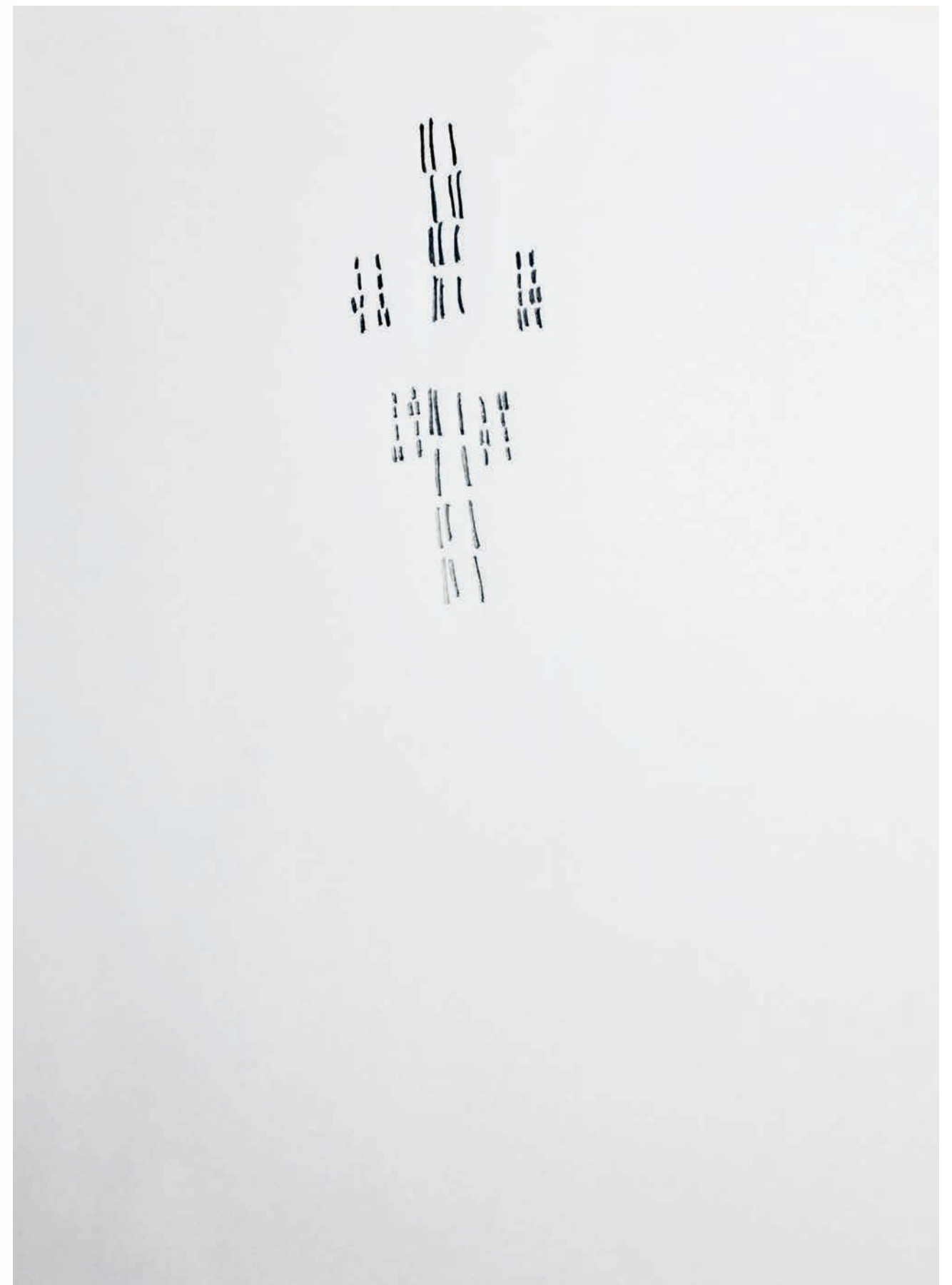


IN THE SHADOW OF THE PLANTATION AND THE PRISON



The last writings of Ikko, which he was preparing to pin to his door.

A figure with a stone head walks through two landscapes. In one, suburban German sidewalks and paths yield, at a distance, quiet views of residential buildings surrounded by barbed wire and guarded gates. In another, windy Puglian motorways and tomato fields make for a noisier, more industrial ramble. This same figure appears in yet another scene, in lapsed time set to Tisha Mukarji's fugitive composition, sitting, waiting, looking, getting up, moving about, on the dock of the Trapani port in western Sicily. A boat with the word RESCUE on its stern is glimpsed briefly. Elsewhere, there is a tribute to one of the stealth forms by which people on the move today communicate with each other about the police and other matters of concern to them. Movement, confinement, the plantation, solidarity, mobilization in the context of the European border regime and the resistance to it. These are among the major themes that Natascha Sadr Haghghian has assembled for her contribution to the Venice Biennale.

This essay provides some historical context for the European border regime and especially the struggles against it that predate the surge in 2015 and the emergence of "Fortress Europe" in the 1990s. It provides a longer historical fetch, oriented towards those who are unfamiliar with this history, which involves going back in time to the story of the origins of modern Western capitalism.¹ This origin or transition story is important because it bequeaths the terms that still, if less confidently, order the world in which we live, and because it is likely that we are living through another long historical transition. And like the earlier transition, it is sometimes very difficult to take the measure of the changes in what are, to use Raymond Williams' terms, "dominant, residual and emergent."² We see and don't see what is coming, even as we try to intervene to turn our fates towards better ends.

