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Testing the Limits: The Inquisition as a Destabilizing Force
in Colonial Latin America

By McKenna Vorderstrasse

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Introduction

The Spanish Inquisition: probably the most well-known (and generally feared) establishment in the Early Modern period. The formation of the inquisitorial body was the direct result of the desire to create a completely Catholic kingdom in Spain. This ideology was termed *limpieza de sangre* (blood purity) which entailed eliminating people who identified as non-Catholic from Spain. When the Inquisition was formed in Spain in 1478, it was a purely judicial system with the primary goal of persecuting *judaizantes* (Catholics who were thought to still practice Judaism in secret) who were oftentimes the victims of forced Catholic baptism.¹ The Inquisition, in fact, had no sanctioned jurisdiction to try anyone who was not a baptized Catholic.

There was fear among the inquisitors, however, that the presence of Jews who had not converted was destroying the faith of the newly converted population. In response to this problem, King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella of Spain issued an ultimatum to the Jews in 1492: convert or get out.² In the wake of the Jewish expulsion, as well as their military triumph over the last Muslim Kingdom of Granada, it finally seemed as if a purely Catholic Spain was not only a possibility, but rather an inevitability.³ However, the acquisition of territory (after conquering the Aztec Empire) in the New World shortly thereafter, left Spain with a new area spanning from the Southwestern and Pacific region of what is now the United States in the north all the way to the southern tip of South America (excluding Brazil), along with the Caribbean

¹ Lu Ann Homza, *The Spanish Inquisition: An Anthology of Sources 1478-1614* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006), xv.

² Juan de Coloma, “*Provisión de los Reyes Católicos ordenando que los judíos slagan de sus reinos*” in *Documentos acerca de la expulsión de los Judíos*, ed. Luis Suarez-Fernandez, trans. (Valladolid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas: 1964), 391-95.

³ John F. Chuchiak, *The Inquisition in New Spain, 1536-1820: a Documentary History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), 4.

Islands off the coast of the continent. Spain now needed to convert all of this territory to Catholicism and the Inquisition would be the stabilizing force to establish this control.

The Inquisition became the Spanish Crown's enforcer of Catholicism and criminal justice in the Colonies. Through the study of Inquisition documents, we see that the Spanish contrived to use Catholicism as law enforcement as well as a judicial body in an attempt to stronghold their empire through the Colonial period. The Inquisition did not, however, produce loyal Spaniards. They, instead, created a culture fundamentally rooted in division, insecurity, and mistrust. The Inquisition was continuously overreaching the boundaries of what could be reasonably and rightly achieved by a religious institution and, in doing so, contributed to class and racial conflict, abused monetary penalties, and strictly condemned outside influence. These actions made the Holy Office a body which was ultimately antithetical to its original goals of establishing a unified Spanish Catholic identity in the New World and, contrarily, promoted a sense of instability which contributed to the desire for colonial independence.

Inquisitions began in Spain's Latin American Colonies as early as the 1510's and were concerned mainly with the control of indigenous "superstitions" and idolatry, which monastic leaders and bishops encountered upon first arriving in the New World. At this time, Spain had not yet set up an office in the Americas, but had given some inquisitorial jurisdiction to these first friars and bishops that arrived. The Tribunal of the Holy Office was not actually established formally until 1569.⁴ With the Inquisition formalized in the Colonies, the trial of the indigenous

⁴ Ibid., 8.

peoples for their religion (since they were not baptized Catholics) was no longer allowed by the Spanish government after 1571.⁵

The colonial inquisitors were now under the management of the Inquisitor General who presided over the *Suprema*⁶ (the Supreme Council) in Madrid and was nominated by the crown and confirmed by the pope. Additionally, there were three offices of the Inquisition that were established in the Colonies: one in Mexico City (Viceroyalty of New Spain), one in Lima (Viceroyalty of Peru), and one in Cartagena (Viceroyalty of New Grenada). Each of these offices had at least three inquisitors (appointed by the Inquisitor General), although the minimum requirement of inquisitors per tribunal was just two. Each office required at least one inquisitor who was a theologian, and one who was either a jurist or a lawyer. These inquisitors then enjoyed the power (with guidelines from the Inquisitor General) to prudently appoint the lesser local officials to serve under them.⁷ These lower officials were called commissaries of the inquisitors and served in smaller offices, one office in each commissariat (division of the viceroyalty).

The offices of the Inquisition in the Colonies however, naturally enjoyed a greater amount of freedom and a different preoccupation than the offices in Spain. The Colonies and the peninsula were separated by the Atlantic ocean and, thus, communication between tribunals in the New World and the Inquisitor General were slow (two months one-way, or more depending

⁵ J. Jorge Klor de Alva, "Colonizing Souls: The Failure of the Indian Inquisition and the Rise of the Penitential Discipline," in *Cultural Encounters*, ed. Mary Elizabeth Perry and Ann J. Cruz (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), 4.

⁶ The highest court of the Inquisition which decided verdicts in the most important court cases and established rules for the general conduct of Inquisitorial Offices through Spain and the Spanish Dependencies.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

on wind and current conditions) and costly. This meant that, although colonial inquisitors had to document all of their trials, they only needed to seek guidance from the powers in Spain concerning the most important trials. Furthermore, the Inquisition gained jurisdiction over crimes in the Colonies that were always handled by civil authorities in Spain.⁸ The Inquisition in the Colonies also had, comparably, very few trials for formal heresy (27.5% as opposed to 42% in Spain) and many more for sexual crimes.⁹ This statistic is partially accounted for by the fact that the Latin American Colonies had (at least initially) a large population of people who were not baptized Catholics and, thus, could not be formally charged with heresy. It also speaks to the variety of different sexual norms within the native population (and accompanying fear of the corruption of the sexually correct Spanish) that required attention and policing in the New World. While the Inquisition in Spain focused heavily on religious crime (major or minor), the Inquisition in the Colonies focused on issues such as sexual crimes and solicitation.¹⁰ The concerns of the Latin American Inquisition, upon its foundation, were already decidedly distinct from those in Spain and, in the Colonies, both religious and civil authorities yielded to the inquisitorial process.

Race and Class Conflict in the Colonies

Arguably, the most obvious obstacle that the colonial inquisitorial body faced (which the peninsular one did not) is the vast diversity which existed in the New World. Although there were increasing amounts of Spaniards who wanted to settle in the Colonies, there were also indigenous populations that already lived in the Americas as well as a large slave population of African heritage, both of which boasted varied culture. The Inquisition was bent on uniting this

⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁹ Ibid., Table 2.

¹⁰ Chuchiak, 7.

enormous territory populated by people of different races, customs, religions, and languages under the umbrella of Spanish Catholicism. The impossibility of this feat is immediately apparent, especially since colonial society was deeply divided by a caste system¹¹ which placed peninsular-born white Spanish above American born people of Spanish descent (who were still above indigenous peoples and blacks, either slaves or free). Yet by the 18th century, the Spanish, as far as they were concerned, had succeeded in their task. In the king's law code for the Colonies which was published in 1774, they exult over their successes in spreading Catholicism throughout the territory. The first page reads, "We have happily brought the innumerable Peoples and Nations which inhabit the West Indies, the islands and mainland, and other parts subject to our dominion, into the fold of the Holy Roman Catholic Church. And they all enjoy, universally, the remarkable blessing of redemption by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹² This shows no lack of confidence on the part of the Spanish as to their success, however this embellished statement should not be mistaken as one of absolute truth. Historians continue to debate the effects of the Inquisition's approach to converting the Colonies, especially with regard to their impact on non-white races.

The common conception of the Inquisition revolves around fire and brimstone and burning people at the stake. Indeed, this was the reality for the indigenous populations in the early days of the Inquisition, before the colonial inquisitorial process was regulated and confined to baptized Catholics. During the Inquisitions which occurred before the formal establishment of

¹¹ A social process in which people were classified by their race and the ratio of white Spanish to Indigenous or African blood that they possessed.

