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Eileen Willingham

Introduction

The articles in this special edition of *Humanities Research* began as papers presented at the Ninth Biennial Conference of the Association of Iberian and Latin American Studies of Australasia in 2010. The conference marked a momentous occasion for those involved in Iberian and Latin American Studies: the bicentenary of independence from Spain for five Latin American countries—Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela. Moreover, 1810 really represented the beginnings of the struggles that led to independence for all of the possessions of Spain and, later, Portugal in the Americas.

The republics of the Americas that began to emerge at this time provided a model for many in the colonial world. Along with the French and American revolutions of the late eighteenth century, Latin American independence stands as a great shift in the political make-up of the modern world. It is easy to look back on these world-changing events with a sense of their inevitability. To those living at the time and taking part in them, however, there was no such certainty. The American Revolution—after a long war—eventually established a constitutional republic. The notions of independence and liberty that this struggle helped to forge were, however, far from triumphant or even well entrenched at this time. Even the French Republic had slid back to a crowned emperor on the throne. A defeat in the great struggles that took place between 1810 and 1825 in Latin America would have seriously weakened what eventually became a global movement: the removal of hereditary monarchy and its replacement with some form of constitutional rule.

In place of vice-royalties governed from the Iberian Peninsula, new nation-states were created—governed, it is true, by local elites. But they were nation-states with the potential—often left unrealised—for eventual broad democratic representation. Along with these nation-states were created various forms of nationalism. While the dream of Simón Bolívar was for a unified state—*Gran Colombia*—rivalry between regional elites made this impossible and the borders of the region, more or less as we know them today, were soon set.

Once such independent states were formed each set out to forge a nationalism to legitimate its existence. This was to be no small effort since they contained people of remarkably diverse backgrounds. Those of Iberian origin often made up the elite. Other Europeans played a part—recalled in the name of the great liberator of Chile: Bernardo O’Higgins. Indigenous people had survived to be numerically predominant in some places. Africans—slaves or their descendents—were also strongly represented. A large *mestizo* population of mixed European and indigenous background was to become the largest group in others. Moreover, the colonial class structure remained intact through the
upheavals, with the newly independent regimes still populated by slave-owners and slaves. Patrician *hacendados* and *latifundistas* kept *campesinos* in serf-like conditions. Simón Bolívar was one of the wealthiest men of the continent when he took up the independence struggle. Joint citizenship alone was not enough to bind these disparate groups together. In many cases, the putative nationalism of the wars of independence defined itself solely against the colonial power, rather than by any broader agreement or common purpose.

Nationalism had to be created in Latin America—largely after the nation-states themselves were born. As Ernst Gellner wrote, ‘Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist’.¹ These new nationalisms were constructed by a political and a cultural process. A historia patria was created and streets and public spaces were adorned with the names of the heroes of independence and of the battles they fought. Literature became a major means for the development and transmission of nationalist themes. The language of politics became—and remains—littered with nationalist references to the processes by which these states were created. President Hugo Chávez has declared Venezuela a Bolivarian Republic. The legacy of José Martí is claimed both by the Cuban Government and by the Cuban exiles in the United States. ‘Ownership’ of nationalist symbols and figures has become part of daily political struggle, for which parties and ideologues vie.

It is easy to forget how modern is this development of nationalism. In the eighteenth century, the term ‘*patria*’ was used in Spanish to refer simply to the locality in which one was born. Until 1884, the *Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy* continued to use the word *nación* only in the sense of a group of inhabitants of a region rather than in the modern sense.²

The rulers of states in the past had attempted to command loyalty from their subjects on the basis of a personal allegiance to a noble family house or in obedience to the word of God. The world that was taking shape—and decisively so with Latin American independence—was built on a more abstract idea: an ‘imagined community’, in the words of Benedict Anderson.³ For the old rulers—such as the Hapsburgs—who sometimes commanded non-contiguous territories of numerous languages and cultures, the question of what nationality they considered themselves to be would have been incomprehensible and probably insulting. For the new rulers in Latin America it was central to their legitimacy.

Independence in Latin America also underlined the long, slow decline of the once great Iberian empires. They, left behind by more economically advanced

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and vigorous European rivals, found some of their American possessions were wealthier than they were. Interestingly, the modern form of nationalism that became established in the Americas had to wait much longer to take root in Spain and Portugal.

Two hundred years after the dawn of Latin American independence, we now hear predictions of the ‘end of the nation-state’ and claims that the nationalism that accompanies it is increasingly a nostalgic dream of past glories destined to play a minor part in our lives. But as several of the papers in this edition show, nationalism is not something that—once constructed—is put aside. There is a constant process of renewal in multiple fields including literature and politics. Even the celebrations of the bicentenaries are themselves part of the process. All the papers here deal, in different ways, with this process.

The article by Nicola Gilmour, ‘Carme Riera’s En el último azul (1994): An encounter with Spain’s conflicted past’, is a discussion of an attempt at a historical apology through a work of literature. The apology is by Carme Riera to a group of Jews persecuted by the Inquisition in late seventeenth-century Majorca, resulting in the execution of 37 of their number. The expulsion and forced conversion of the Spanish Jews are connected both with Latin America and with the construction of nationalism in several ways. The Edict of Expulsion was issued in 1492—at the same time as Columbus set out to colonise the New World. It was an early attempt to establish the homogeneity that later nation-building projects would require, but in a world in which religious uniformity was still more crucial than secular ideas of nationality. The article also explores the importance of a nation’s past in its own identity and of an apology such as this in undermining ‘fantasies of unified identity’.

Eileen Willingham’s contribution is also about the ways in which literature and history can shape a nation’s vision of itself—in this case, the Ecuadorian historian Juan de Velasco in the late eighteenth century and the writer Juan León Mera in the nineteenth century. Willingham traces the work of both men in creating continuity in Ecuadorian history extending even to pre-Hispanic times. The past is used to validate the creation of an ‘Ecuadorianness’ to serve the interests of the state and local elites.

Tensions in the formation of a nationalist narrative of the creation of the nation are also evident in the article by Benito Cao. Here is developed a historiography of the birth of the Brazilian nation. Central to this is a series of revolts during the colonial period. These are not, however, treated equally in the mainstream—and even some of the progressive—histories. In some cases, relatively small upheavals are accorded primacy of place while actually more significant ones are

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4 See, for example, Ohmae, K. 1995, The End of the Nation State, Harper Collins, London.
relegated to a minor position. Part of the reason for this is that white people—of Portuguese background—emerged as the dominant group in colonial and independent Brazil. The newly emerging national identity was therefore based around those aspects of the colonial experience and transition to nation-statehood in which their role was predominant or could be painted as such. The important part indigenous and African people played in the process is correspondingly, and systematically, marginalised.

Kevin Foster deals with the self-reflection of a nation through its own literature and culture. Rather than the early formation of a national identity through the process that others in this issue have explored, his subject, however, is a fully formed national, indeed imperial, identity—that of Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This article explores the relationship between Britain’s view of itself as a superior civilisation, the realities of increasing competition from other emerging imperialisms and the self-doubt and soul-searching that this sometimes produced. Latin America—as a region in which Britain had only very limited formal colonial possessions—afforded British writers the opportunity of ‘an ideal symbolic space, free from the complications of “official” rule, within which narrative fiction might unpack and illuminate the contradictions of imperialist discourse’. Conan Doyle’s _The Lost World_ (1902) is analysed as a fascinating example of the battle between civilisation and barbarism played out in an imaginary Latin American territory where, finally, contradictions in the imperial project itself are exposed.

Irene Strodthoff brings the process of the ideological construction of the nation-building project up to date. Her article on the Chilean and Australian bicentenaries illustrates that the national self-image so central to nation building is unfinished business. It investigates the similarities between the way the Australian bicentenary (1988) and the Chilean (2010) dealt with the question of incorporating indigenous people. Nation building in both cases was done through conquest and colonisation of indigenous people: Australian Aboriginal people and the Mapuche and other indigenous groups in Chile. In each case, most of the following years were marked by a virtual exclusion of the indigenes from official representations of the nation. Moreover, whereas the bicentenaries were officially celebrated, many indigenous people often mourned these events as a loss of their own sovereignty.

The final article deals with national identity in a situation of intense contemporary political consequence. First elected to office in 1998, President, Hugo Chávez, has attempted a redefinition of Venezuela as a ‘Bolivarian’ nation. Here, Guy Emerson shows that the battle for national identity can be of enormous political consequence. Chávez has attempted to construct in the popular imagination a recent past—an unjust one ruled over by his political predecessors and current
opponents—and contrast it with a more distant, but revolutionary one. In this construction, the Bolivarian past is now being reclaimed by a Bolivarian people—a formerly excluded group now taking its rightful place in Venezuela.

We hope these articles will be a significant contribution to continuing discussion of the nation-building project, its flaws and contradictions, in relation to a part of the world that played such an important part in its birth.

Guy Emerson and John Minns
Carme Riera’s *En el último azul* (1994): An encounter with Spain’s conflicted past

Nicola Gilmour

Carme Riera’s novel *En el último azul*—published first in Catalan in 1994 and then in 1996 in a Castilian translation prepared by the author herself—presents the story of a group of crypto-Jews (*chuetas*) living in seventeenth-century Majorca whose failed attempt to flee persecution leads to disaster.¹ Published shortly after 1992—the five-hundredth anniversary of, amongst other things, the official Edict of Expulsion of the Jews—this novel counters the multifaceted positive commemorative discourse of that year (in which Spain hosted a number of significant cultural events that celebrated ‘Spain’s coming of age as a modern, democratic European nation-state’)² with a representation intended to reveal some of 1492’s darker consequences.³ The novel, awarded the *Premio Nacional de Literatura* in 1995 (the first novel in a language other than Castilian to receive it), is based on historical events that took place between 1687 and 1691, but, as the author suggests, in her retelling of them in the genre of the historical novel a significant degree of poetic licence has been exercised.

First and foremost, *En el último azul* is a moving, novelistic account of the life and death of a persecuted community. As Akiko Tsuchiya has observed, however, it is also ‘a complex hybrid of history and fiction’.⁴ It is a novel dominated by questions regarding the relationship between official history and individual and collective memory, by questions regarding the relationship between past and present, and by questions as to where fiction might fit within these debates. Indeed, much of the critical discussion of the novel has centred upon what *En el*

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³ José Francisco Colmeiro, in his *Memoria histórica e identidad cultural. De la postguerra a la postmodernidad* (2005, Anthropos, Barcelona), emphasises the way in which these grand institutional commemorative events of 1992 glossed over or erased the memory of the negative consequences of 1492, which he lists as follows: ‘las múltiples leyendas negras de la historia nacional: el expolio de las colonizaciones, el esclavismo, el racismo, el oscurantismo, el odio y la exclusión del otro, las tensiones internas desestabilizadoras’ (p. 34).
último azul, as a work of fiction, adds to the historical account of those events. Furthermore, almost every critic who has written of this novel has linked it to some aspect of the present, either the context in which the novel was published or the critic’s own present, for, as Carlos García Gual has argued, the historical novel alludes frequently to the present in its evocation of the past and ‘atare ese pasado evocado hacia el presente, mostrando la semejanza de uno y otro’. There can be no question that making reference to historical memory was extremely relevant at the time the novel was written and is even more so now in the current Spanish political climate, with the passing of the Law of Historical Memory in 2007 and the growing demand for recognition of the victims of the Civil War and the Franco regime.

Critics have viewed the text in very different ways: for Janet Pérez, En el último azul presents a kind of historiography in line with the concepts propounded by the New Historicists. Neus Carbonell argues, applying post-colonial theories of the subaltern, that it might be read as ‘a narrative of resistance from the ethical perspective of the responsibility for the repressed’, while Tsuchiya analyses it as an exposé, partaking equally of history and fiction, of the discursive mechanisms used by the Spanish Inquisition to produce a disciplinary society. For Geraldine Cleary Nichols, En el último azul embodies ‘some of the “infinidades de historias” behind the capital-h Historical accounts of the last autos de fe [sic] resulting in loss of life in Majorca’, and thus unsettles the official documents’ monological presentation of the chuetas’ last years, thus restoring ‘some vestige of speech to the silenced’. Reyes Coll-Tellechea, on the other hand, has linked the novel to anxieties relating to the full entry of Spain into the European Union and the ethnic intolerance and genocide surrounding the break-up of the former Yugoslavia.

In particular, the critics have found it irresistibly tempting to read the narrative in juxtaposition with the three-page ‘Afterword/Nota’ at the end of the novel where the author sets out some of her aims in the production of the text. Here Riera also lays out briefly what she understands to be the salient differences between fictional and historical narrative and positions her text in relation to

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8 Tsuchiya, ‘Discourse and the strategies of power’, p. 83.
these two poles. This article too will examine the novel in relation to this ‘Nota’. Rather than address the dichotomy Riera establishes between history and fiction (which has been dealt with in detail by other critics), in this article, I wish to examine the final paragraph of the ‘Nota’ in which the author declares her novel to be an apology of sorts to the descendants of the chuetas, who, for more than 300 years, have suffered marginalisation and humiliation at the hands of their fellow Majorcans. In particular, this article will explore this assertion that a work of fiction could act as a historical apology and examine how that might function.

Before going on to discuss these issues, some brief summary of the key structural and thematic elements of the novel is necessary since they feed into the argument elaborated subsequently. What is more, I do not wish to ignore what is in fact an excellent 385-page novel in favour of the three-page afterword. En el último azul is structured in three parts: Part I, the longest, sets the scene for the escape. It depicts the way of life of the close-knit community of la Calle Sagell, a group of approximately 200 crypto-Jews and nuevos cristianos in Palma de Mallorca. It introduces the various characters and explains the group’s growing need to flee due to the presence of a malsín (or informant) in their midst. Part II narrates the failure of the planned escape due to inclement weather, the subsequent arrest of the group as they try to return to their homes after curfew, and the politically motivated riots that follow. Part III depicts the interrogation and torture of the detainees, the trials, the politicking surrounding the trials, the attempts by exiled compatriots in Livorno to negotiate the release of the chuetas and, finally, the sentencing of the group and the execution of 37 of its members. The narration takes an ostensibly neutral third-person perspective, with multiple points of focalisation, allowing the reader into the minds of different characters, both those in positions of power (the Viceroy, the Chief Inquisitor, the priests, and so on) and those in positions of vulnerability—that is, those who suffer and eventually die, as well as those who attempt to save them and witness their deaths.

The novel begins like an episode from The Arabian Nights, as one critic has commented, with a minor character, João Peres, a Portuguese sailor, pursuing sexual adventure. He is on a quest to find a beautiful and mysterious woman described to him by another sailor, Captain Andreas Harts, Peres’s actions driven by his memories of Harts’ evocative and erotic storytelling. En el último azul ends with that same character, Peres, acquiring a rather more traumatic and shocking memory—the sight of Gabriel Valls being burnt to death at the stake—a memory he wishes he could blot out. In fact, all the characters in the

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11 Nichols, “‘Tras su hache mayúscula’”, p. 201.
novel are haunted by memories of one type or another (of lost loves, of violence suffered or committed, of past humiliations). Indeed, memory is not only an important part of the characters’ lives; it is also an integral theme of the novel.

Memory (specifically the chueta memories) provides a contrast with the official discourse from which Hispanic Judaism is ‘disappeared’ by the Edict of Expulsion in 1492. The very existence of the crypto-Jewish characters depends on memory: their collective and individual ability to remember (to a greater or lesser degree) their traditions and to pass them on to their children at a certain age. Their life as an underground community depends on the retention of those memories of their excluded religious and cultural tradition. Their memory also functions as an alternative history, a subtext contradicting the official state version of Spanish history, in which, of course, they no longer exist as Jews at all, only as Christians, and defective ones at that. Furthermore, as Nichols states, memory actually ‘constitutes them as Jews’—a reference to the Zakhor, the religious mandate of Judaism to remember. Memory is partly what keeps these characters alive during their long stay in prison: ‘En el rebujo de la memoria afloraban pequeños detalles que hasta entonces no habían sido tomados en cuenta, pero que ahora les servían como muletas de aquella vida coja y manca que padecían.’ For these characters, then, memory is not only key to their identity; it represents their support in times of great trial.

At the same time, memory is also integral to the persecution of these characters since the official memory also holds their former identity present: the Inquisition (and the Majorcan society that surrounds them) never forgets that the residents of La Calle were once Jews, regardless of whether or not they practise Christianity. Indeed, as is made clear in the ‘Nota’ and other critical articles, this memory has played a part in the cultural life of Majorca until the present day, having a negative impact on the descendants of the chuetas even at the end of the twentieth century. Thus, the theme of memory is woven subtly into the very structure of the novel, signalling the importance of remembering, both as an alternative or supplement to official history and as a process of bearing witness by which the traumatic events of the long-distant past, the consequences of that official history, can be kept alive. Memory is presented as the intimate human face of history, and giving it pre-eminence in her novel is an important part of Riera’s technique to undermine the official discourse of Spanish history. By creating these imagined (fictional) memories, Riera makes visible the invisible—the absence upon which present-day Majorca (and Spain) is constructed—and reveals the suffering of those long-dead chuetas.

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12 Ibid., pp. 211–12.
13 Riera, En el último azul, p. 353.
14 For more on the need to recover historical memory, see Mate, R. 2008, La herencia del olvido. Ensayos en torno a la razón compasiva, Errata naturae, Madrid, in particular the chapter entitled ‘Tierra y huesos. Reflexiones sobre la historia, la memoria y la “memoria histórica”’. 
In making the victims of the past visible, Riera needs to make them human, and one of the novel’s greatest strengths is the depth of characterisation, the texture of the individuals who come to life off the page—Jewish and Catholic, inquisitor and victim, good and evil, fictional and historical, all are rounded and complexly human. Gabriel Valls, the leader of the would-be escapees, for example, remembers both the terror of being persecuted as a child for his Jewish origin and, equally, the shame and guilt of remembering the way in which he took his revenge against a former friend turned persecutor (a boy of Moorish origin) by sodomising him with a stick. The chief inquisitor is cold and implacable in his efforts to exterminate heresy, but he is also shown to be a devoted son who makes superhuman efforts to get to his mother’s deathbed, and the reader witnesses his despair when he fails. Even Costura, the malsín, is no cardboard cut-out villain. His betrayal of his relatives is motivated by a complex blend of genuine religious belief, greed, loneliness after the death of his much-loved Christian wife, and a sense of abandonment by his community. No one character in the novel is entirely good or entirely evil and, as such, the novel undermines ‘fantasies of unified identity…[thus] unsettling positions of comfortable certainty in the addressees’ identity’. Indeed, to a certain extent, good and evil become destabilised categories, as do history and fiction, as the novel depicts what Graves and Rechiniewski describe as the ‘shades of grey’ that ‘inevitably characterise the actions of those caught up in situations of oppression of one group by another’. The novel shows the reader that in fact the crypto-Jews of Majorca were people, members of Majorcan society, not the Christ-killing outsiders they were made out to be, people who were caught up in larger forces, just like everyone else—including the inquisitors. And so, we can put ourselves in their place and feel empathy for them, entering into what Carbonell calls ‘an ethics of relationality with the Other’.

Ultimately, however, there are winners (who kill) and losers (who are killed), and falling into one category or the other is, Riera’s novel suggests, due largely to the political and institutional forces at work, manipulating the situation. In the final analysis, Riera lays the broader responsibility for the destruction of the chueta community and the ongoing humiliation of their descendants at the feet of the Church and Majorcan, and by extension Spanish, society. Those larger forces, in conjunction with bad luck, as well as individual acts of cruelty, within an environment that sanctioned the exclusion and marginalisation of the chueta community, are shown to be what destroyed the chuetas, rather than any

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15 Riera, En el último azul, pp. 83–6.
16 Ibid., pp. 146–57.
heresy or wrongdoing on their part. It might seem, then, that Riera is somehow saying that no-one is responsible and that it was ‘just one of those things that happened that cannot be changed or remedied now’. In the last paragraph of the ‘Nota’, however, she specifically links the past depicted in the novel to an ongoing suffering in the present for which she does assign responsibility.

Ostensibly, the ‘Nota’ sets out the way in which Riera approached the weaving together of historical fact and literary imagination. It begins with a brief summary of the historical events on which the novel is based, and then the author goes on to specify in some detail the ways in which what she has written differs from the ‘historical events’. She has changed the flow of time, lengthening the time at the beginning, ‘para que el lector pudiera entrar de manera gradual en el conflicto’, and shortening it towards the end, ‘para hacerla más compacta e intensa’—that is, she adjusts events for dramatic impact. She also points out that the character of Peres who opens and closes the novel is fictional and that Blanca María Pires (the mysterious lady of Harts’ story) is a character drawn from literature. The Viceroy is not ‘real’, nor is his nephew or the critics’ favourite character, the prostitute, Beatriu Mas.

Riera then links the characters who are based on real people to their historical counterparts, stating that she changed their names to signal that her book is fiction: ‘He cambiado nombres, apellidos y apodos apostas, para señalar así que mi libro no es historia sino ficción.’ She goes on to state that this is integral to her idea of the fundamental difference between history and fiction: ‘En los dominios de la historia ningún material debe ser manipulado; en el de la novela, por muy histórica que sea, mientras se mantenga la verosimilitud, la verdad de cohesión, todo es válido y, en consecuencia, legítimo.’ History must be above manipulation, and strictly factual, she asserts, while literature can do what it likes, as long as it looks and feels real. Many critics have picked up on this definition (which seems to free literature from any kind of obligation to historical ‘truth’), as it is clearly somewhat problematic. As Tsuchiya states: ‘The “historicity” or “fictionality” of literary discourses…cannot be based simply on the question of referential authority or truth value ascribable (or not ascribable) to the textual referent.’

Having thus disavowed her novel’s link to ‘real events’, Riera then rather paradoxically proceeds to reference the archival research she has carried out and the experts she has consulted to ensure her text’s authenticity, as well as

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20 Riera, *En el último azul*, pp. 387, 386.
21 Ibid., p. 387.
22 Ibid., p. 387.
23 Ibid., p. 387.
24 Ibid., p. 387.
25 Tsuchiya, ‘Discourse and the strategies of power’, p. 77. Furthermore, Riera’s formulation presents a somewhat simplified concept of the nature of historical research; however, to discuss this in detail is beyond the scope of this article.
her not inconsiderable efforts to get the language right, to ensure that it is not anachronistic. Here, then, Riera appears to be wanting to have it both ways, much as James E. Young has observed in relation to Holocaust documentary fiction: by mixing actual events and fictional characters, the writer both invokes poetic licence (therefore eschewing the demand for total historical accuracy) and imbues his or her fiction with authenticity. Young calls this insistence on a narrative’s factuality the ‘rhetoric of fact’ and argues that if used merely to move the reader then it serves only to wring ‘pleasure from the naked pain of the victims’. But, he continues, if an author refrains from ‘conferring an essential fictionality on actual historical events then we might take into account both the legitimate impulse to document events and the manner in which “real past events” are inevitably fictionalized by any narrative that gives them form’. That is, Riera’s insistence on fictionality and authenticity might serve to make readers doubt the absolute veracity of official historical discourse in regard to the events being described, and to point to the absence of key aspects of the traumatic experiences of the past from the official Inquisitorial historical record.

Riera’s novel weaves together imagined memories (fiction) to supplement the official history, giving a voice to the marginalised and thus providing their alternative version of events, as indeed happens in many historical novels. Indeed, she goes further to discredit the makers of the official history (represented by the legajos of the Inquisition, and a work called La fe triunfante, an ‘intemperate’ and ‘vitriolic’ eyewitness account written at the time by Jesuit priest Francisco Garau, represented by Padre Amengual in the novel). In her depiction of the trials, Riera unmasks the Inquisition’s less than holy motives—greed, revenge, fanaticism and ambition—contradicting the historical record, and supplying the truth behind history. In fact, in a sense, the novel puts the Inquisition itself on trial before the jury of its readers. In this way, En el último azul seems to bear out Juan Cruz Mendizábal’s suggestion that a ‘country’s novels may supply a truer account of its culture than its histories, which report facts selected to support the ruling ethos’.

26 Riera, En el último azul, p. 388.
28 Ibid., p. 62.
29 Ibid., p. 63.
30 Nichols, “‘Tras su hache mayúscula’”, p. 204.
31 Ibid., p. 205.
32 I am indebted to Professor Christine Arkinstall of the University of Auckland for this very pertinent insight.
33 Juan Cruz Mendizabal, quoted in Judy B. McInnis’s introduction to her edited book, Models in Medieval Iberian Literature and their Modern Reflections: Convivencia as structural, cultural, and sexual ideal (2002, Juan de la Cuesta, Newark, Delaware), pp. xlix–l.
By providing an imagined insight into the actions and memories of historical and fictional characters, *En el último azul* presents the kind of ephemeral personal detail that the historical record would usually efface. Thus, in a sense, the novel returns the individuality and humanity to those involved, as Aharon Appelfeld urges writers to do in the context of Holocaust literature, in order ‘to rescue the suffering…from dreadful anonymity, and to restore the person’s given and family name, to give the tortured person back his human form’.  

Riera specifically mentions such an intention in her ‘Nota’ as being one of those that lies behind the novel. She states that she wanted to present a picture of the *chuetas*’ way of life that would allow the reader to understand them, to understand ‘cómo fueron sus casas, sus costumbres, qué oficios tenían, y cómo algunos de ellos mantenían alianzas con los nobles en el negocio del mar’. Understanding the characters’ daily reality reveals their normal ‘human-ness’ and, presumably, encourages an empathetic reaction towards their suffering on the part of the reader.

Further intentions are set out in the final paragraph of the ‘Nota’, where Riera, in an ambiguous move, denies any intention of polemic but at the same time makes what could be viewed as a controversial ethical claim:

> En el último azul no tiene, aunque pueda parecerlo, ninguna intención polémica. No pretende hurgar en viejas heridas ni abrir tampoco otras nuevas, haciendo referencia a la intolerancia de buena parte de la sociedad mallorquina contra un grupo de mallorquines de procedencia judía, ya que quizá aún peores que los hechos de 1691 fueron sus trágicas consecuencias, que marginaron y humillaron durante siglos hasta hoy mismo a los descendientes de aquellos mártires judíos quemados en los autos de fe. A todos ellos, me parece que los mallorquines de buena voluntad debemos pedir perdón. Ésa es también una de las intenciones de la novela.

Here we seem to have travelled a long way from the view that ‘it is only fiction’, into the realm of the novel as an ethical response to history. Despite the disclaimer regarding stirring up controversy or ‘reopening old wounds’ (that famous accusation usually thrown by the political right to discourage reconsideration of the past), and despite her stated lack of desire to create new wounds, in what follows Riera uncovers a wound that is very much unhealed and largely hidden from sight: the humiliation suffered over the centuries by the descendants of this group of Majorcans. So grievous is this wound that the author argues that these victims are owed an apology by the Majorcan community and furthermore suggests (although the sentence itself is rather vague) that this novel is designed

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36 Ibid., pp. 388–9.
to embody that apology. Thus, not only is the novel designed to represent an episode of Spanish history, to supplement it by inserting the voices of history’s victims, or contradict it, according to Riera in the ‘Nota’, En el último azul is also intended to compensate for it, to apologise for historical wrongs committed.

It is this bold claim of a fictional work to the status of a ‘retrospective apology’ that I would now like to explore because, at first glance, the idea of a fictional apology seems rather like a cheque drawn on a bank account with insufficient funds to honour it. To this end, I would like to pose the following questions: if a traumatic historical event has been perpetrated by one community upon another and is inadequately publicly recognised or distorted in official documents and largely ignored by the modern community, what role can literature play in righting that wrong? For Weyeneth, retrospective apologies ‘run the gamut from the obvious (words of regret delivered at a podium) to the imaginative (a multi-year walk of reconciliation)’, but can something as imaginative as a historical novel function as an apology? Or is there perhaps something inherently contradictory about such an assertion? And is this novel functioning in that capacity?

