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HOPE, FAITH, AND CHARITY: FOUNDATIONS FOR A (NEW) NATION IN SORAYA JUNCAL'S *JACINTA Y LA VIOLENCIA**

ESPERANZA, FE Y CARIDAD: BASES PARA UNA (NUEVA) NACIÓN
EN *JACINTA Y LA VIOLENCIA* DE SORAYA JUNCAL

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Abstract: In this article I analyze Soraya Juncal's *Jacinta y la violencia* and its arrangement of matters of class, race, and gender. I argue that it conveys a conservative-partisan idea, and I find that whereas it is feasible to link the novel to a Feminist aesthetics, it is really hard to go any further, politically wise, because the story is dedicated to perpetuate oppressive systems. I chose the Theological Virtues (Faith, Charity, and Hope) as deconstruction devices because it is not possible to trace intersectional matters in *Jacinta y la violencia*, without understanding them in a context of an utterly Catholicized nation that sees everything in essentialist ways.

Keywords: Intersectionality, Feminism, Theological Virtues, Colombian Literature, Conservatism.

Resumen: En este artículo analizo *Jacinta y la violencia* de Soraya Juncal y la manera como trata cuestiones de clase, raza y género. Sostengo que la novela transmite una idea partidista-conservadora reconociendo que, siendo posible vincularla a una estética feminista, es difícil ir más lejos, políticamente hablando, porque está dedicada a perpetuar sistemas de opresión. Elegí las virtudes teológicas (fe, esperanza y caridad) como dispositivos de deconstrucción en este análisis porque no es posible rastrear cuestiones de raza, clase y género, en *Jacinta y la violencia*, sin comprenderla en el contexto de una nación completamente católica en la que todo se concibe de manera esencialista.

Palabras clave: Interseccionalidad, feminismo, virtudes teológicas, literatura colombiana, conservatismo.

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Recognizing the Layers of *Jacinta y la violencia*

Jacinta y la violencia, by Soraya Juncal, makes part of what the Colombian literary tradition has called *literatura de La Violencia* a corpus of novels, short stories, and poems that allude to a period of the country's history that runs from 1948, with the killing of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, and the subsequent riots known as El Bogotazo or as El 9 de Abril; to 1964, when the national army dismantled the last subversive settlement, Marquetalia, and the conflict mutated to a guerrilla's war. *La Violencia*, as expected, represents one of the crudest stages in Colombia's long-standing confrontation between left and right wing politicians, and most literary works created around this period are characterized by their portrayal of the atrocities perpetrated by sympathizers of the Liberal and Conservador parties. Juncal's novel complies with such attributes, but its inclusion among the essential works of this cycle, as will be explained in this work, is far from unproblematic given the fact that it conveys a Conservative point of view. Besides its partisan posture, *Jacinta y la violencia* offers an interesting literary perspective as it reveals clear connections to the 19th Century's 'Foundational Fictions': the novel establishes 'desirable' models for the growing of a larger community. It does so by basing them on the representations inherited from the Spanish colonization, specifically the thoughts about heterosexual love, religion/Catholicism, race, and servitude. Nevertheless, Juncal does not try to follow the structural rules of a 'Foundational Fiction' in her novel (the linear fashion, the climax in the middle, the end as its fatal consequence); this topic represents the author's approach to a Feminist aesthetics and will be explored in detail below. Keeping in mind that *Jacinta y la violencia* is thematically close to a 'Foundational Fiction', it is necessary to take a closer look at its closest paradigm. *María* (1867) by Jorge Isaacs became the quintessential 'National Romance' after its publication: both main characters, María and Efraín, were white, Catholic, chaste, and willing to get married and have as many children as God may send their way. There was a 'problem' though: María was the orphan daughter of a couple of Jews who died in a Protestant land (Jamaica) and despite the fact that she embraced Catholicism from her childhood, she carried the 'stigma' of her origins along with a rare case of epilepsy, which would eventually end her life.

