

**Provincial Political Cultures and the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Mexican Fiction.**

Deborah Toner<sup>\*</sup>

*School of History, University of Leicester, UK.*

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<sup>\*</sup> Email: dt151@le.ac.uk

This article examines the representation of provincial political culture and practices in selected fictional works of two prominent Mexican writers of the late nineteenth century: Emilio Rabasa and Heriberto Frías. Particular focus is given to Rabasa's portrait of a fictional pronunciamiento, a widespread form of political protest and negotiation in nineteenth-century Mexico that has recently been subject to historiographical re-evaluation, and Frías's exploration of the 1893 rebellion of Tomóchic. Rabasa's fiction supports the development of a political system that imposes the national will upon the unruly provinces by portraying the pronunciamiento as a destructive and chaotic practice, founded in the political ignorance of its participants. Frías's work, meanwhile, questions the validity of the national enterprise by framing the Tomóchic rebellion as the consequence of a national political system that had disengaged with local and regional voices.

**Keywords:** Emilio Rabasa; Heriberto Frías; political culture; pronunciamiento; Tomóchic; fiction; Mexico.

## Introduction

La revolución se desenvuelve sobre la idea,  
conmueve a las naciones, modifica una institución  
y necesita ciudadanos; *la bola* no exige principios  
ni los tiene jamás, nace y muere en corto espacio  
material y moral, y necesita ignorantes (Rabasa  
1972, 167-8).

Juan Quiñones, the protagonist of Emilio Rabasa's novel *La bola* (1887), so rejects the idea that the violent rebellion he took part in during his youth, in the fictional Mexican town of San Martín de la Piedra during an earlier part of the nineteenth century, had been a legitimate part of provincial political culture. Quiñones repudiates his youthful conviction that he had been an informed and patriotic citizen fighting for a principled cause, and instead concludes that he and other participants in the rebellion had been duped by the self-serving,

manipulative caudillos that dominated the political life of his local community purely for their own ends. Rabasa's novel, narrated from the vantage point of the late nineteenth century, when Mexico was governed by Porfirio Díaz with an unprecedented degree of stability in the national government, thus offers a condemnation of the political culture of an earlier era, to which many contemporary commentators, and subsequent historians, attributed political turmoil, civil war, and a lack of national progress.

More recent historiography has done much to redress such a simplistic and dismissive view of Mexican political culture in the early and mid-nineteenth century. The majority of the numerous military interventions in civilian politics during the first half of the nineteenth century were "inspired by the constitutional debates and disagreements of the civilians rather than by the alleged predatory praetorianism of the overrated warring caudillos" (Fowler 1998, 4. See also Fowler 2009, 13-15). Will Fowler, Michael Costeloe, Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, Barbara Tenenbaum, and other historians have also re-evaluated the significance of *pronunciamientos*. Once widely understood to be meaningless conflicts directed by competing military figures, as in Rabasa's definition of "la bola" as the antithesis to the politically legitimate and civically responsible "revolución", *pronunciamientos* are now subject to analysis as among the most common forms of political protest and negotiation in nineteenth-century Mexico, in which civil society was extremely active.

Fowler (2009, 12) has demonstrated, for instance, that the *pronunciamiento* was "una práctica versátil, dinámica y fluida de influir en la política local y nacional... un medio de facto legítimo aunque ilegal de inducir cambios y reformas en las políticas del gobierno fuera del estado o de la nación". The dynamic ability of *pronunciamientos* to intertwine local, regional, and national political concerns through a process of negotiation with the government is particularly interesting. Rather than being concerned with overthrowing the

government, the overwhelming majority of pronunciamientos simply used a threat of force—often stopping short of force itself—“negociar con las autoridades (fueran locales o nacionales), al exigir que respondieran a sus peticiones” (Fowler 2009, 20. See also Guerra 2007, 136-7). Central to the interaction between local, regional, and national interests in the conduct of pronunciamientos were the *pronunciamientos de adhesión*, the declarations of support made by various communities or their institutional representatives, often the *ayuntamiento* or town council, to an original pronunciamiento. While some of these pronunciamientos de adhesión simply re-stated the aims and demands of the originary pronunciamiento, many others added new articles and demands that addressed particular local concerns, in effect attaching conditions to the local community’s support for the wider pronunciamiento, which could be withdrawn if their demands were not incorporated (Fowler 2009, 24-6; Vázquez 1996, 22; Tenenbaum 1992, 199-200). In this way, the pronunciamiento became a vital element in Mexican political culture, as an “established and recognized means of seeking change” that mediated between local, regional, and national interests during the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century (Costeloe 1988, 245. See also Ortiz Escamilla 1988, 256-9, McDonald 2011, 109-13; Ducey 2011, 90-5).

The balance between local, regional, and national interests in Mexican political culture had undergone considerable restructuring by the late nineteenth century, a change that was reflected in the dramatically reduced legitimacy of the pronunciamiento as a political practice during this period. After a succession of serious conflicts, including the Reforma wars and the French Intervention of the 1850s and 1860s, the Porfiriato (1876-1910) brought a prolonged period of relative political and economic stability, through a more conciliatory and clientelist form of politics between the central state, under Porfirio Díaz, and the Catholic Church, regional leaders, political rivals, and, as historians are increasingly showing, the

popular classes (Esposito 2010, 4-19; Escalante Gonzalbo 1992, 119-40). This so-called *pax Porfiriana* was also underpinned by a new form of “scientific politics” that shaped intellectual and political culture, especially from the 1890s, when a small circle of intellectuals known pejoratively as *científicos* came to dominate public policy and administration. The *científicos* were as much defined by their close political and personal ties to Porfirio Díaz as they were by a common ideological outlook, but Charles Hale (2008, 4-5), one of the foremost scholars of politics in this period, notes that the *científicos*, together with many politicians outside this close circle, shared as their “dominant political doctrine... a transformed liberalism that rested on the contemporary concept of ‘scientific politics’ and on a historical or traditional constitutionalism already rooted in nineteenth-century Mexico”.

In practice, this meant the creation of a more centralized political system and one which sacrificed some democratic elements of liberalism to achieve a more stable political and social order. The key proponents of “scientific politics” writing in *La Libertad* in the late 1870s and 1880s, for instance, Justo Sierra, Telesforo García, and Francisco Cosmes, emphasized the importance of conducting politics on the basis of “empirical study, history and social reality, and practical economic objectives” and criticized earlier generations of Mexican political leaders for causing anarchy through partisan adherence to abstract ideals (Hale 2008, 5). They consequently argued for the need to overhaul Mexico’s constitutional provisions, laid out in 1857, which they regarded as incompatible with Mexican society’s current stage of development, and to implement stronger, more centralized government to create the basis for political order and economic progress (Hale 1989, 20-33; Priego Martínez 2009, 26-33; Vaughan 1981, 13-23; Tenorio Trillo 1996, 78-9).

