"The Garden of America": Nature, Wonder, and Nationalism in the Creole-Jesuit Narrations of Chile

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Abstract:

Major changes in the political and social panorama affected the eighteenth-century world. The regalist policies of the Bourbon culminated with the expulsion of the Society of Jesus from the Spanish imperial domains in 1767, and Jesuits have been forced to move to the Papal State territories of central Italy. Many of them were Creoles, with Spanish ancestry but of American birth. During the exile, the Jesuit community developed a shared cultural and political identity which emerges from their works. The role of Creole-Jesuits goes beyond their figure as religious actors. Indeed, it was fundamental for their scientific contribution to the eighteenth-century debates and the development of modern science. Also, through the reading of their works, it is possible to reconstruct a picture of the late-colonial Spanish imperial world and to rethinking nationalism – in purely anthropological terms. Following these premises and through the analysis of primary sources, I will study the intellectual works of Juan Ignacio Molina and Felipe Gómez de Vidaurre y Girón as representatives of the Creole-Jesuits from the Chilean province who spent their exile between Imola and Bologna over eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Keywords: Atlantic World, Spanish America, Society of Jesus, Natural History, Nationalism

The object of this work is the cultural and political identity of the expelled Creole-Jesuits and the development of a patriotic perception of their homeland through the study of their accounts. Particularly, I will analyse the literature produced by members of the Society of Jesus exiled from the General Captaincy of Chile. Their contribution to the eighteenth-century intellectual debates goes beyond their role as religious actors, rather is fundamental for its scientific impact and the significance of such works composed by the Creoles exiled community. The situation of exiled they suffered increased the sense of belonging to a distant homeland on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. The patriotic discourse that emerges in their literary production is capable to describe a picture of the late-colonial Spanish imperial world and to rethink nationalism – in purely anthropological terms.

As things stand, mainstream historiography denies the existence of a Creole nationalism before the nineteenth-century Independences of the Spanish American colonies. However, this view

underrates the high potential of a cultural-shared Creole background, even if it was merely cultural and not political yet. Indeed, nations could exist before the states, as imagined in their essence through public opinion or literature. Departing from this paradigm and through the reading of primary sources, I analysed the intellectual works of Creoles-Jesuits from Chile, that spent their exile in the Papal State after the expulsion from the Spanish Empire in 1767, and the patriotic narrative they elaborated about their distant homeland in these accounts. I examined selected published works by Juan Ignacio Molina and Felipe Gómez de Vidaurre y Girón as representatives of the Creole-Jesuits from the Chilean province, who spent their exile between Imola and Bologna over the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries.

The contextualisation of the late-colonial Spanish Empire is also necessary to understand this discourse. For this reason, it is essential to briefly mention the major changes that affected the political and social panorama of the eighteenth-century Atlantic world, with special attention to the implications of the Bourbon reforms in the American provinces and the reorganisation of power that arose from such political and economic measures. These developments changed the relationship of power between the Spanish metropole and the American colonies.[1] This, unavoidably, lead us to the discourse on the Creole cultural identity within the imperial context, and the penetration of modernity and Enlightenment ideas in the traditional *ancien régime* societies, as well of the consequent reframing of the role of the Church.

The regalist policies of the Bourbon culminated with the expulsion of the religious order of the Society of Jesus from the Spanish Empire, and Jesuits have been forced to move to the Papal State territories of central Italy. The main factors that led to the expulsion of the Jesuits are of political concern, but this event could also be read as the apex of a wider process of re-evaluation of the Church role, that took place as consequence of the gradual penetration of ideas related to Enlightenment thinking into the *ancien régime* societies. Indeed, Enlightened thinkers considered the clergy as incompatible with the developing of modernity; therefore, their influence had to be downsized.

During the exile in the Papal State, many Jesuits did not stop their works as intellectuals, scientists, and theologians, and continued to produce valuables treaties about sciences and humanities. On the contrary, the production of intellectual works intensified during the exile. The works were consistent and qualitatively influential in humanities, sciences, and theology. Their approach to such disciplines evolved during centuries, also for the influence of global intellectual phenomena such as Enlightenment, and the list of Creole-Jesuits authors who wrote treatises on natural science, history, and philosophy is extended.[2] For this study, however, I will only consulted selected published works by Juan Ignacio Molina and Felipe Gómez de Vidaurre, to stress the prominence of such actors in the development of a – non-unitarian – patriotic consciousness during the exile. Assuming such premises, in the next pages, I will analyse the intellectual works by Molina's and Vidaurre's literary *corpus*, to retrace the image of their distant *Patria* through their narrations, which are mostly imbued with nostalgia and marvel.

Juan Ignacio Molina

Molina (1740-1829) was one of the most productive writers between the Creole-Jesuits from Chile. The themes debated in *Compendio della Storia Geográfica, Naturale, e Civili del Regno del Chile* (1776)[3], *Saggio sulla Storia Naturale de Chili* (1782) and *Saggio sulla Storia Civile del Chili* (1787) concerned the natural history of his homeland, with descriptions of the environment, local fauna, and of the native inhabitants. His work as naturalist substantially contributed to the development of modern science, also for coining a taxonomy for items not included in the classification by Linnaeus. His theories on evolution foreran those by Charles Darwin, as exposed in his work *Analogias Menos Observadas de los Tres Reinos de la Naturaleza* (1815) and *Sobre la Propagación del Género Humano en la Diversas Partes de la Tierra* (1818). Molina and his works acquired resonance in the intellectual European panorama of the eighteenth century; he was also a member of the Royal Italian Institute of Science, Letters and Arts, and the Academy of the Institute of Sciences.

