

A Transgendered Soundtrack of Resistance to Pinochet's Chile: Music and the Radio in Pedro Lemebel's *Tengo miedo torero*

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Set in 1986, thirteen years into Pinochet's dictatorship, Pedro Lemebel's *Tengo miedo torero* (2001) presents as its protagonist a trans woman known as "la Loca del Frente" who finds herself involved in a failed plot to assassinate the dictator. Over the course of the novel, la Loca undergoes a political awakening, evolving from a position of politically neutral irritation with the leftist resistance movement to active participation in the assassination plot. In addition, as she becomes more aligned with the political resistance and detached from the dominant political forces, she also comes to a more resistant understanding of her own womanhood. Throughout the novel, the protagonist's relationship with music and the radio evolves along with her political transformation and her complex relationship with Carlos, the attractive young Communist revolutionary who slowly draws la Loca into the subversive plan to assassinate Chile's dictator. In this article, I examine how la Loca's apolitical passion for eroticized bolero ballads and her physical attraction for Carlos evolve towards both an ideological and a gender identity awakening, as the protagonist ultimately puts her beloved music to the service of Carlos and the resistance movement while she concurrently comes to more complete acceptance of her own womanhood. To this end, I consider how la Loca's gender is presented and understood by the narrator and by other characters in order to place the novel within the

framework of attitudes towards transsexualism posited by trans theorists Sandy Stone and Talia Mae Bettcher.

Sandy Stone, in her “Posttranssexual Manifesto (1992)” explains that traditional approaches to transsexualism have shared certain similarities with colonial discourse in that transsexual subjects are often first treated as exotic objects of fascination and then denied subjectivity and access to the dominant discourse (297). Under these traditional approaches, trans people are “infantilized, considered too illogical or irresponsible to achieve true subjectivity” (298). Furthermore, the “wrong body” terminology, in which trans subjects are believed to have been born with an incorrect set of physical attributes, also suggests a phallogentric and overly binary characterization of gender differentiation. Stone therefore advocates for abandoning the “wrong body” descriptive categorization of transsexuality in favor of “a deeper analytical language for transsexual theory, one that allows for the sorts of ambiguities and polyvocalities that have already so productively informed and enriched feminist theory” (300).

Similarly, and more recently, Talia Mae Bettcher, drawing on Stone’s groundbreaking work, rejects what she describes as the two dominant models of transsexuality. According to Bettcher, both the “Wrong Body Model” and the “Transgender Model” accept a “single-meaning position” with regard to gender. While the latter model embraces a new non-binary category of gender, it forces trans individuals into this new category rather than allowing them to identify as male or female. Therefore, with each gender term assumed to have only one meaning, both of these models presuppose “the dominant meaning of gender terms while erasing resistant ones” (234). Bettcher proposes instead a “Multiple-Meaning Model” in which trans people can reject the entire dominant gender system in favor of the system accepted in trans subcultures. In this view, Bettcher explains, “a trans woman can say that she is a woman in *all* legitimate contexts because those contexts in which she is not a woman occur in a dominant culture that has been rejected” (243). Bettcher’s “Multiple-Meaning Model,” in which the term ‘woman’ can hold many different meanings, appears to provide the deeper analytical language for transsexualism that Stone had envisioned and hoped for in her “Manifesto.”

Lemebel’s novel presents a protagonist that finds herself evolving toward Bettcher’s Multiple-Meaning Model of transsexuality within the largely homophobic and transphobic world of dictatorship Chile. For example, while in other portions of the narrative the unnamed dictator of

the country ejects a military cadet from his service for displaying effeminate mannerisms and expresses disgust for trans individuals, the protagonist begins to resist and reject contexts that deny her womanhood and embrace ones that affirm it. She does this even when these acts of resistance and rejection put her life in peril, make her question her political beliefs, or cause her to lose the object of her desire.

