

Blest Gana via  
Machiavelli  
and Cervantes



# Blest Gana via Machiavelli and Cervantes:

*National Identity  
and Social Order in Chile*

By

Patricia Vilches

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For Mario Vilches, Adela Bustamante, and Christian Vilches.

“sanza quella occasione la virtù dello animo loro si sarebbe spenta, e senza  
quella virtù la occasione sarebbe venuta invano”

—Machiavelli



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Writing about the history of my country in the early seventies transported me back alongside three individuals who personally influenced my life: Omar Bustamante, Denise Bustamante, and Sandra Gajardo. I will always be thankful to them for the experiences we shared during those ebullient times, when everything seemed possible.

The beautiful surroundings, peace and quiet of Harlaxton Manor provided the perfect environment for reflecting upon Machiavelli, Cervantes, and Blest Gana.

## PREFACE

All the protagonists in this study are fictional or dead. In a sense, my analysis is a journey into the cemetery of the notable to reopen tombs, unearth the remains, and examine the connections between those nineteenth- and twentieth-century individuals who have contributed so definitively to our contemporary perception of the Chilean nation and its social order. Alberto Blest Gana (1830-1920), the first bona fide Chilean novelist, was a required author when I was a schoolgirl and remains so today. There is no other text as iconic as his *Martín Rivas: Novela de costumbres político-sociales* [Martin Rivas: A Novel of Socio-Political Manners] (1862). Reading it is something that all Chileans have in common. My turn came during the early years of the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet Ugarte (1915-2006), who ruled from 1973-1990. Beside the love story of Martín and Leonor, I was mesmerized by the characters' antagonistic political views. They reminded me of the enmities that had erupted in the period 1970-1973, during the three-year government of Salvador Allende Gossens (1908-1973). Allende, a romantic at heart, would have easily fit in with Rafael San Luis. The times, too, were not unlike the period when Cervantes published the first and second parts of *Don Quijote* (1605, 1615). Books and print materials were scrutinized and censored during Pinochet, which created an Index of sorts. Bureaucrats from the military junta thought they could read and control people's minds. My high-school instructor completely de-emphasized the political struggles in *Martín Rivas*, probably out of necessity. Had the instructor focused on Martín Rivas and Rafael San Luis and their commitment to liberal ideas, she would have been considered subversive.

Thanks to a Machiavellian *occasione* (opportunity), I saw Allende in person in 1970 when he was a presidential candidate for the fourth time. I was with a group of *vecinos* (neighbors) and other children when he arrived in a dark blue FIAT 125 that was part of a group of four other cars. He looked elegant in a black leather jacket and with a scarf around his neck. He got out of the car and shook people's hands, speaking almost poetically and with clear diction. I was close to him; he struck me as erudite. As he was getting back in the car and closing the door, on impulse I reached out with my arm and put my hand on his cheek. He stopped and,

smiling, said to me: “careful, I don’t want to pinch your arm in the car door” [cuidado, que se va a apretar el brazo en la puerta].

I lived in Chile for six years under the Pinochet regime. I never once saw him in person. When the Junta de Gobierno took official command of the nation it was televised in a spectacular manner on *cadena nacional* (national television). Stern-looking and aware that he was participating in a historic and unprecedented moment, Pinochet relished his role. The four generals first explained why the Armed Forces were now in command of Chile. Then, they were sworn in by a subordinate whose uniform displayed a few stripes. Reading from a prepared text, he declared: “This Junta assumes the supreme command of the nation with the patriotic commitment to restore Chilean identity, justice, and the nation’s broken institutions” [Esta junta asume el mando supremo de la nación con el patriótico compromiso de restaurar la chilenidad, la justicia y la institucionalidad quebrada] (Junta Militar ’73). From early on, then, the dictatorship sought the restoration of *chilenidad*, which in itself implied the restoration of a social order that the Allende period had attempted to change. Surrounded by his fellow Junta members, Pinochet was an arresting figure. In performance, he instantly transformed himself from an obscure officer into a dictator per excellence, taking the helm away from Gustavo Leigh. The Junta members chose as their headquarters a building constructed by the Allende administration; they renamed it Edificio Diego Portales (Diego Portales Building) and thus intentionally connected their enterprise to the *Ministro* (Minister) Diego Portales y Palazuelos (1793-1837). In 2005, Portales’s remains were discovered at the Catedral de Santiago (Santiago Cathedral). This event triggered a deep and distressing collective memory of the Pinochet years. Portales, like Allende and Pinochet, is a divisive historical figure. Through Blest Gana’s *El ideal de un calavera* [The Ideal of a Rogue/Libertine] (1863), I revisit the *Ministro*’s legacy and the concept of nation that he pursued. Like Allende, he was not in power very long, but his legacy occupies a vital space in Chile’s national narrative.

From my brief encounter with Allende so many years ago, I have read about him, listened to or viewed his speeches and reflected on his determination and indefatigable hope for the presidency. Against the odds, he showed himself to be resilient and to possess a unique capacity to parry with his adversaries. As a candidate, his cleverness and his skill in the art of political negotiation and social relations were remarkable. Machiavelli has stated, however, that leaders need to change according to the character of the times. What worked once would not necessarily work a second time. As president, Allende continued to rely on the qualities that had made him

a successful candidate; he did not heed the changes in the times. After his inauguration, he no longer faced an opposition that simply needed more convincing. Rather, he was confronted forcefully by determined and powerful enemies. Conspiracies surrounded him, from the far left and the conservative right, and he was compelled to try to contain them. Like a contemporary don Quijote, he brought an idealistic perspective to his very real political battles. Eventually, his authority and his control of the government dissipated, and his presidential dream went unrealized. Allende had had unwavering faith in the nation and its democratic processes. Like don Quijote, Allende possessed an anachronistic or rather unreal notion of the polis. Its Armed Forces would always fulfill their traditional mission to defend the constitution. In his mind, then, Chile would always be a forward-looking nation that would respect democratic processes.

