Ambivalence in Racial and Urban Discourse in *Vida y Virtudes de la Venerable Madre Francisca María del Niño Jesús* (1723)

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Abstract
The spiritual biography *Vida y Virtudes de la Venerable Madre Francisca María del Niño Jesús, Religiosa professa en el Real Convento de Carmelitas Descalzas de la ciudad de Santa Fé dedicada a la serenissima Reyna de los Angeles María Santissima de el Carmen*, compiled and edited by Fray Pedro Pablo de Villamor, presents the life and miracles of an exemplary prioress in late 17th and early 18th century Nueva Granada in terms that simultaneously exalt her indigenous-like humility and her peninsular lineage. This essay addresses the text's contradictory use of racial and urban discourse to promote Madre Francisca's exemplarity and sheds light on the incipient criollo consciousness emerging in Nueva Granada.

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Until recently *Vida y Virtudes* has received limited scholarly attention. In her article “*El cuerpo ausente: el lugar del cuerpo místico en la Nueva Granada del siglo XVII*” María Piedad Quevedo includes *Vida y Virtudes* in her study of nuns’ mystical practices in Nueva Granada. She claims that the imitation of Jesus’ suffering was fundamental in developing nuns’ ascetic practices and

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1 The text is abbreviated as *Vida y Virtudes* in the rest of the document.
2 The Spanish Empire established a racial hierarchy in their overseas colonies. Spaniards born on the Iberian Peninsula, *peninsulares*, considered themselves purer in blood. They were the elite followed in rank by American-born Spaniards called *criollos*. Mestizos, Africans, and Indians belonged to the lower classes. See R. Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City*, U of Wisconsin Press, 1994. Children of Spanish and Indian unions, *mestizos*, and those of Spanish and African unions, *mulattos*, were viewed by Spaniards as inferior due to their “impure” blood. These social classes or *castas*, including slaves, were discriminated against in law and custom but were, nonetheless, considered superior to Indians. See *The Atlantic World: Europeans, Africans, Indians, and Their Shared History*, 1400-1900. Pp. 186.
a key element in women’s relationship to their physical bodies. Quevedo’s ensuing book *Un cuerpo para el espíritu. Mística de la Nueva Granada: El cuerpo, el gusto y el asco* 1680-1750 examines issues of body, desire, and repulsion in four Nueva Granada spiritual biographies including *Vida y Virtudes*. Jaime Borja Gómez’s also examines *Vida y Virtudes* in his discussion of the historic value of spiritual biographies or *vidas ejemplares*. He claims colonial Spanish American cities used *vidas* to lobby for the sanctification of local exemplary individuals. Spiritual biographies were useful in promoting local piety, presenting ideal behavior and morals, while simultaneously attempting to influence the Vatican. He notes that despite Nueva Granada’s enthusiastic endorsement of at least seven exemplars in the 17th and 18th century, only Pedro Claver’s case achieved beatification (55). In another article, Borja Gomez explores bodily mortification as a recurrent trope in spiritual biographies in Nueva Granada, including *Vida y Virtudes*. Women’s bodies were understood as “a familiar enemy” (my translation) that needed to be controlled and subjected to pain, torture, and abstinence in order to save one’s soul. He claims that Madre Francisca’s use of uncomfortable sandals and indigenous attire belonging to Indian servants were lighter forms of mortification (“Cuerpo” 279). Although not focusing specifically on *Vida y Virtudes*, two texts offer invaluable information on the cultural and historical conditions in Nueva Granada. The art historical treaty, *Tesoros Artísticos del Convento de las Carmelitas Descalzas de Santa Fé de Bogotá* contextualizes the historical and cultural aspects of life in the Carmelite convent home to Madre Francisca. Equally helpful, *Las místicas de Nueva Granada* by Clara Herrera, analyzes autobiographies written by religious women and the writing strategies used to ensure acceptance by the male hegemony. Herrera proposes that Nueva Granada’s isolation from vice-regal and monarchical rule allow these writers to avoid censure and write more freely than their counterparts.

