

Culture can't cure
chaos: thematic
analysis of 'reasons
of state'



In Alejo Carpentier's *Reasons of State*, the Head of State's efforts to align his country's culture with the intellectual culture of Paris completely breaks down any sense of national identity within his homeland and further agitates political unrest among the nation's citizens. On the surface, his country becomes a modernized center of intellectual culture and progress. Below the surface, the citizens grow exhausted with the corruption and negligence of the President's administration. The political unrest makes any attempt at importing high culture useless.

During Nueva Córdoba's economic boom, the Head of State works to modernize the city so quickly that he takes no influence from the native culture and instead diminishes the accomplishments of his own people. He does not take the time to incorporate the country's existing style of architecture into the hugely symbolic capital building; he considers creating it in the styles of the Roman forum and a Parisian opera house, among a host of other potential foreign architectural influences. After contemplating thirty-one possible styles for the building, he settles on a replica of the Washington Capitol despite all of his supposed resentment toward The United States of America. The only component of this building that evokes any national pride is the marble and wood that is used to build it, and the Head of State was willing to nix those if they didn't work in the design (163). This is just one instance of him ignoring native traditions and achievements because he is too obsessed with the European culture that he believes to be superior. This capitol building is a condensation of the President's constant efforts to draw cultural influence from anywhere else in the world but from his own country, which he not-so-lovingly refers to as "over there."

To christen this new capitol building, the Head of State haphazardly installs a magnificent Italian statue that symbolizes his overly high expectations for the reception of European culture in his own country. It is in the Greek style, an ironic choice given that the Head of State does not oversee a democratic state. It is received in pieces and put together within the dome of the building, but the statue itself is far too large to fit into the building comfortably. The woman's head just barely fits within the high dome of the building, just as this imported culture cannot fit comfortably within the country (167). The construction of this statue is not well thought out and is rushed to be completed before a celebration of the country's achievements. The Head of State is far too wrapped up in making sure that the appearance of his country would meet with French approval that the function of its systems falls to the wayside.

The city of Nueva Córdoba becomes a metropolis, but this modern city is not designed for the citizens that have inhabited it for generations. The skyscrapers rise far above the native structures and do not invite the common citizens to ascend them. It is described as the "Invisible City" since the native people can't see all of the structures that loom stories above the one-lane streets — streets that can barely support all of the brand new Ford cars that have materialized on them (158). The city's old wealthy families abandon their traditional palaces for the foreign, modern apartments that have taken over the city. The Head of State does not care about the poor citizens that fill the city and the empty palaces that once displayed the nation's traditional architecture, but only about how magnificent his new city can be — this city that represents anything but his own culture. The soaring

height of the new city alienates the citizens that are left on the ground below it.

The people of the country cannot adapt overnight to this newly-implemented culture while the nation's political infrastructure is in chaos. This is proven through the disastrous outcome of showing an opera in the city. The show is interrupted by shouts of opposition: "Death to the sbirros," "Down with Valverde," and "Viva Robespierre!" And if this interruption wasn't unsophisticated enough, the Head of State's facade of high culture is quite literally blown with the explosion of a bomb under the orchestra's pit (212). The city's revolutionaries are forcing the Head of State to stop hiding behind the pleasantries of art and face the reality of the revolution happening under his nose. The police, too, are not accustomed to this severely foreign artform; they arrest the main opera singer for wearing a costume that is "a sure indication of being 'queer.'" They're completely confused by this art form that has infiltrated their heavily-policed city, an art form that can't coexist with the severe laws they have in place: laws such as the "Law of Repression of Scandalous Behavior and Defence of Civic Morality" (215). The country is rife with policies that restrict human rights and free creative thought, and in turn, restrict the development of any high art forms of their own.

The Head of State could never have successfully introduced all of this foreign culture because his entire country is in a state of political unrest. Amidst all of his home improvement efforts, he is still the same man who has violently shut down peaceful university protests, favored economic interests over civic interests, discouraged free speech, and falsified news reports (among a host <https://assignbuster.com/culture-cant-cure-chaos-thematic-analysis-of-reasons-of-state/>

of other tyrannical presidential practices). While he spends time in Paris without paying any attention to his own country, his citizens embrace revolutionary ideology. The entire city of Nueva Córdoba goes on strike, Communist influence spreads, and bombs are set off in the presidential palace. The Head of State needs to address the real corruption and hopelessness of his country before he can hope to engender his vision of an intellectually elite society.