SUBTLE DIFFERENCES, REFINED DISCRIMINATION

LIFESTYLES IN CONFRONTATION IN COLOMBIAN HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Monika Therrien

Monika Therrien is in the Anthropology Department of the Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia.

Intercultural Contact

Since the last decade of the 20th century, visible change has taken place in most of Colombia's larger cities and in some smaller ones too. A significant rural population migration, escaping from poverty or political violence, has had to adapt to urban settings. Urban administration politics and the ideologies that govern them also have changed due to a new political constitution in 1991 that recognizes the Colombian nation as "pluriethnic and multicultural." In the cities, this has brought about transformations in the meaning of public space and its uses; the organization of new and established urban areas; and the renovation of deteriorated environments to turn them into sustainable habitats. The inclusion of a larger portion of the population, especially those historically marginalized, is anticipated to be part of these new urban development plans.

The changes also have affected the Colombian cultural heritage that remains within cities and has triggered debates on how and what to preserve. Although they are not the most important reason that historical archaeology in Colombia has developed, they have supported this research through both funding and participation in interdisciplinary studies. A more important impetus for historical archaeology's emergence is the academic debate in which notions of acculturation and cultural devastation of native populations after European Contact gave way to notions of resistance, symbolic construction, and dynamic identities. Initially this focus relied on economic interactions between different social and ethnic groups. More recently, however, there has been a shift in emphasis towards understanding the cultural dimensions of these relationships and how difference was construed and inequality naturalized during daily practice in the course of intercultural contact in different periods and places (Grimson 2002).

Lifestyles in Conflict

In this shift of perspectives, *lifestyle* has emerged as a significant concept for interpreting the process through which cultural variability—and with it, discrimination, imposition, and exclusion—is socialized, reproduced, and institutionalized. While it is possible to find cases of wealth or poverty in the territory of Nueva Granada (what is now Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela) during historical periods, this was not the rule. In contrast with viceroyalties like Nueva España and Peru, Nueva Granada was not a commercial *tour de force,* even though Cartagena de Indias, one of the most important ports in America, was located within its territory. Much gold left from there but primarily basic produce and African slaves entered through the port. Luxurious imported goods were rare, a favored archaeological indicator for identifying Hispanic or white populations living in opulent economic conditions; instead, the majority of people led lives without the ostentatious commodities identified by Latin American archaeologists as status-conferring. This did not, however, preclude the use of other strategies to establish certain

lifestyles as legitimate and morally correct, and hence dominant, over others considered immoral and improper. Lifestyles of dominance therefore revolved around very similar goods and generally took place in the same settings as those of the majority.

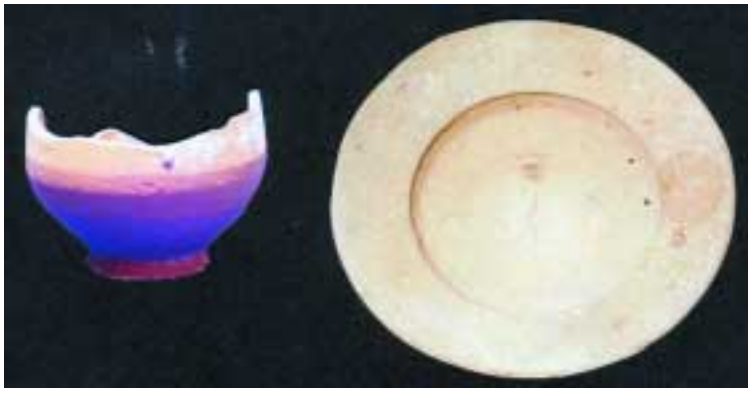

Figure 1: Cups and plates manufactured at the locería of the Jesuit religious community on the island of Tierra Bomba. This ware is identified as Cartagena Rojo Compacto (c. 1650–1770).

Given these characteristics of Nueva Granada's material culture and spatial dispositions, a comparative approach has been needed to understand how various groups confronted each other, resolved their conflicts, and configured social structures. Important for examining these interactions are the roles and identities assumed by each individual or group and the structuring of their different lifestyles through which meaning was assigned to their possessions and locations, thereby dictating daily practice. Emphasis has been put on the study of local processes. For example, ceramics obtained from several archaeological excavations (Therrien et al. 2002) identify the use of a wide variety of local wares to make distinctive ways of daily living possible. The use of land deeds, parish archives, and cadastral surveys and plans also help to reconstruct urban land-use patterns, the social and kinship relations reflected by them, and the different meanings that public and private spaces had for their inhabitants.

Sense and Sensibility: Jesuit and Dominican Convents

The comparison of two particular convents at Cartagena de Indias, one Dominican and the other Jesuit, has proven to be an interesting setting for examining those values that arise from cultural interaction—through education, indoctrination, or slavery. It also has given sense to daily routines and particular lifestyles, a focus that extends beyond economic or religious aspects, and contributes to an understanding of intercultural contact.

At the Jesuit school, which ran between 1618 and 1767, young Spanish and *criollo* (those born in America from Spanish parents) students were educated, and priests baptized African slaves that entered through this port. The Dominicans, in addition to serving as Inquisitors, also took charge of Christianizing the native population from different *encomiendas* (native social units entrusted to the Spaniards as work forces) and *resguardos* or *reducciones* (territorial units imposed by the Spaniards where native populations were settled).