Just as any other 19th Century Novel, *María* was also representative of a certain social group among Colombian people. In this particular case, given Isaacs's constant praise of the Catholic Church, the whiteness of the

masters in contrast to the darkness of the servants, and the radical importance conferred to private property, the novel seemed to reproduce the beliefs of what would eventually become the Partido Conservador, perennial antagonist of Partido Liberal. A few decades before the end of the 19th Century, just around the time *María* was published, both *partidos* located their differences in whether or not to allow the Catholic Church to participate in the nation's public life. The alliance between the Catholic Church and the Conservadores was sealed with the Constitution of 1886, where Catholicism was adopted as the official religion of the República de Colombia adopted Catholicism as its official religion. *El catolicismo del papado mismo, y el interno la convicción* of the country public of Colombia. As a token of appreciation for such an arrangement, the Church became utterly political and started combating the Liberales from the pulpit. It was a matter of time before political beliefs turned into dogmas, and simple differences of opinion developed into justifications for homicide. The relevant political context of this study begins in the 1930's when the Liberales embraced power for sixteen years and started a profound reform of the State. Expectedly, a big part of the decisions made during that time were oriented to deprive the Catholic Church of the privileges it had obtained when the conservatives ruled the country. These decisions were deeply influenced by the Socialist/Communist tendencies that came from Europe, and found an audience in Latin America among the middle and lower classes; but just as the ideology was imported, the animosity against it from the Vatican itself did not take long to arrive, and Colombia's Catholicism reinforced its doctrine by embodying Liberales as the allies of Communism and the, already, devilish USSR. This gave Conservadores a sense of moral righteousness that, soon enough, would turn into a true crusade, which led to the "conservadorization" of the police force, the deaths of Liberales in horrifying circumstances, and the radicalization of bipartisanship. In this panorama, the death of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was the start of a genocide whose number of victims is yet to be determined.

This is the nation where Soraya Juncal, born Amanda Escobar (Belalcázar, Colombia, 1941), spent her childhood. As a dweller in a rural area, she knew La Violencia first hand; and as a woman in the very traditional area of Caldas, she grew up seeing the Liberales as the monsters they were portrayed to be by the Catholic Church. At the age of twenty-three she moved to Medellín and started her life as an independent author, publishing her first novel *Miseria y amor* in 1966 with her own savings. The success of her

novel granted Escobar, now recognized by the pseudonym Soraya Juncal, the publication of *Jacinta y la violencia* in 1967 with the publishing house Editorial Álvarez, which allowed her to stay in Medellín and make a living as an urbanite. After that, the literary career of Escobar seemed to fade away: a few books of poetry, some minor literary awards, and her name in the credits of many books published by Bedout Editores, where she was a secretary, are the vestiges of someone who once appeared destined for greatness. The novel, a true *native informant* of La Violencia, has received the same treatment: frequently ignored, rejected, or simply excluded from the canonical, fictional or non-fictional, works about the period; it seems that, as a representative of the Conservador literary voice, this novel has not had the level of appreciation that more Liberal texts achieved amongst Colombian critics.

Before attempting to analyze *Jacinta y la violencia* as a device of partisan discourse, and considering that I will be proposing a Feminist reading of it, it is important to locate the novel within this frame. This consideration aims to recognize three basic aspects of the novel that make it suitable for reading as a claim for recognition for the author, as a woman *in* Colombian Literature. This part of the study is positioned at an aesthetic level and not in a political one, which will occupy the rest of this text. The first topic that must be considered is Juncal's decision to tell the story her way, almost as if she is talking to a friend instead of using an embellished-yet-deceiving language; or as Cixous (1995) would put it, "aceptando el desafío del discurso regido por el falo, la mujer asentará a la mujer en un lugar distinto de aquel reservado para ella en y por lo simbólico, es decir, el silencio" (p. 56). In this sense, her goal is not to write while trying to fit a mold, but rather to write the way she would like to be spoken to. A second relevant aspect is that, although keeping the Romantic structure, the author tries to create parallel stories while telling those in the main plot. These stories can be synchronic or diachronic to the main argument, however "con esto se introduce también una diferente percepción del tiempo; en vez de una exposición lineal, dentro de los cánones racionalmente establecidos, se va hacia la sugerencia casi poética o mística y la repetición cíclica" (Ciplijauskaitė, 1988, p. 17); the deceitful acceptance of the patriarchal fashion to tell the story, while pushing a technique of her own, certainly makes the reader receive Juncal's work from a different perspective than that of a simple Romance Novel. Finally, Juncal refuses to sacrifice details in hopes of being more "accurate," making her writing a practice of her own intimacy while aiming to disseminate itself, like

