The culture of background investigations (Portugal, 1570-1773)[1]

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In a narrow sense, background investigations corresponded to the process involved in proving various personal, social and genealogical requirements when someone is applying to be admitted into some institutions. Due the fact that the specific candidate showed he was able to enter in the mentioned institutions, the background investigations were named proofs, "provanças" or "habilitações" in Portuguese and "pruebas" in Castilian. In 1720, Rafael Bluteau defined "provança" as "research and proof of something juridically examined […] to prove the nobility of someone"(Bluteau, VI, sub voce "provança").

Since the Third Lateran Council (1179) there were requirements that bishops must prove to obtain a diocese. Perhaps it was through this ecclesiastical route that background investigations as a documental typology were created and developed during medieval times.

Other religious institutions in the late Middle Age may have had exams to help review the social background and *vita et moribus* of each applicant. These may have been orally done and not a written process as happened later.

Early in the first half of the 16th century, there was a formal process to prove that an applicant possessed the qualities that were required to enter the Castilian Military Orders. In the archives, documents of genealogical investigations are preserved from 1510 and 1520 onwards (Orders of Santiago and Alcantara).[2]

At the same time, at least the Portuguese Military Orders of Santiago and Avis have experience of inquiries to confirm the access requirements in each candidate. As early as the first half of the sixteenth century, background investigations were carried out to ascertain whether candidates were fit for the military orders. The earliest records date from the 1520s and later have been preserved in the archives (Pimenta 230); earlier ones, if they existed, have apparently been lost. At that time the investigative process was essentially geared towards corroborating the candidate's honesty, ensuring that he was not part of any ongoing criminal investigation as well as establishing that he possessed material assets that would allow for a standard of living befitting the social status enjoyed by the institution.

This qualification process was developed from the 16th century onwards. It was strengthened indirectly by the *ethos* of Trent and directly by the requirements of purity of blood in the Iberian society. However, in Early Modern times, the degree of rigor practiced varied from institution to institution.

In general, these procedures are studied along two lines: (1) to help researchers contextualize the information they can extract (Rodrigues); (2) with an "administrative intention" to compare procedure and rigor between different institutions.[3]

The following abbreviations are used in this article: ADB – Arquivo Distrital de Braga; ADE – Arquivo Distrital de Évora; AHN – Archivo Historico Nacional, Madrid; ANTT – Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo; BNP – Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal.
[2] AHN, Ordens Militares, Caballeros, Alcantara, Exp.293bis; AHN, Ordens Militares, Caballeros, Santiago, Exp. 6090.
[3] Subtil; Soria Mesa 2000, 127–149; Vaquinhas; Olival 2012; Giménez Carrillo, 2016, 123–174.

The main purpose of this article is quite different; it is focused on extracting the socio-political repercussions of this practice. The objectives are to analyze the following:

1) The dimension of this phenomenon in Portuguese society.
2) The social and institutional implications of it.
3) The vocabulary and administrative apparatus create to support it.

The main objective of this article is to demonstrate why it is possible to speak about a culture of background investigations in Portugal in the period analyzed.

Background investigations, a procedure of great social coverage

Purity of blood is a phenomenon that appeared late in Portugal as compared with Spain, but it contributed greatly to the dissemination of written background investigations or genealogical investigative practices.

If early and occasional manifestations are excluded, it can be generally stated that in Portugal the requirements of purity started in 1560 (see Fig. 1).It was still expanding in the first half of the 17th century. The culmination of the interest in the requirements of purity occurred from 1675 to 1730. This was a period classified as «puritan» in Portugal or a period dominated by «Puritanism» in the sense that there was an exacerbated cult of the purity of blood. At that time, it was not enough to be pure; it was required never having been murmured in the opposite sense. The occasional murmurs could produce damage not only to the honor of the individual, but also to the honor of their relatives and ancestors.

The Portuguese military orders were one of the biggest institutions in which this system of exclusion was first established. Apparently, it was Rome that created it through a Papal bull of 1570 (*Ad Regie Maiestatis*, dated of August, 18). However, it was a bull requested by King Sebastian who was interested in the introduction of the individual services in these institutions as a way to get the habit. This was the immediate interest of the Portuguese Crown on these three Military Orders.

To avoid that the Orders could become extremely open to everybody that got military services, the mentioned bull also established other restrictions. This is why candidates without purity of blood and those who were 'mechanics' (manual workers) and laborers, or those whose fathers and grandfathers had been, were excluded from the military orders. The king as Master of the three military orders tried to transform these institutions into a space for nobility and expanded elites. Consequentially, the military orders were among the first institutions to embrace this type of rules and to put them into practice.

The adoption of purity requirements inside the staff of the Portuguese Inquisition in the 1570's was also important, along with the increasing Spanish influence in the country with the arrival of the Habsburg dynasty in Portugal in the 1580's. As can be observed, the Inquisition was not the first institution to adopt the rules of purity; however, this institution would later symbolize purity and the qualification procedures.