The emergence of capitalism in Europe took hundreds of years and involved a tectonic shift in the organization of economic, political and social life. Needless to say, this is a long and complicated story that I can only cover very superficially. As I will elaborate in what follows, dispossession, expulsion, and theft of land, bodies, and knowledge were central to the origins of modern capitalism and to the recurring waves of primitive accumulation necessary for it to continue. To achieve this level of dispossession, two primary mechanisms were used. The first, notwithstanding capitalist ideologies of free labor and free markets, was forced, unfree labor in the workhouse, on the ship, on the plantation, in the settler colony, in the factory and in the

domestic kitchen. Modern capitalism becomes a global system only through colonization and the trade in enslaved Africans. The second mechanism was punishment (including banishment), confinement, and imprisonment. The modern prison that emerged in the nineteenth century was a descendant of the workhouse, the slave ship, the transport ship carrying banished convicts, the native reservation, and the Bantustan. Both of these mechanisms involved the widespread movement of people—voluntary, captive, and in-between. Today, Europeans tend to conceive of the movement of people as the problem of people coming to Europe. But for most of its history, Europe was a place that people left: because they were displaced from their homes, because they were sent away as punishment, because they needed work, because they were sent to fight wars, because they sought to settle, colonize, and steal other people and their lands.

Needless to say, notwithstanding, or as a result of these repressive technologies of expropriation and rule, people have always organized politically, including in flight and in confinement. The prison or the hold is never only a site of repression, it is also always a living archive of subjugated knowledge, infrapolitical resistance, political conspiracy, and, when possible, organized rebellion. Though subject to extreme forms of historical erasure, the traces of this history—what I've called the utopian margins—remain with us too and are carried along, knowingly or not, across distant times and places.³

1 This essay originated as a lecture given at the *beyond repair* study gathering, which then formed the basis of a day-long seminar with the students participating in the program. In reworking the lecture for publication, I have kept the pedagogical voice of the professorial lecture, including the reminders that in such a short space so much more that should be said is absent. This bears repeating. What I have also not been able to reproduce was the stimulating seminar with the students the following day where for many hours, I answered questions about and we discussed much that arose from the lecture but could not be covered in it, including how we might narrate our present moment, as if it were a historical transition to something or somewhere we cannot yet name.

I thank Natascha for including me in the *beyond repair* study program, as always it's an honor to work with her. And, I thank too Ernest Ah for all their effective and good-natured organizational work.

2 "By emergent I mean, first, that new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created. But it is exceptionally difficult to distinguish between those which are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture ... and those which are substantially alternative or oppositional to it: emergent in the strict sense, rather than merely novel," Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 123.

3 Gordon, *The Hawthorn Archive*.

COUNTERREVOLUTION: THE STANDPOINT OF ANALYSIS

From the vantage point of this struggle, we can also see that capitalism was not the product of an evolutionary development bringing forth economic forces that were maturing in the womb of the old order. Capitalism was the response of feudal lords, the patrician merchants, the bishops and popes, to a centuries-long social conflict that, in the end, shook their power and truly gave “all the world a big jolt.” Capitalism was the counter-revolution that destroyed the possibilities that had emerged from the anti-feudal struggle—possibilities which, if realized, might have spared us the immense destruction of lives and the natural environment that has marked the advance of capitalist relations worldwide. This much must be stressed, for the belief that capitalism “evolved” from feudalism and represents a higher form of social life has yet to be dispelled.—Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*

Capitalism as a racialized political economic system emerges and develops out of social struggles, first within Europe, and then in the places where its agents trade, colonize, and settle, including on the ships that carry slaves, convicts and the indentured across seas and lands that create new global routes and crisscross older Eastern-oriented ones. As Silvia Federici concisely put it, rather than being a revolutionary or evolutionary development, capitalism was essentially a counter-revolution.⁴ It emerged in response to fierce struggles—armed in most cases—and it generated new ones. Everywhere, the attempt to impose a capitalist mode of extraction and production and in turn to create a new world in its image—a world with new experiences of land, of time, of work, of sociality, of the body—were fought before, during and after its ascendancy. These struggles were never strictly speaking over work in the narrow sense, rather, they were fundamentally about the form and ensemble of how life could and should be lived.

Contrary to popular and academic common sense, there were many anti-feudal popular struggles—often led by women—for an egalitarian society based on the sharing of wealth, for the leveling or the refusal of hierarchies of social status, for the right to move and make attachments freely, and for the replacement of authoritarian rule by secular, military and religious bodies. These various movements put the feudal system into crisis from below, so to speak. It was being put into crisis from above as well: merchants chafing at an order based on divine hierarchies, military society, and royal taxes; the church, the largest landowner in Christendom, trying to extend its imperial power against the rise of monarchs claiming dominion over territories soon to be known as nations; nascent scientists and philosophers seeking rational

enlightenment over animistic relational knowledges; manufacturers seeking to break the craft guilds to profit from the segmentation and alienation of other people’s work. This crisis story in which the main actors are elites is the one we’re mostly told, a story in which the popular struggles, barely noticed by later historians, were at best treated as “premature” (because pre-capitalist), as Frederick Engels famously assessed the sixteenth century German peasant wars.⁵ Rather, these popular struggles from below were revolutionary—an attempt to make the “world ... suffer a big jolt” in the words of Thomas Müntzer—in so far as they aimed to turn the feudal world upside down and to prevent a newly oppressive order from being established, one that would replace older forms of power and exploitation with equally undesirable new ones. And while this opposition did not succeed in installing an egalitarian order and protecting the old knowledges, it nonetheless remains as a fork or forks in the historical road of possibilities that were not taken then but might, on a different track, be taken still.