Allende's behavior recalls the attitudes and behaviors of José Miguel Carrera Verdugo (1785-1821), Chile's first head of state. The figures of Carrera and Bernardo O'Higgins Riquelme (1778-1842) appear prominently in Blest Gana's *Durante la Reconquista* [During the Reconquest] (1897), a text that recounts Spain's reconquest of Chile following the fall of Napoleon. The text is a tour de force. In it, rich and poor were required to deal with what it meant to defend patria from the *godos* (Spaniards) and to confront what it meant to be—and to belong to—a new nation. Taken together, Blest Gana's *Martín Rivas*, *El ideal de un calavera*, and *Durante la Reconquista* all provide a socio-historical backdrop for Chile's movement toward political independence and thus also contribute fundamentally to its narrative of social order and national identity. Put succinctly, my reading of this narrative finds in it the socio-political roots for explicating Allende's sixties, seventies, and their aftermath.

My work is transatlantic: it examines a Latin American subject through the lens of Machiavelli and Cervantes's *Don Quijote*. Using literary studies and cultural history, I delve into Chile's emergence as a nation and concentrate on "the style," to borrow Benedict Anderson's term, in which nineteenth-century Chileans imagined their community. *Martín Rivas*, *El Ideal*, and *Durante la Reconquista* each depict the political and social exchanges of the early days of independence, the 1830s and 1850s. They illustrate a set of conflicts among the political parties and the social classes that were already in place at that time. Blest Gana's three novels show the whys and hows of Chile's political struggles. They vividly underscore the painfully real and very deep disagreements about the nation's early direction and sense of identity. This fundamental disunity would be felt

acutely again in the twentieth century during the interrupted tenure of President Allende, a quixotic individual who fought for equality but was vanquished by the keepers of social order.

This book is greatly indebted to J.G.A. Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (1975). Machiavelli had gone back to the ancients to transport and translate their classical republican notions into his own circumstances. Through similar "moments," the republican tradition from sixteenth-century Florence also entered seventeenth-century England and Colonial America. At a precise moment in history, then, a republic will attempt to remain stable as it submits to the vertiginous effects of irrational occurrences. It will face a struggle between *fortuna* and *virtù* as Chile did in the nineteenth century and then again toward the end of the twentieth. My study is also indebted to those many Latin American authors who integrated and adapted *Don Quijote* to their own peculiar socio-political circumstances and who thus turned the image of don Quijote into "a metaphor of Latin American politics" [metáfora de la política latinoamericana] (Schmidt-Welle and Simson). During the time when these nations were asserting their independence, Cervantes's knight errant was either a direct or a symbolic cipher for the hardships and exigencies they were forced to endure.

Benedetto Croce has stated that "all true history is contemporary history" [ogni vera storia è storia contemporanea (4)]. This book is informed, therefore, by a desire to use the early narrative expressions of Chile's national identity to uncover the contemporary history of the country where I was born. In the emerging nation, political and cultural antagonisms resulted from social hierarchies and were a product of the social order. For some, patria was synonymous with order itself; order needed to be established and maintained no matter how severe the measures. Alberto Blest Gana's narration of national identity depicted the struggle between an old order and an incipient one. It featured the stresses in a culture under pressure from the oligarchy, a fervent adherence to a nascent market economy, and European tenets of liberty and equality.

Although *Martín Rivas* remains a canonical text for most Chileans, some—especially television producers—have shamefully undervalued it. It cannot and should not be recreated differently as part of an effort to appeal to those who refuse to engage civically. To do so is to dismiss its fundamental richness and to ignore what motivates and drives each of Blest Gana's characters. I have a small hope, therefore, that my book will also help readers to see *Martín Rivas* for what it truly is, a foundational text in the larger Chilean narrative.

## ABBREVIATIONS

### **Alberto Blest Gana:**

*Durante la Reconquista (DR)*

*El ideal de un calavera (IC)*

*Martín Rivas (MR)*

### **Miguel de Cervantes:**

*Don Quijote de la Mancha (DQ)*

### **Niccolò Machiavelli:**

*Art of War (AW)*

*The Discourses of Livy (D)*

*Florentine Histories (FH)*

*The Letters of Machiavelli (LM)*

*The Prince (P)*

## ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS FROM SPANISH AND ITALIAN

### **Miguel de Cervantes:**

*Don Quijote de la Mancha*. Edith Grossman. 2003. New York: Harper Collins.

### **Niccolò Machiavelli:**

*Art of War*. Neal Wood. 1965. Cambridge, Ma: Da Capo Press.

*Clizia*. Daniel T. Gallagher. 1996. Prospect Heights, Ill: Waveland Press.

*The Discourses on Livy*. Julia C. Bondanella, and Peter E. Bondanella. 1997. New York: Oxford University Press.

*Florentine Histories*. Allan H. Gilbert. 1989. *The Chief Works*. Vol. 3. Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press.

*Letters of Machiavelli*. Allan H. Gilbert. 1961. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

*Life of Castruccio Castracani of Lucca*. Peter E. Bondanella, and Mark Musa. 1979. In *The Portable Machiavelli*. Hammondsworth, Eng: Penguin Books.

*Mandragola*. Mera J. Flaumenhaft. 1981. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press.

“Preface to Autograph Manuscript.” Julia C. Bondanella, and Peter E. Bondanella. 1997. In *The Discourses on Livy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

*The Prince* (P). Peter E. Bondanella, and Mark Musa. 1979. In *The Portable Machiavelli*. Hammondsworth, Eng: Penguin Books.

