SILVIA FEDERICI'S

CALIBAN AND THE WITCH

WOMEN,
THE BODY AND
PRIMITIVE
ACCUMULATION





Fighting Terrorism Since 1492

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VOLUME 5



Amerigo Vespucci landing on the South American coast in 1497. Before him, seductively lying on a hammock, is "America." Behind her some cannibals are roasting human remains. Design by Jan van der Straet, and engraved by Théodore Galle (1589).



Colonization and Christianization

Caliban and Witches in the New World

"...and so they say that we have come to this earth to destroy the world. They say that the winds ruin the houses, and cut the trees, and the fire burns them, but that we devour everything, we consume the earth, we redirect the rivers, we are never quiet, never at rest, but always run here and there, seeking gold and silver, never satisfied, and then we gamble with it, make war, kill each other, rob, swear, never say the truth, and have deprived them of their means of livelihood. And finally they curse the sea which has put on the earth such evil and harsh children." (Girolamo Benzoni, Historia del Mondo Nuovo, 1565).

"...overcome by torture and pain, [the women] were obliged to confess that they did adore huacas.... They lamented, 'Now in this life we women...are Christian; perhaps then the priest is to blame if we women adore the mountains, if we flee to the hills and puna, since there is no justice for us here." (Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, Nueva Chronica y Buen Gobierno, 1615)

Introduction

The history of the body and the witch-hunt that I have presented is based on an assumption that is summed up by the reference to "Caliban and the Witch," the characters of The Tempest symbolizing the American Indians' resistance to colonization. The assumption is the continuity between the subjugation of the populations of the New World and that of people in Europe, women in particular, in the transition to capitalism. In both cases we have the forcible removal of entire communities from their land, large-scale impoverishment, the launching of "Christianizing" campaigns destroying people's autonomy and communal relations. We also have a constant cross-fertilization whereby forms of repression that had been developed in the Old World were transported to the New and then re-imported into Europe.

The differences should not be underestimated. By the 18th century, due to the flow of gold, silver and other resources coming from the Americas into Europe, an international division of labor had taken shape that divided the new global proletariat by means of different class relations and systems of discipline, marking the beginning of often conflicting histories within the working class. But the similarities in the treatments to which the populations of Europe and the Americas were subjected are sufficient to demonstrate the existence of one single logic governing the development of capitalism and the structural character of the atrocities perpetrated in this process. An outstanding example is the extension of the witch-hunt to the American colonies.

The persecution of women and men through the charge of witchcraft is a phenomenon that, in the past, was largely considered by historians to be limited to Europe. The only exception admitted to this rule were the Salem witch trials, which remain the focus of the scholarship on witch-hunting in the New World. It is now recognized, however, that the charge of devil-worshipping played a key function also in the colonization of the American aboriginal population. On this subject, two texts, in particular, must be mentioned that form the basis for my discussion in this chapter. The first is Irene Silverblatt's *Moon, Sun, and Witches* (1987), a study of witch hunting and the redefinition of gender relations in Inca society and colonial Peru, which (to my knowledge) is the first in English to reconstruct the history of the Andean women persecuted as witches. The other is Luciano Parinetto's *Streghe e Potere* (1998), a series of essays that document the impact of witch-hunting in America on the witch trials in Europe, marred, however, by the author's insistence that the persecution of the witches was gender-neutral.

Both these works demonstrate that also in the New World witch-hunting was a deliberate strategy used by the authorities to instill terror, destroy collective resistance, silence entire communities, and turn their members against each other. It was also a strategy of enclosure which, depending on the context, could be enclosure of land, bodies or social relations. Above all, as in Europe, witch-hunting was a means of dehumanization and as such the paradigmatic form of repression, serving to justify enslavement and genocide.

Witch-hunting did not destroy the resistance of the colonized. Due primarily to the struggle of women, the connection of the American Indians with the land, the local religions and nature survived beyond the persecution providing, for more than five hundred years, a source of anti-colonial and anti-capitalist resistance. This is extremely important for us, at a time when a renewed assault is being made on the resources and mode of existence of indigenous populations across the planet; for we need to rethink how the conquistadors strove to subdue those whom they colonized, and what enabled the latter to subvert this plan and, against the destruction of their social and physical universe, create a new historical reality.

The Birth of the Cannibals

When Columbus sailed to "Indies" the witch-hunt in Europe was not yet a mass phenomenon. Nevertheless, the use of devil-worship as a weapon to strike at political enemies and vilify entire populations (like Muslims and Jews) was already common among the elite. More than that, as Seymour Phillips writes, a "persecuting society" had devel-

oped within medieval Europe," fed by militarism and Christian intolerance, that looked at the "Other" as mainly an object of aggression (Phillips 1994). Thus, it is not surprising if "cannibal," "infidel," "barbarian," "monstrous races," and devil worshipper were the "ethnographic models" with which the Europeans "entered the new age of expansion" (ibid. 62), providing the filter through which missionaries and conquistadors interpreted the cultures, religions, and sexual customs of the peoples they encountered. Other cultural marks contributed to the invention of the "Indians". Most stigmatizing and perhaps projecting the Spaniards' labor needs were "nakedness" and "sodomy," that qualified the Amerindians as beings living in an animal state (thus capable of being turned into beasts of burden), though some reports also stressed, as a sign of their bestiality, their propensity to share and "give everything they have in return for things of little value" (Hulme 1994: 198).

Defining the aboriginal American populations as cannibals, devil-worshippers, and sodomites supported the fiction that the Conquest was not an unabashed quest for gold and silver but was a converting mission, a claim that, in 1508, helped the Spanish Crown gain for it the blessing of the Pope and complete authority over the Church in the Americas. It also removed, in the eyes of the world and possibly of the colonizers themselves, any sanction against the atrocities which they would commit against the "Indians," thus functioning as a license to kill regardless of what the intended victims might do. And, indeed, "The whip, gibbet, and stock, imprisonment, torture, rape, and occasional killing became standard weapons for enforcing labor discipline" in the New World (Cockroft 1990:19).

In a first phase, however, the image of the colonized as devil-worshippers could coexist with a more positive, even idyllic one, picturing the "Indians" as innocent, and generous beings, living a life "free of toil and tyranny," recalling the mythical "Golden Age" or an earthly paradise (Brandon 1986: 6–8; Sale 1991: 100–101).

