

10. *Rep.* 490B; 535D-E.
11. *Rep.* 414B-415C.
12. *Rep.* 415D, 416E-417A.
13. *Rep.* 475D-E.
14. *Rep.* 475D.

THE GREAT WITCH-HUNT

SILVIA FEDERICI

Down from the waiste they are Centaurs,
 Though Women all above,
 But to the girdle do the gods inherit,
 Beneath is all the fiends;
 There is hell, there is darkness,
 There is the sulphurous pit,
 Burning, scalding, stench, consumption.¹

You are the true Hyenas, that allure us with the fairness of your skins and when folly has brought us within your reach, you leap upon us. You are the traitors of Wisdom, the impediment to Industry . . . the clogs to Virtue and the goads that drive us to all vices, impiety and ruin. You are the Fool's Paradise, the wiseman's Plague and the Grand Error of Nature.²

The Great Witch-hunt rarely appears in the history of the proletariat or in historical investigation *tout court* (simply). For as Mary Daly points out, "except for a few specialists who have made (it) their field of 'expertise,' there has been a policy of almost total erasure, wiping out the witches again and again through the subterfuge of silence."³ Marxist historians, too, have consigned the witch-hunt to oblivion, as if it had nothing to do with the history of the class struggle. Yet the dimensions of the massacre ought to have raised some suspicions, with thousands of women burned, hanged and tortured in less than a century.⁴ It should also have seemed significant that the witch-hunt occurred simultaneously with the Enclosures, the beginning of the slave trade and the enactment of the laws against the vagabonds, in countries where a reorganization of work along capitalist lines was under way. So far, however, this aspect of primitive accumulation has truly remained a secret.

The fact that the victims of the persecution were mostly peasant women may explain the indifference of the historians towards this genocide. But an equally powerful reason for the marginalization of the witch-hunt is the common identification of "modernity" with social progress, which leads historians to dispose of the witch trials as a residue of medieval obscurantism.

Yet all evidence indicates that the witch-hunt was not the last spark of a dying feudal world. The "superstitious" Middle Ages rarely persecuted

any witches; and never in the "Dark Ages" are mass trials and executions to be found, although sorcery and magic permeated the daily life of medieval Europe.⁶ It was at the end of the 15th century, when the struggles of the serfs were already putting feudalism into crisis, that the number of women tried as witches began to increase. The persecution then intensified, achieving epidemic proportions, in the "iron century" between 1550 and 1650, when feudal relations were giving way to the economic and political institutions of mercantile capitalism.

Its chronology thus demonstrates that the witch-hunt accompanied the transition to capitalism in Europe and must be placed on a continuum with the social processes that marked the rise to power of the commercial bourgeoisie. These are the expropriation of the peasantry from the land which turned many peasants into paupers; the commercialization of agriculture and the Price Revolution; the institution of workhouses and Houses of Correction for the mass confinement of vagabonds and beggars; and the policing of every aspect of proletarian life. In this context, the witch-hunt appears as a crucial step in the rationalization of social reproduction; as the name "witchcraft" suggests, linking witches with the guilds, a broad range of precapitalist practices were criminalized that were antagonistic to the requirements of the new organization of work. As we shall see, the witch-hunt was functional to a redefinition of people's relation to work and sexuality, procreation and family life, while serving to break the resistance of the European proletariat to the new order.

A clear sign of the "political" nature of the Great Hunt is the fact that it was equally virulent in Catholic and Protestant countries alike, and that the initiative of the persecution came from above.⁸ In 1532 the Carolina, the Imperial legal code enacted by Charles V, established that witchcraft should be punished with death. In England, three acts of Parliament passed in 1542, 1563, and 1604 paved the way for the persecution. After 1550, laws and ordinances making the practice of witchcraft a capital offense and inciting the population to denounce witches were passed also in Scotland, Switzerland, France, and the Spanish Netherlands. Meanwhile, witchcraft became for the first time a major topic of debate among jurists, after having for centuries been the exclusive concern of the ecclesiastics. The witch-hunt also received the zealous support of the European intelligentsia, including the fathers of modern rationalism, who, even when sceptical about the reality of witchcraft, as was the case with Thomas Hobbes, approved the persecution as a means of social control.⁷ A typical case was that of Jean Bodin, whom Hugh Trevor Roper calls the Aristotle and Montesquieu of the 16th century. Bodin, who is credited with writing the first treatise on inflation, was a fierce persecutor of witches. Against all

sceptics he wrote a volume of "proves"; participated in many trials; insisted that the witches be burned alive, instead of being strangled before being thrown to the flames; that children, too, be burned; and that the victims be cauterized, so that their flesh would rot before death. Bodin was not an isolated case. In this century of geniuses which saw the development of scientific rationalism, witchcraft became a favorite topic of discussion among Europe's intellectual elite.⁸ Judges, lawyers, statesmen, philosophers, and scientists, were all preoccupied with the problem; wrote pamphlets and demonologies; agreed it was the most nefarious crime; and called for its punishment.

What fears instigated such a united policy of genocide? Why so much violence and why were its prime targets women?

There is no single answer to these questions. For like the charge of high treason, which significantly entered the English legal code at the same time, the witch-hunt took off. The charge of witchcraft provided a powerful weapon against social insubordination at a time when the village community was under the combined attack of the declining nobility, the reforming zeal of the rising bourgeoisie, and the economic forces unleashed by the transition to a market-oriented economy. Thus, as H. Kamen points out, "there is an impressive coincidence between crisis and witchcraft . . . precisely in the period when there was the main price hike (between the end of the 16th century and the first half of the 17th) there were the greatest number of charges and persecutions".⁹ Even more significant is the coincidence between the peaks of the persecution and the explosion of urban and rural revolts. These were the peasant wars in Germany;¹⁰ the English uprisings against the Enclosures, when hundreds of men, women and children, armed with pitchforks and spades, set about destroying the fences erected around the common lands, proclaiming that "from now on we needn't work any more";¹¹ and the riots in rural and urban France against the tithes, oppressive taxation and the rising price of bread, which, in the 16th and 17th centuries, caused mass starvation in large areas of Europe.¹² During these revolts it was often women who initiated and led the action. The revolt at Montpellier in 1645 was started by women who were seeking to protect their children from starvation, and the revolt of Cordoba in 1652 was likewise initiated by women.

