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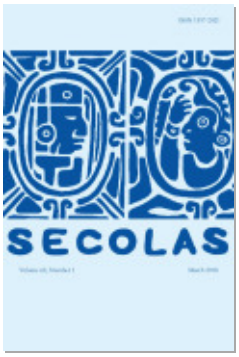

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Love and Progress: Nineteenth-Century Merida's Alternative View of Modernity and Restoration

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On Sunday, July 12th of 1874 the cultural and political elite of Merida, Yucatan gathered for a special program held at the Teatro San Carlos to raise funds for a newly conceived *Casa de Beneficencia* (Settlement House). The event was advertised with great anticipation in the government publication, *La Razón del Pueblo* (1867-1896).[1] Two weeks prior to the event the paper reported that three local organizations: The *Conservatorio*, *La Academia Artístico-Recreativa* and *La Siempreviva* would be in charge of the program and entertainment ("Casa de Beneficencia" 4).[2] The performances for charity were the first major social event in Merida since the defeat of Maximilian in 1867 and the beginning of the reinstatement of the liberal government or the period known as the Mexican Restoration (1867-76).[3] This extraordinary event became a public platform for *La Siempreviva*, a women's society whose main founders' signature line became the motto "Caridad y Progreso" (Charity and Progress). Discourses about gender appeared in the official government paper revealing political tensions in Meridian society that became articulated through discussions of progress and modernity. Women's subjectivity and citizenship were at the center of these discussions as they began to actively participate in the political life of Merida through their accepted roles as providers of charity and education. The special benefit at the *San Carlos* Theatre highlights the involvement of three important women pioneers in the areas of education, literature, and charitable causes. Their public actions served to reject the domestic angel ideology as they embraced modernity and progress as conduits for women's advancement.

The women's volunteer charitable organization, publication and school for girls *La Siempreviva* and its members were at the forefront of a contested space for women's roles in Yucatan.[4] The leaders: Rita Cetina Gutiérrez (1846-1908), Gertrudis Tenorio Zavala (1843-1926) and Cristina Farfán (1846-1880) were well-respected and admired local poets and artists. Their efforts to have a voice and a literary presence surpassed initiatives towards "interpretive power" to create a third space that offered an alternative view of modernity through their quest for progress in acts of charity and the education of girls. The women of *LS* negotiated gender boundaries in strategic and often complex social practices that at times reified the legacy of the Catholic church in works of charity while simultaneously embracing

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Liberal mandates to secularize the education of young girls.[5] Visibly and publicly participating at the theatre and other charitable projects, the women were inaugurating a new expression of citizenship for other women in late 1870's Mexico. Their theme of *caridad y progreso* resonated with Meridian society in a historical moment when the nation was being re-imagined and re-constructed, signaling an interstitial process led by women that preceded the motto *Paz, Orden y Progreso* later appropriated by the *Porfiriato* (1884-1910).

Historical Background

In the 1870's the *Guerra de Castas* or Caste Wars[6] continued to threaten Merida as outlaying towns were frequently attacked by whom the local newspapers characterized as "barbarous indians." Crecencio Carrillo Ancona, in an article published by *La Revista de Mérida* (1869-82) about the archeologist Augustus LePlongeon's return to the capital, notes that Agnes (LePlongeon's young wife) carries a rifle and suggestively mentions that the couple is living "in the camp of the savage indians, ("Colaboración: Incursión Arquelógica," 2).[7] He emphasizes the danger of such proximity when he reminds the readers that the American engineer Joseph Stephens was killed by "rebellious Indians, enemies of all civilization," ("Colaboración" 2). Carrillo Ancona, who later becomes the Bishop of Yucatan, ends his article by proposing another thesis of progress "we will see how religion and science, which are the two wings of real progress, will bring us the cloudless day of the much desired social welfare," ("Colaboración" 2).[8] Carrillo Ancona also proposes that evangelistic conversion by the hand of missionaries could bring peace to the "indio salvaje," an ostensibly kinder approach to the myriad of tactics articulated in print media for addressing the rebellion.[9]

National newspapers in Mexico City distant from the political and social turmoil in the peninsula advocated the "disappearance" of the indigenous population (Guzmán Urióstegui 113). The rebellious indigenous in Yucatán accounted for three fifths of the population and outnumbered the white *criollos* or *vecinos* in many townships.[10] Hundreds of indigenous prisoners and domestics were sent to Cuba as part of a pacification process that involved diminishing the indigenous presence in Yucatan. In February of 1849, for example, 135 indigenous arrive in La Habana and report to José Antonio Mijangos, a Mexican merchant, that they had been taken by force (González Navarro 24). One source claims that others who were prisoners of the Caste Wars were sent to Cuba to avoid being executed:

> Barbachano . . . according to his decree of November 6th of the previous year, had sent 135 of 300 prisoners in his care to Cuba, and he had done this not only to avoid their execution by the troops but because of food shortages. (González Navarro 25)

The forced exodus of the indigenous population separated families and disrupted communities in Yucatán. Álvarez Cuarteto remarks that the

commerce of the indigenous to Cuba lasted thirteen years, from 1849 to 1861, and involved up to two thousand *maya* who were placed in conditions of semi-slavery. At first, they began exporting rebel prisoners but then entire families were sent, regardless of their participation in the conflict: "En un primer momento, se embarcó sólo a los indios encarcelados, pero más adelante se llevaron a Cuba mujeres, niños huérfanos y familias enteras con independencia de su condición rebelde o no" (Álvarez Cuarteto 572). Contractors received up to 40 pesos for a male and 25 pesos for women in what was thinly disguised as labor contracts; the *maya* refer to the period as a time of enslavement (Álvarez Cuarteto 572–73). The Caste Wars continued after Benito Juarez prohibited the trade in 1861.