All other translations from Spanish to English, including works of fiction and criticism, are my own.



# INTRODUCTION

## PASSAGE TO CHILE, 1814

### The Old World and The New Order

To examine nation building and social order in nineteenth-century Chile might seem a futile attempt to comb through issues from the past that no longer relate to the present. Following Alfredo Jocelyn-Holt, however, and his vast *Historia general de Chile* [General History of Chile], we know that “getting close to what is distant and eliminating what is close... one is able to extract what is valuable, what is necessary and substantial” [acercando lo distante y eliminando lo próximo... se exprime lo que verdaderamente vale, lo necesario y sustancial (2004, 31)]. Terrell Carver, in his analysis of Karl Marx, has also argued that “any examination of the present is essentially a reexamination of those ideas and events from the past that we take the present to be” (2). Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) and Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616), were obviously avid readers of history and literature; their own writings recorded a continuous conversation with authors from the past for the purposes of understanding their present. In a similar way, my study aims to engage Chilean Alberto Blest Gana (1830-1920) in a dialogue that includes Machiavelli and Cervantes. On previous occasions, Machiavelli and Cervantes, mainly through his *Don Quijote* (1605, 1615), have been successfully employed, from multidisciplinary perspectives, as tools of research to narrate cultural history. Here, using the precepts of Machiavelli, and key concepts such as *fortuna* (fate, fortune), *virtù* (power, vigor, strength, prowess),<sup>1</sup> and *occasione* (opportunity), as well as quixotic

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<sup>1</sup> The term *virtù* held a variety of meanings for Machiavelli. The Florentine Secretary adopted the notion of *virtù* from classical authors, following the fashion of other contemporaries, such as Giovanni Pontano. Derived from *vir*, the concept contains masculine characteristics that convey, among other traits, courage, ability for spur-of-the-moment action, and boldness to achieve one’s goals. For Felix Gilbert, *virtù* could even be equated with a medicinal power that provided strength to a body. *Virtù*, then, was “the force which gave vitality to a living being”

elements of *Don Quijote*, I explore the transatlantic connections between Machiavelli, Cervantes and Blest Gana and thus illuminate the cultural intersections, socio-political foundations and literary manifestations of Chile's narration of national identity.

Blest Gana provides the framework and the foundation for this analysis. His works, especially *Martín Rivas*, are considered to be among Chile's first national novels, as Doris Sommer has claimed in her seminal *Foundational Fictions* (1993) (4). The life and hardships of the young Martín Rivas are familiar to a wide national audience, including most, if not all, of the country's secondary school students. Sommer has explored the questions of romance and heterosexual love from the perspective of national "consolidation" (6). My main purpose is to uncover in Blest Gana's fiction the strategies that Chileans employed to uphold or undermine traditional social order. Using a narrative analysis of national identity, I propose to explore questions of social class and political hierarchy and thereby to shed light upon the tug-of-war of oppositional views in critical episodes in Chilean history. These include: 1.) The Reconquering of the Capitanía General de Chile (Chilean captaincy) by the Spaniards in 1814; 2.) El Motín de Quillota<sup>2</sup> (Quillota's Mutiny) in 1837 which resulted in the assassination of Diego Portales y Palazuelos (1793-1837); and 3.) El Motín de Urriola<sup>3</sup> (Urriola's Mutiny) in 1851. Each of these events is reproduced in *Durante la Reconquista* [During the Reconquest] (1897), *El ideal de un calavera* [The Ideal of a Rogue/Libertine] (1863), and *Martín Rivas: Novela de costumbres político-sociales* [Martín Rivas: Novel of Socio-Political Manners] (1862), respectively. In addition to these three events, there is a fourth that cannot be ignored and which seems to connect closely to the others—the most dramatic chapter in twentieth-century Chile's national narrative: the 1973 coup d'état against socialist president Salvador Allende Gossens (1908-1973). With *Martín Rivas* as its main focus, my study ultimately examines cultural practices and social behaviors as expressions of the political and class struggles of Chileans. These conflicts result from essentially different conceptions of social order. Related to this, Álvaro Contreras has indicated that chronotopes of "family order and social order" [el orden familiar y el orden social] are cardinal features of Blest Gana's novels (84). I contend

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("Machiavelli's Idea of Virtù," 54). Also see pp. 6-52. For Harvey C. Mansfield, translators of Machiavelli have difficulty with the word *virtù*, especially as it concerns "amoral qualities." In this respect, Mansfield asserts that Machiavelli "speaks of *virtù* transhistorically, as pertaining to the nature of man" (1996, 7).

<sup>2</sup> Quillota is a city located in Central Chile, in the Valparaíso region.

<sup>3</sup> "Urriola" refers to Colonel Pedro Urriola Balbontín, head of the mutiny.

that the aforementioned historical episodes in the narration of Chilean national identity were permeated by two fundamental elements that are also integral to Blest Gana's novels: (i) quests for wealth and individual power (concepts underlined by Machiavelli in his texts) and (ii) quixotic attitudes that defy society's expectations, a principal feature of Cervantes's masterpiece.

