

## “THEY HAVE BEEN UNITED AS SISTERS”: *Women Leaders and Political Power in Black Lay Confraternities of Colonial Lima*

**ABSTRACT:** In Lima in the seventeenth century, both free and enslaved black women held elected leadership roles in black confraternities (corporate bodies of lay Catholics). These women occupied a public position generally reserved for men; their Spanish and indigenous counterparts did not hold comparable roles. Though their experiences have not been documented in scholarly literature, they were highly visible in their own lifetimes. In ecclesiastical court, they acted as the confraternity’s legal agents. In everyday operations, they were primarily responsible for collecting and managing funds. This gave them a large say in how money ought to be spent, whether on festivals, members’ funerals, medical aid, or financial support for imprisoned members. Though black *limeños* made up a majority of the city’s population, other forms of mutual aid were often inaccessible to them. Confraternity leaders in general, and these women in particular, managed one of their community’s only officially recognized spaces for civic organization. As the century wore on, men successfully challenged the women’s authority in court, and militia officers became more and more central to leadership. Yet even with that curtailment, these positions gave black women in Lima a degree of publicly acknowledged power highly unusual for early modern women.

**KEYWORDS:** confraternities, black women, Lima, seventeenth century

In the colonial viceregal capital of Lima, Peru, in the year 1625, the black lay confraternity (*cofradía*) San Antón had a massive internal rift over the results of its annual leadership election.<sup>1</sup> The *cofradía* officers selected would

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1. In seventeenth-century Lima, *negro* could be used in a narrow sense to describe a person (or group of people) who had migrated from Africa, or in a much broader sense to encompass all people of any African ancestry whatsoever. In this article, I sometimes use the term “black” to encompass all Africans and their descendants, as it is the most direct and obvious translation of *negro*, with many of the same associations. However, for the sake of clarity I have used *negro* and *mulato* as often as I can, not altering them from the source material, so that readers can see where these groups were (and were not) differentiated in the seventeenth century. *Editorial note:* In keeping with the author’s intent to use these and similar terms as they appear in the source material, *The Americas* has retained much of the author’s italicization throughout the article.

organize its activities, keep order, and manage its money and goods. In the case of San Antón's disputed election, dueling factions accused each other's candidates of fraud and mismanagement. Unable to solve the problem internally, the parties referred the conflict to Lima's ecclesiastical court. Confraternity officials Juana de Maridueñas and Beatriz de Munson were among the members (*cofrades*) who had firm opinions to share with the court about which candidate to support: "This confraternity and its spending depend on all the alms that we collect with our work and requests [for alms from the community]. The brothers don't work and put very little effort into this, and some of our previous brother officers have squandered all our goods and we have become debtors, so we need to choose a diligent brother for our leader."<sup>2</sup>

Maridueñas and Munson were the confraternity's *mayorals*. Lima's black confraternities used this word exclusively to designate women officers. While most confraternal leadership roles were held by men, some women held positions of authority within the group. In their testimony, Maridueñas and Munson affirmed the importance of women's leadership to San Antón's ability to function. They presented themselves as the confraternity's primary earners and the legitimate, honorable stewards of the group's money and belongings. They used this context to ask the group—and the ecclesiastical judge who heard their plea—to give greater weight to their chosen candidate.

Maridueñas and Munson were not alone. Throughout the seventeenth century, all across the city of Lima, black women took publicly acknowledged leadership roles in their confraternities. Lay confraternities were corporate bodies of worshipers that were composed of lay Catholics (those who were not priests or members of any religious order). These organizations were founded by groups of like-minded people who gathered together, chose a saint or aspect of the Virgin to venerate, drafted a constitution, rented or purchased a chapel in a local parish or monastery, and then recruited dues-paying members and collected alms. They arranged and funded masses, organized and took part in festivals,

2. "Autos seguidos por Agustín de los Reyes para que se anule la reelección de Juan de la Encarnación y Lázaro Ortiz." Archivo Arzobispal de Lima [hereafter AAL], Sección Cofradías, 20, 5, 1625-1639, fol. 2r. "Juana de Maridueñas y Beatriz de munson mayoralas de la cofradia del s sant anton abad decimos que la dicha cofradia y su gasto depende todo de las limosnas que nosotras ajuntamos con nuestro trabajo y solicitud y los cofrades y hermanos [no] trabajan<sup>do</sup> y ponen muy poca solicitud en esto antes algunos y los mas que an sido mayordomos y procuradores an dissipado muchos bienes de la cofradia de que son hasta aora deudores los quales si acaso ven que se elige algun hermano p<sup>a</sup> mayordomo diligente." Note that a literal translation of the original text would read something more like "the *cofrades* and brothers working and put very little effort into this," which given the context does not make sense; I suspect that a "no" was accidentally omitted. It is also within the realm of possibility that Maridueñas and Munson meant that the brothers were so busy at their other labors that they put little effort into confraternity business.

gave to charity, and eased the members’ passage from life into death.<sup>3</sup> John Bossy, in his pioneering work on the early Church in Europe, has explained that before the Council of Trent, lay confraternities were the backbone of the Church, organizing most of its activities.<sup>4</sup> Konrad Eisenbichler writes that even in a post-Tridentine context, in cities, towns, and villages across Europe and its colonies “it would have been difficult for someone not to be a member of a confraternity, a benefactor of a confraternity’s charitable work, or, at the very least, not to be aware of a confraternity’s presence in the community.”<sup>5</sup>

The confraternity was the primary venue for black civic organization in the city of Lima, and most black *limeños* likely had some connection with one, whether through a family member, a friend, or a neighbor. I argue that within confraternities, domestic battles over women’s power and influence within Lima’s black community were made visible and public. Black confraternities chose, or perhaps were compelled by their women members, to recognize these women officially with their own position and mayoral title. Mayorals took on an elected leadership role of a type that in many other contexts was reserved for men. When the confraternity was involved in a dispute, black women officers held legal responsibility for its money and goods. Ecclesiastical lawsuits such as the San Antón dispute show both the extent of that power and the limits that their confraternal brothers attempted to place on it. As the seventeenth century waned, a shift in power away from pious women and toward militia officers transformed the shape of the black confraternity in Lima.

Not all confraternities were organized along ethno-racial lines, though this was common in Spanish and Portuguese territory. A few confraternities organized themselves by profession: in Lima, there was a confraternity of shoemakers and a confraternity of silversmiths. Some were all-inclusive, regardless of race or status of any kind. With the exception of the rare profession-restricted confraternities, all *cofradías* included both men and women.<sup>6</sup> However, a large number of confraternities described themselves as reserved for people with some degree of African ancestry: *negros*, *morenos*, *mulatos* or *pardos*.<sup>7</sup> In Lima in

3. For a thorough analysis of how racially affiliated confraternities functioned during a similar time period in New Spain (now Mexico), see Nicole von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers: Confraternities and Social Mobility for Afro-Mexicans* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006).

4. John Bossy, *Christianity in the West: 1400–1700* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

5. Konrad Eisenbichler, “Introduction: A World of Confraternities,” *A Companion to Medieval and Early Modern Confraternities*, Konrad Eisenbichler, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 1.

6. The above-mentioned confraternities for shoemakers and silversmiths were reserved for men. I have only found one confraternity reserved for women, a community for *parda* and *mulata* servants in one of the convents, which is discussed at length in this article.

7. As mentioned earlier, *negro* could be an all-inclusive term for anyone with any degree of African ancestry, or it could be used in a more specific sense to describe people born in Africa (or whose ancestors had all been born there). *Negro* is used in both senses in the documentation on confraternities: some groups included anyone with some African ancestry,

1613 there were 19 black confraternities recognized by the archbishop. By 1639, the number had ballooned to 40, twice as many as any other ethno-racial affiliation.<sup>8</sup> These confraternities included both enslaved and free members (during this period, there were no confraternities for enslaved people only, nor for free people exclusively), and both enslaved and free people could participate in the highest levels of the organization as officers.<sup>9</sup>

For black people in Lima, the confraternity provided a venue for civic as well as religious organization, allowing people whose social networks had been shattered by the slave trade to seek mutual aid, friendship, and a sense of family with their new brothers and sisters. Though a few of the black men and women who joined black confraternities were born in Spain, the vast majority had been kidnapped and sold from any of numerous ports in West and West-Central Africa, or were descended from people who had been kidnapped.<sup>10</sup> As a result of the extensive slave trade, Lima was more than half black by the end of the sixteenth century and remained so throughout the seventeenth century.<sup>11</sup> In the *cofradías*, black limeños found strength in numbers and in the ability to pool resources.

Confraternities amassed large sums of money, which they used to fund masses, holy processions, funerals of members, and charity to the community, as well as to purchase expensive goods such as holy statues, paintings, altar cloths, and candles. Confraternity officers who controlled access to these funds and items held spiritual power. They could decide which processions or festivals to celebrate; they also held influence over the size and grandeur of members'

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while others used the narrower definition. *Moreno* could be used interchangeably with *negro*, though Karen Graubart has shown that *negros* and *morenos* themselves tended to prefer *moreno*, often describing their enemies pejoratively as *negros*. *Mulato* and *pardo* were similarly related: they both described people who were partially descended from Africans and partially from Spaniards. While the authorities tended to use these terms interchangeably, individuals often preferred to use *pardo* for themselves and called others *mulatos*. Karen Graubart, "So color de una cofradía: Catholic Confraternities and the Development of Afro-Peruvian Ethnicities in Early Colonial Peru," *Slavery & Abolition* 33:1 (2012): 51–52.

8. Diego Lévano Medina, *El mundo imaginado y la religiosidad andina manifestada: el papel social y espiritual de las cofradías en Lima barroca* (Saarbrücken: Editorial Académica Española, 2012), 88–89.

9. Confraternities sometimes accepted members from outside their designated affiliation. From lawsuits related to burials, we know that some enslaved people belonged to the same wealthy Spanish confraternities as their owners. At least one free *morena* of considerable means, Francisca Campoverde, stated in her will in 1651 that she was a member of several confraternities, among them two *cofradías de negros*, but listed first the prestigious Spanish confraternity of Nuestra Señora de la Soledad and requested to be buried in its chapel. "Will of Francisca Campoverde," Archivo General de la Nación Perú [hereafter AGN], Protocolos Notariales (siglo XVII), 609, 1651, fols. 2626r-2631r. However, if members wished to participate as veinticuatro or elected officers in a confraternity, their identities generally needed to align with that of the broader confraternity in the eyes of the rest of the group.

