Oppressing the "Other:" Treatment of Jews and Witches by the Spanish Inquisition

Sarah Snider

The Spanish Inquisition stands out as one of the many dark institutions in world history; it functioned as a system of fear and paranoia for hundreds of years. Thousands of people were convicted and put to death by the Inquisition from the end of the 15th century through the beginning of the 19th century. While the Inquisition worked to hunt down and punish heretics of all sorts, including witches, it was famous for its persecutions of Crypto-Jews. Heresy seemed to be the outward focus of the Inquisition's investigations, but it was certainly not the only impetus for the Inquisitorial system. Distinct from one another in many aspects of the Inquisition, such as the manner of harm they could potentially cause people, the viability of their confessions, and the methods of investing the charges against them, Jews and witches are similar in that they both serve as the proverbial scapegoat. Tying these two types of heretics together was their shared status of "other," which was the inner motivation for the Inquisition's persecution of Jews and witches. In fact, the punishments of the Inquisition themselves served to further the "otherizing" process. However, while both Jews and witches functioned as the "other," these two groups were not the same in their manifestation of "otherness," as Jews were able to be given a group status more easily and for a more practical purpose than witches. Regardless of these differences, the forcing of Jews and witches into the status of "other" demonstrates the sinister need of a repressive society to legitimize itself through the scapegoating of various groups.

The Inquisition

The Spanish Inquisition's stated aim was to protect Christians by rooting out and destroying heresy, although that was not its total objective. As Isidro G. Bango explains, "The Spanish Inquisition was established…to protect the Catholic faith from the proponents of heterodox ideas, within the same faith, that might endanger it."[1] However, he continues on to note

[1] Isidro G. Bango, *Remembering Sepharad: Jewish Culture in Medieval Spain* (Madrid:

that despite the outward purely anti-heretical goal, "the persecution of Judaism is for many researchers the root cause of the Inquisition."[2] Lu Ann Homza takes this idea for granted in her collection of Inquisitorial sources, maintaining that "the Spanish Inquisition was founded to investigate, punish, and reconcile *conversos* who continued to practice Judaism," referring to these *conversos* as "the Inquisition's first targets."[3] Thus, although it began with a broad statement against heresy, the specific heresy in mind at the end of the 15th century was that of Judaism. This is not to say, however, that crushing Judaism ended up to be the only project of the Inquisition; by its end, many other groups, including witches, had been targeted. Also interesting to note is the fact that E. N. Adler brings up that the Inquisition was "a political rather than religious institution," a "merciless tribunal constituted under Ferdinand and Isabella with the grudging assent of the Pope."[4] Thus, although it purportedly had a religious function, the fact that the Inquisition "derived its authority from the Catholic king"[5] and not the official religious authorities, lends itself to the idea that the deeper motives of the Inquisition remain less than unequivocally religious.

Although the Inquisition may have initially formed in order to persecute Judaism, it nevertheless remained in search of heresies of all sorts, and worked to hunt out and punish witches, among other heretical groups. Marvin Lunenfeld writes that "prior to 1500 two thousand [Crypto-Jews] went to the flames throughout the kingdom."[6] However, "by the early sixteenth century, there had been so thorough a sweep that investigations virtually ceased, as the New Christians blended quietly into the general body of believers, and many went on to the highest careers."[7] The accusations of Crypto-Judaism did not totally disappear; however, they did greatly die down; it seems that there was not as much of a need for them anymore in terms of heretical practices. Nevertheless, the Inquisition lived on, searching out new targets. Witches were a notable heretical group that received

State Corporation for Spanish Cultural Action Abroad, 2003), 213.

[2] Ibid., 213.

[3] Lu Ann Homza, *The Spanish Inquisition, 1478-1614: An Anthology of Sources* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2006), 13.

[4] E.N. Adler, "Auto de Fe and Jew." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 13.3 (1901): 393.

[5] Ibid., 393.

[6] Marvin Lunenfeld, "Pedagogy of Fear: Making the Secret-Jew Visible at the Public Auto de fe of the Spanish Royal Inquisition," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 18.3 (2000): 82.

