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White Cannibalism in the Illegal Slave Trade

The Peculiar Case of the Portuguese Schooner Arrogante *in 1837*

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Abstract

The Portuguese schooner *Arrogante* was captured in late November 1837 by HMS *Snake*, off the coast of Cuba. At the time, the *Arrogante* had more than 330 Africans on board, who had been shipped from the Upper Guinea coast. Once the vessel arrived in Montego Bay, Jamaica, the British authorities apprenticed those who had survived. Shortly after landing, however, the *Arrogante*'s sailors were accused of slaughtering an African man, cooking his flesh, and forcing the rest of those enslaved on board to eat it. Furthermore, they were also accused of cooking and eating themselves the heart and liver of the same man. This article focuses not so much on the actual event, as on the transatlantic process that followed, during which knowledge was produced and contested, and relative meanings and predetermined cultural notions associated with Europeans and Africans were probed and queried.

Keywords

cannibalism – slave trade – Jamaica – Cuba – Atlantic crossing – West Africa

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To the memory of Joe Miller

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At dawn on November 23, 1837, HMS *Snake*, under the command of Captain Alexander Milne, spotted a suspicious brig on the horizon, just off Cuba's westernmost point, the Cape of San Antonio. On the brig—a slave vessel named *Arrogante*—the sailors saw a "large cruiser ship in the distance," a circumstance that led the captain to give orders to find an escape route as quickly as possible.[1] The getaway attempt was short-lived, as the fast-sailing British cruiser soon caught up with the slave traders, although only after being forced to fire several shots at it and in spite of the heavy rains and winds that made the chase all the more difficult.[2] Upon boarding the ship, Captain Milne reported that its decks were crammed with enslaved Africans kept in atrocious conditions. In a private letter to his brother, written a couple of months later, Milne referred to the Africans on board as "actual skeletons with death in their countenances."[3] Milne, a seasoned officer who had encountered several slave vessels before, confessed to be shocked as never before by the sight of "dead children lying about the deck" while others were in "the last stage, all calling for food and water & pointing to their mouths."[4]

Without wasting any time, Captain Milne sent Lieutenant Robert Boyle Miller to take control of the *Arrogante* as prize master and to guide her immediately to Montego Bay, Jamaica, in order to disembark the Africans, before continuing toward Sierra Leone, where the vessel and the crew were to be brought before the Anglo-Portuguese Court of Mixed Commission.[5] In the meantime, and after seizing yet another slave ship only hours later, Milne and the *Snake* sailed to the Jagua harbor on the south side of the island of Cuba, where they delivered most of the *Arrogante*'s crew and their passengers to the governor of the fort of Jagua.[6] The *Arrogante*, with a crew of 35 men, mostly Portuguese, which included the captain, the pilot, and other officers, plus eight passengers, had obtained her human cargo 40 days before from the notorious Spanish slave

1 "Cuaderno de Bitácora del Bergⁿ Goleta Portugués Arrogante en su viaje de Santiago de Praya, para la Havana con escala en África," The National Archives (hereafter TNA), London, Foreign Office (hereafter FO), 315/69.

2 "Commʳ between the 6th Septʳ 1837 and the 16th March 1838," Log of HMS Snake, Alexander Milne Esq., National Maritime Museum (hereafter NMM), Greenwich, U.K., MLN/101/8.

3 Alexander Milne to David Milne, January 31, 1838, in Beeler 2004, 1:72. See also Beeler 2006.

4 Alexander Milne to David Milne, January 31, 1838, in Beeler 2004, 1:72.

5 The *Arrogante* was taken to Sierra Leone as this was one of only two places (Luanda being the other) where it was possible to judge and adjudicate the ship according to the Anglo-Portuguese treaties signed since 1815 for the abolition of the slave trade. William Rothery to the Lords Commissioners of Her Majesty's Treasury, Stratford Place, March 7, 1840, TNA, Treasury, 1/4235.

6 Milne to the Governor of the Fort of Xagua, HMS Snake, off Xagua, November 28, 1837. Alexander Milne Private Letter Book, HMS Snake, NMM, MLN/101/12.

dealer Pedro Blanco—who incidentally was one of the eight passengers—at the mouth of the river Gallinas, on the Upper Guinea coast.[7] A total of 470 Africans, many of them children and adolescents, had been crowded under the small deck of the brig and sent on their way to Cuba, almost certainly consigned to the house of Pedro Martinez & Co., of Havana and Cadiz. When the ship came across HMS *Snake*, 64 of them had died, and by the time the Africans were landed in Montego Bay 11 days later, 74 more had passed away, in spite of all the attentions given to them by the assistant-surgeon of HMS *Snake*, who had accompanied Lieutenant Miller.

That the violence effected upon this group of enslaved Africans had been exceptional became even clearer upon their arrival in Jamaica. There, John Roby, the collector of customs at Montego Bay, was just as perplexed as Captain Milne had been before him. In a letter sent to Commodore Peter John Douglas months later, Roby recounted the "horrible state of disease and emaciation" prevailing among them, explaining that "the thighs of many" were not thicker than his own wrist.[8] More alarming, however, was the revelation that many of the Africans made soon afterward. On various occasions upon their arrival and over the next few months, a considerable number of them, mostly children and adolescents, said repeatedly and to different people, that one of the Africans on board the *Arrogante* had been murdered, and that, subsequently, the sailors had cooked pieces of his body and served them with rice to the rest of the Africans. Many other accusations of beatings, rapes, and other various violent punishments were levied against the captain and crew.

Although Roby, Lieutenant Miller, and others who came into contact with them remained skeptical throughout, others, including the collector of customs at Lucea, a coastal town west of Montego Bay, Lyndon Howard Evelyn, the Senior Magistrate at Hanover, Alexander Campbell, and Special Justice of Peace, Hall Pringle, were convinced that the young Africans were telling the truth and denouncing an event that had indeed taken place. Evelyn, perhaps the most outspoken of them all, went as far as stating in public that "the long and patient hearing of the evidence, and the careful observing for many days of the tone and bearing of the many witnesses who were brought before the

7 "Bill of sale and muster roll of the Portuguese schooner Arrogante." TNA, FO, 315/69. In this document it was specified that, by law, the vessel had to carry a crew of which at least two-thirds had to be Portuguese. The names of the officers and sailors indicate that they were all, indeed, Portuguese and likely Whites, perhaps with the exception of one man who was very likely an African, and whose name was Francisco Liberato. See also Barcia & Kesidou 2018.

