

# #29

## LIMÓN'S COSTA RICA OF COLOR, SPECIES AND LAND: A FIRST VEGAN ECOFEMINIST QUEER ECOLOGICAL READING OF ROSSI'S *LIMÓN REGGAE* AND LOBO'S *CALYPSO*

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**Abstract** || This essay applies a vegan ecofeminist queer ecological methodology to a comparative reading of two novels by Costa Rican authors, *Limón Reggae* (2007) by Anacristina Rossi, and *Calypso* (1996) by Tatiana Lobo. This approach focuses on the exercise of highlighting the nonhuman, which is urgent in a planetary context that demands that literary criticism explicitly address the numerous interconnections between literature and “nature”. In the novels, the province of Limón exuberantly exceeds the obsolete category of “setting” and becomes key in de-centering the human and queering the diverse and deep complexities of its varied biocultural ecosystems.

**Keywords** || Vegan Queer Ecofeminism | Comparative Literature | Limón | Rossi | Lobo

### La Costa Rica de color, espècies i terra de Limón: una primera lectura ecològica, queer, ecofeminista i vegana de *Limón Reggae* de Rossi i *Calypso* de Lobo

**Resum** || El present article aplica una metodologia ecofeminista vegana de les ecologies queer a una lectura comparativa de dues novel·les d'autors costa-riquenys, *Limón Reggae* (2007) de Anacristina Rossi y *Calypso* (1996) de Tatiana Lobo. Aquest enfocament se centra en l'exercici de destacar els no-humans, que és urgent en un context planetari que exigeix que la crítica literària abordi explícitament les nombroses interconnexions entre la literatura i la «natura». En les novel·les, la província de Limón excedeix exuberantment la categoria obsoleta de «escenari» i es converteix en clau en la descentralització de l'humà i la deterioració de les diverses i profundes complexitats dels seus variats ecosistemes bioculturals.

**Paraules clau** || Ecofeminisme vegà de les ecologies queer | Literatura comparada | Limón | Rossi | Lobo

## La Costa Rica de color, especies y tierra de Limón: una primera lectura ecológica, queer, ecofeminista y vegana de *Limón Reggae* de Rossi y *Calypso* de Lobo

**Resumen** || El presente ensayo aplica una metodología ecofeminista vegana de las ecologías *queer* a una lectura comparativa de dos novelas de autoras costarricenses, *Limón Reggae* (2007) de Anacristina Rossi y *Calypso* (1996) de Tatiana Lobo. Este enfoque enfatiza el ejercicio de iluminar lo no-humano, lo cual es urgente en un contexto planetario que exige que la crítica literaria articule las numerosas interconexiones entre la literatura y «la naturaleza». En las novelas, la provincia de Limón excede exuberantemente la categoría obsoleta de «escenario» y se convierte en el elemento clave que des-centraliza lo humano y convierte en *queer* las diversas y profundas complejidades de sus variados ecosistemas bioculturales.

**Palabras Clave** || Ecofeminismo vegano de las ecologías *queer* | Literatura comparada | Limón | Rossi | Lobo

*Limón Reggae* (2007) by Anacristina Rossi, and *Calypso* by Tatiana Lobo (1996) are two novels that share what critics traditionally understand as “setting”. In this paper, I seek to re-think this traditional understanding of place and analyze the ways in which *Limón* itself invites a radical new way of reading in both works. Rossi and Lobo both write strongly from a sense of *place* that exceeds the traditional understanding of setting as background. For instance, *Limón* recurs in all of Rossi’s novels, a personal trope of passion, both personal and political. Inasmuch as a detailed comparative analysis in this respect is indeed a fascinating project, here I look at *Limón Reggae* and *Calypso* because in terms of length and themes they are functionally “comparable” in terms of the selected methodology. So far, critical writing on these novels has mainly remained within the well-established realms of cultural studies, intertextuality, and identity politics. These readings are sound and logical, given the richly multivocal nature of the texts, but the two elements that I foreground here, Costa Rica’s *Limón* and black music, calypso and reggae, require a methodology that looks past the sociological aspects of literature and pays closer attention to *landscape* as much more deeply complex than simply “setting”. Critics like Barboza (2018), Manzari (2007) and Mercado (2015) discuss the novels’ cultural aspects, focusing on gender roles and political resistance against racism and colonization. Gómez Menjívar (2019) ventures a little further into the supernatural, pointing out female characters’ roles as bridges into other dimensions, but she does not connect this supernatural capacity with the specifics of *Limón*’s landscape, both cultural and “natural”. In an earlier article, when discussing the reclaiming of blackness in Caribbean narrative, this same critic mentions that “feminist interventions like those of Tatiana Lobo and Anacristina Rossi add a consideration of gender and sexuality to this subversive literary practice” (Gómez Menjívar, 2012: 2-3). All of these approaches are conservative in their scope; while typically valid, they fail in understanding the richly layered function of *place* in the novels; they do not envision the concept of a vegan ecofeminist queer ecological gaze of *Limón*, which is precisely the point here. This specific type of literary criticism, which I have written about before, requires a particular queer view of landscape, not as mere setting or geopolitical location, but as something that, in very complex ways, de-centers the human and looks carefully at the full expanse of interrelationships between the human and the nonhuman, horizontally. As such, the present exploration looks at the mediation of power between nature and culture, the relationships between humans and nonhumans in the environment, the effects of human intervention in the landscape, the disruptions of the nuclear, heteronormative patriarchal family model as queer resistance, and queer disruptions of “the natural” in ecological landscapes.

