

SILVIA  
FEDERICI'S

# CALIBAN

AND THE  
WITCH

WOMEN,  
THE BODY AND  
PRIMITIVE  
ACCUMULATION



[autonomously produced  
zine-format in five volumes]

VOLUME 2



*Albrecht Dürer, THE FALL OF MAN (1510).*

*This powerful scene, on the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, evokes the expulsion of the peasantry from its common lands, which was starting to occur across western Europe at the very time when Dürer was producing this work.*



# The Accumulation of Labor and the Degradation of Women: Constructing “Difference” in the “Transition to Capitalism”

I demand whether all wars, bloodshed and misery came not upon the creation when one man endeavoured to be a lord over another?... And whether this misery shall not remove... when all the branches of mankind shall look upon the earth as one common treasury to all.

—Gerrard Winstanley, *The New Law of Righteousness*, 1649

To him she was a fragmented commodity whose feelings and choices were rarely considered: her head and her heart were separated from her back and her hands and divided from her womb and vagina. Her back and muscle were pressed into field labor... her hands were demanded to nurse and nurture the white man... [H]er vagina, used for his sexual pleasure, was the gateway to the womb, which was his place of capital investment — the capital investment being the sex-act and the resulting child the accumulated surplus....

—Barbara Omolade, “Heart of Darkness,” 1983

## Part One: Introduction

The development of capitalism was not the only possible response to the crisis of feudal power. Throughout Europe, vast communalistic social movements and rebellions against feudalism had offered the promise of a new egalitarian society built on social equality and cooperation. However, by 1525 their most powerful expression, the “Peasant War” in Germany or, as Peter Blickle called it, the “revolution of the common man,” was crushed.<sup>1</sup> A hundred thousand rebels were massacred in retaliation. Then, in 1535, “New

Jerusalem," the attempt made by the Anabaptists in the town of Münster to bring the kingdom of God to earth, also ended in a bloodbath, first undermined presumably by the patriarchal turn taken by its leaders who, by imposing polygamy, caused women among their ranks to revolt.<sup>2</sup> With these defeats, compounded by the spreads of witch-hunts and the effects of colonial expansion, the revolutionary process in Europe came to an end. Military might was not sufficient, however, to avert the crisis of feudalism.

By the late Middle Ages the feudal economy was doomed, faced with an accumulation crisis that stretched for more than a century. We deduce its dimension from some basic estimates indicating that between 1350 and 1500 a major shift occurred in the power-relation between workers and masters. The real wage increased by 100%, prices declined by 33%, rents also declined, the length of the working-day decreased, and a tendency appeared toward local self-sufficiency.<sup>3</sup> Evidence of a chronic disaccumulation trend in this period is also found in the pessimism of the contemporary merchants and landowners, and the measures which the European states adopted to protect markets, suppress competition and force people to work at the conditions imposed. As the entries in the registers of the feudal manors recorded, "the work [was] not worth the breakfast" (Dobb 1963: 54). The feudal economy could not reproduce itself, nor could a capitalist society have "evolved" from it, for self-sufficiency and the new high-wage regime allowed for the "wealth of the people," but "excluded the possibility of capitalistic wealth" (Marx 1909, Vol. 1: 789).

It was in response to this crisis that the European ruling class launched the global offensive that in the course of at least three centuries was to change the history of the planet, laying the foundations of a capitalist world-system, in the relentless attempt to appropriate new sources of wealth, expand its economic basis, and bring new workers under its command.

As we know, "conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in brief force" were the pillars of this process (*ibid.*: 785). Thus, the concept of a "transition to capitalism" is in many ways a fiction. British historians, in the 1940s and 1950s, used it to define a period — roughly from 1450 to 1650 — in which feudalism in Europe was breaking down while no new social-economic system was yet in place, though elements of a capitalist society were taking shape.<sup>4</sup> The concept of "transition," then, helps us to think of a prolonged process of change and of societies in which capitalist accumulation coexisted with political formations not yet predominantly capitalistic. The term, however, suggests a gradual, linear historical development, whereas the period it names was among the bloodiest and most discontinuous in world history — one that saw apocalyptic transformations and which historians can only describe in the harshest terms: the Iron Age (Kamen), the Age of Plunder (Hoskins), and the Age of the Whip (Stone). "Transition," then, cannot evoke the changes that paved the way to the advent of capitalism and the forces that shaped them. In this volume, therefore, I use the term primarily in a temporal sense, while I refer to the social processes that characterized the "feudal reaction" and the development of capitalist relations with the Marxian concept of "primitive accumulation," though I agree with its critics that we must rethink Marx's interpretation of it.<sup>5</sup>

Marx introduced the concept of "primitive accumulation" at the end of *Capital* Volume I to describe the social and economic restructuring that the European ruling class initiated in response to its accumulation crisis, and to establish (in polemics with Adam Smith)<sup>6</sup> that: (i) capitalism could not have developed without a prior concentration of cap-



ital and labor; and that (ii) the divorcing of the workers from the means of production, not the abstinence of the rich, is the source of capitalist wealth. Primitive accumulation, then, is a useful concept, for it connects the "feudal reaction" with the development of a capitalist economy, and it identifies the *historical* and *logical* conditions for the development of the capitalist system, "primitive" ("originary") indicating a precondition for the existence of capitalist relations as much as a specific event in time.<sup>7</sup>

Marx, however, analyzed primitive accumulation almost exclusively from the viewpoint of the waged industrial proletariat: the protagonist, in his view, of the revolutionary process of his time and the foundation for the future communist society. Thus, in his account, primitive accumulation consists essentially in the expropriation of the land from the European peasantry and the formation of the "free," independent worker, although he acknowledged that:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, [of America], the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of black skins, are... the chief moments of primitive accumulation... (Marx 1909, Vol. I: 823).

Marx also recognized that "[a] great deal of capital, which today appears in the United States without any certificate of birth, was yesterday in England the capitalised blood of children" (*ibid.*: 829-30). By contrast, we do not find in his work any mention of the profound transformations that capitalism introduced in the reproduction of labor-power and the social position of women. Nor does Marx's analysis of primitive accumulation mention the "Great Witch-Hunt" of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, although this state-sponsored terror campaign was central to the defeat of the European peasantry, facilitating its expulsion from the lands it once held in common.

In this chapter and those that follow, I discuss these developments, especially with reference to Europe, arguing that:

- I. The expropriation of European workers from their means of subsistence, and the enslavement of Native Americans and Africans to the mines and plantations of the "New World," were not the only means by which a world proletariat was formed and "accumulated."
- II. This process required the transformation of the body into a work-machine, and the subjugation of women to the reproduction of the work-force. Most of all, it required the destruction of the power of women which, in Europe as in America, was achieved through the extermination of the "witches."
- III. Primitive accumulation, then, was not simply an accumulation and concentration of exploitable workers and capital. It was *also an accumulation of differences and divisions within the working class*, whereby hier-

archies built upon gender, as well as "race" and age, became constitutive of class rule and the formation of the modern proletariat.

- iv. We cannot, therefore, identify capitalist accumulation with the liberation of the worker, female or male, as many Marxists (among others) have done, or see the advent of capitalism as a moment of historical progress. On the contrary, capitalism has created more brutal and insidious forms of enslavement, as it has planted into the body of the proletariat deep divisions that have served to intensify and conceal exploitation. It is in great part because of these imposed divisions — especially those between women and men — that capitalist accumulation continues to devastate life in every corner of the planet.

### Capitalist Accumulation and the Accumulation of Labor in Europe

Capital, Marx wrote, comes on the face of the earth dripping blood and dirt from head to toe (1909, Vol. 1: 834) and, indeed, when we look at the beginning of capitalist development, we have the impression of being in an immense concentration camp. In the "New World" we have the subjugation of the aboriginal populations to the regimes of the *mita* and *cuatelchil*<sup>8</sup> under which multitudes of people were consumed to bring silver and mercury to the surface in the mines of Huancavelica and Potosi. In Eastern Europe, we have a "second serfdom," tying to the land a population of farmers who had never previously been enserfed.<sup>9</sup> In Western Europe, we have the Enclosures, the Witch-Hunt, the branding, whipping, and incarceration of vagabonds and beggars in newly constructed work-houses and correction houses, models for the future prison system. On the horizon, we have the rise of the slave trade, while on the seas, ships are already transporting indentured servants and convicts from Europe to America.

What we deduce from this scenario is that force was the main lever, the main economic power in the process of primitive accumulation<sup>10</sup> because capitalist development required an immense leap in the wealth appropriated by the European ruling class and the number of workers brought under its command. In other words, primitive accumulation consisted in an immense accumulation of labor-power — "dead labor" in the form of stolen goods, and "living labor" in the form of human beings made available for exploitation — realized on a scale never before matched in the course of history.

Significantly, the tendency of the capitalist class, during the first three centuries of its existence, was to impose slavery and other forms of coerced labor as the dominant work relation, a tendency limited only by the workers' resistance and the danger of the exhaustion of the work-force.

This was true not only in the American colonies, where, by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, economies based on coerced labor were forming, but in Europe as well. Later, I examine the importance of slave-labor and the plantation system in capitalist accumulation. Here I want to stress that in Europe, too, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, slavery, never completely abolished, was revitalized.<sup>11</sup>

As reported by the Italian historian Salvatore Bono, to whom we owe the most extensive study of slavery in Italy, there were numerous slaves in the Mediterranean areas in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, and their numbers grew after the Battle of Lepanto (1571) that escalated the hostilities against the Muslim world. Bono calculates that more than 10,000 slaves lived in Naples and 25,000 in the Neapolitan kingdom as a whole (one per cent of the population), and similar figures apply to other Italian towns and to southern France. In Italy, a system of public slavery developed whereby thousands of kidnapped foreigners — the ancestors of today's undocumented immigrant workers — were employed by city governments for public works, or were farmed out to private citizens who employed them in agriculture. Many were destined for the oars, an important source of such employment being the Vatican fleet (Bono 1999: 6–8).

Slavery is “that form [of exploitation] towards which the master always strives” (Dockes 1982: 2). Europe was no exception. This must be emphasized to dispel the assumption of a special connection between slavery and Africa.<sup>12</sup> But in Europe slavery remained a limited phenomenon, as the material conditions for it did not exist, although the employers' desires for it must have been quite strong if it took until the 18<sup>th</sup> century before slavery was outlawed in England. The attempt to bring back serfdom failed as well, except in the East, where population scarcity gave landlords the upper hand.<sup>13</sup> In the West its restoration was prevented by peasant resistance culminating in the “German Peasant War.” A broad organizational effort spreading over three countries (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) and joining workers from every field (farmers, miners, artisans, including the best German and Austrian artists),<sup>14</sup> this “revolution of the common man” was a watershed in European history. Like the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, it shook the powerful to the core, merging in their consciousness with the Anabaptists takeover of Münster, which confirmed their fears that an international conspiracy was underway to overthrow their power.<sup>15</sup> After its defeat, which occurred in the same year as the conquest of Peru, and which was commemorated by Albrecht Dürer with the “Monument to the Vanquished Peasants” (Thea 1998: 65; 134–35), the revenge was merciless. “Thousands of corpses laid on the ground from Thuringia to Alsace, in the fields, in the woods, in the ditches of a thousand dismantled, burned castles,” “murdered, tortured, impaled, martyred” (*ibid.*: 153, 146). But the clock could not be turned back. In various parts of Germany and the other territories that had been at the center of the “war,” customary rights and even forms of territorial government were preserved.<sup>16</sup>

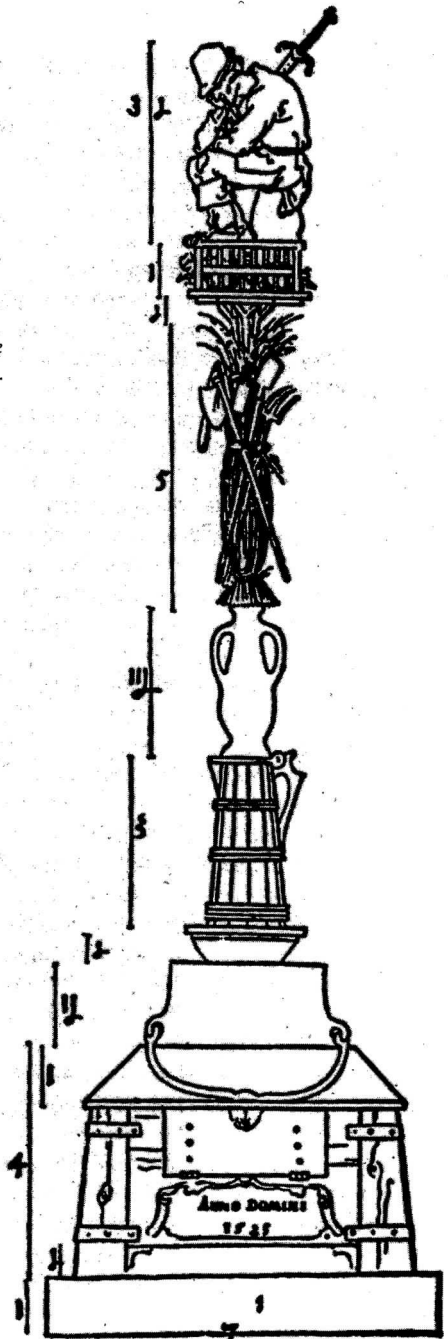
This was an exception. Where workers' resistance to re-enservment could not be broken, the response was the expropriation of the peasantry from its land and the introduction of forced wage-labor. Workers attempting to hire themselves out independently or leave their employers were punished with incarceration and even with death, in the case of recidivism. A “free” wage labor-market did not develop in Europe until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and even then, contractual wage-work was obtained only at the price of an intense struggle and by a limited set of laborers, mostly male and adult. Nevertheless, the fact that slavery and serfdom could not be restored meant that the labor crisis that had characterized the late Middle Ages continued in Europe into the 17<sup>th</sup> century, aggravated by the fact that the drive to maximize the exploitation of labor put in jeopardy the reproduction of the work-force. This contradiction — which still characterizes capitalist development<sup>17</sup> — exploded most dramatically in the American colonies, where work, disease,



*Peasant unfurling the banner of "Freedom."*

and disciplinary punishments destroyed two thirds of the native American population in the decades immediately after the Conquest.<sup>18</sup> It was also at the core of the slave trade and the exploitation of slave labor. Millions of Africans died because of the torturous living conditions to which they were subjected during the Middle Passage and on the plantations. Never in Europe did the exploitation of the work-force reach such genocidal proportions, except under the Nazi regime. Even so, there too, in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, land privatization and the commodification of social relations (the response of lords and merchants to their economic crisis) caused widespread poverty, mortality, and an intense resistance that threatened to shipwreck the emerging capitalist economy. This, I argue, is the historical context in which the history of women and reproduction in the transition from feudalism to capitalism must be placed; for the changes which the advent of capitalism introduced in the social position of women — especially at the proletarian level, whether in Europe or America — were primarily dictated by the search for new sources of labor as well as new forms of regimentation and division of the work-force.

Albrecht Dürer, *MONUMENT TO THE VANQUISHED PEASANTS*. (1526). This picture, representing a peasant enthroned on a collection of objects from his daily life, is highly ambiguous. It can suggest that the peasants were betrayed or that they themselves should be treated as traitors. Accordingly, it has been interpreted either as a satire of the rebel peasants or as a homage to their moral strength. What we know with certainty is that Dürer was profoundly perturbed by the events of 1525, and, as a convinced Lutheran, must have followed Luther in his condemnation of the revolt.





In support of this statement, I trace the main developments that shaped the advent of capitalism in Europe — land privatization and the Price Revolution — to argue that neither was sufficient to produce a self-sustaining process of proletarianization. I then examine in broad outlines the policies which the capitalist class introduced to discipline, reproduce, and expand the European proletariat, beginning with the attack it launched on women, resulting in the construction of a new patriarchal order, which I define as the “patriarchy of the wage.” Lastly, I look at the production of racial and sexual hierarchies in the colonies, asking to what extent they could form a terrain of confrontation or solidarity between indigenous, African, and European women and between women and men.

### Land Privatization in Europe, the Production of Scarcity, and the Separation of Production from Reproduction

From the beginning of capitalism, the immiseration of the working class began with war and land privatization. This was an international phenomenon. By the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century European merchants had expropriated much of the land of the Canary Islands and turned them into sugar plantations. The most massive process of land privatization and enclosure occurred in the Americas where, by the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, one-third of the communal indigenous land had been appropriated by the Spaniards under the system of the *encomienda*. Loss of land was also one of the consequences of slave-raiding in Africa, which deprived many communities of the best among their youth.

In Europe land privatization began in the late-15<sup>th</sup> century, simultaneously with colonial expansion. It took different forms: the evictions of tenants, rent increases, and increased state taxation, leading to debt and the sale of land. I define all these forms as *land expropriation* because, even when force was not used, the loss of land occurred against the individual's or the community's will and undermined their capacity for subsistence. Two forms of land expropriation must be mentioned: war — whose character changed in this period, being used as a means to transform territorial and economic arrangements — and religious reform.

“[B]efore 1494 warfare in Europe had mainly consisted of minor wars characterized by brief and irregular campaigns” (Cunningham and Grell 2000: 95). These often took place in the summer to give the peasants, who formed the bulk of the armies, the time to sow their crops; armies confronted each other for long periods of time without much action. But by the 16<sup>th</sup> century wars became more frequent and a new type of warfare appeared, in part because of technological innovation but mostly because the European states began to turn to territorial conquest to resolve their economic crisis and wealthy financiers invested in it. Military campaigns became much longer. Armies grew tenfold, and they became permanent and professionalized.<sup>19</sup> Mercenaries were hired who had no attachment to the local population; and the goal of warfare became the elimination of the enemy, so that war left in its wake deserted villages, fields covered with corpses, famines, and epidemics, as in Albrecht Dürer's “The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” (1498).<sup>20</sup> This phenomenon, whose traumatic impact on the population is reflected in numerous artistic representations, changed the agricultural landscape of Europe.



Jaques Callot, *THE HORRORS OF WAR* (1633). Engraving. The men hanged by military authorities were former soldiers turned robbers. Dismissed soldiers were a large part of the vagabonds and beggars that crowded the roads of 17th-century Europe.

Many tenure contracts were also annulled when the Church's lands were confiscated in the course of the Protestant Reformation, which began with a massive land-grab by the upper class. In France, a common hunger for the Church's land at first united the lower and higher classes in the Protestant movement, but when the land was auctioned, starting in 1563, the artisans and day-laborers, who had demanded the expropriation of the Church "with a passion born of bitterness and hope," and had mobilized with the promise that they too would receive their share, were betrayed in their expectations (Le Roy Ladurie 1974: 173–76). Also the peasants, who had become Protestant to free themselves from the tithes, were deceived. When they stood by their rights, declaring that "the Gospel promises land freedom and enfranchisement," they were savagely attacked as fomenters of sedition (*ibid.*: 192).<sup>21</sup> In England as well, much land changed hands in the name of religious reform. W. G. Hoskin has describe it as "the greatest transference of land in English history since the Norman Conquest" or, more succinctly, as "The Great Plunder."<sup>22</sup> In England, however, land privatization was mostly accomplished through the "Enclosures," a phenomenon that has become so associated with the expropriation of workers from their "common wealth" that, in our time, it is used by anti-capitalist activists as a signifier for every attack on social entitlements.<sup>23</sup>

In the 16th century, "enclosure" was a technical term, indicating a set of strategies the English lords and rich farmers used to eliminate communal land property and expand their holdings.<sup>24</sup> It mostly referred to the abolition of the open-field system, an arrangement by which villagers owned non-contiguous strips of land in a non-hedged field. Enclosing also included the fencing off of the commons and the pulling down of the shacks of poor cottagers who had no land but could survive because they had access to

customary rights.<sup>25</sup> Large tracts of land were also enclosed to create deer parks, while entire villages were cast down, to be laid to pasture.

Though the Enclosures continued into the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Neeson 1993), even before the Reformation, more than two thousand rural communities were destroyed in this way (Fryde 1996: 185). So severe was the extinction of rural villages that in 1518 and again in 1548 the Crown called for an investigation. But despite the appointment of several royal commissions, little was done to stop the trend. What began, instead, was an intense struggle, climaxing in numerous uprisings, accompanied by a long debate on the merits and demerits of land privatization which is still continuing today, revitalized by the World Bank's assault on the last planetary commons.