8 John Roby to Commodore P.J. Douglas, Custom-House, Montego Bay, July 23, 1838. House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online (hereafter HCPP), 1839 (162), *Ship Snake: Returns relating to the Portuguese Slave Vessel Captured by Her Majesty's Ship Snake*, p. 4.

commission, suddenly, without concert, from various places, and about nine months subsequent to the alleged perpetration of the crime," were conclusive evidence that the horrors described by the Africans were not the result of their vivid imagination, as had been suggested.[9]

Among those horrors, cannibalism was just one. Rape, torture, and beatings, sadistic murders, and another accusation of cannibalism, this one directed toward the ship's sailors, filled page after page of depositions. Perhaps due to the challenging nature of the accusation, and to the fact that, as Vincent Brown has contended, these inquests "laid out the axes, boundaries, and values of community," it took between seven and eight months for the British authorities in Jamaica to give enough credence to the testimony of these young Africans before reluctantly starting a proper investigation that, eventually, involved them as well as the Colonial Office and the Admiralty (Brown 2008:78). During that time, the Africans had first been taken care of—although of the 332 who were landed in Montego Bay, 66 died in the following weeks—and then hastily apprenticed, according to the dispositions associated with the Emancipation Act of 1833, within the parishes of St. James and Hanover in north-western Jamaica.[10]

The story these children and young men and women told was simply harrowing. According to many of them, a few days before being seized by the British cruiser, one of them, a grown-up man called Mina, who according to all descriptions given was not a Black man but "a yellow man," was forced to drink alcohol; then, after being taken behind a sail on the bow, he was slaughtered.[11] Although, as one would expect, some minor specifics in the testimonies of the witnesses are inconsistent, most of them agreed that the man cried out for help as he was being killed, and that his blood remained on deck until the next day. Some witnesses claimed that his head, hands, and feet were cut off and thrown over-

9 Lyndon Howard Evelyn to Lord Glenelg, Lucea, November 9, 1838, in "The Slave Butchery," *The British Emancipator: Under the Sanction of the Central Negro Emancipation Committee* (London, England), Wednesday, July 24, 1839, p. 272. It must be noted here that Evelyn was not known as an abolitionist. On the contrary, he had been singled out in 1833 by *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* as one of the West Indian planters who had opposed immediate emancipation, calling instead for a gradual process. "Intelligence from Jamaica," *The Anti-Slavery Reporter* 6 (110) (July 6, 1833):162–63.

10 Lionel Smith to Lord Glenelg, Spanish Town, December 20, 1837, TNA, Treasury, 1/4235.

11 Some witnesses disagreed on the name of the man, calling him also Carbinjay. The term "yellow negro" was used in the United States from the second part of the nineteenth century to refer to people of mixed racial origins, which included African ancestry. As far as I know, the term was not used before that time anywhere to define any specific type of people.

board, and then the rest of him was cut in small square pieces and served to the rest of the Africans on board as food. Furthermore, in a very revealing testimony, one witness stated that Mina's heart and liver were also cooked and then eaten by the Portuguese sailors.

Regardless of whether cannibalistic practices did indeed take place on board the *Arrogante*, by examining this case through a combination of ethnographic and microhistorical methods, it is possible to "challenge the omniscient [British Colonial] narrator's voice" that dominates in the paperwork created as a result of the investigation. In doing so, it is also possible to scrutinize and query the reasons why the colonial authorities in Jamaica, as well as the Colonial Office and the Admiralty, failed to fully investigate the accusations of cannibalism.[12] Using the resulting court records "to reenact a trial of the past" with the aim of reaching different conclusions is neither desirable nor practical (Ginzburg 1991:90). Instead, this article seeks to present an alternative interpretation to those offered by the colonial authorities who were in charge of the investigation, as well as to challenge the very core values and beliefs that stopped those same magistrates from pursuing promising leads and from further interrogating witnesses in search of what may have been, to them, an inconvenient truth. This approach will allow for a critical reflection on how cultural and ethical conventions can be shaped and reshaped across cultures—in this specific case, with respect to those of the slave ship crew, the enslaved Africans, the British officers, and the magistrates in Jamaica.[13]

At this point some questions about the way in which the British colonial authorities in Jamaica dealt with the investigation can be put forward. Did they really fail to believe the Africans? Or did they instead choose not to believe them in the hope of avoiding a long, potentially embarrassing, judicial process during which the superiority of their own culture and civilization might be brought into question? In any case, why were they so keen on shutting down the judicial process, even before the final set of witnesses had been interrogated?

Cannibalism has often been discussed with reference to pre-industrial societies, and especially in the case of African peoples it has been a constant, irre-

12 Brown 2008:10. Clifford Geertz's *Thick Description* (1973) is particularly useful in cases in which accounts of specific events are blurred by time and/or human deception, allowing the observer to grasp hidden meanings that are not obvious at first sight. In this case, where atrocious actions took place in the isolated and distant world of the Atlantic crossing, the *Thick Description* method is particularly suitable. See also Megill 1989 and Cyrenne 2006. For the adequacy of the microhistorical methodology for cases like this one, see Ginzburg 2012.

13 For a discussion on how historians have benefitted from the reams of paper created by British colonial courts, see Paton 2001:923–24.

spective of their particular origins, cultural traditions, and relationships with other cultures and societies. Within the Atlantic basin, since the time of the first contact between European and Caribbean peoples, it was consistently considered as a marker of so-called uncivilized peoples, contrary to morality and to natural laws (see, for example, Evans-Pritchard 1960; Jennings 2011). By focusing on the events that occurred on a slave ship and their subsequent interpretation by the British colonial authorities in Jamaica, it is possible to offer a different, complementary historical narrative that reveals a reversal of roles: one in which Europeans appear as flesh-eating savages, and Africans as the civilized people horrified by this behavior—a version of history that may be even just as valid as the traditional one, which regularly portrays Africans as cannibals.

The case of the *Arrogante* occurred at a pivotal historical moment within the British Empire, just as the final abolition of African slavery came into being, concluding a process of emancipation that was denoted by the compensation of slave owners and the forced apprenticeship to which the enslaved population was subjected. Just as the British intensified the pursuing of slavers across the Atlantic and Indian oceans, illegal human-trafficking activities expanded across vast regions of West, West Central, and East Africa. Simultaneously with this British reinvention as an antislavery power, and on the back of new Free Trade notions, an emerging new type of British imperialism, characterized by exceptionalist and racist ideas and policies, developed and expanded worldwide.

Perhaps as a result of these ideas and policies, the magistrates involved in this case repeatedly failed to listen to the Africans' version of events. This was not by any means a new phenomenon in the slavery-tainted Atlantic world. While examining the aftermath of the 1692 slave conspiracy in Barbados, historian Jason T. Sharples was keen to indicate that local magistrates could only listen imperfectly to the voices of those Africans who testified before them: "They evaluated informants' ideas and recorded aspects of them that aligned with their own notions of possible forms of insurrection" (Sharples 2015:811).

In many ways, they did the same more than a century later in Jamaica. First, when they plainly refused to accept that the *Arrogante*'s sailors could be capable of undertaking such a barbaric and amoral practice as cannibalism, and then when they decided to focus all their attention on the cooking and serving of the African man's flesh to the other enslaved Africans on board. This choice was questionable, especially if we consider that rather than one, there were two distinctly separated accusations: one relating to the enslaved Africans being forced to engage in cannibalism and another to the ship's crew eating specific human body parts themselves. In fact, all those investigating the events willfully ignored the second, more troubling accusation of cannibalism, which

pertained to the Portuguese sailors, not the Africans, eating the heart and the liver of Mina, thus *de facto* clearing them—and by extension all Europeans—of what they considered an even more dreadful and implausible charge.

In doing so, they also refused to give any credibility to the testimony of the African children and adolescents who witnessed the alleged butchery. Instead, they chose to believe the testimonies of a small minority of Africans—also mostly children and adolescents—whose accounts were unbalanced and highly questionable, including those of Bamboo and Caycoola, who denied ever seeing or hearing of the events, and those of Kai and Tom, who did not have access to the upper deck and thus should have never been considered as key witnesses.