Despite the current research on *Vida y Virtudes*, the text has yet to be studied for its ambivalent approach towards race and ethnicity. This essay discusses how Madre Francisca is simultaneously edified in terms that value both her American and her peninsular traits suggesting the emergence of an incipient *criollo* consciousness in Nueva Granada.

An Introduction to the Text

Madre Francisca María del Niño Jesús was born in 1665 as Francisca María Leonel de Caycedo to a noble, *criollo* family in Santa Fé de Bogotá, the administrative center of the recently organized Viceroyalty of New Granada.¹ Francisca insisted on following her religious vocation and against her father’s wishes joined the *Convento de las Carmelitas Descalzas de la ciudad de Santa Fé del Nuevo Reino de Granada*, a convent for noble *criollas* founded in 1606.² Francisca took her

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1 In the early 16th century the Nuevo Reino de Granada was administered from Lima, the capital of the Viceroyalty of Peru. The Viceroyalty of New Granada was established on May 27, 1717 with jurisdiction over what now is Colombia, Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela. An audiencia was organized soon after in Santa Fé de Bogotá making this city one of the principal administrative centers of the Spanish territories in the New World along with Lima and Mexico. The Viceroyalty of New Granada was short lived as it was suppressed in 1723 and only reestablished until 1739. See José Manuel Groot, *Historia Eclesiástica y Civil de Nueva Granada*.

2 The first Carmelite convent in the Spanish colonies was established in Puebla, Mexico in 1586 by a group of elite women who sought a place of spiritual refuge. In Santa Fé de Bogota the first Carmelite convent was organized in 1606. However, the Nuevo Granada convent was supervised by other religious orders and its constitutions did not adhere faithfully to Santa Teresa de Jesús’ 16th century reforms. See *Historia del Convento del Carmelo Alto*. Pp. 20-21.

3 On August 1606, the noble *criollia* widow, Doña Elvira de Padilla received authorization from the Archbishop and the Real Audencia to establish the religious community in her residence. During her lifetime, Padilla controlled the administration of the convent and retained its economic and political autonomy. See *Tesores Artísticos del Convento de las Carmelitas Descalzas de Santa Fé de Bogota*. p 48-51.
vows in 1691 and died in 1708.6

At the convent Madre Francisca worked in a variety of positions as ropera, portera, escucha, clavaria, encargada de sacristía, maestra de novicias, and subprioress (Fajardo 72). She was elected prioress and remained as the convent’s spiritual and administrative leader “por tres trienios” (185).

It was during this period that her male confessor, concerned with the “frágil memoria y dado que confesores tienen muchos discípulos” asked her to record her experiences “para tener a la vista copia do el orden de su vida” (60-62). Madre Francisca’s testimony “que dio a sus confesores en escrito de su mandato, was edited posthumously by Fray Villamor and published as Vida y Virtudes including relevant witness testimonies, confessors’ notes, and official documents.

Villamor completed Vida y Virtudes in 1720, only twelve years after Madre Francisca’s death. The manuscript was shipped to Spain where it was reviewed and approved for publication between the years of 1721 and 1722. The book was eventually published in Madrid in 1723. It is likely that manuscript copies of Vida y Virtudes circulated in Nueva Granada and the colonies years before its actual publication and distribution in Spain.8

Vida y Virtudes belongs to the genre of vidas espirituales, religious journals written by a nun under the guidance or mandate of a male ecclesiastical authority to inspire and edify readers. Two variations of the genre emerged: the confessional autobiography, usually written by the nun and directed towards the confessor, and the religious biography, written by a nun about another nun or nuns in the convent, or by a priest about a nun or nuns.9 In this second variation, male clergy writing and compiling vidas would usually modify the nuns’ writing, sometimes without giving the women any credit for their own words. The language of the writer nun had to be polished by the lettered priest since the language of women was considered rustic (Franco 37). This generalized practice of male editing and manipulation of women’s words and ideas led to the intellectual appropriation of women’s writing and the inappropriate disclosure of female experiences meant to be confidential (Lavrín 31).

