SILVIA FEDERICI'S

CALIBAN

AND THE

WITCH

WOMEN, THE BODY AND PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION

[autonomously produced zine-format in five volumes]

VOLUME 1

Caliban and the Witch

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Autonomedia

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Woodcut of witches conjuring a shower of rain. In Ulrich Molitor, DE LAMIIES ET PYTHONICIS MULIERIBUS (On Female Sorcerers and Soothsayers) (1489).

Preface

Caliban and the Witch presents the main themes of a research project on women in the "transition" from feudalism to capitalism that I began in the mid-1970s, in collaboration with an Italian feminist, Leopoldina Fortunati. Its first results appeared in a book that we published in Italy in 1984: *Il Grande Calibano. Storial del corpo social ribelle nella prima fase del capitale* (Milano: Franco Angeli) [*The Great Caliban. History of the Rebel Body in the First Phase of Capitalism*].

My interest in this research was originally motivated by the debates that accompanied the development of the Feminist Movement in the United States concerning the roots of women's "oppression," and the political strategies which the movement should adopt in the struggle for women's liberation. At the time, the leading theoretical and political perspectives from which the reality of sexual discrimination was analyzed were those proposed by the two main branches of the women's movement: the Radical Feminists and the Socialist Feminists. In my view, however, neither provided a satisfactory explanation of the roots of the social and economic exploitation of women. I objected to the Radical Feminists because of their tendency to account for sexual discrimination and patriarchal rule on the basis of transhistorical cultural structures, presumably operating independently of relations of production and class. Socialist Feminists, by contrast, recognized that the history of women cannot be separated from the history of specific systems of exploitation and, in their analyses, gave priority to women as workers in capitalist society. But the limit of their position, in my understanding of it at the time, was that it failed to acknowledge the sphere of reproduction as a source of value-creation and exploitation, and thus traced the roots of the power differential between women and men to women's exclusion from capitalist development — a stand which again compelled us to rely on cultural schemes to account for the survival of sexism within the universe of capitalist relations.

It was in this context that the idea of tracing the history of women in the transition from feudalism to capitalism took form. The thesis which inspired this research was first articulated by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, as well as other activists in the Wages For Housework Movement, in a set of documents that in the 1970s were very controversial, but eventually reshaped the discourse on women, reproduction, and capitalism. The most influential among them were Mariarosa Dalla Costa's *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (1971), and Selma James' *Sex, Race and Class* (1975).

Against the Marxist orthodoxy, which explained women's "oppression" and subordination to men as a residuum of feudal relations, Dalla Costa and James argued that the exploitation of women has played a central function in the process of capitalist accumulation, insofar as women have been the producers and reproducers of the most essential capitalist commodity: labor-power. As Dalla Costa put it, women's unpaid labor in the home has been the pillar upon which the exploitation of the waged workers, "wage slavery," has been built, and the secret of its productivity (1972:31). Thus, the power differential between women and men in capitalist society cannot be attributed to the irrelevance of housework for capitalist accumulation — an irrelevance belied by the strict rules that have governed women's lives — nor to the survival of timeless cultural schemes. Rather, it should be interpreted as the effect of a social system of production that does not recognize the production and reproduction of the worker as a social-economic activity, and a source of capital accumulation, but mystifies it instead as a natural resource or a personal service, while profiting from the wageless condition of the labor involved.

By rooting the exploitation of women in capitalist society in the sexual division of labor and women's unpaid work, Dalla Costa and James showed the possibility of transcending the dichotomy between patriarchy and class, and gave patriarchy a specific historical content. They also opened the way for a reinterpretation of the history of capitalism and class struggle from a feminist viewpoint.

It was in this spirit that Leopoldina Fortunati and I began to study what only can be euphemistically described as the "transition to capitalism," and to search for a history that we had not been taught in school, but proved decisive for our education. This history not only offered a theoretical understanding of the genesis of housework in its main structural components: the separation of production from reproduction, the specifically capitalist use of the wage to command the labor of the unwaged, and the devaluation of women's social position with the advent of capitalism. It also provided a genealogy of the modern concepts of femininity and masculinity that challenged the postmodern assumption of an almost ontological predisposition in "Western Culture" to capture gender through binary oppositions. Sexual hierarchies, we found, are always at the service of a project of domination that can sustain itself only by dividing, on a continuously renewed basis, those it intends to rule.

The book that resulted from this research, *Il Grande Calibano: storia del corpo sociale ribelle nella prima fase del capitale* (1984), was an attempt to rethink Marx's analysis of primitive accumulation from a feminist viewpoint. But in this process, the received Marxian categories proved inadequate. Among the casualties was the Marxian identification of capitalism with the advent of wage labor and the "free" laborer, which contributes to hide and naturalize the sphere of reproduction. *Il Grande Calibano* was also critical of Michel Foucault's theory of the body; as we argued, Foucault's analysis of power techniques and disciplines to which the body has been subjected has ignored the process of reproduction, has collapsed female and male histories into an undifferentiated whole, and has been so disinterested in the "disciplining" of women that it never mentions one of the most monstruous attacks on the body perpetrated in the modern era: the witch-hunt.

The main thesis in *Il Grande Calibano* was that in order to understand the history of women in the transition from feudalism to capitalism, we must analyze the changes

that capitalism has introduced in the process of social reproduction and, especially, the reproduction of labor power. Thus, the book examined the reorganization of housework, family life, child-raising, sexuality, male-female relations, and the relation between production and reproduction in 16th and 17th-century Europe. This analysis is reproduced in *Caliban and the Witch*; however, the scope of the present volume differs from that of *Il Grande Calibano,* as it responds to a different social context and to our growing knowledge of women's history.

Shortly after the publication of *Il Grande Calibano,* I left the United States and took a teaching position in Nigeria, where I remained for nearly three years. Before leaving, I had buried my papers in a cellar, not expecting that I should need them for some time. But the circumstances of my stay in Nigeria did not allow me to forget this work. The years between 1984 and 1986 were a turning point for Nigeria, as for most African countries. These were the years when, in response to the debt crisis, the Nigerian government engaged in negotiations with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which eventually resulted in the adoption of a Structural Adjustment Program, the World Bank's universal recipe for economic recovery across the planet.

The declared purpose of the program was to make Nigeria competitive on the international market. But it was soon apparent that this involved a new round of primitive accumulation, and a rationalization of social reproduction aimed at destroying the last vestiges of communal property and community relations, and thereby impose more intense forms of labor exploitation. Thus, I saw unfolding under my eyes processes very similar to those that I had studied in preparation for *Il Grande Calibano*. Among them were the attack on communal lands, and a decisive intervention by the State (instigated by World Bank) in the reproduction of the work-force: to regulate procreation rates, and, in this case, reduce the size of a population that was deemed too demanding and indisciplined from the viewpoint of its prospected insertion in the global economy. Along with these policies, aptly named the "War Against Indiscipline," I also witnessed the fueling of a misogynous campaign denouncing women's vanity and excessive demands, and the development of a heated debate similar, in many respects, to the 17th century *querelles des femmes*, touching on every aspect of the reproduction of labor-power: the family (polygamous vs. monogamous, nuclear vs. extended), child-raising, women's work, male and female identity and relations.

In this context, my work on the transition took on a new meaning. In Nigeria I realized that the struggle against structural adjustment is part of a long struggle against land privatization and the "enclosure" not only of communal lands but also of social relations that stretches back to the origin of capitalism in 16th-century Europe and America. I also realized how limited is the victory that the capitalist work-discipline has won on this planet, and how many people still see their lives in ways radically antagonistic to the requirements of capitalist production. For the developers, the multinational agencies and foreign investors, this was and remains the problem with places like Nigeria. But for me it was a source of great strength, as it proved that, worldwide, formidable forces still contrast the imposition of a way of life conceived only in capitalist terms. The strength I gained was also due to my encounter with Women in Nigeria (WIN), the country's first feminist organization, which enabled me to better understand the struggles that Nigerian women have been making to defend their resources and to refuse the new model of patri-

archy imposed on them, now promoted by the World Bank.

By the end of 1986, the debt crisis reached the academic institutions and, no longer able to support myself, I left Nigeria, in body if not in spirit. But the thought of the attacks launched on the Nigerian people never left me. Thus, the desire to restudy "the transition to capitalism" has been with me since my return. I had read the Nigerian events through the prism of 16th-century Europe. In the United States, it was the Nigerian proletariat that brought me back to the struggles over the commons and the capitalist disciplining of women, in and out of Europe. Upon my return, I also began to teach in an interdisciplinary program for undergraduates where I confronted a different type of "enclosure": the enclosure of knowledge, that is, the increasing loss, among the new generations, of the historical sense of our common past. This is why in *Caliban and the Witch* I reconstruct the anti-feudal struggles of the Middle Ages and the struggles by which the European proletariat resisted the advent of capitalism. My goal in doing so is not only to make available to non-specialists the evidence on which my analysis relies, but to revive among younger generations the memory of a long history of resistance that today is in danger of being erased. Saving this historical memory is crucial if we are to find an alternative to capitalism. For this possibility will depend on our capacity to hear the voices of those who have walked similar paths.

Introduction

Since Marx, studying the genesis of capitalism has been an obligatory step for activists and scholars convinced that the first task on humanity's agenda is the construction of an alternative to capitalist society. Not surprisingly, every new revolutionary movement has returned to the "transition to capitalism," bringing to it the perspectives of new social subjects and uncovering new grounds of exploitation and resistance.[1] This volume is conceived within this tradition, but two considerations in particular have motivated this work.

First, there has been the desire to rethink the development of capitalism from a feminist viewpoint, while, at the same time, avoiding the limits of a "women's history" separated from that of the male part of the working class. The title, *Caliban and the Witch*, inspired by Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, reflects this effort. In my interpretation, however, Caliban represents not only the anti-colonial rebel whose struggle still resonates in contemporary Caribbean literature, but is a symbol for the world proletariat and, more specifically, for the proletarian body as a terrain and instrument of resistance to the logic of capitalism. Most important, the figure of the witch, who in *The Tempest* is confined to a remote background, in this volume is placed at the center-stage, as the embodiment of a world of female subjects that capitalism had to destroy: the heretic, the healer, the disobedient wife, the woman who dared to live alone, the obeha woman who poisoned the master's food and inspired the slaves to revolt.

The second motivation behind this volume has been the worldwide return, with the new global expansion of capitalist relations, of a set of phenomena usually associated with the genesis of capitalism. Among them are a new round of "enclosures" that have expropriated millions of agricultural producers from their land, and the mass pauperization and criminalization of workers, through a policy of mass incarceration recalling the "Great Confinement" described by Michel Foucault in his study of history of madness. We have also witnessed the worldwide development of new diasporic movements accompanied by the persecution of migrant workers, again reminiscent of the "Bloody Laws" that were introduced in 16th and 17th-century Europe to make "vagabonds" available for local exploitation. Most important for this book has been the intensification of violence against women, including, in some countries (e.g., South Africa and Brazil), the return of witch-hunting.

Why, after 500 years of capital's rule, at the beginning of the third millennium, are workers on a mass scale still defined as paupers, witches, and outlaws? How are land

expropriation and mass pauperization related to the continuing attack on women? And what do we learn about capitalist development, past and present, once we examine it through the vantage-point of a feminist perspective?

It is with these questions in mind that in this work I have revisited the "transition" from feudalism to capitalism from the viewpoint of women, the body, and primitive accumulation. Each of these concepts refers to a conceptual framework that is a reference point for this work: the Feminist, the Marxist, and the Foucauldian. Thus, I will begin my introduction with some observations on the relation of my analysis to these different perspectives.

"Primitive accumulation" is the term that Marx uses, in *Capital* Vol. 1, to characterize the historical process upon which the development of capitalist relations was premised. It is a useful term, for it provides a common denominator through which we can conceptualize the changes that the advent of capitalism produced in economic and social relations. But its importance lies, above all, in the fact that "primitive accumulation" is treated by Marx as a foundational process, revealing the structural conditions for the existence of capitalist society. This enables us to read the past as something which survives into the present, a consideration which is essential to my usage of the term in this work.

However, my analysis departs from Marx's in two ways. Whereas Marx examines primitive accumulation from the viewpoint of the waged male proletariat and the development of commodity production, I examine it from the viewpoint of the changes it introduced in the social position of women and the production of labor-power.[2] Thus, my description of primitive accumulation includes a set of historical phenomena that are absent in Marx, and yet have been extremely important for capitalist accumulation. They include (i) the development of a new sexual division of labor subjugating women's labor and women's reproductive function to the reproduction of the work-force; (ii) the construction of a new patriarchal order, based upon the exclusion of women from waged-work and their subordination to men; (iii) the mechanization of the proletarian body and its transformation, in the case of women, into a machine for the production of new workers. Most important, I have placed at the center of my analysis of primitive accumulation the witch-hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries, arguing that the persecution of the witches, in Europe as in the New World, was as important as colonization and the expropriation of the European peasantry from its land were for the development of capitalism.

My analysis also departs from Marx's in its evaluation of the legacy and function of primitive accumulation. Though Marx was acutely aware of the murderous character of capitalist development — its history, he declared, "is written in the annals of humanity in characters of fire and blood" — there can be no doubt that he viewed it as a necessary step in the process of human liberation. He believed that it disposed of small-scale property, and that it increased (to a degree unmatched by any other economic system) the productive capacity of labor, thus creating the material conditions for the liberation of humanity from scarcity and necessity. He also assumed that the violence that had presided over the earliest phases of capitalist expansion would recede with the maturing of capitalist relations, when the exploitation and disciplining of labor would be accomplished mostly through the workings of economic laws (Marx 1909 Vol. 1). In this, he was deeply mistaken. A return of the most violent aspects of primitive accumulation has accompanied every phase of capitalist globalization, including the present one, demon-

strating that the continuous expulsion of farmers from the land, war and plunder on a world scale, and the degradation of women are necessary conditions for the existence of capitalism in all times.

I should add that Marx could never have presumed that capitalism paves the way to human liberation had he looked at its history from the viewpoint of women. For this history shows that, even when men achieved a certain degree of formal freedom, women were always treated as socially inferior beings and were exploited in ways similar to slavery. "Women," then, in the context of this volume, signifies not just a hidden history that needs to be made visible; but a particular form of exploitation and, therefore, a unique perspective from which to reconsider the history of capitalist relations.

This project is not new. From the beginning of the Feminist Movement women have revisited the "transition to capitalism" even though they have not always recognized it. For a while, the main framework that shaped women's history was a chronological one. The most common designation feminist historians have used to describe the transition period has been "early modern Europe," which, depending on the author, could designate the 13th or the 17th century.

In the 1980s, however, a number of works appeared that took a more critical approach. Among them were Joan Kelly's essays on the Renaissance and the *Querelles des femmes*, Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1981), Leopoldina Fortunati's *L'Arcano della Riproduzione* (1981) (now available in English, Fortunati 1995), Merry Wiesner's *Working Women in Renaissance Germany* (1986), and Maria Mies' *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (1986). To these works we must add the many monographs that over the last two decades have reconstructed women's presence in the rural and urban economies of medieval and early modern Europe, and the vast literature and documentary work that has been produced on the witch-hunt and the lives of women in pre-colonial America and the Caribbean islands. Among the latter, I want to remember in particular Irene Silverblatt's *The Moon, the Sun, and the Witches* (1987), the first account on the witch-hunt in colonial Peru; and Hilary Beckles' *Natural Rebels. A Social History of Barbados* (1995) which, together with Barbara Bush's *Slave Women in Caribbean Society:1650–1838* (1990), is one of the major texts on the history of enslaved women in the Caribbean plantations.

