

## ECOLOGY AND ETHNICITY IN ANACRISTINA ROSSI'S *LA LOCA DE GANDOCA*

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In Anacristina Rossi's 1991 novel, *La loca de Gandoca*, Daniela Zermat fights to protect the Refugio Manzanilla Gandoca, which is located on Costa Rica's eastern coast, from international development. Rossi's selection of a semi-autobiographical female protagonist who is involved in an ecological struggle has been examined by literary scholars such as Sophia Kearns, who ably points out shared connections between the novel and the ecofeminist movement. I would argue that, while the links that Rossi establishes between her female lead and the environment are central to the novel, the way in which Rossi incorporates racial identity into her novel both privileges Daniela's ecological commentary and deconstructs racial categories and differentiation. Before moving forward with this line of thought, however, I would like to quickly turn my attention to Central America's past, examining the ways in which indigenous communities have been separated from European culture.

The *indigenista* movement was born, in a sense, in the sea, or at the very least on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. As the first Spaniards emerged from their boats onto the shores of the "New World" and became aware of the Others who were already there, as the first military campaigns were waged on the "Indians," as native religions and cosmologies were replaced and rewritten by the Catholic church, there was a small group of writers whose social and religious projects bordered on the anthropological. In his *Brevísima carta de relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, Bartolomé de las Casas, who embodied many of the

ideologies that would later give way to the literary *indigenista* movement, denounced the brutal treatment of the indigenous populace. As he traveled back and forth across the Atlantic, de las Casas' goal was, if not to hold at bay the cultural invasion and annihilation that was being launched by sea, to give voice to these populations. While many of the objectives that de las Casas sought never came to fruition, his concern for native peoples and cultures is echoed in the *indigenista* and *neo-indigenista* writings of the Twentieth Century.<sup>1</sup> The issue of *indigenismo* that is at play here is that, as these authors attempt to integrate indigenous populations, they necessarily draw lines that inscribe these communities. That is to say that, while *indigenista* authors attempt to deconstruct racial boundaries, they often do so by noticing and drawing attention to ethnic differences in order to validate indigenous peoples.

One of the ironies of the *indigenista* project is that it eventually drowns near the shoreline of the same waters that gave it birth. Gareth Williams, in his examination of José María Arguedas' final novel, *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo*, points out that in the novel's setting in the port town of Chimbote *indigenismo* begins to unravel. He writes:

Chimbote, it seems, is the site of an ethnic-based genealogy that has been interrupted or suspended. It is the place at which the mechanisms and calculations of a certain hegemonic vision of the historical relation between ethnicity and power is ungrounded... Through *Los zorros*, *indigenismo* confronts a maritime boundary.... (51)

Williams' conceptualization of Chimbote as a setting where Otherness and subaltern identities dissolve and are carried away by the tides of an emerging capitalist economy is of interest to this study in that we find a similar erosion of ethnic distinction in the Gandoca Refuge, the setting for Anacristina Rossi's *La loca de Gandoca*. Unlike in the case of Arguedas' novel, where this dissolution is tied to class issues brought on by capitalistic expansion, in *La loca* it results as the by-product of environmental activism in response to the challenges faced by Costa Rica.

In this study I follow William's conceptualization of the shoreline as the space where *indigenista* writings begin to dissolve as race becomes increasingly immaterial. I argue that the impetus for this change, at least in the Central American context, comes not from the capitalistic frenzy that rises from the sea, as in *Los zorros*, but from the ecological undercurrents that unite diverse people as they come together to protect their environmental wealth.

It is hardly surprising that environmental issues have emerged as an important theme in contemporary Costa Rican narratives, and they are presented in a way that is as unique as Costa Rica's renowned environmental policies. In contrast to the other Central American texts that link indigenous identity and ecological expression, Rossi's stories attempt to transcend racial and economic identities by understating or erasing the violence that has been a hallmark many Central

American narratives of resistance. The indigenous voice that has been a central proponent of the ecological projects of these other narratives turns into the muted pounding of the waves in the background of Rossi's writings, which helps legitimize and unify diverse people in their efforts to protect their environment. In *La loca de Gandoca*, Rossi's indigenous characters are not paraded about on a central stage, but rather are transformed into an ethnographic backdrop that helps both define and determine how contemporary ecological activists interpret their environment and act to protect it.