In their appraisal of the political disorder caused—in their view—by the idealism and partisanship of previous generations of liberals, many Porfirian politicians and intellectuals

represented the pronunciamiento as a destabilizing, chaotic, and backward practice. In an attempt to stamp out military interventions in politics in general, and pronunciamientos in particular, the Porfirian administration undertook several measures: the reduction and professionalization of the army; the offering of incentives, such as political offices or lucrative commercial contracts, to regional leaders to remain peaceful; and the manipulation of elections, which had been recurrent triggers for political unrest earlier in the century, through centralized, national organization (Guerra 2007, 140). Moreover, Gantús (2008, 51) argues that although pronunciamientos did continue to occur on a regular basis during the first decade of Porfirio Díaz's period of rule, the central government worked hard to strip the practice of the widespread legitimacy that it had previously commanded: "En la mayoría de los casos un recurso manido de los gobiernos y sus órganos de prensa fue desacreditar esos movimientos calificándolos como simples actos de bandidaje y estigmatizando a sus cabecillas bajo la categoría de bandidos." Through the de-legitimization of the pronunciamiento as a means of achieving political change, and through incentivizing regional leaders to remain loyal to the central government, therefore, the Porfirian government oversaw a significant restructuring of the relationship between local, regional, and national interests in Mexican political cultures.

This article examines how this change in the political balance between the local, regional, and national was represented and interpreted in literary discourse during the Porfiriato. Unsurprisingly, given the level of broad consensus among Porfirian-era intellectuals regarding the need for a strong central government that Charles Hale has identified, some Porfirian writers portrayed the prioritization of the national good as a progressive step, and represented the earlier nineteenth century as an anarchic period when different regional and other interest groups selfishly, or ignorantly, pulled in different

directions to the nation's detriment. In this vein, Emilio Rabasa traces the disastrous effects of a pronunciamiento, originating in a local political squabble, through regional and national-level politics, effectively reproducing in fictional form the Porfirian government's attempts to strip the pronunciamiento of political legitimacy and to justify the strong centralizing agenda of the administration and its scientific politics. In a cycle of four novels published between 1887 and 1888, *La bola*, *La gran ciencia*, *El cuarto poder* and *Moneda falsa*, Emilio Rabasa traces the transformation of his protagonist, Juan Quiñones, from an idealistic youth caught up in a local power struggle, to a cynical journalist embroiled in national political struggles. This tetralogy provides a scathing analysis of Mexican politics in the earlier nineteenth century; in these novels, the consequences of a political system where the interests of provincial strongmen can shape national decisions and processes are portrayed as disastrous for the nation.

However, this consensus position—prioritizing the national and denigrating any local or regional voices that challenged this prioritization—was not shared by all in the intellectual elite of the Porfirian era. Heriberto Frías, for instance, in his 1893 novel *Tomóchic*, fictionalized his experience as a federal soldier involved in the suppression of a rebellion in Tomóchic, a small village in northern Mexico. The absence of any consideration of local grievances by an unyielding national government is construed in the novel as evidence of Mexico's political decay. *Tomóchic* portrays the tragic consequences of this breakdown in communication between local, regional, and national actors, not only for the local community, which is destroyed by the federal army, but also for the national community, which is symbolically associated with the central protagonist, Miguel Mercado, and his Tomóchican lover Julia.

Although the rebellion represented in Frías's novel is not a pronunciamiento, it is useful to compare *Tomóchic* with Rabasa's work due to the contrasting vision of the appropriate balance between local, regional, and national politics that the novel contains. Where Rabasa represents the ability of provincial political leaders to influence national politics as a manipulative and destructive form of political culture—by implication, supporting the centralizing priorities of the Porfirian government—Frías's novel associates the strong central government of the Porfiriato with the alienation of local and regional groups from the national body, and questions whether the national good *should* be prioritized over local and regional interests. Indeed, although pronunciamientos are never even mentioned in Frías's novel, one could even view the violent escalation of conflict in *Tomóchic* as precisely the kind of situation that could have been avoided by a pronunciamiento—using the mere threat of force to demand redress for grievances at local, regional, and national levels—when they had been a legitimate and common form of protest earlier in the century. In other words, Frías's novel represents Porfirian political culture as impoverished, and even dangerous, due to the lack of such channels for local communities to defend their interests within the nation through legitimate, if extra-legal, protest.

### **Emilio Rabasa (1856-1930)**

Emilio Rabasa was born in Ocozocoautla, Chiapas, in 1856 and after a comprehensive legal education, served as governor of Chiapas in the early 1890s under the government of Porfirio Díaz. By this stage, his literary career had come to an end, as he wrote and published all five of his short novels between 1887 and 1891. Rabasa was also an eminent historian, who assessed primarily what he saw as the impracticalities and weaknesses of the 1857 Liberal constitution and, consequently, justified Díaz's stronghold over the national



government from 1876 to 1911 as a necessary step in the political evolution of modern Mexico. Rabasa's most enduring public role was in the field of law, and he was a prominent leader of the pro-Díaz juridical establishment in Mexico City in the early 1900s. He founded the Escuela Libre de Derecho in 1912, in an attempt to distance the legal establishment from the revolutionary administration of Francisco Madero. Although he was subsequently forced into exile for his support of the hated Victoriano Huerta regime (1913-14), Rabasa went on to exercise great influence during discussions of the 1917 constitution and returned to Mexico to direct the Escuela Libre in 1920, continuing to be the leading specialist in constitutional law until his death in 1930.<sup>1</sup>

Given Rabasa's prominent and controversial role in political and juridical debates of the early twentieth century, it is perhaps surprising that his literary corpus, albeit short-lived, has not been subject to more critical attention, although this is probably due to his lasting reputation as a mere apologist for the Díaz regime. His fictional work, especially his cycle of four novels tracing the fortunes of Juan Quiñones and Mateo Cabezudo—*La bola*, *La gran ciencia*, *El cuarto poder* and *Moneda falsa*—is extremely interesting both for its revival of a picaresque narrative in the vein of José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi (but without that author's penchant for lengthy, didactic digressions and explanations) and for his sharply satirical analysis of Mexico's political culture in the early to mid nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

Rabasa's work can be read as a fictionalization of the Porfirian establishment's denunciation of earlier nineteenth-century political culture as anarchic, corrupt, and inhibitive of national progress. In particular, Rabasa's tetralogy portrays pronunciamientos as having a destructive, debasing impact on national political affairs, echoing the Porfirian government's increasing association of pronunciamientos with banditry and corruption. The central feature of *La bola*, the first novel in the cycle of four, is Rabasa's satirical portrait of a local political

dispute and resultant pronunciamiento, the regional and national repercussions of which are played out in the subsequent three novels. Thus, Rabasa's tetralogy develops the government-sponsored defamatory agenda against pronunciamientos—and against local and regional political protests in general—within the realm of fictional discourse.