What this scholarly production has confirmed is that to reconstruct the history of women or to look at history from a feminist viewpoint means to redefine in fundamental ways the accepted historical categories and to make visible hidden structures of domination and exploitation. Thus, Kelly's essay, "Did Women have a Renaissance?" (1984) undermined the classical historical periodization that celebrates the Renaissance as an outstanding example of cultural achievement. Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1980) challenged the belief in the socially progressive character of the scientific revolution, arguing that the advent of scientific rationalism produced a cultural shift from an organic to a mechanical paradigm that legitimized the exploitation of women and nature.

Especially important has been Maria Mies' *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (1986), now a classic work, that re-examines capitalist accumulation from a non-Eurocentric viewpoint, connecting the destiny of women in Europe to that of Europe's colonial subjects, and providing for a new understanding of women's place in capitalism and the globalization process.

Caliban and the Witch builds upon these works, as on the studies contained within *Il Grande Calibano* (a work I discuss in the Preface). However, its historical scope is broader, as the book connects the development of capitalism, on one side, to the reproduction crisis and social struggles of the late feudal period and, on the other, to what Marx defines as the "formation of the proletariat." In this process, the book addresses a number of historical and methodological questions that have been at the center of the debate on women's history and feminist theory.

The most important historical question addressed by the book is how to account for the execution of hundreds of thousands of "witches" at the beginning of the modern era, and how to explain why the rise of capitalism was coeval with a war against women. Feminist scholars have developed a framework that throws much light on this question. It is generally agreed that the witch-hunt aimed at destroying the control that women had exercised over their reproductive function and served to pave the way for the development of a more oppressive patriarchal regime. It is also argued that the witch-hunt was rooted in the social transformations that accompanied the rise of capitalism. But the specific historical circumstances under which the persecution of witches was unleashed, and the reasons why the rise of capitalism demanded a genocidal attack on women have not been investigated. This is the task I take on in *Caliban and the Witch*, as I begin to analyze the witch-hunt in the context of the demographic and economic crisis of the 16th and 17th centuries, and the land and labor policies of the mercantilist era. My work here is only a sketch of the research that would be necessary to clarify the connections I have mentioned, and especially the relation between the witch-hunt and the contemporary development of a new sexual division of labor, confining women to reproductive work. It is sufficient, however, to demonstrate that the persecution of witches (like the slave trade and the enclosures) was a central aspect of the accumulation and formation of the modern proletariat, in Europe as well as in the "New World."

There are other ways in which *Caliban and the Witch* speaks to "women's history" and feminist theory. First, it confirms that "the transition to capitalism" is a test case for feminist theory, as the redefinition of productive and reproductive tasks and male-female relations that we find in this period, both realized with the maximum of violence and state intervention, leave no doubt concerning the constructed character of sexual roles in capitalist society. The analysis I propose also allows us to transcend the dichotomy between "gender" and "class." If it is true that in capitalist society sexual identity became the carrier of specific work-functions, then gender should not be considered a purely cultural reality, but should be treated as a specification of class relations. From this viewpoint, the debates that have taken place among postmodern feminists concerning the need to dispose of "women" as a category of analysis, and define feminism purely in oppositional terms, have been misguided. To rephrase the point I already made: if "femininity" has been constituted in capitalist society as a work-function masking the production of the work-force under the cover of a biological destiny, then "women's history" is "class history," and the question that has to be asked is whether the sexual division of labor that has produced that particular concept has been transcended. If the answer is a negative one (as it must be when we consider the present organization of reproductive labor), then "women" is a legitimate category of analysis, and the activities associated with "reproduction" remain a crucial ground of struggle for women, as they were

for the feminist movement of the 1970s which, on this basis, connected itself with the history of the witches.

A further question addressed by *Caliban and the Witch* is raised by the contrasting perspectives offered by the feminist and Foucauldian analyses of the body in their applications to an understanding of the history of capitalist development. From the beginning of the Women's Movement, feminist activists and theorists have seen the concept of the "body" as key to an understanding of the roots of male dominance and the construction of female social identity. Across ideological differences, they have realized that a hierarchical ranking of human faculties and the identification of women with a degraded conception of corporeal reality has been instrumental, historically, to the consolidation of patriarchal power and the male exploitation of female labor. Thus, analyses of sexuality, procreation, and mothering have been at the center of feminist theory and women's history. In particular, feminists have uncovered and denounced the strategies and the violence by means of which male-centered systems of exploitation have attempted to discipline and appropriate the female body, demonstrating that women's bodies have been the main targets, the privileged sites, for the deployment of power-techniques and power-relations. Indeed, the many feminist studies which have been produced since the early 1970s on the policing of women's reproductive function, the effects on women of rape, battering, and the imposition upon them of beauty as a condition for social acceptability, are a monumental contribution to the discourse on the body in our times, falsifying the perception common among academics which attributes its discovery to Michel Foucault.

Starting from an analysis of "body-politics," feminists have not only revolutionized the contemporary philosophical and political discourse, but they have also begun to revalorize the body. This has been a necessary step both to counter the negativity attached to the identification of femininity with corporeality, and to create a more holistic vision of what it means to be a human being.[3] This valorization has taken various forms, ranging from the quest for non-dualistic forms of knowledge, to the attempt (with feminists who view sexual "difference" as a positive value) to develop a new type of language and "[rethink] the corporeal roots of human intelligence."[4] As Rosi Braidotti has pointed out, the body that is reclaimed is never to be understood as a biological given. Nevertheless, such slogans as "repossessing the body" or "speaking the body"[5] have been criticized by post-structuralist, Foucauldian theorists, who reject as illusory any call for instinctual liberation. In turn, feminists have accused Foucault's discourse on sexuality of being oblivious to sexual differentiation, while at the same time appropriating many of the insights developed by the Feminist Movement. This criticism is quite appropriate. Moreover, Foucault is so intrigued with the "productive" character of the power-techniques by which the body has been invested, that his analysis practically rules out any critique of power-relations. The nearly apologetic quality of Foucault's theory of the body is accentuated by the fact that it views the body as constituted by purely discursive practices, and is more interested in describing how power is deployed than in identifying its source. Thus, the Power by which the body is produced appears as a self-subsistent, metaphysical entity, ubiquitous, disconnected from social and economic relations, and as mysterious in its permutations as a godly Prime Mover.

Can an analysis of the transition to capitalism and primitive accumulation help us

to go beyond these alternatives? I believe it can. With regard to the feminist approach, our first step should be to document the social and historic conditions under which the body has become a central element and the defining sphere of activity for the constitution of femininity. Along these lines, *Caliban and the Witch* shows that the body has been for women in capitalist society what the factory has been for male waged workers: the primary ground of their exploitation and resistance, as the female body has been appropriated by the state and men and forced to function as a means for the reproduction and accumulation of labor. Thus, the importance which the body in all its aspects — maternity, childbirth, sexuality — has acquired in feminist theory and women's history has not been misplaced. *Caliban and the Witch* also confirms the feminist insight which refuses to identify the body with the sphere of the private and, in this vein, speaks of "body politics." Further, it explains how the body can be for women both a source of identity and at the same time a prison, and why it is so important for feminists and, at the same time, so problematic to valorize it.

As for Foucault's theory, the history of primitive accumulation offers many counter-examples to it, proving that it can be defended only at the price of outstanding historical omissions. The most obvious is the omission of the witch-hunt and the discourse of demonology in his analysis of the disciplining of the body. Undoubtedly, they would have inspired different conclusions had they been included. For both demonstrate the repressive character of the power that was unleashed against women, and the implausibility of the complicity and role-reversal that Foucault imagines to exist between victims and their persecutors in his description of the dynamic of micro-powers.

A study of the witch-hunt also challenges Foucault's theory concerning the development of "bio-power," stripping it of the mystery by which Foucault surrounds the emergence of this regime. Foucault registers the shift — presumably in 18th-century Europe — from a type of power built on the right to kill, to a different one exercised through the administration and promotion of life-forces, such as population growth; but he offers no clues as to its motivations. Yet, if we place this shift in the context of the rise of capitalism the puzzle vanishes, for the promotion of life-forces turns out to be nothing more than the result of a new concern with the accumulation and reproduction of labor-power. We can also see that the promotion of population growth by the state can go hand in hand with a massive destruction of life; for in many historical circumstances — witness the history of the slave trade — one is a condition for the other. Indeed, in a system where life is subordinated to the production of profit, the accumulation of labor-power can only be achieved with the maximum of violence so that, in Maria Mies' words, violence itself becomes the most productive force.

In conclusion, what Foucault would have learned had he studied the witch-hunt, rather than focusing on the pastoral confession, in his *History of Sexuality* (1978), is that such history cannot be written from the viewpoint of a universal, abstract, asexual subject. Further, he would have recognized that torture and death can be placed at the service of "life" or, better, at the service of the production of labor-power, since the goal of capitalist society is to transform life into the capacity to work and "dead labor."

From this viewpoint, primitive accumulation has been a universal process in every phase of capitalist development. Not accidentally, its original historical exemplar has sedimented strategies that, in different ways, have been re-launched in the face of every

major capitalist crisis, serving to cheapen the cost of labor and to hide the exploitation of women and colonial subjects.

This is what occurred in the 19th century, when the responses to the rise of socialism, the Paris Commune, and the accumulation crisis of 1873 were the "Scramble for Africa" and the simultaneous creation in Europe of the nuclear family, centered on the economic dependence of women to men — following the expulsion of women from the waged work-place. This is also what is happening today, as a new global expansion of the labor-market is attempting to set back the clock with respect to the anti-colonial struggle, and the struggles of other rebel subjects — students, feminists, blue collar workers — who, in the 1960s and 1970s, undermined the sexual and international division of labor.

It is not surprising, then, if large-scale violence and enslavement have been on the agenda, as they were in the period of the "transition," with the difference that today the conquistadors are the officers of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, who are still preaching the worth of a penny to the same populations which the dominant world powers have for centuries robbed and pauperized. Once again, much of the violence unleashed is directed against women, for in the age of the computer, the conquest of the female body is still a precondition for the accumulation of labor and wealth, as demonstrated by the institutional investment in the development of new reproductive technologies that, more than ever, reduce women to wombs.

Also the "feminization of poverty" that has accompanied the spread of globalization acquires a new significance when we recall that this was the first effect of the development of capitalism on the lives of women.

Indeed, the political lesson that we can learn from *Caliban and the Witch* is that capitalism, as a social-economic system, is necessarily committed to racism and sexism. For capitalism must justify and mystify the contradictions built into its social relations — the promise of freedom vs. the reality of widespread coercion, and the promise of prosperity vs. the reality of widespread penury — by denigrating the "nature" of those it exploits: women, colonial subjects, the descendants of African slaves, the immigrants displaced by globalization.

At the core of capitalism there is not only the symbiotic relation between waged-contractual labor and enslavement but, together with it, the dialectics of accumulation and destruction of labor-power, for which women have paid the highest cost, with their bodies, their work, their lives.

It is impossible therefore to associate capitalism with any form of liberation or attribute the longevity of the system to its capacity to satisfy human needs. If capitalism has been able to reproduce itself it is only because of the web of inequalities that it has built into the body of the world proletariat, and because of its capacity to globalize exploitation. This process is still unfolding under our eyes, as it has for the last 500 years.

The difference is that today the resistance to it has also achieved a global dimension.

Endnotes

1. The study of the transition to capitalism has a long history, which not accidentally coincides with that of the main political movements of this century. Marxist historians such as Maurice Dobb, Rodney Hilton, Christopher Hill revisited the "transition" in the 1940s and 1950s, in the wake of the debates generated by the consolidation of the Soviet Union, the rise of new socialist states in Europe and Asia, and what at the time appeared as an impending capitalist crisis. The "transition" was again revisited in the 1960s by Third Worldist theorists (Samir Amin, André Gunder Frank), in the context of the contemporary debates over neo-colonialism, "underdevelopment," and the "unequal exchange" between the "First" and the "Third World."

2. These two realities, in my analysis, are closely connected, since in capitalism reproducing workers on a generational basis and regenerating daily their capacity to work has become "women's labor," though mystified, because of its un-waged condition, as a personal service and even a natural resource.

3. Not surprisingly, a valorization of the body has been present in nearly all the literature of "second wave" 20th-century feminism, as it has characterized the literature produced by the anti-colonial revolt and by the descendants of the enslaved Africans. On this ground, across great geographic and cultural boundaries, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) anticipated Aimé Cesaire's *Return to the Native Land* (1938), when she mockingly scolds her female audience and, behind it, a broader female world, for not having managed to produce anything but children.

   "Young women, I would say ... [y]ou have never made a discovery of any sort of importance. You have never shaken an empire or lead an army into battle. The plays of Shakespeare are not by you.... What is your excuse? It is all very well for you to say, pointing to the streets and squares and forests of the globe swarming with black and white and coffee-colored inhabitants... we have had other work on our hands. Without our doing, those seas would be unsailed and those fertile lands a desert. We have borne and bred and washed and taught, perhaps to the age of six or seven years, the one thousand six hundred and twenty-three million human beings who are, according to statistics, at present in existence, and that, allowing that some had help, takes time." (Woolf, 1929: 112)

   This capacity to subvert the degraded image of femininity, which has been constructed through the identification of women with nature, matter, and corporeality, is the power of the feminist "discourse on the body," that tries to unbury what male control of our corporeal reality has suffocated. It is an illusion, however, to conceive of women's liberation as a "return to the body." If the female body — as I argue in this work — is a signifier for a field of reproductive activities that have been appropriated by men and the state, and turned into an instrument for the production of labor-power (with all that this entails in terms of sexual rules and regulations, aesthetic canons, and punishments), then the body is the site of a fundamental alienation that can be overcome only with the end of the work-discipline which defines it.

This thesis holds true for men as well. Marx's portrait of the worker who feels at home only in his bodily functions already intuited this fact. Marx, however, never conveyed the magnitude of the attack to which the male body was subjected with the advent of capitalism. Ironically, like Michel Foucault, Marx too stressed the productivity of the power to which workers are subordinated — a productivity that becomes for him the condition for the workers' future mastery of society. Marx did not see that the development of workers' industrial powers was at the cost of the underdevelopment of their powers as social individuals, although he recognized that workers in capitalist society become so alienated from their labor, from their relations with others, and the products of their work as to become dominated by them as if by an alien force.

4. Braidotti (1991) 219. For a discussion of feminist thought on the body, see Ariel Salleh's *EcoFeminism as Politics* (1997), especially Chapters 3 through 5; and Rosi Braidotti's *Patterns of Dissonance* (1991) especially the section entitled "Repossessing the Body: A Timely Project" (pp. 219-224).

5. I am referring here to the project of *ècriture feminine,* a literary theory and movement that developed in France in the 1970s, among feminist students of Lacanian psychoanalysis, who were seeking to create a language expressing the specificity of the female body and female subjectivity (Braidotti, op. cit.).

Woman carrying a basket of spinach. Women in the Middle Ages often kept gardens, where they grew medical herbs. Their knowledge of the properties of herbs is one of the secrets they handed down from generation to generation. Italian, c. 1385.

All the World Needs a Jolt
Social Movements and Political Crisis in Medieval Europe

All the world must suffer a big jolt. There will be such a game that the
ungodly will be thrown off their seats, and the downtrodden will rise.

—Thomas Müntzer,
*Open Denial of the False Belief of the Godless World
on the Testimony of the Gospel of Luke, Presented to Miserable and
Pitiful Christendom in Memory of its Error,* 1524

There is no denying that after centuries of struggle, exploitation does
continue to exist. Only its form has changed. The surplus labor
extracted here and there by the masters of today's world is not
smaller in proportion to the total amount of labor than the surplus
extracted long ago. But the change in the conditions of exploitation
is not in my view negligible.... What is important is the history, the
striving for liberation....