The insistent conflict destroyed homes on both fronts; indigenous children were left orphaned, soldiers fighting the rebellions left families without a provider, and general destitution followed.

The Catholic church, diminished in power and resources, could no longer respond as it had in the past. Local secular organizations such as *La Siempreviva*, along with a male literary and philanthropic society, *Jesús María*, were compelled to act. The two groups used their talents in literature and the dramatic arts to advocate for these causes.

Writing about the interstitial or "in-between spaces" and the opportunities they create to "initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration . . . ," Homi K. Bhabha posits that "(I)t is in the emergence of the interstices-the overlap and displacement of domains of difference- that the intersubjective and collective experience of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (2). The poetry readings for charity at the San Carlos Theatre and their coverage in *LRP*, I argue, expose those negotiations and reveal how Meridian women were forging participatory public spaces for themselves within their prescribed roles as caretakers yet boldly giving voice to the need for the educational and social advancement of women under the rhetoric of modernity and progress.

Recent scholarship on Latin America women and the rhetoric of modernity highlights how the malleability of the concept and term itself were used by women to champion their causes. As Skinner observes:

> Latin American women took advantage of modernity's emphasis on progress to define the terms of that progress. Because modernity was primarily a rhetorical phenomenon . . . (w)riters could deploy its rhetoric strategically emphasizing the elements of modernity that suited their purposes. In the case of female writers, this meant defining progress as inclusive of women and the modern society as one that encouraged women's education and participation in the workforce. (14)

Writing in 1992, Iris M. Zavala offers a similar observation on how women employed modernity to advance their agendas through cultural practices:

> It is no secret that women writers were on the margins in the spatial projection of the polyphony of modernities at the turn of the

> century . . . (a)nother dynamic force in Latin American modernity was women's cultural practices as an activity to reposition the powerful discourses of modernity. (186)

In the pages of *LS* journal we can observe this rhetorical strategy unfurl as the founding members declare their solidarity with other benevolent Meridian societies adding,

> Let us all–women- in our hearts, feel burn the holy flame of progress so that, accomplishing the idea of our Society, we can say to the civilized world's countenance: 'Enough: the hour has come for women's education, she is the source of peace in the home and the tranquility of nations; dear sisters, onward.' The Society. ("Introducción" 1:1)

The women's audacious and invitational tone is followed by an "Official Section" in which they declare that part of their goal is to instill "a love for the Fine Arts in women by offering free classes in literature, music, speech, drawing, and some others later on to be determined by the Government Board" ("Sección Oficial" 1:2). The classes were to be offered to six young girls free of charge at the teacher's home. Inspired by the 1869 Law of Reform in Education and Benito Juárez's charge to secularize girls' education, the women took action with sponsorship from the state of Yucatan. Rita Cetina followed this announcement with an inspirational poem dedicated to women entitled "A Nuestro Sexo" (To Our Sex) that is a call to action, in the tradition of the classical "seize the day" tone:

> Pues no esperemos más; llegó el momento
> Proclamemos: Unión, Fraternidad.
>
> Venid todas, venid! "La Siempreviva"
> Vuestra protección reclama,
> Y Cariñosa con *amor* os llama,
> Y os Brinda sus columnas con placer.
>
> Sacudid la inacción, alzad la frente,
> Levantad con orgullo la cabeza,
> Y podremos decir con entereza,
> Que alcanza cuanto quiere la mujer.
>
> Let us not wait any longer; the moment has arrived,
> Let us proclaim: Union, Fraternity.
>
> Come, all women, come! "La Siempreviva"
> Your protection requests
> And with affection, with *love* calls you,
> And with pleasure offers you its columns.
>
> Dust off inaction, raise up your forehead,
> Lift up with pride your head,
> And we can say with surety,
> Women can achieve all they want. (emphasis mine,1:3)

Cetina writes these verses to an imagined sisterhood of readers and again, it is the discourse of love (for the Fine Arts earlier) that propels her to invite them to write for the journal's columns. The poet and dramaturg produces these verses in May of 1870. By July of 1874, when the benefit at San Carlos Theatre takes place, her work with *La Siempreviva*'s school for girls, journal and literary/charitable organization has garnered Cetina an important voice in Meridian society's public space.

Speaking to this idea of the importance of public access for women in US nineteenth-century civic life as women transitioned from the private to the public domain, Mary P. Ryan writes:

> Late in the nineteenth century, in the face of a more powerful state apparatus and amid the cacophony of mass politics, women had found multiple points of access to the public. They won state funds for their private welfare schemes, lobbied for their sex-specific interests, and prohibited state bureaucracies from trampling on the liberties of their sex. By occupying these scattered public spaces, nineteenth-century women worked out their own political identities, opened up the public to a vast new constituency, and enlarged the range of issues that weighed into the 'general interest.' (283)

Although the nation was slowly recovering, a similar process was occurring in Merida where women were deploying the rhetoric of modernity in strategic forms but also occupying the public domain through the arts and their charitable work. This was no insignificant accomplishment as it occurred despite a very public backlash against the new liberal policies and the role of education in the lives of women in 1871 where, as Campos García recounts in a recent article on models of womanhood,

> a public debate about women's education emerged, with opponents to this policy taking aim at secularization and a 'monstrous social revolution': the emancipation of women, which attacked the Marian model, the template for 'the most sublime class of women.' (572)

Ramón Guzmán Serrano's hostility is palpable as he begins this debate in the pages of *LRP.* He unabashedly critiques a speech by a young girl at a private school (*La Encarnación*) who begins with a quote from Mme de Staël.[11] Guzmán finds the speech offensive because it "lacked one basic touchstone: the goal of educating girls to be mothers, teachers of men, and managers of their households" (Campos García 573). This backlash led to a concerted balancing act that mediated which transformative acts would be possible against what stereotypes and practices regarding women to tolerate under the local civil and ecclesiastic power structures (Rosado Rosado xiv). Echoing Rosado Rosado's observations, Campos García argues the women of *LS* craftily negotiated their calls for women's emancipation with varying success:

