



Vol. 7, No. 2, Winter 2010, 137-164  
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## ***Chuño Palma: A National Subject in Mother's Time***

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From the onset of the twentieth century, a wide spectrum of Bolivian intellectuals, including Franz Tamayo (*La creación de la pedagogía nacional*, 1910), Enrique Finot (*Historia de la pedagogía boliviana*, 1917), and Carlos Medinaceli (“Los exámenes de secundaria y el porvenir oscuro de Bolivia,” 1935), proposed an extensive top-down pedagogical program for the elites to train the subaltern masses as model citizens of the nation-state. Gradually this stress on the pedagogical formation of the citizen gave rise to a conceptual divide between *mestizaje* and *cholaje*.<sup>1</sup> Previously, both *cholo* and *mestizo* interchangeably referred to the racially and culturally miscegenated offspring of the indigenous and the white criollos, but over the course of the early twentieth century, *mestizaje* came to be understood as the elite’s pedagogical discourse to discipline the subaltern population by weaning them from their indigenous modes of belonging. *Mestizaje* also entailed the containment of the masses’ tactical and piecemeal engagement with modernity on their own terms. As

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<sup>1</sup> Carlos Medinaceli wrote the essay “Los exámenes de secundaria y el porvenir oscuro de Bolivia” in 1935. It was later compiled in the posthumous volume *El Huaralevismo: El fracaso histórico de la educación universitaria*, which came out in 1979.

a corollary, cholaje came to denote the practices of the “uncouth” masses variously comprised of urbanized indigenous people partially integrated “into the white Spanish-speaking culture,” or racial mestizos who were culturally closer to indigenous norms and practices (Sanjinés 22). In either case, cholaje marked the protean interaction between the various ethnic groups, constituting the national population. It was not a rejection of modernity but, rather, a contingent and unmediated, and from elite perspective, haphazard, engagement with modernity. That cholaje was inflected with pejorative connotations, therefore, also attested to the narrow parameters within which the very idea of modernity was defined as well as the elite endeavor to maintain their prerogative over the nature of the modern state suitable for Bolivia.

In essence, the objective of these intellectual debates was to straightjacket the culturally heterogeneous and historically dissonant Bolivian society within a linear narrative of progress, wherein progress was, in the final analysis, understood as the relentless drive to approximate the economic, political, and cultural models of European nation-states. This understanding of progress as a project of catching up with Europe collided with the distinctive aspirations of the indigenous and cholo community that looked “for its own returns in the very ruins of its past” (Sanjinés 22). In other words, if the intellectual elite exhorted the nation to work towards a European future, the subaltern community often defined its political goals as the quest for a lost idyllic past.

During the course of the 1940s, the middle class challenge to the hegemony of the liberal oligarchy ruling the country gained momentum but so did the urgency to homogenize the population. The rising popularity of the *costumbrista* novels (realist novels of cultural mores) is directly linked with the political rise of the middle classes. The *costumbrista* plots represented, according to Javier Sanjinés, “the social mobility produced by more or less permanent, more or less socially tolerated, sexual relations between criollo men and chola women” (21). These realist novels harmonized the cultural and ideological ambivalences of the middle classes, whose members strove for a more democratic nation-state and yet were reluctant to envision a national model outside the Eurocentric parameters

of citizenship. On the one hand, the costumbrista novels celebrated the cholo culture as a marker of national authenticity, but, on the other hand, by confining the very same cholo culture to the domestic realm, these texts also inserted the trajectory of the nation-state within the linear time of progress. Not surprisingly then, in most costumbrista novels, the male cholo is featured as an ignorant, crassly materialistic, and power-hungry individual, even as the female chola is a vital, industrious and maternal figure. By thus identifying cholaje with the mother, the costumbrista novels also implied that the measure of the national subject's political maturity is his ability to separate himself from the cholo milieu in order to assume his place in society. Sanjinés, hence, rightly criticizes the costumbrista novel for compressing in its realist narrative the contradictions of a culturally diverse, economically dependent, and, thus, temporally dissonant Bolivian society within a rigidly homogeneous space and linear time (22).

The preponderance of these novels, however, overshadows the occasional text that did voice alternative models of relationship to the state, that was more attuned to Andean sensibilities, and that emphasized accumulation of cultures rather than separation from the indigenous cultures as the measure of the nation's ability to come into its own. This neglect is in part explained by the poor appraisal of such texts in their own periods, which in turn was due to the texts' radical departures from the dominant norms. In part, however, the oversight is also the result of our perception today of a few dominant novels as representatives of that period. This paper examines the significance of one such overlooked text, Victor Hugo Villegas' *Chuño Palma: una novela de cholos*.

Published in 1948 to commemorate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the city of La Paz, *Chuño Palma: una novela de cholos* is a costumbrista novel whose importance has been overshadowed by the fame of its contemporary texts, Carlos Medinaceli's *La Chaskañawi* and Antonio Díaz Villamil's *La niña de sus ojos*. Villegas's text is significant for the period because it celebrates the fourth centenary of La Paz by attributing the city's growth to the cholos' resilient spirit. In doing so, the text inversely also criticizes the self-alienating nature of elite formulations of modernity in Bolivia. The novel traces the life of its eponymous hero, Manuel or

Chuño Palma, from his birth in a squalid cholo neighborhood to his death in an unplanned cholo uprising. Palma's mother, doña Trini, tenaciously shields her young son from the corrupting influence of his father, don Casiano, an inveterate gambler. With her tireless labor, she procures him a proper education, hoping that he will overcome the social prejudices faced by his class. Palma grows up to be an intellectual leader of the cholos, yet his education distances him from his mother's cholo milieu. In the end, Chuño dies in a spontaneous uprising triggered by his cholo supporters' protest against his unjustified arrest by the city police. Trini gradually comes to terms with her son's death, and the novel ends with the possibility of a new relationship between her and an old cholo friend, in this way, resuming once again the cycle of life.<sup>2</sup>