*La bola* begins in the midst of Independence Day celebrations in a fictional town in southern Mexico, San Martín de la Piedra. The ceremonial rigmarole of the day helps to spark an explosion in the resentments that had been simmering between the local military strongman, Mateo Cabezudo, and the recently appointed *jefe político* Jacinto Coderas, who had been sent by the state government to reign in Cabezudo's local authority. Coderas effectively usurps what had been Cabezudo's traditional prerogative of leading the civic parade through the town, seizing the national flag from him and insisting to the flabbergasted Cabezudo "yo soy la primera autoridad política del distrito" and "¡Usted aquí no es nada!" (Rabasa 1972, 20). This rather petty squabble quickly becomes much more serious, when Cabezudo forges an alliance with another regional politician aggrieved by Coderas's appointment. Pérez Gavilán is the region's representative in Congress, who commands a significant popular following, and the state government's support of Coderas was part of a larger plan designed to oust Gavilán from Congress. Meanwhile, as Gavilán and Cabezudo join forces, several other petty officials of the town, who carried personal vendettas against Cabezudo, align themselves with Coderas and the state government.

The ins and outs of these political machinations are transmitted through the eyes of the narrator-protagonist, Juan Quiñones, recounting his experiences in retrospect. Although his wry commentary, benefitted by hindsight, allows him to distance himself somewhat from the heady political atmosphere, self-interest, and rash decision-making that characterizes most of the other figures, Quiñones is nevertheless forced into siding with Cabezudo in revolt

against Coderas, since he is in love with Cabezudo's niece, Remedios. At times, however, the irony-inflected retrospective commentary suggests that Quiñones had, in his youthful naivety, become caught up in the political rhetoric of Cabezudo and his rebels. Upon hearing rumors that Cabezudo would launch the pronunciamiento within days, Quiñones deliberated that "la revolución era justa y legítima; se trataba de derrocar la tiranía y la tiranía es abominable. Yo no sabía cuáles eran los abusos del poder; pero que el Gobierno abusaba, era cosa fuera de toda duda y discusión" (Rabasa 1972, 27).

Moreover, the appearance of a newspaper named *La Conciencia Pública* supporting the imminent pronunciamiento had further inflamed the sense of anger and injustice against this vague and distant "Gobierno" of which Quiñones speaks. Indeed, in the simulated newspaper discussions and in the dialogue amongst the pronunciados, the word government is often used in an incendiary "Us versus Them" sense, and it is often unclear whether the government being referred to is the state government or the federal government or both. *La Conciencia Pública* published editorials lambasting this government for its "odiosa tiranía" and its circumscription of the "inalienables derechos" of the people (Rabasa 1972, 39). On October 10, less than a month after the Independence Day clash between Cabezudo and Coderas, *La Conciencia Pública* declared that

El pueblo reivindica sus derechos usurpados, y sigue a los pundonorosos caudillos que le enseñan el glorioso camino de la libertad. Cada uno de esos heroicos hijos de las montañas, que secundando el Plan de Venta-quemada, abandonan el hogar para acudir en favor de la dignidad nacional vejada, colocarán sobre su frente los inmarcesibles laureles que se ciñen los héroes, o la corona de siempreviva de los mártires (Rabasa 1972, 39).

The newspaper then went on to detail the various points of the Plan de Venta-quemada itself and, although the narrator omits much of the detail, Quiñones notes that of utmost importance

in this pronunciamiento document was the sanctity of the constitutional laws, the inalienable rights that these constitutional laws conferred on the people, and the violation of these rights by the government in its arbitrary and unjust action against the champions of the people: Mateo Cabezudo and Pérez Gavilán.

Rabasa's satirical tone in describing the lofty rhetoric of the pronunciamiento is enhanced by the fact that Quiñones joins the pronunciados for personal rather than ideological reasons. Rabasa further emphasizes the philosophical and ideological bankruptcy of the movement by reminding the reader on various occasions that its origins lay in a petty insult between the local military strongman and the political official representing regional and national political institutions. This section of the novel, therefore, must be read in the context of Rabasa's lifelong commitment to criticizing the constitution of 1857 and its relationship to the political realities of Mexico. Moreover, Rabasa's satirical portrait of the document's empty rhetoric and the flimsy ideological basis of the pronunciamiento are crucial to the overall structure and narrative of the series of four novels.

The central importance of Rabasa's early critique of the pronunciamiento is highlighted by situating the opening scene of conflict in the midst of the San Martín de la Piedra's Independence Day celebrations. The opening description of the fireworks, music, and parade taking place on September 16 seem to Juan to be more like "el comienzo frenético de una asonada tremenda" than a public celebration of civic pride, thus alluding from the earliest stage of the narrative to the forthcoming revolt and also to the impact of local political unrest on the nation (Rabasa 1972, 3). In speeches, as well as in the decorative paraphernalia of the celebration, the Independence heroes Hidalgo, Morelos, Allende, Abasolo, Mina, Rayón, and Galeana are also commemorated, which sets into sharp relief

Cabezudo's subsequent attempt to portray himself as a great liberator and patriot in the same mould as these figures.

By establishing this connection between Mexico's Independence heroes and Mateo Cabezudo, Rabasa's novel does not simply suggest a simple contrast between good and bad figures, but a more complex relationship between these established national heroes and the local caudillo who tries to emulate them. On one level, the contrast does seem to suggest that the local, self-interested, and politically manipulative Cabezudo is a charlatan in comparison to the likes of Hidalgo and Morelos. On another level, however, the association becomes deeply ironic, raising the possibility that the heroes of independence and liberalism were, in reality, little better than Cabezudo, as they also represented false ideals to an easily duped populace. The ambivalence contained within this passage, and the overall satirical framework of the tetralogy, suggests another reading, in relation to Mexico's political culture as a whole: namely, that Mexico's fractious political climate in the early to mid-nineteenth century had subsumed the struggle, agenda, aims, and images of the Independence heroes within political rivalries and factions, to the extent that they could be mobilized to give credence and justification to any and every political ideology, whether at the local level in the pronunciamiento of Mateo Cabezudo, or in the national liberal constitution of 1857.

The ending of *La bola*, and subsequent discussions and events in the remainder of the tetralogy, support this reading of the contrast between Cabezudo and the independence heroes. After Cabezudo's rebellion successfully defeats Coderas, Quiñones is shocked to find the caudillo making a deal with Cañas, a minor local official who had been a loyal follower of Coderas. Together Cabezudo and Cañas draw up a letter to the federal government claiming that peace had been resolved in the dispute that *Coderas* started and that they—Cabezudo and Cañas—have successfully suppressed Coderas's attempted revolution.

