

Rituals of Resistance: “How does the ritual narratives shared during the Congo drama contribute to the empowerment of the Afro-Panamanian community?”

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies
Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of
Research Master

by Maria Teresa Tabares

July 2022

CONTENTS

- Introduction
- Chapter 1: Concepts & Theoretical Framework
- Chapter 2: Methodology & Fieldwork
- Chapter 3: The Panamanian Context – Discrimination, Displacement & Afro-Latinidad
- Chapter 4: Findings – The Congo Drama
- Chapter 5: Analysis – Rituals of Resistance
- Conclusion
- Works Cited

INTRODUCTION



Figure 1. This is a picture of a “Devil” being chased and tied up by performers dressed up as angels/souls of the departed. Their goal is baptizing the devil. This occurs every Ash Wednesday and marks the end of the “Tempe de Soto”.

Every year, all throughout the Caribbean coast of Panama, an epic battle between good and evil occurs, with devils running through the streets causing havoc while angels attempt to apprehend and baptize them. This cultural practice is called the *Congo Drama*, a collection of performances which take place during a month-long period starting the 20th of January and ending on Ash-Wednesday, commonly practiced by the Afro-Panamanian community. These performances are meant to honor the history of “*cimarronaje*” – the rebellion and resistance of formerly enslaved Africans against the Spanish during the colonial period. This performance is named the *Congo Drama* by the community because most of their ancestors originated from the “Kingdom of Kongo” and they use it to pay homage to their roots (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022). For this research I will be focusing on the *Congo Drama*, with its main

acts – *the raising of the palenque flag, the baptism of the Congos and the baptism of the devils.*

The *raising of the palenque flag* signals the start of the festival season, where both the *baptism of the Congos* and *the baptism of the devils* take place. As seen in Figure 1, *the baptism of the devils* marks the end of the *Congo Drama*, with both performances making use of Catholic imagery to narrate the Afro-Panamanian's community's struggles at the hands of slavers and their continued oppression due to their African heritage. This practice is tied to various rites and ceremonies that the slaves brought with them to America, that were later adapted to the Christian framework they were forcibly subjected to by the Spanish (Manrique Pacheco, pers. comm., February 24, 2022). For example: the clothing worn by the performers, specially those of the *Congo Queen and King* are designed to mimic the royal attire worn by the Spanish crown during the colonial period, along with the addition of characters such as devils and angels. Within the drama the role of the *Devil* is meant to symbolize the struggles between evil and good present within *Congo* cosmology. *The Devil* is made to represent the Spanish colonists which enslaved the communities' ancestors and how they would invoke its presence to dissuade them to rebel and flee their plantations (Alexander Craft 2015, 4).

As explained by Johnson, a theologian who specializes in political theology and its relationship with race within minority communities in the Americas, in the relationship between Catholicism, colonialism, and slavery, festivals such as these¹ play a crucial role when it comes to the representation of the identity of historically oppressed groups of people (Johnson 2019). Various authors argue that these rituals fulfill a multitude of functions which benefit the community by the narratives created and reinterpreted together (Matory 2005). Christensen, who specializes in performance studies, lists the various benefits of dancing/observing performances as follows: experiencing flow, emotions,

¹ The *Congo Drama* is defined as a collection of performances that occur during the *tempe de soto* – the specified ritual time starting on January 20th.

imagery, self-intimation, communication, and social cohesion (Christensen, Cela-Conde, and Gomila 2017, 10). For this research the most important one among those is social cohesion, as the re-enactment of a shared past reinforces a sense of belonging. The *Congo Drama* contributes to the strengthening of group identity by the sacralizing of relationships (between in-group and out) and memories. Heritage and memory scholars such as Smith, explain that these performances are all about negotiation. This means using past, collective², and individual memories to negotiate new ways of being and expressing identity (Assmann and Czaplicka 1995) With performances such as the Baptism of the Devils serving to facilitate the processes of remembering, and mediation with the present (Smith 2006). As this performance highlights the importance of rebelling against these injustices - my main research objective is to analyze the various ways in which this performance creates, reinterprets, and shares this narrative of empowerment through the celebration of a shared past.

Moreover, there is currently a gap in existing research concerning the Afro-Latino community and their religious practices within Central America, let alone Panama. This is the second project involved in analyzing the *Congo Drama* and its importance for the Afro-Panamanian community, and the first one with a focus on how the diffusion of these narratives through the performance influences the identity making practices of the community. Previous research conducted by Alexander Craft on the *Congo Drama* focused mostly on the music and dances found within this performance and how the form of the performance combined with the drumming enhanced a sense of effervescence within the crowd. Instead, this research details and examines how these narratives are embedded within their community building processes and self-identification as Afro-Panamanians.

It identifies the importance of the Congo drama for the Afro-Panamanian

² In this research, collective memory refers to the shared representation and knowledge of past social events that have not been personally experienced but are collectively constructed through shared narratives. J. Assmann refers to collective memory as an intrinsic feature of cultural identity in Assmann, Jan, and John Czaplicka. 1995. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." *New German Critique* 65:125–133. <https://doi.org/10.2307/488538>

community of Portobelo, a coastal town in Panama. Analyzing how the narratives created during the *Congo Drama* in Panama contribute to the empowerment of the Afro-Panamanian community through the performance of a form of intangible heritage which allows them to highlight their shared past. Analyzing, how this performance plays an important role in the construction of Afro-Panamanian identity and how this identity is reinforced by this performance. I argue that these narratives allow for the development of a *greater sense of social cohesion that allows for the creation of strong communal bonds which support community members, allowing them to successfully mediate their identity as Afro-Panamanians within a discriminatory system. Asserting that the community's process of meaning-making, social-solidarity and autonomy in a colonial and post-colonial world are informed by these practices.* This research thus focuses how historically oppressed communities forge a set of features that contribute to the ongoing negotiation of identities through ritual performances in post-colonial societies, in this case Panama, by identifying how these communities combat discrimination by subscribing to narratives of empowerment.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. I begin by exploring the main concepts which will appear throughout the text in Chapter 1. This chapter covers theoretical framework used to analyze the findings and the academic discourses employed to create this framework. Chapter 2 covers the operationalization of the main research question and sub questions. It also explains the methodological approach used for gathering information and how the data gathered was handled. Chapter 3 addresses relevant background information regarding the Panamanian context. Focusing on the community of Portobelo, its history, culture and how it shaped the performance of the *Congo Drama*. It also explores the changing politics of identity and belonging of Afro-Panamanians during the 20th century. Chapter 4 provides a thick description of the *Congo Drama* and specially the performance of baptizing the devils (Geertz, 1993). The analysis of the *Congo Drama* encompasses Chapter 5. It explores the narratives created during these performances as repositories of culture which promotes

social-cohesion within the Afro-Panamanian community, in light of the continuous oppression. Finally, the conclusion aims to provide a clear interpretation of the findings based on the theoretical framework and introducing a new perspective on performance studies within post-colonial societies.

CHAPTER 1 - CONCEPTS & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

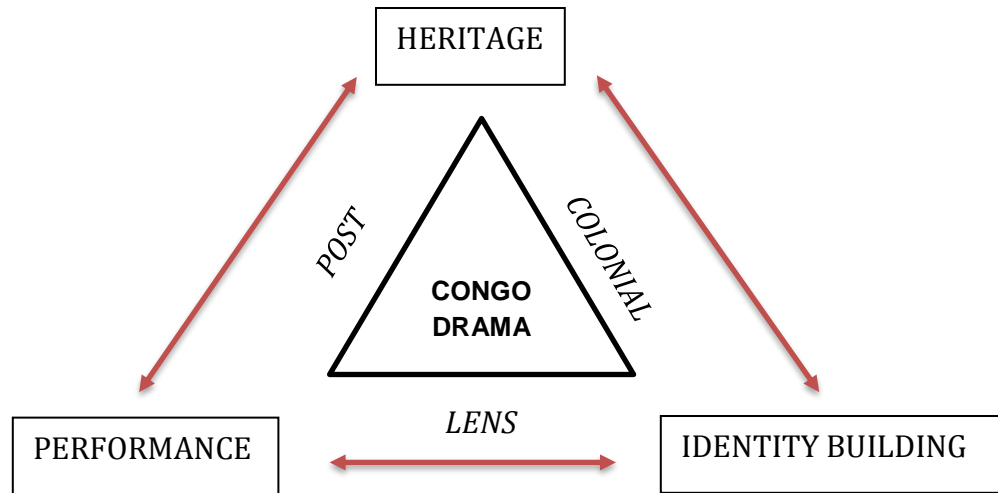


Figure 2: This table shows the relationship between the Congo Drama, heritage, performance and identity building and how they are all informed through a post-colonial studies lens. I created this table based on the key concepts informing my theoretical framework.

This chapter focuses on the relevant concepts, the discourses within which they are embedded, and the development of my theoretical frameworks based on my analysis and reinterpretation of these. The first part explores the key concepts and academic discourses which guided the development of my theoretical framework. This research engages with the following concepts: heritage, identity making, post-colonialism and performance. Heritage and identity-making processes are concepts which are linked to the performance of cultural practices such as the *Congo Drama* and the baptism of the devils. These cultural performances³ influence how communities conceive of their own identity through the use of ritual narratives revolving around themes of displacement, rebellion, and resistance within a post-colonial society that discriminates against them on the basis of their ethnicity (Campbell 2020).

³ In this research, cultural performance refers to performances which are linked to processes of remembering and the creation of shared cultural past. As explained by C. Campbell in, Campbell, Corinna. 2020. *The Cultural Work : Maroon Performance in Paramaribo, Suriname*. Middletown, CT. 06459: Wesleyan University Press. <https://rug.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1142906229>

These narratives, as repositories of knowledge reinterpreted through time, are in themselves performances of intangible heritage. Additionally, I make use of concepts found within migration studies, such counter-narratives and diaspora and how these influence processes of identity through forced migration to analyze the narratives created within the *Congo Drama*. The second part of the chapter provides a detailed explanation of the theoretical framework and how it relates to the main research question and sub questions.

Heritage

One of the most important concepts for this research is that of heritage, especially intangible heritage. This is because the *Congo Drama* and the baptism of the devils constitutes a form of intangible heritage, a collection of narratives and impressions that recount the shared past of the Afro-Panamanian community. Throughout the chapters focused on the findings, and analysis, this connection with the past and the sense of pride in the resistance of their ancestors is emphasized by community members, specially by the performers themselves. This is in line with what Smith, an archaeologist working on memory and heritage, argues - that heritage is not only about the past or about material things, but includes various processes of engagement, communication, and meaning-making for communities. She explains that what gives material heritage its importance is actually not the materials themselves but the various cultural processes and activities that are linked to them which ultimately provides them their value and meaning. She points out a cycle in which heritage actually becomes heritage because it is exposed to various management and preservation processes - that identify them as such. This means that there are cultural processes that identify what should or should not be considered heritage, which are informed by various agents and their goals. Heritage from this perspective is used to build and negotiate various identities and socio-cultural values and meanings in the present. This heritage-making process is in itself a performance which helps constitute, and ultimately validate the ideas of what heritage is, further influencing the way these performances are enacted.

Smith explains that at one level heritage is about the promotion of an approved version of history sanctioned by the state which is carefully regulated by cultural institutions to handle rising tensions in the present. On the other hand, it is also a tool that can be used by minorities to challenge and redefine values and identities in opposition to their oppressors (Smith 2006).

As of 2018 the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage: State of Conservation of World Heritage Properties Inscribed on the World Heritage List. awarded the *Congo Drama* the status of intangible cultural practice and heritage. Given this development, Lipp, an ethnologist and documentary filmmaker specializing in the relationship between intangible cultural heritage and performance, explains that the UNESCO has defined intangible cultural heritage as “*practices, representations, expressions, knowledge skills as well as instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces that communities, groups and individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage*” (UNESCO 2018). Further supporting the theory that intangible heritage is a process which is inherently mediated by humans, acting as mediums, engaging in performances which occur in real time. He asserts that intangible heritage itself also includes various forms of teaching such as observation, imitation and embodied textualization through performances and storytelling (Lipp 2013).

Post-Colonialism & Identity

As mentioned above, the community’s ancestors arrived to Portobelo and the Caribbean coast of Panama from Africa as slaves. They are part of the “African Diaspora” or the “Black Atlantic” as categorized by Matory (Matory 2005). With the transatlantic slave trade inciting one of the biggest displacements of people from Africa to the American continent, I also categorize this community as part of a diaspora. As emphasized by post-colonial studies scholar Hua, the term diaspora refers to a group of people from a center, as well as the collective memory and trauma which is involved in such dispersion (Hua 2006). This collective memory is conceptualized as the shared representation

and knowledge of past social events that have not been personally experienced but are collectively constructed through shared narratives, it serves as a repository of culture and is viewed in this project as constituting intangible heritage. Furthermore, this collective memory is the shared representation of knowledge of past social events that have not been personally experienced, but which are collectively constructed through shared narratives (Hua 2006). These events play a key role in the process of identity-formation through collective memories, myths, and narratives about a shared past. Members of diasporic communities, such as the Afro-Panamanian one, are able to acknowledge the existence of their struggles throughout time and a supposedly cultural framework of Spanish colonial slavery, allowing them to create a critical relationship with the cultural politics of their present context. The creative processes of community and identity building in this sense are tied to external perceptions influenced by mainstream conceptualizations of belonging, shaping narratives through cultural contexts (Buitelaar, Fritz and Maher 2021).

It is important to mention that these processes of community and identity transformation and reconstruction can negatively affect communities if they are not fully immersed and actively participating in them (Apaydin 2020). In this project, this identity is conceptualized as the various processes of achievement and ascription by these communities (Cadge and Davidmann 2006). These narratives, which are commonly informed by Western academia and Western ideas about progress, influence the way in which post-colonial societies are studied and the frameworks which regulate the debate. They inform which knowledge is created, prioritized, and reproduced. This discourse perpetuated by the West naturalizes various narratives regarding cultural and social experiences of minority communities and groups while excluding them from collaborating in these processes - either by excluding various intangible practices from heritage processes or by reinforcing hierarchies which favor “expert” views over participants and communities (Asad 1973). Additionally, the trauma of displacement from one’s homeland affects the way in which

communities are able to create heritage for multiple generations and sometimes even creates new forms of heritage.

As emphasized by post-colonial scholar, Gandhi, a post-colonial lens which critically analyzes the narratives created around the colonizer and the colonized affect the lived reality of minority communities within the Americas (Gandhi 1998). Within this research postcolonialism mainly concerns the construction of the post-colonial identity of a de-colonized group of people (Donaldson 1992). This is a view which is especially relevant when conducting research among Afro-Latino communities, which have a history of displacement and destruction of material heritage at the hands of slavers.⁴ Not creating spaces in which minority groups are able to take charge of narratives regarding their own heritage actively supports their cultural genocide. Thus, there is a need for a more holistic approach to the safeguarding of intangible heritage of minority communities which would allow them to take an active role within it.

Performance

This research focuses on how these performances are used as a vehicle of meaning-making through the mediation of the past and the present by the creation of narratives which are meant to highlight the struggles of the Afro-Panamanian community, their continued oppression due to their African heritage, and the importance of rebelling against these injustices. In this view, the “Congo” Drama and specifically the “Baptism of the Devils” functions not only as a performance but also as an act of community building and as an expression of Afro-Panamanian culture.

