Limpieza de Cuerpo:

The Politics of Purity in Mexico

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Cleanliness is a concept which is often under-scrutinized, I think in part because many feel it is a generally objective idea. It can be discerned by visual inspection: something is either clean or it is not. It denotes personal safety: that which is unclean is dangerous, a threat to lives and livelihoods. However, throughout the centuries, the concept has been taken to mean a number of contradictory notions, and has been invoked to support a variety of fictions about race and gender.

With its origins in the Spanish Inquisition, beliefs about groups of people as pure and impure were carried across the Atlantic by European colonizers, and undergoing various periods of secularization, conscientious revision, and adaptation to new settings, notions about religious or racial impurity were reimagined as notions about physical hygiene, which could be "supported" by irrefutable modern science. Analyzing interventions and policies in the colonial, Porfirian, revolutionary, and post-revolutionary periods, I hope to show how these various regimes reinforced and reiterated ideas about who was "clean" in a number of often conflated senses, and ultimately led to an imagining of the countryside as a seat of impurity, uncleanliness, and backwardness. At the forefront of these narratives, women were often rendered the source of contamination, yet somewhat paradoxically, tasked with the maintenance of the physical cleanliness of their homes and family.

Limpieza de Sangre and the Colonial Caste System

Limpieza de sangre, (literally translated, "cleanness of blood") first appeared as a concept in the middle of the 15th century in Castile, and took hold and spread throughout Iberia over the next hundred years, as it began to merge with secular notions of nobility.[1] It acquired much of its

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[1] María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 2

force during the Spanish Inquisition, constructed to root out "secret Jews" (and later, muslims).[2] The concept was that muslim or Jewishness was passed down through the blood, and thus a "pure lineage" was needed in order to be a faithful Christian, hold certain positions of power, and be granted membership in various institutions.[3] There was a growing population of "conversos" in the 15th century (those who had converted to Christianity from Judaism) and due to beliefs about genetically transmitted Jewishness, there was general mistrust of these converts.[4] This resulted in widespread anti-semitic violence, and an obsession with genealogy and lineage began to take hold over the following few centuries.[5] Those petitioning for membership in various institutions, churches, or seats of power, would have to submit genealogical information, and several others in their community were selected to undergo questioning which was meant to confirm that the petitioner had no muslim or Jewish parents or grandparents.[6]

This fixation with genealogy, in combination with beliefs that various moral and character attributes were passed down "through the blood" were phenomena that would continue to proliferate and impact cultural understandings of race, religion, and heritage for centuries to come. As the Spanish colonized Latin America, these concepts were imported across the Atlantic. In New Spain, the natural sciences began to further secularize the concept of limpieza de sangre, and over time, it became more associated with race than faith, although fictions about the genetic transmission of moral traits from parent to child prevailed.[7]

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[2] Martínez, 1.
[3] Martínez, 1.
[4] Martínez, 28.
[5] Martínez, 28.
[6] Martínez, 65-66.
[7] Martínez, 248.

In fact, around the 18th century, new concepts were integrated into this lexicon of purity.[8] Some of these had to do with capitalistic virtues, such as diligence, work, integrity, education, and utility to the public good, as seen in cleric don José Tembra's 1752 argument that the state ought to discourage unequal marriages (marriages between men of a high class and women of a lower status) in order to promote the "public good".[9] Tembra saw these marriages as a threat to the public good because they threatened the perceived purity of the white, wealthy male with non-white women, who he saw as contaminating entities. Here, the purity of white males was explicitly connected to the capitalist virtues mentioned above, a new development from the solely religious virtues from before. These particular "bourgeois" concepts, borne of mercantile capitalism and growing appreciation for individual achievement[10] have striking resonances in the 20th century, long after Mexico's independence, during the revolutionary period which followed the overthrow of Porfirio Díaz.

