

A photograph of a desert landscape at sunset. The sky is a clear, pale blue. In the background, a range of rugged mountains is illuminated by the warm, golden light of the setting sun. The foreground is filled with dark, scrubby desert vegetation. A white rectangular border is centered on the page, containing the title and volume information.

# **Rice Historical Review**

**Vol. 6  
2021**

## UNTOLD HISTORIES

Using the imagery of the desert and the mountains, we contemplate what is hidden or buried, and what can be seen or what is visible in this volume of the *Rice Historical Review*. Deserts create a facade of clarity — it feels as if all is exposed to you in the open, dry landscape. But what is invisible is really multitudes of worlds, infinite microcosms which must exist in the seemingly barren environment. The mountains in the far distance are the incarnations of our rich history. In a physical sense, they geologically retain a vast archive of Earth's natural transformations and changes. But we can extend this concept and imagine them as the storytellers of the land as well. A primary mission of our journal is to begin to reveal the plurality and complexity of the innumerable histories of our transcultural and transnational societies. We imagine the *untold histories* of such a society in the milieu of the desert. The mountains themselves retain our collective memory, remaining in place for millions and millions of years, not only observing, but gathering, absorbing, and remembering. Through the desert, we begin to unpack the incredible histories, seen and unseen, of our world and confront the trajectory of both human creation and destruction.

*Katie Nguyen, Director of Publishing*



**Rice  
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Review**

**Vol. 6  
2021**

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Two years ago, the *Rice Historical Review* adopted the mission statement, “furthering the future by promoting the past.” In the 2020-2021 academic year, the *Rice Historical Review* had the privilege and challenge of working within historical moments. Among other complications, we continued to battle with the COVID-19 pandemic and dealt with a devastating snowstorm that crippled Texas. Our Board, nonetheless, remained committed to *promoting the past* and made the sixth issue of our publication a reality. We received submissions of exceptional quality, making our review process pleasantly ambitious. The resulting excellence of this year’s publication is a testament to the continued production of high caliber research in the history department in spite of trying circumstances. More broadly, this issue of the *Rice Historical Review* reflects the remarkable resilience of all our Rice colleagues.

Our Board is proud to present five remarkable essays in this issue that recount a series of untold histories. Our Lear Prize, “Becoming *Brujas*,” written by Mariana Najera, delves into the complexities of court records from colonial Mexico to reveal the hidden factors that informed accusations of witchcraft. Next, Joy Wang depicts the remarkable perseverance of Spain’s Sephardic Jews in the face of the Black Death’s horrors in “Suffering and Resilience.” Jason Lee’s “The Role of the Familiar Spirit” argues that the nature of “familiar spirits” in the seventeenth-century Glenville-Miller witchcraft debates, rather than a struggle between modern science and superstition, reflected ongoing Protestant theological debates and associated political positions. Describing the Vatican’s subtle but influential role in World War I, Michael Katona’s “Pope Benedict XV’s Reassertion of Papal Diplomacy” analyzes the precedent-setting nature of this period. Finally, in “Christabel Pankerhurst,” Callie Carnahan discusses the remarkable life of an often overlooked English suffragette.

Rice University prides itself on being the beacon of “unconventional wisdom.” We certainly found ourselves tapping into this skill during the construction of our first virtually produced issue. We are extremely proud of and grateful to our Board members for their dedication this past year. Our team expanded the reach of the journal’s Rice Scrolls (formerly Short Form) publications to historically contextualize the trials of our present moment, initiated timely conversations with faculty and student researchers, and hosted virtual trivia nights — all of which rewrote the academic journal playbook in real time. The *Rice Historical Review*’s successes this year are a testament to our board’s commitment and expertise. We hope that all the hard work, dedication and care our Board put into each of its endeavors, including this issue, serve not only to inform our readers but *further the future* of historical scholarship. May this issue serve as a testament to the resilience, ingenuity, and teamwork that flourished in spite of these challenging circumstances to our readers — both present and future.

**Mikayla Knutson and Victoria Saeki-Serna**  
*Co-Editors-in-Chief*

# THE FLOYD SEYWARD LEAR PRIZE

## 2021 WINNER

### BECOMING *BRUJAS*: COLONIAL WITCHRAFT AND HISTORICAL TRANSGRESSIONS

The Floyd Seyward Lear Prize for Best Essay is an annual prize awarded jointly by the *Rice Historical Review (RHR)* and the Rice University History Department for the best submitted article to the *RHR*. The award is in honor of Dr. Floyd Seyward Lear, who was a member of the faculty at the Rice Institute (later Rice University) in the Department of History from 1925 to 1975, the year of his death. He was Assistant Professor from 1927 to 1945, Professor in 1945, Harris Masterson Jr. Professor of History in 1953 (the first to hold this chair), and Trustee Distinguished Professor from 1965. He served as chairman of the Department of History from 1933 to 1960.



Dr. Floyd Seyward Lear (left) and Dr. Katherine Fischer Drew (right)  
Source: Woodson Research Center

All papers submitted to the *Rice Historical Review* were automatically considered for this award. After submissions have been reviewed, nominated articles selected for consideration were reviewed by the *RHR* editorial board. Through consensus, the board narrowed down the pool to two nominees. The Department of History Undergraduate Studies Committee evaluated the final three candidates and decided the winning article. The author of the winning essay received a \$500 award.

This year, the Lear Prize was given to Mariana Nájera for her article, “Becoming *Brujas*: Colonial Witchcraft and Historical Transgressions.” This article distinguishes itself for its meticulous analysis of primary sources, understanding of historical social dynamics, and nuanced argument.

The Rice Historical Review would like to thank Dr. Katherine Fischer Drew, Lynette S. Autry Professor Emeritus, for giving us the possibility to provide this scholarship.

**BECOMING BRUJAS**



*Colonial Church. Asha Malani.*



# **BECOMING BRUJAS: COLONIAL WITCHCRAFT AND HISTORICAL TRANSGRESSION**



**Mariana Nájera**  
Written for Religion Senior Thesis  
(HIST 404)  
Dr. Claire Fanger

*Hierba mala nunca muere.*  
—Latin American proverb<sup>1</sup>

Within the field of religious studies, the advent of theories of relationality and entanglement has resulted in myriad works that explore how cultivating meaningful relationships with the sacred, others, and oneself can move people, and especially women, to resist hegemony and engage in healing, activism, and community-building. Part of this theoretical turn involves uncovering the historical forces that first led to the formulation of transgressive ideas about religion, gender, and sexuality to colonial societies in the Global South. To contribute to this current of scholarship, in this paper, I adopt a relational approach to examine how the practice of *brujería* (domestic magic or witchcraft) in Colonial Mexico was essential for the rise of transgressive discourses of feminine autonomy, agency, and empowerment, as well as the development of communities focused on generating solidarity and support amongst marginalized populations. Focusing on how feminine, African, and Indigenous spiritual practices occupied an important, if liminal, position in colonial society, I aim to demonstrate how ideas and practices emphasized within modern queer and feminist movements are but the most recent iteration of a lineage

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1. Translation: A bad weed never dies.

## BECOMING BRUJAS

of spiritual efforts by marginalized Latin American peoples aimed at redefining structures and distributions of power.

This work is dedicated to parsing colonial understandings of popular spiritual practices, and particularly those that were characterized as *brujería* during the Mexican colonial period. In the context of the sixteenth to early nineteenth centuries, the category of *brujería* encompassed a range of culturally-syncretic spiritual practices marginalized colonial subjects used to restructure social relations and acquire power that they were otherwise denied in their patriarchal environment. The intensity of women's socio-political abjection at this time meant they had a particularly urgent need to counteract white men's dominance, a desire that played a key part in the creation of an inter-caste, inter-class, mostly feminine network of relations focused on the commerce of magical knowledge, herbs, and rituals.<sup>2</sup> Centuries later, we find the legacies of these relations in Latin American spiritual traditions, such as *curanderismo* (a form of traditional healing) and *chamanismo* (shamanism), which disenfranchised, majority Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) women, still utilize in everyday life as part of their efforts at overcoming systematic subjugation.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, I argue that the spiritual traditions understood as *brujería* were a crucial catalyst for some of the earliest manifestations of ideas of feminine autonomy, embodiment, and agency within colonial Mexican society, and particularly amongst Black, Indigenous, and *mestiza* (mixed-race) women. To trace the emergence of these discourses in Colonial Mexico, I examine specific manifestations of *brujería* and identify how their affective, relational, and spiritual aspects had a lasting impact on women living under Christianized *machista* (male chauvinist) hegemony. Furthermore, by parsing the discursive understandings and relations that upheld the syncretic magical techniques of the time, I outline how women from all classes, castes, and races used transgressive spiritual practices that, aside from providing them a temporary reprieve from masculine domination, would eventually evolve into familiar modern forms of spiritually-charged resistance to hegemony. While focusing on transgression and subversion of conventional patriarchal norms, my

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2. See Ruth Behar, "Sex and Sin, Witchcraft and the Devil," *American Ethnologist* 14, no.1 (1987): 36. Also Laura Lewis, *Hall of Mirrors: Power, Witchcraft, and Caste in Colonial Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 102; and Ruth Behar, "Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women's Powers: Views from the Mexican Inquisition," in *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Asunción Lavrín (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 179-180.

3. Joseph M. Murphy, *Botánicas: Sacred Spaces of Healing and Devotion in Urban America* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 51.

approach to colonial *brujería* also highlights the importance of camaraderie and collaboration for marginalized populations' articulation of power.

In New Spain, Christian discourses normalized associating Indigenous and African spiritual practices with sinful diabolism, such that colonial society began to label these practices as *brujería* using imported Spanish notions.<sup>4</sup> However, it is important to clarify that for most of the Latin American colonial period — in stark contrast to Western European understandings of witchcraft — *brujería* was not typically associated with a broader conspiratorial network of witches, nor were witches presumed to engage in devil pacts, orgiastic sabbaths, and bloody sacrifices.<sup>5</sup> Rather, *brujería* had a decidedly quotidian connotation, as it was primarily employed by lovers, spouses, enslaved people and enslavers, or servants and their employers to address conflicts within their relationships.<sup>6</sup> In these settings, women and Black and Indigenous peoples — usually the subordinates in these relations — used syncretic spiritual practices for a range of affective purposes, including to enact revenge through bodily malaise, manipulate the other party, or simply gain power that was otherwise unavailable to them because of their gender or race. Thus, most instances of colonial Mexican *brujería* are more similar to European domestic sorcery than to openly devilish witchcraft.

While there are marked distinctions between Indigenous and African understandings of these culturally-endemic practices and their reception by colonial authorities, because my primary sources are of inquisitorial origin, they do not offer the information required to fully parse such emic and etic conceptions of *brujería*. Additionally, as *brujería* and *hechicería* (sorcery) were indicative of everything from love magic to malevolent witchcraft, I rely on these terms to describe my subject matter, using them as roughly equivalent catch-alls for my discussion of colonial spiritual practices. There is significant scholarly precedence for using *brujería* to describe such syncretic spiritual traditions in colonial Latin America without adhering to or endorsing a negative tenor. Such efforts have been facilitated by modern Latine practitioners who

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4. Carole A. Myscofski, *Amazons, Wives, Nuns and Witches: Women and the Catholic Church in Colonial Brazil 1500-1822* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 186-187.

5. For an exploration of such European conceptions of witchcraft, see for instance: Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (London, UK: Yale University Press, 2004), 82-123; and Jonathan B. Durrant, *Witchcraft, Gender, and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2007), 32-35, 45-55. For a point of comparison focused on Latin America, see Behar, "Sex and Sin, Witchcraft and the Devil," 35.

6. Behar, "Sex and Sin, Witchcraft and the Devil," 35-36.

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have reappropriated terms like witchcraft, *brujería*, and *bruja* (witch), as scholars such as Raquel Romberg document in their works.<sup>7</sup> Following the self-understanding of modern BIPOC Latin American *brujas*, as well as the example of scholars such as Ruth Behar, Martha Few, and Carole Myscowski, I approach discourses of colonial witchcraft on their own terms: as I present accounts of the *brujería* colonial women employed, my focus is on parsing the dynamic understanding of these practices and how women framed them using terms found in their cultural environment. Consequently, I use magic, *hechicería*, and *brujería* interchangeably to refer to the culturally-syncretic, dominantly non-Christian practices that, attributed supernatural meaning, marginalized peoples used during the Mexican colonial period to heal, enamor, and gain autonomy and authority.<sup>8</sup> By employing these terms, my objective is to illustrate the interstitial nature of these practices, as well as how their networks of discourses and relations offered marginalized individuals ways of articulating power outside of exclusionary colonial structures.

### I. Caste, Class, and Christianity: A Brief History of Colonial Control

In November of 1536, the Mexican Inquisition formally accused an Aztec shaman named Martín Ocelotl of “having committed many acts of sorcery and divination; transformed himself into a tiger, lion, and dog; evangelized the Indigenous peoples [of the colonies] in ways opposite to those of the Christian faith; conversed with the devil; and of having done and said many other things that not only went against the holy Catholic faith but also greatly harmed and impeded the conversion of Indigenous peoples.”<sup>9</sup> Behind these allegations were testimonies from some of the city of Texcoco’s most respectable Spanish citizens, who claimed to have witnessed Ocelotl’s devilish activities. An accusation of particular note is that of Catalina López, a Spanish woman.

The inquisitorial record narrates that López’s encounter with Ocelotl

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7. See Raquel Romberg, *Healing Dramas: Divination and Magic in Modern Puerto Rico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

8. It should also be clarified that I will not be questioning the “real” nature of these practices: magic, witchcraft, and sorcery were considered very real and very effective at the time of my interest, and these understandings fundamentally shaped how people engaged in relations with other individuals, systems, and beliefs. Local practices focused on ligatures, love spells, and other magic provided women opportunities for gaining cultural authority as experts, while also offering marginalized clients unorthodox tactics for contesting hegemonic dominance in both public and private spheres. Hence, it is neither relevant nor useful to try to “prove” anything empirical about witchcraft and magic.

9. “Procesos de Indios Idólatras y Hechiceras,” vol. 3, *Publicaciones de la Comisión Reorganizadora del Archivo General y Público de la Nación* (México: Guerrero, 1912), 17. Translation from Spanish is mine.

## MARIANA NÁJERA

occurred as she was attempting to visit Don Pablo Xochiquentzin, an Indigenous nobleman appointed to rule Mexico City after the death of Moctezuma. When Don Pablo was ill, López explained, she and several local nuns would go visit him to bring him comfort and pray for his health. However, one particular day López was not allowed in, as Indigenous members of Don Pablo's household explained that Ocelotl was within the house, attempting to heal Don Pablo, and he had forbidden the Spanish women entry. The remedies the women used were Spanish, Ocelotl claimed to have said, and rather than healing Don Pablo, they were killing him.<sup>10</sup> López concludes her narrative by asserting that the Indigenous servants told her Ocelotl was performing *brujería* for Don Pablo and also that Ocelotl was famous among the Mexica for having come back to life after Moctezuma had him cut into pieces.<sup>11</sup>

As with all inquisitorial accounts, modern readers are left wondering about the veracity of the witnesses' statements, as well as the underlying biases behind the accusations that, in this case, led to Ocelotl's exile. Looking beyond these matters, the trial of Martín Ocelotl illustrates the racial, religious, and social dynamics at play in early colonial understandings of *brujería*. In López's story, we note the tense competition between two liminal populations for the power afforded by spiritual work. On the one hand, López and the nuns benefited from the privilege of being European Christians, but, because they were also women, the domains in which they could exercise power were limited and they were easily ignored in favor of male demands. Ocelotl, on the other hand, was an Indigenous man, a combination of factors that afforded him the gendered authority and racialized (thus liminal) power required to overrule the women's pious intentions and assert the dominance of his abilities. In López's account, Ocelotl won the proverbial battle by preventing the women's entry to Don Pablo's home. However, because European male authority entirely eclipsed Ocelotl's clout as an Indigenous leader, Ocelotl experienced during his trial a reversal of the discourses of power that had allowed him to exclude the women from Don Pablo's home. Composed entirely of Spanish Christian men, the Inquisition praised the women's proper Christian devotion and vilified Ocelotl's heretical *brujería*, in part because he was an Indigenous "savage" but also because it subverted the colonial Christian order.

From a different perspective, López's story is a paragon of the ethnic

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10. "Procesos de Indios Idólatras y Hechiceras," 26.

11. "Procesos de Indios Idólatras y Hechiceras," 26.

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solidarity that came to constitute a fundamental part of later *brujería*. Don Pablo may certainly have died regardless of Ocelotl's magic. Yet Ocelotl's efforts at healing him and preventing what, from Ocelotl's perspective, was further colonial harm to Don Pablo reveal the complex relations and care undergirding Indigenous people's use of *brujería*. The myriad accusations targeting Ocelotl additionally reveal European colonizers' suspicion of Indigenous peoples, along with the undercurrent of resistance to colonialism that — even when seen through López's eyes — buttressed many instances of Indigenous magic.

I bring up Ocelotl's case to show how, like many aspects of Mexico's religious landscape, the roots of *brujería* can be traced back to the Spanish conquest of Mexico and the Christianization that occurred in the following years. In the early stages of colonization, Christianity was fundamental for Spanish control of the New World. Initially, this was because the Spanish colonial project depended on a papal mandate to both colonize *and* Christianize, but gradually the imperial administrators realized that the imposition of Christian doctrines was itself a core component of securing American lands.<sup>12</sup> This shift occurred in part because, within their salvational project, missionaries used discourses rife with racist conceptions that cast doubt on Indigenous peoples' autonomy by questioning their capacity to understand Christian doctrine. The sixteenth century's failed efforts to truly convert the "native pagans," who continued to secretly practice their religion while publicly following Christianity, supported these assumptions.<sup>13</sup> To deal with their growing frustration, during the mid-1500s, the Franciscans and Dominicans that were proselytizing in the New World began to rely on these racist ideas to justify their use of inquisitorial brute force to scare Indigenous peoples towards the Christian faith.<sup>14</sup> Martín Ocelotl was one of the victims of this persecution, as were numerous other Indigenous leaders who were flogged, jailed, banished, or, in the case of Don Carlos of Texcoco, burned at the stake.<sup>15</sup> These measures partially succeeded in coalescing Christianity, but in 1571, Indigenous peoples were nonetheless declared exempt from inquisitorial jurisdiction due to concerns that they were being judged according to Christian standards they were unable to meet.<sup>16</sup> With

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12. Patricia Lopes Don, "Franciscans, Indian Sorcerers, and the Inquisition in New Spain, 1536-1543," *Journal of World History* 17, no. 1 (2006): 30.

13. Lopes Don, "Franciscans, Indian Sorcerers, and the Inquisition," 31-32.

14. For more on this topic, see Lopes Don, "Franciscans, Indian Sorcerers, and the Inquisition," 30-40.

15. Lopes Don, "Franciscans, Indian Sorcerers, and the Inquisition," 27.

16. Patricia Lopes Don, "The 1539 Inquisition and Trial of Don Carlos of Texcoco in Early Mexico," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 88, no.4 (2008): 605. For a breakdown of the factors that led to a European

religious control made difficult, the seventeenth century saw increased civil and social regulations that targeted the Indigenous population and used Christian ideas to justify their subjugation.

The encounters between cultures, religions, and discourses that occurred during this time laid the groundwork for the distributions of power of the colonial period, meaning those structures that helped lay the foundations for

***“This amalgamation of cultures supported the creation of a variety of syncretic traditions, including the folk Catholicism still practiced throughout much of Latin America and many systems of shamanism and brujería that marginalized populations have long used to transgress normative orders.”***

modern Latin American oppression. From the perspective of the colonizers, Christianization and colonization were necessary to ensure the stability of the New World, as a society regulated by Christian and European discourses would undoubtedly be prosperous. However, Indigenous subversion continually frustrated colonial efforts at societal coherence. This colonial labor was further complicated when enslaved African peoples were brought to the Americas, beginning in 1580.<sup>17</sup> The addition of an African population provided opportunities for expanding colonial hierarchies of power, but their presence also diversified the cultural, spiritual, and political milieu of New Spain. This amalgamation of cultures supported the creation of a variety of syncretic traditions, including the folk Catholicism still practiced throughout much of Latin America and many systems of shamanism and *brujería* that marginalized populations have long

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crackdown on Indigenous religions, see: Fernando Cervantes, *The Devil in the New World: The Impact of Diabolism in New Spain*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); J. Jorge Klor de Alva, “Colonizing Souls: The Failure of the Indian Inquisition and the Rise of Penitential Discipline,” in *Cultural Encounters: The Impact of the Inquisition in Spain and the New World*, eds. Anne J. Cruz and Mary Elizabeth Perry, 3-22 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

17. Behar, “Sex and Sin, Witchcraft and the Devil,” 35.

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used to transgress normative orders.<sup>18</sup>

Spanish colonizers considered non-European spiritual systems unsanctioned uses of supernatural power because they departed from Christian dogma and twisted Christian beliefs into unorthodox forms. The association of these traditions with Black and Indigenous people facilitated their vilification, as both these populations were socio-economically disenfranchised and deemed morally inferior by colonial authorities. These conceptions of Black and Indigenous people were cemented in society through racialized moral discourses, as colonial hierarchies not only determined distributions of power, but also the attribution of goodness by linking moral character with caste.<sup>19</sup> By establishing hierarchies that ranked citizens using intertwinings of race, standards of decency, and Christian ideals, colonial authorities affirmed that white Europeans were superior because of their morality and intellect, whilst Black and Indigenous people were rightfully secondary because of their inherent “baseness.”<sup>20</sup> These racialized negative associations extended beyond individuals, however, to also shape understandings of the cultures of these populations, ensuring that decent European Christians condemned *brujería* because of its connection to these undesirable castes.

The caste system, much like the Western concept of race, legally and socially classified individuals based on “putative distinctions carried in blood, ancestry, and color.”<sup>21</sup> Your *casta* (caste) indicated your socio-political relationship to others and determined your role within relations and hierarchies of power. *Raza* (race) and *casta* coexisted during the colonial period, but *raza* was more commonly associated with being Jewish or Muslim.<sup>22</sup> Caste, in turn, applied to any kind of ancestry and determined the nature of an individual, although it did involve aspects of colorism like modern Western understandings of race. Castes varied throughout Latin America, but the primary ones in colonial Mexico were: *españoles peninsulares* (Iberian-born Spaniards), *criollos* (Spaniards born in the New World), *negros* (Black people), “*indios*” (Indigenous people), *mulatos* (mulattoes, the offspring of a Black person and an Indigenous

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18. Carlos Viesca Treviño, “Curanderismo in Mexico and Guatemala: Its Historical Evolution from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century,” in *Mesoamerican Healers*, eds. Brad R. Huber and Alan R. Sandstrom (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 47-48.

