

Between the Devil and the Inquisition: African Slaves and the Witchcraft Trials in Cartagena de Indies

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In 1620, five black slaves were brought to the Inquisition Tribunal in Cartagena de Indies, a port city of New Granada, from the mining town of Zaragoza.¹ These four women and one man were all “*bozales*,” first generation Africans, and all were charged with participating in a diabolical sect of witches. Of the five, the four female defendants, Leonor, Giomar, Polonia, and María Linda, eventually testified to practicing diabolical witchcraft. The one man, Cosme Negro, persistently refused to testify, even through physical torture. Deciding he was innocent, the inquisitors dismissed the charges against him.² The trial proceedings recorded the confession by Leonor, the first of the defendants

to confess, with a sense of dramatic confrontation:

Standing on her feet, she testified that one hundred blacks of different nations, witches, men and women, alive and dead, the same ones this criminal saw performing the rituals and ceremonies... and leaving the junta carried by the devil in [groups of] twenty and twenty, divided in troupes according to different plantations, where [the devil] ordered them to do all the harm they could. And this [witness] and the rest of them killed the little children, sucking the blood through the naval[:] and when they were adults, [they sucked the blood] through the nostrils.³

¹AUTHOR’S NOTE: Acknowledgements to Andrea Valenzuela for her assistance translating the tangled language of some parts of the trial transcripts.

New Granada was the Spanish colonial name for the region that is presently the country of Columbia.

² The transcript from the trial of Cosme Negro is very brief, and contains little information outside of his refusal to confess and his acquittal. Because of this, my analysis centers on the longer testimonies of the four women. Anna María Splendianni and others, eds. *Cincuenta Años de Inquisición en el Tribunal de Cartagena de Indias, 1610-1660*. Tomo II (Santafé de Bogotá: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 1997), 232-233.

³ “...*testifica al pie, de cien negros y negras de diferentes naciones, brujos y brujas, vivos y muertos, los cuales vio esta rea hacer los ritos y ceremonias... y salir de las juntas llevados del demonio de veinte en veinte, divididos en tropas por diferentes rancherías, donde se les mandaba hiciesen todo el daño que pudiesen y que a los niños chiquitos los mataban, ésta y los demás, chupádoles la sangre por los ombligos y a los grandecitos por las narices.*” *Ibid*, 215.

The words of Leonor's confession appeared and reappeared in reports from the Inquisitor Juan Mañozca, who presided over the trial, and in letters from the bishops of Cuba and Panama, as they repeated the outcome of this trial and voiced their alarm over the dangerous threat of witchcraft conspiracy among the slaves in the region. The bishop of Cuba wrote about the "...the dangers of witches in the district of Cartagena," and the bishop of Panama echoed the concerns over "the great numbers of witches and people who have made pacts with the devil."⁴ Inquisitor Mañozca's lengthy letter claimed, "these lands are widely infested with male and female witches and especially the mines of Zaragoza and its surroundings... where some two thousand slaves are living... among whom this diabolical sect has spread."⁵ He paraphrased Leonor's testimony as evidence of the numbers of these witches and their acts of destructive violence:

[There are] more than one hundred blacks of all nations, each one that knows of the juntas and the congregations that do these evils on top of heresy and apostasy. There are a great many of them, and some of them kill, maim, and dismember the adult men and women, and drown the children. [They] fell and destroy the fruits of the earth and impede the

⁴ Carta del Obispo de Cuba, 26 Septiembre, 1623. Archivo Histórico Nacional, *Inquisición*, Libro 1009, folio 288; Carta del Obispo de Panamá. 16 Abril, 1619, Archivo Histórico Nacional, *Inquisición*, Libro 1009, folio 23.

⁵ "Apéndice 2," in Fermina Álvarez Alonso, *La Inquisición en Cartagena de Indias durante el Siglo XVII* (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1999), 315.

mining of gold.⁶

In the reports of these officials, the outcome of these trials demonstrated the existence of a vast threat to the land and labor of the colony, stemming from the unholy alliance between communities black slaves and the Enemy of the Faith.

This paper examines the transcripts from the trials of Leonor, Guiomar, Polonía and María Linda, and it explicates these texts as products of a circumscribed and power-laced encounter between Inquisition officials and African slaves. In these documents, the defendants confessed to defiantly renouncing the Christian faith, making ritual pacts with the devil, and violently assaulting the land and slave labor of their masters. These testimonies appear to give these women voice to a ferocious resistance; however, that voice emanated nearly entirely from the perceptions and the pens of Spanish officials of the court, who interrogated, translated, interpreted and transcribed the statements of these women. Through the long processes of the witchcraft trials, scripts from European demonological texts were inscribed upon the bodies and testimonies of the defendants. Thus, this paper analyzes the witchcraft trials and the processes of accusation, interrogation, and response, as a site for the production of these witchcraft practices. Nevertheless, these trials also required the cooperation, albeit forced, of the defendants, and I also analyze these texts for the tactics used by these women to construct testimonies that both minimized their culpability and satisfied the expectations of their interrogators. Ultimately, all four women admitted to their willful complicity in a sect of witches led by the devil. Their compliance

