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The Exoticism of Maya Women: Foreign Obsession and Repulsion, 1820-1900

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Historians are constantly in the process of revising collective understanding about the past as previously unknown documents are newly uncovered. The discovery of a diary or memoir, legal papers, and such can cause near ecstasy in an historian and most dream of finding a trunk or suitcase in a dusty attic someday—the waiting goldmine of study. In the past few decades, it has become increasingly more popular to include with traditional written documentation more unusual sources such as archaeological evidence, oral history, and elements of material culture, all adding to the evidence of humans past. What is contained in this research is not of that worthy endeavor; rather, this is a compilation of sorts incorporating excerpts of writings that were published between 1820 and 1900, which, for the most part, are well known amongst Central Americanists today. What I am proposing, however, is a re-reading of these existent texts for a “voice” that has not been readily apparent to historians, nor even intended by the original authors.¹

How can scholars uncover the history of underrepresented peoples? For instance, if one wants to know about the history of women of color anywhere in the American hemisphere before the year 1900, from where would the sources be derived? These women were not educated, were not politically active, and did not have national-level recognition of their importance, whether socially or economically. In male-dominated societies, the lack of inclusion of women in published accounts of the period was the norm. In the case of Latin America, as elsewhere, women of color have been “found” in the past few decades in criminal and ecclesiastical court cases.² As much as these written records illuminate the individual voice of many women who otherwise would have been lost to time, their histories are studies in deviancy. The women who

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found themselves subject to the scrutiny of the criminal justice system were themselves unusual for having been the victims of violent crime or the perpetrators of crime. While much can be gleaned from their individual testimonies on age, marital status, offspring, occupations, and more, solely relying on the unusual to generalize about the average woman in society is dangerous to say the least. Though, the stories do tend to be quite interesting in a sometimes macabre or shocking way when looking at cases of those accused of witchcraft, spousal homicide, or as women of ill repute.

What, however, if the woman were not simply of African or Iberian heritage in an urban area, but instead rural and Native American in origin?³ Guatemala, a nation not much different in size than the state of Georgia and sitting to the south of Mexico, had, in the 19th century as now, a population of majority Maya heritage, and a significant other that were mixed-race of indigenous and Spanish ancestry (*Ladino*). The *mulata* (mixed-race African) women of the capital city wove in and out of households as servants, laundresses, bakers, and sellers of small goods and services as a recognizable and vibrant part of the national economy in their small way as did their *Ladina* counterparts with those of purer Spanish heritage in positions of wealth and power. By contrast, Maya women were all but invisible to Guatemalans of political and economic power, whether Spanish or *Ladino*. The claim has been made by anthropologists and historians alike that the Maya were, and are, a nation within a nation. Even today, Maya women often are not conversant or comfortable in Spanish, are frequently illiterate because of severe economic and political limitations, and continue to dress traditionally in their obviously non-Western clothing, acting as carriers of non-Spanish traditions and cultural practices. These women were completely ignored in the published historical record prior to the arrival of North American and Western European anthropologists, archaeologists, merchants, diplomats,

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scientists, and adventurers into the newly opened ports of an emerging nation. Even so, one must read carefully the texts of these wanderers as the Maya women are difficult to find, but they certainly were present.

It must be noted that there is no single instance in any of the texts surveyed here where the actual speech of a Maya woman is recorded or quoted in any way. In point of fact, across the many texts surveyed here, the name of an actual Maya woman appears but once.⁴ Much of this is cultural on the part of Maya peoples for whom it would have been inappropriate for women to attempt conversation with the mostly male travelers to their regions. As Helen Sanborn notes in her travels in the 1880s, “They always go in groups; the men by themselves and the women by themselves, a man and a woman never walking together unless married.”⁵ This is also partly due to the cultural haughtiness of the foreign travelers themselves who believed their own societies and persons to be far superior to anything and anyone they encountered in their travels. Other reasons are the problems of communication itself as few Maya understood, if the authors are to be believed, fluent Spanish, and even fewer Spanish and *Ladinos* understood any of the numerous varieties of Mayan languages spoken in the country, to which there are presently more than twenty official languages in Guatemala; there is no similarity at all between Maya and Latin or Germanic-based European languages.