In this context, one cannot fail to see a connection between the fear of mass risings and the prosecutors' insistence, in the course of the witch trials, on the "Witches Sabbath,"¹³ the famous nocturnal reunion where thousands of people presumably congregated, travelling often from distant places. Whether this emphasis on the Sabbath was consciously targeted against actual forms of organization cannot be easily established. It is

possible that through the judges' emphasis on the Sabbath we hear the echo of those secret meetings the peasants held at night, on lonesome hills and in forests, to plot their revolts.¹⁴ What is certain is that class revolt was a central element in the descriptions of the Sabbath, which culminated with an account by the participants of the crimes they had committed and with the devil instructing the witches to rebel against their masters. Moreover, the pact between the witch and the Devil was called *conjuratio*, like the pact made by workers in struggle.¹⁵ And in the eyes of the prosecutors, the Devil represented a promise of love, power, and riches for whose sake a person would be willing to sell her (or his) soul, that is, to infringe every natural and social law.

The theme of cannibalism, central to the morphology of the Sabbath, again recalls the morphology of the revolts. As Kamen observes, eating human flesh symbolized a total inversion of social values, an inversion of which the witch became the main embodiment.¹⁶ Indeed, the witch was the living symbol of "the world turned upside down," a recurrent image in the popular writings of the Middle Ages, tied to millenarian aspirations of subversion of the social order, beginning with inversion of rank between rich and poor.

Even the rituals attributed to the practice of witchcraft, centered around the theme of inversion (the mass celebrated backwards, the counter-clock dances), thus being symptomatic of the identity that was established between witchcraft and revolution.

In this sense there is a deep connection between the witch-hunt and the earlier persecutions of the heretics, which also had a class basis; for the language of heresy cloaked the resistance of the medieval proletariat against the nobility and the clergy, as well as the project of a classless society based on communal ownership and the abolition of all social distinctions.¹⁷ The continuity between heresy and witchcraft appears even stronger if we consider the high number of women present in the heretic movements and the similarity of both the accusations and the punishments. Yet these elements of continuity highlight substantial differences that point to the specific nature of the witch-hunt.

First, witchcraft was a far worse crime than heresy; for while the heretics were accused of betraying the true faith, the witches, by their alleged pact with the Devil, were viewed as the quintessence of evil and cast outside the bounds of human society. Moreover, witchcraft was considered a predominantly female crime and most of the accused were women—indeed, more women were persecuted as witches in the 16th and 17th centuries than for any other crime. This was emphasized by the demonologists, who blamed women's evil arts on their "insatiable sexuality," and rejoiced that God had

spared men from such scourge. Further, while among the charges levelled against the heretics infanticide and sexual perversion had only a complementary function, in the witch-hunt they played a central role, being accompanied by the virtual demonization of all contraceptive practices. Thus, the Bull of Innocent VIII (1484) denounced any crime against fertility as a proof of witchcraft:

It has come recently to our attention, not without bitter sorrow, that . . . by their incantations, spells, conjurations and other accursed superstitions and horrid charms, enormities and offenses, (witches) destroy the offspring of women . . . They hinder men from generating and women from conceiving; whence neither husbands with their wives nor wives with their husbands can perform their sexual acts.¹⁸

The accusation that witches practice infanticide appears frequently in the records of the trials, while in the popular imagination the witch came to be associated with an old woman, inimical to new life, who fed upon infant flesh or used the bodies of children to make her magical potions.

Following Margaret Murray's work, some historians have tried to explain such charges with the hypothesis that witchcraft was a residue of old fertility cults.¹⁹ But the fear of infanticide is best understood in the context of the demographic policies of mercantile capitalism which elevated to a creed the belief that people (not just land ownership) are the source of all wealth, and a numerous population is the best guarantee for the security of the nation. The witch-hunt, in fact, proved useful for the attempt made by the state in this period to establish its control over reproduction which, in the course of the 17th century, was to lead to the development of demography as the first "state-science,"²⁰ and the simultaneous eradication of contraceptive practices that had been common in the Middle Ages.²¹ Thus, many witches were the village midwives who soon became the main target of the demonologists. The *Malleus Maleficarum* (*The Hammer of Witches*) dedicated an entire chapter to them, arguing they were worse than any other woman, for they helped the mother destroy the fruit of her womb, a conspiracy made easier by the traditional exclusion of men from the rooms where women gave birth. Observing that midwives were so numerous that there was no hut where one did not board, the authors recommended to the magistrates that no woman be allowed to practice midwifery unless she first testified to being a good Catholic. Their recommendations did not remain unheard. Even in Protestant England, from the late 1500s on, fewer and fewer women were allowed to practice obstetrics, an activity that until then had been considered their inviolable mystery. Then, by the beginning of the 17th century, the first male midwives began to appear and within a century obstetrics passed almost entirely into male hands and under the control of the state.²² According to

Alice Clark:

The continuous process by which women were supplanted by men in the profession is one example of the way in which they were excluded from all branches of professional work, through being denied the opportunity of obtaining an adequate professional training.²³

But interpreting the social decline of the midwife solely in terms of female deprofessionalization misses its real significance. Female midwives were marginalized because they were not trustworthy, and their exclusion from the profession served to undermine the control women had exercised over reproduction.

Just as the Enclosures had expropriated the peasantry from the land, so the witch-hunt expropriated women from their bodies, which were "liberated" from any impediment preventing them from functioning as machines for the reproduction of labor. With the threat of the stake, the state erected more formidable and impervious barriers around women's bodies than were ever erected around the common lands. One can imagine, in fact, what effect it had on women seeing their neighbors, friends, sisters and mothers burned and tortured, and realizing that any contraceptive initiative on their side might be construed as the product of an unnatural perversion. Here again we must stress the unique nature of the witch-hunt which, by projecting the "crimes" it persecuted as the sign of a devilish pact, succeeded in disseminating among its victims and their community a terror incommensurate with any possible deed, while turning the indictment of specific actions into the indictment of a specific social type.

The witch-hunt *demonized women*, particularly the women of the lower classes, thus contributing to redefine their position in the family and in society, their sexual and maternal duties and their relationships with men. In the witch we find as their negative counterpart the parameters that conceptualized the new female identity, that is, the qualities that women would have to possess in order to be accepted in the new social order.

