

## A WITCHCRAFT TRIAL IN GUERRERO

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The following is the initial part of a slightly edited transcript of a trial taped in the town hall of a village a day's walk from Chilapa, Guerrero, on June 14, 1963. The action was brought by Sonia and her husband Macario against the other side in general and María in particular for saying that she, Sonia, had killed her husband's brother's son by witchcraft. The trial was conducted by the Mayor (*Comisario*) with the assistance of three past mayors. The result was that Sonia was convicted on the evidence of her own testimony at the trial of slander - having said that the man had been killed by witchcraft. Sonia was fined ten pesos for falsely accusing María.

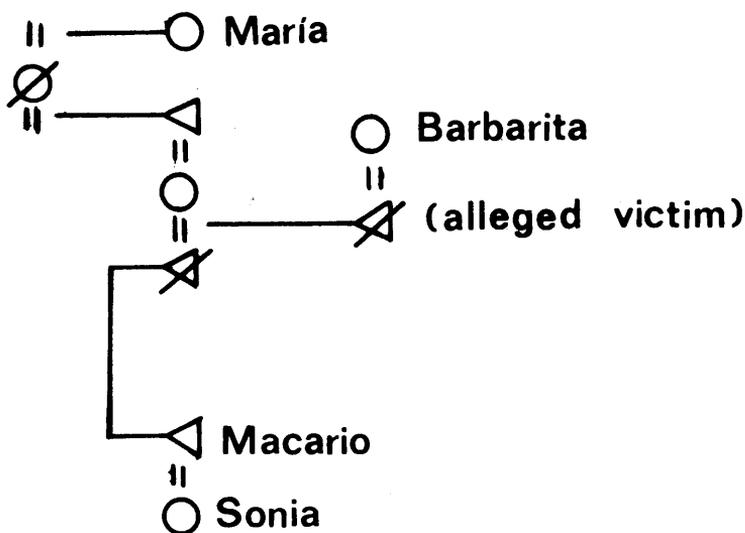
The people of this very mountainous township (*comisaría*) are mostly monolingual Nahuatl speakers who dress in traditional styles and live in patrilineal hamlets. They are swidden agriculturalists with a system of anticipatory inheritance; the new couple generally becomes independent after a year or two of co-residence with the husband's family. The young pair then builds a house a few yards from the husband's parents. This in turn sets the stage for many types of conflicts: land boundaries, animal damage, wives' arguments, etc. Antagonisms tend to increase in severity from those between brothers, to arguments between fathers' brothers and brothers' son and to culminate in the attempt of brothers of deceased males trying to take away the lands of the dead brother's son, especially if the widowed mother has remarried. This is the structural situation between Macario and the alleged victim of the witchcraft.

The political organization of the *comisaría* is based on the past *comisarios* or *principales* who select the new occupants of all offices each year by consensus. Trials are held in the town hall (*juzgado*) and presided over by the *comisario* with the assistance of such *principales* as happen to be present. This in turn depends on their connections with the

interested parties and in particular on the day of the week and the season. On Sundays and in the winter the juzgado becomes rather like a club, the attraction being that all litigants must provide aguardiente for the officials and keep the bottle filled.

Judgments are based in part on local custom, in part on the officials' experience with appeals to the authorities in Chilapa and in part on what fines people are willing to pay before appealing. The limit of fines is worked out by imposing a high fine and then haggling. Crucial to this particular trial was the official's knowledge that the Mexican authorities condemn witchcraft accusations as ipso facto slander. There is no doubt in my mind that all the people concerned with the trial firmly believed in witchcraft; they just could not enforce charges.

Mention should also be made of the adversary style of the people; it consists of presenting a few basic arguments and then repeating these as long as need be to wear down the opponent, the propensity being to speak at the same time at the opposition increasingly as time passes.



R.L.S

*Relationships of Persons Involved in the Witch Trial*

## NAHUATL TEXT

1. *Mayor*: Tehuatzin, aquinon omitztlatohuili?

*Sonia*: Yehuin cihuatl (Barbarita) pampa quitohua tla quen yonicualo iyoquich.

*Mayor*: ...aquinon mitzili?

*Sonia*: María...

*María is sent for and arrives fifteen minutes later.*

*Mayor*: Hora tehuatzin quenequi mitztlatohuili yehuin señora?