When it comes to the performances, Schechner explains that they are a way of grasping experience and understanding it through an orderly progression of events - as a sequence in time. He links performances to ritual as being social, religious, aesthetic or a combination of these. Rituals are therefore performances

⁴ Based on my interpretation of the following sources: (Apaydin 2020), (Matory 2005), (Alexander Craft 2015) and (Christensen 2017)

themselves, however performances that are not rituals are *ritualized*. Ritual and play permeate every aspect of performances and performance-making processes. In this sense, both rituals and play guide people to a sort of second reality or meta-world in which they can explore and transform narratives about themselves and their surroundings. Schechner asserts that: “*performance is basically ritualized behavior which is conditioned by play.*” (Schechner 2020). Klein proposes the idea of performance as a world in itself ruled by the senses, feelings, movements, and the body - where narratives are created mimetically through dance. Thus, dance is considered to be an expression of feelings and understood as being a holistic activity - a perspective which Klein asserts has the ability to funnel subversive power from which socio-critical and emancipatory ideas can be both derived and expressed (Klein and Noeth 2011). Therefore, performance along with dance should be perceived as engaged in creating meta-worlds in which meanings and narratives are able to be changed and re-interpreted to fit the needs of its main stakeholders.

Theoretical Framework

Based on the views previously discussed, the framework of this thesis engages with heritage itself as a process which encompasses the passing on and receiving of knowledge and memories, that later informs the communities decision-making processes and the way they make sense of their world (Smith 2006). By emphasizing heritage as an act of communication and engaging with it as a social process that drives remembering, this perspective allows for performances to be viewed as vehicles for cultural change that aid in the reworking of meanings and values. Heritage being performative in nature because it focuses on the end-result, the accumulation of knowledge, and how in light of this the present reacts performatively with the past.⁵ Heritage as a

⁵ Based on my interpretation of the following sources: (Apaydin 2020), (Matory 2005), (Alexander Craft 2015) and (Christensen 2017)

process encompasses social practices, power relations, ideologies and social meanings which are reproduced through heritage narratives. The performance of heritage in this sense is understood as an interaction between community members which influences memory making practices of displaced communities and allows for the survival of collective identity. Performances in this view act as repositories of culture that aid communities to share, interpret, analyze, and most importantly connect with their ancestors throughout time. Hence, these practices promote social cohesion through the sharing and reinterpretation of collective memories, myths, and narratives about a shared past.

Through this framework I will be analyzing the *Congo Drama* focusing on its most iconic episodes– the raising of the palenque flag, the baptism of the Congos, and the baptism of the devils. Thus, this research examines the community building practices of Afro-Panamanian communities by looking at the *Congo Drama* as a repository of culture through a performance and heritage lens. Focusing on the ritual narratives present during these performances within the Afro-Panamanian community of Portobelo.

To achieve this goal, this research focuses on three main objectives:

- 1) To detail the *Congo Drama* and its main episodes as practiced in the community of Portobelo.
- 2) To examine how this Afro-Panamanian community uses the *Congo Drama*, especially the baptism of the devils to share and reinterpret narratives about their past as an oppressed group.
- 3) To identify and analyze how these narratives are embedded within their community building processes and self-identification as Afro-Panamanians

The main line of inquiry of this research focuses on how the ritual narratives shared during the *Congo Drama* contribute to the empowerment of the Afro-Panamanian community by fostering community building practices. This question is further divided into secondary questions that guide the analysis of the data collected. These deal with the issue of how the baptism of the devils is used to narrate the history of oppression shared and endured by Afro-

Panamanian communities, and how the character of the Devil is meant to symbolize this oppression. Furthermore, I also explore how the Afro-Panamanian community interacts with the narratives created during this performance to build their own community image on the basis of their shared past.

CHAPTER 2 – METHODOLOGY & FIELDWORK

This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the methodological approach which was used to gather data on the *Congo Drama* and the baptism of the devils. The first part of this chapter will explain the research methods used, the type of data gathered and includes a reflection on how these accomplish the main goals set for this research, in light of the theoretical framework explained in Chapter 1. This part gives an overview on the participants that were interviewed and their role both within the *Congo Drama* and in the community. Additionally, this part explains the role of the “Digital Portobelo Archive” and how this research aims to add valuable findings to their multidisciplinary archive online. The second part of this chapter revolves around the fieldwork I conducted in Panama during the months of February and March 2022.

Methodology

I chose qualitative research practices to guide the data collection process of this research because its methods focus on examining people’s experiences and ideas in as much detail as possible (Hennink and Hutter 2020). Both participant observation, video analysis and semi-structured interviews allow for the examining of key issues from the perspective of the Afro-Panamanian community of Portobelo. Providing snapshots as to how they identify based on the meaning and interpretations they engage with through the performance of the *Congo Drama*. This choice is informed by Denzin and Lincoln, who maintain that this type of research involves an interpretative approach which seeks to understand phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Simultaneously, I assert that this research method is a great fit since this research aims to understand processes of identity making and community building by highlighting the meaning that the Afro-Panamanian community gives to their experiences. All while making sure that this minority community’s voice and perspective are represented when identifying and analyzing their cultural practices.

Furthermore, these research methods make use of the interpretative paradigm which recognizes reality as social constructed – a theory shared by both post-colonial and performance studies. This view is in line with the post-colonial theories on discriminatory power-structures stemming from the colonial period and how they influence the identity making practices of minority communities (Gandhi 1998). It also fits the performance-based approach to the *Congo Drama*, as explained in Chapter 1, where performances have the ability to create meta-worlds where reality can be molded and reinterpreted by participants within a safe context (Schechner 2020). Thus, through these methods this research takes on a heritage and performance centered approach to understand the importance of the *Congo Drama* and its main episodes for the Afro-Panamanian community of Portobelo. Considering that in order to foster a holistic approach, knowledge should always be forged from solidarity with the community that is being studied. The main goal is to highlight this performance as a site of knowledge, consumption, curation, and production.

This approach can be defined as participatory, meaning that the main goals and outcomes include critically creating knowledge alongside the Afro-Panamanian community of Portobelo, that can later contribute to social change (Freire and Macedo 2014). This participatory based approach utilizes a mix of qualitative methods such as participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and a type of focus group discussions which took place online. Participant observation was conducted in order to understand how the *Congo Drama* takes place and how participants react to the performances in real time. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to identify the personal perceptions and experiences that both performers and observers of the drama experience as participants. This enabled me to obtain insights as to how the drama and its narrative influence the self-perception and socio-cultural context of community members. Finally, I attended focus groups discussions – in the form of a community led webinar series on the *Congo Drama*, in which performers discussed their experiences and interpretations. Providing various opportunities to explore how the community engaged with these narratives in their daily lives.

Participant Observation

The first research method employed for data collection throughout this project was participant observation. As emphasized by Geertz, there is a need to situate people's behaviors and actions by examining their meaning and interpretation within local frameworks to fully understand their cultural practices (Geertz 1993). Thus, this method was chosen as it allows for the collection of detailed descriptions about social events, and people's behavior in response to them (Hennink and Hutter 2020). My application of this method is strongly informed by the works of Conquergood and Bakhtin, on power, resistance, and agency focusing on how cultural performances act as sites of agency where cultures are able to theorize themselves. The thick descriptions of the *Congo Drama*, the baptism of the devils and the community's engagement in Chapter 4, are the result of this application.

This participant observation consisted of performing ethnographic fieldwork among the primarily Afro-Latino community of Portobelo. Throughout my total three months stay in Panama, between 2021 and 2022, I traveled a total of 15 times to Portobelo – where I conducted semi-structured interviews and learned the community's lived experience. I lived in Portobelo for a total of two consecutive weeks with family friends, who are members of the community. During this time, I stayed in their home and accompanied them throughout their day. Originally, I had planned on spending around 6 to 8 weeks following and participating in the actual preparations leading up to the start of the “*tempe de soto*”. However, this was not possible given the Covid19 international travel regulations and Panama adopted the strictest responses and regulations of any country in the region – with face masks still being mandatory. Instead, I was only able to witness a private performance of the baptism of the devils, which took place inside the performer's home.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic and the various travel restrictions in place, one of my main sources for finding content and examples of the performance of the *Congo Drama* has been the internet. Specifically, video sharing websites such

as YouTube that help with the democratization of media creation by allowing creators from all over the world to upload their videos with one click. This form of video analysis is not considered a classic form of participant observation because video recordings are often mediated and edited with a specific audience in mind. However, these live recordings allowed me to turn to recordings produced from the perspective of the community themselves - rather than solely relying on written ethnographic accounts conducted primarily by Western researchers. This medialization that occurs through the recorded moments ultimately plays a role as to which performances get reproduced and shared. The footage used in this research is in the form of various short-films, videos and especially live-recordings created and uploaded to YouTube by community members.

The main channel, whose videos were used for this project is owned and managed by the performance group “Nengres Congos de Colon”. They uploaded live recordings of their performances during the “*tempe de soto*”, showcasing the festival from its opening performance every 20th of January to the baptism of the devils on Ash Wednesday. They started this channel as a way to connect with community members and continue the festival celebrations through an online medium during the Covid19 crisis (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a). Their video archive includes performances from 2020 and 2021, all of which took place at the performer’s home and were closed to the general public due to the regulations in place. It includes a total of 20 videos, showcasing performances, with each lasting up to 4 hours. Other important sources include the short films, interviews and art installations found in digitalportobelo.org which have been compiled by various social scientists who previously worked with the community in Portobelo, Afro-Panamanian activists and to some extent the Panamanian Department of Tourism and Cultural Heritage.

Semi-structured Interviews

The second research method used as part of this research was that of semi-structured interviews. This type of data collection method involves the “in-

depth” discussion of specific topics concerning the *Congo Drama* and its importance for the Afro-Panamanian community. This method was chosen because it allows for the co-creation of knowledge and meaning, based on the personal experiences of community members. These interviews were conducted to identify their beliefs and perceptions about the drama, the meaning they attached to these performances and how the narratives of the drama are embedded within their decision-making processes. Allowing me to detail and understand how the socio-cultural, political, and economic context of Portobelo influences these performances.

This process consisted of arranging and conducting 8 semi structured interviews with performers, participants, and community leaders. I primarily interviewed 3 distinct groups of people, on the basis of their engagement with the *Congo Drama*. The first group consisted of the organizers of the “*tempe de soto*” and performing troupes, made up of community elders and performers who are active in organizations involved in the preserving of Afro-Panamanian culture. The second group was of community members who participate in the festival as observers, this included the family friends that I stayed with in Portobelo. The final group included interviews with researchers who have previously worked with the community and have detailed the *Congo Drama*.

For Group 1, I conducted four interviews with different performers and community leaders involved with the organizing of the drama. These interviewees were selected on the basis that they all self-identify as Afro-Panamanian and have been involved with the *Congo Drama* as members of performing troupes for at least 20 years. They are all Portobelo locals, who grew up participating in the drama, two of them having previously held the title of ‘*Major Devil*’ and the other two are currently members of the performance group “*Nengres Congos de Colon*”. This choice of interviewees was also influenced by the fact half of them had previously been working alongside the “Digital Portobelo Archive” and reaching out to them was facilitated by their pre-existing engagement with research projects on the *Congo Drama*. This group of interviewees were overall very excited and open to sharing their experiences, all

declining the option of staying anonymous in hopes of acting as key representatives for the community. It included previous *Major Devil* and mayor of Portobelo Carlos Chavarria, the newly instituted *Major Devil* Andres Jimenez, the heads of the “Nengres Congos de Colon” performance troupe and the “Congo Royal Court” Manrique Pacheco and Areyza Gavidia

For Group 2, I conducted two interviews with the family friends I was staying with in Portobelo. The interviewees are a grandmother and granddaughter duo, who were selected because they also identify as Afro-Panamanian but who haven’t actively participated in the performances of the drama for the past 10 years. This allowed for a cross-generational comparison of how they engaged with the narratives created during the performances. The grandmother used to perform as a traditional singer and the granddaughter used to attend a dance school focused on traditional “Congo performances”. This group was also happy to share their experiences, if nervous because they didn’t feel that their experiences would be that relevant. However, the interviewees proceeded without issue – which might have had to do with my status as a trusted family friend which facilitated establishing rapport with them. These more unstructured conversations allowed for an in depth understanding of their emotions, motivations, and perceptions.

For Group 3, I conducted two interviews with scholars and researchers - Arturo Lindsay and Renee Alexander Craft, who aided in the creation of the “*Festival of Devils and Congos*” and the digital archive “*Digital Portobelo*”. They have been involved in studying the Afro-Panamanian community of Portobelo since the early 2000s, with their knowledge making up of most of the digital archive. These interviews focused on their experiences conducting research in Panama, how they interpret the *Congo Drama*, and their role as scholar-activists. Meeting with them allowed me to contact the local NGO - “*Casa Congo*”, who run the small *Congo Museum* that highlights the importance of the *Congo Drama* and showcases art pieces/installations from various community artists.

The interviews were all conducted in person at the interviewee’s homes. Each of them lasted between 1-2 hours, in which participants were asked an

array of questions ranging from their religious affiliation to their experiences with discrimination in Panama as people of African descent. Special importance was also given to the empowerment narratives expressed by each participant. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees using the standard recording application on my phone. These interviews were subsequently transcribed and anonymized in order to preserve the identity and safety of interviewees who requested it. These transcripts were then labeled, and a codebook was developed on the basis of the relationships between various concepts explored in these interviews (Hennink and Hutter 2020). To further elaborate on the analysis of my data, these relationships were labeled and grouped into the main concepts explored in Chapter 1.

Focus Groups Discussions

The final research method used in this project were focus group discussions. This method allows for the collection of information based on the opinions of the participants about the *Congo Drama*, heavily featuring the norms and values which inform the community's perspective (Hennink and Hutter 2020). This method was chosen because it tackles a broad range of perspectives from various performers in Portobelo. I had originally planned on organizing focus group discussions with the performers who would be present at the biyearly "*Festival of the Devils & Congos*", however it was canceled during the pandemic. Instead, one of the Facebook groups that I joined as part of this research announced that there was going to be an online webinar and workshop event organized by their performance group.

This focus group discussions took place online through YouTube, in the shape of a community led webinar-series on the *Congo Drama* hosted by the performance group "*Nengres Congos de Colon*" (NCC). This webinar series started on January 20th, 2021, and ended on July 16th, 2021, its aim was to connect with fellow community members by celebrating & discussing the importance of the *Congo Drama*. A total of 15 sessions of 2 hours each, presented group interviews with performers and community leaders about their

experiences with the drama. These interviews and sessions were moderated by Professor Arturo Gavidia, an Afro-Panamanian historian, performance scholar, and Portobelo local, who is the head of the NCC. He explains that during the Covid19 lock-down the NCC was unable to hold their weekly meetings – so instead they decided to start this webinar series online to reach as many people as possible and have the YouTube channel act as an archive. I attended 80% of these meetings in live, meaning that I was able to comment and interact with other viewers on the interview content being shared in real time. The other 20% of the meetings, I wasn't able to attend due to the 8+ hour difference between our time-zones, I watched at a later date.

The most relevant sessions for this research were Session 1 – ‘The Baptism of the Devils & Congos’, Session 2 – ‘The Devil in Portobelo’ and Session 3– ‘Afro-Panamanian ethnicity, “Congo Culture” & the character of the Devil’. Session 1 – ‘The Baptism of the Devils & Congos’, lasted 1 hour and 30 minutes, with the main focus being the detailing and explanation of what happens during the baptism of the devils, along with the role of the “Congos” within the drama. This session included a discussion of the topic with the “Congo Court” Manrique Pacheco & Areyza Gavidia, Dagoberto Romero – mayor devil of the community of “Nombre de Dios”, and the ex-mayor devil of Portobelo – Carlos Chavarria. Session 2 – ‘The Devil in Portobelo’, talks about the start of the devil tradition in Portobelo and the various changes that have happened with the depiction of the character throughout the last 50 years. This included another group interview with Carlos Chavarria and three other devil performers, who explain how they first got involved with the performance and how the character of the devil has influenced their life-journey. Finally, Session 3 – ‘Afro-Panamanian ethnicity, “Congo Culture” & the character of the Devil’ concentrates on the colonial history of the Caribbean coast of Panama, how the main communities developed from *palenques* and how the devil represents oppression within the colonial context. This was the biggest group discussion, as it involved all the people previously mentioned, plus renowned mask maker Edward Johnson.

