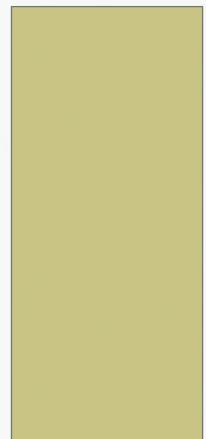


CALIBAN AND THE WITCH (1998) - SILVIA FEDERICI

WOMEN, THE BODY, AND PRIMITIVE
ACCUMULATION



INTRODUCTION

- A feminist examination of the transition to capitalism centering the witch-hunts, deepening the class struggle.
- Caliban: a character from Shakespeare's "The Tempest" (anti-colonial rebel, symbol of the world proletariat, proletariat body as a terrain and instrument of resistance to capitalism).
- Witch: Caliban's mother, the heretic, the healer, the disobedient wife, the woman who dared to live alone, the obeah woman who poisoned her master's food and inspired slaves to revolt.

FEDERICI POSES QUESTIONS

- Why after 500 years of capital's rule, are workers on a mass scale still defined as paupers, witches, outlaws?
- How are land expropriation and mass pauperization related to the continuing attack on women?
- What do we learn about capitalist development, once we examine it through feminist perspective?
- How to explain the execution of hundreds of thousands of “witches” at the beginning of the modern era?
- How to explain why the rise of capitalism was coeval with a war against women?

INFLUENCES: MARXIST

- **Historical materialism:** Placing the history of class struggle beside shifts in material conditions (land ownership, population, wages, food prices etc).
- Critique: overemphasis on the role and experiences of working **men** at the exclusion of others.
- Another critique: Marxism can support that history **naturally** progresses from feudalism to capitalism to worker - run industrial socialism (violence recedes).

INFLUENCES: MARXIST

Federici expands Marx's term "**primitive accumulation**" to describe:

- Collecting of resources necessary for the ruling class to force workers to participate in capitalism (classic sense).
- "The construction of a new patriarchal order" to control women and exploit their reproductive labor.
- The material and ideological "mechanization of the body".

INFLUENCES: FEMINIST

Feminist scholarship limitations:

- Women's histories can fail to speak to broader historical trends.
- Second wave feminism: gender essentialism.
- Post – modern feminism can reject the category of women altogether.

INFLUENCES: FEMINIST

- Federici explores the resistance and oppression of the “witch”, the progress of construction of gender, and the oppression of the entire working class through this difference.
- “Women” is still a legitimate category of analysis as it represents a **class** difference (a difference in access to power and material resources).

INFLUENCES: FOUCAULDIAN

- Most read works: **historical analyses of the construction of marginalized identities** (queerness, madness and criminality).
- **Interiorization of power:** the process by which individuals internalize rules, disciplining themselves and those around them.
- Critique: In “History of sexuality” he creates a **genderless subject**, ignoring women’s experiences. Also, he fails to critique class relations. Instead he advocates for a more humane form of capitalism.
- Federici employs his model of power to examine ideological shifts supported by state sponsored violence.

ALL THE WORLD NEEDS A JOLT

CHAPTER 1

SERFDOM (5TH - 7TH AD)

- Serfdom gave peasants **increased autonomy, but not freedom**. They were forced to work for and pay taxes to landowners, and to pay tithes to the church.
- They were allowed to work for themselves on their own land plots.
- Women's access to communal lands, women's solidarity through working together, being held by a rooted village community (all those were stripped from them in the transition to capitalism).

STRUGGLE ON THE COMMONS AND SOCIAL DIVISION

- Anti – feudal struggle and resistance (refusing to work and pay taxes, refusing military service etc).
- 12th – 14th AD: work requirements and taxes payable by crops were replaced by **money-rents** and **money-taxes**.
- Shift towards market economy and creation of social divisions.
- Women suffered a lot from this, especially **widowed women** with less access to land and earned less as laborers.