¹² Andrés Ortega, *Recopilación de leyes de los reynos de las indias*, 3rd. ed., vol. 1, trans. (Madrid: la Corte del Rey Carlos II, 1774), 21. All translations, unless otherwise stated, are provided by the author.

the Holy Office, called the Monastic Inquisitions (1522-1562), Natives were tried for the practice of idolatry and sacrifices and punished by brutal torture.¹³ These native ritualistic practices were actually harnessed by the Inquisition in later attempts at converting the indigenous populations. Historical anthropologist J. Jorge Klor de Alva argues that even after Natives were excluded from the Inquisition's jurisdiction, they managed to introduce Christian sacraments in a way that made them cohesive with everyday life and ritualistic experiences that were specialized to pertain to certain groups.¹⁴ In doing so, he argues that the Inquisition succeeded in creating an acceptance of Catholicism amongst the natives which allowed them to become self-disciplined in the Christian doctrine. Eventually, when the Inquisitorial penal code was applied, it was readily accepted as just and logical punishment by the Natives and could be called "general and uniform" punishment across all races, regardless of their cultural differences.¹⁵ Serge Gruzinski, a historian, argues that those Natives who did practice Catholicism through the act of going to Confession displayed an marked misconception about what the main tenants of Catholicism even were, which led to Confessors treating them badly and using, "pejorative, if not to say racist expressions, not tempered by any hope of betterment."¹⁶

Other historians focus more on a division that the Inquisition created with regard to race rather than a uniform treatment. Noemi Quezada used the example of *curanderos* (healers) to show a racial dichotomy that was created by the Inquisition. Quezada argues that though there

¹³ Chuchiak, 10.

¹⁴ Klor de Alva, 18.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Serge Gruzinski, "Individualization and Acculturation: Confession among the Nahuas of Mexico from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century" in *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Asunción Lavrin, (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989),106.

were both white Spanish as well as non-white *curanderos*, the way that they approached healing was fundamentally different. Catholic *curanderos* used methods such as healing by incantation, through revelations, or with the use of relics and all was done, “through the grace of God.”¹⁷ On the other hand, Natives, blacks, *mulatos*, and *mestizos* used more of a traditional approach of healing with herbs and rituals. These practices were not connected with Catholicism, but rather originated from their varied cultural and religious backgrounds.¹⁸

After the Inquisition was firmly established in the New World, the Inquisitorial Office of New Spain issued several laws called “Edicts of Faith” which attempted to correct the most pertinent violations to the Church’s vision of a Catholic society. One of these laws published in 1620 was directed particularly toward the use of peyote (a psychoactive cactus native to northern Central America), but was later used to encompass many other hallucinogenic plants. The Inquisition had encountered Natives using herbs for their medicinal properties as well as components of certain rituals and, according to the edict, “this crime has been so frequent and used so commonly as is known,” so it was viewed as a plague of sorts in the Colony.¹⁹ The Inquisition viewed herbs (whether used as medicine or hallucinogens) as one of the many faults of the Native condition which promoted their, “natural inclination toward idolatry.” While the Inquisition had no legal jurisdiction to punish Natives, they stated that under the penalty of fiscal or corporal punishment, “no person of any status or condition whatsoever can use, grow, or make use of the said herb of peyote...or any other herb for the same effects.” Their justification for

¹⁷ Noemi Quezada, “The Inquisition’s Repression of *Curanderos*,” in *Cultural Encounters*, ed. Mary Elizabeth Perry and Ann J. Cruz (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), 52.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ “Edict of the Faith concerning the Illicit Use of Peyote” in Chuchiak, 114.

this was that these herbs would, “trick the simple minds of these Indians,” and, “deceive many other persons who are little fearful of God,” and that any effects they produced were “out of suggestion and with the assistance of the devil.”²⁰

These herbs were incredibly threatening to the Inquisition because they were very clearly associated with Native culture (religious and medicinal practice). The threat of Native culture running over into the mainstream Spanish Catholic culture endangered the conformity that the Inquisition saw as crucial to maintaining their control in the Colonies. The herbs, even when they were used medicinally, were confused with the practice of using herbs for witchcraft, which the Inquisition had experienced previously in Spain. Moreover, Catholics (even priests) had been using native herbs with the claim that they could induce divine prophesy. The Inquisition quickly condemned this practice writing, “it is impossible that the said herb and any other herb can have the virtue or natural property that they ascribe to it.”²¹ These herbs could not be used to bring one closer to the Catholic God because they had been used by the heathen Natives as part of their idolatrous religion and, for all they knew, devil worship.

Had the use of peyote or other herbs only been an issue amongst the Native population, it likely would not have been a concern to the Inquisition. The fact that Spanish were seeking herbs from Native healers, though, meant that they would have been more apt to being corrupted by their other cultural practices as well. While it was fine for indigenous people to adopt the Spanish way of life, the reverse was unacceptable. The wording of the edict against herbs would give any Inquisition-fearing Catholic leave to turn in any other Catholic that possessed these herbs (and who was, by association, participating in Native culture) to the Inquisition, which

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 113.

they frequently did. Although the Inquisition was unable to formally prosecute Natives for possessing herbs, they still tried to limit the use of herbs to some extent.

There are several documents that pertain to an inquisitorial record from October 1698, which show how the Spanish asserted dominion over the Natives' use of these herbs. This record contains the testimony from seven friars regarding the confiscation of a particular hallucinogenic herb from some Natives who were growing it in the Mexican valley. The herbs had been torn from the ground by civil constables (ordered by the magistrate of the city) and the Inquisition was getting involved in the issue, although they were aware that they did not likely have jurisdiction over this matter.²² One of these testimonies reveals that it was Fr. Pedro Sánchez who saw, “a great number of Indians who appeared to be drunk or inebriated,” and then told his superior at the convent who got the Spanish constables involved. They also found that the constables had extorted money from the Natives, which the friars ultimately deemed unfair, but they did not do anything to rectify this injustice. Instead, the friars continued to testify that the herbs make the Natives, “see vile and evil things,” and, “speak with demons,”. The Inquisition took over the jurisdiction of this case, but ultimately decided to drop their investigation because the Natives apparently had not done any harm to anyone except themselves and, “Indians are not to be trusted to maintain and keep the secret necessary for the oath of the Holy Office.”²³ People involved in Inquisition trials were not allowed to speak of them in order to maintain anonymity and secrecy and, apparently, indigenous people were not up to this task. As such, the Natives were completely at the mercy of the Spanish constables and friars who

²² “Denunciation and the Inquisition Investigations and Documents concerning the Prohibited Herb and Hallucinogen Pipiltzintzintli., Which Was Discovered in the Village of Tepeppan and Xochimilco, Valley of Mexico, 1698” in Chuchiak, 309.

²³ Ibid. 311-12.

accused them. Out of fear that the punishment of these Natives would be deemed an illegal procedure by the *Suprema*, the officials of the Holy Office warned the secular constables that they should not openly punish the Natives by formally fining them in cash.²⁴

In another example, a *mulata* (African and Spanish mixed race) woman named María who was a midwife and healer had an encounter with the Inquisition over a bag that had some herbs as well as a child's umbilical cord inside (which was related to multiple Mesoamerican birthing rituals).²⁵ According to the report, she had planned on using one of the herbs to help heal ant bites.²⁶ She left the bag in a Spanish merchant's shop accidentally and the merchant's wife (a Spanish woman named Doña Petrona de Herrea) turned the *mulata* woman over to the Inquisition. In María's testimony, she stated that she had intended no malice by the possession of the herbs, however, the Spanish woman apparently knew they were associated with witchcraft. Because she was Spanish, Doña Petrona de Herrea's word was taken over María's, yet María's case was left open by the Inquisition. She was denounced, which meant she was seen as guilty, although she did not receive any documented penalties. However, in the review of the case, the inquisitor stated that the local commissary should monitor María and "in the case that she attempts to flee, he should ensure that she should be arrested under some other pretext in the royal jail."²⁷ María would have been under the watchful eye of the Inquisition for the rest of her life and completely at their mercy, all because a Spanish woman felt it was her right (if not her duty) to expose her as a *mulata* witch. Non-white people were not allowed to comfortably

²⁴ Ibid., 311.