This characterization may have been a literary stereotype or, as Roberto Retamar, among others, has suggested, the rhetorical counterpart of the image of the "savage," expressing the Europeans' inability to see the people they met as real human beings.³ But this optimistic view also corresponded to a period in the conquest (from 1520 to 1540s) in which the Spaniards still believed that the aboriginal populations would be easily converted and subjugated (Cervantes 1994). This was the time of mass baptisms, when much zeal was deployed in convincing the "Indians" to change their names and abandon their gods and sexual customs, especially polygamy and homosexuality. [B]arebreasted women were forced to cover themselves, men in loincloths had to put on trousers (Cockcroft: 1983: 21). But at this time, the struggle against the devil consisted mainly of bonfires of local "idols," even though many political and religious leaders from central Mexico were put on trial and burned at the stake by the Franciscan father Juan de Zumarraga, in the years between 1536 (when the Inquisition was introduced in South America) and 1543.

As the Conquest proceeded, however, no space was left for any accommodations. Imposing one's power over other people is not possible without denigrating them to the point where the possibility of identification is precluded. Thus, despite the earlier homilies about the gentle Tainos, an ideological machine was set in motion, complementing the military one, that portrayed the colonized as "filthy" and demonic beings practicing

all kinds of abominations, while the same crimes that previously had been attributed to lack of religious education — sodomy, cannibalism, incest, cross dressing — were now treated as signs that the "Indians" were under the dominion of the devil and they could be justifiably deprived of their lands and their lives (Williams 1986: 136–137). In reference to this image-shift, Fernando Cervantes writes in *The Devil in The New World* (1994):

before 1530 it would have been difficult to predict which one of these views would emerge as the dominant one. By the middle of the sixteenth century, however, [a] negative demonic view of Amerindian cultures had triumphed, and its influence was seen to descend like a thick fog on every statement officially and unofficially made on the subject (1994: 8).

It could be surmised, on the basis of the contemporary histories of the "Indies" — such as De Gomara's (1556) and Acosta's (1590) — that this change of perspective was prompted by the Europeans' encounter with imperialistic states like the Aztec and Inca, whose repressive machinery included the practice of human sacrifices (Martinez et al 1976). In the Historia NaturalY Moral de Las Indias, published in Sevilla, in 1590, by the Jesuit Joseph de Acosta, there are descriptions that give us a vivid sense of the repulsion generated, among the Spaniards, by the mass sacrifices carried out, particularly by the Aztecs, which involved thousands of youths (war captives or purchased children and slaves). 4 Yet, when we read Bartolemé De Las Casas' account of the destruction of the Indies or any other account of the Conquest, we wonder why should the Spaniards have been shocked by this practice when they themselves had no qualms committing unspeakable atrocities for the sake of God and gold and, according to Cortez, in 1521, they had slaughtered 100,000 people, just to conquer Tenochtitlan (Cockroft 1983: 19).

Similarly, the cannibalistic rituals they discovered in America, which figure prominently in the records of the Conquest, must not have been too different from the medical practices that were popular in Europe at the time. In the 16th, 17th and even 18th centuries, the drinking of human blood (especially the blood of those who had died of a violent death) and mummy water, obtained by soaking human flesh in various spirits, was a common cure for epilepsy and other illnesses in many European countries. Furthermore, this type of cannibalism, "involving human flesh, blood, heart, skull, bone marrow, and other body parts was not limited to fringe groups of society but was practiced in the most respectable circles" (Gordon–Grube 1988: 406–407). Thus, the new horror that the Spaniards felt for the aboriginal populations, after the 1550s, cannot be easily attributed to a cultural shock, but must be seen as a response inherent to the logic of colonization that inevitably must dehumanize and fear those it wants to enslave.

How successful was this strategy can be seen from the ease with which the Spaniards rationalized the high mortality rates caused by the epidemics that swept the region in the wake of the Conquest, which they interpreted as God's punishment for the Indians beastly conduct. Also the debate that took place in 1550, at Valladolid, in Spain, between Bartolomé de Las Casas and the Spanish jurist Juan Gines de Sepulveda, on whether or not the "Indians" were to be considered as human beings, would have been unthinkable without an ideological campaign representing the latter as animals and demons. 7



Travel logs illustrated with horrific images of cannibals stuffing themselves with human remains proliferated in Europe in the aftermath of the conquest. A cannibal banquet in Bahia (Brazil), according to the description of the German J. G. Aldenburg.

The spread of illustrations portraying life in the New World, that began to circulate in Europe after the 1550s, completed this work of degradation, with their multitudes of naked bodies and cannibalistic banquets, reminiscent of witches' Sabbats, featuring human heads and limbs as the main course. A late example of this genre of literature is Le Livre des Antipodes (1630), compiled by Johann Ludwig Gottfried, which displays a number of horrific images: women and children stuffing themselves with human entrails, or the cannibal community gathered around a grill, feasting on legs and arms while watching the roasting of human remains. Prior contributions to the cultural production of the Amerindians as bestial beings are the illustrations in Les Singularitéz de la France Antarctique (Paris 1557) by the French Franciscan André Thevet, already centered on the themes of the human quartering, cooking, and banquet; and Hans Staden's Wahrharftige Historia (Marburg 1557), in which the author describes his captivity among the cannibal indios of Brazil (Parinetto 1998: 428).



Cannibals in Bahia feasting on human remains. Illustrations displaying the Amerindian community roasting and feeding on human remains completed the degradation of the aboriginal American populations begun by the work of the missionaries.