—Pierre Dockes, *Medieval Slavery and Liberation,* 1982

Introduction

A history of women and reproduction in the "transition to capitalism" must begin with the
struggles that the medieval proletariat — small peasants, artisans, day laborers — waged
against feudal power in all its forms. Only if we evoke these struggles, with their rich cargo
of demands, social and political aspirations, and antagonistic practices, can we understand
the role that women had in the crisis of feudalism, and why their power had to be destroyed
for capitalism to develop, as it was by the three-century-long persecution of the witches.
From the vantage point of this struggle, we can also see that capitalism was not the product
of an evolutionary development bringing forth economic forces that were maturing in the
womb of the old order. Capitalism was the response of the feudal lords, the patrician mer-
chants, the bishops and popes, to a centuries-long social conflict that, in the end, shook their
power, and truly gave "all the world a big jolt." Capitalism was the counter-revolution that
destroyed the possibilities that had emerged from the anti-feudal struggle — possibilities

which, if realized, might have spared us the immense destruction of lives and the natural environment that has marked the advance of capitalist relations worldwide. This much must be stressed, for the belief that capitalism "evolved" from feudalism and represents a higher form of social life has not yet been dispelled.

How the history of women intersects with that of capitalist development cannot be grasped, however, if we concern ourselves only with the classic terrains of class struggle — labor services, wage rates, rents and tithes — and ignore the new visions of social life and the transformation of gender relations which these conflicts produced. These were not negligible. It is in the course of the anti-feudal struggle that we find the first evidence in European history of a grassroots women's movement opposed to the established order and contributing to the construction of alternative models of communal life. The struggle against feudal power also produced the first organized attempts to challenge the dominant sexual norms and establish more egalitarian relations between women and men. Combined with the refusal of bonded labor and commercial relations, these conscious forms of social transgression constructed a powerful alternative not only to feudalism but to the capitalist order by which feudalism was replaced, demonstrating that another world was possible, and urging us to question why it was not realized. This chapter searches for some answers to this question, while examining how the relations between women and men and the reproduction of labor-power were redefined in oppositon to feudal rule.

The social struggles of the Middle Ages must also be remembered because they wrote a new chapter in the history of liberation. At their best, they called for an egalitarian social order based upon the sharing of wealth and the refusal of hierarchies and authoritarian rule. These were to remain utopias. Instead of the heavenly kingdom, whose advent was prophesied in the preaching of the heretics and millenarian movements, what issued from the demise of feudalism were disease, war, famine, and death — the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, as represented in Albrecht Dürer's famous print — true harbingers of the new capitalist era. Nevertheless, the attempts that the medieval proletariat made to "turn the world upside down" must be reckoned with; for despite their defeat, they put the feudal system into crisis and, in their time, they were "genuinely revolutionary," as they could not have succeeded without "a radical reshaping of the social order" (Hilton, 1973: 223-4). Reading the "transition" from the viewpoint of the anti-feudal struggle of the Middle Ages also helps us to reconstruct the social dynamics that lay in the background of the English Enclosures and the conquest of the Americas, and above all unearth some of the reasons why in the 16th and 17th centuries the extermination of the "witches," and the extension of state control over every aspect of reproduction, became the cornerstones of primitive accumulation.

Serfdom as a Class Relation

While the anti-feudal struggles of the Middle Ages cast some light on the development of capitalist relations, their own political significance will remain hidden unless we frame them in the broader context of the history of serfdom, which was the dominant class relation in feudal society and, until the 14th century, the focus of anti-feudal struggle.

Farmers preparing the soil for sowing. Access to land was the foundation of the power of the serfs. English miniature, ca. 1340.

Serfdom developed in Europe, between the 5th and 7th centuries A.D., in response to the breakdown of the slave system, on which the economy of imperial Rome had been built. It was the result of two related phenomena. By the 4th century, in the Roman territories and the new Germanic states, the landlords had to grant the slaves the right to have a plot of land and a family of their own, in order to stem their revolts, and prevent their flight to the "bush" where maroon communities were forming at the margins of the empire.[1] At the same time, the landlords began to subjugate the free peasants, who, ruined by the expansion of slave-labor and later the Germanic invasions, turned to the lords for protection, although at the cost of their independence. Thus, while slavery was never completely abolished, a new class relation developed that homogenized the conditions of former slaves and free agricultural workers (Dockes 1982: 151), placing all the peasantry in a subordinate condition, so that for three centuries (from the 9th to the 11th), "peasant" *(rusticus, villanus)* would be synonymous with "serf" *(servus)* (Pirenne, 1956: 63).

As a work relation and a juridical status, serfdom was an enormous burden. The serfs were bonded to the landlords; their persons and possessions were their masters' property and their lives were ruled in every respect by the law of the manor. Nevertheless, serfdom redefined the class relation in terms more favorable to the workers. Serfdom marked the end of gang-labor, of life in the *ergastula*,[2] and a lessening of the atrocious punishments (the iron collars, the burnings, the crucifixions) on which slavery had relied. On the feudal estates, the serfs were subjected to the law of the lord, but their transgressions were judged on the basis of "customary" agreements and, in time, even of a peer-based jury system.

The most important aspect of serfdom, from the viewpoint of the changes it introduced in the master-servant relation, is that it gave the serfs direct access to the means of their reproduction. In exchange for the work which they were bound to do on the lords'

land (the *demesne*), the serfs received a plot of land (*mansus* or *hide*) which they could use to support themselves, and pass down to their children "like a real inheritance, by simply paying a succession due" (Boissonnade 1927:134).As Pierre Dockes points out in *Medieval Slavery and Liberation* (1982), this arrangement increased the serfs' autonomy and improved their living conditions, as they could now dedicate more time to their reproduction and negotiate the extent of their obligations, instead of being treated like chattel subject to an unconditional rule. Most important, having the effective use and possession of a plot of land meant that the serfs could always support themselves and, even at the peak of their confrontations with the lords, they could not easily be forced to bend because of the fear of starvation. True, the lord could throw recalcitrant serfs off the land, but this was rarely done, given the difficulty of recruiting new laborers in a fairly closed economy and the collective nature of peasant struggles. This is why — as Marx noted — on the feudal manor, the exploitation of labor always depended on the direct use of force.[3]

The experience of self-reliance which the peasants gained from having access to land also had a political and ideological potential. In time, the serfs began to look at the land they occupied as their own, and to view as intolerable the restrictions that the aristocracy imposed on their freedom. "Land to the tillers" — the demand that has echoed through the 20th century, from the Mexican and Russian revolutions to the contemporary struggles against land privatization — is a battle cry which the medieval serfs would have certainly recognized as their own. But the strength of the "villeins" stemmed from the fact that access to land was a reality for them.

With the use of land also came the use of the "commons" — meadows, forests, lakes, wild pastures — that provided crucial resources for the peasant economy (wood for fuel, timber for building, fishponds, grazing grounds for animals) and fostered community cohesion and cooperation (Birrell 1987:23). In Northern Italy, control over these resources even provided the basis for the development of communal self-administrations (Hilton 1973: 76). So important were the "commons" in the political economy and struggles of the medieval rural population that their memory still excites our imagination, projecting the vision of a world where goods can be shared and solidarity, rather than desire for self-aggrandizement, can be the substance of social relations.[4]

The medieval servile community fell short of these goals, and should not be idealized as an example of communalism. In fact, its example reminds us that neither "communalism" nor "localism" can be a guarantee of egalitarian relations unless the community controls its means of subsistence and all its members have equal access to them. This was not the case with the serfs on the feudal manors. Despite the prevalence of collective forms of work and collective "contracts" with the landlords, and despite the local character of the peasant economy, the medieval village was not a community of equals. As established by a vast documentation coming from every country of Western Europe, there were many social differences within the peasantry that separated free peasants and those of servile status, rich and poor peasants, peasants with secure land tenure and landless laborers working for a wage on the lord's demesne, and women and men.[5]

Land was usually given to men and transmitted through the male lineage, though there were many cases of women who inherited it and managed it in their name.[6] Women were also excluded from the offices to which the better-off male peasants were appointed, and, to all effects, they had a second-class status (Bennett 1988: 18–29; Shahar

1983). This perhaps is why their names are rarely mentioned in the manorial registers, except for those of the courts in which the serfs' transgressions were recorded. Nevertheless, female serfs were less dependent on their male kin, less differentiated from them physically, socially, and psychologically, and were less subservient to men's needs than "free" women were to be later in capitalist society.

Women's dependence on men within the servile community was limited by the fact that over the authority of their husbands and fathers prevailed that of the lords, who claimed possession of the serfs' persons and property, and tried to control every aspect of their lives, from work to marriage and sexual behavior.

It was the lord who commanded women's work and social relations, deciding, for instance, whether a widow should remarry and who should be her spouse, in some areas even claiming the *ius primae noctis* — the right to sleep with a serf's wife on her wedding night. The authority of male serfs over their female relatives was further limited by the fact that the land was generally given to the family unit, and women not only worked on it but could dispose of the products of their labor, and did not have to depend on their husbands for support. The partnership of the wife in land possession was so well understood in England that "[w]hen a villein couple married it was common for the man to come and turn the land back to the lord, taking it again in both his name and that of his wife" (Hanawalt 1986b: 155).[7] Furthermore, since work on the servile farm was organized on a subsistence basis, the sexual division of labor in it was less pronounced and less discriminating than in a capitalist farm. In the feudal village no social separation existed between the production of goods and the reproduction of the work-force; all work contributed to the family's sustenance. Women worked in the fields, in addition to raising children, cooking, washing, spinning, and keeping an herb garden; their domestic activities were not devalued and did not involve different social relations from those of men, as they would later, in a money-economy, when housework would cease to be viewed as real work.

If we also take into account that in medieval society collective relations prevailed over familial ones, and most of the tasks that female serfs performed (washing, spinning, harvesting, and tending to animals on the commons) were done in cooperation with other women, we then realize that the sexual divison of labor, far from being a source of isolation, was a source of power and protection for women. It was the basis for an intense female sociality and solidarity that enabled women to stand up to men, despite the fact that the Church preached women's submission to men, and Canonic Law sanctified the husband's right to beat his wife.

The position of women on the feudal manor cannot be treated, however, as if it were a static reality.[8] For the power of women and their relations with men were, at all times, determined by the struggles which their communities fought against the landlords, and the changes that these struggles produced in the master-servant relation.

The Struggle on the Commons

By the end of the 14th century, the revolt of the peasantry against the landlords had become endemic, massified, and frequently armed. However, the organizational strength

that the peasants demonstrated in this period was the outcome of a long conflict that, more or less openly, ran through the Middle Ages.

Contrary to the schoolbook portrait of feudal society as a static world, in which each estate accepted its designated place in the social order, the picture that emerges from a study of the feudal manor is rather that of relentless class struggle.

As the records of the English manorial courts indicate, the medieval village was the theater of daily warfare (Hilton 1966: 154; Hilton, 1985: 158–59). At times, this reached moments of great tension, when the villagers killed the bailiff or attacked their lord's castle. Most frequently, however, it consisted of an endless litigation, by which the serfs tried to limit the abuses of the lords, fix their "burdens," and reduce the many tributes which they owed them in exchange for the use of the land (Bennett, 1967; Coulton, 1955: 35–91; Hanawalt 1986a: 32–35).

The main objective of the serfs was to keep hold of their surplus-labor and products and broaden the sphere of their economic and juridical rights. These two aspects of servile struggle were closely connected, as many obligations issued from the serfs' legal status. Thus, in 13th-century England, both on the lay and ecclesiastical estates, male peasants were frequently fined for claiming that they were not serfs but free men, a challenge that could result in a bitter litigation, pursued even by appeal to the royal court (Hanawalt 1986a: 31). Peasants were also fined for refusing to bake their bread at the oven of the lords, or grind their grain, or olives at their mills, which allowed them to avoid the onerous taxes that the lords imposed for the use of these facilities (Bennett 1967: 130–31; Dockes 1982: 176–79). However, the most important terrain of servile struggle was the work that, on certain days of the week, the serfs had to carry out on the land of the lords. These "labor services" were the burdens that most immediately affected the serfs' lives and, through the 13th century, they were the central issue in the servile struggle for freedom.[9]

The serfs' attitude towards the *corveé*, as labor services were also called, transpires through the entries in the books of the manorial courts, where the penalties imposed on the tenants were recorded. By the mid 13th century, the evidence speaks for a "massive withdrawal" of labor (Hilton 1985: 130–31). The tenants would neither go nor send their children to work on the land of the lords when summoned at harvest time,[10] or they would go to the fields too late, so that the crops would spoil, or they worked sloppily, taking long breaks and generally maintaining an insubordinate attitude. Hence the lords' need for constant and close supervision and vigilance, as evinced by this recommendation:

> Let the bailiff and the messor, be all the time with the ploughmen, to
> see that they do their work well and thoroughly, and at the end of the
> day see how much they have done....And because customary servants
> neglect their work it is necessary to guard against their fraud; further
> it is necessary that they are overseen often; and beside the bailiff must
> oversee all, that they work well and if they do not do well, let them
> be reproved (Bennett 1967: 113).

A similar situation is portrayed in *Piers Plowman* (c. 1362–70), William Langland's allegorical poem, where in one scene the laborers, who had been busy in the morning,

passed the afternoon sitting and singing and, in another one, idle people flocked in at harvest time seeking "no deed to do, but to drink and to sleep" (Coulton 1955: 87).

Also the obligation to provide military services at wartime was strongly resisted. As H. S. Bennett reports, force was always needed to recruit in the English villages, and a medieval commander rarely managed to keep his men at war, for those who enlisted deserted at the first opportunity, after pocketing their pay. Exemplary are the pay-rolls of the Scottish campaign of the year 1300, which indicate that while 16,000 recruits had been ordered to enlist in June, by mid July only 7,600 could be mustered and this "was the crest of the wave... by August little more than 3,000 remained." As a result, increasingly the king had to rely on pardoned criminals and outlaws to bolster his army (Bennett 1967: 123–25).

Another source of conflict was the use of non-cultivated lands, including woods, lakes, hills, which the serfs considered a collective property. "[W]e can go to the woods..." — the serfs declared in a mid 12th-century English chronicle — "and take what we want, take fish from the fish pond, and game from the forests; we'll have our will in the woods, the waters and the meadows" (Hilton, 1973: 71).

Still, the most bitter struggles were those against the taxes and burdens that issued from the jurisdictional power of the nobility. These included the *manomorta* (a tax which the lord levied when a serf died), the *mercheta* (a tax on marriage that increased when a serf married someone from another manor), the *heriot* (an inheritance tax paid by the heir of a deceased serf for the right to gain entry to his holding, usually consisting of the best beast of the deceased), and, worst of all, the *tallage*, a sum of money arbitrarily decided, that the lords could exact at will. Last but not least was the *tithe*, a tenth of the peasant income, that was exacted by the clergy, but usually collected by the lords in the clergy's name.

Together with the labor service, these taxes "against nature and freedom" were the most resented among the feudal dues, for not being compensated by any allotments of land or other benefits, they revealed all the arbitrariness of feudal power. Thus, they were strenuously resisted. Typical was the attitude of the serfs of the monks of Dunstable who, in 1299, declared that "they would rather go down to hell than be beaten in this matter of tallage," and, "after much controversy," they bought their freedom from it (Bennett, 1967: 139). Similarly, in 1280, the serfs of Hedon, a village of Yorkshire, let it be understood that, if the tallage was not abolished, they would rather go to live in the nearby towns of Revensered and Hull "which have good harbours growing daily, and no tallage" (*ibid.*: 141). These were no idle threats. The flight to the city or town[11] was a constant component of servile struggle, so that, again and again, on some English manors, "men are reported to be fugitives, and dwelling in the neighboring towns; and although order is given that they be brought back, the town continues to shelter them...." (*ibid.*: 295–96).