Kristeva (1980) says “writing is upheld not by the subject of understanding, but by a divided subject, even a pluralized subject, that occupies, not a place of enunciation, but permutable, multiple, and mobile places” (p. 111); on this basis it is possible to understand that, even if the author is not identifying herself as a Feminist writer, she is certainly incorporating her female *being* in her work. If all of this is not enough to consider *Jacinta y la violencia* at least as an exercise of *écriture féminine*, Juncal’s foregrounding of women’s struggles —rape, kidnapping, social exclusion, verbal abuse, etc.— in the socio-historical setting depicted in the text, would certainly place her as an advocate for women’s rights.

Jacinta y la violencia starts with the story of an orphan, a black girl, Jacinta who is adopted by a family of peasants who live far away from any urban settlement, which also means that they are distant from a church/God. This situation is reflected in the fact that, right before their humble *ranchito* is taken over by a group of *bandoleros* under the orders of Fermín Sánchez, Jacinta is raped by her adoptive father and then forced to serve as a maid to Fermín and his men. In the development of her story, Jacinta will learn about the Catholic faith from a beautiful, kidnapped, upper class, girl named Clarita who will take her to live in the city after handsome captain Sergio liberates both of them from the outlaws. Captain Sergio falls for Jacinta and gets her pregnant before getting killed by the *bandoleros*; she will give the child up for adoption after delivery and the rest of her story will be her quest to find him again. In Juncal’s twists and turns of the story, Jacinta will also appear, at some point, as Sánchez’s love interest which will lead her to endure marginalization, prosecution, and ultimately jail; about this Camargo and Uribe (1998) have argued:

Esta biografía terrible y desgarradora de una mujer campesina y negra sometida a todo tipo de vejaciones e injusticias, con solo recuerdos amargos y unos muy poco felices [es] la radiografía de un país como el nuestro que se debate entre los extremos de miseria y ostentación (p. 57).

The correspondence between Colombia and Jacinta’s country, in spite of Juncal’s intent to conceal it behind a veil of fiction, added to the sentimental narration that also conveys a political agenda, stresses the possibility of analyzing *Jacinta y la violencia* in terms of ‘Foundational Fiction’ although in this particular case, the intention of the author is to “re-found” through fiction.

Two secondary characters that can also provide a very peculiar approach to Juncal’s proposal for re-founding the nation are Doña Pepita and Natalia.

Doña Pepita is a childless, upper-class widow, who is always looking out for the wellbeing of her folks; she is also a prominent public figure who hosts political gatherings with dignitaries of the nation in her living room. Natalia, on the other hand, is the supplementary romantic heroine par excellence: the one who ends her life in a convent. Both stories will be expanded in their corresponding sections.

In the reading of *Jacinta y la violencia* discussed here, it is possible to affirm that Catholicism provides a background for the intersections of the concepts of gender, race, class, and nationality. However, since the Roman creed is so relevant not only in Juncal's work, but also in Conservadores' ideology at large, it is feasible to state that, in the re-foundation the author is vowing for, the concepts of nation and nationality are not supposed to differ, in any way, from the Catholic Church's Philosophy. In other words, Catholicism *is* nation and the people are supposed to recognize themselves inside this framework. Following this logic, and given the fact that Catholicism allegedly sees no difference between human beings, for all of them are children of God, it is not possible to undertake an analysis of race, gender, and class—inside that Catholic nation— separately, or at least under such a denomination. Hence, the approach I am proposing here is to trace the stories of Jacinta, Natalia, and Doña Pepita by stressing the resemblance of their actions in the novel to the Theological Virtues of Hope, Faith, and Charity, and expose the way those virtues, in spite of their alleged benign purposes, express systems of oppression. The recognition of those systems will allow a deeper understanding of Juncal's proposed national project, as well as her own embrace of it. I will come to the conclusion that even though it is possible to read the novel from an intersectional perspective, Juncal is by no means trying to overcome those systems of oppression, but rather embracing a set of values that lead to its perpetuation.

