

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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Escrito con Tinta Roja:

The Mexicana Feminist Detective in the Fiction of
María Elvira Bermúdez, Myriam Laurini, and Patricia Valladares

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

In Hispanic Languages and Literatures

by

Sandra Ruiz

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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Professor Héctor Calderón, Chair

In my dissertation, I examine Mexican detective fiction of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries written by Mexican feminist writers whose literary works include Mexican female detective characters. Writers and works I analyze in this dissertation are María Elvira Bermúdez's "Detente, sombra," (1962) and "Las cosas hablan" (1985) in conjunction with Bermúdez's socio-historical study, *La vida familiar del mexicano (1955)*, argenmex writer Myriam Laurini's *Morena en rojo* (1994), and Patricia Valladares' *Tan frío como el infierno* (2014). All three writers challenge previous criticism that had relegated the genre to low-art, entertainment literature and redefine the social and literary roles writers of detective fiction play in Mexican social history through the lenses of decolonial feminism, legal-storytelling, and hemispheric studies. In Chapter One, I examine the evolution of the

detective genre beginning with founding father Edgar Allan Poe, moving eastward into Europe with the inclusion of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie, I then head towards the Américas, with the U.S. hard-boiled novel and Latin America's *novela negra*, that places the genre as a tool for social critique and I further discuss the presence of detective, crime, and mystery fiction in Mexico. In Chapter Two, I discuss María Elvira Bermúdez's legacy as one of the first women in twentieth-century Mexico to earn a university degree, attend law school, and become a Supreme Court judge while she simultaneously and passionately dedicated herself to writing and critiquing detective fiction. In Chapter Three, I underscore the value *argenmex* writer Myriam Laurini brings to the genre with her itinerant Afro-Mexican detective, la Morena. The narrative serves as an ethnographic narrative on Mexican women's issues involving race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship. Chapter Four introduces Patricia Valladares' first novel, *Tan frío como el infierno* taking place in post-modern twenty-first century Mexico City with the radical feminist detective Milena Ruiz who traces the social histories and geographies of women's bodies as "*territorios de guerra*." Chapter Five discusses what happens to crime fiction in the hands of Mexican feminist writers, women who as writer-activists forge their professional and creative lives within the wider context of the history of Mexican feminism.

This dissertation of Sandra Ruiz is approved.

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*Para mi madre y padre,
hemos cruzado muchas montañas y desiertos para llegar aquí*

*Para Jaime,
nuestro viaje apenas está por empezar*

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- 2007 "Chicana/os, Society and Discourse: Literary, Linguistic and Historical Enquiries." Graduate Student Conference, University of California, Santa Barbara. 20-21 April.
- 2006 Ruiz, Sandra. "Moving Beyond the Gender Dichotomy: Reyna Grande's *Across One Hundred Mountains*." Pacific Coast Council on Latin America Studies (PCCLAS). Carson, CA. 3 November.

Introduction

In her *Capitalismo gore* (2010), Tijuanaense feminist theorist and performance artist Sayak Valencia adamantly asserts that Mexican feminist theory must stem from a Mexican female context and social location, “No buscamos ni discursos blancos <<ni hombres blancos que buscan salvar a mujeres morenas de hombres morenos>> no necesitamos discursos primermundistas para explicar las realidades del Tercer Mundo” (9). As a first-generation U.S. Latina whose parents migrated from Mexico and El Salvador, Valencia’s statement has resonated with me in my graduate studies in my investigations of Chicana and Mexican women writers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

A young bookworm, I recall feeling a sense of not belonging when I read the various books I borrowed from my local library. One day, I came across an interesting title, *Nancy Drew and the Hidden Staircase* (1930; revised 1959) by Carol Keene. Never before having read a mystery novel, I was intrigued by its title but also by the cover image of a young blond white teenage detective. “What is this story about?” I thought to myself. I was impressed by how easy I was able to finish the book, as I found the language fairly manageable for someone who was still trying to balance her bilingual tongue. The plot-line scattered with clues intrigued me. Yet, I remember feeling a sense of displacement or a lack of connection with the main character Nancy Drew and her worldview as a teenage detective. As a U.S. born teenager, I thought I would surely be able to bond with an American teenage character and her storyline. At thirteen, I was unable to pinpoint why the narrative left me with this feeling. Years later as an undergraduate studying the literature of Chicana and Mexican women like Sandra Cisneros, Rosario Castellanos, Cherríe Moraga, and Elena Garro, I was able to return to that unidentifiable feeling I was left with at the end of the Nancy Drew story: everything was too perfect, too tidy, too clean.

I felt distanced from the book because I did not share Nancy's world-view, where she had a live-in domestic worker and a highly educated father who could afford a single-family home, a car for himself and one for her. It was the kind of life I did not have growing up in an immigrant household in the urban streets of Los Angeles.

The formulaic narrative in the Nancy Drew series where at the end of the day the teenage sleuth solved her crime in time for dinner at home was quite the opposite home life I had with my parents. My mother, a native from El Salvador, had left her war-torn country to the U.S. with the hope that her children would not have to suffer the consequences of a civil war and my father, a farmworker from the rural landscapes of Jalisco, had to leave school to help support his family, but could not find work in his home state as an unskilled laborer. With their own unique experiences, both migrated to *El Norte* not knowing what they would find or how they would get there. My family's stories of migration from their native countries and survival in the United States have always been of great importance to me and none of those stories would be found in Nancy Drew's mysteries.

As a Ph.D. student, the detective genre returned to me in the form of Chicana and Mexicana women who take cues from the traditional formulaic genre created by Edgar Allan Poe, developed by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie and further popularized by the U.S. hard-boiled writers Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. In Chapter One of my dissertation, I delve into the history of detective fiction starting in the United States, moving to Europe and Latin America, returning to the U.S. with the hard-boiled genre. In Latin America, I focus on the innovations in the genre especially regarding detective characters, and in Mexico, I emphasize the discussion on classic detective fiction versus the Mexican *novela negra* as social critique. I end Chapter One with Mexican

feminist detective fiction writers, María Elvira Bermúdez, Myriam Laurini, and Patricia Valladares. These writers enrich the genre with new racial, social, political and economic contexts in Mexico and also with new hemispheric horizons, North and South America, Africa, and the Middle East.

Critics of the genre have dismissed or overlooked the contributions of these women writers. In *Antiheroes: Mexico and Its Detective Novel*, Ilan Stavans calls the genre a parody of U.S. writing (15) and erroneously states that María Elvira Bermúdez did not create a Mexican feminist detective, even though in the case of Bermúdez his study focuses on the same short story collection where the first female detective character in Latin American literature emerges, María Elena Morán in “Detente, sombra” (Stavans 94). In my research, I was aghast when witnessing the misnomer of Myriam Laurini who is identified as Laura Laurini by Mexicanist scholar Salvador C. Fernández (Fernández 56). I could never imagine writers like Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes or Edgar Allan Poe having their names being neglected in the same manner. While my dissertation does not include the works of Chicana and Latina feminist detective writers like Lucha Corpi, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Linda Rodriguez and newcomer María Nieto, my study does provide a valuable contribution to Mexican literary studies. María Elvira Bermúdez is a forgotten writer and critic of the 1950s-1980s. And very few critical essays on Bermúdez and Myriam Laurini have been published. María Elvira Bermúdez, Myriam Laurini and Patricia Valladares all employ the formulaic elements of the genre, but their narratives’ commitment to social justice and equity carry the foundational components of the *novela negra*, advancing detective literature as social critique.

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a growth in female authorship throughout the world. In 1960s United States, a host of new social and political movements

emerged stimulating social change throughout the country as citizens of diverse ethnicities, races and genders became involved in the Civil Rights Movement, Feminist Movement, Gay Rights Movement, and Anti-War Movements. In Latin America, counter-cultures began to emerge in literature, music, and other creative realms challenging traditional social norms. In Mexico, the 1968 student movement was joined by other sectors of society such as laborers, union organizers, mothers and children who protested against the Mexican government's repression of political and civil liberties. The collective protest reached its height el 2 de octubre when President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz ordered the military to fire at a large demonstration in Tlatelolco Plaza. Causing mass hysteria and killing many citizens who were in attendance (the exact number continues to be unknown), this historical moment became known as the Massacre in Tlatelolco. According to scholar Persephone Braham, this particular moment defined how Mexican writers would approach the detective novel, "This violence is grounded in, condoned by, an oppressive discourse of "Mexicanness" (*mexicanidad*) represented in elite culture, official history, and the mass media. Mexican writers implicitly reject the cerebralism of the classic detective novel by creating protagonists whose scarred bodies become visible testaments to abuses of power" (Braham xi).

Equality was slow in coming for Mexican women. Attorney, judge, critic and writer María Elvira Bermúdez wrote both scholarly and creative works as a consequence of her understanding of a just Mexican society. My Chapter Two, "María Elvira Bermúdez Introduces Detective María Elena Morán: Feminism and the Search for *lo justo mexicano*" discusses the creation of the first Latin American female detective. María Elena Morán first appears in the short story, "Detente, sombra" (1962), which is also the title of a collection of her short stories *Detente, sombra* (1962) where Morán shares the stage with Bermúdez's

male detective character Armando H. Zozaya. Morán can also be found in another short story collection *Muerte a la zaga* (1985) in the short narratives “Las cosas hablan” and “Precisamente ante sus ojos.” From mid-twentieth century, Bermúdez had a career as an *abogada* practicing litigation law, a world traditionally reserved for males. She was also involved in seeking suffrage rights for Mexican women. Bermúdez knew well the classic writers of the detective genre: Edgar Allan Poe, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Wilkie Collins, Agatha Christie, Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Jorge Luis Borges, Adolfo Bioy Casares including more popular thriller writers such as Mickey Spillane, Ian Fleming, and John Le Carré. Writing criticism on “¿Qué es lo policiaco en la narrativa?” (1987), Bermúdez assesses the contributions of these writers to the genre. Her history of the genre also includes Mexican contemporaries Jorge Ibarguengoitia and Paco Ignacio Taibo II. In 1953, she published her first detective novel, *Diferentes razones tiene la muerte*, followed in 1955 by the collection *Los mejores cuentos policiacos mexicanos*. It is important to note that Bermúdez began writing in this urban genre at the same time as now well-known contemporaries Rosario Castellanos, Juan Rulfo, and Carlos Fuentes. In 1955, she published *La vida familiar del mexicano*, a sociological study which included a critique of Mexican machismo and offered alternative identities in the search for “*lo justo mexicano*.”

Like Castellanos, Bermúdez was a social and literary activist and in the 1960s her feminist detective character María Elena Morán emerges possessing traditional female characteristics as she is in a heterosexual marriage, she is a mother, and a source of moral support for her husband. Yet, what makes her particular character important within the genre is that Morán as a character works her detective persona within the confines of the traditional gendered roles for Mexican women and at the same time subverts the patriarchal and colonial father. Morán has the agency and capacity to disrupt the

presupposed role for both women and men as she exhibits characteristics that defy the classic definition and understanding of what is a detective character. Bermúdez's María Elena Morán opens the doors for other women writers to explore non-traditional formats and formulas when creating a detective persona, especially evident in *argenmex* Myriam Laurini and Patricia Valladares.

Myriam Laurini exiled to Mexico from Argentina during her country's military dictatorship (1976-1983) along with her children and spouse, writer Rolo Diez. Living in Mexico since 1980, both writers have been politically active and vocal about their home country's political turmoil, which has been extended and creatively explored into Laurini's literature. In Chapter Three, "Myriam Laurini's *Morena en rojo*: Ethnographer with a Gun," I develop the Argenmex's contribution to the genre with her representation of Mexico's Afro-Mexican community via her female detective-journalist la Morena who, as an itinerant character in diverse geographies of the Mexican nation, becomes an ethnographer of Mexico's long-standing social, political, economic, and racial problems. *Morena en rojo* (1994; 2008) is published in a significant historical moment in Mexican ethnic and racial politics. Two years prior to its publication in 1992, during the commemoration of five hundred years since the first Spanish contact with the Americas, the Mexican government declared the African continent as Mexico's third racial, cultural, and historical root. On January 1, 1994 when the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect, one of the most significant Mexican indigenous movements of the twentieth century, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), demanding political, social, and cultural indigenous autonomy from the Mexican state, made its appearance. The publication of *Morena en rojo* is also symbolically important.

Africans brought to what was to be Mexican soil came as slaves. The existence and complex history of the African presence in Mexico has received minimal scholarly attention. For example, one of the first contemporary studies of the Afro-Mexican population is anthropologist Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán's *La población negra en México: Estudio etnohistórico* (1946). His research discusses the history of African people in Mexico along with their slow and difficult acculturation into Mexican mestizo society. The state of Veracruz has consistently been associated with Mexico's African presence especially considering that the port of Veracruz served as the entryway for Spanish conquerors as well as African slaves. Recent works on modern-day Afro-Mexicans have centered on Mexico's Costa Chica located in the coastal regions of the states of Guerrero and Oaxaca, due to the presence of Afro-Mexican communities. Although present day scholars have begun to analyze the history of the *tercera raíz*, it is important to note the complex African/Black image in the Mexican imaginary. In popular culture there are two well-known Black figures, Memín Pinguín and Rarotonga.