During the colonial period, humoral theory also informed "scientific" constructions of race. Generally, these theories consisted of notions that various climatic factors influenced the humors of the body, making those living in warmer climates appear different than those living in colder climates. As can be read in a sixteenth-century encyclopedia, Batman uppon Bartholome (1582) wrote that the warm climate of Africa "'burneth and wasteth humours, and so maketh them more short of bodie, more blacke of face, with crispie haire, and for them the spirites passe out at poores that be open."[11] However, there was an 18th century writing which applied these theories specifically to Latin America, involving notions that indigenous blood was "weak" (and

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[8] Martínez, 247.
[9] Martínez, 247.
[10] Martínez, 247.
[11] Mary Floyd-Wilson, "English Ethnicity and Health," Reading Early Medicine, January 12, 2023, https://readingearlymedicine.org/initiatives/english-ethnicity-and-health/.

could thus be absorbed into Spanish bloodlines) and that the climate made indigenous peoples' bodies "humid" (like women's were).[12] This made them more feminine, unable to grow facial hair, and physically weaker than Spanish bodies.[13] Colder climates were meant to have the opposite effect on the body—closed pores, protected, pure spirit.[14] As we will see, a feminization of indigenous men began to become a prevailing outlook among the Spanish, as well as a belief that white bodies were cleaner or healthier.

The phenomenon of the Mexican caste system was in part produced by this association between purity and whiteness (where before, the association was between purity and Christian lineage). Another part was the increasing role of taxonomies and classification as science gained ground over religion in the new world, and the people of colonial Mexico were subject to categorization in much the same way that the plants and animals were.[15] A clear manifestation of this phenomenon of taxonomy is observable in the "casta painting".[16] These paintings illustrated and labelled, "different 'types' of people that sexual relations among Amerindians, blacks, and Spaniards had engendered in the Americas."[17] The "Western ordering impulse" was on full display in these paintings, as well as an increasingly prevalent emphasis on visual mediums for recording (i.e. the use of the catalogue with images), as opposed to mere observing and classifying with the use of the written word.[18] Examining these paintings not only reveals a paradigm example of this practice of classification, but also offers insight into colonial assumptions about gender, race, class, and power.

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[12] Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 154.
[13] Martínez, 154.
[14] Floyd-Wilson, "English Ethnicity and Health".
[15] Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 4.
[16] Martínez, 5.
[17] Martínez, 227.
[18] Martínez, 228.

Before beginning a visual analysis of the paintings themselves, a brief look at the complicated labelling system for people of various combinations of racial backgrounds alone offers some insight into the fetishization of categorization described on its own. Below is a chart (from Nataly Fletcher's "Más allá del cholo: Evidencia lingüística del racismo poscolonial en el Ecuador" (Beyond the *cholo*: Linguistic evidence of post-colonial racism in Ecuador)) of the various terms for racial categories that were in use. While her paper is largely focused on caste in Ecuador, she includes the following chart which has a section dedicated to the intricate racial categories of New Spain, used not only to label the subjects of casta paintings, but also as descriptors of actual people in the colony. The words that were selected to become racial terms are also telling, with racial categories such as "no te entiendo" (I don't understand you) and "torna atrás" (a turn backwards) used to the describe subjects of what is typically the final unit of a generational casta painting series. The final paintings in the series are meant to show individuals of completely mixed racial backgrounds, "characterized by the total or near-total absence of Spaniards and by ongoing reproduction between people of African and indigenous descent."[19] These terms gesture toward incomprehensibility and degradation, which are especially negative attributes in a social context which emphasizes classifiability and comprehensibility as moral goods in and of themselves.

[19] Martínez, 233

	CRUCE RACIAL	CASTA
NUEVA ESPAÑA	Español con india	Mestizo
	Mestizo con española	Castizo
	Castizo con española	Español
	Español con negra	Mulato
	Mulato con española	Morisco
	Morisco con española	Chino
	Chino con india	Salta atrás
	Salta atrás con mulata	Lobo
	Lobo con china	Jíbaro (gíbaro)(18)
	Jíbaro con mulata	Albarazado
	Albarazado con negra	Cambujo
	Cambujo con india	Zambaigo (Sanbaigo)
	Zambaigo con loba	Calpamulo (Calpamulato)
	Calpamulo con cambuja	Tente en el aire
	Tente en el aire con mulata	No te entiendo
	No te entiendo con india	Torna atrás