It is these diverse and widespread social struggles that are the background to the English enclosures, the German peasant wars, the violent witch-hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the opening of the first workhouses, and the development of the transatlantic slave trade and its plantation economy that will, in combination, give us the full-blown modern racial capitalist system. From the ninth to the fifteenth century, a feudal serf system dominates western Europe and Britain. Simply described, it was a three-tier hierarchical and obligatory land lease system in which nobles received land from a King that they, in turn, would grant to a vassal in return for military service. This land was worked by peasants who held no ownership rights to it but were permitted access to it and its issue, under specified circumstances that were customary and came to be known as “the commons.”⁶ While capitalist private property relations did not yet exist, this was not an easy life. Ordinary people were very poor, often not surviving a harsh winter, or a poor crop, or a difficult childbirth; bound to a place and a master (literally by name and legal right), as well as bound to an unceasing work regime and a rigid hierarchical social order—women doubly so by their super subordinate status—not of their own making.

The hardship and unfairness of this life, early encroachments on land and on customary peasant rights combined with the rise of larger money economies and urban centers that destabilized local markets, provoked a wave of social struggles that begin in the thirteenth century—there are major uprisings in Northern France in 1251 and in

5 Engels’ “The Peasant War in Germany” was written in the summer of 1850 and published in several later editions in 1870 and 1874. It was important in treating the German peasant wars as more than merely a religious contest, but it nonetheless could not imagine peasants as anti-capitalist historical agents. This agency was considered exclusive to an industrial proletariat, a failure of comprehension and imagination which had significant consequences for Marxism, as it meant, for example, that it never took seriously—theoretically—the foundational role of the expropriation of indigenous lands and slave labor in making global capitalism possible.

6 There is still considerable disagreement among historians about the veracity and viability of the concept of feudalism itself, especially given its eighteenth century origins and its erroneous implication of a unified institutional order. It is less well used today, replaced by more detailed and geographically precise accounts and periodizations. The Marxist notion of a feudal mode of production, nonetheless, remains for many a useful shorthand to describe the dominant political-economic order that precedes capitalism.

Umbria in 1260—and continue throughout the period in which capitalism is established as the dominant political-economic system in Europe. By the end of the fourteenth century, the mass revolt of the peasantry against landlords was, as Federici notes, “endemic” and “frequently armed.”⁷ There were struggles not only over access to land, but over ever increasing taxes, over a 24-hour workday, and over the obligation to provide military service. Open rebellion and infrapolitical resistance were the norm and some of these struggles became legendary. For example, in 1377, the cloth workers in Flanders took up arms against their employers, angry and fearful after hundreds of weavers had been banished, leading them to flee to London for work. For three years between 1378 and 1382, the *ciompi*—today we would call them day laborers—in the wool industry rebelled and eventually took power in Florence, the leading banking center of Italy, where they installed a democratic government.⁸ In 1381, the radical priest John Ball and rebel leaders Wat Tyler and Jack Straw marched a peasant army from Essex and Kent to London, where they destroyed the houses of government and demanded the abolition of serfdom.

Of course, these political struggles did not look or sound like ours today. Their language was religious, in the register of heretical millenarianism, filled with prophecies and apocalyptic judgments, harboring older pagan sympathies and deeply influenced by female mysticism, as was evident still two centuries later during the German Peasant war in 1524–1526 and the subsequent attempt to establish a communal government in Münster in 1533. As Federici notes, “the aspiration to a more egalitarian society” was expressed in the language of “the exaltation of poverty,” “the communism of goods,” and the evil of war.⁹ Whatever the vocabulary, the demand for the radical democratization and equalization of social life and the overturning of an oppressive order—of which work and conscripted military service were crucial parts—was very clear. Thus, these movements and the individuals associated with them were severely persecuted and violently repressed by the state and the Catholic Church, the most centralized authoritarian institution in Europe at the time.

This ferment is the background to the systematic campaign of enclosures and the large wave of dispossession that reaches its height in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, producing large-scale movement of people, and that inaugurates our modern regime of property: private possession as the medium of economic wealth, political agency, and bodily integrity. “Enclosure” was the term used to describe a variety of strategies used by landowners to confiscate

as private property land and other resources (natural and human) that were not owned by anyone, to eliminate communal property as fact and concept as well as common rights to private property, thereby expanding their holdings, increasing their power, and commercializing and eventually industrializing agriculture. These strategies included ending the open field system, fencing off the commons, eviction, rent increases, indebtedness through taxes and tithes, and organized starvation. The scale, scope and rapidity of this assault on the commons, broadly speaking, is notable. By the mid-sixteenth century, land privatization has become routine in Europe. Federici notes that two thousand rural villages had been destroyed in England before the Reformation.¹⁰ By the mid-sixteenth century, European merchants had already expropriated much of the land of the Canary Islands, for example, and turned it into sugar plantations, worked by enslaved Africans. In Africa, the loss of land from slave-raiding was massive, as it decimated tribal social structures, and formed the cartographical infrastructure for the continent-wide colonial occupation that accompanied capitalism’s first and second industrial revolutions. In the Americas, by the turn of the seventeenth century, already one-third of communal indigenous land had been forcibly expropriated by Spain or Portugal, which enabled and was soon followed by widespread militarized settler colonization by the British, the French and the Dutch, and the installation of a plantation system throughout the Americas and the Caribbean.