Exploitation, Resistance, and Demonization

A turning point, in the anti-Indian propaganda and anti-idolatry campaign that accompanied the colonization process, was the decision by the Spanish Crown, in the 1550s, to introduce in the American colonies a far more severe system of exploitation. The decision was motivated by the crisis of the "plunder economy" that had been introduced after the Conquest whereby the accumulation of wealth continued to depend on the expropriation of the "Indians" surplus goods more than on the direct exploitation of their labor (Spalding 1984; Steve J. Stern 1982). Until the 1550s, despite the massacres and the exploitation associated with the system of the encomienda, the Spaniards had not completely disrupted the subsistence economies which they had found in the areas they colonized. Instead, they had relied, for the wealth they accumulated, on the tribute systems put into place by the Aztecs and Incas, whereby designated chiefs (caciquez in Mexico, kuracas in Peru) delivered them quotas of goods and labor supposedly compatible with the survival of the local economies. The tribute which the Spaniards exacted was much higher than that the Aztecs and Incas had ever demanded of those they conquered; but it was still not sufficient to satisfy their needs. By the 1550s, they were finding it difficult to obtain enough labor for the both the obrajes (manufacturing workshops where goods were produced for the international market) and the exploitation of the newly discovered silver and mercury mines, like the legendary one at Potosi.8

The need to squeeze more work from the aboriginal populations largely derived from the situation at home where the Spanish Crown was literally floating on the American bullion, which bought food and goods no longer produced in Spain. In addition, the plundered wealth financed the Crown's European territorial expansion. This was so dependent on the continuous arrival of masses of silver and gold from the New World that, by the 1550s, the Crown was ready to undermine the power of the *encomenderos* in order to appropriate the bulk of the Indians' labor for the extraction of silver to be shipped to Spain.⁹ But resistance to colonization was mounting (Spalding 1984: 134–135; Stern 1982).¹⁰ It was in response to this challenge that, both in Mexico and Peru, a war was declared on indigenous cultures paving the way to a draconian intensification of colonial rule.

In Mexico, this turn occurred in 1562 when, by the initiative of the Provincial Diego de Landa, an anti-idolatry campaign was launched in the Yucatan peninsula, in the course of which more than 4,500 people were rounded up and brutally tortured under the charge of practicing human sacrifices. They were then subjected to a well-orchestrated public punishment which finished destroying their bodies and their morale (Clendinnen 1987:71–92). So cruel were the penalties inflicted (floggings so severe that they made the blood flow, years of enslavement in the mines) that many people died or remained unfit for work; others fled their homes or committed suicide, so that work came to an end and the regional economy was disrupted. However, the persecution that Landa mounted was the foundation of a new colonial economy, since it signaled to the local population that the Spaniards were there to stay and that the rule of the old gods was over (*ibid.*: 190).

In Peru, as well, the first large-scale attack on diabolism occurred in the 1560s, coinciding with the rise of the Taki Ondoy movement, 11 a native millenarian move-

ment that preached against collaboration with the Europeans and for a pan-Andean alliance of the local gods (huacas) putting an end to colonization. Attributing the defeat suffered and the rising mortality to the abandonment of the local gods, the Takionqos encouraged people to reject the Christian religion, and the names, food, clothing received from the Spaniards. They also urge them to refuse the tribute payments and labor drafts the Spaniards imposed on them, and to "stop wearing shirts, hats, sandals or any other clothes from Spain" (Stern 1982: 53). If this was done — they promised — the revived huacas would turn the world around and destroy the Spaniards by sending sickness and floods to their cities, the ocean rising to erase any memory of their existence (Stern 1982: 52–64).

The threat posed by the Taquionqos was a serious one since, by calling for a pan-Andean unification of the *huacas*, the movement marked the beginning of a new sense of identity capable of overcoming the divisions connected with the traditional organization of the *ayullus* (family unit). In Stern's words, it marked the first time that the people of the Andes began to think of themselves as one people, as "Indians" (Stern 1982: 59) and, in fact, the movement spread widely, reaching "as far north as Lima, as far east as Cuzco, and over the high puna of the South to La Paz in contemporary Bolivia (Spalding 1984: 246). The response came with the ecclesiastical Council held in Lima in 1567, which established that the priests should "extirpate the innumerable superstitions, ceremonies and diabolical rites of the Indians. They were also to stamp out drunkenness, arrest witch-doctors, and above all discover and destroy shrines and talismans" connected with the worship of the local gods (*huacas*). These recommendations were repeated at a synod in Quito, in 1570, where, again, it was denounced that "[t]here are famous witch doctors who... guard the *huacas* and converse with the devil" (Hemming 1970: 397).

The huacas were mountains, springs, stones, and animals embodying the spirits of the ancestor. As such, they were collectively cared for, fed, and worshipped for everyone recognized them as the main link with the land, and with the agricultural practices central to economic reproduction. Women talked to them, as they apparently still do, in some regions of South America, to ensure a healthy crop (Descola 1994: 191–214). 12 Destroying them or forbidden their worship was to attack the community, its historical roots, people's relation to the land, and their intensely spiritual relation to nature. This was understood by the Spaniards who, in the 1550s, embarked in a systematic destruction of anything resembling an object of worship. What Claude Baudez and Sydney Picasso write about the anti-idolatry drive conducted by the Franciscans against the Mayas in the Yucatan also applies to the rest of Mexico and Peru.

"Idols were destroyed, temples burned, and those who celebrated native rites and practiced sacrifices were punished by death; festivities such as banquets, songs, and dances, as well as artistic and intellectual activities (painting, sculpture, observation of stars, hieroglyphic writing) — suspected of being inspired by the devil — were forbidden and those who took part in them mercilessly hunted down" (Baudez and Picasso 1992: 21).

This process went hand in hand with the reform demanded by the Spanish Crown that increased the exploitation of indigenous labor to ensure a better flow of bullion into its coffers. Two measures were introduced for this purpose, both facilitated by the anti-idolatry campaign. First, the quota of labor that the local chiefs had to provide for the mines and the obrajes was vastly increased, and the enforcement of the new rule was placed under the super-



Andean woman forced to work in the obrajes, manufacturing workshops producing for the international market. Scenes by Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala.

vision of a local representative of the Crown (corregidore) with the power to arrest and administer other forms of punishment in case of failure to comply. Further, a resettlement program (reducciones) was introduced removing much of the rural population into designated villages, so as to place it under a more direct control. The destruction of the huacas and the persecution of the ancestor religion associated with them was instrumental to both, since the reducciones gained strength from the demonization of the local worshipping sites.