In the 17th century, the purity of blood requirement was expanded to a great number of *corpora*. These requirements were never organized into a general law for the entire country; rather, only specific institutions adopted them. In the case of the Portuguese municipalities (*câmaras*) before and after 1611, they may have never established written formal background investigations, as was the case in Spain (Soria Mesa 2000, 294–295).

Year	Institution / entity	Notes:
c. 1544-1547	Colleges ("Colégios Maiores") of All Saints and St. Michael (in Coimbra)	It encompassed the Gentiles
1558	Franciscans	
1565	Hieronymites	
1565	College of St. Paul (Coimbra)	
1570	Military Orders (Avis, Christ and Santiago)	It excluded manual workers
c.1570	Inquisition	
1577	Misericórdia of Lisbon	
1585	Medical sector connected to municipalities, hospitals and *misericórdias*	
1588 -1604	Parish clergy	
1593	Jesuits	
1602	Judiciary career linked to the Crown [Magistrate judges, Judges in the peripheries ("juízes de fora"), etc.]	
1611	Government of Municipalities	
1622-1625	Chapter of the Cathedral of Braga	
1628	Chapter of the Cathedral of Lisbon	
1635	Chapter of the Cathedral of Lamego	

Fig. 1 – Chronology of the introduction of the purity of blood in various Portuguese institutions.

Another important feature was that purity of blood was never considered definitive or judicial fact concluded forever (absolute). If new proofs appeared, an earlier judicial decision could be changed. This introduced tension within the society that extended beyond applicants to a post or candidates to a distinction. Especially in puritan times, no one was out of danger or risk.

Respect for previous genealogical investigations done by other institutions was not observed in Portugal prior 1771, when a royal decree established that it was enough to be successfully approved once in a single court for the sentence to be valid in all others (Delgado § 3, *Alvará* of 24 of January of 1771). However, from the beginning the Portuguese Inquisition accepted the decisions that were made in earlier procedures inside the Holy Office. This means that if someone had an ancestor who had been approved it represented an advantage for his application. Inquiries into this specific family line were

not required, and the procedure was more certain, faster and cheaper. This may also have been an asset in the domain of marriage or in the marriage market, because it was extremely sensitive to the purity of blood. Additionally, in the process of qualifying to receive a post in the chapters of the cathedrals (as was the case of Évora or Lamego), if the candidate or his family had been previously successful in the Holy Office, it was not necessary to repeat background investigations for the chapter.[4]

Usually the Council of the Military Orders accepted as relevant that an applicant arrived previously approved by the Holy Office, but the opposite was not true. In the Military Orders context, there were no knights of the Order of Christ (the most important of the three Portuguese Military Orders) approved without background investigations until 1719. A father could have been approved and the process was repeated for his son.

Institution	Years	Number of persons	Average per year	Notes
Order of Christ	1641-1777	12.389	90	Only successful cases
Inquisition	1570-1820	31.392	126	
Judiciary career linked to the Crown - "Leitura de bacharéis"	1602?-1833	11.491	50	

Sources: Background investigations gathered in the National Archive of *Torre do Tombo*.
Fig. 2 – Number of background investigations done in Portugal.

Globally, a huge number of persons underwent background investigations (see Fig. 2), some of them in more than one institution, and these procedures and requirements differed from institution to institution and from one epoch to other.

Because parish clergy and many brotherhoods also performed these genealogical inquiries, excluding the slaves, almost all social groups could be affected by these practices. Some individuals never need it, but several could testify in the inquiries and by this via they contacted with genealogical investigations. Of course, the background investigations were most common amongst the nobility and elites, but the other social strata were not excluded.

It was therefore a procedure of great social coverage, used not only in mainland Portugal, but also in the maritime Empire, from Asia to the Atlantic territories. In all of these places purity of blood was heeded, even if it was not fully followed (Alberro).

The social and institutional implications of the genealogical inquiries
These procedures were performed through institutions, either central or local.

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[4] ANTT, *Cabido da Sé de Lamego, Habilitações de genere*, Mç. 3; ASE, *Habilitações de limpeza de sangue: Cónegos*, Maço 3. Agradeço a Antonio J. Díaz Rodriguez estas referências (See also: Figueirôa-Rêgo 160–164).

In the case of the Portuguese Inquisition, the number of individuals who had background investigations approved was quite similar to those who were punished in the *Auto da Fé*, the ceremony to read the final verdict when someone was prosecuted (see Fig. 3). From 1690's onwards, the promotional activity was clearly more relevant inside the Holy Office than the repressive one, as argued by José da Veiga Torres. In this case, the institution had been conditioned by the activity of qualifying people from the end of the 17th century until 1773, the year in which purity of blood was forbidden. Gradually, the staff spent more and more time with background investigations, and some officials of the tribunals required direct payment for these specific costs. Since at least the beginning of 1680, everyone should disburse 4% of the money that had deposited in the hands of the Inquisition treasurers for the genealogical qualifications. This percentage was meant for the treasurer himself, and the justification was that a similar contribution existed in other contemporaneous councils that did background investigations (ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Lº 153, f. 84, 85). Since 1715, it was necessary to pay all members of the *Conselho Geral*[5] when they analyzed an application for *familiar* (peripheral lay official).[6] Each member received 1000 *réis*, and whoever made the report received another 1000 *réis* (ANTT, *Conselho Geral*, Lº 211, f. 7v).