Given that, as Coll-Tellechea states, ‘fictional stories about Spain’s historical past reach many more readers than the history books’, fiction can certainly serve as a way of raising a nation’s consciousness about the past. It can act as an effective testimonial of sorts by bringing a version of the ‘facts’ of the situation to wider public scrutiny, or by maintaining the visibility of certain traumatic events of the past, thus potentially reaching a wider audience to be shocked and moved to demand historical justice. Indeed, as Jorge Semprún has affirmed, fiction might give a sense of witnessing those distant events even though all the witnesses are long dead. He argues that fiction will increasingly become an integral channel for the recuperation of historical memory: ‘Es preciso recuperar la memoria histórica a través de la ficción, porque pronto no quedarán testigos de lo sucedido.’

But the recovery of lost ‘memories’ is not an apology; it can really only be a precursor to apology. A historical novel can remind us that, although an injustice might have taken place several hundred years ago, there are often

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37 The term is one used by Robert Weyeneth in ‘The power of apology and the process of historical reconciliation’ (The Public Historian, vol. 23, no. 3 [Summer 2001], pp. 9–38). He defines it as an acknowledgment of ‘injustices of a systematic or structural nature (such as anti-Semitism and colonialism) or long-past historical events (like the Crusades, the Inquisition and the slave trade)’ (p. 35).
38 This provocative metaphor was suggested to me by Professor Alfredo Martínez Expósito at the conference where an earlier version of this article was presented.
41 Quoted in Ferrán, O. 2007, Working Through Memory. Writing and remembrance in contemporary Spanish narrative, Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg, Pa, p. 277.
ongoing implications for the present, as in the case of the descendants of the chuetas. It can remind us that the past cannot really be dead when certain human characteristics (intolerance, fanaticism, hatred, greed, and so on) rear their ugly heads, generation after generation. Riera herself has stated that the only solution to what she calls ‘[l]as hogueras del fanatismo y la ortodoxia [que] son una constante del siglo XXI’ is to ‘matar el yo racista que llevamos dentro y eso sólo se puede conseguir colocándonos en el lugar del otro, sintiéndote agredida’—that is, to put oneself in the position of the other, via exercising empathy, perhaps through the act of reading, or even writing, a novel.\(^42\)

For Leslie Epstein, writer of novels about the Holocaust, the role of the novelist when working with traumatic events of the past is ‘to create a bond...between the reader and every aspect of the world that has been salvaged through imagination’, and he affirms that such a ‘sense of responsibility and connectedness can be achieved only by the creative artist—and by creative readers as well’.\(^43\)

A work of fiction, then, can bring individual life to the victims of traumatic historical events, revealing their humanity in a way that might bring them closer to the readers, thus stimulating an empathetic reaction, creating precisely that bond or connectedness and that sense of responsibility. In respect to long-ago events, when all the eyewitnesses are long dead, fiction provides perhaps our only access to the kind of details that history has effaced—the feelings and emotional realities of everyday life.\(^44\)

Fiction can fulfil all of these functions—and many of them overlap with certain aspects of a retrospective apology. For Weyeneth, the retrospective apology takes the long view and ‘acknowledges that history matters: perpetrators and immediate victims may be gone, but their legacy continues to shape the present’.\(^45\) He notes that ‘history casts long shadows, whether the present wants it to or not, and the general retrospective apology seeks to reckon with the shades’.\(^46\) Recognition of just this kind of impact of the past on the present is very clear in Riera’s ‘Nota’. Additionally, like the historical novel, the retrospective apology ‘provides a means for the present generation to respond to the past and to draw lessons from it’.\(^47\) Clearly, then, there are significant points of contact between a historical novel of the type Riera has written and the concept of the retrospective apology, but the question remains, can a novel constitute an apology?

\(^42\) Quoted in Carbonell, ‘The ethics of dissidence’, p. 224.
\(^44\) This is of course a fantasy—the author’s and the readers’ fantasy about what those characters’ feelings and emotional realities might have been; nevertheless, it has a powerful impact. For more on the idea of fantasy and witnessing in relation to the Holocaust, see Weiss, G. 2004, Fantasies of Witnessing. Postwar efforts to experience the Holocaust, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, and London.
\(^45\) Weyeneth, ‘The power of apology and the process of historical reconciliation’, p. 35.
\(^46\) Ibid., p. 35.
\(^47\) Ibid., p. 36.
In *Mea Culpa: A sociology of apology and reconciliation*, Nicholas Tavuchis examines the nature of the apology as a speech act and asks what is required for an apology to be successful. For him, an apology is a dyadic interaction whose ‘exclusive, ultimate, and ineluctable focus is upon interaction between the primordial social categories of Offender and Offended’. He goes on to set out three stages required for a speech act to qualify as an apology: first, the naming of the offence and the identification of it as an apologisable action responsive to a call for an apology (‘if there is no call, no urgency to remember, no struggle against the natural tendency to forget, then there is no occasion for apology’). Then, there is the apology itself with its admission of wrongdoing and expression of sorrow and regret. Finally, there is the response of the injured party, who might or might not accept the apology and forgive the offence. Tavuchis delineates the structure of possible apologies as being interpersonal (that is, one to one), or between individuals and collectivities (one to many or many to one) and between collectivities (many to many). This last formulation covers situations where the state speaks on behalf of the collectivity, and indeed, in recent times, most apologies for historical injustices have been made by states, symbolically representing the community of a nation. In the light of this, it seems that the kind of apology Riera is referring to in this novel hovers ambiguously somewhere between the one-to-many and the many-to-many varieties of apologies. Given that Riera is an individual and not an officially accredited person to whom the Offender (or perpetrator) group or their descendants has delegated such a task then what she is doing in the novel cannot constitute a successful apology. For, as Tavuchis argues, ‘an apology proffered without proper credentials, that is, lacking the moral imprimatur of the group, amounts to no apology at all. It means nothing because it represents the unaccredited One and not the Mandate of the Many.’ One might possibly argue that, by virtue of her profession as a writer and public intellectual—thus perhaps having an obligation to act as the conscience of society—Riera is accredited in some way. This is, however, somewhat of a long bow to draw.

It seems that what Riera *is* doing here is ‘calling for an apology’; she is laying out the details of the offence committed and is doing it (presumably) from within the collectivity of the Offenders. She has observed in the history of Majorca a

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49 Ibid., p. 22.
50 As the concept of apologies for historical injustices has developed in practice since 1991 (the date of Tavuchis’s book), these last two stages have often become conflated. For example, in New Zealand, in the context of the settling of historical injustices committed by the Crown against the indigenous Maori, the Crown negotiates the form and wording of apologies with the tribes involved. This kind of negotiation is not normally found in interpersonal one-to-one apologies.
52 Apparently, there has been little demand for an apology from the Offended. In fact, Nichols, in her essay, refers to an account in the Majorcan press in which five people of chueta descent argued against a proposed
situation that offends her sense of how that group of which she forms a part—Majorcan society—should behave, a situation that caused persecution, death and suffering to a subset of that community. Furthermore, and perhaps crucially for its relevance to the present, that historical wrong has had an ongoing impact that requires redress, an apology. While the responsibility for the wrongdoing in the past might lie at the feet of those institutions and people of the past, that of the ongoing discrimination and suffering, her ‘Nota’ seems to be implying, can be laid at the door of contemporary Majorcans as a group. In this kind of circumstance of state historical wrongdoing and collective discrimination the only meaningful mode of apology available, however, is that of many to many—a public apology from the state or the leaders of the Majorcan community or the Church—and Riera is not in the position to proffer that.

What she can do in her novel, and what I believe she is doing, is to stimulate, through her empathetic treatment of characters, the collective memory of those events that, it seems, is being expunged from the official record and fading from the collective memory. She implicitly understands that unless the collective memory of the offence is revived then there can be no redress and no healing or reconciliation, for a fading memory does not mean that the ‘wound’ or trauma will be healed. And, as Reyes Mate observes, an unresolved offence ‘quedará ahí, oculta o latente, a la espera de que haya una conciencia moral sensible que la despierte. Esa huella estaría ahí, acompañando a la historia, porque la historia se ha construido sobre ella.’ In Riera, we have that ‘conciencia moral sensible’, signalling the site of an unhealed wound with her novel. As Shoshana Felman has affirmed, ‘[a]rt is what makes silence speak’, and Riera’s retelling of the story of the chuetas from a subaltern perspective fills that silence, revealing truths or imagined stories that have not been told before—portraying, for example, the venal nature of the Majorcan Inquisition, or constructing an empathetic representation of what it might have been like to be persecuted in this way.

The reader is shocked into a realisation of how wrong the past actions were, but, to reiterate, this is an outline of the offence for which the apology is needed, rather than an apology per se. In a sense, however, this is a function that bears similarities to that of the collective apology, for as Tavuchis states, ‘the major structural requirement and ultimate task of collective apologetic speech is to put things on record, to document as a prelude to reconciliation’, which is arguably

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53 Mate, La herencia del olvido, p. 160.
what Riera is seeking to do in her novel. Yet, it is here that the status of Riera’s text as a historical novel works against it being able to constitute this kind of apology or to function as historical documentation since fiction is not, and cannot be, equivalent to the historical record. It is in this context that one needs to read Riera’s assertions to historical accuracy and authenticity, as she treads that tightrope between the historical offence and the imagining of how that offence might have felt to its victims and how it might have figured in their memories. She uses Young’s ‘rhetoric of fact’ to give her fictional re-creation of collective memory some of the weight of history. It is her able deployment of the resources of fiction that enhances the power of her call for an apology (by, for example, enhancing reader empathy with the characters), but the use of these very same resources militates against this novel being able to proffer the apology that she says is one of her purposes.

Thus, a novel—in this instance, En el último azul—can provide a ‘mode of articulation’ for collective memory. It can create or contribute to a groundswell of public opinion that might, if strong enough, lead to an official, collective apology on behalf of a remorseful community in general or on behalf of the political or institutional entity representing the Offenders. I would argue, however, that for an apology for historical injustice to be meaningful, it cannot be delivered in a novel, for the reasons outlined above. And this novel, despite the words of the author in the ‘Nota’, does not act as an apology, but rather as a call for an apology from within the Offender group by attempting to resuscitate the collective memory of that trauma—hence the insistent emphasis on memory in the novel.

Riera is right in asserting that an offence has been committed, both in the seventeenth century and continuing now, and that an apology might be owed. To my knowledge, one has not been offered and perhaps one is not likely to be outside the pages of this novel, especially given the lapse in time since the original events took place. Perhaps the fact that she is presenting this call in a novel might be more of an unarticulated acknowledgment of the fact that an official apology is unlikely to be made in the current climate of indifference. Felman writes that ‘writers often feel compelled to testify through literary or artistic channels precisely when they know, or feel intuitively, that in the court of history…evidence will fail or will fall short’. For Felman, literature is a ‘precocious mode of bearing witness and of accessing reality when all other modes of knowledge are precluded or are rendered ineffectual’.

56 Tavuchis, Mea Culpa, p. 109.
59 Ibid., p. 97.
In conclusion, then, I would assert that this novel, and indeed literature or art in general, might play a valuable role in the process of reconciliation in the case of historical grievances by deploying its resources to raise community consciousness of the wrongs of the past. Without such awareness there is no possibility of getting an apology from the state or the Church or any other institution from whom it is owed. Riera’s novel cannot constitute an apology but it can, through its empathetic representation of the victims of history, function as a call for an apology, which might ultimately, in the right circumstances, heal the wound that Riera has uncovered.
Literary Patriotism in Ecuador’s Juan León Mera and Juan de Velasco

Eileen Willingham

Nineteenth-century nation builders in Ecuador looked to the past for models of national unity and identity. The prolific writer and government servant Juan León Mera served the theocratic state of ultraconservative President Gabriel García Moreno, whose rule extended from 1860 to 1875, and contributed to shaping Ecuador’s national imaginary in his literary and journalistic output. Mera found many elements for his vision of Catholic triumphalism in Ecuador in the work of eighteenth-century exiled Jesuit historian Juan de Velasco. This article traces genealogical ties between the two writers, from the Creole historian’s elite patriotic history *La historia del Reino de Quito en la América meridional* of 1789 to Mera’s many novels, stories and essays.

As was the case for other post-independence Spanish-American nations, in Ecuador, the experience of nation building in the nineteenth century was tumultuous. After the independence wars, the colonial-era Audiencia de Quito joined Gran Colombia as the Distrito del Sur (1822–30), but broke away as Bolivar’s dream of a unified South American state crumbled. In Ecuador’s case, after 1830, conflicts among regions and competing oligarchic interests led to continued instability, as traditional landholding elites in the highlands—themselves divided between northern and southern zones—and export-oriented landholders in the coastal region struggled to establish both a nation-state and a sense of nationhood in the ethnically stratified territory. Between 1860 and 1875, as Ecuador was drawn more closely into the global export economy, the nation was ruled by Gabriel García Moreno, who supported his modernising program with a repressive regime closely allied with the Catholic Church.¹ Writer and government official Juan León Mera made significant contributions to Ecuador’s nation-making project, both by backing García Moreno’s ‘theocratic state’ and by shaping Ecuador’s sense of national identity through his literary output.² Just as García Moreno looked to colonial models of social control—for example, by renewing the Church’s role in ‘civilising’ the people and by reintroducing colonial-era labour arrangements—to shore up his national project, Mera turned to a late-colonial historian of Quito, Juan de Velasco, as a source of elements of

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national identity. Both writers, living in periods of rapid change, attempt to define the essence of the Quiteño or Ecuadorian people by looking to the past to fashion invented traditions for the present. Velasco’s *Historia del Reino de Quito en la América meridional* (1789) and Mera’s works show that both promise and contradictions lie at the heart of their patriotic projects.

Velasco’s eighteenth-century Creole patriotic history played a vital part in Ecuador’s national imaginary during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The text was rescued from near oblivion, repatriated from Europe, and published in early republican Ecuador in the 1840s. Post-colonial nationalists found his tale of alternative indigenous agency and Quiteño identity too enticing to resist; in addition, the text provides the prehistory for nationalist rivalry between Ecuador and Peru. Mera’s work is deeply indebted to Velasco’s history of the Quito region, because of its heroic tale of an indigenous royalty that outshone the Incas; its description of the region’s territory, resources and population; and its model for establishing and perfecting Catholic civilisation in America. Mera saw continuity between various periods and actors of his nation’s history, as did Velasco with the colonial Kingdom of Quito, and both have been instrumental in institutionalising the unbroken narrative of Ecuadorianness (or ‘Quiteñoness’) that elites wished to tell. Mera’s concerns with national and territorial unity, national origins and cultural history resonate with the earlier attempt by Velasco, written during the Jesuit’s exile in Italy after 1767. To take one example, if Mera’s 1879 novel, *Cumandá*, has become a foundational fiction, in the eminently quotable phrase of Doris Sommer, one that has been institutionalised in schools, and in literary and historical texts, Velasco’s history has also been seen as foundational—and a fiction. In short, my analysis of Mera’s debts to Velasco both establishes their ties of genealogy and explores and contextualises notions of nation building and literary history in nineteenth-century Ecuador.

In his work, Mera imposes a story of national continuity on the events, people and places that constitute the nation of Ecuador—that is, like Velasco, he desires an unbroken narrative about a place, its people, and its history as continuous, unified, legitimate and providential. How can Mera forge links between his nineteenth-century present and various stages of the past? His project is similar to that of Velasco, and he unites these elements by focusing on how the ancient Kingdom of Quito’s people, history and place develop into contemporary Ecuador. He links past and present by showing that the peoples

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of Ecuador succeed each other in a historically determined way; they share a patriotic landscape that they have inhabited from time immemorial; and they are also united by language, culture and religion.

Throughout his long career, Mera, a prominent member of Ecuador’s lettered city, wrote short and longer fiction on national themes (*Cumandá*, the stories collected in *Novelitas ecuatorianas*); poetry (*Melodías indígenas*, the ‘legend’ *‘La virgen del sol*, and poems collected in *Cantares del pueblo ecuatoriano*); numerous essays published in the national press, as well as literary criticism (*Ojeada histórico-crítica de la poesía ecuatoriana*); and a history of Gabriel García Moreno’s theocratic state and its aftermath. He served in various government positions, including as senator and provincial governor, and wrote the lyrics to Ecuador’s national anthem. Mera’s patriotic literary project lays cultural and historical foundations for the nation in several ways, and often betrays contradictory impulses. He portrays Ecuador’s indigenous cultures in various genres (novel, poetry and essay) and assesses Ecuador’s national literary history (in prologues, letters and essays). Mera’s literary constructions of the noble savage in *Cumandá* and the poem *‘La virgen del sol’* (1861; second edition 1887) contribute images to the national imaginary that, while underscoring the centrality of indigenous peoples to Ecuador’s sense of nationhood, also emphasise the Indian’s ‘pastness’. Mera’s treatment of this phenomenon, as theorised by Sommer, Hernán Vidal and others, is in concert with other literary projects linked to the consolidation of the nation throughout Latin America (Zorrilla’s *Tabaré* in Uruguay, Galván’s *Enriquillo* in the Dominican Republic). Mera’s work as literary critic and compiler of poetry, however, complicates his literary enterprise. While his ‘Indianist’ works *Cumandá* and *‘La virgen del sol’* cast a nostalgic backward glance at the modernising nation’s mythical forebears and point to a literary solution for unifying the politically, geographically and ethnically stratified nation, Mera’s *Cantares del pueblo ecuatoriano* (1892), *Ojeada histórico-crítica de la poesía ecuatoriana* (1868), and essays and stories published in periodicals, uncover the presence of a more nuanced dialogue between nostalgia and literary historiography in Ecuador.

Velasco’s interpretation of his *patria*’s history establishes a number of patriotic myths and values that later writers and other nation builders have drawn on to shape the nation’s identity. The *Historia* presents Quito with a glorious past in the form of an indigenous dynasty that parallels that of the Incas. Velasco calls that dynasty the Scyris, and he depicts them as authentic shapers of the *patria*, who enfold various ethnic groups into Quito’s territory, and who always exhibit such virtuous characteristics as engaging in just war, and only as a last resort; having an advanced culture and language; and practising a monotheistic religion. He presents the Incas, who conquer the Scyris, but who share a common origin

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with them, both as outsiders who have descended into idolatry and corrupt
governing and as a slightly more civilised people. In short, Quito and its Scyris
benefit from the reflected glory of Incan culture, while Quiteños retain such
attributes as authenticity, legitimacy, pure religious practices and a tradition
of territorial integrity. After narrating the glorious past of the Scyris, Incas and
eyear Spanish conquerors, Velasco redirects his focus to the heroic actions of
his expelled Jesuit brethren, whose labours in the vast Amazonian territories
dominate his history of the later colonial period. Velasco's history lays out
Quito's territorial boundaries, its heroes and myths, its cultural achievements,
and its ideal ethnic make-up, and provides a ready-made story of national glory
for republican Ecuador.

Mera shared many of Velasco's patriotic concerns. The Jesuit's work was not
published until the 1840s in Quito, but contemporary press accounts of the
whereabouts of the manuscript and its eventual publication highlight its
importance in shaping notions about the character of the new nation. Mera
documented his debt to Velasco in many of his works, often through footnotes,
and there are many points of contact between the two. Both were poets and
literary historians who considered the Quichua language to be an integral
component of national culture. Their works exalt idealised past, noble Indians,
but also protest present unjust treatment of contemporary indigenous people.
And both writers look beyond the confines of the populous highland and coastal
regions to the Oriente—the jungle region whose incorporation into the patria
they consider vital. Underpinning their concept of the patria is a deep current
of Catholic triumphalism in the American context; Velasco and Mera praise the
uniqueness of their land and its culture, which, in their view, benefited from the
union of American traditions and European civilisation, especially Christianity.

Velasco—as did earlier historians of America—sees the hand of providence
in the course of Quito's history, but also feels compelled to defend Catholic
humanism and Spanish imperialism against the inroads of certain European
eighteenth-century historians, whom he sees as straying from providentialist
views. He produces a new patriotic discourse, based on colonial-era elite
conceptions of hierarchy, which gives his patria the veneer of an ancient,
glorious past. Velasco's history provides his compatriots with a model for an
aristocratic, autonomous kingdom, based in Quito and worthy of a place in the
Spanish imperial constellation.7

Just as Velasco longs for a return to the Hapsburg Pact, Mera casts a nostalgic
backward glance at colonial modes of Catholicism. He staunchly defended
García Moreno's project of restoring the Church's 'civilising' role in national

7 Cañizares, J. 2001, How to Write the History of the New World. Historiographies, epistemologies, and
Literary Patriotism in Ecuador’s Juan León Mera and Juan de Velasco

life—both in his fiction and in his essays. For example, in the novel *Cumandá*, Mera narrates a continuous Ecuadorian history that incorporates several historical periods, historical actors, languages, ethnicities, spaces, and territorial boundaries into one conceptual whole, controlled by religious figures. He establishes a clear link with the colonial past, by ascribing contemporary nineteenth-century consequences to the 1767 expulsion. Mera emphasises the violent act of writing that expelled Velasco and his fellow Jesuits: ‘*Un repentino y espantoso rayo, en forma de pragmática sanction, aniquiló en un instante la obra gigantesca de dilatadísimo tiempo, de indecible abnegación y cruentos sacrificios.*’

Mera’s support for the Jesuits and his adhesion to the theocratic state of the ultraconservative President García Moreno, who brought the Jesuits back to Ecuador, are well known and amply documented. *Cumandá* shares with Velasco’s *Historia* a rewriting of history that transforms the missionaries into central actors of history, and the jungle into its main stage. The novel’s missionary is a Dominican, as Mera chooses to place the action in 1808, after the Jesuits were expelled and clearly before they were welcomed back from Europe by García Moreno in 1862. The year 1808 is a propitious moment; just before the independence struggle, it was a pivotal moment of upheaval in Spain and in America. Thus, the story is positioned between periods; it takes place in a time of colonial transition to the modern, independent nineteenth-century state. But the novel features tropes that continue from one period to the next: noble and savage Indians; rebellion and resolution; Christian redemption; and a sense of the people who inhabit proto-Ecuadorian space as sharing a collective identity. Mera asks the question that Velasco leaves unexpressed:

[*¡O, qué habría sido hoy del territorio oriental y de sus habitantes al continuar aquella santa labor de los hombres del Evangelio...Habido habría en América una nación civilizada más, donde ahora vagan, a par de las fieras, hordas divorciadas del género humano y que se despedazan entre sí.*](8)

Mera clearly draws connections between the violence of the royal pen in the colonial period and his nation’s present-day situation, in a move that ties the colonial past to present-day Ecuador and presents lessons from history as a critique of the republic.

Catholic triumphalism is also present in Mera’s poem ‘*La virgen del sol*’, a romantic ‘legend’ of star-crossed Scyri lovers, which draws heavily on Velasco’s *Historia*, as the copious footnotes in the 1861 first edition and the prologue to the second edition attest. The poem narrates a complicated set of amorous intrigues, which play out against the backdrop of the Incan dynastic civil wars


9 Mera, *Cumandá o un drama entre salvajes*, p. 49.
on the eve of the Spanish invasion, and end when the Spaniards occupy Quito in 1533. Mera’s figure of the traitorous Scyri general, Rumiñahui, is straight out of Velasco’s account of what the Jesuit calls Quito’s ‘ancient history’; in the second edition of 1887, Mera cites recent historical evidence that challenges Velasco’s account of Rumiñahui’s last days, but he decides to remain faithful to the Jesuit’s story. Mera’s poem excuses the excesses of the Spanish conquistadors by presenting the benign figure of Father Niza, who quickly converts and marries off the Indian protagonists, thus both redeeming them as Catholics and laying claim to the positive effects of Spanish civilisation. Although Velasco takes the Franciscan Niza to task for overstating the case of Spanish cruelty and thus fuelling foreign criticism of Spain, the eighteenth-century historian’s view of the conquest of Quito is similar to Mera’s: he attributes atrocities to specific, low-born Spaniards who acted alone, and argues that the ends—bringing Christianity and civilisation to Quito—justify the means.

In his poem, Mera chooses to end the conquest period with a speedy week of catechism and Catholic marriages for the Scyri lovers. In contrast, after recounting the tumult of the conquest and the Spanish civil wars, Velasco closes the volume on Quito’s ancient history with a portrait of possible harmony, in which order is assured, towns are founded, good government established, new conquests are carried out, and, above all, the Amerindians are brought into the Christian, civilised fold. In the Spanish official sent to pacify rebellious Spaniards during the revolts of the 1540s, President La Gasca, Velasco has found a transitional heroic figure. Velasco’s portrayal of La Gasca foreshadows his descriptions of missionaries heading into the jungle to peacefully win over barbarous Indians. (Velasco’s next volume, the Historia moderna, concentrates more on missionary heroics than on the valour of conquerors.) Velasco judges this last period in Quito’s ancient history as a time when the need for arms has ended, and instead, La Gasca pacifies the Kingdom of Quito through negotiation and religion. Like Niza before him and the Jesuit missionaries to come, La Gasca essays forth among potential enemies unarmed except for the breviary.

Velasco maintains that La Gasca’s mission is the first time that a high-ranking Spanish Government official turns his attention to the welfare of the Indians. Velasco argues that the conquistadors had ignored their duty to convert the Indians until then, and that they had collected tribute from them arbitrarily. He further charges that Indians had been victims of inhumane treatment and that many had died as porters during the Spanish civil wars and conquests and in the mines. In Velasco’s version of Quito’s history, La Gasca regulates

the Indians’ instruction, treatment, and tribute burden, and he also fixes the boundaries of the four bishoprics of the area. Velasco approvingly notes that in two short years, La Gasca manages to quell a major uprising, award loyal vassals, procure the common good, assure a generous living to all, and introduce regular government. According to Velasco, La Gasca leaves behind a colony full of promise, a place where evil has been punished and Christianity flourishes.

In prologues and essays throughout his prolific career, Mera also reflects on America’s unique cultural and historical mixture, based on the continent’s original inhabitants and its natural surroundings, and perfected by European religion and civilisation. For example, in his prologue to an 1892 anthology of Ecuadorian poets, published to coincide with the quatecentenary of Columbus’s discovery of America, Mera links the providentialist, civilising power of Catholicism to his nation’s unique literary output. According to Mera, the book serves ‘a honrar al Gran Descubridor con la ofrenda de algunos frutos literarios producidos en esta parte del Mundo hallado por él, y por él presentado al bautismo de la regeneradora civilización Cristiana’. The volume is intended to repay Ecuador’s cultural and historical debt to Spain, by demonstrating Ecuadorian literary talent to the world, from ‘una parte del mundo que él descubrió e hicieron español las armas de los conquistadores, la palabra y los sacrificios de los misioneros, y la lengua, las costumbres y las leyes de la península ibérica’.

Such pro-Hispanic sentiments tell only half the tale. Mera, like Velasco before him, is interested in explaining his nation’s essential characteristics. Velasco’s subject is his patria’s specific natural and human history from antiquity to the eighteenth century, and he includes Quito’s literary and cultural talents as part of his patria’s heritage. In standard Romantic fashion, Mera repeatedly seeks to define Ecuador’s national soul. One manifestation of this is his frequent defence of American themes, language, customs and natural setting as worthy topics for men of letters to take up. He engaged in numerous debates, with Spanish critics Antonio Rubio y Lluch, Juan Valera and others, in which he defended introducing American ‘novelty’ in literature. He lays out his theories in the Ojeada histórico-crítica de la poesía ecuatoriana, and puts them into practice in

13 Ibid., p. 440.
14 Velasco concludes that the ends justify the means in the Spanish conquest of Peru: ‘Aunque cometieron graves injusticias y violencias contra las naciones indígenas, les introdujeron la vida racional, política y civil; compensándoles con la luz del Evangelio largamente todos los males que les causaron’ (Historia, vol. 2, p. 445).
15 Mera, J. L 1892, ‘Prólogo’, Antología ecuatoriana. Poetas, Imprenta de la Universidad Central, Quito, p. i.
16 Ibid., p. iv.
such works as Cumandá, the poetry of Melodías indígenas, and ‘La virgen del sol’, all of which contain American motifs, Indianist topics and characters, and Quichua terminology.

