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Paper for “Rocky Mountain Interdisciplinary History Conference.”

**Title of paper:** “Historicizing Race: Purity of Blood and Mestizos in Colonial Peru.”

**Abstract:** In addition to colonial stereotypical depictions of Mestizos (People of Spanish-Indigenous descent) as immoral people and potential rebels, biased views rendering them as New Christians, Indian idolaters, heretics, and Protestants were both constructed and contended by bishops, provincials, and secular and regular doctrineros. In this paper I contend that by the latter part of the sixteenth century, Mestizos were excluded from ecclesiastical and secular spheres due to not only socio-political and religious issues in colonial Peru but also religious policies for New Christians and Protestants designed in imperial Spain. In my analysis of the writings penned by members of the Peruvian secular and regular clergies in which the Christian status of Mestizos became the object of discussions, disagreements, rivalries, and imperial anxieties, I thus engage in tracing the ideological continuation and implementation of the Spanish notion of purity of blood –and its discriminatory effects-- in colonial Peru.

The Secular and Regular Clergies and the Issue of Mestizo Priesthood

On 24 February 1583, Sebastián de Lartaún, Bishop of Cuzco (r. 1573-1583), wrote a letter to King Philip II while attending the Third Council of Lima (1582-1583). In the letter, Lartaún’s discussion of the royal ban on Mestizo ordination was intricately embedded in a set of other ecclesiastical reformation issues, which the bishop proposed to the king. These issues included the restoration of all ecclesiastical rights to his bishopric from secular and religious branches, the granting of powers to examine parish priests in Quechua proficiency, the enforcement of ecclesiastical justice to punish cases of “sin and scandal,” and the deployment of *relaciones de méritos* and limpieza de sangre statutes to appoint parish priests in the secular clergy.[[1]](#footnote-1) His endorsed ideas regarding the appointment of parish priests, in particular, address an important factor which took a prominent role in his evaluation of the royal ban on Mestizo ordination. Such a factor is the limpieza de sangre statutes which aimed at excluding New Christians from the Church in Cuzco: “[L]os prebendados todos que estan en ella [Cuzco] nemine discrepante auiendo primero hechos sus tratados convinieron en hazer un estatuto de que todos los prebendados de aquella iglesia fuesen xpianos viejos sin raça ni dependencia de judios ni moros y sin ynfamia.”[[2]](#footnote-2) As I have studied elsewhere, these statutes, fully endorsed by Philip II, excluded the descendants of Jews and Muslims who had converted to Christianity from secular and ecclesiastical posts. The ideology of limpieza de sangre was to be adapted to the colonial context of Spanish America in the latter part of the sixteenth century, including Indians and Mestizos to the category of impurity of blood. Such an adaptation however did not go uncontested, as Lartaún’s letter demonstrates.

Within the context of a program of reformation, the bishop of Cuzco suggested the king to reconsider both the ideological foundation upon which Mestizos were excluded from the Church and the inconvenience that such an exclusion might have for the evangelization enterprise. On 13 December 1577, Lartaún had received a royal decree by Philip II in which the King chided him for ordaining Mestizos and commanded him to refrain from doing so:

“A nos se ha hecho relación que habéis dado órdenes a muchas personas que no tienen suficiencia para poder recibirlas, y a mestizos y otra gente de esta calidad, lo cual es incoveniente por muchas causas [...] como de vuestro celo y cristiandad se confía, dando las dichas órdenes sólo a personas de que tuviéredes mucha satisfacción, y entendiéredes tienen las partes, calidades y virtud necesarias para ejercer tan alto ministerio, excluyendo a los que carecieren dellas, y principalmente a mestizos, hasta que otra cosa en ello se provea.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

In the 1583 letter, in turn, Lartaún informed the king that he had complied with the royal edict as soon as it arrived.[[4]](#footnote-4) However, in view of his reformation program that not only established a standard criteria to appoint priests but also looked to endow the Cuzco bishopric with more functions and a heightened authority vis-a-vis local oligarchies, Lartaún let the king know that he found the anti-Mestizo ban problematic.