Briefly put, the argument proposed by "modernizers," from all political perspectives, is that the enclosures boosted agricultural efficiency, and the dislocations they produced were well compensated by a significant increase in agricultural productivity. It is claimed that the land was depleted and, if it had remained in the hands of the poor, it would have ceased to produce (anticipating Garret Hardin's "tragedy of the commons"),<sup>26</sup> while its takeover by the rich allowed it to rest. Coupled with agricultural innovation, the argument goes, the enclosures made the land more productive, leading to the expansion of the food supply. From this viewpoint, any praise for communal land tenure is dismissed as "nostalgia for the past," the assumption being that agricultural communalism is backward and inefficient, and that those who defend it are guilty of an undue attachment to tradition.<sup>27</sup>

But these arguments do not hold. Land privatization and the commercialization of agriculture did not increase the food supply available to the common people, though more food was made available for the market and for export. For workers they inaugurated two centuries of starvation, in the same way as today, even in the most fertile areas of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, malnutrition is rampant due to the destruction of communal land-tenure and the "export or perish" policy imposed by the World Bank's structural adjustment programs. Nor did the introduction of new agricultural techniques in England compensate for this loss. On the contrary, the development of agrarian capitalism "worked hand in glove" with the impoverishment of the rural population (Lis and Soly 1979: 102). A testimony to the misery produced by land privatization is the fact that, barely a century after the emergence of agrarian capitalism, sixty European towns had instituted some form of social assistance or were moving in this direction, and vagabondage had become an international problem (*ibid.*: 87). Population growth may have been a contributing factor; but its importance has been overstated, and should be circumscribed in time. By the last part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, almost everywhere in Europe, the population was stagnating or declining, but this time workers did not derive any benefit from the change.

There are also misconceptions about the effectiveness of the open-field system of agriculture. Neo-liberal historians have described it as wasteful, but even a supporter of land privatization like Jean De Vries recognizes that the communal use of agricultural fields had many advantages. It protected the peasants from harvest failure, due to the variety of strips to which a family had access; it also allowed for a manageable work-schedule (since each strip required attention at a different time); and it encouraged a democratic way of life, built on self-government and self-reliance, since all decisions — when



*Rural feast. All the festivals, games, and gatherings of the peasant community were held on the commons. 16<sup>th</sup>-century engraving by Daniel Hopfer.*

to plant or harvest, when to drain the fens, how many animals to allow on the commons — were taken by peasant assemblies.<sup>28</sup>

The same considerations apply to the “commons.” Disparaged in 16<sup>th</sup> century literature as a source of laziness and disorder, the commons were essential to the reproduction of many small farmers or cottars who survived only because they had access to meadows in which to keep cows, or woods in which to gather timber, wild berries and herbs, or quarries, fish-ponds, and open spaces in which to meet. Beside encouraging collective decision-making and work cooperation, the commons were the material foundation upon which peasant solidarity and sociality could thrive. All the festivals, games, and gatherings of the peasant community were held on the commons.<sup>29</sup> The social function of the commons was especially important for women, who, having less title to land and less social power, were more dependent on them for their subsistence, autonomy, and sociality. Paraphrasing Alice Clark’s statement about the importance of markets for women in pre-capitalist Europe, we can say that the commons too were for women the center of social life, the place where

they convened, exchanged news, took advice, and where a women's viewpoint on communal events, autonomous from that of men, could form (Clark 1968: 51).

This web of cooperative relations, which R. D. Tawney has referred to as the "primitive communism" of the feudal village, crumbled when the open-field system was abolished and the communal lands were fenced off (Tawney 1967). Not only did cooperation in agricultural labor die when land was privatized and individual labor contracts replaced collective ones; economic differences among the rural population deepened, as the number of poor squatters increased who had nothing left but a cot and a cow, and no choice but to go with "bended knee and cap in hand" to beg for a job (Secombe 1992). Social cohesion broke down;<sup>30</sup> families disintegrated, the youth left the village to join the increasing number of vagabonds or itinerant workers — soon to become the social problem of the age — while the elderly were left behind to fend for themselves. Particularly disadvantaged were older women who, no longer supported by their children, fell onto the poor rolls or survived by borrowing, petty theft, and delayed payments. The outcome was a peasantry polarized not only by the deepening economic inequalities, but by a web of hatred and resentments that is well-documented in the records of the witch-hunt, which show that quarrels relating to requests for help, the trespassing of animals, or unpaid rents were in the background of many accusations.<sup>31</sup>

The enclosures also undermined the economic situation of the artisans. In the same way in which multinational corporations take advantage of the peasants expropriated from their lands by the World Bank to construct "free export zones" where commodities are produced at the lowest cost, so, in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, merchant capitalists took advantage of the cheap labor-force that had been made available in the rural areas to break the power of the urban guilds and destroy the artisans' independence. This was especially the case in the textile industry that was reorganized as a rural cottage industry, and on the basis of the "putting out" system, the ancestor of today's "informal economy," also built on the labor of women and children.<sup>32</sup> But textile workers were not the only ones whose labor was cheapened. As soon as they lost access to land, all workers were plunged into a dependence unknown in medieval times, as their landless condition gave employers the power to cut their pay and lengthen the working-day. In Protestant areas this happened under the guise of religious reform, which doubled the work-year by eliminating the saints' days.

Not surprisingly, with land expropriation came a change in the workers' attitude towards the wage. While in the Middle Ages wages could be viewed as an instrument of freedom (in contrast to the compulsion of the labor services), as soon as access to land came to an end wages began to be viewed as instruments of enslavement (Hill 1975: 181ff).<sup>33</sup>

Such was the hatred that workers felt for waged labor that Gerrard Winstanley, the leader of the Diggers, declared that it that it did not make any difference whether one lived under the enemy or under one's brother, if one worked for a wage. This explains the growth, in the wake of the enclosures (using the term in a broad sense to include all forms of land privatization), of the number of "vagabonds" and "masterless" men, who preferred to take to the road and to risk enslavement or death — as prescribed by the "bloody" legislation passed against them — rather than to work for a wage.<sup>34</sup> It also explains the strenuous struggle which peasants made to defend their land from expropriation, no matter how meager its size.



In England, anti-enclosure struggles began in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century and continued throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, when levelling the enclosing hedges became "the most common species of social protest" and the symbol of class conflict (Manning 1988: 311). Anti-enclosure riots often turned into mass uprisings. The most notorious was Kett's Rebellion, named after its leader, Robert Kett, that took place in Norfolk in 1549. This was no small nocturnal affair. At its peak, the rebels numbered 16,000, had an artillery, defeated a government army of 12,000, and even captured Norwich, at the time the second largest city in England.<sup>35</sup> They also drafted a program that, if realized, would have checked the advance of agrarian capitalism and eliminated all vestiges of feudal power in the country. It consisted of twenty-nine demands that Kett, a farmer and tanner, presented to the Lord Protector. The first was that "from henceforth no man shall enclose any more." Other articles demanded that rents should be reduced to the rates that had prevailed sixty-five years before, that "all freeholders and copy holders may take the profits of all commons," and that "all bond-men may be made free, for god made all free with his precious blood shedding" (Fletcher 1973: 142-44). These demands were put into practice. Throughout Norfolk, enclosing hedges were uprooted, and only when another government army attacked them were the rebels stopped. Thirty-five hundred were slain in the massacre that followed. Hundreds more were wounded. Kett and his brother William were hanged outside Norwich's walls.

Anti-enclosure struggles continued, however, through the Jacobean period with a noticeable increase in the presence of women.<sup>36</sup> During the reign of James I, about ten percent of enclosure riots included women among the rebels. Some were all female protests. In 1607, for instance, thirty-seven women, led by a "Captain Dorothy," attacked coal miners working on what women claimed to be the village commons in Thorpe Moor (Yorkshire). Forty women went to "cast down the fences and hedges" of an enclosure in Waddingham (Lincolnshire) in 1608; and in 1609, on a manor of Dunchurch (Warwickshire) "fifteen women, including wives, widows, spinsters, unmarried daughters, and servants, took it upon themselves to assemble at night to dig up the hedges and level the ditches" (*ibid.*: 97). Again, at York in May 1624, women destroyed an enclosure and went to prison for it — they were said to have "enjoyed tobacco and ale after their feat" (Fraser 1984: 225-26). Then, in 1641, a crowd that broke into an enclosed fen at Buckden consisted mainly of women aided by boys (*ibid.*). And these were just a few instances of a confrontation in which women holding pitchforks and scythes resisted the fencing of the land or the draining of the fens when their livelihood was threatened.

This strong female presence has been attributed to the belief that women were above the law, being "covered" legally by their husbands. Even men, we are told, dressed like women to pull up the fences. But this explanation should not be taken too far. For the government soon eliminated this privilege, and started arresting and imprisoning women involved in anti-enclosure riots.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, we should not assume that women had no stake of their own in the resistance to land expropriation. The opposite was the case.

As with the commutation, women were those who suffered most when the land was lost and the village community fell apart. Part of the reason is that it was far more difficult for them to become vagabonds or migrant workers, for a nomadic life exposed them to male violence, especially at a time when misogyny was escalating. Women were also less mobile on account of pregnancies and the caring of children, a fact overlooked by

scholars who consider the flight from servitude (through migration and other forms of nomadism) the paradigmatic forms of struggle. Nor could women become soldiers for pay, though some joined armies as cooks, washers, prostitutes, and wives;<sup>38</sup> but by the 17<sup>th</sup> century this option too vanished, as armies were further regimented and the crowds of women that used to follow them were expelled from the battlefields (Kriedte 1983: 55).

Women were also more negatively impacted by the enclosures because as soon as land was privatized and monetary relations began to dominate economic life, they found it more difficult than men to support themselves, being increasingly confined to reproductive labor at the very time when this work was being completely devalued. As we will see, this phenomenon, which has accompanied the shift from a subsistence to a money-economy, in every phase of capitalist development, can be attributed to several factors. It is clear, however, that the commercialization of economic life provided the material conditions for it.

With the demise of the subsistence economy that had prevailed in pre-capitalist Europe, the unity of production and reproduction which has been typical of all societies based on production-for-use came to an end, as these activities became the carriers of different social relations and were sexually differentiated. In the new monetary regime, only



Entitled "Women and Knaves," this picture by Hans Sebald Beham (c. 1530) shows the train of women that used to follow the armies even to the battlefield. The women, including wives and prostitutes, took care of the reproduction of the soldiers. Notice the woman wearing a muzzling device.

production-for-market was defined as a value-creating activity, whereas the reproduction of the worker began to be considered as valueless from an economic viewpoint and even ceased to be considered as work. Reproductive work continued to be paid — though at the lowest rates — when performed for the master class or outside the home. But the economic importance of the reproduction of labor-power carried out in the home, and its function in the accumulation of capital became invisible, being mystified as a natural vocation and labelled “women’s labor.” In addition, women were excluded from many waged occupations and, when they worked for a wage, they earned a pittance compared to the average male wage.

These historic changes — that peaked in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the creation of the full-time housewife — redefined women’s position in society and in relation to men. The sexual division of labor that emerged from it not only fixed women to reproductive work, but increased their dependence on men, enabling the state and employers to use the male wage as a means to command women’s labor. In this way, the separation of commodity production from the reproduction of labor-power also made possible the development of a specifically capitalist use of the wage and of the markets as means for the accumulation of unpaid labor.

Most importantly, the separation of production from reproduction created a class of proletarian women who were as dispossessed as men but, unlike their male relatives, in a society that was becoming increasingly monetarized, had almost no access to wages, thus being forced into a condition of chronic poverty, economic dependence, and invisibility as workers.

As we will see, the devaluation and feminization of reproductive labor was a disaster also for male workers, for the devaluation of reproductive labor inevitably devalued its product: labor-power. But there is no doubt that in the “transition from feudalism to capitalism” women suffered a unique process of social degradation that was fundamental to the accumulation of capital and has remained so ever since.

Also in view of these developments, we cannot say, then, that the separation of the worker from the land and the advent of a money-economy realized the struggle which the medieval serfs had fought to free themselves from bondage. It was not the workers — male or female — who were liberated by land privatization. What was “liberated” was capital, as the land was now “free” to function as a means of accumulation and exploitation, rather than as a means of subsistence. Liberated were the landlords, who now could unload onto the workers most of the cost of their reproduction, giving them access to some means of subsistence only when directly employed. When work would not be available or would not be sufficiently profitable, as in times of commercial or agricultural crisis, workers, instead, could be laid off and left to starve.

The separation of workers from their means of subsistence and their new dependence on monetary relations also meant that the real wage could now be cut and women’s labor could be further devalued with respect to men’s through monetary manipulation. It is not a coincidence, then, that as soon as land began to be privatized, the prices of foodstuffs, which for two centuries had stagnated, began to rise.<sup>39</sup>

**The Price Revolution and the Pauperization of the European Working Class**

This “inflationary” phenomenon, which due to its devastating social consequences has been named the Price Revolution (Ramsey 1971), was attributed by contemporaries and later economists (e.g., Adam Smith) to the arrival of gold and silver from America, “pouring into Europe [through Spain] in a mammoth stream” (Hamilton 1965: vii). But it has been noted that prices had been rising before these metals started circulating through the European markets.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, in themselves, gold and silver are not capital, and could have been put to other uses, e.g., to make jewelry or golden cupolas or to embroider clothes. If they functioned as price-regulating devices, capable of turning even wheat into a precious commodity, this was because they were planted into a developing capitalist world, in which a growing percentage of the population — one-third in England (Laslett 1971: 53) — had no access to land and had to buy the food that they had once produced, and because the ruling class had learned to use the magical power of money to cut labor costs. In other words, prices rose because of the development of a national and international market-system encouraging the export-import of agricultural products, and because merchants hoarded goods to sell them later at a higher price. In September 1565, in Antwerp, “while the poor were literally starving in the streets,” a warehouse collapsed under the weight of the grain packed in it (Hackett Fischer 1996: 88).

It was under these circumstances that the arrival of the American treasure triggered a massive redistribution of wealth and a new proletarianization process.<sup>41</sup> Rising prices ruined the small farmers, who had to give up their land to buy grain or bread when the harvests could not feed their families, and created a class of capitalist entrepreneurs, who accumulated fortunes by investing in agriculture and money-lending, at a time when having money was for many people a matter of life or death.<sup>42</sup>

The Price Revolution also triggered a historic collapse in the real wage comparable to that which has occurred in our time throughout Africa, Asia, and Latin America, in the countries “structurally adjusted” by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. By 1600, real wages in Spain had lost thirty percent of their purchasing power with respect to what they had been in 1511 (Hamilton 1965: 280), and the collapse was just as sharp in other countries. While the price of food went up eight times, wages increased only by three times (Hackett Fischer 1996: 74). This was not the work of the invisible hand of the market, but the product of a state policy that prevented laborers from organizing, while giving merchants the maximum freedom with regard to the pricing and movement of goods. Predictably, within a few decades, the real wage lost two-thirds of its purchasing power, as shown by the changes that intervened in the daily wages of an English carpenter, expressed in kilograms of grain, between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century (Slicher Van Bath 1963: 327):

YEARS	KILOGRAMS OF GRAIN
1351-1400	121.8
1401-1450	155.1
1451-1500	143.5

1500-1550	122.4
1551-1600	83.0
1601-1650	48.3
1651-1700	74.1
1701-1750	94.6
1751-1800	79.6

It took centuries for wages in Europe to return to the level they had reached in the late Middle Ages. Things deteriorated to the point that, in England, by 1550, male artisans had to work forty weeks to earn the same income that, at the beginning of the century, they had been able to obtain in fifteen weeks. In France, [see graph, next page] wages dropped by sixty percent between 1470 and 1570 (Hackett Fischer 1996: 78).<sup>43</sup> The wage collapse was especially disastrous for women. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, they had received half the pay of a man for the same task; but by the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century they were receiving only one-third of the reduced male wage, and could no longer support themselves by wage-work, neither in agriculture nor in manufacturing, a fact undoubtedly responsible for the massive spread of prostitution in this period.<sup>44</sup> What followed was the absolute impoverishment of the European working class, a phenomenon so widespread and general that, by 1550 and long after, workers in Europe were referred to as simply “the poor.”

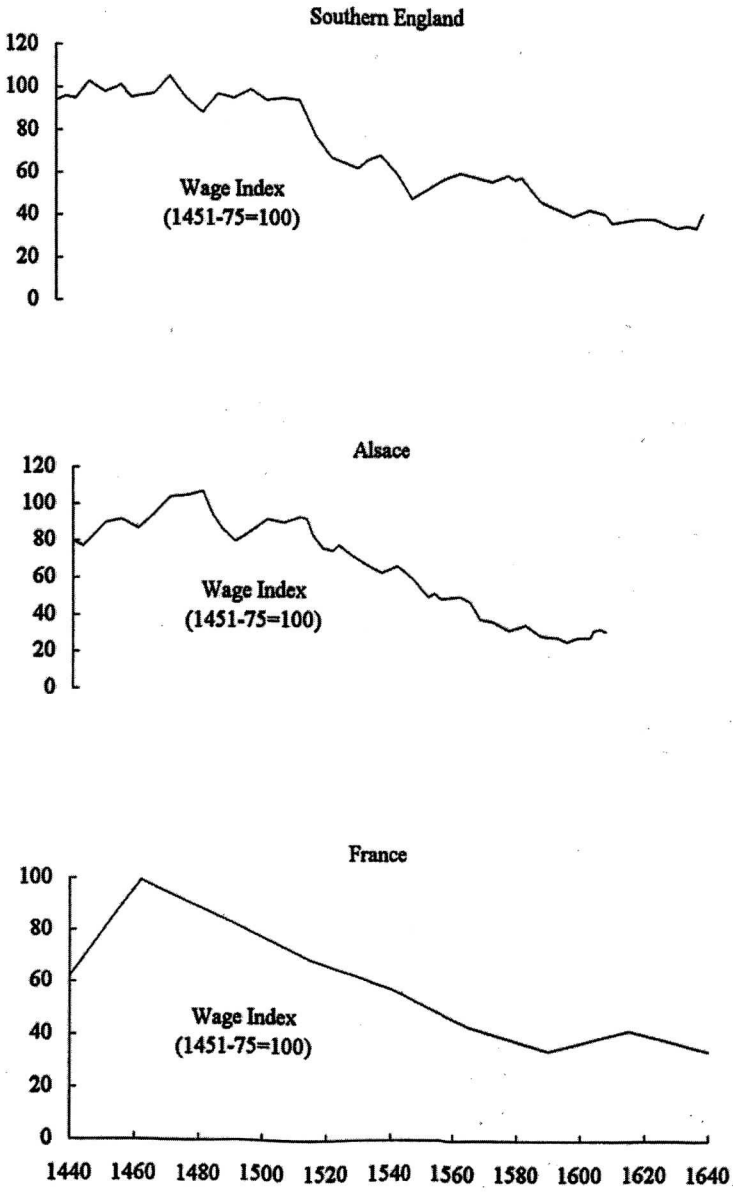
Evidence for this dramatic impoverishment is the change that occurred in the workers’ diets. Meat disappeared from their tables, except for a few scraps of lard, and so did beer and wine, salt and olive oil (Braudel 1973: 127ff; Le Roy Ladurie 1974). From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the workers’ diets consisted essentially of bread, the main expense in their budget. This was a historic setback (whatever we may think of dietary norms) compared to the abundance of meat that had typified the late Middle Ages. Peter Kriedte writes that at that time, the “annual meat consumption had reached the figure of 100 kilos per person, an incredible quantity even by today’s standards. Up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century this figure declined to less than twenty kilos” (Kriedte 1983: 52). Braudel too speaks of the end of “carnivorous Europe,” summoning as a witness the Swabian Heinrich Muller who, in 1550, commented that,

...in the past they ate differently at the peasant’s house. Then, there was meat and food in profusion every day; tables at village fairs and feasts sank under their load. Today, everything has truly changed. For some years, in fact, what a calamitous time, what high prices! And the food of the most comfortably off peasants is almost worse than that of day-labourers and valets previously” (Braudel 1973: 130).

