

Witchcraft, Religion, and the State Apparatus: The Witch Craze Revisited

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“. . . millions of witches, sorcerers, possessed and obsessed were an enormous mass of severe neurotics [and] psychotics. . . for many years the world looked like a veritable insane asylum. . . .” (Gregory Zilboorg).

“. . . the witch-craze was neither a lynching party nor a mass suicide by hysterical women. Rather, it followed well-ordered, legalistic procedures. The witch-hunts were well-organized campaigns, initiated, financed and executed by Church and State. . . .” (Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English)



I. Introduction: The Apparatus and the Witch

In the study of cultural phenomena, cultural studies has often focused on the notion of the Cultural Apparatus (C.W. Mills), or the Ideological State Apparatus (L. Althusser), as a motor of cultural change, a regulator of cultural maintenance, and even a powerful eugenic mechanism that the State deploys to discipline individuals and to shape them psychologically into obedient, docile citizens who can toil their whole lives trying to be good souls and prepare to inhabit paradise after death! This apparatus takes different shapes and carries different missions. It varies from the family to the school, the Church, the police, the hospital, the jail, the T.V., the ministries, and the asylum – but to cite only a few. These apparatuses, according to Mills and Althusser, serve the State in the best way possible in monitoring the lives of the subject individuals, reminding them perpetually of their identity as subjects belonging to particular social, cultural, religious, and political

denominations. While serving the State, the Apparatus interpellates the individuals as such and leads them (through both soft and violent disciplinary means) to follow the identity requirements of the State and its dominant ideology. In order for it to maintain its continuity, the State must maintain its reproduction through its apparatuses; often inventing new ones to respond to emerging events that historical change brings about. And when such events no longer threaten the State, the apparatus can change or disappear to leave room for new apparatuses that would emerge in turn to attend to other necessities. Thus the rise or fall of the witchcraft craze in Europe and USA in the 16th. and 17th. centuries illustrate this complex phenomenon and explain how such a schemata has repeated itself in different social formations throughout history and in different parts of the world.

This paper looks at two complex issues: The functioning of the apparatus in a real historical context, on the one hand; and the rise and fall of the witchcraft craze in Europe in the 16th. and 17th. centuries, on the other; a craze that has witnessed one of the most gruesome, genocidal moments in the pre-modern history of Europe. Through this revisiting of the witch hunt craze, this paper hopes to achieve two objectives: 1. Theoretical: To reframe the Apparatus as a key concept in Cultural Studies and revisit its functioning, its structures of power, and the diverse elements that constitute its body. 2. Empirical: To study the phenomenon of the witch hunt (the Inquisition) as a repressive tool necessarily adopted by the State and the Church at a particular crucial moment in the history of Europe in response to a particular political and religious situation, when the Christian Church, in particular, was threatened by different historical events brought about by wars, famines, the Black Death, freezing weather conditions, and perpetual political strife across Europe. When the latter conditions abated, the pyres of the witch hunt and the gallows of the inquisition of witch trials, at which thousands of innocent people had perished, petered away. However, the 16th. and 17th. centuries were not the last episodes of witch hunting in Europe and US; other episodes ensued in 1936 and starting in 2001, wearing different masks. Outside the Western cultural space, witches are still being hunted and killed in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. As a reporter wrote in the *New York Times* in 2014:

Most people believe that the persecution of “witches” reached its height in the early 1690s with the trials in Salem, Mass., but it is a grim paradox of 21st-century life that violence against people accused of sorcery is very much still with us. . . The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights *reported* that most of the 25,000 to 50,000 children who live on the streets of Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, were abandoned by family members who accused them of witchcraft or demonic possession. . . .¹

Nevertheless, in modern times, in the Western world, within more secular, non-western cultural practices (such as Wicca and new pagan religions), one would openly admit to be a witch with a big smile on the face. There are even courses offered at universities in the US and UK, specializing in magic, sorcery and witchcraft; not only as anthropological subjects of study but as professional training programs.

II. The Cultural Apparatus, the ISA and the Witch

A. The Cultural Apparatus and the ISAs (From C.W. Mills to L. Althusser)

According to the American sociologist Charles Wright Mills (1916-1962) the cultural apparatus embraces the ensemble of state institutions that govern a society:

[The Cultural] apparatus is composed of all the organizations and *milieux* in which artistic, intellectual, and scientific work goes on, and by which entertainment and information are produced and distributed. It contains an elaborate set of institutions: of schools and theaters, newspapers and census bureaux, studios, laboratories, museums, little magazines, radio networks. . . Inside this apparatus, standing between men and events, the images, meanings, slogans that define the world in which men live are organized and compared, maintained and revised, lost and cherished, hidden, debunked, celebrated. It is the source of the Human Variety—of styles of living and of ways to die.²

Mills endows the cultural apparatus with so much power that it becomes a synecdoche for the State as such: it governs all the activities of the citizens, whether they are artists, scientists, or simple laymen. The structures of the State are represented in the Apparatus in terms of the educators, the supervisors, the police, the law enforcers, the religious spiritual guides, the healers, and even the saintly who supervise the world of afterlife. So any counter-cultural movement that rises against the status-quo and threatens the dominant order is countered with all the means available to the Apparatus. The State will stand in the position to supply the Apparatus with the necessary means (varying from Education programs, to psychological interventions, to jail sentences, and army interventions if need be), to bring the situation under control. In the case of witchcraft, the Apparatus of the Inquisition, with power and legitimacy from the State and the religious authorities (the Church) would intervene forcefully through the interrogation of suspected witches, their interrogation under torture, their sentencing, and then their burning or handling in public so that they would serve as an example for the populace at large. This way, the rising heretical, pagan, or anti-Christian counter-culture (witchcraft or heresy) would be brought to a halt, and Christendom would be cleansed of its devilish enemies. So the State is in perpetual need of its apparatuses, especially religion, in order to maintain beliefs and a particular view of the cosmos. Change comes out of the conflict between apparatuses and their failure to banish totally any emerging ideas that escape such a control.

Not unlike CW. Mills, in his theorization of the State and the reproduction of its structures of power, Louis Althusser (1919-1990), the French philosopher, goes beyond CW. Mills in detailing the nature, functions, and working mechanisms of the cultural apparatus. According to Althusser, the State function through different State apparatuses; some work with ideology (Ideological State Apparatuses), and others work with violence (Repressive State Apparatuses).³ Both types look after all the institutions that exist in a social formation to maintain order through the supervision of individual citizens and their behavior in public and

private spheres – supervising them from the cradle to the grave; providing individuals with education, morality, well-being, philosophies of existence, and the truth about the world after death. Althusser calls this process “interpellation” of individuals as subjects and as identity-constructions of these individuals as citizens (Ibid, p.264). For Althusser, “*no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses... the State Apparatus contains two bodies: the body of institutions which represent the Repressive State Apparatus on the one hand, and the body of institutions which represent the body of Ideological State Apparatuses on the other. . .*” (Ibid, 245). Often, the two apparatuses would exchange their tools of social control and guidance by alternating between the use of ideology and repression. Althusser explains that both the family and the school can resort to violent forms of punishment; the same way, the army could resort to the communication channels (as ideology) to convince the public of its moral righteousness. Accordingly, the ISAs in Althusser’s theory of history and the State become a powerful engine of historical change and the maintenance of State reproduction of its structures as long as it could. Althusser argues further that “The ideology of the ruling class does not become the ruling ideology by the grace of God, nor even by virtue of the seizure of State power alone. It is by the installation of the ISAs in which this ideology is realized and realizes itself that it becomes the ruling ideology. But this installation is not achieved all by itself; on the contrary, it is the stake in a very bitter and continuous class struggle: first against the former ruling classes and their positions in the old and new ISAs, then against the exploited class...” (Ibid., 245). Althusser explains further that,

In the pre-capitalist historical period . . . it is absolutely clear that *there was one dominant Ideological State Apparatus, the Church*, which concentrated within it not only religious functions, but also educational ones, and a large proportion of the functions of communications and ‘culture’. It is no accident that all ideological struggle, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, starting with the first shocks of the Reformation, was *concentrated* in an anti-clerical and anti-religious struggle; rather this is a function precisely of the dominant position of the religious Ideological State Apparatus. . . .(p.248).

Both Mills and Althusser provide us with a handy theoretical framework, a working grid, to guide us in reading and deciphering the phenomenon of witchcraft and the ensuing hunt craze in the 16th. and 17th. centuries Europe and US. Persecution remained alive until the 18th. century – though some scholars believe strongly that the phenomenon of witchcraft has remained alive well into 21st. century.⁴ Besides offering us a key to the understanding of the mechanisms that governed the rise and then the demise of the Inquisition of the early modern period in the West, this theoretical framework will open the field of witchcraft (as a complex cultural practice) to the deconstructive tools of cultural studies, which seems to me to have remained distanced from such an under-chartered territory.

B. The Inquisition, Religion, Economics, and Meteorology

If one google-searches the phrase “the witch trials in the modern period,” the search would yield at least 2,810,000 results⁵, which would demonstrate the wealth of research accomplished around the question of the witchcraft and its affiliated terminologies. Nonetheless, Silvia Federici, as well as other scholars, have decried a marked neglect by historians of many aspects (economic, feminist, even medical) of the witchcraft craze in Europe and America during the early modern period. She notes that,

The witch hunt rarely appears in the history of the proletariat. To this day, it remains one of the most understudied phenomena in European history or, rather, world history, if we consider that the charge of Devil worshipping was carried by missionaries and conquistadors to the "New World" as a tool for the subjugation of the local populations. That the victims, in Europe, *were mostly peasant women may account for the historians' past indifference towards this genocide*, an indifference that has bordered on complicity since the elimination of the witches from the pages of history has contributed to trivializing their physical elimination at the stake, suggesting that it was a phenomenon of minor significance⁶

Such a strong critique of the bias in the research conducted on the European witchcraft craze opens an important niche for cultural studies and the Althusserian/Millsian paradigm sketched above. By considering the inquisition phenomenon as an apparatus constructed by the State in alliance with the Church with a mission to face up to the different political, religious, and cultural threats that emerged during that period of European turmoil. It would also offer a different analysis – one that would satisfy Silvia Federici, and even would go beyond her feminist, postcolonial, and anti-capitalist analysis (cf. Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*). Like Federici, Lady Stardust, in 2010, offered a biting critique of the status of scholarship about witchcraft, especially with reference to the question of women and their persecution as a target population during the two centuries of the witch hunt craze in Europe and America. Lady Stardust argues:

During the 16th and 17th century, all across Europe, in every town and village, women were killed en masse as witches. In some areas a few were killed every week; in others hundreds were killed in one go. The killings went on for two centuries and touched everyone's lives. They spread fear, destroyed networks and resistance; and did not stop until the population was sufficiently subordinated and the emerging state, capitalist social relations and Church had got its claws into the lives and psyches of the people. Not only is the deep significance of the witch trials glossed over in mainstream history, but it is glossed over in Marxist and anarchist history too. Where it is discussed the gender implications of the trials are not brought to the fore. . . .⁷

What were the reasons behind the rise and fall of the witchcraft “epidemic” then? Various scholars have offered conflicting explanations, varying from “inherited paganism”; to “economic crises” leading to a catastrophic “rise in poverty” and “food shortages”; to meteorological catastrophic changes, brought about by

the “little ice age” which destroyed crops, cattle, and humans; to the black plague, which killed nearly half of the population of Europe in few months, thus leading Europe into a period of famine; to the European wars; all resulting in a collective hysteria (see bibliography *infra*). As the majority of witches were mostly women, some strong feminist arguments have been advanced as to the religious, political, and psychological reasons. The persecutions spread even to the New World. Social and natural catastrophes were attributed to witches who were perceived as wielding satanic powers gained through a covenant with Satan and the powers of the Anti-Christ. Both the Church and the State institutions worked hand in hand to rid their Christian society of witchcraft, using the worst means available; torture, hanging, and burning at the stake. A full-fledged apparatus, equipped with its courts, magistrates, churches, reporters-spies, witch-hunters, jailors, firemen, were all legitimized by the laws and the ISAs. All these positions and jobs (sometimes invented for the occasion) were lucrative; all paid for by the State but indirectly by the victims’ confiscated property as well. Even some victims had to stay longer in jail because they could not afford paying their jail fees. Many victims were subaltern, but many were also from the nobility and the wealthy classes and had to lose their property to the State (see “Trier Witch Trials,” Wikipedia). It is still a mystery, why the State and the Church suddenly stopped their trials craze over witchcraft. In the same mysterious way, they had started considering witchcraft a capital crime after having tolerated it for centuries of Christian rule. Some scholars attribute this shift towards the abandonment of witch-incrimination to the early emergence of rational enlightenment ethos and the rise of the scientific worldview, but other scholars remain suspicious about that because superstitious beliefs and Wicca (the mother of 16th. century witchcraft) is still thriving, even nowadays.

