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Witches as Queer(ed) Comrades:
How Patriarchy, Sexism and Religious Fanaticism Fueled the Early Modern European
Witch Hunts

by
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An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
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Acknowledgments

My work on this project spanned nearly two years, with the bulk of that falling within the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This has meant that, like people around the world with the privilege and access to the resources to do so, I have attended classes remotely from home, worked from home—and worked on this paper at home, as well. I cannot say enough here to convey the tremendous gratitude and appreciation I hold for my dear partner for the love, support, and patience with which she has held space for me and cheered me on through all this.

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Introduction

For though the devil tempted Eve to sin, yet Eve seduced Adam. And as the sin of Eve would not have brought death to our soul and body unless the sin had afterwards passed on to Adam, to which he was tempted by Eve, not by the devil, therefore she is more bitter than death.

Malleus Maleficarum, Part I, Question VI

One cannot begin to understand the European witch-hunt without recognizing that it displayed a burst of misogyny without parallel in Western history.

— H.C. Erik Midelfort qtd. in Barstow, *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts*

Patriarchy, sexism, and religious fanaticism each played a complementary and compounding role in creating the conditions for the brutal campaign of violent terror, torture, and mass murder that we now refer to as the early modern European witch hunts (hereafter “the witch hunts”). In this paper I explore, by way of a cross-discipline literature review through a feminist and queer theoretical lens, the ways in which those who were accused of being witches in early modern Europe were rendered queer subjects by dominant organized religion, the state and society—regardless of whether they ever actually identified as witches or practiced witchcraft. The term queer here is not concerned with whether those in question at any point identified as non-heterosexual or engaged in non-heterosexual, non-normative sexual behavior, nor with whether they declared or embodied genders beyond what we now know is the mythical

gender binary. Rather, by using the term queer subjects, I am referring to a marginalized positionality where one is made queer relative to dominant power and consequently suffers the resulting deleterious effects on quality of life, life chances and even survival.

Having surveyed a broad array of scholars from various disciplines who have each examined a body of relevant evidence, I explore how individuals accused of witchcraft were targeted not for any crimes or damage that could be proven at trial, but for harmless personal attributes or behaviors that were observed or alleged—often related to undesirable events that said alleged behavior purportedly precipitated. I cast new light on the ways in which such naturally occurring attributes and mundane behaviors were very literally demonized and used as damning evidence against those accused. Indeed, gender, age, physical attributes, and alleged sexual practices—along with other types of behavior—were almost always a factor in the persecution, accusation, arrest, torture, prosecution, and murder of people accused of witchcraft, the vast majority of whom were women. I use the word *murder* here, rather than the more commonly used *execution* or *put to death* as the trials were by almost any measure a sham with no proper legal representation for the defendants and the outcomes near foregone conclusions, with gruesome and prolonged torture used to produce whatever evidence might be needed.

There is a great deal of scholarship that looks at historical events and patterns of the period that may have directly contributed to the eruptions of witchcraft panics, accusations, and witch hunts within specific locales and throughout Europe more generally during the Early Modern period. Wiesner-Hanks notes that “no one factor alone can explain the witch hunts, but taken together, intellectual, religious, political, legal, social, and economic factors all created a framework that proved deadly to thousands of European women” (286). A great many historians have buried or elided the glaring disparity in the gender of those accused and executed, and have

instead focused on the witch hunts “as the result of religious upheaval, of the growth of the nation-state, of the isolation of mountain folk...”, etc. (Barstow, “On Studying Witchcraft” 7). It is not within the scope or interest of this project to explore these events. Instead, this paper examines how individuals came to be suspected, accused, and tried for practicing witchcraft, regardless of the broader context within which the events occurred.

Events that are germane to this project are the Atlantic slave trade, European imperialism, and colonialism (with a focus on the Americas), the dawn of the Scientific Revolution and through this the feminization of nature, as well as the witch hunts. I was struck by the reminder that these events took place during the same period and were largely carried out by the same actors. I make the case that all were interconnected products of the same vicious cocktail of patriarchy, sexism, and religious fanaticism, with racism and xenophobia disastrously involved at points, as well.

These terms are likely familiar to the reader, but it is worth noting this author's specific interpretation and usage here since they are at the heart of what we will be exploring.

Adapting a definition offered by Silke Roth and Katherine Dashper (7), patriarchy is a system of social beliefs, customs, structures, and practices in which cisgender men dominate, oppress and exploit women and people of other genders. Conservative estimates date the origins of patriarchy back approximately 6,000 years [Lerner qtd. in Hrdy 5], while psychologist and anthropologist Barbara Smuts finds that “the sexual conflicts of interest that underlie patriarchy predate the emergence of the human species” (1). In any case, patriarchy was millennia old by the early modern period and anything else was likely unimaginable for those in Europe at this time. In fact, “the vast majority of religious and secular writers before 1500 regarded women as

clearly inferior to men and saw the patriarchal system as natural, divinely authorized, and good" (Weisner-Hanks 23).

Within this dominant system of patriarchy, we have ample evidence that sexism was pervasive and trenchant, along with enforcement of that controlling sexism through various manifestations of misogynist oppression, intimidation, and violence. To understand the difference between the ideology that is sexism and the system that is misogyny, I turn to Kate Manne (80):

Overall, sexism and misogyny share a common purpose—to maintain or restore a patriarchal social order. But sexism purports to merely be being reasonable; misogyny gets nasty and tries to force the issue... Sexism wears a lab coat; misogyny goes on witch hunts.

Importantly, Manne points out that while sexism tends to operate broadly along gender lines, "misogyny will typically differentiate between good women and bad ones, and punishes the latter" (Manne 80). I have foregrounded sexism over misogyny in my title and this paper for the simple fact that the workings of misogyny in the period under review were, for the most part, heavy handed and well documented. The sexism that made the crimes of misogyny not only acceptable, but logical and even desirable in the eyes of so many, on the other hand—this was more subtle and pernicious and thus merits far more excavation and greater scrutiny.

This author has found no evidence or argument that credibly contests the case that codified religious fanaticism will justify, ignite, and stoke extreme, mass-scale racist and misogynist violence like nothing else. In the case of the early modern European witch hunts, this codified religious fanaticism took two primary forms: the first was the 1484 papal bull issued by Pope Innocent VIII in December of that year and then, two years later, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, a

"manual for witch-hunters" to which the papal bull was prepended and that "was cited in virtually every subsequent witchcraft trial" (Schuyler 20). Together, these texts played a key role in inspiring and justifying a campaign of terror that spanned the continent and hundreds of years and, despite the number of men caught up in it, is "a clear example of organised state violence against women" (Jackson 71).

Background

The exact number of people persecuted, tortured, and murdered during the early modern European witch trials remains contested terrain, but there are many things from this grim period about which the majority of witchcraft historians now agree. While earlier estimates had put the number of people executed for witchcraft in the hundreds of thousands, with some estimating more than a million, "most scholars agree that somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 people were officially tried and between 40,000 and 60,000 were executed" (Wiesner-Hanks 278-279). Levack points out that looking merely at those prosecuted and executed, though, does "not convey the full dimensions of the European witch-hunt" (*The Witch-Hunt* 21-22) since it does not capture the fear, threats, accusations, and general terror that people experienced, whether or not a formal prosecution ever came about for any given individual.

There are a number of factors that make it difficult to arrive at even a rough estimate with any degree of confidence, not the least of which is the fact that "so many records have been lost or destroyed" (Wiesner-Hanks 278). Among those that have been recovered and analyzed, many do not include the trial verdicts—"a strange omission given the severity of the penalties" (Barstow 22-23)—and most do not account for those who died in prison or those who took their own lives after suffering torture, out of fear of being burned alive, or simply due to unbearable prison living conditions. Still other accused witches were murdered in prison and, in one of the

few such cases documented, the strangulation was “blamed on a demon” (22-23). Then there were the “lynchings and posse-style murders,” of which there were three hundred in the Ardennes alone, but which were for the most part not recorded (23). Alanna Nissen concurs and, referring to England specifically, points out that “due to the inconsistent survival of court records, it is difficult to establish with certainty how many people were executed for witchcraft...,” since “accused witches might die in prison as a result of illness, suicide, or murder or they might face extrajudicial violence at the hands of their neighbors” (70).

Even as many renowned witchcraft historians have lowered their estimates for the number of people killed during the witch hunts over recent decades, so too have they increasingly discounted patriarchy, sexism, and misogyny as core drivers of the witch hunts, leading Elspeth Whitney to note that “the extent to which gender has ‘fallen out’ as a category of analysis among the majority of historians of the witch-hunts is quite startling” (78). This despite the fact that, while the gender breakdown varied greatly from one time and place to another, in aggregate approximately 85% of those executed for witchcraft were women (Levack, *The Witch-Hunt* 21; Barstow, “On Studying Witchcraft” 7) based on court records alone, and there is no reason to think that the gender disparity among those killed extrajudicially wasn’t potentially even greater given the male supremacist nature of society at the time and the fact that women—particularly married women—had limited protection under the law (Wiesner-Hanks 52) during this period. As a point of reference, marital rape was not made explicitly illegal in England, for example, until 2003.