*Sonia*: Nehua tiquitaz señor melahuac nechtenehuilia, quitohua cocoliztli ticuacatoque tla itla icon huacahua nican señor (Macario) conhuamaca isobrino quitohua quiteilia quen cocoliztli ticonhuacatoque, polan cuecahua cocoliztli. Quema ipampa nehua oninaman, niquitohua, "Ma nictlatolti tla huan quenequi quimati, ma nictlatolti." Onia onictlatoltitiiz ocalito quitohua, "Quehuan quimati quenequi quincuacua cristianos asta quimatztoque quenequi quincuazque cristianos. Aman nehua," quitohua (María), "Xqueman nicua cristianos, xnimati quenequi hueli cristianos. Aman quehuan quincuacua ne cristianos," quitohua, "asta quimatztoque quenequi quincuazque cristianos."

1. *Mayor*: Who told you this?

*Sonia*: This woman (Barbarita) because she said I made her husband sick.

*Mayor*: ...who told you?

*Sonia*: María...

*María is sent for and arrives fifteen minutes later.*

*Mayor*: Now what did this woman say?

*Sonia*: You will see, sir, that in truth she accuses me, she says that we are bringing sickness. This man (Macario) takes anything to his nephew, she says we're bringing sickness, that the banana carries sickness. Yes, for that reason I got angry, I said, "I'll ask how she knows, I'll ask." It seems they know how to eat human beings, they're even knowing how they will eat human beings. "Now I," she (María) said, "I never eat human beings, I don't know how human beings taste. Now it seems they eat human beings there," she said, "they're even knowing how they will eat human beings."

*Mayor:* Aquinon quiteilli señora?

*María:* ... amo xmotlatolcuepa. Xcaqui tehua. Xta, otiquito...

*Sonia:* Otiquito...

*María:* Xcaqui, queman otipanhue ... otiquito, "Ma zan nican nompanohua nitzin." Quitohua, "Tlenon tlatoli otiquito otitlatlatohuili mocomadre Giralda?" Xquita, icon tinechili. Nimitzilia, "Tlenon..."

*Sonia:* Xmocuiti...

*María:* Xcaqui, maniquizati nehua. Nimitzilia yehun quen niman icon titecaquilltinemi te, quitohua, "Tla umpa zan cequi cualo zan quinchihuilia. Quema tamalictic, tamalictic." Quitohua, "Asta quiquixtitoque tzontli asta quiquixtitoque polan." Tehuatzin otiquito.

*Sonia:* Ca tehua otiquito, aman xmotlatolcuepa ye tehua señora, no ye tihueyi, xquita...

*María:* ...xcaqui te, maniquizati, cuac otiquito...

*Sonia:* (continued from above) ...xmotlatolcuepaz tlahuanticnequiz, tlahuanticnequiz ... hueliz tonyazque tiquitohua...

*Mayor:* Who said this, M'am?

*María:* ...don't reverse your words. Listen you. Look you said...

*Sonia:* You said...

*María:* Listen, when you (Sonia) passed by ... you said, "I'm just passing by, sister." She (Sonia) said, "What words did you say to your comadre Giralda?" Look, that is what you said to me. I said, "What..."

*Sonia:* Tell the truth...

*María:* Listen, let me finish. I told you (Sonia) what we were hearing, they say, "If someone is sick there it's witchcraft. Yes, inside the tamale, inside the tamale." She said, "To the point they're vomiting hair, they're even vomiting banana." You said it.

*Sonia:* No, you (María) said it, now don't reverse your words, yes, you, señora, you are old too, look.

*María:* ...listen, let me finish, when you said...

*Sonia:* (cont. from above) ...don't reverse your words, if you want to, if you want to ... we should be able to go you say...

2. *Several speak for 2 seconds.*

*Sonia:* (cont.) ..hueliz tonyazque tiquitohua, "Tla tiquitoz tla xmotlatlacol xmotlatelhuili al cabo yehun hueliz nonaun intonnacizque." Tlenon quipia xniaz? Ma nehua xquenotlatol ocepa nihuacuepaz quen...

*Several speak for 5 seconds.*

*María:* ...quema cuacon nimitzili tlacon zan nehua onitlato nocomadre ... melahuac iquin hualao quitohua, "Aman iquin cualo yehuin señor." Quitohua, "Ma, iquin quiquixtifica". Quen cuac tehua otiquito yeniman xaca tiazque nitzin masque nepaca Tlatlaquitepec...

*Sonia:* ...

*María:* Xcaqui te, maniquito...

*Sonia:* (cont.) ...nepa tlacpac quenequi quitotoque quenequi quitotoque zan huatlan rosario...

*María:* ...otiquito, "Vaye xaca tiazque nitzin asta itzintlan nonaun botellon, umpa quizaz, zalohua tlateteyo." Otiquito tehua. Vaye despues tictohua, "Asta ipan nonaun tlaxcali..."