In the global budget of the Inquisition, the revenue from background investigations was low, but the aforementioned fees would have had a positive impact on the salaries of treasurers and even on the wages of the members of the General Council. Each candidate paid a small amount, but with all aspirants it summed up to a huge number. The more candidates, the more revenue the members of the Inquisition gained. In the Tribunal of Évora, between 1700-1770, the revenue from background investigations represented only circa 0.49% of the total revenue of the institution (Lopes 85). However, the item *habilitações* did not include the quantity paid to the staff. It went directly to the member of it and was for them an extra official wage portion.

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[5] Supreme Council of the Portuguese Inquisition, where was taken the final decision about the background investigations.
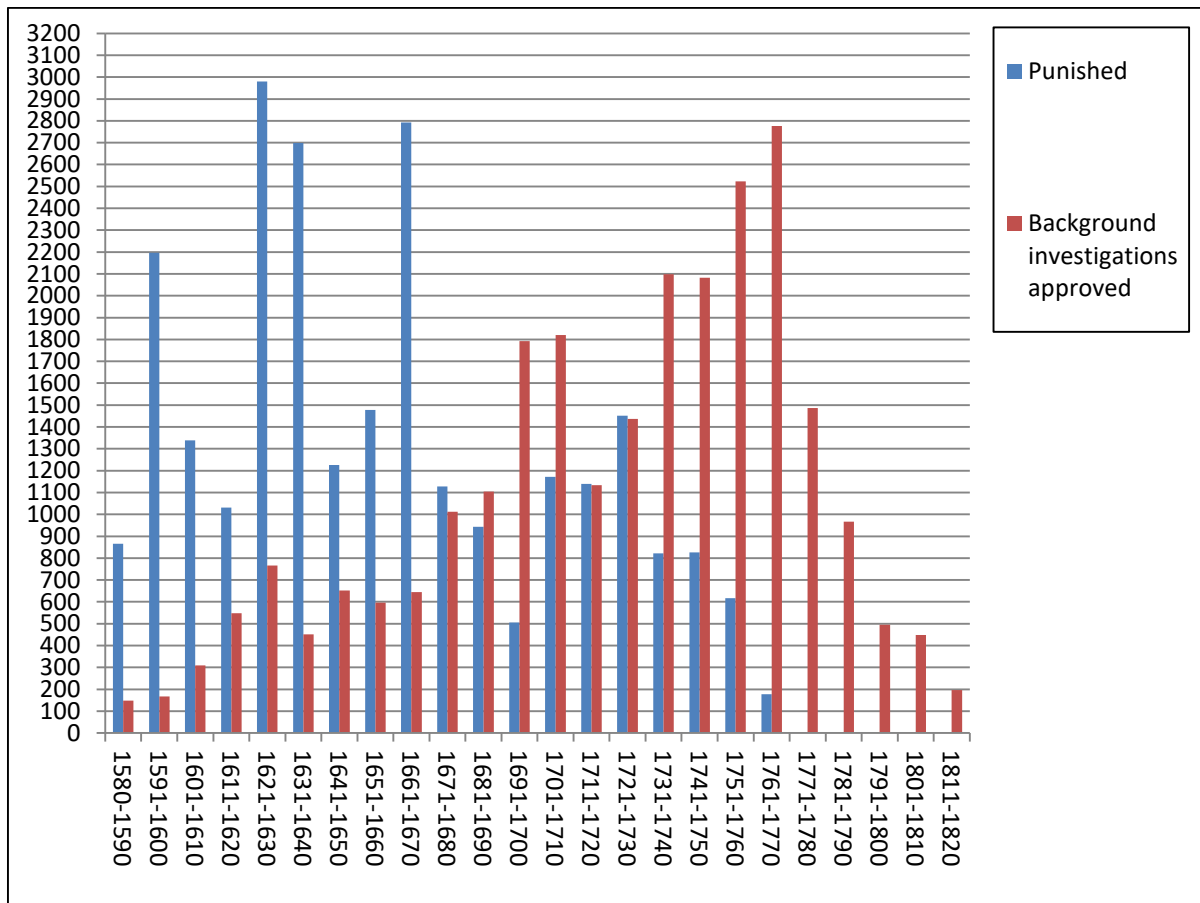[6] About the post and the designation, see (Wadsworth 13–14).

Fig. 3 – Number of individuals punished in the Auto da Fé and number of background
investigations approved in the Portuguese Inquisition (1580-1820)
Sources: (Torres 135) and data base of the project Intergroups.