One thing that became increasingly clear as I explored existing scholarship and considered possible approaches to my research is that the realm of witchcraft historiography appears to be plagued, perhaps not surprisingly, by shadows of the same gendered dynamics as the witch hunts

on which it is focused—thankfully without the terror and physical violence. The resurgence of modern witchcraft historiography over the past half century coincided with the dawn of modern women's studies in the academy in the 1960s and the “explosion of studies in women's history” (Wiesner-Hanks 1) starting in the 1970s. Witchcraft historiography was rightfully a part of this groundswell of scholarship around women's history more broadly by feminist scholars at the time. Just as feminism and women's studies have been under attack from their inception (2), both within the patriarchal academy and without, so too has feminist witchcraft historiography conducted by women. Speaking specifically about the dismissal and relentless drubbing of witchcraft historian and renowned Egyptologist Margaret Murray by fellow historians Alan Macfarlane, Norman Cohn and Keith Thomas (Purkiss 62) among others, Diane Purkiss points out “the creation of a narrative in which the (male) truth of empirical history is opposed to the irrational fancies of a woman who cannot distance herself from the subject enough” (63). Her point isn't to defend Murray's witchcraft scholarship, which she acknowledges is “intrinsically improbable” and rightfully “commands little or no allegiance within the modern academy” (62), but to highlight the ways in which these men made their case against Murray. Their “ferocious criticisms of Murray” (62), while technically sound in terms of their substance, seemed to have been motivated and sharpened by “the fact that Murray is a woman,” which “explains and permits her conflation with witches; she cannot be separated from them, cannot achieve critical distance from them” (63). Just as did Heinrich Krämer, James IV and Johannes Nider, these modern male witchcraft historians seemed “to figure credulity as feminine, and then to conflate that figure with the figure in the text: women cannot write about women because they are women, because they cannot separate themselves from the women they write about” (63).

The result of this dynamic is evident in the body of extant scholarship. Writing in 1994 of “the archival studies” done since the mid-1960s, Anne Llewellyn Barstow “was impressed by three factors that have been practically ignored. First, the lack of gender analysis in most of these works stands out” (*Witchcraze* 1). Barstow is struck by the fact that, despite all scholars in that period agreeing on the fact that it had been overwhelmingly women who had been accused and killed, “few took that pertinent statistic into account in their interpretations” (1).

It is not merely the reception that the scholarship of women historians of witchcraft have received, but the apparent hospitality of the discipline to women and people of genders other than cisgender men at all. Of the 45 people that Google features ahead of standard search results for “witchcraft historians” (“Witchcraft Historians”), just 10 are women. Similarly, the Wikipedia category page for “Historians of witchcraft” lists 12 people and 3 of these are women (“Category: Historians of Witchcraft”). (Presumably all are cisgender men and women; none are identified as or known by this author to be trans, non-binary or otherwise other than cisgender.)

It will surprise few readers that this problem is not unique to witchcraft historiography. In a 2011 article in the magazine *History Today*, the editors “asked distinguished historians to choose their favourite works of history produced in the last 60 years and to name the most important historian of the period” (“The Historians’ Historians”). The responses of 15 historians are featured in the piece and six of these are women—a better percentage than among recognized witchcraft historians to be sure. That, however, is the end of the good news. These 15 historians named 14 individuals they chose as “the most important historian of the period.” There was not one woman among them, despite the fact that 8 of the 14 were named by women. (Some of those interviewed named more than one person while others didn’t specifically name “the most important historian” in their response.) There were 29 historians named in total, with four of

those named by more than one of the historians interviewed. Among those 29, only two women were named—one by a man and the other by a woman. It is worth noting that witchcraft historian Keith Thomas was named by three of the respondents—one woman and two men—for his 1971 book *Religion and the Decline of Magic*.

Lest anyone arrive at this point with the thought that this seems like a long detour en route to the promised destination, rest assured that this has been no detour at all, but a necessary waypoint on our journey. Indeed, any serious project related to the witch hunts that does not incorporate gender in the analysis must either acknowledge this omission and account for it or be considered lacking. Likewise, any literature review and analysis of the impact of patriarchy and sexism on the witch hunts that does not look at how these same forces have affected the discourse community, as well as the production and the substance of that very literature would be at the very least remiss. This paper, then, foregrounds the scholarship of historians who have taken gender into account. Not at the expense of all other factors at play, but with the weight and consideration it deserves in light of the fact that approximately six women were executed for every man and, as I elaborate here, the actual gender disparity was likely even greater.

Theoretical Approach

While the analysis here is situated within a literature review, the work goes well beyond a survey of extant scholarship. When I decided to explore the early modern European witch hunts through a feminist and queer theoretical lens, it was with the expectation that I would be joining a vibrant discourse community already doing exactly this. Despite coming in with the knowledge that witchcraft historiography is a relatively young field and that it has been dominated by cisgender, white men—with the scholarship of women often sidelined and discounted, if not

actively undermined and attacked (Vetere 120-121, Hodgkin 273-274)—I was surprised to learn that this project would be breaking entirely new ground.

At the heart of the conceptualization and framing of this undertaking is the work of Cathy J. Cohen, who wrote in 2019:

In the vision of queer politics that motivated me in “Punks,” individuals like Michael Brown and Rekia Boyd are important queer subjects not because of their sexual practice, identity, or performance but because they, as well as other young and poor folks of color, operate in the world as queer subjects: the targets of racial normalizing projects intent on pathologizing them across the dimensions of race, class, gender, and sexuality, simultaneously making them into deviants while normalizing their degradation and marginalization until it becomes what we expect — the norm — until it becomes something that we no longer pay attention to.

In this journal article (“The Radical Potential” 142), Cohen is referring to two of the countless Black people murdered by police officers in the United States in the years since her groundbreaking 1997 article, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” As I write this, thinking about dominant power and oppression, my heart is heavy for the same reason that there have been massive protests in the streets of Minneapolis, outside the White House and across the country. On Monday, May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, was slowly, brutally, and brazenly murdered by police officers in Minneapolis on a public street in full daylight. With four officers on the scene, one of them pinned Floyd—already handcuffed—to the ground and knelt on his neck. He gasped that he couldn’t breathe, that his neck hurt, that they were going to kill him. He begged for his life, as

did many onlookers trying to intervene on his behalf, until he went limp, and blood started coming from his nose. At one point, perhaps when he knew that death was inevitable, Floyd cried out for his deceased mother. Four minutes after Floyd lost consciousness, an ambulance arrived, and a medic reached under the cop's knee—still on Floyd's neck—to look for a pulse. They loaded him onto a stretcher, into the ambulance and away from the scene. George Floyd was pronounced dead approximately an hour later (“George Floyd”). This followed a string of racist murders, attacks and other incidents by both police and white members of the general public in the United States in the weeks leading up to Floyd's murder—and those have continued to the time of this writing in July 2021, with a significant increase in harassment and attacks against people of Asian descent “reminiscent of the kind faced by American Muslims, Arabs and South Asians in the United States after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001” (Tavernise and Oppel Jr.). In this case, however, this harassment and violence has been actively stoked by the former president of the United States “as bigots blame them for the coronavirus and President Trump labels it the ‘Chinese virus’” (Tavernise and Oppel Jr.).

While reading “Punks” for the fifth or sixth time over the course of my academic career, this time while studying the witch hunts, I realized that Cohen's words could just as easily apply to those who, amidst the witch hunts, were also “queer subjects not because of their sexual practice, identity, or performance but because they... operate in the world as queer subjects: the targets of... projects intent on pathologizing them... simultaneously making them into deviants while normalizing their degradation and marginalization until it becomes what we expect...” (The Radical Potential 142).

Given the historical and ongoing erasure, marginalization, exclusion, intellectual appropriation and outright theft of the labor, ideas and scholarship that scholars of color have

experienced and continue to endure within the academy, it is a fraught undertaking for a white scholar to make the work of a scholar of color the foundational element of an entire project—particularly one that deals with events half a millennium in the past in an area of the Global North that has, along with the author’s own country and countries of ancestry, been responsible for centuries of imperialism, colonialism, predatory global capitalism and countless wars and military campaigns of terror and plunder. My positionality as a queer, trans, older first-generation university student raised in a working poor home in no way offsets the tremendous privilege and access afforded me within the academy as a white, non-disabled person.

