



## **Progress at What Price?: Defenses of Indigenous Peoples in Argentine Writing about Patagonia (1894-1904)**

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Official history boasts that by the mid-1880s, the Argentine government had definitively brought Patagonia under national control, neutralizing the savagery associated with both the land and the indigenous people who lived there. The 1881 *Tratado de Límites* between Argentina and Chile and the 1884 *Ley Orgánica de los Territorios Nacionales* demarcated the limits of national sovereignty and organized the newly-formed provinces of Neuquén, Río Negro, Chubut, Santa Cruz, and Tierra del Fuego. General Lorenzo Vittner declared the successful end of the *Conquista del desierto* in 1885, ending military efforts to subdue indigenous populations in the south (Mases 59). At the same time, presidents Julio A. Roca (1880-85) and Miguel Juárez Celman (1886-1890) organized the sale of public lands and encouraged immigration through propaganda, subsidized passages, and the work of official agents in Europe (Valko 29). The realization of the dream of a white, civilized Argentina appeared to be right around the corner.

Nonetheless, by the turn of the century, numerous Argentine intellectuals had expressed concern about the state of progress in Patagonia. Whereas in 1876 Francisco Moreno called the south an “anfiteatro grandioso” pointing towards future riches (*Viaje* 182), nearly forty years later, his mentee Clemente Onelli referred to the same space as “un anfiteatro en ruinas” (*Trepando* 40). Projects that had once seemed destined to help Argentine progress now appeared unrealized or totally failed. Consequently, intellectuals from a wide variety of disciplines were quick to suggest reforms relating to the influx of non-citizens, lack of infrastructure, and Buenos Aires’s seeming disinterest in the region (Navarro Floria 74).

For some writers, the tragic state of Patagonia’s indigenous population emblemized the failures of civilizing efforts. In accounts of their travels through the region published between 1894 and 1904, Ramón Lista, Roberto J. Payró, and Clemente Onelli denounced the effects of civilization on Patagonian indigenous peoples in emotional and moralizing language. They detail abuses against the Tehuelches, Onas, Yaghans, and Alacaleufs and search for ways to protect them from the excessive cruelty and neglect of ranchers, miners, government officials, and missionaries. In order to reconcile their eyewitness accounts of human tragedy with their continued faith in progress, Lista and Payró contrast what can ironically be called “ethical extinction,” or extinction in accordance with natural law, with the negative forces they saw in Patagonia. Onelli

shares their assumption that white Argentine culture is superior, but goes one step further and begins to question the racial hierarchies that justified extinction. Read together, Lista's *Los indios tehuelches: Una raza que desaparece* (1894), Payró's *La Australia Argentina: Excursión periodística a las costas patagónicas, Tierra del Fuego, e Isla de los Estados* (1898) and Onelli's *Trepando los Andes: Un naturalista en la Patagonia argentina* (1904) demonstrate the continued importance of indigenous peoples in Patagonia and its literature after 1885, as well as the myriad ways that positivist civilizing projects could fracture, contort, and be put back together.

### **The Problem with Progress**

Creole Argentine intellectuals had long been concerned with the nation's progress, a term which implied political, economic, and cultural transformations, and was intimately tied to the control of native peoples. Interracial relations and cultural exchange were defining characteristics of life in the early Argentine republic and indigenous peoples were classified as free men with the same rights as non-indigenous citizens in the 1853 Constitution. However, these connections did not exclude violent conflict, hierarchical thinking, and discrimination (Quijada 677-79; Martínez Sarasola 381). Indian raids on creole settlements were common, limiting Argentine expansion and causing the loss of life and property (Quijada 681-83). Additionally, nineteenth-century racial scientists in both Europe and the Americas attributed the region's chaos to racial factors like indigeneity and *mestizaje* (Hill 723). The *indio*, conceptualized as culturally inferior or even inhuman, thus posed a physical and symbolic roadblock to Argentine progress.

Nineteenth-century governing elites dedicated significant amounts of time and resources to neutralizing the threat posed by those savage citizens. Some efforts were diplomatic, such as the proliferation of treaties that promised rations of food, horses, and other materials in exchange for peace and the military support of the so-called "indios amigos." Other efforts were more violent, including ex-Governor Juan Manuel de Rosas's military campaign against the tribes of the Pampas and Northern Patagonia from 1833 to 1834. These excursions resulted in the death of hundreds, if not thousands, of indigenous men, women, and children, and the expansion of the frontier into the *desierto* (Mases 34-36).

The end of the *Guerra de la Triple Alianza* with Paraguay in 1870 and the *cacique* Calfucurá's organized attacks in Cuyo and the province of Buenos Aires in 1872 provided new impetus to the desire to end the *cuestión de indios* once and for all, while the contemporaneous development of evolutionary theory provided an effective justification for extermination. In August 1878, the Argentine government approved Minister of War Julio A. Roca's plans for an intensive military campaign that would cross the frontier in order to subjugate native tribes (Quijada 689). Roca's *Conquista del desierto*, which lasted from late 1878 to early 1885, resulted in thousands of *indios reducidos*, many of whom were brought to Buenos Aires or shipped to provinces like Tucumán. The national government consequently claimed it had finally established control over the central and southern regions of the nation (Mases 58-59).