> (T)he Siemprevivas agreed to a scope of modest feminist demands that consisted of training republican mothers for not entirely secular but rather syncretic homes where scientific teachings coexisted with love of God, society, and nation. Within her institute, Cetina seems to have sought to foster the *republican* angel of the house recalling (Pablo) García and the heterodoxy of 1875 but inclined towards Catholicism . . . .(italics mine, 590)

It is this syncretism, I would argue, that nurtured the aforementioned interstitial or third space allowing for the women to be the agents of change in 1870s Merida. Of course, not all men opposed women's entry into public space and civic life. As Campos García earlier posits in his discussion of patriarchy and how multiple forms of it coexist: "And if we assume that men dominate in the most significant institutions, this does not imply that women are completely deprived of rights, resources, or certain avenues for exercising power" (561-62). In the pages of *LRP* we see how the state government supported the publication of *LS* and the school for girls, for example.

Perhaps one of the best testaments to La Siempreviva's astute successful maneuvering of their quest for women's advancement while simultaneously assuaging local anxieties of challenges to normative gender expectations can be read in Guzmán Serrano's article "La mujer ciudadana." In this article the author claims he doesn't object to women acquiring knowledge or in his words "cualquier ciencia" but it is its exercise, or employment that he protests. He is concerned about women's virtue and decorum, two values apparently not associated with men. It is clear that, in his mind, expecting these attributes from women is not incompatible with the embracing of progress, claiming "We are supporters of modern education and modern women" (*LRP* 599:4). He ends his article mentioning *La Siempreviva* as a positive example for women stating, "by adopting the theme of enlightenment and charity they have known not to stray from their mission on Earth" (*LRP* 599:4). This article published in the state publication *LRP* in July of 1871, fourteen months after the inaugural publication of *LS* in 1870, signals how important the journal was in advancing ideas linking modernity and women's changing role in Mexican society.

After it began publishing the journal, *LS*, the women had a very public civic life, as their activities were often registered in *LRP*. In July 1871, for example, under the heading "Gobierno del Estado" (State Government) there is a note under "Sociedad la 'Siempreviva.– Secretaría" where it reports that the organization collected funds for Chemax (a village attacked by the rebels) at the bequest of the society "El Porvenir" in Valladolid. It is signed with the theme of "Caridad y Progreso" by "Rita Cetina Gutiérrez, presidenta" ("Gobierno del Estado" 601:1).[12] This entry is followed by another under the heading "República Mejicana" (sic) and the state of Yucatan in which then governor Manuel Cirerol, who signs "Independencia y Libertad," thanks the women of *LS* (601:1). Cirerol links the women's

local efforts to national civic projects when he lists the nation first. The women collaborated with other local organizations with similar charitable objectives.

The Society *Jesús María* and *La Siempreviva* united to aid a town victimized by the internal civil war. *LRP* reported on the 16th of October 1872 that a theatre presentation ("función dramática") was to serve as a fundraising event to aid the town of Kantunil, recently the target of an attack:

> The product of this event will be used to assist the unfortunate inhabitants of Kantunil who were threatened by the last invasion of the barbarians. We hope that all society cooperates with their efforts so that the desires of the Society of Jesus Maria and La Siempreviva remain completely satisfied, so much more since of the misfortunes they wish to remedy, we will derive worthwhile fruits for the entire State. (4)[13]

In subsequent coverage of the event by the official paper, there was acknowledgement of the importance of the service provided by these two societies. This time, however, the account was followed by a statement expressing the belief that a general spirit of benevolence on the part of Yucatecans would eradicate the Caste Wars: "Estamos persuadidos de que si todos los hijos de Yucatán participaran de las mismas benéficas aspiraciones, la guerra de castas desaparecería indudablemente." (We are convinced that if all the children of Yucatan participated in similar benevolent aspirations, the caste wars would undoubtedly disappear, 783: 4).[14] Reading the word "hijos" (which I translate as the gender neutral "children" but is signified as masculine in Spanish) must have been ironic for the women of *La Siempreviva*, since they were equal partners in the organization of these charitable events. The representation of the indigenous as savages and barbarians in Yucatán was a sharp contrast to the rhetoric of racial miscegenation in central Mexico proposed by writers such as Manuel Altamirano (1834-1893).[15]

It is important to note that the Caste Wars were not necessarily fought by those within clearly demarcated ethnic categories. The term *castas* is derived from the colonial era as a social category and meant "persons of presumed mixed ancestry, such as mestizos or mulattos" (Gabbert 465).[16] There were indigenous groups that fought alongside the *blancos* (whites) or *ladinos* against the rebel Maya and were rewarded with the title of *hidalgo* and exempted from paying taxes.[17] In colonial times, as Gabbert notes, the "Indian hidalgos enjoyed privileges which identified them legally with the lower Spanish nobility. They were exempt from tribute, forced labour and the legal prohibitions imposed on Indian commoners" (466). Terry Rugeley argues that it is the disempowerment of an important Maya intermediary and leader that precipitates the revolts since a "central figure in virtually all disputes and uprisings was the Maya *batab* or cacique" (183). It is generally understood that the origins of the war were tied to long-standing systemic injustices such as land expropriation, forced labor, taxes, "cattle

depredations, harsh physical punishment, interference in their domestic affairs, and restraints on their geographic mobility" (Rugeley, *Origins* 90). Those who fought against the ruling *ladinos* were demonized as uncivilized and a hindrance to modernizing projects.

