



Esoteric Movements and Nationalism in Costa Rica

From Theosophy to Hyperborea

Massimo Introvigne (UPS – Torino) - EASR 2016, Helsinki, June 29, 2016

Costa Rican Nationalism



- ▶ «Costa Rican nationalism developed around the idea of the homogeneity of the country's population»*: white, Spanish, and Catholic, with a much lesser impact of Native American and African American components than in the other Central American countries. Although partially imaginary, this narrative had a deep impact on the nation's culture and politics

*Ronald Harpelle, «Costa Rican Nationalism in the Creation of Costa Rica's Pacific Coast Banana Enclave», *The Americas*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Jan., 2000), 29-51 (29)

Competing Nationalisms

- Costa Rican nationalism is not uniform and in fact consists of two competing narratives, one Catholic or Christian and the other secular. Within the secular narrative, an esoteric element has been uniquely important in Costa Rican history



Catholic Church, La Fortuna, with the Arenal volcano

Catholic Nationalism



- ▶ Article 75 of the Costa Rican Constitution states that the «Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Religion is the official religion of the Republic». Even the most anti-clerical governments did not try to change this provision

«Silence in the Name of Consensus»



Pope Francis with Costa Rica's President Chinchilla, 2013

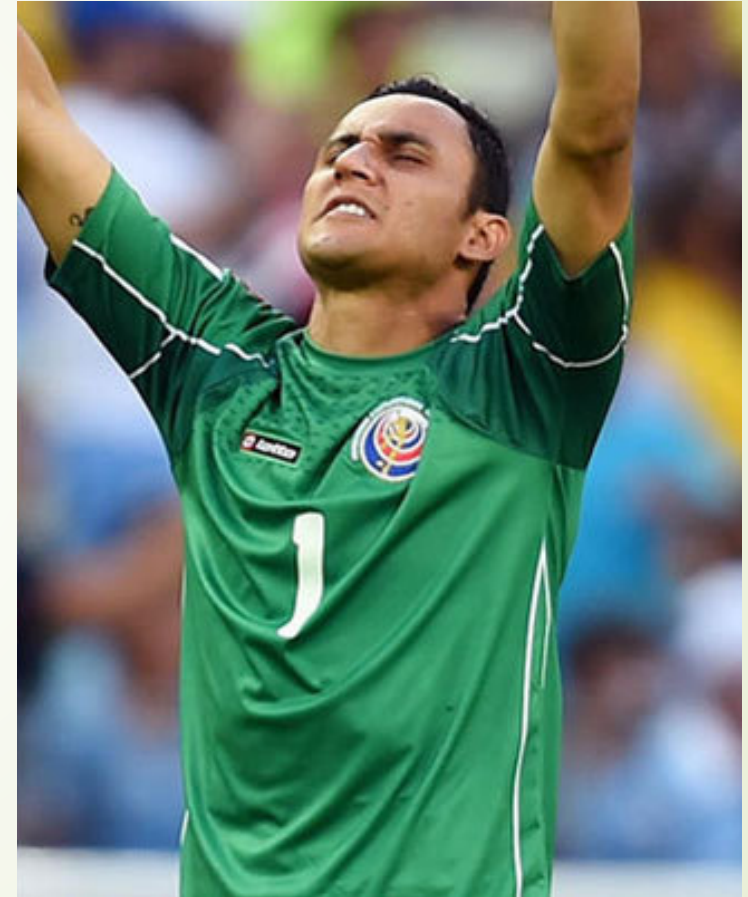
- Notwithstanding the presence of a significant anti-clericalism, particularly among the richest land-owning groups, in Costa Rica in general «there has been a great degree of consensus between [the Catholic] church and state» and, with some exceptions, the Catholic hierarchy has maintained a «silence in the name of consensus» against the shortcomings of the governments*

* Magnus Lundberg, «Overcoming or Silencing Conflicts: The Catholic Church and the Building of the Costa Rican Welfare State» (2006, revised 2016), available online

Nationalism, Christianity, and Football

- Sociologist Sergio Villena Fiengo* has studied the role of the national team of football, which has repeatedly obtained good results in the World Cups (quarter finals in 2014, eliminating inter alia Italy and England), in shaping a nationalist discourse centered on Costa Rica as a quintessentially Christian country. Players (such as star goalkeeper Keylor Navas, right) pray very publicly during the games and carry Rosaries and other religious objects

* See, inter alia, S. Villena Fiengo, «(F)Utopias: The Nationalist Uses of Soccer in Costa Rica», in Héctor Fernández L'Hoeste - Robert McKee Irwin - Juan Poblete - Richard Anker (eds.), *Sport and Nationalism in Latin/o America*, London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 67-84



Never Underestimate Football



Guerra no declarada en Centroamérica

Combates en tierra y aire están librando las fuerzas de Honduras y El Salvador

La OEA instó a ambos países suspender hostilidades

- ▶ Least football be considered a minor expression of nationalism in Central America, it is worth remembering that in 1969 El Salvador and Honduras went to the so called «Football War», where 3,000 died, over a contested qualification to the World Cup finals. Although historians now argue that the war had deeper roots, football was perceived as its immediate cause