Vida y Virtudes is organized into four books or sections, with fifteen, twenty four, twenty three, and twelve chapters respectively. The text integrates elements of the two variations of the vida genre by combining autobiographical sections written by the nun with biographical sections completed by the biographer. In other words, Madre Francisca’s penned account is embedded in Villamor’s biographical compilation. In the prologue, he explains the text’s hybridity, defends his methodology, and enumerates the various sources that inform his narrative. While he attributes authorship of the first twenty-two chapters to Madre Francisca, he admits to weaving in information procured from “personas graves y fidedignas, noticias que constan de las informaciones hechas por el Arzobispo a pedimento de los procuradores de esta ciudad ” (2).10 However,

6  See The Mystic of Tunja: The Writings of Madre Castillo, 1671-1742. P. 103.
7  Trienio is a period of three years. Hence, Madre Francisca María was leader of her convent for nine consecutive years beginning in 1696. According to Fajardo in Tesoros Artísticos del Convento de las Carmelitas Descalzas de Santa Fé de Bogotá, Madre Francisca was elected prioress in 1696, 1699, and 1702. Pp. 78.
8  Nueva Granada did not have a printing press until 1738. See Roldán p. 660. Hence, it is quite likely that manuscript copies of the text circulated among readers wishing to know more about the exemplary woman. Manuscript circulation permitted a controlled and limited diffusion of texts, avoided censorship, the need for permits and authorizations, and expensive printing costs. See Roger Chartier’s The Author’s Hand and the Printer’s Mind, pp. 59-63.
10  The Archbishop compiled all witness’ testimonies that Villamor later used to populate Madre Francisca’s biographical compendium. The document, titled Informaciones de la Vida y Virtudes de la Madre Francisca del Niño Jesús, is housed in the Archivo General de la Nación in Colombia, Concolonias, Conventos, tomo p. 66. See Tesoros Artísticos del Convento de las Carmelitas Descalzas de Santa Fé de Bogotá, pp 73-74.
Villamor chooses to differentiate between his voice and Madre Francisca’s. He highlights the nun’s words in italics and packs her “direct” quotes with his personal rendition of events witnessed as Madre Francisca’s confessor and as a regular visitor to the convent. He notes that the nun, after writing the initial chapters, decided instead to dictate her experiences to her first confessor, Father Martín Niño. Villamor distinguishes Madre Francisca’s oral testimony from her written words by placing quotation marks on Niño’s transcription. Villamor’s interest in preserving Madre Francisca’s true voice authorizes her testimony and inscribes it, as well, as an act of obedience to superior authority figures, her male confessors. Despite Villamor’s efforts to keep Madre Francisca’s testimony authentic and separate from other authorial voices, one should assume that he edited Martín Niño’s transcript of Madre Francisca’s oral testimony.

The text’s multiplicity of authors, voices, and literary strategies, to include autobiography, testimony, biblical references, witness testimonies, confessors’ narratives, and public documentation, creates a fascinating layering of narrative points of views and sources of evidence. It is not my intention to discuss or dissect the origin and function of these authorial voices and sources although it is certainly necessary to be aware of them. In regards to authorship I accept Villamor as the main editor and compiler of Madre Francisca’s life account and recognize his control over what to include and how to portray her in the narrative.

The Ambivalent Racial Discourse in *Vida y Virtudes*

*Vida y Virtudes* stands out among other spiritual biographies by distancing itself from a hegemonic discourse of white, peninsular superiority traditionally endorsed by this genre. Instead, the text asserts an ambivalent stance towards race. The religious exemplar is simultaneously presented in terms of two conflicting racial constructions: her pure lineage and her indigenous-like demeanor and attire. While the account emphasizes Francisca’s noble Spanish lineage and her family’s privileged social and economic status in colonial society, the account also inscribes her internal and external traits in indigenous terms not traditionally observed in the genre.

The text’s ambivalence towards race is noteworthy as the genre of spiritual biographies, or *vidas*, traditionally emphasized the dominant values of the society, in particular those referencing racial difference. Valerie Benoist claims that in black nuns’ spiritual biographies written or compiled by their white, male confessors the women in question underwent a “whitening” of their personality and physical characteristics. This *blanqueamiento* was intended to make the women of color non-threatening to the established hierarchies and consequently, more acceptable as religious role models (13-26). Moreover, black nuns’ biographers shied away from emphasizing the women’s racial traits and any stereotypes associated with their skin color. Given Villamor’s ambivalent racial stance in *Vida y Virtudes*, the characterization of Madre Francisca posing and identifying herself as one of indigenous origins and traits begs for further scrutiny.

