

Marta Zambrano's *Trabajadores, villanos y amantes: Encuentros entre indígenas y españoles en la ciudad letrada*

Joanne rappaport | Georgetown University

Zambrano Escovar, Marta. *Trabajadores, villanos y amantes: Encuentros entre indígenas y españoles en la ciudad letrada. Santa Fe de Bogotá (1550-1650)*. Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia, 2008. 271 pages; plates, charts.



Ángel Rama's *La ciudad letrada* (1984) proposed that the Spanish American colonial world was a "lettered city," a social constellation built on an ideology of the primacy of the written word. In her rich interpretation of the judicial and notarial archives of 16th and 17th-century Santa Fe (today Bogotá, Colombia), Colombian anthropologist Marta Zambrano demonstrates just what being part of a "lettered city" meant for the city's indigenous inhabitants: how legal writing was constituted by and constitutive of the gendered and ethnic hierarchies upon which the colonial system was constructed.

Trabajadores, villanos y amantes focuses on Santa Fe, a peripheral urban center in comparison to colonial Lima or Mexico City and even more so in contrast to European cities of the period. Yet, as Zambrano's insightful ethnographic readings of the colonial archive demonstrate, in the dealings of the most marginal inhabitants of this colonial backwater with the judicial authorities we can discern the evolution of modern forms of social control and surveillance before they appear in Europe, a process that occurred against a backdrop of struggles among the Spanish

EMISFÉRICA

elite to control and exploit Native labor. Zambrano persuasively juxtaposes distinct types of judicial and notarial documentation involving indigenous men and women—cases of theft, concubinage, and violent behavior (in brawls in the plebeian sector, against women)—to convincingly demonstrate how the scripted nature of the judicial process painted men as aggressors and women as victims while typecasting Native men as violent or drunken brutes. Through a remarkable series of narratives of criminal defenses in which the accused justified their misconduct by appeals to drunkenness, she also shows how the defendants themselves were forced to assume the scripts of those sitting in their judgment in order to escape the severe penalties dealt out to the guilty.

The criminal cases that Zambrano peruses, which are drawn from the Archivo General de la Nación in Bogotá, paint a picture of increasing control over the leisure time and sexual activities of indigenous men and women. Yet *Trabajadores, villanos y amantes* also points to the notarial record as a space in which Native people, particularly women, had broader, less-scripted opportunities to compose their own personal narratives, especially in their wills. In these documents, which privilege everyday life over the atypical and occasionally spectacular narratives of the judicial sphere, indigenous actors are the protagonists; here, they are free to determine what is important to *them*, in contrast to the ways they are typecast by colonial institutions.

While Zambrano lays emphasis on her interpretation of the ways the lettered city controlled its labor force during non-working hours, she is more understated when it comes to foregrounding the contributions she makes toward deconstructing the standard portrait of an ethnically segregated society that is found in most historical texts: Native people in the countryside, Africans in the mines or on plantations, and Spaniards and mestizos in urban areas. Instead, she paints a multifaceted portrait of an urban landscape in which indigenous migrants derive their legal and social identities not only from their indigenous status but also from their membership in various occupational categories. She shows a city in which different caste groups—her useful but not entirely accurate gloss, given that the term was not used in Santa Fe in the period—lived and interacted in close proximity. Strikingly, she depicts a colonial scheme shot through with inequality, one that is not based on race but rather antedates racial discourse, even if the discursive and judicial means of distinguishing *indios* from Africans, *mestizos*, mulattos, or Spaniards was gendered in ways that remind us of racial categorization. This is particularly clear in Zambrano's treatment of concubinage, which in 17th-century Santa Fe was classified as a crime worthy of punishment, its detection institutionalized in the *ronda*, or patrol, which, on the basis of intelligence-gathering, sought out cohabiting couples to expose and punish them. In some cases, both the man and the woman were Native, but it was more likely that the couple would be mixed, the woman being indigenous. The narrative that emerges from the numerous concubinage cases Zambrano studies, is one in which the perpetrators are coded by ethnicity, geography, and marital status in predictable ways: single indigenous women are sent back to their communities of origin to live under the supervision of Native authorities; non-indigenous

men are fined; and married women, especially Spaniards, are quietly sent back to the seclusion of their homes.

Trabajadores, villanos y amantes engages in a specifically *ethnographic* reading of the historical sources, a methodological innovation and one of Zambrano's most significant contributions, particularly in the Colombian historiographical landscape, where indigenous people continue to be silent victims and Native people living in urban environments are invisible in the pages of many colonial history texts. Zambrano argues that it is possible to read an archival document as an ethnographic scenario through which we can tease out the social dynamics of colonialism by deconstructing the discourses used by the various actors. Zambrano argues that what makes her methodology ethnographic is that she "inquired into who wrote [the documents], from where, for whom, with what ends, and what effects they had. . . (197)" It seems to me that this is how all scholars working with historical documents must approach their sources, and that Zambrano is actually doing much more than this. To my mind, what makes *Trabajadores, villanos y amantes* stand out is that Zambrano's mode of reading archival documents is not simply a method for sifting through sources in order to determine their validity; rather, the "who, what, and why" is the very stuff of her narrative: it *becomes* the ethnographic scenario she is investigating. Even more so than her argument concerning the gendered nature of the lettered city in its articulation with Native people—which is elegant and certainly a contribution to the literature—I think that her methodological choices are what make this an exemplary text.

Joanne Rappaport es profesora de antropología en Georgetown University. Es autora de *Intercultural Utopias: Public Intellectuals, Cultural Experimentation, and Ethnic Dialogue in Colombia* (Duke, 2005) y co-autora, con el historiador de arte Tom Cummins, de *Beyond the Lettered City: Alphabetic Literacy and Visuality in the Andes, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Duke, de próxima publicación en 2010). Sus intereses incluyen métodos de investigación colaborativa y la raza en el primer momento del periodo moderno.

Obras citadas

Rama, Ángel. 1984. *La ciudad letrada*. Hanover, NH: Ediciones del Norte.

-----, 1996. *The Lettered City*. Translated by John Charles Chasteen. Durham: Duke University Press.