For Lartaún, the exclusion of Mestizos from the Church was inconvenient and ideologically ungrounded. In the 1583 letter and a previous one sent in January 1580, Lartaún pointed out that the Mestizos he had ordained until 1577 had most of the necessary qualifications to become priests –although, it was true,-- they lacked education. He considered them the best parish priests in his bishopric “[H]abré ordenado solo cinco y para tratar la verdad que debo digo a vuestra Magestad que son los mejores clérigos que tengo en mi Ovispado dado caso que no saben mucho por no haber estudiado facultades mayores pero en lo que toca a hazer doctrina y vivir sin escandalo y saber la lengua general y vivir sin menos nota hacen lo que deben.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Not only the Mestizos he had ordained were efficient priests, but also other Mestizo priests were --in Lartaún’s opinion-- even better *doctrineros de indios* than their Spanish counterparts:

“sertifico que algunos [Mestizo priests] son tan virtuosos y de tanto momento que para el edificio espiritual de los naturales desta tierra converna los tales se ordenasen porque son muy peritos en las lenguas y no tanto ympedidos en estoruo de la doctrina por que no pretenden yr a esos reynos de España no se ocupan en tantas grangerias como los que de allá vienen y con esperanza del premio de virtud se ocupan y emplean en ella [...].”[[6]](#footnote-6)

It is worth noting that the portrayal of Mestizo priests as doctrineros who unlike Spanish priests did not plan on going to Spain after accumulating wealth became a theme deployed by supporters of Mestizo ordination. Considering that there were Mestizo priests who had an impeccable morality as well as proficiency in indigenous languages –two fundamental qualifications ideal for the evangelization of Indians which many Spanish priests lacked-, Lartaún found the ban on Mestizo ordination as counterproductive to the evangelization of Indians. Natives in fact had a closer relationship with Mestizo priests due to their virtuosity and proficiency in indigenous languages: “a estos [Mestizos] los naturales muestran mas devocion que a los sacerdotes españoles como a hombres que son de su lenguaje.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

Furthermore, Lartaún understood that the royally sanctioned ban functioned like the exclusionary mechanism of limpieza de sangre statutes, treating Mestizos like Conversos or Moriscos. Like New Christians, Mestizos were banned due to the religion of their Indian mothers. While a few ecclesiastical officials countered theories that proposed a Jewish origin for the Indians, Bishop Lartaún was perhaps the only one who not only rejected any comparison of Indian religion to Judaism or Islam but also opposed to the validity of the exclusionary consequences those comparisons could bring to the Indians’ Mestizo descendants. His disapproval of both the view of Indians as infidels and the resulting exclusion of Mestizos is evidenced in his 1583 letter: “...y el recelo que dello [la ordenación de mestizos] se puede tener cerca de la falta de la Religion no es de tanta consideracion como en los descendientes de judío o moros por que los tales son afectados mucho a su ley, los judios por ser ley revelada y dada de Dios, y los Moros aunque es ynvencion humana dizen lo es lo qual no tienen los gentiles.”[[8]](#footnote-8) According to Lartaún, Indians were not infidels but gentiles and, as such, their Mestizo offspring were not to be treated like New Christians. By postulating that Indians were gentile, Lartaún assessed their lineage in terms of the ideology of limpieza de sangre.