Rossi's *La loca de Gandoca* deals with the questionable management practices of the Costa Rican wildlife refuge Gandoca. The "loca" serves as the novel's narrator, retelling the story of her life and how she became an advocate for the Park that is endangered by plans to urbanize the area. The voice of this "loca," Daniela Zermat, challenges the governmental plans to allow vast areas of the refuge to be bulldozed so that an Italian company—ironically named Ecodólares S. A.—can build a commercial center and a tourist resort. The narrator is enraged by the arrangement since she lives in the park on a tract of private land that holds a small, black community. At the beginning of the novel she recounts her first acquaintance with Carlos Manuel, a coworker she later lives with, who brought her to Gandoca to show her the natural beauty and seduce her shortly after she arrived from Europe with her son. Given that Daniela has recently immigrated to the area, Carlos Manuel's importance is that he ties her to both the black community and nature. It is he who dedicates her to Yemanyá, the goddess of the sea who protects her on several occasions.<sup>2</sup> As she tries to see that Costa Rica's laws that preserve the Refuge are enforced, she must struggle against the bureaucracy and red tape that the wealthy land speculators use to defend their economic interests. Frustrated at the novel's end, she takes up a pen and begins to write the novel's first line since she feels that it is her last option to save Gandoca.

Mirroring an actual political struggle concerning the Refugio Manzanillo Gandoca, *La loca* was published before the matter was resolved, inciting an increase in ecological awareness in Costa Rica that led to the eventual cancellation of the proposed development project.<sup>3</sup> Rossi's use of the pen to promote social awareness of an environmental problem is not unique to *La loca*, as she repeated the strategy in her short story "Pasión vial," which was published in the collection *Situaciones conyugales*, to protest a proposed highway overpass slated to be built around San José, threatening to destroy cultural landmarks and tracts of unspoiled nature. The resulting uproar from the story's publication led to the project's termination.

In her article "Otra cara de Costa Rica a través de un testimonio ecofeminista," Sofia Kearns connects *La loca* to the ecofeminist movement and summarizes the text's autobiographical elements, arguing that *La loca* should be viewed as a testimonial novel. Kearns uses the term "ecofeminism" to signify the union between the ecological and feminist schools of thought, which more specifically focuses on ecological destruction resulting from abuses of patriarchal power.<sup>4</sup>

This ecofeminist theme is well developed in *La loca* and allows Kearns to follow a path that closely traces the one Gareth Williams outlined in his examination of *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo*—a trail that ends in the dissolution of race and gender differences. For Kearns, Rossi's novel hinges on the conceptualizations of ecofeminist theory, which in addition to challenging patriarchal control over environmental policy, envisions a new social order based on decentralized power.

One of the central concerns of ecofeminist theory is the social activism that attempts to bring about heterarchy, or a social organization that does not contain hierarchical rankings. In *Literature, Nature and Other: Ecofeminist Critiques*, Patrick Murphy claims that the tendency toward hierarchical measuring stands in the way of heterarchy. He argues that “only by recognizing the existence of the ‘other’ as a self-existent entity can we begin to comprehend a gender heterarchical continuum in which difference exists without binary opposition and hierarchical valorization” (4-5). This system without dominant/subordinate rankings is central to the social and cultural interpretation of ecofeminism. For ecofeminists, the principal threat to the environment is the patriarchal system that devalues individual members of a social network or organisms of an ecosystem in order to maximize its dominance. The understanding of the essentiality of each element of a biological system spills over into the sociocultural realm where each member of a population is of equal importance, challenging traditional hierarchies.

While Murphy and Kearns focus their attention on gender as the arena for their analyses, I will focus on how this idea of heterarchy applies to the presentation of ethnicity in *La loca*. In the case of Rossi's novel, the grass-roots campaign to protect the environment is founded in a space where indigenous, black, *mestizo* and *criollo* voices blend together, losing much of their individuality.