Silvia Federici argues that, before the 15th. century, witches were not hanged for practicing witchcraft nor was the practice itself a crime punishable by death. Earlier during the 6th. to 8th. centuries, when most of Europe was still converting to Christianity,

. . . at this time, under the name of *malificium*, only magical practices were punished that inflicted damage to persons and things, and the church criticized those who believed in magical deeds. The situation changed by the mid 15th century. It was in this age of popular epidemics, and incipient feudal crisis that we have the first witch trials (in southern France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy), the first descriptions of the Sabbat, and the development of the doctrine of witchcraft, by which sorcery was declared a form of highest crime against God, Nature, and the State. . . . (*Caliban and the Witch*, p. 166).

According to Federici, “witch-hunting reached its peak between 1580 and 1630,” at a time when feudalism was being surpassed by new economic and political institutions, fashioned by the rising capitalist structures. As if “by a tacit agreement, in countries often at war against each other the stakes multiplied and the state started denouncing the existence of witches and taking the initiative of the persecution. . .” (p. 165). New legislations in England, Scotland, France, Germany, Spanish Netherlands, and Switzerland started appearing criminalizing

witchcraft as a capital crime (*Ibid.*). The timeline of the different statutes regulating the hunting, persecution, and killing of witches would be quite revealing in this context.⁸

However, before considering the root causes of the witch hunt craze and the functioning of the apparatus of the inquisition, let us review first the tragic results and the numbers of victims that has been able to document. Jonathan Durrant, in his book, *Witchcraft, Gender and Society in Early Modern Germany* (2007), argues that the witch “hunts in Cologne and Westphalia, Würzburg, Bamberg, Ellwangen or Eichstätt in which hundreds of people found themselves arrested and executed for witchcraft over a short span of time...” (p.xvi) marked the earliest executions in Europe. Durrant explains further that in Germany, “between 217 and 256 executions of witch-heretics were carried out in Eichstätt in just forty years.” Durrant estimates that between 1590 and 1631, there were three phases of witch persecution in the Prince-Bishopric of Eichstätt: From 1590 to 1592; in 1603; and between 1617 and 1631, over 400 people got executed for witchcraft in the territory during this period. “The vast majority of witch-burnings in this region took place in Würzburg and Bamberg (about 1200 and 900 respectively). These persecutions included the dramatic interrogations and executions of several hundred children from the Julius-Spital, the school and orphanage in Würzburg. Interest in the persecutions in Bamberg has been promoted by the trials of Georg Haan, a chancellor of the principality, his wife and two of their children. . .” (Durrant, p. 5). The archbishop of Cologne at the time, Ferdinand, authorized the burning of up to 2000 people for witchcraft in his ecclesiastical territory and the duchy of Westphalia (*Ibid.*, p. 37). Some tribunals even condemned children between 2 and 5 years of age to be burnt at the stake for witchcraft. In the city of Trier, Germany, a city famous for its horrendous witch trials,

Between 1587 and 1593, 368 people were burned alive for sorcery in twenty-two villages, and in 1588, two villages were left with only one female inhabitant in each. People of both sexes, all ages and all classes, were victims; among the victims, 108 were men, women and children of the nobility, and also people with positions in the government and administration. . . One of the victims was Dietrich Flade, rector of the university and chief judge of the electoral court, who was in opposition to the persecutions . . .⁹

Cities were governed like semi-autonomous small states with semi-autonomous governing bodies, receiving religious authority from the Pope (for Catholics). Philip Adolf von Ehrenburg of Würzburg, a Prince-Bishop, was “particularly active: in his reign of eight years (1623–31) he burnt 900 persons, including his own nephew, nineteen Catholic priests, and children of seven who were said to have had intercourse with demons...” (“Würzburg Trials”, Wikipedia, 08/03/2018). Those religious communities who defied Catholic teachings were accused of heresy and needn’t be mixed with witches (see Peter Elmer, p.177. in J. Barry).

C. The Construction of the Witch: Myth and Reality; the Witch and the Apparatus

Among the scholars of witchcraft and “the burning times,” two camps vie for more recognition: One side upholds the thesis that witches never existed, and that the State and Church went on a genocidal rampage killing innocent people; the other side maintains that witches did exist during the Inquisition, constituted

rebellious social groups, attended their Sabbaths, and fornicated with the horned Satan. This paper offers a third interpretation that is inspired by Cultural Studies and the Althusserian/Millsian theorization of the Cultural Apparatus, Interpellation, and the ideological construction of identities (as detailed above). Therefore, in the case of the witches during the hunt craze, the State and the Church allied forces and invented the witch as a means to control the minds of a population that was undergoing radical change and threatening revolt against the established religious and political order. A number of studies have shown how the 17th. century marked the threshold of the Enlightenment ethos and the beginning of a radical view of the cosmos, God, and King. This radicalization of European consciousness came at the footsteps of harsh times (caused by wars, killer diseases, poverty, geo-meteorological catastrophes) that led people to think of the end of time. Millennial prophesies multiplied and the Church was targeted as being part of the problem, often pointed out as the Anti-Christ.¹⁰ Such a destabilizing situation led people to firmly believe the end of the world nigh, the anti-Christ roaming the Kingdom of God, and that redemption must be sought urgently. So the witch had to be invented in order to brandish the flag of the Devil and its consorts, the witches and heretics, to spread terror among the dissenting classes so that they would not join the mushrooming rebel groups, or align themselves with the Saracens who were, by 1529, knocking at the doors of Vienna at the heart of Christendom. In writing his conservative *History of Witchcraft in the Western World* (1911), Montague Summers, the English clergyman who produced the first English translation of the infamous guidebook for witch-hunters, Kramer and Springer's *The Hammer of Witches (Malleus Malificarum [1486])*, defines a witch as follows, claiming to offer a "scientific" portrait:

In the following pages I have endeavoured to show the witch as she really was an, evil liver; a social pest and parasite; the devotee of a loathly and obscene creed; an adept at poisoning, blackmail, and other creeping crimes; a member of a powerful secret organization inimical to Church and State; a blasphemer in word and deed; swaying the villagers by terror and superstition; a charlatan and a quack sometimes; a bawd ; an abortionist; the dark counsellor of lewd court ladies and adulterous gallants; a minister to vice and inconceivable corruption; battenning upon the filth and foulest passions of the age. (p. XIV)

A particular stereotypical image of the witch that gained wide circulation in 17th. century was the one offered by Shakespeare's portrait of the witches in *Macbeth*. Their song illustrated their identity; it is an identity that Shakespeare meant his audience to laugh at, not to seek to burn at the stakes:¹¹

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and caldron bubble.
Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the caldron boil and bake;
Eye of newt and toe of frog,
Wool of bat and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting,
Lizard's leg and howlet's wing,

For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.

.....

(Macbeth: IV.i 10-19; 35-38)¹²

Macbeth's witches are more engaged in magic, charms and spells than in theological mischief; but King James I's story with the witches is more political and religious than artistic. His personal engagement with diabolism and witchcraft was a result of a claimed attempt on his life when, in 1589, his ship nearly perished in a heavy storm off the coast of Denmark, when he went to fetch his bride Anne. The cause of the missed shipwreck was attributed to witchcraft and planned treason; a problem that has haunted him all his life; so a hundred of witches were rounded up and accused of conjuring up the storm were tried in Denmark and Scotland. Some were executed. According to Christopher Smout, between 3,000 and 4,000 accused witches may have been killed in Scotland in the years 1560–1707.¹³ In England, Scotland, and Ireland the image of the witch acquired special diabolic significance with the arrival of James I. In fact, the legal status of the witch had to change in the light of the king's guidance and of the literature produced on the subject. Books, pamphlets, drawings, and sermons about the existence of witches and their demonic powers (but also other writings countering them) proliferated. Frescoes, particularly, on the walls and ceilings of churches, cathedrals, and chapels also proliferated impacting the minds of the parishioners through the colorful, realistic depictions of the life of Jesus and the Day of Judgment; with scenes of the Devil devouring sinners engulfed in hell fire.

Like *The Malleus Maleficarum* in Continental Europe, King James's book *Demonologie* became a guidebook to magistrates and witch-hunters across Protestant England. Another judges guidebook, written by Michael Dalton, *The Country Justice* (1618), referencing the Pendle case¹⁴, was used by magistrates across UK and the colonies in America. Paranoia about Devils was not a character of the Catholics alone; the Protestants had their own fears of the Devil. King James I, after the Catholic terror plot to blow up the Parliament (Guy Fawkes), the witch hunt for enemies of the state roaming the country was most intense

For example, the case of the witch child Jannet Device at Mulkin Tower, Pendle Hill, in Lancashire lent historical notoriety to James I and his crusade against witchcraft. Jannet was a 9 years old girl who testified against her own mother and relatives, sending them to the gallows for witchcraft. Her testimony, validated by the king, initiated a new law that would accept children's testimony as valid. This legal aberration even crossed the Atlantic to the New World where the Salem witch trials made history. Before 1612 and the Pendle witch case, children under the age of 16 were not accepted as credible witnesses because they could not be sworn under oath as minors. King James changed that and legitimated the testimony of younger children. Ironically, Jannet Device would fall victim to the same accusation that she had leveled against her mother, 30 years later; but as times had changed under the new king Charles II and the winds of skepticism sweeping across Europe, Jannet was acquitted. The court required more solid proof to prosecute her for witchcraft. *The*

definition and construction of the witch had entered a new phase; a metamorphosis from being a metaphor for the devil to human citizen with rights to innocence and justice.

After 1650s, physical examination of witches started relying more on empirical and scientific proofs; taking any mark on the witch's body more as a natural skin condition than a mark of the Devil. King Charles I asked his physician, William Harvey, one of the most renowned scientists of the Western world, to check the witches marks before they were sentenced. With his team of physicians, all the accused were acquitted. It was the beginning of the end for the witch hunt craze.