In his first work, the *Compendio della Storia Geografica, Naturale, e Civile del Regno del Chile (1776),* Molina harshly criticises the superficiality and the erroneousness of the existing accounts about Chile. This is precisely the reason that pushed him to write his work, as he states. The *Compendio* is divided into two parts: the first is a general treatise about Chile with descriptions about flora, fauna, and the climate; in the second part, instead, he portrays the indigenous peoples with their customs, language, and religion.

The validity of his account is based on a straightforward assumption that Molina revealed since the very first pages of the *Compendio*, which suggests the existence of a gap between his testimony and those written by foreign intellectuals who rarely visited the places they depicted or worst, criticised: *"io vidi, ed esaminai per me stesso la maggior parte delle cose, che scrivo"* (Molina 1776, VII).[4] This reasoning recalls the 'patriotic epistemology' elaborated by Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra in his *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (2002), and also places itself in the discourse on the *Disputa del Nuovo Mondo* of Antonello Gerbi (1955). Yet, the strong backbone of the work and its central theme could be identified in the continuous use of superlatives by which Molina depicted the uniqueness and superiority of Chile in contrast to other American kingdoms. The exceptional and marvellous essence of Chile became the main argument on which the author develop his description of the Province.

> Il Chile è uno de' migliori Paesi dell'America: la bellezza del suo Cielo, la benignità del suo clima, la fertilità, e ricchezza del suo terreno gli danno vantaggi considerabili sopra i suoi vicini (Molina 1776, 5).[5]

With no hesitation he also affirms in the same page:

> Questo Regno, è senza contraddizione il più bello, il più ricco, e il più fertile di quanti n'abbia in tutti i suoi domini la Monarchia di Spagna (Molina 1776, 5).[6]

The description of the Chilean land continues, as well as the rhetoric of validation and exaltation of its features, which remains a fixed constant in the entireness of the *Compendio*. Pestilences are common in the American provinces, but in Chile there are none. Those who suffered from such illnesses often travelled to Chile to cure them with its fresh and pure air, and neither the animals are affected by common diseases. The beauty of the Andes is matchless for Molina, as the local flora, which he described with some notes of melancholia. Chile has so many varieties of flowers growing free in the countryside, each one with an adorable scent, and in Spring the landscape seems a looked-after garden, rather than untamed fields; Europe also had flowers, but they were not picture-perfect as the American ones. Flowers grew wild and luxuriant in the province, while in Europe it was necessary to plant and take care of them. (Molina 1776, 20-21). The Chilean beauty is rough, and – at the same time – flawless, as a wild fruit that preserved its original taste. Molina also underlines the richness of metals in the Chilean subsoil: gold is so plentiful that is possible to describe the land as *"una piastra d'oro"* (a golden plate) and there is no mountain in which this element is not contained in the province. Besides, this gold is remarkably pure, and the exceptionality as a narrative expedient appears again in the pages of the *Compendio* (Molina 1776, 96-97).

Saggio sulla Storia Naturale del Chili (1782) is probably the most famous and successful by Molina, in which he analyses similar themes already debated in the *Compendio*. Unlike his first work, *Storia Naturale* raised wide interested and received recognition in scientific circles. It called the attention of intellectuals in Italy and Europe, including Alexander Von Humboldt – who tried (and failed) to arrange a meeting with Molina when he was in Bologna in 1805 (Hanisch Espíndola 1973, 38; Chiaramonti 2010, 476). The work is a praise based on the beauty of Chile, in which the Jesuit reaffirms and reinforces many concepts already formulated in the *Compendio*. Molina, by then, was accustomed to his life in the Italian peninsula since one of the key elements of the *Storia Naturale* is the continuous comparison between its homeland and its new residence.

> Questo Paese [Chile], dirò così, è l'Italia, vale a dire il Giardino dell'America Meridionale, ove tutto ciò che può desiderarsi per passare una vita comoda, proviene colla medesima abbondanza, e perfezione, che nell'Europa (Molina 1782, 3-4).[7]

The narrative trend is similar to the *Compendio*: the main topics are recurring, while the parallelism is the favourite tool through which Molina describes its homeland. Chile is apt for any kind of production, as also Italy is. Chile and Italy are geographically and orographically analogous: both are surrounded by huge mountain chains, the Alps and the Andes, which allow the prosperity of those countries (Molina 1782, 4). However, the author shows its displeasure since his kingdom was not properly known and valorised by foreigners, and he complains about those who wrote about Chile, who did it poorly. Cornelius De Pauw was his main target since he did a misleading use of sources and, for Molina, he manipulated the travellers' reports to confirm his thesis and to slander the country (Molina 1782, 12-13). Most importantly, De Pauw

had never set foot in America, and this is also a reason for criticism by the Chilean scientist. What bothered Molina the most of De Pauw's shallow assertions, however, was that the American state of affair that De Pauw reported was fully verifiable, if only he had wanted to.[8]

> Il Sig. Paw insomma ha scritto dell'America, e de' suoi abitanti colla medesima libertà, che potrebbe aver scritto della Luna, e de' Seleniti; ma il male si è, che l'America non è tanto lontana come la Luna (Molina 1782, 13-14).[9]