Madre Francisca’s representation as an indigenous woman runs parallel alongside references to her noble status. In the prologue, Villamor states that Madre Francisca is “noble en sangre... pero mucho más ilustre por sus obras.” In Chapter Two he claims that Madre Francisca was born in Santa Fé de Bogota and was the legitimate daughter of Francisca Floriano Maldonado and Fernando Leónel de Caycedo. Madre Francisca’s father belonged to the Orden de Santiago, ev-

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11 Spiritual women writers were constructed in the texts as writing against their volition and only as an act of obedience to a male authority. This practice ensured authenticity to the text and prevented it from discredit. See also Kristine Ibsen’s study *Women’s Spiritual Autobiography in Colonial Spanish America* for an explanation of how spiritual narratives buttressed the hierarchy of power.
idencing the family’s *limpieza de sangre* and “claro linaje.” The nun’s family is “de viejos cristianos” meaning free of Jewish and Moorish ancestors and worthy of honor. Also, the Caycedo family enjoyed “bienes de fortuna” and an important position in the criollo elite (12). After establishing the family’s lineage and honor Villamor embarks on the indigenous construction of the nun. He explains that Madre Francisca insisted on being called “chinita” a term used to refer to an Indian servant girl (12). According to the text, Francisca took on this nickname to counteract her frustration with her noble and wealthy status. Villamor justifies the woman’s assumed name as a demonstration of fortitude and resolution to follow the humble life of Jesus Christ. He argues that despite her impeccable genealogy and purity of blood, Madre Francisca preferred to be perceived as an indigenous woman (12). Taking on the racial and gender characteristics of individuals at the bottom of the social hierarchy constituted a way for Madre Francisca to solidify her image of exemplary humility, showcase her desire to serve, and practice light mortification (Borja Gómez, “Cuerpo” 279). Alison Weber’s seminal study on Santa Teresa de Jesús, the reformer of the Carmelite Order, offers an alternative understanding of Madre Francisca’s self-referential language. Weber suggests that women writers practiced a “rhetoric of femininity” where female self-deprecation had a different function than the traditional humility topoi. This “was the only self-referential language available to women” (11). Weber’s proposition allows us to consider Madre Francisca’s self-deprecation as a powerless Indian woman as a mechanism to refer to herself in a way that would be approved by her male readers and censors.

Quevedo offers yet another explanation. She claims that for many religious women humility and self-deprecation were ways of gaining pleasure from an undesirable situation. She theorizes that Nueva Granada mystics engaged in activities considered disgusting and demeaning as a way to imitate the suffering of Christ. The penitent nun gained psychological pleasure from willingly undertaking activities that repulsed others. In the process, she tortured and castigated her body, preventing any physical or psychological gratification. In Madre Francisca’s case, Quevedo proposes that the social undesirability of indigenous women provides the nun with the pleasure of impersonating a disgusting and even loathed individual (“Cuerpo” 69-78).

The indigenous presentation of Madre Francisca is further emphasized through her choice of accouterments, in particular her decision to wear *alpargatas*, a rustic sandal used by poor, indigenous women and men. Madre Francisca’s desire to wear these shoes originated after experiencing a mystical vision of the Virgin Mary holding Baby Jesus donned in *alpargatas* (166). This choice of attire is reemphasized in Chapter One of Book One where Villamor describes her as a “caminante y peregrina en este mundo” who had the custom of “calzarse alpargatas que usan los indios carteros y viajantes, que son muy toscas y ásperas” (1-2). Curiously, Francisca’s preference for the simple and uncomfortable footwear evidences the convent’s laxity in adhering to the order’s 16th century reforms. Santa Teresa de Jesús (1515-1582), the order’s charismatic reformer, insisted in a life of humility, enclosure, and prayer where Madre Francisca’s *alpargatas* would have been the norm and not a practice of exceptional humility. The fact that her actions are considered extreme might reveal that the religious community lived in privilege and distant from Santa Teresa’s vision.