²⁵ Patrisia Gonzales, *Red Medicine: Traditional Indigenous Rites of Birthing and Healing*, (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2012), 120-122.

²⁶ "Inquisition Trial against a Mulatta Named Maria, for the use of the herb Pipiltzintzintli and Other Diverse Charges: Texcoco, 1704" in Chuchiak, 314.

²⁷ Ibid., 317.

express certain aspects of their culture under the Inquisition while white Spanish were completely secure.

Another example of the Inquisition's actions contributing to class and racial tensions was the acceptance of the many misdeeds of the clergy under their supervision. Complaints about local clerics abound in Inquisitorial documents and vary from accusations of sorcery to sexual abuse. Many of the plaintiffs were indigenous people, and most were women. Although there were instances when the Inquisition punished members of the clergy, they were generally more reluctant to do so than they would be with an average person. The Inquisition required more proof to make a judgment and we often find that cases are left open without a judgment or acceptance of the denunciation. Members of the clergy were regarded as a different class of people by the Inquisition because they were, of course, ordained by God. Much of the public found frequent fault with their local clerics, yet saw no resolution to the issue. This caused strain between the clergy as a class and the public (whether Catholic or not).

A trial in 1609 (which is more than 2,000 pages long) graphically details one of the worst possible complaints against a parish priest.²⁸ In this case, the priest in a Mayan village in Yucatan sexually abused his male parishioners so violently that the Inquisition had to take action. The priest was removed from the parish and suffered severe penalties, although the document doesn't note what these penalties entailed. This was only after months of interviewing hundreds of Maya from several different villages.²⁹ While the priest did ultimately receive a punishment, there is a striking difference between the amount of evidence that was required to

²⁸”Documents and Accusations Presented to the Commissariat of the Inquisition in the Province of Yucatan by the Maya Villagers of the Town of Hocaba against Their Parish Priest, Padre Cristobal de Valencia for the Crime of Solicitation, Fornication, and Other Nefarious Acts against Nature: Merida, Yucatan: 1609” in Chuchiak, 230.

²⁹ Ibid., 231.

bring the priest to trial versus the amount of evidence which was brought against the *mulata* María. When a white Spaniard denounced a non-white person, the Inquisition only needed one witness to take the case seriously and make a judgment. When a non-white person accused a Catholic priest, it took the whole village and then some before the Inquisition took the complaint seriously. While this case was not typical in the Colonies, it was also not otherwise unheard of. In cases like this, it's difficult to see how trust in the clergy could prevail for non-Spanish people. Even though the Inquisition was able to provide some semblance of justice for the Mayan people who were abused by their priest, it is not the same sort of justice as would be provided for white Spanish people.

The Spanish also encountered problems with their parish priests and the Inquisition was much more determined to protect the white Spanish housewife than the Mayan villager. The Inquisition, in fact, issued an edict in response to the prevalence of accusations that priests were soliciting sexual favors in the confessionals from predominately female confessants.³⁰ This edict attempted to protect elite women by mandating that all confessionals be placed in conspicuous places with good lighting and never in private, and that no woman should confess after sundown. When a woman did confess, she should do so in a confessional with a closed door so that the priest could not touch her with his feet if he tried to. This edict had to be displayed in any and every place of religious affiliation and removing the notice was forbidden under penalty of excommunication.³¹ It's clear that the Inquisition was taking complaints about this issue very seriously and shows that even white Catholic Spaniards were not immune to conflicts with the clergy. As a religious institution, the Inquisition required that their lower clergymen be

³⁰ "Edict of Faith concerning the Extirpation of the Abuses Committed by the Priest Confessors against the Honesty and Purity of the Sacrament of Confession: Mexico City, 1783", 116.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

respected and aid them on a local level in their control over the public. However, in this edict, the Inquisition made it clear that they did not view clergymen as trustworthy enough to have private confessions and made a public declaration saying that the priests were not to be trusted in confessionals. It makes sense, then, that the public would feel an unpleasant separation between themselves and the clerical class and a distrust of the priests.

The Inquisition also functioned in a counter-intuitive way when it came to its policing of the slave/master relationships. Many historians have recognized that slaves frequently used blasphemy in particular as a form of rebellion against their masters. Ruth Magali Rosas Navarro notes that, often, if a slave was brought before the Inquisition upon being accused of blasphemy by his master, he would be able to either repent or give an explanation that was satisfactory enough to the tribunal to warrant a lesser punishment than he would have received from his master.³² In many cases, the accused slave could sincerely repent or say that he blasphemed under the extreme duress of his master's whipping and receive either a much smaller number of lashings as a punishment than his master would have doled out, or be assigned the *abjuración de Levi* (abjuration of the Light). This was a minor punishment for a first-time offender and someone that was only slightly suspected of the crime he was accused of. The punishment was participation in the auto-da-fé³³ in which the accused would be issued a punishment, usually some sort of spiritual penitence, prayer, a small fine, or occasionally flogging.³⁴

³² Ruth Magali Rosas Navarro, "El tribunal de la Santa Inquisición y los negros esclavos en América," *Hispana Sacra* 55, no.112 (2003) 558.

³³"Act of Faith"; a public ceremony in which heretics would be sentenced and their punishments read. The execution of those punishments did not occur in the auto-da-fé.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 559.

The Inquisition, in fact, recognized that corporal punishment was harmful to slaves because, as they noted, “All of these blacks claim in their confessions that they renounced [God] with the affliction and pain of lashing, with what they said being due to punishment, not due to bad sentiments regarding our Sacred Catholic Faith.”³⁵ We see the Inquisition being sympathetic towards the slaves’ plight, to the extent that it is impeding on their ability to be good Catholics. Often, the Inquisition overrode the masters’ assignment of warranted punishment. In this instance, the Inquisition was actually being lenient the black slave to a degree, but it was more in an attempt to exert control over the elite Spanish master than it had anything to do with the slave. The Inquisition needed complete dominion over the elite Spanish in the colonies, and that included having control over their possessions as well.

In autos-da-fé in 1596, 1601, and 1605, dozens of black slaves were sentenced to punishment for the crime of blasphemy- words, actions, or attitudes that were expressed against the Catholic doctrine.³⁶ Black slaves were not protected from the Inquisition by Spanish law like indigenous people were. This was because full-blooded indigenous people were not considered wholly Catholic (even if they had converted), while black slaves were considered property of their master. Thus, if the master was Catholic, the slave was also Catholic. This led to legal sentencing of slaves by the Inquisition in certain cases, such as when the slave refused to repent adequately for blasphemy, or if the slave’s account of the events leading up to an accusation did not match with what white witnesses recalled. Such was the case of one María Blanca y Gerónima. She, like many other slaves, admitted that she had renounced God twice under the duress of flogging. Her account of what happened differed from her mistress’ and the witness’

³⁵ Ibid., trans.

³⁶Kathryn Joy McKnight, “Blasphemy as Resistance,” in *Women in the Inquisition: Spain and the New World*, (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 248.

accounts. According to the other women (the mistress and witness), she received, “ten or twelve lashes that this witness gave her with a leather thong...she renounced the milk she suckled, the bread she ate, the water she drank, and God and all his saints.” After which she was whipped again, struck on the head with a shoe, and dripped with candle wax. María Blanca, on the other hand, stated that she had been whipped cruelly by four women by order of her master and it was so painful that she blasphemed. Although María Blanca said that her own blasphemy, “grieves her greatly because she is so very devoted to Our Lady,” she refused to change her story and was, thus, sentenced to public flogging and humiliation because it was assumed that she had been the one lying in the case.³⁷ Since the slave did not repent or cooperate properly, they received even harsher punishment by the Inquisition than they did by their master.

