

BODIES OF ENCOUNTER: HEALTH, ILLNESS AND DEATH IN THE EARLY
MODERN AFRICAN-SPANISH CARIBBEAN

By

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Para Margarita y Gustavo
und
Für Kathrin

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Archives

AGI Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain

AHN Archivo Historico Nacional de España, Madrid, Spain

AGN Archivo General de la Nacion de Colombia, Bogotá, Colombia

Citations

Exp. Expediente

Fol. Folio

Fols. Folios

n. número

r. ramo

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Early in 1666, four witnesses stepped into the Inquisition tribunal palace in Cartagena de Indias to testify in the case of a Black slave called Miguel Arará. These *Cartageneros* declared that Miguel applied “healing remedies to *good effect*.” During an inspection of Miguel’s belongings the inquisitors found “some little sticks and a little bag with herbs,” Miguel’s tools as a healer. He was a black slave born about 50 years before his trial in the kingdom of Ardra, West Africa. According to the record he was very *bozal*, very African. After being in the city for several years he was still foreign to Spanish mores and language and had to talk through two of the multiple interpreters Cartagena’s Jesuit College had for African languages. In his deposition Miguel said that “he gave people reed” to clean their teeth and for belly aches. In other cases he prepared some “concoctions” that provoked *camaras*, diarrhea. Miguel also declared that he had learned about the cures “naturally” without any diabolic help.¹

Miguel’s story provides us with a window into the complex processes that allowed early modern inhabitants of places like Cartagena de Indias to explain matters of the body through a blend of European, Indigenous, and African traditions and beliefs. Together with

¹ My emphasis. “Miguel de Casta Arara natural de los reinos de Arda, leñatero de oficio no dijo su edad, pareció tenerla de 50 años fue testificado por el año de 66 por 4 testigos los 3 formales y uno de oídas mujeres todas mayores de que había hecho diferentes sortilegios y divinizaciones dando remedio y aplicaba remedios de sanidad con buenos efectos...[during the inspection they found] unos palitos y una bolsita con yervecitas sin otra cosa...en 24 se nombraron 2 interpretes negros esclavos, juraron la fidelidad y secreto ...en 26 dijo que solía dar a algunas personas un palo de bejuco para limpiar los dientes otros para dolor de barriga y otros cociditos que provocan a cámara...dice que las divinizaciones que se le imputan las savia por causas naturales.” Archivo Histórico Nacional de España (hereafter AHN), Inquisición, 1023, Fols. 228r-229r. All translations are mine.

Salvador da Bahia, Cartagena became, culturally speaking, the largest African city in the New World during the seventeenth century. The normative character of West and West Central African culture in Caribbean locales like Cartagena made it possible for people of African origin to integrate their own beliefs around corporeality into the cultural fabric of Spanish American society. Like Miguel, they could live for decades in the city without learning Castilian or assimilating in meaningful ways to Catholic, Iberian ways of life.

My research examines early modern Spanish America, and more specifically the Spanish Caribbean from the vantage point of ideas and beliefs around corporeality and the natural world. This project started taking form around a more general question. What can we learn about the shaping of Latin American cultures and the creation of group and individual identities when we look at them in the light of practices and beliefs around the body? In the process of answering this question I have been paying attention not only to what we know scientifically about our bodies, or what scholastic physicians, enlightened writers, or gilded age and modern scientists wrote about them, but crucially to what contemporary lay people wrote and said about health, sickness, and death.

This dissertation explores African ideas and practices related to the body, health, illness, and death in the Spanish Caribbean from the late sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth century. I have chosen to work on the seventeenth century because of the seminal but understated place it had in the conformation and alignment of Atlantic World identities and cultures. It was also the time when Cartagena de Indias, the city at the center of this study, was most prominent in the trans-Atlantic commercial and cultural networks linking Africa, Asia, Europe, and the New World. Based on evidence from early modern West and West Central Africa and Spanish Caribbean locales, my work presents a novel approach to explore

the ways in which individuals around the circum-Caribbean and Iberian Atlantic thought about their bodies and the world surrounding them. My research demonstrates that a majority of the seventeenth-century Spanish Caribbean population regarded African rituals and healing practices on equivalent terms with European healing traditions. Early modern inhabitants of Spanish locales in the Caribbean did not treat African ideas and beliefs about the body, health, and death as retrograde or “uncivilized” superstitions, a view that would become normative in eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century Western narratives. In fact, they frequently turned to African and Afro-descendant healers and practices when illness and death struck.²

The picture of the early Atlantic World that emerges from the stories of Caribbean African and Afro-descendant healers is more complex and nuanced than traditional binary accounts of hegemony and confrontation.³ In places like Cartagena de Indias or La Habana, Africans and their descendants formed part of a large multicultural and cosmopolitan society and developed strategies to navigate it. African traditions around the body were, rather than

² For example, among many others, Carrie Guerphan Hargrave, *African Primitive Life As I Saw It in Sierra Leone, British West Africa* (Wilmington: Wilmington Printing Company, 1944); Frank H. Melland, *In Witch-Bound Africa, An Account of the Primitive Kaonde Tribe & Their Beliefs* (London: Seeley, Service & Co, 1923); Paul Erdmann Isert and Selena Axelrod Winsnes, *Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade: Paul Erdmann Isert's Journey to Guinea and the Caribbean Islands in Columbia (1788)* (Legon, Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2007); or Joseph Corry, *Observations Upon the Windward Coast of Africa, the Religion, Character, Customs, &C., of the Natives; with a System Upon Which They May Be Civilised* (London : Printed for G. and W. Nicol, 1807).

³ For example of a survivalist approach of resistance see, among others, James Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Jason R. Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); Elisa Larkin Nascimento, *The Sorcery of Color: Identity, Race, and Gender in Brazil* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007); Adriana Maya Restrepo, *Brujería y reconstrucción de identidades entre los Africanos y sus descendientes en la Nueva Granada, Siglo XVII* (Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura, 2005); Adriana Maya Restrepo, “Botánica y medicina africanas en la Nueva Granada, siglo XVII” *Historia Crítica*, 19 (1999): 3-23; Margaret Olsen, *Slavery and Salvation in Colonial Cartagena de Indias* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004); Arturo Rodríguez-Bobb, *Multiculturalismo y jerarquización racial: las interminables transgresiones, Memorias de la diáspora Africana ; las huellas de la emigración transatlántica: la esclavitud y las relaciones asimétricas de la igualdad en Cartagena de Indias (Colombia) ; la historia contada a los escolares-- estudios Caribeños, transnacionales e interdisciplinarios* (Frankfurt am Main/New York, 2008); or

abstruse and peripheral, an essential part of the imagination of bodies, health, illness, and death espoused by the early modern inhabitants of the Spanish Colonies in the Caribbean. They were not only instruments of resistance and cultural survival but also of integration, sharing, and adaptation. Africans and Afro-descendants in the New World were less interested in the maintenance of a pristine cultural heritage than in the pragmatic concerns of surviving and advancing their lot in a threatening, yet fluid society.

This project endeavors to call attention to the power of African beliefs as explanatory models for early-modern perceptions about the body. One of the arguments driving my work is that in Spanish and Portuguese port-cities in the New World, Africans, Europeans, and their descendants developed a common conceptualization of the nature of their bodies, and of the origins of health, illness, and death. A shared understanding of nature, health, and disease as based on supernatural, religious, and metaphysical concepts fueled this process. Such a novel multicultural system was malleable, incorporative, and extremely effective. Cartagena de Indias, the main slave entrepôt of Spanish America during the seventeenth century, is exemplary of how health practices functioned as a uniquely fluid and rich avenue for cultural exchange in Caribbean Spanish America. The events I canvass in this project hint at some of the strategies and instruments used by varieties of people in the Spanish Caribbean to imagine the world around them.

This dissertation involves research in several understudied fields. It contributes to Latin American and Atlantic World history using an interdisciplinary approach that privileges an Africanist point of view. It fills several voids that have left African mores unexamined in the historiography of cultural formation in early modern Colonial Spanish America. It draws on history, material culture, and ethnographic anthropological work.

Furthermore, my dissertation breaks ground by foregrounding African systems of belief and practices as seminal in the emergence of early modern ideas around the body and health. It also challenges prevailing assumptions regarding the place occupied by Africans and Europeans in processes of cultural interchange in the New World. It speaks to historians of medicine and re-conceptualizes what it meant to be sick and healthy in the early modern world. Finally, it speaks to scholars working on African history and archeology and offers novel approaches for the recreation of cultural and social structures in the West and West-central parts of this continent.

Scientific Eurocentric interpretative frameworks have located Africans and their culture as others in time and space, as primitive.⁴ My work rejects this perspective and shows how early modern African and European traditions shared an ontological conception of health and disease based on ideas of the body's equilibrium with itself and with the surrounding natural and supernatural world.⁵ Using resources related to the physical aspects of mundane life; one close to the pain, misery, and elation of bodily matters, my dissertation describes a world that departs in important ways from traditional models depicting Colonial Latin America. As Roger Chartier advanced, the idea of appropriation as dislocated from the lived experience, from specific practices and uses of cultural products, only helps in perpetuating misconceptions about what is "popular" and how it is cleaned and inserted into

⁴ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Michael De Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

⁵ See, for example, Linda Deer Richardson, "The Generation of Disease: Occult Causes and Diseases of the Total Substance," in *The Medical Renaissance of the Sixteenth Century* Andrew Wear, Roger K. French, and I. M. Lonie eds, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 175-94; Stuart Clark, "Demons and Disease: The Disenchantment of the Sick," in *Illness and Healing Alternatives in Western Europe*, eds. Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra, Hilary Marland, and Hans de Waardt (London: Routledge, 1997), 38-58; Also Mathew Ramsey in the same volume, Mathew Ramsey, "Magical Healing, Witchcraft and Elite Discourse in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century France," *Ibid.*, 14-38; or Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London: Simon Forman; Astrologer, Alchemist, and Physician* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005); also, A. Wear, *Health and Healing in Early Modern England: Studies in Social and Intellectual History* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998)

the hegemonic discourses of political and social elites. Instead, the recognition of groups such as early modern Africans as both active receptors, shapers and, most importantly, acculturating agents allows us to “concentrate on the concrete conditions and processes that construct meaning.” In doing so we are able to recognize “that minds are not disincarnated, and, unlike hermeneutics, that the categories which engender experiences and interpretations are historical discontinuous, and differentiated.”⁶

Instead of approaching structure as constraining and normative, I am thinking of it as an enabler, this is, as a “cultural grammar” that allows the emergence of new practices. This approach is particularly important in places like Cartagena where populations and cultures were in constant fluctuation.⁷ Thus, my analysis will look at how Europeans and Africans in Cartagena shaped their health practices and beliefs about the body using received categories and adapting them to novel practices, and how such recursive relations shaped new conceptualizations and modes of thinking about health and illness.⁸ As Marshall Sahlins sustains, culture is structured but also dynamically transformed in nuanced processes hidden from their enactors.⁹

Rather than being divided by ethnic barriers, Americans of all sorts created, and adopted multicultural ideas about the body, health practices, and health. The camouflage of such ideas, and their practice and performance in the religious realm was the norm rather

⁶ Roger Chartier, *Forms and Meanings: Texts, Performances, and Audiences from Codex to Computer* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 89; On the discursive take on “appropriation” that I am rejecting see, Michael Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), Vol 2, 227.

⁷ See, Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essay Towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1990); Also, Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1977).

⁸ As Stephen Palmié argues, this type of analysis entails the writing of history from a different perspective, one that does not involve “objectivist conceptions of historical representation as mere retrieval or correspondent theories of historical truth.” Stephen Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban modernity and Tradition* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 3.

⁹ See Marshall Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides. Understanding History and Vice Versa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

than the exception. Afro-Caribbean communities transported from Africa a rich world of ideas about the body, and observances around it, that were related to events like birth, healing, body hygiene, sexual practices, communitarian relationships, and death.¹⁰

Ideas about the body and corporeality are ideal avenues for the exploration of questions of identity and cultural appropriation. Intrinsicly linked with life's more pressing and pragmatic concerns, concepts related to the body are particularly telling of human's disheveled ways of engaging with the world. Decisions about death, disease, and pain had different, and more pressing, implications than those involving the qualities of angels, the orthodoxy, or lack of thereof of specific dances or dresses, or the adequacy of the recitation of a *Pater Noster*. The urgent matters of the flesh brought early modern humans to reckon with what they would be ultimately willing to do and accept, in spite of the multiple metaphysic entelechies appearing in contemporary religious discourses. They talked about the more pragmatic concerns of survival, adaptation and accommodation faced by those arriving, or being born, in the early modern New World.

We cannot define early modern religious and ritual activities, such as those enacted around the body, as established, unmovable, or insurmountable protocols. They were lived practices used specifically for engaging with the world.¹¹ Because of this, they were historically contingent actions that cannot be analyzed or defined outside specific contexts. Stories talking about immutable Congo-Angola, or Adja, beliefs are not only anachronistic but also patronizing. West and West Central African "core-beliefs" are still in use as comfortable categories of analysis for survivalist models and as the basis for political

¹⁰ See for instance Christopher C. Fennell, "Conjuring Boundaries: Inferring Past Identities from Religious Artifacts." *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 4 (2000): 281-313.

¹¹ This is, as argued by *interactionist* ethnographers, social organizations and forms emerge through "myriad complex and interrelated practices." Paul Atkinson, Sara Delamont, and William Housley. *Contours of Culture: Complex Ethnography and the Ethnography of Complexity* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2008), 208.

scholarly moves more based in contemporary struggles than in historical events. In this dissertation, I used them as “ongoing activities in people’s lives.”¹²

When talking about “cultural” process of “identity” we walk into a complicated terrain that has not only political but also epistemological implications that escape the limits of this work. “Identity” I constantly reminded my self while writing this dissertation, is a word with a specific history. One that has been marked by Western models of self-perception and particularly by the creation of the individual self.¹³ Because of this I will not be using, what I consider to be, inadequate and limiting terms such as “syncretism,” “creolization,” or “hybridization.”¹⁴ These expressions assume problematic categories of analysis maintaining that individuals held a unique and observable ideation about themselves. More problematically, they assume that humans in the early modern era, coming from vastly different places, worked under modern parameters for defining themselves as persons and human groups.

Medical Stories, Healing Histories

Overall, the history of medicine and of medical practices in Latin America remains a seriously understudied field. This is especially true for the early colonial period.¹⁵ Most of the scholars working on the history of medicine and science in Latin America have

¹² See, for recent examples, Linda M. Heywood, and John Kelly Thornton. *Africans and Catholics: The First Generation of African Americans in North America and the Caribbean, 1619-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); James Sweet, “Mistaken Identities? Oluadah Equiano, Domingos Álvares, and the Methodological Challenges of Studying the African Diaspora,” *The American Historical Review* 114 (2009): 279-306; Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill,: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); or Sweet, *Recreating Africa*.

¹³ See Raymond Martin, and John Barresi. *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self: An Intellectual History of Personal Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ These terms also have specific historiographical context that escape the limits of this introductory chapter.

¹⁵ In 1997 Shula Marks noted there were very few articles on the early colonial period in general and not a single study of the Americas or the Caribbean. Shula Marks, “What is Colonial about Colonial Medicine? and What Has Happened to Imperialism and Health?” *Social History of Medicine* 10(2) (1997): 205–219.

concentrated their efforts in studying the medical world and public health conditions of the region during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. These scholars have been interested in examining medicine and science as involved in processes of imperialism and the rise of nationalism and nation-states in the region. As such, these works have been heavily invested in the analysis of the hegemony of scientific medicine and draw heavily from Michael Foucault.¹⁶

Historian Sherry Field has worked on popular perceptions of disease in colonial Mexico. However, most scholars working on the history of medicine in Colonial Latin America have focused on the examination of the impact of Old World diseases in the Americas.¹⁷ A few like John Tate Lanning and Francisco Guerra have worked on medical practices focusing on the introduction and implementation of hospitals, and on the history of the Spanish Crown's regulatory medical board, the *protomedicato*.¹⁸ A handful of authors, mainly local physicians with an interest in the history of the subject, have produced compilations of the development of professional medicine in several Latin American countries. These works pay scarce, if any, attention to popular, indigenous, or African health

¹⁶ Diego Armus, ed. *Disease in the History of Modern Latin America: From Malaria to AIDS* (Durham: Duke University Press: 2003); Diego Armus, "Legados y tendencias en la historiografía sobre la enfermedad en América Latina moderna" in Jorge Márquez, Alvaro Casa and Victoria E. Estrada, eds. *Higienizar, medicar, gobernar: historia, medicina y sociedad en Colombia* (Medellín: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2004), 13–39; Jorge Márquez Valderrama and Víctor García García. *Poder y saber en la historia de la salud en Colombia* (Medellín: Ed. Lealon, 2006); Adriana María Alzate, *Sociedad y orden: reformas sanitarias borbónicas en la Nueva Granada 1760-1810* (Bogotá: Universidad del Rosario, 2007); Diana Obregón Torres, *Batallas contra la lepra: estado, medicina y ciencia en Colombia* (Medellín: Fondo Editorial Universidad EAFIT, 2002).

¹⁷ Sherry Fields, *Pestilence and Headcolds Encountering Illness in Colonial Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). For some examples of the latter see Noble. D. Cook and W. G. Lovell, eds. *Secret Judgments of God: Old World Disease in Colonial Spanish America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992); Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1972); Noble David. Cook, *Born to Die: Disease and New World Conquest, 1492-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁸ See for example, John T. Lanning, "The Royal Protomedicato: The Regulation of the Medical Professions in the Spanish Empire" ed. J. J. Te Paske (Durham: Duke University Press: 1985). Francisco Guerra, *El hospital en hispanoamérica y filipinas 1492–1898* (Madrid: Ministerio de Sanidad y Consumo, 1994).

practices.¹⁹ Steven Palmer, Martha Few and a few anthropologists like Michael Taussig, Sandra Orellana and Irene Silverblatt have picked up on the research on popular medicine.²⁰ However, except for Karol Weaver for late eighteenth century Haiti, none of them has worked on African health practices during the early modern period in the urban Caribbean.²¹

There is a relatively abundant literature, all written in Spanish, on peninsular Spain's early modern medical world and practice. The works of scholars like Luis Granjel, José María López Piñero, Francisco Guerra and Luis García Ballesteros, focus on institutional aspects of the history of medicine.²² Some of them, like Granjel, pay some attention to

¹⁹ See for example, Andres Soriano Lleras, *La medicina en el New Kingdom of Granada: durante la conquista y la colonia* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1966); Fernando Ocaranza, *Historia de la medicina en México* (México D.F: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1995); Ricardo Cruz-Coke Madrid, *Historia de la medicina chilena* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Andrés Bello, 1995).

²⁰ See for example, Steven Paul Palmer, *From Popular Medicine to Medical Populism: Doctors, Healers, and Public Power in Costa Rica, 1800-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Martha Few, *Women Who Live Evil Lives: Gender, Religion, and the Politics of Power in Colonial Guatemala* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002); David Sowell, *The Tale of Healer Miguel Perdomo Neira: Medicine, Ideologies, and Power in the Nineteenth-Century Andes* (Wilmington: SR Books, 2001); Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert eds. *Healing Cultures: Art and Religion As Curative Practices in the Caribbean and Its Diaspora* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Michel S. Laguerre, *Afro-Caribbean Folk Medicine* (South Hadley, Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey, 1987); Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *Medicina y magia: el proceso de aculturación en la estructura colonial* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1963); Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Michael T. Taussig, "Folk Healing and the Structure of Conquest in Southwest Colombia," *Journal of Latin American Lore* 6 No2 (1980): 217–278; Irene M. Silverblatt, "The Evolution of Witchcraft and the Meaning of Healing in Colonial Andean Society," *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 7 (1983): 413–425; Irene M. Silverblatt, *Modern Inquisitions: Peru and the Colonial Origins of the Civilized World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Joseph W. Bastien, *Healers of the Andes: Kallawayas Herbalists and their Medicinal Plants* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987); Sandra L. Orellana, *Indian Medicine in Highland Guatemala: The Pre-Hispanic and Colonial Periods* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano, *Aztec Medicine, Health and Nutrition* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 1990).

²¹ Weaver.

²² See for instance Luis Granjel, *La medicina española renacentista* (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 1980); Jose M. López Piñero, "Paracelsus and his Work in 16th and 17th century Spain," *Clio Medica* 8 (1973): 119–131; Jose M. López Piñero, *Ciencia y técnica en la sociedad española de los siglos XVI y XVII* (Barcelona: Labor Universitaria, 1973); Jose M. López Piñero, "The Medical Profession in 16th Century Spain," in *The Town and State Physician in Europe from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment*, ed. A. W. Russell (Wolfenbütteler: Wolfenbütteler Forschungen, Band 17, Herzog August Bibliothek, 1985), 85–98; Luis García-Ballesteros, "Academicism versus Empiricism in Practical Medicine in Sixteenth-Century Spain with regard to Morisco Practitioners," in *The Medical Renaissance of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. A. Wear, Roger. K. French and I. M. Lonie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 246–270; Luis García-Ballesteros, "The Inquisition and Minority Medical practitioners in Counter Reformation Spain: Judaizing and Morisco Practitioners, 1560–1610," in *Medicine and the Reformation*, ed. O. P. Grell and A. Cunningham (London: Routledge, 1993), 156–191.

popular medicine.²³ Yet, the analysis provided in such works is merely descriptive, and does not attempt to contextualize health practices into bigger cultural, religious and societal phenomena. In early modern Europe the majority of the population relied on medical care provided by hospitals run by the religious orders and on a range of popular healers.²⁴ Magic-religious beliefs were at the basis of such healing practices.²⁵

In the Spanish New World, scholars like Noemí Quezada in Mexico and Inés Sosadías, Diana Ceballos and Adriana Maya in Colombia have worked on inquisition records looking for traces of popular healing practices. However, these authors have narrowly looked at African religious practices through an analytic religious framework examining hegemonic imposition and resistance. These scholars have restricted their work to the examination of the status and societal role of African healers, portraying them as witches, warlocks, or shamans, rather than to the assessment of their health practices. Importantly, a contextualization of European, indigenous, and/or African medical practices in the bigger setting of Atlantic world culture and society is still missing. More problematically, Ceballos and Maya use nineteenth and twentieth century ethnographic works on Africans as the explanatory frameworks on which they explain Afro-descendant practices in the region.²⁶

²³ Granjel, *La Medicina Española*.

²⁴ See for instance Barbara S. Bowers, *The medieval hospital and medical practice* (Aldershot-Burlington: Ashgate, 2007); Roger K French, *Medicine before science: the rational and learned doctor from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Luis García-Ballesteros, *Medicine in a Multicultural Society: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Practitioners in the Spanish Kingdoms, 1222-1610* (Aldershot. Ashgate Variorum, 2001); Sally Scully, "Marriage or a Career? Witchcraft as an Alternative in Seventeenth-Century Venice," *Journal of Social History* 28 (1995): 857-76.

²⁵ See for instance Aguirre Beltran, *Medicina y Magia*, 24-26; Linda Newson and Susie Minchin, *From Capture to Sale: The Portuguese Slave Trade to Spanish South America in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Leiden-Boston: Koninklijke Brill, 2007), 235-266; Luis García Ballesteros, *Academicism vs Empiricism*, 251; Victoria Gutiérrez de Pineda, *Medicina tradicional* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1985), 23-25; Sergio Alberro, *Del gachupín al criollo o de cómo los españoles de México dejaron de serlo* (Mexico DF: El Colegio de Mexico, 1992), 121-125; Benjamin Flores Hernández. "Medicina de los conquistadores, en la Milicia Indiana de Bernardo de Vargas Machuca," *Boletín mexicano de historia y filosofía de la medicina* 6 No1 (2003): 5-10.

²⁶ For Mexico see, for instance, Noemí Quezada, "The Inquisition's Repression of Curanderos," in *Cultural Encounters: The Impact of the Inquisition in Spain and the New World*, eds. M. E. Perry and A. J. Cruz

Scholars working on African culture in colonial Latin America have treated the health practices of Afro-descendants as summary references related to witchcraft or religion. Furthermore, there has not been any methodical and thorough examination of available sources like inquisitorial records for evidence of the survival of medical practices. This existing historiography frames health practices exclusively in a pattern of cultural persistence and resistance, as part of an isolationist reaction to hegemonic culture and institutions.

A Eurocentric examination of medical practices has dominated the historiography of medicine and health practices in the New Kingdom of Granada. Scholars like Adolfo de Francisco Zea, Santiago Díaz Piedrahita, Paulette Silva Beauregard, and Antonio Martínez Zuláica have written, exclusively in Spanish, descriptive accounts of the life and work of European or Euro-descendant physicians that provide little contextualization to their health practices.²⁷ The historiography of medicine in the New Kingdom of Granada has almost completely bypassed the health practices of African and their descendants.

Except for David Lee Chandler, Linda Newson and Susi Minchin, no scholar has published in English about the health conditions of the thousands of Africans and their

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 37–57; Noemí Quezada, *Enfermedad y maleficio: el curandero en el México colonial*, (México DF: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2000); for Colombia see, Ines Sosadias, *El negro curandero en la Inquisición de Cartagena de Indias siglo XVII*. MA Thesis, Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá., 1981; Maya, *Reconstrucción*; Maya, *Botánica*. Also, among others Diana Luz Ceballos Gómez, "*Quyen tal haze que tal pague*": *sociedad y prácticas mágicas en el Nuevo Reino de Granada*. Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura, 2002.

²⁷ See for example, Adolfo de Francisco Zea, *Juan de Dios Carrasquilla, hombre de ciencia* (Bogotá: Academia Colombiana de Historia : Academia Nacional de Medicina, 2004); Jorge Márquez Valderrama, Alvaro Casas Orrego and Victoria Eugenia Estrada Orrego, eds. *Higienizar, medicar, gobernar: historia, medicina y sociedad en Colombia* (Medellín: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, DIME, Dirección de Investigaciones, 2004); Santiago Díaz Piedrahita and Luis Carlos Mantilla, *La terapéutica en el Nuevo Reino de Granada : un recetario franciscano del siglo XVIII* : (Bogotá: Academia Colombiana de Ciencias Exactas, Físicas y Naturales, 2002); Paulette Silva Beauregard, *De médicos, idilios y otras historias : relatos sentimentales y diagnósticos de fin de siglo (1880-1910)* (Bogotá: Convenio Andrés Bello, 2000); Javier Guerrero Barón *Medicina y salud en la historia de Colombia* (Bogotá: Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, 1997); Arturo Romero Beltrán, *Historia de la medicina colombiana : siglo XIX* (Medellín: Universidad de Antioquia, 1996); Antonio Martínez Zuláica, *La medicina del siglo XVIII en el New Kingdom of Granada: de Europa a América a través de filtro español; una gesta y un drama* (Tunja, Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, 1973); Fernando Sánchez Torres, *Sobre la medicina y los médicos* (Bogotá: Empresa Editorial, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1988).

descendants living in the New Kingdom of Granada. Historians have not investigated African culture and its influence on the health practices and concepts of the body in the Spanish colonial cities of the Caribbean. Chandler's work, mainly descriptive, is at its core an eloquent diagnosis of African slave diseases and health conditions from 1600-1810.²⁸ Similarly, geographer Linda Newson and her co-author Susie Minchin have worked on statistical analyses of African slaves' diet in Cartagena de Indias and have tangentially touched on the health conditions of slaves living in Cartagena.²⁹ The work of scholars such as Newson, Minchin, and Chandler is extremely informative. However, it does not contain discussions of particular medical or health practices and their relation to processes of cultural and societal transformation, the subject matter of my research.

My work is not interested in comparing the merits of African or African originated beliefs about the body, whatever this broad categorization might signify, to European medical or scientific ones. Here I will not be joining the discussion about the contested contribution of the encounter with the "exotic" in America to the rise of the scientific revolution or to the creation of conceptualizations about race.³⁰ Neither am I studying the

²⁸ David Chandler, *Health and Slavery: A Study of Health Conditions Among Negro Slaves in the Viceroyalty of New Granada and its Associated Slave Trade, 1600-1810*. PhD. Dissertation, Tulane University, New Orleans, 1972.

²⁹ See for instance Linda Newson, *Life and Death in Early Colonial Ecuador*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995); Linda Newson and Susie Munchin, *From Capture to Sale*; Linda Newson, "Cargazones de negros en Cartagena de Indias en el siglo XVII: Nutrición, salud y mortalidad," in *Cartagena de Indias en el siglo XVII*, eds. A. Mesiel and H. Calvo (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 2007), 206-47; Linda Newson and Susie Munchin, "Diets, Food Supplies and the African Slave Trade in Early Seventeenth-Century Spanish America," *The Americas*, 63 No 4 (2000): 517-50; Linda Newson, "Medical Practice in Early Colonial Spanish America: A Prospectus," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 25 No3 (2006): 367-91. Linda Newson and Susie Munchin, "Slave Mortality and African Origins: A view from Cartagena, Colombia in the Early Seventeenth Century," *Slavery and Abolition* 25 (2004): 18-43.

³⁰ See for some examples in Iberian America Antonio Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature: The Spanish American Empire and the Early Scientific Revolution* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006); Antonio Barrera-Osorio, "Empiricism in the Spanish Atlantic World," in James Delbourgo and Nicholas Dew. *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World*. (New York: Routledge, 2008). Also, Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra. *Nature, Empire, and Nation: Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); or Jorge Cañizares Esguerra, "New World, New Stars: Patriotic Astrology and the Invention of

small but important number of people of African origin joining the ranks of early modern surgeons, barber-surgeons, and even physicians, and the implications of this avenue for social mobility.³¹ This debate pays small attention to larger processes of cultural interactions that did not revolve around European networks of information.

Such literature remains fixated in old narratives of Western ascendancy. Iberian centered historiography of science has been, of late, invested in establish the meeting of Iberians with people and places in Africa and the Americas as the definitive moment in the change from scholastic to scientific traditions of learning. While based on artificial boundaries of what constitutes proper science, the efforts of scholars like Antonio Barrera and Jorge Cañizares Esguerra in incorporating Iberian contributions' to the history of science laudable as they de-center the scientific project from a Northern European centered historiography. At the same time they perpetuate traditional places of historical actors in the encounter of Europeans with natives from Africa, America and Asia. The dynamics of that encounter certainly went beyond a model that had natives only as provider of exotic and "new" substances and materials for the study, elucidation and profit of the West. These are certainly limited visions of how early modern people saw the world that disregard American, African and Asian millenarian traditions of studying the natural world and actively obscure their appropriation by "enlightened" Europeans.

Historians have paid little attention to, other than European, notions of corporeality during the early modern period. When they appear, non-"Western" traditions of the body do

Indian and Creole Bodies in Colonial Spanish America, 1600-1650." *The American Historical Review*. 104 (1999): 33-68.

³¹ See for example, Adam Warren, *Piety and Danger: Popular Ritual, Epidemics, and Medical Reforms in Lima, Peru, 1750-1860*. (Phd Dissertation University of California, San Diego, 2004); Carla B. Starling De Almeida, *Medicina mestiça: dabetes r práticas curativas nas minas setecentistas*. (PhD dissertation Universidade Federal De Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, 2008); Or, Mariza de Carvalho Soares, "African Barbers-Surgeons in Brazilian Slave Ports: A Case Study from Rio de Janeiro," Paper presented at the *Black Urban Atlantic Conference*, University of Texas at Austin, April 1-3, 2009.

so either as foils or as contributors to the larger rise of knowledge of the natural world.³² For all their weight in Latin American and Atlantic World historiography, ideas about the world and body based on Christian, Western medical or scientific traditions were only part of a wide spectrum of contemporary beliefs and concepts about the ways in which the world worked. For most of the early modern inhabitants of the Americas, explanations were far more fluid and eclectic than ecclesiastical authorities would have liked to believe. Priests, doctors, carpenters, peasants, and slaves ascribed a broadly different variety of meanings to what they saw and experienced.

The structures behind African, European, and Native-American systems of thought about corporeality and the natural world made approximate readings possible, understandable, and pragmatic. They also provided fertile ground for the sharing and appropriation of rites, ideas, and material culture, which proved to be highly effective. Culture is, as famously advanced by Clifford Geertz and Marshall Sahlins, universally adaptive.³³ The ability to transmute, borrow, share and transmit rites and beliefs, marked the way in which people in Spanish America made sense of health, illness, dying, and death.

My work investigates what the large majority of early modern people in the Spanish Caribbean thought of the world around them. Because I have, by choice, paid minimal attention to “learned” discourses about corporeality, my story does challenges and in many cases contradicts what historians of medicine have written on seventeenth century ideas about health disease and death.

³² See, among others, for instance, Timothy D. Walker, *Doctors, Folk Medicine and the Inquisition: The Repression of Magical Healing in Portugal During the Enlightenment* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); or Benjamin Schmidt, “Imperfect Chaos: Tropical Medicine and Exotic Natural History c. 1700” in Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham. *Medicine and Religion in Enlightenment Europe* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007), 145-72.

³³ Sahlins; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

Early-Modern African Identities

In examining health practices as influenced by African religion and culture, my work enters a larger historiographical discussion about African cultures intermingling, penetration, and re-imagination in the Atlantic World. The discussion about African cultural survival and identity formation in the Americas is still, fueling a robust debate. My project joins the recent efforts of scholars like John Miller, Peter Mark, Jane Landers, Stuart Schwartz and James Sweet who have been working in redefining what it meant to be African and Afro-descendant in the Atlantic World.³⁴ As James Sweet explains, for early modern Africans, as for other

³⁴ I am particularly engaging with the work of Miller, Landers, Mark, Schwartz and Sweet. See, for example, Joseph C. Miller, "Retention, Reinvention, and Remembering: Restoring Identities Through Enslavement in Africa and Under Slavery in Brazil," In *Enslaving Connections: Changing Cultures of Africa and Brazil During the Era of Slavery*, ed. José C. Curto and Paul E. Lovejoy (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2004), 81-121; Joseph Miller, "Beyond Blacks, Bondage, and Blame: Why a Multicentric World History Needs Africa," in *Recent Themes in the History of Africa and the Atlantic World: Historians in Conversation*, ed. Donald A. Yerxa, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 10; Jane Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Peter Mark, "*Portuguese*" Style and Luso-African Identity: *Precolonial Senegambia, Sixteenth-Nineteenth Centuries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Stuart Schwartz ed. *Implicit Understanding: Observing, reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Stuart B. Schwartz, *Tropical Babels: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Sweet, *Recreating Africa*; Sweet, *Mistaken Identities*. For examples of scholarship on this topic see John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic world, 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 18; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Culture on the Edges: Creolization in the Plantation Context," *Plantation Society in the Americas* 5(1998): 8–28; Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); or John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Also, Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Wyatt MacGaffey, "Dialogues of the Deaf : Europeans on the Atlantic Coast of Africa" in *Implicit Understanding: Observing, reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Stuart Schwartz (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 249-67; de Carvalho Soares, *Devotos*; Philip Morgan, and David Richardson, "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History: Reassessing the African Contribution to Rice Cultivation in the Americas," *The American Historical Review* 112 (2007): 1329–1358. Walter Hawthorne recently answered to Morgan and Richardson's idea that Africans had a limited impact in the implementation of rice cultivation techniques in the Americas, he walks away from "Black" and "White" rices in favor of a "Brown" rice. See, Walter Hawthorne, "From "Black Rice" to "Brown": Rethinking the History of Rice Culture in the Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Atlantic," *The American Historical Review* 115 No 1 (2010): 151-

early modern people, “identity was malleable; at the same time an individual’s experiences informed present understandings. The cultures of Africa “survived” even as Africans embraced new ideas.”³⁵

There is to date no solid framework for the analysis of African’s identity formation and creation for Africans in the early modern Atlantic.³⁶ The models, dialogues, and discussions that have dominated the literature are based on eighteenth and nineteenth century descriptions of the African diaspora.³⁷ These narratives are mostly inadequate for evaluating the history of Africans living in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As Joseph Miller says Africans “affiliated themselves with consummate flexibility with others around them: ‘I am, because I *belong*’; or ‘I am because we are.’” According to Miller, on that philosophical basis, identity is relative, a fluid social and contextual sensibility and Africans worked out multiple identities to seek success through flexible strategies of accumulating connections, of constructing social contexts rather than taking them as a given.³⁸

In examining the influence of African religion and culture on New World health practices my work enters a larger historiographical discussion about definitions of African in

163; see also, Judith A Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

³⁵ Sweet, *Mistaken Identities*, 280.

³⁶ See Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (Chicago: Pluto, 1997), 37. Also, Sweet, *Mistaken*; Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*; Douglas B. Chambers, “‘My Own Nation’: Igbo Exiles in the Diaspora,” *Slavery and Abolition* 18 (1997): 72–97; David Northrup, “Igbo and Myth Igbo: Culture and Ethnicity in the Atlantic World,” *Slavery and Abolition* 21 (2000): 1–20; and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

³⁷ See, amongst others, Vincent Brown, *The Reaper’s Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 7–8; J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). Sweet, *Mistaken*; Gomez, *Exchanging*; De Carvalho Soares, *Devotos*.

³⁸ Miller, “Beyond Blacks,” 10.

the Atlantic World.³⁹ Foregrounding the problems of the debate is the fact that we still do not count with standardizing terms to talk about the people that came to the New World during the slave trade era.⁴⁰ The terms we use are the product of European slave traders labeling. This has created a cacophony of words to describe groups of people. For instance, Africans from around the Calabar river, modern Nigeria, were labeled as *Carabi*, *Carabalís*, *Caraualis*, *Ibo*, *Igbo*, *Calauar*, and even, in Brazil, *Minas*, another term with a further complicated history as it was used for Africans natives from places ranging from the Gold Coast to the Bight of Biafra.⁴¹ Not only this, but European the labels referred only to the place in which traders bought a particular group of slaves. This is, Africans being sold in the port of Ardra were not necessarily Ararás, and could come from slave raids or commerce happening hundreds of miles away.⁴²

³⁹ For some recent works see, Peter Mark, *Portuguese*; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas*; Philip D. Morgan, "The Cultural Implications of the Atlantic Slave Trade: African Regional Origins, American Destinations and New World Developments," *SA* 18:1 (1997): 122-45.

⁴⁰ See, for instance, Stephan Palmie and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall. "Slave Cultures and the Cultures of Slavery". *The American Historical Review* (1997) 102, no. 3: 782; and the introduction to Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities*.

⁴¹ See for instance, Robin Law, "Ethnicities of Enslaved Africans in the Diaspora: On the Meanings of 'Mina' (Again)," *History in Africa* 32 (2005): 247-67; or Philip D. Morgan, "Africa and the Atlantic C. 1450 to C.1820," in Jack P. Greene, *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 238.

⁴² For some examples of this discussion see Morgan, "The Cultural Implications ;" Northrup, "Igbo and Myth Igbo;" Mariza de Carvalho Soares, "A 'nação' que se tem e a 'terra' de onde se vem: categorias de inserção social de africanos no Império português, século XVIII," *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos* 26 (2004): 303-30; Mariza de Carvalho Soares, "From Gbe to Yoruba: Ethnic Changes within the Mina Nation in Rio de Janeiro," in *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, eds. Toyin Falola and Matt Childs (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 246-62; Peter Caron, "'Of a nation which the others do not Understand': Bambara Slaves and African Ethnicity in Colonial Louisiana," *Slavery and Abolition* 18 (1997): 98-121; Donald R. Wright, "'What Do You Mean There Were No Tribes in Africa?': Thoughts on Boundaries and Related Matters in Precolonial Africa," *History in Africa* 26 (1999): 409-26; Robin Law, "Ethnicity and the Slave Trade: 'Lucumi' and 'Nago' as Ethnonyms in West Africa." *History in Africa* 24 (1997): 205-219; David Pavy, "The Provenience of Colombian Negroes." *Journal of Negro History* 52 (January 1967): 35-58; Stephan Bühnen, "Ethnic Origins of Peruvian Slaves (1548-1650): Figures for Upper Guinea," *Paideuma* 39 (1993): 57-110. Alejandro de la Fuente García, "Denominaciones Étnicas De Los Esclavos Introducidos En Cuba, Siglos XVI y XVII," *Anales del Caribe, Centro de Estudios del Caribe* 6 (1986): 75-96; Mariza de Carvalho Soares, "Mina, Angola E Guiné: Nomes d'África No Rio de Janeiro Setecentista," *Tempo* 3 (1998): 73-93; Jean-Pierre Tardieu. "Origines Des Esclaves de la Région de Lima, Au Pérou, Aux Xvie E Xviie Siècles," in *La Chaîne et le lien: une vision de la traite négrière (Actes du Colloque de Ouidah)*, dir. Doudou Diene (Paris: UNESCO, 1998).

In addition, the size of the slave trade, the amount of people transported, and their characteristics differ enormously from the situation in the nineteenth century.⁴³ The two hundred years elapsed since the first arrival of African slaves to the Americas until the explosion of the trade later in the seventeenth century saw a seismic change in the structure of African societies. Extended and prolonged contact with Westerners, as well as the slow but certain growth of slave trading, and the creation of the slave factory model that would be in vogue later during the eighteenth century modeled and shaped interactions, identities, and loyalties in both West and West Central Africa as in the Americas.

Many works have examined the self-grouping of African slaves under ethnic categories in the New World. This scholarship has walked away from models of “creolization” on favor of a survivalist ideation maintaining that “Africans arrived in culturally coherent groups that could maintain direct ties to the African past.”⁴⁴ However, such “creolization” of Africans has to be seen under an Atlantic, and not only American lens. In the end, the model is problematic because any recognition of the malleability of culture has to recognize that we do not have any definable “coherent” West or West-Central African groups to begin with. Africans have been involved in vigorous practices of cultural interchange for centuries before the arrival of Portuguese sailors.⁴⁵

The small number of Africans arriving to the New World during the long seventeenth century, compared to the large numbers of the nineteenth century, structured societies made out of people with different necessities and cultural interactions than those of places like

⁴³ See David Eltis and Martin Halbert slave trade voyage database at <http://www.slavevoyages.org>.

⁴⁴ Sweet, *Mistaken Identities*, 280

⁴⁵ See especially, Jean-Loup Amselle, *Logiques métisses: anthropologie de l'identité en Afrique et ailleurs* (Paris: Payot, 1990); also, Martin Klein, “Ethnic pluralism and homogeneity in the Western Sudan: Saalum, Segu, Wasulu,” *Mande Studies* 1 (1999): 109-124; Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 6-7; Lovejoy, *Transformations*, 24-45; Hawthorne, *Planting*, 8-9.

nineteenth century Salvador de Bahia.⁴⁶ Still, the main difference between both groups was the strikingly different social orders on which they landed. The first generation of “charters” landed in a place to be built, and which societal structures were fluid and in the making. They were crucial in the conformation of societal structures and cultural spaces defining the place that Africans would come to inhabit in the following centuries. While, evidently, such structures and culture did not remain impervious to social, economic and cultural changes and contacts. They established a basis from where later developments departed.⁴⁷ Africans coming later in the eighteenth and nineteenth century arrived in a place already modeled in significant ways by successive waves of fellow forced immigrants. They came to European colonies in the Americas that were already highly structured places.

As Sidney Mintz and Richard Price argued, in the New World, enslaved Africans forged communities based on common cosmological and cultural assumptions, while creating innovative strategies for their expression.⁴⁸ Directly linked with religious ideas, health practices and objects can be particularly useful to evaluate the recreation and re-imagination of African culture in Spanish colonial cities. In the New World, both ritualistic symbols, religious practices and objects, as the use of the everyday materiality, became essential in the transmission of African religious and cultural values and meanings.⁴⁹ This became clearly apparent in the Caribbean islands and coasts.

I look at the Caribbean from an African perspective.⁵⁰ The *Caribe* became a distinctively African place, where African traditions became central to the development of

⁴⁶ See Matory; or Pierre Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres: entre le golfe de Bénin et Bahia de Todos os Santos du XVIIe au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Mouton, 1968).

⁴⁷ See, more famously, Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*.

⁴⁸ See for instance Sidney W. Mintz, and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture*, 6-7, 21.

⁴⁹ See Christopher C. Fennel, “Group Identity, Individual Creativity, and Symbolic Generation in a BaKongo Diaspora,” *International Journal of Historical Archeology* 7 No 1 (2003):2.

⁵⁰ See Paul E. Lovejoy, “Identifying Slave Africans ;” Heywood and Thornton 2007; Lovejoy 1983; Miller 2004.

cultural and social structures.⁵¹ Moreover, as hubs of European power in the Americas, Caribbean locales were particularly open during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, boasting a cosmopolitanism that has been lost in traditional stories of Spanish and Portuguese backwardness.⁵² I aim to unsettle what we think are West or West-Central African “groups” and their culture.

The records I examine here are particularly good at providing African and people of African origins self-ascribing labels. Because, for the most part, they come from inquisitorial records, they contain rare transcriptions of African’s own avowal of origin. Unlike British, French or Dutch registers, scribes in Spanish and Portuguese courts were bounded by law to write as accurately as possible, the declarant’s deposition. Obviously, such declarations were sometimes done under stringent circumstances of coercion. Problematic also is the fact that Africans sometimes had an interest in ascribing their origins to particular ethno-linguistic groups, as James Sweet has shown.⁵³ Yet, as Jane Landers says, the scenario in which Africans made these declarations make them more credible than if they would come from a governmental office.⁵⁴ They were making assertions about who they were in front of representatives of one of the most important institutions of the Colonial order, one that because of its religious significance would have acquired a resonance and hierarchy in the minds of West and West-Central Africans that secular institutions lacked. As we will see in Chapter II, the African groups coming to the Americas in the seventeenth century held religious and political institutions to be closely related. For them, religious power was

⁵¹ See Alejandro de la Fuente, *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008)

⁵² See Schwartz, *All Can Be Saved Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

⁵³ Sweet, *Mistaken*.

⁵⁴ See Jane Landers, “African-American Women and Their Pursuit of Rights through Eighteenth-Century Spanish Texts,” in Anne Goodwyn Jones and Susan V. Donaldson, *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997), 56-76.

decisive in political, economical and legal matters. Whether they declared to be Congo or Ardra had, for all that we know, little implication in their treatment by the inquisition. However, even in Africa, Africans identities were fluid and instable. Instead of striving to maintain an identity paradigm, Africans were open to adopt and exchange cultural mores, particularly in matters of the body. This situation was exacerbated by the slave trade and in the Americas West and West-Central Africans became promiscuous cultural providers and receivers.

The evidence I present in my dissertation, shows that Africans did not ascribe or hold to strongly marked “identities” in the Spanish Caribbean. The lion’s share of the scholarship on the African diaspora, and on slavery, has tirelessly looked for connections and searched for the continuities and establishment of “identities.” However, the parameters within which early-modern people, and particularly Africans, constructed such self-ascribed perceptions of the individual and their communities before the rise of the nation-state were substantially different. The same can be said about their fluidity and mutability. Because of this, the concept of identity leads to the murky realms of ill-defined ethnical, or ethno-linguistic groups, terms that as Miller says became nothing less than euphemisms for the colonialist “tribe.” Identity categories that are exclusively the product of colonial European eyes’ labeling.⁵⁵

The African Caribe

This dissertation also emphasizes the Caribbean nature of Cartagena, a place that had been frequently lumped together with places like Santa Fe de Bogotá into an Andean centered historiography. Colombian historians like Alejandro Múnera have seen Cartagena,

⁵⁵ Ibid., 9.

and its role more in relation to the world of the Audiencia's, and later Viceregal, capital Santa Fe, than to a Caribbean world to which Cartagena was much closer both in geographic and cultural terms.⁵⁶ This project also works on a redefinition of the limits of "imperial domination." Instead of continuing to think about the territories in the northern shore of the South American continent as parts of an imperial realm, my research asks for a re-mapping of such boundaries. Although figuring prominently in Eurocentric maps and archives, and being the seat of such corporative entities as the Inquisition, a bishopric and a military garrison, the city and its province functioned more than anything as a large African settlement.

During the early seventeenth century, for example, the population of African descent reached between 12,000 and 20,000 in Cartagena. These Africans and Afro-descendants, coming from West and West Central Africa, made more than three quarters of Cartagena's population.⁵⁷ In early modern Spanish America, the Crown's territorial control was limited, in practical terms, to specific urban spaces. Yet, my argument does not only refer to military or bureaucratic control and organization of society. In cultural terms, Spaniards claims of control are, at best, doubtful. Cartagena's Black neighborhood Getsemaní, for instance, was at the core of what Europeans saw as the administrative center for the South Caribbean and Northern South America. Cartagena was the most important port city in the region and one critical part of Spanish imperial economic and military systems. Getsemaní, nevertheless,

⁵⁶ See for example, Alfonso Múnera, *El fracaso de la nación: región, clase y raza en el Caribe colombiano (1717-1821)* (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1998); or Jorge Conde Calderón, *Espacio, sociedad y conflictos en la provincia de Cartagena, 1740-1815* (Barranquilla: Fondo de Publicaciones de la Universidad del Atlántico, 1999).

⁵⁷ This according to Fray Luis de Chimillas, see, Ángel Valtierra, *El santo que libertó una raza: San Pedro Claver S.J., esclavo de los esclavos negros, su vida y su época, 1580-1654* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1954), 271; Nicolás del Castillo Mathieu, *La llave de las Indias* (Bogotá: Ediciones El Tiempo, 1981), 239; and to Governor García Giron, Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain, (hereafter AGI), Santa Fe, 38, R. 6, n.176.

operated under clearly non-Iberian, cultural parameters. Available evidence suggests that Getsemaní was more than anything else an African place.

Following Stuart Schwartz and Henry Kamen's work on Iberians' pragmatic acceptance of "other's" beliefs, including protestants, Jews and Muslims, my research shows how Cartagena de Indias, was not one of the paradigmatic counter-reformation Spanish cities of the period.⁵⁸ Their inhabitants did not only live under the rigidly hierarchical and racially divided society and culture dominated by Spanish Crown officials, clergy, Inquisitors, and *principales* [the "most important" residents of the city]. I argue that such accounts are, at least, incomplete. To be sure, seventeenth-century Cartagena's records show how Spanish Caribbean cities were much more fluid and heterogeneous. They were filled by sounds, flavors and smells from all corners of the then known world. These cities were not founded on the basis of large Indigenous societies, nor were they isolated borderlands in the fringes of Spain's colonial project. My analysis thus, departs from well-established models for the interpretation of Latin American history that have privileged Iberian and pre-Columbian indigenous civilizations as vantage points for the examination of culture and rituals in Iberian America. Instead, it shows how the Africanness of the Spanish Caribbean as well as its cosmopolitanism created a particularly fluid socio-cultural milieu in which Spanish traditions

⁵⁸ See Schwartz, *All can be Saved*. Henry Kamen does not go as far as to call Iberian territories places of tolerance. He prefers to use the term "places of dissent." See, Henry Kamen, "Toleration and Dissent in Sixteenth-Century Spain: The Alternative Tradition," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 19 (1988): 3-23. Kristen Block's work on Protestants in the Caribbean portrays the *Caribe* as a "frontier." While I do not agree that the Caribbean can be conceptualized as a borderland, I agree with her idea of a very different and fluid place. This was an isolated place in the workings of the Spanish empire like Chile, or the northern frontier of Mexico in what today is the United States west, but was the neural point of the military and economic activity of the Spanish Crown, and other European powers in the region. See, Kristen Block, "Faith and Fortune: Religious Identity and the Politics of Profit in the Seventeenth-Century Caribbean" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers, 2007), 37-41, 68, 112.

and beliefs, although pervasive, were not dominant. This was particularly true in the realm of religious traditions and health practices.⁵⁹

Cartagena's folk came from all over Europe, Africa, the Americas, and even Asia. In the city lived, among others, Germans, Dutchmen, Britons, Portuguese, Cubans, Mexicans, Peruvians, Swedes, Danes, Frenchmen, and people from Morocco, the Philippines, Argelia and even Constantinople. The city was unlike places like Mexico City, or Lima and it lacked the large Amerindian populations on which Spaniards built the viceroalties of Peru and Mexico. Instead this Caribbean local and Havana, were prominently African places where Africans and their descendants from all around the Atlantic world, free, freed and enslaved, made, more than three quarters of the population. In the Spanish Caribbean people of African origin were not only laborers in the lower echelons of society but owned property, were innkeepers and rented out rooms for sailors and visitors. As in Rio de Janeiro and Salvador da Bahia, they belonged to military and social organizations which functioned in very different terms than the racialized constructs of plantation societies.

A world of inns, sailors, prostitutes, bars and restaurants flourished in the urban Spanish Caribbean. Cartagena was also a place where people came to be healed. The crown and religious orders ran hospitals, and a legion of healers of all origins tended to the needs of residents, sailors, pirates and passengers. People of African origin participated actively in this service economy, as innkeepers, healers, food providers, surgeons, sexual workers and in many other occupations. They were the heart of Cartagena's, and as Alejandro de la Fuente

⁵⁹ Specifically for the New Kingdom of Granada, for instance, Aline Helg observed that "historians have often neglected the Afro-Colombian experience except in relation to colonial slavery." Aline Helg, *Liberty & Equality in the Caribbean Colombia, 1770-1835* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004),13

and David Wheat, have shown, Havana's, economic activity.⁶⁰ The place was, in the words of Church officials, run by heathens.

In Cartagena Africans, Muslims, Jews, and Protestants from Northern Europe freely expressed their opinions on matters of faith challenging Catholic dogma. In particular, in the Spanish Caribbean Africans did not have to enact their traditions in the shadows of mainstream customs. West and West-Central African culture *were the norm*. Because of its visibility and vitality, African culture mutated and morphed in ways that while *recreated* particular mores, also forced their *re-imagination*. Africans and their descendants strived to incorporate pragmatic strategies of living and healing learned from the multiple cultures that arrived to the New World.

According to most of the existent literature on African religiosity in the Spanish Americas, Africans and their descendants even while marginalized, attempted to integrate with corporative structures in Catholic societies.⁶¹ This position presents Catholic and European mores as the *de facto tenets* of Colonial Spanish societies, and argues that African cultures were only, if so, reenacted in isolated rural locales, or in Maroon settlements. In this light, they became diluted in the process of cultural deprivation involved in slavery, or through the disfranchisement brought upon by family disruption and societal marginalization.

⁶⁰ David Wheat, "The Afro-Portuguese Maritime World and the Foundations of Spanish Caribbean Society, 1570-1640" (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 2009); De la Fuente, *Havana*.

⁶¹ See for example, Herman Bennett, *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Olsen, *Slavery and Salvation*; Hélène Vignaux, *Esclavage et rébellion : la construction sociale des Noirs et des Mulâtres : Nouvelle Grenade, XVIIe siècle*, (Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry III, 2007). Joan Bristol, *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches: Afro-Mexican Ritual Practices in the Seventeenth Century* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008); Nicole von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers: Confraternities and Social Mobility for Afro Mexicans* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006); Ben Vinson, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

When freed, according to such narratives, slaves' only avenue for social advancement in urban spaces was acculturation and renouncement to African language, food, and religious and social customs African Christianization was, thus, inevitable. My research shows that this narrative is lacking. For example, one of Cartagena's bishops, Diego de Torres wrote back to Spain about the Blacks living in Cartagena's province, specially those in the "haciendas" located in the outskirts of the city. The Catholic prelate said that Cartagena's African neighborhood was close to being a Sodom. The place was full of "scandalous" customs. He went further and said of the Blacks slaves laboring in the "haciendas" that they had not receive indoctrination and never attended mass.⁶² The situation was the same all around the city and its province. I have found that, at least in certain parts of Spanish America, like Cartagena, Africans like Miguel Arará did not necessarily became *ladinos* (acculturated) even after decades of living in the urban environments of Caracas, Habana, or Cartagena. Even when African Cartageneros declared themselves to be "*christianos viejos y gentiles*" [old gentile, Christians], and after having lived for decades in the city, they could fail in their examination of the most basic elements of their supposed new faith like crossing themselves, or reciting an *Ave Maria*. Moreover, my evidence shows that in Cartagena, or Havana, Africans did not need to learn Spanish to work as midwives, peddlers, carpenters, or healers during their entire lives.

The record suggests that in the type of urban spaces I examine here, the community of speakers of African languages was large enough for *bozales* [unacculturated Africans] to function in these societies and carry out not only elemental functions of survival, but also elaborated and sophisticated societal and ritualistic procedures, with their original linguistic tools. The historiography of indigenous creolization, or European encounter with Native

⁶² AGI, Santa Fé 228, n.78; Wheat, 141.

Americans and their cosmogonies, does little for the framing of the type of societies and cultures I describe here. Likewise, analytical models based on neatly defined *casta* systems, or others that use extrapolations of hybridity and cultural transfer appear misplaced to engage with the dynamic and schizoid characteristics of cultural formation of the seventeenth century Spanish Caribbean.⁶³

Because of this, such studies have considered Africans and their descendants as worthy of analysis only as separate groups creating cultures and societies that remained isolated from the “main” developments in the Spanish domains in the New World. The cultural and social structures that emerged in Spanish port cities like La Habana, Veracruz, Portobelo and Cartagena, and in Portuguese places like Salvador and Rio de Janeiro, substantially differed from those in inland cities and settlements of the Spanish empire.⁶⁴ Similarly, the situation in port cities was in stark contrast with the socio-cultural realm of the world of plantations and mines in the rest of the Atlantic World.

⁶³ For some recent examples see: María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza De Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Stuart Schwartz, “Colonial identities and the sociedad de castas,” *Colonial Latin American Review*. 4, 1995: 185-201; Carlos López Beltrán, “Hippocratic Bodies. Temperament and Castas in Spanish America (1570-1820)” *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*. 8:2, (2007): 253-289; Juan Manuel de la Serna, *Pautas de convivencia étnica en la América Latina colonial: (indios, negros, mulatos, pardos y esclavos)* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2005); Ilona Katzew, *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Verena Martínez –Alier, *Marriage, Class and Color in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974); or Elizabeth Cunin, *Identidades a flor de piel: lo “negro” entre apariencias y pertenencias: categorías raciales y mestizaje en Cartagena (Colombia)* (Bogotá : Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia, 2003). Robert Douglas Cope challenges the usefulness of *casta* categories later in eighteenth century México. See his classic study, Robert Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial México City, 1660-1720* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

⁶⁴ Scholars like Herman Bennett and Laura Lewis for Mexico City, and James Lockhart and Frederick Bowser for Lima, have shown that Africans and Afro-descendants were a significant part of the population in the the Spanish empire’s Viceroyal capitals. However, in such places, they formed a minority of the population when compared to Indigenous and Europeans. See for instance Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico*; Laura A. Lewis, *Hall of mirrors: Power, Witchcraft, and Caste in Colonial Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); James Lockhart, *Spanish Peru*; Frederick P. Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru*.

The literature on the African Diaspora has been defined by constrained circumstances of the plantation or the mine, or in maroon settlements.⁶⁵ Although certainly important, such work fails to acknowledge the seminally different world shaped by Africans and Afro-descendants in the Spanish Caribbean cities. My work, therefore, will also contribute to de-center a Latin American and Atlantic World historiography governed by the stories of plantations and mines, both in the “North” and the “South” Atlantic.

Complementing what scholars like Mariza Soares, Adriana Maya, James Sweet and Vincent Brown, amongst others, have argued, I advance in my research that rituals were not only points for differentiation and struggle. Europeans, Africans and their descendants looked for social advancement and integration and were tremendously successful and resourceful in achieving such objectives. African societal norms and structures shaped Spanish Caribbean port cities’ societies.

Sources

For evidence, I draw on a wide range of under-utilized—and in some cases, previously unknown—source materials held in the Archivo General de la Nación de Colombia, Bogotá, Colombia; the Archivo Histórico Nacional de España, Madrid, Spain; the Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain; the Archivo Histórico Municipal de Cartagena, Cartagena, Colombia; the Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid, Spain; the Biblioteca

⁶⁵ Among others, see for instance Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*; Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (London and New York: Verso, 1997); Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Seymour Drescher, *From Slavery to Freedom: Comparative Studies in the Rise and Fall of Atlantic Slavery* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999); Philip D. Morgan, “The Cultural Implications;” Robert L. Paquette, *Sugar is Made With Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict Between Empires over Slavery in Cuba* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1998); Manuel Moreno Fraginals, *El ingenio: complejo económico social cubano del azúcar* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978); Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onís (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995 [1940]).

Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá, Colombia; the Archivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisbon, Portugal; the Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon, Portugal; The John Carter Brown Library, Providence, Rhode Island as well as in several other university libraries in the United States and Spain.

The unique presence of African culture was central to the history of the Caribbean. This dissertation recognizes the problems of many of the sources with which we have to deal to try and reconstruct the lives of Africans in the early modern Atlantic world, but also, takes a pragmatic approach to these documents. With all their problems these materials, as I show in the following chapters, can be extremely rich and productive in giving us clues about the type of culture and lives lived by African and their descendants in the New World.

My evidence is based largely in Inquisition records. Besides the “*Procesos de Fe*,” and other accounts of Inquisition trials, I also use censuses, inventories, correspondence, and accountant notes of the Holy Office among others. Other types of documents I use are notarial records, diaries, European accounts of African life in the seventeenth century, governmental and civil correspondence, hospital, medical and surgical records and treatises. Throughout the whole dissertation I use a modernized paleographical transcription of the documents. All translations are mine unless noted otherwise.

Because of the type of accounts and topics treated in this dissertation it is worth discussing in brief some of the characteristics of the Inquisitorial records making a large part of my dissertation’s empirical evidence. As I show in Chapter one, Cartagena’s Inquisition office was preoccupied with what became socially “*Publico y Notorio*,” [Public and noticeable]. The Holy Office did not succeed in exerting a strict control of what, by all accounts, was a society functioning under parameters far apart from those held by Catholic

and Iberian orthodoxy. In addition, people of African origin rarely became the object of attention of an Inquisition more preoccupied with the lot of Protestants and Jews coming from all corners of Europe, and specially Portugal, to settle in the city. Even those Protestants and Jews, thought, were fortunate to be under the vigilance Inquisition that, compared to European offices, was characterized for its leeway. Partially responsible for this, “open” atmosphere was the fact that foreigners, of all origins were in charge of a large segment of the economy in the city and had the transatlantic contacts necessary for maintaining the city’s economy. Cartagena’s Inquisition records evidence the openness of a city in which inhabitants, by and large, came from non-Catholic, non-Iberian cultures. Particularly telling is the fact that Africans who represented almost eighty percent of Cartagena’s population, appear in only ten percent of the cases brought in front of the Inquisition.

When they ended up in the Inquisition palace, witnesses, and defendants entered a realm dominated by the terms of European *demonology*.⁶⁶ Cartagena’s Holy Office, even thought it was not very efficient in finding out about sins against the Holy Mother church, did hold all the tools of a proper Inquisitorial delegation, including torture chambers, which were frequently put into use. Not surprisingly, this environment encouraged declarants that were already in the hands of the Inquisitors to give explanations intended to please their ears. Africans and Afro-descendants understood that the best way to survive their sojourn within the inquisitorial realm; the famously brutal inquisition jail in Cartagena’s *plaza mayor* was to reaffirm the world view of their interrogators. All this being said, and while some stories are clearly suspect, most of the rites Africans said they practiced defied being boxed within the limits of European demonology. Juxtaposed with the catalog of the demoniac as defined by

⁶⁶ See, for example, Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

Catholic doctrine, these accounts appeared uncanny. So much so that Cartagena's Inquisitors frequently had trouble labeling them. Most of the time, for instance, Inquisitors accused African ritual specialists, of being *sortilegos* [sorcerers] and not *brujos* [witches], who were necessarily involved with the devil. Africans and Afro-descendants, at least during their first deposition, told inquisitors what they did or saw with remarkable candor. During the process, normally taking up several years, defendants adjusted their testimonies to Inquisition demonological standards as they became more knowledgeable about their judges' expectation. This is why when describing African's and Afro-descendant's practices and beliefs I use, for the most, the initial declarations of witnesses and defendants rather than those appearing later in the process.⁶⁷

These unadulterated declarations provide fascinating first-hand accounts. They put us in close contact, as no other source from the period can, with what African and Afro-descendants were thinking and doing. The openness with which the protagonists of these stories talked about their rites and beliefs further confirms the un-characteristically open environment in which they lived. For if Africans and their descendants would have lived in the repressive and brutal regime portrayed by so many inquisitorial stories, they would in all likelihood have already been prepared to obfuscate stories of their practices at the very beginning of their trials. Africans would have been ready to modify their initial declarations and accommodate them to stories and ideas more understandable and less pernicious in the views of the Holy Office. For instance, they should have been more inclined to say that their

⁶⁷ Mary E. Perry recently proposed a through and through analytical framework to deal with Inquisitorial records. See, Mary Elizabeth Perry, "Finding Fatima, a Slave Woman of Early Modern Spain". *Journal of Women's History*. 20 (2008): 151-167. Scholars have been increasingly recognizing the importance of Inquisition records, with all of their problems, have in unearthing the stories of people who did not leave a written record. See, Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Inga Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and more recently, Schwartz, *All can be saved*.

ritual practices were nothing but attempts at deception, that they were not really religious or healing practices but only tricks for making quick money, a matter of limited interest for the Inquisition. The available evidence tells us that most of the Africans and Europeans witnessing, practicing, or using African practices neither believed that such was the case nor did they use this type of defense in most of their initial declarations to the inquisition.

Outline

This dissertation's first chapter, "*Un Emporio de Naciones: Cartagena de Indias and the Early Modern Spanish Caribbean*" investigates the place of Cartagena de Indias in the early modern Atlantic, defining this city's, and its province's, social and natural landscape. It describes health conditions, and demographic characteristics of the region and of the slave trade that shaped both. The main idea I advance here is that the heterodox nature of the Spanish Caribbean was defined by the central social and cultural role of Africans and Afro-descendants. Chapter Two, "*They Learned from Each Other: Corporeality and Death in Pre-colonial Africa*" uses primary sources from early-modern Africa to address the conceptualization of bodies and the natural world during the long seventeenth century in Africa. It proposes that far from being homogenous, static traditions, African customs were, as in all cultures, continuously and heavily shaped by interchanges with those from the rest of the Atlantic World. Chapter Three, "*Mohanes, Cirujanos y Brujos: African and Afro-descendant Health Practices and Practitioners in the Seventeenth-Century Spanish Caribbean*" explores African ideas about the body, health, illness, and death in the Spanish Caribbean. The evidence examined in this section argues for the centrality and ubiquity of African originated healing practices and practitioners in the early modern Spanish Caribbean.

It shows how African rituals and healing practices were accepted and understood on equivalent terms with European healing traditions by a majority of the seventeenth-century residents of places like Cartagena de Indias. Chapter Four, “*Otherworldly Colonizers: Death and the Dead in the Early Modern African Spanish Caribbean*” looks at the role African originated rituals and ideas about death and dying played in shaping early modern Spanish Caribbean culture and society. This chapter argues that rituals and beliefs around death and the dead were particularly effective, and necessary for the reaffirmation of African cosmogonies. It also shows how dead Africans were also instrumental in shaping the lived experience and belief systems of early modern Caribbean people. Chapter Five, “*The Africanization of the Early-Modern Caribbean*” looks at the African and heterodox nature of the early modern Spanish Caribbean. It emphasizes the role African traditions had in the development of ideas about the natural and the supernatural world in places like Cartagena de Indias and demonstrates how African beliefs and customs were central and normative to the development of Spanish Caribbean's culture and society. Let us walk into that world.

CHAPTER II

“UN EMPORIO DE NACIONES:” MULTICULTURALISM AND HETERODOXY IN EARLY MODERN CARTAGENA DE INDIAS

*Es una ciudad muy calurosa, los esclavos negros van casi
desnudos, hay gran escasez de agua dulce y gran
cantidad de moscas y mosquitos y el aire es poco propicio
para la salud...hay oro y plata. Pero la mercancía más en
uso es la de esclavos negros...*

Carlos de la Orta, 1618

On June 10, 1626, one day before the celebration of *Corpus Christi*, the “*Galeones de su Majestad*” arrived in Cartagena’s harbor. In addition to their cargo of commercial goods, and African slaves, the vessels brought with them an essential element for the *Auto de Fé* that would be celebrated in Cartagena later that month. The ships’ sails would become tents to protect the most important Cartageneros from the blazing Caribbean sun during the affair.¹

It was in such mighty heat that the chief sergeant of the city paraded the streets with the Inquisition banner the day before the *Auto de Fé*,² The admiral of the galleon fleet Fernando de Sosa, the *principales de la ciudad*, and assorted clergy from all denominations accompanied the sergeant as he planted the banner in the middle of the *plaza mayor*, while a

¹ Archivo Histórico Nacional de España, (hereafter AHN), Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 256r. According to a 1666 description of Cartagena’s climate conditions, Cartagena was a place of “excessive heat in relationship to all that are inhabited in this Indies.” A continuous breeze made things tolerable from December to March every year. Still, while it was “scorching all year long, being always damaging...during the resting eight months the sun does not work as a sun but as fire.” José Fernández, *Apostólica y penitente vida de el V.P. Pedro Claver de la Compañía de Jesús: sacada principalmente de informaciones jurídicas hechas ante el Ordinario de la ciudad de Cartagena de Indias : a su religiosísima Provincia de el Nuevo Reyno de Granada* (Zaragoza: Por Diego Dormer, 1666), 102.

² The first *Auto de Fé* celebrated in Cartagena occurred in 1613. A similarly detailed description is available. The inquisitors during that first *Auto de Fé* were Don Pedro Mase de Salcedo and Don Juan de Mayorca. See AHN, Inquisición, 1008, 125r-130v

battery of gunners fired several rounds of cannon salvos.³ The next day, at around six in the morning, the *Auto de Fé* procession departed from the Inquisition buildings. The cortege marched to the tune of the *misere mei deus* sung by the accompanying priests and nuns.⁴

Leading the procession was the cavalry, with Admiral Fernando de Sosa carrying the Inquisition standard. After them came two priests carrying the Cathedral's cross on their shoulders. Following the cross came more clergy led by the sub-prior of the Dominican convent who carried the sentences in an inkstand made of turtle carapace and silver. Walking by his side were the inquisition secretaries. After more priests, *principales* and soldiers marched the twenty two penitents. Some of them had been born in Cartagena, but most had arrived to the city from places in Europe, the Caribbean, Peru, and Africa. Every condemned person walked between two Cartageneros *principales*. Closing the procession, with a statue of Jesus Christ closely following him, was Juan Vicente. Vicente was seeing the last of Cartagena, and of this world. He was to be *relajado*, burned at the stake, at the end of the celebration that night.⁵

When imagined in the light of Auto de Fe descriptions, early modern Cartagena de Indias appears as the paradigmatic counter-reformation Spanish city. A rigidly hierarchical and racially divided society and culture dominated by Spanish Crown officials, clergy, Inquisitors, and *principales*. However, such accounts are, at least, incomplete. Indeed,

³ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fols.256v-257r.

⁴ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 257v It is improbable that the choir would have been signing the famous version of Psalm 51 by Italian composer Gregorio Allegri (1582–1652). Most likely, the priests were chanting a Falsobordone version of the psalm. The Falsobordone was a style of recitation found in religious music from the 15th to the 18th centuries. The Psalm begins: “*Miserere mei, Deus: secundum magnam misericordiam tuam. Et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum, dele iniquitatem meam. Amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea: et a peccato meo munda me.*” [Have mercy upon me, O God, after Thy great goodness: according to the multitude . Thy mercies do away mine offences. Wash me throughly from my wickedness: and cleanse me from my sin.]. See, Murray C Bradshaw, *The Falsobordone: a study in Renaissance and Baroque Music* (Rome : Publications of the American Institute of Musicology, 1978).

⁵ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fols.257r-257v.

seventeenth-century Cartagena's records show that this port city was much more fluid and heterogeneous. The city was filled by sounds, flavors and smells from all corners of the then known world. People and cultures from Africa, as well as from Asia and Europe converged with a small population of Native Americans in seventeenth century Cartagena.

Cartagena's blackness and cosmopolitanism created a particularly fluid socio-cultural milieu in which Spanish traditions and beliefs, although pervasive, were not completely dominant. This was particularly true in the realm of religious traditions and health practices. This chapter will introduce a place that challenges in seminal ways traditional descriptions of Colonial Latin America. Cartagena was far from being unique.⁶ Seventeenth century Habana, Santo Domingo, San Juan, Veracruz, Caracas, and Buenos Aires, for example, were equally diverse.

“La Llave de Indias”

The procession led by Admiral De Sosa went around the city passing by the different convents, churches and cathedrals of the city center and stopped in the “most important plazas and corners” to announce the *Auto de Fé*.⁷ It must have been a long journey for the penitents to finally arrive to the scenario of the *Auto de Fé* staged in the *Plaza Mayor*. Indeed, during the seventeenth century, Cartagena de Indias was far bigger than any city in North America, and larger than most cities in Europe and the rest of the New World. This cosmopolitan, polyglot place was the main slave entrepôt of the Spanish Colonies in South

⁶ Cartagena and Havana were not the backwater stopovers traditionally depicted in surveys of the region. See, for instance, James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz, *Early Latin America: A History of Colonial Spanish America and Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 65, 76, 178.

⁷ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 263r.

America and received far more African captives than any other port in the Americas until the eighteenth century.

Established in 1533, Cartagena de Indias grew to become one of the most important trade centers in the New World. Rather than being “refueling stopovers” and “isolated huts only coming to life with the arrival of the fleet,” as described in traditional histories of the period, they were central locales to the workings of the Spanish empire in America.⁸ Together with la Habana, it was called, one of “the two greatest ports of Christendom.”⁹ They were centers of trade, profanation, and human encounters. Cartagena’s relevance in the Atlantic context was heightened by the establishment of the Inquisition Office in 1610. The founding of the Holy Office, located in a sumptuous palace in the “plaza mayor” was heisted by the feverish political climate of the Counter-Reformation, European politics and Spain’s interest in the preservation of religious-political frontiers.

Early modern Cartagena was raucous, festive, drunk and promiscuous. Also, and because of its position as the port of entry for all the slave trade coming into South America, the ubiquity of smugglers in its territory, and the related development of a prosperous merchant class, Cartagena became very rich. During most of its early history it was a town to which adventurers came to make their fortune. To be sure, gambling was, along with dances

⁸ See, David Wheat, *The Afro-Portuguese Maritime World and the Foundations of Spanish Caribbean Society, 1570-1640*, Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt, 2009. 3. Historians making this remarks are, among others, Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 30-31; Frederick P. Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524-1650* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 53, 63; Gordon Douglas Inglis, “Historical Demography of Colonial Cuba, 1492-1780,” Ph.D. dissertation (Texas Christian University, 1979), 57; Murdo J. McLeod, “Spain and America: The Atlantic Trade, 1492-1700,” in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), I: 352-53; Sidney W. Mintz and Sally Price (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 129; J. H. Parry, *The Spanish Seaborne Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 129-34; Kenneth F. Kiple and Brian T. Higgins, “Yellow Fever and the Africanization of the Caribbean,” in *Disease and Demography in the Americas*, eds. John W. Verano and Douglas H. Ubelaker (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992).

⁹ Leví Marrero, *Cuba: Economía y sociedad*, (Río Piedras: Editorial San Juan, 1972-1992), II: 147-48, citing Archivo General de Indias (hereafter AGI)-Contratación 5101 (Admiral Cristóbal de Eraso). See also Wheat, 3.

that lasted the entire night and knife fights one of the preferred pastimes. Yet Cartagena was also a place of immense contrasts.¹⁰

Cartagena de Indias is located on the Caribbean coast of what then was the New Kingdom of Granada, modern Colombia. The city had around 20,000 inhabitants in 1607, and 30,000 by the late 1630s.¹¹ Table 2.1 depicts the population of the most important cities of the Northern New Kingdom of Granada coming from a 1653 report from Cartagena's Inquisition to Madrid.¹² Most of Cartagena's residents came from places outside the Iberian Peninsula. Most of them, as we will see, were African. The rest came from all over Europe and Asia. As Jesuit priest Carlos de Orta wrote to his father in 1618, "regarding foreigners, no other city in America has so many as this one. It is a trading center [with people from]

¹⁰ For general works on Cartagena see, for instance, Alonso J. Solano, *Salud, cultura y sociedad en Cartagena de Indias, siglos XVI y XVII* (Bogotá: Universidad del Atlántico, 1998); Antonino Vidal Ortega, *Cartagena de Indias y la región histórica del Caribe, 1580-1640* (Sevilla: C. S. I. C. Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, Universidad de Sevilla, Diputación de Sevilla, 2002); María del Carmen Borrego Plá, *Cartagena de Indias en el siglo XVI* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, C.S.I.C., 1983); René Soulodre-La France and Paul E. Lovejoy, "Intercambios transatlánticos, sociedad esclavista e inquisición en la Cartagena del siglo XVII," in *Afrodescendientes en las Américas: Trayectorias sociales e identitarias*, eds. Claudia Mosquera (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2002); Alfonso Munera, *El Fracaso de la Nación, Región, clase y raza en el Caribe colombiano (1717-1810)* (Bogotá: Banco de la República-El Ancora Editores, 1998); and Jorge Palacios Preciado, *La trata de negros por Cartagena de Indias* (Tunja: Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, 1973), among others.