Cabezudo, the original leader of the pronunciamiento, is thus *rewarded* for “defeating” the revolt by being made the local jefe político and being nominated as a candidate in the forthcoming congressional elections, while the turncoat Cañas is made a judge. Quiñones, meanwhile, is left devastated by the realization that his participation in the revolt had helped to secure this unhappy victory, as well as the premature death of his mother. To make matters worse for Quiñones, Cabezudo declares that he is now of too high social standing to allow his niece Remedios to be married to a nobody like Quiñones.

In *La gran ciencia*, the immediate sequel to *La bola*, Quiñones moves to the state capital to pursue a career that will improve his social standing and prospects of marrying Remedios. Again, it is this romantic endeavor, rather than any political agenda or beliefs of his own, that draws Quiñones into complex political intrigues. The scenario is essentially the same as in *La bola*, although the cynical manipulation of power is more overt in *La gran ciencia* than it had been in the first novel. In *La bola*, Cabezudo used the rhetoric of liberty and constitutional rights to regain and extend his personal authority and social status in a very underhand manner. In the second novel, meanwhile, the competition between various suitors to win Remedios’s hand in marriage becomes the pretext for a dirtily fought political campaign for the state governorship, in which the support of Cabezudo—and the votes he could command—was ultimately at stake. At various points in *La gran ciencia*, and from various spokesmen more aware of Mexico’s political system than Quiñones, the love-stricken youth is warned of the disjuncture between politics and ideals. For instance, Quiñones’s friend Pepe Rojo explains “Ya sabemos que entre los buenos principios y la política hay la misma distancia que entre el derecho y un expedientazo de dos mil hojas de papel sellado”, before later complaining “Necesito emigrar... a un país más civilizado en donde la libertad haya sido mejor comprendida y practicada” (Rabasa 1972, 186, 313).

For the last two novels, *El cuarto poder* and *Moneda falsa*, the action and politicking moves on to Mexico City, where Cabezudo has become a Congressional Deputy, and Quiñones and his friend Rojo secure employment with a newspaper, from which the novel *El cuarto poder* ultimately gets its title. The newspaper for which Quiñones and Rojo work is initially named *La Columna* and operates as a pro-government organ, but it then changes ownership and name, becoming an opposition newspaper called *El Cuarto Poder*, before returning to its pro-government stance once again. Instead of the military revolt and the romantic war of the first two novels, in the third book in the series, *El cuarto poder*, Quiñones is drawn into a war of words. This war of words, however, is revealed to be just as much a subterfuge for cynical political machinations as his previous struggles had been. Quiñones discovers that his boss at the newspaper *El Cuarto Poder* had been writing sensationalist propaganda articles both for and against the government in order to increase circulation of the two rival papers.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, one of these articles eulogizes none other than Cabezudo as a noble man “que no vaciló en aceptar la suerte del mártir, sacrificando su bienestar por las libertades públicas... Era Hidalgo en la abnegación, Morelos en la estrategia, Mina en el arrojo, Bravo en la nobleza, Guerrero en la constancia” (Rabasa 1970, 112-13). This homage to Cabezudo in the newspaper uses the image of the Independence heroes in precisely the way that was suggested by the opening parts of the first novel *La bola*: to give justification and credibility to the ideology being espoused by an unworthy, manipulative politician and to create the impression that the pursuit of liberty for the people had been at the centre of political developments in Mexico from Independence to the present. In the final novel, *Moneda falsa*, the war of words continues, as Quiñones writes a succession of defamatory articles about Cabezudo, which prevents the latter from achieving his dream of becoming a government

minister. A heated argument between the two ends with Quiñones attempting to shoot Cabezudo in a confrontation that seriously traumatizes Remedios. Although she recovers from the illness induced by this shock, and helps to bring about the reconciliation of the two men, she dies prematurely at the novel's close from a recurrence of the same affliction.

Remedios's death is symbolic of the destruction wrought upon Mexican society by the self-interested political rivalries and factionalism that Rabasa's work identifies as the central feature of Mexican political culture in the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century. Idealized female figures were commonly used as allegorical representations of the nation in nineteenth-century literature, art, and nation-building iconography. In numerous Mexican novels of the period, the central female protagonist dies as a consequence of a bitter rivalry between two or more male characters, a protracted experience of unrequited love due to racial, class, or familial obstacles, or the nefarious actions of a villain. Recurrently, the heroine's demise allegorically represents the consequences for the national good should the political rivalries, social divisions, or corruption symbolized in the sequence of events leading to her death be left unresolved (Chambers 2003, 57; Carrera 2011, 112-18; Widdifield 1996, 51-2; Sommer 1991, 172-202; Gerassi-Navarro 1999, 150-70).<sup>4</sup> In Emilio Rabasa's tetralogy, the death of Remedios is the direct consequence of the dispute between Cabezudo and Quiñones, itself caused by political opportunism, cynicism, and corruption, as well as Cabezudo's social snobbery regarding Quiñones's merits as a suitor for his niece. She is effectively sacrificed so that the rift between the two men can be healed, as Cabezudo finally allows Quiñones to marry his niece when they all return to San Martín de la Piedra, after the reputation and social standing of both men had been ruined and equalized as a consequence of their actions towards one another. As a final symbol of hope for the fate of the nation, Remedios is able to bear Quiñones a daughter before dying from her mysterious affliction.



The daughter represents the order and peace made possible by her mother's resolution of the conflict through her illness and death.

Ultimately Rabasa's four novels trace the escalation of a local political dispute, which manipulated innocent citizens like Quiñones into thinking they were fighting for a larger ideological and revolutionary sentiment in order to gain personal political advantages, into the regional and national arenas. Thus, the local vendettas and allegiances surrounding Cabezudo affect the outcome of a regional governorship, lead to the appointment of self-interested figures in high-ranking positions, cause bitter and highly publicized debates and scandals in Mexico City, and result in the untimely death of a young woman who acts as a metaphor for the nation of Mexico itself. The effortless manipulation of liberal ideals of rights and liberties by the provincial caudillo and other politicians, and the willingness of Quiñones (the everyman, Juan) to get caught up in the rhetoric and to fight passionately for a cause that turned out to mask much more sinister intentions, are together shown to have serious ramifications throughout the Republic.

