

6-1-2011

Inherited Exile and the Work of María Rosa Lojo

Marcela Crespo Buiturón
CONICET, Argentina

Follow this and additional works at: <http://newprairiepress.org/sttcl>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Recommended Citation

Buiturón, Marcela Crespo (2011) "Inherited Exile and the Work of María Rosa Lojo," *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*: Vol. 35: Iss. 2, Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.1747>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature* by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

Inherited Exile and the Work of María Rosa Lojo

Abstract

In recent decades, Argentine literature has demonstrated increasing interest not in Spanish immigrants or exiles but rather in their children, prompting a reconsideration of critical approaches to exile to account for situations in which the same experience acts as a mirror between parents and the children who inherit exile from them. The work and the reflections of the poet, essayist and narrative writer María Rosa Lojo, daughter of exiles—a Spanish Republican father and Francoist mother—in Buenos Aires, can be considered a paradigmatic example.

Inherited Exile and the Work of María Rosa Lojo

Marcela Crespo Buiturón
CONICET, Argentina
Translated by Laura Kanost

Introduction

Recent Argentine literature has demonstrated increasing interest not in immigrants or exiles, but in their children. Moving beyond an anthropological approach, a critical framework is necessary to rethink the literariness of exile in cases where the same experience becomes a sort of mirror between parents and their children. These children inscribe a new vision: inherited exile.

In Argentina, writers who are children of exile are in large part of Spanish descent, due to the influx of Spanish Republican exiles escaping the Civil War and persecution under the subsequent Franco regime. In this sense, the poet, essayist and narrative writer María Rosa Lojo can be considered a paradigmatic example. The Spanish presence in Argentina is certainly a recurrent theme in her work. Spanish exile and emigration throughout history appear repeatedly in her writing, from brief allusions in her poetry collections—*Visiones* (1984) ‘Visions,’ *Forma oculta del mundo* (1991) ‘Hidden shape of the world,’ *Esperan la mañana verde* (1998) *Awaiting the Green Morning* (1998)—to central themes in her novels, especially the quadrilogy of *Canción perdida en Buenos Aires al oeste* (1987) ‘Song lost in West Buenos Aires,’ *La pasión de los nómades* (1994) *The Passion of Nomads* (2010), *Finisterre* (2005) and the recently published *Árbol de Familia* (2010) ‘Family tree,’ as well as in her short story collections: *Marginales* (1986) ‘Marginals,’ *Historias ocultas en la Recoleta* (2000) ‘Stories hidden in the Recoleta,’ and *Amores insólitos de nuestra historia* (2001) ‘Singular loves from our history.’

Born in Buenos Aires in 1954, Lojo is the daughter of a marine who fought for the Spanish Republic, while her mother came from a family loyal to the opposite side, the Francoists. This political clash at the heart of her own family history would bring the author to a permanent state of contradictions and ambiguities, in which access to historical truth becomes problematic, not only as a theoretical concern, but as a lived reality. Her professional activity also registers this duality: she is a poet, but also a literary scholar, and her texts dramatize and fictionalize multiple theoretical issues, particularly the line between history and fiction, and the relevance of classical dichotomies (civilization vs. barbarism, feminine power vs. masculine power, country vs. city, among others). This complexity is inscribed within the framework of the recent Argentine novel, in which shared fundamental aesthetic and ideological lines trace out their own literary universe: the question of postmodernity, the reformulation of Argentine and American history, the aesthetization of recent collective violence and of exile, and the deconstruction of the traditional feminine image.

Some Preliminary Remarks: Critical Perspectives

In order to discuss the identity of the exile/immigrant and, consequently, of the children of this group—in Lojo's work as well as in the work of other writers who explore this theme in Argentina—it is essential to consider the debated and debatable issues of identity and identification in contemporary society.

The field of sociology proposes a significant difference between person and individual, a difference that lies in the exteriority of the former in contrast to the interiority of the latter. The person, as an archetype, lives and repeats collective creative instincts. Like a mask, the person dramatizes or participates in the dramatization of general types. It allows the representation of fright or anguish, anger or joy, primary affective states that only have value because they are collective. In different ways, each one interprets a role that integrates him or her into the societal whole, a phenomenon that is fundamental to the own body/social body dialectic. Thus, Michel Maffesoli recalls the Thomist habit/*habitus* parallel.¹ Clothing goes along with custom. The relationship between appearance and social body has clearly ceased to be the exclusive domain of the social stra-

ta, becoming the sign of recognition of the multiplicity of informal groups that make up postmodern society. Even as one's own body is emphasized it is simultaneously consumed by the collective body.