Francesca Matteoni, in her thesis, *Blood Beliefs in Early Modern Europe* (2009), argues that, the witch "was not an original invention of the early modern period. Witches or sorcerers accused of maleficium. . . had operated in the known world since antiquity, but the presence of such people did not imply their persecution. It is during the late medieval period, that the witch started to be seen as the personification of the theological evil. . ." (p. 34). Matteoni adds that the Catholic Church responsible for inventing the witch as Devil consort in its fight against pagan Europe, especially its peasant population " among whom magic and ancient pagan beliefs . . . mingled with Christian ideas." (Ibid). Illustrating this same idea of the new meaning attached to the character of the witch, early modern Europe telescoped the concept of the witch with that of heresy in order to hit two birds with one stone – as it were; combatting religious dissent and crashing the rising political power of the subaltern classes (peasants, women, others). In the mind of the State-Church apparatus, both witches and heretics were considered worshippers of the same Devil and caused harm to the Christian world order. As Keith Thomas , a renowned specialist of the subject, explains:

Witchcraft had become a Christian heresy, the greatest of all sins, because it involved the renounce of God and deliberate adherence to his greatest enemy. *Maleficium* was a purely secondary activity, a by-product of this false religion. Whether or not the witch injured other people, she deserved to die for her disloyalty to God. Around this conception was built up the notion of ritual Devil-worship, involving the Sabbath or nocturnal meeting at which the witches gathered to worship their master and to copulate with him . . .¹⁵

In the 16th. and 17th. centuries, witches figured widely in paintings, frescoes, drawings, and stone carvings as propaganda tools: The image of the witch as a powerful weapon of propaganda (books and painting) made witches look as real beings populating the real world and ready to jump at the living humans. The spread of the anti-witch literature was made possible by the Gutenberg print revolution that made printed materials (as print or image) more available to the literate and illiterate alike across Europe. During this period, famous painters were commissioned by their patrons to paints life-like frescoes re-enacting the life of Jesus and imagining the end of the world. Artist like Durer, Grien, Goudie, Jacques de Gheyn, Michael Angelo and others all produced large collections of prints and drawings of witches that they sold and had

inserted in pamphlets and publications of such a hot subject. The process of construction of the image of the witch as well as the images and motifs contributing to this construction came from different sources; the bible, folklore, literature, pamphlets, drama, myths, and influences coming from Europe and across boundaries. Whether it is the Sabbath of witches or the Devil himself, the elements that constituted their imagery came from different sources that went back even to the classical Greek period.¹⁶ There is no description in the Bible of the Devil; but we see him often portrayed with horns, a goat's head, and forked or hooved feet; undoubtedly a borrowing from the imagery of previous Greek, Egyptian, and pagan Roman divinities like Pan, Ammon, and Jupiter. Another cultural industry of the period which helped propagate imagery of the witch was drama. Shakespeare exploited the theme and imagery widely in his plays. Other playwrights like William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, and John Ford in *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621); Richard Brome and Thomas Heywood in *The Late Lancashire Witches*; Thomas Middleton, in *The Witch* (1613); and others the adoption of the witch was such a hot topic that served the public hysteria of the day. In addition to these dramatic constructions, prose literature by theologians and common essayists and philosopher was raging with proponents and counterarguments (see James Sharpe). Sharpe notes that the Sabbath, as a crucial motif in the witch's wider narrative, was absent from different texts on witchcraft before 1633, but became central afterwards: "the vision of the Sabbat conjured up in the Lancashire scare of 1633-1634 reached a wider contemporary audience by being incorporated into a play by Richard Brome and Thomas Heywood's *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634) (cf. Sharpe, p.172).

In this process of witch construction, the ideological apparatuses of the period (circa 17th century), being motivated by various social, ideological, political, and religious imperatives, represented the witch in a plethora of colors and with a multiplicity of attributes. The latter varied from flying on a broomstick at night to go convene with the Devil, his cohorts, and other witches, to murdering babies and cooking them, to digging out dead bodies from graveyards, to using concoctions that mix human body parts and poisonous herbs to harm people and property, to being able to control the weather and cause tempest and destruction of harvest. A wealth of media, drawings, people's folklore, pamphlets, sermons, books, wood engravings, imaginary tales multiplied and inundated the cultural spheres of the European societies of the period.

Major topoi specifically characterizing the witch referred to: 1. Newly born or dead (unbaptized) children; 2. Fornication with the Devil at the Sabbath; and 3. Signs of the Devil on the witch's body (the mark), which is usually a scratch, a mole, an extra teat, which is proof of her alliance with Satan. According to Metteoni, "witches were believed to suffocate infants, preferring those unbaptized, and then, dug up the dead small bodies from their graves to cook them in a cauldron, in order to separate the flesh from the bones and melt this last to obtain a drinkable wax-like substance . . . Witches used this liquid to . . . to anoint their bodies and so be able to fly to the covens. . . ." (p. 37)

Another 17th. century writer has detailed the powers attributed to the witches as they had been confirmed by the victims' confessions during interrogation, and at the time of their execution. William Perkins, writing in 1600s, explains in his pamphlet, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (1608) that, "the wonders done by Enchanters are: 1. The raising of stormes and tempests; windes and weather, by sea and by land: 2. The poysoning of the ayre: 3. Blasting of corne: 4. Killing of cattell, and annoying of men, women, & children: 5. The procuring of strange passions and torments in mens bodies and other creatures, with the curing of the same: 6. Casting out of deuills. . . ." (William Perkins; cit. Matteoni, p. 56).

One of the most perverted characteristics of the new witch construction, which presented the European society of the time with a mirror image of (real) women, was the sexuality of the witch and her unbridled orgies at the Sabbath. All the theologians who wrote pamphlets and guidebooks advocating the execution of witches revealed incredible obsession with the claimed monstrous sexuality of the witch. In 1481, the Pope Innocent VIII issued a Bull (an edict) in which he warned everybody about witches and their destructive powers. In a highly alarming warning, the Bull read:

It has come to our ears that numbers of both sexes do not avoid to have intercourse with demons, *Incubi* and *Succubi*; and that by their sorceries, and by their incantations, charms, and conjurations, they suffocate, extinguish, and cause to perish the births of women, the increase of animals, the corn of the ground, the grapes of the vineyard and the fruit of the trees. . . .¹⁷

The perceived threat of witches as the embodiment of some Satanic forces that the church might find difficult to vanquish was intentionally constructed as part of an ideology to mobilize the population against the rising-counter-papal, anti-Catholic, anti-Christian, subaltern forces. Sexuality in particular, served as a valuable topic used to blame much of the evil practices on. The Apparatus also used religious and moral references to original sin and the fall of man as being caused by Eve, who was perceived as easy prey to temptation and the seduction of Satan. In fact, sexual hyperactivity and perverted sexual practices were mentioned profusely in the confessions of the accused witches as having practices. Jonathan Durrant reports that, in Germany,

Explicit references to sexual relations occur at the beginning of several confessions. Margretha Bittelmayr's second account of her seduction into the witch sect, for example, was occasioned by her experiences with her bed-partner Anna, but completed by the Devil in the form of her future husband Jacob. . . Harding began her account of her seduction by the Devil by naming three priests with whom she had had sex over the past eighteen years. . . The interrogators had to interrupt Harding's narrative to bring her back to the point, the diabolical seduction. For this the Devil had assumed the form of a nobleman of Freihalden in Swabia and met her in a wood (Durrant, pp.153-4)

Sexual activity among witches and Devils were perceived as taking different shapes. When both would copulate, they were believed to engender children who grew to become members of their parents' community. In fact, a large number of the executed witches were children of the condemned. For the theologians of the time, *succubi* and *incubi* were real Devil entities that could marry humans. Montague Summers responds abusively to those skeptics who doubt this truthfulness of the Devil copulating with humans and engendering Devil-kids. He imitates the writers of *The Malleus Maleficarum*, who say that whoever does not believe in the existence of witches is a heretic and deserves the same fate. Summers argues: "But the sceptics are happier in their singleness and their simplicity, happy that they do not, will not, realize the monstrous things that lie only just beneath the surface of our cracking civilization.... the incubus can assume the shape of some person whose embraces the witch may desire. . ." Like the incubus, succubus, and the Devil, the witch can also masquerade under different forms and creatures (p. 95).

During their interrogations, the witches would confess to these fantastic stories and would expand on their nightly adventure flying to Sabbaths in faraway lands. But these confessions were pronounced under extreme duress, torture, sleep deprivation, and the application of various horrid torture tools. From the strappado, to the thumb screws, to the wheel, the iron lady, the confessions iron spikes chair, to the bridle, the hot chair, duckting, and finally the pyre or gallows. Swimming the witch was a strange test; if she float, she is a witch; if she drowns she is not – in either case, she is condemned to die! Often, applying torture tools was not enough. The humiliation would yield further revelations. The knights of the inquisition apparatus would not stop at causing terrible pain, but move on to humiliating these victims by undressing them, shaving their hair, and searching their bodies for the mark of the Devil. The marks would vary from scratches, to moles, to birthmarks, wrinkles, to warts, to a skin condition or handicap. The hair of the victim would be shaved to check for hidden marks that the Devil was believed to have hidden in the hairy parts of the body. Often the search extends beyond the private part of the victims, to their "secrets". With such a humiliating handling the victims would volunteer any story the inquisitors wanted to hear. They would admit to the identity that the apparatus had projected and wanted the witches themselves to construct and confirm.

So the body of the witch was turned into a spectacle whose sight was voyeuristic, pornographic, and sadistic. But such pornography of pain was not new in the history of State apparatuses. Around the same period of the witch craze, scientists who were accused of heresy were quartered and then burnt at the stake in front of huge crowds in public city squares.¹⁸ Many scholars confirm now that many of these revelations and fertile imaginary narratives were told by the witches in order to free themselves from torture and excruciating pain.

It seems that the way the witches' bodies were handled by men in front of male judges and mostly male crowds in public town-squares would only reveal some medieval pornographic obsession with the

female body; a form of entertainment mixed with sadistic tendencies; terror and desire were used as ideological tools to repress the masses. A whole culture, industry, and economics thrived on these practices; although this did not succeed in stopping the movement of history towards the revolutions that later swept the whole of Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. From the artists who etched prints and drawings of witches they sold in markets, to carvers whose sculptures and woodcarvings thrived during this period, all portraying women witches in different nude body positions. Some of these portraits reported faithfully the practice of searching for extra nipples or scratches of the Devil (see albums by Durer, Grien, Van Gheyn and others).

Some over-zealous characters, theologians, Magistrates, and political figures excelled in witch-hunting. Famous among them were Mathew Hopkins (Witch Hunter General) and his assistant John Stearne, Roger Nowell in England; Balthazar Dernback, Heinrich Kramer, Johann Schonnenburg, and Peter Binsfeld in Germany; Peter Remy, Pierre de Lancre in France; and Salazar Frias in Spain. These inquisitors refined the new profession of “pricker”; they specialized in pricking the Devil’s marks on the body of the witch to test her real identity. They thrived in their profession since they were paid well for the job, especially when the victims had their property confiscated from them. In fact, many swindlers were caught and prosecuted.

Many of these inquisitors published pamphlets and books on which hunting that circulated widely as best-sellers at the time; notorious among them was Kramer and Springer’s *The Malleus Maleficarum (The Hammer of Witches)* which was prefaced by a Papal Bull in 1487, and became a guidebook for inquisitors across Europe. It contains a list of 84 questions that an inquisitor should ask the suspected witch, varying from her childhood, to secret affairs, religious practice, marriage life, love affairs, relationships with the neighbors, to encounters with the Devil and participation to the Sabbath.

Inspired by the witch literature of the time, the Eichstatt (Germany) Interrogatory Document of 1617 offers a valuable documentation of the intricate minds of the inquisitors, the judicial system, and the whole penal apparatus which constructed the character of the witch, and then set up various judicial structures to torture, discipline, and even exterminate her. The 84 questions, which were always addressed to a woman, are highly revealing for our analysis of the construction of the witch. Here is a random selection:

5. In what form and in what she was instructed when she was young; what she learnt.
10. On what occasion did she come to know her spouse, and become betrothed to him? Also, who was he?
11. Whether they did not meet together at night and confer with each other alone.
12. Whether she had not previously, when single, had disorderly love with him, mixed with him in the flesh, or done such things willingly.
14. If she had not before or near to her wedding used superstitious things, or let them be used by others.
20. When the dead children died, of what illness, and whether one sought and used remedies on them during the illness, and what they were.
21. Whether her husband still lives, or has died. When this happened; of what illness; how long he lay ill; how he became ill; what kind of remedy was used; who survived him.