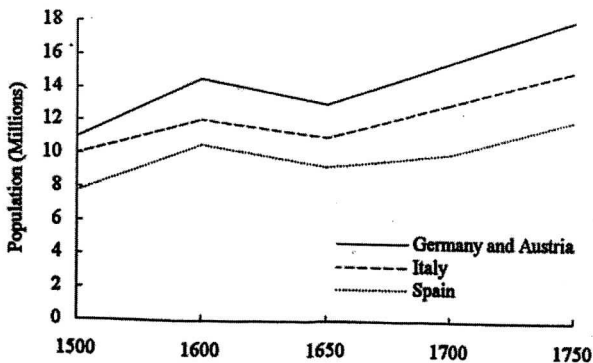
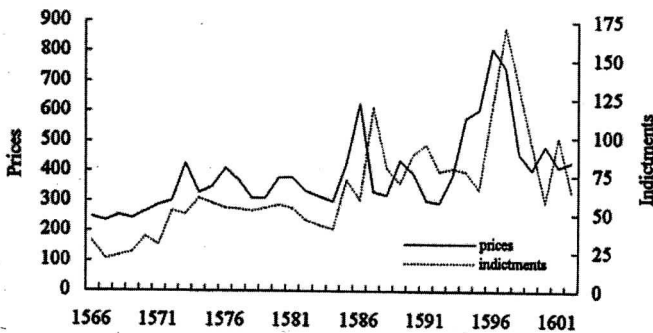
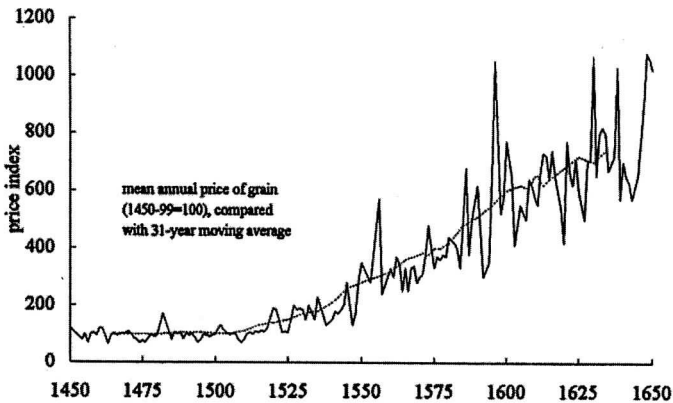
Not only did meat disappear, but food shortages became common, aggravated in times of harvest failure, when the scanty grain reserves sent the price of grain sky-high, condemning city dwellers to starvation (Braudel 1966, Vol. I: 328). This is what occurred in the famine years of the 1540s and 1550s, and again in the decades of the 1580s and 1590s, which were some of the worst in the history of the European proletariat, coinciding with widespread unrest and a record number of witch-trials. But malnutrition was



*Price Revolution and the Fall of the Real Wage, 1480–1640. The Price Revolution triggered a historic collapse in the real wage. Within a few decades, the real wage lost two-thirds of its purchasing power. The real wage did not return to the level it had reached in the 15<sup>th</sup> century until the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Phelps-Brown and Hopkins, 1981).*



The social consequences of the Price Revolution are revealed by these charts, which indicate, respectively, the rise in the price of grain in England between 1490 and 1650, the concomitant rise in prices and property crimes in Essex (England) between 1566 and 1602, and the population decline measured in millions in Germany, Austria, Italy and Spain between 1500 and 1750 (Hackett Fischer, 1996).



rampant also in normal times, so that food acquired a high symbolic value as a marker of rank. The desire for it among the poor reached epic proportions, inspiring dreams of Pantagruelian orgies, like those described by Rabelais in his *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1552), and causing nightmarish obsessions, such as the conviction (spread among north-eastern Italian farmers) that witches roamed the countryside at night to feed upon their cattle (Mazzali 1988: 73).

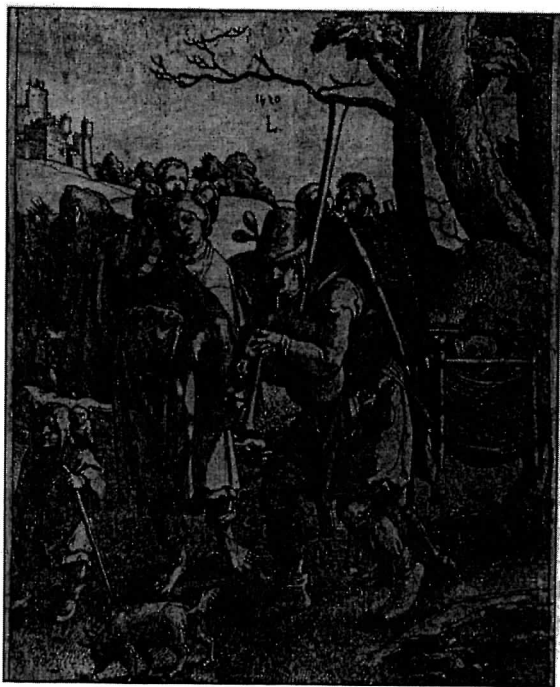
Indeed, the Europe that was preparing to become a Promethean world-mover, presumably taking humankind to new technological and cultural heights, was a place where people never had enough to eat. Food became an object of such intense desire that it was believed that the poor sold their souls to the devil to get their hands on it. Europe was also a place where, in times of bad harvests, country-folk fed upon acorns, wild roots, or the barks of trees, and multitudes roved the countryside weeping and wailing, "so hungry that they would devour the beans in the fields" (Le Roy Ladurie 1974); or they invaded the cities to benefit from grain distributions or to attack the houses and granaries of the rich who, in turn, rushed to get arms and shut the city gates to keep the starving out (Heller 1986: 56-63).

That the transition to capitalism inaugurated a long period of starvation for workers in Europe — which plausibly ended because of the economic expansion produced by colonization — is also demonstrated by the fact that, while in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the proletarian struggle had centered around the demand for "liberty" and less work, by the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, it was mostly spurred by hunger, taking the form of assaults on bakeries and granaries, and of riots against the export of local crops.<sup>45</sup> The authorities described those who participated in these attacks as "good for nothing" or "poor" and "humble people," but most were craftsmen, living, by this time, from hand to mouth.

It was the women who usually initiated and led the food revolts. Six of the thirty-one food riots in 17<sup>th</sup>-century France studied by Ives-Marie Bercé were made up exclusively of women. In the others the female presence was so conspicuous that Bercé calls them "women's riots."<sup>46</sup> Commenting on this phenomenon, with reference to 18<sup>th</sup>-century England, Sheila Rowbotham concluded that women were prominent in this type of protest because of their role as their families' caretakers. But women were also those most ruined by high prices for, having less access to money and employment than men, they were more dependent on cheap food for survival. This is why, despite their subordinate status, they took quickly to the streets when food prices went up, or when rumor spread that the grain supplies were being removed from town. This is what happened at the time of the Cordoba uprising of 1652, which started "early in the morning ... when a poor woman went weeping through the streets of the poor quarter, holding the body of her son who had died of hunger" (Kamen 1971: 364). The same occurred in Montpellier in 1645, when women took to the streets "to protect their children from starvation" (*ibid.*: 356). In France, women besieged the bakeries when they became convinced that grain was to be embezzled, or found out that the rich had bought the best bread and the remaining was lighter or more expensive. Crowds of poor women would then gather at the bakers' stalls, demanding bread and charging the bakers with hiding their supplies. Riots broke out also in the squares where grain markets were held, or along the routes taken by the carts with the corn to be exported, and "at the river banks where...boatmen could be seen loading the sacks." On these occasions the rioters

ambushed the carts... with pitchforks and sticks... the men carrying away the sacks, the women gathering as much grain as they could in their skirts" (Bercé 1990: 171–73).

The struggle for food was fought also by other means, such as poaching, stealing from one's neighbors' fields or homes, and assaults on the houses of the rich. In Troyes in 1523, rumor had it that the poor had put the houses of the rich on fire, preparing to invade them (Heller 1986: 55–56). At Malines, in the Low Countries, the houses of speculators were marked by angry peasants with blood (Hackett Fischer 1996: 88). Not surprisingly, "food crimes" loom large in the disciplinary procedures of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Exemplary is the recurrence of the theme of the "diabolical banquet" in the witch-trials, suggesting that feasting on roasted mutton, white bread, and wine was now considered a diabolic act in the case of the "common people." But the main weapons available to the poor in their struggle for survival were their own famished bodies, as in times of famine hordes of vagabonds and beggars surrounded the better off, half-dead of hunger and disease, grabbing their arms, exposing their wounds to them and, forcing them to live in a state of constant fear at the prospect of both contamination and revolt. "You cannot walk down a street or stop in a square — a Venetian man wrote in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century — without multitudes surrounding you to beg for charity: you see hunger



*Family of vagabonds.  
Engraving by Lucas van  
Leyden, 1520.*

written on their faces, their eyes like gemless rings, the wretchedness of their bodies with skins shaped only by bones" (*ibid.*: 88). A century later, in Florence, the scene was about the same. "[I]t was impossible to hear Mass," one G. Balducci complained, in April 1650, "so much was one importuned during the service by wretched people naked and covered with sores" (Braudel 1966, Vol. II: 734–35).<sup>47</sup>

### The State Intervention in the Reproduction of Labor: Poor Relief, and the Criminalization of the Working Class

The struggle for food was not the only front in the battle against the spread of capitalist relations. Everywhere masses of people resisted the destruction of their former ways of existence, fighting against land privatization, the abolition of customary rights, the imposition of new taxes, wage-dependence, and the continuous presence of armies in their neighborhoods, which was so hated that people rushed to close the gates of their towns to prevent soldiers from settling among them.

In France, one thousand "emotions" (uprisings) occurred between the 1530s and 1670s, many involving entire provinces and requiring the intervention of troops (Goubert 1986: 205). England, Italy, and Spain present a similar picture,<sup>48</sup> indicating that the pre-capitalist world of the village, which Marx dismissed under the rubric of "rural idiocy," could produce as high a level of struggle as any the industrial proletariat has waged.

In the Middle Ages, migration, vagabondage, and the rise of "crimes against property" were part of the resistance to impoverishment and dispossession; these phenomena now took on massive proportions. Everywhere — if we give credit to the complaints of the contemporary authorities — vagabonds were swarming, changing cities, crossing borders, sleeping in the haystacks or crowding at the gates of towns — a vast humanity involved in a diaspora of its own, that for decades escaped the authorities' control. Six thousand vagabonds were reported in Venice alone in 1545. "In Spain vagrants cluttered the road, stopping at every town" (Braudel, Vol. II: 740).<sup>49</sup> Starting with England, always a pioneer in these matters, the state passed new, far harsher anti-vagabond laws prescribing enslavement and capital punishment in cases of recidivism. But repression was not effective and the roads of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century Europe remained places of great (com)motion and encounters. Through them passed heretics escaping persecution, discharged soldiers, journeymen and other "humble folk" in search of employment, and then foreign artisans, evicted peasants, prostitutes, hucksters, petty thieves, professional beggars. Above all, through the roads of Europe passed the tales, stories, and experiences of a developing proletariat. Meanwhile, the crime rates also escalated, in such proportions that we can assume that a massive reclamation and reappropriation of the stolen communal wealth was underway.<sup>50</sup>

Today, these aspects of the transition to capitalism may seem (for Europe at least) things of the past or — as Marx put it in the *Grundrisse* (1973: 459) — "historical preconditions" of capitalist development, to be overcome by more mature forms of capitalism. But the essential similarity between these phenomena and the social consequences of the new phase of globalization that we are witnessing tells us otherwise. Pauperization, rebellion, and the escalation of "crime" are structural elements of capitalist accumulation as capitalism must strip the work-force from its means of reproduction to impose its own rule.





*Vagrant being whipped through the streets.*

That in the industrializing regions of Europe, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the most extreme forms of proletarian misery and rebellion had disappeared is not a proof against this claim. Proletarian misery and rebellions did not come to an end; they only lessened to the degree that the super-exploitation of workers had been exported, through the institutionalization of slavery, at first, and later through the continuing expansion of colonial domination.

As for the “transition” period, this remained in Europe a time of intense social conflict, providing the stage for a set of state initiatives that, judging from their effects, had three main objectives: (a) to create a more disciplined work-force; (b) to diffuse social protest; and (c) to fix workers to the jobs forced upon them. Let us look at them in turn.

In pursuit of social discipline, an attack was launched against all forms of collective sociality and sexuality including sports, games, dances, ale-wakes, festivals, and other group-rituals that had been a source of bonding and solidarity among workers. It was sanctioned by a deluge of bills: twenty-five, in England, just for the regulation of ale-houses, in the years between 1601 and 1606 (Underdown 1985: 47–48). Peter Burke (1978), in his work on the subject, has spoken of it as a campaign against “popular culture.” But we can see that what was at stake was the desocialization or decollectivization of the reproduction of the work-force, as well as the attempt to impose a more productive use of leisure time. This process, in England, reached its climax with the coming to power of the Puritans in the aftermath of the Civil War (1642–49), when the fear of

social indiscipline prompted the banning of all proletarian gatherings and merrymaking. But the "moral reformation" was equally intense in non-Protestant areas where, in the same period, religious processions were replacing the dancing and singing that had been held in and out of the churches. Even the individual's relation with God was privatized: in Protestant areas, with the institution of a direct relationship between the individual and the divinity; in the Catholic areas, with the introduction of individual confession. The church itself, as a community center, ceased to host any social activity other than those addressed to the cult. As a result, the physical enclosure operated by land privatization and the hedging of the commons was amplified by a process of social enclosure, the reproduction of workers shifting from the openfield to the home, from the community to the family, from the public space (the common, the church) to the private.<sup>51</sup>

Secondly, in the decades between 1530 and 1560, a system of public assistance was introduced in at least sixty European towns, both by initiative of the local municipalities and by direct intervention of the central state.<sup>52</sup> Its precise goals are still debated. While much of the literature on the topic sees the introduction of public assistance as a response to a humanitarian crisis that jeopardized social control, in his massive study of coerced labor, the French Marxist scholar Yann Moulier Boutang insists that its primary objective was "The Great Fixation" of the proletariat, that is, the attempt to prevent the flight of labor.<sup>53</sup>

In any event, the introduction of public assistance was a turning point in the state relation between workers and capital and the definition of the function of the state. It was the first recognition of the *unsustainability* of a capitalist system ruling exclusively by means of hunger and terror. It was also the first step in the reconstruction of the state as the guarantor of the class relation and as the chief supervisor of the reproduction and disciplining of the work-force.

Antecedents for this function can be found in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when faced with the generalization of the anti-feudal struggle, the state had emerged as the only agency capable of confronting a working class that was regionally unified, armed, and no longer confined in its demands to the political economy of the manor. In 1351, with the passing of the Statute of Laborers in England, which fixed the maximum wage, the state had formally taken charge of the regulation and repression of labor, which the local lords were no longer capable of guaranteeing. But it was with the introduction of public assistance that the state began to claim "ownership" of the work-force, and a capitalist "division of labor" was instituted within the ruling class, enabling employers to relinquish any responsibility for the reproduction of workers, in the certainty that the state would intervene, either with the carrot or with the stick, to address the inevitable crises. With this innovation, a leap occurred also in the management of social reproduction, resulting in the introduction of demographic recording (census-taking, the recording of mortality, natality, marriage rates) and the application of accounting to social relations. Exemplary is the work of the administrators of the Bureau de Pauvres in Lyon (France), who by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century had learned to calculate the number of the poor, assess the amount of food needed by each child or adult, and keep track of the deceased, to make sure that nobody could claim assistance in the name of a dead person (Zemon Davis 1968: 244-46).

Along with this new "social science," an international debate also developed on the administration of public assistance anticipating the contemporary debate on welfare. Should

only those unable to work, described as the “deserving poor,” be supported, or should “able-bodied” laborers unable to find a job also be given help? And how much or how little should they be given, so as not to be discouraged from looking for work? These questions were crucial from the viewpoint of social discipline, as a key objective of public aid was to tie workers to their jobs. But, on these matters a consensus could rarely be reached.

While humanist reformers like Juan Luis Vives<sup>54</sup> and spokesmen for the wealthy burghers recognized the economic and disciplinary benefits of a more liberal and centralized dispensation of charity (not exceeding the distribution of bread, however), part of the clergy strenuously opposed the ban on individual donations. But, across differences of systems and opinions, assistance was administered with such stinginess that it generated as much conflict as appeasement. Those assisted resented the humiliating rituals imposed on them, like wearing the “mark of infamy” (previously reserved for lepers and Jews), or (in France) participating in the annual processions of the poor, in which they had to parade singing hymns and holding candles; and they vehemently protested when the alms were not promptly given or were inadequate to their needs. In response, in some French towns, gibbets were erected at the time of food distributions or when the poor were asked to work in exchange for the food they received (Zemon Davis, 1968: 249). In England, as the 16<sup>th</sup> century progressed, receipt of public aid — also for children and the elderly — was made conditional on the incarceration of the recipients in “work-houses,” where they became the experimental subjects for a variety of work-schemes.<sup>55</sup> Consequently, the attack on workers, that had begun with the enclosures and the Price Revolution, in the space of a century, led to the *criminalization of the working class*, that is, the formation of a vast proletariat either incarcerated in the newly constructed work-houses and correction-houses, or seeking its survival outside the law and living in open antagonism to the state — always one step away from the whip and the noose.

From the viewpoint of the formation of a laborious work-force, this was a decisive failure, and the constant preoccupation with the question of social discipline in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century political circles indicates that the contemporary statesmen and entrepreneurs were keenly aware of it. Moreover, the social crisis that this general state of rebelliousness provoked was aggravated in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century by a new economic contraction, in great part caused by the dramatic population decline that occurred in Spanish America after the Conquest, and the shrinking of the colonial economies.

### Population Decline, Economic Crisis, and the Disciplining of Women

Within less than century from the landing of Columbus on the American continent, the colonizers’ dream of an infinite supply of labor (echoing the explorers’ estimate of an “infinite number of trees” in the forests of the Americas) was dashed.

Europeans had brought death to America. Estimates of the population collapse which affected the region in the wake of the colonial invasion vary. But scholars almost unanimously liken its effects to an “American Holocaust.” According to David Stannard (1992), in the century after the Conquest, the population declined by 75 million across

South America, representing 95% of its inhabitants (1992: 268–305). This is also the estimate of André Gunder Frank who writes that “within little more than a century, the Indian population declined by ninety percent and even ninety-five percent in Mexico, Peru, and some other regions” (1978: 43). In Mexico, the population fell “from 11 million in 1519 to 6.5 million in 1565 to about 2.5 million in 1600” (Wallerstein 1974: 89n). By 1580 “disease... assisted by Spanish brutality, had killed off or driven away most of the people of the Antilles and the lowlands of New Spain, Peru and the Caribbean littoral” (Crosby:1972:38), and it would soon wipe out many more in Brazil. The clergy rationalized this “holocaust” as God’s punishment for the Indians’ “bestial” behavior (Williams 1986: 138); but its economic consequences were not ignored. In addition, by the 1580s, population began to decline also in western Europe, and continued to do so into the 17<sup>th</sup> century, reaching a peak in Germany where one third of the population was lost.<sup>56</sup>

With the exception of the Black Death (1345–1348), this was a population crisis without precedents, and statistics, as awful as they are, tell only a part of the story. Death struck at “the poor.” It was not the rich, for the most part, who perished when the plague or the smallpox swept the towns, but craftsmen, day-laborers and vagabonds (Kamen 1972: 32–33). They died in such numbers that their bodies paved the streets, and the authorities denounced the existence of a conspiracy, instigating the population to hunt for the malefactors. But the population decline was also blamed on low natality rates and the reluctance of the poor to reproduce themselves. To what extent this charge was justified is difficult to tell, since demographic recording, before the 17<sup>th</sup> century, was rather uneven. But we know that by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the age of marriage was increasing in all social classes, and that, in the same period, the number of abandoned children — a new phenomenon — started to grow. We also have the complaints of ministers who from the pulpit charged that the youth did not marry and procreate, in order not to bring more mouths into the world than they could feed.

The peak of the demographic and economic crisis were the decades of the 1620s and 1630s. In Europe, as in the colonies, markets shrank, trade stopped, unemployment became widespread, and for a while there was the possibility that the developing capitalist economy might crash. For the integration between the colonial and European economies had reached a point where the reciprocal impact of the crisis rapidly accelerated its course. This was the first international economic crisis. It was a “General Crisis,” as historians have called it (Kamen 1972: 307ff.; Hackett Fischer 1996: 91).

It is in this context that the question of the relation between labor, population, and the accumulation of wealth came to the foreground of political debate and strategy to produce the first elements of a population policy and a “bio-power” regime.<sup>57</sup> The crudeness of the concepts applied, often confusing “populousness” with “population,” and the brutality of the means by which the state began to punish any behavior obstructing population growth, should not deceive us in this respect. It is my contention that it was the population crisis of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, not the end of famine in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> (as Foucault has argued) that turned reproduction and population growth into state matters, as well as primary objects of intellectual discourse.<sup>58</sup> I further argue that the intensification of the persecution of “witches,” and the new disciplinary methods that the state adopted in this period to regulate procreation and break women’s control over reproduction, are also to be traced to this crisis. The evidence for this argument is circumstan-

tial, and it should be recognized that other factors contributed to increase the determination of the European power-structure to control more strictly women's reproductive function. Among them, we must include the increasing privatization of property and economic relations that (within the bourgeoisie) generated a new anxiety concerning the question of paternity and the conduct of women. Similarly, in the charge that witches sacrificed children to the devil — a key theme in the "great witch-hunt" of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries — we can read not only a preoccupation with population decline, but also the fear of the propertied classes with regard to their subordinates, particularly low-class women who, as servants, beggars or healers, had many opportunities to enter their employers' houses and cause them harm. It cannot be a pure coincidence, however, that at the very moment when population was declining, and an ideology was forming that stressed the centrality of labor in economic life, severe penalties were introduced in the legal codes of Europe to punish women guilty of reproductive crimes.

The concomitant development of a population crisis, an expansionist population theory, and the introduction of policies promoting population growth is well-documented. By the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century the idea that the number of citizens determines a nation's wealth had become something of a social axiom. "In my view," wrote the French political thinker and demonologist Jean Bodin, "one should never be afraid of having too many subjects or too many citizens, for the strength of the commonwealth consists in men" (*Commonwealth*, Book VI). The Italian economist Giovanni Botero (1533-1617) had a more sophisticated approach, recognizing the need for a balance between the number of people and the means of subsistence. Still, he declared that that "the greatness of a city" did not depend on its physical size or the circuit of its walls, but exclusively on the number of its residents. Henry IV's saying that "the strength and wealth of a king lie in the number and opulence of his citizens" sums up the demographic thought of the age.