To interest the members of an institution on the genealogical qualifications was strongly consequent. This issue was more pronounced in the case of the Council of the Military Orders, designated *Mesa da Consciência* in Portugal. Prior to 1754, in almost all central institutions of this country the high staff would receive a salary, kickbacks and emoluments. Only the annual amount of wages were fixed, but the last two portions could double or almost triple the salary. Because it was difficult to obtain enough money to pay kickbacks, in 1730 the deputies of the *Mesa da Consciência* had suggested to the king that he create a fee to be paid by each dispensation given in the background investigations. If one individual achieved more than one dispensation, he should pay for each one. If a grandfather had been a mechanic, it was cheaper (it cost 5.000 *réis*) than if the dispensation was for the applicant (20.000 *réis*) or for his parents (10.000 *réis* each one). The king as Master of the Orders agreed, and after that period rigor increased in the inquiries, especially regarding the analysis of the beginning of a candidate's career. The risk of manual work was higher during that phase, and they knew it. The average of dispensations rose from 45.4% in the first 30 years of the eighteenth century to 51.6% in the next thirty years, only in the Order of Christ and not considering all dispensations. Those of common homeland (*pátria comum*)[7] or the exemption to receive the habit in the

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[7] *Pátria comum* was the name give when a candidate requested to make the background investigations not in the birthplace of someone, but in Lisbon. It would be a designation originated in the Roman Law. It was based on the principle that every Roman citizen would have two homelands: the city where he was effectively born and Rome, considered the common homeland of all Roman citizens (Mello 62).

convent were excluded. If those dispensations were considered, the number would be higher.

The most elevated percentage of dispensations occurred in 1754, when 65.4% of the knights of the Order of Christ were enrolled in the Order due to the exemptions achieved in their personal and/or genealogical qualities (Olival 2001, 182, 197–198, 570).

The attention to purity of blood and to the culture of background investigations had contaminated not only institutions; it had affected families and individuals. In 1617, at the entailed estate (*morgadio*) funded by Belchior Dias Preto, knight of the Order of Christ, Judge of the Court Household (*Desembargador do Paço*) and councilor of the Board of the Military Orders (nominated in 1602), it was established: "when the person who is going to succeed in this entailed estate marries a person who has Moorish blood, or who is a new Christian, he becomes unable to succeed him [the deceased] if the wife or husband is still living or if the descendants are still living. If the person married after taking possession [of the entailed estate] they must lose the entailed estate because my intention is to create it to honor and conserve my lineage, and through these marriages the family is dishonored and disqualified from serving in posts and dignities of the res public" (ANTT, *Núcleo Antigo - Instituição de Morgadios e capelas*, Mç. V, nº 208, nº 20).[8] It was necessary to determine the purity of the one succeeding in this entailed estate. There were many other entailed estates that set the same requirements.

In early Modern times it was common to exclude individuals within a family. On this issue, unsuitable marriages carried a heavy weight and a high price. Parents severing relations with a daughter or son because they married a new Christian was widespread. This rejection could take dramatic forms within the community, such as bereavement, etc. In 1761, in Sambade, located in the North of Portugal (Trás-os-Montes), a father threatened to shoot his daughter, saying that he did not want her to marry a Jew. This happened despite the fact that her fiancé had brothers in the clergy (ANTT, *Habilitações Incompletas*, doc. 5144, f. 3).

The frequent need for background investigations created more attention on certain documents in the family archives. They did not only need to keep records that proved ownership rights over land, dowries, and services rendered to the Crown or rewards; it was also important to retain everything that proved the appropriate status of weddings and other individual issues, such as receiving minor or consecrated orders. Referring the post of familiar of the Inquisition in the grave was also very strategic as a stone memory for future. There are a reasonable number of these graves inside the Portuguese churches, spread by all country.

When historians look carefully to the Early Modern Portuguese society, they can observe preventative behaviors that were developed by different groups. The following examples may help to illustrate this idea:

In 1691, several years after Manuel Curado exercised the office of judicial scribal of the city of Leiria, he asked for a certificate proving that he had been successfully approved in the *Desembargo do Paço* Court[9] as pure of blood and had thus met the

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[8] "sendo caso, que a pessoa, que ouver de socceder neste morgado se casar com pessoa, que tenha raca de Mouro, ou da nacao dos cristaos novos pello mesmo, caso fique inhabil para socceder nelle, sendo Viva a molher, ou Marido com que casarão, E tendo descendentes Vivos, que ficassem do ditto matrimonio; E casandosse depois de Já estarem de posse do dito morgado o percão porque a minha tenção seja vir este morgado para honra, E conservação de minha geração [e] pellos dittos casamentos se fica infamando a familia, E inhabilitando para os descendentes della se inhabilitarem para os officios, E dignidades da Republica".

[9] *Desembargo do Paço* was a court of grace that also provided the examination and background investigations to graduates and other clerks before they started their occupation.

requirements needed to receive the office as owner.[10] He wanted to keep it just if necessary. This strategy was common, and appeared in many other cases. In 1757, a man requested a certificate from the General Council of the Inquisition because his maternal half sister had gone to *Auto da Fé* a month and a half earlier. The printed list of the *Auto* only had written that the mentioned woman punished (the man's sister) had part of New Christian blood without any kind of detail about her origin. The brother did not want to be affected by association. It is for this reason that he requested a certificate stating that their mother was Old Christian (Olival 2004, 181). In 1790, a Lisbon trader went to a public notary and registered all his most relevant documents as familiar of the Holy Office, a post he got in 1758. This was a way of keeping the written records safe and to be able to obtain the necessary certificates at any time (ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, Mç. 34, n.º 76).