19. Myscofski, *Amazons, Wives, Nuns, and Witches*, 20, 24, 54; Behar, “Sex and Sin, Witchcraft and the Devil,” 35.

20. Few, *Women Who Live Evil Lives*, 26-28. See also Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 22.

21. Lewis, *Hall of Mirrors*, 22.

22. Lewis, *Hall of Mirrors*, 23-24



person or Spaniard), and *mestizos* (the offspring of a Spaniard and Indigenous person).<sup>23</sup> Broadly speaking, the caste system defined an individual's socio-political position by situating them on a hierarchy of identities where being a white Spaniard was the highest ideal and Indigenous and African people occupied the lowest positions.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, magic became essential for marginalized castes' acquisition of power, since, as Laura Lewis argues, *brujería* "helped free people from their proper places in the colonial social hierarchy while bringing others under their control."<sup>24</sup> Magical assistance was necessary for empowerment because Europeans conceived of Black people as an economically profitable but otherwise "vile caste" with an aggressive, shrewd nature that made them a threat to other groups — although they were nonetheless thought to be more Christianized than any Indigenous person.<sup>25</sup> This other indecent caste was seen as morally and physically frail to support European paternalism, as colonial authorities thought their control was necessary to protect the colonized peoples from returning to diabolic lifestyles.<sup>26</sup> Leaders like Martín Ocelotl threatened colonial power by encouraging Indigenous autonomy, so colonial authorities dealt with them quickly, often through accusations of *brujería* that reinforced the diabolic orientation Spanish colonizers thought Indigenous beliefs adopted when left without European guidance.

Because Black and Indigenous populations regularly challenged colonial hierarchies, they were frequently brought before the Inquisition to account for their disruptive actions.<sup>27</sup> However, it is important to note that most of the accused were women, as colonial discourses assumed gender played a role in determining moral character and strength.<sup>28</sup> Behind colonial Christian discourses that deemed women fundamentally inferior to men was an understanding that women's nature was foolish, simple, and overly passionate, meaning they could not master themselves as men did and achieve true subjectivity.<sup>29</sup> This lack of

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23. Lewis, *Hall of Mirrors*, 4.

24. Lewis, *Hall of Mirrors*, 108.

25. Lewis, *Hall of Mirrors*, 2, 20, 24-25, 69.

26. Lewis, *Hall of Mirrors*, 24, 26-29.

27. Few, *Women Who Live Evil Lives*, 4-5.

28. Gaspar de Alba, *[Un]Framing the Bad Woman*, 50, 270.

29. Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 15-16. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 22-23. For a similar argument about women within the context of antiquity, see for instance Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* Vol. 3: *The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 161, 175, 200, 222-223.

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control made women more likely to become embroiled in sinful schemes that endangered not only themselves but also the men around them. As incomplete, imperfect versions of the normative white masculine ideal, colonial authorities saw women as a threat to society. Ignorant, weak, and sinful, women's autonomy needed to be restricted for the common good.<sup>30</sup>

Men's control over these marginalized populations extended to matters of politics and legal rights, but also sexuality, particularly for women of color. "In theory, sexuality was a site of social control for both men and women," Laura Lewis notes,

But because women were regarded as more carnal than men, they required closer supervision. Supervision protected them from their own weaknesses, but more generally it protected...male salvation and honor, which were vulnerable to corruption by women, who could weaken men's minds with lust and their bodies with venereal diseases.<sup>31</sup>

Widespread colorist suspicion of Black and Indigenous "savagery" compounded this phallogentric fear of women's weakness, meaning colonial discourses produced thoroughly dehumanizing conceptions of non-white women that ensured this populations' oppression.<sup>32</sup> Thus, while white and *mestiza* women regularly experienced the paternalizing othering Lewis describes, Black and Indigenous women had to endure intensified versions of these discourses and their everyday consequences.

Supported by racialized moral discourses, colonial authorities continuously vilified marginalized castes to justify colonial hegemony and exploitation. Through negative effects affiliated with specific identities, Black, Indigenous, and female bodies acquired an agency that threatened the European status quo. Spanish colonial administrators used these effects and threatening agency to sanction the enforcement of a socio-economic order thoroughly to their advantage. However, as I explore later, marginalized peoples used this same agency created through fear and demonization to shift distributions of power, a process in which *brujería* played a significant role.

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30. Lewis, *Hall of Mirrors*, 59-60.

31. Lewis, *Hall of Mirrors*, 61.

32. Behar, "Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women's Powers," 193.

II. La Magia de Mujeres Malas<sup>33</sup>

In 1709, a Spanish man named Lorenzo Martínez Montañez denounced his former *mestiza* mistress, Bonifacia Miranda, with the Holy Office for having performed on him an *amarre*, a magical ligature.<sup>34</sup> Since husbands and lovers often wounded their women, it was thought that women regularly asked *brujas* to perform retributive *amarres* that cut off a man's sexual abilities, making ligatures a common explanation for impotence.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, when Martínez Montañez found himself impotent with his wife, he immediately thought of Miranda. The evidence he presented included that, after cutting ties with Miranda, she cursed him saying that he would remember her always. He also narrated that, after their trysts, Miranda often gave him cocoa and food (both perfect covers for sorcery) and he had felt "something cross his virile member" during intercourse. Because Martínez Montañez was unable to locate Miranda to demand she reverse the ligature, his confessor sent him to ask the Holy Office for aid.

While this example only provides a male victim's perspective, we can still identify some key discourses that undergirded sex and love magic at the time. For instance, Martínez Montañez seemed to fear the Church's response to his infidelity less than his mistress's *brujería*, as he readily appealed to his confessor when he discovered Miranda's curse. Knowing that Martínez Montañez had a daughter by Miranda and wanted to cut sexual ties with her while remaining the child's godfather, it would not be surprising if Miranda had reacted angrily and used magic against him. There is no way to be certain that Miranda applied an *amarre* to her lover, but it is revealing that Martínez Montañez assumed that was the case. This means that he recognized her negative reaction to his choices and associated *amarres* with these feelings in women, while also identifying the likelihood that Miranda had not acted alone. Martínez Montañez's case thus exemplifies common understandings of sexual magic by linking his jilted lover's strong emotions with *brujería* enacted from within a broader network of colonial *brujas*.

In the cultural environment of the Mexican colonial period, these approaches to gender demonstrate that it was not only women's autonomy in the public and

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33. Translation: The Magic of Bad Women.

34. Archivo General de la Nación (Mexico City), Ramo de Inquisición (ACN Inq.) 765, exp.9.

35. Behar, "Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women's Powers," 185.

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private spheres that was limited. Their bodies and sexuality were also restricted as sites of subjectivity because of men's fear of women, and especially of women "turning against them."<sup>36</sup> These colonial discourses which intertwined gender, power, and religion were used to deny women culturally legitimate authority. Yet, as Ruth Behar writes, such discourses also made possible the inversion of normative power dynamics through the manipulation of masculine fears.<sup>37</sup> It is in this overall context, characterized by the subjugation of Black and Indigenous people and women's domination by men, that we can understand *brujería* as a way for marginalized peoples to transgress structures of power.

As seen in the case of Miranda and Martínez Montañez, colonial Mexican *brujería* was distinctly quotidian, affective, and relational in its symbolic language. Hence, accusations to the Inquisition tended to involve marital bonds, sexual relationships, and inter-class contact, as these were the situations where uneven power dynamics were most likely to appear.<sup>38</sup> For instance, also in 1709, several women accused a *mestiza* healer named Agustina de Lara of being a witch.<sup>39</sup> These women claimed to have asked Lara for *brujerías* but, before going through with the rituals, regretted their actions and confessed their lapses to the Inquisition. A Spanish woman named Isabel de Tovar was amongst those who accused Lara of *brujería*. In her testimony, Tovar said she was *comadres* (friends) with Lara and thus felt comfortable sharing with Lara the heartbreak she experienced when her lover left her. After hearing about her friend's experience, Lara is said to have asked Tovar for a few hairs from her "intimate parts," promising to make her a remedy that would bring her lover back. A few days later, Lara gave Tovar some foul-smelling powders containing her ground-up hairs to smear on her lover's clothing and an ensorcelled lump of sugar to slip into his food. Alleging that she quickly regretted her decision to use *brujería* to save her affair, Tovar declared she got rid of the materials and rushed to admit her sins (and Lara's) to her confessor and the Holy Office.

Another woman, a *castiza* (half *mestiza*, half Spaniard) named Marta Picón offered a similar story to the Inquisition a few months after Tovar. Picón had worked in Lara's house as a domestic servant and declared she had extensively witnessed Lara's putative knowledge of magic. Many women came to Lara for substances that they could use to enamor men, Picón explained. Lara would

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36. Behar, "Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women's Powers," 179.

37. Behar, "Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women's Powers," 181.

38. Behar, "Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women's Powers," 200-201.

39. AGN Inq. 765, exp.10.

obtain raw materials like herbs and hummingbirds from Indigenous suppliers, themselves likely purveyors of similar services, and prepare them according to her clients' needs. To make Lara's deviance even worse, she reputedly once told Picón that, although her magical mentor had been arrested by the Inquisition, Lara herself did not fear the Holy Office and was confident she would know how to respond to their accusations if the need arose. It seemingly did not, or at least we have no record of it. After Tovar and Picón gave their confessions, they were absolved by the Holy Office under the promise of acts of penance. Of Agustina de Lara, however, nothing more is said.

As illustrated by this case and that of Bonifacia Miranda, women were often accused before the Inquisition of using sex and love magic on their menfolk — and many even admitted to it because they had interiorized Christian discourses

***“...women were often accused before the Inquisition of using sex and love magic on their menfolk — and many even admitted to it because they had interiorized Christian discourses that vilified brujería and the subversion of male authority.”***

that vilified *brujería* and the subversion of male authority.<sup>40</sup> Noemí Quezada explains the prevalence of such cases by arguing it was common to believe that “unnatural” maladies were the consequence of hatred, jealousy, or unrequited love, all effects that could drive people to use magic.<sup>41</sup> These associations between magic, love, and sex were also a consequence of colonial Mexico's sexual landscape, which was replete with illicit sexual unions whose regularity was compounded by the legitimacy of men's affairs. However, because of double standards, the same principle did not extend to women.<sup>42</sup> Unless they led thoroughly indecent lives, most women were constrained by rigid codes

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40. Behar, “Sex and Sin, Witchcraft and the Devil,” 38.

41. Quezada, “The Inquisition's Repression of Curanderos,” 41. Behar, “Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women's Powers,” 194.

42. Behar, “Sex and Sin, Witchcraft and the Devil,” 35-36.

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that bound them to the authority of a husband or male guardian.<sup>43</sup> Men, on the other hand, felt free to engage in sexual liaisons<sup>44</sup> and abandon their spouses to heartbreak, jealousy, and shame because they knew women were unlikely to recur to judicial interventions. *Brujería*, however, remained an accessible and illicit possibility for those women who desired to take action against their menfolk.

Both of the prior cases exemplify the affective orientation of Mexican witchcraft, as well as the shared affects between women and Black and Indigenous people that helped generate the inter-caste, inter-ethnic relations involved in the exchange of goods and services for *brujería*. Because women were more likely to be oppressed, they required ways of changing their situations without resorting to economic, social, or political power they did not have.<sup>45</sup> Thus, women like Agustina de Lara and Bonifacia Miranda took advantage of unofficial resources available to them according to their caste, class, and upbringing, often building upon understandings of traditional medicine to create magical solutions for their specific needs. For instance, Spanish and *mestiza* women had access to magical knowledge brought over from Spain that was used in daily life for healing but could also be channeled towards *brujería*.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Black and Indigenous women used repertoires of ancestral knowledge for both healing and *brujería*. These latter castes made up the majority of professional *brujas* because, from their marginalized positions, they could more easily recognize needs and offer remedies drawn from the sources at their disposal.<sup>47</sup>

Because the sources of women's magical knowledge were frequently other women, male authorities tended to classify women's power as illegitimate.<sup>48</sup> These *machista* associations are an early form of discourses of decency that, by linking femininity with pollution, danger, and monstrosity, made women into others. The marginalized sources from whence women putatively acquired their *brujería* further intensified the vilification of women and magic. *Brujas*

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43. Behar, "Sex and Sin, Witchcraft and the Devil," 35-36.

44. Sodomy was thoroughly discouraged and stigmatized even without the Church's insistence upon it.

45. Behar, "Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women's Powers," 181.

46. Amos Megged, "Magic, Popular Medicine, and Gender in Seventeenth Century Mexico: The Case of Isabel de Montoya," in *Witchcraft, Healing, and Popular Diseases: New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York: Routledge, 2001), 242, 246.

47. Behar, "Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women's Powers," 192. Megged, "Magic, Popular Medicine, and Gender," 244-245.

48. Behar, "Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women's Powers," 181.

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were often Indigenous, Black, or of a mixed caste, all marginalized populations because of European ethnocentrism.<sup>49</sup> Due to their feminine, non-white, and non-Christian identities, *brujas* led a liminal existence. Because they knew how to use the powers inherent to both non-white and feminine natures, *brujas* generated respect and even fear throughout the strata of colonial society. With their mastery of both the body and supernatural forces, *brujas* were thought to subvert the masculine control of women that formed “an integral part of the power relations of colonial rule and...between men and women in daily life.”<sup>50</sup> Non-Christian, feminine, and BIPOC, witches were fundamentally the other, and they often used this position to transgress the orders sustaining colonial oppression. By offering their services to help others challenge masculine domination in their domestic lives, *brujas* laid the foundations for later forms of organized spiritual resistance to hegemonic patriarchy.

### III. Morality, Materiality, and Magic

In the context of non-witches, or laywomen, the indecent implications of employing *brujería* should be contextualized by the normalization of women’s compliance with decent societal standards. Unlike *brujas*, whose existence was marginal and defined by their otherness, laywomen were usually Christians of every caste and class engaged in everyday efforts of belonging, such that they only dabbled in *hechicería* when they felt obligated to do so. With their lives organized according to standards of decency, laywomen like Isabel de Tovar claimed to feel morally conflicted over their desire to use magic to tame lovers, husbands, masters, or male kin, likely because they interpreted these impulses according to internalized misogynistic ideas about the righteousness of woman’s submission to man.<sup>51</sup> However, the hegemonic nature of male dominance and growing inquisitorial leniency towards *brujería* meant there was nevertheless a large market for magic related to sex, love, and control.<sup>52</sup>

Laywomen’s experience of *brujería* tended to follow regular patterns, wherein women would suffer an injustice and go in search of a solution that was usually proffered by a female friend or local professional. The primary difference amongst the cases within inquisitorial records is whether others were accusing women of using *brujería* or whether women were admitting to

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49. Behar, “Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women’s Powers,” 179.

50. Few, *Women Who Live Evil Lives*, 48.

51. Behar, “Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women’s Powers,” 184.

52. Behar, “Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women’s Powers,” 184.

it themselves. In 1715, for instance, a *mestiza* named Magdalena de la Mata came before the Inquisition to confess that she had used a ligature provided by Beatris, an Indigenous woman, to render her husband impotent.<sup>53</sup> Mata explained that after her husband beat her bloody, she had gone to Beatris, who purportedly recommended a ligature. Mata was unable to go through with the ritual and admitted her sinful actions to her parish confessor within the day. Because *brujería* was involved, her confessor sent Mata to the Holy Office, who absolved her and assigned her penance. This brief example illustrates how women would seek out *brujas* for help but abandon their plans and confess to masculine authorities, largely due to the guilt women experienced because of internalized phallogocentric discourses that condemned subverting male power.<sup>54</sup> These same discourses, however, attest to the very real power of *brujería*, as it was essential for the survival of patriarchal hegemony that women be made to fear the powers attributed to their spirits and bodies to prevent its undue use against masculine authorities.

Colonial *brujería* directly affected women's relationships and understanding of their bodies. These aspects are interconnected because men's relations with women were often founded on bodily control, and also because women's understandings of their relations were fundamentally shaped by patriarchal ideas about feminine pollution and submission.<sup>55</sup> Thus, as seen in the case of Magdalena de la Mata, magical interventions at the site of women's relations, especially with men, necessarily touched upon women's internally misogynist conceptions of feminine bodies and the powers contained therein.

Thinking with the symbolic language of *brujería*, the connection between heterosexual relationships and the dangerous agency of women's bodies explains why so much of colonial magic relied on using women's body parts or excretions.<sup>56</sup> Shunned by religious and civil discourses because of their alleged polluting capacities, feminine bodies became a symbolic weapon in women's relations with men because women could take advantage of the power granted

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53. AGN Inq. 878, f.314-316.

54. Behar, "Sex and Sin, Witchcraft and the Devil," 50-51.

55. AJacqueline Holler, "Of Sadness and Joy in Colonial Mexico," in *Emotions and Daily Life in Colonial Mexico*, eds. Javier Villa-Flores and Sonya Lipsett-Rivera (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014), 32-33. Behar, "Sex and sin, witchcraft and the devil," 42.

56. See for instance Few, *Women Who Live Evil Lives*, 52-53, and Behar, "Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women's Powers," 181, 199-200.



to them by the fears of masculine authorities.<sup>57</sup> As explained by Ruth Behar,

Women frequently used menstrual blood or the water that had cleansed their “intimate parts” to make up the ensorcelled food or drink that they served to their husbands. The logic behind this was clearly that of “metaphorical extension,” by which the ingestion of women’s bodily essences worked, by means of analogy, to subdue, tame, or attract the men who consumed them...And perhaps, too, women’s serving of ensorcelled food to men was another kind of reversal, sexual rather than social: a way for women to penetrate men’s bodies.<sup>58</sup>

Through inversion, feminine bodies could become a source of empowerment, allowing women to temporarily subvert one of the primary sites of hegemonic patriarchal control. While *brujería* may not have been an everyday activity for most, it created interstitial spaces for resisting oppression so that women could take action against male authority and redefine their relationship with their bodies. Though many women seem to have not overcome their internalized misogyny enough to complete their rituals, even considering the possibility of *brujería* was a significant transgression that allowed women to contemplate alternatives to masculine domination.

Concerning women’s relations with menfolk, understandings of *brujería* as resistance should be framed within the multivalent dimensions of male dominance. Outside of bodily control, masculine colonial structures also ensured that, in marriage, women of all social levels lost most of their legal autonomy and owed total obedience to their husbands, who assumed the right to beat and abuse their wives if they deviated from feminine decency.<sup>59</sup> This oppressive environment severely restricted women’s agency, so it is understandable that efforts of resistance likely began at the most basic level outside of the self: that of affective relationships. Taking advantage of contemporary discourses, women used all available magical resources to try to affect the behavior of the men they loved, lived with, or worked for. Whether the end goal was to diminish abuse or enact retribution for infidelity, women’s bodies and sexual power had the potential to become sites for external and internal transformations through *brujería*.

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57. Few, *Women Who Live Evil Lives*, 52-53.

58. Behar, “Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women’s Powers,” 180.

59. Behar, “Sex and Sin, Witchcraft and the Devil,” 35.

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When agency and power are understood to be relational in nature, it is only in the folds of relations that an individual can effect change on others or



*Navigating solidarity.* Ashna Malani.

acquire any form of empowerment.<sup>60</sup> From this perspective, it was the authority generated by the relations between *brujas*, clients, and victims, and embedded in the practices and widespread discourses of witchcraft, that catalyzed the various processes that allowed women to participate in relations of power as agential subjects. *Maestras* (magical teachers), *curanderas* (spiritual healers), and other *brujas* based their “community authority on their knowledge of the body and the natural world, connected to Spanish, African, and [Indigenous] ideas and practices of religion and the supernatural,” Martha Few notes.<sup>61</sup> As seen in the cases mentioned thus far, *brujas*’ power was maintained through reputation and the creation of “informal social ties, which often crossed the ethnic, status, and rural/urban boundaries of colonial society.”<sup>62</sup> Hierarchies of power enabled these inter-caste, inter-ethnic networks by creating a common cause to individual experiences of patriarchal oppression, as well

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60. Clements, *Sites of the Ascetic Self*, 176.

61. Few, *Women Who Live Evil Lives*, 3.

62. Few, *Women Who Live Evil Lives*, 3.

as establishing shared sites of subjectivity (such as the body) for contesting masculine power.<sup>63</sup> By suggesting new ways to approach relations with others and oneself, *brujería* not only helped women shift distributions of power, but also laid the foundations for ongoing efforts that challenged the paradigms subjugating marginalized populations' existence.

#### IV. Rethinking and Relating in Otherness

In 1733, Fray Diego Núñez accused his mulata slave Manuela de Bocanegra of having bewitched him, causing him countless pains, aches, and other maladies, including temporary paralysis, excruciating urination, and having to expel small objects through his genitals.<sup>64</sup> After careful examination of these objects, the Franciscan concluded that these were signs of a *maleficio diabólico* (diabolic witchcraft) that inevitably pointed back to his slave and, more importantly, her sexuality, as Núñez had recently caught her copulating with a lover and severely scolded both individuals, likely inciting in Bocanegra a desire for revenge. From a modern standpoint, the priest's "diabolic" symptoms appear even to the untrained eye to be those of several common venereal diseases. However, Núñez's reaction to these symptoms is indicative of the gendered, ethnocentric fears that plagued many white colonial men, as well as the sorts of situations that were understood to move women towards indecent magic. As Marcella Althaus-Reid notes, in situations of hegemonic patriarchy, "what happens is that the return for a woman's investment in decency is so poor that in the end it allows her to keep a rebellious spirit in spite of her sexual/gender investment [in structures of decency]."<sup>65</sup>

Not every case of *brujería* involves such a marked difference between the identities of those involved, yet Núñez's story is a useful case study precisely because of the chasm between his status and that of Bocanegra. The fear of *brujería* noted across inquisitorial records is exacerbated in Núñez's case because his relationship with Bocanegra was composed of many dyadic dominations, including "man and woman, priest and lay person, white and Black, and master and slave."<sup>66</sup> Because Bocanegra was an enslaved person, her alleged draining of the priest's vitality was even more threatening since he would be "lowered" to her level, symbolically becoming a BIPOC woman

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63. Few, *Women Who Live Evil Lives*, 6.

64. AGN Inq. 765, f.15.

65. Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 51.

66. Behar, "Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women's Powers," 197.

who did not legally own her body. This case also reveals the inherent dualism underlying colonial patriarchy. In male-female relations, only one person could exercise their will at a time, since it meant the other would necessarily lose theirs. This phallogocentric paradigm unsurprisingly led to the male belief that, by using illegitimate methods such as *brujería*, women could neutralize and appropriate men's power, reducing men's rightful control over women and making men as weak as women were thought to be. The androcentric nature of such colonial Christian discourses explains why male authorities felt so threatened by women, as it was understood that any increases in women's

***“From a modern standpoint, the priest’s ‘diabolic’ symptoms appear even to the untrained eye to be those of several common venereal diseases. However, Núñez’s reaction to these symptoms is indicative of the gendered, ethnocentric fears that plagued many white colonial men, as well as the sorts of situations that were understood to move women towards indecent magic.”***

agency would necessarily be followed by a proportional decline in the agency of men.<sup>67</sup>

Continuing with Fray Núñez's story, the priest accused Bocanegra of having abused their domestic relationship by cursing him through substances slipped into his meals.<sup>68</sup> Further complicating the situation was the presence of another woman, a *mulata* healer named Gertrudis whom Fray Núñez sought out with the hope of breaking Bocanegra's spell.<sup>69</sup> While at first the priest's interactions with Gertrudis seemed promising, they came to a halt when Núñez discovered that Gertrudis was a purported dealer of sexual magic and Manuela's friend,

67. Lewis, *Hall of Mirrors*, 109.

68. AGN Inq. 765, f.15.

69. AGN Inq. 765, f.15.

explaining why his symptoms seemed to worsen after he began using Gertrudis' treatments.<sup>70</sup> There is no information about the conclusion of the case, but what we do know illustrates the affective entanglements and relations of power involved in masculine understandings of women's *brujería*. Colonial society was rife with vertical hierarchies that created oppressive relations between individuals with marked power differentials, but these same structures generated solidarity between marginalized peoples who underwent similar experiences under colonial oppression. Colonial distributions of power, while inherently vertical, were thus able to foster horizontal relations such as friendships and kinships that facilitated the transgression of decent orders through various forms of mutual support.