Both Machiavelli and Cervantes revered the mythical idea of the city of Rome. For the Florentine Secretary, Rome represented a glorious republican past, one that for him had taken a turn for the worst with the instauration of empire in the majestic city. At every turn, Machiavelli exulted the *virtù* of Roman citizens, individuals that he defined as devoid of selfish ambitions and forcefully dedicated to maintaining patria. His *Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livy*, known as *The Discourses* (p. 1531), paid homage to a way of life that he felt was a key socio-political antidote to the materialistic concerns of his present. According to Roberto Ridolfi, when Machiavelli finally had the chance to see Rome, his encounter with the city ought to have felt like a magic moment for him: "In his writings we do not find a word about it, not even an allusion; and yet we cannot do otherwise than think of him dwelling on those ruins as he did on the pages of Livy" (67). For Cervantes, Rome meant a literary rite of passage. According to Frederick De Armas, in *La Numancia* [The Siege of Numantia] (1582), Cervantes revealed his full and complete admiration for Italy, accomplishing an epic poem that would rival and problematize Virgil, "singer of Rome" (2002, 38). Indeed, in "El licenciado vidriera" [Glass Graduate/Licentiate Vidriera], Cervantes narrated a biographical journey of Tomás Rodaja through various places in the Italian territories, among them Rome, "queen of cities and mistress of the world" [reina de las ciudades y señora del mundo] (Cervantes 1997, 49). Likewise, in *Don Quijote*, Cervantes depicted the powerful Charles V as an admirer of the ancient Roman Pantheon. That was the building, don Quijote stated "that best preserves the fame of its founders for grandeur and magnificence" (*DQ*, II, 8; 505) [es el que más conserva la fama de la grandiosidad y magnificencia de sus fundadores (p. 593)]. Similarly, Chile as a national entity could only be conceived by going back to Rome, as Jocelyn-Holt has observed. We see this most clearly in *Histórica relación del reyno de Chile* [An Historical Account of the Reign of Chile] (1646), written in Rome by the Jesuit *criollo*<sup>4</sup> Alonso de Ovalle (1601/3-1651). Ovalle's work was quickly translated into Italian, a fact that allowed Ovalle to

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<sup>4</sup> In the Chilean captaincy, *criollos* were understood to be Chilean-born children of European parents.

recruit men of the cloth to accompany him to Chile. An essential aspect of Chile's first historical account can be found in the way in which Ovalle conceived his work in Italian Renaissance terms and perspective; that is, the Jesuit author wrote as if he were recuperating and reviving cultural elements that he recognized, turning his authorial voice into a mixture of the familiar and the remote (Jocelyn-Holt 2004, 37).

In nineteenth-century Chile, social order was imposed and maintained by the ruling elite, a social group that, in collaboration with a powerful church, successfully ruled by collective agreement during the nation's early period. After independence, as in most of Latin America, Chilean society strove to establish community networks through institutions that would establish new traditions as well as preserve inherited ones from their colonial past. These latter were dedicated most fundamentally to the upholding of a rigid social hierarchy. Relieved from the social imprisonment of the *peninsulares* (Spaniards), the *criollo* elite were granted the *occasione*, in a Machiavellian sense, to become the new most powerful sector of Chile. Through the Catholic church, moreover, the values and morals of the conquistadores were perpetuated through a common faith. The church, an institution characterized as stifling by Machiavelli, facilitated the work of the *criollos* in the new nation, keeping the people subdued under the banner of Christianity. Individuals in power, like Portales, understood that social order was preserved by keeping people "in place." In that manner, they assured themselves that maintenance of well-defined conservative institutions and values would not only move the nation forward but also prevent it from falling apart. With time, however, harmony progressively disintegrated and consensus about the nation's socio-political direction could no longer be reached by the nation's elite, as Ana María Stuenkel has found (129). Conservative versus progressive factions emerged. In many respects, each group's conception of Chile was directly proportionate to the amount of influence they felt from Enlightenment France. On the one side were those who saw the Church as an institution above the State. Those opposed to the impediments of conservative thought were influenced by French revolutionary processes; they questioned the grip of what they considered degenerate Catholic power (133). The *pelucones*—conservatives whose views represented the nation's powerful families—, considered the church a deterrent against disorder. They did not wish their sacred institution to be subordinated to the nascent Chilean state. On the other hand, the *pipiolos*—individuals who, like their opponents, were for the most part from the higher classes—held progressive, liberal ideas, and viewed the Church as a bastion of reactionary power which held the nation back. This

original fractiousness has never been resolved in Chile. In fact, it outlived the nineteenth century and persisted clearly into the twentieth century, a fact made most evident by the presidency, ousting, and death of Salvador Allende. Allende ended his life in the presidential palace of La Moneda—a place conceptualized as an emblem “as much of colonial as of republican pride” [orgullo tanto de la Colonia como de la República] (Jocelyn-Holt 2004, 367)—an episode that we can view as completing the cycle of the birth of republicanism.

In the past, many critics have considered Blest Gana as not truly politically engaged. Against this characterization, we can say that he was in fact fervently concerned with his nation’s development. As a novelist, he wanted an audience that would buy his novels, of course, which made him proceed with caution when dealing with political subjects. His treatment of divisive socio-political ideologies and their deleterious effects on the country, however, was at once wise and self-assured. His writings obviously and systematically set the fragility of Chile’s social order into relief, a subject that Jocelyn-Holt has explored in *El peso de la noche: Nuestra frágil fortaleza histórica* [The Weight of Night: Our Fragile Historical Fortitude], (1997, 2014). In *Martín Rivas* and *El ideal de un calavera*, Machiavellian as well as quixotic postures were adopted by rebellious, manly characters who were compelled to subvert order in society. Consequently, Martín Rivas and Abelardo Manríquez, the protagonists, radiated defiance and masculinity. They developed heroic masculine identities through their engagement in nation building; that is, they appeared like nineteenth-century manly caballeros in their visions and aspirations for their young nation. Abelardo was beautiful and debonair. He could wear a uniform like no other, which lent a particular brand of manliness to his brave performance as an elegant *húsar* (hussar) in the Chilean Army. As for Martín, he stood out as timid but manly, not hesitant to flex his Machiavellian muscle of patriotism and intellectual superiority over others (Vilches 2010, “Martín”, 71-72). As a young man from Copiapó, from the provinces, he engaged with the various sectors of Santiago’s society and thereby came into contact with differing views of social order.

