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**Biopolitics and the Critique of Neoliberalism
in *El corazón del silencio* by Tatiana Lobo**

Laura Barbas-Rhoden

Wofford College

According to Eduardo Mendieta, “the maps of globalization...are utopias in which the space of the political is violently colonized and then abolished by monetary and legalistic imperatives” (vii). After citing ways in which neoliberal globalization eviscerates political bodies, Mendieta heralds a new politics of the Left, citing the work of philosopher Enrique Dussel as example *par excellence* of what Mendieta calls “biopolitics—a politics not only of the preservation, enhancement, and continuation of the life of the political community but also of its very condition of material production: the planet earth, the cultural communities, and the traditions within which naked life is transformed into political life” (xiii). Dussel himself calls for a renaissance of the Left through a new theory that includes normative demands for “Ecological Revolution” (116) and that will produce a “new transmodern civilization” (xvi). Dussel asks: “Is it not the

case that capitalism, and even real existing socialism, have corresponded to a contempt for the *absolute dignity of life in general*? Was it not the criteria of an ‘increase in the rate of profit’ (in capitalism) and an ‘increase in the rate of production’ (in real socialism) that brought us to this ecological cataclysm?” (116). Dussel’s *Twenty Theses on Politics* articulate the principles of a new, transmodern, leftist politics that corrects the injustices of capitalism and the shortcomings of real socialism.

I argue that this new biopolitics of the Left, articulated by Dussel, Mendieta, and others, also appears in a number of Latin American fictional works from the last decade of the 20th century and first decade of the 21st century. Here I examine how Tatiana Lobo critiques the social and material conditions of an exemplary Latin American neoliberal success story—Chile in the 1990s—and, through my reading of the novel, propose that an ecocritical lens can sharpen our focus on the social realities of Latin America.

Published in 2004, *El corazón del silencio* is Tatiana Lobo’s only novel set outside Central America. The novel features the return of Yolanda, a middle-aged Chilean expatriate, to her hometown in southern Chile, identified by the author as Puerto Varas on the shores of Lake Llanquihue (Lobo, personal communication). It also revolves around a mystery: the disappearance of Yolanda’s cousin Marcelo during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. During her brief visit, Yolanda reunites with the cousin who raised her, seeks answers to the disappearance of Marcelo, and stumbles into the tangled web of power relations in the democratic state superimposed over a terrain shaped by the economic policies of dictatorship.

An ecocritical reading of the novel reveals a compelling, environmentally oriented discourse that weaves together the storyline about dictatorship, family, and memory. In fact, Lobo’s ecologically oriented discourse runs like a thread through the narrative to pull disparate pieces of Chilean history together. The story and discourse are structured in a way that highlights silences, injustices, and exploitation, not just of human communities but of non-human nature as well. Like Mendieta and Dussel, Lobo shifts traditional social and economic critiques of the political

Left in Latin America into new forms that question neoliberalism in terms resonant with the global environmental movement. The way Lobo manages this discursive shift in fiction will be the subject of my reading of *Corazón*. First, though, it is important to contextualize Lobo's literary production in terms of Central American letters and also broadly within the context of social and economic policy in Latin America.

Chilean-born Tatiana Lobo has resided in Costa Rica for decades, where she has published with various presses since 1989. Author of novels, essays, historical studies, poetry, and newspaper columns, Lobo is one of the most prolific contemporary writers in Central America. Her works have garnered international attention, as well as literary prizes that included the inaugural Premio de la Academia Costarricense de la Lengua del 2008 (Premio ACL 2008) for *Corazón*.

Lobo's publications register in provocative ways anxieties surrounding globalization in Latin America. Specifically, her work articulates relentless leftist and feminist critiques of the injustices of modernity. In this deconstructive enterprise, Lobo joins fellow Costa Rican-based authors like Jacinta Escudos, Carlos Cortés, and numerous others who have dismantled the image and rhetoric of the state in post-war Central America. These authors write during a moment of transition, crisis, and redefinition in political and literary terms. In narrative, the post-war period sees an abandonment of overtly leftist political positions, such as those articulated by Central American authors of *testimonios* and *pseudo-testimonios* in the 1970s and 1980s, and use of innovative narrative techniques to present the realities of poverty, crime, corruption, and violence in the isthmus. All of Lobo's novels—*Asalto al paraíso* (1992), *Calypso* (1996), *El año del laberinto* (2000), *El corazón del silencio* (2004), and *Candelaria del azar* (2009)—were published after the Sandinista electoral defeat in Nicaragua in 1990, the watershed moment for the demise of the revolutionary Left in Latin America. Without exception, they challenge official, state-endorsed representations of history and underscore a legacy of exploitation and violence against women, Afro-Latin Americans, indigenous peoples, and other marginalized people.