The story of Bocanegra and Fray Núñez exemplifies the power dynamics created by hierarchies of racialized morality used to justify oppressive violence, as seen in Núñez's anger at having his power putatively usurped and his fear of being symbolically lowered to an inferior position. Simultaneously, this case demonstrates some of the ways women could exploit oppressive systems to gain an advantage over men. Working with the unverifiable assumption that Bocanegra *did* place a curse on Núñez, the effectiveness of her *brujería* was undoubtedly heightened by Núñez's fears of female rebellion against male authority. Women and other marginalized populations were likely well aware of these phallogocentric anxieties and used *brujería* (either consciously or unconsciously) to exploit such sentiments as part of their pursuit of power. The power of *brujería* was thus multivalent, penetrating religious, political, and social structures: while manifesting most evidently through beliefs in *brujas'* ability to manipulate real diabolic powers using magic, it is clear that the recognition of *brujería's* potency was also largely due to the ways it manipulated patriarchal fears to empower marginalized subjects.

The interethnic, interclass networks previously alluded to facilitated the exchange of *brujerías* that could address women's domestic and amatory concerns. The near-universal need for these exchanges meant women of all classes and castes could develop close contact, and even friendships, with the Black, Indigenous, and *mestiza* women lauded as magical specialists.<sup>71</sup> While these relationships — which we mostly know of through inquisitorial records of questionable accuracy and veracity — cannot be considered an

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70. Behar, "Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women's Powers," 198-199.

71. Behar, "Sexual Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women's Powers," 192.

exact parallel of modern mutual aid networks, they nonetheless point towards frequent significant breaches of colonial ethnic and class divides. Through relations based on the shared goals of transgression, care, and support, the networks of *brujería* “were able to mould a gender consciousness which

**“Because *brujería* involved new understandings of embodied being, race, and gender that went largely against mainstream discourses, *brujas* and their clients could access through magic potential sites of subjectivity that afforded them a holistic, if interstitial, sense of self.”**

helped them withstand repression.”<sup>72</sup> Magic practices, Amos Megged writes, “became for [women] an alternative social and ritualistic haven from the male-dominated ‘caste system’ of the colonial theatre.”<sup>73</sup> When combined with their fundamental role in the “weakening” of men, these subversive networks provide a perspective of femme communities during the colonial period that contests mainstream narratives of pre-modern women’s helplessness before patriarchy.

From a modern standpoint, these efforts are sometimes seen as piecemeal, since they operated within a male-dominated system that made women internalize patriarchal beliefs. Yet suspicions of *brujería* should still be understood as early forms of resistance because they created impressions of power around individuals who were otherwise oppressed, temporarily disrupting the colonial distributions of power that perpetuated marginalized peoples’ subjugation. Through this lens, *brujería* can be recognized as a tactic marginalized people used to recoup a sense of autonomy and agency when licit powers failed to provide them an adequate existence. Because *brujería* involved new understandings of embodied being, race, and gender that went largely against mainstream discourses, *brujas* and their clients could access

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72. Megged, “Magic, Popular Medicine, and Gender,” 251.

73. Megged, “Magic, Popular Medicine, and Gender,” 251.

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through magic potential sites of subjectivity that afforded them a holistic, if interstitial, sense of self. With *brujería* also came the possibility of agency, since, as argued by Niki Clements, agency does not only reside in individual subjectivities, but also in interrelationships that include discursive and intimate connections with others, and relationships of self to self.<sup>74</sup> For Black and Indigenous people, and particularly the women of these castes, *brujería* was a way to build relationships with oneself and others, but also to develop larger communities that provided the support lacking in normative institutions.<sup>75</sup>

During the colonial period, both men and women feared women's empowerment because such a change would nullify the rigid structures of patriarchal hierarchy and decent Christian living, yet, in the face of systemic violence, women's resistance was unavoidable. Internalized decency decreased the likelihood of women's use of *brujería*, but many nonetheless relied on such methods to gain power over their menfolk, and in the process began to redefine their relationships to womanhood and the female body. Historical records of women's involvement with magic reveal colonial society's very real fear of the chaos that women's power, especially when intensified by *brujería* and left unmanaged, could inflict upon society. These sentiments also point towards colonial men's perception that their hold upon society as a whole was tenuous, which explains why there are so many fear-driven, paranoid masculine narratives of women and BIPOC using diabolic power to subdue white men. However, these same masculine anxieties about losing authority helped cement *brujería* as an interstitial method for defying patriarchal hegemony and creating solidarity around the experiences of subjugation and transgression.

When studied in the broader transhistorical context of indecent resistance to hegemony, colonial *brujería* is an interstitial, subversive tradition sustained by both individual and collective transgression of hegemonic normativities. Through cultural syncretism, holistic discourses, and spiritual pluralism, *brujería* and its daughter traditions have long taught women ways to counteract hegemonic efforts aimed at the subjugation of marginalized and non-normative identities. Academically, the interstitial colonial activities that we label *brujería* should begin to be understood as a conscious reappropriation of power that redefined uneven distributions of authority by articulating the inarticulate power attributed to marginalized bodies, sexualities, and beliefs. Ultimately, colonial

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74. Clements, *Sites of the Ascetic Self*, 169.

75. See Megged, "Magic, Popular Medicine, and Gender," 247, 250, 252.

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witchcraft paved the way for later forms of gendered spiritual transgression in Latin America, and particularly those that constitute ongoing forms of resistance to the exclusionary legacies of hegemonic empire. By positing alternative understandings of feminine bodies, sexualities, and relationships, colonial women's *brujería* laid the groundwork for countless women to thereafter challenge standards of decency, reconsider their rejections of otherness, and even find power in their indecent forms of being.



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## SUFFERING AND RESILIENCE



*The Violence of Death.* Laura Semro.

# SUFFERING AND RESILIENCE: THE JEWS OF SPAIN AND BLACK DEATH

**Joy Wang**

**Written for Coexistence in Medieval Spain**

**(HIST 324)**

**Dr. Maya Irish**

During a time in which the world is currently blanketed by a pandemic, there is an irresistible compulsion to look for understanding and kernels of hope in how the world managed to emerge from previous pandemics. Between the years 1347 and 1352, the bubonic plague swept through the world with catastrophic losses, earning its label as the Black Death. However, while there have been substantial studies done on the Black Death in Europe as a whole, there appears to be a dearth of studies on the effects of the Black Death in Spain. Furthermore, studies specific to the effects on the Jewish communities in Spain have lagged behind.<sup>1</sup> A large part contributing to this may be the scarcity of primary sources available to historians as there are very few that describe the crisis experienced by Jewish communities during the Black Death.<sup>2</sup> However, enough sources exist to begin to construct an understanding of the relationship of the Black Death to anti-Jewish violence in Spain and how the Sephardic Jews coped with the resulting epidemiological and human destruction in the second half of the fourteenth century.

This essay seeks to analyze the experiences of violence and recovery of the Sephardic Jewish community at the time of and following the Black Death. In analyzing the violence the Sephardic Jews endured, evidence suggests that these anti-Jewish attacks rose from the exacerbation of anxieties and fears

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1. Susan L. Einbinder, *After the Black Death: Plague and Commemoration among Iberian Jews*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 4.

2. Julia Itin, "Fractured History: Jewish Sources and Narratives of the Plague and of the Black Death Persecutions," in *Strategies, Dispositions and Resources of Social Resilience: A Dialogue between Medieval Studies and Sociology*, ed. Martin Endress, Lukas Clemens, and Benjamin Rapp (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2020), 188.

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already in place from the wars and famines of the 14th century rather than an economic class conflict.<sup>3</sup> As for how the Sephardic Jews coped with the trauma from the plague and violence, their commemorative and medical texts as well as their economic status in the years after the Black Death demonstrate a narrative of resilience.<sup>4</sup> Thus, while the economic and religious visibility of the Sephardic Jews made them a vulnerable outlet to violence and anxieties exacerbated by the Black Death, the Jewish community of Spain showed resilience in confronting the epidemiological and human destruction of the disease through their commemorative and medical literature as well as the continuation of their economic roles in the second half of the fourteenth century.

### The Convenient Scapegoat

Although they were a minority in Christian Spain during the time of the Black Death, the Sephardic Jews had been rooted in the Iberian Peninsula since antiquity.<sup>5</sup> From then until their expulsion in 1492, the Sephardic Jews oscillated between Muslim and Christian rule. However, while Spain has been considered a second Jerusalem, the Sephardic Jews also faced centuries of persecution.<sup>6</sup> The period of the Black Death was no exception as Jews weathered not only the epidemiological destruction of the plague, but also the physical attacks by Christians. As a minority with such deep roots in Spain, what made the Jews vulnerable to such violence?

Although many Jews occupied important economic positions during the time of the Black Death in Spain, the social composition of the perpetrators and victims indicate that these anti-Jewish attacks lacked aspects of a class struggle.<sup>7</sup> This is apparent in the examination of the attack in Tàrrega, the site of one of the most vicious outbreaks of violence in Spain. Contemporary records give the mortality figure in Tàrrega to be three hundred compared to twenty in Barcelona and eighteen in Cervera.<sup>8</sup> The markings on the bones of Jewish

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3. Samuel K. Cohn Jr, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," *Past & Present* 196, no. 1 (August 2007): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtm005>; Teofilo F. Ruiz, "Medieval Spain in the Late Middle Ages: Society and Economy," in *Spain's Centuries of Crisis, 1300-1474* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 47-48.

4. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*; Philippe, Wolff, "The 1391 Pogrom in Spain. Social Crisis or Not?" *Past & Present*, no. 50 (1971): 6, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/650241>.

5. Jane S. Gerber, *The Jews of Spain: a History of the Sephardic Experience* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), xi.

6. Gerber, *The Jews of Spain: a History of the Sephardic Experience*, x.

7. Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 6-9.

8. Anna Colet et al., "The Black Death and its Consequences for the Jewish Community in Tàrrega: Lessons from History and Archeology," *The Medieval Globe* 1, no. 1 (2014): 69, <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/>

victims in Tàrraga indicate they succumbed to a variety of weapons, including swords, axes, lances, stones, and arrows.<sup>9</sup> The range of weapons used indicates that a mixed class of people participated in the attack.<sup>10</sup> The swords would have belonged to the nobility while large knives, axes, and stones would have been used by commoners.<sup>11</sup> Similar indications have also been found on the bones of Jewish victims in Valencia, whose markings also indicate that their attackers consisted of a mixed group of people from different social classes.<sup>12</sup> As for the social composition of the Jewish victims, archaeological evidence indicates they were also of different statuses and ranks.<sup>13</sup> Taken together, this suggests that the attacks were not drawn along class lines in which the poor or popular classes sought to redress specific political or economic grievances.

However, looting and destruction of debt ledgers and documentations occurred during these attacks.<sup>14</sup> This can be explained by the economic instability medieval Spain suffered in the fourteenth century. During this time, the Black Death was only one of several calamities to strike, along with war and famine.<sup>15</sup> Thus, it is unsurprising that there was a substantial growth in loans given by Jews in Catalonia when the Black Death arrived in Spain.<sup>16</sup> However, none of these attacks resulted in any institutional economic changes regarding Jewish loans that benefited the perpetrators. In fact, notarial evidence indicates that there was a clear legal recourse available to Jews for the recovery of debts destroyed during these attacks and many Jewish citizens filed claims to recover them.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, no large uprisings against the Jewish community continued in the years immediately following the Black Death.<sup>18</sup> Under these circumstances, the destruction of property and debt documentation seem to be an opportunistic activity during the attack rather than an organized attempt at social and economic change. While evidence shows that these attacks did not contain aspects of a class struggle or organized revolution, they serve to

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[viewcontent.cgi?article=1021&context=tmg](http://viewcontent.cgi?article=1021&context=tmg).

9. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 136.

10. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 136.

11. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 136.

12. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 135.

13. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 127.

14. Colet et al., "The Black Death and its Consequences for the Jewish Community in Tàrraga: Lessons from History and Archeology," 69.

15. Ruiz, "Medieval Spain in the Late Middle Ages: Society and Economy," 42.

16. Colet et al., "The Black Death and its Consequences for the Jewish Community in Tàrraga: Lessons from History and Archeology," 79.

17. Colet et al., "The Black Death and its Consequences for the Jewish Community in Tàrraga," 70.

18. Ruiz, "Medieval Spain in the Late Middle Ages: Society and Economy," 48.

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demonstrate the vulnerability in the economic visibility of the Sephardic Jews.

In addition to economic visibility, the minority status of the Sephardic Jews also made them a convenient target. In fact, Jews were not the only minority

***“As a minority group with economic and religious visibility, the Sephardic Jews became a convenient and vulnerable scapegoat for the stress and upheaval brought about by the Black Death.”***

group to be targeted during this time.<sup>19</sup> In places where Jews were absent, a scapegoat was sought and found in minorities such as the Catalans in Sicily, the English in Narbonne, and even priests in Denmark and Germany.<sup>20</sup> Thus, scapegoats were found easily in minority groups whose perceived differences seemed to be exacerbated during times of calamity. For the Sephardic Jews, the pre-existing tension from their religious differences and economic roles made them particularly vulnerable to blame and attack. There was such widespread unrest during this period that even members of the royal household of Aragon experienced crime and looting.<sup>21</sup> One member of the royal household reported the theft of property in Barcelona after the death of his parents and wife and a similar occurrence also took place in Valencia.<sup>22</sup> Such incidents underscore the widespread confusion and disorder during the Black Death and further demonstrate how economic visibility can make certain groups, even protected groups such as the Jews and members of the royal household, the target of crime and looting amidst the Black Death.

As a minority group, the religious and economic visibility of the Sephardic

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19. Mordechai Breuer, “The ‘Black Death’ and Antisemitism,” in *Antisemitism through the Ages*, ed. Shmuel Almog (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988), 142.

20. Breuer, “The ‘Black Death’ and Antisemitism,” 142-143; Cohn, “The Black Death and the Burning of Jews,” 8.

21. Melanie V. Shirk, “The Black Death in Aragon, 1348–1351,” *Journal of Medieval History* 7, no. 4 (January 1, 1981): 361, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0304-4181\(81\)90014-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0304-4181(81)90014-2).

22. Shirk, “The Black Death in Aragon, 1348–1351,” 361.



Jews made them a convenient target for the anxieties, fear, and anger exacerbated by the Black Death. Amidst pre-existing hardships from periodic famines and Spain's involvement in the Hundred Year's War in addition to their own internal conflict, the appearance of the Black Death formed a perfect storm of disasters which amplified tensions.<sup>23</sup> Thus, rather than uprisings aimed at addressing concrete political, economic, or social grievances against the Jews, the violence and attacks resulted from tension amplified by the rampant and seemingly uncontrollable mortality of the Black Death.<sup>24</sup> As a minority group with economic and religious visibility, the Sephardic Jews became a convenient and vulnerable scapegoat for the stress and upheaval brought about by the Black Death.

### A Resilient Community

In coping with the loss from both disease and human violence, the Sephardic Jews used commemorative writing to make sense of their suffering and to find hope. In works like liturgical laments, community commemoration through the narration and verbalization of past traumatic events helped survivors and their descendants maintain a positive outlook on life after experiencing persecution.<sup>25</sup> The lament by Emanuel ben Joseph is one of the few Sephardic liturgical works plausibly attributed to anti-Semitic violence during the Black Death.<sup>26</sup> Presenting the catastrophe within a religious framework, Emanuel draws upon biblical prooftexts to make sense of the suffering while emphasizing the preservation of hope. For instance, verse 12 translates to "Their days ended, their grasp weakened, the day they were struck / down before the impure ones."<sup>27</sup> This is a reference to Leviticus 26:17, which warns the people of Israel that they will be defeated by their enemies.<sup>28</sup> Emanuel attributes this to the desertion of God's mercy which draws from Numbers 14:9 and is reflected in verse 14: "The Glory that had shaded them departed, their honor fell. In their / misfortune, they went in hunger and thirst."<sup>29</sup> God's desertion also meant the consequences of disease.

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23. Ruiz, "Medieval Spain in the Late Middle Ages: Society and Economy," 43-44.

24. Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 9.

25. Itin, "Fractured History: Jewish Sources and Narratives of the Plague and of the Black Death Persecutions," 185.

26. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 38.

27. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 40; Emanuel b. Joseph, "Aqonen bemarrah vetzom," 1481, translated in Susan L. Einbinder, *After the Black Death: Plague and Commemoration Among Iberian Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 38-41.

28. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 46; Joseph, "Aqonen bemarrah vetzom," 40.

29. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 46; Joseph, "Aqonen bemarrah vetzom," 40.

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In verse 11, Emanuel references Jeremiah 16:4 as he laments that “They had been radiant as the dawn, [but now] their skin turned / black. They died of deadly diseases.”<sup>30</sup> These verses suggest that the disease and violence suffered by the victims were punishment for straying from God.<sup>31</sup> This offers an explanation and interpretation for Jewish survivors to make sense of the suffering. However, Emanuel’s lament also offers hope for redemption as he goes on to plead with God in verse 17 to “Purify their hearts and straighten their path; wipe out their debt and / take away [their] sins.”<sup>32</sup> In verse 19, Emanuel instills more confidence in the redemption of the Sephardic Jews as he asks God to “Lead Your people, O God, as You have spoken, to Your heavenly Temple; let them return redeemed.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, the liturgical lament interprets the violence that the Jews suffered within a religious framework, giving the events meaning and hope by tethering it to scriptural contexts and theological meanings.

The liturgical poetry by Moses Nathan, which Einbinder argues convincingly to be linked to the anti-Semitic violence of the Black Death in 1348, contains similar elements.<sup>34</sup> In it, the author also attributes the suffering of the Black Death to God and pleads with Him to “forgive my debts and erase my sin.”<sup>35</sup> However, in verse 16, Moses offers explicit consolation to the reader to “Take comfort, take comfort, for relief will come, Joy will increase; sorrow and sighing will flee.”<sup>36</sup> Concluding the lament, Moses ends with “Rejoice with her [Jerusalem] in joy and gladness: in her are found Torah and sounds of song.”<sup>37</sup> This verse alludes to Isaiah 51:3 and the rebirth of a city in ruins, giving the Jewish community hope for recovery.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps even more so than Emanuel’s verses, Moses’ liturgical lament outlines not only an explanation for the violence and suffering but also explicit consolation. It reminds listeners of the heavenly origin of the catastrophe and emphasizes faith and penitence for redemption from suffering. These works demonstrate the fortitude of the Sephardic Jews in their intent to find meaning and hope through religion as they cope with the trauma from the Black Death.

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30. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 46: Joseph, “Aqonen bemarrah vetzom,” 40.

31. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 46: Joseph, “Aqonen bemarrah vetzom,” 40.

32. Joseph, “Aqonen bemarrah vetzom,” 40.

33. Joseph, “Aqonen bemarrah vetzom,” 40.

34. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 138-147.

35. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 138-147: Moses Nathan, “Mi gam bakhem,” 1348. Translated in Susan L. Einbinder, *After the Black Death: Plague and Commemoration among Iberian Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 140-142.

36. Nathan, “Mi gam bakhem,” 141.

37. Nathan, “Mi gam bakhem,” 141.

38. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 144.

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In the medical tractates of Jewish physicians and translators, there is also evidence of continuation and resilience in the Sephardic Jewish medical community after the blow of the Black Death. The Jews of Christian Spain showed a great deal of interest in the medical aspect of the plague, which contradicts claims of there being few efforts to create a genuine medical tradition



*Dawn of Redemption.* Asha Malani.

after 1348.<sup>39</sup> In fact, the Sephardic Jews produced a great deal of original and translated works on the plague.<sup>40</sup> *Preservatio contra pestilenciam* written by Jean de Tournemire was translated into Judeo-Spanish by a Jewish scribe at the request of King Enrique II and *Regimen sanitatis* (The Rule of Health) by Pablo de Sipaya was translated into Hebrew in Spain.<sup>41</sup> Translations of medical treatises were significant because they constituted an important component of curating the medical library available to medieval Jewish physicians.<sup>42</sup> Translators carefully examined and selected Arabic and Latin works by Muslims and Christians in order to supply Jewish physicians and scholars with the most

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39. Ron Barkaï, "Jewish Treatises on the Black Death (1350-1500): A Preliminary Study," in *Medicine from the Black Death to the French Disease*, eds. R. French et al. (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 1998), 6.

40. Barkaï, "Jewish Treatises on the Black Death (1350-1500)," 6.

41. Barkaï, "Jewish Treatises on the Black Death (1350-1500)," 7.

42. Barkaï, "Jewish Treatises on the Black Death (1350-1500)," 9.

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current and practical texts.<sup>43</sup> The production of these plague tractates after 1348 indicates the continued professional commitment of Sephardic Jewish physicians and scribes and their ongoing efforts to advance the field of medicine after the Black Death. They demonstrate that despite the losses due to disease and violence during the plague, there was no irreparable rupture in the medical and learned communities of the Sephardic Jews.

Furthermore, religious references in Jewish medical treatises produced on the Black Death also indicate a preservation and conviction of faith to make sense of the plague. Similar to the authors of liturgical laments, most of the Jewish physicians ultimately attribute the cause of the Black Death to God.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the recitation of the Book of Psalms was considered especially useful to fight the plague.<sup>45</sup> While the inclusion of biblical references generally indicates a need to supplement or even replace inadequate medical knowledge, it also shows an attempt by Jewish physicians and authors to make sense of the Black Death through the familiar and comforting lens of religion.<sup>46</sup> Although their knowledge and practices against the plague may seem inadequate, they can look for hope from the heavens to ease the suffering of their patients. Looking to historical precedence in scripture and mollifying God through means of prayer and repentance, Jewish physicians used religion as a coping mechanism and form of consolation to continue their battle against the Black Death.

The exception to this would be the original tractate written by Abraham ben David Caslari, the most important Jewish author in the field of epidemiology during the Black Death years.<sup>47</sup> In Abraham's work, *Tractate on Pestilential* and other *Types of Fevers*, there is a near-total avoidance of biblical allusions.<sup>48</sup> While Abraham reminds his readers that God ultimately controlled the celestial factors that cause universal pestilence, heavenly motives play an otherwise minor role in his analysis and recommendation.<sup>49</sup> Instead, Abraham emphasizes that the events of 1348 were not a universal pestilence and that the individual temperament of each patient mattered in giving the correct diagnoses and treatment.<sup>50</sup> Thus, by arguing that the Black Death was not a universal pestilence

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43. Barkaï, "Jewish Treatises on the Black Death (1350-1500)," 10.

44. Barkaï, "Jewish Treatises on the Black Death (1350-1500)," 21.

45. Barkaï, "Jewish Treatises on the Black Death (1350-1500)," 18.

46. Barkaï, "Jewish Treatises on the Black Death (1350-1500)," 17.

47. Barkaï, "Jewish Treatises on the Black Death (1350-1500)," 10.

48. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 78.

49. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 79.

50. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 71.

with a primarily divine cause, Abraham is putting the agency in the physicians' hands in diagnosing and curing their patients. This observation may reflect the reality of Abraham's situation contextualized by a relatively low plague mortality rate and the survival of some of his patients.<sup>51</sup> However, even without the supplementation of religion, Abraham's tractate demonstrates a type of resilience in his optimism and conviction of the physician's ability to treat the disease. Furthermore, his decision to emphasize this unusual point of view in a traditional medical tractate indicates his desire and continued commitment to the professional and medical community in a time of crisis. Thus, in the face of the epidemiological destruction caused by the Black Death, these medical treatises indicate continued learning and strength in the Jewish community of medical practitioners and scholars.

More than just through commemorative works and medical treatises, the Jewish community in Spain also showed their resilience in the continuation and resumption of their economic contributions in the latter half of the fourteenth century. Under the patronage of the crown, Jews had done well after the Black Death.<sup>52</sup> To help restore the economic state of the Jews, creditors were barred from bringing lawsuits against the Jews for one year in Barcelona while the Jews of Montblanc were given a delay of a year to meet their debts.<sup>53</sup> Jews in other communities were also allowed measures to aid their survival.<sup>54</sup> Even in Tàrraga, the scene of such a violent massacre, the municipality would hire a Jewish physician a decade later and the Jewish community would slowly return to life.<sup>55</sup>

Under these protective measures and attempts from the crown to restore their economic health, many Jews achieved substantial success. Men like Yussaf Pichon and Yussaf ibn Wakar became the chief financial advisers to Castilian kings during the second half of the fourteenth century.<sup>56</sup> Many Jews also became the crown's principal tax farmers and served the nobility.<sup>57</sup> In other fields, Jews like Rabbi Haym el Levi became the doctor to the archbishop of Toledo in 1389 and astrologers like Hasdai Cresque were part of the royal household of Queen Yolande.<sup>58</sup> In addition to these examples of great financiers, administrators,

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51. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 71.

52. Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 32.

53. Shirk, "The Black Death in Aragon, 1348–1351," 363.

54. Shirk, "The Black Death in Aragon, 1348–1351," 363.

55. Einbinder, *After the Black Death*, 146.

56. Wolff, "The 1391 Pogrom in Spain. Social Crisis or Not?" 6.

57. Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 32.

58. Wolff, "The 1391 Pogrom in Spain. Social Crisis or Not?" 6.

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and professionals, the mass of Jewish population also included moneylenders, doctors, artisans, and peasants.<sup>59</sup> While there were also poor Jews, the level of success that many Jews were able to achieve through their trades and financial skills in the latter half of the fourteenth century demonstrate their economic recovery after the Black Death. In fact, the level of success that Sephardic Jews portrayed through their economic visibility in service to the crown would provoke Christian jealousy and contribute to their persecution in 1391.<sup>60</sup> Thus, analyzing the economic status of Sephardic Jews, the Black Death did not seem to have an irreparable effect on their community. Rather, the Sephardic Jews demonstrate an admirable resilience in the continued pursuit of their professions and contributions to the economy in the wake of their losses from both disease and violence.

### Conclusion

Within the context of the Black Death, the economic and religious visibility of the Sephardic Jews made them a convenient scapegoat for the anxieties, fear, and anger the plague exacerbated. From the social composition of both the perpetrators and the Jewish victims, it becomes clear that the violence against the Sephardic Jews was not the product of a social revolution intended to address specific social, political, or economic grievances.<sup>61</sup> Rather, they are the manifestation of tensions brought on by famines, wars, and disease that bore down heavily on the medieval Spanish society. The arrival of the Black Death created a perfect storm of disasters that exacerbated anxieties already in place. These fears and anger found its release in the Sephardic Jews, whose economic and religious status made them a particularly attractive and convenient target.

However, in the face of mortality from both the plague and the violence it sparked, Jewish communities showed remarkable resilience in the continuity of their commemorative works, medical texts, and economic roles. The existence of traditional liturgical laments demonstrates the Jews' attempts to make sense of the catastrophe and find consolation. Using a religious framework, the Sephardic Jews were able to justify the grief and losses they suffered while also finding conviction and hope in their faith. Through the abundance of medical treatises written by Jewish authors or translated by Jewish scribes, the Sephardic Jews

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59. Wolff, "The 1391 Pogrom in Spain. Social Crisis or Not?" 6.

60. Angus MacKay, "Popular Movements and Pogroms in Fifteenth-Century Castile," *Past & Present*, no. 55 (1972): 39-40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/650222>.

61. Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of Jews," 9.

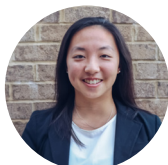
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also demonstrated a continued commitment to the academic and medical community during and in the aftermath of the Black Death. Their continued production and translation of medical treatises indicate no rupture in the medical and learned communities of the Jews in Spain. Finally, in the continuation of their roles as financial advisors, tax farmers, physicians, and other professions, the Jews were able to continue their professional pursuits and contributions to the economy. This economic recovery, the resilient narrative in their commemorative works, and the continued commitment to scholarship and medicine demonstrated in their medical texts reveals a strength and endurance that inspires not only admiration but also hope for a modern world currently suffering from a Black Death of its own.

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## THE ROLE OF THE FAMILIAR SPIRIT



*The Familiar Spirit.* Julia Kidd.

# THE ROLE OF THE FAMILIAR SPIRIT IN THE GLANVILLE-WEBSTER WITCHCRAFT DEBATE

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## Introduction

Recent accounts of scientific advancement from the Middle Ages to the Age of Enlightenment often overcome a prior scholarly tendency to draw distinctions between the superstitious practices of the Dark Ages and the rational sciences of the Enlightenment. Largely discredited nowadays, prior discussions of the decline in witchcraft in early modern England often glorified the scientific revolution as a radical break from medieval superstition.<sup>1</sup> An example that seemingly contradicts the assumption that science became progressively enlightened in early modern England is the Glanvill-Webster debate, which pitted the Anglican clergyman Joseph Glanvill against the radical sectarian physician John Webster. Whereas Joseph Glanvill, who attempted to adhere to the experimental method put forth by the Royal Society, argued in support of the existence of witchcraft in his 1668 *A Blow at Modern Sadducism*, John Webster, who was an ardent supporter of occult practices such as alchemy and astrology, argued against the existence of witchcraft in his 1677 *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*. In 1681, a year

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1. Peter Elmer, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting, and Politics in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 176.

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after Glanvill's death, the enlargement of *A Blow at Modern Sadducism* was published as the *Saducismus Triumphatus*.

Given that the Glanvill-Webster debate complicated the simple narrative of modern scientific progress, historians such as Thomas Jobe have also shifted away from the assumption that a surge in scientific advances was the main contributor to the decline in witchcraft. Rather than focusing solely on the science of early modern England in discussing the shifts in witchcraft, Jobe emphasized the importance of acknowledging the religion and politics of Restoration England.<sup>2</sup> In his article, Jobe proposed that paradoxes of the Glanvill-Webster debate can be resolved by contextualizing the scientific beliefs of this period in terms of the religious and political alignments of Restoration England. Lasting from 1660 to 1685, Restoration England was the period after Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth when Charles II returned to the throne. Following his return as king, Charles II established an exclusive body of Anglican clergy that refused admittance to Catholics and nonconformists ranging from Presbyterians to radical sectarians. Within the Anglican clergy, however, a group of clergymen called latitudinarians was distinguished by their views of religious moderation and scientific rationality.<sup>3</sup>

According to Jobe, previous historians attempted to resolve the paradox by proposing that the broad explanatory powers of occultism allowed occultists to provide alternative naturalistic explanations to phenomena that would otherwise be interpreted as Satan's influence in the natural world. However, as Jobe pointed out, this hypothesis does not address why Glanvill sought to defend witchcraft using mechanical methods.<sup>4</sup> By shifting the focus of the debate to the religious and political facets of Restoration England, Jobe framed the debate as a conflict between latitudinarian Anglicans, who favored mechanical philosophy, and radical sectarians, who favored chemical philosophy. Mechanical philosophy, in particular, refers to the philosophy that regards the universe as being composed of small particles governed by mechanical principles. In contrast, chemical philosophy, rooted in alchemy, is the field of chemistry and medicine that is primarily concerned with the use of chemical principles and solutions to cure illnesses. Contending that their differences in scientific beliefs are attributable to

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2. Thomas Harmon Jobe, "The Devil in Restoration Science: The Glanvill-Webster Witchcraft Debate," *Isis* 72, no. 3 (1981): 343-356, <https://doi.org/10.1086/352786>, 344.

3. John Spurr, "'Latitudinarianism' and the Restoration Church," *The Historical Journal* 31, no. 1 (1988): 61-82, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0018246x00011997>, 61.

4. Jobe, "The Devil in Restoration Science: The Glanvill-Webster Witchcraft Debate," 344.

their theological disagreements, Jobe argued that the separation between spirit and matter is a critical issue that latitudinarian Anglicans and radical sectarians heavily disagreed on. Whereas latitudinarian Anglicans posited that spirit and matter are separate entities, radical sectarians sought to merge the spiritual and the material.<sup>5</sup> Discussing the beliefs of latitudinarian Anglicans, Jobe stated that:

Their theology was Anglican and their synthesis favored a mechanical corpuscularism because the philosophy's separation between spirit and matter supported the view of God's presence in nature that was clearly implied in Anglican theology: one of a cosmos run by a transcendental deity served by a hierarchy of spirits.<sup>6</sup>

Jobe thus argued that Glanvill, a latitudinarian Anglican, subscribed to mechanical philosophy because he believed that its emphasis on the separation of spirit and matter is more compatible with his Anglican theology. In turn, Glanvill's belief in a universe run by God, who rules over all other spirits, could explain why he was more likely to believe in the existence of witches and demonic spirits and used the experimental method of the Royal Society in an attempt to establish the science of witchcraft as an accredited field of study.<sup>7</sup>

However, more recent scholarship has complicated Jobe's religious-political explanation of the Glanvill-Webster debate by re-examining its scientific aspects. In her 2012 article, Julie Davies highlighted the key aspects of Joseph Glanvill's poisonous vapors theory, which outlined his scientific explanations as to why familiar spirits were able to tempt the minds of witches. In brief, Glanvill proposed that familiar spirits produced poisonous vapors that interacted with the bodies of air that came out of witches' bodies.<sup>8</sup> Also referencing Glanvill's use of naturalistic explanations such as the poisonous vapors theory, Allison Coudert argued that Jobe's interpretation of the debate as a result of conflicts between latitudinarian Anglicans' mechanical philosophy and radical sectarians' chemical philosophy may be oversimplifying the debate.<sup>9</sup> Specifically, Coudert argued that Glanvill's beliefs seemed to contradict those of other mechanical philosophers whereas Webster's beliefs also defied those of other occultists. Coudert also

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5. Jobe, "The Devil in Restoration Science: The Glanvill-Webster Witchcraft Debate," 345.

6. Jobe, "The Devil in Restoration Science: The Glanvill-Webster Witchcraft Debate," 345.

7. Jobe, "The Devil in Restoration Science: The Glanvill-Webster Witchcraft Debate," 345.

8. Joseph Glanvill, *A Blow at Modern Sadducism* (London: E.C., 1668), 20.

9. Allison Coudert, "Henry More and Witchcraft," in *Henry More (1614–1687) Tercentenary Studies* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), 115-136, 117

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contended that the witchcraft debate was neither clear-cut in terms of scientific theories nor in terms of corresponding religious and political ideologies. Thus, instead of framing the Glanvill-Webster debate as a conflict between scientific, religious, and political forces, Coudert used a non-ideological framework that avoided mapping religious and political ideologies to scientific beliefs. With this framework, Coudert asserted that Glanvill was not primarily targeting Webster or occultism but rather atheism and materialism, which were synonymous for Glanvill. Thomas Hobbes' 1651 *Leviathan*, for example, was dangerous in the eyes of Glanvill as it provided natural explanations for spirits and miracles, acts that he criticized as atheistic. As a result, Glanvill, who was aware of how mechanical philosophy could be utilized by materialists like Hobbes, wanted to use mechanical philosophy to prove the existence of familiar spirits and witches, which in his mind corroborated the existence of God.<sup>10</sup>

The most recent scholarship has further unraveled other societal aspects of witchcraft in early modern England that have been under-addressed. In contrast to how Coudert focused primarily on religion and science in her analysis, Peter Elmer delved further into the political and religious significance of witchcraft before, during, and after the Restoration. Specifically, Elmer argued that witchcraft was often used as a political tool by those who were in power and those who were not. In addition, Charlotte-Rose Millar also provided a systematic analysis of witchcraft pamphlets published in early modern England to highlight the widespread beliefs of the familiar spirit. Such studies are critical in reemphasizing the importance of the politics of Restoration England in the Glanvill-Webster debate. This paper expands on how science was used in the Glanvill-Webster debate to rationalize the belief in familiar spirits for political and religious gains. It also examines how depictions of the familiar spirit in the Glanvill-Webster debate could have affected how historians analyzed the debate by comparing Glanvill's and Webster's interpretation of the familiar spirit to the popular conceptions of the familiar spirit as observed in witchcraft pamphlets. As a corporeal demonic spirit that had a fluid nature, the familiar spirit is an interesting case in which a popular belief that long pre-existed the Glanvill-Webster debate was absorbed into the realms of religious theology and scientific theory during Restoration England. As a popular belief that opposing religious and political figures, such as Glanvill and Webster, were competing to define using scientific means, the familiar spirit demonstrates that even though ideological differences in the separation between spirit and matter cannot resolve the paradox of the

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10. Coudert, "Henry More and Witchcraft," 118-119.

Glanvill-Webster debate, heightened political and religious disputes during this period may still provide partial explanations as to why Glanvill and Webster took their respective nuanced stances on the issue of witchcraft.

Furthermore, considering the gendered biases embedded in Glanvill's scientific arguments, analyses of science in the Glanvill-Webster debate can also provide insights into the gendering of witchcraft. Given that the victims persecuted for witchcraft in early modern Europe were predominantly women, previous writers such as Marianne Hester and Anne Llewellyn Barstow have equated witch-hunting to "woman-hunting." These writers mostly referenced the *Malleus Maleficarum* as the basis for their arguments. Written by German inquisitor Heinrich Kramer in 1486, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, or *Hammer of Witches*, is the

***“...demonologists were not necessarily “arch-misogynists” who used witchcraft to denigrate women but conceived of witchcraft under a binary classification system that regarded men as positive and women as negative.”***

demonological treatise most often cited as evidence of misogyny among the elite that contributed to a top-down persecution of women as witches.<sup>11</sup> Complicating this narrative, however, historians such as Christina Lerner have instead contended that “witchcraft was not sex-specific, but sex-related,” indicating that sex, though important, was not the sole factor that determined whether one was labeled as a witch.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Stuart Clark also argued that demonologists were not necessarily “arch-misogynists” who used witchcraft to denigrate women but conceived of witchcraft under a binary classification system that regarded men as

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11. Alison Rowlands, “Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Europe,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 450-466, 450.

12. Rowlands, “Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Europe,” 453.

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positive and women as negative.<sup>13</sup> Even though historians nowadays have mostly refrained from claiming that demonologists were solely motivated by misogyny, historians such as Alison Rowlands have highlighted how patriarchy in early modern European societies affected witchcraft accusations and persecutions. In her 2013 essay, Rowlands contended that “the patriarchal organization of early modern society was not a cause but a necessary precondition for witch-hunts that produced predominantly female victims.”<sup>14</sup>

As gender was not regarded as a central issue in Glanvill’s texts, the Glanvill-Webster debate aligns with Clark’s argument that demonologists in early modern England were not necessarily arguing for the existence of witchcraft to target women. However, even though Glanvill did not cite gender in his arguments in support of the existence of witchcraft, his attempt to explain the gendered nature of witchcraft using his poisonous vapors theory was built on pre-existing discourses that contributed to the misogynistic nature of witchcraft. In particular, prior works regarding witchcraft, such as the *Malleus Maleficarum*, reinforced dichotomous views of gender to justify why women were more likely to become witches. In examining the medical concepts that Glanvill drew on to rationalize why women were more easily tempted by familiar spirits, his scientific framework provides further insights as to how gender and witchcraft in Restoration England were mutually constitutive.

### Fluidity of the Familiar Spirit

Previous articles on the Glanvill-Webster debate have mainly focused on their dispute over whether Satan can physically affect the natural world rather than their dispute over the existence of familiar spirits. Although the argument over Satan’s influence in the natural world is indeed a central component of the Glanvill-Webster debate, the role of the familiar spirit in the debate is a critical issue that still largely remains overlooked even though both Glanvill and Webster addressed the familiar spirit in their respective works. However, prior to discussing their respective arguments concerning the familiar spirit, it is important to understand how the general population perceived the familiar spirit.

According to Millar’s analysis of witchcraft pamphlets, the belief in the

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13. Stuart Clark, “Women and Witchcraft,” in *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: University Press, 1996), 106-133, 115.

14. Rowlands, “Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Europe,” 453.



familiar spirit had already been widely circulating in the late sixteenth century. Despite the widespread belief in the familiar spirit, as observed in the prevalence of its depiction in pamphlets from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century, the origins of the familiar spirit remain unknown. Even though there are disagreements as to whether the belief in the familiar spirit appeared due to beliefs in fairies or beliefs in learned magic and conjuration, most historians nowadays agree that the familiar spirit stemmed from popular English beliefs rather than the beliefs of prominent theologians.<sup>15</sup>

In these pamphlets, familiar spirits were often conflated with Satan or described as Satan's demons. As Millar pointed out, witchcraft pamphlets provided varying depictions of the familiar spirit. For one, pamphlets often used phrases such as familiar spirits, spirits, the Devil, devils, and imps interchangeably. While some pamphlets used "the Devil" to imply that the familiar spirit is a corporeal form of Satan others used terms such as "familiar spirits" or "spirits" to imply that familiar spirits are Satan's demons. A pamphlet published in 1619, for example, stated that "the Devil himselfe will attend in some familiar shape of Rat, Cat, Toad, Birde, and Cricket etc." A 1612 pamphleteer, on the other hand, described the familiar spirits as minions or servants of Satan by referring to Satan as the "godfather of familiar spirits."<sup>16</sup>

The shape of the familiar spirit also varied throughout various witchcraft pamphlets. Even though the most common forms of the familiar spirit were domestic animals such as cats and dogs, there were other cases in which it appeared as exotic creatures or domestic animals with odd characteristics. For example, a 1566 pamphlet included an illustration of a dog with horns and cloven feet.<sup>17</sup> Various accounts in pamphlets also described the familiar spirit as appearing in human form. In such cases, pamphlets published since the mid-seventeenth century often included stories of witnesses who claimed to have seen "the Devil" appear as a human being to tempt witches. Although the familiar spirit and the witches are usually seen as cooperating entities, some pamphlets also described the witches themselves morphing into different familiar spirits.<sup>18</sup> Thus, not only was the distinction between the familiar spirit and Satan blurred, the distinction between the familiar spirit and the witch was similarly blurred.

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15. Charlotte-Rose Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2019), 51.

16. Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions in Early Modern England*, 66-69.

17. Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions in Early Modern England*, 60-63.

18. Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions in Early Modern England*, 67-70.

Understanding the fluid characteristic of the familiar spirit is important in reexamining the Glanvill-Webster debate since the fluidity of the familiar spirit was reflected in the ways in which Glanvill and Webster depicted the familiar spirit in their works. In particular, the variety of terminologies that Glanvill and Webster used to refer to the familiar spirit is akin to the inconsistent usage of phrases throughout witchcraft pamphlets. Glanvill, in particular, preferred to use

***“Not only was the distinction between the familiar spirit and Satan blurred, the distinction between the familiar spirit and the witch was similarly blurred.”***

“Devils,” “Familiars,” “Spirits,” “Familiar Spirits,” and “Demons” when referring to familiar spirits in *A Blow at Modern Sadducism*. Although Glanvill’s use of “Devil” could have implied the familiar spirit is either Satan or a demon, he specifically defined Devil as “a name for a body politick, in which there are very different orders and degrees of spirits.”<sup>19</sup> Such a definition of Devil is in line with the lack of distinction between Satan and demons in witchcraft pamphlets, given that the word Devil itself can simultaneously refer to Satan or a demon. In the cases in which Glanvill used “familiars,” however, he described familiar spirits as demonic spirits ranked far below Satan. Specifically, Glanvill depicted familiar spirits as vile, inferior spirits that were never “once of the highest hierarchy.”<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, although there was also a conflation between the witch and the familiar spirit as observed in the witchcraft pamphlets, Glanvill perceived the two as distinct by arguing that the transformation of witches into the shapes of animals is not plausible. Nevertheless, Glanvill still attempted to theorize why there were testimonials of witches becoming animals. Suggesting that the “airy vehicles” that came out of the bodies of witches are by nature passive and pliable bodies of air, Glanvill argued that those bodies of air could have been shaped by familiar spirits into the appearance of animals. Further suggesting that witches and familiar spirits are distinct, Glanvill also posited that familiar spirits could

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19. Glanvill, *A Blow at Modern Sadducism*, 43.

20. Glanvill, *A Blow at Modern Sadducism*, 25.

have had the ability to induce illusions and therefore trick spectators to see the bodies of air coming out of witches as animals.<sup>21</sup>

Adopting similar phrases that Glanvill used to refer to the familiar spirit, Webster, also used “Devils” while he referred to the discourses of the familiar spirit, in addition to “Familiars,” “Familiar Spirits,” and “Familiar Devils.” Arguing against the existence of the familiar spirit, Webster contended that:

(1) That the Devil doth not make a visible or corporeal League and Covenant with the supposed Witches. (2) That he doth not suck upon their bodies. (3) That he hath not carnal Copulation with them. (4) That they are not really changed into Cats, Dogs, Wolves, or the like.<sup>22</sup>

Similar to the confusion surrounding Glanvill’s use of “Devil,” Webster’s use of “Devil” can be misleading in how it could imply that either the familiar spirit was Satan or a single demonic spirit. However, while Webster also used “Devils” to refer to multiple familiar spirits, his use of “the Devil” appeared to refer specifically to Satan. Pointing out the lack of theological evidence to support the existence of the familiar spirit, Webster argued that the Bible had “revealed no such thing as the visible appearing of Satan, much less of his making of a visible League with the Witches, or the sucking of their bodies, or the having carnal Copulation with them.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, by describing the familiar spirit as the visible form of Satan, Webster blurred the distinction between Satan and the familiar spirit. As such, Glanvill and Webster most likely held different conceptions of what constituted the popular views of the familiar spirit.

In turn, the fluidity as to what constituted the familiar spirit could be the main reason as to why the familiar spirit had been underplayed in prior articles on the Glanvill-Webster debate as well as other works on witchcraft in early modern England despite its widespread presence. As Millar stated, not only was it difficult to determine the exact origin of the familiar spirit, sometimes it was also difficult to comprehend what figures witchcraft pamphlets were actually referring to since the familiar spirit was oftentimes conflated with Satan.<sup>24</sup> Despite how well-developed the concept of the familiar spirit was by Restoration England, there were still coexisting narratives of the familiar spirit as either Satan, a demonic

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21. Glanvill, *A Blow at Modern Sadducism*, 18.