The witch was not just the midwife, or the woman who avoided maternity. She was the loose, promiscuous woman, the prostitute or adulteress, and generally the woman who exercised her sexuality outside the bonds of marriage and procreation. Thus, in the trials, adultery was equated with witchcraft and "ill repute" was a sure proof of guilt. By contrast, it was believed that a virgin could not be a witch, and pregnant women were rarely charged with witchcraft. Witches were also rebel women who talked back, argued, swore and did not cry when they were tortured. "Rebel" here does not refer to any specific subversive activity in which women might be involved. Rather, it refers to the *female condition* as it had developed in the late Middle Ages, in the course of the struggles

against feudal power, when women were in the forefront of the heretic movement, often organized in female associations, and posing a growing challenge to male authority and the Church. The witch was not the exception, but the rule, as represented in the medieval morality plays: ready to fight back, more violent, more carnal than men, ready to take initiatives, often caricatured as wearing male clothes, or riding on the back of her husband, holding a whip.

The very fact that witchcraft was a "crimen exceptum," that is, one punishable even in the absence of any evidence of damage against persons and things, shows that the charges were not designed to punish the breach of accepted norms, but aimed at modifying social behavior. The witch-hunt, in fact, was the culmination of a process which paved the way for the consolidation of marriage and the nuclear family and the construction of a domestic role for women, who, while burning at the stake, would learn to become good wives and mothers. For the prescription of the Wife of Bath, "Better to marry than to burn," did not hold true for the witch-hunters, who built the stakes not as an alternative to marriage, but as a condition for it.

There is an unmistakable continuity between the ideological apparatus that sustained the witch-hunt and the contemporary legislation in family matters. In England, France, and Switzerland laws were passed whereby adultery was punished with death (in England by the stake, as high treason); prostitution and procreation out of wedlock were criminalized, while female friendships became an object of suspicion, often denounced from the pulpit as subversive of the alliance between husband and wife. In turn, the witch-hunters attacked the solidarity and the communal ties that existed among women, forcing those brought to trial to denounce each other and their own friends as accomplices in their crimes. The image of women that emerges from the witch-hunt closely resembles the one constructed by the contemporary debate on "the nature of the sexes," which presented women as weak in mind and thus endowed with a biological propensity to evil, to which men must take care not to fall victim.²⁴

The iconography of the witch-hunt provides many revealing details concerning the social goals and the mentality of the prosecutors. We learn, for instance, how far they were preoccupied with boosting male authority and hierarchical rule from the relationship they established between the witch and the Devil, one of the main novelties introduced by the 16th- and 17th-century trials.

The Great Witch-hunt introduced a marked change in the image of the Devil, compared with that which populated the medieval lives of the saints

or the books of the Renaissance magicians. In the former, the Devil appeared as a maligned being but one with little power; a sprinkling of holy water or a few holy words were sufficient to defeat his schemes. His image was that of an unsuccessful ill-doer, who far from inspiring horror (like the Devil of the witch-hunt) was often credited with some virtues. The medieval Devil was a logician, competent in legal matters, who was sometimes represented as defending his case in front of a law court.²⁵ He was also an able worker who could be used to dig mines, or build city walls, although he was routinely cheated when the time came for his recompense. Also, in his relation with the Renaissance magician, the Devil was the subordinate one, being called to task, willing or not, as a servant made to perform according to his master's will. In the witch-hunt, the power relation between the Devil and the witch became totally reversed. It was now the woman who was the servant, the slave, the *succubus*, in body and soul, while the Devil functioned as her owner and master, husband and pimp at once. Furthermore, in a clear prefiguration of women's matrimonial destiny, the witch-hunt instituted *one single Devil*, in place of the multitude of Devils which had characterized the medieval and Renaissance world, and a *male Devil* at that, in contrast with the female figures (Diana, Hera, "la Signora del zogo"), whose cults had been spread among women during the Middle Ages in both the Mediterranean and Teutonic areas.²⁶

How intensely the orthodox thinkers of the day were concerned with the question of male authority can be seen by the fact that even when presumably in revolt against all human laws the woman had to be portrayed as subservient to a man, and her rebellion, the famous pact, was made to resemble an inverted marriage. By the same token, the witch-hunt taught men to fear and discipline women. Thus, the *Malleus Maleficarum* (*The Hammer of Witches*) stressed that women are dangerous, indeed mortal enemies of men. Every kingdom of the world, wrote the authors, has been destroyed by women and if we could be freed from them, all the evil in the world would undoubtedly end; for women are lovely to look at but contaminating to the touch, as in their hearts lies an indestructible wickedness. They are natural liars; they attract men but only in order to undermine them; they do everything to please them, but the pleasure they give proves more bitter than death, as their vices lead men to lose their souls.²⁷

Not only were women portrayed as the source of all evil; as in the classical myth of Circe, they were cast as the destroyers of the male sex. Thus, the witches were accused of making men impotent by freezing their generative forces or causing their member to come out and draw back as

they wished. In plainer words, they were accused of castrating men.²⁸ According to the demonologists, some specialized in stealing male penises which they collected in great numbers, up to twenty or thirty, hiding them in bird nests or boxes, where they kept moving like living members until occasionally the witch was forced, under *duress*, to return them to their owners.²⁹

Who were these witches who castrated men or made them impotent? Once again, potentially every woman. In a village or a small town of a few thousand people, where at the peak of the hunt dozens of women would be burned in the space of a few years or even a few weeks, no man could feel safe and assume he did not live with a witch. Many must have worried when they heard about the evil deeds the witches were forced to confess. For example, that at night they left the marriage bed to go to the Sabbath, fooling their sleeping husbands by putting a stick next to them, or that they had the power to steal their penises, like that witch who had dozens hidden on the top of a tree.

The success of these divisive tactics can be measured by the fact that, except for a few isolated cases of sons and husbands who tried to save their female relatives from the stake,³⁰ we have no record of male organizations set up to oppose the persecution. On the contrary, some men profited by the hunt, by posing as "witch-finders" and traveling from village to village threatening to denounce women unless they paid up.

Thus, the witch-hunt served to break the solidarity that had existed between women and men in the struggles of the Middle Ages, weakening their defense against the attack that was being launched against them. As Marvin Harris wrote,

The witch-hunt mania . . . scattered and fragmented all the latent energies of protest. It has demobilized the poor and disinherited, increased social distance; it has filled (people) with reciprocal suspicion, set neighbour against neighbour, isolating everyone, making all afraid and intensifying their insecurity; it has made everyone feel impotent and dependent upon the dominant social groups, and has furthermore given them a local outlet for their frustrations. By this it has prevented the poor, more than any other social group, from confronting ecclesiastical authority and the secular order, and making their claims within the redistribution of wealth and the levelling of social status.³¹

Just as today, by repressing women the ruling class was able to repress more effectively the entire proletariat, as they instigated men who had been expropriated, pauperized and criminalized to blame all their misfortunes on the castrating witch, and conceive of the power women had won against the authorities as power women used against them. All the deep-seated, atavistic fears men have ever harbored against women were revitalized in

this context, with the help of a Biblical tradition, which in no ambiguous terms casts women as the ruin of humankind.