In the face of political rhetoric touting the “transition to democracy,” writers like Lobo signal the lingering effects of war, dictatorship, and (neo)colonialism during an era of rapid globalization. During the 1990s, globalization ramped up consumer economies in the West and in emerging powers like China, where a thirst for cheap goods in the United States and growing domestic demand led to tremendous economic change. At the same time, globalization altered daily reality for many poor Latin Americans. It gave new impetus to migration and exposed millions to mass media from the United States. As Arjun Appadurai pointed out in 1996, “globalization has shrunk the distance between elites, shifted key relationships between producers and consumers, broken many links between labor and family life, obscured the lines between temporary locales and imaginary national attachments” (9-10). For example in Mexico and Central America, foreign imports and investment flooded in as a result of free trade agreements, like NAFTA (2000) and CAFTA-DR (2004 for all countries but Costa Rica). A frenzy of commercial and residential construction began, and industry observers warned that “the spate of construction projects under way in Central America and the Caribbean, and to a lesser extent in South America, is causing labor and materials shortages that are driving up construction costs, contractors say” (Nicholson 36). Migration also altered the daily lives of millions, for both those who left and those who benefited from remittances sent home.

The immediate post-war, or post-dictatorial, period in Latin America saw increasing globalization in large part because of neoliberal policies adopted during the 1980s. Neoliberal reforms meant, among other changes, the sale of public enterprises and increased foreign access to markets. The political and social consequences were profound, as were the environmental ones, though these have been less frequently studied. For example, in Chile, Mexico, Ecuador, and Peru between 1980-2000, researchers have noted the dearth of information about the environmental impact of market reforms, and they have applied a “social metabolism” approach to document impacts by studying material flows (Russi, et.al. 704). They note that “the domestic extraction of materials increased considerably in the four countries, mainly due to the mining sector in Chile

and Peru, biomass and oil in Ecuador, and construction minerals in Mexico” (Russi, et.al. 704). Though Latin American communities experienced profound repercussions from such activity, their options for participating in the new democracies faced serious challenges in the shifting political and economic landscape. In fact, political scientists point to growing empirical evidence from Latin America that suggests that neoliberal policies have led to decreased “political participation, representation, and government responsiveness” (Holzner 89).

In this milieu, authors like Lobo have confronted unresolved questions about right-wing oppression at the same time they levy critiques of persistent economic inequality in the “new” Latin American democracies. What, then, is the place of an environmentally oriented discourse in such a context? In Lobo’s *Corazón*, allusions to ecological change serve to articulate a new, globally resonant critique of exploitative practices affecting human communities and non-human nature. In fact, Lobo links environmental references to concerns about violence in other spheres, particularly vis-à-vis the social and economic transformation of Chile, in order to drive home a message about the nature of contemporary Latin American societies and demonstrate the need for a new biopolitics along the lines imagined by Dussel.

In the hands of writers like Lobo, environmental discourse serves as a new weapon to challenge the legitimacy of earlier projects of nation building, as well as the contemporary reorientation of the capital nation-state, its natural resources, and the labor of its citizens, for economic projects like those envisioned by proponents of neoliberalism. Lobo employs environmentally oriented discourse to question authoritarian organizations of human society and the non-human natural world for economic gain, and she recuperates the memory of human and non-human casualties of settlement (driven by liberalism), dictatorship, and neoliberalism. In this manner, the interdependencies, denials, and silences upon which the new, democratic Chile has been rhetorically constructed as a paragon of neoliberalism all become visible, as do their costs.