Marx had identified the enclosures as a crucial stage in the creation of industrial capitalism: the mechanism by which a population of people newly displaced, disgraced, and desperate became available to be accumulated as labor power. This original or what he called “primitive” accumulation was, in his view, a singular event. But Marx was wrong in two ways that the continuing history of enclosure, broadly conceived, has made abundantly clear. First, he was wrong about the significance of the English enclosures. Though they were extraordinarily destructive for English peasants and of traditional rural life, they were not sufficient for the development of a world capitalist system. Capitalist expansion would have been impossible without the African slave trade and the colonization of the Americas, which were both multinational efforts. Marx was also wrong to think that once this “primitive-original” (Adam Smith’s term) accumulation process was complete, it would not repeat. Primitive accumulation—the original constitutive violence of capitalism—repeats and is a permanent feature of it. It is not a one-time process. In setting the term on this path of constitutive violence, “primitive” came to refer not only to the barbarism or savagery at the heart of capitalism but also to the centrality of the very division of the world into “primitive” and “civilized,” “developed” and “undeveloped” that was so important to imperialism and to the various forms of neo-colonialism that followed it.

7 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 25.

8 The *ciompi* were the most radical of all the groups involved in the insurrection remembered in their name—“Revolt of the Ciompi.” They were the leaders in agitating against a guild system that excluded them and in demanding greater equality among all workers. They led the occupation by the lower classes of the government and replaced it with one that represented them. Unfortunately, the new government did not implement their demands and they were eventually defeated, their newly acquired guild status abolished, thus returning them to economic and political disenfranchisement.

9 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 42. See also Robinson, *An Anthropology of Marxism*, who emphasizes the significance of female mysticism. Most of the pamphlets and manifestos issued by the Diggers in mid-seventeenth century England and primarily written by Gerrard Winstanley, including the most famous one on the occasion of the occupation of St. George’s Hill in Surrey in 1649, explicitly linked the evils of private property to militarism and undemocratic government. See Winstanley, “A Declaration from the Poor Oppressed People of England.”

10 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 70.

54 The economic and social function of the commons was to create a web of local cooperative relations, what Marx and Engels called primitive communism, within a system in which little land was owned outright.¹¹ A noble had property rights given to him by a monarch; a tenant had user rights to cropland and common land and those rights were passed down from generation to generation. Lord and tenant were bound to the land in service and obligation. Eviction was a serious breach of this obligation just as free movement was not permitted for the tenant. The concept of land as a commodity to be bought and sold—land understood as individual private property—led to the demise of the open field system and to the social system in which it was embedded.¹² Dispossession and expulsion produced a breakdown in social cohesion, unprecedented movement of people, and a peasantry increasingly polarized by economic inequality. This stratification was exacerbated as displaced peasants, now a cheapened mobile labor force, fled to cities where they were used to break the urban guilds and destroy the artisans' independence. The wage, which at one time would have been viewed as an instrument of freedom because it entailed a commutation from indenture and servitude, increasingly became viewed not as an instrument of freedom but of enslavement. Gerrard Winstanley, a radical Leveller, who along with his fellow Diggers occupied George's Hill in Surrey in 1649, called the wage simply "a terrible thing."¹³

So, the struggles against enclosure, land privatization and commercialization of agriculture on the European continent continued throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and in some places into the eighteenth century. Cutting down (i.e. levelling) the hedges and fences were common forms of protest that could turn into mass uprisings. For example, in 1549, 16,000 rebels in Norfolk, taking the name of Robert Kett, the rebellion's spokesman, defeated the state's army of 12,000, capturing Norwich, the second largest city in England at the time. They issued twenty-nine demands, and the first demand was: No more enclosures.¹⁴ *Omnia sunt communia!* Everything belongs to everybody! Open rebellion, food revolts led by women, poaching, vagabondage: there was an incredible ferment and movement, political and otherwise, throughout Europe at this time. In France, between the 1530s and the 1670s there were an estimated 1000 uprisings; in England, Spain, Italy, Germany we see a similar pattern.¹⁵ There was, in effect, a general uprising against the old forms of mastery and the new ones being imposed. Here, I am only describing what is happening in western Europe. The extent of this general uprising against the new order becomes even clearer when we take into account the armed

55 resistance by indigenous peoples to the genocidal wars against them and the resistance of Africans, Asians and others to enslavement and indenture during capture, on the ships, and on the plantations in the Americas. It will take a great deal of violence, repression and damage to install the capitalist world we take for granted as progressive, inevitable, civilized, the best; a world in which it is still not possible for millions of women and men to go where they please and where they have need, in peace and welcome.

All these social struggles, in their ragged disarray, involved not merely resistance or opposition to privatization, hierarchy, bondage and misery. They also involved efforts to protect existing and to produce further alternatives to this private property regime. These alternatives were crucial because they challenged the cloak of naturalization and inevitability that all-powerful people and systems wrap themselves up in for protection, and thus they posed a danger to the existing authorities, a danger which had to be contained (enclosed) or destroyed. Of course, containment never fully succeeded because the need for the alternatives remains and we keep the struggle for them alive, under the conditions of our time, thus continuing some very old struggles to this day.

MEANS OF CONTAINMENT

The means of containment and destruction of these alternative and older ways of life in Europe during the time we are discussing are many. Three that are important for our story are: changing racial regimes, the witch-hunt against women, and the criminalization of poverty and autonomous movement. It is not possible to discuss these properly in the space available, but I will touch on each briefly.

The incorporation of Africa and Asia into a world system of merchant capital in the fourteenth century, which marks the end of the then existing eastern and Islamic centered world economic system, and the subsequent expansion of European colonialism through the transatlantic slave trade in the sixteenth century is accompanied by a new racial regime that produces first the "Negro" and, by the nineteenth century, white nationalism and what WEB Du Bois called "the wages of whiteness."¹⁶ This new racial regime had momentous consequences, including undermining the possibility of solidarity the earlier struggles promised and destroying ancient cultures and relational modes of knowledge. We are familiar with this disastrous racial regime and its profound anti-Blackness because we live in the aftermath of its ongoing iterations. But it would be unwise and misleading if we take it to be the origin of Western racism.