As la Loca's gender identity is complex and not wholly unrelated to her national identity in the novel, it is important to supplement Stone and Bettcher's theories of trans studies with a discussion of the Latin American concept of *la loca*. In his work on queer Latino American narratives, Ben Sifuentes-Juáregui examines the taxonomy of *locas* laid out by Cuban author Reinaldo Arenas in his autobiography *Before Night Falls*. Although Sifuentes-Juáregui refuses an attempt at translating the term *loca* because such labels cannot be unattached from the culture in which they are used, he describes the *loca* as "not just a man who has sex with other men, but rather one who assumes membership in a particular subculture, one of whose traits is effeminate... role-playing and gender enactment" (201). Sifuentes-Juáregui concludes that Arenas's categorization of *locas* is not based on the openness of their homosexuality, as could commonly be expected in a classification of different types of queerness. Instead, he determines that Arenas categorizes his *locas* based on their proximity to the Castro regime in Cuba. Arenas's taxonomy is, therefore, a political one, rather than a purely sexual or cultural one. While Lemebel's *locas* are located in Pinochet's Chile rather than Castro's Cuba, the possible political implications of la Loca's identity as a *loca* are not to be overlooked, as the protagonist's realization of her womanhood is accompanied and bolstered by her political awakening and the understanding of her participation in politically subversive activities. Furthermore, la Loca's transformation in the novel is juxtaposed with what Vinodh Venkatesh describes in *The Body as Capital* as a queering of both the macho Communist rebel, Carlos, and of the dictator Pinochet himself (49). In this way, all the main characters of the novel find some aspect of their sexual orientation or gender identity questioned, even the ones who present in the most heteronormative and gender conforming manner possible.

Throughout the novel, the protagonist of *Tengo miedo torero* moves back and forth between a dominant culture that rejects her womanhood and a trans subculture that recognizes her as a woman. La Loca's neighbors recognize her sexual attraction towards men and her effeminate

dress and mannerisms but consider her a homosexual man, not a woman. The narrator voices the neighborhood's commentary on the new resident in this way: "Solamente le falta el novio, cuchicheaban las viejas . . . pero es **simpático**" (my emphasis, 8). The masculine adjective employed by these neighbors implies that although they refer to the protagonist using the grammatically feminine moniker of *la Loca*, they consider *locas* to be homosexual men. These neighbors are representative of Chile's wider general population that has little to no understanding or acceptance of trans individuals during the mid-1980s in which the novel is set.

While her new neighbors represent traditional attitudes towards homosexuality and transsexuality in Chilean society, *la Loca* also moves in a more marginal circle of friends from her days living on the street. In an interview with Chilean author Andrea Jęftanovic, Lemebel describes a type of marginal group within the homosexual world that he refers to as "prostibular transvestism" and explains that this population is segregated within the gay community (76). Along with the protagonist herself, *la Lupe*, *la Fabiola* and *la Rana*, whom *la Loca* refers to as "sus únicas hermanas colas," appear to belong to this marginal world of prostibular transvestism (Lemebel 75). By referring to her friends in this way, *la Loca*, speaking through the narrator, appropriates the despective term *cola*, which is used in Chile to refer to an extravagantly effeminate homosexual, and further feminizes her friends and her membership within this class with the use of the word *hermanas*.

Furthermore, *cola* is a word originally created in Chile through an inversion of the syllables of *loca*, which has the same meaning as *cola* and has been appropriated to a greater degree than *cola* by the Chilean LGBT community. According to Lemebel, his own appropriation of words typically associated with aggression towards homosexuals serves to discharge the brutal energy of those terms (Jęftanovic 76). The name he confers on his protagonist in *Tengo miedo torero* is, without a doubt, a prime example of such an appropriation. Within *la Loca*'s trans subculture of friends, the protagonist is treated linguistically as a woman, even when one of them is urging Carlos not to take advantage of *la Loca*'s infatuation with him. *La Rana* tells him, "Mire mijo . . . a **esta chiquilla la** quiero como a **una hija** . . . no **la** haga sufrir . . . no **la** entusiasme" (my emphasis, 148). Not only does *la Rana* use female terms and pronouns for *la Loca*, but she appears to emphasize the protagonist's female identity through an abundance of grammatically female references to her.

Carlos, on the other hand, comes to straddle both the dominant and the resistant gender cultures, employing masculine pronouns for la Loca with others while addressing her with feminine language during their extended sessions of campy role-play. In response to la Rana's request that he not cause la Loca undue heartache, and despite la Rana's abundant references to her friend as a female subject, Carlos employs a masculine pronoun for la Loca in his response to la Rana, when he defensively claims: "pero yo nunca **lo** he ilusionado" (my emphasis, 148). In the latter half of the novel, as Carlos and la Loca become closer, in their theatrical dialogues he addresses her with the female terms: *reina*, *princesa*, *mi señora*, or *amiga princesa*. As for the narrator, he or she uses almost exclusively female pronouns to refer to the protagonist, with only a small handful of instances where masculine pronouns are employed.