Nationalist Football Songs

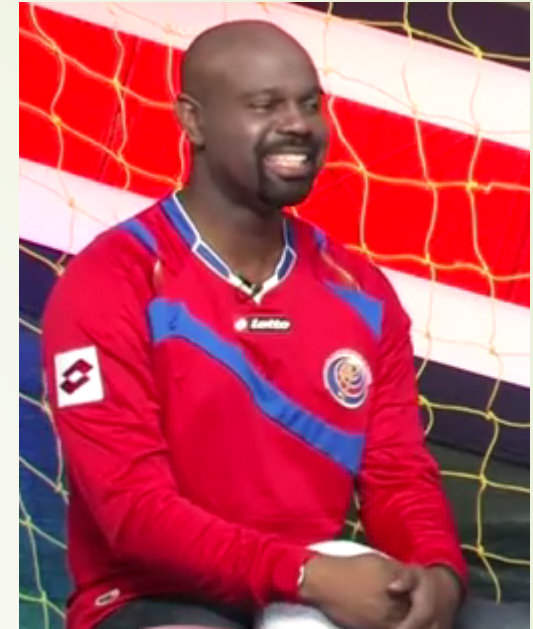


- Villena insists on the nationalist role of football songs – ironically, often created for publicity purposes by non-Costa Rican companies such as Coca Cola. They hail the «Sele», i.e. the national team, with lyrics such as «Costa Rica, I keep you in my soul, and I love you more each day», or «a team that (...) above all keeps the fatherland in its heart»*. And fans both sing and pray...

* See S. Villena Fiengo, «Fútbol, discurso publicitario e imaginarios nacionalistas en Costa Rica», *efderportes.com Revista digital*, 12:112 (Sept. 2007)

Ecumenical Football?

- While the Catholic Church for decades denounced Protestantism as anti-national, today, with Pentecostals constituting roughly 15% of the population, Catholics and Protestants co-operate in defending a Christian version of Costa Rican identity. In the «Sele», there have been no contrasts between Catholic players and others who are Evangelical, including Richard «the Panther» Smith, who eventually became a pastor



Alternative Nationalism: Freemasonry



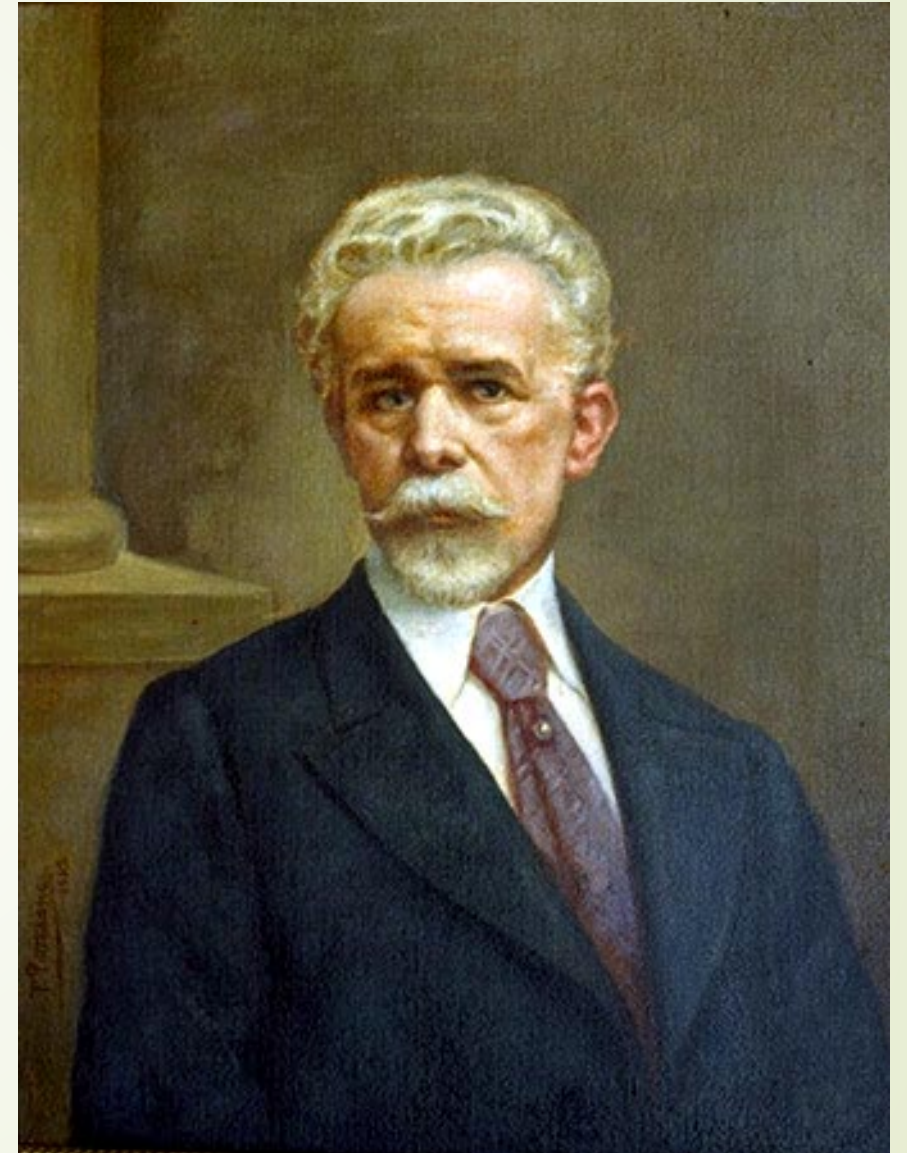
- From its foundation in 1865, although somewhat less anti-Catholic than in the neighboring countries, Costa Rican Freemasonry sought an alternative basis for nationalism*. Rather than as quintessentially Catholic, the nation was celebrated as eminently peace-loving and democratic, based on a long tradition of direct democracy through municipal councils. The myth of the «Switzerland of Central America» was created