MILLENIAN AND HERETIC MOVEMENTS

- They **rose against social order** (short-lived rebellions).
- Alternative community structure(s). Many **embraced poverty and communalism**.
- The working class vastly followed heresy from 13th to the mid 16th centuries.
- They were violently **persecuted by church**, state (Inquisition).
- Heretics openly **rejected the Church's limits on sexuality**.

POLITICIZATION OF SEXUALITY

- Church recognized the power that sexual desire gave women over men and tried to exorcise it by **identifying holiness with avoidance of women and sex.**
- Penitentials since 6th century was a process that invested sexuality with a new significance. Made it a subject of **confession**, discussion. Created a science of sexuality. (Foucault)
- Church's interference in intimate affairs increased in 12th century with restrictions including **attacks on non-procreative sex and homosexuality.**

WOMEN AND HERESY

- Women held **leadership roles** in heretical sects.
- Resisting Church's sex edicts, **abortion and contraceptives were common**.
- Since the demographic crisis of **Black Death (1347 – 1352)** these practices were **criminalized and persecuted**.
- By the beginning of the 15th century the main target of persecution against heretics became primarily **women**. Specifically, the **witch**.

URBAN STRUGGLES & BLACK DEATH

- Landless migrated to cities and towns forming a new **urban proletariat**. They engaged in social protests.
- Black Death (1347 – 1352) killed about 1/3 of the European population.
- Wages increased while familiarity with death undermined social discipline. **Differences in standards of living between the poor and the rich decreased.**
- “15th century: Golden age of European proletariat” -Marx

SEXUAL POLITICS, THE RISE OF THE STATE AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION

- Growing cities: capitalist alliance permitted common (gang) **rapes** of proletarian (so unprotected) women.
- Men's rage was directed to women casting them as **class traitors**, allegedly being mistresses of the employers.
- State sponsored prostitution emerged and became widespread.
- The intensification of social conflict, led to the **centralization of the state** (counter – revolution).

**THE ACCUMULATION OF LABOR AND THE
DEGRADATION OF WOMEN: CONSTRUCTING
“DIFFERENCE” IN THE “TRANSITION TO CAPITALISM”**

CHAPTER 2

15TH - 16TH CENTURY SHIFT & PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION

- In the early 16th, the revolutionary process ended, crushed by ruling class through violence and ideological systems of control.
- Marx's **primitive accumulation**: What made capitalism possible, according to Marx, is the concentration of resources in the hands of a small owning class and their gaining control of the labor of the working class by removing the possibility of their subsistence without participating in wage labor.
- Federici includes: the creation of differences and divisions within the working class, the ideological shift to conceive of the body as machine, and a campaign to break women's power and control their reproductive labor.

ACCUMULATION OF LABOR AND LAND

- 16th – 17th: The workforce was barely surviving. The correction to make capitalism sustainable was new systems of social control to **capture women's reproductive labor** (childbirth, cleaning, feeding, care work).
- Since late 15th: The ruling class started **accumulating control of fields, forests and water**, removing peasants from their subsistence, expropriating lands.

ENCLOSURES

- The **Enclosures** was “a set of strategies the English lords and rich farmers used to eliminate communal land property and expand their holdings, mostly referred to the abolition of the open-field system.
- This process led to the destruction of village communities, peasants’ dependence on wage-labor, and “**two centuries of starvation.**”
- **Peasant resistance** to enclosures was widespread, and often led by women who suffered the most from the loss of communal lands and the disintegration of village communities.

THE PRICE REVOLUTION AND THE PAUPERIZATION OF WORKING CLASS

- 16th century: **decrease in wages**, hunger.
- “**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.”
- **Food riots** with many women participants (assaults in bakeries etc).

THE STATE INTERVENTION IN THE REPRODUCTION OF LABOR: POOR RELIEF AND THE CRIMINALIZATION OF THE WORKING CLASS

- Emerging states forced the poor to participate in wage labor through **criminalizing** and harshly punishing **vagrancy**.
- Governments began offering bread to the poor. That was 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.