22. John Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* (London: J.M., 1677), 63.

23. Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, 48.

24. Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions in Early Modern England*, 68.

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spirit, or a witch. Since Glanvill and Webster were addressing different narratives of the familiar spirit, historians of the Glanvill-Webster debate likely framed the debate as a dispute over Satan's ability to physically affect the natural world as a way to circumvent the figure of the familiar spirit that was specific in its function yet elusive in its essence.

### Corporeality of the Familiar Spirit

In addition to showing how the familiar spirit is fluid in its relation to both Satan and the witch as well as how varied it is in its appearances, witchcraft pamphlets often described witches forming "demonic pacts" with familiar spirits in exchange for supernatural powers. According to Millar, the fact that witches were perceived as forming pacts with demonic spirits that appeared as domestic animals demonstrates the merging of learned theology with popular belief. Specifically, Millar described the demonic pact as the inverse of covenant theology, which is the belief that one forms a conditional agreement with God upon getting baptized. Instead of forming covenants with God, witches were believed to be forming covenants with Satan. Highlighting the corporeal nature of the familiar spirit, pamphlets also emphasized how demonic pacts can be made via physical interactions between the witch and the familiar spirit. By sucking on the bodies of witches, the familiar spirit is regarded as a key agent to form the demonic pact. As such, witchcraft trials during this time often relied on the presence of the "Witch's Mark" on those who were accused of being witches.<sup>25</sup>

The corporeality of the familiar spirit, as observed in the distinct ways it can physically interact with witches, weakens Jobe's argument that understanding how mechanical philosophers and chemical philosophers disagreed on the separation of spirit and matter is key to resolving the paradox of the debate.<sup>26</sup> The case of the familiar spirit refutes the assumption that Glanvill, a latitudinarian Anglican, ascribed to mechanical philosophy because he believed that its emphasis on the separation of spirit and matter was better suited for his Anglican theology. As opposed to being an incorporeal demonic spirit, which would support Jobe's argument that Anglican ideologies of spirit and matter were compatible with the belief in witchcraft, the familiar spirit was a corporeal spirit that can physically suck on the body of witches.<sup>27</sup>

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25. Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions in Early Modern England*, 59-60.

26. Jobe, "The Devil in Restoration Science: The Glanvill-Webster Witchcraft Debate," 345.

27. Glanvill, *A Blow at Modern Sadducism*, 17.

In contrast, the fact that the familiar spirit was perceived as a corporeal demonic spirit that can physically tempt a witch might explain why instead of arguing solely on theological grounds, both of them included some form of a scientific explanation as to why people in Restoration England were witnessing familiar spirits. As opposed to being an incorporeal spirit that one would be unable



*Discerning the Familiar Spirit.* Asha Malani.

to explain using scientific methods, a corporeal spirit that can physically target witches and leave visible marks could be perceived as an entity that was more likely elucidated with science. Whereas Glanvill used his poisonous vapors theory to further rationalize the ritual that familiar spirits used to form demonic pacts, Webster used the concept of the astral spirit, a corporeal but non-demonic spirit, to dismiss the testimonial accounts of familiar spirits.

Although Glanvill mostly used testimonial evidence to support his arguments for the existence of the familiar spirit, he was aware of the importance of having scientific theories and experiments to back up his

claims.<sup>28</sup> In particular, the concept of the familiar spirit coincided with Glanvill's belief in demonic spirits in the natural world and was therefore adopted into his scientific theories. As observed in *A Blow at Modern Sadducism*, Glanvill appeared to be familiar with the key characteristics of the familiar spirit, such

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28. Julie A. Davies, "Poisonous Vapours: Joseph Glanvill's Science of Witchcraft," *Intellectual History Review* 22, no. 2 (2012): 163-179, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496977.2012.693741>, 164.

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as how familiar spirits sucked on witches' bodies as part of the ritual to form demonic pacts. Noting that the familiar spirits' sucking on the bodies of witches is "no great wonder nor difficult to be accounted for," Glanvill contended that there was a possibility that the sucking is "only a diabolical sacrament and ceremony to confirm the hellish covenant." However, even though Glanvill acknowledged the main observations of the familiar spirit, he also reinterpreted some of the common

***“In brief, Webster explained how humans are composed of three components—the physical body that is returned to the earth, the corporeal soul, or ‘astral spirit,’ that wanders near one’s body after death, and the incorporeal spirit that is returned to God.”***

explanations of them. Arguing that it was likely that familiar spirits did not merely suck on witches' bodies to form covenants with Satan, Glanvill conjectured that familiar spirits could also infuse "poisonous ferments" into witches. Subsequently, the poisonous vapors would taint the spirit and imagination of witches, who by nature already have "heightened melancholy." The infection of the imagination would, in turn, give the melancholic humor a "magical tincture" and allow witches to become "mischievously influential."<sup>29</sup>

In short, Glanvill argued that the poisonous substances produced by familiar spirits interacted with the melancholic humor already present in witches, which in turn allowed witches to gain supernatural powers. Relying heavily on the concept of Galen's melancholic humor, which is often associated with physical pathologies that can lead to mental disorders, Glanvill was trying to incorporate contemporary views of melancholic humor by referencing Robert Burton's 1621 *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. In particular, the notion that melancholic vapors can cause one to have "absurd thoughts and imaginations" was a dominant theme

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29. Glanvill, *A Blow at Modern Sadducism*, 20.

in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Therefore, by proposing the poisonous vapors theory, Glanvill was able to combine traditional beliefs of witchcraft with the newer natural philosophical ideas without suggesting any radically new ideas that philosophers during this period were not familiar with.<sup>30</sup>

Webster, on the other hand, mostly argued on theological grounds to refute the existence of witchcraft. For one, Webster contended that words from the Bible that were synonymous with witches or witchcraft were mistranslations of the original Hebrew text.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, Webster also argued that the Witch of Endor in the First Book of Samuel was not actually a witch.<sup>32</sup> However, he seemed to be aware of the importance of having some kind of scientific theory to back up his claims. As such, in addition to suggesting that the supposed witches either willingly lied or were coerced, Webster also proposed that witnesses of familiar spirits could have seen “astral spirits” or “animal spirits” instead.<sup>33</sup> In brief, Webster explained how humans are composed of three components — the physical body that is returned to the earth, the corporeal soul, or “astral spirit,” that wanders near one’s body after death, and the incorporeal spirit that is returned to God.<sup>34</sup> Using this concept, Webster postulated that witnesses of apparitions might have seen astral spirits, which were corporeal natural spirits instead of familiar spirits, which were corporeal demonic spirits.<sup>35</sup> Similar to how Glanvill referenced contemporary works that reinterpreted long-standing medical theories, Webster cited fellow physician Thomas Willis’ 1672 *Two Discourses Concerning the Soul of Brutes*, which provided a novel interpretation of the animal spirit.<sup>36</sup> Although Galen presented the theory of animal spirits long before Webster’s time, their actual presence had never been demonstrated even though their existence was widely believed to be critical for normal neurological function.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, Willis did not merely reference the presence and activity of these animal spirits, but sought to explain the animal spirits using principles of chemical philosophy.<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, similar to the melancholic humor, the animal spirit was also a well-established medical concept that philosophers

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30. Davies, “Poisonous Vapours: Joseph Glanvill’s Science of Witchcraft,” 171-172.

31. Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, 106.

32. Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, 165.

33. Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, 308.

34. Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, 320.

35. Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, 292.

36. Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, 315.

37. M.J. Eadie, “A Pathology of the Animal Spirits – the Clinical Neurology of Thomas Willis (1621–1675) Part I – Background, and Disorders of Intrinsically Normal Animal Spirits,” *Journal of Clinical Neuroscience* 10, no. 1 (2003): 14-29, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0967-5868\(02\)00165-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0967-5868(02)00165-0), 14.

38. Eadie, “A Pathology of the Animal Spirits – the Clinical Neurology of Thomas Willis (1621–1675),” 16.

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and physicians were still attempting to rationalize. Just as Glanvill was able to present an elaborate theory by citing contemporary work on the melancholic humor, Webster was able to come up with scientific explanations of the familiar spirit by invoking contemporary work on the animal spirit. Even though both Glanvill and Webster sought to provide original explanations for the familiar spirit, both of them referenced long-standing scientific concepts that prominent philosophers and physicians during their time continued to subscribe to and were actively defining.

### Gendered Implications of the Familiar Spirit

In “Sleeping with Devils,” Millar further analyzed how the demonic pacts between witches and familiar spirits were often depicted as carnal. Out of the forty-eight pamphlets she studied, twenty-three described the relationship between witches and devils as sexual. In particular, Millar noted that the fluid nature of the familiar spirit affected the nature of the sexual acts between witches and familiar spirits. In addition to being accused of engaging in non-penetrative acts with animal-like devils, witches were also accused of engaging in “carnal intercourse” with man-like devils. Noting that the depiction of witches having sexual relations with man-like devils mostly appeared in pamphlets published after the 1640s, Millar argued that the shift in the types of sexual acts depicted represents a major shift in how the general public perceived witchcraft. Specifically, the fact that the pamphlets depicted witches as sexually deviant beings that engaged in a wide range of sexual acts with Satan and familiar spirits suggests that beliefs in witchcraft in early modern England were more sexualized than previously described.<sup>39</sup>

Considering how the physical interactions with familiar spirits were often depicted as female witches engaging in sexual acts with animal-like or man-like spirits, the fact that Glanvill did not center his arguments around gender or connect femininity directly to carnality supports the notion that demonologists were not necessarily arguing for the existence of witchcraft to persecute women. Nevertheless, Glanvill did use the gendered biases embedded in contemporary scientific discourses to rationalize the gendered nature of witchcraft, in addition to referencing long-standing scientific concepts due to their credibility. As stated by Clark, the associations that demonologists made between women and

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39. Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions in Early Modern England*, 117-118.



witchcraft were based on unoriginal foundations such as Aristotelian physiology.<sup>40</sup> Building on this observation, Laura Apps and Andrew Gow also contended that a key reason as to why witchcraft was feminized in early modern England was because demonologists believed that Satan was able to seduce witches due to their “weak-mindedness,” a characteristic that demonologists strongly, but not exclusively, associated with women.<sup>41</sup> Such beliefs can be traced back to the *Malleus Maleficarum*, in which Kramer argued that women had “insatiable carnal lust” due to fundamental flaws such as weak-mindedness, which in turn explained why women were more easily seduced by Satan.<sup>42</sup> As argued by Jennifer Radden, strong connections were made between sin, carnality, mental disorder, and witchcraft.<sup>43</sup> In line with Clark’s analysis, such connections reaffirmed the dichotomous views of men as intellectually strong and morally righteous and women as intellectually weak and morally corrupt.

In the context of the Glanvill-Webster debate, even though Glanvill did not explicitly state carnality in his arguments that support the existence of witchcraft, he still used well-established medical concepts, such as the melancholic humor, to justify why witches were predominantly women. In *A Blow at Modern Sadducism*, Glanvill noted that the people most commonly accused of being witches were “poor and miserable old women, who are overgrown with discontent and melancholy.”<sup>44</sup> Connecting the concept of the melancholic humor to why certain populations were more prone to be infected by the familiar spirit, Glanvill posited that:

Witches are most powerful upon Children and timorous persons, viz. because their spirits and imaginations being weak and passive, are not able to resist the fatal invasion; whereas men of bold minds, who have plenty of strong and vigorous spirits, are secure from the contagion; as in pestilential Airs clean bodies are not so liable to infection as other tempers. Thus then we see ‘tis likely enough, that very often the Sorceress her self doth the mischief.<sup>45</sup>

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40. Clark, “Women and Witchcraft,” 114.

41. Lara Apps and Andrew Gow, “Conceptual Webs: The Gendering of Witchcraft,” in *Gender at Stake: Male Witches in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003), 118-150, 132.

42. Apps and Gow, “Conceptual Webs: The Gendering of Witchcraft,” 132.

43. Jennifer Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy: from Aristotle to Kristeva* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 96.

44. Glanvill, *A Blow at Modern Sadducism*, 35.

45. Glanvill, *A Blow at Modern Sadducism*, 29.

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In order to rationalize why certain categories of people were more susceptible to the vapors produced by familiar spirits, Glanvill asserted that there were excessive amounts of melancholic humor in women and children.<sup>46</sup> Claiming that the spirits and imaginations of women, children, and other “timorous” people are more “weak and passive” whereas those of men are more “strong and vigorous,” Glanvill ultimately concluded that healthy males were not as prone to infection as other groups who have more melancholy.<sup>47</sup> By drawing on the connections between the melancholic humor and weak-mindedness to explain how one transforms into a witch, Glanvill’s arguments coincide with Apps and Gow’s observation that weak-mindedness was inherently linked to witchcraft.<sup>48</sup> By using the gendered nature of the melancholic humor to rationalize why witches were mostly women, Glanvill’s arguments also aligned with Apps and Gow’s theory of the asymmetrical triad between femininity, weakness, and masculinity.<sup>49</sup> In particular, Glanvill’s discussion of the melancholic humor provided him a physical justification as to how femininity was more closely tied to weakness than masculinity. Because those with excessive amounts of melancholic humor were believed to be predominantly, but not exclusively, women, Glanvill was also able to justify why the people who were accused of witchcraft were mostly, but not exclusively, female.

Despite attempting to persuade others into believing the existence of witchcraft, Glanvill’s theory of witchcraft did not center around its carnal nature. Given the continued prevalence of carnal depictions of familiar spirits in witchcraft pamphlets, it is most likely that many associated witchcraft with carnality before and during Glanvill’s time. As observed in works such as the *Malleus Maleficarum*, discourses of carnality in witchcraft were often based on the misogynistic assumption that women’s fundamental weak-mindedness was the cause of their moral corruption and carnal desires. In turn, this reasoning was used to argue why women were more likely to engage in sexual acts with familiar spirits and become witches. Rather than building on these discourses that associated carnality with femininity and weak-mindedness, Glanvill seemed to have excluded aspects of carnality from his theories of witchcraft to purify the science of witchcraft. While depicting the familiar spirit’s act of sucking on the witch’s body as non-sexual in *A Blow at Modern Sadducism*, Glanvill concurred with Webster’s objections to the sexualized depictions of witchcraft by calling

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46. Davies, “Poisonous Vapours: Joseph Glanvill’s Science of Witchcraft,” 171.

47. Glanvill, *A Blow at Modern Sadducism*, 35.

48. Apps and Gow, “Conceptual Webs: The Gendering of Witchcraft,” 131.

49. Apps and Gow, “Conceptual Webs: The Gendering of Witchcraft,” 135.

the carnal anecdotes of witches “silly lying stories of witchcraft and apparitions among the vulgar.”<sup>50</sup> In turn, by not depicting the physical acts between the witch and the familiar spirit as sexual, Glanvill was able to defend the use of science to study witchcraft since his scientific theory was able to rationalize how witches are produced without addressing the aspects of it that could come off as repulsive. However, even by removing misogynistic discourses that accused women of having insatiable carnal lust, Glanvill still provided a scientific theory that contributed to the production of female witches. In comparison to the arguments in the *Malleus Maleficarum* that discussed weak-mindedness and carnality, Glanvill’s depiction of weak-mindedness did not appear as “arch-misogynist” since he did not portray weak-mindedness as an exclusively feminine trait. Even so, by identifying a physical cause of weak-mindedness and connecting it to the gendered nature of witchcraft, Glanvill still produced a discourse that could allow others who sought to maintain the associations between femininity and witchcraft to strengthen their arguments.

On a similar note, Webster also believed that weak-mindedness was the reason why supposed witches were displaying signs of witchcraft, acts that he called impostures.<sup>51</sup> Arguing that Satan could tempt those with more “melancholic temper,” Webster suggested that some of those accused of being witches were mentally insane.<sup>52</sup> In contrast to Glanvill, Webster asserted that Satan could only tempt people mentally and not physically in the form of a familiar spirit.<sup>53</sup> Even though Webster did address the carnal aspects of witchcraft, his main goal of mentioning carnality was not to reference the misogynistic arguments similar to those found in the *Malleus Maleficium*, but to contest the reliability of the testimonies that Glanvill relied on. Recognizing the sexual nature of the relationship between witches and familiar spirits, Webster sought to dismiss the idea of the familiar spirit by exclaiming that “pure and sober minds” should not seek to understand “unclean stories.”<sup>54</sup> As Davies pointed out, Webster was not able to come up with a concrete scientific argument to refute Glanvill’s novel interpretation of the familiar spirit.<sup>55</sup>

Although Glanvill and Webster were arguing over the existence of

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50. Joseph Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus* (London: J.C., 1681), 8.

51. Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, 8.

52. Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, 66.

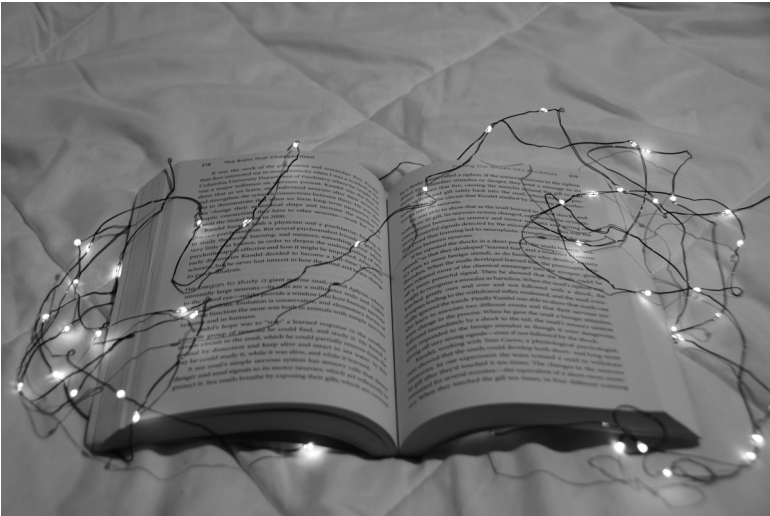
53. Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, 241.

54. Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, 68.

55. Davies, “Poisonous Vapours: Joseph Glanvill’s Science of Witchcraft,” 178.

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witchcraft and familiar spirits, they both agreed on similar concepts such as the melancholic humor and weak-mindedness. Furthermore, they also both seemed to be wary that others could overrun their theories with arguments of carnality and condemned these uncontrollable and offensive aspects of witchcraft. The figure of the familiar spirit, in particular, was of indeterminate form as observed in the various pamphlets that described its fluidity and carnality. Whereas Glanvill's naturalistic interpretations downplayed the sexual nature of familiar spirit, Webster's discussion of witches' carnality mainly centered on its moral



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offensiveness. In doing so, Glanvill and Webster seemingly purified the discourse of witchcraft to empower yet defend science.

### Political Implications of the Familiar Spirit

The fact that the familiar spirit was a popular belief of witchcraft is crucial in examining any political motives that Glanvill potentially had to use his scientific methods to rationalize the familiar spirit. As a belief that did not stem from either political or religious authorities, the ways in which it merged with religion suggests that attempting to explain it using scientific methods could be considered a political act in itself. Given that Restoration England was a period in which the monarch was simultaneously the head of the restored Anglican Church, religious

***“Whereas Glanvill’s naturalistic interpretations downplayed the sexual nature of familiar spirit, Webster’s discussion of witches’ carnality mainly centered on its moral offensiveness.”***

failures, such as being labeled a witch, were also regarded as political failures since allegiance to Satan would be regarded as a complete rejection of Christian society.<sup>56</sup>

Concerning the politics and religion of Restoration England, Peter Elmer argued that disputes over witchcraft are heightened during periods of political instability. In particular, the ruling elite was more likely to act upon incidents of witchcraft at times when they perceive threats or challenges to their sense of religious and political order. Conversely, during periods of political quiescence, fewer incidents of witchcraft were brought to court. However, Elmer also proposed that witchcraft functioned in two contradictory ways. On one hand, witchcraft performed “an integrative role to reinforce normative behaviors and reaffirm the social, religious and political status quo.” On the other hand, witchcraft also performed “a subversive role to encourage criticism of the ruling powers, particularly when they were rendered vulnerable to challenge by broader political events.” As such, the eventual political and religious outcome was unpredictable — the politics of witchcraft during this period was dangerous. If its integrative role prevails, the ruling powers would be strengthened with greater societal cohesion that reinforces the beliefs of those in power. If its subversive role prevails, the large presence of witchcraft in society would likely be perceived as divine disapproval of the ruling powers.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to political instability, skepticism over the existence of witches and the familiar spirit due to the lack of solid evidence to support them further heightened the dangers of witchcraft. Although the concept of the familiar spirit

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56. Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions in Early Modern England*, 59.

57. Elmer, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting, and Politics in Early Modern England*, 7-8.

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was widespread and specific in terms of how it interacted with the witch, people were still uncertain as to whether the familiar spirit was Satan, a demon, or a witch as there were widely differing testimonial accounts of the familiar spirit.<sup>58</sup> Despite widespread skepticism concerning witchcraft in early modern England due to the inconsistent narratives of the familiar spirit and witches, very few people dared to publish such views of disbelief due to fear of political and religious repercussions. This is likely connected to the fact that one could be labeled as an atheist for not believing in the existence of witchcraft. Similar to how being labeled as a witch was simultaneously a religious and political failure, being labeled as an atheist was also considered seditious during a period in which the Church was also the state. Although Coudert argued that fighting atheism was likely the key motivation for Glanvill to publish *A Blow at Modern Sadducism*, the fact that atheism is also a major political offense suggests that Glanvill could have also had political intentions in arguing for the support of witchcraft and equating the denial of witchcraft to atheism.

However, prior to examining Glanvill's potential political motives, it is critical to acknowledge that views on witchcraft were not associated directly with certain religious factions or scientific groups. As discussed by Michael Hunter, the 16-month delay in *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* receiving an imprimatur and the suppression of Webster's dedication to the Royal Society are possible indications of dispute within the Royal Society over the topics of witchcraft and occult practices.<sup>59</sup> As Glanvill himself was a vocal advocate of the Royal Society's "new science," the fact that *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* was still ultimately published by the Royal Society demonstrates that neither belief nor disbelief in witchcraft was directly associated with certain scientific or religious ideologies. Therefore, a similar non-ideological framework that Coudert used is critical in further examining the political incentives that Glanvill possibly had to argue for the existence of witchcraft as it steers clear of mapping religious, political, and scientific ideologies to views on the existence of witchcraft. However, it is also important to recognize that the use of a non-ideological framework, which avoids discussing theological disputes as the main factor behind political and scientific differences, should not exclude the tracing of political forces to different religious factions. Considering that religion and politics in Restoration England appear to be more interrelated compared to their

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58. Millar, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting, and Politics in Early Modern England*, 50.

59. Michael Hunter, "John Webster, the Royal Society and *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* (1677)," *Notes and Records: the Royal Society Journal of the History of Science* 71, no. 1 (December 2016): 7-19, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsnr.2016.0022>, 7.

relations with science, the political motivations of opposing religious factions to argue for or against the existence of witchcraft should still be accounted for in discussions on the political implications of the familiar spirit.