11 See Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto*.

12 See Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*.

13 The Diggers, or the "True Levellers" as they called themselves, were anarchist, communist, radically self-governing commoners who appeared among a series of radical groups, including the original Levellers and the Ranters, who were active during the English Civil War in the 1640s and 1650s. They were called Diggers because they believed in equality of persons—in the leveling of inequalities and indignities between rich and poor and between the powerful and the powerless. And because they formed cooperative communities to prevent the enclosure of common land and the privatization of property in England. They dug up

common lands to create growing fields, the produce of which they would give away for free, inviting others to join them. See Gordon, *The Hawthorn Archive*, pp. 124–133.

14 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 73. Sampson's novel, *Tombland*, offers a remarkably thorough and mostly historically accurate rendering of the peasant rebellion against enclosures that ended with Kett's condemnation for treason and hanging from the walls of Norwich Castle. Social historian Peter Clark offers a succinct 50-minute lecture on "Down with the Fences: The Kett Rebellion" at <http://www.brh.org.uk/dwtf2008/kett.html>.

15 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 82.

16 Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*. See Robinson, *Black Marxism* and Anievas and Nişancıoğlu, *How the West Came to Rule*.

European racism is not, in fact, modern. It neither emerges as a post-hoc rationalization of modern slavery nor is it the result of a kind of specular trauma produced by the European encounter (not its first by any means) with Africans in the sixteenth century. As Cedric J. Robinson pointed out years ago in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, capitalism is a product of western civilization, not the other way around. This civilization was never egalitarian nor free. And it was already highly racialized well before Europeans entered the trade in African slaves, and would remain so, as demonstrated by the rise of Chinese indenture in the wake of the waning fortunes of the slave trade and the rather flexible but persistent racialization of peoples throughout its history.¹⁷ Hence the meaning of the term racial capitalism as Robinson used it. Not to put too fine a point on it, the ancient Roman and Viking-era Danish empires were highly racialized slave societies. The English honed their racial thinking on the Irish and the Scots and in fact used the colonization of Ireland as a laboratory for the plantation system it subsequently exported to Barbados, Jamaica, and North America. The transition from feudal to capitalist Europe doesn't introduce a previously absent racialism into Europe, it modifies existing forms. It is in these ancient and pre-modern forms that we find the genealogy for racialized figures that have prominently returned in our time: the barbarian, the savage, the infidel, the stranger, the foreigner.

"Racial regimes are ... unstable truth systems ... in which race is proposed as a justification for relations of power."¹⁸ In Robinson's words, racial regimes, which "masquerade" as natural and unchanging, in reality are "unstable" and "fragile," and they shift over time. Racial regimes are unstable and fragile because they construct, rank and ontologize (or essentialize) what are artificial differences among people. Because in doing so they exclude an ever-present noisy repressed reality (we're not that!) which is always threatening to destabilize the justifications. Racial regimes shift over time not only because of their inherent instability but because the power needs that they serve change over time. Thus, the Irish ceased to be a barbarous people and became white when skills in rice planting and indigo production became more valuable to English colonists and a white landowning minority needed protection against its large, unfree, very highly skilled, and very angry African workforce.¹⁹ Thus, you see continuing and mutating efforts to develop ways and means to do the racial ordering work states have formally outlawed in a post civil rights or multicultural context. Today, that primary form is criminalization, a very old technology, and one notably tied to the making of racialized subjects.

17 See Carney, *Black Rice* and the series of articles by Tinde van Andel on rice in Surinam and the memory of African botanical knowledge in the Americas over 350 years.
18 Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning*, xii.
19 See Carney, *Black Rice* and the series of articles by Tinde van Andel on rice in Surinam and the memory of African botanical knowledge in the Americas over 350 years.
<https://www.sapiens.org/culture/african-rice-new-world/>

Just as Western civilization was racialized, so too it was gendered. As Silvia Federici shows in *Caliban and the Witch*, the great witch hunt in Europe played a crucial part in the primitive accumulation necessary to the emergence of capitalism. "*Just as the Enclosures expropriated the peasantry from communal land,*" she writes, "*the witch-hunt expropriated women from their bodies,*" creating a new and devalued sexual division of labor, in which women would "*function as machines for the production,*" not of children, but of labor power itself.²⁰ Federici provocatively argues that the human body is the first machine developed by capitalism—not the steam engine nor the precision clock—and the long history of slave labor bears this out. The witch-hunt was a war against women: against the midwife, the healer, the sexually independent woman without children, the prostitute, the rebel. It was a means to destroy their social power, their knowledge (of herbs, of contraception, of secrets, secret doors, secret lovers and so on) and take whatever land or possessions the women held. The witch hunt was "*the first unifying terrain in the politics of the new European nation states.*"²¹ At the time, it was the most important laboratory for the systematic use of torture on political enemies, and it produced an elaborate legal infrastructure for the criminalization of independent knowledge systems and disobedience.²² In short, Federici argues, it was one of the most important events in the establishment of a mature capitalism. Why? The campaign of terror against women—thousands tortured and spectacularly murdered—"weakened the resistance of the peasantry to the assault launched against it ... at a time when the peasant community was already disintegrating under the combined impact of land privatization, increased taxation, and the extension of state control over every aspect of social life." It "deepened divisions between men and women," taught "men to fear the power of women, and destroyed a universe of practices, beliefs and social subjects whose existence was incompatible with capitalist work discipline."²³

In my view, this is key. The witch hunt was designed not only to create sexually submissive female subjects, but to eradicate an entire mode of existence grounded in communal life with residual vestiges, kept alive mostly by women, of an animistic, polytheistic, relational view of the world. This so-called magical view of the world—so frightening to monotheists—appeared as an illicit and competing form of power to the one God, for it touched and was touched by the force in all things seen and unseen, dead and alive. It also embodied a profoundly anti-capitalist principle: "everything is in everything," later evoked famously by both Jacques Rancière and the singer Lauryn Hill.²⁴ The witch who necessitated elaborate trials, iron chains, and burning by fire to determine her relationship to the Devil did not appear until the mid-fifteenth century, precisely in the midst of the ferment and crisis I've

20 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 184, emphasis in original.
21 Ibid. 169, emphasis in original.
22 See Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*.