Though many novelists have noted the social and political costs of the Pinochet era, Lobo makes a contribution by drawing attention to

ecological legacies of economic miracles. The Pinochet regime ended in 1990, but the economic and environmental impacts of its policies have been powerful and enduring. In *The Ecologist* in 1996, Joseph Collins and John Lear point to some of these. They offer a neat summary of the free-market policies, famously associated with the “Chicago Boys,” free-market gurus from the University of Chicago: “privatize government-owned companies, lift price controls, give free rein to private enterprise, slash government budgets especially for consumer subsidies and social services, and pull down barriers to foreign trade and corporate investment” (157). There were two waves of sell-offs of public assets, 1975-1981 and 1985-1990 during which time were sold “160 corporations, 16 banks and over 3,600 agro-industrial plants” (157). The authors point out that “free market Chile has plundered its rich forestry and fishery resources” through the sale of public lands and infrastructure (165). They finger two industries in particular for their environmental effects: the wood chip industry, which leveled native forests and led to planting of rapid-growing non-native species like pine and eucalyptus trees, and the fishing industry, in which “unrestricted access to fish and boom-and-bust cycles have exhausted one fish species after another” (165). Interestingly enough, the aquaculture industry (namely, salmon farming) that Lobo references in her novel, grew in the wake of this destruction of natural fisheries.

Though the novel is set in 1998, in *Corazón del silencio* Lobo makes explicit reference to the rearrangement of landscape and social structures in the Pinochet era and also in the settlement of southern Chile by German immigrants. In this way, Lobo points to patterns of exploitation that stem from patriarchal preferences for the authoritarian organization of liberal economies in home, garden, nation, and ecosystem. In *Corazón del silencio*, Lobo combines environmental discourse with pointed critiques of injustices to reveal the homophobia and misogyny, racism, and ecophobia that have structured Chilean material and social conditions at different historical moments. By drawing these hatreds and phobias to the surface, Lobo affirms a biopolitics that advocates for preservation and enhancement of the conditions for political and physical life.

By what literary techniques, then, does Lobo discursively shift the rhetoric of the Left and construct such a biopolitics? In part, Lobo insists on a diachronic perspective, facilitated by the invention of a protagonist long absent but recently returned to her childhood home. This allows Lobo to highlight the accelerated social, economic, and environmental changes of the latter decades of the twentieth century. For example, early chapters contain frequent references to new banks (88), auto repair shops (33), and commercial fish farms, as Yolanda becomes reacquainted with a town she left (before the 1973 coup) as a young woman. Banks, cars, and new export commodities serve as markers of the neoliberal transformation of Chilean patterns of consumption and production.

Lobo also places at the heart of the plot, locales that experience dramatic transformation precisely because of their connection to the darkest moments of the Pinochet dictatorship. To begin, I will detail Lobo's depiction of the transformation of one particular place before discussing the second, which is a keystone in the construction of the social, economic, and environmental critique Lobo makes. In the early pages of the novel, the auto repair shop behind her cousin's house is the most jarring intrusion into Yolanda's memory: "estaba en el mismo lugar donde antaño estuvo el pantano" (37). The space that was swamp and becomes mechanic shop occupies a central place in the narrative and serves more than a metaphorical function. In fact, it is the space by which Lobo links the malicious, ecophobic, and homophobic games of childhood to the violence of dictatorship and the state-directed imposition of neoliberal projects.

By means of the story of Marcelo and the swamp, Lobo condemns homophobia, authoritarianism, and ecophobia in subtle, but compelling, ways. Yolanda's disappeared cousin Marcelo had stood out as a child among the other boys for disliking incursions into the swamp. When he opted out of swamp adventures, Marcelo bore his cousins' cruel taunts of "maricón" by going off to play the piano. In a passage focalized through Yolanda, who recalls an incident from childhood, Lobo paints a scene reminiscent of Horacio Quiroga's "La gallina degollada," but her horror story foreshadows the way rivalry and politics will coincide in Marcelo's death and its cover-up. Yolanda recalls that one day when his cousins find

him playing with dolls with neighbor Melania, cousin Oscar leads the other boys as they carry off Marcelo and pretend they will decapitate him as their parents do the chickens, until an adult intercedes. An earlier passage that alludes to the butchering of the hens and pigs overtly links cruelty toward animals to the normalization of violence, including that practiced upon humans: “El sacrificio de los pollos era un espectáculo, sobre todo cuando salían aleteando sin cabeza. Los que no tenían esa magia mórbida eran los cerdos, atroces, colgados de las patas con un tajo en la yugular, desangrándose sobre un recipiente para la posterior morcilla, a todo chillar en su lenta agonía. Qué gente y a la vista de los niños. Con razón todos salieron partidarios de los milicos” (44). In addition to being a nod to naturalism, the passage is classic Lobo description: sarcastic, pointed observations and a conclusion that leads the reader to imagine a broader context, in this case, the violence of dictatorship. Whether or not it logically follows that all who witness violence against animals end up as partisans of Pinochet is not important in narratological terms. Lobo maneuvers the text in such a way that it seems so, especially since the decapitation threat prefigures Marcelo’s later death, a murder in which his cousin Oscar was also implicated.