10. Jean-Pierre Tardieu, "Origins of the Slaves in the Lima Region in Peru (Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries)," in *From Chains to Bonds: The Slave Trade Revisited*, Doudou Diène, ed. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 43–54.

11. Frederick Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524–1650* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 4–6.

funerals—no small matter in the age of baroque Catholicism when it was understood that a person’s funeral had a direct relationship to the soul’s trajectory to heaven.<sup>12</sup> Their power was also temporal. Those who managed confraternity money could play a large role in deciding how much aid to give to a member who was sick, or whether to bail out a member who had been sent to prison. Lorenzo de Sotomayor, an elected leader of the black confraternity of San Gabriel, testified in a 1679 dispute over confraternity goods that “[*negros*] would never have anything if they could not buy it within their confraternities.”<sup>13</sup>

As the black confraternities’ primary alms collectors, *mayoralas* often had a controlling interest in such decisions. Spanish religious and political authorities expected and sometimes demanded that black confraternities organize and police themselves as a governing corporate body. For a time, Spanish officials even considered collecting a tribute tax on free *negros* and *mulatos* via the confraternities, recognizing confraternity officers as the equivalent of indigenous *caciques*, whose responsibility it always was to collect tribute in indigenous towns.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, women leaders were not only fulfilling a religious function, but a political and fiscal one as well. The women’s title came from the word *mayoral*, which indicated either a foreman of a working crew, or a financial administrator who collected taxes, rents, or alms. *Mayoralas* in seventeenth-century Lima were most likely elected, just as male officers were.<sup>15</sup> They were the most important women leaders, but women could also serve as founders of confraternities and participate as *veinticuattros* (members of the confraternity’s voting council).<sup>16</sup> Sometimes they even began their own splinter sororities, nominally under the auspices of their original brotherhoods.

12. See for example Carlos Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

13. “Autos seguidos por Lorenzo de Sotomayor contra el capitán Miguel de Medrano,” AAL, *Cofradías*, 65, 22, 1679, fol. 5v. “no tiene vienes ningunos ni a los negros les avia de fiar cantidad tan considerable por q nunca les an fiado nada sin q para comprar qualquiera cosa en sus cofradías.”

14. “Audiencia and Fiscal to Crown, Manda V Mgd q los mulatos y negros libres paguen cierto tributo,” March 17, 1627, Archivo General de Indias, Audiencia de Lima, 99. In 1574, Philip II declared that all free *negros and mulatos* living in Castilian territory had to pay a tribute tax. This was collected in an extremely haphazard manner across the empire. By the 1620s, officials in Peru had mostly given up the battle to collect it; in New Spain, however, it remained an important feature of colonial society. For Peru, see Ronald Escobedo Mansilla, “El tributo de los zambaigos, negros, y mulatos en el virreinato peruano,” *Revista de Indias* 41:163 (1981): 43–54. For New Spain, see Norah A. Gharala, *Taxing Blackness: Free Afromexican Tribute in Bourbon New Spain* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019).

15. None of the cases I have explored make specific reference to the election or appointment of female officers, and no confraternity constitution that I have found makes mention of these officers. However, confraternities tended to follow generations of precedent when making leadership decisions, and in Lima in the nineteenth century, women confraternity leaders (by then called *reinas*) were elected. It is therefore probable that this was true in the seventeenth century as well. See Tamara Walker, “The Queen of los Congos: Slavery, Gender, and Confraternity Life in Late-colonial Lima, Peru,” *Journal of Family History* 40:3 (2015): 305–322.

16. See among many others the will of Esperanza Carabali, who was a *veinticuatro* of the Rosario confraternity of *negros* at the Dominican monastery (AAL Testamentos, 1640, 19, 7); the will of Andrea de San Pedro, who was a *veinticuatro* of the *mulato* Rosario confraternity at the Dominican monastery (AAL Testamentos, 1675, 91, 5); the will

Women's participation in confraternities in Lima in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is well documented. The narratives tend to be centered around festival organization and "womanly" chores such as keeping the chapel clean.<sup>17</sup> Yet despite their importance, black women are hardly mentioned in the major sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature on these groups in Lima, perhaps because serious scholarly interest in the black confraternities has developed only within the past 25 or 30 years and their form and function had to be explained and theorized.<sup>18</sup> Based on this omission, one might assume that the words and deeds of black confraternal women leaders of seventeenth-century Lima would require considerably complex and imaginative schemes of archival recovery and reading against the grain, but this is not the case.

Far from being silent, these women speak clearly from the pages of these disputes. In the catalogue of the archive of the Archbishop of Lima's confraternity lawsuits, on which this article is based, the women confraternity officers who are identified as plaintiffs or defendants are exclusively black.<sup>19</sup> This disparity reflected a dynamic that was true across Iberian Atlantic slaveholding societies: free black women consistently outnumbered their male counterparts and held unusual influence and economic power in their confraternities in Lima.

## ECCLESIASTICAL LAWSUITS AS SOURCES

This article draws from a collection of seventeenth-century ecclesiastical lawsuits preserved in the archive of the Archbishop of Lima (hereafter AAL). Approximately 200 of these ecclesiastical lawsuits involved *negro* and *mulato* confraternities. The lawsuits took place in Lima's ecclesiastical court, which was

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of Antonia Gonzales, who was both founder and veinticuatro of both Nuestra Señora de Loreto at the Mercedarian monastery and San Jerónimo at the parish church of Santa Ana (AGN, Protocolos Notariales, 15, 1635, fols. 159v-162v); and the will of Juana de los Santos, a veinticuatro of Santa Elena, based at that time at the Mercedarian monastery (AGN, Protocolos Notariales, 255, 1643, fols. 858r-861v).

17. Maribel Arreluca Barrantes, *Sobreviviendo a la esclavitud: negociación y honor en las prácticas cotidianas de los africanos y afrodescendientes. Lima, 1750–1820* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2018); Christine Hünefeldt, *Paying the Price of Freedom: Family and Labor among Lima's Slaves, 1821–1854* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Walker, "The Queen of los Congos."

18. Luis Gómez Acuña, "Las cofradías de negros en Lima (siglo XVII). Estado de la cuestión y análisis del caso," *Páginas* 19:129 (1994): 28–39; Jean-Pierre Tardieu, *Los negros y la iglesia en el Perú: siglos xvi-xvii*, Vol. 1., Jorge Gómez, trans. (Quito: Centro Cultural Afroecuatoriano, 1997); Walter Vega Jácome, "Manifestaciones religiosas tempranas: cofradías de negros en Lima, siglo XVI," *Historia y Cultura* 24 (2001): 15–16; Ciro Corilla Melchor, "Cofradías en la ciudad de Lima, siglos XVI y XVII: racismo y conflictos étnicos," in *Etnicidad y discriminación racial en la historia del Perú*, Elisa Dasso et al., eds. (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2002), 11–34; Graubart, "So color de una cofradía." Diego Edgar Lévano Medina mentions these women briefly in "Para el aumento del servicio de Dios" [For the Intensification of Service to God]: Formalization of Piety and Charity in Lima's Confraternities during the 16th and 17th Centuries," in *A Companion to Early Modern Lima*, Emily A. Engel, ed., Brill's Companions to the Americas: History, Societies, Environments and Cultures, Vol. 2 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), 253–274.

19. Javier Campos y Fernández de Sevilla, *Catálogo de cofradías del Archivo del Arzobispado de Lima* (Madrid: Estudios Superiores del Escorial, 2014).

a court system run by the archbishopric of Lima that was parallel to Lima’s secular Real Audiencia.<sup>20</sup> The ecclesiastical court enforced canon law rather than Spanish civil law. It had jurisdiction over cases that involved religious institutions and those who belonged to them, such as priests, nuns, and monks, as well as those related to idolatry and marriage, including divorce and annulment.

The ecclesiastical court had its own constable (*alguacil eclesiástico*) and its own jail. It had its own panel of magistrates, which included two notaries, the crown attorney (*promotor fiscal*), and the chief ecclesiastical judge (*provisor*). The provisor was an ordained priest who had to hold a canon law doctorate, which took ten years to earn.<sup>21</sup> Some of the lawsuits concerning confraternities were between a representative of the confraternity and an outside agent, for example, a merchant trying to collect a debt or a priest attempting to impose his authority; others were internal conflicts that confraternity members sought assistance to resolve, such as disputes over the use of communal money or property, or contestations over results of elections. In the vast majority of these lawsuits, male confraternity officers accused each other of manipulating election results or mismanaging goods and funds. Only 18 cases involved women officers as plaintiffs or defendants.<sup>22</sup>

Because the confraternity lawsuits have been overlooked as a source for information on black women’s lives, scholarship focused on women’s role within the black confraternities across the Iberian Atlantic has only begun to highlight how this role of fiscal responsibility translated into official prestige and power for women within such lay Church associations. Scholars have shown that women were present at important confraternity events ranging from dances to funerals to protests, that they had cultural agency, and that there were particular types of gendered chores they were expected to perform.<sup>23</sup> In

20. The Audiencia was both a court of first instance and an appeals court. See Michelle McKinley, *Fractional Freedoms: Slavery, Intimacy, and Legal Mobilization in Colonial Lima, 1600–1700* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 29.

21. McKinley, *Fractional Freedoms*, 39. If Lima’s archbishop was in the city and available, he often came to the sessions as well (during this period, most archbishops of Lima also had canon law doctorates). McKinley explains the parallel legal systems of seventeenth-century Lima and the options that enslaved people had to present their cases within these systems. For more, see *Fractional Freedoms*, 26–61.