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[20] Nataly Fletcher, "Más Allá Del Cholo: Evidencia Lingüística Del Racismo Poscolonial En El Ecuador," Sincronía, 2003, http://sincronia.cucsh.udg.mx/fletcher03.htm. 8

There is also much to be observed within the casta paintings, and I will be taking a closer look at two of them here (images of them can be found at the end of this document). One is the first canvas of a 1763 set by Miguel Cabrera (1695–1768). In this painting, a Spanish man surveys a native woman and child while at a market, as the woman and child stand in front of a display of textiles, almost as if they are among the commodities available for purchase and possession.[21] There is a clear subordination of the mother and child to this man, depicting an idealized patriarchal order, and a deference towards the male figure.[22] The family in the painting is clothed lavishly, and they are depicted as merchants, known for being a profession of the wealthy at the time.[23] The Spanish man is a central figure in these paintings. In a typical set, the sequence begins with the family of a Spanish male and an indigenous female, which is followed by that of a Spaniard and a black woman.[24] This artistic decision is likely based on a historical artifact. When the conquistadors came to the Americas, they largely did not bring any women (unlike English colonists in the northern parts of the Americas, for example), and thus, in the earlier days of the Spanish colonies, most of the reproduction involving colonists would have been between European men and indigenous women. This context is relevant to Martínez's point that this pattern of portraying Spanish men with non-white women, "not only promotes the notion that elite white men were in command of the sexuality of all women (thereby emasculating other men), but construct a gendered image of New Spain's three main populations. Sexual subordination essentially functions as a metaphor for colonial domination."[25] Notions like

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[21] Martínez, 237.
[22] Martínez, 237.
[23] Ilona Katzew, *Casta painting: Images of race in eighteenth-century Mexico*. (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2004), 106.
[24] Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions,* 233.
[25] Martínez, 233.

these about superiority and domination of the colonists manifests in this manner in much of the casta paintings.

When these paintings are understood as associating purity with whiteness, as became the case in the colonial iteration of limpieza de sangre, a gendered distinction can also be made. This is that women tend to be rendered the source of contamination of the bloodline, even if it is men who wield power over them. The perceived risk to the aim of protecting the racial purity of the white male was the non-white female. An important consideration is that as these paintings portray generation after generation of the mixing of various races, they do insist that a return to one of the "poles of purity" is possible—specifically, that a Spanish-native union can result in a Spaniard in the third generation, if descendents continue to reproduce with those of European descent.[26] Importantly, there was a notion that blackness, however, *could not* be absorbed into Spanish (or native) lineages, it was bound to resurface.[27] This is just one way in which people (in this context, largely women) of African descent occupy a different place in the casta narrative than indigenous people.

One example of a union between a Spanish man and Black woman depicted in a casta painting is Andrés de Islas' *De español y negra, nace mulata* (From Spaniard and Black, Mulatto), 1774.[28] Here, an African woman is depicted as violent and masculinized, beating her husband and child with some sort of tool, demonstrating the perceived danger to Spanish men and their offspring of procreating with an African woman. While not all portrayals of African women in casta paintings were negative, the absence of similarly negative portrayals of women

[26] Martínez, 233
[27] Martínez, 233
[28] Martínez, 234

of other races is striking.[29] There is a reversal of gender roles involved in this casting the African woman as violent, as well as a disruption of the idealized patriarchal familial order of the Cabrera piece described above. Additionally, as Martínez puts it, "the rising obsession with safeguarding limpieza de sangre resulted in the feminization of impurity and masculinization of women deemed to be impure."[30] Thus, procreation between Spaniards and Africans specifically is rendered especially destructive, and with the potential to lead to moral degeneration (similarly to how (faith related) moral traits were believed to be able to be passed down genetically during the inquisition).