Velasco, too, relies on his knowledge of Quichua in narrating Quito’s history, and demonstrates his privileged mastery of native American knowledge. For example, as part of his natural history of the Quito region, Velasco produces a patriotic taxonomy of its flora and fauna. Faced with the task of categorising the seemingly innumerable plant species of the region, Velasco tries to manage them by reducing them to nine categories based on their utility, such as those useful for medicine, or for their flower or wood, or for various other uses. Velasco gives each plant’s name, its meaning in Spanish if it is a Quichua name, a description of the plant and where it is found, and its properties. He often includes an anecdote about the plant’s discovery or a notable story of how it has been used, to which he was an eyewitness or for which he relies on the account of suitable witnesses. Velasco often values the Jesuit missionaries’ knowledge of Quichua and botany over that of the Indians themselves, or he at least requires the corroboration of such a reliable witness for indigenous knowledge to be codified. Velasco notes that the area’s wood varieties, for example, are innumerable, their names only vaguely known by the missionaries in the region. He makes no mention of indigenous naming systems for this subset of the natural world, and states that he must omit many plants because he does not know—or cannot remember—their names. Velasco even claims that there are so many edible fruits in hot places that not even the Indians know all the names, let alone the Spanish. He sets himself up as the knowledgeable Creole subject, able to mediate between European and American epistemological fields.

Similarly, Mera also positions himself between Ecuador and Europe, as a kind of culture broker who controls several registers. In his prologue to the 1892 anthology, Mera recognises that such works, which showcase the work of ‘cultivated intelligences’, present an incomplete portrait of Ecuadorian wit (‘ingenio’) because they neglect the products of the people. Mera, along with a group of like-minded literary men, set out to rectify this one-sided view of national culture, by collecting and publishing Ecuador’s popular poetry, in the Cantares del pueblo ecuatoriano (1892). In the collection’s prologue, Mera spells out the value of studying such forms of popular expression to arrive at a fuller understanding of Ecuador’s history and culture. According to Mera, ‘el pueblo ecuatoriano todo lo canta’, including politics, history, romance and customs, expressed in popular forms and using Quichua and Ecuadorian expressions in

18 ‘Omitida la infinidad de especies, unas excelentes para enmaderados de casas: otras para el ordinario trabajo de carpinteros; otras para la fábrica de navíos; otras cuyos nombres apenas saben los operarios [Jesuitas] de las particulares provincias apuntaré algunas pocas de las más nombradas’ (Mera, Obras de Juan Leon Mera, vol. 1, p. 118). He ends this section: ‘Omito innumerables especies de maderas, por ignorar los nombres’ (p. 122).
19 Ibid., p. 135.
Spanish. Mera promises that the poetry collection gives the ‘moral portrait of the people’, and is a vital part of civil and political life that should take its rightful place in Ecuador’s literary canon.

Ángel Rama observed that during the nineteenth century in Spanish America, the study of philology proliferated, and many national institutions concerned with regulating national languages were established. Such concern about linguistic matters had to do with the post-independence Spanish-American lettered city’s preoccupation with national languages as ‘effective instruments for disciplining the symbolic order of national cultures’. Mera, one of the founding members of Ecuador’s Academia de la Lengua and a corresponding member of Spain’s Real Academia de la Lengua, was a pioneer in championing the Quichua language, although, as Regina Harrison and others have demonstrated, Mera’s relationship to Quichua was complex. For example, Mera’s acts of collection, compilation, editing, translation and analysis of Ecuadorian popular poetry, including poetry in Quichua, reveal an impulse to historicise and theorise such productions as a vital component of national literature. Most important, the Cantares and Melodías indígenas collections value contemporary indigenous cultural production as an authentic expression of Ecuadorian national literature, instead of viewing indigenous works as irrelevant, incomprehensible, inferior, or above all, products of an irrecoverable past.

For both Velasco and Mera, Quito’s indigenous peoples—through their culture, language and knowledge of the natural world—are an essential ingredient of the territory’s identity. Velasco and Mera both look to the long-vanished Scyris for a noble story about the past, and both lament the poverty and ill treatment of their contemporary indigenous people. Mera finds Velasco’s stirring tales of ancestral heroism attractive, and he borrows extensively from the Jesuit’s tale of pre-Hispanic exploits for Cumandá, ‘La virgen del sol’ and various other Indianist poems. Given Mera’s Catholic triumphalism, he is especially drawn to the purity of the Scyris’ religion, including the unadorned worship of the Sun, and the chastity of the Chosen Virgins. Velasco chooses to emphasise the purity of Quiteño religion, before it is adulterated by impious Incan impositions, but he is also interested in portraying the Scyris’ enlightened manner of government, which is less interesting for Mera’s romance. The Scyris provide colour and novelty to European literary forms, although Mera, conscious of his European audience, greatly reduced the use of Quichua words and footnotes in the 1887,

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21 Ibid., pp. 39–40.
23 Harrison, R. 1996, Entre el tronar épico y el llanto elegíaco: simbología indígena en la poesía ecuatoriana de los siglos XIX–XX, Ediciones Abya-Yala, Quito.
second edition of ‘La virgen del sol’. The Scyris give Velasco’s eighteenth-century Creole compatriots a noble past to take pride in, and nourish Mera’s Americanist romanticism in the next century.

While Mera’s backward-looking works anchor the Ecuadorian Indian in the glory of the past, or in the exoticism of the distant jungle, he does provide a small measure of contemporary social critique in the story ‘Historieta’ and the poem ‘La madre y el hijo’, both set in the highlands.24 ‘Historieta’ exposes republican Ecuador’s forced indigenous labour system, the concertaje, in this story of a formerly prosperous smallholding Indian who loses his land and possessions to the depredations of the labour recruiter, the local priest, mayor and other officials of highland Ecuadorian life. In the poem, an indigenous mother laments the fate that is sure to befall her young son: a lifetime of working like a mule, under the whip, and producing wealth on someone else’s land. While Mera supported García Moreno’s modest attempts at legislating for indigenous labour protection in 1869,25 the poem and the story both express a ‘tragic sense of history’ in which not much can change for the better for Ecuador’s indigenous population. As in Cumandá, here the Indians must wait for redemption in the afterlife.26

The pro-indigenous sentiments expressed in the poem and the story complicate Mera’s nostalgic vision of noble ‘Ecuadorian’ Indians as cultural and historical ancestors of nineteenth-century Ecuadorians, but those works do not offer any alternative means of configuring the nation in the republican present. In fact, Mera’s works express a yearning to return to colonial forms of social hierarchy.27 For example, in Cumandá, Mera finds metaphors for organising the nation in the harmonious Catholic family, in small farmers, and in the mission, ignoring the increasing power of large landholding, export-oriented estates that put pressure on Indian lands. In the novel, he expresses regret at the loss of the Jesuit missions, as he describes the state of one Dominican mission, Andoas, in 1808. The missionaries have drawn the Indians into town life from the jungle, and each family, carefully Christianised, inhabits its own house and cultivates its own small plot. He spells out the role of the Church in civilising the Indians and inducing them to be part of national life: ‘Los sacerdotes que evangelizaron en esas tribus nómades les enseñaron la estabilidad y el amor a la tierra nativa, como bases primordiales de la vida social.’28 He provides a few picturesque details of mission life, using indigenous words to describe materials for buildings and

25 Harrison, Entre el Tronar épico y el llanto elegíaco, pp. 76–9.
28 Mera, Cumandá o un drama entre salvajes, p. 67.
explaining the Indians’ hunting and agricultural practices, along with their harmonious Christian communal life. But again, present-day cares creep into the late-colonial setting, as Mera bemoans the loss of those missions for national life: ‘¡Oh, felices habitantes de las solitarias selvas en aquellos tiempos! ¡Cuánto bien pudo haberse esperado de vosotros para nuestra querida Patria a no haber faltado virtuosos y abnegados sacerdotes que continuasen guiándoos por el camino de la civilización a la luz del Evangelio! ¡Pobres hijos del desierto!’ Mera goes on to lay the blame for the neglect of the jungle and its inhabitants, not on the Indians, but rather on ‘civilised society’ and governments that ignore the Oriente. Mera would have found ample evidence in Velasco’s work of successful missionaries and harmonious towns full of smallholding Indians, each layer of society occupying its proper place, according to the Jesuit’s elite notions of how society should be organised.

Mera and Velasco share the conviction that the Catholic Church and its best-trained cultural brokers, the Jesuits, are the perfect instruments for instilling civilisation and unifying the territory. Velasco spells out his order’s contributions in a map that accompanies the Historia del Reino de Quito, in which he details the towns, cities, missions, and natural features that make up his homeland. The more settled coastal and highland areas are dotted with toponyms, as are many affluents of the Amazon Basin region. Borders are clearly delineated: the Pacific Ocean to the west, the provinces of Popayán and New Granada to the north, Lima to the south and east, and Portuguese territories to the south-west. One north-western territory stands out. Labelled ‘Países bárbaros poco conocidos’, this great swath of land bisected by the Equator graphically illustrates a confluence of Velasco’s representational and historiographical strategies. The map reveals a patriotic landscape that unites Velasco’s concerns about territoriality, knowledge, mastery and civilisation. His conception of geography pits an American natural landscape domesticated by 250 years of Spanish rule against a stretch that remains unknown and therefore barbarian. The map draws attention to the Jesuit’s claim that his order’s labours in fields of knowledge and tangled jungle fields populated by non-Christians have brought vast territories under the control of the Spanish Crown and numberless souls to the Christian, civilised fold. Velasco’s cartography of the possible maps a representational strategy based on fields of knowledge—history, natural history, linguistics, ethnography—that shape the Kingdom of Quito’s natural, human and epistemological boundaries. Finally, the map graphically illustrates how the Spanish Crown has abandoned strategies—and strategists—known to produce desired results. Velasco shows—both in prose and in this carefully drawn ‘Mapa general de las provincias de Quito’—that the exiled Jesuits have been instrumental in creating a promised land of this region of America, and

29 Ibid., p. 70.
30 Ibid., p. 70.
that with their absence, human, spiritual and physical resources go untapped, are lost to the Portuguese, or remain mired in or revert to backwardness and savagery.\textsuperscript{31}

Velasco opens the first volume of his \textit{Historia}, the \textit{Historia natural}, with an affirmation of the Kingdom of Quito’s natural gifts, and he immediately links Quito’s natural and political history. His sweeping gaze takes in the whole of his \textit{patria}, and Velasco connects the knowledge to the knower with an ‘I’ statement, thus assuring himself an identity as what Antony Higgins has called a ‘criollo subject of knowledge’:\textsuperscript{32}

\textit{El Reyno de Quito, noble porción del Nuevo Mundo, célebre entre los escritores, por su situación bajo la Tórrida Zona: por la sin igual elevación de su terreno: por su benigno clima bastantemente ponderado: por la natural riqueza de sus vegetables, frutos: por el inestimable Tesoro de sus preciosos metales; y por haber sido el teatro principal de las antiguas, y modernas revoluciones de Estado, es el que voy a describir sucintamente.}\textsuperscript{33}

These opening words produce the \textit{patria} on the page and in his reader’s imagination. After describing the geographical situation, Velasco shows how the land and its history are connected, by providing a summary of how the Kingdom of Quito’s borders were expanded through conquest and confederation. Velasco establishes the legitimacy and naturalness of Quito’s contours, from pre-Incan times to the Quito-born Atahualpa’s just claim to the Incan Empire, finishing with its greatest expansion, by Spaniards from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. Velasco insists that Quito is not only blessed by nature; its political history is also singularly rich and deserving of exposition and praise. Through his magisterial representation of Quito’s bountiful natural resources, Velasco constructs a subject of knowledge uniquely qualified to interpret this abundance and to understand the special natural laws that operate in America.

\textsuperscript{31} The map’s full title is ‘CARTA GENERAL de las provincias del QUITO PROPIO de las orientales adjuntas y de las Misiones del Maranon [sic], Napo, Pastaza, Guallaga, y Ucayale DELINEADA Según las mejores Cartas modernas y observaciones de los Académicos y Misioneros Por el Presb° D. Juan de Velasco para servir a su Historia del Reino de Quito. Año de 1789.’ In Velasco, \textit{Historia del Reino de Quito en la América meridional}, vol. 1.

\textsuperscript{32} Higgins, A. 2001, \textit{Constructing the Creole Archive. Subjects of knowledge in the Bibliotheca mexicana and the Rusticatio mexicana}, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Ind.

\textsuperscript{33} Velasco, \textit{Historia del Reino de Quito en la América meridional}, vol. 1., p. 49. As Cañizares observes: ‘It would be impossible to understand the structure and configuration of this land, Velasco maintained, “without first admiring the effort made by nature to privilege it with its greatest works. The Kingdom of Quito”, Velasco insisted, “can glory itself of having features that no other part of America or any other part of the globe can equal”. Quito was unique because nature had elected it to have the highest mountain, be the source of the largest river, and enjoy the most temperate climate on earth.’ In Cañizares, J. 1998, \textit{Nation and nature: patriotic representations of nature in late colonial Spanish America}, Working Paper No. 98–31, International Seminar on the History of the Atlantic World, 1500–1800, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., p. 5.
Furthermore, the utopian configuration of American space as bounteous provides Velasco with a blueprint for remediing the ills facing his deteriorated patria.

In his *Ojeada histórico-crítica de la poesía ecuatoriana*, Mera offers his judgment of Velasco’s poetry and history, finding both somewhat defective: ‘Mas, por desgracia, en punto a su historia, sí merece mucho aprecio como narrador noticiosos y justiciero, no hallamos al pensador que con juicio recto sabe sacar lecciones provechosas de moral y filosofía de los acontecimientos que presenta al lector.’ Mera, and other members of Ecuador’s lettered city, knew what moral and philosophical lessons to draw from Velasco’s foundational history, which is mentioned in patriotic terms in the Ecuadorian press from 1840 on, and published with state backing in 1841–45.

Mera wrote about literary patriotism in a letter to his son J. Trajano Mera, published in 1889 in the *Revista Ecuatoriana*, a journal co-edited by Trajano and Vicente Pallares Peñañiel. Juan León counsels his son about the abnegation, dedication and patriotism necessary in an Ecuadorian writer. He compares the literary career with a dangerous jungle journey: ‘Ser literato entre nosotros es como meterse en el corazón de las selvas trasandinas: aquí halla uno una espesura impenetrable, allá un río que es preciso esguazar con riesgo de ahogarse, acullá una red de lianas que le amarran los pies o medio le estrangulan.’ Even after one escapes from the jungle, the effects of its trials linger: ‘siente al mismo tiempo el escozor de las picaduras que le han dado millones de bichos venenosos, y le zumban todavía a los oídos las voces destempladas de las alimañas que le salieron al paso.’ Nonetheless, he does not dissuade Ecuadorians from pursuing such a carreer; in fact, he advises that all learning and literature be in service to the patria: ‘Es preciso darlo todo a la patria, aunque la patria no nos dé nada; es preciso ser de ella, aunque ella nos rechace; es preciso no buscar otra retribución que la justicia de la posteridad y el reposo en el seno de Dios.’ Mera portrays the Ecuadorian republic of letters as a dangerous jungle full of ingrates, but he also notes that the literary career is a heroic mission and patriotic duty whose virtuous practitioners will be rewarded by God—and future members of the patria. Perhaps this is what happens with Velasco, who died in poverty in Italy, his work unpublished in his lifetime, but who has been rescued by later generations of patriotic men of letters (and a very few women). In a similar vein, Mera has suffered in the estimation of some Ecuadorians because of his identification with García Moreno’s particular brand of theocratic conservative rule, and his conflicted portrayal of indigenous Ecuadorians either as romanticised noble savages or as doomed serfs.

Velasco’s history and Mera’s novel *Cumandá* serve to domesticate ‘empty spaces’ for the patria and to legitimate them as national territories. (In fact,
Velasco’s map would later prove useful in Ecuador’s border disputes with Peru over those very territories.) In the first chapter of *Cumandá*, narrated from the point of view of ‘el viajero’, the narrator casts an appropriating gaze over what is alternately the green hell and *locus amoenus* of the jungle, replete with exuberant vegetation of difficult penetration, dark and uninhabited, save for savages. The jungle inspires a few sensitive souls to poetry, but in general the solitude assures the ‘traveller’ that ‘[e]res dueño de ti mismo y verdadero rey de la naturaleza: estás en tus dominios, haz de ti y de cuanto te rodea lo que quieras. Excepto Dios y tu conciencia, aquí nadie te mira ni sojuzga tus actos.’

No-one will judge our traveller—that is, except the ‘savage’, whose indomitable character has been formed by his surroundings. The appropriating gaze, inscribed into this ‘national romance’, is inspired by Mera’s reading of Velasco, where he would find tales of Jíbaro rebellion and Jesuit heroism. Velasco’s mission history and Mera’s foundational fiction instil those far-flung territories into their reader’s imagination as part of a unified Quiteño—and later Ecuadorian—territory, whose initial boundaries were traced by Velasco’s Scyris, Incas, and early Spanish conquerors—and whose consolidation could be assured by republican-era missions and theocratic policies.

35 Mera, *Cumandá o un drama entre salvajes*, p. 45.
White Hegemony in the (Re)Birth of Brazil

Benito Cao

Abstract

On 7 September 1822, Dom Pedro de Alcantara, Prince Regent and future Emperor of Brazil, uttered the most famous cry in Brazilian history: ‘Independence or death!’ The symbolic power of the royal cry—known as the Grito de Ipiranga—has served to idealise Brazilian independence: the (re)birth of Brazil. The Grito de Ipiranga has been interpreted as the culmination of a peaceful process of political integration destined to give birth to a single nation-state in Portuguese America. This article examines this idealised and teleological portrait of Brazilian independence. The analysis extends from the first anti-colonial manifestations in the early sixteenth century to the consolidation of national unity in the mid nineteenth century. This wide historical framework enables us to discern the criteria used to select the events and figures that came to be part of the national(ist) discourse of Brazilian independence. The analysis reveals how this portrait of Brazilian independence locks out of the nationalist imaginary all those who did not participate in the formal process of independence, managed by Luso-Brazilians. This narrative of the (re)birth of Brazil turns independence into a symbolic pillar of white hegemony in Brazil.

White Hegemony in the (Re)Birth of Brazil

On 7 September 1822, Dom Pedro de Alcantara, Prince Regent and future Emperor of Brazil, uttered the most famous cry in Brazilian history: ‘Independence or death!’ The symbolic power of the royal cry—known as the Grito de Ipiranga—has served to idealise Brazilian independence: the (re)birth of Brazil. The Grito de Ipiranga has been interpreted as the culmination of a peaceful process of political integration destined to give birth to a single nation-state in Portuguese America—an interpretation common to both conservative and progressive canonical historians, such as Francisco Varnhagen, João Capistrano de Abreu, Manuel de Oliveira Lima and Manoel Bomfim. The peaceful character of that

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process is attributed to the political wisdom of the (white and male) elite of colonial Brazil and their ability to minimise internal conflicts and avoid a direct confrontation with Portugal. This, the argument goes, enabled a smooth transition from colony to nation, without the bloodbath and fragmentation that characterised the process of independence in Spanish America. The result is a historiography that privileges the trope of cordiality and the historical agency of Luso-Brazilians, turning independence into a symbolic pillar of white (and male) hegemony in Brazil.

The narratives and the studies of Brazilian independence tend to focus on the period 1808–22, with the turning point being the transfer of the seat of the Portuguese Crown to Rio de Janeiro in 1808, following the invasion of Portugal by Napoleonic troops. The transfer posed a crucial challenge to the colonial relations between Brazil and Portugal. Yet its impact on the process of independence had less to do with the separation from Portugal than with the impulse to the political and symbolic unity of Brazil. The 13-year residency of the Portuguese Crown in Rio de Janeiro brought a series of reforms that promoted the unification of the colony: improvements of transport and communication between population centres, reforms in taxation and the administration of justice, the creation of naval and military academies as well as of schools of medicine and surgery, the expansion of coffee production under royal protection, the building of textile factories, the beginning of the iron and steel industries, the establishment of the Bank of Brazil, the creation of the National Library, and the establishment of the Royal Printing Office.

The separation from Portugal did not alter the Eurocentrism that was at the heart of the formation and formulation of Brazil(ianness). Independence signalled ‘the climax of three centuries of changing attitudes toward Portugal—from inferiority, to equality, to superiority’, but the Brazilian Empire that came about was to be built upon Eurocentric cultural foundations, imitating the nations of the North Atlantic, in particular France—at the time the foremost symbol of (Western) modernity in Brazil. Brazilian Indians and Afro-Brazilians would be denied a place in the formal process of Brazilian independence and the foundation of the Brazilian Empire—other than as the ‘Other’ of (Western) modernity. This same Eurocentrism would be imbued in the formulation of Brazilian independence in the canonical texts of Brazilian historiography, even

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by those who, like Manoel Bomfim, praised the people as the central actors of Brazilian politics. The privileged actors in his and other canonical accounts of Brazilian independence were invariably the Luso-Brazilians.

This article examines the idealised and teleological portrait of Brazilian independence that dominates canonical accounts and general histories of Brazil. The analysis extends from the first anti-colonial manifestations in the early sixteenth century to the consolidation of national unity in the mid nineteenth century. This wide historical framework will enable us to discern the criteria used to select the events and figures that came to be part of the national(ist) discourse of independence. Shifting the attention towards historical events that preceded and followed the period 1808–22—that is, bringing events usually placed at the margins of canonical accounts into sharp focus—enables us to see Brazilian independence in a new light, one that reveals its inherent Eurocentrism. The patterns of inclusion and exclusion are examined in three separate sections. The first focuses on the so-called nativist movements: a series of colonial revolts that was invented as national (or proto-national) events after the independence of Brazil. The second examines the different ideological reception of the two most emblematic colonial revolts inspired by the principles of the Enlightenment: the Inconfidência Mineira (1789) and the Inconfidência Bahiana (1798). The final section examines the different treatment accorded to the rebellions that followed the independence of Brazil.

The analysis reveals a double narrative that serves to deny the political nature of popular rebellions protagonised by Brazilian Indians and Afro-Brazilians. The nationalist accounts produce two separate narratives: a narrative of political revolts (led by whites) seeking to liberate the nation from external control, which were eventually successful, and with little, if any, bloodshed; and a narrative of social revolts (led by non-whites) seeking to fulfil particular needs, driven by emotions and violence, which were responsible for immense bloodshed, but were dissociated from the struggle for Brazilian independence. This article posits that this double narrative allows traditional historiography to create a hierarchy of revolts in which the political agency of Brazilian Indians and Afro-Brazilians is ignored, marginalised or misrepresented. This narrative

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4 This narrative of Brazilian independence also found ideological affirmation in the work of Gilberto Freyre, the chief author of the formulation of hybridity as the essence of Brazilianness. Freyre defined Brazil as the product of cultural syncretism and sexual miscegenation and argued that Brazilians should take pride in their culturally and racially mixed heritage, which had enabled the emergence of a racial democracy in Brazil. His celebration of hybridity was, however, no impediment to placing whiteness at the heart of historical narratives of Brazilian politics. He argued that revolutions, and even the abolition of slavery, had been relatively peaceful—in his words, white rather than bloody—and he attributed this to the cordiality of the Portuguese and their Brazilian descendants, the Luso-Brazilians. See Freyre, G. 1959, New World in the Tropics: The culture of modern Brazil, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, pp. 15–16.
strategy entrenches white hegemony and Eurocentrism at the heart of Brazilian independence, effectively erasing the political agency of Brazilian Indians and Afro-Brazilians from the historical memory of Brazil.

Nativists and (the) Others in Brazilian Nativism

The portrait (and process) of Brazilian independence cannot be properly understood without the analysis of Brazilian nativism—a nationalist narrative that presents the history of Portuguese America as a teleological sequence of events destined to culminate in the independence of Brazil. The term nativism has been used in different ways in Brazilian history. It is, however, possible to identify two main expressions of nativism in colonial Brazil: nativist narratives and nativist movements. Nativist narratives are literary expressions of affection and exaltation of the land of Brazil. These narratives did not contribute to the formation of Brazil during the colonial period—not least because most of them were published only in the late nineteenth century—but were crucial for the (re)construction of colonial history as well as for the invention of the colonial past of the nation after independence. Nativist movements are uprisings against the colonial regime carried out by people born in Brazil. This section examines so-called nativist movements—a series of regional colonial revolts that was invented as national (or proto-national) after independence—as well as other important conflicts from the same period that are excluded from the definition of Brazilian nativism. The analysis will reveal the ideological character of the national(ist) portrait of Brazilian independence.

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Nativism remits ultimately to the question posed by Barbosa Lima Sobrinho in his book *Desde quando somos nacionalistas?*. His answer is unequivocal: the first expressions of nationalism date back to the moment the first colonists perceived their interests as being different from those of the metropolis and decided to act upon that perception. Sobrinho presents the struggles of the Portuguese colonists, and their Brazilian descendants, against the Spanish (in the south), the French (in the centre), and the Dutch (in the north) as precedents of the nationalist sentiment that would eventually pit Brazilians against Portuguese. This Eurocentric interpretation—one in which all historical agents are Europeans and/or descendants of Europeans—is present in both conservative and progressive canonical narratives of Brazilian history.

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6 See, for example, Francisco Varnhagen, *História geral do Brasil* (1854–57); João Capistrano de Abreu, *Capítulos de história colonial* (1907); Manuel de Oliveira Lima, *Formação histórica da nacionalidade Brasileira*
In these narratives, Brazil emerges from the struggle of the Portuguese against the other colonial powers: Spain, France, Holland and Britain. The historical narratives do not ignore the participation of the indigenous population in the early disputes over the colonisation of Brazil. In fact, the alliance between the Indians and the Portuguese is often defined as essential for the Portuguese colonisation of Brazil and the expulsion of the other European contenders. What is interesting here, however, is the fact that only the alliances between the Portuguese and the Indians get the seal of Brazilianness. This means that the Brazilianness of this alliance can derive only from the presence of the Portuguese. Otherwise their enemies would also have to be considered Brazilian. After all, the French also formed strong and lasting alliances with the Indians.

The other colonial conflicts incorporated as part of Brazilian nativism are those revolts carried out by the Portuguese colonists and their descendants against the colonial authorities and the Portuguese Crown. The first of these conflicts to gain historical prominence took place in the State of Maranhão in 1684, and came to be known as the Revolta de Beckman. It is important to note here that, in Portuguese America, there were two official Brazils for more than 150 years (c. 1618–1774): the State of Brazil and the State of Maranhão. The two states were cut off from one another and only loosely governed from Portugal. The two states came together to form the State of Brazil, with a capital in Rio de Janeiro, in 1774. Rogério Forastieri da Silva notes quite correctly that if this separation had been perpetuated there would have been a great chance that not one but two nation-states would emerge from Portuguese America: Brazil and Maranhão. In that case, the Revolta de Beckman would not be a nativist movement of Brazil, but of this other country, Maranhão.\(^7\)

The Revolta de Beckman was one of several revolts carried out by the colonists in the tradition of the old-regime rebellions: food riots and tax rebellions. In Portuguese America, these included the Revolta da Cachaça in Rio de Janeiro (1660–61), the Revolta da Maneta in Salvador (1711), the Revolta de Pitangui in Minas Gerais (1718), and the Revolta de Felipe dos Santos in Vila Rica (1720). These revolts forged a history of resistance against the fiscal pressures of the Portuguese Crown. There is, however, a tendency to invoke these revolts as precedents of nationalism and Brazilianness, even though they were always related to economic issues, and were of regional character. Thus, for example, Sobrinho credits the Revolta de Beckman with having established the ‘framework of nationalism’ that would set up the road towards the independence of Brazil,\(^8\) even though, as noted above, the revolt could as easily have set up the road towards the independence of Maranhão.

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The attribution of nationalism and Brazilianness to the actions of the colonists is even more acute in the two conflicts that have come to best symbolise nativism: the Guerra dos Emboabas (1707–09) and the Guerra dos Mascates (1710–11). The Guerra dos Emboabas was a small-scale civil war between two groups of colonists over the control and exploitation of the goldmines discovered in Minas Gerais. The first group comprised pioneers from São Paulo (Paulistas) and their Indian auxiliaries, servants and slaves. The second group comprised newcomers from Portugal and from other parts of Portuguese America, together with their slaves—mainly of West African origin. The Paulistas resented the presence of any rivals on what they considered to be their property, viewing them as ‘foreigners’ and ‘outsiders’, and derisively referring to them as *emboabas* (chicken-feet).9

The struggle of the Paulistas to retain control of the mines has typically been interpreted as an expression of Brazilian nativism. The classic case is José Soares de Melo’s *Emboabas* (1929), subtitled ‘Chronicle of a nativist revolution’.10 This interpretation sidelines the fact that the claims of possession of the Paulistas were not based on a politics of identity but on the right of discovery—that is, on the fact that they were the first to find the mines. In any case, the interpretation of the conflict as a proto-national(ist) revolution betrays the early identification of Brazilianness with the identity of the colonists. After all, when the Guerra dos Emboabas is posed in terms of a conflict of identities, the identities in conflict are those of two groups of colonists: the Paulistas and the Portuguese.