Similarly, the protagonist generally appears to think about herself with female language but occasionally employs masculine endings and pronouns, and decidedly presents herself linguistically as a man with members of the dominant gender culture. Venkatesh explains his selection of the term 'transvestite' to refer to la Loca, rather than the option of 'transgendered person,' was due to the protagonist's repeated disidentification with women, though he notes the possible inappropriateness of the term selected (*The Body as Capital* 45). Nevertheless, while the protagonist does refer to herself with masculine language on occasion, much more often she presents linguistically as a female. Notably, when la Loca reflects on her defiant act of refusing to deliver an embroidered tablecloth that the wife of a general had commissioned from her, the narration demonstrates a confusion between the narrator and the protagonist in which both waffle back and forth with respect to the gender pronouns employed for la Loca: "¿Por qué le bajó ese soponcio de loca que tal vez **la** había hecho perder a su mejor clienta? A la señora Catita, que se iba a poner furia con **él** por no haberle entregado el mantel. ¡Bah!, vieja de mierda. ¿Qué se cree que **una** la va a esperar toda la tarde . . . ?" (my emphasis, 66-7). The insertion of the masculine pronoun *él* to refer to the protagonist in the sentence referencing the general's wife's anger sandwiched in between two references to la Loca with feminine pronouns demonstrates la Loca's presentation of herself as masculine as a reflexive act of subordination to the dominant political system. She reverts to the feminine *una* in the final sentence as she commits to her act of political defiance towards the general's wife.

According to Katerín Barrera, through her feminine discourse and simply by her sexual orientation and identity, the protagonist rejects her traditional masculine gender assignment, and in her transgression, she positions herself as challenging the dominant order and national identity of her patriarchal nation: “Por ser homosexual y una ‘loca’ la protagonista desafía de forma inconsciente – en un principio – el sistema macho dictatorial” (Barrera 47). Similarly, Berta López Morales states that Lemebel’s novel constructs the trans identity of la Loca by the use of language rather than by the use of dress (90). Within the Multiple-Meaning framework offered by Bettcher we can interpret this linguistic manifestation of the protagonist’s gender identity as la Loca taking up a position of resistance against the dominant gender culture. Nevertheless, the protagonist’s inconsistent and selective use of this feminine discourse indicates that la Loca’s rejection of the dominant gender culture is incomplete.

Moreover, early in the novel, the protagonist’s resistance to the dominant gender culture does not translate into a resistance against the dominant political culture, and this is demonstrated by the protagonist’s ambivalent attitude towards the radio. While on the one hand la Loca embraces the radio for its power to bring her love ballads, she is irritated by the political radio station, with its protest songs and disturbing news broadcasts. For example, during a scene in which Carlos brings his revolutionary friends to hold meetings at her house, la Loca expresses annoyance when they turn the radio dial from her love songs to news of street violence related to the resistance movement: “Entonces ellos le cortaban la inspiración cambiando el dial, sintonizando ese horror de noticias” (12). While la Loca quickly develops a strong emotional and physical attraction toward Carlos, she expresses in the beginning of the novel indifference and irritation towards the political resistance with which Carlos is affiliated and the radio to which he listens: “Pero ella no estaba ni ahí con la contingencia política. Más bien le daba susto escuchar esa radio que daba puras malas noticias” (9). At this early point in the novel, the narrator establishes a clear division with regard to the radio; for la Loca the radio’s purpose is to offer romantic boleros, while for Carlos the radio serves to provide news of the political resistance mixed with the protest songs that bolster the resistance movement. In a discussion on popular music as literary intertexts in Caribbean texts, Venkatesh points out that the bolero is “a highly erotic genre of musical expression” that explores sexual desire and often functions intertextually as a “register for

and a repository of many of the questions and polemics that plague identitarian politics in Latin America” (*The Body* 70). Indeed, for la Loca, the boleros she both listens to and sings provide the soundtrack to the love story she imagines that she and Carlos are sharing. Seen in this way, the tension between la Loca and Carlos over the use of the radio is that of a struggle between issues of sexual identity and the fight for political identity.

