From Sylvia Federici, Caliban and the Witch (New York: Autonomedia, 2004)

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....
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> —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.[1] 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.[2] 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.[3] 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.[4] 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.[5]

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)[6] 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 preconditon for the existence of capitalist relations as much as a specific event in time.[7]

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 16th and 17th 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. I: 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*[8] 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.[9] 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[10] because capitalist development required an inunense 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 inunense 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 16th 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 15th century, slavery, never completely abolished, was revitalized.[11]

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 16th and 17th 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 Napolitan 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).

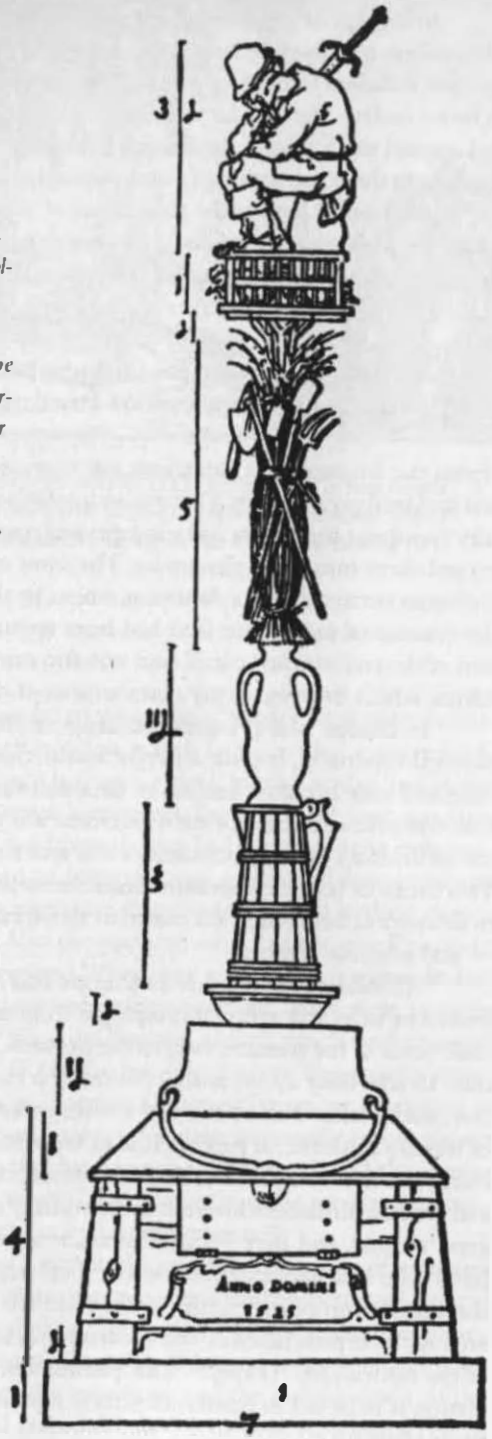
Slavery is "that form [of exploitation] towards which the master always strives" (Dockes 1982: 2). Europe was no exception. This must be emphasized to dispel the assumption of a special connection between slavery and Africa.[12] But in Europe slavery remained a limited phenomenon, as the material conditions for it did not exist, although the employers' desires for it must have been quite strong if it took until the 18th 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.[13] 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),[14] 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.[15] 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.[16]

This was an exception. Where workers' resistance to re-enserfment 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 18th 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 17th 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[17] — 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.[18] 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 16th and 17th 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.



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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-16th 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 17th 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-15th 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 16th 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.[19] 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).[20] 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).[21] 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."[22] 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.[23]

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.[24] 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.[25] 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 18th 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"),[26] 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.[27]

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 16th 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. 16th-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.[28]

The same considerations apply to the "commons." Disparaged in 16th 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.[29] 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 (Seccombe 1992). Social cohesion broke down;[30] 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.[31]

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 16th and 17th 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.[32] 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).[33]

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.[34] 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 15th century and continued throughout the 16th and 17th, 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.[35] 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 sheddying" (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.[36] 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.[37] 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;[38] but by the 17th 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 19th 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.[39]