As a Sexuality, Gender, and Queer Studies major, I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to countless scholars of color—particularly trans women of color, who face the greatest marginalization—whose work has and continues to break new ground and forms the foundation and inspiration for so much of the scholarship and so many of the advancements in these three areas of study, along with so many others. I reject in the strongest terms the prevailing notion within white academia that only knowledge produced within the academy or other privileged institutions, organizations and venues is legitimate—as well as the ways in which generated knowledge is locked behind pay walls and other elitist, exclusionary mechanisms. In fact, as I write this amidst the global COVID-19 pandemic, I am more keenly aware than ever before that some of the most valuable iterative knowledge production, as well as the most effective application of that organically evolving knowledge, happens outside the halls of power and privilege—very often in the streets—by those who have been made to learn and live by the ethos of our street medics: “We take care of us.” It has been Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and in particular LGBTQ2IA+ women and gender expansive BIPOC, who have generated invaluable “theory in the flesh” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 2015):

A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives — our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings — all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity.

It is with the deepest sense of gratitude and humility then that I take inspiration, knowledge, and wisdom from the work of Cathy J. Cohen and other scholars of color, in concert with the many other scholars within the discourse community gathered here, as I approach this project. I have found, with Owen Davies and Jonathan Barry, that “scholars of witchcraft have often been pioneers of new forms of historical study and interdisciplinary developments, as the subject touches upon many fundamental issues regarding the human experience both in the past and the present” (Barry 2007). In keeping with that tradition and by examining scholarship on and adjacent to the early modern European witch hunts through an intersectional queer theoretical lens, this paper makes important connections and bridges gaps that have heretofore gone unattended.

When women became witches and witches became women

Justly we may say with Cato of Utica: If the world could be rid of women, we should not be without God in our intercourse. For truly, without the wickedness of women, to say nothing of witchcraft, the world would still remain proof against innumerable dangers.

— *Malleus Maleficarum*, Part I, Question VI

There were a vast many ways a woman might become a witch during this period and there were few corners of her constricted social sphere where she was not in ever-present danger of this, especially in light of her diminishing legal protections (Wiesner-Hanks 54). “Married women were almost continuously pregnant or nursing” and could expect to lose almost half their children before they reached five years of age (Barstow, *Witchcraze* 141). In this physically and

emotionally grueling environment, and in line with the general trend of stripping women of their social and bodily autonomy (Wiesner-Hanks 54), “penalties for attempting or performing an abortion after the child had quickened grew increasingly harsh during the early modern period” (76), during which time “more women were executed for infanticide...than any other crime except witchcraft” (77). In at least one region, a guilty verdict came with an accusation of being a witch, because it was reasoned that “only the devil could lead a mother to kill her child.” Given this logic, it is not surprising that the methods of execution for abortion were no less horrific than those for witch trials; these included “being impaled on a stake and then buried alive, or having the offending hand cut off before being drowned” (77). With that snapshot of the environment in mind, let us step back and look at how women and femininity itself—long assailed and denigrated in religious, philosophical, and popular text (22-31)—came to be very literally demonized in the Christian supremacist, witch-phobic literature and lore of the time (286-282).

Contemporary texts like the *Malleus Maleficarum* (“the *Malleus*”) potently codified and weaponized historical, ambient sexism and provided both the justification and the tools of misogyny with which to police and enforce patriarchal hegemony and the dominant ideology of male supremacy through the criminalization of women via the witch hunts. While it is by no means the only text of its kind, the *Malleus* remains “arguably the most misogynist of witchcraft treatises” (Wiesner-Hanks 290) and was without parallel in its role as a witch-hunting manual that literally demonized women, with a particular focus on their sexuality. (The opportunity to handle and examine a first edition of the *Malleus* housed in the Special Collections at the Portland State University Library was part of the impetus for this project.) The *Malleus* was first published in Germany in 1486 and, to illustrate its rapid rise and enduring popularity, there were “six editions before 1500, at least 13 by 1520, another 16 by 1669” (Barstow, *Witchcraze* 171).

Krämer's apparent inspiration for the *Malleus* speaks volumes to the ideology and motivation behind it, as well as to the misogynist invective against women and femininity that it contains. After being designated a witchcraft inquisitor by Pope Innocent VIII in 1484 and receiving authorization to hunt witches in southern Germany, alongside Jacob (James) Sprenger, a Dominican theologian, "Krämer oversaw the trial and execution of several groups—all of them women" (Wiesner-Hanks 289). When local authorities intervened, to the point of banishing Krämer for "his use of torture and his extreme views on the power of witches," Krämer took up the pen and channeled his religious zealotry and misogynist rage into the creation of the *Malleus*, and then "added Sprenger's name as co-author because he was more prominent and respected" (289). The written decree from Innocent VIII was included in the preface and this papal *Summis Desiderantes*, or *witch-bull*, "recognized the existence of witches and the authority of inquisitors to do what was necessary to get rid of them" (Broedel 15). This granted Krämer sweeping authority that few dared oppose, even verbally. As if to ensure this, Kramer made clear on the title page of the *Malleus* the fate of anyone who might feel inspired to be the voice of reason. "Haeresis est maxima opera maleficarum non credere (To disbelieve in witchcraft is the greatest of heresies).' Thus, to express disbelief in witchcraft was taken as virtually an admission of being a witch" (Neave 4).

With his arguments in the *Malleus*, Krämer sought to "demonstrate the existence and prevalence of witchcraft and the terrible threat it poses" (Broedel 3), as well as to provide "a guide for civil and ecclesiastical authorities to the successful detection and prosecution of witches" (4). The *Malleus* became Krämer's weapon of misogynist terror and mass murder, and the full title makes clear the purpose for which it was written: *The Hammer of Witches which destroyeth Witches and their heresy as with a two-edged sword* (Schuyler 20). Krämer was not

seeking to merely find and convict witches, or even to simply have them executed: his aim was to *destroy* them, and the brutality of his methods and those of the myriad others he inspired bear this out.

In the 2006 inaugural issue of the peer-reviewed scholarly journal, *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, Michael D. Bailey—founding associate editor—offers a balanced assessment of Broedel’s *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft*. A historian of the European Middle Ages now at Iowa State University, Bailey observes of Broedel’s effort that “by exploring the work’s uniqueness, he seeks to uncover what made it for several centuries such a compelling statement of the idea of witchcraft” (*The Malleus Maleficarum* 124), noting that Broedel does not seek to inflate the reach or influence of the *Malleus* beyond what evidence supports. Bailey highlights Broedel’s assertion that Heinrich Krämer was surely influenced by the same cocktail of superstition that would drive the influence of the *Malleus* upon its publication: not only the theory and dogma of the religious order to which Krämer belonged, but by the popular beliefs of “ordinary laypeople” that he encountered in the course of his investigations (125). According to Broedel, this hybrid nature of the *Malleus* no doubt contributed to its approachability, enduring popularity, and influence among both religious and secular authorities, as well as laypeople.

In a 2002 article in the peer-reviewed scholarly journal *Essays in Medieval Studies* entitled “The Feminization of Magic and the Emerging Idea of the Female Witch in the Late Middle Ages,” Bailey finds that Krämer drew key elements of his “profoundly misogynistic work” (Bailey, “The Feminization of Magic” 120) in the *Malleus* from Johannes Nider’s *Formicarius*, first printed in 1475—approximately 11 years before the first edition of the *Malleus* appeared. Bailey observes that Nider, a German theologian, offers the “earliest appearance of a strong

association between women and witchcraft in authoritative literature” (121) when Nider asserts that the “female proclivity for witchcraft, ultimately based on longstanding Christian conceptions of the physical, mental, and spiritual weaknesses of women, and their greater susceptibility to the temptations of the devil” (122). Krämer lifted much of this wholesale for use in the *Malleus*, but went further and narrowed his focused indictment of women and witchcraft to the realm of sexuality, saying that “all witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which in women is insatiable” (120). According to Bailey, the connection of women to witchcraft “was developed most completely and ruthlessly in the...*Malleus Maleficarum*” and came as a result of Krämer’s deeply sexist views of women as simple creatures prone to carnal lust and temptation who were, as a result, easily led astray.

One of Bailey’s most important contributions in this paper, however, is his observation that the sexist views of the clergy during the Middle Ages, as well as prevailing notions of gender, “actually made difficult the belief that women might be the chief practitioners of powerful, threatening, and terribly effective demonic sorcery” (121). Especially key to our project are Bailey’s findings in terms of when this changed, how, and the ways in which this shift drove the feminization of witchcraft thereafter. Bailey notes that “clerical authorities in the tenth and eleventh centuries had no difficulty associating such magical activity with women” (125), but this was largely due to the fact that they saw it as relatively “harmless superstitious belief and susceptibility to demonic deception,” which did not trouble in any way their male supremacist views. This began to shift in the twelfth century and continued to do so through the thirteenth, wherein the clergy “began to take magic and especially demonic maleficium, the practice of harmful sorcery that would form an important basis for the idea of witchcraft, much more seriously” (125). As Western European intellectuals discovered or reacquainted themselves with

a “whole host of classical, Hebrew, and Arabic text on occult arts,” their interest in and respect for the potential power and influence of magic and demonic power grew. Necromancy, in particular, seems to have drawn both fascination and concern—perhaps because it was “a specifically learned, indeed often specifically clerical form of demonic invocation for magical purposes.” This growing concern over the increasingly credible power and danger of magic continued through the fourteenth century, when it was increasingly argued that “magic was necessarily demonic, that it entailed pacts made with demons, and that those pacts always involved the worship of demons” (125).

