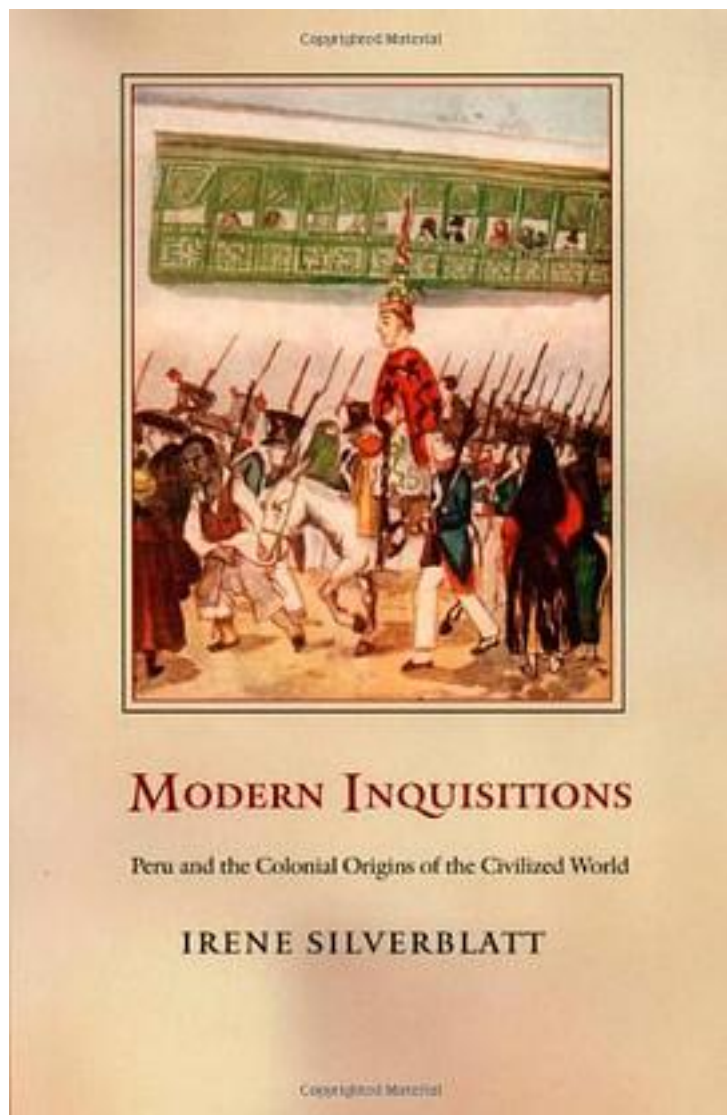


Modern Inquisitions



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Looking for a precedent that eased the way for "civilized" people to embrace fascism in the twentieth-century, Hannah Arendt found it in nineteenth-century colonialism, with its mix of bureaucratic rule, racial superiority, and appeals to rationality. "Modern Inquisitions" takes Arendt's insights about the barbaric underside of modern Western civilization and moves them back in time several hundred years to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the Spanish empire dominated the globe. Irene Silverblatt argues that the modern bureaucratic state developed in tandem with colonialism and that its genesis is especially evident in the machinations of Spanish Inquisition. She illuminates the intricate "dance of bureaucracy and race" evident in the Inquisition's persecution of scores of Spanish subjects in colonial Peru. Drawing on extensive archival research in Lima, Silverblatt highlights what Spanish trial records, evangelizing sermons, and missionary guides say about how the emerging modern world was understood, experienced, and constructed by colonists and Inquisition officials: Early missionaries preached about world history and the "races" that inhabited the globe; Inquisitors, able bureaucrats, turned executions into "reasons of state"; royal authorities spoke of grand conspiracies of Jews, merchants, Indians, and blacks; "stained" blood - carried by Indians, blacks, and those of Jewish and Moorish descent - became marks of deficient character and ability. Engaging with the state formation theories not only of Arendt but also of others including Max Weber, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Mick Taussig, "Modern Inquisitions" forces the reader to confront the idea that the modern state, with its capacity to rationalize extreme violence, is in fact a product of the Inquisition rather than a progression beyond it.

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