At least at the end of the 18th century some institutions stimulated the mentioned preventive behavior through written proofs. In the 1760s and 1770s, when people were rejected to serve the Inquisition because they were poor and died during the process or due to related circumstances, the Inquisition offered its services to deliver a certificate because these individuals were Old Christians (ANTT, *Habilitações Incompletas*, doc. 3271; ANTT, *Conselho Geral*, Lº 366 – year of 1769).

All of these attitudes were a way to overcome the fears and risks inherent in the competitive arena of honor and social status that was established in the 17th-18th centuries in Portugal and in Iberian societies.

The apparatus created to deal with the background investigations

To perform all of these background investigations, the Holy Office and the *Mesa da Consciência* created a network of peripheral resident officials that grew consistently during the Ancien Regime. However, as many historians have underlined, in the case of the Inquisition it did not increase directly in sync with the needs of repression.

As the most rigorous organization performing background investigations, the Holy Office and the *Mesa da Consciência* payed strong attention to their archives. When these institutions were active, their old archives never obtained the statute of historical ones; they were always being used to prove the purity of blood of the descendants. In the case of the Holy Office this practice was clear and the archive was well organized so as to retrieve all needed information. Their existence and organization was crucial in order to support the institution and its iterations with the society. From 1640 onwards, when background investigations were starting, it was mandatory to consult the indices of the archive to calculate the risk involved. That was why many of their contemporaneous catalogues were organized by names, names of persons or family names. Archives, organization and secrecy were three important elements to this culture of genealogical investigations, a culture structured by institutions that specialized in classifying people. In the Portuguese Holy Office tribunals, the archive was named Secret (*Secreto*) to strengthen the ambiance of this central and secure space.

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[10] "Diz Manuel Curado que fazendo-lhe VM mercê da propriedade do ofício de tabelião do Judicial da cidade de Leiria, para efeito de encartar-se nele, lhe mandou VM tirar inquirições *de genere* judicialmente pelo provedor da comarca de Tomar, as quais nesta mesa do Desembargo do Paço se julgaram limpas, em virtude do que o suplicante se encartou, e porque do sobredito lhe é necessário uma certidão". Pede a VM lhe faça mercê mandar se lhe passe do que constar" (ANTT, *Desembargo do Paço*, *Repartição das Justiças e Despacho da Mesa*, Mç. 38, cx. 61).

Background investigations also conditioned sources, such as parish record books (*registos paroquiais*), that documented baptisms, marriages and deaths. There were occasions in which these records were falsified to ensure rights and ancestries (Lima).

In the 18th century, there was an increment of knowledge about background investigations and their proofs both inside and outside the aforementioned institutions. It mainly resulted from an accumulated practice. None of the regulations of the Portuguese Inquisition allocated space to the genealogical inquiries. It was the repeated practice that created a specific jurisprudence and a specialized knowledge. However, in other institutions, during the statutes of the 17th century, such as the Military Orders, the standard of inquiry was included in its pages and more attention was given to this activity.

Specialized officers also appeared to deal with this knowledge. This was the case of *comissários* and notaries working with the *comissários*. In order to be more certain and confident of their loyalty and facilitate their social reception, the Holy Office only appointed members of the clergy to these occupations. Usually the institution did not accept either one of them for these functions. Apart from purity of blood and appropriate behavior, the Inquisition required that they have a degree, were effective parish priests and in churches with good yield to avoid that they accepted to be corrupted by money. The Holy Office took care of the performance of the *comissário* and rebuked those regarded as unreliable subjects.

In different institutions, the actors who performed the same tasks (receiving commissions to hear witnesses and perform other duties outside of the establishments) were also named "comissários".[11] They imitated the Inquisition, which was the model, little by little. In the case of the ecclesiastic powers performing *de genere* qualifications, they used the local parish clergy, the archpriests and the network of foreign vicars in mainland Portugal. In the most consolidated colonial territories of the 18th century (as was the case of Brazil) the foreign vicars were frequently used as clergymen in the most distant localities. The diocesan powers did not create a new network or a new apparatus of officials. The bishoprics' authorities liked to select ecclesiastics enrolled in Holy Office positions (*comissários* and notaries), which, when there were no local resident officials, preferred to use the foreign vicars or the cathedral canons. This means that the three institutions – the Inquisition, bishopric authorities and cathedral chapters – sometimes cooperated spontaneously and that their members learned from each other in remote places.

