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Whose Passion?: *La pasión de los nómades* and the Word-Weary Warrior

Lucio Victorio Mansilla's travel memoir, *Una excursión a los indios ranqueles*, while completed well over one hundred years ago, still invites writers and readers to examine his idealization of ethnic traits and gender roles as a means to glorify the cultures of the Argentine Pampas. In fact, in her historical novel *La pasión de los nómades*, María Rosa Lojo destabilizes Mansilla's notions of ethnicity and gender. This article will demonstrate how Lojo's late twentieth-century historical novel engages tropes of ethnicity and gender in Mansilla's nineteenth-century travel memoir in order to assess and critique the military dictatorship that gripped Argentina from 1976-1983.

Long before Argentina asserted its independence in the early nineteenth century, it was fraught with divisions, both political and territorial. Shortly after independence, a political divide was drawn between Unitarians and Federalists while a territorial divide existed between Buenos Aires and the interior provinces. The beliefs and value systems on both sides of the divide differed significantly and only a few intrepid travelers crossed from one side to the other in order to examine the reality of life on both sides of these political and territorial borders. One such traveler who dared to make the crossing to *Tierra Adentro* was Lucio Victorio Mansilla, a Lieutenant Colonel in the Argentine Army and nephew of political strongman General Juan Manuel de Rosas, ruler of Argentina from 1829-1852.

Mansilla tried to assert his own ideological position, but he could never seem to escape the effects of his Federalist family tie during a time of rising Unitarist sentiment. As Saúl Sosnowski succinctly states in his 1984 prologue to Mansilla's *Una excursión a los indios ranqueles*: "Su papel histórico, político, jamás fue central para el desarrollo de las doctrinas oficiales, excepto en la organización de su vida privada y en la percepción de su impronta" (Mansilla/Sosnowski ix). In fact, as Pampa Arán points out, Mansilla "había emprendido [el viaje] como modo de asegurarse un protagonismo que siempre buscaba y con la esperanza de hacerse perdonar algunas imprudencias políticas y verbales que a menudo cometía" (123). That is, while outwardly Mansilla wished to inform the public about the true nature of the indigenous inhabitants of *Tierra Adentro*, he also had barely suppressed dreams of political and military glory.

In 1870, Mansilla set out from his post at Río Cuarto in search of the Ranquel Indians in order to seek their approval of a peace treaty. Later, he published an account of his journey as a travel memoir. *Una excursión a los indios ranqueles* originally appeared as a series of "letters," written to his friend Santiago Arcos, residing in Spain, in the Buenos Aires newspaper *La Tribuna*. Through these very public "private" letters, Mansilla invited his readers to "look over his shoulder" to see the culture of the Pampas through his eyes and, perhaps, change their minds about the "ignorant" and "barbaric" people who inhabited these lands.

From the beginning of the travel memoir Mansilla attempts to better understand the varied cultures of the Pampas and to describe them to his reading public of *La Tribuna*. Therefore, Mansilla uses the cultures of the Pampas (which is

home to indigenous, mixed bloods, gauchos, Christians, and outlaws) to call into question the civilization / barbarism dichotomy propagated by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, then President of Argentina. Additionally, he describes the rich cultures in order to draw attention to the hypocrisy of governmental policies and actions that dismiss these inhabitants as irrelevant and barbaric. While Mansilla is interested in understanding the wide range of peoples and cultures he discovers, he is most interested in the Ranqueles since it is with them he is seeking an audience in order to secure their approval of a peace treaty.

Even though Mansilla is critical of cultural perceptions of the Ranqueles, he fails to examine the ideologies and biases that motivate him to write such an account. María Rosa Lojo, on the other hand, utilizes the historical fiction genre in order to deconstruct Mansilla's motivations and thereby critique the recent military dictatorship. Lojo's novel, *La pasión de los nómades*, is a tale narrated in two voices set in late twentieth-century Buenos Aires province. The narrative voice alternates between that of the fairy Rosaura dos Carballos, who is writing a manuscript entitled "Viajes inverosímiles," and that of Lucio Victorio Mansilla, who is writing "nuevas cartas" to his friend Santiago Arcos. This unlikely pairing form the nucleus of a small band of travelers, including Rosaura's "uncle" Merlin and Lucio's servant Manuel Peña, who journey by car from the outskirts of Buenos Aires in search of Leubucó (1), the capital of the former lands of the Ranquel Indians. From distinct perspectives, Rosaura and Lucio describe their journey.(2)