It was soon clear, however, that, under the cover of Christianization, people continued to worship their gods, in the same way as they continued to return to their milpas (fields) after being removed from their homes. Thus, instead of diminishing, the attack on the local gods intensified with time, climaxing between 1619 and 1660 when the destruction of the idols was accompanied by true witch-hunts, this time targeting women in particular. Karen Spalding has described one of these witch-hunts conducted in the repartimiento of Huarochiri', in 1660, by the priest-inquisitor Don Juan Sarmiento. As she reports, the investigation was conducted according to the same pattern of the witch-hunts in Europe. It began with the reading of the edict against idolatry and the preaching of a sermon against this sin. This was followed by secret denunciations supplied by anonymous informants, then came the questioning of the suspects, the use of torture to extract confessions, and then the sentencing and punishment, in this case consisting of public whipping, exile, and various other forms of humiliation:

The people sentenced were brought into the public square....They were placed upon mules and donkeys, with wooden crosses about six inches long around their necks. They were ordered to wear these marks of humiliation from that









Scenes from Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala representing the ordeal of Andean women and the followers of the ancestors' religion.

Scene 1: Public humiliation during an anti-idolatry campaign. Scene 2: Women "as spoils of conquest." Scene 3: The huacas, represented as the devil, speak through a dream. Scene 4: A member of the Taki Onqoy movement with a drunken Indian who is seized by a huaca represented as the devil. (From Steve J. Stern, 1982.)

day forward. On their heads, the religious authorities put a medieval coroza, a cone shaped hood made of pasteboard, that was the European Catholic mark of infamy and disgrace. Beneath these hoods the hair was cut off — an Andean mark of humiliation. Those who were condemned to receive lashes had their backs bared. Ropes were put around their necks. They were paraded slowly through the streets of the town with a crier ahead of them reading out their crimes... After this spectacle the people were brought back, some with their backs bleeding from the 20, 40 or 100 lashes with the cat-o'-nine-tails wielded by the village executioner (Spalding 1984: 256).

Spalding concludes that:

The idolatry campaigns were exemplary rituals, didactic theatre pieces directed to the audience as much as to the participants, much like a public hanging in medieval Europe (ibid.: 265)

Their objective was to intimidate the population, to create a "space of death" where potential rebels would be so paralyzed with fear that they would accept anything rather than having to face the same ordeal of those publicly beaten and humiliated. In this, the Spaniards were in part successful. Faced with torture, anonymous denunciations and public humiliations, many alliances and friendships broke down; people's faith in the effectiveness of their gods weakened, and worship turned into a secret individual practice rather than a collective one, as it had been in pre-conquest America.

How deeply the social fabric was affected by these terror campaigns can be deduced, according to Spalding, from the changes that over time took place in the nature of the charges. While in the 1550s people could openly acknowledge theirs and their community's attachment to the traditional religion, by the 1650s the crimes of which they were accused revolved around "witchcraft," a practice now presuming a secretive behavior, and they increasingly resembled the accusations made against witches in Europe. In the campaign launched in 1660, in the Huarochiri area, for instance, "the crimes uncovered by the authorities... dealt with curing, finding lost goods, and other forms of what might be generally called village 'witchcraft'." Yet, the same campaign revealed that despite the persecution, in the eyes of the communities, "the ancestors and waks (huacas) continued to be essential to their survival" (Spalding 1984: 261).

Women and Witches in America

It is not a coincidence that "[m]ost of the people convicted in the investigation of 1660 in Huarochiri' were women (28 out of 32)" (Spalding 1984: 258), in the same way as women had been the main presence in the Taki Onqoy movement. It was women who most strongly defended the old mode of existence and opposed the new power structure, plausibly because they were also the ones who were most negatively affected by it.

Women had held a powerful position in pre-Columbian societies, as reflected by the existence of many important female deities in their religions. Reaching an island off the coast of the Yucatan peninsula, in 1517, Hernandez de Cordoba named it Isla Mujeres "because the temples they visited there contained numerous female idols" (Baudez and Picasso 1992: 17). Pre-conquest American women had their organizations, their socially recognized spheres of activity and, while not equal to men, 14 they were considered complementary to them in their contribution to the family and society.

In addition to being farmers, house-workers and weavers, in charge of producing the colorful cloths worn in everyday life and during the ceremonies, they were potters, herbalists, healers (curanderas), and priestesses (sacerdotisas) at the service of household gods. In Southern Mexico, in the region of Oaxaca, they were connected with the production of pulque-maguey, a sacred substance believed to have been invented by the gods and associated with Mayahuel, an earth-mother goddess that was "the focal point of peasant religion" (Taylor 1970: 31–32).

But with the Spaniards' arrival everything changed, as they brought their baggage of misogynous beliefs and restructured the economy and political power in ways that favored men. Women suffered also at the hands of the traditional chiefs who, in order to maintain their power, began to take over the communal lands and expropriate the female members of the community from land use and water rights. Thus, within the colonial economy, women were reduced to the condition of servants working as maids (for the encomenderos, the priests, the corregidores) or as weavers in the obrajes. Women were also forced to follow their husband when they would have to do mita work in the mines — a fate that people recognized to be worse than death — for, in 1528, the authorities established that spouses could not be separated, so that women and children, from then on, could be compelled to do mine labor in addition to preparing food for the male workers.

Another source of degradation for women was the new Spanish legislation which declared polygamy illegal, so that, overnight, men had to either separate from their wives or reclassify them as maids (Mayer 1981), while the children issued from these unions were labeled according to five different types of illegitimacy (Nash 1980: 143). Ironically, while polygamous unions were dissolved, with the arrival of the Spaniards, no aboriginal woman was safe from rape or appropriation, so that many men, instead of marrying, began to turn to public prostitutes (Hemming 1970). In the European fantasy, America itself was a reclining naked woman seductively inviting the approaching white stranger. At times, it was the "Indian" men themselves who delivered their female kin to the priests or encomenderos in exchange for some economic reward or a public post.