22. The number of cases that included women witnesses is considerably larger.

23. Rafael Castañeda García has shown that women were economically important in the confraternity of San Benito de Palermo in Michoacán, New Spain; they collected money and tended confraternal objects, but the women important in the leadership were called “mothers” and were probably selected by the mayordomos rather than elected. Confraternity motherhood was restricted to widows and sometimes to single women; married women did not play a strong role. They also had to do chores such as food preparation and cleaning the chapel. Castañeda García, “Piedad y participación femenina en la cofradía de negros y mulatos de San Benito de Palermo en el Bajío novohispano, siglo XVIII,” *Nuevo Mundo, Mundos Nuevos*, Debates, <https://doi.org/10.4000/nuevomundo.64478>, posted December 5, 2012, accessed August 4, 2022. For black women’s participation in public displays of confraternities, from festivals to funerals, see also Silvia Hunold Lara, “Une fête pour les historiens: La *Relation* de Francisco Calmon (1762) et la figure du Roi du Congo dans le Brésil colonial,” in *Brésil, quatre siècles d’esclavage: Nouvelles questions, nouvelles*

particular, Nicole von Germeten was able to use wills alongside surviving confraternity records to show that black women in New Spain could be confraternity leaders.<sup>24</sup> But the extent to which women confraternity leaders could use their power to challenge both their fellow male officers and the colonial hierarchy is not well studied.

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century ecclesiastical court records concerning confraternities had a poor survival rate in other places where black confraternities proliferated, such as Mexico City and Havana. Because Lima's ecclesiastical court records are extant, they can show what these women's daily tasks were, what kind of opposition they faced, and how they conceived of their place in society. As surviving fragments from an ecclesiastical legal system that was active across all Iberian territories, these cases also have the potential to shed light on black women's lives across the Iberian Atlantic.

Because the lawsuits capture moments of conflict, this analysis is centered around power struggles. However, even these documents do offer occasional glimpses into harmonious relationships between men and women confraternity officers. In one lawsuit, the elected male leaders of the black confraternity Santa Elena, based at the Mercedarian monastery, filed suit against the priests of the parish of Santa Ana, accusing them of impeding the burial of Santa Elena's late mayoralía Dominga Vitoria. The men offered touching accounts of their long-standing friendship with her, testifying that they were at her bedside when she expressed her dying wish to be buried in the confraternity's chapel in the monastery rather than in her Santa Ana parish.<sup>25</sup> Nor did women always act in solidarity with each other: in a lawsuit that dragged on through 1656 and into 1657, two women officers of the black confraternity of Santa Cruz, in concert with the senior male officers, fought their fellow woman officer in court over missing confraternity goods and money.<sup>26</sup> Yet the majority of lawsuits

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*recherches*, Jean Hébrard, ed. (Paris: Éditions Karthala et CIRESC, 2012), 85–113; João José Reis, *Death Is a Festival: Funeral Rites and Rebellion in Nineteenth-Century Brazil*, H. Sabrina Gledhill, trans. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); and Miguel Valerio, "Kings of the Kongo, Slaves of the Virgin Mary: Black Religious Confraternities Performing Cultural Agency in the Early Modern Iberian Atlantic," (PhD diss.: Ohio State University, 2017). Maria Cecilia Ulrickson has recently shown that communications between two black Catholic women exposed a major controversy in a nineteenth-century Haitian lay confraternity devoted to the Sacred Heart, though she presents this as a behind-the-scenes takedown that alerted religious authorities and does not suggest that the anonymous whistleblower was an officially recognized confraternity leader. Ulrickson, "The Sacred Heart of Early Haiti," *Catholic Historical Review* 106:4 (2020): 595–624.

24. von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers*.

25. "Autos seguidos por Tomás García, procurador de la cofradía Santa Elena (Merced), para poder enterrar el cuerpo de Dominga Victoria, morena libre, en la iglesia del convento Nuestra Señora de la Merced," AAL, Cofradías, 65, 11, 1655.

26. "Autos seguidos por Pasquala de Asañero, priosta de la cofradía de la Cruz, contra Francisca Zapata y María de la Concepción," AAL, Cofradías, 72, 7, 1656-1657.



involving women confraternity officers show moments of stress and rupture with male confraternity leadership, allowing us to see both the power they could hold and the limits men attempted to impose on that power.

## GENDER, RACE, AND FREEDOM IN THE IBERIAN WORLD

Why is it that black women confraternity officials appear so prominently as litigants in the ecclesiastical lawsuits of the seventeenth century, when women from other communities do not? Though the standard narrative about the lives of women in pre-modern Europe and its colonies tends to assume that they were subordinate to their fathers and husbands, generations of historians of gender have shown that the situation was more nuanced. A brief survey of the historiography of the colonial Andes alone shows that women of many different social positions could carve out space for autonomy, legal agency, and even political leadership. For instance, within the convent, women religious managed their own financial affairs and elected leaders from among their own number; this was a space in which wealthy Spanish women, in particular, could exert their will.<sup>27</sup> The powerful *encomenderas* of the early colonial period played a key role in the colonization of the region.<sup>28</sup> The same held true for some indigenous women; elite *cacicas* governed territory, while in both rural and urban indigenous communities women of lower social position, exempt from the *mita* labor system, could accumulate capital and property and use it for social elevation.<sup>29</sup>

Yet the role of women officers in indigenous and Spanish confraternities in Lima was much less prominent than that of the black *mayorals*. In 1700, the male officials of the prominent Spanish confraternity Nuestra Señora del Rosario debated whether women should be allowed to serve as *veinticuatro*s and decided against it, on the grounds that women were incapable of fulfilling the responsibilities of the post. Although within that same confraternity, there are some examples of women *mayordomas* and *veinticuatro*s in the eighteenth century, Luis Rodríguez Toledo has shown that they were representatives of extremely powerful and wealthy families who had almost certainly gained their

27. Kathryn Burns, *Colonial Habits: Convents and the Spiritual Economy of Cuzco, Peru* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

28. Luis Martín, *Daughters of the Conquistadores: Women of the Viceroyalty of Peru* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1989 [1983]); Rocío Quispe-Agnoli, “Domesticando la frontera: mirada, voz y “agencia” textual de dos *encomenderas* en el Perú del siglo XVI,” *Guaragua* 15 (36): 69–88.

29. Margarita R. Ochoa and Sara V. Guengerich, eds., *Cacicas: The Indigenous Women Leaders of Spanish America, 1492–1825* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021); Karen B. Graubart, *With Our Labor and Sweat: Indigenous Women and the Formation of Colonial Society in Peru, 1550–1700* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Jane E. Mangan, *Trading Roles: Gender, Ethnicity, and the Urban Economy in Colonial Potosí* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

roles because of their social connections. Women without high standing were routinely rejected.<sup>30</sup>

Likewise, though a number of indigenous women have been identified as powerful confraternity officials in towns with large native populations, such as Cajatambo and Jauja, they did not feature prominently in the documents in Lima.<sup>31</sup> Some indigenous mayoralas appeared as witnesses in ecclesiastical lawsuits, but during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they are never named in the catalog as litigants.<sup>32</sup> Every one of the 18 cases from this period where mayoralas, women veinticuatro, or (in very rare cases) women with female-gendered versions of male-coded titles such as *mayordomas*, were named as plaintiffs or defendants involved confraternities that were designated for *negros* or *mulatos*.<sup>33</sup>

There are also two cases that involve women plaintiffs or defendants who are named in the case summaries as founders of confraternities. Founders were not officially granted special privileges in confraternity constitutions, but litigants identified themselves as founders when testifying, probably indicating that a founder was a person worthy of respect whose opinion should be considered. One of these two cases involved a black woman who was a founder, and the other featured an indigenous woman who was listed as part of a couple alongside her husband, who was also a founder.<sup>34</sup> It seems clear that although Spanish and indigenous women in Lima worked hard for the confraternities behind the scenes, they were often not recognized with the official titles that their communities understood to hold economic and political power.

30. Luis Rodríguez Toledo, "Hermanas 24 y mayordomas: la participación femenina en las cofradías de prestigio de Lima, siglo XVIII," *Revista del Archivo General de la Nación* 34:1 (2019): 101–124.

31. Erik Gabriel Bustamante-Tupayachi, "Cofradías y mayoralas en Cajatambo y Jauja, siglo XVII," in *Actas del I<sup>er</sup> Congreso de Historia y Cultura*, Emilio Rosario Pacahuala, Carlos Castillo Vargas, and Marco Palacios García, eds. (Lima: Seminario de Historia Rural Andina, 2014), 31–62. Campos and Fernández de Sevilla's catalog also mentions several cases referred to the court of Lima's archbishopric that involved confraternities based in other towns and cities in the region, and some of those cases involved indigenous mayoralas. These cases certainly merit further study.

32. For indigenous mayoralas in seventeenth-century Lima, see "Autos seguidos por Domingo Ramos, indio mayordomo de la cofradía de Nuestra Señora de Loreto (parroquia de Santa Ana), contra Francisco García," AAL, Cofradías, 30, 10, 1654–55, fols. 1r, 4r–4v. Fol. 1r identifies Fulana Sanches as a mayoral; fol. 4r names María Madalena as a mayoral; fol. 4v names Juliana de Sandoval as a mayoral. These women were not parties in the lawsuit, which was about missing confraternity belongings. However, Fulana Sanches was identified as a witness, while María Madalena and Juliana de Sandoval testified that they oversaw decorating the chapel space where the confraternity's image of its saint was dressed on the night before a festival. I thank Ximena Gómez for identifying and sharing this document with me.

33. Campos and Fernández de Sevilla, *Catálogo*. See also Lévano Medina, "Para El Aumento Del Servicio de Dios," 265.

34. Inés Angú was listed as a founder of the black confraternity Nuestra Señora de los Remedios, located at the parish of San Marcelo. "Solicitud de Cristóbal Cartagena y Inés Angú," AAL, Cofradías, 20, 7, 1654. Doña María Pasna and her husband Pedro Maíz were identified as founders of the indigenous confraternity Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria. "Autos seguidos por Gregorio de Montenegro contra don Diego Solsol y doña Constanza Caja Chumbi para que cumplan con el pago de limosna por las misas que doña María Pasna y Pedro Maíz, su marido, fundadores de la cofradía, mandaron oficiar," AAL, Cofradías, 6, 1, 1599–1601.