The novel begins with Rosaura's narration of her birth and how she and her uncle Merlin end up in Castelar, Argentina. (3) In Castelar, Rosaura meets Lucio, a

spirit who has escaped from the "boring confines" of heaven, reconstitutes him to his svelte 39-year-old self (the age when the real Mansilla undertook his journey) and the three of them, along with Peña, travel to the land of the Ranqueles in order for Lucio to relive his most glorious political moment—his meeting with the Ranqueles and their subsequent agreement to a peace treaty. Both Rosaura and Lucio narrate the journey; the near-equal division of perspectives in the novel is a significant departure from the original *Excursión*, written in 1870, which is narrated exclusively by Mansilla. However, their perspectives differ sharply in that Rosaura seems most concerned about *understanding* the culture of the Ranqueles while Lucio is more interested in *describing* it while promoting himself and defending himself against detractors who do not believe his story or are suspicious of his motivations.

Perhaps the most unique characteristic of this text is Lojo's hybridization of various genres. That is, not only does she mix fiction and history, but also *lo fantástico* with *lo real*. Through the sometimes comedic intervention of Merlin and Rosaura, Lucio is able to "live" in the late twentieth century and undertake a return trip to the Pampas. Through this intertextual approach, Lojo juxtaposes the events of the late twentieth century with the narration of Mansilla's travels that both reflect and refract his original nineteenth-century journey. By intertwining fiction and history, Lojo blurs the division between lived experiences and narrativized reality.

While Mansilla's *Excursión* is solidly situated in Argentina's late nineteenth century, *Pasión*, set in the late twentieth century, maintains, as Alejandra Cebrelli states, a "juego permanente entre el pasado y el futuro, lo que fue y lo que es" (34).

This narrative game is at the heart of the dialog between these two texts. Specifically, Lojo's 1994 *La pasión de los nómades* engages Mansilla's 1870 *Una excursión a los indios ranqueles* by first, both resuscitating Lucio Mansilla as a character and recreating his journey to the Pampas; second, questioning Mansilla's motivations for the journey and therefore his writing of *Excursión*; third, blending European and Ranqueline mythical elements; and fourth, problematizing issues of gender by including female characters and women's concerns, a subtext that remains unexamined in *Excursión*.

Obviously, the most direct link between *Pasión* and *Excursión* is through Lucio Victorio Mansilla: in one text an intrepid fictional traveler and narrator, in the other, a real-life intrepid traveler and narrator. (4) Lucio, as a character in Lojo's twentieth-century historical novel, undertakes an expedition back to the Pampas to what he still believes is the frontier; that is, the lands beyond civilization. In fact, the group of companions attempts to follow Lucio's original footsteps as outlined in *Excursión*. This task is more difficult than our fictional Lucio admits and he is quickly offended when Rosaura asks for maps of the route. The map-provider is none other than the grandson of Gregorio de Laferrère, Argentine playwright and acquaintance of the nineteenth-century Mansilla. The parodic interplay between past and present journeys and the interaction between a twentieth-century phantasm and the grandson of one of his nineteenth-century contemporaries is a means by which Lojo blurs the distinction between past and present, history and fiction.

Although Diana Salem asserts that "María Rosa Lojo retoma en sentido paródico *Una excursión a los indios ranqueles*, [...] sólo su autor, Mansilla, y el paisaje, permanecerán invariables" (82), the idea that the character Lucio and the landscape through which he passes in the novel remain permanent is only partly correct. True, Lojo revives Lucio as the protagonist of his own writings and he does undertake a journey over the same ground; however, as the novel progresses, it is clear that neither Lucio nor the ground on which he travels has remained unchanged. In fact, Mansilla himself predicts the disappearance of his nineteenth-century world in his own travel memoir, *Excursión*. In a prophetic parallel to the reality of the Pampas in the late twentieth century and to Lojo's novel, Mansilla states that "in the boundless Pampas, in these solitary forests, no memory or trace would remain of your ever having lived here" (Mansilla/Gillies 304). Furthermore, Lucio has frequent encounters with the land on his new journey that demonstrate the profound changes it has undergone in the past century.