While *Chuño Palma*, like its counterparts, also associates cholaje with the mother, Villegas employs this gendered representation to extricate cholaje from the confines of the domestic sphere and locate it as the true manifestation of Bolivian public sphere. Through its mother-son plot, the novel presents cholaje as a public sphere regulated by a maternal symbolic order, which is, reflecting its Andean cosmology, based on ideals of recuperation and return. The cyclical form of the novel, which begins and ends with the mother's story, evokes the cyclical temporality intrinsic to the Andean worldview. The plot's resonances with the nineteenth-century regime of the La Paz caudillo, Manuel Isidoro Belzú (1848-1855), further inflect the linear time of realism with a cyclicity that enables it at once to highlight the paradoxes of the Bolivian experience of modernity and to visualize an alternative model of nationalism in which these paradoxes might be accommodated rather than repressed.<sup>3</sup> *Chuño Palma's* quest to

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<sup>2</sup> In an appraisal emblematic of the period's unease with the idea of cholo protagonists, Villegas' contemporary (and an acclaimed author himself), Augusto Guzman, lauded the novel's representation of Trini's tireless enterprise and exuberant vitality, even as he dubbed the revolt led by her son Chuño Palma a fanciful gesture of political ambitions and romantic sterility (169).

<sup>3</sup> Following the 1847 fall of José Ballivián, an upper-class leader of Spanish descent, Belzú, a populist caudillo, captured political power with the support of the artisan cholos. His rise would later be referred to as "la revolución de cholos" (Peredo Beltrán 19). Herbert Klein asserts that although most Bolivian historians have dismissed Belzú as a demagogue, he was a staunch defender of local industries (129). Guillermo Lora notes Belzú's contribution to the emergence of a new social force constituted by the peasants and artisans, whom he staunchly

give cholo reality a cholo form thus presents Bolivia as a community that seeks its realization "in the ruins of its past."

In what follows, this article plots the novel's trajectory towards this alternate symbolic order. The first section explores Chuño's fraught relationships with his cholo father and the pedagogical order of the state that gives rise to his identification with his mother and not with his father. The second section demonstrates the connection between the identification with the mother and conceptualization of cyclical temporality in the novel. The third section highlights the inherent paradoxes of identifying the sites of Trini's economic activities as maternal spaces that defend and engender a hermetic national identity. The fourth section probes the predicaments of a cholo subject whose education separates him from his mother and her culture. It also demonstrates that Chuño's death represents, paradoxically, the overcoming of this distance between him and his mother. The last section argues that Trini's life after her son's death attests to the enduring spirit of cholaje.

#### *The cholo Family and Patriarchy's Unraveling Narrative*

As already mentioned, twentieth-century Bolivian literature registers marked distinctions between the chola and the cholo. The chola is typically loving, maternal, and vital while the cholo is generally disruptive, decadent, and corrupt. Initially, *Chuño Palma* tacitly upholds these assumptions in its representation of Chuño's dissipated cholo father, Casiano, and his industrious chola mother, Trini. Casiano is neglectful, given to compulsive gambling, and debauchery; Trini is nurturing,

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defended through his protectionist policies (26). The caudillo's ascent coincided with the growing economic influence of Franco-English business interests and the rise of Bolivia's free trade movement. During his regime, Belzú imposed protective tariffs against English manufacturers, promoted cottage industries, and provided tax relief to national products. These protective trade policies established a series of associations between the cholos, local industries, and national interests. Belzú eventually voluntarily resigned from the presidency in 1855, tired and disappointed by the continual revolutions that assailed his government (Lora 28). Ultimately Belzú failed in his utopian dream of a republic of small property owners because it was impossible to effect concrete change with the artisans and peasants as a starting point as they were themselves legacies of an outmoded colonial structure (Lora 29).

enterprising, and fiercely protective of her son. Through these reductive categories, however, Villegas probes the existential crisis of an educated cholo subject who is, as a result of his father's moral decrepitude, bereft of a male role model.

Casiano's unrelenting hedonism and disregard for all parental roles make him an unfit role model in the patriarchal symbolic order of the modern nation-state. His location on the periphery of the physical space of the house and the interpersonal relationships of the family underscores his irrelevance as a figure of paternal authority and identification for his son. As such, his gambling den is in the front portion of the family's house in a seedy La Paz neighborhood. Like the gambling den, Casiano also marks the exteriority of the house, and his occasional forays inside it are described as an "eruption," i.e., an intrusion into his wife and son's orderly lives (55). Casiano's outsider status in his own home prefigures Chuño's own complicated entry into the Symbolic order.

Casiano does not represent for Chuño the figure of patriarchal order, so disengagement with the cholo father, rather than identification with him, frames Chuño's conflicted development as a national subject. His first encounter with Casiano's gambling den and its unbridled hedonism drives home the impossibility of any filial identification and constitutes as such the primal scene of rejection (60).

En brusco transplante a la vulgaridad de ' la Batea' ésta que por fuer debía ser suya, encontraba que oleajes de repulsión le asaltaban, contemplando aquellas artes de holgar y pasar el rato con que tan a sabor parecían vivir los presentes. Decididamente, sentíase un extraño en este rincón de ciudad, donde por designios de la vida los parroquianos veíanse atraídos hacia las puertas siempre abiertas de La Batea. (68)

Though devoid of sexual allusions, this moment figures as a primal scene through trauma that leaves a lasting impact on the identification, or lack thereof, between Palma and his father. Casiano's addiction to pleasure and consumption disgusts Chuño so much that he flees the scene never to return, metaphorically speaking, to this paternal setting. This scene marks the unraveling of the conventional family unit for Palma.

In the western patriarchal paradigm, which also constitutes the "stable core around which a nation's [...] 'reality cohere[s]," the subject's

identity is predicated on his separation from the mother, and identification with the father" (Silverman 42). Chuño's primal scene marks the rupture of this most fundamental image of familial unity by signalling his disavowal of the cholo father. This act marks Chuño as a fractured subject. Bereft of a male role model, he experiences a conflicted entry into the national symbolic. For, while he has ceased to identify with his father, Chuño is still, for the national society, the son of Casiano Palma, the cholo gambler. Given his cholo parentage, Chuño is mercilessly mocked as "the common factor" by his classmates—a racial and social inferior (28).