All in all, because of their prejudiced understanding of the world, they struggled to make sense of an event that presented that same world turned upside down. Inevitably, one must wonder whether this was an isolated, excessively violent event in what was generally a world of cruelty and impunity. However, repeated allusions to White cannibalism—which have not gone unnoticed by historians—and the continuous fear of being cooked and served as food that was felt by Africans about to embark on Atlantic crossings, point to the plausible prospect that, sheltered by distance, isolation, and lawlessness while at sea, other similar instances may have indeed taken place between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries.[14]

1 White Cannibalism during Atlantic Crossings: A Historical Parenthesis

To slave ship masters and crews, what happened on the ship stayed on the ship. The very illicit character of the slave trade after 1820 provided them with a near-perfect environment to express their deepest and most sadistic desires and needs, often to their own financial detriment. Rape, torture, beatings, outright murder, and even mass killings were nothing rare in the illegal Atlantic. As a matter of fact, by the time the *Arrogante* was seized by HMS *Snake* in 1837, such crimes were so common that they barely merited a few lines in Colonial and Foreign Office letters and reports whenever they happened. There is little doubt

14 In recent years, William Pierson (1977) and John K. Thornton (2003) have discussed how Africans across times and cultures occasionally perceived Europeans as cannibals. They both focused on the mental aspects of the phenomenon, although they also engaged with its ideological side, which they presented as a collective radical ideology.

that by keeping these abuses away from public knowledge, slave ship captains and crews bestowed upon themselves a considerable degree of impunity.[15]

Over the years, historians have regularly reviewed some of the most disturbing episodes of cruelty, trying to make sense of the pitfalls of human nature, and reaching broadly similar conclusions. Notable among these cases is the one of the ship *Zong* in 1781, where hundreds of Africans were jettisoned overboard by an inexperienced captain, after overshooting the vessel's destination in the Caribbean.[16] The case of the *Zong*, however, has a more straightforward financial dimension, since all the evidence points to the mass murder being a result of the captain and crew choosing to "lose" their human cargo in the hope of claiming insurance for their loss upon arrival in Jamaica.

A much closer case, both in time and substance, is that of the schooner *Amistad*, which on her way from Havana to the eastern part of the island of Cuba, was taken over by the Africans imprisoned on board. The Africans of the *Amistad* had originated from the same West African regions as those of the *Arrogante*, and their uprising had taken place just a year and a few months after the *Arrogante*'s Africans were forced to endure their own Atlantic crossing. Here, according to the existing records, the *Amistad*'s cook, a racially-mixed man named Celestino, decided to repeatedly tease the Africans by making gestures with his knife, drawing the blade's edge across his throat, and then making "a chopping motion with his knife to show that their bodies would then be hacked to bits by the white men" (Rediker 2012:71–72). Finally, Celestino pointed to a barrel of salt beef, "implying that it was filled with the bodies of Africans who had made a previous voyage" (Rediker 2012:71–72).

The fear of being killed, cooked, and eaten felt by the *Amistad*'s Africans, which led them to confront their captors, was by no means unique. Fear of White cannibalism had existed among West and West-Central Africans since at least the sixteenth century.[17] From the beginnings of the Age of European Expansionism in the Atlantic, Africans seem to have been wary of the prospect

15 See, for example, the case of the schooner *Estella*, wrecked off Jamaica's south coast only a few months after the *Arrogante* was seized by the British. On this occasion, the Spanish sailors let around 300 Africans perish, while they escaped to Black River. James Kennedy to Lord Palmerston, Havana, June 19, 1838, TNA, FO, 84/240, fols. 147^{v}–148. The Superintendent of Liberated Africans in Havana, Richard Robert Madden, also mentioned the case in his correspondence with the Colonial Office, see TNA, Colonial Office, 318/140.

16 See, for example, Krikler 2012, Rupprecht 2007, and Walvin 2011. Another contemporary case where fear of White cannibalism was prevalent among the slaves was that of the *Hudibras*; see Brown 2009:1231–32.

17 The most recent and comprehensive study on the formation of early notions of cannibalism in the transatlantic slave trade is Staller 2019.

of being eaten by White men. Historical evidence suggests that at least from the sixteenth century onward, the Portuguese were told in West Africa that Africans believed that "Christians ate human flesh and that all the slaves they bought were carried away to eat" (see Bailey 2005:18 and also Shaw 2002:231). The very experience of being carried to the coast and being put on a crammed ship governed by often never-seen-before White men may have played a significant role in the existence of such beliefs. As historian Joseph C. Miller has argued, the darkness of the slave ship's hold was a propitious environment for the growth of "ubiquitous fears of Portuguese cannibalism" (Miller 1988:413).

As the slave trade expanded over the following centuries, references to this fear continued to appear in the historical record. In the late eighteenth century, Olaudah Equiano discussed it, specifically recalling how the sight of the boiling pot on the slave ship had overpowered him "with horror and anguish" (Equiano 1793:46). Slave traders were well aware of these potential problems, and of the consequences that they could have for the preservation of their human cargo. They knew that frightened Africans could either rebel or take their own lives, and thus they frequently endeavored to take measures to allay the fear of White cannibalism as much as possible. Eric Robert Taylor, for example, has discussed how "[o]n Portuguese ships, owners urged captains to avoid using metal cauldrons, which were often left steaming on deck for the purpose of cooking the slaves' food, because many Africans believed they were to be boiled alive in them" (Taylor 2006:25).

In fact, this fear still existed among Africans by the time the transatlantic slave trade was finally coming to an end. In the mid-1860s British explorer William Winwood Reade was surprised to find out during a visit to West Central Africa, that some of the Fang people from the area near Cape Lopez, in what is today Gabon, considered him to be a cannibal. He wrote: "The best of it was, that he [an African man he had befriended and whom he thought was a real cannibal] thought I was a cannibal too; a belief which is universal among the Bush tribes of Western Africa, and of which the slave-trade has been the cause" (Reade 1864:137). That Reade blamed the slave trade for such a belief is not surprising in the slightest. Maybe Africans were right to be frightened of White cannibals, basing their fear on previous genuine, rather than imagined, episodes of brutality that may have included cannibalism, and that were better concealed than the occurrence on the *Arrogante*.

The existing narratives about this fear point to a consistency over time of similar beliefs that cannot be easily overlooked (see, for example, Pierson 1977; Plasa 2009; Thornton 2003). In reality, no in-depth study based on primary sources exists on the extent to which Africans' belief in White cannibalism may have been grounded in fact. Often relying on the narratives of contemporaries

like Equiano, scholars have repeatedly referred to this fear without being able to find specific cases that could enable them to shed further light on the issue (see, for example, Pierson 1977). This belief, due to a lack of evidence, has often been placed in the realm of metaphor, when it may have been quite tangible. In fact, other than the case of the *Arrogante*, there is only one other recorded example in which European slave traders practiced a sort of coerced cannibalism by forcing some of their captives to eat the heart and liver of one of their companions, who had rebelled against the master and crew. This case, on the vessel *Robert* from Bristol in 1721, also revealed the perpetration of a wide range of sadistic punishments, and was, until now, the only one that indicated that White European slave traders had no moral or ethical qualms about resorting to cannibalism, if necessary, even if they were not eating human flesh themselves (Davidson 1961:196).

Cannibalism, as other inhumane sorts of behavior, was a practice associated not with Europeans but with the "other" African, Amerindian, and Australasian peoples. To the British magistrates who interrogated the *Arrogante*'s Africans in Jamaica, any admission that the White man could practice cannibalism was nothing short of a cultural aberration that was likely to be rejected at once as a threat to their moral values and laws. In the words of Rediker: "Cannibalism was one of the idioms through which the war called the slave trade was waged. Europeans had long justified the trade, and slavery more broadly, by saying that Africans were savage man-eaters, who must be civilized by exposure to the more 'advanced' life and thought of Christian Europe" (Rediker 2007:266). Such a discourse represented Western civilization as a pacesetter, both in technological advancements and moral principles, where barbaric practices like cannibalism were a thing of the past.