Because Lobo vindicates numerous Others, it is useful here to reference the work of two theorists who have written about the structures behind colonial, gender-based, and ecological exploitation: late Australian philosopher Val Plumwood and contemporary ecocritic Simon Estok. In a 1997 essay, Plumwood points to similarities among various “centric” ideologies, such as androcentrism, ethnocentrism, and anthropocentrism (336). According to Plumwood, all forms of centrism are characterized by a common structure marked by the following characteristics: radical exclusion, in which the other is hyper-separated from the hegemonic culture (in the case of nature, human beings); homogenization, in which others are seen as fundamentally all the same; ‘backgrounding’ and denial, in which the other is considered part of the background to more important affairs; incorporation, in which the other is devalued and defined as lacking in qualities valued by the hegemonic culture; and instrumentalism, in which the other is given a role by which to serve the dominant society

(Plumwood 337-341). Plumwood sees variations of the same structure in patriarchy, colonialism, and the subjugation and exploitation of nature. Following ecocritic Simon Estok, I would add that each of the centric philosophies Plumwood specifies, has a hatred or phobia at its core: homophobia and misogyny; racism; and ecophobia (208). Ecophobia, according to Estok, “is an irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world, as present and subtle in our daily lives and literature as homophobia and racism and sexism” (208). I read these two theorizations side by side and conclude that centric structures offer mechanisms by which the dominant subject or culture can normalize phobias and control the threat the other represents, while at the same time maximizing the economic benefit for the hegemonic subject. These centric structures, products of phobias about difference, facilitate exploitation and ultimately impede us from seeing ourselves on what Dussel calls “the horizon of humanity” (38).

For Plumwood, the best response to forms of centrism is a model of liberation in which centric structures are rendered visible and are thereby debilitated. In *Corazón*, Lobo debilitates powerful centric discourses that gave impetus to violence and that have remained unquestioned by drawing attention to the destruction of life and place vis-à-vis the swamp. In Yolanda’s family, the disappeared of the dictatorship are absent and invisible in the present. Within the family, for example, Marcelo is no longer visible, and his memory, like the swamp, is covered over by Aurelia’s insistence on practicality and a veneer of normalcy. Marcelo was killed when a death squad mistook his home for the safe house for leftists next door. Oscar was involved in the action that resulted in Marcelo’s murder, and he covers up the death by bringing Aurelia the bloody corpse under cover of darkness. Aurelia disposes of Marcelo’s body in the swamp, and the traces of his existence are later definitively buried by the construction of the road and auto shop. Marcelo has disappeared thanks to the violence of the dictatorship and the complicity of his family, and in an ultimate social irony, Aurelia lives from the economic benefit of the expropriation of his final resting place.

With the image of Marcelo’s body buried beneath the asphalt of the former swamp, Lobo makes explicit links between various centric

discourses in Chile. Marcelo as a child is victim of the brutal taunts of young boys, intended to push children into roles of strict gender conformity in a testing ground of masculinity: a natural landscape coded as wild, dark, and dangerous. He becomes a victim again, when military assassins associated with his cousin Oscar—who thrives in a hyper-masculinized, repressive, and conservative regime—kill Marcelo when they mistake his home for the leftist safe house next door. The final victimization of Marcelo occurs after death, when practical, stoic Aurelia—epitome of the German immigrant stock that hacked the town out of wilderness and herself a Pinochet partisan—hides Oscar’s crime (metonymy for the crimes of the dictatorship) by secretly disposing of his body in the swamp and wiping all traces of him from the family home. Two key phobias play out in Marcelo’s life and death: homophobia, which found his passivity and his love of art and animals threatening and distasteful, and ecophobia, which led town planners to see his final, secret resting place as a marginal landscape best paved over for a road and auto repair shop.