His dark complexion indicates his visible "inferiority" of both race and class. More than education, however, the school provides Chuño, the cholo student, training in subaltern resistance. Hardship and discrimination at school teach him to deal with discrimination in the larger society since his classmates' jeers motivate him to work harder and succeed (25). This resolve is bolstered by his indomitable mother, Trini, who not only motivates him to excel academically but who also exhorts him not to shy away from his cholo heritage: "La altivez siempre vigilante de su madre le enseñaba a no renegar del pasado ni a traicionar el humilde origen de su casa" (Villegas, 24-25).

*Chuño Palma*, however, does not merely reformulate the school as the site of the subaltern subject's first lesson in resistance to domination; it also strives to break modernity's homogenizing pedagogical framework in Bolivia by writing back into the school the popular practices of the cholo masses. In this endeavor, Villegas broke with the dominant theories of the day, which maintained that the cholo's education also entailed divesting him of the cultural particularities that made him a cholo.<sup>4</sup> Trini becomes the constant reminder of the nation's cultural distinctiveness. After a scuffle with classmates who were calling his mother a "chola chicharronera," Chuño is suspended from school, and Trini immediately comes to protest this punishment (58).<sup>5</sup> En route to the school, Trini

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, the purported incompatibility between cholo culture and modern education constitutes one of the central themes of Díaz Villamil's novel, *La niña de sus ojos* (1948).

<sup>5</sup> *Chicharronera* is a derogative colloquial adjective that plays on the cholas' association with the brewing and sale of chicha, the local corn beer. Cholas who sold chicha were called chícheras, and the locales where chicha was sold were

stamps the streets with “el intenso colorido de su indumentaria” (Villegas 73). Her march to Chuño’s school thus infuses the pedagogical order with her cultural vitality. Proudly proclaiming her pollera as the marker of the difference between her and her son’s social class and that of the richer pupils, she asserts “que con mucho honor ‘lucía’ estas polleras que abrían un abismo entre su estrato social humilde y expoliado y la de los otros señores intocables de la ‘decencia’” (74).<sup>6</sup> Trini’s pollera inserts the subaltern difference into the homogenized nation-state, not as its subversion but as its concrete reality. While this portrayal of the chola woman as the element invigorating the nation was common to many costumbrista novels of the period, Villegas’s text explores the full implications of such portrayals through her “culturally pure” cholo son, wherein his “purity,” in fact, amounts not only to a rejection of the patriarchal symbolic order but also to a questioning of the linear time that inscribes it.

#### *Psychic Circularity and Cyclical Time*

Under his mother’s loving vigilance, Chuño grows up to see the nation “con ojos de hombre altioplánico, racial y culturalmente puro” (120). The word “puro” ostensibly refers to cultural purity, that is to say, unadulterated by the pernicious influence of modern notions. Chuño’s position as a culturally and racially male cholo who embraces modern education yet strives to retain the cholo culture is based on and further cements his ties to his mother. This purported cultural purity, however, also dooms him to solitude. For the strong bond with his mother ultimately undermines Chuño’s romantic relationship with María Luisa, the upper-class army general’s daughter.

Chuño’s strong cholo identity despite his education is contrasted with María Luisa’s private-school education. María Luisa is a frivolous and “ephemeral” figure, and her education becomes a wasteful and even

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known as *chicherías*. At the same time, the slang is a play on the word, “chicharrón,” literally, a piece of burnt meat, but also used to describe a dark-skinned person.

<sup>6</sup> Pollera is the voluminous and multi-layered skirt worn by the cholas in the Andean region.

debilitating process rather than an edifying one. Cloistered in her elite school's false glamour, María Luisa symbolizes superficial modernity precisely because she lacks connection with the local specificities of her society (115). Her naïve confusion of elitist leisure activities with the practices of modernity only emphasizes the mediocrity of her instruction. In contrast, the struggles involved in Chuño's education had taught him that the cholo milieu was the real location of the national subject. As a result, he chooses to end his relationship with María Luisa rather than give up his cholo identity. Henceforth, Trini is the only woman in his life. His bachelorhood highlights the paradox of being an educated cholo and, once again, emphasizes his complicated engagement with the national symbolic order.

Chuño's entry into modernity's symbolic order is preceded by the rejection of his father's milieu of dissipation and accompanied by his mother's constant presence. Not surprisingly, this entry results in ambiguities of identification. What kind of subject position does Chuño occupy if he not only refuses to renounce the mother but also does not identify with the cholo father? This conflict alludes to the misfit between the western patriarchal paradigm and the Bolivian reality and signals the need for imagining an alternative symbolic order wherein the subject at once desires the mother and identifies with her<sup>7</sup>. Chuño's desire to be identified as a cholo and his inability to form any romantic union underscores the circularity of this paradigm: he at once desires the mother and identifies with her.

Marcia Stephenson has noted this circular paradigm to the relationship with the mother in the Bolivian indigenous communities (54). The child's desire for, and identification with, the mother in this paradigm create, in Stephenson's terms, a psychic circularity (54). This psychic circularity, denying the child's separation from the mother, is also expressed in the Andean conceptualization of cyclical time, which is, in a similar fashion, characterized by "integration rather than separation [and] accumulation rather than substitution" (Adorno 42). The term *pachakuti*,

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<sup>7</sup> See Kaja Silverman's discussion of the negative Oedipal Complex in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, 362.

meaning the upheaval of time and the world, encapsulates the Andean notion of cyclical time wherein each cycle of time ends with a cataclysmic event “led by representatives of Wiracocha, the Andean Creator God, who are deemed to have returned to earth to reverse the existing unjust world order” (Sanjinés 5). From the vantage point of pachakuti, the present is always understood as a reversal or restatement of the past (MacCormack, 968). In other words, the past is always the point of reference for interpreting and evaluating the present. However, as Rolena Adorno clarifies, cyclical time in the Amerindian cultural ethos does not denote a closed circular time wherein the same events would be repeated ad nauseam. Instead, Amerindian time is best conceived of through the geometric figure of the helix: “a curving, spiraling line that never runs over the previous path but reiterates its basic movement. That is, time and experience were not expected to repeat themselves precisely; [instead] the burdens of time were accumulated [and] each age retained heritages from all previous ages” (Adorno 41). The plot of Villegas’s novel is conditioned by this rhythmic understanding of time wherein each age resonates with the experiences of the previous ones. Specifically, the past reverberating through Villegas’s plot and which reinforces its cyclical undertones is the regime of the nineteenth-century caudillo Manuel Isidoro Belzú.