In this spirit, it became a norm to refer to African peoples as uncivilized heathens who were in need of the White man's god and enlightening progress. Travelers, missionaries, slave traders, British abolitionists, and diverse colonial administrators were regularly at pains to point out the savage and backward character of the peoples they met.[18] In some cases, as in that of explorer Reade, preconceptions of various kinds may have clouded the judgments they made about the peoples they came across. Reade, who had been in close contact with Christian missionaries since his arrival in Africa, stated that these missionaries were certain that the Fang were cannibals—a suspicion Reade promptly

18 For more contemporary references to the persistence of the idea of African barbarism in contrast to European (or American) civilization, see, among many others, Castle 1844:45–46, Nott 1857:29–32, and Pritchard 1837, II:47–48.

embraced. To his credit, however, he noticed that they had arrived at this conclusion in spite of never having seen a single case of cannibalism or receiving "a clear confession of cannibalism from one of them" (Reade 1864:136–37). In another, similar case, Augustus P. Arkwright, an officer at HMS *Prompt*, wrote to his grandfather from West Africa in 1842, casually describing his interaction with locals while carrying out antislavery patrols as living "among savages" and "boating off cannibals."[19]

On almost all occasions that Africans were taken across the Atlantic, they were viewed as barbarous, ungrateful, and incapable of enjoying the technological advances and the moral blessings of Western civilization. In Cuba, they were presented as cannibals in a memorandum to the Spanish king in 1790. In Brazil, the French consul in Bahia, Francis de Castelnau (1851), interviewed several Africans in the late 1840s as he attempted to learn more about the Azande people of Central Africa, who were reputed to be cannibals and often referred to as the "Nyam Nyam" people, a pejorative name that clearly referred to their supposedly cannibalistic habits.[20] In Britain in 1831, at the time the epicenter of the fight against the slave trade in the Atlantic, *The African Repository and Colonial Journal* went as far as describing Africa as "a land where despotism, superstition and barbarism have unitedly, and for ages, held dark dominion."[21]

Although these beliefs in African backwardness and cannibalism permeated most of the public sphere and discourse in most of the Western world, at least from the early nineteenth century, there were some isolated attempts to challenge their authenticity. A case in point is that of James Stephen, who in 1821 published his *Strictures on the Charge of Cannibalism on the African Race*, in which he meticulously revised the existing literature and reports written and published by those who had come into contact with various African peoples, concluding that all accusations of cannibalism were "beyond doubt" unfounded (Stephen 1821:47). His, however, was to be an exceptional digression that was hardly ever cited or repeated anywhere.

Even though in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe cannibalistic practices, including some related to the consumption of body parts reputed to

19 Augustus P. Arkwright to his grandfather, HMS *Prompt*, becalmed off Sierra Leone, November 7, 1842, Derbyshire Record Office, Matlock, D5991/10/74.

20 "Los hacendados y dueños de ingenios de Cuba al Rey Carlos IV, Havana," January 19, 1790, Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Estado, 7/5; Castelnau 1851.

21 Anonymous, "Character and Influence of the Colonization Society," *The African Repository and Colonial Journal* 7(7) (September 1831), p. 197.

cure medical problems, remained in existence, cannibalism had become a custom intrinsically associated with non-Western, and especially African peoples. White cannibalism, on the other hand, continued to be more of a dwindling myth than a demonstrated fact, in spite of the work of authors like William Cullen, who in 1806 was keen to point out that such practices had existed and still continued to exist at the time in parts of the Western world (Cullen 1806, II:417).

To the *Arrogante*'s Africans, however, this primordial fear soon turned into a very violent reality, when the vessel where they had been crammed together was transformed into what historian Rosalind Shaw has aptly called "a space of deadly transformation" (Shaw 2002:231). Examining their experiences, then, can help us shed light on the traumatic experience they were forced to endure during their Atlantic crossing, and on the extent of the ineptitude—real or otherwise—shown by most of those who came into contact with them and dismissed beforehand their accounts in the following days and months.

2 The Accusation(s)

Of the 266 Africans who survived the *Arrogante*'s ordeal, 24 were brought before various colonial officers to testify in the case. Since adult men and women were kept below deck during the entire Atlantic crossing, among those who saw Mina's murder, there were only children and adolescents of both sexes, all of whom appeared extremely distressed during their depositions. As they faced their own individual traumas, they showed a steely resolution, first by repeatedly denouncing the murder they had witnessed, and then by insisting on having their voices heard before the British magistrates who interviewed them.

These children and adolescents had all been embarked at the infamous slave factory of Gallinas, belonging to the notorious Spanish slave trader Pedro Blanco, who accompanied them on their transatlantic voyage. In many ways, their life histories seem to have been remarkably similar to the children of the *Amistad*, who have been the focus of an excellent book by Benjamin Lawrance (2014). Like many of the children of the *Amistad*, those of the *Arrogante* had been sent to Gallinas from the interior of the continent, after being enslaved through kidnapping and warfare; and they had spent time in the slave barracoons located there. Like the children of the *Amistad*, they were put on a vessel headed for the island of Cuba; and like them, they were forced to endure the traumatic experience of the Atlantic crossing. It would not be far-fetched to suggest that some of them may have known or may have even been related to

those on the *Amistad*, since they had been embarked just over a year prior to the embarkation of the majority of the children on the *Amistad*.[22]

There is little doubt that many were left traumatized by this experience. One of them, Sadea, a half-sister of Mina, the man who was allegedly killed and cannibalized, burst into tears as she told those questioning her about how the sailors had murdered her older brother. Another one, Manu, had her examination adjourned after showing signs of fatigue and "fear or excitement," while recalling the impression that this event had had upon her.[23] It is no small feat that six of them assured the authorities in Jamaica that they had seen the crime with their own eyes. Of these, Sarou was between 12 and 13 years of age; her sister, Manu, between 13 and 14; Fabborough was about 12; Sequi was 16; Sadea was "but a girl"; and Cawley was between 18 and 20.[24] These six Africans, who had coincidentally been placed in areas such as the space near the kitchen and other limited areas near the upper deck where they were very likely to have witnessed the events they described, recounted in a coherent fashion, almost to the smallest detail, how the events had unfolded. They all described how the Portuguese sailors took Mina behind a sail that they had put up across the deck to stop the rest of the Africans from witnessing what was about to happen. Sadea, as well as at least two others, described how her brother had screamed "Sadea, they do kill me," as he was being murdered.[25] The testimony of Cawley, also a half-brother of Mina, was almost identical. According to him, Mina had called "Sadea, Sadea, they are killing me."[26] Other Africans who had heard the screams gave similar descriptions of the events, confirming the testimonies of Mina's half-siblings. Manu, who had peeped through the holes in the sail that the sailors had used to cover their actions, described how they cut Mina's throat "with a long knife," and how he had cried out just beforehand, "they kill me,

22 According to Lawrance (2014:9–15), most of the children of the *Amistad* had been sent toward Cuba in March or April 1839, or about one year and five months after those taken on the *Arrogante*.

23 "Testimonies of Mary, or Manu, and Sadea, or Sarah," Lucea, July 18, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade: Copy of the Report of Hall Pringle and Alexander Campbell, Esquires, Associate Justices of the Peace, Relatives to Certain Atrocities of Slave Trades*, pp. 2, 3.

