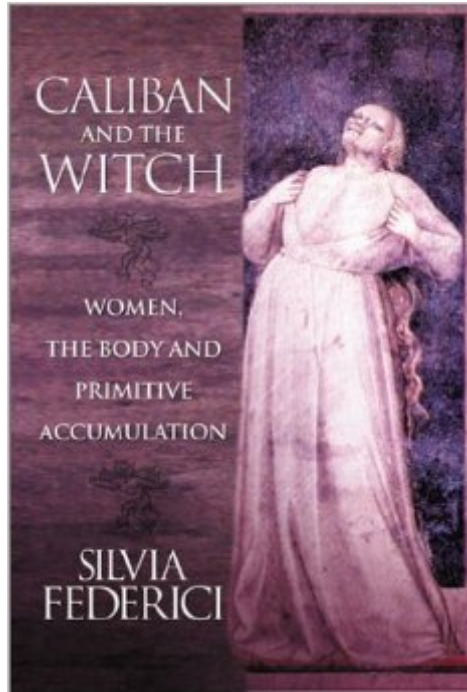


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Caliban And The Witch: Women, The Body And Primitive Accumulation



Synopsis

Literary Nonfiction. CALIBAN AND THE WITCH is a history of the body in the transition to capitalism. Moving from the peasant revolts of the late Middle Ages to the witch-hunts and the rise of mechanical philosophy, Federici investigates the capitalist rationalization of social reproduction. She shows how the battle against the rebel body and the conflict between body and mind are essential conditions for the development of labor power and self-ownership, two central principles of modern social organization."It is both a passionate work of memory recovered and a hammer of humanity's agenda."â Peter Linebaugh, author of The London Hanged

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Silvia Federici's book "Caliban and the Witch" demonstrates the absolute necessity of women's studies for a thorough and scientific understanding of history. Focusing on the role of women and the body in the process by Marx and Adam Smith described as "original accumulation", i.e. the violent expropriation of the feudal commons in the movement towards a capitalist society, Federici demonstrates that a true war against women was an important part of the ruling class' strategy. The book assesses various aspects of this development, including witchcraft and the witch-hunts, the "Christianization" (or rather Catholization) of the North and South American native civilizations, the role of philosophical mechanism and the developers of the scientific method (Bacon, Descartes, Newton, Hobbes, etc.), and the early slave trade. In each case Federici masterfully shows how this development came to be, what role it played in the process of 'original accumulation', and why it

was favored temporarily by the ruling class. She also gives very strong evidence that things like fear of witchcraft, patriarchy, racism etc., often seen as the inevitable and 'natural' results of ignorance and superstition in those societies, were in reality forced onto the common people as part of a top-down campaign to destroy the backbone of the feudal communities. What is an additional interesting contribution of this book is Federici's evidence that there was not only widespread peasant resistance against the process of enclosure, capitalization and expropriation, but more particularly that women often played a very major role in these resistance movements, especially after the German Peasant War ended in a massacre.

Published the same month, April 2004, that Fallujah first turned back the American onslaught and that the photographs of American tortures in Abu Ghraib prison were displayed to the world, Silvia Federici's book, *Caliban and the Witch*, although describing a time and place remote from the lawless atrocities in Mesopotamia, being as it is a study of the witch-hunt, of medieval heretical movements, and of European mechanical and materialist philosophy from the 'Age of Reason,' nevertheless, it is essential for understanding either. At the same time, the paradox of the hideous pun of the Structural Adjustment Program and the Special Access Program as the SAP, or the grotesque contradiction found between chapter 39 of Magna Carta and order 39 of the Iraq occupation are explicated. Nothing can so clearly help us understand the torture and the project of neo-liberalism as this, for Federici describes a foundational process creating the structural conditions for the existence of capitalism. This is the fundamental relationship of capitalist accumulation, or (as it is called in decades of technical literature) 'primitive accumulation.' This mystery perplexed (however coyly) Adam Smith. It was the 'original sin' of the political economists, and for Karl Marx it was written in "letters of blood and fire." The birth of the proletariat required war against women. This was the witch-hunt when tens of thousands of women in Europe were tortured and burnt at the stake, in massive state-sponsored terror against the European peasantry destroying communal relations and communal property. It was coeval with the enclosures of the land, the destruction of popular culture, the genocide in the New World, and the start of the African slave trade.

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