The Limón province's ethnic history is present in a simplified form in *La loca* and Costa Rica's indigenous communities play an important, yet understated, role in Daniela's ecological struggle. In her initial description of Gandoca, Daniela declares that this “sitio más hermoso sobre la tierra era de los negros, era de los indios, era Talamaca...” (13). Daniela's allusion to both the African and indigenous past of Gandoca is important because it summarizes a great portion of the region's history in very general terms, while simultaneously conferring a sense of native ownership over the refuge. In a sense, she is proposing that the refuge does not belong to anybody but rather that it belongs to all. This idea of the communal ownership of Gandoca is repeated later as Daniela writes a letter to the Vice Minister saying that “en mi opinión el Refugio Gandoca seguía siendo un santuario y que había que protegerlo para los costarricenses y para la humanidad” (23).

For Daniela, the importance of the Refuge is closely tied to the ocean's beauty and the awe that it inspires in her. Within *La loca*, the sea as a symbol functions as the novel's bedrock and is tied to the protagonist's identity. In many

ways, the ocean determines who Daniela Zermat is and defines many aspects of her life. From the very beginning of the narration, Daniela is linked to the sea. Following the epigraph and the refrain of “Odiabas los boleros, Carlos Manuel...” Daniela’s first words of narration subtly connect her to water: “Apenas te conozco. Llegué hace unos meses de Europa, sola y con un hijo. Estoy trabajando provisionalmente con mi hermano en su agencia naviera y vos sos el gerente de operaciones” (11). The initial economic dependence on the ocean gives way to a spiritual and relational dependence. Carlos Manuel, her coworker, invites her to accompany him “al lugar más hermoso que hay en el mundo” (12), which the reader later discovers is the Gandoca Wildlife Refuge. On arriving at the beach, Carlos Manuel declares that he is dying of his love for Daniela and then presents her to the sea goddess Yemanyá. He says, “Yemanyá, ella es tu hija. Protegémela siempre, Yemanyá” (12); these words establish a mother/daughter relationship between Yemanyá and Daniela. Carlos Manuel then tells Daniela that Yemanyá has agreed to protect her, but with the condition that she not cut her hair. Following the makeshift dedication, the two talk about Carlos Manuel’s past and his connection to Afro-Caribbean religion from his time in Brazil, and then make love in the ocean. She writes, “Y sellamos nuestra unión en ese mar, el sitio más hermoso del mundo” (13). Daniela’s description of the encounter confers a priestly power on the sea as it is the witness of their conjugal union. Within the first three pages of narration, Daniela brings the ocean to life and establishes it as her mother, protector and bridesmaid all in one.

The way in which Rossi brings the sea to life as a character in her novel is particularly noteworthy in the context of my study in that it is a literary reflection of ecological thought. As the sea gains a voice and a persona in the novel, the importance of protecting this entity becomes increasingly pressing since as a living organism it is a member of the heterarchy that Rossi, like her protagonist, is advocating. Once the sea and the creatures that live in it have become constituents in the ecosystem in which Daniela is living, any attempt to undermine their importance becomes an attempt to create a hierarchy of rankings that, according to ecofeminist thought as outlined earlier, threatens to unbalance the environment. While the ways in which Rossi establishes the ocean as a living being serve as a literary avenue for the presentation of conservational thought, the ocean also has divine qualities that bolster the need to protect it.

The spiritual significance of the ocean is confirmed on several occasions throughout the narration. Yemanyá saves Daniela when she becomes exhausted while snorkeling and deposits her back on the shore (22), counsels her when she no longer knows how to win her political battles to protect the refuge (90-2), and shields her from the voodoo and sabotage of her political enemies (110). Daniela’s description of the ocean at the Gandoca Refuge provides a contrast with other beaches and establishes it as a deeply spiritual place: “Sentarse en las playas del Refugio Gandoca es trascenderlo todo, incluso su propia arbitraria belleza, sus flores y sus algas, eternas, perfumadas, putrescibles” (25). Immediately before

this, Daniela praises some of the ocean's beauty, such as its flowers and algae. This passage emphasizes Gandoca's spiritual value to Daniela as she affirms that it is a place of transcendence.

