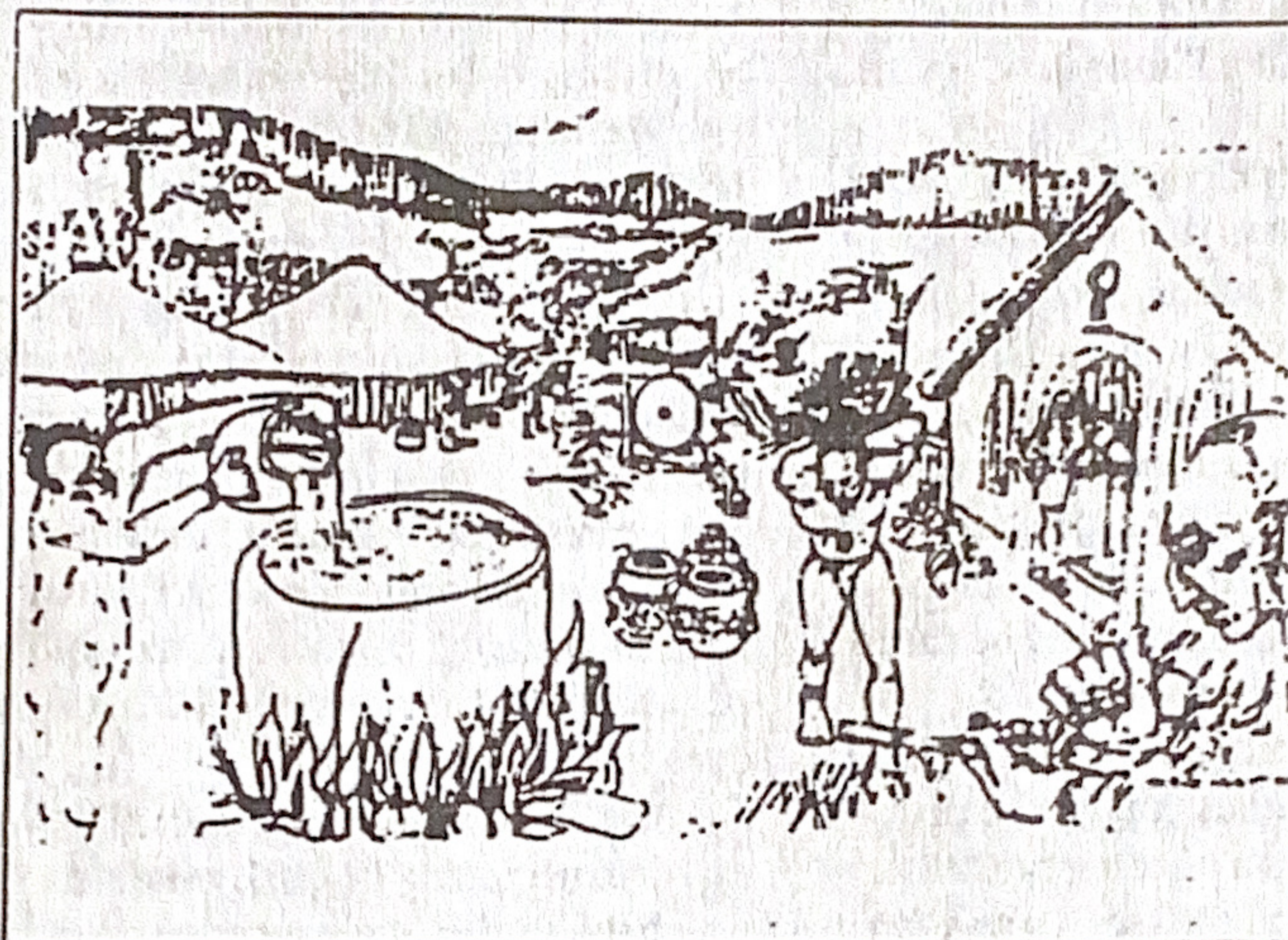


organizes the territory with the ultimate goal of removing the riches and exporting them, creating an intimate economic relationship between the exploited territory and the economy of the colonizers. And a colony of exploitation is distinguished from other forms as colonies of inhabitants, where for reasons of strategy or some other convenience human contingents are moved to occupy, divide territories or whichever other goal, but whatever the consequence, it is not the economic integration of the home country with the new territory.

The history of the first economic mines in America is another of the great concealments of American historiography. The emphasis of those introductory chapters in American history texts have always speculated about the accidental or incidental death of the Antillean Indian, making a case that neglects knowingly the context of the exploitive action of the Europeans. The message has been that the indigenous peoples died of nothing. I had the fortune to have come across, fifteen years ago, in the General Archive of Indians, in Seville, with the most extensive documentation of the mineral extraction process in the island of Puerto Rico, during the first fifteen years of colonization. There were the mineral registries, the names, the quantities, the accounting books, and the evidence of the human and material costs of the economic conquest of the Islands. All of this prestigious documentation has been there, in Seville, all along. Open to the interested investigator, Spanish or native. But for some reason it has never attracted the attention of the official historians. It was preferable to keep the myths of the conquest alive: that the colonization was for religious motivations; that the Islands never represented sources of any kind of wealth, and that the aboriginal people disappeared for reasons that the colonizer could not control. From these myths emanate all of the colonial justification. The inferiority of the colonized begins with the inferiorization of their lands. That strategic commodity,

gold, then dictated the guidelines of the first stages of overseas expansion and was hidden just as today, the strategic commodity, oil, is hidden as the capitalist world makes its moves toward the Persian Gulf.

The contribution of Antillean capital to that Europe which was out on the periphery and in need during the time of Columbus is a theme that will require more serious investigation. However, the history of Europe's move toward the control of America beginning at that time along with the inventory of the shipments of gold that for decades were exported, assure us that its historic role as wealth producing lands was not a myth. We have calculated that between 1503 and 1550, the islands: Hispaniola, Puerto Rico and Cuba,



The Encomienda System forced the Taíno to work without pay for the colonizers.

in that order of importance, produced some 500 million dollars, valued according to the London Market quote for gold in 1987. And the value of this prodigious wealth was clearly greater than that which was in circulation in an Old World that lacked metal, and was greedy for its circulation. We are speaking of what economists define as originating capital accumulation, a process which allowed Europe to continue to extract and accumulate at its bosom so that it could make its modernist transformation.

Later came sugar. Around the middle of the 16th century, Hispaniola and Puerto Rico were the first sugar colonies of the Americas. Sugar turns into gold when it arrives at the old continent and into slaves when it gets to Africa, so as to perpetuate itself as the sap that runs through the veins of the new international order which it constitutes.

Therefore, as we place ourselves into the context of that history, we can understand very well why the Indians died, why Africans were wrested from their lands, why the Europeans, became the masters of the lands which were not theirs, and why we continue as the inheritors of the Indians and Africans of that period.

**Translated and adapted from the pamphlet "500 Años de Encuentro o Resistencia", published by CASEP, Puerto Rico, December, 1991.*