[7] Ibid., 82.

attention during the following centuries. Although he focuses on the trials taking place in the Italian areas of Aquileia and Concordia instead of Spanish territory, Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini demonstrates the Holy Office's concern with witchcraft. Having searched through the trial records for instances of Jewish persecution, Zorattini notes that "the crimes that kept the Holy Office judges busiest from the second half of the 17th century to the end of the 18th, were those of witchcraft and other kinds related to the magic arts."[8] One of the only trials around this time period that mentions a Jew, Iuseppo, is itself a witchcraft trial, as he and two other men were accused of plotting to use magic in order to "cure an ill cow."[9] This case represents a shift from the suspicion of Jewish practices to those of witches.

The Trials

Crypto-Jews and witches both received persecution and punishment from the Inquisition; however, their trials differed in the nature of court judgment. These variations were based on the types of heresies in which each group was suspected to have engaged. Crypto-Jews were accused of crimes that included "renouncing their new faith and…reverting 'to the law of Moses and the Jews," as well as "committing transgressions against the precepts of the Catholic Church."[10] Witchcraft involved "explicit or implicit pacts with demons, and magic that was intended to harm."[11] The demonic pacts represented pure heresy; however, harmful magic fell under the jurisdiction of the secular court system.[12] Thus, witches who were convicted of committing murder were not fully prosecuted by the Inquisition. This is evidenced by the Inquisitorial document from Granada in 1526, "Deliberations on the Reality and Heresy of Witchcraft," included in Homza's *The Spanish Inquisition, 1478-1614: An Anthology of Sources*. This document discusses whether murderous witches "must be exiled or relaxed [to the secular arm], or handed over to a secular court after their reconciliation [to the Church], so they may be struck with worthy penalties for their actions."[13] The Inquisition did not have as complete control over

[8] Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini, "The Jews and the Inquisition of Aquileia and Concordia." *Jews and Conversos: Studies in Society and the Inquisition.* Ed. Yosef Kaplan. Jerusalem: Daf Chen Press, (1985), 228.

[9] Ibid., 230.

[10] Bango, *Remembering Sepharad: Jewish Culture in Medieval Spain,* 215.

[11] Homza, *The Spanish Inquisition, 1478-1614: An Anthology of Source,* 153.

[12] Ibid., 153.

[13] Ibid.,154-5.

witches as it did Jews, although it must be noted that, as in the case of the accused Crypto-Jew Isabel, wife of *bachiller* Lope de le Higuera, Jews might be relaxed to the secular courts, which actually carried out the death penalty.[14] Even so, Jews still fell more fully under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition than witches.

Beyond their actual prosecutions, Jewish and witches also diverged in terms of their confessions. As a baseline, the general methods of the Inquisition included "denunciation, guaranteeing the anonymity of the accuser; the use of torture as a method for interrogating those who had partially confessed; and punishment, including the death penalty."[15] Accused Crypto-Jews sometimes refused to admit that they were engaging in Jewish practices, and were then tortured and convicted anyway. This was unfortunately the case with Marina Gonzalez, tried in 1494, who was charged with heresy and apostasy for her alleged relapsed Judaizing (she had confessed and then renounced her Jewish practices during an Edict of Grace period, so that she could receive a penance and be reconciled to the Church without punishment).[16] According to the Inquisition's records, insisting that she was a good Christian, Gonzalez was "stripped of her old skirts and put on the rack, and her arms and legs were tied tightly with cords…they started to pour water down her nose and throat."[17] Although she declined to confess despite continued torture, Gonzalez was found guilty; insistence upon innocence was often ignored in cases of Judaizing. Witches, on the other hand, could confess to their sins and the Inquisition would still fail to believe their own testimonies against themselves. One of the issues discussed in the aforementioned "Deliberations on the Reality and Heresy of Witchcraft" was "Whether the witches reviewed in this case really and truly commit the crimes they have confessed or whether in fact they are fooled."[18] This question stemmed from the Inquisitors' "realization that the witches' imagination could play a role in confessions."[19] Witchcraft was not as concrete as Judaizing in the view of the Inquisition, as Crypto-Judaism involves taking certain actions, while witchcraft may occur solely in one's mind. This highlights the disparity of the Crypto-Jew's trial versus

[14] Ibid., 16.
[15] Bango, *Remembering Sepharad: Jewish Culture in Medieval Spain*, 215.
[16] Homza, *The Spanish Inquisition, 1478-1614: An Anthology of Source*27.
[17] Ibid., 45.
[18] Ibid., 155.
[19] Ibid., 153.

that of the witch, as well as demonstrating the arbitrariness of the Inquisition's belief in personal confessions.