Post-Colonial and Porfirian Mexico (~1810-1910)

After Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1810, the synonymity of purity and whiteness was brought into question. As the project of constructing a national identity was undertaken, there was debate over whether to preserve whiteness as the pole of purity and center of the nation, or whether this pole ought to shift toward the mestizo, the predominant population in the region.[31]

It is at this juncture, I argue, that a new phase of thinking about purity and the population of Mexico began to take root. During the colonial period, limpieza de sangre became secularized and transformed from a religious concept into one which was about race. In post-colonial Mexico, I think there was another shift, where limpieza de sangre became something more like limpieza de cuerpo—cleanness of the body. This construction of purity certainly differed from the former. It was imagined as something physical, and on its face, non-innate. Where the racial

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[29] Martínez, 235
[30] Martínez, 244
[31] Carlos López-Beltrán and Vivette García Deister. "Aproximaciones científicas al mestizo mexicano," *História, Ciências, Saúde-manguinhos* 20, no. 2 (2013): 391–410. https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-59702013000200002

fictions rendered certain people inherently dirty, the hygienic conception of purity is not an inherent quality that a person possesses: it can be changed with intervention and development.

However, I'll argue, this new, hygienic imagining of purity echoed the former in its assertion of the moral superiority of one group of people over another, as well as in its close relation to natural science. This new concept of purity existed under a veil of (and once again, with the support of) what was seen as objective, empirical scientific knowledge. As we will see, it also echoed notions of women being a force of contamination, and indigenous people being less "clean" than other racial groups, but again, this iteration of language about contamination and purity was *thought* not to refer to racial concepts, but to physical, tangible, literal dirt. This imbued these notions with renewed force. If the dirt was physical and observable, and those asserting its presence were scientists and medical professionals, how could its existence be questioned?

This new era of hygienic purity would also eventually take on a spatial character involving an (often imagined) dichotomy between the countryside and the city, but that will be explored in the final section of this paper. During the Porfirian era in the latter half of the nineteenth century, rural populations were at best ignored, and at worst, blamed for any disorder or problems within the state.[32] Instead of rural interventions, we can see the aforementioned dynamics play out in the context of interventions within Mexico City, especially as they relate to gender, nation building, and class.

In 1876—the same year that the decades-long Porfirian era began—a group of physicians held a conference on urban sanitation, during which they urged the government to take the lead

[32] Patience Schell, "Nationalizing Children through Schools and Hygiene: Porfirian and Revolutionary Mexico City," *The Americas* 60, no. 4 (2004):560.

on upholding sanitation codes and employ a sanitary police force.[33] At this point, the Supreme Board of Health had already been formed, but there was a push among many physicians for much more government involvement in the lives of citizens (although some thought that these initiatives ought to be led by doctors, not bureaucrats).[34] The belief that more federal oversight was necessary for maintaining a healthy citizenry was widespread at this time. The Porfirians also believed that the solution to the strong class and cultural divisions of the time was more federal oversight for schools, orphanages, and correctional facilities (instead of these institutions being run by municipal governments).[35] Childhood was seen as a crucial avenue for moral development for the creation of a citizenry. If purity was now a more transient concept which could be achieved via a certain moral (and hygienic) education, the perceived role of the state was to see to it that this education occurred, and occurred according to their beliefs about goodness and cleanliness. One could call this the beginning of an era of governmentality in Mexico.

The state's regulation of prostitution is also relevant to this discussion. Socially, there existed a double standard in regards to sex, where men were expected to be sexually active before marriage, while women were expected not to be.[36] Seeing a prostitute was seen as a rite of passage across classes for men, but being a prostitute was common as an only option for many young girls in poverty, and generally regarded as dishonorable.[37] Prostitution was technically legal, and specific institutions such as the Morelos Hospital in Mexico City were well known for

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[33] Brian Ellis Cassity, "Health, Sanitation, Hygiene, and Welfare: Public policy in the age of the Mexican Revolution." (PhD diss. Arizona State University, 2010), 75.
[34] Cassity, 74.
[35] Schell, "Nationalizing Children" 560
[36] Schell, 561.
[37] Schell, 561.

specializing in treating prostitutes with syphilis.[38] However, while legal, those suspected of prostitution could be essentially kidnapped off the street, and sent to these hospitals which were meant not only to cure them physically, but also to "cleanse their souls."[39] They were registered (which involved recording a host of personal information) then classified according to physical attributes and clothing into first, second, third, and "lowest" classes (some inspectors even sorted them into categories of beautiful, plain, and ugly).[40] Not only does this imply a conflation of perceived physical and moral cleanliness, it also seems to be a manifestation of a belief that classification can act as a bulwark against various threatening forces of disorder. This assumption seems similar to the assumptions which motivated the creation of castes in the colonial era: that sorting people into categories could contain forces which were seen as contaminating or dangerous.

