

F.O. Wolf and TINA

Claudia von Werlbof

As I concluded in my article “No Critique of Capitalism without a Critique of Patriarchy! Why the Left is No Alternative” in *CNS*, March 2007, I am no longer going to explain my point of view to people who do not want to hear it. I am not a missionary, I do not want to be elected, and I do not want to lead anyone or anything. I have no hidden agenda. I am only trying to express what I know. And in doing this, I go as “deep” as I can—until I reach the “bottom.” This is where the arguments come to an end and where the consequences have to be drawn. I call this “thinking to the end” (*zu Ende denken*). I have been doing this publicly for many years, because I think that it might help others to both better understand the world we live in and act differently. I, therefore, do not want to “convince” F.O. Wolf that I am right and that he is wrong. I will, however, analyze the way he has responded to my article.

When I read his response, two main questions emerged: Why did *CNS* publish my article, and why does *CNS* publish F.O. Wolf’s comment on it? Let us start with some general conclusions I am drawing from F.O. Wolf’s piece.

1. F.O. Wolf is not at all commenting on my article. On the contrary, he seems to ignore everything I have developed in it: my theoretical approach, my concepts, and the logic of my arguments. As a result, Wolf is consciously misleading the reader, because he does not even inform him/her about my article’s real contents.
2. Instead, F.O. Wolf is cutting my article into pieces that do not relate to each other. This is the typical patriarchal “divide and rule.” He hides the pieces that seem to be “too big” for him—namely my theoretical concepts and the “great turn” I am offering: looking at the world from the bottom instead of from the top and taking an historical perspective that looks back far beyond modernity and takes 5,000-7,000 years of patriarchal development into account. Thus, F.O. Wolf is de- or re-constructing my article into something I have not written. Sometimes he distorts my views so that they appear to be completely illogical and the opposite of what I wrote. Once again, there is no acknowledgment of the new understanding of capitalism and the capitalist mode of production (CMP) that I try to develop, in the sense that I see it as patriarchy’s latest, most aggressive form—capitalist patriarchy. Finally, F.O. Wolf is attacking me politically, intellectually, and even personally (although, despite the fact that we are both German, we have never met). He ridicules what he alleges are my thoughts and demonizes or psychoanalyzes what he presents as my “emotions“ and/or even my “religion” (?). In short: He is behaving as if I am the “class enemy” who has to be destroyed at all levels, including the personal level.
3. F.O. Wolf’s approach is rather dramatic. The drama starts with him complimenting my work and allegedly regretting that a “rendezvous” had not taken place earlier. He then suggests that we stand on similar ground, which we clearly do not. By claiming so, he entirely undermines what I actually have to say. Then—suddenly, and apparently out of nowhere—I am defined as a political enemy. In the ever growing “crescendo,” barely any possible accusation is left out. In the end, the enemy is intellectually, politically and personally annihilated. The “missed rendezvous” no longer matter—it would have been pointless anyway.

4. The fact that the “enemy” is a woman obviously plays an important role. A man surely would have been treated in a rather different manner. A woman, however, cannot be allowed to think independently beyond what men have already thought. A woman who does so, must not be taken seriously, her thoughts must be belittled, and personally she has to be treated like a sort of monster. We have seen this before: it is called a witch-hunt. Today women are no longer burnt at the stake, but they remain suspicious as soon as they do not obey, or escape male control. In doing so, they are considered politically dangerous, mentally ill, or emotionally debauched—or all of these things. Men’s reactions are well known. F.O. Wolf has chosen to try to verbally guillotine me. Women should take their heads to the hair dresser instead of using them to argue with men!
5. Why did F.O. Wolf feel this need? Why did his final “rendezvous” with my sort of “ecofeminism” end up to be so malicious? What does this mean for the already initiated “dialogue” between socialism and ecofeminism in *CNS* and elsewhere? Why couldn’t F.O. Wolf even listen to what I am really saying? Why was he trying to hide what he read? Why wasn’t he curious enough to take it into consideration? Why did he do everything he could to prevent himself and his readers from doing so?

Unfortunately I know the answer, though I would really like to be wrong: The Left is and has no alternative, and this includes so-called “critical Marxism,” apparently represented by F.O. Wolf. He himself proves the conclusion of my article is right. I would have hoped that it was not. But it seems that the Left really does not present any alternative. Worse, it really doesn’t want any.

F.O. Wolf does nothing but reiterate thoughts of the 19th century. What would Marx have thought and done today? The answer is easy: he would have thought beyond Marxism! But that women are trying to do so is unacceptable! (Especially if they do it before any men—but would they ever?) So why can’t men on the Left consider what women are saying and thinking? And **furthermore**, why do these men ignore reality? Why don’t they see that the “objective” (the material) limits of “nature” and its “domination,” “transformation,” and “valorization” (of which the Left was so proud) have been reached or already transgressed? Because this is what ecofeminism is about. Why don’t they realize that the Left has no future, since it is linked to the CMP—better, the CMD, the capitalist mode of destruction—which is causing the disaster we are facing? The reason is *the unbroken, “romantic” belief in the capitalist mode of “production” as such, and the refusal to analyze it in terms of its relationship with patriarchy, namely as “capitalist patriarchy,”* which is violently trying to “overcome” the “dependence” on women and nature as a whole, resulting in their destruction.