Lojo also questions Mansilla's motivations for undertaking the original journey and his reasons for writing *Excursión*, a publicly-read series of "private" letters. Certainly *Excursión* is a significant contribution to the understanding of the Pampas and the Ranquel Indians, however, despite scholar Eva Gillies' assertion that Mansilla "obstinately refuses to sentimentalize or to glorify [the Ranqueles]" (Mansilla/Gillies xxxvii), Mansilla often falls into the trap of exoticizing and idealizing life in the Pampas. I believe he does this unconsciously in order to convince his readers that the Ranqueles are a fundamental part of Argentine society. The exaltation of the Ranquel culture is especially apparent in Mansilla's description

of their horse-riding skills. He states, "Our clumsiness was equaled only by the skill of the Indians; where we found at every step a barrier that obliged us to shorten our pace, to go at a trot or a walk, to halt and start again, they went imperturbably on their way, fast as the wind" (Mansilla/Gillies 105). Clearly, in Mansilla's mind, superior horse-riding skills are evidence that the Ranqueles are not wholly "barbaric."

In *Pasión*, on the other hand, Lojo attempts to subdue Mansilla's adulation of the Ranqueles in *Excursión* by portraying the indigenous point of view from their perspective on the *margin* rather than from Mansilla's viewpoint in the *center*. That is to say, while Lojo's position as author bestows upon her the point of view of the dominant center, she de-centers herself through her characters. Specifically, Rosaura dos Carballos reports on what is perceived reality within the novel *without* the addition of Mansilla-style grandiose idealizations. By re-evaluating Mansilla's perspective through the characters of Lucio and Rosaura, Lojo questions Mansilla's original motivations for his journey as opposed to questioning the government's policies toward the inhabitants of the Pampas as Mansilla did in *Excursión*. In this way, even though Lucio the character "writes" another travel memoir in Lojo's text, there is less focus on Lucio himself and the transparent self-aggrandizement in *Excursión* is absent.

At the same time that Mansilla's motivations are revealed as suspect in Lojo's novel, *Pasión* also questions how civilization and barbarism are defined and deployed by governments. One way in which Lojo re-evaluates this dichotomy is by subtly comparing the Rosas regime with the recent dictatorship. During and after

his rule, Rosas was characterized as either the Defensor de la Soberanía or the Tirano Sangriento, depending on which side of the civilization / barbarism dichotomy one viewed him to be on. However, when Lucio seeks the advice of a psychoanalyst in *Pasión* and his military deeds during the nineteenth century are confused with the horrors of the recent dictatorship, Lojo makes clear that the defining terms of this dichotomy change not only with whose side you are on but also with the time and historical circumstances. Upon concluding his visit with the psychoanalyst, Lucio muses: "quienes criticaron tanto a mi tío hoy pensarían algo mejor de él [...] por vía comparativa" (Lojo *Pasión* 62). Lucio's recognition of the flexibility of this terminology and how it affects his own ancestor signals Lojo's re-evaluation of the dichotomy from the perspective of the late twentieth century. As Alejandra Cebrelli points out: "*Una excursión a los indios ranqueles* significa la inversión de la antinomia civilización / barbarie que caracterizó buena parte de nuestra historia. La novela de María Rosa Lojo retoma la duda del coronel sobre las bondades de la civilización, desde el amargo conocimiento que un siglo de violencia ha dejado a los hombres" (37). Through Lucio, Lojo calls into question notions of civilization and barbarism in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and breaks down the traditional divisions of this dichotomy.

Lojo also blends European and Ranqueline mythical elements in *Pasión* as part of the dialog with Mansilla's nineteenth-century text. Whereas the indigenous culture and its leaders are a constant presence in *Excursión*, Mariano Rosas (5) and the other Ranquel chiefs do not appear in Lojo's novel until the end. On the surface, it seems that Lojo's focus is on the interplay between Lucio and Rosaura. However,

this seeming lack of engagement with the Ranquel culture on Lojo's part is actually superficial. Through the characters of Merlin and Rosaura, both European mythical figures, Lojo creates a parallel with the lives and actions of the Ranqueles as described by Mansilla in his original text. That is, Merlin and Rosaura, although part of a different mythic tradition, stand in for the Ranqueles in the temporal space of the late twentieth century in Lojo's novel until the end when Rosaura is transformed into Antümalguén, the mythic Doncella del Sol, the Mujer Luminosa, of the Ranquel culture. Therefore, what was once mythical representation (Rosaura) is transformed into a new indigenous reality (Antümalguén): Rosaura transforms into the Doncella del Sol and thereby becomes part of a mythical indigenous culture that she was previously only traveling in as Lucio's companion. That is, Rosaura is no longer an outsider, but rather an insider—and not just any insider—Antümalguén.