23 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 165.
24 Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*; Lauryn Hill, "Everything is Everything."

58 been discussing. And when the job was finished in Europe, the witch trials came to an end there and were exported to the Americas by settler colonists where they were used to break the resistance of local indigenous and enslaved populations in campaigns designed to force work and destroy autonomous knowledges and societies. There was, Federici ominously notes, a “cross-fertilization” across the continents whose origins become in time mystified, as Europeans forgot that the “heathen savage” and “black devil” were their own issue and not something strange and foreign they discovered in faraway lands.

The great expulsion of peasants from the land, the disintegration of the feudal mode of production and governance, and the secularization and appropriation of Church wealth and property produced, as mentioned, thousands of poor, dispossessed, and displaced persons on the move all across Europe. Some, deserting in anticipatory flight to the cities, found unregulated work, prostitution, or took up begging. Some, families in tow, desperately moved from village to village, squatting in woods and fields, taking day work harvesting, reaping, and gleaning when not banished as unwelcome, threatening strangers. Still others found in the breakdown of bondage to place and master the freedom not to serve, not to soldier, not to work oneself into the grave, and not to create families, setting the countryside alight with true and fabulous tales of bandits taking expropriation and redistribution into their own hands and “masterless men” defying all attempts to bring them into line.²⁵ Yet others were collectively organizing, gathering mobile men and women, wrecking machinery, stopping work where it was taking place, and as Eric Hobsbawm put it, generally trying to bargain collectively by the only means available: riot.²⁶ These men and women were not called migrants or refugees or asylum seekers. Along the lines of these escape routes, those in flight received new names—vagrant, vagabond, idler, beggar, thief, wayward—that marked their place in the new order and organized the moral panics of the day.

Allen Feldman has written that “arrest is the political art of individualizing disorder” and indeed criminalization, punishment, confinement, and forced labor were the responses to the ferment of unauthorized movement.²⁷ The first laws that placed restrictions on the movement of workers, beggars, and self-defined “free” persons and criminalized both poverty and the refusal to work, in the process creating the crimes of vagrancy and idleness, were written in the fourteenth century and then honed throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries amidst this ferment. In 1555, the first House of Correction, the prototype for the workhouse, is built at Bridewell in London, giving the generic name to the workhouses in England and later

65 the United States. The first workhouse in Germany opens in Hamburg in 1618, after the success of the *Rasp-huis* in Amsterdam, opened in 1596, itself belatedly following the publication of Martin Luther’s detailed and venal instructions for catching vagrants and wanton women in the 1528 *Book of Beggars*.²⁸

In England, where the criminalization of poverty was most advanced and poaching was a capital offense, once the workhouses and houses of correction were bursting at the seams with the poor, banishing or transporting the new criminals in conditions of indentured servitude to the colonies solved two problems at once, as the English, like the Europeans, had not the manpower needed to do the work necessary to settle plantation economies as they conceived them. As Scott Christianson shows, from 1718 until 1769 more than 70% of convicted felons in Britain were banished to America, making transportation the leading punishment for “serious” crime. Indeed, there was a large and profitable trade in human prisoners starting in the late fifteenth century, which included convicts, sailors, indentured servants, slaves, and kidnapped poor children and adults. This trade in prisoners was crucial to the so-called discovery and colonization of the Americas.²⁹

Weaving, spinning, sewing, tailoring, beating hemp, knitting nets, stockings, and blankets, spooling silk, carding, dying, hackling, twining, making canvas marbled shoes, gunpowder, polishing glass, and of course rasping or grating wood to produce dye. The workhouse was a prison whose punishment regime centered on brutal work. The purpose of the workhouse was both more efficient and profitable production of cloth or dye and more efficient and profitable production of capitalist subjects. Through work and intimidation, the workhouse taught discipline, obedience, order, and the acceptance of imposed conditions of work and life. It was designed to create docility, to “suppress a world of productive capabilities and instincts,” and to “smash a radically counterposed underground popular culture which combined forms of the old peasant way of life with new methods of resistance.”³⁰ Thus, the endless rules stipulating forms of dress, methods of hygiene, and so on; the prohibitions against swearing, reading, writing, singing ballads about Münster or Jack Straw, and using nicknames. Not surprisingly, the most severe punishments were reserved for the refusal to work. Preparation and training for the total impoverishment of factory life is how Melossi and Pavarini describe the purpose of the workhouse.

Resistance was the only alternative and it was rampant among those the magistrates called “idle blockheads,”³¹ perhaps one origin or point of identification for the stone-headed figure who, as silent witness, wanders through the films that prefaced and accompanied Sadr Haghigian’s Pavilion in Venice. Resistance occurs by any means

25 See Beier, *Masterless Men*. Julius Scott uses the term in the Caribbean context in his riveting book *The Common Wind*. The first use of the term “masterless men” to describe those sixteenth and seventeenth century men and women who were the “victims of enclosure and who were on the move from disintegrating controlled spaces, many of whom were squatting on commons and in forests,” belongs to Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*.