24 A seventh key witness, named Bania, died in Montego Bay after disembarking, a circumstance that deprived British authorities in Jamaica from bringing him to testify months later. "Testimony of Candune," Montego Bay, July 11, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 17.

25 "Testimony of Sadea, or Sarah, apprenticed to Mr. Thomas Barker Allwood," Lucea, July 19, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 3.

26 "Testimony of Thomas Barker or Cawley," Lucea, July 30, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 6.

oh!"[27] Another young African girl, Samou, told how she had also heard someone on the deck scream "they da kill me, oh!" while she was below deck.[28]

There is little doubt that the story of the murder became a defining event in the ship mates' memories of their Atlantic crossing. By most accounts, even those who had not seen the murder or heard the man's screams, had heard some of their shipmates talking about the murder directly afterward. Some, like Gemma and Foulah, conveyed their shock at seeing a large amount of blood "running about the deck of the ship" and falling "through a hole to the sea."[29] Nango, another young African girl, gave an even more unnerving version of this event, telling how she and other young girls had seen "drops of blood coming through one place in the deck, one by one, into the hold," right after hearing somebody above bawling "they are killing me; they are killing me."[30]

Beyond these disturbing stories, in the days that followed Mina's assassination, there were accounts of a suspect meat being presented to the captives for consumption. The fact that the only other possible source of red meat on board at the time was a hog that was still alive days later when HMS *Snake* seized the vessel made the accusations even more plausible. Certainly, many of the Africans interrogated throughout July and August 1838 discussed at length how, after they had seen or heard about Mina's death, they had been served a foul-smelling and bad-tasting red meat that had made many of them vomit.[31] Seven of those interrogated in Montego Bay and Lucea agreed that the meat was "different." Many of them went as far as to explain that in addition to being very red, it was "flavoured like horse meat," it had no bones, and that it also had "somebody hairs" [sic] in it.[32]

More revealing, two or three of those questioned, mostly young girls who were placed near the ship's kitchen during the Atlantic crossing, confirmed that the flesh of Mina had been cut into small pieces and specifically cooked in the

27 "Testimony of Mary, or Manu," Lucea, August 2, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 7.

28 "Testimony of Jane Stainsby, or Samou," Lucea, July 19, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 4.

29 "Testimonies of Thomas Wilson, or Gemma, and Thomas, or Foulah," Lucea, July 19, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, pp. 3 and 4.

30 "Testimony of Margianna, or Nango," Lucea, July 25, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 5.

31 Various witnesses also agreed on the fact that the head, hands, and feet, and some of Mina's entrails, were thrown into the sea. See, for example, the testimonies of Sarou and Fabborough.

32 See, among others, the testimonies of "John, formerly Balla," Montego Bay, July 4, 1838; "Jane Stainsby, or Samou," Lucea, July 19, 1838; and "Margianna, or Nango," Lucea, July 25, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, pp. 15, 4, and 5, respectively.

big pot destined for the Africans.[33] At least one of them, Sarou, asserted that the sailors had also cooked the liver and heart of Mina in their own smaller pot, and then had eaten those parts themselves.[34] Sarou's testimony was confirmed by Cawley, who saw the sailors put the heart and the liver "into a pot the next day."[35]

In an act that was consistent with the previous and subsequent behavior of the *Arrogante*'s crew, those who rejected the strange meat were severely punished for doing so. Many of the witnesses agreed on the fact that the sailors beat to death many of those who refused to eat it. For example, Bresah, revealed that when they refused the meat, the sailors "beat them very bad."[36] Bresah also added that "so many died from the Spaniards beating them" that he was not able to count them.[37] Another African who also discussed the quality of the meat at length, Kyenia, pointed out that the beatings were carried out with the "ship ropes."[38] These testimonies were also confirmed by Nambey, who testified that some of the Africans below deck, "were beat so much that they died afterwards."[39] Even Caycoola and Bamboo, two of the four enslaved Africans who denied seeing or hearing anything about the murder and dismembering of Mina, agreed that another man, called Bangba, had been flogged to death with a rope and a cat-o'-nine earlier in the Atlantic crossing.[40]

To be sure, the scale and nature of the violence that took place aboard the *Arrogante*, even leaving aside the accusations of cannibalism, is almost impossible to fully express in writing without detracting from it. In addition to the flogging and subsequent death of Bangba, there were other noteworthy criminal acts carried out by the crew of the *Arrogante* that went unpunished. From the time of departure, daily fatalities due to the particularly inhumane condi-

33 "Testimonies of Mary, or Manu, and Jane, or Sarou," Lucea, July 18, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 2.

34 "Testimony of Jane, or Sarou," Lucea, July 18, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 2.

35 "Testimony of Thomas Barker or Cawley," Lucea, July 30, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 6. Fabborough, however, gave a different version of the event, when he claimed that both organs were thrown overboard by Mina's killers. "Testimony of Robert, or Fabborough," Lucea, July 18, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 3.

36 "Testimony of Bresah, or Richard Willock," Lucea, July 19, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 4.

37 "Testimony of Bresah, or Richard Willock," Lucea, July 19, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 4.

38 "Testimony of Sophia, or Kyenia," Lucea, July 19, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 4.

39 "Testimony of Clara, formerly Nambey," Montego Bay, July 7, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 16.

40 "Testimony of Edwin, formerly Caycoola," Montego Bay, July 3, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 15.

tions in the ship's hold were common. Various witnesses recalled that between five and eight of their companions were found dead every morning on the voyage as a result of a combination of factors that included the unbearable heat, the frequent beatings, the restrictive space in which they were confined, and the lack of medical attention given to those who fell ill.[41] Children seem to have been particularly affected by these conditions, and in a chilling case, one recently born child who had died during the Atlantic crossing was subsequently thrown overboard to the despair of her mother.[42]

As with other slave vessels for which we have detailed reports of the abuses committed by the crew, instances of rape—usually combined with beatings—were not rare on board the *Arrogante*. A number of them were described by the Africans interrogated in Jamaica. For example, Samme, who was 16 or 17 years old at the time, told how the sailors used to take "some of the girls upon deck at night for their wives."[43] Both Caycoola and Banna recalled how one of the White men known to them as Papiau or Papio tried to rape one of the Africans called Caffasano, and how when she resisted he beat her so badly that he cut her eye and forehead.[44] According to Candune, another girl called Wenga "was taken from the hold upon deck by a sailor," where he "had connexion [sic] with her."[45] And in what was perhaps the most astonishing case of rape reported, two witnesses, Nambey and Banniy, independently described how after Lieutenant Miller had taken command of the ship, one of the slave dealers who had been allowed to remain on board, "beat a woman with a cat all night [sic] because she would not submit to him." According to Nambey and Banniy, the woman, named Yacca, died soon after as a result of the beating, and had to be thrown overboard after "the man-of-war people could not find it [the perpetrator of the rape] out."[46]

41 "Report from Walter Finlayson and Richard B. Facey, Esqrs., Special Justices, to Richard Hill, Esq." Montego Bay, Jamaica, July 17, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 11. See also the testimonies of "Henrietta, formerly Tarloo," "James, formerly Sequi," and "Bamboo," Montego Bay, Jamaica, July 2, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 13.

42 "Testimony of Clara, formerly Nambey," Montego Bay, July 7, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 16.

43 "Testimony of Jane, formerly Samme," Montego Bay, July 3, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 14.

44 "Testimonies of Edwin, formerly Caycoola, and James, formerly Banna," Montego Bay, Jamaica, July 3, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 15.

45 "Testimony of Candune," Montego Bay, July 11, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 17.