* See Ricardo Martínez Esquivel, «Sociability, Religiosity and New Cosmovisions in Costa Rica at the Turn of the Nineteenth to Twentieth Century», *Revista de Estudios Históricos de la Masonería Latinoamericana y Caribeña*, Special Issue UCLA – Grand Lodge of California (2013), 159-192; Tomás Federico Arias Castro, *150 años de historia de la Masonería en Costa Rica*, San José: Editorial Costa Rica, 2015

Theosophical Society

- ▶ Not without connections with Freemasonry*, a specific esoteric basis for this alternative Costa Rican nationalism was offered by the Theosophical Society. In 1896, the (largely Masonic) Costa Rican government asked the Spanish academic painter Tomás Povedano de Arcos (1847-1943: *Self-Portrait*, 1942, right), a Freemason and Theosophist who lived at that time in Ecuador, to settle permanently in the country. He became the principal of the newly established National School of Fine Arts, a position he maintained for more than forty years

* See R. Martínez Esquivel, «Masonería y el establecimiento de la Sociedad Teosófica en Costa Rica (1904-1910)», in José Antonio Ferrer Benimeli (ed.), *La masonería española: represión y exilios*, 2 voll., Zaragoza: Gobierno de Aragón, Departamento de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2011, vol. 1, 369-392





Theosophy in Costa Rica

- ▶ On June 1, 1904 the Virya Lodge of the Theosophical Society was established in Costa Rica's capital San José, with Povedano as president. In 1908, the first issue of the journal *Virya* was published. In 1911, there were three Theosophical lodges in San José (others will follow outside the capital)*. The second was Dharana, presided by the distinguished intellectual Roberto Brenes Mesén (1874-1947, left). The Society was also supported by the influential author Joaquín García Monge (1881-1958), editor of the journal *Repertorio Americano*

* See Chester Urbina Gaytán, «Teosofía, intelectuales y sociedad en Costa Rica (1908-1929)», *Ciencias Sociales*, 88, II (2000), 139-144

A National Painter

- ▶ Povedano had a very distinguished Masonic career and served as the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Costa Rica. He also became one of the national painters. His painting *Domingueando* (right), an idyllic rendering of Costa Rican peasants on Sunday, may well be the most beloved work of art in the country



The National Theater



- Povedano also contributed to the decoration of the National Theater of Costa Rica in San José, inaugurated in 1897, which quickly became a center for the promotion of a secular national identity

Mentor of Theosophical Artists



- In his capacity as principal of the National School of Fine Arts, Povedano was the mentor of many Costa Rican artists, and some of them were Theosophists, including Gilberto Huertas and Lily Artavia (1905-1982)*. A distinguished sculptor (left), Artavia lost a leg in a shark attack in 1928 and had to survive with a small pension from the government

*Eugenia Zavaleta Ochoa, *Las exposiciones de artes plásticas en Costa Rica (1928-1937)*, San José: Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 2004, 100

Enrique Echandi (1866-1959)

- Echandi (right) was the main competitor of Povedano for the title of national painter of Costa Rica. Although not a Theosophist, he was a Freemason and the president of the leading Costa Rican Spiritualist group, the Centro Espiritista Claros de Luna. Although this was theoretically forbidden by the Theosophical Society, some Costa Rican Theosophists – and a number of politicians of the Belle Époque – were also Spiritualists*

* See Iván Molina Jiménez, *La ciencia del momento. Astrología y espiritismo en la Costa Rica de los siglos XIX y XX*, Heredia: Editorial Universidad Nacional, 2011 (but see also the critical review of this book by Esteban Rodríguez Dobles in *Revista de Estudios Históricos de la Masonería Latinoamericana y Caribeña*, 4:1, May 2011-Nov. 2012, 243-249)