26 Eric Hobsbawm, “The Machine Breakers” (1952) in *Uncommon People*, 9. See also E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*.
27 Feldman, *Formations of Violence*, p. 109.

28 Much is condensed here in this section. See Spierenburg, *The Prison Experience*; Melossi and Pavarini, *The Prison and the Factory*; Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*; Gordon, “[the workhouse]” in *The Hawthorn Archive*.

29 Christianson, *With Liberty for Some*.
30 Melossi and Pavarini, *The Prison and the Factory*, pp. 39–40.
31 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

necessary: spontaneous, unconscious, criminal, organized. Refusal to work remains foremost, but escape, riots and organized revolts are common, sometimes all together, as at Newgate prison in 1780, where the prisoners, having had enough, escaped, burned to the ground the building first erected in the twelfth century, and joined rioters elsewhere in the city.

FUGITIVITY

The language of resistance keeps common cause with the perspective of individuals forced to cross borders illegally and critically questions the presumptions and divisions that dominate state policy and the popular media, whose terms are signified in the state-sponsored identities “illegal immigrant,” “economic migrant,” “refugee,” “asylum seeker.” To see migration or movement from South and East to North and West as a “mode of resistance” is to see it, as the artist Bouchra Khalili noted, as “lived expressions of political positions that refuse state control and power, and the restrictions of nationalisms, regionalism, and ideology.”³² It is clear that illegality is completely woven into the long history of movement within Europe and into the seams and sinews of the movement of people from Africa and Asia to Europe and the Americas. Today, for people lacking means, social standing and state authorization, it is fair to say that there is no “migration,” no movement across nation-state boundaries, that does not involve becoming a fugitive. A fugitive from the law, a fugitive from the nation-state, and possibly also a fugitive from the whole geopolitical order that structures markets for labor and politics for governance through national citizenship.

In the African-American Black radical tradition, resistance through escape, flight, and illegal movement embraces the language of fugitivity. It embraces the language of fugitivity because it is a radical tradition built up from and still tied to the vantage point of the enslaved who were, in even imagining themselves as themselves and not merely as slaves, in violation of the law and social order which construed them as property belonging to another. Everything about enslaved life was bound up with parsing what was permitted and what was forbidden, with living in the seam of illegality. Recall that in slave-holding societies like those in the Caribbean and in the United States, the slave was treated as a complete non-person—a non-human human being—and was legally prohibited from free association, from kinship and all other civil and political rights, from reading and writing, from thinking their own thoughts, from strategizing collectively, from keeping secrets, and certainly from travel without permission and the paperwork to prove it.

Fugitivity was a general condition of the life of the enslaved in at least two senses. First, the slave, in not being the property they were presumed and held to be, was always already a fugitive from this private property regime with its elaborate legal and social rigging, always already running away from it, always already against it, always already an outlaw in the eyes of the law. Second, even in Brazil and the Caribbean countries where there were great slave revolts and large, well-organized, self-governing runaway or maroon communities, which was not the case in the United States, the most common resistance to slavery was self-emancipation and flight, even if this just meant escaping to the woods or to town for a little peace and quiet for a couple of hours or a couple of days. In this way, fugitivity became an epistemology or even an ontology of Black resistance as everyday life, which also bound this resistance up historically with illegality and criminality, a bind still very much operative. The current brutal policing regime along the U.S.’s southern border is not unrelated to the history of the treatment of fugitive slaves who were, everywhere in the Americas, hunted down without mercy. In fact, the capture of Mexicans and Central Americans fleeing towards the United States by state police and white militias resembles nothing so much as the old slave patrols, the origin of the police in the United States.

In his book *Freedom as Marronage*, Neil Roberts writes that freedom is grounded in “acts of flight that are at moments evanescent, durable, overlapping.”³³ I’ve been especially interested in changes in political consciousness and changes in the political mise-en-scène that running away produces or that happen in flight; that happen in the interval between the no-longer and the not-yet, the no-longer putting up with what is and the not-yet something better.³⁴ Sometimes what changes is that episodic flight, what Roberts calls truancy, becomes more durable.

In the United States, as Du Bois showed in *Black Reconstruction*, it was the mass flight of the enslaved from the plantations that ended slavery and won the Civil War for the North, whose objective was not, as we’re instructed, the abolition of slavery or the emancipation of the slaves, but unification of the nation state around industrial capitalism rather than a plantocracy. There were around four million Black slaves in the South alone at the start of the war. When they walked out of the fields, the workshops, the kitchens and their living quarters, at first gradually and then en masse, when they inaugurated what Du Bois called “the general strike of the slaves,” they abolished the system of plantation capitalism that relied on their bonded labor by abandoning it. Du Bois is describing a revolution by flight: “This was not merely the desire to stop work. ... It was a general strike against the conditions of work ... [that] involved directly in the end perhaps a half million people. They wanted to stop the economy of the plantation system, and to do that they left the

plantations. ... The slave entered upon a general strike against slavery by the same methods that he had used during the period of the fugitive slave. He ran away to the first place of safety."³⁵ For thousands the first destination were the Union Army camps where the runaways received a new name. "Contraband of war" or confiscated property is what the Army officially called this mass of poor, starving, mistreated strikers, who were put to work—digging latrines, cleaning weapons, building housing for white soldiers, cooking, taking care of horses and so on—and who were eventually legally emancipated, it must be emphasized, only once they were armed and a major fighting force.³⁶

These fugitives had plans for a way of life without enslavement, disenfranchisement, and racial subordination. For a brief moment, the reconstruction plan which Du Bois called "abolition democracy" seemed possible and flight or fugitivity was a necessary preparation for it. Its failure set the terms for the militarized racial capitalism we confront today in the United States, just as it bequeathed to the word abolition, once the "byword for finality," a usable past and gave to abolition its current meaning of total "urgent democratic social and political change."³⁷ If we presume that fugitive migrants, in varying degrees of militancy and political planning, have entered upon a general strike against the conditions of work and life in which we are all entwined, then the question becomes not how to manage this movement or create more welcoming laws to accommodate it or even merely to master a critical understanding of it. The question then becomes what would constitute the terms of the abolition democracy for which we would join that strike and together collectively struggle.