These drastically different treatments of cases of blasphemy by the Inquisition created greater racial tension on both ends. The Inquisition frequently acquitted slaves for blasphemy or gave them very lenient punishments, which undermined the master's control. Many other times, the slaves were further oppressed and punished by the Inquisition because their word was not taken as truthful or sincere. The fact that the Inquisition did not have a firm stance and, yet, was frequently involved in master/slave relationships, promoted more strife between the slave and master while simultaneously straining the relationship between the Inquisition and both other parties. Neither slave nor master could count on the Inquisition to back them definitely in a case, which led to an increased sense of mistrust in the system.

The Inquisition and Monetary Morality

The Inquisition, from its founding in the Americas, had a complicated relationship with money, just as it did with race. When the three main tribunals were first established in the New

³⁷ Ibid., 237-43.

World, they faced funding issues because the Spanish Crown could not afford their expenses and, thus, the salaried office positions were occasionally left unfilled.³⁸ In 1583 (shortly after the tribunals were established), Inquisitors were already petitioning the Crown for the abolition of some of the lesser offices due to a lack of funding and a concern over salaries.³⁹ However, by the 1650's, the Holy Office had accumulated considerable capital. So how did the Inquisition become self-sufficient in the Colonies? Part of it was from a portion of tithes⁴⁰ that it received from its different bishoprics, as well as from confiscated money and goods from prisoners (those who had been convicted or accused of heresy or some other moral crime). Even though the Inquisition had the means to be self-sufficient, everything from the upkeep of the grounds and palaces of the tribunals, to holding prisoners, to organizing celebrations and processions of autos-da-fé, cost the Inquisition more money.⁴¹ This is why the Inquisition's acquisition of money and approach to monetary penalties has become a subject of interest for historians.

The Inquisition's main targets, as it has been noted by many historians, were wealthy *conversos* (Jews who had converted to Catholicism). These people, because they were new to the faith and were seen as more easily corruptible and susceptible to Judaizing. This made them easy targets for the Inquisition. As Henry Charles Lea points out in his *Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies*, the middle of the seventeenth century was a time of enormous confiscations from these rich New Christians. Eventually, the New World tribunals had amassed so much wealth that they were no longer deemed needy enough to receive the 10,000 pesos⁴² per annum that the

³⁸ Chuchiak, 13.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁰ A tax collected in support of the Church.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 186-7.

⁴² Also called a "piece of eight"; a silver coin which was the most common Spanish colonial unit of currency.

Spanish Crown had previously supplied them.⁴³ An auto-da-fé in 1646 earned them 38,732 pesos, in 1647, 148,562 pesos. In 1649, they had an auto that yielded 3 million pesos.⁴⁴ While this trend did not continue through the whole century, this snapshot of three years serves Lea's assertion that the Inquisition was targeting wealthy *conversos*, and more often once they saw the great profit that could be made from their persecutions. John Chuchiak, likewise, argues that the Inquisition probably tactfully extorted millions of pesos from the *converso* population.⁴⁵

For the Inquisition, *conversos* or *criptojudios* (declared Catholics who truly did practice Judaism in secret) were the most obvious targets when they needed fresh funds. Not only were they relatively plentiful in the New World (as many had fled there after being expelled from Spain and Portugal), but they were also frequently suspected of formal heresy just by nature of the fact that they had not been born and raised Catholic, or their parents had not been. Besides this, the *converso* and *criptojudio* population had the most money of all the marginalized groups in the new world. The *converso* population, for the most part, was able to blend into Spanish culture more readily than black or indigenous people, who were automatically identified as an out-group because of their race. If the heritage of a *converso* or *criptojudio* (no matter how distant the connection) was somehow discovered by or revealed to the Inquisition, then the person would be targeted as a heretic.

Probably the most famous case of the Inquisition targeting a *criptojudio* is that of Luis de Carvajal "*el mozo*." The fame of this case is mostly due to the fact that Luis de Carvajal wrote extensive memoirs which survive, but the scandal of his heresy was the fact that *el mozo*'s uncle,

⁴³Henry Charles Lea, *The Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922) 219.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Chuchiak, 236.

don Luis de Carvajal y de la Cueva, was one of the most prestigious inquisitors of New Spain.⁴⁶ When *el mozo* was finally sentenced, he was given the death penalty by burning at the stake because his commitment to Judaism constituted him as a relapsed heretic. This practice was termed “relaxation to the Secular Arm” as a sort of circumlocution which transferred blame for the execution away from the Church and onto the secular branch while also being euphemistic. In his definitive sentencing, the Inquisition also states that this punishment should be combined with, “the confiscation and loss of all his goods from the time that he began to commit his crimes of heresy.”⁴⁷ This meant that any assets that he had accumulated from his conversion at age thirteen to his death at age thirty, were seized by the Inquisition for their profit. The trial of *el mozo* was not a singular occurrence. Entire families could be bankrupted just from suspected heresy because the charged’s assets were sequestered and used to pay for their imprisonment. The cases in which prisoners were “relaxed” quickly were the most lucrative because the Inquisition could just absorb the money without having to fund a lengthy imprisonment.

While persecuting *judaizantes* gave the Inquisition the potential to acquire large sums of money at a time, they were not above petty fining of the average Catholic citizen. Fines were often attached to actions which the larger Catholic community deemed criminal (such as bigamy, polygamy, and, sexual immorality broadly) and, thus, the Inquisition had little need to justify their assessment of fines.⁴⁸ These fines, while small sums in terms of the larger income of the Inquisition, could be devastating to the common colonist. The fact that the Inquisition attached

⁴⁶ Lee Penyak and Walter Petry, *Latin America: a Documentary History*, ed. Lee Penyak and Walter Petry, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006) 132.

⁴⁷ “Selected Autos and Proceedings of the Second Trial against Luís de Carvajal the Younger, Reconciled by This Holy Office as a Judaizer, a Relapsed Practioner of Judaism, and a Formal Heretic: Mexico City, 1594-1596” in Chuchiak, 243.

⁴⁸ Hans-Jürgen Prien, *Chrisitanity in Latin America* trans. Stephen Buckwalter (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2007), 203.

monetary penalties to acts of immorality (rather than spiritual atonement) gave authority to the Inquisition that, according to their initial purpose as promoters of the Catholic Faith in the Spanish Colonies, need not have been there. The Inquisition, especially in cases of moral fining, created increased financial insecurity for the colonist rather than being a stabilizing or even policing force of religion.

Catholics were not ready targets of the Inquisition like *judaizantes*, but the fining of a crime such as bigamy⁴⁹ is a prime example of how the Inquisition used the built-in moral norms of Catholicism for its own monetary gain, rather than a concern about the proper practice of the faith. In the very early years of the Inquisition's move to Latin America, they acknowledged to the *Suprema* that the majority of the people in the Colonies who were practicing bigamy were actually doing so in an attempt to be better Christians by pursuing marriage rather than living in sin with their second spouse (after having to abandon the first one because of things like abuse or adultery).⁵⁰ Additionally, bigamy frequently occurred completely by accident. Couples were often separated for extended periods of time and there are many accounts of both men and women re-marrying because they either had been out of communication with their spouse for so long (most women reported their husband being absent for an average of fifteen years) that they believed them dead, or had received false word that their spouse had died.⁵¹

While bigamy was still considered a crime, it was a minor one, and generally did not need as much correcting in the perpetrator as it did in the priests that performed marriages

⁴⁹ The act of marrying one person while already being legally married to another.

⁵⁰ Chuchiak, 218.

⁵¹ Allyson M. Poska, "When Bigamy is the Charge" in *Women in the Inquisition: Spain and the New World*, (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 189-93.

without proof of the spouse's death (which the Inquisition did go to great lengths to prevent).⁵² We see from a variety of sources the great financial toll that this "minor" religious crime of bigamous marriage could have on a colonist. Men were more often accused of bigamy than women. Men were the most frequently accused of nearly all inquisitorial charges.⁵³ However, when women were brought before the Inquisitions for minor crimes, it was more often for bigamy than any other infraction. Most cases of bigamy, for women, involved either an attempt to escape an abusive husband, or a marriage after the previous husband was believed to be dead.⁵⁴ Women were not marrying with malicious intent or with the intention of being sinful, but would still likely be punished harshly for the crime if caught.