While the Atlantic is important to Daniela on a spiritual level, she becomes involved in the political battle to protect Gandoca mainly because of the Refuge's natural beauty. From an ecological perspective, the park's land and water are valuable in and of themselves, but this conservational need gains an increased urgency because of the spiritual status of the sea. Rossi's technique here is interesting since the sea, although a deity, needs an advocate that will fight for it. The fact that Yemanyá and the Caribbean have divine qualities and are able to protect Daniela from her enemies is important, but as a goddess Yemanyá also needs protection. The symbiotic relationship that Rossi establishes between Daniela and Yemanyá is remarkable in that it mirrors the heterarchical concepts as outlined by Patrick Murphy.

Yemanyá's appearance in *La loca* is also significant as it establishes a syncretic undertone in the novel that underscores Rossi's de-emphasis of racial differentiation. Yemanyá is a representation of the orisha Yemayá, who is associated with fertility and the sea. Her connection with Daniela demonstrates the ecologist's ability to transcend different cultures in order to accomplish her mission to protect Gandoca. Rossi's appropriation of Yemayá is consistent with ethnographic information provided by Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, who list several of the orisha's attributes that are echoed in *La loca*: Yemayá is the deity of maternity and the sea; she is associated with the moon, judgment and reason; she is a protector who swirls around her children like the waves of the sea (43). These characteristics are faithfully incorporated into Rossi's version of the orisha who watches over Daniela. Yemayá's children are characterized by "a harmonious personality" (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 218), a statement that is descriptive of the novel's protagonist. Daniela's "harmonious personality" stems from her ability to connect various cultures and groups into her conservational campaign.

The syncretic vision that Rossi establishes in *La loca* is indicative of a concerted effort to establish the environmental movement in which Daniela participates as a space that does not rely on divisive hierarchies or social differences. Thus, while the protagonist mirrors the children of Yemayá's harmonious nature, this tendency spills over into the ecological movement as a whole. Syncretism lies at the core of this tendency to accept diverse elements and incorporate them into one world view. As Carsten Colpe has observed,

A tolerant attitude to all that is of value in the world is thus a basic condition for the rise of any syncretism, as well as a basic virtue of the human being who is shaped by syncretism and in turn supports it. In addition, however, an enormous intellectual power is required in order to cement all the elements together into a new type of tradition and, further, to maintain the combination of the erudite and the popular. (8933)

Colpe chooses to view syncretism as the result of tolerance and the acceptance of “all that is of value,” a condition that resonates in *La loca*’s protagonist. It is important to note, however, that “syncretism” has also been used as a pejorative term that reflects power structures that are in place in a given society, as noted by Peter Wade:

This highlights the important role played in the process of ‘syncretism’ by power relations which can, for instance, define some traditions as authentic but folkloric (and hence controllable), others as authentic and orthodox (and hence hegemonic), and yet others as impure and debased (and hence to be suppressed or ignored). Power is, then, a crucial issue, and I believe that to talk of syncretism without talking of the social relations, including those of power, within which it occurs is misguided. (122)

Wade’s point is well taken and of interest to my study as a counterexample of the space that Rossi attempts to configure through her own presentation of syncretism in *La loca*. The fact that hierarchical structures are able to use syncretism to support their own value systems by dismissing certain elements as “folkloric” or “impure” indicates the extent of control they exert on cultural thought. Yet in spite of this tendency to devalue outside religions as “folkloric”, Rossi’s novel is devoid of such judgments as to the value of the orisha tradition. This unwavering acceptance of diverse cultural elements is indicative of Rossi’s attempt to create an accepting space for all social groups. This valuation of different, marginalized religions parallels Daniela’s insistence on the importance of all creatures in the Gandoca ecosystem.