As the novel progresses, though, the protagonist becomes increasingly tolerant of and ultimately dependent on resistance radio. While riding in a car with Carlos, unwittingly accompanying him on a reconnaissance mission as part of the planning of the assassination attempt on Pinochet, la Loca struggles to find her music on the car radio, but then admits that she finds herself strangely comforted by the political broadcasts: “. . . de tanto oír esa radio, ella se había acostumbrado a soportarla. Es más, cuando no encontraba su música preferida . . . la voz de Sergio Campos era un bálsamo protector en esas tinieblas de guerra” (27). In this way, Sergio Campos, the soothingly protective voice of the oppositional Radio Cooperativa, serves as a stand-in love interest for la Loca when her erotic ballads are unavailable. Just as her physical and romantic attraction to Carlos helps awaken her ideological resistance to the dictatorship, Campos endows the oppositional radio with a seductive voice. While la Loca still prefers her romantic boleros, she now finds the resistance radio and its denunciation of human rights violations to be a source of comfort rather than one that simply provoked fear or annoyance in her.

As Carlos pulls up to the protagonist’s house to drop her back off at home after the picnic in the countryside that he had orchestrated in order to scope out the location of the future assassination plot, Carlos listens attentively to a breaking news story. The urgent radio broadcast reports on a police raid in which weapons and documents were seized from members of the anti-Pinochet resistance group, Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez (FPMR) (37). La Loca, however, fails to realize the relevance of the news story to Carlos as well as to the mysterious boxes and other items that Carlos and his friends are storing in her house: “Ella también escuchó, pero no le hizo caso. Ninguna noticia iba a opacar ese romántico momento del adiós” (37). In essence, she refuses at this point in the novel to let issues of political resistance get in the way of her romantic view of herself and her relationship with Carlos. The political news simply interrupts the soundtrack of her imagined love story.

A few days later, though, when Carlos fails to reappear after leaving abruptly upon hearing the news of the raid, the protagonist listens to a news broadcast regarding a disturbance between students and the military police that resulted in injury and arrest of numerous students, and la Loca wonders if Carlos might have been involved. Shortly thereafter, when the protagonist is riding a city bus and is angered by a wealthy older woman's criticisms of student protesters, without thinking she launches into a political commentary, advocating for a need to challenge the violence of the dictatorship. La Loca's sudden foray into the political realm takes her by surprise: "La Loca del Frente se asustó al decir eso, porque en realidad nunca se había metido en política, pero el alegato le salió del alma" (60). Furthermore, this moment represents the protagonist's awakening as a political actor of the resistance, though she also relishes the thought that Carlos would be proud of her, thereby linking her political motivation back to her romantic feelings towards Carlos. It is noteworthy that, in this scene, the narrator identifies the protagonist with her full moniker, 'la Loca del Frente'. The epithet of 'del Frente' is a play on words in which la Loca is either considered a neighbor *loca* from across the way or a *loca* at the service of the political front. The use of 'del Frente' to describe la Loca as she delivers a public tirade against the dictatorship is clearly tapping into the political connotation of her name precisely in the moment in which she begins to act politically.

As her infatuation with Carlos grows, la Loca's interest in political news does as well. She begins to actively seek out Radio Cooperativa for news of the resistance movement, and she becomes emotional upon hearing stories of the women planning a demonstration to demand justice for their disappeared loved ones: "De tanto escuchar transmisiones sobre ese tema, había logrado sensibilizarse, emocionarse hasta vidriar sus ojos, escuchando los testimonios de esas señoras a quienes les habían arrebatado . . . algún familiar en la noche espesa de la dictadura" (123). Moreover, her attitude towards the government also undergoes a change, as she recognizes that she now refers to it as a dictatorship and not a military government as one of her more conservative friends does: "Ahora se atrevía a decir dictadura y no gobierno militar, como lo llamaba la Lupe, esa loca tan miliguera, tan de derecha" (123). La Loca's emotional connection with Carlos and with the women of the resistance, along with her recognition and rejection of the military dictatorship, go hand in hand with her evolving relationship with the radio.