Storia Naturale has strong praise and patriotic traits which Molina expressed with no qualms. For the Jesuit intellectual, his *Chili* is one of the best kingdoms of America, as he affirmed explicitly. Also, this sentiment leaks by the constant exaltation of the Chilean singularity that resulted in the hyperbole, the usage of absolute and relative superlatives, and simile rhetorical devices already present in the *Compendio*. This literary techniques were not new to American accounts, and they have been used from the first chronicles written by the narrators of the Conquest. Indeed, this figurative stratagem is a dominant and characteristic trait in the descriptions of the Indies. In the epistolary exchange of Giovanni Nicolozzi, a visitor of New Spain Viceroyalty in the sixteenth century, Intimistitan – Mexico City – is compared to Venice. The aim of this rhetorical tool is elementary and logic. The American diversity was lessened to the European audience, to convert exoticism into something familiar through a process of homogenisation of the New World to the Old. However, this exotic essence sedimented itself into the '*meraviglia americana'* (American wonder) (Perassi 2011, 38-39), which a recurrent *topos*.[10] The marvel in front of the American beauty is present from the first letters by Christopher Columbus and his descriptions of the land features. For Colombus, everything is 'the greenest' and 'the richest' (Perassi 2011, 44). What cannot be describe – the marvellous element – became the dominant language and the favourite means used also by Hernán Cortés in his missives to Charles V (Perassi 2011, 42). By the use of this literary style, the reality is overcome through evocative and unparalleled images that looked picture-perfect into the readers minds. What surprises most, is that the theme of abundance and excess of the Provinces are reiterated into the same writing style that remained typical of the descriptive literature about America, which privileged an ecstatic over-generalisation and over-simplification of the New World, rather than close-up accounts (Perassi 2011, 47). America is different and unknown to Conquerors' eyes, but even over centuries, Europe was not able to describe the New World in realistic terms; rather, America continued to be identified as an exotic and alien object of interest. And, most importantly, even the Creole writers could not overcome this rhetoric when called to write for a European audience.

In *Saggio sulla Storia Civile del Chili* (1787) Molina is already aware of the debates between Creoles and European intellectuals about the American status of inferiority of the late-eighteenth century. In this work, Molina describes the indigenous people and the historical events of Conquest of Chile. The main subjects of Molina's work are Spaniards and *araucanos*, to defend the indigenous from the falseness affirmed by American detractors. Molina clarifies some of

Mapuche habits, and he mentions the harmonious structure of their language. For the Jesuit, the richness of the indigenous language is so surprising that seemed that they had a glorious and cultured past that eventually decayed into the status in which they lived. He also hazards the hypothesis that Mapuche were the descendants of a great enlightened society that yielded to physical or historical events, of which they did not have any memory about (Molina 1787, 10). This is the quasi-mythological explanation Molina fabricated to justify the sentiment of fascination he had toward such people. However, the author still considers the indigenous people as savages, and he does not try to refute this thesis in the work, while he often uses terms as 'uncultured' and 'ignorant' to refer to them. Nonetheless, for Molina, natives of Chile are superior to other native American people. The propensity to consider Mapuche as exceptional is particularly evident for the passion he reserves for the defence of their language, especially concerning foreigner affirmations. Indeed, this aspect is crucial for Molina, as irrefutable proof of the indigenous grandeur. Molina explores it in grammatical and philological terms, then he returns to criticise De Pauw's assertations on the narrowness of the native American languages and most importantly, one cannot trust travellers' relations for their inaccuracy since *"una lingua non s'impara di passaggio"* (Molina 1787, 306).[11]

Nostalgia, sentimentalism, and pride are the foundations of Molina's works and, as we saw, it is possible to recognise a pattern in his literary production. However, as Cañizares-Esguerra has noticed, the peculiarity of Molina exaltations of its *Patria* is the absence of a large group of Chile detractors.[12] Indeed, Chile was often pictured in positive terms by foreign writers, but Molina often responds to general assertations about America as they were addressed directly to Chile. In his works, America is Chile and Chile is America, as in a synecdoche that reveals an emerging Americanism.[13] Molina's thinking could be placed in a defined scenario that combined the knowledge of a religious man with the Creole regional historiography. For this reason, Molina's thinking could be identified within the framework of the Enlightenment, and it was not free from Eurocentric influences. Indeed, if the principal aim of his works was to let foreigners knew about his country – and its people – and the redemption from stereotypes that hovered about it, the method he employed was the assimilation of the Chilean essence to its origin, namely Europe and its traditional institutions (Fuenzalida Caro 2009, 234). Narrating about the history of native peoples, for Molina, was not a way to put those people on a pedestal; rather his intentions were to normalise their anthropological nature towards European eyes (Fuenzalida Caro 2009, 237). Presenting Mapuche people to Europe, Molina constructed unity between them and portrayed a series of segmented groups into a well-structured and centralised society.

Felipe Gómez de Vidaurre y Girón

Vidaurre (1748-1818) was the author of *Historia Geográfica, Natural y Civil del Reino de Chile* (1789) and *Conversaciones Familiares de un Padre Americano con Sus Hijos Caupolican y Colocolo* (n/a). He was a historian but, unfortunately, his work did not reach wide appeal and

recognition during his life. Indeed, the manuscript of the *Historia* was published only after Vidaurre's demise, almost a century after its writing. However, nowadays we can consider his *Historia* as a relevant source for ethnographic information about Mapuche people and about the situation in the Araucanía region, along Bíobio natural border with the southern territories in which natives lived. Remarkably, he was one of the few Jesuits who achieved to return to America due to an exceptional permission, and in June of 1800 he was already in his beloved Concepción with few other former members of the order. Also, during the Independence, Vidaurre openly supported the cause, and he consequently lost his pension in 1816 (Vidaurre 1889a, IX-XVIII).[14]