Of course, there was more than imagined danger involved in the spread of debilitating diseases like syphilis, however, fears rapidly became overblown, and blame for the spread of these diseases was unevenly applied to women. Hospital programs like the one above were created to stop the spread of venereal diseases, which were not only seen as a threat to the growing nation, but also capable of ending the human race.[41] The regulatory discourse mainly dealt with women, who were generally impoverished young women from villages or the countryside.[42] While both men and women spread syphilis, it was almost exclusively women who were viewed as and spoken about as the contaminating force. This rhetoric and discourse

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[38] Schell, 559.
[39] Fernanda Nuñez and Pamela Fuentes. "Facing a Double Standard: Prostitution in Mexico City, 1521–2006". In *Selling Sex in the City: A Global History of Prostitution, 1600s–2000s*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2017) doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004346253_018, 448
[40] Nuñez and Fuentes, 448
[41] Nuñez and Fuentes, 447
[42] Nuñez and Fuentes, 448

largely was produced by medical doctors or other urban professionals, whose proclamations were understood as factual and objective, unable to be influenced by biases or feelings. Additionally, it is crucial to note that the urban/rural divide in Mexico had a very strong racial flavor as well: those living in the countryside were almost entirely indigenous, whereas white and mestizo people tended to live in urban areas.

Revolutionary period (1910-1920)

After Porfirio's regime was ousted, a ten year long revolutionary period ensued. The political emphasis in this time was on capitalist modernization. Additionally, many were troubled by the relaxation of public morals that they perceived had taken place during the Porfiriato.[43] The Porfirian interventions were inadequate for dealing with what seemed like a broader social crisis. Along with the concept outlined above about hygienic purity, an ideal capitalist man and family unit was constructed during the revolutionary period, in which the man was expected to be sober, industrious, literate, patriotic, moral, and dedicated to capitalist gain for himself, his family, and the nation.[44] There was also a strong focus on the domestic supportive role of women, and her crucial job of making the home, which involved maintaining standards of cleanliness.[45]

The political focus on modernization in this time period also involved an insistence upon the need for development in the countryside. As the ideal of modernization was increasingly emphasized by politicians and academics, a concurrent interest in the countryside as a site for development took hold. Schools were constructed to teach indigenous children in rural areas Spanish, as well as to "civilize" them, forcing them to abandon "backward" customs and

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[43] William E. French, "Prostitutes and Guardian Angels: Women, Work, and the Family in Porfirian Mexico." *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 72, no. 4 (1992): 529–53. https://doi.org/10.2307/2516659, 530
[44] Schell, "Nationalizing Children," 563.
[45] Schell, 563

assimilate to modern, urban Mexico.[46] In addition to literacy (which was generally defined as the ability to read, write, and speak in Spanish as opposed to an indigenous language) a key part of the rhetoric around these ideas was related to hygiene. In 1917, politician Alberto Pani wrote a pamphlet titled *La higiene en México*, where he blamed high infant mortality rates on dirty housing, poor nutrition, and, "crass ignorance and lack of motherly care."[47] Beyond the fact that the the language of this pamphlet is indelicate, the rhetoric used betrays Pani's imagining of the countryside—an envisioning of it as an area of moral depravity and impurity, one which is morally worse than urban settings. It also shows that once again, the blame for many issues of hygiene or illness is placed on women as caretakers, especially in this era of strong emphasis on a mother's "natural" role in the home. These pamphlets also indicate a strong moral association between what is regarded as clean and what is regarded as dirty, with what is clean being, very simply, what is good. However, in spite of widely held beliefs about the concept, cleanness is not an objective category. Anthropologist Lili Lai discusses this in the context of rural Henan, China. She picked a chili pepper from her food, and as there was nowhere else to put it, she set it beside her plate on the table, but noticed everyone else was putting things like this on the floor. To her, this would make the room dirty; to them it was dirty to put the waste on the tabletop, making it visible to others at the dinner table. It isn't seen as a problem to put waste on the floor, which is practical to clear and is always swept right after a meal.[48] While it is widely accepted that what is "polite" is a socially constructed concept, in many contexts, cleanness itself is also a product of socially agreed upon standards.