As detailed in a previous work, this ideology held that only the Christian descendants of gentiles --those without any Jewish (and Muslim) ancestors-- had an untainted, pure blood. Like these self-fashioned “Old Christians,” Indians were perceived by Lartaún as having pure blood. He contended then that due to their non-Jewish lineage, there was no reason to exclude all of their Mestizo descendants from the Church. It is worth noting that outside the context of limpieza de sangre, Indians’ *gentilidad* was also deployed to convey their non-Christian status, especially their practice of idolatry. During the first half of the seventeenth-century, in particular, Indians’ ancient religious practices were referred to as being part of their “idolatría y gentilidad.”[[9]](#footnote-9) By the end of the seventeenth-century, however, the usage of gentilidad was used again to refer to Indians’ pure blood. This is evidenced in the royal decree drafted on 26 March 1697 in which both caciques and tributary Indians were described as people whose gentilidad proved their purity of blood and, as such, they were to be esteemed as an Old Christian. Regarding caciques and their descendants, the decree held that “se les deben todas las preeminencias y honores, así en lo eclesiástico como en lo secular, que se acostumbran conferir a los nobles hijosdalgos de Castilla, y pueden participar de cualquier comunidades que por estatuto pidan nobleza*, pues es constante que éstos en su gentilismo eran nobles*[.]” With respect to the “indios menos principales,” they and their descendants were also viewed as gentiles whose blood was not “infected”: “y como los indios menos principales y descendientes de ellos y en quienes concurre la puridad de sangre como descendientes de la gentilidad, sin mezcla de infección u otra secta reprobada, a éstos también se les deben contribuir con todas las prerrogativas, dignidades y honras que gozan en España los limpios de sangre que llaman del estado general[.]”[[10]](#footnote-10) Thus, as Kathryrn Burns has noted, one of the problems with Mestizos was precisely their condition of “mixture,” that is to say impurity: they did not belong to any of the two “pure” groups.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Lartaún’s critique concerning King Philip II’s legislation for Mestizos is important in many respects. First, it reveals the underlying ideology of a good part of such legislation. Mestizos were barred from priesthood because they were considered to be impure like those peoples of Jewish and Muslim descent. Comparing Conversos and Mestizos, critic Sabine Hyland has stated that despite their “different socio-economic positions within Peru and Spain, respectively, both groups were excluded from the priesthood for fear that they were not ‘true Christians.’”[[12]](#footnote-12) Evaluating Mestizos’ exclusion from the Church, historian Allen Durston has noted that it is “tied to the limpieza de sangre or purity of blood norms that excluded people of Jewish ancestry from the clergy and other professions in Spain [...] the rationale being that individuals inherited their basic moral and even religious dispositions from their parents.”[[13]](#footnote-13) Moreover, Martínez has pointed out that from 1550 onward the re-configuration of the ideology of limpieza de sangre in Spanish America, especially New Spain, consisted of increasingly linking native religions to Judaism, extending Iberian notions of impurity to Indians and their descendants, and interpreting indigenous women’s bodies as sources of heretical contamination.[[14]](#footnote-14) “At the start of the seventeenth century,” --affirms Martínez--, “the category of mestizos, like that of Indian, was deeply embedded in discourses of religious conversion and being linked, more often than not implicitly, to the concept of limpieza de sangre.”[[15]](#footnote-15) In 1580 and 1583, Bishop Lartaún pinpointed the adaptation of the status of impurity of blood to Mestizos as the basis for their exclusion.

Second, Lartaún’s defense of Mestizos invites us to think of the anti-Mestizo legislation during the sixteenth-century as being part of the Spanish Crown’s policies for New Christians and Protestants. Moreover, his proposed implementation of limpieza de sangre statutes in the Cuzco clergy took his consideration of Indians and Mestizos as gentiles. These statutes exceptionally did not include Mestizos or Indians as impure people. They were unlike other statutes from the regular and religious clergies which banned Mestizos from the priesthood. Lastly, Lartaún’s critique of the anti-Mestizo legislation evidences that by the latter part of the sixteenth century Mestizos were excluded from ecclesiastical and secular spheres due to not only socio-political and religious issues in the colonies but also religious policies for New Christians and protestants designed in Spain.