The concept of nation used in this work is Anderson's nation as an 'imagined community.' In order to gather some comprehension of this conceptualization, as much as its effectiveness to dialogue with literary texts, it is important to remember that for Anderson the concept of nation/nationality was born in the convergence of Capitalism and print technology, which allowed for dissemination and exchange of 'big' ideas much faster than it used to be. Hence, it facilitated the possibility of thinking about people beyond regional limits as true fellow citizens (1991, pp. 44-45). Nevertheless, as Anderson does not elaborate on the idea of how the perception of community,

mediated by literature, mutates from fellowship to nationality, it is necessary to articulate his position with McClintock's (1995):

Anderson neglects that print capital has, until recently, been accessible to a relatively small literate elite. Indeed, the singular power of nationalism since the late nineteenth century, I suggest, has been its capacity to organize a sense of popular collective unity through management of mass national *commodity spectacle* (p. 374).

Summarizing, it is not only the 'image' of the community that makes it evolve, it is also the way that image is conveyed to those who do not have access to the primary sources informing it.

In Juncal's case this proves to be true from many perspectives. First of all, *Jacinta y la violencia* is written in a way that has proven to be—as *María* did in the 19th Century— particularly accessible to those who only have basic literacy skills, an accomplishment that the novel owes to the simplicity of the language used by the author. Second, the plot is engaging and it also appeals to two of the most searched-for qualities in any kind of book, for the average Colombian reader at that time: religion and politics; this is strengthened by the novel's lack of sexual images that would make it morally reprehensible. Third, if focus is given primarily to its political hints, it is clear that the novel would have a captive audience among the Conservadores/as. Lastly, if the probable audience were completely illiterate, the novel is quite easy to reproduce orally, thus one single reader would be enough to replicate its message. Bearing this in mind, it is possible to start explaining how Theological Virtues are interpreted in the novel, and the way they serve to perpetuate oppression systems.

The Theological Virtues in the Novel: Oppressing by Meaning Well

Hope. Jacinta. Poor Jacinta, the good Black woman, the poor Black woman, the ignorant Black woman, the miserable Black woman, the helpless Black woman; all these qualifiers can be found in the novel to describe Jacinta's circumstances, and despite their racial dissonance all of them are intended to communicate the pity that the narrator feels for the main character. As the story progresses, Jacinta faces two major challenges: the first, to find a place to dwell after the slaughtering of her family by Fermín and his men, the second, to find her son. In the course of her journey, after having served as a maid—one of the few occupations which women of her race could hold at that time—and achieve some stability, she falls into the clutches of Fermín with the consequences foretold; the protagonist does not have a

single moment when she may feel that life smiles on her. Jacinta may not be the kind of woman of faith that Natalia embodies, but she is emblematic of a religious icon; a martyr struggling against adversity. This can also be based on the fact that Jacinta's fateful path starts a few days before she learns about Catholicism from Clarita. With such conditions as a starting point, it is clear that the narrator's intentions are to make the main character an exemplary one.

A good Catholic, as is the narrator of Juncal's novel, cannot think about an exemplary/heroic character without thinking about the Virgin Mary and, in a way, that is exactly what Jacinta is: she is the sexless lover of a heroic man who he left impregnated, before getting killed by the wrong-doers; she remains chaste the rest of her life, even when she is living with Fermín and is accused of being his criminal accomplice. She is also the mother of another hero, the one who prevents the country from the moral debacle of divorce—and, unwillingly accepts the death penalty as the only way for the country to be pacified. A question would remain regarding her actual virginity, sullied by her father, but the skillful narrator shows that in spite of the physical damage, Jacinta's 'purity' is intact; right after the assault: "Jacinta pensaba que aquello debía ser muy natural porque así vivían las gentes de la ciudad y si al principio tuvo miedo, con un gesto muy peculiar se encogió de hombros y siguió indiferente tras su padre hacia el rancho" (Juncal, 1967, p. 12). The image of Jacinta as the 'original mother' is not gratuitous, the narrator wants the reader to understand that few women are worthy of being looked up to, and offers the intertextual reference to the Virgin Mary's story as an example of it.