Ramón Lista, Clemente Onelli, and Roberto J. Payró's works were published in the ten years after this final conquest, bringing new context to bear on the debates about nation,

Indians, and progress that had defined the nearly first 100 years since Argentine independence. All three were closely connected to the intellectual elite of their time and participated in the nation's scientific and political life. One of the most important explorers of the late-nineteenth century, Lista (1856-1897) published numerous scientific studies in journals and popular newspapers, penned pro-colonization treatises for the *Departamento General de Inmigración*, and served as the second governor of the province of Santa Cruz. The Italian Onelli (1864-1924) was also closely tied to Argentine scientific institutions as he was hired by Francisco P. Moreno to work at the *Museo de la Plata* shortly after his arrival in Argentina in 1888. He traveled frequently to Patagonia to collect fossils, served as an expert in the border dispute with Chile, and reported on the region and the construction of the Bahía Blanca-Neuquén rail line for the newspaper *El Diario*. Lastly, although officially a journalist and a writer, Payró (1867-1928) helped found the Argentine Socialist Party and opined on numerous scientific debates in his articles for the national newspaper *La Nación*.

In their works, the three authors continue the earlier tradition of associating progress with control over both nature and natives. In *La Australia Argentina* and *Trepando los Andes* respectively, Payró and Onelli identify the factors they consider to have impeded the colonization and/or civilization of the south. Their assessments and solutions are inserted into a framework that considered evolution a natural, inescapable law, and civilization (associated with European culture) as superior to barbarism. As Onelli predicts, "Día vendrá en el cual esa frontera, hoy desierta, huraña e inaccesible en su virgen naturaleza, será el centro de actividad [...] Entonces pueblos, villas, ferrocarriles, establecimientos industriales, serán los ruidos indefinidos y continuados que repercutirán el eco de la montaña" (114). In his earlier works, Lista also tied progress to the advance of white civilization:

No pretendo engañar la opinión pública, y el móvil único que me guía es el de abrir nuevos derroteros a la investigación científica, en pos de la cual vendrán las industrias, el comercio y la expansión [sic] territorial en latitudes donde fácilmente puede establecerse y prosperar la raza caucásica que languidece y se enerva bajo el sol ardiente de los trópicos. ("Viaje al país de los Onas" 18)

In his 1894 *Los indios tehuelches: Una raza que desaparece*, Lista further develops these cultural hierarchies. He claims the Tehuelches' social organization is primitive and calls them savages who have not changed in over a century (154-55). Thus, all three texts agree on the overall desirability of progress and the fact that this progress would be associated with the spread of Euro-Argentine culture.

The development of evolutionary theory in the River Plate in the 1870s and 1880s allowed writers who believed deeply in positivism and evolution to understand the disappearance of indigenous peoples as the result of natural, amoral processes. As naturalist Eduardo Holmberg argued in front of 3,000 people at the *Teatro Nacional de Buenos Aires* in May 1882,

los blancos, los civilizados, los cristianos, armados con Remington, acabamos con los Indios, porque la *Ley de MALTHUS* está arriba de esas

opiniones individuales [...] y así, luchando nosotros también por la vida, con buenas ideas, con buenas armas, con buenos recursos, no hacemos más que poner en juego nuestras ventajas.

- «¿Hacemos bien?» Esto es una pregunta.

- «Luchamos por la vida». Esto es una contestación. (66)

Holmberg's explanation insists that neither the actions of the Argentines nor the tribes could be judged, for they were only the human manifestation of universal laws that also applied to the plant and animal worlds. Within this framework, the extinction of indigenous peoples was not only justified, but also something to be celebrated as proof of the advances of non-indigenous Argentina (Novoa 237). Extinction was nothing more than the price of progress.

Writing between ten and twenty years later, Lista, Payró, and Onelli had seen this extinction first hand as the *Conquista del desierto* and related projects were carried out. In *Los indios tehuelches*, Lista calls the Tehuelches “una raza próxima a desaparecer de la escena del mundo” (125); a decade later, Onelli concluded that they were nearly obliterated (65). Payró describes a similar process in Tierra del Fuego, insisting that Fuegians were scarce in 1898 (184), and the few who remained were being rapidly extinguished (178). The three authors also note the profound cultural transformations that accompanied this physical reduction: broken bottles had replaced stone arrowheads (Payró 201-2) and Tehuelche women were reduced to scavenging for discarded stone scrapers as they no longer knew how to make new ones (Onelli 75). Excessive drinking, the influence of missionaries, and other forms of cultural contact had also resulted in the loss of oral history and cultural autonomy (Onelli 19; Payró 184; Lista 143). For example, Onelli notes that while the Tehuelches still carried out ritual immersions, the meaning of these baths had been totally forgotten (66-7). The loss of culture was so great that Payró claimed that the few Tehuelches he encountered “no pueden considerarse ya como genuinos” (91).