As the subject is freed from the anguish of choice it is identified as a member of the group, that is, as a receptacle for social content. Thus, appearance is anything but individual. A person necessarily forms an identity as a function of others, as a function of the natural and social environment. Therefore, the break with society is accentuated in the case of the exile. Imitation reveals the desire to be recognized by the other, the search for support or social protection, for a shared path to follow.

So-called spatial identifications are also produced. Groups trace their limits in the sand, as it were, and thus find their collective memories within defined spaces. There are, then, many ways of representing space as groups. The city is sensitive and relational, animated by the everyday theatricality of sensations, smells, and sounds. Thus, space creates a collective memory that allows for identification.

According to Marc Augé, the organization of space and the constitution of places within the same social group are one of the challenges and one of the modalities of collective and individual practices.² Collectives, just like the individuals who take part in them, need to think about identity and relationships. The treatment of space is one medium of this enterprise. The anthropological place is the beginning of meaning for those who inhabit it.

The identifying factors of a social group could be summarized, then, as: a population that biologically perpetuates itself; shared values and cultural forms; a field of communication and interaction; and a grouping that identifies itself and is identified by others as a category that is different from others of the same type. Ethnicity relates elements of the past and future: ancestors, contemporaries and descendents are members of a group. Identity is individual, but it only exists in its interrelation to the cultural values of the group. It is a question of a person's attitudes toward basic values of the particular social group. Cultural alterity is never considered a positive difference, but rather, is always inferiority according to a hierarchical system.

Culture can be defined, then, as an ideological space whose ob-

jective function is to root a collectivity in the consciousness of its own identity. Its fundamental characteristic is to be specific: it only exists inasmuch as it distinguishes itself from others and its boundaries are indicated by a system of differentiating markers. It functions as a collective memory that serves as a reference.

Language is established as one of the most important symbolic markers of sociocultural identity. Through it the individual can feel like a member of a group and the members of other groups can be differentiated, since interdiscursivity is understood as sociodiscursivity. The notion is to deploy a rhetoric of social speech, of class dialects, of regionalisms, what is said, what is written, what is discussed, what is spoken... based on the premise that every discourse refers back to another discourse. If everything is discourse facing reality, we should no longer be discussing specificity, but rather a multiplicity of speech varieties that speak of the same thing in different places and of different things in the same places. The permeability of discourses allows the constant modification of discursive fluency and the dissolution of an absolute referent. What is said can only be defined by way of what cannot be said in a given society. Taboos and discursive censorship mark the places of discourses, but also their exclusion. This produces a discursive extension and imaginary polyphony on the surface, which covers up phenomena of silence, closure, muteness, and ostracism of other discourses. Within this framework, literature is a confluence of utterances that migrate, accept, transform, diverge, and modify. It is subject to two principles: it is a construction of the observer and it is shaped by the social doxa that establishes it.

Marc Angenot argues that in addition to the diversity of languages working in a given society, the prevailing interdiscursive modes should be identified. These ways of knowing and of labeling what is known, which are unique to each society, regulate and transcend the division of established discourses. In this sense, the word hegemony is used to refer to the set of recurrences kept and developed over a period of time. Among its components are basic topics, or the utterances of social verisimilitude, since hegemony acts to legitimate certain utterances just as much as to expel others. The immigrant/exile must enter this linguistic reality and overcome this barrier. Social discourse is heterogeneous, not just in its

global perception, but in every utterance, since each one functions polyphonically. This heterogeneity converges in the concept of sociogram proposed by Claude Duchet: “a vague, unstable, dissonant collection of partial representations, revolving and interacting with one another around a central theme” (qtd. in Angenot 61).

The cultural subject, as conceived by Edmond Cros, integrates all the individuals of the same collective since, according to him, culture requires submission of subjectivity within the same collective representation that alienates it.³ The cultural subject is an instance of discourse occupied by I, an emergence and functioning of a subjectivity, a collective subject and a process of ideological submission.