To these forms of open confrontation we must add the manifold, invisible forms of resistance, for which subjugated peasants have been famous in all times and places: "foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, feigned ignorance, desertion, pilfering, smuggling, poaching...." (Scott 1989: 5) These "everyday forms of resistance," stubbornly carried on over the years, without which no adequate account of class relations is possible, were rife in the medieval village.

This may explain the meticulousness with which the servile burdens were specified in the manorial records:

> For instance, [the manorial records] often do not say simply that a
> man must plow, sow and harrow one acre of the lord's land. They say
> he must plow it with so many oxen as he has in his plow, harrow it
> with his own horse and sack.... Services (too) were remembered in
> minute detail....We must remember the cotmen of Elton who admit-
> ted that they were bound to stack the lord's hay in his meadow and
> again in his barnyard, but maintained that they were not bound in
> custom to load it into carts to be carried from the first place to the
> second (Homans 1960: 272).

In some areas of Germany, where the dues included yearly donations of eggs and
poultry, tests of fitness were devised, in order to prevent the serfs from handing down to
the lords the worst among their chickens:

> The hen (then) is placed in front of a fence or a gate; if frightened she
> has the strength to fly or scramble over, the bailiff must accept her,
> she is fit. A gosling, again, must be accepted if it is mature enough to
> pluck grass without loosing its balance and sitting down ignomin-
> iously (Coulton 1955: 74–75).

Such minute regulations testify to the difficulty of enforcing the medieval "social
contract," and the variety of battlefields available to a combative tenant or village. Servile
duties and rights were regulated by "customs," but their interpretation too was an object
of much dispute. The "invention of traditions" was a common practice in the con-
frontation between landlords and peasants, as both would try to redefine them or for-
get them, until a time came, towards the middle of the 13th century, when the lords put
them down in writing.

Liberty and Social Division

Politically, the first outcome of the servile struggles was the concession to many villages
(particularly in Northern Italy and France) of "privileges" and "charters" that fixed the
burdens and granted "an element of autonomy in the running of the village commu-
nity" providing, at times, for true forms of local self-government. These charters stipu-
lated the fines that were to be meted out by the manorial courts, and established rules for
juridical proceedings, thus eliminating or reducing the possibility of arbitrary arrests and
other abuses (Hilton 1973: 75). They also lightened the serfs' duty to enlist as soldiers and
abolished or fixed the tallage; often they granted the "liberty" to "hold stallage," that is to
sell goods at the local market and, more rarely, the right to alienate land. Between 1177
and 1350, in Loraine alone, 280 charters were conceded (*ibid*.: 83).

However, the most important resolution of the master-serf conflict was the *com-
mutation* of labor services with money payments (money rents, money taxes) that placed
the feudal relation on a more contractual basis. With this momentous development, serf-

dom practically ended, but, like many workers' "victories" which only in part satisfy the original demands, commutation too co-opted the goals of the struggle, functioning as a means of social division and contributing to the disintegration of the feudal village.

For the well-to-do peasants who, possessing large tracts of land, could earn enough money to "buy their blood" and employ other laborers, commutation must have appeared as a great step on the road to economic and personal independence; for the lords lessened their control over their tenants when they no longer depended directly on their work. But the majority of poorer peasants — who possessed only a few acres of land barely sufficient for their survival — lost even the little they had. Compelled to pay their dues in money, they went into chronic debt, borrowing against future harvests, a process that eventually caused many to lose their land. As a result, by the 13th century, when commutations spread throughout Western Europe, social divisions in the rural areas deepened, and part of the peasantry underwent a process of proletarianization. As Bronislaw Geremek writes:

> Thirteenth-century documents contain increasing amounts of information about "landless" peasants who manage to eke out a living on the margins of village life by tending to flocks.... One finds increasing numbers of "gardeners," landless or almost landless peasants who earned their living by hiring out their services.... In Southern France the "*brassiers*" lived entirely by "selling" the strength of their arms (*bras*) and hiring themselves out to richer peasants or landed gentry. From the beginning of the fourteenth century the tax registers show a marked increase in the number of impoverished peasants, who appear in these documents as "indigents," "poor men" or even "beggards" (Geremek 1994: 56).[12]

The commutation to money-rent had two other negative consequences. First, it made it more difficult for the producers to measure their exploitation, because as soon as the labor-services were commuted into money payments, the peasants could no longer differentiate between the work that they did for themselves and that which they did for the landlords. Commutation also made it possible for the now-free tenants to employ and exploit other workers, so that, "in a further development," it promoted "the growth of independent peasant property," turning "the old self-employing possessors of the land" into a capitalist tenant (Marx 1909: Vol. III, 924 ff).

The monetization of economic life, then, did not benefit all people, contrary to what is claimed by supporters of the market economy, who welcome it as the creation of a new "common" replacing land-bondage and introducing in social life the criteria of objectivity, rationality, and even personal freedom (Simmel 1978). With the spread of monetary relations, values certainly changed, even among the clergy, who began to reconsider the Aristotelian doctrine of the "sterility of money" (Kaye 1998) and, not coincidentally, to revise its views concerning the redeeming quality of charity to the poor. But their effects were destructive and divisive. Money and the market began to split the peasantry by transforming income differences into class differences, and by producing a mass of poor people who could survive only on the basis of periodic donations (Geremek 1994: 56–62). To the

growing influence of money we must also attribute the systematic attack to which Jews were subjected, starting in the 12th century, and the steady deterioration of their legal and social status in the same period. There is, in fact, a revealing correlation between the displacement of the Jews by Christian competitors, as moneylenders to Kings, popes and the higher clergy, and the new discriminatory rules (e.g., the wearing of distinctive clothing) that were adopted by the clergy against them, as well as their expulsion from England and France. Degraded by the Church, further separated by the Christian population, and forced to confine their moneylending (one of the few occupations available to them) to the village level, the Jews became an easy target for indebted peasants, who often vented on them their anger against the rich (Barber 1992: 76).

Women, too, in all classes, were most negatively affected by the increasing commercialization of life, for their access to property and income was further reduced by it. In the Italian commercial towns, women lost their right to inherit a third of their husbands' property (the *tertia*). In the rural areas, they were further excluded from land possession, especially when single or widowed. As a result, by the 13th century, they were leading the movement away from the country, being the most numerous among the rural immigrants to the towns (Hilton 1985: 212), and by the 15th century, women formed a large percentage of the population of the cities. Here, most of them lived in poor conditions, holding low-paid jobs as maids, hucksters, retail traders (often fined for lack of a license), spinsters, members of the lower guilds, and prostitutes.[13] However, living in the urban centers, among the most combative part of the medieval population, gave them a new social autonomy. City laws did not free women; few could afford to buy the "city

Female masons constructing a city wall. French, 15th century.

freedom," as the privileges connected with city life were called. But in the city, women's subordination to male tutelage was reduced, as they could now live alone, or with their children as heads of families, or could form new communities, often sharing their dwellings with other women. While usually the poorest members of urban society, in time women gained access to many occupations that later would be considered male jobs. In the medieval towns, women worked as smiths, butchers, bakers, candlestick makers, hat-makers, ale-brewers, wool-carders, and retailers (Shahar 1983: 189–200; King 1991: 64–67). "In Frankfurt, there were approximately 200 occupations in which women participated between 1300 and 1500" (Williams and Echols 2000: 53). In England, seventy-two out of eighty-five guilds included women among their members. Some guilds, including silk-making, were dominated by them; in others, female employment was as high as that of men.[14] By the 14th century, women were also becoming schoolteachers as well as doctors and surgeons, and were beginning to compete with university-trained men, gaining at times a high reputation. Sixteen female doctors — among them several Jewish women specialized in surgery or eye therapy — were hired in the 14th century by the municipality of Frankfurt which, like other city administrations, offered its population a system of public health-care. Female doctors, as well as midwives or *sage femmes,* were dominant in obstetrics, either in the pay of city governments or supporting themselves with the compensation they received from their patients. After the Caesarian cut was introduced in the 13th century, female obstetrics were the only ones who practiced it (Opitz 1996: 370–71).

As women gained more autonomy, their presence in social life began to be recorded more frequently: in the sermons of the priests who scolded their indiscipline (Casagrande 1978); in the records of the tribunals where they went to denounce those who abused them (S. Cohn 1981); in the city ordinances regulating prostitution (Henriques 1966); among the thousands of non-combatants who followed the armies (Hacker 1981); and above all, in the new popular movements, especially that of the heretics.

We will see later the role that women played in the heretic movements. Here suffice it to say that, in response to the new female independence, we see the beginning of a misogynous backlash most evident in the satires of the *fabliaux,* where we find the first traces of what historians have defined as "the struggle for the breeches."

The Millenarian and the Heretic Movements

It was the growing landless proletariat which emerged in the wake of commutation that was the protagonist (in the 12th and 13th centuries) of the millenarian movements, in which we find, beside impoverished peasants, all the wretched of feudal society: prostitutes, defrocked priests, urban and rural day laborers (N.Cohn 1970). The traces of the millenarians' brief apparition on the historical scene are scanty, and they tell us a story of short-lived revolts, and of a peasantry brutalized by poverty and by the clergy's inflammatory preaching that accompanied the launching of the Crusades. The significance of their rebellion, however, is that it inaugurated a new type of struggle, already projected beyond the confines of the manor and stimulated by aspirations to total change. Not surprisingly, the rise of millenarianism was accompanied by the spread of prophecies and apocalyptic visions announc-

ing the end of the world and the imminence of the Last Judgment, "not as visions of a more or less distant future to be awaited, but as impending events in which many now living could take active part" (Hilton 1973: 223).

A typical example of millenarianism was the movement sparked by the appearance of the Pseudo Baldwin in Flanders in 1224–25. The man, a hermit, had claimed to be the popular Baldwin IX who had been killed in Constantinople in 1204. This could not be proven, but his promise of a new world provoked a civil war in which the Flemish textile workers became his most ardent supporters (Nicholas 1992: 155). These poor people (weavers, fullers) closed ranks around him, presumably convinced that he was going to give them silver and gold and full social reform (Volpe 1922: 298-9). Similar to this movement were those of the Pastoreaux (shepherds) — peasants and urban workers who swept through Northern France around 1251, burning and pillaging the houses of the rich, demanding a betterment of their condition[15] — and the movement of the Flagellants that, starting from Umbria (Italy), spread in several countries in 1260, the date when, according to the prophecy of the abbot Joachim da Flora, the world was supposed to end (Russell 1972a: 137).

It was not the millenarian movement, however, but popular heresy that best expressed the search by the medieval proletariat for a concrete alternative to feudal relations and its resistance to the growing money-economy.

Heresy and millenarianism are often treated as one subject, but while a precise distinction cannot be drawn, there are significant differences between the two movements.

The millenarian movements were spontaneous, without an organizational structure or program. Usually a specific event or a charismatic individual spurred them on,
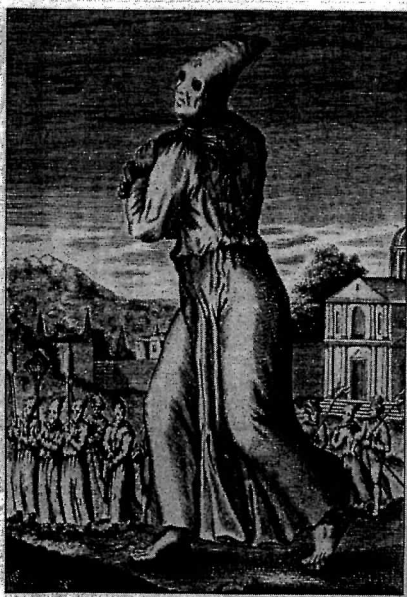
A procession of flaggelants during the Black Death.

but as soon as they were met by force they collapsed. By contrast, the heretic movement was a conscious attempt to create a new society. The main heretical sects had a social program that also reinterpreted the religious tradition, and they were well-organized from the viewpoint of their reproduction, the dissemination of their ideas, and even their self-defense. Not surprisingly, they had a long duration, despite the extreme persecution to which they were subjected, and they played a crucial role in the anti-feudal struggle.

Today, little is known about the many heretic sects (Cathars, Waldenses, The Poor of Lyon, Spirituals, Apostolics) that for more than three centuries flourished among the "lower classes" in Italy, France, the Flanders, and Germany, in what undoubtedly was the most important opposition movement of the Middle Ages (Werner 1974; Lambert 1977). This is largely due to the ferocity with which they were persecuted by the Church, which spared no effort to erase every trace of their doctrines. Crusades — like the one moved against the Albigensians[16] — were called against the heretics, as they were called to liberate the Holy Land from the "infidels." By the thousands, heretics were burned at the stake, and to eradicate their presence the Pope created one of the most perverse institutions ever recorded in the history of state repression: the Holy Inquisition (Vauchez 1990: 162–70).[17]

Nevertheless, as Charles H. Lea (among others) has shown, in his monumental history of the persecution of heresy, even on the basis of the limited records available to us we can form an impressive picture of their activities and creeds and the role of heretical resistance in the anti-feudal struggle (Lea 1888).

Although influenced by Eastern religions brought to Europe by merchants and crusaders, popular heresy was less a deviation from the orthodox doctrine than a protest movement, aspiring to a radical democratization of social life.[18] Heresy was the equivalent of "liberation theology" for the medieval proletariat. It gave a frame to peoples' demands for spiritual renewal and social justice, challenging both the Church and secular authority by appeal to a higher truth. It denounced social hierarchies, private property and the accumulation of wealth, and it disseminated among the people a new, revolutionary conception of society that, for the first time in the Middle Ages, redefined every aspect of daily life (work, property, sexual reproduction, and the position of women), posing the question of emancipation in truly universal terms.

The heretic movement also provided an alternative community structure that had an international dimension, enabling the members of the sects to lead a more autonomous life, and to benefit from a wide support network made of contacts, schools, and safe-houses upon which they could rely for help and inspiration in times of need. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the heretic movement was the first "proletarian international"— such was the reach of the sects (particularly the Cathars and Waldenses) and the links they established among themselves with the help of commercial fairs, pilgrimages, and the constant border-crossing of refugees generated by the persecution.

At the root of popular heresy was the belief that god no longer spoke through the clergy, because of its greed, corruption and scandalous behavior. The two major sects presented themselves as the "true churches." However, the heretics' challenge was primarily a political one, since to challenge the Church was to confront at once the ideological pillar of feudal power, the biggest landowner in Europe, and one of the insti-

tutions most responsible for the daily exploitation of the peasantry. By the 11th century, the Church had become a despotic power that used its alleged divine investiture to govern with an iron fist and fill its coffers by endless means of extortion. Selling absolutions, indulgences and religious offices, calling the faithful to church only to preach to them the sanctity of the tithes, and making of all sacraments a market, were common practices from the pope to the village priest, so much so that the corruption of the clergy became proverbial throughout Christianity. Things degenerated to the point that the clergy would not bury the dead, baptize or grant absolution from sin unless it received some compensation. Even the communion became an occasion for a bargain, and "[i]f an unjust demand was resisted the recalcitrant was excommunicated, and then had to pay for reconciliation in addition to the original sum" (Lea 1961:11).

In this context, the propagation of the heretical doctrines not only channeled the contempt that people felt for the clergy; it gave them confidence in their views and instigated their resistance to clerical exploitation. Taking the lead from the New Testament, the heretics taught that Christ had no property, and that if the Church wanted to regain its spiritual power it should divest itself from all its possessions. They also taught that the sacraments were not valid when administered by sinful priests, that the exterior forms of worship — buildings, images, symbols — should be discarded because only inner belief mattered. They also exhorted people not to pay the tithes, and denied the existence of Purgatory, whose invention had been for the clergy a source of lucre through paid masses and the sales of indulgences.