24. Whether she was aware, so as not to doubt, that these persons had been executed for witchcraft. Because these persons named her also as one of this vice, and she is suspected through all sorts of indicia, she should not spend long, but tell the complete truth.
28. When she first kept the company of the evil enemy.
29. In what form he appeared, what he promised to her, how his speech and form appeared to her, and what she gave him.
75. Whether she did not change into other forms; why, how, when and by what means did it happen.
76. What other magic and evil did she cause; and what harm followed from it.
77. Whether she did not at times regret this vice and remember the ruin of her soul; what she thought about her salvation or damnation; and what she imagined of the Devil in this respect.
84. She should consider her souls health. She would not avoid authority. It is certainly better to suffer a little temporal punishment than to wait in eternal damnation (Cit. in Durrant, pp. 255-61)

In this lengthy questionnaire, which invites a discourse analysis exercise on its own, the Devil is always a male and the witch a female; male witches would be usually consorts and assistants or accomplices to their female leaders. A male witch would be like a failed witch – who lost her femininity. Only about 20% of the witches were male. Scholars in the field are in unanimous agreement that the majority of the victims, imprisoned, executed or burnt at the stake were women (of different ages, including children). The imagined character of the witch that emerges from this questionnaire is that of a woman who is powerful, independent, rebellious, defiant, uninhibited, and in total disagreement with the dominant moral order. Some feminist writers have celebrated this particular side of the character of the witch.¹⁹

However, beside all these active segments of the of the Ideological Apparatus, the interrogation scenario, like the courts and assizes, constructed the witch as a real and concrete entity; they created her, invented her, gave her a real shape before she became a human herself. A whole population of professionals (handlers, prickers, jailors, firemen, hangmen, and others) were all mobilized to hunt for witches and prepare them for the pyre or the gallows. Often they appointed themselves as informal guards of the moral order. But the job was also quite lucrative: “Beneficiaries from the witch hunt – New professions thriving. . . notaries, copyists, and innkeepers grew rich. The executioner rode a blooded horse, like a noble of the court, and went clad in gold and silver; his wife vied with noble dames in the richness of her array. The children of those convicted and punished were sent into exile; their goods were confiscated. . .”²⁰

For example, pricking, a new profession in service of the ISA, contributed also to the invention of this new character of the witch; the witch’s body much be pricked to confirm its identity; if it does not react to the needles plunged in the teat or other Devil’s marks, she is not a real witch! Mathew Hopkins and John Stearne in East Anglia, and John Kincaid in Scotland were famous prickers. As pricking became an important test confirming the identity of the witch, sometimes even the witches themselves sought the test in order to avoid the terror of torture and humiliation: To cite an example, “Mr Paterson, a pricker at work during the second half of the seventeenth century, who turned out to be a woman in disguise, used to drive the pin deep inside

the mark and afterwards he asked the witch to find it and take it out. The prickers were often fraudulent men, endowed with good medical skills. . ." (Matteoni, p. 53). So the prickers, in part, had a determining role in the fate of a large number of witch-victims; they were responsible for the rise and fall in the number of witches reported and killed. The prickers could also be considered as mediators between a legal apparatus and a populace governed by superstitious passions and thirsty for witch blood!

The prickers' search for the Devil's marks was highly sexualized, for finding the mark on the witch's body meant body-contacts and copulation with the Devil, but also often rape. So the witch was constructed as a sexual object par excellence, sallyed by the "filthy" touch of the Devil, bound to contaminate members of the Christian community through prostitution; but it is mostly a sinful act that the witch had engaged in willfully, and for which she must pay with her neck.

Sexuality, orgies, Sabbat feasting lasting until dawn ("the cock's crow"), perverted fornication with Devils, zoo-sexuality, and imaginary pornographic fertility rituals, all offered fertile and highly charged imaginary constructions of the witches. The latter were even accused of stealing men's sexual organs, thus symbolically depriving Christendom of a fertility that would ensure its continuity in the face of wars, the Black Death, and the powers of the Anti-Christ. The long wars and the devastating plague had killed more than 50% of the population of Europe. As Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English explain, with reference to sexuality, "over the centuries of witch hunting, the charge of 'witchcraft' came to cover a multitude of sins ranging from political subversion and religious heresy to lewdness and blasphemy. But three central accusations emerge . . . sexual crime against men . . . they are 'accused' of female sexuality . . . they are accused of being organized. . . [and] of having magical powers affecting health. . ." ²¹

The other key topos, one of the most threatening imaginary practices performed by the witch, is the Sabbath as constructed by the representatives of the Inquisition apparatus and the literature supporting it. In the theological literature of the time, especially the texts dealing with demonology and witchcraft, witches always evoked scenes of the Sabbath and sexual orgies. With its Judaic connotations, the Sabbat (Shabbat, or Sabbath) evokes macabre orgies of perverted sexuality, children sacrifice, cauldrons simmering cooking concoctions mixing human flesh, and cannibalism. The inquisition perceived the Sabbath as the Devil's mass and the best means to create havoc in the City of the believers. Usually, the ceremony is held outside the parameters of Christian space, in forests or caves; it is a perverted mass/Eucharist where bread and salt are not served. During the Sabbath, witches have claimed to accomplish a number of miraculous subversive acts; the covenant with the Devil and the community of witches; the initiation rites for the new converts; and the sexual orgies. The pact is signed with the witch's blood, and commits the converts to serve the Devil for life; in return the witches would be granted the powers and wealth they desired. The means of transport to the venue of the Sabbath would be flying broomsticks or riding other Devils masquerading as animals (goats,

horses, dogs, cats, or multiple-headed monsters). They would fly to the Sabbath after having anointed themselves with special concoctions made of poisonous herbs and cooked babies fat. Montague Summers explains how the Devil and witches travel to the locale of the Sabbath (as if he has performed the pilgrimage himself): “. . . the convoy of witches, straddling their broomsticks, sped swiftly along to the Sabbat, their yells and hideous laughter sounding louder than the crash of elements and mingling in fearsome discord with the frantic pipe of the gale. . . The witches rode sometimes upon a besom or a stick, sometimes upon an animal, and the excursion through the air was generally preceded by an unction with a magic ointment. . .” (p. 121). To lend his argument support, Montague Summers cites Martin Delrio, a 16th century theologian, who wrote about this mysterious practice:

The Demon is able to convey them to the Sabbat without the use of any unguent, and often he does so . . . Sometimes when the witches seem afraid it serves to encourage them. When they are young and tender they will thus be better able to bear the hateful embrace of Satan who has assumed the shape of a man. For by this horrid anointing he dulls their senses and persuades these deluded wretches that there is some great virtue in the viscid lubricant. Sometimes too he does this in hateful mockery of God's holy Sacraments, and that by these mysterious ceremonies he may infuse, as it were, something of a ritual and liturgical nature into his beastly orgies. . . . (pp. 121-22; *passim*).

To offer a “scientific” proof that a flying witch is a real, and therefore, the claimed demoniac power is no matter of delusional imaginary travels in virtual reality, and to reconfirm the call for witch persecution, Summers cites other ancient Christian scholars (“Fathers of the Church”), who confirmed the flights of saints: “But S. Augustine, S. Thomas, S. Bonaventure, and a score of great names are agreed upon the reality of this locomotion. . . .” Summers further explains, citing a priest Francesco Guazzo, who wrote *The Compendium Maleficarum* (1609), which served as another guidebook for witch hunters beside Kramer’s guidebook: “. . . Witches are actually conveyed from one place to another by the Devil, who under the bodily form of a goat or some other unclean & monstrous animal himself carries them. . . This opinion is that generally held by the authoritative Theologians and Master Jurisprudists of Italy and Spain, as also by the Catholic divines and legalists. . . .” (p. 129).

At the Sabbath, the congregation of witches proceeds to a number of clearly enumerated tasks, all described *ad nauseum* by accused victims during interrogation sessions: lighting black candles, the adoration of the Devil, kissing his posterior, the blood signing of the covenant, the ritualistic nude dance, the sacrifice of children and animals, drinking beverages brewed by the witches, and engaging in sexual orgies. The Sabbath would end by the early hours of the morning at “the cock’s crow.” With reference to the feasting at the Sabbath, Summers quotes some inquisitors of the time who reported the confessions of the witches at the courts: “. . . sorcerers at the Sabbat eat the food which the Devil lays before them . . . The Lancashire witches of 1613,

when they met at Malking Tower, sat down to a goodly spread of “Beefe, Bacon, and roasted Mutton, ‘the sheep having been killed twenty-four hours earlier by James Device; . . . Alice Duke, a Somerset witch, tried in 1664, confessed that the Devil ‘bids them Welcome at their Coming, and brings them Wine, Beer, Cakes, and Meal, or the like’ . . . (*History*, p. 144)

However, the inquisitors’ manuals did not invent the Sabbath processions and the witch’s practices. Many part of the ritual had been appropriated from previous pagan cults and religions. Metteoni notes the existence of such a dimension of the witch’s identity already in 1428, in one of the earliest confessions:

The behaviour of the witch at the sabbath appeared for the first time in the confession of the Italian Matteuccia di Francesco at Todi, on the 20th March of 1428. . . Some of the main elements were already displayed: infanticide, the shape-shifting ability (later attributed to the witch herself), the flight, the adoration of the Devil. They will recur in the demonological treatises of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, that described the sabbath as a meeting where witches danced, consumed banquets, copulated with the demons, made poisonous concoctions, planned the future evil actions, and shared the company of filthy animals such as vipers, lizards and toads. Lust and consummation were the most significant tracts of the reunions. Salt and bread were missing from the banquet. . . . (Matteoni, p.37)

Among the other powers attributed to the witch was the control of the weather and destructive meteorological changes. Through this power, witches were perceived as been capable of affecting harvests, damaging crops, inviting hail to destroy ripe fruits, causing tempests at sea (as in the Case of King James), and even causing shipwrecks. Such a powerful construction of the witch was a determining factor behind King James I metamorphosis into a with-hunter and prosecutor. Famines, plagues, common diseases, sickness leading to death, the death of cattle, and even common mishaps were attributed to witches’ curses and spells. Some scholars have noted an uncanny coincidence between drastic weather shifts (due to the Little Ice Age) and the ebbing of the witch hunt craze between 1650 and 1700, when there was an “overlap between the period of the little ice age and the witchcraft trials.”²² Destructive storms and “other weather anomalies” were evoked during trials and the landlords could call for more witch persecution whenever the weather became destructive of their crops. Emily Oster has collected data from eleven different regions/countries and came to the conclusion that the sharp rise of the number of witchcraft persecutions coincided with the drastic changes in weather conditions; effects caused by what is known as “the little ice age between 1550 and 1700.” She explains further that “data on the number of trials were compiled from a variety of secondary sources dealing with 11 regions of Europe: Bishopric of Basel (in the northern part of modern Switzerland), Essex (in the modern United Kingdom), Estonia, Finland, Franche-Comté (now in eastern France), Geneva, Home Circuit (England), Hungary, Neuchatel (now near the western border of Switzerland), Parlement of Paris and Scotland. . .” (Oster, p. 5). They all point to the parallelism between weather catastrophes and the witch hunt craze fluctuations.