Moreover, the structure and organization of the four novels strongly depict the local and the provincial to be the root of this network of political cynicism and corruption, reaching out from its regional power bases to infect the capital as well. At the end of *La bola*, the narrator—an older Quiñones, left wiser by his experiences—makes this point after discovering the dirty deal done between Cabezudo and his former enemies, in a revealing passage that is worth quoting at length:

¡Y a todo aquello se llamaba en San Martín una revolución! ¡No! No calumniemos a la lengua castellana ni al progreso humano, y tiempo es ya para ello de que los sabios de la Correspondiente envíen al Diccionario de la Real Academia esta fruta cosechada al calor de los ricos senos de la tierra americana. Nosotros, inventores del género, le hemos dado el nombre, sin acudir a raíces griegas ni latinas, y le hemos

llamado *bola*. Tenemos privilegio exclusivo; porque si la revolución como ley ineludible es conocida en todo el mundo, *la bola* sólo puede desarrollar, como la fiebre amarilla, bajo ciertas latitudes. La revolución se desenvuelve sobre la idea, conmueve a las naciones, modifica una institución y necesita ciudadanos; *la bola* no exige principios ni los tiene jamás, nace y muere en corto espacio material y moral, y necesita ignorantes. En una palabra: la revolución es hija del progreso del mundo, y ley ineludible de la humanidad; *la bola* es hija de la ignorancia y castigo inevitable de los pueblos atrasados (Rabasa 1970, 167-8).

By following the conventions of the pronunciamiento and manipulating the rhetoric of the 1857 constitution and the Independence movement to pursue his own political gains, Cabezudo (and Quiñones for being taken in by this maneuvering) initiates the cycle of events that Rabasa depicts as an unhealthy mode of political negotiation that sends the larger Mexican nation on the road to ruin. In this passage, legitimate political action appears next to impossible within Mexico's provincial communities, which are depicted as devoid of any genuine understanding of citizenship and political responsibility. Moreover, the comparison of *la bola* to "la fiebre amarilla" is suggestive both of a hot-headed, spontaneous outbreak of political violence lacking any discernible motive, and of a sickness that could spread outwards from the provinces to infect the national political community as a whole. Indeed, the febrile delirium that attacks, and ultimately kills, Remedios in *Moneda falsa* represents the fulfilment of this threat predicted in *La bola*. In Rabasa's depiction, then, the lack of political transparency, restrictions on democratic practice, and stunted political discourse at the national level, have been produced by an ignorant population and the corrupt and short-sighted form of local and regional politics that he argues their ignorance supported earlier in the nineteenth century.

**Heriberto Frías (1870-1925)**

By contrast, Heriberto Frías's 1893 novel *Tomóchic*, which details the federal army's campaign against a rebellious town in northern Mexico, explores local politics to question the appropriate balance between local priorities and concerns against those of the nation. On the surface, the rebels of Tomóchic are portrayed as religious fanatics, subject to the power-hungry machinations of a handful of local strongmen, apparently, therefore, meeting the criteria for ignorance and backwardness outlined in Rabasa's exposition on the difference between "la bola" and "la revolución". In the course of *Tomóchic*, however, Frías challenges this perception of the rebels, and demonstrates a very different vision of local politics and the relationship between local, regional, and national politics to that portrayed in Rabasa's fiction. In contrast to Rabasa's novels, which portray the local and regional disputes of an earlier part of Mexico's nineteenth century as harmful to the nation, thus supporting the more centralized, strong government of the Porfirian era, Frías's novel examines the consequences of this altered balance of power between the local, the regional, and the national during the Porfiriato. In *Tomóchic*, the central government fails to engage with the local concerns of the Tomóchic community and this absence of dialogue creates a political vacuum in which violent conflict becomes the inevitable recourse. The novel thus portrays a marked deterioration in political relations between local, regional, and national actors in comparison to an earlier era, when the mediated negotiation entailed in a pronunciamiento could have helped to avoid the violent confrontation that occurred. Furthermore, this outbreak of violence has detrimental consequences not only for the local community in Frías's novel, but also for the national community, indicating a critical stance with respect to the Porfirian formula for order and progress. In its examination of the relationship between local, regional, and national interests, *Tomóchic* challenges the very idea of the nation as a vehicle of

progress. In this respect, as a novel published during the Porfirian era, *Tomóchic* “fue excepcional porque puso en entredicho algunas de las convicciones centrales en las que se asentaba la ideología modernizadora del Porfiriato” (Dabove 2004, 355).

Frías served four months in Belén prison for authoring *Tomóchic*, which was initially published in installments in the newspaper *El Demócrata* from early 1893, narrating the government’s ongoing military campaign against the small but determined rebel town of Tomóchic, Chihuahua, in which the author himself took part as a low-ranking officer.<sup>5</sup> Having already spent time in military prison for drunkenness and insubordination, Frías went on to serve another spell in Belén in 1895 for his oppositionist journalism, during which time he wrote a famously scathing exposé of the appalling conditions in the prison. *Tomóchic* received considerable critical acclaim from writers contemporary to Frías, such as José Juan Tablada, Rubén Campos, and José Ferrel, for its direct, stark prose exposing the realities and chaos of war, and for the complex characterization of the central protagonist Miguel Mercado, who would also appear in several of Frías’s subsequent novels. The character of Mercado exhibited many parallels with Frías’s own life: like Mercado, Frías was forced into active military service as a means of providing for his family after the death of his father in 1889, and he also struggled with drinking and drug abuse problems throughout his life (Campos 2012, 139-40; Rodríguez González 2005, 521-30; Piccato 2001, 199-200; Brushwood 1966, 155-7).

Early in *Tomóchic* various discussions take place regarding the reasons for the outbreak of the rebellion that forms the core of the novel. These passages contain consistent hints that the official line held by the national government and federal army regarding the ignorance and irrationality of the rebels might not be the whole story. In the first such discussion, a high-ranking officer explains:

son excesivamente ignorantes y altaneros. No se ha cuidado de ilustrarlos y quieren ‘independerse’ de los dos poderes a los cuales hasta hoy han obedecido: el clero y el gobierno. Están bajo una obsesión imbécil... ¿quién les sugestiona...? Desconocen toda autoridad; ya se ha querido tratar con ellos y piden imposibles. ¡Hay que acabar de una vez con ellos...! (Frías 2007, 20-1).

Despite acknowledging to himself the soundness of this argument, Mercado still feels that something did not add up in the officer’s words: “entreveía algo tenebroso y podrido” in the explanation (Frías 2007, 21). Shortly afterwards, Mercado wonders “¿habría algunos ambiciosos que explotasen la indómita bravura de los serranos, protegiéndolos, cebando odios antiguos en sus almas fieras y sencillas, azuzándolos luego contra el triste heroísmo de las bayonetas federales?” (27).