In one case, a woman, María de Sotomayor, had re-married in New Spain allegedly because she had received word that her first husband (who she left in Toledo) had died. She had been living a polygamous life with her new husband in Mexico City for over a year before she was brought before the Inquisition. After various witnesses reported that her husband was still alive, María de Sotomayor was sentenced to return her husband in Spain. She was also publicly disgraced by, "being stripped naked before the congregation and forced to kneel and hear a penitential mass... and remain naked from the waist up and barefoot." She was then, "paraded before the congregation... and forced to kneel before the images of saints and listen to a sermon concerning the holy bonds of matrimony."⁵⁵ All of this ceremony was focused on the correction of moral sins and spiritual penance. This is how the Inquisition, as a policing force of the

⁵² Chuchiak, 218.

⁵³ Susan Migden Socolow, *The Women of Colonial Latin America*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 147.

⁵⁴ Poska, 189-205.

⁵⁵ "Inquisition Trial against María de Sotomayor, for the Crime of Polygamy: Mexico City, 1538-1540" in Chuchiak, 224.

Catholic Church, should be correcting this crime against marriage. It is the part that follows which shows the Inquisition overstepping their bounds. The document reads, “We also condemn her to the confiscation and loss of half of all her belongings as a fine that is to be applied to the fiscal office of this Holy Inquisition.” It is only after they’ve extorted money from her that the Inquisition will allow a priest to absolve her of her sins, so long as she returns to her husband.⁵⁶

María de Sotomayor, however, refused to go back to Spain. Six days after her sentencing, she petitioned an inquisitor to grant her one year’s time to send for her Spanish husband to come to live with her in Mexico instead. This petition was not granted. Two years later, María de Sotomayor was arrested for fleeing to Peru. After this arrest, she was forcibly placed on a ship to Spain and all of her possessions were sequestered. These possessions, once sold, fetched 177^{1/2} pesos according to Inquisition documentation.⁵⁷ Although this doesn’t match the thousands of pesos that the Inquisition could take from *judaizantes*, this was just the profit from one, relatively poor, woman, and without adding the profits from the goods that Inquisition took the first time she was arrested.

The case of María de Sotomayor represents a small monetary gain for the Inquisition, but there were many other cases like hers. Many of these relatively small fines, together, have the potential to generate quite a bit of revenue for the Holy Office. Cases of bigamy alone accounted for 18% of Inquisition trials between 1571 and 1700. A man could be fined 700 pesos (enough money to pay an Inquisition Jailer’s annual salary) for this charge, and that would be considered a “lenient” sentence in the eyes of the Inquisition.⁵⁸ When the Inquisition paraded María de

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 227.

⁵⁸ Chuchiak, 219, 29.

Sotomayor around naked and took half of her belongings, it was described as “benevolent” treatment by the Inquisition.⁵⁹ The Inquisition was able to disguise their malicious intent by presenting monetary penalties as being less harsh than physical punishments like flogging or incarceration or spiritual punishments such as excommunication. These penalties, however, could be disastrous for the average colonist who would be hard pressed to recover from a financial blow such as a 700 peso fine. The Inquisition could have more properly fulfilled its intended function as a religious institution through prescribing penitence for criminals. But that was not going to solve the Inquisition’s financial issues. No one was safe from these financial assaults besides the inquisitors themselves. People of the upper class or nobility, when convicted of being a reconciled heretic, received even harsher monetary punishments than the lower class and could be excluded from holding public or ecclesiastical office. They also were not allowed to be doctors, surgeons, or public clerks. These bans, unsurprisingly, could be lifted as long as the heretic was willing to pay the price. They were often allowed to pay a fee (*composición*) to escape these prohibitions.⁶⁰ In the pursuit of generating income, the Inquisition was nothing if not resourceful.

It was then a logical leap for the Inquisition to attempt to profit not just off of its own citizens, but off of visitors as well. It justified, based on religious prejudices that were universally held amongst the colonial inquisitors, the capture and imprisonment of foreign sailors or pirates that came to the Colonies, particularly in New Spain.⁶¹ It was a combination of political and religious rivalry between King Philip II and the “heretic” Queen Elizabeth I of

⁵⁹ “Trial against María de Sotomayor” in Chuchiak, 226.

⁶⁰ Chuchiak, 50.

⁶¹ Ibid., 257.

England that provoked the harsh treatment that the Protestant English sailors experienced upon capture.⁶² There was reason to believe (at least in the opinion of those Englishmen) that the Inquisition was targeting them because they were aware that it would be a profitable endeavor.

Miles Philips, one of many English sailors who were detained in 1568 by the Inquisition (and held for six years), wrote an account of his experience. While his story is likely biased against his Spanish captors, it serves to show the intention of the Inquisition to extort money from the Englishmen. Philips writes, “they had perfect knowledge and intelligence that many of us were become very rich... and therefore we were a very good booty and pray to the inquisitors.”⁶³ The Inquisition could justify any targeting of Protestants by claiming that they were attempting to re-direct them to the true faith. However, this source suggests that the Inquisition had a monetary motive for their actions. According to Philips, the Inquisition already knew that the Englishmen were “rich” and were determined to capture them and all of their property. In their pursuit of the Englishmen, the Inquisition made a proclamation that, “upon paine of loosing of goods and excommunication, that no man should hide or keepe secret any Englishmen or any part of their goods.”⁶⁴ While this source doesn’t show the Inquisition explicitly targeting its own citizens, the colonist that might harbor an English fugitive (and possibly be paid to do so, as evidenced by the mention of “goods”), would also be affected financially if caught. Besides the threat of the Inquisition seizing goods, the threat of excommunication would also have a major effect on the Catholic colonist’s ability to support himself.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Miles Philips, “Harder, Harder on These Lutheran Heretics! Enemies of God!” in *Religion in Latin America: a Documentary History*, ed. Lee Penyak and Walter Petry (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), 136.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 137.

Excommunication was not just a spiritual affair, but would mean exclusion from the larger colonial society, which was entirely Catholic. Excommunications were highly publicized events in order to ensure that the good Catholics of the Colony would not accidentally associate with the excommunicated person. This process barred the heretic (or in the case of the English sailors, the person harboring a heretic) from infecting Catholics with their impious ideas. The Inquisition applied excommunication as a tool of isolation to establish a more potent punishment for these people who may not have feared God sufficiently to consider the spiritual ramifications as punishment enough.⁶⁵ This social isolation would have had a major effect on the earning potential of the colonist (because no one would do business with someone who was excommunicated) as well as hindered his abilities to get any goods or services from local merchants or tradesmen.

François Raymond Joseph de Pons gives us an outsider's perspective of a similar issue from his book entitled, *Travels in South America* (published in English in 1807). This particular section comes from the censorship attempts of the Inquisition, which he witnessed in Peru. While his description may have been colored by prejudice against the Spanish⁶⁶ due to their religious and political conflicts with England, his account doesn't diverge much from other documents (even inquisitorial records) which describe print censorship. The Spanish had an extensive list of prohibited books which they banned on the basis of scientific or humanist

⁶⁵ Maria Tausiet "Excluded Souls: The Wayward and Excommunicated in Counter-Reformation Spain" *History* 88, no. 291 (2003): 440.

⁶⁶ Since de Pons' book was written in English, it can be assumed that it was written for an English-speaking audience, primarily in England.

content, religious heresies, or foreign language.⁶⁷ De Pons describes the catalogs that book vendors were required to keep and report of their inventories, books they intended to buy or sell, or books that were being brought into the Colonies by ship. De Pons writes that, “the omission or imperfect execution of this declaration occasions a confiscation of the books, and a cost of two hundred ducats⁶⁸ for the expenses of the Holy Office.” He also writes that anyone who sells or buys a prohibited book will receive a punishment, “for the first offense of interdiction from all commerce in books for two years; banishment, during the same term... and a fine of two hundred ducats to the profit of the Inquisition.”⁶⁹ The punishment is significantly harsh for a first-time offense. This is both because of the monetary penalty, but also because banishment from the vendor’s place of establishment would seriously impact his earning potential until he could re-establish himself in the new place.

