

Transcription for Episode 14: Interview with Cristina Ramírez

Run Time: 17:36

AH: Allison Hitt (co-executive producer)

KS: Karrieann Soto (producer, host)

CR: Cristina Ramírez (guest speaker)

BK: Ben Kuebrich (co-executive producer)

Cue music: “As Colorful as Ever” by Broke for Free.

AH: You’re listening to This Rhetorical Life, a podcast dedicated to the practice, pedagogy, and public circulation of rhetoric in our lives.

KS: Hello everyone. My name is Karrieann Soto, and I’ll be your host today.

About a month ago, I went to the ninth biennial Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference, where a wide array of scholars engaged in productive conversations on how they intersect rhetoric and feminism in their scholarship.

In a panel titled “Creating Community Through Composing Anthologies: Reflections on Collecting the Rhetorical Work of Marginalized Women,” Jessica Enoch and Cristina Ramírez presented on their project: “Different Pens, Different Voices: Crafting an Anthology of Mestiza Rhetors.”

Their presentation provided insights into the importance of archival work. Specifically, they focus on women from the late 19th to early 20th century in the contexts of Mexico, the Southwest of the United States, and Puerto Rico.

I was able to sit down with Cristina Ramírez from the University of Arizona to chat about how this project came about and the importance of such work.

CR: Well, I have a couple projects. First is my forthcoming book from the University of Arizona Press called [*Mestiza Rhetoric:*] *Ocupando Nuestro Puesto*, which means in English “to occupy our place or space”—the *mestiza* rhetorics of Mexican women journalists and activists from 1880 to 1942. This will be the first book that covers Mexican women journalists. It’s crossing the border. We’ve got to go global. We’ve got to be more transnational. And part of this work is that we have to start looking in other places, in other spaces. That even means rhetorics that are not in our language, and so I’m writing of course on these Mexican women journalists.

The ones that I’m focusing on: Laureana Wright de Kleinhans, she was writing in the 1880s to 1890s; Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza, a revolutionary writer and journalist and activist; and then I found a feminist manifesto from 1900 from these women called *las mujeres de Zitácuaro*—and Zitácuaro is a city in Michoacán, Mexico where these women were writing from. They were Presbyterian women that were starting education

programs in Mexico and really fighting for a more secular kind of education in Mexico, but they articulated women's rights against the Catholic Church, against the monasteries—how women were being locked in the monasteries and not being allowed to fulfill their goal that they saw as mothers. And so I have that manifesto, 40 signatures of the women. So I have 40 names of the women. That translation will appear in the text. Also Hermila Galindo who was also...she was writing and speaking during the time of the Mexican Revolution.

From that work, I have so much left over. Jessica Enoch and I got together. I understood that she wanted to work on this anthology, and so we kind of started emailing back and forth. She said, "Are you sure? You know, you can do this on your own if this is your project." And I said, "Jessica, let's do this together," and so we're submitting a grant—the 4Cs grant—to get funds to start the translation on these women. So we're expanding the project from here, looking at women that I couldn't cover in my book.

We're doing women from Mexico, from South Texas, from New Mexico, and also a woman—Luisa Capetillo—from Puerto Rico. We had wrangled a little bit about including Luisa Capetillo because at first we were looking at it as these are regional perspectives or regional voices, but this work is really about building coalitions. This is the Americas. And we need to...[pause] It *includes* Puerto Rico; it *includes* Central America; it *includes* Mexico and all of this region. We are one people.

So we're starting by defining the topic or the term of *latina*. Who is being included in that? Then we're looking at questions of who are we going to include? Why are we going to include them? And which works are significant and important in talking about nationalism and feminism?

KS: In the presentation before them, Shirley Wilson Logan mentioned that in putting together *With Pen and Voice: A Critical Anthology of Nineteenth Century African-American Women*, she had to begin with women from elite backgrounds. So I asked Cristina if they also focus on women from the elite.

CR: The first woman we're including in this collection and also in my chapter is this woman Laureana Wright de Kleinhans, born in 1842 to an American father and a Mexican mother. And she received an elite education, and then she married a German. So she's truly living this *mestizaje*. So yes she was running in the elite circles—the elite literary circles. But she had the understanding that she had to bring other women into the conversation, which is why she started her literary journal. She was literary director of a journal called *Dos violetas de Anáhuac*. And *Anáhuac* is the Aztec valley kingdom.

So we have Laureana Wright de Kleinhans who was from an elite background, but then you have juxtaposed to that Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza. She wasn't. She was born really into poverty. She was interpolated toward a life of literacy; she knew it from a very young age. Some scholars in Mexico have even compared her to like a Sor Juana Inés De La Cruz but from a very grassroots background. Juana identified with her maternal indigenous roots of *Kashkan*—Indian. And so she really drew on that, and her

writing began when she started writing against the treatment of the indigenous miners in Northern Central Mexico. Her voice was a proverbial foot in the door for the 20th century, saying *aquí estamos*. Here we are, and we are here to occupy our place and our space within the discursive realm of Mexico and Mexican journalism.