*Sonia:* ...

2. *Several speak at the same time for 2 seconds.*

*Sonia:* (cont.) ...we should be able to go you say, "If you see it's not your sin then sue since we are able to get there" (to the *juzgado*). Why shouldn't I go? It's not my word, I'll return again since...

*Several speak for 5 seconds.*

*María* ...then I told you that I was the only one who asked my comadre ... in truth she came like this, she said, "That's how this man is sick." She said, "That's what he's vomiting". Since you said it no one will go sister, even there to Tlatlaquitepec...

*Sonia:* ...

*María:* Listen, let me say...

*Sonia:* (cont.) ...there above (Tlatlaquitepec) how they are saying, how they are saying just as the rosary was over...

*María:* ...you said, "No one will go sister, even at the bottom of the demijohn, there it is, they've tied in a clod (by witchcraft)." You said it. Later you said, "Even in the tortillas..."

*Sonia:* ...

*María:* (cont.) Xcaqui te. "Asta ipan tixtli quinextique tlaquentli quichuncanqui." ...Xquita tlen huel melac nitzin, maca xmotlatolcuepa.

*Sonia:* ...tehua noiqui.

*María:* Ca ... icon mechiliz señor icon oquictomaco yehua para incaquizque te señor. Nehua icon nimitziliz señora.

*Sonia:* ...

*María:* Ipampa nimitzilia tla xcaqui nehua manimitzili ... masque tla oniquito pero zan onicac te, niman melac asta ocialito Benita.

*Macario:* ...zan ohuatlan rosario ... opeu quitohua quenequi nonaun. Pampa tehua mitztenetoque nahui tlachixque...

*María:* ...xcaqui ... xenonquiza te ... Cuacon oticalquito otitlatotiu, aman yoticualan...

3. Above two speak for 6 seconds.

*María:* (cont.) ...tlen itla ticaquiz niman ne otiquito ... quema zan ica tinechtlatelhuiliz ... Xquita señor, xquito tlen huel melac, maca xmotlatolcuepa.

*María:* (cont.) ...Listen. "Even in the dough they find bits of cloth." ... Look at the truth, sister; don't reverse your words.

*Sonia:* ...you also.

*María:* No ... that's what she told them, sir; that's how she untied it so they could hear, sir. That's what I said to you M'am.

*Mayor:* ...

*María:* For that reason I'll tell you, if you'll listen I'll tell you ... even if I said it, but I just heard it, even Benita said it.

*Macario:* ...just after the prayers were over ... you began to say how (it was done). Because four diviners have named you ...

*María:* ...listen ... I haven't finished ... Then you joined in, went on talking and now you're mad...

3. Above two speak for 6 seconds.

*María:* ...if you hear anything then you go and repeat it ... yes, just with this you're going to sue me ... Look, sir, tell the truth, don't reverse your words.

*Mayor:* ...ce pacencia, maquizati...

*María:* ...nimitzilia xquita telon otiquixti tlaquentito ipan tixtli niman botellotzin teteyo umpa zalitica tlen ... nepaca tocnihuan insobrinno omic. Tlen tlenon quiquixtitica tla pampa nehua nichihua? Quema cuacon melahuac onimitzili, "Seguro nitzin tla timati motlatlacol umpa xcuapolo ihuan tla timati xmotlatlacol xmotlatlehuilli pero umpa tixtotomizque ipan tecpan timatizque quenequi titlatlatozque." ...

*Several speak for 25 seconds.*

*María:* ...xnimati nehua, xnipinao ... nican oninoquetzaco, xnimati tla tlen mas onimitzili.

*Sonia:* Nehua noi qui te noxnipinao...

4. *Above two talk for 4 seconds.*

*María:* ...para timatizque quenequi tiquitozque ce tlamantli.

*Sonia:* ...toconsejo.

*María:* Andale hija nimitzili.

*Sonia:* ...tiquitohua xnicaquizquia umpa in quitotoque...

*María:* ...pampa tlatotoque te, mismo cocoxqui

*Mayor:* ...patience, let her finish...

*María:* ...I tell you, look, you took out cloth from the dough and then there were clods tied (by witchcraft) in the demijohn ... there our brother's nephew died. What, what was he vomiting because I did it (bewitched him)? Yes, it's certainly true I said to you, "Certainly, sister, if you know it's your sin, then that's where you will lose and if you know it's not your sin then sue, but there in the town hall our eyes will be untied and we will know how we are to speak." ...