The focus on Rosaura and her transformation into Antümalguén signals a significant difference between *Pasión* and *Excursión*. While relegated to the periphery in *Excursión*, gender issues are significantly more prominent in *Pasión*. Most obviously, the issue of gender is deployed through the figure of Rosaura dos Carballos, the daughter of "el hada Morgana [y] un duende gallego plebeyo y sin categoría" (Lojo *Pasión* 19), to destabilize Mansilla's "angel or devil" characterization of women on the Pampas. In her twentieth-century re-evaluation of Mansilla's journey to the Ranquel Indians, Lojo inserts gender to destabilize Mansilla's nineteenth-century travel memoir by first, creating a main character who is female to oppose Mansilla's self-promotion as the protagonist of his memoir; second, giving Rosaura a voice during the new journey to the land of the Ranqueles

in order to provide a female-centered perspective to oppose Mansilla's male-centered interpretation of women's lives on the Pampas; and third, allowing Rosaura's mythic story and journey to eventually overtake Mansilla's narcissistic interpretations of his original journey and of the one that they are undertaking in the late twentieth century.

Lojo's use of a principal female character is significant in the dialog between *Pasión* and *Excursión* since no such parallel character can be found in Mansilla's text and the lack of a prominent female character renders much of Mansilla's observations on women of the Pampas suspect. Even though, temporally, *Pasión* is set in the twentieth century, it engages the nineteenth century through the figure of Lucio Mansilla; therefore, the temporal space within the novel fluctuates. Given the fluctuation between time periods, Rosaura can be alternately viewed as a subverted feminine archetype of the nineteenth-century or the mythic being that she embodies in the late twentieth century.

Let me explain. Instead of representing the ideal model of womanhood whose role was to produce children and care for them and the home, Rosaura dos Carballos subverts the archetype of nineteenth-century femininity. In fact, Rosaura breaks down this model and eschews traditional domestic bonds. For example, even though she is constituted in the flesh in the novel, she is still a mythic being and can travel easily. Few upper-class women in nineteenth-century Argentina traveled beyond their prosperous neighborhoods. Rosaura, on the other hand, seems to be born to travel and study. In fact, shortly after coming of age she gives in to her wanderlust. She explains: "volví a mi tierra de nacimiento. Pero primero

visité Irlanda y viajé varios años por los bellos ríos de Alemania; viví en los fiordos noruegos y en los espejados canales de Venecia" (Lojo *Pasión* 22). Additionally, since her "uncle" is Merlin and her mother the fairy Morgan, she is encouraged and required to study more than the domestic arts.

As part of a mythic world, Rosaura is independent and self-sufficient—female qualities that the character Lucio finds difficult to grasp and no doubt his real-life nineteenth-century counterpart would have had equal difficulty in understanding despite his deep love for his sister (6) as well as his own insistence on the further education of his daughters. But perhaps what is most difficult for him to accept is the fact that Rosaura is unwilling to give up her immortality for a union with a mortal such as himself. That is, this woman is unwilling to bind herself to a man. In fact, even though the present of the novel is set in the late twentieth century, the main character Lucio still believes in the reality of 1870 while Rosaura recognizes the changes that have occurred in the past one hundred years. Because of Lucio's nineteenth-century understanding of women's place, he treats Rosaura according to the traditional beliefs of the time. While Lucio believes Rosaura to be a traditional nineteenth-century woman, she subverts this model by fulfilling a role that coincides with women taking a more active role in society, culture, and politics.

At the same time, as the embodiment of a mythic being in the late twentieth-century of the novel, Rosaura destabilizes traditional ideas about women's proper place that are propagated through popular television, cinema, and fairy tales. When contemplating the representations of fairies in popular culture, it is easy to remember them as beautiful, helpful young women who save poor girls, make them

beautiful, and generally do good by perhaps granting a wish or three. Rosaura, too, is beautiful and helpful to the person in distress; however, in the case of *La pasión de los nómades*, Rosaura's helpful intentions are generally directed at Lucio. He is the one who receives Rosaura's help in order to be reconstituted from a spirit to a handsome man of 39 and it is he who is the recipient of her good hospitality and knowledge, not a helpless young girl. In a sense, as an immortal mythic woman, Rosaura might represent women's fantasy: she is immortal, revered, and not bothered by earthly concerns. She does not depend on a man for financial stability nor does she need to rely on him for personal fulfillment.