Bringing the presence of the Virgin Mary to narration is not a new *motif* in Latin American Literature—*María* herself is the spitting image of a *Madonna*—; however, 'including' her inside the plot, like Juncal does, is definitely a new attitude towards Mary's representation; moreover, incarnating Mary in the body of a Black woman tells a lot about racialization in the novel. Such circumstances call for a solid comprehension in order to frame them in the Conservador nation proposed in the novel. The presence of the Virgin Mary in Latin American culture, in general, is deeply rooted in the Spanish conquest; Saint Mary of Guadalupe is the emblem of a collision between the Old and the New World: the divine mother of the Christian God, depicted with Mesoamerican, instead of European, features; "*Guadalupe* took upon herself the psychological and physical devastation of the conquered and oppressed *indio*, she is our spiritual, political and psychological symbol. As a symbol of hope and faith, she sustains and insures our survival" (Anzaldúa, 2012, p.

52). The natural consequence of this is the overestimation of motherhood as the ultimate way for women to have a fulfilling life, but also the lauding of women who are able to endure the odds with Mary's moderation: she declares herself the slave of the Lord, she stands by the cross with dignity, she is merely content when her son resurrects. This kind of passive dignity is what Araújo (1989) points out when she says:

Sí, la idealización de la maternidad estimula un narcisismo en la mujer, que al compararse o identificarse con María tiende a agravar sus conflictos y alejarse de la realidad. ¿Por qué? Porque rechazando su sensualidad y su cuerpo, influenciada por el modelo mariano, asume una vez su papel más subalterno y su predisposición a la obediencia y al silencio. Recordemos, la Virgen nunca habla ni discurre. Solamente oye, escucha órdenes de la divinidad o súplicas de pecadores (p. 63).

Under such perspective the horizon of expectations, in the traditional Latin American literary texts but also in Juncal's despite her structural rebelliousness, is to see representations of selfless, abnegated, and devoted mothers who would do anything for their children. This would be the kind of woman who would fit the pattern for mothering the nation that the novel proposes.

Now, it is convenient to address the fact that Juncal is creating a black Mary, who is also poor and displaced from the countryside. Following the plot, as the narrator preys on Jacinta's fate —over and over again— in order to emphasize her heroism, the class factors would not matter that much; the Virgin Mary was also poor when she had baby Jesus and she was also, somehow, displaced due to Herod's persecution. Yet the racialization of the character remains. Of course, this is not intended to question the author's artistic freedom, but it is debatable from the perspective of the novel itself: if all good, generous, kind, beautiful people are not characterized as black, why is the heroine a Black woman? And, most importantly, why does this Black woman have such a miserable life? A plausible explanation of this can be found in Lorde (1984) as she states: "As white women ignore their built-in privilege of whiteness and define *woman* in terms of their own experience alone, then women of Color become 'other,' the outsider whose experience and tradition is too 'alien' to comprehend" (p. 117). Juncal, a white woman herself, magnifies her main character's journey in order to avoid dealing directly with the racial question; she only knows 'being Black' from the outside, from stereotypes, from alien experience. The representation of Hope with Jacinta, and the inextricable parallelism of her story with that of the Virgin

Mary, makes it possible to conclude that in the Catholic nation projected by *Jacinta y la violencia*, women are supposed to overcome every obstacle which may come their way, not by fighting against it, but rather by bearing it until God wills otherwise. This sacrifice must also be endured with stoicism, as if nothing was being felt, because in the imitation of the Virgin Mary's virtues, there is no space for complaining.