These women that I'm writing about were really the pioneering and revolutionary voices for other women to continue. So I mean a lot of these women were elite. Luisa Capetillo from Puerto Rico—she wasn't elite. Her mother cleaned houses. Luisa got her start as being a reader in the cigar shops. In the cigar factories when they would roll up the cigars, she was one of the readers, and that was actually a very prestigious position. And they would read radical political writings and stuff like that. And then from there she began her labor activism in Puerto Rico, and she started...she would contribute her pieces to newspapers. In doing the research, I saw that she...they said she started a magazine called *La Mujer*, but they can't find this journal that she started. So that's really what we're working with, myself and Jessica, is bringing these women's primary writings together in a place where students can access them.

KS: I was interested in learning more about the kinds of texts that they were using, given the different backgrounds of these women.

CR: So we've got of course Laureana, Juana Belén, and also we're including several women that Laureana included—Murguilla, I think her name was. We have Dolores Jiménez Y Muro. We want to include a letter that she wrote from prison, writing from prison to I believe it was a general. But here she is, she's articulating her stance on politics from prison. Dolores Jiménez Y Muro—she predated Juana, and she was an older revolutionary woman who came up through the ranks and really taught some of these younger revolutionary women.

We are using women who were writing in journals and contributing to journals. It's almost an invisible medium. In Mexico they had a saying that these were *papeles volantes*. *Papeles volantes* literally meaning flying papers, that they were here one day and then gone the next. This was their form of civic discourse. They were engaged in this conversation. And there were serious political debates going on in these newspapers. Even at this time, in late 19th century and especially early 20th century leading up to the Mexican revolution, journalists were being thrown into jail for speaking against the dictatorship, for speaking out against the politics of that time. So you ask, who was listening? That's rhetoric at its core. What kind of effect is this having on the communities and on the societies that they are addressing?

Well, let's just look at Juana. I mean, she was thrown into jail. She was obviously hitting some nerve with people in power. And so entering into these journalistic conversations were extremely important for the women because they were becoming part of the *civic* conversation. And this, for them, was also fundamental because they were infantilized so much. They were considered almost *niñas*, children. And for them to enter into the political sphere, the political conversation, the revolutionary conversation was a tectonic shift—yes, extremely radical! So the journals are extremely important spaces where

we're recovering these women's writings. We're looking at them from a very practical, rhetorical, identity-shaping medium.

We're not the only ones doing this work. This work has been slowly being done in the past 25-30 years by other Mexican woman scholars and some scholars here in the United States. Joel Bollinger Pouwels—she wrote a book¹ on the political activism of women. Cherlene Soto—so Cherlene Soto was a major contributor to recovering these women and their participation in the revolution in civic discourses and things like that.

KS: Once again, driven by my curiosity about publishing processes and the choices that Shirley Wilson Logan articulated, I asked if they had considered a timeline for the *mestiza* rhetors book.

CR: I think a timeline would be very useful in being able to see the big picture as to situating these women within the historical framework of what was happening because a lot of times the history is the exigency. The history provides that exigency. What's happening around them is what either allows them to be able to speak or is the impetus for them to speak. For example, like, Juana Belén, it was the Mexican Revolution. She was really getting upset about labor issues and women's treatments, and so she spoke up. Luisa Capetillo, she also got involved in labor. So these were the things that were happening around that time. Like for example, in Puerto Rico colonization went from the Spanish to the United States.

KS: [*snaps fingers*] One after the other.

CR: One right after the other. What are we talking about? They're still colonized. So talking about it in those terms, situating them within the historical context, gives their discourse a richer and deeper context connected to the history.

KS: To close our interview, I asked, what would be the next step in this project?

CR: Really the next step is to get this into students' hands. I ended my talk yesterday with a term that Kirsch and Royster use—and Jackie Jones Royster even used it in her talk—of an ethics of hope, of an ethics of hope of expanding discursive horizons, right? That we look for more women because they are out there, and to bring them in, look at them, and study them. But what Jessica and I really want is for this anthology, for these books, to get into the hands of young *latina* women. Because these are your grandmothers. These are your *abuelas*, and they will see themselves in these texts. And it doesn't matter that these young *Latinas* are here in the United States. They have a connection to the history of Mexico, of the Texas Southwest, of Puerto Rico.

There's thousands of *boricuas* and *chicanas* and *Latinas* that are now infiltrating campuses just like this: Stanford, U of A, UCLA, UTEP, UT Austin. We are rising in the ranks, and we need to have not just physical representation, but we have to be able to see

¹ *Political Journalism by Mexican Women during the Age of Revolution 1876-1940*

ourselves within the discourse of the classroom. It's so important, and that's what's going to make the difference in these young *latina* women's lives—that they see themselves as able to be part of the conversation. To see what these women were doing with the very difficult situations that they were writing under—during war, during a time that they were being silenced. And if they can do it, I can also do it. My vision is to see more women, more young women, young scholars be attracted to these voices and theorize them more.

I'm doing the hard work of recovery—this is some hard work. I never realized how exhausting archival work is going into the Latin American Benson Collection. I was there for a week, day in and day out. I'm doing this hard work, and I want to see other women do this work, too, but let's get those voices out there.

Cue music: "From Stardust to Sentience" by High Places.

KS: I would like to thank Cristina Ramírez for taking out the time to chat with us about this important project and to all of our listeners for your continued support.

BK: This Rhetorical Life is brought to you by graduate students in the Composition and Cultural Rhetoric Program at Syracuse University. Executive Producers of This Rhetorical Life are Ben Kuebrich and Allison Hitt with additional editing from Karriann Soto, Tamara Issak, and Seth Davis.