If the sources exclude the writings by French, German and other European travelers and the concentration solely rests on Anglo-American visitors to Guatemala in the 19th century, some clear trends emerge. First, the majority of travelers were male, which was to be expected when considering Western views of women at the time in terms of their perceived physical and mental capabilities (or limitations). This is also unsurprising because Guatemala had been part of the Spanish colonial empire until 1821, then for a short time a part of the United Provinces of

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Central America, until finally becoming a truly independent nation by mid-century. This was a time of political upheaval and some of the travelers carrying diplomatic correspondence failed to even find a legitimate government with whom to present their credentials.⁶ Central America, throughout the 19th century and beyond, also lacked adequate infrastructure and traveling cross country was by mule over poorly conceived dirt roads that disappeared in the rainy season and were clouds of dust in the dry. This was hardly the place for the western upper class woman of the 1800s—given that only women of means would have had the economic possibilities of travel in the first place.

While male travelers began their forays into the wilds of the Guatemalan interior in the same decade as initial independence from Spain in the 1820s, the first recorded travel by women is not until much later in the century. All three existent published female accounts are from 1870-1899, squarely in the latter half of the 19th century, and were most probably influenced by the movement toward Victorian ideals of womanhood and the rise of the progressive impulse. These foreign travelers who were women came accompanied by fathers and husbands; to travel alone would have been unseemly. Caroline Salvin followed her husband, Osbert, while he collected specimens of local flora and fauna to send to the Royal Botanical Society in England. She painted wonderfully detailed recreations of the plant matter, which were later published in an encyclopedia. Historians, however, should not fail to take careful look at her informative watercolor creations of local life and geography. Helen Sanborn traveled as her father's translator on a coffee buying venture, using all her newly acquired education from Wellesley College to her benefit. Anne Cary Maudslay came to Guatemala with her husband, Alfred Percival Maudslay, a famous British archaeologist, who had been many times before. She was simply along for the adventure. All of these women experienced difficulty maintaining proper

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dress and conduct while “on the road.” June Hahner, an historian of the travel writing genre, believes that, “Many female travelers might feel obliged to write primarily about subjects considered suitable for their participation and comment, such as scenic rides, shopping, and social encounters.”⁷ The implication is that these ladies would have deliberately left out key information that might have been unappealing to audiences if they wrote outside their gender norms. This might certainly have been true for Sanborn and Maudslay, but Salvin’s was a diary that never saw publication in her lifetime and her book, published only recently, also includes insertion of personal correspondence to close family members. There is some similarity amongst the three female writings, though Salvin’s has a bit more edge and biting choice of descriptive terms. Perhaps the notion that Guatemala was so remote and exotic could have pushed the boundaries of acceptable observation; the reality is that the women, like the men, were all tourists of a sort who captured the veneer of Guatemala and did not scratch too hard below the surface.

Each of these Anglo-American women had their travel records published, though at different times and for different reasons. Salvin had kept an awkwardly maintained diary, which had apparently never been intended for publication. Her diary, correspondence, and watercolors were found by her great-granddaughter in Canada in the late 20th century. Sanborn had been submitting small pieces of her recollections in her local Massachusetts grocery newspaper when she was encouraged to publish a full-length text of her time in Guatemala. Maudslay freely admitted that she had always intended to publish a text with the idea of popular appeal, and her husband lent his name to the book authorship and inserted excerpts from his prior forays into Guatemalan archaeology into various chapters, possibly to add weight to the scholarship. The

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original tome was beautiful in its color, design, and inclusion of numerous captivating images of local customs and lifestyles.

Perhaps it is not that strange that the three women travelers mentioned above happen to have incorporated more instances of interaction with Maya women than any of their some twenty male counterparts for the period. Theirs would have been a closer contact with Maya women's sphere of duties and concerns regarding household chores from cooking and cleaning, to style of dress, care of children, and such, even if from the point of view of a mistress who would watch over her female servants at work.⁸ At the same time, though there are many instances where the Western women paid attention to their Guatemalan hosts, some men, such as J. W. Boddam-Whetham and William T. Brigham meticulously copied weaving patterns, clothing styles, and instances of interactions in marketplaces that crossed very deliberately into the world of women.⁹ Simply because Salvin, Sanborn, and Maudslay were female did not give them some magical empathy for Maya women who were clearly not like them in race or class or cultural heritage. The catty and frequently unkind remarks were many times mirror images of the same language used by Western men.¹⁰ Equally true, both men and women would wax romantic on the idyllic and exotic scenes before them. The writings of Anglo-American travelers clearly situated the Maya woman in the position of "other" or "exotic being," as something to be studied, classified, and simultaneously admired and reviled, then subsequently tossed aside and ignored.