Necromancy was thought to require “skill, training, preparation, and above all education,” and thus the practitioner “had to be intelligent and have a certain force of will to work his magic” (126)—with “his” being a key term here, as surely the complexity of necromancy, while never explicitly named an exclusively male domain, disqualified women out of hand. The decisive pivot came when Nider offered in the *Formicarius* both examples and explanations of witchcraft that rattled establishment conceptions of what witches—“typically not highly trained or educated”—were capable of, both individually and collectively. While their methods differed greatly from those of necromancers, “in the minds of clerical authorities the witch controlled and directed exactly the same sort of real and effective demonic power” (127) by making a pact with the devil and submitting to him. Importantly, “[a]s demonology mixed with popular beliefs, witchcraft was increasingly associated with women, for witches were now understood to be dependent agents of a male devil rather than independently directing demons themselves, which fit general notions of proper gender roles” (Wiesner-Hanks 282). With this turn, “witches were no longer simply people who used magical power to get what they wanted but rather people used by the devil to do what he wanted” (281) and, since the devil was almost universally depicted as

male, the implication was that only women, being “more passive and weaker not just physically but also morally and intellectually” (287) could be thus ensnared. Importantly for the purposes of the witch hunters was the fact that now “witchcraft was thus not a question of what one did but of what one was” (281). In short, this shift in thinking inspired by the *Formicarius*, combined with evolving popular beliefs, put the now credible and increasingly disturbing power of demonic invocation and magic into the hands of not just the common masses but, most terrifyingly, into the hands of women.

 Tempting as it might be to want the simplicity of attributing the atrocities of the witch hunts to Nider and Krämer, aided and explicitly authorized by Innocent VIII and the *Summis Desiderantes*, this would grant these men far more power and influence than they merit. It does not diminish their roles in the depraved horrors of the hunts to say that all three were products and puppets of the cultural moment and everything that came before as much as they were contributors to it. Both the *Malleus* and the papal witch bull are little more than regurgitations, aggregations, and adaptations of dominant thinking of the time, simply paraphrasing and expanding on the violently male-supremacist rhetoric found in other religious and secular texts, including the Christian *Bible*. Wiesner-Hanks makes the important point that “[t]he authors of other important works on witchcraft included leading political philosophers and scientists, who saw the power of witches as part of the natural world they were seeking to understand and explain” (280), which in her view—having explored in detail the full sweep of the environment and dynamics around women and gender in early modern Europe—makes very clear that “the witch hunts were not marginal events involving ill-educated villagers and fanatical clergy but rather a central part of the early modern era” (280). That said, as I imply in my title, *fanatical clergy* turned ambient smoke into a raging, deadly fire and their sexist, Christian supremacist

decrees and other texts were used as propaganda, inspiration, and moral justification for the horrors they inspired—destroying countless lives and leading to the persecution and murder of tens of thousands of people, the majority of whom were women. In short, while the *Formicarius*, *Malleus* and *Summis Desiderantes* were not the only witch-phobic, misogynist screeds of the time, they are unique and invaluable historical artifacts in that they provide deadly distillations of the ideology and, in the case of the *Malleus*, show it to have been resonant enough to have been reprinted at least 35 times and used to justify hundreds of years of violent persecution and terror throughout Europe, primarily directed at women.

As painful as these texts are to read, especially in light of the unfathomable persecution, terror, torture and death that they seem to have inspired and been deployed to justify, they are also essential to an examination of how witches have been rendered queer subjects by dominant culture and hegemonic power structures, regardless of how they were conceptualized and what they were accused of—let alone what they were actually doing. Whether the clergy actually believed in the power of witchcraft or simply saw a timely opportunity to strike fear in the masses in order to shore up their own credibility and consolidate power is something that will never be proven definitively because, alas, it would take powerful necromancy indeed for investigators today to depose the subjects and witnesses. What we can do, however, is examine the history, the contemporary context, the growing body of evidence, and the trajectory of historical events that followed and do our best to deduce implicit motivations from there.

The woman's body as damning evidence and coerced confessional

Not only is a witch defined as an ugly, aggressive, lustful old woman prone to devilish and malicious acts, but she is also the femme fatale in that she is young, attractive, seductive, and imbued with the chilling power of emasculation.

— Dorinda Neave in “The Witch in Early 16th-Century German Art,” p. 6

Much of the violently misogynistic rhetoric and visual depictions of women as witches during the early modern period might seem incredible to a reader today in light of how almost comically outlandish they appear now. In a class I took studying the witch hunts (“Witchcraft as Cultural Imaginary”), there was uncomfortable laughter in the room at points as we read excerpts from the *Malleus*, the *Formicarius*, and the papal witch bull. Of course, the tone turned somber and the laughter gave way to silent horror as we learned about how these preposterously sexist assertions were not only believed, but were acted upon and considered credible evidence in the context of witchcraft investigations, trials and for far too many people, protracted torture and murder at the hands of the state. Just as there were innumerable mundane things a woman might *do* that could draw an accusation of being a witch, so too were there countless physical attributes a woman might have that could be cited as damning evidence—either contributing to a prosecutorial investigation or, in the case of anything that could be deemed the “devil’s mark” or the “witch’s mark,” be considered the equivalent of a smoking gun in the hand of the accused.

In her paper “The Witch in Early 16th-Century German Art,” Dorinda Neave offers a survey of “how artists visually reinforced the anti-female rhetoric of the witch hunters and in doing so shared in the expansion and perpetration of the stereotype of the woman as a dangerous witch” (3), in what became tantamount to a misogynist circle jerk centered on the demonization of women’s bodies and the twisted fantasies of their imagined sexuality. The earliest illustrations depicting witches began to appear—primarily in German art—around 1500 (Neave 4). This provenance is not surprising to Neave, “[g]iven that Germany was the birthplace of ‘organized witchcraft,’ the home of esteemed inquisitors and prominent authors on witchcraft, and the country that appeared to harbor the most witches in Europe...” (4). Albrecht Dürer, whose

“iconology stems directly from the demonologists' writings” (4), was one of the earliest artists and the witch in his engraving entitled *Witch Riding Backwards on a Goat*, dated to approximately 1500, “is portrayed as a naked old woman with sagging breasts” and, as promised in the title of the piece, she is indeed “mounted backward on a goat and flies aggressively past a hailstorm...” (4).

The ageist views of women were not limited to their appearance; this was always inextricably intertwined with their behavior, much of which was either imagined or, in the case of mundane things the accused woman was actually observed to have said or done, twisted into some diabolical deed that was taken as proof she was a maleficent witch. This was fueled by the fact that Krämer considered the lived reality of an aging woman to be such a disappointing and deplorable state that he declared in the *Malleus* that “old women were particularly prone to practicing witchcraft, chiefly because old women's spirits were often ‘inflamed with malice or rage’” (4). Silvia Federici observes that the “witch-hunt turned the image of the old woman upside down: traditionally considered a wise woman, she became a symbol of sterility and hostility to life” (193).

Even as she was reviled as sterile and hostile to life, the texts and images of the time portrayed “the old witch flying on her broom...the projection of an extended penis, symbol of an unbridled lust” (Federici 192). So she was simultaneously unattractive, barren—and driven by insatiable carnal lust, to the point that she would give herself over to the devil and his demons in order to have sex with them. Federici makes the important point that the general sexist sentiment behind this conceptualization of the older woman was not entirely new or unique to the context of the witch hunts, but that in “the creation of this stereotype the demonologists conformed to the moral sensibility of their time...” (192). Federici is referring to a growing patriarchal awareness,

concern and “repulsion that non-procreative sexuality was beginning to inspire”—one “that denied the ‘old and ugly’ woman, no longer fertile, the right to a sexual life” (192).

Federici’s observations and analysis seem especially astute in light of the fact that “more women were executed for infanticide...than any other crime except witchcraft” (Wiesner-Hanks 77). She notes this as the “first step in the long march towards...the transformation of female sexual activity into work, a service to men, and procreation,” and the demonization and criminalization of everything else was central to this. This being the case, it was not only old women who were targeted, but they do appear based on all available evidence to comprise the majority; “most European victims were older, over fifty” (Barstow, *Witchcraze* 27).

As though to remove any doubt of their own deep insecurities that inspired their loathing of women, men in various positions throughout the church and society believed that women had the power to not only render them impotent or infertile, but in some cases to actually deprive them of their most prized possession: their penis. Referring to this in the witch bull, Innocent VIII bemoaned the fact that witches “hinder men from performing the sexual act and women from conceiving, whence husbands cannot know their wives nor wives receive their husband” (qtd. in Neave 4). Much of the artwork and witchcraft literature of the time makes clear that this anxiety was at the heart of the patriarchal fear of witches.

