

Toasting *México* in the American West: *Brindis* Poems and Political Loyalties of Women's Mexican Patriotic Clubs

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Abstract

Brindis poems were popular in the nineteenth century. Accompanied by the raise of a glass, their verses were meant to celebrate a person or event. Only two decades after the Mexican-American War, Latinas/os living in the newly annexed territories of the American West found themselves using the *brindis* genre to declare their loyalties to Mexico against a new invader, France. Among the most ardent supporters of the Mexican army's fight against French imperialism were lower and middle-class Latinas who formed Mexican patriotic clubs exclusively for women in California and Nevada. This article examines one *brindis* series recited by women of the Patriotic Club of Mexico of Virginia City, Nevada, and two series of such poems by women of the Zaragoza Club of Los Angeles published in 1865 in the San Francisco, Spanish-language newspaper *El Nuevo Mundo*. By reading the printed *brindis* as a trace of the original vocal and performative gesture, this article asserts that the verses of these women were a three-fold protest: first, through their performance in the public sphere, these Latinas disrupted their political disenfranchisement as women; second, they contested outright European tyrants; and third, by verbalizing anti-colonial sentiment more broadly, they protested their annexation by the U.S. in a shrouded, but powerful way. The article explores some of the most salient stylistic features of the *brindis* poems, including the mocking tone of most of the rhymed verses, call and response technique, and gendered rhetoric of patriotic "deber" or duty.

¿Quién mandó a Méjico la intervención?
El perjuro Napoleón.
¿Quién nos quiere gobernar?
Fernando el de Miramar.
Pues se puede retirar
Este archiduque simplón,
Que su trono ha de estallar
En la boca de un cañon.
¡Brindo por la independendencia de nuestra nación!

Who brought upon Mexico this invasion?
The perjured Napoleon.
Who seeks to rule us?
Fernando of Miramar.
Well he can be gone
This Archduke simpleton,
That his throne should explode
At the mouth of a cannon.
I toast to the independence of our nation!
(Patriotic Club of Mexico 1)

These untitled verses were originally delivered in Spanish to commemorate one of the earliest celebrations on U.S. soil of *Cinco de Mayo*. The poem was published in the Spanish-language, San Francisco newspaper *El Nuevo Mundo* on May 15, 1865 and was one of several *brindis*, or toasts, recited at a *Cinco de Mayo* event by politically inclined Latinas² who formed the Patriotic Club of Mexico of Virginia City, Nevada. Ceremonies like this one were meant to remember the Battle of Puebla, in which the Mexican army led by Ignacio Zaragoza and Porfirio Díaz forced a temporary retreat of the French army's march towards Mexico City on May 5, 1862. Puebla would fall to the French the following year and remain part of the Second Mexican Empire under French rule until 1867. The Napoleon mentioned in the *brindis* is Napoleon III, whose imperial ambitions included a successful takeover of Mexico. Fernando is Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian, emperor of Mexico from 1864 to 1867.

The toast denouncing these powerful men was recited by Doña Silveria Luna, and it was just one of five *brindis* poems published in the same series celebrating *Cinco de Mayo*, all by fellow members of the women's patriotic club. This article will examine the *brindis*

series recited by Luna and her fellow women of the Patriotic Club of Mexico of Virginia City, Nevada, as well as two series of such poems created by women of the Zaragoza Club of Los Angeles and published in March and July of 1865 in *El Nuevo Mundo*. Twenty-five different women contributed poems to these series: six from Virginia City and nineteen from Los Angeles.³

A study of a selection of these *brindis* poems provides a window for reflecting on the voices of women who had an active role in advancing Mexican nationalism from their local U.S. clubs during the Second Mexican Empire. Examining these *brindis* from the perspective of gender studies sheds light on what may be early examples of female political organization and agency among Latina women. Doing so from a cultural studies perspective sheds light on the role of print media in circulating and advancing anti-colonial ideas. Finally, studying performance furthers an understanding of these *brindis*, since they are by nature live performances, possibly written before being recited, but with the intent of having immediate effect on a present audience. Reading the *brindis* poems through these lenses, I propose that a growing solidarity on the bases of both gender and shared politics provided

fertile ground for exchange amongst the women of these Mexican loyalist clubs. To better contextualize the relevance of the gendered voice in the poems examined, I consider some discursive elements of the poems, including the use of call-and-response, humor, and the rhetoric of patriotic “deber,” duty or indebtedness.

The Mexican Patriotic Club Movement

To better understand the *brindis* poems’ social purpose as a political performance and as a popular genre, I begin by contextualizing the Mexican patriotic club movement in the Southwest more broadly. Thankfully, much of the historical research related to the women’s patriotic clubs has already been carried out by David E. Hayes-Bautista, Cynthia L. Chamberlin, and Paul Bryan Gray. In “‘The Men Were Left Astonished’: Mexican Women in *las Juntas Patrióticas de Señoras*, 1863–1866,” they stress the crucial role that Spanish-language newspapers played in the founding of these patriotic clubs. In fact, the launch of the Mexican patriotic club movement in the U.S. was a direct response to an article published in the San Francisco newspaper *La Voz de Méjico* on August 26, 1862. The article, reprinted from the Mexico City newspaper *El Monitor* and titled “Invitación á los mexicanos” [“An Invitation to Mexicans”], urged Latino sympathizers to organize and raise funds for President Benito Juárez’s army to combat the French imperialists (Gray, Hayes-Bautista, and Chamberlin 163-164). At this time, much was at stake for Mexico: not only had French troops begun advancing via Vera Cruz, following the same

route as Hernán Cortés centuries earlier, but Napoleon III had officially declared the Austrian royal, Ferdinand Maximilian, as Emperor of Mexico. Latino sympathizers in the American West were urged to establish a network whereby funds were collected by an appointed treasurer who was responsible for ensuring their delivery to the proper authorities in Mexico.