For the foreign traveler, the living accommodations of the Maya were the only choice for stopping the night in remote areas and they made do as best they could in such circumstances, though not always with pleasant comments on the personal habits of those whose homes they invaded, on the sharing of space with animals, or the proclivities for smoking amongst all members of the typical family. Clearly, these families who lived in *ranchos*, or mud huts with

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thatched roofs, with the bare minimum of furniture and niceties of modern 19th century civilization were to be pitied as well as scorned by the traveler. Inadvertently during their stay, the foreign visitors included a great deal of detail about the typical daily activities and duties of the women in the households—cooking, weaving, and water carrying fell under their collective gaze.

Most travelers were unappreciative of Maya fare, or even Guatemalan food in general, no matter where they stopped. From upper class houses in the capital city to the poorer homes of the countryside, these traveling elite were snooty and critical of what edibles were placed before them in most instances, but also demonstrating their own cultural preferences in the process. One of the more arduous and time-consuming tasks in the woman's sphere of duties was that of making bread for the household, which came in the form of a flattened corn tortilla. William T. Brigham, as if conducting field research, wrote:

Here we first saw the whole process of tortilla-making. The maiz was hulled in lime-water, washed in the lake, and ground laboriously on a stone metatle into a consistent paste, which is then skillfully patted into cakes from four to six inches in diameter, round and thick as an ordinary griddle-cake. These are then baked on an iron place or comal, but not browned, and should be eaten hot, and then the tortilla tastes like parched corn.¹¹

Other than the note of the tortilla, occasional beans, tinctures of coffee, and the happenstance egg, the diet was relatively meager along all of the travelers' routes and oftentimes they could not even find any extra food for purchase, whether for themselves or even fodder for the mules.

Weaving was one of the most necessary and most laborious pursuits tying up a woman's day after the making of corn tortillas. The women wove carrying cloths, clothing for all

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members of the family, and religious garments on a rudimentary stick or backstrap loom.

Maudslay watched carefully and commented, "One end of the loom is usually tied to the post of the house, and the other end steadied by a band round the woman's body..." from which she noted the clicking and other noise of the weaving apparatus from a distance when a woman was at work.¹² William T. Brigham paid careful attention to the weaving process done by women in Guatemala and peppered his work with photographs and sketches with examples of typical costuming:

The blue cloth is woven in rude looms, several of which we inspected, and the thread is dyed in vats of masonry in the house-yard. The threads are dressed in the loom and dried by a few coals...A border is woven at each edge...to mark the length of a dress pattern. A common design [he shows on a separate page of his text]...--the lines being light blue or dark. The lines of light filling are carried outside the selvage, and of course are easily broken; otherwise the cloth is coarse and strong, in widths of a *vara*, or thirty-three inches. The weavers were very obliging, and pleased to have us inspect their work.¹³

Typically the Maya woman had few if any changes of clothing and the general consensus was that she wore her one and only *huipil*, or female indigenous tunic, and would hopefully finish the next one on her loom before the first fell apart. The elaborate shirts, often embroidered with pattern and color indicating not only the weaver herself, but her language group and town, and infused with religious symbolism, geometrics, and local flora and fauna, took months to complete by hand. Maudslay was met with anger when she tried a number of times to purchase the *traje*, or traditional outfit of Maya women, finally pushing one poor young lady to the point

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of embarrassment who meekly admitted that if the garments were purchased, the wearer would have been left naked.

Households of 19th century Latin America would not have been complete without the chore of cleaning going to women. Maya women worked behind the scenes in many hotels, hostels, homes, and other establishments as well as their own abodes. For many of the travelers, these women were simply a part of the scenery to be enjoyed and, for the benefit of academics, some of the few instances of close contact. For instance, as one traveler illustrated his surroundings, “Birds hung in cages, and flowers in baskets; and the negligee air of everything, except the neat little Indian woman who did the household work, added to the comfortable feeling the place inspired.”¹⁴ Helen Sanborn believed that, “The women seemed more industrious than the men, for they were housekeepers; and the noise of the Indian housewife patting her tortillas in preparation for breakfast was the only sound that ever broke the silence of our quiet morning rides.”¹⁵ Other household chores involved washing clothing as Anne Carey Maudslay described in ridiculous fashion, “The water’s edge was fringed with washerwomen, who plied their trade with great energy and small regard for the fabrics they were hammering and beating out with sticks and stones.”¹⁶ Now, perhaps, one can understand why clothing had a short lifespan in the 1800s.