Like Oster, Christian Pfister, in his article “Climatic Extremes,” cites a 17th century German writer reporting about the drastic changes in the weather, to such an extent that people started thinking the Biblical prophecy of the end of the world had come true. Pfister reports that “in about 1600, Renward Cysat took a retrospective view of the recent past in the foreword to his *Collectanea*, and maintained that . . . because of our sins, for already some time now the years have shown themselves to be more rigorous and severe than in the earlier past, and deterioration amongst creatures, not only among mankind and the world of animals but also of the earth’s crops and produce. . . .”(cit. p.23). Another writer specialist of witchcraft, Wolfgang Behinger, wrote an article in 1995 about the need to take the weather conditions into consideration in the re-reading of European history of the witch hunt craze: “for these waves, in turn, were an outflow of extreme climate. Indeed, peaks of persecution coincided with critical points of climatic deterioration.” Pfister goes on to explain further that,

In the Vaudois region of western Switzerland, no fewer than 971 persons were executed between 1580 and 1620 . . . For example, as late as 1630 the suspects still had to confess that they had been responsible for the extreme frost in May of 1626. “According to the confessions, the Franconian witches had discovered how to make the frost. They prepared an unguent from children’s fat, flew through the air on the night of 27 May 1626 and dropped the poison on the crops and everything was frozen.” The first rise in executions up to 1600 coincides with the massive increase of cold anomalies after 1565. From about 1603 to 1617 the anomalies dropped back to their pre-crisis level which obviously coincides with a decrease in the number of executions. From 1618 to 1630 there is a second wave of extreme months which was followed by the most pronounced rise in executions . . . (p.32) ²³

The witch’s control of the destructive weather could equal only the destructive power of sexuality and the nude body – as noted earlier. Indeed, the Devil’s mark on the witch’s body acquired highly significant meanings. It was the material proof that the accused was definitely a diabolical creature. The mark was the seal of recognition, a metaphor and a synecdoche for the Devil himself, the signifier that proved to the public the veracity of the witch’s identity, but also the truthfulness of the examination, the justice of the whole system, and the efficiency of the Apparatus. The Satanic mark on the witch’s body, being an erotic body *par excellence* (even the body of a wrinkled old hag), is a highly sexualized mark; depending on the country, the mark is found everywhere, especially, in the women’s “secrets” (i.e. genitalia). The “women that searched them ‘found several large Teates in the secret Parts of their Bodies’: and at the same time asking them, how they came there, they both made Answer, that the Devils Imps had done. . . it” (cit. Matteoni, 160). The demonologists and prickers’ accounts of these marks were “quite marvelous,” Matteoni elaborates further. The mark was “. . . described as resembling an animal’s footprint, that of a hare, a toad, a dormouse, a spider,

recalling its superhuman origin and the shape-shifting ability attributed to the witch. It was generally well hidden, close to the sexual parts . . . so that one of the practices during the interrogation of the supposed witch was the shaving of his/her body. But men also bore it on the eyelids, the armpit, the shoulder, while women could have it on the breasts. . . ." (Matteoni, p. 46).

In the Basques countries, the Inquisitor Valle reported that "the mark is a small one. On some it can barely be seen. When it is pricked with a needle they feel nothing even if pressure is exerted; and even if the needle pierces the skin and is pressed right in they feel nothing. The witch marks that I have seen are the size of a pinhead and form a small depression in the skin. It has really amazed me. . ." (Ibid.). In Denmark, it was reported that "a woman had a mark on the stomach, another on the arm, that she put in front of her eyes where 'her lad' (the devil) tried to scratch a hole; a last one on the forehead. . . ." (Matteoni, p, 50)

The sexual obsession with the witch's body in anti-witchcraft narrative is boundless. In the Pendle trials (1620), and Loudun's (1634), the insensitive marks were discovered in great numbers on the back, "the secrets", and on the testicles of the Priest Urbain Grandier.²⁴ In England, it was reported that

the widow Margaret Moone of Thorpe in 1645 was found to have marks as "three long teats or bigs in her secret parts", which were sucked by her twelve spirits. The Devil also behaved like a familiar. At Exeter in 1682 two teats were found hanging in the secret parts of Temperance Lloyds' body, from which, as she confessed, the Devil in the shape of a black man used to suck her blood, causing her great pains . . . In 1690, four witches were condemned at Worcester, and the women that searched them "found several large Teates in the secret Parts of their Bodies: and at the same time asking them, how they came there, they both made Answer, that the Devils Imps had don it . . ." (cit. Metteoni, p. 160)

It is difficult, however, to apply rationality to these confessions or the working mind of the Apparatus, the Judges, the Magistrates, and the intellectuals at large who were managing the witchcraft terror at the time; a time of the rise of reason, rationality, and empiricism. This was the time of Giordano Bruno, Galileo, Copernicus, Descartes, Newton, Harvey, and other champions of the early enlightenment ethos. As noted earlier, many of these dissenting voices were ignored; it took longer time to effect any radical change.

One also wonders about a striking paradox in this construction of the witch and the Devil: Since the witch was an incarnation of the devil, why believe all her supposed confessions? Wasn't the Devil perceived to be deceptive through and through?! She could simply invent pure lies and dupe the juries and the whole apparatus; exactly the way the Devil was believed to act. Yet, the witch's words during the confessions, and about her most fanciful ventures in the middle of the night, were taken *ipso facto* as truthful. So either the apparatus was blinded by religious ideology and the terror of the Devil, or the Apparatus unconsciously just

needed fanciful narratives to base its new constructions of the witch in order to maintain its scapegoating and cleansing of rebel women and other threatening subalterns.

Kramer's and Springer's master-narrative (*The Malleus Maleficarum*) is a highly sexualized portrait of the witch. Every theme, description, and page is thought through "fornication", original sin, and moral "filth", to such extent that the writers imagine the witches (and by implication nearly all women) as being engaged in "fornication" with the devil nearly all the time without knowing it. To the question "*whether incubi and Succubi commit this Act Visibly on the part of the Witch, or on the part of Bystanders*" (p. 223), Kramer and Springer respond bluntly:

As to whether they commit these abominations together visibly or invisibly, it is to be said that, in all the cases of which we have had knowledge, the devil has always operated in a form visible to the witch; for there is no need for him to approach her invisibly, because of the pact of federation with him that has been expressed. But with regard to any bystanders, the witches themselves have often been seen lying on their backs in the fields or the woods, naked up to the very navel, and it has been apparent from the disposition of those limbs and members which pertain to the venereal act and orgasm, as also from the agitation of their legs and thighs, that, all invisibly to the bystanders, they have been copulating with Incubus devils; yet sometimes, owbeit this is rare, at the end of the act a very black vapour, of about the stature of a man, rises up into the air from the witch. And the reason is that that Schemer knows that he can in this way seduce or pervert the minds of girls or other men who are standing by (*Malleus*, p. 233)

As one would note, the discourse of the *Malleus Maleficarum* is as hallucinatory and imaginative as the discourse of the witches themselves. Yet, the book was a best seller across Europe for years! In detailing their case against witches and all the sorts of harm they would be capable of causing, Kramer and Springer sum up these potential injuries to humans, animals and property: ". . . first with regard to men, then with regard to beasts, and thirdly with regard to the fruits of the earth. And as to men, first, how they can cast an obstructive spell on the procreant forces, and even on the venereal act, so that a woman cannot conceive, or a man cannot perform the act. . . They take away the virile member as though it were altogether torn away from the body. . . ." (*The Malleus*, p. 236).

Such a colorful and multifaceted construction of the witch is telling of the image of the Devil himself. The way the witch was constructed through imaginary stereotypes, is not that different from the way the Devil himself was constructed. As a negation of the Christian God, the Devil – in his early forms -- was often portrayed as an animal with a goat head, horns, hoofs, or forked feet, and a long (phallic) tail. He is the anti-Christ and the personification of Satan, Lucifer, and primal cause of original sin. The Devil's rituals at the Sabbath are all perverted imitations and substitutions of the real Eucharist, Church mass, the Host (as the body of Christ), baptism, and the regular religious rites of the Christians (both Catholics and Protestants –

despite their differences). Nonetheless, as various studies demonstrate, the construction of the witch and the devil send the reader back to the early cultures of paganism, the horned Mithras, and the Wicca rites.

Not unlike the history of the witch (as construction), the Devil has also seen his physiognomy and behavior change over time. In a BBC documentary, “How the Devil Got Its Horns,” Alistair Stoke, studying frescoes in chapels, notes that the artists (from Roman times to the renaissance) “invented the devil” through their different representations of the way the devil looked in different biblical scenes as painted on the walls of churches, chapels, and basilicas. The effects of the church’s preaching on the masses depended greatly on the iconography displayed on these walls: the images served as powerful tools of education, indoctrination, formatting of consciousness, even terrorizing the souls, and reaping consent to a Christian worldview. This is the interpellation and eugenic working par excellence that Althusser, Mills and the psychoanalysts have expounded. For instance, in the Arena Chapel, Giotto has depicted the Day of Judgment in bright colors, with God sitting on the throne at the top, surrounded by the elect with the glow around their heads, a sign of their entry to Paradise; but below, at the bottom of the fresco, there is a river of red fire streaming down the left corner, representing Hell, where Satan is sitting pot-belly naked devouring sinners. In the middle of the canvas, two angels are bookkeeping, selecting the sheep from the goats and feeding Satan and the lake of brimstone and fire. Similar frescos and carving have been displayed in chapels across Christendom. Other famous frescoes by renowned artists such as Di Marco Valdo, Signorelli, Limburg, Botticelli, Traini, Landsburg, and others produced between 1100s and 1500s have impressed multiple congregations with awe and terror of the soul. The scenes from the life of Jesus, dominated especially by images of punishment by fire and torture inflicted by devils and Satanic creatures were frightening to all souls. Illuminated manuscripts also contributed a great deal to the spread of this culture of portraits of the life of Christ (e.g. the Limburg Brothers’ *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* [c. 1405], and *The Winchester Psalmer* [c.1150s], both collections of miniatures depicting scenes from the Bible). Alistair Stoke notes that the Devil, within centuries of change has moved from a more ferocious animal-like creature, to a more human-shaped creature (cf. the blue Fresco by the Limburg brothers depicting fallen angels with Satan falling head down showing an angelic “beautiful” human face – logically, since the devil was initially an angel!).

However, for Kramer and Springer, writing during the heyday of the witch hunt craze, the Devil wears strange colors and features: “Devils have no lungs or tongue . . . as well as teeth and lips, . . . they cannot truly and properly speak. But since they have understanding, and when they wish to express their meaning, then, by some disturbance of the air included in their assumed body, not of air breathed in and out as in the case of men, they produce, not voices, but sounds which have some likeness to voices. . . . (*The Malleus*, p. 228). This portrait of the Devil is paradoxically caught between the material and the abstract. It is a paradox that inhabits the identity of the witch but neither Kramer nor the upholders of the real nature of the witch could resolve. On

the other hand, the pact between the Devil and the witch is sealed with blood. Once the pact is completed, the witch is believed to be granted limitless powers over humans and the elements of nature. The witch would also have smaller devils working at her beck and call; these are “imps,” “consorts,” and “familiar’s”; they can take different camouflaging shapes (frogs, cats, dogs, horses, birds, goats, sheep, snakes, owls, or other). They could be sent by the witch on special criminal missions to kill, destroy, kidnap, or render somebody impotent. Jim Sharpe, in his “The Devil in East Anglia,” sums up the confession narratives evoking devils, imps, and familiar’s to cause death and destruction to property, arguing that those narratives amounted to pure folklore imaginary constructions: “A woman witness deposed how a child in her master’s house was stricken and died the day after Mary Edwards came to her house and was given ‘some milk but not so much as she desired, and she went away mumbling.’ In another case a servant told how mother Palmer came to her master’s house and asked for beer. Refused it, ‘she went away thretning . . . from which moment no beer could be brewed successfully in that household. . . .” (p. 243-44). Another case illustrates well the powers that a witch would have through the devil’s work. The charges brought against Margaret Harken, an old widow of sixty-five hanged at Tyburn in 1588, were in response to her revelations about her claimed supernatural powers: “She had picked a basket of pears in the neighbor’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 baillif who had caught her taking wood from the master’s ground; the baillif went mad. . . .”²⁵

It seems that the subaltern members of the community who would resent negative treatment would not go away quiet, and thus would bring on themselves the accusation of witchcraft. However, notwithstanding the problematic veracity of these confessed events, their empirical cause-effect certainty beyond doubt, and the absence of any viable means to check their validity, the image of the witch acquired phantasmagoric dimensions that only a powerful Ideological and repressive apparatus could face up to such a metamorphosis. So the state, the religion, and the zealots among the common populace all collaborated together to put an end to the phenomenon of the witch and her devilish relations to cleanse Christendom from this plague. And behind the versatile constructions of Devils, demons, witches, imps, familiar’s, and other ghostly supernatural figures which concealed a highly misogynistic attitude towards women and subaltern classes, there lies a powerful struggle between religious creeds, political hierarchies, shifting economic structures, philosophies about the cosmos, interpretations of the biblical scriptures, and the relationship between humans and the supernatural.