In addition to these officers associated with the tribunals, there were other important players in this context. It was important to invoke lawyers, procurators (*procuradores de causas)*, and genealogists. All of these players could profit from the processes, as they could be employed to assist with it. Lawyers and procurators were employed to produce petitions and other documents to defend the rights of their clients. Genealogists, however, were the most recognized in these tasks. In some cases, applicants consulted them in order to solve possible rumors about their ancestors and relatives, and in other cases tribunals also consulted them. The books they compiled and their reputation as experts were essential to resolving those types of issues. If necessary, they could swear how certain line of a family or certain person had purity of blood. Genealogy was a structural knowledge that was required for life in Early Modern Iberian society in order to conduct family affaires, especially in intermediate and upper groups. It was a way to justify changes and to insert them in the social continuity or in what could by classify as tradition (Soria Mesa 2004, 22). Genealogy was not an academic knowledge, but it had

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[11] Some examples: ADB, *Processos de habilitação sacerdotal*, pasta 8 (year of 1680), pasta 2007 (year of 1682), pasta 2731 (year of 1733).

rules to be followed and genealogists had to be trustworthy and credible to be well accepted. They were not only interested in the history of generations (family trees); almost all of them were experts in documenting and archiving impure bloodlines, so as to guide those who wanted to avoid harmful marriage. In 1756, an Inquisition *comissário* reported that having consulted a genealogist about a specific family, he answered him with his efforts to archive everyone arrested by the Holy Office, inserting them in his books: "Although in the years 1625-1627 some people were arrested by the Inquisition in the New Street of this city [Braga], they were not ancestors of this family; he knows because he had written in his books all prisoners, and their descendants".[12] The books of the genealogists were really a way to exercise social control, and genealogists knew it.

In 1746, Bento Pais do Amaral, a member of the *Conselho Geral* of the Inquisition, commented in a letter written to a friend: "this kingdom is lost with the genealogical studies, because the boys will not know the Christian doctrine, but the defects of families they all know".[13] Knowledge about families was widespread.

From the beginning of 17th century, some control over the books of Genealogy was established. Mandatory rules were established from at least 1605 onwards. Nobody could print books of coats of arms without a license from the Court official that supervised these distinctions – the *Portugal Rei d'Armas Principal* (*Collecção chronológica da legislação portugueza* Vol. I, 139; Castro 16). In 1608, before printing a book about genealogy, the head of the country's main archive (*guarda-mor da Torre do Tombo*) would supervise it. He required to compare it with the actual books of the Archive to avoid mistakes. He would also write to Madrid to recommend that it would be important to continue preserving a copy of each printed book of Genealogy in the archive, "as it was usual" (AHN, *Estado*, L° 81, f. 123v). There was a need to control this knowledge. If it was exercised anarchically, it could create social danger and high tension.

The culture of background investigations also represented an opportunity for "linajudos", those who intended to extract money or other assets by threatening people who attempted to qualify. These cases were more frequent in Spain, where there were well-organized groups, but some occurred in Portugal as well (ANTT, *Inquisição de Lisboa*, proc. 11413).[14]

Knowledge of Genealogy was a way to defend or attack someone. It gave power. The abilities or expertise of genealogists could mean the difference between a family's honor and dishonor.

In the Ancien Regime society, strongly marked by the obsession of purity of blood and the culture of qualification, choosing the right spouse was essential. The marriage market was the social sphere that was most sensitive to and affected by this topic. A Portuguese genealogist, Don Manuel de Meneses († 1628), commander of the Order of Christ and chief chronicler of the kingdom, used to say that "he wanted to have the occupation of marrying men from Portugal, because only he could give them the adequate woman" (Machado).[15] This sentence was repeated many times in 18th century disputes about purity of blood and genealogy (BNP, *Pomb*. 688, f. 507). Before anyone negotiated

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[12] "Ainda que nos anos de 1625, 26, e 27 se prenderam na Rua Nova desta cidade [Braga] para o Santo Ofício, não foram ascendentes desta família; porque todos os presos, e seus descendentes tem escritos nos seus cadernos" (ANTT, *Habilitações Incompletas*, doc. 1738, f. 20).

[13] "Este reino está perdido com os estudos genealógicos, porque os muchachos não saberão eles a doutrina cristã, porém os defeitos das famílias todos os sabem" (ANTT, *Habilitações do Santo Ofício*, *António*, Mç. 36, doc. 900, 97-97v).

[14] About Spain, see: Soria Mesa; Pike; Giménez Carrillo 2011, 2013, 234-240, 2016, 169-172.

[15] "Dezejar ter officio de casar os homens de Portugal, porque só elle lhes poderia dar a cada hum mulher que lhe competisse".

marriage, it was common to consult a genealogist as a way to prevent risks. It was not only the nobility who did so; lower social groups sometimes consulted parish priests or other knowledgeable persons.

Indeed, the priests used to be well informed on the subject. It was common in inquiries for qualifications at the behest of the church authorities that the arriving *comissário* contacted the parish priest to ask two things: (1) immediate information about an applicant's purity of blood; (2) a list of witnesses who knew the candidate. All the players had to swear that they were doing this work with confidentiality.[16] The Inquisition itself appealed to parish priests to nominate witnesses, especially when the *comissário* was someone who lived out of town (Olival et al. 345–349). The parish priests were extremely powerful within the localities. They knew who were the oldest old Christians (in terms of chronological age) and the most reliable people to testify about someone. They were able to organize "a social network around the applicant" (Glesener 171). In short, they had symbolic and effective power over the community's relationships and this power was reinforced through background inquiries.