One of the many tasks that caught observers’ attention was with the method of Maya women fetching water on their heads in clay jars. This is evidenced with the passing complimentary phrases from Caroline Salvin about climbing over a stone wall: “Just before my clumsy ascent an Indian woman heavily laden with an enormous water pot crept down the notched branch that served as steps, without touching her load so nice was her balance.”¹⁷ Anne Carey Maudslay wrote, “Just before entering the half-ruined city we passed a group of women

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filling their great earthen “tinajas” with water at a picturesque old fountain, and lingering in the sweet evening light to gossip with their neighbors and stare at us as we passed.”¹⁸ Interestingly, water carriers did not much catch the attention of male observers. It may be that western women were more able to imagine their own difficulties and strain on their heads and necks putting themselves in the place of their Maya sisters. For Sanborn, Maya ladies were superwomen in their ability to juggle multiple tasks simultaneously as she remarked about one indigenous servant, Candelaria:

who was the busiest body in the whole house. She waited on the table, took care of the rooms, brought water for the house in a jar on her head, went to market, and in fact was doing something every moment and yet never seemed to be tired. Sometimes we heard her grinding coffee at nine o’clock in the evening, and she was always the first one up in the morning.¹⁹

There was even the outright assertion that women were far more “industrious” in Mayan society than the men, though perhaps the outdoor activities related to male-dominated agriculture would not have been scrutinized by female travelers in seasons other than planting or harvest. Anglo-American male photographers and illustrators did find the Maya female watercarrier image a scenery enhancer, peppering many views with these anonymous women, but generally ignored female servants.²⁰

Maya women came under the scrutiny of many foreigners for simply being women, and comparisons between Maya and Western families on methods of childrearing and spousal relationships ensued. Particular attention was paid to the Maya method of carrying their children and, to the traveler, the peculiar behavior of Maya offspring. Henry Dunn praised Maya women for nursing their children so carefully, believing, however incorrectly, that they did not trust their

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children to others, and that they “carry them on their backs wherever they go.”²¹ Brigham, after having hired a cargo-carrier, found that the *mozo* intended to bring his wife and daughter with him:

This was more of a caravan than we had bargained for, and I was puzzled; but the woman seemed quiet and inoffensive, and the child, who could hardly walk, and was carried always on her mother’s back, was a good little thing, --indeed, the most reasonable child I ever saw.²²

Anne Carey Maudslay reiterated these comments stating, “Here party after party of women with babies slung on their backs or astride their hips, and strings of children running at their heels” was the typical event as women went to fill their water jugs in the indigenous town of Santa María de Jesús.²³ Somewhat along the same lines, Caroline Salvin noticed a “mother with the newborn babe slung on her back, another burden on her head, and a child by the hand” whereas the man had “a motley net of various household and agricultural tools...”²⁴ In a letter home to her daughter, Salvin gave example of this in the form of a drawing, writing in the letter, “you see the woman has the baby and the fruit, the man has the umbrella made of leaves, a calabash to drink out of, and a bottle.”²⁵ In another instance Brigham commented that, “Women carry their babies on the back while washing clothes at the fountains or by the streams. At home hammocks serve well for cradles.”²⁶ Dunn believed that the “children find no better cradle than the ground” leaving us to wonder if he was neglecting to mention the babies were in a carrying basket, on a woven mat or other such protection, as was customary.²⁷ Maudslay, rather insultingly, mentioned in passing,

An Indian baby slung in a shawl over its mother’s back is a delightfully grotesque mite; but what charmed me most were the little girls about eighteen inches high,

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just able to toddle by their mothers' sides, who were miniature copies of their mothers in dress and appearance. They seemed to be contented little things, and we never saw a child roughly treated throughout our journey.²⁸

What the travelers failed to understand and came to falsely believe was that Maya children were somehow "born old" or, as John Lloyd Stephens complained, did not have the sense to cry as other "normal" children. Instead, the reality, if we compare the accounts to other historical documents, anthropological case studies, etc. is that these children were carefully indulged, communally cared for, and generally contented. None of the travelers complained of Maya children abused by or going hungry because of their parents, though often they appeared under-dressed to the westerners.