Mercado subsequently learns from Julia, a young Tomochican woman with whom he falls in love, the real reason for the outbreak of revolt. She explains that this happened after the rapid spread of a local religious cult, which centered on the worship of a young girl, Teresa Urrea, known as the Saint of Cabora, whose followers believed she could perform healing miracles and had regular visions. Studies of more recent literary incarnations of the Saint of Cabora, such as *La insólita historia de la Santa de Cabora* (1990) by Brianda Domecq, have suggested that Frías’s novel renders her a mere “exploited hysteric” and that he portrays the Tomóchic rebels as “ignorant messianists fighting under the banner of the illusory Saint Teresa of Cabora” (Guerrero 2001, 45, 47). Domecq’s novel, and other representations of the Saint of Cabora that position her as a symbol of chicano/a identity and empowerment, undoubtedly afford this young woman a much greater degree of political agency than does Frías’s novel, in which her character is over-shadowed by male local leaders (Newell 2005, 90-106).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the view that the people of Tomóchic are ignorant fanatics is given ample airing in the course of Frías’s novel. However, this view is also

repeatedly challenged, both directly, in the arguments of several characters who highlight the rational, political motivations for the rebellion, and indirectly, in the symbolic representation that conflates the image of the rebels with that of the federal army. The ambivalence created through this juxtaposition of different representations of Tomóchic and its rebels in Frías's novel therefore creates a more complex portrait of the rebellion than a straightforward representation of fanaticism and backwardness. Moreover, this ambivalent representation of the Tomóchic rebellion allows Frías's novel to problematize the relationship between local, regional, and national political interests and thus to critique the Porfirian political system and nationalist ideology.

In advancing a more political explanation for the rebellion in Tomóchic, Julia explains to Mercado that the cult developed as a result of the lack of help and attention given by church and government personnel in the locality, at the same time as taxes increased astronomically. Resentment at this situation was further exacerbated by high profile incidents in which state officials angered the local community. First, the state governor requisitioned valuable and venerated art works from the local church; a second official from the state government seduced and impregnated a local girl; a third official leveled supposedly unfounded accusations against the townspeople regarding thefts from a local mine. The Chávez family, the leading family in Tomóchic, then used this latent hostility to increase their own power over the community: they championed the religious cult against the local Catholic priest; they refused to pay a fine levied against them for their action against this priest; and they defiantly scoffed at the threat of conscription made by state officials.

But in reaction to what amounted to little more than a small group of men demanding greater local autonomy and control, the state government, under the direction of the state officials who had been implicated in the previous scandals, assumed that a violent uprising

had already begun and sent a military force to quash it. This military force was accordingly met with a staunch defense in Tomóchic, where the state troops were roundly defeated. Only at this stage did the Chávez family start to amass followers and weapons to resist the government campaign against them. Thus, the Tomóchic rebellion is not presented in the novel as a pronunciamiento, since the established pattern of these political negotiations and protests in the earlier nineteenth century was for pronunciados to recruit supporters *before* deciding whether or not to proceed with any violent action (Costeloe 1988, 256; Tenenbaum 1992, 191; Vázquez 1996, 21; Fowler 2000, 56-7). Neither did the fictionalized Tomóchic rebels issue any official pronunciamiento document—another ubiquitous feature in the practice of pronunciamientos—in contrast to Rabasa's portrait of Mateo Cabezudo's uprising and its associated publication, the Plan de Venta-quemada. The significance of the contrast between Rabasa's fiction and Frías's novel lies not these procedural details but in the overall representation of the balance of power between local, regional, and national actors. While Rabasa's *La bola* and subsequent novels portray local politics and conflict as being borne of ignorance and backwardness and resulting in the corruption of regional and national political cultures, *Tomóchic* portrays a local community acting in response to legitimate grievances that had been caused by the state, or regional, government.

Positioning the state, or regional, government as the initial aggressor, responsible for escalating tensions and reacting violently to local expressions of grievance, is indicative of the novel's critique of the changes in political culture during the Porfiriato. While Rabasa's novels located the origins of unrest, violence, and corruption in the ignorant politics of local leaders by tracing the spiraling effects of a local pronunciamiento at regional and national levels, Frías's novel identifies as the central problem a regional level of administration that is totally unresponsive to local concerns. Not only does the lack of engagement between

regional and local voices lead to the dispatch of a state military force, thus instigating the outbreak of violence, but it is also responsible for the national government's subsequent heavy-handed response in sending the federal army to quash the rebellion. As we have seen, *pronunciamientos* (especially through *pronunciamientos de adhesión*) had been a vital means through which local concerns could be attached to regional and even national level political protests and discussions in Mexico during the first half of the nineteenth century. By the Porfiriato, however, the legitimacy of *pronunciamientos* had been eroded, and regional political leaders had become more closely tied to the central government through clientelist relationships with Porfirio Díaz. Perhaps, then, the sequence of events leading to violence in Frías's novel points to a concern for the removal of channels through which local communities could politically engage with regional authorities, and through them, the national government. The closure of such channels of protest as the *pronunciamiento*, and the breakdown in communicative links between local, regional, and national politics, are here represented as a deterioration of political culture, and one that has catastrophic consequences.

These consequences are not only destructive at the local level, but also for the nation, which the novel associates symbolically with the character of Mercado and his romance with Julia. Early in the novel Mercado proposes a plan to rescue Julia from her miserable life as a concubine for her uncle Bernardo, one of the leading rebels, and flee from the conflict zone together. Later they agree to wait and promise to marry once the fighting is over. The possibility of reconciliation offered by such a union—between two lovers representing opposing sides of a conflict—follows a recurrent allegorical pattern in nineteenth-century Spanish American literature, where romantic relationships involving lovers trying to overcome some form of divide, in terms of class, race, ethnicity, or politics for instance, symbolizes the potential to harmonize and unify divided groups within the national



community (Sommer 1991, 49-50; Rappaport 1992, 120-2). In *Tomóchic*, however, this reconciliation and union never materializes because Julia is mortally wounded during the final battle between the townspeople and the federal army, and dies in Mercado's arms, leaving the latter to dolefully ponder a life of solitude.

The manner of Julia's death thus provides another contrast between Frías's and Rabasa's fiction. While the central heroine of Rabasa's novel, Remedios, also died, her death facilitated the resolution of conflict between the warring protagonists, Cabezudo and Quiñones, and, by giving birth to a daughter, she left behind a symbol of unity and hope for the future health of the nation. This conclusion reveals a certain degree of confidence within Rabasa's fictional work that the Porfirian government, by exerting greater authority and control over regional and local politics, was creating a stronger, more unified national community. Meanwhile, in *Tomóchic*, Julia's death provides no equivalent resolution or hope; instead her death represents the failure of politics in the Porfirian era to incorporate local voices and, consequently, the absence of a meaningful "nation". As Juan Pablo Dabove (2004, 360-61) has argued, Julia's death marks a "fracaso amoroso, político, y cultural, donde no hay reconciliación posible entre los dos bandos en guerra". This failure is further reflected in the condition of Mercado, the novel's central protagonist, who is left after Julia's death feeling an enormous void:

¡Ah! Señor, ¡ah! Dios mío... ¡solo...! ¡solo...! ¿adónde voy? ¿adónde iré...?  
sollozó.