Because the population of Lima was majority black, and because women wielded great financial power and influence within black communities across the Atlantic World, black women in Lima were able to inhabit the role of *mayorala* and imbue it with officially recognized financial and legal powers. This was partly because of demographics and manumission patterns. Scholars working on any part of the Iberian Atlantic world with a large enslaved population have noted that free black women tended to outnumber the men considerably. Nonetheless, although confraternities allowed free and enslaved men and women to participate, and even elected enslaved men and women as officers, the composition of black *limeño* society that was free versus enslaved can still give a picture of how power flowed in that community.

Because slave law held that children’s legal status followed their mother’s, families tended to prioritize purchasing the freedom of women of childbearing age. Women were also more likely to work inside the home as caregivers, forming affective bonds with their owners; their owners were thus more inclined to free them as a gesture of magnanimity.<sup>35</sup> Both enslaved men and women participated in the *jornal* system, an arrangement in which owners leased the labor of enslaved people to others and divided the profit between themselves and the enslaved worker. Women’s opportunities to work outside the home under the *jornal* system, and thereby save some money toward self-purchase, were also plentiful, ranging from selling foodstuffs in markets to cooking to wet-nursing.<sup>36</sup> Across early modern Europe and its colonies, even when men were the household’s primary wage earners, it was often women’s task to manage the household’s money.<sup>37</sup> In black communities, this traditional balance of power within the household was more strongly tilted toward women because they tended to be both the primary wage earners *and* the household’s money managers.

It is probably also the case that West African ideas about women, leadership, and religion had an influence on the role of the *mayorala*. Scholars have found many connections between black Catholic worship practices and celebrations in the

35. Such relationships could include the bonds generated by participation in domestic chores alongside their owners or in close proximity to them: care for children (including wet-nurse duties); care for the elderly or infirm; and sexual encounters with owners, especially those that produced children. For a few relevant examples, see McKinley, *Fractional Freedoms*; Diana Paton and Amanda Scully, eds., *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005); and Elizabeth Dore, ed., *Gender Politics in Latin America: Debates in Theory and Practice* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997).

36. For plentiful examples of enslaved black women’s participation in Lima’s marketplaces, see Leo Garofalo, “The Ethno-Economy of Food, Drink, and Stimulants: The Making of Race in Colonial Lima and Cuzco” (PhD diss.: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2001).

37. This is a vast literature. One comprehensive recent example is Ariadne Schmidt, “Labour Ideologies and Women in the Northern Netherlands, c. 1500–1800,” *International Review of Social History* 56 (2011): 45–67.

Americas and those in West and West Central Africa.<sup>38</sup> Some of the black confraternities in Lima were associated with the African *naciones* that Spaniards assigned to new arrivals, indicating a common port of origin in West Africa; art historian Ximena Gómez has shown how engagement with sacred art passed from the material culture of the Bissagos Islands to the confraternal worship practices and engagement in confraternities led by *biojoes*, people who were identified as having been kidnapped from the greater Senegambia region.<sup>39</sup> However, many black confraternities in Lima had no such formal association, including the majority of the confraternities that produced the cases analyzed here. A lack of concrete evidence tying these groups to particular West and West Central African peoples makes it difficult, though certainly not impossible, for scholars to identify direct antecedents of particular gendered political practices in Lima. Tracing those connections would be well worth further study and would involve careful critical speculation.

Numerically, women dominated both the black community and limeño society as a whole. An estimated 75 percent of free black people in 1700 were women.<sup>40</sup> By 1700, Lima was majority female as well as majority black. Some 58 percent of its inhabitants were women, and women raised most of its families. Only 2 percent of households included children but no women, whereas 54 percent of households included children but no men.<sup>41</sup> Indigenous women could serve as active and powerful mayoralas in areas of Peru where they were numerically dominant and where men were often absent on business or performing mita labor, and black

38. It is clear that a robust black Catholic culture existed in parts of West and West Central Africa, such as the Kongo. See for example Cécile Fromont, *The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo* (Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, University of North Carolina Press, 2014); and John Thornton, "The Development of an African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1491–1750," *Journal of African History* 25:2 (1984): 147–167. In other parts of the Americas, analyses of cultural transmission from the Catholic Kongo across the Atlantic have been particularly fruitful. Miguel Valerio proposes that the black women who performed a choreographed dance reenacting the Queen of Sheba's visit to King Solomon for the viceroy of New Spain in Mexico City in 1640 were possibly members of a black confraternity. Valerio argues that the women showed agency by performing an African dance, a *congo* or *congada*, in which the coronation of the rulers of the Congo was reenacted. Miguel Valerio, "The Queen of Sheba's Manifold Body: Creole Afro-Mexican Women Performing Sexuality, Cultural Identity, and Power in Seventeenth-Century Mexico City," *Afro-Hispanic Review* 35:2 (2016): 79–98. Cécile Fromont has shown how depictions of these *congado* dances, such as the early nineteenth-century lithograph by Johann Moritz Rugendas of such a dance taking place in Brazil, reveal the ambivalent reception of such dances by Europeans alongside their reframing by African populations in the Americas. Cécile Fromont, "Envisioning Brazil's Afro-Christian *Congados*: The Black King and Queen Festival Lithograph of Johann Moritz Rugendas," *Afro-Catholic Festivals in the Americas: Performance, Representation, and the Making of Black Atlantic Tradition*, Cécile Fromont, ed. (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2019), 117–139.

39. Ximena A. Gómez, "From *Ira* to *Imagen*: The Virgin of the Antigua as a 'Space for Correlation' in Seventeenth-Century Lima," *Colonial Latin American Review* 30:2 (2021): 214–237.

40. Graubart, "The Bonds of Inheritance: Afro-Peruvian Women's Legacies in a Slave-Holding World," in *Women's Negotiations and Textual Agency in Latin America, 1500–1799*, Mónica Díaz and Rocío Quispe-Agnoli, eds., *Women and Gender in the Early Modern World* (London; New York: Routledge, 2017), 131.

41. Bianca Premo, "The Maidens, the Monks, and Their Mothers: Patriarchal Authority and Holy Vows in Colonial Lima, 1650–1715," in *Women, Religion, and the Atlantic World, 1600–1800*, Daniella Kostroun and Lisa Vollendorf, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 276.

women in Lima were able to take the same role in their community. Moreover, examinations of the few surviving wills of black limeñas have revealed that they rarely mention husbands; on the occasions when a spouse is mentioned, he is almost always framed as a dependent.

For instance, Antonia de Lezaña, a free *mulata*, noted in her will in 1614 that her husband, Pedro de Clavel, had no worldly goods to his name; most of her considerable property had been hers when she married and was hers to dispose of as she pleased.<sup>42</sup> She set aside a sum for her funeral as well as bequests of small amounts of money to her parish, the four confraternities to which she belonged, and several women friends (many of them identified as *negras* and *mulatas*).<sup>43</sup> The remainder of her property was to be sold and the proceeds divided equally, half to be given to her husband and the other half used to fund masses for her soul and the souls of her parents.<sup>44</sup>

In her will dated 1640, Esperanza Carabalí testified that her husband Francisco was enslaved and named a Spanish merchant, Juan de Salazar Negrete, as her heir, asking him to use her money to “do all the good he can for my said husband.”<sup>45</sup> When the ecclesiastical court asked Salazar Negrete to clarify why he had not settled the estate, he explained that Esperanza could not leave Francisco anything directly for fear that his owner would seize it. She had privately asked Salazar Negrete to liquidate the estate and use the proceeds to free her husband. Salazar Negrete had been slow to do so because a young enslaved woman who Esperanza had directed him to sell had run away. The young woman’s escape was successful, and as a result, when the estate was settled, Francisco collected only a meager 40 pesos—not nearly enough to purchase his freedom. One wonders why, if Esperanza’s estate was large enough to purchase her husband, she did not do this herself while she was still alive.<sup>46</sup>

Karen Graubart has shown in her analysis of wills such as Antonia de Lezaña’s and Esperanza Carabalí’s that free women were the black community’s principal money lenders and often loaned enslaved friends and family money to purchase their own freedom.<sup>47</sup> Yet it has been difficult to get a sense of the specific ways men responded to this power in the private sphere. A look at confraternity

42. “Testamento de Antonia de Lezaña,” AAL, Testamentos, 5, 20, 1614, fol. 3r.

43. AAL, Testamentos, 5, 20, fols. 1v-7r.

44. AAL, Testamentos, 5, 20, fol. 6v.

45. “Testamento de Esperanza de casta carabalí,” AAL, Testamentos, 19, 7, 1640. Also quoted in Graubart, “The Bonds of Inheritance,” 139–140.

46. For an analysis of how black women’s slave ownership played out within families in New Spain during this period, see Danielle Terrazas Williams, “‘My Conscience is Free and Clear’: African-Descended Women, Status, and Slave Owning in Mid-Colonial Mexico,” *The Americas* 75:3 (2018): 525–554.

47. Graubart, “The Bonds of Inheritance,” 138–139.

records shows that black men who were confraternity officers could (and did) attempt to use the courts to try to keep women officers in check; black women officers tried to combat this with the power of piety and the purse.

## MAYORALAS AS MONEY MANAGERS AND LEGAL AGENTS

In addition to their other duties—such as caring for the chapel and the image of the saint, caring for the sick, and organizing burials—mayoralas collected and managed confraternity money. As a result, when a confraternity had a dispute about funds, mayoralas were sometimes blamed for financial mismanagement or theft. They could also be called on to testify to the whereabouts of money or goods. Evidence from Lima suggests that alms collection was often the responsibility of women, under the direction of the mayoralas. However, male confraternity members did collect alms, as one of the cases in this article attests. In the 1673 dispute between Antonia de Cartagena and Antonio Lucumí that will be explored shortly, Lucumí was taking a turn at the alms-collecting table when Cartagena approached him.<sup>48</sup> Yet women claimed to do the lion's share of this work and men often confirmed, either tacitly or explicitly, that this was the case.<sup>49</sup> In 1680, mayorala Juana María de Nájara of the black confraternity Santa Elena was accused by her brother officers of having stolen 80 pesos of alms money. She explained in her reply that she and her fellow mayorala were indeed responsible for collecting all the alms, “at the cost of sleeplessness and hard work.” However, they always returned all the money to their male chief officer (*mayordomo*) because he held the keys to the confraternity's strongbox.<sup>50</sup>

In 1675, the mayordomo of the black confraternity Nuestra Señora de la Vitoria accused mayorala Juana Cancharanbo of stealing 70 pesos from the alms she had collected. He called on three witnesses to testify on his behalf: the parish priest and two women who had assisted Cancharanbo in her collections. All three stated that Cancharanbo had put out tables to collect alms and had taken the money home

48. “Autos seguidos por Antonio Lucumí contra Antonia de Cartagena,” AAL, Cofradías, 36, 33, 1673.