At first, the membership of the clubs was made up of mostly of men, although a handful of women were recorded in the newspaper as donors to the cause. However, when interest in the patriotic clubs began to dwindle after Puebla was seized by the French army, women stepped up their participation. On July 16, 1863, the San Francisco newspaper, *La Voz de Méjico*, published a letter from Francisca Manzo de Cavazos of Los Angeles to the “Junta Central” in San Francisco, announcing the inauguration of a new patriotic club made up of only women. This organization was the first group formally assembled by Mexican women in California for an overtly political purpose (Gray, Hayes-Bautista, and Chamberlin 167). Although comprehensive biographical data on all the women members of the patriotic clubs is not readily available, according to Hayes-Bautista, Chamberlin, and Gray, “these were ordinary women and relatively poor. Almost none had names associated with wealthy Los Angeles families” (Gray, Hayes-Bautista, and Chamberlin 170). Although nearly every woman associated with the patriotic clubs had a Spanish first and last name—and although they are referred to as Latinas for the purposes of this article—in terms of citizenship and nationality, the makeup of the women’s

patriotic clubs was not homogenous. Mexican, Mexican American, Chilean, Spanish, and Native American women participated, with the majority of the members born in either California or Mexico. There were slightly more Mexican born members than not, including the leader, Francisca Manzo de Cavazos, who was born in Guadalajara (Gray, Hayes-Bautista, and Chamberlin 170). Following the lead of the Los Angeles club, women of other cities began to form clubs of their own. By the end of 1863, women's clubs across California in Sonora, San Jose, and Marysville would form. On April 5, 1864, *La Voz de Méjico* would publish an announcement that the women of Virginia City, Nevada, a silver-mining town outside of Reno, had formed a club in solidarity with the others (Gray, Hayes-Bautista, and Chamberlin 173-177).

The earliest set of *brindis* published by these women was printed over a year after the initial founding of the women's patriotic clubs, and it marked an initiative by the leadership from the Los Angeles "Junta Patriótica de Señoras de Los Ángeles" to begin a new organization, the "Club Patriótico Mejicano de Zaragoza." The inauguration celebration, on February 26, 1865, took place at a public schoolhouse and *El Nuevo Mundo* published news of the event on March 29th of the same year. The new organization had different priorities and activities than the patriotic club. Although one of their main missions continued to be fundraising, the club would also ask its members to help defray the cost of medical and burial services for the sick or dying among them (Gray, Hayes-Bautista, and Chamberlin 184). Interestingly, the *brindis* recited as part

of this inaugural event did not mention these shifted priorities, and only reflected the women's sense of nationalism and loyalty to what they considered the real Mexico, or the rebel army that was combatting the Second Mexican Empire. The tactic of printing the *brindis* alongside news of the mutual benefits society inauguration was possibly meant as a showy display in order to ensure that their patriotism would not come into question by members of the men's patriotic clubs, or others who might question such a move.

The second set of *brindis* poems by the Zaragoza Club were recited on June 15, 1865 and were performed in honor of the much-celebrated arrival of three Mexican army officers who had been held as prisoners of war in France. These men included José María Herrera, Francisco Rivera, and Modesto Medina. They were passing through Los Angeles after a truly harrowing journey following their capture in Mexico and detainment in France. After being held in French prison camps for a year, they were released at the Spanish border in San Sebastián and earned their passage back to America by working as laborers. Because the ports in Mexico were blockaded by the French military, the officers were forced to disembark in Los Angeles. Although they planned to rejoin President Benito Juárez's army soon after, these men paused briefly in Southern California. Hayes-Bautista, Chamberlin, and Gray describe how the "Mexican community in Los Angeles indulged in a frenzy of patriotism on the arrival of the three former prisoners" (Gray, Hayes-Bautista, and Chamberlin 187). The women of the Zaragoza club planned an elaborate reception for

the officers, and the entire event was described in great detail in the July 21, 1865 issue of *El Nuevo Mundo*. It is in this issue that the second series of *brindis* by the Zaragoza Club was published, and their poems express the intense excitement and patriotism that the sensational story of these men provoked in Los Angeles.

The only known set of *brindis* poems performed by the Patriotic Club of Mexico of Virginia City was published in May of 1865. As noted at the beginning of this article, these toasts were performed at a celebration of *Cinco de Mayo*, or the May 5th, 1862 victory at the Battle of Puebla. For the women of the Mexican patriotic clubs in 1865, *Cinco de Mayo* was a celebration of recent invention and truly a display of loyalty both in light of the recent U.S. invasion of Mexico and even more recent occupation of Mexico by the French. Despite enjoying initial victory, the city of Puebla had fallen to the French two years prior in May of 1863. Only a year and seventeen years earlier, per the terms of The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the soil the women currently called home had been ceded from Mexico to the U.S. In spite of these defeats, the *brindis* poems reveal that Mexican sympathy and patriotism in the Southwest was strong, even in small mining towns, such as Virginia City. The exuberant loyalist sentiment expressed in the poems did not hide the irony, or the women's knowledge, of the fact that part of Mexico was under occupation by the French, just as they, as members of the Patriotic Club of Mexico of Virginia City, were themselves residing in land occupied by the U.S. The latter situation, as we know, would prove more permanent than the former.