III. The State Apparatus and the Witch: Conditions of a Fall

Indeed, there is so much hiding behind the witch hunt craze. Lurking behind these varied representations of the witch and the devil during the Middle Ages and the early modern period in Europe, a

plethora of other related entities acquired special significance and power. As these representations could not have happened without a super-active cultural apparatus working at them day and night, the larger entity englobing all of them is the State, upheld by the Church and its octopus-like tentacles. Different studies have emerged, especially since the 20th. century analyzing the various social, political, economic, religious, and psychological drives behind the 16-17th centuries witch hunt (see bibliography below). The different studies have unearthed valuable archives that shed light on the mystery of the rise of such superstitious practices (as the belief in witchcraft and the power of the devil), and the setting up of a whole State apparatus to eradicate them, at a crucial historical juncture when rationality, science, anti-superstitious thought, empiricism, all coming under the umbrella of early enlightenment ethos, were emerging with much force. At the same time, researchers addressed the other mysterious phenomenon of the sudden decline and demise of the witch craze. Researchers have demonstrated that behind the witch, the devil, and the apparatus fighting to eradicate them, there lay complex structures of power governing the history and development of European societies of the time; namely:

1. The rise of capitalism and the pre-capitalist state; a form of pre-modern authoritarianism displacing the feudal system;
2. The peasant revolutions, religious dissenting movement, and the rise a class of displaced landless lumpen-proletariat; women were a major constituent of these rebellions because they benefitted from key position that the church deprived them of;
3. The Reformation and the Catholic-Protestant schism which led to bloody confrontations, that devastated the whole of Europe;
4. The radical transformation of women's condition and the challenge to the religious and patriarchal order;
5. The rise of medical sciences which played a key role in pushing women witch-doctors, wizards, and midwives aside; this practice that had offered witches total access to women's reproductive role in society, the control of sexuality, and the libido of the people became a direct threat to the position of the Church in people's lives. Hence the accusation of the witches of killing babies, stealing male organs, and blighting the fertility of the families and the cattle. The men who had also been specializing in the university training as physicians and medical personnel saw the witches' competition a great threat too. And last but not least;
6. The shaky state of the Christian Church, accused of being superstitious (in its own right) and unable to offer any concrete help to the poor classes (victims of the Black Death and perpetual famines), had to face up to the rise of scientific atheistic knowledge resulting from a new understanding of the cosmos, nature, human biology, and the nature disease.

A. The Rise of the Absolutist State, Early Capitalism, and the Witch Hunt

Many scholars advocate the thesis that the witch craze was a result of the rise of the modern state, nation states, secularism, and the rise of a pre-capitalist economic mode of production. Lady Stardust argues that “the most intense phase was 1580 to 1630 during the decline of feudal relations, the rise of mercantile capitalism and increasing migration and day labouring. The trials were no hangover from medieval times, but part of the project of the rise of capitalism and the ‘Enlightenment’ . . .” (Lady Stardust, p. 2.). As a workforce in the new social configuration of economic relations, women contributed massively to the new mercantile and pre-capitalist modes of production. Silvia Federici, corroborates Lady Stardust’s thesis, saying that “in the medieval towns, women worked as smiths, butchers, bakers, candlestick makers, hat-makers, ale-brewers, wool-carders, and retailers . . .” In Frankfurt, there were “approximately 200 occupations in which women participated between 1300 and 1500.” (p. 30). The women worked as part of the workers and early proletariat and were becoming notoriously active members of the society, to the displeasure of the clergy: “In England, seventy-two out of eighty-five guilds included women among their members. Some guilds, including silk-making, were dominated by them; in others, female employment was as high as that of men. . . As women gained more autonomy, their presence in social life began to be recorded more frequently: in the sermons of the priests who scolded their indiscipline . . .” (Federici, p. 31)

However, Brian Levack offers a strong reservations against this state-centered vision of the witch hunt by advancing a theory that focuses on the local communities as the ones conducting the witch hunt rather than the State as such. In his article “The Rise of Nation State as Major Cause: State-Building and Witch Hunting in Early Modern Europe,” Levack warns against generalizing the role of the State as a main reason for the witch craze phenomenon. He argues: “A number of historians have attempted to establish a causal relationship between the great European witch hunt of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the development of the modern state. . . The general impression one gets from this line of argument is that witches were in a certain sense victims of the advance of that emerging leviathan, the centralised, bureaucratised, secularised modern state. . . (p. 98).

In partial disagreements with this State-centered line of argument, Levack argues that, with reference to Scotland, e.g., “. . . it was the failure of the state to control local authorities and to supervise local justice that led to the great prosecutions of the seventeenth century. These local authorities figured how to use the power of the state to their advantage, mainly by obtaining commissions that entitled them to proceed. . .” (Levack, p. 108). Levack here looks also at France, Germany, Spain, and Denmark and points out how the Inquisition was not under the direct control of the State, but was rather governed by local zealots and communities (112-114).

Nevertheless, although one finds many cases to support Levack's thesis in Scotland, Essex, or Germany, it is difficult to refute Federici's and other scholars' argument about the primary role of the state, the church and their ideological apparatuses in fully running the show. Federici offers strong proofs that the State, alongside its religious and judicial apparatuses, was clearly behind the hunts, trials and persecutions of the witches (like the heretics) through the promulgation of laws and the nomination of judges, magistrates, courts, assizes, spies, and prickers. Some kings and Popes supervised witch executions themselves (cf. the case of James I, and the execution of Father Urbain Grandier). Federici explains, that "it was the Carolina – the [first German Imperial legal capital criminal] code enacted by the Catholic King Charles V in 1532 - that established that witchcraft be punished by death. In Protestant England, the persecution was legalized by three Acts of Parliament passed in 1542, 1563 and 1604. . . After 1550, laws and ordinances making witchcraft a capital crime and inciting the population to denounce suspected witches, were also passed in Scotland, Switzerland, France, and the Spanish Netherlands . . ." (Federici, p. 165)

Federici maintains that the witch hunt emerged not only along the rise of early capitalism, but also coincided with colonial expansionism, the slave trade, feudal enclosures (especially in England), and the "bloody laws" against the homeless. She argues further, reproaching openly those Marxist scholars who were concerned primarily with the history of capitalism, but were blind to the witch hunt, that "Marxist historians . . . even when studying the "transition to capitalism," with very few exceptions, have consigned the witch-hunt to oblivion, as if it were irrelevant to the history of the class struggle. Yet, the dimensions of the massacre should have raised some suspicions as hundreds of thousands of women were burned, hanged, and tortured in less than two centuries. . ." (p.164)

The church was going through radical and had to mobilize its counter-offensive. As an ISA par excellence, it worked in full collaboration with the state, even acting at the level of grass roots and mobilizing parishioners to report on their neighbors (even relatives) when suspecting them of witchcraft. Across Europe, every church-goer was ordered to keep an eye on his/her neighbor and report suspicious witchcraft or magic activities. Federici cites different research sources documenting such practices. In 1603, in Scotland, "the ministers of the Presbyterian Church were ordered to ask their parishioners, under oath, if they suspected anyone of being a witch. Boxes were placed in the churches to allow the informers to remain anonymous; then, after a woman had fallen under suspicion, the minister exhorted the faithful from the pulpit to testify against her and forbid anyone to give her help. . ." (p. 165). Similarly, in other counties (in Germany, Italy, France, "denunciations were solicited," and the Lutheran Church appointed inquisitors. Federici maintains further that "in Northern Italy, it was the ministers and the authorities who fueled suspicions, and made sure that they would result in denunciations; they also made sure that the accused would be totally isolated,

forcing them, among other things, to carry signs on their dresses so that people would keep away from them" (p. 165)

Beside this mutual surveillance mission thrust upon the parishioners, the Church as a cultural center maintained the propagation of the religious, anti-witchcraft culture through the Biblical writings on the walls (frescoes, engravings, paintings, statues, etc. . .), as noted earlier -- a dimension often neglected in the study of the phenomenon. If one studies the engravings on the walls (inside and outside) the churches, chapels, cathedrals, and basilicas, one is astounded by the powerful images, scenes of the life of Jesus, his disciples, the angels, the devils, the sinners roasting in fire, or hanging from their genitalia on the last day of judgment. One would note even some highly perverted images engraved on the porches of entrances to cathedrals, like the engravings of the Devil (in naked copulating position) on the south entrance to the Lincoln Cathedral in the UK, or Notre Dame in Paris; all are in full display to the viewers without embarrassment. Since the early times of the Christian church, iconography played a major role in explaining the bible to the lay parishioners. Before the widespread of the Gutenberg print revolution, the murals, engravings, and frescoes were open books for the church-goers. Paradise, Hell, the temptations of Satan, and the fate of the sinners, and personified sins are displayed in stunning shapes and colors on the walls and ceilings of the cathedrals; famous artists, such as Giotto, Di Marco Valdo, Signorelli, Limburg, Herrad of Landsberg, Giorgio Vasari and others produced frescoes of the devil and the sinners in rivers of fire that would strike awe and terror of the soul. Through these cultural media, in addition to sermons given at the pulpit, people were fed particular representations of the witch, the devil, humans, God and the cosmos.

As the Catholic Church saw itself threatened by a world turning upside down, especially as the dissenting movements, which culminated in the Reformation, started mushrooming across Europe, it created the Apparatus of the "Hotly Inquisition" to attend to the dissenters²⁶, heretics, and devil-worshippers. The Church, in the 16th. and 17th. centuries, was not only threatened from inside by rebellions and alternative religious practices, but was also threatened from outside by the encroaching Muslim armies. In 1525, when the Peasant Rebellion started in Germany, led by Munster and prophets friends, the Muslim armies were moving westwards towards the gates of Vienna. The Church was being challenged by the most threatening resistance movements of its history. Federici corroborates this idea: "Today, little is known about the many heretic sects . . . that for more than three centuries flourished among the "lower classes" in Italy, France, the Flanders, and Germany, in what undoubtedly was the most important opposition movement of the Middle Ages. . . By the thousands, heretics were burned at the stake, and to eradicate their presence the Pope created one of the most perverse institutions ever recorded in the history of state repression: the Holy Inquisition. . . ." (Federici, p. 33). The Heretic Movements, in contrast to the church philosophy (Catholic and Protestant), gave women more rights and a special status, which made them primal targets of the Inquisition Apparatus: "One of the

most significant aspects of the heretic movement is the high status it assigned to women . . . They were considered equal; they had the same rights as men, and could enjoy a social life and mobility (wandering, preaching) that nowhere else was available to them in the Middle Ages . . . The heretics also allowed women and men to share the same dwellings. . . Heretical women and men often lived freely together, like brothers and sisters. . . .” (Federici, p.38)

B. The State, the Clergy, and the Rise of the Peasantry

Beside the dissenters’ movements that openly declared their hostility to the hegemony of the church, and during the Reformation which saw dissenters who protected also Lutheranism and Calvinism, the Peasants organized radical rebellions that threatened the Church, the Monarchy, and the Holy Roman Empire. Already in the late Middle Ages, a number of peasants revolts turned the European world upside down and brought the Feudal order to an end. “In the 14th and 15th centuries . . . new downward pressures on the poor resulted in mass movements of popular uprisings across Europe. For example, Germany between 1336 and 1525 witnessed no fewer than sixty instances of militant peasant unrest. . . .”²⁷ In 1381, the English Peasant revolt miraculously spared the head of the king who agreed to all the rebels’ demands before turning against them after the rebels defeat.²⁸ In Germany, the 1524-25 Great Peasant Revolt claimed about 100.000 lives out of 300.000 poorly armed peasants and farmers. Similar revolts took place in France, Italy, Spain, and other European States and kingdoms. The religious dissenters and the peasants united against the Feudal order, which was allied with the Church and the monarchic regimes, to demand the abolition of taxes, the rights to property, the end of serfdom, and the freedom to practice their religious creed of choice freely. “On December 27, 1521, three ‘prophets’ appeared in Wittenberg .” They were collaborators with the rebel leader Thomas Müntzer. “They preached an apocalyptic, radical alternative to Lutheranism . . . Under the leadership of Müntzer,” the peasants rebellion “became a war against all constituted authorities and an attempt to establish by revolution an ideal Christian common-wealth, with absolute equality among persons and the community of goods. . . .”²⁹ In 1316 and 1317, there were attempts to kill the Pope by dissenters (see Bennett, p.28). The Cathars, or Albigensians, in particular, who were remnants of religious creed that had developed during the time of early Byzantine Christianity,³⁰ were much dreaded by the Church, hence their accusation of heresy and witchcraft to legitimate their targeting by the Inquisitorial apparatus.