Despite continuing to believe in the benefits of progress and European superiority, Lista, Payró, and Onelli's depictions of this extinction diverge from those seen in the scientific-political texts of the 1870s and 1880s. They insert both emotion and moral judgement into their representations of indigenous extinction. All three lament the disappearance of the Argentine Indians from a scientific and a humanitarian perspective (Lista, “Los indios tehuelches” 128; Payró 184; Onelli “El Chaco” 97). They sympathize extensively with the “vestigios” whom they meet and depict them as innocent victims of an invasive civilization. Examples of this attitude abound in their texts, such as when Payró writes that “El fueguino se extingue con pasmosa rapidez. Asistimos a los últimos exortores de su agonía, comenzada desde que los primeros hombres blancos pusieron el pie en su isla. Sin embargo, esos indios, y especialmente los onas, no merecen suerte tan cruel” (233). Lista similarly grieves, “¡Pobres tehuelches! [...] Hoy todo ha concluido o va a concluir para el tehuelche; el pastor lo repele, la oveja rumia donde antes lo hiciera el guanaco. Todo está en su contra: los gobiernos lo abandonan, y el vivandero cristiano, despiadado, lo emborracha para despojarlo de cuanto tiene. ¡Destino fatal!” (164-65). Each writer utilizes different narrative strategies to reconcile this concern with indigenous peoples' suffering with their faith in progress. These differences shed light on the contradictions

and complex political motivations of Argentine colonizing efforts at the turn of the century.

### **Advocating for Ethical Extinction: Ramón Lista and Roberto J. Payró**

Ramón Lista's *Los indios tehuelches: Una raza que desaparece* (1894) is one of the most complete nineteenth-century studies of the Tehuelche people. Taking advantage of the authority that comes with first-hand experience, he introduces the text as written "bajo la choza del salvaje pat[ta]gón" during his governorship of Santa Cruz (125). Although ostensibly an ethnography, much of the text is devoted to criticizing Argentine and Chilean treatment of the Tehuelches and passionately defending their humanity. As Jorge Carman writes, "este excepcional ensayo antropológico es además un documento-denuncia sobre el latrocinio de esa stirpe noble" (14).

Throughout the text, Lista passionately defends the Tehuelches from the abuses they suffered, insisting on their humanity, representing their culture as more sophisticated than previously thought, and condemning those who provoked their deaths. At the same time, he continues to maintain that the Tehuelches were biologically destined to go extinct. In order to resolve these seemingly contradictory positions, Lista sets forth a very specific definition of evolution. In contrast to those like Holmberg who viewed attacking Indians with Remingtons as simply using the Argentines' advantages in the struggle for life, Lista claims that true extinction is not primarily defined by violence, but rather "refundición, incorporación" (127). The merchants, miners, and government authorities who sold the Tehuelches alcohol, took away their horses, raped indigenous women, and perverted their children represented an "aniquilamiento implacable y artero por un instinto de malignidad civilizada, y tácitamente consentida por los que mandan," not the "ley del evolucionismo natural" (127-28). Of course, Lista's call to defend the Tehuelches and encourage them to slowly "[fundirse] en las masas civilizadas" would eventually have the same effect, causing the disappearance of the Tehuelches as an independent race (128). Nonetheless, the author's articulation of natural and unnatural evolutionary forces allow him to advocate for this eventual outcome while continuing to at least temporarily protect the Tehuelches and take the moral high ground.

*Los indios tehuelches* suggests specific policies that could be enacted to shift Argentine history back towards natural processes. In previous decades, many of Lista's peers had turned to the United States as a model for how to eliminate indigenous peoples. In 1878, Estanislao Zeballos wrote in *La conquista de quince mil leguas: Ensayo para la ocupación definitiva de la Patagonia* that Argentines should encourage General Julio A. Roca to "Go ahead," adopting that "inspirational phrase, which has carried the North Americans so far in their conquest of their savage regions" (51). In turn, Roca sent Miguel Malarín to study U.S. policy at the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Malarín wrote extensively throughout 1879, noting that the U.S. case showed that alcohol and forced displacement (the Trail of Tears, specifically) were slow but effective strategies. Combined with the creation of colonies and an insistence on work, they could put an end to the "eterna pesadilla nacional" (Letter). In contrast, Lista looks to the north for a less violent model that demonstrates the tension in his work between defending the Tehuelches and bolstering the belief that they were racially inferior:



Bastaría una voz enérgica en el parlamento argentino y otra en el chileno, para conservar aún por muchos años las reliquias de la raza tehuelche. Díctese en ambos países una ley de reserva agraria, modelada sobre el texto de la más reciente de Norteamérica a favor de los sioux, prohibábase bajo penas severas el expendio de alcoholes en los campamientos indígenas: créense escuelas infantiles en los mismos bajo la dirección de virtuosos misioneros, y ambos gobiernos no tendrán sino motivos de regocijo, si es que lo hay en una doble acción, en dar la mano al que ya está al borde del abismo insondable. (90)

It is unclear exactly which U.S. law Lista refers to in this passage. The reference to reservations and the Sioux points to the 1868 Treaty with the Sioux, which established the Great Sioux Reservation in South Dakota and Nebraska and laid out governmental obligations to them, including the provision of education. More contemporaneous to Lista's writing but less directly favoring the Sioux were the 1887 Dawes Act, permitting allotment of territories, and the 1889 division of the Great Sioux Reservation into smaller parcels.