In terms of my main theoretical objective, the methodology and its application to the selected novels requires a brief introduction for the sake of clarity. Quinn (2021), for instance, asserts that “the political efficacy of terms such as ‘woman’ or ‘queer’ comes from understand-

ding them as permanent sites of contest and refusing closure into an all-inclusive or substantive definition” (269). These definitions of “woman” and “queer” are relevant to the heart of a queer vegan ecofeminist method, whose premise is the multidimensional integration of theoretical fields that have not interconnected enough in the past and urgently need to so in light of the (disastrous) anthropocenic present and / or the possibility of a survivable planetary future. This method is in itself a thought experiment in theoretical melding and co-creating. I wanted to ask the questions that involve everyone: the ecofeminist, the queer and the vegan, not as separate, isolated islands, but as waves in an ocean of possibilities. Optimistic intent notwithstanding, this approach is difficult in application, at times almost counterintuitive, precisely because it requires much undoing of rigid academic / theoretical training and much, much, much human-centered social conditioning. In this sense, the nonhuman becomes primordial, and this means more than looking at the presence or absence of nonhuman animals in a given text. A vegan queer ecofeminist reading requires minute attention to the interrelationships between nonhumans in the intricate weaving of what is traditionally considered “setting”, “landscape”, or even “the environment”, or “nature”. I have selected these novels because while following Rossi’s and Lobo’s literary careers, they subjectively remain my favorites, first and foremost. From a comparative perspective, well, the central macro-conflicts present interesting parallelisms, yes, but from a more radical, nonhuman-centered method, the *latency* of Limón in both texts is striking. Both novels speak to the special interrelationship between the Limonese coast and jungle (including all their nonhuman inhabitants, the *animacías* they *home*) and the human “development” that they induce, allow, and finally destroy. The application of the methodology per se tends to appear rigid, but I would like to suggest that this impression has more to do with the unfamiliarity of decentering the human for the nonhuman and less with the critic’s forcefulness. As a reading exercise, I believe there are many fruitfully innovative perspectives to enrich an already robust body of traditional criticism.

In *Limón Reggae* (LR henceforth), various cultures are presented as a consequence of the type of landscape, mediated by human intervention in the original nonhuman. Laura/Aisha is an extremely mobile character; she travels through space a lot, and her name (s) change (s) with each geographical, political and emotional landscape. However, the novel shows us several main locations: the slums in the bad part of San José, the countryside in El Salvador, Limón Town, and Puerto Viejo. The Costa Rican slums and the Salvadorian countryside where she joins the guerrilla forces share what she calls “eso” [“it”], which I translate as raw human cruelty. Laura says: “Cagarse en una Puerta ajena y descuartizar un gato o estallarle los ojos es humillar la vida. Y poner los gatos ciegos en medio de la calle para ver qué les pasa es un experimento. Por eso los Güilas se ríen como locos cuando los gatos se lanzan contra los vehículos y mueren aplastados” (Rossi, 2007: 15)<sup>1</sup>. What predominates in the

<1> “To shit in a stranger’s doorway or to butcher a cat or burst its eyes is to humiliate life itself. And putting blind cats in the middle of the Street to see what happens is an experiment. This is why the Güilas laugh like madmen when the cats are thrown against vehicles and crushed to death” (All English translations of Spanish quotes are by Jonathan Purdy).

text is the tension between a *culture of cruelty*—“eso”, in slum children and in the Salvadorian military who methodically uses torture against the people—and a *culture of humanism*—the guerillas in El Salvador that fight for economic and social justice for the people and the Black Panthers that fight for the end of racism and class oppression, for instance. Interestingly, both these cultures, of cruelty and humanism, are directly opposed to “nature”. We find “nature” in Puerto Viejo, especially, even if we see glimmers of it the times that Laura/Aisha escapes death by hiding in the forest in El Salvador. Rossi categorically separates the “nature” of Limón from all the other social (human and nonhuman) locations in the novel. Manzari notices this distinction when he argues that “El contraste entre el Limón paradisíaco y la capital pobre y en decadencia trastrueca la vieja dicotomía metafórica de la civilización versus la barbarie establecida en la primeras novelas fundacionales de Latinoamérica del siglo XIX” (2007: 257)<sup>2</sup>. From a vegan ecofeminist queer ecological point of view, what stands out in this opposition is precisely the “paradisical” aspect of the south of Limón. Rossi writes “nature” as untouched, pristine, and idyllic. There, a young Laura/Aisha experiences a sensual nature that is later transformed into literal refuge from the culture of cruelty, where she can let loose and enjoy her sexuality with abandon. When she has sex with her black lover on the beaches of Limón, surrounded by deep jungle, we can very well ask, as Chen does, “When is human ‘animal sex’, whether bestial or queer or rapacious, racially intensified?” (2012: 122). Laura/Aisha becomes more animal than human in this particular space, reveling in upsetting the racial order that frowns upon interracial liaisons: “Aisha lo toca a él y su piel lisa y perfecta se entrega a sus dedos exhalando un perfume parecido al bairrún. Una animala ronca le camina por dentro y se apodera de ella una mujer llena de gracia” (Rossi, 2007: 200)<sup>3</sup>. She becomes woman/animal only while in this space. In positioning Puerto Viejo as idyllic nature, *LR* follows the traditional understanding of humans as *outside of* nature instead of *as part of* nature.

In *Calypso* (*C* henceforth), the main opposition is between “nature” (virgin jungle) and a markedly *criolla costarricense* “civilization”. Differently from *LR*, the main locations are Parima Bay (in its vicinity to Monkey Point, a location of the same category), and Limón Town (viewed entirely from a “white” Costa Rican perspective, in contrast to *LR*), with very brief views of San José and the mountains that surround the Central Valley. Barboza Núñez analyzes this basic opposition from a cultural studies perspective: “Esta tensión también se establece en la colisión entre un mundo ancestral, femenino, orgánico, con saberes y nociones de mundo básicas singulares y diferenciadas de cánones occidentales, y el progreso moderno” (2018: 3-4)<sup>4</sup>. In this quote, the typical categorization of “the feminine” as “closer to nature” is easy to observe in the terms “organic”, and “ancestral”. While it is true that this seems to be intrinsic to Lobo’s text and not the critic’s evaluation, sometimes her female characters resist this “feminine” function (the three generations of Scarlets, no-

<2> “The contrast between the paradisiacal Limón and the impoverished and decaying capital transcends the old metaphorical dichotomy of civilization versus barbarity established in the early foundational Latin American novels of the 19th century”.