Memín Pinguín, a Cuban-Mexican character, was introduced in comic form in the 1940s through the comic book "Pepín." Though his personality affirmed Mexican societal moral codes, Memín Pinguín's physical appearance brings into question issues of race and identity. When looking at Memín Pinguín's corporeal characteristics, exaggerated lip size, enlarged ears, dark skin, and flat nose the image that stands out is that of the African sambo, a historically racist image employed to denigrate and oppress people of African heritage. Memín Pinguín's physical aspects are partially human; if anything, I would argue that his image is more comparable to that of simian. In 2005, Memín Pinguín brought outrage from U.S. African American and Latino activists and civil rights leaders when the Mexican government decided to release a commemorative stamp in the honor of Memín

Pinguín's anniversary. Leaders argued against the release because of the racist overtones the image exhibits, the stamp nonetheless was released because the Mexican government declared Memín Pinguín as a part of Mexico's national popular heritage. The *Washington Post* quoted a Mexican embassy spokesperson as stating, "Just as Speedy González has never been interpreted in a racial manner by the people in Mexico [...] He is a cartoon character. I am certain that this commemorative postage stamp is not intended to be interpreted on a racial basis in Mexico or anywhere else" ("Mexican Stamps Racist"). African American scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in his film documentary *Black in Latin America* (2010) has a look of shock when he asks an Afro-Mexican man if he believes Memín Pinguín to be a racist image, and to Gates' dismay the man replies, "No" (*Black in Latin America*). Memín Pinguín is not alone in the comic book world. Rarotonga is another African character, who also appears in the Mexican comic magazines during the 1970s under the publication of *Lágrimas, Risas y Amor* with the catch phrase "*Hazme tuya cada martes.*" Her physical appearance and representation like Memín Pinguín also brings forth issues of race and gender, which I discuss in depth in Chapter Three. These two Mexican popular culture icons become representative for what is understood as Black or African in the Mexican imaginary and although these comics are no longer published, the images they projected for many years regarding "Blackness" in Mexican society still linger to present day. Therefore, how does a contemporary figure like la Morena relate to the predecessors of her racial identity? How does Laurini construct la Morena's Afro-Mexicanness?

Through la Morena, Laurini depicts African-Mexican subjectivity, still a rarity in Mexican literature,¹ with an intelligent feminist detective journalist who embraces her

¹ Francisco Rojas González's *La negra Angustias* (1944) and Carlos Fuentes' *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962) are part of the small group of novels with Afro-Mexican characters as central figure to the narrative.

Afro-Mexican body. La Morena is a woman who is not only socially conscious of her racial, sexual and gender identity but she is also observant and critical of other identities outside her own. The novel is rich with female characters like the indigenous teenage sex worker María Crucita, Zindzi *la mulata jarocho*, Rosi who is one-third of Morena's undercover group of private investigators *Súper Agente 86*, all of whom recount their histories to Morena asking her to remember and document their lives. Moreover, in la Morena's quest to become a published *nota roja* reporter not only of crimes but also of social injustices committed, she encounters a system which forces her and the readers to question the conditions under which the legal code is enforced and justice implemented.

The most recent Mexican detective fiction writer, Patricia Valladares, a clinical psychologist and academic specializing in gender and sexual violence in Mexico, published her first detective novel in May 2014. Valladares has been an activist for over twenty-five years on behalf of women who suffered violence. She had the first *albergue* for battered women in Mexico and is founder in 1987 of UNAM Iztacala's Programa Interdisciplinario para la Atención de la Violencia Sexual y los Estudios de Género (PIAV). Her writing like that of her female predecessors continues their literary legacy with the militant, post-punk rocker detective feminist Milena Ruiz. Chapter Four, "*Crónica de un secuestro: Postmodern Noir in Patricia Valladares' Tan frío como el infierno*" discusses the narrative's real-time Mexico City, as Milena, who I call the Mexican Nike runs throughout the Mexican capital disclosing the various political, social, racial, and economic issues confronted by contemporary Mexicans. Valladares pushes the genre into new and exciting areas, illustrating to the reader an Americanized modern/postmodern global Mexico City with its new high-rise and high-tech buildings, glossy shopping centers, gentrified neighborhoods, and at the same time contrasts the lack of progress in the country with real-life examples of

gender violence, femicides, wars and governmental oppression. Valladares situates her novel in two presidential *sexenios*, from Felipe Calderón and the war on narco-trafficking which spurred the killing and disappearances of many Mexican citizens to current President Enrique Peña Nieto whose administration, in the name of progress, has been implementing undemocratic reforms to the Mexican Constitution such as the amendments made to Article 27 allowing Mexico's most valuable resource, petroleum, to transform from a nationalized economic entity now open to foreign investment and trade. Even though Valladares' detective novel begins with the kidnapping of well-known Mexican photojournalist, Eloísa Castellanos, the narrative's overarching theme "*territorios de guerra*" addresses the various bodily geographies as "sites of struggle" to borrow Barbara Harlow's term:² women, Oaxacan indigenous communities, urban poor, and Palestinians are among the subjectivities explored in the text. The novel's critique is as sharp and fast moving as the novel itself, giving the reader a new lens from which to analyze the literary genre.

These three Mexican women writers move beyond the critical limitations imposed by scholars and writers like Ilan Stavans and Carlos Monsiváis who had previously perceived the genre as one of mimicry and entertainment. In my concluding Chapter Five, "When Crime Fiction Matters," I discuss why detective fiction that has been labeled as second tier literature becomes an important literary genre in the hands of Mexican feminist writers. My research and writing move beyond the existing criticism that has limited itself to depicting the genre as one-dimensional, static, and male-centered. With theoretical support of decolonial feminism (María Lugones), Critical Race Theory's legal-storytelling

² In her essay, "Sites of Struggle: Immigration, Deportation and Exile" (1991), Harlow does a cross-comparison between Chicana/o and Middle Eastern writers along with the various ways their struggles parallel one another, placing in conversation two historical groups living in the borderlands.

(Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic) and Hemispheric Studies (Diana Taylor), these Mexican writers and their novels allow the reader to enter a fictional world that enhances her/his critical understanding of Mexico through women's perspectives and experiences. Since most of the theories address issues from a U.S. context, I develop them to include Mexican women writers as their literature engages and modifies the genre. While women writers continue to be excluded and marginalized from literary canons, Bermúdez, Laurini and Valladares challenge heteronormativity in Mexico and abroad as they insert themselves in local and global worlds where empowerment, difference, and justice are invoked and exercised.

Chapter One

From C. Auguste Dupin to Milena Ruiz:

From Poe to Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Mexicana Feminist Detective Fiction

Introduction

The nineteenth century witnessed a dramatic shift throughout the world. While empires were losing their territories, new technologies and innovations, such as uses of electricity, steel, petroleum contributed to the emergence of the modern city. The nouveau riche, a rising bourgeoisie, supplanted the old world social order of monarchies and noble elites. Scientific knowledge began to contest religious dogmas and practices, superseding centuries of unquestioned ideologies. Infrastructures and moving vehicles, railways and steam engines, brought rapid contact and communication, which in turn brought movement and migration of people. Towns that were normally under-populated and manageable became urban metropolises overnight. The cosmopolitan city became an important point of entry for many people, expanding the city and bringing a new set of challenges and limits to its inhabitants such as crime, violence, and poverty. From within this whirlwind of change, American writer Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) creates and develops the urban detective narrative. Through his short story “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), the reader encounters Parisian C. Auguste Dupin, the first modern detective character. Researcher Martin Kayman asserts that as the invention of the short story during the century was seen as a modern phenomenon, no less is the appearance of a new and innovative protagonist known as “the detective” (Kayman 41). Poe’s literary creation gave readers a central character whose sole purpose was to employ deductive

logic when solving mysteries and crimes. Poe had labeled these stories as “tales of ratiocination” to describe Dupin’s unique intellectual capacity (Marlowe xii). Poe’s tales of ratiocination created a genre and sparked a number of writers, including prolific and influential Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie.

With the growing authorship, the twentieth century’s obsession with film produced a new genre, film noir with scripts based on the detective genre, depicting real life urban issues between law enforcement and growing mafia enclaves. Along with film noir, writers of the American hard-boiled novel such as Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett echoed the social concerns represented in film and gave way to a new interpretation of the detective character. In Latin America, Jorge Luis Borges, a fan of gangster films, brought innovation to the genre by deconstructing its classic deduction formula, and creating a new one based upon the reader. The second half of the twentieth century brought a change to the face of the protagonist who had traditionally been a white, heterosexual, educated middle-class male. In contrast to the founding fathers of the genre, women, gays, lesbians, and ethnic minorities began to produce their own interpretations of the genre. Feminist detective writers Marcia Muller with character Sharon McCone and Sara Paretsky with private investigator VI Warsharksy position their female protagonists at the center of the narrative while detecting issues not only pertaining to male subjectivities but female ones as well. These women writers challenge ideas that women’s literature can only be set within the passive domestic sphere, hidden from public view. In the feminist stories and novels in this study, concerns revolve around issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship while concurrently seeking justice and critiquing a state that ignores or supports crimes against women and children. In my dissertation “*Escrito con tinta roja*,” I follow three Mexican women writers from 1955 to 2014, from the intellectual search for

Mexican identity at mid-twentieth century to the current social ills stemming from political turf wars, indifference of the government, and continued class, ethnic, and gender inequality. María Elvira Bermúdez, attorney, judge, and literary critic, Myriam Laurini, Argentinian-Mexican political exile and investigative journalist, and Patricia Valladares, professor of clinical psychology and advocate on behalf of women and children, are all social activist writers who have brought artistic and thematic innovations to the genre through the female detective.

Emergence and Development of the Detective Genre:

Edgar Allan Poe, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and Agatha Christie

Poe: Fathering the Detective Genre

As has been universally recognized, the detective mystery genre was an invention of the nineteenth century through Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) via his short story, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841). The detective fiction genre has had some foundational formulas that authors, through Poe’s literary cues, have continued to employ in this creative aesthetic, one of them being the construction of the detective character. The genre has centered on a lone male detective, whose connection to the mystery or crime committed varies and depends on the author. For example, in Poe’s case, his character C. Auguste Dupin is a French intellectual who resides in Paris. Described by an anonymous narrator who is closely acquainted with Dupin but does not actively participate in his cases, the narrator acknowledges that Dupin possesses some interesting qualities about him, specifically his lack of socialization with the outside world. The detective has been described as someone who solely focuses on the logic of life and does not delve into the quotidian aspects of Parisian life. As is narrated in the sequel short story to “The Murders

in the Rue Morgue”, “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” (1842) further develops Dupin’s detachment from Parisian society:

“Upon the winding up of the tragedy involved in the deaths of Madame L’Espanaye and her daughter, the Chevalier dismissed the affair at once from his attention, and relapsed into his old habits of moody reverie. Prone, at all times, to abstraction, I readily fell in with his humor; and, continuing to occupy our chambers in the Faubourg Saint Germain, we gave the Future to the winds, and slumbered tranquilly in the Present, weaving the dull world around us into dreams. (Poe 38)

The narrator provides intimate knowledge on Dupin’s habits after he has solved his cases. He performs a physical and a mental detachment from the case, physical by creating a self-imposed isolation where he moves away from the city center into an agricultural suburb of the city. As an upper middle-class man, Dupin possesses the privileges that allow for him to choose when to connect and disconnect from Parisian urban society. The narrator also describes the mental detachment by describing everyday life as a “dull world”, whose residents, Dupin and the narrator, need to create and project a more fantastical environment. Although this detachment is common amongst other detective characters throughout the genre’s literary history, within Mexican writing I argue that a complete and total disengagement is contrary to the Mexican female detective characters found in the works of María Elvira Bermúdez, Myriam Laurini, and Patricia Valladares. Why this detachment is not completely possible within a Mexican framework will be later explained when discussing the genre within a Latin American context.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie: Specializing in Murders, Of Quiet, Domestic Interest³

However, not all detective characters are designed with the same personality traits; for example British writers, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) and Agatha Christie (1890-1976) placed their own imprints on their respective detective characters, Sherlock Holmes (Doyle), Hercule Poirot, and Miss Jane Marple (Christie). These authors create their characters according to their own creative context and understanding of the genre. Sherlock Holmes, possibly the most recognized of the three, exists during a period of great economic growth for England, where an emerging middle class challenges previous social understandings of capital, which had been solely controlled by monarchs and elites. In his “The Short Story from Poe to Chesterton,” Martin A. Kayman explains why Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes series was radically successful in comparison to other similar detective characters and their tales: “Doyle expertly achieved the right balance of elements to provide the male middle-classes with relaxing reading which flattered them by providing an intellectual adventure, while assuaging their anxieties with the modern world. The stories celebrate the materialism of the age” (48). In contrast, Poe’s Dupin lived in Paris, away from the proximity of the everyday American middle class life. This physical disconnect allowed for Poe’s readers of the time period to experience the stories as far away fantasy, in a city and country unfamiliar to them, hence, never feeling the anxiety of the crimes being committed in recognizable spaces. Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes lives among his readers, in urban London, frequenting the same places they do. Doyle continues to provide a sense of security, by always reestablishing the status quo when solving the mystery, identifying and imprisoning

³ Quote is from an original Agatha Christie quote found on her estate’s website: “I specialize in murders, of quiet, domestic interest.” Web. 19 Mar 2012. <<http://agathachristie.com>>.

the criminal. He reminds his readers that their social positions and lives are stable and protected. British writer Agatha Christie (1890-1976) creates her detective characters in a similar fashion, but while Dupin and Holmes were self-isolating, Christie's characters had evolved into individuals that attempted to interact within their social communities.