The main source of danger—men were implicitly told—is women's "insatiable sexuality," the original sin on the path to becoming a witch and, in the eyes of the inquisitors, a demonic force, potentially destructive of every social order. According to Kramer and Sprenger, the witches could turn the minds of men to "inordinate love" and transform men into animals, in addition to destroying their generative powers, as well as the generative powers of women, and offering their offspring to the Devil.³²

That the witches were simultaneously accused of rendering men impotent and generating an immoderate passion in them is only apparently a contradiction. For physical impotence was but the other side of the moral impotence that women's fascination (*glamour*) could provoke in man. What the inquisitors feared was the erosion of male authority, that is, women's ability to bend the will of men to serve their own desires, as presumably the witch did with her love potions and magical filters. This posed a major threat to social discipline and family life. For how could any legislator advocate the type of family the contemporary bourgeois wisdom demanded, modeled on the state, with the husband as the undisputed king, if female sexuality had the power to make men *succubi* of women? From this point of view a sexually active woman represented a social danger; for she could undermine man's self-control, his sense of responsibility, his capacity to work; in one word, she could make him loose that precious head wherein, according to current Cartesian philosophy, resided the source of all reason, beginning with the ability not to be swayed by women. In this way the witch was also functional to an attack on the erotic power of men, that had to be channelled into more productive enterprises and transformed into labor power. As for women, the witch-hunt was the first step in the long march towards "clean sex among clean sheets," in that by banning as antisocial all nonproductive, non-procreative forms of female sexuality, it attempted to reduce women to passive instruments of the reproduction of the labor force, glorified as a religious must.

The repulsion female sexuality was beginning to inspire when not finalized to procreation is captured by the myth of the old witch flying on her broom, which, like the animals she also rode upon, was the projection of a giant penis, symbol of an unbridled lust. This imagery, too, betrays a new sexual discipline which denied the "old and ugly" woman, no longer fertile, the right to a sexual life. The lesson of the demonologists reflected the moral sensibility of the time, as illustrated by the words of two illustrious contemporaries of the witch-hunt.

To see an old lecher, what more odious? What can be more absurd? And yet

so common . . . Worse it is in women than in men . . . Whilst she is an old crone, a beldam, she can neither see nor hear, a mere carcass, she caterwauls and must have a stallion.³³

Yet it is even more fun to see the old women who can scarcely carry their weight of years and look like corpses that seem to have risen from the dead. They still go around saying "life is good," still in heat, looking for a mate . . . they are forever smearing their faces with make up and taking tweezers to their pubic hair, exposing their sagging, withered breasts and trying to rouse failing desire with their quavering whining voices, while they drink, dance among girls and scribble their love letters.³⁴

This is a far cry from the world of Chaucer, where the Wife of Bath, after burying five husbands, could still openly declare: "Welcome the sixth . . . I don't mean to be chaste at all cost. When a spouse of mine is gone, another Christian man shall take me on."

But irrespective of age (although perhaps not of class), in the witch trials there is a constant identification between female sexuality and bestiality. This is suggested by copulation with the goat-god (one of the representations of the Devil), the infamous kiss *sub cauda*, and the charge that the witches kept a variety of animals, called "imps" or "familiar," with whom they entertained a particularly intimate relation. These were cats, dogs, hares, frogs the witch cared for, presumably suckling them from special teats; other animals, too, played a crucial part in her life as instruments of the Devil: goats and (night)mares flew her to the Sabbath, toads provided her with poisons for her concoctions—such was the presence of animals in the witches' world that one must conclude they too were being put on trial.³⁵

This was possibly a response to the indiscriminating, "bestial" practices that characterized the sexual life of rural Europe, which remained a capital offense long after the witch-hunt was over. In an era that was beginning to worship reason and draw a rigid divide between the physical and the spiritual, animals too were subject to a drastic devaluation, and reduced to mere brute matter, the perennial symbol of the worse human instincts. No crime, then, would inspire more horror than copulation with a beast, a true attack on the ontological foundations of a human nature that increasingly was identified with its most immaterial aspects.

But the continuity between female sexuality and animality postulated by the imagery of the hunt also insinuated that women are at a (slippery) crossroad between man and animals; for what in men appeared as a temporary fall, an eclipse of reason produced by the orgasmic effects of the sexual act, in the case of women was elevated to an inherent condition, as it was agreed that women are especially carnal and weakminded. Thus the *alter ego* of the witch was the toad, the most frequently cited familiar,

which being a symbol of the vagina, perfectly synthesizes sex, bestiality, femaleness, and evil.

The witch-hunt provides an extensive list of the forms of sexuality that in this period were being banned and truly demonized in the areas of both the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation: homosexuality, sex between young and old and between people of different classes, anal coitus and coitus from behind (reputed to lead to sterile relations), nudity and dances.³⁶ Also proscribed was the public, collective sexuality that had prevailed throughout the Middle Ages, as in the Spring festivals of pagan origins that still in the 16th century were celebrated all over Europe. In this context, it is interesting to compare the way in which P. Stubbes, in his *Anatomy of Abuse* (1583), describes the celebration of May Day in England and the standard accounts of the Sabbath which charged that the witches always danced, jumping up and down at the sound of pipes and flutes, and indulged in much collective sex and merrymaking.