<3> “Aisha touches him and his smooth, perfect skin gives itself to her fingers, exhaling a *bairrun*-like perfume. A rough animal walks within her and a woman full of grace takes hold of her”.

<4> “This tension is also established in the collision between an ancestral, feminine, organic world, with basic notions and knowledge of the world that are unique and differentiated from western canons and modern progress”.

tably) and her male characters embrace “organic” and “ancestral” roles (the herbalist and el Africano, especially), reminding us that from a vegan ecofeminist queer ecological perspective we strive to move away from bipolar oppositions; *C* displays the complexity of the resistance against literal and metaphorical devastation of nature in Limón’s Parima Bay. *Nature*, coincidentally, is never purely nature, but always deeply imbricated with *culture*, both human and nonhuman, as Latour and Haraway have extensively proven, and, coincidentally, as Brent reminds us, “landscape ecology has been the first science to confirm that all ecosystems and places have cultural dimensions” (2011: 263). In spite of glossing over nature as simply background and the setting of resistance to colonialization, it keeps exploding out of Lobo’s text and into the critical article in question, which ends by describing the disconnection of Parima Bay citizens from “nature” as ultimately catastrophic: “el progreso civilizatorio patriarcal capitalista y positivista se impone, primero con la apertura del camino a Limón, luego con la llegada de la electricidad, que acrecienta el consumismo y la desconexión con la naturaleza por parte de los habitantes locales” (Barboza Núñez, 2018: 14)<sup>5</sup>.

The present analysis centers, specifically, on this conglomerate of interrelationships, in both Lobo’s and Rossi’s texts. I am suggesting a type of reading that resists the ingrained urge (more like learned academic mandate) to foreground the human, exclusively and hierarchically. *Calypso*’s jungle is extremely powerful, and indeed fights Lorenzo’s enslavement until the very end. Repeatedly, Lobo tells us that the jungle “takes over”, the makeshift chapel, the school, the store, even the patch of forest where the pagan African rites take place, the jungle reclaims all of these spaces; for example, we see that, “frente a la bulliciosa escuela se marchitaba la ermita. La selva se le metía por las rendijas, las culebras anidaban donde había estado el altar” (Lobo, 1996: 70)<sup>6</sup>. Definitely, and very much unlike the treatment of “nature” in *LR*, *C* shows a much more complex vision of nature-culture, and it highlights the interrelation(s) between both the human and the nonhuman component. In *LR*, Limón Town is the site of racial and political tensions, similarly to Limón Town in *C*, even if from a “white” perspective. However, Laura/Aisha never quite belongs to the ecosystems that she lives in; she connects to “the natural” via her paintings—that is, she translates it into a *cultural product*: “Caminaba por el bosque y pensó, me urge pintar esta belleza. Y tuvo una punzada. No la podía pintar porque no sabía qué era lo bello. No era una belleza humana, no la podía entender con la razón” (Rossi, 2007: 259)<sup>7</sup>. In *C*, the black protagonists participate within the nature-culture that they inhabit; of the two main elements, the jungle and the ocean, the ocean remains untamable: “Aquí nunca se sabe, este mar es muy extraño y caprichoso” (Lobo, 1996: 174)<sup>8</sup>. The ocean is the one elemental, “capricious” and “strange” element, the intrusion of the real in the text, sweeping everything away at the end in one large swoop: “Al replegarse el agua, los asombrados pariminos vieron cómo el comisariato, socavados sus podridos

<5> “Patriarchal, capitalist and positivist civilizational progress is imposed, first with the opening of the road to Limón, then with the arrival of electricity, which increases consumerism and a disconnect with nature on the part of the local inhabitants”.

<6> “In front of the bustling school the Hermitage withered away. The jungle crept in through the cracks, and the snakes nested where once had been the altar”.

<7> “She was walking through the forest and thought, I have an urge to paint this beauty. And she felt a pang. She couldn’t paint it because she didn’t know what beauty was. It was not a human beauty, and she could not understand it with reason”.

<8> “Here you never know, this sea is very strange and capricious”.

basamentos, caía, desmoronándose, con una terrible crujidera de vigas desgajadas” (Lobo, 219)<sup>9</sup>. The novel ends with a collusion of the human and nonhuman that even includes the supernatural as queer, as we will see later, but what becomes clear is that Lobo’s novel delves more into the complexities of the configuration(s) of nature-cultures in Costa Rica’s Limón.