A major turning point in the novel occurs in the scene referenced earlier in which the protagonist suddenly decides not to turn over an embroidered tablecloth that a general's wife had commissioned for an event commemorating the September 11 coup. As she waits in the general's home for his wife to appear, la Loca imagines that beloved white tablecloth—that tablecloth embroidered with little birds, that tablecloth that she and Carlos had used for their picnic in the countryside—has been stained with the literal wine and figurative blood of a party in honor of the dictatorship. “El vino rojo salpicaba el mantel, el vino lacre rezumaba en manchas de coágulos donde se ahogaban sus pajaritos” (65). Moreover, “. . . el albo lienzo era la sábana violácea de un crimen, la mortaja empapada de patria donde naufragaban sus pájaros” (66). Illusions of bloodstains and drowning and floundering embroidered birds on her beloved white tablecloth cause la Loca to run out of the general's home, with the knowledge that she is not only losing the money from that particular commission but that she is also choosing to side with Carlos and the other the revolutionaries and against the military dictatorship. In her refusal to sell the tablecloth to the general's wife she is also freeing her carefully and lovingly embroidered birds from the fate that she has imagined that they would suffer in that home.

Soon thereafter, in a moment in which the protagonist turns to music as an emotional escape, she realizes that she is also no longer able to divorce love songs from political concerns. In essence, the political has infiltrated her soundtrack of love. In order to change the subject from a conversation about the weapons la Loca unwittingly had in her possession and her fear of having to use one, she turns on the car radio. The lyrics of Luis Sepúlveda's song “Si Dios me quita la vida” then appear in the text, and the song's reflection on mortality appears to remind both Carlos and la Loca of the high stakes and dangers of the assassination plot in which they are both involved: “La música los envolvió con su timbaleada ranchera, entre la canción y sus pensamientos, la historia política trenzaba emociones” (151). The radio, in this moment, ceases to be a means of escape from political concerns for the protagonist and becomes instead a reminder of her own involvement in the political tensions.

In her state of newly awakened political awareness, the protagonist wanders through the streets of Santiago and happens upon political resistance pamphlets scattered on the ground. As she reaches down to pick one up a military police officer pokes her with his nightstick and insults her as a male homosexual. The narration employs a male pronoun for the

protagonist at this point, reflecting the officer's view of her as a male subject "¡Bótalo, maricón culiao!, le gritó el paco mirándolo con furia" (my emphasis, 164). Feeling humiliated, angry, and disconnected from her female identity, la Loca then stumbles upon a protest group of women demanding justice for the disappeared, and a woman from the demonstration immediately invites the protagonist into the group. In this critical scene, as she accepts a photograph of someone else's disappeared loved one, la Loca publicly and unabashedly establishes herself as a woman of the resistance, a member of both the resistant political class and the resistant gender class. ". . . [Y] casi sin pensarlo, la loca tomó un cartel con la foto de un desaparecido y dejó que su garganta colisa se acoplara al griterío de las mujeres. Era extraño, pero allí, en medio de las señoras, no sentía vergüenza de alzar su voz mariflauta y sumarse al descontento" (165). Unlike her neighbors and the police officer, who see her and deride her as a homosexual male, or Carlos, who cares for her but only treats her as a woman for theatrical purposes, these women instantly accept la Loca as a fellow woman, and she comfortably adds her feminized voice to theirs.

As la Loca eases into her womanhood, and as she establishes herself as a member of the political resistance, and by extension as a dedicated listener of Radio Cooperativa, Carlos also becomes more in tune with the protagonist's beloved ballads. When la Loca angrily expresses to Carlos that she feels that he has used her, Carlos responds that he has come to care for her and for her music: ". . . en todo este tiempo te he tomado cariño. Hemos compartido tantas cosas, tu música, hasta me he aprendido de memoria algunas canciones" (88). Carlos' subsequent off-key rendition of César Portillo de la Luz's "Contigo en la distancia" provokes an intimate moment of laughter, friendly caresses, and tickling between the two. Later, when Carlos acknowledges to her that he and she both are part of the anti-Pinochet militant organization Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez and might need a secret countersign that only the two of them know, la Loca proposes "Tengo miedo torero," the title of one of her favorite songs (Lemebel 100). This selection unites the two of them in political resistance through one of the protagonist's love ballads.