The women writers of *La Siempreviva* did not counter this representation of the barbarous other, rather they propagated it in their poetry even as they sought compassion and charity for the poor. Works of charity, although helpful to those receiving the aid, did not lead to the profound social transformation that the Caste Wars were ostensibly attempting to achieve. The members of *La Siempreviva* were mostly educated, upper-class women originating from Merida's cultural and political elite. Rita Cetina Gutierrez's father had been a Jefe Político and military man. Gertrudis Tenorio Zavala's famous grandfather Lorenzo de Zavala (1788-1836), published the first newspaper in Yucatan, *El Aristarco* (1813) and became the first Vice President of the short-lived Republic of Texas. Cristina Farfán originated from a modest family and lost her father as a child but was educated, a privilege shared by a small percentage of nineteenth-century Mexicans.[18] These three women were the impetus behind this *sui generis* organization whose work touched the lives of many young women in Merida. Recently, scholarship has emphasized the homonymous publication and its promotion of education. My study of the local newspapers published during the time of the organization's existence points to the women's commitment to embracing the rhetoric of progress and modernity in a very visual and public fashion through their organized acts of benevolence.

In an article about the end of year exams at the girls school *La Siempreviva* in April of 1874, the official paper reports, for example, that the organization has a colorful banner or flag whose motto reads: *caridad y progreso* (charity and progress).[19] Although it is unclear whether they are the initiators of this theme or reflecting a trend, the flag or banner is evidence that they are actively participating in the re-articulation of progress and what it means to be modern. Indeed, two months later when the state forms a governing board for the newly founded Settlement House, Gertrudis Tenorio is asked to gather items for a fundraiser and she accepts the charge stating:

> I accept, proposing to work with all the zeal and activity required. I have the conviction that this important project will find a general resonance in the hearts of all, since the sons of Merida whom have always been distinguished because of their philanthropy, and more than once have given proof of the *love* they hold for their brothers, will contribute with pleasure to form the house for the poor, unfortunately, so necessary. (*italics mine* "Junta Central de Beneficencia," 1060: 2).[20]

It is Gertrudis Tenorio's foundational work with *LS*, her social standing and fame as poet which contribute to the visibility and experience that

facilitates this public position as a volunteer for the bazar that is to aid in funding the settlement house.[21]

Tenorio's letter is followed by other political figures in nearby municipalities joining in welcoming the founding of a *Junta de Beneficencia* and alternatively signing with the mottos "Caridad y Progreso" or "Independencia y Libertad" after their names. Emilio Mac-Kinney, from Merida accepts the position in the *Junta* and signs "Independencia y Libertad" adding "que atendido su objeto Dios nuestro Señor llenará de bendiciones" (considering its objective, God our Lord will fill it with blessings, Junio 29, 1874). Juan M. Iturralde accepts from Valladolid and signs "Dios Nuestro Señor guarde a esa H. Junta por muchos años" (May God our Lord, protect this Honorable Junta for many years). However, other men such as C. Escalante from Acanceh, and J. Rivero y Alcalá and José María Bolio from Izamal sign "Caridad y Progreso" (1060:2). These men who are asked to represent their towns are responding to a patriotic call and do so with the characteristic *fin-de-siècle* gallantry. They also notably employ a religious terminology that registers a public resistance to the anti-Catholic rhetoric espoused by the Liberal government now in power in Mexico City. It is through the rhetoric of charity that we note those interstitial moments of resistance and negotiation. The women of *LS* who wrote about charity and faith as well as women's emancipation in their publication, navigate that liminal space of enforced secularization and progress confronting traditional Catholic teachings, especially about the importance of Christian charity, values and girls' education.

Cristina Farfán was the most religious of the three women and often used Christian rhetoric and imagery in her writings for *LS*. The women alternated editing the journal and Cristina often contributed with essays whose content revealed her profound faith and knowledge of Christian principles. Her second contribution in the fourth number of the publication is an essay entitled "La cruz" (The Cross) in which she declares the cross of Christ to be "nuestra única esperanza" (our only hope, *LS* 4:1-2). Other contributions with a Christian message include the poems, "Un mandamiento" ("A Commandment" *LS* 15:1) and "Plegaria a María" ("Prayer to Mary" *LS* 19:4) and the reflection "Bienaventurados los que lloran" ("Blessed are those who mourn" *LS* 22:1) dedicated to Gertrudis Tenorio's cousin and *LS* contributor Catalina Zapata. Like Cetina, Farfán also writes about the education of women and declares "Later Christianity made her a companion to man" (*LS* 72:1). As her fellow editors, she also advocates for the education of women in terms of the benefits to the nation; "¡Cuan provechosa y necesaria es la educación de la mujer para el bien de la patria! ("How worthwhile and necessary is women's education for the good of the nation," *LS* 27:1). Cristina's voice and presence in *LS* was a conscious, deliberate inclusion by her co-editors. Creating that syncretic space for her was significant because it gathered women who held her views into the conversation. Catholic women could see themselves reflected in her words and thereby be a part of the movement for progress.

A brilliant strategy, perhaps echoing Jean Franco's observation that Mexican women, in the period that she examines, "(w)ithout the power to change the story or to enter into dialogue, . . . have resorted to subterfuge, digression, disguise, or deathly interruption" (xxiii).

Farfán is often neglected in studies about *LS* because she moves to Tabasco after marrying the poet José García Montero and tragically dies in childbirth in 1880. Fittingly, she is credited with founding the journal *El Recreo del Hogar* (1879) in Tabasco. The publication is described as being "de corte literario" (having a literary bent, Reyes Ramírez 346). Farfán did not originate from the upper-class families of Merida, and yet she also contributed in a significant manner to *La Siempreviva*'s charitable work. She gave lessons in art drawing to the young girls of the cost-free school.