Agatha Christie is arguably the most published and widely read detective fiction writer with over one hundred books and sales in the millions throughout her six-decade career.⁴ Her most popular detective characters are Hercule Poirot and Miss Jane Marple. Hercule Poirot first appears in the short story *The Mysterious Affairs at Styles* (1920) as the prototypical detective character following in the footsteps of his predecessors Dupin and Holmes. Yet, the character I would like to focus on is not Hercule Poirot but instead the female detective Miss Jane Marple. Miss Marple first appears six years after Poirot in the short story "The Tuesday Night Club" (1926). Detective fiction scholar Maureen T. Reddy states that it was not rare for women writers to produce detective fiction at the time period of Poe and Doyle. She writes that between inserting Sherlock Holmes into the world of detective fiction with its readership to the emergence of the feminist detective, a number of women writers were publishing in the genre. However, "most of these writers created male detectives, as did virtually all male writers of mystery fiction. The few series that did feature women sleuths in those decades tended to make their protagonists nosy spinsters or the helpmates of male detectives" ("Women Detectives" 193). Christie's Miss Marple was an elderly woman who "uses the spinster stereotype to her advantage" ("Women Detectives" 194) and was rarely acknowledged as an active contributor to the solving of the mystery or crime. Christie's female detective remained within the confines of her gender

⁴ Source for the statistics on Christie's book sales can be found on Agatha Christie's Official Website. "Agatha Christie Timeline." Web. 15 Nov. 2011. <<http://agathachristie.com>>.

and was treated as a meddling old woman whose intelligence and wit were overshadowed by her social station in life as an unmarried and unemployed female, and because of this Reddy points out, “Miss Marple seldom gets official credit for the mysteries she solves in the twelve novels and twenty-one short stories in which she appears” (“Women Detectives” 193). It would be of interest to compare Miss Marple and María Elvira Bermúdez’s character María Elena Morán.

Both female characters represent the limits women confront when attempting to move beyond societal gender roles. As a married woman, Morán also experiences some challenges when involving herself in other people’s affairs. After Morán expresses some concerns to husband Bruno about a situation in which they are involved, he explains to her that it must be her active female imagination, as women like to overindulge or exaggerate on certain issues, “-Estás en plena novela, chata. Personajes ocultos, ruidos extraños, ¡todo un misterio! Pero en realidad nada hay de raro o de temible en esta casa. Balvanera y su criado son un par de viejos chochos e inofensivos. ¿Por qué les tienes miedo? Además, ¿no estoy yo aquí?” (83). In his attempt to comfort Morán by letting her know that she should not worry because his male presence should be enough to protect her, Bruno’s comments initially dismiss Morán’s instincts. But Morán does not allow for Bruno to completely persuade her, she decides to leave their bedroom to follow her detection instincts and investigate the strange house. Although Morán’s gender role limitations are similar to Miss Marple’s, Bermúdez allows for her character to defy them, by demonstrating how Morán negotiates between her investigative drive and the social roles and expectations placed upon her. Christie’s Miss Marple character, on the other hand, was constantly placed within her social position and although she had the intelligence and experience to assist in solving the mysteries, those around her would deduce her actions to her being an old

meddling woman, not an active and concerned citizen who had an intentional purpose in assisting those around her with her mystery-crime solving skills. The great influence these three authors, Poe, Doyle, and Christie had on the genre could be witnessed world-wide, especially within Latin American writers, where the genre was renovated and reinvented within a Latin American social context.

Reinventing the Genre in the Americas From “La muerte y la brújula” to *The Long Goodbye*

Jorge Luis Borges: “el mundo es un laberinto, del cual era imposible huir”⁵

Latin American writers have had a historical relationship with the detective fiction genre from the classic detective narration to the innovative and gritty American hard-boiled novel. The popularity of the genre in Latin America is witnessed via the publication of novels and short stories by a diverse group of authors. From Mexico to the Caribbean to South America, the genre has found a home in Spanish-speaking countries. Writers like Ricardo Piglia (Argentina), Alberto Fuguet (Chile), Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru), Paco Ignacio Taibo II (Mexico) and Rodolfo Pérez Valero (Cuba) are just an exemplary handful of the many contributors and authors of detective fiction. Even though historically male writers have mostly dominated the genre, women writers from Latin America as well as Spain have also published literary works. The most recognized detective fiction women writers are Alicia Giménez Bartlett (Spain), Marcela Serrano (Chile) and María Elvira Bermúdez (Mexico). From this group of women a younger generation of women writers has emerged to produce their own interpretation of the genre. One of Latin America’s best-known writers, Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) is widely acknowledged for being one of the first

⁵ Quote is taken from Jorge Luis Borges’ short story “La muerte y la brújula” (168).

Latin American writers to defy and reinvent the formulaic approach to the detective genre. Borges does not shy away from restructuring the limits of traditional literary methodology; his literary production is a living testament.

In his short story “La muerte y la brújula,” Borges presents what at first seems to be a Holmesian narrative. A criminal has been committing murders throughout an unknown urban center, possibly modeled after Borges’ Buenos Aires. Detective Erik Lönnrot has been called upon to assist the city’s law enforcement with the capture of an elusive criminal. Through a method of rational deduction, Lönnrot, early on figures out that the perpetrator of the crimes is his nemesis and mastermind criminal Red Scharlach. Lönnrot deciphers where the next crime is going to take place and decides to go there himself to stop the fourth and final offense. Unbeknownst to Lönnrot, Scharlach had planned for him to be his fourth and final murder victim. The beginning of the short story demonstrates how Borges begins to deconstruct the traditional detective formula by already informing the reader that the hero-protagonist Lönnrot does not succeed at the end of this story. Although Lönnrot may think of himself as a logical modern day detective, “Lönnrot se creía un puro razonador, un Auguste Dupin, pero algo de aventurero había en él y hasta de tahúr” (153-154), he fails at rationally discerning his fatal end. Scharlach had also forewarned Lönnrot that he intended on killing him, but Lönnrot presumed the threats as empty. By killing Lönnrot, Borges takes away the unshakeable power of the detective who had until then seemed as an invincible force.

With this particular short story’s ending, Borges dismantles the stability readers had become accustomed to in the detective genre. The traditional expectation is for the detective investigator to capture the criminal in order to bring justice and peace in a time of chaos. Yet, “La muerte y la brújula” demonstrates that the literary and social comforting

setting established by Poe, Doyle, and Christie is not always plausible. This short story is an important example of Borges' approach to the genre of detective fiction providing a more realistic ending, shaking the core of the traditional readership. In her seminal essay "De Poe a Borges: La creación del lector policial," Verónica Cortínez discusses how Borges not only renovates the genre by including a Latin American context, but he also creates a new reader and methodology in approaching his text. She states: "Al rescatar, secretamente, las características genéricas propias de Poe y llevarlas a un extremo, Borges logra desplazar el género policial a un terreno simbólico. El lector policial ya educado, ya producto de Poe, comprende que es precisamente esta innovación genérica la que permite el juego borgeano" (135). Cortínez's argument is a poignant one, claiming that in order to comprehend Borges' game play in the short story, the reader must be already aware of the traditional game structure. Borges relies on this awareness because within it he is able to include his own which results in a concurrent deconstruction and renovation of the genre.

Carroll John Daly, Raymond Chandler, and Dashiell Hammett: The Good Ol' Boys Club

Many Latin American writers and scholars acknowledge the deep influence the U.S. American hard-boiled novel has on the Latin American detective genre. Writing in the 1920s, Anglo-American writer Carroll John Daly (1889-1958) has been widely recognized as the first writer to introduce hard-boiled fiction into the American literary scene. Many scholars have argued that the appearance of this subgenre was a response from U.S. (mostly male) writers to the classic and traditional detective narrative. The hard-boiled novel represents a collective reaction to the soft, unrealistic and out-of-touch narrative within the genre's foundational and classic formula. On the other hand, other scholars like Maureen T. Reddy expand the argument to also include the growing racial tensions of the

time period: “the hard-boiled came into being at a time when anxieties about race and about the role of race in Americanness were matters of public debate” (“Race and American Crime Fiction” 136). Popular literature expert John Cawelti observes the tension between these two different literary approaches where one that “abstracts the story from the complexity and confusion of the larger social world and provides a rationale for avoiding the consideration of those more complex problems of social injustice and group conflict that form the basis of much contemporary realistic fiction” (qtd in Moore 9). Daly’s short story “Knights of the Open Palm” was published in the pulp magazine *Black Mask* in 1923 introducing the first hard-boiled investigator-character Race Williams. Now, what makes a hard-boiled narrative different from classic detective fiction? Literary scholar, Sean McCann defines the hard-boiled narrative as a:

style most people think of when they refer to the American crime story: tough-talking, streetwise men; beautiful, treacherous women; mysterious city, dark, in Raymond Chandler’s famous phrase, ‘with something more than night.’; a disenchanting hero who strives usually without resounding success, to bring a small measure of justice to his (or more recently, her) world. The main elements of the style are so widely known that they have achieved something close to mythic stature. (42)

With the publication of “Knights of the Open Palm,” the hard-boiled genre began to develop and produced writers Raymond Chandler (1888-1959) and Dashiell Hammett (1894-1961) who would form part of the “mythic stature” to which the genre was elevated. Dashiell Hammett’s works *The Red Harvest* (1929) gave us the nameless character of The Continental Op and *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) gave us private investigator Sam Spade and Raymond Chandler’s *The Big Sleep* (1939) introduced detective Philip Marlowe. These

three male writers, Daly, Hammett, and Chandler are universally considered as the founding fathers of the hard-boiled genre and the impact of their literary contributions can be witnessed throughout Latin American and Spanish detective fictions.

The U.S. American hard-boiled novel has left a significant impression especially when taking into consideration the literary development of Latin American and Spanish detective fiction. Patricia Hart's *The Spanish Sleuth: The Detective in Spanish Fiction* discusses Spanish writers' adaptation of the hard-boiled novel genre within their own socio-historical context. She observes the existence of an interchange between the classic detective fiction novel and the *novela negra*. According to her work, for some Spanish authors there is no distinction between the two genres. But for others the terms signify two divergent literary forms, which may contain the basic format of a detective-mystery-crime novel, but the content is drastically different. Hart refers to Javier Coma's work on the genre of *novela negra* and agrees with his definition. She states that he gives a "clear support to the reality of this critical division. He subtitles his work: *realismo crítico en la novela policiaca norteamericana*, clearly saying that a *novela negra* must contain *realismo crítico*" (14). Hart goes on to point out the lack of universality when employing this definition, "the term *novela negra* has been used to describe a variety of fiction whose only common denominator is the presence of crime" (15). As Spanish writers negotiate the new approaches to detective fiction, the question must be asked: How is the hard-boiled novel or *novela negra* incorporated in Latin American literary production?

Latin America and La Novela Negra: Literature and Social Criticism

Eighty years after the majority of Latin American countries declared their independence from Spain during the nineteenth century, Cuban writer José Martí published

his influential essay "Nuestra América" (1891). He asks for all Latin American countries to unify as a collective front to resist the imperialistic powers of Europe and to be aware of the growing hemispheric dominance of the United States. Martí wanted for all Latin Americans to acknowledge that what unites their continent is their shared history of conquest, colonialism, oppression and racism. And yet, through the painful process of becoming *América*, Martí reminds Latin Americans of the rich diversity, resiliency, creativity, and vitality that exist throughout the hemispheres. Due to these elements, Martí was convinced that the new and younger generation of independent Latin Americans needed to build their nations from a uniquely and authentically Latin American perspective. "Los jóvenes de América se ponen la camisa al codo, hunden las manos en la masa, y la levantan con la levadura de su sudor. Entienden que se imita demasiado, y que la salvación está en crear. Crear es la palabra de pase de esta generación" (37). He expresses a desire for all to work towards establishing sovereignty, even if mishaps are experienced, "el vino, de plátano; y si sale agrio, ¡es nuestro vino!" (37). Martí calls for a Latin America that will look within itself to produce, create, and establish its autonomy, one that acknowledges the influences of Europe and the United States but nonetheless works on finding its own ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and political voice. Therefore, when taking into consideration the detective/mystery/crime genre one must ask: Since the genre did not originate in Latin America, how do writers incorporate national, ethnic, cultural and linguistic subjectivities without imitating their Anglo-American and European counterparts? How do Latin American writers negotiate the tension of being looked upon as imitators instead of pioneers and innovators?

Mempo Giardinelli in his important *El género negro* (1984) discusses the popularity of the genre with Latin American readers evidenced in many published translations. Latin

American writers are acutely aware of the impact the U.S. hard-boiled novel has on the Latin American readership; many U.S. writers of the era as well as those from other genres were translated due to the demand from the Spanish readership. Giardinelli observes that this may directly correlate with the proliferation of Latin American as well as Spanish detective fiction writers in the latter half of the twentieth century (42). Latin American writers were also known to incorporate the traditional detective genre formula but with time the genre evolved and writers began to mold the genre as their own. By incorporating elements based on Latin American perceptions, histories, politics, and social realities, the Latin American *novela negra* was born.