Notably, what is a glaring lack in Mansilla's *Excursión*, remains a prominent component of Lojo's novel. Specifically, Mansilla glosses over or makes his own assumptions of the quality, or lack thereof, of women's lives on the Pampas, including indigenous, captives, and outlaws. Lojo, on the other hand, although lacking first-hand knowledge of the true nature of women's condition at this time and place, attempts to present the women's perspective. That is, while Mansilla makes assertions based on his own position in the dominant society and based on his own experiences (a top-down approach), Lojo presents views that are said through the mouths of women (a bottom-up approach), namely through the characters of Rosaura and Eduarda Mansilla de García, Lucio Mansilla's younger sister.

However, it is important to note that like Mansilla's memoir, Lojo's text does not have a central female *indigenous* character. Indeed, feminine perspectives are more prevalent in *Pasión* but they are presented through the figures of Rosaura and

Eduarda, both insiders as women but outsiders of the indigenous culture. Instead of using these female characters to present a particularly indigenous viewpoint, Lojo utilizes their voices in an attempt to universalize female experience. The universalization of experiences is particularly evident during the meeting between Eduarda and Lucio toward the end of *Pasión* in which she explains to him: "Los grandes temas de la vida humana son siempre los mismos en cualquier sociedad" (Lojo *Pasión* 168). Clearly, Eduarda, like her brother Lucio, relies on their upper-class upbringing (education, and beliefs) which leads them to assert a commonality of concerns that cross ethnic, gender, and economic lines. Neither character questions their assumptions nor considers that other groups might have different concerns.

While the female indigenous perspective is initially absent, it takes over the narrative at the end. Lojo's use of gender destabilizes Mansilla's travel memoir by allowing Rosaura's mythic, female-centered story to eventually overtake Lucio's narcissistic interpretations of both his original journey and of the one that they are undertaking in the late twentieth century. As previously indicated, Rosaura first appears in the novel as narrator of her "viajes inverosímiles" and ends by writing from the "casa de plata" where she has been transformed from a European mythic being to Antümalguén, the Doncella del Sol of the Ranqueles, where she is "tejiendo la tela de la fecundidad, tramando los dibujos de la vida desde los espacios simétricos, en lo hondo del lago o en lo alto del cielo" (Lojo *Pasión* 198). By the end of the novel, the reader realizes that although *Pasión* is in dialog with *Excursión* in significant ways, Lucio Mansilla is not the central protagonist of the fictional text nor

is his journey fruitful. What this novel suggests is that Lucio, as an outsider, can never fully enter into Leubucó and understand its inhabitants, but that this task falls to a type of insider, such as Rosaura. Similar to the original journey recounted in *Excursión*, the journey to the land of the Ranqueles has a definite beginning and end and there seems to be little lasting impact on Lucio Mansilla. However, Rosaura's journey to the same place is a journey to a beginning, not an end. For Rosaura, it is a trip of self-discovery and understanding that goes much deeper than that which can be perceived by Lucio, either in the late twentieth century or in the nineteenth century.

In addition to Lojo's engagement with the issue of gender, she also foregrounds Argentina's lost and (nearly) forgotten ethnic past and implicitly criticizes governmental and military policies that sought to exterminate the inhabitants of the Pampas. (7) In *Pasión*, Lucio decides to re-enact the journey that led to his greatest political achievement—a peace treaty with the Ranquel Indians. He still believes in his own innocence and good intentions concerning both his original and his more "recent" trips to the Ranqueles. While in *Excursión* Mansilla valorizes, even idealizes, the indigenous way of life, in *Pasión* he is forced to recognize that he did not know, understand, or even admit everything about the reality of Ranquel culture or the motivations behind his visit.

As mentioned earlier, Mansilla appears to be genuinely concerned about understanding and explaining to his reading public who the people of the Pampas are, particularly the Ranquel Indians, and what life is like on the Pampas. Lojo, on the other hand, while also concerned about appropriate and accurate descriptions of

this lost time and people, focuses more on the fact of its disappearance. Not only is this an important narrative strategy given the fact that *Pasión* is set in the late twentieth century and cannot imitate the eyewitness epistolary style of *Excursión*, Lojo's focus on the *disappearance* of the Ranquel culture rather than the culture itself ties Mansilla's narrative to over a century of governmental repression and elimination of native populations, and other undesirables making *Excursión* as relevant then as it is now. (8)

Additionally, while in *Excursión* the primary destination of Mansilla's trip is the encampment of Mariano Rosas, Mansilla also stopped at the lodges of other chiefs. However, in *Pasión* many of the landmarks leading to the original homes of the Ranqueles have disappeared. In some cases, entire lagoons have withered or dried up. However, most frightening for the character Lucio is the fact that he hardly recognizes his surroundings. Not only has the culture of the Ranqueles disappeared, but, as previously mentioned, the landscape of the Pampas is no longer recognizable. This is due to the fact that over one hundred years have passed and the line of the "frontier" that the real-life Mansilla knew was extended further into what was once a blank space on the map of Argentina and the cultures that once thrived on this land have disappeared.