THE SHADOW OF THINGS TO COME

I will defer that question and conclude by narrating some of what happens in Togolese writer Kossi Efoui's beautiful short novel, *The Shadow of Things to Come*, which is very much a story for our time and one to which I often return.³⁸ I feel that it keeps good company with Natascha Sadr Haghghian's project and, in its own way, pays homage to the refugee activists like Aino Korvensyrjä, David Jassey and Rex Osa who have been an integral part of Sadr Haghghian's project and her life. In *Tribute to Whistle*, Sadr Haghghian asks: "Politics needs emotional intelligence. How does it take shape?" This is a difficult question to which Efoui's novel suggests something of an answer in an intelligence, without a "whit of vanity," forged in the bonds of solidarity that fugitive movement from Africa to Europe requires. I do not wish to interpret the novel or analyze it so much as leave something of it as trace evidence, in story, of the accumulated weight of the crisscrossing history of the plantation and the prison as it confronts its oppositional past, present and future.

Set in an unnamed country after the "Time of Annexation," and the "Times of Dispersal," as the state euphemistically records its history, the novel begins with the unnamed narrator waiting in the dark telling the time by the movement of the moon's reflection across the floor on which he is sitting. While he is waiting for something we will learn later, he remembers when, at the age of five, his father, carrying his saxophone and "already a shadow moving off into the distance," was arrested and taken away to the labor camp known as "The Plantation." He also remembers his mother, deemed insane, who wanted nothing more than to transform into a bird. The removal of his parents finds him living with twenty other children, under the care of Mama Maize. One of the children is Ikko who plays an important role in creating a language of words and lines that can secretly communicate to those in need what happens when you are sent to fight, "along routes of future pipelines" in the counterinsurgency war that is not called a war but a "frontier challenge" against the people living in the forest, called the border people. For a century, the forest people have fought the efforts to penetrate the forest, to mine it, and to contain them. Ikko returns, "having put off his old body," and covers the city with words and images that speak of what's forbidden to name: war, combat, enemy. He tries to explain invisible enemies shooting shooting shooting dead birds. They tell him to shut up and he refuses. For the crimes of vagrancy, spreading rumors of war during peacetime, and "aesthetic sabotage" he is sent away again.

I cannot tell you the whole of this extraordinary story, but our narrator's father returns "ferociously" silent, never to speak, although the young man witnesses a most remarkable scene in which his father finds his voice one last time to sing to his mother, now a bird. And he makes friends with bookshop owner Axis Kemal, estranged son of a wealthy Egyptian businessman, who was and still is a member of the underground liberation movement. Kemal introduces our narrator to his friends, the young crossdressing men who work by day as porters, hairdressers, and ambulance drivers and at night live otherwise, and who make the underground function, in part owing to their skills in disguise and stealth.

By the end, the twelfth movement, when the reader is returned to our unnamed narrator sitting in the same moonlit room in which we first encountered him, we understand that he's been called up to report to the war in the forest and will not go. He's become a "deserter in peacetime," a fugitive, and for the past days has been moving from one house to another, picked up and taken in by strangers and members of the Nameless Brotherhood who don't give their names and ask him to forget their faces. When he asks why they're helping him they look surprised at the question. He is waiting for the men known as the crocodile men, so called because they live on an inaccessible island with crocodiles. Like other maroon societies, they trade on the mainland and help prisoners escape from the

35 Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, pp. 67, 57.

36 As David Roediger writes in *Seizing Freedom*, p. 78: Frederick "Douglass skewered the new language...finding 'contraband' to be 'a name that will apply better to a pistol than a human being.' ... seeing in the policy the preservation of the norms of slave property even if it opened

new possibilities to resist bondage."

37 Fanuzzi, "Abolition." On abolition democracy, see Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*; Lipstiz, "Abolition Democracy and Global Justice"; Davis, "Abolition Democracy" in *Abolition Democracy*.

38 Efoui, *The Shadow of Things to Come*.

64 plantations, which is how Kemal first met them. These are the only men who can sail the Atlantic sand bar, cross the abyss of swirling waves and get our narrator out. There is no whistling, only the anticipation of four rhythmic knocks made by a friendly hand (not two pounding knocks made by the police), the ritual of remembering the last writings by Ikko the narrator had received—*This hut is not of this world. But I am delighted to share the neighborhood*—and the ritual of forgetting the last name the identity papers assigned him. The four knocks come and he, along with twenty others, is welcomed by smiles that translate the language they do not share. The twenty vow to take on the smell of the men who rescue them so the crocodiles will recognize them.

The last words of the book are these: “I’ve long known there’s no magic formula against the roaring of storms, that there’s no prayer that will calm the furious sea. There’s just the intelligence of mind of an expert at the helm, who is master, at every second, and amazed too at each of these seconds that he was not smashed to pieces long ago. Though perfection is not of this world, I have no other word, not one, says the speaker, but perfection for each of these seconds into which no whit of vanity enters.”

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