Women's *Brindis* in the American West

Based on records of *La Voz de Méjico*, *El Nuevo Mundo*, *La Crónica*, *El Ranchero*, and other mid-nineteenth-century periodicals from across the American West, publishing *brindis* or toasts by men of note, generally in prose form, was a relatively common phenomenon, especially as part of news coverage for major political events and holidays. For example, from November 1st through the 15th of 1864, the San Francisco newspaper *La Voz de Méjico* printed *brindis* by men from a Mexican Independence Day celebration in New York City (Mancillas). These *brindis* were longwinded and essayistic, dominating the front page of the newspaper for seven consecutive issues in a section titled "Banquete Mejicano."

If publishing the *brindis* of well-connected Latinos was common in the newspapers mentioned, publishing *brindis* spoken by Latinas was rare. There were indeed references to women giving toasts at various public events, attesting to the fact that a few women felt they had as much a right to do so as the men, but their words almost never found their way into print. Per the patriarchal norms of the time, male editors and contributors often preferred to toast women than to publish their *brindis*.

An example of such a toast to "Mexican women" was the "*Brindis por las Mejicanas*," published on July 11, 1856, by J.A. Quintero, the editor of the San Antonio newspaper *El Ranchero*. It was dedicated to "las amables lectoras del *Ranchero*" ["the lovely women readers of *El Ranchero*"]. The writer first introduces the poem by noting that he composed it while popping a bottle of champagne

with his male friends. Three women are named at the beginning of the poem, all by the diminutive version of their first names: Joaquinita, Isabelita, and Vicentita. This use of the diminutive without including proper last names possibly implies that they were young or unmarried women, but the patronizing attitude is laid thick from the very start. The editor proceeds to note the effect that the young women's beauty and charm had on him and his friends, thus immediately turning them into objects for male pleasure or pleasurable torment: "el recuerdo de una linda Joaquinita hacia temblar de emocion i placer nuestro corazon, tal vez la imagen de una alegre i donosa Isabelita nos sonreia

Elegante es la Francesa,
 I la Española amorosa
 I blanca como una rosa
 Es la Alemana o la Inglesa,
 Nuestra alma se embelesa
 Al ver las Americanas,
 Admito a las Italianas,
 Todas son flores i estrellas;
 Pero yo entre tantas bellas
 Prefiero las Mejicanas.

Unlike many of the *brindis* by men in Spanish-language newspapers, such as those of *La Voz de Méjico* from the New York City celebration in 1864, this *brindis* is printed in the form of a poem rather than an essay and does not deal with a subject that is overtly political. The octosyllabic verses, light and playful, are marked by four rhyming couplets. Although the patronizing tone and the lack of sophistication on the part of the writer make it easily forgettable, what is interesting about this *brindis* poem is not the

a lo lejos, quizás los hermosos ojos i el candido rostro de una Vicentita venían a atormentar nuestra memoria" ["the memory of a pretty Joaquinita made our heart tremble with emotion and pleasure, maybe the image of a happy and charming Isabelita smiled to us in the distance, perhaps the beautiful eyes and the candid face of a Vicentita came to torment our memory"] (Quintero 2). Quintero goes on to say that there were so many *lectoras* that inspired *brindis* that it would be impossible to name them all, then finishes his editorial with a *brindis* poem comparing the Mexican girls to those of other nations, predictably concluding that they he prefers Mexican girls most of all.

Elegant is the French girl,
 And the Spanish girl is loving
 And white like a rose
 Is the German or the English girl,
 Our soul is enchanted
 Seeing the American girls,
 I confess the Italian girls as well,
 All are flowers and stars;
 But among so many beauties
 I prefer the Mexican girls.

(Quintero 2)

superficial description of women as national stereotypes, but the fact that Quintero addresses his toast to the "lovely readers" or "amables lectoras" of *El Ranchero*. Quintero refers to these women in his introduction as "lectoras," but the level of literacy of the women who had access to his newspaper would be impossible to ascertain. It is known that during the nineteenth century illiterate women were often able to keep up with the newspaper by listening to it being read aloud by others. So, in this case, the word

“lectoras” may not necessarily imply that the women were educated, but does imply that Quintero understood that these women were part of the *El Rancho* community and formed an important contingent of the newspaper’s audience. His effort to acknowledge and pander to them, though superficial, shows that he must have been considerate of a Mexican American female audience.