The *Historia Geográfica, Natural y Civil del Reino de Chile, Tomo I* (1789) follows a well-defined structure that, by now, should sounds familiar. Geography, climate, flora, fauna, and the indigenous people are the main themes of the work. The propulsive reason that leads Vidaurre to write his *Historia* is the wish to do justice to his homeland, which was barely or wrongly known in Europe. For Vidaurre, Chile is one of the most natural-blessed land in the world: its perfect climate has been denigrated by foreign authors who, on the contrary, used to define it as one of the most harmful. Chile precious outcomes have been *"omitidas del todo, o mal esplicadas, o equivocadas, ó confundidas"*, while its inhabitants were not depicted properly (Viduarre 1889a, 3).[15] Of course, Vidaurre did not ignore the works of other historians and naturalists who appreciated the beauty of the kingdom before him. Those authors are the same who appeared also in Molina's works: Antonio de Ulloa, Amédée François Frézier, and Louis Feuillée. Besides, also in the *Historia* by Vidaurre, the use of superlatives as *"sanísimo"*, *"fertílisimo"*, *"riquísimo"* is widely spread. Nonetheless, according to Vidaurre, even if the autochthonous fauna is not numerous, it also deserves a mention in his *Historia*. In this respect, the author criticises the foreign authors who only reported limited and superficial lists of such animals, without any accurate descriptions (Vidaurre 1889a, 3-4). For the Jesuit historian, even those who sang Chile praises in their works missed the central objective: how is it possible to transmit the beauty, the abundance, of the kingdom with no detailed descriptions of its treasures? This was a mistake perpetuated by many of those who sought to write about the Province, even if their goodwill was sincere. Indeed, Vidaurre's work is disseminated by descriptions of local species and historical events, scrupulously reported.

Vidaurre does not limit himself to the use of superlatives and comparisons, but he wants to prove the effective value of Chile through tangible contents. His role as a writer was to illustrate a faithful image of his homeland. Then, it would have been the reader role to deduce the true value of Chile. In so doing, the Jesuit does not want to convince the audience of Chile beauty, because it was authentic and tangible. For this reason, Vidaurre did not resort to literary devices and rhetoric figures to let the message pass, since an accurate report of reality was the preferable means to do so. Yet, this is exactly what Vidaurre tried to do in his *Historia*. As shown, Vidaurre's literary production is different from Molina's, still neither the former was immune to the assimilation of Chile to Europe.

Vidaurre criticises the existing literature about Chile, especially regarding the indigenous people: by then, there were only few descriptions of the native customs and traditions, and they were often defined as barbaric, inhuman, with no language, atheists, and lawless (Vidaurre 1889a, 4). Indeed, the mainstream narrations about Chile were dominated by war, death, and hostility. Vidaurre explicit purpose is to subvert this horrific paradigm, and to redeem Chile from such stereotypes. Clearly, he does not ignore the merits of more detailed and exhaustive works by authors such as Diego de Rosales, Miguel de Olivares, and Molina – to whom he was very attached as a friend (Vidaurre 1889a, 5). The will of Vidaurre is clearly revealed in *Historia* first pages: what he wanted to do – as Molina – was to *"servir al público y de hacer conocer a mi patria en su propio y verdadero aspecto"* (Vidaurre 1889a, 6).[16]

The *Historia* contains a general description of the *Reyno*, its geographical position and an anthropological distinction between its inhabitants (which lacks in Molina). Many authors, according to Vidaurre, used to include in the Kingdom of Chile also the Province of Cuyo, Patagonia and Magallanes. However, Vidaurre decides not to include such Provinces in his narration, for the cultural differences of the natives from those lands had compared to Mapuche. These people did not share traditions with the latter, and they lived apart. In this respect, Vidaurre ventures a remarkable and anachronistic thought about them. He also highlights that Chile corresponded to what Mapuche called with that name and the place they lived in. Any change of this concept would be misleading because it would not reflect the real extension of this social entity with shared language, government, customs, and traditions, namely 'culture' (Vidaurre 1889a, 12).

The exaltation of the beauty and fertility of Chile is a recurring *topos* also in Vidaurre's work, as well as nostalgia. Particularly, when Vidaurre describes the central part of the *Reyno* he emphasizes its extraordinary splendour: green-coloured landscapes were predominant in this area; fauna has multiple varieties; while the atmosphere is dominated by a peace and tranquillity aura. Albeit Vidaurre realises that his ardour and enthusiasm shines by his words, he clarifies that his affirmations are not driven by the *"ciega passion de la Patria"* (blind passion for the Homeland); rather, are the outcome of the actual knowledge of such environment and its true essence. Also, he states that is *"el amor de la verdad"* (the love for the truth) which imbued his intentions (Vidaurre 1889a, 20, 310).[17] To support his assertions, the author recures also to the use of foreign sources to guarantee a higher level of impartiality.

Vidaurre also deals with the eighteenth-century *'Disputa'* and, through the opinion of Guillarme-Thomas François Raynal, he tries to demonstrate an opposed thesis on the degeneration of the American continent. As in the perfect apologia, the trees and fruits that European introduced in the colonies did not deteriorate; rather, those improved thanks to the delightful Chilean climate and, by then, they almost resembled the endemic varieties for their quality (Vidaurre 1889a, 40-41). Vidaurre specifies: if there were variations in those European-original crops, they only affected positive aspects, *"porque si se nota alguna variedad o en la sazon o en la grandeza o cualquiera otra cualidad, es para hacerlas superiores"* (Vidaurre 1889a, 135).[18]

This reasoning was not only applied to European-imported crops, but also to animal species. European-imported animals found a suitable climate for their nutrition and reproduction that prospered in the entire region and, of course, – it could sound redundant – *"se han mejorado"* (Vidaurre 1889, 287).[19]