For all these reasons, women became the main enemies of colonial rule, refusing to go to Mass, to baptize their children or to cooperate in any way with the colonial authorities and priests. In the Andes, some committed suicide and killed their male children, presumably to prevent them from going to the mines and also out of disgust, apparently, for the mistreatment inflicted upon them by their male relatives (Silverblatt 1987). Others organized their communities and, in front of the defection of many local chiefs who were co-opted by the colonial structure, became priests, leaders, and guardians of the huacas, taking on functions which they had never previously exercised. This explains why women were the backbone of the Taki Onqoy movement. In Peru, they also held confessions to prepare people for when they would meet with the catholic priests, advising them as to what it should be safe to tell them and what they should not reveal. And while

before the Conquest women had been in charge exclusively of the ceremonies dedicated to female deities, afterwards, they became assistants or principal officiants in cults dedicated to the male-ancestors-huacas — something that before the Conquest had been forbidden (Stern 1982). They also fought the colonial power by withdrawing to the higher planes (punas) where they could practice the old religion. As Irene Silverblatt writes:

While indigenous men often fled the oppression of the *mita* and tribute by abandoning their communities and going to work as *yaconas* (quasi-serfs) in the merging haciendas, women fled to the *punas*, inaccessible and very distant from the *reducciones* of their native communities. Once in the *punas* women rejected the forces and symbols of their oppression, disobeying Spanish administrators, the clergy, as well as their own community officials. They also vigorously rejected the colonial ideology, which reinforced their oppression, refusing to go to Mass, participate in Catholic confessions, or learn catholic dogma. More important, women did not just reject Catholicism; they returned to their native religion and, to the best that they could, to the quality of social relations which their religion expressed (1987: 197).

By persecuting women as witches, then, the Spaniards targeted both the practitioners of the old religion and the instigators of anti-colonial revolt, while attempting to redefine "the spheres of activity in which indigenous women could participate" (Silverblatt 1987: 160). As Silverblatt points out, the concept of witchcraft was alien to Andean society. In Peru as well, as in every pre-industrial society, many women were "specialists in medical knowledge," being familiar with the properties of herbs and plants, and they were also diviners. But the Christian notion of the devil was unknown to them. Nevertheless, by the 17th century, under the impact of torture, intense persecution, and "forced acculturation" the Andean women arrested, mostly old and poor, were accusing themselves of the same crimes with which women were being charged in the European witch trials: pacts and copulation with the devil, prescribing herbal remedies, using ointments, flying through the air, making wax images (Silverblatt 1987: 174). They also confessed to worshipping stones, mountains, and springs, and feeding the *huacas*. Worst of all, they confessed to bewitching the authorities or other men of power and causing them to die (*ibid.* 187–88).

As it was in Europe, torture and terror were used to force the accused to deliver other names so that the circles of the persecution became wider and wider. But one of the objectives of the witch-hunt, the isolation of the witches from the rest of the community, was not achieved. The Andean witches were not turned into outcasts. On the contrary, "they were actively sought for as *comadres* and their presence was required in informal village reunions, for in the consciousness of the colonized, witchcraft, the maintenance of ancient traditions, and conscious political resistance became increasingly intertwined" (*ibid.*). Indeed, it was largely due to women's resistance that the old religion was preserved. Changes occurred in the meaning of the practices associated with it. Worship was driven underground at the expense of its collective nature in pre-conquest times. But the ties with the mountains and the other sites of the *huacas* were not destroyed.

We find a similar situation in Central and Southern Mexico where women, priestesses above all, played an important role in the defense of their communities and cultures. In this region, according to Antonio Garcia de Leon's Resistencia y Utopia, from the Conquest on, women "directed or counseled all the great anti-colonial revolts" (de Leon 1985. Vol. 1:31). In Oaxaca, the presence of women in popular rebellions continued into the 18th century when, in one out of four cases, they led the attack against the authorities "and were visibly more aggressive, insulting, and rebellious" (Taylor 1979: 116). In Chiapas too, they were the key actors in the preservation of the old religion and the anticolonization struggle. Thus, when, in 1524, the Spaniards launched a war campaign to subjugate the rebellious Chiapanecos, it was a priestess who led the troops against them. Women also participated in the underground networks of idol-worshippers and resisters that periodically were discovered by the clergy. In 1584, for instance, upon visiting Chiapas, the bishop Pedro de Feria was told that several among the local Indian chiefs were still practicing the old cults, and that they were being counseled by women, with whom they entertained filthy practices, such as (sabbat-like) ceremonies during which they mixed together and turned into gods and goddesses, the women being in charge of sending rain and giving wealth to those who asked for it" (de Leon 1985, Vol. 1:76).

It is ironic, then, in view of this record, that Caliban and not his mother Sycorax, the witch, should be taken by Latin American revolutionaries as a symbol of the resistance to colonization. For Caliban could only fight his master by cursing him in the language he had learned from him, thus being dependent in his rebellion on his "master's tools." He could also be deceived into believing that his liberation could come through a rape and through the initiative of some opportunistic white proletarians transplanted in the New World whom he worshipped as gods. Sycorax, instead, a witch "so strong that she could control the moon, make flows and ebbs" (*The Tempest*, Act V, Scene 1) might have taught her son to appreciate the local powers — the land, the waters, the trees, "nature's treasuries" — and those communal ties that, over centuries of suffering, have continued to nourish the liberation struggle to this day, and that already haunted, as a promise, Caliban's imagination:

Be not afeard, the isle is full of noises,
Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,
That if then had wak'd after long sleep.
Will make me sleep again and then dreaming,
The clouds methought would open, and show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that when wak'd
I cried to dream again (*The Tempest*, Act III).

The European Witches and the "Indios"

Did the witch-hunts in the New World have an impact on events in Europe? Or were the two persecutions simply drawing from the same pool of repressive strategies and tactics which the European ruling class had forged since the Middle Ages with the persecution of the heretics?

I ask these questions having in mind the thesis advanced by the Italian historian Luciano Parinetto, who argues that witch-hunting in the New World had a major impact on the elaboration of the witchcraft ideology in Europe, as well as the chronology of the European witch-hunt.

Briefly put, Parinetto's thesis is that it was under the impact of the American experience that the witch-hunt in Europe became a mass phenomenon in the second part of the 16th century. For in America, the authorities and the clergy found the confirmation for their views about devil-worship, coming to believe in the existence of entire populations of witches, a conviction which they then applied in their Christianization drive at home. Thus, another import from the New World, described by missionaries as "the land of the devil," was the adoption by the European state of extermination as a political strategy which, presumably, inspired the massacre of the Huguenots and the massification of the witch-hunt (Parinetto 1998: 417–35).15

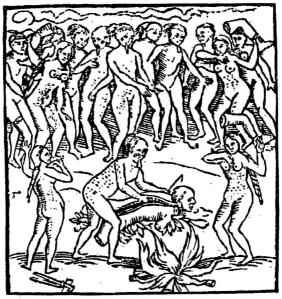
Evidence of a crucial connection between the two persecutions is, in Parinetto's view, the use made by the demonologists in Europe of the reports from the Indies. Parinetto focuses on Jean Bodin, but he also mentions Francesco Maria Guazzo and cites, as an example of the "boomerang effect" produced by the transplanting of the witch-hunt in America, the case of the inquisitor Pierre Lancre who, during a several months' persecution in the region of the Labourd (Basque Country), denounced its entire population as witches. Not last, Parinetto cites, as evidence of his thesis, a set of themes that, in the second half of the 16th century, became prominent in the repertoire of witchcraft in Europe: cannibalism, the offering of children to the devil, the reference to ointments and drugs, and the identification of homosexuality (sodomy) with diabolism — all of which, he argues, had their matrix in the New World.