A less overtly patronizing but equally telling example of the issue of gender in relation to these *brindis* can be found in an editorial from May of 1877 published in the Spanish-language Los Angeles newspaper, *La Crónica*. The editorial responds to a criticism issued by the editors of the San Francisco newspaper *La Sociedad* who chided the Los Angeles publication for failing to mention the *brindis* pronounced by “las Señoritas Gutierrez” at a birthday party in honor of Pío de Jesús Pico, the last Mexican governor of Alta California before it became part of the U.S. In their response, cheekily titled “Al Cesar lo que es del Cesar” [“Render unto Caesar What Belongs to Caesar”], Pastor de Celis, then editor of *La Crónica*, explains that they only omitted the sisters’ names on the assumption that the women would not want their names published: “Sentimos que nuestro colega nos tache de egoistas por tal omisión que hicimos *simplemente* por temor de ofender en su modestia á las citadas señoritas” [“We regret that our colleague accuses us of being egotistical for such an omission, which was done *simply* for fear of offending the modesty of said ladies”] (De Celis 2). Taking on a similarly condescending tone as Quintero, De Celis nonetheless uses the opportunity to note his admiration for the Gutierrez sisters, women who were well-known in

California for their oratory and writing skills. Though his overall tone is patronizing, De Celis’ admiration was likely sincere: Carlota Gutierrez had several poems published in *La Crónica* between 1876 through 1877. Guadalupe Gutierrez published a serialized novel titled *Espinas y Rosas* in *La Sociedad* in 1877, and *La Crónica* published several updates on the progress of the novel. From the editorial, it is clear that De Celis kept these Mexican women in mind as “lectoras,” but also considered them active contributors to Spanish-language newspaper culture in California. Although the *brindis* of the Gutierrez sisters were not transcribed in *La Crónica*, the editorial reveals the importance of the *brindis* as a popular public discourse. Both the editors of *La Sociedad* and *La Crónica* saw in the *brindis* not merely a way to sell more newspapers by mentioning the presence of local women in their social pages, but also understood the *brindis* as a record of events which marked significant dates in the Latino community. Thus, it follows that the women who performed them deserved recognition by name, not just for performing their *brindis*, but for having key roles in these public gatherings.

Between Performance and Print

Among the most troubling aspects of studying these *brindis* poems is the impossibility of determining their authorship with certainty. We can be confident that the *brindis* poems were performed by the women named in the newspaper, but the extent of control they exercised in preparing the final version to be printed is somewhat murky. The Zaragoza Club *brindis* were sent to *El Nuevo Mundo* by mail, and we do not know whether they

were revised by the newspaper editors who published them. It is clear from an editorial comment that accompanied the series printed in *El Nuevo Mundo* that only a few of the women's toasts delivered at the event were printed: "No bastaría una página de *El Nuevo Mundo* para dar una idea de todos los *brindis* que se dijeron en el calor de la improvisación y que sería imposible reproducirlos, porque sus mismos autores no recuerdan lo que dijeron" ["A page of *El Nuevo Mundo* would not suffice to give an idea of all the toasts that were said in the heat of improvisation and it would be impossible to reproduce them, because their own authors do not remember what they said"] (Zaragoza Club 1). This brings up, along with the issue of authorship, the issue of selection. On what basis did the editors decide which *brindis* to print and which to leave out? Having answers to these questions would obviously enrich our reading of the *brindis* poems available, but we are unlikely to ever have access to these decisions.

This account certainly presents challenges when it comes to reading and situating the *brindis* poems within literary and cultural studies. The printed account of the original *brindis* performance always feels incomplete. In a brief overview of the Zaragoza Club series in her book, *Ambassadors of Culture: The Trans-american Origins of Latino Writing*, Kirsten Silva Gruesz describes the *brindis* in terms of an "oscillation between performance and permanence" (Gruesz 179). Perhaps it is this sense of oscillation between the printed and the performed, both in terms of assigning authorship and in understanding the *brindis* genre, that left nineteenth-century *brindis* largely out of literary anthologies. Fortunately, some of

them found a way into *The World of Early Chicano Poetry, 1846-1910*, Luis A. Torres' anthology on early Chicano poetry. Likely as a result of Torres's anthology, the *brindis* series of the Zaragoza Club are also included in two anthologies of nineteenth-century writings by American women: *She Wields a Pen: American Women Poets of the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Janet Gray (1997), and *The Aunt Lute Anthology of U.S. Women Writers Volume One: 17th through 19th Centuries*, edited by Lisa Maria Hogeland and Mary Klages (2004). The women's anthologies are excellent in that they include writing by culturally diverse women of the U.S., such as the *brindis* poems of the Zaragoza Club. However, in their descriptions of the Zaragoza Club there is serious confusion about the historical circumstances surrounding the women's patriotic clubs and their social objective. It is assumed that the clubs are formed for the specific purpose of writing poetry. This misunderstanding highlights the complexity of a genre caught between the printed page and the performed; it also highlights the importance of studying context with greater care.

Within the pages of *El Nuevo Mundo*, it is impossible to ignore the layers of contextual clues surrounding the *brindis* series. Although they are given a special section, they appear almost hidden in the midst of news, advertisements, the installment of a serialized novel, and stories of local interest. In the aforementioned study of the Zaragoza Club *brindis*, Gruesz uses the metaphor of swaddling to describe the sense of embeddedness and contextual containment that characterized these published toasts by women: "while male writers' patriotic odes are printed in the 'Variedades' section as distinct poems,

the women's are swaddled in a nest of contexts: first a prose overview of the history of the Zaragoza Club, then a transcription of each speaker's statement preceding the poem, and finally the poems themselves" (Gruesz 179). I would venture to take Gruesz's metaphor of swaddling one step further. In addition to be-

ing enmeshed in context immediately related to the Zaragoza Club, the poems are physically and typographically contained within the pages and columns of other printed media. An illustration of this can be seen on the page of *El Nuevo Mundo* in which the Zaragoza Club series appeared on July 21, 1865 (see image).