Y cuando levantó la cabeza y se irguió, otra vez resignado y fuerte, sus ojos húmedos, sus tristes ojos contemplaron: abajo, las tinieblas maculadas por los fulgores fatídicos de los cadáveres ardiendo en la soledad profunda del valle... y arriba, hacia el oriente, sobre las crestas de los montes, el alba...

Y entonces, gritó: ¡Corneta de guardia! ¡Toca la *diana*! (Frías 2007, 246)

Mercado's abrupt return to business as a military officer is a poignant and pointed close to the novel, as it represents his continued resignation and ambivalence towards the nation he is charged to serve. The novel gradually builds a comparison between the character of Mercado and the rebels of Tomóchic, culminating in this scene where Mercado's solitude is associated with that of the destroyed town, in order to problematize the relationship between national, regional, and local politics, and to problematize the very idea of the nation itself. The closing passage of the novel reflects Mercado's ironic acceptance of the costs that the nation exacts at a personal and local level: his character's development suggests that these costs are inescapable but not worthwhile.

Throughout the novel, Frías's narrator expresses a marked ambivalence regarding the nation and the national good. This is first apparent through his initial impression of the Tomóchic rebellion, which appears, at first glance, to condemn the uprising as a destabilizing force upon the otherwise peaceful nation:

Una rebelión dentro de la Sierra Madre de Chihuahua turbaría la paz laboriosa y restauradora de la república... pero ¿qué importa eso a las ambiciones sombrías, tan inermes como cobardes?

¿Qué querían, en concreto, aquellos serranos...? No conocían la patria, ni sus gobernantes, ni la religión, ni sus sacerdotes.

Y era lo más extraño que no constituían una tribu bárbara. No eran indígenas, sino criollos.

Sangre española, sangre árabe, de fanatismo cruel y de bravura caballeresca, circulaba en aquella raza maravillosa tarahumara y andaluza...

¡Tomóchic daba a la república mexicana el raro espectáculo de una villa que se había vuelto loca... con locura peligrosa! (Frías 2007, 54-55).

This judgment is ambiguous, however. Mercado notes that the character of the people involved in the uprising was not “bárbara”, meaning not indigenous, but “criollo”, which is a source of some bafflement for him. He also speculates that the ordinary townsfolk were not the real instigators of the affray but people with “las ambiciones sombrías, tan inermes como cobardes”, who used the religious fervor of the population—in the absence of any official channel through which the local people could seek redress for their grievances—for their own gain without concern for the effect on the nation.

Taken in isolation this passage seems to represent the local rebellion as a tool of self-interested local politicians and strongmen that had damaging repercussions for the nation: a rather similar portrait to the *bola* described in Rabasa’s work. But, when the causes of the rebellion are examined in more detail, with the assistance of Julia’s character, it becomes clear that the novel identifies the regional and national political cultures as the instigators and escalators of violence, not the local. Moreover, Frías’s narrative also suggests that nationalist fervor and ideology were themselves a kind of irrationality or madness, similar to the “locura peligrosa” of the rebellious Tomochicans.

Two moments of celebration amongst the soldiers together foreground this ambivalence regarding the nation and nationalist ideology. Before the first assault on Tomóchic by Mercado’s corps, the troops have a raucous night of drinking and celebration, during which Mercado feels the hypocrisy of their carousing. While other soldiers offer drunken, celebratory toasts to one another, and recite poetry excerpts that honored the grandeur and sacrifice of war, Mercado muses morosely to himself that “todo aquello era estúpido y que la poesía debía desterrarse del mundo, donde la realidad reinaba, horrible...” (Frías 2007, 75). Eventually, Mercado does bring himself to offer a toast that expresses the essence of nationalism and the role of soldiers in service to the nation, but his toast is

suffused with a sadness and bitterness that shows the tragedy of their heroism, that even they did not fully understand. While he mentions “lo noble de nuestra misión”, Mercado also sobers his fellow soldiers by reminding them that their mission made them into “los inmolados por el destino o la casualidad” (75). The ambivalence expressed in Mercado’s vision of the soldiers’ service to the nation, by suggesting that their sacrifice in dying or killing on the nation’s behalf was not always meaningful or heroic, but sometimes the mere playing of chance, is then reiterated powerfully in a subsequent passage of celebration by the soldiers.

After the Tomóchic resistance had been reduced to almost nothing by the federal army, the hollowness of this sacrifice that Mexico’s soldiers made for their nation is suggested by Mercado’s reflection, again alone and unheard, that the sacrificial victims were not remembered as they should be:

Era un magnífico espectáculo. En aquel momento todos se sentían héroes, todos comían, bebían, cantaban o charlaban, contentos y dispuestos a todo.

¡Ah, pero nadie se acordaba, en aquel abandono de orgía, de los ausentes, de los compañeros abandonados sobre los cerros, de los cadáveres que en trágicas posturas, negros y horribles, yacerían en las soledades de la sierra... No, nadie quería acordarse en aquel instante de furiosa alegría y de intensa excitación, de las oscuras víctimas del deber... (Frías 2007, 182).

This sorrowful statement partially mirrors Mercado’s view of the tragic Tomóchic rebels themselves, who are repeatedly described as heroic, valiant, supreme fighters, passionately committed to the death to their cause. Within the context of Mercado’s admiration of the rebels’ heroic qualities, his melancholy thoughts in the midst of celebration allude to a parallel between the actions of the government troops, and their nationalist cause, and those of the rebels defending their homes. The implication is that the soldiers fighting blindly and

to the death for the nationalist cause, and the Tomochicans fighting blindly and to the death for their local religious and political freedom are as mad as—or no more mad than—each other.

Moreover, in a visceral scene towards the end of the novel, this ambiguous and ambivalent duality between the rebels and the soldiers is represented metaphorically in the battle between the pigs and the dogs in the destroyed town of Tomóchic for the bodies of the fallen. While the pigs are starving and trying to eat the dead bodies of the Tomochican fighters, the dogs defend their former masters viciously and to the death. Another soldier reports to Mercado that while the federal troops set about burning the dead bodies, the dogs of Tomóchic came to defend their masters, and the soldiers were forced to kill them and add their bodies to the pile: “¡Los matamos y los tiramos en el montón, revueltos con los de Tomóchic y con los mismos de nosotros, todos juntos” (Frías 2007, 188). Then, the soldier says, the pigs smelt the blood or the burning flesh and rushed at the pile of corpses, when the remaining dogs leapt at the pigs to stop them:

aquello era una batalla sobre los mismos muertos; los marranos gruñían de hambre, los perros ladraban con furia, ¡siempre fieles...! ¡Y todos, marranos y perros, se hacían bola, entre gruñidos espantosos y los chillidos de los perros, medio muertos de hambre, velando y defendiendo a sus amos todavía! ...Óigalos, óigalos usted, mi subteniente...! Ahorita se han de estar peleando los marranos que se quieren comer a los difuntos, y los perros que velan a sus amos, defendiéndolos... ¿No oye usted? (Frías 2007, 188-9).