De Pons’ writing allows us to see the Inquisition’s actions through a secular lens which the Inquisition documents do not provide. While the Inquisition was confiscating books for religious motives, they were not using a punishment that fit the crime. The people who were found in possession of prohibited books could have been sentenced to do spiritual penance (an attempt at improved instruction in the Catholic Doctrine), but their punishments of fines and banishment seem more like those that would be associated with the violation of a trade law. De Pons writes this whole account with no mention of religion, which shows that while there was

⁶⁷ Caterine Sánchez Ramírez, “El índice de libros prohibidos: la inquisición española: un acercamiento a la herejía y la censura en la lectura,” *Revista en Historia General*, no. 2 (2015), 78-94.

⁶⁸ A ducat is a monetary unit. It is worth roughly $1^{1/3}$ of a silver peso (piece of eight): 200 pesos equal 145 ducats.

⁶⁹ François Raymond Joseph de Pons, *Travels in South America in Religion in Latin America: a Documentary History*, ed. Penyak and Petry, 141.

undoubtedly a religious element to the confiscation of prohibited books, the powers that the Inquisition was taking on in the punishment of this crime appeared more secular.

For the Inquisition, religious malpractice could always be policed through a monetary penalty. This was problematic for their legitimacy. Namely, it made the Inquisition untrustworthy. They were not, as they presented themselves, acting as the arm of the Church or because of the will of God, since it is not logical that moral misdeeds should have a fine attached to them. The Inquisition was acting as an organization which was bent on making a profit. This motive also naturally lent itself to the fostering of corruption within the Inquisition. The amounts of confiscated pesos that were recorded did not account for the vast amounts of sequestered goods that could have been omitted from the record because they were embezzled by an inquisitor.⁷⁰ The colonists could not trust an institution that could mean financial ruin for them. Even people who were suspected of heresy or blasphemy could be fined without significant proof of their guilt. The Inquisition, in its greed, overstepped religious authority and, in the process, perpetuated insecurity in the Spanish Colonies.

The Inquisition Against Outsiders

While instituting fines was a useful tool for the Inquisition to assert control in the colonies, it was still necessary to prevent outside influences on the colonial psyche. The fear of the outsider was prevalent from the founding of the Tribunal to its dissolution. In fact, the first four decades of inquisitorial proceedings in New Spain saw many “foreigners and outsiders” tried for heresy and very few other groups by comparison.⁷¹ In this process, the Inquisition hoped to promote Spanish patriotism as well as Catholic loyalty. Outside ideas, particularly

⁷⁰ Lea, 219.

⁷¹ Solange Alberro, *Inquisición y Sociedad en México 1571-1700* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997), 174.

from Protestant nations, could be carried to the Colonies either through books or through people. This threat was identified by the Inquisition and so the Colonies experienced heavy censorship and restriction of immigration. It is in this practice that we see the oppressive force of the Inquisition at its height.

The censorship of books, in particular, proved difficult to enforce in the Spanish Colonies. As historian Lu Ann Homza notes in her book *The Spanish Inquisition 1478-1614*, the index of prohibited books in Spain was constantly changing from year to year and the prohibitions were not consistent across all of Spain, let alone across all of the Spanish dependencies. Homza claims that, in regards to the index of prohibited books, “mandates could be open to interpretation and prohibitions could be nearly impossible to enforce.”⁷² If this was the case in the peninsula, it would be much more difficult to enforce a set list of printed prohibitions in the expansive Colonies. Although the Inquisition thought it necessary to maintain Spanish rule, the control of the circulation of prohibited books was not very successful in Latin America. The practice was, by far, more effective in the larger urban areas, where the inquisitorial presence was strongest. In the more rural areas, the Inquisition simply did not have the manpower to enforce these prohibitions, as is evidenced by countless complaints by local authorities.⁷³ Still, The Inquisition laid out in its index that it intended to, “not only tend to the conservation and purity of Our Catholic Faith, destroying all errors against it, but also help and give all favor to those who defend it, declare it, and are illuminated by it and who write against the heretics.”⁷⁴

⁷² Homza, 213.

⁷³ Chuchiak, 318.

⁷⁴ “General Rules and Orders Taken From the New Index of Prohibited and Purged Books for the Spanish Catholic Kingdoms of King Philip IV Written by Don Antonio Zapata, Inquisitor General: Seville, 1632” in Chuchiak 103.

No matter the difficulty of their task, the Inquisition took their policing of prohibited texts very seriously. The Inquisition in the Colonies had the ability to investigate and persecute anyone who possessed, read, or sold prohibited books. Punishments for this crime included fines and the confiscation of the prohibited texts.⁷⁵ While historians Lee Penyak and Walter Petry argue that this, “control over the reading materials... was simply a logical extension of the Office’s jurisdiction over the individual’s adherence to orthodox Catholic doctrine,” the Inquisition’s actions in regard to books were not solely religiously based.⁷⁶ It was yet another play for power. There were instances in which the inquisitors in the Colonies overstepped the allowances made to them by the *Suprema* in their ruthless pursuit of banned books, and were reprimanded by the powers in Spain for their insubordination. Only the Inquisitor General had the power to grant licenses or deny petitions to read prohibited books, but inquisitors in New Spain took on that responsibility many times.⁷⁷ While this withholding of outside information may have worked for a time to quell religious revolution in the Colonies, it was not a long-term solution for the Inquisition’s problems because they overreached their authority and impeded on people’s intellectual pursuits and freedoms.

The Inquisition occasionally granted petitions to read banned books but, more often than not, they denied these requests, no matter how well justified they were. This was the case when one young doctor, Don Anacleto Rodríguez, petitioned the Inquisition to read books on Natural Science, which he hoped would be helpful to him in his position as a professor of medicine at the naval hospital in the port of Veracruz, Mexico. In his petition to his local tribunal, he stated that

⁷⁵ “Edict of Faith against Prohibited Books: Mexico City, 1621” in Chuchiak 114.

⁷⁶ Penyak and Petry, 139.

⁷⁷ Chuchiak, 319.

he was, “desirous to contribute to the defense of the Faith and the propagation of the Catholic Religion.”⁷⁸ He then asked to be made a Familiar⁷⁹ and subsequently asked to have permission “read and have in my power the prohibited books in all languages, especially in French, which deal with my profession.”⁸⁰ As was the common practice, his petition was forwarded to Spain for review. Rodríguez’s local commissary wrote a letter which accompanied his petition and which validated his character. The commissary wrote that Rodríguez was, “of good conduct and known virtue... who wishes to excel in his profession, not out of vanity but to improve his talents to help humbly and with charity all those who have need of his services.”⁸¹ Skilled doctors were not plentiful in the Spanish Colonies. Much of the rural population still depended on the folk healing of *curanderos* (which the Inquisition also condemned) because they did not have access to modern medicine. For Rodríguez, a teacher who would have imparted his knowledge on many trainees at the hospital, access to new reading material could have been invaluable. Certainly, allowing him to read prohibited books pertaining to his profession could have positive effects in his community as a whole. It is not logical to argue that improved healthcare is a dangerous thing, but new knowledge was a threat to the Inquisition.

However, whether it was because of fear that books about the Natural Sciences (most of which were banned) would somehow challenge the Catholic doctrine, or because the French language was associated with French Protestant Reformation leader John Calvin, Anacleto Rodríguez’s petition was denied. At this rejection, the Veracruz commissary wrote to the

⁷⁸ “Documents Relating to the Petition of the Surgeon and Doctor Don Anacleto Rodríguez Requesting Permission to Read Prohibited Books: Veracruz, 1799” in Chuchiak, 333.