As “la loca” begins her campaign to save Gandoca from development, she draws on the importance of all of the organisms that are contained in Gandoca’s environs. When Daniela first challenges the proposed development of certain sections of the park she asks several questions that draw attention to the area’s diversity and beauty:

¿Y la vida silvestre? ¿Las tortugas marinas que dependen de los verdes repastos babosos? ¿El manglar? ¿Las esponjas de todos los colores, las algas? ¿El olor embriagante de las flores al caer el sol? ¿Las ipomeas, los lirios, las anonas de mar, los yolillales, los pantanos, los sajales, los cativos, los sangríos, los cedros machos, las orquídeas, los tepezcuintles, los osos mieleros, los manatís? ¿Los criques que salen al mar por una boca distinta cada vez que llueve? (21)

This concern for Gandoca draws attention to the interconnectedness of all of the biological components of the refuge’s ecosystem. Indeed, species loss is one of the central concerns for the novel’s ecological activists. The interdependence of organisms is often repeated as one of the principal dangers of the planned development. Álvaro Cienfuegos, an ecologist consulted by Daniela, indicates that the reef’s health is dependent on the shore’s trees (27), and Carlos Manuel’s

sickness intensifies as the ecological attacks on the Refuge increase (38). Furthermore, Cienfuegos' appearance in the text reaffirms Daniela's position about the importance of the environment from the authoritative perspective of a scientific expert. While Cienfuegos validates and legitimizes Daniela's concerns for the future of the Gandoca Refuge, his expertise also advances the novel's political purposes as he backs up the message that *la loca* is attempting to convey.

In spite of Cienfuegos' message on the ecological impact of building in the park, plans do not change. The Atlantic with its reef full of coral and algae, fish, urchins and crustaceans lies at the center of the ecological crisis, and is also the central attraction for Gandoca. The developers, an Italian company named Ecodólares, desperately try to coerce government officials to approve their plans without providing the necessary ecological impact statement.

The developers from Ecodólares implement the tactic of "greenwashing" their project in *La loca* so that it appears to be more ecologically motivated than it actually is, a strategy in which government officials also take part. Daniela finally becomes aware of the Ecodólares plan for development after it is approved by the government, in spite of the lack of several important documents such as an ecological impact study. When she challenges the government officials who are in charge of the project approval, they understate the impact of the project, calling it a "hotelito" (47) and "totalmente ecológico" (47).

These understatements are challenged by the protagonist, who argues that the plans are for a sweeping urbanization of the area: "No, señor Ministro, es que usted no ha visto los planos bien. Van a hacer un salón de patines de hielo, varias discotecas, canchas de tennis y miles de lotes sin árboles y rellenaditos de grava" (47). Rossi's incorporation of the dialogue between government officials who attempt to minimize the project's environmental impact and Daniela, who calls their bluff, demonstrates a careful attention to the dialogues of ecological development. The inclusion of the Italian company Ecodólares, which by its very name suggests an ecologically conscious strategy for marketing Costa Rica's wilderness, draws attention to the fact that governmental and corporate entities make use of "greenwashing" strategies to their own financial benefit. Daniela's observations on the matter illustrate the corruption behind the project's approval: "América Latina es tierra de tiranos. Los tiranos se caracterizan por decir, ante un objeto que es por ejemplo verde, que el objeto es azul. Castigo al que no vea de color azul. La compañía 'Ecodólares' presenta los planos de una urbanización. El Ministro dice que esa urbanización no existe, que es un hotel" (48-49).

Shortly after this observation, Daniela offers the following commentary on the plan's ultimate effects: "Se devuelven a Europa con ese platal ... de una inversión de cuarenta mil colones pueden sacar seis o siete millones. Se van y dejan a los costarricenses el problema de la contaminación urbana y la destrucción del Refugio" (55).

While Rossi establishes the ocean as the key draw for developers and speculators, she also uses it as the source of the solution to the battle which

Daniela spearheads, for it is Yemanyá who gives Daniela advice on how to proceed with her legal challenge. The encounter between protagonist and goddess recalls the emphasis on the value of all life forms and reasserts the spiritual significance of the sea, once again underlining the importance of a heterarchical view of the environment that does not underestimate the importance of any one organism. When Daniela feels she will lose the legal challenge, endangering the ecosystem's future, she turns to Yemanyá for advice, entering the goddess's realm in a worshipful posture:

Empiezo invocando las estrellas de mar enrolladas antaño en mis muñecas. Sigo con los pulpos, los que he cazado para comer y los que he perseguido para observarlos. Paso a las anémonas, a las esponjas, al coral con su dibujo tortuoso como un cerebro o sus márgenes crespos y amarillos, al coral como mesas extendidas, como sillones redondos, paso a la infinita variedad multicolor de organismos que se agitan y ondulan, madre del mar, mi única señora. Tu largo pelo verde está tibio y baboso, son hebras de thalassia, el mar teje tu pelo. (91)