According to Bennett, the moral-philosophical justification for patriarchal society is that “the world is a divinely created order and that order has the shape of a fixed hierarchy. Humans are not only organic, unique, and ensouled but they also occupy the top of the ontological hierarchy, in a position superior to everything else on earth (2010: 87). Inasmuch as this argument has survived even when its “divine” mandate is no longer valid in secular discussions, it is plain to see that this (imaginary) hierarchy still dominates critical readings about the (inter)relationships between humans and nonhumans, as participants themselves in shared biosocial environments—an element which consistently fails to appear in literary criticism. Once again, traditional readings assume that environments, landscapes, places, are simply “settings” for the human drama to play out. When evoked, it is only in their geopolitical capacity, that is, perennially revolving *only* around humans and their issues. As I move into a comparative analysis of human-nonhuman (inter)connections in *LR* and *C*, I want to briefly discuss Chen’s fascinating treatment of animacies. “Animacies”, she explains, “interrogates how the fragile division between animate and inanimate—that is, beyond human and animal—is relentlessly produced and policed and maps important political consequences of that distinction” (2012: 2). In this way, the concept of animacies serves well in the present study because, firstly, it understands animacy exactly as this critic suggests, that is, as extensive to multiple nonhuman categories of existence, and secondly because an exploration of animacies makes evident how tenuous the division between human and nonhuman actually is, and how human projections of the nonhuman evidence an underlying panic of the instability of what makes humans, *humans*. In other words, humans tend to organize their understanding of ecosystems vertically, with them on top, of course, which justifies the horrifying treatment of nonhuman animals and of humans who, because of their sexual, gender, racial, and ability characteristics, get treated by the hegemony *like animals*. The latent anxiety and tension over this human-nonhuman instability is notorious in both novels. Given my (highly political) theoretical lens, I completely concur with Chen when she succinctly claims that “animacy is political, shaped by what or who counts as human, and what or who does not” (2012: 30). Rossi’s and Lobo’s novels display a completely different categorization of humans and nonhumans, but they share *human-nonhuman animacy anxiety*, my working term for exploring that deep tension of which the definition of humanness is comprised. Fundamentally, *LR* does two things: it separates nonhumans from the Limón landscape, just as it shows that in El Salvador, the United States-trained militia tortures,

<9> “As the water receded, the astonished pariminos saw the commissariat, its rotted foundations undermined, crumbling, with a terrible crunching of crumbling beams”.



rapes, dismembers, murders and burns the bodies of humans and nonhumans in the *precisely the exact same way*, which creates an equality of being that is absent from *C*. Lobo maintains the human/nonhuman bipolar opposition strictly, and while she does show nonhumans as participants in the ecological landscape, exhibiting a more varied nonhuman population and co-existence in the Limonese jungle than Rossi, the most salient aspect in her text is the treatment of particular *humans* (women, blacks, the indigenous, the poor, the disabled) as nonhuman *animals*. This makes perfect sense given my initial contention that the main thematic oppositions in the novels differ greatly; in this sense we need to look at the specific types of human entanglements with nonhumans in terms of a *culture of cruelty* versus a *culture of humanism* in *LR*, and in terms of the force of “civilization” versus the force of “nature” in *C*.

Indeed, “it is no longer so controversial to say that animals have a biosocial, communicative, or even conceptual life” (Bennett, 2010: 53). But in terms of curious similarities, I want to begin by pointing out the function of nonhumans as food for humans, as is both common and normative in heteropatriarchal hegemonic patriarchy. It is noticeable, particularly in a vegan ecofeminist queer ecological analysis, that when Laura/Aisha lives with the guerrilla, their diet is fully vegan: tortillas and beans, for breakfast, lunch and dinner. However, their vegan diet is not an ethical or political choice (indeed, as most—all? communist movements that have repeatedly failed in their “revolution”, the Central American version is also a doomed one-issue-at-a-time organization, which Laura/Aisha eventually understands) but a consequence of poverty. They need to use other animals for transport and communication, for instance the mules, and therefore seem to prioritize function out of the necessities of war (the guerillas use human children for communication operations just as they use mules, proving, again, that in this particular context humans and nonhumans have the exact same value). Raising nonhumans for food also does not fit the situation since it requires mobilizing large amounts of humans and equipment at very short notice. However, Rossi shows how nonhumans are deeply connected to humans’ lives, at a physical and emotional level. Julián, the man in charge of training the mules to remain silent during transportation operations, loves them, and teaches Toño to understand them and love them as well. When the military murders him, a mule brings his dead body back to camp before dying herself, showing that the mules loved him too, and were loyal to him to the end: “En eso se escuchó un resoplido y un grito. Era Julián que regresaba arrastrado por una mula, los dos cubiertos de sangre. La mula logró su propósito de traer a Julián y se desplomó” (2007: 158)<sup>10</sup>. In Rossi’s *El Salvador*, love is punished with utmost, bone-chilling cruelty. “Uno de los asesores gringos”, Fernando tells Laura/Aisha, “nos pidió buscar una mascota. Por meses anduvimos con nuestros gatitos y perritos cuidándolos y chineándolos. Y un día... nos ordenó matarlos... había que desollarlos vivos, cortarlos vivos mientras ellos nos miraban con sus ojos atónitos” (182)<sup>11</sup>. When the

<10> “In that moment a snort and a scream were heard. It was Julián, who returned being dragged by a mule, both covered in blood. The mule, having succeeded in its purpose of bringing Julián back, collapsed”.

<11> “One of the gringo assessors [...] asked us to find a pet. For months, we kept our kittens and our puppies, caring for and spoiling them. And one day... he ordered us to kill them... they had to be skinned alive, cut open alive, while they watched us with their astounded eyes”.

military tortures, they torture human and nonhuman equally. Rossi does not spare any detail in describing the gang-rapes of infants, the dismemberment of live nonhumans and humans, the burning of screaming human children and nonhumans, the deep, purposeful, methodical infliction of pain and suffering—all based on true accounts. The extensive specificity of her descriptions is brutal. It is not a little shocking that most critical writers have chosen to highlight Limón’s landscape, sexuality or reggae instead of the extreme emphasis of the author on highlighting the unspeakable violence of guerrilla wars in Central America. In the end, there is no doubt that in *LR*, humans and nonhumans alike share an equal status: “Había que moverse constantemente entre montes y precipicios, había que andar agachados como animales, sobrevivir sin desbandarse como los animales y como animales nobles enfrentarse y pelear” (189)<sup>12</sup>. This quote reveals that, in the novel, that the boundary between human and nonhuman is in fact porous and unstable.