Witches who just weren’t man enough

It is well documented and undisputed that men were ensnared in the witch hunts, and in rare cases, men even comprised the majority of those tried and executed in a given area (Barstow, *Witchcraze* 179-181). These individuals certainly deserve to be remembered and to have the facts of their suffering, persecution, prosecution, and deaths analyzed, understood, and recognized in the annals of history. What is critically important in this author’s view, however, is

that this fact is not allowed to distract or detract from the clear evidence that the witch hunts were overwhelmingly “a clear example of organised state violence against women” (Jackson 71), as well as one of societal and religious persecution and terror, fueled by religious fanaticism and millennia of patriarchy and sexism. While men comprised approximately 20 percent of those tried as witches and 15 percent of those executed (Barstow, *On Studying Witchcraft* 7), the vast majority of victims were women. In Essex, for example, just 23 of the 291 accused witches were men, and eleven of these “were either married to an accused witch or appeared in a joint indictment with a woman” (Macfarlane 160).

Laura Kounine invites us to challenge the way we have come to think about gender in our analysis of historical events, particularly in regard to the witchcraft trials in the Lutheran duchy of Württemberg of early modern Germany. In her 2013 article “The Gendering of Witchcraft: Defence Strategies of Men and Women in German Witchcraft Trials” in the peer-reviewed journal *German History*, Kounine “examines what ‘gender’ meant, and how it shaped and constituted experience for men and women caught up in witchcraft trials in early modern Germany” (295). Kounine, Lecturer in Early Modern History at the University of Sussex, deploys convincing evidence for her claim that it wasn’t a straightforward undertaking to prove that someone was a “good” or “bad” man or woman, and this ambiguity rendered the witch trials that much more dangerous (296).

Kounine’s work—in concert with that of a great many others—shows that no one is exempt from the tyranny of patriarchy, sexism and femmephobia, including men. Patriarchy and sexism do not, as it turns out, reserve their dominance, control, and violence for women, but for people of all genders who do not live up to the impossible ideal of what a woman or man should be, including cisgender men. That said, and as the witch hunts illustrate well, by definition

women and people of genders other than that of cisgender man bear the brunt of this sexist tyranny and violence.

Kounine sets out to address “one key historiographical problem” that vexed the claims of scholars like Diane Purkiss, Lyndal Roper and Ingrid Ahrendt-Schulte that “the witch represented the female ‘other’” (297): the existence, prosecution and even executions of male witches. Kounine reviews the “three ‘traditional’ theses” (297) summarized by Lara Apps and Andrew Gow for the presence of men in the witch trials. In short, these are 1) men related to female suspects, 2) men caught up in areas of mass panic and 3) men in areas where trials focused on witchcraft as heresy (297). Through a sweeping review of germane scholarship, Kounine shows how these traditional theses have been challenged by two different lines of argument.

The first, by Apps and Gow—drawing on the work of Stuart Clark—“argues that male witches were implicitly feminized” (Apps and Gow qtd. in Kounine 298), not based on their sexuality or mannerisms, but on the thinking of the time that “it was primarily the weak-minded (especially women) who could be duped by the Devil into becoming his servants” (Apps and Gow qtd. in Kounine 298). They make the bold and pioneering (within witchcraft historiography) assertion that “the male witch suggests that biological sex was not, at the conceptual level, the primary characteristic of the witch; gender was” (Apps and Gow qtd. in Kounine 298). The tyranny of a witchcraft accusation against a man, then, was that it at once indicted him as a witch and retroactively feminized him by assigning to him the traits of witches. Not surprisingly, this thesis has not gone unassailed.

There are various voices in the chorus of dissent against the idea of the implicitly feminized male witch. Willem De Blécourt asserts that male witches were “a male ‘other’”

(298), and Elizabeth Kent agrees: they weren't feminized so much as they "were seen to have contravened specifically male codes of behaviour" (298). Kounine introduces the work of a number of scholars whose "regional studies of male witchcraft" (298) supports this thesis. Malcolm Gaskill finds that the confessions of most male witches reveal "not only their social and religious failure, but a failure of masculinity" (Gaskill qtd. in Kounine 299). Gaskill has since gone on to advocate for a different lens where "the 'witch' should constitute its own historical category, which 'deserves to be taken at least as seriously as gender'" (Gaskill qtd. in Kounine 299), and Alison Rowlands agrees, contending that "the witch as a "bad neighbour" ... is thus a potentially more useful conceptual category than that of the masculine or feminine "other"" (Rowlands qtd. in Kounine 299). Kounine finds that "we must question instead *how* and *to what extent* gender was intrinsic to the identity of the witch" (299).

Kounine analyzes actual trial records from "the Lutheran duchy of Württemberg, the largest territory in south-west Germany, with a population of between 300,000 and 450,000 inhabitants" (300) and has enough data on witchcraft investigations, trials, and executions in this area between 1497 and 1750 to make it a rich case study. Importantly, she asserts that the corpus of these trial records shows that "close readings can move beyond the gendered binaries that have dominated the study of early modern witch-hunting" (300).

In a section entitled "Men and Masculinities," Kounine notes that the trials studied "were a site where 'gender' was constituted, contested and experienced in different ways by different people" (307). In the case of men who were brought to trial as witches, she finds that—in the words of Robert Walinski-Kiehl speaking of witch trials in Bamberg—"male suspects' behaviour... 'often violated expectations of masculinity embodied in the ideal of the honest, reliable, married household head' (Kounine 299). A woman, on the other hand, was suspect if

she strayed far from being “either at home or out with her husband” (308). If she was “not under the protection of a man... she was free and unbridled, and thus highly threatening” (308).

Kounine arrives at a conclusion that is perhaps less surprising for a reader today than it might have been at any time prior, given what we know about the complex universe of gender: within her geotemporal target of study, there were no clean, distinct binary ways to delineate good or evil men or women. She insists that “one must incorporate the knowledge that different forms of femininity and masculinity could exist within any given society” (311). Kounine observes that “we can thus trace patterns in these trials” (316), noting her findings that “there was clearly no such thing as a good nomadic woman; nor was it likely that an independent woman, without the protection of a male authority, would be likely to escape a charge of witchcraft” (316). The cases of men, on the other hand, were more complex. In one case, the accused was “a lax, even murderous, husband and father, a poor provider, and an ungodly man”... who escaped any conviction “despite not living up to the hegemonic—patriarchal—ideal of masculinity” (315).

Though Kounine closes with the warning that “gender is a useful category of analysis...only if we use it to ask questions, not confirm answers” (316), her full body of evidence—from both her analysis of the trial records, as well as her deep engagement with a formidable discourse community—seems to add importance to, but ultimately shore up the findings of other scholars that men were afforded far more independence than women in their day-to-day lives and far greater lenience in the context of witchcraft accusations and trials.

The virgin-whore / saint-witch dichotomy

In her 2006 article “Witches, Saints, and Heretics: Heinrich Krämer’s Ties with Italian Women Mystics,” Tamar Herzig, director of the Morris E. Curiel Institute for European Studies

at Tel Aviv University, offers up something that had been, to that point, disregarded by “most of the works that deal with early modern demonology—and virtually all the studies published in the English language” (Herzig, *Witches* 30). What Herzig explores is the last 18 years of Heinrich Krämer’s life—the years that followed the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* in 1487 until his death in 1505. In Herzig’s view, this neglected information complicates the common historical view of Krämer’s motivation for his campaign of terror in the witch hunts as “a chaste friar’s fear of female sexuality” (29), and then, for more recent scholars, “late-medieval clerical discontent with the supernatural abilities and social prestige of saintly female mystics” (30). All of these scholars, according to Herzig, have based their entire analysis and estimation of Krämer on his most infamous creation: the *Malleus Maleficarum*.

Herzig, by analyzing previously neglected sources of information regarding the latter years of Krämer’s life, finds that he actively and ardently promoted and supported—in both speech and publication—“the four best-known Italian holy women of his time” (31). Krämer went so far as to publish multiple “polemical tracts” in defense of these women when their saintliness was called into question by detractors; one of these tracts was entitled *On the Stigmata of the Virgin Lucia of Narni and of the Deeds of Other Spiritual Persons of the Female Sex that are Worthy of Admiration* (44).

Herzig provides compelling evidence, complete with 102 footnotes across 31 pages, for her argument that while “there is no denying that there was a misogynistic aspect to Krämer’s writing about women” (55), his “view of the female nature was clearly not as simplistic as it has often been portrayed in modern scholarship” (55). No one could deny this point after reading Herzig’s well-researched piece. It is not the evidence that Herzig has marshaled or her treatment of it that leaves her conclusion feeling as though it has missed the mark and rings hollow. Rather,

it is the way the paper on the whole seems intent on making Krämer out to be a less deplorable character—even one who exerted himself to further the interests of select women. What is hinted at, but in such an oblique way as to make the reader ever in doubt as to whether this is what Herzig might be alluding to, is the fact that chivalrous behavior on the part of the worst misogynists and abusers of women are not an exception; it is very much part of the script.