Front page of the July 21, 1865 edition of *El Nuevo Mundo* with *brindis* by the Zaragoza Club of Los Angeles printed front and center. Image courtesy of The Huntington Library in San Marino, California.

While the *brindis* poems appear in the upper half of the central columns in the front page of the newspaper—and thus given pride of place—they are surrounded by dense columns of prose. The poems appear above an installment of the serialized novel *Los Oficiales Del Rey* by Jules de San-Felix (translated into Spanish from French). As Gruesz noted in the passage cited, in the two columns before and after the poems appear, the reporter describes the details of the reception at the Zaragoza Club in which the *brindis* were recited and includes the introduction by the club “Presidenta”⁷ Merced J. de González. As was the custom for many newspapers of the time, the left columns are filled with advertisements.

In contrast to these advertisements, the quiet of the white space surrounding the *brindis* poems is striking on a page that is so densely packed with text. *El Nuevo Mundo*’s large and unadorned masthead and an advertisement for *camisas*, shirts, are notable exceptions. The advertisement is particularly loud and eye-catching, spelling “C A M I S A S” vertically from top to bottom. Each giant letter is made up of smaller, typed imprints of the corresponding letter. For example, the large “C” is made up of 61

small “C” letters. An advertisement for the *Casa Importadora de Dientes*, Import House of Teeth, to the left of the *camisas* advertisement includes two repeated images of dentures. In a topographic way, these various visual assortments—of teeth and of common letters in unified formation—compliment the *brindis* stanzas of the Zaragoza Club women. Since the verses of the toast are meant to be said in person and accompanied by the raise of a glass, the *brindis* poem is a genre that especially recalls the body. Lines of verse are stand-ins for performed toasts, and thus stand-ins for the voices and gestures of women’s bodies. Socially, politically, and poetically, these verses play into a complex arrangement of exchange in terms of patriotic duty and gendered relations, which I will explore further in the sections that follow.

***Brindis* Poetics: Humor and a Call to Solidarity**

A close reading of Luna’s *brindis* poem cited in the introduction of this study reveals not only a humorous and heartfelt protest against French rule, but also the fact that although the poem is spoken by one person, the first two couplets project the aesthetic of call and response:

¿Quién mandó a Méjico la intervención?

El perjuro Napoleón.

¿Quién nos quiere gobernar?

Fernando el de Miramar.

Who brought upon Mexico this invasion?

The perjured Napoleon.

Who seeks to rule us?

Fernando of Miramar.

(Patriotic Club of Mexico 1)

Through this banter of call and response visually set apart by a line break and indentation, the call takes on the dimension of an activist holler amongst

a crowd of protesters. Though these visual breaks were likely the work of the editor, such a printed style informs the perspective of the reader and possibly

reflects the original performance. The word “quién,” opens both call verses and serves as the driving force of rhythm—uneven in the first couplet because of the length of the first verse, but perfectly rhymed in the second couplet. The beat of this repetition opens up as a place and time for prefigured response. This imagined chorus rings in solidarity with the interrogatory demands of the instigating speaker.

On another, subtler level, Luna’s *brindis* also functions as a reply in a larger

play of call-and-response. More precisely, Luna’s poem echoes closely the poem of Los Angeles club member, Andrea Belarde,⁸ who contributed a *brindis* to the series recited at the Zaragoza Club inaugural event in March of 1865. It is reasonable to suspect that Luna must have read and been inspired by these inaugural poems, in both form and content, her verses mimic very closely Belarde’s style. The *brindis* by Belarde appears third in the series of the fourteen *brindis* in the series:

¿Que hombre será el mas villano?

Maximiliano.

¿Y cual será el mas bribon?

Napoleon

Dios con una maldicion

Los confunda á los abismos,

Y allí con los diablos mismos

Propongan en intervencion,

Brindo por su destruccion.

What man will be the most villainous?

Maximiliano.

And which will be the most rogue?

Napoleon

God with a curse

He confounds them to hell,

And there with the devils themselves

They propose invasion,

I toast to their destruction.

(Zaragoza Club 2)

Belarde’s poem is somewhat more complex and shows greater artistry, particularly in its form, but what I want to emphasize is the way in which Luna’s *brindis* is itself part of a dialogue among women of the different patriotic clubs. Luna’s *brindis*, as an imitation, both complements and compliments Belarde’s piece. More importantly, it joins them as *compañeras* who are fighting the same enemy and for the same cause across a few hundred miles from each other. As such, the two poems can be read as an example of women riffing off of one another. Caught on historically contested territory between Mexican and American rule, the women find

common ground in mocking an imperialist enemy that threatens Mexico. Their *brindis* model the grammar of their commitment and solidarity.

As opposed to serving as the subjects, or objects, of toasts by men—such as in the toast of Quintero, for example—Luna and Belarde are active speakers and performers of their toasts. They crafted the content and rhythm of their verses with discursive strategy in mind. In Torres’ close readings of the *brindis*, he focuses on the rhythmic qualities of the poems, proposing that “these women were committed to advanced principals of poetic techniques and to a variety of poetic forms” (Torres 473).