49. For instance, in 1693 the chaplain of the confraternity of Nuestra Señora del Rosario of the *mulatos* attested that the sisters of the confraternity were very busy collecting alms in advance of a festival procession and that their progress was impeded because no sister wanted to serve as mayorala. “Autos seguidos por Juan del Barrio para que se dispense de salir en la procesión de Semana Santa,” AAL, Cofradías, 31-A, 4, 1693, fol. 2r.

50. “Autos seguidos por Melchor de Zorrilla y Luis Palomeque contra Juana María de Nájara,” AAL, Cofradías, 65, 23, 1680, fol. 2r. “yo y la dha mi compañera juntamos dha limosna a costa de mucho desbello y trabajo poniendo la maior diligencia que se necesita para adelantarla, como quienes son los fundamentos de juntar dha limosna devemos cuidar della para q se logre en servir de la s<sup>ta</sup>.” From the extant constitutions of black confraternities, we know confraternity strongboxes had three keys, with one normally entrusted to each of the two mayordomos and one entrusted to the confraternity's chaplain. Theoretically, the box could be opened (and the money deposited or accessed) only with all three people present. See for example the constitution of the black confraternity Nuestra Señora de los Reyes, drafted in 1589 and preserved in an early nineteenth-century lawsuit. “Copia de los autos de la fundación de la cofradía de negros Nuestra Señora de los Reyes,” AAL, Cofradías, 51, 24, 1829.

with her every week.<sup>51</sup> The mayordomo demanded that Cancharanbo be thrown in ecclesiastical prison if she could not demonstrate what she had done with the funds.

Denied the keys to the strongbox, mayoralas were vulnerable to accusations of theft. Yet these accusations also reveal the extent of the power they had over finances. In 1687, the leader of the black confraternity Nuestra Señora de Aguas Santas accused the mayoralas Juana Saul and Josefa Betanzos of financial mismanagement and demanded that they present accounts of all the money they had spent. He explained they had been responsible for collecting alms, arranging with priests to hold funeral masses, and paying the associated costs.<sup>52</sup> Clearly, in this case the mayoralas of Aguas Santas were normally trusted to keep money and pay it out to arrange funerals, rather than simply collecting the money and handing it directly to a male superior. Indeed, mayoralas could be responsible for keeping all kinds of accounts and for managing debts. In 1656, a master silversmith filed suit against Jacinta de Medrano, mayorala of San Antón, requesting payment on a silver diadem she had asked him to forge to decorate the head of their statue of the saint. He said that Medrano had “walked many times through the streets asking for alms, holding the diadem, and saying [the money] was to pay for it, and she has collected many times more than what the diadem cost.”<sup>53</sup> Though the male leaders were nominally in charge of the keys to the strongbox, the silversmith knew Medrano had hired him and had been in charge of collecting his payment. As far as he was concerned, she was the confraternity’s business agent.

Mayoralas could not only defend themselves against accusations, but they could also make accusations against others. They had proactive input into how money ought to be spent and who should be in charge. In 1625, María Prieto, mayorala of the black confraternity Nuestra Señora de la Antigua, filed a petition to request that the mayordomos allow her to keep some of the money she collected so that she could buy more garments to decorate their statue of the Virgin of the Antigua. She insisted she should not have to hand everything over to the current mayordomo, Domingo de Segovia, because the brothers and sisters were angry with him for spending the money on gambling with cards and lavish food on feast days.<sup>54</sup> Her counterpart María Hernandez filed a

51. “Autos seguidos por José Góngora contra Juan de Urrutia,” AAL, Cofradías, 22, 19, 1675.

52. “Autos seguidos por el alférez Antonio de Acevedo contra Juana Saul y Josefa Betanzos,” AAL, Cofradías, 10-B, 39, 1686, fol. 1r.

53. “Autos seguidos por Juan Díaz de Mondoñedo, maestro platero, contra Jacinta de Medrano,” AAL, Cofradías, 20, 8, 1656, fol. 1r. “a andado mucho tiempo por las calles pidiendo limosna con la dicha diadema diciendo que era para pagarla y a juntado en diferentes veces mucha mas cantidad de la que costo la dha diadema.”

54. “Autos seguidos por Antón de Niza para que se impida a cualquier otra cofradía pedir limosna. Incluye los autos seguidos por María Prieto y María Hernández,” AAL, Cofradías, 64, 9, 1625-1632, fol. 9r.

concurring petition to clarify that they wanted 37 pesos for a velvet standard to carry during processions and to say she was acting in company with other *cofradía* sisters who went from house to house and asked for money for this purpose.<sup>55</sup> Prieto and Hernandez positioned themselves and their sisters as the virtuous caretakers and defenders of the Virgin against the dissolute Segovia, who stole money and spent it on immoral personal wants.

Black *mayorals* also could and did initiate and pursue legal cases on the confraternity's behalf, from demanding the right to access chapels to accusing chaplains of fraud and insisting on payment of debts. According to most contemporary specialists in canon law who wrote manuals and other reference books, women, like children and enslaved people, were legally minors and were not supposed to be able to bring or defend lawsuits under normal circumstances. Technically speaking, their husbands or fathers were expected to represent them in contractual arrangements and court cases. However, in practice, the situation was quite different. Canon law scholars have observed that church courts usually allowed women and other legal minors to bring suits or give testimony even when the learned law did not permit this.<sup>56</sup> They have also noted that female landowners, abbesses, and secular rulers sometimes had the same jurisdictional rights as their male counterparts.<sup>57</sup>

Nonetheless, most of the scholarship on ordinary lay women and canon law, especially those without the resources of a ruler or a major landowner, has focused on marital issues, showing that women who wished to enforce a promise of marriage or obtain a divorce could use the courts to do so.<sup>58</sup> Others have shown how enslaved women could use church courts to seek freedom or negotiate the conditions of their enslavement.<sup>59</sup> Yet in ecclesiastical courts, *mayorals* and other black women leaders of confraternities engaged in making and enforcing contracts, making major purchases, and running elections without submitting to the authority of (or even referencing) their husbands, fathers, or owners. This shows that like abbesses and queens, elected women confraternity officers had access to legal powers that could equal those of free men, and they maintained that access beyond the restrictions of legal minority,

55. AAL, *Cofradías*, 64, 9, fol. 11r. "en compania de otras hermanas . . . fuimos de cassa en cassa por esta ciudad y los pedimos para el efecto referido"

56. Sara McDougall, "Women and Gender in Canon Law," *Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, Judith Bennett and Ruth Karras, eds. (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2013), 163–176. For an analysis of how this functioned in the secular courts in Lima, see Bianca Premo, *Children of the Father King: Youth, Authority, and Legal Minority in Colonial Lima* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 6, 10, 23–27.

57. Eva M. Synek, "Ex utroque sexu fidelium tres ordines": The Status of Women in Early Medieval Canon Law," *Gender & History* 12:3 (2000): 599.

58. McDougall, "Women and Gender in Canon Law."

59. Michelle McKinley has shown how enslaved women could navigate the ecclesiastical court system to negotiate both their marriages and their status of enslavement. McKinley, *Fractional Freedoms*.



whether those related to slavery or gender. The only legal suit that directly involved the husband of a woman officer as a litigant was a special circumstance: she had passed away and he was her heir.<sup>60</sup>

For example, in 1661, José de Cardenas, an elected officer of San Antón, filed a suit against a priest of the parish of San Marcelo. Cárdenas testified that a veinticuatro had died, and that the pastor had refused to open the chapel vault for his burial.<sup>61</sup> The priest never responded to the suit, but the judge issued an official ruling that he should not impede the confraternity members from burying their dead in their chapel. At some point in the following ten years, the same priest defied the ruling and once again began restricting San Antón’s use of the chapel. Jacinta de Medrano, the same mayoralá who 15 years earlier had purchased a silver crown for the Virgin, filed another complaint in defense of her confraternity in 1671. She alleged that the priest had “a bad condition and anger that your Illustriousness gave a ruling that he should let the mayordomos use their right to bury brothers and veinticuatros and other people, and now he thinks to impede me from entering said chapel, abusing me with his words.”<sup>62</sup> After being issued a reminder of the previous ruling against him, the priest did not respond, nor did the cofrades of San Antón continue their suit. Medrano had successfully defended their rights to the use of the chapel.

Though women litigants’ husbands and fathers did not tend to appear in ecclesiastical lawsuits over confraternities, these women sometimes experienced challenges to their performance of their gender in the courtroom. In a 1673 lawsuit, Antonio Lucumí, an official of the black confraternity of Nuestra Señora del Rosario in the Dominican convent, accused his cofrade Antonia de Cartagena of coming to the alms tables bearing arms to take money by force, and of refusing to provide any accounting of how she had spent it. He said she wanted to “split my head open” (*descalabrándome*) and was organizing a group

60. In this case, the leaders of the black confraternity San Gabriel attempted to recover a statue by suing the husband of the late Francisca de Salazar, who had brought the statue home with her and never returned it. AAL, Cofradías, 65, 22, 1679.

61. “Autos seguidos por José de Cárdenas contra el licenciado don José Laureano de Mena,” AAL, Cofradías, 20, 11, 1669, fols. 8v-9r.