Even though these sessions were part of a webinar series and did not follow the traditional style of a focus group, I assert that the live online discussions as provided similar data as to that of a focus group discussion. This is because throughout the sessions there were opportunities for discussions to take place between the interviewee, the host and the viewers as questions and relevant comments were routinely read out loud and reviewed. This online interaction still allowed participants to identify a wide range of issues and evaluate where they stand in comparison to the “official” view. Creating a safe-space for community members to learn, reinterpret and connect to their shared past.

Digital Portobelo Archive

The Digital Portobelo Project is an interactive online collection of ethnographic interviews, photos, videos, artwork, and archival material that illuminates the rich culture and history of Portobelo (Alexander Craft 2015). It was created and set-up by Renee Alexander Craft after her initial research of the Afro-Panamanian community of Portobelo in 2003. This project serves as a public platform to allow researchers and community members to document and share their knowledge on the *Congo Drama*. This project establishes a digital space, available in both English and Spanish, for researchers to upload and share the stories and interviews they collaborated on – directly with the community and anyone interested in researching this area further. Likewise, this project creates a collaborative digital environment where community members and researchers may share information and create ongoing dialogues related to Congo traditions and culture (Alexander Craft 2015). The project’s main goal is to contribute to the growing body of work on Afro-Latino history and culture as well as highlight the complexity of the Panamanian context.

In the development of this research project, the Digital Portobelo archive acted as an anchor point from which to explore the key elements of the *Congo Drama*. It allowed me to access a list of relevant people to possibly interview and connect with as part of my fieldwork. This is how I connected with the “Nengres

Congos de Colon” performance association, found relevant literature written by Panamanian authors, and surveyed the current state of the discussion revolving around this performance. The archive itself also gave me the opportunity to listen to interviews from the past (2003-2007) with important community figures, such as Celedonio Molinar, who passed away in 2005 – and others who I wouldn’t have had the ability to interview myself due to the Covid19 regulations. Finally, this research project also aims to add relevant insights and share findings with the Digital Portobelo archive, in a way that highlights the importance of conducting research and creating knowledge alongside the Afro-Panamanian community. Thus, this archive constitutes an important primary source of information and a repository of culture in and of itself.

Fieldwork

I conducted fieldwork in Panama for around 3 months between 2021 and 2022. The first month of this time-span consisted of traveling to Panama during November 2021 to prepare and acquaint myself with the area of Portobelo. I planned my stay with family friends who are Portobelo locals and actually conducted the first interviews – those of Group 2. During this period, I also completed a preliminary literature review, which consisted of compiling the latest publications regarding the Congo drama and the Afro-Panamanian community of Portobelo written by Panamanian authors, all of which were physically stored at the National Library. Moreover, I met with the Research Center of Social and Political Sciences, AIP which provided me with a list of tentative people to contact in Portobelo, including the ‘Nengres Congos de Colon’ association. Another meeting was held with the Center for Anthropological and Historical Research, CIHAC which collaborates with various researchers studying the area of Portobelo. They arranged for me to join the Central-American Research Network on Religion, where I presented my research project and got in contact with the ‘Digital Portobelo Archive’.

In that first month, I travelled to Portobelo by car, for a total of 8 times – with the community being located around one and half hours’ drive away from

my home in Panama City. I was able to witness some of the small-scale celebrations taking place on the 5th of November – the official day the province of Colon took up arms against Colombia during the separation in 1903. These included small performances of the “Congo” dances and music all over the city. The next month of research took place from February to March 2022 - starting at the middle of the “Congo season” or “*tempe de soto*” as commonly referred to by the community. This is where the bulk of the actual fieldwork took place, including the participant observation and the interviews of community members. It was during this month that I stayed living with the community for a total of two weeks, following my family friends in their day-to-day tasks and asking them about their involvement in the drama after our first meeting six months earlier. The ‘Festival of Devils & Congos’ was also supposed to take place during this time.

This important congregation of Congo performers and participants was one of the many large-scale events which were affected by the covid-19 regulations in Panama. During the 2 years that covid-19 affected the world, Panama had one of the strictest responses and regulations of any Latin American country. For example: people were separated by sex and the last digits of the ID numbers to be assigned specific days and time slots to go outside - not complying would mean incurring in a hefty fine. It was not until April 2022 that the mask mandate was lifted in outdoor spaces - indoor mask use remaining mandatory for the time being. This greatly affected the community in Portobelo because they were not able to gather for performances, and also the tourism to the area heavily stopped. Tourism, being their primary source of income. This also changed the way in which the drama was practiced because gatherings were prohibited, this meant that the Baptism of the Devils and the ceremony to induct the new Mayor Devil also happened in the private residences of the main performers, with almost no audience except their own group. Thankfully, these performances were transmitted live and recorded by the NCC on their YouTube channel. These included videos dedicated to important performances during the *tempe de soto* such as the rising of the flag for the *palenques* and the baptism of

the devils. While I was in Panama during the spring, the Baptism of the Mayor Devil was also supposed to take place during Ash Wednesday, but it never ended up happening due to a heavy thunderstorm which made the celebration impossible in the coastal town. All of these developments made me ultimately rely on recordings of previous year's performances as part of my primary material. This material includes live recordings of the performances which took place in 2020, 2021 and the baptism of the devils in 2022 and group discussions about the importance of the drama for the community.

Finally, after spending these two weeks living in Portobelo, I moved back to Panama City to consolidate all of my data. During this period, I also met once more with representatives of the two cultural research centers. They offered me the opportunity to present my research once more at an international conference and planned on further collaboration regarding research in this area. Moreover, this is when I met with two social scientists, sociologist & Portobelo native Arturo Lindsay and Renee Alexander Craft - whose research on the *Congo Drama* I refer to throughout this text.

CHAPTER 3 - THE PANAMANIAN CONTEXT – DISCRIMINATION,
DISPLACEMENT & AFRO-LATINIDAD



Figure 3. This is a picture of the town of Portobelo, taken by Elaine Bradley.

This chapter focuses on describing the context of this research project. Part I details the history of Portobelo and its colonial roots, which are the background and inspiration behind the *Congo Drama*. This is because this cultural performance is directly tied to its location, as its narratives stage the tensions between the community's past and the present. I start by depicting the historical timeline of events, looking at the relationship between the Spanish colonialists and the “*cimarrones*” – enslaved people who regained their freedom through rebellion ((Alexander Craft 2015). This allows for the understanding of the complexity of characters within the drama, especially *The Devil*. Then I move on to framing the contemporary ‘lived’ view, focusing on how the changing context has influenced the way in which the drama is currently practiced. Paying particular attention to how it informs the identity making practices of the community. Part II revolves around identity and the politics of what it means to identify as “Afro-Panamanian”. I pinpoint the key moments in which the national discourse on ethnicity shifted towards a state-endorsed nationalistic model of

belonging. Finally, I also note how trans-national narratives on 'Blackness' and 'liberation' coming from the United States influenced the work of race - based social justice movements in Panama.

Portobelo

To understand the role that the *Congo Drama* and its episodes plays within the Afro-Panamanian community, it is necessary to explore how the tradition has aided in the construction of black identity in Panama. Portobelo is the perfect context to look at because this is where the Congo drama is said to have been originated (Alexander Craft 2015). Portobelo, is a city along the Caribbean coast of Colón, a province in Panama, whose population consisted of around five thousand inhabitants in 2010, more than 70% of whom reported themselves as Afro-Panamanian during the latest national census (Dirección de Estadística y Censo 1998). This city was officially founded on March 20th, 1597, as a new main trading post – after the community of 'Nombre de Dios' was plundered by Sir Francis Drake.

The town of Portobelo itself is nestled between two colonial forts – the *San Fernando* and *Santiago* Forts. This is also where the *San Lorenzo* keep is located, close to the Spanish *Customs House* – where all the gold and goods arriving to Portobelo would be stored. The town is a narrow strip of land surrounded by rainforest and sea, with a colonial style Catholic Church built right in the middle, housing the wooden figure of the "Black Christ" (Alexander Craft 2015). During colonial times, Portobelo was a strategic point of military, commercial and political interest - since gold from Peru passed through here to reach Spain. Making Portobelo a key point for trade between the Americas and Spain. At the same time, groups of slaves came from the areas of the Congo, Angola, and Cameroon. Those who managed to escape from the Spanish plantations took refuge in the mountains and formed communities called *palenques*. They recovered their freedom and preserved their Afro-colonial customs until today.

They would create these autonomous communities in the *palenques* and would interact with the Spanish colonists for trade. According to local oral history the cimarrones had previously aided Sir Francis Drake to sack and loot the city of 'Nombre de Dios', another coastal trade town (Manrique Pacheco, pers. comm., February 24, 2022)

By 1597, 95 years after slaves were first brought to the Americas, there were already sizeable populations of 'cimarrones' living in 'palenques', to avoid any further ransacking, the Spanish decided to strike a deal with the community leaders. They would recognize the 'cimarrones's status as free people as long as they agreed to not help the English privateers and relocate to the area northwest of Portobelo (Rodriguez 1979). This oral account can be verified to some extent as asserted by Edwin Webster, who explains that free and enslaved Blacks greatly outnumbered the Spanish in Portobelo by the end of the seventeenth century. Both the Spanish and the 'cimarrones' then relocated to Portobelo around the same time, with the Spanish living closer to the shore and the 'Congos', as the communities called themselves living closer to the forests of the north (Rodriguez 1979).

It is important to acknowledge that this agreement between the 'cimarrones' and the Spanish, although guaranteeing their sovereignty over their communities, did not stop the slave trade in the area. This is mainly because of the regional importance of the 'Portobelo Fairs'. These fairs would last up to three months and would attract commerce from all over the empire. Since 1597, this fair made Portobelo one of the most important towns in Latin America, becoming a staple point for the exchange of merchandise between Spain and its colonies, with up to 60% of the total gold arriving to the Spanish crown passing through Portobelo. This also included the slaves brought from Nombre de Dios to Portobelo by the Spanish during their relocation, those who continued to be imported into the area from the 17th to early 19th century to build the forts, Customs House, and church, as well as to serve as domestics in Spanish households (Alexander Craft 2015). However, after repeated attacks from the English the fairs were stopped in 1738. This made the Spanish population of the

town dwindle, and with it the trade – turning the town into a ghost of its former self. Especially after the main trade routes within Panama were re-structured during the 19th century to favor the city of Colon instead of the coastal towns, leaving the community geographically isolated from the mainland. Nonetheless, Portobelo continued to retain a large portion of its Afro-Panamanian residents (Webster 1973).

During the 19th and early 20th century, primarily Afro-Colonial communities like Portobelo and those located in *Costa Arriba* were still isolated from the rest of the country. It wasn't until the main Caribbean Road was built, connecting all of these small coastal towns with the City of Colon during the 1940's, that interest in the area started to grow once more. Simultaneously, the construction of this road allowed for people from these communities to relocate to urban centers in large numbers in search of work. Additionally, nation-building projects, created extra opportunities for local migration by guaranteeing communities living within the rural countryside land within the Atlantic coast, where Portobelo is located. This road and land distribution projects exposed formerly closed coastal communities and fostered a new wave of population influx to the area (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022)

After the community became reachable for the general public through these nation-building projects, Panamanian scholars became interested in the cultural practices of these Afro-Colonial communities. For example, throughout the 50's Felicia Santizo, a local Portobelo professor, folklorist and activist succeeded in organizing a public performance of *Congo* dance at the University of Panamá, which was pivotal in framing *Congo* performance as Panamanian folklore. This was one of the first times that the *Congo Drama* was performed for a wider audience outside of the context of Portobelo. Later during the 1970's an association called "Taller Portobelo", led by Portobelo locals, artists and Panamanian photographer Sandra Eleta – created a visual archive to promote *Congo* culture, history, and performance. It was through this sustained cultural engagement that the Panamanian state's attention was finally brought to

Portobelo, allowing for the preservation of this intangible heritage (Alexander Craft 2015).

In 2006, “Taller Portobelo”, the Ministry of Culture, the Institute of Tourism, community leaders and the performance troupes met together to create the *Festival of Devils and Congos*. This festival takes place every two years in the province of Colón, which aims to promote trans local dialogues within Afro-Panamanian communities by having them exhibit their own particular versions of the *Congo Drama* and the baptism of devils. This festival is also based on the origins of the game Congo, where several communities would visit each other weekly and have a ritual battle in which they would try to capture the *palenque’s* flag of the other community (Alexander Craft 2015). A detailed description of this original ritualized game is provided in Chapter 4.

Thanks to these cultural initiatives, currently the Royal Customs House has been repurposed as a museum, and the offices of the National Institute of Culture manage the exhibitions, performances and tours which take place within the town. During this time, the “*School of Rhythm*”, a non-profit organization and performance school was also opened. It provides local children the opportunity to learn about the *Congo Drama* by teaching them how to play the drums and other instruments that are used for the performances. This interest surge revolving around *Congo* cultural practices, has brought a renewed sense of pride within the community.

Afro-Panamanian Identity

As explained in the introduction, the term *Congos* is used by the community as an identifier, because in their shared narratives most of their ancestors are said to have originated from the “Kingdom of Kongo”. According to Ferris, most Spanish colonialists would use the term to refer to the ‘Bakongo’ people who inhabited the colonial entity known as the “Belgian Congo”. This is where they would obtain their supply of slaves, and gradually they also started using the term to designate any person who was brought from the west coast of Central

Africa to the Americas as “Congos” (Thompson 1983). While “Congo” in this sense was once an explicit ethno-racial term used by the Spanish and community alike, contemporary practitioners use it to refer to the cultural performance traditionally enacted by the community during the *tempe de soto*.

To this day, the majority of the population identifies as Afro-Colonial, as their ancestors arrived in Panama during the time of Spanish colonization. However, the community were still reluctant to identify themselves as “black”, because of the negative connotation of discourses surrounding people of color before the early turn of the century in Central America. Anthropologist, Peter Wade argues that both race and ethnicity are socially constructed categories that nonetheless have deep material impacts based strongly on skin color and ideas as to what constitutes “culture” (Wade 2010). It is hence key to examine the dialectical relationship between the two African-descended populations in Panama and how they became grouped under the category “afro-Panamanian”.

On May 30th, 2000, “La Asamblea Legislativa de la República de Panamá” (Panama’s National Assembly), passed *Ley por la cual se crea el día de la etnia negra nacional* (Law 9 of 2000), which marks the creation of the “Day of Black Ethnicity” in Panama. This celebration can be described as an annual civic recognition of the culture and contributions of people of African descent to the Republic of Panama. The date was chosen because it coincides with when King Ferdinand VII of Spain abolished slavery in the colonies in 1820 (Alexander Craft 2015). This event serves as a site of commemoration, and social change, as it opens up spaces for dialogues regarding Black identity in Panama at both the national and local level. It allows for the development of ethnic identity discourse within social institutions while highlighting positive relationships between various ethnic groups (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022). It is also the first time that the national identity of a minority served as the focus of a commemorative day in the country. Additionally, the law that created the “Day of Black Ethnicity” specifies that the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, and the Institute of Tourism all organize activities to celebrate the holiday – with all schools and public institutions hosting

educational events on how the contributions of the Afro-Panamanian community have impacted the development of the country (Alexander Craft 2015).

This meant that a new focus was given to the *Congo Drama*, which went from a marginal ethnic performance to an important part of national folklore overnight. Alexander Craft mentions that this state ruling was also one of the first times that the “Afro-Colonial” and “West-Indian”⁶ communities were joint within the umbrella term – “Afro-Panamanian” (Alexander Craft 2015). Before the emergence of the term Afro-Panamanian within Panamanian discourses on identity, people of African descent would either identify themselves as Afro-Antillean or Afro-Colonials. The main distinction between them being the fact that the former often spoke English and worked primarily as canal laborers.