All three U.S. laws shared the basic principle of setting aside land for the Sioux while also hastening their assimilation to the white U.S. way of life by encouraging agriculture and private property (Hoover 71). Applied to Argentina, this approach would limit Lista's so-called unnatural forces of extinction by prohibiting the sale of alcohol and creating protected areas for the Tehuelches. At the same time, missionary schools and colonization could encourage the natural forces of extinction, especially assimilation and racial mixing. Lista's plan makes clear that although he claimed that their culture was scientifically interesting and advocated for their physical protection, the moral obligation to protect Argentine Indians did not extend to protecting their culture. In this way, he could denounce the abuses of the past and present without questioning the forward-moving sense of time, the racial inferiority of the Tehuelches, or the belief that progress was both inevitable and desirable.

Roberto J. Payró was not a scientist, but *La Australia Argentina: Excursión periodística a las costas patagónicas. Tierra del Fuego, e Isla de los Estados* provides one of the longest and most detailed accounts of the status of indigenous peoples around 1900. Between February and May of 1898, he traveled to Chubut, Santa Cruz, Tierra del Fuego, and Isla de los Estados at the behest of *La Nación*. His observations were published in that newspaper between May 15 and September 26 of the same year, and released nearly simultaneously as a book: the extensive *La Australia Argentina*. The text includes over sixty pages of ethnography of the Patagonian and Fuegian Indians, quotes Darwin, Lista, Onelli, and Moreno, and the title page boasts that Payró was a "Miembro corresponsal del Instituto Geográfico Argentino," inscribing it within the same scientific context in which Lista (and later Onelli) was writing.

Like Lista, whose *Los indios tehuelches: Una raza que desaparece* was one of his primary sources, Payró departs from the assumption that evolution exists and that indigenous peoples' inferiority destined them to disappear as part of that forward-moving process. To make

this argument, he cites figures such as Darwin, Quatrefages, Rochas, Blaine, and Garnier, claiming that they had shown that it was a universal law that superior races destroy inferior races. According to Payró, South America was no different:

Los indios del extremo austral de América no podían quedar exceptuados de esta ley general, y no lo han sido. Los indios y los blancos son naturalmente enemigos. Los últimos, más fuertes, tienden a despojarlos de sus territorios, y subyugarlos para que trabajen en provecho suyo; los primeros se esfuerzan por mantener el dominio de su país, y por conservar su libertad absoluta. (232-33)

In this passage, Payró makes clear that he still views human races hierarchically and locked in struggle. The end of this racial conflict was also predetermined by natural, universal rules: “La lucha que forzosamente se traba entre el salvaje y el blanco, tiene que ser, forzosamente también, mortal para el primero, como está comprobado por los hechos en todas partes del mundo” (233-234). Payró then follows Lista’s lead to argue that the inevitability of extinction could be appropriated by unethical actors looking to hasten the indigenous disappearance for their own benefit. After making clear his loyalty to a Darwinian understanding of extinction, he identifies seven specific factors leading to the disappearance of Patagonian indigenous peoples: persecution by white settlers, imported illnesses, the exportation of children and adults, environmental changes, alcohol, changes in customs and nutrition brought about by foreign influence, and their own warlike spirit (234).

The rest of the section is dedicated to identifying the human beings behind each of those elements and accusing them of acting with greed, carelessness, and malice beyond the struggle for survival. Targeting government officials, Payró writes, “¿No cumplen los indios un decreto, una disposición, una orden que quizá no conocen? ¡Pues fuego en ellos! Que así aprenderán... desapareciendo... Esto es inicuo, pero ha sido y es así” (235). In sentences like this, Payró both highlights the blamelessness of the Indian and the evils of civilized society. He notes that the *hacendados* are similarly eager to kill, paying two pounds for every right ear of a dead Indian the hunters bring them (235-6). Not even the scientists and explorers whose work Payró uses to enrich his ethnography escape his ire. He accuses Ramón Lista of having wantonly massacred Selk’nam (Ona) Indians during an 1886 exploration and denounces foreign scientists like Julius Popper for killing Fuegians “para enriquecer los museos de Europa con sus esqueletos” (235). And although the effects were less direct, white colonists had also brought diseases and alcohol and scared away or overhunted the guanacos and seals. In each case, Payró makes clear how greed leads to immoral actions that cause extinction, but cannot be considered natural.