Latin America Studies scholar Glen S. Close acknowledges the tension that exists for Latin American writers, intellectuals, and artist to create work that is not an absolute imitation of their Anglo and European counterparts. Close acknowledges the influence of the U.S. American hard-boiled genre on Latin American writers, but also asserts that the Latin American *novela negra* serves a different purpose in comparison to Anglo-American writers:

it seemed to them to offer the formula for a critical literary response to a comparable but more acute crisis in public life and security in Mexico, Argentina and elsewhere. The Latin American *novela negra* denounced and imaginarily combated criminal contamination of economic and political institutions, foremost among them, the authoritarian state. In retrospect, perhaps its principle distinction was its attempt to modify the essentially individualistic and populist orientation that rendered US hard-boiled novel, for all its disenchanting skepticism, ideologically integrative in the view of many critics. (144-45)

The modifications made by Latin American writers can be perceived through a variety of components, one of those being the police-detective as a main protagonist. Chilean writer and filmmaker, Alberto Fuguet discusses how an anti-social and self-absorbed detective figure will not work within a Latin American cultural context:

A detective wouldn't have been very credible, so in order to write a *novela negra*, I put in a journalist, since journalists are the most hard-boiled people I know, cigarette fiends and all that. And besides that, this country is just too gossipy, when are you going to investigate if everyone knows everything, especially about affairs. In detective novels, there's always an affair, and the main case derives from that. You also don't have people as marginalized [as the private eye]. There's a different kind of isolation. What you don't have is that situation where you live in Cincinnati without any relatives and never speaking to another human being. (qtd in Close 151-52)

Similar to Fuguet's reasoning, Colombian writer Santiago Gamboa explains how the *novela negra* in Colombia cannot have a police detective because it would be difficult to convince his Colombian readers that a person of this position would provide a tactile sense of reality (Close 151). He reasons that a journalist would be a better fit as a detective investigator because their profession requires for them to report (or narrate) to the readers a tangible and authentic account. The presence of trust between the reader and the journalist has a lengthy and strong relationship therefore to replace the police detective with a writer who investigates and reports as a profession becomes plausible within this cultural and political context.

Mexico: El Género Negro

When discussing the *novela negra* in Mexico, scholar Janice Spleth writes that it is important to recognize the multifaceted and difficult relationship Mexicans citizens have had with institutions of authority and power. She suggests, “that in dysfunctional states detective fiction may be used as a means to expose neocolonialism, corruption and social inequality” (qtd in Paul 181). The need for a socio-politically conscious detective is important in Mexico especially when taking into consideration its culture, ethnic, social, and political histories. One of the most notable contemporary authors of the Mexican *novela negra* is Spanish-born Mexican-raised writer Francisco “Paco” Ignacio Taibo II. Taibo’s family exiled to Mexico in the 1950s during Spain’s fascist dictatorship of Francisco Franco. Taibo is known throughout Mexico as an intellectual, writer, political activist, historian and commentator. He is a well-known contemporary author whose written works are diverse, consisting of novels, essays, poetry, and op-ed pieces. He has researched and written biographies on revolutionary icons, Pancho Villa and Ernesto “Che” Guevara, and historical events, the Battle of the Alamo, the Tlatelolco massacre of 1968, the Mexican government’s wars against the Yaqui. His books have been translated into many languages and his work has received prestigious awards, including the International Dashiell Hammett Prize for Crime Fiction.⁶ Taibo’s novel *Días de combate* (1976) introduces the character Héctor Belascoarán Shayne, a one-eyed informal detective who is half-Irish, half-Spanish and a naturalized Mexican citizen. He moves among the overwhelmingly dense Mexico City coming into contact with the complex and varied social strata.

⁶ As is stated by the author’s personal website under “Autor.” Web. 5 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.pacoignaciotaibo2.com>>.

Writer and literary critic María Elvira Bermúdez has in-depth knowledge on the history and development of the detective genre in Mexico. She has numerous essays and introductions to anthologies where she exhibits her passion for the genre as well as a genuine interest in its evolution. In her writings, she mentions three Mexican male writers as the founding figureheads of the genre, Antonio Helú, Rodolfo Usigli and Rafael Bernal. Antonio Helú is given credit not only for his literary work but also because he mentored younger writers interested in creating Mexican detective fiction. Helú was the founder of *Selecciones Policiacas y de Misterio* (Bermúdez “Novelas policiacas mexicanas” 35), a detective fiction literary magazine that published the first modern detective fiction produced in Mexico. Famed playwright Rodolfo Usigli’s *Ensayo de un crimen* (1944) is not considered a detective mystery novel; nevertheless, it is important to consider its influence due to the psychological element presented. The novel delves into the deep recesses of the human psyche, mixing fantasy with reality while revealing how the mind of a (potential) criminal functions.

Although each of these writers approached the genre differently, Bermúdez sees in their works the initial influences that assisted in anchoring the genre within a Mexican context. With Taibo’s Belascoarán Shayne series, Bermúdez identifies his novels as undoubtedly belonging to the Mexican *novela negra* genre: “Todas estas novelas deben ser sin duda consideradas como *negras*, o de ‘crítica social’, de acuerdo con las manifestaciones de repudio a la novela ‘tradicional’ que pública y repetidamente ha hecho Taibo II, el novelista que mayor número de libros de su cosecha ha vendido en toda la historia del género ‘negro’ en el país que lo ha acogido como ciudadano” (“Prologo” 12). Bermúdez correlates the *novela negra* genre with possessing a major element that differentiates it from its other forms, the social critique. Throughout Taibo’s career as a public figure and

writer, he has been a vocal and active participant speaking out against social injustices throughout Mexico.

His candor, political and social concerns are attested in his literary works. For example his historical text *'68* (1991) begins by asking a series of questions on the circumstances that led the student movement and Mexican government to arrive at the bloody massacre at Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968. Through his own memories as well as research, he narrates the progression and events leading up to the massacre and he attempts to construct its aftermath. Taibo adamantly asks the questions that continue to haunt him after nearly thirty years: “¿Dónde botaron a nuestros muertos? ¿Dónde tiraron a nuestros muertos? ¿Dónde, chingados, tiraron a nuestros muertos?” (Taibo 13). Taibo’s dedication to Mexico’s historical, social, and political concerns is not limited to historical texts. In her “‘Sympatheic Traveling’: Horizontal Ethics and Aesthetics in Paco Ignacio Taibo’s Belascoarán Shayne Novels,” Jennifer Lewis discusses Taibo’s political and social positionality via his novels:

These novels, with their unlikely (anti)hero, fantastic plots, and playfully ironic style, respond in different ways to an array of questions triggered by this violent history: how to represent a city that is both ‘magical’ and monstrous; how to respond to both the burden of history and a kind of cultural amnesia; how to imagine a kind of ‘Mexicanidad, Mexican-ness’ that does not simply reproduce ‘exotic delusions.’ (Lewis 137)

Unlike the classic detective genre formula, when writing about urban life in Mexico City Taibo refuses to provide a return to the status quo or give his readers a sense of “false security” at the end of his novels, such as those that are consistently found in the works of

Doyle and Christie. Ernest Mandel has discussed why the classic formula is more likely to work in the U.S. and European nations:

It was no accident that this classical detective story developed primarily in the Anglo-Saxon countries. One of the central characteristics of the prevailing ideology in Britain and the United States during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth was the absence, or at least extreme debility, of concepts of class struggle as tools for the interpretation of social phenomena [...] This reflected the stability of bourgeois society and the self-confidence of the ruling class. The intelligentsia in general, and authors of books in particular, whether socially critical or conservative, assumed that this stability was a fact of life. (44)

By reinforcing the ideologies of “bourgeois society and ruling class,” Taibo would be reiterating a hegemonic perspective that is unrealistic and unattainable for the great majority of the Mexican population. Because of the critical lens he employs as his protagonist narrates the realities of Mexico City and its residents, his books connect with the Mexican audience. The *novela negra* is not escapist literature as had been perceived by Mexican intellectual Carlos Monsiváis (Paul 180), it serves as counter-narrative “intended to create possibilities for identification across boundaries of language and nation as a correction to government corruption and a breakdown of community” (Adams 251).

Mexican Women Writers

Hemispheric Studies and Feminist Legal Storytelling

María Elvira Bermúdez, nicknamed the “Mexican Agatha Christie” (Fuentes 4), not only developed a professional career as an attorney and judge but was also a major

contributor to the development of the Mexican detective genre. Although other Mexican women writers have published detective mystery fiction such as Carmen Boullosa's *La Milagrosa* (1993), Myriam Laurini's *Morena en rojo* (1994), and Cristina Rivera Garza's *La muerte me da* (2007), and recently Patricia Valladares' *Tan frío como el infierno* (2014), Bermúdez was the first Mexican and Latin American writer to present a female investigator as a protagonist. She has translated English and U.S. writers as well as published essays and edited anthologies dedicated to discussing the development of detective fiction in Mexico. Bermúdez has also defended the classic traditional mystery detective formula when literary critics and new writers had begun to shun it in favor of the *novela negra*. She stated:

Sólo de una vasta ignorancia en torno a los antecedentes y al devenir de la narrativa policiaca puede surgir la errónea afirmación en el sentido de que en la clásica no existe la llamada crítica social. Crítica implica enjuiciamiento; y social no es un término abstracto e impersonal, sino aquello que atañe a la sociedad; por ende, si dentro de la novela calificada como *burguesa* son miembros de esa burguesía los que en gran número son desenmascarados como criminales y como tales enjuiciados y castigados, resulta obvio que en dichas novelas hay crítica social. ("La novela 'negra' y la literatura social" 120)

Bermúdez argues that by default detective fiction denounces social injustices. To discard the "classic" form would mean ignoring the different forms that "crítica social" is manifested throughout the evolution of the detective-mystery genre. Bermúdez is not apologetic when employing and supporting the classic formula. Yet for the purposes of my analysis, I am not focusing my study on the incorporation of the traditional detective genre,

instead I am interested in Bermúdez's developing the first Latin American female detective character who as a decolonial feminist and an active participant in the act of legal storytelling, which will be further discussed in Chapter Two.

Critical Race and Legal Studies theorists Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic argue that legal storytelling performs counter-stories where communities and subjectivities that have been historically relegated to second-class citizenship find agency when speaking about and documenting the multifaceted and difficult relationship with diverse institutions (9). Though Delgado and Stefancic focus on legal institutions for their analysis, I argue that there are other structures including the legal system, such as culture and family that consistently exercise injustice. In so doing, the counter-narratives provide a critical lens with which to analyze the social environments in the detective narrative. By employing female character María Elena Morán, Bermúdez is the first to actively participate in the evolution of the traditional detective investigator protagonist. A legal storytelling lens within a Mexican female context provides a narrative that challenges the master discourse and assumption that social equity is available in all spaces as the writer critiques the colonial Mexican family dominated by the patriarch. By offering a decolonial analysis, one that dismantles Mexican machismo and sexism while proposing alternative social loci, Bermúdez initiates a discourse for Mexican men and women focused on mid-twentieth century gender conditions. The introduction of María Elena Morán as a detective changes the gender of the detective figure as well as expands and includes social and gender issues that directly pertain to the social condition of Mexican women. In various instances, a number of scholars refer to Bermúdez's work, ironically, as not feminist. For example, "Pero María Elvira no era una feminista en sentido burdo: era, más bien, alguien convencida de la autenticidad de sus razones" (Fuentes 3). Even though this rhetoric

categorizes Bermúdez's work as "non-feminist," her literary production with María Elena Morán as the detective protagonist and her sociological research contest these ideas. For example, in the short story "Las cosas hablan" Morán and her husband have car failure in the middle of the night; too far from home, they decide to go to the nearest house and ask for lodging. Upon entering the home Morán's instincts are on edge, she senses that something is wrong in the decrepit house and grows suspicious of her male host and his domestic helper. Morán's husband attempts to soothe her feelings assuring that her imagination is overactive. Rejecting her husband's assessment, Morán searches the house and finds a woman that has been gagged and bound.

Through the woman's story, Morán discovers domestic violence and abuse that the victim has experienced, all of which would have continued and been hidden had Morán and her husband not come across the isolated house. At the end of the story, the protagonist asks herself what would have happened to the woman if they had continued with their trip, if their car not broken down in the middle of the night forcing them to ask for accommodations? Who would have helped her? When would she be helped? When incorporating legal storytelling as a theoretical tool from which to analyze Bermúdez's work, it challenges its core definition traditionally contextualized in legal studies. When Stefancic and Delgado developed the theory it was from a U.S. perspective, as both are scholars and professors of law and education in U.S. universities. Legal storytelling changes when taken out of a U.S. context and applied with a Mexican female perspective, giving it a transnational feminist dimension. The theory traditionally focuses solely on race and its relationship to justice, but with the inclusion of Mexican feminist perspectives that intersect with race, as well as gender, class, and sexuality the theory alters. In the case of the story "Las cosas hablan" race does not necessarily play a role but gender and class do.