It is through language that human beings posit themselves as subjects. Emile Benveniste maintains,

“Ego” is he who *says* “ego.” That is where we see the foundation of ‘subjectivity’ which is determined by the linguistic status of ‘person’ ... And so it is literally true that the basis of subjectivity is in the exercise of language. If one really thinks about it, one will see that there is no other objective testimony to the identity of the subject except that which he himself thus gives about himself. (224-26, original emphasis)

When the subject is set up within this structure the forms speak on his behalf. This idea of subjectivity as a product of language already implies a division between the speaking subject and the subject spoken to (alienation in discourse). In this sense, the emergence of the subject assumes a move from language to speech, both of which, according to Benveniste, constitute an antinomy in the subject. The sign summons reality and reality vanishes in the sign to the benefit of its representation. The same thing happens with the subject, who does not speak, but rather is spoken by discourse: it remains hidden in the speaking subject’s utterance. The subject emerges from the network of signs organized according to lines of meaning and ideological traces that constitutes culture. The truth of its existence can only emerge in that articulation of language that constitutes the enunciation. The subject finds itself presentified under forms that attest to the greater or lesser distance it adopts with respect to its utterances. In extreme cases, subjectivity can disappear from the scene: this happens with the use of impersonal forms that char-

acterize explicit repetitions of doxa, commonplaces, clichés, and ideologemes, all of which represent the most visible stratus of the instance governed by the cultural subject.

In this sense, far from home, the immigrant/exile enters a polyphonic world full of constant reminders of being foreign, of being broken off from one's own cultural group. And this, in particular, is what accentuates the exile's feeling of estrangement and loss.

A Necessary Dialogue: Protagonists and Heirs of Exile

Within this framework, the handling of the experience of emigration and exile in general, and that of Spaniards in Argentina in particular, becomes inevitably complex. Argentine history has been shaped by various waves of immigration and exile, which in turn have left their mark on the country's literary production.

This experience entails loss, impoverishment and even mutilation, as suggested by Guillermo de Torre in a letter to Ricardo Gullón, dated February 27, 1952: "... aunque íntimamente y en rigor cada vez me siento más europeo, más nostálgicamente español en lo esencial" ("Homenaje" 84) '... although deep inside and in fact I feel more and more European, in essence I feel more nostalgically Spanish' or as Isabel de Armas poetically writes, "Miró alrededor y estaba en un Páramo terrible y su torre era una torre ruinosa..." (190) 'He looked around and he was in a terrible Wasteland and his tower was a tower in ruins...' The intimate fragmentation of the subject, the expulsion from the cultural and political present and future of the place of origin turn the life of an exile into an absence. As Griselda Gambaro affirms, "lo que determina la cualidad dolorosa e incluso degradante es la expulsión de un sentimiento colectivo" (31) 'what determines the painful and even degrading quality is the expulsion from a collective feeling,' although María Teresa León puts it most tragically, "El cansancio por no saber dónde morir es la mayor tristeza del emigrado" (30) 'Growing weary from not knowing where to die is the emigrant's greatest sorrow.' Distance exacerbates scarcity, saddens the spirit. Because, among other things, in this new space, for the poet the reading public is other, alien and external. Thus, Francisco Ayala, a Spaniard exiled in Argentina, asks, "¿Para quién escribimos nosotros?" (73) 'For whom do we write?' Ayala proposes an eloquent image: the exile lives in parenthesis. Since the

writer creates for a real or fictitious addressee, Ayala attests, in exile one loses the possibility of addressing “esa comunidad activa, hosca y amarga, sí, pero sensible, que era la nación española” (73) ‘that community—active, surly, and bitter, yes, but sensitive too—that was the Spanish nation,’ and thus loses the connection to a concrete reality that was the basis for writing.

In this sense, the experience of writers like de Torre or León becomes doubly heartbreaking, since they returned to Spain only to feel uncomfortable with the literature developing there and perceive their own compatriots as strangers. In the words of León, wife of Rafael Alberti, “He sentido muchas veces angustia al mirar, sentados junto a mí, a seres que dicen que son mi gente y no los reconozco” (19) ‘Many times I have felt anguish as I looked at human beings sitting next to me who say they are my people and I do not recognize them.’ The exile constructs himself or herself through a vital—and in some cases, literary—fiction.

Literature might fill the void produced by what the exile feels is lacking in reality, but it cannot hide its lack of authenticity. This is precisely what makes the exile’s entire literary world into a tragedy. Exiles remain trapped in their own constructions. They fashion an almost literary mask for their double lives, but these very masks reveal that these constructions will not open the door to returning home nor to overcoming the past, although neither do they rule out the possibility of continuing to write fiction, to fictionalize oneself. Thus, exiles begin to slip between three worlds: reality, the mask, and literary fiction, all in continuous interaction.