In turn, the Church used the charge of heresy to attack every form of social and political insubordination. In 1377, when the cloth workers in Ypres (Flanders) took arms against their employers, they were not only hanged as rebels but were burned by the Inquisition as heretics (N. Cohn 1970: 105). There are also records of female weavers being threatened with excommunication for not having delivered promptly the product of their work to the merchants or not having properly done their work (Volpe, 1971: 31). In 1234, to punish his peasant tenants who refused to pay the tithes, the Bishop of Bremen called a crusade against them "as though they were heretics" (Lambert 1992: 98). But heretics were persecuted also by the secular authorities, from the Emperor to the urban patricians, who realized that the heretic appeal to the "true religion" had subversive implications and questioned the foundations of their power.

Heresy was as much a critique of social hierarchies and economic exploitation as it was a denunciation of clerical corruption. As Gioacchino Volpe points out, the rejection of all forms of authority and a strong anti-commercial sentiment were common elements among the sects. Many heretics shared the ideal of apostolic poverty[19] and the desire to return to the simple communal life that had characterized the primitive church. Some, like the Poor of Lyon and the Brethren of the Free Spirit, lived on donated alms. Others supported themselves by manual labor.[20] Still others experimented with "communism," like the early Taborites in Bohemia, for whom the establishment of equality and communal ownership were as important as religious reform.[21] Of the Waldenses too an Inquisitor reported that "they avoid all forms of commerce to avoid lies, frauds and oaths," and he described them as walking barefoot, clad in woolen garments, owning nothing and, like apostles, holding all things in common (Lambert 1992: 64). The social content of heresy, however, is best expressed in the words of John Ball, the intellectual

Peasants hang a monk who has sold indulgences. Niklaus Manuel Deutsch, 1525.

leader of the English Peasant Rising of 1381, who denounced that "we are made in the image of God, but we are treated like beasts," and added, "Nothing will go well in England... as long as there will be gentlemen and villeins" (Dobson 1983: 371).[22]

The most influential among the heretical sects, the Cathars, also stand out as unique in the history of European social movements because of their abhorrence for war (including the Crusades), their condemnation of capital punishment (which provoked the Church's first explicit pronouncement in support of the death penalty)[23] and their tolerance for other religions. Southern France, their stronghold before the crusade against the Albigensians, "was a safe haven for Jews when anti-semitism in Europe was mounting; [here] a fusion of Cathar and Jewish thought produced the Cabbala, the tradition of Jewish mysticism" (Spencer 1995b: 171). The Cathars also rejected marriage and procreation and were strict vegetarians, both because they refused to kill animals and because they wished to avoid any food, like eggs and meats, resulting from sexual generation.

This negative attitude towards natality has been attributed to the influence exerted on the Cathars by Eastern dualist sects like the Paulicians — a sect of iconoclasts who rejected procreation as the act by which the soul is entrapped in the material world (Erbstosser 1984:13–14) — and, above all, the Bogomils, who proselytized in the 10th century among the peasantry of the Balkans. A popular movement "born amidst peasants whose physical misery made conscious of the wickedness of things" (Spencer 1995b: 15), the Bogomils preached that the visible world is the work of the devil (for in the world of God the good would be the first), and they refused to have children not to bring new slaves into this "land of tribulations," as life on earth was called in one of their tracts (Wakefield and Evans 1991: 457).

The influence of the Bogomils on the Cathars is well-established, [24] and it is likely that the Cathars' avoidance of marriage and procreation stemmed from a similar refusal of a life "degraded to mere survival" (Vaneigem 1998: 72), rather than from a "death-wish" or from contempt for life. This is suggested by the fact that the Cathars' anti-natalism was not associated with a degraded conception of women and sexuality, as it is often the case with philosophies that despise life and the body. Women had an important place in the sects. As for the Cathars' attitude toward sexuality, it seems that while the "perfected" abstained from intercourse, the other members were not expected to practice sexual abstinence, and some scorned the importance which the Church assigned to chastity, arguing that it implied an overvaluation of the body. Some heretics attributed a mystical value to the sexual act, even treating it like a sacrament (*Christeria*), and preached that practicing sex, rather than abstaining from it, was the best means to achieve a state of innocence. Thus, ironically, heretics were persecuted both as extreme ascetics and as libertines.

The sexual creeds of the Cathars were obviously a sophisticated elaboration of themes developed through the encounter with Eastern heretical religions, but the popularity they enjoyed and the influence they exercised on other heresies also speak of a wider experiential reality rooted in the conditions of marriage and reproduction in the Middle Ages.

We know that in medieval society, due to the limited availability of land and the protectionist restrictions which the guilds placed on entrance into the crafts, neither for the peasants nor for the artisans was it possible or desirable to have many children, and, indeed, efforts were made by peasant and artisan communities to control the number of children born among them. The most common method used to achieve this goal was the postponement of marriage, an event that, even among Orthodox Christians, came at a late age (if at all), the rule being "no land, no marriage" (Homans 1960: 37–39). A large number of young people, therefore, had to practice sexual abstinence or defy the Church's ban on sex outside of wedlock, and we can imagine that the heretical rejection of procreation must have found some resonance among them. In other words, it is conceivable that in the sexual and reproductive codes of the heretics we may actually see the traces of a medieval attempt at birth control. This would explain why, when population growth became a major social concern, at a time of severe demographic crisis and labor shortage in the late 14th century, heresy became associated with reproductive crimes, especially "sodomy," infanticide, and abortion. This is not to suggest that the heretics' reproductive doctrines had a decisive demographic impact; but rather, that for at least two centuries, a political climate was created in Italy, France, and Germany, whereby any form of contraception (including "sodomy," i.e. anal sex) came to be associated with heresy. The threat which the sexual doctrines of the heretics posed for the orthodoxy must also be viewed in the context of the efforts which the Church made to establish its control over marriage and sexuality, which enabled it to place everyone — from the Emperor to the poorest peasant — under its scrutiny and disciplinary rule.

The Politicization of Sexuality

As Mary Condren has pointed out in *The Serpent and the Goddess* (1989), a study of the penetration of Christianity into Celtic Ireland, the Church's attempt to regulate sexual behavior had a long history in Europe. From a very early period (after Christianity became a state religion in the 4th century), the clergy recognized the power that sexual desire gave women over men, and persistently tried to exorcise it by identifying holiness with avoidance of women and sex. Expelling women from any moment of the liturgy and from the administration of the sacraments; trying to usurp women's life-giving, magical powers by adopting a feminine dress; and making sexuality an object of shame — all these were the means by which a patriarchal caste tried to break the power of women and erotic attraction. In this process, "sexuality was invested with a new significance.... [It] became a subject for confession, where the minutest details of one's most intimate bodily functions became a topic for discussion" and where "the different aspects of sex were split apart into thought, word, intention, involuntary urges, and actual deeds of sex to form a science of sexuality" (Condren 1989: 86–87). A privileged site for the reconstruction of the Church's sexual canons are the Penitentials, the handbooks that, starting from the 7th century, were issued as practical guides for the confessors. In the first volume of his *History of Sexuality* (1978), Foucault stresses the role that these handbooks played in the production of sex as discourse and of a more polymorphous conception of sexuality in the 17th century. But the Penitentials were already instrumental to the production of a new sexual discourse in the Middle Ages. These works demonstrate that the Church attempted to impose a

Punishment for adultery. The lovers are guided through the street tied to each other. From a 1296 manuscript from Toulouse, France.

true sexual catechism, minutely prescribing the positions permitted during intercourse (actually only one was allowed), the days on which sex could be practiced, with whom it was permissible, and with whom forbidden.

This sexual supervision escalated in the 12th century when the Lateran Councils of 1123 and 1139 launched a new crusade against the common practice of clerical marriage and concubinage,[25] and declared marriage a *sacrament*, whose vows no power on earth could dissolve. At this time, the limitations imposed by the Penitentials on the sexual act were also reiterated.[26] Then, forty years later, with the III Lateran Council of 1179, the Church intensified its attack on "sodomy," targeting at once gay people and non-procreative sex (Boswell 1981: 277–86), and for the first time it condemned homosexuality ("the incontinence which is against nature") (Spencer 1995a: 114).

With the adoption of this repressive legislation sexuality was completely politicized. We do not have yet the morbid obsession with which the Catholic Church later approached sexual matters. But already by the 12th century we see the Church not only peeping into the bedroom of its flock, but making of sexuality a state matter. The unorthodox sexual choices of the heretics must also be seen, then, as an anti-authoritarian stand, an attempt the heretics made to wrench their bodies from the grip of the clergy. A clear example of this anti-clerical rebellion was the rise, in the 13th century, of new pantheist sects, like the Amalricians and the Brethren of the Free Spirit who, against the Church's effort to control sexual behavior, preached that God is in all of us and, consequently, that it is impossible for us to sin.

Women and Heresy

One of the most significant aspects of the heretic movement is the high status it assigned to women. As Gioacchino Volpe put it, in the Church women were nothing, but here they were considered equal; they had the same rights as men, and could enjoy a social life and mobility (wandering, preaching) that nowhere else was available to them in the Middle Ages (Volpe 1971: 20; Koch 1983: 247). In the heretical sects, above all among the Cathars and Waldenses, women had the right to administer the sacraments, preach, baptize and even acquire sacerdotal orders. It is reported that Waldes split from the orthodoxy because his bishop refused to allow women to preach, and it is said of the Cathars that they worshipped a female figure, the Lady of Thought, that influenced Dante's conception of Beatrice (Taylor 1954: 100). The heretics also allowed women and men to share the same dwellings, even if they were not married, since they did not fear that this would necessarily lead to promiscuous behavior. Heretical women and men often lived freely together, like brothers and sisters, as in the agapic communities of the early Church. Women also formed their own communities. A typical case was that of the Beguines, laywomen from the urban middle class who lived together (especially in Germany and Flanders), supporting themselves with their labor, outside of male control and without submitting to monastic rule (McDonnell 1954; Neel 1989).[27]

Not surprisingly, women are present in the history of heresy as in no other aspect of medieval life (Volpe 1971: 20). According to Gottfried Koch, already in the 10th cen-

Heretic woman condemned to be burned. Women had a large presence in the heretical movement in every country.

tury they formed a large part of the Bogomils. In the 11th century, it was again women who gave life to the heretical movements in France and Italy. At this time female heretics came from the most humble ranks of the serfs, and they constituted a true women's movement developing within the frame of the different heretic groups (Koch 1983: 246–47). Female heretics are also present in the records of the Inquisition; of some we know that they were burned, of others that they were "walled in" for the rest of their lives.

Can we say that this large female presence in the heretic sects was responsible for the heretics' "sexual revolution"? Or should we assume that the call for "free love" was a male ploy designed to gain easy access to women's sexual favors? These questions are not easily answered. We know, however, that women did try to control their reproductive function, as references to abortion and the use of contraceptives by women are numerous in the Penitentials. Significantly — in view of the future criminalization of such practices during the witch-hunt — contraceptives were referred to as "sterility potions" or *maleficia* (Noonan 1965: 155–61), and it was assumed that women were the ones who used them.

In the early Middle Ages, the Church still looked upon these practices with a certain indulgence, prompted by the recognition that women may wish to limit their births because of economic reasons. Thus, in the *Decretum*, written by Burchard, Bishop of Worms (circa 1010), after the ritual question —

> Have you done what some women are accustomed to do when they
> fornicate and wish to kill their offspring, act with their *maleficia*, and

their herbs so that they kill or cut the embryo, or, if they have not yet conceived, contrive that they do not conceive? (Noonan 1965: 160)

— it was stipulated that the guilty ones should do penance for ten years; but it was also observed that "it makes a big difference whether she is a poor little woman and acted on account of the difficulty of feeding, or whether she acted to conceal a crime of fornication" (*ibid.*).

Things changed drastically, however, as soon as womens' control over reproduction seemed to pose a threat to economic and social stability, as it did in the aftermath of the demographic catastrophe produced by the "Black Death," the apocalyptic plague that, between 1347 and 1352, destroyed more than one third of the European population (Ziegler 1969: 230).

We will see later what role this demographic disaster played in the "labor crisis" of the late Middle Ages. Here we can notice that, after the spread of the plague, the sexual aspects of heresy became more prominent in its persecution, grotesquely distorted in ways that anticipate the later representations of the witches' Sabbat. By the mid-14th century the Inquisitors' reports were no longer content with accusing the heretics of sodomy and sexual license. Now heretics were accused of animal worship, including the infamous *bacium sub cauda* (the kiss under the tail), and of indulging in orgiastic rituals, night flights and child sacrifices (Russell 1972). The Inquisitors also reported the existence of a sect of devil-worshippers called Luciferans. Corresponding to this process, which marked the transition from the persecution of heresy to witch-hunting, the figure of the heretic increasingly became that of a woman, so that, by the beginning of the 15th century, the main target of the persecution against heretics became the witch.

This was not the end of the heretic movement, however. Its final consummation came in 1533, with the attempt by the Anabaptists to set up a City of God in the German town of Münster. This was crushed with a blood bath, followed by a wave of merciless reprisals that affected proletarian struggles all over Europe (Po-chia Hsia 1988a: 51–69).

Until then, neither the fierce persecution nor the demonization of heresy could prevent the dissemination of heretic beliefs. As Antonino di Stefano writes, excommunication, the confiscation of property, torture, death at the stake, the unleashing of crusades against heretics — none of these measures could undermine the "immense vitality and popularity" of the *haeretica pravitatis* (heretic evil) (di Stefano 1950: 769). "There is not one commune," wrote James de Vitry at the beginning of the 13th century, "in which heresy does not have its supporters, its defenders and believers." Even after the 1215 crusade against the Albigensians, that destroyed the Cathars' strongholds, heresy (together with Islam) remained the main enemy and threat the Church had to face. Its recruits came from all walks of life: the peasantry, the lower ranks of the clergy (who identified with the poor and brought to their struggles the language of the Gospel), the town burghers, and even the lesser nobility. But popular heresy was primarily a lower-class phenomenon. The environment in which it flourished was the rural and urban proletariat: peasants, cobblers, and cloth workers "to whom it preached equality, fomenting their spirit of revolt with prophetic and apocalyptic predictions" (*ibid.*: 776).

We get a glimpse of the popularity of the heretics from the trials which the Inquisition was still conducting in the 1330s, in the Trento region (Northern Italy),

against those who had given hospitality to the Apostolics, when their leader, Fra Dolcino, had passed through the area thirty years before (Orioli 1993: 217–37). At the time of his coming, many doors had opened to give Docino and his followers shelter. Again, in 1304, when announcing the coming of a holy reign of poverty and love, Fra Dolcino set up a community among the mountains of the Vercellese (Piedmont), the local peasants, already in revolt against the Bishop of Vercelli, gave him their support (Mornese and Buratti 2000). For three years the Dolcinians resisted the crusades and the blockade the Bishop mounted against them — with women in male attire fighting side by side with men. In the end, they were defeated only by hunger and by the over-whelming superiority of the forces the Church mobilized against them (Lea 1961: 615–20; Hilton 1973: 108). On the day when the troops amassed by the Bishop of Vercelli finally prevailed upon them, "more than a thousand heretics perished in the flames, or in the river, or by the sword, in the cruelest of deaths." Dolcino's compan-ion, Margherita, was slowly burned to death before his eyes because she refused to abjure. Dolcino himself was slowly driven among the mountain roads and gradually torn to pieces, to provide a salutary example to the local population (Lea, 1961: 620).