62. “Autos seguidos por Jacinta de Medrano contra José Laureano de Mena,” AAL, 20, 9, 1671, fol. 1r. “digo que Don Joseph Laureano de Mena Cura de la dha Parochia llebado de su mala condision y enojo que ha consevido de aver mandado su s<sup>a</sup> Illustrisi por el Auto que proveyo que el susodicho dexasse libremente usar a los mayordomos de ella del derecho que tienen de enterrar en su capilla a los hermanos y veinte y quatos y demas personas que su oblig<sup>on</sup> ha pretendido aora impedirme la entrada en la dicha capilla, tratandome mal de palabra.” This was not the only time Jacinta de Medrano sued a priest. In 1666, she demanded that the priest Damián de Cuéllar repay the confraternity 20 pesos he borrowed to purchase some wax. “Autos seguidos por Jacinta de Medrano contra el presbítero Damián de Cuéllar,” AAL, Cofradías, 20, 10, 1669. Medrano’s lengthy tenure as a confraternity officer was not unusual; many men also served for long periods of time. It was also usual for officers to be re-elected to non-continuous terms; they might serve for a period of years, lose an election or simply take a break from the responsibility, and return to office later.

to kill him. He asked that Cartagena be forced to show how she had spent the money or give it back, on pain of being thrown out of the confraternity.<sup>63</sup> In her reply, Cartagena ignored the accusations of violence and threats. She merely responded that with Lucumí's permission she had used ten pesos of confraternity money to pay the rent on the confraternity's meeting house. She further explained that Lucumí owed her 28 pesos and 4 *reales*, money she had spent out of pocket to make the house a fit meeting place by whitening it with lime and lighting the interior.<sup>64</sup> Lucumí never responded, and the matter may have been resolved in some extrajudicial fashion.

Much of the literature on black women and violence in the early modern period has rightly been concerned with violence done *to* them rather than violence done *by* them.<sup>65</sup> One exception has been analysis of late eighteenth-century *casta* paintings from New Spain, which in their depictions of mixed-race families sometimes portray *negra* and *mulata* women attacking their white partners.<sup>66</sup> Within the legal sphere, Tamara Walker has also shown that black women were sometimes accused of insulting and attacking white women in the street with gendered insults and in some cases physical assaults.<sup>67</sup> Accusations against black women by black men are less common and less well studied. By framing Cartagena as a violent person, Lucumí associated her with men and masculine activities, and thus a person fully responsible for her actions under law rather than a woman deserving of special protection. He also relied on the same tool used by the white women of Walker's study and the artists of *casta* paintings—the trope of violent behavior of black people, most commonly associated with black men—and turned it on Cartagena.<sup>68</sup>

Had Lucumí invented the threats to make Cartagena sound unreasonable, untrustworthy, unwomanly, and above all, dangerous in a way specifically ascribed to black people? Or had Cartagena used violence to force Lucumí and other brothers to release the funds to her and enable her to prepare the house and liaise with the landlord? Either explanation is plausible. In either case, it suggests that Cartagena and other women like her not only served as litigants

63. "Autos seguidos por Antonio Lucumí contra Antonia de Cartagena," AAL, Cofradías, 36, 33, 1673, fol. 1r.

64. AAL, Cofradías, 36, 33, fol. 2r.

65. Marisa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

66. See for example Magalí M. Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 88–89.

67. Tamara Walker, "'Blanconas Sucias' and 'Putas Putonas': White Women, Cross-Caste Conflict and the Power of Words in Late-Colonial Lima, Peru," *Gender & History* 27:1 (2015): 131–150.

68. References to the stereotype of black violence (especially by black men), and its use to justify brutality against black populations both enslaved and free, abound in the literature. For an excellent recent example, see Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019).

but also played an important role in managing confraternity space and property and enforcing norms around its use. Not only were they unsupervised by men, but they also filled positions of authority that were reserved for men in most other contexts.

## INFORMAL ORGANIZATIONS OF CONFRATERNITY WOMEN

Women collectively tended to be viewed as a subgroup within the larger confraternity. In lawsuits, they often presented themselves as united sisters who had a particular interest or opinion to express together. As related above, in 1625, María Prieto and María Hernández, *mayoralas* of Nuestra Señora de la Antigua, expressed their concern about confraternity spending in exactly these terms: they had collected the money alongside many other sisters, who they claimed to represent. Similarly, in 1630, members of the black confraternity Santa Elena were divided over the question of whether to stay in their chapel in the Hospital de San Pedro or move to the convent of the Purísima Concepción, a wealthy and powerful order of Franciscan nuns. Those in favor of moving insisted that the chapel of San Pedro was uncomfortable, often locked, ill-kept, and poorly adorned in honor of Santa Elena; those who wished to stay countered that it was convenient and perfectly suited to their needs. A group of six women, led by *mayorala* Pasquala de Bonilla, expressed themselves as strongly against the move. “Since the holy confraternity was founded in that church, we have attended and attend to its administration and the adornment of its altar with all punctuality and care, without ever having failed in any way,” they declared.<sup>69</sup> They said they preferred to stay at San Pedro because it was convenient, peaceful and quiet.<sup>70</sup> The two *mayordomos* who wanted to move to Purísima Concepción were dismissive of the women’s petition. “Your Mercy must declare that we have no obligation to respond to their petition,” they said. “They have not paid their entry dues, besides which these women have never agreed to come, and don’t come, to the confraternity for anything.”<sup>71</sup> In other words, they had not participated and thus were not legitimate members, so their opinion did not need to be taken into account.

69. “Autos seguidos por Hernando Barreto, Pascual de Arce, Juan Manrique y Bernardo Fajardo contra Melchor de Zorrilla y Marcos Benites.” AAL, *Cofradías*, 28, 1, 1630-1631, fol. 7r. “desde cue la dha sancta cofradia esta fundada en la dha yglesia nosotros abemos acudido y acudimos con toda puntualidad y cuydado a la administracion della y adorno de su altar sin que jamas aya abido falta alguna.” This is the same Santa Elena confraternity that would eventually be housed at the Mercedarian monastery (they would move twice in the span of five years).

70. AAL, *Cofradías*, 28, 1, fol. 7r. “podemos acudir a su administracion y ornato con mas quietud que en otra parte alguna.”

71. AAL, *Cofradías*, 28, 1, fol. 9r. “Vmd a de declarar no tener nossotros Obligacion a Responder a la dha su pet<sup>on</sup> y por no ser como no son Partes las susodhas para ello y no tener Pagada sus entradas demas de que la sobre dha nunca se an acordado de acudir como no acuden a la dha cofradia a cosa ninguna.”

Later in the proceedings, the mayordomos would accuse Bonilla of keeping back the alms she had collected, demand that she produce records of her collections and spending, and accuse her of having sent some of the money to Panama.<sup>72</sup> The case illuminates the domestic nature of some of the duties Bonilla and her sisters were expected to perform: cleaning and tending to the altar. Yet the mayordomos rejected them as irrelevant, not because they were women, or even because they had not swept the altar and performed other domestic duties, but because of the allegations that they were derelict in dues payment, did not attend meetings, and had mismanaged money. Similar charges were often levied against male officers. The ecclesiastical judge would eventually rule that the confraternity should vote among themselves over the question of moving.

In the subsequent election, Bonilla's faction was overruled. While Bonilla and her sisters represented themselves as a collective, their opponents did not see this as a threatening development in and of itself, because their organization had no formal standing. They, like the other mayoralas and women veinticuatro mentioned above, represented themselves as working for the financial benefit and preservation of the entire confraternity. As long as this remained the case, male officers seemed relatively comfortable with their influence. In the courtroom, they generally spoke of the sisters in much the same way that they spoke of their brothers on similar occasions, opposing them because they disagreed with the women's ideas or did not approve of how the women had handled money. Yet in some black confraternities, women would on occasion formally split from the main group to form their own branch, a decision that their brothers opposed at every turn.

## FREEDOM AND ESCLAVITUDES

In the late seventeenth century, women's auxiliary branches of black confraternities, called *esclavitudes*, began to appear in the historical record. In this context the word *esclavitud* generally did not refer to the legal and social condition of slavery, nor even always to race. Confraternities known as *esclavitudes* were founded by elite, aristocratic lay Spaniards in the Iberian peninsula in the first two decades of the seventeenth century. These groups were composed of both men and women, but generally led by men, and they tended to be especially strict and militant in their practice of Catholicism.<sup>73</sup> The concept of slavery to God, Jesus, or Mary is discussed in Scripture: Paul

72. AAL, Cofradías, 28, 1, fol. 21r.

73. Erin Rowe, *Black Saints in Early Modern Global Catholicism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 116–120; María Cruz de Carlos Varona, "Una propuesta devocional femenina en el Madrid de comienzos de siglo XVII: Simón de Rojas y la Virgen de la Expectación," *La imagen religiosa en la Monarquía hispánica: usos y espacios*, María Cruz de Carlos Varona, Pierre Civil, Felipe Pereda, and Cécile Vincent-Cassy, eds. (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2008), 83–99;

calls himself a “slave of God” (Titus 1:1).<sup>74</sup> Confraternity records in other parts of Spanish America reveal that anyone, from the most elite Spaniards to the most newly arrived enslaved people, could be an *esclavo* or *esclava* of a confraternity.<sup>75</sup> The term was used infrequently, only by some members who chose to become symbolic slaves as a demonstration of their extraordinary piety.<sup>76</sup>

The use of the term ‘*esclavitud*’ to designate religious sororities in Lima shows that ideas of slavery and religious devotion pervaded confraternity life but that in these cases enslavement was a symbolic gesture, a choice that women could make to show devotion. For these splinter groups, the term also connoted obedience to a religious hierarchy. The choice of words may have been intended to emphasize that the women’s groups were supposed to be subordinate to the larger confraternity with its male-dominated leadership. Conversely, as spiritual enslavement was considered an act of great piety, *esclavitud* also allowed the women to lean harder on the language of piety to try to win concessions from the men and from the ecclesiastical court system. Moreover, for the black women who participated in *esclavitudes*, spiritual enslavement sometimes—but not always—coincided with legal enslavement. In this context, free and enslaved black women were spiritual *esclavas* together.