The conflict usually considered the quintessential expression of Brazilian nativism is the Guerra dos Mascates, a short-lived civil war between the two most important populations of Pernambuco: the Brazilian-born planter aristocracy of Olinda and the Portuguese merchants who operated from Recife. The local nobility (known as *mazombos*) resented the privileges granted to the economic activities of the foreign traders (derisively referred to as *mascates*: peddlers). Their increasing disaffection with the colonial regime turned into open conflict with the colonial authorities after the decision of the Portuguese Crown to free Recife from the political control of Olinda. The repression that followed squashed the vague aspirations of autonomy voiced by some of the *mazombos*, but their stand against the Portuguese Crown would enter the national imagination through the epic narrative of José de Alencar, entitled Guerra dos Mascates (1870). It was in fact only after the publication of this book

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that a minor conflict previously referred to as ‘sedition’ or ‘alteration’ became known as the Guerra dos Mascates. Subsequently, the revolt was defined as a proto-nationalist affirmation: ‘a nativist movement precursor of independence.’

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The detailed accounts of the Portuguese defensive wars against their European rivals and of the conflicts between colonists and the Portuguese Crown stand in stark contrast with the scant attention paid to the actions of Indians and Africans. In his classic study of the colonial historiography, José Honório Rodrigues dedicates two pages to indigenous rebellions, five pages to black rebellions, and 30 pages to the rebellions of the colonists. The space allocated to each group reflects the little attention paid to the campaigns launched by the Indians against the Portuguese in the historiography of colonial Brazil. Significantly, when they appear, they are defined as offensive wars, thus legitimising their violent repression as well as reversing the logic of the situation, by presenting those who resisted colonisation as the aggressors. Moreover, the actions of the Indians are commonly interpreted in these narratives as expressions of barbarism and resistance to civilisation.

The nationalist historiography has departed from this line of argument only to incorporate into the definition of Brazilianness the courage displayed by the Brazilian Indians. This reappraisal of indigenous anti-colonial resistance, however, has been highly selective, and retains the basic Eurocentric tenor that informed colonial historiography. This point can be illustrated by comparing the different treatment accorded to the two most important indigenous rebellions in colonial Brazil: the Guerra dos Tamoios (c. 1540–70), and the Guerra dos Bárbaros (c. 1650–1720).

The Guerra dos Tamoios pitted a coalition of several Tupi tribes (in alliance with the French) against the Portuguese. The Confederation of the Tamoios was the first great coalition of indigenous peoples to rebel against the Portuguese colonisation of Brazil. The significance of this coalition can hardly be overestimated, especially given the fragmentation and intertribal warfare that characterised relations amongst the indigenous peoples of this part of the Americas. The formation of the coalition showed the political will to overcome traditional rivalries in their effort to resist the colonial expansion of the Portuguese. The Confederation of the Tamoios was defeated only after the arrival of reinforcements under the Governor-General Mem de Sá to aid the

campaign of Estácio de Sá. The superior artillery and cavalry of the Portuguese and the diseases against which the indigenous peoples had no immunological resistance sealed the fate of the Tamoios in 1567.

The Tamoios have received little attention in Brazilian historiography. Their courageous stance against the Portuguese Crown, however, turned them into useful symbolic material during the struggle for the independence of Brazil. Their courage was invoked, for example, in the newspaper of nativist inspiration published by José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva: *O Tamoio*. The temporary hostility against Portugal and the need to formulate a distinctive national identity following independence led to the development of a literary movement known as Indianism. One of the main exponents of this movement was *A Confederação dos Tamoios* (1857), by Domingos Gonçalvez de Magalhães. The Tamoios were portrayed as noble savages fighting against the Portuguese. By the late nineteenth century, however, the hostility against Portugal had receded, and with it the interest in the Brazilian Indians. In the end, the incorporation of the Tamoios in the discourse of independence was temporary and framed by literature rather than history; they were treated as literary figures rather than as historical agents. Moreover, rather than the chief of the Tamoios, Aimberê, the celebrated historical figure of the *Guerra dos Tamoios* is Estácio de Sá, the captain of the Portuguese forces, who entered history as the founder of Rio de Janeiro.

The Eurocentric treatment accorded to indigenous anti-colonial resistance in Brazilian nativism can be observed also in the so-called *Guerra dos Bárbaros*. This expression has been used to refer to two different but related conflicts: the *Guerra do Recôncavo*, in the hinterland of Bahia (c. 1651–79), and the *Guerra do Açu*, in the region of Pernambuco (c. 1679–1720). These wars followed the expansion of the cattle industry in the north-east, which began in earnest after the expulsion of the Dutch. The cattle expansion into the interior of the north-east was one of the most important stages in the conquest of Brazil and the annihilation of the Brazilian Indians. The struggle between the colonists and the Confederation of the Cariri was one of the most terrible conflicts in the history of Portuguese America. The conflict showed the strong and permanent resistance of the Brazilian Indians, but resulted in the massive annihilation of the indigenous population of the north-east.\(^\text{13}\)

The *Guerra dos Bárbaros* is one of the most overlooked conflicts in the historiography of Brazil. Unlike the *Guerra dos Tamoios*, this revolt was not incorporated into the discourse of independence. Instead, the *Guerra dos Bárbaros* has been interpreted—as its very denomination indicates—as an

expression of barbarism and resistance to civilisation. The different treatment accorded to the two conflicts can be explained by the increasing nationalisation of the colonisation of Brazil. Thus, while the Guerra dos Tamoios was waged during the early years of colonisation—and therefore against an enemy who was born in Portugal—the Guerra dos Bárbaros was waged against an enemy who was born in Brazil. The Guerra dos Bárbaros was another courageous expression of anti-colonial resistance—only this time not against external colonisation but against internal colonisation. In sum, the incorporation of indigenous resistance into the national imagination is not only circumscribed to the world of literature, but also emptied of any possible connotation that might lead to questioning of the mythical cordiality of the relations between Brazilian Indians and Luso-Brazilians.

The selective interpretation of the formation of a spirit of independence in Brazil is demonstrable also in the treatment accorded to the struggle against slavery. Slavery was a ubiquitous institution in Brazil for more than 300 years, and of critical importance to the political economy and social identity of Brazil. Slave labour fuelled the economic development of Brazil from the mid sixteenth century until the late nineteenth century. Slaves cultivated the plantations of sugar cane established at different times in Bahia, Pernambuco, Alagoas, Paraíba, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, as well as the plantations of tobacco and cacao in Pará and Bahia, cotton in Maranhão, Pará and Pernambuco, rice in Maranhão, and coffee in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. They participated in large numbers in the extraction of gold and diamonds in Minas Gerais and Goiás. They contributed to the development of the cattle industry of Rio Grande do Sul, Paraná and Santa Catarina, and to the commercialisation of herbs and spices from the Amazon. Slaves also provided most of the services required in the urban centres of Bahia, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

The possession of slaves was open to everyone: men and women, rich and poor, nationals and foreigners, whites and blacks, free and freed, and there were even cases of slaves owning other slaves. Some studies have even suggested that the social and economic dream of freed men was the acquisition of slaves—that is, to complete the full transition from slave to master.14 This democratisation of slave ownership—for want of a better term—gave slavery a degree of flexibility and social and ideological penetration far larger than if it had been the privilege of a single group. In short, slavery fuelled the Brazilian economy, structured Brazilian society and shaped Brazilian mentality. Indeed, slavery was responsible not merely for the prosperity but for the very existence of

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Brazil. But slavery was also a permanent threat to the social and political control exercised by the Luso-Brazilians. For these, the presence of black slaves threatened the safety and identity of Brazil. In this sense, it is not surprising that Brazilian independence—and later Brazilian abolition(ism)—would be shaped by a double fear: the fear of revolution and the fear of blackness. These fears—and the prejudices that went along with them—informed the process and the narratives of Brazilian independence. This is clearly observable in the historiographical treatment afforded to the formation of Palmares.

Palmares was the most important of a large number of *quilombos* (settlements of fugitive slaves) that were formed in Brazil. The *quilombo* of Palmares emerged in the Brazilian north-east in the early seventeenth century. Its political structure resembled that of a federal state with an elected monarchy. The ruler was a king elected for life by a council made up of the rulers of the settlements that constituted Palmares. The King ruled with the advice of the federal council and the support of officials and magistrates. The economy of Palmares was based on agricultural production, hunting and fishing, a dynamic craft sector, and trade with the surrounding populations. Palmares existed at the heart of Portuguese America as a political entity independent of the Portuguese Crown for almost a century. The inhabitants withstood frequent attacks from the Portuguese and the Dutch, until they were finally defeated in 1695.

The conflict between Palmares and the Portuguese Crown is no more or less nativist than any of the other conflicts between the inhabitants of Brazil and the Portuguese Crown. Palmares not only became ‘the most prolonged episode at self-government attempted by the black peoples of Brazil’, but one could even argue that the first independent state to emerge out of Portuguese America was not Brazil, but Palmares itself. After all, this was the only political entity independent of the authority of the Portuguese Crown in colonial Brazil. Yet, Palmares—like the anti-colonial resistance of the Brazilian Indians—is not considered part of Brazilian nativism, of the forging of the spirit of Brazilian independence. Instead, nativism gives coherence to a series of multiple anti-colonial conflicts by effecting a selection that excludes indigenous resistance and black rebellion from the discourse of Brazilian independence.

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The Colours of the Enlightenment in Colonial Brazil

The transformation of Portuguese America into a nation-state began in the second half of the eighteenth century—a period defined by the crisis of absolutism and mercantilism, and the emergence of nationalism in Europe and the Americas. This period saw the territorial consolidation of Portuguese America in the Treaty of Madrid and the Treaty of Santo Ildefonso, the formal abolition of Indian slavery, the creation of the Diretório dos Indios, the expulsion of the Jesuits, the transfer of the colonial capital from Salvador to Rio de Janeiro, the abolition of the State of Maranhão and its integration into the State of Brazil, the consolidation of Portuguese as the official language of Brazil, and, last but not least, the arrival of the ideas of the Enlightenment.

The ideas of liberty and equality inspired a series of conspiracies in the late eighteenth century that came to be known as inconfidências—a word coined by imperial historians to indicate a break of loyalty (literally: the lack or withdrawal of trust) from the Portuguese Crown. The inconfidências have been incorporated by nationalist historiography alongside nativist movements as precedents of Brazilian independence. They incorporate a new dimension, however, that sets them apart from earlier anti-colonial manifestations: their embrace of the Enlightenment. This section examines the different treatment the discourse of Brazilian independence affords to the two most emblematic colonial revolts inspired by the ideals of the Enlightenment: the Inconfidência Mineira (1789) and the Inconfidência Bahiana (1798). Their study is crucial to understand the ideological formulation of independence—in particular, to determine the identification of reason with whiteness in the portrait of Brazilian independence.

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The Inconfidência Mineira was a plot to replace the colonial regime with an independent republic in Minas Gerais. The conspiracy was a minor affair involving less than 20 people—mostly white notables and intellectuals, with the support, more or less explicit, of merchants and large contractors, many of them Portuguese. The conspirators were inspired by the American Revolution and by their opposition to the fiscal demands of the Portuguese Crown. The prospect of independence was particularly enticing to the leading merchants and wealthy proprietors, who saw it as a way to evade paying their large debts.
to the Crown.\textsuperscript{17} The conspirators wished to end the colonial regime without upsetting the internal social structure. They invoked the ideals of liberty and equality in the context of the relation between Minas Gerais and Portugal, but did not extend the application of these ideals to the internal reality of Minas Gerais, let alone Brazil. The conspirators who dreamt about independence did not speak of Brazil but of America or Minas Gerais.\textsuperscript{18} They discussed the abolition of slavery but concluded that without slavery they would find no-one to work in the mines or on the farms; paid work was obviously not a valid option. In the end, they agreed to free the local-born slaves while retaining the institution of slavery. This would provide the revolt with much needed support without causing major social readjustments.\textsuperscript{19} Its conservative social character would later turn the \textit{Inconfidência Mineira} into the popular choice amongst the white elite in their quest for the roots of independence and the Republic.

The plot was betrayed to the authorities and the participants were arrested and subjected to a lengthy and humiliating trial in Rio de Janeiro. Of the 11 death sentences, only one was carried out—that of José Joaquim da Silva Xavier, a modest army officer and occasional dentist known by the nickname of ‘Tiradentes’ (Tooth-Puller). Tiradentes was the only conspirator who admitted participation in the conspiracy, and the only one who did not belong to the elite of Minas Gerais. This, and his permanent advocacy of republican ideals during the trial, made him the perfect scapegoat in the eyes of the Portuguese Crown. Tiradentes was hanged, drawn and quartered on 21 April 1792 in Rio de Janeiro. The execution was to serve as a warning to those who might contemplate rising against the Crown, but the episode left an aftermath of republican sentiment in the region that would eventually spread to the whole of Brazil.

Similarly, the \textit{Inconfidência Bahiana} was a plot to replace the colonial regime with an independent and democratic republic in Bahia. The initial discussions involved a small group of men from the white elite of Bahia, but soon the majority of the conspirators were blacks and mulattos from the lower classes—mainly soldiers and artisans. The large proportion of tailors arrested led the movement to be known as the \textit{Conjuração dos Alfaiates} (Conspiracy of the Tailors). There were also a significant number of slaves amongst the conspirators; 12 of those arrested were slaves—most of them born in Brazil. The presence of Afro-Brazilians transformed the conspiracy into a more complex movement that saw political independence from Portugal as a means to bring to an end slavery and racial discrimination in Bahia. The free blacks and mulattos were offended by

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\textsuperscript{18} Carvalho, J. M. de 2001, \textit{Cidadania no Brasil: O longo caminho}, Civilização Brasileira, São Paulo, p. 76. \\
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the multiple barriers to their social mobility, which, for example, prohibited anyone having ‘black blood’ or married to a woman ‘of colour’ from holding public office. In sum, the participation of Afro-Brazilians in the conspiracy raised the spectre of abolition and forced the notion of racial equality—equality between whites, blacks and mulattos—to the forefront of politics in Bahia.

The rebels posted handwritten proclamations in public places calling, amongst other things, for higher pay for troops, free trade, the equality of people of all colours, and the independence of Bahia. Their actions were clearly inspired by the rhetoric of the French Revolution, but also by the slave uprising of Saint Domingue, later known as the Haitian Revolution. The prominence of slaves, blacks and mulattos amongst the conspirators, coupled with the events of Saint Domingue, frightened the white elites of Bahia, who were not willing to risk their position of privilege for independence from Portugal. Their fear was clearly illustrated in the advice of Cipriano Barata de Almeida, a white slave owner and early conspirator, to one of his colleagues: ‘My friend, caution with the African rabble.’

The quick reaction of the authorities aborted the conspiracy. Of the 46 individuals arrested, 36 were brought to trial. The trial enabled the identification of two groups of conspirators. The first included Cipriano Barata himself, a surgeon and graduate of the University of Coimbra; Francisco Muniz Barreto d’Aragão, a teacher of rhetoric; and two military officers, Lieutenants Hermogenes Francisco d’Aguilar and José Gomes de Oliveira Borges. All four were white and socially prominent in Bahia. These men—some of whom were slave owners—showed little interest in slavery and racial inequality. Their ardour was for free trade (that is, the freedom to make money). The members of this group escaped with minimal or no punishment. The second group—those accused by the royal authorities of being the chief plotters—was formed by the soldiers Luís Gonzaga das Virgens e Veiga and Lucas Dantas de Amorim Torres, and the tailors João de Deus Nascimento and Manoel Faustino dos Santos Lins. The four—all free and poor mulattos—were found guilty and hanged. Their bodies were beheaded and quartered, and their body parts left to rot in public places around Salvador. Their execution sent a chilling warning to non-whites who dared to call for racial equality, and reassured the white population that, under the existing regime, Portuguese America would not become another Saint Domingue.

The *Inconfidência Mineira* and the *Inconfidência Bahiana* did not achieve their objectives, but helped shape the character of Brazilian independence. To be sure, neither of the conspiracies was an expression of Brazilianness. The eighteenth-century plots against the Portuguese Crown sought, without exception, regional autonomy, not the independence of Brazil. These regional movements revealed, however, the obstacles and dangers that would face those willing to gain independence from Portugal. The main lesson drawn by those who would eventually conduct the formal process of independence (the white political elite) was the need to separate the social from the political. Thus, the formal independence of Brazil would follow the liberal and conservative path envisaged by the leaders of the *Inconfidência Mineira*. This conspiracy would later emerge as the foremost precedent for Brazilian independence, whereas the *Inconfidência Bahiana* would be sidelined as a minor affair in the history of colonial Brazil.

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The *Inconfidência Mineira* was invoked by the national(ist) historiography after the independence of Brazil. The stance of the conspirators against the Portuguese Crown—in particular, the behaviour of Tiradentes—appealed to a nation in search of a heroic past. The regionalist and republican character of the conspiracy was, however, a direct affront to the monarchical nature of the Brazilian Empire and the effort of the authorities to consolidate the national unity of Brazil. The figure chosen by official historians—those associated with the *Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro*—to define the character of the Brazilian Empire was that of Dom Pedro I. Nevertheless, the growing republican sentiment was leading to the rapid diffusion of the historical memory of Tiradentes and the *Inconfidência Mineira* throughout Brazil. The result: ‘The struggle between the memory of Pedro I, promoted by the government, and that of Tiradentes, promoted by the republicans, became increasingly emblematic of the battle between Monarchy and Republic.’

The *Republican Manifesto* of 1870 precipitated the publication of the most important study of the *Inconfidência Mineira* written during the Empire: Joaquim Norberto de Sousa Silva’s *História da Conjuração Mineira* (1873). Norberto minimised the historical significance of the conspiracy and questioned the patriotism of Tiradentes. He argued that Tiradentes had been transformed during his long time in prison by the regular visits of the Franciscan friars, to the point that his patriotic fervour had turned into religious fervour: ‘They had arrested a patriot; they had executed a friar.’ Norberto interpreted his

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behaviour in terms of sacrifice rather than resistance—denying in the process the political significance of the death of Tiradentes. The talk of mysticism and sacrifice, however, gave Tiradentes a quasi-religious aura that enhanced his reputation as a patriotic figure, turning him into the first national martyr—the man who stood up for Brazilian independence against the tyranny of Portugal.

The centrality of Tiradentes and the Inconfidência Mineira in national(ist) historiography contrasts with the little interest shown in the Inconfidência Bahiana, even though the latter was arguably a more significant development in the history of Portuguese America. The Inconfidência Bahiana was a ‘unique example of penetration—imperfect as it may have been—of the Enlightenment into the masses’ in Brazil.26 This alone should be sufficient to draw attention to this event, if only to do justice to the complex history of colonial Brazil. The discrepancy between historical significance and historiographical treatment can be explained by the fact that the independence of Brazil followed the liberal (and hierarchical) model discussed by the (white) conspirators of Minas Gerais rather than the social (and egalitarian) model proposed by the (black) conspirators of Bahia. This explanation hides something deeper about the national(ist) imaginary: the whiteness of the Enlightenment in the official accounts of the colonial history of Brazil. The historiographical treatment of the Inconfidência Bahiana, especially when contrasted with that of the Inconfidência Mineira, suggests that reason—and the ideals of liberty and equality associated with reason—was considered the exclusive attribute of the white elites, and that in the hands of non-whites those same ideals would turn into barbarism.

In the narratives of Brazilian history, the Inconfidência Bahiana has usually been denigrated, silenced or marginalised—a fate similar to that of the Haitian Revolution in the narratives of world history.27 The early commentaries on the conspiracy focused on the character of the protagonists—portrayed as ignorant, immoral mulattos of no social standing—rather than on their thoughts and objectives. The only extensive account of the conspiracy produced during the nineteenth century was in Francisco de Varnhagen’s História Geral do Brasil (1854–57). The official historian of the Brazilian Empire condemned all conspiracies against the Crown, but was particularly repelled by the Inconfidência Bahiana, which conjured violent images of radical France, and especially of revolutionary Saint Domingue. The accounts of the conspiracy evoked images of a mutinous black rabble running amok, lacking control and civilised standards of behaviour, confusing freedom with licentiousness, political change with social disorder. The implication was that people of low status in general, and non-whites in particular, could not be rational political agents.

Historical narratives continue to apply a double standard to the *Inconfidência Mineira* and the *Inconfidência Bahiana*. The general idea stands that the former failed because it was betrayed, whereas the latter failed because of the ignorance and ineptitude of its leaders. Significantly, the behaviour of Tiradentes was also considered by many of his contemporaries as irrational, crazy and dangerous, not least because he was also a person of low social status.\(^28\) His actions, however, were subsequently reinvented as those of a visionary, someone who was anticipating the future of Brazil. Thus, while the actions of Tiradentes have been celebrated and his political errors excused by his enthusiasm and idealism, the idealism and political errors of the Afro-Brazilian conspirators of Bahia continue to be explained in terms of naivety and precipitation.\(^29\) The refusal to attribute political rationality to their actions makes reason and political agency synonymous with the actions of the Luso-Brazilians, privileging white(nes)s in the formulation of Brazilian independence.

### The Politics of the Possible in the Age of Revolt

The independence of Brazil cannot be regarded simply in relation to Portugal, but also in relation to the process of internal unity—without which there would be no Brazil (as we know it) and thus no Brazilian independence. The analysis of this process brings to light the conflict and violence that underpinned the formation of Brazil in the years that surrounded its independence from Portugal. This period—characterised by social unrest and political instability—can be dated from 1817, the year of the Revolution of Pernambuco, to 1850, the year of the consolidation of the nation-state of Brazil. This *age of revolt* refutes the myth of a peaceful social and political integration commonly associated with Brazilian independence. Moreover, the historical accounts of these revolts reveal a concept of politics that denies most of the population—especially Brazilian Indians and Afro-Brazilians—political agency in the formation of Brazil(ianness).

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The Revolution of Pernambuco was a reaction against the centralisation of power and the increased tax burdens that followed the transfer of the Portuguese Court to Rio de Janeiro. The revolt was driven by the resentment of the regional elite for their loss of autonomy to Rio de Janeiro and the official favouritism shown to the Portuguese. The revolt found support amongst the military, public officials,

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landowners, men of letters, judges, artisans, merchants, and a large number of priests. The rebels established a new regime based on liberal ideals, including the sanctity of private property. The leaders of the provisional government reassured slave owners: ‘Patriots, your property rights are sacred, no matter how repugnant this may be to the ideal of justice.’

The liberal experiment was short-lived, lasting only 74 days. The defeat of the rebels was followed by a brutal repression and the sending of fresh troops from Portugal to Rio de Janeiro, Salvador and Recife.

The provinces of the north-east that had participated in the revolution of 1817 refused to accept a constitution imposed on them by the Emperor and that concentrated power in Rio de Janeiro. In 1824, the rebels seized power and proclaimed the Confederation of the Equator. The revolt was a direct affront to the monarchical character of the Empire, not to mention to the unity of Brazil. But the rebels did not intend to change the social order. In fact, they resented the involvement of blacks and mulattos in the revolt because it reminded them of ‘the scenes of Saint Domingue’. Their preoccupation was with attaining autonomy over economic interests and commerce—that is, with the control of the state. In the event, the revolt suffered from the same lack of cohesion and rashness in action that had doomed the revolution of 1817. The short-lived separation was crushed by the troops of the British Admiral Cochrane and followed by numerous executions—the most prominent being that of the liberal priest known as Frei Caneca.

The Revolution of Pernambuco and the Confederation of the Equator were discredited by imperial historians, but became objects of veneration in the history of the north-east, and patriotic landmarks in the nationalist accounts of Brazilian independence. The revolts entered the national imaginary as the continuation of the spirit of independence and Brazilianness that nationalist historians attribute to the Guerra dos Mascates (1710) and the Inconfidência Mineira (1789). Frei Caneca, the most prominent intellectual of Pernambuco at the time, was portrayed by nationalist historians as a ‘martyr of Brazilian freedom’ despite the fact that his vision of the nation was dominated by a strong regional(ist) feeling, and that his political formula tried to bring together the ‘Portuguese of Europe’ and the ‘Portuguese of Brazil’ but gave no consideration to Brazilian Indians and Afro-Brazilians. In short, this interpretation of

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the liberal revolts not only obviates their regional(ist) character but, more importantly, extracts the political essence of the nation exclusively from the actions and thoughts of the white elites of Brazil, the Portuguese of America.

The continuation of past injustices and the inability of the imperial authorities to secure national unity without violence tarnished the popularity of Dom Pedro soon after independence. In 1831, pressure from the Brazilian political leaders, combined with demonstrations in the streets of Rio de Janeiro, finally led him to abdicate in favour of his Brazilian-born five-year-old son, Dom Pedro de Alcântara, the future Dom Pedro II. The abdication furthered the nationalisation of the throne and marked the completion of political independence from Portugal. The date 17 April was placed alongside 7 September as the other crucial date of Brazilian independence: the Second Independence. Manoel Bomfim defined the events of 1831 in revolutionary terms and placed them alongside the revolution of 1817 as the true essence of Brazilian nationalism, in what constitutes further illustration of the narrow definition of Brazilianness that informs the nationalist accounts of the political history of Brazil.

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The Eurocentrism of these accounts becomes even more acute when dealing with the revolts that followed the abdication of Dom Pedro. His abdication to the throne was followed by two decades of unrest and insurrections across the whole country, including: the Cabanos War in Pernambuco (1832–35), the Cabanagem in Pará (1835–40), the Sabinada in Bahia (1837–38), the Balaia da in Maranhão (1838–41), the Farrupilha in Rio Grande do Sul (1835–45), and the Praieira in Pernambuco (1848–49). These revolts are generally interpreted as movements against the Portuguese, and other foreign influences, in post-independence Brazil (that is, as expressions of nationalism) and/or as movements of opposition to the policies of the imperial government in Rio de Janeiro (that is, as expressions of regionalism). In both cases, their interest and historical importance are determined by their impact on the formation of the Brazilian state, and even more so by the size of their threat to the political unity of Brazil. This focus on the struggle over institutional power (between nationals and foreigners, and between the capital and the provinces) has often led historians to overlook the specificity and underestimate the complexity of the different revolts, as well as to create a hierarchy of revolts (and rebels) that privileges the actions of Luso-Brazilians and ignores or minimises those of Afro-Brazilians and Brazilian Indians.

The Eurocentrism of these accounts can be illustrated by examining, for example, the historiography of the Cabanagem—a civil war that devastated much of the Brazilian north-east. This conflict lacks a clear beginning and a clear end, but
can be roughly dated between 1831 and 1841, with its acute phase from 1835 to 1836. The revolt began as a movement towards political autonomy led by the regional elite of Pará. The political instability created by the disputes amongst the local elites soon gave way, however, to a broader conflict across the Brazilian north-east. The conflict reflected the dissatisfaction of non-whites with a regime that kept them in poverty and slavery. In 1835, the rebels took the capital, Belém, and declared the independence of Pará. The imperial authorities sent a coalition of imperial troops and foreign mercenaries to regain control over a region thought to be ‘lost altogether to the civilised world’. The Court turned to Marechal Francisco José de Andréa, who took control of the capital on 13 May 1836. The conflict continued in the interior, extending outside the eastern Amazon, but would never again threaten the territorial integrity of the Brazilian Empire.

The visions of the Cabanagem have been expertly analysed by Luís Balkar Sá Peixoto Pinheiro in *Visões da Cabanagem* (2001). Pinheiro reveals how the Cabanagem was initially interpreted as a ‘Spectacle of Barbarism’. The historians and ideologues of the Brazilian Empire portrayed the rebels as scum, criminals, irrational beings, even animals. The imperial accounts spoke of a cruel, primitive, and ignorant people whose actions were opportunistic and derived from basic instincts such as hatred, revenge, and violence. This derogatory portrait of the rebels ignored their motives and demands, and justified the carnage—some have even called it genocide—that followed the arrival of Marechal Andréa.