The veil was another way for Madre Francisca to identify herself with the indigenous community. When Francisca took her vows on July 14, 1692, she requested permission to wear the white veil, instead of the prestigious black veil. Choir or black-veiled nuns paid a full dowry, were literate, played an instrument or sang, and enjoyed a privileged status within the convent. On the other hand, white-veiled or lay nuns (*legas*) were women from a lower social status with a lower dowry to pay upon joining the convent but could not vote or hold administrative po-
They worked as cooks, nurses, and other skilled laborers as part of the servant class. A convent's rules and regulations guided the social and racial segregation of the nuns and reflected the social and economic distinctions existing in colonial society (Lavrín 188). In Madre Francisca's convent, the governing constitutions specifically delineated the social status and the racial categorization or castes of nuns who could profess in each of the categories. The black veiled nuns had to be peninsular women of clean lineage and of good family and reputation. The white veiled nuns could be Spanish (white), mestizo, or quadroon (25% white). Indian, black and lower caste women were not allowed to profess (Perpetuo Socorro and Salgado 146-147).

In addition to class and racial segregation within convents, Diaz claims that nuns also experienced differences in education and literacy. However, women of modest origins nonetheless had some opportunities for literacy and education that would not be available outside of the convent (“Convent” 159-165). Similarly, Darcy Donahue suggests that reading and writing activities inside the convent, while providing educational opportunities to nuns of all castes, also had the advantage of fostering community between black veiled nuns from noble families and white veiled illiterate nuns (118-136). Diaz and Donahue's research allows us to reconsider the nun's insistence on donning a white veil. Madre Francisca's apparently inconsequential desire to take the white, and not the black veil, would not only signal her lower status and prohibit her access to positions of power and leadership (Ibsen 3). Madre Francisca would also be positioning herself as a person of inferior or no education and, in the process, assuming the perceived lack of education and illiteracy of indigenous women.

Ignoring the repercussions of her decision, Francisca insisted on working in the kitchen and helping out with domestic chores, as would an indigenous novicia. However, the other nuns refused to let her profess with a white veil and objected to her undertaking demeaning tasks. Eventually Francisca convinced her superiors to allow her to help out with meager chores, as was her will.

Even after being elected prioress Francisca persisted in presenting herself as a young indigenous girl. She demanded to be called “chinita” and “con este nombre se apedillaba lo restante de su vida y quisiera que asi la nombrasen todos según el bajo concepto y estimación humilde que de si tenía” (195). To emphasize her choice appellative, she commissioned a painting of the virgin to adorn her chair so that all nuns would consider her an “india sirviente de la madre de Dios” (196). Madre Francisca's self-presentation as an Indian woman was problematic as a nun and even more controversial as prioress of her community. Indian women in the religious spheres suffered a double alienation by virtue of their sex and their race. Moreover, the Catholic Church actively sought to control and exclude Indian women from the top tiers and religious leadership on the grounds that these women could not understand the meaning and responsibilities of monastic life. Likewise, the religious community feared that indigenous nuns were too sensual to respect their vows of chastity, were intellectually inferior, and did not have the constancy and ability for suffering and penance that white nuns exhibited. It was not until 1724 that the first convent for indigenous nuns, the Convent of Corpus Christi, was founded in New Spain. Convents in Nueva Granada or elsewhere in the colonies did not allow indigenous women to take vows. Women of

12 See Las místicas de Nueva Granada: Tres casos de busqueda de la perfección y la construcción de santidad for an examination of the spiritual narrative of Sister María de Jesús, a white veiled nun from Nueva Granada. This is the only known autobiography written by a person of this lower social caste.
13 Poor, non-white women could only work as slaves and servants in convents and could not profess as nuns. However, some of these servants were also donadas who wore a nun's habit and supervised other servants and slaves beneath them. See Arenal and Schlau, Untold Sisters, p. 297
14 “de barrer, coger basuras, lavar ollas, fregar vasijas y estar recibiendo las molestias del humo de el fogón.” p. 179.
color, either Indian or black, could only join a convent as servants, caretakers, or slaves (Díaz “Indigenous” 179-85).