Rhea Ashley Hoskin refers to this dynamic as *benevolent sexism*, “which is the belief that women are to be cherished, protected, and valued” (Glick and Fiske qtd. in Hoskin 695) and, while this is “seemingly positive, benevolent sexism marks women and, by extension, those who are feminine as innately vulnerable and in need of protection.” Yes, Krämer was championing the cause of “*Spiritual Persons of the Female Sex that are Worthy of Admiration*” (Herzig 44), but the presumed access to and condescension with which he gazes, assesses, and ultimately deigns to issue his support renders the women vulnerable and implies a need of protection and patronage in the form of this saving cleric’s approval, which the dominant male supremacist church and broader culture have fully deputized him with the power to grant or withhold as he sees fit.

In the case of Krämer, women who were saintly (in his estimation), chaste (as he trusted) and well behaved (in line with his subjective standards and loyal to male superiors)—in short, a “most saintly virgin” (40)—drew his praise and his condescensions in the form of support and active promotion. In other words, women were likely safe who embodied and behaved in the ways deemed acceptable according to gender norms and relations, as well as women whose power and approval came from the church and from a sponsoring man or men, and who operated in service and deference to the church and this sponsoring man or men. Any woman who fell far afield of this, however, merited nothing short of persecution, torture, and death.

Far from making Krämer a more complicated, nuanced character who we should recognize as having not been all bad for all women, this additional information and analysis from Herzig only serves as a reminder that simply because one person—or even many people—knows someone to have been a decent human being based on their own observations, opinions, and experience doesn't mean they are to all people at all times. In the case of Krämer, for example, the fact that he chose to spare and even favor a select number of women in no way redeems this monstrosity of a sadistic misogynist whose publications and deeds likely inspired and provided justification for tens of thousands of people, mostly women, suffering the worst abuses, repeated torture in the grisliest of ways and, in far too many cases, death—either burned alive or their bodies burned following hanging, strangulation or beheading. It cannot have been lost on Krämer that “[w]hereas the saintly female mystic was revered as an emblem of piety, her mirror-image, the witch, was believed to be the embodiment of evil, who deliberately inverted orthodox religion by engaging in diabolic rites” (Herzig 24); indeed, this was a fine line of distinction that Krämer not only knew well, but one atop which he stood as a ruthless inquisitor, playing fast and loose with women's lives in determining on which side of this line to place them.

European men: Becoming the demons they projected onto the Other

You are the Devil's gateway. You are the first deserter of the divine Law.... You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert, that is death, even the Son of God had to die.

— Tertullian, addressing women, qtd in Wiesner-Hanks, p. 26

While sexism and misogyny had thrived in Europe long before the early modern period, Anne Llewellyn Barstow observes that “the dramatic events of the witch persecutions reinforced the received traditions of misogyny and patriarchal control, narrowing women's status and

demonizing the image of women in a damaging way.” She makes a point that this author has seen no evidence to refute when she asserts that “it can be argued that [women] have never entirely recovered since” (*Witchcraze* 12).

As I found myself simultaneously studying the Atlantic slave trade (16th to 19th centuries), European imperialism and colonialism, specifically in the Americas (15th to 19th centuries), and the early modern European witch hunts (15th to 18th centuries) for three different projects, I was struck by the reminder that these events not only happened during the same period, but that they were carried out by wealthy, white, Christian, European men who were, in the case of Christopher Columbus, “motivated more by religious zeal...than by a ‘modern’ desire to explore the unknown” (Wiesner-Hanks 10). In reality, of course, there were many factors and motivations at play that can be summarized as a desire by European states, religions, business interests and individual men to expand their reach and dominion, grow and consolidate their power, and source and extract ever more resources that could be transformed into wealth. In short, the early modern period saw white European men engaged in not only voracious expansion on an unprecedented scale, but in some of the worst crimes against humanity in history in their efforts to accomplish this.

In the Americas, the European colonizers were engaged in “a culture of conquest—violence, expropriation, destruction, and dehumanization,” leveraging knowledge, experience, and resources they had gained through the “Crusades to conquer North Africa and the Middle East, leading to unprecedented wealth in the hands of a few” (Dunbar-Ortiz 32). They employed their knowledge and resources with depraved zeal in the so-called *New World*, “razing and destroying enemy villages and fields; killing enemy women and children; raiding settlements for captives; intimidating and brutalizing enemy noncombatants; and assassinating enemy

leaders...” (John Grenier qtd. in Dunbar-Ortiz 56). As far apart as the genocide in the Americas was from the witch hunts in Europe, they were connected by the ideology that drove both: “In language reminiscent of that used to condemn witches, they quickly identified the Indigenous populations as inherently children of Satan and ‘servants of the devil’ who deserved to be killed” (Dunbar-Ortiz 36).

Turning to the transatlantic slave trade, agreement on precise figures is hard to come by—as with the witch hunts and other ignominious historical events—but scholarly opinions have coalesced around numbers in the range of those offered by David Brion Davis, who tells us that the practice “persisted for 366 years and resulted in the forced deportation of 12.5 million Africans to the New World” (Davis xvii). The conditions were horrific, with each person laying in a space roughly the size of a coffin (Johnson 4). The voyages, depending on the route and other factors, could take anywhere from six weeks to nearly three months and on the longer journeys, “nearly one in six captives taken on board died” (Eltis 160). Those that survived the journey found themselves in a white supremacist dystopia:

a masculine social world in which being a ‘good judge of slaves’ was a noteworthy public identity, a world of manly one-upsmanship in which knowledge of slaves’ bodies was bandied back and forth as white men cemented social ties and articulated a hierarchy among themselves through shared participation in the inspection and evaluation of black slaves... (Johnson 137)

Barstow explores these connections between European imperialism, racism and the misogyny of the witch hunts, noting that “the witch hunts took place at the same time as colonial expansion and the Atlantic slave trade” (*Witchcraze* 12), and she goes on to illustrate the ways in which “the European ruling elite valorized certain European women much as it did African

slaves and conquered natives, as objects to exploit and as useful symbols of all that European men claimed they were not” (12).

Enlightenment philosophers recognized and wrote that “[t]he ‘forces of darkness’... were the authorities who had persecuted generally harmless people for witchcraft, not the witches themselves” (Wiesner-Hanks 279), and the same can certainly be said in regard to the brutal genocides throughout the Americas, as well as nearly 400 years of the Atlantic slave trade. While one will be hard pressed to find a great deal to quibble with in the 2019 fourth edition of Wiesner-Hanks’s venerable *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, her statement that “[t]he witch hunts were the most extreme example of the misguided and irrational nature of religion” (279) might give one pause. Looking across the sweep of European history from the Middle Ages onward, we can see the ways in which religion was used to justify some of the most brazen and bloody land and power grabs seen during this period of time. One might wonder then whether it was truly “the misguided and irrational nature of religion,” or whether religion was merely calculated to be, among all options under consideration, the most powerful tool with which to charge into a morally bankrupt campaign of terror and theft. Was religion, too, deemed useful as the ultimate get-out-of-Hades-free card for any genocidal foot soldiers who might experience a twinge of conscience as they carried out some of the most depraved crimes against humanity in history? After all, who were they to question the mouthpiece of god on earth?

It was a papal decree (by Pope Innocent VIII) that officially authorized and unleashed the mostly violently unhinged period of the witch hunts and pope Alexander VI who issued a papal decree that not only “asserts the rights of Spain and Portugal to colonize, convert, and enslave,” but it specifically “justifies the enslavement of Africans,” as well (“Pope Asserts Rights to Colonize, Convert, and Enslave” pars. 1-2). Lest anyone protest or question the authority of the

colonizers, they had merely to brandish the papal decree, which explicitly declared them and “your said heirs and successors lords of them with full and free power, authority, and jurisdiction of every kind...,” and they were no doubt emboldened by the fact that it was granted by none other than “the authority of Almighty God conferred upon us in blessed Peter and of the vicarship of Jesus Christ, which we hold on earth” (par. 2).

Layered atop the male supremacist patriarchal culture of the time, this “theological racism” (Jaimes 317) is “predicated on Eurocentric myths interpreted from biblical scripture that a ‘chosen’ people are meant to have dominion over nature and others as they subdue the Earth (Genesis 1: 28)” (317). This was the beginning of what would come to be called “manifest destiny” and the “Doctrine of Discovery,” which still informs international law and territorial disputes to this day, with U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg citing it to rule against the Oneida Indian Nation of New York in 2005 (Sunderlin).

In early modern Europe where a woman was seen, at her most noble, as a faithful, silent and submissive appendage to her husband and, at worst—according to Jacques Cujas in 1606— “[a] woman, properly speaking, is not a human being” (Wiesner-Hanks 22) at all, it is little wonder that European men received the mandates from the Bible and the pope not as something intended for white Europeans, but for white European *men*. Their unfettered dominion, their “full and free power, authority, and jurisdiction of every kind” was not merely over those beyond their borders, but over their own lands and everything in them—including the women and children. And given the fact that St. Augustine made it very clear that “only men were fully created in the image of God, and women were intellectually, physically, and morally inferior” (26), is it any wonder that European men unleashed the same misogynist fury and violence on the women among them as they did in their crusades of terror and genocide abroad?