Afro-Colonials, like the ancestors of the community in Portobelo are represented within the Congo tradition – as it relates directly to the lived experiences of enslaved communities in Panama. People who identify as Afro-Colonial are able to claim a history of over 500 years in the country, while “West-Indians” have only been a prominent community for 160 years, composed of mainly English-speaking migrants (Arroyo 1995, 155). International discourses on race & ethnicity have also influenced the way in which “blackness” is conceptualized in Panama. Especially when considering the discrimination that the town has faced by being conceptualized at the state level as a mostly “black area”, and how this reflects on the ways in which they construct their identity as “Portobeleños”. For example, primarily Afro-Colonial communities, like Portobelo, experienced discrimination at a systematic level with fewer economic and cultural resources allotted to their communities and a negative stigma associated with their skin color (Alexander Craft 2015). This, coupled with the economic legacies of their enslavement left these communities in relative

⁶ In Panama, the term ‘West-Indian’ and Afro-Antillean were used interchangeably to refer to Afro-descendant populations which arrived at the isthmus from English or French-speaking colonies.

isolation until the main road connecting them to Colon was built in late 20th century (Manrique Pacheco, pers. comm., February 24, 2020).

Discourse in this context refers to the intellectual constructs of Blackness, its material practices, and the human agency that moves and molds them. These discourses hold a strong influence because they not only affect afro-Panamanian communities but how the state perceives itself. As mentioned by Alexander Craft, the dynamism of the 'Black' identity in Panama exists around the politics of Afro-Colonial and Afro-Antillean identities as they have been created, contested, and revised in the Republic's first century (Alexander Craft 2015). With Twentieth-century Panamanian conceptions of Blackness evolving through a struggle between West Indian and Latino ethnoracial politics, that can be translated into the concepts of *Blackness* versus *mestizaje*⁷ as forms of nationalism. This is because during the construction of the canal, the railway and their occupation of Panama, the United States exported Jim Crow – segregation laws. These coupled with the States imperialistic relationship with Panama, heavily influenced how discourses about race and nationalism were tackled in the country. During this period the concept of 'black identity' was enmeshed in debates around discrimination, equality, social inclusion, social justice, racism, tolerance, and xenophobia.

During this period Afro-Colonials and West Indians were pitted against each other through the conceptualization of blackness, with the term Afro-Colonial meant to signify (Black) nationals versus (Black) immigrants in the form of West-Indian migrants. With the added pressure of the imperialist presence of the United States and its racist practices, these tensions were exacerbated with the distinction between the two groups becoming markers of national and ethnoracial identity. These affected how socioeconomic structures

⁷ In this research, *mestizaje* refers to the Latino discourse of homogenization of the population through intermarriage of all ethnic minorities, with the goal of achieving a 'whitening' effect which erases the cultural markers of these minorities in favor of a adopting a 'white-passing' image. See *mestizaje* in Anderson, Mark, Elisabeth Cunin, Figueroa Mónica G. Moreno, Odile Hoffmann, Huet Nahayeilli Juárez, Gabriel Izard, Hettie Malcomson, et al. 2013. *Mestizaje, Diferencia Y Nación: Lo "Negro" En América Central Y El Caribe*. Mexico: Centro de estudios mexicanos y centroamericanos. <https://rug.on.worldcat.org/oclc/960809850>

worked and pushed social biases specially against non-English speaking ethnic minorities. In retaliation, Panama embraced Spanish-speaking minorities under the “Panamanian” national identity, while English-speaking minorities associated with the Canal were perceived as working together with the United States to oppress nationals. ‘West-Indians’ fell within this category and were deemed undesirables and prohibited immigrants (Constitución de la República de Panamá 1946). They were treated as being part of a ‘racial’ category outside of what it meant to be Panamanian, while Afro-Colonials were seen as nationals. As Spanish speakers living predominantly in the isolated coastal communities of their ancestors, these Afro-Colonial populations were primarily identified with their local towns. As explained by Alexander Craft, this also included a shared identity as part of what she calls “Congo cultural nationalism”. This is expressed through participation in Congo tradition(s) and an affiliation with a particular Congo community or “kingdom.

In comparison, West-Indian migrants from Barbados, Trinidad, Jamaica, and the Greater and Lesser Antilles were commonly thought of as an “immigrant minority”. These diverse groups experienced “West Indian-ness” in Panama through solidarities informed by shared cultural values and traditions as well as shared oppression under U.S. and Panamanian systems of ethnoracial control; and they lived in more urbanized multinational space associated with the Canal Zone (Alexander Craft 2015). Meaning that within this framework ‘West-Indians’ are conceptualized as being “Black” and Afro-Colonials are conceptualized as being ‘mixed’/’mestizos’ due to their colonial roots. Therefore, these communities themselves also approached issues of discrimination on the basis of race through a different framework. While those identifying as Afro-Colonials’ in the twentieth-century were largely influenced through Latin American ideologies of mestizaje, those identifying as West Indian engaged with the world primarily through ideologies of Blackness associated with ‘Black Internationalism” facilitated by their command of English (Edwards 2021).

It wasn’t until the late 70’s with the dismantling of the US ‘Canal Zone’ through the ‘Panama Canal Treaty’, that these communities would finally be

considered as belonging to the same ethnic group, a decision which was passed by the US Congress in 1978. By the early 2000s, both African-descended populations in Panama were less marginalized – with ‘West Indians’ no longer being treated as a problem to be fixed. It was finally at this moment that the term “Black” ceased to be associated with “foreigners” and were accepted as Panamanian. Ever since the first celebration of the “Day of Black Ethnicity”, the *Congo Drama* which once had been enacted exclusively by Afro-Colonial practitioners as a celebration of their specific Panamanian history and culture became a more general Afro-Panamanian folkloric performance, with more diverse groups being created.

This newly formed “Afro-Panamanian” community allows for Black descendants of both populations to be part of political action in Panama under a unified identity. Part of this political action also includes the *Congo Drama* as a parodic cultural performance that portrays a history of sociopolitical struggle for inclusion and self-determination for the Afro-Panamanian community. These performances hence create a space that allows for the subversion of contemporary matrices of power by creating a cultural space within existing systems while sharing narratives on political change.

CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS – THE CONGO DRAMA

This chapter focuses on detailing the *Congo Drama* has influenced the way in which practitioners use ritual narratives and how these actually take place (Williams 1977). Paying attention to the context in which the *Congo Drama* is performed, it's history and the key performers who have shaped the practice. Starting with the detailing of the *tempe de soto*, the festival period in which these performances take place. I will explore how the *tempe de soto* came to be, and how it is connected to both Catholic and Yoruba religious figures. Moreover, I will provide a detailed account of the narratives, space, characters, and costumes which make up the actual performance. I will also describe how the iconic character of the *Devil* is conceptualized by the community. Additionally, I will describe the following performance acts which are directly traceable to the historic realities of enslaved African communities in Panama. These include the *raising of the palenque flag*, *the baptism of the Congos*, and the closing act - *the baptism of the Devils*.

The Congo Drama - Overview

The *Congo* traditions in Panama are aimed at celebrating the spirit and resistance of formerly enslaved Africans who arrived in the country during the Spanish colonial period, and who were able to escape their captors – creating their own independent communities. Currently, the term *Congo* is used by performers and practitioners in Portobelo, to mark this cultural performance which was traditionally performed by Afro-Colonial communities in order to celebrate their shared history and various cultural practices (Alexander Craft 2015). This cultural practice, as a drama, features performances that revolves around a battle of good versus evil in the form of free Blacks versus their enslavers, who are embodied as the *devil*. The performance ends when the *Major Devil* is defeated, has their mask and whip taken away, and is symbolically baptized (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022).

Within the cosmology of the *Congo Drama*, there is a struggle for power and freedom which is meant to symbolize the relationship between the enslaved and

the slavers. This battle between good and evil is performed through the bodies of the community which retell the stories of their shared oppression on the basis of their African heritage (Andres Jimenez, pers. comm., February 25, 2022). In the drama, the *Congos* are shown to live as slaves and receive constant physical abuse from the Spanish. Within the community's oral history, the *devil* is a direct metaphor for the slavers, as they carry a whip in hand. The decision to embody these characteristics through the drama was also created as a play on words. This is because the Spanish used to dissuade the slaves from rebelling and fleeing to nearby *palenques* by telling them that the *devil* was going to catch them and drag them to *Hell*. In the case of the *Congo Drama*, protected by *angels* - representing their ancestors, the *Congos* rise up against their oppressors and through a ritual dance performance, unmask them and "baptize" them. They do this in order to convert them to "good" in a similar way in which slaves were forcibly baptized - this being how they finally triumph and liberate themselves from their oppressors.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the *Congo Drama* is performed throughout various communities in the Caribbean coast. Portobelo, being the largest coastal town in the area, became a hub for these cultural performances. With each community and performance group performing the drama in a different way based on their current social context. For example, over the past 50 years in Panama, the inhabitants of the Caribbean coast have traveled to more densely populated areas, like Colon. Where they take parts of the culture from their communities and transpose them in a different context. Gavidia shares that even though the province of Colon and the Caribbean coast all have their own regional manifestations, the main stories shared within the performance of the drama remain roughly the same (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022). All of them including the same characters, dances, and succession of events (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a). Regardless of various changes that performers have experienced to the aesthetic aspects of the tradition, they all still maintain that the *Congo Drama* is a key feature of their identity as Afro-Panamanians (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022).

Officially the ritual time known as the *tempe de soto* takes a total of 40 days in which the town engages in performances throughout both day and night. There is no set time as to when these performances take place, based on interviews, these are usually scheduled based on the availability of performers during this time. With most performers taking time off of their work's holiday allowance to be able to fully commit to the performance.

History and Context – Tempe de Soto

“The tempe de soto is marked with a black and white flag, it is reflected in a drum, in a dance, in a song. The “Congo” drama is the unification of feelings where we can express our ways of living.” – Areyza Gavidia, ‘Mise’/Congo Queen (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021b)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the *Congo Drama* was created during the colonial period, in which slavery lasted for a total of 350 years in Panama. During this time, enslaved peoples were continually being oppressed and discriminated against by the Spanish. After rebelling and fleeing the plantations, previously enslaved African people relocated to self-governing communities called *palenques*. It was in these community spaces that the events unfolding in the drama would take place and would later be interpreted into a performance. Based on this context, the origin of the drama can be traced back to the practices that the *cimarron* communities would engage in during this designated period of ritual time.

According to performers such as Carlos Chavarria, the performance is part of a broader “*Congo*” tradition and way of life which was brought to the Americas from Africa during the slave trade. These displaced communities brought with them rites and ceremonies which were later adapted to the Panamanian context. Originally, the *Congo Drama* was not a performance – it started out as a ritualized game that later evolved with the addition of characters, creating narratives that recount the experiences of these enslaved communities in

Portobelo. Panamanian folklorist and “Congo” performer Professor Arturo Gavidia stresses that their enslaved “ancestors were continually being physically, mentally, and emotionally oppressed. It was like a vice for the Spanish and the consequences were horrible for us. So, to set the balance, every year we had to get baptized to cleanse ourselves from this pain and hardship”. He explains that these ritualized games started as a way for the community to gain some closure from the abuse they endured daily under the Spanish rule. In the course of my interviews, participants emphasized the importance of three specific episodes within the drama. These main episodes were defined as having the most traces of these original practices practiced by ancestors. These include *rising of the palenque flag, the baptism of the “Congos” and the baptism of the Devils*. These ritualized games were practiced during a period of time called “*Tempe de Soto*”. This time period is also called the “*Congo Season*” by the community, but throughout this text I will be referring to it as *tempe de soto* – as this is the more common description that I encountered through my interviews (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022).

The *tempe de soto* officially starts every year on January 20th, on the feast of St. Sebastian. This festival period likewise coincides with the “Carnival Season”, starting a few days later and ending on the same date. However, *Congo* performers and community leaders contend that their practice is not related to carnival at all – due to the negative connotations associated with it. Gabriel, a *devil* performer, mentions that “*over the years we realized that in our culture...it has nothing to do with carnival...however many people assimilate it with that and fear it because of it.*” (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a). Currently, there exist two versions within the community’s oral history as to why the festival season starts on this day, with Saint Sebastian being regarded as its patron saint. Gavidia explains that in one version this period of time is dedicated to Saint Sebastian and Saint Fabian, both of whom were martyred by arrows and share the same feast day (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022). In this view, the dying soldier pierced by arrows becomes a representation for a defeated Spanish colonist instead of staying within the representation of him as

a heroic Christian martyr (Harris 2003). The second version states that there are coincidences between the celebrating of the start of the season on the 20th of January because of the mix between Yoruba religious festivities that the *cimarrones* were celebrating. Luis Valencia, a “Congo” performer shares that the day matches with the feast of Ochosi (Manrique Pacheco, pers. comm., February 24, 2022). The latter being a deity associated with the Yoruba religion of West Africa and the Afro-Latino religions of Santeria, Palo Santo & Candomblé. Ochosi is represented as a skilled hunter who uses arrows, since Saint Sebastian was killed by arrows the two are associated by this similarity (Wafer 1991). Combined with the first version of the festival’s association, it is conceptualized to relate Saint Sebastian to a Spaniard colonist who was hunted down by the skilled African hunter Ochosi (Manrique Pacheco, pers. comm., February 24, 2022).

Panamanian folklorist Miroslava Herrera theorizes that the *tempe de soto* first started during a period of rest which the Spanish colonists allowed slaves to have. This period would begin on January 20th and end on Ash Wednesday – coinciding with the same dates that the *tempe de soto* is currently observed in Portobelo. She explains that the Spanish granted this moment for the slaves to tend to their settlements. On Ash Wednesday the Spanish would return to collect them and take them back to the plantations, destroying the *palenque* in the process – signifying the end of the season. Panamanian historian, Apolonio Acosta further emphasizes that this was a time in which slaves had the opportunity to perform activities which were normally forbidden to them. These included practicing rites, ceremonies, and dances without pressure from the slavers. These views are backed by the *Pacification Treaty* of 1607, between the Spanish and the slaves – influenced by their successful rebellion. The first slave rebellion in Panama took place in 1530, led by *cimarron* Bayano. Whom also spearheaded multiple following rebellions between 1537 and 1548 (Vilar Vilar 1987). These rebellions ended up with large casualties on both sides, and with the loss of financial property for the Spanish Crown. They intervened through this *Pacification Treaty* by recognizing these *cimarron* community’s freedom.

Apart from being able to perform activities without the watchful eyes of their slavers, one of the main features of the *tempe de soto* was the re-structuring of the *cimarron* society. During this time, *cimarron* communities divided under *palenques*, each of whom was ruled by their very own “Congo Court”. The most important person within this court is the queen, who becomes the primary community head/leader under a temporary matriarchy (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a). The figure of the queen is elected in unison by the members of each *palenque*, with her duties revolving around organizing and monitoring the performances. As to the process behind this decision, Gavidia recounts “*In the past within Africa, there was a time when women had all the control of the activities within a community. They were the ones who determined things and ruled. Hence during the tempe de soto, the queen rules.*” (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022). Performer Manrique asserts that “*in these palenques that women originally ruled. It was through religious syncretism that the cimarrones combined their deities with those of the Catholics. For example, the term for the queen is “Mise” who relates to the Virgin of Mercy. In Yoruba tradition the Virgin of Mercy is related to Obatala, a Yoruba god who has two branches - female and male, who rules over the entire human head. This is why it is the woman who rules in the matriarchy of the tempe de soto.*” (Manrique Pacheco, pers. comm., February 24, 2022). From this perspective, the *tempe de soto* is related to a space in time in which the *cimarron* communities are able to return to their cultural framework, following their original hierarchy structure. Which ends with them having to leave their settlements once again and return to serve under the colonial power structure that sought to oppress them. According to Congo Queen Areyza, “*the palenque was almost like an escape for their ancestors, as they were able to play and live as if they were back in Africa.*” (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021c).