The implicit parallels between Chuño Palma’s story and that of Manuel Belzú’s government reiterate the nation’s life force, identified here with cholaje. Like Belzú, the novel’s protagonist is named Manuel and is a lower class paceño; also, like the caudillo, Chuño defends local industries and opposes foreign commercial establishments and leads a “revolución de cholos” as the caudillo had done in the nineteenth century. Both men were frustrated in their projects by the powers that be: Villegas’s protagonist dies during the revolt, and Belzú was eventually forced to resign amidst a spate of revolts orchestrated by his oligarchic enemies. Nevertheless, their aborted trajectories manifested the power of the masses.

According to Guillermo Lora, the 1848 revolution that led to Belzú’s populist government was a historic event that marked “the decisive and violent eruption of the artisans and peasant masses on the political scene in such a way that they made a considerable impact on the nature of the

popular government” (26). The significance of Belzú's regime, thus, did not reside in Belzú or his vision per se. Rather, its importance lay in how it manifested the will of the masses, comprised of indigenous and racially mestizo peasants and artisans or, in other words, the cholos. Belzú's regime was a formative moment for the cholos. It was the first moment in Republican Bolivia's history that revealed Bolivians potential to impact the nature of the state. Carlos Montenegro, one of the principle ideologues of the 1952 National Revolution, referred to this force as “belcismo” in his discussion of Belzú's regime in *Nacionalismo y coloniaje* (108-110). Belcismo is the manifestation of the will of the masses as the hegemonic will of the nation. This hegemonic force was hybrid not only in its racial composition but also in its cosmology.

As a Republican government constituted and supported by the masses, Belzú's regime straddled the cusp of both the modern and Andean worldviews. The noted Andeanist, Tristan Platt, contends that each generation of Indians must have interpreted and, in the process, assimilated landmark political events in the history of “western” Bolivia according to the logic of pachakuti (164). This argument can be extended further to assert that if Andean (both Inca and indigenous) historical events have been explained within the parameters of modern secular narratives, political events of the republican state must have also found alternative interpretations according to the cosmology of pachakuti. In other words, the history of the Bolivian state can be, and has been, viewed through the prism of both linear and cyclical time. The narrative of *Chuño Palma* summons the indigenous interpretation of Republican history by linking its own story to that of the nineteenth-century caudillo within the revolutionary temporal horizon of pachakuti. This linkage also implies that the horizon of cyclical time is sustained by the energies of the collective memory of the masses, relentless in their quest for a social order capable of expressing their national aspirations. These are the energies Montenegro called belcismo, which constituted for him “el rumbo auténtico de la nación” (109). As the constitutive matrix of the hegemonic nation, *belcismo* is the irrepressible will of the masses, which asserts itself through “decisive

and violent eruptions” whenever the nation-state’s structure becomes incongruent with its material cultural reality (Lora 26).

If the popular will engenders the democratic and hegemonic nation, then *belcismo* or, the popular spirit, could be regarded as a maternal force, and Villegas genders *belcismo* thus in his text. In doing so, the author reinforces the relationship between *belcismo* and the hegemonic nation as the inseparable bond between mother and child. In the novel, Trini represents this resilient spirit of *belcismo*. The psychic circularity of Trini and Chuño’s relationship, that is, the son’s desire for and identification with the mother, reinforces the cyclical temporality expressed through historical resonances between Belzú’s regime and Chuño’s life. These identifications suggest that in Villegas’s novel the basic pattern of Bolivian nationhood, encapsulated in *cholaje*, is articulated through a maternal time of gestations and cycles.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to the reigning pedagogical theories, which conceived the cholo’s education in terms of his separation from the cholo milieu, the success of Chuño’s education is predicated on his continued connection to his chola mother. The chola mother’s role is, however, not just confined to the domestic realm; rather, she pulls down the barriers between the domestic and the public spheres through her economic activities in her grocery store and the *picantería*.<sup>9</sup> Her *picantería* comes to be regarded as the last bastion of authentic La Paz cuisine, and here Trini nurtures an alternative public sphere where the present can also be attuned to the rhythms of the past. Yet, while Trini’s identification with the cholos’ economic activities concatenates the market, cholos, mother, culture, and the nation, the *picantería*’s portrayal as the bastion of national culture also ultimately exposes the disjuncture between an all-embracing cyclical time and restrictive ideas of national authenticity.

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<sup>8</sup> Julia Kristeva’s essay “Women’s Time” has been influential for this article. For Kristeva, the cyclical temporality of female subjectivity, “[o]n the one hand preserves cycles, gestations, and the eternal return of biological rhythm that is similar to the rhythm of nature. [...] On the other hand, it reserves a solid temporality that [...] has so little to do with linear time that the very word ‘temporality’ seems inappropriate” (205).

<sup>9</sup> *Picantería* is a restaurant that serves traditional Andean food. It is generally run by cholas.

*Provincializing Modernity in Trini's Picantería*

Trini raises her infant son in a small grocery store she ran before her husband started the gambling den. "Muchos años se vivió así. La madre junto al hijo. [...] Tardes soleadas en las que Trini enjugaba la ropa, ojo avizor al requerimiento de los clientes" (47). Located in the market-place, her "tienda de expendios" envelops Chuño in the warmth and nurture that a maternal womb provides to the unborn child (48). This conflation of the market and the home suggests a Janus-faced project: it evokes at once the plenitude of pre-capitalist societies and the discursive shift towards a democratic modern nation state.

The dichotomy requires some explanation. On the one hand, the maternalized marketplace exudes a sense of plenitude similar to the pre-capitalist or traditional society that J.M Bernstein says was characterized by "a harmony between culture and economy" (83). The store represents this harmonized fusion of culture and economy. In contrast to this tranquility, the outside world seems vulgar and uninteresting to Trini:

Más allá de las paredes de la tenducha del barrio bullía la vida y aprisionaba días en su transcurrir incesante. Panorama de sugerencias fugaces y ritmo vulgar de ajetreos humanos era la plaza [...] como un pequeño mundo exterior que le interesare (sic) menos que esa búsqueda del sustento diario y los estudios de su Manucho [Chuño]. (48-49)

Enveloped in the rhythm of daily sustenance and maternal domesticity, Trini's store shuts out the vulgar rhythm of the outside world. The self-sufficiency of the store resonates with Belzú's economic dream for Bolivia, which he unsuccessfully tried to promote through his protectionist legislations. Lora observes that Belzú envisioned Bolivia as a "republic of small property owners who, through their numbers, would reduce the violence or conflicts between the classes" (28). This project's goal can also be understood as the cultural fullness characteristic of a society in which each man owns his labor power (Bernstein 82). The maternal quality of Trini's store thus evokes Belzú's visions of a self-sufficient economy, closed off to the rest of the world. On the other hand, the autonomy of Trini's store also registers the structural changes that the Bolivian economy was undergoing in the twentieth century. For example, Ileana Rodríguez notes the persistent links between land and women in Latin American literature.