Even though Mansilla wishes to justly represent the Ranquel Indians in order to show his readers that these people are no more barbaric than the so-called civilized citizens of Buenos Aires, his approach to relating their culture reflects his deeply-held belief that he is superior to them. Mansilla believes that what he sees and reports to the readers of *La Tribuna* is true because he believes himself to be all-

knowing. Lojo, in contrast, contests the dominant position from which Mansilla describes his journey by speaking through her fictional characters in order to understand the lost Ranquel culture. (9) She refrains from making pronouncements on its civilized or barbaric nature and instead allows the reader to make a judgment. This narrative strategy succeeds because the character who undermines Mansilla's 1870 text is Lucio himself.

Principally, the authority of Mansilla's original text is questioned in the confrontations that the character Lucio has with his sister Eduarda and the Ranquel Indians who reconvene for a new *junta*. Instead of accepting and learning from criticism, Lucio is angered when Mariano Rosas accuses him of writing *Excursión* in order to gain fame and distinction among the elites who excluded him from a more prominent role during this crucial nation-building period. Mariano states: "Él escribió un libro donde nos retrata como creyó vernos, y le dieron premios por ese largo cuento y hasta del otro lado del mar se enteraron de nuestras vidas y costumbres y muchos gringos se habrán reído de lo que aprendimos de nuestros padres y éstos de los suyos hasta los días primeros" (Lojo *Pasión* 178). Additionally, while not specifically addressing Lucio at this moment, Mariano questions Lucio's motivations for learning about their culture if nothing was gained: "¿De qué vale, hermanos, la sabiduría, si no tiene palabras poderosas? ¿De qué vale un conocimiento que no cambia los hechos?" (Lojo *Pasión* 177). In this instance, and in others, Lojo makes clear the suspicion that despite Mansilla's attempt at a clear and concise reporting of his journey, his account is fraught with misconceptions and perhaps willful reinterpretations.

While confronting misconceptions and reinterpretations of ethnicity and gender in nineteenth-century Argentina, *La pasión de los nómades* also subtly critiques the military dictatorship that ruled Argentina from 1976 to 1983. As a historical novel in dialog with the travel memoir genre, *Pasión*, like Mansilla's *Excursión*, permits space for philosophical questioning and critiques of the world beyond the text. In fact, Lojo's text links the problems of gender and ethnicity in the nineteenth century with the recent dictatorship by focusing on minority perspectives, "confusing" the Rosas regime with the recent military dictatorship, revealing the way in which the recent repressive regime ensured the loyalty of future citizens, and questioning official governmental policies and doctrines that naturalize gender roles.

Lojo's focus on minority ethnic perspectives in nineteenth-century Argentina parallels the issue of minority, or dissident, perspectives during the dictatorship. In *Pasión* the management and extermination of the Ranquel Indians is a metaphor for how the recent dictatorship treated political dissidents. "The military governments," explains Mary Beth Tierney-Tello, "went far beyond their initial task of annihilating the subversive movements in their respective countries, however. Implementing a so-called doctrine of National Security, these regimes virtually waged war on their own populace which they considered to be dangerously contaminated by Marxist ideology" (1). In *Pasión*, by focusing on the treatment of the people on the periphery, namely the Ranquel Indians, Lojo implicitly links her analysis of their disappearance to the disappearances and assassinations of thousands of political dissidents of the 1970s and 1980s. Nowhere is this link more

apparent than at the very *junta* convened by Mariano Rosas and the other Indian chiefs upon Lucio's return visit to Leubucó.