Faith. The Reverenda Hermana Natalia del Corazón de Jesús. Such a pompous name and the solemnity the narrator uses to insert it into the plot is a powerful display of how the Conservador's struggle is legitimized by the teachings of the Catholic Church. Natalia's journey starts with a horse accident which leaves her paralyzed from the waist down. Due to her family's poverty, Doña Pepita decides to take Natalia as her protégé, pay for her operations, and allow her to receive a weekly visit from a very well educated man named Mauricio. As the plot progresses, the reader discovers that Mauricio is Padre Mauricio Zamora, a good, yet arrogant Catholic priest who is progressively losing the 'good path' as he is influenced by Socialist/Communist ideas. Nothing ever happens between Mauricio and Natalia, but right after she finds out the truth about Zamora's personal involvement with Fermín and the *bandoleros*, and miraculously gains back the use of her legs. She actually stands up from her wheelchair at the very moment when his forced-labor sentence is being publicly read, she chooses to seclude herself in a convent. At the end, the government and the Church will pardon Mauricio, after spending seven years in jail for terrorist activities, due to Hermana Natalia's mediation in front of the President of the Republic.

The character of Natalia is paradigmatic insofar as her condition as Doña Pepita's putative child, not only opens the convent's doors for her, but also reclassifies her socially, and provides her with the power to ask for forgiveness for Mauricio of people who, in her original circumstance as a daughter of peasants, would have not listened to her. Still, Natalia does not totally enter the convent out of a broken heart, but rather with the conviction that it is the only way for Mauricio to redeem himself. The first display of this divine calling comes, literally, right after Zamora accepts the leadership of the "chusma salvaje y cruel que venía azotando al país" (Juncal, 1967, p. 163) due to Fermín's desertion. The reader knows already that Natalia is a woman of faith but, at this moment, her prayers are a cry for help: "Natalia, desde su silla de ruedas pedía por el amigo... Hasta el cielo subían las plegarias de la Iglesia, unidas a las de esa pobrecita madre que había puesto en su hijo las

más bellas esperanzas y a los ruegos de la triste inválida que ya nada esperaba de la vida” (Juncal, 1967, pp. 163-164). In the ensuing lines, Mauricio’s situation will become more and more ominous; his sentence will be publicly read and Natalia will realize that she need to fully give herself to God in order to save him: “No es por desengaño, Claudia María, comprendeme; en verdad que Dios me ha escuchado y ahora me llama... tengo que ir a su lado para ayudar a la salvación de muchas almas” (Juncal, 1967, p. 180). A fine interpretation is not necessary to guess which one of those souls is the priority for Natalia: just a few lines later she is filled with joy, “¡Gracias Dios mío, gracias!... Estoy segura que Mauricio se ha arrepentido y podrá volver a ejercer su sagrado ministerio con tu ayuda” (Juncal, 1967, p. 218). The nun is, as stated before, a supplementary heroine in Romantic Novels. The role is traditionally assigned to devious women who were so despicable to a man that they decided to condemn themselves to a life in a religious ‘prison’ in order to search for God to redeem them. In Natalia’s case, her decision rather looks like an act of self-determination in order to serve God’s wishes and avoid the temptations of the Devil; in spite of that, it is clear that the narrator is using her cloistering as a way to address perceptions about women’s singleness and talk about Catholic mercy.

Why should a woman embrace the biggest love of all and become a nun, instead of a spinster? Beauvoir (1989) accurately explains the fundamentals of this kind of character when she says:

El amor le ha sido asignado a la mujer como su propia vocación y, cuando lo dedica al hombre, busca en él a Dios: si las circunstancias le impiden el amor humano, si es engañada o exigente, elegirá adorar la divinidad en Dios mismo (p. 457).