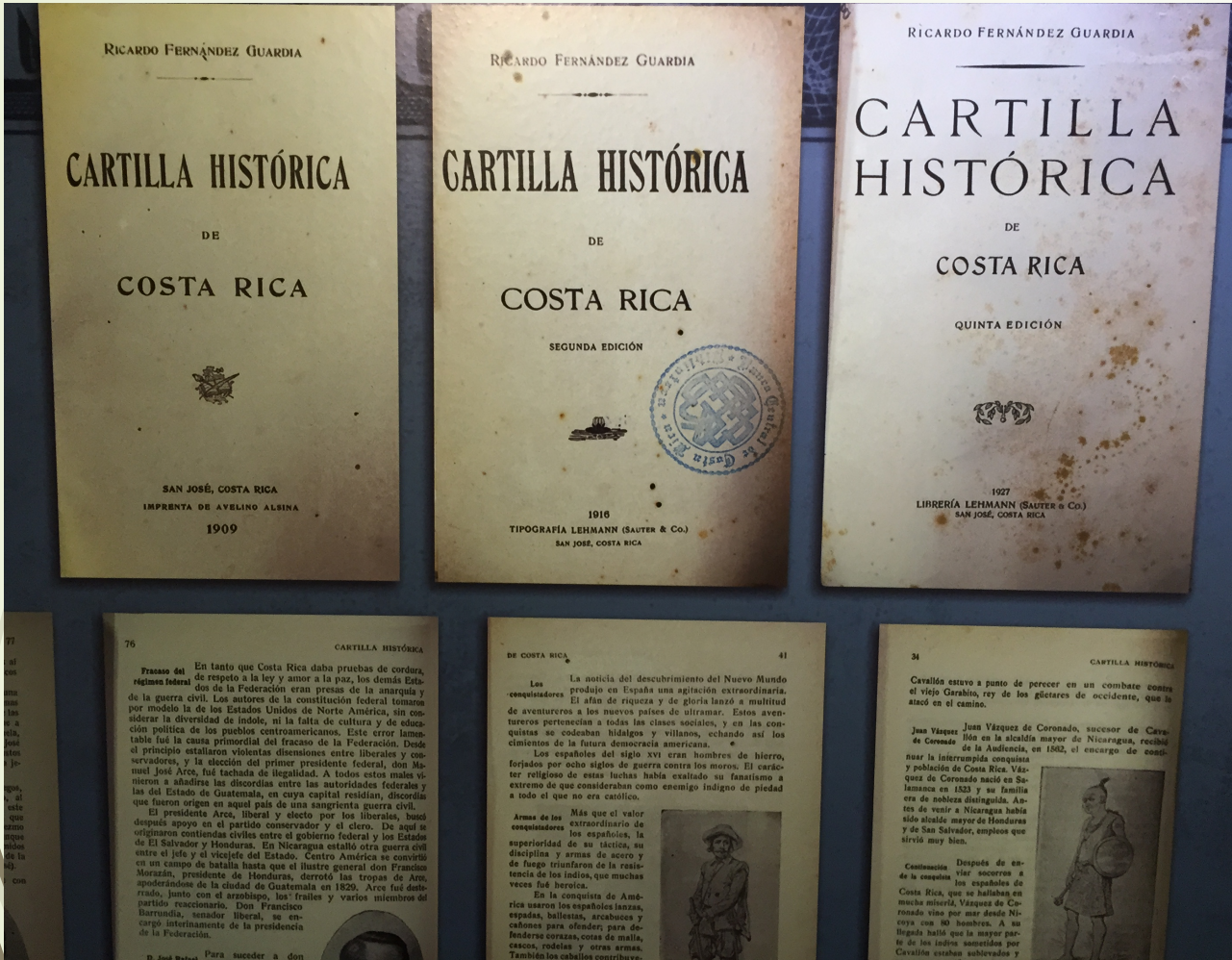


Historical Themes

- ▶ Povedano's artistic contribution to Costa Rican nationalism included paintings about national history. One of the most famous, and one of several works by him later reproduced on Costa Rican banknotes, was *The Rescue of Dulcehe* (left), showing the Spanish conquistador Juan Vázquez de Coronado (1523-1565) paying the ransom for rescuing the beautiful Native American Dulcehe, who had been kidnapped by a rival tribe