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[46] Schell, 581

[47] Schell, 563

[48] Lili Lai, "Everyday Hygiene in Rural Henan." *positions* 22, no. 3 (1 August 2014); 635–659, https://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-2685404, 643

Post-Revolutionary period (1921 onwards)

Throughout the post-revolutionary era, politicians were interested in upholding a narrative of national progress and industrial triumph.[49] Part of this would have to involve addressing various health crises in the countryside, and soon, the countryside rapidly became the focal point of many of the federal interventions. However, before the 1930s, there were virtually no health statistics on the countryside.[50] It was seen as imperative that this be changed in order for the government to implement various programs.

In order to remedy this absence of statistics, as well as the lack of physicians in the countryside, in 1936 a program was implemented requiring all sixth-year medical students (*pasantes*, as they had passed all their exams) in Mexico to stay in a location in the countryside, work in healthcare there, and write up a report about it.[51] Superiors requested that any and all "key information" on the area be included,[52] and if that sounds vague, you may be on the way to understanding the confusion of the students who were met with these requests. Faced with this daunting task, students included a vast array of information in their reports, including types of armadillos, names of rivers, mountain ranges, total latrine counts, quality of roads, train depots, movie theaters, and markets.[53] Reports also included statements like, ''the climate of Villa de Fuente is extreme to the point that they have highs and lows in temperature'' or, as another student reported, homes in Santa Rosalia are made of wood and, ''some are well made and others are not.''[54]

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[49] Gabriela Soto Laveaga, "Seeing the Countryside through Medical Eyes: Social Service Reports in the Making of a Sickly Nation," *Endeavour* 37, no. 1 (March 2013): 29, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.endeavour.2012.11.004.
[50] Laveaga, 29
[51] Laveaga, 30
[52] Laveaga, 30
[53] Laveaga, 31
[54] Laveaga, 31

Once again, the exercise of classification was undertaken. In a situation where there truly was a crisis of health, the first line of defense against this danger to the nation was gathering and classifying as much information as possible. Beyond an eclectic collection of information to varying degrees of helpfulness, there was another commonality between many of these reports: "they invariably portray the countryside as a space that lacked hygiene, where vectors of disease originated, morals were loose, and human waste was habitually improperly disposed."[55] The students who wrote them were unfamiliar with the nation's diversity. They did not speak the indigenous languages of the areas they went to, and were uneducated on the social, political, and economic structures within the villages.[56] These students would have been recognized as being generally of white or mestizo ancestry, and from well-off financial backgrounds in cities.[57]

Written with a sense of bewilderment of local customs, these reports reflected the common "travel writing" style of this era:[58] a civilized outsider enters a foreign land, bewildered by the strange, and sometimes frightening customs of the area's local inhabitants. These often exaggerated narratives would shape the understanding of the area for people back where the explorer came from, who had never been to the region themselves. However, in the case of the pasantes, these outsiders were domestic students, and their writing was being used to shape urban understandings of the countryside. Interestingly, I think casting oneself as the bewildered outsider in this way also could function as a method of making oneself seem like a reliable, dispassionate authority. Taking on this position as an author allowed audiences back in the city to not only relate to the students, but to read them as "impartial outsiders".[59] This was compounded

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[55] Laveaga, 30
[56] Laveaga, 30
[57] Laveaga, 32
[58] Laveaga, 31
[59] Laveaga, 30

by the fact the students were likely viewed as *men of science*, meaning they possessed an ability to pass judgments about people without being influenced by various strong feelings or beliefs, despite actually holding numerous prejudices.