Towards May . . . every parish, town and village gets together, both men, women and children, old and young . . . they run to the bushes and woods, hills and mountains, where they spend all the night in pleasant pastimes, and in the morning they return bringing home birch bows and branches of trees . . . the chiefest jewel they bring home is their maypole, which they bring home with great veneration . . . then they fall to banquet and feast, to leap and dance about it, as heathen people did at the dedication of their idols. . . .³⁷

It is significant that in some areas of Northern Italy going to the Sabbath was called "going to the dance" or "going to the game" (*al zogo*), particularly when one considers the campaign that Church and state in this period, not to mention the local (counter) reformed bourgeoisie, were conducting against such pastimes.³⁸ As Carlo Ginzburg points out, "once we remove (from the Sabbath) the myths and the fantastic trappings, we discover a gathering of people, accompanied by dances and sexual promiscuity," and, we must add, much eating and drinking, surely a fantasy at a time when starvation was a common experience among the European masses.³⁹ (How revealing, as far as the conditions of the proletariat at the time of the witch-hunt, that dreams of roasted mutton and ale could be frowned upon by a well-fed, beef-eating bourgeoisie as the signs of a diabolical connivance!) Ginzburg, however, following a well-trodden path, labels the orgies associated with the Sabbath as "the hallucinations of poor women, to whom they serve as a recompense for a squalid existence,"⁴⁰ a view that makes the victims accomplices in their fate and ignores that we do not have the witches' viewpoint on the hunt, as the confessions we have were forced out of them by torture and many other forms of physical and psychological intimidation. Ginzburg also ignores

that while it is highly doubtful that the witches believed what the judges transcribed in the records of the trials, we have no such doubt in the case of many 16th century, even famous intellectuals who devoted reams of papers to discussion of such "hallucinations," debating the respective tasks of *succubi* and *incubi*, or whether the witch could be impregnated by the Devil and so on. Today these grotesque debates are carefully screened from the histories of "Western culture," or are simply forgotten, although they wove a web that condemned thousands of women to death. Thus, the role the witch-hunt has played in the development of the bourgeois world and specifically in the development of the capitalist disciplines of sexual labor has also been erased from memory. Yet to this process we can trace back some of the main taboos of our own time. This is the case with homosexuality, which in many parts of Europe was still fully accepted and practiced during the Renaissance, but was weeded out in the course of the witch-hunt. Such was the persecution against homosexuals that its memory is still sedimented in the language. "Faggot," for instance, reminds us that homosexuals were used to build the stake upon which the witches were burned, while the Italian "finocchio" (fennel) refers to the practice of scattering these aromatic vegetables on the stakes to mask the stench of burning flesh.

Of particular significance in this context is the relation the hunt established between the prostitute and the witch, which indicates the devaluation of prostitution, a socially accepted function in the Middle Ages, brought about by the capitalist reorganization of sexual work.

As the saying went, "a prostitute when young, a witch when old," for both used sex only to deceive and corrupt men, faking a love that was only mercenary.⁴¹ And both sold themselves, the witch who sold her soul to the Devil being the magnified image of the prostitute who sold her body to men to obtain money and an illicit power. Further, both the (old) witch and the prostitute are symbols of sterility, the very essence of non-procreative sexuality. Thus, while in the Middle Ages, both the prostitute and the witch were considered positive figures who performed a social service to the community; with the witch-hunt, both acquired the most negative connotations and indeed were negated as possible female identities, physically by death at the stake and socially by marginalization and criminalization. For the prostitute died as a legal figure only after having died a thousand times on the stake as a witch. Or better, the prostitute would be allowed to exist and would even be used (although in a clandestine fashion) only as long as the witch had been killed; for the witch was the more socially dangerous figure, the one who (in the eyes of the inquisitors) had more power and was less controllable; she could give pain or pleasure, heal or harm, stir up the

elements and chain the will of men; she could even hurt one solely by her look, a look which, presumably, could kill.

It was her sexual nature that distinguished the witch from the Renaissance magician who was largely immune from the persecution. The magicians were an elite servicing often highly located people, and the demonologists were always careful to make a suitable distinction between their High Magic and witchcraft, including the former (particularly in the case of astrology and astronomy) within the range of the sciences.

The counterpart of the witch is not, then, the Renaissance magician; rather, it is the black slave, male and female, who in this very period was being seized on the coasts of Africa by the Portuguese and the English slave ships. This is because, from the very beginning, the European proletarian woman and the black slave had a similar destiny in the history of capitalism. For if it is true, as Marx writes, that capitalist accumulation is essentially the accumulation of the proletariat, then it must be concluded that it was they who bore the cost of it, as both provided the limitless supply of labor that capital required to take off. Thus, the stakes represented for European women what the slave ships were for the African proletariat, while the witch-hunt served to exorcise both, as shown by the growing exchange in the course of the 17th century between the ideology developing on the soil of the slave trade, whereby the Devil was increasingly portrayed as a black man, and vice versa devil worship became the most widely reported aspect of the non-European societies the slave traders encountered. In each case, the trademark of diabolism was an abnormal lust and sexual potency. Thus, the Devil was portrayed with two penises, while tales of brutish instincts, unnatural sexual practices (e.g. copulation with apes) and inordinate fondness for music and dancing became staples in the reports of the travellers to the "New World" and later the missionaries' reports.⁴² According to Brian Easlea, the systematic exaggeration of black sexual potency, which is reflected in the image of the Devil (and has continued to this day), betrays the anxiety the white, male owners felt towards their own sexuality, which excessive doses of self-control and prudential reasoning had severely undermined, enough at least for them to fear the competition of the very people they enslaved.⁴³ But as appealing as this argument might be, its limit is that it fails to relate the oversexualization of women and black—the Devils and the Witches—to their position in the new division of (waged and unwaged) labor where their work was so devalued as to appear as nothing but a natural resource. This is to say that the redefinition—which is at the center of the witch-hunt—of both black and female identities as bestial, sexual, irrational (in contrast with the self-controlled, ascetic rationality of white men) was crucial as both a product

and a legitimization of the wage relation, which excluded women and blacks from the social contract and the rationality implicit in it.

Other motives that operated behind this attack on blacks and women played a part in the witch-hunt. The witch-hunt very often served to punish the attack on property, and first of all theft, which was very common among women, following the reorganization of land, property and agricultural relations in the 16th and 17th centuries. In England it was believed that women would steal milk or honey and wine from the houses of their neighbors. Under attack was also the daily warfare that expressed the class struggle at the village level: the curse of the beggar to whom the alm was refused, the evil eye, the struggle around the payment of rent, or for public assistance.⁴⁴ The social milieu of the witch-hunt was one where the "better sorts" were endemically afraid of the proletariat, who could always be counted to harbor evil thoughts insofar as in this period they were losing everything.