*Durante la Reconquista* provides a veritable historical backdrop for Chile’s struggle to recover itself as a nation during the three-year reconquering of Chile by Spain. This was a time when the *criollos*’ ambitions, desires, and apprehensions towards the new nation became clearly evident. In these times of duress, the *criollos*’ ambiguous territorial position, halfway between Europe and America, coincided with the image they held of themselves, which was “half American, half European—that

is, *inbetweeners*” [americanos y europeos a medias—por eso, *mediadores*] (Jocelyn-Holt 2004, 29). As Blest Gana’s text opens, we learn that in 1814, after the Spaniards reconquered Chilean territory, the *criollos* experienced a “desolate patriotism” [patriotismo desconsolado (*DR* 30)]. As Chile became liberated, fear of anarchy compelled the ruling elite to continue to uphold the Spaniards’ hierarchical social order. They did this because they believed it could help them maintain a kind of political steadiness and preserve their material wealth. In all three novels, then, Blest Gana’s protagonists clashed against the conservative gatekeepers of social order. In Blest Gana’s vision, Manuel Rodríguez Erdoíza (1785-1818), the members of El Motín de Quillota, and those of El Motín de Urriola fostered disarray in the nation as a means to correct what they perceived to be an unjust socio-political order. Sensing the danger, conservative factions founded the Sociedad del Orden (Society of Order) in 1845 “with the manifest purpose of restoring the value of the notion of order as a value in itself” [con el manifiesto propósito de restituir el valor de la noción de orden como valor en sí mismo] according to Stuvén (139). As a reaction, the Sociedad de la Igualdad (Society of Equality) was created in 1850 to promote Enlightenment ideals of social equality and to combat nonessential and rigid social codes which had been implemented during numerous conservative governments. The impulse to preserve or destabilize the social customs and cultural practices of Chile, entrenched since colonial times, was a central feature, therefore, of Blest Gana’s characters who operated within a class-based social order. As noted by Victor Figueroa Clark, Allende grew up in a Chile that had fully absorbed nineteenth-century social changes (8). To an extent, then, Allende erupted onto the political scene towards the middle of the twentieth century to continue the social fights initiated by the Sociedad de la Igualdad.

Blest Gana depicted for his readers the intricate world of the so-called *siúticos*,<sup>5</sup> a social group effectively explored by Óscar Contardo in *Siútico: Arribismo, abajismo y vida social en Chile* (2008) [Social Wannabe: Upward Mobility, Poverty Chic, and Social Life in Chile]. For Contardo, the Chilean elite, past and present, have made a concerted effort to keep themselves separate from others and thus to maintain order in their social imaginary. One way they have done this is by labeling intruders as *siúticos*. Chile has a plethora of exclusive physical spaces, urban and rural, that display an invisible yet concrete “members only” ambiance. In the words of René Girard, the Chilean upper-class are bona fide mediators of

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<sup>5</sup> A *siútico* may be best described as someone who performs the role of a person of a higher social station than he/she truly is. Concurrently, it may also define a person with visibly affected manners, executed to cause an effect on others.

desire for the *siúticos* who are anxious to possess the objects of the mediators as “a means of reaching the mediators. The desire is aimed at the mediator’s *being*” (53). Given these compelling parameters, the mediators are perpetually devising ways of separating themselves. Besides illustrious names and certifiable European roots and looks, the Chilean upper-class differentiate themselves from *siúticos* by linguistic codes, clothing, and aesthetic tastes in general. Notably, in the nineteenth century, upper-class Chileans more often than not were traders, miners and landowners, according to Simon Collier (15). To be a land owner in Chile, then, was essential and exclusive, a quality of the elite and an object of social desire. To this day, the length of time a piece of land has been held by a family can be viewed almost as a marker of nobility and is certainly a sign of “belonging” for the elite (Contardo 132). Families with enduring links to their land may even have an ancestral, private cemetery on their properties, an unmistakable indicator of aristocratic roots. Nowhere is Machiavelli’s dicta that, in order to succeed, an able ruler would know to keep his hands off people’s property (*P*, 17; 131) (p. 733) more apt.<sup>6</sup>

Contardo depicts Chilean aristocrats as having a greyhound’s nose for detecting the scent of new money. With this comes unavoidable affected taste. An egregious modern display of this can be found in Lucía Hiriart de Pinochet and her loud hats, which, in their abundance, became counterpoints to Imelda Marcos’s massive inventory of shoes (224). Chile’s über-*siútica*, Lucía Hiriart wore them despite her inelegance. As L.J. Jordanova has argued, in visual culture hats narrate an eloquent story; indeed, they are a central focus for “mediating social relationships,” which gives full meaning to why and where people wear them (64). For an ambitious woman like Lucía Hiriart, her hats situated her in a position of power, and, unfortunately for her, of ridicule, too. In this respect, the first lady of the dictatorship embraced her hats like a queen would embrace her crown, believing that through a powerful visual artifact she could earn a much desired place at the top of the social ladder. Despite her social aspirations, as a *siútica*, she remained socially landless and an outsider, rejected by the members of the *tribu* (tribe), a term forcefully and bravely given by Contardo to the Chilean aristocracy. Indeed, desiring to belong,

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<sup>6</sup> In *Nation of Enemies*, Constable and Valenzuela showed how Chile’s agrarian reform, pushed through by the government of Eduardo Frei Montalva (1911-1982), president of Chile 1964-1970, expropriated lands from the oligarchy to redistribute them among peasant cooperatives. This was a push to combat poverty and modernize the country by promoting industrial efficiency. As expected, the agrarian reform provoked “a visceral upper-class resentment that has never diminished” (23).