Of course, there is no such thing as an entirely detached human perspective, but the doctors and scientists were imagined as being able to see through such a lens, and thus, discover indubitable truths about the world. Statistics and categories are both registers of discussing information which are meant to enable this detached and impartial perspective. This is one reason why they were so keenly sought out by the medical professionals, public health officials, and politicians. Information arrived at through this methodology is seen as unable to be questioned, and views from those outside of the circle of these professionals can be counted as simply incorrect. Additionally, this fetishization of categorization and enumeration seemed to be part of a larger project of constructing a "modern nation". The act of collecting statistics and classifying is a means of governmentality, a tool for the state in wielding power over subjects, and as has been a theme throughout this paper, a defense against that which seems somehow threatening. Pejorative terms about dirtiness could now be backed up with appeals to scientific evidence, which was (and is) understood as unquestionable and impervious to the human biases, errors and vulnerabilities that other types of evidence may be susceptible to.

The students' training in medical school would have emphasized that there was one proper method of caring for the ill and maintaining hygiene, and everything else was incorrect. This is not to say that the medical students were wrong about everything, or that the medical schools had nothing to offer the rural poor. However, this education would have imbued them with very strong feelings about what is correct and incorrect, even in cases where the truth *was* more ambiguous, or those living in rural areas might have information or knowledge on

situations that the pasantes did not. The pasantes also brought with them their prejudices, such as beliefs about rurality and the backwardness of its inhabitant (referring to indigenous people consistently as "incivilizados" (uncivilized people)), as well as distinctly racial notions.[60] When describing malaria, a medical student explained that black skin was more resistant to the disease because of ''natural immunity, happiness, or the roughness of the skin and strong body odor'' that he thought protected Afro-Mexicans from disease.[61] This unsupported assertion almost seems to harken back to the theory of humors and race from the 16th century, reproducing very old racial ideas using the veneer of modern medicine. Sometimes, the writing lacked even an attempt at appearing objective, such as in one case where a student wrote of the village he was visiting that the ''general appearance of the town is depressing.''[62] Despite observations sometimes being based in pre-conceived notions about the countryside and those who lived there, there was a sentiment that whatever the students said could be trusted immediately, in virtue of them being objective, detached scientists. When a medical doctor makes claims about those with dark skin being less susceptible to malaria, or even a town being unpleasant, these claims were seen as objectively correct, and, unlike the backward, incorrect views of the villagers, as belonging to the modern era.

Another key theme of these reports was the way that mothers and midwives were consistently blamed for the illnesses and problems in their community, even when actual issues were much larger than any one woman or family could handle. For example, most rural towns did not have the funds for advanced water systems, which pasantes did not take into account when criticizing their "'antiquated system' of wells that did not take into consideration the

[60] Laveaga, 37
[61] Laveaga, 37
[62] Laveaga, 33

‘‘microbial consequences’’ of having open air water storage or having them too close to outhouses.”[63] Instead of highlighting this lack of access to public works, the main culprit which Mexican officials cited for high rates of illness and mortality in villages was “ignorance of the majority of inhabitants regarding hygiene.”[64] It should be noted that some pasantes did see the lack of access to public works as a genuine crisis, but the overwhelming sentiment of the reports was that indigenous people were largely responsible for the medical issues in their communities. Mothers and midwives were continually blamed for infant mortality rates, and these women were described as ‘‘dirty, with long, black fingernails, and occasionally drunk,” and their healthcare practices “truly dreadful.”[65] As mentioned, the revolutionary period brought an emphasis on women’s responsibility for the home and their family, so when standards of hygiene fell short of the medical students' expectations, it was women who faced blame. The statistics such as high infant mortality were connected innately with dirty women in the minds of these students, and then in the minds of policy-makers and others back in the city. In this way, the association between women and contamination discussed in other sections of this paper was reproduced, and supported by the assertions of medical students.