Bermúdez's short story forces the reader to think of the limits of traditional systems. For the most part, legal systems were constructed to function within public spheres; with justice served after a crime has been committed and reported to the proper authorities. But what about during the act of crime, especially in non-public spaces such as the intimacy of a household, spaces where women traditionally inhabit? What about crimes that are directed towards women such as spousal verbal and physical abuse, and spousal rape? Through Bermúdez's feminist legal storytelling, she provides another way to understand female detective fiction. With María Elvira Bermúdez's character, feminist legal storytelling provides a more critical understanding of the relationship between women as citizens and their social, political, and cultural environments. Bermúdez writing a feminist detective who hears a woman's scream for help in her 1985 "Las cosas hablan" provides an important foundation for understanding how legal storytelling is employed and interpreted by Mexican writers like Myriam Laurini and Valladares whose narrations engage, emphasize, and further problematize traditional discourses on race, gender, class, sexuality, and citizenship.

Argemex writer Myriam Laurini's 1994 novel *Morena en rojo* presents the multi-layered Afro-Mexican character la Morena. La Morena unlike María Elena Morán works as an itinerant professional journalist throughout Mexico. Her storytelling exudes the skill of an ethnographer as she documents the various interactions and regional lives she encounters as she moves to and from various points in Mexico. She narrates her life as a contemporary woman who is concerned with a variety of social issues centered on the social, political, and racial conditions of Mexican women. From child prostitution to human trafficking to racist and oppressive social codes, Morena negotiates and moves in between the diverse hierarchies in contemporary Mexico. The reader comes to learn how her

subjectivity challenges the boundaries of identities that have historically been categorized and bound to the borders of the nation-state of Mexico. For example, historians and scholars universally agree that the African presence in the Americas is due to the largest human trafficking recorded. African Diaspora Studies scholar Chege Githiora notes that, “It is estimated that 250,000 Africans came to Mexico between early sixteenth century and late seventeenth century directly from Africa’s West Atlantic coast as far south as the Congo and Angola, and that between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, Africans outnumbered Spaniards 20 to 1 in Mexico City” (10). The novel’s inclusion of an Afro-Mexican female identity brings to the forefront two social identities--women and Blackness--that have traditionally been relegated to peripheral and subaltern spaces. Laurini further complicates Mexican cultural, ethnic and racial identity when Morena explains that her father is a U.S. African-American man who migrates to Mexico, not an Afro-Mexican or *mulato*. The integration of non-Mexican ancestry frames la Morena’s identity in a transnational hemispheric context.

Hemispheric Studies as an analytical literary lens supports a holistic understanding of identity formation, especially when taking into consideration Myriam Laurini’s Afro-Mexican character Morena and her hemispheric identity. Indirectly through her father’s roots, la Morena is tied to the United States. Her father’s migration and permanent residence in Mexico questions traditional im/migration discourses that focus on patterns and movements from a south to north course. Transnational Studies scholar Juanita Heredia argues that in order for one to understand Chicana and Latina identities and literary productions, one must take into consideration the transnational and hemispheric histories, dialogues, and relationships. Transnationalism in turn will provide an in-depth understanding of the significance nations outside of the United States specifically those in

Latin America have on diverse racial communities (4). Adding to Heredia's observations as an extension to transnationalism, Hemispheric Studies provides a wider and critical scope from which to understand Mexican feminist subjectivities especially when acknowledging her dynamic participation in a rapidly developing globalized world.

Hemispheric Studies scholar Diana Taylor argues for a dialogical approach to boundaries and the concept of the nation-state. She writes:

Instead of seeing the Americas as a delimiting, bounded entity, we approach them as a portal for thinking about shared practice through centuries of migration and diasporic movement to and through the landmass. Identities are far more flexible and relational than formulated in the national frameworks of area studies and ethnic studies [...] none of these Americas exists independently of one another; we are all constantly bumping up against one another in ways that challenge any pre-fixed notion of place or identity. (1425)

Morena's body and identity are physical representations of hemispheric connections. She like the other Mexican female detective investigators, María Elena Morán and Milena Ruiz are representatives of the shift moving away from the constrained nation-state into a holistic awareness and transnational-hemispheric integration. The shift challenges the classic detective formula that mostly concentrated on local or national issues. While the other female detective characters introduce a transnational dialogue between Mexico and the United States and vice versa, Morena introduces a third hemisphere, Africa, and twenty years later further complicating the national within an international context, Patricia Valladares, via her character Milena Ruiz in *Tan frío como el infierno* (2014), introduces the Occupied Territories of Gaza and the West Bank. The African imaginary within a Mexican

context challenges the notion that the Americas can only speak to each other from an Americas point of view. By adding a third area for dialogue, Morena's character opens the reader to consider other hemispheres. Morena demonstrates that Mexican feminist detective fiction serves as bridges and conjunctions for multiple-national experiences that traditional approaches to the genre have failed to explore. Laurini's inclusion of the African hemisphere in her novel spurs other hemispheric possibilities as Patricia Valladares' first detective novel provides a fourth geographical point: early twenty-first century Middle East.

Milena Ruiz, *la detective* in Patricia Valladares' *Tan frío como el infierno*, is a distant literary relation to C. August Dupin. She is a cerebral loner, who lives without family in her small apartment in Mexico City's Colonia Roma. Like other male detectives in the hard-boiled genre she is a tough urban character. She is a young woman from Mexico City with punk purple hair, who uses all the current Mexican slang, "puta madre," "no mames, *no way*." She has learned English, "*not bad at all*," and can play with both English and Spanish: "*Well, the point is que dentro de unas horas, será la Madrugada Cero*" (218). Her code switching is also integrated with the latest technology of the twenty-first century, flat screen televisions, Macintosh computers, smart phones with access to the internet; her network has come to include physical and virtual realms. She is not Miss Marple or María Elena Morán, she can enter a bar, gay or straight, by herself and wake up in a hotel after a one-night stand. She is not a daily drug addict like Holmes, although she does admit that she is "an addict," or a woman with an addictive personality, "La verdad soy una adicta. Depende de a qué eres adicta, ¿no?" (72). She does cocaine lines and drinks rum, while the next morning she'll have her organic coffee from Starbucks. Physically she can outperform Dupin and Sam Spade, she runs eight kilometers every day from her *habitat* (her

apartment) through Chapultepec Park to the Monumento a la Independencia el Angel, she does spinning and kick boxing, she has also traveled abroad to study Krav Maga, an Israeli military system of self-defense.

She is unlike Bermúdez's well-born Morán and unlike most of her class, mestizo Mexicans from the working classes. Valladares has created a character that makes sense for a twenty-first century Mexico City, a paramilitary *detective* whose training with her Israeli lover Yossi makes her better than most Mexican males in D.F. security forces. Like María Elena Morán and la Morena, Milena is a strong, independent, intelligent woman with a feminist point of view who understands the Mexican capital from above and below. As a legal storyteller, Milena uses her previous profession as a federal detective in charge of investigating femicides throughout Mexico to provide counter-stories to dismissive and misogynist discourse. One excellent example is a scene when the detective reflects upon the history of Mexican serial killers and how uncommon it is to have them in Mexico. Yet, as she runs down the list, her perceptive description of each criminal and their crimes committed illustrate a pattern, although Mexicans may not be into serial killing because it is "típico de programa gringo de televisión," it is consistently common for Mexican serial killers to commit femicide (67-68). While in 2012 government officials of el Estado de México continue to deny statistics that elucidate the gravity of femicides in their state, as it was reported that the Estado holds the first place position in homicides against women.⁷

In her travels through Mexico City and Estado de Mexico to find kidnapped New Age photographer Eloisa Castellanos, Milena offers a reading of a postmodern Mexico City to contrast with political turf wars, ineffective government, and social inequality. There is

⁷ Please see "Desmiente Rosario Robles aumento de femicidios con EPN en el Edo. de México" <<http://www.sexenio.com.mx/nuevoleon/articulo.php?id=12267>>.

historical depth to her reading of swanky Mexican areas such as Polanco, Lomas, and Santa Fe and she parallels her urban experiences with those she has in Palestine/Israel noting in both hemispheres, the Americas and the Middle East, “*El cuerpo de las mujeres como territorio de guerra*” (author’s emphasis 18); a theme consistently present in Milena’s narration. Women’s bodies as occupied territories in Mexico City, Estado de Mexico, Tel Aviv, Gaza connote not only a bodily subjugation, the narrative includes geographical, political and social occupations side-by-side with gendered ones. Valladares’ decolonial feminist narrative pushes the reader outside of their Mexican comfort zone as the inclusion of a foreign nation, like Palestine, turns out to be not foreign at all, after all Palestine is suffering a twenty-first century conquest only five-hundred years after Mexico’s.

María Elvira Bermúdez, Myriam Laurini and Patricia Valladares as women writers demonstrate a passionate commitment for social and literary justice. Their exceptional feminist detective characters, María Elena Morán, Morena, and Milena Ruiz give a new breadth to the genre of Mexican detective-crime fiction. The inclusion of hemispheric discourses along with decolonial feminism and legal storytelling take the *novela negra* into new areas that had not been addressed by previous writers. This dissertation project unveils the multilayered structures constructed by these women writers and the transformations their literary production brings to late twentieth and early twenty-first century Mexican culture, politics, and society.

Chapter Two

María Elvira Bermúdez Introduces Detective María Elena Morán:

Feminism and the Search for “*lo justo mexicano*”

As Latin American writers began to incorporate the mystery detective genre into their literary production, twentieth-century Mexico witnessed a rise in its popularity. Important Mexican writers such as the well-known dramaturge Rodolfo Usigli, Antonio Helú, considered the founding father of the genre, and Jorge Ibargüengoitia, all of whom had national recognition in other genres, also incorporated and developed the Mexican *policíaco* narrative. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, a rising advocate and writer among the group, María Elvira Bermúdez, one of the first women writers of the genre, created and introduced the first female detective character in Latin American letters, María Elena Morán. Through Morán’s presence, Bermúdez practiced decolonial Mexican feminism within the constraints of Mexican nationalist patriarchy; this becomes especially important to consider as the genre has been and continues to be dominated by male writers. In this chapter, I discuss two short stories, “Detente, sombra” (1962) and “Las cosas hablan” (1985), where Morán plants the seeds of decolonial Mexican feminist discourse within the detective-mystery genre.

María Elvira Bermúdez and Decolonial Feminism

Though European and U.S.-American feminism frames itself as a counter posture to the traditional gender binary between men and women, challenging patriarchal authority and emphasizing gender identity politics, Mexican feminism adds other layers to this established ideology. For example, Third World Feminist practices identified and expressed

by Chicanas Gloria Anzaldúa and Norma Alarcón and Black feminists Audre Lorde and bell hooks such as race, sexuality, class and citizenship have often been overlooked and blatantly ignored by White feminists. Intersectionality, or the imbrication of multiple social locations, such as race, gender, class, citizenship and their mutual working relationship to one another, has become one of the major components of Third World Feminism, which has in turn allowed for an in-depth critique of power structures that have historically oppressed and marginalized women of color. By acknowledging the diverse social locations of women of color, Third World Feminist practices provide a holistic understanding to the female experience. How then, do women of color perform acts of feminism that deconstruct and challenge the social, political, and cultural structures that oppressively bind women to one-dimensional roles? To answer this question, it is necessary to look at decolonial Mexican feminist practices manifested explicitly in the works of Bermúdez.

In the case of Mexican writer María Elvira Bermúdez, she adds another component that Third World Feminism has yet to address: How do women of color, specifically Mexican women, those who are not considered in European and White-Anglo feminist practices, implement feminism from within patriarchal power? In other words, how do Bermúdez's characters perform acts of feminism from within a colonial patriarchal framework? What do literary practices of decolonial feminism look like in Mexican literature? Even though decolonial studies has existed as a discipline since the 1980s, the in-depth development of decolonial feminism occurred in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Feminist philosopher María Lugones was one of the first scholars to begin to concretize a theoretical framework for decolonial feminism. She employed Nelson Maldonado Torres' study "Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity" (2008) and his "coloniality of being" to describe the historical colonial remnants left in Latin

America; however, Torres did not address gender politics. Following Torres, Lugones addressed the state of coloniality as one that lies in “not just a classification of people in terms of the coloniality of gender and power, but also the active reduction of people, the dehumanization that fits them for the classification, the process of subjectification, the attempt to turn the colonized into less than human beings” (Lugones 745). Once the female subject becomes aware of her colonized positionality within the social structures she encounters, Lugones asks to focus on the acts of resistance performed by women that serve as a catalyst to the deconstruction of ingrained patriarchal values. Lugones is not alone in highlighting the geopolitics of women of color, as Mexican feminist and Latin American Studies Professor Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo states “recordar que nuestro lugar de enunciación determina la manera en que vivimos y concebimos las relaciones de dominación, que para develar las redes de poder, que se ocultan bajo la fachada de neutralidad y universalidad del conocimiento científico occidental, es necesario recordar que nuestras producciones discursivas y perspectivas del mundo están marcadas por la geopolítica” (Hernández Castillo 71). For Lugones resistance is not “the end or goal of political struggle, but rather its beginning, its possibility.” Resistance must be searched for within what she calls the “infra-politics” of a woman of color’s experience, in other words the non-public experiences women have had. Within those spaces they create possibilities towards their own liberation through “adaptive and creatively oppositional” acts, defying the heterosexist and hegemonic categorizations (Lugones 746). Lugones recognizes that most women must work within their limits, and it is within those constraints that women are engaged in decolonial feminism.