Concern with population growth is detectable also in the program of the Protestant Reformation. Dismissing the traditional Christian exaltation of chastity, the Reformers valorized marriage, sexuality, and even women because of their reproductive capacity. Woman is "needed to bring about the increase of the human race," Luther conceded, reflecting that "whatever their weaknesses, women possess one virtue that cancels them all: they have a womb and they can give birth" (King 1991: 115).

Support for population growth climaxed with the rise of Mercantilism which made the presence of a large population the key to the prosperity and power of a nation. Mercantilism has often been dismissed by mainstream economists as a crude system of thought because of its assumption that the wealth of nations is proportional to the quantity of laborers and money available to them. The brutal means which the mercantilists applied in order to force people to work, in their hunger for labor, have contributed to their disrepute, as most economists wish to maintain the illusion that capitalism fosters freedom rather than coercion. It was a mercantilist class that invented the work-houses, hunted down vagabonds, "transported" criminals to the American colonies, and invested in the slave trade, all the while asserting the "utility of poverty" and declaring "idleness" a social plague. Thus, it has not been recognized that in the mercantilists' theory and practice we find the most direct expression of the requirements of primitive accumulation and the first capitalist policy explicitly addressing the problem of the reproduction of the work-force. This policy, as we have seen, had an "intensive" side consisting in the imposition of a total-

itarian regime using every means to extract the maximum of work from every individual, regardless of age and condition. But it also had an "extensive one" consisting in the effort to expand the size of population, and thereby the size of the army and the work-force.

As Eli Hecksher noted, "an almost fanatical desire to increase population prevailed in all countries during the period when mercantilism was at its height, in the later part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century" (Heckscher 1966: 158). Along with it, a new concept of human beings also took hold, picturing them as just raw materials, workers and breeders for the state (Spengler 1965: 8). But even prior to the heyday of mercantile theory, in France and England the state adopted a set of pro-natalist measures that, combined with Public Relief, formed the embryo of a capitalist reproductive policy. Laws were passed that put a premium on marriage and penalized celibacy, modeled on those adopted by the late Roman Empire for this purpose. The family was given a new importance as the key institution providing for the transmission of property and the reproduction of the work-force. Simultaneously, we have the beginning of demographic recording and the intervention of the state in the supervision of sexuality, procreation, and family life.

But the main initiative that the state took to restore the desired population ratio was the launching of a true war against women clearly aimed at breaking the control they had exercised over their bodies and reproduction. As we will see later in this volume, this war was waged primarily through the witch-hunt that literally demonized any form of birth-control and non-procreative sexuality, while charging women with sacrificing children to the devil. But it also relied on the redefinition of what constitutes a reproductive crime. Thus, starting in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, while Portuguese ships were returning from Africa with their first human cargoes, all the European governments began to impose the severest penalties against contraception, abortion and infanticide.

This last practice had been treated with some leniency in the Middle Ages, at least in the case of poor women; but now it was turned into a capital crime, and punished more harshly than the majority of male crimes.

In sixteenth century Nuremberg, the penalty for maternal infanticide was drowning; in 1580, the year in which the severed heads of three women convicted of maternal infanticide were nailed to the scaffold for public contemplation, the penalty was changed to beheading (King 1991: 10).<sup>60</sup>

New forms of surveillance were also adopted to ensure that pregnant women did not terminate their pregnancies. In France, a royal edict of 1556 required women to register every pregnancy, and sentenced to death those whose infants died before baptism after a concealed delivery, whether or not proven guilty of any wrongdoing. Similar statutes were passed in England and Scotland in 1624 and 1690. A system of spies was also created to surveil unwed mothers and deprive them of any support. Even hosting an unmarried pregnant woman was made illegal, for fear that she might escape the public scrutiny; while those who befriended her were exposed to public criticism (Wiesner 1993: 51-52; Ozment 1983: 43).

As a consequence women began to be prosecuted in large numbers, and more were executed for infanticide in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century Europe than for any other crime,

except for witchcraft, a charge that also centered on the killing of children and other violations of reproductive norms. Significantly, in the case of both infanticide and witchcraft, the statutes limiting women's legal responsibility were lifted. Thus, women walked, for the first time, into the courtrooms of Europe, in their own name as legal adults, under charge of being witches and child murderers. Also the suspicion under which midwives came in this period — leading to the entrance of the male doctor into the delivery room — stemmed more from the authorities' fears of infanticide than from any concern with the midwives' alleged medical incompetence.

With the marginalization of the midwife, the process began by which women lost the control they had exercised over procreation, and were reduced to a passive role in child delivery, while male doctors came to be seen as the true "givers of life" (as in the alchemical dreams of the Renaissance magicians). With this shift, a new medical practice also prevailed, one that in the case of a medical emergency prioritized the life of the fetus over that of the mother. This was in contrast to the customary birthing process which women had controlled; and indeed, for it to happen, the community of women that had gathered around the bed of the future mother had to be first expelled from the delivery room, and midwives had to be placed under the surveillance of the doctor, or had to be recruited to police women.

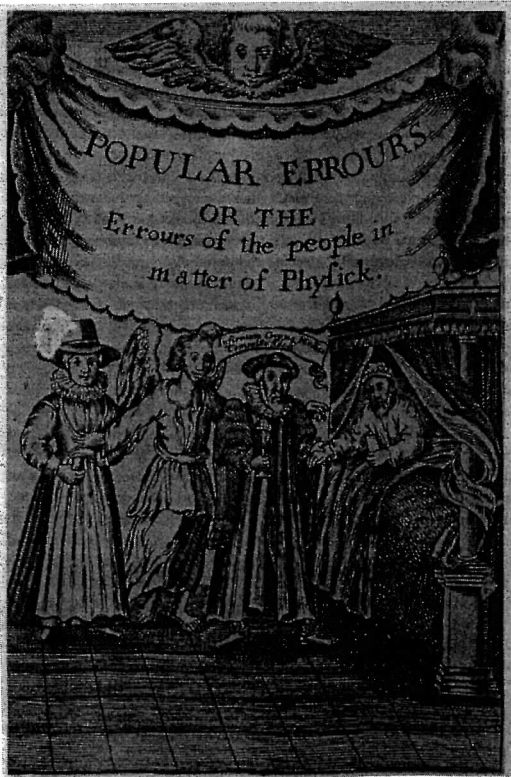
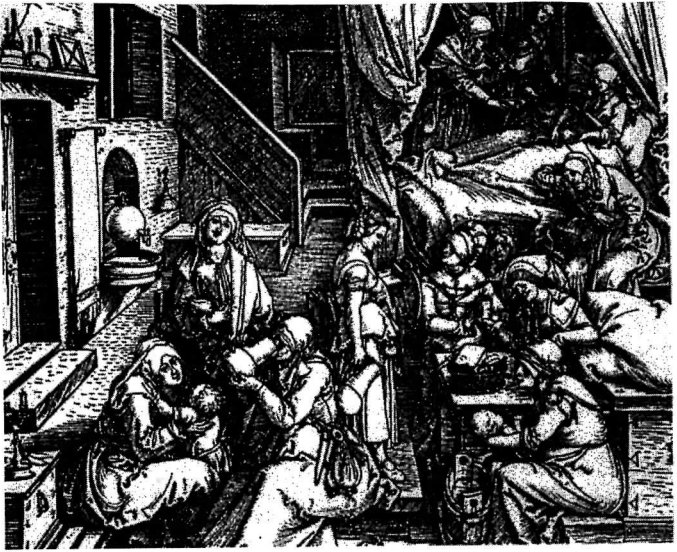
In France and Germany, midwives had to become spies for the state, if they wanted to continue their practice. They were expected to report all new births, discover the fathers of children born out of wedlock, and examine the women suspected of having given secret birth. They also had to examine suspected local women for any sign of lactation when foundlings were discovered on the Church's steps (Wiesner 1933: 52). The same type of collaboration was demanded of relatives and neighbors. In Protestant countries and towns, neighbors were supposed to spy on women and report all relevant sexual details: if a woman received a man when her husband was away, or if she entered a house with a man and shut the door behind her (Ozment 1983: 42–44). In Germany, the pro-natalist crusade reached such a point that women were punished if they did not make enough of an effort during child-delivery or showed little enthusiasm for their offspring (Rublack 1996: 92).

The outcome of these policies that lasted for two centuries (women were still being executed in Europe for infanticide at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century) was the enslavement of women to procreation. While in the Middle Ages women had been able to use various forms of contraceptives, and had exercised an undisputed control over the birthing process, from now on their wombs became public territory, controlled by men and the state, and procreation was directly placed at the service of capitalist accumulation.

In this sense, the destiny of West European women, in the period of primitive accumulation, was similar to that of female slaves in the American colonial plantations who, especially after the end of the slave-trade in 1807, were forced by their masters to become breeders of new workers. The comparison has obviously serious limits. European women were not openly delivered to sexual assaults — though proletarian women could be raped with impunity and punished for it. Nor had they to suffer the agony of seeing their children taken away and sold on the auction block. The economic profit derived from the births imposed upon them was also far more concealed. In this sense, it is the condition of the enslaved woman that most explicitly reveals the truth



Albrecht  
Dürer, *THE  
BIRTH OF THE  
VIRGIN*  
(1502-1503).  
Child-birth  
was one of the  
main events in  
the life of a  
woman and an  
occasion in  
which female  
cooperation tri-  
umphed.



The masculinization of  
medical practice is por-  
trayed in this English  
design picturing an  
angel pushing a female  
healer away from the  
bed of a sick man. The  
banner denounces her  
incompetence.

and the logic of capitalist accumulation. But despite the differences, in both cases, the female body was turned into an instrument for the reproduction of labor and the expansion of the work-force, treated as a natural breeding-machine, functioning according to rhythms outside of women's control.

This aspect of primitive accumulation is absent in Marx's analysis. Except for his remarks in the *Communist Manifesto* on the use of women within the bourgeois family — as producers of heirs guaranteeing the transmission of family property — Marx never acknowledged that procreation could become a terrain of exploitation and by the same token a terrain of resistance. He never imagined that women could refuse to reproduce, or that such a refusal could become part of class struggle. In the *Grundrisse* (1973: 100) he argued that capitalist development proceeds irrespective of population numbers because, by virtue of the increasing productivity of labor, the labor that capital exploits constantly diminishes in relation to "constant capital" (that is, the capital invested in machinery and other production assets), with the consequent determination of a "surplus population." But this dynamic, which Marx defines as the "law of population typical of the capitalist mode of production" (*Capital*, Vol. 1: 689ff.), could only prevail if procreation were a purely biological process, or an activity responding automatically to economic change, and if capital and the state did not need to worry about "women going on strike against child making." This, in fact, is what Marx assumed. He acknowledged that capitalist development has been accompanied by an increase in population, of which he occasionally discussed the causes. But, like Adam Smith, he saw this increase as a "natural effect" of economic development, and in *Capital*, Vol. 1, he repeatedly contrasted the determination of a "surplus population" with the population's "natural increase." Why procreation should be "a fact of nature" rather than a social, historically determined activity, invested by diverse interests and power relations, is a question Marx did not ask. Nor did he imagine that men and women might have different interests with respect to child-making, an activity which he treated as a gender-neutral, undifferentiated process.

In reality, so far are procreation and population changes from being automatic or "natural" that, in all phases of capitalist development, the state has had to resort to regulation and coercion to expand or reduce the work-force. This was especially true at the time of the capitalist take-off, when the muscles and bones of workers were the primary means of production. But even later — down to the present — the state has spared no efforts in its attempt to wrench from women's hands the control over reproduction, and to determine which children should be born, where, when, or in what numbers. Consequently, women have often been forced to procreate against their will, and have experienced an alienation from their bodies, their "labor," and even their children, deeper than that experienced by any other workers (Martin 1987: 19-21). No one can describe in fact the anguish and desperation suffered by a woman seeing her body turn against herself, as it must occur in the case of an unwanted pregnancy. This is particularly true in those situations in which out-of-wedlock pregnancies are penalized, and when having a child makes a woman vulnerable to social ostracism or even death.

## The Devaluation of Women's Labor

The criminalization of women's control over procreation is a phenomenon whose importance cannot be overemphasized, both from the viewpoint of its effects on women and its consequences for the capitalist organization of work. As is well documented, through the Middle Ages women had possessed many means of contraception, mostly consisting of herbs which turned into potions and "pessaries" (suppositories) were used to quicken a woman's period, provoke an abortion, or create a condition of sterility. In *Eve's Herbs: A History of Contraception in the West* (1997), the American historian John Riddle has given us an extensive catalogue of the substances that were most used and the effects expected of them or most likely to occur.<sup>61</sup> The criminalization of contraception expropriated women from this knowledge that had been transmitted from generation to generation, giving them some autonomy with respect to child-birth. It appears that, in some cases, this knowledge was not lost but was only driven underground; yet when birth control again made its appearance on the social scene, contraceptive methods were no longer of the type that women could use, but were specifically created for use by men. What demographic consequences followed from this shift is a question that for the moment I will not pursue, though I refer to Riddle's work for a discussion of this matter. Here I only want to stress that by denying women control over their bodies, the state deprived them of the most fundamental condition for physical and psychological integrity and degraded maternity to the status of forced labor, in addition to confining women to reproductive work in a way unknown in previous societies. Nevertheless, forcing women to procreate against their will or (as a feminist song from the 1970s had it) forcing them to "produce children for the state,"<sup>62</sup> only in part defined women's function in the new sexual division of labor. A complementary aspect was the definition of women as non-workers, a process much studied by feminist historians, which by the end of the 17th century was nearly completed.

By this time women were losing ground even with respect to jobs that had been their prerogatives, such as ale-brewing and midwifery, where their employment was subjected to new restrictions. Proletarian women in particular found it difficult to obtain any job other than those carrying the lowest status: as domestic servants (the occupation of a third of the female work-force), farm-hands, spinners, knitters, embroiderers, hawkers, wet nurses. As Merry Wiesner (among others) tells us, the assumption was gaining ground (in the law, in the tax records, in the ordinances of the guilds) that women should not work outside the home, and should engage in "production" only in order to help their husbands. It was even argued that any work that women did at home was "non-work" and was worthless even when done for the market (Wiesner 1993: 83ff). Thus, if a woman sewed some clothes it was "domestic work" or "housekeeping," even if the clothes were not for the family, whereas when a man did the same task it was considered "productive." Such was the devaluation of women's labor that city governments told the guilds to overlook the production that women (especially widows) did in their homes, because it was not real work, and because the women needed it not to fall on public relief. Wiesner adds that women accepted this fiction and even apologized for asking to work, pleading for it on account of their need to support themselves (*ibid.*:

The prostitute and the soldier. Often a camp follower, the prostitute performed the function of a wife for soldiers and other proletarians, washing and cooking for the men she served in addition to providing sexual services.



A prostitute inviting a client. The number of prostitutes increased immensely in the aftermath of land privatization and the commercialization of agriculture which expelled many peasant women from the land.

84–85). Soon all female work, if done in the home, was defined as “housekeeping,” and even when done outside the home it was paid less than men’s work, and never enough for women to be able to live by it. Marriage was now seen as a woman’s true career, and women’s inability to support themselves was taken so much for granted, that when a single woman tried to settle in a village, she was driven away even if she earned a wage.

Combined with land dispossession, this loss of power with regard to wage employment led to the massification of prostitution. As Le Roy Ladurie reports, the growth in the number of prostitutes was visible, in France, everywhere:

From Avignon to Narbonne to Barcelona “sporting women” (*femmes de debauché*) stationed themselves at the gates of the cities, in streets of red-light districts... and on the bridges... [so that] by 1594 the “shameful traffic” was flourishing as never before (Le RoyLadurie 1974: 112–13).

The situation was similar in England and Spain, where, everyday, in the cities, poor women arriving from the countryside, and even the wives of craftsmen, rounded up the family income with this work. A proclamation issued by the political authorities in Madrid, in 1631, denounced the problem, complaining that many vagabond women were now wandering among the city’s streets, alleys, and taverns, enticing men to sin with them (Vigil 1986: 114–5). But no sooner had prostitution become the main form of subsistence for a large female population than the institutional attitude towards it changed. Whereas in the late Middle Ages it had been officially accepted as a necessary evil, and prostitutes had benefited from the high wage regime, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the situation was reversed. In a climate of intense misogyny, characterized by the advance of the Protestant Reformation and witch-hunting, prostitution was first subjected to new restrictions and then criminalized. Everywhere, between 1530 and 1560, town brothels were closed and prostitutes, especially street-walkers, were subjected to severe penalties: banishment, flogging, and other cruel forms of chastisement. Among them was “the ducking stool” or *acabussade* — “a piece of grim theatre,” as Nickie Roberts describes it — whereby the victims were tied up, sometimes they were forced into a cage, and then were repeatedly immersed in rivers or ponds, till they almost drowned (Roberts 1992: 115–16). Meanwhile, in 16<sup>th</sup>-century France, the raping of a prostitute ceased to be a crime.<sup>63</sup> In Madrid, as well, it was decided that female vagabonds and prostitutes should not be allowed to stay and sleep in the streets and under the porticos of the town, and if caught should be given a hundred lashes, and then should be banned from the city for six years in addition to having their heads and eyebrows shaved.

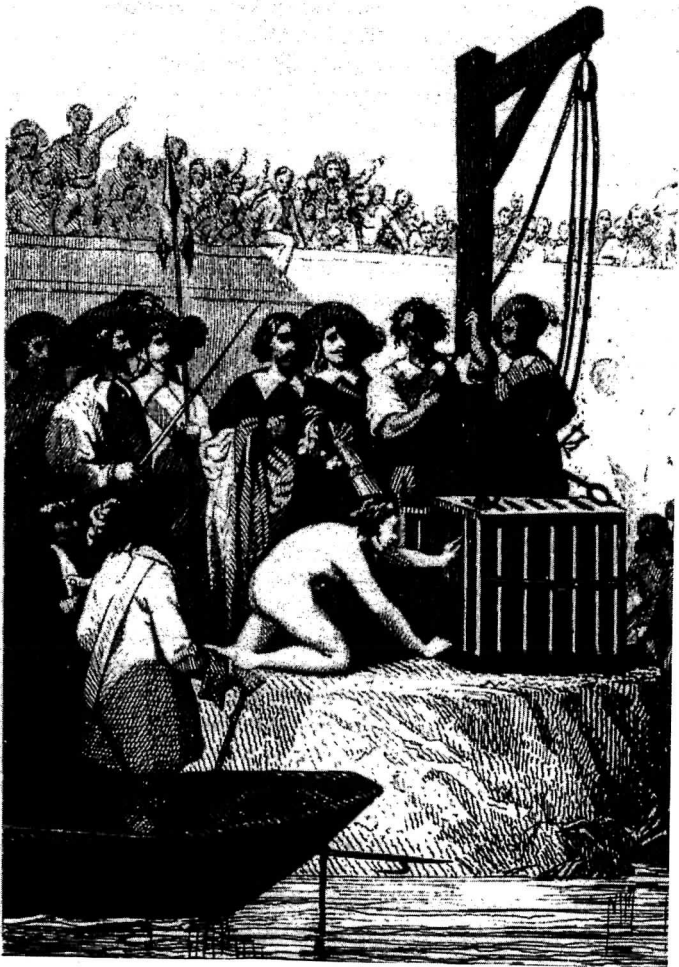
What can account for this drastic attack on female workers? And how does the exclusion of women from the sphere of socially recognized work and monetary relations relate to the imposition of forced maternity upon them, and the contemporary massification of the witch-hunt?

Looking at these phenomena from the vantage point of the present, after four centuries of capitalist disciplining of women, the answers may seem to impose themselves. Though women’s waged work, housework, and (paid) sexual work are still studied all too often in isolation from each other, we are now in a better position to see that the discrimination that women have suffered in the waged work-force has been directly rooted

in their function as unpaid laborers in the home. We can thus connect the banning of prostitution and the expulsion of women from the organized workplace with the creation of the housewife and the reconstruction of the family as the locus for the production of labor-power. However, from a theoretical and a political viewpoint, the fundamental question is under what conditions such degradation was possible, and what social forces promoted it or were complicitous with it.