What to make of this theory and where to draw the line between what is accountable and what is speculative? This is a question that future scholarship will have to settle. Here I limit myself to a few observations.

Parinetto's thesis is important since it helps us dispel the Eurocentrism that has characterized the study of the witch-hunt and can potentially answer some of the questions raised by the persecution of the European witches. But its main contribution is that it broadens our awareness of the global character of capitalist development and makes us realize that, by the 16th century, a ruling class had formed in Europe that was at all points involved — practically, politically, and ideologically — in the formation of a world proletariat, and therefore was continually operating with knowledge gathered on an international level in the elaboration of its models of domination.

As for its claims, we can observe that the history of Europe before the Conquest is sufficient proof that the Europeans did not have to cross the oceans to find the will to exterminate those standing in their way. It is also possible to account for the chronology of the witch-hunt in Europe without resorting to the New World impact hypothesis, since the decades between the 1560s and 1620s saw a widespread impoverishment and social dislocations throughout most of western Europe.





Top: Francesco Maria Guazzo, COMPENDIUM MALEFICARUM (Milan, 1608). Guazzo was one of the demonologists most influenced by the reports from the Americas. This portrait of witches surrounding the remains of bodies excavated from the ground or taken from the gallows is reminiscent of the cannibal banquet.

Bottom: Cannibals preparing their meal. Hans Staden's WAHRHAFTIGE HISTORIA (Marburg 1557).





Top: Preparation for the Sabbat. German engraving from the 16^{th} century.

Bottom: Preparing a cannibal meal. Hans Staden's WAHRHAFTIGE HISTORIA (Marburg 1557).

More suggestive, in provoking a rethinking of the European witch-hunt from the viewpoint of witch-hunting in America, are the thematic and the iconographic correspondences between the two. The theme of self-ointing is one of the most revealing, as the descriptions of the behavior of the Aztec or Incan priests on the occasion of human sacrifices evoke those found in some demonologies describing the preparations of the witches for the Sabbat. Consider the following passage found in Acosta, which reads the American practice as a perversion of the Christian habit of consecrating priests by anointing them:

The idol-priests in Mexico oint themselves in the following way. They greased themselves from the feet to the head, including the hair... the substance with which they stained themselves was ordinary tea, because from antiquity it was always an offering to their gods and for this much worshipped... this was their ordinary greasing... except when they went to sacrifice... or went to the caves where they kept their idols when they used a different greasing to give themselves courage.... This grease was made of poisonous substances... frogs, salamanders, vipers... with this greasing they could turn into magicians (brujos) and speak with the devil (Acosta, pp. 262–63).

The same poisonous brew was presumably spread by the European witches on their bodies (according to their accusers) in order to gain the power to fly to the Sabbat. But it cannot be assumed that this theme was generated in the New World, as references to women making ointments from the blood of toads or children's bones are found already in the 15th-century trials and demonologies. ¹⁶ What is plausible, instead, is that the reports from America did revitalize these charges, adding new details and giving more authority to them.

The same consideration may serve to explain the iconographic correspondence between the pictures of the Sabbat and the various representations of the cannibal family and clan that began to appear in Europe in the later 16th century, and it can account for many other "coincidences," such as the fact that both in Europe and America witches were accused of sacrificing children to the devil (see figures pp. 234–5).

Witch-Hunting and Globalization

Witch-hunting in America continued in waves through the end of the 17th century, when the persistence of demographic decline and increased political and economic security on the side of the colonial power-structure combined to put an end to the persecution. Thus, in the same region that had witnessed the great anti-idolatry campaigns of the 16th and 17th centuries, by the 18th, the Inquisition had renounced any attempts to influence the moral and religious beliefs of the population, apparently estimating that they could no longer pose a danger to colonial rule. In the place of the persecution a paternalistic perspective emerged that looked at idolatry and magical practices as the foibles of ignorant people not worthy of being taken into consideration by "la gente de razon" (Behar 1987). From then on, the preoccupation with devil-worshipping would

migrate to the developing slave plantations of Brazil, the Caribbean, and North America where (starting with King Philip's Wars), the English settlers justified their massacres of the native American Indians by labeling them as servants of the devil (Williams and Williams Adelman 1978: 143).

The Salem trials were also explained by the local authorities on this ground, with the argument that the New Englanders had settled in the land of the devil. As Cotton Mather wrote, years later, recalling the events in Salem:

I have met with some strange things... which have made me think that this inexplicable war [i.e., the war made by the spirits of the invisible world against the people of Salem] might have its origins among the Indians whose chief sagamores are well known unto some of our captive to have been horrid sorcerers and hellish conjurers and such as conversed with the demons (ibid. 145).

It is significant, in this context, that the Salem trials were sparked by the divinations of a West Indian slave — Tituba — who was among the first to be arrested, and that the last execution of a witch, in an English-speaking territory, was that of a black slave, Sarah Bassett, killed in Bermuda in 1730 (Daly 1978: 179). By the 18th century, in fact, the witch was becoming an African practitioner of obeah, a ritual that the planters feared and demonized as an incitement to rebellion.

Witch hunting did not disappear from the repertoire of the bourgeoisie with the abolition of slavery. On the contrary, the global expansion of capitalism through colonization and Christianization ensured that this persecution would be planted in the body of colonized societies, and, in time, would be carried out by the subjugated communities in their own names and against their own members.

In the 1840s, for instance, a wave of witch-burnings occurred in Western India. More women in this period were burned as witches than in the practice of *sati* (Skaria 1997: 110). These killings occurred in the context of the social crisis caused both by the colonial authorities' attack on the communities living in the forests (among whom women had a far higher degree of power than in the caste societies that dwelled in the plains) and the colonial devaluation of female power, resulting in the decline of the worship of female goddesses (*ibid.* 139–40).