The centenary of the rebellion witnessed a revision of the Cabanagem that portrayed the rebels (known as cabanos: people who lived in cabins) as heroes of regional and national liberation. The transformation of the revolt into a movement of political liberation took place through a process of whitening that attributed political agency exclusively to the white elite and emptied the movement of social criticism. Those who took part in the early stages of the revolt (the white elites) became the true, ideal cabanos. The rest of the participants—the real cabanos: those who actually lived in cabins—came to occupy the place of extras. The white rebels were praised for their high ideals and leadership qualities, whereas the non-white rebels were ‘merely attributed the courage, good will and hope of seeing their wishes realised by the just, conscious and well-intentioned persons who guided them’.

This portrait of the revolt explains the ease with which local authorities and official historians chose 13 May 1936 to celebrate the centenary of the

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33 Cleary, D. 1998, “‘Lost altogether to the civilized world’: race and the Cabanagem in northern Brazil, 1750 to 1850”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 40, no. 1, p. 127.
35 Ibid., p. 81.
Cabanagem, culminating in the erection of a statue to Marechal Andréa, who came to be known as the Peace-Maker (Pacificador) of Pará. The commemoration framed regionalism and nationalism in a liberal discourse of law and order that celebrated the re-establishment of institutional order and removed the popular rebels from the heroic portrait of the revolt, even though they had turned the revolt from a minor affair into a major event. This vision of the Cabanagem portrayed the revolt as a nativist movement, loyal to the Empire, fighting against pro-Portuguese presidents nominated from Rio de Janeiro. The savages of the imperial accounts were transformed in the nativist narratives into noble savages brandishing the flag of Brazil(ianness).36

The liberal vision of the Cabanagem has coexisted with a socialist vision that argues for the centrality of the popular masses in the revolt. This vision came to life as part of an effort to rehabilitate the place of the people in the history of Brazil. This process, initiated by João Capistrano de Abreu—often referred to as the ‘historian of the people’—in the early twentieth century, was turned into an academic movement in the 1930s by a group of Marxist historians, the most eminent of whom was Caio Prado jr. This new discourse, informed by historical materialism, has defined popular revolts, first and foremost, as class struggles. These authors rejected the visions of barbarism, insanity, and inherent cruelty attributed to the popular classes who participated in the Cabanagem. Instead, they explained the rebellion of the popular masses as a logical reaction against their oppression. Yet, the actions of the people appear to be instinctive rather than rational: at best, in need of direction; at worst, easily manipulated by those with ambitions of power.37

In sum, the exclusion and deprecation of the Cabanagem in imperial accounts have been replaced with a more subtle but equally disempowering discourse that has reduced the popular rebels to the role of extras (rather than actors) or a source of energy (rather than ideas). In the final analysis, the white liberal elite continues to be the only historical agent, or, more precisely, the only rational agent in the history of the Cabanagem. For their part, the popular (mostly non-white) segments continue to appear as extras or irrational beings in a movement defined by the ideas and actions of others, by the white elites inspired by the high ideals emanating from Europe.

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Similar discursive trajectories to that of the Cabanagem can be observed in the historical accounts of other revolts that took place during the period of consolidation of the nation-state in Brazil. Caio Prado jr was one of the first

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36 Ibid., p. 74.
37 Ibid., pp. 89–106.
scholars to note that popular movements were viewed by most historians as ‘facts without more significance’ than the ‘explosion of bestial sentiments and passions of the masses’. He rejected this interpretation but continued to define popular rebellions as acts of *instinctive violence*—natural and understandable reactions against centuries of oppression and exploitation, but not rationally articulated ones. In this view, the rebels lack ideology, ideals and plans beyond the motivation of revenge and the use of violence. Thus, their rebellion translates mainly into personal attacks rather than struggles against the system. Such an interpretation simplifies the motives, strategies and objectives of many popular revolts, and equates the arguably simple means used by the rebels with their level of rationality, ignoring the fact that more often than not the rebels were simply—but not simplistically—acting out a *politics of the possible*.

The articulation of this politics of the possible in popular revolts is clearly illustrated in João José Reis’s account of the *Revolução dos Malês*—the uprising of the Muslim Africans of Bahia that took place in 1835—entitled in its English translation *Slave Rebellion in Bahia* (1993). This event was arguably the most important black urban rebellion in the Americas, yet it is conspicuously absent from most historical accounts of the formation of the nation-state in Brazil. The uprising was the culmination of a long cycle of Afro-Brazilian revolts that dominated life in the region after 1798, and which were partly inspired by the Haitian Revolution. These were not mere revolts against slavery, but often revolts for (racial) equality. This was the case of the *Revolução dos Malês*, which was led by free blacks and mulattos. Reis’s work provides a comprehensive historical account and political analysis of the uprising, illustrating the objectives, tactics and actions of the rebels. The portrait of the uprising that emerges from his analysis is that of a political rebellion with clear objectives and a plan of action destined to put an end to white domination in Bahia. Moreover, this work reveals how their plans were based on a complex evaluation of what the rebels thought was the correlation of forces in Bahia in 1835.

The exclusion of popular movements from—or their selective and subordinate incorporation into—the political history of Brazil goes hand-in-hand with their widespread consideration as *pre-political* manifestations. Their definition in terms of evolution (pre-political versus political) to denote difference (social versus political) reveals the higher value attached to political revolts (usually defined in liberal terms). This distinction not only obscures the complexity of forces and interests at play in the different revolts but, more importantly, it serves to establish a *hierarchy of revolts* that privileges political revolts (viewed

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as complex, rational, informed by high ideals) over social revolts (viewed as simple, emotional, driven by basic needs). In other words, it privileges revolts preoccupied with institutional change and led by the white elites, in detriment of those preoccupied with broader social and political change (that is, revolts against slavery, poverty and discrimination) and led mostly by non-whites. Moreover, the term pre-political often suggests that non-white rebels cannot grasp the notion of modern politics (understood in liberal terms: institutional and representative) and thus they come across as pre-modern subjects (that is, inferior and/or backward).

The narrow definition of politics as liberal and formal (that is, institutional) sidelines the fact that the essence of politics is power, not associations and institutions—these are merely mechanisms to articulate power—and, therefore, overlooks the fact that social revolts, in so far as they seek to change the balance of power, are always political. In other words, this narrow definition of politics denies the political nature of popular rebellions, whose so-called social nature ignores the fact that popular rebels were simply acting out the politics of the possible. The ultimate effect of this distinction is to minimise the presence, when not erasing the political agency, of Brazilian Indians and Afro-Brazilians from the historical memory of Brazil.

In short, the age of revolt that took place in the mid nineteenth century illustrates the widespread discontent that followed the independence of Brazil, pointing out the problems that did not end with the separation from Portugal. The national(ist) accounts of this age of revolt produce a double narrative: one of political revolts (led by whites) seeking to liberate the nation from external control, which were eventually successful, and with little, if any, bloodshed; and one of social revolts (led by non-whites) seeking to fulfil particular needs, driven by emotions and violence, which were responsible for immense bloodshed, but were dissociated from the struggle for Brazilian independence. This double narrative reinforces the white hegemony and the Eurocentrism that define the portrait of Brazilian independence.

**Conclusion**

The idyllic portrait of Brazilian independence formulated in the nineteenth century has survived virtually unscathed into the twenty-first century. This is the portrait of a cordial and peaceful process, led by a rational and reasonable (white and male) political elite, which culminated in the harmonious integration of the different peoples and regions of Brazil into a single and unified nation-state. In this narrative, Brazilian independence is the culmination of a teleological process—more a matter of destiny than a matter of contingency. This portrait
rests largely on the symbolic power of the *Grito de Ipiranga*. The notion that independence came about with a simple (royal) cry—without a single shot being fired—symbolises the peaceful nature of Brazilian independence.

Yet, as we have seen, this is an idealised (and ideological) portrait that omits and distorts essential aspects that are necessary to fully comprehend Brazilian independence, let alone the formation of the nation-state in Brazil. Above all, this portrait glosses over the fact that Brazilian independence was preceded, accompanied and followed by violent conflicts across all regions of the country, involving all sectors of the population. Moreover, this exorcism of political violence from the portrait (and the process) of Brazilian independence betrays a double standard in the historiographical treatment of anti-colonial resistance in Brazil. On the one hand, the anti-colonial revolts carried out by Luso-Brazilians against their External Others—initially the European rivals of Portugal for the control of Brazil, and then Portugal itself—are defined as political, rational, and modern, and are integrated into the teleological narrative of Brazilian independence. On the other hand, the anti-colonial revolts carried out by the Internal Others of the Luso-Brazilians (that is, Brazilian Indians and Afro-Brazilians) are defined as pre-political, irrational, and primitive, and are dissociated from the portrait of Brazilian independence. Thus, Brazilian independence becomes synonymous with Luso-Brazilian agency, entrenching Eurocentrism and white hegemony in the (re)birth of Brazil.
Confronting Genocide: Latin America, adventure fiction and the moral crisis of British imperialism

Kevin Foster

Adventure fiction was widely employed by British writers during the nineteenth century to address serious questions of politics and morality, particularly those arising from the nation’s imperial responsibilities. The nineteenth-century adventure tales that argued for or justified the extension of empire were, in Martin Green’s well-worn phrase, ‘the energising myth of English imperialism. They were, collectively, the story England told itself as it went to sleep at night, and, in the form of its dreams, they charged England’s will with the energy to go out into the world and explore, and conquer and rule.’

By the mid nineteenth century, however, some of these adventure narratives, particularly those set in Latin America, were less likely to bring on a reassuring slumber than they were to engender nightmares of self-doubt before waking the sleeper with a nasty start. At a time when the popular literature of empire was slavishly hero-worshipping or blindly propagandistic, and high culture all but refused to acknowledge the existence of an imperial frontier, adventure fiction set in Latin America furnished a unique critical and intellectual space within which the political, social and moral consequences of empire might be thought through or imaginatively enacted.

This employment of Latin America in nineteenth and early twentieth-century British adventure fiction grows out of a long-established pattern of discursive relations between the two. J. H. Elliott identifies its precedents in the earliest European responses to the New World. Surveying a wide array of texts from the late sixteenth into the seventeenth centuries, Elliott observes:

[I]t is difficult not to be impressed by the strange lacunae and the resounding silences in many places where references to the New World could reasonably be expected. How are we to explain the absence of any mention of the New World in so many memoirs and chronicles, including the memoirs of Charles V himself? How are we to explain the

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2 Green refers to a ‘literature of promotion’ stretching ‘from the poems of Marston and Chapman to the Twentieth-century pamphlets of the Canada Office in London’, whose centrepiece was the work of imperial mythopoeists such as Scott (ibid., p. 119).
continuing determination, right up to the last two or three decades of the sixteenth century, to describe the world as if it were still the world as known to Strabo, Ptolemy and Pomponius Mela…

The reluctance of cosmographers or social philosophers to incorporate into their work the new information made available to them by the discovery of America provides an example of the wider problem arising from the revelation of the New World to the Old. Whether it is a question of the geography of America, its flora and fauna, or the nature of its inhabitants, the same kind of pattern seems constantly to recur in the European response. It is as if, at a certain point, the mental shutters came down; as if, with so much to see and absorb and understand, the effort suddenly becomes too much for them, and Europeans retreat to the half-light of their traditional mental world.

There is nothing very novel about the form of this sixteenth century response. Medieval Europe had found it supremely difficult to comprehend and come to terms with the phenomenon of Islam…Nor is this a matter for surprise for the attempt of one society to comprehend another inevitably forces it to reappraise itself…This process is bound to be an agonizing one, involving the jettisoning of many traditional preconceptions and inherited ideas. It is hardly surprising, then, if sixteenth-century Europeans either ignored the challenge or baulked at the attempt. There was, after all, an easier way out, neatly epitomized in 1528 by the Spanish humanist, Hernán Perez de Oliva, when he wrote that Columbus set out on his second voyage ‘to unite the world and give to those strange lands the form of our own’.

Elliott’s vision of sixteenth-century Europeans dazzled by the prodigality of the New World, retreating to ‘the half-light of their traditional mental world’ from where they seek to understand ‘those strange lands’ by imposing on them ‘the form of our own’, furnishes a key image for the processes determining Britain’s cultural relations with Latin America and the persistence of its seemingly perennial ignorance about the continent. The British, as Alan Knight observes, have a long and venerable ‘tradition of denigrating Latin America and its inhabitants’. In 1850, Palmerston grouped South America with China and Portugal as

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half-civilised governments…[that] require a dressing down every eight or ten years to keep them in order. Their minds are too shallow to receive any impression that will last longer than some such period and warning is of little use. They care little for words and they must not only see the stick but actually feel it on their shoulders before they yield to that argument that brings conviction.⁵

That Palmerston should have harboured such opinions is no surprise when one examines the public and private pronouncements of the diplomats who served in Latin America and whose reports crucially shaped British perceptions of the continent. Sir Robert Ker Porter, the British Consul General in Caracas in the 1820s, found its populace ‘ignorant, lazy and full of vice…the manners and usages of the people resemble truly the general appearance of their city…fair remains…choaked [sic] up…with rank weeds’.⁶ Charles Milner Ricketts, the British Consul in Lima during the same period, thought the Peruvian Indians ‘amiable enough but uneducated, slavish, feeble and inert and moreover hopelessly “priest-ridden”’.⁷ Though neatly dismissed by Alan Knight as the usual round of ‘smells, bells and lazy natives’, these stereotypes survived well into the twentieth century and are still widespread.⁸ When, between the wars, W. Osbaldeston Mitford left London to take up a diplomatic posting in Mexico City, the members of his London Club—well-travelled men whom he considered ‘of a high standard of general education and tolerably well informed on world affairs’—warned him that ‘if you ever venture outside the capital you will be made to occupy a cannibal’s stewpot or be sacrificed on some pagan altar to an Indian God’.⁹ The pomp and panoply of empire might be gone, but the attitudes that characterised and sustained it have turned out to be more enduring, and, as a result, as Knight ruefully reflects, ‘the incomprehension and stereotypes remain, even where least expected’.¹⁰

David Cannadine’s Ornementalism (2001) helps to further explain the persistence of the intellectual half-light that spawns such stereotypes. It is Cannadine’s aim in Ornementalism to correct the approach of British and foreign scholars who had traditionally regarded British imperial history ‘as if it were completely separate and distinct from the history of the British nation’. On the contrary, he contends, ‘Britain was very much a part of the empire, just as the rest of the empire was

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⁷ Ibid., p. 75.
⁸ Knight, Latin America, p. 3. Cilauro, S., Gleisner, T. and Sitch, R. 2006, San Sombrero: A land of carnivals, cocktails and coups, Hardie Grant, Prahran, Vic., offers a fine example of the survival of such views.
⁹ Quoted in Knight, Latin America, p. 5.
¹⁰ Ibid., p. 5.
very much part of Britain’, the two comprising an ‘entire interactive system’—one ‘vast interconnected world’. Indeed, Cannadine argues that the Empire was literally inconceivable in isolation from the metropolitan centre, in that the domestic environment furnished a model by which the broader populace might think of and so understand the Empire. What this meant in practical terms for those Britons struggling to ‘conceive of these diverse colonies and varied populations beyond the seas’ was that they began ‘with what they knew—or what they thought they knew—namely, the social structure of their own home country’. Through the heyday of the Empire, from the mid nineteenth century to the end of World War II,

Britons generally conceived of themselves as belonging to an unequal society characterized by a seamless web of layered gradations...which extended in a great chain of being from the monarch at the top to the humblest subject at the bottom...and it was from that starting point that they contemplated and tried to comprehend the distant realms and diverse society of their empire.

As a result, the people’s perception of the Empire was not exclusively (or even preponderantly) concerned with the creation of ‘otherness’ on the presumption that the imperial periphery was different from, and inferior to, the imperial metropolis: it was at least as much (perhaps more?) concerned with what has recently been called the ‘construction of affinities’ on the presumption that society on the periphery was the same as, or even on occasions superior to, society in the metropolis. Thus regarded, the British Empire was about the familiar and domestic, as well as the different and the exotic: indeed, it was in large part about the domestication of the exotic—the comprehending and the reordering of the foreign in parallel, analogous, equivalent, resemblant terms.

Consequently, one of the central if unforeseen functions of the Empire was its provision of a powerful ‘mechanism for the export, projection and analogisation of domestic social structures and social perceptions’.

Cannadine’s assertion that the Empire was dedicated to the domestication of the exotic through parallel, analogy and equivalence is, of course, a calculated rebuttal of the theories of Edward Said. Said’s reading of the British Empire

12 Ibid., pp. 3–4.
14 Ibid., p. xix.
15 Ibid., p. 10.
conceived of it as a bureaucratic and discursive system designed to ‘other’ and thereby legitimate the oppression of its subject peoples. Cannadine contends that this approach is ‘too simplified’, and he is not alone in his recognition that for all his moral forcefulness—if not because of it—Said’s understanding of the relations between coloniser and colonised wanted subtlety, that it was unable to acknowledge ‘the extent to which empire was about collaboration and consensus as well as about conflict and coercion’. Where the British Empire was concerned, the imperative to analogisation rescued the nation’s vision of its far-flung possessions from trite reductivism, producing a sophisticated understanding of its structural complexities and a genuine responsiveness to the lives of the individuals who constituted it. Yet when this same sense-making system was applied to British visions of Latin America it rendered a disappointing array of familiar stereotypes. Where one promoted knowledge through identification, the other seemed to foster only ignorance. Why was it that an identical process resulted in such contrasting outcomes?

One explanation resides in the cognitive processes involved in making sense of the unfamiliar. If ‘acts of perception are really acts of recall’ then what the British saw in India, Africa, Latin America and elsewhere was crucially determined by what they remembered of or had read or heard about equivalent prior experience and the preconceptions they fed. The effort to understand new experiences, to absorb and evaluate unfamiliar situations involves a combination of what cognitive scientists term ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ processing. Bottom-up processing involves ‘building up a composite meaning on the basis of our perception of its component parts’; top-down processing, as its name implies, draws on the ‘expectations, assumptions and prior knowledge’ of the interpreter. While regular contact between Britain and its colonies

18 Hence Alan Knight’s longing for a ‘New World equivalent of Edward Said’s “Orientalism”’ (Knight, Latin America, p. 2).
served to demystify many of the Empire’s exotics, to convert a raft of top-down assumptions into the embodied evidence of bottom-up observation, ongoing ignorance about Latin America necessitated a primary—and thereafter habitual—recourse to top-down processes, within which experience and observation might be ordered and explained. Britain’s popular imagining of South America, like ‘Darkest Africa’, might have had its origins in geographical ignorance, but as Philip Curtin remarks, it was subsequently ‘adhered to out of cultural arrogance’. 21

Elliott observes that a society engaged in a genuine effort to comprehend another must undergo an often agonising self-appraisal in which many ‘traditional preconceptions and inherited ideas’ have to be jettisoned. 22 This is not a process that any community will undertake lightly, and when it does take place it is driven not by altruism or a disinterested desire for greater knowledge of others but by a combination of compulsion and self-interest. In the case of the Spanish conquest of Latin America,

it was the stimulus of practical considerations—the need to exploit the resources of America and to govern and convert its peoples—which compelled Europeans to widen their field of vision (sometimes in spite of themselves) and to organize and classify their findings within a coherent frame of thought.

Officials and missionaries alike found that, to do their work effectively, they needed some understanding of the customs and traditions of the peoples entrusted to their charge…The visitas of royal officials to Indian localities therefore tended to turn into elaborate inquiries into native history, land tenure and inheritance laws; and the reports of the more intelligent and inquiring of these officials…were in effect exercises in applied anthropology, capable of yielding a vast amount of information about native customs and societies. 23

The eagerness of the British to conquer and then exploit their imperial possessions, particularly in India, gave rise to practical considerations of government, commerce and comparative religion comparable with those that the Spaniards had confronted in the New World and that, albeit involuntarily, enforced a corresponding extension of the conquerors’ cognitive boundaries. 24

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22 As Peter Winch noted: ‘Seriously to study another way of life is necessarily to seek to extend our own—not simply to bring the other way within the already existing boundaries of our own because the point about the latter in their present form, is that they ex hypothesi exclude the other.’ Winch, P. 1967, ‘Understanding a primitive society’, in D. Z. Phillips (ed.), Religion and Understanding, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 30.
23 Elliott, Old World, pp. 32–3.
24 David Cannadine advances the case for India’s contribution to the making of Britain in Cannadine, Ornamentalism. For Latin America’s role in the invention of Europe, see Pratt, M. L. 1992, Imperial Eyes:
Yet in Latin America, while the British had extensive resources to exploit, they had, beyond the thinly scattered populations of Guyana and Belize, no people to govern and so no need to pretend to an interest in or concern for the locals and their cultures, or any mission beyond the extraction of profits or the exercise of influence. They were, as William Yale put it, at liberty ‘to secure [their] imperial interests without assuming the invidious burden of colonial rule’. Freed from most of the ‘practical considerations’ that might demand an uncomfortable cohabitation with the other, the British had no need to expand their settled patterns of thought and perception to make room for the challenges posed by contact with Latin America or its people, and so no reason to subject themselves to a painful process of reappraisal. While Latin America remained of largely commercial interest to the British, their established perceptions of it and the prejudices they fed could survive undisturbed, and the vision of Britain they reflected remain untarnished.

This suggestion that these stereotypical constructions reveal as much about Britain as they do about Latin America implies a further explanation for their persistence. They survive because they continue to perform a valuable function: they express the nation’s ‘political unconscious’. According to Frederic Jameson, it is the purpose of the political unconscious to restore ‘to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of [the nation’s] fundamental history’. British stereotypes of Latin America restore to the surface of the narratives that preserve them voices previously unacknowledged in or consciously excised from the nation’s fundamental history. These voices are significant because instead of extolling the glories of the Empire they have articulated the anxieties inherent in its extension, management and loss. The consolidation and further expansion of the British Empire in the early nineteenth century coincided with the rapid expansion of the revolutionary liberation movements of the Latin American republics. As the British were coming to terms with the moral and practical dilemmas arising from the extension of their dominion across the globe, the peoples of Latin America were, with varying degrees of success, throwing off the yoke of colonial government and for the first time enjoying the rights of free men. As a result, at that point and perennially thereafter in the world of British literary culture (and far beyond), Latin America became inextricably intertwined with a range of efforts to understand and mediate the burdens of

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empire. Narratives set in or centred on Latin America ostensibly concerned with the experience of imperial subjugation can thus be seen as endeavours to address the effects of the exercise of imperial power. Patrick Brantlinger notes that while ‘empire involved military conquest and rapacious economic exploitation’, it was also characterised by ‘the enactment of often idealistic although nonetheless authoritarian schemes of cultural domination. The goal of imperialist discourse is always to weld these seeming opposites together or to disguise their contradiction.'

Latin America furnished an ideal symbolic space, free from the complications of ‘official’ rule, within which narrative fiction might unpack and illuminate the contradictions of imperialist discourse. Here the ‘buried reality’ of imperial affirmation could be exhumed and held up for examination. Here the anxieties of the Empire might be articulated, assuaged or indulged. In few places was this more persistently done than in British adventure fiction.

Though Patrick Brantlinger has claimed that in Britain serious ‘social doubt’ about the aims and morality of imperialism ‘emerges in many ways from the 1870s onward’, adventure fiction set in Latin America reveals that ‘defensiveness, self-doubt, worries about “fitness”, “national efficiency” and racial and cultural decadence’ do not suddenly and unexpectedly surface at ‘the end of the century’, but are a consistent presence in the fictional treatment of imperialism from the mid nineteenth century onwards. They arise from a fundamental contradiction at the heart of the nation’s imperial vision residing in the fact that despite the position espoused by ‘Palmerston and many of his contemporaries’ that ‘British overseas interests should be secured wherever possible without formal imperialization’, the mid nineteenth century witnessed an exponential growth in the nation’s overseas possessions. Edward Said calculates that while European powers were ‘in occupation of approximately 35 percent of the earth’s surface’ in 1815, by the end of the Great War this had more than doubled to 85 per cent, and a significant proportion of this territory was in British hands. As such, while explicitly denying an interest in extending its imperial holdings, Britain continued to conquer, dispossess, expropriate and exterminate. Adventure fiction set in non-imperial regions such as Latin America provided a space within which this lust for possession might be balanced against the nation’s no less prominent ambivalence about conquest and control. After all, in a place where, as Lord John Roxton remarks in Conan Doyle’s The Lost World (2001), ‘anythin’ was possible—anythin’, little was likely to be probable so

27 Mediation, Jameson notes, ‘aims to demonstrate what is not evident in the appearance of things but rather in their underlying reality’ (ibid., p. 39). One of the key texts in this association originated in Argentina: Sarmiento, D. F. 1845, Facundo or Civilization and Barbarism, Penguin, London.
28 Brantlinger, Rule of Darkness, p. 34.
29 Ibid., p. 33. For more detail, see ibid., pp. 19–45.
30 Ibid., p. 20.
31 Said, The World, the Text, and the Critic, p. 222.
anything might be imagined. The moral and critical licence that freedom from formal political ties to the continent granted enabled the writers of adventure fiction set in Latin America to do three specific things in their work: to reveal, or at least hint at, the unpalatable truths about the nation's conduct on its imperial frontiers; to explore what this conduct implied about the wellbeing of the imperial centre; and to express anxiety or ambivalence about the moral defensibility and practical sustainability of the imperial enterprise as a whole. Latin America thus furnished British writers of adventure fiction with a secure intellectual and political space within which they might pronounce upon the most explosive issue of the day: the moral and political economy of imperialism.

While earlier in the nineteenth century writers such as Robert Southey and Charles Kingsley had fretted over the errant ways of the ruling classes and their continuing fitness for imperial captaincy, as the century reached its close there was a more pointed interrogation not of the nation’s capacity to rule, but of the genocidal consequences of its doing so. One of the principal contributions to this debate was Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Lost World*. By the time of Conan Doyle’s birth in 1859, ‘the conviction that “inferior peoples” were by nature condemned to extinction’ was, as Sven Lindqvist has shown, ‘a major element in the European view of mankind’. Prominent thinkers in biology, anthropology, race and evolutionary theory had separately concluded that the extermination of primitive peoples by their more civilised brethren was the expression of an irresistible law of nature. ‘It seemed obvious’, from the fact that white men all over the globe were decimating the darker-skinned peoples they came into contact with, ‘that some racial natural law was at work and that the extermination of non-Europeans was simply a stage in the natural development of the world’. If by the mid nineteenth century genocide was regarded as an ‘inevitable by-product of progress’, the key question for modern man was not whether to condone or condemn it, but how to arrive at some sort of moral accommodation with it. It was the moral responsibility of civilised man not to protest against the eradication of primitive peoples, but to ensure that they were taken off in the most efficient and humane fashion. Restraint or mercy in this context, Eduard von Hartmann argued, was not charity, but a species of cruelty:

As little as a favour is done the dog whose tail is to be cut off, when one cuts it off gradually inch by inch, so little is there humanity in artificially prolonging the death struggles of savages who are on the

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34 Ibid., p. 115.
verge of extinction… The true philanthropist, if he has comprehended the natural law of anthropological evolution, cannot avoid desiring an acceleration of the last convulsion and labour for that end.\textsuperscript{36}

As early as 1850, Herbert Spencer had proposed that the eradication of the unregenerate was not a matter for moral vacillation, but a binding religious obligation: ‘The forces which are working out the great scheme of perfect happiness, taking no account of incidental suffering, exterminate such sections of mankind as stand in their way… Be he human or be he brute—the hindrance must be got rid of.’\textsuperscript{37} In this context, instead of wringing their hands over the plight of the unfortunate victims, it was believed that ‘the true compassion of the superior races consisted in helping them on their way’.\textsuperscript{38}

Not everybody was convinced that the extinction of primitive peoples was inevitable, or regarded genocide as a misunderstood species of Christian charity. Surveying the catastrophic results of modern man’s endeavours to improve his primitive brothers, John Howison argued that the real savages were closer to home, and that it was civilised man himself who was most in need of moral reform:

The continent of America has already been nearly depopulated of its aborigines by the introduction of the blessings of civilisation. The West Indian archipelago, from the same cause, no longer contains a single family of its primitive inhabitants. South Africa will soon be in a similar condition, and the islanders of the Pacific Ocean are rapidly diminishing in numbers from the ravages of European diseases and the despotism of self-interested and fanatical missionaries. It is surely time that the work of destruction should cease; and since long and melancholy experience has proved us to be invariably unsuccessful in rendering happier, wiser, or better, the barbarians whom we have visited or conquered, we may now conscientiously let them alone and turn a correcting hand towards ourselves and seek to repress… our avarice, our selfishness, and our vices.\textsuperscript{39}

In \textit{The Lost World}, Conan Doyle strips away the lagging of respectability that science and religion had afforded genocide, exposing the ugly truths about colonial dispossession, and exploring thereby Howison’s theories about the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{38} Lindqvist, ‘Exterminate All The Brutes’, p. 123.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Quoted in ibid., p. 122. After an inquiry into the extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines, the Aborigines’ Protection Society was founded in 1838 ‘with the aim of putting an end to the extermination of native peoples’ (ibid., p. 124).
\end{itemize}
complicated relations between civilisation and savagery. Conan Doyle projects his analysis of the practical implications and moral burdens of empire onto an imaginary Latin American landscape. Here, in the semiotic free-fire zone that this setting affords, and in the sort of detail that no account of Britain’s imperial front line could countenance at the time, he illustrates what happens when civilised man finds his pursuit of land, loot or security obstructed by his more primitive brothers, and how he justifies and lives with the bloody consequences of his actions. As such, his central concern in *The Lost World* is to offer an allegorical critique of the moral landscape of British imperialism, to use Latin America to explore and explain a society in which obscure matters of scientific dispute occasion outrage and wild public brawling, while the eradication of whole peoples passes without comment.