The answer here is that an important factor in the devaluation of women's labor was the campaign that craft workers mounted, starting in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, to exclude female workers from their work-shops, presumably to protect themselves from the assaults of the capitalist merchants who were employing women at cheaper rates. The craftsmen's efforts have left an abundant trail of evidence.<sup>64</sup> Whether in Italy, France, or Germany, journeymen petitioned the authorities not to allow women

*A prostitute being subjected to the torture of the accabusade. "She will be submerged in the river several times and then imprisoned for life."*



*Like the “battle for the breeches,” the image of the domineering wife challenging the sexual hierarchy and beating her husband was one of the favorite targets of 16th and 17th-century social literature.*



to compete with them, banned them from their ranks, went on strike when the ban was not observed, and even refused to work with men who worked with women. It appears that the craftsmen were also interested in limiting women to domestic work because, given their economic difficulties, “the prudent household management on the part of a wife” was becoming for them an indispensable condition for avoiding bankruptcy and for keeping an independent shop. Sigrid Brauner (the author of the above citation) speaks of the importance accorded by the German artisans to this social rule (Brauner 1995: 96–97). Women tried to resist this onslaught, but — faced with the intimidating tactics male workers used against them — failed. Those who dared to work out of the home, in a public space and for the market, were portrayed as sexually aggressive shrews or even as “whores” and “witches” (Howell 1986: 182–83).<sup>65</sup> Indeed, there is evidence that the wave of misogyny that by the late 15<sup>th</sup> century was mounting in the European cities — reflected in the male obsession with the “battle for the breeches” and with the character of the disobedient wife, pictured in the popular literature in the act of beating her husband or riding on his back — emanated also from this (self-defeating) attempt to drive women from the workplace and from the market.

On the other hand, it is clear that this attempt would not have succeeded if the authorities had not cooperated with it. But they obviously saw that it was in their interest to do so. For, in addition to pacifying the rebellious journeymen, the displacement of women from the crafts provided the necessary basis for their fixation in reproductive labor and their utilization as low-waged workers in cottage industry.



## Women: The New Commons and the Substitute for the Lost Land

It was from this alliance between the crafts and the urban authorities, along with the continuing privatization of land, that a new sexual division of labor or, better, a new "sexual contract," in Carol Pateman's words (1988), was forged, defining women in terms — mothers, wives, daughters, widows — that hid their status as workers, while giving men free access to women's bodies, their labor, and the bodies and labor of their children.

According to this new social-sexual contract, proletarian women became for male workers the substitute for the land lost to the enclosures, their most basic means of reproduction, and a communal good anyone could appropriate and use at will. Echoes of this "primitive appropriation" can be heard in the concept of the "common woman" (Karras 1989) which in the 16<sup>th</sup> century qualified those who prostituted themselves. But in the new organization of work *every woman (other than those privatized by bourgeois men) became a communal good*, for once women's activities were defined as non-work, women's labor began to appear as a natural resource, available to all, no less than the air we breathe or the water we drink.

This was for women a historic defeat. With their expulsion from the crafts and the devaluation of reproductive labor poverty became feminized, and to enforce men's "primary appropriation" of women's labor, a new patriarchal order was constructed, reducing women to a double dependence: on employers and on men. The fact that unequal power relations between women and men existed even prior to the advent of capitalism, as did a discriminating sexual division of labor, does not detract from this assessment. For in pre-capitalist Europe women's subordination to men had been tempered by the fact that they had access to the commons and other communal assets, while in the new capitalist regime *women themselves became the commons*, as their work was defined as a natural resource, laying outside the sphere of market relations.

## The Patriarchy of the Wage

Significant, in this context, are the changes that took place within the family which, in this period, began to separate from the public sphere and acquire its modern connotations as the main center for the reproduction of the work-force.

The counterpart of the market, the instrument for the privatization of social relations and, above all, for the propagation of capitalist discipline and patriarchal rule, the family emerges in the period of primitive accumulation also as the most important institution for the appropriation and concealment of women's labor.

We see this in particular when we look at the working-class family. This is a subject that has been understudied. Previous discussions have privileged the family of propertied men, plausibly because, at the time to which we are referring, it was the dominant form and the model for parental and marital relations. There has also been more interest in the family as a political institution than as a place of work. What has been emphasized, then, is that in the new bourgeois family, the husband became the representative of the state, charged with disciplining and supervising the "subordinate classes," a cate-

gory that for 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century political theorists (Jean Bodin, for example) included the man's wife and his children (Schochet 1975). Thus, the identification of the family as a micro-state or a micro-church, and the demand by the authorities that single workers live under the roof and rule of a master. It is also pointed out that within the bourgeois family the woman lost much of her power, being generally excluded from the family business and confined to the supervision of the household.

But what is missing in this picture is a recognition that, while in the upper class it was *property* that gave the husband power over his wife and children, a similar power was granted to working-class men over women by means of *women's exclusion from the wage*.

Exemplary of this trend was the family of the cottage workers in the putting-out system. Far from shunning marriage and family-making, male cottage workers depended on it, for a wife could "help" them with the work they would do for the merchants, while caring for their physical needs, and providing them with children, who from an early age could be employed at the loom or in some subsidiary occupation. Thus, even in times of population decline, cottage workers apparently continued to multiply; their families were so large that a contemporary 17<sup>th</sup>-century Austrian, looking at those living in his village, described them as packed in their homes like sparrows on a rafter. What stands out in this type of arrangement is that though the wife worked side-by-side with her husband, she too producing for the market, it was the husband who now received her wage. This was true also for other female workers once they married. In England "a married man... was legally entitled to his wife's earnings" even when the job she did was nursing or breast-feeding. Thus, when a parish employed women to do this kind of job, the records "frequently hid (their) presence as workers" registering the payment made in the men's names. "Whether the payment was made to the husband or to the wife depended on the whim of the clerk" (Mendelson and Crawford 1998: 287).

This policy, making it impossible for women to have money of their own, created the material conditions for their subjection to men and the appropriation of their labor by male workers. It is in this sense that I speak of *the patriarchy of the wage*. We must also rethink the concept of "wage slavery." If it is true that male workers became only formally free under the new wage-labor regime, the group of workers who, in the transition to capitalism, most approached the condition of slaves was working-class women.

At the same time — given the wretched conditions in which waged workers lived — the housework that women performed to reproduce their families was necessarily limited. Married or not, proletarian women needed to earn some money, which they did by holding multiple jobs. Housework, moreover, requires some reproductive capital: furniture, utensils, clothing, money for food. But waged workers lived poorly, "slaving away by day and night" (as an artisan from Nuremberg denounced in 1524), just to stave off hunger and feed their wives and children (Brauner 1995: 96). Most barely had a roof over their heads, living in huts where other families and animals also resided, and where hygiene (poorly observed even among the better off) was totally lacking; their clothes were rags, their diet at best consisted of bread, cheese and some vegetables. Thus, we do not find in this period, among the working class, the classic figure of the full-time housewife. It was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century — in response to the first intense cycle of struggle against industrial work — that the "modern family" centered on the full-time housewife's unpaid reproductive labor was gen-

eralized in the working class, in England first and later in the United States.

Its development (following the passage of Factory Acts limiting the employment of women and children in the factories) reflected the first long-term investment the capitalist class made in the reproduction of the work-force beyond its numerical expansion. It was the result of a trade-off, forged under the threat of insurrection, between the granting of higher wages, capable of supporting a "non-working" wife, and a more intensive rate of exploitation. Marx spoke of it as a shift from "absolute" to "relative surplus," that is, a shift from a type of exploitation based upon the lengthening of the working day to a maximum and the reduction of the wage to a minimum, to a regime where higher wages and shorter hours would be compensated with an increase in the productivity of work and the pace of production. From the capitalist perspective, it was a social revolution, overriding a long-held commitment to low wages. It resulted from a new deal between workers and employers, again founded on the exclusion of women from the wage — reversing their recruitment in the early phases of the Industrial Revolution. It was also the mark of a new capitalist affluence, the product of two centuries of exploitation of slave labor, soon to be boosted by a new phase of colonial expansion.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, by contrast, despite an obsessive concern with the size of population and the number of "working poor," the actual investment in the reproduction of the work-force was extremely low. Consequently, the bulk of the reproductive labor done by proletarian women was not for their families, but for the families of their employers or for the market. One third of the female population, on average, in England, Spain, France, and Italy, worked as maids. Thus, in the proletariat, the tendency was towards the postponement of marriage and the disintegration of the family (16<sup>th</sup>-century English villages experienced a yearly turnover of fifty percent). Often the poor were even forbidden to marry, when it was feared that their children would fall on public relief, and when this actually happened, the children were taken away from them and farmed out to the parish to work. It is estimated that one third or more of the population of rural Europe remained single; in the towns the rates were even higher, especially among women; in Germany, forty percent were either "spinsters" or widows (Ozment 1983: 41-42).

Nevertheless — though the housework done by proletarian women was reduced to a minimum, and proletarian women had always to work for the market — within the working-class community of the transition period we already see the emergence of the sexual division of labor that was to become typical of the capitalist organization of work. At its center was an increasing differentiation between male and female labor, as the tasks performed by women and men became more diversified and, above all, became the carriers of different social relations.

Impoverished and disempowered as they may be, male waged workers could still benefit from their wives' labor and wages, or they could buy the services of prostitutes. Throughout this first phase of proletarianization, it was the prostitute who often performed for male workers the function of a wife, cooking and washing for them in addition to serving them sexually. Moreover, the criminalization of prostitution, which punished the woman but hardly touched her male customers, strengthened male power. Any man could now destroy a woman simply by declaring that she was a prostitute, or by publicizing that she had given in to his sexual desires. Women would have to plead with men "not to take away their honor" (the only property left to them) (Cavallo and Cerutti

1980: 346ff), the assumption being that their lives were now in the hands of men who (like feudal lords) could exercise over them a power of life and death.

### The Taming of Women and the Redefinition of Femininity and Masculinity: Women the Savages of Europe

It is not surprising, then, in view of this devaluation of women's labor and social status, that the insubordination of women and the methods by which they could be "tamed" were among the main themes in the literature and social policy of the "transition" (Underdown 1985a: 116–36).<sup>70</sup> Women could not have been totally devalued as workers and deprived of autonomy with respect to men without being subjected to an intense process of social degradation; and indeed, throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, women lost ground in every area of social life.

A key area of change in this respect was the law, where in this period we can observe a steady erosion of women's rights.<sup>71</sup> One of the main rights that women lost was the right to conduct economic activities alone, as *femme soles*. In France, they lost the right to make contracts or to represent themselves in court, being declared legal "imbeciles." In Italy, they began to appear less frequently in the courts to denounce abuses perpetrated against them. In Germany, when a middle-class woman became a widow, it became customary to appoint a tutor to manage her affairs. German women were also forbidden to live alone or with other women and, in the case of the poor, even with their own families, since it was expected that they would not be properly controlled. In sum, together with economic and social devaluation, women experienced a process of legal infantilization.

Women's loss of social power was also expressed through a new sexual differentiation of space. In the Mediterranean countries women were expelled not only from many waged jobs but also from the streets, where an unaccompanied woman risked being subjected to ridicule or sexual assault (Davis 1998). In England, too, ("a women's paradise" in the eyes of some Italian visitors), the presence of women in public began to be frowned upon. English women were discouraged from sitting in front of their homes or staying near their windows; they were also instructed not to spend time with their female friends (in this period the term "gossip" — female friend — began to acquire a disparaging connotation). It was even recommended that women should not visit their parents too often after marriage.

How the new sexual division of labor reshaped male-female relations can be seen from the broad debate that was carried out in the learned and popular literature on the nature of female virtues and vices, one of the main avenues for the ideological redefinition of gender relations in the transition to capitalism. Known from an early phase as "*la querelle des femmes*," what transpires from this debate is a new sense of curiosity for the subject, indicating that old norms were breaking down, and the public was becoming aware that the basic elements of sexual politics were being reconstructed. Two trends within this debate can be identified. On the one hand, new cultural canons were constructed maximizing the differences between women and men and creating more feminine and more masculine prototypes (Fortunati 1984). On the other hand, it was established that women were inher-

A scold is paraded through the community wearing the "bridle," an iron contraption used to punish women with a sharp tongue. Significantly, a similar device was used by European slavetraders in Africa to subdue their captives and carry them to their ships.



ently inferior to men — excessively emotional and lusty, unable to govern themselves — and had to be placed under male control. As with the condemnation of witchcraft, consensus on this matter cut across religious and intellectual lines. From the pulpit or the written page, humanists, Protestant reformers, counter-reformation Catholics, all cooperated in the vilification of women, constantly and obsessively.

Women were accused of being unreasonable, vain, wild, wasteful. Especially blamed was the female tongue, seen as an instrument of insubordination. But the main female villain was the disobedient wife, who, together with the "scold," the "witch," and the "whore" was the favorite target of dramatists, popular writers, and moralists. In this sense, Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (1593) was the manifesto of the age. But the punishment of female insubordination to patriarchal authority was called for and celebrated in countless misogynous plays and tracts. English literature of the Elizabethan and Jacobean period feasted on such themes. Typical of this genre is John Ford's *'Tis a Pity She's a Whore* (1633) which ends with the didactic assassination, execution and murder of three of the four female characters. Other classic works concerned with the disciplining of women are John Swetnam's *Arraignment of Lewed, Idle, Forward, Inconstant Women* (1615); and *The Parliament of Women* (1646), a satire primarily addressed against middle class women, which portrays them as busy making laws in order to gain supremacy over their husbands.<sup>72</sup> Meanwhile, new laws and new forms of torture were introduced to control women's behavior in and out of the home, confirming that the literary denigration of women expressed a precise political project aiming to strip them of any autonomy and social power. In the Europe of the Age of Reason, the women accused of being scolds were muzzled like dogs and paraded in the streets; prostitutes were whipped, or caged and subjected to fake drownings, while capital punishment was established for women convicted of adultery (Underdown 1985a: 117ff).

It is no exaggeration to say that women were treated with the same hostility and sense of estrangement accorded "Indian savages" in the literature that developed on this subject after the Conquest. The parallel is not casual. In both cases literary and cultural denigration was at the service of a project of expropriation. As we will see, the demonization of the American indigenous people served to justify their enslavement and the plunder of their resources. In Europe, the attack waged on women justified the appropriation of their labor by men and the criminalization of their control over reproduction. Always, the price of resistance was extermination. None of the tactics deployed against European women and colonial subjects would have succeeded, had they not been sustained by a campaign of terror. In the case of European women it was the witch-hunt that played the main role in the construction of their new social function, and the degradation of their social identity.

The definition of women as demonic beings, and the atrocious and humiliating practices to which so many of them were subjected left indelible marks in the collective female psyche and in women's sense of possibilities. From every viewpoint — socially, economically, culturally, politically — the witch-hunt was a turning point in women's lives; it was the equivalent of the historic defeat to which Engels alludes, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), as the cause of the downfall of the matri-

Frontispiece of *THE PARLIAMENT OF WOMEN* (1646), a work typical of the anti-women satire that dominated English Literature in the period of the Civil War.



archal world. For the witch-hunt destroyed a whole world of female practices, collective relations, and systems of knowledge that had been the foundation of women's power in pre-capitalist Europe, and the condition for their resistance in the struggle against feudalism.

Out of this defeat a new model of femininity emerged: the ideal woman and wife — passive, obedient, thrifty, of few words, always busy at work, and chaste. This change began at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, after women had been subjected for more than two centuries of state terrorism. Once women were defeated, the image of femininity constructed in the “transition” was discarded as an unnecessary tool, and a new, tamed one took its place. While at the time of the witch-hunt women had been portrayed as savage beings, mentally weak, unsatiably lusty, rebellious, insubordinate, incapable of self-control, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century the canon has been reversed. Women were now depicted as passive, asexual beings, more obedient, more moral than men, capable of exerting a positive moral influence on them. Even their irrationality could now be valorized, as the Dutch philosopher Pierre Bayle realized in his *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (1740), in which he praised the power of the female “maternal instinct,” arguing that that it should be viewed as a truly providential device, ensuring that despite the disadvantages of childbirthing and childraising, women do continue to reproduce.

### Colonization, Globalization, and Women

While the response to the population crisis in Europe was the subjugation of women to reproduction, in colonial America, where colonization destroyed ninety five percent of the aboriginal population, the response was the slave trade which delivered to the European ruling class an immense quantity of labor-power.

As early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, approximately one million African slaves and indigenous workers were producing surplus-value for Spain in colonial America, at a rate of exploitation far higher than that of workers in Europe, and contributing to sectors of the European economy that were developing in a capitalist direction (Blaut 1992a: 45–46).<sup>73</sup> By 1600, Brazil alone exported twice the value in sugar of all the wool that England exported in the same year (*ibid.*: 42). The accumulation rate was so high in the Brazilian sugar plantations that every two years they doubled their capacity. Gold and silver too played a key role in the solution to the capitalist crisis. Gold imported from Brazil re-activated commerce and industry in Europe (DeVries 1976: 20). More than 17,000 tons were imported by 1640, giving the capitalist class there an exceptional advantage in access to workers, commodities, and land (Blaut 1992a: 38–40). But the true wealth was the labor accumulated through the slave trade, which made possible a mode of production that could not be imposed in Europe.

It is now established that the plantation system fueled the Industrial Revolution, as argued by Eric Williams, who noted that hardly a brick in Liverpool and Bristol was not cemented with African blood (1944: 61–63). But capitalism may not even have taken off without Europe's “annexation of America,” and the “blood and sweat” that for two centuries flowed to Europe from the plantations. This must be stressed, as it helps us realize how essential slavery has been for the history of capitalism, and why, periodi-



cally, but systematically, whenever the capitalist system is threatened by a major economic crisis, the capitalist class has to launch a process of "primitive accumulation," that is, a process of large-scale colonization and enslavement, such as the one we are witnessing at present (Bales 1999).

The plantation system was crucial for capitalist development not only because of the immense amount of surplus labor that was accumulated from it, but because it set a model of labor management, export-oriented production, economic integration and international division of labor that have since become paradigmatic for capitalist class relations.

With its immense concentration of workers and its captive labor force uprooted from its homeland, unable to rely on local support, the plantation prefigured not only the factory but also the later use of immigration and globalization to cut the cost of labor. In particular, the plantation was a key step in the formation of an international division of labor that (through the production of "consumer goods") integrated the work of the slaves into the reproduction of the European work-force, while keeping enslaved and waged workers geographically and socially divided.

The colonial production of sugar, tea, tobacco, rum, and cotton — the most important commodities, together with bread, in the production of labor-power in Europe — did not take off on a large scale until after the 1650s, after slavery had been institutionalized and wages in Europe had begun to (modestly) rise (Rowling 1987: 51, 76, 85). It must be mentioned here, however, because, when it did take off, two mechanisms were introduced that significantly restructured the reproduction of labor internationally. On one side, a global assembly line was created that cut the cost of the commodities necessary to produce labor-power in Europe, and linked enslaved and waged workers in ways that pre-figured capitalism's present use of Asian, African, and Latin American workers as providers of "cheap" "consumer" goods (cheapened by death squads and military violence) for the "advanced" capitalist countries.

On the other side, the metropolitan wage became the vehicle by which the goods produced by enslaved workers went to the market, and the value of the products of enslaved-labor was realized. In this way, as with female domestic work, the integration of enslaved labor into the production and reproduction of the metropolitan work-force was further established, and the wage was further redefined as an instrument of accumulation, that is, as a lever for mobilizing not only the labor of the workers paid by it, but also for the labor of a multitude of workers hidden by it, because of the unwaged conditions of their work.

Did workers in Europe know that they were buying products resulting from slave labor and, if they did, did they object to it? This is a question we would like to ask them, but it is one which I cannot answer. What is certain is that the history of tea, sugar, rum, tobacco, and cotton is far more significant than we can deduce from the contribution which these commodities made, as raw materials or means of exchange in the slave trade, to the rise of the factory system. For what traveled with these "exports" was not only the blood of the slaves but the seeds of a new science of exploitation, and a new division of the working class by which waged-work, rather than providing an alternative to slavery, was made to depend on it for its existence, as a means (like female

unpaid labor) for the expansion of the unpaid part of the waged working-day.

So closely integrated were the lives of the enslaved laborers in America and waged laborers in Europe that in the Caribbean islands, where slaves were given plots of land ("provision grounds") to cultivate for their own use, how much land was allotted to them, and how much time was given to them to cultivate it, varied in proportion to the price of sugar on the world-market (Morrissey 1989: 51–59) — plausibly determined by the dynamics of workers' wages and workers' struggle over reproduction.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the integration of slave labor in the production of the European waged proletariat created a community of interests between European workers and the metropolitan capitalists, presumably cemented by their common desire for cheap imported goods.

In reality, like the Conquest, the slave trade was an epochal misfortune for European workers. As we have seen, slavery (like the witch-hunt) was a major ground of experimentation for methods of labor-control that were later imported into Europe. Slavery also affected the European workers' wages and legal status; for it cannot be a coincidence that only with the end of slavery did wages in Europe decisively increase and did European workers gain the right to organize.

It is also hard to imagine that workers in Europe profited from the Conquest of America, at least in its initial phase. Let us remember that it was the intensity of the anti-feudal struggle that instigated the lesser nobility and the merchants to seek colonial expansion, and that the conquistadors came from the ranks of the most-hated enemies of the European working class. It is also important to remember that the Conquest provided the European ruling class with the silver and gold used to pay the mercenary armies that defeated the urban and rural revolts; and that, in the same years when Arawaks, Aztecs, and Incas were being subjugated, workers in Europe were being driven from their homes, branded like animals, and burnt as witches.