Witch-hunting also took hold in Africa, where it survives today as a key instrument of division in many countries especially those once implicated in the slave trade, like Nigeria and Southern Africa. Here, too, witch-hunting has accompanied the decline in the status of women brought about by the rise of capitalism and the intensifying struggle for resources which, in recent years, has been aggravated by the imposition of the neo-liberal agenda. As a consequence of the life-and-death competition for vanishing resources, scores of women — generally old and poor — have been hunted down in the 1990s in Northern Transvaal, where seventy were burned just in the first four months of 1994 (*Diario de Mexico*: 1994). Witch-hunts have also been reported in Kenya, Nigeria, Cameroon, in the 1980s and 1990s, concomitant with the imposition by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank of the policy of structural adjustment which has led to a new round of enclosures, and caused an unprecedented impoverishment among the population. 17



The Africanization of the witch is reflected in this caricature of a "petroleuse." Note her unusual earrings, cap, and African features suggesting a kinship between the female communards and the "wild" African women who instilled in the slaves the courage to revolt, haunting the imagination of the French bourgeoisie as an example of political savagery.

In Nigeria, by the 1980s, innocent girls were confessing to having killed dozens of people, while in other African countries petitions were addressed to governments begging them to persecute more strongly the witches. Meanwhile, in South Africa and Brazil older women were murdered by neighbors and kin under the charge of witchcraft. At the same time, a new kind of witch-beliefs is presently developing, resembling that documented by Michael Taussig in Bolivia, whereby poor people suspect the *nouveau riches* of having gained their wealth through illicit, supernatural means, and accuse them of wanting to transform their victims into zombies in order to put them to work (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 1998: 73–74).

The witch hunts that are presently taking place in Africa or Latin America are rarely reported in Europe and the United States, in the same way as the witch-hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries, for a long time, were of little interest to historians. Even when they are reported their significance is generally missed, so widespread is the belief that such phenomena belong to a far-gone era and have nothing to do with "us."

But if we apply to the present the lessons of the past, we realize that the reappearance of witch-hunting in so many parts of the world in the 80s and 90s is a clear sign of a process of "primitive accumulation," which means that the privatization of land and other communal resources, mass impoverishment, plunder, and the sowing of divisions in once-cohesive communities are again on the world agenda. "If things continue this way" — the elders in a Senegalese village commented to an American anthropologist, expressing their fears for the future — "our children will eat each other." And indeed this is what is accomplished by a witch-hunt, whether it is conducted from above, as a means to criminalize resistance to expropriation, or is conducted from below, as a means to appropriate diminishing resources, as seems to be the case in some parts of Africa today.

In some countries, this process still requires the mobilization of witches, spirits, and devils. But we should not delude ourselves that this is not our concern. As Arthur Miller already saw in his interpretation of the Salem trials, as soon as we strip the persecution of witches from its metaphysical trappings, we recognize in it phenomena that are very close to home.

Endnotes

 Actually, Sycorax — the witch — has not entered the Latin American revolutionary imagination in the way Caliban has; she is still invisible, in the same way as the struggle of women against colonization has been for a long time. As for Caliban, what he has come to stand for has been well expressed in an influential essay by the Cuban writer Roberto Fernandez Retamar (1989: 5-21).

"Our symbol is not Ariel... but rather Caliban. This is something that we, the mestizo inhabitants of these same isles where Caliban lived, see with particular clarity. Prospero invaded the islands, killed our ancestors, enslaved Caliban and taught him the language to make himself understood. What else can Caliban do but use the same language — today he has no other — to curse him...? From Tupac Amaru... Toussaint-Louverture, Simone Bolivar... Jose Marti... Fidel Castro... Che Guevara... Frantz Fanon — what is our history, what is our culture, if not the history and culture of Caliban?" (p. 14).

On this topic see also Margaret Paul Joseph who, in *Caliban in Exile* (1992), writes: "Prospero and Caliban thereby provide us with a powerful metaphor for colonialism. An offshoot of this interpretation is the abstract condition of being Caliban, the victim of history, frustrated by the knowledge of utter powerlessness. In Latin America, the name has been adopted in a more positive manner, for Caliban seems to represent the masses who are striving to rise against the oppression of the elite" (1992: 2).

- 2. Reporting about the island of Hispanola, in his Historia General de Las Indias (1551), Francisco Lopez De Gomara could declare with utter certainty that "the main god which they have in this island is the devil," and that the devil lived among women (de Gomara: 49). Similarly, Book V of Acosta's Historia (1590), in which Acosta discusses the religion and customs of the inhabitants of Mexico and Peru, is dedicated to the many forms they have of devil-worshipping, including human sacrifices.
- 3. "The carib/cannibal image," Retamar writes, "contrasts with another one, of the American man present in the writing of Columbus: that of Aruaco of the Greater Antilles our Taino primarily whom he describes as peaceful, meek, and even timorous, and cowardly. Both visions of the American aborigene will circulate vertiginously through Europe.... The Taino will be transformed into the paradisiacal inhabitant of a utopic world.... The Carib, on the other hand, will become a cannibal an anthropophagus, a bestial man situated at the margin of civilization who must be opposed to the very death. But there is less contradiction than might appear at first glance between the two visions." Each image corresponds to a colonial intervention assuming its right to control the lives of the aborigene population of the Caribbean which Retamar sees as continuing into the present. Proof of the kinship between these two images, Retamar points out, is the fact that both the gentle Tainos and the ferocious Caribs were exterminated (ibid. 6-7).
- 4. Human sacrifices occupy a large place in Acosta's account of the religious customs of the Incas and Aztecs. He describes how, during some festivities in Peru, even three of four hundred children, from two to four-years-old, were sacrificed "duro e inhumano spectaculo," in his words. He also describes, among others, the sacrifice of seventy Spanish soldiers captured in battle in Mexico and, like de Gomara, he states, with utter certainty, that these killings were the work of the devil (p. 250ff.).
- 5. In New England, medical practitioners administered remedies "made from human corpses." Among the most popular, universally recommended as a panacea for every problem, was "Mummy," a remedy prepared with the remains of a corpse dried or embalmed. As for the consumption of human blood, Gordon-Gruber writes that "it was the prerogative of executioners to sell the blood of decapitated criminals. It was given still warm, to epileptics or other customers waiting in crowds at the spot of execution 'cup in hand'." (1988: 407).
- 6. Walter L. Williams writes:

[T]he Spanish did not realize why the Indians were wasting away from disease but took it as an indication that it was part of God's plan to wipe out the infidels. Oviedo concluded, "It is not without cause that God permits them to be destroyed. And I have no doubts that for their sins God's going to do away with them very soon." He further reasoned, in a letter to the king condemning the Maya for accepting homosexual

behavior: "I wish to mention it in order to declare more strongly the guilt for which God punishes the Indian and the reason why they have not been granted his mercy" (Williams 1986: 138).