The qualifications were based on witnesses and oral depositions that were written by a scribe. This was a common practice among the various types of investigations performed by different Portuguese institutions. In this context testimonies could be easily manipulated and the selection of witnesses was a central issue. The qualifications explored the local inter-knowledge in the societies, particularly in the case of Portugal, because the oral depositions (written by a scribe or a notary) were enough to prove the quality.[17] For instance, in the background investigations for the Castilian Military Orders the oral depositions were not sufficient. It was necessary, particularly in the 18th century, to confirm the status of the candidate with material proofs such as written documents and coats of arms on the facades of buildings or elsewhere.

There was knowledge on the background investigations, manipulated by experts and there was a detailed and specialized vocabulary surrounding and with regards to this practice. In general it was a vocabulary used to classify people, occupations, religious origins, social status and results of the qualification process.

In the late 1770's, the Military Orders *comissário*'s report on the maternal grandparents of an applicant whose grandparents were born in the municipality of Fráguas (*comarca* of *Lamego*) included the following details: "They never had any note here. They lived in the company of their parents without mechanical or vileness, but they had nor status neither any kind of treatment only living by their resources, being served by themselves, without servants or beasts. They used to help their parents in their own farms."[18] During this period occupations were analyzed and divided into mechanical and

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[16] Some examples for the late 17th century and for the first half of the 18th century: ANTT, *Câmara Eclesiástica de Lisboa, Habilitações de genere*, Mç. 185, proc. 7; Mç, 291, proc. 46; Mç. 363, proc. 59; ADB, *Habilitação de Ordenação sacerdotal*, pasta 2211. ADE, *Câmara Eclesiástica de Évora*, *Ordens Menores*, Mç. 31, doc. 892, f. 5v, 12; doc. 893, f. 23v, 30; ADE, *Câmara Eclesiástica de Évora*, *Ordens Menores*, Mç. 107, doc. 1598, f. 47v-48.

[17] In 1599, in São Miguel, Azores, in the parish of San Roque of Rosto de Cão testified "João Gonçalves, cattleman, mulatto man resident in the said parish" of nearly 90 years about someone who has been resident in the place. He said he never heard that the inquired family were new Christians and if there was fame "it was said in the neighborhood and parish because it was a place of little traffic, and people" (ANTT, *Habilitações do Santo Ofício, Aparício*, Mç. 1, doc. 1). This is only one example of many other similar about how it works in the local inter-knowledge societies. It was not usual to hear mulattos as witnesses.

[18] "[…] nunca tiveram cá nota alguma vivendo na companhia de seus pais sem mecânica nem vileza; mas não tinham estado algum nem tratamento mais do que viverem com o seu servindo-se a si mesmo, sem criados nem bestas ajudando seus pais nas suas próprias fazendas" (ANTT, *Habilitações da Ordem de Cristo*, Letra A, Mç. 35, doc. 1).

liberal arts. The former group received a negative reference, but there was a hierarchy in its composition. Some were considered bad and classified as vile or, even worse, catalogued as sordid. In the middle there was the classification "strongly vile" (vilíssima). Almost everybody in the 17th and 18th centuries knew the levels of this hierarchy.

In the opposite sense, there were posts that had the best reputation ("ofícios de melhor reputação") and others in which the witnesses were expected to disclose whether or not the occupation was performed "in a noble style."[19]

When witnesses did not use the kind of classifications cited above, they described the context and lifestyle in which the person or his ancestors lived. There was a pattern of nobility, a neutral background and a plebeian context, in a descending order. All of this was full of classified descriptions.

Sometimes they described the aspirant's occupation and style of life with a contrasting conjunction. It was the mentioned adversative that explained the exclusion, such as in the following cases:

- António João: "he is an old Christian but he farms, digs, and goes about shoeless" (year of 1693 - ANTT, *Conselho Geral*, Lº 36, f. 4).
- "Father Francisco de Figueiredo Serrão Vicar in Escalhão: Old Christian and well behaved, but poor" (year of 1695 - ANTT, *Conselho Geral*, Lº 36, f. 61).
- "Francisco Fernandes son of Manuel Fernandes, and Maria Jorge: Old Christian but wood carver for salary" (year of 1695 - ANTT, *Conselho Geral*, Lº 36, f. 61).
- "Manuel Duarte living in Avelal de Cima, son of Manuel Duarte and Maria Fernandes: he is Old Christian, but he doesn't live with any kind of status (year of 1703 - ANTT, *Conselho Geral*, Lº 36, f. 164) .[20]

The second part of the cited descriptions was always negative and decisive in the decision. It prevailed. The power of the aforementioned pictures was so great that even institutions that did not inquire into nobility, such as the Inquisition, considered an individual's lifestyle.