Turn-of-the-century Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego were also the site of intense missionary activities by various Christian sects. Beginning in the 1850s, George Pakenham Despard and Thomas Bridges established Anglican missions in the *Malvinas* Islands and Ushuaia, where they introduced the Yaghan to Christianity, the English language, and British customs. Under the guidance of the Italian Don Bosco, in 1879 the Salesian religious order started their activities alongside Roca’s army, eventually establishing missions across the entire region (Nicoletti 6). Lista does not mention those

activities in his defense of the Tehuelches, except to suggest in passing that missionary schools would be an effective way to integrate the Tehuelches. In contrast, Payró depicts the missionaries as the primary agent of indigenous extinction in Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego (233). At best, he argues, the missions had been ineffective. The Salesians had been active in the region for several years by the time of Payró's journey, "sin que sus beneficios se hayan hecho notar sobre los indios" (311). Combining examples from Patagonia with examples from Europe and the words of Darwin and others, he further notes that the missions incubate illnesses, swap out the Indians' warm capes and *quillangos* for "ropas ridículas en aquel clima," move families to new environments that sterilize and kill them, and feed them inappropriate diets (240-44, 280-81). Religious instruction also forces them to forget or hide their beliefs (184-85). Although he allows that some of these actions might have been well-intentioned, he repeatedly insists that missionaries were as susceptible to greed and cruelty as their non-religious counterparts: "Con esto gana la civilización, comenzando por el civilizador" (244).

In other passages, Payró accuses the Salesian and Anglican missionaries of abusing the *indios* by treating them terribly, forcing them to work, and refusing to pay them what they had earned (208-81). Notably, Payró rarely makes direct accusations himself. While he is clear about his distrust of the missions, he generally insinuates, uses sarcasm, and allows direct quotes from his informants to make the most damning condemnations. For example, he includes a several-page long transcription of a conversation he had with "un antiguo vecino del territorio" who claimed to know Bridges's mission well (279). Payró's interlocutor lists numerous abuses, including accusing Bridges and company of exploiting indigenous labor, running a company store scheme, giving them minimal clothing, and insufficiently protecting them from the sale of alcohol (280-82). Throughout the conversation, Payró questions the credibility of his informant and attempts to find justification for the missionaries' actions. For example, after hearing about the company store, Payró interjects, "Me parece que usted exagera y tuerce la intención de las cosas. Querrían evitar con eso que se explotara a los pobres indios y se les envenenara con bebidas alcohólicas" (280). Through this narrative technique, Payró can anticipate the objections of his opponents, neutralizing them by also reporting his informant's careful responses. As a result, it is clear that Payró's general thesis regarding the missions is also that of his informant: "Lo que querían [los misionarios] era que [los indios] trabajaran y les dieran provecho, sin pensar en otra cosa... ¡Qué les importaba de los indios!" (281).

Through these examples, which criticize nearly every actor in the Patagonian region, Payró is able to make an argument about extinction that is quite similar to Lista's. The extinction of Argentine indigenous peoples, he insists, was going to happen eventually due to immutable general laws that dictated that inferior races cede to superior ones. Payró never questions this rule, nor the assumption that indigenous peoples occupied the bottom of the hierarchy in this comparison. Nonetheless, in his examples of the neglect and/or outright cruelty of various members of white society, Payró insists that extinction did not have to happen the way that it did nor as fast as it did. The Fuegians, he writes, "no merecían suerte tan cruel. Por su inteligencia, por sus condiciones de carácter, por su mansedumbre, eran acreedores a los beneficios de la civilización, y debió tratarse de conquistarlos poco a poco para ella" (233). Argentina had fundamentally misinterpreted



evolution, taking Darwin's conclusions as *carte blanche* to abuse instead of allowing natural forces to work.

Payró and Lista agree in their assessment of the problems of Patagonia and the general immorality of Argentine actions, but deploy these critiques for different purposes. Both suggest that the government could take measures to protect the Tehuelches from the worst abuses, thus facilitating their ethical extermination through racial mixing and assimilation. Lista focuses on missionary schools and agricultural reservations, while Payró recognizes the missionaries' capacity for greed, proposing instead that by proclaiming "una amnistía general y procurándoles alimentos, de que hoy carecen, los indios se reducirían sin dificultad." Such actions would be just and equitable, recognizing and to a certain degree rectifying the fact that "les ha quitado la tierra de sus padres, y lo que es peor, que los nuevos pobladores les han ahuyentado las focas y diezmados los guanacos, dejándolos en la indigencia, y que luego los matan si se atreven a robar una oveja para comer" (239).

Payró adds to Lista's vision by arguing that protecting indigenous peoples would also benefit non-indigenous Argentina. Like many of his peers in the 1890s, Payró began to have misgivings about the arrival of immigrants previously seen as the solution to all of Argentina's problems (Valiente 141). This ambivalence emerges in *La Australia Argentina*. On one hand, Payró expresses enthusiasm for the mixing of Argentines and Anglo-Saxon colonists, believing that such a mixture would result in a "raza poderosa" that could energize the country (84). On the other hand, however, he fears that an increased population of non-citizens of other races would only further reduce the Argentine government's control over the region. For example, he notes that in certain parts of Chubut, the municipalities are led entirely by Welsh immigrants, completely excluding citizens "de raza latina." In those zones, Payró frets, "los hijos del país se consideran extraños, cuando no enemigos" (84).