The fictional premise that underpins this analysis rests on maverick Professor George Edward Challenger’s discovery of an isolated plateau in Brazil, where, cut off from the evolutionary conditions that have shaped the modern world, ancient life forms coexist with more developed species. When Challenger presents these findings to a meeting of the Zoological Institute in London, they provoke uproar. Undaunted, he invites the institute to dispatch a party to the area to test the veracity of his claims. This group—comprising a professor of comparative anatomy, Summerlee, the gentleman adventurer, Lord John Roxton, and the journalist and narrator, Edward Malone—is duly elected, dispatched, and later augmented in the upper reaches of the Amazon by Challenger himself. The party heads inland, locates and ascends the plateau, and the adventure begins. For all the primeval glamour of this lost world, its soupy central lake bubbling with amphibious proto-life, antlered herds, swooping pterodactyls, and the lumbering Jurassic bestiary, the narrative centres on the struggle for dominion between the plateau’s competing hominid groups: the ‘ape-men’, who are primitive, simian and savage, and the more evolved Indians—‘small men, wiry, active…Their faces…hairless, well-formed and good humoured’. Despite their evolutionary advantages, the Indians are barely holding their own against the depredations of the ape-men and when the adventurers encounter them are fighting for their survival. The opposing groups’ differing conduct of the struggle implies a good deal about each. If violence is, for the Indians, an unpalatable means to the higher end of peace and progress, for the ape-men the slaughter of their enemies is an entertaining end in itself. The ceremonial centrepiece of their society is a bizarre and entirely purposeless sacrificial rite in which, to the ape-men’s evident delight, the hapless victim is flung off

40 Conan Doyle, *The Lost World and Other Thrilling Tales*, pp. 151, 153. For a description of the ape-men, see ibid., p. 130. For more on their status as the ‘missing links’, see Fraser, R. 1998, *Victorian Quest Romance: Stevenson, Haggard, Kipling, and Conan Doyle*, Northcote House, Plymouth, UK, pp. 70–4.
the plateau to his death far below.\textsuperscript{41} When the adventurers are attacked and brutalised by the ape-men, they take an active role in the conflict and play midwife to evolution. Contributing their more advanced military strategy and greater force of arms to the Indians, in a final, climactic confrontation, they help them defeat and all but exterminate the ape-men. Fresh from the massacre, Challenger observes that it has been their privilege to be present at one of the typical decisive battles of history—the battles which have determined the fate of the world. What, my friends, is the conquest of one nation by another? It is meaningless. Each produces the same result. But those fierce fights, when in the dawn of the ages the cave-dwellers held their own against the tiger folk, or the elephants first found that they had a master, those were the real conquests—the victories that count. By this strange turn of fate we have seen and helped to decide even such a contest. Now upon this plateau the future must ever be for man.\textsuperscript{42}

Yet for all his evocation of the historical moment, Challenger’s orthodox vindication of the evolutionary process does nothing to mitigate the horrors at its sharp end. As Malone notes:

\begin{quote}
It needed a robust faith in the end to justify such tragic means. As we advanced together through the woods we found the ape-men lying thick, transfixed with spears or arrows...driven back to their city, they had made a last stand there, once again they had been broken, and now we were in time to see the final fearful scene of all...As we arrived the Indians, a semi-circle of spearmen, had closed in on them, and in a minute it was over. Thirty or forty died where they stood. The others, screaming and clawing, were thrust over the precipice, and went hurtling down, as their prisoners had of old, on to the sharp bamboos six hundred feet below.\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

The particular manner in which the last of the ape-men are dispatched is highly suggestive, not least in its biblical allusion to the Gadarene Swine. More pertinently, and more topically, it alludes to a method commonly employed by white settlers in Australia to dispose of Aborigines with whom they were in conflict over land or natural resources.\textsuperscript{44} Further, the strange clicking talk of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[41] For Roxton’s description of the ceremony, see Conan Doyle, \textit{The Lost World and Other Thrilling Tales}, p. 154.
\item[43] Conan Doyle, \textit{The Lost World and Other Thrilling Tales}, p. 174.
\end{footnotes}
ape-men recalls the languages of the Nama and Herero people of South-West Africa, now Namibia, who after rebelling against the cruelty of the colonising Germans were almost entirely exterminated in 12 months during 1904–05.45 These parallels drive home Conan Doyle’s point that though the superior beings might claim to be accidental witnesses to the working out of a natural law, here and all across the globe, they have shown themselves to be active, if not enthusiastic, participants in the extermination of their fellow men.

Furthermore, their responses to or reasons for participating in the slaughter suggest that they are not nearly as civilised as they believe themselves to be. Challenger might portray himself as no more than a fortunate witness to an irresistible natural process, but when Malone and Roxton come across him in the final stages of the massacre of the ape-men, he has abandoned all pretence to scientific detachment and is ‘strutting about like a gamecock’, his eyes ‘shining with the lust of slaughter’.46 If Challenger’s regressive savagery comes as a shock, Lord John Roxton’s coldly rational determination to settle a personal ‘score’ with the ape-men by ‘wiping them off the face of the earth’ is more deeply alarming. The ape-men’s sin? The ‘filthy beasts’ had ‘fingered [him]…all over’.47 Increased refinement, Conan Doyle demonstrates, brings not a transcendence of savagery, merely a greater facility in justifying or excusing its employment. In their efforts to demonstrate their superiority over the brutal primitives of the plateau, the adventurers only reinforce the evidence of their commonality with them. The ape-men’s sacrificial rites might revolt Roxton but they also fascinate him: ‘It was horrible—but it was dooceedly interestin’ too.’48 When Malone fires on the ape-men he is less the well-drilled territorial marksman than a blood-crazed berserker, ‘cheering and yelling with pure ferocity and joy of slaughter’.49

Yet as Conan Doyle points out, in this regard there is nothing extraordinary about the members of the party. By turns suave, savage and coldly scientific, the adventurers are fitting emblems of their society and the brutality that bristles beneath its civilised exterior. ‘There are’, Malone reflects, ‘strange red depths in the soul of the most commonplace man’.50 Indeed the behaviour of London’s intellectual elite is at times scarcely distinguishable from the pack frenzy of the ape-men. Conan Doyle lavishes considerable detail on the two Zoological Institute lectures that bookend the party’s journey to South America, and how each descends into wild brawling. He notes how, during the first lecture, the

46 Conan Doyle, *The Lost World and Other Thrilling Tales*, p. 174.
48 Ibid., p. 154.
49 Ibid., p. 159.
50 Ibid., p. 159.
The key figure linking the seemingly antithetical extremes of civilisation in the novel is the ‘splenetic scientist’, Challenger. His formidable intellect is strangely yoked to a pathological incapacity to restrain himself; he is forever ‘effervescing with fight’. In a manner later made famous by Monty Python’s wrestling bishops, he meets scepticism, or any expression of intellectual difference, with an immediate recourse to physical assault. When, after his attack on Malone, his exasperated wife describes him as ‘a brute’, this is no idle rhetorical figure. Every description of Challenger emphasises his squat, simian bulk: he is ‘a stunted Hercules whose tremendous vitality had all run to depth, breadth and brain’. His affinity with the ape-men is first implied in a glint of teeth. Immediately before he launches an assault on Malone, his ‘black moustache lifted and a white fang twinkled in a sneer’. This brief glimpse of Challenger’s fangs and the bestial instinct they signify have an important echo later in the novel, when Malone is throttled by an ape-man. Drifting into unconsciousness, he recalls that as ‘the creature felt me grow limp in his grasp, two white canines gleamed for a moment at each side of the vile mouth’. Little wonder that when the adventurers are captured by the ape-men, while Summerlee and Roxton are humiliated and brutalised, in Challenger they recognise and revere a more advanced specimen of their own kind, bearing him aloft like ‘a Roman emperor’. The uncanny likeness between the scientific übermann and the degenerate apes makes explicit what is only hinted at in Challenger’s volcanic temper and Malone’s berserker frenzy: that for all the smug assurance of his evolutionary advantages, modern man has not left his more primitive self behind but carries his primordial savagery within him, and the least provocation might bring it to the surface and betray him. This insistence on the fellowship between civilised man and his primitive forebears demolishes the orthodox scientific and moral vindications of genocide, exposing the uncomfortable truth that for all its cant about civilisation, progress and mission, colonialism involved the dispossession and destruction of men, who, whatever their physical or cultural differences, were inescapably our kith and kin, if not our brothers.

51 Ibid., p. 47.
52 Ibid., p. 193. For more on the lecture/riots, see ibid., pp. 46–55, 192–202.
53 Fraser, *Victorian Quest Romance*, p. 66.
55 Ibid., p. 28.
56 Ibid., p. 25.
58 Ibid., p. 166.
59 Ibid., p. 152.
Confronting Genocide: Latin America, adventure fiction and the moral crisis of British imperialism

Conan Doyle’s moral point here has an important political dimension. Having rescued a number of Indians from certain death at the hands of the ape-men, Challenger is gratified by the grovelling obeisance they display towards the adventurers: ‘They may be undeveloped types’, he observes, ‘but their deportment in the presence of their superiors might be a lesson to some of our more advanced Europeans’.60 Challenger’s remarks point up the degree of anxiety among the British about a perceived falling off in the deference that they felt was due to them from their European competitors. This, in turn, resulted from a relative decline in Britain’s power and prestige in the decade before World War I.61 Conan Doyle’s message is clear. If the British wish to retain their pre-eminence, if they are not to find themselves at the sharp end of political and military evolution and wish to avoid the fate of the ape-men, they will have to draw on all of their instinctual resources to compete against and conquer their competitors, to fight harder than ever before to prove their superior civilisation. Barbarians, Conan Doyle points out, are not to be regarded as ‘objects of disgust…but as the models of a new imperial masculinity’.62 As Jacqueline Jaffe noted: ‘Only by learning to be more like Challenger can they hope to ensure their continuance.’63 Genocide, in this context, is less a moral issue than an arresting reminder of the contingent nature of national superiority, and a demonstration of what, in different, more hostile circumstances, their fate might yet be. The novel thus condemns the brutality of the colonial frontier while conceding its indispensable role in ensuring the survival and integrity of the nation. As Jaffe put it:

Doyle is not advocating a return to the bestiality of the ape-men. Rather, he is suggesting that as life in a post industrial, materialistic society has led to a spiritual and moral decline, a salutary look at a time when people had to fight to survive and life was worth fighting for would not come amiss. Challenger, the ape-man/scientist, is a perpetual reminder of qualities that the middle class had forgotten ever existed.64

What is most ironic about this muted call for an appreciation of cultural relativism is the manner in which Conan Doyle articulates it by drawing on and reinforcing a range of orthodox visions of Latin America. He grounds his call for cultural understanding in a discursive bedrock of prejudice and received opinion. Though at the outset of the novel Malone’s editor laments that the ‘big blank spaces on the map are all being filled in, and there’s no room for romance

60 Ibid., p. 169.
64 Ibid., p. 97.
anywhere’, the succeeding action demonstrates that where Latin America is concerned quite the contrary is the case. If elsewhere in the world the routine processes of discovery, exploration, mapping and settlement are held to be inimical to romance, in Latin America the reverse is in force. As Roxton points out to Malone, the more one fills in the blank spaces on the map of Latin America, the more one multiplies both the opportunities and the appetite for adventure: ‘if you take it right through from Darien to Fuego, it’s the grandest, richest, most wonderful bit of earth upon the planet...The more you know of that country, young fellah, the more you would understand that anythin’ was possible—anythin’.’ Anything might be possible, but what actually happens in Latin America is inevitable. The novel might pose some awkward questions about colonialism, but as a model of narrative imperialism it is hard to beat.

Conan Doyle’s Latin America is imagined and constructed purely as a means of addressing and resolving what were, for the British, determinedly domestic anxieties. As the British grappled with the moral, political and social burdens of imperialism, Conan Doyle employed Latin America to imagine the nation’s darkest fears, rehearse its guiltiest secrets, and exorcise its most shameful fantasies—to play out a final solution for the primitive peoples of the world. What the British most feared and desired—absolute power, what they could do with it, and what might happen to them were they to lose it—is given substance in the personal and political engagements played out on the plateau. While the anxieties that this depiction of Latin America addresses are resolved or shift focus, while the moral and social questions lose their relevance as the world changes, Conan Doyle’s portrait of Latin America as a landscape of bold polarities and brutal extremes, of entrenched antagonisms, conquest and subjection, degeneracy and cultivation, beasts and men, remains constant. It is this very constancy that has made it so useful to British writers, and has thus reinforced its stubborn unchangingness. Latin America’s reliable failure to develop, its comic petrification, furnishes a handy measure of how others have evolved. For Conan Doyle, the ossification of Latin America, its continual revisiting of irreducible antagonisms and the age-old struggles they breed, are less matters for moral or political condemnation than they are an indispensable, deep structure that enables their differing analyses of and responses to the perilous state of contemporary Britain.

65 Conan Doyle, *The Lost World and Other Thrilling Tales*, p. 15. In John Buchan’s *The Courts of the Morning*, Archie Roylance confesses that ‘he had always had a romance about [South America], and he understood that it was the only place which still held some geographical secrets’. Buchan, J. 1929, *The Courts of the Morning*, Thomas Nelson and Sons, London, p. 16.
66 Conan Doyle, *The Lost World and Other Thrilling Tales*, pp. 60–1.
Rethinking the Nation in the Chilean and Australian Bicentenaries

Irene Strodthoff

Abstract

Bicentenaries, as created and chosen historical moments, can be considered a space for reflection on the achievements and challenges of a nation and its collective project in a setting of contestations. This article argues that rethinking the nation and articulating the discourse of identity both in Chile and in Australia have become contentious within the respective bicentenaries because of issues of exclusion and inclusion in which the ‘white’ settlement associated winners with ‘white’ people and the defeated with indigenous peoples. Both located in the southern hemisphere, Australia and Chile share a past as former British and Spanish settler colonies, respectively, and they have therefore shown certain socio-historical similarities in regard to the nation-building project against the original indigenous population that have fractured the discourse of the nation.

Introduction

Bicentenaries are an appropriate framework within which to examine the nation as an unfinished project and as a unique experiment that attempts to give cohesion to its members. These commemorations challenge the nation with reference to tradition and continuity as well as certain ambiguities of mutable national identity in the midst of inevitable cultural tensions between the present and the past in a society that tends to be heterogeneous, controversial and the object of continuous debate. Usually conceived as commemorations of the beginning of the nation-building project, bicentenaries can also provide a suitable framework within which to discuss the achievements and challenges of a nation and its collective undertaking in a setting of contestations. To understand the nation’s capacity to integrate and articulate itself, it is necessary to examine these commemorations in terms of inclusion and exclusion processes as well as multifarious contradictions.

1 Not to be cited without the permission of the author. Email: <istr9460@uni.sydney.edu.au>
This article argues that rethinking the nation and articulating the discourse of identity both in Chile and in Australia have become contentious within the respective bicentenaries because of issues of exclusion and inclusion originating from the idea of imagining a ‘white’ nation, where the ‘white’ settlement associated winners with ‘white’ people and the defeated with indigenous peoples. Despite the fact that Latin América is not usually described as a ‘white-settler’ country, it shares common features with the English expression. This article aims to compare and deconstruct the discourse of the nation in the context of the Australian bicentenary in January 1988 and the Chilean bicentenary in September 2010.

This article situates the analysis within the ideas of nation and identity according to Benedict Anderson and Jorge Larraín. Anderson suggests that the nation is imagined as a community because, despite the fact that most members will never know each other, they still share a sense of communion in their minds. Larraín understands the idea of identity as a social construction that entails the identification of individuals with shared social categories, such as nationality or ethnicity, and consequently, he argues, ‘all personal identities are rooted in collective contexts culturally determined’. Therefore, if the sense of belonging to a group is not strong enough, the notion of identity might weaken.

Australia and Chile consider different historical starting points to commemorate their respective bicentenaries and, owing to their distinct social, cultural and historical processes, they have approached these chosen moments in a unique way. Along with Argentina, Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela, Chile celebrates the commencement of the independence process from Spain (18 September 1810)—a time when the nation-building process began to emerge. On the other hand, Australia’s two-hundredth anniversary is based on the arrival in 1788 of the First Fleet—11 ships transporting convicts and crew—and the starting point of British colonisation (26 January, officially known as Australia Day). In contradistinction with Chile, the Australian nation-building process began 90 years later, when the existing six British colonies became states and Federation was finally proclaimed in Australia in 1901. Both located in the southern hemisphere, Australia and Chile share a past as former British and Spanish

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2 The use of the stress (acento) on América is based on the original sense of the word in Spanish—‘América con acento’—described by Cherríe Moraga in ‘Art in América con acento’, in D. Taylor and J. Villegas (eds) 1994, Negotiating Performance: Gender, sexuality, and theatricality in Latin/o America, Duke University Press, Durham, NC.
5 Anderson, Imagined Communities, p. 6.
7 The Australian states and territories started to use the name Australia Day in 1935, but it was only in 1994 that they began to celebrate it as a public holiday.
settler colonies, respectively, and they have therefore shown certain socio-historical similarities in regard to the nation-building project against the original indigenous population (Aborigines and mainly Mapuches, respectively).\(^8\)

Despite remaining invisible for a long time, this situation began to change towards certain gestures of inclusion and rhetorical recognition with the increasing social mobilisation of the indigenous population both in Australia and in Chile in the context of more recent collective historical moments. While the Australian bicentenary was the appropriate framework for a sudden re-emergence of the Indigenous discourse, the advent of 500 years since the arrival of the Spaniards in the Americas in 1992 became the ‘necessary and appropriate context for the emergence of new indigenous identities, new discourses on ethnicity, new organisations and new movements’.\(^9\) The occurrence of indigenous movements in Latin América as well as the arrival of democracy in Chile in 1990 opened up a space for the re-emergence of the Mapuches within the imagined nation in terms of cultural identity and land rights in the lead-up to the Chilean bicentenary.\(^10\)

First, this article will analyse the nation-building process of both countries in a setting of exclusion and inclusion. Second, it will examine the complexities challenging the nation within a selected historical moment such as the bicentenary.

**Nation Building: A non-negotiated project**

Regarding the objective of becoming European colonies, the appropriation of land was the first confrontational issue between settlers/conquerors and indigenous peoples. Both the British and the Spanish—despite this being a more British notion—understood this appropriation in terms of ‘terra nullius’, where ‘unoccupied land remained the common property of mankind, until being put

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8 When British colonists arrived in 1788 in Australia, there were about 300 000 Aboriginal Australians divided among 500 tribes, each with their own dialect and culture: Broome, R. 1994, *Aboriginal Australians: Black response to white dominance, 1788–1980*, (Second edition), Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, p. 10. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008), the estimated resident Indigenous population is about 517 000 people, or 2.5 per cent of the total Australian population. When the Spanish conquerors started to arrive in Chile in 1536, the population of Mapuches—one group of the original indigenous inhabitants of central and southern Chile as well as southern Argentina—was nearly one million people: Bengoa, J. 1996, *Historia del pueblo Mapuche: Siglo XIX y XX*, (Fifth edition), Ediciones Sur, Santiago, p.15. According to the most recent census (2002), 4.6 per cent of the Chilean population (692 192 people) consider themselves to be members of an ethnic group. While the Mapuches represent 87.4 per cent of that total, other ethnic groups, in descending order, are the Aimara, Atacameño, Quechua, Rapa Nui, Colla, Alacaluf and Yámana. Despite these being distinct groups, I use the word Mapuches as an umbrella term since they are the most numerous indigenous population in Chile.

9 Bengoa, *La emergencia indígena en América latina*, [Author’s translation], p. 95.

10 The Chilean bicentenary took place in the midst of a hunger strike led by 34 Mapuches, who were seeking the abolishment of a polemic anti-terrorist law.
to use’. The European explorers believed that land could be freely taken if it was either unpopulated or inhabited by people who did not practice agriculture or change the land by constructing towns. Since land was the major object of occupation and the basis for setting up European societies, the ties between explorers and Aborigines (Australian Indigenous people) as well as Mapuches were developed in a binary and negative articulation of invaders and the invaded, and enemies as well as rivals. Both in Australia and in Chile, the appropriation of land by British explorers and Spanish conquerors was the origin of clashes with the native population and caused a negative articulation—a relationship based on dispossession and loss.

As appropriation of land did not involve any negotiation with the indigenous populations, the historical consequences of this moment of loss led to a context of exclusion. In Australia, Britain’s declaration of ownership over the continent excluded any treaty with the Aborigines and ignored any acknowledgment of native title. In Chile, as in other territories in Latin América, Spanish conquerors were determined—more than the appropriation of land as an isolated issue—to subjugate and expel the indigenous inhabitants. Therefore, the ideas of subjugation and expulsion brought historical tensions to the nation-building project and the discourse of the nation.

These historical tensions originated not only because of land, but also on account of the purpose of settlers and conquistadors to impose their own projects. Australia was seen as an ‘imperial artefact’—a result of the expansion of the British Empire with superstructures imposed from above that displaced Indigenous people. In this context, the Indigenous people were ‘almost completely peripheral’ to the colonisation project. Chile, as other countries in Latin América, was the result of a process of conquest, which imposed relations of domination and placed some in a ‘natural situation of inferiority to the others’. This relationship, based on imposition, both in Australia and in Chile has framed the nation-building project as a hegemonic narration with fractures where the original views became subordinated.

On account of this hegemonic narration and the perception of the nation as a ‘white’ project, the Aborigines and the Mapuches did not fit within the Australian

13 In mapudungun, the Mapuche language, ‘mapu’ means earth and ‘che’, people.
and the Chilean nation-building projects, respectively. They were seen as a different group—a threat to the objective of shaping national homogeneity. Aborigines were automatically excluded when Australia proclaimed the Federation in 1901 and imagined its destiny as a ‘white’ nation. Australian Aborigines did not fit into the label of ‘white Australia’. They were placed in the category of ‘aliens’—a non-white classification.\(^{19}\) In Anthony Moran’s view, this attempt by an emergent state to build an ‘ethnically homogenous nation’ provoked a situation in which Indigenous peoples were kept out of the nation and had nowhere else to go.\(^{20}\) In Chile, when the state proclaimed its sovereignty over the whole territory to build the nation during the second half of the nineteenth century, the Mapuches began to be excluded by a political and intellectual class that felt ‘awkward’ with their presence; they came to be seen as enemies of civilisation and a nuisance for progress.\(^{21}\) The attempt of forging a homogenised ‘white’ nation both in Chile and in Australia excluded the original indigenous population because they were not suited for this purpose.

In this objective of attaining national homogeneity in Australia, the Aborigines were supposed to disappear, so they were sent to remote places, or assimilated through explicit policies of intermarriage and cultural absorption, which, on the surface, appeared to be inclusion, but in reality tended to negate them. The invisibility of the Aborigines was driven to extremes and only in 1967, by a referendum, were they first recognised as citizens and counted as people.\(^{22}\) Assimilation was built on notions of egalitarianism, albeit those intentions were structured by a ‘settler-colonial relationship that assumed the disappearance of Aboriginality’.\(^{23}\) Aborigines were seen as an opposite to the hegemonic European discourse of settlement in which there was no room for difference. Absorption included a ‘naïve social engineering’ intended to change Aborigines into Europeans with black skins.\(^{24}\) Some governments, as in Western Australia and the Northern Territory, applied breeding policies through ‘interracial’ marriages during the 1930s and 1940s that evolved into cultural assimilation, whereby the Aborigines would replace their old ways with those of whites.\(^{25}\) Furthermore, these policies included taking Aboriginal children away from their parents to grow up in ‘white’ foster homes. These children are known

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21 Pinto, J. 2003, *La formación del estado y la nación, y el pueblo Mapuche: De la inclusión a la exclusión*, (Second edition), Ediciones de la Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos, Santiago, [Author’s translation], p. 119.
as the ‘Stolen Generations’. Through explicit policies of cultural absorption and imagining Aboriginal children as ‘white’ in Australia, the visibility of the Indigenous peoples was deliberatively negated and suppressed.

Similarly in Chile—albeit not through explicit interracial policies—the Mapuches were assimilated and negated through the *mestizaje*, the rather spontaneous mix that occurred between Spaniards and the indigenous population. *Mestizaje* simultaneously represents inclusion and exclusion within the nation-building project. It is discursively constructed around the symbolics of the original and certain future homogeneity in a continuous recreation; it reflects tension between equality and inequality, sameness and hierarchy. While inclusion is brought about by national homogenisation, exclusion is shaped through differentiation and racism. In Chile, since the Spanish conquerors did not bring women to the territory, *mestizaje* began almost on their arrival and became highly prevalent during the sixteenth century and over those that followed. Rather than an integrated mix, the Mapuches remained separate from this process. In this tension between sameness and difference, the Mapuches remained as those defined by difference. This version of *mestizaje* could not be perceived as an active cultural project of synthesis, but rather as one that highlighted negation. As opposed to Australia, where there were explicit initiatives to encourage interracial mixing, in Chile, *mestizaje* was an extended practice from the beginning. Within this context, rather than being included, even in a limited rhetorical sense, in the nation-building project, the Mapuches have remained apart and invisible.

**Land, Integration and Symbols: Challenging issues**

The question of land rights, as an object of inherited dispute between the European invaders and prior custodians of the land, has meant that neither the Aborigines in Australia nor the Mapuches in Chile found reasons to celebrate within the respective bicentenaries. In Australia, the March of Freedom, Justice and Hope in Sydney, supported by the National Coalition of Aboriginal Organisations, the Redfern Group and Reverend Charles Harris, represented a

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29 Waldman, G. 2004, ‘Chile: indígenas y mestizos negados’, *Política y Cultura*, vol. 21, [Author’s translation], p. 105.
public Aboriginal outcry for ‘land rights’ and ‘sovereignty’. The protest was organised against what they call Invasion Day (opposition to Australia Day), also known as Survival Day, because ‘if anything was to be celebrated it was 200 years of Indigenous survival’.\textsuperscript{30} Posters summarised their malaise: ‘White Australia has a black history—Don’t celebrate 1988.’\textsuperscript{31} The protest turned out to be the largest gathering since the arrival of the settlers and, in the long term, it demonstrated itself to be ‘the most significant Bicentenary event’.\textsuperscript{32} In Chile, representatives of the Mapuche people said they did not have anything to celebrate in the bicentenary. ‘I am afraid (we commemorate) 128 years of occupation’, historian Hernán Curiñir said while remembering the military defeat in 1881 and the later confinement of the Mapuches to small territories.\textsuperscript{33} On account of this exclusion issue and the strong feeling of defeat—clearly represented by indigenous peoples in words such as ‘invasion’, ‘occupation’ and ‘survival’—neither the Mapuches nor the Aborigines had reasons to celebrate during the Chilean and the Australian bicentenaries.