Yemanyá, more than a goddess of the sea, becomes the sea itself, and her reply to Daniela is to continue her efforts to convince the Tribunal to protect Gandoca. Yemanyá's answer to Daniela's problems is merely to continue to do what she has been doing, hoping for different results. On a discursive level, Yemanyá's advice is a reminder of the strategy that Rossi herself had to abandon due to the roadblocks that were placed in her path as she tried to convince government officials to change their policy that allows development within the refuge.

As the plans to develop the Refuge advance, the political stakes become more significant, to the point where Daniela fears that Gandoca no longer belongs to Costa Rica:

No, esta región ya no nos pertenece. Primero dejó de ser de los indios, luego dejó de ser de los negros, después dejó de ser de los costarricenses en general. Eso lo vi en los ojos del policía de Puerto Viejo cuando vino a esposarme y meterme en prisión por oponerme a los destrozos que hacía una francesa que no tiene ni un año de vivir aquí. 'No obstaculice la inversión extranjera, señora, circule, circule. (99)

This is a crucial passage since it both summarizes the ethnic history of the region and vocalizes the dangers inherent in the current political plans for encouraging the influx of foreign money to the region. But this "progress" threatens the very ownership of the land and authorizes a potential recurrence of the mistakes made by the governments that had sold out to the United Fruit Company and other transnational corporations. At the same time, it undercuts the claims that international interests have in the region due to the legitimization of the Refuge's ownership by Daniela and other Costa Ricans. Within the novel's context, local residents are presented as the most fitting heirs of their landscape since they share in

a genealogy of sorts that proceeds from indigenous to black to all Costa Ricans. Rossi's inclusion of this historical progression of the local inhabitants highlights the legitimacy of modern-day Costa Rican ownership of the Refuge. This transfer of land rights, while subtly presented in the text, hinges on the fact that these movements were never brought about through violence or deception. Shortly after her observation that Costa Rica is losing control of its own land, Daniela reinforces this feeling of vulnerability by stating that she feels "pequeña, frágil, nativa" (99).

The connection that Daniela feels with the region's native population bolsters her resolve and legitimizes her voice as an environmental activist. Her bond with Yemanyá and the sea, while forming the foundation of her political convictions, heads inland with the arrival of the *dueño de monte*, who approaches to tell her that she has allies who will provide help. The *dueño* urges Daniela to make sure that her readers realize that he is more than a metaphor or stylistic device (100) and is actually "un espíritu de los bosques" (100) who warns her that if she fails to protect Gandoca, all national parks will fall prey to foreign development. Shortly after this episode, Daniela is alienated by the government and her community and realizes that "los intereses comerciales parecen triunfar sobre la salud, la belleza, la vida. Ahora solamente 'me queda la palabra'" (105). Daniela's realization that she is only left with "words" foreshadows the novel's final paragraph, "Le hago caso. Me levanto, voy a mi casa, saco papel y un bolígrafo y empiezo. Se me hace un nudo en la garganta. Empiezo por el principio. Escribo: 'Odiabas los boleros, Carlos Manuel...'" (139). Daniela's recording of her story draws us back to Kearns' explanation of the reception of the text in Costa Rica, which resulted in the cancellation of the proposed development project. In this sense, *La loca* is not a self-contained novel that presents a neat closure; rather, it is a call to action for Costa Ricans to protect the natural areas that are rightfully theirs.

While the legitimacy Daniela's voice is based, to some extent, on her connection to Costa Rica's indigenous cultures, the native voice—as well as the Afro-Caribbean perspective—becomes subsumed in the plight to protect the environment, assuming positions that reaffirm Murphy's ecofeminist vision of a rewriting of society "in which difference exists without binary opposition and hierarchical valorization" (5). But this new societal structure, which comes about as the result of the ecological activism, mirrors the dissolution of *indigenismo* as proposed by Gareth Williams in his analysis of *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo*, even though it results from an environmental plight rather than from a capitalistic superstructure. The indigenous voice, far from being the principal legitimate commentator on the environment like it has been in the novels previously examined, is merely part of the chorus of advocates for environmental responsibility.