¹¹ This is according to the Priest Antonio Vasquez de Espinosa, who lived in Cartagena from 1608 to 1622 and to Alonso de Sandoval, a Jesuit priest living in Cartagena during the first half of the seventeenth century. Antonio Vázquez de Espinosa, *Compendio y descripción de las Indias occidentales* (Madrid: Atlas, 1969), 219-22; and Alonso de Sandoval, *Instauranda aethiopum salute; el mundo de la esclavitud negra en América* [Sevilla, 1627], ed Angel Valtierra (Bogotá, Empresa Nacional de Publicaciones, 1956), 346. This last book is a literal transcription of the 1647 version of Sandoval's work, Alonso de Sandoval, *De instauranda Aethiopum salute. Historia de Aethiopia, naturaleza, policia sagrada y profana, costumbres, ritos y cathecismo evangelico de todos los Aethiopes con que se restaura la salud de sus almas. Dividida en dos tomos: ilustrados de nuevo en esta segunda impresión con cosas curiosas y Índice muy copioso por el P. Alonso de Sandoval, de la Compañía de Jesús, natural de Toledo* (Madrid: A. de Paredes, 1647). All future references are taken from the 1956 version. In 1653 the Inquisition in Cartagena sent a census of all the cities in the Caribbean. In it it says that Cartagena "Tiene de ochocientos a mil vecinos" [It has from eight hundred to one thousand vecinos]. This means that, together with the slave population the city had around 21,000 inhabitants (see table 2.1). AHN, Inquisición 1014, 403r.

¹² To my knowledge this is the earliest existent estimate of populations in the region and has not been described or published before.

almost all nations.”¹³ To be sure, during the seventeenth century Cartagena de Indias was the foremost international city in the Americas. Cartagena’s position as the gateway for the riches of the Spanish colonies in South America, and its main slave trading center during the sixteenth and seventeenth century made it a particularly vibrant and colorful place, a place that had a strong African flavor.

For all the Europeans living in the city, Cartagena was, conspicuously, an African place. The city was unlike places like Mexico City, or Lima and it lacked the large Amerindian populations on which Spaniards built the Viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru. After decades of forced work and epidemics the remaining native Americans lived in a region broadly described as *Tierra Adentro*, [the interior land].¹⁴ For instance, in 1602 Cartagena’s governor answered to officials in Madrid who worried that Portuguese Jews might “contaminate” the native population with prohibited religious ideas that there was “not a single house of Indians” in the city of Cartagena. Moreover, Governor Guazo insisted, the few existent Indians in his territory were “all in the interior and the closest Indian *pueblo* is six leagues away.” He added that the inhabitants of the city rarely dealt with natives due to “the land’s roughness, the trail’s discomforts, and other reasons.”¹⁵

¹³ In 1618 the Jesuit priest Carlos de la Orta wrote to his father. Quoted in Juan Manuel Pacheco, *Los Jesuitas en Colombia* (Bogotá: Editorial San Juan Eudes, 1959), 91.

¹⁴ The decimation of the Native population in the Caribbean and Northern New Kingdom of Granada far exceeded that of Mexico and Peru. Several studies have argued this. See, among others, Noble David Cook, *Born to Die: Disease and New World Conquest, 1492-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Linda A. Newson, “The Demographic Impact of Colonization,” in *The Cambridge Economic History of Latin America*, 1: 143-184, eds. Victor Bulmer-Thomas, John H. Coatsworth and Roberto Cortés Conde. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. I: 143-84; and Stanley L. Engerman, “A Population History of the Caribbean,” in *A Population History of North America*, eds. Michael R. Haines and Richard H. Steckel (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 483-528.

¹⁵ AGI-Santa Fé, 38, R.2, n.55, Gobernador de Cartagena don Jerónimo de Zuazo a S. M., Cartagena, 1 agosto 1603; Vidal Ortega, *Cartagena de Indias*, 78-79. See Also, Wheat, 32.

Table 2.1 Northern New Kingdom of Granada’s Population in the 1650s

Source: AHN, Inquisición, 1014, 402-414r.

City	Population in Vecinos	Total Free Population Estimate (1:5) ¹⁶	Estimate Population of People of African or Indian Origin (1:15) ¹⁷	Total Estimate
Cartagena	800-1000	5000	15000	21000
Villa de Tolu	60	300	900	1260
Mompox	200	1000	3000	4200
Simiti	12	60	180	252
Santa Fe De Antioquia	100?	500	1500	2100
Zaragoza	50	250	750	1050
Aguamoco	12	60	180	252
Caceres	50	250	750	1050
Merida	400	2000	6000	8400
Gibraltar	150	750	2250	3150
Santa Marta	60	300	900	1260
Rio de la Hacha	50	250	750	1050

Because of its prominent place in the “Carrera de Indias,” the Spanish galleon fleet’s journey through the Caribbean, Cartagena, had a large African and African-descendant population. Blacks of all origins, from West and West Central Africa, as well as from Europe, the Atlantic Islands and all over the Caribbean, formed the large majority of

¹⁶ This is a contentious point. I have decided to use the 1:5 ratio, the most common coefficient used for seventeenth century Spain and Spanish America. Different researchers have used estimates ranging from 4-5. On the limitations of using the term *vecino* for population calculation see, for instance, María del Carmen Mena García, *La sociedad de Panamá en el siglo XVI* (Seville: Diputación Provincial de Sevilla, 1984), 30-36; Alejandro de la Fuente, “Población y crecimiento en Cuba (siglos XVI y XVII): un estudio regional,” *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 55 (1993): 62-63; Julián Amadeo *Bancos, ingenios y esclavos en la época colonial* (Santo Domingo: Banco de Reservas de la República Dominicana, 1997), 184-85.

¹⁷ Based on the reported population for slaves in Cartagena at the time, 15,000 to 20,000, I have calculated a ratio of 15 dwellers of non-european origin for each *vecino*. Cartagena’s governor Garcí Girón de Loaya, reported that the city and its province contained more than 20,000 black slaves in 1622. AGI, Santa Fé 38, Fol.176. See also Wheat, 133, Borrego Plá, *Cartagena*. Earlier estimates can be found in Richard Konezke, *Colección de Documentos para la Historia de la Formación Social de Hispanoamérica, 1493-1810* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1958), vol. II, tomo 1: 179-80 (doc. 117), R.C. al gobernador de Cartagena que informe sobre la falta que se ha entendido tienen los negros de aquella ciudad de quien les administre los sacramentos, San Lorenzo, 10 septiembre 1611 (AGI, Santa Fé, 991, Libro 1, fol. 211v.); del Castillo Mathieu, *La llave de las Indias*, 238. AGI-Santa Fé, 228, n.41, Obispo Fray Juan de Ladrada a S.M., Cartagena, 24 junio 1607. Drake said, after attacking the city that already by 1583 there were 4,000 blacks in the city. AGI-Santa Fé 37, R.7, n.145. For testimony of Drake’s assault given by Agustín [Martín], “captain of the free blacks and mulattoes,” see Irene A. Wright, trans. and ed., *Further English Voyages to Spanish America, 1583-1594: Documents from the Archives of the Indies at Seville Illustrating English Voyages to the Caribbean, the Spanish Main, Florida, and Virginia* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1951), 127-29.

Cartagena's standing population. Cartagena's humanity would swell periodically with the arrival of slave carrying ships.

Following the disembarking of the slaves, and for a period that lasted from a few days to two weeks, the *negreros* paraded their human cargo through the streets of Cartagena. Like the *Auto de Fé*, this was a humiliating, yet, for the onlookers, festive, procession that congregated towncriers, soldiers, drunken onlookers and festooned donkeys.¹⁸ Slave traders publicly auctioned and sold African slaves in the plazas of Cartagena. After being sold, usually in a matter of a few weeks, most of the slaves were forcibly transported to places like Portobelo on the Isthmus of Panama, on their way to Callao and Lima. From there slaves could be shipped further south to the silver mines of Peru. Slave traders also sent African slaves inland via the Magdalena and Cauca rivers to the gold mines of Remedios, Zaragoza, Santa Fe de Antioquia, and Chocó in modern day Colombia. Thus, most of the Africans arriving in Cartagena left the city within weeks. However, Cartagena's Europeans, and their descendants, people not very inclined to manual or menial labor of any sort, bought for their service a considerable number of the slaves passing through the *Llave de las Indias* "key to the Indies," as contemporary Europeans called Cartagena.¹⁹

These slaves, as the rest of their counterparts in colonial Spanish America, had multiple if limited avenues for some social improvement, and, at least in theory, were protected against unjustified or extreme physical punishment. They also had some legal resources to gain manumission from their masters. Port cities like Cartagena offered conditions that facilitated, in the constraints of slavery, African cultural and social

¹⁸ See Nicolás del Castillo Mathieu, *La Llave de las Indias* (Bogotá: Ediciones El Tiempo, 1981), 47; Navarrete, 38; Maya, 211.

¹⁹ Contemporary writings also refer to Havana and Puerto Rico as "the Keys to Indies." However, it seems plausible that Cartagena, being a port of entry instead as one of departure as Havana, would have been the first in receiving the name. see Enriqueta Vila Vilar, *Historia de Puerto Rico, 1600-1650* (Seville: EEHA, 1974), 6.

mobility.²⁰ The life of Africans and Afro-descendants in urban spaces in early modern urban Spanish America differed not only from the existence of those of their counterparts in British, French or Dutch colonies in the New World, but also from the ones of slaves working on Spanish plantations or in mines. In cities like Cartagena, African slaves were in close physical proximity to their masters, living in the same houses, interacting and mediating in streets, public places, taverns, *pulperías* [grocery stores], public markets and cock fighting rings. Blacks were in the midst of the informational flow of the community and enjoyed a space of liberty and anonymity, impossible to find in the plantation or mine's settings. They were intimately integrated in the social life of the city.²¹ They interacted in, admittedly limited and structured ways, with European creoles in social gatherings and Cartagena's mythical bacchanalias, to the dismay of the evangelizing army sent to convert the Africans to Christianity.²²

Unlike Africans in British or French territories in the Americas, slaves in the Iberian realm could access freedom through different legal strategies and become *negros horros* [free Blacks].²³ Beginning with the Muslim occupation of Iberia during the Middle Ages, African

²⁰ See Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Alejandro de la Fuente, *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Carmen Bernand, *Negros esclavos y libres en las ciudades hispanoamericanas* (Madrid: Fundación Histórica Tavera: Fundación Hernando de Larramendi, 2001); Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Laura A. Lewis, *Hall of Mirrors: Power, Witchcraft, and Caste in Colonial Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); James Lockhart, *Spanish Peru, 1532-1560: A Colonial Society* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968); Frederick P. Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524-1650* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1974).

²¹ See, Bernard, 11; Rosalva Loreto López, *Perfiles habitacionales y condiciones ambientales: historia urbana de Latinoamérica, siglos XVII-XX* (Puebla: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, 2007); Linda Manzanilla and Claude Chapdelaine, *Domestic Life in Prehispanic Capitals: A Study of Specialization, Hierarchy, and Ethnicity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Museum of Anthropology, 2009); also Jay Kinsbruner, *The Colonial Spanish-American City: Urban Life in the Age of Atlantic Capitalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

²² For example, see Barnard 15; See also Jose Antonio Maravall, *La cultura del Barroco*, (Barcelona: Editorial Ariel, 1983), 257-258. See Soulodre-La France and Lovejoy, 195-211.

²³ As John Elliot argues, the characterization of the Spanish and English Atlantic worlds as isolated cultural and socio-economic realms has been driven by generalizations and biased stereotyping. Distinctive historical

slaves had been a common feature of Spanish cities. Because of this, a highly developed legal system was in place and affected in significant ways the treatment of African slaves in the colonies. Based on Alfonso el Sabio's thirteenth century "*Siete Partidas*," the Spanish legal system provided, under the horrific standards of slavery, a more humane treatment of slaves. Under this scheme, slaves had multiple avenues for social improvement, and, at least in theory, were protected against unjustified or extreme physical punishment.²⁴ The magnitude of the human traffic coming into places like Cartagena explains the concern on the part of the Spanish Crown on a tight regulation of what, for Europeans, was very precious merchandise.

In addition to a freed population, a free population started growing through natural reproduction in the city. Although there are no reliable data, it is sensible to presume that by the mid-seventeenth century a large proportion of the African and Afro-descendant population of Cartagena had been born free or gained freedom through manumission. They formed part of a social and cultural structure that differed in fundamental ways from that created by the chattel system of slavery familiar to scholars studying slavery in the British colonies.²⁵

circumstances marked and defined the development of Spanish and British enterprises. Hence, it would seem naïve to fall into explanations based on James Lang's all-encompassing model that stereotypes Spain's enterprise as "an empire of conquest" and the British one as "an empire of commerce." However, it is still possible to make some qualified assertions on main traits that differentiate the establishment of socio-cultural and economic systems in the Spanish and British Atlantic world. Such dissimilarities stemmed from Spanish and British different patterns of economic cycles, disease patterns, modes of production, cultural and legal structures, timing of arrival to the Americas, and European political alliances and rivalries. In addition, and most importantly, there were clear differences in the type of indigenous societal structures Spaniards and Britons faced when they arrived to the shores of the Western hemisphere. See John H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).244; James Lang, *Conquest and Commerce: Spain and England in the Americas* (New York: Academic Press, 1975).

²⁴ See, among others, Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (London-New York: Verso, 1997); Maravall; also Beceiro Pita and Ricardo Cordoba de la Llave, *Parentesco, poder y mentalidad. La nobleza castellana, siglos X-XII* (Madrid: Centro Superior Investigaciones Científicas, 1990).

²⁵ See, Wheat, 136.

Exemplary of, at least some, African and Afro-descendants conditions, are the inventories drawn up by inquisitors of the belongings of an Black slave woman before her trial. Paula de Eguiluz, the slave, wore “silk dresses” and adorned herself with gold artifacts and “other precious things.”²⁶ She used fashionable colorful dresses with silver inlays and other items made across the Atlantic in Roan, France and others from Holland.²⁷ Even after she was condemned by the inquisition, scandalized neighbors denounced what they considered her unwarranted luxuries for a penitent of the Holy office.²⁸ Even slaves had

²⁶ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp 10, Fol. 21r.

²⁷ Its worth to quote this inventory at length. Among her belongings Paula had “[U]na saya negra de gorgorán vieja, otra saya de perpetúan azul, con doce pasamanos amarillos. Otra saya de perpetúan colorado con cinco pasamanos de plata falsa. Otra saya de perpetúan verde mar con once pasamanos de seda . Otra saya de perpetúan verde oscuro apresillada de coro. otra saya de perpetúan leonado llana. Otra saya de perpetúan morado aforada en tafetán amarillo picada. Otra saya de damasco azul con once pasamanos de seda verde y blanca. Otra saya de raso amarillo picada con once guarniciones de plata finas. Un cuerpo de raso azul guarnecido con trencilla de oro ya usado. Otro cuerpo de mujer de damasco verde y colorado con sus botones de plata. Otro cuerpo de mujer de tela amarilla y Blanca guarnecida con trencilla de plata. Un fustán de Ruan bordado de pita ya Usado. Otro de hilo avisado ya usado. Otro fustán labrado de anis ya usado. Otro fustán de motilla blanca usada otro de ruan blanco llano con sus puntas abajo y a usado. Una camisa de Roan labrada de anirmangas y perso ya usada. Otra camisa de ruan labrada de pita mangas y perso ya usada.” [A black gogram-silk skirt; a blue wool skirt that had twelve yellow ribbons; a red wool skirt with five ribbons made out of false silver; another sea green wool skirt with eleven silk ribbons; other dark green wool skirt embroidered with gold; other tawny wool skirt; other purple wool skirt adorned with yellow taffeta; other blue damask skirt with eleven green and white silk ribbons; other yellow satin skirt with eleven edgings of fine silver; a dress of blue satin adorned with gold braids; other dress of green and red damask with silver buttons; other woman dress of white and yellow fabric adorned with silver trimmings; a ruan [linen from Rouen France] fustian embroidered with *pita* [thread made out of the *pita* plant] used; other made of *avisado* thread used; a fustian that had been worked with anis?; Other Fustian of white *motilla*? used; other of white ruan with its points down used; a ruan shirt worked of *anirmangas y perso*?; Other ruan shirt worked with *pita*, sleeves and *perso*.] She had many other shirts, five total, including one “de Holanda y una de ruan” [one from Holland and another one from Rouen, France]. Paula also had “cuatro fajas las dos de grana y dos blancas. Tres tocadores uno de pita y otro de lan y otro de anda labrado de seda. Una toca de lana con puntas blancas. Un cinto de San Agustín con buró de plata . un coquito engastado en plata con el dicho cinto de arriba. Un espero pequeño viejo. Dos almohadas viejas. La una con lana. Un colugon de lana y una sábana viejas y una fresada Blanca.” [four girdles. Tow of grain and other two whites. Three *tocadores* [clothes to cover her head], one made out of *pita* and other of wool, and other of *anda* made out of silk. A wool wimple with white tips. A San Agustín belt with silver buckle? A little *coconut* mounted in silver on the mentioned San Agustín belt. An small old mat. Two old pillows, one made out of wool. A wool sheet and other old sheet and a white *fresada* [mixture of butter, milk and flour]. AHN, Inquisición, 1620. Exp 7. Fol. 1032v-1033r.

²⁸ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 10. Fol. 37v.

access to commodities from all over the Atlantic; articles that up to now, historians have placed exclusively in the hands of European elites.²⁹

As David Wheat and Antonino Vidal Ortega have shown, people of African origin were not only laborers in the lower echelons of society but owned property, were inn-keepers and rented out rooms for sailors and visitors to Havana and Cartagena. Often they belonged to military and social organizations which functioned in very different terms than the racialized constructs of plantation societies.³⁰ Physician Juan Méndez Nieto, living in Cartagena during the late sixteenth and first decades of the seventeenth century wrote in the 1611 that some of the city visitors “do not have a certain place to stay, but rather they go and stay it in the house of *mulatas*.”³¹ During his layover in Cartagena on his way to Spain, according to Méndez Nieto, the scribe of the viceroy of Peru also lodged in “houses of *mulatas*.”³² A similar situation was characteristic of the hospitality service sector of the places like Havana, Caracas or Portobelo.³³

As in the rest of the early modern world, Cartageneros of African origin owned property and traded with slaves of all origins.³⁴ Race, as we think of it today, did not exist at the time. Instead, a complex hierarchical system shaped by social networking, ideas about *hidalgía* [nobility], religion, occupation, and wealth, determined Spanish Americans social

²⁹ Alejandro de la Fuente also discusses how in Havana it was common to find merchandise from Rouen, the French city famous for its textiles. The Ruan, shirts and skirts that we find in Paula de Eguiluz inventory had been, most probably, made in France. However, it is plausible, as De la Fuente points out, that they were made out of French fabrics in the new world. or imitating such fabrics. De la Fuente, *Havana*, 32-33. For the most Africans have been treated only as commodities themselves. See, for example, Robin Blackburn’s classic, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800*. (London: Verso, 1997), 302, 403, 448.

³⁰ Vidal Ortega, 246, 259, 271. Also David Wheat’s dissertation, in particular chapter III.

³¹ Juan Méndez Nieto (1611), *Discursos medicinales* (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, Junta de Castilla y León, 1989), 358.

³² *Ibid*, 411. Such layovers could last for months at a time as the arrival of the fleet was sometimes delayed, or canceled by weather, pirates attacks, or epidemics.

³³ See De la Fuente, 52-55.

³⁴ See, for instance, Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

status. Kin relationships and friendships, thus, were based on much more than the color of skin, or even origin. Africans could bring grievances from the Old to the New World and did not necessarily align under ethnic lines. In societies as fluid as Cartagena, the incentives were little for self-segregation. Instead, integration and accommodation to the multi-culturality of the place became essential for survival and later for social advancement.

“Negros Bozalez y Ladinos:” Cartagena’s African Roots

Among the penitents walking the streets of Cartagena in the fateful morning of June 17, 1626, were Dominga Núñez, a Black woman and a slave, who was condemned for blasphemy and paraded through the city dressed in a *San Benito* mock dress and with a gag covering her mouth, and Mariana de la Peña, a free mulata condemned because she was a sorcerer.³⁵ Whilst there were only two people of African origin among the unfortunate lot walking the streets of the city that day, they were representative of the large majority of the population of Cartagena de Indias and shaped the cultural and societal structure of the city.

Conspicuous by their absence in this *Auto de Fé* were the many African ritual practitioners that abounded in the city. Scholars have interpreted this type of evidentiary silence as proof of the isolated locus occupied by Africans in Spanish American societies. According to such literature people of African origin remained invisible, and even when seen, they and their practices were ignored.³⁶ Instead, I argue that the reason for such silence, and the absence of more Africans in the Spanish Inquisitorial proceedings, was that the

³⁵ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol.258v. Several other Actos de Fe, including Autos de Fe particulares, are described in some detail in the “*Relaciones de Causas de Fe*” from Cartagena. For instance, AHN, Inquisición, 1023. Fols. 227v-230r.

³⁶ For Cartagena see, for instance, Maya, *Brujería*; Bennett, *Africans*; Navarrete, *Historia Social*; or Arturo Rodríguez-Bobb, *Exclusion e Integración del Sujeto Negro en Cartagena de Indias en Perspectiva Histórica* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2002).

presence of people of African origin in places like Cartagena was not only accepted and tolerated but that actually these people of African origin and their culture came to be normative in Cartagena's society. Rather than being the extraneous, they were part of everyday life. Their numbers give us a good idea of why this was the case.³⁷

Between, 1580 and 1640, during the time of the Portuguese *asientos* [exclusivity contracts for slave trade provided by the Royal Crown], approximately 170,000 African slaves passed through the city.³⁸ Some sources put the numbers as high as 10,000 per year during the first decades of the seventeenth century with years such as 1633 bringing as many as 12,000.³⁹ As Table 2.2 shows, through the seventeenth century Cartagena received more slaves than any other port in the Spanish Americas. From 1640 until the end of the seventeenth century, the *asientos* were in the hands of Spaniards, Genovese, Neogranadinos [inhabitants of the Nuevo Reino de Granada, present day Colombia, Ecuador and Panama] and Dutch people. Besides the legal trading, slaves' smuggling abounded around Cartagena.

As early as 1587 Governor Ledena complained that the boats bringing African slaves used to "anchor in whatever harbor they prefer in the Indies. The slave-traders even disembark in those without Royal officials looking for [larger] utility and benefit for

³⁷ See, for instance, Maya, *Brujeria*; Herman Bennett makes this point and, correctly, argues that Africans and their descendants have been placed in an "intermediate" category between "conquerors" and "conquered" which makes them to drop out of national narratives. However, Bennett frames the alternative, political and social significance of Afro-Mexicans lives under the schemes provided by Iberian-Catholic social tenets. While he recognizes the value of studies of African cultural formation in the Americas when they connect the experiences of early modern Africans to their homelands in the Old world, he argues that such studies pay little attention to the adoption of Iberian cultural mores by Africans and their socio-political significance. Yet, while it could be the case that in big Viceregal capitals like Mexico City and Lima, Africans resorted to the more pragmatic use of Iberian and Indigenous societal protocols for their political and social goals, in places like Cartagena they did not have to. Africans norms were more useful, as I show here, in achieving the same objectives in Caribbean cities. Herman Bennett, *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009). For another example of how blacks became central to the workings of American societies see, Jane Landers, *Black Society*.

³⁸ See David Eltis, *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Also Chapter II in David Wheat's dissertation and, among others, Del Castillo Mathieu; Palacios Preciado; and Maya.

³⁹ Fernández, *Apostólica y Penitente*, 105.

themselves on the sale of the slaves.” Ledeña further claimed that the *negreros* were full of “nuevos engaños,” [new tricks] to smuggle their human merchandise.⁴⁰ Exemplary was the case of a vessel coming from Guinea, and owned by Miguel Nieto, which carried 150 slaves. According to the governor, Nieto sold “setenta y seis piezas” [seventy six pieces of Indias], and still had thirty two pieces for selling.⁴¹ Regarding the whereabouts of the rest of the slaves’ lot, “[Nieto] said that twelve [slaves] escaped in Guinea and that thirty of them died during the journey [from Africa to the New World].”⁴²

The Governor was not convinced that such had been the fate of the Africans. He was worried because “there could be new tricks and frauds against the property of Your Majesty.” Ledeña explained to the king that so far he had been unable to stop slave contraband even “with all the precautionary measures of the world,” to impede the contraband. This was because, according to Ledeña, the slavers had the custom of switching “healthy for sick ones and the other way.” They also “collude with the buyers and pretend to perform a sale in public and privately they do other completely different together with other thousand tricks and deceptions.” Worse, the governor complained they had “no respect for him or for other officers in the port.”⁴³ No word on Nieto’s fortune though.

⁴⁰ AGI, Santa Fé,37,R.6,N.74, Fol2r.

⁴¹ A “pieza de indias” or the slave part consisted in a first rate “Negro,” of between eighteen and thirty years of age and seven “palmos” (a “palmo” o “cuarta” was the length from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the little finger with the hand extended with the fingers in abduction) of height, this is approximately 5 feet 4 inches. So, the slaves accordingly to their sex, statue, and “tachas” (defects) were considered more or less than a pieza, a complex system of measurement developed around such system. The price of a slave at that time in Cartagena was between 260 pesos and 300 pesos, the price was reduced by about 10 pesos for a hernia, 20 pesos for two hernias, 30 pesos for broken arm or missing fingers, 2-8 pesos for impaired vision. “Sarna” (scabies) 4-6 pesos, “manchas” (skin marks) deducible varied depending on the severity of the skin problem, including scurvy, and could go as higher as 20 pesos if they affected the head. see i.e., Linda A. Newson and Susie Minchin, “Slave Mortality and African Origins: A View from Cartagena, Colombia, in the Early Seventeenth Century,” *Slavery and Abolition*, 25 (3) 2004.32- 34.

⁴² AGI, Santa Fé,37,R.6,N. 74a.

⁴³ AGI, Santa Fé,37,R.6,N. 74a.

Table 2.2 Slave trade to Spanish Americas from 1580-1740

Source: *The Slave Trade Database*. <http://www.slavevoyages.org/> accessed August 19, 2009

Port of Disembarkment	Number of Slaves
New Spain	42202
Vera Cruz	52735
Portobelo	7384
Cartagena	117962
Caracas	2444
Spanish Central America, port unspecified	3843
Rio de la Hacha	1114
Buenos Aires	27444

Like Nieto, slave traders of all origins conspired with Crown officials not only in Cartagena, but also in Santa Marta and the Rio de la Hacha, a town north of Santa Marta, and imported thousands of slaves that did not enter the records. The available data are, hence, at best incomplete. We do know, however, that Africans of multiple origins stayed in the city, and that the Jesuit College owned slave translators for at least seventy African languages. Contemporary sources estimate the number of Africans and Afro-descendants living at different points in seventeenth century Cartagena in the range of 7,000 to 20,000.⁴⁴ Table 2.3 gives a breakdown of the origins of the Africans coming to Cartagena from 1540-1740, the time frame of this dissertation. We will explore Cartagena's Africans regions of origin in more detail in the next chapter.

⁴⁴ Spanish priest Juan de Chumillas claimed in 1619 that about twelve to fourteen thousand *Negros* lived in Cartagena. As quoted in Toribio Jose Medina, *La Imprenta en Bogotá y la Inquisición en Cartagena* (Bogotá: Editorial ABC. 1972), 143. Other observers noted the presence of 12,000 to 14,000 "*negros de servicio*" in "Cartagena and its district" during the years 1619 and 1620, and, according to Cartagena's governor García Girón, the city and its province contained more than 20,000 black slaves in 1622. AGI, Santa Fé 38, r.6, n.176, Don García Girón a S.M., Cartagena, 28 marzo 1622. De Sandoval claimed that the Jesuit College had translators for seventy languages. De Sandoval, 48.

Table 2.3 Origins of Africans Coming to Northern South America 1580-1740

Source: The Slave Trade Database. <http://www.slavevoyages.org/> accessed August 19, 2009

* *Places in the New Kingdom of Granada.* ± *Places in the General Captaincy of Venezuela*

Region of Embarkment	Place of Disembarkment in South America							Total
	Cartagena*	Santa Marta*	Venezuela±	Caracas±	Cumana±	La Guaira±	Rio de la Hacha*	
Senegambia and offshore Atlantic	36,075	228		400			365	37,068
Windward Coast			192					192
Gold Coast	1,224							1,224
Bight of Benin	9,404				400	398	398	10,600
Bight of Biafra and Gulf of Guinea islands	5,648	346		402				6,396
West Central Africa and St. Helena	63,599		237	1,125	631	275	351	66,218
Southeast Africa and Indian Ocean islands	197							197
Other Africa	1,815			517				2,332
Totals	117,962	574	429	2,444	1,031	673	1,114	124,227

A letter from the accountants of the Royal treasury in Santa Fe de Bogotá gives us a good idea of the type of Africans arriving to Cartagena during the early seventeenth century. In June 1622, Miguel Corcuera and Bernabé Pérez Bernal, the accountants, wrote to the council of Indias in Seville about the type of Blacks sold in the city. According to them, “There are three types of Black slaves that are brought, and sold, in Cartagena. The first, and the most valued, are the ones of the rivers of Guinea, that are called *de ley* [of law]. They all have different names.” Corcuera and Pérez Bernal continued their letter saying that “the second type is the one of the Ardas, or Araras. These are the ones that [slavers] bring in less quantity.” Finally, they said, “the third and the largest one is the one of Angolas and Congos of whom there are uncountable numbers in their land.”⁴⁵

As specified in table 2.3, Senegambia, Upper Guinea, was second only to West-Central Africa as the place of origin of Africans imported into Cartagena. Upper Guinea continued to provide forced migrants to Cartagena in large numbers during the years 1617 to

⁴⁵ AGI-Santa Fe, 52, N.172. Cartas y expedientes: Tribunal de cuentas de Santa Fe, 22-06-1622. Guinea was also a generic name for all Africans, at least in Sandoval accounts of it, see i.e., Sandoval, *De instauranda*, 60-74; Also, Navarrete, *Historia Social*, 82-83; and the description of the interrogatory to Jorge Ballivián, captain of the frigate “Nuestra Señora de Aranzazú” and its shipment of slaves in the Archivo General de la Nación de Colombia (hereafter AGN), Colonia, Bolívar. 145.288. Fol.1r.

1626 with twenty-nine ships arriving from “the Rivers of Guinea” and nine ships from Cabo Verde. Amongst them were the *Zape* people who came from the Upper Guinea region in which today are Guinea and Sierra Leone, and the *Brans* who were natives from the Guinea region south of the Gambia river at the mouth of the Cacheo river. To date, Africanists have largely argued about the relative importance of these two main provenance zones prior to 1650, but Cartagena’s port entry records suggest a third overlooked region. During the same ten year period between 1617 and 1626, a relatively small but highly concentrated wave of captives was transported to Cartagena from the Bights of Benin and Biafra, arriving on ten ships from *Allada*, and one ship from *Calabar*. Africans from Lower Guinea figured prominently among the captives carried on an additional eleven ships from São Tomé during the same years.⁴⁶

During the second half of the seventeenth century, most Africans forcibly brought to Cartagena came from West-Central Africa. Some others came from the Bights of Benin and Biafra and they included the *Araras*, the *Mina*, the *Carabalies* and people, like the *Popos*, from the kingdom of Dahomey.⁴⁷ Also, for the first time the *Akán* speakers and those of the language *Twi* began arriving in considerable number to Cartagena from the Gold Coast.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ See David Wheat, “África no desenvolvimento da terceira cidade das Índias: Cartagena de Indias e o tráfico transatlântico de escravos, 1570-1640,” Paper presented at the conference “Cortes, cidades, memórias: trânsitos e transformações na modernidade” Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Among them were slaves coming from the kingdom of *Allada*, called by the Spaniards *Arara* or *Arda*.

⁴⁷ See Philip D. Morgan, “The Cultural Implications of the Atlantic Slave Trade: African Regional Origins, American Destinations and New World Developments.” *Slavery and Abolition* 18 (January 1997): 122-45; David Pavy, “The Provenience of Colombian Negroes” *Journal of Negro History* 52 (January 1967): 35-58; Stephan Bühnen, “Ethnic Origins of Peruvian Slaves (1548-1650): Figures for Upper Guinea,” *Paideuma* 39 (1993): 57-110. Jean-Pierre Tardieu, “Origines des esclaves de la région de Lima, au Pérou, aux XVI^e e XVII^e siècles,” in *La Chaîne et le lien: une vision de la traite négrière* (Actes du Colloque de Ouidah), dir. Doudou Diene (Paris: UNESCO, 1998), 81-94; Robin Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa, 1550-1750: The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on an African Society*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 189; Elizabeth W. Kiddy, *Blacks of the Rosary: Memory and History in Minas Gerais, Brazil* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 45.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 10. The sources refer to these groups as *Mina*, a problematic term that refers to the origin of embarkment in the city of *elmina* which was founded by Portuguese traders in West Africa and appropriated by

Slavers also brought the people to São Tomé from several regions in Africa including the ones mentioned above.⁴⁹

The rector of the Jesuit college in Cartagena Alonso de Sandoval, wrote one of the earliest ethnographic works on Africans based on the testimony of fellow Jesuit missionaries and Portuguese slave traders. His monumental work, *De Instauranda*, is one of the richest sources about the ethnicities and lives of people of African origin in the Americas during the early modern period. *De Instauranda*, is based on the testimonies of multiple slave traders interviewed by the Jesuits in Cartagena. It also drew from the stories of Africans living in the Jesuit convent and from internal correspondence of “The Company of Jesus.”⁵⁰

Talking about the forced immigrants coming to Cartagena, for instance, De Sandoval said, “Blacks come to this harbor of the city of Cartagena de Indias, which is the main and rightful place for unloading [merchandise] of the entire world. They come from the rivers of Guinea and harbors in the mainland from the Cabo Verde island, from Saint Thome and from the harbor of Loanda or Angola.”⁵¹ As Table 2.3 shows, this last group, became the most numerous of all arrivals to Cartagena during the “long seventeenth century.” They came from groups called at the time *Congos*, *Axiolos*, *Manicongos*, *Anzicos*, *Benguela*, *Matamba*, *Malemba*, *Ndala* and more generally *Angolas*. Importantly, of the seventy or so languages

the Dutch later in the seventeenth century. Amongst the *mina*, there were probably also *fanti-ashanti* people. See, Pierre Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres entre le Golfe du Bénin et Bahia de Tous les Saints* (Paris: 1968), 64.

⁴⁹ Today these groups are known as the *Ewe* or *Fon* people. Verger, *Flux et reflux* 46. The *Carabalies* came from around the *Calabar* river, present day Nigeria, and are now known as *Ibo*. As the *Arara*, these groups shared a common linguistic background, *Kwa*. Joseph Greenberg, *The Languages of Africa* (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1989).

⁵⁰ Sandoval wrote that the *Guineos* were the “*ílofos*, *berbesies*, *mandingas fulos*, *fulupos*, *banunes fulupos* que llaman [that they call] *bootes*, *czangas* y [and] *banunes purso*, *branes*, *balanzas*, *biáfaras* y *biojos*, *nalus*, *zapes*, *cocolies* y *zozoes*” Sandoval considered *Guineos* the people from the region bordering the basins of the rivers in *Senegal*, *Gambia*, *Cazamansa* and *Cacheo*. De Sandoval, 57-58.

⁵¹ “Suelen venir Negros a este puerto de la ciudad de Cartagena de las Indias, que es la principal y derecha descarga de todo el mundo. Vienen de los ríos de Guinea y puertos de Tierra Firme de la isla de Cabo Verde, de la isla de San Thomé y del puerto de Loanda o Angola.” De Sandoval, 43r.

spoken by the mid-seventeenth century in Cartagena, according to Alonso de Sandoval, he was able to clearly identify at least nine. According to the Jesuit, Cartageneros Africans spoke *Angola, Arda, Caravalí, Banulo Bañol, Mandinga, Biojo, Bran y Biáfara*. Six of these languages came from Guinea, one from Angola and two from West Central Africa.⁵² Many of them were shared, especially in Upper Guinea, and some groups, prominently the *Zapes*, were polyglots speaking, *Lindagoza, Zozo, Pelicoya, Baga* and *Boloncho*.⁵³ Cartagena was certainly a Babylon.

There are no data on the number of these *negros* [Blacks] that were considered *criollos* [born in the Americas]. However, contemporary records show the presence of a constant influx of *bozales* [slaves born in Africa] who intermingled with the Afro-Neogranadinos in the city. The Africans that arrived and stayed in Cartagena during the late sixteenth and first decades of the seventeenth century formed, to borrow Ira Berlin's term, the "charter generation" that established Cartagena's African socio-cultural foundations.⁵⁴ They gathered and formed large communities that were essentially African colonies in the New World. Famously they created what some historians have labeled the first "free African communities in the Americas," maroon settlements known at the time as *palenques*.⁵⁵

⁵² These designations were Portuguese and Spanish. They differ, somehow, in sources coming from different places even in the Iberian realms. For instance *Anzicos* are also known as *Anchicos*. The situation is more complex even when comparing British, French, Dutch and Iberian labels. The field is in bad need of creating a uniform categorization of African ethnicities as designed by slave traders. De Sandoval, 46v.

⁵³ Del Castillo Mathieu, *Esclavos*, 161.

⁵⁴ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁵⁵ Several works have examined the story of Cartagena's *palenques*. For some recent studies, see, María Cristina Navarrete, *Cimarrones y palenques en el siglo XVII*. Cali [Colombia]: Universidad del Valle, 2003; Jane Landers, "Cimarrón Ethnicity and Cultural Adaptation in the Spanish Domains of the Circum-Caribbean 1503-1763," in Paul Lovejoy ed., *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery* (London: Continuum, 2000). 30-54., See also Renee Souldre-La France, "Socially Not So Dead! Slave Identities in Bourbon Nueva Granada." *Colonial Latin American Review*. 10, no. 1 (2001): 87-103. For other cities in Northern South America see, for example, Sherwin Bryant, "Enslaved Rebels, Fugitives, and Litigants: The Resistance Continuum in Colonial Quito" *Colonial Latin American Review*. 13:1 (2004): 7-46; or Jane Landers, "La cultura material de los cimarrones:

Amongst the most renowned of these settlements were the *palenques* of San Basilio, Limón, El Polín and Zanagüare.⁵⁶ Such was the situation that Governors and *vecinos* were afraid of chastising severely their slaves for being afraid that they would run to encampments in the jungle.⁵⁷ Furthermore, in certain times, the power of such settlements came to be a threat to the security of the city. *Cimarrones* [Maroons], though, were not isolated in the mountains. As Maria del Carmen Borrego Plá, Maria Cristina Navarrete, and Jane Landers, among others, have shown, Cartagena boasted ample spaces for commercial and social interchange.⁵⁸ African *Cimarrones* were essential part of the city dynamics and had close contact with residents of the city and surrounding populations. This happened not only through the incidents of robbery and assault to travelers that Spaniards repeatedly used to justify attacks to the *Palenques* [Maroon settlement] around the province, but also through commerce.

In 1633, then Governor Francisco de Murga launched a famous expedition against maroons in “El Limon” *palenque* after they attacked a pig farm and kidnapped several Spaniards. After being captured during the raid, Gaspar Angola, a runaway slave from West Central Africa, declared that, “He knew that the Blacks of such *Palenque*, including him, went to the farm of Don Juan de Sotomayor and dealt and communicated with them and with the Indians of the town, and with de Piña, father in law of the mentioned Don Juan.” He continued saying that “they traded blankets and girdles that were made in the *palenque* for

Los casos de Ecuador, La Española, Mexico y Colombia,” in *Rutas de la esclavitud en Africa y America Latina*, ed. Rina Cáceres (San Jose: Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 2001) 145-74.

⁵⁶ AGI-Patronato, 234, R.7, “Testimonio de los autos que formó el gobernador de Cartagena Francisco de Murga, contra los negros cimarrones alzados en los palenques de Limón Polín y Zanaguare y sobre el castigo que por sus delitos se les impuso,” Cartagena, 1634, Bloque 2, folio 361v.

⁵⁷ A *vecino* was an male, usually of Spanish descent, owning real state in the city. Different cities had different limits for what would be the level of property necessary for a person to be considered a *vecino*.

⁵⁸ Richard Price. *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 76; Landers “Cimarron ethnicity.” Navarrete, *Cimarrones*.

tobacco, salt, shorts and dressing tables.” During the transactions, Don Juan sit down at the table with the Blacks and sent gifts to the chief of the maroon settlement, a Black woman from central Africa, Isabel Angola. To the military chief of the *Palenque*, he gave an *alfanje* [a curved sword of Arab origin], a table knife and a embroidered sheet. Gaspar also said that Francisco Martin Garruchena communed with the mentioned Blacks in his farm and bartered with them. He provided the *palenque* with machetes, axes, knives and other things in interchange for clothes and work that the Blacks provided for him including the threshing of his corn.”⁵⁹

Besides the many maroon settlements founded in the outskirts of Cartagena people of African origin settled in the Getsemaní neighborhood. This part of the city was founded in the late sixteenth century on a swamp that initially laid outside of the walled part of the town. Later in the seventeenth century it would be enclosed, and grew to hold most of the free, freed and enslave population of African origin in the city. It became the largest Black settlement in Cartagena’s province and, thereby, in all of the Caribbean. Arguably, Getsemaní became the largest African city, outside Africa, in the seventeenth century. In this place, African languages and culture were the norm and, as I show in Chapter V, people of African origins could spend a life time without learning Spanish or attending a mass.

Emporio de Naciones

Leading the “penitents” section of Cartagena’s 1626 *Auto de Fé* processional was Federico Cuperes, a Dutchman born in “Antwerp in Flanders.” Following him, and as

⁵⁹ AGI patronato 234. This incident has been recounted by Kathryn J. McKnight, “Confronted Rituals: Spanish Colonial and Angolan “Maroon” Executions in Cartagena de Indias (1634).” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 2004 (5:3); also in Kathryn J. McKnight, “Gendered Declarations: Testimonies of Three Captured Maroon Women, Cartagena de Indias, 1634.” *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 12:4 (Fall 2003): 499-527.

Cuperes wearing *Sanbenitos* and, some, *Corazas* [hats conical in shape], were condemned people with origins as diverse as Milan, Italy; Granda, Nicaragua; Santa Fe de Antioquia and Tunja, New Kingdom of Granada; the Great Canaries; Honduras; Lisbon, Coimbra, Aljavre and Villa del Campo, in Portugal; and from Albuquerque, Extremadura, Galicia, Malaga, Seville, Triana, and Zaragoza, in Spain.⁶⁰

Reading this, admittedly rather exceptional sampling, it is hard to imagine that Cartagenos ascribed to unique cultural backgrounds.⁶¹ Besides the polyglot and multicultural lot of Africans and descendants living in the city, the rest of Cartagenos came from all over the Atlantic and Pacific worlds. Furthermore they had traveled and lived in multiple places before establishing themselves in Cartagena. For example, Juan Federico Pyes, who was living in Cartagena in the 1670s, had been born in Amsterdam to a “corsair father.” From there he traveled to Cadiz in Spain, England, Jamaica and then around the Caribbean with other “English pirates.”⁶²

Bernardo Andrés de Nayo, a “Calvinist” natural of *Sotropo* [?] had been living in Germany, Holland, Denmark and Sweden before traveling to Norway where he learned how to be a surgeon. After living for a while in London and Lisbon, he came to Cartagena de Indias, where he had been practicing his trade for several years before his inquisition trial.⁶³ Like Bernardo, Pedro Musco, a German born in Hamburg, had been in several places in Europe before establishing to practice carpentry in Cartagena. Among others places Musco

⁶⁰ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol.258v.

⁶¹ Kristen Block has studied in her dissertation the fluidity of religious and cultural beliefs in seventeenth century Caribbean. See, Kristen Block, *Faith and Fortune: Religious Identity and the Politics of Profit in the Seventeenth-Century Caribbean*. Ph. D. Dissertation Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 2007.

⁶² AHN, Inquisición, 1023. Fol. 264r.

⁶³ AHN, Inquisición, 1023. 266r-267r.

had lived in Poland, France, Portugal, Malaga and Cadiz before arriving to the Indies.⁶⁴ Many other Europeans of various origins lived in the city together with Arabs, and even people of Asian origin.⁶⁵ Juan González for instance, was “a moro de nación” [a born muslim], as was Juan Antonio, a “Berber slave of Domingo Juan Carballo,” and Miguel Martín who had been born in Constantinople.⁶⁶

Besides Cartagena’s resident population, a swarm of humanity arrived periodically, at least two times a year, for the large commercial fairs happening with the arrival of the Galleon and Armada fleets. Smaller crowds came at other times to trade with smugglers and smaller trading ships and caravans. According to the surgeon Pedro López de Leon, the galleon fleet brought with it between 2,000 and 4,000 people to the city.⁶⁷ In Cartagena, as could be expected, flourished a world of inns, sailors, prostitutes, bars and restaurants. The port was also a place where people came to be healed. The crown and religious orders run hospitals, and a legion of healers of all origins tended to the needs of residents, sailors, pirates and passengers. People of African origin participated actively in this service economy, as innkeepers, healers, food providers, surgeons, sexual workers and specialists of many other service activities. They were the heart of Cartagena’s economic activity.

⁶⁴ AHN, Inquisición, 1023, 271v-272r. Many other Europeans lived in Cartagena for instance, Juan Geronimo Carote from Venice, Italy. AHN, Inquisición, 1020. Fol. 495r; Jorge de los Santos, a Greek that had been born in Tripoli and lived in Cartagena, AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 7v.; Marco Pacio from Gaeta in the Kingdom of Naples; and Juan Alberto, from “Chalumbeque” in *Alemania la alta* [the highlands of Germany], AHN, Inquisición, 1020. Fol. 8r.

⁶⁵ Asians almost certainly came to Cartagena through New Spain. Through the Manila Galleon fleet, Portuguese merchants in Macao acquired Chinese slaves, and sold them in the Philippines from where Spaniards transported them to Acapulco in New Spain. See Tatiana Seijas, “The Portuguese Slave Trade to Spanish Manila, 1580-1640,” *Itinerario* 32:1 (2008): 19-38. See also Konetzke, *Colección*, vol. II, tomo 1: 291-92, “R.C. sobre el registro de los chinos esclavos que vienen de las islas Filipinas,” Madrid, 16 oct 1626; Homer H. Dubs and Robert S. Smith, “Chinese in Mexico City in 1635,” *Far Eastern Quarterly* 1:4 (August 1942): 387-89; Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra de México, 1519-1810: estudio etno-histórico* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Fuente Cultural, 1946), 41-44, 146-48; and Tatiana Seijas, “Transpacific Servitude: The Asian Slaves of Mexico, 1580- 1700,” Ph.D. dissertation (Yale University, 2008).

⁶⁶ AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol.361r; AHN, Inquisición, 1021. Fol. 407r.; and AHN, Inquisición, 1021. Fol 498r.

⁶⁷ López de Leon.

Cartagena's transient inhabitants came from all over the Caribbean, Europe, Asia, the Mediterranean and Asia.⁶⁸ Juan Thomas, for instance, was a Briton who had been traveling around all of the Atlantic world. He had fallen into the hands of Arabs whom had enslaved and kept him in Algeria for eight years.⁶⁹ Juan Nicolás, a Greek, lived in Constantinople, Cairo and Turkey for ten years before going to Jerusalem and from there to Cadiz.⁷⁰ As Nicolás, Juan Manuel, a Black man from Goa in the "*Indias Orientales*," had been in the hands of Arabs in Algeria where their captors "le cortaron el capullo del viril..." [cut the bud of his virile member, (circumcised him)], before coming to La Havana where he worked as a baker. He said that during his time in Algeria he had lived as a Muslim, and guarded their customs and festivities while learning Arabic, a language in which he claimed to be fluent.⁷¹ Many other Africans, enslaved and free, coming from Upper Guinea, and other locales, had lived in close proximity with "Moros" [Muslims] and also brought with them "all the mistakes [of Islam] and their stubbornness."⁷²

Hence, not only Iberians, but also Germans, French, Britons, Scots, Greeks, Prussians, Italians, and Austrians, amongst others Europeans lived in Cartagena. In Cartagena lived, besides people from Europe, Turkish natives, and even Chinese and

⁶⁸ Geronimo for instante, came from Jamaica. He knew how to read and write and that his parents were all Arara. AHN, Inquisición, 1023. Fols. 298r-v. Juan Seyber was from "the place of *Qualsbult* in the Kingdom of Denmark." He also knew how to read and write and had traveled in the Caribbean and between Cadiz and Cartagena. AHN, Inquisición, 1023. Fols.273r-v. Rodrigo Escolt had been born in Hamburg, Germany. AHN, Inquisición, 1023. Fol.276r-v. Pedro Pablo was from Cologne in Germany. AHN, Inquisición, 1023. Fols.277r-v. Leonardo Pedro, was from Nuercope near Amsterdam in Holland. AHN, Inquisición, 1023. Fols. 278v-279r. Bernabé Blanquerel, a Black Slave was from the San Cristobal Island "which was around the parts inhabited by French people." AHN, Inquisición, 1023. Fols. 294v-295v. Juan Martin whose nickname was Juan de Cadiz was born in Chante "an island in the sea of levante, in the domains of city of Venice." All his family was from Santorini in Greece. AHN, Inquisición, 1023. Fol. 413v-414v; Also, Juan Gaspar had been born in Leipzig, Germany, AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 419r.

⁶⁹ AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fols. 296r-297r.

⁷⁰ AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fols. 354v-356v

⁷¹ He also knew how to read and write. AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fols. 480r-483r.

⁷² "Traen pegados todos sus errores y toda su terquedad con ellos." Fernández, *Apostólica*, 107.

Filipinos.⁷³ They espoused all types of beliefs and customs. Cartagenos, thus, were Calvinists, Lutherans, Muslims, Catholic Orthodox, Catholics, Jews as well as agnostic and atheists. Furthermore, the great majority, believed in one of the multiple religious systems of African origin that arrived to the city together with their *baganga*, and *babalawos* [ritual specialists from West Central Africa and the Bight of Biafra]. Cartagena de Indias, despite its Inquisition office, remained largely alluring to outsiders as a place to settle.

Arguably, no other group was as definitive in shaping Cartagena's character as Portuguese immigrants. Even in the face of fierce persecution in southern Europe and the rest of the colonies in the Americas, Cartagena's authorities and *vecinos* successfully argued for the necessity of admitting, tolerating, and even fostering the presence of people of Portuguese origin in the city. Such forbearance was, at least initially, spurred by the essential role Portuguese traders had in the economy and functioning of Cartagena's society during the period that lasted Spain's annexation of Portugal (1580-1640). This attitude created the basis for the characteristic openness of the *Llave de Indias*. In 1586, illustrating Cartagenos' attitudes towards outsiders, then Governor Pedro de Lodeña wrote to the Crown defending the presence about the "remarkable amount of foreigners, and specially Portuguese, that reside in this city for days and years."⁷⁴ As David Wheat has shown in his study of Portuguese networks in the Atlantic world, Cartagena's royal officials during the 1590s were clearly aware of "the great quantity of Portuguese people who have arrived via Guinea and the Barlovento islands. [They] are gathering up all the money of this city and province through slave trading."⁷⁵ Indeed, already by 1602 Cartagena's council had become heavily

⁷³ One of them is declared to be Philippine or "from the East Indies." AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fols. 43v

⁷⁴ AGI, Santa Fé, 37, R.6, n.69, D. Pedro de Lodeña a S. M., Cartagena, 13 agosto 1586; David Wheat, 31,

⁷⁵ AGI, Santa Fé, 72, n.81; Vidal Ortega, Cartagena de Indias, Wheat argues that Portuguese traders in Cartagena were tolerated, while clearly discriminated against, in great part because of the prominent place they

invested in protecting the city's foreign population against "purges" sponsored by the Spanish Crown. They wrote to Madrid that "the city's conservation and growth depends on trade and commerce, most of which is administered by foreigners serving as factors for their countrymen."⁷⁶

Economic opportunity was certainly an essential motivation for this assorted lot to establish themselves in Cartagena. All the same, it is hard to imagine that people coming from such variegated backgrounds would find themselves at ease under the constant vigilance of an oppressive inquisitorial state. This is particularly true of the important number of non-catholic Europeans establishing in Cartagena at the height of counter-reformation. As Kristen Block has shown, this was a highly resourceful lot that accommodated their beliefs to local circumstances.⁷⁷ Yet, evidence abounds that they freely expressed and practiced beliefs that not only diverged from the teachings of Spanish Catholic dogmas, but, challenged and even contradicted them and were prohibited under pain of death.

Not without reason did Cartagena's Archbishop Bartolome write desperately in 1599 to the Crown asking for the establishment of an Inquisition tribunal in the city. According to Monsignor Bartolome "this land is the most corrupt in customs and all type of vices in your Majesty's entire realm." The archbishop believed that in the New Kingdom of Granada, and above all in Cartagena, "the battle for the faith was being lost." In this realm, the prelate believed, "the sins are many and the continuing habit of committing them has depraved the will and induces errors in understanding and foster stubbornness." Most revealingly,

had socially and economically in the city. Furthermore, Wheat argues, "Portuguese trade networks to Cartagena were firmly established during the two decades leading up to the turn of the century, and by 1600, the city's highest-ranking authorities had come to view the transatlantic slave trade as Cartagena's primary source of income." Wheat, 31, 109.

⁷⁶ AGI, Santa Fé, 62, n.83.

⁷⁷ Block, *Faith and Fortune*.

Bartolome said that the inhabitants of such places, particularly those of African origin, did not know or understand the tenets of the Catholic faith and that “the people were so obstinate in their vices and sins [that they] do not even try to denounce them so they can be properly punished.”⁷⁸

Bichos and Sabandijas: Health Conditions in Early Modern Cartagena

Immigrants from all over the Atlantic world arrived to Cartagena bringing with them, in addition to their culture, illnesses all sorts. These afflictions joined, already plentiful, native ways of misery and made the Northern New Kingdom of Granada a famously insalubrious place. When first disembarking in the city, according to Josef Fernández a Jesuit priest writing about Cartagena in the first half of the seventeenth century, newcomer bodies got “weakened and became languid.”⁷⁹

The worst months, when the soothing breeze coming from the Caribbean Sea had stopped blowing, were “abundant in water, which worsens the fire [of the sun].” Fernández wrote that water and sun originated “very dangerous diseases” and multiple “*sabandijas*” [creepy-crawlies]. Cartagenos suffered “various and malignant” sicknesses and “as the external circumstances of heat and humidity are so active, with the poor predisposition of the individuals, they attack with strength.” The creepy-crawlies, for their part, were “the most

⁷⁸ AGI, Santa Fé, 226, N.60.

⁷⁹The conditions made people “to stop eating.” The oppressive climate, Fernández said, made that when new dwellers arrived they thought that they had been “injured by a grave disease.” Fernández, *Apostólica*, 102. For similar examples of how death exceeded frequently birth rates in the early modern world see: David E. Vassberg, *The Village and the Outside World in Golden Age Castile: Mobility and Migration in Everyday Rural Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 74. For consideration of similar dynamics in the context of eighteenth-century Jamaica, see Vincent Brown, *The Reaper’s Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2008); Mary J. Dobson, *Contours of death and disease in early modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Claudio Lomnitz has even argued that the death rate in Mexico has been historically so large that it became the national symbol. See, Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, *Death and the idea of Mexico* (New York.: Zone Book, 2005).

terrible worry that the faith charges to the conscience.” Swarms of flies and mosquitoes “the first importune, and the other, of various types, cruel all,” had “little goads” to which “there was not defense, because they are so strong that there is not clothing that can stop them.” They produced “poisoned bumps.” In the Jesuit view, such were the conditions that “all the gold and silver in your coffers” was “worthless” to alleviate the wretchedness of the situation.⁸⁰

As Fernández remarked, Cartagena was battered by a long rainy season, running from April until November, that fed the abundant rivers and swamps around the city. The conditions were perfect for the breeding of swarms of mosquitoes and flies, effective vectors for the transmission of tropical diseases. Like other early modern cities, Cartagena de Indias lacked any type of sanitary infrastructure. The dead were buried in houses and backyards. Cartageneros threw trash and human and animal excrement on the street and into the city’s water primary sources.⁸¹ Cartagena’s health care facilities were not anymore developed. The city’s first hospital, the hospital of San Sebastian was already functioning by the late sixteenth century. The religious order of San Juan de Dios took over it in 1613. The order had founded another *sanatorium*, the Hospital of the Espíritu Santo in 1603. These would function together throughout the first half of the seventeenth century. These early modern versions of hospitals were, as in the rest of the Western world, places of last resort for the destitute. Cartagena’s hospitals were filled not only by sick Cartageneros but also with a unending procession of injured and diseased military and seaman personnel arriving constantly in the city.

⁸⁰ Fernández, *Apostólica*, 102-103.

⁸¹ Still in the eighteenth century *vecinos* complained of the dirtiness of the place. See, for example, AGN, Policia, Exp. 7. Fols. 181r-185r.

Not all hospitals, however, were the grotty places described in many historical works on the period.⁸² A case in point, Cartageno surgeon Pedro López de Leon, praised The San Sebastián Hospital because of its cleanliness, and that of “the bed of the sick.” He remarked on the supply of food and other provisions that the Prior, Juanes de Segura, secured for the place “even when it lacks in the city.” According to López de León, the hospital ordinarily served about eighty sick people. However, with the arrival of the galleon fleet the hospital increased its capacity to attend “between one hundred and fifty and two hundred sick people.” The infirmary was always full because the port was constantly receiving sick people coming in boats from “Guinea and other parts.” López de León said that such was the fame of the place that people traveled from Panama, Portovelo, Santa Fé de Bogotá, Santa Marta, Rio de la Hacha, Caracas, Margarita and all the islands of Barlovento, to be healed.” In the hospital boasted López de León “we cure all type of diseases.”⁸³

Physician Méndez Nieto, confirms López de León observations and wrote about how in a June during the late sixteenth century the galleon fleet bringing the riches of Peru “came back from Nombre de Dios as filled with sick people as with Gold and Silver.”⁸⁴ In the 1620s the Crown founded a lepers’ hospital, the San Lázaro hospital, on the outskirts of the city, by the *Camino Real*. Initially, the *lazaretto* was nothing but an open shack. The conditions were such that by 1628, *vecinos* were petitioning Seville for a more appropriate building. They were particularly worried because the Black lepers confined in the hospital, did not follow the parameters of their incarceration. The person in charge of the place, for all purposes a

⁸² See, for example, Mary Lindemann’s discussion in Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999),122-125.

⁸³ López de Leon, 310.

⁸⁴ “En junio volvió la flota de Nombre de Dios tan cargada de enfermos como de oro y plata. Ni siquiera pudo ir a España por la cantidad de enfermos que había.” Méndez Nieto, 303, also cited in Borrego Pla 16-17, Vidal Ortega, 86.

jailer, was corrupt and Blacks received visitors all the time and traveled frequently in and out the hospital and city.⁸⁵ A more solid construction was in place by the 1630s at the foothill of the castle of San Felipe de Barajas. Indeed, the castle was initially named the “Castle of San Lázaro”.⁸⁶

Besides hospitals, several convents in the city tended to the sick. Seventeenth century records register that health care, of some sort, took place in the convent of Santa Clara, the convent of the Jesuits, the convent of San Fernando, the convent of Santa Mercedes, and the Dominican convent. Certainly many more, less official places for healing practices, were to be found in Cartagena’s neighborhoods. It is not unwarranted to suppose that people of African origin had places devoted to curing sick people in the Getsemaní quarter.⁸⁷

As in the rest of the South Atlantic, epidemics of malaria, measles, smallpox, typhus, bubonic plague, yellow fever and dysentery periodically ravaged Cartagena. This city’s position as the major Caribbean port determined that myriad of travelers from all around the Atlantic world arrived every year to its shores, with microscopic foes inside their guts, lungs and blood. Europeans, Asians and *Caribeños* all contributed their share of pestilences. However, slavers were distinctively effective as carriers of *pestilencias*. The crowded conditions of slavers’ vessels were particularly effective for the cultivation of flies, ticks, mosquitoes and the diseases they transmitted. Spanish officials known as *protomédicos* were charged with detecting disease on the arrival of these vessels. Protomédicos were the ancestors of public health officers in modern cities. In the Spanish empire they were in

⁸⁵ AGI, Santa Fé 63, n.69, Expediente de la ciudad de Cartagena en que solicita ayuda para la construcción de un hospital para los leprosos, Cartagena, 29 marzo 1628. See especially n.69a, “Información de los pobres que hay enfermos de San Lázaro y estado del hospital,” fols. 7r-16r.

⁸⁶ This was, together with its counterpart in the Havana, the biggest and more heavily armed fortification of the Spanish Empire in the New World. See, Rodolfo Segovia Salas and Oscar Monsalve. *The Fortifications of Cartagena De Indias: Strategy and History* (Bogotá: El Ancora Editores, 1998).

⁸⁷ Emilio Quevedo Vélez, *Historia de la medicina en Colombia* (Bogotá: Tecnoquímicas, 2007). Also, Splendiani, 206.

charge of caring for the health conditions of the city, in charge of expediting medical and surgical licenses and, moreover, regulating medical activity in their jurisdiction.⁸⁸

Besides looking for diseases, physicians were in charge of evaluating slaves and deciding on their physical value. During the second half of the seventeenth century, slavers had to wait at least two weeks before selling their slaves.⁸⁹ Upon arrival, physicians and traders determined the value in “*piezas de indias*” of the enslaved Africans. For instance an “Angola” lot put for sale by one of the “*negrerías*” [slave warehouses] on Santo Domingo street on April 28, 1656, was bought by Diego de Vega with the condition that he would be allowed to examine the “*tachas*” [defects] of the slaves in the presence of a third person, and the “*piezas*” would be calculated accordingly.

After examining the lot of just christened Angolas, Mendo López del Campo, the physician in charge, found the following “*tachas*”: Juan had a “*tuerto*” [crippled] left hand finger; Gerónimo had a “*lobanillo*” [ganglion] in his hand; Pedro had “*morpheus*” [bruises of bad humors, related to the “mal de Luanda,” scurvy];⁹⁰ Gonzalo suffered from “*calenturas*” [fever] of a “*enfermedad peligrosa*” [dangerous disease]; Diego lacked some teeth and had a thumb with “*alición*” [immobility?]; Manuel, besides being sick, lacked teeth both “*abajo y arriba*” [superior and inferior teeth rows]; Andrés also lacked most of his teeth; Cristina had an ulcer in one leg, lacked teeth and “*la luz de un ojo*” [the light on one eye, cataracts], and had one swollen ankle; María lacked teeth above, and Guiomar in both sides; Lucía, besides not having teeth above and below, had a scar in her face; Juliana lacked some teeth; Beatriz

⁸⁸ For more on the protomedicato see the classic John T. Lanning, and John J. TePaske. *The Royal Protomedicato: The Regulation of the Medical Professions in the Spanish Empire*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1985;

⁸⁹ David Chandler says that this process was not always followed. During the first half of the seventeenth century slaves were sold as hastily as it was possible for slavers. David L. Chandler, *Health and Slavery in Colonial Colombia* (New York: Arno Press, 1981), 75,86.

⁹⁰ A ganglion is a cyst of the tendon sheaths or the articular cavity. They are most common in the wrist and knee. Morpheus “Humor feo” refers to the marbled hemorrhages characteristic, among other clinical signs of scurvy.

had the scar of a leg wound which was a “*gran fealdad*” [great ugliness] and had a “*tuerto*” finger on her hand; Maria and Isabel lacked teeth “*arriba y abajo*,” Isabel, a “*muleca*” lacked some teeth and two toes.⁹¹ Of Lorenza it was said that she was crazy, deaf, and mute, and she was returned to the seller. All these “*tachas*” were valued in one hundred and thirty two pesos, and as required by De Vega, the physician, and Blas de Paz Pinto, a lawyer so attested.⁹²

In addition to the illnesses and afflictions described above, slaves arriving to Cartagena suffered common epidemic diseases like dysentery, typhus, smallpox, measles, malaria and yellow fever.⁹³ They also suffered from malnutrition, pinta, tumors, scabies, rash, syphilis, yams, dropsy, swollen legs and groin, *lamparones* [scrofula], and *pie regordido* [philariasis].⁹⁴

While we do not have information, besides anecdotal evidence about the type of diseases afflicting other Cartageneros, it would be sensible to assume that, with the differences accorded by nutritional status and living conditions, the same type of afflictions affected inhabitants of the city.⁹⁵ Evidence from medical writings coming from Cartagena confirm this assumption. At least two medical treaties, published in Spain, were written in

⁹¹ “Muleca” was the term used to designate pre-puberty Blacks females that were pre-pubescent.

⁹² AGN, Colonia, Bolívar, 4822. Fol. 10r.

⁹³ AGI, Santa Fe, 63, número 22; AGN, Colonia, Bolívar, Fol. 557; AHN, Diversos- Colecciones 27, N.25, Fol. 2r; AHN, Diversos- Colecciones, 27, N.26, Fol. 2r; AGI, Santa Fe, 64, Exp. 43, Fol. 2r.

⁹⁴ Pinta could be referring to the disease of the same name, in English and Spanish prevalent in tropical America and which affects almost exclusively people of African descent. This disease is caused by the *Treponema carateum*, a microorganism similar to the ones causing syphilis and yaws, and is characterized by thickening and loss of skin pigmentation. It affects prominently feet, ankles, hands and wrists. “pinta n.” *Concise Medical Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, 2007. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Vanderbilt University. 27 December 2009

<<http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t60.e7849>>

⁹⁵ Using slave traders records, correspondence, Notarial and ecclesiastical records, Linda Newson, Susie Munchin and Chandler have shown that malnutrition and infectious diseases of all types marked the lives of slaves, and one would assume free blacks, in the city. See, Chandler, *Health*; Linda A. Newson, and Susie Minchin. *From Capture to Sale: The Portuguese Slave Trade to Spanish South America in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

Cartagena de Indias. In these books we find evidence of cardiovascular diseases, neoplasias, wounds of all sorts, poisoning, mental and dental diseases, and more generally of all the varieties of torments and miseries that accompanied early modern human life.

Cartagena's Dissenters

Early in the morning of April 4, 1626, Mateo Ramírez de Arellano, the chief constable of Cartagena de Indias's Holy Office, rode his horse to the governor's palace. Diego de Escobar, the governor and a knight of the Order of Santiago, "received the chief constable with all due courtesy." Joining the governor were all of Cartagena's councilmen, who appeared "destocados" [without hats] before the Inquisition's representative in deference to the sacred nature of the procedure taking place. After meeting with Governor and council, Ramírez directed his horse to Cartagena's cathedral, two blocks from the palace. Waiting for him at the Cathedral's choir were the cathedral's dean and deputy of the Bishop, Doctor Don Francisco de Yarza, and the whole of the city's ecclesiastic council. Both meetings were summoned by the General Inquisitor of Cartagena, Don Agustín de Ugarte y Saravia to announce a "magnificent" *Auto de Fé* that would be celebrated in two months, shortly after the scheduled arrival of his majesty's galleon fleet.⁹⁶

Later that day, at four in the afternoon, Ramírez de Arellano, accompanied by the Secretary of the Inquisition Luis Blanco de Salcedo, collaborators of the Inquisition called "*familiares*," as well as ministers and officials of the Holy Office, passed through the city accompanied by a towncrier proclaiming the event. The cavalcade, a "*vistoso alarde*" [bright and colorful show] in the words of a witness, was preceded by a group of "trumpets,

⁹⁶ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 255r.

clarinets, *chirimías* [an instrument of African origin similar to a clarinet] and *atabales* [a type of drum].”⁹⁷

Cartagena’s Holy Office and Crown officials carefully staged the *Auto de Fé* over the next two months. Slaves and workers from all around the province built “the biggest machine that up to now has been seen by the people of the New World.” The juggernaut was made out of a main platform 150 feet long and 105 feet wide. The platform was divided in three levels. The higher one was reserved for the Inquisition tribunal officials. Cartagena’s ecclesiastic and secular city councils and Crown officials occupied the lower two stages. From the higher Inquisitorial level descended” each forty feet long and one foot tall. The members of the different religious orders existent in Cartagena sat on “*alcatifas moriscas*” [fine Persian rugs] placed over six “regal stairs. “The principal ladies of the city” filled two minor and lower platforms, bordered by banisters. Below them were the *crujías*..⁹⁸

Through separate aisles the “*principales*” [main people] of the city accessed other, lower stages. They were “*ciudadanos nobles*” [noble citizens], most of them “captains and officers of the army.” All of them, according to the record, “*gente lucidisma*” [splendid people].⁹⁹ Crowning this apparatus of societal hierarchy was an altar built on top of the upper stage. This bellwether of the whole affair was covered by a canvas red and gold in color and was embroidered with silver and gold pieces representing “a starred sky.”¹⁰⁰

The elaborate ceremony and the similarly structured scenario built for it embody the paradigmatic model of early modern Spanish America. The description of the convoluted announcement of the *Auto de Fé*, and the organization of its physical setting, can, as has,

⁹⁷ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 255r.

⁸¹ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 255v.

⁸² AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 255v-56r

⁸³ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 256r.

been read as proof of the bureaucratic, hierarchical, hegemonic and profoundly Catholic nature of seventeenth century Spanish America.¹⁰¹ Indeed, most of current historiography of colonial Latin America has made use of comparable descriptions of Catholic or governmental ceremonies, or their pictorial representations as evidence of Iberians' ultramontanist and of the caste obsessed conservative societies they created in America.¹⁰² Even when tolerance in Iberian realms is discussed, it is presented not as a central characteristic of such societies, but as evidence of marginal toleration.¹⁰³ One of the most famous representatives of such paintings is Francisco Rizis' "Auto de Fé." This 1680 reproduction of an *Auto de Fé* in

¹⁰¹ See for example, Kenneth Mills, *Idolatry and Its Enemies: Colonial Andean Religion and Extirpation, 1640-1750* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); James Muldoon, *The Americas in the Spanish World Order: The Justification for Conquest in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); Pedro Guivovich Pérez, "Proyecto colonial y control ideológico: El establecimiento de la Inquisición en el Perú," *Apuntes* 35 (1994): 110-11; Jean Pierre Tardieu, *L'inquisition de Lima et les hérétiques étrangers (xvie-xviie siècles)*, (Paris, 1995), 19-22; Martin A. Nesvig, *Ideology and Inquisition: The World of the Censors in Early Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Jose Pardo Tomas, *Ciencia y censura: La Inquisición española y los libros científicos en los siglos xvi y xvii* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1991); Irene Silverblatt, *Modern Inquisitions: Peru and the Colonial Origins of the Civilized World*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); also, among others, Alejandro de la Fuente, César García del Pino and Bernardo Iglesias Delgado, *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Rachel S. O'Toole, "Danger in the Convent: Colonial Demons, Idolatrous Indians, and Bewitching Negras in Santa Clara (Trujillo Del Peru)". *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*. 7, no. 1 2006; Merry E. Wiesner, *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World: Regulating Desire, Reforming Practice* (London: Routledge, 2000), 9; Patricia Seed, *To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial México: Conflicts over Marriage Choice, 1574-1821* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); Susan M. Socolow, *The Women of Colonial Latin America*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); or Susan Schroeder, and Stafford Poole "Introduction" in ed. . Susan Schroeder, and Stafford Poole , *Religion in New Spain*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 4; Martha Few, *Women Who Live Evil Lives: Gender, Religion, and the Politics of Power in Colonial Guatemala*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002; or María E. Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza De Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), specially chapter 2-3 and 8; Margaret M. Olsen, *Slavery and Salvation in Colonial Cartagena de Indias* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004).

¹⁰² See, for instance, Ann Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1999). Mary Elizabeth Perry, and Anne J. Cruz. *Cultural Encounters: The Impact of the Inquisition in Spain and the New World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991; Robert Rowland "Inquisição, intolerância e exclusão." *Ler História* 33 (1997): 9-22.

¹⁰³ See for example, Antonio Dominguez Ortiz, "El primer esbozo de tolerancia religiosa en la España de los Austrias." In *Instituciones y sociedad en la España de los Austrias* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1985); Henry Kamen, "Toleration and Dissent in Sixteenth-Century Spain: The Alternative Tradition". *The Sixteenth Century Journal*. 19, no. 1 (1988): 3-23; Ole Peter Grell and Robert W. Scribner. *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); John C. Laursen, and Cary J. Nederman, *Beyond the Persecuting Society: Religious Toleration Before the Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); or Sabine MacCormack, *Religion in the Andes: Vision and Imagination in Early Colonial Peru* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991)

Madrid clearly captures the intricacies of the functioning of Spanish society as imagined by ecclesiastic and Crown authorities. Notably, in the picture, as in the record in Cartagena we found no traces of “el pueblo” [the populace].

For the most part, the “invisible” masses of seventeenth century Spanish America have been traditionally depicted on the receiving end of colonial acculturation. This motley crew, located on the fringes of the *tablado* [platform] with its *gente lucidísima*, was composed of the thousands of sailors, slaves, peddlers, prostitutes, *pulperos* [store’s owners], carpenters, farmers and housewives, among the many others of all origins and occupations that made up most of Cartagena’s, and the New World’s, population. According to the historiographical tradition of seventeenth century Latin American history, this large majority lived under a regime dominated by the *principales* and the Church. This was, as the narrative goes, a system under which expressions of dissent or heterodoxy were swiftly and brutally repressed. In this depiction, race had well established limits, the famous “*castas*” that defined not only societal but professional position, residence, and kin.¹⁰⁴

Cartagena’s records, if examined with detail, challenge the above described representations. Hidden in the records left by Spanish inquisitors, doctors in theology and judges, we can find clear evidence of the richness of Cartagenos’ “alternative” lives and

¹⁰⁴ This has been a defining trope of Latin American Historiography, for some, of multiple, recent examples see: María Elena. Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza De Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Stuart Schwartz, "Colonial identities and the sociedad de castas". *Colonial Latin American Review*. 4, 1995: 185-201; Carlos López Beltrán,. "Hippocratic Bodies. Temperament and Castas in Spanish America (1570-1820)." *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*. 8, 2007, no. 2: 253-289; Juan Manuel de la Serna, *Pautas de convivencia étnica en la América Latina colonial: (indios, negros, mulatos, pardos y esclavos)* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2005); Ilona Katzew, *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Verena Martínez –Alier, *Marriage, Class and Color in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974); or Elizabeth Cunin, *Identidades a flor de piel: lo "negro" entre apariencias y pertenencias: categorías raciales y mestizaje en Cartagena (Colombia)* (Bogotá : Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia, 2003). Robert Douglas Cope challenges the usefulness of *casta* categories later in eighteenth century México. See his classic study, Robert Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial México City, 1660-1720* (Madison : University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

lifestyles; that of the existences of those left out of *Auto de Fé* depictions. In the rest of this dissertation I show how African and Afro-descendant culture and ritual practices became normative in the city of Cartagena, as well as in other parts of the Spanish Caribbean. Fundamental for my claim is the argument, advanced by Stuart Schwartz that Iberian societies were substantially different places from the ones depicted in the Black Legend. This section, thus, aims to sketch the larger cultural workings of Cartagena's society. Govermental, Inquisitorial and ecclesiastical authorities had very pragmatic concerns about the control of Colonial societies that, according to the best available evidence, functioned in terms very different from ideal counterreformation Catholic flocks. Only what threatened a "public" image of orthodoxy became punished. If rituals, actions or words did not become "*publico y notorio*" they were not only tolerated, but became part of the quotidian. Only a few cases would end up in front of courts. In all likelihood, personal turfs, more often than actual concern about blasphemy or sorcery, were behind denunciation cases.