POPULATION DECLINE AND THE DISCIPLINING OF WOMEN

- Population decline in the 16th and 17th centuries turned **reproduction and population growth into state matters**.
- **States broke the control women had exercised over their bodies** and reproduction, replacing female midwives with male doctors and introducing severe **punishment for reproductive crimes** (contraception, abortion, infanticide, and adultery).

NEW GENDERED WAGE REGIME

- Women: excluded from wage work, lower wages, not considered “workers”.
- Women’s position hid their status as workers, while giving men free access to women’s bodies and their labor.
- “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.”

COLONIZATION, GLOBALIZATION AND WOMEN

- End of 17th century: change of female archetype from unreasonable, vain, wild (similar to colonial subjects to justify their exploitation) to passive, asexual beings, more obedient, more moral than men.
- Capitalism emerged from the creation of “an **international division of labor** that integrated the work of slaves into the reproduction of the European work-force, while keeping enslaved and waged workers geographically and socially divided.”

SEX, RACE, CLASS IN THE COLONIES

- The ruling class divided proletariat **enforcing racism** in the colonies (just like with sexism).
- When the importation of slaves was outlawed in the American colonies, policies were implemented to control slave women's biological reproduction.
- “Primitive accumulation has been above all an accumulation of differences, inequalities, hierarchies, divisions, which have alienated workers from each other and even themselves.”

THE GREAT CALIBAN: THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE REBEL BODY

CHAPTER 3

ENLIGHTENMENT

- 17th century's Scientific **Enlightenment: empirical scientific method**, appropriation of folk knowledge from academia, defining the “**truth**”, developing the **mechanical concept of the human body**, divesting it of its sacrality.
- 18th century: power decentralized and relocated in individuals.
- The synthesis of the theories of **Hobbes** and **Descartes**, the **centralization of state power** and the proliferation of **self-management**, allows capitalism to control laborers with less outward expressions of violence.

HOBBES & DESCARTES

- **Hobbes** theorizes that everything is **matter**, that all human behavior is caused by **biological reflexes**, **chemical reactions** in the brain etc. He argues that **humans are by nature compelled to seek dominance**, and thus the absolute power of kings is necessary to maintain a peaceful society.
- **Descartes**, “the father of modern philosophy” **separates the human mind/soul from its body** and places all the mystical aspects of a human in its immaterial soul. He advocates for the rational human **mind to control the passions of the body**.

AGAINST MECHANIZATION OF HUMAN BODY

- Many detested anatomy, dissection etc that degrades the human body.
- Magical beliefs and practices, including a **magical conception of the natural world and the human body** are core to all pre-capitalist ideologies. Eradicating these beliefs and practices is **necessary** to make humans into laborers for capitalism.
- Magic was viewed as the “ability to get what one wanted without work.”



A telling example of the new mechanical conception of the body is this 16th-century German engraving where the peasant is represented as nothing more than a means of production, with his body composed entirely of agricultural implements.

THE GREAT WITCH-HUNT IN EUROPE

CHAPTER 4

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

- The witch-hunts have been **downplayed** and **depolitized**. Marxist historians have failed to recognize their significance.
- Witch trials first appeared in the mid 15th century (witchcraft: a capital crime), escalated in the mid 16th, and peaked late 16th – mid 17th.
- They were orchestrated by **governments** and the **church** with the support of **intellectuals**.
- **NOT a result of the absurdity of Middle Ages but an outcome of the transition to capitalism and “Logic”, a proud feature of Enlightenment.**

CHANGES IN THE MODE OF PRODUCTION

- Witchcraft was a charge that criminalized **a whole demographic of people** and punished **a wide range of behaviors**, absolutely common and acceptable in previous years. The characteristics that were criminalized illustrated the “poor woman”.
- Witch-hunts were an **attack on women's power** and their **resistance to capitalism** and were critical to the process of **capturing women's reproductive labor**.
- In Europe they were concentrated in places that were in the **process of transitioning to capitalism** (shift in labor relations).
- The witch-hunts punished **property crimes and poverty**. Many trials featured beggar women who were accused of cursing those who refused them assistance.