Exile, then, ends up becoming a sort of labyrinth that fulfills the Borgesian promise (“Para la próxima vez que lo mate—replicó Scharlach—le prometo ese laberinto, que consta de una sola línea recta y que es invisible, incesante” [“La muerte” 507] “‘The next time I kill you,’ replied Scharlach, “I promise you that labyrinth, consisting of a single line which is invisible and unceasing” [“Death” 87]): to be linear, without any possible return to the starting point, but at the same time, eternal.

Likewise, the immigrant—a sort of late exile, delayed in accepting his or her fragmentation, immersed in plans for future projects to fulfill in the new country—faces the reality of living between two cultures. Knowing their condition is inferior to that of the members

of the host society, immigrants must struggle to overcome it, attempting to become invisible. In Argentina, with its mass immigrations supported by intellectuals such as Juan Bautista Alberdi and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, this turned out not to be a complete utopia for the Spaniards, due to the intrinsic and extrinsic cultural affinity for traditional Creole society, although the feeling of uprootedness could certainly not be eliminated.

In Argentine literature both immigrant and exile coexist, traversing the pages written by their children, as well as by other writers who have shared some of these experiences. These texts evoke the traditional reiterative themes, such as the feeling of transience in the new place; dislocation, which does not end with the return home; existing between reality and desire; the feeling of “flotando sobre el tiempo como un madero inútil” ‘floating over time like a useless piece of driftwood,’ as Pedro Garfias (Spain, 1901-67) articulated; or the feeling of being “inquilinos de la soledad” ‘tenants of solitude,’ in the words of Juan Gelman (Argentina 1930), to cite writers from both sides of the ocean.

The image created by poet and critic Jorge Boccanera of “tierra que anda” ‘earth that walks’—which has become the title of a collection of reflections on post-dictatorial Argentine exile—summarizes everything inexorably.

A makeshift life, like a quarantine, living in parenthesis, many have called it. The simultaneity of two languages (the native language and that of the host country) works to accentuate, not bridge, distances. The native tongue can become a link that sabotages efforts to overcome estrangement. Parents and children sharing exile turn genetics into a cultural and not only a biological fact, notes Angelina Muñoz-Huberman, referring to this experience of Republican exile in Mexico.⁴ The powerlessness of having others decide one’s own destiny; the conviction that life is somewhere else. Feeling like life is slipping away and it is impossible to decide anything, like exile is spent in basements.

On the other hand, Argentine emigration and exile offer both a way of reliving family history (in reverse), and the fear of repeating it because the parents’ experience has taught that estrangement is an irreversible condition. This is the image that Pedro Orgambide presents in “Aprendimos a ser extranjeros” ‘We Learned to Be For-

eigners’:

Creo que en el exilio todos revivimos de algún modo la experiencia de nuestros abuelos inmigrantes. Aprendimos a ser extranjeros. Comprendimos al *nono* o al *zeide* que soñaban con su aldea o con el mar, sentados en la vereda. Fuimos *ellos* o como *ellos*, y desde la extranjería entendimos algo de la identidad aluvional del argentino. (qtd. in Boccanera 156, original emphasis)

I believe that in exile we all in some way relived the experience of our immigrant grandparents. We learned to be foreigners. We came to understand our *nono* or *zeide* who used to dream about their village or about the sea as they sat on the sidewalk. We were *them* or like *them*, and through foreignness we were able to understand something about the cumulative Argentine identity.

Immigrants and exiles not only learn to be foreigners, they also come to know—and if nostalgia doesn’t prevent it, even love—the adopted country, says Orgambide. They even miss it upon returning to the native country, according to Horacio Salas, another Argentine writer and critic: “Ahora puedo volver a España ... que es sin duda mi segundo país ... allí ha quedado una parte importante de mi vida” (qtd. in Boccanera 188) ‘Now I can go back to Spain ... which is without a doubt my second country ... an important part of my life remains there.’

But the feeling of transience is inescapable, as is the uncertainty, an essential condition of human beings in general and of exiles in particular. To be foreign is to live with daily evidence of lacking a common history, places harboring memories, words with the same meaning. It is to be forever unable to become a part of the world we, since neither movement whereby identification takes place (heteropathic: when the subject identifies his or her own self with the other; and idiopathic: where the subject identifies the other with him or herself) can occur. In other words, what Lacan called the imaginary, which depends on the construction of the self through a mirror image, is not shared with the other.