Schwartz has shown how, dissent was not a rare occurrence in Spain, Portugal or in the Iberian colonies in the New World.¹⁰⁵ What could be said, and in what manner, did not always strictly correlate to the way commoners lived their lives. Priests, bishops and inquisitors were visibly preoccupied with threats to the Catholic faith in Cartagena de Indias and were especially worried because of what they considered the "dangerous" customs its inhabitants. Hundred of cases of heresy, blasphemy, witchcraft, and bigamy, among many other punishable offenses, ended up in front of the inquisition. This, certainly small, percentage of the "crimes against the faith" daily occurrences of in the region, hint at the predominant situation around Cartagena.

¹⁰⁵ Stuart B. Schwartz, *All Can Be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

Inquisitorial efforts at repression were accommodated to local circumstances. Every official inspector sent to Cartagena by the *Suprema* [the supreme] Inquisition office in Madrid complained of the lack of efficiency and leniency of Cartagena's inquisition. The place was, allegedly, run by "heathens." In Cartagena, Blacks "of all nations," delighted themselves with "dances, assisted by throngs of people...to the tune of flutes, *adufes* [Arab tambourine], drums and other musical instruments." In what in all likelihood are misreadings of African rituals, European reported to see demons in the same gatherings that were at work "keeping the tempo of the dance."¹⁰⁶ The same observers remarked how, late in the night, the Blacks got together in "*juntas*" [meetings] that they called "*lloros*" [cryings]. There "men and woman gather at night to mourn their dead with *gentil* [African] customs. They eat and drink in excess and in the name of lamentations they enjoy the most dissolute effects of drunkenness and overeating under the cover of night."¹⁰⁷ During the *juntas* Blacks drank "*guarapo*" [a fermented beverage made out of sugar cane] that according to contemporary descriptions "is a potion that delights and inebriates them." In the "heat of drunkenness," they "offend God gravely."¹⁰⁸

The situation was aggravated when pirates captured the city. When the French privateer Bernard Desjean, Baron de Pointis, besieged, and invaded, Cartagena in 1697, the buccaneers manning his ships happily decapitated the image of "our lady of the rosary" and other statues in several convents of the city. To further compound the humiliation of church and city, the pirates stole the Inquisition "sanbenitos and the *corozas* and came out dressed in them to the plaza. Some posed as prisoners and other as the ministers of the Holy Office.

¹⁰⁶ Fernández, *Apostólica*, 222.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 226.

They mimicked the actions of all the actors in the Autos de Fé [even] reading the sentences in loud voice with great derision and mockery.”¹⁰⁹

Pirates, Muslims, and people of African origin have been, for the most, excluded in studies of cultural formation in Spanish America, with the notable exception of Cuba. Scholars have frequently reduced Latin American maelstrom of cultures to models examining the “hybridization,” “syncretism” or “cultural transfer” between native cultures and European ones. Yet, these binary models ignore ideas, cultural mores and dogmas that came from many other groups. Under the umbrella of an ostensibly Catholic social structure, foreigners from all places in Europe, Africa, the Americas, came together with Native American of equally diverse cultures.

Enter Luis Andrea. The son of a Native American from *Tierra Adentro*, the forest region East of Cartagena, Luis Andrea was one of the most important healers in the city at the dawn of the seventeenth century. Indeed, his case is the first for which there are records in Cartagena’s Inquisition documents. The famed Luis Andrea was said to be a “maestro de idolatrías” [a master of idolatries].¹¹⁰ For some sixteen years, the then thirty-eight years old Luis, “had been curing different diseases, healing sick people already declared hopelessly ill by physicians.”¹¹¹ This *mohan* [master of witches] served Spaniards, Indians and Africans alike. Andrea’s clientele was so European that according to witnesses, the very spiritual entities that helped him had admonished him, quite accurately in retrospect, “you only want to cure Spaniards. They [the Spaniards] will cut your head. Instead, you should be curing Indians who are good people.” By his own admission he continued curing his would-be tormentors of diverse sickness such as “*hidropesía, mal de vaso, búas y otros males*” [edema,

¹⁰⁹ AHN, Inquisición, 1019, Fol. 361v.

¹¹⁰ AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 3r.

¹¹¹ AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 4r.

spleen problems, buboes, and other illnesses] He was so effective that “miraculously, nobody died [under his care].”¹¹²

Luis Andrea’s case is unique in Cartagena’s Colonial Inquisition records.¹¹³ Unlike Mexico City, Cuzco, Oaxaca or Lima, Indians had all but disappeared from Cartagena. Other groups, hence, came to dominate the social landscape of the place. Cartagena’s Jewish community, for instance, was much larger. Several Inquisition processes tell the story of the city’s “crypto-Jews.” In such accounts, not the object of this study, it is obvious that “*marranos*,” most of them Portuguese refugees, came into the city because of its more open nature and tolerance.¹¹⁴

In Cartagena, Jews frequently met in houses that functioned as synagogues. For instance, Diego López, the Afro-descendant surgeon living in the mid seventeenth century in the city, alleged that a man named Nuñez customarily met every week in a house turned synagogue in the city.¹¹⁵ López also held that when he went to examine the surgeon Blas De Paz, who would end up condemned by the inquisition for “judaizante” [being a Jew], he found that his chamber pot, where he examined De Paz’s feces, was covered with the image of a “Santo con Diadema” [Saint with Crown].¹¹⁶

Like Jews, Northern Europeans freely expressed their opinions on matters of faith challenging Catholic normativity. Juan Mercader, for instance, was a peddler born in

¹¹² AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 21r.

¹¹³ I have been able to identify only *mestizos* [mixed race] in the existent records. There are sporadic references to indigenous groups in both church and governmental records, but these actors appear to be living in isolated communities that for the most had limited contact with Cartagenos African and Europeans.

¹¹⁴ AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 421r.

¹¹⁵ For studies of the Judaism in early-modern Cartagena see, Lucia García de Proodian, and Manuel Ballesteros Gaibrois. *Los Judíos en America, sus actividades en los Virreinos de Nueva Castilla y Nueva Granada, S.XVII* (Madrid: Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, 1966); Isaac Croitoru Rotbaum, *De Sefarad al neosefardismo; contribución a la historia de Colombia* (Bogotá: Editorial Kelly, 1967); or Richard L. Kagan, and Philip D. Morgan. *Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500-1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

¹¹⁶ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp.7. Fols. 16v -17r.

Normandy, France, who had no qualms in declaring that “when a man died he would go, exclusively, to hell or heaven, because there was not such a thing as purgatory.”¹¹⁷ As Mercader, Francisco Rodríguez Cabral expressed his opinions against deeply held tenets of Catholicism saying that “Jesus Christ had not died.”¹¹⁸ While it is true that these declarations brought their owners to the doors of the Inquisition, they are also symptomatic of a larger trend. Far from being uncontested world views, Catholic, and Spanish tenets were challenged in Cartagena’s province towns, plazas, streets and houses.

Doubts about the validity of sacraments and Catholic dogma were common in Cartagena, even among Catholics. Andrés de Cuevas, a Cartagenero carpenter and native of Jaen in Spain, did not believe in “confessions and communions.” Instead, he thought that such things were “disparate y mentira” [foolishness and lie].¹¹⁹ Besides, like other Cartagenos, he called into question concepts such as original sin and the humanity of “mankind’s father.”¹²⁰ In like manner, De Cuevas, a soldier from the Ciudad de los Reyes in Valle de Upar declared that he was not going to entrust himself to any saint. He went further and said “for Christ that all of [the saints] were in hell and fuck the animas, [and] that he did not want any saint or woman saint for a friend.” He continued saying that “processions were shit” and that “the animas were all whores and the saints of heaven their cuckolds.”¹²¹ The Virgin Mary’s dignity did not escape all this vitriol. A man from Zaragoza, south of Cartagena, said that Mary was “una puta” [a whore] who liked being sodomized.¹²²

¹¹⁷ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 6v.

¹¹⁸ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 7v.

¹¹⁹ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 25v.

¹²⁰ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 36v.

¹²¹ AHN, Inquisición, 1022, Fol.316v.

¹²² AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 236r.

Not all such un-orthodox ideas referred to metaphysical topics. Matters of the body were, as I show in the rest of this dissertation, fertile ground for the elaboration of dissent. Cartagenos' sexual, culinary and health practices and customs clearly departed from Catholic and Iberian tenets. It was in places like Cartagena that the multifarious characteristics of body practices in the Iberian realm became more evident. Luis Alvarez, from Lima, for example, reputedly repeated to anyone who wanted to hear, and apparently they were quite a few in Cartagena, that "to fornicate was not a sin."¹²³ Scholastic medical discourses also made it to the streets of Cartagena and served to question the teachings of the "holy mother church." For example, Fray Francisco de Oviedo, from Lima who had a Master's in Theology and was the founder of the convent of Nuestra Señora de la Merced in Cartagena, declared about "the original sin and death, that even while Adam had not sinned he would have died either way as his body was made of *four contraries and qualities* and in the end one of these [contraries and qualities] would have prevailed."¹²⁴

De Oviedo was not an exception. Cartagena's clergy was far from being the militant evangelizers portrayed in canonization processes such as that of Pedro Claver. In this "Sodom" the social location of priests as defenders of chastity and beliefs was a world apart from its depiction in scholastic treaties. Cartagena's priests, many of them born in the New World, were voracious womanizers preying on Africans, Native Americans and Europeans.

Alonso de Zamora, a clergyman born in Cartagena was accused, as many others, of having sex with Indians.¹²⁵ Like him, Ignacio de Osma, a Jesuit was caught *in fraganti* asking

¹²³ This is according to Felipe Alvarez, from Madrid, Gaeta, born Napoles, and a Cartagenero Carpenter also said that "having carnal access with woman was not a sin." AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 38v.

¹²⁴ De Oviedo was referring to the Hippocratic theory of the four body humors, which correlated with four the four elements.

¹²⁵ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 71r.

for sexual favors from a woman in his congregation.¹²⁶ Fray Gerónimo de Farías also confessed that that he seduced an Indian woman during her confession and then “had sex with her” in “holy locales” and in the vestry.¹²⁷ Fray Francisco de Amaya went further and confessed not only his earthly *pecadillos*, but also about what he hoped to achieve in more ethereal realms. Witnesses declared that de Amaya said that “the simple fornication was not a sin.” In his own view he was qualified to join the holy trinity as a fourth entity. More to the point, he was sure that “at the day of the final judgment he would appear naked among the eleven thousand virgins joyfully playing with them.”¹²⁸

Priests had sex and doubted, or simply ignored, Catholic doctrine. They traded sexual favors for the sacraments and prayed not only to Christian God and saints but to a vast array of spiritual entities. For example, Fray Luis de Saavedra Benavides, a priest of the Augustinian order, and the prior of the convent in Mompo, 100 miles south of Cartagena, “examined the hand lines of men and women and divined many things in their future.”¹²⁹ Their relaxed, frequent, and varied interactions with Africans, Calvinists and Lutherans, present a picture that challenges the one of zealotry and intolerance that dominated the imagination of northern European writers.

Alternative practices were not derided as “foolishnesses.” When a priest belonging to one of Cartagena’s convents was accused, together with the rest of his “brothers,” of using the services of an African healer, the bishop admonished him that he should not use the African services because “they were illicit.” The Bishop did not tell the priest to pull himself together and stop believing in primitive African rites. Instead he urged him to abandon his

¹²⁶ AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 304r.

¹²⁷ AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 231r.

¹²⁸ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 102v.

¹²⁹ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 76r.

use of practices outside of the Catholic dogma.¹³⁰ They were part of a social order that Africans helped shape.

Evidently, it was not rare for Cartageneros to espouse dissenting ideas and concepts. For all their militant presence in Inquisitorial parades and their scolding writings, the opinion of the “*Doctores de la Santa Madre Iglesia*,” [Doctors of the holy mother Church] was but a part of a myriad of positions and visions about the world that traversed the city and province’s streets, alleys and paths. The city of Cartagena was not unique in this respect. The further people went from established crown or church centers, the more dissention and heterodoxy one was likely to encounter. For instance, one of Paula de Eguiluz friends told her to go to Tolú, some sixty miles from Cartagena, because in that city “were many more things than in Cartagena because there was more liberty and nobody dares to say or denounce anything.”¹³¹

Another point made repeatedly by scholars defending the orthodoxy and dominance of Spanish and European viewpoints and structures in the city is that the circulation of knowledge for all but a few of the early modern inhabitants of the Americas was limited by their illiteracy. Nonetheless, in Cartagena, as in the rest of the then known world, a considerable number of people of African descent, freed and enslaved, as did many, non *hidalgo*, residents of European descent, knew how to read and write. While it is true that it is not possible to establish with certainty literacy rates from the available documents, it would not be surprising to find rates similar to those recorded in European cities.¹³² Many of these

¹³⁰ AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fols. 314r-315v.

¹³¹ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 7, T2, Fol.50v.

¹³² By the mid eighteenth century at least 70% of the population, was literate and had some numeracy. This varied according to countries. Northern European countries, prominently Holland had the highest rates while France had the lowest. Bo Poulsen and Jelle Van Lottum, *Numeracy and literacy in early modern Europe: Evidence from the maritime sector* (Roskilde: Roskilde Universitetscenter, 2009).

“commoners” wrote or testified about their lives and beliefs, and its clear that they were familiar with ideas coming from all corners of the world.

Discursos and Apostemas

The borrowing and appropriation of strategies for dealing with the world was, of course, not exclusive of “lowlifes,” and seamen. Two medical treatises written in Cartagena and published in Spain in the seventeenth century left ample evidence that “learned” Europeans were adopting un-orthodox practices from Africans and Native Americans. The first of such works, *Discursos Medicinales*, was written by Juan Méndez Nieto (ca. 1531- ca. 1617).¹³³ Méndez Nieto practiced medicine and surgery in Cartagena de Indias during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. A Portuguese, and most probably a “*marrano*,” a Jewish convert to christianity, Méndez Nieto, left in his writings a rich testimony of his work and that of multiple other health practitioners in the city.¹³⁴

The *Discursos* are particularly interesting because, besides providing readers with a rare look at medical practice in early modern Spanish America, and a *picaresque* picture of

¹³³ Méndez Nieto was a graduate of the University of Salamanca and a disciple of Fray Marciso (1516-1561). His work was evidently influenced by Gregorio de Arcis who trained at Paris School as a theologian and physician and was a disciple of Andrea Vesalius’ teacher Jacobus Silvius (Jacques du Bois of Amiens, (1478-1555). Méndez Nieto, visibly picked up on De Arcis’ claims of thaumaturgical healing powers, and wrote about several miraculous cures of his own in the New World. Yet, it was Lorenzo Alderete, an Italian physician who graduated from the Universities of Bologna and Ferrara, and one of the most renowned physicians in Europe at the time, who left the strongest mark on Méndez Nieto’s medical practice. See i.e, V. Muñoz Delgado, “Fray narciso Gregori (1516-1561), médico, filósofo y humanista,” *Aesclepio* 16 (1964): 193-203; Marcel Bataillon, “Riesgo y ventura del ‘licenciado Juan Méndez Nieto,’” *Hispanic Review* 37:1 (1969): 23-60; Also in Luis S. Grangel introduction to the newest edition of the *Discursos Medicinales*: Juan Méndez Nieto, *Discursos medicinales* (Salamanca:Universidad de Salamanca, Junta de Castilla y León, 1989). The original manuscript de Méndez Nieto’s *Discursos Medicinales* is at the University of Salamanca Library and consists of 501 pages with Arabic numeration. This book published at the end of his long career as a physician in the Caribbean, gives detailed accounts of treatments and lives of Cartagenos and their attending physicians.

¹³⁴ *Marrano*, a term coming from the Spanish *reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula in the high middle ages was a Jew, or Moor recently converted to Christianity. See, for example, Benzion Netanyahu, *The Marranos of Spain: From the Late 14th to the Early 16th Century, According to Contemporary Hebrew Sources* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

the always competitive medical world, it presents evidence of how physicians readily adopted medical practices of Africans and indigenous people. A case in point, for the treatment of “mouth putrefaction,” and “genital ulcers,” Méndez Nieto recommended the leaves of a tree he had discovered in Cartagena. According to Méndez Nieto, he learned about a tree “that the Blacks and the people in the country side call *limpiadientes*, named after its uses.” He argued in his book that preparations from the *limpiadientes* leaves were much better than other remedies for diseases of the mouth and “the virile member and low parts of woman.” Méndez Nieto said that “it is something to behold, and something that frightens Galen, that being these leaves hot and dry in the third degree....they tighten and cure the relaxed gum and tighten and comfort the teeth, and work better than wine and myrrh...and better than the *tabayba* sticks and all other remedies, simple and complex, so far described [for such diseases].” It is remarkable that a scholastic physician like Méndez Nieto was willing to contradict Galen’s doctrine in lieu of practices he had learned from people of African origin. Méndez not only adopted them but put them above all other known practices for the treatment of these conditions.¹³⁵ While the embracing of plants and remedies from the New World was common practice during the seventeenth century in Europe, it was

¹³⁵ “[E]s de saber que hay en esta ciudad de Cartagena y Reino de Tierra Firme...un árbol montesino que los negros y gente del campo llaman limpiadientes, tomando del efeto la denominan...lo que los palitos del antisco en este caso hacen, lo hacen los de este “árbol con mucha ventaja, y ningún hisopillo ay de polvos ny cerdas para limpiar dientes que tan bien lo haga como son las hojas de este árbol, verdes o secas, siendo mascadas y refregados los dientes con ellas; y lo que mas es de admirar y que espantó al galeno, que , siendo estas hojas calientes y secas en tercero grado, abstersivas o alimpiadoras todo lo posible, tengan tanta astringencia y de tal manera aprieten que aderezan y curan las relajidas encías y aprietan los dientes y lso confortan y afirman mejore que el vino cocido con la mirra, que para este esto hicimos, y mejor que los palitos de tabayba y quantos otros remedios, asi simples como compuestos, hasta hoy para el mismo efecto están descubiertos, demás d que sanan las llagas de la boca, y su zumo o polvo las de la verga y partes bajas de las mujeres, como no sean de bubas y precedan las universales y necesarias evacuaciones., mejor que ningún otro remedio, por lo que ahorra este Arbor de mucho gasto y debe tenerse en mucho y ser muy estimado. Méndez Nieto, 332-33.

extremely uncommon to attribute their discovery to people of African origin as Méndez Nieto did in his book.¹³⁶

The other surviving treatise originating in Cartagena is the “*Práctica y Teórica de las Apostemas.*”¹³⁷ Its author, Pedro López de León, mentioned above, was one of the main figures of surgery in the Spanish speaking world at the turn of the seventeenth century.¹³⁸

López de León left not only the first, and beautifully illustrated, description of surgical tools in the New World, and how they evolved in Cartagena, but also a rich collection of anecdotes in which he refers to the multiple encounters with African and Indigenous medicine and his use of them. Writing about the treatment of the snakes around Cartagena that, in his words, were “worse than the vipers of Spain, and the *triacas* of Toledo,” he recommended a remedy used by the Natives of the region. In López de León words, “the Indians of this land make a potion [using] many *contrahierbas* [antidotes], tobacco extract and honey. They cook all this until is as thick as *egypciaco* unguent.” According to López de León the beverage was “so strong and effective that if the person bitten by the snake, or any other poisonous animal, drinks within half of a quarter of an hour the weight of a *Real* [of this potion] dissolved in wine or water, the potion stops and kills the poison and repairs the heart.”¹³⁹

¹³⁶ For a recent study see Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

¹³⁷ This work, published in 1685 details medical and surgical treatment for wounds, and surgically treatable diseases of the time. López de León had been trained in Spain, and demonstrated a broad knowledge of Anatomy. Pedro López de León, *Práctica y teórica de las apostemas en general, question y practicas de cirugía, de heridas llagas y otras cosas nuevas y particulares. Agora nuevamente se han añadidos insvmentos freriales que sirven al uso de la cirugía. Compuesto por el licenciado Pedro López de León Cirujano en la Ciudad de Cartagena de Indias* (Christóbal Gálvez: Calatayud, 1685).

¹³⁸ López de León’s book was one of the first surgical treaties written in the New World. The book was published in Spain where it became one of most influential surgical works on during the first half of the seventeenth century, and underwent several re-editions. Benito E. Hernandez, “La obra de López de León,” *Seminario de Historia de la Medicina Española* 2 No 4 (1960): 119.

¹³⁹ “hacen los Indios una composición de muchas contrayerbas, y zumo de tabaco, y miel, todo cosido, dejándolo tan espeso como unguento egyciaco, y de aquella color y consistencia llale ambier, es tan fuerte y de tanta virtud, que si el mordido de la culebra bebe peso de un real desatado en vino, o en agua, como sea dentro

Physicians like Méndez Nieto and Pedro López de León were certified by the *Protomedicato* Royal Office based in the capital of the New Kingdom of Granada, Santa Fe de Bogotá. Like them, any surgeon or practicing *Doctor en Medicina* [Medical Doctor] had to travel to the capital. Not only *peninsulares* [Iberians], or people of European descent, made that trip. As in other viceroyalties, Lima for example, surgery would become a possible avenue for social advancement of people of African descent.¹⁴⁰ Diego López, for instance, was a *mulato* surgeon working in Cartagena during the first half of the seventeenth century. His clientele included not only people of African origin but also European and Euro-descendants such as Ambrosio Arias de Aguilera, a public scribe and trader in the port. López worked in the San Sebastian hospital, and had been certified as a surgeon by the *protomedicato* in Santa Fe de Bogotá. Like most other people of African descent working in curative practices in the city, he used African originated techniques, in addition to European ones, for attending his broad clientele. He belonged both to the surgeon's guild in the city as well as to other, less mainstream, societies. Indeed, he would end up being caught up in the big "*conspiración de brujas*" [witchcraft ring] of the 1620s as an attendant and participant in African rites undertaken under cover of warm nights on the outskirts of Cartagena.

Medical practitioners in the northern New Kingdom of Granada came from all over Europe and brought with them their own therapeutic traditions. Surgeons and physicians from Portugal, Holland, England, and even Norway, like Bernardo Andrés de Nayo, came to live and practice in Cartagena.¹⁴¹ Juan Teofilo, in another case, came from Saxony, in

de medio cuarto de hora que le pico la culebra, u otro cualquiera animal venenoso, luego ataja el veneno y le mortifica y repara el corazón." López de León, 201.

¹⁴⁰ For Afro-Mulato surgeons see, for example, Adam Warren, "Poetry, and Spectacle among Lima's Afro-Peruvian Surgeons." Unpublished paper presented at the meeting of the American society of Ethno-history, New Orleans. September 2009.

¹⁴¹ AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fols. 266r-267r.

Alemania Alta [High Germany] to practice surgery in Santa Marta, north of Cartagena.¹⁴²

Besides certified physicians, and surgeons a multitude of other healers and lay personnel was attached to hospitals and convents. Remarkably, Pedro Claver, the Jesuit priest who worked in Cartagena during the first half of the seventeenth century, became famous, among other things for taking care of diseased slaves.¹⁴³ As it was, most of the health care in the city was carried out by individuals outside the medical profession. Notably, people of African origin were at the center of Cartagena's medical market place. There is no reason to believe that Iberian or Catholic views about the body health, illness or death, were predominant in the city. On the contrary, all evidence point not only to a diverse marketplace but also to a confluence of beliefs about the body in the city.

Conclusion

The description of Cartagena's highly structured and elaborate in portraying this society as one under the rule of Catholic and Spanish imperial law. Being a monarchic corporation, the Inquisition's own existence and success relied on the repetition and reiteration of defined societal tenets that put church, nobility and Spaniards at the top of a hierarchy that was to be reproduced, throughout the cities of the New World.

In the physically and imaginarily gridded social and architectural landscape of cities like Mexico, Lima and Cartagena, Africans and their descendants would only be present as prisoners of the inquisition or as spectators too low in the social hierarchy to be even mentioned in the records in any other capacity than as transgressor of ecclesiastical or Royal

¹⁴² AHN, Inquisición, 1023. Fol. 467r.

¹⁴³ See Fernández, *Apostólica*; Ángel Valtierra, and Rafael María de Hornedo, *San Pedro Claver, esclavo de los esclavos* (Madrid: La Editorial Católica), 1985; Anna María Splendiani, and Tulio Aristizábal, *Proceso de Beatificación y Canonización de San Pedro Claver* (Bogotá: Universidad Javeriana, 2002).

laws or as property. Colonial Latin American historiographical tradition portrays people of African origin as a further isolated lot living their lives in a separate and culturally and socially impoverished realm. More than any other group, in this tradition, people of African origin lived on the margins of society.¹⁴⁴ Because of this, most studies in continental Latin America have considered Africans and their descendants are worthy of study as separate groups creating a culture and society that remained isolated from the “main” developments of Spanish domains in the New World.¹⁴⁵

The performance, and its depiction, however, had very little to do with the day-to-day life of the large majority of early modern Americans. Instead, Caribbean port cities like Cartagena de Indias formed societies and cultures that were shaped by multiple forces coming from across the Atlantic World. In particular, is my contention, they were fashioned by African ways of imagining the natural and supernatural worlds.¹⁴⁶

The exploration of the deviant nature of the Spanish Caribbean I just hinted at here is a subject that deserves more attention than this chapter can provide. To be sure, Cartagena’s society was still defined by Catholic rites and Spanish Crown law and government. It was

¹⁴⁴ See, among others, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra de México*; Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*; Herman Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico*; Carlos Sempat Assadourian, *El tráfico de esclavos en Córdoba de Angola a Potosí, siglos XVI-XVII* (Córdoba: Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, Instituto de Estudios Americanistas, 1966); Bowser, *The African Slave*, 54- 63; Vila Vilar, *Hispanoamérica*; Navarrete, *Historia social*; Maya, *Brujería y*, 211; Navarrete, *Génesis y desarrollo*.

¹⁴⁵ Herman Bennett, makes this point in *Colonial Blackness*, 9. Some recent examples on historians incorporating early modern African experience into the national narratives of continental Spanish America include Joan C. Bristol, *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches: Afro-Mexican Ritual Practice in the Seventeenth Century* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007); Ursula de Jesús, and Nancy E. Van Deusen. *The Souls of Purgatory: The Spiritual Diary of a Seventeenth-Century Afro-Peruvian Mystic, Ursula De Jesús* (Albuquerque.: University of New Mexico Press, 2004); Frank T. Proctor III, “Slavery, Identity, and Culture: An Afro-Mexican Counterpoint, 1640-1763” (Ph.D. diss, Emory University, 2003); Ben Vinson, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). Nicole Von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers: Confraternities and Social Mobility for Afro-Mexicans* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006).

¹⁴⁶ See Louisa S. Hoberman, , and Susan M. Socolow, *Cities & Society in Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986); Kinsbruner, *The Colonial Spanish-American City*; Richard L Kagan and Fernando Marías, *Urban Images of the Hispanic World, 1493-1793* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Felix Jay, *Urban Communities in Early Spanish America, 1493-1700* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002).

also a society with slaves in which representatives of the King had no qualms about quartering criminals and torturing and burning people at the stake because of their religious convictions. However, this is only a partial account of how people lived their lives in places like Cartagena.

As I show in this chapter, Cartagena's human landscape was very different from common conceptualizations of Latin American Colonial society. This was not because Cartagena was an exotic backwater location. Cartagena de Indias was, by all accounts, a crucial locale in Spain's imperial scheme. Rather than being just a cog in the empire machinery of Colonial exploitation or a refueling stopover in the *carrera de Indias*, Cartagena was a central place in the Spanish Caribbean. Its conspicuous absence for the modeling of our conceptions of the life of early modern Spanish America is, I suspect, more related to the methodological difficulties that its analysis entails using the established models of Colonial Latin America.

The historiography of indigenous creolization, or European encounters with Native Americans and their cosmogonies, does little for the framing of societies and cultures in the early modern Northern South America and Caribbean. Likewise, analytical models based on neatly defined *casta* systems, or others created after extrapolations of hybridity and cultural transfer based on postcolonial studies appear misplaced to engage with the dynamic and schizoid characteristics of cultural formation of seventeenth century Spanish Caribbean. The paucity of studies examining Latin American seventeenth century history, for some a lost period marked by wars, epidemics, economic stagnation and climatic catastrophes, has made it easy to bypass this, seminal, period in the formation of Latin American societies.¹⁴⁷ Socio-

¹⁴⁷ There has been a considerable historiographical revision of this conceptualization of the seventeenth century, so much in vogue during the 1960s and 1970s. See, for instance, the incisive series of articles in the American

cultural dynamics and patterns of cultural interchange, exchange and borrowing were clearly defined by circumstances extraneous to the trumpeted models of Colonial society of the eighteenth century.

The following chapters will examine what I have found to be a particularly rewarding field for unearthing of stories of people of African origin in the seventeenth century Spanish Caribbean. Through an examination of ideas about bodies, health, disease and death, emerges a very different picture about the stories and history of Africans and their descendants and this region. They allow us possibly to sketch and imagine a society quite unlike than the one cavalced by Mateo Ramírez on his way to announce Cartagena's 1626 Auto de Fe.

CHAPTER III

AFRICAN BODIES IN THE EARLY MODERN AFRICAN ATLANTIC WORLD

The natives are seldom troubled with any distempers, because being born in that unhealthy air, and bred up in sloth and that stench, those things little affect them...their skins are so supplied by daily anointing with palm-oil, that the weather can make but little impression on them.¹

Jean Barbot, 1678

Around 1678 Frenchman Jean Barbot admonished that any “White man” daring to disembark in Fetu, modern Ghana, was almost certain to fall pray to “several distempers, daily exposing their lives to danger, very many being carry’d of throu’ these excesses, in a very deplorable condition, by fevers, fluxes, cholicks, consumptions, asthmas’ small-pox, coughs, and sometimes worms and dropsies.”² Notices of West and West-Central African

¹ Jean Barbot was a French Protestant who fled to England in 1685 following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and who traveled in West and West Central Africa during the years 1678-9 and 1681-2. Jean, P. Barbot, E. H. Hair, Adam Jones, and Robin Law, *Barbot on Guinea: The Writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa, 1678-1712*, Works issued by the Hakluyt Society, 2nd ser., Vol. 176. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1992), 398.

² Barbot, *Guinea*, Vol. 176, 397. The Guinea worm disease, also called dracunculiasis, is caused by the parasitic threadlike worm *Dracunculus medinensis*. It still affects millions of people in Africa. There are descriptions of the “Guinea worms” and the high incidence of other infectious diseases in virtually all accounts of life in seventeenth century West and West Central Africa. See for example, Samuel Braun, and Johann Jacob Genath, *Samuel Brun, des Wundartzet und Burgers zu Basel Schiffarten: welche er in etliche neue Länder und Insulen, zu fünf unterschiedlichen Malen, mit Gottes Hülff, gethan : an jetzo aber, auff Begeren vieler ehrlicher Leuthen, selbs beschrieben, und menniglichen, mit kurzweil und nutz zu lösen, in Truck kommen lassen* (Basel: in Verlegung Johan Jacob Genaths, 1624), (80-81 original). Michael Hemmersman, who was from Nuremberg and lived in Africa from 1639-45 also wrote about this. See Michael Hemmersman and Christoff Ludwig *West-Indianische Reissbeschreibung, de An. 1639. biss 1645. von Amsterdam nach St.Jorius de Mina, ein Castel, in Africa, von Michael Hemmersam ... in desselben Lebzeiten, selbsten zusammen getragen anietzo aber ... einer Vorrede, Delineation dess gantzen Werkcks, und nützlichen Register vermehret, durch Christoff Ludwig Dietherrn [von Anwenden (Nürnberg: lin Verl. Paul Fürstens, Kunsthändlers, gedr. daselbst bey Christoff Gerhard, 1663), 79; Also Pieter De Marees, A. van Dantzig, and Adam Jones, *Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602)* (Oxford: Published for The British Academy by Oxford University Press, 1987), 196; Adam Jones provided the first translation of some of the German texts I use here (Brun, and Hemmersman). See his painstakingly researched work Adam Jones, *German Sources for West African History 1599-1669* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1983), 68, 91, 121. All translations are mine unless noted otherwise.*

“putrid” and “malign” air and waters, which in European medical thought were responsible for the “distempers,” appear in the great majority of the writings Europeans sent home from the Atlantic coast of Africa during the long seventeenth century. This was not a ruse factors and missionaries used to deceive possible competitors in the lucrative Atlantic trade of commercial goods and souls, one that was exploding at the time. Mortality rates were astonishingly high, even for the time. One in three European men died during the first four months of arriving in sub-Saharan African.³

West and West-Central Africa were unquestionably dangerous places for Europeans ill-accustomed to the weather and without built immunity to shield them from the hodgepodge of tropical diseases waiting for them on sub-Saharan African shores.⁴ Besides invisible viruses, bacteria, and more visible worms, Europeans encountered a vastly different understanding of the workings of the human body. In West and West-Central Africa, the body, closely connected to both natural and supernatural worlds, functioned around principles and mechanisms with deep roots in complex communitarian and spiritual systems. Most of them were as foreign as yellow fever and Guinea worms to the early modern Italians,

³ See, H. M. Feinberg, “New Data on European Mortality in West Africa: The Dutch on the Gold Coast, 1719-1760,” *Journal of African History*, 15 (3) (1974): 357-371; K. G. Davies “The Living and the Dead: White Mortality in West Africa, 1684-1732,” in *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere; Quantitative Studies*. Quantitative studies in history, eds. Stanley L. Engerman, Eugene D. Genovese, and Alan H. Adamson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 83-98; Also, Philip D. Curtin, *Disease and Empire: The Health of European Troops in the Conquest of Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁴ All sixteenth and seventeenth century accounts of the living conditions of sub-Saharan Africa talks about the brutal toll infectious diseases took over European. Typical is this description in Thomas Astley collection of African accounts: “The malignity of the Whidah Air is manifest from the Dews which fall on the Deck before Sun-rise... These malignant fevers rage most in June, July and August, discovering themselves by great pains in the head and reins, inclination to vomit, bleeding at the nose, insupportable drought, and a dryness of the tongue which makes it quiet black. ... Besides these burning Fevers, which are always malignant, and intermitting fevers... dysenteries are very common here, thought to be owing to their fruits and Water... This is the most difficult distemper to cure, as it attacks strangers at all seasons of the year. Thomas Astley, *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels; Consisting of the Most Esteemed Relations Which Have Been Hitherto Published in Any Language; Comprehending Every Thing Remarkable in Its Kind in Europe, Asia, Africa and America, with Respect to the Several Empires, Kingdoms and Provinces ... so As to Form a Complete System of Modern Geography and History, Exhibiting the Present State of All Nations*, Volume 3 (London: Printed for Thomas Astley, 1745), 23.

Dutch, Englishman, Portuguese and Frenchman arriving in *Guinee* during the seventeenth century. This chapter is an initial exploration into the ways in which early modern West and West-Central African people conceptualized matters of the body.

As in the New World, the process of cultural interchange between communities in West and West-Central Africa started long before the arrival of Europeans. While the transatlantic commercial and cultural interchange initiated by Europeans' settlement in Africa and America certainly bridged three continents in ways unimaginable until then, Africans, as well as Native Americans, were involved in vigorous and rich processes of trans-culturation a long time before the arrival of Europeans.⁵ Moreover, as Peter Mark and George Brooks have shown, a thriving population of Euro-Africans started emerging with the arrival of Portuguese sailors to West Africa in the fifteenth century.⁶ While this could seem to be self-evident, the literature on creation of "Latin-American," or "African-American" cultures, in the continental sense of the word, has been very liberal in their use of broad categories defining Africans.⁷ These large cultural groups appear as static and immobile even in the

⁵ See especially, Jean-Loup Amselle, *Logiques métisses: anthropologie de l'identité en Afrique et ailleurs* (Paris: Payot, 1990); also, Martin Klein, "Ethnic pluralism and homogeneity in the Western Sudan: Saalum, Segu, Wasulu," *Mande Studies* 1 (1999): 109-124; John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6-7; Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 24-45; Walter Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves: Transformations Along the Guinea-Bissau Coast, 1400-1900*. Social history of Africa. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003), 8-9.

⁶ Peter Mark, *"Portuguese" Style and Luso-African Identity: Precolonial Senegambia, Sixteenth-Nineteenth Centuries*. Bloomington: (Indiana University Press, 2002); George E. Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa: Commerce, Social Status, Gender, And Religious Observance From The Sixteenth To The Eighteenth Century*. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003).

⁷ This is a long list. For some recent examples see, James Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Jason R. Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); Elisa Larkin Nascimento, *The Sorcery of Color: Identity, Race, And Gender In Brazil*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007); Rachel Sarah O'Toole, "From the Rivers of Guinea to the Valleys of Peru: Becoming a Bran Diaspora within Spanish Slavery," *Social Text* 92, 25: 3 (Fall 2007), 19 – 36. Several of the essays in Linda Heywood's *Central Africans* make use of the same kind of assumptions. See, for example, Hein Vanhee, "Central African Popular Christianity and the making of Haitian Vodou Religion" in *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora*, ed. Linda Heywood and John K. Thornton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

momentous changes associated with war and imperial expansion of powerhouses such as the Mande or Kongo empires.

This chapter contributes to a growing recognition of the need for defining West and West-Central African traditions as changing over time and with more precise cultural specificity, instead as static, bounded systems of beliefs, in this case about corporeality, which could serve as unique points for their reconstruction on the other side of the Atlantic. The common incorporation and adoption of religious, cultural and bodily practices from the rest of the continent makes it impossible to delimit with certitude clearly unique West or West-Central African ontological systems regarding the nature of humans and the intimately related natural world surrounding them.

A similar affirmation could be made about lay European beliefs about the body. The historiography of healing traditions and beliefs about the body in Europe, with a few exceptions, has been defined by the study of primary printed sources representing the views of learned physicians and scholars.⁸ While historians have recognized the presence of “alternative” models for the description of the body most of the historiography on westerners concepts about matters of the flesh portray the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as one

2002), 243-264. New Kingdom of Granada colonial history is particularly ill-informed about the amalgamation of West and West Central African cultures. In particular the work of Adriana Maya is wanting in regards to her identifications of African continuities, which she identifies based almost exclusively on nineteenth and twentieth century accounts. See, Adriana Maya Restrepo, *Brujería y Reconstrucción de Identidades Entre los Africanos y sus Descendientes en la Nueva Granada, Siglo XVII* (Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura, 2005); Adriana Maya Restrepo, “Botánica y medicina africanas en la Nueva Granada, siglo XVII” *Historia Crítica*, 19 (1999): 3-23. Older literature on African history insisted on the now, recognized for most African historians as misleading view that African communities were static. See for instance, P.E.H. Hair, for instance, who insisted that African ethnic groups have remained remarkably located around specific territories from the early modern period to the present. P.E.H. Hair, “Ethnolinguistic Continuity on the Guinea Coast,” *The Journal of African History* 8 (1967): 247-268.

⁸ For instance the work of Mary Lindemann that although announces to include a patient perspective of sickness and death uses published sources exclusively and focuses strongly on the influences of learned traditions on “lay” ideas about corporeality. See, Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Also, among others, Linda Deer Richardson, “The Generation of Disease: Occult Causes and Diseases of the Total Substance,” in Andrew Wear, Roger K. French, and I. M. Lonie eds, *The Medical Renaissance of the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

marked by the “disenchantment” of the body.⁹ Although still present, the long held Hippocratic-Galenic tradition, in this line of thought, started receding in the minds of Europeans and their descendants in the Old and the New World. This historiography holds that, fueled by the discoveries of the likes of William Harvey, physicians and laymen abandoned long held beliefs about humors and miasmas, as well as “magical” or “spiritual” ideas about the functioning of the body.

Scholars in other fields have described how “magical” thinking permeated concepts of illness and death in early modern Europe. This “magic” conceptualization of bodies has treated as an outsider to outright histories of medicine in the period.¹⁰ In the scholarly works considering the intersection between “magical thinking” and “learned” traditions, the beliefs that the body could work in any other “deviant” manner than the ones promulgated by church and learned doctors has been treated as exotic. Folk beliefs act as foils for the contrasting of professional ascendance and social structuration of the medical profession.¹¹ The vacuum is even bigger when we consider works that treat non-medical, non-European histories of the body in the early modern period. There are no English language monographs that examine

⁹ See for example, Stuart Clark, “Demons and Disease: The Disenchantment of the Sick,” in Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra, Hilary Marland, and Hans de Waardt. *Illness and Healing Alternatives in Western Europe*. (London: Routledge, 1997), 38-58; Also Mathew Ramsey, “Magical Healing, Witchcraft and Elite Discourse in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century France,” *Ibid.*, 14-38; Linda Deer Richardson, “The Generation of Disease: Occult Causes and Diseases of the Total Substance,” in Andrew Wear, Roger K. French, and I. M. Lonie eds, *The Medical Renaissance of the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); or Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London: Simon Forman ; Astrologer, Alchemist, and Physician* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005; also, A. Wear, *Health and Healing in Early Modern England: Studies in Social and Intellectual History* (. Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 1998).

¹⁰ With some exceptions. for instance Guido Ruggiero, “The Strange Death of Margarita Marcellini: Male, Signs, and the Everyday World of Pre- Modern Medicine,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 106, No. 4 (2001):1141-1158.

¹¹ See for instance, Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 457-88; Kaspar von Greyerz and trans. Thomas Dunlap, *Religion and Culture in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 150; Willem de Blécourt “Witch Doctors, Soothsayers, and Priests. On Cunning Folk in European Historiography and Tradition,” *Social History* 19 (1994): 285-303; or Hofstra, Marland, and de Waardt. *Illness*.

how people in West and West Central Africans thought about bodies before the colonial era.¹²

Contributing to a literature that has examined African culture almost exclusively from the perspective of anthropological studies from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I define here, to the extent that is possible, African ideas about bodies through contemporary primary sources.¹³ Many of these accounts were written by Europeans living in Africa for decades. Others are narratives provided by people of African origin and recorded by European scribes in Africa or in the Americas. Finally I use selected material culture elements that mark continuities within what we traditionally consider African systems of thought about the natural and supernatural worlds.

African Religious Traditions: Core Beliefs, and Cultural Zones?

This chapter focuses on rites and beliefs about the body of some of the most important African groups that sent slaves to the Spanish Caribbean during the long seventeenth century. My objective is to advance a vision of West and West-Central African traditions as plural, open, incorporative, and as essentially understandable and attractive to early modern Europeans. I will focus on those of seventeenth-century groups from Upper Guinea, West-Central Africa, and the Bights of Benin and Biafra who form the majority of the cases I examine in this dissertation. Demographic data, however can be deceiving and

¹² One of the few essays devoted to the topic actually uses modern sources. See, John M. Janzen, "Ideologies and Institutions in Precolonial Western Equatorial African Therapeutics," in *The Social Basis of Health and Healing in Africa*, eds. Steven Feierman and John M. Janzen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 195-211; For East Central Africa we have, Gloria Martha Waite, *A History of Traditional Medicine and Health Care in Pre-Colonial East-Central Africa*. Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1992. There is a very abridged survey of medicine in Africa in Ludwig Brandl, *A Short History of Medicine in Africa* (Victoria: West Cameroon Medical Association, 1972).

¹³ Several scholars have pointed out to the problem of using contemporary sources to examine pre-colonial African. See, for instance, Collen Kreeger, "The Conundrum of Culture in Atlantic World History," in *Africa and the Americas: Interconnections during the Slave Trade*, eds. José C. Curto And Renée Soulodre-La France (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2005), 265-266.

does not uniquely explain the creation of particular socio-cultural structures and mores. Other regions also provided forced immigrants to the New Kingdom of Granada and the Spanish Caribbean in the seventeenth century and had a strong influence in the shaping of Spanish Caribbean culture.

Most current scholarly as well as public understanding of African culture are a product of ethnographic work done by Europeans, mostly during the last two hundred years. Not surprisingly, most historians working on early modern Africa consider the ethnic categories I will use here as colonizing tropes.¹⁴ Indeed many scholars of the African Diaspora, particularly those studying the United States, have been recently criticized for trying to directly “connect” cultures in the United States to African ones. Douglas Chambers for example has been roundly criticized for seeing *Igbos* everywhere.¹⁵ Gwendolyn Midlo Hall’s discussion of *Bambaras* uses similarly problematic survivalist arguments.¹⁶ Amongst the most eloquent advocates of the hypothesis of survivalism on the part of African specialists are Hall, Chambers, and Thornton who insist that concrete “groups” of Africans from specific regions in Africa were transported to specific locations in the Americas. Central to this has been Thornton’s hypothesis of broad, African cultural zones.¹⁷ But, as scholars of West Africa argue, Africans usually did not identify themselves in terms of one set “ethnicity” or “nation.” This is why it is imprecise to project African ethnic identities from

¹⁴ See for one of many examples, Peter Mark, *"Portuguese" Style and Luso-African Identity: Precolonial Senegambia, Sixteenth-Nineteenth Centuries* (. Bloomington: (Indiana University Press, 2002), 5-8.

¹⁵ See, Douglas B. Chambers, 'My own nation': Igbo Exiles in the Diaspora," in David Eltis and David Richardson. *Routes to Slavery: Direction, Ethnicity, and Mortality in the Transatlantic Slave Trade*. *Studies in Slave and Post-slave Societies and Cultures* (London: Frank Cass, 1997); also, Douglas B. Chambers, *Murder at Montpelier: Igbo Africans in Virginia* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005).

¹⁶ See, Stephan Palmié and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall. 1997. "Slave Cultures and the Cultures of Slavery". *The American Historical Review*. 102, no. 3: 782; and the introduction to Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

¹⁷ See Thornton, *Africans*. Particularly the introduction and chapter 7.

the Americas backwards onto the African past. Still unknown is to what extent can we know to what extent African “nations” were created in the Americas? Further problematic is the fact that this discussion has centered in the North Atlantic and not in the South, the place where most of the slave trade happened.¹⁸

Nonetheless, as the same Africanists recognize, these categories are still useful, and unavoidable as the only ones that were passed to us from the early modern period and the age of African exploration. For all of their problems, such “ethnic” classifications are at least an attempt to avoid the all too common generalizing stereotypes that characterized much of the scholarship on African culture and medical traditions during the last century.

Scholars such as John Thornton, James Sweet and Jan Vansina, have argued for the permanence of “core beliefs” that remained in place throughout Africans different historical encounters with other cultures, and with the momental changes brought by the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism.¹⁹ While simplistic, this model has been the base of most work on

¹⁸ For some examples of this discussion see Philip D. Morgan, “The Cultural Implications of the Atlantic Slave Trade: African Regional Origins, American Destinations and New World Developments.” *Slavery and Abolition* 18 (1997): 122-4; David Northrup, “Igbo and Myth Igbo: Culture and Ethnicity in the Atlantic World, 1600-1850.” *Slavery and Abolition* 21 (December 2000): 1-20. Mariza de Carvalho Soares, “A ‘nação’ que se tem e a ‘terra’ de onde se vem: categorias de inserção social de africanos no Império português, século XVIII,” *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos* 26 (2004): 303-30. Mariza de Carvalho Soares, “From Gbe to Yoruba: Ethnic Changes within the Mina Nation in Rio de Janeiro,” in *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, eds. Toyin Falola and Matt Childs (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2004), 231-247; Peter Caron, “‘Of a nation which the others do not Understand’: Bambara Slaves and African Ethnicity in Colonial Louisiana,” *Slavery and Abolition* 18 (1997): 98-121; Donald R. Wright, “‘What Do You Mean There Were No Tribes in Africa?’: Thoughts on Boundaries and Related Matters in Precolonial Africa,” *History in Africa* 26 (1999): 409-26; Robin Law, “Ethnicity and the Slave Trade: ‘Lucumi’ and ‘Nago’ as Ethnonyms in West Africa.” *History in Africa* 24 (1997): 205-219; Robin Law, “Ethnicities of Enslaved Africans in the Diaspora: On the Meanings of ‘Mina’ (Again),” *History in Africa* 32 (2005): 247-67. David Pavy, “The Provenience of Colombian Negroes.” *Journal of Negro History* 52 (January 1967): 35-58; Stephan Bühnen, “Ethnic Origins of Peruvian Slaves (1548-1650): Figures for Upper Guinea,” *Paideuma* 39 (1993): 57-110. Alejandro de la Fuente García, “Denominaciones Étnicas De Los Esclavos Introducidos En Cuba, Siglos XVI y XVII,” *Anales del Caribe, Centro de Estudios del Caribe* 6 (1986): 75-96; Mariza de Carvalho Soares, “Mina, Angola E Guiné: Nomes d’África No Rio de Janeiro Setecentista,” *Tempo* 3 (1998): 73-93; Jean-Pierre Tardieu. “Origines Des Esclaves de la Région de Lima, Au Pérou, Aux Xvie E Xviie Siècles,” in *La Chaîne et le lien: une vision de la traite négrière (Actes du Colloque de Ouidah)*, dir. Doudou Diene (Paris: UNESCO, 1998).

¹⁹ Although James Sweet has complicated his argument, he still uses the same type of categories of his “Recreating Africa.” For instance see James H. Sweet, “Mistaken Identities? Olaudah Equiano, Domingos

early-modern African culture. In no place is this more evident than in the historiography of African body culture.

The history of African healing traditions is inextricably linked to the history of African religion. Scholars of African “traditional medicine” have signaled that it is not possible to dissociate the physical and the spiritual or religious worlds in West and West-Central Africans’ vision of corporeality. In fact, the recognition of the inseparability of religious beliefs from beliefs about the body in the study of African traditions provides what I consider a more holistic and historically accurate and complete approach to the issue of suffering and “affliction.”²⁰

The differentiation of Western vis-à-vis non-Western categorizations of illness’s etiology is a fictional one, one tainted by scientism. In the West, as in Africa, people have since long believed that illness can be caused equally by natural, social, and/or human causation, say by evil eye for instance. Westerlund describes African’s beliefs on the origins of illness under two categories: “personalistic” and “naturalistic.” Personalistic implies a direct agent, either human or supra-human, is involved in the causation of illness. Naturalistic when the cause is related to identifiable natural events.²¹ These categories become evident

Alvares, and the Methodological Challenges of Studying the African Diaspora," *The American Historical Review*. 2009.114, no. 2: 279. See also, Jan Vansina, and Claudine Vansina. *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward A History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 249-251; Jan Vansina, *How Societies Are Born: Governance in West Central Africa Before 1600* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004); also Thornton, *Africa*, 1-12, 183-205.

²⁰ See among others, David Westerlund, *African Indigenous Religions and Illness Causation: From Spiritual Beings to Living Humans* (Brill: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2006), 5; or S.R. Whyte. “Anthropological Approaches to African Misfortune: From Religion to Medicine,” in *Culture, Experience and Pluralism: African Ideas of Illness and Healing*, eds. A. Jacobson-Widding and David Westerlund (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1989), 289-301.

²¹ He further divided the personalistic causation of illness in three categories that apply both for African as for European and indigenous beliefs in the early modern period. According to Westerlund, the personalistic etiology of illness can be divided into religious, supra-human, and human. The naturalistic category remains the same. The first category encompasses the beliefs that human beings are influenced or are “dependent on certain supra-human or spiritual entities or powers.” Here, we only have supra-human causes, such as the living dead or ancestor spirits. The second one, the social causation of illness, refers to relations between living human beings,

when we consider traditions about corporeality in West and West-Central Africa.

Early modern West and West-Central African groups had beliefs about the body that, were fluid and open to external influences. They shared more than differed with each other. This is clear in the primary sources available for the study of the topic in the early modern period. In order to avoid repetition and overlapping, I will be grouping different African traditions under two geographically defined areas, West and West-Central Africa. In each of this sections I will be acknowledging the particularities of each group and will be defining them as precisely as possible. This is a rhetorical strategy and does not imply that I am tossing the tradition and culture of the several identifiable groups that follow into an overarching West or West-Central African tradition. The first section will discuss traditions coming from groups in Upper Guinea and the Gold Coast. Then I will examine those of the Slave Coast and the rest of the Bight of Benin, and the Bight of Biafra. Finally in the West-Central Africa section, I will be including traditions from several of the groups south of what today is Cameroon, including Angola, Kongo, Matamba, Benguela, Luango, Bengo and Ndongo.

Upper Guinea and the Gold Coast

According to the Jesuit missionary, Manuel Alvares, in the late sixteenth century most groups in Upper Guinea considered disease and death as the product of supernatural forces.

They could appear as a consequence of the direct action of several kinds of spiritual forces,

which in Africa entails a supernatural dimension. Under this category fell concepts such as witchcraft, sorcery, and witchery. The natural causes refer to the effects of “entities of nature” such as insects, germs, natural substances, food, lack of sleep, or disequilibrium of basic elements believed to hold the body and the world together. However, as Westerlund concedes, this categorization is always necessarily incomplete, and in African thought, as in Western conceptualization, illness causality was, and still is, commonly an overlapping and multi-originated idea that simultaneously draws from several of the realms I just described. Westerlund, 5-7.

or indirectly through the intercession of diverse ritual specialists.²² Upper Guineans, amongst them, the Papels (or Buramos), the Brames, the Zapes, the Balanta, the Banhus, the Fulupos, and the Biafaras, believed in the existence of a supreme entity, akin to the god of monotheistic religions, who was not involved in everyday businesses of daily life.²³ More closely related to human affairs was a multitude of spirits that could be primal spirits, essential natural forces, or the souls of ancestors which were intimately linked to illness etiology.

Spirits of nature resided in creeks, in the forest, or in other bodies of water like lakes and the ocean. They were also present in natural forces such as thunders and storms. Ancestors formed part of the community and were decisive in the fortunes of individuals and the community at large. They interacted with humans on a daily basis in all sorts of activities. In particular spirits played an essential role in the causation of disease. Like living human beings they were whimsical creatures to be appeased, encouraged and even consoled.²⁴ They could re-appear in the form of other human beings, or animals.²⁵

Early modern Upper Guineans used several different terms to refer to spirits. Among the Balanta a spirit was a *kussase*.²⁶ Diola Folup groups called them *ekin* and *ennati*.²⁷ While

²² Manuel Alvares, 1526-1583 was a Jesuit missionary living around Sierra Leone during the 1580s. See Manuel, A. Alvares, Teixeira da Mota, Luís de Matos, and P. E. H. Hair, *Ethiopia Minor and a geographical account of the Province of Sierra Leone (c. 1615)* (Liverpool: Dept. of History, University of Liverpool, 1990). <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/AfricanStudies.Alvares01> Chapter 5, p.3 and Chapter 7, p. 9.

²³ Alvares, *Ethiopia*, Chapter 7. We do not count with a standardized format to refer to African groups in the pre-colonial era.

²⁴ Robert M. Baum, *Shrines of the Slave Trade: Diola Religion and Society in Precolonial Senegambia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 45; Luigi Scantamburlo, *Etnologia dos Bijagós da Ilha de Bubaque* (Lisboa: Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical, 1991), 66-73.

²⁵ “They accept a thousand lies about the soul, believing and asserting that it wanders about on earth; and if anyone bears a resemblance to a dead person they say that he is the dead man's soul. They are so imbued with this idea that they consider (certain animals) as rational transformations of the human body, such as the tame snakes which make their way about houses and are useful in the way cats are with us, also monkeys...elephants, in fact any animal they fancy.” Alvares, *Ethiopia*, Ch 7, p. 11.

²⁶ Peter Mark, *A Cultural Economic and Religious History of Basse Casamance since 1500* (Stuttgart: Wiesbaden, 1985), 79-80; George E. Brooks, *Landlords and Strangers: Ecology, Society, and Trade in Western*

they could be ancestors, and thus part of the community, they could also arrive from the outside and attack the community. People in Upper Guinea frequently walled their villages to protect them not only from other more physical invaders, very common in the region, but also from spirits dwelling in places like forests.²⁸ As these arboreal spirits held a tremendous potential for destruction, Upper Guineans not only walled them out, but also honored them and frequently offered them sacrifices.²⁹ As we will see in the following chapter, some of these customs made their way to the other side of the Atlantic. The sacrifice of oxes, for instance, was used by Brames, and other groups in *Guiné* and the Spanish Caribbean to appease ancestors and other spirits causing sicknesses.³⁰

In seventeenth century Upper Guinean cosmogony, god could only cause beneficial things and was not responsible for death and diseases. Upper Guineans believed that spiritual forces animated all type of objects either lifeless or parts of living beings, plants or animals. Language was an essential tool for the awakening of particular forces in healing rituals. These spiritual forces could materialize in the form of *chinas*, power-objects, which were essential in the interaction between the solicitant and the spirit. The power of the word, another element common to African ritual practices, was to be accurately used by the recitation of specific linguistic compositions in the midst of the proper rituals.³¹ According to Jesuit missionary Manuel Alvares and the rector of the Jesuit College in Cartagena de Indias,

Africa, 1000-1630 (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 36.

²⁷ Peter Mark, *The Wild Bull and the Sacred Forest: Form, Meaning, and Change in Senegambian Initiation Masks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 24-5.

²⁸ See Ramon Sarró, *The Politics of Religious Change on the Upper Guinea Coast: Iconoclasm Done and Undone* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 36-38; Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 58-60; Hawthorne, *Planting Rice*, 122.

²⁹ Baum, *Shrines*, 43.

³⁰ They were associated with “wealth and power.” See, for example, Avelino Teixeira da Mota, *As viagens do Bispo D. Frei Vitoriano protuense a guine e a cristianização dos reis de Bissau* (Lisbon: Junta de investigações Científicas do Ultramar, Centro de Estudos de Cartografia Antiga, 1974), 60-1; Barbot, *Barbot*, 320;

³¹ See Alvares, *Ethiopia*, chapter 1; also Baum, *Shrines*, 44

Alonso De Sandoval, natives in Upper Guinea “offer the chinas the nastiest things such as the heads and feathers of cocks, and their blood or that of other animals.” As was the case in Benin, they ate the more nutritious parts of the chicken and threw back to “the interceding idol” bones “with wine and other things.”³²

For people in West Africa it was essential to maintain an equilibrium with the spiritual forces that were decisive in every day matters, and particularly in questions of illness. Because of this, practices devoted to health care had a strong preventive nature, and Upper Guineans expended considerable resources making sure that the spiritual entities to which they were connected were adequately served and revered. The Frenchman Nicolas Villault, writing about his two year stay in West Africa, reported around 1666 that south in the Gold Coast they revere “certain extravagant figures that they call *Fetiches* and that they adored as if it were god.” According to Villault, they offered every morning a prayer, songs, dances, fish, and palm wine to these deities for their protection during the day.³³ fish, and palm wine to these deities for their protection during the day. They also carried power-objects in the form of “little bags made out of leather,” which they treated in like manner.³⁴ Parents made infants wear these “fetishes’ as protection.³⁵ James Sweet has examined the use

³² Alvares, *Ethiopia*, Ch. 7-p10.

³³ The *Idolâtres* “révèrent certain figure extravagantes, qu’ils appellent *Fétiches* & qu’ils adorent comme des Dieux, auxquelles ils font soir matin une prière, s ils ont de bons morceaux, soit viande, poisson ou vin de palme, ils en jettent ou versant à bas en l’honneur de leur Dieu.” “Ont de petits fachets de cuir pendus au col, qu’ills nomment *fetiches*.” Nicolas Villault, *Relation des costes d’Afrique, appellées Guinée; avec la description du pays, moeurs et façons de vivre des habitans, des productions de la terre, et des marchandises qu’on en apporte, avec les remarques historiques sur ces costes, le tout remarqué par le sr Villault, escuyer sieur de Bellefond, dans le voyage qu’il y a fait en 1666 et 1667* (Paris: D. Thierry, 1669), 56, 82. The word *Fetiches* comes after the Portuguese word for “spell” *fetiço* which then would become the English “Fetish.”

³⁴ Talking to a “moor,” a Muslim *bexerin*, Villault wrote that all the Moors “portent tous de ces *Fetiches* dans un petit sac pendant fur leur cœr, ou sous leurs épaules, leur donnant à manger soir matin, les parant avec de la *Rasade*, ou petits grains de verre de toutes couleurs ce qu’ils croyant avoir de plus beau.” [carry such fetishes in little bags close to their heart, or beneath their shoulders, giving them food evening morning, passing them a glass[?], or small beads of all colors]. Villault, 82-83.

³⁵ Pieter de Marees, *Beschryvinghe ende historische verhael, vant gout koninckrijck van Gunea, anders de Gout-custe de Mina genaemt, liggende in het deel van Africa: met haren gelooven, opinien, handelingen, oft*

of Mandinka bags and shows how they were used by Europeans and Africans in places as distant as Ouidah, Pernambuco, Madeira, and Porto.³⁶

Ritual specialists, called *jabacouses* or *jambacous*, were the translators that allowed for the communication with the spirits through specific rites and ceremonies. These specialists were able to communicate with materials that either embodied the power of the spirit or had energies of their own. They determined who had died and the causes of their deaths.³⁷ They did not always belong to a specific community. In Upper Guinea, Mandinka healers, known as *marabouts* or *bexerins* transmitted Mande ideas and beliefs about the body throughout the region.³⁸ Alvarez talked of the mixing of Mande ideas with Arab traditions that arrived in Senegambia via the Sahara trade.³⁹

mangelingen, manieren talen, eñ haere ghelegentheynt van landen, steden, hutten, huysen eñ personen ...: mitsgaders oock een cort verhael vande passagie die de schepen derwaerts nemen deur de Canarische Eylanden (Ghedruet tot Amstelredam: by Cornelis Claesz, vvoonende opt Water int Schrijfboeck, 1602) fol. 12v, Villault, 236. In Europe, parents were using similar artifacts. In Spain they called them *figas* or *higas*. See, for example Maria-Luisa Rey-Henningsen, *The World of the Ploughwoman: Folklore and Reality in Matriarchal Northwest Spain* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1994), 207.

³⁶ According to Sweet, who uses Inquisition records too, the very prosecution of the Inquisition reaffirmed the power of power-objects such as Mandinga Bags. See, James Sweet, "Slaves, Convicts, and Exiles: African Travelers in the Portuguese Atlantic World, 1720–1750," in Caroline Williams, *Bridging the Early Modern Atlantic World: People, Products, and Practices on the Move* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 193-202.

³⁷ "In the land of the Casangas, a particular law has been imposed by the kings as a device to raise revenue. The law is this. When any man dies, before he is buried, he is laid on the wooden supports which will be used for his tomb, which are covered with black cloth, and (this bier is placed) on the shoulders of blacks. Carrying the dead man, they go (round the village). They dance wildly, here and there, to the sound of numerous drums, ivory trumpets and conch-shells, jumping about with such fury and force that it seems that they have devils in them. Other blacks called jabacosses speak to the dead man, and put questions to him, so that he can tell them who killed him. And if the men who carry (the bier) on their backs and who dance here and there so furiously (happen to) meet an individual, and (immediately) quieted down, it is said that this individual is the person who killed the dead man." André Alvares d'Almada and others. *Brief treatise on the rivers of Guinea*. (Liverpool: Dept. of History, University of Liverpool, 1984), 68.

<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/AfricanStudies.Almada01>>; also, Alvares, *Ethiopia*, Ch. 6.

³⁸ In what can be a transliteration from the Arabic wordk "*Bexerin*," in the Caribbean "*Behigues*" is a name for ritual specialists. This is the case in Dominican Republic. Jane Landers, personal communication, March 14, 2010.

³⁹ Alvares, talks about them when he sais "In their wars these Banhus use various amulets, and they often employ a bexerin as a magician to prepare for them magic medicines which are made from certain herbs, in the same way as in Moorish geomancy. Alvares, *Ethiopia*, Ch 7, p. 9. See also, A Teixeira da, Mota and P. E. H. Hair. *Jesuit Documents on the Guinea of Cape Verde and the Cape Verde Islands, 1585-1617 In English Translation* (Liverpool: Dept. of History, University of Liverpool, 1989), Ch.1. February 25, 2010 <<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/AfricanStudies.Jesuit01>>

Because of the similarities of the beliefs, these healers were considered particularly effective through the pre-colonial and colonial period in Upper Guinea. These specialists traveled throughout Senegal and Gambia and the Guinea rivers as respected ritual specialists.⁴⁰ Indeed the image of Mandinka as specialists in ritual practices was so strong that in places like the New Kingdom of Granada, and Cuba, the ethnonym *Mandinga* [Spanish for Mandinka] became associated with ritual practitioners. Many specialists, some of them called *brujas* or *brujos*, from diverse regions would end up having their last names changed to *Mandinga* as a signifier of their occupation and, one presumes, of the ability with which they carried it out.

When preventive measures failed and early modern people in Upper Guinea and the Gold Coast got sick, they would call ritual practitioners. There were several types of specialists in the early modern Gold Coast. According to Wilhelm Johann Müller, a Lutheran pastor who remained in West Africa from 1661 until 1669, they were called *o-bossum-fu*, another *summàn-fü*, and a third one *com-fu* or *sophu*. The *o-bossum-fu* had the highest rank, followed by the *summàn-fü* who was in charge of sacrificing creatures of all kinds, and the *sophu*, whom Müller describes as simply a sorcerer “who keeps a *fitiso*.”⁴¹ Ritual specialists would start their curative process using specific herbal remedies. Whenever regular cures did not work, ritual specialists suspected the interference of spirits called *uikan coratoco*. These entities were responsible for barrenness, death, and illness, and as in other communities along the Gold Coast and Upper Guinea, they could be manipulated by pacts. In Upper Guinea

⁴⁰ Alvares, Ch. 7; Hair, *Barbot*, 85.

⁴¹ Wilhelm J. Müller (1676), *Die Afrikanische auf der Guineischen Gold Cust gelegene Landschafft Fetu*, Zwernemann Juu rgen ed. (Graz: Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 1968), 75. Müller lived mostly in the Glückstad (Danish) African Company fort of Frederiksborg, near Cape Coast. He first published his book in Nürnberg in 1673. Here I am using the 1968 reprint of the 1676 Hamburg 2nd edition of Müller’s work. Wilhelm. J. Müller, *Die Africanische/ Auf Der Besichtigung/ und unablaa ssiger Erforschung beschrieben/ Auch mit dienlichen Kupffern/ Und einem Fetuischen Woo rter-Buche geziehret* (Hamburg: Härtel, 1676).

people that negotiated such agreements became *befera*, *afera* in the singular [witches].⁴²

They could also be *Kusaye*, cannibal witches, who would eat the souls, and consequently the living energy, of the affected patient.⁴³ According to Alvares, “if an illness is unknown to them and they will not run the risk of treating it, they obtain from the sick man something to give to the china, since the author of all good things, including life, it is not god who takes it away. They have persuaded the people that, when they are sick, witches are devouring them.”⁴⁴

When all efforts failed and the person died, Gold Coast ritual specialists asked the dead person about who had “eaten” her/him. After specialists identified and captured them, witches were either killed or enslaved with the rest of their families.⁴⁵ According to Müller “when someone suffers a mishap, be it a serious, long-lasting illness or early death, the suspicion soon grows that this man or that, with whom the deceased may have lived at variance has brought it about through the strength and power of the household idol or *summàn* he possesses.”⁴⁶

Around the rivers of Guinea forests and trees were believed to embody the energy of powerful spiritual powers. De Sandoval wrote that “all this land is full of very tall Ceibas that

⁴² Scantamburlo, *Etologia*, 66-70

⁴³ Mark, *Wild Bull*, 40.

⁴⁴ Alvares, *Ethiopia*, Ch 7, p 11. John Thornton has discussed how this belief was extended throughout all West and West Central Africa. See, John Thornton, “Cannibals, Witches, and Slave Traders in the Atlantic World.” *William and Mary Quarterly*.2003. 60, no. 2: 273-294.

⁴⁵ “When a sick man dies, they straightway ask him not to flee away but to reveal who ate him. In the excess of their malice and ignorance they do as their ancestors did. Do they hate any of their fellow citizens? Four of the heathen then carry the dead man on a wooden grating like a bier, and sometimes they add the cloth the man wore when he died. They quickly make their way around the village, from one side to the other and through the open places. And whenever the ministers of the devil stop, it is said and falsely believed that the people in that spot late’ the dead man. Then they take him to be buried in the forest, carrying away with the body all the precious possessions it was found he had, such as cloths, etc. The wretch whom the bier accused (by stopping) has to pay. His house is attacked and a host of his children are enslaved. Spite is (thus) one of the heads under which those who are sent to our Spanish lands [i.e. the Indies] are acquired.” Alvares, *Ethiopia*, Chapter 7, 13. Also Walter Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves: Transformations Along the Guinea-Bissau Coast, 1400-1900* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003), 109, 203-207.

⁴⁶ Müller, 55-56.

they call poilones, because they [the trees] are used as [places for the recording of] memory of all of their actions...always with sacrifices or superstitions, revering the poilones that they sow when their kings die and revering them like [they were] the very same royal persons.”⁴⁷

In New Kingdom of Granada, as in other places in the New World, rituals took place under “big trees.”⁴⁸ In “juntas” [ritual meetings] in Cartagena, the center of the ceremony was occupied by a “throne” located “under a tree.”⁴⁹ In Tolú, a town some one hundred and fifty miles south from Cartagena, ritual specialists usually met “Bocaprieta,” a spirit in the form of a man, who was always under a big tree.⁵⁰

Around the “Rios de Guinea” trees central to ritual ceremonies. De Sandoval writes that dwellers of this region “had all their land full of very high *ceibas* that they call poilones, as they serve them as memory milestones of all of their actions; when they have a funeral they plant a *poilón*, when they marry off a daughter...always revering with sacrifices or superstitions the poilones.”⁵¹ Villault observed the same and reported that to celebrate their

⁴⁷ “Toda la tierra tiene llena de altísimas ceibas que llaman poilones, porque les sirve de memoria de todas sus acciones... siempre con sacrificios o supersticiones, reverenciando a los poilones que siembran en la muerte de los reyes y adorándolos como las mismas personas reales.” Alonso de Sandoval, *Instauranda aethiopum salute; el mundo de la esclavitud negra en América* [Sevilla, 1627], ed Angel Valtierra (Bogotá, Empresa Nacional de Publicaciones, 1956), 376. Ceibas (*Ceiba pentandra*, family *Bombacaceae*) have been the object of important scholarly attention lately as keepers of African memory. See, for instance Baum, *Shrines*; Shaw, *Memories*; Suzanne Blier, *African Vodun: Art, Psychology, and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and Edna G. Bay, “Protection, Political Exile, and the Atlantic-Slave Trade: History and Collective Memory in Dahomey,” *Slavery and Abolition* 22 (2001): 22-41.

⁴⁸ Africans recreated hierarchical constructions of society in the Americas. This included monarchich artifacts such as thrones. See, Jane Landers, “Cimarron and Citizen: African Ethnicity, Corporate Identity, and the Evolution of Free Black Towns in the Spanish Circum-Caribbean.” In Jane Landers and Barry Robinson, *Slaves, Subjects, and Subversives: Blacks in Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 111-145; one of seventeenth century Mexico’s maroon settlement leade by Yanga, who was in all likelihood a Bran, also had a “big tree” that was the social and ceremonial center of the community. Jane Landers, “Leadership and Authority in Maroon Settlements,” in José C. Curto, and Renée Soulodre-LaFrance eds. *Africa and the Americas: Interconnections During the Slave Trade*. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005).

⁴⁹ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp 10, 94v-95r.

⁵⁰ AHN, Inquisición, 1021, 438v.

⁵¹ “Toda la tierra tienen llena de altísimas ceibas que llaman poilones, porque les sirven de memoria de todas sus acciones; en juntándose a un llanto siembran un poilón, en casando una hija siembran otro, en muriéndoseles el padre o la madre, otro; en la muerte del rey o en su nueva elección, otro, siempre con

festivities people around the Gold Coast would assemble “in one place, among which is a big tree.” They used the tree bark of to make “nets with which they attach to their arms & legs ...At the foot of this tree, they set up a table, they adorn the feet with diverse offerings” that included “millet, maize, the fruit, meat, fish, with wine palm, and oil”⁵²

Spirits however did not only appear as *ceibas* in Upper Guinea. They participated in most of the communal undertakings. Europeans frequently misinterpreted such beliefs and reconstructed anecdotes that while show their ascriptions to African mores, also demonstrate the problems of cultural translations. In what, Wyatt MacGaffey would have called a “dialogue of the deaf,” two Jesuit missionaries experienced, quite terrifyingly, the literal meaning of the dramatic presence of the living dead.”⁵³ De Sandoval wrote about the wondrous events witnessed by his colleagues during the reconstruction of one of the churches in the *Cacheo* region in Upper Guinea.

According to De Sandoval’s colleagues, while working on the foundations of the building, “[The church workers] hit the body of a woman that had died fourteen months ago. She was buried [and] was entire [uncorrupted]...At the moment when the person who was digging stepped on her, [the digger] felt that [the deceased woman] moved and rose up.”⁵⁴ As I show in chapter four, these “living dead” had not only risen in the Cacheo river, but they

sacrificios o supersticiones, reverenciando a los *poilones*.” De Sandoval, 70.

⁵² Pur célébrer le Dimanche ils s’assemblait dans une place, au milieu de laquelle est un grand arbre, qu’ils appellent l’arbre de la Fétiche de l’escorce quedule ils font ces filets avec lesquels ils attachent à leurs bras & jambes ces petits ouvrage d’or, dont j’ay parlé cy –diffus. Au pied de cet arbre, ils dressent une table, dont ils ornent les pieds de diverse couronnes faites de rames d’arbres, fur laquelle ils mettent du ris, du mil, du mays, du gruit, de la viande, du poisson, avec du vin de l’huile de Palm.” Villault, 258-259.

⁵³ Wyatt MacGaffey, “Dialogues of the Deaf: Europeans on the Atlantic Coast of Africa,” in Stuart B. Schwartz, *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 249-267.

⁵⁴ “[D]ieron con el cuerpo de una mujer que había catorce meses que estaba enterrada, entero y la mortaja y cordón como si se acabara de enterrar entonces. Apenas puso los pies sobre ella el que iba cavando, cuando sintió que se movía y que se levantaba hacia arriba. Salto admirado fuera llamo a sus compañeros estos y el Padre, y al vicario de la población que fueron también testigos del caso....que averiguo sido la vida de aquella mujer malísima y llegando a tener trato con el mismo demonio.” De Sandoval, 71.

also migrated to the New World.⁵⁵ In the beliefs of natives of Cacheo, the soul took a long time to finally leave the body and it animated it for several months after death. This made it possible for ritual specialists to interrogate corpses in their search for the culprits of somebody's death.

According to Willem Bosman, the chief factor of the Dutch company in Whydah in the late seventeenth century, when somebody died around the Gold Coast natives started an inquiry "into his death or why he would dye (sic)." The premise guiding the proceedings was that "death is never without a cause." Initially, Bosman wrote, ritual specialists' inquiry on somebody's death looked for transgression to long-held customs. If an obvious cause could not be identified, then the "inquest" proceeded to look for "powerful enemies" who could have used "fetishes" or "poison" [potions] to attack the deceased person.⁵⁶ Family members and other inhabitants of the household, including slaves, were interrogated next. When the "priests," the specialists, were not able to find a clear cause, they would go back and interrogate the corpse. Europeans like Bosman would use "diabolic" references to explain the procedures. In them, the "roguish priests" would be in charge of establishing connections with the devil, which, in all likelihood, was a reference to the multiple spiritual entities that populated Upper Guinean inhabitants' supernatural world.⁵⁷ The interrogatory, at least

⁵⁵ For examples of "walking death" in other parts of the Atlantic world see, for example, *Drums And Shadows; Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes*, ed. Savannah unit, Georgia writers' project, foreword by Guy B. Johnson, photographs by Muriel and Malcolm Bell, jr. (Athens, University of Georgia press, 1940); and in Haiti see for instance, Selden Rodman and Carole Cleaver *Spirits of the Night : the Vaudun gods of Haiti* (Spring Publications: 1992).