In this context, the value he assigns to indigenous people in *La Australia Argentina* is at least partially in relation to their status as native, autochthonous, and legal Argentine citizens in the face of an increasing number of foreigners. By depicting indigenous peoples as positively Argentine and foreign agents—sheep ranchers, missionaries, and goal diggers—as the primary causes of their expedited and illegitimate disappearance, Payró can strengthen national claims over the region while discrediting competing institutions. This rhetorical mechanism is exceptionally clear in his argument regarding the Salesian missionaries. After several pages maligning their efforts to civilize the Fuegians, Payró concludes, "Los terrenos que usufructúan [the Salesians] son los más apropiados para el establecimiento de la nueva capital fueguina, que es urgente sacar de Ushuaia" (312). The foreigners abusing native peoples who were legally Argentine citizens should have absolutely no right to lands that would benefit the nation.

Payró's concerns were also conceptually tied to his greater political projects, particularly his long-standing opposition to the ruling oligarchy of the *Partido Autonomista Nacional* (PAN) led by Julio A. Roca. Payró spent 1887 to 1892 running his own newspaper in Bahía Blanca, where he became an outspoken critic of the government of Miguel Juárez Celman, Roca's appointed successor. In subsequent years, Payró joined the *Unión Cívica*,

participated in the *Revolución del Parque* and, in his journalism, often associated Roca and his brand of politics with all that was wrong in the country (Pastormerlo 11-14). Later, Payró would be very active in the *Partido Socialista*. In 1894, he joined the precursor of that party, the *Centro Obrero Socialista*, in 1896 he was present at the party's foundation and his home served as the first meeting place of the *Centro Socialista de Estudios*, and in 1897 he helped found the *Biblioteca Obrera* (Tripaldi 42-43).

*La Australia Argentina* appeared in *La Nación* two years after the foundation of the *Partido Socialista*, exactly encompassing the period between Julio A. Roca's second election to the presidency in April and his assumption of the position in October. In this context, Payró's harsh condemnation of the *Conquista del desierto* not only reflects his humanitarian and moral concerns, but also serves as an effective political tool. What better way to challenge the PAN and all it represented by taking aim at the singular accomplishment that catapulted its leader to national prominence? Who better to symbolize the brutality of capitalist competition and the worker's sorry lot than the *indios reducidos* forced to work for little or no pay on sugar plantations and missions? Patagonia and its native inhabitants thus provided the material to work through socialist understandings of evolution and progress as well as to undercut the ruling class, inextricably tied to indigenous extinction.

In *Los indios tehuelches* and *La Australia Argentina*, Lista and Payró develop alternative understandings of evolution and extinction that categorize violence towards indigenous peoples as unnatural and, thus, immoral. In this regard, they challenge the ideas that previously justified the *Conquista del desierto* and create space to propose new laws and policies that would prolong the Argentine Indians' physical, if not cultural, survival. Nonetheless, neither of their projects question the fundamental belief in progress, nor the belief that indigenous peoples were biologically inferior and, therefore, would play no part in the future. Rather, they propose protecting indigenous peoples until nature dictated their extinction, thus achieving the same outcome through gentler methods. It would be Clemente Onelli in 1904 who finally began to question the assumptions that shaped Lista and Payró's reactions to the tragedies they all observed.

### **A More Inclusive Future: Clemente Onelli**

A decade after the publication of Lista's *Los indios tehuelches*, Onelli published his account of northern Patagonia and its Tehuelche inhabitants, *Trepando los Andes: Un naturalista en la Patagonia argentina*. Largely forgotten today, *Trepando los Andes* was read widely at the time and received praise from Miguel Cané, Leopoldo Lugones, and even Ruben Darío, who called Onelli "sabidor, estudioso y poeta" (Moser and Woodbridge 350).<sup>1</sup> In the narrative, Onelli shares Payró's focus on the inadequate attempts to civilize the region, insisting that "puede decirse que la civilización, hasta ahora, sólo ha conseguido hacer huir al indígena y hacer desaparecer los ejemplares característicos de la fauna austral" (15). At the same time, he echoes Lista's affection for the Tehuelches, describing one *Cacique* as a good friend (42). He also shares both writers' concerns about the effects of liquor and government neglect, depicting the Tehuelches as "vestigios del progreso alcohólico de la región" and accusing President Roca of not following up his armed excursions in Patagonia with positive efforts to encourage colonization and civilization (13, 24).

At the same time, Onelli distances himself from Lista and Payró by not speaking of inferior races nor extinction at any point in his text. Throughout, he remains insistent that the Tehuelches' rapidly reducing numbers were the result of neglect and that there was no underlying biological basis to presume that they would go extinct. Furthermore, whereas Lista and Payró suggested that indigenous peoples would assimilate to the point that they effectively disappeared, Onelli's later actions suggest that there could be some—albeit limited—space in the civilized future for Tehuelches *as* Tehuelches. To argue these points, Onelli focuses on the case of the *Cacique* Ñancuche Nahuelquir, whom he had met while traveling in the south with Francisco P. Moreno. In 1899, the two scientists helped Nahuelquir win land rights from President Roca, resulting in the formation of one of the first indigenous colonies in the country, Colonia Cushamen (Ramos 125).