We should not assume, then, that the European proletariat was always an accomplice to the plunder of the Americas, though individual proletarians undoubtedly were. The nobility expected so little cooperation from the "lower classes" that initially the Spaniards allowed only a few to embark. Only 8,000 Spaniards migrated legally to the Americas in the entire 16<sup>th</sup> century, the clergy making up 17% of the lot (Hamilton 1965: 299; Williams 1984: 38–40). Even later, people were forbidden from settling overseas independently, because it was feared that they might collaborate with the local population.

For most proletarians, in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, access to the New World was through indentured servitude and "transportation," the punishment which the authorities in England adopted to rid the country of convicts, political and religious dissidents, and the vast population of vagabonds and beggars that was produced by the enclosures. As Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker point out in *The Many-Headed Hydra* (2000), the colonizers' fear of unrestricted migration was well-founded, given the wretched living conditions that prevailed in Europe, and the appeal exercised by the reports that circulated about the New World, which pictured it as a wonder land where people lived free from toil and tyranny, masters and greed, and where "myne" and "thyne" had no place, all things being held in common (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000; Brandon 1986: 6–7). So strong was the attraction exercised by the New World that the vision of a new

society it provided apparently influenced the political thought of the Enlightenment, contributing to the emergence of a new concept of "liberty," taken to signify masterlessness, an idea previously unknown in European political theory (Brandon 1986: 23–28). Not surprisingly, some Europeans tried to "lose themselves" in this utopian world where, as Linebaugh and Rediker powerfully put it, they could reconstruct the lost experience of the commons (2000: 24). Some lived for years with Indian tribes despite the restrictions placed on those who settled in the American colonies and the heavy price to be paid if caught, since escapees were treated like traitors and put to death. This was the fate of some young English settlers in Virginia who, having run away to live with the Indians, on being caught were condemned by the colony's councilmen to be "burned, broken on the wheel... [and] hanged or shot to death" (Koning 1993: 61). "Terror created boundaries," Linebaugh and Rediker comment (2000: 34). Yet, as late as 1699, the English still had a great difficulty persuading the people whom the Indians had captivated to leave their Indian manner of living.

No argument, no entreaties, no tears [a contemporary reported]... could persuade many of them to leave their Indian friends. On the other hand, Indian children have been carefully educated among the English, clothed and taught, yet there is not one instance that any of these would remain, but returned to their own nations (Koning 1993: 60).

As for the European proletarians who signed themselves away into indentured servitude or arrived in the New World in consequence of a penal sentence, their lot was not too different, at first, from that of the African slaves with whom they often worked side by side. Their hostility to their masters was equally intense, so that the planters viewed them as a dangerous lot and, by the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, began to limit their use and introduced a legislation aimed to separate them from the Africans. But only at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were racial boundaries irrevocably drawn (Moulier Boutang 1998). Until then, the possibility of alliances between whites, blacks, and aboriginal peoples, and the fear of such unity in the European ruling class' imagination, at home and on the plantations, was constantly present. Shakespeare gave voice to it in *The Tempest* (1612) where he pictured the conspiracy organized by Caliban, the native rebel, son of a witch, and by Trinculo and Stephano, the ocean-going European proletarians, suggesting the possibility of a fatal alliance among the oppressed, and providing a dramatic counterpoint to Prospero's magic healing of the discord among the rulers.

In *The Tempest* the conspiracy ends ignominiously, with the European proletarians demonstrating to be nothing better than petty thieves and drunkards, and with Caliban begging forgiveness from his colonial master. Thus, when the defeated rebels are brought in front of Prospero and his former enemies Sebastian and Antonio (now reconciled with him), they are met with derision and thoughts of ownership and division:

SEBASTIAN. What things are these, my lord Antonio?  
Will money buy them?

ANTONIO. Very like; one of them is a plain fish, and, no doubt, marchetable.

PROSPERO. Mark but the badges of these men, my lords,  
 Then say if they be true. This mis-shapen knave,  
 His mother was a witch, and one so strong  
 That could control the moon, make flows and ebbs,  
 And deal in her command without her power.  
 These three have robbed me; and this demi-devil—  
 For he's a bastard one — had plotted with them  
 To take my life. Two of these fellows you  
 Must know and own. This thing of darkness I  
 Acknowledge mine. (Shakespeare, Act V, Scene 1, lines 265–276)

Offstage, however, the threat continued. “Both on Bermuda and Barbados white servants were discovered plotting with African slaves, as thousands of convicts were being shipped there in the 1650s from the British islands” (Rowling 1987: 57). In Virginia the peak in the alliance between black and white servants was Bacon’s Rebellion of 1675–76, when African slaves and British indentured servants joined together to conspire against their masters.

It is for this reason that, starting in the 1640s, the accumulation of an enslaved proletariat in the Southern American colonies and the Caribbean was accompanied by the construction of racial hierarchies, thwarting the possibility of such combinations. Laws were passed depriving Africans of previously granted civic rights, such as citizenship, the right to bear arms, and the right to make depositions or seek redress in a tribunal for injuries suffered. The turning point was when slavery was made an hereditary condition, and the slave masters were given the right to beat and kill their slaves. In addition, marriages between “blacks” and “whites” were forbidden. Later, after the American War of Independence, white indentured servitude, deemed a vestige of British rule, was eliminated. As a result, by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, colonial America had moved from “a society with slaves to a slave society” (Moulier Boutang 1998: 189), and the possibility of solidarity between Africans and whites had been severely undermined. “White,” in the colonies, became not just a badge of social and economic privilege “serving to designate those who until 1650 had been called ‘Christians’ and afterwards ‘English’ or ‘free men’” (*ibid.*:194), but a moral attribute, a means by which social hegemony was naturalized. “Black” or “African,” by contrast, became synonymous with slave, so much so that free black people — still a sizeable presence in early 17<sup>th</sup>-century America — were later forced to prove that they were free.

### Sex, Race and Class in the Colonies

Would Caliban’s conspiracy have had a different outcome had its protagonists been women? Had the instigators been not Caliban but his mother, Sycorax, the powerful Algerian witch that Shakespeare hides in the play’s background, and not Trinculo and Stephano but the sisters of the witches who, in the same years of the Conquest, were

being burned in Europe at the stake?

This question is a rhetorical one, but it serves to question the nature of the sexual division of labor in the colonies, and of the bonds that could be established there between European, indigenous, and African women by virtue of a common experience of sexual discrimination.

In *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* (1992), Maryse Condé gives us an insight into the kind of situation that could produce such bonding, by describing how Tituba and her new mistress, the Puritan Samuel Parris' young wife, gave each other support at first against his murderous contempt for women.

An even more outstanding example comes from the Caribbean, where low-class English women "transported" from Britain as convicts or indentured servants became a significant part of the labor-gangs on the sugar estates. "Considered unfit for marriage by propertied white males, and disqualified for domestic service," because of their insolence and riotous disposition, "landless white women were dismissed to manual labor in plantations, public construction works, and the urban service sector. In these worlds they socialized intimately with the slave community, and with enslaved black men." They established households and had children with them (Beckles 1995: 131-32). They also cooperated as well as competed with female slaves in the marketing of produce or stolen goods.

But with the institutionalization of slavery, which was accompanied by a lessening of the burden for white workers, and a decrease in the number of women arriving from Europe as wives for the planters, the situation changed drastically. Regardless of their social origin, white women were upgraded, or married off within the ranks of the white power structure, and whenever possible they became owners of slaves themselves, usually female ones, employed for domestic work (*ibid.*).<sup>74</sup>

This, however, was not an automatic process. Like sexism, racism had to be legislated and enforced. Among the most revealing prohibitions we must again count that marriage and sexual relations between blacks and whites was forbidden, white women who married black slaves were condemned, and the children resulting from such marriages were enslaved for life. Passed in Maryland and Virginia in the 1660s, these laws prove that a segregated, racist society was instituted from above, and that intimate relations between "blacks" and "whites" must have been very common, indeed, if life-enslavement was deemed necessary to terminate them.

As if following the script laid out by the witch-hunt, the new laws demonized the relation between white women and black men. When they were passed in the 1660s, the witch-hunt in Europe was coming to an end, but in America all the taboos surrounding the witch and the black devil were being revived, this time at the expense of black men.

"Divide and rule" also became official policy in the Spanish colonies, after a period when the numerical inferiority of the colonists recommended a more liberal attitude towards inter-ethnic relations and alliances with the local chiefs through marriage. But, in the 1540s, as the increase in the number of *mestizos* was undermining colonial privilege, "race" was established as a key factor in the transmission of property, and a racial hierarchy was put in place to separate indigenous, *mestizos*, and *mulattos* from each other and from the white population (Nash 1980).<sup>75</sup> Prohibitions relating to marriage and female sexuality served here, too, to enforce social exclusion. But in Spanish America,

*A female slave being branded. The branding of women by the devil had figured prominently in the European witch-trials, as a symbol of total subjugation. But in reality, the true devils were the white slave traders and plantation owners who (like the men in this picture) did not hesitate to treat the women they enslaved like cattle.*



segregation along racial lines succeeded only in part, checked by migration, population decline, indigenous revolt, and the formation of a white urban proletariat with no prospect of economic advancement, and therefore prone to identify with mestizos and mulattos more than with the white upper-class. Thus, while in the plantation societies of the Caribbean the differences between European and Africans increased with time, in the South American colonies a “re-composition” became possible, especially among low-class European, *mestiza*, and African women who, beside their precarious economic position, shared the disadvantages deriving from the double standard built into the law, which made them vulnerable to male abuse.

Signs of this “recomposition” can be found in the records which the Inquisition kept in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Mexico of the investigations it conducted to eradicate magical and heretic beliefs (Behar 1987: 34–51). The task was hopeless, and soon the Inquisition lost interest in the project, convinced by this time that popular magic was no longer a threat to the political order. But the testimonies it collected reveal the existence of multiple exchanges among women in matters relating to magical cures and love remedies, creating in time a new cultural reality drawn from the encounter between the African, European and indigenous magical traditions. As Ruth Behar writes:

Indian women gave hummingbirds to Spanish healers for use in sexual attraction, mulatta women told mestiza women how to tame their husbands, a loba sorceress introduced a coyota to the Devil. This "popular" system of belief ran parallel to the system of belief of the Church, and it spread as quickly as Christianity did in the New World, so that after a while it became impossible to distinguish in it what was "Indian" or "Spanish" or "African" (*ibid.*).<sup>76</sup>

Assimilated in the eyes of the Inquisition as people "without reason," this variegated female world which Ruth Behar describes is a telling example of the alliances that, across colonial and color lines, women could build, by virtue of their common experience, and their interest in sharing the traditional knowledges and practices available to them to control their reproduction and fight sexual discrimination.

Like discrimination on the basis of "race," this was more than a cultural baggage which the colonizers brought from Europe with their pikes and horses. No less than the destruction of communalism, it was a strategy dictated by specific economic interest and the need to create the preconditions for a capitalist economy, and as such always adjusted to the task at hand.

In Mexico and Peru, where population decline recommended that female domestic labor in the home be incentivized, a new sexual hierarchy was introduced by the Spanish authorities that stripped indigenous women of their autonomy, and gave their male kin more power over them. Under the new laws, married women became men's property, and were forced (against the traditional custom) to follow their husbands to their homes. A *compadrazgo* system was also created further limiting their rights, placing the authority over children in male hands. In addition, to ensure that indigenous women reproduced the workers recruited to do *mita* work in the mines, the Spanish authorities legislated that no one could separate husband from wife, which meant that women were forced to follow their husbands whether they wanted it or not, even to areas known to be death camps, due to the pollution created by the mining (Cook Noble 1981:205-6).<sup>77</sup>

The intervention of the French Jesuits in the disciplining and training of the Montagnais-Naskapi, in mid-17<sup>th</sup> century Canada, provides a revealing example of how gender differences were accumulated. The story is told by the late anthropologist Eleanor Leacock in her *Myths of Male Dominance* (1981), where she examines the diary of one of its protagonists. This was Father Paul Le Jeune, a Jesuit missionary who, in typical colonial fashion, had joined a French trading post to Christianize the Indians, and turn them into citizens of "New France." The Montagnais-Naskapi were a nomadic Indian nation that had lived in great harmony, hunting and fishing in the eastern Labrador Peninsula. But by the time of Le Jeune's arrival, their community was being undermined by the presence of Europeans and the spread of fur-trading, so that some men, eager to strike a commercial alliance with them, were amenable to letting the French dictate how they should govern themselves (Leacock 1981: 39ff).

As often happened when Europeans came in contact with native American populations, the French were impressed by Montagnais-Naskapi generosity, their



sense of cooperation and indifference to status, but they were scandalized by their "lack of morals;" they saw that the Naskapi had no conception of private property, of authority, of male superiority, and they even refused to punish their children (Leacock 1981: 34-38). The Jesuits decided to change all that, setting out to teach the Indians the basic elements of civilization, convinced that this was necessary to turn them into reliable trade partners. In this spirit, they first taught them that "man is the master," that "in France women do not rule their husbands," and that courting at night, divorce at either partner's desire, and that sexual freedom for both spouses, before or after marriage, had to be forbidden. Here is a telling exchange Le Jeune had, on this score, with a Naskapi man:

"I told him it was not honorable for a woman to love anyone else except her husband, and that this evil being among them, he himself was not sure that his son, who was present, was his son. He replied, 'Thou has no sense. You French people love only your children; but we love all the children of our tribe.' I began to laugh seeing that he philosophized in horse and mule fashion" (*ibid.*: 50).

Backed by the Governor of New France, the Jesuits succeeded in convincing the Naskapi to provide themselves with some chiefs, and bring "their" women to order. Typically, one weapon they used was to insinuate that women who were too independent and did not obey their husbands were creatures of the devil. When, angered by the men's attempts to subdue them, Naskapi women ran away, the Jesuits persuaded the men to chase after their spouses and threaten them with imprisonment:

"Such acts of justice" — Le Jeune proudly commented in one particular case — "cause no surprise in France, because it is usual there to proceed in that manner. But among these people... where everyone considers himself from birth as free as the wild animals that roam in their great forests... it is a marvel, or rather a miracle, to see a peremptory command obeyed, or any act of severity or justice performed" (*ibid.*: 54).

The Jesuits' greatest victory, however, was persuading the Naskapi to beat their children, believing that the "savages'" excessive fondness for their offspring was the major obstacle to their Christianization. Le Jeune's diary records the first instance in which a girl was publicly beaten, while one of her relatives gave a chilling lecture to the bystanders on the historic significance of the event: "This is the first punishment by beating (he said) we inflict on anyone of our Nation..." (*ibid.*: 54-55).

The Montagnais-Naskapi men owed their training in male supremacy to the fact that the French wanted to instill in them the "instinct" for private property, to induce them to become reliable partners in the fur trade. Very different was the situation on the plantations, where the sexual division of labor was immediately dictated by the planters' requirements for labor-power, and by the price of commodities produced by the slaves on the international market.

Until the abolition of the slave trade, as Barbara Bush and Marietta Morrissey have

documented, both women and men were subjected to the same degree of exploitation; the planters found it more profitable to work and "consume" slaves to death than to encourage their reproduction. Neither the sexual division of labor nor sexual hierarchies were thus pronounced. African men had no say concerning the destiny of their female companions and kin; as for women, far from being given special consideration, they were expected to work in the fields like men, especially when sugar and tobacco were in high demand, and they were subject to the same cruel punishments, even when pregnant (Bush 1990: 42-44).

Ironically then, it would seem that in slavery women "achieved" a rough equality with the men of their class (Momsen 1993). But their treatment was never the same. Women were given less to eat; unlike men, they were vulnerable to their masters' sexual assaults; and more cruel punishment were inflicted on them, for in addition to the physical agony women had to bear the sexual humiliation always attached to them and the damage done, when pregnant, to the fetuses they carried.

A new page, moreover, opened after 1807, when the slave trade was abolished and the Caribbean and American planters adopted a "slave breeding" policy. As Hilary Beckles points out, in relation to the island of Barbados, plantation owners had attempted to control the reproductive patterns of female slaves since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, "[encouraging] them to have fewer or more children in any given span of time," depending on how much field labor was needed. But only when the supply of African slaves diminished did the regulation of women's sexual relations and reproductive patterns become more systematic and intense (Beckles 1989: 92).

In Europe, forcing women to procreate had led to the imposition of capital punishment for contraception. In the plantations, where slaves were becoming a precious commodity, the shift to a breeding policy made women more vulnerable to sexual assault, though it led to some "ameliorations" of women's work conditions: a reduction of work-hours, the building of lying-in-houses, the provision of midwives assisting the delivery, an expansion of social rights (e.g., of travel and assembly) (Beckles: 1989: 99-100; Bush 1990: 135). But these changes could not reduce the damages inflicted on women by field-labor, nor the bitterness women experienced because of their lack of freedom. With the exception of Barbados, the planters' attempt to expand the work-force through "natural reproduction" failed, and the birth rates on the plantations remained "abnormally low" (Bush 136-37; Beckles 1989, *ibid.*). Whether this phenomenon was a result of outright resistance to the perpetuation of slavery, or a consequence of the physical debilitation produced by the harsh conditions to which enslaved women were subjected, is still a matter of debate (Bush 1990: 143ff). But as Bush points out there are good reason to believe that the main reason for the failure lied in the refusal of women, for as soon as slavery was eradicated, even when their economic conditions in some respect deteriorated, communities of freed slaves began to grow (Bush 1990).<sup>78</sup>

Women's refusals of victimization also reshaped the sexual division of labor, as occurred in Caribbean islands where enslaved women turned themselves into semi-free market vendors of the products they cultivated in the "provision grounds" (in Jamaica, "polinks"), given by the planters to the slaves so that they could to support themselves. The planters adopted this measure to save on the cost of reproducing labor. But access to the "provision grounds" turned out to be advantageous for the slaves as well; it gave

them more mobility, and the possibility to use the time allotted for their cultivation for other activities. Being able to produce small crops that could be eaten or sold boosted their independence. But those most devoted to the success of the provision grounds were women, who marketed the crops, re-appropriating and reproducing within the plantation system what had been one of their main occupations in Africa. As a result, by the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, enslaved women in the Caribbean had carved out for themselves a place in the plantation economy, contributing to the expansion, if not the creation, of the island's food market. They did so both as producers of much of the food consumed by the slaves and the white population, and also as hucksters and market vendors of the crops they cultivated, supplemented with goods taken from the master's shop, or exchanged with other slaves, or given to them for sale by their masters.

It was in this capacity that female slaves also came into contact with white proletarian women, often former indentured servants, even after the latter had been removed from gang-labor and emancipated. Their relationship at times could be hostile: proletarian European women, who also survived mostly through the growing and marketing of food crops, stole at times the products that slave women brought to the market, or attempted to impede their sales. But both groups of women also collaborated in building a vast network of buying and selling relations which evaded the laws passed by the colonial authorities, who periodically worried that these activities may place the slaves beyond their control.

Despite the legislation introduced to prevent them from selling or limiting the places in which they could do so, enslaved women continued to expand their marketing activities and the cultivation of their provision plots, which they came to view as their own so that, by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, they were forming a proto-peasantry with practically a monopoly on island markets. As a result, according to some historians, even before emancipation, slavery in the Caribbean had practically ended. Female slaves — against all odds — were a key force in this process, the ones who, with their determination, shaped the development of the slave community and of the islands' economies, despite the authorities' many attempts to limit their power.

Enslaved Caribbean women had also a decisive impact on the culture of the white population, especially that of white women, through their activities as healers, seers, experts in magical practices, and their "domination" of the kitchens, and bedrooms, of their masters (Bush 1990).

Not surprisingly, they were seen as the heart of the slave community. Visitors were impressed by their singing, their head-kerchiefs and dresses, and their extravagant manner of speaking which are now understood as a means of satirizing their masters. African and Creole women influenced the customs of poor female whites, whom a contemporary portrayed as behaving like Africans, walking with their children strapped on their hips, while balancing trays with goods on their heads (Beckles 1989: 81). But their main achievement was the development of a politics of self-reliance, grounded in survival strategies and female networks. These practices and the values attached to them, which Rosalyn Terborg Penn has identified as the essential tenets of contemporary African feminism, redefined the African community of the diaspora (pp. 3–7). They created not only the foundations for a new female African identity, but also the foundations for a new

*Above: A family of slaves (detail). Enslaved women struggled to continue the activities they had carried on in Africa, such as marketing the produce they grew, which enabled them to better support their families and achieve some autonomy. (From Barbara Bush, 1990.)*

*Below: A festive gathering on a West Indian plantation. Women were the heart of such gatherings as they were the heart of the enslaved community, and the staunchest defenders of the culture brought from Africa.*



society committed — against the capitalist attempt to impose scarcity and dependence as structural conditions of life — to the re-appropriation and concentration in women's hands of the fundamental means of subsistence, starting from the land, the production of food, and the inter-generational transmission of knowledge and cooperation.