In Lobo’s novel, the boundary between human and nonhuman is also porous and unstable, but the author manifests inter(relationships) following different categorizations. As I pointed out earlier, and unlike the undeniable equivalence of the human and the nonhuman in *LR*, *C* maintains strict lines between humans and nonhumans, insofar as the human in question is male, heterosexual, and “white” (informally, I could call most mestizo Costa Ricans *wannabe whites*). In other words, *C* shows several ways in which marginalized humans are animalized and/or treated “like animals”, following the same hierarchical notion of human speciesism that is typically applied to nonhumans. In terms of nonhumans as food, the humans in *C* eat mostly seafood, as this is true of Limón in both, *LR* and *C*. Lobster is a nonhuman favorite of humans (to this day, especially in Limón). Curiously, the specific cruelty of cooking live lobsters is addressed by both authors. In Rossi’s text, The Black Panthers prepare a feast of lobsters due to a surplus in the daily catch: “Maikí y las chicas iban metiendo las iban metiendo vivas [las langostas] en el agua hirviendo lo que es algo muy bárbaro, en realidad” (2007: 45)<sup>13</sup>. In *C*, Matilda is an avid lobster hunter who is absolutely indifferent to anything resembling a feeling of compassion for the nonhumans that she profits from. She approaches Lorenzo to sell them to him, and here the author also remarks on their near, painful death so that humans can eat their flesh: “tres gordas langostas que sostenía por las antenas y que movían sus patas con lentos movimientos angustiados, como si presintieran que en breve las esperaba una muerte horrenda en el agua hirviendo de la olla” (186)<sup>14</sup>. In Parima Bay there is not much reference to domestic companion nonhumans or nonhumans raised for food instead of fished or caught in the ocean other than Amanda’s chickens at the beginning of the novel, and the companion dogs at the end of the novel. The chickens are banished after they provide the excuse for Lorenzo’s cowardly murder of Plantintáh, who later reincarnates in a beautiful black rooster that remains with Amanda forever, after they disappear in the tidal wave

<12> “You had to move constantly between mountains and precipices, you had to walk crouched over like animals, to survive without being scattered like animals and like noble beasts to stand and fight”.

<13> “Maikí and the girls were putting them, they were putting them (the lobsters) into the boiling water alive, which is a truly barbaric thing to do, in reality”.

<14> “Three fat lobsters held by the antennae and moving their legs in slow, agonized movements, as though they foresaw that a horrendous death soon awaited them in the boiling waters of the pot”.

that concludes the novel: “El gallo negro se fue con ella hasta el fin del mar” (Lobo, 1996: 220)<sup>15</sup>. Plantintáh always was profoundly kind, and even before his peculiar, queer, actually, transformation into a happy nonhuman we see evidence of his okay-ness with, perhaps, the nonhuman in himself. Lobo tells us how he dislikes the hunting and murder of innocent nonhumans: “No le gustaba la cacería de animales silvestres y cuantas veces Lorenzo trató de despertar su entusiasmo para que los dos salieran en busca de un venado, un chancho de monte o un saíno, había sido rechazado” (1996: 30)<sup>16</sup>. Usually when humans are turned into nonhumans it is a type of punishment and/or supernatural curse. Plantintáh settles gracefully into his new shape, which allows him to accompany his beloved in the physical realm once again. In terms of the dogs, the arrival of electricity cements the radical division between nonhumans and humans, and they become veritably enslaved creatures while the nocturnal nonhumans also (sadly) retreat further into the mountains (and closer to the indigenous communities). Meanwhile, and in a landscape that is fully populated with nonhumans, remarkably unlike Rossi's Limón, wild animals are at least part of the shared landscape with humans: the serpents are dangerous, the nocturnal large cats are feared, butterflies are cruelly murdered (by the *Nazi* entomologist, no less!) and alligators are denied a soul during a priest's very brief stay in town (how quaintly biblical). Finally, I want to end this section by highlighting the fact that oppressed groups belong, as a category, to the nonhuman, as such, the political, racial, gender hegemony obtains a justification for their mistreatment, abuse and exploitation. Many critics have already drawn these parallels, as Chen explains:

As existing scholarship tells us from many different disciplinary sites and, indeed, as everyday language practices also confirm, vivid links, whether live or long-standing, continue to be drawn between immigrants, people of color, laborers and working-class subjects, colonial subjects, women, queer subjects, disabled people, and animals, meaning, not the class of creatures that includes humans but quite the converse, the class against which the (often rational) human with inviolate and full subjectivity is defined (2012: 95).

In *C*, then, Lobo evidences this de-humanization of humans when Lorenzo and Olga sexually exploit poor, black underage girls in Limón Town, via rape and sex traffic, for example. They dehumanize these children and treat them like abused nonhumans: “Eso te calmará. Yo te las puedo conseguir. Hasta de diez, de nueve ¡de ocho años! –dijo encantada con la idea de reclutar niñas sin menstruado. Quien quita, quizá después le servirían, a ella, como pupilas mansas y sumisas–. Pero te saldrá caro porque es muy peligroso para mí” (Lobo, 1996: 192)<sup>17</sup>. The appalling brutality of this woman emphasizes the interconnection between all types of oppression, in this case, racism and sexism intersect in the premeditated abuse of unprotected children whose lives are not “valuable”. This is the logic of speciesism as well. All of these evils come from exactly the same place. If we consider that “racism is the hierarchization of power and

<15> “The black rooster went with her to the end of the sea”.

<16> “He didn't like hunting wild animals, and many times Lorenzo tried to awaken enthusiasm in him for the two of them to go out in search of a deer, a wild boar, or a peccary, yet had been rejected”.

<17> “This will calm you down. I can get them for you. As young as ten, nine, even eight years old!” she said, delighted with the idea of recruiting girls yet to menstruate. Who knows, perhaps later they would serve her as meek and submissive pupils. ‘But it will cost you dearly, as it's very dangerous for me’”.

privilege across lines of race, then its reliance on the construction of a fragile humanity is one of its most profound dependencies” (Chen, 2012: 40), we see how, in spite of the differences in the structural hierarchy of humanness, both *C* and *LR* problematize the alleged stability of the *human* versus the *nonhuman*.