⁶ "Ibid," 315.

secured an alleviated sentence of “perpetual jail” rather than death, which was inflicted only upon the unrepentant. Ironically, their coerced submission also secured their bodies and voices as evidence of the threatening power of black diabolical witches, a specter that has long haunted Africanist discourses about the cultural practices of African peoples and their descendants.⁷

Early modern Europe already had long-standing discourses that associated Africans peoples and the devil, and many Spanish traditions, both elite and popular, linked dark skin with the devil. Witches tried in Logroño, Spain, testified that the devil appeared as “a dark-skinned man with wide, glaring horrible eyes.”⁸ The tradition of representing evil with the color black developed with the frequent portrayal of the devil as a black man in Spanish medieval art.⁹ Contemporaneous colonial literature also queried possible demonic origins for African-originated cultural practices. Father Alonso de Sandoval, a Jesuit priest in Cartagena, wrote a lengthy work, *De instauranda Aethiopum salute*, on the “nature, religion, customs, rites, and superstitions of the blacks.” Though Sandoval did not claim that the influence of the devil was

widespread, he did report that the rituals of various African peoples were demonic in origin. He named several nations who purportedly practiced demonic sacrifices, including some that sacrificed humans and had the custom of eating human flesh. He also noted one nation where women performed “acts” with the devil, and he also described another region where “in these parts the devil has many ministers, who with spells and portents destroy whatever they want.”¹⁰

Fears of African witchcraft also widely circulated outside the writings by educated elites and had particular resonance with popular Spanish understandings of witches as practitioners of *mallificium*. Incidents of illness and death kindled fears of supernatural dealings, and Spanish colonists often suspected the enmity of non-European populations around them as the cause of these misfortunes. The travel narratives of Antonio Vazquez de Espinosa observed the regions around Zaragoza to be peculiarly afflicted with poor health, and he attributed it to

⁷ I use “Africanist” here according to the meaning that Toni Morrison suggests, “...as a term for the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people.” Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 6-7.

⁸ Gustav Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate: Basque Witchcraft and the Spanish Inquisition*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1980, 92.

⁹ Eileen E. McGrath Grubb, “Attitudes Towards Black Africans in Imperial Spain.” *Legion Journal of the Humanities*. vol. 1, 1974, 79.

¹⁰ “en estas partes tiene el demonio muchos ministros que con hechizos y brebajes acaban cuanto quieren...” Alonso de Sandoval, *De Instauranda Aethiopum Salute: El Mundo de la Esclavitud Negra en America*. (Bogota: Biblioteca de la Presidencia de Columbia, 1956) 30, 67, 70-73, 101. Sandoval at times adopts the format used by Jose de Acosta, who writes about the religions of the indigenous peoples of New Spain, equating indigenous paganism with idolatry and an inversion of Christian faith. See Jose de Acosta, *De Procuranda Indorum Salute* (Cologne, 1596); See Fernando Cervantes, *The Devil in the New World: The Impact of Diabolism in New Spain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 25-27 for Acosta’s work on diabolism, and Tulio Aristizabal Giraldo, S.J., *Retazos de Historia: Los Jesuitas en Cartagena de Indias* (Santafé de Bogotá: Ediciones Antropos, 1995), 51-53 for a comparison of De Sandoval and Acosta.

a bewitchment from the indigenous inhabitants. He reported, “they [the Indians] desired death rather than be subjected to the Spanish, so they let their blood run out their noses, which is why the land is so extremely sickly.”¹¹ According to Inquisitor Mañozca, colonists also feared the spiritual power of their slaves to cause illness and death, and “when they see one of their slaves suddenly fall ill or die, they sense the harm that the witches cause.”¹²

Thus, when a free black servant complained to Francisco de Santiago that two of his slave women had bewitched her, de Santiago likewise feared that these women might be witches. As he testified later before the court, de Santiago questioned one of these women, Leonor Zape. Leonor, he reported, admitted to harming the servant, but she also accused the other woman, Guiomar, of forcing her to do it. “Desiring to know the truth of all that he suspected,” de Santiago forcibly questioned both slaves. By this time, he suspected that he was also one of their victims, blaming them for causing a strange illness in his legs. Using Leonor to question Guiomar (who probably did not speak

Spanish), de Santiago commanded them both to “untie” him from the bewitchment to his legs. Guiomar unsuccessfully attempted to heal his legs, de Santiago testified, but they remained “sick and crippled” until Leonor appeared to him at night when he was in bed, elevated his legs, and “he felt something in the inside of his knee in the right leg that felt like fire escaping.”¹³ After this incident, de Santiago brought both Leonor and Guiomar before the *comisario*¹⁴ of the Inquisition in Zaragoza, accusing them of witchcraft.