### Capitalism and the Sexual Division of Labor

As this brief history of women and primitive accumulation has shown, the construction of a new patriarchal order, making women the servants of the male work-force, was a major aspect of capitalist development.

On its basis a new sexual division of labor could be enforced that differentiated not only the tasks that women and men should perform, but their experiences, their lives, their relation to capital and to other sectors of the working class. Thus, no less than the international division of labor, the sexual division of labor was above all a power-relation, a division within the work-force, while being an immense boost to capital accumulation.

This point must be emphasized, given the tendency to attribute the leap capitalism brought about in the productivity of labor only to the specialization of work-tasks. In reality, the advantages which the capitalist class derived from the differentiation between agricultural and industrial labor and within industrial labor itself — celebrated in Adam Smith's ode to pin-making — pale when compared to those it derived from the degradation of women's work and social position.

As I have argued, the power-difference between women and men and the concealment of women's unpaid-labor under the cover of natural inferiority, have enabled capitalism to immensely expand the "unpaid part of the working day," and use the (male) wage to accumulate women's labor; in many cases, they have also served to deflect class antagonism into an antagonism between men and women. Thus, primitive accumulation has been above all an accumulation of differences, inequalities, hierarchies, divisions, which have alienated workers from each other and even from themselves.

As we have seen, male workers have often been complicitous with this process, as they have tried to maintain their power with respect to capital by devaluing and disciplining women, children, and the populations the capitalist class has colonized. But the power that men have imposed on women by virtue of their access to wage-labor and their recognized contribution to capitalist accumulation has been paid at the price of self-alienation, and the "primitive disaccumulation" of their own individual and collective powers.

In the next chapters I further examine this disaccumulation process by discussing three key aspects of transition from feudalism to capitalism: the constitution of the proletarian body into a work-machine, the persecution of women as witches, and the creation of "savages" and "cannibals" both in Europe and the New World.

Endnotes

1. Peter Blicke objects to the concept of a "peasant war" because of the social composition of this revolution, which included many artisans, miners, and intellectuals among its ranks. The Peasant War combined ideological sophistication, expressed in the twelve "articles" which the rebels put forward, and a powerful military organization. The twelve "articles" included: the refusal of bondage, a reduction of the tithes, a repeal of the poaching laws, an affirmation of the rights to gather wood, a lessening of labor services, a reduction of rents, an affirmation of the rights to use the common, and an abolition of death taxes (Bickle 1985: 195-201). The exceptional military prowess demonstrated by the rebels depended in part on the participation of professional soldiers in the revolt, including the Landsknechte — the famous Swizz soldiers who, at the time, were the elite mercenary troops in Europe. The Landsknechte headed the peasant armies, putting their military expertise at their service and, in various occasions, refused to move against the rebels. In one case, they motivated their refusal by arguing that they too came from the peasantry and that they depended on the peasants for their sustenance in times of peace. When it was clear that they could not be trusted, the German princes mobilized the troops of the Swabian League, drawn from more remote regions, to break the peasant resistance. On the history of the Landsknechte and their participation in the Peasant War, see Reinhard Baumann, *I Lanzichenechi* (1994: 237-256).
2. The Anabaptists, politically, represented a fusion of "the late medieval social movements and the new anti-clerical movement sparked off by the Reformation." Like the medieval heretics, they condemned economic individualism and greed and supported a form of Christian communalism. Their take-over of Munster occurred in the wake of the Peasant War, when unrest and urban insurrections spread from Frankfurt to Cologne and other towns of Northern Germany. In 1531, the crafts took control of the city of Munster, renamed it New Jerusalem, and under the influence of immigrant Dutch Anabaptists, installed in it a communal government based upon the sharing of goods. As Po-Chia Hsia writes, the records of New Jerusalem were destroyed and its story has been told only by its enemies. Thus, we should not presume that events unfolded as narrated. According to the available records, women had at first enjoyed a high degree of freedom in the town; for instance, "they could divorce their unbelieving husbands and enter into new marriages." Things changed with the decision by the reformed government to introduce polygamy in 1534, which provoked an "active resistance" among women, presumably repressed with imprisonment and even executions (Po-Chia Hsia 1988a: 58-59). Why this decision was taken is not clear. But the episode deserves more investigation, given the divisive role that the crafts played in the "transition" with regard to women. We know, in fact, that the craft campaigned in several countries to exclude women from the waged work-place, and nothing indicates that they opposed the persecution of the witches.
3. For the rise of the real wage and the fall of prices in England, see North and Thomas (1973: 74). For Florentine wages, see Carlo M. Cipolla (1994: 206). For

- the fall in the value of output in England see R. H. Britnel (1993: 156-171). On the stagnation of agricultural production in a number of European countries, see B.H. Slicher Van Bath (1963: 160-170). Rodney Hilton argues that this period saw "a contraction of the rural and industrial economies...probably felt in the first place by the ruling class.... Seigneurial revenues and industrial and commercial profits began to fall.... Revolt in the towns disorganized industrial production and revolt in the countryside strengthened peasant resistance to the payment of rent. Rent and profits thus dropped even further" (Hilton 1985: 240-241).
4. On Maurice Dobb and the debate on the transition to capitalism, see Harvey J. Kaye, *The British Marxist Historians*. New York: St. Martin's Press, (1984), 23-69.
  5. Critics of Marx's concept of "primitive accumulation" include: Samir Amin (1974) and Maria Mies (1986). While Samir Amin focusses on Marx's Eurocentrism, Mies stresses Marx's blindness to the exploitation of women. A different critique is found in Yann Moulier Boutang (1998) who faults Marx for generating the impression that the objective of the ruling class in Europe was to free itself from an unwanted work-force. Moulier Boutang underlines that the opposite was the case: land expropriation aimed to fix workers to their jobs, not to encourage mobility. Capitalism — as Moulier Boutang stresses — has always been primarily concerned with preventing the flight of labor (pp. 16-27).
  6. As Michael Perelman points out, the term "primitive accumulation" was actually coined by Adam Smith and rejected by Marx, because of its ahistorical character in Smith's usage. "To underscore his distance from Smith, Marx prefixed the pejorative 'so-called' to the title of the final part of the first volume of *Capital*, which he devoted to the study of primitive accumulation. Marx, in essence, dismissed Smith's mythical 'previous' accumulation in order to call attention to the actual historical experience" (Perlman 1985: 25-26).
  7. On the relation between the historical and the logical dimension of "primitive accumulation" and its implications for political movements today see: Massimo De Angelis, "Marx and Primitive Accumulation. The Continuous Character of Capital 'Enclosures'." In *The Commoner*: [www.commoner.org.uk](http://www.commoner.org.uk); Fredy Perlman, *The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism*. Detroit: Black and Red, 1985; and Mitchel Cohen, "Fredy Perlman: Out in Front of a Dozen Dead Oceans" (Unpublished manuscript, 1998).
  8. For a description of the systems of the *encomienda*, *mita*, and *catequil* see (among others) André Gunder Frank (1978), 45; Steve J. Stern (1982); and Inga Clendinnen (1987). As described by Gunder Frank, the *encomienda* was "a system under which rights to the labor of the Indian communities were granted to Spanish landowners." But in 1548, the Spaniards "began to replace the *encomienda de servicio* by the *repartimiento* (called *catequil* in Mexico and *mita* in Peru), which required the Indian community's chiefs to supply the Spanish *juez repartidor* (distributing judge) with a certain number of days of labor per month.... The Spanish official in turn distributed this supply of labor to qualified enterprising labor contractors who were supposed to pay the laborers a certain minimum wage" (1978: 45). On the efforts of the Spaniards to bind labor in Mexico and Peru in the course of the various



stages of colonization, and the impact on it of the catastrophic collapse of the indigenous population, see again Gunder Frank (*ibid.*: 43–49).

9. For a discussion of the “second serfdom” see Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) and Henry Kamen (1971). It is important here to stress that the newly enserved peasants were now producing for the international grain market. In other words, despite the seeming backward character of the work-relation imposed upon them, under the new regime, they were an integral part of a developing capitalist economy and international capitalist division of labor.
10. I am echoing here Marx’s statement in *Capital*, Vol. 1: “Force... is in itself an economic power” (1909: 824). Far less convincing is Marx’s accompanying observation, according to which: “Force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one” (*ibid.*). First, midwives bring life into the world, not destruction. This metaphor also suggests that capitalism “evolved” out of forces gestating in the bosom of the feudal world — an assumption which Marx himself refutes in his discussion of primitive accumulation. Comparing force to the generative powers of a midwife also casts a benign veil over the process of capital accumulation, suggesting necessity, inevitability, and ultimately, progress.
11. Slavery had never been abolished in Europe, surviving in pockets, mostly as female domestic slavery. But by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century slaves began to be imported again, by the Portuguese, from Africa. Attempts to impose slavery continued in England through the 16<sup>th</sup> century, resulting (after the introduction of public relief) in the construction of work-houses and correction houses, which England pioneered in Europe.
12. See, on this point, Samir Amin (1974). To stress the existence of European slavery in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (and after) is also important because this fact has been often “forgotten” by European historians. According to Salvatore Bono, this self-induced oblivion was a product of the “Scramble for Africa,” which was justified as a mission aimed to terminate slavery on the African continent. Bono argues that Europe’s elites could not admit to having employed slaves in Europe, the alleged cradle of democracy.
13. Immanuel Wallerstein (1974), 90–95; Peter Kriedte (1978), 69–70.
14. Paolo Thea (1998) has powerfully reconstructed the history of the German artists who sided with the peasants.

“During the Protestant Reformation some among the best 16<sup>th</sup>-century German artists abandoned their laboratories to join the peasants in struggle.... They drafted documents inspired by the principles of evangelic poverty, the common sharing of goods, and the redistribution of wealth. Sometimes... they took arms in support of the cause. The endless list of those who, after the military defeats of May–June 1525, met the rigors of the penal code, mercilessly applied by the winners against the vanquished, includes famous names. Among them are [Jorg] Ratget quartered in Pforzheim (Stuttgart), [Philipp] Dietman beheaded, and [Tilman] Riemenschneider mutilated — both in Wurzburg — [Matthias] Grunewald chased from the court of Magonza where he worked. Holbein the Young was so troubled by the events that he fled from Basel, a city that was torn apart by religious conflict.” [My translation]

Also in Switzerland, Austria, and the Tyrol artists participated in the Peasant War, including famous ones like Lucas Cranach (Cranach the old) as well as myriad lesser painters and engravers (*ibid.*: 7). Thea points out that the deeply felt participation of the artists to the cause of the peasants is also demonstrated by the revaluation of rural themes depicting peasant life — dancing peasants, animals, and flora — in contemporary 16<sup>th</sup>-century German art (*ibid.*: 12-15; 73, 79, 80). “The countryside had become animated... [it] had acquired in the uprising a personality worth of being represented” (*ibid.*: 155). [My translation].

15. It was through the prism of the Peasant War and Anabaptism that the European governments, through the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, interpreted and repressed every form of social protest. The echoes of the Anabaptist revolution were felt in Elizabethan England and in France, inspiring utmost vigilance and severity with regard to any challenge to the constituted authority. “Anabaptist” became a cursed word, a sign of opprobrium and criminal intent, as “communist” was in the United States in the 1950s, and “terrorist” is today.



Early 17<sup>th</sup>-century German engraving reviling the Anabaptists' belief in the communistic sharing of goods.

16. Village authority and privileges were maintained in the hinterland of some city-states. In a number of territorial states, the peasants “continued to refuse dues, taxes, and labor services”; “they let me yell and give me nothing,” complained the abbot of Schussenried, referring to those working on his land (Blickle 1985: 172). In Upper Swabia, though serfdom was not abolished, some of the main peasant

grievances relating to inheritance and marriage rights were accepted with the Treaty of Memmingen of 1526. "On the Upper Rhine, too, some areas reached settlements that were positive for the peasants" (*ibid.*:172-174). In Switzerland, in Bern and Zurich, serfdom was abolished. Improvements in the lot of the "common man" were negotiated in Tyrol and Salzburg (*ibid.*: 176-179). But "the true child of the revolution" was the territorial assembly, instituted after 1525 in Upper Swabia, providing the foundation for a system of self-government that remained in place till the 19<sup>th</sup> century. New territorial assemblies emerged after 1525 "[realizing] in a weakened form one of the demands of 1525: that the common man ought to be part of the territorial estates alongside the nobles, the clergy, and the towns." Blicke concludes that "Wherever this cause won out, we cannot say that there the lords crowned their military conquest with political victory, [as] the prince was still bound to the consent of the common man. Only later, during the formation of the absolute state, did the prince succeed in freeing himself from that consent" (*ibid.*: 181-182).

17. Referring to the growing pauperization brought about across the world by capitalist development, the French anthropologist Claude Meillassoux, in *Maidens, Meal and Money* (1981), has argued that this contradiction spells a future crisis for capitalism: "In the end imperialism — as a means of reproducing cheap labor power — is leading capitalism to a major crisis, for even if there are still millions of people in the world...not directly involved in capitalist employment... how many are still capable owing to the social disruption, famine and wars it brings about, of producing their own subsistence and feeding their children?" (1981:140).
18. The extent of the demographic catastrophe caused by "the Columbian Exchange" is still debated. Estimates of the population decline in South and Central America, in the first post-Columbian century, range widely, but contemporary scholarly opinion is almost unanimous in likening its effects to an American Holocaust. André Gunder Frank writes that: "Within little more than a century, the Indian population declined by ninety percent and even ninety-five percent in Mexico, Peru, and some other regions" (1978: 43). Similarly, Noble David Cook argues that: "Perhaps 9 million people resided within the limits delineated by Peru's contemporary boundaries. The number of inhabitants remaining a century after contact was roughly a tenth of those that were there when the Europeans invaded the Andean world" (Cook 1981: 116).
19. On the changes in the nature of war in early modern Europe see, Cunningham and Grell (2000), 95-102; Kaltner (1998). Cunningham and Grell write that: "In the 1490s a large army would have consisted of 20,000 men, by the 1550s it would have been twice that, while towards the end of the Thirty Years War the leading European states would have field armies of close to 150,000 men" (2000: 95).
20. Albrecht Dürer's engraving was not the only representation of the "Four Horsemen." We have also one by Lucas Cranach (1522) and by Mattheus Merian (1630). Representations of battlefields, portraying slaughters of soldiers and civilians, villages in flames, rows of hanging bodies, are too numerous to mention. War is possibly the main theme of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century painting, leaking into every representation, even those ostensibly devoted to sacred subjects.



Matthaeus Merian, *FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE* (1630).

21. This outcome reveals the two souls of the Reformation: a popular one and elitist one, which very soon split along opposite lines. While the conservative side of the Reformation stressed the virtues of work and wealth accumulation, the popular side demanded a society run by “godly love” equality, and communal solidarity. On the class dimensions of the Reformation see Henry Heller (1986) and Po-Chia Hsia (1988).
22. Hoskins (1976), 121-123. In England the pre-Reformation Church had owned twenty-five to thirty per cent of the country’s real property. Of this land, Henry VIII sold sixty per cent (Hoskins 1976:121-123). Those who most gained from the confiscation and more eagerly enclosed the newly acquired lands were not the old nobility, nor those who depended on the commons for their keep, but the gentry and the “new men,” especially the lawyers and the merchants, who were the face of greed in the peasants’ imagination (Cornwall 1977: 22-28). It was against these “new men” that the peasants were prone to vent their anger. A fine snapshot of the winners and losers in the great transfer of land produced by the English Reformation is Table 15 in Kriedte (1983: 60), showing that twenty to twenty-five per cent of the land lost to the Church became the gentry’s property. Following are the most relevant columns.

DISTRIBUTION OF LAND BY SOCIAL GROUPS IN ENGLAND AND WALES:

	<u>1436*</u>	<u>1690</u>
Great owners	15-20	15-20
Gentry	25	45-50
Yeomen/freeholders	20	25-33
Church and Crown	25-33	5-10

[\*excl. Wales]

On the consequences of the Reformation in England for land tenure, see also Christopher Hill who writes:

“We need not idealize the abbeys as lenient landlords to admit some truth in contemporary allegations that the new purchasers shortened leases, racked rents and evicted tenants.... ‘Do ye not know,’ said John Palmer to a group of copyholders he was evicting, ‘that the king’s grace hath put down all houses of monks, friars, and nuns, therefore now is the time come that we gentlemen will pull down the houses of such poor knaves as yet be?’ ” (Hill 1958: 41).

23. See Midnight Notes (1990); see also The Ecologist (1993); and the ongoing debate on the “enclosures” and the “commons” in *The Commoner*, especially n.2, (September 2001), and n.3., (January 2002).
24. Primarily, “enclosure” meant “surrounding a piece of land with hedges, ditches, or other barriers to the free passage of men and animals, the hedge being the mark of exclusive ownership and land occupation. Hence, by enclosure, collective land use, usually accompanied by some degree of communal land ownership, would be abolished, superseded by individual ownership and separate occupation” (G. Slater 1968: 1-2). There were a variety ways to abolish collective land use in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The legal paths were (a) the purchase by one person of all tenements and their appurtenant common rights;” (b) the issuing by the King of a special license to enclose, or the passage of an enclosure act by the Parliament; (c) an agreement between the landlord and tenants, embodied in a Chancery decree; (d) the making of partial enclosures of waste by the lords, under the provisions of the Statutes of Merton (1235) and Westminster (1285). Roger Manning notes, however, that these “legal methods... frequently concealed the use of force, fraud, and intimidation against the tenants” (Manning 1998: 25). E. D. Fryde, too, writes that “[p]rolonged harassment of tenants combined with threats of evictions at the slightest legal opportunity” and physical violence were used to bring about mass evictions “particularly during the disorder years 1450–85 [i.e., the War of the Roses]” (Fryde 1996: 186). Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) expressed the anguish and desolation that these mass expulsions produced when he spoke of sheep which had become so great devourers and so wild that “they eat up and swallow the very men themselves.” “Sheep”— he added — that “consume and destroy and devour whole fields, houses and cities.”
25. In *The Invention of Capitalism* (2000), Michael Perelman has emphasized the importance of “customary rights” (e.g., hunting) noting how they were often of vital sig-

- nificance, making the difference between survival and total destitution (pp. 38ff.).
26. Garret Hardin's essay on the "tragedy of the commons" (1968) was one of the mainstays in the ideological campaign in support of land privatization in the 1970s. The "tragedy," in Hardin's version, is the inevitability of Hobbesian egoism as a determinant of human behavior. In his view, in a hypothetical common, each herdsman wants to maximize his gain regardless of the implications of his action for the other herdsmen, so that "ruin is the destination to which all men rush, each pursuing his best interest" (In Baden and Noonan, eds., 1998: 8-9).
  27. The "modernization" defense of the enclosures has a long history, but it has received new energy from neo-liberalism. Its main advocate has been the World Bank, which has often demanded that governments in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania privatize communal lands as a condition for receiving loans (World Bank 1989). A classic defense of the productivity gains derived from enclosure is found in Harriett Bradley (1968, originally published in 1918). The more recent academic literature has taken a more even-handed "costs/gains" approach, exemplified by the works of G. E. Mingay (1997) and Robert S. Duplessis (1997: 65-70). The battle concerning the enclosures has now crossed the disciplinary boundaries and is being debated also among literary scholars. An example of disciplinary border-crossing is Richard Burt and John Michael Archer, eds., *Enclosure Acts. Sexuality Property and Culture in Early Modern England* (1994) — especially the essays by James R. Siemon, "Landlord Not King: Agrarian Change and Interarticulation;" and William C. Carroll, "'The Nursery of Beggary': Enclosure, Vagrancy, and Sedition in the Tudor-Stuart Period." William C. Carroll has found that there was a lively defense of enclosures and critique of the commons in the Tudor period carried out by the spokesmen of the enclosing class. According to this discourse, the enclosures encouraged private enterprise, which in turn increased agricultural productivity, while the commons were the "nurseries and receptacles of thieves, rogues and beggars" (Carroll 1994: 37-38).
  28. De Vries (1976), 42-43; Hoskins (1976), 11-12.
  29. The commons were the sites of popular festivals and other collective activities, like sports, games, and meetings. When they were fenced off, the sociality that had characterized the village community was severely undermined. Among the rituals that came to an end was "Rogationtide perambulation," a yearly procession among the fields meant to bless the future crops, that was prevented by the hedging of the fields (Underdown 1985: 81).
  30. On the breaking down of social cohesion see (among others) David Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603-1660* (1985), especially Chapter 3, which also describes the efforts made by the older nobility to distinguish itself from the *nouveaux riches*.
  31. Kriedte (1983), 55; Briggs (1998), 289-316.
  32. Cottage industry was an extension of the manorial, rural industry, reorganized by the capitalist merchants to take advantage of the large pool of labor liberated by the enclosures. With this move the merchants aimed to circumvent the high wages and power of the urban guilds. This is how the putting-out system was born — a system by which the capitalist merchants distributed among rural families wool or cotton to spin or weave, and often also the instruments of work, and then picked

up the finished product. The importance of the put-out system and cottage industry for the development of British industry can be deduced from the fact that the entire textile industry, the most important sector in the first phase of capitalist development, was organized in this fashion. The cottage industry had two main advantages for employers: it prevented the danger of 'combinations'; and it cheapened the cost of labor, since its home-based organization provided the workers with free domestic services and the cooperation of their children and wives, who were treated as helpers and paid low "auxiliary" wages.