This is also why, the structure of the *palenque* plays such an important role, as the background for all the celebrations taking place during the *tempe de soto*. Marking the performance space, serving as a stage for the unfolding drama. When it comes to the reason as to why they continue to practice these ritualized

games, performer Manrique Pacheco explains the importance of the *tempe de soto* for the community throughout different contexts. “*During the tempe de soto our ancestors performed symbolically what the Spanish did to them. Nowadays, I use this festival time as an opportunity to teach our community what happened during those times and have them understand in the clearest and safest way possible.*” (Manrique Pacheco, pers. comm. February 24, 2022). This is a view that is shared by community members involved in the performing and organizing of the events that take place during the *tempe de soto*. With them viewing it as a learning opportunity for the entire community to connect to their shared past.

Performances - Raising the Palenque Flag

The *tempe de soto* officially starts with the raising of a black and white flag over the *palenque*. I will refer to this performance as the *raising of the palenque flag*, and as explained above – it is one of the events which to this day retains traces of the original way in which the community’s ancestors inaugurated their settlements (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a). It always starts on January 20th and ends on Ash Wednesday – lasting a total of 25 days. Before this date, the entire community meets to determine where the *palenque* will be built this season. This is an activity that is officially organized by the “Congo Court” and community elders. They instruct everyone to donate time – either in the form of manual labor, financial support, or goods to decorate the thatch structure (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022). The *palenque* is then built in an area which is accessible to the community – in the case of Portobelo, the *palenque* is always located in the park within the center of town. To some extent it is mandatory that everyone participates in some way. This *palenque* is a structure that the community builds and takes apart every season. It is continuously used throughout the season, holding more elaborate events each weekend.

Manrique explains that this is because “*in the past these palenques were the areas where the cimarrones would escape and everyone had to work together to start their settlements.*” (Manrique Pacheco, pers. comm., February 24, 2022). His statement shows the direct links that exist in the community’s consciousness between the way and the reason in which the drama is performed and how it relives the experiences of their ancestors. It also stresses the community-building aspects of this practice both within its original context (colonial times) and in what its representation through the drama aims to achieve (contemporary), namely the same experience of increased social-cohesion. Gavidia further clarifies that “*all of these dramatizations are examples of real circumstances that happened in the past.*” (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022). After the structure is built, the community members gather with the performers, playing drums, and singing together. This takes place as midnight approaches on the 19th of January. After about half an hour of gathering, singing, and walking towards the *palenque* - the performer known as *Pajarito* (Little Bird) arrives. His role as a *messenger* within the drama is emphasized in this performance, as he officially leads the community towards the *palenque*, who he later circles three times – as if to check its surroundings and safety, before signaling to the crowd to enter (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022). After the space is designated as safe by *Pajarito*, the crowd leaves various goods such as food and drinks inside. This also includes the flag which is to be raised on January 20th. The next morning, the community and performers gather once again at the *palenque* to raise the flag (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021c).

This entire performance takes up most of the next day. It starts at mid-day and ends at around 18:00, and it includes multiple hours of singing, dancing, and sharing. The black and white flag is raised at the start of the performance, it is raised by the *Congo King* and sits a top of the entire structure. In Portobelo, the colors of the flag are meant to symbolize the delicate peace established between the *cimarrones* and the Spanish colonists (Alexander Craft 2015). Traditional “*Congo*” music is present throughout the entire performance. This type of music centers around drumming and singing with lyrics that correlate to the occurring

events. During the raising of the flag, the performers, band, and community members are present. The performers include the entirety of the “*Congo Royal Court*” in full costume, which is further detailed in the second part of this chapter. The band is made up mostly of women and a primary singer who leads the chorus – it also consists of three to five main drummers, all of whom are also wearing traditional outfits. The participants usually wear their everyday clothes, with the addition of traditional patch-work skirts (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022).

After the performance ends, everyone present shares a meal that was prepared in the *palenque*, cooked with all the ingredients and donations brought by the participants. This dinner happens at 18:00 and allows for a moment in which the performers and the participants can interact with each other outside of their roles. This is also the moment when the *Congo Queen* selects a couple of performers to stand watch of the *palenque* until Ash Wednesday. This task is rotated between various performers, whose main objective is to deter members of *palenques* of neighboring communities to enter the *palenque* and potentially steal the flag. According to Gavidia, this stealing of the other *palenque*'s flag is widely practiced within the communities within the Caribbean coast. This practice is directly related to ritualized games which the community's ancestors used to play during colonial times. Within the ritualized games, queens of different *palenques* would ask members of their court to travel to neighboring communities and steal their flag (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022). Creating direct lines of contact between these communities, as the queens were the ones who had to negotiate how to get the flags back. They would send emissaries back and forth to set the “ransom” for the flag and provide the appropriate payment in the form of food or support for the preparations during the festival season (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021b). In Portobelo, these meetings were arranged by sending the other *palenque* messages wrapped in leaves, giving the other community time to prepare for the upcoming musical challenge that would take place between them, whenever the flags were returned to their rightful owners.

Performers shared that these performances of ritualized war-play served as opportunities for neighboring Congo communities to socialize during the days and weeks leading up to Ash Wednesday (Alexander Craft 2015). Devil performer and current Mayor Devil of Portobelo, asserts that before the creation of the state sponsored Festival of Devils and Congos, it was through these exchanges that various villages would primarily interact with each other, with the performers from each *palenque* traveling to a different community each weekend. These performances would continue to happen within the *palenque* every weekend. For example, the last weekend of the festival season, the performances hosted within often spill out into the surrounding streets as people from all over the area, including different communities gather to celebrate. Throughout my interviews, this version of the origin of these ritualized games is conceptualized by participants as valuable moments of intercommunity bonding, celebration, and interaction.

The Baptism of the Congos

The *baptism of the Congos* is another performance that takes place during the *tempe de soto*. Even though it is one of the episodes which have direct ties to the experiences of enslaved communities in Panama, it is not generally practiced in Portobelo. One of the reasons that this performance is not that well known is because the *baptism of the devils* often takes the focal point within discussions of the drama. This episode of the *Congo Drama* occurs just the day before the *baptism of the devils* – on Ash Tuesday. It starts with the *Congo Queen* summoning all the *Congos* to the *palenque*, where she announces that they are leaving their settlement. Within this performance, those dressed as *Congos* are taken to get baptized by the *Congo Queen*, who does this in order to bless and protect them on their travels, as it is said that the *Congos* are to leave for “*Guinea*”. This mention of *Guinea* relates to the place where the majority of the community’s ancestors are believed to had originated from (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a). Gavidia points out the importance of this “homeland” that the *Congos* return to, with the town of Portobelo having a whole sector named

“Guinea” to commemorate their roots (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022).

All of these performers, including the children are required to be baptized by the *Congo Queen*, who is provided the spiritual power necessary to grant these blessings by her crown and the cross she holds. After their baptism, they are collected and officially exit the performance. This means that after this moment, they are no longer able to participate in the *drama* as *Congos* anymore. From this perspective, the ritual act of *baptism* is a necessary step for performers to exit their *roles* in the drama and be able to return to their daily lives after the *tempe de soto* is over. This creates a moment of symbolic closure for the festival season and marks a return to the colonial frameworks that the *Congos* were subjected to.

The *baptism of the Congos* actually begins on the Monday before Ash Tuesday. It is on this day that the preparation for this baptism starts, with the burning down of the *palenque*. About the origins of this practice, Gavidia observes that, “*When the slaves rebelled and ran to the mountains, they saw that the Spanish would come looking for them; so, when the Spanish were close, they would burn down their own palenques to leave no trace and burn down any evidence.*” (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022). It is from the remains of the burnt *palenque*, that ashes are then collected by the *Congos* who would later mix these with *holy water* to mark people during Ash Tuesday. They use ashes to mark the *Congos* because these communities were oppressed, and ashes are meant to symbolize a new start. On the importance of this practice, *Queen Areyza* explains that “*the ashes represent the ending of a time of suffering, once the person is marked, they are able to enter a new life where all the negative energies and spirits that might be affecting them are banished from their lives.*” (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a). This belief is linked to the fact that the Spanish would usually burn *palenques* to prevent *cimarrones* from establishing settlements. It was because of the attachment that these communities had to their *palenques*, that they used their remains in the form of ashes to mark their new beginning (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021c).

On Ash Tuesday, the performance of the actual *baptism* starts during midday. This performance is open to the public and takes place in the space that the *palenque* used to stand in. After the *Congos* gather the ashes of the *palenque* in their *chupas* they hand them over to the *Queen*. After the *Queen* obtains the ashes, she takes them to a performer acting as a priest – the same one who is tasked with *baptizing the devils* the following day. She asks this priest for *holy water*, which she later mixed with the ashes to create the paste used to mark *Congos* for baptism. All of them then surround the *Queen* and allow her to baptize them (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a). Regarding the practice of baptism, Gavidia argues that this idea of seeking out a priest for baptism was almost like a natural reflex for these communities because it was instilled in them from the Spanish which they had to convert to Catholicism or face punishment (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022). Manrique, further adds that, “*It is because of religious syncretism...It doesn't mean that our ancestors abandoned their beliefs and fully converted to Catholicism. They did so in order to avoid controversy and punishment...*” (Manrique Pacheco, pers. comm., February 24, 2022).

In Portobelo, the practice of baptizing the *Congo* performers is not usually practiced anymore. This means that these performers also participate within the performance of the *Devil Tun Tun* and the *baptism of the devils* on the next day. According to Gavidia, this practice lost favor when the *palenques* became more expensive and time-consuming to build, so the burning and collecting of ashes that precede this ritual doesn't happen anymore. Instead, this practice is more commonly told within oral history and performed for cultural activities outside of the *tempe de soto*. Nowadays, most performers and community members attend the Catholic church in the middle of town to get baptized on Ash Wednesday before joining the celebration of the *baptism of the devils* (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022).

The Baptism of the Devils

The *baptism of the devils* occurs on Ash Wednesday, marking the end of the *tempe de soto*. The relevance of Ash Wednesday as the official end of the *Congo* festival season relates to the perceptions of this date within the *Catholic* tradition. It is important because this day also marks the beginning of the *Lent* season, practitioners explain that it infuses the *baptism of the devils* with a sense of renewal (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022). Like the *Congos* on the day before, the abusers represented by the character of the *Devil* also have a day to start anew. Manrique shares this reasoning behind why the *devils* are baptized in the *Congo* tradition: “*When you discriminate against the slaves you fall from grace. You create and hold on to negative energy. That is why it is necessary to baptize the devils.*” (Manrique Pacheco, pers. comm., February 24, 2022).

Within the tradition, all *devils* are required to get baptized for the *tempe de soto* to officially conclude. On a more personal level, as with the *Congos*, this ritual is meant to provide performers with closure and protection from the experiences displayed in the drama. Dagoberto, a *devil* performer, explains that in the community’s oral history this practice was adopted because: “*It is said that one opens doors when one performed as a devil and that when one is baptized those doors closed.*” (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021b).

According to interviews and records, in Portobelo, it was Celedonio Molinar Ávila (1916–2005) the most renowned Major Devil within the tradition, that incorporated the practice of baptizing the devil. He brought this practice to Portobelo, when he arrived from Costa Arriba– another majorly Afro-Panamanian community, during the late 1930’s (Alexander Craft 2015). He continued to act as the elder devil for 49 years and trained various major devils along the Caribbean coast. While devils are meant to perform in cycles of seven years, Celedonio on the other hand made a vow to himself to complete seven cycles of seven years which amounted to his total of 49 years performing and teaching (Carlos Chavarria, pers. comm., February 25, 2022).

The actual *baptism of the devils* starts unfolding in the evening around 18:00, after the *baptism of the Congos* on Ash Tuesday. It begins with *Pajarito*, indicating the sighting of the *devils* with his whistle. After interacting with the *Congo Court*, other *devils*, and the public – these devils make way for the *Major Devil* who arrives and begins the performance of “*The Devil Tun Tun*”. Throughout this dance, the *Congo Queen* and the *Major Devil* face each other as she tries to protect the *Congo Court* by holding a wooden cross against the *Devil* to keep him at bay. This performance of “*The Devil Tun Tun*”, is the first one that happens in this episode of the drama, the narrative accompanying the beat goes: “Last night I dreamed of a man with golden teeth who wanted to take me away... Do you know who it was? It was the devil knocking. There he goes, knocking once more...” (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021b).

The main goal of the *Major Devil* is to attempt to overpower the *Congo Queen*, but ultimately the performance continues with her succeeding in grabbing him and holding him by the back of his neck so that he becomes unable to attack anyone. However, this struggle ends with the Devil pushing them both towards the drummers and singers, almost tumbling over them. This is when the performance ends and everyone leaves the area where the *palenque* once stood. After this, the performance of the actual *baptism* starts the next day. This time around there is no *palenque* to gather in, so instead they perform on a stage which is built in the same area where it used to be. Around this stage, space is made for the *devils* and the other characters to perform.

In Portobelo, this stage is located in the middle of town, where everyone converges to witness the finale. The singers and drummers are also present, they sit at the back of the main stage with a set of speakers and LED lamps, that provide the lighting for the performance. The finale to the drama starts during midday, where the *devils* and the *Congo Court* face off once more. These *devils* are also accompanied by the *archangel* and the *souls of the departed* who attempt to corner and restrain them (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a). This group is composed of around 10-11 performers, who are all connected by a rope held by the *archangel*. They enter the performance space chanting: “*we are angels who*

come from heaven looking for alms for ourselves." (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a). They run all through the space attempting to capture the *devils* and bring them to a smaller raised platform where they are held down for baptism.

Before the priest enters the performance, the *devils* have their whips taken again and their masks forcibly removed. After this, the priest starts the ritual of baptism, by having the *madrina* bring forward the ritual components. The baptism starts with the priest attempting to make them repent by uttering the word "God". This usually takes multiple tries, as the *devils* refuse, struggle, and say the words "*arroz*" meaning rice (which in Spanish sounds similar to the word God) instead. Next, while their mouth is still open, the priest puts a spoonful of salt and makes them do the sign of the cross over their chest. After succeeding in having them repent they then have holy water sprinkled all over them with the basil leaves. After this, they are released back to the public but are unable to perform as *devils* anymore. (Andres Jimenez, pers. comm., February 25, 2022).

During this time, the first *devils* which the *souls of the departed* attempt to restrain are the ones who are performers from outside of the community. Performers explain that since palenques and therefore performance groups are small they are able to recognize who is a local. Especially because each community has their own variations as to the look of the devil masks and costumes. After all these visiting devils have been neutralized, they start pursuing the local devils, until all of them have been baptized – this is finally when the *Major Devil* makes his appearance once more for a battle against the *souls of the departed* and the *archangel* before being finally baptized (Andres Jimenez, pers. comm., February 25, 2022).

The *Devils* are all baptized by a performer acting as a priest. This priest holds them down, with the help of the archangel, the souls of the departed and the devil's *madrina*. The ingredients used for the baptism are salt – to banish evil, basil – for protection and holy water – to purify the soul (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021c). Finally, the Major Devil is cornered and brought before this priest who attempts to exorcize him three times before baptizing him, thus concluding

the Congo drama. As summarized by Major Devil Carlos, *“That’s when everything ends. With the baptism of the major devil, evil is officially beat. That is what we celebrate and what the tradition shows.”* (Carlos Chavarria, pers. comm., February 25, 2022).

As mentioned earlier, after being baptized, the performers are forbidden to act as *devils* until the next *tempe de soto*. They are only allowed by the *Congo Queen* to perform as devils once more if they are doing a cultural showcase outside of the established ritual time. Gavidia asserts that continuing to perform as a devil outside of this ritual time, or even after being baptized but still during the *tempe de soto* is discouraged. This is because after this ritual, when their masks and whips are removed, they are supposed to enter a new life (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022). Traditionally, when masks used to be less elaborate – they would be burned at the end of every festival season.