The feminization of nature and the foundations of ecocide

Civilized Man says: I am Self, I am Master, all the rest is other—outside, below, underneath, subservient. I own, I use, I explore, I exploit, I control. What I do is what matters. What I want is what matter is for. I am that I am, and the rest is women & wilderness, to be used as I see fit.

Ursula Le Guin, qtd. in Tyler, p. 60

It might be credibly argued that this intensified domination and exploitation of the feminized body has extended to the traditionally feminized planet, as well—to *Mother Earth*, *Mother Nature* and the environment—and in 2021 we are seeing the rapidly-intensifying effects of this. Carolyn Merchant, Professor of Environmental History, Philosophy, and Ethics at the University of California, Berkeley, offers yet more evidence for this in a 2006 article “The Scientific Revolution and The Death of Nature” in the peer-reviewed scholarly journal *Isis*, a publication of the History of Science Society. This article provides a timely “twenty-five-year retrospective” on her 1980 book, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, and responds “to challenges to the argument that Francis Bacon’s rhetoric legitimated the control of nature” (Merchant, *The Scientific Revolution* 513).

Merchant’s 1980 book laid a groundbreaking critique at the feet of those who saw the Scientific Revolution in general—and Francis Bacon in particular—as benevolent agents that drove human progress in a manner above reproach. Merchant offers a powerful case—and some shockingly damning evidence—that Bacon saw nature, which he always referred to as female, as something to be subdued, dominated, and exploited. Indeed, he used very similar language and imagery to that employed by those who accused, persecuted, and murdered women during the witch hunts in early modern Europe (Merchant 518), alongside torture-related imagery he

invoked when talking about extracting value from nature (524). Addressing King James I of England in his 1623 *De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum*—an expanded version of his 1605 *The Advancement of Learning*—Bacon wrote (520):

For you have but to follow and as it were hound nature in her wanderings, and you will be able, when you like, to lead and drive her afterward to the same place again... Neither ought a man to make scruple of entering and penetrating into these holes and corners, when the inquisition of truth is his [sole] object—as your Majesty has shown in your own example; who, with the two clear and acute eyes of religion and natural philosophy, have looked deeply and wisely into those shadows...

Merchant argues that Bacon likely wrote this in reference to *Daemonologie*, the anti-witchcraft screed penned by James in 1597 in which he “denounced witchcraft and advocated the death of witches by fire” (519), and as a nod to James’s manifest obsession with witchcraft and his direct participation in the torture and murder of accused witches. Despite the fact that torture had long been banned in England, James and other Tudor and Stuart monarchs “ordered hangings, whippings, mutilations, and the pillory” (519), and he was personally involved in the questioning of the accused. In one such case:

Agnis Sampson had all her hair shaven off, in each part of her body, and her head thrown with a rope according to the custom of that country, being a paine most grievous, which she continued almost an hour, during which time she would not confess anything until the Devil’s mark was found upon her privates... (522)

Merchant details James’s obsession and notes that “both sexual torture and physical torture were integral components of the interrogation process” (523). While we cannot know for certain,

I do not envy the scholar who tries to argue against the case that Bacon seems to have taken this as inspiration in the ways in which he advocated for the interrogation and exploitation of a feminized nature and her secrets, as well.

Bacon, his peers and his intellectual heirs may have been inspired, too, by the words of Martin Luther, written some 100 years prior to Bacon's *De Dignitate* when, in *The Estate of Marriage* (1522), Luther wrote:

The woman should be subordinate and obedient to her husband and not undertake or do anything without his consent. Even if women bear themselves weary in childbirth—or ultimately bear themselves out—that does not hurt. Let them bear themselves out. This is the purpose for which they exist. (Luther qtd. in Wiesner-Hanks 22)

If anyone reading this can make the case that any country on earth has fought harder than the United States of America for the mantle and legacy of Francis Bacon, the author welcomes all evidence. The intersections are not subtle. Let us remember that, referring to the genocidal European colonizers in the Americas, Dunbar-Ortiz observes that “[i]n language reminiscent of that used to condemn witches, they quickly identified the Indigenous populations as inherently children of Satan and ‘servants of the devil’ who deserved to be killed” (Dunbar-Ortiz 36). How painfully well we know today that the ensuing genocide of that time has never ceased. If anything, the U.S. has doubled down on “its mistreatment of all groups of people who do not meet ‘white’ ideals of physical characteristics and ‘moral’ character” (Jaimes 318). Specific to the treatment of the feminized earth and the environment, the U.S. “has been particularly avaricious in targeting indigenous peoples with visible acts of genocide and ethnocide that can be correlated with ecocide” through acts of what has been referred to as “environmental racism,

because Indian lands have been targeted first for military sites, uranium mining, and toxic waste dumps” (318).

Would Bacon be pleased or, in surveying all that has transpired, horrified with how unflinchingly and relentlessly the patriarchal capitalist superpowers of the world have continued “to follow and as it were hound nature in her wanderings” (Merchant, *The Scientific Revolution* 520), to the point that Mother Earth—Turtle Island—has been driven to bear herself weary, to nearly bear herself out (Luther qtd. in Wiesner-Hanks 22)? From the titans of industry to the halls of Silicon Valley, from the fracking fields of the midwest to the drive to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge—behind whatever doublespeak might be in the press releases, the subtext always seems to bleed through: “This is the for purpose which they exist” (Luther qtd. in Wiesner-Hanks 22).

Expanding the queer umbrella

As mentioned earlier in this paper, it is Cathy J. Cohen’s 1997 article, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” in the peer-reviewed scholarly journal *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (“*GLQ*”) that inspired the focus for my research, and it will likely influence follow-on projects, as well. Cohen is the David and Mary Winton Green Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago.

This article has been assigned in three, perhaps four, of my classes within my Sexuality, Gender and Queer Studies major at Portland State University and this is not due to a lack of communication and coordination among faculty; it is simply the right foundational article for a variety of topics and I have found something new each time I have read it. When I read it last, I immediately thought about how the word “Witch” could be added to the title and fit very well

there. With Cohen, “I envision a politics where one's relation to power, and not some homogenized identity, is privileged in determining one's political comrades” (Cohen, *Punks* 438): a politics where we revisit our definition of “queer” and who we invite under its umbrella—and who we exclude.

In the course of writing this paper, I was thrilled to discover an article by Cohen in the January 2019 issue of *GLQ* entitled “The Radical Potential of Queer? Twenty Years Later.” This felt like the next best thing to sitting down to coffee with Cohen as she spoke plainly and directly to many of the things in her 1997 article that I had found most meaningful—and addressed some questions I have had, as well. Cohen begins the article by observing that “the things we write are never created in isolation, but often speak to and reflect the issues, conditions, and hopes that are most prevalent in our time and space” (Cohen, *The Radical Potential* 140). She goes on to share some contemporary factors that shaped her 1997 article, including: the HIV/AIDS crisis, “the devastation of poor communities and communities of color that resulted from...neoliberal policies and ideologies,” and “the emergence and solidification of both Black feminist and Black gay and lesbian communities during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s” (140).

In many instances, we cannot know the author's intent when they wrote something, so it is a gift to learn that I had not been misreading the passages of Cohen's 1997 article that I have drawn on again and again. Cohen clarifies that her vision of queer politics when she wrote “*Punks*” would most definitely include people like Michael Brown and Rekia Boyd, two young Black people murdered by police officers in the United States in 2014 and 2012 respectively, who “are important queer subjects not because of their sexual practice, identity, or performance but because they, as well as other young and poor folks of color, operate in the world as queer subjects...” (Cohen, *The Radical Potential* 142). Cohen points out the ways these queer subjects

are targeted and pathologized in ways that end up “making them into deviants while normalizing their degradation and marginalization...” (142).

Cohen observes in this piece, with palpable disappointment, that “a truly radical or transformative politics has not resulted from queer activism” (438) and calls us all to more expansive, inclusive work in coalition. To contextualize the moment, *GLQ* published Cohen’s piece just two years after a 1995 New York Times article declared that “AIDS is Now the Leading Killer of Americans From 25 to 44” years of age (AmfAR) and one year after it was reported in 1996 that “a larger proportion of AIDS cases occur among African Americans (41%) than among whites (38%)” (AmfAR). It is difficult to read this now, nearly a quarter century later, in the context of all that has transpired since in the areas Cohen highlights. Not only have disparities persisted in terms of income, health, and other measures of quality of life across lines of race, class, gender, and immigration status, among others—they have actually gotten worse in many cases. According to Pew Research Center in 2020, “over the past 50 years, the highest-earning 20% of U.S. households have steadily brought in a larger share of the country’s total income,” and the income gap between Black and white households has not changed since 1970. A shocking 27% of upper-income Americans and 26% of middle-income Americans surveyed say “there is about the right amount of economic inequality” (Pew Research Center).