33. Wage labor was so identified with slavery that the Levellers excluded waged workers from the vote, not considering them sufficiently independent from their employers to be able to cast a vote. "Why should a free person make oneself a slave?" asked The Fox, a character in Edmund Spenser's *Mother Hubbard's Tale* (1591). In turn Gerrard Winstanley, the leader of the Diggers, declared that it did not make any difference whether one lived under one's enemy or under one's brother if one worked for a wage (Hill 1975).
34. Herzog (1989), 45-52. The literature on vagabonds is vast. Among the most important on this topic are A. Beier (1974) and B. Geremek's *Poverty, A History* (1994).
35. Fletcher (1973), 64-77; Cornwall (1977), 137-241; Beer (1982), 82-139. At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century many enclosure riots involved the lesser gentry who used the popular hatred for enclosures, engrossments, and emparkments to settle their feuds with their betters. But, after 1549, "the gentry's leadership in enclosure disputes diminished and small-holders or artisans and cottagers were more likely to take the initiative in heading agrarian protests" (Manning 1988: 312). Manning describes the typical victim of an enclosure riot as "the outsider." "Merchants attempting to buy their way into the landed gentry were particularly vulnerable to enclosure riots, as were farmers of leases. New owners and farmers were the victims of enclosure riots in 24 of the 75 Star Chamber cases. A closely-related category consists of six absentee gentlemen" (Manning 1988: 50).
36. Manning (1988), 96-97, 114-116, 281; Mendelson and Crawford (1998).
37. The increasing presence of women in anti-enclosure riots was influenced by a popular belief that women were "lawless" and could level hedges with impunity (Mendelson and Crawford 1998: 386-387). But the Court of the Star Chamber went out of its way to disabuse people of this belief. In 1605, one year after James I's witchcraft law, it ruled that "if women offend in trespass, riot or otherwise, and an action is brought against them and their husbands, they [the husbands] shall pay the fines and damages, notwithstanding the trespass or the offense is committed without the privity of the husbands" (Manning 1988: 98).
38. On this subject see, among others, Maria Mies (1986).
39. By 1600, real wages in Spain had lost thirty percent of their purchasing power with respect to what they had been in 1511 (Hamilton 1965: 280). On the Price Revolution, see in particular Earl J. Hamilton's now classic work, *American Treasure and the Price Revolution in Spain, 1501-1650* (1965), which studies the impact of the America bullion on it; David Hackett Fischer *The Great Wave: Price Revolutions and the Rhythms of History* (1996), which studies price hikes from the Middle Ages



to the present — in particular Chapter 2 (pp. 66–113); and Peter Ramsey's edited volume, *The Price Revolution in Sixteenth Century England* (1971).

40. Braudel (1966), Vol. I, 517–524.

41. As Peter Kriedte (1983) sums up the economic developments of this period:

“The crisis sharpened the differentials in income and property. Pauperization and proletarianization were paralleled by an increased accumulation of wealth.... Work on Chippenham in Cambridgeshire has shown that the bad harvests of [the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries] resulted in a decisive shift. Between 1544 and 1712 the medium-sized farms all but disappeared. At the same time the proportion of properties of 90 acres or more rose from 3% to 14%; households without land increased from 32% to 63%” (Kriedte 1983: 54–55).

42. Wallerstein (1974), 83; Le Roy Ladurie (1928–1929). The growing interest of capitalist entrepreneurs for money-lending was perhaps the motivation behind the expulsion of the Jews from most cities and countries of Europe in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries — Parma (1488), Milan (1489), Geneva (1490), Spain (1492), and Austria (1496). Expulsions and pogroms continued for a century. Until the tide was turned by Rudolph II in 1577, it became illegal for Jews to live in most of Western Europe. As soon as money-lending became a lucrative business, this activity, previously declared unworthy of a Christian, was rehabilitated, as shown by this dialogue between a peasant and a wealthy burgher, written anonymously in Germany around 1521:

Peasant: What brings me to you? Why I would like to see how you spend your time.

Burgher: How should I spend my time? I sit here counting my money, can't you see?

Peasant: Tell me, burgher, who gave you so much money that you spend all your time counting it?

Burgher: You want to know who gave me my money? I shall tell you. A peasant comes knocking at my door and asks me to lend him ten or twenty gulden. I inquire of him whether he owns a plot of good pasture land or a nice field for plowing. He says: 'Yes, burgher, I have a good meadow and a fine field, worth a hundred gulden the two of them.' I reply: 'Excellent! Pledge your meadow and your field as collateral, and if you will undertake to pay one gulden a year as interest, you can have your loan of twenty gulden.' Happy to hear the good news, the peasant replies: 'I gladly give you my pledge.' 'But I must tell you,' I rejoin, 'that if ever you fail to pay your interest on time, I will take possession of your land and make it my property.' And this does not worry the peasant, he proceeds to assign his pasture and field to me as his pledge. I lend him the money and he pays interest punctually for one year or two; then comes a bad harvest and soon he is behind in his payment. I confiscate his land, evict him and meadow and field are mine. And I do this not only with peasants but with artisans as well. If a tradesman owns a good house I lend him a sum of money on it, and before long the house belongs to me. In this way I acquire much property and wealth, which is why I spend all my time counting my money.

Peasant: And I thought only the Jews practiced usury! Now I hear that Christians do it, too.

Burgher: Usury? Who is talking about usury? Nobody here practices usury. What the debtor pays is interest (G. Strauss: 110–111).

43. With reference to Germany, Peter Kriedte writes that:

“Recent research has shown that a building worker in Augsburg [in Bavaria] was able adequately to maintain his wife and two children from his annual income during the first three decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Thenceforth his living standard began to fall. Between 1566 and 1575 and from 1585 to the outbreak of the Thirty Years War his wages could no longer pay for the subsistence minimum of his family” (Kriedte 1983: 51–52). On the impoverishment of the European working class due to the enclosures and the Price Revolution see also C. Lis & H. Soly (1979), 72–79. As they write, in England “between 1500 and 1600 grain prices rose six-fold, while wages rose threefold. Not surprisingly, workers and cottars were but ‘house beggars’ for Francis Bacon.” In the same period, in France, the purchasing power of cottars and waged workers fell by forty five percent. “In New Castile... wage labour and poverty were considered synonymous.” (*ibid.*:72–4).

44. On the growth of prostitution in the 16<sup>th</sup> century see, Nickie Roberts, *Whores in History: Prostitution in Western Society* (1992).

45. Manning (1988); Fletcher (1973); Cornwall (1977); Beer (1982); Bercé (1990); Lombardini (1983).

46. Kamen (1971), Bercé (1990), 169–179; Underdown (1985). As David Underdown notes:

“The prominent role played by female [food] rioters has often been noted. At Southampton in 1608 a group of women refused to wait while the corporation debated what to do about a ship being loaded with grain for London; they boarded it and seized the cargo. Women were thought to be the likely rioters in the incident in Weymouth in 1622, while at Dorchester in 1631 a group (some of them inmates of the workhouse) stopped a cart in the mistaken belief that it contained wheat; one of them complained of a local merchant who “did send away the best fruits of the land, as butter, cheese, wheat, etc., over the seas” (1985: 117). On women’s presence in food riots, see also Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford (1998), who write that “women played a prominent role in grain riots [in England].” For instance, “[a]t Maldon in 1629 a crowd of over a hundred women and children boarded the ships to prevent grain from being shipped away.” They were led by a “Captain Ann Carter, later tried and hanged” for her leading role in the protest (*ibid.*: 385–86).

47. In a similar vein were the comments of a physician in the Italian city of Bergamo, during the famine of 1630:

“The loathing and terror engendered by a maddened crowd of half dead people who importune all comers in the streets, in piazzas, in the churches, at street doors, so that life is intolerable, and in addition the foul stench rising from them as well as the constant spectacle of the dying...this cannot be believe by anyone who has not experienced it” (quoted by Carlo M. Cipolla 1993: 129).

48. On 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century protest in Europe, see Henry Kamen, *The Iron Century*

- (1972), in particular Chapter 10, "Popular Rebellion. 1550-1660" (pp. 331-385). As Kamen writes, "The crisis of 1595-7 was operative throughout Europe, with repercussions in England, France, Austria, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, and Ukraine. Probably never before in European history had so many popular rebellions coincided in time" (p. 336). There were rebellions in Naples in 1595, 1620, 1647 (*ibid.*: 334-35, 350, 361-63). In Spain, rebellions erupted in 1640 in Catalonia, in Grenada in 1648, in Cordova and Seville in 1652. For riots and rebellions in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century England, see Cornwall (1977); Underdown (1985), and Manning (1988). On revolt in Spain and Italy, see also Braudel (1976, Vol. II), 738-739.
49. On vagrancy in Europe, beside Beier and Geremek, see Braudel (1976), Vol. II, 739-743; Kamen (1972), 390-394.
  50. On the rise of property crimes on the wake of the Price Revolution see the Charter on p.141 in this volume. See Richard J. Evans (1996), 35; Kamen (1972), 397-403; and Lis and Soly (1984). Lis and Soly write that "[t]he available evidence suggests that the overall crime rate did indeed rise markedly in Elizabethan and early Stuart England, especially between 1590 and 1620" (p. 218).
  51. In England, among the moments of sociality and collective reproduction that were terminated due to the loss of the open fields and the commons there were the processions that were held in the spring to bless the fields — which could no longer take place once the fields were fenced off — and the dances that were held around the Maypole on May First (Underdown 1985).
  52. Lis and Soly (1979), 92. On the institution of Public Assistance, see Geremek's *Poverty A History* (1994), Chapter 4: "The Reform of Charity" (pp.142-177).
  53. Yann Moulrier Boutang, *De L'esclavage au salariat* (1998), 291-293. I only partially agree with Moulrier Boutang when he claims that Poor Relief was not so much a response to the misery produced by land expropriation and price inflation, but a measure intended to prevent the flight of workers and thereby create a local labor market (1998). As already mentioned, Moulrier Boutang overemphasizes the degree of mobility available to the dispossessed proletariat as he does not consider the different situation of women. Furthermore, he underplays the degree to which assistance was the result of a struggle — a struggle that cannot be reduced to the flight of labor, but included assaults, the invasion of towns by masses of starving rural people (a constant feature, in mid-16<sup>th</sup>-century France) and other forms of attack. It is not coincidence, in this context, that Norwich, the center of the Kett Rebellion became, shortly after its defeat, the center and the model of Poor Relief reforms.
  54. The Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives, who was knowledgeable about the poor relief systems of the Flanders and Spain, was one of the main supporters of public charity. In his *De Subvention Pauperum* (1526) he argued that "secular authority rather than the Church should be responsible for the aid to the poor" (Geremek 1994: 187). He also stressed that authorities should find work for the able-bodied, insisting that "the dissolute, the crooked, the thieving and the idle should be given the hardest work, and the most badly paid, in order that their example might serve as a deterrent to others" (*ibid.*).
  55. The main work on the rise of work-house and correction houses is Dario Melossi

and Massimo Pavarini, *The Prison and the Factory: Origins of the Penitentiary System* (1981). The authors point out that the main purpose of incarceration was to break the sense of identity and solidarity of the poor. See also Geremek (1994), 206–229. On the schemes concocted by English proprietors to incarcerate the poor in their parishes, see Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1 (1909: 793). For France, see Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* (1965), especially Chapter 2: “The Great Confinement” (pp. 38–64).

56. While Hackett Fischer connects the 17<sup>th</sup> century decline of population in Europe to the social effects of the Price Revolution (pp. 91–92), Peter Kriedte presents a more complex picture, arguing that the demographic decline was a combination of both Malthusian and socio-economic factors. The decline was, in his view, a response to both the population increase of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, on one side, and on the other to the landlords’ appropriation of the larger portion of the agricultural income (p. 63).

An interesting observation which supports my arguments concerning the connection between demographic decline and pro-natalist state policies is offered by Robert S. Duplessis (1997) who writes that the recovery after the population crisis of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was far swifter than that after the Black Death. It took a century for the population to start growing again after the epidemic of 1348, while in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the growth process was reactivated within less than half a century (p. 143). This estimates would indicate the presence in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe of a far higher natality rate, possibly to be attributed to the fierce attack on any form of contraception.

57. “Bio-power” is the concept Foucault used in his *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1978) to describe the shift from an authoritarian form of government to one more decentralized, centered on the “fostering of the power of life” in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe. “Bio-power” expresses the growing concern, at the state level, for the sanitary, sexual, and penal control of individual bodies, as well as population growth and population movements and their insertion into the economic realm. According to this paradigm, the rise of bio-power went hand in hand with the rise of liberalism and marked the end of the juridical and monarchic state.
58. I make this distinction with the Canadian sociologist Bruce Curtis’ discussion of the Foucauldian concept of “population” and “bio-power” in mind. Curtis contrasts the concept of “populousness,” which was current in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, with the notion of “population” that became the basis of the modern science of demography in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He points out that “populousness” was an organic and hierarchical concept. When the mercantilists used it they were concerned with the part of the social body that creates wealth, i.e., actual or potential laborers. The later concept of “population” is an atomistic one. “Population consists of so many undifferentiated atoms distributed through abstract space and time” — Curtis writes — “with its own laws and structures.” I argue, however, that there is a continuity between these two notions, as in both the mercantilist and liberal capitalist period, the notion of population has been functional to the reproduction of labor-power.
59. The heyday of Mercantilism was in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, its dom-

- inance in economic life being associated with the names of William Petty (1623–1687) and Jean Baptiste Colbert, the finance minister of Louis XIV. However, the late 17<sup>th</sup>-century mercantilists only systematized or applied theories that had been developing since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Jean Bodin in France and Giovanni Botero in Italy are considered proto-mercantilist economists. One of the first systematic formulations of mercantilist economic theory is found in Thomas Mun's *England's Treasure by Forraign Trade* (1622).
60. For a discussion of the new legislation against infanticide see (among others) John Riddle (1997), 163–166; Merry Wiesner (1993), 52–53; and Mendelson and Crawford (1998), who write that “[t]he crime of infanticide was one that single women were more likely to commit than any other group in society. A study of infanticide in the early seventeenth century showed that of sixty mothers, fifty three were single, six were widows” (p. 149). Statistics also show that infanticide was punished even more frequently than witchcraft. Margaret King writes that Nuremberg “executed fourteen women for that crime between 1578 and 1615, but only one witch. The Parliament of Rouen from 1580s to 1606 prosecuted about as many cases of infanticide as witchcraft, but punished infanticide more severely. Calvinist Geneva shows a much higher rate of execution for infanticide than witchcraft; from 1590 to 1630, nine women of eleven charged were executed for infanticide, compared to only one of thirty suspects for witchcraft (p.10). These estimates are confirmed by Merry Wiesner, who writes that “in Geneva, for example, 25 women out of 31 charged with infanticide during the period 1595–1712 were executed, as compared with 19 out of 122 charged with witchcraft (1993: 52). Women were executed for infanticide in Europe as late as the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
  61. An interesting article on this topic is Robert Fletcher’s “The Witches Pharmakopeia” (1896).
  62. The reference is to an Italian feminist song from 1971 titled “Aborto di Stato” (State Abortion). In ....
  63. Margaret L. King, *Women of the Renaissance* (1991), 78. For the closing of brothels in Germany see Merry Wiesner, *Working Women in Renaissance Germany* (1986), 194–209.
  64. An extensive catalogue of the places and years in which women were expelled from the crafts is found in David Herlihy, *Women, Family and Society in Medieval Europe: Historical Essays*. Providence: Berghahan, 1978–1991. See also Merry Wiesner (1986), 174–185.
  65. Martha Howell (1986), Chapter 8, 174–183. Howell writes:
 

“Comedies and satires of the period, for example, often portrayed market women and trades women as shrews, with characterizations that not only ridiculed or scolded them for taking on roles in market production but frequently even charged them with sexual aggression” (p.182).
  66. In a thorough critique of 17<sup>th</sup>-century social contract theory, as formulated by Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, Carol Pateman (1988) argues that the “social contract” was based on a more fundamental “sexual contract,” which recognized men’s right to appropriate women’s bodies and women’s labor.
  67. Ruth Mazo Karras (1996) writes that “‘Common woman’ meant a woman avail-

- able to all men; unlike 'common man' which denoted someone of humble origins and could be used in either a derogatory or a laudatory sense, it did not convey any meaning either of non-gentile behavior or of class solidarity" (p. 138).
68. For the family in the period of the "transition," see Lawrence Stone (1977); and André Burguière and François Lebrun, "Priests, Prince, and Family," in Burguière, et al., *A History of the Family: The Impact of Modernity* (1996). Volume Two, 95ff.
69. On the character of 17<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchalism and, in particular, the concept of patriarchal power in social contract theory, see again Pateman (1988); Zilla Eisenstein, *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (1981); and Margaret R. Sommerville, *Sex and Subjection: Attitudes To Women In Early Modern Society* (1995).
- Discussing the changes contract theory brought about in England, in the legal and philosophical attitude towards women, Sommerville argues that the contractarians supported the subordination of women to men as much as the patriarchalists, but justified it on different grounds. Being at least formally committed to the principle of "natural equality," and "government by consent," in defense of male supremacy they invoked the theory of women's "natural inferiority," according to which women would consent to their husbands' appropriation of their property and voting rights upon realizing their intrinsic weakness and necessary dependence on men.
70. See Underdown (1985a), "The Taming of the Scold: The Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England," in Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (1985), 116-136; Mendelson and Crawford (1998), 69-71.
71. On women's loss of rights in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, see (among others) Merry Wiesner (1993), who writes that:
- "The spread of Roman law had a largely negative effect on women's civil legal status in the early modern period both because of the views of women which jurists chose to adopt from it and the stricter enforcement of existing laws to which it gave rise" (p. 33).
72. Adding to the dramas and tracts also the court records of the period, Underdown concludes that "between 1560 and 1640... such records disclose an intense preoccupation with women who are a visible threat to the patriarchal system. Women scolding and brawling with their neighbors, single women refusing to enter service, wives domineering or beating their husbands: all seem to surface more frequently than in the period immediately before or afterwards. It will not go unnoted that this is also the period when witchcraft accusations reach a peak" (1985a: 119).
73. James Blaut (1992a) points out that within a few decades after 1492 "the rate of growth and change speeded up dramatically and Europe entered a period of rapid development." He writes:
- "Colonial enterprise in the 16<sup>th</sup> century produced capital in a number of ways. One was gold and silver mining. A second was plantation agriculture, principally in Brazil. A third was trade with Asia in spice, cloth and much more. A fourth element was the profit returned to European houses from a variety of productive and commercial enterprises in the Americas.... A fifth was slaving. Accumulation from these sources was massive (p. 38).

74. Exemplary is the case of Bermuda, cited by Elaine Forman Crane (1990). Crane writes that several white women in Bermuda were owners of slaves — usually other women — thanks to whose labor they were able to maintain a certain degree of economic autonomy (pp. 231–258).
75. June Nash (1980) writes that “A significant change came in 1549 when racial origin became a factor, along with legally sanctioned marital unions, in defining rights of succession. The new law stated that no mulatto (offspring of a black man and an Indian woman), mestizo, person born out of wedlock was allowed to have Indians in *encomienda*. ... Mestizo and illegitimate became almost synonymous” (p. 140).
76. A *coyota* was a part-mestiza and part-Indian woman. Ruth Behar (1987), 45.
77. The most deadly ones were the mercury mines, like that in Huancavelica, in which thousands of workers died of slow poisoning amidst horrible sufferings. As David Noble Cook writes:  
 “Laborers in the Huancavelica mine faced both immediate and long term dangers. Cave-ins, floods, and falls as a result of slipping shafts posed daily threats. Intermediate health hazards were presented by a poor diet, inadequate ventilation in the underground chambers, and a sharp temperature difference between the mine interiors and the rarefied Andean atmosphere.... Workers who remained for long periods in the mines perhaps suffered the worst fate of all. Dust and fine particles were released into the air by the striking of the tools used to break the ore loose. Indians inhaled the dust, which contained four dangerous substances: mercury vapors, arsenic, arsenic anhydride, and cinnabar. Long exposure... resulted in death. Known as *mal de la mina*, or mine sickness, it was incurable when advanced. In less severe cases the gums were ulcerated and eaten away...(pp.205–6).
78. Barbara Bush (1990) points out that, if they wanted to abort, slave women certainly knew how to, having had available to them the knowledge brought from Africa (p. 141).





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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)