In both novels, the effects of human intervention of the ecological landscape are devastating. From the perspective of landscape ecology, it is undeniable that, “we are living in a transformative era. Since the start of the Industrial Revolution, humans have issued a new geological period—the Anthropocene—a ‘geology of mankind’ [...]. There are few places on earth that have not been touched, either directly or indirectly, by humans” (With, 2019: 2). However, there is a chronological aspect to the comparison of human effects in Limón in *LR* and *C*; essentially, Lobo’s novel comes first, and describes the original human impact in the area, while Rossi’s looks at contemporary environmental catastrophe. *C* narrates the original clash between the violent force of mestiza “civilization” and “nature” while *LR* focuses on the degradation of urban landscapes in San José manifested in the slums. The Limonese jungle in *C* goes from an almost mythological “virgin” state, where “los vecinos, bien avenidos, compartían cocales y riquezas del mar, los pescadores aumentaban. Cada nueva criatura que hacía su entrada en el pequeño mundo de la aldea era celebrada con grande regocijo y celebraciones paganas, puesto que ninguna religión ni secta se había ocupado de ese insignificante rincón de la cristiandad” (Lobo, 1996: 26)<sup>18</sup>, to a landscape organized by production and capitalism: “la selva densa, sus tremendos árboles, fue moderando su salvajismo y por aquí, por allá, empezaron a aparecer matitas de cacao sembradas en los claros, prometedoras, en el futuro, de abundantes cosechas” (18)<sup>19</sup>. The crops in this quote are cacao crops. The two novels come together in one specifically devastating human-produced environmental tragedy: the blight that killed approximately 80% of the plants in the (until then thriving) cocoa plantations in Limón in the late 1970s. The multi-layered, complex environmental, social and economic consequences of that catastrophe are enormous; one could argue that moment was pivotal for Limón’s destiny, affecting the human and the nonhuman alike; in fact, Limonese people to this day speak about this terrible event and how it impacted their landscape and their lives for generations. While Lobo’s characters helplessly watch their lives unravel, “Ante la vista desalentada de los hombres, mujeres y niños que sudaban trabajando denodadamente, en vano intento por detener el mal, las bayas se teñían de un morbosos color de podredumbre y la contagiosa peste asolaba hectáreas y hectáreas de cultivos” (152)<sup>20</sup>, Rossi’s definitely more radical former Black Panthers look at the event from a much more politicized and outraged point of view. Maikí argues that the entire thing was a trap from the “pañás” (the “white” mestizo Costa Ricans): “Por ese famoso cacao resistente que todos sembramos entró el hongo monila y nos arruinó” (2007: 234)<sup>21</sup>. According to this perspective, the “Instituto Agronómico” introduced a new genetically

<18> “The neighbors, living harmoniously, shared coconut groves and the riches of the sea, the fishermen grew. Every new creature which made its entrance to the little world of the village was celebrated with great rejoicing and pagan festivities, since no religion or sect had cared for this insignificant little corner of Christendom”.

<19> “The dense jungle, with its tremendous trees, gradually started moderating its savagery and, here and there, small cocoa plants began to appear in the clearing, promising abundant harvests in the future”.

<20> “Before the despondent eyes of the men, women and children toiling and sweating in vain attempts to stop the evil, the berries turned a morbid color of rot and the contagious plague ravaged acres and acres of crops”.

<21> “For that famous resistant cocoa that we all planted, the monilinia fungus came in and ruined us”.

modified species of cocoa plant that was completely vulnerable to the fungus. It was a genocide of an entire vegetable species that targeted a specific racial minority of thriving landowners, if you will. Of particular interest to the present vegan ecofeminist queer ecological analysis is the interrelationship between politically-motivated genetic alteration of natural plant species and the direct economic consequences: “Vendimos hasta el último centímetro de tierra [...]. Las tres familias que se dejaron algo fueron la excepción que confirmó la regla de que los negros todo lo vendíamos” (235)<sup>22</sup>. Lobo echoes the hopelessness evident in the previous quote in *C* as well: “Ya no hay tortugas –contestó ella con su gravedad acostumbrada. –Ni lagartos, ni monos, ni cúculas... En este pueblo ya no queda nada” (148)<sup>23</sup>. Thus, both novels confirm the devastating impact of human intervention on the Limón landscape, an impact that builds upon initial “civilizing” of “nature” and reverberates through generations of both humans, nonhumans, the land, and plants.

In previous articles, I have emphasized the disruptive importance of queer families in any traditional patriarchal, speciesist, heteronormative ecological landscape; these queer families are present in both Lobo’s and Rossi’s novels. In accordance with Chen, it is important to clarify that the “adjectival queer therefore acts to shift meaning to the side of a normative interpretation, away from meanings associated with the notional center” (2012: 69). In this sense, a queer family is an alternative family that does not obey the laws of normative nuclear heteropatriarchal ones, and this includes but is *not* limited to LGBTQ+ families. Furthermore, and especially because I strive to always keep the (inter)relationship(s) between humans and nonhumans at the forefront of my methodology, I want to direct our attention to the fact that Chen also concludes that, “where and when nonhuman animals serve as more or less proximate members of human families (or the human family), cultural mappings between nonhuman animals and humans cluster around questions of sex, regulation, substance, and biopolitics” (2012: 133). Taking these radical, disruptive queer / human(s) and nonhuman(s) families as my basic focus, I propose that in *LR* and *C*, we can find three types of queer families: social (and anti-social) families, primal families, and supernatural families. Social and/or antisocial families include The Black Panthers, guerrilla groups and *maras* in *LR* and the hippies in *C*. Primal families include Laura/Aisha and Toño in *LR* and Amanda and the rooster and Miss Emily, Stella and Plantintáh in his ghost form in *C*—these last two are also supernatural families. A thorough analysis of the radical interventions of these queer families merits an entire paper of its own (the weight of classification the *maras* as queer families that originate as a direct response to brutal economic inequality and cultural degradation alone is one tempting research area), but let us consider just two in a little bit more detail. In Rossi’s text, Laura/Aisha and Toño as queer family of two disrupted the guerilla by forming a mother and son bond where most *guerilleros* and *guerilleras* set up in heterosexual couples. But they also disrupt the violent *maras* fa-

<22> “We sold every last inch of land [...] The three families who left something behind were the exception that proved the rule that we black sold everything”.