Detective María Elena Morán adheres to a number of hetero-normative and patriarchal values: she is married to a man; is a dedicated mother to her children; and does

not have a “traditional” career or profession. And yet within these limits, Morán can strategically exercise her own agency when challenging Mexican patriarchy within the confinements of her expected role. My close reading of this chapter’s two short stories illustrate Morán as an agent for decolonial Mexican feminism while Bermúdez’s involvement as an author and critic of the detective mystery fiction, *lo policiaco* in Mexico, allows for literary spaces for future women writers such as Myriam Laurini and Patricia Valladares.

In his *Antiheroes: Mexico and Its Detective Novel* (1997), Ilan Stavans offers a valuable history of the emergence and development of the Mexican mystery-crime novel. Stavans begins his study with Antonio Helú (1900-1972), acknowledged as the first Mexican writer to present a recurring detective character in the genre. Stavans ends his study with one of the most widely read and recognized novelists today, Spanish born-Mexican, Paco Ignacio Taibo II. Taibo has brought the Mexican detective-crime-mystery narrative into a contemporary Mexican context. For example, *Muertos incómodos* (2005) was co-written with Zapatista rebel leader Insurgent Subcomandante Marcos. The novel merges rural indigenous issues with urban mestizo anxieties through the investigative collaboration between Taibo’s detective character, Héctor Belascoarán Shayne and the indigenous rebel detective created by Subcomandante Marcos, Elías Contreras.⁸ Taibo has brought international attention to the genre as the founder in 1987 of “Semana Negra” in Gijón, Spain, an annual multicultural festival that focuses on the detective, mystery, and crime genre. In recent years, the festival has included science fiction, humor, and fantasy

⁸ At the beginning of the novel, Elías Contreras explains that this is not his real name but rather his insurgent name given to him by Subcomandante Marcos, as it represents the person he is as a fighter for the indigenous cause. “Así me dice el Sup, ‘Elías Contreras’, pero no porque así me llame. ‘Elías’ es mi nombre de Lucha y ‘Contreras’ pues así me puso el Sup porque dijo que yo también necesitaba un apellido de lucha y como siempre llevaba la contra en lo que fuera pues me quedaba bien el apellido ‘Contreras’” (10).

literatures. Ilan Stavans' text gives a cohesive chronology of the genre in Mexico identifying it as " 'parody;' the truth is that no other classification has been sufficiently convincing. When all is said and done, the creation of a detective fiction in Spanish is always an imitative task. It was in the United States, Great Britain, and France where the genre was cultivated, not in the Spanish-speaking world" (Stavans 15). The scholar attempts to express the anxiety many Mexican and Latin American mystery writers experience when creating their own literary niches within Western literature, as American gothic writer Edgar Allan Poe is considered by most scholars to be the founding father of the mystery genre. Stavans' study is now dated and does not take into consideration that for Mexican mystery fiction writers—Taibo and Marcos are a good example—the genre has become a platform from which to redefine and reconstruct traditional literary formulas as well as Mexican identity politics.

In his study, Stavans includes only one notable female writer, attorney and literary critic María Elvira Bermúdez. Although Stavans brings critical attention to Bermúdez's work, he completely ignores one of the first women to write detective fiction in twentieth century Mexico, Margos de Villanueva also known as Margarita Reinbeck de Villanueva (1920 – n.d.). Known mostly as a Mexican dramaturge, her novel *22 horas* (1955) with detective Silvestre Martín and her theatrical play *La muerte nos visita* (1956) replicate some of the formulaic elements found in the American hard-boiled crime novel. Although de Villanueva will not be included in this study, it is important to note that her plays focused on contemporary labor issues, specifically women workers, *obreras*, who can no

longer be dependent on a single-income family and have sought work in spaces traditionally reserved for their male counterparts.⁹

Stavans perceives Bermúdez an important contributor to the canon, but, according to him, she fell short of a great opportunity—to create the first female Mexican and Latin American detective/private investigator. He writes: “It is curious that Bermúdez did not create a feminist detective. She would have been the first of her kind in Mexico! Why did she choose not to do so?” (94). But, upon further research,¹⁰ in Bermúdez’s collection of short stories, *Detente, sombra* (1962) and *Muerte a la zaga* (1985) readers come across female detective María Elena Morán who is not the customary detective model, as is seen through her male counterparts: hypermasculine, heterosexual, rational investigator who either works for the state or has his own business where he can be hired to investigate and ultimately solve the crime. We are left in the dark on Stavans’ understanding of a “feminist detective.” He does not elaborate on the elements or traits he seeks in such a character. Stavans’ study suffers from critical shortsightedness as Bermúdez’s one and only female detective character, María Elena Morán, embodies and practices Mexican feminism. By dismissing Morán as another female character in a story, Stavans is the one with the missed opportunity as he neglects Bermúdez’s contributions to the detective genre and feminist literary studies in Mexico. In this chapter, I will unpack the ways in which not only does Morán represent a feminist detective but also how Bermúdez creates an anti-heterosexist

⁹ Very little research has been done on Margos de Villanueva. The information I gathered on her work was mostly found in a 2004 multi-volume edited by Aurora Maura Ocampo titled *Diccionario de escritores mexicanos, siglo XX* (115-116).

¹⁰ As has been acknowledged by Darrell Lockhart and J. Patrick Duffey in *Latin American Mystery Writers: An A to Z Guide* (2004), both scholars recognized the major contributions Bermúdez has given to the genre as a supporter, literary critic, and author. Duffey provides an encyclopedic overview on the late Mexican writer pointing out the diverse themes found in the three short stories that include her Mexican feminist detective, María Elena Morán.

discourse through the deconstruction of colonial legacies, such as gendered imprisonment and violence.

Bermúdez's Critique of the Mexican Family: *La vida familiar del mexicano* (1955)

During the decade of the 1950s when canonical Mexican writers like Juan Rulfo, Carlos Fuentes, Elena Garro, and Rosario Castellanos were gaining national and international recognition, María Elvira Bermúdez was also actively producing notable scholarship and innovative feminist fiction. Unlike her contemporary counterparts, she has received little scholarly attention for her literary legacy. Only recently in the 2008 encyclopedic *Latin American Mystery Writers: An A to Z Guide*, J. Patrick Duffey describes her as “the most prolific female detective fiction author in the Spanish-speaking world, one of the most innovative practitioners of the genre in Mexico and one of its most perceptive critics” (24).

Bermúdez was born in Durango in 1912 and passed away in 1988. She lived most of her life in Mexico City in the Colonia Roma. During her life, she witnessed many changes. In her early childhood, Mexico was still in the midst of a civil war. After Francisco I. Madero ousted Porfirio Díaz from power in 1910, factional disputes continued through the writing of the Constitution of 1917, and the Wars of the Cristeros 1927-1929. By 1953 when Bermúdez wrote her first detective novel, Mexico was enjoying a post-World War II boom known as the Mexican Miracle. The successive political parties that emerged after the Revolution, Partido Nacional Revolucionario (1929) and Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (1936) became the present Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), so named in 1946 during the Presidency of Manuel Avila Camacho. As we shall see in “Detente, sombra” of 1961, Bermúdez depicts a thriving Mexico City Center, Calles Madero and Juárez, the

Americanized Sanborns. Women characters are government officials, attorneys and judges, and writers and literary critics, a female Mexican intelligentsia of the Partido (though the PRI is not named), a fictional parallel to Bermúdez's biography.

Bermúdez was a highly educated woman, earning her law degree in 1939 at Mexico's well-respected Escuela Libre de Derecho. She was one of first women to earn advanced degrees. From 1941-1970, she practiced law and was an *actuário* (an administrative position) of the Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación, one of the highest professional ranks in the Mexican justice system, uncommon for a woman of her time considering that women had struggled to gain recognition in private and public spheres. She was the first woman litigation attorney in Mexico. Like the characters in "Detente, sombra," she was highly active in several areas of Mexican social and political culture, working within the PRI as secretary of Acción Social, collaborating with and contributing in newspapers and journals such as *La palabra y el hombre*, *Cuadernos Americanos*, *Revista Mujer*, and *Excelsior*. Her publications consisted mostly of book reviews or essays concerned with the genre of detective fiction but she also would include opinion pieces on the Mexican women's suffrage movement and activism. In Chapter One of this study, I noted Bermúdez's knowledge of literary criticism and her writing craft, entering the dispute over the definition of *la novela negra* in Mexico.

Her success did not come easy. It is a historical fact that women had been active in the social and political movements during and after the Mexican Revolution. Although no one would deny the active participation of Mexican women in the divisions of the Revolutionary forces, the marginalization of their gender as well as sexist practices continued to deprive women of full rights as citizens. Director Emilio "El Indio" Fernández's highly acclaimed films, such the 1946 *Enamorada* with Mexico's first screen

couple, María Félix and Pedro Armendáriz, were based on scripts supportive of the Mexican Revolution. As a reflection of a strong Mexican woman, María Félix, the legendary Doña was a much loved and admired film star but she was never a “star” behind the camera directing her own stories. In the closing scene of *Enamorada*, Félix, Beatriz Peñafiel, joins the Revolution, abandons her wealthy parents, and walks beside General José Juan Reyes, Pedro Armendáriz, who is on horseback. The long shot against Gabriel Figueroa’s Mexican sky has all the men on horseback, *charros*, with women in *rebozos* at their side. This romantic portrayal of following your man did not hold up against reality. According to Mexican feminist scholar Eli Bartra, women were not asked nor considered to participate in the Constitutional Congress of 1917, leading them to be excluded from basic political rights such as voting or running for public office. Early Mexican suffragist, Hermilia Galindo sought an audience at the Congress on behalf of the nation’s women, where “it was argued that not all women have the capacity to exercise those rights, and the Congress decided against the inclusion of women in political life” (qtd. in Bartra 450). Although excluded, women’s political activism continued throughout Mexico instituting political organizations concerned with women’s issues and rights though largely focusing on women of middle to upper-middle class. Some efforts, however, were made to incorporate all economic sectors within the women’s struggle; the Frente Único de Pro Derechos de la Mujer founded in 1935, reached out to women from all social and economic classes, with central efforts concentrated on gaining women the right to vote in Mexico (Bartra 451). By 1953 Mexican women had gained full voting rights in local and national elections, which allowed for a shift to occur and reintroduce systemic issues found within Mexican social, cultural, and political structures such as rape, domestic violence, women’s health, and sexual education. Bermudez participated actively on behalf of women’s suffrage. The hard won rights for

women are represented in “Detente, sombra,” where several female characters are members of the National Chamber of Deputies, and all characters belong to the Partido’s Unión de Mujeres. Against these women’s professional accomplishments, litigation attorney Bermúdez writes a story of a woman with the physical appearance of an intellectual and feminist, rumored to be a lesbian, who has been wrongfully imprisoned for a murder she did not commit.

Bermúdez’s first publications, short story “Soliloquio de un muerto” (1951), novel *Diferentes razones tiene la muerte* (1953) and anthology *Los mejores cuentos policíacos mexicanos* (1955), coincide with the emergence of women writers. Founder of Mexican feminism Rosario Castellanos published her first book of poetry, *Trayectoria del polvo*, in 1948. In 1950, Castellanos earned a Master’s Degree in Philosophy at the old UNAM campus located in what is now el Centro Histórico around the Zócalo. Castellanos’ 1950 thesis, “Sobre cultura femenina,” is one of the founding documents of Mexican feminism. Other women writers to emerge with Bermúdez and Castellanos were Elena Garro and Elena Poniatowska. At a recent September 2013 conference titled “Mujeres ilustres en México” at the Instituto de Estudios Universitarios (IEU) keynote speaker Elena Poniatowska discussed the difficulty Mexican women had in the 1930s and 1940s when attempting to create a professional life for themselves outside of the private-domestic sphere. She acknowledged a wide range of women writers, journalists and artists, while also highlighting the impact of María Elvira Bermúdez as one of the first Mexican women to obtain a university education and professional degree in twentieth-century Mexico (“Las mujeres subversivas son”). Yet, even with her groundbreaking accomplishments, Bermúdez’s literary work and research has had little academic attention.

As a woman of an era whose female contemporaries Castellanos, Garro, and Poniatowska, are well known in Mexican literature, it is a wonder that Bermudez's literary legacy has not been given serious scholarly attention. She was a wife and mother, and an intellectual with diverse literary interests, a mentor to younger writers, contributor to journals, professor, and scholar who produced a significant, but forgotten, sociological study on the Mexican family during heyday of the mid-twentieth century intellectual search for "*lo mexicano*."

After the Mexican Revolution, Mexican male intellectuals like José Vasconcelos and Antonio Caso concerned themselves with invigorating and cultivating a Mexican intellectual movement. In his historical study, Henry C. Schmidt provides a clear and concise definition to the ideological movement of *lo mexicano*:

the term *lo mexicano* became a 'sacred phrase' and assumed popular as well as academic meanings as the question of what is Mexico and the Mexican was asked. *Lo mexicano* referred to the Mexican ethos as well as to its study and became a driving principle growth of knowledge relating to Mexico. With its allied terms, *mexicanidad*, *mexicanismo*, and *el mexicano*, it cut across disciplines and engaged historians as well as philosophers and psychologists. In part a manifestation of post-Revolutionary cultural nationalism, the movement was analogous in the history of ideas to the quest for Mexican authenticity in painting, music, the novel and education. (Schmidt x)

As the Mexican historian later points out, the movement did not accelerate until Samuel Ramos arrived on the Mexico City intellectual scene.