Besides, what Vidaurre energetically defends most are the native populations. The Jesuit was perfectly aware of the diversity that existed between the various indigenous people living in the territory, as mentioned before. Indeed, when he refers to the *'naturales'*, he distinguishes between the different ethnic groups. It is very interesting to focus on this feature, which lacks in Molina's works. The former often refers to them as generally *'araucani'*, *'chileni'* or *'chilesi'*. Vidaurre, instead, provides a descriptions of such groups, and he distinguishes between '*guiglieches'*, '*juncos'*, and '*araucanos'*. They all lived in the level grounds: *'Guiglieches'*, he explains, are those who live between Río Bueno and the Chiloé Archipelago; *'juncos'* are settled between Valdivia River and Chiloé; finally, the *'araucanos'* live along the border of the Biobío River to the north, and up to the Valdivia River which separated them with the *'juncos'*, to *'patagones'* and *'poyas'* at the East. 'Araucanos', he writes, are the most renowned ethnic group of the entire continent for their courage, fortitude, and resilience during the Spanish Conquest (Vidaurre 1899a, 301). As Molina, Vidaurre is also surprised by the harmony of the Mapuche language and, also according to him, indigenous were the timeless heirs of an ancient civilisation of which everything went lost except for their mild language (Vidaurre 1889a, 311). For that reason, the second volume of Vidaurre's *Historia* has as its main objective to demonstrate the value of natives, as he did for the Chilean nature.

The second volume is always part of the *Historia* but, for convenience, I prefer to treat them as two separated texts. What Vidaurre exposes in this work is, mainly, the *historia civil* of the kingdom, focusing on the main chronological events that marked the centuries from the Spanish Conquest. Vidaurre narrates the military achievements of Almagro, Valdivia, Caupolicán, Lautaro and Colocolo, and the consequences of Valdivia's demise, as well as the succession of the governors. He reports the events helped by other well-known historical sources, as the *Historia Militar, Civil y Sagrada de lo Acaecido en la Conquista y Pacificación del Reino de Chile* (1758) by Olivares, using a quite objectively and appropriate historiographical method with no speculations. Finally, he dedicates particular attention to the system of *castas* on which the colonial society was based, with a detailed explanation on *mestizaje*, Spanish nobility, *'pureza de sangre'* (blood's purity), and the status of *criollos* or *chilenos españoles*.

For this analysis, it is also worthy to examine the pages he dedicates to the latter. *'Criollos'*, in the words of Vidaurre, were usually healthy, and they rarely born with deformities; the benignity of the climate is the main explanation for understanding this status, he affirms (Vidaurre 1889b, 289). The Jesuit historian defines their attitude as affable, sympathetic, and generous. He only has gentle words for them, and he has no hesitancy in flattering them. Creoles grew up with sturdy principle concerning Christianity and politics, respect, and honesty. They had a propensity

for arts but, unfortunately, they were not broadly sponsored and studied in the region; although Vidaurre is sure they would have succeeded also in this field, if they only had the opportunity to deepen their studies (Vidaurre 1889b, 290). For Vidaurre, a well-educated European would surely have enjoyed any kind of scientific conversation with an American-born intellectual, because the contribution of the latter would have been of great significance by giving a different and American-based point of view (Vidaurre 1889b, 295).

The work by Vidaurre is the perfect apologia for his style of writing, and his patriotism goes beyond patriotism itself. Even though the Jesuit continues to assure his absolute commitment to impartiality concerning Chile, he was not. His *Historia* is studded of nostalgia, melancholia, and homesickness. The similarities with Molina's works are several; however, Vidaurre's *Historia* looks even more detailed in the description of nature and historical events. Yet, as in the Molina's *corpus*, it is possible to detect an emerging Americanism also in the *Historia*, due to the commitment of Vidaurre to participate in the vibrant intellectual debate on the nature of America, and for its propensity to identify *'la parte per il tutto'* (the part for the whole), in a paradigm in which Chile is America and vice versa. Moreover, another recurrent theme in Vidaurre's work is the comparison to Europe and the – false – claim of neutrality, which he often assured has nothing to do with patriotism.

The Chilean patriotism of Molina and Vidaurre is based on the continuous usage of analogies and parallelism as rhetorical tools to raise their homeland at the European expected standards. For that reason, according to Vidaurre, the marbles from Chile looked like those of Carrara, Bayona, or even Mount Sinai. Crystals, instead, are like those of Bohemia (Vidaurre 1889b, 176, 179). The main keyword in Vidaurre's work is also 'abundance': there no other place in the world as Chile, for its beauty and the same amount of natural resources.

Those congruencies between the two authors denoted the use of the same sources; also, their friendship is an element which worth mention in this analysis, as well as the profound esteem Vidaurre had towards his compatriot Molina. Similarly, the use of many rhetorical figures and narrative devices are common in both authors. For that, it is possible to identify a common pattern and a shared thinking by the two authors, which had its origin in the condition of exiled, in their participation into the European enlightened debates of the century, and in the use of common sources.

Molina's and Vidaurre's cultural identity – as Creole intellectual and former Jesuits exiled in Italy – led them to develop a patriotic perception of their homeland. Chile was the best country of the empire for its naturalistic features, resources, and people – both natives and Spanish-descendants. Indeed, even the indigenous were superior to other populations living in the New World before the Conquest. On the one hand, the astonishment, the surprise, and the wonder are the pillars of Molina accounts – who was not able to rid its writing style from old literary *cliché* belonging to the conquistador descriptions of America. On the other hand, the persistent chase for a most detailed and real account characterized Vidaurre's work, who tried to provide an accurate

image of Chile. Finally, the patriotic narrative they elaborated about their distant homeland in the analysed accounts is an indicator of a shared cultural and intellectual identity that could be placed into a global nationalistic framework, as we will see.