Moreover, Manrique explains that the idea behind not performing once more after baptism also has to do with the closing of the ritual space. He elaborates, *“There is a saying that if you open a door and close it and then reopen it, negative energies are going to get into you and will bring more bad things. That is a door that you will not be able to close. That is why people should not play as devils after being baptized.”* (Manrique Pacheco, pers. comm., February 24, 2022).

Devil performer Gabriel shares how he protects himself from negative or harmful energies during and after the drama and cultural performance likewise. *“Even if I go to do cultural performances, after getting baptized I always try to protect myself. Either with gold necklaces or repeating many Hails Mary’s while I get ready to perform. Meanwhile, when I’m there I just dance the “Devil Tun Tun” and I don’t even use my whip. As soon as I finish performing, I make sure to take everything off while repeating Hail Mary’s once more.”* (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021c).

Characters – Representations & Roles

Throughout the entirety of the *Congo Drama*, a variety of performances take place throughout the festival, emphasizing the mix of Western Catholicism and African traditions. One of the most discernible being the main characters of the drama and the roles that they are supposed to enact. These character representations often appropriate Catholic imagery and use it to narrate the history of slavery and the oppression experienced by previously enslaved minorities, and the continued discrimination faced by their descendants.

The Royal Court

The main characters of the *Congo Drama* consist of the *Congo Royal Court*. The court is comprised of the *Congo King and Queen*, as well as the princess and the prince who is called *Pajarito*, meaning *little bird*. These figures take on an important role both within and outside of the drama. This is because they are the ones who become the community's leaders during the *tempe de soto*. They have the responsibility to organize and carry out the drama in a way that fulfills the needs of the community (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022). According to Manrique - apart from the social hierarchy shifting during the *tempe de soto*, the *cimarrones* decided to refer to these temporary rulers as King and Queen to spite the Spanish (Manrique Pacheco, pers. comm., February 24, 2022). Queen Areyza asserts that this was a type of criticism of the Spanish. Since the colonists would constantly remind these enslaved groups that the Spanish crown were their protectors and were looking out for their benefit (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021c).

Within the community's oral history, this is why the clothes worn by performers, especially those of the Queen and King Congo, are designed to mimic the royal attire worn by the Spanish crown during the colonial period. These also included props such as crowns, scepters, jewelry, and thrones to mark their station. All of which are handmade, with special attention being paid to the crowns. These are usually constructed out of cardboard, decorated in aluminum foil or golden fabric, and later embellished with the addition of mirrors, bows,

rhinestones, and glitter. The Queen's crown differs from that of the King, as it includes an assortment of colorful ribbons that flow from the back of it – simulating long hair (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022). As the community's matriarch, she is the one who interacts with the devils the most. In order to protect her community from this evil, she also holds a wooden cross to deter the devils from entering the *palenque* (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022). *Queen Areyza* explains the importance of this wooden cross as a weapon, "*Seeing that the Spanish devils respected the cross, the Congos decided to use their own weapon against them.*" (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a). They decide to use this symbol in their defense, which in the end shows how ingrained the imposition of Catholic symbols was within these communities. Manrique further adds, "*The devils always respect the Congo Queen. The Spanish respected the Spanish crown because it had a cross, and this cross represents the holy trinity. Since Catholicism was imposed on the slaves, the Congo queen wears a crown with a cross to command respect.*" (Manrique Pacheco, pers. comm., February 24, 2022).

Various Panamanian folklorists have shown that throughout the 20th century, apart from the *Queen*, the rest of the court have faced considerable alterations. Mainly the fact that the roles of the King and the Princess have been diminished (Alexander Craft 2015). A key member of this set of performers whose role has stayed consistent is that of *Pajarito*. His role in the drama consists of acting as a scout and informing the rest of the court on the events that are taking place in other *palenques*. Apart from selecting the area where the *palenque* will be built, they are also the ones that look for other *palenque's* flags and devises the plans on how to successfully secure them. He further acts as a messenger between the *palenques* if flags were stolen. Gavidia maintains that "*Pajarito's primary leadership role is to help guard the community and help guide them.*" (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 2022). In Portobelo, his costume is usually composed of a long golden tunic of shiny taffeta fabric that is secured at the waist with a twine rope. As part of the Congo Court, taking the role of a prince - *Pajarito* also wears a decorative cardboard crown and multiple rows of beaded

necklaces made out of shells (Alexander Craft 2015). His crown is also wrapped in shiny golden fabric and is further adorned with multiple feathers that make him stand out from the crowd. His outfit is directly linked to the meaning behind his name – as he is meant to represent the attributes of a bird (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022). Like the other male *Congo* performers, he also paints his face with green or yellow to match the rest of his costume. Congo Queen Areyza shares that, “Originally as the scout, Pajarito should be the only member that uses a whistle which he needs to alert the community with – in case the devils, the Dutch or other communities are close by.” (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a).

Congo Performers

The rest of the Congo ensemble/performance groups includes male and female Congo dancers, a group of 6 people intended to represent the souls of the deceased, various devils and the major devil who only appears on Ash Wednesday for his baptism. Both groups of Congo performers wear similar clothing styles as the *King* and *Queen*. With the main variations being based around the traits and personality that the performers embody during the *tempe de soto*. These costumes come in a multitude of colors and varieties -with the only rules being not to wear black or red, as these colors are associated with the character of the devil (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022).

The women’s costumes include a sleeveless cotton top, and a long voluminous skirt called a *pollera*. The top half of the outfit is comprised of a sleeve-less blouse, often in white or in the same fabric as the skirt. The blouses feature a round neck collar, with a flap of printed fabric that covers the bosom and top of the arms. The *pollera* skirts are created from 8-10 meters of light cotton fabric, the most popular prints include small flowers on light pastel backgrounds (Alexander Craft 2015). Women often wear white petticoats under them, to accentuate both the volume and patterns of the skirts. The Queen wears the most voluminous petticoat, with the rest of the women wearing a similar garment that stops at the knees. *Polleras* are all made by hand, with the women

usually sewing new ones for every *tempe de soto* (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022). With every skirt being one of a kind. Traditionally, these skirts would be made up of patchwork pieces of discarded or recycled fabrics that were available to the *cimarron* communities during the colonial period (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021b). This representation of the pollera is still the most commonly associated with the drama in the community's imagery. Performers often pay homage to this original style during the various state-sponsored cultural showcases. According to Panamanian folklorist Ernesto Polanco, these patchwork *polleras* had a resurgence in popularity during the end of the 1960's, after professor and performer Felicia de Santizo formed a performance troupe in the city of Colon. He states the following: "*That's where this type of skirt begins to be re-introduced and promoted. Because it speaks of a social situation... you can't really find these skirts taking such an important role before then. This new performance troupe gave it a new meaning when they associated it with the struggles of black culture in Panama.*" (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a).

As accessories, the women also wear a bag called the *chupas*, these are made from cotton twine and are worn as a cross-body bag. They are used to carry any necessary items that the performers might need to bring with them throughout the performance. For example, waterskins, snacks or materials to fix their costumes (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022). When it comes to stylization, there are also multiple hairstyles that the women don for performances. The two most notable ones including flowers, and ribbons to adorn the top of the head. These flowers are usually of the *cañitoledo* variety – a white and lilac wildflower found along the coast; that looks similar to Baby's Breath (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021b). As jewelry, the women use a combination of necklaces made out of beads, shells, and fish scales. They call these beaded necklaces *Virgin Mary's Tears*, because of the way they gleam when touched by sunlight (Alexander Craft 2015).

The men's costumes are similarly intricate. They wear long sleeved shirts and trousers, often with the addition of a vest. These are all torn, painted, and

worn inside out. None of the *Congos* wear shoes during the performances. Performer Manrique shares that these clothing choices are meant to symbolize the hardships that slaves encountered, specially that they weren't even able to own decent clothes. Various performers assert that the clothing is worn inside out a sign of rebellion, because it mirrors the clothing worn by the Spanish (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a). As accessories they wear a cone shaped hat that is made out of papier-mache, and is decorated with a variety of feathers, beads, mirrors, and rhinestones. They also wear multiple long beaded necklaces, and a rope tied around their waists as a belt. These necklaces are usually made from natural materials such as cow bones and clams shells. The rope is meant to symbolize liberation (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022). From this belt, they secure various interesting objects that they collect during their performances. These later act as props which they use to interact with the crowd, and other performers. Complementary to the women, the men also carry *chupas*, although these are larger in size. Moreover, they also paint their faces, darkening them with charcoal (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a). Finally, they also carry a long stick as a weapon against the devils.

During the drama, both male and female practitioners refer to each other through the use of animal names or titles. According to Congo King, Manrique, *"The Congos mainly use animal names for themselves to reflect the way in which the Spanish treated them. They also used these names because they would imitate certain traits that these animals had. For example, they would call themselves ocelot, eagle, or fox. Sometimes they also use titles like Doctor...then they imitate them by wearing a white robe."* (Manrique Pacheco, pers. comm., February 24, 2022). Performers usually embody these traits within their costumes and mannerisms throughout the drama. During the *tempe de soto*, both sets of performers also fulfill multiple tasks. The women are the primary musicians as they are the ones who carry the performance through their singing. They also dance - interacting with the crowd and other *Congos*. In Portobelo, they also participate in the *baptism of the devils* as baptism godmothers, tasked with making sure that the devils are all rounded up and baptized on Ash Wednesday.

Simultaneously, the men alternate between drumming, dancing, and engaging in rowdiness with the crowd and *the devils* (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022).

The Devils

“For the Congos, the devil is a despicable being because it has always represented our oppressors, they have always persecuted the slaves. At the very least, they have always subjected us to discrimination and hardship. He is the master who has subjugated us all our lives.” – Congo performer Manrique (Manrique Pacheco, pers. comm., February 24, 2022).

This character is also one of the most dynamic ones, as during the performance their main role is to interact with participants and the audience - which they achieve through the use of whips and long sticks to intimidate and rile up the crowd with their advance. Simultaneously, it is also the character which has experienced the most variations throughout time, with their outfits - specially their masks, becoming more elaborate over time - even more so after the creation of the “*Festival of the Devils and Congos*” (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022). Nowadays in Portobelo and throughout the Caribbean coast of Panama, this character is one of the most popular. As this popularity grows, the number of devil performers rises exponentially. This often makes it difficult for performance troupes to have an equal distribution of characters within their shows.

Throughout all the interviews and conversations with performers and community members, the character of the *Devil* has been conceptualized as being inherently linked to processes of discrimination and enslavement (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022). Within the *Congo Drama*, the term *Devil* is used to refer to the Spanish colonist who enslaved the community’s ancestors. *Major Devil*, Carlos Chavarria, explains that this character is meant to represent the way in which the *cimarrones* viewed their enslavers (Carlos Chavarria, pers. comm., February 25, 2022). Similarly, as how

they adopted Catholic elements to create the characters of the *Congo King & Queen*, they shaped the *Devil* within these religious narratives. Gavidia argues that “It is probable that our ancestors didn’t even know of the devil, but they saw this character among all the things the Spanish tried to impose religiously on them, that they adopted it to symbolize their oppressors.” (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021c). *Devil* performer Gabriel explains that the devils should be categorized as part of the *Congos* as well, because they are inherently linked. He argues that “Devils are a representation of the white man who at the time outraged, raped and killed our black brothers. Within the community of the Congo, along with the jokes and others, they created the figure of the devil, which is a symbolic representation of that white man.” Within this line of thinking, without the devils there would be no Congos because they wouldn’t have created *palenques* to begin with, and without Congos to oppress there wouldn’t be devils (Carlos Chavarria, pers. comm., February 25, 2022).

The clothing is usually a combination of black and red, a devil-shaped mask, a whip or cane, and bells tied around the calves. Performers are completely covered from head to toe, with costumes consisting of a onesie-like outfit or a long-sleeved shirt and pants. They also wear gloves, and intricate shoes – making sure to hide every inch of exposed flesh. *Devil* costumes all reflect the rank that the performer has within the group. New devil performers are meant to dress all in red, it is only after their first seven-year cycle playing that they can start to incorporate the color black into their outfits (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a). The bells they wear around their calves are painted silver, with the number of bells being around 120 on each leg. These are used primarily to accentuate the rhythm of the drums when performing (Carlos Chavarria, pers. comm., February 25, 2022). These jingle bells are also believed to represent the bells and the sounds that the Spanish search parties would use when trying to capture *cimarrones* (Alexander Craft 2015).

These *devil masks* are all made by hand by molding them either with clay or aluminum foil, and later painting them in a vibrant red. Traditionally, masks used to be simpler and would be modeled after animals while still having the

distinctive features of the Spanish colonists in the shape of more pronounced noses and chins (Andres Jimenez, pers. comm., February 25, 2022). The most important characteristic of the masks is their facial expressions, especially their frowns/scowls. This is because they are supposed to inspire fear, by having an expression that shows the hatred they embody (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021c). On the process and inspiration behind the creation of the masks, artisan Edward Johnson explains: *“Each mask calls you and when you create it, from its foundations a feeling is created. Within that feeling, sometimes one gets so involved that sometimes one starts thinking that the mask emanates an aura, or that it speaks to them or that it moved. Darkness is represented in this game because of the Spanish. It is a performance, but then if you take it very seriously you open doors and bad things start to happen to you.”* (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021b). Another key element of the *devil* character is that they carry a whip. This whip is used to hit the *Congos* in the legs and it’s meant to simulate the weapons that the Spanish used against enslaved communities. Within the unspoken rules of the drama, *Congo* performers and bystanders all participate under the impression that they are aware they might end up getting hit by this whip at one point or another (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022).

The *Major Devil* also wears a similar costume to the *devils*, but they do have some distinctive features to show their rank. These consists of wearing an all-black costume with the addition of a pair of wings. While also incorporating a large beard made of white rope to represent their seniority within the devil performers (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a). Previously in Portobelo the character of the *devil* had already been part of the Congo Drama, however the figure of the *Major Devil* was not part of the community’s imagery. It wasn’t until Celedonio claimed the title of *Major Devil*, after being taught about the tradition in Costa Arriba. He is ultimately the one who taught the Portobelo community how to perform as a *Major Devil* and how to close the drama through the ritual of baptism. The *Major Devil* is a title given to the person who has been acting as a devil the longest within the community. Portobelo *Major Devil* Carlos Chavarria explains how the title is earned: *“It is definitely earned through respect. At the end*

of the day who chooses the Major Devil is the Congo Queen with the aid of the Congo Court. It comes down to your ability and stage presence.” (Carlos Chavarria, pers. comm., February 25, 2022).

Moreover, unlike the *Congo* performers who usually communicate with the crowd using the *Congo* dialect, *devil* performers don't speak at all. They only use a type of groaning, called “*pujido*” – which they let out to communicate with one another and the crowd. On this practice, Dagoberto explains that: “*This pujido means that the slavers are coming, this noise is used to instill fear and communicate with each other.*” (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021c). Another version of the meaning of the *pujido* is given by Celedonio Molinar during an interview with researcher Alexander Craft. He shares, “*This pujido is something that comes out of a person whenever they get into the devil costume. It marks when a person fully transforms...*” (Alexander Craft 2015).

They also use laughter to communicate with each other, especially when two *devil* performers meet each other on the streets. When performing, they move in groups of two or three, making the shape of the cross with their feet perpendicular to each other. On why they should move in this manner – *Major Devil* Celedonio showed that this was a way to protect the performer by simulating the Catholic cross at all times within their dance movements (Alexander Craft 2015).