46 "Testimony of Clara, formerly Nambey," Montego Bay, July 7, 1838. See also "Testimony of Emily, formerly Banniy," Montego Bay, July 7, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 16.

If we are to believe the words of these two young girls, even after the British seized the ship, the slave dealers were able to carry on abusing and murdering the Africans, under the very eyes of those who were supposed to stop them from doing so. Despite all these claims, however, it is worth noting here that each and every one of the *Arrogante*'s crew were set at liberty soon after, as they were Portuguese subjects over whom British courts in Jamaica had no jurisdiction.[47]

3 The Investigation

Shortly after Evelyn sent his first letter on this matter informing Commodore Douglas about the atrocities that some of the *Arrogante*'s Africans had been denouncing for months, a much-delayed inquest into the possible act of cannibalism was ordered. This was, by all means, as uncommon an investigation as they had ever experienced. After all, to them, the accusations against the crew of the *Arrogante* represented nothing short of an alarming turnaround of the traditional roles ascribed to Europeans and Africans. This time they were not asked to confirm, once again, the barbaric customs of the "uncivilized Africans" that were trafficked across the Atlantic, or even to question the sort of well-known sadistic brutalities frequently carried out by slave trade crews at sea. This time the stakes were much higher: this was a case that in a straightforward way challenged the superiority of White men, their Western civilization, and their Christian values and beliefs.

Twenty-four of the surviving Africans were interrogated through July and August by three different sets of people. A first group of 13 Africans testified between July 2 and 11 in front of justices Walter Finlayson and Richard B. Facey. A second group of 3 Africans, including Bamboo, who had also been interviewed by Finlayson and Facey, testified before John Roby and his associate P. Spencer between July 17 and 23. Finally, a third group of 11 Africans, which included Kyennia and Cawley, both of whom had also been interviewed by Finlayson and Facey, came before Campbell, Pringle, and occasionally Evelyn in Lucea, between July 18 and August 2. It was in this last group that the largest number of direct witnesses was concentrated. Sadly, by the time they testified, Finlayson and Facey, mostly basing their conclusions on a biased let-

47 The *Arrogante*'s sailors and passengers were taken to Cuba and Sierra Leone, where they were set at liberty shortly upon their arrival. "Report of the case of the Portuguese Brigantine 'Arrogante,' Augusto Cezar Medina, Master," TNA, FO, 84/235, fols. 157–163; and H.W. Macaulay and R. Doherty to Palmerston, Freetown, Sierra Leone, March 8, 1838, TNA, FO, 84/235, fols. 153–54.

ter sent by Lieutenant Miller, on the subjective opinion of Roby, and on the erratic deposition of Bamboo, had hurriedly concluded that there was not "sufficient evidence to substantiate the allegation that the slaves in question were subsisted on human flesh during the voyage," an inference that seems to have satisfied the colonial authorities in Kingston and Secretary of State for War and the Colonies Lord Glenelg in London, even though the investigation in Jamaica was not entirely closed until early August.[48]

Lieutenant Miller's letter of July 6 in particular was quite damaging to the Africans' cause. In this missive, he stated his disbelief that something so horrible could have happened on the ship, without him being informed. Lieutenant Miller also based his opinion on the fact that there were two Africans on board who were able to speak English and who never told him a word about these brutalities, and on his one-sided appreciation of the *Arrogante*'s captain, with whom he had become acquainted, and whom he considered to be "inoffensive" and not capable "of such a horrible transaction."[49]

All the circumstantial arguments presented by Lieutenant Miller in this letter were quite problematic, and yet they were readily accepted by justices Finlayson and Facey. His assumption that a slave ship captain who, according to his own words, had carried out six voyages to Africa was inoffensive or incapable of allowing such a monstrosity was naive at best and perhaps revealed his own internal struggle to comprehend the magnitude of the accusations that had been leveled against the ship's crew. Furthermore, his supposition that an event like the one described by the Africans could not have taken place without him being informed was at best an incredulous attempt to conceal his own lack of awareness of events that were taking place under his authority and that could bring into question his effectiveness as prize officer. This is especially the case if we consider that a young African girl was beaten to death during the night by one of the sailors after Miller had assumed command, without him ever hearing of it. Even more questionable was the fact that Lieutenant Miller readily chose to rely on the testimonies of two recaptured Africans who were found on board the *Arrogante*, perhaps because they were able to speak some English. What he purposely failed to disclose while portraying their statements as conclusive is that both of them, Kai and Tom, had spent the entire voyage in chains and below the deck, as they asserted months later before John Roby,

48 "Report from Walter Finlayson and Richard B. Facey, Esqrs., Special Justices, to Richard Hill, Esq," Montego Bay, Jamaica, July 17, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 12.

49 R.B. Miller to Commodore Douglas, Port Royal, Jamaica, July 6, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (162), *Ship Snake*, pp. 1–2.

thus rendering their personal experiences on board and their knowledge of any event occurring above deck essentially useless.[50]

John Roby's take on the matter was just as prejudiced. As far as he was concerned, the Africans he had talked to about the issue could not give him precise information on whether human flesh had been served to them. Regardless, and contradicting himself to a certain extent, he twice confirmed that upon their arrival belief in the authenticity of the incident was "very prevalent" among them, and he also admitted that they "all seemed to have heard it, and most of them seemed to believe it."[51] Just as Lieutenant Miller had done before, the subjective opinion that Roby had formed *a priori* about the veracity of the Africans' testimonies, conceivably as a result of his own limitations in coming to terms with such a particularly ominous claim, also led him to doubt the fact that the mostly White Portuguese sailors could ever be capable of the brutalities they were being accused of. In his letter to Evelyn, Roby tried to sway his colleague's opinion by stressing the grounds for his disbelief, going as far as suggesting that even though they were all aware of the cruelties usually committed by slave ship crews, they should not "paint the devil blacker than he is."[52]

The third opinion held in high regard by Finlayson and Facey was that of Bamboo, one of the African children—he was 12—who spent most of the Atlantic crossing serving as a cabin boy to the ship's captain, and who was considered to be very intelligent by Roby, Finlayson, and Facey. As a matter of fact, Bamboo's refutation of the evidence given by many of his companions, was perhaps more instrumental than any other opinion, including those of first-hand witnesses Cawley and Sequi, who repeatedly gave very similar narratives of the event, accusing the sailors of murder, and who coincidentally agreed on the fact that Bamboo had also witnessed the murder of Mina. What is more telling, when Bamboo and Sequi were cross-examined, it became clear that Bamboo's original testimony was inconsistent and contradictory, and that he was either falsifying or concealing information. In spite of these glaring problems, Finlayson and Facey chose not to question the accuracy of his words. When he was asked to challenge Sequi's account of the murder and subsequent act of

50 "Testimonies of Kai, otherwise John Thomson, and Tom, otherwise Thomas Bradshaw," Montego Bay, July 20 and 23, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (162), *Ship Snake*, p. 3.

51 Roby to Evelyn, Custom-House, Montego Bay, July 24, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 8; and Roby to P.J. Douglas, Custom-House, Montego Bay, July 23, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 9. See also: "Testimony of John Roby," Montego Bay, July 9, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 16.