For the Jesuits, the main purpose of education was to preserve Catholic morals, especially in an environment where illicit relations were not uncommon. Another goal, however, was to teach traditional Spanish practices to the Spanish students, such as eating, cleaning, reading, and writing, all necessary both for social and cultural recognition within the diverse population as well as for their anticipated return to Spain. The Jesuits were prolific writers and had access to an extensive library focused on grammar and sciences. To discipline the youngsters in European table manners, they depended on a *ménage* of plates, cups, and *escudillas,* in which stews and broths consisting of cow meat—provided by their *haciendas*—was always served. As for hygiene, they depended on chamber pots and *lebrillos* (Figure 1). This ceramic assemblage was manufactured in their own *locería*, located at the island of Tierra Bomba, near Cartagena. As such, the Jesuit ware was used to define and reproduce certain habits as a mark of social differentiation without having to depend on scarce imported goods.

This ware was manufactured and also used by the Jesuits' African slaves. Obtaining clay and producing the vessels were men's tasks, while women decorated them. It imitated the Spanish *majolica* tradition,

although its decorative styles (Figure 2), when present, were as distinctive as the ways these slaves put them to use when consuming their own food. These practices differentiated the Jesuit's slaves from those working in mines or plantations.

A quite different archaeological context characterized the Dominican convent, due probably to their distinct functions in Cartagena. The Dominican order often held the Bishop's seat, with the indoctrination and protection of the natives its principal mission and a source of conflict with the *encomenderos* and local authorities. They also contributed to the Inquisitorial tribunes that condemned immoral and demoniacal conduct. Rather than texts on grammar and science, the Dominicans favored theological ones.

Figure 2: Decorative styles of the Jesuit ware, identified as Mayólica Cartagena (c.1650–1770).

Dominican domestic trash from the 17th and first half of the 18th centuries reveals a lifestyle quite different from that of the Jesuits. The refuse deposits consist primarily of native wares. Earlier ceramics are consistent with local prehispanic traditions, while later ones present some variation in form and decorative style, similar to what Meyers (1999) reports for Jamaican slaves (Figure 3). Although Jesuit ware was popular in Cartagena, it is rarely present in the Dominican convent, further evidence of the ongoing rivalry between the religious communities.

Christian indoctrination and direct interaction between natives and priests resulted in a wide selection of vessels forms and decorative styles (Figure 4), such as rounded pots, pitchers, and small bowls, as well as flat *budares,* often used to prepare *cazabe,* a yuca bread. Faunal remains also included a variety of species, many of them from wild animals such as turtles, birds, and fish, demonstrating that in daily routines such as food preparation and consumption, indigenous habits and tastes prevailed. What made these practices legitimate, however, was their acceptance into the lifestyles of the priests, who held high social and moral positions in Cartagena.

Pride and Prejudice: *La Casa* in the Urban Setting

Spatial organization and social and kinship relations can also reflect how change and variability occur within different lifestyles. Using a diachronic perspective, it is possible to examine the significance of space and the house—*la casa*, a concept underutilized in urban history and architecture—especially concerning intimacy, privacy, family and households, and sociability in urban lifeways. A focus on the house can overcome views in which the European urban model is simply transplanted to America, and instead provide an understanding of how the house was made "familiar" in unfamiliar conditions for both natives and foreigners and how a variety of house forms vied for acceptability during the Colonial period.

Archival research using cadastral and parish documents and deeds has helped the interpretation of complex urban plots, different structural remains, and material goods found in the historical area of Bogotá, a city that, instead of expanding, tended to crowd its growing population into the same area almost until the 20th century. Two factors were identified as having influenced the ways urban plots were subdivided: their kinship significance and their commercial value.

Figure 3: Local wares from Cartagena. The incised ware identified as Crespo Fino follows native traditions (left) and the stamped decoration of Crespo Rojo Arenoso is similar to that found in African wares (right).

Kinship relations produced a particular spatial organization as parents subdivided their plots into smaller ones that were passed on to their children. While

paternal spaces consisted of the larger sections at the back of a plot, they appeared to be equally divided when looked at from outside, thereby signifying familiar relations in different ways publicly and privately. In contrast, commercial space was organized according to a strict geometrical plan with no visible difference from within or outside of the property (Figure 5).

Archaeologically, these patterns pose a challenge when identifying stratigraphic relationships—such as structuring and reading a Harris matrix—between a property and its neighbors or in the division of a single plot. It also challenges the interpretation of material culture and its use in social identification between neighbors and different tenants. Kinship relations, shared lifestyles, and issues of exclusion and distinction of relatives from non-kin must be examined.

An example of this comes from one of the corner houses at the central plaza of Bogotá. In the early Colonial period, it was inhabited by a *mestiza,* the daughter of an Indian and a Spaniard, who tried to give her *casa* a preeminent position by building a two-story structure, maintaining Indian servants, and using local glazed wares that were distinct from the indigenous wares. A Spanish noble later bought her property and completely changed it, explicitly establishing his European lifestyle as distinct from that of the former *mestiza* owner. *Mulatos,* the offspring of Africans and Spaniards, and not Indians served his dinners using Spanish *majolica*. He required that his family follow European dining conventions while eating, after which they would enjoy reading one of his 300 books in a large salon decorated with native artifacts. Surrounding this private existence were the servant quarters, chicken yard, stables, and latrines—spaces that were all regarded as equal to one another but segregated from the main house, a distinction that subsequently was used to divide the property when it was sold for commercial purposes.

Figure 4: A variety of local wares, following native and African traditions (c. 1600–1800)

Figure 5: Each colored area represents the original size of a family plot, while internal lines show how they were subdivided through time. Family plot divisions produced irregular boundaries, while divisions for commercial purposes—the unshaded areas—are geometrical (Illustration by Marcela Cuellar).

Conclusion

Cultural practices that give meaning to everyday activities become more visible during intercultural contact, often turning them into "weapons" that promote discrimination and stigmatization. Today, political violence and economic crisis is revealing the deep social inequality that exists between different groups in Colombia's major cities. As such, an understanding of how some lifestyles have come to be naturalized as legitimate, and the conflict that is then provoked, is providing renewed importance for research in Colombian historical archaeology.

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