Thus, it is not surprising that the witches were always poorer than their alleged victims who were often their employers or landlords or wealthier neighbors and members of the community. Many witches were older women, who lived on public assistance, begging bits of food from house to house; if they were married, their husbands were daily laborers, but most often they were widows or lived alone. As A. MacFarlane and K. Thomas have shown, in this period there was a marked deterioration in the condition of old women, following both the loss of the common and the reorganization of family life, which gave priority to childraising at the expense of the care traditionally provided to the older members of the family. These elders were now forced to rely for their survival on their friends or neighbors, on the Poor rolls, at the very time, however, when the new Protestant ethic was beginning to finger alms giving as an encouragement to idleness and sloth and the institutions that in the past had catered to the poor were also breaking down. In this context, the charge of witchcraft was often the response of the rich to the curse of the poor to whom the alm had been refused. A typical example was that of Margaret Harkett, an old widow of sixty-five, hanged at Tyburn in 1585:

She had picked a basket of pears in a neighbour's field without permission. Asked to return them she flung them down in anger; since then no pears would grow in the field. Later William Goodwin's servant denied her yeast, whereupon his brewing stand dried up. She was struck by a bailiff who had caught her taking wood from the master's ground; the bailiff went mad. A neighbour refused her a horse; all his horses died. Another paid her less for a pair of shoes than she had asked; later he died. A gentleman told his servant to refuse her buttermilk; after which they were unable to make butter or cheese.⁴⁵

There were undoubtedly women who used their reputation as witches to get from people what they needed, by inspiring fear in them. But it was not just the "bad witch," the one who cursed and allegedly lamed the cattle and raised storms to ruin the crop of her employers and landlords who was condemned; the "good witch" as well, who had made witchcraft her career, was also punished, sometimes even more severely.

Historically, the witch was the village midwife, medic, soothsayer or sorceress, whose privileged area of competence (as Burkhardt writes of the Italian witches) were amorous intrigues. It was not in the interest of this type of witch to inspire fear in her community, as witchcraft was her means of making a living. She was, in fact, an extremely popular figure: everyone would go to her to be cured, to have his or her fortune told, to find missing objects, to buy love potions. But she did not escape the persecution. Many demonologists believed that she was even more dangerous than the "bad witch," because while the latter was only a danger to the body, the former was a threat to the soul, or as the Puritan theologian William Perkins more prosaically put it, in his discourse on the *Damned Art of Witchcraft*, she was more dangerous because while the "bad witch" was hated, the "good witch" is so liked that "a village thinks itself lucky if it has one and they run to them in moments of need, and depend on them as if they were gods."⁴⁶ The attack on the good witch was part of the destruction of that sympathetic relation with nature that had prevailed in Middle Ages Europe (as in every pre-capitalist society), and whose elimination historically has been a precondition of capitalist accumulation. This is a magical world-view that looks at nature as on a continuum with our subjective faculties and desires, thus interpreting every event as the expression of an occult will and teleology. What this implied at an everyday level is indicated in a letter written in 1594 by a German Lutheran priest, after one of his pastoral visits.

The use of incantations is so widespread that there is no man or woman here who begins or does anything . . . without first taking recourse to some sign, incantation, magic or pagan means. For example during labor pains, when picking up or putting down the child . . . when taking the beasts to the field . . . when they have lost an object or failed to find it . . . closing the windows at night, when someone gets ill or a cow behaves in a strange way they run at once to the soothsayer to ask who robbed them, who's enchanted them or to get an amulet. The daily experience of these people shows there is no limit to the use of superstitions. . . . Everyone here takes part in superstitious practices, with words, names, rhymes, using the names of God, of the Holy Trinity, of the Virgin Mary, of the twelve Apostles. . . . These words are uttered both openly and in secret; they are written on pieces of paper, swallowed, carried as amulets. They also make strange signs, noises and gestures. And then they practice magic with herbs, roots, and the branches of

a certain tree; they have their particular day and place for all these things."⁴⁷

The world described here is one that does not know of causal relationships or of the sphere of accidentalness; for everything in the world of magic has a soul so everything in the external world must be propitiated and filtered through a set of devices that help to decipher, placate, and neutralize its powers. This magical world view clashed with the new bourgeois ethic and organization of work which assumes that nature—beginning with human nature—can be controlled.

Hence the battle against magic, which has always accompanied the rationalization of labor power, insofar as uniformity of work and responsibility are incompatible with the unpredictability and irresponsibility implicit in the world of magic.

As it has often been noted, the witch-hunt also proceeded simultaneously with the professionalization of medicine, that is, the formation of a body of experts, who monopolized the trade and were vitally interested in banning the witch, as they saw in her a dangerous rival. For her prices were lower, within the reach of the average person, and her ability was possibly greater, if it is true that Paracelsus learned his medical skills from the witches. Thus, to accuse these women of witchcraft would have been a convenient way of eliminating their competition and rationalizing at the same time their greater success. But, as in the case of obstetrics, it is important to realize that the professionalization of medicine was itself born out of the need for a higher level of social control. This means that professional medicine did not just destroy certain popular practices in order to develop; rather it was developed in order to destroy them. For disciplining the proletariat meant expropriating them of the means that allowed them to exercise any autonomous control over the world, substituting a body of "unchallengeable" scientific knowledge for their accumulated science.

The witch-hunt also cast a deep suspicion on all the powers that traditionally had been attributed to the individual: the ability to foretell the future; the ability to affect material objects with "the power of thought"; to leave one's body or take on a different form; and so on. These beliefs, too, were so counterproductive from the viewpoint of the rationalization of the world capitalism called for that once the witches were defeated, that is, once a certain level of social discipline was successfully imposed, they became the object of ridicule and cast as superstitions.

This turnaround took place throughout Europe towards the end of the 17th century and it was possible because the witches no longer represented a social danger. Easlea is, in fact, correct when he argues that it was not the advent of Rationalism, but the ruling class' growing sense of security that defeated the fear of witches.⁴⁸ As Easlea had exhaustively shown, scientific

rationalism and mechanical philosophy cannot be credited with having helped to end the persecution. One may even argue that they aggravated the plight of the witches. How far did, for example, the Cartesian speculations on animal behavior go in quieting misgivings about the atrocities perpetrated against the witches, given the ease with which vivisection was justified on the ground that animals have no feelings and cannot suffer? But was not the witch, too, an animal after all? And would it not be true, then, that she too would not be able to suffer when tortured?

There is evidence, however, that the witch-hunt also drew to a close because the dominant classes were beginning to lose their exclusive control over it, and came under the fire of their own repressive machinery. In fact, by the mid-17th century, we have evidence of increasing proletarian involvement in the denunciations—this time against members of the ruling class. As Midelfort points out:

. . . as the flames licked closer to the names of people who enjoyed high rank and power, the judges lost confidence in the confessions and the panic ceased. . . .⁴⁹

In France, too, the final wave of persecutions brought widespread social disorder: servants accused their masters, children accused their parents, husbands accused their wives; the King decided to intervene and Colbert extended Paris's jurisdiction to the whole of France in order to put an end to the persecution.⁵⁰ At the same time a new legal code was promulgated in which witchcraft was not even mentioned.