The writing of these children of exile is traversed by the internal conflict but also nostalgia of that land that is in principle their parents’, but is also their own. Argentina, beloved as an adopted land,

is an accidental country. The feeling of exile is handed down in a sort of gradation: from the protagonists themselves to their Spanish children (themselves also protagonists, in part, but basically heirs) and, finally, to the Argentine children, absolutely separate from the factual experience, but not from the spiritual one.

Among the Spanish children, the situation is clear: in their homes, the evocation of the immigrant's homeland or of the exile's Civil War was an omnipresent reality. Living between two polarities (the abandoned world and the other, the world of refuge), they felt in their current situation the constant presence of another vacant dimension, one they constantly sought through all sorts of cultural and social activities. Regarding this situation, opposing feelings are evoked. Some Spanish children say they feel like Spain is a lost mother, while others consider their country of birth a sort of step-mother who has not allowed them to cherish pleasant memories, like their parents have, because the children did not have these experiences. They called themselves "the disoriented generation" or "the border men." The concept of border is rather problematic in this case, since the boundaries between self and other are not as clear as they ought to be. The lack of definition of nationality and of belonging, along with the duality of the figure of Spain, a faraway country whose presence is nonetheless conjured up in their homes, create a translucent border between what is Spanish and what is Argentine, what is real and what is desired.

As Eduardo Mateo Gambarte explains, they live in a fossilized situation, where parents try to fulfill a future that has been truncated because exile does not permit them to renew the social model that was fought for, so that time rather than space becomes the true tyrant condemning them to the constant presence of a referent absence—and where they foster in their children a yearning to return.⁵ They see in their children the only possibility for a future, for perpetuating their ideals and models, placing them between two fatherlands, without a history of their own and with a fragmented identification with society, reality, and the values of their surroundings.

Thus, it would seem that the exile experience for both parents and children occurs within a framework of negativity. Gradually, however, a way out of this classic aporia begins to appear, as we will

now see suggested in the reflections of Lojo in her nonfiction texts. In these works, poetry enters into a dialogue with essay, proposing a way to achieve the utopia of exile: the possibility of returning home.

María Rosa Lojo: Reflections on Exile

For Lojo, this issue marks Argentine national identity in many ways and adds further complexity to questions of literature:

Durante muchos años yo también me creí parte extraviada del país al que evocaban estas imágenes [se refiere a los recuerdos de sus padres]: un fragmento más en el rompecabezas a reconstruir. Le dediqué libros propios y largas horas de memorias fantásticas. Ahora no sabría qué decir: este país austral: la Argentina, no es mi patria (la tierra de los padres) aunque sea el lugar de mi nacimiento físico asentado en un documento de identidad. ... Es la tierra, también, donde han nacido mis hijos, que tienen tanto de sangre alemana como de sangre española: perfectos europeos, se diría, que sin embargo definen, por obra de nuestra paradoja nacional, a un argentino típico. ("España" 60)

For many years I too thought I was a missing piece of the country evoked by these images [referring to her parents' memories]: another fragment in the puzzle to be put back together. I dedicated my own books to it, as well as long hours of fantastic memories. Now I wouldn't know what to say: this Southern country, Argentina, is not my fatherland (the land of my fathers), even though it may be the place of my physical birth recorded on an identification document. ...

It is, also, the land of the birth of my children, whose blood is as much German as Spanish: perfect Europeans, one might say, who nevertheless, thanks to our national paradox, define the typical Argentine.

The Argentine, child of Europeans, often lives thinking of returning to a country that is technically foreign to him or her but at the same time forms part of the family history. The central point of the question is, perhaps, the complexity of the term *ajeno* 'foreign' in its Argentine usage, since, as Lojo affirms, the paradox is part of

national identity and thus of not only literary, but also daily reality:

Me crié con el oído atento a prodigiosas guitarras andaluzas, a Albéniz y a los amores brujos de Manuel de Falla, junto con algunas dosis fuertes de cante-jondo y de flamenco (que siempre me resultó relativamente incomprensible) y también de gaitas antiguas que hasta el día de hoy me arrancan lágrimas y una alegría perdurable y áspera, como labrada en piedra. (“Mínima” 93)

I grew up with an ear attuned to prodigious Andalusian guitars, Albéniz, and the bewitching loves of Manuel de Falla, along with a few strong doses of cante-jondo and flamenco (which I always found relatively incomprehensible) as well as ancient bagpipes that even today drive me to tears and to a joy that is enduring and rough, as though carved in stone.

And this paradox is experienced, furthermore, as something completely natural.