Another way in which the investigation of Judaizing and the pursuit of witches differed was in the collection of evidence. As noted above, Crypto-Judaism involved a level of Jewish practice that includes concrete action. It is possible to find witnesses that will testify against a Crypto-Jew for keeping Shabbat and Kashrut, not eating pork, fasting on a fast day, etc. It is also feasible to discover objects that point to Jewish practices. People also testified against others for witchcraft, and there were certain objects such as magical ointments that may be found in the possession of a witch.[20] However, there was another method of uncovering this strain of heresy that was not available when attempting to find out Crypto-Jews; the medical knowledge of the time was used to discern if one was actually possessed by the devil. As Andrew Keitt explains "it was widely accepted that Satanic forces wielded a powerful influence on the human body," and thus "demonic agency necessarily had a place in early modern medical theory."[21] Keitt brings the case of Eugenia de la Torre, who was accused of falsifying her spiritual visions and being possessed by demons. As evidence of this, "it was reported that Eugenia suffered from a hugely swollen abdomen that lasted a number of months until it was relieved in a torrent of blood from her vagina," indicating that "Eugenia had been impregnated by evil spirits."[22] Medicine was connected to the discovery of Eugenia's evil possession; there was no such medical involvement in cases of Judaizing.

The court cases themselves were distinct for Crypto-Jews and for witches, but, more importantly for larger society, what was at stake for each crime was also divergent. Obviously, Jews and witches could both harm Christians through their heretical beliefs. The Edict of Expulsion that forced all Jews to leave Spain supported this decree through its claim that "there were some wicked Christians who Judaized and apostatized from our holy Catholic faith, the great cause of which was interaction between the Jews and these Christians."[23] Similarly, Crypto-Jews could neg-

[20] Jacqueline Simpson, "Reviewed work: *The Witches' Advocate: Basque Witchcraft and the Spanish Inquisition (1609-1614)* by Gustav Henningsen," *Folklore* 93.2 (1982): 233.
[21] Andrew Keitt, "The Miraculous Body of Evidence: Visionary Experience, Medical Discourse, and the Inquisition in Seventeenth-Century Spain." *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 36.1 (2005): 82.
[22] Ibid., 79.
[23] "The Edict of Expulsion." Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture, (2004).

atively influence good Christians, as could those that interacted with or were possessed by the devil, who would lead Christians astray through falsifying spiritual visions, as noted above, or merely seducing them over to evil. Witches, however, presented a whole different level of threat than just acting as a bad influence; they actually had the ability to harm others. In the aforementioned "Deliberations on the Reality and Heresy of Witchcraft," the Inquisitors discussed what to do with "the witches who really commit murders."[24] These witches were engaging in "harmful magic or *maleficia*...which could result in the illness or death of people or animals, as well as the destruction of property."[25] While Crypto-Jews could hurt only Christians spiritually, witches could nefariously cause both spiritual and physical destruction.

Jews and Witches as "Other"

Deeper than the desire to wipe out heresy lay the hidden thought process that placed the Jew and the witch as "other." This shared outsider status links the two heretical groups together. Stephen Haliczer, quoted by Olga Lucia Valbuena, argues that for a long time in Spain, "the converted Jew substituted for the witch as a pariah, reflecting through antithesis and projections society's most ingrained fears and repressed longings."[26] In a nutshell, Jews functioned as the "other" instead of witches for a certain period, acting as the object of the same sort of societal "projections" and serving as the "antithesis" to Spanish society. This explains the Inquisition's shift to witch-hunting after the mid-16th century, when it felt that it had done a sufficient job of wiping out Crypto-Judaism and needed a different target upon which to force the role of "other." As both groups were seen as "nefarious" and "treacherous," "the popular imagination could conflate the threat of the secretive Jew, [and] the diabolically empowered witch."[27] Jews and witches blended together somewhat in the collective mind of Spanish society, and this marks the easy transition from persecution of the Jew to persecution of the witch.

In fact, not only do they both serve to exert the same sort of negative power pertaining to heresy, the actual imagery of the Jew and that of the

[24] Homza, *The Spanish Inquisition, 1478-1614: An Anthology of Source,* 154.
[25] Ibid., 153.
[26] Olga Lucia Valbuena, "Sorceresses, Love Magic, and the Inquisition of Linguistic Sorcery in Celestina," *PMLA 109.2* (1994): 208.
[27] Ibid., 208.