Urban Struggles

Not only women and men but peasants and urban workers found in the heretic move-ment a common cause. This commonality of interests among people who could other-wise be assumed to have different concerns and aspirations can be accounted for on sev-eral grounds. First, in the Middle Ages, a tight relation existed between city and country. Many burghers were ex-serfs who had moved or fled to the city in the hope of a better life, and, while exercising their arts, continued to work the land, particularly at harvest time. Their thoughts and desires were still profoundly shaped by life in the village and by their continuing relationship to the land. Peasants and urban workers were also brought together by the fact that they were subjected to the same political rulers, since by the 13th century (especially in Northern and Central Italy), the landed nobility and the urban patri-cian merchants were becoming assimilated, functioning as one power structure. This sit-uation promoted among workers mutual concerns and solidarity. Thus, whenever the peasants rebelled they found beside themselves the artisans and day laborers, as well as the growing mass of the urban poor. This was the case during the peasant revolt in maritime Flanders, which began in 1323 and ended in June 1328, after the King of France and the Flemish nobility defeated the rebels at Cassel in 1327. As David Nicholas writes, "[t]he rebels' ability to continue the conflict for five years is conceivable only in the light of the city's involvment" (Nicholas 1992: 213–14). He adds that, by the end of 1324, the peas-ants in revolt had been joined by the craftsmen at Ypres and Bruges:

> Bruges, by now under the control of a weaver and fuller party, took direction of the revolt from the peasants.... A war of propaganda began, as monks and preachers told the masses that a new era had come and that they were the equals of the aristocrats (*ibid.*: 213–14).

Another peasant-urban worker alliance was that of the Tuchins, a movement of "bandits" operating in the mountains of Central France, in which artisans joined an organization that was typical of the rural populations (Hilton 1973: 128).

What united peasants and artisans was a common aspiration to the levelling of social differences. As Norman Cohn writes, this is evidenced in documents of various kinds:

> From the proverbs of the poor that lament that, "The poor man works always, worries and labours and weeps, never laughing from his heart, while the rich man laughs and sings..."
>
> From the miracle plays where it is stated that "...each man ought to have as much property as every other, and we have nothing we can call our own. The great lords have all the property and poor folk have nothing but suffering and adversity..."
>
> From the most widely read satires which denounced that, "Magistrates, provosts, beadles, mayors — nearly all live by robbery. They all batten on the poor, they all want to despoil them....The strong robs the weaker...." Or again: "Good working men make wheaten bread but they will never chew it; no, all they get is the siftings from the corn, and from good wine they get nothing but the dregs and from good cloth nothing but the chaff. Everything that is tasty and good goes to the nobles and the clergy...." (N. Cohn 1970: 99–100).

These complaints show how deep was the popular resentment against the inequalities that existed between the "big birds" and the "small birds," the "fat people" and the "lean people," as rich and poor were referred to in the Florentine political idiom of the 14th century. "Nothing will be well in England until we are of the same condition," John Ball proclaimed during his drive to organize the 1381 English Peasant Rising (*ibid.*: 199).

As we have seen, the main expressions of this aspiration to a more egalitarian society were the exaltation of poverty and the communism of goods. But the affirmation of an egalitarian perspective was also reflected in a new attitude towards work, most evident among the heretic sects. On one side, we have a "refusal of work" strategy, such as that adopted by the French Waldenses (the Poor of Lyon), and the members of some conventual orders (Franciscans, Spirituals), who, wishing to be free from mundane cares, relied on begging and community support for their survival. On the other, we have a new valorization of work, particularly manual labor, that achieved its most conscious formulations in the propaganda of the English Lollards, who reminded their followers that "The nobles have beautiful houses, we have only work and hardships, but it is from our work that everything comes" (*ibid.*; Christie-Murray 1976: 114–15).

Undoubtedly, the appeal to the "value of work" — a novelty in a society dominated by a military class — functioned primarily as a reminder of the arbitrariness of feudal power. But this new awareness also demonstrates the emergence of new social forces that played a crucial role in the downfall of the feudal system.

This valorization of work reflects the formation of an urban proletariat, made up in part of journeymen and apprentices — working under artisan masters, producing for the

local market — but mostly by waged day-laborers, employed by rich merchants in industries producing for export. By the turn of the 14th century, in Florence, Siena, and Flanders, concentrations of up to 4,000 of such day-laborers (weavers, fullers, dyers) could be found in the textile industry. For them, life in the city was just a new type of serfdom, this time under the rule of the cloth merchants, who exercised the strictest control over their activities and the most despotic class rule. Urban wage-workers could not form any associations and were even forbidden to meet in any place and for any reason; they could not carry arms or even the tools of their trade; and they could not strike on pain of death (Pirenne 1956: 132). In Florence, they had no civil rights; unlike the journeymen, they were not part of any craft or guild, and they were exposed to the cruelest abuses at the hands of the merchants who, in addition to controlling the town government, ran their private tribunal and, with impunity, spied on them, arrested them, tortured them, and hanged them at the least sign of trouble (Rodolico 1971).

It is among these workers that we find the most extreme forms of social protest and the greatest acceptance of heretic ideas (*ibid.*: 56–59). Throughout the 14th century, particularly in Flanders, cloth workers were engaged in constant rebellions against the bishop, the nobility, the merchants, and even the major crafts. At Bruges, when the main crafts gained power in 1348, wool workers continued to revolt against them. At Ghent, in 1335, a revolt by the local bourgeoisie was overtaken by a rebellion of weavers, who tried to establish a "workers' democracy" based on the suppression of all authorities, except those living by manual labor (Boissonnade 1927: 310–11). Defeated by an impressive coalition of forces (including the prince, the nobility, the clergy, the bourgeoisie), the weavers tried again in 1378, when they succeeded in establishing what (with some exaggeration, perhaps) has been called the first "dictatorship of the proletariat" known in history. Their goal, according to Peter Boissonnade, was "to raise journeymen against masters, wage earners against great entrepreneurs, peasants against lords and clergy. It was said that they had contemplated the extermination of the whole bourgeois class, with the exception of children of six and the same for the nobles" (*ibid.*: 311). They were defeated only by a battle in the open field, at Roosebecque in 1382, where 26,000 of them lost their lives (*ibid.*).

The events at Bruges and Ghent were not isolated cases. In Germany and Italy as well, the artisans and laborers rebelled at every possible occasion, forcing the local bourgeoisie to live in a constant state of fear. In Florence, the workers seized power in 1379, led by the *Ciompi*, the day-laborers in the Florentine textile industry.[28] They too established a workers' government, but it lasted only a few months before being completely defeated by 1382 (Rodolico 1971). The workers at Liege, in the Low Countries, were more successful. In 1384, the nobility and the rich ("the great," as they were called), incapable of continuing a resistance which had lasted for more than a century, capitulated. From then on, "the crafts completely dominated the town," becoming the arbiter of the municipal government (Pirenne 1937: 201). The craftsmen had also given support to the peasants in revolt, in maritime Flanders, in a struggle that lasted from 1323 to 1328, which Pirenne describes as "a genuine attempt at a social revolution" (*ibid.*: 195). Here — according to a Flemish contemporary whose class allegiance is apparent — "the plague of insurrection was such that men became disgusted with life" (*ibid.*: 196). Thus, from 1320 to 1332, the "good people" of Ypres implored the king not to allow the town's inner bastions, within which they lived, to be demolished because they protected them from the "common people" (*ibid.*: 202–03).

Jaquerie. Peasants took arms in Flanders in 1323, in France in 1358, in England in 1381, in Florence, Ghent and Paris in 1370 and 1380.

The Black Death and the Labor Crisis

A turning point in the course of the medieval struggles was the Black Death, which killed, on an average, between 30% and 40% of its population (Ziegler 1969: 230). Coming in the wake of the Great Famine of 1315–22, that weakened people's resistance to disease (Jordan 1996), this unprecedented demographic collapse profoundly changed Europe's social and political life, practically inaugurating a new era. Social hierarchies were turned upside down because of the levelling effects of the widespread morbidity. Familiarity with death also undermined social discipline. Confronted with the possibility of sudden death, people no longer cared to work or to abide by social and sexual regulations, but tried to have the best of times, feasting for as long as they could without thought of the future.

However, the most important consequence of the plague was the intensification of the labor crisis generated by the class conflict; for the decimation of the work-force made labor extremely scarce, critically increased its cost, and stiffened people's determination to break the shackles of feudal rule.

As Christopher Dyer points out, the scarcity of labor which the epidemic caused shifted the power relation to the advantage of the lower classes. When land had been scarce, the peasants could be controlled by the threat of expulsion. But after the population was decimated and land became abundant, the threats of the lords ceased to have any serious effect, as the peasants could now freely move and find new land to cultivate (Dyer 1968: 26). Thus, while the crops were rotting and livestock wandered in the fields, peasants and artisans suddenly became masters of the situation. A symptom of this new development was the growth of rent strikes, bolstered by threats of a mass exodus to other lands or to the city. As the manorial records laconically registered, the peasants "refused to pay" (*negant solvere*). They also declared that they "will not follow the customs any

longer" (*negant consuetudines*), and ignored the orders of the lords to repair their houses, clean ditches, or chase escaped serfs (*ibid.*: 24).

By the end of the 14th century the refusal of rent and services had become a collective phenomenon. Entire villages jointly organized to stop paying fines, taxes and tallage, and no longer recognized the commuted services, or the injunctions of the manorial courts, which were the main instrument of feudal power. In this context, the quantity of rent and services withheld became less important than the fact that the class relation, on which the feudal order was based, was subverted. This is how an early 16th-century writer, whose words reflect the viewpoint of the nobility, summed up the situation:

> The peasants are too rich... and do not know what obedience means;
> they don't take law into any account, they wish there were no nobles...
> and they would like to decide what rent we should get for our lands
> (*ibid.*: 33).

In response to the increased cost of labor and the collapse of the feudal rent, various attempts were made to increase the exploitation of work, either through the restoration of labor services or, in some cases, the revival of slavery. In Florence, the importation of slaves was authorized in 1366.[29] But such measures only sharpened the class conflict. In England, it was an attempt by the nobility to contain the cost of labor, by means of a Labor Statute limiting the maximum wage, that caused the Peasant Rising of 1381. This spread from region to region and ended with thousands of peasants marching from Kent to London "to talk to the king" (Hilton 1973; Dobson 1983). Also in France, between 1379 and 1382, there was a "whirlwind of revolution" (Boissonnade 1927: 314). Proletarian insurrections exploded at Bezier, where forty weavers and cord-wainers were hanged. In Montpellier the workers in revolt proclaimed that "by Christmas we will sell Christian flesh at six pence a pound." Revolts broke out in Carcassone, Orleans, Amiens, Tournai, Rouen and finally in Paris, where in 1413 a "workers' democracy" came into power.[30] In Italy the most important revolt was that of the Ciompi. It began in July of 1382, when cloth-workers in Florence for a time forced the bourgeoisie to give them a share of government and declare a moratorium on all debts incurred by wage earners; they then proclaimed what, in essence, was a dictatorship of the proletariat ("God's people"), though one soon crushed by the combined forces of the nobility and the bourgeoisie (Rodolico 1971).

"Now is the time" — the sentence that recurs in the letters of John Ball — well illustrates the spirit of the European proletariat at the close of the 14th century, a time when, in Florence, the wheel of fortune was beginning to appear on the walls of taverns and work-shops, to symbolize the imminent change of lot.

In the course of this process, the political horizon and the organizational dimensions of the peasant and artisan struggle broadened. Entire regions revolted, forming assemblies and recruiting armies. At times, the peasants organized in bands, attacking the castles of the lords, and destroying the archives where the written marks of their servitude were kept. By the 15th century the confrontation between the peasants and the nobility turned into true wars, like that of the *remensas* in Spain, that lasted from 1462 to 1486.[31] In Germany a cycle of "peasant wars" began in 1476 with the conspiracy led by Hans the Piper. This escalated into four bloody rebellions led by Bundschuch

The Black Death destroyed one-third of the population of Europe. It was a turning point in European history, socially and politically.

("Peasant Union") between 1493 and 1517, and culminating in a full-fledged war that lasted from 1522 to 1525, spreading over four countries (Engels 1977; Blickle 1977).

In all these cases, the rebels did not content themselves with demanding some restrictions to feudal rule, nor did they only bargain for better living conditions. Their aim was to put an end to the power of the lords. As the English peasants declared during the Peasant Rising of 1381, "the old law must be abolished." Indeed, by the beginning of the 15th century, in England at least, serfdom or villeinage had almost completely disappeared, though the revolt had been politically and militarily defeated and its leaders brutally executed (Titow 1969: 58).

What followed has been described as the "golden age of the European proletariat" (Marx 1909, Vol. I; Braudel 1967: 128ff.), a far cry from the canonic representation of the 15th century, which has been iconographically immortalized as a world under the spell of the dance of death and *memento mori*.

Thorold Rogers has painted a utopian image of this period in his famous study of wages and living conditions in medieval England. "At no time," Rogers wrote, "were wages [in England] so high and food so cheap" (Rogers 1894: 326ff). Workers sometimes were paid for every day of the year, although on Sunday and the main holidays they did not work. They were also fed by their employers, and were paid a *viaticum* for coming and going from home to work, at so much per mile of distance. In addition, they demanded to be paid in money, and wanted to work only five days a week.

As we shall see, there are reasons to be skeptical about the extent of this cornucopia. However, for a broad section of the western European peasantry, and for urban workers, the 15th century was a period of unprecedented power. Not only did the scarcity of labor gave them the upper hand, but the spectacle of employers competing for their services strengthened their sense of self-value, and erased centuries of degradation and

subservience. The 'scandal' of the high wages the workers demanded was only matched, in the eyes of the employers, by the new arrogance they displayed — their refusal to work, or to continue to work after having satisfied their needs (which they now could do more quickly because of their higher wages); their stubborn determination to hire themselves out only for limited tasks, rather than for prolonged periods of time; their demands for other perks beside their wages; and their ostentatious clothing which, according to the complaints of contemporary social critics, made them indistinguishable from the lords. "Servants are now masters and masters are servants," complained John Gower in *Mirour de l'omme* (1378), "the peasant pretends to imitate the ways of the free-man, and gives himself the appearance of him in his clothes" (Hatcher 1994: 17).

The condition of the landless also improved after the Black Death (Hatcher 1994). This was not just an English phenomenon. In 1348 the canons of Normandy complained that they could not find anyone to cultivate their lands who did not ask for more than what six servants had earned at the beginning of the century. Wages doubled and trebled in Italy, France and Germany (Boissonnade 1927: 316–20). In the lands of the Rhine and Danube, the daily agricultural wage became equivalent in purchasing power to the price of a pig or sheep, and these wage rates applied to women as well, for the differential between female and male earnings was drastically reduced in the wake of the Black Death.

What this meant for the European proletarian was not only the achievement of a standard of living that remained unparalleled until the 19th century, but the demise of serfdom. By the end of the 14th century land bondage had practically disappeared (Marx 1909, Vol. I: 788). Everywhere serfs were replaced by free farmers — copy holders or lease holders — who would accept work only for a substantial reward.