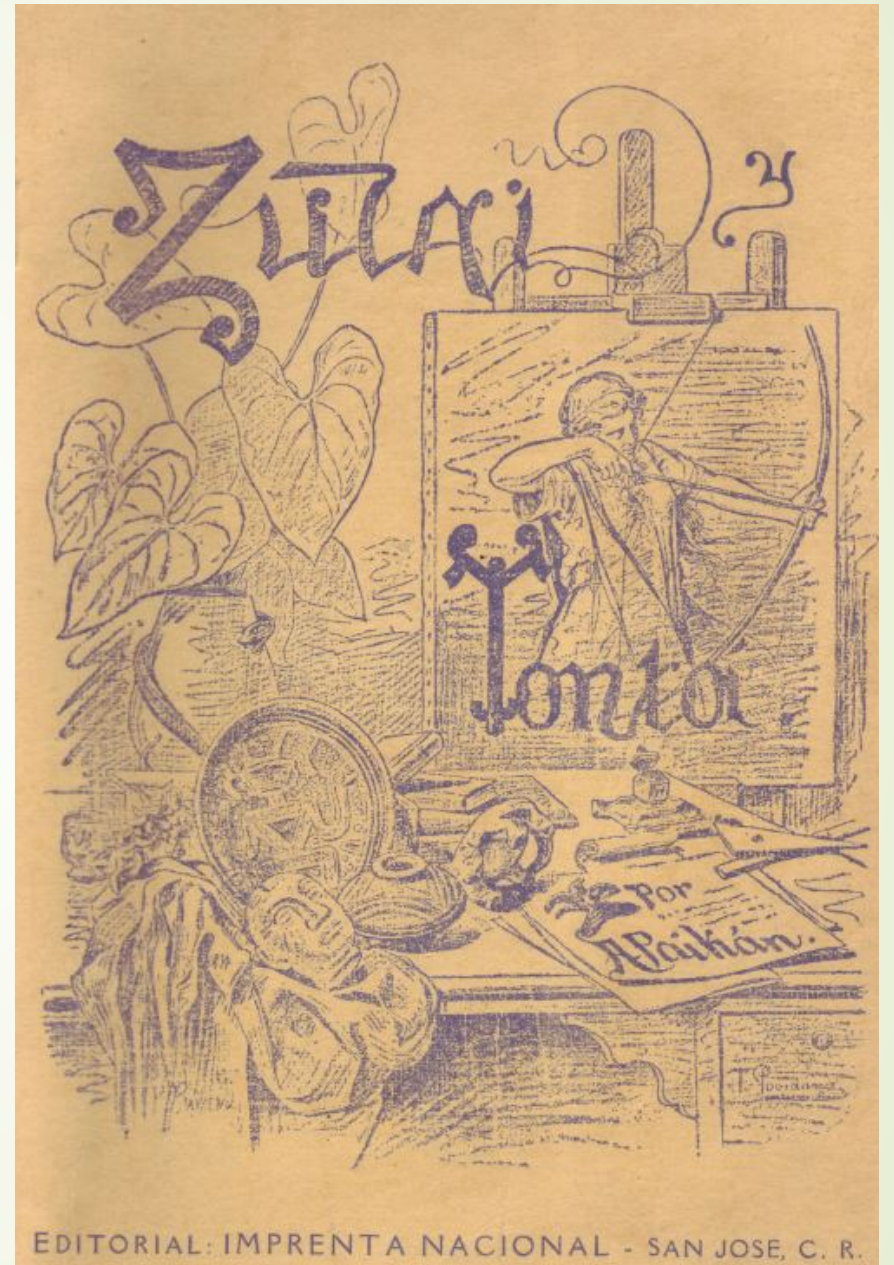
Popular Illustrator



- ▶ Povedano illustrated the different editions of the *Cartilla Histórica de Costa Rica* by local historian Ricardo Fernández Guardia (1867-1950), a popular book that powerfully contributed to shaping national identity and pride

Zulai

- Povedano also illustrated *Zulai*, a novel written in 1907 and published in 1909 by María Fernández Le Cappellain (1877-1961). She was one of the first members of the lodge Virya, and *Zulai* was a crucial book for defining the Theosophical version of Costa Rican nationalism. The third Theosophical lodge of San José was also named Zulai



The «Legend» of Zulai

- The «legend» of Zulai, as the author called it, is at first sight just another «indigenist» tale. Two young Native Americans, Ivdo and Zulai (left, in an illustration by Povedano), love each other, but their love is contrasted by the evil ruler of the tribe, who wants Zulai as his fourth wife. He threatens to kill the mother of Zulai if she refuses, and Zulai accepts to marry him. Before the marriage is celebrated, however, the chief is killed by a viper. Zulai escapes the marriage but should die in a fire on the ruler's pyre with his other three wives, a costume Costa Rican tribes had (allegedly) in common with India

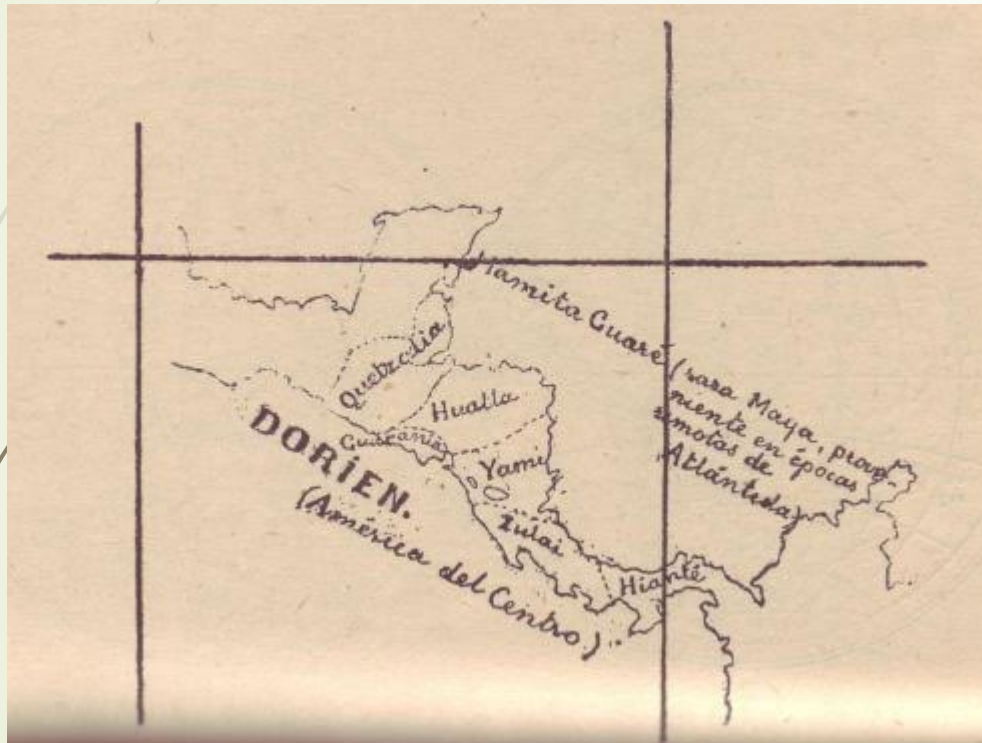


No Happy End



- ▶ María Fernández (left) did not conclude her novel with a happy end. The new ruler of the land talks to Ivdo and tells him things have changed and he wants to be Ivdo's and Zulai's friend. She saves Zulai from the immolation, but it comes out he also wants her for himself, and treacherously kills Ivdo. Zulai refuses to marry the ruler and throws herself (or falls) into the fire