Just as the state initiative had started it, so too, one by one, various governments took the initiative of ending the witch-hunt. From the mid-17th century on, efforts were made to put the brakes on both judicial and inquisitorial zeal. One immediate consequence was during the 18th century when "common crimes" suddenly multiplied. In England, for instance, between 1686 and 1712, as the hunt died down, arrests for damage to property (burning of granaries and houses, and hay stacks in particular) as well as assault rose enormously.⁵¹ New crimes also entered the statute books. Blaspheming began to be treated as a punishable offense (in France it was decreed that after the sixth conviction the blasphemer should have his/her tongue cut out), and so was sacrilege (profanation of relics and theft of Hosts). All this suggests that the new social order was by now established firmly enough for crimes to be identified and punished as such, without any recourse to the supernatural. In the words of a French parliamentarian, "Witches and sorcerers are no longer condemned, firstly because it is difficult to establish proof of witchcraft, and secondly because such condemnations have been used to do harms. One has ceased therefore to accuse them of the uncertain in order to accuse them of the certain."⁵²

Once the subversive potential of witchcraft had been eliminated, it became possible to allow magical practices to continue. For example, many European women continued to foretell the future and sell various forms of magic. But now witchcraft was seen as a reality that existed only at a psychological level or as a disorder of the imagination. By the 18th century, then, the ruling class began to pride itself on its newly acquired enlightenment and openly proceeded to rewrite the history of the witch-hunt itself, casting it as an exclusively feudal product. To this day the witch-hunt has remained, in the accounts of most history books, a bizarre historical episode, largely unexplained, or settled with explanations which in any other context would be deemed grotesquely inadequate (e.g. that the witch-hunt was the result of a change in legal procedures, or that it represented the final coalescing of different ideological elements that had until then lacked a unifying thrust, and so forth).

Thus, not only has much been lost concerning our history, but the lesson it could have provided has not been drawn, as has been shown in the current debates concerning the meaning of western civilization, or the conditions of the capitalist take-off in Europe, and finally the relationship between the sexual and the political, or, more precisely, sex, race and class.

It is with the hope of drawing this lesson, and ensuring that the story of the witch-hunt is not forgotten, not at least as long as the conditions that give place to witch-hunts continue to exist, that this essay is written.

NOTES

1. William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 4, vi, 126-131.
2. Walter Charleton, *Ephesian Matron* (1659) quoted in Brian Easlea, *Witchhunting, Magic and the New Philosophy: An Introduction to the Debates of the Scientific Revolution, 1450-1750*. (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1980), 242.
3. Mary Daly, "European Witchburnings: Purifying the Body of Christ," in *Gyn/Ecology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 205.
4. There are no conclusive figures concerning the scale of the persecution. However, "one of the most conservative reckonings has put the number at 100,000. . .," T.C. Smout, *A History of the Scottish People, 1560-1830*, 2nd ed. (Bungay, Suffolk: Fontana, 1972), 185. In the period between 1550 and 1650 "they no longer burnt one or two witches, they burned twenties and hundreds," Henry Charles Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages* (London: MacMillan, 1922), 549.
5. In the 7th and 8th centuries, witchcraft appeared as a crime in the codes of the new German kingdoms, as it had in the Roman code, but condemned as *Maleficia* were actions that caused harm to people and things. In this period, the church's attitude was tolerant. The Ecclesiastical Synods condemned magical practices (sacrifices to the old gods, charms, etc.) as remnants of paganism, but the penalties were light.
6. Also, the mechanisms of the persecution show the initiative came from the state, which then relied on the local authorities for the organization and the financing of the trials. These were very expensive; they could continue for months and required the payment of

- the judge, the surgeon, the torturers, the cost of the stake, the cost of keeping the witch in prison. Cf. Robert Mandrou, *Magistrates et Sorcières en France au XVII^e Siècle* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1968), 112. In Germany, it was the task of the "Visitors," instituted by the Lutheran Church and encouraged by the German princes, to elicit denunciations from the population. They discovered, however, that people did not relish to "have to spy on one another." (The "Visitors" were reformed priests whose task was to travel from village to village to check the moral pulse of the population.) Cf. Gerald Strauss, "Success and Failure in the German Reformation," in *Past and Present*, 67 (May, 1975): 54.
7. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1963), 67. "As for witches I think not that their witchcraft is any real power; but they are justly punished for the false belief that they can do such mischief."
 8. Cf. H.R. Trevor Roper, *The European Witchcraze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 122 ff. "[The witch-hunt] was forwarded by the cultivated Popes of the Renaissance, by the great Protestant Reformers, by the Saints of the Counter-reformation, by the scholars, lawyers and churchmen. . . . If these two centuries were an age of light, we have to admit that in one respect at least the dark ages were more civilized. . . ."
 9. Henry Kamen, *The Iron Century* (New York: Praeger, 1980), 249 ff.
 10. Frederick Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977).
 11. Kamen, *Iron Century*, 384-385. See also Julian Cornwall, *The Revolt of the Peasantry, 1549* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977).
 12. Kamen, *Iron Century*, 331. See also Emmanuel Le Roy Laudie, *The Peasants of Languedoc* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 208.
 13. Often called "Synagogue," indicating how elements drawn from the persecution of the Jews entered the ideology of the witch-hunt.
 14. Engels, *Peasant War*, 66 ff.
 15. Michael E. Tigar and Madeline R. Levy, *Law and the Rise of Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), 136.
 16. Kamen, *Iron Century*, 334. See also Le Roy Laudie, *Peasants of Languedoc*, 196-197.
 17. On witchcraft in the Middle Ages and its relation to heresy, see Jeffrey B. Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), 34 ff.
 18. Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters, eds., *Witchcraft in Europe 1100-1700* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), 107-108.
 19. Margaret Murray, *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
 20. Michael J. Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain: The Foundations of Empirical Social Research* (New York: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1975), 6 ff.
 21. John T. Noonan, *Contraception* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965) see, especially, chapter 7, and Norman E. Himes, *Medical History of Contraception* (New York: Gamut Press, 1963).
 22. *The Malleus Maleficarum* was the first and most influential demonology. It was written in 1486 by two Dominicans, J. Spencer, Dean of Cologne University, and the Prior H. Kramer. It laid down the main arguments against the witches, while instructing the judges and inquisitors on how to proceed with the trials. It is probably one of the most violently anti-women books ever written. On the content and context of the *Malleus*, see Russell Hope Robbins, *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology* (New York: Crow Publishers, 1959), 337-340.
 23. Alice Clark, *The Working Life of Women in 17th Century England* (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1968), 265.
 24. Louis B. Wright, *Middle Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1965), 465 ff.
 25. Kurt Seligman, *Magic, Spiritualism and Religion* (New York: Random House, 1948),