In fact, Mercado is trying not to hear it, as the sound and the mental image it produces profoundly disturb him. Part of the disquiet this grotesque image elicits is perhaps the realization of the parallels between the animals' fight and that just finished between the human protagonists, as the last-ditch, unrelenting, and desperate defense of the town by the

Tomochicans had been described in very similar terms to the hopeless yet heroic defense of the dead bodies put up by the hungry dogs. And if the Tomochicans were like the dogs, the federal troops must have been occupying the role of the pigs, or at least, it is intimated, in the eyes of the Tomóchic fighters, the federal troops were so many hungry pigs, preying on their weakened, vulnerable people.

In fact, this scene was added to the novel for a new edition in 1906, and acts as a much more explicit example of Frías's questioning of the relationship between local and national interests than the ambiguous musings of Miguel Mercado regarding the value of a soldier's sacrifice, precisely because the dog and pig scene shifts perspective to try to imagine how the Tomóchic rebels would have interpreted the events of the rebellion and its suppression. From the local perspective then, morality, loyalty, and honor were on the side of the dogs defending their masters, and the Tomochicans defending their homes, while the pigs and the federal soldiers represented a rapacious, arbitrary, and ignoble force, imposing itself on the vulnerable and isolated population of Tomóchic. By 1906 Frías had had further experience of Mexico's prisons and the various cracks in the Porfirian regime were starting to become more transparent, so perhaps the addition of this scene reflects the author's willingness to render more explicit his opposition to the government. The scene questions the prioritization of the nation and national interests over individual and local concerns, by encouraging the reader to see the conflict from the Tomochicans' point of view.

The added perspective in Frías's novel, sympathizing with the experience and prerogatives of the local community of Tomóchic, also highlights the acute difference in the way Frías represented the appropriate relationship between local, regional, and national interests and the much more nation-orientated perspective portrayed by Emilio Rabasa. In *Tomóchic*, depicting the violent devastation of the town from the local point of view

reiterates the novel's interpretation of the conflict as the consequence of regional and national level political failures to engage with local political concerns. The absence of effective political channels for local communities to air grievances and defend their interests is shown to have catastrophic effects on both the local community and the possibility of achieving a unified nation worthy of its citizens' sacrifices. Rabasa's cycle of four novels, by contrast, prioritizes the national viewpoint and identifies local political cultures as the source of disorder and conflict, driven by ignorance and selfishness. Although the action progresses in expanding concentric circles, from a local community to a regional seat of authority to the national capital, the local perspective and local politics are never taken seriously; order is only restored, through the birth of Remedios's daughter, when the local "problem" retreats quietly back to its local home, as Quiñones and Cabezudo return to their provincial origins having disgraced themselves on the national stage.

## **Conclusion**

Rabasa's cycle of four novels traced the negative ramifications of a cynically manipulated local pronunciamiento on the regional and national administrations, creating a space in the reader's mind to conclude that the national good should be prioritized above all other concerns. Frías's work, meanwhile, showed the tragic massacre—of provincial townspeople and federal soldiers alike—when the real experiences, beliefs, concerns, and needs of a local community were ignored, ridiculed, and made worse by an exploitative regional administration and a distant, unresponsive, and inflexible national government. In contrast to Rabasa's fictional denunciation of pronunciamiento politics that had been so important to political interactions between national, state, and local levels in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, suggesting that Porfirio Díaz's government was justified in

creating a system of stronger centralized rule, Frías's novel suggests the opposite. His portrait of the mutual destruction of, and mutual misunderstanding between, the people of Tomóchic, once renowned as heroic defenders of the national borders against tribal Indians, and the federal soldiers, charged with the responsibility of protecting the nation and its loyal citizens, criticizes the political balance between national, regional, and local interests at the turn of the century. *Tomóchic* offers a lament against the demise of such political channels as the pronunciamiento, through which local and regional voices could be heard on the national stage, and contains an ambivalent warning about the consequences of a political culture that sought to prioritize the abstract ideals of the nation over the local communities and groups of citizens which comprised the real nation's lifeblood.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The most detailed biographical source for Rabasa is Hale 2008. See also Benjamin and Ocasio-Meléndez 1984, 336-9; Hale 2000, 265-6; Jiménez Rueda, 1988, 162.

<sup>2</sup> On Fernández de Lizardi's pioneering role in Mexican fiction, and his use of the picaresque, see Álvarez de Testa 1994, 174-98; Irwin 1998, 32; Osegura de Chávez 1990, 23-6; Palazón Mayoral 2005, 40-44; Vogeley 2001, 21-25.

<sup>3</sup> The critique of Mexico's national press, in terms of its prioritization of sensationalism and partisan ties over impartial reporting, is another central feature of Rabasa's fiction (Varela Jácome 1987, 120-1).



<sup>4</sup> To give a few examples: in Eligio Ancona's *El filibustero* (1864), the heroine Berenguela dies from the shock of discovering—upon being reunited with her beloved Leonel after a prolonged separation involving class differences, forced marriage, piracy, crime, duels, and confinement in a convent—that he is actually her brother. In Florencio M. del Castillo's short story "Amor y desgracia" (1849), the heroine Remedios dies from a mysterious fever as a result of a separation from her true love Francisco, the couple's union having been prevented by Francisco's low social status. Clemencia, the central female protagonist in Juan Díaz Covarrubias's *Gil Gómez el Insurgente* (1858), dies after being abandoned by her betrothed, Fernando, who had been seduced by an evil aristocratic Spanish woman while fighting in the royalist army against the Independence insurgency. In *La guerra de treinta años* (1850) by Fernando Orozco y Berra, one of the central male protagonist's constant friends, Angela, dies from febrile delirium that has been induced by her unrequited love for him. And, in Justo Sierra's short story, "Confesiones de un pianista" (1871), one of the central female characters, Luisa, dies from a mysterious fever after a prolonged spell of unrequited love for the central male character Antonio, who has become obsessed by another woman above his social station.

<sup>5</sup> The work was published anonymously until Frías was finally accredited with its authorship in the 1899 edition, but Frías was consistently suspected of writing it and was imprisoned accordingly. He was released after four months when one of *El Demócrata*'s editors, Joaquín Clausell, claimed to have written the narrative without any specific information from the battle front in Tomóchic, basing it purely on the influence of Emile Zola's smash-hit war satire *La Débâcle* (1892), with which *Tomóchic* does have considerable similarities (Brown 1967, 467-8; Dabove 2004, 355). For an analysis of the short-lived rebellion and the government's crushing military response see (Vanderwood 1998; Knight 1999).

<sup>6</sup> For an alternative view of Domecq's novel, that questions the Saint of Cabora's greater political role in that novel, see Finnegan 2005, 413-27.

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