Francisco de Goya's *The Tribunal of the Inquisition*, circa 1816. Beginning in the Middle Ages the Church had prescribed the conical hat as a distinguishing mark for Jews. Jewish conversos were a principal concern of the Spanish Inquisition.

witch parallel one another. In a manuscript from 14th century Barcelona there appears a picture of a Jew drawn by Bishop Solomon Vidal; the Jew is hunched over with a hooked nose and a pointed hat.[28] This sort of image of the suspicious-looking Jew "became widespread from the thirteenth century onwards."[29] Francisco Bethencourt prints a strikingly similar image of a witch on a broomstick drawn by Anton van Dyck around 1625. In the picture, the witch has an analogously hooked nose and is sporting the same manner of pointed hat; even the hunchback posture is the same as that of the Jew. These two "others" share not only negative internal qualities, but even look the same to Spanish society, strengthening their common outsider status.

[28] Bango, *Remembering Sepharad: Jewish Culture in Medieval Spain,* 190.
[29] Ibid., 190.

If their similarly suspicious body types were not enough to mark the Jew and the witch as "other," the fact that they were both forced to wear specially marked clothing when caught out by the Inquisition ensured that everyone was aware of their "other" category. Not only did these garments mark them as physically "other," but also as ethically different, since "in the early modern period…one's body was thought to express the moral state of its occupant's soul."[30] Clothes were an extension of the body, and therefore, by wearing different clothes, Jews and witches were known by larger society to be evil and separate groups, in addition to the fact that their unattractive bodies themselves were proof of their immorality. Interestingly enough, when the Inquisitors were discussing the punishment of witches in their "Deliberations on the Reality and Heresy of Witchcraft," there was a dispute over whether witches should be compelled to wear *sanbenitos,* or penitential tunics. This disagreement arose because, as Dr. Micer May argued, "*Sanbenitos* are imposed only on Jews, by general custom of the Inquisition; and if Jews saw *sanbenitos* on witches, the Crypto-Jews could say they had not Judaized, but rather had been witches."[31] This implies that although Jews and witches were both "other," it was actually worse to be a Jew than a witch, since, apparently, Judaizers would rather be known as witches than as those who followed the Law of Moses. This seems to have been resolved by Jews and witches wearing distinct penitential garments, differently decorated dunce caps.[32] Their clothes signified their despicable deeds as well as designating them as "other."

The ultimate punishment of the Judaizer and the witch, being burnt to death in the Auto de Fe, was an extremely effective way of both forming as well as concretizing their "other" status. Bango notes that the "principal goal [of the Auto de Fe] was to serve as an example."[33] Lunenfeld supports this idea, insisting that "Inquisitors were well aware of the educational purpose of their public ceremonies."[34] In fact, "their most definitive handbook declares: 'The end of the trial and execution is not the salvation of the soul of the accused, but it is to achieve the public good by terrorizing the

[30] Lunenfeld, "Pedagogy of Fear: Making the Secret-Jew Visible at the Public Auto de fe of the Spanish Royal Inquisition," 88.
[31] Homza, *The Spanish Inquisition, 1478-1614: An Anthology of Source,* 162.
[32] Lunenfeld, "Pedagogy of Fear: Making the Secret-Jew Visible at the Public Auto de fe of the Spanish Royal Inquisition," 90.
[33] Bango, *Remembering Sepharad: Jewish Culture in Medieval Spain* 218.
[34] Lunenfeld, "Pedagogy of Fear: Making the Secret-Jew Visible at the Public Auto de fe of the Spanish Royal Inquisition," 80.

people."[35] However, beyond ensuring onlookers' good behavior by establishing the final, fiery position of one who goes against the Inquisition, the Auto de Fe clearly demarcates its victims as "other." This process serves to instill within society hatred towards the "other" as well as the fear of being or becoming "other." Indeed, the Auto de Fe manifests itself as the process of actually engulfing the "other" in flames and incinerating it, erasing it from society completely. In this way, the Jew and the witch are further separated from the norm and demonized.