Mexican philosopher Samuel Ramos has been canonized as the father of Mexican philosophy and culture; scholar Patrick Romanell described the impact of Ramos' work as

one that spurred the move to nationalize Mexican philosophy and move away from imitating European predecessors in the task, “there is no doubt that Samuel Ramos is the actual founder of the contemporary movement in Mexico for the Mexicanization in general and philosophy in particular [...] Samuel Ramos was not a cheap propagandist but a patriotic critic who did not allow the love of his country to interfere with his love of truth. Our Mexican author, sees himself historically, as an intellectual pioneer in a movement toward *la mexicanidad*” (Romanell 81-82). Though Ramos is a Mexican philosopher, born in Michoacán, his formulation did not come into being until he had contact with well-known Spanish writers and philosophers, one of them being José Ortega y Gasset, “whom Ramos called the Spanish bridge between German and Latin American thought [...] Ortega’s unique journalistic philosophy derived from a cultural analysis that was to become especially attractive to Ramos—the fusion of abstract principles and the details of daily existence together with the notion of national character” (Schmidt 145). Ramos’ contributions towards *la mexicanidad* or *lo mexicano* became an important element when addressing Mexican identity at mid-twentieth century when philosophical working groups emerged. Grupo Hiperión, one of the most influential, took up Ramos’ ideological proposal and attempted to synthesize Mexican philosophy with Mexican reality.¹¹

Los existencialistas mexicanos, as the group has also been known, cultivated important thinkers and theorists, publishing essays and thought pieces in academic journals that would become staples in Mexican scholarship such as *Revista Filosofía y*

¹¹ One of the most recent anthologies regarding this important Mexican philosophy group is *El Hiperión: Antología* (2006) by Guillermo Hurtado, in the introduction he states “Los miembros del Hiperión no se conformaban con conocer las raíces más profundas de México, sino que deseaban cambiarlo, sacudirlo, liberarlo [...] efectuar una salvación de la circunstancia mexicana, desatar los nudos de su historia, de su conciencia” (xi). Hurtado also identifies three key elements to the working philosophy group’s purpose: “comprometida, terapéutica y emancipadora” (xx).

Letras and *Cuadernos Americanos* published by Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) along with important cultural supplements like *La Revista Mexicana de Cultura* in *El Nacional* newspaper (Hurtado ix). Members such as Luis Villoro, Emilio Uranga, and Joaquín Sánchez McGregor were looked upon as purveyors of contemporary Mexican philosophy and identity. The leader and mentor amongst this group, Leopoldo Zea, emerged as an important figurehead of the movement as Zea was not only involved in mentoring and guiding young scholars and thinkers, but he also provided an outlet from which they could produce and publish their work. Zea coordinated and edited the series *México y lo mexicano*, a multi-volume collection of essays where he published and gave exposure to some of the most important writers in twentieth-century México such as Alfonso Reyes, José Gaos, and Luis Cernuda. After nineteen titles, the only female author in the series was published, María Elvira Bermúdez. Her 1955 historical-sociological study *La vida familiar del mexicano* took on the task presented by the founding father of contemporary Mexican philosophy. In her essay, Bermúdez acknowledges the literary inheritance from her male predecessor and cites Ramos' important text *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (1934), Bermúdez like Ramos, asks her reader to maintain an open mind on the difficult theme upon which she is about to embark, taking the time to reflect on her observations and recommendations regarding the modern-day Mexican family. She points to Ramos' caution in *El perfil del hombre* as her foundation:

No hay razón para que el lector se ofenda al leer esta páginas, en donde no se afirma que el mexicano sea inferior, si no que se *siente inferior*, lo cual es cosa muy distinta. Si en algunos casos individuales el sentimiento de inferioridad traduce a deficiencias orgánicas o psíquicas reales, en la mayoría de los mexicanos es una ilusión colectiva [...] Lo invitamos, pues, a

penetrar nuestras ideas con entera ecuanimidad. Si no obstante estas aclaraciones, el lector se siente lastimado, lo lamentamos sinceramente.

(Ramos 52)

Yet for Ramos and Bermúdez's contemporary male colleagues writing about *lo mexicano* became mutually exclusive in writing about *el mexicano*, as women were consistently excluded from case studies and no women have been mentioned or recalled as active participants of intellectual working groups like *los hiperionistas*. Within the search for *lo mexicano* and *el mexicano*, María Elvira Bermúdez's investigation is remarkable: this feminist writer's study shifts the focus on the individual male and brings forth a new element from which to study Mexican identity politics, the family. This feminist practice allows for her to expose the gender inequities in her country from within one of the most important cultural foundations in Mexican identity, *la familia*.

La vida familiar del mexicano has a particular focus on two cities, her birthplace of Durango and her permanent home, Mexico City. Her research has been cited in a variety of works studying Mexican identity, family formation, and in the 1980s during the institutionalization of Chicano Studies, her insights crossed the U.S.-Mexico border to assist in a diverse range of disciplinary research on Chicana/o identity and family studies.¹² Bermúdez's work also serves as a predecessor for Chicana feminist theory and activism, as twenty years earlier she asked questions that Chicana feminists had begun to vocalize regarding the Chicano family and the Chicano Movement in the 1970s and 1980s, especially in regards to women's role in the private and public sphere. Ana M. García's pivotal

¹² Please see Mirandé, Alfredo. *The Chicano Experience: An Alternative Perspective*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985. Print.; Vasquez, Melba, and Anna Gonzalez. "Sex roles among Chicanos: Stereotypes, challenges, and changes." *Explorations in Chicano psychology* (1981): 50-70.; Contreras-Ramos, Raquel J. *Marital satisfaction and attitudes toward love and sex in Mexican-American couples: a cross-cultural perspective*. Diss. Texas Tech University, 1989. Ann Arbor: ProQuest. Web.

compilation, *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings* (1997) collected a variety of Chicana feminist essays and poetry, which addressed issues of Chicano machismo in and outside of the Chicano Movement. In her “Women of La Raza,” Enriqueta Longeaux y Vázquez’s discusses how at the Chicano Movement’s seminal 1969 Denver Youth Conference women had expressed the concern that the general male consensus amongst those actively involved in the Movement was “that the Chicana woman does not want to be liberated” (García 29). Workshops and conferences surrounding women’s issues emerged with titles “Sex and the Chicana” and “Marriage-Chicana Style,” (García 21) clearly paralleling Bermúdez’s socio-historical concerns in her study regarding *la mexicana*, and establishing critical models for future Mexican-American writer-intellectuals north of the border such as Cherríe Moraga, Sandra Cisneros, and Ana Castillo.

In *La vida familiar del mexicano*, Bermúdez inquires as writer and activist into the interactions between male and female and the evolution of the Mexican family at mid-twentieth century. She states that her study is not for creating a racial and social hierarchy between Mexicans and non-Mexicans but rather an informative account that may help in creating a better nation of engaged and active citizens, which at its core begins with the family (*La vida familiar* 10-11). She challenges those who believe that she cannot assess Mexico’s families due to the vast diversity and differences found within the nation and claims that her study can have an important impact within the psycho-sociological world, when reflecting on how Mexicans relate to one another, “En efecto la vida familiar está condicionada por el factor económico, por las creencias religiosas, por los lazos jurídicos y por los imperativos morales; al mismo tiempo, condiciona la vida nacional en sus expresiones artísticas, políticas e intelectuales” (*La vida familiar* 23). Bermúdez’s anxiety

regarding Mexican identities and the future of the Mexican nation goes hand in hand with the other contemporary intellectuals.

For example, Octavio Paz's seminal collection of essays written in post-war France, *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950) also posed similar questions upon which Bermúdez reflects in her study. Paz who was studying and writing at the height of the Grupo Hiperión was not a part of this UNAM philosophical collective, rather he chose to take on the task of answering the question of *lo mexicano* through his own personal studies and investigation. While Bermúdez looks inward to different regions and social classes, into the very nation that concerns her, Paz, on the other hand, searches *a lo extranjero*, leaving Mexico City to examine and define Mexican identity politics while on a Guggenheim Fellowship in California in 1943. By traveling north of the U.S.-Mexico border, he removes himself from the academy that had been the center for Paz's male contemporaries like Leopoldo Zea and Alfonso Reyes, and via his observations on Mexican-Americans or *lo chicano*, he is able to identify *lo mexicano* via what he characterizes as the extremes of Mexican identity as stated in his opening essay to *El laberinto de la soledad*, "El pachuco y otros extremos": "Pero los 'pachucos' no reivindican su raza ni nacionalidad de sus antepasados. A pesar de que su actitud revela una obstinada y casi fanática voluntad de ser, esa voluntad no afirma nada concreto sino la decisión—ambigua, como se verá—de no ser como los otros que los rodean [...] Queramos o no, estos seres son mexicanos, uno de los extremos a lo que puede llegar el mexicano" (*El laberinto* 16). When Paz does look inward, when he returns to the nation, he employs Mexican patriarchal values to underscore gender identity politics, as well as explore concerns surrounding Mexican industrialization and modern capitalism in "Los hijos de la Malinche." For this particular essay, many Mexican and Chicana feminists have taken issue with the divisively sexist portrayal of women, as Paz defines *la mujer* as

the Enigma and “rhetorically” inquires, “En casi todas las culturas las diosas de la creación son también deidades de destrucción. Cifra vidente de la extrañeza del universo y de su radical heterogeneidad, la mujer ¿esconde la muerte o la vida?, ¿en qué piensa?, ¿piensa acaso?, ¿siente de veras?, ¿es igual a nosotros?” (*El laberinto* 73). The Mexican writer and poet’s scholarship is intertwined with his social location, as a privileged, heterosexual, highly educated male, which explains how he could even wonder whether women 1) possess the capability to think and 2) if they are equal to “us,” meaning him, them, the patriarchs of the Mexican nation.¹³ Paz’s discourse serves as one of the many catalysts to move forward a study like Bermúdez’s, where a Mexican feminist writer may carefully and consciously uncover the complexities within the Mexican family through gender politics.

Bermúdez also looks at the interactions between Mexican men and women to identify gender identity politics but challenges Mexican machismo discourse similar to Paz by exercising resistance and reconstructing these relationships via her own decolonial feminist framework. In her study, she discusses the traditional interaction between men and women:

La realidad prueba, en todo caso, que el mexicano no acostumbra elevar a la mujer hasta planos trascendentes de moralidad colectiva, por el contrario, cuando de feminidad se trata, se reduce a pensar en abnegación, sometimiento y absoluta entrega a los quehaceres del hogar. La moralidad y la educación quedan ahí incluídas; y en cuanto a la inteligencia... ‘cuanto menos notable sea, tanto mejor para la buena marcha del matrimonio’. Por lo demás, el mexicano difícilmente se representa a la mujer despojada de sus

¹³ In his poem “Las Palabras,” from *Libertad bajo palabra* (1960), Paz feminizes words displaying his intellectual and artistic position in relation to the inferiority of women as sexual objects: “Dales la vuelta, / cógelas del rabo (chillen putas), / azótalas” (*Lo mejor de Octavio Paz* 25).

atributos sexuales. El mexicano, en efecto, como nota propia tiene la de enmascarar su preocupación constante por el sexo opuesto, con un desdén agudo y exagerado. Dicho en otras palabras: *desprecia a la Mujer; pero vive obsesionado por las mujeres.* (*La vida familiar* 85)

The writer also tussles with Paz's very own description of Mexican female identity, displaying Mexican machista politics, "Jamás el mexicano admite una negativa femenina como franca derrota. *En buena lid, un macho no puede ser vencido.* En consecuencia, la que lo desdeña u olvida ha de ser, necesariamente, un traidora" (*La vida familiar* 88). While not necessarily directly mentioning Paz in this section of her analysis, she does employ key terms and language of Paz's "Los hijos de la Malinche" when describing the fatalistic view of Mexican femalehood especially surrounding Malinche, the Indigenous adolescent given to Hernán Cortés during his journey of conquest toward Tenochtitlán.

Paz writes on the national mythical identity attributed to Malinche to which he adds his own truism of Malinche's "betrayal": "Es verdad que ella se da voluntariamente al conquistador, pero éste, apenas deja de serle útil, la olvida. Doña Marina se ha convertido en una figura que representa a las indias, fascinadas, violadas o seducidas por los españoles. Y del mismo modo que el niño no perdona a su madre que lo abandone para ir en busca de su padre, el pueblo mexicano no perdona su traición a la Malinche" (*El laberinto* 94). By acknowledging the discourse surrounding gender politics, Bermúdez is direct and persuasive in her delivery as her main concern is that in knowing that these historical social interactions and discussions between Mexican men and women exist how then, can the relationships be improved and how can both sexes surpass patriarchy and sexism? As a feminist, she does not adhere to the European and Anglo-American values of separatist feminist politics that at the time alienated and rejected male-counterparts,

instead her innovation stems what she calls “Trascendencia social del machismo,” in particular how both men and women can work together as well as individually to become not only better for each other, but from a macro-perspective, ultimately better for the nation.