Duality appears as another one of the most outstanding characteristics of the Argentine condition: as the heir to hundreds, even thousands of years of tradition, but born in a young country, the Argentine receives a deeply rooted cultural legacy, but at the same time, is trapped by an incurable nostalgia that turns this gift into a burden. Not everyone succumbs, of course, to their parents’ melancholia. Most overcome it and learn to live in that permanent dividedness, in spite of the latent pain of their hidden wound. Lojo adds this experience in her own literature, “los gallegos, castellanos y andaluces (y algún moro y seguramente algún judío remotos) que dibujan las líneas de mi mano y se mezclan en mi propia escritura con la fascinación de un llano que los ignora...” (“España” 60) ‘the Galicians, Castilians, and Andalusians (and even, remotely, a Moor and surely a Jew) who trace out the lines on my hand and blend together in my own writing with the fascination of a flat stretch of land that is unaware of them...’

Many children have lived convinced they would return, even though their parents, the ones who inspired that longing, may have known that achieving it had become a utopia. And this is, perhaps, one of the most devastating issues, since it seems that exiles or immigrants need to convince their children in order to sustain the illu-

sion of recovering that lost paradise, never realizing that in doing so they are condemning them to a meaningless desire with no possible future. They cannot go home again, because they never left:

Aunque las copas se elevasen en los días de fiesta y Laxeiro, el pintor, y su mujer, Lala, brindasen con ellos [sus padres] y hasta con nosotros (los niños sólo un dedo de vino) porque el regreso se acercaba. Ellos no lo creían y yo, que sí lo creí, los vi morir sin que volviesen. (“España” 60)

Although glasses would be raised on holidays and Laxeiro, the artist, and his wife, Lala, would offer toasts with them [their parents] and even with us (just a sip of wine for the children), because the return was approaching. They did not believe it, and I, who did believe it, saw them die without ever returning.

Seeing them die is also inscribed in the same paradox, because exiles, more so than immigrants, are already dead in a way. Lojo writes, “Eso es casi todo lo que me queda de ellos: los muertos que me trajeron aquí” (“España” 60) ‘That is almost all I have left of them: the dead ones who brought me here.’ Being expelled from a collective feeling, living in hope of an impossible return, and bearing a past without a future was enough to kill the exile’s soul:

Ellos lo negaron con su voluntariosa fundación de otra casa y de otra familia en otro mundo, pero lo supieron siempre. También lo sé yo, su hija, la hija del destierro, aunque me obstiné en refutarlo algunas veces y miré el tiempo con los ojos de infancia de mi padre. (“España” 61)

They denied it by willfully founding a new home and a new family in a new world, but they always knew it. I know it too, I, their daughter, the daughter of exile, even though I may at times stubbornly refute it and view time through the eyes of my father’s childhood.

In a way, Argentina was for them the place (or non-place) of exile, a place of permanent transience, where self and other coexist, where things may be familiar, but not completely. In Buenos Aires and other Argentine cities with traditionally large immigrant and exile communities, one can hear “villancicos de un lugar donde la

nieve existe” (“España” 61) ‘Christmas carols from a land where snow exists’ but the local climate allows this only as an imaginary construct; nuts are served despite being too heavy a food for the hundred-degree heat; snowflakes are simulated with cotton balls, and some heroic relative selflessly endures the torment of the heavy Santa Claus suit... and the most curious thing is that the children believe in it all.

Argentina is, in the national imaginary, the mythical and non-existent place devised by José de la Colina, the creation of immigrants and exiles throughout history.⁶ And just as the Mexican child asks the author “What are exiles?” the Argentine asks, What are we Argentines? Lojo replies:

Mirar la vida desde un “no lugar” donde toda huella amenaza desvanecerse como una marca en el agua. Vivir sobre el agua, yendo y viviendo, flotando en la marea de la historia ajena que sin embargo aparece como la más propia. Desde estas contradicciones—que llegan a ser aporías—se dibuja un conflictivo perfil identitario. (“Mínima” 94, original emphasis)

To look at life from a “non-place” where every footprint threatens to vanish like a ripple on water. To live upon the water, coming and going, floating in the tide of a foreign history that nonetheless seems closest to being one’s own. These contradictions—which become aporias—shape a conflictive identity profile.