It was near impossible for any of the travelers to neglect commentary on the dress of the indigenous inhabitants of the region, given that it was so distinctive in color, cut, and purpose than Western habits of dress. James Wilson, one of the earliest English-speaking travelers to the region carefully and critically commented on the lack of any sort of covering from the waist up on the wife of the local mayor in that she was simply wearing "a petticoat tied round her waist..." while other travelers were somewhat more appreciative of the textiles.²⁹ Salvin was intrigued by Sololá women who wore "such a handsome scarf of broad bands of light brown cotton, deep blue, and white. It serves all purposes from a coquettish square cover for the head and falling behind, to tying the never failing baby on the back."³⁰ For Sanborn, the women were "very picturesque" and she generalized about women's dress as "a full plaid skirt and a loose, sleeveless waist, embroidered, often elaborately, with the colors of the tribe ... They are always barefooted, and wear no jewelry except a necklace of beads and money---their necklace being their bank."³¹ Maudslay described the garments stating,

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This enagua or skirt is usually a cotton cloth about a yard in width wrapped round the body and reaching from the waist to below the knee” and the shirts in another town as “woven in stripes and brightly coloured with native dyes” with the homemade skirts “of blue and white striped cotton is fastened round the waist over the huipil by a beautifully embroidered belt with hanging ends. Every woman carries over her arm a small striped cotton shawl to throw over her bare neck and arms in the cool of the evening...³²

Brigham found “native jackets made in the simplest manner, but embroidered with the greatest labor and most barbaric fancy of color and form. These the women take great price in; and the showy garments cloak many deficiencies in the rest of the wardrobe.”³³ In another instance, however, he is not so kind in remarking:

The Indian women in the streets all dress alike,--in a skirt of indigo-blue cotton, generally figured in the loom; and their long and abundant black hair is carefully bound in red bandages (listones) reaching nearly to the ground. Their stature is below medium; they seem modest and good-natured.³⁴

Travelers also apparently loved the hair of Maya women.

On the road to Coban, Salvin marveled at Mayan women’s hair writing, “The women had their hair all bound in a long roll with scarlet braid and two long tassels on either side falling almost to the ground.”³⁵ Maudslay echoed Salvin stating almost enviously that, “The women of the town...take especial care of their hair: we saw numbers of them almost standing on their heads in the shallow edge of the lake in their efforts to give their hair a good washing, after which they dried and combed and oiled it and braided it into long tails.”³⁶ For Sanborn, she perfunctorily commented that, “The hair, which is long, black, and often beautiful, is sometimes

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left flowing, but usually wound with a red woolen roll.” Other than hers, there is no mention, of hair color or texture. As a number of travelers noticed, though, Maya women found no shame in searching for headlice in their children’s hair, an action that was equally horrifying as intriguing to those that viewed it. Wilson noted:

A daughter of this functionary, an interesting-looking damsel about fifteen or sixteen years of age, was sitting weaving. On laying aside her work, she got the head of one of the younger branches of the family into her lap, and commenced a search in that quarter. As she picked the little beasties out she put them deliberately in her mouth!³⁷

Likewise, Brigham commented that he:

saw a woman boldly eating the game she caught in a little girl’s hair. I had before seen aged Hawaiian women engaged in this fascinating pursuit; but they always seemed quite ashamed to be seen by strangers. Not so the Quiché woman; the wretch even held her hand out for us!³⁸

Even Helen Sanborn noted a similar activity while she visited a highland market saying, “we saw some curious and anything but agreeable sights; for instance, in the pauses of trade, women nursing their babes or searching industriously the heads of their children with a large, coarse, wooden comb.”³⁹ The Western travelers were caught up in their own ideals and mores dealing with sanitation.

Many travelers criticized the “dirty” or “miserable” living conditions of the Maya peoples; consequently, any intended positive remark came in terms of cleanliness. Maudslay paid such a compliment with “the women of the town are very clean and tidy in their dress” and Salvin mentioning in Chinautla that the “people seemed clean” and she happily noticed “several

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of the women were taking baths during the day.”⁴⁰ Maya peoples were known to frequently bathe and even have separate public bathing and sweatbath facilities for men and women.