⁷⁹ A member of a set of laymen who acted as an inquisitorial militia of sorts.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 334.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

inquisitor that, “Don Anacleto Rodríguez has become frustrated as he remembers the French *Encyclopedia* and the *Natural History*... that he studied in his college, and he has insinuated that he will suspend any further petition.”⁸² This young doctor’s pursuit of knowledge was crushed under the heel of the Inquisition and he realized that it was not worth the struggle of going through the process to apply for permission again because he had already been denied once. The likelihood of a second petition being granted was negligible. Don Anacleto Rodríguez’s case shows a typical outcome for petitions of this sort. Even if the petitioner had the best intentions, permission to read banned books was hardly ever granted by the Inquisitor General. The sheer number of books that were banned on the grounds that they were harmful to the Faith, Catholic morality, or Spanish patriotism (even if the actual threat that these books posed was unclear), severely limited the amount of reading material that was available to the educated colonist. If permission to read banned books was granted, it was only allowed for a very specific category of books pertaining to a specific subject. A person would never be given free reign to read all banned books by the Inquisition.⁸³ Don Anacleto Rodríguez made a wise decision, though, by relenting in his pursuit of French knowledge because if a person were caught in the possession of prohibited books without permission, the punishment would be damaging to both the finances and the reputation of the criminal.

Books were not the only objects that posed a threat to the Inquisition’s authority. Sometimes the dangers of subversion and heresy were hidden in other common objects. The Inquisition in Mexico was always on the guard for the possibility that religious motifs could be used disrespectfully. The Inquisition confiscated things such as furniture, bedding, and even

⁸² Ibid., 335.

⁸³ Chuchiak, 336.

eating utensils from colonists in order to erase images of crosses, the Virgin Mary, or Saints that were commonly depicted on such objects. These confiscations were meant to redirect piety away from objects and towards more formal manifestations of holiness which could be provided from local church officials. Men with tattooed crosses were ordered to deface them within fifteen days if they were reported to the Inquisition. Even if the colonist's daily life was not severely affected by the censorship of books, this extreme version of censorship was much more likely to interfere with everyday life in the Colonies. This is especially true since, "Spanish piety had luxuriated in the use of such emblems whenever possible."⁸⁴ Colonists who had previously been encouraged to show their piety through these trinkets were now confused as the Inquisition went about confiscating and defacing their thimbles, cross-shaped branding irons, or towels. The colonists were not told why these confiscations were happening besides the fact that they were not showing correct reverence. The Inquisition now insisted that only the holiest objects were allowed to bear the sign of the cross. While many of these (now prohibited) images were manufactured in the Colonies, the growing threat of Protestantism created a constant fear that the Catholic faith of the people was somehow being compromised. The Inquisition targeted the colonist's individual displays of faith in an attempt to impose stricter control over the way that Catholicism was practiced. Salvation through correct Catholicism was now only offered through officially sanctioned activities such as attending Mass or Confession.

The extent to which the Inquisition was willing to investigate and eliminate outside influence in the Colonies is demonstrated by a source which details the discovery of five foreign handkerchiefs. These handkerchiefs were confiscated by a secular constable in Veracruz. Upon seeing that they depicted religious images and were also printed with the English language, the

⁸⁴ Lea, 266.

constable was inclined to turn them over to the Inquisition, as they had jurisdiction over things of religious import. The very same day that the Inquisition received the handkerchiefs from the constable, the inquisitors forwarded the parcel to Dr. Don Josph Garcia Bravo (who was competent in English) and ordered him to translate the writing on the fabric, “with exactitude and brevity.”⁸⁵ Thirteen days later, the doctor sent a detailed report to the Inquisition explaining what each scene on the handkerchief depicted and what the accompanying writing said.

Altogether, the translator determined that “the object or idea is to make known the parable in the Gospels of the Two Servants⁸⁶, and this is done by using the images, the texts, and the Holy Scriptures all placed in English, and taken out of the Bible.”⁸⁷ The Inquisition then deliberated whether or not the handkerchiefs were considered to be against the prohibitions of the Index, and they finally decided that they were, “parodies of sacred figures... that could cause irreverence.” They mandated that the cloths should be erased of their printing for this error, besides the fact that “the sixteenth rule [of the *Expurgatorio*]⁸⁸ is even more explicit in this individual case because it says that all words in foreign languages should be purged.”⁸⁹ This case went on for another month with the inquisitors attempting to track down the origin of these handkerchiefs and everyone who may have bought one from the man who was known to have sold them. Fortunately for the people who possessed the handkerchiefs, they were not seriously punished.

All the Inquisition cared about was that the English writing and the image of an angel (which

⁸⁵ “Documents and Papers concerning Several Printed Cloths or Handkerchiefs Remitted to This Holy Office by the Chief Constable of the City of Veracruz Which Contain Inscriptions in the English Language: Veracruz, 1775) in Chuchiak, 327.

⁸⁶ Matthew 24:45-51

⁸⁷ Ibid., 329.

⁸⁸ The catalog of prohibited publications.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

appeared in the center) were erased from the cloth. As the image was permanent and the owners could not find any way of erasing the writing, they were forced to burn the handkerchiefs.

The Inquisition, in these cases, was punishing people for attempting to show their piety because of their intense fear of a Protestant invasion. Even though the English language expert said that there was nothing to suggest a Protestant motive in the handkerchiefs, they destroyed them anyway. The widespread purging of religious paraphernalia was confusing to the colonists because they had previously used such objects as a show of their Catholic devotion. The Inquisition did not fulfill its duty in providing Catholic guidance, in this instance, because it could not make its ideals of piety clear to the public. The Inquisition's censorship of Protestant influence was not limited to print and images. They also sought to preemptively censor people through highly restricted immigration management.

When the Inquisition inspected ships arriving in colonial ports, they were not just looking for heresies in the form of objects, but also for heresies personified. The Holy Office expected their commissaries to conduct interviews with all of the people who were on board the ship. The captain of the ship was questioned in regards to the presence of heretical persons on the ship and had to take the oath of the Master which testified to the Inquisition's commissary that, "what is written is his word under oath... and that he does not state his testimony out of hatred for the said person, but for the discharge of his conscience." The Inquisition also mandated that, "[the Commissary] should make all of the other merchants and passengers on board of the ship take the oath [of the Master], and they should be questioned about the particulars concerning if they know of or have seen or understood that onboard the ship some person had done something or

said something against Our Holy Catholic Faith.”⁹⁰ These interviews were mostly directed at rooting out heretics or, at least, heretical ideas, in people who were moving from Spanish Iberia to Spanish America.

Since before the founding of the Colonial Inquisition, there had been laws in place that prevented heretics from immigrating to the Colonies. One of these was first posted in 1518 and stated, “That no reconciled heretic, child, nor grandchild of a burned *sambenitado*⁹¹ nor heretic shall travel to the [West] Indies”.⁹² This restriction shows concern by the Inquisition over the susceptibility of its Colonies to the influences of heresy from the motherland. The Inquisition, from the beginning, viewed Catholicism’s place as the dominant religion in the Colonies as insecure. They had to bar heretics (and potential heretics) from emigrating from Spain as best they could. They also made an effort to make sure that no religious figures except those who were very devout were allowed to travel to the Colonies. Another law states, “no cleric nor friar shall travel to the [West] Indies without license from the King.”⁹³ While these people (who were traveling from Spain) would not have been considered “foreigners” in the traditional sense, they still could not be allowed into the Colonies because they had the greater potential to spread Protestant heresies. Iberia was in close proximity to Protestant European nations and had also been historically plagued with Jewish and Muslim ideology. As such, the Inquisition had to

⁹⁰ “Instructions and the Order That Should Be Maintained and Followed by Commissaries of the Holy Office of the Inquisition in New Spain: Madrid, 1667” in Chuchiak, 94-5.

⁹¹ A person who was sentenced to wear a *sambenito*, which was a garment of shame that was forced upon those who were condemned by the Inquisition for heresy. This particular passage references to a heretic who was relaxed, as opposed to one who had committed a more minor crime and could outlive his/her period of shame and eventually remove the *sambenito*.