Torres insists upon the worthiness of the women's verse and seriousness of their intent, perhaps at times so much so that he loses sight of two important complementary qualities of the verse: their improvisational energy and colorful humor. More attuned to the tone of these *brindis*, Gruesz divides the poems into two types: "toasts to Mexican patriotic heroes and roasts of Maximilian and Carlota" (Gruesz 179). Luna and Belarde's poems fall into the "roast" category, and the power of their verses lies in their witty or sly humor.

For Belarde and Luna, their *brindis* are a chance to publicly declare their common enemies and an opportunity to discursively "burn" them in mock effigy. Belarde's Napoleon III is the bigger "bribon," which roughly translates to "rogue" or "rascal"; Maximilian the bigger villain, "el mas villano." She then paints a cartoonish portrait of their villainy, imagining them being cursed to hell by God and surrounded by devils. Luna also indulges in the fantasy of Maximilian's throne exploding in the mouth of a canon. The poems both end with the obligatory "brindo por" or "I toast for." The difference between them is the difference between a toast and a "roast." While Luna toasts Mexican independence: "brindo por nuestra nación," Belarde toasts to the enemy's destruction: "brindo por su destrucción."

In *Humoring Resistance: Laughter and the Excessive Body in Latin American Women's Fiction*, Dianna Niebylski reminds readers that the women of the new Latin American Republics were socialized to become "either enlightened matrons or gentle nurses—wholly serious" (Niebylski 18). She notes that even nineteenth-century women writers and journalists

who "were known to have admirable wit in social situations and a marked independent streak in their private lives" (Niebylski 19), such as Clorinda Matto de Turner and Juana Manuela Gorriti, were often restrained in the expression of this humor when it came to their published work. The mocking humor in Luna's and Belarde's *brindis* is somewhere between the easy humor and wit common to social gatherings and a playful—neither too angry nor too bitter—type of political satire. Within this discursive and tonal middle ground, women's words would be lauded as patriotic without seeming offensive or vitriolic.

Of those who have most recently written about the *brindis* as a Mexican literary genre, José Manuel Mateo insists that the toast is a performance that easily vacillates between the solemn and ridiculous. He writes in the *Enciclopedia de la Literatura en México* that although most *brindis* evoke laughter, "quieren reservarse el derecho de que los tomen de vez en cuando en serio" ["they wish to reserve the right to be taken seriously from time to time"] (Mateo). In this way, the *brindis* of Luna and Belarde are no different from toasts made in most cultures on the occasion of weddings, graduations, or other events to celebrate personal or professional turning points or accomplishments. In these events, light jest and solemn praise mix easily. It is at this intersection between humor and solemnity that another important aspect of the *brindis* appears: a sense of optimism. According to Arturo Martín Criado in *Poesía Popular: El Brindis*, "la característica esencial es la risa como esperanza en el cambio de la Humanidad, en su renovación, en la desaparición del mal" ["the essential characteristic is laughter

as a means of hope in changing Humanity—in its renovation, in the disappearance of evil”] (Criado 16). Though his words signal an exaggerated hope in the power of laughter, it is notable that optimism and faith in change are what sustain many of the *brindis* poems’ humor. Furthermore, as theorists of humor from

Mikhail Bakhtin to Regina Barreca have noted, humor can both build and solidify group solidarity. Mixing wit, mocking humor, and declarations of their patriotism, Luna’s, Belarde’s, and similar women’s *brindis* would prove useful in building communal bonds both within and across these groups.

The Material Side of the Patriotic *Brindis*: Fundraising as Women’s Duty

Brindo con todo placer
Por el Club de Zaragoza;
Porque cumple aquel deber
Que sólo puede caber
En una alma generosa.

I give a toast with all my heart
For the Zaragoza Club;
Because it fulfills the duty
Which can only be contained
Within the most generous soul.

(Zaragoza Club 1)

Women of the patriotic clubs were often reminded that they owed a duty to the war effort in Mexico. This is evident in Isabel Ramírez’s *brindis* recited at the Zaragoza Club reception for the Mexican officers who were held as prisoners of war: Herrera, Rivera, and Medina. As mentioned briefly at the beginning of this article, a crucial mission of the patriotic clubs was to raise money for Mexico’s war against its French invaders. Thus, when it came to duty, the women were not only thinking about

a symbolic loyalty, but rather, they had dollars and cents in mind. On this particular occasion, “Presidenta” Mercedes de González, set the tone for the meeting by stressing members’ duty to contribute financially to the war effort, implicitly contrasting the soldiers’ sacrifices with the “débiles servicios” [“paltry services”] they as women could render their country. This implicit but understood comparative scale takes on the double meaning of “deber” as both “duty” and “debt.”

Nosotras, al hacer las justas apreciaciones del mérito adquirido en los días de prueba, no hacemos más que cumplir en parte con nuestro deber. Y si los débiles servicios emanados de nuestro patriotismo fueren alguna vez útiles á la patria, en ese día serán coronados los deseos de todas las buenas mejicanas residentes en esta ciudad.