The struggle over women amounts to a struggle over means of production. These links announce transition from one discursive system to another, be it from colony to independence, from slavery to wage labor, or from modernism to modernity. Trini's store permits her to lead a tranquil life and signals the shift from a liberal oligarchy with partial suffrage to a nationalist state with universal citizenship. Trini is thus identified with the market, and as market, she is freed from all masculine claims of ownership over her. Since lineage justifies claims of ownership over land, Trini's identification with the market signals a more democratized order wherein power and prestige are grounded on individual enterprise. The democratized space of the market, through this association with the mother's labor, constitutes the formative matrix for the national subject.

The novel attempts to conjugate these two images of the market in Trini's *picantería*: one alluding to a past dream of cultural fullness; and the other signaling a vision of future political democratization. Casiano's death is followed by the demise of Calle Bueno, the cholo neighborhood, due to the expanding urbanization driven by foreign capital and high rises. Following Calle Bueno's disappearance, the cholos are pushed to Calle Colon on the city's outskirts. There, now liberated from her dissipated husband, the chola mother confronts modernity by "provincializing" it with her *picantería*. According to Dipesh Chakrabarty, the project of provincializing modernity can be read as the intent to:

Write over the given and privileged narratives of citizenship other narratives of human connections that draw sustenance from dreamed up pasts and futures where collectivities are defined neither by the rituals of citizenship nor by the nightmares of 'tradition' that 'modernity' creates. There are of course no intra-structural sites where these dreams could lodge themselves [...] these dreams are what the modern represses in order to be. (46)

These "dreamed up pasts" that emerge from other forms of collectivities mark the return of the repressed that thwarts modernity's homogenizing drive. The demise of Calle Bueno, the erstwhile cholo neighborhood, and the cholos' subsequent banishment to the city's outskirts illustrate modernity's attempt to repress local culture and to further its universalizing drive.

Before this rampaging modernization, Trini's *picantería* signals the "intra-structural" site where these repressed dreams are released and where narratives of collective identities live through the flavors of the "national" dishes she prepares. Her food transforms the periphery, to which local traditions are relegated by modernity, into a new center, one of "authentic" national culture. The *picantería* becomes the polis where an organic public sphere emerges with the consumption of Trini's food.

Empleados públicos, artesanos, estudiantes, gentes transnochadoras en diaria visita, hallaban en casa de doña Trini, nombre que se hizo de fama popular, el plato paceño de jugosos choclos[...]. Último reducto de cocina genuinamente popular, rociada en profusión por docenas y docenas de cerveza y buscado con afán reincidente todas las tardes, mantenía su sabor y aderezo tradicionales no permitiendo la subterránea intromisión de platos transplantados. (105)

In addition to symbolizing the organic public sphere, the *picantería* also serves to exhort the nation not to forget the traditional, i.e., the local, in the midst of the city's relentless modernization. In this sense, the *picantería* parallels Trini's involvement with Chuño's education and reinforces the idea of the *picantería* as a maternal space. Since it works as an organic public sphere, it offers an alternate familial paradigm. A patriarchal dominant fiction fosters linear temporality, but by the same token, foregrounding a maternalized *picantería* as a more authentic public sphere for the nation projects a maternal paradigm, mediated by the cyclical time associated with women. The symbolic order altered and attuned to cyclical time would, arguably, promote a more fluid culture. By its very nature, cyclical time has no specific point of arrival or departure and, as a result, cannot be mobilized in the service of any unitary notion of identity, culture or nation. Rather, such a temporality ceaselessly integrates and manifests itself through a multiplicity of perspectives.<sup>10</sup>

Ultimately though, the novel succumbs to constrictive identifications between the woman, the mother, and the nation, reducing national identity to a matter of wielding power over its origins and its end. By locating the *picantería* as the last bastion of the nation's authentic

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<sup>10</sup> Kristeva stresses the irrelevance of notions of origins and ends for cyclical time in her essay, "Women's Time."

culture, the text restricts Trini's role to being a "madre popular henchida de vitalidad" (Guzmán 169). In the process, it paradoxically reinforces the patriarchal national symbolic. The picantería does not just dish up the national culture; it also creates it by deciding what is authentic and what is "transplanted." Indeed, as a defender of everything local and, thus, national, Trini also defends its authenticity in linguistic terms. When a guest offers her a "coctail," Trini impatiently exclaims: "Qué coctail ni que niño muerto—replicaba a la ocurrente Teodosia doña Trini, tenaz defensora de todo lo que era criollo—Eso que usted dice se tomará en las cantinas o donde el Hasler. En la casa de la chola Trini se sirve yungueño y con singani legítimo" (84). Here, "Hasler" obviously alludes to the Jewish immigrants to Bolivia. By characterizing the drinks she served as legitimate, she also defines the other bars (cantinas) run by immigrants like Hasler as inauthentic.