⁵⁶ Willem Bosman, *A new and accurate description of the coast of Guinea, divided into the Gold, the Slave, and the Ivory Coasts. Containing A Geographical, Political and Natural History of the Kingdoms and Countries: With a Particular Account of the Rise, Progress and Present Condition of all the European Settlements upon that Coast; and the Just Measures for Improving the several Branches of the Guinea Trade. Illustrated with several cuts. Written originally in Dutch by William Bosman, Chief Factor for the Dutch at the Castle of St. George D'Elmina. And now faithfully done into English. To which is prefix'd, an exact map of the whole coast of Guinea, that was not in the Original* (London: printed for James Knapton, at the Crown, and Dan. Midwinter, at the Rose and Crown, in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1705) Letter XIII, 226

⁵⁷ Most accounts of the Gold Coast and the bight of Benin have similar accounts. See for instance, Müller, 85.

according to Bosman, took place in a communal scenario. In it, “some [unspecified] men” placed the corpse on their shoulders. The ritual specialist would ask questions. If the answer was affirmative, the body would bend forwards. If negative, the corpse, and its bearers remained still.⁵⁸ Very commonly the body would be colored white.

As in West-Central Africa and the Bights of Benin and Biafra, in Upper Guinea white was the color of the dead and the otherworld. Bosman narrates how when a man died, “his wives immediately shave their heads very close, and smear their bodies with white Earth.” Crying and wailing were common, and, as was the case in Cartagena de Indias across the Atlantic, they “continually repeated the name of the dead and recited the great actions of his past life.” The “confused tumultuous noise of the women” lasted several days until the body was, mercifully, buried.⁵⁹ In Upper Guinea, death rituals were elaborate ceremonies that involved generous eating and drinking.⁶⁰ As in other places in West Africa and around the Gold Coast, family members and denizens of the town would join the celebration that involved not only the wailings and perorations but also large amounts of liquor, including brandy, and palm-wine. If the deceased was a prominent member of the elite, his unfortunate slaves and wives were often interred alive with him. Mourners also placed several types of power-objects and jewelry in the tomb.⁶¹

According to Bosman, around the Gold Coast, people interred their dead in backyards or below their own houses, in contrast to the special places reserved for them in Congo-Angola.⁶² The communal aspect of the underground was an essential part of beliefs about

Also Brun, 20-21.

⁵⁸ Bosman XIII, 228.

⁵⁹ Bosman XIII, 229.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ According to Bosman, sometimes elderly, or disabled people were sold specifically for this purpose. He also Bosman XIII, 230-232.

⁶² The same customs came to the New World. See, for example, Douglas V. Armstrong, *The Old Village and the*

death in places like *Axim*. According to Bosman in *Axim*, “The negroes are strangely fond of being buried in their own country, so that if any person dies out of it, they frequently bring his corpse home to be buried.” Even when the places were distant, they would have friends or acquaintances to “cut off” their heads, one arm and one leg, which they cleanse, boil and carry to his own country, where they are interred with fresh solemnity.”⁶³ As I discuss in chapter four, beliefs about the circuitous relationship between the “mother-land,” the ancestors, and the dead made the ground on which Upper Guineans lived essential in the spiritual make-up of their communities. By being buried around their families and friends, and together with their ancestors, Africans in places like the Gold Coast would create a trans-generational link that also “colonized” and culturally fertilized, very physically, the ground on which the community stood. As the underground remained populated with the dead, life above elapsed constantly affected by them. It occurred in the interstices between earth and heaven and was affected by both. Similar concepts guided the existence of people in places like Benin.

Bights of Benin and Biafra

According to Astley, in Benin, “the religion was very similar to that of the coasts westward.”⁶⁴ As in the other places around West and West-Central African, “they talk much of apparitions of the ghosts of their deceased ancestor or relations in their sleep.”⁶⁵

Religious beliefs and ideas about sickness and death emanating from communities around the

Great House: An Archaeological and Historical Examination of Drax Hall Plantation, St Ann's Bay, Jamaica (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Also Jerome S. Handler, “An African-Type Healer/Diviner and His Grave Goods: A Burial from a Plantation Slave Cemetery in Barbados, West Indies,” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 1 (1997): 89-128.

⁶³ Bosman XIII, 232.

⁶⁴ Astley, 99.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Slave Coast and the Bight of Benin had a disproportionate influence in the process of cultural formation in the Spanish Caribbean when we consider the number of forced immigrants they sent to the region. The exploration of Slave Coast and Bight of Benin traditions, for example, has been a staple in the study of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian culture. Studies such as the seminal work of Fernando Ortiz have relied on questionable ethnographic evidence that sees African cultures as static and definable. For instance, it has become common to talk about a “Yoruba” diaspora to the Americas.⁶⁶ This type of work does not, for the most, recognize that, for example, the term Yoruba itself is a product of European labeling. Because of the type of studies and the primary sources available, most of the literature on Yoruba culture and religion come from what in the eighteenth and nineteenth century became *Oyo* and *Egba*.⁶⁷ For African scholars, the term Yoruba refers more to a unity of language than to a cultural commonality. The term itself is a product of colonialism, although *Yoruba* people refer to themselves as such now. Anglican missionaries coined the term during the 1950s. *Yoruba* is probably derived from a nickname in *Hausa/Fulbe* meaning *cunning*.⁶⁸

Thus, here we will not be referring to the questionable continuities that have assumed the existence of a “proto-Yoruba” tradition around Calabar, or that establish direct links between religions such as vodun and the beliefs of the inhabitants of Whydah. As was the case in Upper Guinea, seventeenth century inhabitants of the regions south and east of the Volta River based their beliefs about corporeality on a system that incorporated ancestors, nature, spiritual forces, and materialized energies. Communities around the Bights of Benin

⁶⁶ See among other examples, Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs eds. *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

⁶⁷ William Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969), 5.

⁶⁸ See D. Forde, *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of South-Western Nigeria. Ethnographic Survey of Africa* (London: International African Institute, 1951). Yoruba referred to themselves using further defined group names, such as *Oyo* and *Egba* whose religion is without doubt the most complex religious system of west and West-Central Africa. Westerlund, 38.

and Biafra also divided the causation of health, disease, and death into personalistic or natural causes. Their sense of individuation depended on their relations to the community at large, including those living in the spiritual realm.

According to the early eighteenth century English compiler Thomas Astley, people around the Bight of Benin “took every thing extraordinary in nature for a god, and make offerings to it.” These elements included elephant’s teeth [tusks?], claws, dead men’s skulls, and skeletons, these they consider as subordinate deities, or mediator between them and the principal deity.”⁶⁹ In Whydah, as it has been recognized in multiple monographs, snakes had a prominent place. Bosman remarks that the most important type of snakes were the pythons called locally *Dangbe*.⁷⁰ These reptiles were involved in the etiology of diseases and, according to the French Des Marchais, who visited the place in the first half of the eighteenth century, they belonged to the superior tier of spiritual entities. Together with snakes, trees, the sea, and *agoye*, a divinity he described as the “god of consultation,” and the river Euphrates. Of these, trees were particularly important in time of sickness.⁷¹

Only “lofty trees in the formation of which dame nature seems to have bestowed the greatest art,” became the object of veneration of Whydah natives. French cartographer Reynaud Des Marchais wrote that these trees were “only prayed-to and presented with offering in time of sickness, more specially fevers, for the restoration of health.” People in Whydah also believed that illness was “as properly to be the business of the trees as the snake’s...for they imagine, (and that truly enough) if he does you no good, he will do you no

⁶⁹ Astley, quoting Dapper and Barbot said that entities he called *Orissas* [Orishas] were represented in this elements, Astley 99.

⁷⁰ Bosman, 361.

⁷¹ Jean-Baptiste Labat, *Voyage du chevalier Des Marchais en Guinée, isles voisines, et à Cayenne, fait en 1725, 1726 & 1727 par le R. père Labat*. (Paris: chez Pierre Prault, 1730), Vol 2, 161. Reynaud Des Marchais, the Chevalier des Marchais, was a navigator and cartographer commissioned by King Louis XV of France to travel and map the west coast of Africa. His work was posthumously published by the priest Jean Baptiste Labat.

harm.”⁷² Snakes, hence, were involved in all important business of life.⁷³ In Whydah, Barbot wrote how natives had “thatched huts” all around the country side in their roads. In them, they would place snakes for which “they have a quite peculiar veneration.” According to Barbot they called these places “*Case de Deu* (sic)” [the house of god].⁷⁴ In Calabar, modern Nigeria, the presence of materialized spiritual entities was also large and indigenous people called these “tutelary gods” *Jou-Jou*.⁷⁵ Amongst other sacrifices, hens were common offerings to *Jou-Jou* around the Bight of Benin. These *power-objects* would be present in every house as well as in the streets of the town.⁷⁶

In Ardra, the entities that natives revered were of a different sort. Private persons had all their “particular fetishes” that could be pieces of wood, pebbles, or other “inanimate bodies” including a mountain or a tree. They beheld such objects “with respect, but without offering either prayers or sacrifices.” In Ardra, birds, and not serpents, were considered high deities. In particular, according to Astley and Des Marchais, people in Ardra adored “certain black birds like Crows,” but not to the extent of Whydah people revered their serpents.⁷⁷

In Whydah, according to Astley and Bosman, natives did not entrust their sick-care to medicines. Instead, in case of sickness, “Whydah Negros” placed all their hopes “in the number of offerings to their *Fetish*.” While medicinal remedies were, according to the Englishmen, similar to those of the Gold Coast, “the offerings are very different.” According to Des Marchais, the sacrifices natives offered to the trees were loaves of millet, Maiz or

⁷² Astley 26. Des Marchais, Vol. 2 163.

⁷³ Des Marchais, Vol. 2, 166.

⁷⁴ Barbot, 638. Many of the *Pidgins* languages described by Barbot were variations of corrupted Portuguese used by West and West Central Africans to trade with Europeans. It was called “*Lingua geral*” [common language]. See II, 678. These words were mostly corrupt Portuguese; See, P.E.H. Hair, ed., *Barbot's West African Vocabularies c. 1680* (Centre of African Studies, University of Liverpool, 1992).

⁷⁵ Barbot, 170.

⁷⁶ Barbot 693.

⁷⁷ Astley, 72.

Rice.”⁷⁸ The ritual specialist would place it at “the foot of the tree” for which “patient has a devotion.”⁷⁹

When elucidating the nature of sicknesses, ritual specialists would use several types of rites. Miguel Arara, a woodcutter from Ardra, said in 1666, talking through interpreters to the inquisition tribunal in Cartagena de Indias that, when a difficult illness case presented, “in his land, the [ritual specialists] were summoned to a meeting so they could learn from their wisdom. [In such meetings] the specialists took a rooster, poured water into its mouth. If the rooster died, it was a signal that the illness was caused by poison. If not, it had other cause.”⁸⁰

The knowledge about healing was carefully maintained inside family traditions. Talking about ritual practitioners in Whydah and Ardra, Des Marchais, who was “very close to one of such Doctors,” tried to learn about his secrets, “without ever having been able to get anything out, they'd rather kill than to reveal anything.” The transmission of the trade also differed from European patterns and it was hereditary. According to Des Marchais, “the priests leave their knowledge to their children, after having demanded a solemn oath that says that the skills they are receiving, and which they hold most sacred, are not to be revealed by them [to anybody].”⁸¹

Around the Bights of Benin and Biafra health care also depended, for the most part, in appeasing ancestors and spiritual entities and maintaining a fluid and effective

⁷⁸ Des Marchais, Vol. 2, 164.

⁷⁹ Des Marchais, Vol. 2, 131.

⁸⁰ “[E]n su tierra se usaba llamar a junta a los negros para conocer la sabiduría de cada uno de ellos y era el modo, tomar un gallo, echarle agua por la boca y si moría era señal que era veneno y sino, no era veneno.” Archivo Histórico Nacional de España (hereafter AHN), Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 228v. Poison, for Miguel Arara, referred to a curse or malediction that could have been delivered in several forms, not necessarily, although they could be, eaten or drunk.

⁸¹ “ Le chevalier des M. *** avoit lié une étroite amitié avec un de ces médecins, dans la pensée de découvrir quelqu'un de ses secrets ; il lui faisoit des présens, il le faisoit boire, il lui a fait plusieurs fois des offres très avantageux, sans en avoir jamais pû rien tirer ; ils se laisseraient plutôt tuer que de rien découvrir. Les peres laissent leurs connaissances a l'ainé de leurs enfans, âpres en avoir exigé un serment solennel sur ce qui'ils ont de plus sacré, qu'ils ne le déclareront jamais.” Des Marchais, Vol. 2, 165

communication with them. It was largely based on “preventive” spiritual measures. By honoring spiritual entities, people around the Slave Coast and the Bight of Benin kept alive the connections with energies emanating from immaterial actors that could harm them if not adequately maintained. Nefarious actions by personalistic agents could, nevertheless, bring bereavement even to the most devote of the practitioners.

Material links were fundamental for communicating with super-natural beings. In Whydah, the connections between the bodily and the spiritual took clearly materialized forms. Barbot narrates how they practiced a ceremony called “*boire Dios*” in Portuguese [drinking god]. In it, two persons would “make two small holes on the earth, into which they [each] let some of their blood drip, and after having diluted the blood with a little of the earth, the two drink as much of it as they can.” The pact was supposed to bond each person to the other in the strongest possible way. The pact holders would tell each other whatever they thought and heard. Indeed the seriousness of the pact was such that they believed that they would die should they incur in “the least relaxation in this respect.”⁸² According to Barbot’s vocabulary, that would have been in Whydah’s language “*bodou-houy*” related to the native term *vodun-nu-nu* signifying connecting with the gods or spirits.⁸³ Presumably, in performing the ceremony, they would be connecting their two bodies and the energy animating them with *voduns*, spiritual entities, inhabiting the underground. The body, from this evidence, could function as an incorporative spiritual vehicle that linked people’s thoughts and feelings through the spiritual presence in the natural world. Obviously, these kinds of beliefs had major implications for how people from the Bight of Benin would explain illnesses and healing. The natural and social world, were populated not only by

⁸² Barbot, 641.

⁸³ Barbot, 108.

visible material components but also engulfed the spiritual nature of entities such as *voduns*.

In Whydah natives also offered sacrifices to “several inferior fetishes.”⁸⁴ Villages and roads were full of personal places for ritual prayers. Bosman told how every person “reserves a place under the open air, set apart for that purpose, and hedged about with reeds and other trash. In this consecrated place they continually sacrifice, in order to obtain health and prosperity.”⁸⁵ In Ardra people also present specific offerings, usually associated with blood, to the deity of their veneration. According to Astley and Bosman, if a person was sick, “the priest must come and sacrifice some animals for the patient’s recovery. He rubs the *Fetish* with the Blood, and throws away the flesh.”⁸⁶

While, or because, their own sense of self-awareness was entrenched in their connections with family and village communities, people around the Bight of Benin, at least according to some observers, were quick in dissociating themselves from ill-persons. De Marchais was surprised by “the abandonment with which they let people who should be their most dear when they are sick... [They] do not give the ill any relief, Women abandon their husbands, children their father.”⁸⁷ While this is only anecdotal evidence, it is sensible to argue that, because for people around the Bight of Benin disease was marked by either offense to divinities or supernatural attacks, it was considered dangerous to be around sick people. Presumably, even family members would strive to dissociate themselves from the curse or nefarious action befallen their relative. This custom could have been exacerbated by the transmittable nature of many infectious diseases around the region, the largest scourge

⁸⁴ Des Marchais, Vol. 2, 164.

⁸⁵ Astley 24.

⁸⁶ Astley, 85

⁸⁷ “L’abandonnement ou ils laissent les personnes qui leur doivent être les plus cheres quand elles sont malades. C’est un suage établi parmi eux de ne leur pas donner le moindre secours, les femmes abandonnent leur mari, les enfans leur père, à moins qu’ils n’ayent des esclaves pour se faire servir ou de quoi payer ceux dont ils exigent.” Des Marchais, Vol. 2, 164.

plaguing such communities.

Because attacks from outside spirits or members of the larger community, and even family, were not infrequent, it was essential to be protected, to the extent possible, against supernatural events. Bosman, for instance, wrote about a custom that recalls contemporary traditions in Upper Guinea, North Africa, and in Spain and Italy. Immediately after a baby was born, the family would tie “around the body, neck, arms, [and] legs quantity of rope, coral, and & other trifles, having spent their regular exorcisms, which preserved the child of, so they believed, illness of other accidents.”⁸⁸

Also talking about power objects, Müller wrote how around the Fetu kingdom, in the Slave Coast, people were particularly afraid of “a man who is thought to have a strong and powerful household devil.” The *devil* would have been a powerful spiritual entity that could be manipulated through power-objects. In Fetu, in the Slave Coast, the *summàn*, ritual specialist, had different powers and some were considered more powerful than others. Thus besides their own tutelary power-objects, inhabitants of the Fetu kingdom would acquire several others to help them in the protection of their houses.⁸⁹ Power-objects could also directly cause death. Around the Slave Coast inhabitants would place curses on enemies by burying pieces of wood or iron activated through specific words. These objects would then kill the person “as soon as he walks over the buried iron or wood.”⁹⁰

In Whydah, as elsewhere in West and West-Central Africa, ritual practitioners used several types of medicinal preparations. Bosman was highly complimentary of some of the remedies he observed and tried around the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin. He wrote that

⁸⁸ “[Q]ui lui fait incontinent attacher autour du corps, du col, des bras, des jambes quantité de cordelettes, de corail, and & d'autres bagatelles, après les avoir consacrées par leurs exorcismes ordinaires, ce qui préservé l'enfant; a co qu'ils croyant, de maladie d'autres accidents.”

⁸⁹ Müller, 55.

⁹⁰ Müller, 49.

“The chief Medicaments here in use, are first and more especially an entire lemon or lime-Juice. They also used *malaget* [pepper], also called “grains of paradise,” cardamom, roots, branches, gums of trees, and about thirty several sorts of green herbs” which were, according to Bosman, “impregnated with an extraordinary sanative virtue.”⁹¹ He also said that “The Remedies used here frequently seem pernicious in the case wherein they are given, and yet are found very successful, as an instance of which please to take one of the most common medicaments.”⁹²

According to Barbot, when neither medicine nor prayers sufficed, the inhabitants of places around the Bight of Benin and the Slave Coast, including those of “Oyeo, Benin, Ardra, Popo and Juda...regard death very stoically, being completely Pythagorean, like those of the Gold Coast.”⁹³ Here, we can interpret Barbot’s observation as related to a belief in the reincarnation and continuous presence of souls in nature, in inert objects, in animals and even in persons. While it is always risky to extrapolate from cryptic references such as Barbot’s the care with which indigenous people from around the Bights of Benin and Biafra observed funerary practices seems to confirm this hypothesis.

In Benin, shadows dictated how one would die. Natives called “a Man’s shadow, his *Passador*, or *Conductor*, [from the Portuguese],” which, after having been the closest possible witness of a person life, would be in the best position to judge it. If the *Passador* determined that somebody had lived well, that person would die in happiness and dignity. On the contrary, appallingly lived existences would condemn the individual to “perish with hunger

⁹¹ Bosman, XIII, 224.

⁹² Bosman, XIII, 224.

⁹³ Barbot, 638. Pythagorean refers to the Greek philosopher’s belief in the transmigration of souls. "Pythagorean adj. & n." The Oxford American Dictionary of Current English. Oxford University Press, 1999. Oxford Reference Online. Oxford University Press. Vanderbilt University. 8 March 2010 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t21.e24721>>

and poverty.”⁹⁴ Thus, and depending on the circumstances of their death, people around the Bight of Benin treated the dead “with many signs of mourning.” After funerals, the families of the dead would keep their houses open for five to six days. In Whydah, unlike some of the groups in the Gold Coast, natives had special burial places. In other places around the Bight of Benin, as the Swabian surgeon Andreas Josua Ulsheimer reported in 1603, people would bury the dead “in his bedroom where he slept.”⁹⁵ Whydah natives observed “several ceremonies after death, including attaching to the feet of a black bird (of a kind known to them) some specially-made-fetishes; then they put this bird on the grave of the dead man, together with a large pot of water, and they dance around the grave singing, until the grave is leveled with the ground.”⁹⁶ In Ardra, as in some places in Upper Guinea, the dead would be placed in the houses they inhabited wrapped up in shrouds. The burials were commonly performed with little or no pomp or ceremony but “rather privately.” Apparently only the dead of the king would bring the kind of celebrations that populate contemporary European description of burial services.⁹⁷

As in the rest of West and West-Central African, funerary rites in the Bight of Benin

⁹⁴ Astley, 99

⁹⁵ As quoted in Adam Jones, *German Sources for West African History 1599-1669* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1983), 42. For more reports on royal funerals and the sacrifices of several of the maids, wives, servants and slaves of dignitaries see for example, among others, Olfert Dapper, *Description de l'Afrique, contenant les noms, la situation & les confins de toutes ses parties, leurs rivieres, leurs villes & leurs habitations, leurs plantes & leurs animaux, les moeurs, les coûtumes, la langue, les richesses, la religion & le gouvernement de ses peuples* (Amsterdam: Wolfgang, Waesberge, Boom & van Someren, 1686), 305, 312, 309; I have used the 1686 French translation of the original in Dutch published in 1668. Olfert Dapper, *Naukeurige beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche gewesten van Egypten, Barbaryen, Lybien, Biledulgerid, Negroslant, Guinea, Ethiopiën, Abyssinie. Getrokken uyt verscheyde ondersoekers dier landen* (Amsterdam: Jacob van Meurs, 1668). Dapper was a Dutch geographer and most of his accounts of West and West-Central Africa are appropriations from sixteenth and seventeenth century sources. With this disclaimer, I, as Adam Jones argues, consider Dapper's monumental work an invaluable source, especially for the area of Ardra, and the bight of Biafra. Indeed, many authors have considered Dapper's work on this region the most complete source coming from the seventeenth century. See, Adam Jones, “Decompiling Dapper: A Preliminary Search for Evidence Author(s): Adam Jones Source,” *History in Africa* 17 (1990):171-209.

⁹⁶ Barbot, 640.

⁹⁷ Astley, 84.

were highly specialized ceremonies that involved several days of morning, dancing, drinking, and human or animal sacrifices. Rituals for the departure of the death were essential in assuring the continuing collaboration of ancestors in earthly matters. Also, it assured that they would not come back with vengeance if they were not properly served with ritual offerings that should be continued on a monthly or yearly basis in some places. South of Calabar, in places like Luango and Bengo spirits seemed to have comparable habits.

West-Central Africa

Many Africans referred to as Congo, or Congo-Angola in seventeenth century sources, came to Cartagena from vast areas in West-Central Africa.⁹⁸ By the time *lançados* Portuguese sailors first arrived in West Central Africa's coast during the fifteenth century, they had already undergone centuries of robust cultural interchange among themselves. As John Thornton and Wyatt MacGaffey have asserted, early modern West-Central African culture, and particularly traditions in the Kingdom of Congo seemingly "incorporated" Christian customs more than any other culture in Western Africa. Thus, it is not surprising to find several common Christian tropes in the writings of ethnographers of the seventeenth century.⁹⁹ However, the precise nature of such incorporation is debatable. There is evidence that Christian rites and ceremonies were tossed with ease when they became socially or

⁹⁸ Here I will refer to both the people and the kingdom of Congo with the same term, Congo. Although some scholars, Thornton among them, argue that the term Congo refers only to the people, and the word Kongo refers to the actual kingdom, I have found that all my records refer to the region as Congo, and to the people coming from there as Congo too.

⁹⁹ See Wyatt MacGaffey, "African Religions: Types and Generalizations," in *Explorations in African Systems of Thought*, eds. I. Karp and C. Bird (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 301-328; Wyatt MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa: The Bakongo of Lower Zaire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984); and Thornton, 43.

politically inconvenient.¹⁰⁰ West Central Africans also incorporated, like many other customs, Christian rites into a vast panoply of ceremonies and religious ideas of which missionaries' teachings were a minimal part at best. If this was the case in large urban places like Loanda, the situation was further tenuous in the deep tropical forest of most of the territory of kingdoms like Matamba or Kongo. At any rate there is not evidence to support the claim that Christian customs became dominant or the driving force behind beliefs about nature and about bodies of the afterlife for West-Central Africans.¹⁰¹

J. Van Wing, using early-modern sources, argues that during the slave trade era, Congo people thought of the soul as composed of several distinctive components. The *moyo*, one of its components, began dying when corporal functions ceased. However, as *moyo* was closely related with blood and "humors" in the body, it only disappeared definitively, rendering the body effectively dead, when the corpse dried out, a period that in Caribbean locales could last for several months. After leaving the body, the *moyo* took another body colored white. While the soul was the same, the form changed. The *Mwela*, unlike the *moyo*, moved away from the corporal realm once the heart stopped pumping blood. *Mwela* can be compared to the concept of *anima* in Western literature. As the *anima*, *Mwela* was the energy powering the body. Depending on the circumstances of a person's life, *mwela* could end up in the realm of *mpemba*, good ancestors, or with *bankuyu*, the bad ones.¹⁰²

West-Central African people shared a conceptualization of a supreme god, *Nzambi* a

¹⁰⁰ In Kongo and Matamba Kings and Queens came in and out of the umbrella of Catholicism several times during the sixteenth and seventeenth century. See Thornton, *Central Africans*, 67.

¹⁰¹ As has been strongly argued by John Thornton and Heywood. See for instance, Linda M Heywood and John Kelly Thornton. *Africans and Catholics: The First Generation of African Americans in North America and the Caribbean, 1619-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); also, Heywood and Thornton, *Central Africans*, for instance.

¹⁰² Anne Hilton, *The Kingdom of Kongo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 15-17.

term that also means soul in old Congo language.¹⁰³ The word was also used when referring to ancestors and deities. While the term for god is *Nzambi a mpungu*, this term does not refer to an entity similar to the unique all powerful God of Christians or Muslims. Instead it names the “first, highest, or greatest ancestor deity or spirit,” also known to be “the founder of the land of the dead.”¹⁰⁴

The moment of dying was a particularly dangerous instance and was represented in every day life by the threshold between the worlds outside dwellings and inside them. In Cartagena, for instance, a ritual specialist from Congo, Antonio Congo, “did not allow anybody to stand or sit in the threshold of the door of his home. He said that he had all of his wellness there and that that was his place.” In the case of Antonio, being a ritual specialist, the threshold was possibly also a place of power where he would come in contact with spiritual entities and a locale essential for deriving power from the spiritual World.¹⁰⁵

Between the two manifestations of the soul explained above was the *nsala*. In Kongo, *nsala* was conceptualized as being the seat of reason and the place where ideas and thoughts were formulated. The time that the *nsala* lasted in the otherworld depended on the remembrance of the deceased on the part of the community left behind. When nobody remembered the departed, the *nsala* disappeared leaving only the *mwela*.¹⁰⁶ Ancestors’ spirits that lost their individuality became *Basimbi*, benevolent, undifferentiated spirits associated with streams and lakes.¹⁰⁷ Different than these forces of nature, and according to seventeenth

¹⁰³ See Wyatt MacGaffey, “African Ideology and Belief: A Survey,” *African Studies Review* 24 (1981): 227-274.

¹⁰⁴ J. Van Wing and C. Penders eds. *Le Plus Ancien Dictionnaire Bantu*, (Louvain : Imprimerie J. Kuyil-Otto, 1928), p, 279.

¹⁰⁵ “no permitía a persona alguna que al entrar o salir en su bojio se parasen ni sentasen en el umbral de la puerta del prunedesia este reo que allí tenia todo su bien y que aquel lugar no era mas que para el.”AHN, Inquisición, 1023, 478r.

¹⁰⁶ J. Van Wing, *Études Bakongo: Sociologie-religion et Magie*, (2d ed. Brussels: Desclee de Brouwer), 284.

¹⁰⁷ Wyatt MacGaffey, *Modern Kongo Prophets, Religion in a Plural Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University

century missionaries, “those who had died violent deaths, outcasts or people who were not buried...formed a category of ghosts and other wicked spirits...Religious precautions were taken to prevent them from doing harm.”¹⁰⁸ These spirits, *bankuyu* or *minkuyu* were special types of entities closely associated with disease.¹⁰⁹ Thus, while the *bakulo* was a friendly ghost who could be invoked for help, the *minkuyu* were isolated malefactors and should be exorcised.¹¹⁰ People who died violent deaths were likely to enter a fourth category of the dead called “ghosts.” Illness could originate from reasons ranging from the curse of one’s own father to the action of a *minkuyo*.¹¹¹

For most early modern West-Central Africans, the cosmos was divided in two realms, one visible and the other invisible. The visible world was the world of the human beings and was located on the surface of the earth. The underworld was the invisible world and was inhabited by spirits and ancestors.

Nkisi, plural *Minkisi*, were the sacred objects associated with very old spirits of ancestors and were essential to West-Central African healing rituals.

A supernatural force called *mbumba* was considered in Kongo to be responsible for the appearance of albinos, dwarfs, and other persons with “deviant” physical characteristics. These persons were considered incarnations of the divinity, through the power of *mbumba*, and became revered. The birth of a child with “deviant” characteristics was also considered by certain groups in Kongo to indicate that a certain divinity had chosen the family and the parents would be expected to become *baganga*.¹¹² In particular albinos, with their white

Press, 1983), 148.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Thompson, *An Account of Two Missionary Voyages* [1758] (London: Society for the propagation of the gospel in foreign parts by the Society for promoting Christian knowledge, 1937). 44-45.

¹⁰⁹ See MacGaffey, *Modern Kongo Prophets*, 64.

¹¹⁰ Hilton, 15.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Hilton 114.

color, the color of the realm of the dead, the ancestors, and the divinities, were guarded as powerful materializations of spiritual entities. They became power-beings themselves and were not only respected but also feared and sometimes killed. Groups in West-Central Africa differentiated between the principle that fuels life, *moyo*, and the soul that survives death. Once dead, the ancestor spirits, *bakulu* (singular *nkulu*) remained closely associated with the living beings. These concepts of life are directly associated with the ontological vision of the world and nature as cyclical and harmonious.¹¹³

Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi a Capuchin missionary living in the Congo-Angola region during 1654-1667 and 1673-1677, explained how illness for natives of the Matamba people originated from personalistic and naturalistic causes.¹¹⁴ West-Central Africans conceptualized *Mayeela* [illness] as always having a specific causality. Thus, it required a particular treatment grounded on a specific explanatory framework.¹¹⁵ Natives in the region associated serious illnesses with spiritual and human agents, while they linked milder diseases to natural causation. Cavazzi, for instance, reported that in Angola, natives “call the soul by the name of Zumbo [Nzumbo] and they believe in its immortality.” According to the Capuchin

¹¹³ See J.O. Awolalu and P.A. Dopamu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (London: Longman, 1979); U. Beir, *Yoruba Myths* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

¹¹⁴ Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi (1621-1678) was a Capuchin monk who lived in Angola and Congo from 1654 to 1677. He visited the courts of the King of Pungo, Andongo and the Queen Nzinga in Matamba and the Kingdom of Congo. On his return to Italy he completed his “Missione evangelica nel Regno de Congo.” This was one of the first European description of life in West-Central Africa and also tells the history of the Capuchin mission there. Giacomo Monti published the book posthumously in 1687, and with it left historians with an invaluable ethnographic description of seventeenth century African culture and society. Cavazzi’s work is divided in two different volumes, which I will be referring to as books 1 and 2. The copy of the “Araldi manuscript” for the Italian family holding the original manuscript, I used is: Giovanni A. Cavazzi, “Missione Evangelica nel Regno de Congo,” MS 1668. Microfilm “CAMs of Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi da Montecuccolo, Capucine Missionary to Kongo and Angola, 3 Volumes, 17th Century.” University of Virginia Library, Manuscripts Department, 1976. See Also, Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi and Fortunato Alamandini, *Istoria descrizione de’ tre’ regni Congo, Matamba et Angola: sitvati nell’Etiopia inferiore occidentale e delle missioni apostoliche esercitateui da religiosi Capuccini*. (Bologna: Giacomo Monti, 1687) 84, 158. For translation, I have compared my own and corrected it using the one published by John K. Thornton on the World Wide Web at <http://centralafricanhistory.blogspot.com>.

¹¹⁵ As in every other system of healing, the explanatory framework, and the embedding of particular illness in it is an essential component of the therapeutic process.

missionary, they “affirm that these souls wander about or remain in one place, needing like travelers to eat and drink and to dress and such... [I]t is their firm belief that the soul can hurt relatives and enemies.”¹¹⁶

Like Cavazzi, Olfert Dapper wrote that in Luango, when somebody fell ill, “he firmly believes that the cause is an offense he has committed against his moquissie.”¹¹⁷ As in Upper Guinea and around the Bight of Benin, providing for spiritual entities was essential in the maintenance of one’s health. When the equilibrium was disrupted or a whimsical entity did not believe that the necessary rites had been performed, sickness ensued. Indeed, Dapper wrote that natives in Luango believed that “a person would not be dead but because of the malice and the spells of their enemies.”¹¹⁸ The same spiritual force behind the birth of albinos and dwarfs, *mbumba*, was also the cause of a mortal affliction caused by rain. The bodies of the people afflicted with this exceptional illness were considered particularly dangerous and were thrown into the water, possibly for purification through the contact with ancestors.¹¹⁹

Once sick, most people in Luango would resource to a *nganga*, plural *baganga*, or to a practitioner of the *mbumba*.¹²⁰ According to Dapper, when a native in Angola healed, and independent that “the integrity of his complexion, the forces of nature, good air, good diet or some other happy accident” had “freed him from his illness, he attributes his recovery to the song or the drumbeat of the enchanter.”¹²¹ In 1697 Capuchin priest Luca da Caltanissetta

¹¹⁶ Cavazzi, 84.

¹¹⁷ Moquissie in this case referees to a spiritual entity. In this case this is a transcription of the term *Nkisi*.

¹¹⁸ “Personne ne meurt que par la malice les enchantements de son ennemi, qui par les mes sortilèges le ressuscite, le transporte dans des lieux deferts l’y fait travailler pur se richer.” Dapper, 335.

¹¹⁹ Hilton 14

¹²⁰ Hilton 14

¹²¹ “[Q]ue si’il devient malade ou qu’il lui arrive des affaires, il se met dans l’esprite qu’une offense qui’il a commise contre sa moquissie en est la cause... Que si la bonté de sa complexion, la roce de la nature, un bon air, un bon régime ou quelque autre accident heureux le délivre de sa maladie, il impute sa guérison aux chanson au battement de tambour de l’enchanteur, qui lui fait accoried toutes ces rêveries, pur maintenir son crédit.” Dapper, 335.

wrote about the power of *Ngangas*. Caltanisseta tells how,

At some point some men and women told my interpreter that my mission was evil because I fashion myself to be an enemy of the 'feticheurs' and burned their idols; they added that they were unable to abandon the practices of their country. Being *Christians* they have originally prayed to god for the healing of the sick [and] have not obtained [it], they turned to the 'feticheurs' in order to get healing from the devil, [and] honored in these idols. This demonstrates the profound disposition of all habitants of this unfortunate kingdom of Kongo.¹²²

Among many other elements, *baganga* would use hair and fingernails to channel the energy of the ritual to the intended victim. Writing about such practices, Dapper says that,

All of the little rarities that one can find, several sorts of shells, stones and bells, dried plants, herbs, feathers, rock crystals, gum, tree bark, roots, grains, pieces of fabric, claws and horns, teeth, hair and fingernails...sewn up and crowned with the feathers of parakeets, chickens, or some other bird, with cords and pieces of fabric and woolen cloth and canvas of divers colors hanging all about.¹²³

He also left one of the only specific descriptions of one of such power-objects used by ritual specialists around Luango. One of the spiritual entities was called *Malemba*. According to Dapper this entity was related to health matters. It was materialized in “a mat of one foot and a half square...of it they hang bottles, [Fish?] scales, feathers, pipes, dried pods small

¹²² “Entre temps quelques hommes et femmes dirent à l’interprète que j’agissais mal en me montrant ennemi des féticheurs et en brûlant leurs idoles; il ajoutèrent qu’ils ne pouvaient abandonner les coutumes de leurs pays; étant chrétiens, ils avaient d’abord eu recours à Dieu pour la guérison de ce malade; ne l’ayant pas obtenue, ils s’étaient adressés aux féticheurs afin que ceux-ci l’obtiennent du démon, honoré dans ces idoles. Cette réponse montre les dispositions profondes de tous les habitants de ce malheureux royaume de Congo.” Luca de Caltanisseta and François Bontink trans., *Diaries Congolais, (1690-1701)*, (Kinshasa: Publications de l’Université Lovanium de Kinshasa, 1970), 68-69.

¹²³ Dapper, 336

bells, or *cresselles*, bones and all dyed red.” Similar objects would be re-constructed in the New World by African ritual specialists.¹²⁴

Rather than being specifically healing practitioners, all around the Atlantic shores of Africa ritual specialists were amid material and immaterial forces. Because of this, bodily practices became matters of pressing social importance. The reactions of the body reflected larger issues than only individual characteristics. The following section shows how West and West-Central Africans examined relations to the community, both of the living well as those occupying the underground, through the use of bodily based signs and trials.

Ordeals

In early-modern West and West-Central Africa, power and authority had spiritual bases. This is, to hold to power, kings had to ensure their subjects clearly recognized their connections with the realm of the dead.¹²⁵ Such otherworldly links were maintained and fostered through the use of specific rites that simultaneously asserted the kings' authority while they also assured continuing protection and cooperation from the underworld. For this reason, ritual practitioners were powerful, while politically dangerous, individuals that the king would woo but also fear.

Jesuit priest Raimongo da Diacomano wrote early in the eighteenth century that when someone felt sick or died in Kongo “the community invariably accused someone of harming

¹²⁴ According to Dapper “ce n’est pourtant qu’une natte d’n pié & demi en carré, ou l’on attaché pare en haut une courroie, pour y pendre des bouteilles, dese écailles, des plumes, des tuyaux de casse seche, des petites cloches, des cresselles, des os c. le tout teint en rouge.” For descriptions of similar mats see the case of Mateo Arara in Chapter III of this dissertation. The other *Moquisies* Dapper described were: *Kikokoo whowas* “la pur garder de les morts, pur empecher que les Magiciens les faisant fortir de tombeaux ne les battent, pour les contraindre a travailler a aller pecher avec eux de nuit. Cette Moquisie preside aussi sur la mer, preveint les tempers les orages.” He also talked about *Bomba*; *Mymi*, and finally about *Kymaye*. Dapper, 335-337.

¹²⁵ Hilton, *Kongo*, 33,37.

him through witchcraft.¹²⁶ A trial ensued and if convicted, local authorities confiscated all of the defendant's goods. Moreover, if the presumed victim of the rites were to be a child or a village lord, “the convicted was not only put to death but his whole family was sold to traders to be shipped to the Americas.”

Europeans in Africa observed several variations of this rite. Some of them involved oath taking rituals. Other judicial cases were decided by ordeals in which death was the end result if the oath taker was lying or had bad intentions. Father Bernardo da Gallo also tells how in seventeenth century Kongo, its inhabitants performed,

[A] ritual called *Bulungu* which consists of [the administration] of a poisonous drink. [The ritual] is used to predict who, for example, has committed a crime. Anyone who is guilty remains unconscious and if we do not give him the antidote he dies...Sometimes a White uses this *Bulungu* to ask whether [the death] was caused either by poison or a curse, and who was the killer of his deceased friend [or family member].¹²⁷

Father Pedro Tavares, in another instance, wrote in 1631 from Kongo that in a place called Quionzo, they had “a form of oath in which they give the accused a pint of squeezed *agoa*, which juice was venomous. When guilty, [the person] dies within one hour after drinking the *agoa*. [When the person] does not die, a great party starts. They hug and shout and put all dust of the earth over the accused’s body. Many other [Congolese] have similar

¹²⁶ Louis Jadin, *Relations sur le Congo et l'Angola tirées des archives de la Compagnie de Jésus, 1621-1631* (Bruxelles: Academia Belgica, 1968),.332,334.

¹²⁷ “Une autre s'appelle *Bulungu*, c'est une boisson vénéneuse qui se donne pour deviner: qui, par exemple, a commis tel délit? Celui qui se tient pour coupable reste étourdi et si on ne lui donne pas le contrepoison, il en meurt. Certain disent que le fait est un pur hasard et il arrive souvent que des innocents restent étourdis et sont considérés comme coupables. Ceux-ci se voyant convaincus publiquement et à cause de cela couverts de honte, confessent le [fol. 230] délit qui n'a pas été commis par eux.” Relations de Bernardo da Gallo, in Louis Jadin, “Le Congo et la Secte des Antoniens. Restauration du Royaume sous Pedro IV et la ‘Saint Antoine’ Congolaise.” *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* 33 (1961): 453.

oaths to this one.”¹²⁸

The same was true in early modern Upper Guinea. According to Walter Hawthorne, for the Balanta convictions of witchcraft carried with them certain death or a slavery sentence. Hawthorne explains that around the rivers of Guinea, where the Balanta are located, this was a useful mechanism for centralized societies like the Brans and Biafara, and decentralized groups like the Balanta, to dispose of political or personal enemies. Manuel Alvares said about this custom in Upper Guinea that “one such is when they enslave large numbers on the grounds that they are witches, an offence which they can only prove by diabolic arts. But once the notion is in their heads they attack the homes of the witches and kill their families.”¹²⁹ Among the Banhus, in Upper Guinea it was common during the seventeenth century to judge people through “Red Water” Ordeals.¹³⁰ What is more, such “witch-hunts” could have also functioned as a way to control the power ritual specialists held in communities.

Ordeals, hence, served as physical mechanisms for establishing the strength and veracity of communal and spiritual links. They were also essential in the maintenance of political and spiritual powers, as well as tools for social order control. Ritual practitioners would be at the center of such ceremonies that took on several different forms in the areas examined in this chapter. While ordeals give us an idea of the fluid interface between the material, the ethereal, the political, and the social, this concept was more clearly represented

¹²⁸ “[A] forma do juramento era, dar a beber ao culpado hu quartilho d'agoa esprimido nella o sumo de çerta erua peçonhenta; e se morre dentro de huã hora depois de beber a agoa, naõ morrêra, o abraçaráõ cõ muita festa e alaridos, enchendolhe todo o corpo de pó da terra. Outros muitos juramentos tem semelhantes a este.” Carta do Padre Pedro Tavares ao Reitor do Colégio de Luanda, Padre Reitor Jeronymo Vogado” Brassio, Lib 8, 66.

¹²⁹ Alvares, *Ethiopia*, Ch 5, p. 3.

¹³⁰ Alvares, *Ethiopia*, Ch7, p. 8. Hair, the translator, argues that these rituals were common among Jewish communities where they were called “proof-waters.” According to Hair, Moses used them to “learn those guilty of worshipping idolatrously the calf.” Ibid. See also Exodus 32 [20]. “And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.”

in one of the most representative of all West and West-Central African ritualistic elements. Europeans' reports and letters from early modern Africa made a poor job of understanding what was behind what Portuguese people called *Fetiços*.

Trans-Atlantic Power-Objects

Power-objects were an essential part of rituals both in West and West-Central Africa. In Kongo, *mbumba*, very old ancestors, materialized in *minkisi*. In Upper Guinea, Africans from the “rios de Guinea” [Rivers of Guinea] prayed to “the idols which they adore, and whom they revere like their god, are the statues of their ancestors and several other wood or mud figures that are called *Corofines*.”¹³¹ These objects, rather than being powerful by themselves, acquired their qualities after being inhabited by a particular spiritual force.

In seventeenth century Kongo, *mbumba* revealed its intention of serving a particular individual by appearing in the form of objects like oddly shaped grains, stones or wood sticks. Such items became, after appropriated rituals, power-objects, *minkisi*, and contained the energy of the spirit. Similarly, the birth of “oddly shaped” children meant that either the father or the mother had been chosen by the spirit and should undergo initiation as a *Nganga*. In this case, children themselves were considered *minkisi*.¹³²

Several Europeans described power-objects in seventeenth century Africa, Capuchin missionary Father Capelle wrote in 1643 that in Congo,

¹³¹ “Los ídolos que adoran y a quienes como a su dios reverencian, son las estatuas de sus antepasados, y otras varias figuras de madera, o barro que se llaman Corofines.” De Sandoval, 47. In addition to De Sandoval, there are other sources mention the same practices in West-Central Africa during the seventeenth century. See Tavares mentions that he had to constantly burn “idols” them in 1631. See Antonio Brasio, *Monumenta Missionaria Africana Africa Occidental (1631-1642)* (Lisboa: Academia Portuguesa de Historia, 1960), L8, 47; Also Cavazzi, 58-60.

¹³² Dupre, 14, 16; Rui de Pina, LXII in Brasio, I, 125; Report of P. Bernadino da Gallo, Rome 17 Dec 1710 in Jadin, *Le Congo*, 495. Report of Lorenzo da Lucca, Nkusu, 3 Jan, 1707 in, in Jadin, *Le Congo*, 546; De Lucques, 136; P Girolamo da Montessarchio to P. Bonaventura da Sorrento, Nsevo, Nsundi 25 Mar. 1650 in Brasio, X, 86; Report of P. Giacinto da Vetralla, Quoted in Hilton, 15.

[T]hey have their moquisis in which they believe... [they] were made by their fetishers and consist of small rocks, little bones, feathers, herbs and other useless rubbish, with which...they practice magic and speak with the devil, as if they were insane and possessed...The moquisis are wrapped in the skins of certain small animals. They kept them on their person or suspend them in their homes...Other wears bracelets with which the fetishers transmit their magical forces.¹³³

In Fetu, Müller described that it was common to see in most houses “several hundred sticks, indeed a thousand in one bundle. In such bundles one finds another stick with is large and long, and on which hangs all kinds of rubbish, bark of trees, chicken bones...colored with blood, eggshells and even old swaddling clothes.”¹³⁴ Europeans often believed in the power of the very same “fetishes” they decried as “rubbish.”¹³⁵ Such objects, morphed, appeared on the other side of the Atlantic. The content of the bags described by Dapper closely resembles what ritual practitioners in seventeenth century Cartagena, like Antonio Salinas, carried around their necks, ritual objects that, like in Kongo, had very real powers for Europeans and their descendants.¹³⁶

When captured by the “*Sargento Mayor*” Major Sergeant of the Holy Office in Cartagena de Indias, Antonio de Salinas, had a similar bag to the one described above. Born in Cartagena some sixty years before his fateful encounter with the inquisition, de Salinas, in

¹³³ Louis Jadin, “Rivalités ,»231. Dutch Geographer, Olfert Dapper described similar objects in 1676 Kongo, “La moquisie *Cossi* est un petit sac rempli de coquilles et d'autres fadaises pour deviner. Le culte de cette Moquisie se célébre au bruit des cresselles, des change bizarres et affreux, en s'entre passant les jambes l'une dans l'autre, en s'entre-lavant et couvrant de crachats, en se mettant des boucles aux bras et des ceintures sur le corps et faisant mille autres singeries.” Dapper, 337.

¹³⁴ Müller 49-50.

¹³⁵ Naturally, each cultural group read differently the events related to power-objects. Wyatt MacGaffey has written extensively about this. See, for example, Wyatt MacGaffey, “Dialogues of the Deaf: Europeans on the Atlantic Coast of Africa.” In ed. Stuart Schwartz, *Implicit understandings: Observing, reporting, and reflecting on the encounters between Europeans and other peoples in the early modern era*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1994), 249-267.

¹³⁶ Power-objects have been found in archaeological excavations in South Carolina, Florida, Saint Domingue and Jamaica among other places.

his words, descended from “Blacks from Guinea.”¹³⁷ After living in Nicaragua and Guatemala for more than a decade, he had returned to Cartagena and began working on ritual practices.¹³⁸ Besides being a healer, de Salinas used his powers, tools and rituals to terminate life. On July 6, 1689, for instance, he confessed “to have killed two persons.”¹³⁹ His powers over death were ample. He was also said to be able to use his knowledge to save himself from dying. Eleven witnesses, “seven White and four Black,” declared that using “magic” he was able to survive the close range impact of “a cannon bullet” that hit him in his chest.¹⁴⁰ Evidently, not only Africans and Afro-descendants believed in De Salinas’s authority over death.

A free black fisherman, De Salinas, faced the inquisition tribunal in 1666 after witnesses of African and European descent declared that in the bag that the Cartagena's *Sargento Mayor* confiscated from him he had “*ominas* to kill and other herbs and sticks to do it.”¹⁴¹ The inventory of the objects contained in Salina’s bag is unique in its detail. To my knowledge, there is no comparable description until then, in its detail, of an African power-object in seventeenth century New Kingdom of Granada. The bag contained white powder, sticks, stamps of saints, a piece of wood that appeared to be part of a cross, fragments of white, blue, and red fabrics, a stick that was a “contra” against snake bites, a corn kernel, ten splinters of a tree, leaves from another plant, a painted image of Mary the Virgin in a piece of paper, two pieces of Saint Nicolas bread, an old papal bull, and two written prayers to save him from “ferocious animals” and from being drowned, and which were also “very beneficial

¹³⁷ This could mean that his parents were indeed from West Africa, as Guinea was the most common name Europeans gave to this part of the continent. However, it is not possible to discard that Salinas' parents came from other place in Africa as in America, Europeans and Africans alike used Guinea as a proxy for Africa.

¹³⁸ AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 400v.

¹³⁹ AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 401r.

¹⁴⁰ AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 400v

¹⁴¹ “[T]raían ominas para matar y [malas??] yerbas y palos para dicho efecto.” AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 401r.

for the body.”¹⁴²

As is evident from this inventory, Antonio de Salinas did not reproduce African power-objects following strict “African” rules. Robert Farris Thompson’s formulation captures more clearly the re-imagination of power-objects in the New World. He calls them “strategic objects.”¹⁴³ Naturally, African adapted such strategic objects, as well as the rituals in which they were used, to the Americas. De Salinas' bag contained not only elements clearly recognizable as related to African rituals but also European Christian ritual objects and even written prayers. It was further filled with grains from the New World, corn, and herbs, and sticks that ritual practitioners have discovered in the Americas. The use of particular colors in the papers and fabrics in Salinas' bag, on the other hand, suggests West and West-Central African influences. Writing from Loango in 1603, Ulshemier for instance, reported that natives believed that “when their people died, they come to the country of the Whites...for that reason they make all their dead quite white before burying them.”¹⁴⁴

Red and white were also highly symbolic colors in the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin. Talking about power-objects made out of sticks, Müller said that “these red-colored sticks are seen by these blinded people as highly sacred.” In Fetu, natives “painted their faces with blood and with red and white soils...on their hands, arms and legs they have an ornamental tassel, which is white, red or yellow, and in addition little cords colored white,

¹⁴² “Unos polvos blanco envueltos en dos papelitos y en otros... un palo embutido al parecer de reliquias que parece fue cruz, una estampa? De San ?pto de Burgos pegada en un pedazo de safesan carmesí y con ella un pedacillo de lienzo que no supo si era o no corporales envuelto todo en un pedazo de raso azul. Y en otro papel tenia envuelto una varilla [havilla?] que es contra de culebra s un grano de maxi [maíz?] diez pedacitos que parecían astillas de palo y hojas de algún árbol, una bolsita de tela burda y dentro de ella una imagen de Nuestra Señora de la Soledad pequeña pintada en papel y una hoja de la da de su mismo parte formada en ella una cruz y en otro papel dos panecitos de San Nicolas con otro s pedazos que parecían ser lo mismo y una bulla vieja de la santa cruzada sin nombre de la persona a quien pertenece ni fuera ni dentro una oración manuscrita en [???] empieza [??] oración muy milagrosa y muy provechosa al cuerpo y al alma y acaba palabra voluntad amen Jesús. Otra oración manuscrita para no ser ahogado lastimado ni preso ni otras cosas, que comienza encomiendo al justo Jesús y a su madre cuyo hijo es: y acaba amen Jesús.”AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 400r.

¹⁴³ Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit* (New York: Random House, 1983), 117.

¹⁴⁴ As quoted in Janzen, 31.

red and yellow. Around the Gold Coast, according to Villault, De Marees and Dapper, natives “anoint their hair with palm oil and decorate it with gold ornaments or red sea-shells and with *rassade*. They often put red or white coloring on their faces, on the brow and eye brow, and on the cheeks, and they make little cuts on each side of the face.” As in West-Central Africa the red and the white had specific symbolic significance relating to the spiritual and earthly realms.¹⁴⁵ Adaptation and incorporation of novel strategies for the manipulation of natural and spiritual forces was of the essence in a place like Cartagena. Apart from the African flavor of this rich bag, it also suggests slave's literacy. As de Salinas, many other Africans and Afro-descendants read and wrote in Cartagena as I explain in chapter five of this dissertation.

While the elements in de Salinas' bag contained several recognizable African elements, it also contained European objects. Linda Heywood, Wyatt MacGaffey, and John Thornton have shown that the incorporation of European relics and ritual elements, power-objects themselves, was not a New World phenomenon.¹⁴⁶ A famous power-object with the figure of a beaten and tortured dead man was considered, according to MacGaffey, as one of the most powerful *nkisi*. Crucifixes with their deploy of nails, corpses, and blood (red over white, the two colors of the limbo and death) were considered by many Congolese as very effective power-objects.¹⁴⁷ Dapper for instance, said that during the *Bomba ceremonies* the *Nganga* painted cross figures on his entire body.¹⁴⁸

Upper Guineans called similar objects *GrisGris*, *nominas* or *bolsinhas*.¹⁴⁹ They

¹⁴⁵ Barbot, 495; De Marees, 18-19; Dapper, 104, Villault 224-226.

¹⁴⁶ Heywood and Thornton, 178. John K. Thornton, "Demography and History in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1550-1750," *Journal of African History* 18 (1977): 512-13.

¹⁴⁷ Young, 116.

¹⁴⁸ Dapper, 336.

¹⁴⁹ Hair, *Jesuit Documents*; Alvares, *Ethiopia*, Ch1 ; Barbot, 85, 221-222

contained papers with prayers, herbs, parts of animals, pebbles, sticks, and other things.¹⁵⁰ In Upper Guinea, Villault reported about indigenous people that “if any misfortune happens to them, they will find their priests to have a Fetish help them.” Power-objects and the deities they embodied were essential in the treatments of diseases. Bodily sacrifices were also necessary either for the prevention of diseases or for their cure. Villault for instance said that natives “abstain from eating or drinking anything as a way of honoring their fetish.” They would think that if they broke the promise they “would die immediately.”¹⁵¹

Power-objects contained spirits and channeled their energy. They were “portals through which communication with the dead might be effected in order to address any number of concerns in the material world.”¹⁵² *Minkisi* were not formal power-objects until infused with the power of the otherworld. *Baganga* used several methods for the activation of the power-object. Burial was one of the most common. Dapper reported how *Ngangas* in Kongo activated power-objects by burying them under trees.¹⁵³ Something similar was observed in 1697 by Luca da Caltanissetta in Kongo. The Jesuit described a ritual in which,

[R]ecognizing and regretting their sins, the [worshippers] asked that the devil come back into the head of the [ritual specialist], the ngombo Nganga or other Nganga.

Calmed, [the Nganga] ordered that we brought things belonging to the living as well as to the *dead* such as ashes, wood, or something else. We *bury* all these things...

putting in a fabric and as much palm nuts as there were demons as main witnesses for

¹⁵⁰ Barbot, 85-86.

¹⁵¹ “S’il leur arrivé quelque disgrâce, ils vont trouver leurs Prestes pour avoir une Fétiche, qui leur fasse du bien, ce que les Prestés leur accordant, moyennant de l’or, pour lequel il leur donne du suif où ils auront fiché deux ou trois plume de Perroquets, ou quelque herbe, & le gendere du Roy de Fetu avoit une teste de singe pour sa Fétiche.” Villault also said that “Tous s’abstienne de manger ou boire de quelque chose à l’honneur de leur Fetiche, avec la pensée, que s’ils en mangeotent ou beuvoient après l’avoir promis, qui pour l’ordinaire est quand ils semaient, ils mouraient à l’heure même ; c’est pourquoi un ne mange point de bœuf, l’autre de cabris, celui-cy de poules blanches, ou d’autres oiseaux, celui-là ne boira point de vin, d’eaud-de vie.” Villaut, 274

¹⁵² MacGaffey, *Kongo*, 78-80.

¹⁵³ Dapper, 338.

the demon who had entered the head of the ngombo Nganga.¹⁵⁴

However, burial was only one technique for the activation of the power-objects. Knocking them achieved the same effect. Luca de Caltanissetta writes in 1698 that in *Kongo* a female specialist, “called *Nganga zagi*, that is to say, priestess of the devil having power over thunder and lightening...In the name of these idols, she was cursing her enemy, invoking strikes of lighting upon him...[as] she knocked the idols together, one against the other.”¹⁵⁵

Other common forms of strategic objects’ activating only appeared later, in the eighteenth century. According to MacGaffey, the use of nails as strategy to awake *nkisi*, by driving them into wooden power-objects, only developed with the readily availability of nails in the eighteenth century.¹⁵⁶ Hence, power-objects were closely associated with the presence and manipulation of the dead in both sides of the Atlantic. Their uses were adaptative and their composition, interpretation, and the rituals in which they were involved, were contingent upon local circumstances and cultural interchanges.

For instance the use of medicinal horns was widespread in West and West-Central Africa during the seventeenth century as well as in American places like the Spanish Caribbean and Brazil.¹⁵⁷ Villault refers to them when describing the customs of the people around the Gold Coast. Power-objects in this part of Africa frequently were made out of “small bits of horns filled with garbage, and other small figures.” Naturally, what Villault

¹⁵⁴ My emphasis. “Le démon a toujours raison et le tort se trouve du côté de ceux qui sorguent de telle maladie. Reconnaissant et regrettant leur fautes, ceux-ci demandent que le démon vienne de nouveau dans la tête de son prêtre, le *Nganga ngombo* ou un autre *Nganga*. Apaisé, le démon ordonne qu'on rassemble les choses appartenant aux vivants aussi bien qu'aux morts: cendres, bois ou n'importe quoi. On enterre ensemble toutes ces choses et sur cette sépulture on dresse cette fourche, mettant dans une étoffe autant de noix de palme qu'il y avait de démons venus comme témoins du démon principal qui était entré dans la tête de ce *Nganga ngombo*.” Caltanissetta, *Diarie*, 39r-39v.

¹⁵⁵ Caltanissetta, *Diarie*, 95.

¹⁵⁶ MacGaffey, *Kongo Political Culture*, 99.

¹⁵⁷ Barbot’s painted several artifacts from the Gold Coast amongst them three highly decorated ritual horns. Barbot, 571.

called garbage was in reality an assortment of ritualistic elements with highly symbolic value and specific purposes.¹⁵⁸ These instruments served as both instrumental and emblematic tools for healing and divination rituals. They appear in European reports from seventeenth century Africa, and there are some surviving examples of them in museums in Africa and Europe.¹⁵⁹ However, there exists limited information about their use in early modern rituals. Spanish court records document many African ritual objects, their uses, and the emblematic and symbolic ceremonies of which they formed an essential part. With the appropriate caveats, seventeenth-century records of African-born ritual specialists' practices in places like the New Kingdom of Granada provide researchers, some three and a half centuries later, with the best available descriptions of rituals and the use of ritual artifacts from both early modern Africa and Iberian America. Cartagena's inquisition and governmental records are exceptional in how they inform the material and ethnographic record of early modern Africa.

Ritual elements introduced both the beholder and the practitioner of the ritual to recognizable representations of the natural and supernatural worlds.¹⁶⁰ The symbolic and emblematic power of the objects Africans recreated in the Americas, as well as of the rites in which they used them, is evidenced by their efficacy. Not all ritual objects used by Africans and Afro-descendants were made in the New World. African ritual specialists brought with them, few but highly relevant symbolic material elements from Africa. Domingo Congo, a

¹⁵⁸ "Ont tous qu'ils portent fur eux, les uns seront de petits bouts de cornes remplies d'ordures, les autres de petites figures, des testes d'animaux, cent autres infamies que leurs Prestes leur vendent, disant les avoir trouvez à l'arbre de la Fétiche." Villault.

¹⁵⁹ Two of the most highly preserved medicinal horns coming from early modern west Africa are housed in the British museum in London, (coll. Oldman), inv.no.Af1949,46.170, and (coll. Beasley), inv.no.Af1944,04.21. I had the opportunity to examine these horns at the Ethnologisches Museum-Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin, in May 2008.

¹⁶⁰ These artifacts and rites conveyed "An array of metaphors, making polysemous by design." Fennell, *Bakongo Identity*, 201; Johannes Fabian. "Religious Pluralism: An Ethnographic Approach," in *Theoretical Explorations in African Religion*, eds. W. van Binsbergen and M. Schoffeleers (London: KPI Limited, 1985): 138-63; Edward. M. Bruner, "Epilogue: Creative Persona and the Problem of Authenticity,": in *Creativity/Anthropology*, eds. Smadar Lavie, Kirin Narayan, and Renato Rosaldo (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 321-34.

famous healer and ritual practitioner living in Caracas during the first half of the seventeenth century, declared that in his cures he used chickens, leaves, crosses and some red powders called *barquisi*. Helping him in finding the elements necessary for his rituals was an animated and talkative little figure that helped him to pick the appropriate roots for his concoctions. The figure, which he said to have brought originally from Congo some five decades before, was of “very dark color” and moved freely while talking to Domingo and indicating him what roots were the most appropriate for the treatment of specific ailments.¹⁶¹

Domingo Congo's story shows how, besides reinventing the material elements of their rituals, ritual specialists were able to bring power-objects to the Americas. Power-objects, in Domingo's case a *nkisi*, as I discuss in the following chapter, were essential in the construction of relationships between the earthly and immaterial realms. They provided Africans with a sense of communal continuity and must have functioned as recognizable and formidable tools for the re-invention of African culture in the Spanish Caribbean. Besides their obvious symbolic value, elements such as Domingo Congo's figure were instrumental in the channeling of specific African social and cultural norms and components. African rituals and objects, hence, conveyed a myriad of cultural structures and traditions to the New World. Ritual practitioners had to talk to the objects in their native tongues. Together with the oral tradition came religion, social hegemony, and structure, all of them woven into the emblemization and representation performed by health practitioners using these objects in carefully recreated African rituals.

The stories told in Cartagena by African born ritual specialists and by several witnesses, most of them African themselves, root the use of African ritual instruments in closely related ethnographic evidence. Because of their specific instrumental purposes, these

¹⁶¹ Domingo declared “Que la figurita era de Congo, muy negra.”AHN, Inquisición, 1022, Fol. 102v-103r.

objects functioned as artifacts with highly defined origins and uses. They were essential but not sufficient pieces of highly elaborated procedures and became effective only when practitioners used them under specific circumstances and with specific accompanying artifacts, this is, as parts of an elaborated performative protocol. Precisely because of their specificity, the interpretation of artifacts is greatly enriched with the use of contemporary sources, like the records I introduce in Chapter three, in which their function and performative use are clearly specified rather than inferred, and in which it is possible to place the material elements in specific rituals.

Multiculturalism

Villault says that around the Gold Coast most people spoke a type of Portuguese.¹⁶² As in Upper Guinea, traders in Benin, Luango, Ardra and Calabar quickly learned linguistic tools that enabled them to trade effectively in a new age of unparalleled commercial opportunities. However, trades, and the learning of the necessary linguistic and cultural tools for successful commerce, were not new concepts to West and West-Central Africans when Europeans arrived in the fifteenth century. Africans had not only waged war and lay to waste enemy villages and croplands but also traded commercial goods, slaves, and, more importantly, knowledge about the world. After looking at some of the particular African traditions about the body, this last section shows how interconnected and open were early modern West and West-Central African systems of beliefs about corporeality. An examination of evidence related to matters of the flesh complicates easy histories of European derision and belittling of Africans. It challenges the idea that scorn and mockery

¹⁶² “Tous parlent Portugais, & appréhendent de s’yvrer; c’est pourquoi ils ne boivent (du Monins avec nous, que fort peu d’eau de vie.) Villault, 86109.

were the *de facto* attitudes assumed toward sub-Saharan African culture and traditions by European traders.

The incorporative nature of African systems of belief is not particular of West-Central African groups. As Walter Hawthorne and Robin Law have argued, and as I show here, groups in Upper Guinea and in the Bights of Benin and Biafra welcomed and incorporated beliefs and practices from foreign traditions in their rituals. The nature of such adoption, unlike what John Thornton argues, was neither characterized by displacement nor was it a model that relied on balanced hybrid beliefs. Instead, traditions from all around the continent, as well as from Europe, were added to multicultural belief system that incorporated a large pantheon of spiritual entities.

West and West-Central Africans, different than Europeans, did not hold religion or beliefs around the body to be immutable, closed epistemological systems. Nor did they hold particular beliefs about the nature of the world so close to their perception of individual's and groups "identities." For instance, as Queen Nzinga of Matamba and Ndongo incorporated her catholic name, Ana de Sousa, to a long rosary of titles and names, fellow Matamba ritual specialists adopted healing practices without renouncing or supplanting theirs. In Ardra the situation was similar. About this Robin Law writes that, as in Kongo and Matamba, "Christianity had been regarded in Allada as something to be added, rather than substituted for, indigenous practices and customs."¹⁶³ As with their religion that, as we have seen in this chapter, was closely integrated with healing practices they increased their therapeutic arsenal not by holding to "ancient" primal concepts, but by adapting novel systems of dealing with nature.

¹⁶³ Robin Law, "Religion, trade and politics on the 'Slave Coast': Roman Catholic mission in Ardra and Whydah in the Seventeenth Century." *Journal of Religion in Africa* XX (1), 1991: 45.

For example, Bosman wrote that around the Gold Coast healing treatments seemed to be very efficacious “either by the efficacy of the medicines” or by natural resolution.¹⁶⁴ He emphasized, nevertheless that in West Africa, “like in Europe,” healing specialists were involved in a fierce competition. When they approached a new client, if someone else had treating her/him, “their first order of business” was to deprecate about their predecessor.¹⁶⁵ The promiscuity of African health-market clients was prodigal. It was also an effective spur for innovation and experimentation with new elements or rites that included cultural borrowing and miss-appropriation.

Bosman said that around the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin, the “change of physicians sometimes happens twenty times or more successively and at a continual and greater charge than with us.” In the adaptable vision of corporeality that West Africans, and presumably West-Central Africans had, multiple systems of healing could co-exist. For West and West-Central Africans these were not competing, but concomitant hierarchies of knowledge. The incorporation of several ontological systems into their own allowed West Africans to switch not only from ritual practitioners coming from traditions as disparage as those coming from Mandinka, Arara, and even European health practitioners.¹⁶⁶

Not all ritual practitioners were of had the same social category. Dapper, Barbot, Des Marchais and other accounts signal how some practitioners were very close to the king, “the great feticheurs.” In Whydah According to Marchais and Barbot these “feticheurs” were were involved in political and social decisions of determining importance.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, the priest of Loebo in Benin was supposed to be in command of the sea and waters. The king of

¹⁶⁴ Bosman, XIII, 222.

¹⁶⁵ Bosman, XIII, 223.

¹⁶⁶ Bosman, XIII, 223.

¹⁶⁷ Astley, 86 (Based on Dapper and Des Marchais).

Benin gave him an entire town, Loebo, for his services to the kingdom, and to keep it at bay as a powerful possible political rival.¹⁶⁸ In contrast, other practitioners were prohibited to work and scrapped a living out of the monies they would obtain from their cures.¹⁶⁹ In Benin, according to Barbot, they were forbidden to go out of cities.¹⁷⁰ It was thus a very competitive marketplace in which patients would, like in Europe, obtain counsel and medicines from several practitioners either in succession, as “itinerant patients,” or “promiscuously” in a simultaneous manner.

It is possible to imagine that such situation made ritual practitioners adaptative and willing to learn not only practices from each other but also from itinerant practitioners, as well as from Europeans, that would give them an advantage in enacting their cures. Such resourcefulness would have been impossible to maintain in the presence of restrictive beliefs about bodies, nature and spirits. Instead being adaptive was, according to the available evidence, a necessity.

The promiscuity of healing practices did not only include African traditions. In the Gold Coast, for instance, natives around Mori/ Fort Nassau, a place known as “the Dutch Cemetery,” went in mass seeking the help of one of the Dutch surgeons established in the fort. According to Samuel Brun, a Swiss barber-surgeon, after the fort’s surgeon and his assistant died, he had to stay behind when the ship in which he was supposed to take back to Holland departed from Mori sometime in the 1610s. Brun said that “there was a lack of help and advice concerning the sick.” Regardless of the self-serving nature of such statement, he reported that once he was given lodging, “a good table” and medicaments by the admiralty,

¹⁶⁸ George Sale, *The Modern Part of an Universal History from the Earliest Account of Time. Vol. XI* (London: Printed for S. Richardson [et al], 1759), 378.

¹⁶⁹ Astley, 97. (probably copying from Bosman)

¹⁷⁰ Astley 99.

he “immediately received all kinds of patients afflicted with worms in their flesh and other open wounds.”¹⁷¹

The interchange went the other way too. Users of African medical practices not only included natives. Bosman, among others, talks about “some *Europeans* who not only think favorably of, and believe, this idolatrous worship effectual, but instigate their servants to it; and are likewise grown very fond of wearing some trifles about their bodies which are consecrated.”¹⁷² As it would happen in the New World, the profligacy of beliefs and adoption of systems of healing, and presumably about conceptualizations of the body, was fertile and fruitful. Europeans did not believe they were being deceived; instead they looked for and praised African ritual practitioners and practices.

The admiration for Africans’ abilities has not been explored in the racialized discourse informing the historiography of the slave trade era. This evidence complicates long held assumptions about the place European and Africans had in their encounter around the Atlantic coast of Africa from the fifteenth century on. Not all of the descriptions of Africans were derogative, or their knowledge dismissed. For instance, talking about Gold Coast native oral traditions and memory Villault says that “they have wit, a lot of judgment, and they are thin and dexterous. You do not have to show them twice the same thing...their memory surpasses all what one could say.”¹⁷³ This becomes more evident when we consider healing practices

We know little about the process by which West and West-Central African groups “discovered” what herbs and other natural elements would help them in their cures.

¹⁷¹ Brun, 63.

¹⁷² Bosman, XIII, 224

¹⁷³ “Ils ont de l’esprit, beaucoup de jugement, ils sont fins, adroits, jamais il ne fut leur montrer deux fois une mesme chose... menteurs au dernier point. Leur mémoire surpasse tout ce qu’on en put dire.” Villault, 216-17.

Whatever the method, the transmission of the knowledge and the reiteration of their effectiveness had also something to do with strongly imbibed religious traditions. In the materiality of the plants, African concepts of healing were transmitted. Europeans, consciously or not, not only appropriated the “scientific” effectiveness of the plants but certainly the cultural baggage that came with them.

Indeed, it could also be argued that the effectiveness of such plants had more to do with the rites in which they were enacted and not only with the yet to be discovered “pharmaceutical properties” of these materials. Thus, even the “discovery” of the plants was shaped by the rituals in which they were enacted. Bosman says that “in case of a violent Cholick, they give to drink morning and evening for several Days successively a good Calabash of Lime Juice and Malaget mix, and in other Diseases full as contradictory Ingredients.”¹⁷⁴ But he was surprised and added that “how contradictory and improper soever these Med’cines may seem, yet I have seen several of our Country Men cured by them, when our own Physicians were at loss what to do.”¹⁷⁵ It is impossible to define what was curing Bosman’s “countryman.” Yet, I will venture to say that in all likelihood most of the therapeutic work was being done by the rituals involved in the administration of the medicine. As I argue later in Chapter III, the recognition of “healing *motifs*,” cultural elements associated with healing, played a seminal role in the appropriation of medicinal knowledge and in the evaluation of its effectiveness on the part of both Europeans and Africans. They would be clearly reading the rituals from their own perspectives but, I propose, recognized in a conscious or unconscious manner acts associated with healing.

In another example Bosman talks about “the green herbs,” saying that they were “the

¹⁷⁴ Bosman, XIII, 224.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

principal Remedy in use amongst the *Negros*.” Bosman wrote that they “are of such wonderful Efficacy, that ‘tis much to be deplored that no European physician has yet applied himself to the discovery of their Nature and Virtue.”¹⁷⁶ He was sure that “they would prove more successful in the practice of Physic than the *European* preparations.” Bosman said that he was particularly impressed with the “green herbs” of which he said that “I have several times observed the *Negroes* cure such great and dangerous Wounds with them, that I have stood amazed thereat.”¹⁷⁷ This was a strikingly bold proposal. For an European to say that African methods of healing were superior to European’s ones turns upside down the narrative of the “civilization” of Africa, or that of the religious crusade to bring true knowledge to the “brutes” of *Ethiopia*.

What Bosman articulated in this paragraph was a more relevant, revealing, and I think genuine sentiment among Europeans living in Africa than the trite tropes that filled so many of their pages about the “diabolic,” “inanity” of Africans. When confronted with the realities of pain, disease, and death, as well as those of money, early modern Europeans saw Africans were not only equals but conceived that their *knowledge* and skills about the world and the body could be superior to European traditions and practitioners.

Des Marchais was likewise impressed by the effectiveness of African healing practices and said that around Whydah and Ardra “There are Black physicians and surgeons who, without having taking their courses or being wearing the robe of Rabelais, do not tire of practicing their art in such a way that it would be an honor for our Aesculapiuses of Europe to do similar things. They know simple admirable cures, whose juices, leaves or bark

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. In other examples Europeans, as in Asia and America, were busy learning useful healing techniques and medicines from natives in Africa. For instance Des Marchais, wrote how in Whydah the natives used “with great success, the root of the *simarouba*... which is employed as a specific against this disorder.” Des Marchais, Vol.2, 156-57.

¹⁷⁷ Bosman, XIII, 225

are amazing.”¹⁷⁸

Alvares was also very impressed with the power of Upper Guinean African healing arts.¹⁷⁹ The missionary said, for instance, that “In medical matters, some of them are expert herbalists, and hence they perform cures like doctors and surgeons. Some cures are so striking and are performed so rapidly that they are of interest to those most learned in the art (of medicine).”¹⁸⁰ About Upper Guinean healing traditions he also said that “those given a wound measuring a palm-span in breadth from a spear of the kind they have, a wound which is cured in 8-10 days, without suppuration, by means of a wonderful herb.”¹⁸¹ While most European travelers and residents in West and West-Central Africa were quick to condemn several of the ritualistic acts of natives as primitive and barbaric, it is remarkable how in matters of corporeality they almost without exception have words of praise about the admirable and beneficial nature of their healing practices. For all their denunciation of the perversity of African rites, Alvares, Bosman and Des Marchais like many other Europeans in Africa and across the Atlantic, understood in their own terms, and believed, in West and West-Central African systems of the body.

While initially contradictory to European’s common sense, African healing practices proved to be effective in the eyes of the very same Europeans decrying them as primitive. This is a topic that has been bypassed by most historians of science. How did the creation of the other, that “primitive” African, proceed side by side with the simultaneous appropriation

¹⁷⁸ “Il ne faut pas oublier qu’il y a des Medecins & Chirurgiens Negres, qui sans avoir fait leurs cours ni endosse la robe de Rabelais, ne laissent pas de faire des cures dont nos Esculapes d’Europe se seroient un honneur infini. Ils connoissent des simples admirables, dont les sucs, les feuilles ou les écorces sont des cures incroyables.” Des Marchais, 165.

¹⁷⁹ Alvares, *Ethiopia*, Ch 7, p 12.

¹⁸⁰ Alvares, *Ethiopia*, Ch 7, p.10.

¹⁸¹ He also narrated how “The disorders which arise from sensuality they flatten like hosts (?), the outer appearance being that of a living thing(?); and those they treat are instantly better.” Alvares, *Ethiopia*, Ch 7, P.10.

of these “retrograde” cultures’ knowledge of nature for “scientific” purposes?¹⁸² While it is true that by the eighteenth century a racialized construct of the “other” had emerged in learned discourses in Europe, the realities of trade and cultural interaction in the coast of Africa contradict the stories of segregation, and the creation of “patriotic” bodies that populate the literature on the exchange of goods and medicines between the Old and the New World. For Europeans were not only “scientifically” studying the natural world and the “inferior human beings” they encountered. While they were invested in the creation of a taxonomy and hierarchy of the natural world and the human races with Europeans at the top, they were also clearly appropriating the practices of those very humans they were decrying as inferior.