In *Trepando los Andes*, Onelli describes visiting the colony one year after its formation. He finds that in a short period of time, the Tehuelches “habían hecho prodigios de cultura y progreso” (42-43). They now lived in houses and cultivated crops, far from the image of the nomadic savage. Nahuelquir's tribe comes to symbolize what indigenous peoples could achieve if given the chance as Onelli wonders if “esta tribu es una excepción a la apatía y al faquirismo indígena, o si no sería bueno que el Gobierno ensayara educar a las demás tribus con el aliciente de la tierra donada” (43). Earlier ethnographers including Zeballos, Holmberg, Mansilla, and Moreno stressed indigenous laziness as one of their most enduring and biologically-rooted characteristics. In this rhetorical question, Onelli suggests that his experiences with Nahuelquir and his tribe reveal the illusory nature of that association and, thus, questions whether the Tehuelches were actually racially inferior.

Onelli further disrupts hegemonic ideas about race by arguing that in some aspects, indigenous peoples could actually be considered racially superior to Europeans. Again discussing Ñancuche Nahuelquir's tribe, he argues that not only are they civilizable, they “tiene[n] más aptitudes para el progreso que los otros sujetos colonizadores de la comarca, sean ingleses, galeses o criollos, que, a pesar de disponer de campos más fértiles y de capitales más importantes, presentan una inmunidad a toda prueba contra los sueros de la civilización y del progreso” (43). Upending the common assumption that immigrants would help Patagonia progress, Onelli depicts them as wasting their resources and resisting civilization. Mere pages after describing the miraculous progress of Ñancuche Nahuelquir's tribe, Onelli insists that the Welsh race “quedará siempre estacionaria,” for they have no desire to do more than survive, worship God, and reproduce (47). Through the close narrative juxtaposition of these two examples, Onelli powerfully shifts the apathy commonly associated with indigenous peoples onto European immigrants, scrambling the terms of the hierarchy.

He similarly insists that although English efforts to better agriculture in the south had been received with great fanfare: “El tan mentado empuje anglosajón para roturar las tierras, mejorar las razas y explotar de manera proficua las industrias agrícola-ganaderas, no se ha revelado allí” (41). In this passage, the reference to bettering the races can be read denotatively as a statement on livestock, but also connotatively as an ironic reflection on human *mezizaje* and racial change. Argentine intellectuals had long dreamed of the

benefits of an influx of Anglo-Saxon blood, a sentiment apparent in Payró's *La Australia Argentina*, where immigrant women are turning Chubut into "una especie de haras humano," thus cooperating with "la tarea evolutiva" (81). Anticipating Onelli's parallel between animal and human crossing, Payró insists that evolution "[h]izo una raza de ovejas para la Patagonia; con facilidad igual, sin el concurso de sabios ni estadistas, está haciendo un pueblo" (83). Despite Payró's confidence, from Onelli's vantage point in 1904, the experiment had failed. What is more, English colonists had actually adopted indigenous ways of working the land, proving that "los ingleses son también susceptibles de regresión hacia la vida nómada de los pueblos primitivos" (41).

Onelli's statements on the English bring to the forefront several contradictions that give shape to his text. First, Onelli's defense of the Tehuelches is motivated both by personal relations and a utilitarian concern about Argentine sovereignty. He refers to Nahuelquir as his good friend and appears to have genuine affection for the members of his tribe. At the same time, he is highly concerned about fixing and populating Argentina's frontiers in the south, and indigenous peoples were a useful rhetorical tool for this argument (114). Like Payró, he is concerned that the Argentine government has been absent too long and worries that the Anglo-Saxon immigrants maintain loyalty to their home countries: "He dicho pequeños galeses y no argentinos, porque a pesar de las leyes del país, a pesar de las tierras a ellos concedidas por el Estado, se declaran galeses" (47).<sup>2</sup> In this context, indigenous peoples once again represented not the foreign other of the past, but Argentine citizens who could eventually form a physical and cultural barrier against outside influences. In this sense, *Trepando los Andes* can be located squarely between the emotive and highly relational defense in Lista's *Los indios tehuelches* and Payró's political machinations.

Second, while Onelli inverts racial hierarchies, he continues to associate indigenous peoples with primitivism and implicitly accepts that agriculture, industry, and non-indigenous culture were the way of the future. He does not predict indigenous peoples' extinction, but none of his descriptions of Patagonia's future—including the appendix dedicated to that topic—make any mention of indigenous peoples at all. In a parallel fashion, his own activities in relation to the Tehuelches oscillated between facilitating their assimilation and ensuring the survival of their culture. He personally brought one of the *Cacique* Nahuelquir's sons to Buenos Aires and ensured that he receive a "white" education. However, legend also states that he learned Araucano and Tehuelche before Spanish and would have continued to speak Tehuelche with the boy (Fernández Balboa 11). While his advocacy on behalf of the Tehuelches' land rights integrated them into the Argentine legal framework for private property, it also allowed them to settle relatively undisturbed. Finally, Onelli was also an "importante impulsor de la industria textil indígena y del estudio de la imagería religiosa" (9), and organized workshops on the ceramics, metalwork, and weaving of the indigenous artisans (Pino 43). Although he never completely shakes off the paternalistic attitudes of his time period, it is clear that Onelli is the turn-of-the-century figure who most solidly questioned racial hierarchies and the assumption that the disappearance of Argentine indigenous peoples was a necessary and inevitable consequence of progress.