As the *comisario* began interrogating the witnesses, the accusations against these women escalated beyond the practice of harms and spells to a more damning charge of participating in a demonic sect. As the investigation proceeded, the court also required the defendants to identify others who participated in the devil’s cult. Thus, when Leonor confessed to being a witch, she also accused Guiomar of initiating her into a witchcraft sect led by the devil, and she named another woman, María Linda, as a member of the sect.¹⁵ In spite of their denials, both Guiomar and María Linda were transported along with Leonor to appear before the Holy Office in Cartagena.¹⁶ After several hearings in Cartagena, both women confessed, and Guiomar accused two more people who were also brought to trial, Polonía and Cosme Negro. Like the other three women, Polonía eventually confessed, but only after being subjected to torture. Cosme Negro, the

¹¹ “*por no estar sujetos a los españoles se deseaban la muerte, se desangraban por las narices, como porque la tierra en sí es enfermiza con extremo.*” Antonio Vázquez de Espinosa, “Compendio y descripción de las Indias Occidentales,” ed. B. Velasco Bayón, *Biblioteca de Autores Españoles* vol. 231, (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1969), 238; Robert C. West, in *Colonial Placer Mining in Columbia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 87-88 confirms a high incidence of disease among black slaves in mining districts such as Zaragoza, largely due to measles, smallpox, yaws, intestinal disease, syphilis, leprosy and tuberculosis.

¹² “*quando ven el negro o negra de su cuadrilla mal parado o muerto de repente sienten el daño que las bruxas hacen*” “Apéndice 2,” Álvarez, *La Inquisición de Cartagena*, 316.

¹³ “*sintió que de la pierna derecha, por el tobillo de la parte adentro, le salía fuego.*” *Ibid*, 212. Francisco de Santiago also reported another claim by Leonor, that she and Guiomar had trapped the soul of de Santiago’s servant and tied it in a handkerchief.

¹⁴ A local deputy of the office of the Inquisition.

¹⁵ The transcripts say that Leonor accused three women of being witches, but there is no other record of this third defendant. *Ibid*, 217, 223.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 218, 223.

only man and some twenty years younger than the others, was also tried by torture. He persistently refused to confess, and the court officials decided to dismiss the charges against him.

The testimonies of the defendants offered meager information about their personal histories, except to make it clear that all of these defendants were African-born with little Spanish acculturation. Leonor recounts arriving in Cartagena and then being brought to Santa Marta, where she stayed for some time before she was sold to her current master in Zaragoza. Guiomar as well, said she was sold in Santa Marta to the same master.¹⁷ The transcripts from the trial report their African nationalities: Leonor was Zape, Guiomar and Polonía were Bran, “from the rivers of Guinea,” and María Linda, also called Mandinga, was from Terranova. Cosme was recorded as Biáfara, though the records said that Guiomar initially misidentified him as being Nalu.¹⁸ The transcripts note all of them as “bozales,” and at least one of them, Guiomar, did not speak Spanish. Leonore, as well, also occasionally testified through an interpreter.¹⁹ The stilted syntax of the trial transcripts of Polonía and Cosme Negro also suggest that they may not have spoken Spanish well, or at least that the

transcriber had difficulty understanding them. María Linda seemed to have had the most facility with Spanish.

Though the lack of Spanish acculturation made these defendants more suspect in the eyes of the officers of the Holy Office, it also makes their confessions to diabolical witchcraft more problematic. Scholars have widely argued that the practices that constituted diabolicalism were primarily the subject of elite demonological treatises, and had little overlap with popular concepts of magic and sorcery.²⁰ Indeed, a contemporaneous investigation of a series of witchcraft trials in Logroño, Spain, argued that the witch trials actually served to educate the populace about the practices of diabolicalism. The author of this investigation, a junior inquisitor named Alonso de Salazar Frías argued that belief in witchcraft in its theological form, as an organization of people in a pact with the devil who practiced inverted forms of Christianity, was irrelevant to popular belief in witches. For there to be witchcraft epidemics, Salazar argued, the people in a region had to be instructed of these formal beliefs about witchcraft.²¹ While the trial of five witches in Cartagena could hardly be called an epidemic, Salazar’s model for understanding the trials of witches is still instructive for understanding how a group of African slaves, with no access to formal treatises of demonology, came to confess to the practices

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 213, 217.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 211, 215, 221, 222, 231.