The contradictory nature of such encounters complicates the neat picture emanating from print culture of the early modern period. In innumerable letters, inventories and reports that did not reach the libraries of the most important European centers of learning, the places where the “enlightenment” project took off, we find testimonies of a different story. In it, the knowledge of nature is a cultural act. The appropriation of medicinal plants cannot, as Bosman history shows, be disparaged from the actual process of discovery that African used for the incorporation of them into their therapeutic arsenal.

¹⁸² See for some examples in Iberian America Alonso Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature: The Spanish American Empire and the Early Scientific Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006); Alonso Barrera-Osorio, “Empiricism in the Spanish Atlantic World,” in *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World*, eds. James Delbourgo and Nicholas Dew (New York: Routledge, 2008). Also, Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra. *Nature, Empire, and Nation: Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); or Jorge Canizares Esguerra, “New World, New Stars: Patriotic Astrology and the Invention of Indian and Creole Bodies in Colonial Spanish America, 1600-1650,” *The American Historical Review* 104 (1999): 33-68.

Conclusion

Rather than being pristine or static, West and West-Central African cultures were incorporative systems of dealing with the world that borrowed, added, and shaped mores coming from other African places and Europe. African people migrated, waged war, traveled and traded throughout the western shores of the continent. Such tumultuous interchange was arguably responsible for the characteristic openness of African systems of healing. The examination of practices about corporeality helps us in understanding at its more basic level the interpenetration between social practices and beliefs. This was particularly true in Africa where the realms of health, death, and illness were intermingled intimately with the social, the religious, and the natural realms. Moreover, looking at the reactions of early modern Europeans about what constituted health care, disease, or causes of death in the seventeenth century complicates the clear-cut depictions of "primitive" racialized Africans that they produced. This complicated evidence has been the basis for the creation of particular models of racialization that nineteenth century narratives impose on the lives of sixteenth and seventeenth century people.

While the creation of a "primitive" African appears to be the objective of Europeans, we should remember that similar remarks about the "idiocy," and "primitivism" of enemy European powers were the norm in writings of the period. Europeans' recognition of African beliefs as effective and powerful in explaining the world seems to contradict the more negative description of African rites. In the latter, Africans are depicted either as ignorant children, diabolic idolaters, or foolish brutes, in the former they appear as effective, knowledgeable, and even miraculous.

The examination of early modern systems of healing in Africa illuminates the

incorporative nature of West and West-Central African cultural systems. The African healers and ritual specialists who crossed the Atlantic would bring not only the power of their traditions but also their open nature to the New World. As happened in Africa, such traditions became essential for the encounter of Europeans and Africans. As we will see in the following Chapter, they functioned as effective tools for the Africanization of European and European culture in Africa and in the Americas. In no place was this more evident than in the Spanish Caribbean.

CHAPTER IV

MOHANES, CIRUJANOS Y BRUJOS: AFRICAN AND AFRO-DESCENDANT HEALTH PRACTICES AND PRACTITIONERS IN THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY SPANISH CARIBBEAN

*Ogun wá Ogun wò
Ogun ta ku a gbala
O yo kaka f(i) b la (i)di
Ogun iba o sà̀n koj nia kò daw ku
O p k sinuna
O payar sidi aro*

...

Oriki (Ogun Igbo Igbo) from Ishèdè ¹

In November 1618 a crestfallen Francisco de Santiago testified before the inquisition tribunal's envoy to Zaragoza, a hot and humid town in the northeastern corner of the New Kingdom of Granada, modern Colombia.² De Santiago, a native from peninsular Spain, managed one of Zaragoza's multiple gold mines, and had been, by then, paralyzed for four years "from the waist down." Surprisingly there had not been any discernable accident or illness to which he could attribute his symptoms. Not only this, but he had had no pain whatsoever. All circumstances signaled that a curse had befallen de Santiago, who had discovered that two of his slaves, Leonor, who was a *Zape*, and Guiomar, a *Bran*, had conspired to "*amarrarle las piernas*"[tie his legs].³

¹ [Ogun is here hello Ogun; Ogun saves the one whose death is imminent; it is satiated and cleaves its buttocks (drying) his knife; if Ogun cures the persons they will not die! it kills the husband of fire; it kills the wife of the house]. Oriki [the performative act of telling, or chanting, a legend] from Ishèdè, a Nago-Yoruba Village. Pierre Verger, *Notes sur le culte des Orishas et vodouns à Bahia, la Baie de Tous les Saints au Brésil et à l'ancienne Côte des Esclaves en Afrique* (Dakar: Institut Français d'Afrique Noir, 1957), 197.

² Archivo Historico Nacional de España, (hereafter AHN), Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 215r.

³ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 215v. Zape and Bran are the names European missionaries and traders recorded for two groups of people from the Guinea region in West Africa during the seventeenth century. In Spanish and Portuguese America, slave traders and owners named African natives with European first names and their

During Guiomar's trial de Santiago testified that "while asking [Leonor] why this witness [Francisco de Santiago] was sick and crippled from the legs for four years, without any pain, she told him that this defendant [Guiomar] and she had tied them [the legs]."⁴ De Santiago was desperate. He had tried to convince Leonor and Guiomar to untie him. Leonor wanted to help. Alas, Leonor's attempts to heal him had been unsuccessful. His condition remained the same even after "He felt that from the right leg, through the ankle in the inside part, fire was coming out [of his body]" during one of Leonor's healing rituals.⁵ Guiomar's help was also required. She had once reluctantly agreed to rub his knees briefly, but to no avail.⁶ For all we know De Santiago remained firmly tied for the rest of his life.

This chapter explores African ideas about the body, health, illness and death in the Spanish Caribbean. Evidence from seventeenth-century Cartagena de Indias in the New Kingdom of Granada, modern Colombia, represents a unique window into the ways in which individuals around the circum-Caribbean and Iberian Atlantic thought about their bodies and the world surrounding them. Rather than being treated as "magical," or "uncivilized" superstitions—a view that would become normative in eighteenth and nineteenth century

presumed region of origin as their last name. However, last names do not necessarily accurately reflect ethnic provenance, as slave-traders often named their slaves according to the port in which they were purchased. The slaves sold in these ports could come from slave raids or wars in a ratio of tens of miles inland and across the coast. Yet, these ethnonyms are the best available empirical evidence from which to infer New World-African slave's cultural origins. The discussion about Africans self-ascribed or imposed identities is still the subject of an intense and some times acrimonious scholarly and public debate. See chapter II of this dissertation for a larger discussion on this topic. Also see, for instance, James Sweet, "Mistaken Identities? Oluadah Equiano, Domingos Álvares, and the Methodological Challenges of Studying the African Diaspora," *American Historical Review* 114 (2009): 279-306; Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, : University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Douglas B. Chambers, "'My Own Nation': Igbo Exiles in the Diaspora," *Slavery and Abolition* 18 (1997): 72-97; David Northrup, "Igbo and Myth Igbo: Culture and Ethnicity in the Atlantic World," *Slavery and Abolition* 21 (2000): 1-20; and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

⁴"La dicha Leonor [le dijo] ser brujas algunas negras que nombro...y preguntándole como estaba este testigo [Juan de Santiago] enfermo y tullido de las piernas, había cuatro años, sin tener dolor alguno, le dijo que esta rea [Leonor] se las tenia amarradas." AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 215v.

⁵"La dicha Leonor le sobo las piernas y las rodillas...sintió que de la perna derecha, por el tobillo de la parte de adentro, le salía fuego." AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 216r.

⁶AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 218r.

Western narratives—African rituals and healing practices were accepted and understood on equivalent terms to European healing traditions by a majority of seventeenth-century Cartagena’s population. Archbishops, priests, lawyers, and government officials as well as slaves, frequently turned to African and Afro-descendant healers and practices when illness struck.

In the New World, Europeans, Native Americans, and Africans started anew. Circumstances forced them to accommodate alternative visions and develop a new knowledge to engage the alien world in which they suddenly found themselves. The processes by which the creation of such altered knowledge emerged were by no means homogenous, nor were their results predictable. Far from creating a new teleology for the development of ideas about corporeality and illness in the Atlantic world, this work reevaluates the “hybrid”, “syncretic,” or “creolized” narratives of cultural encounters in the South Atlantic.

This chapter links contemporary synchronic sources from both sides of the Atlantic and demonstrates how these documents and artifacts inform each other. Instead of relying on colonial or post-colonial European sources about Africa, a model relying heavily on questionable analogical inferences originated in modern African ethnographic studies, this chapter describe rituals and practices from an early-modern perspective.⁷ In addition to sketching the preponderance and complexity of African healing practices and ideas about death and disease in the Caribbean, and their discernable origins, this chapter aims to

⁷Adriana Maya Restrepos' painstaking examination of several of the same records I have used for this chapter relies on twentieth-century ethnographic evidence for comparing rituals from seventeenth century Cartagena. Adriana Maya, *Brujería y reconstrucción de identidades entre los Africanos y sus descendientes en la Nueva Granada, Siglo XVII* (Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura, 2005). James Sweet has also relied in nineteenth and twentieth century explanations of rituals in his otherwise highly sophisticated study of ethnicity and religion in the Portuguese Iberian world. See, for example, Sweet, *Mistaken Identities*.

underscore their power as explanatory models for early-modern perceptions about the body, illness, health and death.⁸ All the actors involved in healing, practices in places like Cartagena de Indias, produced and recognized gestures, words, objects and rituals with high symbolic value. This becomes clear when looking at the diversity and visibility of African religious and ritual practices and practitioners in places like Cartagena.

African and Afro-Descendant Ritual Specialists in the Spanish Caribbean

Table 4, divided in four sections, provides a chronological list of 106 African and Afro-descendant ritual specialists appearing in Inquisition records from seventeenth century Cartagena de Indias. The list is by no means exhaustive. I have left several cases mentioned only in passing in inquisitorial processes, or on which the evidence seem precariously tenuous to include them on the list. At any rate, this incomplete list is, nevertheless, only a sample of what we can imagine was a broader group of ritual specialists practicing in the northern New Kingdom of Granada. At any rate, and as is evident from the surviving information in the records, we can assert that this was a diverse lot. There were important differences among these Africans and Afro-descendants in every category of analysis including gender, age, origin, place of residence, occupation, and also stated ethnicity in the records.

⁸Linda Newson points to the absence in the literature on the history of medicine of a systematic study of African medical practices in Colonial Spanish America. See Linda Newson, "Medical Practice in Early Colonial Spanish America: A Prospectus" *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 25 (2006): 367-391

Table 4.1 *African and Afro-Descendant Ritual Practitioners in Inquisition Records from Seventeenth Century Cartagena de Indias*

Sources: AHN, collection *Inquisición*, sections: *Procesos de Fe*, *Relaciones de Causas de Fe*, *Correspondencia entre Tribunales y la Suprema*, *Visitas a los Tribunales de la Santa Inquisición*, and *Procesos Criminales*.

Name	Age*	Gender	Occupation	Origin	Residence	Ethnic ID	Date
Juan Lorenzo	26	M	N/A	Criollo	Cartagena	Mulato	1610-1612-1614
Antonia	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	Cartagena	Black	1610-1612
Polonia Bioho	N/A	F	N/A	Bioho	Cartagena	Black	1610-1612
Catalina de los Angeles	50	F	N/A	Seville, Spain	Santa Marta	Mulata	1611-1613
Anon	N/A	M	N/A	N/A	Cartagena	Black	1613
Francisca Mejia	N/A	F	N/A	Fregenal, Extremadura	Cartagena,	Mulata	1614
Leonor Zape	51	F	N/A	Zape	Zaragoza	Black	1618
Giomar Bran	51	F	N/A	Bran	Zaragoza	Black	1618
Polonia Bran	41	F	N/A	Bran	Zaragoza	Black	1618
Maria Linda alias Mandinga	31	F	N/A	Maninga, Terranova	Zaragoza	Black	1618
Jusepa Ruiz	41	F	N/A	Santo Domingo	Santo Domingo	Free Black	1620-1621
Cosme Biafara	30	M	Miner	Biafara (Nalu)	Zaragoza	Black	1620
Luisa Sanchez	50	F	N/A	Bayamo, Cuba	Bayamo, Cuba	Black	Ca 1621-1634
Ana de Mena	20	F	N/A	Puerto Rico	La Habana	Mulata	Ca 1621-1634
Isabel Hernandez	61	F	N/A	Biafara	Pacora, Panama	Free Black	Ca 1621-1634
Maria Cacheo	41	F	N/A	Cacheo	Pacora, Panama	Free Black	Ca 1621-1634
Anton Carabali	51	M	N/A	Carabali	La Habana,	Black	Ca 1621-1634
Catalina de Otavio	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	Cartagena	Black	Ca 1621-1634
Angelina de Nava, de Guinea	N/A	F	N/A	Biafara	Cartagena	Black	Ca 1621-1634
Ana Maria	N/A	F	N/A	Carabali	Tolu	Black	Ca 1621-1634
Barbara Gomez	N/A	F	N/A	Lisbon, Portugal	Tolu	Black	Ca 1621-1634
Sebastian Delgado Botafogo	51	M	N/A	Angola	Rio de la Hacha	Black	Ca 1621-1634
Juana Baptista "La Ochandiana"	N/A	F	N/A	Criolla	Zaragoza	Mulata	1622
Paula de Eguiluz	N/A	F	Hospital	Cuba	Cartagena	Black	1624-1636

Table 4.2 (Continuation Table 4.1) *African and Afro-descendant Ritual Practitioners in Inquisition Records from Seventeenth Century Cartagena de Indias.*

Sources: AHN, collection *Inquisición*, sections: *Procesos de Fe, Relaciones de Causas de Fe, Correspondencia entre Tribunales y la Suprema, Visitas a los Tribunales de la Santa Inquisición*, and *Procesos Criminales*

Name	Age*	Gender	Occupation	Origin	Residence	Ethnic ID	Date
Luisa de Soto	N/A	F	N/A	Cuba	La Habana	Black	1624
Antonio Mulato	N/A	M	N/A	Cuba	Santiago, Cuba	Mulata	1624
Maria Cometera	N/A	F	N/A	Cuba	La Habana	Black	1624
Juana Geronima	N/A	F	N/A	Cuba	Santiago, Cuba	negra	1624
Mariana de la Pena	N/A	F	N/A	Cartagena?	cartagena	mulata	1626
Juana Zamba	40	F	Midwife	La margarita	Cartagena	Zamba	1632
Juana de Mora	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	Cartagena	Free Black	1632
Bernarada Suares	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	Cartagena,	Mulata	1632
Juana Conga	N/A	F	N/A	Congo	Cartagena,	Black	1632
Francisca Zape	N/A	F	N/A	Zape	Cartagena,	Black	1632
Ana Maria de Robles	30	F	Household	Santo Domingo	Cartagena,	Mulata	1632-1633
Teodora de Salcedo	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	Cartagena,	Black	1632
Maria Mendez	27	F	N/A	Cartagena	Cartagena	Black	1632
Ana Suarez (de saragossa)	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	Cartagena,	Black	1632
Luisa Dominguez	26	F	Household	Santo Domingo	Cartagena,	Free Black	1632-1635
Joan Biafara	N/A	M	N/A	Biafara	Cartagena	Black	1632
Juliana de Arissa	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	Cartagena	Zamba	1632
Marta de San Anton	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	Cartagena	Mulata	1632
Sebastiana	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	Cartagena	Black	1632
Marta de Cerpa	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	Cartagena	Black	1632
Heronima	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	Cartagena	Black	1632
Yumar de Anaya	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	Cartagena	Mulata	1632
Michaela	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	Cartagena	Mulato	1632
Geronima	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	Tolu	Black	1632
Ana Suarez	30	F	Household	Zaragoza	Zaragoza	Black	1632
Juana de Granejo	30	F	Household	Cartagena	Cartagena	Black	1632
Rafaela de Nava	27	F	Household	Cartagena	Cartagena	Black	1632-1633
Ana de Victoria	60	F	Midwife	Cartagena	Cartagena	Black	1635
Elena de Vitoria	N/A	F	N/A	Cartagena	Cartagena	Black	1632-1635
Justa	30	F	Household	Cartagena	Cartagena	Mulato	1634
Rufina	26	F	Household	Cartagena	Cartagena	Mulato	1634
Beatriz Lopez	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	Cartagena	Black	1634
Geronima Micaela	N/A	F	Midwife	Seville, spain	Cartagena	Black	1634
Diego Lopez	40	M	Surgeon	Cartagena	Tolu	Mulato	1633-1634

Table 4.3 (Continuation Table 4.2) *African and Afro-descendant Ritual Practitioners in Inquisition Records from Seventeenth Century Cartagena de Indias.*

Sources: AHN, collection *Inquisición*, sections: *Procesos de Fe, Relaciones de Causas de Fe, Correspondencia entre Tribunales y la Suprema, Visitas a los Tribunales de la Santa Inquisición*, and *Procesos Criminales*

Name	Age*	Gender	Occupation	Origin	Residence	Ethnic ID	Date
Andres Barrera	N/A	M	Fisherman	N/A	Cartagena	Mulato	1633
Joan Bran	N/A	M	N/A	Bran	Cartagena	Free Black	1633
Juana Ortensia	26	F	Household	Cartagena	Cartagena	Black	1635
Barbara de Alvornoz	28	F	Household	Barquisimeto	Cartagena	Mulata	1635
Anton Angola	N/A	M	N/A	Angola	Ocaña, Santa Marta	Black	1647
Francisco Mandinga	N/A	M	N/A	Mandinga	Cartagena	Black	1648
Catalina de Barros	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	Jamaica	Mulata	1648
Domingo Lopez	40	M	N/A	Criollo	La Barraca,	Free Black	1651
Mateo Arara	N/A	M	N/A	Arara	Cartagena	Black	1651
Domingo Congo	61	M	N/A	Congo	Caracas	Black	1651
Juana de Torres	N/A	F	N/A	De la isla de Española	Santo Domingo,	Mulata	1652
Antonio Garcia	N/A	M	N/A	Bayamo, Cuba	Bayamo, Cuba	Mulato	1652
Isabel Angola	N/A	F	N/A	Angola	Jamaica	Black	1654
Laureana de Basto	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	Merida	Black	1654
Maria de Tapia	40	F	N/A	Criolla	La Habana	Free Mulata	1654
Alejandro Matamba	N/A	M	N/A	Matamba	La Habana	Black	ca1654-1660
Catalina Gonzalez	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	La Habana	Mulata	ca1654-1660
Juana Estupinyan	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	Santa Marta	Mulata	ca1654-1660
Ana de Brito	48	F	N/A	Palma Isla de Canaria	La Habana	Mulata	1656
Juan Angola	70	M	Farmer	Angola	Caracas	Black	1656
Maria de Rivera, la Portuguesa	30	F	seamstress	Viana, Portugal	La Habana	Mulata	1657
Thomasa de los Reyes	50	F	N/A	N/A	La Habana	Black	1658
Manuel Yabacu	N/A	M	N/A	Yabacu?	Cartagena	Black	1658
Juana La Campechana	N/A	F	N/A	N/A	La Habana	Mulata	1658
Ana Ramirez	70	F	Household	La Habana	Cartagena	Mulata	1658, 1682
Felipe Angola	N/A	M	N/A	Angola	Cartagena,	Black	1659
Maria de Aguirre							
Alisa Maria del Datil	N/A	F	N/A	Cartagena	Cartagena	Negra	1659-1660
Francisco Mandinga	N/A	M	N/A	Mandinga	Cartagena	Black	1664

Table 4.4 (Continuation Table 4.3) *African and Afro-descendant Ritual Practitioners in Inquisition Records from Seventeenth Century Cartagena de Indias.*

Sources: AHN, collection *Inquisición*, sections: *Procesos de Fe*, *Relaciones de Causas de Fe*, *Correspondencia entre Tribunales y la Suprema*, *Visitas a los Tribunales de la Santa Inquisición*, and *Procesos Criminales*

Name	Age*	Gender	Occupation	Origin	Residence	Ethnic ID	Date
Miguel Arara	50	M	Woodcutter	Arara	Cartagena	Black	1666
Juan Diaz	90	M	Carpenter	Isla de Madeira	Margarita	Black	1666
Francisco de Llanos	40	M	Farmer	Guinea, llanos	Cartagena	Black	1670
Francisco Mandinga	50	M	Woodcutter	Xocoli (Xoroli?)	Cartagena	Black	1675
Luis Yolofo	26	M	Soldier	Yolofo	Cartagena	Black	1675
Francisco Arara	60	M	N/A	Arara	Cartagena	Free Black	1681
Maria de Tapia	50	F	Household	La Habana	Cartagena	Free Mulata	1683
Juan Diaz	N/A	M	N/A	N/A	N/A	Black	1685
Francisco Arara	N/A	M	N/A	Arara	Cartagena	Black	1685
Francisco Mandinga	N/A	M	N/A	Mandinga	Cartagena	Black	1685
Alonso Venero	40	M	Cowboy	Villa del Vaqueres	Cartagena	Mulato	Ca 1685
Pedro Congo	70	M	Farmer	Nambua, Congo	Mompox	Black	1686-1688
Josepha Matallanez	N/A	F	N/A	Cartagena	Cartagena	Free Mulata	Ca 1688-1690
Francisco Hernandez	N/A	M	N/A	Tolu	Cartagena	Black	Ca 1688-1690
Pedro Arara	N/A	M	N/A	Guinea	Baracoas	Black	Ca 1688-1690
Manuel Lopez	N/A	M	N/A	Jamaica	Trinidad	Mulato	Ca 1688-1690
Antonio de Salinas	60	M	Fisherman	Cartagena	Cartagena	Free Black	1689
Juan Ingles	31	M	Woodcutter	Cartagena	Cartagena	Free Black	1689
Pablo Serrano	50	M	Cowboy	Cali	Mompox	Free Mulato	1689
Antonio Congo	51	M	Farmer	Congo	Cartagena	Free Black	1690

The origins of these specialists closely reflect the patterns of the contemporary slave trade.⁹ As evident in table 2, the great majority of these 106 ritual specialists were either *criollos* [born in the New World], or came from two main regions, Angola or Upper Guinea. The rest came from the Bight of Benin, the Bight of Biafra, the Atlantic Islands and Southern Europe.¹⁰ Naturally, this is, at best, a fragmentary sample of the population of ritual specialists practicing in the Spanish Caribbean at the time. Certainly, many more did not make it into the record. Other histories of these Africans and Afro-descendants were lost to fire, looting or mold. However, in all of its incompleteness, this list does allow for the sketching of, admittedly, broad trends in the origins, occupations, and general characteristics of the population in question. Because of the limited number of cases available, it is not possible to divide or establish any trends in a diachronic fashion.

Multiple waves of immigrants came and went to the Spanish Caribbean during the long seventeenth century. As mentioned above, the distribution of the sample indicates the importance of West-Central and Upper-Guinean Africans' forced immigration to the Spanish Caribbean during the seventeenth century. Yet, there is no reason to define Cartagena or la Habana as uniquely, or distinctively Congo, Angola or Bran places, for example.

⁹ Between 1580 and 1640, during the time of the Portuguese *asientos*, exclusive slave trade contracts provided by the Crown, approximately 170,000 African slaves passed through the city. David Eltis et al. "The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database," <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/index.faces>. Enriqueta Vila Vilar's estimate 135,000 slaves disembarked in Cartagena between 1595 and 1640. Enriqueta Vila Vilar, *Hispanoamérica y el comercio de esclavos* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1977), 209. Antonio Mendes' recent estimate is much lower but he recognizes the lack of information we have for this period. Antonio Mendes, "The Foundations of the System: A Reassessment of the Slave Trade to the Spanish Americas in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*, ed. David Eltis, and David Richardson. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 87. David Wheat shows in chapter 2 of his dissertation that the data are vastly incomplete. Still he has found evidence of more than 72,000 Africans disembarked in Cartagena alone between 1573 and 1640. David Wheat, "The Afro-Portuguese Maritime World and the Foundations of Spanish Caribbean Society, 1570-1640" (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 2009)

¹⁰ One was a mulata from Extremadura in western Spain. AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fols. 9v, 46r. Also, the Black Slave Barbara Gomez was borned in Lisbon and said that she was taught in Cadiz how to be a witch. AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fols. 331r-336r. Also from Portugal came Maria de Rivera, alias la Portuguesa. AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fols. 323v-324r; 1022, 31r, 52r.

Demographic patterns, although important, are not uniquely decisive in the shaping of culture. “cultural brokers,” like ritual practitioners, certainly had a disproportionate relevance in establishing and modifying customs, beliefs and rites. The effect of the first generations of African ritual specialists in the shaping of the Spanish Caribbean culture should have been, as advanced by Ira Berlin, disproportionate to their number too. The “charter generation” of practitioners was essential in the creation of particular mores and practices in the city which new Africans will have to reckon with.¹¹ African and Afro-descendant ritual specialists played a seminal role in permeating Spanish Caribbean culture and society with their practices.

The available records of seventeenth century African and Afro-descendant ritual specialists in the Spanish Caribbean do not contain, usually, information about their occupations. Nevertheless, as shown in Table 3, the scant available data shows the deep involvement of free and enslaved Blacks in Cartagena's economy. As expected, most of these Africans and Afro-descendants were involved in household activities, farming and fishing. Some of them were specialized craftsman like Juan Diaz, a carpenter, while others like the surgeon Diego López worked in occupations traditionally seen as being exclusive for Europeans and Euro-descendants. Notably, as I examine in more detail in Chapter five, ritual specialists also worked, especially after being convicted by the Inquisition, as caregivers for the sick in Cartagena's hospitals and convents.

¹¹ Ira Berlin, “From Creole to African Atlantic: Creoles and the Origins of African-American in Mainland North America.” *The William and Mary Quarterly*. 53, no. 2 (1996): 251.

Table 4.5 *Region of Origin of African and Afro-descendant Ritual Specialists in the Inquisition Records of Seventeenth Century Cartagena de Indias.*

Source: Databased summarized in Table 1: *African and Afro-descendant Ritual Practitioners in the Inquisition Records from Seventeenth Century Cartagena de Indias.*

Region	Number	%
Caribbean	37	34.9
Upper Guinea (Senegambia, Rios de Guinea, Gold Coast)	19	17.92
West Central Africa	12	11.32
Bight of Benin	4	3.77
Bight of Biafra	3	2.83
Southern Europe	5	4.72
Atlantic Islands	2	1.9
Unspecified	24	22.64
Total	50	47.18

Table 4.6. *Occupations of African and Afro-descendant Ritual Practitioners in Inquisition Records from Seventeenth Century Cartagena de Indias*

Source: Databased summarized in Table 1: *African and Afro-descendant Ritual Practitioners in the Inquisition Records from Seventeenth Century Cartagena de Indias.*

Occupation	
Carpenter	1
Cowboy	2
Farmer	4
Fisherman	2
Hospital Worker	1
Household	11
Midwife	3
Miner	1
Unspecified	75
Seamstress	1
Soldier	1
Surgeon	1

As I explain in chapter one of this dissertation, the social place of Africans and Afro-descendants in Cartagena, and more generally in the Spanish Caribbean, differs enormously

from the condition endured by slaves in plantation economies. Exemplary of this is the fact that 89 of the 106 cases examined here involved slaves, Africans or Afro-descendants. These slaves moved freely throughout Spanish Caribbean society and offered their services in the cosmopolitan health market of Cartagena, Habana or Caracas.¹² Like the “*escravos de ganho*” in Salvador and Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, some slaves in Cartagena lived independently in the Black neighborhood of Getsemani, and paid a daily, or weekly, payment to their masters known as *jornal*.¹³ Ritual practices would provide ritual specialists with alternative income with which to pay for the *jornal* or to buy their freedom.¹⁴ Like St. Augustine, la Habana and other early-modern Spanish Caribbean cities, Cartagena's was a “society with slaves” not a “slave society.”¹⁵

More than half of these specialists, sixty-five in total, were women. An analysis of the gender implications of this distribution escapes the objectives of this dissertation.¹⁶ However it is nonetheless relevant to remark here the possible African influences in this remarkable trend. In West and West-Central African societies, religious and political power were not necessarily gendered. Women had access to, and participated, in established

¹² Slaves occupy a particular belligerent and isolated space in the weaving of Cartagena's society in most of XVII Colombian historiography. See, for instance, María del Carmen Borrego Plá, *Cartagena de Indias en el siglo XVI* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, C.S.I.C., 1983); and Maya Brujería, among many others.

¹³ See amongst others, Suely Creusa Cordeiro de Almeida, *O sexo devoto: normatização e resistência feminina no império português XVI-XVIII* (Recife: Imprensa Universitária da UFRPE, 2005).

¹⁴ Ana Ramirez, said that she received up to “Cinquenta doblones” for her practices in La Habana. AHN Inquisición, 1022, Fol. 313v. Francisco Arará said that he received 4 reales from a priest for curing him of a heart disease. AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 314r. Juan Díaz declared that he also received 4 reales for curing an arm. AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 259r.

¹⁵ This certainly is a contested division, but it reflects an important difference in the characteristics of social systems between early modern and modern systems of slavery. See, *Black Society in Spanish Florida*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999; Alejandro de la Fuente, *Havana and the Atlantic in the sixteenth century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 8. For some critiques, see Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 14-15.

¹⁶ As Noemi Quezada and Martha Few have argued, women were disproportionately targeted by the Inquisition in Colonial Spanish America. Noemí Quezada, *Enfermedad y Maleficio* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2000); Martha Few, *Women Who Live Evil Lives: Gender, Religion, and the Politics of Power in Colonial Guatemala* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

political and religious roles that included the performance of ritual practices.¹⁷ As in Europe, where witchcraft acquired a loaded gendered characteristic, it is also possible that such practices offered opportunities for woman to explore nontraditional forms of power.

Most of the Spanish Caribbean ritual practitioners examined here were far past the average life expectancy of slaves in this region and period.¹⁸ Even with the lowest possible estimate, that is, counting the lowest possible age of defendants said to be of a certain age or older, the ages of the Africans and Afro-descendant practitioners studied here averaged an impressive 43 years at the time of the trial. Furthermore, of the 48 cases in which there is an estimate of the ritual practitioner's age, 21 are at least 50 years of age, including several septa, and one nonagenarian.

These figures signal to the importance of elders in the enactment of ritual practices in African, and American, communities. African traditions required ritual specialist to undergo lengthy periods of training. In West and West-Central Africa old people were, besides, the holders of political and religious power, both of which were associated with ritual practitioners. On the other hand, the advanced age exhibited by the population studied here also suggests that the life expectancy of Africans and Afro-descendants in places like Cartagena was not as short as it has been commonly assumed. These types of assumptions are admittedly risky, particularly with the scarcity of available data. As in other places in the

¹⁷ See Edna G. Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998); Marcia Right, *Strategies of Slaves and Women: Life-Stories from East/Central Africa* (New York: Lilian Barber, 1993); also, Judith van Allen, "Aba Riots' or Igbo 'Women's War'? Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women," in *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, eds. Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. bay (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 59-86.

¹⁸ In Barbados, a sugar colony, for instance, average life expectancy for slaves was seventeen years, in Brazil and the Caribbean it was an even lower fifteen. See, Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, "The Americas the Survival of African Religions," in Gad J.Heuman, and James Walvin. *The Slavery Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), 388; and Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730-1830* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 367.

early modern world, life expectancy statistics are dragged down by infant mortality. People who reached adulthood had good chances of living to an advanced age. Elderly could have been also disproportionately represented in the sample I study. If this is the case, and there are reasons to think that it could be, it would provide a biased sample of Cartagena's Afro-descendant population. Nonetheless, it is intriguing to think that ritual specialists could have enjoyed benefits and opportunities that raised their quality of life and life expectancy.

Even as effective mediums of their singular cultural traditions, African *bozales* and Afro-descendants did not remain impervious to other cultural influences. Rather, they were eager to exchange knowledge with Native Americans, Europeans and Euro-descendants, and among themselves.¹⁹ In Cartagena, Africans from very dissimilar cultures met and shared their knowledge. They lived in socio-cultural circumstances certainly different from their counterparts living in plantations or in mines and did not necessarily organize around ethnic lines. In the process of creating new cultural structures, they brought about rich healing traditions and cosmogonies that would take root, grow and evolve in multiple ways in the New World. As Lorand Matory has argued, the re-imagination of Africa took place most prominently not in isolated plantations or mines, but in cities like Cartagena or Habana where

¹⁹ During the first half of the seventeenth century most Africans arriving in Cartagena came from West Central Africa. However this region was the main source of African slaves coming into the Iberian Colonies only in the 1620s and 1630s. Slavers also brought the people to São Tome from several regions in Africa including the Lower Guinea region, the Gold Coast, the Bight of Biafra and the Bight of Benin. Among them were slaves coming from the kingdom of Adja, called by the Spaniards Arará or Arda. The Carabalies came from around the Calabar river. During the second half of the seventeenth century, most Africans forcibly brought to Cartagena came from places around the Bight of Benin. See, Wheat, *Afroportuguese*. See also Philip. D Morgan, "The Cultural Implications of the Atlantic Slave Trade: African Regional Origins, American Destinations and New World Developments," *Slavery and Abolition* 18 (1997): 122-45; and David Pavy, "The Provenience of Colombian Negroes," *The Journal of Negro History* 52:1 (1967): 35-58.

Africans consciously picked and used African traditions for cultural social and political benefits.²⁰

The groups that arrived in the Americas were by no means “Africans” as sometimes defined in essentialist terms. That is, they cannot be categorized as embodying the characteristics of one of the large “cultural zones” described by historians like John Thornton. Instead, most of the Africans arriving to the New World had been influenced by a variety of European and African cultural other than their own. Francisco Mandinga, a *bozal* of the Xocoli nation, for example, said in 1675 that after being kidnapped in Upper Guinea, slave traders took him to “different parts of Spain and then here.”²¹ Other ritual specialists I have researched also traveled the Caribbean settling in a place as Paula de Eguiluz's story shows.

Paula de Eguiluz was born a slave in the city of Santo Domingo, La Española, present day Dominican Republic, and lived there until she was thirteen years old. Her father, Cristobal, was of the Bañon group and her mother, Guiomar, a Laranga, both from Upper Guinea. When she was thirteen years old, her master, Diego de Leguizamo, gave her as part of a payment for debt to a Juan Nieto who sold her to Yñigo de Otaco. After moving with de Otaco to Puerto Rico and living there for four years, she was sold again, this time because Otaco's wife suspected that Paula was her husband's lover. Paula's new master, Joan de

²⁰ Furthermore, Matory argues, it has been these type of reimagination what has been determining in the creation of a Diasporic past and in the perpetuation of certain types of “African” rites and traditions in the Americas. James Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, And Matriarchy. In the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). Here I am also following Marshall Sahlins' concept, as modified by Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, of cultural dis-continuity in which culture fluidity and transformation is represented as a process in which cultural structures are definable but always in constant metamorphosis. See Marshall Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides. Understanding History and Vice Versa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Also, Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, “Structure, Event and Historical Metaphor: Rice and Identities in Japanese History,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 1 (1995): 227-253.

²¹ “[D]iferentes partes de España y para aquí [después].”AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 375r.

Eguiluz, moved with her to Santiago de Cuba.²² In 1624 Paula was accused by Habana's Bishop of being a "witch, herbalist and Muslim who is not afraid of God" was seized by the Inquisition in Santiago de Cuba and sent to Cartagena.²³ Paula never returned to Cuba. After serving her sentence in Cartagena's San Sebastian Hospital, she started a profitable practice of ritual healings, and killings in Cartagena, for which she received between six to fifty pesos per service. Not unexpectedly, it was not long before she was again in trouble with the church authorities and end up being sentenced to serve a life-term in one of Cartagena's convents, barely escaping being burn at the stake.²⁴

Paula de Eguiluz's practices reflect the influences of different traditions coming from several Caribbean and African groups. As I discuss in Chapter Five, Paula, who in Cartagena was known also as "*aleluya*," incorporated elements of Christian and Western traditions in her healing rites.²⁵ She probably learned them during the time she worked in the San Sebastián hospital in Cartagena, where she made rounds dressed in a *San Benito* robe with red and yellow crosses in the front and in the back, and through contact with her European friends and disciples.²⁶

²² AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp.10, Fol. 41r.

²³ "Bruja, herbolaria y mora que no tiene miedo de Dios" AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 41v. Later, Paula said that her mother was Biafara, further defining the place from where she came in Africa. The *Biafaras* were had been in close contact with Muslim culture for centuries. Thus, the accusation of Paula being a *mora* probably referred to the fact that she was suspected to come from a Muslim family as her mother was *Biafara*.

²⁴ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp.10, Fols. 41r. 62v.

²⁵ [She learned healing practices from Europeans, like when, "Her master felt sick of fever, she went around asking for some type of remedy to cure him. [She met] Juana Geronima, a single Spanish woman advised her to use the skin of oranges...and that she should grind everything and gave the powder together with wine to her master. And that with this [Geronima said] her master would be cured from the fever] "Estando el dicho su amo malo de calenturas y andando esta preguntando por algún remedio para quitárselas Juana Geronima mujer soltera y Española... aconsejo a esta que tomase unas cascarillas de naranjas que se ponen en el monumento...y otro día lo moliese todo junto y de aquellos polvos y le diese en vino al dicho su amo y que con eso se le quitarían las calenturas." AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp.10, 39r. Indeed, in the inquisition trials in Cartagena there is plenty of evidence of the strong influence of European pagan rituals (in contrast with religious one) which were, according to the records, practiced by a variate of Cartageneros from all social classes and origins. A complete analysis of such traditions is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

²⁶ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp.7, 109v.

Even more traveled was Juan de Salcedo, or as he was known in Cartagena, Juan Ingles [Juan the Englishman]. Juan, a free black from Cartagena, was a thirty-year old when he was brought before the inquisition in 1689. Juan told the tribunal that in 1671, when he was twelve-years old, he was kidnapped by the British navy, most probably during a pirate attack on the city. He spent the next several years sojourning around Caribbean Islands such as Barbados, Jamaica, Curacao and Pitugao with “British, French and Dutchmen.” He traveled to England and Caracas as a slave and page of a British surgeon.²⁷ Like Paula de Eguiluz, Juan Ingles combined European and African traditions, ideas, and rituals about health and the body in his practices. He, for example say to “know some cures for snakes' bites that Indians have taught him. With the Englishmen he learned...[to use] the *revolba* dressing...for fracture, or dislocation, of any limb.”²⁸ Another Juan, whose last name was Diaz, was also kidnapped by Britons. In 1666 he said that he “had been imprisoned by Britons and that he escaped from the island of tobacco to La Margarita where he had been until he was brought to this [Inquisition] jail.”²⁹

After being tried by the Inquisition, most of the defendants coming from other Caribbean locales stayed in the city serving their sentences in hospitals and hospices. Because the transportation costs were so high, even after finishing their incarceration, enslaved and free Africans and Afro-descendants from elsewhere would stay in Cartagena de Indias and provinces. Transportation costs made it prohibitive for masters to recover slaves.

²⁷ He declared that he had been “Hasta la edad de doce años en esta ciudad y... que fue hecho prisionero de Ingleses. [Y que] estuvo en Jamaica, Inglaterra, Barbados, Pitugao, Caracas [y] Curazao ...[con] Franceses, Ingleses, Holandeses, estando con ellos por esclavo de paje y [por] ayudar a un cirujano.”AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fols. 405v.

²⁸ “[D]ijo solo conocer algunas contras de culebra que se las habían enseñado algunos Indios y con los Ingleses les...aprendido el apósito de *revollba* y *catibo* de mans[?]g[?]et[?] Para facertura [fractura] o dislocación de algún miembro.”AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fols. 405v.

²⁹ “[F]ue prisionero del ingles y de la isla del Tabaco tomo escape para La Margarita donde estuvo hasta que fue traído a estas cárceles.”AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 259r.

Free blacks, for their part,, preferred to stay in Cartagena, or did not have the means to return home. Unwittingly, Inquisitors made of Cartagena and its province a place for the encounter and interchange of a wide variety of African and European ritual practices.

As shown, a vibrant multicultural and cosmopolitan African and Afro-descendant community lived in early modern Cartagena. Africans, as I show in chapter five, read, wrote, and transmitted their knowledge in printed form and not only in long-established oral African traditions.³⁰ Some of these Africans moved frequently across the Atlantic basin, and many would be in continuous contact with people from all over the Atlantic World coming to Cartagena. The free black woman Barbara Gómez, for instance came from Portugal and traveled several times back and forth to Guinea during her lifetime.³¹ Spanish Caribbean culture and society were in constant flux. They were continuously infused with novel ideas and traditions.

From the Wombs of Their Mothers

According to contemporary European descriptions of customs in Upper Guinea, Guiomar and Leonor, the two African *bozales* [un-aculturated slaves] protagonist of the story that opens this chapter, should have had stepped into an obscure realm before taking the life out of their master's inferior extremities. Olfert Dapper, a Dutchman who lived in Africa during the mid seventeenth century, in order to cause diseases or death, ritual specialists in Upper Guinea summoned a divinity "that they call *Souah* [who] appears in the form of a

³⁰ "They got together to read and discuss about healing or diseasing practices." AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp.10. Some of them were literate, Diego López, for instance, continuously asked for paper to write about the accusations that brought him to the Inquisition jail, and about his practices. AHN, Inquisición, Exp. 7.

³¹ AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fols. 331r, 366v., 414r. During his depositions to the Inquisition tribunal, in 1634, Diego Lopez, a mulato surgeon, mentions a "Mulata que es Portuguesa que había ido y vuelto a guinea" AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp.7, Fol. 40r.

plant or animal. He talks to them and instructs them the type of herbs that must be used to do evil to men, and how to prepare them.”³²

Descriptions such as the one by Dapper were intended to induce horror or disgust in European audiences. Nevertheless, they do offer ethnographic clues about the practices of ritual specialists like Guiomar and Leonor, who, like their ancestors the Brans and Zapes in Upper Guinea considered the ancestors as capable of harming them and their extended family through illness. The priest Alonso De Sandoval, rector of the Jesuit College in Cartagena, wrote in the first decades of the seventeenth century about how the Brans visited the altars for their ancestors “to talk with the dead people and tell them about their works and to ask god to keep them [the ancestors’ spirits] away from them.” Drawing on reports coming from fellow missionaries in Africa and from interviews with officials and crew of slave-trade vessels, and the slaves themselves, he wrote extensively about West African culture and customs. About the Branes he also wrote that according to his sources, they had “a place dedicated to the demon where they go to make the more solemn sacrifices, and that the demons are so feared that [when passing in front of their statues] they offered them rice, oil or any other thing that they happen to be carrying with them.”³³ African-born ritual

³²[L]e démon de l’envie qu’ils appellent Souah leur apparaît sous la forme d’une plante ou d’un animal, leur parle et les instruit des herbes dont il faut se servir pour faire du mal aux hommes, et de la manière dont il faut les préparer.” Dapper Olfert, *Description de l’Afrique, contenant les noms, la situation & les confins de toutes ses parties, leurs rivieres, leurs villes & leurs habitations, leurs plantes & leurs animaux, les moeurs, les coutumes, la langue, les richesses, la religion & le gouvernement de ses peuples* (Amsterdam: Wolfgang, Waesberge, Boom & van Someren, 1686). I have used the 1686 French translation of the original in Dutch published in 1668. Dapper Olfert, *Naukeurige beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche gewesten van Egypten, Barbaryen, Lybien, Biledulgerid, Negroslant, Guinea, Ethiopiën, Abyssinie. Getrokken uyt verscheyde ondersoekers dier landen* (Amsterdam: Jacob van Meurs, 1668). Guiomar’s story also resembles closely related rites in Bantu culture. In them, the nkisi, material representation of an ancestor or primal spirit, should be tied to awaken their power. See John M. Janzen and Wyatt MacGaffey (eds.), *An Anthology of Kongo Religion* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Publications in Anthropology, 1974), 36.

³³ Alonso de Sandoval, *Instauranda aethiopia salute; el mundo de la esclavitud negra en América* [Sevilla, 1627], ed Angel Valtierra (Bogotá, Empresa Nacional de Publicaciones, 1956), 376-377.

specialists served as effective mediators of the transmission of such beliefs to New World during the early modern period.

African ritual specialists like Leonor and Guiomar underwent long training period and occupied a central, and sometimes hereditary, place in West and West Central African societal hierarchies.³⁴ Jean Barbot, a French *commis*, a commercial agent, involved in the slave trade during the late seventeenth century, said about ritual specialists in the Gold Coast that they “are very serious people and lead a prudent life. They vow never to drink palm wine. This office is hereditary within families; there are some families which have held it since time immemorial, which gives them greater esteem among the blacks.”³⁵ Testimonies in Cartagena correspond to Barbot’s observation.³⁶ For instance, Francisco Mandinga, a black slave from Upper Guinea, affirmed in 1640 that he could cure because of “a gift that he had inherited through his mothers womb.”³⁷ Similarly, Antonio Congo, a free black from Congo-Angola, who was put on trial because of his *curaciones* [treatments], said in 1690 that “in his land his mother had taught him how to make the herbs and the *curaciones*.”³⁸

Like Francisco and Antonio, Catalina de Barros, a free Zaori mulata from Jamaica declared around 1649 that she was “*mulata de parte de su madre*” [*mulata* on the part of her mother] and that her gifts had a divine origin and were transmitted through the “womb of her

³⁴ The hereditary nature of healing gifts was not unique of African culture. All over Europe families claimed to have hereditary powers over specific diseases, or even to set bones. See for example Matthew Ramsey, *Professional and Popular Medicine in France, 1770-1830: The Social World of Medical Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 245.

³⁵ Jean Barbot, *Barbot on Guinea: the writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa 1678-1712*, Hair P.E.H., Jones A. and Law R. (eds.) (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1992), 580. Barbot’s 1688 original manuscript “Description des Côte d’Afrique depuis le Cap Bojador, jusque au Cap de Lopo Gonzalves,” is held at the British National Archives. British National Archives, ADM 7/830A. Here I use the 1992 English annotated translation by P.E. H. Hair, Adam Jones and Robin Law. Barbot used the accounts of several other Europeans living in Africa including Olfert Dapper, Pieter de Maares, Leo Africanus and William Bosman.

³⁶ In some African societies the inheritance of healing powers was patrilineal, in others matrilineal and in some others, like the Akan in Guinea, did not have any relationship to lineage. Barbot, 588

³⁷ “[U]na gracia que había sacado del vientre de su madre.” AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fols. 413r-418v.

³⁸ “[Q]ue en su tierra le enseñó su madre las yerbas y curaciones.” AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 481r

mother.”³⁹ Mateo Arará, from the Adja region in the Bight of Benin, also said in 1651 that his healing gifts had been transmitted to him through the womb of his mother. This hereditary tradition effectively contained the political and social power associated with ritual practices in secluded families closely associated with the ruling elites in West and West Central Africa.⁴⁰

Barbot, for example, wrote that the inhabitants of the kingdom of the Great Popo in the Bight of Benin, “like all the others in Guinea, defer blindly to the opinions of the priests [ritual specialists]...who are all dressed in long white robes, with a crooked stick in their right hand.”⁴¹ Likewise, Dapper wrote that in *Adja* “all important people had their own *fetiseros* [ritual specialists] who are ready for their families. When somebody in the house is ill, [they] call the *fetisero* who sacrifices cattle, sheep, chicken [and then] sprinkles with blood [the family's] *Fetisi*. [This object] is usually an old pot, or some animal paw hidden in a basket.”⁴²

The same was true in Angola where, according to Dapper, “*Gangas* who are the priests of these idols are respected themselves as Gods. They seem to know about some good remedies, which attract respect from the people...[They are said] to produce fertility and infertility, decide about life or death, to see into the future, and to discover the hidden things by the virtue of their *Moquisies* and their enchantments.”⁴³”

³⁹ AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 343v.

⁴⁰ Jhon Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1993) 88.

⁴¹ Barbot, p. 630. Osun is a medicinal divinity which rites are extended throughout the Benin bight.

⁴² “Toutes les personnes de qualité ont leurs Fetiseros [ritual specialists], qui sont les prêtres de leur famille. Quand quelcun de la maison est malade on mande un Fetisero, qui vient immoler des beurs, des moutons, des poulets et arose du sang luer Fetisi, qui n’est d’ordinaire qu’un vieux pot de terre, ou quelque patte cachée sous une corbeille. [a divinity, in this case an Adja Vodun or a Yoruba Orisa].” Dapper 1686, p. 226.

⁴³ “Les Gangas qui sont les prêtres de ces Idoles son respectez eux mêmes comme des Dieux, tans parce qu’ils savent donner à propos quelques bons remèdes, qui leur attirent le respect deus peuples, que parce qu’ils se vantent...de produire la fécondité et la stérilité, de donner la vie ou la mort, de pénétrer dans l’avenir, et de découvrir les choses cachées par la vertu de leurs Moquisies et de leur enchantements.” Dapper, 303.

In Cartagena, African ritual specialists held societal positions similar to those held by their counterparts in Africa. For West and West Central Africans, religious and political power, as in medieval and early modern Europe, went hand in hand. Ritual specialists became central and vocal figures in shaping societies in the New world. In 1634, for instance, Gaspar Angola wrote about how they had avoided an ambush in one of the many maroon camps surrounding Cartagena, “that the chief of that maroon camp, whose name was Leonor, and who was a female *Mohan*, told them not to go to Flamencos because the Spanish were going to that place.”⁴⁴

As I explore in detail in Chapter Five, African maroons were not isolated members of the colonial society and had strong commercial and political links to Europeans of all sorts in the city. Also evident is the power exerted by ritual specialists, in this case, a female. African visions of political, societal and religious hierarchies in Cartagena evidently trumped European, modern, vision of the place Africans and their descendants, and women, occupied in the fluid society of the Colonial Spanish Caribbean.⁴⁵ While African specialists commonly healed slaves, they also treated surgeons, physicians, priests, and lawyers, as well as prisoners of the Inquisition prison, peddlers, and archbishops, among many others. In places like Cartagena, the large majority of Europeans, Africans and Native Americans thought about their bodies and the world surrounding them as places for the encounter of multiple

⁴⁴A *Mohan* is a native American term for high rank ritual specialists. *Mohanes* were also masters of other practitioners. “[Q]ue la capitana del dicho palenque nombrada Leonor *que era mohana* les dijo que no fuesen a Flamencos porque iban los blancos a el dicho palenque.” AGI-Patronato 234, Ramo 7 bloque 2 135v. Kathryn J. McKnight has used this *legago* in two articles. Kathryn Joy McKnight, “Gendered Declarations: Testimonies of Three Captured Maroon Women, Cartagena de Indias, 1634,” *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 12 no 4 (2003): 499-527. Kathryn Joy McKnight, “Confronted Rituals: Spanish Colonial and Angolan ‘Maroon’ Executions in Cartagena de Indias (1634),” *Journal of Colonialism & Colonial History* 5 no 3 (2004).

⁴⁵ This was not an isolated case, Maroons were in close contact with Europeans and negotiated with them. See, for example, AGI, Patronato, 234, Fols. 138r-v

natural and supernatural forces.⁴⁶ For these early-moderner people, health and disease were the products of complex interactions between physical and non-physical agents, interactions that, for the most part, only a select group of individuals understood. While the rest of the population went about their lives, in a world in which disease and death were overpoweringly present, some individuals borrowed from one another strategies to cope with the certainty of pain and suffering. They looked for assuage wherever it was available and from whomever provided it.

They Learned from Each Other

In 1627, the Portuguese physician Juan Mendez Nieto reported on the treatment of Don Fray Francisco Çapata, the archbishop of the New Kingdom of Granada. Mendez Nieto wrote that “Francisco Díaz and many other physicians, and also many other *Mohanes* and female healers treated him for a long time ... with fire, baths ... [they also] made him stay all day long with his arm inside a freshly killed bull, until [the bull] cooled down.”⁴⁷ The use of fire and baths as healing methods were common in contemporary Europe. However, I have not found references to the sacrifice of bovines for healing purposes. Such a ritual was, certainly, an archiepiscopal type of treatment. To be sure, most of the not-so-abundant cattle in early modern Cartagena was used for culinary, rather than for healing, purposes.

Although there are no specifics as to the ethnicity of the healers treating “*Su reverencia*” [his reverence], there are some strong links in their practices to a ritual common

⁴⁶ See David Westerlund, *African Indigenous Religions and Illness Causation: From Spiritual Beings to Living Humans* (Brill: Koninklijke Brill NV 2006), 182; Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁴⁷ “[E]l licenciado Francisco Díaz y muchos otros médicos, y también muchos otros Mohanes y curanderas le trataron por un largo tiempo....con fuego...baños...también le hicieron permanecer con el brazo todo un dia entero dentro de un novillo recién muerto hasta que este [el novillo] se enfrió.” Juan.Méndez Nieto (1627), *Discursos medicinales* (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, Junta de Castilla y León. 1989), 370-371. In the New Kingdom of Granada, Mohanes was an Amerindian word for a master of witches.

amongst people from the Upper Guinea region. For the *Brans*, for instance, the sacrifice of cows or bulls was indispensable for attaining the protection offered by the divinities, the ancestors, and the independent spirits. Manuel Álvares, a Portuguese Jesuit missionary, wrote from West Africa around 1610 describing how around the Bissau region in lower Guinea, natives sacrificed oxes in honor of particular divinities either for appeasement or for protection against disease, plagues and bad crops.⁴⁸ Barbot also wrote in 1682 that the people in Bissau “have the custom of killing an ox or several hens, in honor of the [divinity].”⁴⁹ In the case of Çapata, the location of the “dead” arm inside the freshly killed bull might have directed the ire of the causing agent, either a divinity, an ancestor, or a malign vagrant spirit, from the man to the animal and would thereby release the paralyzed limb from the curse.

Africans and Afro-descendants in Cartagena were involved in a variety of other health practices including *brujeria* [witchcraft],⁵⁰ *hechiceria* [sorcery]⁵¹ and *partería* [midwifery].⁵² They were certified surgeons like Diego López, who incorporated African healing rituals in his practices.⁵³ Also, they worked as *yerbateros* [herbalists]⁵⁴ or privately in the San Sebastian hospital and the convent of Santa Clara in curative practices.

For instance, a witness in Paula de Eguiluz inquisition trial declared in 1635 that “he called Paula de Eguiluz so she cured him of a swelling he had in his throat over the left

⁴⁸ Avelino Teixeira da Mota, *As viagens do Bispo D. Frei Vitoriano protuense a guine e a cristianização dos reis de Bissau* (Lisbon: Junta de Investigacoes Cientificas do Ultramar, Centro de Estudos de Cartografia Antiga, 1974), 60-1.

⁴⁹ Barbot, p. 320.

⁵⁰ Most of these health practitioners would not belong to the specific category of witch in Africa.

⁵¹ Unlike witches, *hechizeros* used not only herbs, powders and physical means to affect health. Besides these more material strategies, they had power of manipulation over non-physical supernatural forces. One of many examples is Domingo López. AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fols. 303r, 319v, 337r, 385r.

⁵² For instance Geronima la Partera, who was accused of witchcraft. AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fols. 280r, 391v, 430r, 464r.

⁵³ Diego López, a mulato was not only a witch but also a successful surgeon. AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fols. 364v, 386v, 413r, 418r, 460r, and AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 7.

⁵⁴ Although many of the witches were also considered *yerbateras*, there were specific herbs-physicians in Cartagena. Like Felipe Angola, they did not used their powers for evil deeds and were concerned mostly with the properties of the plants. AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 239r.

shoulder...and it would be more or less one month that being this prisoner in the hospital he saw that Paula de Eguiluz gave some powders in a folded paper and that he took them and said that he had one of his children sick and that Paula had given him such paper to heal his son.”⁵⁵ Africans and their descendants also worked in hospitals taking care of diseased people,⁵⁶ as well as in the *lazareto* [leprosarium]⁵⁷ and in pharmacies where they were in charge of preparing medicines which they then used in their own rituals.⁵⁸ Ana Ramirez, for example, said that in her rituals she used “ointments from the pharmacy, fragrant water, and other very useful preparations for healings.”⁵⁹ While many of these preparations were almost certainly of European origin, it is highly plausible that Africans, some of them like Francisco Arará in charge of the Santa Clara convent pharmacy, would incorporate some of their own preparations in pharmacies’ inventory.⁶⁰

African and Afro-descendant healers would teach each other and created similar hierarchical structures for the transmission of ritual traditions. The case of Isabel Hernandez is exemplary. Isabel was a free black from “the Biafara nation” in Upper Guinea. Even after

⁵⁵ “[L]lamo a este Paula de Eguiluz para que lo curase una hinchazón en la garganta sobre el hombro izquierdo...seria como un mes poco mas o menos estando este reo en el hospital vio que Paula de Eguiluz dio al dicho ayudante Perusso unos polvos en un papelito doblado y el los tomo y llegando este dijo que tenia un hijo suyo ahito y que Paula le avia dado aquel papelito para curarle” [He call Paula de Eguiluz so she cured him of a swelling he had in his throat on the left shoulder...and it would be more or less one month that being this prisoner in the hospital he saw that Paula de Eguiluz gave some powders in a folded paper and that he took them and said that he had one of his children sick and that Paula had given him such paper to heal his son].” AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 10, Fols. 37v, 48r. Similar procedures happened in Europe at the time. However, the argument I am advancing here deals less with the specificity of, in this case Paula’s, ritual practices than to the fact that afro-descendants were accepted, and common providers of health care in the city.

⁵⁶ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 10.

⁵⁷ Indeed ,Africans were in charge of themselves in places like the San Lazaro hospital for lepers. AGI, Santa Fé, 63, Fol. 69r.

⁵⁸ For instance, in the pharmacy of Francisco Miranda and Antonio Pau. AGN, Colonia, Médicos y Abogados, Exp. 2, Fols. 542r-545r..

⁵⁹ “[U]ngüentos de la botica, aguas olorosas y preparamientos muy a propósito para las ayudas.” AHN Inquisición, 1022

⁶⁰ Jane Landers reports on the case of Francisco Arará who was in charge of preparing medications in the Santa Clara convent. Jane Landers, “Cimarron Ethnicity and Cultural Adaptation in the Spanish Domains of the Circum-Caribbean 1503-1763,” in Paul Lovejoy ed., *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery* (London: Continuum, 2000). 30-54.

spending decades in Cartagena, she remained so *bozal* that in her trial she needed the assistance of Bartolome, another Biafara Black, who worked at the Colegio de Jesuitas. Talking through Bartolome, Isabel told the inquisitors how she starting being a ritual practitioners “because she was persuaded and taught by Luis Bañon, a free black, who told her about all the good things coming from being a witch and promise [to taught her] them.”⁶¹ Luis, another West African from Upper Guinea, presumably shared a linguistic connection with Isabel and reproduced, with a Biafara woman, Bañon traditions, creating new forms of practices in Cartagena.

In 1687, another *bozal*, Antonio Congo declared to Cartagena's Inquisition tribunal that in performing his healing rituals, in which he threw coins in the air, he did “as it was custom in [his] land with the intention that the *Mohan* instruct them [the witches] in the [correct] cures.”⁶² As Antonio and Isabel Hernandez correctly told the inquisitors, African *bozales* carried with them a world of African traditions which they reinvented, embodied and materialized through their ritualistic performances and in the objects they (re)created.⁶³

The interchange of ideas was meretricious in Cartagena. Juan de Alomera said in 1697 that he knew about the power of the sticks and leaves he used in his practices, as well as of the words he recited during them after “another Black, from the Mandinga nation, whose name he does not know, cured him.”⁶⁴ As Miguel Arará, a West-African slave accused of witchcraft, put it in 1666, in his land, in the bight of Benin, “[The healers] got together to

⁶¹ “[P]or la enseñanza y persuasión de Luis Bañon, negro horro, que le dijo muchos bienes del oficio de brujería y se los prometio.” AHN, Inquisición, 1020, 293v.

⁶² Antonio said that, “Costumbre en su tierra hacerlo a fin e intención de que el Mohan les diga y enseñe las contras con que habían de hacer dicha curación.” AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 481r.

⁶³ African societies transmitted their cultural inheritance through both oral and performative actions. For a General discussion of the African memory and knowledge transmission, see Mbiti, *African religions*.

⁶⁴ “[E]l fundamento que tiene para ello era haber hecho la experiencia consigo mismo cuando le curo a este reo otro negro de nacion Mandinga que no sabe su nombre.” AHN, Inquisición, 1622, Exp. 21. Fol. 26r.

learn from each other.”⁶⁵ Ritual specialists, as the repositories for both oral and ritualistic traditions, were for African societies essential in the reproduction of cultural structures. However, in the very process of re-enacting their practices in the New World, Africans transformed them.

Among Cartagena's most prominent African healers was Mateo Arará. Mateo was a *bozal* whom Portuguese slave traders had forcibly embarked in the Dutch-established post of Ardra, south of the Volta river in the bight of Benin. In Cartagena Mateo became the slave of the Captain Juan de Heredia. In 1651, Mateo appeared before the inquisition tribunal in Cartagena facing charges of being a *Mohan*, which in the prosecutor's words was a “Master of sorcerers.”⁶⁶ Witnesses declared that Mateo used an *esterita* [little mat] that opened and closed by itself when he asked it a question. Furthermore, witnesses affirmed that Mateo used a *cornezuelo* [little horn] that he laid on the ground and that raised up when Mateo talked to it in its language. Mateo explained that “an uncle by the name of Soo, who cured in the King's house, and who was a brother of his mother, taught him how to heal.”⁶⁷

Mateo Arará told the inquisitors about the characteristics of his initiation rite as a ritual specialist. In the ceremony, which was carried out on the banks of a river called “*La Madalena*,” the sorcerers had to swear that they “will not do evil to the people, nor will they

⁶⁵ “[Los curanderos]: se juntaban para aprender de cada uno.” AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 228r.

⁶⁶ “[E]ste negro, señor, fue testificado de Mohan que es lo mismo que hechicero y maestro de ellos.” [This black, my lord, was testified of being a mohan that is the same as a sorcerer and master of them.] Witnesses declared that “...tenia en la mano la escobita [esterita] y le hablaba en su lengua y abriéndose y cerrándose dicha escobita decía y respondía lo que le preguntaba y un testigo dice que también le vio que usaba de un cuernezuelo y que lo puso en el suelo por lo ancho y que no queriendo pararse le hablo en su lengua y luego se paro.” [He had in his hand the little mat. He talked to it in its own language and that opening and closing such little mat said and answered whatever was that he [Mateo] was asking it and that a witness said that he also saw that he used a horn and that he put the horn in the floor on its side and that not wanting the horn to raise up, he talked to it in its language making the horn to raise up]. AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fols. 304v-305r, 340v.

⁶⁷ “[Y] siendo preguntado que quien le enseñó [dijo ser] un tío suyo hermano de su madre, que se llama Soo y curaba en casa del rey y que los que así curan en su tierra van a un río que se llama de la Madalena que no corre.” [And after having being asked who taught him he said it was an uncle who was brother of his mother and who cured in the King's house. [He also said] that the ones who cure [like his uncle and him] go to a river that does not flow and which is called de la Madalena]. AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 341r.

cause rain...or other things.”⁶⁸ Mateo said that after the oath, something “*como una mula*,” [like a mule] comes out from the bottom of the river. The mule-like creature “grabs the one making the oath and takes him to the middle of the river, which is very big, and that if [the oath taker] swears false things he stays there, and if he swears the truth [the creature] returns him [the oath taker] to the shore.”⁶⁹

William Bosman, the chief *factor* for the Dutch West India Company, described a similar rite practiced in Whydah in the Bight of Benin in the seventeenth century. According to Bosman, during oath-taking *ordeals* “[the person taking the oath] is brought to a river, not far from the King’s court; to which is ascribed the strange quality of immediately drowning all the guilty persons which are thrown into it...but the innocent come clear out of it without any damage.”⁷⁰ “Water Ordeals,” similar ceremonies to the ones told by Mateo Arará and Bosman, were carried out in medieval and early modern Europe. In them suspected witches, or bewitched, people would be thrown tied by their toes and fingers into bodies of water. However, no animal is mentioned as coming out of the bottom of the river to claim the lives of those guilty of witchcraft.⁷¹ As with many other body practices of the time, these types of rituals were cultural points of contact that made Europeans’ appropriation of African corporeal practices fluid and which provided spaces on which Africans would not only be at the receiving end of processes of cultural transfer, but were acculturating agents themselves.

⁶⁸ “[N]o haran mal a gente, ni haran que no llueva, ni que vengan gusanos para comer los frutos, ni otras cosas.” [That they won’t do evil to people, neither will they make rain or that worms come to eat the harvest or other things]. AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 341r.

⁶⁹ AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 341r.

⁷⁰ William Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (London: James Knapton & Dan Midwinter, 1705), 359; I have used the 1705 English version of Bosman 1704 original Dutch account. William Bosman, *Nauwkeurige beschrybing van de Guinese Goud, Tand en Slavekust, nevens alle desselfs landen, koningryken, en gemenebesten: van de zeeden der inwoonders, hun godsdienst, regeering, regtspleeging, oorlogen, trowen, begraven, enz. Mitsgaders de gesteldheid des lands, veld-en boomgewassen, alderhande dieren, zo willde als tamme, viervoetige en kruipende, als ook ’t pluim-gedierte, vissen en andere zeldzaamhede meer, tot nog toe de Europeër on bekended* (Utrecht: Anthony Schouten, 1704).

⁷¹ Robert Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water The Medieval Judicial Ordeal* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

After his initiation ceremony as a healer, Mateo traveled around the kingdom with his uncle who had many “things that he used to cure” and who taught him the secrets of this African people healing tradition.⁷² Some time during the 1640s, Mateo was sold as a slave in the port of Ardra, most probably after warriors from a neighboring chieftaincy captured him. At the time the region immediately adjacent to Benin was composed of several chief-towns under three bigger polities, Dahomey, Allada and Hueda. The warriors vended Mateo to Portuguese slave traders on the Slave Coast near the Bight of Benin who brought Mateo to Cartagena de Indias, New Kingdom of Granada, modern Colombia.⁷³

Once in the New World Mateo began to study the native plants, and made the above-mentioned *esterita*. As he explained, “after arriving in this kingdom he had made, from his wits, a little mat out of palm leaves, and that he tied it by the ends. In its upper part [the little mat] was divided in two parts like arms. [He also explained] that he made this [little mat] to know [how to recognize] the good and bad herbs to cure Christians.”⁷⁴ When the inquisition’s prosecutor asked Mateo about how he used his *esterita*, Mateo answered that “[To use it] he had taken a chicken and opened its beak, and cut its throat with a knife and with the blood that came out of the chicken he sprinkled the *esterita*, and after [the *esterita*] was wet and sprinkled he put in it powders of all types of counter herbs.”⁷⁵ Most importantly, Mateo

⁷² “[Y] que como andaba tras de su tio cargado con aquellas cosas con que curaba, aprehendio a curar.” [And that he was around his uncle who was loaded with those things he used to cure, he learnt to cure]. AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 341r.

⁷³ Because of his high rank as a ritual practitioner Mateo was most certainly captured by enemy troops rather than sold as part of a debt payment among chieftaincies, a common arrangement in West Africa during the late seventeenth century. See Walter Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves: Transformations Along the Guinea-Bissau Coast, 1400 – 1900* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003).

⁷⁴ “[Y] que habiendo venido a estos reinos, el propio de su cabeza hizo una escobita de hojas de plama y que la ato por los cabos y que por arriba quedo dividida en dos partes como brazos y que esta escobita hizo para conoces la yerbas buenas y malas para curar christianos y que nadie le enseño a hacer dicha escobita, sino que el la hizo por su propio parecer.” AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 340r.

⁷⁵ “[D]icha esterita la penso este por su caveza, tomando un pollo y abriendole el pico y con un cuchillo cortandole azia el gazzate, y que con la sangre que salia roçiaba la esterita y despues de mojada y rrociada le hecha polvos de todas contraierbas.” AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 340v.

learned which herbs were beneficial because he asked the *esterita*. If the herb was good, the little mat opened itself and if it was ineffectual, the little mat closed itself and moved from one side to the other.⁷⁶

Besides his *esterita*, Mateo always carried a *congolón* [gourd] with him. In his audience in front of the inquisition tribunal in 1651, Mateo said that “such gourd is from a pumpkin, and that it had inside powders from a plant that is called *ariajua*, which is cultivated at the Santa Catalina gate of this city.”⁷⁷ The gourd was an essential tool in the rituals he had performed in Mompox some years before.

In 1648, Saavedra, the lieutenant from Mompox, a city seventy miles south of Cartagena up the Magdalena river, wrote a letter to Mateo’s master Juan Heredia asking for Heredia to send Mateo to his mine as he had many sick slaves plagued with a mysterious illness.⁷⁸ Reluctantly, Mateo sailed with some *bogas*, barge rowers, upstream the Magdalena River to Mompox. When he arrived at the gold mine at a place called *Moroci* Mateo examined the house of the mine owner, one Juan Abad, using his *esterita* to look for *yerbateros* but he did not find anyone. Then he went to the mine and gathered the entire slave work force and put them in a circle. First he gave them wine to share and then Mateo took out a *congolón* [gourd] that was full of the herb *ariajua*, and mixing it with wine gave the concoction to all the sick slaves. He then went with his little mat through the circle on which the slaves had congregated. When the mat took a turn to the right in front of a slave named Ventura Anchico, it [the mat] singled him out as the *yerbatero* [herbalist] who was causing

⁷⁶ AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 340v.

⁷⁷ “[D]icho Congolón es de un calabazo y tenia dentro polvos de un palo que se llama ariajua, que se criaba junta a la puerta de Santa Cathalina de esta ciudad.”AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 304v.

⁷⁸ AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 339v.

the mine's plague.⁷⁹ Mateo finished his treatment using the bark of a tree called *Orejón*,⁸⁰ on which he tied a cross [or sticks], took the bark and mixed it with *hydromiel* [water and honey]. According to the inquisition records, this beverage with some others of Mateo's potions healed all the ill *negros*, after they spit through their mouths "bones, hairs, and feathers."

Mateo's healing elements and rituals were characteristic aspects of early modern West African healing systems.⁸¹ While working for the Danish African Company in the mid-seventeenth century, the German Wilhelm Johann Müller wrote that ritual specialists in the kingdom of *Fetu*, which was neighbor to *Adja*, had to repeat divination procedures three times for them to be effective.⁸² Ritual practitioners from the *Fetu* kingdom also used rituals gourds in which they put "red lumps of earth, the size of a fist, a tree fruit of a peculiar kind, the *bark of trees* [my emphasis], [and] chickens' bones' and then sprinkled with blood."⁸³

During his trial, Mateo narrated other rites he performed. The Arará *mohan* declared,

⁷⁹ AHN, Inquisición, 1021, 340v.

⁸⁰ This tree is *Enterolobium cyclocarpum*, it is also known in Latin America as algarrobo francés, anjera, caracaro, carita, dormilón, flamboyán extranjero, guanacaste, oreja de judío, oreja de mono, oreja de negro, pichi, or piñon, among other names.

⁸¹ See, for example, William Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston 1969), 79-80. Kathrin J. McKnight has argued that these are Chibcha rituals. The Chibchas were one of the most important pre-Columbine native American cultures populating the New Kingdom of Granada. McKnight, however, is mistaken, in geographical terms at the very least, as the Chibchas and Muisca pre-Columbian civilizations resided in the Andean mountains which were six hundred kilometers and several months of travel through the rainforest and the Andes. The Native American culture from which Africans could have drawn in seventeenth century Northern New Kingdom of Granada was either Caribe or Arawak. Furthermore, McKnight does not address the patent African roots of Mateo's rites Kathrin J. McKnight, "En su Tierra lo Aprendio: An African Curandero Defense Before the Cartagena Inquisition", *Colonial Latin American Review* 12 (2003): 63-84.

⁸² Wilhelm J. Müller, *Die Afrikanische auf der Guineischen Gold Cust gelegene Landschafft Fetu* [1676], Zwernemann Jürgen ed. (Graz: Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 1968), 62, 84. Müller first published his book in Nürnberg in 1673. Here I am using the 1968 reprint of the 1676 Hamburg 2nd edition of Müller's work. Wilhelm J. Müller, *Die Afrikanische/ Auf Der Besichtigung/ und unablässiger Erforschung beschriebener/ Auch mit dienlichen Kupffern/ Und einem Fetuischen Wörter-Buche geziehret* (Hamburg: Härtel, 1676).

⁸³ Müller 1676 (1968), p. 53-54. In *Fon-Ewe* languages the number three is pronounced similarly to the world *e-ta*. Akinwumi Ogundiran suggests that *E-ta* belongs the common linguistic root that also signifies "To shoot of" this is to enact a counter action that would expel the maledictions enchantment. See, Akinwumi Ogundiran, "Living in the Shadow of the Atlantic World : History and Material Life in a Yoruba-Edo Hinterland, ca. 1600-1750." In Akinwumi Ogundiran, and Toyin Falola eds., *Archaeology of Atlantic Africa and the African Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 86.

That, while being in the *Morosi* mine, a little black boy was sick, and that, to cure him, he made a cross with some sticks which he put on the door of the hut [where he lived with his mother]...and then he made them bring a chicken, and [after] having “cleaned” the boy with the bird, and putting it [on the boys head]...he said that if the chicken died the boy would live, and that if [the chicken] lived, the boy would die... and [then, he] commended the boy to God.⁸⁴

Other practitioners used chickens as well. A Spanish woman declaring in 1670 during the trial of Francisco de Llanos, a Black slave from the “Llanos de Guinea” in Upper Guinea, said that,

Being sick of a mass on one side of her belly, she looked for the defendant in the farm where he lived... [Francisco] told her that it was [a curse] sent by a man that had courted her, and that she had rejected. [The woman] then said that [Francisco] had cured her from the mass by using the *contra* and sucking the wounds [he had made on her]. [She also said] that while doing this he threw through his mouth some bundles that seemed to be toads. He also took a chicken and told the witness to [cook the chicken] in a pot together with, in lieu of two *reales*, two corn kernels...She cooked the chicken and was healed.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ “[Q]ue estando en la mina del Morosi estaba malo un negrito, y que para curarlo hizo una cruz de unos palitos y la puso sobre la puerta del bujio (que es choza), donde vivia la madre del negrito y que luego hizo traer un pollo, y dijo que si el pollo se moria viviria el negrito y si vivia, moriria, con lo qual con el mismo pollo limpio todo el cuerpo del negrito, y que luego se lo puso en la caveza teniendolo su madre, y que este la encomendó a Dios rezando sus oraciones, que eran, Dios padre, Dios hijo, Dios Espíritu santo, rogando a Dios y a la Virgen Maria le diese buena mano para curar el negrito y que luego se murió el pollo y este mando a un negro que lo echase en una quebrada y que el negrito quedo bueno...”AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 341r.

⁸⁵ “[T]eniendo un bulto a un lado de la tripa busco al reo en la estancia que vivía para que se lo curase y la dijo que era veneno dado por un hombre que la sollicito y ella había despreciado; que la sano el bulto y aplico la *contra* la chupo las llagas y en este ejercicio arrojaba el de la boca unos bultos como de sapos cogió una polla y la dijo a la mujer que en falta de no tener dos reales echase por su mano dos granos de maiz ... en la olla...coció la polla dicha mujer y quedo sana y buena.” AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 235r.

Like de Llanos, Miguel Arará, a *bozal* slave from the Bight of Benin, was said to apply remedies for health problems with good results.⁸⁶ Declaring in his trial 1666, Miguel who worked as a *leñador* [woodcutter] in Cartagena, explain that in his land when the healer wanted to differentiate between sorcery and poisoning, “[they]gave water to a black chicken and that when [the chicken] died it meant that the person had drunk poison.”⁸⁷ Another Arará *bozal*, Francisco, also used chickens when curing. In 1685, two witnesses declared that he had “scrubbed the body [of a sick woman] with some live hens. [Also that] he had then spited the chicken in the beak and told the sick woman to do the same, doing crosses with the chicken over the [sick woman] belly three times.”⁸⁸

In various West and West-Central African traditions, and more specifically in the customs of communities around the Bight of Benin, chickens served several purposes in activities involving from the social to the supernatural. In the social realm, the chicken was the symbol of hospitality and acknowledgement. The chicken was presented both at births as at marriages. It also appeared during burial ceremonies and in most the practices related with the supernatural. In particular, chickens were essential in the performance of rituals of healing, divination and protection. The election of the correct plumage color was of essential importance according to the type of ceremony. A white chicken was preferred in the case that its use was intended for the adoration of the ancestors. On the other hand, a chicken with black plumage was used when the case called for liberating the victim from evil spirits.