Sexual Politics, the Rise of the State and Counter-Revolution

However, by the end of the 15th century, a counter-revolution was already under way at every level of social and political life. First, efforts were made by the political authorities to co-opt the youngest and most rebellious male workers, by means of a vicious sexual politics that gave them access to free sex, and turned class antagonism into an antagonism against proletarian women. As Jacques Rossiaud has shown in *Medieval Prostitution* (1988), in France, the municipal authorities practically *decriminalized rape*, provided the victims were women of the lower class. In 14th-century Venice, the rape of an unmarried prole-tarian woman rarely called for more than a slap on the wrist, even in the frequent case in which it involved a group assault (Ruggiero 1989: 91–108). The same was true in most French cities. Here, the gang-rape of proletarian women became a common practice which the perpetrators would carry out openly and loudly at night, in groups of two to fifteen, breaking into their victims' homes, or dragging their victims through the streets, without any attempt to hide or disguise themselves. Those who engaged in these "sports" were young journeymen or domestic servants, and the penniless sons of well-to-do fam-ilies, while the women targeted were poor girls, working as maids or washerwomen, of whom it was rumored that they were "kept" by their masters (Rossiaud 1988: 22). On average, half of the town male youth, at some point, engaged in these assaults, which

Rossiaud describes as a form of class protest, a means for proletarian men — who were forced to postpone marriage for many years because of their economic conditions — to get back "their own," and take revenge against the rich. But the results were destructive for all workers, as the state-backed raping of poor women undermined the class solidarity that had been achieved in the anti-feudal struggle. Not surprisingly, the authorities viewed the disturbances caused by such policy (the brawls, the presence of youth gangs roaming the streets at night in search of adventure and disturbing the public quiet) as a small price to pay in exchange for a lessening of social tensions, obsessed as they were with the fear of urban insurrections, and the belief that if the poor gained the upper hand they would take their wives and hold them in common (*ibid.*: 13).

For proletarian women, so cavalierly sacrificed by masters and servants alike, the price to be paid was inestimable. Once raped, they could not easily regain their place in society. Their reputation being destroyed, they would have to leave town or turn to prostitution (*ibid.*; Ruggiero 1985: 99). But they were not the only ones to suffer. The legalization of rape created a climate of intense misogyny that degraded all women regardless of class. It also desensitized the population to the perpetration of violence against women, preparing the ground for the witch-hunt which began in this same
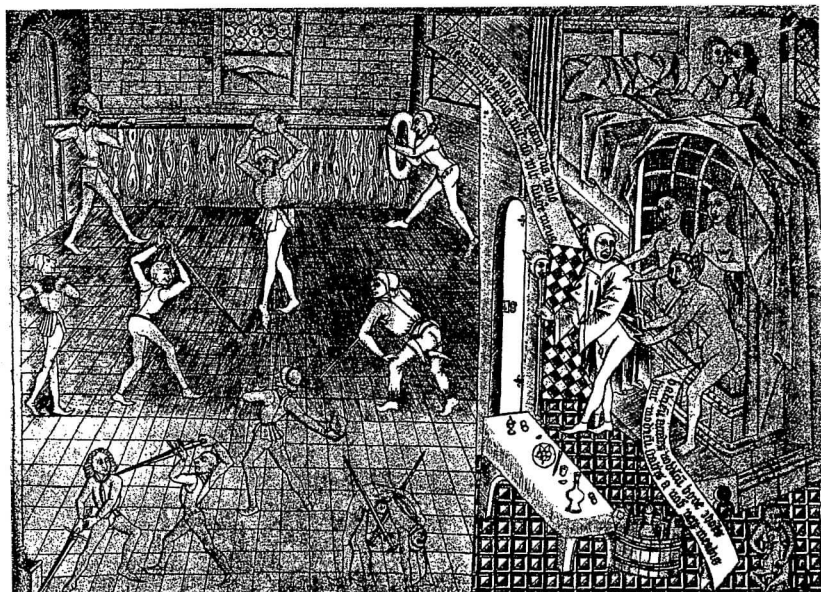
Brothel, from a 15th-century German woodcut. Brothels were seen as a remedy for social protest, heresy, and homosexuality.

period. It was at the end of the 14th century that the first witch-trials took place, and for the first time the Inquisition recorded the existence of an all-female heresy and sect of devil-worshippers.

Another aspect of the divisive sexual politics that the princes and municipal authorities pursued to diffuse workers' protest was the institutionalization of prostitution, implemented through the opening of municipal brothels soon proliferating throughout Europe. Enabled by the contemporary high-wage regime, state-managed prostitution was seen as a useful remedy for the turbulence of proletarian youth, who in *"la Grand Maison"* — as the state-brothel was called in France — could enjoy a privilege previously reserved to older men (Rossiaud 1988). The municipal brothel was also considered a remedy against homosexuality (Otis 1985), which in several European towns (e.g., Padua and Florence) was widely and publicly practiced, but in the aftermath of the Black Death was beginning to be feared as a cause of depopulation.[32]

Thus, between 1350–1450, publicly managed, tax-financed brothels were opened in every town and village in Italy and France, in numbers far superior to those reached in the 19th century. Amiens alone had 53 brothels in 1453. In addition, all the restrictions and penalties against prostitution were eliminated. Prostitutes could now solicit their clients in every part of town, even in front of the church during Mass. They were no longer bound to any particular dress codes or the wearing of distinguishing marks, because prostitution was officially recognized as a public service (*ibid.*: 9–10).

Even the Church came to see prostitution as a legitimate activity. The state-managed brothel was believed to provide an antidote to the orgiastic sexual practices of the heretic sects, and to be a remedy for sodomy, as well as a means to protect family life.

It is difficult retrospectively to tell how far playing the "sex card" helped the state to discipline and divide the medieval proletariat. What is certain is that this sexual "new deal" was part of a broader process which, in response to the intensification of social conflict, led to the centralization of the state, as the only agent capable of confronting the generalization of the struggle and safeguarding the class relation.

In this process, as we will see later in this work, the state became the ultimate manager of class relations, and the supervisor of the reproduction of labor-power — a function it has continued to perform to this day. In this capacity, state officers passed laws in many countries that set limits to the cost of labor (by fixing the maximum wage), forbid vagrancy (now harshly punished) (Geremek 1985: 61ff), and encouraged workers to reproduce.

Ultimately, the mounting class conflict brought about a new alliance between the bourgeoisie and the nobility, without which proletarian revolts may not have been defeated. It is difficult, in fact, to accept the claim, often made by historians, according to which these struggles had no chance of success due to the narrowness of their political horizons and the "confused nature of their demands." In reality, the objectives of the peasants and artisans were quite transparent. They demanded that "every man should have as much as another" (Pirenne 1937: 202) and, in order to achieve this goal, they joined with all those "who had nothing to lose," acting in concert, in different regions, not afraid to confront the well-trained armies of the nobility, despite their lack of military skills.

If they were defeated, it was because all the forces of feudal power — the nobility, the Church, and the bourgeoisie — moved against them united, despite their traditional

divisions, by their fear of proletarian rebellion. Indeed, the image, that has been handed down to us, of a bourgeoisie perennially at war with the nobility, and carrying on its banners the call for equality and democracy, is a distortion. By the late Middle Ages, wherever we turn, from Tuscany to England and the Low Countries, we find the bourgeoisie already allied with the nobility in the suppression of the lower classes.[33] For in the peasants and the democratic weavers and cobblers of its cities, the bourgeoisie recognized an enemy far more dangerous than the nobility — one that made it worthwhile for the burghers even to sacrifice their cherished political autonomy. Thus, it was the urban bourgeoisie, after two centuries of struggles waged in order to gain full sovereignty within the walls of its communes, who reinstituted the power of the nobility, by voluntarily submitting to the rule of the Prince, the first step on the road to the absolute state.

Endnotes

1. The best example of a maroon society was the Bacaude who took over Gaul around the year 300 A.D. (Dockes 1982: 87). Their story is worth remembering. These were free peasants and slaves, who, exasperated by the hardships they suffered due to the skirmishes between the contenders to Rome's imperial throne, wandered off, armed with farm implements and stolen horses, in roving bands (hence their name: "band of fighters") (Randers-Pehrson 1983: 26). Townspeople joined them and they formed self-governing communities, where they struck coins, with "Hope" written on their face, elected leaders, and administered justice. Defeated in the open field by Maximilian, the colleague of the emperor Diocletian, they turned to "guerrilla" warfare, to resurface, in full force in the 5th century, when they became the target of repeated military actions. In 407 A.D., they were the protagonists of a "ferocious insurrection." The emperor Constantine defeated them in battle in Armorica (Brittany) (*ibid.*: 124). Here "rebellious slaves and peasants [had] created an autonomous 'state' organization, expelling the Roman officials, expropriating the landowners, reducing the slave holders to slavery, and [organizing] a judicial system and an army" (Dockes 1982: 87). Despite the many attempts made to repress them, the Bacaude were never completely defeated. The Roman emperors had to engage tribes of 'barbarian' invaders to subdue them. Constantine recalled the Visigoths from Spain and gave them generous donations of land in Gaul, hoping they would bring the Bacaude under control. Even the Huns were recruited to hunt them down (Renders-Pehrson 1983: 189). But we find the Bacaude again fighting with the Visigoths and Alans against the advancing Attila.

2. The *ergastula* were the dwelling of the slaves in the Roman villas. They were "subterranean prisons" in which the slaves slept in chains; they had windows so high (in the description of a contemporary landowner) that the slaves could not reach them (Dockes 1982: 69). They "were... found almost everywhere," in the regions the Romans conquered "where the slaves far outnumbered the free men" (*ibid.*: 208). The name *ergastolo* is still used in the Italian criminal justice vocabulary; it means "life sentence."

3. This is what Marx writes in *Capital*, Vol. III, in comparing the serf economy with the slave and the capitalist economies. "To what extent the laborer, the self-sustain-

ing serf, can here secure for himself a surplus above his indispensable necessities of life... depends, other circumstances remaining unchanged, upon the proportion in which his labor time is divided into labor time for himself and forced labor time for his feudal lord.... Under such conditions the surplus labor cannot be filched from [the serfs] by any economic measures, but must be forced from them by other measures, whatever may be the form assumed by them" (Marx 1909, Vol. III: 917–18).

4. For a discussion of the importance of the commons and common rights in England, see Joan Thirsk (1964), Jean Birrell (1987), and J.M. Neeson (1993). The ecological and eco-feminist movements have given the commons a new political significance. For an eco-feminist perspective on the importance of the commons in the economy of women's lives, see Vandana Shiva (1989).

5. For a discussion of social stratification among the European peasantry see R. Hilton (1985: 116–17, 141–51) and J.Z. Titow (1969: 56–59). Of special importance is the distinction between *personal* freedom and *tenurial* freedom. The former meant that a peasant was not a serf, though s/he may still be bound to provide labor services. The latter meant that a peasant held land that was not "burdened" by servile obligations. In practice, the two tended to coincide, but this began to change after the commutation when free peasants, to expand their holdings, began to acquire lands that carried servile burdens. Thus, "We do find peasants of free personal status (*liberi*) holding villein land and we do find villeins (*villani, nativi*) holding freehold land, though both these occurrences are rare and both were frowned upon" (Titow 1969: 56–57).

6. Barbara Hanawalt's examination of the wills from Kibworth (England) in the 15th century, shows that "men favored mature sons in 41 percent of their wills, while they left to the wife alone or the wife with a son the estate in 29 percent of the cases" (Hanawalt 1986b: 155).

7. Hanawalt sees the medieval marital relationship among peasants as being a "partnership." "Land transactions in manorial courts indicate a strong practice of mutual responsibility and decision making.... Husband and wife also appear in purchasing or leasing pieces of land either for themselves or for their children" (Hanawalt 1986b: 16). For women's contribution to agricultural labor and control over their surplus produce also see Shahar (1983: 239–42). For women's extralegal contributions to their households, see B. Hanawalt (1986b:12). In England, "illegal gleaning was the most common way for a woman to get extra grain for her family" (*ibid.*).

8. This is the limit of some of the otherwise excellent studies produced, in recent years, on women in the Middle Ages, by a new generation of feminist historians. Understandably, the difficulty in presenting a synthetic view of a field whose empirical contours are still being reconstructed has led to a preference for descriptive analyses focussing on the main classifications of women's social life: "the mother," "the worker," "women in the rural areas," "women in the cities," often treated as if abstracted from social and economic change and social struggle.

9. As J.Z. Titow writes in the case of the English bonded peasants: "It is not difficult to see why the personal aspect of villeinage would be overshadowed by the problem of labour services in the minds of the peasants.... Disabilities arising out of unfree status would come into operation only sporadically.... Not so with the labour services, particularly week-work, which obliged a man to work for his landlord so many days a

week, every week, in addition to rendering other occasional services" (Titow 1969: 59).

10. "[T]ake the first few pages of the Abbots Langley rolls: men were fined for not coming to the harvest, or for not producing a sufficient number of men; they came late and when they did come performed the work badly or in an idle fashion. Sometimes not one but a whole group failed to appear and so left the lord's crop ungarnered. Others even when they came made themselves very unpleasant" (Bennett 1967: 112).

11. The distinction between "town" and "city" is not always clear. For our purposes the city is a population center with a royal charter, an episcopal see and a market, whereas a town is a population center (usually smaller than a city) with a regular market.

12. The following is a statistical picture of rural poverty in 13th-century Picardy: indigents and beggars, 13%; owners of small parcels of land, so unstable economically that a bad harvest is a threat to their survival, 33%; peasants with more land but without draught animals, 36%; wealthy farmers 19% (Geremek 1994: 57). In England, in 1280, peasants with less than three acres of land — not enough to feed a family — represented 46% of the peasantry (*ibid.*).

13. A silk spinners' song gives a graphic picture of the poverty in which female unskilled laborers lived in the towns:

> Always spinning sheets of silk
> We shall never be better dressed
> But always naked and poor,
> And always suffering hunger and thirst (Geremeck 1994: 65).

   In French municipal archives, spinners and other female wage workers were associated with prostitutes, possibly because they lived alone and had no family structure behind them. In the towns, women suffered not only poverty but loss of kin, which left them vulnerable to abuse (Hughes 1975: 21; Geremek 1994: 65–66; Otis 1985: 18–20; Hilton 1985: 212–13).

14. For an analysis of women in the medieval guilds, see Maryanne Kowaleski and Judith M. Bennett (1989); David Herlihy (1995); and Williams and Echols (2000).

15. (Russell 1972: 136; Lea 1961: 126–27). Also the movement of the Pastoureaux was provoked by events in the East, this time the capture of King Louis IX of France by the Moslems, in Egypt, in 1249 (Hilton 1973: 100–02). A movement made of "humble and simple" people was organized to free him, but it quickly took on an anticlerical character. The Pastoreaux reappeared in Southern France in the spring and summer of 1320, still "directly influenced by the crusading atmosphere.... [They] had no chance of crusading in the east; instead, they spent their energies on attacking the Jewish communities of south-west France, Navarre and Aragon, often with the complicity of local consulates, before being wiped out or dispersed by royal officials" (Barber 1992: 135–36).

16. The Crusade against the Albigensians (Cathars from the town of Albi, in southern France) was the first large-scale attack against the heretics, and the first Crusade against Europeans. Pope Innocent III launched it in the regions of Toulouse and Montpellier after 1209. In its wake, the persecution of heretics dramatically intensified. In 1215, on the occasion of the fourth Lateran Council, Innocent III inserted in the council's canons a set of measures that condemned heretics to exile, to the confiscation of their properties, and excluded them from civil life. Later, in 1224,

the emperor Frederick II joined the persecution with the constitution *Cum ad con-servandum* that defined heresy a crime of *lesa maiestatis*, to be punish with death by fire. In 1229, the Council of Toulouse established that heretics should be identified and punished. Proven heretics and their protectors were to burned at the stake. The house where a heretic was discovered was to be destroyed, and the land upon which it was built confiscated. Those who reneged their beliefs were to be immured, while those who relapsed were to suffer the supplice of fire. Then, in 1231-1233, Gregorio IX instituted a special tribunal with the specific function of eradicating heresy: the Inquisition. In 1252, Pope Innocent IV, with the consensus of the main theologians of the time, authorized the use of torture against heretics (Vauchez 1990: 163, 164, 165).