Devil performers explain that they usually have their own rituals when attempting to get into character. Most of them share that they feel like they get into a type of trance-like state when they are performing. *Devil* performer Dagoberto explains these feelings as, “*It's almost like having a seizure, you lose control of your body, and you don't know what you are doing.*” (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a). In the past, these performers would all meet up in the mountains to dress up and prepare themselves but nowadays people gather in the home of the *Major Devil* to prepare together (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022). *Major Devil* Carlos Chavarria takes pride in changing the tradition from having performers gather in the mountains to having them gather at home instead. He emphasizes, “*I have changed the tradition. Before, the Major*

Devil used to get dressed in the mountains, but I do it at home. On the one hand it's to be comfortable, I don't want to have to go to the mountains just to do that. On the other hand, traditionally the Major Devil dresses up on the mountain because he is imitating the lord of darkness (the actual devil) and I don't want to do that in the wilderness.” (Carlos Chavarria, pers. comm., February 25, 2022).

Carlos shares that when he performs as a *devil*, he often forgets who he is. About the change in demeanor that happens when *devils* attempt to get in to character, he adds that he has been told by Panamanian photographer and activist Sandra Eleta that when he dresses up as a *devil*, he emanates a strong negative aura (Carlos Chavarria, pers. comm., February 25, 2022). About his performance Carlos further adds, *“When I start to hear the rhythm of the drum, I get a very strong emotion. It was like it possessed me at that moment, it didn't transform me, but I did feel an energy that I didn't know where I got it from.”* (Carlos Chavarria, pers. comm., February 25, 2022). He explains that his performance is informed by the various emotions that bubble up during the drama while engaging with the drumming. They further explain that as soon as one gets in character, as a *devil* one has to follow certain prescriptions in order to avoid having the negative energy from the character one embodies to possibly possess them and negatively impact their daily lives. For example, it is said that when a devil performer leaves the house where they get ready – that they have to exit it facing backwards, with the same going for when entering through a door. In oral history, *devils* are taught to never enters a house head-on, and that the same goes for when they are faced with the *Congo Queen's* wooden cross. Carlos explains his reasoning for following these rules as: *“I don't really know the myth behind why, but I do it because it is tradition. I always sit with my back towards the door because that is how I will have to exit. Before I enter the performance, I always face the 4 cardinal points and salute them... I do the same when I exit the performance...I enter my home facing backwards. This way any negative energy will be cast out and won't follow me home. When I perform, I also make sure to be walking with my feet crossed to protect myself from any negative energy.”* (Carlos Chavarria, pers. comm., February 25, 2022).

Devil performer Gabriel further adds that during the period of *Lent* that immediately follows the *baptism of the devils* he does not wear or perform. “*I do this to protect myself, I just don’t do it during Lent even for cultural performances After this time is over you can find me performing again.*” (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021c). Carlos assures that this belief in negative energies that emanate whenever performing or embodying the character of the *devil* are shared within the community. He explains that even Celedonio Molinar once tried to talk to him about the energies he channeled when preparing for the performance in the mountains, asserting that these are able to empower the performer. Carlos further adds that this is one of the reasons why he discourages performers from going to the mountains on their own, instead making their preparations as public and open as possible (Carlos Chavarria, pers. comm., February 25, 2022).

Finally, it is important to mention that throughout the tradition of the *drama*, the role of the devil has been reserved for men. However, in recent years with the growing popularity of the drama, women have been allowed to perform as *devils* too. Performance troupes explain that women are allowed to play as devils as long as they don’t take off their masks until the *baptism*. Gavidia asserts that, “*As long as they are following the tradition and actually committing to the performance there are no issues.*” (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021b).

Godmothers, The Priest, The Archangel and Souls of the Departed

These four characters play an important role in the performances of *baptism* within the drama. The same performers who played as *Congos* throughout the *tempe de soto* are the ones who take on these roles. They only appear towards the end of the festival season, with the *priest* making his first appearance on Ash Tuesday – handing over the *holy water* to the *Congo Queen*. Later he takes on a more distinctive role when *baptizing* the devils. The *archangel*, the *souls of the departed* and the *madrina* or godmother only appears on Ash Wednesday (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022).

As part of the costume, the *priest* wears a white robe and a white cloth over their heads, along with a wooden rosary around his neck. Manrique, who

has also played the part of *priest*, explains that the white cloth is used to protect the head from negative energies and bad intentions (Manrique Pacheco, pers. comm., February 24, 2022). Both the *archangel* and the *souls of the departed* wear similar clothing to the priest. However, *the souls* are tethered together, representing how slaves used to be tied up, and move as a unit that is controlled by the *archangel*. This character usually wears a pair of angel wings, paints their face with silver paint and carries a wooden cross similar to that of the *Congo Queen*. According to oral history, the archangel protects the souls so that they don't get corrupted by the evil power of the devils. Alexander Craft notes that unlike the *Congos* who usually get lashed over layers of inside out pants, these performers participate bear-legged – with their white robes usually ending up dirty with splattered blood and dirt (Alexander Craft 2015).

The role of the *madrina* is more complex. It is usually embodied a previous *Congo* performer, who stays within the crowd – taking on a passive role until the *devils* are brought to the altar for baptism. In the case of the *madrina*, it is the *devils* who before their baptism choose them. This is when they help physically pin the *devils* down, successfully aiding in the fight between evil and good to subdue them. *Queen Areyza* maintains that the role of the *madrina* is important because she is the one that helps present the *devil* to the priest and brings them towards a new life. She explains that since women are the ones that rule within the matriarchy and also the ones to give life that they should be part of this ritual (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a).

CHAPTER 5 – ANALYSIS – RITUALS OF RESISTANCE

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the *Congo Drama* based on the findings detailed in Chapter 4. It explores how the tradition's official consciousness influenced the way in which practitioners build their identity on the basis of shared cultural practices found within the drama. Moreover, it explores how the performance of the drama plays an important role in fostering social cohesion and community through the celebration of a shared past. Based on these findings, it analyzes how the festival has been interpreted as an example of resistance by the community and political activists. Part one of this chapter aims attention at the relationship between conceptions of race and religion in Panama, and how these affect the drama's practices and how it is perceived by the general public. Part two analyzes the drama as a cultural performance that engages in practices of intangible heritage conservation by identifying its main elements in light of Victor Turner's 4-part structure of identifying social dramas.

Race, Religion and Resistance

As explained in Chapter 3 – one of the main issues that the Afro-Panamanian community of Portobelo faces is discrimination on the basis of their African roots. As members of diasporic minority community, they acknowledge the existence of their struggles throughout time. This allows them to create a critical relationship with the cultural politics of their present context through the drama. However, these creative processes of community and identity building are still tied to external perceptions influenced by mainstream conceptualizations of belonging, shaping narratives through cultural contexts (Buitelaar, Fritz and Maher 2021). One of these pre-existing perceptions deals with the e of these pre-existing perceptions deals with the “myth of mestizaje”. This “myth of mestizaje” turns black and indigenous populations and their ethnic markers, culture and especially people into a product which is used to promote nostalgia and patriotism connected to a supposedly shared

“national identity”. This narrative affects how minority communities in Latin America are viewed, as the state constantly promotes narratives that being “mestizo” (mixed-race) is associated with progress, while Black and indigenous communities are framed as something from the past. This view provides a narrative of social evolution from Black and indigenous to continuously more white-passing people who are equated with the “model” citizen (Costa Vargas 2004).

This discourse on culture⁸ as marker of modernity, is an element that affects the way in which the Afro-Panamanian community views the drama and its relationship to the past. Throughout the interviews, participants were reluctant to openly talk about the similarities between aspects of the *Congo Drama* and rituals associated with Yoruba religious practices – practiced by mostly Afro-Latino communities. As explained by Gavidia, “*In some circles mentioning the Yoruba religion is a scandal, when this should not be. We should be able to speak of these religious practices without qualifying them - without taboos. We cannot think that when the slaves arrived in America, they did so devoid of religion.*” (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022).

Currently, one of the main struggles that is constantly brought up in conversation both by performers and community members, is that the *Congo Drama* is associated with “negative” religious practices such as *witchcraft* or *satanism* within the broader Panamanian society (Alexander Craft 2015).

Manrique expresses that, “*A lot of people think that Congo culture and performance has diabolic elements. They haven’t thought or analyzed the reality that the slaves lived in Panama. This is because they have linked Congo culture directly to Carnival...*” (Manrique Pacheco, pers. comm., February 24, 2022).

On the negative perception that the *Congo Drama* used to hold within the broader Panamanian society, performer Gabriel shares: “*My mom was opposed to me performing as a devil because she had heard some negative things about the*

⁸ As opposed to Geertz’ ideas on culture, this discourse is rooted in Weber’s “Protestant Ethics” which was co-opted by Christian groups as equating the “West” as the pinnacle of innovation.

devils in Colon.” (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021c). He hypothesizes that this perception of the drama is due to the mostly Catholic population of Panama and their lack of knowledge of the tradition. Over the years, specially towards the end of the 1960’s, performers and activists started making use of the narratives within the drama and more broadly connecting them to social justice struggles. That is when the drama started to become a cherished cultural performance (Alexander Craft 2015). It was through the introduction of the historical/social aspect which made the *Congo* Drama to become understood and accepted under the narrow definition of “culture” popular in Panamanian discourse, as long as its perception conforms to certain expectations. Gabriel explains how, “*Over the years we realized that this performance has nothing to do with carnival, however many people assimilate it with that. That is why I think that many negative religious ideas are associated with the figure of the devil.*” (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a).

As mentioned in Chapter 4, as the popularity of the drama and especially that of the character of the devil increased, more people decided to join in as devils. However, this means that there are currently more *devils* than *Congo performers*, even though both are supposed to be linked as part of the same troupe (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022). Gavidia points out that the character of the *Congo* is often not taken seriously or treated with respect, as it is associated with slavery and poverty – things that people want to maintain a distance from. On these feelings of embarrassment that men express when confronted with why they don’t participate as *Congos* within the drama, Gavidia adds – “*It is a shame because it is important for our sense of identity and belonging. Before in Colón, they looked at our Congo performance for decades as if it were the worst. So much so that it is possible that this is why people no longer want to dress as a Congo. They associated it with something gross or tattered when that is not the reason for the wardrobe. It is due to marginalization and that is why the men do not want to participate - so as to not give up their humanity by acting as former slaves.*” (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022).

However, *Queen Areyza* explains that this is the mentality that they are currently trying to shift. She asserts, *“This performance is part of our culture. It is part of our essence, even ourselves – the Congos represent our ancestors who fought for all of our freedom. Why would you want to cut them off like that?”* (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021c). Performance troupes argue that there is nothing negative about having previously been enslaved and, if anything, strength should be drawn from their resistance. Carlos expresses, *“We shouldn’t feel ashamed. We are a minority, and minorities are always discriminated against by privileged groups. We should be proud of our ancestors for surviving.”* (Carlos Chavarria, pers. comm., February 25, 2022).

Regarding the importance of making sure that *Congo* cultural practices and performances are showcased in a way that emphasizes the community’s shared history, Gavidia explains that ever since the Festival of the Congos and Devils was created in the early 2000s – there have been efforts to homogenize the practice. Gavidia tells of that these efforts are channeled through teaching a version of the *Congo Drama* that lines up the most with the community elder’s memory of how the drama was performed during their youth. He adds, *“What we do is instill in the children what the Congo culture is. If there are no longer people to play that role, we are going to make sure everyone knows how to practice all the key elements. If we do not do so, we run the risk of losing all these cultural expressions.”* (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022). Performers stress the need for researching and sharing the “correct” version of the drama, in order to have their cultural performance be considered a “real” expression of intangible heritage in the form of folklore (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021c). As an example of this struggle for cultural recognition and the impact that it has on the community, Manrique stresses – *“All performance troupes, everyone who identifies as Afro-Panamanian...please on January 20th add a Congo flag to your homes. We want to show the UNESCO and the Panamanian government that our culture is very much alive and that we are here to stay.”* (Manrique Pacheco, pers. comm., February 24, 2022).

The Congo Drama as Heritage

Heritage is all about negotiation (Smith 2006). This means that past, collective and individual memories are employed to negotiate new ways of being and expressing identity. From this perspective, the cultural markers explored throughout the *Congo Drama* act as catalyst for creating spaces in which this dialectical engagement between how community members perceive themselves as Afro-Panamanians versus how national and global outsiders perceive them (Alexander Craft 2015). Following the view of heritage as an active process, Smith explains that material elements such as the Devil masks, costumes and the decorations of the *palenque* are important within the performance because they serve as aids and props to facilitate the processes of remembering and mediating with the present Portobelo and its adjacent communities thus engage in this practice of preserving their intangible heritage as custodians of their oral texts and performance of the Congo Drama.

Victor Turner proposes a 4-part structure of identifying social dramas and ultimately performances as sequential: breach, crisis, redressive action and reintegration or schism (Turner 1980). Using this framework, I have identified that within the *Congo Drama* the following relate to these sequential actions: the breach is related to the trauma of these enslaved communities forced arrival to the Americas, the crisis includes the various struggles that this community suffered at the hands of the Spanish colonists, redressive action would be the creation of the drama itself to represent and parody this struggle, with the reintegration being the performance of the drama itself as a form of embodied cultural knowledge. Within the ritual narrative of the drama, the breach would be showcased in Act I – the raising of the palenque flag, when the *Congos* finally build their free settlements. The crisis would be related to Act II – the baptism of the *Congos*, where their settlement is destroyed, and the community leave to their homeland. The redressive action would include Act III – the baptism of the devils, where they face off with the *Congo Royal Court*, signifying the abuse of the

Spanish enslavers with their whips. Finally, the reintegration would include the final baptism of the *Major Devil*, which concludes the drama – as it signals that evil has been suppressed and banished.

Furthermore, he illustrates that the relationship between social drama and cultural performance is a dialogical process of reflection, representation, and (re)interpretation. In this sense the *Congo Drama* functions as a “cultural performance” that makes use of parody to manifest the “social drama” of Cimarron resistance to Spanish enslavement. This practice thus allows practitioners an opportunity to celebrate their history, renew their bonds of community, and experience a sense of solidarity. Additionally, when it comes to minority communities, Turner asserts that through cultural performances people create and participate in “public” life. Particularly for marginalized communities that are denied access to “public” forums, cultural performances become the venues for “public discussion” of vital issues central to their communities, as well as an arena for gaining visibility and staging their identity (Turner 1980). In this view, the main aim of performance as a type of ritual is to put people in touch with transcendent beings and forces that would guide them through life-identity transitions and effectively smooth their way through their daily routine. In case of the *Congo Drama*, these transcendent forces being exemplified in the intragenerational dialogues between community members.

Cultural performances as heritage in this context are therefore not only engaged with remembering the past but are processes which actively engage with the present context (culturally, politically, economically) and act as tools for the resilience of communities (Apaydin 2020).

1. Culturally, they engage by allowing the Afro-Panamanian community of Portobelo an opportunity to directly relate to their roots and instruct the younger performers with the knowledge that has been passed down through various generations (Buitelaar, Fritz and Maher 2021). An example of this is how throughout my interviews, all participants emphasized that the slaves arrived in Panama and

America by force and that they had their own religious traditions which were banned by the Spanish colonists. Gavidia even points out that – “*The Spanish used their power to bring Catholicism to both the indigenous and African populations. Imposing their beliefs, practices, and concepts upon them.*” (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022).

2. Politically, it provides a clear example of resistance and subversion against discriminatory systems that continue to oppress this community on the basis of their African roots. An example of this is how throughout the evolution of the drama, social justice struggles have been tied to its performance as was the case with the *polleras* during the late 60’s. *Congo* cultural performances also open up spaces for dialogue between this minority community, the broader Panamanian society, and the state by granting them deserved recognition as an important element of Panamanian culture (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a). On how these performances influenced social justice movements, Gavidia adds: “*Although we broke the chains, a new system of slavery has been created. That is why Afro-Panamanians, and other descendants of slaves are still fighting for their freedom. Our struggles are less, but even though the fight for our rights has ended in one phase it continues in different ways.*” (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022).
3. Economically, the recognition of these cultural performances as intangible heritage by the UNESCO, drives interest and tourism to the area of Portobelo. This in turn benefits the community by creating new and constant opportunities to monetize their performances, allowing them to fund the various performance troupes, NGOs and cultural festivals which they organize culture (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021b).