Because of the status granted to women among these dissenting groups, women served as radical members and often among leaders of these revolts. Ehrenreich and English emphasize the key role that women played in these dissenting underground popular movements; so the constructed image of the witch was not simply that of a secondary lascivious member of the community, as depicted in the Church’s master-narrative of the witch, as it was represented especially by *The Malleus Maleficarum*. On the contrary, the witch had become also a threatening political figure. As Ehrenreich and English comment, “there is evidence that

women accused of being witches did meet locally in small groups and that these groups came together in crowds of hundreds or thousands on festival days. . . Undoubtedly the meetings were also occasions for trading herbal lore and passing on the news. . . .”(p.11)

In order to face up to these rebellious peasants, women, and dissenters, the Church apparatus promulgated various strict regulations that the gate-keepers of the doctrine would strictly abide by. Although the Church tried to relax its strictures sometimes, the peasants became convinced that their sufferings were not attended to; even the witches would offer better remedies to cure disease and relieve the pain.

C. Heretics, the Church, and the King

I.R. Cooke notes that in 1184 at Verona, Pope Lucius III jointly with the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, issued a bull (an edict), “*ad abolendam*”, announcing the forbidding of “the sacraments of the church to such pestilential people [the heretics]. . . to give them Christian burial, or to receive their alms and offerings.” To enforce these regulations, he required that “Every archbishop or bishop should . . . twice or at least once a year make the rounds of his diocese in which report has it that heretics dwell, and there compel three or more men of good character or . . . the entire neighbourhood, to swear that if anyone know of the presence there of heretics or others holding secret assemblies. . . .” (p.8). Cooke points out that such European-wide measures were new only in their globalizing outreach, but they were “. . . derived from a variety of precedents and procedures of the previous century or so, including the first secular legislation against heresy, chapter 21 of the *Assize of Clarendon* (1166) in which Henry II had forbidden help or succour of any kind to be given to those whom he had recently condemned as heretics at Oxford. . .”(p. 8). Thus the Inquisitorial apparatus infiltrated every segment of the society to the extent that hysteric paranoia and a spy mentality seemed to dominate the minds and behavior of the people. In another example, in Scotland, Levack points out the active role of the royal judge, the circuit courts, and the privy council in deciding the fate of the witch; although he maintains, the interference of the Scottish State in the “management” of the witchcraft prosecutions was limited.

Thus, the working of the Inquisition system through its judicial apparatuses as invested in State support, monarchic supervision, Church intrusions, and public involvement have all contributed to the new image and construction of the witch as a social entity signifying a number of threats varying from heresy to paganism, to anti-Christ diabolism. Only historical radical transformations of the economy, the political reconfiguration of statehood, and the rise of a scientific consciousness could bring the craze to an end.

D. The Witch Craze – Beginning of the End

Nonetheless, by the mid-seventeenth century, the fearful structure of the Inquisition apparatus started crumbling down, as social and political turmoil swept over Europe, culminating toward the French revolution, few decades later. More books and pamphlets attacking the Inquisitions started proliferating, as more scholars, clergymen and magistrates started speaking out against the witch hunt craze, and courts

started asking for more concrete, rational proofs before the condemnation of any witch for a criminal offence. Other more profound and wide-ranging causes have been evoked by different scholars; namely, the emerging colonial world which started providing Europe with vital materials, thus initiating an era of prosperity, and offering the dominant classes more optimism in their future; the rise of medical sciences which started dissipating the superstitious beliefs in witches curing powers; and the relatively improvement in the weather conditions that allowed for the regeneration of the food supplies and animal welfare to pick up in improvement. Starvation, wars, diseases, and doomsday beliefs were becoming past history. The increase in population made work available, and better pay allowed for better conditions for those masses drifting from the countryside to the urban centers. Accordingly, as Megan Shore argues, “. . . the primary reason for the decline of the witch-hunts was the reform of the law as this meant it was more difficult for trials to be conducted and witches to be found guilty. This change was called for by the early skeptics, and adopted by the powerful for various reasons including self-protection, religion and disbelief in the diabolical compact . . . The judges realised they were condemning innocents and initiated important legal reforms. . . .” (Shore, pp.7-8). Indeed, a number of individuals upheld strong skepticism vis-à-vis the existence of witchcraft power, magic, or even the power of the Devil. Early enlightenment consciousness started rising and, therefore, chasing the mentality of superstition and devil ethos. Some pockets of resistance maintained their witch hunt, but the State intervened and even executed those who tortured and killed two individuals accused of witchcraft.

With the rise of medical sciences in the 16th century, the image of the witch lost more of its positive characteristics; she was no longer to heal the sick or to serve as a midwife as had been the case since the beginning of European history. Only recognized (male) doctors, now admitted by the State, and having studied at universities, had the right to receive patients. But if these doctors could not cure a disease, they would attribute it to witchcraft. As noted earlier, Harvey was asked by the king to check whether the witches were real or fake; he liberated all the accused. So the traditional witch knowledge of herbs, concoctions, and know how accumulated to treat various maladies was rejected. As Ehrenreich and English argue, “the partnership between Church, State and medical profession reached full bloom in the witch trials. The doctor was held up the medical ‘expert,’ giving an aura of science to the whole proceeding. He was asked to make judgments about whether certain women were witches and whether certain afflictions had been caused by witchcraft. . . .if a woman dare to cure without having studied she is a witch and must die.’. . .” (p.18).

However, the more the doctors succeeded in curing the sick, the less witches were condemned for throwing spells and disease on people. But as the majority of the population were peasants, lumpen and subaltern, their means to see a modern doctor were forbidding; their resort to “good witches” to cure their ailments had been practice for centuries, and the witches had proven their successful knowledge about the herbs and the prescriptions they would give to the sick. Therefore, many of these witches were simply driven

underground. As Federici maintains, with the persecution of the folk healers, women went underground; they were excluded from the public sphere and “from a patrimony of empirical knowledge, regarding herbs and healing remedies, that they had accumulated and transmitted from generation to generation, its loss paving the way for a new form of enclosure.” Their going underground or joining dissenting communes brought upon them accusations of heresy, illegal gathering in marginal spaces, and the organization of rituals the participants often considered as therapeutic practices, but which were condemned by the church authorities. This atmosphere of repression and exclusion definitely contributed to the proliferation of dissent and the countering of witches themselves by resorting to all means to fight back (see Federici, p. 200).

Nonetheless, both Federici and Shore maintains some reservation against the role the rising new science (medical or other) might have had in bringing the witch hunt to a halt. “The witch-hunt came to an end, by the late 17th century, because the ruling class by this time enjoyed a growing sense of security concerning its power, not because a more enlightened view of the world had emerged ” (Federici, p. 201). For Megan Shore, “the Scientific Revolution cannot be seen to be the catalyst for the initial decline as the periods do not align chronologically” (Shore, p. 7).

Notwithstanding Federici’s and Shore’s disagreement, a number of writers, clerics, philosophers, and even magistrates, starting in late 16th century opposed the witch hunt and openly declared their opposition in books and pamphlets – sometimes at their own peril. The Dutch Roman Catholic priest, Cornelius Loos (1546-95), who lived in Trier, wrote a mildly skeptical treatise, *The True and False Magic* in 1590s, in which he argued that witch-hunting was a distraction from the real dangers of Protestant heresy. Loos was tried in court, his books burned and he had to recant his ideas. It was argued that “only those in league with Satan doubted his own danger.” Loos saved his head by renouncing his ideas. Like Loos, Reginald Scot (1538-99), an English MP and country gentleman, wrote a book, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), in which he refuted the existence of witches. Scot maintained that, “. . . it is neither a witch, nor devil, but glorious God that maketh the thunder. . . God maketh the blustering tempests and whirlwinds. . .” (cf. “Reginald Scot,” *Wikipedia*). Scot tried to prove how the “belief in witchcraft and magic was rejected alike by reason and religion, and that spiritualistic manifestations were either willful impostures or illusions due to mental disturbance in the observers.” According to him, the prosecution of people for witchcraft was “irrational and un-Christian,” and he held the Roman Church responsible. Scot was particularly targeted by King James’s book, *Daemonologie*, and copies of *Scot’s The Discoverie* were burnt. Johan Weyer (Wier) (1515-1588) was a Dutch physician and philosopher who wrote against the persecution of witches. His book, *On the Tricks of Demons* (1563), helped abolish witch hunting in Holland. He particularly attacked the famous manual *Malleus Maleficarum*. As Waite comments in his study of Weyer, the latter “explained witch confessions as caused by diabolical delusions on the minds of old women already mentally disturbed by the humoral imbalance of melancholia. He . . . argued that this is

merely 'phantasms' arising from unbelief. Hence, when subjected to torture 'they confess to crimes which are purely imaginary on their part, and which truly proceed from Satan, with God's permission'. . . (Waite, p. 499).

Weyer's work was highly influential on Scot and the other skeptics about the witch craze, such as Balthazar Bakker, Thomas Ady, and John Webster. Oliver Bullock comments on Ady's radical stand vis-à-vis witchcraft: "Ady was critical of physicians who failed to understand diseases and were too quick to blame them on witchcraft." He also criticized the general population for attributing all the "blame for natural disasters and unexplained events. . ." on witches. Ady's final book, *The Doctrine of Devils, Proved to be the Grand Apostacy of these Later Times* (1676), which was "initially published anonymously," developed the theory that "possession could be attributed to mental illness" (Bullock, 231). This strong skepticism filtered into the minds of the courts magistrates, disturbed the treatment of victims accused of witchcraft, and led to the beginning of the end of the witch hunt craze. As Oliver Bullock explains further: "Sir George Mackenzie, a Scottish lawyer and Lord Advocate from 1677 to 1686, became concerned at the legitimacy of witchcraft trials. . . Mackenzie published *Laws and Customs of Scotland in Matters Criminal*, where he conceded that although he believed that witchcraft was possible, most of the people accused were not genuine witches. . . Mackenzie [was accused] of atheism; however, his work contributed to a steep decline in witchcraft cases being heard at court . . ." (Bullock, p. 22)

The pressures on the legal and judicial apparatus were so strong that the officials and the population, who were still driven by the power of ideological indoctrination against the supposed witches, had to shift attitude toward witchcraft, the devil, magic, and the blood thirsty-drive toward female genocide under the banner of fighting devilish witchcraft. Many of the officials and the populace were put in jail for not respecting the law. A new vision of the witch has emerged in the European conscious; she is now a citizen who can be defended by the law and the secular State. Now, even a witch victim's confession, was no longer valid as proof of condemnation; only acts that could be rationally and empirically proven criminal were believed by the court juries. As Oliver Bullock reports:

The last witch to be executed in England was Alice Molland of Exeter [in 1684]. She had been accused of murdering three people in 1682, and was hanged in 1684. In Scotland, ten people – seven men and three women – were executed at Paisley in 1697. One final execution in Scotland involved the burning of Janet Horne in a tar barrel in 1727. Horne had been accused of changing her daughter into a flying horse in order to travel. Her daughter had a deformity that affected her hands and feet, and neighbours began to suggest that this was as a result of the transformation. The final trials had ended, but more than 1,500 people had been executed for witchcraft in Britain. A final attempt was made to bring a suspected witch to trial in Leicester in 1717, but this was rejected by the court. In 1736, the government finally repealed the 1604 *Witchcraft Act* in both England and Scotland. . . .