During the colonial era, charitable societies run by women dated back to the 18th century and were considered a natural extension of their role as nurturers. One precursor to Meridian women's charitable work can be found in the eighteenth-century Spanish women's *Junta de Damas.* This civic group which was "the women's auxiliary organization of the Royal Economic Society of Madrid," was "formed after women were denied direct membership in the organization" (Lewis 271). In a study about the group, Elizabeth Franklin Lewis writes:

> Charity, deemed an acceptable form of women's participation in Enlightened social reform, became increasingly more prominent for Spanish women of the upper classes, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and yet their charitable acts carried with them many layers of religious, social, and political significance both for the women committing these charitable acts as well as for the women (and children) who found themselves recipients. (267)

In a recent study by historian Silvia Marina Arrom entitled *Volunteering for a Cause: Gender, Faith, and Charity in Mexico from the Reform to the Revolution* (2016), she argues that middle-class women and those from humbler origins also participated in the *Association of the Ladies of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul* disputing assumptions that it was only upper-class or elite women who participated. Arrom points to the "gendered dimension" of their work as these experiences placed women in visible and public positions in their communities at a time in the nineteenth century when the spaces they inhabited were under social scrutiny and judgement. She states:

> By recruiting middle and upper-class women to defend the faith and assist the poor, the church gave them a base from which to move into the public sphere. Although the work of benevolence was justified as a natural extension of women's domestic role, it was far more than that. (7)

Arrom assigns significance to the women's organization, arguing for its role in the resurgence of the Catholic church in early twentieth century Mexico.

La Siempreviva was one of many literary societies that organized intellectuals in post-independence Mexico. It is the presence of these groups and not independence itself that is considered the benchmark of the creation of an autoctonous national literary society. Clark de Lara cites José María Lafragua as the source of the idea that "national literature was initiated, not as much with the advancement of independence as with the opening of the Letran Academy of 1836" (*Letras mexicanas* 64). Very little is provided about the Academia de Letrán, however one can surmise that it was a literary society headed by men and centered in Mexico City. Keenly aware of its unique status, *LS* prided itself on being organized by women for women that it boasted this fact, on the very masthead of its premiere number published in 1870, which read, "EDITED EXCLUSIVELY BY MARRIED AND UNMARRIED WOMEN."

On that masthead the major themes of the journal were listed as Fine Arts, Erudition, Recreation and, lastly, Charity. From its very first page the journal unites the causes of fine arts and charity under the guiding sentiment of love and Religion (spelled with a capital R). Indeed, they claim that it is this *love* that propels them to found a fine arts school for girls: "Just the creation of a school of this type is fact enough to demonstrate in a palpable manner our *love* for Yucatán and our desire to have knowledge available" (*italics mine* "Introducción"1:1).[22] The further evidence of the society's major identification with charitable works can be seen in its printed salutation to other similar organizations in Merida:

> Please receive our most cordial greetings, our sister charitable societies 'Saint Vicent de Paul, 'La Purísima' and Jesús María that recently created the 'School for Artisans;' 'La Minerva,' 'The Recreation of Youth,' 'La Unión,' The Academy of Artístic Recreation and the 'Lyceum of Merida,' as well as all the journals, societies, and corporations of our type. (*LS* 1:1)

LRP documents the spirit of collaboration that *LS* practiced with similar organizations. With *La Unión*, for example, *LS* shared its interests in art and education. Under the "Gacetilla" section of March 6th 1871, the newspaper reports that the biblical drama *La pasión y muerte de Jesús* was presented by a group of children at the San Carlos Theatre. The short article then states that . . .

> The society La Unión in the first night of the (theatre) presentation and the enthusiastic society LS in the second one gave them flowers and crowns as testimony of their admiration and sympathies. ("Gacetilla" 4)

Three years later, after having established itself as a viable and effective literary and civic organization, *LS* would partner with *El Conservatorio* and *Academia artístico recreativa* (founded by the poet Juán Peon Contreras) to sponsor the special event at the San Carlos Theatre (June 29th 1874). Although by July 6th the name of the *Conservatorio* does not appear in the list

of those signing the proposed program, indicating that perhaps Merida's philharmonic society did not officially participate, several musicians performed.

The program of the event was publicized in *LRP* on Wednesday, July 8th under the GACETILLA section of the paper and read:

> Teatro de San Carlos. Variety show for the night of the upcoming Sunday the 12th, whose product will be given to the Settlement House that we are attempting to establish. ("Gacetilla," 1064: 4).

Under "Precios de Localidades" the announcement that followed declared that the prices for the event would be higher than usual because of its "charitable objective" (1064:4). The cost of attendance ranged from 12.5 pesos for seats in the upper balcony for "niños y descalzos" (children and barefoot) to 50 pesos for "billetes sueltos de entrada" for individual tickets in the center of the theatre.[23] The organizers employed a unique form of selling tickets by distributing them among the elite households of Merida and assuming their purchase if they were not returned: "Those that receive them at home, please have the kindness to return them immediately to the Commission because if not, we will understand that you accept them" ("Nota" 4). The program boasted that it was a "gran obertura" (grand overture), attesting to the uniqueness of the presentation.

The program was to include three sections. The first began with poetry readings by Cristina Farfán, Gertrudis Tenorio Zavala, and Rita Cetina Gutiérrez who were to read "compositions regarding the noble objective of the event" ("Gacetilla," 1064: 4).[24] They were to be followed by a violin and piano piece played by locally noted musicians, a short original historical drama, a hymn, and a short aria from an Italian opera. The cultural and social elite of Merida were to attend a very special evening.

The poems read by the three founders of *LS* were the first to appear in the pages that covered the event the Monday after the program (July 13th 1874).[25] Their social acceptance and credibility stemmed from their success as poets and recent public lives as educators and philanthropists. The three women were known to participate in local literary salons, such as *La Minerva*, and were accustomed to reading in public from their participation in previous benefits.[26] The subscribers to *LS* were familiar with their previous essays and poems on the themes of charity and poverty. All entitled "Caridad" or Charity, the three poems written especially for this event revealed each woman poet's signature style and voice. Notably, no male poets read poems about charity, confirming the gendered nature of the theme.