The previous example points to a recurrent trope for Lobo: the landscape in flux. Ecophobic human action, facilitated or demanded by the economic structures of the state, is most often the catalyst for change. To render the environmental destruction visible, Lobo constructs images of the landscape only to dismantle them later. In the opening chapters, Lobo outlines a picturesque town by means of passages focalized through Yolanda. Lobo then points out the ecological and human cost of picturesque landscapes. This narrative technique of construction, followed by deconstruction or dismantlement, calls into question not only the stability of the visible landscape, but also of the veracity of mimetic description in narrative. For example, Lobo makes this typical association of German immigrants with progress in Chile, only to cast it into doubt with the next sentence (and indeed, the rest of the story): “Gente honrada, trabajadora, disciplinada, gracias a su esfuerzo progresó esta región del país. Sin ellos, el atraso, la selva, la nada. Esto fue lo que le contaron a Yolanda” (16). Indeed, this is how typical histories of the region have portrayed the German settlement of Llanquihue, as evidenced by this 1974 account: “The early years...were exceedingly difficult. First of all, there was

the overwhelming forest to penetrate and clear” (Young 111). When Lobo, in her narrative, alternates description (apparently in the voice of an extradiegetic narrator) with focalization (that reveals even the early declarations to be focalized discourse), she draws attention to the fact that the veracity of narrative depends on the credibility of those who are doing the telling. Readers must engage actively with a destabilizing narrative, deciphering constantly the provenance of new information and deciding, like Yolanda, what to believe based on the motives of their interlocutor.

As Lobo constructs and deconstructs the images she presents readers, it becomes clear that in this world, tidy yards, tranquil lakes, and pleasant views conceal violence against the non-human natural world, as well as against human beings who threaten the hegemonic order by nonconformity or active dissent. For example, Lobo paints a pastoral landscape of apple and pear orchards, raspberry brambles, and fields of wheat, but then immediately catalogues the landscape it replaced: forests of native conifers and cypresses, which Lobo refers to with the names by which they are known locally (17). Descriptions of the city itself give testimony to the systematic reorganization of landscape according to particular patriarchal norms of order, aesthetics, and access.

Lobo singles out moments first in the 19th-century, in the efforts made to impose civilized, agrarian order upon the untamed and barbaric landscape of the south and later, in the efforts of the dictatorship to present a clean, ordered image to its own citizens and the rest of the world. New research in the post-dictatorial period has also focused on the symbolic production of the Pinochet regime. For example, Luis Hernán Errázuriz asserts that efforts between 1973-1975 sought to re-shape public spaces according to the values of the military dictatorship: “La intervención de los militares cubrió un espectro muy amplio de acciones, que iban desde la eliminación de monumentos con evidente carga ideológica de izquierda, hasta el blanqueo de paredes, la limpieza de aceras y el aseo de jardines, entre otros” (141). He notes that Pinochet regime projected this image of tidiness and order at the same time it associated the Allende government and its adherents with disorder, dirtiness, and permissiveness (140).

In her novel, Lobo uses the very tidiness of the town to draw attention to an obsession with order, control, and access. Consider this passage that describes Aurelia's garden, keeping in mind that Aurelia serves a metonymical function as German immigrant and Pinochet partisan: "Había gladiolas en el centro de rectángulos flanqueados por claveles y también espesos macizos de hortensias correctamente alineados contra la pared de la casa. Jardín francés, simétrico, racional, con sus caminitos de grava para facilitar el paso" (36). Symmetry, rationality, and ease of access define an anthropocentric order. In fact, the "French garden" is rooted in European humanist traditions of the Renaissance; its epitome is the formal garden of Versailles. Typically arranged to showcase architectural elements, the French garden is the ultimate example of anthropocentric landscape designed to showcase wealth, and in Latin America, a French garden connotes civilization and conformity to European aesthetics. Ironically, the extreme to which the anthropocentric reorganization of landscape is carried in post-dictatorial Chile destroys the garden: "El gran jardín que bajaba hacia una pendiente natural por una escalera entre terrazas sostenidas por muros artesanales de piedras, que servían de morada a las pequeñas y olorosas violetas, se interrumpía groseramente y ahí donde la vista gozaba discurriendo por el ramaje barroco de manzanos y perales, ahora se veía el horizonte cortado por una cumbre plana...vio una calle de tránsito regular, al otro lado un taller de automóviles" (36). The garden cedes way to new symbols of civilization, prosperity, and progress, in this case those associated with market-driven practicalities like infrastructure and automobiles.