In the context of Restoration England, disputes between religious factions greatly contributed to political instability. During an era in which clergymen in the restored Church established a strict Anglican orthodoxy, religious nonconformists, including Presbyterians as well as radical sectarians, were excluded from political, religious, and legal involvement. As a reaction to this mistreatment, many nonconformists sought to preserve a worldview that bolstered the prominent belief in witches, demons, and spirits. Not only did this worldview reinforce how God allowed evil forces to punish those deemed sinful, but it also

***“Glanvill and Webster seemingly purified the discourse of witchcraft to empower yet defend science.”***

served as an indirect way for nonconformists to criticize those in power.<sup>60</sup> For a brief period, some nonconformists found support from latitudinarian Anglicans in the Church due to their sympathy for the nonconformists, many of whom were their former colleagues. In particular, latitudinarian Anglicans including Joseph Glanvill were eager to widen and therefore redraw the boundaries of the Anglican communion in order to make them more inclusive of other religious factions such as Presbyterians.<sup>61</sup> Although Glanvill highlighted atheism as his main motive in *A Blow At Modern Sadducism*, he also argued that the religious divides within the Church were distracting Christians from more concerning issues such as “modern sadducism” and how it could potentially lead to atheism.<sup>62</sup> Since the familiar spirit was such a prominent issue that had not been properly explained with “reason,” it is likely that Glanvill was politically motivated to use “new science” to corroborate the existence of the familiar spirit and witchcraft with the ultimate goal of uniting the Church against a common enemy on moral grounds. Complicating Coudert’s theory that Glanvill’s main concern was simply atheism and that atheism was a

60. Elmer, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting, and Politics in Early Modern England*, 179.

61. Elmer, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting, and Politics in Early Modern England*, 175.

62. Elmer, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting, and Politics in Early Modern England*, 216.

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grave concern of Christians regardless of religious faction, Elmer's analysis of politics and religion in Restoration England suggests that Glanvill's interest in combating atheism was likely not just out of a fear of increasing atheism but also out of a desire to use atheism as a cohesive tool that can unite several religious factions with the Church. As such, whereas nonconformists seemed to be arguing for the existence of witchcraft for subversive purposes, Glanvill appeared to be arguing for the existence of witchcraft to integrate certain religious factions back into the Church.

### Conclusion

Understanding the fluid, corporeal, and popular nature of the familiar spirit is key to recontextualizing the Glanvill-Webster debate. The fluid nature of the familiar spirit, as observed in witchcraft pamphlets as well as Glanvill's and Webster's depictions of the familiar spirit, was likely the key reason why the familiar spirit was mostly underemphasized in prior discussions of the Glanvill-Webster debate. Furthermore, the corporeal nature of the familiar spirit was likely critical in motivating Glanvill and Webster to supplement their arguments with widely accepted scientific concepts such as the melancholic humor and the astral spirit. Moreover, by denouncing how the familiar spirit's physical role in the formation of the demonic pact was sexualized, both Glanvill and Webster presented how science can provide cleaner and more impartial explanations of witchcraft or supposed signs of witchcraft. Nonetheless, although neither Glanvill nor Webster discussed gender as the main issue in their works, the gendered nature of the melancholic humor allowed both of them to rationalize why witches or supposed witches were mostly, but not exclusively, women. Lastly, the popular nature of the familiar spirit suggests that Glanvill was also politically motivated to argue for the existence of witchcraft. Specifically, Glanvill's discussion of "modern sadducism" and its connections to atheism likely served as an integrative device to unite certain religious factions with the Church.

This paper highlights the importance of accounting for the multifaceted roles of the familiar spirit as a political, physical yet fluid figure in the Glanvill-Webster debate and how a non-ideological framework can be used to demonstrate how science influenced politics and religion in Restoration England. Coudert was able to use a non-ideological framework to demonstrate that Glanvill was not simply trying to attack occultism or Webster, but rather atheism in general. Using a similar framework, this paper demonstrates, in addition to atheism, Glanvill likely had political motivations to reintegrate certain religious factions back into



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the Church. As this framework allows for analyses of witchcraft in early modern England that avoid relying heavily on ideological dichotomies, future work could benefit from using this framework to further explore the complex relations of science, politics, and religion in the Glanvill-Webster debate.

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## PAPAL DIPLOMACY WITH GERMANY DURING WWI



*We are going somewhere: the nature of destruction.* Hugo Estrada.

# POPE BENEDICT XV'S REASSERTION OF PAPAL DIPLOMACY THROUGH IMPARTIALITY WITH GERMANY DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

**Michael Katona**  
Written for WWI in Europe  
(HIST 414)  
Dr. Peter Caldwell

The Italian annexation of the Papal States in 1870 marked the end of the Vatican's status as a sovereign state, establishing the Pope as a "prisoner in the Vatican" and threatening the Vatican's diplomatic influence. Though Pope Pius XI's pontificate (1922-1939) saw the establishment of a sovereign Holy See through the Lateran Pact of 1929, Pope Benedict XV's pursuit of peace during the First World War served to reassert the Vatican's role as a diplomatic authority among Catholic and non-Catholic states. A pursuit of impartiality was a cornerstone of Benedict's wartime pontificate, enabling the Vatican to engage in the conflict diplomatically without alienating any specific nation and, by extension, its Catholic citizens. The Pope's peace efforts needed to be oriented solely towards ending hostilities and preventing injustices, not using peace as an opportunity to expand the temporal authority of the Church. By seeking to act with impartiality and remaining devoted to ending an unjust war, Benedict set the precedent for the Church's approach to war in the modern age. I will begin by outlining the context surrounding Benedict's papacy with respect to Catholic

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teachings on the morality of war and the political standing of the Roman Catholic Church in Europe during the late nineteenth century. With this context established, I will recount the actions of the Vatican and German Empire from unification through the beginning of the Weimar Republic. By showing his willingness to cooperate with the German Empire and uphold the Just War Doctrine impartially, I will argue that Benedict's diplomatic actions moved Europe significantly closer to a peaceful resolution to the First World War. Though he was ultimately unable to facilitate this peace, Benedict used his office to criticize unjust military actions and seek an expedient and negotiated end to the conflict rather than promoting a solely pro-Catholic foreign policy, legitimizing the Vatican's role in secular diplomacy.

Benedict was influenced by Catholic doctrine in determining the greatest threats to peace and human dignity. The Catholic Church has never been opposed to war in all cases, regarding war as "a rational and moral activity when, like police action, it is governed by rules justifying the resort to violence and the nature of the violent force."<sup>1</sup> The history of the Catholic Just War Doctrine traces its roots to St. Augustine of Hippo, who viewed war as a form of punishment against another nation, justifiable only as a "defense of the peace against serious injury...with mercy for the vanquished."<sup>2</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas echoed Augustine's sentiments in the *Summa Theologica*. Sixteenth century Catholic philosophers in the School of Salamanca refined Augustine's and Aquinas' theories, defining the conditions of a just war as, "(1) war must be declared by a legitimate authority; (2) for a just cause; (3) it must be fought as a last resort; (4) fought with a right intention; (5) in the proper manner, i.e., without the destruction of the innocent."<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the school considered "the collective and intentional affecting of death and destruction in response to 'injurious actions' of other kinds" to be an "offensive" or "aggressive" form of war.<sup>4</sup>

Considering the First and Second World Wars, Pope St. John Paul II expanded on the Just War Doctrine to account for the increased destructive power of modern warfare, writing,

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1. John A. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Himes, "Pacifism and the Just War Tradition in Roman Catholic Social Teaching," in *One Hundred Years of Catholic Social Thought: Celebration and Challenge* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 330.

2. R.A. McCormick, "Morality of War," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Palatine, IL: Jack Heraty & Associates, 1981), 803.

3. McCormick, "Mortality of War."

4. McCormick, "Mortality of War."

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The gravity of such a decision makes it subject to rigorous conditions of moral legitimacy. At one and the same time: the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain; all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective; there must be serious prospects of success; the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated.<sup>5</sup>

John Paul's Catechism further states that moral law does not change in times of war, and the outbreak of war "does not mean that everything becomes licit between the warring parties" and "non-combatants, wounded soldiers, and prisoners must be respected and treated humanely."<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the Just War Doctrine, Benedict was influenced by the papal precedent set by Pope Pius IX, the first "prisoner in the Vatican," following the secular Kingdom of Italy's capture of Rome. This posed both practical and ideological problems for the Roman Catholic Church. Troubled by increased support for nationalist ideologies in Europe, Pius published *The Syllabus of Errors* in 1862, defending the power of the Church. In this encyclical, Pius specifically denounces the belief that the Vatican has "erred in defining matters of faith and morals," and has, "[no] temporal power, direct or indirect," meaning the Pope should "reconcile himself, and come to terms with progress, liberalism and modern civilization."<sup>7</sup> He also challenges the moral authority of government by criticizing the belief that "the State, as being the origin and source of all rights, is endowed with a certain right not to be circumscribed by any limits," and further criticizes the common view that any unjust act "inflicts no injury on the sanctity of right," so long as this injustice is seen as successful by some practical metric.<sup>8</sup> *The Syllabus of Errors* denounces additional beliefs prevalent in late nineteenth century Europe, many of which were upheld by the German Empire under Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. At its core, *The Syllabus of Errors* was an

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5. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1997), 2309.

Note: The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) should not be taken as a primary source document. The CCC was published by Pope John Paul II in 1992 as a compendium of the Church's teachings on moral philosophy and theology. As this would not have been available to Benedict XV, similarities between Benedict's actions and the CCC should not be taken to mean Benedict was following Church doctrine, but rather taken as an endorsement of his actions with respect to doctrine present both before and after his pontificate.

6. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2312, 2313.

7. Pius IX, *The Syllabus of Errors*, encyclical letter, EWTN website, December 8, 1864, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/syllabus-of-errors-9048>, sec. 23, 24, 80.

8. Pius IX, *The Syllabus of Errors*, sec. 39, 61.

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assertion of the Vatican's place as the dominant moral authority in Europe. During the First Vatican Council of 1869-1870, Church officials contextualized war in terms of Pius IX's concerns, writing, "the spirit of irreligion and forgetfulness of law in international affairs open an altogether readier way for the beginning of illegal and unjust wars, or rather hideous massacres spreading far and wide."<sup>9</sup> Pius IX's successors, most notably Pope St. Pius X, vehemently defended this stance against modern approaches to warfare. Benedict was the first Pope to prove that the Vatican could remain relevant yet morally respected in temporal matters of the modern age.

In addition to contributing to the success of European nationalism, the loss of Rome and surrounding Papal States marked the end of the Vatican as a sovereign political entity. Despite this, the Roman Catholic Church retained influence through the loyalty of Catholic monarchs and politicians. Additionally, papal ambassadors known as nuncios maintained diplomatic connections between secular states and the Holy See. Benedict's predecessor, Pius X, is reported to say, "the only monarch with whom I can intervene is Emperor Francis Joseph...I cannot do so, because the war Austria-Hungary is fighting is a just war," suggesting the Vatican had substantial influence within the Dual Monarchy.<sup>10</sup> This monarchial influence ended with Francis Joseph, being the only Catholic monarch in Europe with any meaningful power. For his pursuit of peace to be successful, Benedict needed to win influence within Protestant and secular nations. Within the German Empire, politicians such as Matthias Erzberger and other members of the pro-Catholic *Zentrumspartei* (Center Party) proved influential in pressuring the German government to abandon anti-Catholic legislation in the 1870's and accept the Vatican's aid in pursuing a negotiated peace during the First World War. While the Vatican was stripped of any sense of national sovereignty, it was not completely powerless in a time of war.

Despite prevalent anti-Catholic sentiments in Germany and pro-Catholic sentiments in Austria-Hungary, Benedict limited his praises and condemnations to issues causally related to wartime injustices and the pursuit of peace. In Germany, the establishment of a Prussian-led Protestant state was not viewed favorably by the Vatican. The subsequent anti-Catholic legislation under Bismarck, known as the *Kulturkampf* (Conflict of Culture), only contributed to the further breakdown

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9. Coleman and Himes, "Pacifism and the Just War Tradition in Roman Catholic Social Teaching," 331.

10. Engel-Janosi, Friedrich. "The Roman Question in the First Years of Benedict XV." *The Catholic Historical Review* 40, no. 3 (1954): 270, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25015747>.



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of diplomatic ties between the two states. As a result, Benedict held anti-German sentiments which are made clear by his official actions and writings. In Austria-Hungary, the Revolutions of 1848 and Italian Unification of 1860 left the empire as the sole major European power ruled by a Catholic monarch, leading to closer diplomatic ties with the Vatican. Benedict's official actions as Pope, however, were not influenced by a pro-Austrian and anti-German bias. The Pope's criticisms of Germany were limited and legitimate, especially considering the German state's commitment to a morally bankrupt war doctrine. Though he did not directly condemn the Austro-Hungarian Empire's injurious declaration of war against Serbia, Austria-Hungary was not the only combatant nation fighting an unjust war. Benedict held inherent biases towards Austria-Hungary and against the nationalist states of Germany and Italy, but did not allow these biases to influence his impartial treatment of the respective states.

Following the establishment of the German Empire, Berlin and the Vatican considered each other a threat, given the inclusion of Bavaria, the Rhineland, and Alsace-Lorraine in the new Protestant-led German state. For Bismarck, this influx of Catholic Germans had the potential to destabilize national unity on the basis of religion. Additionally, the presence of an "independent moral authority beyond [Germany's] borders" was a threat to German nationalism.<sup>11</sup> For the Pope, the governance of a Catholic populace by a Protestant authority both posed a threat to the religious liberties of German Catholics and challenged the Vatican's authority in ecclesiastical matters within Germany. The worries of both parties came true, with Bismarck enacting a series of anti-Catholic laws within a few years of unification. This was known as the *Kulturkampf*, and addressed the religious rift by encouraging Germans to prove their loyalty by putting "fatherland ahead of faith." The *Kulturkampf* began with the German state obstructing the removal of Catholic professors who refused to teach the infallibility of Catholic doctrine, eventually escalating to the German state regulating private Catholic schools. The Society of Jesus, a Holy Order focused on promoting Catholic education and preventing the spread of Protestantism, was subsequently barred from missionary work in Germany.<sup>12</sup> Bismarck's attack on Catholic education was fueled by the belief that schools and universities "should be freed from all ecclesiastical authority, control, and interference, and should be fully subjugated to the civil and political power at the pleasure of the rulers, and according to the standard of the prevalent opinions of the age," a belief directly criticized in *The*

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11. Dennis A. Castillo, *Papal Diplomacy from 1914 to 1989* (London: Lexington Books, 2020), 17.

12. Castillo, *Papal Diplomacy*, 17.

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*Syllabus of Errors*.<sup>13</sup> Further assaulting the authority of the Church, Bismarck deemed civil marriage to be the only legitimate form of marriage, again following *The Syllabus of Errors* by proclaiming that authority over “matrimonial causes and espousals [belongs] by their nature to civil tribunals.”<sup>14,15</sup> To Bismarck’s dismay, the *Kulturkampf* ultimately failed, with members of the Catholic clergy and laity opting to put “faith ahead of fatherland” instead of “fatherland ahead of faith.” This distrust of the Protestant state ultimately united German Catholics through the *Zentrumspartei* and strengthened their loyalty to the Vatican.<sup>16</sup>

Seeing the failure of his initiative, Bismarck abandoned the anti-Catholic legislation of the *Kulturkampf* following the death of Pope Pius IX. He did not, however, abandon the extreme German nationalism and militarism which prompted the laws. Nearly 40 years later, soon after the outbreak of the World War, Benedict criticized this extreme form of nationalism in his encyclical, *The Most Holy*. Addressing the outbreak of war, he states, “for ever since the precepts and practices of Christian wisdom ceased to be observed in the ruling of states, it followed that, as they contained the peace and stability of institutions, the very foundations of states necessarily began to be shaken.”<sup>17</sup> This is not a direct criticism of Germany alone, but rather a general condemnation of European nationalism and liberalism in the same vein as *The Syllabus of Errors* and Vatican I. Where Pius IX had identified the errant beliefs dominating Europe, Benedict classified the bloody outbreak of war as a direct consequence of these beliefs. Benedict communicates the urgency of an end to the fighting, remarking that “the combatants are the greatest and wealthiest nations of the earth...provided with the most awful weapons modern military science has devised.”<sup>18</sup> Though this could be interpreted as an attempt to reassert temporal power, the encyclical follows the Catholic Just War Doctrine and does not inspire support for the Vatican for the mere sake of expanding temporal power. Following St. Augustine’s teachings on the importance of mercy in a just war, Benedict expressed concern for any nation which was defeated “with refinements of horror” before any clear victor was evident.<sup>19</sup> In light of this, Benedict’s condemnation of nations that put the

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13. Pius IX, *The Syllabus of Errors*, sec. 47.

14. Castillo, *Papal Diplomacy*, 18.

15. Pius IX, *The Syllabus of Errors*, sec. 47.

16. Castillo, *Papal Diplomacy*, 18.

17. Benedict XV, *Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, November 1, 1914, [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xv\\_enc\\_01111914\\_ad-beatissimi-apostolorum.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xv_enc_01111914_ad-beatissimi-apostolorum.html), sec. 5.

18. Benedict XV, *Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum*, sec. 3.

19. Benedict XV, *Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum*, sec 3.

state before Christian teaching can be taken as a sincere appeal for continual peace, not a means to reassert power over nations which had challenged the Vatican's authority.

Germany was by no means the only nation denounced by Benedict in *The Most Holy*. Following the establishment of the Third Republic in 1871, France embraced secularism and anticlericalism in government, seeking to challenge the Vatican's influence over the French people. Despite this, the Republic viewed the Vatican with some degree of favor, going as far as criticizing the Kingdom of Italy for attempting to nationalize Vatican museums following the fall of the

***“Benedict’s condemnation of nations that put the state before Christian teaching can be taken as a sincere appeal for continual peace, not a means to reassert power over nations which had challenged the Vatican’s authority.”***

Papal States.<sup>20</sup> In the opening weeks of the First World War, France was fighting a defensive war in line with the Just War Doctrine, as German aggression was “lasting, grave, and certain.”<sup>21</sup> Lacking a government guided by Christian doctrine, however, France's involvement in the war became less justifiable as focus shifted away from a defense of the homeland to the annihilation of the enemy. Thus, Benedict's condemnation of secular nationalist governments held, even in a primarily Catholic nation.

In terms of acting against nations which prioritized “fatherland ahead of faith,” Benedict did not allow his foreign policy to be influenced by a hopeful expansion of papal authority in secular affairs. Regarding Germany, a nation which had made a direct assault on the ecclesiastical authority of the Church less than 50 years before his pontificate, Benedict did not use the German entry into the conflict to regain temporal power. He criticized only the nature of the German

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20. Castillo, *Papal Democracy*, 16.

21. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2309.

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government, not the German nation itself. These criticisms were indirect, rooted in Catholic doctrine, and were applied to any state in violation of this doctrine, even France with its mostly-Catholic populace.

Though Benedict would not directly condemn Germany's nationalist government for contributing to the "suicide of Europe," neither would he remain silent in the face of injustices committed by the Empire during the war. Most notably, the Pope would criticize Germany for its violation of Belgian neutrality and unrestricted submarine warfare. These criticisms were made in the spirit of impartiality due to the irreconcilable conflict between these German actions and the Just War Doctrine, the extreme differences in reception of Church statements between countries, and Benedict's fear of discouraging combatant nations from approaching a negotiated peace.



*Reconciling Sides, Pacifying Tides.* Asha Malani.

Under the Schlieffen Plan, Germany's invasion of France would require moving their forces through Belgium, who remained neutral at the outbreak of war. When the small nation objected to this, Germany responded with invasion. Germany later resorted to unrestricted submarine warfare, sinking enemy civilian ships without warning. These actions, motivated solely by the pursuit of military success, were irreconcilable with the Catholic Just War Doctrine. The German

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tradition of justifying a military action by its benefit to the fatherland justified this unrestrained warfare but stood antithetical to Pius IX's *The Syllabus of Errors*, which implied "the injustice of an act when successful inflicts no injury on the sanctity of right" due to the State "being the origin and source of all rights."<sup>22</sup> This inherently negated the conditions of "just cause" and "right intention" proposed by the School of Salamanca. With respect to the violation of Belgian neutrality, Belgium had committed no assault against European peace which warranted correction through warfare. Therefore, Belgium should be considered innocent, and Germany's invasion would bring about "the destruction of the innocent."<sup>23</sup> On a similar thread, Germany's use of unrestricted submarine warfare threatened innocent merchant and passenger ships, nullifying any moral justification for the practice. The Allied blockade of Germany could be seen as an "injurious action" that justified unrestricted submarine warfare; however, as John Paul II explains in his Catechism, "the mere fact that war has regrettably broken out does not mean that everything becomes licit between the warring parties."<sup>24</sup>

While Benedict denounced both the German invasion of Belgium and the initial use of universal submarine warfare, he did so with much caution. The extreme polarization between the Entente and Central Powers led to drastically different responses, as "both sides sought the Vatican's sympathy in a war where every bit of support was needed."<sup>25</sup> Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, Benedict's Secretary of State, held that "the violation of the neutrality of Belgium [was] contrary to international law" and an injustice which the Pope had already "[condemned] unequivocally [since] he had incontrovertible facts."<sup>26</sup> The Allies would criticize the Vatican for the five months between the invasion and this statement. Conversely, the Germans would take serious offense to this statement, claiming that Germany was, "the one belligerent power against which the Vatican has officially spoken."<sup>27</sup> This polarization spread not only through the secular world, but the religious one as well, as nationalist sentiment grew among the clergy. Despite Benedict's emphasis on the urgency of peace, French and Belgian priests and bishops often appended the line "on conditions honourable to our fatherland" to the end of prayer requests for peace from the Pope.<sup>28</sup> In Germany, Catholic politicians,

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22. Pius IX, *The Syllabus of Errors*, sec. 61, sec. 39.

23. McCormick, 803; referencing the School of Salamanca's just war theory.

24. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2312; referencing *Gaudium et Spes* from Vatican II.

25. Stewart Stehlin, *Weimar and the Vatican, 1919-1923* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 9.

26. Castillo, *Papal Diplomacy*, 45.

27. Castillo, *Papal Diplomacy*, 45.

28. John F. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), 113.

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including Matthias Erzberger, took issue with the increased number of French Cardinals during the war, despite the Vatican operating “within the bounds of normal ecclesiastical procedure under wartime conditions.”<sup>29</sup> As members of the laity and clergy alike questioned the Pope’s actions or augmented his requests, the Church struggled to remain immune to the divisiveness of the conflict. The nationalist sentiment emboldened the war, hence, plagued the lower levels of the Church — the very institution that sought to combat it. This situation emphasized the need for Benedict to remain impartial, as any hint of national preference would have magnified repercussions both inside and outside of the Church.

Though Benedict was willing to condemn Germany for the violation of Belgian neutrality, he refrained from condemning the British and French for their 1917 invasion of neutral Greece to open a new Bulgarian front. While this seemed to indicate a preferential treatment of the Allies, Benedict believed such a condemnation would hinder the pursuit of peace. At the start of the war, the prospect of a negotiated peace was slim; thus Benedict focused his efforts primarily on humanitarian aid and preventing the escalation of the war. By the time of the Allied invasion of Greece, peace had become more plausible, with the Central Powers willing to approach the negotiating table. The Vatican, consequently, opted to make “private protests and generic public statements” in an effort to avoid dissuading the Allies from accepting a negotiated peace.<sup>30</sup> As this was a situational decision based on preserving a chance at a negotiated peace, and not based on preference towards the Allied Powers for their actions before the war, it can be taken as impartial.