- 7. The theoretical foundation of Sepulveda's argument in favor of the enslavement of the Indians was Aristotle's doctrine of "natural slavery" (Hanke 1970: 16ff).
- 8. The mine was discovered in 1545, five years before the debate between Las Casas and Sepulveda took place.
- 9. By the 1550s, the Spanish Crown was so dependent on the American bullion for its survival needing it to pay the mercenaries that fought its wars that it was impounding the loads of bullion that arrived with private ships. These usually carried back the money that was set aside by those who had participated in the Conquest and now were preparing to retire in Spain. Thus, for a number of years, a conflict exploded between the expatriates and the Crown which resulted in new legislation limiting the formers' power to accumulate.
- 10. A powerful description of this resistance is contained in Enrique Mayer's *Tribute to the Household* (1982), which describes the famous *visitas* which the *encomenderos* used to pay to the villages to fix the tribute that each community owed to them and to the Crown. In the mountain villages of the Andes, hours before its arrival, the procession of horsemen was spotted, upon which many youths fled the village, children were rearranged in different homes, and resources were hidden.
- 11. The name Taki Onqoy decribes the dancing trance that possessed the participants in the movement.
- 12. Philippe Descola writes that among the Achuar, a population living in the upper part of Amazonia, "the necessary condition for effective gardening depends on direct, harmonious, and constant commerce with Nunkui, the tutelary spirit of gardens" (p. 192). This is what every woman does by singing secret songs "from the heart" and magical incantations to the plants and herbs in her garden, urging them to grow (*ibid*. 198). So intimate is the relation between a woman and the spirit protecting her garden that when she dies "her garden follows suit, for, with the exception of her unmarried daughter, no other woman would dare step into such relationship that she had not herself initiated." As for the men, they are "therefore totally incapable of replacing their wives should the need arise.... When a man no longer has any woman (mother, wife, sister or daughter) to cultivate his garden and prepare his food, he has no choice but to kill himself" (Descola 1994: 175).
- 13. This is the expression used by Michael Taussig in Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man (1991) to stress the function of terror in the establishment of colonial hegemony in the Americas:

"Whatever the conclusions we draw about how the hegemony was so speedily effected, we would be unwise to overlook the role of terror. And by this I mean us to think-through-terror, which as well as being a physiological state is also a social one whose special features allow it to serve as a mediator *par excellence* of colonial hegemony: the *space of death* where the Indian, African, and white gave birth to a New World" (p. 5) (italics mine).

Taussig adds, however, that the *space of death* is also a "space of transformation" since "through the experience of coming close to death there well may be a more

vivid sense of life; through fear there can come not only growth of self-consciousness but also fragmentation, and then loss of self conforming to authority" (*ibid*.: 7).

14. On the position of women in pre-conquest Mexico and Peru, see respectively June Nash (1978, 1980), Irene Silverblatt (1987), and Maria Rostworowski (2001). Nash discusses the decline of women's power under the Aztecs in correspondence to their transformation from a "kinship based society... to a class-structured empire." She points out that, by the 15th century, as the Aztecs had evolved into a war-driven empire, a rigid sexual division of labor emerged; at the same time, women (of defeated enemies) became "the booty to be shared by the victors" (Nash 1978: 356, 358). Simultaneously, female deities were displaced by male gods — especially the bloodthirsty Huitzilopochtli — although they continued to be worshipped by the common people. Still, "[w] omen in Aztec society had many specializations as independent craft producers of pottery and textiles, and as priestesses, doctors, and merchants. Spanish development policy [instead], as carried out by priest and crown administrators, diverted home production into male-operated craft shops and mills" (ibid.).

15. Parinetto writes that the connection between the extermination of the Amerindian "savages" and that of the Huguenots was very clear in the consciouness and literature of the French Protestants after the Night of San Bartholomé, indirectly influencing Montaigne's essays on the cannibals and, in a completely different way, Jean Bodin's association of the European witches with the cannibalistic and sodomitic indios. Quoting French sources, Parinetto argues that this association (between the savage and the Huguenot) climaxed in the last decades of the 16th centuries when the massacres perpetrated by the Spaniards in America (including the slaughter in Florida, in 1565, of thousands of French colonists accused of being Lutherans) became "a widely used political weapon" in the struggle against Spanish dominance (Parinetto 1998: 429–30).

16. I am referring in particular to the trials that were conducted by the Inquisition in the Dauphiné in the 1440s, during which a number of poor people (peasants or shepherds) were accused of cooking children to make magic powders with their bodies (Russell 1972: 217–18); and to the work of the Swabian Dominican Joseph Naider, Formicarius (1435), in which we read that witches "cook their children, boil them, eat their flesh and drink the soup that is left in the pot.... From the solid matter they make a magical salve or ointment, the procurement of which is the third reason for child murder" (ibid.: 240). Russell points out that "this salve or ointment is one of the most important elements of witchcraft in the fifteenth century and later." (ibid.)

17. On "the renewed attention to witchcraft [in Africa,] conceptualized explicitly in relation to modern changes," see the December 1998 issue of the *African Studies Review*, which is dedicated to this topic. In particular, see Diane Ciekawy and Peter Geschiere's "Containing Witchcraft: Conflicting Scenarios in Postcolonial Africa" (*ibid*.: 1–14).

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- The Many Headed-Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic (Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, 2000)
- Witches, Midwives, and Nurses A History of Women Healers (Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, 1973)
- Settlers: The Mythology of the White Proletariat (J. Sakai, 1989)