¹⁹ Guiomar and occasionally Leonor testified through interpreters. It is possible that Father Peter Claver was her interpreter, as his name is mentioned in other trials as aiding in court translations for non-Spanish speaking Africans. *Ibid*, 279, 284. A useful source on Claver and Alonso de Sandoval and their relationship with the Inquisition is Angel Valtierra, *Peter Claver, saint of the slaves*. trans. Janet H. Parry and L. J. Woodward (London: Burns and Oates, 1960). 167-177.

²⁰ See Laura de Mello e Souza, *The Devil and the Land of the Holy Cross: Witchcraft, Slavery and Popular Religion in Colonial Brazil*. trans. Dian Grosklaus Whitty (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003) 188-190 for a synopsis of how scholars have interpreted the relationships between elite and popular discourses about witchcraft.

²¹ For a complete presentation and analysis of Salazar’s report, see Gustav Henningsen, *The Witches’ Advocate*, especially pages 390-391.

of diabolical witchcraft. The accused African slaves from Zaragoza would have encountered this knowledge of witchcraft for the first time through the questions of the Inquisition officers. The interrogation process served as a kind of coercive catechesis, by which the defendants learned to properly confess themselves as witches.²²

An understanding of the practices of diabolical witchcraft also required some familiarity with liturgical forms of Christianity, since the demonic cult practiced inverted Christian forms. Though all of the accused assented to the question that they were “Christian, baptized and confirmed,” the more extensive answer by Giomar provides a more substantive account of her contact with Spanish Christianity.²³ Through a translator, she testified that:

...[she] was a baptized Christian, that they had baptized in the said city of Zaragoza, while being a slave of another master before the one she has now[.] She was not able to say whether she had been confirmed, nor was she able to say a single prayer of the Christian doctrine, nor hardly did she know how to make the sign of the cross, saying that because she was always in the mines, she didn't learn the prayers.²⁴

Reports by Jesuit missionary Alonso de Sandoval similar acknowledged the barriers that prevented missionaries from teaching the slaves about Christianity: “...there are many bad examples of those who prevent them [the slaves] from being good Christians and to live like brutes and appear incapable.”²⁵ However, in the mind of the Inquisitor Mañozca, the impenetrability of the slaves to Christianity made them only more permeable to the seductions of the devil. He complained in his letter to the Suprema that, “badly catechized and instructed and without the knowledge necessary in the things of the faith, they fall easily into the idolatry of the devil.”²⁶

Ironically, the Inquisitor himself provided the slaves with the most thorough instruction of the ways of the devil's idolatry. The role of the Holy Office in transmitting the knowledge of these practices appears even more clearly in an examination of the confessions of the accused slaves in Zaragoza in 1620 next to those in the Logroño trials of 1609-14. In both places, the defendants testified to being initiated into the devil's pact in a ceremony that ritually renounced God, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and the saints. They confessed allegiance to the devil and kissed the devil on the posterior. Once initiated, the witches secretly met in *juntas* with other witches several times a week. They flew through the air

²² Henningsen's own analysis suggests “brainwashing” as a comparable contemporary method to the processes by which the Inquisition trials extracted confessions to witchcraft. *Ibid.*, 20-22.

²³ Splendianni, *Cincuenta Años*, 213, 221, 223, 232-233.

²⁴ “...era cristiana bautizada, que la habían bautizado en la dicha ciudad de Zaragoza, siendo esclava de otro antes que el amo que ahora tenía y no supo decir si estaba confirmada, ni supo decir ninguna oración de la doctrina cristiana, ni apenas

se supo signar y santiguar, diciendo que como estaba siempre en las minas no aprendía las oraciones.” *Ibid.*, 218

²⁵ “muchos y malos ejemplos son los que impiden a ellos el ser buenos cristianos, y vivir como brutos y parecer incapaces.” Alonso de Sandoval, *De Instauranda*, 199.

²⁶ “mal catequizados e instruidos y no tienen después la enseñanza necesaria en las cosas de la fe, fácilmente caen en la idolatría del Demonio...” “Apéndice 2,” Álvarez, *La Inquisición de Cartagena*, 316.

to the secret meetings with the devil, who provided them with food, music, and dancing. During the celebrations and rituals, the witches performed various sex acts with the devil and with the other male and female witches gathered at the junta. The devil also led them to do various evils—to damage plants and animals, to harm people and even to kill them by sucking their blood or by drowning them. On occasion, the devil and the witches would ritually consume the bodies of these victims.²⁷

The slaves from Zaragoza, perhaps barely familiar with the tenants of Christianity, may well have puzzled at the demands by the Spanish inquisitors that they confess their allegiance to the Christian devil. Most of them resisted. Leonor confessed first, perhaps under pressure from her master, or perhaps because of a promise for an alleviated sentence. After three hearings, the publication of witnesses, and after “being reprimanded in another hearing,” Guiomar confessed. María Linda changed her plea after interference from the lawyer to “discharge her conscience and tell the truth,” and Polonía broke down after being sentenced to torture.²⁸ Even their final confessions, however, evade accusations of particular witchcraft practices that had been made against them. Thus, with only limited power to improvise their testimonies, the accused witches of Zaragoza responded to the notions of witchcraft and the demonic in the questions of the Inquisitors and constructed testimonies that both minimized their own culpability and satisfied the expectations of their interrogators.