When faced with the issue of unrestricted submarine warfare, Benedict and Gasparri denounced the German tactic as “essentially immoral [and] clearly contrary to established international law.”<sup>31</sup> Though Germany considered unrestricted submarine warfare a justified response to the Allied blockade, this hardly aligned with the Catholic Just War Doctrine. Given this morally bankrupt justification from Germany, Benedict was wary of a papal denouncement of the embargo being used “to serve the propaganda interest of any nation’s war effort.”<sup>32</sup> Gasparri also noted that “the Pope could not utter condemnations and denunciations which under the circumstances would be based solely on the

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29. Stehlin, *Weimar and the Vatican*, 7.

30. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope*, 93-94.

31. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope*, 121.

32. Castillo, *Papal Diplomacy*, 44.

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slanted accusations made by the belligerents.”<sup>33</sup> Because of this, a denunciation of the blockade from Benedict would promote a German narrative which would legitimize unrestricted submarine warfare and work contrary to his pursuit of peace.

The extreme contentiousness of the two issues, Germany’s undeniable responsibility in these actions, and the negligible effect of denunciations on the pursuit of peace made the Vatican’s denunciations of Germany’s violation of Belgian neutrality and unrestricted submarine warfare necessary. In the case of Belgium, Benedict’s reluctance to make a statement condemning Germany led the Allied powers to suspect Vatican bias towards the Central powers. By refraining from denouncing nations unless their actions were grave and verifiable, the Pope protected the prospect of an early peace and avoided alienating nations by validating their foes, the consequences of which would be magnified by the inherent polarization between the Entente and Central Powers. In light of this, Benedict’s actions can be taken as impartial, prioritizing the pursuit of peace over any biases towards or against combatant nations.

As Benedict failed to facilitate a negotiated peace by the end of the war, one could interpret his commitment to preserving a possible peace as an excuse for partiality towards the Allies. This seems unlikely, however, as the international community recognized the Pope as a major force for peace early in the war. In addition to organizing extensive humanitarian aid, Benedict sought to bring nations to peace on multiple occasions, through official Vatican publications, convincing the Central Powers to support a negotiated peace in 1916, and offered to serve as a diplomat for both Italy and Austria-Hungary on separate occasions. Despite its rejection from American President Woodrow Wilson, his 1917 Papal Peace Note influenced Wilson’s *Fourteen Points*. Being closer to facilitating a negotiated peace than any other diplomatic entity, Benedict’s decision to refrain from denunciations of the Allies in the name of expediting the end of the conflict is reasonable and justifiable.

Delivered on the first anniversary of the outbreak of war, Benedict’s Apostolic Exhortation, *To the Peoples Now at War and to Their Rulers*, would mark the beginning of Benedict’s “peace offensive,” where the Vatican’s foreign policy shifted from one of mere impartiality to an impartial pursuit of peace.<sup>34</sup> Despite

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33. Castillo, *Papal Diplomacy*, 45.

34. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope*, 117.

being generally ignored by the combatant nations due to its impartiality, both the Entente and Central Powers criticized the Vatican for sympathizing with the other side. In France, former prime minister Georges Clemenceau would refer to Benedict as “*le pape boche*” (the pope of the krauts) while German general Erich Ludendorff would refer to him as “*der französische Pabsl*” (the French

***“Benedict’s Apostolic Exhortation, To the Peoples Now at War and to Their Rulers, would mark the beginning of Benedict’s “peace offensive,” where the Vatican’s foreign policy shifted from one of mere impartiality to an impartial pursuit of peace.”***

pope).<sup>35</sup> Despite Benedict “increasingly being seen by a variety of groups as a major force for peace,” he would be unable to make significant progress in facilitating a peace between Germany, Belgium, and France in 1915; a German Cardinal and French Monsignor both rejected Benedict’s request to forward his peace proposal to their respective governments, believing his compromises over Belgium and Alsace Lorraine would contradict the national interest.<sup>36</sup> In addition to their reluctance to accept compromise, both sides had considerable grievances with the other, reported to the Vatican in hopes of gaining its support. Germany would direct its ministers in Rome to “make certain that the Allied Powers did not gain the full confidence of the Papacy.”<sup>37</sup> This mass of complaints against enemy powers led the Vatican archives to be “bulging with ‘white,’ ‘grey,’ ‘green,’ and ‘orange’ books” by the end of the war, a reference to the various books detailing a combatant nation’s diplomatic account of the conflict.<sup>38</sup>

The desire of the major powers to win an absolute, non-negotiated peace motivated Benedict to avoid legitimizing the causes of any nation’s war efforts. In

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35. Castillo, *Papal Diplomacy*, 42.

36. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope*, 118.

37. Stehlin, *Weimar and the Vatican*, 6.

38. Castillo, *Papal Diplomacy*, 42.



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his 1915 exhortation, Benedict makes clear his view that the combatant nations engaged in a war with the goal of annihilating their opponents, calling them to, “lay aside your mutual purpose of destruction; remember that Nations do not die; humbled and appressed, they chafe under the yoke imposed upon them, preparing a renewal of the combat, and passing down from generation to generation a mournful heritage of hate and revenge.”<sup>39</sup> Though the exhortation intended to cast a light on the consequences of engaging in an unjust war, it demonstrated the extreme pressure Benedict faced to remain impartial. Combined with the increased scrutiny of the Vatican’s actions due to wartime polarization, this led Benedict to, when possible, refrain from making specific denouncements in order to maintain diplomatic civility with both sides.

Benedict’s attempted peace in 1915 was a crucial step towards a potential negotiated peace, but he failed to make substantial progress in facilitating peace until the Central Powers accepted the possibility of a negotiated peace in late 1916. The death of Kaiser Franz Josef in late 1916 and a political shift within Erzberger’s *Zentrumspartei*, beginning in late 1915, specifically contributed to said sentiment. In Austria-Hungary, the new Kaiser would “become increasingly anxious to negotiate his way out of the war in order to escape [the impending] collapse of the Empire.”<sup>40</sup> In Germany, Erzberger began to realize the futility of the Empire’s war aims, realizing that “peace as the Pope had proposed would be to the Reich’s best interest.”<sup>41</sup> He would lead his party to adopt this viewpoint, eventually convincing the German government to “[convert] the Bavarian nunciature into a Reich nunciature, since stronger ties with Rome would benefit Germany’s international position.”<sup>42</sup>

With the Central Powers open to the Pope’s aid, the Vatican would appoint Eugenio Pacelli, then nuncio to Bavaria, as the nuncio to the German Empire as a whole. He would win the favor of Berlin, with one Prussian minister reporting to Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, “Pacelli has shown himself to be friendly to Germany...during the time of Pius X, he sought to work in a fair and accommodating manner, as far as his strict subordination to his superiors allowed.”<sup>43</sup> This cooperation between the German state and the nuncio allowed

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39. Benedict XV, *Allorche Fummo Chiamati*, apostolic exhortation, Vatican website, July 28, 1915, [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xv\\_exh\\_19150728\\_fummo-chiamati.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xv_exh_19150728_fummo-chiamati.html).

40. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope*, 119.

41. Stehlin, *Weimar and the Vatican*, 11.

42. Stehlin, *Weimar and the Vatican*, 11.

43. Stehlin, *Weimar and the Vatican*, 14.

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Germany and the Central Powers to approach a negotiated peace supported by the Vatican.

Unfortunately, the German peace note lacked substance. Benedict and Gasparri welcomed the note initially, but realized it contained “nothing concrete at all.”<sup>44</sup> To avoid offending the Allied Powers, Benedict would not openly support the peace note. While unsuccessful in this attempt at reaching a negotiated peace, Benedict was making progress. Any partiality against Germany, or willingness to directly denounce the state for more than the violation of Belgian neutrality and unrestricted submarine warfare, would have made such cooperation impossible.

Benedict attempted to fix the shortcomings of the 1916 German Peace Note, authoring his own the following year. Through Pacelli’s conversations with Bethmann-Hollweg and Kaiser Wilhelm, the Vatican and German leadership created a set of topics Germany would be willing to negotiate, consisting of, “[the] general limitation of armaments, [the] establishment of international courts, [and the] restoration of the independence of Belgium. Alsace-Lorraine and other such territorial questions were to be settled by agreements between the countries concerned.”<sup>45</sup> Benedict used this to construct his own Papal Peace Note of 1917, which was described as “the first time during the course of the war that any person or power had formulated a detailed and practical schema for a peace negotiation.”<sup>46</sup>

After the discussions between Pacelli and the German leadership but before Benedict sent his note, Bethmann-Hollweg was replaced by a more militaristic Chancellor loyal to General Hindenburg and General Ludendorff. The Kaiser’s influence within the German government would also deteriorate. Due to this shift in government, the German leadership abandoned the prospect of peace and reverted to militarism. This shift in leadership would ensure the failure of Benedict’s peace note, with Woodrow Wilson citing “the need to crush the power of German militarism” as the reason the Allied Powers could not accept a negotiated peace, barring “a change of regime in Germany in a democratic direction.”<sup>47</sup> As the Vatican had warned years earlier, militaristic nationalism and the absence of a Christian authority had destroyed any prospect of peace in Germany. In short, “Benedict had overestimated the power of civilian politicians

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44. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope*, 120.

45. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope*, 125.

46. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope*, 126.

47. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope*, 127.

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like Erzberger, and underestimated that of the military.”<sup>48</sup>

While Benedict relentlessly advocated for peace as a means to end human suffering, Woodrow Wilson saw the facilitation of peace as a means for the United States and Allied Powers to gain diplomatic influence in the post-war global community. Wilson sought this reward for himself, believing the Allied Powers “should initiate the final movement for peace rather than that the Pope should.”<sup>49</sup> The staunch Presbyterian also harbored personal anti-Catholic sentiments, recently intensified by political quarrels with Irish-Americans during the 1916 Election, which diminished his trust in the Vatican.<sup>50</sup> A distrust of the Vatican would not rule out cooperation for all nations. In 1915, the Dutch prime minister would comment on the Pope’s diplomatic importance, remarking that, “this is [the regrettable] reality...we must work with [the papacy].”<sup>51</sup> Rather than putting aside his anti-Catholic sentiments and cooperating with the most widely recognized force for peace at the time, Wilson would instead ignore Benedict’s pleas for mediation as he believed these requests to be “infringing upon his [own] self-arrogated, exclusive right to bring World War I to an equitable end.”<sup>52</sup> Though Wilson’s distrust of German militarism was warranted, his opportunistic view of peace and anti-Catholic bias created unreasonable obstacles to a negotiated peace beyond Benedict’s control.

Despite Benedict’s ultimate failure to reach a negotiated peace before the unconditional surrender of the Central Powers, the Vatican nearly achieved this goal through a pursuit of impartiality and unwillingness to dissuade the Allied Powers from approaching the negotiating table. Had the German government not returned to the Prussian military tradition under the influence of Ludendorff, a negotiated peace in 1917 would have likely ensued — even more so had Wilson abandoned his desire to be the sole arbiter of European peace. The Vatican’s similar treatment of the Central Powers, denouncing only the most egregious of Germany’s actions, would directly result in cooperation between Germany and the Vatican via Erzberger and the *Zentrumspartei*. Thus, the Vatican’s leniency with these powers could by no means be taken as impartiality. The pursuit of an attainable, early peace took immediate precedent.

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48. Pollard, *The Unknown Pope*, 127.

49. Dragan R. Zivojinovic, “The Vatican, Woodrow Wilson, and the Dissolution of the Hapsburg Monarchy 1914-1918.” *East European Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (1969): 41; citing Wilson.

50. Zivojinovic, “The Vatican, Woodrow Wilson, and the Dissolution of the Hapsburg Monarchy,” 39.

51. Stehlin, *Weimar and the Vatican*, 9.

52. Zivojinovic, “The Vatican, Woodrow Wilson, and the Dissolution of the Hapsburg Monarchy,” 61.

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Benedict acted impartially towards the Germans during the conflict, but this does not negate any biases the Vatican held against the nation internally. After the end of the conflict, Benedict would publish a papal encyclical, *In Hac Tanta*, directed towards the archbishops of Germany. The encyclical was presented in May 1919, celebrating roughly the 1200 year centenary of St. Boniface's first mission to the European continent. The encyclical allowed German churches and priests to celebrate the Mass of St. Boniface on additional days, authorized German bishops to administer papal blessings, and granted plenary indulgences for Catholics visiting German churches for these Masses.<sup>53</sup> Though the anniversary was technically the 1203rd anniversary of Boniface's mission, Benedict felt the end of the war would "commemorate [a] new era of Christian civilization" in Germany, parallel to Boniface's establishment of Christian civilization in Germany.<sup>54</sup>

Benedict also saw Boniface as "the representative of the Roman Catholic Church in Germany", both during his lifetime and through his intercession.<sup>55</sup> The Pope continued by appealing to St. Ambrose and St. Jerome, stating, "where the Church is, there is no death but life eternal [and this eternal life through the Church] depends on the dignity of the papacy."<sup>56</sup> Contrasting the anticlerical laws of the *Kulturkampf*, Benedict later claimed that Europe's long history of conflict stemmed from a departure from the authority of the Pope. He urged the nation of Germany, and all other nations, to come back into communion with the Roman Catholic Church and "to be obedient to the [Vatican's diplomatic authority]."<sup>57</sup> The encyclical would also act as an exhortation for the German Catholic *Zentrumspartei*, as Benedict had already begun to advocate for the maintenance of religious education in German schools, which he believed was "the basic pillar in the education of true Christians and good citizens."<sup>58</sup>

*In Hac Tanta* reveals Benedict's personal bias against the antebellum German state, as it compared the Protestant-driven anticlericalism of Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* to paganism and celebrated a departure from it. As the war had already ended, this criticism did not create as much of a diplomatic shockwave

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53. Benedict XV, *In Hac Tanta*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, May 14, 1919, [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xv\\_enc\\_14051919\\_in-hac-tanta.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xv/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xv_enc_14051919_in-hac-tanta.html), sec. 29.

54. Benedict XV, *In Hac Tanta*, sec. 3.

55. Benedict XV, *In Hac Tanta*, sec. 22.

56. Benedict XV, *In Hac Tanta*, sec. 19.

57. Benedict XV, *In Hac Tanta*, sec. 28.

58. Stehlin, *Weimar and the Vatican*, 49.

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as it would have a year earlier. Once the conflict had ended, Benedict was free to support the expansion of the Vatican's temporal power in post-war Germany without jeopardizing European stability. Though Benedict could have supported a pro-Catholic, anti-*Kulturkampf* foreign policy before the war ended, he refrained from acting on these anti-German sentiments in the pursuit of peace. Considering this and his unwillingness to directly condemn Germany in all but the most egregious of violations of the Just War Doctrine, Benedict did not let his biases influence his impartial treatment of Germany. Additionally, Benedict was justified in attacking the militaristic and nationalistic German political ideals which had cost Europe an early peace.

The Pontificate of Benedict XV would take the first step towards the resolution of the "prisoner in the Vatican" dilemma raised half a century earlier, proving the papacy could act as significant diplomatic power that provided fair, moral guidance and facilitated the pursuit of peace among nations. At the start of his reign, Benedict's proclamations often fell on deaf ears, drowned out by the nationalist conflict between the combatant nations. He would try to act impartially, hoping to prevent the Church from contributing to the chaos. Despite holding anti-German sentiments due to injustices Bismark committed against the Church in the 1870's, the Pope treated Germany no worse than the states which had come to the Church's aid in her time of need. In addition to this pursuit of impartiality, Benedict would refrain from expanding the Vatican's claims to authority in Germany until the end of the conflict. This approach would allow Germany to cooperate with the Vatican in the pursuit of peace. Though Benedict was unsuccessful in facilitating an early negotiated peace, the Vatican's ability to maintain civil diplomatic relations with most Western powers while attempting to end a global conflict demonstrated the papacy's relevance to the international community. Benedict's policy of an impartial pursuit of peace reasserted the diplomatic authority of the Church in temporal affairs, setting the precedent for papal peacemaking in the modern age.

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Michael is a junior at Will Rice College studying European Studies and Computer Science. As for interests, he has been fascinated with technology for as long as he can remember. Michael was able to explore this last summer by running summer camps which taught kids about computer science through video games. He entered Rice hoping to pursue a career in computer science, but the more he learns about the industry, the less he wants to be a part of it. Having a concrete plan and sticking to it isn't Michael's *modus operandi*, but his long-term goal is to teach at the high school level.



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### **ASHA MALANI** (ARTIST-PHOTOGRAPHER)

**Will Rice College, '23**

See page 33.



*Rejecting Male Dominance.* Asha Malani.



# CHRISTABEL PANKHURST: THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF A SUFFRAGETTE MISUNDERSTOOD

**Callie Carnahan**  
Written for WWI in Europe  
(HIST 414)  
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Christabel Pankhurst, a prominent militant suffragette in Edwardian Britain, has been the subject of extensive historical analysis for her seemingly incoherent feminist ideology. Her involvement with the Independent Labour Party, endorsement of suffragette militancy, and later rejection of that militancy in order to devote herself and her organization, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), to the support of Britain's World War I efforts all seem to fit awkwardly, if at all, into an understandable ideological framework.

However, a deeper examination of Pankhurst's writings and experiences reveals great continuity in her thoughts, beliefs, and actions. Embedded in all of her work, before and during World War I, are three themes: the rejection of patriarchal structures and systems, the obligation to pursue aims she felt were morally right, and the implementation of a constructive, two-way relationship between the state and its people that was grounded in the consent of the governed. All three of the most important developments in Pankhurst's understanding of feminism — her rejection of the Independent Labour Party and party politics more generally, her belief in the imperative of suffragette militancy, and her apparent setting aside of women's suffrage in order to mobilize women for the war — fit within these three frameworks of understanding.

There are two significant implications of such analysis. The first is that, by looking at Pankhurst's feminism through the lens of modern-day liberalism, most historians have underestimated if not completely overlooked Pankhurst's radicalism. Unlike the many British suffragists who worked within the framework

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of the law, Pankhurst and the WSPU rejected the government, claiming that the law, forced upon them without their consent, was not applicable. Pankhurst envisioned a society where women would not only get a seat at the men's table but in fact get an entirely new table for themselves. Pankhurst's feminism, in short, was based on women's reform on the terms of women themselves.

The second major implication of the analysis is that it sheds light on Pankhurst's war policy, which has caused scholarly confusion and generated claims of inconsistency. Many see Pankhurst's feminism during wartime as a tragic concession, one in which she decided that it was more effective to work within the system rather than outside. However, this analysis does not examine carefully enough her wartime writings and actions. Indeed, her wartime policy can in fact be seen as the culmination of her devotion to the women's cause and is reflective of her now wholly developed views on one's relationship to government and country. Rather than forsaking suffrage for nationalism, as is so often assumed, Pankhurst actually wove the two together brilliantly, capitalizing on World War I as a way to reshape the very definition of British citizenship and remaining coherent throughout.

As historian June Purvis' work *Christabel Pankhurst: A Biography* begins, Christabel Pankhurst was born on September 22, 1880 in Manchester, England to Emmeline and Richard Pankhurst.<sup>1</sup> The eldest of four, Pankhurst was her mother's favorite and the most bookish of her siblings. She particularly enjoyed reading the work of John Stuart Mill, a utilitarian philosopher and an early supporter of women's suffrage. Mill actively opposed the Reform Act of 1832, the first time British law explicitly prohibited women from voting. Both of Pankhurst's parents were heavily involved in the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the growing call for women's suffrage within the labor movement. Richard Pankhurst ran for Parliament twice but lost both times. Richard's increasingly radical views also cost him many of his clients as a lawyer, putting the family in tough financial straits by the time Pankhurst was a young girl. However, the Pankhurst parents pressed on in their political engagement, bringing their children to rallies and meetings. The family was not particularly religious, but the Pankhurst children grew up in a household intensely focused on moral values. Christabel Pankhurst thus gained early exposure to radical political ideas and had two strong role models to observe and emulate.

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1. June Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst: a Biography* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2019).

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Richard Pankhurst's sudden death from a gastric ulcer in 1898 rocked the entire family. It also sent them into further debt, as Pankhurst left behind no money or will. A number of wealthy men within the labor movement set up a "Dr. Pankhurst Fund" to help support the four Pankhurst children and their education. The fund was run and distributed by these men, though, making Emmeline feel financially powerless and compelling her to open a dressmaking shop. Disappointed but dutiful, Pankhurst suspended her education to help with the shop for over a year. Emmeline, however, recognizing her daughter's intellectualism and drive, eventually suggested she take classes at Owens College at Victoria University. There, Pankhurst worked with the ILP, the North of England Society for Women's Suffrage, and the Manchester and Salford Women's Trade Union Council. She began delivering speeches about suffrage and making a name for herself in both the labor and feminist movements.

The Pankhurst family, however, continued to struggle financially. When the Dr. Pankhurst Fund administrators reduced the family's allowance and suggested, given the difficult financial situation, that they only fund the education of Pankhurst's brother, Harry, Emmeline became indignant and decided to refuse the fund altogether. To make ends meet, Emmeline decided to call Christabel's sister, Sylvia, home from Italy to work at the shop so that Pankhurst could continue working towards her law degree. Even though women were forbidden to become lawyers, Pankhurst resolved to follow in her father's footsteps and study law, and her extensive legal knowledge would serve her greatly during her involvement in the suffrage movement and eventual suffragette militancy.

In 1903, frustrated with the ILP's lukewarm and ineffective stance on women's suffrage, Emmeline and Christabel formed the Women's Social and Political Union. A suffrage organization by and for women, sustained by persistent fundraising, the WSPU had no formal political affiliation but existed parallel to the ILP, drawing much of its membership from the party. Its slogan, "Deeds not words," reflected women's growing impatience with male politicians who continued, at best, to equivocate on, and at worst, to altogether avoid the women's question. While the WSPU's signature militancy did not begin for a couple of years, the slogan foreshadowed the group's impulse for action-based change.

As Christabel Pankhurst's involvement in the WSPU grew, so too did her impatience with the ILP. While many ILP politicians were nominally supportive of

suffrage, they rarely attempted to effect change once they were in a position to do so. Even worse, Pankhurst began to feel that some of these politicians merely claimed to support suffrage in order to gain women's help on their campaigns. To combat the ILP's complacency on issues of women's rights, Pankhurst wrote and spoke extensively about the need for the labor movement to prioritize the rights of women workers. One of her written works that is particularly illuminating is called "The Citizenship of Women: A Plea for Women's Suffrage." While Pankhurst wrote all but the preface and the conclusion, the pamphlet was published under the name of Kier Hardie, a male ILP politician and friend of the Pankhursts, presumably to facilitate its publication and lend it greater legitimacy. In addition to giving a legal and historical overview of women's suffrage in England, a task which the law student Pankhurst was well-equipped to do, the pamphlet thoroughly outlines Pankhurst and the WSPU's feminist philosophy in the beginning of the twentieth century. She describes how the rights of women are inextricably bound to the rights of men, writing that "the emancipation of women will also infallibly

***“One can see here that Pankhurst is beginning to develop her radical rejection of the party system as a male-run institution inherently incapable of serving women. Suffrage, to Pankhurst, is a moral rather than political question.”***

give freedom to the man.”<sup>2</sup> The nature of this freedom, notably, is one tied to human progress, and she explains this progress in the language of capitalism. One can particularly see this capitalist tilt in her mention of how women's labor should come "...[I]nto competition with that of man in nearly every department of industry.”<sup>3</sup> She also explains women's fraught relationship to the state, writing: "A woman, for the purpose of citizenship, has no legal existence in England, and has to be created before she can be enfranchised.”<sup>4</sup> Within the current bounds of British law, women existed outside the realm of citizenship. Pankhurst would later

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2. James Hardie, *The Citizenship of Women: A Plea for Women's Suffrage*, History of Women, 4th ed. (Manchester: The I.L.P. Publication Department, 1906), 4.