This belief/refusal syndrome is not “essentially” implied in the Left, as F.O. Wolf thinks I am arguing. It is not me who is the “essentialist”—it is the Left itself in clinging to this belief (religion?). For this not to be the case, the Left must denounce all pseudo-theories that stem from the dream of modernity and claim to create the best of all worlds. Modernity is already creating the worst of all worlds. *This* has to be explained and—more urgently—*changed!* Capitalism does not help against capitalism. And capitalism does not help against patriarchy either, because it is patriarchy itself in its most modern form.

This neither rattles F.O. Wolf’s brain nor his heart. On the contrary, he conceals as much as he can of my definition of patriarchy, capitalism, and capitalist patriarchy as theoretical concepts. Surprisingly enough, he claims on page 1 of his article that he shares “two central theses” with me:

1. He seems to agree with me that a critique of patriarchy has to be part of a critique of capitalism. But when he defines patriarchy as “male-dominated gender relations” (that are

only “personal”/“subjective” and still “pre-capitalist”), we can clearly see that he distorts what I have defined as patriarchy in my article. My critique is not directed at a patriarchy “light” but a world system that *includes* capitalism in the form of “capitalist patriarchy” as its latest and most aggressive stage. There is no capitalism without patriarchy. Capitalism is the crystallized form of patriarchy. Capitalism is the way that patriarchy tries to realize its utopia of a society that does not depend on mothers, mother earth, “nature.” But for F.O. Wolf, “motherlessness” is nothing but a ridiculous idea that deserves no attention.

2. He falsely pretends that we share the vision of “overcoming the CMP by a socialist transition towards communism.” From my point of view, socialism and communism have always been part of the modern capitalist world system. They are as patriarchal as the rest of it. F.O. Wolf writes that my critique “does not challenge the value and validity of these basic insights.” Of course it does! Why doesn’t he acknowledge the difference in our approaches? It is because he only knows one approach? *His* approach? Namely, a dogmatic “Marxist” one? (Which, by the way, has nothing to do with ecofeminism at all.)

F.O. Wolf fiercely refuses to consider new theoretical terrain. He believes in the “essence” of the CMP. TINA: There is No Alternative! In his opinion, the “true” and “clean” CMP has very little to do with the dirty “real existing capitalism,” as I call it: with “modes of domination”—war, violence, destruction, direct coercion, despotism, personal dependencies, and patriarchy. In F.O. Wolf’s eyes, my analysis is all jumbled up. However, it only appears that way to him, because I refuse to exclude critical aspects of the system we live in from its analysis, whereas he thinks that these are “precapitalist defects” that will disappear in the future. If I am “obscuring” something, as he says, I may be obscuring the radiant light of the clean CMP—the one that he is defending so fervently. “Factories are not barracks” and “not all technology is weaponry,” he says. But he does not say anything about the fact that the factories of the multinationals in the “Free Production Zones” are indeed barracks, or that without machines there would be no weaponry ... The “reduction and oversimplification” lies with himself. He is the one who excludes aspects from the analysis, not me. Yet he claims that I am “proposing to abandon critical analysis of what is concretely happening under industrialization”; that it is me who is “closing her eyes before the challenges”; that it is me who “blinds us to the very real dangers of capitalist accumulation!”

Why this relentless critique? The answer is: Because I look for alternatives and don’t want to spend my energies on the wrong project, whereas he does not. He believes in the CMP. His research remains within a system that he is taking for granted and that he sees as a possible future! Mention the possibility of subsistence production instead of commodity production, or of a technology beyond the technology of the machine, and he goes mad!

F.O. Wolf cannot see that it is commodity production that is destroying the world—no matter how “pure” or “clean” or “civil.” He cannot see that a fully realized CMP is neither possible nor a solution but would mean the end of life and the end of the world. He cannot see that rationality itself means violence and—completely “irrationally”—aims at dominating, overcoming and even replacing (wo)man and nature. He cannot see that patriarchy is the “deep structure” of the modern project that is actively and consciously annihilating the world. Does F.O. Wolf really want us to further participate in this project? Yes, he says, because a “mass exit could not take place without major catastrophes”—as if it was the search for alternatives, and not capitalist patriarchy, that is the catastrophe!