17. André Vauchez attributes the "success" of the Inquisition to its procedure. The arrest of suspects was prepared with utmost secrecy. At first, the persecution consisted of raids against heretics' meetings, organized in collaboration with public authorities. Later, when Waldenses and Cathars had already been forced to go underground, suspects were called in front of a tribunal without being told the reasons for their convocation. The same secrecy characterized the investigative process. The defendants were not told the charges moved against them, and those who denounced them were allowed to maintain their anonymity. Suspects were released, if they informed against their accomplices and promised to keep silent about their confessions. Thus, when heretics were arrested they could never know if anyone from their congregation had spoken against them (Vauchez 1990: 167–68). As Italo Mereu points out, the work of the Roman Inquisition left deep scars in the history of European culture, creating a climate of intolerance and institutional suspicion that continues to corrupt the legal system to this day. The legacy of the Inquisition is a culture of suspicion that relies on anonymous charges and preventive detention, and treats suspects as if already proven guilty (Mereu 1979).

18. Let us recall here Friedrick Engels' distinction between the heretical beliefs of peasants and artisans, associated with their opposition to feudal authority, and those of the town burghers, that were primarily a protest against the clergy (Engels 1977: 43).

19. The politicization of poverty, together with the rise of a money-economy, brought about a decisive change in the attitude of the Church towards the poor. Until the 13th century, the Church exalted poverty as a holy state and engaged in distributions of alms, trying to convince the rustics to accept their situation and not envy the rich. In Sunday sermons, priests were prodigal with tales like that of the poor Lazarus sitting in heaven at the side of Jesus, and watching his rich but stingy neighbor burning in flames. The exaltation of *sancta paupertas* ("holy poverty") also served to impress on the rich the need for charity as a means for salvation. This tactic procured the Church substantial donations of land, buildings and money, presumably to be used for distribution among the needy, and it enabled it to become one of the richest institutions in Europe. But when the poor grew in numbers and the heretics started to challenge the Church's greed and corruption, the clergy dismissed its homilies about poverty and introduced many "distinguo." Starting in the 13th century, it affirmed that only voluntary poverty has merit in the eyes of God, as a sign of humility and contempt for material goods; this meant, in practice, that help would

now be given only to the "deserving poor," that is, to the impoverished members of the nobility, and not to those begging in the streets or at city gates. The latter were increasingly looked upon with suspicion as guilty of laziness or fraud.

20. Much controversy took place among the Waldenses on the correct ways of supporting oneself. It was resolved, at the Bergamo Meeting of 1218, with a major split between the two main branches of the movement. The French Waldenses (Poor of Lyon) opted for a life supported by alms, while those of Lombardy decided that one must live out of his/her own labor and proceeded to form workers' collectives or cooperatives (*congregationes laborantium*)(di Stefano 1950: 775). The Lombard Waldenses continued to maintain private possessions — houses and other forms of property — and they accepted marriage and the family (Little 1978: 125).

21. Holmes 1975: 202; N. Cohn 1970: 215–17; Hilton 1973: 124. As described by Engels, the Taborites were the revolutionary, democratic wing of the Hussite national liberation movement against the German nobility in Bohemia. Of them, Engels tells us only that "[T]heir demands reflected the desire of the peasantry and the urban lower classes to end all feudal oppression" (Engels 1977: 44n). But their remarkable story is more fully narrated in H. C. Lea's *The Inquisition of the Middle Ages* (Lea 1961: 523–40), in which we read that they were peasants and poorfolk, who wanted no nobles or gentlemen in their ranks and had republican tendencies. They were called Taborites because in 1419, when the Hussites in Prague first came under attack, they moved on to Mount Tabor. There they founded a new town, that became a center of both resistance against the German nobility, and experimentation with communism. The story has it that, on arrival from Prague, they put out large open chests in which each was asked to place his/her possessions, so that all things could be held in common. Presumably, this collective arrangement was short-lived, but its spirit lived on longer after its demise (Demetz 1997:152–157).

   The Taborites distinguished themselves from the more moderate Calixtins because they included among their objectives the independence of Bohemia, and the retention of the property which they had confiscated (Lea 1961: 530). They did agree, however, on the four articles of faith that united the Hussite movement in front of its foreign enemies:

   I. Free preaching of the Word of God;

   II. Communion in [both wine and bread];

   III. The abolition of the clergy's dominion over temporal possessions and its return to the evangelical life of Christ and the apostles;

   IV. The punishment of all offenses against divine law without exception of person or condition.

Unity was much needed. To stamp out the revolt of the Hussites, the Church, in 1421, sent against Taborites and Calixtins an army of 150,000. "Five times," Lea writes, "during 1421, the crusaders invaded Bohemia, and five times they were beaten back." Two years later, at the Council of Siena, the Church decided that, if the Bohemian heretics could not be defeated militarily, they should be isolated and starved out through a blockade. But that too failed and Hussite ideas continued to spread into Germany, Hungary, and the Slavic territories to the South. Another

John Hus being martyred at Gottlieben on the Rhine in 1413. After his death, his ashes were thrown into the river.

army of 100,000 was once more launched against them, in 1431, again to no avail. This time the crusaders fled the battlefield even before the battle started, on "hearing the battle hymn of the dreaded Hussite troops"(*ibid.*).

What, in the end, destroyed the Taborites were the negotiations that took place between the Church and the moderate wing of the Hussites. Cleverly, the ecclesiastic diplomats deepened the split between the Calixtins and the Taborites. Thus, when another crusade was launched against the Hussites, the Calixtins joined the Catholic barons in the pay of the Vatican, and exterminated their brothers at the Battle of Lipan, on May 30, 1434. On that day, more than 13,000 Taborites were left dead on the battlefield.

Women were very active in the Taborite movement as in all heretic movements. Many fought in the battle for Prague in 1420 when 1500 Taborite women dug a long

trench which they defended with stones and pitchforks (Demetz 1997).

22. These words — "the most moving plea for social equality in the history of the English language," according to the historian R. B. Dobson — were actually put into John Ball's mouth to incriminate him and make him appear like a fool, by a contemporary French chronicler, Jean Froissart, a stern opponent of the English Peasants' Revolt. The first sentence of the sermon, which John Ball was said to have given many times, (in Lord Berners' 16th-century translation) is as follows: "Ah, ye good people, matters goeth not well to pass in England, nor shall do till everyting

be common, and that there be no villains nor gentlemen, but that we may be all united together, and that the lords be no greater masters than we be" (Dobson 1983: 371).

23. By 1210 the Church had labeled the demand for the abolition of the death penalty an heretical "error," which it attributed to the Waldenses and the Cathars. So strong was the presumption that the opponents of the Church were abolitionists that every heretic who wanted to submit to the Church had to affirm that "the secular power can, without mortal sin, exercise judgement of blood, provided that it punishes with justice, not out of hatred, with prudence, not precipitation" (Mergivern 1997: 101). As J. J. Mergiven points out, the heretical movement took the moral high ground on this question, and "forced the 'orthodox,' ironically, to take up the defense of a very questionable practice" (*ibid.*: 103).

24. Among the evidence proving the Bogomils' influence on the Cathars there are two works that "the Cathars of Western Europe took over from the Bogomils." They are: *The Vision of Isaiah* and *The Secret Supper*, cited in Wakefield and Evans's review of Catharist literature (1969: 447-465).

    The Bogomils were for the Eastern Church what the Cathars were for the Western. Aside from their Manicheanism and anti-natalism, the Byzantine authorities were most alarmed by the Bogomils' "radical anarchism," civil disobedience, and class hatred. As Presbyter Cosmas wrote, in his sermons against them: "They teach their own people not to obey their masters, they revile the wealthy, hate the king, ridicule the elders, condemn the boyars, regard as vile in the eyes of God those who serve the king, and forbid every serf to work for his lord." The heresy had a tremendous and long-term influence on the peasantry of the Balkans. "The Bogomils preached in the language of the people, and their message was understood by the people... their loose organisation, their attractive solution of the problem of evil, and their commitment to social protest made their movement virtually indestructible" (Browning 1975: 164-166). The influence of the Bogomils on heresy is traceable in the use, common by the 13th century, of "buggery," to connote first heresy and then homosexuality (Bullough 1976a: 76ff.).

25. The ban which the Church imposed upon clerical marriages and concubinage was motivated, more than by any need to restore its reputation, by the desire to defend its property, which was threatened by too many subdivisions, and by the fear that the wives of the priests might unduly interfere in clerical affairs (McNamara and Wemple 1988: 93-95). The ruling of the Second Lateran Council strenghtened a resolution that had already been adopted in the previous century, but had not been observed in the midst of an open revolt against this innovation. The protest had climaxed in 1061 with an "organized rebellion" leading to the election of the Bishop of Parma as Antipope, under the title of Honorious II, and his subsequent, failed attempt to capture Rome (Taylor 1954: 35). The Lateran Council of 1123 not only banned clerical marriages, but declared those existent invalid, throwing the priests' families, above all their wives and children, into a state of terror and destitution. (Brundage 1987: 214, 216–17).

26. The reforming canons of the 12th century ordered married couples to avoid sex during the three Lenten seasons associated with Easter, Pentacost and Christmas, on every

Sunday of the year, on feast days prior to receiving communion, on their wedding nights, during their wife's menstrual periods, during pregnancy, during lactation, and while doing penance (Brundage 1987: 198–99). These restrictions were not new. They were reaffirmations of the ecclesiastic wisdom embodied in dozens of Penitentials. What was novel was that they now became incorporated within the body of Canon Law "which was transformed into an effective instrument for Church government and discipline in the twelfth century." Both the Church and the laity recognized that a legal requirement with explicit penalties would have a different status than a penance suggested by one's confessor. In this period, the most intimate relations between people became a matter for lawyers and penologists (Brundage 1987: 578).

27. The relation between the Beguines and heresy is uncertain. While some of their contemporaries, like James de Vitry — described by Carol Neel as "an important ecclesiastical administrator" — supported their initiative as an alternative to heresy, "they were finally condemned on suspicion of heresy by the Council of Vienne of 1312, likely because of the clergy's intolerance of women who escaped male control. The Beguines subsequently disappeared, "forced out of existence by ecclesiastical reprobation" (Neel 1989: 324–27, 329, 333, 339).

28. The Ciompi were those who washed, combed, and greased the wool so that it could be worked. They were considered unskilled workers and had the lowest social status. "*Ciompo*" is a derogatory term, meaning dirty and poorly dressed, probably due to the fact that the "ciompi" worked half-naked and were always greasy and stained with dyes. Their revolt began in July 1382, sparked by the news that one of them, Simoncino, had been arrested and tortured. Apparently, under torture he had been made to reveal that the *ciompi* had held a secret meeting during which, kissing each other on the mouth, they had promised to defend each other from the abuses of their employers. Upon hearing of Simoncino's arrest, workers rushed to the guild hall of the wool industry (*Palazzo dell' Arte*), demanding that their comrade be released. Then, after securing his release, they occupied the guild hall, put patrols on Ponte Vecchio, and hung the insignia of the "minor guilds" (*arti minori)* from the windows of the guild hall. They also occupied the city hall where they claimed to have found a room full of nooses which, they believed, were meant for them. Seemingly in control of the situation, the *ciompi* presented a petition demanding that they become part of the government, that they no longer be punished by the cutting of a hand for non-payment of debts, that the rich pay more taxes, and that corporal punishment be replaced by monetary fines. In the first week of August, they formed a militia and set up three new crafts, while preparations were made for an election in which, for the first time, members of the *ciompi* would participate. Their new power, however, lasted no more than a month, as the wool magnates organized a lock-out that reduced them to hunger. After their defeat, many were arrested, hung and decapitated; many more had to leave the city in an exodus that marked the beginning of the decline of the wool industry in Florence (Rodolico 1971: passim).

29. In the aftermath of the Black Death, every European country began to condemn idleness, and to persecute vagabondage, begging, and refusal of work. England took the initiative with the Statute of 1349 that condemned high wages and idleness, establishing that those who did not work, and did not have any means of survival,

had to accept work. Similar ordinances were issued in France in 1351, when it was recommended that people should not give food or hostel to healthy beggars and vagabonds. A further ordinance in 1354 established that those who remained idle, passing their time in taverns, playing dice or begging, had to accept work or face the consequences; first offenders would be put in prison on bread and water, while second offenders would be put in the stocks, and third offenders would be branded on the forehead. In the French legislation a new element appeared that became part of the modern struggle against vagabonds: forced labor. In Castile, an ordinance introduced in 1387 allowed private people to arrest vagabonds and employ them for one month without wages (Geremek 1985: 53–65).

30. The concept of "workers' democracy" may seem preposterous when applied to these forms of government. But we should consider that in the U.S., which is often viewed as a democratic country, not one industrial worker has yet become President, and the highest governmental organs are all composed of representatives from an economic aristocracy.

31. The *remensas* was a redemption tax that the servile peasants in Catalonia had to pay to leave their holdings. After the Black Death, peasants subject to the *remensas* were also subjected to a new taxation known as the "five evil customs" (*los malos usos*) that, in earlier times, had been applied in a less generalized way (Hilton 1973: 117–18). These new taxes, and the conflicts revolving around the use of abandoned holdings were the source of a protracted, regional war, in the course of which the Catalonian peasants recruited one man from every three households. They also strengthened their ties by means of sworn associations, took decisions at peasant assemblies and, to intimidate the landowners, put up crosses and other threatening signs all over the fields. In the last phase of the war, they demanded the end of rent and the establishment of peasant property rights (*ibid.*: 120–21; 133).

32. Thus, the proliferation of public brothels was accompanied by a campaign against homosexuals that spread even to Florence, where homosexuality was an important part of the social fabric "attracting males of all ages, matrimonial conditions and social rank." So popular was homosexuality in Florence that prostitutes used to wear male clothes to attract their customers. Signs of a change in Florence were two initiatives which the authorities introduced in 1403, when the city banned "sodomites" from public office, and set up a watchdog commission devoted to the extirpation of homosexuality: the Office of Decency. But significantly, the main step which the office took was to make preparations for the opening of new public brothel, so that, by 1418, the authorities were still looking for means to eradicate sodomy "from the city and from the county" (Rocke 1997: 30–32, 35). On the Florentine government's promotion of publicly funded prostitution as a remedy against population decline and "sodomy," see also Richard C. Trexler (1993):

> Like other Italian cities of the fifteenth century, Florence
> believed that officially sponsored prostitution combatted two
> other evils of incomparably greater moral and social import:
> male homosexuality — whose practice was thought to obscure
> the difference between the sexes and thus all difference and

decorum — and the decline in the legitimate population which
resulted from an insufficient number of marriages (p.32).

Trexler points out that the same correlation between the spread of homosexuality, population decline, and the sponsorship of public prostitution can be found in late fourteenth-century, early fifteenth-century Lucca, Venice and Siena, and that the growth in the number and social power of prostitutes eventually led to a backlash, so that whereas

> [i]n the early fifteenth century preachers and statesmen [in Florence] had deeply believed that no city could long endure in which females and males seemed the same ... [a] century later [they] wondered if it could survive when [upper] class women could not be distinguished from brothel prostitutes (ibid.: 65).

33. In Tuscany, where the democratization of political life had proceeded further than in any other European region, by the second half of the 15th century, there was an inversion of this tendency and a restoration of the power of the nobility, promoted by the mercantile bourgeoisie to block the rise of the lower classes. By this time, an organic fusion had occurred between the families of the merchants and those of the nobility, achieved by means of marriages and the sharing of prerogatives. This put an end to that social mobility that had been the major achievement of urban society and communal life in medieval Tuscany (Luzzati 1981: 187, 206).

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Suggested readings in addition to *Caliban and the Witch*:

- *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* (Charles Mann, 2005)
- *Life Under the Jolly Roger: Reflections on Golden Age Piracy* (Gabriel Kuhn, 2009)
- *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)