3. Hardie, *The Citizenship of Women*, 9.

4. Hardie, *The Citizenship of Women*, 6.

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capitalize on this understanding of the relationship between woman and state in order to justify suffragette militancy. In this pamphlet, though, she stresses the point to appeal to men and women's common humanity. By women's very humanness, she writes, they are deserving of the vote. Importantly, Pankhurst does not argue that women are the same as men — there are differences “subtle, deep seated, and ineradicable,” between the sexes.<sup>5</sup> She contends, rather, that these differences are not reasons to deem women inferior. While she does not expressly list these differences, it seems clear that chief among them is motherhood. Motherhood, Pankhurst argues, has been the main avenue for male subjugation, as women dedicate much of their time and effort into bearing and rearing children. Women's devotion to children, though, is certainly not a negative for Pankhurst. In fact, one of her chief arguments for women's suffrage is that it will produce better, more civic-minded mothers. She writes, “Broaden the outlook of the mother, and you open a new world for children to grow in.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, Pankhurst is certainly not arguing for the radical notion that women and men are equal in their responsibilities and roles; however, she does assert that they are both human and thus are equal in capability, and for that reason are deserving of citizenship. While in this pamphlet she is desperately trying to appeal to the ILP and indeed is still a member, she asserts that “the enfranchisement of women is not a party question.”<sup>7</sup> One can see here that Pankhurst is beginning to develop her radical rejection of the party system as a male-run institution inherently incapable of serving women. Suffrage, to Pankhurst, is a moral rather than political question. This moral indignation, which develops in the early years of the WSPU, would come to a militant head just a few months later.

On October 13, 1905, Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney went to Sir Edward Grey's speech at the Free Trade Hall with the intention of getting arrested. Grey was a Liberal political figure and soon-to-be foreign secretary. It was Pankhurst and Kenney's first act of militancy, a tactic that they would pursue vigorously in the coming years. At the meeting, the two women stood on their chairs and shouted at Grey for his stance on the women's question, inciting an angry mob of men who attempted to knock the women down and scratched Pankhurst so hard she began to bleed. The police escorted the two out, but Pankhurst, nearing the completion of her law degree, knew that disrupting a meeting would not be enough to land her in jail. In order to ensure

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5. Hardie, *The Citizenship of Women*, 3.

6. Hardie, *The Citizenship of Women*, 9.

7. Hardie, *The Citizenship of Women*, 9.

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she would be jailed, she deliberately assaulted an officer, spitting in his face.<sup>8</sup> At court she did not deny the charges, proclaiming, “My conduct in the Free Trade Hall and outside was meant as a protest against the legal position of women today. We cannot make any orderly protest because we have not the means whereby citizens may do such a thing; we do not have a vote; and so long as we have not votes we must be disorderly.”<sup>9</sup> Echoing her pamphlet from May that year, Pankhurst stressed that without citizenship, women exist outside the state. Without the ability to participate peacefully as citizens, women could not be subject to the law and the whims of the male-run government. Their exclusion from the system necessitated their working outside the system. Not all suffragists, however, supported this new turn to militancy. Suffragist and pacifist Eva Gore-Booth asserted that Pankhurst should not “fit her explanation to her audience. She either deliberately invited imprisonment or she was a victim; she either spat at the policeman or she did not.”<sup>10</sup> Gore-Booth, however, perhaps missed the point. It seems that, beyond the details of what Pankhurst emphasized in one speech versus another, the exact line Pankhurst was trying to toe was one which narrowly divided agency and oppression. The nature, and indeed the efficacy, of suffragette militancy lay in this tension. Pankhurst was both asserting her liberties and inviting subjugation, and in doing so convinced onlookers to ponder the peculiar role of women in society — a role in which they could be arrested under British law but were unable to affect the lawmaking itself.

In 1906, Pankhurst’s rejection of party politics became official. Much to the anger of the ILP, the WSPU did not endorse ILP candidate Robert Smillie in an election for a seat in the House of Commons for the Cocker mouth constituency. The ILP narrowly lost the election, fueling the party’s rage at this sudden betrayal. With tensions between the ILP and WSPU rising, Pankhurst and her mother Emmeline officially resigned from ILP party membership. They also barred their members from political party activity until women gained the vote. As historian Krista Cowman argues, however, in her article, “‘Incipient Toryism’? The Women’s Social and Political Union and the Independent Labour Party, 1903-14,” this rule was not strictly enforced. In fact, there were many women with important positions in the WSPU who also campaigned openly for ILP candidates or organized their meetings. The relationship between the two groups may have been severed formally, but informally it remained as many of the same people

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8. Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, 2-3.

9. *Manchester Guardian*, 16 October 1905, in Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, 93.

10. *Social and Feminist Awakening*, TBG Papers, in Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, 97.

involved in the ILP were involved with the WSPU. This allowance was likely a calculation on Pankhurst's part, as she understood that strictly enforcing this rule against party involvement would weaken WSPU membership. Thus, the ban was likely more symbolic than practical. However, the Cockermouth by-election

***“Pankhurst situates human liberty as something inherently bound up with citizenship. Further, she implies that the government is failing in its “duty” to secure the rights of women. To Pankhurst, one of the government’s primary tasks is to dole out freedom.”***

certainly did mark a shift in Pankhurst's suffrage philosophy, as she turned from party politics to militancy as the best way to effect change.

This turn to militancy, though, is much more logically consistent with Pankhurst's earlier views than historians have generally suggested. At first glance, Pankhurst's militancy seems to mark a strange and drastic turning point in her ideology. However, at closer examination, it actually retains most of its interpretive pillars. She continues to reject the male system of government and pursue the righteousness of her cause — just in a more forceful way. This force can be attributed to her solidified view that women had the right, without citizenship, to disobey the law, and indeed had the moral obligation to do so if they desired change. To Pankhurst, one was only subject to the government if one possessed the vote in return for that subjection. During a speech in St. James' Hall in 1908, Pankhurst declared, “The only womanly thing to do is to fight against the Government, who are fighting against us.”<sup>11</sup> The radical implication of this assertion is the call to work outside the system completely. A few years later, Pankhurst declared on the cover of the WSPU's weekly publication, *The Suffragette*, “The law is powerless to repress the militant women. It can no longer protect property nor preserve order. Justice herself is become a

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11. Marie Mulvey Roberts and Tamae Mizuta, *The Militants: Suffragette Activism* (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1995), 8.

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Suffragette.”<sup>12</sup> Pankhurst believed that the law possessed no power over those without citizenship, a view she also asserted in her earlier pamphlet with Kier Hardie while discussing women’s lack of legal existence. The primary difference between then and now was that, disillusioned by her inability to effect change through the government, she participated in the very breaking of this law.

A source that is particularly useful in understanding Pankhurst’s pre-war militant ideology is a speech she delivered in Queen’s Hall on December 22, 1908, entitled “The Political Outlook.” Now thoroughly convinced of the righteousness of her cause, she tells the audience: “We could never win if we were not in the right, but because we are in the right we are going to win.”<sup>13</sup> In addition, she directly equates liberty with citizenship, giving readers a greater glimpse into her understanding of the relationship between man and state. She pronounces at one point, “[...]the liberty of human beings — what can transcend that? When worldly affairs are concerned, what is our Government for?...Therefore, the first duty of statesmen ought to be to attend to the claims of those who are still without the elementary rights of citizenship.”<sup>14</sup> Notable in this statement is the claim that the government is responsible for giving people their freedom. In saying this, Pankhurst situates human liberty as something inherently bound up with citizenship. Further, she implies that the government is failing in its “duty” to secure the rights of women. To Pankhurst, one of the government’s primary tasks is to dole out freedom. The relationship between women and the state, though, is one of zero obligation because the government is not upholding its end of the deal — providing the ability to vote.

As suffragette militancy grew, so too did Pankhurst’s conviction in the righteousness and urgency of the cause. Before the war, tactics of arrest, arson, vandalization, and the publicization of hunger strikes and government force-feeding increased and drew attention to the call for women’s suffrage. The WSPU’s violence began to alienate many sectors of British society.<sup>15</sup> However, just as the controversy around the WSPU came to a tipping point, World War I broke out in the summer of 1914. World War I marked the beginning of what many considered a new era in Pankhurst’s feminism. As Purvis describes in her

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12. Christabel Pankhurst, “The Majesty of the Law,” *The Suffragette VI*, no. 22 (1913).

13. Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp, *Speeches and Trials of the Militant Suffragettes: the Women’s Social and Political Union, 1903-1918* (Madison N.J: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000), 91.

14. Jorgensen-Earp, *Speeches and Trials of the Militant Suffragettes*, 89.

15. Laura E. Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement: Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860-1930* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), 115.



biography, the WSPU immediately called for a pause in suffragette militancy until the end of the war and became fervently anti-pacifist, anti-Bolshevik, and anti-German. Christabel and Emmeline changed the name of *The Suffragette*, their WSPU publication, to *Britannia*, and gave it the new slogan, “For King, For Country, For Freedom.” Christabel even traveled to the United States to deliver a lecture series that encouraged Americans to join in the British war effort. This sudden nationalist zeal confounded many suffragists and suffragettes alike, as they wondered how a woman so strong in her suffragette conviction as Christabel Pankhurst could so abruptly abandon the cause. The Pankhursts ignored all criticism, though, which led some particularly frustrated members of the WSPU to break off and form the Suffragettes of the Women’s Social and Political Union (SWSPU) and the Independent Women’s Social and Political Union (IWSPU).<sup>16</sup> Pankhurst’s apparent change of priorities has also continued to confuse feminist scholars, who accuse her of, at best, finally relenting and pandering to politicians in order to get the vote, and, at worst, a weak commitment to the cause altogether. Neither of these interpretations, however, examines the fundamental ideological consistency that Pankhurst’s war views had in relation to her ILP and militant days. Indeed, through one lens, one can understand her wartime politics as actually the great culmination of the views she had refined in her earlier years.

The three pillars of Pankhurst’s feminist views — the divinely ordained and indisputably just nature of her cause, the rejection of male-dominated systems, and the two-way relationship between man and state — all characterized her wartime efforts. There was no doubt that Pankhurst saw the war as a mortal battle between good and evil. Indeed, scholars such as Jacqueline de Vries argue that supporting the war became nearly a religion for Pankhurst and the WSPU.<sup>17</sup> In *Britannia*, Pankhurst wrote, “[T]his war is essentially a spiritual conflict...between God and the Devil...women’s part must be to keep the spiritual side of the conflict foremost. It is women who must see that the last sacrifice of body is made if that is needed that the human spirit may remain free.”<sup>18</sup> It was easy for Pankhurst to map her rhetoric of moral urgency onto the war effort. However, unlike what scholars often assume, this was not just nationalism for nationalism’s sake. As Pankhurst importantly hints in her *Britannia* article, the war must be won so that “the human spirit may remain free.” The language of freedom dominated both her pre-war and wartime speeches, and this was not a

16. Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement*, 118.

17. Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement*, 123.

18. *Britannia*, June 13, 1917, pp. 4, in Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, 403.

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freedom much different from the one she called for before the war. In her ILP and suffragette days, Pankhurst saw freedom as citizenship, a right granted by the government. During the war, though, Pankhurst viewed the whole concept of the British nation, and thus the whole concept of British citizenship, at stake. Rather than abandoning suffrage, Pankhurst believed she must support the war to save democracy altogether. At the start of the war, even before she renamed the WSPU's publication "*Britannia*," Pankhurst wrote in *The Suffragette*, "To defeat the Germans is the Woman Question of the present time. German Kultur means and is the supremacy of the male. It is maleness carried to the point of obscenity... It is the rejection of the principle of the equality and the political co-operation of men and women."<sup>19</sup> To Pankhurst, German encroachment threatened a reversal of any progress the suffrage movement was hoping to make and represented a return to complete male domination. As Pankhurst concisely explained at one point to the *Weekly Dispatch*, a popular newspaper publication, "The British citizenship for which we Suffragettes have been fighting is now in jeopardy."<sup>20</sup> Thus, she understood the war as an existential battle between right and wrong, just like the suffrage movement. It was easy for her to weave together nationalist and feminist rhetoric as one large existential crisis — she had much practice before the war. Indeed, Pankhurst truly viewed the war as the ultimate threat to suffrage and thereby maintained an attitude of moral righteousness throughout its duration.

It is Pankhurst's reference to the "political co-operation of men and women," however, that seemed to most confound her contemporaries and scholars today. This tone felt like a vast departure from her earlier anti-government, anti-system rhetoric. On a surface level, it is challenging to reconcile her pre-war militancy and violence with her wartime law-and-order agenda. However, her ideology becomes coherent when one more closely examines the nature of her pre-war and wartime government critiques.

While Pankhurst and the WSPU consistently preached support for the nation during the war, they did not necessarily preach support of the government. This is an outwardly minor but, in fact, rather important distinction in order to make sense of Pankhurst's feminist philosophy. All of Pankhurst's calls to support the war effort were grounded in women's duty to serve their country, not the

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19. Christabel Pankhurst, "What a German Victory Would Mean," *The Suffragette IV*, no. 116 (1915).

20. Christabel Pankhurst, *Unshackled : the Story of How We Won the Vote* (London: Hutchinson Education, 1988), 371.



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government. As Pankhurst explained in her book, *Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote*, “How, it was asked, could we support a Government that had been torturing women and had opposed the women’s cause! The answer was that the country was our country. It belonged to us and not to the Government, and we had the right and privilege, as well as duty, to serve and defend it.”<sup>21</sup> The notion that the people compose and thus own the country is a radical one. In her years as a suffragette, Pankhurst was performing her “duty” to her country by challenging its illegitimate government, the government that would not give her the vote. She continued to challenge the government during the war, too. As Purvis describes in her biography, Pankhurst clashed greatly with the government of Prime Minister Asquith, criticizing everything from his policy in the Balkans to his decisions on the war front. Indeed, the newspaper published works so scathingly critical of the government that it raided and seized *Britannia’s* printing press on multiple occasions. However, the Pankhursts pressed on, changing printing locations and working underground.<sup>22</sup> In 1915, Pankhurst stated plainly in *Britannia*, “The Prime Minister and Sir Edward Grey are unfit for the responsible positions they hold.”<sup>23</sup> A far cry from drumming up support for the government,

21. Pankhurst, *Unshackled*, 288.

22. Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, 388-395.

23. Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, 386.

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Pankhurst launched attack after attack on policies she saw as foolish. As she described in her book *Unshackled*, she believed it was her duty to provide this constructive criticism. She did so in the hope that the democratic ideals of the British nation could be better practiced within the government. The government, whether she liked it or not, was setting the policy that would determine Britain's entire existence. While she despised the system and still worked outside of it, she recognized the government's power and decided, during the war, to capitalize on her public presence to pressure it into policies that would beat back German domination. This was not a concession as much as a tactical next step. To Pankhurst, Germany and the government were both threats to freedom, but Germany posed a bigger threat. There was no opportunity for a constructive,

***“Pankhurst truly viewed the war as the ultimate threat to suffrage and thereby maintained an attitude of moral righteousness throughout its duration.”***

two-way relationship between the government and its citizens under German rule — only subjugation and suppression of democracy.<sup>24</sup>

While holding fast to British national ideals, and not necessarily British political structures, Pankhurst sought to completely change the government's definition of citizenship. While one might see this as “working within the system” to get the change she wanted, her wartime feminist efforts were much more strategic and subversive than she often gets credit for. Reflecting the view of many suffragists, suffragettes, and contemporary historians, scholar Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp writes about the suffrage movement during World War I in her book, *Speeches and Trials of Militant Suffragettes*, explaining, “With the WSPU brand of militancy stilled, the milder militant societies and the non-militants kept the women's suffrage issue alive.”<sup>25</sup> While it is true that the WSPU's feminist militancy disappeared during the war, it is simplistic to assume that Pankhurst and

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24. Christabel Pankhurst, “Robert Williams and a ‘Sex War’: Warning to All Women Workers,” *The Suffragette VII*, no. 11 (1918).

25. Jorgensen-Earp, *Speeches and Trials of the Militant Suffragettes*, 356.

her mother did not continue their fight for the vote. They did carry on their suffrage work, just in more tactical and understated ways. Pankhurst understood that the war was her opportunity to change the narrative around women's relationship to the state, so her work during the war was an active attempt to reframe what it meant to be a Brit, and thereby what it meant to be a British citizen. She embraced an understanding of British citizenship based not on sex, property, or age, but rather on patriotic devotion. A popular argument against suffrage was women's inability to serve in the army, so Pankhurst set out to demonstrate women's invaluable role in maintaining the home front and supporting British soldiers, illustrating how critical women's work was to the survival of the nation. In order to demonstrate such patriotic devotion, the WSPU campaigned actively for women's involvement in the war, encouraging members to join the Register of Women for War Service to take up the agricultural, industrial, and commercial jobs men had abandoned to fight in the war.<sup>26</sup> They also delivered speeches and held rallies. One rally, the Women's War Service Procession of 1915, in support of women's work in munition factories, attracted around 40,000 women. They held signs with phrases such as "Women's Work Will Save Men's Lives" and "Shells Made By A Wife May Save Her Husband's Life."<sup>27</sup> Slogans and demonstrations such as these emphasized the woman's role in preserving the nation. Men were not only protecting women — women were protecting men, suggesting a relationship of mutual dependency. If men and the nation were so dependent on women for success in the war, then certainly women were worthy and capable of participating in the political sphere. Pankhurst thus calls for women and men alike to "unite for the sake of our particular interests and beliefs and for the sake of our common citizenship and ideals against the enemy." Citizenship here is grounded in a set of "interests and beliefs," rather than age, wealth, or gender. By framing the war as a battle for British ideals and demonstrating women's capacity to uphold and fight for these ideals, Pankhurst brilliantly shifts the criterion for citizenship from gender to patriotism.

There were, of course, limits to Pankhurst's radicalism. She was radical insofar as she wanted to reshape the government; however, she certainly did support the idea of government in concept. Governments were what gave people freedom, as she had maintained since her early days, and the goal was to fix government, not permanently destroy it. Further, her economic views remained firmly pro-capitalist throughout the war. She elaborates on these opinions in

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26. Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, 379.

27. Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst*, 382.

## CHRISTABEL PANKHURST

her book *Industrial Salvation*. To Pankhurst, the class war is nothing more than an inflammatory and politically damaging idea that was deliberately exported by the Germans to undermine their opponents. Rather than destroying the bourgeoisie, The British people should try to abolish the proletariat and make the bourgeoisie's standard of living widely accessible. The nation could accomplish this by increasing both production and consumption. Necessarily coupled with this economic shift was the social destigmatization of industry work. Industrial labor should be seen, Pankhurst explained, as a service to the nation. If workers did their jobs with enough zeal and efficiency, they could perhaps even shorten the workday and receive a bonus for their efforts. Pankhurst writes,

The workers will then have greater opportunity for self-devotion, for recreation, for study and other self-chosen activity...They should simply regard the less congenial work as a bit of national service...The real grievance which the working classes have suffered up to the present is that they have never been able to develop their own individual powers and gratify their individual taste...Let them be workers during working hours and ordinary human beings the rest of the time.<sup>28</sup>

While an admirable attempt to eliminate class distinctions, Pankhurst's vision of workers being allowed the life of "ordinary human beings" only after work hours represents an ironically condescending attitude towards the labor of a worker. Further, she confounds labor and gender in convoluted ways that discredit the work of laborers themselves. She writes that, "this social inferiority [associated with manual labor] is in any case doomed to disappear. It is the women of the so-called 'upper classes' who have led the way in this, and we find them proudly doing all kinds of manual work, and thus proclaiming their conviction of the dignity and sanctity of toil."<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, Pankhurst credits upper-class women with restoring the dignity to labor, rather than lower-class women. She continues, "The Women's Party (W.S.P.U.) in pre-war days has already brushed aside in practical fashion all class distinctions based on social origin and the performance of manual work."<sup>30</sup> To Pankhurst, the WSPU serves as a model for how society should understand labor. It is perhaps confusing, however, why Pankhurst finds the "class war" so repugnant but spent most of her life fighting the "gender war." It seems, though, that the answer lies in her views

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28. Christabel Pankhurst, *Industrial Salvation* (London: The Women's Party, 1918), 20.

29. Pankhurst, *Industrial Salvation*, 10.

30. Pankhurst, *Industrial Salvation*, 10.

on citizenship. Women, as a body, were not enfranchised and, owing nothing to the government that oppressed them, could fairly wage “war” on the systems that subjugated them. Male laborers, by contrast, possessed citizenship and thus had no license to disobey the law and stir up social trouble. However, women laborers still existed, and when the Representation of the People Act of 1918 enfranchised women above the age of thirty who held land or whose husbands held land above a certain value, poor women laborers were left in the same position. Pankhurst’s lack of protest about these property qualifications raises uncomfortable but well-deserved questions about the limits of Pankhurst’s democratic views. Indeed, right before the Representation of the People Act was passed, the Pankhursts dissolved the WSPU and formed the Women’s Party. The Women’s Party held tight to these capitalist and subtly classist economic ideals and shifted toward working with the portion of the vote women had just gained.

Regardless of these shortcomings, Christabel Pankhurst’s political activism led to a dramatic and enduring shift in the English feminist landscape. The scope of her involvements — with the ILP, with the WSPU, and with the war effort — makes her life and ideology seem inconsistent. However, a closer look at Pankhurst’s words and deeds paints both a fascinating and clear picture of her brand of feminism — one that was radical, righteous, and strategic. Indeed, her understanding of the relationship between the people, the nation, and the government also remains relatively consistent, and keeping this political framework in mind makes her ideology much more coherent. After earning the vote in 1918, Pankhurst ran for a parliamentary seat in Smethwick. She narrowly lost, however, much to the disappointment of her mother and her supporters. Some scholars believe she would have won if women under thirty had been enfranchised, as that age group comprised a large section of her followers, a sad reminder of the work that had yet to be done.<sup>31</sup> However, that day would come, and it could not have without the work of the Pankhursts. Despite her unpopular and misunderstood legacy, Pankhurst left an incredible mark on the fight for women’s rights and should be better respected in the history books for her coherent, thoughtful, and nuanced definition of feminism.

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31. Nicoletta Gullace, “Christabel Pankhurst and the Smethwick Election: Right-Wing Feminism, the Great War and the Ideology of Consumption,” *Women’s History Review* 23, no. 3 (2014): 330-346.

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