It is the space where the extremes converge, even though they might not mix. They seem to form a whole, but they coexist, ever taking turns at being the protagonist, altering all the established orders and creating a new logic, made up of essential contradictions. But the children, yet again, only repeat the same contradictions that have marked the lives of their parents:

[Mi padre] Dejaba una España que para sus ojos había retrocedido siglos en el tiempo, donde no cabía la dimensión de su deseo. El futuro estaba afuera. Había resuelto que en las nuevas tierras haría otra cosa, y sería, casi otra persona..., [pero] sólo pudo, en su periplo austral, ser aún más español, y más gallego. (“Mínima” 88)

[My father] was leaving a Spain that in his eyes had gone centuries backward in time, where the size of his desire found no place. The future was on the outside. He had resolved that in the new land he would do other things and would be, almost, another person... [but] in his Southern journey, he only succeeded in becoming even more Spanish, and more Galician.

The consequence is immediate: *hijo del exiliado* ‘the child of an exile’ becomes *exiliado hijo* ‘a child of exile,’ a play on words at work in the title of Lojo’s autobiography, which reflects a pressing issue: the child winds up feeling strangely foreign in her own place of birth, which is located in a place that is hierarchically inferior to the parents’ place of origin:

Para el exiliado hijo el lugar de su nacimiento tiene a menudo la dudosa calidad de las copias platónicas, es un “mundo de segundo grado”, en tono menor, a punto de desvanecerse, deslucido e insuficiente. De la historia y la geografía, hasta entonces, sólo me habían hablado los libros de la escuela, incapaces de alcanzar el esplendor de la memoria viva y el peso candente del extrañamiento. La biografía familiar—yo lo ignoraba entonces—no hacía sino repetir lo que la ensayística argentina había rastreado ya en los comienzos de la conquista del Plata: una fundación que nunca se terminó de realizar, porque las extensiones vacías u hostiles fueron pobladas con el espíritu del “campamento” y no de la permanencia... (“Mínima” 94, original emphasis)

For the child of exile the place of birth often has the dubious quality of Platonic copies; it is a “secondary world,” in a minor key, fading away, colorless and incomplete. Until then, only textbooks had told me about history and geography, and they had been incapable of achieving the splendor of living memory and the burning weight of alienation. The family biography—at that time unknown to me—only repeated what the Argentine essay had already outlined at the beginning of the conquest of the River Plate: a founding that was never completed, because the empty, hostile territories were settled in a spirit of “encampment” and not of permanence...

In a way, this spirit of transience, which began long ago and

seems never since to have been overcome, determines the indefinite national character that the children of immigrants or exiles present in their texts.

In this same autobiography, Lojo discusses a family anecdote: her father had planted a chestnut tree, “En sus hojas rejuvenecía, cada primavera, la esperanza del reencuentro” (‘In its leaves, every Spring, the hope for reunion was reborn’) in his yard in Buenos Aires, but the local climate never suited it, “los frutos eran muy malos, casi raquíticos” (91) ‘the chestnuts were terrible, almost deformed.’ When her father died, she traveled to (re)visit Spain, but when she returned to Argentina, she found that the chestnut tree had withered away. Clearly, it had no reason to go on living, since its owner, through his daughter, had achieved his dream. In a way, this case sustains an exception to the rule that the exile cannot return, which might instead be restated: perhaps a return is possible in the soul of a child of exile.

This last return is a sort of homage to the parents, but it is never an entirely personal conviction: other ties to the present ensure the other return to the place of birth. And here reality begins to split: in addition to two places of origin, a double identity, and dual citizenship, there is a double return. On the one hand, it is an idealized place, often unconsciously viewed through the parents’ eyes rather than one’s own, as Lojo explained in a recent interview, “Un mundo cerrado, redondo, verde, por donde pasaba un río (el Coroño) y donde se podía pescar truchas con la mano... Eso es lo que recordaba sobre todo al final” (“Entrevista” 226) ‘A closed, round, green world, with a river (the Coroño) where you could catch trout in your hands... That is what I remembered the most in the end’; “Ese paisaje húmedo, verde, siempre sorprendente, con el mar a la vuelta de cada recodo del camino ejerce en mí una especie de encantamiento” (227) ‘That wet, green, always surprising landscape, with the sea just around every bend in the road, casts a sort of spell over me.’ On the other hand, the birthplace is also tinged with Spanish influences through the signs present in the city’s architecture and customs, newly paternal elements that inscribe the tacit question of which place is the one that really belongs to the children.

It has often been said that exiles live alienated from what is their own. In the case of the children of exiles, it would be more accurate

to say they are alienated in what is their own: this simple change in prepositions points to the essence of inherited exile.

Therefore, it becomes evident that having been born in exile was for many a cruel whim of fate, since even though many exiles built new homes in Argentina, everything always felt temporary.