<23> “There are no tortoises”, she replied with her usual seriousness. ‘Nor lizards, nor monkeys, nor sloths... There is nothing left in this village’.

mily when Toño/Douglas protects his mother from the others. Laura/Aisha describes life in the *mara* as hell, and she concludes that the *culture of cruelty* that she has observed from childhood is the most *human* of human (horrific) creations: “Siempre había pensado que ‘eso’ era una deshumanización. Pero no, ahora sé que ‘eso’ es lo más humano que hay, no existe entre los animales” (Rossi, 2007: 288)<sup>24</sup>. Pérez qualifies this “eso” as “abyección” [*abjection*], which is an interesting idea, especially because she inadvertently refers to the instability between the human and the nonhuman that I have touched upon throughout this essay, especially when she argues that “hay que tratar de inventar una noción de lo humano, de la comunidad que no se defina ante un estado anterior de naturaleza. Hay que inventar una noción de lo humano que sea capaz de atravesar el umbral de lo animal, de lo puramente biológico” (2012: 53)<sup>25</sup>. In Lobo’s text, Miss Emily, Stella and the ghost struggle to resist Lorenzo’s endless evil. They fail, but at the end of the novel we see a sort of hope that their primal, supernatural, queer forces still remain (interconnected intimately with Limón’s jungle-as-place). As we approach the conclusion of the present study, I want to thread together the main methodological intents of my vegan ecofeminist queer ecological approach by pointing out a few more queer disruptions in both novels, and, finally and inevitably, the profound significance of African-diasporic music in terms of the complex ecological landscape in Lobo’s and Rossi’s novels.

In order to retake these most salient queer disruptions of the “natural” in both *LR* and *C*, I want to continue to build upon the understanding of queer as non-normative and transgressive of traditional human-on-top (real and imaginary) hierarchies that I have been exploring from the beginning of the present study. There are two explicit references to “homosexuality” in *LR*: first, The Black Panthers believe in fighting economic and political injustice at the same time that they defend minority groups’ rights, explicitly black people, women and “homosexuals”. Second, Laura/Aisha makes a bizarre comment about boys “turning” gay if too attached to their mothers: “un niño muy apegado a su madre y sin figuras paternas podía hacerse homosexual” (Rossy, 2007: 156)<sup>26</sup>. This homophobic assertion probably speaks to the social context at the time. In *C*, Lobo makes Eudora bisexual, in a very sex-positive, affirming way: “Cierto que Eudora nunca más volvió a sentir lo que disfrutó aquella noche, porque nunca más hizo el amor colectivamente” (1996: 133)<sup>27</sup>. When Stella finds out about her orientation, she reacts with moderate surprise but then accepts it quite naturally. In essence, and in line with a vegan ecofeminist queer ecological perspective, Lobo’s and Rossi’s novels show how the speciesist, patriarchal hierarchy of domination places nonhumans in the category of “others”, along with the rest of the undesirables: the dissenters, the rebels, women, the disabled, the queer, the people of color, and so on. In fact, many theorists have discussed one of the possible readings of disability as queer, and I would like to suggest that, in Lobo’s novel, Stella reads as disabled (and queer) because

<24> “I had always thought that ‘it’ was a dehumanization. But no, now I know that ‘it’ is that which is most human, it does not exist among animals”.

<25> “We must attempt to invent a notion of the human, of community that is not defined by a prior state of nature. We must invent a notion of the human that is able to cross the threshold of the animal, of the purely biological”.

<26> “A boy extremely attached to his mother and without father figures could become homosexual”.

<27> “It was true that Eudora never again felt that which she enjoyed that night, because never again did she make love collectively”.

she is a mixed-raced albino, and does not fit in with any racial-social group in Parima Bay—she even feels a little like the odd-woman-out in the queer family I mentioned earlier. However, precisely because of her queer disability she has access to the supernatural, via the teachings of Miss Emily: “Encarnada en ella la deidad bromista, Stella hizo los gestos de un muchacho voluble y caprichoso, torció la cara en muecas y absurdos visajes, se apoderó del sombrero de un espectador y a otro le tiró del pelo, y terminó, completamente agotada, en un baile desafortado y picaresco, con una mano en el bajo vientre y otra sobre la nalga” (Lobo, 1996: 145)<sup>28</sup>. How unfortunate, though, that the author then relegates Stella to the typical representation of disabled characters as self-destructive alcoholics.