For this reason, and because it was relevant to a family with Jewish or another problematical origin (such as mulatto or Moorish blood), all social groups tried to insert their sons into an ecclesiastic career, as was observed in the Tribunal of Évora in 1741 through the following interesting note about inter-knowledge in rural communities:

> […] It is not credible that if there was some slight rumor of these defects [in the family of a candidate] any witness did not speak about because in the churches of the countryside there is only one Mass but everybody come together and listen with attention the warnings and orders that the parish priests publishes. And to have a clergyman son is the thing they most estimate and they talk more about. Thus it seems impossible that if there were some known defects they do not comment about. (ANTT, Habilitação do Santo Ofício, Bernardo, Mç. 13, doc. 488, f. 1-3) [21]

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[19] The witnesses could say "não sabe a graduação da nobreza que tem este ofício" -1753, Loures, near Lisbon - (ANTT, *Habilitação da Ordem de Cristo*, Letra J, Mç.13, doc. 7).

[20] "não se trata com estimação".

[21] " […] Não é crível que se houvesse algum leve rumor destes defeitos não falassem alguma testemunha neles porque nas igrejas do campo só há uma missa contudo que todos se juntam e ouvem com toda a atenção as admoestações e mandado que lhe publicam os seus párocos, e é para eles o despacho de um filho clérigo a coisa que mais estimam e em que mais falam, e desta forma parece impossível que se houvesse uns defeitos tão conhecidos os calassem."

To involve a son in an ecclesiastic career meant a double protection: it protected against impurity of blood and also represented social distinction.

Addressing the global social classifications there were people noted or someone with a stain ("pessoas com nota ou com mancha"). Noted did not reflect distinguished, but the opposite: someone with a patch in his blood. There were people qualified (*habilitada*) in certain court and others who were not.

In 1593, in Lisbon, a witness remarked about a German applicant: "neither he nor his ancestors have race or stain of Moors, infidels, Jews, New Christians, heretics and schismatics, converts or members of any sect. I knew it by the fame that ran in Anvers and between foreigners and Portuguese people who were in this city¨ [Lisbon] (ANTT, *Habilitação do Santo Ofício*, *João*, Mç. 1, doc. 10). The obsession with purity of blood and the practice of background investigations helped to develop the art of cataloguing. The same words or sentiments were repeated by clergymen, secular and ecclesiastic authorities, notaries and the population inside Portugal as well as throughout different points of the colonial Empire. The practice of background investigations contributed to the diffusion of the cited vocabulary and the system of social classification itself. They were documented in the archives of the community, inserted in its collective memory.

As Pierre Bourdieu advised, classifications "owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will" (Bourdieu 246).

To nickname somebody "Jew" was one of the worst insults that someone could give to another person. However, the Ancien Regime society's obsession was not restricted to purity of blood. It was also about social status. In the 17th century those who had no proper clothing, adequate to their social status, were even relieved of hearing Mass on Sundays (Soares Trat. IV, cap. 1 § 5). The public sphere prevailed over everything, including religious duties. It was for this reason that the effects that resulted from the processes of qualification were deeply felt. They defined and recreated the person. Plebeian, New Christian, noble were more than words of classification. They marked social and juridical status in a society that was defined as structurally unequal. The practice of the genealogical investigations was inserted into this entirely contextual environment. It would be very limited to consider them as having been simple administrative procedures.

Conclusions

In short, background investigations were a way in which to include /exclude someone into the social and political community in its broader sense. They also represented a way of inserting and spreading the system of social classification (vocabulary, notions and its fundaments) within a hierarchical society.

Through them the individual became aware of his social position and simultaneously became conscious of the strategy needed to develop to improve, conceal or subvert his or her position.

Especially if someone was New Christian, member of one of the intermediate groups or of the lower strata of the hierarchy of the nobility, he needed to learn the rules and strategies to overtake these proofs without problems. He needed to invest in it. To face them one day should be something for which to be prepared long time before, starting with adopting a noble style of life, using horses and servants or even slaves; it could be useful to collect documental proofs about the strengths conquered by the family, consanguineous and other relatives in a broad sense. Money and a good relational network were vital. To have information about other processes and smart and helpful genealogists, procurators or even lawyers could also help. To arrange all of these issues could take

more than a generation. It was necessary to take this time in order to consolidate a status in the surroundings, as the genealogical investigations were decided upon based on the opinions of others (witnesses).

These qualifications were not a rare practice of Common Law. A large proportion of the society was confronted with them, especially through the clergy. If they were not applicants, they could be witnesses.

Background investigations helped to put each one in his or her position or even to promote a family in the competitive and theatrical social game in which everybody was implicated in an unequal and hierarchical society. They were much more than a bureaucratic process to overcome. It required a global approach to be able to interpret the steps of the procedure and to face it successfully. Background investigations or their results could also be conditioned or confined trough social relationships. The sphere of marriage provides the best example.

In other words, background investigations were an issue of political culture of the Ancien Regime for most social groups, starting with the intermediate ones.

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