Madre Francisca’s lifetime association as a humble, indigenous woman lingered beyond her death. A witness account describes how Pedro de la Caridad Aguirre lost a borrowed horse and met a young chinita who told him where to find the horse. He found the stallion but when he returned to thank her, she had already disappeared. The text states that “infrieron que en aquella china quedó transformarse la humilde madre porque viviendo era tan humilde que quería ser tenida, tratada y nombrada con este despreciado nombre de india sirviente” (388). Vida y Virtudes reiterates the prioress’ wish to be remembered beyond her death as the simple Indian woman she sought to impersonate.

Santa Fé de Bogotá as Paragon of Order and Civility

While endorsing the special merits of Madre Francisca, the biography simultaneously ascertains the spiritual and geographic importance of the city of Santa Fé de Bogotá by creating an intrinsic connection of the near-holy woman with the distinctive place. Throughout the account, Bogotá is memorialized as a metropolis of merit and distinction due to its Spanish political and religious influence. Like Francisca, the city is constructed as noble, humble, and spiritually blessed by God’s presence. However, the association of Madre Francisca and Santa Fé takes on contradictory racial undertones that stray away from the woman’s construction as a humble, exemplary Indian girl and proposes instead an urban idealization based on its white, European heritage and the intentional omission of its Indian past. Germán Colmenares’ interpretation of the unique geopolitical situation of Nueva Granada sheds light on this phenomenon. The first Spanish conquerors arriving in Nueva Granada found the terrain extremely challenging which complicated the colonization of the region. The early settlers focused their energies on the cities of Santa Fé and Tunja, which quickly became colonial centers of intellectual and political power. The presence of an active lettered elite in these two urban centers helped to consolidate Spanish intellectual and political power and in turn, lead to the internalization of the values and ideals of the Spanish conquistadores. Conflated with the rapid demise of the Indian population to disease and hard labor, Colmenares claims that the focused development of the two urban centers led to the emergence of a strong homocultural criollo mentality that easily accepted Spanish social and cultural values (31-39).

The first chapter of Vida y Virtudes provides a thorough description of Santa Fé de Bogotá and exemplifies the notion of a homocultural criollo mentality. 15 The history, geography, landscape, environment, climate, and cartographic coordinates mentioned allow readers to recreate the strategic city. The chronicler explains that Francisca denied her love for her “patria” in order to focus on the sweet love of the eternal and celestial nation of Jerusalem (2). The narrator defends his need to talk about the noble city in which Francisca was born so that there is “memoria para la imitación o para la admiración de los propios del pais” (2). He justifies his quest by affirming that chroniclers also mentioned the city in which Christ was born, Bethlehem, when talking about His merits and life. Villamor creates an immediate and important parallel between the sacred city of Bethlehem and what he calls the “ilustre y noble ciudad de Santa Fé” (2). Both cities are confirmed as Christian urban centers that bred individuals of heightened spiritual value.

15 Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada founded Santa Fé de Bogotá on August 6, 1538. King Carlos V elevated it to the status of city on July 27, 1540 as the “muy noble, muy leal y ciudad más antigua del nuevo reino.” See Historia General de las Conquistas del Nuevo Reyno de Granada.
and a source of pride. Comparing an exceptional city with Jerusalem is not unique to Villamor. For example, Fray Juan de Torquemada in his chronicle Monarchia Indiana (1615) presents Mexico City as the New Jerusalem and New Rome. According to Richard L. Kagan this comparison promoted criollo pride and can be understood as the invention of criollo history (Urban 239). Villamor adopts this criollo strategy to exalt his birthplace.