As early as 1560, Philip II began sending royal decrees to the bishoprics of Spanish America, prohibiting the ordination of Mestizos. The first royal decree of this kind was sent to the archbishop of Mexico on 24 June 1560. On 2 December 1568, the bishop of Quito received a similar royal decree. During the 1570s, the Spanish king continued submitting the same royal edict --although with minor variations-- throughout Spanish America for at least three times. One of the last bishops who received the royal edict was the archbishop of Lima in 1578.[[16]](#footnote-16) This *real cédula* submitted on 2 December 1578 from El Pardo was the one able to definitively refrain most of the bishops from the archbishopric of Peru from ordaining Mestizos. In most of these decrees, the king informs the bishops that it has come to his attention that they had ordained Mestizos. It was Spanish secular officials and members of the religious orders the ones who sent reports to the king, portraying these people of mixed linage in denigrating terms and accusing bishops of ordaining these people of mixed lineage and faith. The issue of Mestizo ordination was particularly embedded in power struggles between the secular and regular clergies over doctrinas de indios.

By the time the diocese of Lima received the royal edict banning Mestizo ordination, some religious orders had already closed their doors to Mestizos years earlier in Peru. Not unlike anti-Converso attitudes, by 1594 all religious orders --with the exception of the Mercedarians-- had adopted anti-Mestizo admission policies. In the second half of the sixteenth century, it was the regular clergy the one which more often than not targeted Mestizos as unfit for admission. The Augustinians in Cuzco prohibited the admission of Mestizos as early as 1571.[[17]](#footnote-17) In turn, the constitutions of the Franciscan Peruvian Province issued in 1580 stated: “Ninguno sea recibido a la orden si no fueran hijos de españoles.”[[18]](#footnote-18) The Franciscans were in fact the first order that implemented limpieza de sangre statutes in Spanish America in which Mestizos along with Conversos occupied the same category of impurity and thus were excluded from admission. In the Franciscan provinces of Santa Cruz of Española (Hispaniola) and of Santa Cruz of Caracas (Venezuela), the constitutions issued in 1538 stated that: “En ninguna manera sea recibido ningún confeso ni mestizo, pues claramente nos consta por muy clara experiencia: por los unos, venir nuestra religión en opropio y *dirisum omni populo;* y por los otros, haberse hecho muchos escándalos.”[[19]](#footnote-19) Also, the Dominican province of San Juan Bautista issued constitutions in 1594 excluding Mestizos and Indios until the fourth generation: “[D]e ninguna manera sean admitidos al hábito ni a la profesión los indios originarios del país, ni los mestizos descendientes de ellos hasta el cuarto grado; que los que hasta entonces hubiesen profesado de este género, no pudieran obtener prelatura, ni otro oficio, ni ser curas, ni doctrinantes, sino que los ocupen en los comunes ejercicios de la orden.”[[20]](#footnote-20) The Jesuits decided during their Third Provincial Congress held in Lima on December, 1582, to stop admitting Mestizos into their order:

“[A] todos, *nemine discrepante,* parezió muy necessario que [a los Mestizos] se les cierre [la puerta] del todo y se pida a nuestro Padre dé orden en ello, porque la experiencia ha mostrado a la larga no probar bien este género de gente; y las demás religiones han abierto camino a la Compañía para esto con su exemplo, aviendo ordenado no se reciba ninguno deste género en sus Religiones, y el Rey tiene mandado no sean admitidos a Orden sacro, y así pide esta Congregación a Nuestro Padre mande al Provincial desta Provincia no reciba de aquí adelante ninguno deste género en la Compañía.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

Regarding the Mercedarian Order, it was the only one that continued ordaining Mestizos throughout the sixteenth century. This is evidenced in a letter sent to King Philip II by Fernando de Torres y Portugal, Count of Villardompardo, Viceroy of Peru (1585-1589), on 8 May 1588. In this letter, Torres y Portugal informed about the state of affairs in the Peruvian Church. In his rather critical description of the secular and regular clergies, he described Mercedarians as friars who “reciben muchos criollos y mestizos y, aunque entre ellos hay algunos de mucha aprobación, en general, los de esta orden viven con no tanta como parece que convenía, y así tienen mucha necesidad de ser visitados y corregidos por personas graves.”[[22]](#footnote-22)