*Chuño Palma's* anti-Semitic tone echoes the anti-Jewish/anti-immigrant sentiment of the nationalist ideology during the 1940s. Right before the Second World War and in the years following it, Bolivia witnessed a wave of Jewish immigrants from Europe. Many set up small businesses in La Paz, which the nationalist leaders often projected as threats to local establishments in order to whip up anti-oligarchy sentiment.<sup>11</sup> Anti-immigration rhetoric was also translated into a strident nationalist discourse. In the novel, the immigrants' economic prosperity is at odds with local commercial interests, an outlook that echoes the Belzú regime's strong protectionist ideology. By the same token, it also repeats the paradox that ultimately proved to be that regime's undoing. According to Lora, "From the moment when, for the sake of its own survival, the artisan industry shut Bolivia's market off from world trade, the country had no way out of its economic depression" (29). In other words, Belzú attempted to found an egalitarian society with artisans and peasants, themselves symptomatic of an economic system in which the colonial

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<sup>11</sup> Due to its focus on the gender dynamics in the construction of a cholo national subject in the novel, this paper does not delve deeper into the novel's anti-Semitic nuances. For more on this issue, see Herbert S. Klein's *Bolivia: the Evolution of a Multiethnic Society*, and Waltraud Q. Morales's *A Brief History of Bolivia*.

contradictions had yet to be resolved (29). The country's lack of capital, closed artisan guilds, and technological backwardness condemned it to be the producer of raw materials for the international market rather than a self-sufficient producer of manufactured goods (10-29). The traditional corporative guilds, which especially received a boost under Belzú's government, promoted a closed world in which anyone who did not conform to its regulations was derided as a drifter (21). The *picantería*, with its rigid emphasis on what is authentic and inauthentic, recreates this conformist aspect of Belzú's protectionist government in the early twentieth century when Bolivia had become a part of the global economy, even if it was as a supplier of raw materials. In other words, the *picantería*, as the bastion of national authenticity, was as untenable as the protectionist trade policies undertaken by Belzú in the nineteenth century.

In representing the *picantería* as the nation's authentic core, Villegas strives to pin down cyclical time, which is identified with Trini, to a unitary perspective. Trini has no role but that of the mother who nourishes the nation with its cultural identity, and yet, the same culture has also now been restricted to a narrow supplementary place. This confinement, paradoxically, culminates in the reassertion of linear time. The paradox illustrates the contradictions Chakrabarty acknowledges in the project of provincializing Europe. Chakrabarty admits that provincializing Europe is an always already doomed enterprise because it is an intellectual exercise to represent the ways in which subaltern subjects inflect quotidian realities, determined by modernity's infrastructure, with their own beliefs and practices. As a product of modernity, and articulated in an idiom hemmed in by a "hyperreal" Europe, such a project compartmentalizes the modern from the traditional and, accordingly, assigns narrowly defined roles to the actors in such spaces (45). The representation of Trini's *picantería* as the last bastion of popular culture reproduces such reified binaries of modernity and tradition. The spatialization of *cholaje* interrupts the rhythmic flow of cyclical time with which the novel had heretofore associated it.

Trini and, by extension, the *picantería*'s reification as the symbol of a narrowly defined national culture end up superimposing the linear time

of patriarchal national narratives over the cyclical women's time. Consequently, cholaje is once again relegated to a supplementary private domain. The resurgence of these patriarchal narratives, which demand the male subject's separation from the maternal domain—in this case, the cholo milieu—exposes the predicament of a cholo national subject, one called upon to leave cholaje in order to be its subject. The resolution of this predicament will once again guide the novel back to Trini's story.

*The Revolution of the Cholos*

Chuño's relationship with his mother's picantería suggests the awkward location of an educated cholo within the popular setting. This awkwardness is poignantly clear at the adult Chuño's birthday party at Trini's restaurant. Despite his strong filial ties, Chuño Palma remains an outsider at the restaurant, an honored guest but not a prodigal son. His presence at the feast his mother prepared does not mark a return but, rather, a brief visit that all too soon must end, leaving unfulfilled Trini's maternal yearnings. "A ojos vistos, crecía el cariño de su hijo, pero agonizaban los mimos, las caricias filiales que brotan en el abrazo de cada hora, las voces dulces que se iban en espacio. Huía en materia el soñado Manucho de otrora" (Villegas 99). The corporeal presence of her son is now replaced by a bitter-sweet pride in his success. Trini realizes her mission to raise Palma as a chola's son is now complete, yet as a woman, she feels incapable of understanding what her son, "como varón, docto y capaz mozo," wanted to accomplish for the nation (99).

While his mother lives in the peripheral working-class suburb, Chuño rents rooms in the city's center. Even more significantly, he and his fellow political activists meet not at the picantería but at the restaurant of one of the Jewish immigrants whose business establishments threaten the cholos' economic survival. Finally, we hardly ever hear Chuño speak convincingly as a cholo. Instead, now transformed into a cholo leader, he articulates and vindicates the cholo vision through an elite pedagogical discourse, which expresses the need for a new "structure" in accordance with the nation's material reality. Chuño believes education can provide a strong structure for the nation, "un medular raigambre [de] pléyades de

hombres capaces, plasmados y logrados en el gabinete de estudio, en el campo fecundo de la investigación cultural, en el laboratorio científico, en la biblioteca” (119). He rejects, nevertheless, the conventional pedagogies, calling instead for a more active educational system, which would transform the nation into “la Universidad tecnicista y popular” (119). Once again, the parallels with Belzú’s vision are unmistakable. Lora has noted Belzú’s establishment of several trade schools throughout the country, “with the aim of strengthening the [artisans] as a class and improving their productive activity in the workshops” (25). Likewise, education enables Chuño to articulate and uphold the cholo’s entrepreneurial spirit as a quality the nation needs. He is, however, no longer part of the class he champions since he does not practice any trade. Instead, he emerges as a union leader, respected by his followers precisely because of his intellectual education. As such, even while upholding the cholo interests as the legitimate national destiny, the educated Chuño destabilizes the very meaning of the term cholo. Only his death in an unexpected cholo uprising can reintegrate him with his mother’s cholo culture.

Chuño exposes the nexus of the trade union he joins with the oppressive government the union was supposed to fight, which leads to his being implicated on trumped-up charges of corruption. His supporters’ protests of his detention spark that spontaneous uprising that precipitates his death. His “double role” as a protagonist in this rebellion or, to borrow Montenegro’s word, “convulsion,” highlights the predicament of a cholo leader, fractured between being a man of passion and a man of reason. His heart is fired by the raw enthusiasms of his ragtag group of apolitical supporters, with its unexpected force, and its men willing to lay down their lives for the cause. His reason, however, cautions him against this unplanned and, hence, premature insurgency. The paradox is that considering the revolution premature reinserts the insurgency within the narrative of progress and linear time, the same narrative that denies the subaltern subjects their rights because they are purportedly not yet ready for them.