The reviewer of the fundraiser ends with the statement "La Caridad es una flor cuyo perfume jamás se extingue, porque viene de Dios" (Charity/Love is a flower whose perfume is never extinguished because it comes from God, "La función de anoche" 1066:3). The event was a success at many levels. It gathered funds for a *Casa de Beneficencia* but also solidified a new

theme of progress in Merida that included the care of the less fortunate, as those who signed Caridad y Progreso affirmed.

Interest in the fate of the Settlement House flanked the pages of *La Revista de Mérida* when under "Remitido" (Announcement) there is a lengthy article detailing how Sr. Brunet left 50, 000 *pesos* for the establishment of the Settlement and there were concerns that the funds were being mismanaged. Women were being turned away, the writer continues, and cites the situation of Da. Manuela Castillo, a widow with three small children. His concern appears genuine and at the end his language turns to the rhetoric of charity as the reward of expected blessings and gratitude from the needy are recounted: "and the inmortal remembrance of its founder will be blessed, as in other times, by those in need" (Llanes Marín, "Casa de Beneficencia" *LRM* 65:2).

However, not everyone shared this approach to the social problems confronting Meridian society in the beginning of the Restoration. Vagrancy laws were reinforced in Merida and there were articles in the paper about the importance of work. A few months after the event (November 6th 1872) under an article entitled "La paz no lo es todo" (Peace is not everything) the editorial staff argued that yes, peace was certainly desired, but that to achieve this "order and work" was the prescribed route. Indeed, the Settlement House not only educated the orphan children but it was required that at a certain unspecified age they were to begin to work. Young girls were also required to engage in domestic chores around the house as stated in Article 53 of Chapter XV of the *Estatutos Generales de la Casa de Beneficencia* (Statutes of the Settlement House): " . . . se ocuparán también alternativamente en el servicio de la casa, como barrer, lavar, planchar, guisar, etc." (they will occupy themselves alternatively in the service of the house by sweeping, washing, ironing and cooking, 12). These added responsibilities were not assigned to the boys.

The preoccupation with progress in the late nineteenth century was not unique to Yucatan but its link to charity by a group of concerned citizens is notable.[27] Charity became a project of Carmen Rubio Díaz, the dictator's young wife who worked with Mexico City's urban poor women, and founded the *Casa de la Amiga Obrera* (Friend of the Working Woman House) inaugurated in December 1887. Charity, minus the Christian rhetoric, was considered Mrs. Díaz's purview.[28] Those who opposed Porfirio, however, suffered repression and exile.

In 1870s Merida, subsequent numbers of the *LRP* expose that the discourse on charity evolves as it becomes contested space. Both the state government and the recently disenfranchised Catholic church vie for credibility as the legitimate caretakers of the indigent. A few months after the theatre event and bazar, for example, on March 3rd 1875 (47:4),[29] *LRP* reports that a Catholic journal was urging Catholic families not to receive charity from Masons and Spiritists who were a growing sect in Merida! The argument was that doing so would give these religions or sects, the legitimacy that the Church believed they did not have. As the role of the

church decreased, the place of government in providing relief to poverty increased.

Women involved in philanthropic work has been largely ignored and this, according to Silvia Arrom is due to a conscious omission on the part of Latin American historians:

> Historians during the past half century favored the lower classes over the elites, and if they mentioned charity at all, they dismissed it as a form of elite paternalism and social control. Moreover, because of the influence of modernization theory that correlates progress with secularization, religious groups were considered obstacles to modernization and remnants of an earlier age, destined to disappear *and* therefore, unworthy of study. (4)

In varying degrees, the women of La Siempreviva originated from the privileged classes and their participation in charitable projects served to cement their social positions. Although unmarried at the time, these women had access to resources through their connections to powerful men. Their work did not disrupt the entrenched social hierarchy that oppressed the indigenous and poor.[30] Educating the young girls in Spanish, for example, served state and social economic elite interests since it acculturated and assimilated the *castas* in Merida. As the women spoke on behalf of the poor, orphaned and handicapped, they subsumed those represented into silence.[31] Ultimately, their performance that night and general works of charity solidified elite ties to the "good" indigenous and *castas* on their side of the war.

Although *La Siempreviva* was not a religious group, the women of the charitable organization, journal and school for girls used the language of Christian charity to legitimize their active and public roles in working to alleviate poverty as well as educate girls. In *LRP* this sentiment of syncretic coexistence with religion and science, as well as charity as part of progress, was echoed by male intellectuals even though there was an official stance that rejected the expansion of the Church in the provision of aid for the poor. Merida's view of modernity (as expressed by the contributors to *LS*, *LRP* and other journals of the time) embraced faith, for it was faith in God that engendered the noble sentiments that could be employed in benefit of the restored Liberal state. These positions were not, I hope to have proven, simple continuations of a conservative agenda but rather a nuanced embracing of the future (modernity and secularity), with a recognition of the values that were important to maintain in civic life: not only love of self but love of country, state and the imagined "neighbor." This syncretic approach helped the women of *LS* advance their agenda in possible practices that gained them and other women visibility, recognition and acceptance in the public domain. Women slowly began to take on leadership roles as the impulse for national reconstruction focused on education. And although women did not obtain the right to vote in Mexico until the 1950s, the leaders of *LS* were instrumental in professionalizing

an entire generation of women educators in Merida whose unaltered voices where heard in Merida, Yucatan's Feminist Congress of 1916.[32] The organization's banner which held the words "Caridad y Progreso" sought to inspire an entire generation of young people, reminding them that progress could be measured in actions that worked for the uplifting and improvement of the most vulnerable in Mexican society.