We women, to show just appreciation of the merit these men won in those trying days, do not do more than pay our duty in part. And if the feeble services emanating from our patriotism were ever useful to our country, on that day the wishes of the good Mexican women residents of this city would truly be crowned.

(Zaragoza Club 1)

González's speech is thoroughly inscribed in the common rhetoric of women's discourses of patriotism of the era. In the presence of the soldiers who fought and then suffered the ignominies of being captured by the enemy, González characterizes women's efforts on behalf of the nation as "weak." Yet she envisions a day in which her debt as a *Mexicana* could be repaid through her own humble services. She states that the hopes of the "buenas mejicanas residentes en esta ciudad" or the "good Mexican women residents of this city," "serán coronados," ["would be crowned"] by the repayment of their debts. What remains unsaid but would have been understood by the women present on this occasion, is that their "weak" efforts at fulfilling their duty would primarily consist of fundraising—the most powerful way in which Latinos in the U.S. could show their patriotic duty. González's words, though veiled in modesty and self-deprecation are nevertheless an implicit demand for an official recognition of the club's efforts. The "débiles servicios," or humble services she mentions are none other than raising funds to assist the Mexican armies battling French occupation, but that is no small feat. In other words, the

Aunque creyéramos incurrir en la nota de impertunos, no dejaríamos pasar desapercibido el doloroso hecho de la decadencia que se observa en las suscripciones patrióticas de señores. Tan conspicuo es este hecho, que hasta las señoras de la Junta Patriótica de San José lo denunciaron fuertemente en su discurso inaugural, diciendo que la ocupación de Puebla había debilitado el patriotismo de los señores

expectation is that by understating the importance of their services these will be duly noted, both by the visiting soldiers and others who might report on the meeting.

There is much at play in terms of gender and the rhetoric of "deber" when it comes to finances. In autumn of 1863, when the women's Patriotic Club of San Jose, California was formed, the leader of the club, Teresa Díaz de Casanova, gave a speech in which she urged that her fellow women had a duty to pick up the slack of the men's patriotic clubs. Casanova implied that the men were lagging in their contributions, and that women must boost their efforts to make up for their shortcomings. In fact, she had been called upon by leaders of the men's patriotic club on an earlier occasion to collect money from women, so that funds towards the war effort could be gathered more quickly (Gray, Hayes-Bautista, and Chamberlin 172). On November 12, 1863, Antonio Mancillas wrote an editorial in *La Voz de Méjico* in which he refers to Casanova's speech directly and effectively shames men for their lackluster fundraising. According to Mancillas, the women attribute this decline in enthusiasm to the recent fall of Puebla to French forces, which had occurred in May of the same year:

Although we may have perceived a note of insolence, we should not leave unnoticed the painful fact of the degeneracy observed in the patriotic subscriptions by men. So conspicuous is this fact that even the ladies of the Patriotic Club of San Jose denounced it strongly in their inaugural address, saying that the occupation of Puebla had weakened the patriotism of the men

(Mancillas 2)

According to Hayes-Bautista, Chamberlin, and Gray, “[n]o self-respecting Latino man of the period would have wanted to be thought less resolute or less patriotic than a woman,” furthermore “he especially would not want women to view him in that light” (Gray, Hayes-Bautista, and Chamberlin 173). One hopes that being chided for their half-hearted efforts at fundraising by members of a woman’s patriotic organization might have had the effect of shaming these men into making more generous contributions. On the other hand, Mansilla’s comment makes it equally clear that women’s clubs and organizations in charge of raising funds for the war effort saw this as a way in which they might prove themselves as more patriotic by being the more generous of the two genders. Furthermore, although there is nothing about Ramírez’s *brindis* that would lead one to compare a woman’s sense of patriotic duty to a man’s, her description of “deber” as a natural condition of a generous soul, as well as the natural association of “alma” with the feminine, might justify reading her *brindis* as a toast to the generosity of women, and not simply to the women of the Zaragoza Club.

Conclusion

As discussed in this article, the *brindis* is a multi-purpose genre and one that gave the women of the Mexican patriotic clubs of the 1860s an opportunity to publicly declare their national loyalties and be taken seriously as contributors to the war effort on behalf of the Mexican armies battling the forces of Napoleon III. They also gave women a chance to match wits with each other in their public

toasts and “roasts.” That some of these rhymes survive in the pages of *El Nuevo Mundo* speaks to the social and cultural interest in these women’s clubs and their activities. This was a particularly tense and uncertain time for Mexican Americans and other Latinos who were living in the U.S. and supported the Mexican cause. It was a time for these far flung Latino communities across the American West to stand in solidarity, and the primary means of keeping up with news of Mexican patriotic club activities was to read Spanish-language newspapers. Furthermore, the fact that these *brindis* have been rediscovered by scholars of the genre, by Chicano researchers interested in recognizing the contributions of women to early Chicana/o letters, and by feminist editors of anthologies of nineteenth-century U.S. women’s writing, attests to the historical and cultural relevance of the Latina/o *brindis* tradition in the U.S. It also attests to women’s roles in advancing and perhaps reforming that tradition. Finally, there was a relationship between the *brindis* of patriotic events and the women’s sense of obligation to assist the war effort with fundraising and monetary contributions. The performative aspect of raising glasses and speaking *brindis* was meant to encourage a sense of patriotic duty in others, and that duty translated into funds for the cause. Therefore, organizing events and performing *brindis* no doubt brought these women another kind of recognition, not for their charm or their humor, but for the efficiency and commitment with which they raised funds. Fundraising would have likely been more valued than crafting patriotic verses by the larger male-dominated Mexican patriotic club movement, yet

the verses of the *brindis* poems only survive because these fundraisers' toasts were clever enough to attract the attention of newspaper editors and readers.