The medical students also continually criticized perceived belief in superstition and rejection of modernity by non-Western healing practices, which was generally aimed at *brujas* or *curaderos,* traditional healers (who were often women).[66] They described practices such as the temazcal/sweat bath as “clearly torture” and admonished indigenous people for not embracing modern healing practices and abandoning others.[67] However, it wasn’t as though “modern”

[63] Laveaga, 37.
[64] Cassity, “Health, Sanitation, Hygiene, and Welfare,” 183.
[65] Laveaga, “Seeing the Countryside,” 36.
[66] Cassity, “Health, Sanitation, Hygiene, and Welfare,” 184.
[67] Laveaga, “Seeing the Countryside,” 36.

healing techniques were all a walk in the park, nor were all of them particularly effective. These responses again showcase a revulsion to the practices of indigenous people in the countryside. While there was no longer an explicit assertion of genetic moral inferiority, their inferiority continued to be insisted upon by the medical students who wrote about the people they encountered, which did take on a biological character at times. There was also the pushing of a narrative which associates between women in the countryside and being old fashioned or backwards.

Additionally, there continued to be discourse around prostitution. One medical student curiously distinguished between "those who periodically had health exams, followed the advice of doctors, and who were 'careful with their appearance and with their sexual hygiene' and those who 'did not follow the basic rules of hygiene.'"[68] The latter group were the true "degenerates", while it seemed the first were seen as somewhat redeemable, even in a disreputable occupation.[69] Another student made a similar distinction, singling out the prostitutes who refused to label themselves as such and thus were not subject to sanitation checks.[70] By evading the system of classification, these women escaped the state's attempt at containment, and this rendered them a "severe problem." However, by abiding by rules set by the state, and allowing oneself to be classified, prostitutes could not only become physically cleaner, but morally cleaner, too.

Longstanding urban stereotypes about those living in the "backward" countryside became cemented in the national Mexican imagination by these reports, as the fact that they were written by medical professionals offered them a new air of objectivity. The application of concepts such as dirty, impure, and backward which dates all the way back to the casta paintings and racialized

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[68] Laveaga, 34
[69] Laveaga, 34
[70] Laveaga, 30

pseudo-science in the colonial era seemed to be again applied to the indigenous populations of the countryside, but now was being employed by medical students who thought they were making objective statements about these communities. These reports not only betray the students' personal views of the countryside—they influenced how public health and economic development programs were implemented, as well as how the rural was imagined on a national scale.[71] Writing about the indigenous people of the countryside with this bewildered, travel-log style had another impact: it bolstered a perceptual distance between the dirty country and the cleaner city. Based on limited stays, medical students constructed a massive dichotomy between an unhealthy, dirty countryside largely incapable of embracing modern healing, and cleaner urban settings, using medical language to document the poverty of the countryside to designate and categorize the biological inferiority of certain groups.[72]

Just as purity was associated with whiteness during the era of limpieza de sangre, the cleaner city dichotomy led to those from the cities (who were often those of white or mestizo descent) to be imagined as cleaner than indigenous people from rural areas. Even if the cleanliness was not seen as having to do with one's blood, in the minds of the students and their audience, it was still a moral trait, and the situation in the countryside was hopeless. Despite the belief that these people were technically capable of becoming clean, the medical students wrote that any efforts to affect change were "useless."[73] Their writing implied (and constructed) an almost unbridgeable gap between the indigenous people of the countryside and the others in the city. Via methods of classifying, recording, and reporting, notions that some groups had more claim to purity than others continued to be reproduced well into the 20th century.

[71] Laveaga, 30
[72] Laveaga, 37
[73] Laveaga, 33

FIG. 6. Andrés de Islas [Mexican], No. 4. *De español y negra, nace mulata* (From Spaniard and Black, Mulatto), 1774. Oil on canvas, 75 × 54 cm. SOURCE: Courtesy of Museo de América, Madrid.

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[74] Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions,* 234.

FIG. 7. Miguel Cabrera [Mexican], 1. *De español y de india, mestiza* (From Spaniard and Indian, Mestiza), 1763, oil on canvas, 132 × 101 cm. SOURCE: Private collection.

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[75] Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions,* 154.

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