Reframing colonial space through nationalism

In the late-eighteenth century, Spanish – peninsular – Enlightenment identified the *Patria* with the peninsular nation, not with the Spanish imperial dominions (Ortega 2011; Entin 2013, 22). For that, it is difficult to identify the American dominions as a unitarian *patria* under the Spanish rule. By then, Spanish America was a combination of kingdoms and no Spanish American could have described his patriotism as *'criollo'* (Entin 2013, 30-31). In the late-colonial era, the sentiment of attachment of Creoles to their lands could only be regional, since American kingdoms were united under the Spanish rule, and not by a shared consciousness of belonging to the same continental entity.

The transformation of '*reynos'* into '*patrias'* took place only in the late eighteenth century. Still, America represented a community that, even of juridical inconsistency, was distinctive in its – cultural – identification (Entin 2013, 30-31). Spanish American patriotism is conceivable as part of situational rhetoric that saw the involvement of social actors tied together by the imperial dynamics, and by an essentially Hispanic, Enlightened and Catholic discourse (Entin 2013, 30-31). Nevertheless, it would denote shallowness to overlook to how Creole-exiled Jesuits referred to their birthplace, and the deep affection they showed in their written texts towards their distant lands. John Lynch has highlighted how much these well-educated religious actors gave tangible expression to the growing *'americanismo',* becoming the literary forerunners of American nationalism (Lynch 1976, 41).

Nationalism is a complex phenomenon with multiple facets, and many scholars in the last decades tried to set its features and explored it deeply.[20] A treatise about its definition, origin, and nature would be demanding for these pages. For that, I embrace the concept of nationalism already formulated by Benedict Anderson. In his view, the notion is deprived by its ideological connotation but meant in purely anthropological terms, implying the existence of an "imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 2016, 5-6). Nationality, nation-ness, and nationalism are cultural artefacts, according to Anderson. Yet, this perception did not alter their authenticity. Nations are imagined, but not crafted, nor invented (Anderson 2016, 5-6). Assuming the existence of such communities does not imply necessarily the presence of a political project. Indeed, cultural nationalism and political nationalism are two different phenomena, not complementary nor consequential. Therefore, the distinction with the twentieth-century political nationalistic movements should be strongly underlined in this discourse. In Anderson's view, the nation is imagined, limited and sovereign. The community "is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the

image of their communion", and the imagination of those depends on the "horizontal comradeship" which characterizes the nation (Anderson 2016, 7). Consequently, communities are imagined but not fabricated; the sense of belonging comprises also genuine patriotic values by its people. At this point, a question could arise: is territory a prerogative *sine qua non* for the development of patriotic or nationalistic beliefs? What happens to a community that lives – or is forced to live – outside the national territorial borders? Which are the repercussions of distance on the sense of belonging to a common homeland? As Lord Acton affirmed, "exile is the nursery of nationality" (Acton 1967, 134; Anderson 1992, 2).[21] Anderson, following the thinking of Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, also analysed this aspect referring to a general human condition of attachment to the physical lands in which people have born (Anderson 1992). This imagined *patria* has variable frontiers. Indeed, the main reference point associated with this concept of *patria* could differ in each one's consciousness: homeland could be represented in people imagination by a town, by a region, or by a country (Anderson 1992, 2). The connection could also goes beyond geographical borders, and the bond with the ancestral home is similar to the classical definitions of territorial-based nationalism (Glick Schiller 2005, 570-571). The main difference, in this case, is "the nature of the relationship between the members of the nation and the national territory", which implies a potentially borderless communitarian bond (Glick Schiller 2005, 570-571). This definition of nationalism could open the path to a global approach in the analysis of the phenomenon, in which national communities are seen as nationalistic clusters in foreign national territory, but still tied to their native lands. These de-localised nationalistic communities could be self-ascribed or ascribed by others in a form of a diasporic tie. Yet, this belonging could be real or imagined, and the organisation of their relationship during the exile is not always necessarily enriched by political attempts to establish a state (Glick Schiller 2005, 571). In this respect, it is necessary to distinguish between nationalism as a cultural discourse and nationalism as a political aspirational project – which often endorses political mobilisations.

Analogously, the Jesuits' accounts created an 'imagined community' removed by any political pushes. Still, this community had a sense of belonging to a shared, beloved, and distant *patria* which can be reconstructed by their narrations. Indeed, literary production was the preferential means of expression during the exile. And, as illustrated before, natural histories were the key element of this Creole-Jesuit patriotic discourse. Still, the development of natural science and the writing of natural histories were not typical of the exiles Chilean-Jesuit, nor of the members of the Society of Jesus.

The writing of such literature was the product of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment in the Atlantic world, and of the development of modern science. Von Humboldt, Charles Marie La Condamine, Linnaeus, and George-Louis Leclerc de Buffon are well-known European naturalists, and they were key actors of the scientific panorama of their time. Natural Histories were proliferating in the late eighteenth century and Creole-Jesuits, as intellectuals, also joined this literary wave. Yet, their accounts are distinctive from those of Europeans. Creoles did not only

write about Natural History, but about their homeland. In so doing, Creole-Jesuits used such works as a tool to unload their feelings; such emotions comprehended longing, marvel, and melancholy, but also an emerging patriotism which becomes known by their narrations.