The formation of an *esclavitud* gave women a certain degree of autonomy from their confraternal brothers, though the brothers were suspicious of these splinter organizations and on several occasions filed suit against them when they perceived the women to have become dangerously independent. Confraternities often competed with each other, especially over territory for alms collection.<sup>77</sup> Yet women’s special financial role made it especially dangerous for a confraternity to lose them. If the two groups were to formally separate, there would not only be competition for territory but the most experienced alms collectors would become members of the new branch. In

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Elena Sánchez de Madariaga, “Cofradías y sociabilidad en el Madrid del Antiguo Régimen” (PhD diss.: Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 1996), 40.

74. Rowe, *Black Saints*, 118. Rowe also explains that the proliferation of *esclavitudes* on the peninsula may have been tied to the fear of enslavement by North African corsairs. When statues of Christ were taken from coastal Iberian cities during raids, rulers of Islamic polities recognized their value and ransomed them back to Spaniards, just as they did humans. Such ransomed images became the focus of worship. Rowe, *Black Saints*, 117.

75. As Rowe has shown, because suffering was believed to bring Christians closer to God, legal enslavement could be mobilized to show that enslaved black people were the holiest of all Christians. Rowe, *Black Saints*, 7. Larissa Brewer-García has also written about blackness as representative of Christian virtue. Brewer-García, *Beyond Babel: Translations of Blackness in Colonial Peru and New Granada* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

76. von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers*, 36.

77. There are many such cases in the archives; for one excellent example see “Autos seguidos por Antón de Niza para que se impida a cualquier otra cofradía pedir limosna,” AAL, Cofradías, 64, 9, 1625-1632. The confraternity of *morenos* Nuestra Señora de la Antigua, based at Lima’s cathedral, filed this suit to prevent any other confraternity from asking for alms at the door of the cathedral because it was the oldest confraternity there.

1643, the mayordomos of the *negro* confraternity Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles, housed in the city's Mercedarian monastery, filed suit against their cofrade Ana de Ochoa, a free *morena*, accusing her of having kept control of the confraternity's belongings and alms for the past three years. They demanded that she turn them over, along with all the relevant financial records. They also said that Ochoa had founded an *esclavitud* nine years previously and that she would not show records for that organization either.<sup>78</sup>

In her response, Ana de Ochoa identified herself as a founder of both the confraternity and the *esclavitud*. She announced she would present financial records for the *esclavitud* if asked, but she denied the allegation that she had taken control of confraternity goods, asserting that she had had nothing to do with the senior leadership of the *cofradía* for several years. She lamented that Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles had once been one of the wealthiest and most prominent of the city's confraternities, and she accused the mayordomos of having squandered the funds and pawned the goods and not having taken good care of what was in their charge. She explained that the women had founded an *esclavitud* partly so that they could protect the property and attempt to prevent the confraternity's fall from grace. According to Ochoa's version of the events in a previous dispute between the two that took place in 1634, the ecclesiastical judge had ordered that the *cofradía* and the *esclavitud* should "go forward separately" (*anduviese separada*) and declared that there would be "grave consequences" (*penas muy agravadas*) if the brothers interfered with the sisterhood.<sup>79</sup> She went on to say that the *esclavitud* had kindly given money to the *cofradía* for essential purposes such as burials and the purchase of candles, but framed this as a donation rather than an obligation. The mayordomos responded indignantly that the *esclavitud* "is aggregated to the confraternity and its alms are for its conservation and growth."<sup>80</sup>

78. "Autos seguidos por Lucas de Quiñones y Pablo de Valverde contra Ana de Ochoa," AAL, Cofradías, 10-B, 17, 1643, fol. 1r. All confraternities kept such records. This did not necessarily mean that the person in charge of recordkeeping could read and write. Sometimes they could, and this was considered an advantage. Yet limited literacy did not prevent confraternity officials from engaging in financial transactions and keeping records. Confraternity officials who were illiterate or semi-literate used confraternity funds to hire accountants to help them maintain their records. They also collected and saved receipts from many of the people with whom they conducted financial transactions; those receipts were customarily compiled with the official record. In 1628, one accountant sued the confraternity of Nuestra Señora del Rosario of the *morenos* for refusing to pay him for this work. See "Autos seguidos por Juan de Belveder contra los mayordomos de la cofradía de morenos de Nuestra Señora del Rosario," AAL, Cofradías, 31, 13, 1628-1629. In the case analyzed here, Ana de Ochoa presented all her receipts along with the list of her spending.

79. AAL, Cofradías, 10-B, 17, fol. 2r-2v. Ochoa did not produce the text of this dispute, nor did I find it in the archives. She did specifically say that the ruling was given on the first of April, 1634, and that the name of the ecclesiastical judge who had given it was Fernando de Guzmán.

80. AAL, Cofradías, 10-B, 17, fol. 4r-4v. "la dha esclavitud . . . puesta agendada a la dha cofradía y las limosnas dello son p<sup>a</sup> su enserbacion y aumento."

Ana de Ochoa brought forward the financial records of the *esclavitud*, producing three years’ worth of accounts, from 1640 to 1643.<sup>81</sup> The collections and spending of the *esclavitud* do not differ greatly from other similar records for confraternities.<sup>82</sup> The sisters regularly put out tables in front of the monastery to collect alms; just as regularly, they paid dues to the organization. They reached out to neighbors, friends, and acquaintances for donations. They primarily financed masses and burials, spent money on candles for worship, and bought food and medicine for the sick. They also spent considerable sums to purchase and tend to an image of Our Lady of the Angels. Confraternal images of saints and virgins, generally carved wooden sculptures, were central to the worship practices of these organizations. They were a major focus for the confraternity’s veneration, proudly displayed on the altar and lovingly tended.<sup>83</sup> The decision to purchase their very own statue for the exclusive use of their *esclavitud*, rather than continuing to share a statue with the confraternity, was a remarkable one. In 1640, the *esclavitud* commissioned a sculpture from a local artist, paying 250 pesos, a substantial amount of money.<sup>84</sup> This is extraordinary, because a proprietary statue might have permitted the women to hold their own processions. If they had chosen to seek physical separation from the brothers with their own chapel and altar, the purchase of the statue would also have facilitated that end.<sup>85</sup>

After presenting the accounts, Ana de Ochoa and her legal representative stopped responding to the mayordomos’ demands to turn over the goods and money to them. This was a common legal strategy known as *rebeldía*. It was an attempt to exhaust the patience and financial resources of legal opponents. Courts allowed litigants to refuse to respond or appear twice; on the third strike, a consequence of some sort was imposed.<sup>86</sup> In an ecclesiastical context, a litigant whose opponent engaged in *rebeldía* could publicize a *censura*, a warning issued during high mass that the respondent must appear in court or else face serious spiritual consequences, up to and including excommunication.<sup>87</sup> Twice Ochoa and her representative refused to appear. After the second instance, the mayordomos of Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles asked the ecclesiastical judge to

81. AAL, Cofradías, 10-B, 17, fols. 8r-47r.

82. There are many examples of just such spending records reproduced in lawsuits about black confraternities. See for instance “Autos seguidos por Agustín de los Reyes contra Pedro de Paz,” AAL, Cofradías, 65, 1, 1623-1627.

83. Ximena A. Gómez, “*Nuestra Señora*: Confraternal Art and Identity in Early Colonial Lima” (PhD diss.: University of Michigan, 2019).

84. AAL, Cofradías, 10-B, 17, fol. 10r.

85. Gómez, “*Nuestra Señora*,” 63–68. Gómez gives a detailed explanation and analysis of the purchases by Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles, including their prices, appearances, and implications for worship practice, as well as other similar purchases by indigenous and black confraternities.

86. Bianca Premo, *The Enlightenment on Trial: Ordinary Litigants and Colonialism in the Spanish Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 86–87.

87. McKinley, *Fractional Freedoms*, 46–55.

warn Ochoa's representative that the continued use of *rebeldía* would result in excommunication.

The case ends there. Perhaps the two sides came to a mutually agreeable extralegal solution; perhaps Ochoa and her sisters felt they had no choice other than to submit. Ana de Ochoa's story shows that the status of *esclavitudes* in black confraternities in Lima was in flux. She and her sisters pushed the boundaries of their autonomy from the brothers as far as they could. They used the same strategies that other *mayoralas* had used to exert their influence: they emphasized their financial contributions and their prudent stewardship of goods and funds, and they contrasted these with the dissolute and dishonorable conduct of their spendthrift brothers. If Ana de Ochoa was reporting the result of the 1634 lawsuit accurately, this strategy had secured complete, officially recognized financial autonomy for the *esclavitud* for almost a decade. Yet the threat of being folded back into the brotherhood was omnipresent, and when the brothers had had enough, they made it manifest by reasserting that the *esclavitud* must always be subject to them and that the money the women collected was rightly to be spent by them.

In a similar case in 1645, the *mayordomos* of Nuestra Señora del Rosario of the *mulato* confraternity at the Dominican monastery filed suit against the leaders of their *esclavitud*, Nuestra Señora de la Presentación.<sup>88</sup> The *mayordomos* complained that six years previously, two *cofrades*, Francisca de San Millán and Lorenza de Córdova, had founded an *esclavitud* "in which they have been united as sisters," and stated that "the confraternity has always helped them with [funds for] their belongings and parties, because they are very poor, they can't do it by themselves." Yet the brothers were concerned, because, they said, the women had turned the tables on them: "Now they aspire to form their own corporate body and have their own head that will govern them, and for the purpose they. . . have gathered a lot of money, which is a grave danger to our own confraternity. . . if it is acceptable for these women to have their own funds collections, our confraternity of the Rosary will be lost."<sup>89</sup>

88. There were four confraternities of the Rosary at the Dominican monastery: one for *españoles*, one for *indios*, one for *negros* or *morenos*, and one for *mulatos* or *pardos*. Antonio Lucumí and Antonia de Cartagena belonged to the Rosary confraternity associated with *negros*; Francisca de San Millán and Lorenza de Córdova's confraternity was that of the *mulatos*. They did not share a chapel or leadership structure.