Although there have been initiatives towards the restitution of traditional lands both in Australia and in Chile, further gestures in Australia as well as practical results of land transferral in Chile have been shown to be controversial and limited. Only four years after the Australian bicentenary, a decision of the High Court changed the Australian land-title laws and overthrew the notion of \textit{terra nullius} (‘the land of no-one’), supporting the lawsuit of Eddie Mabo and the Meriam people who claimed ownership of their ancestral land in the Torres Strait.\textsuperscript{34} Although the \textit{Mabo} case represents a ‘dramatic example’ of ‘unassailable assumptions’ and precedent concerning Aboriginal land rights, the recognition of native title was ‘tightly circumscribed’ and the scope for more ambitious claims left unclear.\textsuperscript{35} In Chile, although the Corporación Nacional de Desarrollo Indígena (Conadi)—the official body in charge of indigenous affairs—has transferred 650 000 ha of land to the Mapuches since 1994, the indigenous communities that are recovering their territory face internal problems of distribution, understanding and communication, because both the leaders and the power structures have changed.\textsuperscript{36} The Australian bicentenary, however, came to be a platform that

introduced sensitivity to Aboriginal demands. The restitution of land has taken place within a scope of confined projections in Australia and unclear effective results in Chile especially in terms of depth and durability.

The reactions and protests originating from exclusion within the context of the Australian bicentenary sensitised the nation towards the Aborigines as a group and their claims, and opened up a path for further gestures of inclusion and reconciliation—albeit not enough to fix the notion of an inclusive nation. In Australia, the ongoing national, and at times divisive, debate on the settler/Indigenous relationship since the early 1990s has led to ‘spasms of guilt, avoidance and self-justification’ in the non-Indigenous population.37 Furthermore, these sentiments have had a significant influence on the development of a reconciliation movement that reached its peak in 2000 when thousands of Australians participated in walks for reconciliation in the major cities throughout the country.38 In 2008, the then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, delivered a government apology to the Stolen Generations. Warren Mundine, head of the Australian Indigenous Chamber of Commerce, said, however, that the apology does not mean that everything is going to be put right in Indigenous Australia: ‘We all knew that was never going to happen.’39 In spite of the increased visibility of Indigenous people on account of the Australian bicentenary and these inclusive gestures at official and community levels, the discourse of the nation remains fractured.

In Chile—albeit far from reconciliation gestures and in a different context—the advent of 500 years since the arrival of the Spaniards in the Americas in 1992 became an appropriate framework for the re-emergence of the indigenous identity and its claims to be part of a transnational and global phenomenon. Bengoa points out that the first cycle understood as ethnical identity reconstruction is ending. In a new phase, the indigenous peoples are leading countries (Evo Morales in Bolivia) or running Chilean municipalities, challenging a new indigenous citizenship, where to be a national citizen and an indigenous person does not cause a contradiction.40 Three Mapuche mayors can exemplify the previous concept: Adolfo Millabur, who was elected in the locality of Tirúa (1996), and Domingo Nancupil (2000) and Ricardo Tripainao (2004), who were elected in the locality of Puerto Saavedra. This has, however, been diluted over the past years because ‘the state considers that the municipalities where there is [an] absolute majority of indigenous population should be no different from

38 Ibid., p. 1018.
those without it’. Despite the fact that the discourse of ethnic identity is now visible through their own indigenous leaders in positions of power, the idea that indigenous peoples are able to be indigenous only if they take part in the conditions of being a national citizen is still strong.

In spite of these inclusive issues, the integration of the cultural and ethnic diversity of the indigenous has become a controversial matter in the context of bicentenaries. In Australia, rather than highlighting the success or failures of the Aboriginal demands during the bicentenary, their demonstrations were successful in terms of elevating their rights in the national consciousness of social imperatives, projecting their efforts beyond the boundaries, and forcing non-Aboriginal Australians to accept that the nature of their nation is ambiguous and contested. More recently, the leader of an Australian Indigenous community, Galarrwuy Yunupingu, a Gamatj man of the Yolngu people in the Northern Territory, said that the current policies of government must be adapted to conciliate ‘our two worlds’. In the context of the Chilean bicentenary, there were still pending issues in regard to the acceptance of the value of indigenous peoples within the imagined nation and its diversity. Society was interested in a rapid integration rather than in the value of their identity as a cultural asset for the nation. Indigenous peoples do not want to be seen, however, merely as an embellishment of national culture or an ethnic group. Both in Australia and in Chile, the integration of the indigenous population into the nation has become contentious since the acceptance of diversity clashes with the hegemonic view.

In terms of articulating the discourse of identity inclusively, neither Australia nor Chile arrived at their respective bicentenaries with an official constitutional recognition of their indigenous populations—representing a controversial matter that remains unresolved. In Ruiz’s opinion, as a bicentenary is a construction that originates from power, certain strategies and discourses exclude actors such as national minorities and the indigenous people, particularly in respect of a state that fails to recognise a pre-existent diversity in its construction. Former Australian Prime Minister John Howard’s promise in 2007 to amend the Constitution to recognise Aborigines, as well as the commitment for such acknowledgment given in 2008 by his successor, Kevin Rudd, ‘remains only

42 Turner, Making it National, p. 87.
In Chile, following a request from a group of congressmen, the government of President Sebastián Piñera decided to postpone the discussion of the indigenous peoples’ constitutional recognition project to meet the requirements of the International Labour Organisation’s 169 agreement. Furthermore, the werkén (messenger) of the Pepiukelén Mapuche community in the Región de los Lagos, Francisco Vera, said that the project has neither the support nor the approval of the indigenous communities. Within the context of rethinking the nation in their respective bicentenaries, neither Australia nor Chile has given formal constitutional recognition to the indigenous peoples—something that still fractures the discourse of national identity.

The official narration of the nation also became contested within the context of the Australian and the Chilean bicentenaries in terms of multiple appropriations of symbols and meanings emanating from the official construction that clashed with the original inhabitants or placed them in a marginal or rather an invisible position. In Australia, the initial conflict of how to understand the event was represented at the level of ‘possession of symbols, appropriateness of metaphors and veracity of images’. One of the issues discussed was whether or not the First Fleet re-enactment ships should fly the Aboriginal flag and whether it was legitimate to show Uluru—a sacred site for Aborigines and known by Europeans as Ayers Rock—as an Australian representative icon within the bicentenary advertising campaign (Celebration of a Nation). Despite the fact that the original inhabitants were rhetorically visible in the Chilean bicentennial symbols such as the bicentennial song, La fuerza de la libertad (The Strength of Freedom), and one of the bicentennial stamps, they were absent from the theme, ‘Celebrating What We Are’—a bicentennial poster that ignored people and diversity and metaphorically focused on the Andes Range, a geographical landmark. On account of the hegemonic official construction of bicentenaries, indigenous peoples became symbolically peripheral to the celebration.

The visibility of symbolic meanings associated with cultural identity, such as the indigenous flags both in the Australian and in the Chilean bicentenary, has been controversial, albeit in different contexts. Bengoa points out that culture becomes the only bastion for identity when independence is lost. In Larrain’s

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46 Yunupingu, ‘We need to find ways to meet the future with hope’.
50 Bengoa, Historia del pueblo Mapuche, p. 370.
perspective, identity is not only a question of cultural similarities, but also a matter of possessions and objects that can affect self-recognition and give a sense of belonging to a desired community.\textsuperscript{51} In Australia, the Aboriginal flag—associated with land rights—became the symbol in defiance of the bicentenary and the British occupation of land. More recently, it has been hoisted during public events such as the march for reconciliation in 2000, National Reconciliation Week in May and the anniversary in the Eddie Mabo case in June. One of the most controversial gestures took place when the sprinter Cathy Freeman defied the organisation of the 1994 Commonwealth Games in Canada and waved both the Aboriginal flag and the national Australian flag during her victory lap.\textsuperscript{52} The day prior to the Chilean bicentenary, a group from a movement called ‘Equality’ unfurled a Mapuche flag in opposition to the Chilean one in front of the government palace, albeit without hoisting it. During the Chilean bicentennial year, the Mayor of the city of Villarrica—Mapuche territory in the nineteenth century—authorised the hoisting of the Mapuche flag in front of the town hall on the occasion of the Indigenous Peoples Day, in June 2010.\textsuperscript{53} The General Controller of the Republic said that the Mapuche flag may be hoisted adjacent to the national flag in town halls if those symbols represent a ‘cultural, educational or artistic expression of the referred ethnicity’.\textsuperscript{54} The visibility of both the Aboriginal and the Mapuche flags—as symbols associated with cultural identity and land rights—becomes contentious in terms of equal representation of indigenous peoples who protest against the hegemonic construction of a national celebration and where the sense of belonging to the nation becomes very questionable.

\textbf{Conclusions}

As discussed above, modern society has not resolved its relationship with indigenous peoples. In the context of bicentenaries, as chosen historic moments, rethinking the nation becomes a useful exercise in understanding how the narration of identity emerges in terms of representation in the imagined community. Nowadays this representation is fractured on account of exclusion issues emanating from the colonial project of imagining the nation as a ‘white’ construction. The sudden emergence of Aboriginal claims during the Australian bicentenary and the reappropriation of an indigenous identity in the context

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\item \textsuperscript{51} Larraín, \textit{Identity and Modernity in Latin America}, p. 25.
\end{itemize}
of the Chilean bicentenary as part of the opposition against the five-hundredth anniversary of the arrival of Spaniards in the Americas can both be regarded as transnational phenomena that clash with the dominant discourse of the nation as they try to find new spaces within society.

The idea of representing two worlds in one nation, which followed the words of the Australian Indigenous community leader Galarrwuy Yunupingu, becomes contentious on account of inherited divisions that have fragmented the discourse of the nation. While the official reconstruction of the nation within the Australian and the Chilean bicentenaries tried to articulate a message of community, the indigenous discourse represented the gap between the invaders and the invaded and challenged the discourse of the nation.

The historical consequences of the foundational moment in terms of winners and defeated peoples both in Australia and in Chile have created a negative articulation within the idea of an imagined community. Land, as an object of appropriation and further disputation, as well as the imposition of the colonisation project carried out by conquistadors and settlers, established a complex relationship, whereby indigenous peoples became peripheral to the hegemonic project. Therefore, far from perceiving bicentenaries as a moment of celebration, indigenous peoples both in Australia and in Chile instead felt marginalised, leading them to protest or rather express their idea of self-recognition through symbols, such as the indigenous flag.

In a certain way, the Australian bicentenary became the starting point towards a collective awareness of Indigenous peoples, as Australians adopted further gestures of inclusion in the years that followed. Within the context of the Chilean bicentenary, however, it might be too soon to evaluate whether or not this chosen moment represented a change of collective attitude towards the Mapuches in terms of visibility. Perhaps this commemoration will not alter the image of indigenous peoples in a society with unresolved cultural tensions in terms of race, class and power. The nation is and will be an unfinished project that should demonstrate its capacity for providing cohesion to its members in a new context. The question that will likely be asked is how much of a change the nation will be able to demonstrate towards inclusion in the next tercentenary.
A Bolivarian People: Identity politics in Hugo Chávez’s Venezuela

R. Guy Emerson

Abstract

The 1998 electoral success of Hugo Chávez brought about a dramatic shift in Venezuelan identity. While rhetorically inclusive at first glance, references to the ‘Venezuelan people’ would not speak to all Venezuelans. Rather, the ‘people’ would come to denote a previously marginalised segment of society now at the centre of Venezuelan political life. More than a simple reorientation in political focus, this shift in the politics of Venezuelan identity sends out a set of messages that acts as a symbolic boundary to frame, limit and domesticate an official ‘Bolivarian’ identity. It is the construction of this new official identity assembled, in part, from the ruins of the previous order that concerns this article.

A Bolivarian People: Identity politics in Hugo Chávez’s Venezuela

Hugo Chávez Frías arrived at the Miraflores Presidential Palace as the fifty-second President of the Republic of Venezuela, promising to dramatically refashion political life. Coming to the presidency during a period of institutional decay and popular exhaustion with traditional political parties, Chávez and his Bolivarian Revolution stood upon the ruins of the Punto Fijo system pledging to consign political corruption and economic hardship to the past. Foremost in the former Lieutenant Colonel’s message was the promise to return dignity to both the nation and its people. On the back of this narrative of national renewal began a period of dramatic transformation. The former constitution was consigned to the scrap heap, taking with it the country’s bicameral legislative system, while both the national flag and its emblem were modified to affect symbolic change. Not even the name of the country was left untouched, with the South American state becoming the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Beyond these structural and symbolic changes, however, the new Chávez administration would also affect a shift in Venezuelan identity. President Chávez’s inaugural address in 1999 pointed to the dimensions of this shift: ‘Today, the second of February
1999, arrives the hour of the Venezuelan people.\textsuperscript{1} While seemingly inclusive at first glance, the phrase ‘Venezuelan people’ would not refer to all Venezuelans. Rather, the ‘people’ denotes a previously marginalised segment of society now at the centre of Venezuelan political life. More than a simple reorientation in political focus, however, Chávez would speak directly to the concerns of the previously marginalised, and later come to superimpose their history over that of the nation. It is specifically this transformation in the official state identity that concerns this article.

Beyond simply trading on the increased inequality that the poor majority faced in the lead-up to the 1998 poll, analysis below takes a broader view of the shift in identity that explores the structural underpinning of Chávez’s language as well as the boundaries within which a new official ‘Bolivarian’ identity operates. It does so by examining the political and historical parameters that greeted Chávez upon his arrival at the presidency and what effect his reading of these factors had on forging a new official identity. How does the Chávez reading of his failed \textit{coup d’état} attempt in 1992, for example, serve to reinforce both the righteousness of the ‘people’ and the corruption of the \textit{ancien régime}? A focus on the materiality of Chávez’s discourse asks how, having made an investment in an unjust account of the Venezuelan past, he is then able to draw dividends on these representations so as to solidify calls for change and call forth a ‘Bolivarian people’. Accordingly, the analysis below highlights how Chávez works within these structures to promote a particular reading of events—past, present and future—and to sponsor a particular Bolivarian identity. In so doing, it provides an insight into how the symbols, rules, concepts, categories, and meanings elaborated within Bolivarianism shape how the Chávez administration constructs and interprets its people and its world.

\textbf{Understanding the Shift in the Politics of Identity: From a maligned people to a Bolivarian people}

Explanations of the shift in Venezuelan identity tend to focus on the President himself and his style of leadership. Criticism of Chávez, who is portrayed as a populist, and of his divisive manipulation of social discontent for political gain is generally followed by references to the antagonism he generates through Manichean representations both at home and abroad.\textsuperscript{2} Chávez has developed a politics of inequality, so the argument goes, that mirrors Venezuela’s social and economic cleavages between rich and poor, and therefore exacerbates the

\footnote{1 Cited in Moreno, M. A. 2008, \textit{Metaphors in Hugo Chavez’s Political Discourse: Conceptualizing nation, revolution, and opposition}, The City University of New York, NY, p. 1.}

already polarised identities within the South American nation. The Bolivarian leader and his United Socialist Party of Venezuela emphasise social discontent so as to outmanoeuvre other parties who are unable or unwilling to adapt to the new socio-political realities. Moreover, the Bolivarian Revolution is often portrayed as a movement in reaction to past injustices, with the confrontation between rich and poor becoming a ‘moral and ethical struggle between el pueblo (the people) and the oligarchy’. Honest people, positioned at one end of the spectrum, are in open confrontation with the corrupt elites at the other. While such antagonisms exist in Chávez’s Venezuela (and indeed precede his administration), conflating this animosity with a new ‘Bolivarian’ identity is problematic.

Frequent references to a corrupt oligarchy and a glorious people make it tempting to attribute the shift in identity to a populist style of antagonistic leadership. Contributing to such a view is the continued exclusion of a historically threatening oligarchy. The oligarchy was responsible for the failed 11 April 2002 coup d’état attempt to overthrow his government, Chávez argues, while at the same time they threaten social reforms, as they want to ‘turn off, alter the course or neutralise change’ within the Bolivarian Revolution. Bolivarianism—committed to overcoming inequality and restoring justice—is placed in contrast to the corrupt, exploitative oligarchy intent on maintaining their privilege. Undoubtedly, elements of this narrative influence the ideas and identities within Venezuela. Antagonism between el pueblo and la oligarquía is not, however, the basis for the shift in Venezuelan identity. As is demonstrated below, the simple pueblo/oligarquía binary is not capable of authoring identity and difference. Rather, the new identity is multi-layered and depends on a broader narrative rather than its simplest binary part. Accordingly, this article suggests that a new appreciation of official Venezuelan identity is needed. In so doing, it argues that it is as much an understanding of how the socio-cultural and politico-historical environments are themselves discursively represented as it is the pueblo/oligarquía binary that underpins a new identity and gives Bolivarianism its symbolic boundary.

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A Breakdown in the Previous Identity

The construction of a new ‘Bolivarian’ identity is made possible by a collapse in the previous state narrative of unity and progress. For most of the twentieth century, the promise of modernity served as a powerful narrative to unite Venezuelan society. The Punto Fijo pact signed in 1958 by the three principal political parties enshrined a modernising state at the centre of Venezuelan development.\(^9\) Designed to lift the South American nation from its economic and social backwardness, the Punto Fijo state would reconcile the complex and often opposing tendencies between a powerful minority and a poor majority.\(^10\) Rómulo Betancourt, a key architect of Punto Fijo, argued that the modernising state would mediate between the poorer labouring and landless classes, and a ‘parasitic elite’ that previously had enriched ‘themselves at the public expense through political favouritism’.\(^11\) The placement of the state at the head of the march towards progress served as a coherent and unifying message that claimed to benefit all Venezuelans by relegating exploitation to the past. High levels of revenue derived from oil earnings enabled the Venezuelan state to create an exceptionally sheltered domestic space ‘fertile for cultivating hierarchical alliances and weaving illusions of social harmony’.\(^12\) Increases in social spending maintained the confidence of the majority and enabled the state to channel and coopt popular movements away from revolutionary or radical demands. Literacy rates increased from 51 per cent of the population in 1950 to 88.1 per cent in 1981, while Venezuelan workers benefited from some of the highest wages and the most heavily protected labour market in Latin America.\(^13\) Similarly, business interests were gradually absorbed into the state apparatus, as the upper classes used their direct access to policy makers and petroleum-generated rents to pressure for the continued distribution of wealth to certain sectors of the economy that would, in turn, underpin pro-business development policies.\(^14\)

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\(^9\) In addition to the involvement of Acción Democrática (AD), Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (COPEI) and Unión Republicana Democrática (URD), the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV) also had popular support as a modernising force. They were, however, explicitly excluded from the Punto Fijo pact—a notable omission given their role against the dictatorship of General Marcos Pérez Jiménez. For more, see Ellner, S. 2008, Rethinking Venezuelan Politics: Class, conflict, and the Chávez phenomenon, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colo.


\(^13\) Roberts, ‘Social correlates of party system demise and populist resurgence in Venezuela’, p. 47.

Within this environment, class cleavages gradually eroded as the Punto Fijo political system allowed both Acción Democrática (AD) and Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (COPEI) to develop into multi-class, catchall electoral organisations. An array of policy initiatives and institutions was organised along party lines—from beauty contests and choral societies to trade unions and professional groups—all designed to control societal demands. The success in uniting its peoples saw the Venezuelan state labelled ‘exceptional’ for its high levels of stability despite the ongoing political and social turbulence throughout the rest of Latin America. By the 1980s, however, limits to both Venezuelan stability and the belief in unified progress began to appear.

Amid a deteriorating economic outlook, the 1988 presidential campaign saw former President Carlos Andrés Pérez promise to maintain the wealth and social prosperity associated with the modernising state. Presiding over the 1974 oil boom in his previous term, Pérez incarnated the myth of oil wealth and progress like no other president in Venezuelan history. Traversing the country during the 1988 election campaign with the slogans of ‘the man with energy’ and ‘the man who really walks’, Pérez reinforced popular beliefs that progress would continue despite the unfavourable economic landscape. Fomenting perceptions of a leader willing to meet popular demands, President Pérez, during his inauguration celebrations, called on debtor nations to lobby against the policies of international banks and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Calling for a 50 per cent devaluation of Latin American debt, the Venezuelan President positioned his country as a leader of Latin American interests and their battle against oppressive international financial institutions. Like Betancourt before him, Pérez placed international exploitation at the forefront of his political narrative. While Betancourt had bemoaned ‘the exploitation of our large natural resources’ and spoke of defending ‘national industry…on behalf of all the people in order to promote national development’, Pérez offered a similar message in relation to debt. With Venezuela one of the World Bank’s top-20 ‘highly indebted nations’, Pérez labelled the bank’s economists ‘genocide

20 Coronil and Skurski, ‘Dismembering and remembering the nation’, p. 295.
22 Coronil, The Magical State, p. 96.
workers in the pay of economic totalitarianism' and described IMF prescriptions as ‘la bomba solo-mata-gente’ (the bomb that only kills people). A vote for Pérez thus seemed to reinforce the state’s position between what Betancourt had defined as the poorer classes and a ‘parasitic elite’, in addition to reaffirming the previous redistributive measures of a paternalistic state. Such expectations, however, were short-lived.

In what later became known as ‘el gran viraje’ (the great turnaround), within a month of his inauguration, President Pérez signed a letter of intent with the IMF and announced his ‘paquete económico’ of macroeconomic stabilisation that promoted cuts in social spending, trade liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation. As a consequence of the Pérez reform, the price of subsidised petrol increased immediately by 100 per cent, the bolívar saw an immediate 170 per cent devaluation as a result of being floated, while interest rates were freed and subsequently moved from 13 to 40 per cent. Faced with an immediate increase in food and transport costs, el paquete met with a series of urban protests in 17 cities, collectively known as the Caracazo uprising, which, according to official counts, left 287 people dead, although other sources claim the toll to be as high as 5000. Pérez’s policy about-face coincided with a shift in official rhetoric. The previous talk of independence from foreign domination was replaced with the need to meet IMF prescriptions and conform to austerity measures now described as ‘painful but inevitable’. Pérez shattered the myth of progress by disavowing the oil-protected past as an irrational fantasy and instead turned to the free market as the rational means of achieving progress.

More than a simple reorientation in message, however, the Venezuelan President would recast the relationship between the state and the poor majority. Just as previous governments had labelled those opposed to their policy prescriptions as impediments to modernisation, so too did Pérez. In contrast with Betancourt’s talk of a ‘parasitic elite’, however, Pérez was distinguished from his predecessors in that his accusations identified the poor majority as obstacles to progress. In response to the protests, President Pérez sent in the armed forces and suspended

24 More specifically, Pérez’s ‘paquete económico’ can be split into two parts: the short-term stabilisation measures implemented immediately, and the more medium-term structural reforms meant to permanently reverse the old development strategy. Short-term measures unified all exchange rates and floated the bolívar. Medium-term structural reforms sought to attack every area of government activity. Distortions in the foreign-trade regimes were abolished, all but a few sectors were opened up to private investment, and government enterprises were privatised, while others were significantly restructured to improve delivery of social services. Government borrowing was to be permanently limited, while subsidies for the agricultural sector were removed.
civil liberties, claiming ‘we must safeguard the right to peace and safeguard the property of our nation’, and told the audience in his televised address that ‘this will be in your benefit’.\(^{28}\) Clearly directing his words to the economically well off, Pérez had shifted the state from its position at the centre of Venezuelan society between rich and poor. In a series of attacks, Pérez accused protestors of being ‘committed to violence and willing to take advantage of difficult times’.\(^{29}\) These attacks intensified throughout the week, with the President describing protestors as ‘phantasmagorical remnants of subversives [who] are still not convinced this is a democratic country’.\(^{30}\) The depiction of popular sectors as out of control ‘subversives’ not only reinforced a polarising discourse, but also offered the state a justification for its use of force.\(^{31}\) The effect of the bloody crackdown, however, was to further shake assumptions concerning paternalistic state–society relations and reinforce perceptions of a popular class inhibiting the forces of modernity represented by the state and the more prosperous classes. Indeed, perceptions among the upper classes that protestors threatened private property saw the very wealthy leave the country in their private jets, while sectors of the middle class organised armed defence groups to protect their property.\(^{32}\) The Caracazo uprising brought to the fore the social cleavages that the state—no longer able to unite all Venezuelans in the march to modernity—had previously absorbed.\(^{33}\)

With the official reading of the Caracazo differing from the claims of a ‘massacre’ by the popular classes, both the legitimacy of the state and its narrative of unity in modernisation came into question. As a consequence of state action, the poor majority no longer identified themselves within the official narrative. Far from becoming silent, however, the popular classes appropriated their exclusion and began to create their own counter-narrative. Depicted as an impediment to progress, the newly maligned openly confronted their role within Venezuelan society, crying foul at the silencing and manipulation of their demands. Shouts of ‘we are no longer a passive pueblo’ became common, while ‘el pueblo está bravo’ (the people are brave/angry) was scrawled across walls and repeated by protesters.\(^{34}\) Appropriating the official signs of nationhood, protesters sang the opening line of the national anthem: ‘Gloria al bravo pueblo que el yugo lanzo’

\(^{28}\) Cited in Simon, ‘100 said dead in riots’.
\(^{29}\) Cited in ibid.
\(^{31}\) Coronil and Skurski, ‘Dismembering and remembering the nation’, p. 327.
\(^{33}\) At the time, the Caracazo constituted the largest and most repressed uprising that modern Latin America had seen. For an excellent analysis of the Venezuelan setting, see Coronil and Skurski (‘Dismembering and remembering the nation’), while for a careful comparative analysis of protests in Latin America against debt-related austerity programs, see Walton, J. 1989, ‘Debt, protest and the state in Latin America’, in S. Eckstein (ed.), Power and Popular Protest, University of California Press, Berkeley.
\(^{34}\) Coronil and Skurski, ‘Dismembering and remembering the nation’, p. 318.
(glory to the brave and angry people who threw off their yoke). State repression not only shattered the myth of unified progress, but also opened up new avenues for unexpected meanings and practices to come together in novel ways.\(^{35}\)

By self-ascribing themselves as the brave people of *Gloria al Bravo Pueblo* (the national anthem), those officially maligned as ‘phantasmagorical subversives’ claimed to be representative of the legitimate people of the nation. Although state identities are always in negotiation, this rupture called into question the official identity of Venezuelans as a united people. Indeed, the marginalisation of the popular classes after the *Caracazo* would not only place in contradistinction rival identity claims over who were the authentic representatives of the nation, but it would also juxtapose rival interpretations of the events of February 1989. Claims of a ‘popular uprising’ and a ‘massacre’ interacted with official assertions that neutrally labelled the conflict ‘27-F’ and ‘the events’.\(^{36}\) While it would ultimately take 10 years, Hugo Chávez would best acknowledge this rupture and place his reading of Venezuela and its people on the national stage.

**The Politics of Identity**

The socio-political setting of an exhausted political and economic model offered Hugo Chávez a receptive environment in which to develop his political message. While Pérez ostracised the popular classes through his portrayal of the *Caracazo* uprising, Chávez would place the formerly maligned at the centre of his political narrative. Indeed, Pérez’s formerly ‘phantasmagorical’ subversives would become the authentic Venezuelan ‘people’ and, in the process, be converted into the subjects of the nation rather than those previously excluded. It is this placement of the popular classes at the heart of political life that underpins the new official ‘Bolivarian’ identity promoted by Chávez. Central to this process is a historically contingent narrative that placed the Bolivarian leader’s own political struggle alongside that of the previously maligned.