This interpretation, applied to *Jacinta y la violencia* reveals several topics that should be pointed out: first of all, marriage is the natural destiny of every woman, whether it is with a man or with the ‘Divine Spouse,’ no woman shall remain single; second, even though there are no possibilities of talking about the love for Christ as romantic love it is clear that giving into it is the most loving act any woman can do; third, religious life is the only way for women who have lost the opportunity to get themselves a good man. In the particular case of Natalia and Mauricio this becomes very evident, especially because of the way their relationship started: he hides his priesthood from her and becomes her confidant, assuming the work of a confessor rather than a simple friend; and, as Beauvoir (1989) explains:

El confesor es, sobre todo, quien ocupa un lugar equívoco entre cielo y tierra. Escucha con oídos carnales a la penitente que el exhibe su alma, pero en su mirada brilla una luz sobrenatural, es un hombre divino, es Dios bajo la apariencia de un hombre (p. 459).

Natalia, on the other hand, is attracted to him but she is too self-conscious about being condemned to a wheel chair to reveal her feelings; certainly she does not see him as a confessor because she does not know that he is a priest, nevertheless, given the train of emotions that Mauricio mobilizes in Natalia and the way she eventually finds Christ after 'breaking up' with him, it is impossible not to think that it was real love that she was feeling for him.

Now, what is really important about the representation of faith through the character of Natalia is how it constitutes a triumph for the Conservador doctrine in the broader context of the nation. The mere fact that Natalia decides to seclude herself in a convent, instead of following a love that is not only dissolute but borderline criminal, is indeed showing her moral superiority and greater spirituality. It is also worth mentioning that, although Mauricio never tried to seduce her, the fact that he had kept secret being a clergyman from her, is an indication of the Liberales' 'malicious' ways. Nevertheless, the most important aspect of this divine calling is the way Natalia ends up asking for forgiveness for Mauricio, whose Conservador uncle ends up sending him the message:

Recordado sobrino. Ha querido la buena suerte que llegara a mis manos una carta firmada por la Rvda. Hermana Natalia del Corazón de Jesús y por Manfredo Villaveces, en la cual me piden la aprobación para tu indulto ya que ha sido obtenido gracias a estos tus amigos, pero se necesitaba que fuera sellado por mí (Juncal, 1967, p. 193).

The kind of agency that Natalia has achieved with her religious profession is not related to her own bravery or the fact that she is an exceptional woman—even in the convent she is still timid and not very active; she has the will to help because the narrator wants to portray her as the agent of Mauricio's salvation. In other words, the narrator needs to show how compassionate the Conservadores can be in that even a man who apostatized can get a little help from them. Evidently, in this confusion of Catholicism and nation, a remark from what Yuval-Davis (1997) frames inside the development of fundamentalisms is in order, "being active in a religious movement allows women a legitimate place in a public sphere which otherwise might be blocked to them" (p. 63) To put this another way, the ultimate victory for the Conservadores will be to forgive Liberales' lives, make them rethink and rectify their mistakes, and ask for forgiveness to God—as Padre Zamora

effectively ends up doing. “God” being in this instance, the association of the Catholic Church and the Conservative government.

Charity. Doña Pepita is undoubtedly the “public woman” she could be any woman in Latin America at that time, without getting directly involved in politics—a job exclusively given to men. Therefore, the fact that the narrator is so grandiloquent about this woman, as pitiful about the characters of Natalia and Jacinta, makes the reader begin to question her presence in the novel and the fact that her actions are usually referred to as the practice of charity: “Su dinero siempre estaba al servicio de la humanidad; con él se habían levantado en su ciudad hospitales, orfanatos y escuelas; por ella comían centenares de familias” (Juncal, 1967, p. 160). Charity as interpreted by the Catholic Church, inspired (even today) the Conservador perception of access to property for the needy. Somehow, Doña Pepita’s character is explaining to the reader the performance of conservative doctrine and all the benefits to be gained from it, almost solely by getting under its wing. The benevolent widow would be, if one wills, an endearing propagandist; nevertheless, when the admiration for the character by the narrator starts resembling adulation, or even an homage to someone in real life, the reader feels as if an agenda was being deceitfully conveyed behind the text of the novel. It does not take much to see how it ends up defending the crudest plutocracy. This issue can be explained with Lara’s (1998) conception of Public Space:

The arena where all discourses have to compete for the acceptance of a new interpretation criticizing previous ways in which people understood themselves. The normative element, therefore, has always to be present in order to overcome the lack of criticism of narrow conceptions of cultural and discursive identities (p. 152).