I explored Molina and Vidaurre accounts, but they were not the only testimonies of this trend. *"Solamente saben lo que es Chile los que lo han perdido"*, affirmed the Chilean Jesuit Manuel Lacunza in a letter to his friend Juan de Santa Cruz (Meier 2001, 436).[22] However, this phenomenon was neither merely Chilean: also Juan de Velasco and Francisco Javier Clavijero had similar views regarding their homelands, which it should be interesting to discuss properly and separately.[23]

As Cañizares-Esguerra noticed, however, Anderson underestimated the role of the *intelligentsia* in shaping nationalism (Cañizares-Esguerra 1997, 2). Cañizares-Esguerra argues that "subordinate elites ... not only been preoccupied with crafting autonomous spiritual-cultural space of difference but also with marking differences by inventing altogether separate physical spaces." (Cañizares-Esguerra 1997, 2). For our discourse on Creole-exiled Jesuits, it is not possible to overlook it because this intellectual space is exactly where Molina and Vidaurre placed themselves. Although this Spanish American patriotic wave was not political but merely cultural, Creole-Jesuit intellectuals made use of Natural History as a tool to give voice to a sense of belonging to a shared and distant *Patria*. This rhetoric was then reclaimed and inflated after the Independences of the nineteenth century, and history became an efficient political mean to forge national unity.[24]

The representation of American nature in the late eighteenth-century narrations reframed the image and space of the colonies, creating a pre-political imaginary national community (Cañizares-Esguerra 1997, 3). Molina's and Vidaurre's accounts manipulated the colonial space of Chile, depicting the American colony as an idealised, privileged, and autonomous kingdom in which the indigenous were unconquerable and had a glorious past. The colonial space, essentially fragmented, was depicted by those authors as an integrated, cohesive, and homogenous reality which posed the basis of what Cañizares-Esguerra called 'proto-national spaces' (Cañizares-Esguerra 1997, 12). This is particularly evident in Molina account, who constructed unity between the various ethnic groups of Chile – which he called collectively 'Chilean' – depicting them as a well-structured and centralised Western-style society, as above-mentioned. Yet, the questioning of the colonial space also had another dimension, as in the Vidaurre case. As we saw, he did not recognise in the imperial-settled borders the essence of the Chilean province: he decided not to include in his descriptions the Province of Cuyo, Patagonia, and Magallanes, recognising the diversity of those lands and the indigenous people who lived there.

The manipulation of America's image created a colonial space into which the national perceptions of the cleric intellectuals about their Province were settled. Moreover, through the exaggeration and exaltation of the American physical spaces, Creole-Jesuits emphasized the colonial economic potential of their lands, highlighting the presence of gold and silver in abundance. Colonies were microcosmos and commercial emporium, which God blessed with the

richness of everything necessary for life (Cañizares-Esguerra 1997, 5, 7). Molina's and Vidaurre's attempts to describe America proceeded along with two different directions: they exalted and strongly underlined the uniqueness and limitless beauty of Chile while, at the same time, trying to standardise those unmatched features in the constant comparison with European nature. Consequently, the American uniqueness should have been respected, but not feared by foreigners.

The patriotism showed by Molina in Vidaurre could be defined as nature-based patriotism, in which nature and the birth soil are the fundamental aspects through which establish the bond. For Maurizio Viroli, "natural patriotism is an attachment to the native soil understood as a place of memory" (Viroli 1997, 46). The land is loaded with unique meanings that is impossible to find elsewhere, which are then translated into the love for the *patria* (Viroli 1997, 46). The sentiment of attachment showed by those authors helped to increase the sense of territorialisation to a concrete object, namely homeland. However, the idea naturalists wanted to give of this land was crafted, altered, and imbued by exceptionality.

Chile is a *giardino* (garden) that, even if not explicitly clarified, recalls the Eden. The wonder contained in Molina and Vidaurre accounts is not far from the religious astonishment: they subverted the paradigm of the divine and substituted it with natural marvel. When analysed, this image is not dissimilar to that painted by Columbus in his travel diaries. If the feeling of marvel Columbus felt in front of the American beauty could be ascribed in relationship with possession, as explored by Stephen Greenblatt (1991), I argue it is possible to apply the same framework also for the Chilean Jesuit narrations. The marvellous was translated into possession by Columbus, and this expedient was necessary to put the American lands under the Spanish rule virtually. For the Chilean Jesuits, instead, it served to tie a strong bond with a remote land in which they could no longer live.[25]

In conclusion, the Chilean homeland is imaginary through the Jesuits accounts, but consistent. The patriotism of Molina and Vidaurre leaked by the reading of their works, and they did not try to hide this sentiment. But, as highlighted by David Brading, the development of Creole patriotism could be defined as an ideology belonging to a particular class of intellectuals, nor of a nation (Brading 2017, 334). However, even through these lenses, it is not possible to overlook to their contribution to the development of Creole nationalism through the identification of the national space. Although the sentiment was elitist, it included the awareness of a shared historical background of the *patria*, which is a fundamental component of nationalism (Lynch 1976, 43). The Creole patriotism of Molina and Vidaurre translated into nationalism in the exact moment in which they re-designed such territorial space as finite and concrete, different from that of the empire. The nation they crafted was there, on the other side of the Atlantic, tangible, and real; what was imagined, however, was the sense of unity.

Conclusions

The exogenous factors that influenced the Creole-Jesuits' thinking are of global interest and

they had their foundations on both sides of the Atlantic, in intellectual and cultural processes. There are major elements that shaped the sense of belonging to their *Patria*, of endogenous and exogenous natures; between these components, it is possible to distinguish the main aspects that constituted their thinking.

Firstly, (1) their status of Creoles is fundamental to understand the entire discourse. Particularly, the emerging cultural identity this social group was developing in the eighteenth-century Spanish America colonies played a fundamental role in fashioning their sense of belonging to the colonies. They were of Spanish origins, but of American birth. Secondly, (2) their role as members of a religious order as the Society of Jesus allowed them access to a specific kind of knowledge, of high level and of classical European-styled setting. The study of ancient literature was encouraged, as well as the study of Greek and Latin languages and selected philosophical school of thoughts to the detriment of other tendencies. Thirdly, (3) the gradual penetration of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth-century colonial societies of the Atlantic world, as well as modernity, prepared the ground for the re-elaboration of the relationship of power to the Spanish metropolis. (4) This process of penetration of modernity into traditional societies modified the role of the clergy within the *ancien régime* societies, reframing the paradigm which saw the Church as the bastion of old-fashioned values, that did not fit anymore with the new model. And, lastly, (5) their status of exiled after the expulsion and the suppression of the *Societas* entailed substantial consequences in their lives as individuals and as a displaced community, which sought refuge into science and literary production as an escape hatch to the unfortunate situation.