89. "Autos seguidos por Nicolás Maytín y Mateo Hernández contra Francisca de San Millán y Lorenza de Córdova," AAL, *Cofradías*, 31, 16, 1645, fols. 3r-3v. "abia tiempo de seis años que fran<sup>ca</sup> de san millán y lorenza de cordova hermanas de la dha cofradia en concurso de otras muchas an introducido en la dha cofradia una esclavitud de nuestra s<sup>a</sup> del Rosario en la cual an estado unidas como hermanas pues son della y para celebrar la fiesta de las dhas esclavas an ganado un jubileo de su santidad a cuya celebracion les a ayudado siempre la dha cofradia con sus bienes y fiestas por estar tan pobres cue por si solas no lo pueden hacer y por ser como son un Ramo de la dha cofradia y aora pretenden hacer por si solas cuerpo y criar caveca cue governe la dha esclavitud Y para ello an echo y hacen muchas



The mayordomos asked the ecclesiastical judge to force the sisters to stop. The women’s branch was acceptable while it remained dependent on the brothers of the Rosary, but once the women began devoting more of their resources and money to their sisterhood, the brothers became afraid that they would eclipse Rosario entirely. The same women served as alms collectors for both Presentación and Rosario. They could therefore exhaust Rosario’s donor base. The sisters of Presentación did not respond to this suit, but it is suggestive that it took place a year after the dispute at Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles; perhaps a sea-change was taking place in which confraternity brothers were controlling the finances more tightly.

In 1661, once again, the mayordomos of Rosario filed suit against their sisters for collecting too much in alms for themselves and endangering Rosario’s financial situation. They made reference to a previous agreement that Presentación could not collect alms more than three times a year, alleging that its mayoralas were in violation. The sisters Ysabel de Atocha and Petrona Prieto did respond to this complaint, referring to themselves not as mayoralas but as “*Priosta*” and “*Mayordoma*,” direct corollaries of male titles of confraternity leaders. They protested that they never held more than three collections of alms per year and were “always very subject to what [the brothers of Rosario] demand.”<sup>90</sup> It seems that unlike Ana de Ochoa, Atocha and Prieto felt they needed to adopt some deference and maintain their association with Rosario. The sisters could and did turn the same complaint of excessive alms collection around on the brothers, however. Atocha and Prieto said that “those who have spent excessively are the mayordomos of Rosario. They hold twelve collections a year. . . and they throw parties with food. . . which we don’t do.”<sup>91</sup> The connections forged within the sisterhood were obviously powerful. At least two wealthy *mulatas*, Juana Barba and Juana de Arteaga, had such a strong affiliation with the sisterhood that they identified themselves in their wills as members of Presentación and made no mention of Rosario.<sup>92</sup> At least in some aspects and for some members of the black lay community, Presentación during its heyday had indeed eclipsed its parent organization.

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Juntas es cue recoxen y an Recoxido mucha limosna en grave perjuicio de la dha cofradia de nuestra S<sup>a</sup> del Rosario . . . si se diese lugar a que las dhas esclavas hiciesen las dhas juntas se perderia la dha cofradia de nuestra s<sup>a</sup> del Rosario.”

90. “Autos seguidos por Juan de Ita y Santa Cruz contra Isabel de Atocha y Petrona Prieto,” AAL, Cofradías, 31, 21, 1661, fol. 3v: “siempre estamos muy sujetas a la q se nos manda.”

91. “AAL, Cofradías, 31, 21, fol. 3v: “y quien excede en esto . . . con excessivos gastos son los dhas Mayordomos del Rosario, por q hacen doce Juntas al año, en q cojen mucha limosna y todos los domingos y fiestas del año salen los hermanos a pedir por las calles, y en las fiestas q hacen reparten . . . comidas . . . todo lo q<sup>1</sup> no hacemos nosotras.”

92. See the will of Juana Barba, AAL, Testamentos, 31, 39, 1651; and the will of Juana de Arteaga, AAL, Testamentos, 49, 2, 1660.

## SERVANT WOMEN AND MILITIA MEN

Though mentions of *mayoralas* persist in the documents through the end of the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth, semiautonomous *esclavitudes* composed of black women fall out of the documentary record after the 1660s. By 1678, a confraternity known as Nuestra Señora de la Presentación, composed of *mulatas* or *pardas*, was housed at the Augustinian convent of La Encarnación. In that year, the Jesuit preacher José de Aguilar delivered a sermon to the women of Presentación.<sup>93</sup> He addressed them as “*pardas criadas*.” *Criadas* were free servants who lived in the convent, a step above enslaved servants but below the *donadas* who professed religious vows of chastity and poverty as well as taking on heavy loads of chores. Both groups of women tended to be *negras*, *mulatas*, *indias*, and *mestizas*.<sup>94</sup> Aguilar’s sermon lauded the women for their service to the convent and to God, advising them to take Marcella, the loyal servant of Jesus’s follower Martha, as their example.<sup>95</sup> It seems highly unlikely that this was the same group of women who maintained the *esclavitud* of Rosario. Many of the *esclavas* of Presentación were wealthy. It also seems unlikely that two confraternities of *parda* women existed at the same time under the same name. In 1691, when a group of *morenos* tried to found a confraternity with the name San Benito de Palermo at the free black hospital (the Hospital of San Bartolomé), another group of *morenos* using the same name for a confraternity at the monastery of San Francisco hotly contested it on the grounds that they were already devoted to that saint.<sup>96</sup>

However, it was not unusual for groups to “re-found” disbanded confraternities. It is possible that the *pardas criadas* of the Augustinian convent re-founded Presentación after the sisters of Rosario stopped meeting for whatever reason. This is a noteworthy development because it shows that the female-only *esclavitud* had moved away from the laity and toward the sphere of the convent and the life of women religious. Nuns were permitted to organize and run

93. Joseph [José] de Aguilar, *Sermones varios* (Brussels: Mercador de Libros, 1684), 257–270. Also quoted in Nancy van Deusen, *Embodying the Sacred: Women Mystics in Seventeenth-Century Lima* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 113.

94. van Deusen, *Embodying the Sacred*, 101. See also Burns, *Colonial Habits*; Javiera Ruiz Valdés, “Recogidas, virtuosas y humildes: representaciones de las donadas en el Monasterio de la Encarnación de Lima, siglo XVII,” *América colonial: denominaciones, clasificaciones e identidades*, Alejandra Araya Espinoza and Jaime Valenzuela Márquez, eds. (Santiago de Chile: RIL Editores, 2010), 235–255.

95. Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus of Bethany, appear in Luke 10:38–42. When Jesus visited their house, Mary sat at Jesus’s feet to listen to what Jesus said. Martha was busy preparing food for Jesus and became angry with her sister for refusing to help. Jesus defended Mary’s choice. Marcella is not a canonical biblical figure but appears in apocrypha.

96. “Jacinto de Mendoza y Costilla y Sebastián Zapata solicitan licencia para fundar una cofradía en el Hospital de San Bartolomé,” AAL, *Hospitales*, 3, 3, 1691.

their own bureaucracy and hold elections to decide how they would manage convent affairs; this was nothing new or remarkable. Though they were not nuns, the *pardas criadas* were subject to convent rules and authority. Rather than occupying political positions that would enable them to make important spiritual and financial decisions for the black lay community, the *pardas criadas*' choices and impact were limited to within convent walls.

Could years of fighting their brothers over finances have diminished the lay *esclavas*' will to continue? Was some greater change taking place over the course of the seventeenth century that made it more difficult for these women to operate with logistical and financial autonomy? Had they been forced out of the confraternity and into some other venue for civic organization? Throughout the century, the free *negro* and *mulato* militias of Lima grew in strength, power, and social status, from a popularly organized band with no official recognition in the 1610s to a fighting force of six companies (between 600 and 700 men) with a full complement of officers (also *negros* and *mulatos*) in the 1650s.

In the first half of the century, almost none of the members named in the roughly 200 ecclesiastical lawsuits involving *negro* and *mulato* confraternities at the Archivo Arzobispal de Lima used a military title. By the mid 1650s, however, such titles were regularly used in confraternity documentation. Most confraternities had at least one militia officer serving as an officer of the confraternity as well. This suggests that as the century wore on, militia service became more common among *negros* and *mulatos*. Their service also became more and more highly regarded. If they were more likely to use their titles on a daily basis and ask that others use them, it follows that these titles must have conveyed prestige to political authorities and to other members of their community. In the late eighteenth century, *negro* and *mulato* officers had achieved such strength in numbers and prominence that they were able to found a confraternity at the Franciscan monastery that restricted veinticuatro positions not only to men, but to militia officers.<sup>97</sup> These were said to have “the best judgment and correct conduct, so that the body of the brotherhood has more authority.”<sup>98</sup> This was a sharp contrast to the arguments of the mayoralas who, more than a century earlier, had based their authority on good financial stewardship. This trajectory may have been part of a greater redistribution of power in black communities, away from women and toward men. Perhaps as appreciation for displays of masculine honor grew, women's

97. San Benito de Palermo, Archivo San Francisco de Lima [hereafter ASFL], 42, 3, 1779.

98. San Benito de Palermo, ASFL, 42, 3, 1779, fol. 22r. The veinticuatro “sean aquellos individuos de mayor graduacion que se distinguen del Comun del Gremio por sus empleos Militares, y en quienes concurra el mejor Juicio, y arreglada conducta, para que asi se authorize mas el cuerpo de la Hermandad.”

influence in confraternities diminished, along with their influence over other aspects of early modern society.<sup>99</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The confraternity lawsuits explored in this article show clearly that women in the confraternities of seventeenth-century Lima claimed and created official leadership positions. Such positions enabled women to take control of the group's finances and to make important decisions about the confraternity's future, including leadership and location. In their roles as *mayoralas*, black women could act as legal agents for the confraternity. These women sometimes even split from the broader confraternity to form their own sororities. Scholars have long been aware that black women held a great deal of social and economic influence within the black community. I have shown how that influence was made manifest as real political power through control of confraternity goods and money.

However, such power ran up against certain limits. While men tolerated women's performance of leadership roles, the threat (real or imagined) that women might take the money they earned and leave the men to fend for themselves was perhaps too reminiscent of the dynamics often lived out within their own households. The larger the group of women, and the more financial autonomy they demanded, the more determined men were to curtail that autonomy.

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99. This may prefigure some of the developments Sarah Chambers has observed for the late colonial and early republican period. Sarah C. Chambers, *From Subjects to Citizens: Honor, Gender, and Politics in Arequipa, Peru, 1780–1854* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1999).