**Conclusion: Lista, Payró, and Onelli in Relation to the Past and Future**

Beyond these meditations on progress, ethical extinction, and the ability to call for a group's protection even while predicting their demise, what can these texts tell us about the relationship between indigenous peoples and Argentine elites at the turn of the century? On one hand, it seems clear that the very conditions that Lista, Payró, and Onelli lament were those that made their more sympathetic representations of Argentine Indians possible. That is to say, whereas earlier authors were writing in a context in which indigenous peoples presented a threat to white populations in terms of theft, violence, or kidnapping, the "success" of the *Conquista del desierto* neutralized much of that risk (Mases 197-99). Absent the sensation that indigenous peoples presented an obstacle to livelihoods or national development, new possibilities opened for positively valuing their culture or material contributions to the nation. Indeed, on the whole these turn-of-the-century texts depict indigenous peoples more positively and Euro-Argentine civilization more negatively than their predecessors, while also questioning the naturalness of extinction and even racial hierarchies.

Yet many of Lista, Payró, and Onelli's ideas can also be traced back at least several decades. While the critique of alcohol intensifies in their texts and begins to be expressed in relationship to hygiene movements, a similar frustration with the *cristianos* who provided liquor to the tribes is readily apparent in Lucio V. Mansilla's 1870 *Una excursión a los indios ranqueles* (79). Mansilla also anticipates Lista's call for incorporation through racial mixing and the concern with the barbarism of civilization seen in all three of the latter texts. Similarly, the argument that at least some tribes could become peons and farmers can be seen in nearly all of the major texts of the 1870s and 1880s, even Estanislao Zeballos's *La conquista de quince mil leguas*. Amongst the racist rhetoric of most of the text, which served as a blueprint for military actions, Zeballos argues that the Tehuelches could be incorporated and would even be "la base de la población argentina de la Patagonia" (214). Thus, despite the substantial shift in understandings of extinction, the points of contact between the pre- and post-*Conquista del desierto* texts also bring into focus the fact that the violent suppression of native peoples was never accepted by all Argentine elites, nor was it meant to be applied equally to all tribes. Both pre- and post-military action, Argentine authors could frequently hold conflicting positions at the same time, arguing for the inferiority and even required extinction of indigenous peoples while also defending them when personal ties or political projects demanded it.

Additionally, one of the most striking aspects of these three texts is that they are still debating the role of indigenous peoples in Patagonia ten to twenty years after the "definitive" conquest of the region. Even as they speak repeatedly of the disappearing Indian, their narratives undercut their claims of scarcity. Descriptions of their activities in Patagonia reveal indigenous peoples serving as guides (Onelli 76), assisting miners (Payró 149), and participating in the fur trade (77). Without negating the very real and tragic reduction of indigenous peoples at the end of the nineteenth century, these texts also point to the overly facile generalization that the *Conquista del desierto* exterminated all Argentine indigenous peoples, an assumption that has contributed greatly to the denial of indigeneity in formulations of national identity up to and including the present.

These texts additionally demonstrate that indigenous peoples continued to be present in Argentine political discourse, even as they themselves were no longer the primary topic of



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conversation. By the late 1890s, elites' interest had largely shifted to debates over the advisability and effects of immigration, and one would hardly expect to see lengthy ethnographies of native peoples presumed extinct. Nonetheless, as seen in Payró and Onelli's texts, in this context indigenous peoples could take on new value as both legal citizens and physical incarnations of the autochthonous in the face of increasing foreignness. From their physical presence to their symbolic weight, indigenous peoples continued to shape Argentina long after the *cuestión de indios* was formally resolved. Lista, Payró, and Onelli's texts make this endurance readily apparent even as they work to achieve a future that would largely ignore Argentina's indigenous citizens.

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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup>In the same text, Darío also praised Payró for *La Australia Argentina*, writing:

Admiro a Roberto J. Payró, ese vigoroso y bello talento argentino, que supo traer de las lejanías patagónicas y del extremo sur de su patria inmensa una obra en que, a través de las precisiones del diarista y de las observaciones del etnólogo, surgen de repente las flores de oro de un decir de artista. (ctd. in Moser and Woodbridge 350)

<sup>2</sup>The critique of immigrants may seem strange given Onelli's own immigrant background. Nonetheless, at this point he had been living in Argentina and working for the government for nearly 20 years. Furthermore, turn-of-the-century racial projects often opposed Latin and Anglo-Saxon peoples, so while Onelli was not Argentine, he likely felt a sort of Latin solidarity with the people of his adopted homeland, especially in the face of English and Welsh settlers.

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