Villamor introduces Madre Francisca's city in historical terms that emphasize the value of Iberian conquest and demerit its indigenous heritage. He states that before Santa Fé de Bogotá was Christian, it was part of the court of the “barbaro Rey de Bogotá.” He inscribes the city in a tradition of monarchical rule albeit one that is not yet Christian but instead barbaric and heretic. Villamor focuses on the city's connection to the Spanish monarchs beginning with the Spanish conquest when the urban center: “fue conseguida la conquista de los barbaros indios naturales” (2). In Villamor's historical recreation, the existence and accomplishments of the indigenous communities dating before Columbus’ arrival in America are intentionally ignored. The racial and cultural individualities of the indigenous communities are limited to the defining term barbaros, emphasizing their lack of civility and state of idolatry. Instead, Santa Fé de Bogotá is “rendida en obediencia y puntual ejecución a sus reales ordenes, indicio claro de su gran lealtad” (3). Readers are assured of the reigning Catholic and monarchical order in the once barbarous and heretic region. This comment is particularly noteworthy when taking into consideration the city's relatively recent status as head of the newly established Viceroyalty of New Granada on May 27, 1717. Since the organization of the Nuevo Reino de Granada at the beginning of the 16th century, Santa Fé de Bogotá and the geographical area of what is now Colombia, Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela had been under the control of the Viceroyalty of Peru. However, with the establishment of New Granada as an independent administrative center, Santa Fé de Bogotá became one of the principal administrative centers for the Crown alongside Lima and Mexico. At this strategic moment when Villamor writes it was indispensable for Santa Fé to pose as an organized and legitimate “Spanish” metropolis of the same caliber as the established Mexico and Lima administrative centers.

Villamor emphasizes the connection to the Iberian motherland with an explanation of the city’s name. Gonzalo Ximenez de Quesada named the city “por memoria de la que en Granada fundaron los Reyes Católicos” (4). This phrase creates another implicit connection, this time between the Reino de Nueva Granada, where Santa Fé de Bogotá was located, and the foundational city of the Spanish nation-state, Granada. By referencing the Andalusian urban center, Villamor reasserts the overpowering of Islam by Catholicism in the takeover of Granada from the Moors in 1492 by the Catholic Monarchs. He reiterates the shared name and qualities of the region, New Granada, with the historically symbolic Spanish city.

The author portrays Santa Fé by defining the city, its urbs and civitas, in terms of order and policia, essential traits of Spanish urban design. 16 He stresses that its inhabitants, its urban spaces, and its buildings coexist in harmony and order. The society is organized as any and all Spanish colonial cities with its various government institutions, such as cabildos, audiencias, and Casa
Real, which ensure the orderly functioning of the city. They enumerate the religious institutions that provide spiritual order, such as the mendicant orders and ecclesiastical leaders. He lists with attention to detail the plaza, the many temples, churches, and convents, all of which are adorned with great riches and “indecible limpieza” (8). The town’s observance of religious feasts and rituals corroborates the faith and devotion of the community and the observance of the church calendar by “sus muy piadosos habitantes” (9). Order and policía are further guaranteed by the colegios mayores. These institutions of higher learning were precursors of universities as known today. The colegios mayores provided advanced education in the liberal arts and evidenced the civilized modernity of Santa Fé (7-8).

After Villamor introduces the city and its people as an ordered, Catholic metropolis, he offers a chorographic, birdeye’s view of its landscape. The city is described as nestled in mountains “al arrimo de elevados montes” (8). It is protected by religious images strategically located on its surrounding hills, rather than by traditional city walls. The images and the natural landscape guard the city due to the community’s “piedad tan grande y religioso culto” (8). He reinforces the pious nature of the community and reminds the reader of the potential threat of barbarian attacks that only divine intervention can prevent.

Villamor continues describing abundant rivers, fish, and fruits that attest to the bountiful resources available in the area. The pastoral representation of the city is interrupted with a reference to the poverty afflicting the region. The writer explains that the city had suffered poor harvests and food shortages as a consequence of the 1691 eclipse but excuses further commentary (8). Readers are intrigued by the author’s articulated silence. The laudatory memorialization of Santa Fé comes to a conclusion with a quasi-scientific reference to the climate, humidity, and the exact latitude and longitude coordinates of the town. He reiterates the region’s medicinal attributes claiming that it is “más saludable para los españoles forasteros, que para los que en ella nacen” (9). Villamor’s attempts to emphasize the region’s benevolence towards peninsulares over those born in American lands reveals his interest in influencing readers in Spain and portraying his place of birth in the best possible light.