Endnotes

[1] The last issue I was able to consult at the *Biblioteca Yucatenese* in Merida was dated May 18th of 1892, num. 843. It is uncertain when publication stopped but the virtual library lists 1896 as the last issue available for consultation. Henceforth represented in the text as *LRP*. Also, throughout the text I have updated the use of the diacritical marks to reflect modern grammatical standards. The author wishes to thank Dr. Naomi Lindstrom of UT Austin for her support as well as the kind staff at the *Biblioteca Yucatenense*.

[2] June 29, 1874, num. 1060. *El Conservatorio* is not mentioned in the subsequent descriptions of the evening's events in the Monday, July 13th issue. It was the Philharmonic Society of Mérida. The first edition of its journal was published on September 16th 1873. Its masthead read "Semanario de Literatura y Bellas Artes. Órgano de la Sociedad Filarmónica de Mérida" (Año 1, Num. 1).

[3] The organization, *La Unión* organized dances frequently and there is a mention of a "baile democrático" in the home of Sr. D. Rogerio Cantón. The newspaper *LRP* congratulates the society *La Igualdad* (Equality) for the event that included an orchestra and dancing (article appears in *LRP* 215:4; Monday, January 18, 1869). However, judging from the participants involved and the extent of the coverage of the July 12th event in the *LRP*, the Teatro San Carlos fundraiser was the most important social event since the fall of Maximilian.

[4] *La Siempreviva*, from now on represented as *LS* in the text, was *sui generis*. No where else in Mexico do we find such a multi-purpose organization for and by women. Founded in 1870, the women published a homonymous journal that served as the "órgano official de la sociedad de su nombre" (official entity of the society of its name) from May 7, 1870 to March 7th 1872 (forty-three numbers, the last of which was erroneously dated "MARZO 7 DE 1862"). The charitable society and school for girls continued after March 1872 but the publication lost state funding with the change in governorship that year. In 2010 the *Instituto de Equidad de Género en Yucatán* (Institute of Gender Equity of Yucatán), under the direction of Georgina Rosado Rosado, published a facsimile of *LS* along with an introductory study by Melchor Campos García.

[5] Rosado Rosado refers to their strategies as conscious, intelligent, and necessary tactics in response to a hostile environment. "En un contexto histórico de patriarcado hostil, decidieron de manera inteligente qué era conveniente transformer y qué mantener de los estereotipos y prácticas

ligadas a la mujer y a lo femenino, en una continua negociación con los grupos de poder, civiles y eclesiásticos," (In the historical context of a hostile patriarchy, they decided in an intelligent manner what was convenient to transform and what stereotypes and practices linked to women and femininity to maintain, in what was a continuous negotiation with civil, ecclesiastic and powerful groups, "Prólogo" xiv).

[6] The *maya* uprising surged in January of 1847 with a vicious attack on the town of Tepich. Cecilio Chí is credited with leading the rebellion that began in the south of the Yucatan peninsula. Yucatan gains independence from central Mexico in 1841 after a successful struggle for succession beginning in 1836. The Yucatec Republic is short-lived and reunification occurs in 1848. Unable to quell the rural violence, Rugeley notes that Yucatan "had grown so desperate for aid that it was willing to return to Mexico under almost any terms" ("Brief, Glorious History" 223). As a result of the Caste War, Yucatan lost the region of Campeche in 1857 and what became Quintana Roo in 1901 as part of Porfirio Díaz's "reconquest of the eastern territories" "(Rugeley "Brief" 224).

[7] Henceforth, all translations mine.

[8] Carlos R. Menéndez identifies then presbyter Crecencio Carrillo Ancona as the editor of the journal *El Repertorio Pintoresco* first published in 1861 with the added subject heading of "Literatura, Religión, Ciencias, Variedades, etc. He claims the periodical, along with *La Guirnalda*, "conquistaron merecida fama" (conquered deserved fame, 16). The poetry of Gertrudis Tenorio Zavala appeared in both publications. Note that religion and science are not incompatible.

[9] Note: the syncretic gesture proposed here in the co-existence of religion and science is also adopted by the women of LS, as revealed in essays published in the journal by Farfán. "La educación de la mujer" June 19, 1871 n. 27, for example. Also, Carrillo Ancona appears unknowledgeable of the role that *hacendado* clergy had in displacing and abusing of *maya* peasants (See Terry Rugeley, *Yucatán's Maya Peasantry and the Origins of the Caste War*).

[10] Those of European descent in Yucatán are interchangeably referred to as *criollos*, *blancos*, *ladinos* and *vecinos*.

[11] Germaine de Staël (1766-1817), French intellectual of Swiss origin. She held famous literary salons and advanced liberal politics. She published two novels, *Delphine* (1802) and *Corinne* (1807). She also wrote political and theoretical essays such as *The Influence of Literature Upon Society* (1800).

[12] *LRP* July 31st 1871, 601:1.

[13] *LRP* Wednesday, October 16th 1872 under "Gacetilla." (short news item)

[14] *LRP* Monday, October 21st 1872, under "Gacetilla. FUNCION DRAMATICA," 783: 4. The article specifies that the drama *Bienaventurados los que lloran* (Blessed are those who mourn) was presented in the "salones de 'La Siempreviva' el Viernes por la noche, ante una numerosa y elegante concurrencia" (salons of La Siempreviva, Friday evening, before a numerous

and elegant audience). The work of these organizations was very popular in Meridian society.

[15] Altamirano is considered the father of national literature in Mexico. The posthumously published novel, *El zarco* (1901) is his best-known work.

[16] The term *indio*, and the Mayan word *masewal* were both used to refer to Indian commoners. Gabbert asserts that these also "referred to a social category, not to a self-conscious ethnic grouping" (467).