⁹² “Libro 9, Título 26, Ley 10” in *Pasajeros a Indias: Catálogo Metodológico de las Informaciones y Licencias de los que allí pasaron, existentes en el Archivo General de Indias* ed. Luis Rubio y Moreno, trans. (Madrid: Ibero-American Publishing Company, 1930), 235.

⁹³ “Libro 9, Título 26, Ley 11” in Rubio y Moreno, trans., 237.

ensure that the already precarious place of Catholicism was only strengthened by incoming Spanish Catholics.

Another immigration problem came from Spain's Iberian neighbor: Portugal. Accounts from the early 17th century show that many *judaizantes* had traveled from Portugal to Brazil and then moved to Peru. This perceived problem was one that stemmed from Spain because Castile had been, during the time, the victim of an influx of Portuguese who had moved to Spain after the Portuguese succession crisis of 1580.⁹⁴ These Portuguese people were thought of by the Spanish as natural *judaizantes* because a vast amount of the Jewish population of Spain had fled to Portugal after the expulsion of 1492. This idea that Portuguese was synonymous with Judaizer also eventually translated to the Colonial Inquisition. In Peru, many of these Portuguese immigrants were tortured and relaxed because they would not admit heresy or relent to the Inquisition's demands of conversion.⁹⁵ Later decades brought more immigration threats for the Inquisition to contend with as King Philip III succeeded his father. He signed a treaty with England in 1603 which put a stop to the prosecution of English sailors and merchants in Spanish ports in the New World.⁹⁶ This eventually minimized the amount of foreigners that the Inquisition was relaxing in general. It did not, however, stop them from ensuring that these foreigners could not contaminate Colonial Catholicism.

The Inquisition was also tasked with enforcing a ban on immigration from many protestant nations including England, Holland, Germany, and parts of France. It was impossible

⁹⁴ After the King of Portugal died in battle (leaving no heirs), King Philip II of Spain was named rightful heir of the Portuguese crown. He united Spain and Portugal in a union for the following 60 years.

⁹⁵ Lea, 419-21.

⁹⁶ Chuchiak, 257.

to completely bar these people from the Colonies. Before the 1610's, the Inquisition did their best to punish the outsider heretics brutally, in hopes that it would both correct their religion and discourage their fellow countrymen from continuing to attempt immigration.⁹⁷ In later decades, though, they mostly relied on long imprisonments as their punishment of choice. These prisoners, as was the case with Swedish sailor, Jacob Fors, often opted to convert to Catholicism so that they could live "freely" in the Colonies. This choice came with a price because it required the heretic to renounce his religion and his homeland, and would also bring him under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition. He would be closely monitored for the rest of his life, lest he relapse into Lutheran heresy (which would likely constitute relaxation).⁹⁸

Although the Inquisition attempted to completely isolate its Colonies from any influences that were not Spanish Catholic, it was ultimately unsuccessful in this feat as well. Word of the revolutions happening in France, The United States, and Haiti spread through the Spanish Colonies and, with the news of their successes, new political leaders began to emerge. Enlightened men such as Miguel Hidalgo, a professor turned priest and Mexican revolutionary leader, began to speak out against Spanish oppression that the Inquisition enforced in the Colonies. The Inquisition, as was their way, attacked him under false (religiously based) pretenses. Hidalgo was advocating for political reforms that would benefit the poor and mixed-race Catholics of Mexico. The Inquisition, obviously, saw this as a threat to their power and, more broadly, to Spanish power. In an attempt to destroy Hidalgo's legitimacy, they painted him as a heretic. The Bishop of Michoacán (Hidalgo's former friend, Manuel Abad y Queipo) wrote

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ "Documents Pertaining to the Reconciliation to Our Holy Catholic Faith of Jacob Fors, Native of Sweden and a Lutheran Heretic: Mexico City, 1720," in Chuchiak, 267.

against Hidalgo, condemning him for his rebellion and for committing two grave sacrileges, “insulting religion and Our Lady [of Guadalupe],” and excommunicating him.⁹⁹ The Inquisition went to great lengths to squash the followers of Hidalgo. They had even common, unemployed colonists self-denouncing under oath that they had supported the revolt, but they could not stop it.¹⁰⁰ Throughout the 19th century, Spain lost its Colonies one by one.

Conclusions

The Colonies presented more of a challenge to inquisitorial dominion than Spain had originally anticipated, and its biggest obstacle was not Catholicizing a land full of heathens. Spain had attempted, by use of the Inquisition, to unite its vast Colonies through religion. The problem with this plan was the fact that Spain had allowed the Inquisition to become self-sufficient and independent. The Inquisition had been more successful in Spain because it had been used as an instrument of Catholicism in conjunction with the secular ruling of the Crown. Besides those heretics who were relaxed by the Inquisition, the Spanish were able to forcefully remove heretics by expelling them and physically driving them out of the realm because they had an army. In the Colonies, there was an army of inquisitors who were, for all intents and purposes, allowed to act both as a secular and religious power. We see time and time again in the documents that the secular officers yield to the inquisitors, giving them information, consulting them about prisoners, and taking their advice about how to sneakily extort money from those who they caught in crimes against the religion.

Religion was supposed to be the factor that would make all of the colonists loyal to Spain. If they were Catholic, they were Spanish because Spain is Catholic. Or at least, that was

⁹⁹ Manuel Abad y Queipo, “Excommunication of a Former Friend,” in Penyak and Petry, 150-51.

¹⁰⁰ “Self Denunciation of Don José Ignacio Sánchez concerning His Support for the Miguel Hidalgo Revolt: Mexico City, 1811,” in Chuchiak, 337.

the assumption. It is clear, however, that this was a logical fallacy. Spain had thought that Catholicism would be hard-won in the Colonies, but this was not the case. The majority of Latin America was, indeed, converted Catholicism and remains predominantly Catholic to this day. Whether or not this was the work of the Inquisition specifically is unclear. What is certain, though, is that the Inquisition did not make faithful Spaniards out of the colonists as they had intended. Even though they believed that it was morally correct to follow the Catholic doctrine, colonists did not naturally associate it with loyalty to Spain because the only representatives that they had of Spain were the secular and religious officials that were sanctioned in the Colonies. The colonists would have no reason to have allegiance to a king across the Atlantic, besides the fact that these officials told them that they should. These Spanish kings had not done anything tangible for them, but they had placed the Inquisition in their stead. The Inquisition was a representation of Spain, and the Inquisition had not brought good things to the Colonies beyond a basis for their faith.

The Inquisition implemented their religion in a way that was ultimately destructive to the colonists. They increased class and racial tensions by targeting Native traditions, defending priests who abused their parishioners, and playing both sides in slave/master conflict. Their primary concern was to systematically extort money from heretics and bigamists and other religious wrongdoers and spiritual punishment became an afterthought. They tried to prevent foreign heresies from entering the Colonies, but it was the ideological invasion that was their undoing. The Inquisition was unwilling to support variances in cultural expression and, eventually, there was a major backlash against this oppression. The Colonies were not converted to Protestantism or Judaism as they had feared, but they were lost to the desire to be free from oppression in the form of persecutions, taxes, tithes, and class and racial strife. While the

Inquisition did not create these issues, it perpetuated them. Colonists wanted the freedom to go about their lives and practice their Catholicism without worrying that their handkerchief could send the Inquisition knocking on their door. People were tired of being scared that their livelihood would be ruined by rumors of their sexual misconduct or medicinal practices. An institution that seeks to control every aspect of daily life will always be met with resistance. The Inquisition was given so much power and trusted to control the Colonies, but they were too busy harping on the heretics to realize that a socio-political revolution was right under their noses. The Inquisition overstepped the boundaries of what a religious institution should have been allowed to do and eventually lost its century-long vice grip on Latin American life.

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*Please note: Spanish language capitalization practices were used in bibliographical entries for those books published in Spanish.