Notably, the lyrics that appear in the text are a slightly altered version of the original song penned in 1945 by the Spanish composer Augusto Algueró (1934-2011) and sung by well-known artists such as Lola Flores, Sara Montiel, and Carmen Sevilla. Whereas the original lyrics of "tengo miedo de que al borde de la tarde el temido grito flote" evoke the fear on

the part of the bullfighter's beloved that the matador will succumb to the bull, la Loca's rewriting of the song trivializes the lover's anxiety. At two points in the novel, in the exposition of the novel as the first words sung by la Loca and then when she proposes the title of the song as a secret countersign for their revolutionary activities, the lyrics appear as "tengo miedo de que en la tarde tu risa flote" (Lemebel 8). While maintaining the rhyme, the shift from the dreaded yell of the original to the laughter of la Loca's version of the song is in line with the protagonist's desire in the beginning of the novel to distance herself from the dangers of the political reality that surrounds her. Furthermore, at these points in the text, the lyrics can be interpreted as casting Carlos in the hypermasculine role of the bullfighter and la Loca as the female lover fearful for his safety.

Once Carlos and La Loca establish their theatrical rapport of princess and her coachman, he addresses her using female terms. That and his increasing willingness in the latter part of the novel to share with her information regarding the clandestine group are signs that Carlos has moved past a traditional treatment of La Loca as a trans individual into what Stone would describe as a more (though incomplete) posttranssexual treatment of her. Earlier in the novel La Loca felt that Carlos and the other members of the militant movement thought she was too stupid to explain why they needed her house. This is strikingly similar to Stone's descriptions of how early accounts of transsexuals infantilized the transsexual subjects, considering them "too illogical or too irresponsible to achieve true subjectivity" (297-8). By the novel's end, and through the convergence of la Loca's love ballads and Carlos' resistance radio, the protagonist achieves a certain degree of subjectivity and agency as a trans woman resistant to both the dominant gender culture and the dominant political culture as she gives up the stance of willful ignorance with which she begins the novel.

Despite these advances in subjectivity and agency on the part of the protagonist, she is never able to change the dominant culture either with regard to politics or to gender. Politically, the resistance movement experiences a substantial setback when the assassination plot fails and everyone involved in the attempt, including la Loca, is forced into hiding or exile. With regard to the protagonist's gender identity, although Carlos treats her as a female, it is only as part of their theatrical rapport, as he always employs male pronouns when speaking about her to other people. It is interesting to note that after the failed assassination plot, when true fear has set in for both of them, Carlos switches up the roles of the title

song, identifying himself to la Loca with an altered version of the countersign in the form of the whispered question, “¿Tienes miedo torero?” (201). With this question, Carlos thrusts la Loca into the masculine role of the matador while implicitly placing himself in the feminized role of the fearful lover. In addition, Carlos’s question casts political agency on the protagonist, in essence acknowledging her actions in support of the subversives that have exposed her to great danger. In this way, Carlos is able to recognize la Loca as a political actor, and is even able to queer himself to a degree to acknowledge his affection for her, but he is still not able to see her as a woman.

Furthermore, la Loca turns down Carlos’ last minute invitation to leave with him for Cuba precisely because she realizes that, although he treats her as a female as part of their theatrical rapport, he is incapable of loving her the way that she wants to be loved, as a woman. Carlos loving her both romantically and sexually would indicate the ultimate realization of la Loca’s womanhood. Nevertheless, the protagonist’s attempts on that score have failed just as devastatingly as the unsuccessful assassination plot. In the final pages of the novel, la Loca makes explicit the parallel between the resistance movement’s political project and her personal romantic one when she asks Carlos: “¿Te fijas cariño que a mí también me falló el atentado?” (216). By comparing her efforts to seduce Carlos and have him love her as a woman to the revolutionaries’ plot to kill Pinochet, la Loca is equating Carlos’ frustrated attempt to topple the dominant political structure with her attempt to pull Carlos out of the dominant gender structure.