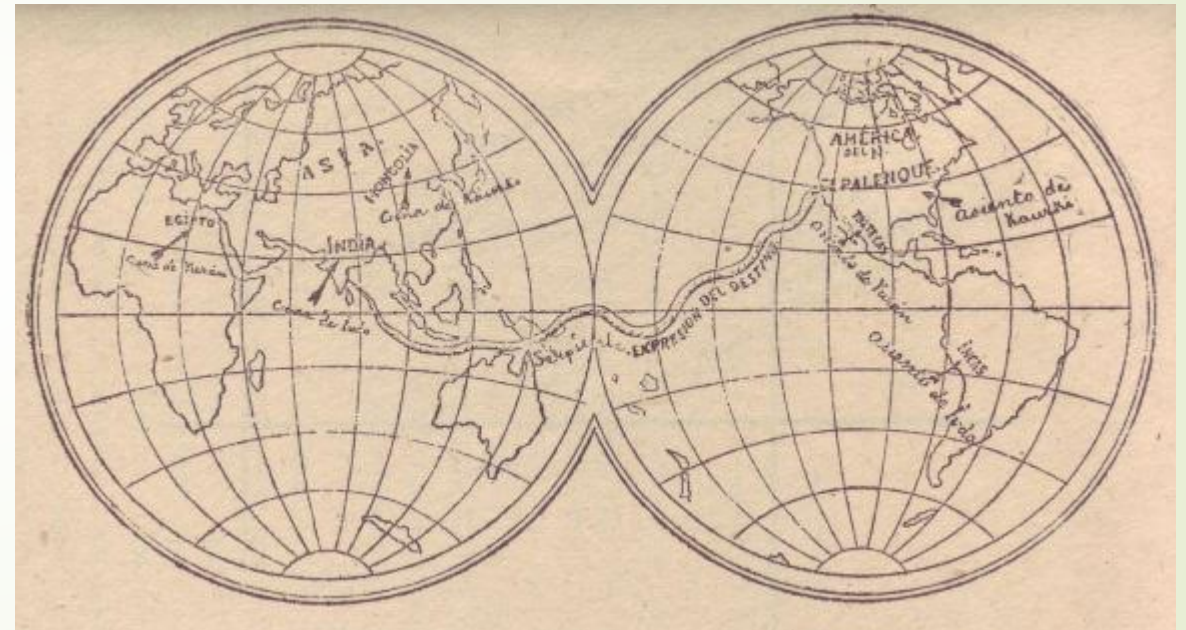
An Esoteric Meaning



- In an epilogue, Fernández explains the esoteric (Theosophical) meaning of the story. Native Americans came from India and the enemies of the Indians, the Mongolians, also came to America. The cruel rulers represent the Mongolian race, Ivdo the Indian race, while Zulai's mother, Mamita Cuaré, came from Atlantis

Theosophical Geography

- Zulai, Fernández explains, represents Costa Rica, and she is purified by the fire (a symbol of spirituality and Theosophy) in view of future reincarnations. The ruler's other wives represent the other Central American countries, and the evil rulers (of course) the United States. A shaman represents corrupted and dogmatic religion. And a queen invading Central America represents Spain, whose coming and fusion with the old races is ultimately beneficial



Yontá



- ▶ In a prequel novel called *Yontá* (also illustrated by Povedano, above), Fernández told the story of the birth of Ivdo, whose mother represents the old Costa Rican tribes, while his father came from India and his teachers from Egypt through Atlantis

The Secret of Costa Rica



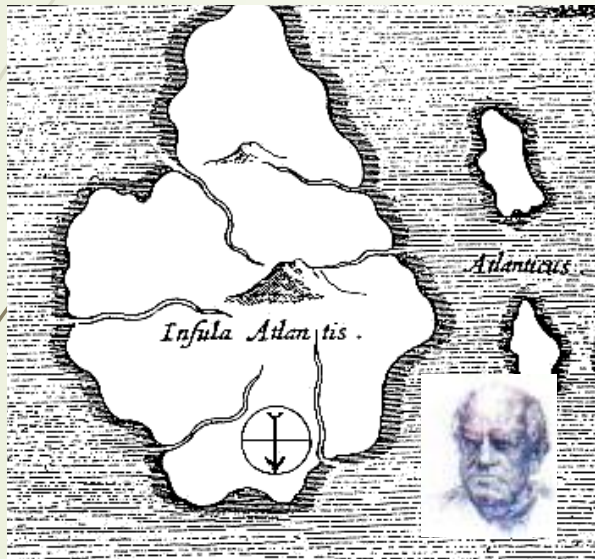
- *Zulai* and *Yontá* (above, another illustration by Povedano) revealed the secret history of Costa Rica. Since the Spanish conquest absorbed the old Native American blood maintaining all its virtues, the new Costa Rican nationalism presented the local race as a synthesis of Egypt, Europe, India, and Atlantis

More than Novels

- Fernández maintained that the content of *Zulai* and *Yontá* was not invented, but came to her in dreams and revelations after the archeological excavations she performed in various regions of Costa Rica (left: the illustration is, again, by Povedano)



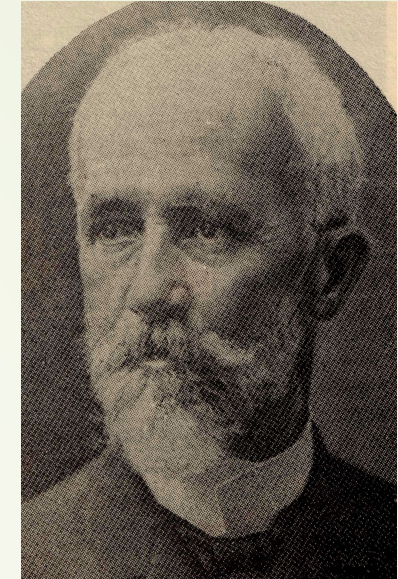
A Considerable Success



- ▶ A surprising number of Costa Rican girls received (and still receive) Zulai as their first name. Fernández's novels effectively created an alternative Costa Rican nationalism, which did incorporate Christianity through the role of Spain but insisted much more on esoteric lore about Atlantis, Egypt, and Native Americans, and on the Theosophical evolution of root races
- ▶ The connection between Costa Rica and Atlantis was later reinforced in 1928 by another novel, *Arausi*, by Diego Povedano Amores (1883-1949, left), Tomás Povedano's son and yet another member of the Theosophical Society

Who Was María Fernández?

