainly technology) and specialization, but a violent one by which first certain categories of men, later certain peoples, were able mainly by virtue of arms and warfare to establish an exploitative relationship between themselves and women, and other peoples and classes.”(Mies, 1986, 74).

She goes on to argue that the predatory patriarchal division of labor, based on a structural separation and subordination of human beings also leads to a separation between man and nature, and ties the rise of capitalism to an important ideological change, one that includes a cultural redefinition of Nature and those who were defined into nature by the ‘modern’ capitalist patriarchs: Mother Earth, Women and Colonies.”(Mies, 1986, 75) And she suggests that the subordination of women, nature and the colonies is the underground of capitalist patriarchy, otherwise known as civilized society. Instead of being the precondition for capitalist accumulation, over the course of the last four or five centuries women, nature and colonies were “externalized, declared to be outside civilized society, pushed down, and thus made invisible as the under-water part of an iceberg is invisible, yet constitute the base of the whole”(Mies, 1986, 77). That is, the subordination of women, nature, and the colonies—processes that might have been supposed to lie outside the core processes of the reproduction and accumulation of capital instead constitute its “base.” Mies has thus dialectically transformed the current “moment” of primitive accumulation to one in which women, nature, and the colonies are central, rather than peripheral and invisible. Thus, while Harvey attempts to incorporate these exclusions into the intrinsic logic of capitalism, I find myself agreeing with Mies that we need to recognize the dialectical relationships of social processes which are both external and intertwined with capitalism. I find hers a very powerful series of theses—one of whose virtues is that they bring into relation sets of processes which are usually seen as profoundly disparate.

Moreover, Mies directs our attention to some important features of the contemporary moment of globalization—what I want to call the feminization of primitive accumulation.

In the context of the shift of labor intensive work to the former colonies, and the use of women’s labor in those places to produce products for export, Mies herself has argued that international capital has rediscovered Third World Women and suggested several important theses to guide analysis:

1. Women, not men, are the optimal labor force for the capitalist accumulation process on a world scale.
2. Women are the “optimal labor force” because they are now being universally defined as ‘housewives,’ not as workers.’ This means their work can be bought at a much cheaper price than male labor since it is not defined as income-generating activity.
3. Moreover, by defining women “as housewives, it is possible not only to cheapen their labor but also gain political and ideological control over them.” They remain focused on their families, and trade unions continue to ignore them.
4. “Due to this interest in women, especially women in the colonies, we do not observe a tendency towards the generalization not of the ‘free proletarian and the typical laborer, but of the marginalized, housewifed, unfree laborers, most of them women.”
5. “This tendency is based on an increasing convergence of the sexual and the international division of labor; a division between men and women,... and a division between producers (mainly in the colonies) and consumers (mainly in the rich countries or the cities).” (Mies, 1986, 116).

Thus, she concludes, the ideological offensive that treats women as housewives whose work is not valued, who are in many cases unable to own land, etc., is a

necessary precondition for the smooth functioning of global capital: “it makes a large part of labor that is exploited and super-exploited for the world market invisible”(Mies, 1986, 120). She is right that it is made invisible. But I would suggest that in the moment of contemporary globalization, Mies’ concept of housewifization should be reformulated as the virtualization of workers, as the making of workers into not real workers.<sup>14</sup> Virtualization can be understood as covering a series of processes which includes housewifization, flexibilization, casualization, devalorization, and feminization and most profoundly the denigration of labor in general. All are processes in which the roles of women in the labor force are being generalized to all workers.

### Conclusion

I have argued that Harvey’s understanding of dialectics and his focus on the accumulation of capital can be very helpful for those who want to understand the dynamics of globalization. I have suggested that some of the prominent feminist critiques of his work have failed to understand what is involved in a dialectical understanding of Marxist theory and have also failed to understand the importance of a gender in the area of political economy. But these critiques do not exhaust the field of gendered analysis—especially when centered on Harvey’s work on the accumulation of capital.

I believe it is important to understand the dynamics of this moment of primitive accumulation or accumulation by dispossession in order to recognize some of the political possibilities for change. Thus, I have argued that this round of primitive accumulation is not gender neutral but is built on the backs of women. It has required their massively increased incorporation into waged labor, while at the same time denying that they are real workers deserving of a real wage; it has generalized the work of women to a much more feminized working class internationally, whether the workers are women or men; it has made use of non-market or semi-market sectors as needed as sources for labor power or

(sometimes) consumers. Yet as women have been drawn into wage labor and the capitalist market, to some extent their power within the family has increased as have their options. While they remain at the lower levels of the working class, classified as mostly “unskilled,” they have at least to some extent escaped from the confines of the patriarchal families to which they were subjected. They have some of their own money, however little. They have in some cases a little more freedom, some possibilities that were not there before. I think it is worth thinking about Harvey’s suggestion that there might be a “strongly feminized proletarian movement (not an impossibility in our times)[which] might turn out to be a different agent of political transformation to that led almost exclusively by men.”(Harvey, 2000a, 46). While he does not elaborate on this point, I think it can be an important insight especially when coupled with his comment in *The New Imperialism* that class struggle should be organized around these processes. (Harvey, 2003a, 178).