The COVID-19 pandemic has cast a spotlight on all this as perhaps nothing has in a generation or more. Human Rights Watch summarized it well in their “World Report 2021”:

The grossly disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black, brown, and Native people, connected to longstanding disparities in health, education, and economic status, revealed the enduring effects of past overtly racist laws and policies and continuing impediments to equality.

These groups have been targeted and pathologized in U.S. society so consistently and for so long that it had become for far too many an unremarkable and largely invisible part of the national landscape. The pandemic brought the facade crashing down and laid bare the heretofore remarkably durable myth of a classless, post-racial society that had only recently started to crack and visibly crumble with the (s)election of the 45th president of the United States.

More directly germane to the focus of this paper on identity-based state oppression, persecution and violence are the findings shared in a 2019 paper from the National Academy of Sciences that looks at the “risk of being killed by police use of force in the United States by age, race–ethnicity, and sex.” While a staggering “about 1 in every 1,000 Black men can expect to be killed by police” (Edwards 16793), as with the court records of the witch trials, that number doesn’t begin to tell the whole story since it doesn’t include the profiling, harassment, intimidation, unlawful arrests and less than lethal violence inflicted on Black men, women, and members of other marginalized communities in the U.S. every day.

While it is critically important to not in any way equate the discrimination, oppression and violence against one group with that inflicted on another, I do think it is not only instructive, but strategically valuable and important, to turn that lens toward the ideologies and systems of power that perpetuate this terror across these disparate groups along the lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, age and so forth and to observe and learn from the ways that these are meted out in various places and times. Indeed, patriarchy, sexism, racism, ageism, classism, and ableism have been violently exerting power, dominance, and control for hundreds of years and, in some cases, for millennia—including, as we have explored together here, throughout the early modern European witch hunts, the Atlantic slave trade, and the genocidal colonization of the Americas and other regions.

It is for this reason that I invite the reader to join me in considering whether those accused of and persecuted for being witches might also be invited under the queer umbrella—not because they identified as queer in the way the term has been used over the past few decades since being reclaimed by communities historically marginalized on the basis of their sexuality and gender, but because they have also been “important queer subjects” (Cohen, *The Radical Potential* 142), targeted by those “intent on pathologizing them” as traitors to the dominant patriarchal religious and social order, “simultaneously making them into deviants while normalizing their degradation and marginalization” to the point that large swathes of society at the time, from the state to clergy to the academy to their own neighbors not only stood aside as they were subjected to persecution, torture and execution, but often vocally supported and actively participated in these campaigns of terror against them.

The victims of the witch hunts were, as we have learned, demonized and targeted for, in large part, their alleged sexual practices, their failure to perform their gender as expected, their socioeconomic status, their disobedience to men in positions of power, their age (often connected with their perceived lack of attractiveness), their inability to produce offspring and so forth. In short, they were rendered queer subjects on the basis of their intersecting identities and attributes and, in many cases, made to pay the ultimate price.

We have seen, too, how even in modern day studies of the witch hunts, the role of patriarchy, sexism, and misogyny has often been downplayed by historians, the majority of whom have been and remain predominantly cisgender men. Among these historians, there has been a near universal refusal and at best a reluctance among all but a very few to name the witch hunts for what they were, with isolated exceptions: campaigns of terror by those in power against

women, as well as men who didn't live up to the hegemonic masculine ideal and/or men who found themselves in close proximity to a woman accused of witchcraft.

Conclusion

By exploring extant literature across a number of disciplines through a feminist and queer theoretical lens, I have drawn new and important connections and laid bare the ways in which the patriarchal European colonial powers have dehumanized and demonized others under the banner of patriarchy, Christian supremacy, manifest destiny and the Doctrine of Discovery, and used these to justify some of the most bloody and destructive crimes against humanity in history: the early modern European witch hunts, the Atlantic slave trade, and the genocidal colonization of the Americas and other regions, among others.

While it is critically important to avoid equating the discrimination and persecution of one group with that of another, there is tremendous value in looking at the ways in which patriarchy, sexism, and religious fanaticism—alongside racism, xenophobia and other forms of bias and bigotry—have informed, inspired, and fueled campaigns of terror throughout history. Specifically, I have identified some of the ways in which white European men in particular have projected their own demons, their own insecurities, onto the Other, based on gender, race, ethnicity, place of origin, sexuality, physical attributes and so forth, and I have connected this to the early modern European witch hunts in a way that has not been done before, based on an extensive survey of extant scholarship, with a focus on scholars who have properly accounted for gender in their analysis of the witch hunts.

The roles of patriarchy, sexism, and religious fanaticism—and specifically Christian supremacy—have been elided or downplayed by too many historians in a discipline historically dominated by cisgender white men. This project is a corrective, foregrounding the fact that 85%

of those killed as accused witches were women, and exploring the ways in which it has been largely women historians who have called this out and in too many cases been made to do so from the margins.

While the witch hunts and associated persecution and terror are perhaps the most visible and best-known events driven by patriarchal sexism and misogyny in the early modern period, they were by no means an anomaly in terms of the rhetoric that inspired and justified them. The inherited sexist views of the clergy during the Middle Ages, as well as prevailing sexist notions of women at the time made ready kindling for the violent conflagration that claimed the lives of nearly six women for every man killed as an accused witch.

Those who were accused of being witches were rendered queer subjects by dominant organized religion, the state and society—regardless of whether they ever actually identified as witches or practiced witchcraft—and suffered persecution, terror, torture and murder as a result.

While some witchcraft historians have attempted to soft-pedal the virulent and violent misogyny of Krämer, Nider, King James I of England and others, even the incomplete and relatively scant records that have survived and been found make such a misguided undertaking futile. In the case of Francis Bacon, this misogyny extended to his conceptualization and approach to a feminized earth and the environment, and we are suffering the legacy of this today in the form of increasingly extreme weather events due to human-precipitated climate change. At the time of this writing in August 2021, a newly-released report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change finds that “[h]uman influence has warmed the climate at a rate that is unprecedented in at least the last 2000 years” (IPCC, 2021 7) and “[c]limate change is already affecting every inhabited region across the globe with human influence contributing to many observed changes in weather and climate extremes” (12). The

dominance and exploitation of the earth, seemingly inspired by the same misogynistic ideologies and dynamics that fueled the witch hunts, have brought about the very catastrophic weather conditions—only on a global scale and to far more calamitous outcomes!—that those accused of witchcraft were often persecuted, tortured and murdered for.

There are many opportunities for additional research and scholarship that fell beyond the scope of this project, and it is my hope that I will be joined by others in taking up this important work. One such project would be a similar lens and approach to witchcraft accusations, trials, and executions—as well as vigilante killings of accused witches—that are happening in the world today.

There is work yet to be done to build on the excellent scholarship of Barstow, Wiesner-Hanks, and others in looking at the broader impact the witch hunts and public executions had on the mental health and lives of society, particularly that of women who were not (yet) implicated or otherwise directly involved in any way (Witchcraze 148-149, Wiesner-Hanks 282).

There is more work to be done, too, in exploring the ways in which internalized patriarchy, misogyny and fear likely drove the instances where women accused and testified against other women, as well as the ways in which they were coerced into offering up the names of others, including other women, during protracted periods of brutal torture—which was performed by men and often sexual in nature.

Another adjacent project involves the unaddressed piece of my original vision for a two-pronged approach to this project: an exploration and analysis of the popularity of witchcraft today among queer and trans people. It quickly became clear that, in order to do this justice, it would need to be done separately, with the project you have in your hands (or on your screen)

preceding it. It is my hope and intention to move forward with this and I invite any readers who have an interest in being involved or following the work to contact me.

Methodology

The research here presents an exploration of relevant extant literature in the disciplines of queer theory, feminist theory, early modern European history, Black feminism, women's history, and others, as well as an examination of a translation (from the original Latin) of the *Malleus Maleficarum*—an original 1490 copy of which I was able to handle and examine within the Special Collections of the Portland State University Library Archives.

I started assembling my body of evidence by reviewing the syllabus and materials from my Spring 2019 *Witchcraft as Cultural Imaginary* class with Dr. Kathleen Merrow in the Honors College at Portland State University (PSU). From there, I reviewed the works cited in readings from that class that seemed especially relevant. I then met with Dr. Merrow over the course of my time working on the project and received further guidance and additional resource recommendations that proved invaluable.

I spoke with Dr. Lisa Weasel, the head of the Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies department at Portland State University, and she shared ideas around specifically addressing the body and the witch's mark—or devil's mark—in particular, along with other suggested considerations and resources, including the work of Carolyn Merchant, which explores the historical feminization and exploitation of nature that I have included in my analysis here.

Finally, I cast a wide net for scholarship germane to the project, foregrounding the work of scholars who properly accounted for gender in their research and analysis. For inspiration and additional information along the way, I listened to the History of Witchcraft podcast by Samuel

Hume, along with other media offering both fictionalized accounts and scholarly observations and analysis of the early modern European witch hunts.

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