- ▶ The success was largely due to the personality of María Fernández. She was the daughter of Mauro Fernández Acuña (1843-1905, above), appointed as Minister of Education in 1885 and regarded as the father of Costa Rican culture
- ▶ In 1898, she had married (below) Federico Alberto Tinoco Granados (1868-1931) who was president of Costa Rica from 1917 to 1919, duly elected but later behaving as a dictator. While Tinoco was controversial, Fernández was a popular first lady



The Krishnamurti Connection



- ▶ The short-lived presidential adventure of Tinoco was deeply connected with the announcement by the Theosophical Society that Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986, left) was the coming World Teacher. The president and his wife were prominent members of Krishnamurti's Order of the Star in the East, of which Tomás Povedano became one of the international leaders. They believed that, through a benign dictatorship, Costa Rica would become the model for the new world Krishnamurti would eventually create

Dawn of a New World?



- ▶ In the day of Vesak of 1917, the Theosophical Society celebrated the new President with a gala in Povedano's home, where the portraits of Madame Blavatsky and Krishnamurti painted by the host (left) presided over speeches by the President, his wife, and the leaders of the Order of the Star in the East. A new world seemed at hand

Tomás Povedano en su estudio.
Principios siglo XX.

Povedano's Portraits



- ▶ The portraits were then conserved by the Costa Rican Theosophical Society, where they still are. They have never been reproduced, but here they are, courtesy of Ms. María de los Angeles Orlich Soto, of the Society headquarters in San José

The Fall of Tinoco

- ▶ The dream was short-lived. Tinoco (right) was accused of having his opponents ruthlessly killed and of mismanaging public finances. He was deposed by a revolution led by Julio Acosta García (1872-1954), ironically himself a member of the Theosophical Society and of the Order of the Star in the East. Tinoco died in exile in Paris, and some of his closest friends escaped to United States, including Tomás Povedano's nephew, Sidney Field Povedano (1905-?), who continued as an intimate friend of Krishnamurti and wrote an important memoir about him*

*S. Field Povedano, *Krishnamurti: el cantor y la canción: memorias de una amistad*, México: Orión, 1988



A Continuing Legacy



- Both Tomás Povedano and María Fernández – who returned to Costa Rica after Tinoco's death – remained, however, very influential intellectuals. In 2012, a documentary film by Mercedes Ramírez financed by the Costa Rican Parliament, *La Ocarina de Cuesta de Moras*, told the story of Fernández and celebrated the role of her novels in shaping the nation's identity

Povedano and the banknotes



- In 2014-2015, the Museums of the National Bank of Costa Rica organized a well visited and widely reviewed exhibition on Povedano and how his paintings were repeatedly used for Costa Rican banknotes

* See the catalog: Vivian Solano Brenes - Manuel Benito Chacón Hidalgo, *Tomás Povedano y los billetes de Costa Rica*, San José: Fundación Museos Banco Central, 2014



A Parallel with Salvador

- ▶ The case of Tinoco was exceptional but not unique. Later, between 1931 and 1944 General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez (1882-1966, left) governed El Salvador in the thirteen years known as the Martinato. A dictator who repressed an indigenous revolt in 1932 by killing at least 25,000 rebels, Martínez was a fervent and even fanatical member of the Theosophical Society. He organized lodge meetings in the presidential palace encouraging the cabinet ministers to participate

A Conflict of Nationalisms

- ▶ Although it did not disappear entirely, today the conflict between the Catholic and the esoteric Costa Rican nationalisms seems somewhat defused. It went, however, through acute confrontations, and in 1913 a Catholic fanatic set fire to San José's Theosophical Center*. With a letter of 1912, republished as a booklet in 1917, the third Catholic Bishop of Costa Rica, the German prelate Juan Gaspar Stork Werth (1856-1920, right), excommunicated all members of the Theosophical Society

*See E. Rodríguez Dobles, «Conflictos en torno a las representaciones sociales del alma y los milagros. La confrontación entre la Iglesia Católica y la Sociedad Teosófica en Costa Rica (1904-1917)», *Revista de Estudios Históricos de la Masonería Latinoamericana y Caribeña*, 2:2 (Dec. 2010 – Apr. 2011), 87-110



Education and the Liberal Catholic Church



- Other conflicts with the Catholic Bishops concerned the alleged teaching of Theosophy at the female Colegio Superior de Señoritas, whose faculty included several Theosophists*, and the presence in Costa Rica of the Theosophically oriented Liberal Catholic Church, of which the distinguished local poet and Theosophist, José Basileo Acuña Zeledón (1897-1992, above), was consecrated as Bishop in 1922 (below). Zeledón also founded Costa Rican Co-Masonry in 1920

* See C. Urbina Gaitán, «Iglesia, Estado y control mental en Costa Rica: el caso de la prohibición de la enseñanza de la Teosofía en el Colegio Superior de Señoritas (1922)», *Rev. Ciencias Sociales Universidad de Costa Rica*, 150 (2015), 53-61 [apparently, the same author signed some articles as Gaitán and others as Gaitán]