In terms of the heteronormative categorization of the white, able-bodied human male as the *one* opposed to the *other*, Chen argues that the “responsibilities of feeling then fell to lower places on the hierarchy—women, animals, racialized men, disabled people, and incorporeals such as devils or demons. The theory of the subject thus had consequences that had everything to do with animacy and mattering, given the distribution of ontological castings down along the hierarchy” (2012: 46). Characters of dissent are abundantly present in both *LR*—The Black Panthers, the members of the guerrilla, Laura/Aisha herself, and *C*—*el Africano, el hierbatero, el maestro*. What I want to suggest is that such “a responsibility of feeling”, which comes with being relegated by the hegemony to an intrinsic inferiority actually opens up the space for magic, for the mysterious and unexplainable (in rational terms), that is, the supernatural, which in both *LR* and *C* appears as a rich, wonderful space of transgression and resistance. While the supernatural occurs naturally in *C*, it is a little more surprising to find it in *LR* since Rossi is a notoriously pragmatic writer. I think it appears because it cannot *not* appear. Here I am aware that I am taking wide license with traditional forms of literary criticism in terms of my destabilizing the “real” Limón with the “narrative” one. This is purposeful; I cannot help but see it in the novels. Notably, when Laura/Aisha feeds Toño from the scarce milk of a starving cow and her baby, the vegan parallel is not only obvious, but opens up the magic of the Tolteca women that literally rips into the text of the novel: “Detrás de sus párpados, una mujer le ordenó a Laura hacer una línea en la tierra. Le indicó cómo abrirla y entrar con el cipote” (Rossi, 2007: 144)<sup>29</sup>. Toño also sees the Tolteca women later on in the novel, when they instruct Laura/Aisha on how to use the winds—which she never does, coincidentally: “Ya nosotras nos vamos, usted use los vientos” (183)<sup>30</sup>. This ancestral-supernatural element is *extremely* remarkable in such a social-political novel. The supernatural in Limón is inevitable and final—inasmuch as Costa Ricans “struggle with” (to put it mildly) our Latin American-ness (not to speak of our Central American-ness!) magical realism is, more than a literary style, simply part of who we *are*. This supernatural quality is, in the novels written by Lobo and Rossi, uniquely Latin American, Caribbean, Costa Rican, *Limonense*. They could not have happened

<28> “Possessed by a playful deity, Stella made the gestures of a fickle and capricious boy, contorted her face into grimaces and absurd visages, seized one spectator’s hat and pulled another’s hair, and ended up, completely exhausted, in a frenzied and mischievous dance, with one hand on her lower belly and the other on her buttock”.

<29> “Behind her eyelids, a woman ordered Laura to make a line in the earth. She showed her how to open it and enter it with the cock”.

<30> “We are leaving, you use the winds”.

anywhere else. Here I may pause for a second and apply one of the unorthodox strategies of a vegan queer ecofeminist reading to point out that as a Costa Rican myself, who has intimately and figuratively experienced Limón during the course of my life, I inevitably respond viscerally to the markers in place in the novels. This is not necessarily a weakness, but simply a different path of interacting with the narratives. Indeed, in terms of Limón as *more-than-place*, “ideas, including ones that are key ingredients for sexual cultures [queer interventions], lead to the transformation of urban spaces just as biophysical environments can foster certain experiences and ideologies” (Brent, 2011: 257). The *place-queer-supernatural* (inter) connection runs through both novels like a fluid river, and is of course manifested in music: calypso and reggae. Both music genres are Afro-diasporic; however, in *C*, calypso appears as more exclusively black—the “white” mestizo Costa Ricans do not understand it, lyrics or melody. At the least expected moments, the black people of Parima Bay create calypso with sticks and coconut graters; music sprouts from them, whatever the means. In *LR*, on the contrary, Laura/Aisha insists that reggae is *ecumenical*; that its beauty and importance lies in the fact that everyone can vibe to it, can understand it: “Su cuerpo se movía como una culebra independiente, como si la música le hablara a su parte más viva. Y entonces Laura comprendió. La magia de esta música, su fuerza terrible, venía del extraño compás atrasado que creaba un silencio y en ese silencio estaban el poder y la gloria” (2007: 107)<sup>31</sup>. Critics like Grinberg Pla have analyzed this musical genre with the issue of transnationalism and identity, for example when she states that “el calypso, en tanto que crónica cantada de la comunidad, ha funcionado como lugar de memoria y reinención de la identidad afrocaribeña en el contexto centroamericano, visibilizando por tanto los complejos vínculos transnacionales de los afroantillanos panameños y costarricenses” (2012: 394)<sup>32</sup>. In the novel, however, this understanding is beyond both the cultural/transnational *and* the physical/emotional; it is ancestral. The final passage of *C* is also imbued with music (and the supernatural), as Matilda’s ghost returns to dance over Lorenzo’s ocean-destroyed *comisariato*: “Su danza es una voluptuosa liturgia, un llamado ferviente a otra dimensión, la comunión con un tiempo no alcanzado todavía, gozosa euforia vital, reto [...] desentrañar su misterio. La joven cabeza inclinada hacia atrás, enajenada y narcisa, baila la negra distante a los ojos extraños, refugiada en [...] su secreta región interior. Antífona y respuesta, baila sobre los escombros” (220)<sup>33</sup>. Music in these two Costa Rican books is both *nature* and *culture*, like Limón. In both these wonderful novels, *Calypso* and *Limón Reggae*, Tatiana Lobo and Anacristina Rossi write beautiful words that show how Limón screams out of their texts, in the shape of music, in which the natural includes nonhumans in a rich, queer, complex multiverse of voices, experiences and realities, including the Latin American *reality* of magical realism, which certainly becomes more than a genre. I believe Costa Rican vegan ecofeminist queer ecolo-

<31> “Her body moved like an independent snake, as if the music spoke to its most living part. And then Laura understood. The magic of the music, its terrible force, came from the strange backbeat that created a silence, and in that silence was the power and the glory”.

<32> “Calypso, as a sung chronicle of the community, has functioned as a place of memory and reinvention of the Afro-Caribbean identity in the context of Central America, thus making visible the complex transnational links of Afro-Caribbean Panamanians and Costa Ricans”.

<33> “Her dance is a voluptuous liturgy, a fervent call to another dimension, a communion with a time not yet reached, joyous vital euphoria, a challenge [...] to unravel its mystery. The young head tilted back, mad and proud, dances the black woman far from strange eyes, sheltered in [...] her secret inner world. Antiphon and response, she dances on the rubble”.



gical literary criticism can do with a little magic. Perhaps what novels like these show is that our Costa Rican identity is made of mountain jungle and ocean, corruption and passion, music and ghosts, and that as long as Limón breaks through and there is someone willing to keep fighting, there is hope, even if utopian.

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