Caliban and the Witch

Silvia Federici

Autonomedia

Acknowledgements

To the many witches I have met in the Women's Movement, and to the other witches whose stories have accompanied me for more than twenty-five years, nevertheless leaving an inexhaustible desire to tell, to let people know, to make sure that they will not be forgotten.

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

Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Endnotes

1. The study of the transition to capitalism has a long history, which not accidentally coincides with that of the main political movements of this century. Marxist historians such as Maurice Dobb, Rodney Hilton, Christopher Hill revisited the "transition" in the 1940s and 1950s, in the wake of the debates generated by the consolidation of the Soviet Union, the rise of new socialist states in Europe and Asia, and what at the time appeared as an impending capitalist crisis. The "transition" was again revisited in the 1960s by Third Worldist theorists (Samir Amin, André Gunder Frank), in the context of the contemporary debates over neo-colonialism, "underdevelopment," and the "unequal exchange" between the "First" and the "Third World."
2. These two realities, in my analysis, are closely connected, since in capitalism reproducing workers on a generational basis and regenerating daily their capacity to work has become "women's labor," though mystified, because of its un-waged condition, as a personal service and even a natural resource.
3. Not surprisingly, a valorization of the body has been present in nearly all the literature of "second wave" 20th-century feminism, as it has characterized the literature produced by the anti-colonial revolt and by the descendants of the enslaved Africans. On this ground, across great geographic and cultural boundaries, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) anticipates Aimé Cesaire's *Return to the Native Land* (1938), when she mockingly scolds her female audience and, behind it, a broader female world, for not having managed to produce anything but children.

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

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

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

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

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

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