Chuño’s last hours mark a struggle between the “not yet” of his mind and the “now” of his heart. “En el reducido tiempo de cada minuto de

alternativa, cerebro y corazón trabajaban a prisa en él, hasta que se produjo la total identificación del hombre con lo imprevisto” (163). His education complicates his status as a leader who speaks for the subaltern classes. Having equipped him with the discourse of modernity, his intellectual pragmatism advises restraint and reflection in order to channel over time his supporters’ raw energy into a skillful design for revolution. Yet, such a course of action would have reiterated, and not obliterated, the distance between him and his cholo supporters. Chuño chooses, thus, to surrender himself to the spontaneous force of the cholo revolution, “Y se entregó a la aventura con la misma o mayor entereza que la denotada por esos ‘cuatro’ rebeldes cholos agazapados en la barricada” (183). In willfully fusing into the collective vortex of the insurgency, Chuño embraces death and is eventually killed in a fight between the police and rebels.

Villegas’s representation of the revolution and Chuño’s death dovetails with Montenegro’s discussion of Belzú’s regime: both descriptions valorize spontaneous upheavals against social injustice as the real expression of the people’s will. However, Montenegro, as Sanjinés shows, compares such political upheavals to the spasmodic convulsions of a headless body, taking them, as such, to be the expression of a people lacking organic leaders.<sup>12</sup> Villegas’s text, in contrast, celebrates the will of a collective hero. In his novel, these sudden upheavals register the unmediated popular will. Unencumbered by elite rationalizations, the cholo insurgents embody pure resistance to hierarchical power machinations. In short, they are the agents of the cataclysmic “reversal” of the world evoked by the notion of pachakuti wherein each upheaval of the universe is triggered by the decadence of its corresponding society. It follows that the

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<sup>12</sup> Carlos Montenegro described the mass energies to which Belzú’s regime was witness as the nation’s quest for a structure in conformity with its reality. (115). Sanjinés writes that the metaphor of a decapitated body in Montenegro’s essay alluded to a disconnect between the “spiritual and material forces of the society” (127). Mestizaje in this framework was the “enlightened thought” that should guide the nation’s praxis in accordance with its concrete reality (126). The head, or enlightened thought, then articulates the form of the nation. This insight suggests that for Montenegro the Bolivian dysfunction was symptomatic of the absence of an overarching network of symbols. He bemoaned the absence of a symbolic order, which was conducive to the nation’s material reality in mid-nineteenth-century Bolivia. Yet, it is also clear that he considered the creation of such a system a task for the intellectuals, and not the masses.

insurgents' spontaneous and unmediated energy encompasses and is prior to all class and racial identities that constitute the nation as is evident from this passage:

La revolución chola, la de los obreros, la de los hombres desamparados y humildes, la de los proletarios de bufanda. Decenas como los conspiradores de la Locería tendrían que venir a sumar sus vidas y brazos para dar alma a los anhelos de justicia social. ....Blancos, cholos, indios nacieron iguales para exigir derechos. Esta no sería una revolución politiquera de los "partidos" u hombres de partido....Ni un golpe de estado que simula cambio de personajes [...] Sería la sacudida violencia, la conmoción inevitable de un pueblo cholo que tiene derecho a vivir mejor. (151-152)

Here, the category of the cholos contains the proletariat within its fold. This vision once again links the cholo setting with the maternal space, where the proletariat, being a product of modernity's class structure and not an expression of its organic, ethnic profile, becomes its offspring. Chuño's death also erases the physical and emotional distance separating him and his mother and, hence, signals his return to cholaje.

Susan Tritten says Chuño's death represents "el principio de la lucha, y no el final exitoso, para superar barreras de clase tanto como de raza" (224). However, the cholo protagonist's death is better understood as symbolizing the limitations of a time marked by beginnings and ends. It marks the cyclical temporality of a maternal nation that has no beginning or end. This mobility referred to by Chuño's death resonates with Sanjinés's observations on the displacement of mestizaje undertaken from the subaltern vantage point: mestizaje "is a kaleidoscopic identity, separated from the dominant imaginary, a mobile continuum between indio and blanco, a word in mid sentence, (indio-cholo-mestizo-blanco)" (183). For Sanjinés, this protean identity has no point of arrival in Bolivia (183). By the same token, however, it also has no point of departure. As such, in the novel, it is the cholo identity, the always-already mixed and impure identity, that constitutes the originary milieu of the Bolivian nation.

Chuño's death, in this sense, marks the resolution of the dilemma of the cholo subject caught in the linear time of the patriarchal order. This system dictates his separation from the mother in order for him to be recognized as a subject, yet to be a *cholo* subject he must be part of the

maternal sphere. For with his separation from this sphere, the cholo is no more, and, therefore, the only recourse left to him in Villegas's novel is death, when Chuño becomes a symbol, a "gonfalon sangriente," of the cholos' resistance (166). As the mourners parade Chuño's inert body through the streets of La Paz, its human form lends coherence to the multiform procession. Turned into a symbol of the irrepressible cholo energy in death, Chuño Palma returns to his mother's house. His death also reinforces the cyclical context of pachakuti as a cataclysmic event mediated by the heroic acts of a charismatic leader that marks the end of one temporal cycle and the beginning of another. His return home, now turned into a myth that will serve to mobilize future rebellions, allows this maternal time of cholo destiny to resume its course.

*Trini's Picantería as the Locus of an Enduring Subaltern Agency*

The novel's end marks Trini's final act of survival-recuperation from her beloved son's death. Life goes on as usual in the picantería even as encroaching urbanization again threatens to displace Trini. In an eloquent image evoking the confrontation between linear and cyclical time, the novel describes this unchecked expansion as a long night in which the rigid lines of the mansions choke the city's jumbled up past (169). Left without a reason to live in the wake of her son's death, Trini is about to admit defeat to this all-consuming march of progress when, in the midst of this "noche alta de siglo veinte," an old friend knocks at her "puerta de viudez y orfandad filial" to confess his long and abiding love for her (170). Now the cycle of life starts anew for Trini. In this way, she and not her son emerges as the novel's real hero. She overcomes the violence of her childhood to start a new life with Casiano, but she must then suffer his irresponsible behavior. With fortitude, however, she channels her energies into her son's education. Undeterred by the demolition of her old neighborhood during the city's expansion, she starts the picantería, and finally, she overcomes the grief of Chuño's death in order to start life anew. Embodiment of the maternal chola, Trini signifies the vital desire at the nation's core, its enterprise, endurance, resistance, and resilience.