⁸⁶ AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 228v. During his trial he said that “Solia dar a algunas personas un palo de bejuco para limpiar los dientes otros para dolor de barriga y otros cociditos que provoan a camara.” AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 229r.

⁸⁷ “[D]ijo que en su tierra se usaba llamar a junta a los negros para conocer la sabiduría de cada uno de ellos y era el modo, tomar un gallo, echarle agua por la boca y si moría era señal que era veneno.” AHN, Inquisición, 1023 Fols. 228r.

⁸⁸ “[L]as refregó todo el cuerpo con una gallinas vivas salivaba después a la gallina en el pico y decía a la enferma [que] hiciese lo mismo y la una añade que en su curación la hizo tres cruces con la gallina sobre la barriga.” AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 313v.

Chickens and chicken parts have been essential part of the therapeutic armamentarium of Europeans for centuries.⁸⁹ The parameters under which European used these birds and the beliefs behind the practices on which they appeared were certainly different from those espoused, in all likelihood, by Africans and Afro-descendants like De llanos, and Miguel and Mateo Arará. However, their presence on African ritual practices made them essential cultural links in such specific rites. They opened avenues for European's appropriation of African healing *motifs*. However, domestic birds were not the only diagnostic and therapeutic methods used by Africans in Cartagena.⁹⁰

Domingo López, like Mateo Arará, also used a little horn in his healing practices. López, a free Black from Cartagena, was forty years old when he appeared in front of the Inquisition tribunal in 1651. An imposing figure, he was tall, bearded and filled a big body frame.⁹¹ When curing, López asked a *cuernezuelo*, [a little horn] “about what illness the sick person had, whether it was caused by herbs. To say no, the *cuernezuelo* moved from one side to the other, to say yes, it went up and down.”⁹² The *cuernezuelo* was about “a quarter of length [10 inches] in which [at the end] it had a hole and inside it a cord, and that he [López] held one of the ends of such cord with his feet, and the other end with his hand, and that in this way he asked [the *cuernezuelo*] about what affliction the person had, and if it was caused or not by herbs.”⁹³ When the interrogators asked him how the *cuernezuelo* moved, López

⁸⁹ See for example, Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: a Medical History of Humanity* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 218.

⁹⁰ Westerlund, 96.

⁹¹ “[E]s alto, de cuerpo y barbado. Por el año de 51 ser de 40 años.” [López] is tall, with a big body and bearded. In 1651 [he should have had] forty years]. AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 385r.

⁹² “[P]reguntaba al dicho cuernezuelo que enfermedad tenia el enfermo que si eran yerbas y que el cuernezuelo se movió para decir que no de un lado a otro y que si lo eran subía y bajaba con que decía que si.” AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 385v.

⁹³ “[U]na cuarta de largo en el cual estaba hecho un agujero por junto al nacimiento y metido un cordel por el, y que por la una punta del dicho cordel tenia con el pie y la otra punta con la mano y que en esta forma

answered that the *cuernezuelo* “moved by itself,” and that, like Mateo Arará, the only thing he did was to talk to it in its “native tongue.”⁹⁴ López was also an expert in curing snake bites and poisoning, a gift he said was of divine provenance. Ritual practitioners like Domingo López filled the horns with special herbs and spells and used them to probe the etiology of illness, offer protection against them, or to perform other types of rituals. Juan de Salzedo, our “Juan the Englishman,” for instance, used a horn that was “full of the root *Capitana*” in cases of snake bites.⁹⁵

Francisco Mandinga, a slave of Don Gonzalo de Herrera, was also a famous “herbalist who cured from curses and poisons.”⁹⁶ In 1649 one of his patients, his own master de Herrera, told the inquisitors that, “[Francisco Mandinga] had cured this witness in the following way: he made three small wounds on the scapula. He then sucked from the wounds and extracted a toad and afterwards he made him drink water with *bejuco*.”⁹⁷ Two interpreters, both Africans working in the Jesuit College with the priest Pedro Claver, translated Francisco’s deposition to the Inquisition tribunal, where he said, that “he was from the *Mandinga* nation and that since he was born he had had the virtue to cure the evils done with herbs and spells and that using his smell he knew who had such herbs. [He also said] that only by smelling the herbs he knew the virtue that they had.” During his healings,

preguntaba que enfermedad tenia la persona que estaba enferma y si eran o no yerbas.” AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 385v.

⁹⁴ AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 385v

⁹⁵ AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 404r.

⁹⁶ “[Y]erbatero, herbolario y que curaba de hechizos y venenos.” [Herbalist and that he cured spells and poisons]. The word Mandinga, similarly to mina, is problematic when used to elucidate the origins of African *bozales*. In Ethnonymic terms, Mandinga refers to people from the Mande region in Western Africa. Africans coming from this broad area were embarked in the ivory and gold coast of Guinea. However, Europeans frequently used the same term to designate any slave practicing what they considered witchcraft or sorcery. Hence, Mandinga or Mina did not necessarily refer to the particular person ethnonymic category. However, from Francisco’s story it appears to be clear that he thought of himself as Mandinga. AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 121r.

⁹⁷ “[Francisco Mandinga] había curado al dicho testigo en esta forma, dandole tres heridas pequeñas sobre la paletilla y chupándole dichas heridas con la boca. Y que le habia sacado un sapo y que después le dio beber agua de bejuco.” AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 140r.

Francisco Mandinga also “made some wounds on the body and after this he sucked them with his mouth and sometimes he took out hairs, other times bones...and that after this he gave to those that he cured cooked water, and that he cooked all days...and that he also helped to preserve the people who were sick so they did not get affected by herbs or spells, and that all of this he did because of virtues that God had given to him.”⁹⁸

Juan Alomera also used wounds to carry out his healings. A witness declared in 1697 that Alomera “had made a cut in the form of a cross on his big toe and that he put powders of the root called *capitana* and of a tree called *Carara* on the wound. [To prepare the powders, the healer] scrapes the root and stem [of the tree] and [then] dries the scraped material, and then grind them.”⁹⁹ Juan Díaz, a Black slave native from Madeira Island in the Atlantic Ocean, was said to cure using a similar procedure. Witnesses declaring in 1666 against Juan, who was older than seventy years then, said that, “they have looked for him after one of them felt sick of an arm. [Juan] then told the relative of the ill person to bring some leaves of a tree that was nearby. [Juan] put the leaves in a pot with water. With the water [Juan] washed the [ill person's] arm and poured over the ground where two little *yuco* toads were found.” Two

⁹⁸ “[Q]ue era de nación mandinga y que desde que nació había tenido virtud para curar los males que se hacían con yerbas y hechizos y que por el olfato conocía quien tenía dichas yerbas y que Dios le había enseñado las yerbas con que él curaba, que era el dicho bejuco, y que con otra yerba, que no sabía como se llamaba, curaba mordeduras de culebras y que de solo oler las yerbas conocía la virtud que tenían y que para curar los maleficios hacia unas zahajaduras en el cuerpo y las usaba con las yerbas, que curaba y luego las chupaba con la Boca y unas veces saca cabellos, otras huesos, que estos eran de cuerpos y luego les daba a los que curaba agua cocida y que curaba en todos los días y horas, pero mejor en los días de viernes y que también preservaba a las personas que estaban buenas para que no les hiciese mal con yerbas ni hechizos. Y que todo lo hacia por virtud que Dios le había dado.” AHN, Inquisición, 1023. Fols. 349r-351r.

⁹⁹ “[S]obre el dedo grande del pie con una navajita le hizo una cisura en forma de cruz y sobre ella le echo unos polvos de la raíz de la capitana y de un palo llamado Carara cuya raíz y palo se raspan y las raspaduras se ponen a secar y secan y majan y [se] hacen polvos que son los que echa y lo mismo ejecuto en el otro pie y manos.” AHN, Inquisición, 1624, Exp21. Fol. 25v. That Juan made the wounds in the form of a cross does not necessarily implies he was using a Christian reference. West and West Central African’s frequently made use of crosses in his rituals. At the same time, ritual specialists like Juan could have been, purportedly or not, using healing elements that could have been recognized by their clients, or were using them with an intended reference to the Christian symbolism of the cross. See, for instance, Dapper, 336.

other witnesses declared that Juan had “closed his body to heal him from the bites of a snake. [Juan also] made some cuts on his big toe in the form of a cross.”¹⁰⁰

Also dealing with lacerations, Juan Sarna, from Angola in West Central Africa, confessed in his 1685 Inquisition trial that “He chewed on herbs that he then put on wounds.” After rubbing the herbs on the ill person’s wound, Pedro sucked the wounds and took out sticks, stones, hairs and other things.¹⁰¹ Angolan ritual specialists were performing similar rituals across the Atlantic. The Capuchin missionary Giovanni A. Cavazzi wrote around 1660, “[t]hat when someone is sick, he sends for a doctor...[or]priest who immediately applies the remedy against the *Zumbo* [spirit] which is working the sickness...[the priest] mixes various herbs and powders and rubs the body of the sick person with them.”¹⁰² According to Cavazzi, these ritual specialists, as their counterparts in Upper Guinea also had the power to protect with the use of *contras* against illness,

[T]hey already have relics which they keep inside, because they are not only beautiful, but [they] say they are beneficial...as a protection against various pains and

¹⁰⁰“[E]stando uno de ellos enfermo de un brazo... habían buscado y referido el achaque y dicho al pariente trajese unas hojas de un árbol que estaba allí y el reo las echo en una olla y con el agua de ellas se unto el brazo y la derramo y después andaba entre la tierra que se avia derramado y se hallaron dos sapitos vucos?...otros dos [testigos declaran]de que a uno para que sanase unas picaduras de culebras le había cerrado el cuerpo y sajadole el dedo grande en un pie en forma de cruz .”.AHN, Inquisición, 1023. Fol. 258v.

¹⁰¹AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 349v.

¹⁰²“[Q]uando qualcuno avia inforemado manda a indocinare dal [medico]... se glidice che el zumbo che lo tramagliamanda del sacendo quela subito qi la medicinee contra del zumbo che le travaglia in quella infermiza applicato i remedio... per strataghema del ministro, con quello mistera varie herbe polvere unge il corpo del infermo.” Giovanni A. Cavazzi, “Missione Evangelica nel Regno de Congo,” MS 1668, Lib I, Cap VIII, 84. Microfilm “CAMs of Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi da Montecuccolo, Capucine Missionary to Kongo and Angola, 3 Volumes, 17th Century.” University of Virginia Library, Manuscripts Department, 1976. Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi (1621-1678) was a Capuchin monk who lived in Angola and Congo from 1654 to 1677. On his return to Italy he completed his "Missione evangelica nel Regno de Congo" an Italian description of West-Central Africa and the history of the Capuchin mission there. Here I use the original manuscript which Cavazzi completed in 1668 and which has been in the hands of the Araldi family in Modena Italy. Cavazzi's original handwritten text is also known as the "Araldi manuscript. In 1668 Giacomo Monti edited and published Cavazzi's original work. See Giovanni A. Cavazzi and Alamandini Fortunato, *Istorica descrizione de' tre' regni Congo, Matamba et Angola: sitvati nell'Etiopia inferiore occidentale e delle missioni apostoliche esercitateui da religiosi Capuccini* (Bologna: Giacomo Monti, 1687). For translation, I have compared my own and corrected it using the one published by John K. Thornton on the World Wide Web at <http://centralafricanhistory.blogspot.com>.

sicknesses... and saying various words, they disperse [the roots] and dig up various tree roots, which they partly burn. They use the rest to make an ointment with bones of all sorts of ferocious and poisonous animals and of men and with plants...[then the priest] makes a sacrifice, killing an animal, calling on the first inventor of this art and infernal master [the divinity], so that he [the master] gives virtue and strength to persevere to those who use it.¹⁰³

Pedro, a Black slave from the Nanboa nation in Congo was a farmer working in Mompox who walked the streets of that town brandishing the tusk of a leopard around his neck. Around 1678 witnesses declared that Pedro applied “*remedios para que los alacranes no picasen*” [potions so the scorpions did not bite]. More frighteningly, he was said to be able to transform himself into a tiger. Pedro was captured in Congo when he was twenty years old and had been in “several places in *Las Indias*” before ending living in Cartagena’s province. He told the inquisitors that the sticks he had in his bag were against the bite of snakes and “*ventosidad*” [bloating]. He cured ulcers with roots and leaves and “belly obstruction” with “*agua de raíces de escobilla y miel de abejas*” [water of roots and honey], and for other abdominal ailments he used the skin and stomach of a “*pájaro nombrado cocolí*” [bird called *cocolí*].¹⁰⁴ For heart diseases, it was useful to “extract the nail of the right leg of a female hog before she dies and clean it of earth. Then [the healer] should dry it and took out the bone of

¹⁰³ “[G]ia inbeso hanno reliquie che portano dentro oltre alla perché bellezza mosiera, dicono al dire Lovo contra leoni & ogni animale ferce, & anco protezione de varie dolori & infirmitadi... & dicendo varie parole quelle dispergge & scavare radice d’alberi parte per abrieggiare, comporne unguento con difietterdi ossa di tutte le sorti d’animali feroci velenosi & d’huominiosse, & herbe... [allora] quello fa la sacrificio con amarrarr sopra di quello uni animale chiamando per il primo inventore di quell arte e maestro infernale perche dia ui fanno fuorza di preservaere chi di que ello si servie.” Cavazzi 1668, Lib I, Cap VIII, 80-81.

¹⁰⁴ “[D]ijo que aunque se había dicho sin fundamento que era este reo gran mojan que se volvía tigre siendo todo siniestro... Dijo haber Curando una obstrucción de vientre con agua de raíces de escobilla y miel de abejas... para con el buche y el pellejo del pecho con sus pluma curar el estomago a una mujer... dijo haber hecho solamente algunas curaciones de llagas con raíces y hojas que nombro. AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fols. 419v-420r.

it and put what it has been taken out in a narrow pot. [Finally] the pot should be left covered for one or two weeks.”¹⁰⁵

As the material in this section shows, African ritual traditions like the rubbing of ointments and the sucking of the materialized causes of illnesses were ubiquitous in Cartagena. However, precisely because of their ubiquity and the rich contact between ritual practitioners, African rituals and ideas around body and health did not remain pure, pristine representations of an archetypical Africa. Arguably, because of the demographics of the slave trade, African ritual specialists in Cartagena had arrived in the city when they were either teenagers, or young adults. This means that Africans, even those initiated in ritual practices in Africa like Mateo Arará, learned, and modified, their trades in the new world. Pedro Congo, one of the most powerful and feared ritual specialist of the late seventeenth century in the province of Cartagena, for instance, declared that he had learned his trade in the New World from other Africans.¹⁰⁶

The practices of African-born health ritual specialists can be linked to specific African, regionally originated ceremonies and beliefs. These rituals came from regions all around the western African coast. From the mouth of the Cacheo River to the deep tropical forest in the Congo. However, African and Afro-descendants not only used and reproduced practices from their particular cultures, but eagerly engaged in a robust give and take of ideas and rituals in places like Cartagena. The “Africanness” of the place allowed them, as in the case of Isabel Hernandez, to spend a life in Cartagena without having to learn the supposed *lingua franca* of the place, in this case Spanish. However, that very same *Africanness* that

¹⁰⁵ “[Q]uitar la uña de la mano derecha de una puerca antes que muera y se lava la tierra que tiene en ella y poner al ayer o al sumo y seca sacarle el hueso lavarla y lo que sale echarlo en agua fría en vasija angosta que quede tapada y beberla por una o dos semanas.”AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 256r

¹⁰⁶ AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fols. 419v.

allowed them to navigate society and culture using mores and cultural tools learned in West and West-Central Africa made it possible for them to be exposed to the myriad of life experiences of other Africans who were equally appropriating the New World in their own terms. As I advance at length in Chapter five, in Cartagena Africans did not have to enact their culture in the shadows of mainstream culture. West and West-Central African cultural practices *were the norm*. Because of its visibility and vitality African culture became easily mutated and morphed in ways that while *recreating* particular mores, also enforced their *re-imagination* to incorporate pragmatic strategies of living and healing learned from the multiple cultures that arrived in the Iberian Caribbean.

The Doctors are My Enemies

The centrality of African customs and culture in Cartagena is demonstrated by the ample and unproblematic use of African healing rituals by Europeans of all extractions. As I explain at length in the introduction to this dissertation, although Inquisition accounts come from the paradigmatic example of an institution devoted to intolerance and repression, those examined illuminate a society that was far more open and multicultural than it has been credited.

A case in point is Domingo Congo who declared that “the doctors of Caracas were his enemies.” In Domingo’s mind university trained physicians were behind the slander that had put him in jail. When asked whether he knew the cause of his imprisonment, Domingo, who had come to the New World from Congo sometime during the first decade of the seventeenth century, told the inquisitors that he believed that the reason for his imprisonment must be

“because he cured” and the doctors were jealous because “he healed the incurable [patients] with remedies and healings.”¹⁰⁷

Like so many other African *bozales* living in the Spanish Caribbean during the seventeenth century, after more than five decades in the Americas Domingo had not learned Spanish. Inquisitors in Cartagena saw Domingo Congo's declaration as no more than gibberish. They, like in many other cases, had to ask for a translator from the Jesuit College. Domingo's story underscores the broad clientèle these African rituals drew. Obviously, from the reaction of Caracas' medical establishment, Domingo's practice was hurting their business.

Other specialists, also had a variegated clientele. Juan Sarna, for example, was subjected to an experiment of sorts that, in the view of European observers, proved the power and reality of the rituals the African specialist performed. Thirteen witnesses, “of all conditions and ages,” most of them adult European or Euro-descendant, declared in 1656 “that he had cured legs and other parts [of the body] using diverse herbs. [He] chewed the herbs before [using them] and then spreaded them on the wounds, which he sucked afterwards taking out of them little sticks, stones, hairs and things like that.”¹⁰⁸ Juan was understandably disappointed. After all, in his words, as in many occasions before “a neighbor had asked him to cure one of his nephews.” He then did and said things that “was custom to

¹⁰⁷ “[S]ería la causa porque curaba y que los doctores de caracas eran sus enemigos y los enfermos que ellos dejaban los incurable este los [trataba] con remedios y curaciones.” AHN, Inquisición, 1022, Fol. 102v.

¹⁰⁸ He was “Natural del reino de Angola trabajador de el campo en la ciudad de Caracas de setenta años de edad donde fue testificado el año de 56 por 13 testigos de todos estados y edades formales los mas y de ambos sexos de que había curado piernas y otras partes aplicando diversas hiervas que mascaba antes y esparcía en la heridas que después chupaba sacando de ella palillos piedrecitas, cabellos y cosas de estas.” AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 349v.

use in Angola. [But] that he had no other intention or pact or any other thing...and that they made him do these things and then said that he was a witch.”¹⁰⁹

The witnesses, to probe that he was indeed using otherworldly powers in his actions, “to prevent that the defendant excused his actions by saying that he had put into his mouth [the things he took out of the wounds], invited him [Juan] to have lunch with them right before the healing. And even though they had him under surveillance the whole time during and after lunch, he took out from the wounds the mentioned things.”¹¹⁰

Juan's bafflement with the behavior of his neighbors is telling. His rituals could be, and had been performed in the open for decades. They were not occult practices, nor the parcel of secluded African meetings. Furthermore, as the testimonies of the European witnesses show, in the Spanish Caribbean, actors of all ways of life adopted as their own, and in their own terms, African, in this case Angolan, beliefs about bodies and health. Here, we found nothing of the sort of the mockery and patronizing descriptions that would increasingly define European descriptions of African rituals from the seventeenth century on in “enlightened” writings. As with Juan, several witnesses of European descent declared against Francisco Mandinga,

Francisco, who was born in Upper Guinea, also faced the denunciation of his former clients. A Euro-descendant woman told the inquisitors in 1675 that, when curing her of an

¹⁰⁹“[U]n vecino de allí le había pedido curase a un su sobrino.” also that he did as “Se usaba en Angola sin que el tuviera ninguna otra intención ni mas pacto ni que cosa...y que le obligaban a hacerlo y después le decían que era un brujo.”AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 350r.

¹¹⁰“[Y] en prevención de que el reo no se excusara en algún tipo con que llevaba en la boca este genero de cosas que ostentaba sacar de las heridas le convidaron a almorzar dos de los testigos antes que hiciese la aplicación y sin embargo de tenerle [vigilado] hasta que la haría saco de dichas heridas dichas cosas.”AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 349v.

unspecified illness, Francisco “had anointed different parts of her body with saliva while reciting words and making signs...in the presence of several persons of this city.”¹¹¹

He was obviously a powerful ritual specialist in the view of Cartageneros of all classes. Eighteen witnesses “of both sexes, women most of them, of all ages,” declared that Francisco had cured a woman who was in her deathbed made her stand in a matter of minutes “and she healed, and stayed with such an appearance and actions as if she had never been ill.” During the ritual, Francisco did “different types of turns over a bed of the dying woman...and then, in the same place, applied concoctions of sticks and stems.” which as in other rituals he had performed before, he “Chewed, then put them in both palms of his hands, and applied, while massaging, on the infirm parts of the body with good results.”¹¹²

Paula de Eguiluz's services was similarly sought after by Europeans and Euro-descendants of all sorts. In the 1620s, after she had finished serving the sentence of her first inquisition trial,

Don Francisco de la Guerra, who was very sick, send for her so she could cure him of and stomach illness...Don Francisco's sister also beg her to cure her brother because she was afraid that he was suffering from curses. So, she went and tried his stomach and found that he had a mass that was the cause of his problems and anguish. She then gave him some powders of yellow color to cure him. With the mentioned powders and some sweet *angelos* oil he anointed the stomach of the mentioned Don

¹¹¹ “[L]a había untado con saliva diferentes partes el cuerpo diciendo palabras haciendo signos...presentes diferentes personas de esta ciudad.”AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 353r.

¹¹² “[D]e ambos sexos mujeres las mas, de todas edades formales casi todos,” witnesses continued “y quedo ella con tal semblante y acciones como sino hubiera estado enferma.” The healing began when Francisco performed “[D]iferentes vueltas por enzima de una cama en que estaba una moribunda...luego allí mismo que aplico cocimientos de los dichos palitos y varillas.” To use the sticks he “[los]mascaba, los ponía en ambas palmas de las manos restregaba las partes doloridas con buen suceso.”AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 353r.

Francisco de la Guerra with which he healed and got ridden of the mentioned curses.¹¹³

The noble title of Don is indicative of the elite status of both de la Guerra and his sister. Most certainly, de La Guerra had access to all varieties of health services and practitioners available in the city. The fact that he asked for Paula's services, as the Europeans detailed in the stories of Francisco Mandinga, Pedro Congo and many other African ritual practitioners, attests to not only the pervasiveness of African ritual practices and practitioners, but also to their central and normative status in the hierarchy of healers in the Spanish Caribbean.

Paula, for instance healed priests like Fray Pedro Arias of the Saint Agustin order, and several other Spaniards.¹¹⁴ Pedro Arias was not the only religious person using African rituals. Despite their reputation for persecuting non-christian practices, missionaries and priests in Cartagena not only tolerated but used the services of African specialists. Mateo Arará, after curing the slaves in *moroci*, went to Mompox and healed two catholic priests that were sick in using the same ritual he had used for the mine's slaves.¹¹⁵

Francisco Arará was similarly accused by a priest that while "being [the priest] very sick and with pain due to a wound in one of his legs he called the defendant. [Francisco] visited and informed him that his disease was caused by herbs. [Francisco also said] that he will cure him, and that he needed two pesos to prepare the concoctions...which he prepared in

¹¹³ "[E]stando muy malo...y también le rogó a esta Doña Agustina de Barros hermana del dicho Don Francisco que le curase porque se temía que tenía algunos hechizos en el estomago y esta fue y le tentó el estomago y halló que tenía en él un bulto y con grandes fatigas y ansias que le causaba el dicho bulto que era de hechizos...y le dio unos polvos para curarle de color amarivillo(sic)... y con los dichos polvos y un poco de aceite de agenlos dulces unto el estomago tres veces al dicho Don Francisco de la Guerra con lo cual el susodicho estuvo bueno y libre de los dichos hechizos. AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 7, 49v-50r.

¹¹⁴ She also healed "Francisco de Simancas y a María Cana y un hijo suyo los cuales estaban envenenados con polvos." AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 7, 90v-91r

¹¹⁵ AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 340r-340v.

the act. He made crosses on his leg and thigh and repeated the procedure the next day adding some herbs that he had brought prepared and which had a nice smell. [Francisco] insisted that they were alone, and in this way, the two of them alone, they expended the next few days. Sometimes during his cures, [Francisco] made different signs and movements with his hands and head while moving his lips.”¹¹⁶

Like Domingo Congo in Caracas, Francisco was a specialist of last resort for desperate cases. One witness declared that seeing that “he did not get any benefit from [the treatments] of his physicians, he called the defendant [Francisco] and said that he had cured him using herbs from Santa María.”¹¹⁷ Another priest declared that

[B]eing sick from the heart...he looked for [Francisco Arará] and told him of his problems. [Francisco] instructed him to go to his house on a Friday. He also said that then he will tell him whether somebody had put a curse on him. After the arrived, in closed doors, [Francisco] get down to the floor close to a gourd...and while mumbling to himself he took out objects from his bag and threw them in the gourd. Then he said to the witness to cross himself after which he got up and, consoling him, told him that his afflictions were of natural origin.¹¹⁸

Most of the ritual practitioners for which we have records had been practicing in the city for decades before they were denounced. What is more, the denunciation to the Inquisition came after they had used or mentioned Christian concepts or material in their practices. In many cases it appears that they were the object of campaigns of defamation by

¹¹⁶ “[E]stando muy enfermo y dolorido de una herida en la pierna llamo al reo. Le visito y le dijo era mal de yerbas que le curaría dándole dos pesos para las preparaciones de ellas...y allí mismo le las hizo. La pierna y muslo se los santiguo al día siguiente repito lo mismo añadiendo unas yerbas que llevaba prevenidas de lindo olor y previno que nadie estuviera allí y así paso a solas en ellos y otros días y algunas veces hacia diferentes visajes con las manos y cabeza menando los labios.”AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 314v

¹¹⁷ “[D]iciendo que el medico no aprovechaba llamo al reo y [dijo que este] le curaba con unas yervas de Santa Maria.”AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 314r

¹¹⁸ AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 314v.

their competitors in the health market including physicians and other fellow African and Afro-descendant practitioners. The evidence presented here undermines the idea that Africans and their rites belonged to the periphery of society, or that they had to be enacted in secret meetings. African rituals were, evidently, carried out widely in the open. As this section shows, Europeans and Euro-descendants living in the Spanish Caribbean abundantly consulted and used the services of African ritual specialists. The cases discussed here suggest, in addition, that Europeans and Euro-descendants, widely integrated into their own world view African originated ideas about health and the body.

Conclusion

The evidence examined in this chapter is representative of the tumultuous flux of ideas, concepts and representations of the natural and metaphysical world happening in the early modern Spanish Caribbean. For all their weight in Latin American and Atlantic World historiography, ideas about the world and body based on Christian, Western medical or scientific tradition were, if not peripheral, only part of a broad spectrum of notions, beliefs and conceptualizations about the ways in which the world worked. For most of the early modern inhabitants of the Americas, explanations were far more fluid and eclectic than ecclesiastical authorities would have like to believe. Priests and doctors, slaves, peasants and carpenters, ascribed a broadly different variety of meanings to what they saw and experienced.

African healing practitioners were ubiquitous in Cartagena de Indias and their rituals were used by Cartagenos of all extractions. Misunderstandings, false readings and half-truths were essential parts of African, European and indigenous healing practices and beliefs

about bodies, health, and illness. However, the structures behind African, European and Native-American systems of thought about corporeality and the natural world made approximate readings possible, understandable, and pragmatic. They also provided fertile ground for the sharing and appropriation of rites, ideas, and material culture, which proved to be highly effective.

The stories described here exemplify the diversity of beliefs and health rituals espoused by African and Afro-descendant communities in places like Cartagena. They also show how *bozales* learned from each other and created multi-originated rituals and healing practices. No pristine recreation of Africa occurred here. This was *not* the most important preoccupation of the Africans and Afro-descendants presented in these stories. Instead African cultural tools allowed for adaptation and integration. Africans and their descendants used them to design novel strategies for dealing with a foreign land in which the natural and human landscape seemed and felt so much like home and at the same time so alien.

This evidence gainsays common ideas about the marginalization of African cultures, Africans, and Afro-descendants in Spanish colonial society. African culture was alive and well in Caribbean locales like Cartagena. Even under slavery, Africans were able to implement successful strategies of accommodation to the New World. Practices designed to care for the sick were among the most successful. Far from being mirror images of specific African beliefs, rituals and objects, African and African-derived healing arts in the Caribbean blended together several African traditions. In these stories, we find evidence of a complex process of re-imagination and re-categorization of the mysteries of the body and illness. Rather than re-creating Africa, African *Mohanes*, *cirujanos*, *brujos* and *yerbateros* were imagining a new world.

CHAPTER V

OTHERWORLDLY COLONIZERS: DEATH AND THE DEAD IN THE EARLY MODERN AFRICAN SPANISH CARIBBEAN

Acuérdome de que vi una vez, entre otros muchos, dos ya muertos, desnudos en carnes en el puro suelo, como si fuesen bestias, las bocas hacia arriba abiertas y llenas de moscas.

Alonso de Sandoval, 1627

The stench of death percolated through the wooden walls of the slaver vessels on their arrival in Cartagena de Indias' port. The smell was so overpowering that according to witnesses "there is not a Spaniard who would risk putting his head inside the hatch, or who would spend one hour inside, without gravely risking getting ill. Such is the stench, tightness and misery of this place."¹ Below the ship decks, hundreds of African captives awaited their immediate fate. In many cases these forced immigrants to the Americas would not survive their first weeks in the New World. They arrived "hechos unos esqueletos" [like skeletons]. Priests from the Company of Jesus desperately tried to reach harbor as rapidly as possible when it was announced that a slave ship had anchored in the bay. However, "even though they strive with all their will to get [to the docks] on time, they always find many [slaves] already dead and others about to die."² *Tabardillo, Vomito Negro, Camaras*, and other

¹ "[N]o hay Español que se atreva a poner la cabeza al escotillón sin almadiarse, ni a perseverar dentro una hora sin riesgo de grave enfermedad. Tal es la hediondez, apretura y miseria de aquel lugar." Alonso de Sandoval, *Instauranda aethiopum salute; el mundo de la esclavitud negra en América* [Sevilla, 1627], ed Angel Valtierra (Bogotá, Empresa Nacional de Publicaciones, 1956), 107.

² "[A]unque ponen en acudir con tiempo todo su cuidado, siempre hallan algunos ya muertos...y otros que apenas los alcanza." *Ibid.*, 108

pestilences would kill as many as three in ten of those surviving the middle passage.³ Alonso de Sandoval, the rector of the Jesuit College in Cartagena wrote about this fateful disembarkment.

There is nothing it can be done to avoid that many [slaves] arrive sick...When they are disembarked, the warehouses becomes a hospital. [Supplied] by slaves [passing away] in the hospital, the cemetery gets populated of the dead. Some of them die of *cámaras*, which tortures them with cruel pains in the sides of their bellies. [Others] are killed by strong fevers, some others by *viruelas*, *tabardillo* and *sarampión*. [Yet others] die from an illness called *of Loanda*. [This disease] is incurable. The bodies of [the sufferers of the illness of Loanda] get swollen, and their gums rot, after which they die suddenly.⁴

Africans were not the only people dying in the city. Early modern Cartagena was a raucous and viciously violent place. Cartagenos often settled debts, love disputes and arguments to the sound of clinking spades. As in many other cities in the early modern world, hangings, decapitation, and burnings at the stake were weekly occurrences. Legend has it that the dungeons of the Forts of San Luis de Bocachica had wells full of sharks fed by traitors to

³ Illnesses that will become known later in the following matter: *Camaras* as Dysentery; *Viruelas* as Smallpox; *Tabardillo* as Typhus; *Sarampion* as measles; and *Illness of Loanda* as scurvy. There are not precise numbers on the number of captive Africans that died during the middle passage, let alone how many died from illness or malnutrition. Around 10 to 33% of all Africans captured in the Old World would perish in their journey to the Americas. Death rates varied enormously depending on the place of origin of the captives. The longer the journey was, the higher the chances of dying before reaching American soil. In addition, different traders allocated different amounts of space and provisions for the journey. Navigation technology and increases in the amount of cargo carried by slaver vessels also affected notoriously the outcome of the middle passage. See Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: a Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975), 279-286; Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730-1830* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴ “Nada basta para que no enfermen muchos en llegando...con lo cual la casa y armazón esta hecha un hospital de enfermos, de donde se puebla el cementerio de muertos, acabando unos de cámaras que les dan crueles, de dolor de costado, de recias calenturas, otros de viruelas tabardillo y sarampión y de un mal que llaman de loanda incurable, con que se les hincha todo el cuerpo y pudren las encías, de que suelen morir de repente.” De Sandoval, 108.

the Crown. The carnage reached a climax when war and epidemics visited Cartagena de Indias. Man and nature hastily dispatched Europeans, Africans and natives alike in the infernal humid tropic of the Caribbean coast. In that “*emporio de todas las naciones*” that Cartagena was in the seventeenth century, death was all around.⁵

Shadowing almost every aspect of their lives, death and dying were certainly matters of pressing importance for seventeenth-century Cartageneros. Scholars have paid scant, if any, attention to this seminal aspect of the lives of early modern inhabitants of the Spanish Caribbean.⁶ This chapter looks at the role African rituals and ideas about death and dying played in the shaping of early modern Spanish Caribbean culture and society. As Joseph Roach explains, the process of dying creates simultaneously the realm of the dead and alive. In shaping these two clearly defined states, it emerges as an unstable, fluid and rich stage that “tends to generate the most intense experiences of ritual expectancy, activity, and meaning.”⁷ Thus in the “space of death,” as Michael Taussing would have it, rituals were particularly effective, and necessary for the reaffirmation of cosmogonies as well for the integration of African concepts into the lived experience of early modern *Caribeños*.⁸

These determining “interstitial” moments of passing, I suggest, were essential in the “africanization” of Cartagena’s society. Rites around death have the potential for creating “moral boundaries” and “ideals and standards of human conduct” in specific societal and

⁵ Juan M. Pacheco, *Los Jesuitas en Colombia*. (Bogotá: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 1989), 275.

⁶ In the Spanish Caribbean, literature has looked at death and rituals of death during the seventeenth century uniquely as evidence for denouncing mistreatment and increased mortality. No work has been specifically devoted to this topic. Tangentially touching it are, amongst others, Linda A. Newson, and Susie Minchin, *From Capture to Sale: The Portuguese Slave Trade to Spanish South America in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Jaime H. Borja Gómez, *Inquisición, Muerte y Sexualidad en el Nuevo Reino de Granada*. (Bogotá: Editorial Ariel, 1996). María Cristina Navarrete, *Génesis y Desarrollo de la Esclavitud en Colombia Siglos XVI y XVII* (Cali: Programa Editorial, Universidad del Valle, 2005).

⁷ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 37.

⁸ Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

cultural scenarios.⁹ They help in the creation of behavioral limits and categories of what is acceptable and cherished, or, on the contrary, uncanny and derided.¹⁰ In Cartagena, because of the fluidity of the interactions between the supernatural and natural realms, such morals and ideals stemmed not only from the rites themselves but also from the constant interactions between the living and the dead. As elsewhere, natural explanations were clearly involved in Cartagena's folk conception of death. Yet, as I will show, they rarely sufficed. Instead, Cartageneros frequently conceptualized death as having its roots in supernatural events of some sort. African ideas about such supernatural realm were prevalent in the early modern Spanish Caribbean.

Cartagena's society was far more heterodox than traditional accounts of Iberian backwardness and rigidity would have us believe.¹¹ To be sure, an important section of Cartagena's inhabitants thought about death and dying in ways that did not involve African ideas. Nevertheless, as this chapter shows, African conceptions of death were powerfully present in everyday explanations about why, for instance, one would drop dead in the middle of dinner, or the nefarious origin of a deadly "calentura cuartana." [intermittent fever].¹²

Culture is, of course, universally adaptative.¹³ As I advance elsewhere in this dissertation, in the New World African concepts were modified to fit the new realities in which they were enacted. Still, they were clearly African in origin. The ability to transmute,

⁹ Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 62; Thomas W. Laqueur, "Bodies, Death, and Pauper Funerals," *Representations* 1 (1983): 109-131.

¹⁰ See, Pierre Bordieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984)

¹¹ See Stuart B. Schwartz, *All Can Be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

¹² Usually associated with malaria, the calenturas could be "Cuartanas," appearing every four days, or "Tercianas," appearing every third day.

¹³ I do not think that, as James Sweet argues, this was a defining and unique characteristic of early modern West-Central African cultures. See, James H. Sweet, "African Identity and Slave Resistance in The Portuguese Atlantic Sweet," in *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550-1624*, ed. Peter C. Mancall (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

borrow, share and transmit rites and beliefs, marked the way in which people in the Spanish Caribbean, Europeans, Africans and their descendants alike, perceived and made sense of death and dying. Complementing what scholars like Vincent Brown have argued for eighteenth century Jamaica, I advance in this chapter that death in Cartagena, and the rituals it elicited, were not only points for differentiation and struggle.¹⁴ Slavery was without doubt a deadly brutal business and, as the stories opening the next section show, slave owners of different origins, Europeans and Africans alike, maimed, killed and dislocated generations of Africans in ways that are hard to imagine today. However, seeing Africans as only victims of what certainly was a violent and oppressive social system, or as reacting to it, misses what, in my view, are the most obvious and prevalent integrative social interactions of Africans and their descendents in the Iberian world. As I advance in the rest of this dissertation, Africans and their descendants looked for social advancement and integration and were tremendously successful and resourceful in achieving such objectives.

The events I describe here hint at some of the strategies and instruments used by varieties of people in Cartagena to make sense of the world around them. This chapter, hence, looks at ways of knowing and perceiving rather than at modern explanations of death and dying. For death in the seventeenth-century Caribbean cannot be reduced to modern scientific terms. In Wyatt MacGaffey's words, we should "recognize the irreducibility of these testimonies to life in another world and to imagine in our turn a reality based on very different assumptions about personhood, agency, life and death, and the nature of power."¹⁵

¹⁴ Like Vincent Brown or Jason Young, amongst others, have argued. See Jason R Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); also Vincent Brown, "Spiritual Terror and Sacred Authority in Jamaican Slave Society". *Slavery and Abolition* 24 (2002): 24-53.

¹⁵ Wyatt MacGaffey, *Kongo Political Culture: The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 2000), 17.

The Africans and Europeans, slaves and Inquisitors, protagonists of the accounts that follow have all long since disappeared. These early modern *Caribeños* did not fall prey to Yellow Fever. Instead, they died from “*Vomito Negro*,” a distinct and ominous entity with quite different origins and consequences.¹⁶ Similarly, simple poisoning, or drowning were not always straightforward explanations for demise. Powerful forces were at play in the humid heat of the Caribbean.

Pestilences and Pirates

Death was ever present in the Spanish Caribbean. Arriving vessels plagued by pestilences, like the ones described by Alonso de Sandoval, were supposed to be quarantined. Spanish Crown officials in the city, together with a *protomedico*, one of the official physicians working for the Crown in the port, were supposed to inspect incoming vessels in Cartagena's bay before they were allowed to anchor in the port. Yet, as in the rest of the continent, bribes were the norm, and ship captains usually allocated money for the smoothing of the inspection and for port officials and physicians to turn a blind eye to ulcers, fevers and buboes. In addition, bootlegging was prevalent all around the Caribbean and smugglers were, naturally, even more liberal in disembarking sick “passengers.”¹⁷

Not surprisingly, thus, plagues frequently made their way into the city during the

¹⁶ The “Scientification” of the world of illness and dead continued in the nineteenth century to develop measurable categories for statistical purposes and finally to the identification of microscopic agents causing many of illnesses with the emergence of the “Germ theory of disease.” See Jon Arrizabalaga, “Medical Responses to the ‘French Disease’ in Europe at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century,” in ed. Kevin Patrick Siena, *Sins of the Flesh: Responding to Sexual Disease in Early Modern Europe* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2005); Also Mary Lindemann’s useful survey, Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Mark Harrison, *Disease and the Modern World: 1500 to the Present Day*. (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

¹⁷ See Lance R. Grahn, *The Political Economy of Smuggling: Regional Informal Economies in Early Bourbon New Granada*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997).

seventeenth century.¹⁸ Although Royal and ecclesiastic officials recorded and described several of these pestilences, most remained unidentified and many did not even make it into the records. Among the ones documented are pestilences of *Viruela* and *Sarampion* in 1619 that, according to Cartagena's council, killed 2,000 slaves;¹⁹ *Tabardillo* in 1629 and 1639;²⁰ *Viruela* in 1587 and in 1692, the first bout lasting for a decade and killing around 90% of the Native American population; *Sarampion* in 1692; and the feared *Vomito Negro* that arrived in 1650, and which in 1651 killed around 7,000 people including Jesuit priest Pedro Claver from the Jesuit College with nine of his colleges.²¹

Other unnamed pestilences also visited Cartagena. In 1625, for instance, Pedro Ferrera de Barros, a Portuguese merchant living in Cartagena wrote to the Marquis del Basto in Europe,

[O]f the things that have happened in this city and province from the contagious illness that struck it. It is something of which it is better not to speak. Many noble people, and even more plebeians, died...being in the list of the dead, besides many more of whom there is not notice, one thousand and two hundred that, because this land is so small, amount to a great quantity.²²

The Governor, Fernando de la Riba Agüero, also wrote about the pestilence to the

¹⁸ For instance on August 25, 1699, Cartagena's council wrote to Seville about the dire fate of three boats arriving with guards for the prison and the city that, "With the variation of temperatures and the long voyage, the people who came to become guards in such ships suffered an epidemic. [From such epidemic] resulted many deaths and more than one third of the guards died. Because of this reason, the dwellers [of the city] had to start making the rounds themselves." AGI, Santa Fe, 64, Exp.43, Fol. 2r.

²¹ AGI, Santa Fe, 63, número 22.

²⁰ Andrés Soriano Lleras. *La Medicina en el Nuevo Reino de Granada Durante la Conquista y la Colonia* (Bogotá: Editorial Kelly, 1972). 79.

²¹ Archivo General de la Nación de Colombia, Bogotá, Colombia (hereafter AGN) Bolivar, Fol. 557

²² "[D]e las cosas que han sucedido en esta ciudad y provincia del mal contagioso que en el la dio que es muy para silencio que no para hablar. Muriose en esta ciudad mucha gente noble y mas de la plebeya...habiendo de lista de los muertos fuera de los mas que no se saben mil y docientos que para tierra tan pequeña viene a ser mucha cantidad." Archivo Histórico Nacional de España, Madrid, Spain, (hererafter AHN), Diversos- Colecciones 27, N.25, Fol. 2r.

Count of Fernanbuco in Spain saying that from it “died just in one day more than eight hundred people.”²³ Epidemics struck Cartagena periodically. On August 25, 1699, Cartagena's council wrote to Seville about the dire fate of three boats arriving with guards for the prison and the city that, “with the variation of temperatures and the long voyage, the people who came to become guards in such ships suffered an epidemic. [From such epidemic] resulted many deaths and more than one third of the guards died. Because of this reason, the dwellers [of the city] had to start making the rounds themselves.”²⁴

War and frequent pirate attacks contributed to the carnage. Among the most famous events, Sir Francis Drake attacked and occupied the city from February 9th until March 26th, 1586.²⁵ French corsair Pointis plundered, burned and sacked the city from April 16th to July 1, 1697.²⁶ Catastrophically less successful was British Vice-Admiral Edward Vernon's attack on Cartagena during the War of Jenkins' Ear in 1741. During that most important battle of the war, Vernon lost close to 18,000 of his 25,000 strong expeditionary force, the largest British naval campaign up to then, on the beaches of what today are the elite neighborhoods of Bocagrande and el Laguito in the southwestern part of Cartagena.²⁷ The rigors of combat

²³ “[M]urieron en cuarenta días mas de 800 personas.”AHN, Diversos-Colecciones,27,N.26, Fol.2r

²⁴ “[C]on la mutación de temperaturas y el dilatado viaje que tuvieron las tres naos [naves] se experimento en esta ciudad entre la gente que vino de presidio una epidemia de que se originaron repetidas muertes y perecieron en ellas mas de la tercera parte quedando por esta razón los vecinos en la misma necesidad de hacer guardias.” Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain, (Hereafter AGI), Santa Fe, 64, Exp.43, Fol. 2r.

²⁵ He also exacted 110,000 ducats in ransom from the Spanish Crown. Walter Bigges, Croftes, and Baptista Boazio *Expeditio Francisci Draki eqvitis Angli in Indias Occidentales a. M.D.LXXXV. Quâ vrbes, Fanum D. Iacobi, D. Dominici, D. Augustini & Carthagenae, captae fuere. Additis passim regionum locorumque omnium tabulis geographicis quàm accuratissimis.* (Leydae: Apud Fr. Raphelengium, 1588).

²⁶ Jean-Bernard-Louis Desjean Pointis, *Monsieur De Pointi's Expedition to Cartagena Being a Particular Relation, I. Of the Taking and Plundering of That City, by the French, in the Year 1697, II. Of Their Meeting with Admiral Nevil, in Their Return, and the Course They Steer'd to Get Clear of Him, III. Of Their Passing by Commadore Norris, at Newfound-Land, IV. Of Their Encounter with Capt. Harlow, at Their Going into Brest.* (London: S. Crouch, 1699).

²⁷ Edward Vernon, and Thomas Wentworth, *Authentic Papers Relating to the Expedition against Carthagenae Being the Resolutions of the Councils of War : Both of Sea and Land-Officers Respectively, at Sea and on Shore : Also the Resolutions of the General Council of War, Composed of Both Sea and Land-Officers, Held on Board the Princess Carolina, &C. : with Copies of the Letters Which Have Passed between Admiral Vernon and General Wentworth : and Also between the Governor of Carthagenae and the Admiral. Miscellaneous pamphlets,*

and disease dispatched scores of Vernon's fellow Britons. In the words of one of the officers of the expeditionary force sent to invade the city, “the corps of troops, which were then on shore, must, by sickness only, in a few days have been reduced so low, as not to be able to bring off their cannon.”²⁸ He continues in his journal, “April the 13th, great numbers of sick both officer and soldiers were sent on board ...the sickness amongst the troop increases to so great a degree that any longer continuance in that unhealthy situation, seemed to threaten no less than their total ruin; the General therefore, and the principal Land Officers, agreed to the Admiral's [Vernon] proposal, for demolishing the forts...that being done, and water taken in for the voyage the whole fleet set sail for *Jamaica* [emphasis in original].”²⁹

Like Britons, African slaves commonly fell prey to disease in the New World. The “seasoning period,” after which rates of illness and death decreased dramatically, could last as much as six months. Before the acclimatization was over, however, up to thirty percent of Africans, and a third to forty five percent of Europeans, had died.³⁰ Linda Newson and Susie Munchin, using Portuguese slave trader’s records from Lima has shown that up to 5.68% of

(London: L. Raymond-J.M., 1744).

<<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/Sabin?af=RN&ae=CY101148289&srcthp=a&ste=14&locID=new64731>> Accessed March 14, 2009.

²⁸ *A Journal of the Expedition to Carthage. With Notes. In Answer to a Late Pamphlet, Entitled, An Account of the Expedition to Carthage.* (Dublin: George Faulkner, 1744), 45. Miscellaneous Pamphlet Collection (Library of Congress), Jay I. Kislak Collection (Library of Congress).

http://books.google.com/books?id=xz_tQNkXX6IC&printsec=frontcover&dq=A+Journal+of+the+Expedition+to+Carthage.+With+Notes.+In+Answer+to+a+Late+Pamphlet&source=bl&ots=fyAHxMLIgd&sig=kXu73JF0sk_beUSyGDBm8zYNmR8&hl=en&ei=szTgS5zjC4a69QT3jJTbCQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CAYQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed May 1, 2010)

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁰ We do not have reliable data for most of the seventeenth century. These estimates are extrapolations from late seventeenth and eighteenth century statistics, mostly from the British Caribbean. Miller, *Way of Death*, 440; Thad W. Tate, and David Ammerman. *The Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century: Essays on Anglo-American Society* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 113. Michael Haines and Richard H. Steckel, *A Population History of North America* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 169; Herbert Klein, *S. A Population History of the United States* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 42. Susan E. Klepp, “Seasoning and Society: Racial Differences in Mortality in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 51 (July 1994): 473-506; also Kenneth F. Kiple, *The Caribbean Slave: A Biological History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

slaves in transit for Lima would die during their layover in Cartagena de Indias.³¹

Malnutrition, exposure to the elements, exhaustion and the vicissitudes of life in the tropical forest, where many Africans and their descendants worked, increased their chances for encountering death early in their lives. Yet, if for no other reason than plain business interests, slave owners were, for the most, reasonably concerned with the wellbeing and health of their property.³²

Putrid Pits and Swimming Corpses

Independent of their condition, early modern Cartagenos generally died in houses, plazas and streets. Unlike modern sanitized versions of death in hospitals or nursing homes, death in Cartagena was a dirty, bloody and smelly business, even in the crammed seventeenth century versions of hospitals. So many died in such places that by the eighteenth century Cartagena's governor Anastasio Zejudo wrote to his superiors asking them for the allocation of a lot to bury the steady stream of bodies coming from the Military hospital. According to the Governor, there was not enough place for the dead inside the San Carlos Hospital. He reported to Madrid saying that, "This morning we opened a sepulcher for three who died last night. We put them with the other bodies that were still complete and causing much stench all over the hospital. With all the tides the corpses swim below ground and do not become consumed."³³ According to the governor there were so many corpses that it had been necessary to bury them in the kitchen's threshold as the rest of the hospital was full. The

³¹ Linda Newson and Susie Munchin, "Slave mortality and African Origins: a View from Cartagena, Colombia, in the Early Seventeenth Century." *Slavery & Abolition*. 25(3) 2004:18-43.

³² See chapter one and five of this dissertation for a more ample discussion of the particular conditions under which Africans lived in early modern Iberian colonies and, specially, in the large port cities of the Caribbean, Havana and Cartagena.

³³ AGN, Colonia, Hospitales y Cementerios, 2, Fols. 9r-40r

stench was such that the governor was worried about the sick people in the hospital because “they are so close to these putrid pits...which stench is, by itself, enough to make everybody ill.”³⁴

When possible, Africans and Europeans preferred to be buried below churches’ floors.³⁵ Churches’ underground swarmed with bodies of all origins. Africans, as the rest of the population, had reserved sections for their group’s entombment.³⁶ For example in 1622 the king sent a communication to Cartagena’s governor and bishop asking about an increase in the payments for the burial of slaves in the cathedral the bishop had ordered. In being buried in churches, however, Africans like were not ascribing uniquely to Christian customs. West Central African ideas about how souls remained in bodies until these dried out, plausibly made it desirable, for Africans coming from this region, as well as for many other exposed to Congo and Angola mores, to spend this period in good company, with friends and family. Furthermore, in places like *Kongo*, churches became places of power. According to John Thornton, churches themselves were considered powerful *minkisi* [power objects]. Churches, thus, became associated with the power of the dead interred in their floors and came thus, to be viewed as the ultimate place for “evangelization.” They functioned, paradoxically, as symbols of Africans' cultural appropriation of Christian rites and objects for

³⁴ “[S]u inmediación a estas corrompidas fosas...cuya fetidez por si sola es capaz de un contagio general. AGN, Colonia, Hospitales y Cementerios, 2, Fols. 9r-40r

³⁵ For an excellent treatment of European attitudes towards the dead body in medieval and early modern Europe see, Vanessa Harding, “Whose Body? A study of Attitudes Towards the Dead Body in Early Modern Paris, in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 170-187. Also Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall, “Placing the Death in Medieval en Early Modern Europe, in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-16.

³⁶ See María Cristina Navarrete, *Prácticas religiosas de los negros en la colonia: Cartagena, siglo XVII*. Santiago de Cali: Universidad del Valle, Editorial Facultad de Humanidades, 1995), 77

the enactment of their own rites and beliefs.³⁷

When not buried in churches, bodies were thrown into the sea or laid to rest in low lying areas in the patios of the houses, jails and hospitals and some even came back to haunt their undertakers.³⁸ Not until the nineteenth century did Cemeteries become the usual final destination of most Cartagenos. Until then tides frequently flushed bodies under the ground and into the sea and adjacent lakes and returned them to the shores outside the city walls.

“Desnudos y sin abrigo ni amparo alguno”

Like Britons, Africans were terrified of arriving at this land of pestilence and death. After all they had just navigated across the Atlantic Ocean, considered by many groups, particularly West Central Africans, as one of the places of residence of the dead, and whose bottom was littered with so many of the corpses of their country men.³⁹ For Africans, arriving in Cartagena was to continue a long “march of the dead,” that had started back in the African forests and savannahs where they were captured. For many, such a horrific journey of murder, starvation and illness started in battles between African Kingdoms and chieftaincies where they lost many of their kin and friends. Death was, thus, the marker of the transit from Africa to the Americas and shaped African ideas and remembrances about the journey. Such concepts included the widely disseminated notion amongst Africans that Europeans were

³⁷ John K. Thornton, “The Development of an African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1491-1750”. *Journal of African History*. 25 (1984): 155, 157. and John K. Thornton, “On the Trail of Voodoo: African Christianity in Africa and the Americas” *The Americas*, 44 (January 1988): 266-67.

³⁸ After hanging himself, Francisco Angola, was buried in “La huerta de su amo” [his master’s backyard]. AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 281v. Pedro Lopez de Vaca was buried in “El patio de las carceles” [in the jail’s yard] AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 281r.

³⁹ Wyatt MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa: The BaKongo of Lower Zaire*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 198; Miller, *Way of Death*, 4-6; Andele Fu kiâu, *N’Kongo ye nza yakun’zungidila: nza Kongo. Le Mukongo et le monde qui l’entourait; cosmogonie Kôngo* (Kinshasa: Office National de la Recherche et de Development, 1969), 118; Anne Hilton. *The Kingdom of Kongo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 50.

sequestering them to kill and eat them and that red wine, of which the white people were so fond, was made out of African blood.⁴⁰

African bodies were left to rot and be devoured by beasts in Africa's fields and by fish in the middle of the ocean, or abandoned in Cartagena's streets "naked and without cover or any help...and without anybody who cares about their souls. It is such their situation that it is doubtful that they are dying of their illnesses and rather they die of abandonment."⁴¹ As I will show, without having been properly dispatched, these spirits stayed, in the view of West and West Central Africans, in a restless state and at the mercy of evil influences.

Africans' belief in the permanence of their countrymen's infuriated spirits in the city is more understandable after learning about the treatment "*negreros*" [slavers] gave to black bodies. According to the rector of the Jesuit College in Cartagena, Alonso de Sandoval, when, during the first decades of the seventeenth century an African slave died in one of Cartagena's slave warehouses, slavers heedlessly tossed the body in a corner of the room wrapped in a worn mat. More frequently, however, they "left them naked in the patios, in the yards, in the corners where the gravity of illness caught up with them."⁴² Secluded in warehouses, as in Africa, scores of newly arrived Africans fell prey to variegated scourges, including *viruelas* and *calenturas*, before they could even be put to auction. Slavers housed forced African immigrants in "big rooms with wooden walls. They devised these places for those [slaves] without hope and throw them there. The slaves cry in the midst of all that misery and misfortune. Finally, eaten by flies, on top of each other, ones over and others

⁴⁰ For a recent treatment of African notions of white cannibalism see John K. Thornton, "Cannibals, Witches, and Slave Traders in the Atlantic World," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 60, (April, 2003):273-294

⁴¹ "[D]esnudos y sin abrigo, ni amparo alguno...sin que ni de sus cuerpos ni de sus ánimas haya quien se duela, que se duda con mucho fundamento si es la causa de su muerte su gran desamparo o sus enfermedades." De Sandoval, 108.

⁴² "[L]os dejaba desnudos en los patios, en los corrales, en los rincones, donde les cogía la gravedad de la enfermedad." De Sandoval, 109

below the wooden tables, they die.”⁴³ The isolation of the surviving Africans further aggravated this terrible situation. For them, the New World to which they just arrived was a place of solitude, one that was haunted by the souls of the ones left behind.

With rituals of death and dying, Africans infused local culture with their own. But the colonizing and *Africanization* of Cartagena had a more material component. By dying and being buried in American ground Africans were colonizing the world of the dead, the underground, and consequently the world of the living, with their own people. Rites of death were thus not only means of cultural appropriation but also strategies for claiming a land and a place.

The African Dead

For Africans the New World was a world of ghosts and “evil spirits.” The souls of the thousands of bodies left behind in their path from the Americas without receiving proper departing rites haunted the fields of Africa and the Ocean on which they were dumped. It is sensible to presume that such desecration signified for most surviving Africans a brutal disruption with their culture and social networks, a betrayal of their ancestors and traditions.⁴⁴ As Melville Herskovits would have it, ancestors represented for Africans “the most important single sanctioning force for the coaxial system and the codes of behavior that underlie it.”⁴⁵

In West and West Central Africa, ancestors were active members of the society and

⁴³ “[U]nos grandes aposentados todos rodeados de tablas. Estos lugares, pues, tenían disputados sin remedio alguno para los desahuciados; allí los arrojan y entre aquella miseria y desventura se lamentaban, y allí finalmente, comidos de moscas, unos encima de los tablados, otros debajo de ellos, morían.” De Sandoval, 109.

⁴⁴ Brown, *Reaper's*, 43

⁴⁵ Melville J. Herskovits and Frances S. Herskovits, *Trinidad Village* (New York: A.A. Knopf 1947), 300; quoted in Brown, *Reaper's*, 65. For modern accounts see Monica Schuler, “Enslavement, the Slave Voyage and Astral and Aquatic Journeys in African Diaspora Discourse,” in *Africa and the Americas: Interconnections During the Slave Trade*, ed. José C. Curto and Renée Soulodre-LaFrance (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2005), 185-214.

exerted their influence in everyday affairs.⁴⁶ In Angola, Giovanni Cavazzi, a capuchin missionary who lived for several decades among natives, experienced first hand how entrenched were such beliefs after Ginga, Queen of Ndongo and Matamba (ca 1582-1663), died.⁴⁷ The capuchin missionary reported that warriors of her house “did various warlike acts, and settled that they would die where their Queen was buried and would fight to the death to defend the place where the deceased had died, and there kill someone so that the spirit of the dead person should not harm the living.”⁴⁸ In Kongo, the cult of the dead ones took different forms but was similarly organized. The most active participants in them were the direct descendants of the *Kanda*, the dead ones. In the late sixteenth century Father Bonaventura da Corella wrote that in Congo, the “children and near relatives pay their respects every new moon to the dead leaving food and palm wine in the graves...after they feasted and ate and drank as much as their bodies allowed.”⁴⁹

The Branes from Upper Guinea, also considered ancestors as active participants of every day activities. For the Branes, ancestors were capable of harming them and part of their extended family through illness. De Sandoval writes about how groups from the rivers of Guinea visited the altars for their ancestors “to talk with the dead people and tell them about

⁴⁶ See amongst many others, Linda Heywood and John K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Making of the Foundation of the Americas, 1585-1660* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 72-90.

⁴⁷ Queen Ginga was known by several variations of her name. Amongst many others: *Queen Nzinga, Nzinga I, Queen Nzinga Mdongo, Nzinga Mbandi, Nzinga Mbande, Jinga, Singa, Zhingha, Ginga, Njinga, Njingha, Ana Nzinga, Ngola Nzinga, Nzinga of Matamba, Queen Nzinga of Ndongo, Zinga, Zingua, Ann Nzinga, Nxingha, Mbande Ana Nzinga, Ann Nzinga, Dona Anna de Sousa, and Dona Ana de Sousa*. She was the Queen of the Ndongo and Matamba Kingdoms of the Mbundu people West-Central Africa.

⁴⁸ Giovanni A. Cavazzi, “Missione Evangelica nel Regno de Congo”, MS 1668, Book II, Chapter 11, Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi (1621-1678) was a Capuchin monk who lived in Angola and Congo from 1654 to 1677. As the rest of the Capuchin and Jesuit missionaries I am quoting here, Cavazzi had lived for a long time with Africans. Their accounts differ substantially from later traveler accounts in substance and detail. Similarly, they showed a sophisticated understanding of African social and cultural mores. Something that, obviously, was not accessible to other more fleeting visitors from Europe who had limited and obfuscated contact with African people in the early modern and modern era.

⁴⁹ Bonaventura da Corella, *Report on Indigenous Kongo Religion*, quoted by Hilton, 12.

their works and to ask God to keep them [the ancestors' spirits] away from them.”⁵⁰

As in Angola, and Guinea, in Zaragoza, south of Cartagena, the dead participated in communal rites and could affect the activities of every day life. According to the testimony of Leonor Zape, an African *bozal* from the Zape region in Upper Guinea,

All this meetings took place within the limits of Zaragoza, in its mines and villages as well as in other places. In the most important meetings more than one hundred and fifty persons got together and separated in groups of twenty...[I]n these main meetings the devil brought many hogs of wine, cakes, *cuzcuz*, plantains and all the things that the Blacks eat...[I]n other meetings about “one hundred Black women and men, from different nations, witches men and women, *dead and alive* [my emphasis], whom this defendant saw, get together to perform the rites and ceremonies that she has declared.”⁵¹

De Sandoval colleagues recorded similar rites when talking about the *etiopes de los rios de Guinea*, Africans from the Guinea rivers, the region of origin of Leonor Zape.

According to De Sandoval, “In each kingdom there is a place dedicated to the demon where they go to make the more solemn sacrifices, and that the demons are so feared that [when passing in front of their statues] they offered them rice, oil or any other thing that they

⁵⁰ “[P]ara hablar con los difuntos y a darles cuentas de sus trabajos para que rueguen a Dios les libre de ellos.” De Sandoval, 70.

⁵¹ “[T]odas estas juntas se hacían en el termino de Zaragoza y sus minas y rancherías y no en otras partes y que en las principales se juntarían mas de ciento y cincuenta y después se dividían de veinte en veinte...y en las dichas juntas principales traía el demonio muchas botijas de vino, bolos, *cuzcuz*, plátanos y todo lo que comen los negros y alli comían y bebían esta y los demás...En otras audiencias 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 cermonias que tiene declaradas.” AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 213v-214r. The depositions of those who attended such juntas emphasize their African quality. The officers, or demons, were more often than not, African themselves. Guiomar Bran, from the Bran region also in Upper Guinea, said in 1618 that in Zabaletas' at *juntas* she attended with Leonor Zape, the demon appeared in the form of a “Negro, en cueros con solo un *calambe* [taparrabo] o pañete que tapaba sus vergüenzas y en la cabeza un paño negro con que tapaba su cuernos.” A Black, naked, only with a loincloth or handkerchief that covered his private parts and in his head a black cloth with which [he] hid his horns.” AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 217r.

happen to be carrying with them.”⁵² But of course, all these references to demons are, most probably, European readings of cult to ancestors rather than, necessarily, specific divinities.

The same was true further south, although, with more bloody features in Africa. Writing about the customs of the Fulani, Popos and Ardras in the Bight of Benin, De Sandoval said that, “To honor his ancestors, hundred of Blacks get together...[They] sacrifice sixteen thousand souls, men and women.” They opened the victims guts and “left them tied to trees where vultures eat them.” They also sacrificed “one hundred and fifty maidens, of age of fourteen to sixteen years old...[The executioners] cut their hands and feet from the root and like trunks throw them alive inside a vault that they cover with a tombstone, where they scream and moan until they die.”⁵³

Besides recording particular African customs and rituals, European observers of seventeenth century West and West Central Africa remarked on the centrality and pervasive presence of death in these societies. Robin Law for instance, refers to the use of ritual decapitation in pre-colonial Dahomey.⁵⁴ Like the rest of the then-known world, Africa was an extremely violent and brutal place where death was an everyday occurrence and, as today, preyed ferociously on the corporally, politically and/or socially weak. Casual and ritual killing of slaves' and royal subjects' was as much a European as an African practice, and not the parcel of savage Africans, or Native Americans, as some of the early modern chroniclers seemed to emphasize.

Independent of their societal status while alive, the dead became subversively

⁵² “[Q]ue en cada reino hay un lugar dedicado al demonio donde van a hacer los sacrificios mas solemnes; y son tan temidos los demonios que cerca de ellos pasan que porque no les maten ofrecen cuanto llegan enfrente del arroz, aceite, o cualquier otra cosa de las que llevan en la mano.” De Sandoval, 71

⁵³ De Sandoval, 81.

⁵⁴ Robin Law, “My Head Belongs to the King: On the Political and Ritual Significance of Decapitation in Pre-Colonial Dahomey,” *Journal of African History*. 30 (1989): 399-415.

powerful once in the supernatural realm. They were unpredictable, often staying around their tombs and being quite demanding and dangerous to their immediate surviving kin.⁵⁵ Because of this, people in Angola took special care of their predecessors. Cavazzi wrote that Angola people,

Observe this law [cult to the ancestors] with much zeal because not only do they keep cloth belonging to the departed person but also keep some part of the body, like the head, hairs, fingernails. They keep them in boxes which they call Missetos. Some of them are inlaid with gold, some with silver and yet others have signs and they adore and revere these [Missetos] as if the creator of life to whom one ought to give all honor and glory were enclosed in them.⁵⁶

Sometimes, however, the dead ones would appear with more fleshly countenances. Stereotypes about the living dead abound in Western popular perceptions and representations of African ritual practices and beliefs. As many authors have pointed out, this Eurocentric imposition of what is seemingly an impossibility has its origin, for the most part, in the misinterpretation of traditional African beliefs in the presence of ancestors in their lives. De Sandoval, for example, narrates the wondrous events witnessed by fellow Jesuits during the re-construction of a church in the Cacheo region in Upper Guinea when, “[the workers] hit the body of a woman who had died fourteen months ago and who was buried [and] was entirely [uncorrupted] and with the shroud and cordon as if had been just buried. At the moment when the person who was digging put his feet on her, [the digger] felt that [the

⁵⁵ Basically family spirits can only attack their own kin. MacGaffey, *Religion*, 519-20.

⁵⁶ Cavazzi, Book 1, Chapter 5, 60. Writing about the word Misseto in his excellent blog with the first complete English translation of the Cavazzi manuscript, John Thornton notices that “Nouns commencing with mi- in Kimbundu are already plurals. Cavazzi may have made a double plural, thus pluralizing the form according to both Kimbundu and Italian..” John Thornton, *The Araldi Manuscript*, <http://centralafricanhistory.blogspot.com/2008/08/book-1-chapter-5.html#_edn36> accessed 10-14-2008.

deceased woman] moved and rose up.”⁵⁷

Ritual specialists resurrected bodies all around West and West Central Africa. In seventeenth century Kongo if the ghost of an ancestor came back to harm the living, the *nganga atombola*, the “Priest of the resurrected,” dug up the corpse, resurrected it and interrogated the dead about what rites had not satisfied him. He then performed the rites in an adequate fashion and re-buried the body. Bodies’ resurrections were public events.⁵⁸

In Angola, when calamity struck, it was considered the work of the dead. Thus, in times of war, epidemics or natural disasters, ritual specialists performed special procedures.⁵⁹ However, conversation and interaction with dead ones was not restricted to the departed members of the family. Cavazzi, for example, tells how, before going to war, Angola warriors would visit the graves of deceased combatants and asked for their protection and advice in what seems to have been a guild-fraternity that transcended the limits between the earthly and the spiritual.⁶⁰

Like the Angola warriors, Cartagenero ritual specialists regularly reached over the threshold of death to draw potency from the afterlife. For example, when curing, Antonio Congo, a *bozal* living in Cartagena during the second half of the seventeenth century, took the reales [coins] he got for his cures and “threw them around in different places while saying

⁵⁷ “[D]ieron con el cuerpo de una mujer que había catorce meses que estaba enterrada, entero y la mortaja y cordón como si se acabara de enterrar entonces. Apenas puso los pies sobre ella el que iba cavando, cuando sintió que se movía y que se levantaba hacia arriba. Salto admirado fuera llamo a sus compañeros estos y el Padre, y al vicario de la población que fueron también testigos del caso....que averiguo sido la vida de aquella mujer malísima y llegando a tener trato con el mismo demonio.”De Sandoval, 71.

⁵⁸ Cavazzi, Book I, 100-101.

⁵⁹ Bernardino da Gallo called the type of rites he witnessed in Kongo *Chitampi* ceremonies P.Bonaventura da Corella, Report on Indigenous Kongo Religion, quoted in Hilton p13; Report of P. Beranardino da Gallo to Cardinal Guiseppe Sacripanti, Rome, 12 Dec. 1710. Quoted in Louis Jadin, *Le Congo et la Sected des Antoiniens. Restauration du Royaume sous Pedro IV et la 'Saint Antoine' Congalaise. Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* (1961), 453.

⁶⁰ Cavazzi, Book I, 114.

that this he did so *his people* helped him during his healings.”⁶¹ In this case, Antonio's “people” were the spirits helping him in his cures. Kongo *Baganga* could also use the power of spirits such as the *nkadi mpemba*. These spirits embodied a power of “destruction and protection associated with the social and cultural world of the individual man.”⁶² Europeans in seventeenth century Africa thought of them as “devil- dead-man, phantoms.” These spiritual entities were white, the color of the dead and the realm of the dead ones.⁶³

Dead people also participated in social rituals and shared food and company. Similarly to their situation in Africa, they inhabited the underworld. Antonio, wary of them, “when it was time to eat, threw two bites [of food] to his left and right before putting any in his mouth. He said that they were for the people of his devotion.”⁶⁴ Antonio also declared that “he threw [the bites] because he had been told that the ground on which he had build his hut was the cemetery of the chief Indians and that [he threw the food] so that the dead Indians] did not come to kill or suffocate him.”⁶⁵ Antonio feared the reaction of the dead natives living in the underworld of his shack should he not perform the adequate rites to pay them homage and feed them. In other words, Africans integrated in their cosmogony the dead of the new land in which they had arrived. They clearly considered indigenous dead as part of the underworld that had so much effect in their everyday lives.

Alonso Venero, a Cartagenero cowboy born in the Villa del Vayamo in Cuba,

⁶¹ “[L]os arrojaba a distintas partes diciendo [que] le hacia para pagar *a su gente* para que le ayudasen a las curaciones.” AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 478v.

⁶² Hilton, 16.

⁶³ Jean Barbot, *Barbot on Guinea: the writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa 1678-1712*, P.E.H. Hair Jones A. and Robin Law eds. (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1992), 490. Dapper Olfert, *Description de l'Afrique, contenant les noms, la situation & les confins de toutes ses parties, leurs rivieres, leurs villes & leurs habitations, leurs plantes & leurs animaux, les moeurs, les coûtumes, la langue, les richesses, la religion & le gouvernement de ses peuples* (Amsterdam: Wolfgang, Waesberge, Boom & van Someren, 1686). 176-177.

⁶⁴ “[A]l tiempo de comer antes de meter bocado en su boca arrojaba dos de dichos bocados a la parte diestra y siniestra diciendo eran para la gente de su devoción.” AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 477v

⁶⁵ “[E]l echarlo lo hacia por habersele dicho que el suelo donde este reo tenia su bohio era cantería de los indios caciques y que para que estos no viniesen [a] ahogar o matar a este reo.” AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 480r.

diseased, healed and, sometimes killed people. As his brother, who was also a ritual practitioner, Alonso interacted with *Babulares*, spirits of ancestors, that in his words were “*lo mismo que familiares*” [the same as family].⁶⁶ The *Babulares* helped him in his ritual affairs. He met for the first time one of them when,

While being in the country side, he had met some maroon slaves and their dogs. The maroons had killed a bull, and while they skinned it the dogs came to him, from which he got goose bumps. After the dogs, a dark skinned man came...He asked him if he wanted to admit him in his company. [Alonso] said yes and asked [the dark skinned man] who was he? [The man said that] he was a *babular*. After which this defendant said, so you are a *babular*[!]?⁶⁷

In this world of ancestral devotions, Africans and their descendants created and transmitted a particular vision of the world. The lives and deaths of the people that transpire in these pages happened all before, and in communion, with other human beings, dead and alive. In the New World, as in the Old, West and West-Central Africans, and their descendants, were born, grew, ate, slept and did most of their daily activities in close contact with other people; people that in their minds could be either dead or alive. For all of their power in controlling sprits and ancestors, *Baganga* like Antonio depended on their immaterial allies for their cures, and rituals of death and dying.

In 1680s Cartagena Antonio Congo, like his fellow countrymen back in Africa, used “a little drum which he played all night long making turns and talking, while being alone, as

⁶⁶ AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 243v. The world Babajar, or Babular could be related to the Yoruba term *Babalawo* that would become common in Cuba during the nineteenth century.

⁶⁷ “[H]abiendo salido afuera encontró cimarrones con unos perros habiendo muerto un toro al tiempo de quitarle el pellejo se huyeron los perros hacia este reo y a este se le erizaron los cabellos y al tiempo vio venir a un hombre de color pardo desbarbado y le pregunto si era aquel el primer toro que había muerto y si quería admitirle en su compañía dijole este que si y le pregunto [al dicho pardo] quien era [y] dijo que un *babular*, con que asustado este reo le dijo que sois *babular*?! AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 244r.

if he was with more people.”⁶⁸ The objects associated with the ritual had, as in most cultures, specific powers and were not to be used by the uninitiated. So thought Antonio, who said that “he could not loan his little drum because with it his people danced and that when he had once lent it, the mentioned *people* [the dead] had come. They did not let him sleep and scared him very much.” According to witnesses, the Congo *Mohan* [master of ritual specialists], frequently called *his people* “a deshoras de la noche” [late at night] when “he got up and went out to the patio and whistled three times, as if he was calling somebody, and after that he talked in a language as if he was talking to other people and that he did this very often.”⁶⁹

In Congo, as in most of West and West-Central Africa, drums were in the early modern period, as they are today, essential components of religious rituals. According to Dapper, in Kongo, in order to invoke the power of ancestors and spirits, *baganga*

[F]ill a gourd full with leaves and sticks. Then, the Ganga sits down and talks through his nose, as if being angry. Holding the cup against his knees, he makes sure that it bursts out sticks and leaves. Throughout the ceremony the Ganga holds between bells ?? that make a racket sound while two assistants hit, one an iron and the other one a drum ... The festivity of Bomba is celebrated to the sound of drums.⁷⁰

A full discussion of the significance of drums in ritual ceremonies invoking ancestors

⁶⁸ “Un tamborico en que tocaba toda la mas de la noche haciendo visajes y hablando estando solo como si estuviese con gente.” AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 478v.

⁶⁹ “[D]ecía no podía prestar dicho tamborico porque era con el que bailaba su gente y que por haberle prestado una ves avia venido la dicha su gente y no dejadole dormir y astado muchísimo.” After whisteling, “Se levantaba este reo y salia al patio donde daba tres silbos como si llamaba alguna persona y después hablaba lengua como que hablaba con gente y se volvía a dicha su cama lo cual hacia muy de costumbre.” AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 478v.