Probably nothing so created the idea of Maya women as existing completely at a distance from Western human understanding to the point of being inhuman or subhuman as in the numerous comparisons of Maya peoples to objects in nature or animal-like behavior, as if Anglo-Americans were hunting for human trophies. From Sanborn’s colorful statement that she and her father had been “waited on by young Indian maidens, who stole noiselessly in and out like so many dusky phantoms” to Maudslay’s descriptions of young girls who “fluttered up the hill” like birds in a “sylvan” surrounding to Salvin’s painter’s palette of girls who “were like richly tinted pomegranates with the rich carmine beneath the warm soft brown skin,” Maya women were akin to animals on display in an elaborately crafted zoo. As Salvin wrote, “They looked at us like startled deer as they ran past with their water jars...”⁴¹ But was this simply colorful language or dehumanizing the Maya population? Was it intended to be complimentary or simply causing the disappearance of a population into a watercolor landscape? Is this the purest example of foreigners distancing themselves from the exotic “other”?

Many foreign travelers simply did not even see Maya women, literally or figuratively. For them, the female indigenous person was totally invisible. George Alexander Thompson wrote of unnamed Indians carrying goods to market and about unskilled laborers for forced hire, but they were all presumably male. From Dunn, Crosby, Dunlop, Page, Wilson, Tucker, and others of the first half of the 19th century, women just did not figure into their narratives. Instead, more concern was paid to commerce, political organization, evangelization, and other interests related to the newly opened nations to foreign intrusion and diplomatic relations. Men of the latter half of the century for the most part did not markedly register any difference or

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increase in interest in allowing the appearance of women in their writings. The exceptions to these are John Lloyd Stephens in the 1830s and William T. Brigham in the 1880s, though each seems to have had an unusual interest in women, perhaps for conquest and lechery rather than pure observation. There is quite a bit of ugliness in these pieces of travel accounts that reflect the innate desires of Anglo-American travelers to keep a healthy distance separating them from the “others” under scrutiny. From Anne Carey Maudslay’s comment about “a dirtier or more hideously ugly female population it would be difficult to find” to Caroline Salvin’s portion of her letter to her young daughter that Sybil “should see the old women. You would be quite frightened they are so very ugly” or the comment that she “should far prefer one of the oxen for a near neighbor” rather than one of the Indians who were, in her opinion, “not lively or intelligent.”⁴² In somewhat of a defense of Salvin, she did not particularly like anyone but her “own kind” as she did happen to write about the people she had met in her Guatemalan travels with the following: “The Americans were wearily vulgar, the Germans slow, the unmarried men had nothing to say, and the married ones talked of their stores. The women were not much educated and where natural wit did not do something you soon came to the end of them.”⁴³ Rather narrow-minded, yet she was a woman, in her mind, alone in an uncivilized land far from comforts of home, friends, and family.

So that there is not the sense of loss and despair at the lack of objectivity on the part of the foreign travel writers, an optimist would hope to find instances of emerging intercultural connections. For Salvin it was in noticing the respect given to one particular woman:

A very old woman with shriveled face and grey hair, in a richly embroidered huipil or chemise and handsome orange and red skirt, the dress of the village, came down the hill. As each woman passed by her with her load or baby they knelt and bowed repeatedly to one another saying some

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gentle sounds and touching each other's forehead to each. This graceful salutation took a few moments and was repeated to each one. The old crone was Comadre, a kind of village godmother.⁴⁴

So, what can be gleaned from all these episodes? Maya women had a variety of gender-segregated responsibilities, from daily food preparation, to weaving of cloth and clothing for personal use, to care and responsibility at least for young children, and occupations as potter, market-woman, and more. Alongside this strenuous life of carrying things on backs and heads and without means of transportation other than one's own feet, women had communal occupations of water gathering and washing of clothes. Even when Salvin was being critical by writing—"You would laugh to see the women wash our clothes. They stand at a great fountain in the street and each girl has a hole in the fountain to wash her won things in. She rubs them between two stones"—she allows us to glimpse the potential for social interaction and easing of tension.⁴⁵ Maudslay, herself, was sympathetic to the difficulties of the typical Maya woman's life commenting sadly, "To an onlooker that of the women seems hopelessly monotonous and devoid of any recreation or pleasure, and one could only silently sympathize with them in the patient labour of grinding maize for tortillas, and the never-ending task of washing clothes at the fountain or at the river's edge."⁴⁶ It is also pleasant to read of Salvin's diary with her entry, "At sundown all the Indian women ran out of hiding, where they had been during the heat of the day, and resumed their chattering."⁴⁷