For its time period, *Chuño Palma: una novela de cholos* is a significant novel for two main reasons. First, the text departs from the dominant representational paradigms of its day by presenting the trajectory of the nation as a cycle of female acts and not a series of male acts. In her exhaustive analysis of Central American and Caribbean women writers, Rodriguez says their texts reveal women's "negation of a feeling of nationality that we have taken for granted" (196). In her opinion, this denationalization of women is a reaction to their exclusion as "subjects of law in liberal politics and of plotting the construction of the nation as a series of male acts" (196). As a text written by a male writer that, nonetheless, locates the continuation of the nation in the body of an itinerant chola, *Chuño Palma* departs notably from the hegemonic representations of both nation and women. Trini engenders the national subject, but she also survives him. Through her, the text plots the nation as a cycle of female acts, which also, significantly, summon the temporal horizon of pachakuti.

Secondly, and even more significantly, Villegas's rewriting of the national narrative also complicates Sanjinés's observations on the predominance of modernity's homogenizing optics in the Bolivian costumbrista novel. Sanjinés contends that as a "Western historical form [emerging from] capitalistic historic time and its determining modes of production" the novel as a literary genre fails to illuminate the dissonant Bolivian historical experience, whose key defining element is colonialism" (133)<sup>13</sup>. The novel, however, is the literary form of a bourgeois society bereft

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<sup>13</sup> Sanjinés's argues that Bolivian letrados of the 1940s, mainly Carlos Montenegro, were unable to discern the novel's inadequacy to narrate an organic account of Bolivian nationality, whose primordial element was its indigenous population. Sanjinés's further contrasts Montenegro's naïve faith in the ability of the novel to signal and convey the culmination of Bolivian national identity with José Carlos Mariátegui's skepticism about the ability of the indigenista novel to express "una versión rigurosamente verista del indio" since it is authored by mestizo writers and not by the indigenous actors themselves (Mariátegui 307). Yet, as Mariátegui makes clear, this failure does not take away from the instinctive commitment that this literature exhibits towards the Indian cause. Indeed, he suggests that the indigenista literature is a necessary stage to be traversed in the empowerment of an "indigenous" literature (307). Finally, Mariátegui wrote his essay on indigenismo in the 1920s, and, as Vicky Unruh also speculates, had he lived longer "his views might have undergone change, as did those of other politically committed intellectuals of his time" (66). At the very least, this conjecture indicates that the comparison between a 1920s Peruvian intellectual

of the totalizing unity between economical and cultural production. As the creative expression of a fragmented society, the novel signals a quest for balance between form and content. As a colonial/capitalist society, Bolivia suffers the loss of this totalizing unity even more viscerally, because here “the needs of all other domains of life are relativized to the needs of the economy” (Bernstein 82). Because colonialism was an external system, forcibly imposed on a society that had not undergone the transformations leading to the rise of capitalism in Europe, it goes without saying that this experience of fragmentation and loss would be even more acute in a colonial/postcolonial society. It would, therefore, be limited to argue that the novel per se necessarily signals an outside view of the Bolivian nation. At the same time, though, it is true that the realist novel is inadequate to express the complexity of a Bolivian social space that is, to paraphrase Ricardo Roque-Baldovinos, “intrinsically heterogeneous, [and] where many of the givens of modernity have at best an uncertain status” (72). In this sense, *Chuño Palma*, though a minor costumbrista novel framed within a realist optic, approximates what Roque-Baldovinos calls the epic novel, which was emerging on the Latin American literary scene during the 1940s. Roque-Baldovinos writes that “for the epic novel to assimilate the logic of time and space of Latin America entails both rejecting a view of a centrally hierarchized system and dissolving the illusion of a linear and abstract time” (74). *Chuño Palma* enacts the contradiction of colonial modernity characterizing Bolivian nationhood through a narrative that navigates both linear and cyclical times. In addition, its privileging of a maternal symbolic order underscores the limitations of a patriarchal imaginary for narrating Bolivia’s social and political reality.

The novel’s engagement with temporality and patriarchy, thus, counters Sanjinés’s contention that the historical time in which the Bolivian nationalist novels were narrated “did not correspond fully to the time of a reality in which the cyclical, the recurrent, also marked the essence of its being” (22). Undoubtedly, *Chuño Palma* is still located within a western cultural temporality in that it upholds the western form of the nation-state

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and the 1940s Bolivian literature is rather skewed to infer the failure of Bolivian authors in penning a revolutionary national literature through the novel.

and ignores the cultural and historical memory of the “multifaceted indigenous society” (Sanjinés 23). The past horizon it invokes is not that of indigenous memories of the Incan Empire but of republican nationalism. We can also agree that the novel's efforts to weave the modern and the indigenous narrative horizons together lack the creative sophistication of indigenismo stalwarts like José María Arguedas. None of these facts, however, detract from the text's significance in pre-revolutionary Bolivia, a period Sanjinés claims was marked by an absence of attempts to formulate the novel through the Bolivian social reality. At the very least, *Chuño Palma's* disjointed narrative, balancing itself on cholaje's slippery ground, marks a valiant attempt to undertake precisely such an enterprise. Formulating a multicultural country like Bolivia in terms of one culture, be it the western or the indigenous, attributes to it a static quality that belies the vibrancy of living culture. *Chuño Palma: una novela de cholos* references the Bolivian state's history through an Andean cyclical time in order to link this history to the story of a cholo national subject who is conditioned by a maternal order of accumulation. In doing so, this national narrative locates itself in the unstable ground of cholaje where the nation's indigenous, mestizo, and western elements continually confront each other and modify each other through conflict and collaboration. Aside from the text's intrinsic merits, it also suggests that Bolivian writers, like their Peruvian and other Latin American counterparts, were preoccupied with the elaboration of a literary form that could do justice to their nation's racial difference and historical heterogeneity. That they fail to meet the standards of creative sophistication dictated by our aesthetic parameters cannot diminish the worth of these experiments.

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