When questioned about their initiation into the sect of witches, each woman portrayed her participation as coerced or bribed by the devil and other witches. Leonor testified that she attended the junta only after repeated urgings by Guiomar, and that she became a witch only because the devil promised her “many treasures and her liberty” if she worshipped him.²⁹ Guiomar, for her part, testified that other witches had forced her to join the devil’s sect, carrying her to the junta tied up in a sheet.³⁰ Polonía details the strategy of spiritual seduction used by the devil, confessing that she kneeled before him and worshiped him as God because “the goat told her that he was very powerful to give her much money.”³¹ Later in her testimony, she also claimed that she was forced by other witches to meet the devil.³² María Linda explained that when she was a young girl, a group of other slaves tricked her into coming with them to the witch’s hiding place, where they introduced her to the devil and then threatened to kill her. She testified to being “silent from fear” until the witches commanded her to kiss the hand and posterior of the devil, renounce God, the Virgin Mary, and the holy Catholic Church and worship the devil. She also claimed that the devil offered treasures for her participation, “the devil was powerful to save her, to give her many good things.” Skillfully, María Linda admitted that she knew her actions were against the holy catholic faith, but she claimed she had not done them “wholeheartedly,” but from fear of the threats to kill her.³³

In these trials, all four women also testified that the devil required them to swear allegiance to

²⁷ Gustav Henningsen, *The Witches’ Advocate*, 89-94. Splendiani, *Cincuenta Años*, 211-224.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 221

²⁹ “*le daría muchos bienes y libertad...*” *Ibid.*, 214.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 218.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 222.

³² *Ibid.*, 222.

³³ *Ibid.*, 224.

him and to renounce the holy Catholic faith, God, the Virgin and the saints, and to agree “not to say the name of God nor Jesus Christ, not to hear mass, or confess or take the holy water.”³⁴ Even Guiomar, who had originally testified that she had never learned the prayers and creeds of the Catholic Church, confessed here that she had to “deny God Our Lord and Our Lady and our holy catholic faith.”³⁵ María Linda made a problematic analogy between the beliefs of “we” Christians and the rituals of the witchcraft cult, ambivalently identifying herself as both a witch and a Christian: “This criminal [María Linda] and the rest of the witches prayed to the devil as to God, that he would raise us to heaven, as we Christians pray to Jesus Our Lord to save us and raise us to heaven.”³⁶

All four of these women also testified to participation in the devil’s feast. Though most

³⁴ “*que no mentase a Dios ni a Jesucristo, ni oyese misa, ni confesase, ni tomase agua bendita.*” *Ibid*, 214.

³⁵ “*...renegase de Dios Nuestro Señor y de Nuestra Señora y de nuestra santa fe católica.*” *Ibid*, 219
Certainly some of the accused witches received their most systematic catechesis of both the practices of witchcraft and the beliefs of the Catholic Church in the Inquisition courtroom. One later trial, of a slave named Sebastian Botafogo, contains another testimony that indicates this ironic catechesis. When recounting his initiation into the witchcraft cult, and the instruction of the devil to renounce the Catholic faith, including the Virgin Mary, the trial transcripts recounts that he said that “he didn’t know that she was a virgin.” To which the devil purportedly responded, “Do you want or not want to be in my company?” Botafogo answered, “Yes, I do, but I didn’t know that the thing was a virgin...” *Ibid*, 403.

³⁶ “*...rogaban esta rea y los demás brujos al demonio como a Dios, los llevase al cielo coma acá rogamos los cristianos a Jesucristo Nuestro Señor nos salve y lleve al cielo.*” *Ibid*, 220.

of what the defendants from Zaragoza describe is parallel to the feast for the witches in Logroño, there were interesting differences in details of food, clothing, and music, probably reflecting what would have been familiar within the slave culture in Zaragoza. In both series of trials, the devil took the form of an animal, usually a goat. The women from Zaragoza described the devil with the tail or horns of a goat, but some of them also described him as a black man, with the “the figure of a black man in skins, with only a loinskin covering his private parts and on his head a handkerchief covering his horns.”³⁷ In Logroño, when the devil was described wearing clothes, it was a good quality suit.³⁸ The food at the devil’s feast also reflected what was familiar to these black women. Leonor described the feast of the junta as having “many bottles of wine, rolls, couscous, plantains, all like the food the blacks eat,” while Guiomar listed the kinds of food served, “Meat of a mountain pig, couscous and chicha (an alcoholic beverage)”³⁹ The tradition of the dance also used familiar cultural forms. Guiomar testified, “he played a tambourine... and the men and women danced and the devil gave them bells for dancing...”⁴⁰ In contrast, the witches in Logroño danced to the music of a flute, bass drum, side drum, and sometimes a violin. The Logroño defendants

³⁷ “*figura de negro, en cueros, solamente un calambe con que tapaba las vergüenzas y en la cabeza un paño con que cubría los cuernos.*” Spendianni, *Cincuenta Años*, 213; Henningsen, *The Witches’ Advocate*, 70-71.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 70-71.