[17] See Gabbert, Wolfgang. "Social categories, Ethnicity and the State in Yucatán, Mexico," p. 471 footnotes 43 and 44.

[18] According to Mary K. Vaughan, "Official statistics show that literacy defined as the capacity to both read and write increased from 17 percent of the population over six in 1895 to 29 percent of the population over twelve in 1910 (33 percent male literacy and 13 percent female)" (43). In the same article Vaughan avers that the Federal District in Mexico City had a higher literacy rate of 64% in 1910 (see footnote 55 on page 58). Due to Merida's proximity to La Habana, many Cuban educators instructed the Meridian youth of the middle to upper classes. It is possible that as in Mexico City, literacy percentages were higher in the "White City" (La ciudad blanca).

[19] *LRP* Monday, April 20th 1874, under "Gacetilla, El H. Consejo de Instrucción Pública. LA SIEMPREVIVA" 4. After discussing the results of the end-of-year public exams of the girls who attend their school, the writer states "y realizando cumplidamente el precioso tema que cubre los hermosos colores de su bandera: caridad y progreso" (and dutifully realizing the precious theme that covers the beautiful colors of their flag: charity and progress).

[20] *LRP* Monday, June 29th 1874, under "Gacetilla, JUNTA CENTRAL DE BENEFICENCIA," 1060:2.

[21] *LRP* Wednesday, June 17th 1874 under "Gacetilla, La idea de establecer un Bazar,"1054: 3. The list of all-male members of the board for the settlement house does not include Gertrudis Tenorio.

[22] In the title of this essay I have chosen to interchange the word "charity" for "love" because of this statement. I am aware of their semantic variances. In the interest of space, I will refrain from providing a historical revision of the Greek origins of the words but instead reference a passage that inspired the Catholic imagination of the time, First Corinthians chapter 13, verse 13: "So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (*Holy Bible. Saint Joseph Edition*, "The New Testament," 259). Originally translated as "charity" in the King James Version, modern translations use "love." In Spanish versions *caridad* has been replaced by "love." Paraphrasing the New Testament, the origins of this Catholic impulse at the end of the nineteenth century, the true essence of charity is love. Negative connotations of the word charity often conjure images of the devaluing of the poor because they receive alms. Selfish motivations on the part of the giver have also tainted the word. The newspaper accounts mostly believe in the sincerity and good will of the women and men who acted on behalf of those less fortunate.

[23] The word "descalzos" may refer to the indigenous caretakers who accompanied the children.
[24] It is important to note how unique these women's cultural and social visibility was, not just in the context of Méridan society but, in Mexico in general. In Stuart Easterling's lengthy study entitled "Gender and Poetry Writing in the Light of Mexico's Liberal Victory, 1867-ca. 1890," the author twice remarks how women's public presence was limited. "Unlike their male counterparts, women poets did not read their poetry for the broad public or even the narrower literary public. This distinction was significant because poetry, at this time, was not merely a written genre; it was also fundamentally an oral one . . . (w)omen writers, for their part, were simply not afforded this opportunity" (Easterling 103). Regarding literary *veladas* he comments "But gatherings of this kind very rarely included women as poets" (134). The "pair of notable exceptions" he posts in footnote 133 appear in *El Federalista* in 1875.
[25] *LRP* 1066:3.
[26] In *La Aurora* (1870), a journal published by Cuban national Idelfonso Estrada y Zenea, under "Velada Literaria" we find "el martes 4 tuvo lugar en la bonita casa del Sr. D. Darío Galera la segunda velada literaria promovida por la Sociedad "Minerva.' En la parte de literatura tomaron parte nuestras amigas y distinguidas colaboradoras las Señoritas Tenorio, Farfán y Cetina." (on Tuesday the 4th the second literary salon promoted by the Minerva Society was held at the lovely home of Mr. Darío Galera. In the literature section our friends and distinguished colaborators participated, the Señoritas Tenorio, Farfán and Cetina, 18). There are no dates registered (only page numbers) on this publication found at the *Biblioteca Yucatenense*.
[27] Note that the new port city founded in the late nineteenth century is named Puerto Progreso (de Castro).
[28] In a study on working women in Mexico City, Susie S. Porter asserts that "The transfer of charity from the Catholic Church to the Mexican state during the Reform period, and then to private interests in the late nineteenth century, implied a partial transfer of responsibility for, and authority over, female poverty" (162).
[29] Note the newspaper changes its numeration as it identifies a "Segunda Época" or second epoch, and it registers Wednesday, February 17th of 1875 as its eighth year (año VIII) and number 41.
[30] Writing about rural revolts, Friedrich Katz aligns class status along ethnic subjectivity and geographic location in Yucatan: "Relations between hacendados and free villagers were much more antagonistic in the southeast than in the north . . . class differences coincided with ethnic differences; the hacendados were whites or mestizos, the peasants were Indians" (525).
[31] In a reflection on how similar social actors are represented in the 1880s literature of Peruvian *indigenista* Clorinda Matto de Turner, Ana Peluffo notes: "Al convertir al indio objeto de piedad de una dama de caridad, se produce en el texto un claro silenciamiento de la voz del otro que

se convierte en un objeto mudo, fácilmente interpretable por el sujeto femenino" (By converting the indian into an object of mercy for a lady of charity, in the text a clear silencing of the voice of the other occurs converting him into a mute object, easily interpretable by the feminine subject, 110).

[32] For a study of Rita Cetina Gutierrez's role in the professionalization of teachers and her legacy in the Feminist Congress of 1916 please see Piedad Peniche Rivero's *Rita Cetina, La Siempreviva y el Instituto Literario de Niñas: Una cuna del femenismo mexicano 1846-1908*. Merida: INEHRM, 2015.

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