⁷⁰ “Pur obtenir la guiersion d'un malade est quelque chose de fort plaisant. Pur faire l'ouverture de la cérémonie, on apporte la tasse pleine de rateraz, le Ganga s'assied à adresser le discours à son propre nez, comme s'il étoit en colère, donnant de la tasse contre ses genoux, ensorte qu'elle crève et que la es rearatez en sortent... Pendant toute la cérémonie le Ganga tient des sonnettes entre ses doit, qui font un fieux tintamarre, tandis que deux des assistants frappent l'un sur un fer et l'autre sur un tambour...La Fête de *Bomba* se célébré au son du tambour.” Dapper, 336.

in Africa and the Americas escapes the limits of this dissertation. However, their importance has been remarked in several studies of African and African re-imagined American religions. African “dancing religions,” as they have been called, use complex ensemble and protocols of drumming for the summoning of spiritual and ancestral powers.⁷¹ Even today, they remain essential part of *Candomblé*, *Vodou*, *Santería*, and *Convince* practices, amongst others.⁷²

Before using his drums, Antonio went to the forest to look for power and herbs. Witnesses declared that he missed mass and other Catholic ceremonies because of his custom of “being always in the woods.”⁷³ Another West-Central African, Pedro Congo, looked for and made his cures out of herbs and sticks he found in the forest.⁷⁴ In *Kongo*, as in Cartagena, Africans thought of forests, and more generally wooden areas, as the places where the dead people lived. Alfonso King of Kongo, for instance, decried, in his Christian zeal, the “idolatrous custom” of burying the deceased in places called *infinda* inside the tropical forest. Several other chroniclers of pre-colonial Africa reported similar customs. It was in the woods where the power of ancestor could be summoned. Besides their strategic advantages, the tropical forests of Cartagena could have been seen by Africans as *power-places*, where ancestors and spirits could be summoned for help. Not surprisingly, most maroon camps

⁷¹ Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomblé* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005). Alfred Metraux, *Voodoo in Haiti* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 30. John Storm Roberts, *Black Music of Two Worlds* (New York: Praeger, 1972), 6; Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); and the classic Pierre Verger, *Dieux d’Afrique: culte des Orishas et Vodouns à l’ancienne Côte des esclaves en Afrique et à Bahia, la baie de tous les saints au Brésil*. (Paris: P. Hartmann, 1954), 165.

⁷² See among many others, Laurent Dubois, “Vodou and History”. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 43 (2001): 92-100; Clarence Bernard Henry, “The African Legacy: The Use of Music and Musical Instruments in the Candomblé Religion of Salvador Da Bahia, Brazil”. In ed., Jacqueline C. DjeDje, , and Ernest Douglas Brown, *Turn Up the Volume!: A Celebration of African Music* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1999). 170-181. Fernando Ortiz, *Los Tambores Ararás, la Conga* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1995). Ademole Moses Adegbite, “The Drum and Its Role in Yoruba Religion”. *Journal of Religion in Africa*. 18 (1988): 15-26. Ina Fandrich, “Yorùbá Influences On Haitian Vodou and New Orleans Voodoo”. *Journal of Black Studies*. 37 (2007): 775-791.

⁷³ “[E]star siempre metido en el monte.” AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 479r.

⁷⁴ “[Y]la aplico para las curazion unos palitos que trajo del monte” AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 254r.

around Cartagena and La Habana were established in wooden areas. In such areas, both in Africa and the Americas, special ceremonies, as I discuss below, were carried out for the appropriate departure of the deceased souls.

African Rituals of Death in the Spanish Caribbean

African, as well as European and Native American communities regarded rituals performed for the adequate departure of the dead as essential to assure an adequate transition of the departed's soul. These ceremonies usually required a considerable communal undertaking. In Africa death ceremonies were also “occasions to articulate communal values.”⁷⁵ Likewise, Africans and Afro-descendants in Cartagena met and created community around rituals of death. Paula de Eguiluz, for example described in front of the Inquisition Tribunal the funeral of Joan Bran, an African *bozal* [unacculturated] “great *brujo*” who lived in the street of the *Cruz*. When Joan died, according to Paula, the *brujas* of Cartagena “got together and cried for him late in the night.” Among them, were “Elena de Vitoria, Teodora de Salcedo, Juana de Mora, María Mendez, y Juana Zamba y Rafaela de Nava and a great number of other witches that she does not recognize.” Paula also told the tribunal how when all the *brujas* were in the middle of the *lloro* [funeral] ceremonies, drinking and dancing, they felt sounds from the guard's round. According to Paula, after seeing the guards they transformed themselves into hogs.⁷⁶

As in Africa, death ceremonies in Cartagena involved feasting in food and alcohol.

⁷⁵ Brown, *Reaper's*, 59.

⁷⁶ “[D]ice como habiendo muerto Joan Bran negro horro, gran brujo que vivía en la calle de la cruz, se juntaron las brujas de Cartagena a llorarle a deshoras dela noche y estando llorándole Elena de Vitoria, esta, Teodora de Salcedo, Juana de Mora, María Mendez, y Juana Zamba y Rafaela de Nava y otro gran numero de brujas que esta no conoció vino ruido como de la ronda y habiéndole visto... se convirtieron en una manda de puercos.” AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp 10, Fols. 94r-v.

Father Bernardo da Gallo wrote about funerals in Congo in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. The ceremony called *Chittampi*, “is accompanied by a banquet, much crying and wailing music which they dedicate to their dead. They lay...to eat and drink on the graves and coffins of them.”⁷⁷ Equally illustrative are contemporary reports from Upper Guinea, according to de Sandoval's sources,

[T]he dead are usually placed in top of a high grill, similar to a burial mound covered by very fine fabrics. The grill is enclosed in a house made out of straw that is covered with sand...At the time of the burial there are great rituals involving smoke. After all is finished, the people come back to the central square, where all the town's folk gathers and then everybody comes back to the crying and dancing...When somebody dies, they send notice to all the villages in which family members [of the deceased] live, and whom are usually many...Once they arrive to the village, they enter with great cries that grow in loudness with the help of the people who go out to receive them.⁷⁸

The death of personages with political or religious power called for more elaborated ceremonies. In 1663 Capuchin missionary Giovanni Cavazzi witnessed the funeral of Ginga the Queen of Ndongo and Matamba, and described it in detail. According to Cavazzi the body was “washed by attendants, and anointed with various scented oils and aromatic compounds, and adorned and dressed in a queenly manner.” The body then rested on “silken

⁷⁷ “[C]onsiste en un banquet accompagné de complaintes, lamentations musicales, qu'ils font à leurs défunts; ils jettent, alors, à boire et à manger sur les cases et sépultures de ceux-ci.” Jadin, *Le Congo*, 453.

⁷⁸ “A los difuntos entierran de ordinario encima de una barbacoa alta del suelo, a semejanza de túmulo cubierta de muy finos paños, encerrada en una casa de paja, cubierta con un montón de arena, la cual tiene su señal por donde se abre la puerta para enterrar aquel abalorio...al tiempo del entierro hay grandes sahumeros. Acabado se vuelve la gente a la plaza de la aldea, adonde está convocada toda la comarca, y allí se vuelve todo el llanto en baile...En muriendo alguno, envían luego aviso a todas las aldeas en que viven parientes suyos, los cuales son comúnmente muchos...En llegando a la aldea donde está el difunto, entran llorando con grandes clamores, que van creciendo cada vez más con el concurso de la gente que las sale a recibir.” De Sandoval, 69.

cloths, paved not with plain cloth but with various pieces of silk, such as damask, *orriulia*, velvet, London, capes, pieces of linen from Germany,” and “large numbers of skins of elephants.” Around the coffin, the undertakers positioned “various pieces of silk and all those silks which she had been used to wearing were placed in the tomb.” The Queen’s pages, and ladies and gentleman in waiting “ran away after her death, because they thought they must observe the custom of the Giaghi, and none of them could be sure of his life, because all her pages, ladies and gentlemen in waiting should have gone into the tomb of their Queen to serve her in the next life.”⁷⁹

For all its relevance as a political instrument, funerals were also occasions for the reaffirmation and transmission of cultural values and beliefs. In performing death rites in Cartagena Africans and their descendants were constructing a novel vision of the world, one which drew heavily from African traditions. This was as true of African and Afro-descendants’ funerals, as it was of funerals for European and their progeny. For instance, Jorge Juan y Antonio de Ulloa, an “enlightened” *peninsular* [native from the Iberian peninsula] man who visited Cartagena in 1735, described in detail one of Cartagena’s

⁷⁹ Giovanni A. Cavazzi also describe the richness of her attire, “I was in the place where lay the body of her who when alive impressed and intimidated friends, enemies and strangers, and whose very name put them to flight, and I found her richly dressed; she wore on her head a very fine cap worth forty Italian ducats, and her temples were encircled by a very fine crown of corals, pearls and jewels, and she was also adorned by four very beautiful feathers, two white and two red, a Royal insignia, with precious pendants in her ears; her arms were covered to the elbow with gold and silver bracelets, and elephant hair, she had a cloth over her breasts and another which covered her from her belt to her feet, on which were various anklets according to the custom of Ethiopia, and on her shoulders she wore a cloak of scarlet with gold embroideries; it was necessary to remove everything to dress her in the holy habit which she had asked for and obtained as you heard in the previous chapter, and when she had been dressed in it and the Royal insignia laid aside, she was placed on a [200] table covered with a cloth of Jabu, and to support her one of her pages served as her cushion.” Cavazzi, “Missione Evangelica nel Regno de Congo”, MS 1668, Book II, Chapter 14, 197-198. Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi (1621-1678) was a Capuchin monk who lived in Angola and Congo from 1654 to 1677. On his return to Italy he completed his “Missione evangelica nel Regno de Congo” an Italian description of West-Central Africa and the history of the Capuchin mission there. Here I use the original manuscript which Cavazzi completed in 1668 and which has been in the hands of the Araldi family in Modena Italy. Cavazzi’s original handwritten text is also known as the “Araldi manuscript. In 1668 Giacomo Monti edited and published Cavazzi’s original work. See Giovanni A. Cavazzi and Alamandini Fortunato, *Istorica descrizione de' tre' regni Congo, Matamba et Angola: sitvati nell'Etiopia inferiore occidentale e delle missioni apostoliche esercitateui da religiosi Capuccini* (Bologna: Giacomo Monti, 1687).

funerals. De Ulloa relates that, “When someone distinguished dies, they put her/his body on a sumptuous bier that they build in the principal room of the house.” The house was open and lighted by candles “twenty four hours of the day” in such a way that, “as was custom,” all people and, according to Ulloa “mostly all women with bad reputations in the city,” went to the house and “mourned the deceased.” In this case Ulloa was referring to low “*castas*,” as he would have called them. Specifically, such “*castas*” were people of “color,” *mulatos*, Blacks, *quarterones*, *zambos* and in general Africans and Afro-descendants, who came en masse to such celebrations.⁸⁰

Women would appear “*vestidas de negro*” [dressed in black] and join the ritual in the late afternoon and remain all night. Upon entering the room where the body was, they would “get close and, sometimes while kneeling and other times standing, they would gesture a hug and start their crying clamors mixed with outrageous cries.” In the midst of all this crying and shouting the woman would continue “without any change in the tone or strength” of their crying, “a peroration of all qualities and defects of the dead person. They did this, according to Ulloa “with such accuracy and articulation that an individual confession [to the priest] could not be more personal.”⁸¹

When the women, and presumably the rest of the assistants, got tired of all of such bemoaning, they would move the festivities to an adjacent room where they would start drinking from a “*botija de aguardiente*” [hog of *aguardiente*] or other of wine, and in some

⁸⁰ “[C]uando el difunto es persona de distinción colocan el cuerpo sobre un suntuoso féretro que hacen en la pieza principal de la casa...generalmente todas las mujeres de baja esfera de la ciudad, que es costumbre el que vayan a llorar al difunto. Jorge Juan y Antonio de Ulloa, *Relacion Historica del Viage a La America Meridional Hecho De Orden De S. Mag. Para Medir Algunos Grados de Meridiano Terrestre y Venir por ellos en Conocimiento de la Verdadera Figura Y Magnitud de La Tierra, con Otras Varias Obsevaciones Astronomicas y Phisicas* (Madrid: Por Antonio Marin, 1748), 55.

⁸¹ “Se acercan y unas veces puestas de rodillas junto a el, y otras en pie, y lo mas común como queriendo abrazar, dan principio a sus clamores con un aire lloroso, mezclado con desaforados gritos...sin mudar de tono, ni de capacidad...con tanta puntualidad, y expresion de la s circunstancias, que no puede ser mas individual una confesion general.” Ibid.

cases both.⁸² The “relief” group would arrive and other women would take the place of the first “crying” mourners. Significantly, de Ulloa emphasizes that after other women from the town, “slaves and women from the family would continue the same ceremony.” De Ulloa’s depiction strongly resembles the crying that Capuchin and Jesuit missionaries had heard in Africa when the family and the townsfolk got together to cry for the deceased. Such ceremonies continued all night long.⁸³ After the burial the ceremonies continued for another nine nights where “family members, both men and women, cannot move from the house where they receive the condolences. All friends and relatives must join them [every day] for the nine hours until the sun rises in the morning.” These nightly rituals were also showered by *aguardiente* and wine and animated by drum fueled dances.⁸⁴

The remarkable similarities between African rites of death and funeral ceremonies of European and their descendants in Cartagena, even those of “principal condition,” is evidence of an ample adoption of African mores into the cultural and social structures of this city. The abundance of drink and dance in the ceremonies, the unending bemoaning and crying, the physical location of the body in a bier, and the length of the ceremony all hint to African origins. Similarly, the multicolored and socially dappled attendance of the rituals signals to the integrative nature of rituals of death in the city.

The scant record of African ritual celebrations in Cartagena during the seventeenth century does not allow us to deepen our analysis of specific African rituals in the city. Stories like the one of Paula de Eguiluz must be contextualized within the limits of the possibilities for interpretation that inquisitorial records allow. However, they do indicate that Africans

⁸² *Aguardiente* is a sugar cane distilled liqueur flavored with anis. Its name roughly translates as “Fire water.”

⁸³ “Continuando las misma ceremonial las criadas esclavas, y las que han sido familiares de la casa.” *Ibid.*, 56.

⁸⁴ “Los pacientes, así hombres, como mujeres, no se han de mover del paraje, donde reciben los pésames. Todas las personas, que tienen Amistad o parentesco con ellos les han de acompañar desde las nueve horas desde que obscurece hasta que quiere volver a salir el sol.” *Ibid.*

created spaces and ceremonies to care for their dead in the midst of urban spaces and on their own terms. Evidence from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries coming from places with a similar African demographic composition, like Salvador da Bahia, Rio de Janeiro and Havana, demonstrate how Africans would enact rich ritual ceremonies for their dead. While we do not have such descriptions for seventeenth century Cartagena, there is evidence that a similar situation was in place. Jesuit priest Pedro Claver, renowned because of his work with African slaves in the city, set out to put an end to, what in his view, were heathen practices in the streets of the city. He famously went around the city, in a Sisyphean endeavor, dissolving African dances and *lloros* that filled the air of the city with drums and crying.⁸⁵

The accounts of Juan and Antonio de Ulloa one century later show the interpenetration and incorporation of African and European rites in the city. In Cartagena, Africans and Europeans, according to all available evidence, developed shared moments and spaces for enacting death and dying rituals. The world of the dead, henceforth, shaped in concrete ways societal and cultural structures in the Caribbean. By creating alliances, defining boundaries, excluding and creating hierarchies and by materializing cultural practices death and dying rites served as a reaffirmation of Africa's presence in the city. Rituals of death certainly functioned as places to “express and enact ideas about group membership and cultural distinctiveness.”⁸⁶ Such ideas about belonging and cultural identity would also become physically manifested in several types of artifacts.

⁸⁵ Anna María Splendiani and Tulio Aristizábal Giraldo. *Proceso de beatificación y canonización de San Pedro Claver* (Bogotá: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2002), 115-124.

⁸⁶ Douglas B. Chambers, 2001. “Ethnicity in the Diaspora: The Slave-Trade and the Creation of African 'Nations' in the Americas”. *Slavery and Abolition*. 22, no. 3: 25-39. Brown, *Reaper's*, 64; Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 183-205; Chambers, “Ethnicity in the Americas,” 25-39 Roach, *Cities of the dead*, 59-63.

Afro-Caribbean “Little balls of Bad Intentions”

Knives, harquebuses or swords were not the only deadly tools used by Cartagenero's to take care of problems. People frequently solved personal matters through the use of deadly means, many of which were based on African traditions.⁸⁷ Death could be chalked up not only to accidents, illnesses, or physical aggression. Unlike from our modern conceptualization of death as consequence of highly individualized processes, death in the Spanish Caribbean, like illness and life itself, took place in shared spaces. Such communal space also counted with the spiritual presence of ancestors, and spirits from nature, from the underworld and heaven.

It was in this place where Rituals around death provided African and Afro-descendants with a fertile ground to embed Caribbean culture with African mores and ideas. In the early modern world the “*interstitial*” space between the world of the living and the dead was, as the stories here show, particularly open for cultural “colonization.” Rather than being places for the creation of differentiation and isolation, rituals of death and killing functioned to integrate African and European visions of the world. Europeans, Africans and their descendants, frequently resorted for African ceremonies and strategies to deal with death, or the vicissitudes of life. Rather than qualifying them from our modern perspective, I am introducing the evidence that follows as examples of what early modern Cartageneros and *Caribeños* were willing to believe as plausible.

Exemplary is the case of Paula de Eguiluz. During the 1620s and 30s de Eguiluz, a

⁸⁷ Multiple cases were reported to Colonial authorities, for example in 1633 Juana de Ortensio killed his master “con unos polvos colorados , que su Diablo ñaga le había dado” [with some red powders that ñaga, her devil, gave her.” Is possible that when talking about the devil ñaga, de Ortensio was actually referring to a West Central African ritual specialist, a *Nganga*. AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 337v. Using a similar technique Teodora de Slacedo killed Francisca Negra. AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 415r. Other examples of Africans using deadly spells or powders were Rafael de Nava and Juana de Mora. AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 373r., and AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 378r.

slave of Biafara descent, was denounced for providing powders, *recaudo*, to customers looking to “solve” love or business relationships turned sour by killing the other person involved.⁸⁸ De Eguiluz prepared her potions while reciting specific curses and omens. The form and celerity in which they worked depended on the specific purpose of the spell, and on the desired circumstances of death.

Death “recaudos” [commissions] could go in *escudillas* [receptacles] of milk, water, or wine. Paula de Eguiluz declared in 1622 that “before his death, one Doctor Velasco, a physician who died the past year of 1620, had told her that that Doña Magdalena de Estrada had killed him with a milk *escudilla*.”⁸⁹ The effects could be immediate or, as in the case of a Mr. Rodriguez, they could take a period of days. About Rodriguez's passing, de Eguiluz declared that she and Francisca Herbas, a Spanish woman had confabulated,

[T]o kill a man from Quito called Xpousel? Rodriguez who lived in front of her house. [Rodriguez] had tried to marry the mentioned Doña Francisca who, after learning that he was going to get married in Quito, had “given him something to kill him. [Rodriguez] left the city with the curse of death and died in the first leg of the trip in a hostel on the road to Barranca.”⁹⁰

Evidently, De Eguiluz's clientele, and victims, were not only African or Afro-

⁸⁸ For instante, witnesses declared that after drinking from some water that Paula had given him “His jaw got locked, and that in four days the mentioned priest died.” Also that Geronima, the nephew of Luis Tellez had killed such priest with *recaudos* that Paula had given her. Another Priest, Father Brito, had suffered the same fate. “Le dijo el dicho padre a este reo que salía de la casa de la susodicha donde había bebido un jarro de agua y que luego que le bebió se le trabaron las quijadas tanto que parecía que estaba muriendo y dentro de cuatro días murió el dicho clérigo después de lo que estándose este en otra ocasión don la dicha Rufina de Rafael Gomez le contó como la dicha Gerónima sobrina del dicho Luis Téllez había muerto a su amigo el Presbítero porque habiéndole pedido cincuenta pesos y dándoselo y no teniendo otra cosa que sacarle le despacho por despedirle de si y que quien le dio el recaudo para matar a la hija de la dicha Gerónima que fue Paula de Eguiluz le dio si mismo recaudo para matar al dicho Padre Brito todo lo que se lo tanto a este la dicha Rufina como tiene dicho.” AHN, 1620, Exp. 7. Fol. 36r-v.

⁸⁹ “El doctor Velasco medico que murió en esta ciudad por el año pasado de seiscientos y veinte y seis le contó a esta antes de la muerte que doña Magdalena de estrada le había muerto con una escudilla de leche que le había dado.” AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 7. Fol. 37v.

⁹⁰ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 7. Fols. 37r.

descendant. European and Euro-descendants also used her services, and as the rest of the deponents served as witnesses of their “nefarious” effectiveness in inquisitorial processes. They clearly ascribed to the powers and forces de Eguiluz was said to manage.

Cavazzi described similar practices in seventeenth-century West Central African societies, where the control over matters of death was a privilege of ritual specialists. The Capuchin priest wrote that, “The above mentioned minister [a *nganga*], and those who depend on him, are so feared that he is very much esteemed and feared by these ignorant people, because they say it is his duty to give poison to people in order that they may die, and as is well known that the name of death alone causes all to pay heed to him, giving him much reverence and honor.”⁹¹

Like de Eguiluz, the *nganga* had “many ways of giving poison. [T]o some [the *nganga* gives the poison] in drinks customary among them, to others in food, and to others breathing into in the face of their enemy.” Also, like ritual specialists in Cartagena, the *nganga* “gives [the poison] to others at the entrance of their houses and in places where they customarily live.”⁹²

In Cartagena, ritual specialists adapted their techniques. Juan Ingles, an Afro-descendant slave ritual specialist who traveled all around the early modern Atlantic world during the 1670s and 80s, experimented with the plants and animals he found in Cartagena. In 1689 he declared that a colleague “gave him several elements against poison...[He also gave him] several roots and bird feathers with that he tried in an animal. After three hours the animal became dry and died. He also experimented with another curse that used bread

⁹¹ Cavazzi, Book 2, 183.

⁹² Cavazzi, Book 1, 82.

crumbs...which he put in the mouth of an animal that also got dried and died.”⁹³

As Juan Ingles, it is plausible that Paula de Eguiluz learned and experimented with other ritual specialist’s materials and techniques that she encountered during her sojourn in the Caribbean. After living in *las Minas del Cobre* and la Habana in Cuba, in Puerto Rico and in Cartagena, de Eguiluz was prepared to bring ill using an assortment of deadly techniques. Besides giving “*escudillas*” and “*recaudos*,” for instance, she asked a client sometime during the 1620s for, “a lace from the underwear of about three feet.” According to the witness, a “White” woman, declaring in front of the inquisition, she,

[G]ave her the lace together with seven pins and another cotton lace with many nodes of about eight inches. Tying one extreme with the other, she...bring it [inside a piece of] paper and put it in a box...when asked how would they give the [*recaudo* to the victim] Paula said that they will give it in a soup...and that he will start having diarrhea in eight days from which he will die in fifteen days.⁹⁴

This technique is reminiscent of contemporary “awakening” of power-objects in West Central Africa by tying. De Eguiluz could had learned it from West Central African practitioners in the multiple “*juntas*” she attended in Cuba, Puerto Rico, or in the New Kingdom of Granada. In other places of America, Africans also used tying techniques for ritual purposes.⁹⁵ However, laces were not the only channels of anger in the Spanish Caribbean.

⁹³ “Le dio varias contras de veneno...y raíces y plumas de pájaro que experimento en un animal que en tres horas se seco y murió y así mismo otro maleficio contra migajas de pan que estaban en la mesa puestas en la boca del animal [con] lo que ese seca y muere.” AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 406r.

⁹⁴ “[U]na cinta de los calzones como de una vara de largo y se la dio la dicha cierta persona encaretada y con siete alfileres y un cordón de algodón con muchos nudos de el tamaño de un palmo y atada un cabo con otro dijo que trayéndola en un papel y poniéndola en una caja que hallado llorando a la dicha cierta persona la dicha Paula mas no vino en ello y preguntándola que como le avían de dar dijo que habían de dárselo en el caldo que habían de beber ... [que] le darían unas cámaras dentro de ocho días y a los quince días estaría muerto.” AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp 10, Fols. 126v-127r.

⁹⁵ See for instance, Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 130.

Coming from Upper Guinea, Leonor Zape used spiritual forces to channel her rage and hatred.⁹⁶ Talking through an interpreter, Guiomar Bran said that “in hers and other person’s presence, Leonor Zape killed Isabel Biafara, her comrade and slave of her master, suffocating her by the nose.”⁹⁷ Around the rivers of Guinea lethal ritual practitioners abounded as well. De Sandoval's colleagues informed him that “in these parts the demon has many ministers that kill as many as they want with curses and potions. Whoever drinks these beverages become crazy.”⁹⁸

Ana Suarez, a *horra* [free black] born in Zaragoza, New Kingdom of Granada and an inhabitant of the black neighborhood of *Getsemani* in Cartagena, was not a less dangerous than Paula de Eguiluz or Leonor Zape. In 1648 she confessed to have killed a blacksmith who went by the name “Patillas” and other *pulperos* [owner of a grocery store which also functioned as a bar] using herbs and curses, all of them presumably “White.” One of her techniques was to put bones or teeth in the food, as when she was asked to either kill or drive away from the city the husband of Juana Machado.⁹⁹ By 1634, African and Afro-descendant ritual practitioners created havoc and took lives all over the province of Cartagena. Catalina

⁹⁶ Leonor Zape's accuser was also taking revenge in his own hands. Around 1618 Guiomar Bran, attempted to kill one of his fellow slaves in the mines in Zaragoza while he was sick. The victim, a Black slave, as well as another witness, said that “Estando el enfermo en el sitio de las Zabaletas había pedido a esta reia un jarro de agua para beber y trayendoselo en una totuma la había puesto sobre la barbacoa [cama de madera] en que restaba echado y luego el agua se había puesto como lavazas de jabón, que parecía estar hirviendo y debajo de la espuma estaba el agua colorada, por lo cual no había querido beber y la había derramado.” [while he was sick in Zabaletas, he had asked the defendant for a glass of water to drink. When [Leonor] brought the water in a gourd, he put it on his bed, on which he was lying. The water then turned red and with foam, as if it had soap in it. He did not want to drink it and threw it away.” AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fols. 218r-v.

⁹⁷ “La dicha Leonor Zape, en presencia de la testigo y la otra [persona], mato a Isabel Biafara su compañera, esclava del dicho su amo, ahogándola por las narices...y el demonio le pregunto que porque la había muerto y diciéndole que porque cada rato la azotaba.” AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 210v-211r.

⁹⁸ “En estas partes tiene el demonio muchos ministros que con hechizos y brebajes acaban cuantos quieren, y el efecto es quedar los que los toman enajenados.” De Sandoval, 71.

⁹⁹ “Y que haciendo unos bollos de maiz hallaron en uno un diente que se sospecho por cosa cierta que la dicha Ana de Zaragoza lo habia echado” [And that while making some maiz rolls they found in one of them a tooth that they had as a truthful thing that it had been Ana de Zaragoza who had put it there]. AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 185r.

de Bargas, a “White” woman, in one of many similar cases, killed her husband using *recaudo* “because he was sick and infected and that she killed him so he did not pass on to her the illness.”¹⁰⁰ The daughter of one Maria Canaria, another Euro-descendant, for her part “had killed one of her brothers called Luis Gonzalez because he had married in disgrace and caused disgust to all of his family.”¹⁰¹ In addition, Rufina, López’ mistress, killed a woman called Damina using the same rituals her mother had used.¹⁰²

Debts could trigger fatal consequences. Juana Ortensio, after being confronted with public scandal because of a debt, gave her creditor a potion “with which [the creditor, a woman] got sick...when a different healer was called to cure him, the defendant had obstructed the work of [the summoned healer] asking that person to not to cure [her creditor], after this, the sick woman had died in a few days raging from her stomach.”¹⁰³ Jealousy was not less lethal. In 1631, Teodora de Salcedo, a free black from Cartagena, was accused by five witnesses because, “Francisca, a Black woman of whose death she was accused, had

¹⁰⁰ [P]orque estaba medio hetico y que lo matarse porque no le pegara la enfermedad.” AHN, 1620, Exp.7, Fol. 39r.

¹⁰¹ “[A]via muerto a un hermano suyo llamado Luis Gonzalez porque así se lo había mandado el dicho Luis Tellez su amigo porque se había casado a disgusto de todos sus deudos.” AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 7. Fol. 41r.

¹⁰² Diego López, an Afro-descendant healer and surgeon told about what happened when he was curing Damina, a mulata, in the Cartagena of the 1630s, “De como una de las mulatas hace a la otra caer enferma por celos y que estando curandoloa este en cassa de una hermana suya junto a duarte de León le pregunto a este la dicha Rufinna curarte a Damina y este le respondió que si y ella dixo no se canses en curarla y este dixo porque ¿darle? Hecho algun daño y ella respondió no se acuerdas que te dixes que me lo avia de pagar y este dixo que si puesno has oydo decir de una negra de Diego Marquez que dizen la mato mi madre y esto dixo que si pues lo mismo con que mataron a aquella le di yo a esta y me ¿???ando le de se el hombre le dixo hermano ser mano desto me ha valido yo y me lo ha dado Paula que es bra??sa negra y sabia que quize de delante de los ojos de mi ama a Francisca mestiza no tuve paz con ella y este le dixo pues luego tu la mataste...” [About how one of the *mulatas* made the other one sick because of jealousy and that while he was healing her in one of her sister's houses, together with Duarte de Leon, Rufina asked him if he was curing Damina, and he answer that yes and she [Rufina] told him, do not get tired trying to cure her, and he said why? Have you done some harm to her? And she answered, don't you remember that I told you that she will have to pay for what she had done? And he said, yes. [Rufina then said] that if he had not hear said about a Black woman from Diego Marques that they said my mother killed? And he said that yes, [Rufina said] well, with the same that they killed that another one I gave to her]. AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 7. Fol. 34v.

¹⁰³ “Con que enfermándose...el dicho amigo y queriendo se llamase para curarla a otra persona, lo había estorbado la rea rogando a quien llamaban que no la curase, con lo cual había muerto la enferma dentro de pocos días rabiando del estomago.” AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 388v

died violently. Francisca had ordered for a jar of chocolate with a little bread. Witnesses say that Teodora had sent the mentioned little bread to injure or to kill her so she could marry Francisca's friend."¹⁰⁴

In like manner, one of Luis de Soto's slaves from la Habana performed what for contemporaries should have been tenebrous killing ceremonies. According to 1628 Inquisition court records from Cartagena, Anton Carabali, the slave, had a reputation in the city of being a "gran curandero" [great healer]. He had been in all likelihood embarked in the port of Elem Kalabari in Lower Guinea and was initiated in the ritual practices by one Isabel Mulata.¹⁰⁵ As many other *bozales*, he did not speak proper Castilian although he had lived "for sixteen years in this Indies."¹⁰⁶ Anton, talking through one interpreter called Tome, a slave of the Jesuit College that appears in several inquisitorial processes,

Started confessing about his reputation as a great healer and expert in many things. [He said] that certain persons, whom he named, came to him to ask for herbs. [T]hey used such herbs to kill their enemies. Even though he did not know such people he gave them the herbs to because they paid him. Because of the herbs, seven people died whose death he narrated. He also explained the circumstances of such deaths.¹⁰⁷

Anton was also able to fly in the "carapacho de tortuga" [a turtle's carapace] after

¹⁰⁴ "Francisca negra, de cuya muerte estaba testificada, había muerto violentamente, que estando buena mando hacer una jicara de chocolate con un panecillo del que la Francisca dio y que habiéndolo bebido murió luego. Y dicen los testigos que el dicho panecillo se lo había enviado la dicha Teodora y que se entendía que para hacerle mal o matarla, por casarse con un amigo de la dicha Francisca." AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 415r.

¹⁰⁵ René Souldre-LaFrance. "I, Francisco Castañeda, Negro Esclavo Caravali': Caravali Ethnicity in Colonial New Granada," in *Trans-Atlantic Dimensions of Ethnicity in the African Diaspora. The Black Atlantic*, eds. Paul E. Lovejoy and David Vincent Trotman (London: Continuum, 2003) 96-114.

¹⁰⁶ "Por espacio de diez y seis años en éstas indias." AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 297v.

¹⁰⁷ "Empezó a confesar que a la fama que este tenia de tal curandero y que sabia muchas cosas, acudieron algunas personas que nombro, a pedirle hierbas para matar a enemigos suyos y que aunque este no las conocía, porque se lo pagaron busco persona que se las diese y este se las dio a las dichas personas, con que causo siete muertes que contó y como había sido." AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 298r.

Isabel, his mentor, “rubbed his armpits, shoulders and chest with a green and sparse ointment.”¹⁰⁸ In the end he confessed to one hundred and two deaths. He also provided details on each as to the residences and places in which these people were buried. Many of these victims were Europeans or Euro-descendants. However, a large proportion was of African descent. Indeed, grudges between different African groups frequently traversed the Atlantic.

Africans coming from neighboring areas often brought to the Americas the regional conflicts that had in the first place put them in harm’s way and, very often, condemned them to slavery. Thus, Leonor Zape was famously eager to kill Biafaras. Guiomar Bran said in 1618 that “Leonor had killed many slaves of her master, and all of them of the Biafara nation, because she had always being indisposed towards the Blacks of this caste.”¹⁰⁹ Zape's grudge was understandable. It is most likely that she had been captured, while many of her relatives and friends were killed, raped and even eaten, during wars between Biafaras and Zapes during the early seventeenth century.¹¹⁰ Rancor with its mortal consequences traveled the Atlantic westward.

Specialists like Leonor could also make enemies ill like when she and Guiomar Bran paralyzed her master Francisco de Santiago.¹¹¹ Others could pay with their lives when daring to fight ritual practitioners like Leonor and Guiomar. According to Guiomar after,

Being for a long time angry with a free Black woman, she tied [the free

¹⁰⁸ “Le unto con un ungiuento verde muy ralo por debajo de los brazos y en los hombros y en el pecho, muslos, pies y manos.” AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 298r.

¹⁰⁹ “[Leonor] le había muerto [a su amo] muchos negros sus esclavos y todos Biafaras de nación por haber estado siempre mal con los negros de esta casta.” AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 216r.

¹¹⁰ Zapes, a large group of the New Kingdom of Granada African immigrants, came from a region in what today is Liberia. In close proximity were the Bran territories, in Sierra Leone, and Leonor's nemesis the Biafaras who came from what today is Guinea Bissau. De Sandoval tells how at the beginning of the seventeenth century the Zape and the Biafaras “Were constantly in war.” De Sandoval, 63.

¹¹¹ See Chapter III.

Black's] soul and took it elsewhere...After this the Black woman felt sick and was consume by her illness while blaming her [Guiomar] for her sorry state...[This continued] until she made peace with the free Black woman and returned her soul with which she had gotten better.¹¹²

Being in the wrong place when African specialists carried out rituals could also lead to one's demise. Several witnesses of European and African origin declared in 1680 that Antonio Congo said "after a man suddenly died... that he had killed him." According to witnesses, "while curing a sick woman by the side of the above-mentioned deceased, Antonio had taken the *air* or *curse* from the sick woman, healing her, and passing it to the now dead man causing his demise."¹¹³ In Cartagenos minds, only someone as powerful as Antonio had the ability to transfer "air" or a "curse" from one sick person to the other.

The shaping of Spanish Caribbean culture, thus, occurred not only in the contested spaces of Catholic religious ceremonies, or in the structured social interactions between slave and masters that appear in many of the studies of Colonial Spain. In the uncertain and obscure space between dying and death, Europeans, Africans, Natives and their descendants shared and borrowed from each other and shaped pragmatic concepts to deal with the terrifying and unpredictable certainty of bereavement.

Of all deaths, the death of a child is always the most untimely. In the Spanish

¹¹² "[M]uchos días que estando esta reá mal con una negra horra, le había amarrado el alma en un engaño y llevándose a otras partes y que lo había visto la testigo y se espanto de ello y luego había caído enferma la dicha negra horra y se iba consumiendo y echaba la culpa a la testigo, diciendo que ella la tenía en aquel estado, hasta que habiéndole entendido su amo y hecho las amistades de la negra horra y esta reá Guiomar, le volvió el alma y había ido mejorando."AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 216r.

¹¹³ "Que habiendo muerto de repente un cierto hombre había dicho este reo...que el le había muerto dando a entender en ello que una enferma que estaba curando este [en vecindad?] del dicho difunto y que el aire o maleficio de que padecía se le había sanado y con el había muerto a la dicha persona."AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 478r.

Caribbean it was commonly explained as the evil acts of ritual specialists of all sorts.¹¹⁴ Maria Cacheo was born in the Cacheo region in an area Portuguese slavers knew as the [Lower] Guinea's rivers. According to her own confession, and the declarations of twenty witnesses of all ways of life, in the 1620s Maria killed and then ate Elenilla and Juanillo, her own children. She also said, talking through an interpreter from the Jesuit College, that she “had wanted to kill, in the shape of an alligator, a Black to whom he injured because she was mad at him.”¹¹⁵ Maria was, according to all available information a respected and feared practitioner of African rituals. In the juntas she got together with Diego Fulupo with whom she worked together to unearth bodies and to prepare the “pelotillas de mal hacer” [little balls of bad intentions]. Maria said that she had killed fourteenth people including Juanillo her four years old son, whom she killed with a beverage that she had given to him together with the “pelotillas.” She did the same with her daughter Antonia. After her two children died, she dogged their bodies, unearthed them, and brought them to a ritual meeting to be devoured.¹¹⁶

We do not know whether Maria's circumstances were comparable with more famous cases of slave's infanticide in Africa or in the antebellum south.¹¹⁷ Was Maria explaining the so common natural dead, at the time, of her kids, through her own faults? The events narrated here, give us, at least, some idea about the brutality and all too common presence of death in Cartagena. They also suggest the type of strategies through which people living in the early modern Caribbean coped with the inevitable.

Europeans, Africans and Cartagenos of all extractions construed the death of their

¹¹⁴ Marcela Echeverry has examined a famous case of infanticide that occurred later in Barbacoas, northern New Kingdom of Granada. Marcela Echeverri, "Enraged to the limit of despair": Infanticide and Slave Judicial Strategies in Barbacoas, 1788-1798" *Slavery and Abolition* 30 (October 2009): 403-426.

¹¹⁵ “Había querido matar en figura de caimán a un negro a quien lastimo porque estaba enojada con el.”AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 295v.

¹¹⁶ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 296r.

¹¹⁷ See William A. Link, *Roots of Secession Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 58.

child through supernatural explanations. As Joel Harrington shows, the entrenched trope that pictures infants as disposable beings during the middle ages and early modern period could not be more further from the truth. Parents agonized over choosing clothes, food, rites and kinship to assure the well being of their kids. While infants, toddlers and children were indeed the group with the highest mortality rates until the mid twentieth century, their parents did not become, regardless of the frequency of this event, less sensible to their demise.¹¹⁸ When nothing else satisfied, parents frequently channeled their unbearable grief through accusations of witchcraft. This was as true in early modern Africa as it was in Europe, and certainly in Cartagena.

Whatever the ultimate causes of death in Cartagena, ritual practitioners were clearly claiming to be the culprits.¹¹⁹ By appropriating well known deaths in the community, ritual practitioners solidified their reputation as masters of life and death and their alleged power to manipulate the natural world. The learning process of these ritual practitioners could start in Africa, but certainly continued in Cartagena, and in many cases involved collaboration of different traditions, including European and indigenous ones. Europeans and Euro-descendants, for their part, adapted and used African originated rituals for their own purposes.¹²⁰ Because of, similar, while un-acknowledged, ontologies of death, dying and the dead, Europeans of all sorts readily assumed African customs of killing. Dying, thus, proved

¹¹⁸ See particularly Chapter one in Joel Harrington, *The Unwanted Child: the Fate of Foundlings, Orphans, and Juvenile Criminals in Early Modern Germany* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

¹¹⁹ Paula de Eguiluz, for instance appropriated what appeared to be the results of a well known epidemic in the city that she called a "Very public evil." She said that Rafaela and her devil killed five people "Martín Félix y su hermano Don Diego Polo, un religioso de San Agustín, un negro, y una negra cocineros" [Martín Félix and his brother Don Diego Polo, a priest of the San Agustín order, a Black man, and a Black woman, both of them cooks]. AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp 7, Fol. 91v.

¹²⁰ Whatever the ultimate causes of death in Cartagena, ritual practitioners were clearly claiming to be the culprits. Paula de Eguiluz, for instance appropriated what appeared to be the results of a well known epidemic in the city that she called a "Very public evil." She said that Rafaela and her devil killed five people "Martín Félix and his brother Don Diego Polo, a priest of the San Agustín order, a Black man, and a Black woman, both of them cooks." AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp 7, Fol. 91v.

to be an exceptionally rich avenue for cultural integration and transformation. Death reshaped Cartagena's culture. In the brutal reality of the early modern Spanish Caribbean, Africans and Europeans re-imagined, or incorporated new ideas and concepts about life and death.

Sucking Life, Feasting on Death

As with Maria Cacheo, African death traditions could take on more corporeal and fleshy turns. In 1619 Jusepa Ruiz, a free black born in Santo Domingo, La Española, and resident of Cartagena, was accused by according one of twelve witnesses declaring against her of being a necrophagous body-snatcher. According to the witness,

After a Black woman gave birth to a stillbirth baby in the house of the witness, she buried the creature in her house's yard. [The witness] saw how the next night, at around nine, while all the doors of the house were closed, a Black man and two Black women unburied the creature. She recognized [the three persons] and named them. One of such persons was the accused...To confirm what she saw [that night], she open the burial the next day and did not find the mentioned baby but only a little bone from [the baby's] throat.¹²¹

Necrophagia, was very much present in seventeenth century Caribbean inhabitants' imagination.¹²² Isabel Hernandez said that during the ceremonies in which she participated,

¹²¹ [H]abiendo parido una negra en casa de la testigo una criatura muerta, la enterró en el patio de su casa y vio como la noche siguiente, como a las nueve horas de ella, estando todas sus puertas cerradas, fueron al lugar donde estaba enterrada un negro y dos negras que conoció y nombro, de las cuales una era esta rea, todos tres en sus mismas figuras que los conoció porque tenia lumbre y desenterraron la dicha criatura y el día siguiente esta testigo para mas certificarse, abrió la sepultura y no hallo la dicha criatura mas de un huesecillo de la garganta.AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fols. 227r-v.

¹²² As I have explained before, these testimonies must be contextualized. I am not taking at face value what is contained in them. Rather, I am using them as evidence of the possibilities for the imagination of the world that emerged at a particular time and place. I advanced this at length in the introduction of this dissertation.

and after dancing with devils in the form of black men, she and the rest of the congregation “put some table cloths on the ground and...took out, in some bowls, a great amount of cooked human meat that the mentioned witches and sorcerers had brought...[After which] they ate that meat and...and drank in gourds, made out of the skulls of people, *chicha* with dissolved blood in it.”¹²³

Hernandez also declared around 1628 that she contributed her share of human flesh from “her own doings.” For instance, once while being “in the house of Antonio Baltasar, [after] entering it through the window, she went to the bed where was Mariquilla, Ana Bran's daughter, sucked her by the nose and killed her. She then took the blood she sucked out of the girl and put it in a gourd. Together with the blood she brought the body to one of the witches *juntas*.”¹²⁴ The ceremonies' officiant was displeased with the limited quantity of flesh from such a small corpse and, according to Isabel, asked her for more. She,

To fulfill her duty killed Manuel, her friend with whom she was living, because she was mad with him after he left her for another Black...She killed him with her own hands suffocating him while he was asleep. After he was buried in the principal church, she went Friday night with his co-parent in god [a *bozal* of name, Luis Bañon], unburied [the body] and brought it to the meeting.¹²⁵

Similarly, in that section I consider in detail the particular characteristics of inquisition records, their limitations, the coerced circumstances in which defendants produced their depositions, as well as their, in my view, great advantages for the rescue of popular culture.

¹²³ “[T]endieron unos manteles blancos por el suelo y...sacaron en unas bateas mucha carne cocida de personas humanas que habían llevado los dichos brujos y brujas, de los que habían muerto, y comieron de aquella carne y esta con ellos y bebieron en unas totumas, hechas de cabezas de personas *chicha* con sangre desleída en ella.” AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 294r. *Chicha* is a traditional liquor of Native Americans in the Nuevo Reyno de Granada prepared through the fermentation of corn.

¹²⁴ “En casa de Baltasar Antonio y entrando por la ventana fue a la cama donde estaba Mariquilla, hija de Ana Bran, a la cual chupo por las narices en forma que la mato. Y habiendo echado en una totuma la sangre que le saco y cargando el cuerpo, que seria como de tres años lo llevo a la junta.” AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 294v.

¹²⁵ [P]ara cumplir con su obligación mato esta a Manuel su amigo y con quien estaba amancebada, sobre haberse enojado con el, porque la dejo y se fue con otra negra...lo mato con sus propias manos ahogándolo estando dormido y que habiéndolo enterrado en la iglesia mayor, fue esta el viernes a la noche con el dicho su

Imagined or not, Hernandez confessed to the death of sixteen people, all of them adults. She said to have brought their remains to the *juntas*. She also declared that she had killed them using some “*polvos de unas pelotillas*” [powders from some little balls] that the demoniacal officiant of the *juntas* had given her.¹²⁶

Some scholars like Kathryn Burns, have argued that the representation of the devil in this accounts as “Black” or “African” signals to a contemptuous European demonization of Africans and their descendants.¹²⁷ This is, as part of the formation of racialized conceptualizations of evil and otherness based on religious artifacts that emerged with the enlightenment and “modernity”. While is undeniable that in some cases such was the case, I think it is also clear from the records here that Africans many times resorted to the depiction of their rituals with certain pride. I believe, for instance that Isabel Hernandez’s representation of the highest priest in the *juntas* she attended as a Black man has less to do with European representations of a savage and demonic Africa, than with Hernandez desire to underscore the African nature of such meetings. Ignoring, the possibility that Africans had indeed carried out such meetings, and that, naturally, Africans themselves were directing them is to fall in the too well rehearsed scenario of Europeans obliteration of African culture in the Americas this dissertation seeks to correct.

All this talk about devouring corpses would certainly be a discomfiting scenario for an European to behold. Anthropophagical concoctions did not figure high in the list or early modern Europeans culinary preferences.¹²⁸ Although not common, and certainly far less

compadre [a bozal of name, Luis Bañón], lo desenterraron y llevaron a la junta. AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 294v.

¹²⁶ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 295r.

¹²⁷ Kathryn Burns, “Notaries, Truth, and Consequences,” *The American Historical Review*. 110 (2005), no. 2: 350.

¹²⁸ Indeed, cannibalism in early modern Europe became a recurrent metaphor for self-differentiation and identification of the other, the primitive. See, for example Charles Zika, *Exorcising Our Demons: Magic,*

practiced than what contemporary European accounts would lead us to believe. Anthropofagia was practiced in certain communities in West and West Central Africa. However, as in pre-Columbian America, it had a well established, and in some communities seminal, place in the reiteration and renovation of political and religious structures.¹²⁹ While terrifying and a showoff of power, for specific groups in West and West-Central Africans the eating of human flesh was an essential part of well entrenched ritual customs.¹³⁰ However, in Kongo for instance, when cannibalism occurred outside ritual scenarios, it was seen as a disgusting sign of evilness, a “metaphor for unbridled greed and selfishness.”¹³¹ In such cases, Congo people would have seen it as one of the paradigmatic characteristic of a *kindoki*, a witch.¹³²

The theme of cannibalism has been discussed at length elsewhere.¹³³ A Full discussion escapes the limits of this chapter. However, there are two points worth mentioning regarding the feasting in human flesh happening in Cartagena. Although in Europe witches were also supposedly eating children at the time, events in Cartagena signal to at least a partial African origin of these, imaginary or real, rituals. In Europe the bodies of the babies were brought to the *aquelarres* [witch meetings] as a way to offer pure bodies to the devil. However they were for the most, not consumed. In contrast, in the juntas in Zaragoza, Cartagena and Panama, the meat was always said to be eaten. In other words, the sacrifice was intended for consumption. Furthermore, as the example of Isabel shows, the victims, real

Witchcraft, and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe (Leiden: Brill, 2003). Specially Chapter twelve.

¹²⁹ De Sandoval for instance says, “El uso de comer carne humana, que algunas de estas naciones hasta ahora conservan, se ha caído en gran parte,” De Sandoval, 67.

¹³⁰ See for instance, Robin Law, “Dahomey and the Slave Trade: Reflections on the Historiography of the Rise of Dahomey,” *Journal of African History*. 27 (1986): 237-267. Walter Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves: Transformations Along the Guinea-Bissau Coast, 1400-1900* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003), 65, 109.

¹³¹ Young, 226.

¹³² In Kongo sorceress were called *ndoki*. In the words of De Geel, a *ndoki* is a “Sorcerer, one who menaces another with poison or other witchcraft/.” Georges de Geel, *Vocabularium Latinum/Hispanicum et Congense* (1652). Translated by J. Van Wing and C. Penders, *Le Plus Ancien Dictionnaire Bantu* (Brussels, 1928). 249.

¹³³ See, among others, Hedwig Röckelein, *Kannibalismus und europäische Kultur* (Tübingen: Ed. diskord, 1996).

or imaginary, were adults too. The process of eating, thus, adult and infants meat was probably more related to African customs and beliefs than to the *demonological* inventory of inquisitors.¹³⁴

Dead bodies were not only object of culinary attention in Cartagena. They were also the ingredients of less “nutritious” recipes. Juan Lorenzo, a *mulato* slave of friar Antonio de Cisnero of the Saint Augustin order, resorted to the use of body parts of deceased for his rituals. Lorenzo, according to ten witnesses declaring against him in 1610, used in his rites “holy things like consecrated host and skulls of dead people in his rituals.”¹³⁵

Later in 1622, Paula de Eguluz was also said to use “huesos de muerto” [dead’s bones] in her healing practices in Cuba. Polonia a black King’s slave declared that, “more than two years ago at around noon, without remembering the day or month, Paula called this witness and a Black woman called Manuela, when the major mayor was very sick. Both of them went with the mentioned Paula to the main church of these mines and behind the chorus [Paula] dug with a rod a tomb and from it took out two bones of a deceased.” The bones where then used to prepare a healing potion for the major.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ The same can be said about the transformation of Cartagena's ritual practitioners in all sorts of animals including mice, cats, leopards, chicken, pigs and birds. Jusepa Ruiz for instance became chicken and mouse, Paula de Eguluz and Diego Lopez pigs, Antonio Congo leopard, Maria Mena in duck, goat and caiman, and also in turkey and hen-turkey and mouse; Isabel Hernandez in a bull. Because of the diversity of animals and the significance of animals in African culture rituals it seems more sensible to say that these Africans were referring to African rather than European (demonology) customs. In particular Antonio Angola, Francisco Mandingo, Isabel Hernandez who transformed themselves in animals not commonly associated with what Inquisitors would expect. However, it is not possible to say for sure whether this claims were not influenced by the accused stays in Cartagena’s inquisition prission and were not already accommodated to satisfy the vision Inquisitors had of “demoniac” animals. Alternatively, they could have also been genuine beliefs of Africans and Afro-descendants who had appropriated common European tropes about the transformative powers of witches and the type of animals commonly associated with them. See for instance, Gareth Roberts, “The Descendants of Circe: Witches and Renaissance Fiction,” in Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts. *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996),194; also Kathryn A. Edwards, *Werewolves, Witches, and Wandering Spirits: Traditional Belief & Folklore in Early Modern Europe* (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2002), xiv.

¹³⁵ “Aprovechándose de cosas sagradas como es de la ara consagrada y de las calaveras de los difuntos, moliendolas y santiguandolas” AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 34r

¹³⁶ “Estando el susodicho [alcalde mayor] muy enfermo hará mas tiempo de dos años llamo la dicha Paula a esta

In Habana, bones of dead Christians were also in high demand. Prosecutors argued in 1654 to Cartagena's inquisition that Maria de Tapias, a *mulata*, “has powders made out of skulls [which] she gives for drinking [dissolved] in Chocolate.”¹³⁷ A Black woman, witness in the process, declared that Maria asked her to bring a package to another woman. Out of curiosity she opened the package and “saw that it was the skull of a dead person.”¹³⁸

The use of bodily parts for ritual and medicinal practices was widespread in early modern Europe.¹³⁹ It is not possible to unambiguously ascribe a “cultural” origin to the use of skulls or other bones in Cartagenero’s ritual practices. What becomes apparent in the evidence presented here is that practitioners like De Eguiluz purportedly used body parts as effective elements of rituals that could be read by Europeans and people of European descent. The circumstances under which such readings took place, and the cultural background on which they became enacted, are hidden from us. I suspect they were similarly obfuscated in the eyes of both practitioners and clients of Afro-descendant body practices. As I argue through this dissertation, I am proposing for a fluid, messy and rich appropriation of rites that rather than being part of processes of hegemonic imposition, provided African culture and actors with agency. In other words, the uses of African originated ritual practices by Europeans did not deprive them of their cultural significance, nor did it made them part of hegemonic discourses. As with other ritual objects, body parts became the elements of

declarante y a otra negra llamada Manuela como entre las doce y la una del día y que no sabe que día ni mes fue y fueron las dos con la dicha Paula a la iglesia mayor de estas minas y detrás del coro escarbo con un palo una sepultura y de ellas saco dos huesos de muerto y los llevo a casa muy escondido.” AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 10, Fol. 9v.

¹³⁷ “Anda con polvos hechos de calaveras de difunto para dar de beber en chocolate.” AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 341v

¹³⁸ “Una mujer que es ya difunta la llamo a la dicha rea para que le diese a esta dicha María de Tapia un atado que le dio y que por curiosidad lo abrió y vio que era una calavera de muerto.” AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 441v.

¹³⁹ See for instance, Pero Camporesi, *The Incorruptible Flesh. Bodily Mutation and Mortification in Religion and Folklore*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 12-24; Zika, 450-451.

contact that facilitated appropriations, borrowings and camouflages.

The power over life and death made ritual practitioners masters of a realm substantially different than the one traditionally ascribed to folk-healers. Not surprisingly ritual specialists were feared as much in the Caribbean as in their homelands. They were at the center of matters relating to life and death. Their decisions and actions influenced and affected the entire community and as such became matters of enormous political and social significance. Death, then, for many Africans, and for Americans and Europeans similarly, took on communal significance.

Because of *Cartagena's* ritual practitioners power other types of specialists were discouraged to try curing victims of their “malefactions.” In the 1630s, for instance, a *mulata* named Rufina, declared about the dead of a “White” man. She said that,

The mentioned Paula [Eguiluz] had provided Ana Maria de Lima with a *recaudo* to kill a trader called Hernando Godo Mejia. [Godo Mejia] died in the orchard of Don Pedro de Rebolledo from the mentioned curse because starting the infirmity, [de Lima] said to [Rufina] that she should not try to cure him [Godo Mejia] because he was condemned to die as Paula de Eguiluz had given her *recaudo* to the mentioned Ana Maria to kill him, and that after the burial Ana Maria said, ‘you see, I told you that this man would die.’¹⁴⁰

She also said that a demon had adumbrated her that *mulato* surgeon Diego López’s daughter would die in the course of very few days and that there was no remedy for it.

According to López testimony, four days later, his daughter fell irremediably sick and soon

¹⁴⁰ “[L]a dicha Paula de Eguiluz había amadrinado para que fuese bruja esa Ana Maria de Lima a la cual había dado la dicha Paula Recaudo para matar a un mercader llamado Hernando Godo Mejia. El cual murió en la huerta de Don Pedro de Rebolledo del dicho maleficio.” AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 10, Fol. 37r.

passed away.¹⁴¹ Similarly, López told the story of how in 1633, on his way to bloodlet one Juan Gonzalez, he had met Paula de Eguiluz in the “Plaza of the Jagueyes.” Paula had asked him “if he was going to open some fountains [to bloodlet] Juan Gonzales, and that he [Diego López] answered that yes and that then Paula told him not to bother trying to cure [Gonzalez] because he would die in four days, as it effectively happened.”¹⁴²

Cartageneros of all social classes and cultural backgrounds associated death and dying with African related rites and beliefs. These events were understood at face value by Europeans, Africans and their descendants in a closely related fashion. The practice of using body parts of deceased persons, or help from the dead, as elements of non-orthodox rituals was not, by any means, the exclusive patrimony of African traditions. While, as I show here, there were clear Bran, Zape or Congo roots, among many others, to ceremonies and beliefs enacted in the Iberian Caribbean, Africans and Europeans understood in their own terms such events and concepts. In Cartagena, common rituals and materials functioned as *cultural bridges*, as *elements of encounter*. In understanding and believing in common ritualistic elements, Europeans, Africans and Native Americans opened ways for sharing and shaping their own beliefs and created new ones.

¹⁴¹ “Habiendo algunos días que este no veía a la dicha Rufina mulata su amiga porque la mujer desde estaba recién parida y la asistía, una noche como a las diez de ella tiraron tres pedradas al tejado de este conque le quiso la gente de su casa de salir de que ele obligo a salir a este de su casa...conoció luego ser Rufina su amiga y llegándose a ella le pregunto que hacia allí y ella le respondió buena pregunta es esa como no me a visto en tanto tiempo y este la dijo que como su mujer estaba parida...y que su diablo le había dicho que habría de morir su hija débil en poco tiempo sin que hubiera remedio.” AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 10, Fol. 31v.

¹⁴² “[P]laza de los Jagüeyes que salía de casa de Rafael Gómez y le pregunto a este que si le iba a abrir algunas fuentes [sangrar] al dicho Juan González y este respondió que si a que la dicha Paula dijo no se canse en curarle porque moría dentro de cuatro días y así sucedió.” AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 10, Fol. 41r.

Conclusion

Dying, death and the dead were, as I have shown here, ubiquitously present in the natural and imaginary landscape of early modern Spanish *Caribeños*. Because of their importance in shaping the world of the living, the study of death and the dead provides rich clues as to the characteristics of cultural and social structures in early modern Caribbean locales like Cartagena de Indias. In cities like Cartagena, moments of passing and beliefs about the afterlife and the power of the dead were potent vehicles for the incorporation of African mores into local culture. Most scholars working on slavery, African Diaspora, Black Atlantic, and Latin American History have examined African death rites and beliefs in the light of resistance, survivalism and struggle. According to this view, the social meaning of death is relevant exclusively in political or cultural isolationist terms. While I agree with scholars like Vincent Brown in regarding death rites as uniquely powerful social events, with political significance attached to them, I do not consider that their only purpose was to channel reactionary cultural motifs. The dead, as Brown says, are “integral to both social organizational and political mobilization, and therefore vital to historical transformation.”¹⁴³ Yet, this transformation, and therefore the power of the dead in society, could also be an adaptative and integrative one.

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Jamaican society, the subject of Brown's inquiry, is a world apart from seventeenth-century Cartagena de Indias. Common to both places, however, was death's powerful and ubiquitous presence and its power to shape the “History of the living.”¹⁴⁴ Here lies the relevance of exercises in deciphering concepts and ideas about death and dying in the early modern Spanish Caribbean. As I show here, concepts of dying

¹⁴³ Brown, *Reaper's*, 6

¹⁴⁴ Brown, *Reaper's*, 6

and ideas about death and the dead functioned as exceptional and fluid routes for African cultural penetration, reinvention and re-imagination in the Americas.¹⁴⁵ However, when examining this process it is essential to define, as precisely as possible, African cultural configurations using contemporary sources. It is not possible to simply describe idioms, ideas, words, rites and customs as “African” based on the admittedly tremendous and adaptative borrowing and sharing of cultural artifacts that happened in the Americas. The very concept of “Africanness” entails generalization and stereotyping. The same can be said about the use of post-colonial ethnographic works as the sources for defining such Africanness. These heuristic tools, besides their historicism, reduce African and African history to tales about nationalistic, or anthropological colonialist tropes, such as “Bantu,” or “Yoruba” “cultural zones.”

One of the issues at stake here is the lack of a useful framework for the analysis of identity formation and creation in the early modern Atlantic. The models, dialogues and discussions that have dominated the literature are all primarily based on eighteenth and nineteenth century descriptions of the African Diaspora. These accounts are, for the most part, quite inadequate for evaluating the Africans identities in the early modern period. The two hundred years between the beginning of African slavery in the Americas and the mammoth growth of trade later in the eighteenth century saw a seismic change in the structure of African societies. Extended and prolonged contact with Westerners, as well as the slow but certain increase in slave trading and the creation of the slave-factory model that would be in vogue during the eighteenth century, shaped interactions, identities and loyalties

¹⁴⁵ See also, amongst others, Stephan Palmié, *Slave Cultures and the Cultures of Slavery* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995); also, Joseph Miller, “Retention, Re-invention, and Remembering: Restoring Identities Through Enslavement in Africa and Under Slavery in Brazil,” in José C. Curto and Paul E. Lovejoy. *Enslaving Connections: Changing Cultures of Africa and Brazil During the Era of Slavery* (Amherst.: Humanity Books, 2004).

in West and West Central Africa. The small number of Africans imported to the New World, then, compared to the gargantuan number transported in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, made it a necessity for Africans to align themselves with other African groups in the Americas. This was true even in places like Cartagena, which had a population formed largely by Africans and their descendants.

Furthermore, the identification of practices, material culture or ideas exclusively with one place misses the commonalities that cultures, seemingly separated by vast geographical and cultural distances, shared. As I show here, Europeans and Africans shared common elements -- cultural cognates -- which served as *cultural bridges*. Such elements were often recognized by actors coming from Elmina and from Hamburg and were seminal in the fruitful interchange that occurred in the Spanish Caribbean.

Cartagena's dead had origins. This, obviously, does not imply that these dead ones, and the power they exerted, were not transformed by beliefs coming from other parts of the Atlantic world. But how are we to describe such metamorphoses, or just to assume them, if we do not search, to the extent that this is possible, for the connections and ingredients of the Caribbean cultural maelstrom? These otherworldly colonizers populated Cartagena's underground and imagination. They became essential for the re-imagining of Africa and the creation of the Spanish Caribbean culture and society, and in the shaping of Afro-Caribeños memory of both the Old and the New World.

However, not all "social connections and communities of memory" were created through fights.¹⁴⁶ Memory, like identity, was also created through advancement, adaptation, sharing and willful learning between different cultural groups, including Europeans, African

¹⁴⁶ Brown, *Reaper's*, 127

and Native Americans.¹⁴⁷ The memory of the people living in the New Kingdom of Granada's northern shores began in Africa and Europe, but it was consciously created and re-fashioned in the reiteration of the quotidian.

Much as beliefs and rituals about death varied among Africans during the seventeenth century, funerals and dying practices worked as locales for the creative re-imagination of different cultures and the seasoning of a foreign land and society with recognizable elements. The dead were, in some regards, the glue holding together the creation and reinvention of African culture in the Americas, and more specifically in the New Kingdom of Granada. They allowed the living ones to recognize themselves and re-appropriate, or reinvent, their lives.

The evidence I show in this chapter makes clear that in Cartagena's multicultural society, Europeans and their descendants had "Africanized" visions of death, the dead, and dying. Unlike the tropes that populate both scholastic, scientific and African culture and rituals, seventeenth century Europeans in Cartagena believed, used and feared African customs and ideas about dying and death. As I discuss in the following chapter, Cartagena's socio-cultural realm was a world apart from the orthodox, Catholic, and rigid place that has served as the point of departure of many works on Spanish "hegemonic" society. Cartagena was a distinctively African place where newly arrived immigrants from the entire Atlantic world encountered and submitted to the power of spirits, souls, animas and ghosts.

¹⁴⁷ The scholarship in the creation of Black Atlantic Diasporic memory has been a vibrant focus of scholarly conversation during the last decade. For some examples see, Kristin Mann, and Edna G. Bay, *Rethinking the African Diaspora: The Making of a Black Atlantic World in the Bight of Benin and Brazil* (London: F. Cass, 2001); Ana L. Araujo ed, *Living History: Encountering the Memory and the History of the Heirs of Slavery* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2009); André Jolly and Emanoel Araújo. *Benin: está vivo ainda lá : ancestralidade e contemporaneidade/ Bénin: est encore vivant là-bas : ancestralité et contemporanéité* (Sao Paulo: Museu Afro-Brasil, 2007); also, Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies, and Ali AlAmin Mazrui *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

CHAPTER VI

THE AFRICANIZATION OF THE EARLY MODERN SPANISH CARIBBEAN

No podía concebirse un bailongo más taciturno en medio de tanta música, con los esclavos propios y algunos de otras casas de distinción que aportaban lo que podían. La niña se mostraba como era. Bailaba con más gracia y más brío que los africanos de nación, cantaba con voces distintas de la suya en las diversas lenguas de África, o con voces de pájaros y animales, que los desconcertaban a ellos mismos. Por orden de Dominga de Adviento las esclavas más jóvenes le pintaban la cara con negro de humo, le colgaron collares de santería sobre el escapulario del bautismo y le cuidaban la cabellera que nunca le cortaron y que le habría estorbado para caminar de no ser por las trenzas de muchas vueltas que le hacían a diario.

Gabriel García Márquez, *Del Amor y Otros Demonios*

On February 5, 1610, Juan de Iturrieta Alcibia and Pedro Gil de Redonda, respectively the treasurer and the accountant of the Spanish Crown in Cartagena de Indias, reported to the Council of the Indies in Seville about the expenses of the “royal barge.” One of the entries in their report explains why they had to replace one of the slave rowers of the barge. De Iturrieta Alcibia and Gil de Redonda wrote that Pedro Bran, “had become sick of paralysis and went mad because he had killed and skinned a big snake.” According to the Spaniards, “it was understood that in the frenzy of his illness he had either drowned or fell from a cliff.”¹

¹ “[E]n lugar de otro negro nombrado Pedro de nación Brand que de matar y desollar una culebra grande había enfermado de perlesía [parálisis] y se había vuelto loco...que habiendo enfermado del dicho achaque de haber muerto y desollado la dicha culebra se había vuelto loco y perlático y con la dicha locura se había echado dos veces a la mar y le habían sacado estándose ahogando y andaba haciendo otros disparates como loco hasta que abría dos meses y medio poco mas o menos que aunque los demás negros sus compañeros tenían cuidado con el se había desaparecido y aunque se había buscado por la ciudad y en la ciénaga y popa de la galera y otras partes no se había hallado ningún rostro del antes se entendía que con el furor de su enfermedad se habría ahogado o despeñado.” Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain (hereafter AGI), Contaduría, 1388. Fols. 385-395.

De Iturrieta Alcibia and Gil de Redonda's framing of Pedro Bran's "madness" in an African model of causality exemplifies the complex, multi-layered conceptualization of corporeality, illness and death espoused by the early-modern inhabitants of places like Cartagena de Indias. Africans contributed to common explanatory discourses of the body and the natural world in Colonial Latin America and shaped, in ways that have not been fully explored, the lives of Europeans, Native Americans and their descendants alike.²

This little anecdote, an entry in the bookkeeping records of the Spanish Royal Crown in Cartagena, provides us with a window into the complex processes that allowed two Spaniards to explain paralysis and madness based on what in most likelihood is a commingle of African traditions and beliefs about the powers of snakes. The normative character of West and West Central African culture in Cartagena made it possible for Africans of many distinct locales and ethnic groups to integrate their own beliefs into the cultural fabric of Spanish Caribbean society. Although this process was certainly not homogeneous, all evidence indicates that Africans in places like Cartagena shared strategies for maneuvering the New World.

This early modern *Caribe*, one impregnated by ideas, beliefs and mores of African origin, is not necessarily obvious in contemporary extant records. Most of these written accounts are generated by early-modern Europeans and represent their worldview.³ Such

² Different from what recent scholarship has argued for other places in the early modern and modern era, in Spanish Caribbean cities slaves lived simultaneously private and public lives in which they were able to construct communal and political lives out of the control of their masters. See, for examples of such scholarship, Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003); Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 33-78; Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 69-143.

³ Paul Gilroy further advances that "a quiet cultural nationalism" is behind the work of several of the more recent studies of the British Atlantic. Gilroy, and Herman Bennett consider that "this crypto-nationalism means that [scholars] are often disinclined to consider the cross catalytic or transverse dynamics of racial politics as a

bias, however, should not mislead us into believing that the social categories and ideas they reproduce were the only ones existing, or even that they were truly dominant in places like Cartagena de Indias.⁴

Camouflaged by terminology, Europeans' erasure, and historians' readings of the records, there is an New world, one that filters through the writings of inquisitors, scribes and bishops and which was decisively modeled by West and West-Central Africans and their cultures.⁵ This chapter explores this other world, a world that challenges the ways in which Europeans and their descendants portrayed Africa and Africans. This world appears only in the periphery of the surviving record, but keeps, nonetheless, jostling to be recognized.

Many scholars working on the history of the African experience in the Americas have argued that part of the problem of reconstructing the lives of African and their descendants is the scarcity and fractured nature of the records these people's "fractured" lives left. It is undeniable, for example, that the written sources we have for the reconstruction of the lives of Cartagenos' elite like Jesuits, doctors and Crown officials are not comparable to those available for describing the existence of early modern slaves living in the same city. However, the paucity of sources only partially explains the limited perspective we have of how African and their descendants engaged with the New World during the first two centuries of their arrival to American shores.

significant element." Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 4.

⁴ For specific examples about body practices in the New Kingdom of Granada and Caribbean, see Diana Ceballos Gómez, "Grupos Sociales y Prácticas Mágicas en el New Kingdom of Granada Durante el Siglo XVII," *Historia Crítica* 22 (2001): 51-75; or Jairo Solano Alonso, *Salud, cultura y sociedad: Cartagena de Indias, Siglos XVI y XVII* (Barranquilla: Universidad del Atlántico, 1998).

⁵ Certainly, as Bennett recognizes, "The African presence, black slavery and the proliferation of mixed-race populations influenced the workings of the Spanish Commonwealth (*república*), including the ways that Spaniards and Indians imagined difference, value and honor." Herman Bennett, *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 3; See also, Laura A. Lewis, *Hall of Mirrors: Power, Witchcraft, and Caste in Colonial Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

Several difficulties are responsible for this neglect. Prominently, scholars studying Latin American and Caribbean societies have based their analytical categories on models used to re-create European societies.⁶ In addition, most of the work on the Spanish Caribbean has used tools provided by economic or social history. These approaches, because of their design, discuss Africans as a homogenous mass, as numbers only, as if these African lives cannot be known. They also locate Africans at the bottom of a socio-economic hierarchy created by Europeans and their descendants.⁷ Equally problematic is, the tendency to analyze the experience of African and their descendants solely through the institution of slavery.⁸ This approach impoverishes their history. It blinds us to the relevance and abundance of testimonies of all sorts that relate the centrality, diversity and richness of the lives and culture of people of African descent in early-modern Colonial Iberia.⁹

Recent attempts at reconstructing the lives of free and freed Africans in the Spanish colonies have, for example, often seen African culture only as peripheral and part of an

⁶ For example the, otherwise, excellently researched monograph of Alejandro de la Fuente. Alejandro de la Fuente, *Havana and the Atlantic in the sixteenth century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008). This problem has been addressed by several historians like Jane Landers, Paul Lovejoy, Joseph C. Miller, and John Thornton. See Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida*. Blacks in the New World. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); or Joseph C. Miller, "Retention, Reinvention, and Remembering: Restoring Identities Through Enslavement in Africa and Under Slavery in Brazil," in *Enslaving Connections: Changing Cultures of Africa and Brazil During the Era of Slavery*, ed. José C. Curto and Paul E. Lovejoy (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2004).81-121.

⁷ See for instance, amongst many others, Adriana Maya Restrepo, *Brujería y Reconstrucción de Identidades Entre los Africanos y sus Descendientes en la Nueva Granada, Siglo XVII* (Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura, 2005); Adriana Maya Restrepo, "Botánica y medicina africanas en la Nueva Granada, siglo XVII" *Historia Crítica*, 19 (1999): 3-23; Margaret Olsen, *Slavery and Salvation in Colonial Cartagena de Indias* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004); Hélène Vignaux, *Esclavage et rébellion : la construction sociale des Noirs et des Mulâtres : Nouvelle Grenade, XVIIe siècle*, (Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry III, 2007). The same can be said of places like Brazil. See, James Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Elisa Nascimento, *The Sorcery of Color: Identity, Race and Gender in Brazil* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007); Ernesto Mora Queipo, *Los esclavos de Dios: religion, esclavitud e identidades en la Venezuela del siglo XVIII* (Zulia: Universidad del Zulia, 2007); Luis Nicolau Parés, *A formação do Candomblé: história e ritual da nação jeje na Bahia* (Campinas: Editora Unicamp 2007).

⁸ Bennett, *Colonial Blackness*, 1- 5

⁹ Specifically for the New Kingdom of Granada, for instance, Aline Helg observed that "historians have often neglected the Afro-Colombian experience except in relation to colonial slavery." Aline Helg, *Liberty & Equality in the Caribbean Colombia, 1770-1835* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 13.

unrelenting march towards dissolution in Western European social, cultural and religious norms. Bennett, for instance, has argued that the lives of freed, free and enslaved Africans and their descendants in Iberian America were marked by cultural disbanding and loss.¹⁰ What may be true of a Viceregal capital such as Mexico City, is not in a vastly different scenario such as the Spanish Caribbean port cities of Cartagena, Habana or Caracas, that I study.¹¹

This type of reading of colonial documents privileges the familiar narrative that looks at processes of cultural interchange as unidirectional. In other words, it reinforces the old tropes of “creolization,” “cultural transfer,” or “hybridization,” which refer, most commonly, to the “Europeanization” of either Africans or Native Americans. This vision of Spanish America perpetuates its image as a place for cultural confrontation and imposition.¹²

From this perspective, African religions and culture became subsumed in the intricacies of Catholicism.¹³ This is not what I have found in Cartagena. If anything, the process of “creolization,” “syncretism,” or, if you will, “hybridization,” in Cartagena may describe the sharing and shaping of the African cultures brought by people as diverse as the Zape, the Bran, the Ararás, the Carabalés, or the Congos, to name just a few of the African groups that came to Cartagena during the seventeenth century.

This chapter examines the terms used to define early modern African identities and cultural groups. As Robin Law, Joseph Miller, and Walter Hawthorne, amongst others, have

¹⁰ Bennett, *Colonial Blackness*. 8.n

¹¹ *Ibid*, 6-8.

¹² As anthropologist Peter Wade argues “There never really emerged a tradition, functionalist or otherwise, of doing intensive ethnographies that had as their object the explication of the internal characteristics of particular black communities.” Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (Chicago: Pluto, 1997), 37.

¹³ See for example, Joan Bristol, *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches: Afro-Mexican Ritual Practices in the Seventeenth Century* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008); Nicole von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers: Confraternities and Social Mobility for Afro Mexicans* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006); Ben Vinson, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). Maya, *Brujería y Reconstrucción*.

argued, the cultural interchange of African cultures did not start in the Americas. Not only regional trade, but, from the fifteenth century on, European sponsored commerce and human immigration along the Atlantic shores from Senegambia to the tip of the continent, created a series of ports in which Africans from diverse places coexisted.¹⁴ The imagination of African seminal or primordial cultures, thus, owns much more to modern strategies for self-identification, and Eurocentric ethnological colonialism as it does to the characteristics of early modern African societies. The *Bantu*, *Ewe-Fon*, or *Yoruba* ethnic groups, to name just a few, did not exist as a cohesive or describable community in the seventeenth century, if they ever did. Again, this does not mean that African cultures cannot be known or that Africans are devoid of history. On the contrary, the recognition of the dangers of up-streaming cultural definitions, acknowledges Africans and their descendants as equivalent to Europeans. As agents and actors in their world, Africans adapted culture, norms and rites to an ever-changing economic and social situation, as Europeans did.¹⁵

¹⁴ Robin Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving 'port', 1727-1892*. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004).