If the swamp and garden mark the intersection of Yolanda's personal experience of memory, death, and dictatorship, the forest-turned-shantytown marks the collective experience of the very same. Lobo constructs the climax of the novel around this other, more public landscape in flux, to reveal the broader reach of phobias and repression. The site has been successively forest, grave, shantytown, and will next be an aquaculture site (141). Change comes from a complicated politics in which local allegiances, state terror, church complicity, and collusion by the so-called New Left (of the 1960s, 70s, and even 80s) facilitate neoliberal economic

development, in this case, in the form of aquaculture projects for non-traditional exports like salmon.

The latter half of the novel features this transformed landscape, first introduced when Yolanda visits a poor neighborhood on the outskirts of town. The passage also immediately steers the readers into a flashback, focalized through Yolanda, by which Lobo again draws attention to change:

Hizo un esfuerzo por ubicar el lugar que fue y que ahora era. Un vago sonido de viento pasando por entre los árboles, el sol convertido en medallas doradas, crujidos leves de ramas que se quiebran, vegetación espesa, helechos, las hojas grandes de la nalca, sospecha del Lobo Feroz y Caperucita Roja, de duendes y gnomos y otros seres fantásticos y temibles y en las manos de la niña, un cernidor de harina. Para qué el cernidor. (137)

Yolanda remembers the forest where she and her cousins as children caught shrimp in a stream, now barely recognizable. Interestingly, in the passage, evocative, pleasant descriptions give way to the literary descriptors from fairy tales that have populated the imaginations of children with fearsome images of the woods. Reality, it turns out, is even more troubling. Yolanda sees the stream now runs with a trickle of dirty, polluted water, and a squatter settlement occupies the former forest (138). Yolanda learns that the forest plot first became a clandestine mass grave, briefly though, because the bodies of the dictatorship's victims were disinterred and tossed in the lake shortly after the crime.

The later transformation of the forest into shantytown, and then aquaculture site, documents the broad outline of contemporary environmental and economic history, deeply shaped by the dictatorship. In fact, the associations Lobo makes between dictatorship, economic change, and environmental damage are well-documented by business publications. A *Business Week* article published in 2005, near the height of the Chilean salmon boom, attributed the success of the industry to the Santiago business incubator Fundación Chile, which in the 1980s identified salmon as a potential growth industry for Chile and started the first salmon farm in 1982. The story of Fundación Chile illustrates the *modus operandus* of the Pinochet dictatorship. Fundación Chile began in 1976 with ITT Corp. money, funds the company had received in compensation for the 1971 expropriation of the telephone company by the Allende government. In

addition to salmon, Fundación Chile pushed the economy into new sectors with high environmental impacts: berry exports, forestry for furniture and paper products, and biotechnology (Smith 34).

With her environmental discourse, Lobo does not just bring centric discourses of a dictatorship into the foreground, she also includes details that draw attention to the complicity of consumers in this new economic model. For example, the cold-storage apples in the dessert Aurelia has prepared and the smoked salmon she serves make an explicit environmental statement. Consider this passage; the first speaker is Yolanda, and the second, Aurelia:

—Y este salmon, de cuál es,
 —es salmón-salmón,
 —digo si es de criadero o de los que nadan en libertad. En el lago vi un helicóptero que trasladaba los...los...
 —alevines,
 —eso, los alevines,
 —y cómo supiste que eran alevines,
 —me lo explicó el hombre del bote,
 —entonces yo termino de explicar que ya no hay salmones en libertad. Este viene de una jaula y de la jaula pasó a ser conserva,
 —o sea que es el mismo que me puedo comer en cualquier parte del mundo,
 —supongo. (106-7)

Later, a passage focalized through Yolanda reveals a further critique: “Yolanda encontró el salmon bastante insípido, pero no dijo nada. El color rosado intenso se le hizo sospechoso a carotenos o algo peor. Mierda, pensó, ni en el culo del mundo se puede comer algo natural” (107). The politics of food, documented in English-language publications from Michael Pollan’s *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* to films like *Food, Inc.*, appear in this Latin American novel not as tangential critique, but as part of a story about the impact of neoliberalism and globalization on modern-day economic and environmental realities, as well as consumer tastes.