THE SABBAT

- The myth of the Witches Sabbat, a subject of wild speculation by witch-hunters, reveals the ruling class' fear of **peasant gatherings to plot their revolts.**
- The Sabbats were described as scenes of orgies and cannibalism, reflecting bourgeois fears of **peasants' sexual freedom and threats to eat the rich.**
- Witches were imagined to travel from across the region to attend nighttime Sabbats which represents the **threat of deviation from capitalist work-time and travel regulations.**

WOMAN HUNTING

- Peasant women were accused of witchcraft for a broad range of behaviors that represented their **power and sexuality**.
- **Attacks on contraceptives and abortions** and the midwives who carried the knowledge of practices and reproductive functions.
- State authorities examined the naked bodies of the accused and tortured them to force confessions.
- The entire community -including the families of the condemned- were forced to attend their **public executions**.

THE TAMING OF WOMEN

- Women had to be portrayed as subservient to a man: Devil (affirmation of male supremacy).
- In the witch hunts women were cast as “the destroyers of the male sex” (they were feared for their power to make men impotent, or drive them wild with lust).
- The witch hunts sought to cement the patriarchal order by demonizing the sexual power women held over men.
- These witch trials initiated a new era of sexual repression.

THE CAPITALIST RATIONALIZATION OF SEXUALITY

- The witch hunts initiated an era in which sex was sanitized and oriented towards baby-making and men's pleasure.
- Attack on other expressions of sexuality that upset the social order: "homosexuality, sex between young and old, sex between people of different classes, anal coitus, coitus from behind, nudity, and dances" also collective expressions of sexuality and fertility celebrations.

THE WITCH-HUNT AND THE NEW WORLD

- The tactics of the witch hunts were employed to control colonized Native Americans and Africans.
- Witch-hunting and charges of devil-worshipping were brought to the Americas to break the resistance of the local populations, justifying colonialism and the slave trade in the eyes of the world.
- Academics compared black Africans to devils and speculated that they were naturally hyper-sexual and thus needed to be controlled.

THE WITCH, THE HEALER AND THE BIRTH OF MODERN SCIENCE

- Women - holders of magic, serving the community as sorcerers, healers, performers of incantations and divinations represented an **alternative center of power** to the rising capitalist regime.
- The witch hunts were a **transitional ideological bricolage** that leveraged the irrational to destroy a set of cultural practices and beliefs which were **incompatible with capitalism** (appears necessary).
- The witch hunts mostly ended in the late 17th century, called off by the authorities because they no longer were needed.

COLONIZATION AND CHRISTIANIZATION: CALIBAN AND WITCHES IN THE NEW WORLD

CHAPTER 4

PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION IN THE NEW WORLD

- The development of **Capitalism in the Americas** was preceded by a process of primitive accumulation that removed people from land, impoverished them, stripped them of local autonomy and destroyed communal culture.
- A global division of labor emerged through differences in access to resources and disciplinary methods in segments of the global proletariat defined by race and nationality.

THE BIRTH OF THE CANNIBALS

- Early myths of natives as **peaceful** and **childlike** may reflect Colonizers' hope that populations would be easily subdued as laborers.
- These narratives were later replaced with more **dehumanizing** stories portraying American Indians as cannibals and devil worshippers (masking colonization as a benevolent "converting mission").
- The descriptions and images deployed against Native Americans resemble those used to demonize European witches.

WITCH-HUNTING AND GLOBALIZATION

- Witch hunting continued in colonial America through the end of the 17th century, a few decades past the end of witch hunts in Europe.
- Since then, witch hunting has appeared across the globe in places that are transitioning to capitalism.
- **In recent decades witch accusations and executions have occurred on multiple continents under growing pressure from aggressive Neoliberal economic policies, which expropriate land, labor, and other resources.**