Villamor maintains that God chose the city of Santa Fé de Bogotá as Francisca’s birthplace and as a site of exemplary spirituality. Like Jesús’ Bethlehem, Santa Fé is offered as a sacred space for remembrance and spiritual excellence, a civitas christiana. Like Granada, Santa Fé is memorialized through the life of an exemplary leader, Madre Francisca, whose presence vanishes any suspicion of barbarian idolatry or unsuccessful conversion to Catholicism. Santa Fé is a “Spanish” city with the indispensable components of a true metropolis: order, faith, and piety. Above all, this is a city defined by its Spanish heritage. Although initially described as “barbarous,” the city is defined as a center of modernity and civility due to the omission of its “barbari-

Angel Rama in La ciudad letrada, claims that as a means to impose order in the New World, Spanish monarchs carefully planned cities so that institutional and legal powers were administered through a specialized cadre of elite men called letrados. Rama calls the urban nexus of lettered culture and state power “the lettered city.” As Richard L. Kagan has argued, Spanish monarchs employed the founding of cities as a tool of imperial legitimacy in ways other emerging colonial powers did not, creating an “empire of cities.” See Kagan, Richard L. Urban Images of the Hispanic World 1493-1793. The Ordenanzas Reales of 1573 served as the blueprint for building cities in the colonies and responded to the Spanish obsession with organizing towns and urban spaces. The ordinances were meant to promote good governance or policía. Cities had to be organized on a grid pattern with the plaza in the center. The perimeters of the plaza were to be lined with the church and other important government buildings. See Richard Kagan for an in-depth analysis of the educational system in the 16th and 17th century in Spain: Students and Society in Early Modern Spain.

Civitas christiana is defined as a holy community united in faith and at the service of God.
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ic” Indian origins. God favored Madre Francisca with her birthplace and she in turn honored her city with her exemplarity.

In Villamor’s hesitant discourse, the city with whitened historical origins, becomes special and distinctive to local criollos and peninsulares. It is through the exemplarity of a woman, one that insisted in darkening herself and passing as Indian, that Santa Fé evolves into a patria criolla.

Conclusion

Vida y Virtudes evidences the skillful manipulation of women’s writing by a male confessor-editor to “whiten” the indigenous heritage of Nueva Granada and construct a spiritual exemplar that was more appealing and acceptable to peninsular and criollo readers in the mainland and in the colonies. Villamor’s racial and urban discourse reveals an ambivalent criollo consciousness that fails to fully identify as either “Spanish” or “Indian;” one that leans towards the order and organization imposed by Empire yet simultaneously is proud of the products and peoples of the New World. Stephanie Merrim refers to this criollo ambivalence as the “conflicting investments of the creoles in both home and empire” (5). Creoles loyalties shift back and forth between emotional, local attachments and imported Spanish culture, ideology and imperial power. This puts criollos, and in particular, creole writers, in a flexible and at times conflicting position. Criollos were constantly mediating between their interests and loyalties to the colonies and to Europe; they are constantly ambivalent in regards to their identity (5-8).

Villamor’s text also corroborates the homocultural assimilation that emerged by early 18th century in Nueva Granada. Vida y Virtudes promotes positive associations with the criollo elite; individuals born and bred in the Spanish American colonies like Madre Francisca, who despite not being considered full peninsular subjects by birth or truly pure, could nonetheless offer models of exemplarity for the incipient colonial society. Villamor highlights the positive effects of exporting Spanish civility to idolatrous lands and presents us with the virtuous life of an exemplary criolla written by another criollo. He constructs the colonized as barbarians and non-participants in society and the criollos, as the intellectual, pious, and exemplary people that engage in religious and cultural life and ensure the prosperity of the region. In this sense, the text reaffirms Iberian colonization and Catholic evangelization and defends the existing criollo hegemony that prevails over other subcultures in early 18th century Nueva Granada.

However, the unique, ambivalent text chooses not to represent the white, hegemonic discourse exclusively. It also considers the value of indigenous members of this new society. While the text reveals tensions between Madre Francisca’s abject self-presentation and the important role she played in the convent, it also allows us to reflect on a confessor nun that, while belonging to a great genealogy of saintly women, in which Santa Teresa held a prominent place, also invites readers to emulate the positive traits of its indigenous subjects. The convent is proposed as an arena where the politics of racial difference are negotiated and re-envisioned to fit and test the needs of an emerging criollo consciousness.
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