The protagonist’s refusal of Carlos’ proposal to leave for exile together responds to a realization on her part that he has only ever seen and accepted her as a man dressed up as a woman and not as a true woman. Early in the novel Carlos brings over a large heavy cylinder to store in la Loca’s home. This cylinder, which she only later understands to be full of weapons for the assassination plot, she describes at first look as “un agresivo tubo de metal . . . un condón para dinosaurio” (21). As such, the veiled cylinder, described as aggressive because of the weapons it contains, acts as a phallic symbol of violent hypermasculinity. Using her talents of “teatralidad decorativa” la Loca dresses it up in doilies and ribbons in order to transform it into a flower stand for her home (21-22). The decorated weapons are rendered unrecognizable, and it is, in fact, Carlos’ realization of the success of la Loca’s efforts to transform the cylinder full of weapons into a flower stand that provoke him to embrace

her for the first time. “En realidad no se nota lo que es, musitó Carlos dando unos pasos emocionado, acercándose . . . atrayéndola a su pecho en un abrazo agradecido” (22). La Loca dresses the phallic cylinder in feminine attire in the same way she dresses herself and thinks of herself as a woman. While for Carlos the weapons are merely cleverly disguised as a flower stand, for la Loca the cylinder actually becomes one. The painful realization that she comes to at the end of the novel is that Carlos will only ever see her as a man dressed as a woman and will therefore never love her as a true woman.

The end of the novel, therefore, finds la Loca abandoning her pursuit of Carlos both literally and figuratively as she leaves behind her beloved tablecloth at the site of her second and final picnic with Carlos. The novel ends with these lyrics from one last song: “Tienen sus dibujos / figuras pequeñas / avecitas locas / que quieren volar” (217). These lyrics are from the song “Mantelito blanco,” written by Chilean singer-songwriter Nicanor Molinare and made famous by the Chilean folk music group Los Huasos Quincheros. This song is, therefore, a reference to the white tablecloth that serves as a leitmotif in the novel. The tablecloth represents both the emotional communion between la Loca and Carlos, as it is used for both their picnic early in the novel during Carlos’ reconnaissance mission and their final trip to the countryside before parting ways for exile. This role of the tablecloth as an element of communion is also evident in the first verse of the song, “Mantelito blanco / del humilde mesa / en que compartimos / el pan familiar.” The “avecitas locas” of the song constitute a reference in the novel to the little birds that la Loca embroidered on the tablecloth that she then refused to hand over to the general’s wife. In addition, la Loca is also clearly also an “avecita loca” who yearns to fly free of the dominant political and gender structures that restrict her.

Furthermore, this final song in the novel is notable because, unlike all the other songs whose lyrics appear in the novel, this is the only one both written and made famous by Chilean artists. Moreover, la Loca sings the song softly by herself because the taxi that takes her away from the beach where she has abandoned the tablecloth has had its radio stolen. Combined together, these two details are evidence of the protagonist’s newfound sense of agency, as she chooses a Chilean song to sing, emphasizing her choice to remain in Chile, abandoning both her dream to be together with Carlos and the tablecloth that represents that dream. While she has come to terms with her own personal rejection of both the dominant gender

system and the actual political system, she also resigns herself to the realities of having to live within both systems.

Seen through the lens of Bettcher's Multiple-Meaning Model of transsexuality, la Loca learns to reject the dominant gender system at the same time as she learns to resist against the dominant political system. Nonetheless, she also realizes that Carlos is still firmly rooted in the dominant gender system and therefore will never see her as a woman. Notwithstanding the playful rapport with which he addresses la Loca with female pet names and despite his own rejection of the dominant political system as evidenced by his active membership in the resistance movement, Carlos is unable to move into a fully posttranssexual view of the protagonist. She is, for him, not a woman but a *loca*.

Despite the close and flirty friendship that the two develop over the course of the novel, Carlos' inability to view the protagonist through a posttranssexual lens constitutes for her a particularly painful denial of her womanhood. For this reason, and because la Loca has evolved towards a Bettcher's Multiple-Meaning Model of transsexuality, she finds herself compelled to reject the object of her deepest desire as representative of the dominant gender system even as in doing so she commits to remain within the dominant and repressive political system of dictatorship Chile. The protagonist's ideological awakening allows her to see Carlos as a respected political actor and not just as a sexual object, and their friendship allows Carlos to see her as person and not just as a political tool. Nevertheless, his inability to accept her as a woman coupled with her newfound sense of agency ultimately causes her to reject him and abandon the white tablecloth embroidered with little birds that symbolized her imperfect communion with him. She and those embroidered birds are both the *avecitas locas* of the song that yearn to fly free.

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