In Lobo’s novel, the transformation of the landscape and society happens because those with the power to do so refuse to acknowledge phobias, confront centric discourses, and thereby recuperate the memory of the past. Her narrative about the forest plot drives home the message that silence serves the purpose of nearly all stakeholders involved in the transactions. The forest owner, who was part of the firing squad, sold the

timber for a profit and let squatters move in and conveniently cover the clandestine grave. When the secret of the dumping of the bodies in the lake is leaked to him, he makes plans to allow the empty grave to be excavated. Pinochet partisans win because excavation will reveal that there are no bodies in the grave. The new democratic government wins for investigating the claims about the mass grave and for moving squatters to a new housing development. The property owner comes out best of all because his role in the death squad becomes blurrier, he rids himself of the squatters, and after already profiting from the timber sale, he will make a second fortune selling the land to a salmon operation.

Yolanda discovers that there are only two people in town who know the truth about the murders, the priest (who heard it in confession) and Miguel, who heard it from the priest. Miguel is part of the old revolutionary Left (he had been in the safe house next to Marcelo's home), and his progressive social politics keep him from speaking out about the mass grave. Miguel knows that denouncing the removal of the bodies will jeopardize the squatter relocation and furthermore, as he justifies himself to Yolanda, denunciation offers no guarantee that the truth will be heard. Why? The salmon operation will likely suppress the news so consumers never learn that their dinner special is being cultivated in a lake that is the watery grave of dissidents (175-77). Miguel has gone from a revolutionary seeking transformation of the existing order to a dissident in search of small gains within it.

Miguel is a complicit bystander in Chile under Concertación governments, but there are, of course, losers in the game in which Pinochet partisans still score victories. In fact, a look at the losers in Lobo's novel reveals the evolution of critiques from traditional leftist ones to new, leftist ones with environmental overtones. Who loses in the web of silence? The ones "en el corazón del silencio," the repressed memory of modern Chile: nature, the dead victims, and those left out of the new economic model (alluded to in the figure of a petty thief that attempts to mug Yolanda and Aurelia). Marcelo and those at the bottom of the lake are casualties of right-wing oppression, and the non-human natural world falls victim first to

agrarian settlement (in service of an earlier, liberal economic model) and then to the neoliberal commodification of land and water.

Ultimately, Lobo's fiction condemns the organization of space and society that insists on progress at any cost and thereby precludes the recuperation of memory and place. At the same time, her narrative affirms a practice of dialogue and debate that is central to biopolitics as Mendieta imagines them. The conclusion of the novel involves a confrontation by Yolanda of Aurelia about Marcelo's murder and Oscar's involvement. The dialogue is like others I have cited, with the women overlapping words and finishing one another's sentences. The last scenes of the novel feature Yolanda and Aurelia planting hydrangeas in the garden, hands overlapping hands: "En la oscuridad se rozaban los dedos, sarmentosos, antiguos, manos jóvenes, las de Melania acariciando a Marcelo, las de la empleada de la bombonería haciendo el paquete de los mazapanes" (208). Though inconclusive –Yolanda later comments "Qué mañas, las de la vida, nunca cierra nada" (208), the act gestures toward some sort of agreement to coexist, if not reconcile, and the reader sees both women on Dussel's "horizon of humanity" (38). Yolanda leaves, and her aunt mourns a just-detained Pinochet, abandoned by even the spirits of the house (save one). Life in the town marches on.

The inconclusive conclusion affirms certain key points, namely that a confrontation with the past is possible, if not embraced by all involved, and that environmental destruction is ongoing for practical reasons, as well as sinister ones involving power, profit, and fear. All told, the environmental details bring a new discourse of environmentalism to bear upon "old" concerns like human rights and social justice in Latin America and point to what Ursula Heise calls a "sense of planet." Heise has argued that "in a context of rapidly increasing connections around the globe, what is crucial for ecological awareness and environmental ethics is arguably not so much a sense of place as a sense of planet—a sense of how political, economic, technological, social, cultural, and ecological networks shape daily routines" (55). For Lobo, daily routines around a globalized world have insidious links to repression based in phobias and hatreds. When Lobo rewrites the picturesque town of her own childhood, she projects a

different image, one that acknowledges the human and natural landscape of Chile as a place of exploitation, where wounds do not heal or close, but are instead often unacknowledged and paved over with progress. Lobo leaves readers with the vision of a town in which hydrangeas may grow in the garden, but the brutal past of the Pinochet years persists just below the surface of prosperity—out of sight beneath the pavement, under the azure surface of the lake, and in the shuttered memories of the town's inhabitants. She also reminds us that a new biopolitics—in narrative and in praxis—must affirm not only “the life of the political community but also of its very condition of material production” (Mendieta xiii).

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