52 Roby to Evelyn, Custom-House, Montego Bay, July 24, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 8.

cannibalism, Bamboo failed to do so. His only answer was that at the time "he was too little," and thus could not remember every detail.[53]

Irrespective of the blunt inconsistencies of Bamboo's testimony, Finlayson and Facey preferred it to those of Sequi and Cawley, likely because it was more convenient to them and their prejudiced vision of what could be real and/or believable, and what was not. On more than one occasion they made biased, adulatory remarks about Bamboo's intelligence, contrasting it with the limited trustworthiness of Sequi and Cawley, even though they were older—Sequi was approximately 16 and Cawley between 18 and 20—and in spite of their testimonies remaining consistent throughout. Cawley, the witness with the most coherent account of the events, was dismissed as a liar based on the opinion other Africans had of him. His testimony was also dismissed based on the fact that since his arrival the police had twice arrested him due to his repeated complaints about his "master, Mr. Allwood."[54] Cawley, like the rest of his surviving ship mates, had been placed under the system of apprenticeship adopted in the island five years before, which in effect had placed him under the supervision of a local resident, for whom he was forced to work. Obviously not an acquiescent apprenticed laborer, Cawley never had his intelligence praised by anyone, even though, remarkably, he had become fully fluent in English after just nine months of living in Jamaica.[55]

The fact is that all three sets of colonial authorities seem to have classified the Africans who appeared before them into very loose "good" and "bad" categories, which were broadly related to their behavior since their time of arrival on the Caribbean island. The testimonies of those who had abided by the colonial law and obeyed their assigned employers were invariably given more weight than the testimonies of those, like Sequi or Cawley, who had, in their eyes, failed to show the sort of obedience that was expected of them.

Equally troublesome was the overall methodology followed by all three sets of investigators. By repeatedly and consistently focusing on the meat that was served to the Africans, all three disregarded the fact that at least two witnesses strongly suggested the possibility that the Portuguese sailors themselves had feasted on the heart and liver of Mina. The fact that no further questions were

53 "Cross examination of James, formerly Sequi, and Bamboo," Montego Bay, July 3, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 14.

54 Roby to Evelyn, Custom-House, Montego Bay, July 24, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 8.

55 The vast majority of the Africans interviewed by the authorities were not able to testify in English, which makes Cawley's proficiency even more extraordinary. Interpreters were used in almost all cases from the moment they landed in early December 1837 until the final interviews in August 1838.

asked every time one of the Africans mentioned this peculiar behavior indicates a deliberate or subconscious lack of awareness in following up a lead that could have revealed to them the extreme and deadly levels of violence perpetrated by Europeans aboard slave ships.

Another central problem with the investigation was the failure of the authorities to interview as many potential witnesses as possible. Although by any accounts there were more than 260 Africans who could have been questioned, only 24 were called. John Roby himself, while being questioned by Finlayson and Facey, mentioned the names of several of them who could have been brought before the authorities, including Tamba, Tumba, Jombo, Lucca, and three boys named Cabingi, all of them aged between 12 and 16.[56] Some convincing evidence also suggested that at least half of these 24 witnesses were subjectively selected based on how intelligent they appeared to be, and not by the likelihood of their potential as key direct witnesses.[57]

The testimonies taken by Finlayson and Facey, and by Roby and Spencer, denote a lack of diligence that calls into question not only their investigative ability to decide which leads to pursue but also their ethics and actual interest in finding out the truth of what had happened during the *Arrogante*'s Atlantic crossing. The most damning indication of this lack of diligence was when they overlooked the testimonies gathered by Campbell and Pringle in Lucea barely a few days later, and hastily dismissed the case. This, it should be pointed out, was not the only time that the behavior of Finlayson and Facey indicated bias against the testimony of Africans within their parish. Less than a year later, they would be accused by none other than John Roby himself of dismissing an unambiguous case of excessive punishment dispensed by a local neighbor on an apprenticed African girl.[58] In this case, they also failed to follow procedure, only hearing the testimony of the abusive White neighbor and dismissing the charges presented as "utterly unfounded and malicious," without ever listening to the accusing party.[59]

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56 "Testimony of John Roby, Esq.," Montego Bay, July 9, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 17.

57 "Report from Walter Finlayson and Richard B. Facey, Esqrs., Special Justices, to Richard Hill, Esq." Montego Bay, Jamaica, July 17, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 10.

58 G.M. Lawson to Captain Darling, Portobello, May 26, 1839. HCPP, 1839 (523), "Papers relative to the West Indies. Part I (5) Jamaica—British Guiana—continued. (In continuation of parliamentary paper no. 272, ordered to be printed 31 May 1839)," p. 181.

59 G.M. Lawson to John Duff, Porto Bello, May 20, 1839. HCPP, 1839 (581), Jamaica, "Copies or extracts of further communications transmitted to the Marquess of Normanby by the Agent of Jamaica, on the 13th day of June and the 12th day of July, relative to the agricultural state of that colony," pp. 6–8.

Campbell and Pringle also seem to have been selective in which Africans they interviewed, although they at least seem to have chosen potential key witnesses among the 11 Africans they deposed. Their conclusions, not surprisingly, were entirely different to those of Miller, Finlayson, Facey, and Roby. In their report, which was subsequently picked up and published in the pages of *The British Emancipator*, they stated that they were convinced that Mina had been "murdered in cold blood," and that they were satisfied that "part of this man's body was served to the other slaves as food."[60] Unfortunately, by then, Governor Lionel Smith, just like others before him, had decided to close the matter for good, and the report of Campbell and Pringle was filed away.

4 Conclusions

Although the colonial authorities in Jamaica dismissed the accusations against the crew of the *Arrogante*, the *sui generis* character of the incident turned it into a sort of *cause célèbre* over the next year in Britain, and even in the United States, repeatedly featuring in the abolitionist press and fueling public debate about the evils of the slave trade at a time when British abolitionist policies in the Atlantic were being forcefully redefined.[61] From the moment *The Morning Journal* published part of the process started by Finlayson, Facey, and Roby on April 9, 1839, a number of articles, mostly condemning the atrocities committed by the *Arrogante*'s crew and the impartiality and legitimacy of the actual process conducted in Jamaica, began to appear, turning Mina and his fellow shipmates into what Vincent Brown has referred to as "transatlantic spirits" (Brown 2008:152).

At some point even Evelyn himself, months after inciting the start of the investigation and shortly before his death, wrote his observations on the case, which were later published in *The British Emancipator*, dissecting the partial and implausible arguments given by Lieutenant Miller, and exposing the flaws of the investigation carried out by British magistrates and government officers in Jamaica. Months after Campbell and Pringle took the testimonies of 11

60 "Report from Alexander Campbell and Hall Pringle, Esquires, to His Excellency Sir Lionel Smith, K.C.B., Governor of Jamaica," Lucea, August 9, 1838. HCPP, 1839 (157), *Slave Trade*, p. 1. See also "Slave Butchery: Official Document," *The British Emancipator: Under the Sanction of the Central Negro Emancipation Committee* (London, England), Wednesday, April 17, 1839, p. 235.

61 For a discussion of the case in the United States, see "Horrors of the Slave Trade," *The Emancipator* (New York), January 24, 1839, p. 155.