All those factors constituted the influences of their views of the world and of their homeland, enabling the development of patriotic and nationalist beliefs. Jesuits were conscious of the implications of their works and they were aware of the debates that animated the eighteenth-century European intellectual panorama. For that, their apologias perfectly suited into this context and tried to overturn sedimented stereotypes on America-related matters. Natives were re-evaluated in a new framework that identified them as successors of great forgotten civilisation; Creoles were depicted as the most honest and sincere people on earth; while nature has been exalted beyond belief, with the preponderant association with the quasi-divine. Chile was blessed and unique in its essence for Molina and Vidaurre, and they were firmly convinced that their writing attempts were deprived by any partiality, which were not. The beauty of Chile is under everyone's eyes, it is objective and undeniable: nature becomes, in the words of Cañizares-Esguerra, the 'patriotic space' to fulfil with their praises.

The way in which America has been described during the centuries, through the highlighting of the exotic and of the marvellous, is interiorised by the Jesuits intellectuals who used the same rhetoric to re-disclose America to Europe. The way in which they presented Chilean complex reality to Europe was the gala of the new image they fabricated for it, for its restored and triumphant entrance into the European collective imagination. They decided to revise and re-evaluate an old image of their homeland that did not reflect reality for them. In so doing,

however, they let themselves be tempted by the overemphasis and by the seed of patriotism. The marvel, the hyperboles, and the comparisons are parts of a singular patriotic discourse that saw a nation where there was not yet. They constructed an imperfect unity through the literary inventiveness, which reframed the Chilean image and space while creating a pre-political imaginary national community. The sentiment of attachment and territorialisation for this distant land, the awareness of a shared past, and the struggle of the exile created a tangible object in their narrations that could be defined as their *Patria*.

Endnotes:

1. See Francisco Ortega, "A Brief Conceptual History of 'Colonia,'" in *The First Wave of Decolonization*, Mark Thurner ed. (New York: Routledge, 2019).
2. In this essay I have chosen to take into consideration only sources relevant for their scientific value, to better analyse the secular contribution to the intellectual debates by Creole Jesuits from Chile. Clearly, Jesuits were primarily religious men, and their production of theological works is also abundant. See authors as Diego José Fuenzalida, Andrés Febres, and Manuel Lacunza.
3. The authorship of this work is still debated between Molina and Vidaurre. However, the predominant tendency attributes it to Molina.
4. "I saw and I examined for myself most of the things I write."
5. "Chile is one of the best countries of America: the beauty of its Sky, the benignity of its climate, the fertility and richness of its soil gave it considerable advantages over its neighbour countries."
6. "This kingdom is, with no contradiction, the most beautiful, the richest, and the most fertile between the Spanish Monarchy dominions."
7. "This country [Chile] is like Italy, namely the Garden of the Southern America, where everything that one could desire to conduct a comfortable life comes with the same abundance and perfect as in Europe."
8. For a deepened analysis on De Pauw affirmations and intellectual eighteenth-century debates about America, see Antonello Gerbi, *La Disputa del Nuovo Mondo: Storia di una Polemica, 1750-1900* (Milano e Napoli: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1955).
9. "Mr Paw wrote about America and of its inhabitants with the same liberty that could have used to write about the Moon and of Selenites; but the sin is that America is not far as the Moon is."
10. See also Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (University of Chicago Press, 2017); and Antonello Gerbi, *Nature in the New World: From Christopher Columbus to Gonzalo Fernandez De Oviedo* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975).
11. "A language cannot be learn passing through."
12. Criticism about American colonies were common in the eighteenth century, but they mainly interested the American continent in general. Few or none addressed their critique right against the Chilean province.
13. See Miguel Rojas Mix, "La Idea de la Historia y la Imagen de America en el Abate Molina," in *Revista de Filosofía*, 10, 1 (2016); and Osvaldo Rodríguez Pérez, "El Hispanoamericanismo de los Jesuitas Expulsos en Italia," in *Actas de XII Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas: 21-26 de agosto de 1995* (Birmingham: Department of Hispanic Studies, 1998).
14. See also Walter Hanisch Espíndola*, Itinerario y Pensamiento de Los Jesuítas Expulsos de Chile: 1767-1815* (Santiago de Chile: Andrés Bello, 1972).
15. "Completely omitted, misunderstood, or wrong, or confused."
16. "To serve the audience and to let them know my homeland in its true essence."
17. "The love for the truth."

18. "Because if one notices any variation in the smoothness or dimensions or any other aspect, it is to make them superior."
19. "They improved themselves."
20. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London: Verso Books, 2016); John Alexander Armstrong, *Nations Before Nationalism* (Chapell Hill: UNC Press 1982); Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986); and Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1788* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).
21. See also Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile: and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta Books, 2013).
22. "Only those who have lost it know what Chile is: there is not the least compensatory here."
23. See Juan de Velasco, *Historia del Reino de Quito de la América Meridional* (1789); Francisco Javier Clavijero, *Historia Antigua de México* (1780). See also the works by José Antonio Alzate y Ramírez.
24. See Antonio Annino and François-Xavier Guerra, *Inventando la Nación: Iberoamérica, Siglo XIX* (México DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003).
25. See also Edmundo O'Gorman, *La Invención de América: Investigación acerca de la Estructura Histórica del Nuevo Mundo y del Sentido de su Devenir* (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1958).

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