³⁹ “*...muchos botijas de vino, bolos, cuzcuz, plátanos y todo lo que comen los negros.*” Spendianni, *Cincuenta Años*, 215. “*carne de puerco de monte, al cuzcuz y chicha,*” *Ibid*, 222.

⁴⁰ “*les tomaba un tamboril... y ellos y ellas bailaban y el demonio mayor les daba castañetas con que bailaban,*” *Ibid*, 219.

also did not describe the feast as an actual meal, but testified to celebrating a ritual similar to communion or to attending a banquet at which the human victims of the witches were eaten.⁴¹

Another point of both commonality between the Logroño and Zaragoza witch trials is the means of travelling to the junta service. In both trials, defendants confessed to joining the rituals several times a week. In Logroño, the witches claimed they flew or sometimes walked to a meeting place located a few hundred meters from the town near a grotto.⁴² The Zaragoza witches gave various different answers for the meeting times for their junta rituals, yet all claimed that they were held in a “hiding places of those distant parts, a half a league from where they were.”⁴³ Like the Logroño witches, flying to the junta formed an important part of the ritual. The women gave various answers for their method of flight. Leonor confessed that the other witches gave her a bone to fly with them, while Guiomar claimed that the devil gave the witches an unguent to put underneath their arms to fly, and that sometimes she flew “in spirit in the form of an eagle.”⁴⁴ One comment by Guiomar suggested that the ability to fly enabled spirits of ancestors and other slaves from distant lands to gather for the rituals, as she testified that the *juntas* included the presence of “some [who] were alive and others deceased and others [who] had been sold away from the land to different parts of these Indies.”⁴⁵ That the women from Zaragoza gave such variant responses to the methods of flight

suggests that their testimonies borrowed from multiple traditions about the methods and meaning of flying. At the same time, their consistent responses for the location of the ritual may suggest that such a site was actually used, perhaps for hidden gatherings of slaves. The remote and mountainous geography of the regions surrounding Zaragoza did provide such hiding places for resistant slaves and maroon societies.⁴⁶

The practices of demonic witchcraft, according to confessions in the trials in both Logroño and Cartagena, notoriously required the witches to perform sex acts with the devil and the other witches.⁴⁷ Both Polonía and Leonor confessed that the devil “knew [them] carnally from behind,” and that the other witches, both men and women, also had sex with the devil and with each other.⁴⁸ Several years later, another series of witchcraft cases in New Granada, predominantly involving black and mixed-race women from Tolú and Cartagena, discussed in detail whether the devil had sex with the witches “por vaso natural [in the vagina]” or “por el vaso trasero [in the rectum]” and whether the devil’s semen was cold or hot.⁴⁹ Besides its potency as an image of infidelity to the Christian faith, the penetrated body of the black witch also conjures the power

⁴¹ Henningsen, *The Witches’ Advocate*, 73, 84.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴³ Spendianni, *Cincuenta Años*, 222-223.

⁴⁴ “*en espíritu en figura de gavián,*” *Ibid.*, 214, 220.

⁴⁵ “*que unos son vivos y otros difuntos y otros los han vendido fuera de la tierra a diferentes partes de estas Indias...*” *Ibid.*, 220.

⁴⁶ María Cristina Navarette, *Historia social del negro en la colonia: Cartagena, siglo XVII*. (Santiago de Cali, Columbia: Universidad del Valle, 1995), 94.

⁴⁷ Henningsen, *The Witches’ Advocate*, 81, 83; Spendianni, *Cincuenta Años*, 214, 219, 222.

⁴⁸ “*conocía a esta rea y a los demás en figura de cabrón carnalmente por detrás,*” Spendianni, *Cincuenta Años*, 214, 222.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 304-421.

of the Tribunal to inscribe even the most intimate narratives onto the bodies of its defendants.⁵⁰