Aside from acting as a public example of what not to be, the "other" performs an even greater, albeit more subconscious, service as an essential part of the process of state-building. In the 15th century, Spaniards innovatively redefined Jews as a racial group instead of a religious one through their new focus on the need for "pure blood" of Christians.[36] Thoroughly "otherizing" these racial Jews, the Spanish took the first step towards state-building, since "the modern nation, then and now, perpetuates its forced unity by excluding such designated groups."[37] In other words, through its rejection of Jews, Spain reinforced itself as a nation. In fact, Lunenfeld maintains that Spain was the "earliest [nation] to attempt state-formation by designing an omni-purpose "other."[38] It is not surprising, therefore, that "whenever tensions damaging to the state were high, verbal and visual stratagems were mustered to bring into view during some great public spectacle the Secret-Jew."[39] Using the Jew as a scapegoat was a quick and dirty way for the Spanish rulers to gain support for their modern state. However, it is important to note that while Jews as "other" were able to serve this purpose as a discrete racial faction, witches were not, as they had a different sort of group status. There is no witch nation in the same sense that there is a Jewish nation; one can banish Jews as a group, as evidenced by Spain's expulsion of the Jews in 1492, but cannot, in the same sense, banish witches. As witchcraft has the potential to pop up just about anywhere and witches are not born into specific communities and a particular religion in the same manner as are Jews, they cannot be considered a fully equivalent "other," nor can they play the same sort of part in the process of state-building.

[35] Ibid., 80.
[36] Ibid., 78-9.
[37] Ibid., 79.
[38] Ibid.,
[39] Ibid.,

Beyond consisting of a basic separate group, the "other" actually specifically presents itself as a gendered role; being "other" involved being a woman. In a section titled "The Inquisition of the Jew and the Woman, Valbuena explains that Christians "viewed women in general, and accused witches in particular, as treacherous and deceitful enough to drive men to madness or perdition"; so to, they "perceived the 'converso as a nefarious dissembler and secret enemy of Christianity" . Indeed, "many of old Christians distrusted the authenticity of the recently converted, tending to associate them with the suspicious gender (and with witches), in keeping with Catholic anti-feminine tradition" . Crypto-Jews are seen as connected to the feminine, and therefore evil. This manifests itself in the overall percentage of women accused of Judaizing versus men charged with the same crime. In "the sex ratio of converse defendants during the first forty years of the Inquisition's existence…female defendants apparently outnumbered male ones by a large proportion." Homza attributes this numerical disparity to the nature of the Judaizing crimes for which the Inquisition searched, which primarily consisted of those centered on the household, such as the keeping of dietary restrictions and lighting Shabbat candles. Even if this is the case, however, it does not sufficiently explain the over-focus on female Judaizers. For instance, Isabel, wife of *bachiller* Lope de la Higuera was accused of "withdraw[ing] to pray, sometimes alone and sometimes with other women" on Saturdays,[40] something that is unconnected to the household. Prayer is not specific to female Jews; in fact, it is actually more of a communal feature of male Jews, who must gather together to pray in a group of ten men. It is more likely that the numbers of accused women are boosted because, based on the theory of the gendered "other," the Jewish woman is doubly "other" because she is Jewish and she is woman; she is "other" in both religion and gender.

Through "otherizing" the Jew and the witch, the Spanish Inquisition both reaffirmed its purpose for existence and validated its persecution of these groups. Outwardly established to combat heresy and built on anti-Jewish sentiment underneath the surface, the Inquisition shifted from hunting down Jews to searching out all sorts of heresies, including witchcraft. Distinct in the nature of their trials in terms of the specific court that handled their crimes and punishments, the acceptance of confessions, the sorts of evidence that were available, and the harmfulness of their offenses,

[40] Ibid., 15.

Jews and witches were both seen as "other" to mainstream Spanish society. Their evil tendencies manifested themselves through their suspicious physical appearance as well as their carefully marked form of dress, which confirmed that they were, in fact, "other." The Auto de Fe also proved to the people that these groups were "other" and therefore warranted destruction. Nevertheless, Jews and witches do not belong to the exact same category of "other." Witchcraft was not as negative as Judaizing, and also did not serve the same purpose of state-building through the rejection of the "other." Furthermore, woman is always more "other" than man, and thus females were more likely to be persecuted than males, as Jews or as witches (who were primarily female). Either group, regardless of its utility in terms of state-building or otherwise, allowed the members of mainstream Spanish society to validate its own self-worth in the face of the "other." The tendency to raise oneself up through the repression of another, the "other," can unfortunately be noticed as a trend in both interpersonal as well as societal relationships. Taking note of the dangers of "otherizing" is therefore central to the betterment of our own society. The lack of proper respect for and acceptance of another group can lead to terrible consequences; this is the fundamental lesson of the Spanish Inquisition.