Much of what is presented here is in response to June Hahner's *Women through Women's Eyes*, published back in 1998. Her intriguing introduction states that "few female travel writers, aside from some scientists' wives...ventured deep or long into rural regions or dealt with Indian

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women,” something travelers to Guatemala could not help but do. It is only more recently with rereading that introduction that one particular comment stood out with necessary importance: Scholars in the expanding field of Latin American women’s history generally neglect travel writings, even those by women, relying instead on such sources as notarial and trial records or will and testaments. They neither examine the foreign traveler as historical actor nor analyze foreign female perceptions of Latin American women in the nineteenth century.⁴⁸

Then, as now, this is a solidly true statement. There is a wealth of information not only for the literary theorist or linguist, but quantitative data and valuable descriptions for the historian. Granted the cultural bias must be considered and placed squarely in the time of travel, which is why the selection was only for Anglo-American travelers in this instance; but, as Hahner states, “These firsthand accounts shed light on questions of gender differences, family life, religion, and women’s labor and education. They help reveal attitudes, customs, practices, and interrelationships between men and women within the structure of Latin American societies...These writings provide a window into nineteenth-century Latin America.”⁴⁹ Given the sad state of English-language writings on Central America or historical writings in general about Central American history pre-1900, the call for use of non-traditional sources should be that much more imperative in enhancing the available knowledge and promoting a resurgence of new and interdisciplinary studies in the region.

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¹ See Marjorie Agosín and Julie H. Levison, eds., *Magical Sites: Women Travelers in 19th Century Latin America* (Buffalo, NY: White Pines Press, 1999): 12. Rather than the praising of Anglo-American women travelers with descriptive like “pioneers,” “revolutionaries,” “inspirational,” and “defiant,” the

focus for this paper is squarely on the subjects of the travelers' gaze rather than the traditional focus on the gaze itself.

² For an excellent and groundbreaking work on women in the colonial period through a mining of ecclesiastical record, see Martha Few, *Women who Lead Evil Lives: Gender, Religion, and the Politics of Power in Colonial Guatemala* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002). Another example is to be found in the case study on the first pages of Chapter 1 of Richard Boyer's abridged, *Lives of the Bigamists: Marriage, Family, and Community in Colonial Mexico* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2001): 13-15. Work on the 19th century for female criminal activity in Guatemala is still in its infancy with portions of that topic to be found in Rene Reeves recent *Ladinos with Ladinos, Indians with Indians: Land, Labor, and Regional Ethnic Conflict in the Making of Guatemala* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006). David McCreery is another excellent source of information for the national period with, "This Life of Misery and Shame: Female Prostitution in Guatemala City, 1880-1920," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 18:2 (November, 1986): 333-353. There are also various notes of import about women and crime in David McCreery's *Rural Guatemala: 1760-1940* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

³ See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992). She bases her entire discussion of European and U.S. women traveling to Latin America in this period on two travel writers, both of whom stayed in the "urban center" and both from South America. Most other scholars of travel writing skip Latin America entirely, or, if they do count the continent, rural Central America rarely finds an audience.

⁴ Her name, Candelaria, becomes synonymous with the "Maria" concept of the typical Maya servant woman who comes in contact with foreign travelers in European owned hotels in Guatemala.

⁵ Helen Sanborn, *A Winter in Central America and Mexico*, (Guatemala City: Popol Vuh Museum, Francisco Marroquín University, 1996): 91.

⁶ Much of what John Lloyd Stephens writes related to his wanderings throughout Guatemala is concerning the warring in the region and the lack of clear and legitimate government in *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* vol. 1 (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1969).

⁷ June Hahner, *Women through Women's Eyes: Latin American Women in Nineteenth-Century Travel Accounts* (New York, NY: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1998): xiii.