A Disturbing Nationalism: Neo-Nazism



- The racist myth of Costa Ricans as more «white» than the other Central Americans, and perhaps somewhat connected with Atlantis, also had a deviated version in the Nazi organizations that surfaced in the country in the 1930s and 1940s (left). Although Nazis tried to appropriate some Theosophical themes, it is important to note that the Costa Rican Theosophical Society was constantly opposed to Nazism and Fascism

Esoteric Neo-Nazism



Sociedad Costa Rica de la Lanza Hiperbórea

Un grupo de estudio místico, esotérico, espiritual, filosófico, histórico, intelectual, metapolítico y literario. No creemos en la violencia, el crimen o en fomentar el odio. Rechazamos la violencia asesina y terrorista de la extrema izquierda y la usura inhumana de la derecha capitalista. Buscamos rescatar la herencia espiritual, cultural y esotérica de la Tradición por sobre el universalismo decadente.

Entradas

Comentarios

Entradas populares

-  **MAHOMA: EL ASESINO, VIOLADOR Y PEDÓFILO QUE FUE HECHO PROFETA**
Curiosa figura fue Mahoma. Este “hombre santo” y “profeta de Dios” mató a cientos de personas con su propia mano o girando órdenes a sus ...
-  **EL PLAN SEFARDIA: LA CREACIÓN DE UN ESTADO JUDÍO EN COSTA RICA**
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miércoles, 4 de enero de 2012

CRISTIANISMO ARIO Y CRISTIANISMO JUDÍO



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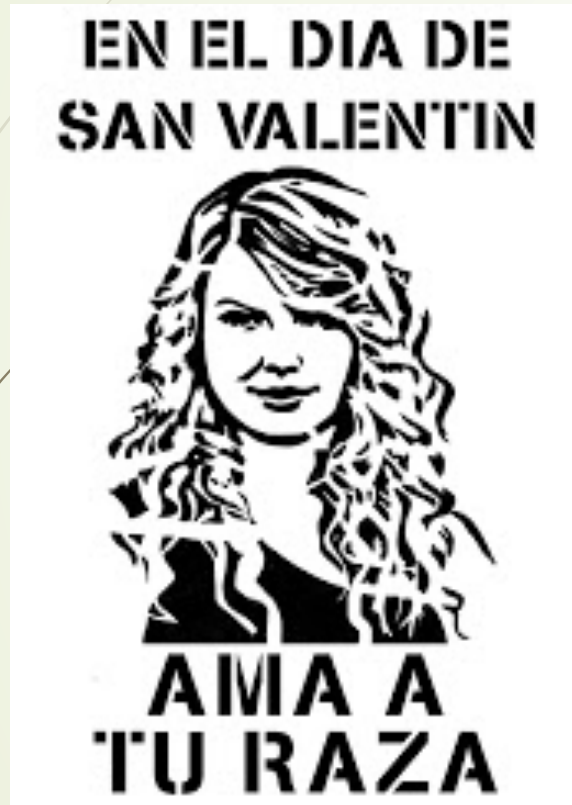
ISRAEL

Enlaces externos



Neo-Nazism resurfaced in Costa Rica in the 21st century, in small circles following the ideas of Chilean esotericist Miguel Serrano (1917-2009) and also influenced by Julius Evola (1898-1974). The main esoteric group is the Sociedad Costa Rica de la Lanza Hiperbórea, which in recent years has operated in a very discrete way

Appropriation of Theosophy



- ▶ Unlike Evola, the Costa Rican Hyperboreans appropriate the local and international Theosophical tradition and include Blavatsky among their masters (together with Evola, Serrano, the very much anti-Theosophical René Guénon «and obviously Adolf Hitler»). They claim that, «although Theosophists today are somewhat deviated, their doctrine is primarily based on sound Aryan spiritual and esoteric concepts»*

* «La espiritualidad aria», <http://scr1h.blogspot.it/2011/09/la-espiritualidad-aria.html>

The Hyperborean Myth

- ▶ The Sociedad Costa Rica de la Lanza Hiperbórea is aware of the old Theosophical claims for an Indian and Atlantidean origins of Costa Ricans. But it goes one step further than *Zulai*. Drawing from modern mythologies, including Serrano's and Zecharia Sitchin's (1920-2010), the Society teaches that extraterrestrials from Aldebaran landed in Hyperborea and created with the more elevated women from Planet Earth, the Cro-Magnons, the Aryan race. Unfortunately, they also mixed with inferior women (Neanderthals), generating the African races

EL ORIGEN DE LOS ARIOS



Atlantis and Costa Rica



Si a una Costa Rica Libre, Sana y Soberana



Si al orgullo blanco

- ▶ This «racial sin» was punished with the destruction of Hyperborea, but later the Aryans created Atlantis, from where all higher civilizations originated. Aryans of Atlantidean origin also landed in Central America, namely in Costa Rica, and the *Book of Mormon* is a deviated and Judaized version of these real events. Other high-level Hyperboreans lived for centuries and remained in the world to lead humanity to the truth, speaking in Enochian (i.e. Hyperborean) language to John Dee (1527-1608) and revealing themselves as the Masters to Madame Blavatsky

A Dream of Atlantis

- ▶ Costa Rican Hyperborean Neo-Nazism represents a tiny movement with only a handful of followers. It appropriates, and distorts, the legacy of the Theosophical esoteric nationalism that, with key intellectuals such as Povedano and María Fernández (right), was a significant component of Costa Rican culture for decades and a serious competitor of the Catholic version of nationalism





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