*siúticos* such as Lucía Hiriart perform flawed or over-the-top tribal rites that are easily detected and dismissed by the elite. Thus they remain nothing more than frustrated projections of the aristocracy. In *Martín Rivas* and *El ideal de un calavera*, the elite maintained order by keeping the *siúticos*, who were members of the *medio pelo* class (lower middle class) outside of their social circles. In turn, the more able *siúticos* devised ways to penetrate the protected social spaces of the tribal elite, mimicking the battle tactics described by Machiavelli. As detailed in *El ideal de un calavera*, the members of the *medio pelo* class lived under a constant illusion of attaining a higher social membership by association:

The social class that in our country has been designated with the distinctive name of *medio pelo*, one that naturally exists, as in all classes, within a variety of categories, always lives to cultivate the illusion that friendship can erase the boundary that separates its members from the well-to-do.

[La clase social que, en nuestro país, designamos con el distintivo de *medio pelo*, entre la que naturalmente existe, como en todas, variedad de categorías, vive siempre cultivando la ilusión de que la amistad puede borrar el lindero que de la gente rica la separa (*IC*, I, 229)].

In the private as well as in the public realm, Blest Gana's characters behaved in ways that adhered to material aspirations and polarized views about Chile's order. Ambition made people consider that "anything that is not business is superfluous. Arts, literature, all of this constitute for them a pastime for the idle" [todo lo que no es negocio es superfluo. Artes, literatura, todo para ellos constituye un pasatiempo de ociosos (*MR* 242)]. From this perspective, Martín and Abelardo confronted a materialistic, hostile environment that did not care for penniless young men. They fought for a niche in society and pursued unsuitable romantic love in a quixotic manner, not understanding that they were tilting at social windmills whose ferocious blades would destroy them. In a nation that had come into contact with foreign markets, as well as revolutionary thoughts from France, a clash had been set up among the elite: conservatives who desired to preserve the precious social order versus progressives who wanted change and to inspire the working classes.

## Narrating Chilean National Identity

In his seminal *Imagined Communities* (1983, revised 1991, 2006), Benedict Anderson has argued that fellow-members of nations, or

members of imagined communities, as he famously and categorically defined nations, possess a specific and tangible “image of their communion” (5). Anderson has stressed that these imagined communities ought not to be distinguished in terms of the falsity or genuineness in which they are perceived, “but by the style in which they are imagined” (5). Due to the increased deterioration and decentralization of both the dynastic realm and the religious community, individuals began to conceptualize the nation, massively aided by print culture (newspapers, novels), a phenomenon that Anderson has characterized as “print-capitalism” (135).<sup>7</sup> During the past decades, Latin American scholars have detailed that Anderson basically concentrated on the imagined communities of the cultural and political elites. With that in mind, the boundaries of Latin American nations’ imagined communities have been redefined and reconstructed, as in *Beyond Imagined Communities* (2003), edited by Sara Castro-Klarén and Charles Chasteen. Raising a few perceived issues not addressed in Anderson’s argument, Castro-Klarén has contended that “in the making of the nation as a cultural artifact” the pre-Hispanic groups in Latin America felt themselves part of a community that claimed “immemorial occupation of the land” (164). These communities, therefore, felt a link that “exceeded the bounds of print media, especially novels” (164). Likewise, Walter Mignolo has notably examined the weight of the yoke that canonical readings from the West imposed on Latin America. There is no doubt that the Americas were greatly influenced by European cultural hegemony, which is evidenced in a work such as *Don Quijote*. Rejecting a Eurocentric lens, Mignolo has argued that Cervantes’s text contributed to silencing the voices and to squelching the “epistemic breaks” that attempted a “de-linking” from Western cultural influence (31). For that reason, while investigating Blest Gana’s narration of national identity in nineteenth-century Chile, one needs to remain aware that the Chilean author spoke mostly from above, from an elitist perspective on nation building. Shanty towns and marginalized ghettos could not be considered as components of the socio-political order (Jocelyn-Holt 2014, 242).<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, Blest

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<sup>7</sup> Print culture triggered an exchange of ideas and it increased individuals’ realization of their own simultaneity in a “horizontal-secular, transverse-time” fashion; hence, through reading about a shared territory, people began to develop national consciousness (Anderson 39).

<sup>8</sup> “In fact, we would exaggerate if we said that the peripheral slum dwellings, the tenement houses, and later the shantytowns are constitutive axes of the socio-political order. This should not surprise us; they are not only pseudo-urban displaced individuals, but they are also ejected from the land” [En efecto, exageraríamos si dijéramos que las barriadas periféricas, los conventillos, y más

Gana's novels were permeated by a fundamental preoccupation with a common language that could reach all social levels. For the author, this task could not be accomplished through the graceful and elevated language of lyric poetry and rhyme. According to Bernardo Subercaseaux, the epistemological advantage of narrative discourse over a poetic one had already been promoted in the nineteenth century by José Victorino Lastarria (1817-1888), a prominent scholar, fiction writer, and instructor at the prestigious Instituto Nacional (National Institute). This type of endorsement of narrative style over poetry contributed, in turn, to Blest Gana's predilection for a *novela de costumbres*, novel of manners (147).<sup>9</sup> The portrait of customs and everyday life in Chile, with patriotic themes and characters' awareness of their physical surroundings, reflected a set of ideas that were welcomed by a receptive audience, benefitting Blest Gana in his creation of a burgeoning literary nationalism (149).