¹⁵ See the introductory chapter, as well as chapter two and three of Walter Hawthorne's monograph, Walter Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves: Transformations Along the Guinea-Bissau Coast, 1400 – 1900* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003); Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations*; Joseph C. Miller, *Retention*; Thornton, *Africa and Africans*. Also, Peter Mark, *"Portuguese" Style and Luso-African Identity: Precolonial Senegambia, Sixteenth-Nineteenth Centuries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002). Philip Morgan, and David Richardson, "Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History: Reassessing the African Contribution to Rice Cultivation in the Americas," *American Historical Review* 112 (2007): 1329–1358; Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 7–8; J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). I do not think that, as James Sweet argues, this was a defining and unique characteristic of early modern West-Central African cultures. See, also, James H. Sweet, "African Identity and Slave Resistance in The Portuguese Atlantic Sweet," in *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550-1624*, ed. Peter C. Mancall (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Furthermore, see Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Douglas B. Chambers, " 'My Own Nation': Igbo Exiles in the Diaspora," *Slavery and Abolition* 18 (1997): 72–97; David Northrup, "Igbo and Myth Igbo: Culture and Ethnicity in the Atlantic World," *Slavery and Abolition* 21 (2000): 1–20; and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

No sabía santiguarse

According to the most accepted view on African religiosity in the Spanish Americas, Africans and their descendants, even while marginalized, belonged to and strived to integrate into corporative structures in Catholic societies.¹⁶ This position presents Catholic and European mores as the *de facto habitus* of Spanish colonial societies.¹⁷ It argues that Africans and their descendants only reenacted their socio-cultural mores and tenets in isolated rural locales, or in maroon settlements.¹⁸ Scholars adopting this position argue African cultural characteristics became diluted in the process of social deprivation that characterized the institution of slavery, or through the family disruption and cultural impoverishment that characterized the lives of slaves.¹⁹ When freed, according to such narratives, the best avenue slaves had for social advancement in urban spaces was acculturation and renunciation of African language, food, and religious and social customs. African Christianization was, thus, inevitable. Historians have seen the participation of Africans in *cofradías* [brotherhoods] or their marriage under Catholic tutelage as evidence of such processes.²⁰

Many of these previous works have bypassed what for me are prominent examples of alternative models of cultural interchange. The literature on the African Diaspora in Latin

¹⁶ Slaves occupy a particular belligerent and isolated space in the weaving of Cartagena's society in most of seventeenth century Colombian historiography. See, for instance, María del Carmen Borrego Plá, *Cartagena de Indias en el siglo XVI* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, C.S.I.C., 1983); and Adriana Maya, *Brujería*, among many others.

¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 54.

¹⁸ Historian George Reid Andrews, for instance, says about plantations that “These highly developed centers of plantation-based export production became the largest importers of African slaves, and thus the heartlands of Afro-Latin America.” George R. Andrews, *Afro-Latin America 1800-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 17.

¹⁹ Naturally, scholars working on nineteenth century Brazil and Cuba have famously emphasized the retention of African culture. Here, I am referring, most specifically, to what happened in the rest of the mainland colonies of Spanish America such as New Kingdom of Granada, Mexico, or Peru.

²⁰ See for example, Bennett, *Africans*; Von Germetten, *Black Blood*; or ; Mariza de Carvalho Soares, *Devotos da cor: identidade étnica, religiosidade e escravidão no Rio de Janeiro, século XVIII* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2000); Matt Childs, “The defects of Being a Black Creole: The Degrees of African Identity in the Cuban Cabildos de Nación,” in *Slaves, Subjects and Subversives: Blacks in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Jane Landers and Barry Robinson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 209-246.

America has too often focused on stories of cultural disintegration as part of what some historians have branded the holocaust-like narrative of slavery studies. However, Africans in Cartagena did not necessarily become acculturated, nor did their culture disappear.

The inadequacy of taking social sanctioning rituals as evidence of the Europeanization of Africans is evident when confronted with material from Inquisition records. Even when Africans and their descendants interviewed in Inquisition trials declared themselves to be “*christianos viejos and gentiles*,” [old Christians and gentile] a logical strategy considering the circumstances, they almost without exception failed when examined on the most basic precepts of their supposed faith, such as reciting a *Pater Noster* or an *Ave Maria*. Most of the ritual practitioners studied in this dissertation, for instance, had a very limited, knowledge of Catholic rites, if any.

For instance, when examined by the inquisition, Guiomar Bran, a ritual practitioner from Upper Guinea who was identified as a *ladina* [acculturated] who had lived for many years among the Spanish, “did not know how to cross her self nor the prayers.”²¹ Like Guiomar, Francisco Mandinga, another powerful and old practitioner who had lived for decades around Cartagena and faced charges of being a healer and a *sortilego heretical* [heretical sorcerer], failed his examination in front of the tribunal. According to the record of his trial, Francisco was of “gentile” origin and had been baptized. Francisco testified that “after having been stolen [from his homeland],” he had been taken to “different parts in Spain.” He told his questioners that he went to mass but had never been confessed or taken

²¹ “Con ser negra ladina y de muchos años de estar entre Españoles no sabia signarse ni santiguarse ni las oraciones.” Archivo Histórico Nacional de España (hereafter AHN), Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 242r.

communion, but they reported that “He did not know how to cross himself or any other thing.”²²

Juan Angola, also known as Juan Scabies, also testified that “He was a baptized Christian and that, as such, he went to mass.” However, he “did not know how to cross himself or other things of the Christian doctrine.”²³ Juan de Salzedo, while being “a baptized and confirmed Christian who went to mass when the Holy Mother Church ordered,” butchered “most of the prayers” during his trial, a time and place where any rational being should have strived to deliver a perfect doctrinal performance.²⁴

Some historians would consider these events evidence of partial acculturation. Under such processual light, Africans were irredeemably marching toward European Christian integration and renouncement of other types of religious or cultural beliefs. However, another reading of these testimonies is that Africans adopted Christian customs in a pragmatic way and as needed to survive and thrive in Cartagena’s society. Sometimes, they adopted very little.

Many Africans in seventeenth-century Cartagena lived their Catholicism in a nominal, pragmatic way...as a rite of passage and belonging that had very little, if anything in some cases, to do with the ways they saw the world. For instance, it is impossible to prove, but all evidence suggests that Africans, particularly those coming from Kongo, would see churches as places for the veneration of ancestors and full of power like *Minkisis*.²⁵ Unlike what happened in Kongo, in Spanish America not only nobility was inside the church. Indeed,

²² “Avia oído algunas misas pero nunca confesadose ni comulgado ni supo signarse ni otra cossa que le trajeron hurtado.” AHN, Inquisición 1023, Fol. 353v.

²³ “Era cristiano bautizado y confirmado y como tal oía misa pero ni persignarse supo ni otras cosas de doctrina Cristiana.” AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 350r.

²⁴ AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 404v.

²⁵ See John K. Thornton, “The Development of an African Church in the Kingdom of Kongo 1491-1750.” *Journal of African History* 25 (1984): 147-167.

many slaves could be buried inside and African brotherhoods had particular places reserved for the burial of their members.²⁶

What is more surprising, Africans apparently did not need to learn Castilian to succeed in occupations requiring continuous public interaction. Several of the ritual specialists examined in this dissertation did not speak this language after living in Cartagena for several years, and in most cases after decades. In other words, in places like Cartagena, the community of speakers of African languages was large enough for *bozales* [unacculturated] to navigate Spanish cities with their original linguistic tools, and thereby preserve elaborate and sophisticated social and ritual practices.

For example, the famous Miguel Arará spent at least a decade in Cartagena before his inquisition trial, yet he was far from being a *ladino* when he faced the tribunal. In his first audience, “he talked about all his ancestors and said that he was baptized, although nobody else in his land is.” Even though he had not left the city since he came as a *bozal* from Arda he needed two translators.²⁷ The free woman Isabel Hernández, who worked as a midwife, was another who did not know how to speak Castilian. The famed Jesuit priest Pedro Claver, had to send two interpreters from the Jesuit College to help in the translation of her trial.²⁸ Felipa, “of the *Falupa* nation, and an old slave who was very *bozal* [un-acculturated],” was accused of being a witch and underwent several interrogations by inquisitors who found it impossible to extract an intelligible deposition from her. Although she had been living in Zaragoza for a decade, she only spoke her native tongue.²⁹ The inquisitors, explaining why

²⁶ People coming from *Kongo* are known as *Congo*.

²⁷ “Dio su genealogía de negros toda y que el era bautizado aunque en su ley ninguno lo es.” AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 228v.

²⁸ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 293v.

²⁹ AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 50r. Possibly a predecessor of what latter would become the Fulfulde/Pular family of languages.

after several months of imprisonment they had to liberate her without pressing charges, said that during all that time nobody had hear her say “a word in Castilian.”³⁰ Another African, Luis Yolofo, also from upper Guinea, had lived in Cartagena for some three decades, and was able to explain “all of his genealogy.” However, he was only able to do so in “Yolofo or Futta” language. He too could not speak a word of Castilian.³¹

The situation was more surprising when we consider that, as shown in Chapter III, most of these African ritual specialists were healing people from all ethnic and social backgrounds including priests, lawyers and Crown officials. Francisco Arara, who according to the record was the healer of several priests in Cartagena, said that like many others “he was a baptized and confirmed Christian.” By 1682, when he was put to trial, he was “more than sixty years old,” and had been in Cartagena around four decades healing Europeans of all origins. Still, as had Miguel and Isabel, he needed two translators to be able to talk to the tribunal about the nature of his rites and the people using them.³²

As I have shown in the previous chapters, these powerful *Mohanes* [master sorcerers] were at the center of communal events. Spaniards and Africans alike consulted them. They exerted considerable influence in societal matters in the city and yet only communicated in their language of origin, or through interpreters. This situation also suggests that Africans taught their descendants languages coming from the Old World. All evidence shows that while imports of slaves, both through sporadic official sales and through smuggling, continued in Cartagena de Indias after the demise of the Portuguese *asientos* in 1640, most of

³⁰ “Porque hasta entonces no se le había oído palabra en lengua castellana y por falta de intérprete de la suya y haber estado cerrado el tribunal, no se había tenido con ella audiencia alguna.” AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 50r.

³¹ “Dió su genealogía todo en yolofo o futa y en no querer hablar nombrosele interprete con quien quiso insistir en lo mismo.” AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 351r-v.

³² AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 314v-315r.

Cartagena's population grew from the reproduction of people of African descent. As in Habana and Caracas, people of African descent freed and enslaved, created vibrant communities and in Cartagena, they formed the large majority of the city's inhabitants.

The situation of Africans in places like Cartagena de Indias, even slaves, was quite different from what happened in plantations, or in British and French realms. Africans and their descendants, free and enslaved, freely interacted in the urban space of Caribbean cities. They would even freely visit the leprosarium on the outskirts of the city. In 1628, Doctor Antonio Chavarría "protomédico" [public health official in charge of examining physicians, surgeons and apothecaries for licensing purposes] and other *vecinos* [residents of the city] asked the Council of the Indies for money to build a new hospital for lepers. The *leprosarium*, called, as most of these places were known in the Spanish world, "San Lazaro," was located on the Camino Real, the main road into and out of the city. However, as the *vecinos* complained, it had no walls to keep the lepers inside the building. As a result, Black lepers were frequently seen in the company of other Black men and women who had gone outside the city to gather wood, or to boil salt. Lepers also gathered with Blacks from nearby *estancias* [cattle ranch], all of whom congregated with them in a friendly manner, smoking tobacco together, eating together, and bartering.³³

The *vecinos* complained that some Black lepers even sneaked into the city at night. While the *vecinos* punished the Black when they apprehended them, there was no effective manner to restrain them. In addition, the *vecinos* were scandalized that there was no space in the hospital to separate men from women, or funds to build separate housing for women. Not surprisingly, pregnant Black women suffering from leprosy left the hospital to give birth. Giving the *de facto* cohabitation of men and women, the *mayordomo* [the manager of the

³³ AGI, Santa Fe 63, Exp. 69.

place] had even forced some couples to marry. He and the *vecinos* recommend a high outer wall be built to keep lepers inside hospital grounds, away from the city, and away from other Blacks. One of the witnesses who owned an *estancia* was particularly worried about leprosy spreading among Black slaves, especially, his own.³⁴

As this example shows, even when condemned to incarceration by disease regulations, Blacks were an active part of their communities and moved freely around the city. The same was true of African practitioners condemned by the inquisition to imprisonment either in jails, convents or hospitals. Francisco Arará is a case in point. Francisco was serving a prolonged sentence in the Santa Clara convent for using African rituals when he received particularly worrisome news during his imprisonment at the Santa Clara convent. His wife was being unfaithful.³⁵ One night he asked the convent guard's permission to visit his wife who lived in the city. The guard complied indicating how lax incarceration was for most of these African ritual practitioners. In Francisco's words "he went to his house and found his woman sleeping with another Black." Francisco's reaction was fast, violent and, unlike some of his spiritual rituals, very much physical. According to his wife "[Francisco] grabbed her, tied her by her arms, threatened them with an *alfanje* [a scimitar] and took her to the beach to kill her there, while screaming all the time that she was having an affair and that it was because of her he was in jail."³⁶ There is no mention in the record of the lover's fate, but people hearing the shouting of the husband and the screams of his wife, ran to her defense and promptly captured Francisco. After the melee, the betrayed

³⁴ AGI, Santa Fe, 63, Exp. 69.

³⁵ After being brought through the streets of the city in a donkey and in San Benito of a *Sortilego*. AHN, Inquisición, 1023, 315r.

³⁶ "Había ido a su casa y hallado a su mujer acostada con un negro...que había ido a buscarla la amarfo las manos, la amenazo con un alfange y la llevaba a la playa para matarla diciendo que estaba amancebada y que era ella la causa de haber sido castigada por este santo oficio y a las voces que es dio salió gente y la defendió." AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 315v.

Arará *Mohan* was sentenced to be paraded around the city sitting naked on a donkey, and to what must have been 200 very bitter lashes.³⁷

Evidently, most of the cultural interchange occurring in places like Cartagena must have happened not between European and African cultures but *between* African ones. Cartagena was Africa in the Americas. African languages were spoken openly and were the *lingua franca* of poorer enclaves in the city, such as Getsemaní. In such areas, African rituals around health, illness, and death dominated the cultural landscape of the city. Religion, music, food, and family, all had African roots as well. If there was not a recreation of a particular African custom in Spanish Caribbean locales, it was not because Africans became Europeanized or Christianized, but because in the *Africanness* of such places, African custom, rituals, and structures became intermingled. They camouflaged each other in the fabric of the mundane. The apparent dissolution of African mores the early modern Spanish Caribbean resulted not from their destruction in the middle passage and the experience of enslavement, but, rather, because they were so robust that they became normative.

Snakes, “Juntas de Brujas,” and Diablitos: Africa’s re-imagination in Cartagena

The anecdote of Pedro Bran, with whose story I opened this chapter, and the conclusions drawn by the two Spanish officers in charge of explaining why they would need another slave for the royal barge have well established African roots. Like other residents of Cartagena, Juan de Iturrieta Alcibia and Pedro Gil de Redonda used African explanations to make sense of the world around them. Their claim that the killing of a snake was the cause behind Bran’s madness probably came from the filtration of West and West Central African ideas about the nature and location of snakes in their cosmogonies.

³⁷ AHN, Inquisición, 1023, Fol. 317r.

British trader William Bosman wrote in the seventeenth century about a strikingly similar event in the Bight of Biafra. According to Bosman,

The reverence and respect which the Negroes preserve for the snake is so great that if a black should barely touch one of them with a stick, or any otherwise hurt him, he is a dead man, and certainly condemned to the flames. A long time past, when the English first began to trade here, there happened a very remarkable and tragical [sic] event. An English Captain having landed some of his men and part of his cargo, they found a snake in their house, which they immediately killed without the least scruple, and not doubting but they had done a good work, threw out the dead snake at their door, where being found by the Negroes in the morning, the English preventing the question who had done the fact, ascribed the honour [sic] to themselves; which so incensed the natives, that they furiously fell on the English, killed them all and burned their house and goods.³⁸

During the seventeenth century, several groups around the Bight of Benin revered snakes, and particularly pythons, as the embodiment of the god Dã/Dangbe.³⁹ They were not

³⁸ William Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (London: James Knapton & Dan Midwinter, 1705), 359.

³⁹ The inherent problems of Western-Europeans' ethnic classification of African slaves have been profusely discussed in the literature. Pedro Bran probably came from the Guinea-Bissau region and was embarked in the *Brame* seaport. However, his reaction to the skinning of the snake and its attempts to draw himself are probably related to *Vodun* tradition's belief in the snake god Dã/Dangbe. Either because he became in contact with such traditions on Cartagena, or he brought them with him from Africa, Bran's actions, and the two Spaniards explanations evidently exemplifies an extended, and shared, understanding of the *Vodun* tradition. For *Vodun* believers, snakes are sacred animals not to be disturbed and that anyone daring to do so would become cursed, mad, sick and would finally perish. Western Europeans collectively called all these *Vodun*-worshiping people as "Arda/Ardra/Arder/Ardres" (from the name of the kingdom of "Allada") and "Minas" (after the fort of Elmina, or in Portuguese São Jorge da Mina). In Saint Domingue these groups were called "Rada." In Cuba and in the Nuevo Reino de Granada they were called "Arará," and in Brazil and French Louisiana they were called "Mina." See, for example, Jane Landers, "Cimarron Ethnicity and Cultural Adaptation in the Spanish Domains of the Circum Caribbean 1503-1573." In *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery.*, ed. Paul Lovejoy (The Black Atlantic. London: Continuum, 2000), 30-54; Paul Lovejoy, "Identifying Slaves in the African Diaspora." In *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery.*, ed. Paul Lovejoy (The Black Atlantic. London: Continuum, 2000), 1-29; Gwendolyn M. Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); or Richard Price, *Ethnographic history, Caribbean pasts* (College

the only ones though. West Central Africans also considered snakes as representatives of ancestors and spirits. This was similarly true in Kongo where there is ample evidence showing that in Angola, according to contemporary narratives, natives worshiped “big snakes.”⁴⁰ Isabel Angola, speaking to the inquisition tribunal in Cartagena about his visit to maroon settlements in the outskirts of Cartagena said that ‘the demon appeared to her in the form of a snake.’ She was, “a Black woman from the Angola nation and a slave of Manuel Paez.” But, Isabel was not alone in believing that divinities appeared in the form of snakes. Eight witnesses “seven of them Black, three women and a *mulato*,” said that Isabel was a sorcerer and diviner who “used several techniques including herbs, waters, stones and other things and that she communicated with the demon who came in the form of a snake.”⁴¹

Europeans all around the Caribbean believed in African originated ideas about the natural and supernatural worlds. For missionaries like Jesuit priest Pedro Claver this was a desperate situation, But missionaries in Africa were at least as concerned as Claver about their inability to eradicate African religious beliefs and about their own ranks falling into “heathen beliefs.” Some of them wrote desperately to their peers in Europe about the enormous challenges they faced. For example, Father Bernardino da Gallo wrote his superiors in Rome from Angola in the mid seventeenth century that,

The fathers who lead the church, instead of securing the child in the Catholic faith, turned their eyes to the left and off the church...[They] began to fall back into ancient superstitions. The little children [the Africans]...due to a lack of evangelical

Park: University of Maryland, 1990).

⁴⁰ Anne Hilton. *The Kingdom of Kongo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 12-14.

⁴¹ “Usaba de muchos y diversos modos, valiéndose de yerbas, aguas, piedras y otras cosas y de que tenia comunicación con el demonio en figura de culebra.” AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 408r.

sustenance were left to fall prey to all vices...and became the miserable slaves of the devil and the hell-fire.⁴²

Africans in Cartagena, for all of the efforts of clergy and inquisitors, continued to be enthralled by those very same “ancient superstitions.” However, they did not do it in separated groups divided by region of origin or language. Unlike nineteenth-century Cuba or Brazil, there is little evidence that in Cartagena Africans organized themselves around ethnic lines. Although it could be a consequence of the characteristics of the available record, in early modern Cartagena there are only hints of the existence of the same African brotherhoods that emerged in Habana, Lima and Mexico.⁴³

What we do know, is that Black Cartagenos of all origins gathered around drums and liquor in the city’s streets and plazas. Evangelizers like Father Claver despaired. He patrolled Cartagena’s plazas and streets brandishing a club that he lashed against drunken Blacks while furiously trying to stop the innumerable dances that proliferated in places like the “Plaza de Jueyes,” the “Plaza de Santo Domingo,” or at the gates of Santa Catalina and San Carlos.⁴⁴ Contemporaries in Cartagena repeatedly remarked upon the Blackness of the place, and how its nights and days were filled by the sound of drums coming from the four corners of the city.

Cartagena smelled, sounded and tasted like Africa and Blackness. Yet this was not a Blackness created by European visions of humanity, nor was it the result of “social death.”⁴⁵

⁴²Relations de Bernardo da Gallo, Quoted in Louis Jadin, *Le Congo et la Sected des Antoiniens. Restauration du Royaume sous Pedro IV et la 'Saint Antoine' Congalaise. Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* (1961), 473.

⁴³ The only hint to this are some references to it in the seventeenth century like Miguel Arará who worked in the pharmacy of the Santa Clara convent and said that, he belonged to the Arará brotherhood of the city. Landers, *Cimarron*, 39.

⁴⁴ Ana María Splendiani and Tulio Aristizábal, *Proceso de Beatificación y Canonización de San Pedro Claver* (Bogotá: Universidad Javeriana, 2002), 28.

⁴⁵ A new generation of scholars have picked Patterson concept and reinvented it to explain social patterns in

It was one created by Africans in the reshaping of their lives in the New World. The description of the ethnic, social and even geographic origin of some those attending one of the ritual practitioners meetings in seventeenth-century Cartagena illustrate the cultural *mélange* taking place in the Caribbean city. One of the participants in a *junta de brujas* [ritual practitioner gathering] declared to the inquisition tribunal,

That the [practitioners] came at midnight to the Manzanillos plaza [for a witch meeting] and that he saw arriving ...[to the meeting] Doña Francisca de Herbas, wife of Beltran, and a daughter of Juan Bautista de Bargas that was a nun...[he also saw] María Vasquez, *mulata* who is the woman of Geens, and a niece of Juan Téllez...[also] a *mestiza*, the wife of Escobar the fisherman, as well as the sister of Dorotea Sabina...who came from Jamaica, and a *mulata* that lives in front of Don Joseph de las Salas and is the lover of Juan Téllez. [He continued saying that in addition he saw] a woman called Sable, natural of Santa Marta and who lives in Getsemaní, and also Doña Laura the wife of Céspedes the surgeon...and that [they] meet there with Paula de Eguiluz who was the teacher of them all. [my emphasis].⁴⁶

places like Jamaica. See Vincent Brown, *Reaper's*; and the classic Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

⁴⁶ “[Que] se vinieron como a media noche a la plaza de los manzanillos y vinieron y este vió venir volando por el aire con su diablo cada una puestas las suyas como calzones a Doña Francisca de Herbas mujer que ahora es de Don Beltrán de Luna y una hija de Juan Bautista de Bargas que fue monja y casada con un hijo de Montiel y ahora lo es con un hombre de la mar [también] Doña Magdalena de Estrada, María de Thema que vive en la calle de la Ceiba junto a María Vásquez *mulata* la mujer de Geens y Ayala una sobrina de Juan Téllez donde tiene Paula su hija, una *mestiza* que vive en frente del matadero en casa de Ana María viuda de Juan Bautista de Bargas la mujer de escobar el pescador, la hermana de Dorotea sabina viuda que es al presente y vino de Jamaica, una *mulata* que vive en frente de don Joseph de las salas y trata deshonestamente con Juan Téllez Isabel de Sta. Marta que vive en Getsemaní, Doña Laura la mujer de Céspedes el cirujano que vino a mula desde su estancia que según dijo la dicha Rufina era el diablo la mula en que venia. Las cuales todas vio este que bailaron alrededor de un cabrón con Paula de Eguiluz que se hallo allí como maestra de todas estas.” AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 7, Fols.11v-12r.

These meetings occurred in the middle of the city, and not only in rural locations. For example, ritual practitioners would meet in the house of “Elena de Vitoria,”⁴⁷ or at Paula de Eguiluz’s abode.⁴⁸ Believers also freely congregated in the streets, like during the *lloro* [funeral] of Joan Bran “a great sorcerer who lived in the *Cruz* street, “when all of Cartagena’s *brujas* [ritual practitioners] got together for his funeral late at night In that meeting, several practitioners gathered “between the doors of Diego López and Elena de Vitoria.” Among them were “Paula de Eguiluz, Elena de Vitoria, Teodora de Salcedo, Juana de Mora, María Mendez, y Juana Zamba y Rafaela de Nava, and many other *brujas*.”⁴⁹

In spite of their participants’ variegated origins, these gatherings had, nevertheless, a discernable African background. One of the *brujas* described one of the *juntas*, which she declared were at least weekly events, in certain detail. According to Paula de Eguiluz, the *brujas* and *brujos* would get together at around ten at night. In the meetings a “personage dressed from head to toe and who carried something similar to a bishop’s miter on his head,” sat on a regal throne under a tree.⁵⁰ The person Paula described at the center of the ceremony was, in most likelihood, the officiant of the rite. Such personages used masks and ornaments as in many African traditions, and *brujas* called them “*Rey-Obispo*” [King-bishop]. Writing about contemporary Angola, the Italian Capuchin Missionary Giovanni Cavazzi described *similar events*. Writing about *kibandas*, a type of *baganga* [ritual specialists pl.]⁵¹ the

⁴⁷ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp 7, Fol. 4v.

⁴⁸ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp 7, Fol. 29v.

⁴⁹ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp 10, Fols. 94r-v.

⁵⁰ They got together at around “diez y las once de la noche donde vio un sitial o trono negro muy majestuoso y debajo de el una figura vestida toda hasta los pies y encima de la cabeza tenia una cosa como mitra que parecia obispo.” AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp, 10, Fol, 30r

⁵¹ For a detailed discussion on the different type of *bagangas* see David Westerlund, *African Indigenous Religions and Illness Causation: From Spiritual Beings to Living Humans* (Brill: Koninklijke Brill NV 2006), 114-117.

Capuchin friar said that they, “dress like pontiffs in various animal skins such as those of lions, tigers, wolves, dogs, etc. and various little bells which they call *pambas*.”⁵²

As Cavazzi explained, the use of human fat in religious or healing rituals was a common element in several types of West and West-Central African rituals and Cartagena’s ritual specialists also used concoctions based on human fat and, not rarely, hallucinogens. The Capuchin missionary said that “the Giagas rub themselves with the oil of their mother and renew it according to law with the human fat of a noble person taken in war.”⁵³ In Europe, and particularly in France, human fat was employed in medicinal preparations. However, we do not count with particular information on specific ritual practices in which European used them. This, naturally, does not discard that the use of human fat by people of African descent in Cartagena was a unique African custom. Indeed, it could be very well be part of the larger multidirectional processes of cultural appropriation taking place in the city.⁵⁴

As in Africa and Europe, the meetings of Cartagena’s *brujas* took place during the night in remote, inaccessible areas of the city, like the “cienaga del Manzanillo” [the Manzanillo swamp].⁵⁵ Most of these *brujas* were Africans or Afro-descendants, although

⁵² Giovanni A. Cavazzi, “Missione Evangelica nel Regno de Congo”, MS 1668, Book 1, 73. Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi (1621-1678) was a Capuchin monk who lived in Angola and Congo from 1654 to 1677. On his return to Italy he completed his “Missione evangelica nel Regno de Congo” an Italian description of West-Central Africa and the history of the Capuchin mission there. Here I use the original manuscript which Cavazzi completed in 1668 and which has been in the hands of the Araldi family in Modena Italy. Cavazzi’s original handwritten text is also known as the “Araldi manuscript. In 1668 Giacomo Monti edited and published Cavazzi’s original work. See Giovanni A. Cavazzi and Alamandini Fortunato, *Istorica descrizione de' tre' regni Congo, Matamba et Angola: sitvati nell'Etiopia inferiore occidentale e delle missioni apostoliche esercitateui da religiosi Capuccini* (Bologna: Giacomo Monti, 1687).

⁵³ Cavazzi, Book 2, 54.

⁵⁴ See for example, Brigitte Rossignol, *Médecine et médicaments au XVIe siècle à Lyon* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1990), 85.

⁵⁵ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 7, Fol.4v. López’s “*reniego*” [denial of God] and initiation in “satanic” rituals was most probably a story fabricated with his fellow defendants in the *conspiración de brujas* of Cartagena in 1634. In that story he refers to common places of the stories of witches initiation in the pagan European traditions, like encountering the *Cabron*, kissing his anus, and having a bacchanalia in which food was without

there were many Europeans and *mestizos* [descendants of Europeans and Native-Americans] too. Although it is uncertain whether such *juntas* [meetings] actually took place in the physical realm, there is no doubt in the fact that Diego López shared with the other members of his circle a familiarity with African traditions.⁵⁶ Like Diego and his accomplices, did in the Bight of Benin and Biafra, ritual specialist met in *ajo*, nocturnal congregations for the cult of divinities. Similarly, the *baloki*, or the *banganga*, witches and ritual specialist of upper Guinea and Congo-Angola respectively, were associated with the night, and met at that time, for this was when the spirits of the underworld, *bakulu*, *bambisi*, and *minkuyu* were more active.⁵⁷

While witches meeting during the night were common features of both European and African traditions, there are several hints that point to the African origin of these *Cartageneros' juntas*. Potencia de Abreu, a free Black *Cartagenera* testified that *Brujas* in Cartagena painted themselves with white powder. “She recognized the devil as [her] God and Lord because the [priest], who was covered in flour, ordered it.”⁵⁸ Ritual specialists in Kongo, among them the *Mbewe* and the *Fang* used *Pemba* or *mpemba* [kaolin] in their rituals. In Kongo culture, white is the color of the underworld, the world of the death. According to Wyatt MacGaffey, “removable ‘white skin’ chalk dust connects the wearer with

salt, and where every witch should have sex with Lucifer himself who always had a semen of extreme temperature, either cold or hot. For general works on early modern European witchcraft see Gary K. Waite, *Heresy, magic, and witchcraft in early modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); or, among many others, Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: the Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Diego, and the rest of the witches in that cluster of trials tell the same stories of wondrous flights and animal conversions. This strategy was intended to provide a story that would fit the inquisitors’ framework of the satanic, and thus would reinforce the Catholic discourse, and would make them acceptable, although misbehaved members of the society. See for instance, Serge Gruzinski, *La colonisation de l’imaginaire: sociétés indigènes et occidentalisation dans le Mexique espagnol, XVIe-XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988); also Joan Cameron Bristol, *Christians, blasphemers, and witches: Afro-Mexican ritual practice in the seventeenth century* (Albuquerque : University of New Mexico Press, 2007).

⁵⁶ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 7, Fol.29r.

⁵⁷ Westerlund, 56, 87.

⁵⁸ “le reconoció por Dios y señor al diablo por habérselo mandado el [oficiante] aquel estaba en figura enharinado.” AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fols.467r.

the dead.”⁵⁹ Several African cultures also saw in their trees, either *Baobabs*, or *Ceibas*, a ceremonial and ritualistic place that they associated with cultural and societal memory and ancestry.⁶⁰ Prototypical of such rites was López’s initiation ritual.

During this ceremony López was assigned a *diablito* [little devil] called *Taravita*.⁶¹ This *diablito*, which had the form of a “dwarf Indian,” was López’s unique assistant. This was because, according to Lopez, “it was not necessary,” as he also had his wife who helped him with his “entertainments.”⁶² The form of López’s *diablito* is also telling. As discussed in previous chapters, deviations from common forms in the human figure were a signal of divine intervention in several West and West-Central African traditions.⁶³ Still, there is one feature of Cartagena’s initiation rituals that, from my perspective, represents the most compelling evidence of their African flavor. Diego López described this initiation *junta*, saying that he had met with,

A devil that was in the figure of a dwarf and was called Taravita and dressed as an Indian...then [he had] hugged his sponsor and his little devil who had given him a

⁵⁹ For a through and through analysis of the significance of colors in *Congo* culture see Anita Jacobson-Widding, *Red--white--black as a mode of thought: A study of triadic classification by colours in the ritual symbolism and cognitive thought of the peoples of the Lower Congo* (Uppsala: Univ/ Stockholm : Almqvist & Wiksell international, 1979). The *banganga* (*Singular nganga*) are the religious specialists who make the *Nkisi* objects and are the experts in the type of prescriptions used in them. See Wyatt MacGaffey, *Kongo Political Culture: The Conceptual Challenge of the Particular* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 100.

⁶⁰ See Robert Farris Thompson, *Face of The Gods: Art And Altars Of Africa And The African Americas* (New York: Museum for African Art, 1993); also for references to the same type of rituals in other places of the Caribbean see the classics Fernando Ortiz, *Los negros brujos* (La Habana : Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1995); and Lydia Cabrera, *El Monte, Igbo Finda, Ewe Orisha, Vititinfinda; Notas Sobre Las Religiones, La Magia, Las Supersticiones y el Folklore de Los Negros Criollos y del Pueblo De Cuba* (Habana, Ediciones C. R., 1954).

⁶¹ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 7, Fol.5r.

⁶² AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 7, Fol.51r.

⁶³ In the Bight of Biafra alterities in the physical forms of the human body, including albinos, dwarfs, hunchbacks, and people with moles, are associated with a divine origin. Bascom, 81; E.T. Lawson, *Religions in Africa: Traditions in Transformation* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), 59. In contrast, MacGaffey argues that Congo traditions, consider such abnormalities to be dangerous, “recycled dead.” MacGaffey, clarifies that in Congo’s cosmology, twins as well as people with abnormalities are regarded as “recycled dead”, a condition which is dangerous, although the actual treatment of them varies. See MacGaffey, *Religion and Society*, 85-88.

little candle in the hand with which he danced as everybody else did circling a big devil and kissing [the devil's] ass when they went around...and that when they put out the little candles he had got together [had sex] with his devil, who had taken him and known him [penetrated] through the back hole [anus] in which he had had more pleasure than if he had been with a woman.⁶⁴

In this, imaginary or real, encounter López not only confessed to the “*pecado nefando*,” [sodomy] but also, arguably, referred to two closely related West and West Central African tenets about homosexuality. In Dahomey, and the rest of the Bight of Biafra and Benin, homosexual men were preferred as ritual specialists. They would become the wives of divinities to whom they had to serve. The spiritual possession, as in the case of López, sometimes took on more physical forms. Divinities, physically, penetrated the bodies of ritual practitioners.⁶⁵ Angola beliefs also assigned a holy status to homosexual men. Cavazzi, for instance, talks about a ritual specialist in *Angola*, “this diabolic minister [who] is called *kibanda*, goes around dressed in women's clothes and is called by the name of [his] mother, exercising the vice of Gomorrah [sodomy] worthy of eternal fire... some are doctors who cure people, others practice various arts but all exercise the vice of Gomorrah.”⁶⁶ The *kibanda*, thus, were in charge of healing and were assumed to be the most powerful of all

⁶⁴ “ Un diablo que estaba en figura de hombre enano y se llamaba Taravita vestido como indio...luego abrazado a su madrina y a su diablo el cual le había dado una candelilla en la mano con que bailó con las demás a la redonda de un cabrón besándole en el trasero al dar la vuelta...apagadas las candelillas se había juntado el reo con su diablo el cual le había tomado y conocido una vez por el vaso trasero en que había tenido mas gusto que si estuviera con una mujer.” AHN, Inquisición,1020, Fol. 387v.

⁶⁵ Matory provides a rich discussion of the topic of homosexuality in *Jeje (Adja)* traditions. See Matory, 235.

⁶⁶ Most seventeenth century observers were struck by the homosexuality of the *kibanda*, for which there seems to be no modern analogy. Cavazzi calls these priests “great mothers” and says that they dressed in feminine clothes used powders of several colors to beautify their faces.” Cavazzi, Book 2, 46.

brujas. Angolas considered *kibanda*'s sexual preferences a sign of divinity and of these priests closeness to supernatural realms.⁶⁷

For all their efforts in eradicating African “diabolic” ideas, Inquisition ministers actually fostered the multiculturalism of what was already a heterodox and cosmopolitan place. Instead of isolating ritual practitioners, Cartagena’s inquisition introduced ritual practitioners from the entire Caribbean to Cartagena’s society and placed them to work in convents and hospitals. As we have seen, these Africans were hardly secluded in the convents and hospitals where they served their sentences and instead enjoyed certain freedoms like going out and visiting family and friends outside their place of incarceration.

Most certainly, the bulk of African religious and cultural mores came through ritual and oral tradition to the new world. However, Africans and their descendants were literate. They also had access to printed media such as books for expanding their knowledge. There is no way to determine what type of books these Africans were reading. We know, however, that many Afro-Descendants knew how to read and write, and that even more knew at least how to read. Diego López, for instance, frequently asked his jailors in Cartagena to provide him with *pliegos* [paper sheets] so he could write his depositions to the Inquisition.⁶⁸

In addition, Diego López told the Inquisition, that he had found Paula de Eguluz and some other *brujas* reading. He talked about “a little book that Isabel López and Paula Eguluz had.”⁶⁹ Diego López’ occupation as surgeon had required him to take exams and read extensively in order to gain the royal certification of the *protomedicato* [the Royal Spanish

⁶⁷ James Sweet has found the same kind of practices in colonial Brazil. See Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 50.

⁶⁸ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp 7. Fol.51r.

⁶⁹ “Un librito que tenían Isabel López y Paula Eguluz el librito estaba en medio de la sala y este concibió mala sospecha ver los dichos instrumentos.” AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp.7, Fol.39r.

regulator of medical licenses].⁷⁰ Besides this, his insatiable curiosity for the life of others meant that he paid attention to what his patients were reading. As a direct consequence, Lopez denounced many *marranos* [Jews recently converted to Christianity] and *herejes* Protestantes [Protestants...], whom he caught reading prohibited texts. López was reported his patients for less intellectual activities, such as the use of papal *bullas* as toilet paper, or of images of the holy virgin as covers for *vasinillas* [chamber pots].⁷¹

Ambrosio Hernández, a *mulato* from Cartagena, was similarly unsuccessful in concealing his reading abilities or his abilities as a witch. He knew about “herbs and witchcraft.” What he knew about illnesses he “had studied and was studying and that it was not against his faith because his books had passed the inquisition screen.”⁷²

These stories attest to the literacy of some Afro-descendant populations in early modern Caribbean cities. Writing and reading, added to a strong oral tradition allowed a mediated communication and transmission of African traditions. Oral and ritualistic traditions retained their primordial importance as symbolic and representative mediums of African culture and rituals. However, Africans and their descendants also had a sophistication and accommodation for the transmission and integration of knowledge that most historians of the period have failed to recognize.

⁷⁰ He told the tribunal about his trip to Santa Fe in the Andes to get his certification. AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 7, Fol. 41r. The protomedicato was a medical board whose responsibilities involved not only licensing but also was in charge of public health measures and was in charge of declaring quarantines of boats, houses and cities. It was also the regulator of hospitals and leprosariums. See John Tate Lanning and John Jay TePaske. *The Royal Protomedicato: The Regulation of the Medical Professions in the Spanish Empire*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1985.

⁷¹ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp.7, Fol. 42v

⁷² “Lo había estudiado y estaba estudiando y que no era contra su fe porque sus libros habían pasado por la Inquisición..que habiendo visto el libro de Cortés y que se decía que el que esta pasado por la Inquisición de Valencia, lo tuvo por bueno y por eso lo leyó y que habiéndose leído los edictos de la fe en el pueblo de Turbaco este es un pueblo de indios que esta a tres leguas de esta ciudad por el año de 1650, llevó dicho libro al comisario de dicho pueblo y que habiéndole tenido algunos días en su poder se lo volvió diciendo que era bueno y que así no tuvo malicia en sacar algunos signos que saco y dió a algunas personas como tiene declarado.” AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 336r.

Colonizing European Imagination

On August 27, 1631, the tribunal of the Holy Office in Cartagena received notice that African witchcraft was behind an epidemic devastating the city. Informants filed a complaint in Cartagena's Inquisition in which they claimed to know about some *negros* and their "*polvos que han ocasionado una gran peste*" [powders that have caused a great pestilence].⁷³

That Europeans and their descendants ascribed the origin of plagues and natural disasters to African and Afro-descendant ritual specialists was not, apparently, a rare occurrence nor was it patrimony of Cartagenos. In the 1620s, in another case, two Spaniards from the Minas del Cobre in east Cuba told inquisitors about some terrifying thunderstorms they said had been caused by Paula de Eguiluz's witchcraft, as was evidenced by the abnormal activity of sheep and goats around the hamlet where Paula lived.⁷⁴

Indeed, there are no hints in the evidence examined in this dissertation that could signal to Europeans doubting, deriding or belittling African and Afro-descendants' ceremonies and ideas about nature and bodies. Instead of being peripheral, Africans mores about bodies and nature became normative in Cartagena. They fitted into the world-view of prosecutors, witnesses, defendants and judges. Cartagenos coming from all ways of life and from places as diverse as Madrid, Lisbon, London, Amsterdam, Puerto Rico, Angola, Elmina, Senegambia or Mozambique used, trusted and feared African practices and ideas about the natural and supernatural worlds. In the New Kingdom of Granada's Caribbean coast, and more generally in the Spanish Caribbean, explanations of living and dying derived not only from orthodox but also from alternative sources.

⁷³ AHN, Inquisición 1011, Fol.68r.

⁷⁴ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp 10. Fol. 29v.

Andres del Campo, a prominent peninsular surgeon who was a *vecino* of Cartagena during the first decades of the seventeenth century pleaded to the inquisition in the process against his wife Lorenzana de Acereto arguing that,

Her cause should be dismissed...[as] the tribunal has not taken into account that in this kingdoms the [Catholic] faith has been only recently planted, and [so far] it has only been inhabited by idolaters. [What is more] the persons that were born here [in the New Kingdom], as Doña Lorenzana, are raised by Indian and Black women who did not know, until now that the Holy Office of the Inquisition was founded, about what is good or evil.⁷⁵

It was because of such circumstances that ritual practices became part of everyday life. In places like Cartagena, the purported limits between “learned, European” culture,” and African “magic, primitive” ones, were permeable and diffuse. Europeans frequently resorted to and used the services of ritual practitioners of African origin. They also believed themselves to be the victims of these practitioners’ rites. Case in point, Justa Perez, a *mulata* who had already being tried by the inquisition one decade earlier, went again to trial in 1648 on charges of forcing people to get married by using love potions. Her accuser, a Spanish woman from Portobelo, modern Panama, called Doña Agustina de Rojas, said that she had been persuaded by Justa to marry her master. De Rojas, claimed that before meeting Justa she wanted to marry one Juan Triunfo. However, after Justa started using her rites against

⁷⁵ “La causa seria imputable haber admitido algún uso de yerbas, polvos. O palabras. De lo cual vuestra alteza a de ser servido. De no hacen la consideración que se debiera en estos reinos porque en aquella tierra es nuevamente plantada la fe. Ya estado llena de indios idolatras y las personas que allí han nacido como nació la dicha doña Lorenzana se crían al pecho de amas indias y negras. Que ni hacen escrúpulo de su susodicho ni lo conocen por cosa mal echa hasta que agora se fundo allí el dicho tribunal del santísimo oficio de la inquisición y con sus edictos se a conocido: atento a lo cual y a que la dicha Doña Lorenzana como queda referido nació en la dicha ciudad y se crio con las amas referidas que son personas de poca capacidad y ser ella de poca edad no experta en cosas que la pudiesen advertir.” AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 1. Unnumbered facsimile at the end of the volume.

her, she had “fallen in love [with Justa’s master] in such a manner that she could not be a minute without him until, finally, they had sex until they got married, all of which [she] attributed to the mentioned Justa Pérez because she is a witch.”⁷⁶

Paula de Eguiluz’s clients also included Spanish women. One told the inquisitors that after being fighting with her husband day and night for several months with her husband, she asked Barola, her slave, to call Paula de Eguiluz. After being updated on the situation, Paula asked the woman for two shirts, one of hers and the other of her husband’s to solve the situation. She asked other desperate housewives for “a cloth with their husband’s semen.” On another occasion, she asked one of her afflicted customers to take pork meat and “measure with it the length of their husband’s genital member.” After this, one would imagine rather awkward measuring, the afflicted wife should bake the meat and feed it to her husband.” According to her patrons, later turned accusers to the inquisition, such procedures were extremely effective either in igniting the passion, or the *mansedumbre* [meekness] of lovers and husbands.⁷⁷ Europeans and their descendants frequently attended the “juntas” of African and their descendants and often participated in African ritual practices. They learned and used them and were not only at the receiving end of *maleficios* [curses] or healings. Diego Lopez for instance said that, Doña Laura, the wife of another surgeon whose last name was Cespedes, was a practitioner of African rites.⁷⁸ Witnesses declared that Cespedes’s wife had “damaged the correct thinking of her husband.” She had also “given poison to Avallero, the tailor, in a receptacle full of chocolate because he wanted to marry a woman that today is

⁷⁶ “Se trocó de manera que nos e hallaba hora ni punto sin él y finalmente tuvieron trato ilícito hasta que se casaron; todo lo cual atribuyeron a la dicha Justa Pérez por ser Bruja.” AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 204r.

⁷⁷ “Con ella le tomase la medida del miembro genital del dicho su marido y la tal medida la asase y se la diesse a comer.” AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 10 (2), 5v-11r.

⁷⁸ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp 7, 39v.

married to Martin, [another] tailor.”⁷⁹ Alonso Laso, a surgeon of European descent, was also said to attend African rites for divination.⁸⁰

Even the few aristocrats living in the Spanish Caribbean used the rituals of African and their descendants. Ana Ramirez, a *mulata* born in la Havana was accused around 1672, by several Spanish women and men, and even a priest that

While dealing with the illicit loves [sexual activity] of the mentioned Marquise of Villalba with Don Marquez, now her husband, [Ana Ramirez] had given her some waters so she could marry him. She also used hairs and a black hen, as well as a black tape that [Ana] returned with five knots one of which was made in the name of the Marquis and one *sedoma* [jar?] so she poured [the water] in the front of the Marquis’ house... while saying, here I poured in the name of Don Gonzalo de Herrera.⁸¹

Europeans and Euro-descendants also used African ritual practices for less loving initiatives. Such was the case of Lorenzana de Acereto, the wife of Andres del Campo. Del Campo, paradoxically, would have to plead with Inquisitors for the life of his wife arguing that, as I explain above, she was born in the *Indias* and raised by Blacks and Indian women. According to Juan Lorenzo, a *mulato* ritual practitioner born in Lima, Lorenzana de Acereto, with the complicity of her *negra* slave, Juana, had planned the death of her husband.⁸² The motive was mundane enough. Doña Lorenzana was in love with another man, the Sergeant Mayor Francisco de Santander. Juan declared that Lorenzana, a Euro-descendant *criolla*,

⁷⁹ “Doña Laura mujer de Cespedes el cirujano había entorpecido el entendimiento de su marido y dado con que matar al Avallero sastre en una chicara de chocolate por haber entendido que se quería casar con la mujer que hoy es de Martin el sastre.” AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 7, 39v.

⁸⁰ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 7, 29v.

⁸¹ “Que tratando amor ilícitos la dicha Marquesa con el Marques su marido abra la había dado esta rea algunas aguas para que se casase, y manos y cabellos y una gallina negra y una cinta y se la volvió con cinco nudos hecho el uno en nombre del marques y una *sedoma* para que las derramase en la puerta de el... diciendo aquí derramo en nombre de Don Gonzalo de Herrera AHN, Inquisición, 1023, 312r.

⁸² He served as a slave of fray Antonio de Cisneros of the San Augustine order. AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 1, Fol. 5v.

asked him for a human skull which he suggested they could find in a tomb in one of Cartagena's churches. Two days later, Lorenzo saw Lorenzana "breaking the skull," which he had robbed from a church tomb. After breaking it into little pieces, she proceeded to grind it into powder. Lorenzo "seasoned" this powder with special herbs that would cause the demise of Lorenzana's husband.⁸³

What took place then, tells about the importance and pervasiveness of African beliefs about the origin of illness in early modern Cartagena. Asked five years later about the mysterious affliction that overcame del Campo at the time of Lorenzana's experiments with skulls, a priest from the San Agustín order, the "*Presbitero Maestro*" Fray Gaspar de Herrera, declared that he had then "heard Andres de Campo complaining to him about his [de Campo's] wife." According to de Herrera, Andres de Campo told him that Doña Lorenzana, "wanted to give him some powders and that because of this he had to flee to the house of the blacksmith." Not long after this conversation, according to the priest, "when he went to say farewell to the mentioned Andres del Campo, he found him with a great fever, while saying a thousand foolish remarks." De Herrera left horrified while saying that "such condition could not be caused by anything else but spells."⁸⁴

Remarkably, it was obvious to anyone involved in this process, including a surgeon, a judge, a priest, and several other Spaniards, that the cause of de Campo's affliction was spells

⁸³ AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp 1. Fol. 5r.

⁸⁴ "Haría cinco años cuando don Francisco de Herrera oidor de este Reino tuvo preso al susodicho mayor francisco de Santander, y muy apretado que por su causa se hacían en esta ciudad muchas diligencias en razón de hechizos y que en particular se acuerda de a quien lo a oído aunque han sido muchas y que la doña lorenzana mujer de Andrés del Campo le visto todo el tiempo que estuvo preso en la cárcel y que la principal que trata deshonestamente con ella y que haría tres años poco mas menos que oyó decir a Andrés de Campo quejándose a este declarante de la ya de su mujer le dijo que la doña lorenzana le quería dar unos polvos y que se había huido en aquel tiempo a casa del herrero? Y que ahora cinco años lléndose a despedir del dicho Andres del Campo el Padre Mayor le había hallado con una gran calentura diciendo mil disparates fuera de si y que había venido admirado y le dijo a este declarante que no podía ser sino que eran hechizos." AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp. 1 Fols. 17v-18r.

caused by the works of African and Afro-descendants practitioners. The recalcitrance of such type of belief speaks to the type of world in which these Europeans thought they were living. This was a world full of African *brujas*, demons and spells. We do not know what was the cultural framework (s) on which these Euro-descendants were using to evaluate the practices of Doña Lorenzana. Certainly, experiences and beliefs of European origin modeled in large part of their vision.

As with healing ones, overlapping beliefs about disease produced openings for European's appropriation of African culture, in the pragmatic and muddled way incited by body experiences. Case in point, in European folk traditions, fever was associated with enchantments or curses. Also, as in Europe, around Upper Guinea, and in West-Central Africa, the compromise of mental abilities is strongly associated with the use of witchcraft, as in the case of Andres del Campo.⁸⁵

The same could be said about unexplainable, or sudden deaths. For example, Rafaela Nava, a free Black, was accused in the 1610s of killing "a certain person" after "giving her some yellow powders she had obtained from her devil." She confessed that, to give the mentioned person the poison, she had, carelessly, put them in the water all attendants to a party were drinking," and that while she had effectively killed the person for which the powders were intended, there had been some collateral damage. The rest of the revelers had gotten extremely sick with ulcer in their *culos* [asses].⁸⁶ Writing in the margin of the folio in which these deaths are described, an inquisition official clarifies that "such deaths and

⁸⁵ See Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 31.

⁸⁶ "Haber dado unos polvos amarillos que pidió al diablo...y confesaba que se los había echado en el agua que todos los de la fiesta bebían y había muerto la dicha persona y otras dos que nombro y enfermado los demás y llagado muy el culo."AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 373r.

illnesses were true and [seen] by everybody. [However] their cause was not then known.”⁸⁷

Similarly, in the case of Ana Suarez the scribe recorded prosecutors’ efforts to clarify the causes of their killings. They found that she “had killed two men because she had been paid to do so. That one was a blacksmith that went by the nickname ‘Patillas’ and the other was a store owner.”⁸⁸

Some of the claims might well have been exaggerated; like Anton's that he killed more than one hundred Christians. However, all such deaths were apparently familiar to the community at large. The relative ease with which ritual practitioners admitted to have killed is related to the fact that it was not possible to prosecute an Inquisition defendant under ordinary civil law for the same crimes. The office of the inquisition was concerned with matters of faith and not with murder. Whatever the defendants said in the process was secret and the evidence could not be transferred to the “secular arm” [secular justice].⁸⁹ Thus, ordinary justice never processed any of the confessed killings described above. Had they been convicted of the same crimes in secular courts, most, if not all, of the Africans and Afro-descendants named in this chapter would have been hanged on Cartagena's notorious public gallows.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ “Estas muertes y enfermedades fueron ciertas a vista de todo el lugar sin saberse entonces su causa.” AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 373r.

⁸⁸ “Había muerto a dos hombres porque se lo habían pagado, que el uno era un herrero llamado por mal nombre Patillas y otro un pulpero, sobre que se hizo información y se examinaron siete testigos.” AHN, Inquisición, 1021, Fol. 185r.

⁸⁹ As I said above, they could not handle her to ordinary justice. This was only done in the very last minutes of the life of those burnt at the stake and only for procedural causes as the church could not kill, according to its own principles, a human. Thus, the “relajados” were, technically, put to death by secular authorities at the end of the very catholic “Autos de Fe.” Inquisitors did not send Africans to the gallows not because they did not believe they deserved it, but because the rigid code that guided them did not allow them to do so.

⁹⁰ Some accusations were denied by defendants like Juana de Mora who was accused of being a witch and killing her husband with a “tortilla de huevos” [a plate of scrambled eggs] She answered that far from being the truth, she has not done such a thing as her husband “had drowned at the mouth of the Magdalena River.” “había muerto ahogado en la boca del Río Grande.” AHN, Inquisición, 1020, 378r. “El Rio Grande” was the Magdalena river, the largest one of Colombia.

Inquisition records make clear that prosecutors were invested in clarifying, to the extent possible, the ritual, in their words “malefic,” origin of the deaths. The same can be said of the witnesses whose ethnicity, age and sex were carefully noted at the beginning of each process. Naturally, only a few persons, or in some cases only the specialist him or herself, would have known about the ritual origins behind somebody's death. However, the suspicion hovered over all unexplainable or “unnatural causes.” The zeal in the inquiry of several deaths allegedly caused by Diego Lopez is telling. According to the record, more than twenty-two witnesses were summoned to declare on the causes of the death of seven Europeans and Euro-descendants. Although the cause was clarified to be of “*etico*” [tuberculosis] in two cases, in the others “*maleficio*” [a spell or curse] was supposed or “could not be discarded.”⁹¹

It is also sensible to presume that ritual practitioners firmly believed they caused the deaths they confessed. The imagination and conceptualization of the process of dying were essential in the reaffirmation of African cosmogonies in the Americas. Through death and dying, Africans ingrained their worldview into the life experience of all the inhabitants of places like Cartagena.

The practices of death were, as curing practices, transmitted and taught from specialist to specialist. Although some of the practitioners mentioned above learned their trade in Africa, most began their training in the New World. Furthermore, as I advance in chapter three of this dissertation, even *bozales* were eager and did learn new rituals and techniques

⁹¹ Juraron cinco testigos en razón de lo que el dicho reo testifico de que cierta persona con maleficio había quietado el juicio al tesorero de la Real Hacienda, por haberle quitado a la persona el ser oficial de ella, los cuales declararon haberlo visto muchos días a temporadas sin juicio y que aquella persona le quería mar, pero no que supiesen había hecho el maleficio, sino que de la dicha locura había venido a morir. También se hizo averiguación sobre si era verdad que una criatura que el reo testificaba que se había llevado a cierta casa, muerta, había pasado así y dos testigos afirman haber sucedido así, pero no deponen de maleficio. Y en otro caso de una niña que murió también se examinaron dos testigos que dicen que murió y se morateo toda, pero no sabían quien le hubiese hecho mal. AHN, Inquisición, 1620, Exp 7. 7r.

from other practitioners once in America, whether they came from West and West-Central African coast, the Iberian Caribbean or Europe. The vast amalgamation of beliefs and cultural mores in Cartagena and its area of influence is evident in the fluid relationships between specialists of all origins and their practices.

In the Spanish Caribbean, Europeans did not think that what they were seeing in African rituals of death and dying were “pretense.”⁹² On the contrary, they fully ascribed to the African vision of the world that would come to dominate Cartagena's social and cultural realms. For instance, the inquisitors did not raise any doubts regarding Maria Cacheo's statement of having killed more than one hundred persons including her own children. The inquisitors, after “considering the circumstances of this case, its inhumanity and sacrileges,” condemned her to jail, and to march in an *Auto Público de Fe*, where she would receive one hundred lashes; furthermore, she was supposed to spend the rest of her life in Cartagena.⁹³ Because of the particularities of the inquisitorial legal system, she had to be condemned according to the terms of reconciliation. As she had confessed, and was, according to her own avowal, “repentant” of her acts, the inquisitors, whose rulings were reviewed, and often rebuked, in Madrid, had no other choice but to impose the maximum sentence allowed under the given circumstances.

Likewise, the evaluation of European attitudes to “fetishes” and African rites has been tainted by the positions of enlightened writers. The fact that these views are the ones that are more easily accessible to scholars, and the lack of reference to a well developed field on folk and alternative beliefs in contemporary Europe on the part of scholars of the African diaspora, has obscured the fact that, for the most, Europeans believed and feared ceremonies

⁹² Brown for instance describes skepticism and derision as the common attitude of eighteenth century Europeans in Jamaica towards African practices of dying. See Brown, 76.

⁹³ AHN, Inquisición, 1020, Fol. 297r.

and objects such as the ones they encountered in Cartagena. African rituals and objects, though foreign, were elements to be reckoned with. While historians of medicine have recognized for a long time the relevance and preeminence of popular beliefs about the body in early-modern, and even contemporary, Europe, historians working on the African diaspora, or Latin American history continue to use the figure of the “enlightened” European as a foil to contrast with “African” alternative ritual practices.⁹⁴

European Africanization, as African Europeanization, started in Africa itself. The fanaticism with which European missionaries went after power-objects in Africa cannot be explained unless they were convinced of these objects’ powers. Sometimes, missionaries went too far and were believed to have paid with their lives for their zeal. Father Laurent de Lucques, for instance, wrote with contempt about Congo people's belief in power-objects saying that, “they put their confidence in these idols because they have a poorly developed intelligence.” Yet, actions by Europeans, and Americans of European descent, indicate an implicit acknowledgement of the power of those same “idols.”⁹⁵ For instance, Jesuit Missionary Bernardo da Gallo tells how during the late seventeenth century Europeans used the poison ordeals, in this case with a potion called *bulungu*, to determine the causes of deaths. In Kongo, da Gallo wrote, “sometimes a White uses this *bulungu* to ask whether [the

⁹⁴ For some examples on literature on medical popular medical practices see, for instance, Matthew Ramsey, *Professional and Popular Medicine in France, 1770-1830: The Social World of Medical Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Stuart Clark, “Demons and Disease: The Disenchantment of the Sick,” in *Illness and Healing Alternatives in Western Europe*, eds. Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra, Hilary Marland, and Hans de Waardt (London: Routledge, 1997), 38-58; Also Mathew Ramsey, “Magical Healing, Witchcraft and Elite Discourse in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century France,” *Ibid.*, 14-38; Linda Deer Richardson, “The Generation of Disease: Occult Causes and Diseases of the Total Substance,” in *The Medical Renaissance of the Sixteenth Century*, eds. Andrew Wear, Roger K. French, and I. M. Lonie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); or Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London: Simon Forman ; Astrologer, Alchemist, and Physician* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005; also, A. Wear, *Health and Healing in Early Modern England: Studies in Social and Intellectual History* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 1998)

⁹⁵ Laurent de Lucques, *Relations sur le Congo du père Laurent de Lucques (1700-1717)* (Bruxelles: Institut royale colonial belge, 1953), p. 147.

death] was either by poison or a curse, and who the killer of his deceased parent was.”⁹⁶ The differentiation between African and European beliefs, as discussed in Chapter III, seems more artificial when considering that Catholic priests were actively defending their own ritual objects.

In Cartagena, as in the rest of the Catholic world, the Inquisition was prosecuting people, and sometimes burning them at the stake, for desecrating consecrated hosts, crosses, or papal bullas. While Lutheran and Anglican writers decried the primitivism of papist idolaters and their beliefs in animas, purgatories and other other-worldly beings, common folk in cities like Hamburg, Amsterdam and London continued to draw on the very same old Catholic, and pagan, traditions denounced by such scholars to explain disease and death.⁹⁷ The trumpeted secularization and demystification of Europe went more smoothly in the minds of the reformers and enlightened writers than on the ground.

When taken at face value, the writings of seventeenth century Northern Europeans like Dutch Geographer Olfert Dapper seem to indicate that the derision and mockery they have for African culture and societies are reflective of an already well-developed pattern of thought. For instance, he writes about West-Central Africa that “most of the inhabitants...are still idolaters, they have moquisies or false wooden gods...[and] strongly believe that all of the sicknesses that afflict them are caused by the anger of the moquisies. The Gangas who are the priests of these idols are respected themselves as gods.”⁹⁸ Yet, it is useful to contextualize

⁹⁶ “Parfois un blanc se sert de ce *bulungu* pour savoir qui a été, soit par le poison, soit par un maléfice, le tueur de son parent décédé.” Relations de Bernardo da Gallo, in Louis Jadin, “Le Congo et la Secte des Antoiniens. Restauration du Royaume sous Pedro IV et la 'Saint Antoine' Congalaise,” *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* 33 (1961), 453.

⁹⁷ Northern European's, as argued by Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall, continued to hold to old Catholic ideas and rites about death and the dead. See, for instance, the introduction to their excellent edited volume, Bruce Gordon, and Peter Marshall eds., *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁹⁸ Olfert Dapper, *Description de l'Afrique, contenant les noms, la situation & les confins de toutes ses parties*,

the attitudes of Europeans towards African culture and artifacts without falling into the prevailing reliance on post nineteenth-century sources that dominate African Diaspora and Latin American histories. The history and attitudes of Europeans toward Africa changed substantially during the slave trade and colonial era. Early modern Europeans, and Americans of European descent, for the most part, had completely different opinions on the matter than proselytizing priests and Northern European writers would lead us to believe.

As Joyce Chaplin argues about the changing attitudes of Britons toward Native Americans, once it became clear that they would not side with them in the conquest of their own territory, Europeans had particular interests in the intellectualization of the colonial project and the slave trade.⁹⁹ Besides the more obvious objective of justifying the enslavement of “inferior beings,” Northern European attacks on “lower intelligence” of those still practicing idolatry had overtones of religious slandering of Catholics from southern Europe.

As a case in point, Father George de Geel wanted to get rid of “idols” and “fetishes” so that the real gospel could be heard and the correct objects idolized in Angola. De Geel died in 1652 after being mobbed by the inhabitants of a villa after he reprimanded the *nganga* [ritual specialist] and, burned all the *minkisi* [power objects pl.] of the place.¹⁰⁰ The commonly scathing Lucas da Caltasinetta was so afraid of the power of one of the *Baganga* [ritual specialists pl.] he encountered in Kongo that he refuse even to engage, let alone

leurs rivieres, leurs villes & leurs habitations, leurs plantes & leurs animaux, les moeurs, les coütumes, la langue, les richesses, la religion & le gouvernement de ses peuples (Amsterdam: Wolfgang, Waesberge, Boom & van Someren, 1686), 335.

⁹⁹ Joyce Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500-1676* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁰ Serafino da Cortona á José de Granada, gardien de Séville, Loanda, 6 March 1653, in Louis Jadin, *L'Ancien Congo et l'Angola, 1639-1655, d'après les Archives Romaines, Portugaises, Néerlandaises et Espagnoles*, (Bruxelles-Rome : Institute Historique Belge de Rome, 1975) :1453.

instruct her.¹⁰¹ Father Pero Tavares was not less afraid of excommunicating a famous local healer in Kongo after, he felt “a bolt of lightning ” strike him as he slept. His belief in the power of the *nganga* needed no further proof. The next morning, Tavares canceled the manhunt he had launched to capture the *nganga*.¹⁰² These were not isolated events. Other Jesuits wrote about what, for them, were very real stories from the underworld.

In a letter dated October 14, 1631, Tavares told the rector of the Jesuit College in Luanda about what happened when he entered a village in *Bongo*, Kongo. Tavares wrote that, The idol was at the entrance of the place, as if it was a cross. [The Blacks] revered it when leaving and entering [the village]... After I finished the liturgy I got to the place where the idol was and struck him many times, hung from it, but could not pull him out of the ground. Seeing that it was so attached (and entrusting in my heart the good end of this victory to God) I asked for a large knife from my people, and I dug around the idol. When I finally took it out, I turned my view to the village and saw that on top of the walls many people were astonished and furious against me, [and that they were armed] with many archers and arrows... I took then a rope and tied the idol by his neck and hooked it to a donkey... and dragged [the idol] circling the village; When we came back, the whole place was full of armed people saying that the idol that I was dragging was not only a stick. They also insulted me and cried in a loud voice that [the idol] was excellent.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Luca de Caltanisseta, *Diaries Congolais, (1690-1701)*, trans., François Bontink (Kinshasa: Publications de l'Université Lovanium de Kinshasa, 1970), 68-69.

¹⁰² “Le P. Pero Tavares au P. provincial du Portugal,” in Louis Jadin, “Pero Tavares, missionnaire jésuite, ses travaux apostoliques au Congo et en Angola, 1629-1635,” *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* 38 (1967): 370-372.

¹⁰³ “Estua o idolo á entrada do lugar, e como se for a cruz, ao sair e ao entrar nelle, ihe faziaõ reuerença...Acabados os santos actos me cheguie ao idolo e o cospy, dandolhe muitos couços; arquie cõ elle, e nunca do chaõ o pude arrancar: e vendo eu que estaua taõ afincado (encomenando em meu coração a Deos o bom fim desta victoria) pedy huã faca grande a hu dos meus moços, e fiz della enxada com que cauei ao redor

In the end, Tavares had to sleep with the idol under his own blankets and fearing for his life, with good reason, fled the region the next day. As Jason Young argues, Tavares treatment of this “idol” is telling. Besides attempting to burn it, and failing to do so, Tavares decided to subject the object to a very human type of treatment. He tied it to a horse and dragged it for miles, as was customarily done when killing wretched criminals or traitors. Evidently, Tavares thought that there was a unique force in the idol to the extent of being willing to risk his life in desecrating and “killing” the village *nkisi*.¹⁰⁴

Scholars such as Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, Jason Young or Vincent Brown, among others, assume that Africans and Europeans held substantially different worldviews, and that the vision of seventeenth century missionaries can be conflated with those of post-colonial anthropologists.¹⁰⁵ However, the enlightened, ethnocentric and condescending European that is so useful in constructing traditional stories of confrontation and domination did not exist quite yet. These early modern Europeans denounced the “brutes” believing in fetishes, but they also used them. They hoped to be healed by their power, and that these “idols” would kill their enemies. As the record examined here show, they commonly used the procedures of African and Afro-descendant ritual specialists in Africa and the Americas.

Despite what some scholars such as MacGaffey argue, Europeans did not think that “things [were] categorically different from persons.” According to McGuffey’s notion, the encounter of Europeans with African rites, beliefs and power -objects “created something of a crisis for European observers who first described them in the sixteenth and seventeenth

do idolo. Arrancado já, virei o rosto pera o lugar, e vy estar por çima dos muros muitos gentios admirados e colericos contra mym, cõ muitos arcos e frechas... Tomei entãõ huã corda, e atei a ao pescoço do idolo e a preny no jumento... leuasse á roda do terreiro: já neste comemnos estaua tudo cheio de gentios armados; e ao idolo que se leuaua arrastrado hya en açoutando co hu bordaõ e fazendo outros vituperios, diziendo em alta voz pelo lingoa, qeu era excellente.” Brasio, *Monumenta Missionaria Africana*, Vol 8, 70.

¹⁰⁴ Jason R Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁵ Hall, *Ethnicities*, 78; Brown, *Reaper's*.

centuries. In response, some chroniclers decried the so-called 'fetishes' that they encountered."¹⁰⁶ As I have shown, this is a limited reading of the available records.

For all their denunciation, Europeans perceived and acknowledged the very same power Africans said were contained in *nkisi* and other power-objects. It would be easy to dismiss such beliefs or attitudes as the result of Europeans' "intellectual seasoning" in the "tropic" Caribbean. However, the reason behind the survival of Cartagena's Inquisition documents is that all of them were reviewed by the central Inquisition council in Spain. Some of Cartagena's processes bear the signature and comments of the "señor Inquisidor General Don Francisco de Rojas Arzobispo de Toledo" [the General Inquisitor in Toledo]. Thus, it is apparent that inquisitors on the other side of the Atlantic shared the beliefs of their colleagues in Cartagena. Inquisitors in Madrid, Toledo and Seville did not chastise the court in Cartagena for believing "tall stories," in these processes. Instead, these peninsular officers supplemented the processes with extensive comments and recommendations that, together with the abundant correspondence, attest to the seriousness with which the Inquisition treated these cases not only in Cartagena, but also in Europe.

Notable also, is the remarkable agreement among witnesses from separate interrogations, most of whom came from very different ways of life and social conditions, regarding the description of different African ritual practices, objects, and beliefs. The average number of witness declaring in the surviving inquisitorial cases related to African and Afro-descendants rituals of death and dying is seven. Scribes labeled around forty-eight percent of all witnesses as white, while thirty-nine percent were either blacks or *mulatos*. They failed to describe the ethnicity of the remaining thirty percent. The consistency of the testimonies of such a variegated group indicated that practices with African origins were well

¹⁰⁶ Young, *Rituals*, 114.

established and had normative expected outcomes. The uniformity of the testimonies signals also the pervasiveness of these African cultural mores throughout different social strata. This is, slaves as well as masters were using the same ritual techniques regardless of their origin. While African slaves incorporated crucifixes into their own system of beliefs, Europeans and their descendants did the same with African objects and rites. The ill-defined Caribbean “cultural interchange” of the early-modern period did not go unidirectionally.

Alternative Caribes

The available documentary evidence shows clearly how African cultural mores were predominant and prevalent in cities like Cartagena de Indias or la Habana. However a repetition of old tropes about discernable areas in the Atlantic coast of Africa has allowed historians and anthropologists alike to dispense with the rigor ascribed to the study of Western European peoples when describing the origins of African culture.

Current models for the study of African identity and cultural formation in Latin America favor discontinuities and ruptures. The conflation of the apparent geographic isolation of Caribbean sites with the apparently limiting corporative structures of the Spanish empire and the dearth of the written record has directed the scholarship in the field in this direction. As I have shown in this dissertation, however, the knowledge, cultural and social tenets, religious beliefs and worldviews of early modern Caribeños were, as might be expected in such an open and multicultural place, anything other than rigid and established. As scholars like Ira Berlin and Jane Landers have argued, the study of culture formation in

the early modern Atlantic world, conceptually, helps greatly in understanding the development of Caribbean locales culture.¹⁰⁷

The type of analysis I am arguing for, in other words, favors a circum Atlantic approach for the study of early-modern individuals, group identity and cultural formation. The origins of such processes link events and people from all over the Atlantic world. The enacting of early modern Caribbean culture of the everyday simultaneously involved and linked the historical, cultural and social trajectories of disparaged human groups around the Atlantic basin. As such, *isolationist* what would later become *nationalistic*, definition of cultural identities became unattainable, un-claimable. Such models of cultural formation it escapes modern historicizing, and many time politically, imposed limits. The analytical categories that can emerge from such approach are more integrative and traceable. They allow for a more generous definition of human self-awareness, one, I think, closer to the elusive, and I think multidimensional, ideation of the self, identity if you will, espoused early-modern people.

Cartagena was shaped by memories and events occurring in Angola, Bengo, Amsterdam, Granada, Algiers, and Ardra, to name just a few places of origin of its population. The same was true of other Caribbean ports such as San Juan, Habana, Caracas and Saint Augustine. It is not possible to fully appreciate the heterodox nature of these societies when focusing on ruptures and social hegemony.

Assuming the position I am advancing here, requires the recognition of the paradoxical nature of the texts left with which to study such societies. It also asks for an intellectual challenge of Spanish Colonial social and religious categories. The groupings and

¹⁰⁷ For instance, Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998); Landers, *Black Society*

parameters followed in traditional models of Spanish American society owe more to the vision of the world Spaniards wanted to create in the Caribbean than to the realities of daily life. Of course, every person creates his or her own world. Historians, however have been seeing the early modern *Caribe* exclusively through the eyes and mind-frame of Europeans and their descendants. While necessarily incomplete, the evidence we have of alternative visions of life in the Spanish Caribbean calls into question old models..

Examining the Africanization of the Spanish Caribbean from the vantage point of beliefs about nature and bodies changes the way we understand Spanish American societies. An *embodied* study of the *Caribe* shows the extent to which societies in places like Havana or Cartagena functioned in many ways on African socio-cultural tenets. Authorities did not enforce participation in Catholic rites in Cartagena. As I have shown here, the so-called Catholic Africans that had been living in the city for decades failed to recite *Pater Nosters* and *Ave Marias*, not to mention the credo or other “articles of faith.” Notoriously, they did so in front of the inquisition when they should have been keen to demonstrate, for their lives’ sake, how much they belonged to the holy mother church. Disguised under what historians and anthropologists have labeled “creolization,” “syncretism,” and “hybridity” are pragmatic strategies of personal and communal interaction that Africans learned to navigate and use to their benefit.

Conclusion

This chapter contributes to the growing recognition of the *Caribe* as an African place. This was a world in which Africans, influenced by ideas from all over the Atlantic, shaped culture and society. After the mid-seventeenth century, fewer African slaves were shipped to

Spanish America. Later populations of Afro-descendants, built on the culture shaped by the “charter generations” and the particular circumstances of the regions where they settled. Demography, thus, was not the only or best determinant of a society’s tenets. While Angola and Congo people entered Cartagena in large numbers during the seventeenth century, many had already had long contact with Europeans, which may have influenced their particular practice of Christianity in Cartagena, as did their subsequent familiarity with concepts and mores from other African locales. We cannot determine people’s cultural impact only by their numbers.

Traces of early-modern African culture only rarely appear in Church or official accounts and records. We can find their most lasting evidence in customs and ideas expressed through elements of popular culture such as dance, food, sexual attitudes, and in the enacting of everyday superstitions. The fact that they do not usually figure in codices, notarial or governmental records, or medical treatises, does not mean that they had less impact in the ways early modern people in places like Cartagena lived their lives. As I have shown here, African beliefs and cultural practices also appeared in rituals of healing and death. In other words, they defined everyday matters, the mundane, the stuff of human life.

I have so far utilized well-established categories of analysis for the study of culture formation in the Spanish Caribbean. Distinguishing early modern Cartagenos as Europeans, Euro-descendants, Africans and Afro-descendants, as well as naming them *peninsulares*, *criollos*, Congos, Minas, Ararás, Italians, Portuguese among many other identifiers stems from a tradition of scholarship that has assumed that processes of cultural transformation, although multidirectional, occurred against a background of European culture and society. In

other words, the heuristic tools historians have used to evaluate the fleeting event of cultural encounters have been defined by modern Western scholarship..

The evidence presented in this chapter obfuscates and subvert such categories. Moreover, it undermines the very same assumptions that have guided the study of Colonial Spanish Caribbean human groups. An examination of the, admittedly limited nature of the records left behind by Africans and their descendants in the Caribbean, makes evident that such places functioned on the ground more as African societies than as European ones. . Cartagena de Indias, for all its Spanish corporate, imperial, and military structure was also African. Hence, I propose that in the Spanish Caribbean, Europeans became more Africanized than Africans became Europeanized. While it is not possible to prove this assertion with certainty, demography and the obviously inadequate attempts by Inquisition and church officials to impose customs, language and religion on an ever-increasing Black population, strongly suggest that African language and mores were normative in the city.

Regardless of what Crown, church and Inquisition officials would have liked to believe, and what older scholarship holds, the great majority of the population functioned under cultural and societal norms far removed from traditional catholic and Iberian law and customs. Obviously, such situation has escaped most existing analysis of Caribbean societies. Under such views, Cartagena was a city of Autos de Fe, *Galeras*, Slaves and powerful Iberian *Dones y Doñas* willing to impose their *casta* and *limpieza de sangre* over the rest of the population.

And yet, Cartagena was a heterodox, multicultural place. Cartageneros of all origins imagined their world in several forms. Many of such images of the world became “colonized” by African ideas. Africans thus, came to cities like Cartagena and found societies

than functioned under terms and structures that were very familiar to them. Other Africans filled the streets and plazas; African sounds and music recalled their homelands. It was a terribly alien and yet mesmerizingly familiar place. In it, they would not need to learn another language, but could speak their mother tongues. They could eat, dance, get ill, and die in communal spaces reminiscent of their homelands, while interchanging strategies of living with other Blacks from all over the Atlantic world. This was not yet the racialized society that would arrive with the dawn of modernity. In places like Cartagena, Africans and their descendants were legion and defined how life was lived. T More than an “*emporio de naciones*,” Cartagena was an “*emporio de Africanos*.”

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