Exile has often been called a place of knowledge. To this regard, Lojo states, “puede enseñarnos quiénes somos, y dónde estamos parados en la vida” (228) ‘it can teach us who we are, and where we are in life.’ The question we must then ask is whether this is the case for children of exile, in an exile perceived as dual, paradoxical, and sometimes meaningless.

For the protagonists of exile, there is no doubt—or at least practically all of them state—that exile teaches them something about their own identity. Exile makes identity a theme, opens it up for discussion, and in many cases, reaffirms it. In contrast, for their children, this exile they inherit as they first become self-aware winds up becoming a barrier that continuously questions the possibility of defining their own personal and national identity.

For Lojo, literature is an open door that allows her to discover that conflicting identity, “Integrar el aquí y el allá en un centro nuevo capaz de producir vida y cultura autónomas, valiosas por sí mismas, sin culpas ni añoranzas que impidan o lastren el desarrollo creativo: eso es lo que todavía parece faltar en la conciencia comunitaria argentina, no sólo en la de los pensadores y literatos” (“Entrevista” 229) ‘Integrating here and there into a new center, able to produce a life and a culture that are autonomous, valuable in their own right, without guilt or longing that hinder or burden the creative process: that is what still seems to be missing in the Argentine collective consciousness, not just in the consciousness of thinkers and writers.’

Notes

1 For further reading see Maffesoli’s “Identidad e identificación en las sociedades contemporáneas.” *El sujeto europeo*. Madrid: Pablo Iglesias, 1990.

2 See Augé’s *Los “no-lugares.” Espacios del anonimato*. Barcelona: Gedisa, 1996.

3 See Cros’s *El sujeto cultural. Sociocrítica y psicoanálisis*. Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1997.

4 See Muñiz-Huberman’s “Los hijos del exilio.” *Ínsula* 627 (Mar. 1999): 21-22.

5 See Mateo Gambarte's *Los niños de la guerra. Literatura del exilio español en México*. Lleida: U of Lleida P, 1966.

6 See Colina's "La palabra exilio." *Letras libres* I, 8 (Aug. 1999): 76-77.

Works Cited

- Angenot, Marc. "L'Inscription du discours sociale dans le texte littéraire." *Sociocriticism* 1 (1985): 53-82. Print.
- Armas, Isabel de. "Para recuperar mundos de exilio." *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos* 428 (Feb. 1986): 188-94. Print.
- Ayala, Francisco. "El viaje como metáfora de la vida humana." *El tiempo y yo, o el mundo a la espalda*. Madrid: Alianza tres, 1992. 73-74. Print.
- Benveniste, Emile. "Subjectivity in Language." *Problems in General Linguistics*. Trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek. Coral Gables: U of Miami P, 1971. 223-30. Print.
- Bocanera, Jorge. *Tierra que anda. Los escritores en el exilio*. Buenos Aires: Ameghino, 1999. Print.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. "Death and the Compass." Trans. Donald A. Yates. *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*. Ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby. New York: New Directions, 2007. 76-87. Print.
- . "La muerte y la brújula." *Obras Completas I*. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1974. Print.
- Gambaro, Griselda. "Los rostros del exilio." *Alba de América* VII 12-13 (1989): 31-35. Print.
- Garfias, Pedro. *Poesías de la guerra española*, México: Minerva, 1941. Print.
- Gelman, Juan. *Bajo la lluvia ajena*. Barcelona: Libros del Zorro Rojo, 2009. Print.
- León, María Teresa. *Memoria de la melancolía*. Barcelona: Laia, 1977. Print.
- Lojo, María Rosa. "Entrevista a María Rosa Lojo." Marcela Crespo Buiturón. *Andar por los bordes. Entre la historia y la ficción: el exilio sin protagonistas de María Rosa Lojo*. 2008. 225-33. Web. 17 Jan. 2009. <www.cervantesvirtual.com>.
- . "España (Argentina) en el corazón: Los hijos de la Posguerra." *Revista del Hogar Gallego para Ancianos. 50º Aniversario 1943-1993*: 60-61. Print.
- . "Mínima autobiografía de una exiliada hija." *Lèxili literari republicà*. Ed. Francisco Tovar Blanco and Manuel Fuentes Vázquez. Tarragona: URV,

Crespo Buiturón

225

2006: 87-96. Print.

Torre, Guillermo de, "Carta a Ricardo Gullón." *Ínsula* 272 (Mar. 1971): 84-85.
Print.