Africans, Evelyn was still riled about the colonial authorities' lack of action in Jamaica and was lobbying the government to do something about it. In a letter sent to Lord Glenelg in November 1838, Evelyn pledged to no longer withhold his opinions on the matter, which had been the result of "the careful observing for many days of the tone and bearing of the many witnesses," that had been brought before Campbell and Pringle, without previous warning and from various locations.[62]

Ultimately, Evelyn's struggle to convince Governor Smith, Lord Glenelg, and the rest of the British establishment both in Jamaica and in Britain, of the alleged atrocities committed by the crew of the *Arrogante*, fell on deaf ears. The sailors were all taken to Cuba and Sierra Leone where they were freed and able to enroll in other slave-trading expeditions should they have wished to do so.[63] The case was abandoned, even by the press, and it was only when the vessel was eventually destroyed, in mid-1840, that some newspapers resurrected the story for a few days.[64]

Ultimately, whether the slave traders fed the enslaved Africans below the deck with the flesh of one of their own companions does not really constitute the center of this story. What the case of the *Arrogante* really highlights is the frightening thought that the atrocities committed during Atlantic crossings were so many and varied—even in a single voyage, as this case reveals—that they were likely to be overlooked unless certain human traffickers had taken them to an entirely new level. Due to the isolation and distance provided by the Atlantic, rape, beatings, malnourishment, and lack of medical attention, among the many other sorts of violent acts perpetrated against Africans, became so frequent that for British officers on land and at sea, they were not worthy of notice, except on extraordinary occasions. Distance, in cases like this, generated "a total lack of compassion for [...] fellow human beings" that was

62 Evelyn to Lord Glenelg, Lucea, November 9, 1838, in "The Slave Butchery," *The British Emancipator: Under the Sanction of the Central Negro Emancipation Committee* (London, England), Wednesday, July 24, 1839, p. 272.

63 Letting slave ship captains and crews go after being captured was a customary practice at the time among antislavery trade patrols.

64 The *Arrogante* was a well-known slave trade vessel, which made at least 11 successful trips to Africa, first under the name of *Urraca* between 1831 and 1836, then under the name of *Arrogante* between 1836 and 1838, and finally under the name of *Yberia* until its final destruction in July 1840. "Bill of sale of the brig Urraca," Praia, December 3, 1836, TNA, FO, 315/69; "Report of the case of the Portuguese Brigantine 'Arrogante,' Augusto Cezar Medina, Master," TNA, FO, 84/235, fol. 163. See also Voyage 1466, in slavevoyages.org (accessed October 15, 2015); and Friend of Africa, "Cuba. Destruction of a Slaver," *The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, January 27, 1841, p. 2.

well documented throughout the nineteenth century (Ginzburg 1994:57). In this respect, the *Arrogante* provides us with a window into the world of violence on the slave ship but also into the world of indifference and apathy shown by those interested in bringing this inhuman traffic to an end.

What actually happened on the ship? Were there, as quite a few of the Africans testified, one or more instances of cannibalism in addition to a wide array of other types of violence? Although the testimonies of most of the witnesses seem to point to a positive answer, we will probably never know the truth, precisely because the events described took place under the control of the very slave traders who were accused of committing them. Does that mean that we should dismiss the voices of these witnesses because of their age, origins, or color of their skin, just as most of their Western contemporaries did? The actual investigation carried out by the British authorities in Jamaica, these individuals' interpretation of the world, and their consideration and understanding of the testimonies offered by the Africans they interrogated offer some clues as to whether they even considered giving them the benefit of the doubt. In most cases, from Lieutenant Miller to Lord Glenelg, they appear to have made up their minds even before they listened to or read the allegations. Even so, once the process had begun, they were all forced to reluctantly perform their duties, arguably in order to legitimize the more civilized and superior nature of British governance.

The testimonies offered by the witnesses were quite substantial about the veracity of the events they described. Among the repeated failures of the colonial authorities in Jamaica to come to terms with the story that was presented to them by the Africans, they chose to ignore the fact that several key witnesses swore to having seen with their own eyes the murder of Mina, and that several others had heard his screams and seen his blood shortly afterward. More to the point, most of them, according to the one person who received and took care of them after their landing, had heard about this particular crime and were fully convinced that the murder and subsequent serving of human flesh had indeed taken place. Among them, many had similar comments and remarks about the quality of the meat they had been offered after Mina was killed, and at least one was positive that the Portuguese sailors—almost certainly mostly White men—had also participated in the feast, reserving for themselves Mina's heart and liver. The fact that the authorities were unable to find a reasonable explanation for the origin of this different meat served during the Atlantic crossing also reinforces the credibility of the accusations of cannibalism made by the Africans.

This specific detail should not go unnoticed, as it is probably central to understanding the reasons behind Mina's alleged slaughtering. Were the Por-

tuguese sailors acting out of pure sadism, or were they more interested in the conceivable powers that eating this different man's heart and liver could offer them? Here, one final line of investigation shall remain open, since we do not know the precise composition of the *Arrogante*'s crew, even though we have their names. From the muster roll we can guess that at least one of them, Francisco Liberato, was an African or a descendant of Africans. But were the other 34 all White Portuguese from Portugal, Cape Verde, or other parts of the Portuguese Atlantic world, or were there more Africans among them, as was customary on many slave ships of the period? Based on the existing evidence—namely the muster roll, the logbook, and the other papers confiscated by the British—it is reasonable to assume that the vast majority were White men and Portuguese subjects. Had they been otherwise, especially if they had been Africans or of African-descent, it is almost certain that such an important detail would have been revealed in the previously mentioned documents taken from the ship, or by Lieutenant Miller and the Lucea and Montego Bay authorities. We will probably never know for certain, as their names on the ship's muster roll are all characteristic Portuguese names.

From Lieutenant Miller's letter to Roby's warnings about not painting "the devil blacker than he is," anyone reading this criminal inquest is likely to be stunned by the prejudice, sloppiness, and indolence—real or otherwise—shown by most of those who were tasked with finding out the truth behind this gruesome accusation. In most of the cases we can only speculate that a subconscious cultural empathy for other Whites prevailed over logical inquisitiveness and reasoning. Perhaps a lack of interest in following clues that could have led to a longer investigation process may have also played a part, discouraging them from interrogating more of the *Arrogante*'s Africans and preventing them from digging deeper in the hope of finding some actual answers. Perhaps the physical absence of those accused may have played a part as well. Contemporary ideas commonly held in Great Britain, which suggested that Africans "were undoubtedly morally and intellectually inferior," may have also led to the apparent underestimation of the depositions given by many of these children and young adults (Hanley 2016:106).

The testimonies of these African children and adolescents were doubted and ultimately dismissed as they challenged the very core of Western and Christian cultural and religious values. By making such claims, the Africans placed the reluctant public officers forced to deal with their case in a difficult situation. The historical records left by them clearly point to an almost-universal concerted attempt to dismiss, often beforehand, the accusations of cannibalism made by the Africans against the Portuguese sailors. As a matter of fact, the term cannibalism was never even used—not once—by any of those involved in

the investigation, in sharp contrast with its widespread use across the Western hemisphere whenever Africans were charged with the same crime. Throughout the investigation, those asking the questions resorted instead to the use of euphemisms and elaborate language that concealed the real meanings and softened the judicial process, as it wended its way towards a preordained and uneventful conclusion.

This article has not attempted to prove that one likely example of flesh-eating Europeans is sufficient to represent what may have actually happened in almost four centuries of transatlantic slave trade. Instead, the examination of the documents bequeathed to us by the protagonists, witnesses, and authorities emphasize at the very least two challenging findings. The first and, perhaps, most significant one relates to the refusal of most of the British colonial officers involved in the case to even conceive of the possibility of a world in which fellow Europeans appeared to be less civilized than the same Africans they often considered as savages, backward, and capable of cannibalism. The second one concerns these officers' hasty rejection of the testimonies of the African children and adolescents who came forward with very similar accounts of the harrowing events they had experienced. Instead, and based on their prejudiced opinion of the intelligence of those they interrogated, they "chose" to believe the Africans—also children and adolescents—whose statements matched their predisposed and prejudiced judgments of the events.

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