*Several speak for 25 seconds.*

*María:* ...I don't know, I'm not ashamed ... I've come to stand here, I don't know what more to tell you.

*Sonia:* I also am not ashamed.

4. *Above two talk for 4 seconds.*

*María:* ...for us to know how we will say a thing.

*Sonia:* ...your admonishment.

*María:* That's it, daughter, I'm telling you.

*Sonia:* ...you said I should not have heard it, there they're saying...

quitohua quitotica quenequi, quitenetica ... Xquita xaca  
occe xomechtlatlatolhuilique, quen nictohua, cocoxqui iquin  
omic, iquin tlatoticatca...

*Sonia:* ...quiquixtitoque tlaquentli cequi quiquixtia  
tzontli cequi quiquixtia nonaun chayotzitzintin cequi  
quiquixtia...

*Barbarita:* Xmotlatol quenequi xmotlatol quenequi  
motlatol señora? Ye tihueyi ... xtimotlatolcuep...

*Above two speak for 7 seconds.*

*María:* ...quiquixticatca seguro tlen nimitzilia tla  
quinequi tla quimati aquinon hueli te. Asta quitlahuelcaqui  
tla melan onechcao noDios. Ca ica nitlami ninomachotia,  
nimitziyanilia ce credo miac nicuaquixtia...

*Sonia:* Ma, tiquitohua noica neci noinyahue tiopan  
noitla invela...

*María:* ...para naciz itechconfesion, ye niman naciz  
te...

*The two speak for 4 seconds.*

*María:* (cont.) ...maninomamaltitinemi  
maniyolcuititinemi para tlenon icon señor? Nehua nictohua  
tlen huel melac.

*María:* ...because they're saying it, the sick person  
himself was saying how, was naming. Look, no one else said  
anything to you all. As I said, the sick person died like this,  
that's how he was talking...

*Sonia:* ...they were vomiting out cloths, some were  
vomiting hair, some vomit squash, some...

*Barbarita:* It's not your word, how is it your word,  
m'am? you're old ... don't reverse your words...

*Above two speak for 7 seconds.*

*María:* ...he was vomiting certainly what I tell you if he  
wants to if he knows who is able to. One even hears it with  
anger, if it's true my God has left me. No, with this I finish,  
I cross myself, I hide a Creed from you, so much have I come  
to say...

*María:* (cont.) ...I should go about carrying it, I should  
go to confess, why should I do that, sir? I say what is true.

5. *The two speak for 3 seconds.*

*Sonia:* ...quenequi nochichihua cocoliztli...

*María:* ...tehua nimitzilitica quenequi melaqui, amo xmotlatolcuepa, xcaqui quenequi nimitzilia quenequi otiquito.

*Sonia:* ...quenequi tiquitoticatca.

*María:* Quenequi tlen oniquitac tlen oticontlali tlacon...

*Sonia:* Seguro otiquitac ipampa inquitohua.

*María:* ...ca nehua xninotlatolcuepa...

*The two speak for 4 seconds.*

*María:* ...ca nehua xninotlatolcuepa...

*The two speak for 15 seconds.*

*Sonia:* ...nehua niquitotica pampa tehua timati quenequi yotiquito quema nochi nehua niquitotica.

*María:* Ca xnitonto...

5. *The two speak for 3 seconds.*

*Sonia:* ...how do they make sickness...

*María:* ...I'm telling you how straight, don't reverse your words, listen to what I tell you, how you spoke.

*Sonia:* ...how you were saying.

*María:* How what I saw what you put then...

*Sonia:* You must have seen it, that's why they're talking.

*María:* ...ah, sister, now here you come to reverse your words...

*The two speak for 4 seconds.*

*María:* ...no, I don't reverse my words...

*The two speak for 15 seconds.*

*Sonia:* ...I'm saying because you know how, you said it. I am saying everything...

*María:* No, I'm not a fool...

**RESUMEN**

En un pueblo cerca de Chilapa, Guerrero, no es raro que se hagan acusaciones y corran rumores sobre practicantes de hechizos. En este caso, grabado por Ek en 1963, no se trata exactamente de una acusación de brujería sino de una acusación de calumnia, llevada ante la comisaría local. Los cónyuges Macario y Sonia acusan a María y a otras personas de haber corrido la voz que Sonia había dado muerte a su sobrino político por medio de artes mágicas. María se defiende, insistiendo en que no había hecho tal acusación. El comisario y tres principales condenan a Sonia a pagar una multa de diez pesos por falsa acusación (F.H.)