Described by Hugo Chávez as a ‘massacre’ and a ‘savage repression’ that ‘marked my generation’, the *Caracazo* is represented as the foundational myth of the Bolivarian Revolution, as it launched a desire amongst members of Chávez’s *Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200* (MBR-200) to join the people in their opposition to the state.\(^{37}\) From that point onwards, he argues, MBR-200 could ‘no longer be the guardians of a genocidal regime’.\(^{38}\) Positioning his own political trajectory within the popular discontent generated by the *Caracazo*, the Bolivarian leader claims that the 1989 uprising acted as a catalyst for a series

\(^{35}\) Ibid., pp. 289–90.  
\(^{36}\) Ibid., p. 311.  
\(^{38}\) Cited in ibid.
of discussions within MBR-200 about how to overcome the corrupt Punto Fijo system. The outcome of these discussions was a coup d'état in 1992 launched against the Pérez government. More than a simple coup, however, Chávez claimed that if successful, he would gain popular legitimacy by restoring power to the people via a constituent assembly.\textsuperscript{39} While the coup ended in failure, Chávez has since positioned the events of 1992 within a larger narrative that picks up on the popular resentment of the Caracazo. The actions of 4 February 1992, he claims, are representative of the same revolutionary zeal that the people demonstrated some three years earlier. This shared struggle for change was encapsulated in two words: ‘por ahora.’ Making a television appearance to call on his co-conspirators to lay down their arms after the failed coup attempt, the then Lieutenant Colonel told viewers that his objectives had not been met ‘por ahora’ (for now). Stirring popular sentiment that the struggle had only begun, ‘por ahora’ has since been historicised as a popular rallying cry for the aspirations set loose by the Caracazo. By linking the fortunes of his political trajectory with that of the ‘phantasmagorical’ subversives, Chávez, in his assent to power, was to represent the arrival of the previously marginalised at the centre of Venezuelan political life.

More than aligning his political history with that of the poorer classes, Chávez specifically traded on popular discontent with the Punto Fijo system. Perceived as responsible for declining living standards, official state institutions could no longer contain popular demands or channel protest through less-disruptive forms of mobilisation, such as marches or legal strikes.\textsuperscript{40} Between 1991 and 1994, the frequency and manner in which Venezuelans took to the streets changed significantly. Protest as a tactic was now used by indigenous communities, street vendors, retired workmen, oil workers, policemen, doctors, nurses and teachers in state schools, in addition to the unemployed, local residents, students and public transport drivers.\textsuperscript{41} Violent protests peaked between 1991 and 1993 during the Pérez government and again between 1995 and 1996 amid a second wave of economic austerity measures referred to as ‘la Agenda Venezuela’.\textsuperscript{42} Before the Caracazo, confrontational protests accounted for less than one-quarter of the total protests. Subsequently, however, this figure rose to average about one-third for the 1990s and reached 43 per cent in the second half of that decade.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41} López-Mayo, ‘Venezuela after the Caracazo’, p. 213.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 100.
Chávez’s language in the lead-up to the 1998 poll spoke directly to these frustrations. Denouncing the old system as ‘not defending democracy…but rather] trying to defend their privileges’, Chávez promoted a collective sense of injustice by likening the Punto Fijo system to a ‘gangrenous politics’, a corrupt system ‘encrusted right to the marrow’. Extending the illness metaphor, he claimed that Punto Fijo was ‘the most terrible cancer that we have…[in] the body of the Republic’. This perceived exhaustion of the political system was reflected by an increase in abstention rates for presidential elections from traditional levels of about 10 per cent to 18 and 39.8 per cent in 1988 and 1993 respectively. Capitalising on such a setting, Chávez maintained that only the return of the ‘people’ to the heart of Venezuelan politics would arrest this decline: ‘we are going to encourage, to push for and to reinforce solidarity in the streets, with the people, through the calling of elections for a national constituent assembly in order to redefine the fundamental base of the republic that came from below.’

Which People? Limits to a shift in the politics of identity

Far from speaking to all Venezuelans, the Bolivarian leader, in calling upon the ‘people’, does not refer to a civil society of legal equals who share a common national identity. Rather, he depicts el pueblo as the poor majority of Venezuelans who live at the margins of society. Viewed with this objective in mind, Chávez’s references to el pueblo are similar to the ‘demos’ outlined by Jacques Rancière. In each case, the ‘people’ are not an ontological whole, but rather are exposed as an outcast group previously excluded in a given order. Chávez affects a constitutive split within the term ‘people’, differentiating between what Rancière calls a populus and plebs—the whole populace and a maligned part. Chávez’s usage of the ‘people’ thus seeks to represent all groups that were previously marginalised.

45 Cited in ibid., p. 319.
by the state. Moreover, by evoking the previously marginalised through his usage of the term ‘people’, Chávez attempts to appropriate their perspective and expand it to the entire populace. That is, although el pueblo represents the plebs, Chávez makes it reflective of the populus. ‘I feel myself President for all’, Chávez stated on the third anniversary of his 1998 electoral triumph: ‘this revolution is for all, but especially for you the poor, those that were left unprotected during much of the time and were marginalised.’ As already noted, however, this reorientation is not a result of the Venezuelan President alone. During the Caracazo uprising, Pérez’s ‘phantasmagorical subversives’ claimed themselves as the legitimate people of the nation. It is this appropriation, and later Chávez’s acknowledgment of the ‘people’ on the national political plain, which demonstrates the shift in the politics of identity.

Although highlighting the placement of the formerly maligned masses at the centre of Chávez’s political project, this shift, of itself, is not enough to constitute a new Venezuelan identity. Neither the Caracazo nor Chávez’s electoral success acted as a singular foundational moment of rupture whereby a new political subjectivity was created. The shift in focus was only the first constitutive step in the production of a new identity. As it stands, Chávez’s language constitutes a political subjectivity (the ‘people’); however, the ideas and demands of the formerly maligned are varied and lack the unity required to produce the new identity. In order for the new ‘Bolivarian’ identity to have any resonance amongst the polity, references to the ‘people’ must carry a unifying logic that speaks to, and represents, the diverse ideas and demands of the formerly maligned. It needs to interlock the various ideas and frustrations launched by the Caracazo and the decadence of Punto Fijo, and reorganise them in a harmonious way, so that to refer to one issue comes to evoke another. To speak of issues relating to housing must also be to evoke concerns over health, education, landownership, social inequalities and so forth. More than material themes, it must also encompass the varied frustrations, ideas, symbols, beliefs and narratives, and re-aggregate them within an official ‘Bolivarian’ narrative. The resonance of Chávez’s language thus becomes temporally contingent on speaking to the (varied) future aspirations of the ‘people’.

While acknowledging the production of unity, this is not to suggest that a new official ‘Bolivarian’ identity is a relatively harmonious set of parts that function smoothly. Rather, its coherence is dependent on blocking and reorganising

certain ideas, symbols, beliefs and narratives. Moreover, the subjectivity of a given social agent (or more precarious still, of a social collective) can never be finally established as it is provisionally and often precariously constituted of multiple overlapping identities, enabling a plethora of possible constructions, and myriad intertwining subjectivities. Far from disabling an exploration of identity construction, however, to acknowledge this fragility is to do two things. First, rather than focusing on the contingent nature of identity and its multiple overlapping elements, analysis below centres on one dominant (official Chávez) reading of identity and its attempts to codify what it means to be Bolivarian. In so doing, the point is not to examine the veracity of the official reading, but to explore its specific elements and their attempts to construct a stable identity. More than just a superficial reading, however, it looks at how specific narratives interact so as to discern both the boundaries they configure and what possibilities they enable. Second, it is to recognise that the construction of identity is ongoing and can take multiple forms. Be it a reading of the Caracazo that elicits a brave, angry people or commentary on a fraudulent state that stands in relief with a repressed, marginalised populace, the articulation of a Bolivarian identity is ongoing and multidimensional. The ‘people’, as representatives of a ‘Bolivarian identity’, become performative subjects that are continuously invoked in Chávez’s discourse, be it through a policy position or a particular political narrative. In this sense, the ‘Bolivarian people’ are not some pre-existing sociological category but rather come into being through Chávez’s discourse as a formerly outcast group now rightfully taking their place at the centre of Venezuelan society. The remainder of this analysis explores this reorientation and the construction of a Bolivarian identity through an analysis of Chávez’s political narrative.

The Production of a Bolivarian Identity

While analysis below centres on Chávez’s attempts to speak to and represent the diverse ideas and demands of the formerly maligned, this does not mean that the Venezuelan leader has carte blanche to construct a Bolivarian people. Rather, to be of value, Chávez’s statements must not only speak to the experiences of the people, they must also fit within a series of expectations that is temporally

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56 Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, p. 66.
contingent on a common understanding of the past and, also, the future. Further to the already mentioned message of an unjust (recent) past associated with the Punto Fijo system, Chávez speaks of a revolutionary (distant) past and a hopeful future. It is through this temporal division that the central themes of past injustice, a return of dignity and ultimate emancipation are elaborated so as to codify a Bolivarian reading of Venezuela and its official identity.

A (Recent) Past of Injustice and the Rise of a Bolivarian People

Although depictions of an unjust past underpin the shift in the politics of identity by placing the previously maligned at the centre of political life, this message also generates a discourse of blame. Just as the party Acción Democrática was able to claim itself as ‘el partido del pueblo’ (the party of the people) in opposition to the oppressive regime of General Isaías Medina Angarita, the Bolivarian leader constructs a similar representation of himself and his party today. Be it the oligarchy or the Punto Fijo system itself, this politico-economic elite is placed in opposition to the interests of the ‘people’ and is blamed for the country’s failure to achieve its potential. They were responsible for robbing the nation’s wealth and for steering the country away from its glorious destiny.58

More than eliciting the two basic identity claims of the present (the ‘people’ versus the ‘oligarchy’), a blame discourse also conveys a sense of righteous indignation that clarifies the meaning associated with each subjectivity. It reinforces a conviction amongst the ‘people’ of their virtue in contrast with the absolute corruption of those before them. To this extent, the public performance of shaming acts as a mechanism through which to build solidarity around a new Bolivarian identity.59 Not only are the ‘people’ morally superior to the oligarchic elite, the difference between the two is represented as dangerous. The Chávez narrative explicitly feeds into the supposed risk associated with the economic and political elite by emphasising the traumatic history of the Caracazo as a ‘massacre’ (rather than as ‘27-F’ or ‘the events’) and by fuelling common perceptions of rampant corruption and the pain caused by widespread and endemic poverty. The blame discourse thus codifies the interpretation of Venezuelan history, whereby any ambiguity in the reading of the Caracazo, for example, is easily clarified as a ‘savage repression’ by a ‘genocidal regime’.60

Similarly, Chávez’s failed coup attempt is easily portrayed as an attack against a corrupt state in the name of a righteous people.

58 This point was initially made in relation to the most recent debt crisis in Argentina, by Armony, A. C. and Armony, V. 2005, ‘Indictments, myths, and citizen mobilization in Argentina: a discourse analysis’, Latin American Politics and Society, vol. 47, no. 4, p. 44.
Although such a setting gave Chávez’s claims of a decadent state greater resonance, these sentiments were already common within the South American nation. La paradoja venezolana—the Venezuelan paradox—is a case in point. Unable to explain the contradiction of so much wealth being generated by oil rents amid so much poverty, the indignant citizen reasoned that theft by governing elites was the only explanation for this paradox.\(^{61}\) La paradoja not only reinforced the distinction between the people and the elite, it expanded this division to include an ethical struggle whereby the exploitative oligarchic forces needed to be collectively overcome.\(^ {62}\)

While Chávez’s narrative of injustice feeds into these concerns, he also offers a hopeful vision of the future. A shameful, corrupt past is recognised so that the dignity of the people can now be restored. Placed against previous injustice, the official narrative of returning dignity to the nation enables Venezuelans to become aware of their inglorious (recent) past, and empowered by its new role in the creation of a just and dignified era: ‘Venezuela will be great again, it is on its way towards greatness. Venezuela will be glorious again, it is lifting the flags of glory, the glory of the people, the hope of the people.’\(^ {63}\) The ‘people’ are at once conscious of how weak they have been and of how strong they could be thanks to the Bolivarian Revolution. Chávez himself gives voice to these expectations: ‘the most important thing that Venezuela can have today is not a man, but a conscious people, you conscious of what is happening, awake, conscious, marching.’\(^ {64}\) Moreover, by returning dignity to the ‘people’, so the argument goes, no longer will they be subservient to the politico-economic elite. ‘We the Bolivarians, we the revolutionaries, we are not afraid of any threats by any oligarch no matter how rich or powerful.’\(^ {65}\) The appeal of the Chávez narrative, beyond mere antagonism directed towards the elite, comes from its ability to both recognise and (re)construct the frustrations and aspirations felt by the formerly maltreated. A Bolivarian people are a glorious people who require no external inspiration—nor ought they be subordinate to anyone.\(^ {66}\) Rather, they will be the inspiration for others. ‘Bolivarianism is not only a thesis for Venezuela. We, with much humility, propose it for the world, especially to the

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\(^ {63}\) Chávez cited in Moreno, ‘Metaphors in Hugo Chavez’s political discourse’, p. 115.

\(^ {64}\) Cited in Zúquete, ‘The missionary politics of Hugo Chávez’, p. 103.

\(^ {65}\) Cited in ibid., p. 100.

\(^ {66}\) This point was initially made in relation to the politics of debt in Peru by Weber, C. 1990, ‘Representing debt: Peruvian Presidents Belaunde’s and Garcia’s reading/writing of Peruvian debt’, *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 3, p. 361.
Latin American and Caribbean world, it is Our America.’⁶⁷ This allusion to ‘Our America’ and its author, the Cuban revolutionary figure José Martí, points to the second temporal dimension in Chávez’s narrative: a distant, revolutionary past.

A (Distant) Revolutionary Past and the People’s Emancipation

More than any of his predecessors, Chávez often invokes historical figures and events when surveying the contemporary political landscape. The ideals of the War of Independence that liberated Venezuela from Spain, for example, are replayed today for new emancipatory purposes.⁶⁸ Evoking the Federal Wars (1859–63) in the lead-up to the 2004 elections to recall his presidency, Chávez equated the ‘No’ campaign with the Battle of Santa Inés of 1859. In this battle, General Ezequiel Zamora used tactical retreats (just as Chávez utilised the recall elections) to draw his conservative enemies into a strategic trap.⁶⁹ Similarly, present-day policies are named after historical figures with the effect of reinforcing a connection with the revolutionary past. Social-welfare and education programs are named after figures such as Ezequiel Zamora (for land reform), Simón Robinson (a pseudonym for Simón Rodríguez; for literacy), José Félix Ribas (another figure in the fight for Venezuelan independence; for education) and Guaicapuro (an indigenous anti-colonial resistance leader; for indigenous rights).⁷⁰

The synthesis between the past and present is more than a static invention of tradition. By isolating and reifying particular elements of Venezuelan history, Chávez is also able to naturalise both the subjectivities (‘people’ versus the elite) and the narratives (returning dignity) within his political discourse. Evoking a sense of continuity among the subject positions of the two epochs, Chávez noted that ‘[t]he oligarchy of today are the same as yesterday [only] with different faces and names and the Bolivarians of today are the same as yesterday with different faces and names’.⁷¹ Placing the antagonistic positions of the ‘people’ and the ‘elite’ in a historical context, Chávez is able to naturalise this classification of Venezuelan society by acknowledging its existence in the past. ‘You know that Bolivar was betrayed by the predatory oligarchy, this same oligarchy that now…

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threatens in a ridiculous manner this revolutionary government.’

Not only was the nation constructed in a struggle against an oligarchy, Chávez argues, these elites have always acted at the expense of the people. Accordingly, the hardships and the challenges faced today by the ‘people’ are, in essence, the same as those that the people of Venezuela suffered in the past. The appeal to lost traditions, the recovery of histories and the construction of an alternative historical narrative all serve to exclude the oligarchy, painting them as impediments to the Bolivarian Revolution, while also reinforcing the primacy of the ‘people’.

Moreover, the narrative of historical continuity also promotes a sense of a common emancipatory outcome: ‘we are the same fighters for independence, for dignity, for liberty and for equality for our people.’ By configuring this historical link, Chávez is able to reinforce the central themes of the Bolivarian narrative with the quest for ‘dignity and equality as prescient today as it was 200 years ago’. To this extent, the synthesis of the past with the present (re)introduces the theme of emancipation as the historical struggle of the ‘people’. ‘[W]e are this year precisely, commemorating 180 years since the heroics of Ayacucho, where the united peoples converted into liberation armies…[and] overthrew imperial Spain…Today before the evident failure of neoliberalism…our peoples are retaking that spirit.’

The mythical weight of Simón Bolívar—who liberated present-day Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Venezuela during his own lifetime (1783–1830)—is central to an emancipatory struggle. The historical importance of Bolívar within Venezuela provides Chávez with a broad framework within which to situate his own emancipatory ‘Bolivarian’ representation. Dating from 1842, Venezuelan presidents of different ideological persuasions have invoked the image of Bolívar. Whether it was President José Antonio Páez (1830–35), who ordered the repatriation of Bolivar’s remains in order to arrest a slide

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72 Cited in ibid., p. 34.
74 Cited in Arreaza, ‘El discurso de Hugo Chávez’, p. 32.
75 Persaud, ‘Situating race in international relations’, p. 67.
76 Chávez, H. 2006, ‘Discursou en la Instalación de la XII Cumbre de Jefes de Estado y de Gobiernos del G15, Teatro Teresa Carreño, Caracas 27 February 2004, “El Sur También Existe”’, in S. Rinaldi (ed.), La Unidad Latinoamericana, Ocean Sur, Bogota, pp. 29–30. Beyond Bolívar himself, the Venezuelan President uses a combination of historical sources, known collectively as ‘el árbol de las tres raíces’ (the tree with three roots) to underpin the Bolivarian narrative. Recycling existing ideas and fitting forgotten actors and events into new situations, the historicising of Bolivarianism is based on a nationalist trinity of figures: Simón Bolívar, Ezequiel Zamora and Simón Rodríguez. Zamora, the federalist martyr from the same llanos region of Barinas as Chávez, is exalted for his anti-oligarchic rhetoric and has come to symbolise the unity between the peasantry and the army. Simón Rodríguez is portrayed in a similar light. As Bolivar’s tutor and mentor, Rodríguez comes into the trinity by virtue of his educational qualities and the redeeming value of educating the masses. Additionally, Rodríguez is represented as a force for independence, with his famous comments ‘we innovate or we will disappear’ recontextualised to appeal to a nationalist doctrine of self-determination and emancipation. For more, see, Sanoja, ‘Ideology, institutions and ideas’, pp. 401, 406; and Hellinger, ‘Tercermundismo and Chavismo’, p. 11.
in his popularity, or Hugo Chávez today, Bolivar has served as a nationalist veneer within which policy decisions are legitimated and political careers are energised.\textsuperscript{77} Outlining the mythology surrounding the Liberator’s life, German Carrera Damas describes the cult of Bolívar as a complex historical-ideological formation that permits the projection of Bolívar’s values (however defined) over all aspects of political life.\textsuperscript{78} As a result, Bolivar has become a divine-like figure—‘the Son of Venezuela, its immortal Creator’—who represents the highest values of the people.\textsuperscript{79} The cult of Bolívar enables President Chávez to activate a particular reading of the Liberator and reinscribe a more radical, emancipatory interpretation of an already established nationalist ideology.

The task below is to locate the particularities (focal points and silences) in the Chávez usage of the Liberator. Indeed, amid the multiple representations of Bolívar, the question of interest becomes how Chávez is able to turn a member of one of the largest landowning families of the Creole oligarchy, a provincial leader and a liberal ideologue into a figure who speaks to the ‘people’.\textsuperscript{80} In part, he is able to do so by simplifying the complex story of Bolívar, and by reassembling the already existing myths regarding Bolívar’s life and times. While not discarding the traditional, liberal readings of Bolívar—readings that pose the Liberator as Venezuela’s greatest exponent of the concepts of liberty and equality—the Chávez interpretation radicalises these concepts.\textsuperscript{81} Bolívar’s concern for freedom and the national transcendence of exploitation (both foreign and domestic) is emphasised over themes of political equality. Similarly, on this issue of political equality, a more radical notion of natural equality is extrapolated.\textsuperscript{82} While ideas associated with the European Enlightenment and the French Revolution served as a template for Bolívar’s feelings on republicanism and the centralised role of government, Chávez localises these themes and, in the process, affects a more radical reading:

\textbf{[W]e were born for liberty, they [‘imperialist infiltrators’] were born for world domination; we were born Bolivarian, we were born together with el pueblo…and we are here to carry out the mandate of Simón Bolívar, in order to...defend the guarantees of the people, the happiness of the people, the freedom of the people, not to dominate them or to insult, nor violate them.}\textsuperscript{83}

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\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., p. 61
\textsuperscript{80} Coronil and Skurski, ‘Dismembering and remembering the nation’, p. 296; Cannon, ‘Venezuela, April 2002’, p. 287.
\textsuperscript{81} Cannon, ‘Venezuela, April 2002’, p. 287.
\textsuperscript{82} Sanoja, ‘Ideology, institutions and ideas’, p. 402.
\textsuperscript{83} Chávez, H. 2006, ‘Celebración del VII Aniversario del Gobierno Revolucionario Bolivariano, Sala Ríos Reina, Teresa Carreño Theatre, Venezuela, 2 February 2006, “Hemos echado las bases de lo que estamos
The qualities of liberty, equality and fraternity are elevated to an emancipatory struggle against the despotism and inequality of political and economic power demonstrated in Chávez’s readings of the recent past.84

In emphasising the social-justice dimension of the Liberator, Chávez aligns Bolívar with steps to return dignity to the people. The Liberator gave ‘land to the peasants in order to liberate them from slavery, from hunger and from misery, for this reason the revolution of independence was consolidated with the support of the Venezuelan people’.85 Moreover, in affecting this radical reading, Chávez both emphasises and confines the Liberator’s emancipatory value to the ‘people’. While other readings of liberation call attention to the equality given Creoles in respect to their local colonial equivalents, the Chávez narrative emphasises the freedom of slaves from their owners, and the indigenous struggle for equality in front of the strong landed and commercial aristocracy.86

‘The liberation of slaves, the liberation of Indians, the dividing of land for the Indians, for the poor, that all should be equal, that freedom without equality has no meaning, it was for this that the oligarchy of the Americas overthrew him [Bolívar].’87 This emancipatory reading is forwarded despite the abolition of slavery occurring as a result of political expediency on the part of Bolívar so as to obtain military support from Haiti. Neither Bolívar’s political calculations nor the equality given to Creole elites is, however, put forward by a Venezuelan President intent on fashioning a more radical Liberator so as to legitimate his own Bolivarian project.

Having made an investment in certain emancipatory accounts of who Bolívar was, Chávez is able to draw dividends on these representations.88 As a defender of social justice and equality, Bolívar’s struggle can be repositioned and applied to the enduring social and political asymmetries of today.89 Referring to the Battle of Carabobo that sealed the country’s independence, Chávez said ‘that battle is the same struggle as today. This is the continuation of that revolution, the Bolivarian Revolution.’90 The present-day Bolivarian project embodies the same emancipatory quest for dignity and justice as did the actions of Bolívar.

84 Carrera Damas, El Culto de Bolívar, p. 42.
86 Carrera Damas, El Culto de Bolívar, p. 44.
90 Cited in Moreno, ‘Metaphors in Hugo Chavez’s political discourse’, p. 206.
These representations enable Chávez to absorb the spirit of emancipation and place himself and his Bolivarian project as the natural heirs to the life and work of Bolívar.

Deceived during his time, already dying, almost solitary, betrayed, expelled from here, he [Bolivar] said ‘the great day of South America is yet to arrive’. Two hundred years later we believe that now the day of the Americas has arrived, and more than just America, the great day of the people. The great day of freedom, of equality and of justice is arriving.\textsuperscript{91}

Carrying the Bolivarian sword into the future, Chávez now makes possible the emancipation previously unachieved by Bolívar. Indeed, far from a failure, Bolivar comes to represent all that was not obtained during the independence struggle in the first half of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{92} ‘Simón Bolívar, father of our patria [homeland] and guide of our revolution, swore not to give rest to his arm, nor respite to his soul, until America was free. We will not give rest to our arms, nor respite to our souls until we save humanity.’\textsuperscript{93} Speaking to this emancipation, on the seventh anniversary of his coming to power, Chávez told the assembled that today, thanks to the Bolivarian Revolution, Venezuela is a ‘society totally different to that of exclusion and privilege’. As a result, ‘[w]hat is happening now is a truly second independence’.\textsuperscript{94} Failures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries become the possibilities of what Chávez has termed ‘twenty-first-century socialism’.

**Conclusions**

A new ‘Bolivarian’ identity was predicated on a shift in the politics of identity that placed the previously maligned masses at the centre of political life. With the former ‘phantasmagorical subversives’ and impediments to national progress located at the forefront of Venezuelan politics, Chávez elicited and expanded upon the experiences of the ‘people’ so as to make their history congruent with that of the nation. Examining the social interface between the Chávez narrative and its resonance amongst the polity, it was found that the shift in identity was enabled by a common belief in the exhaustion of the previous politico-economic structures associated with the Punto Fijo system. The rise in popular protests against official austerity measures, in addition to the increase in abstention

\textsuperscript{91} Chávez, ‘La Revolución Bolivariana y la Construcción del Socialismo en el Siglo XXI’, p. 198.

\textsuperscript{92} Carrera Damas, El Culto de Bolívar, p. 55.


\textsuperscript{94} Chávez, ‘Celebración del VII Aniversario del Gobierno Revolucionario Bolivariano’, p. 314.
rates for presidential elections, reflected popular perceptions of a corrupt state. Picking up on these perceptions, Chávez’s descriptions of the Caracazo as a ‘massacre’ and of the Punto Fijo system as a ‘gangrenous politics’ not only reinforced the need for change, they also placed his Bolivarian Revolution as best equipped to dramatically reorientate Venezuelan society.

Having demonstrated the shift in identity, attention then turned to the construction of a new ‘Bolivarian’ identity. Rather than being authored by a simple pueblo/oligarquía binary, however, the new identity was dependent on a matrix of history and narrative. Within this matrix, Chávez sought to bring together the various aspirations of the ‘people’ by constructing a recent past of injustice and a distant, revolutionary past. Chávez spoke to the disenchantment with the Punto Fijo system, but did so as a means of consigning such hardship to the past. Buttressing this argument were allusions to a more distant revolutionary past, which, in turn, served at least two rhetorical purposes. First, the links forged between the Chávez administration and the revolutionary past enabled the Venezuelan President to present the recent Punto Fijo past as an anomaly in Venezuelan history. Indeed, more than making static allusions to events 200 years ago, Chávez, by evoking the dignity of the Liberator, claimed to be returning the nation to a more just normality. Second, the supposed revolutionary links were also based on the promise of emancipation to come. The present-day Bolivarian Revolution would fulfil the emancipatory potential unattained by Bolívar himself. This Bolivarian world view—encompassing both a revolutionary past and the promise of emancipation—thus sought to codify the multiplicity of frustrations, ideas, symbols, beliefs and demands into a shared view. Significantly, however, it was the investment in an emancipated future that acted as the cornerstone of Bolivarian politics. Indeed, in the lead-up to the 1998 poll, an improvement in the socio-political setting and the disavowal of the Punto Fijo system were the principal factors that determined Chávez’s political legitimacy. Moreover, the subsequent investment made in a new Bolivarian identity was predicated on the betterment of the lives of Venezuelans. To refer to a Bolivarian ‘people’, therefore, was to refer to an emancipated people.

The link between the promise of emancipation to come and the Bolivarian identity exhibited a symbiotic relationship between the ‘people’ and Chávez. On the one hand, by reifying the maligned masses and their interests, the Venezuelan President was able to justify his policy initiatives as furthering the people’s emancipation. Be it the successful ‘no’ vote in the 2004 recall election or the exclusion of the oligarchic elite from political life, both were framed as consistent with the people’s emancipation. On the other hand, by claiming that it acted in the historical interests of the formerly marginalised, the Bolivarian Revolution came to speak for the ‘people’. Indeed, the ‘people’ became increasingly dependent on the Chávez presidency, not only for their
recognition on the national political stage, but also because their interests were interpreted for them by the Chávez administration. Looking forward, there is a potential danger in this scenario should there develop a meaningful distinction between the leader and the led. That is, if the interests of the formerly maligned come to differ significantly from those constructed by Chávez for the ‘people’ then the resonance of the Bolivarian narrative and the political longevity of Chávez himself are likely to be limited. The question becomes for how long can the promise of emancipation resonate if an actual betterment in the lives of the ‘people’ fails to materialise? While Chávez was able to affect a shift in the politics of identity—an accomplishment for which he deserves credit—the permanence of this movement remains contingent on a receptive audience mindful of their past exclusion, but also weary of previous disappointment.