Conclusion

Throughout this paper we have seen several portrayals of Mestizos’ customs that aimed at depreciating their political and religious fidelities. While these views undoubtedly influenced the drafting of anti-Mestizo royal laws and were at the same time re-enforced by them, there were also other views especially from the secular clergy and certain members of the religious orders who not only supported Mestizo ordination and continued ordaining Mestizos well into the 1590s but also questioned the ideological foundation of the views indistinctly depreciating Mestizos and the laws excluding Mestizos from the Church. In this paper, I have also studied the prohibition of Mestizo ordination taking into consideration not only the various interpretation Spanish colonial officials gave on the matter but also the processes themselves through which Mestizos were interpellated by the Crown. Institutions such as the Inquisition and the Council of Trent --and their criteria to define and police Catholic orthodoxy-- and local secular establishments came to increasingly influence the portrayal of Mestizos as subjects linked to rebellion, immorality, viciousness and idolatry, and ideologically validated their exclusion based on the discourse about Indian origins and the hereditability of indigenous idolatry. These portrayals –which were similar to those about Conversos and Moriscos-- were fashioned by Spanish officials who belonged to a period of time characterized by the Counter-Reformation and King Philip II’s defense of his realms from any threat that entailed Protestantism, religious heterodoxy, or rebellions. In this way, Mestizos provoked in Counter-Reformation Spanish officials specters of political and religious anxieties which were well-known and feared.

1. Lisson Chaves, *La iglesia de España en el Perú,* 3:103-107. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid.,2:824. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In turn, in the 1583 letter, regarding the Mestizos he had ordained, Lartaún summarily stated that “Manda vuestra magestad por otra cédula que no ordene mestizos lo qual he cumplido *después* que la reciuí inviolablemente” (Ibid., 3:104, my emphasis). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., 2:824. In some aspects, Acosta’s defense of Mestizo priesthood had a few similarities with Lartáun’s. For instance, the Jesuit father noted that doctrineros did not need to be theologians. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., 3:104. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 2:824. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., 3:104. In the 1580 letter, Lartaún stated: “y de ellos [Mestizos] no se debe presumir lo que de confesos y moriscos por que tales tienen ley o secta a lo que dicen rrebelada a que están con mucha porfía obedientes los unos a la de Moysen (sic) y los otros a la de Mahoma y los naturales de esta tierra ninguna tuvieron a que pueden estar tan afectados y vendidos como ellos a la suya y asi a mi poco entender y juicio no se debe tener tanto recelo destos mestizos como de los confesos y moriscos mayormente haciendo election para ello de los que mejor ensenados estan y mas virtud tienen” (Ibid., 2:824). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For instance, in his manual for extirpators, *Extirpación de la idolatría del Pirú* (1621), the Jesuit Pablo José de Arriaga stated: “Primeramente si de aquí adelante algun Indio, o India boliere a reicindir en la Idolatría, adorando Huacas, Cerros, o al Rayo, Sol, Luna, y Estrellas, o hiziese algunas de las ceremonias antiguas de su gentilidad; el Cura, o Vicario que fuere de esta Dotrina escribirá la causa, substanciándola, y la remitirá al Illustrísimo Señor.” (Arriaga, *Extirpación de idolatrías,* 275). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Konetzke, *Colección de documentos,* 3.1:67 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Burns, “Unfixing Race.” *The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires* [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Hyland, *Conversion, Culture and Custom,* 220. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Durston, *Pastoral Quechua,* 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions,* 142-170. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid., 148-152. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Konetzke, *Colección de documentos,* 1:514. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Castañeda Delgado, *El mestizaje en Indias,* 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. .Ibid., 137 and 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid., 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Castañeda Delgado, *El mestizaje en Indias,* 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Engaña, *Monumenta Peruana*, 3:205-06. Soon after it established in Peru in 1568 until 1576, the Jesuits admitted eight Mestizos into the order and ordained three of them. The latter were Blas Valera, Pedro de Añasco, and Bartolomé de Santiago. (Brewer-García, “Bodies, Texts, and Translators: Indigenous Breast Milk and the Jesuit Exclusion of Mestizos in Late Sixteenth-Century Peru,” 373). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Castañeda Delgado, *El mestizaje en las Indias,* 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)