Despite the repealing of witchcraft legislation, many ordinary people continued to believe in witches. Accusations against neighbours continued, and crowds would occasionally gather to confront a suspected witch. In 1751 in Long Marston, Hertfordshire, John and Ruth Osborne were attacked by an angry mob who accused them of harming cattle and people. Determined to put them to the swimming test, a 4,000-strong group dragged them to a pond, and Ruth Osborne drowned after she was thrown in. Her husband was beaten to death. One of the ringleaders, a chimney-sweep named Thomas Colley, was arrested and executed for the murder of Ruth Osborne. (Bullock, p. 225)

Thus during the 16th. and 17th. centuries in Europe the image of the witch went through a maze of transformations and colorful representations; all governed by the ISA or the cultural apparatus of each State as they were commonly governed by the Church and monarchic regimes which had worked in tandem.

E. Metamorphoses of the Witch: The Rehabilitation of Wicca

Undoubtedly, the demise of the Inquisition apparatus, starting in mid-seventeenth century, the success of various peasant revolutions across Europe, culminating towards the French and the 1848 Revolutions, and the widespread of Enlightenment anticlerical scientific thought, all announced the defeat of the Church-State apparatus in the face of the culture of witchcraft. In light of these developments, the Church – whether Catholic or Protestant -- became perceived as a superstitious institution itself, performing miracles and magic rituals that were not that different from witchcraft practices. Secular laws followed suit and abandoned the persecution of witches and criminalization of witchcraft. In 1735, an English Witchcraft Act repealed all previous laws on witchcraft and marked a strong break in the evolution of the witch's perpetual metamorphosis. The devilish dimension of her identity was abandoned, and any claim to witchery was considered more a misdemeanor than a prime crime like heresy and treason. The 1735 *Witchcraft Act* marked a radical break from the previous representation of the witch. "Penalties for the practice of witchcraft as traditionally constituted . . . were replaced by penalties for the pretence of witchcraft. A person who claimed to have the power to call up spirits, or foretell the future, or cast spells, or discover the whereabouts of stolen goods, was to be punished as a vagrant and a con artist subject to fines and imprisonment. . . ." ³¹ This act remained in force until its eventual repeal in 1952 with the Fraudulent Mediums Act (1951). The latter was repealed in turn in 2008 by the new Consumer Protection Regulations following a European Union rule governing unfair marketing practices.

Another radical break with the skewed past representations of the witch was marked by the 1986 US federal law ruling that Wicca was a legal religion that was protected by US law, like any other religion. ³² Even before this date, and starting in the 19th. century, witchcraft, paganism and Wiccan (all synonym terms with slight variations sometimes) witnessed a powerful revival both in folk practice, in scholarly publications, and in academia; especially after the migration of Wicca from Europe to US. Early in the 20th. century, the works of

such writers and anthropologists as Alistair Crowley, Gerald Gardner, Margaret Murray, and others propounded the thesis that Wicca (witchcraft) was a religious creed that Christianity had tried to eradicate leading even to genocides. It was a form of pagan religion that worshipped a duality of deities, a horned god and the goddess Diana. This thesis, which is still maintained by much scholarship nowadays, gave a new shape to the figure of the witch. The debates around this thesis gave a powerful boost to Wicca studies. During the 20th century, Wicca scholarship moved into universities, specialized museums, and churches. Various communes started spreading around the US and Europe, merging Wiccan beliefs with Hindu communitarian philosophy, advocating even a more democratic attitude towards all religious beliefs and practices.

Nowadays in Europe and North America, the witch has acquired a more humane representation; she has been rehabilitated as a harmless member of the community, even a source of mysticism, awe, and entertainment. At least, in the eyes of the State apparatuses, the witch is no longer an enemy to be hunted down for her affiliation with the Devil. Whether in Hollywood culture, the folkloric celebrations of Halloween, or pagan rites, the witch has become more a source of inspiration than of terror. With the revival of Wicca, the witch is now proud of her identity and profession. She has lost the power to fly on broomsticks, or control the weather to cause storms and wreck ships at sea, but she still can throw a love spell on somebody, command spiritual power, and harness human energy.³³ The image of the witch has also been re-appropriated by the mass culture industry; from Hollywood to Halloween celebrations, the witch has become a source of entertainment par excellence. Neither the church, nor the State, nor the public is accusing the witch of devil worship and calling for her destruction or burning at the stake. With the accelerated environmental threats to the planet, witchcraft -- under the umbrella of Wicca -- has become even much more appreciated for showing more care about the universe and nature, than the religious and secular ideologies that had fought it in the past. "As the 20th century is now officially over, all of the Pagan religions, including the many Wiccan traditions (as well as others, such as Asatru and Neo-Druidism) are now continuing to grow in number. It may well be that the 21st century will become the era when the Pagan religions again come of age, and eventually cast off the domination of the Judeo-Christian mindset which still rules America and England."³⁴

Endnotes

1. <https://culturalapparatus.wordpress.com/culture-and-politics-the-fourth-epoch/the-cultural-apparatus>. n.p.
2. See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 232-272.
3. See UN report on Witchcraft in the 21st century. (24 August 2009): (<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NEWSEVENTS/Pages/Witches21stCentury.aspx>=Accessed March 3, 2018.
4. Google search on April 10, 2018 at 11:45 am.
5. *Caliban and the Witch*, p. 162.
6. "The European Witch Hunts, Enclosure and the Rise of Capitalism," p. 1.
7. Dateline of key dates for the witch hunt craze:
 - a. 1468 The Papacy declares witchcraft an 'exceptional crime'.
 - 1486 Publication of Kramer's *Malleus Maleficarum* (*Hammer of Witches*).
 - 1532 Carolina Code permitted the torture and burning of witches in the Holy Roman Empire.

- 1560-1630 Main period of concentrated localized witch-hunts in Europe, especially in the Holy Roman Empire.
- 1542 Witchcraft first becomes a civil offence in England.
- 1563 Johan Weyer writes *The Deceptive tricks of Evil Spirits*, the first notable work skeptical of witchcraft.
- 1584 Reginald Scot publishes *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*.
- 1597 James VI of Scotland publishes a book, *Daemonologie*.
- 1604 Witchcraft Act passed in England; more severe than its predecessors.
- 1610 Last execution for witchcraft in the United Provinces.
- 1631 The Jesuit writer von Spee publishes *Cautio Criminalis The fraudulent Hoarstones Case in England*, criticizing witch trials.
- 1648 End of the Thirty Years' War.
- 1645-6 Matthew Hopkins active as Witchfinder General in East Anglia.
- 1685 Alice Molland executed; the last such execution in England.
- 1692-3 Salem witch trials in America.
- 1728-9 Most intense period of witch-hunting in Hungary.
- 1736 English Parliament repeals the 1604 Witchcraft Act.
- 1775 Last witch executed in the German lands.
- 1793 Last execution for witchcraft in Poland.

(see Simon Lemieux, "Witch-Hunting in Early Modern Europe: The End of the 'Bloodbath of the Innocents,'" *History Review* 57 [Mar2007], pp. 20-25).

9. "Trier witch trials", *Wikipedia*. Access: 8 March, 2018.
10. Cf. Müntzer and the peasants rebellion.
11. Historically, Shakespeare's interest in witchcraft in many of his plays was a gesture of rapprochement towards King James I (VI of Scotland), who wrote a book on Demonology and participated in person in the torture and execution of witches. Macbeth was meant to represent James I.
12. *The Random House Book of Poetry for Children* (1983). Web.
13. Thomas Christopher Smout, *A History of the Scottish People 1560–1830* (1969), pp. 198–207. Cit. in Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Berwick_witch_trials#CITEREFsmout1969. Accessed: April 18, 2018.
14. See "The Pendle Witch Child," BBC Timeline Documentary, www.YouTube.com
15. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 521 – cited in Francesca Matteoni, *Blood beliefs in early modern Europe* p. 7).
16. The Sabbath as a construction, like the with herself, was a construction borrowed from popular folklore. This is a thesis developed by James Sharpe: "The concept of the Sabbath seems to have gained growing acceptance among demonologists in the years following 1500, and subsequently received full treatment in the classic demonological works published later in the sixteenth century, with demonological writing on the Sabbath reaching its apogee in 1612 with the publication of a massive work by the French judge Pierre de Lancre. De Lancre had headed a witch-hunt in the Pays de Labord, a Basque-speaking area in the extreme south-west of France, in the course of which, he claimed, he had been responsible for the execution of 600 witches (modern estimates suggest a much lower total). What makes de Lancre's work distinctive, however, is the centrality he awarded to the Sabbath, and the lengthy descriptions he gave of what happened there, based on the confessions of those suspected witches he had interrogated, with special emphasis on the sexual promiscuity they described. (Sharpe, p. 165).
17. Cit. Murray, *The Witch Cult in Western Europe*, p. 11.
18. See Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, and *Discipline and Punish*. The case of Giordano Bruno (1600) comes to mind here. See also the story of the Catholic priest, Father Urbain Grandier (accused of witchcraft, quartered, and burned in Loudun, France, in 1634); see the excellent film on this story, *The Devils*, by Ken Russell.
19. See Dawson, Bennett, Federici, and Hendershot in the bibliography.
20. Cit. in Wikipedia "Trier Witch Trials", accessed March 8, 2018.
21. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, "Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers," p. 5.
22. See Oster, "Witchcraft, Weather, Economics," p.5.
23. Christian Pfister, "Climatic Extremes, Recurrent Crises and Witch Hunts," p. 32.
24. See the excellent film production of the Loudun trials and Grandier's story in *The Devils* (1971), by Ken Russell, on YouTube.
25. Cit. in Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, p.171.
26. Here is a non-exhaustive list of the famous groups of dissenters who threatened the Holy Roman Empire and the Protestant Reformation too: The Anabaptists (Reformation protestants, ancestors of Mennonites and Quakers, who believed in no infant baptism, only adult baptism counts, and no bearing of arms); the Waldensians; the Baptists; the Taborites; the Lutherans; the Libertines; the Huguenots; the Night Templars; the Moravians; the Arnoldists; the Diggers and Levellers (UK); the Brethren of Free Spirit (NL); the Bohemian Brethren (Germany); the Adamites (nudists); the Beghards (of 14th cent. Germany; they celebrated nudity and free love).

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27. See "German Peasants' war," *Wikipedia*. Access: April 23, 2018.
 28. See Tony Robinson's excellent BBC documentary on "The English 1381 Peasant Revolt," <https://www.youtube.com/>
 29. See "Anabaptism," *Wikipedia*. Access: April 23, 2018.
 30. See "Catharism," *Wikipedia*. Access: May 15, 2018.
 31. "Witchcraft laws," *Wikipedia*. Access: May 18, 2018.
 32. <https://www.butler.edu/cfv/wicca>. During 1985, the District Court of Virginia recognized witchcraft as a valid and legitimate religion, in the case of Dettmer vs. Landon. This decision was upheld later on by a Federal court. So the witch could roam free in American society now. In 2004, the first Wiccan wedding was legally recognized in the UK (by the Registrars of Scotland). See "Wicca," *Wikipedia*. Access: May 18, 2018.
 33. "Power of Wicca," documentary (1971), YouTube.
 34. "History of Paganism and Wicca," in <http://www.angelfire.com/ny2/wiccan/history.html>. Access: May 15, 2018.