⁸ This brings to mind the retelling of the words of Lucy Bainbridge in Mary Suzanne Schriber, *Telling Travels: Selected Writings by Nineteenth-Century American Women Abroad* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995): xxvii-xxviii. She writes, "After years of dealing with butcher, grocer, and the milkman, it is a matter of real interest to a housewife how these things are managed on the other side of the world."

⁹ See J. W. Boddham-Wetham, *Across Central America* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1877) and William T. Brigham, *Guatemala: The Land of the Quetzal* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1965).

¹⁰ Chasteen captured that same idea, though he, like others, vacillates between believing women are unique in their travelogue writing or more similar writing, "Women travelers...often wrote of Latin Americans more sympathetically." Yet he ends the same paragraph with, "In many ways, [a woman] was as biased as any male traveler." See John Charles Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: W. W. Norton Company, 2006): 115.

¹¹ Brigham, *Guatemala: The Land of the Quetzal*, 70.

¹² Anne Carey and Alfred Percival Maudslay, *A Glimpse at Guatemala: And Some Notes on the Ancient Monuments of Central America*, reprint (Indianapolis: Flo Silver Books, 1992): 56.

¹³ Brigham, *Guatemala: The Land of the Quetzal*, 95.

¹⁴ Brigham, *Guatemala: The Land of the Quetzal*, 93.

¹⁵ Sanborn, *A Winter in Central America*, 62.

¹⁶ Maudslay, *A Glimpse at Guatemala*, 145.

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- ¹⁷ Caroline Salvin, *A Pocket Eden: Guatemalan Journals, 1873-1874* (Vermont: Plumstock Mesoamerican Studies, 2000): 131.
- ¹⁸ Maudslay, *A Glimpse at Guatemala*, 23.
- ¹⁹ Sanborn, *A Winter in Central America*, 54.
- ²⁰ One of the best known of these photographers for the last quarter of the century would be Muybridge. His images have been faithfully reproduced in the late E. Bradford Burns, *Eadweard Muybridge in Guatemala, 1875: The Photographer as Social Recorder* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987).
- ²¹ Henry Dunn, *Guatemala, or the Republic of Central America*, reprint of the 1829 ed. (Detroit: Blaine Ethridge Books, 1981): 277.
- ²² Brigham, *Guatemala: The Land of the Quetzal*, 195.
- ²³ Maudslay, *A Glimpse at Guatemala*, 31.
- ²⁴ Salvin, *A Pocket Eden*, 175.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 123. Presumably the bottle contained a tincture of coffee.
- ²⁶ Brigham, *Guatemala: The Land of the Quetzal*, 125.
- ²⁷ Dunn, *Guatemala, or the Republic of Central America*, 274.
- ²⁸ Maudslay, *A Glimpse at Guatemala*, 29.
- ²⁹ James Wilson, *A Brief Memoir of James Wilson 1799-1827*, reprint (Troy, NY: Tienda El Quetzal, 1983): 72.
- ³⁰ Salvin, *A Pocket Eden*, 281.
- ³¹ Sanborn, *A Winter in Central America*, 48.
- ³² Maudslay, *A Glimpse at Guatemala*, 42.
- ³³ Brigham, *Guatemala: The Land of the Quetzal*, 189.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.
- ³⁵ Salvin, *A Pocket Eden*, 299.
- ³⁶ Maudslay, *A Glimpse at Guatemala*, 55.
- ³⁷ Wilson, *A Brief Memoir of James Wilson*, 72.
- ³⁸ Brigham, *Guatemala: The Land of the Quetzal*, 124.
- ³⁹ Sanborn, *A Winter in Central America*, 78.
- ⁴⁰ Maudslay, *A Glimpse at Guatemala*, 55; Salvin, *A Pocket Eden*, 129.
- ⁴¹ Salvin, *A Pocket Eden*, 133.
- ⁴² Maudslay, *A Glimpse at Guatemala*, 31; Salvin, *A Pocket Eden*, 97.
- ⁴³ Salvin, *A Pocket Eden*, 137.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 129.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.
- ⁴⁶ Maudslay, *A Glimpse at Guatemala*, 58.
- ⁴⁷ Salvin, *A Pocket Eden*, 307.
- ⁴⁸ Hahner, *Women through Women's Eyes*, xxi.
- ⁴⁹ Hahner, *Women through Women's Eyes*, xxiii.