- 151-158. "Tu non pensavi ch'io loico fossi!" ("You didn't think I was a logician!") says the Devil in Dante's Hell to a pope absolved of crimes he was plotting.
26. Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, 45-60, and Luisa Muraro, *La Signora del Gioco* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1977).
 27. Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum (The Hammer of the Witches)* in *Witchcraft in Europe, 1100-1700: A Documentary History*, Alan C. Kors and Edward Peters, eds. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), 114-115 ff.
 28. The actions that presumably impeded the conjugal act were a major theme also in contemporary judicial proceedings regarding matrimony and separation, especially in France. As Mandrou observes, at the time men were almost obsessional in their preoccupation with the fear of being made impotent by women, so that the village priest often forbade those who were suspected of being experts in "tying knots" (the means to causing impotence) from participating in marriage ceremonies. See Mandrou, *Magistrates et Sorcières*, 81-82, 391 ff.
 29. This tale appears in several demonologies. It always ends with the man discovering the evil that has been done to him and then forcing the witch to return his penis. She accompanies him to the top of a tree where she has many penises hidden, the man chooses one but the witch says "No, that one belongs to the Bishop."
 30. Among the more famous cases is that of Kepler, whose mother was accused of witchcraft, thanks to the imprudence of her son.
 31. Marvin Harris, *Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches* (New York: Random House, 1974), 239-240.
 32. Kramer, *Malleus Maleficarum*, 130-132.
 33. Richard Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1622) (New York: Random House, 1977), 56.
 34. Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, Hoyt Hopewell Hudson, trans. (New York: Modern Library, 1941), 42.
 35. Robbins, *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft*, 190-193; Wallace Notestein, *A History of Witchcraft in England from 1558 to 1718* (1911) (New York: Russell and Russell Pubs., 1965), 184-185.
 36. In this period the old familiarity that had existed between master and servant in the Middle Ages was rapidly vanishing with the rise of the bourgeoisie, which seemed to institute more egalitarian relations (e.g. by levelling clothing manners), but at the same time enormously increased the physical and psychological distance between servants and employers. No longer did the employer undress, e.g., in front of the servants, nor would he sleep in the same room with them.
 37. Quoted by Burgo Partridge, *A History of Orgies* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1960), III.
 38. Muraro, *La Signora*, 109 ff. On the 16th-17th century campaign against dances and rural pastimes, see Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-revolutionary England* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 183 ff.
 39. Carlo Ginzburg, *I Berandonti* (Torino: Einaudi, 1966), 189. Ginzburg observes that until the 15th century, going in *striacum* (to the Sabbath) did not have the connotations it later acquired in the course of the witch-hunt. The Sabbath was at that point described as a tranquil gathering of people who stay together, until dawn, eating.
 40. *Ibid.*, 190.
 41. Dora Steifelneier, "Sacro e Profano. Note sulla Prostituzione nella Germania Medievale," in *Donna, Woman, Femme*, 3 (1977): 48 ff.
 42. Anthony J. Barker, *The African Link: British Attitudes to the Negro in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1550-1807* (London: Frank Cass, 1978), 91 ff.
 43. Easlea, *Witchhunting, Magic and the New Philosophy*, 249-250. Easlea adds that the white male needed to codify his rational superiority in the hope that the bourgeois women would not be attracted by "brutes who lacked reason." As for proletarian

- women, the intervention of Edward Long (a judge), giving his reasons for not having black slaves introduced into English households, speaks for itself: "the lower class women in England are remarkably fond of blacks, for reasons too brutal to mention." See E. Long, "Candid Reflections . . . on what is commonly called the Negro cause," in Easlea, 250.
44. See Alan MacFarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 97; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1971), 565; and G.L. Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1929), 163.
 45. In the Middle Ages when the child took over the property, she or he would automatically take over the care of the aging parents, while in the 16th century the parents began to be abandoned and preference went to investment into one's children. MacFarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor & Stuart England*, 205.
 46. Thomas, *Religion and Decline*, 556.
 47. Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, 295-297. It was upon the same reasoning that the statute of James I was passed in 1604, imposing the death penalty for all who "used spirits and magic" regardless of whether they had done any harm. This statute later became the basis upon which the persecution was carried on in the American colonies.
 48. Strauss, "German Reformation," 21.
 49. H. C. Midelfort, *Witchhunting in Southwestern Germany: 1562-1684* (Stanford, California: University Press, 1972), 206. See also Mandrou, *Magistrates et Sorcières*, 443.
 50. Mandrou, *Magistrates et Sorcières*, 443.
 51. *Ibid.*, 481. See also Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, 333.
 52. Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, 361.

FORUM

Editor's Note: The Maine Scholar intends to publish, as a regular feature, companion essays, or an essay and a response, on public issues of great controversy. The aim of this feature is to encourage contributions that argue strongly for a definite point of view, while balancing different perspectives. It is hoped that this "Forum" will further scholarly debate between opposing positions. The following essay, "The Israelis, Palestinians and the Intifada," is intended to be read in conjunction with the response article immediately following it.

ISRAELIS, PALESTINIANS, AND THE INTIFADA: Some Reflections

RICHARD AYRE

Since the current Palestinian uprising began in mid-December, 1987, more than 170 Palestinians have been killed, thousands have been arrested, detained without trial, others buried alive; accounts of torture and other acts of brutality repeatedly surface.¹ George Katsiaficas' gruesome litany, recently reported in the *Boston Sunday Globe*,² is not unusual:

Many Palestinians have already died in Israeli prisons and detention centers, and many more have been physically disabled or disfigured, psychologically scarred or driven insane, raped, gassed, beaten, burnt with cigarettes, hooded with excrement-soaked material, bitten by dogs and had electric current driven through their bodies.

The plight of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza has moved to center stage of the theatre of world opinion.

American media coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has most often focused on the terrorism of the Palestinians. While one occasionally reads of Israeli terror visited upon Palestinians and Arabs, such incidents are viewed neither as massacres nor projected in systemic terms, but as aberrations in furtherance of an otherwise benign and legitimate defense strategy.³ It is incontestable that some Palestinians have committed reprehensible acts of terror, but Israeli terror is more frequent and