Significantly, the meeting between the indigenous leaders and Lucio is called a *junta* in Lojo's novel. The very word choice describing this encounter brings to mind the recent dictatorship and the military *junta* that ruled Argentina from 1976 to 1983. The link between the recent dictatorship and the *junta* that takes place in Lojo's novel is further strengthened when one considers the players in each and the way in which Lojo undermines the traditional dominant / subordinate dichotomy associated with the regime. That is, during the military dictatorship the *junta*, established and maintained by the military, used its power to destroy all opposition to the government, including political dissidents and citizens on the margins of society. Consider, however, the roles of the *junta* established in Lojo's novel. This time the *junta* is made up of those on the margin, the Ranqueles, and the one being judged, Lucio, is in the military. By destabilizing the norms of the dichotomy, Lojo implicitly questions the authority of the military and the elites who rose to power by annihilating dissidents.

An even more explicit reference to the recent dictatorship in Lojo's novel occurs when Lucio discusses his military history. Confusion reigns when Lucio visits a psychoanalyst in late twentieth-century Argentina to discuss his military experiences in the nineteenth century. When asked if he killed many people in his military career, Lucio responds: "No lo sé señor. No las he contado. Fui militar, no carnicero. En cada frente a donde me enviaron traté de cumplir mi deber dignamente. Eso es todo" (Lojo *Pasión* 60-61). To which the psychoanalyst, clearly

disconcerted, replies: “Quiero decir, señor Mansilla, que quizás un elemento de culpa pueda haber influido en los motivos que lo han llevado hasta aquí. Por ejemplo, si usted se hubiera visto obligado a intervenir en la tortura de prisioneros, o hubiera mandado a otros ejecutarla...” (Lojo *Pasión* 61). It is obvious from this dialog that, given the political situation of the 1970s and 1980s, the psychoanalyst believes that Lucio is confessing to crimes of the dictatorship. While presented as a darkly humorous misunderstanding, it is clear that Lojo’s novel reflects concern over the fact that much of the military who perpetrated such horrors still lives in their midst.

While it seems difficult to imagine that a populace that has lived through a dictatorship would remain loyal to the legacy of that regime, the government ensured future loyalty during the height of its repression by capturing an innocent and impressionable audience: infants. In order to explain this loyalty and the gendered-nature of political violence Mary Beth Tierney-Tello states: “the violence enacted by the military was often directed against women in particularly brutal ways, which included the systematic sexual assault on women prisoners, the rape of mothers in the presence of their families, and the abduction of pregnant women who were then either tortured until miscarrying or who were allowed to give birth only to be permanently separated from their newborns” (7). The point I wish to make is related to these disappeared newborns. After separation from their mothers, many of these babies were then adopted by military families. Through adoption, or perhaps entrapment into the system that supported and propagated thousands of tortures and assassinations, these children were redeemed and saved

from growing up into subversives by being raised in families that supported law and order.

Lojo also develops the idea of entrapment and adoption in her treatment of the relationship between Rosaura dos Carballos and Lucio Mansilla thereby asserting a parallel between her novel and the recent dictatorship. Although Rosaura's narrative voice in *Pasión* is clearly independent from that of Lucio, it is in Lucio's "nuevas cartas" that the reader can see his figurative attempt to either "adopt" or "trap" Rosaura in his traditional and patriarchal point of view. The possibility of Rosaura's entrapment is most clearly evident in the final section of Lucio's "nuevas cartas" when he decides to declare his love for her. What Lucio ignores is the fact that while with their union he would gain a companion, Rosaura stands to lose a great deal in such an arrangement, such as her immortality and freedom. Clearly, Lucio cannot conceive of a mere platonic friendship but must draw Rosaura into the traditional patriarchal structure through marriage and trap her in the gender confines inherent in this structure. By using Rosaura, Lucio attempts to re-enact the military *junta's* program that re-inscribed its populace into a dominant, patriarchal order.

In addition, both Mansilla and the recent dictatorship attempted to naturalize gender roles. However, as Tierney-Tello points out, women writers use "narrative techniques [that] are complicated and enriched as [they] confront not only what is obscured by authoritarian discourse but by patriarchal discourse as well" (5). Through the development of the relationship between Lucio and Rosaura, Lojo breaks down traditional gender roles (Rosaura is educated and independent and

does not require the safekeeping that a husband provides; Lucio depends on Rosaura and believes in a traditional patriarchal structure) and de-naturalizes them by analyzing traditional nineteenth-century ideals of motherhood and domesticity that thrived throughout the twentieth century and were then subverted by the military regime in order to control the populace. (10)

Through a questioning of Mansilla's motivations, Lojo also problematizes the hidden agenda behind political rhetoric that allowed for the disappearance and assassination of thousands of Argentines. Outwardly, *Pasión* problematizes the motives behind Mansilla's original journey and thereby critiques nineteenth-century policies regarding Indian treaties and removals. Lojo reveals how Mansilla's travel memoir is not an objective description of every detail of his trip, but rather a purposeful selection of occurrences intended to manipulate his public's knowledge of the situation. In this way, Lojo links Mansilla's narrative maneuverings to official government reports during the military regime of the 1970s and 1980s that tried to keep the Argentine populace from knowing the full extent of state-authorized repression.