F.O. Wolf’s personal attack is manifold. First, he detects a “frustration” in me. Not to show sympathy, of course, but to discredit me. Then my approach is deemed a “monism,” “reductive of the complexity...of human history” and “destructive of the possibilities of rational

argument” (does this mean “irrational?”) just as “its Leninist or Stalinist predecessors!” Wow. These are interesting comparisons, given that F.O. Wolf never goes through the trouble of explaining what my approach actually is. F.O. Wolf is also preoccupied with what he understands as my “feelings.” So he observes an “irritation” in me, too, quoting a debate I had with socialist women a quarter of a century ago. Once again, his sole purpose here is to portray me as irrational. Doesn’t he know how to use polemics as a means of debate? He really should have read his Marx better.

As a part of his drama, F.O. Wolf then turns to compliments again: He appreciates my/our “hypothesis on the rise of the housewife-model”: *Hausfrauisierung* (“housewifization”). But if this is so, then why doesn’t he apply this hypothesis to his analysis? On the contrary, he sees “the dependent household labor of women” as one of those labor relations that are “still” pre-capitalist, in the “transition to wage labor” and “not directly exploited by capital,” whereas for us there is no accumulation of capital without the unpaid housewife, as there is generally no wage labor without precarious and/or non-wage labor before, besides or after it. But F.O. Wolf cannot acknowledge this type of “dialectical” understanding of the reality of the CMP/D.

Ecology is also not his field of interest. The one time he speaks of nature, he praises Francis Bacon and his characteristically alchemical notion of “obeying nature.” This notion does not aim to establish a good relationship to nature, but to trick her, using our knowledge about her against her! So, F.O. Wolf is still thinking like an alchemist, defending the machine-technology that came about as a result of Bacon’s “alchemical” project to dominate nature and to “create” a new one, a project that leads straight to the ecological catastrophe of today.

I am also scolded for being an “anarchist.” I am much worse. I am an “a-cratic”! This means that I am not interested in questions of “strategy.” If F.O. Wolf detected that, he was right for once. Participating in forms of war and domination are not my fields of interest. I am looking for alternatives! But F.O. Wolf still believes in the necessity of the Left’s strategy to “build the political power base needed”—well, and what for? This strategy has failed. Shall we still stubbornly pursue it until the year 3000? And what is its goal anyway? Continuing capitalist patriarchy?

It is my “claim,” F.O. Wolf says, “to have arrived...at a new ...understanding of capitalism that *supersedes* the one formulated by Marx.” Indeed, here he is right too. It really is time to engage in such a project. However, once again, F.O. Wolf is turning my arguments upside-down: The end of wage labor as a general model for the reproduction of labor power is read by him as the end of wage labor as such. Nobody ever said that, but he seems to fear to lose wage labor as the central category of his analysis. It now becomes obvious why he never mentioned my discussion of the “relations of production” in capitalism. I and the people I worked with have argued for a long time that the CMP consists of all these “relations of production,” including non wage labor *as capitalist* and not as pre- or proto-capitalist! This means that capitalism has to be made responsible for their exploitation, too. It is truly insincere to deny the effort that many women put into this analysis over decades. F.O. Wolf’s claim that for *me* “the aim of capital is simply the transformation of all labor into wage labor” is, therefore, not only ludicrous, but illogical. It is the definition of the Left—and so his own! My definition is totally different: The aim of capitalism is the transformation of everything into a *commodity*: into capital, machinery, command. If wage labor is useful, it is applied—if it isn’t, it’s not. Did F.O. Wolf really miss this point? He did, because he is totally convinced of commodity production through (“regular”) wage labor as the only way that capitalist accumulation and the CMP “proper” can happen.

F.O. Wolf's critique is also deceitful. On the one hand, he is concealing the arguments of my/our theoretical approach, and on the other, he is pretending that I have "a style of theorizing" that is reminiscent of "a kind of conspiracy theory." Here he refers to an explicitly non-theoretical, purely descriptive introductory part of my text. He adds more insults: I have a "dubious" notion of "system." Which one he does not say. I am "essentialist" with respect to the Left, which I supposedly (and he really seems to believe this) do not accept because "so many on the Left have been born male." This fantasy leads him to the conclusion that my arguments concerning the Left are "gender reductionist." Finally, he tries to discredit me completely by suggesting that I am more "religious" than "political," because I relate to a matriarchal past of humanity. He also suggests that such "debates on human history ... were dropped by 20th century historicists and relativists." He is wrong. These debates—at least as far as its feminist contents are concerned—were dropped by the NS regime. Since the 1970s, there exists extensive new feminist research on past and living matriarchal societies. I have, in fact, been part of this re-emergence of matriarchal studies, because we indeed need to go into the direction of a post-patriarchal world. But this was not crucial to my article.

I return to my first questions: Why did *CNS* accept such an attack against an "invited outsider" like me? *CNS* seems not interested in continuing the "dialogue" between socialists and ecofeminists, at least not with me. And I, too, I will not try to engage in any "dialogue" through *CNS* anymore—unless it becomes common practice that feminists comment on the texts that men publish in the journal.

I am concluding once more that the Left is and has no alternative to capitalism and patriarchy. In this case, this is not polemics. It is the logical conclusion of a proper analysis that F.O. Wolf has confirmed.