The most lurid contents of the testimonies of the women from Zaragoza were their confessions to killing other slaves and their children. Murder by bloodsucking and ritually consuming these victims or other dead bodies in the demonic sect were also part of the standard practices for diabolical witchcraft. The confessions of the women from Zaragoza certainly conformed to these practices with convincingly gruesome detail. Polonía named several victims of the witches' murders, including an incident when she and her companions entered the home of a young girl, and "sucked the blood through the navel and carried the dead body to present to the devil to cook it."⁵¹ Leonor confessed that the devil had instructed the witches to "do all the harm they could against the Christians and kill children. And this one and the rest killed many by sucking their blood."⁵² María Linda also confesses to a different kind of murder. After she made several statements about her complicity as a witch, she finally admitted that she "killed a young black boy by drowning him

by the nose."⁵³ Numbers of other black and mixed race defendants were charged in later Inquisition witchcraft trials with bloodsucking murder, taking corpses, and eating human flesh. These trials in Cartagena appear to portray cannibalism and bloodsucking witchcraft as unique to the witchcraft practices of people of African descent. However, in the earlier trials in Logroño, where the perceptions of witchcraft were not attached to the behaviors of African peoples, Spanish defendants were accused of and confessed to similar practices of murder and cannibalism. They purportedly violated tombs, murdered their victims by bloodsucking, and ritually consumed the bodies of their victims, often their own children or family members, during the devil's feast.⁵⁴

After confessing to these practices of diabolical witchcraft before the Inquisition court, the inquisitors asked the defendants two final questions in which they were to formally acknowledge their guilt and plead for the mercy of the court. The first required the defendants to acknowledge that they sinned by their own volition. Even María Linda, who had recounted in detail how the devil and other witches had forced her to join the sect, finally carefully acknowledged:

And to another question that they asked of her, she said that it is true that she willfully did all of what she had confessed, and that the great fear that she had and [still] has is the cause of the little instability with which she has confessed. And the truth is that with faith and intention she adored the demon

⁵⁰ Jaime Humberto Borja Gómez argues that the confessions of these accused witches mirrored many Spanish perceptions of the sexualized body black and mixed-race women, and of Spanish colonial efforts to define and control the sexual accessibility of women in other spheres of colonial life "El Control Sobre la Sexualidad: Negros e Indios (1550-1650)" in *Inquisición, muerte y sexualidad en la Nueva Granada*. ed, Jaime Humberto Borja Gómez. (Santa fe de Bogotá: Editorial Ariel, S.A., 1996), 171-198.

⁵¹ "chupándole la sangre por el ombligo y muerto lo llevaron a presentar al demonio para cocinarlo." Spondianni, *Cincuenta Años*, 222.

⁵² "hiciesen todo el daño que pudiesen a los cristianos y matasen criaturas y ésta y los demás mataban muchas, chupándoles la sangre." *Ibid*, 214.

⁵³ "donde se hacía todo lo que tiene dicho y declarado y haber muerto un negrillo ahogándolo por las narices." *Ibid*, 224.

⁵⁴ Henningsen, *Witches' Advocate*, 84, 87-88.

and was a witch and now she confesses
it....⁵⁵

Polonía, in the statement immediately following a declaration that other witches had forced her to join the junta, also responded to the question, “she did it of her own will, and not by the fear that she said they put upon her.”⁵⁶

In the final words of their confessions, all four of the convicted witches “petitioned for pardon and mercy and to be reincorporated into the union of the holy mother church and to be accepted for reconciliation.”⁵⁷ The court agreed “to use mercy... because justice [would have] demanded great penalty.”⁵⁸ All four of the African slave women from Zaragoza were sentenced to wear penitential garb, forever marking them as heretics. Leonor received a sentence of one year in jail, perhaps because she provided most of the accusations against the other witches, and the other three women were sentenced to “perpetual jail” in the Inquisition prison. The last news of them came in a letter from Mañozca to the Suprema, informing the office that he did not have funds to pay for their confinement and sustenance, and so he had transferred the four women to the convent of San Francisco, where they were to work in a hospital for the duration of their sentences.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ “Y a una repregunta que se le hizo, dijo que es verdad que de su voluntad hizo todo lo que tiene confesado y que el mucho miedo que han tenido y tiene ha sido causa de la poca estabilidad con que ha confesado y que la verdad es que con creencia e intención adoró al demonio y fue bruja y así lo confiesa ahora...” Spendianni, *Cincuenta Años*, 224.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁵⁹ “Apéndice 2,” Álvarez, *La Inquisición de Cartagena*, 316.

In this same letter, Mañozca informed the Suprema of the proliferation of the demonic sect among slaves in Zaragoza and other regions under his jurisdiction. He complained of the court’s limitations to address this proliferating apostasy. The trial notes had also referenced the court’s decision to halt trials of the mounting numbers of the accused, reporting, “none of these [defendants] accused anyone whom another had accused, and thus there is no argument, and they are the sole accusers against those named as accomplices, who are many.”⁶⁰ It is also likely that further trials were also limited because of Mañozca’s complaint: slaves had no funds of their own to finance the travel to the Holy Office or the prison accommodations in Cartagena, and neither the slave-masters nor the Inquisition itself were willing to underwrite the expenses.⁶¹ Left in a stalemate between the limited reach of the Inquisition and the proliferation of heresy and apostasy, Inquisitor Mañozca suggested a novel solution in his letter to the Suprema, that given the dearth of funds and the slaves’ impenetrable heresy, the Suprema should extend a general pardon for all the slaves, thus placing them outside the jurisdiction of the Inquisition courts.⁶²

The Suprema evidently denied Mañozca’s request. The trials of the slaves from Zaragoza were only the first of many more cases of witchcraft involving black or mixed-race

⁶⁰ “ninguna de éstas nombra a nadie de los que otra ha nombrado y así no hay contestación y son singulares contra los que nombran por cómplices que son muchos.” *Ibid.*, 224.