The animosity among Chileans about the shape of their community, their nation, was patent in political uprisings in the nineteenth century and it continues to be so in the twenty-first century. Early on, Chileans were particularly eager to adopt a local national narrative and identity, having been perceived by former viceroynalties as "bumptious provincials," as Gertrude Yeager has noted (71). In Europe, Chile was from its beginnings no more than a brief note or "noticia" (notion) from far away (Jocelyn-Holt 2004, 31).<sup>10</sup> Despite these inauspicious beginnings, Chile, even as it established its own identity, also became a place of political enmities. As the republic developed, a tug of war began between those Chileans who wanted at all costs to enshrine their social status permanently and those

tarde las poblaciones callampas forman parte de los ejes constitutivos del orden político social. Lo cual no debiera sorprendernos; no sólo se trata de desplazados seudourbanos, sino de expulsados de la tierra] (Jocelyn-Holt 2014; 242).

<sup>9</sup> Young members of the intellectual elite, such as Joaquín Blest Gana, (the author's younger brother), as well as Francisco Bilbao, the Arteaga Alemparte brothers and Lastarria himself, demanded the birth of a national novel. By 1850, in Chile the novel became "the most appropriate way to create a profile of Chilean literature" [la forma más adecuada para fijar el perfil de la literatura chilena], allowing individuals the possibility to fulfill an aspiration for portraying nationalism from a liberal perspective (Subercaseaux 136).

<sup>10</sup> Jocelyn-Holt emphasizes that the enterprise of Chile is a frustrated one: "People begin to think and spread the idea that Chile is something else: a 'no place place', a utopia, one that even as it has been so many times seen and declared, nonetheless does not materialize; it remains in limbo, in absolute exile" [Se llega a pensar y difundir la idea de que Chile es otra cosa: un 'lugar no lugar', una utopía, que habiendo sido tantas veces vista y anunciada, así y todo, no se materializa, persiste en un limbo, en un exilio absoluto (32-33)].

influenced by France who wanted forcefully to disrupt the status quo. As the nineteenth century went on, these bifurcated visions of the nation acted upon Chileans in increasing levels of intensity. The presidency of José Manuel Balmaceda, (1840-1891), from 1886-1891, was one demonstration of the severity of these divisions. Before Allende's failed presidency, such antagonistic views were also vividly enacted during the tenure of president Gabriel González Videla (1898-1980), from 1946-1952.

Balmaceda's tenure ended in the so-called Guerra Civil Chilena de 1891 [Chilean Civil War of 1891], a civic revolution that pitted executive power against legislative power. With the president's troops defeated by the oxymoronic conservative-revolutionary forces, who were aided by the British, Balmaceda took his life a day after the end of his mandate. González Videla, partly due to the exigencies of the Cold War, radically turned against those who had helped him to gain the presidency in 1946. Having come to power through the aid of the radical and communist parties, González Videla disenfranchised the Communist party a few years later by making it illegal. Thousands of Chileans were forced to flee to avoid being incarcerated; the most famous political exile was Pablo Neruda (1904-1973), one of Chile's Nobel Laureates (1971). Naturally, these conflicting narrations of national identity contributed to the socio-political animosity that was vividly present in twentieth-century Chile, especially during the presidency of Salvador Allende. In a flagrant attack on civility, Allende's three-year presidency was truncated by a coup d'état on Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1973, emblemized by the figure of Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, (1915-2006).<sup>11</sup> Determined to govern in collaboration with the Chilean upper-class, Pinochet and the other leaders of the military coup not only abruptly ended the presidency of Allende, but, in a reactionary mode, they also egregiously reset the clock on the nation's social order, successfully retaining a vertically stratified social order that resembled the times of the *pelucones*.

In 2000, almost thirty years after the coup d'état by the Chilean Armed Forces, a statue of Allende was brought to the Plaza de la Constitución (Constitution Square). In 2005, the remains of Diego Portales were

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<sup>11</sup> Ariel Dorfman illustrated the fatal coincidence of the two Tuesdays, 11<sup>th</sup> September, in Chile and the United States: "I have been through this before... Tuesday, September 11 has been a day of mourning for me and millions of others, ever since that day in 1973 when Chile lost its democracy in a military coup, that day when death entered irrevocably and changed us forever. And now... the malignant gods of random history have wanted to impose upon another country that dreadful day, again a Tuesday, once again an 11<sup>th</sup> September filled with death (1).

discovered in La Catedral de Santiago (Santiago Cathedral). Both events were national news, and, as the memory of the still-living Pinochet hovered in the background, Chileans' reactions evinced incompatible perceptions of authoritarianism and national identity. In the nineteenth century, conservative factions realized that through authoritarianism they could preserve a social arrangement that was prone to permanency and presented very favorable "conditions of governability" [condiciones de gobernabilidad] (Stuven 39). Portales sought to confront the old modes which he believed needed fixing. From this perspective, he acted as J.G.A. Pocock has described in *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (1975). Juan Carlos Arellano's *Entre la virtud y la fortuna: Portales en los ojos de Maquiavelo* [Between *Fortuna* and *Virtù*: Portales in the Eyes of Machiavelli] (2012), has also addressed Portales's Machiavellian moment in the formation of the Chilean republic:

Within the logic of political innovation and its consequences, as underlined by Pocock, we can venture as a hypothesis that Diego Portales's main *virtù* is his capacity to handle perilous political contingency and its unpredictable consequences as he seeks to strengthen the government.

[Dentro de la lógica de la innovación política y sus consecuencias, subrayada por Pocock, podemos aventurar como hipótesis que la principal virtud de Diego Portales es su capacidad para manejar la azarosa contingencia política y sus imprevisibles consecuencias en su objetivo de fortalecer el gobierno (20)].