By purposefully entering into a dialog with Lucio Mansilla's text, María Rosa Lojo questions Mansilla's deployment of gender and ethnicity that was intended to reveal life on the Pampas to upper-class readers in Buenos Aires. Through a conscious re-evaluation of Mansilla's nineteenth-century journey Lojo succeeds in demonstrating the continuity of gender and ethnic constructs from the nineteenth century to the late twentieth century and thereby renders suspect the recent dictatorship's attempts to naturalize these representations. Lojo's re-examination

of gender and ethnicity through the lens of Mansilla's text therefore successfully critiques the recent military dictatorship's control of all forms of representation and suggests, through the character of Rosaura, a feminine-indigenous rendering of historical interpretation.

Notes:

(1) Throughout *Una excursión a los indios ranqueles*, and therefore also throughout *La pasión de los nómades*, Leubucó is spelled with a *b*, however, its original spelling is with a *v*: Leuvucó.

(2) From this point on, "Lucio" will be used when referring to María Rosa Lojo's character in the novel, *La pasión de los nómades*; "Mansilla" will be used when referring to *Una excursión a los indios ranqueles*.

(3) Although born in Buenos Aires, Lojo spent most of her childhood in Castelar, a suburb approximately 20 kilometers from the metropolis, and still resides there.

(4) Of course, I am considering Lucio Mansilla to be more or less "real" in *Una excursión a los indios ranqueles*; however, since the source of his ideas and proclamations come from a text that he wrote, one must question how "real" he is. That is, Mansilla becomes a character in his own memoir; does that make him "real" or "fictional"?

(5) Mariano Rosas was a Ranquel Indian who was captured as a young boy by General Juan Manuel de Rosas. He was baptized with his captor's surname, the custom of the time period (Lojo "Una nueva excursión" par. 1), and grew up on Rosas's El Pino estate.

(6) Eduarda Mansilla de García (1834-1892), younger sister of Lucio Mansilla, was one of the first female writers of Argentina to gain fame in the literary world. Eduarda's works ran the gamut of literary genres from novels to theater, from philosophical essays to music criticism. She received much praise for her literary

production from both Argentine and international writers including Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and Victor Hugo, among others. Her husband, Manuel Rafael García Aguirre (1826-1887), was a career diplomat who served posts in both the United States and in Europe. During his diplomatic assignments, Eduarda and their children accompanied him. These international experiences were fundamental to her literary output; she even published a novel in French.

(7) It should be noted that Argentina, similar to the United States, did not manage to exterminate *all* of its native inhabitants; however, most of them were pushed to the margins of society. In the case of Argentina, most people with indigenous blood or heritage tend to live in the interior provinces rather than in Buenos Aires. Therefore, when discussing a "lost" ethnic past, I refer most specifically to it being lost to those living in Buenos Aires.

(8) Most noteworthy of these campaigns to exterminate the native inhabitants was the Conquest (Campaign) of the Desert, begun by Adolfo Ansina and continued by Julio Roca upon the former's death. The purpose of this campaign, which was a culmination of smaller military campaigns carried out by the Argentine government that furthered the work of the original Spanish conquistadores, was to gain territorial dominance of the Pampas and eastern Patagonia.

(9) Lojo frequently creates characters on the margin in her novels that are more able to enter into places unknown and inaccessible to main characters. In *La pasión de los nómades*, Rosaura functions as the character on the margin. Consider also Carmen Brey in *Las libres del Sur* (2004) and Alice in *Una mujer de fin de siglo* (1999), among others.

(10) The *junta's* attempt to control the populace was publicly thwarted by the Madres de la plaza de mayo. Instead of privately mourning the disappearance and deaths of their loved ones, this group of women demonstrated publicly to show their refusal to believe the official stance on these disappearances and deaths. They subverted their traditional role as women in order to reclaim their authority and their rights to be mothers and demand the return of their children.

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