Nancy Naples notes that the terms “global, transnational, international, and ‘the’ grassroots” are contested among postcolonial, Third World, and international feminist scholars when analyzing women’s agency. Women are increasingly involved in transnational projects of resistance, but on different terms than men, often in much more locality based movements, often in struggles that may not be recognized as “political”, or work related in any traditional sense. (Naples and Desai, 2002, 5) There are contradictory problems and possibilities. On the one hand women are increasingly drawn into global capitalism but on greatly unequal terms. On the other hand women are freed from some patriarchal oppressions. On the one hand women become aware of and are included in global/transnational processes. On the other their resistances are for the most part localized. To understand both the problems and the possibilities in this situation an understanding of dialectics is essential. Harvey’s work can be a very valuable in this project.

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## Footnotes

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1.

See also Harvey's somewhat annoyed responses to the "surprise and disbelief at how [he] seem[ed] to merge modernist and postmodernist, structuralist and post-structuralist arguments



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in *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference*. (Harvey, 2000, 12)

2. I would like to think that my own work shares some of these characteristics. See for example, my essay, "Objectivity and Revolution: the Unity of Observation and Outrage in Marxist Theory" (Hartsock, 1998); See also (Hirschmann, 1997)

3. For example, Harvey suggests that the fire at the Imperial Foods chicken processing plant in North Carolina could have been addressed through "simple class politics." (1992b, 322) I think that class politics must be seen as inflected by issues of race and gender as well.

4. See also Ollman's statement quoted by Harvey, p. 48. "Dialectics restructures our thinking about reality by replacing the common-sense notion of "thing" as something that *has* a history and *has* external connections to other things, with notions of "process" which contains its history and possible futures, and "relation", which contains as a part of what it is its ties with other relations." (Ollman, 1993, 11).

5. As I read Marx, the separation of epistemology and ontology breaks down. Because of his emphasis on the centrality of human activity what we do and what we know are mutually constitutive. I see these issues most prominently in some of the *Economic and Philosophical Essays of 1844*.

6. I have not done the historical research (yet) to know what happened to gender relations during previous rounds of primitive accumulation, but things like laws against more than three women assembling on a street corner in revolutionary France, and the contradictory attention paid to the situation of women by the varieties of socialist theorists in France, England, and the United States throughout the nineteenth century make me believe that some important changes in the situation of women were taking place. (There is a sign in a Seattle suburb that reads, 'horses prohibited on sidewalks.' What must be prohibited matters.) What is certainly clear is that the accumulation of capital during the present moment is not gender neutral, but is built importantly on the backs of women.. Maria Mies, however, has made some important and suggestive connections between the subordination of nature, the subordination of women in Europe, and the ways these two processes were linked to the colonization of lands and peoples—thus the links between the persecution of witches, the rise of modern science, the slave trade, and the destruction of subsistence economies in the colonies. (Mies, 1986); (Pinchbeck, 1930, 1969).

7. Naomi Klein's work in *No Logo* (1999) where she cites Disney's claim that they have no employees in Haiti. (Ch 10.)

8. I find Harvey's use of Arendt very intriguing and plan to explore her theoretical contribution to this issue in the future. I found her work very important to a similar female theoretical lineage in debates on the concept of power in my earlier work (Hartsock, 1983, 1984)

9. Castells and others have noted that in the new informational economies it is women's relations skills that are in demand rather than men's muscular skills. (See also Breugel, 2000; McDowell, 2000)

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10. Harvey points out, citing Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* that Luxemburg sees the dual character of accumulation. One is the transaction between the capitalist and the wage laborer which takes place where “in form at any rate, peace property and equality prevail” and the other is in relations between capitalism and non-capitalist modes of production where “force, fraud, oppression and looting” are common (Harvey, 2003, 137). This is an important distinction with definite gender dimensions. Violence against women is rampant in the world.

11. I have made a similar argument about Arendt in Hartsock, 1983, 1984. Despite her admiration for ancient Greeks, her discussion of power added the dimension of natality to their more unidimensional concern with mortality—a concern I argued provided suggestive evidence that women writing about power were more able to see different dimensions than men. Neither is a feminist argument as such but both were women’s argument which were taken up later by other women making points about questions of women’s roles.

12. It is my assumption that this is a male work force, theoretically, given Marx’s two class/two man model. The problem is of course when Luxemburg begins to apply real world conditions and to argue that the reserve army of the unemployed cannot come solely from the working class of the industrialized European world.

13. This is particularly interesting in the context of Kevin Bales book on contemporary slavery and also Naomi Klein’s *No Logo* on the new forms of corporate awfulness in both the first and third world

14. See also Naomi Klein, *No Logo* Chapter 10 on this point where she describes the jobs that are jobs only for students or other non (real) workers but jobs which are held by people in their 30's and beyond. See also V. Spike Peterson, *A Rewriting of Global Political Economy* (2003) who introduced me to the term the “virtual economy.”