Portales was a political virtuoso. He left a strong legacy in a remarkably short time. A strong man, Portales was among the most prominent authoritarian figures of his times, committed to the preservation of order at any cost. The *Ministro*, as Portales was known, considered this the only way forward for nineteenth-century Chile. In the twentieth century, Allende became the other side of the stern *Ministro's* coin. A long-term candidate for the presidency, Allende was an innovator who sought to break with older political modes. As a young politician and student of medicine, he understood that there were too many decayed social systems in the nation and that they were forcibly maintained by an antiquated order. They were collapsing around under-privileged Chileans and needed to be replaced by new, audacious ones that would seek to integrate those that had been left behind since the founding of the republic. This social impulse was a tremendous threat to the elite. Allende, however, felt that his socialist program could be a success because of "Chile's

unique political inheritance” (Stern 18). In an intrepid quixotic move, he attempted to exercise change in Chile’ social order through an unheard-of socialist democratic process.

In *Nation and Narration* (1990), Homi Bhabha has analyzed the “conceptual indeterminacy” and ideological ambivalence that inhere in the concept of a nation. As a structure, for Bhabha, the nation has elusive margins and can be best understood as a discourse of “political power and cultural authority” (1990, 2-4). Along with power, of course, comes subjugation. In this connection, Blest Gana’s nineteenth-century narration of national identity expressed the socio-political obsessions of upper-class Chileans as a discourse of power. For these heirs of the *criollos*, there was a need to keep the nation divided along inflexible social lines. Rigidity and oppression were required to maintain social order. But their efforts did not always succeed. The patricians were sometimes confronted from within their own circle by quixotic individuals who fought for the underprivileged. In *Martín Rivas* and *El ideal de un calavera*, national identities were determined by an intermingling of private concerns with public ones such that, from an economic perspective, Chile’s sense of “nationness” was more contentious than the national discourse emanating from the powerful sectors. Private and public social spaces created by Blest Gana disclosed sentimental as well as materialistic features in the characters’ behaviors and aspirations. As a result, not many of his characters expressed patriotism, or, in a Machiavellian sense, a love for patria. Characters that identified themselves with higher sectors of society found support and cohesiveness principally within their own *tribu*, to use Contardo’s felicitous term. This caused fragmentation and discord when they encountered members of inferior social sectors. Indeed, from early on, the elite had the tendency to form a group united by common interests [cierta tendencia a “aclararse”] for instance, via “god-parenting with members of the same family” [compadrazgo con miembros de la misma familia] (Jocelyn-Holt 2011, 136). Notwithstanding such close-knit allegiances, the political fragmentation of the elite can clearly be seen in action in *Martín Rivas*. The *pelucones* defined their oligarchic views in stark opposition to those of the French-influenced *pipiolos*, who perceived the reactionary modes of the *pelucones* as an impediment to progress and intellectual advancement. In the end, the *pelucones* prevailed. After the debacle of the Motín of Urriola, the *pipiolos* realized that the *pueblo* (the people) had not been with them. In a Machiavellian sense, and following James A. Wood, this was because the people did not perceive a significant positive change in their lives through the actions of the *pipiolos*. In fact, they did not even think they were worse off with the *pelucones*. In this regard, the Sociedad

de la Igualdad never really considered the people. They patronized them without pushing for social reform (225). On the other hand, speaking along lines later followed by Allende in the twentieth century, the Sociedad de la Igualdad decided that the only route to political success was “to attack the sources of poverty everywhere: city, village, and rural estate” (226). From this perspective, using Bhabha’s notion of transactions, national identity emerged as an expression of opposite and conflicting narratives. The ruling elites defined the nation for themselves by opposing the views and desires of the people and thus offered a vision for Chile that, from a socio-political perspective, was essentially inverted.

Within the Machiavellian and quixotic context, the civic-minded characters of *Martín Rivas* and *El ideal de un calavera* engaged in reflection and action to undermine a pre-established social order, a struggle that reverberated and found echo during Allende’s presidential mandate. Those individuals from the *medio pelo* sector, even though frustrated by their social circumstances, realized Bhabha’s concept of mimicry. They were removed from the main social stage by nascent nineteenth-century capital markets and they copied the behaviors and aspirations of those in power. In this way, they expressed Bhabha’s notion of “a double articulation” (1994, 86). They followed the political affiliations of the upper class, even if doing so went against their own self-interest and sense of class identity. This characteristic is still very much present in Chile’s twenty-first century. Through conspiracies, Blest Gana’s characters intended to penetrate their social superiors’ physical spaces. In *Martín Rivas*, for instance, Agustín Encina envisioned himself to be a worldly seducer, aggressively approaching Adelaida Molina, a member of the *medio pelo* class. Contrary to his wishes, he was trapped in a spurious marriage concocted by the unhappy young woman’s family. The narration, on the whole, revealed that the Molinas aspired to ascend through the “marriage,” but noted that their personas completely betrayed them to others, highlighting Bhabha’s insight that “in order to be effective, mimicry must continuously produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (1994, 86). Within these disputed national spaces, Blest Gana underscored his characters’ perceptions of what the established social order should be. Very firmly, his narration of national identity foreshadowed the hardships of Allende’s three-year presidency in Chile. Just as Balmaceda was during his tenure, Allende was criticized for having *siúticos* in his cabinet, among them Mireya Baltra, minister of Labor who had previously been a seller of newspapers. Aware of the historic moment—a person with working class roots who would join the traditionally aristocratic Chilean government—Allende solemnly addressed the background of Baltra when inaugurating