⁶¹ “Apéndice 2,” Álvarez, *La Inquisición de Cartagena*, 316.

⁶² Henry Charles Lea, *The Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies*, (New York : The Macmillan Company, 1922), 462-63.

defendants. And for some twenty years after this trial, witchcraft remained the predominant charge for which the Inquisition tried blacks, mostly slaves, in the jurisdiction of Cartagena.⁶³ The Tribunal tried most of these cases during the witch panics in the cities of Tolú and Cartagena, where defendants from these cities and surrounding areas, almost entirely black and mixed-race women, appeared before the court on charges of diabolical witchcraft.⁶⁴

Though the Inquisition Tribunal in Cartagena did not precipitate the perceptions and fears of “black witches,” it did give authority to popular apprehensions of the dangerous spiritual power of African peoples and their descendants. To the fears of witches as the causes of unnatural illness and death, the trials of witches by the Tribunal added the specter of the black diabolical witch. By ritually renouncing the Christian faith and declaring their allegiance to the devil, by dedicating their bodies for pleasurable feasts and illicit acts with the devil, and by murderously preying upon other slaves,

these witches sought to “harm and destroy” the welfare of the Spanish colony in the New World. Given the threatening power attributed to these four women in the letters by Inquisitor Mañozca, it is tempting to suggest that these slaves may have intentionally appropriated the persona of the witch and their allegiance to the devil as a strategy of resistance to Spanish slavery and imposed Christianity. Michael Taussig, in *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism*, cites the trial of the Zaragoza witches to support a similar claim: “ironically, through its very attempts at suppression, the Church indirectly validated devil worship and invested it with power. By acknowledging fear of the slaves’ spiritual powers, the credulous Spanish inadvertently delivered a powerful instrument to their bondsmen.”⁶⁵ However, closely examining the site of the production of witchcraft powers in the Inquisition court should temper interpretations of slaves’ voluntary identification with the persona of the diabolical witch. The defendants in the witchcraft trials in Cartagena crafted their confessions by resisting both the accusations of witchcraft and the allegiance to the devil, finally confessing only because of the duress of the Inquisition court and the promise for alleviated sentences as penitents. Caught between the devil and the Inquisition, these defendants’ greatest act of resistance was to ensure their own self-preservation. At points, this required fabricating accusations against other defendants, and implicating friends or neighbours in the alleged demonic conspiracy. In spite of their reluctance to confess, and the inconsistent testimonies they produced, the Inquisitors and church officials around Cartagena repeatedly quoted the most lurid segments of their confessions to

⁶³ After 1640, more Blacks were tried on a lesser charges of *hechicería*, and throughout the period, many *negros* and *mulattos* were tried for blasphemy and renunciation of the faith. Spendianni, et. al., *Cincuenta Años*. Tomo IV. “Índice de Reos.”

⁶⁴ In Tolu, the ten defendants, all female, were *Negra* (6), *Mestiza* (2), *Mulatta* (1), and *Blanca* (1). In Cartagena, 24 defendants (23 females, 1 male) were *Negra* (14), *Mulatto/a* (9), and *Zambo* (1). Of the fifty-five cases of witchcraft tried before the Cartagena Tribunal during its first fifty years, there were thirty-one *Negros*, eighteen *Mulattos* (of mixed Black and White parentage) and one *Zambo* (of mixed Black and indigenous parentage). Merely three cases tried *Mestizos* (of mixed White and indigenous parentage), and only one of the suspects was *Blanco*. Forty-seven of these were women and eight were men. Statistics from Spendianni, et. al., *Cincuenta Años*. Tomo IV. “Índice de Reos.”

⁶⁵ Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 43.

substantiate the threat to the health and productivity of the Spanish colonial endeavor caused by the widespread witchcraft practices among black slaves.

The outcome of this trial did more than castigate four slave women as witches, it contributed to a discourse in which the practices of black peoples were encountered and understood as diabolical witchcraft. In taking this site seriously as a place of “encounter,” we must also attend to the sites of power that structure the discourses about black religiosity. In particular, it is important to attend to the ways in which the traditions of knowledge about African diasporic religions have been charted around residual axes of witchcraft practices.

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