Collective cultural memories, such as the ones permeating the narratives within the drama, are created through the social and cultural interactions of

communities with their environment. This accumulated knowledge is then used to inform the construction of identity and a sense of belonging of both the community as a whole and individuals within it. Performing the drama, therefore becomes not only a ritual performance, but informs a framework that allows Afro-Panamanians to organize knowledge about the world while offering a way of thinking about the self within these power-relationships (Alexander Craft 2015). Grounded on Apaydin's main ideas regarding the important role of cultural memories when it comes to the creation, performance, and preservation of intangible heritage – I argue that the narratives created through the performance of the *Congo Drama* allow for the transmission of these cultural memories through embodied practices. These processes allow for the consolidation of their sense of belonging through collective intragenerational memory making. This is in line with the various uses of heritage discussed by Smith, where it is concluded that heritage - very similarly to collective- is an ongoing process of creation and change. With this collective memory being something that is accumulated through time, that in order to be remembered has to be performed and engaged by people (Smith 2006). Apaydin further argues that the *“performance of heritage can be understood as any interaction between/within communities by using aspects of the landscape to aid in memory and heritage”* (Apaydin 2020)

Based on the various interviews held with performers, I concluded that the performance of the drama is meant to parody both the Catholic Church and the Spanish Crown in order to critique the abuse suffered at their hands. Alexander Craft further argues that this critique also focuses on how this Catholic ideology was wielded by the Catholic Church and Spanish Crown to promote and protect the institution of slavery. The idea is that this reappropriation of narratives is therefore a tool which allows the Afro-Panamanian community to remember their history and negotiate their present (Alexander Craft 2015). However, these performances are context dependent, and they can become subject to various changes depending on who the audience is. Alexander Craft touches on how performances which are created for cultural showcases differ from those which

are practiced during the scheduled ritual calendar. According to her, when the drama was first created during the colonial times, Spanish enslavers approved of its message. From their perspective, the drama symbolized the *Devil* fulfilling the promise of terrorizing runaway slaves (Alexander Craft 2015).

On the other hand, the *Congos* conceptualized of this performance a parody of their enslavers (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022). For example, in the final episode of the drama – “*The Baptism of the Devils*”, this parody of the Spanish crown takes a center stage. Starting with the role of the *Congo Queen* who uses her cross to combat the enslavers represented as devils to protect her nation – *the palenque*. In reality, this is meant to parody the attitudes adopted by the colonial Spanish crown, who’s interest lied in a process of colonization through violent expansion, forced Christianization, and slavery. Instead of using Catholicism to support the institution of slavery, the Congo Queen utilizes the same power to condemn it instead (Alexander Craft 2015). It is through this act of parody that the *Congo Drama* acts as a space allowing for the critical intervention, reappropriation and reconceptualization of their ancestors lived realities. Thus, becoming an act of resistance through both the narratives shared and through the embodied performance.

As mentioned above, these processes of shared knowledge take place through embodied practices. With performers and community members often learning about these practices through immersion, repetition, and community support (Alexander Craft 2015). Throughout the interviews and webinars, performers often shared that their first encounters with the drama were mediated through having them watch their parents participate in it themselves (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a). Interviewees explained that one of the sources which they use to make sure the drama is performed as accurately as possible, are the oral narratives given by community elders of what they witness in their youth. These oral narratives thus influence the community’s official consciousness and act as repositories of culture – allowing performers to compare and contrast their own practices to those practiced by their ancestors. All of this occurring through the mediation of the past and the present by

engaging in acts of communal remembering and recreation (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022). From a more evolutionary perspective, performance functions to enhance group cohesion, reducing fighting with each other by creating these meta-worlds in which boundaries can be tested and new narratives explored. When asked about the importance of this didactic element of the drama, Carlos shared that he wishes more performers would take the time to research the elements of a *Congo* performance (Carlos Chavarria, pers. comm., February 25, 2021). Gavidia adds that one of the main goals within their performance troupe is to share their knowledge about the tradition. *“Teaching our youth is very important. A community is rich because of its culture and tradition. If we can get them to understand, they will hopefully participate and share these performances with others, it is the only way.”* (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022).

This is why community led celebrations that focus on cultural preservation and teaching are regarded with much importance by the community. These allow for the creation of intergenerational and trans local dialogues between performers. Performances in these spaces evolve and change through inter-group encounters and reckonings. However, as asserted by Roach – *“The key to understanding how performances work within a culture is recognizing that a fixed and unified culture exists only as a convenient but dangerous fiction.”* (Roach 2021). An example of this is how, in Portobelo elders explain that they don’t recall the practice of baptizing the devil before it was taught by *Major Devil Celedonio* (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022).

Likewise, the way in which the drama itself is performed – by consciously enacting traumatic events that occurred to the community, a double consciousness is necessary. This allows performers to embody the experiences of enslaved communities by showcasing how the Spanish perceived them as non-humans, while simultaneously narrating the resilience and rebellion needed by their ancestors to survive a system that was built with this notion (Rabaka 2018). This performance reflects how this double-consciousness is used as a way to use these negative pre-conceived notions about black-ness to their

advantage against outsiders as a process of lived decolonization. With each new generation of performers of the drama improvising and building upon the tradition in order to reflect their current context. By utilizing the narratives of community elders, these performers engage with their community's histories as resources which they repurpose to align with their contemporary needs (Alexander Craft 2015). Within this context, performance troupes and cultural associations such as the *Nengres Congos de Colon*, have made it their goal to make sure that the drama continues to have an important role within the community's ritual calendar. Gavidia asserts, "*We dedicate ourselves to the documentation, conservation, defense, and dissemination of all these elements of the Congo culture. This is so that it can be practiced in the best way – one that honors our past.*" (Arturo Gavidia, pers. comm., February 21, 2022). Ultimately showing how entrenched the *Congo Drama* and its associated cultural elements are for the Afro-Panamanian community's sense of identity through the performance of a shared past.

CONCLUSION

The *Congo* traditions in Panama celebrate the spirit and resistance of formerly enslaved Africans who arrived in the country during the Spanish colonial period. Revolving around those who were able to escape their captors – creating their own independent communities as *cimarrones*. With the term *Congo* being used by performers and practitioners in Portobelo to mark this cultural performance. It features a battle of good versus evil in the form *cimarrones* against their enslavers, who are embodied within the character of the *devil*. The drama ends when the *Major Devil* is defeated, has their mask and whip taken away, and is symbolically baptized – successfully banishing evil and safeguarding the *Congo* community (Anonymous/Group 2, pers. comm., March 6, 2022).

Through this research I analyzed the drama by focusing on its main acts – the raising of the palenque flag, the baptism of the Congos and the baptism of the devils. This research examined how the community building practices of Afro-Panamanian communities employed the narratives present within the *Congo Drama*. Acting as a repository of culture through an embodied performance of resistance. I focused on the ritual narratives present during these performances and how this community makes use of them to build their identity as Afro-Panamanians.

As mentioned during the introduction, this research focused on three main objectives:

- To detail the *Congo Drama* and the baptism of the devils as practiced in the community of Portobelo.
- To examine how this Afro-Panamanian community uses the *Congo Drama*, especially the baptism of the devils to share and reinterpret narratives about their past as an oppressed group.

- To identify and analyze how these narratives are embedded within their community building processes and self-identification as Afro-Panamanians

With the main line of inquiry of this research focuses on how the ritual narratives shared during the Congo drama contribute to the empowerment of the Afro-Panamanian community. From this perspective Congo traditions function as sociopolitical cultural performances which evolve through intragroup negotiations within repositories of culture in the form of oral narratives. Based on the findings and analysis have tentatively concluded that these narratives allow for the development of a greater sense of social cohesion that allows for the creation of strong communal bonds which support community members, allowing them to successfully mediate their identity as Afro-Panamanians within a discriminatory system. Asserting that the community's process of meaning-making, social-solidarity and autonomy in a colonial and post-colonial world are informed by these practices. This research thus focused how historically oppressed communities forge an identity through ritual performances in post-colonial societies, in this case Panama, by identifying how these communities combat discrimination by subscribing to narratives of empowerment.

Based on the findings and analysis, I conclude that the *Congo Drama* fulfills the following needs for the Afro-Panamanian community of Portobelo – it creates spaces were remembering the past, reappropriating elements, and engaging with the present are possible. Culturally, it allows the Afro-Panamanian community of Portobelo an opportunity to directly relate to their roots and share the knowledge that has been passed down through various generations with the youth. Politically, it provides a clear example of resistance through the use of forms of irony and inversion that aid in the subversion against discriminatory systems that continue to oppress the community and highlights the importance of rebelling against these systems. Creating spaces for dialogue between this community, the broader Panamanian society, and the state (Nengres Congos de Colón 2021a). Finally, economically - the recognition

of these cultural performances as important by international organizations and in academia, benefits the community by creating new and constant opportunities to monetize their performances and driving State funds to these areas – giving the Afro-Panamanian community more visibility.

On an ending note, in the same line as Panamanian historians, Dora & Manuel Zarate, I would like to emphasize that there are several details of the overall “Congo” culture that have yet to be identified and studied. Suggesting that this task be undertaken by a team of interdisciplinary researchers, performers, and participants – to bring together all the elements thus far and co-create a truly holistic approach to understanding the “Congo” culture and its various iterations throughout the Caribbean coast of Panama.

WORKS CITED

- Alexander Craft, Renee. 2015. *When the Devil Knocks : The Congo Tradition and the Politics of Blackness in Twentieth-Century Panama*. Black Performance and Cultural Criticism. Columbus: Ohio State University Press. <https://rug.on.worldcat.org/oclc/902909715>
- Anderson, Mark, Elisabeth Cunin, Figueroa Mónica G. Moreno, Odile Hoffmann, Huet Nahayeilli Juárez, Gabriel Izard, Hettie Malcomson, et al. 2013. *Mestizaje, Diferencia Y Nación: Lo "Negro" En América Central Y El Caribe*. Mexico: Centro de estudios mexicanos y centroamericanos. <https://rug.on.worldcat.org/oclc/960809850>
- Apaydin, Veysel, ed. 2020. *Critical Perspectives on Cultural Memory and Heritage : Construction, Transformation and Destruction*. London: UCL Press
- Arroyo, Justo. 1995. "Race Relations in Panama." In *African Presence in the Americas*. Carlos Moore , ed. Tanya R. Saunders, Shawna Moore, 155-62. Trenton, NJ: Africa World.
- Asad, Talal, ed. 1973. *Anthropology & the Colonial Encounter*. London: Ithaca Press.
- Assmann, Jan, and John Czaplicka. 1995. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." *New German Critique* 65 (65): 125–33.
- Buitelaar, Marjo. 2022. "Migration and Identity: The Dialogical Self Theory Approach to Study Intersecting Identifications in a Post-Migration Context." In *Uncertain Destinies and Destinations: Audiovisual Perspectives on Migration and Religion*, ed. Natalie Fritz and Marie-Therese Mäder. 29 - 54. Marburg: Schüren.
- Cadge, Wendy, and Lynn Davidman. 2006. "Ascription, Choice, and the Construction of Religious Identities in the Contemporary United States." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45 (1): 23–38.
- Campbell, Corinna. 2020. *The Cultural Work : Maroon Performance in Paramaribo, Suriname*. Music/Culture. Middletown, Connecticut:

Wesleyan University Press.

<https://rug.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1142906229>

Christensen, Julia F, Camilo José Cela-Conde, and Antoni Gomila.

2017. "Not All About Sex: Neural and Biobehavioral Functions of Human Dance." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1400 (1): 8–32. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.13420>.

Panamanian Constitution. 1946.

Costa Vargas João. 2004. "Hyperconsciousness of Race and Its Negation: The Dialectic of White Supremacy in Brazil." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 11 (4): 443–70.

Denzin, N. K., & Y.S. Lincoln, Y. S., eds. 2000. *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* 2nd ed.. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dirección de Estadística y Censo. 1998. "Población de la provincia de Colón, por distrito: Censos de 1911 a 1990." In *Compendio estadístico: Provincia de Colón*, ed. Dirección de Estadística y Censo 1992–1996.

Donaldson, Laura E. 1992. *Decolonizing Feminisms : Race, Gender & Empire Building*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Edwards, Brent Hayes. 2021. *The Practice of Diaspora : Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674034426>.

Freire, Paulo, and Donaldo P Macedo. 2014. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* . Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. 30th anniversary ed. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic.

Gandhi, Leela. 2019. *Postcolonial Theory : A Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed. New York: Columbia University Press.

Geertz, Clifford. 1975. *The Interpretation of Cultures : Selected Essays*. London: Hutchinson.

Harris, Max. 2003. "Saint Sebastian and the Blue-Eyed Blacks: Corpus Christi in Cusco, Peru." *Tdr / the Drama Review* 47 (1): 149–75.

Hennink, Monique M, Inge Hutter, and Ajay Bailey. 2020. *Qualitative Research Methods*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

- Hua, Ahn. 2018. "Diaspora and Cultural Memory." In *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity : A Search for Home*, ed. Vijay Agnew, 191-208. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
<https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442673878>
- Johnson, Kyle S. 2019. "Racism and the Mystical Body of Christ." Master's Thesis, Boston University.
- Klein, Gabriele, and Sandra Noeth. 2011. *Emerging Bodies : The Performance of Worldmaking in Dance and Choreography*. Critical Dance Studies, V. 21. Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag.
- Lipp, Thorolf. 2013. "Materializing the Immaterial: On the Paradox of Medializing Intangible Cultural Heritage." In *Understanding Heritage: Perspectives in Heritage Studies*, ed. Marie Therese Albert, Roland Bernecker, and Britta Rudolff, 135-152. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter
- Matory, James Lorand. 2005. *Black Atlantic Religion : Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Nengres Congos de Colón. 2021a. "Afro-Panamanian Ethnicity." Livestream, 2:18. April 23, 2021. <https://youtu.be/xaTMceBCeA0>
- 2021b. "Figure of the Devil in Portobelo". Livestream, 1:39. February 16, 2021. <https://youtu.be/PBUyOofSPls>
- 2021c. "The Baptism of the Congos & Devils." Livestream, 1:30. February 16, 2021. https://youtu.be/-v0gjK_03_U
- Rabaka, Reiland. 2018. "15. Double- Consciousness" In *Keywords for African American Studies*, ed. Erica R. Edwards, Roderick A. Ferguson and Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, 75-78. New York: New York University Press. <https://doi-org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/10.18574/nyu/9781479810253.003.0018>
- Roach, Joseph R. 2021. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Rodriguez, Frederick. 1979. "Cimarrón Revolts and Pacification in New Spain, the Isthmus of Panama, and Colonial Columbia, 1503-1800." PhD. diss., Loyola University Chicago.
- Schechner, Richard. 2020. *Performance Studies : An Introduction*, 4th ed. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Smith, Laurajane. 2006. *Uses of Heritage*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Thompson, Robert Farris. 1983. *Flash of the Spirit : African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. 1st ed. New York: Random House.
- Turner, Victor. 1980. "Social Dramas and Stories About Them." *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1): 141–68
- Vilar Vilar, Enriqueta. 1987 "Cimarronaje En Panamá y Cartagena. El Costo de Una Guerrilla En El Siglo XVII." *Cahiers Du Monde Hispanique et Luso-Brésilien* 49: 77–92. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40852783>.
- Wade, Peter. 2010. *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*. 2nd ed. Anthropology, Culture and Society. London: Pluto Press
- Wafer, Jim. 1991. *Taste of Blood : Spirit Possession in Brazilian Candomble*. Contemporary Ethnography. University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press. <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812203868>.
- Webster, Edwin C. 1973. *La Defensa De Portobelo*. Panamá: Editorial Universitaria.
- Williams, Raymond. 1977. *Marxism and Literature*. Marxist Introductions. Oxford: Oxford University Press.