It is important to note, however, that the push for conservation comes from marginalized subjects: Indians, blacks and women. In *La loca*, as well as in many of Rossi's other stories, male characters often adhere to the political power structures that maintain their authority. Thus, while several male characters, such as the scientist Sergei Domeniev and her lover Carlos Manuel, support Daniela, the overwhelming

majority of men is in favor of the current governmental policies and hinders the protagonist's quest. Due to the difficulties that she experiences in trying to work from within the government to bring about policy change, near the end of the novel Daniela takes on the identity of Jorge Boscoso. With this new masculine identity she is able to regain access to the offices of the Parks Department and discovers many of the shortcomings of her activities to halt the development project. Thus, while strides have been made within the green movement to devalue the patriarchal hierarchies, these changes occur slowly and have not yet taken place within the governmental hierarchies.

Even though the ecofeminist project has influenced change within the grassroots movements that seek to protect Costa Rica's environment, it still falls short of a complete reworking of Costa Rican society, not achieving the aims that Murphy outlines of "exposing, critiquing, and ending the oppression of women, overthrowing patriarchy and phallogentrism, demand male recognition of the other as not only different in more ways than binary configurations can recognize, but also of equal ontological status" (5). While Daniela shares a connection with the Bribri and Cabécar tribes of Costa Rica, these ethnic identities begin to dissolve as they become environmental activists, with a new identity of environmental protector emerging.

This perceived fading of indigenous identities brings me back to my original concern regarding the indigenous voice in Rossi's ecologically driven narrative: does the ecological movement in *La loca* undermine racial differentiation that is key to the *indigenista* movement's survival? While it is clear that Rossi does incorporate indigenous aspects into her novel, these efforts remain superficial and fail to firmly establish an indigenous identity or racial differentiation. Daniela's connection to the indigenous and black communities who have inhabited Gandoca does little to define her as someone who is uniquely tied to the land in an "indigenous way." In *La loca de Gandoca* there is an understating of the importance of the difference between indigenous and non-indigenous characters. While other Central American authors such as Manlio Argueda, Arturo Arias, Miguel Ángel Asturias and Gioconda Belli have all used these racial categories to legitimize the ecological concerns expressed in their narratives, in Rossi's writings these racial distinctions disappear. It is a collective voice that lays claim to Costa Rica's landscape and argues for its conservation. It is on the shoreline of the Gandoca Refuge in southern Costa Rica that the ethnic differentiation of the *indigenista* movement disappears, perhaps returning to the same waters from which it emerged with the arrival of the first Spanish explorers.

#### NOTES:

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Raup Wagner, in *The Life and Writings of Bartolomé de las Casas*, answers the question of whether de las Casas succeeded in bringing about significant change for indigenous subjects as follows: "Certainly, though he never managed to have his main principles put into full practical operation, he accomplished a great deal of good. His work did bring about an amelioration in the status of Indians, and a great many protective measures" (247).

<sup>2</sup> The importance of the narrator's connections to African mythology should not be understated, since it serves as an example of the disintegration of racial differentiation. Daniela, due to

her connections to her partner and the landscape that surrounds her, stands at the intersection of European, African and American traditions, and as such embodies all three traditions, eliminating a clear sense of racial categories.

<sup>3</sup> Sofia Kearns summarizes the novel's impact as follows: "[it] created a national outcry in Costa Rica, which led to the halting of all large-scale tourist projects within the wildlife refuge, saving it from destruction" (262).

<sup>4</sup> The term "ecofeminism" was first coined by the French feminist François d'Eaubonne in her 1974 book *Le Féminisme ou la mort*. Barbara Gates (15-22) provides a summary of d'Eaubonne's pioneering work and subsequent variations of her ideas. Gates emphasizes the following as the two most common components of the iterations of ecofeminism: 1) "the necessity for social transformation by moving beyond power politics and an equivalent necessity for less 'management' of the land," and 2) "an appreciation for the intrinsic value of everything in nature" (21).

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