It is also reasonable to conclude that in publicly claiming their loyalty for Mexico and declaring their hostility to the occupying French forces, the women were also, in a not so veiled way, declaring their condemnation of the U.S.'s colonization and acquisition of Mexico's Alta California—the very land on which they stood while they delivered their toasts. It is perhaps possible to imagine that the women reciting and listening to these toasts and “roasts” mentally substituted the names of U.S. leaders and generals when they heard the names of Napoleon III or Maximilian. If so, these *brindis* would have had a cathartic effect.

Those women whose rhymed *brindis* found their way into the front pages of *El Nuevo Mundo* would certainly have seen the choice to print their words as a measure of recognition of their (and other women's) wit and creativity, not merely their social graces or patriotic sentiment. While the act of the *brindis* was a vocal performance and physical gesture that was circumstantial, improvisational, and momentary, once in print it allows readers and critics to look at it as a linguistic record of that performance and judge it accordingly. And while the conventional versification and rhyme patterns offer little proof of exceptional poetic innovation, the humor and wit present in these *brindis* convey these performers' perfect sense of their purpose and their audience. Call and response, repetition, good octosyllabic rhythm, modest rhyme and a sense of wily humor will win over audiences much faster

than fake lyricism or baroque verbosity, especially when those audiences were made up of mostly middle and lower class Latinas/os. It takes courage to stand and perform one's work in any setting. These women were doing so under circumstances in which their sense of loyalty to the Mexican cause felt urgent, and sense of community as Latinas/os in the U.S. felt precarious.

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Notes

- 1 Quotations from primary sources of Spanish-language newspapers have not been altered for grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Translations from the *brindis* series published in May and July of 1865 are modified versions of the ones published by Luis A. Torres in his book, *The World of Early Chicano Poetry, 1846-1910*.
- 2 Use of the terms “Latina” and “Latino” throughout this article, as opposed to “Mexican Americans,” is intentional. Although the Mexican patriotic clubs included many Mexican Americans, the clubs also included Native Americans, Spaniards, and Latinos from across Latin America who participated in solidarity with their Mexican American allies. Biographical data is not available on all of those who participated in the women's clubs, but since they all had Spanish names, Latina is the most accurate umbrella term to

- describe them. Furthermore, the word “Latino” is not anachronistic in this context and was used frequently in nineteenth-century newspapers. For more on the term “Latino” and a detailed history of *Cinco de Mayo* in the context of the patriotic club movement, see *El Cinco de Mayo: An American Tradition* by David E. Hayes-Bautista.
- 3 Filomeno Ibarra is the only man to have contributed a *brindis* in any of the series. His poem caps the Zaragoza Club series printed in July of 1865 and praises the women for their patriotism.
 - 4 Based on my archival research of newspaper publications in the nineteenth century, this is the earliest set of *brindis* published in the newspapers related to the women’s patriotic clubs in the Southwest. Gaps exist in these records, and new materials are still being recovered that may yield more *brindis* poems in the future.
 - 5 Kirsten Silva Gruesz astutely addresses this subject in her book, *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing*, citing the concept of “transitional literacy” and “orature” as being useful frameworks for upending notions of literacy when addressing reading practices of nineteenth-century America (Gruesz 23).
 - 6 Specifically, the *She Wields a Pen* anthology states that “women’s poetry clubs in Los Angeles organized to promote the composition of poetry in solidarity with soldiers fighting against the French invasion of Mexico” (Gray 242). This is untrue except for the fact that the club was organized in Los Angeles. Unfortunately, the *Aunt Lute* anthology echoes this incorrect information.
 - 7 The tradition of using the feminine title “Presidenta” instead of the standard term “Presidente” was begun by Francisca Manzo de Cavazos when she founded the first women’s Mexican patriotic club in Los Angeles in 1863 (Gray, Hayes-Bautista, and Chamberlin 166-167).
 - 8 In the newspaper, the surname is printed “Belarde,” but Andrea’s true last name is probably spelled “Velarde.” For the purposes of this study, I will refer to Andrea’s surname as it was printed in *El Nuevo Mundo*.
 - 9 Mateo studies carefully the *brindis* poems of various writers, including the nineteenth-century poet, Daniel Meneses (1855-1909), and the early twentieth-century poet Guillermo Aguirre y Fierro (1887-1949), who wrote the well-known poem, “El *brindis* del bohemio.”
 - 10 The term “deber” in the sense of “debt” should also be thought in tandem with the historical landscape that launched Mexico into wars with the U.S. and France throughout the nineteenth century. For the Latino of this time period, logic and rhetoric related to debt collection served as a constant threat to the stability of Mexican self-determination. In the 1860s, the invasion and attempted colonization of Mexico by Napoleon III was, at its outset, justified by a claim of debt collection. The Convention of London of 1861 marked a cooperation by Spain, Britain, and France to occupy and seize customs revenues from Mexico until debts were paid (Redinger).

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