Whenever Doña Pepita may appear, she is always surrounded by people who she bosses around. They bend to her will either because of her money or her social influences. This would not be anything but a profound encomium to her own agency, but when the story comes to the point of showing her living room as a small Roman forum, Conservador values flourish:

En casa de doña Pepita se han reunido grandes personalidades para discutir el escabroso tema del divorcio. Hay mayoría de votos en contra, sobre todo en la gran masa del pueblo. En cambio, entre los altos círculos sociales, el ambiente es favorable. La Iglesia, por su parte, se opone abiertamente a él (Juncal, 1967, p. 195).

The presence of a Cardinal among the guests illustrates, from the very beginning, how necessary it is for Juncal that the Catholic Church supervise

every decision that the seculars make. Sergio, Jacinta's child, who has become a prestigious doctor, reinforces the idea by invoking the Catholic faith as sufficient reason to reject the initiative of the divorce, ironically enough embracing that of the Death Penalty. The other guests, a group of ministers and a journalist, appear as simple bystanders in the "debate" at Doña Pepita's. The fate of a law of interest to the country ends up being decided in the living room of the widow "Continuaron las discusiones y al finalizar estas, ya entrada la noche, quedó definitivamente rechazado el proyecto sobre el divorcio en el país" (Juncal, 1967, p. 197). The conclusion is almost obvious: Juncal imagines the nation's basis as calling for a corporative legislation, headed by aristocrats, and guided by the Catholic Church. Not in vain, Sergio gets an enthusiastic ovation from the Cardinal, due to his vehement intervention in favor of faith, rather than the interests of the people.

The question could go further considering that Doña Pepita welcomes Claudia María to her house right after "failing" in the attempt to get Natalia married. Until then, the other sister had been studying at a secular school and depending on the charity of a group of relatives who despise her; when they withdraw support, Doña Pepita not only provides a roof for her, she moves her influences to a Catholic school so the young girl can have a proper education. Again, charity is shown as proof of benevolence but when Leon Darío, Sergio's best friend, begins to court Claudia María, and then asks for her hand in marriage, it will be revealed that the narrator is simply trying to put her at his level through a Catholic, elitist, education. The praise of marriage comes as no surprise, particularly if we return to what Sommer (1991) tells about the 'Foundational Fictions': "national ideals are ostensibly grounded in 'natural' heterosexual love and in the marriages that provided a figure for apparently nonviolent consolidation during internecine conflicts at mid century" (p. 6).

No wonder, thus, that it is all weddings at the end of *Jacinta y la violencia*: Sergio (who has Jacinta's Black blood and humble origins) with Nazaret (his 'sister', the daughter of the couple of millionaires who adopted him); Claudia María (a peasant, but protected by Doña Pepita) with Leon Darío (his lineage similar to Nazaret's). Class conflict in the country will cease, or at least that seems to be the way Juncal sees it, when rich and poor accept the dignity of Catholic schooling, and learn to honor the sacred bond of marriage. It is impossible now not to see how much more dignified Sergio is than his own biological mother, him being half white and a true believer in the Roman dogma.

A frontal attack on divorce, the strengthening of the marriage institution and its enthronement as a device for social reunification, seems to be the discursive strategy used by Juncal to ensure the perpetuity of the Conservador nation that she strives to re-find in her novel, because, as Hill-Collins (2006) explains in regards to the legitimacy that a state-sanctioned marriage confers on the family and the children born in it: Individuals acquire varying degrees of authority, rights, and wealth based on their mode of entry into their biological families; a nation-state's population reflects similar power relations (p. 57). In this sense, even when eroticism is completely eradicated from the text, it is not unreasonable to think that the story ends beyond the text itself, with the two married couples having many children. The reproductive element of the nation, as much as the legitimacy of the children, and the certainty that they will follow Catholicism and Conservatism, is ensured by the fact that everything is happening inside a marriage —obviously performed as a Holy Sacrament, not in front of a judge—.

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