As Bermúdez discusses potential solutions to her current Mexican gender politics, she examines the conformity she has found in some Mexican women of accepting the submissive and martyr role imposed upon their gender, allowing for the label of victimhood to be given to her, while internalizing the very machismo that places her in that position (*La vida familiar* 94-97). Without the vigorous contribution and participation of Mexican women, the transcendence of Mexican patriarchy cannot occur therefore, she needs to break free of that mold. Bermúdez limits her study to only heterosexual families along with men and women who wish to have children, she acknowledges the existence of Mexican women who reject marriage, motherhood and heterosexuality, but decides not to focus on this particular population because she wants to deconstruct and redefine the traditional structures in which the vast majority of Mexican women find themselves. According to Bermúdez, men need to humanize women, perceive them as complex individuals instead of entities that compete against them; she urges refocusing on how women complement men and rejecting the inferiority complexes that limit men’s full understanding of their female counterparts.

Bermúdez labels this alternative Mexican male identity as *hembrismo/hombría* (*La vida familiar* 131), which challenges the notions found in modern-day capitalism where its tenets center around individualism and competition, in its place she asks for collectivity as a tool to benefit and improve the Mexican nation. She provides a hopeful outlook to her study, as she has already observed hints of changes in her nation:

En algunos hombres jóvenes se nota una franca oposición al machismo: no se avergüenzan al declarar, en las reuniones, que tienen que regresar temprano a sus hogares porque la esposa está atendiendo al pequeño enfermo [...] Existen asimismo mujeres ancianas, viudas o solteras, que trabajan; que emplean el tiempo que otras derrochan en llorar y en quejarse, en contribuir al mantenimiento de sus hogares [...] Si viviendo para nosotros mismo, *existimos*, viviendo para los demás, para la familia, para la Patria, para la humanidad, *seremos*. (139-140)

By reconstructing and redefining the relationship between women and men, Bermúdez's discourse resists 'the coloniality of being' in both genders since the founding of New Spain and the emergence of the Mexican nation, one that limits the woman to states of submission and the other who reiterates and reinforces this cycle. With men, the writer acknowledges how hyper-masculinity and machismo chastises men who deviate from these traditional markers of male identity while also permitting practices of everyday oppression against women. She asks women to work against their state of oppression and victimhood but to be careful of creating a narrative of martyrdom, which only recycles patriarchal authority, in its foundation a colonialist authority. By proposing to both men and women the necessity of dismantling machista politics, Bermúdez decolonizes Mexican female and male subjectivities; her study delivers alternative possibilities away from the traditional, oppressive and limiting gender identities. Her creative works, along with her sociological study exhibit the writer's commitment to women's issues in Mexico as her detective mystery stories seek out the execution of justice or at least provide a sense of justice while giving birth to the first feminist detective character in Latin American literatures.

The First Mexican Feminist Detective: “Detente, sombra” and “Las cosas hablan”

“Detente, sombra” of 1962 marks a radical departure in Latin American detective fiction, with the creation of detective María Elena Morán who will have a recurring role in Bermúdez’s writing. This story first appeared in *Anuario del cuento mexicano* (1961) published in 1962 by the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes Departamento de Literatura. The brief literary bio in the anthology offers that she began writing in *el género policiaco* in 1948; by 1953, she already had a well-known detective novel *Diferentes razones tiene la muerte*. Her work had already been translated into English, French, and Russian. “Detente, sombra” is included in a collection of the same title published by Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana in 1984. In 1962, Bermúdez was already well known in Mexico City literary circles. It is important to note that it is a story that appears at the beginning of the Latin American boom in literature marked in Mexico by the publication of Carlos Fuentes’s *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962) and *Aura* (1962). Like these two novels, “Detente, sombra” is a story of Mexico City in the early 1960s with the innovative feature that all characters are women in the Mexico City center; all are writers, journalists, attorney, and judges. It is an upper-class world similar to Fuentes’ masculinist world in his first novels of Mexico City, however, Bermúdez offers readers Mexico through the perspectives of women. Certainly, in its genre, murder mystery, and in its female world, it is as innovative as stories and novels of the emergent Latin American boom. Though the setting is a very contemporary 1960s Mexico, Bermúdez reaches back to colonial Mexico City through the title of her story taken from one of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s famous sonnets. The colonial woman intellectual who defended the rights of women also lived in Mexico City center in what is now Universidad del Claustro de Sor Juana. Part of the mystery of “Detente, sombra” is the meaning of the ghost of Sor Juana through repetition of “sombra” in the story. A murder

occurs, with a shadow, while a television set has Elvis Presley singing his 1960 hit “It’s Now or Never,” lyrics that are repeated along with the “sombra.” Bermúdez presents the first woman detective in Latin American literature in a contemporary U.S.-Mexico setting.

María Elena Morán is a “traditional” 1950s contemporary Mexican female; she is in a heterosexual marriage with children of her own, she is economically dependent upon her husband. She does not have a traditional career within the public sphere, as she is a full time mother who dedicates herself to her family. Though she does not possess a traditional profession, the first time her character emerges in literature through the short story “Detente, sombra,” she and other female characters do identify her as a detective. For example at the beginning of the story upon arriving to Mexico City, Morán receives a visit from her good friend Oralia Vargas, a criminal lawyer who immediately informs Morán about her current case. She discloses to Morán the issues surrounding a client Vargas is defending, explaining to Morán that she believes her client to be innocent. Vargas then requests for Morán to assist her in proving her client’s innocence to which Morán responds: “—Pero, ¿yo qué puedo hacer? Si tú no puedes siendo abogada... —Mira, mira. No te hagas la modesta, por favor. Yo sé que resolviste un caso en Chihuahua y dos aquí en México. Tú puedes ayudarme, descubriendo la asesina” (*Detente, sombra* 182). Vargas’ counter-argument breaks down Morán’s modesty only to then list the various times her friend has been successful in her cases. Being the first time Morán appears as a female detective character in Latin American letters, María Elvira Bermúdez provides her with multiple previous experiences, which allows for the reader to understand that Morán is not, by any means, an amateur detective as she has a reputation that precedes her. By giving her a professional past, Bermúdez cements her character as a legitimate detective;

one who demonstrates the possibilities for the modern Mexican woman beyond the traditional life path.

Although her character may be interpreted under the lens of the traditional heterosexual Mexican female, upon a closer read, María Elena Morán forces the reader to acknowledge the deficiency of binary gender identities, and to look upon her as a woman of complex layers, who at times will contradict and defy static gender identities. Bermúdez developed a character who to the untrained eye may not necessarily submit to the customary characteristics of a detective character—male, heterosexual, macho, public persona—yet Morán’s practices and interactions demonstrate those of not only an engaged investigator, but one who establishes herself as the first Mexican feminist detective as previously stated by J. Patrick Duffey (24-25) along with Myung Nam Choi in her study *La mujer en la novela policial: evolución de la protagonista femenina en cinco hispanas* (12-13). Bermúdez’s character breaks the traditional and formulaic traits of a detective investigator and opens the possibility for new approaches and techniques other female authors could employ when writing mystery or crime novels. The two short stories discussed in this chapter, “Detente, sombra” and “Las cosas hablan” accentuate Bermúdez’s feminist sensibility in a literary and social world dominated by men.

In 1984, Bermúdez embedded “Detente, sombra” within a short story collection carrying the same name, but I would argue that this particular narrative is not a short story but rather a short novella as it has a prologue and an epilogue with a village of female characters. Bermúdez provides the “typical” disclaimer prior to the prologue, explaining to the readers how any characters or situations who may have similarities to real life are purely from the author’s creative imagination and yet, she contradicts herself in the very last line of the warning by stating, “no vea en esa coincidencia propósito ofensivo alguno de

parte de quien esto escribe, sino el enlace necesario con la realidad que tiene toda obra de ficción” (175). She advises the reader not to be offended by said similarities in the story but rather to be conscious of the fact that there is always a touch of reality in matters of fiction.

Bermúdez’s intent may be two-fold, as her tongue-in-cheek approach to cleanse her hands of the possible parallel between the fictional story and real life via the use of humor, allows for her to manipulate the detective fiction genre. The genre’s initial function was to provide a sense of social order to a bourgeois Anglo and European population detached and disconnected by reflecting “the stability of bourgeois society and the self-confidence of the ruling class. The intelligentsia in general, and authors of books in particular, whether socially critical or conservative, assumed that this stability was a fact of life” (Mandel 44). Bermúdez forces the reader to acknowledge how urban crimes, especially in a grand metropolis like Mexico City are always close to its inhabitants so much so, that there exists the possibility of offending her readers when an author such as herself lifts a real life story and transforms it into a fictional detective narrative.

It is important to point out that from all the stories in the collection of *Detente, sombra* (1962) the titular story “Detente, sombra” is the only one that possesses said disclaimer. This may have been a conscious effort on the author’s part, especially since the story itself takes place in an all-woman’s world, where no male characters ever enter into the cosmos of the narrative, though they are referenced here and there, men in the story have no true presence. As such, Bermúdez understands the intent of the disclaimer, but also plays with its usage, as has been done in popular mediums such as U.S. television shows like *The Three Stooges*, a slap-stick comedy trio, popularized in the 1930s to 1970s who at times performed various social critiques of modern American society.

In their episode “You Nazty Spy!” (1940), set during World War II, the short film satirically addresses Nazi Germany along with Adolf Hitler’s Third Reich. Its disclaimer during the opening credits state “Any resemblance between the characters in this picture and any persons, living or dead, is a miracle.” While the film attempts to separate itself from any possible resemblance to reality, it also seeks to pacify fears on the real possibility of this kind of existence, after all Nazi Germany and the Axis alliance are all real historical moments and tensions. The *Stooges* sequel short “I’ll Never Heil Again” (1941), once again comically satirizes the introductory warning, “The characters in this picture are fictitious. Anyone resembling them is better off dead.” Though a bit sinister, the intent shrouds itself with anti-Nazi sentiment as the majority of the characters are extremely unlikeable and possess unredeemable characteristics, therefore to be a real-life character such as Adolf Hitler or a Nazi soldier, according to the episode’s narrative, warrants nothing other than death. Although these two cases use and express satirical elements, the original intent of the fictitious persons and scenarios disclaimer came from a legal approach set forth to safeguard the content from potential lawsuits. Bermúdez’s short story expands on Mandel’s assertion regarding the genre and those of the elite class, as the story only surrounds itself with women who are in positions of power, as Mexican female professional elites. Though Mandel claims that the genre is far removed from the bourgeoisie class for them to be affected by the crimes taking place, Bermúdez inserts the crime within the Mexican elite, reminding the reader that in contemporary Mexico you cannot escape Mexican reality.

The women also have genuine concerns for their homeland as the word “Partido” is repeated throughout the narrative, kept in the background of their activities. And even though it is not mentioned by name, it is understood that the party the women are committing their allegiance to is the PRI. While the PRI has historically come to represent a

patriarchal *estado y patria* or state and homeland, the women represent the change that is taking place from within the governing political party, as they are highly educated, intelligent and possess social as well as political positions of power. While the Three Stooges create a satirical parody aiming at those in power and the abuses performed by them, Bermúdez's narrative is far from satire instead, she provides an alternative perspective to how the powerful in Mexico negotiate, interact, and perform while balancing life in modern-day Mexico City.

Bermúdez, a practicing lawyer in Mexico City, is aware of the original function of said device, as it is necessary to provide legal protection for the creative works or productions, yet along with the intended humor she also allows for the disclaimer at the beginning of "Detente, sombra" to serve as a warning sign that in modern-day Mexico however fictional her story may be, the narrative carries weight when it comes to women's issues in the second half of the twentieth century. As other scholars have stated, Bermúdez's induction of her Mexican female detective, María Elena Morán into the literary world is through a story that solely focuses on women in Mexico City, they are university-educated, from high social rankings and professionals in their own right. Though Morán's marital status is not immediately known, what is disclosed early on is that she has escaped her hometown of Torreón, Coahuila, traveling alone in the hopes of being able to come across an adventure in the energetic capital:

Esa vez había venido sola a México con el pretexto, más que con la intención, de visitar a una vieja tía que estaba internada en el sanatorio. En realidad, quería sumarse aunque fuera por una semana a la vida compleja de la capital y, si la suerte se portaba bien, seguir de cerca las averiguaciones sobre algún crimen misterioso. Sus aficiones de detective eran auténticas. Pero allá en

Torreón no podía desenvolverlas con la frecuencia, la amplitud, y sobre todo, la discreción que México le brindaba. (180-181)

Not only does Mexico City give Morán a different space to work from but also Bermúdez subtextually expresses how the capital possesses a complex relationship with its inhabitants, which in turn may not be the case with smaller towns or states such as Morán's hometown state of Coahuila. For someone who is committed to solving crimes and cases, Mexico City provides various possibilities to fulfill Morán's detecting needs. Yet, the writer also acknowledges that non-urban spaces, those removed and alienated from the capital, are always in need of her expertise and services, as is seen in the short story, "Las cosas hablan," which will later be discussed in relation to "Detente, sombra."

"It's Now or Never": Elvis and Mexican 'Social Deviance'

The prologue of the short story introduces the reader to the unknown murderess in the mystery plot, a woman who has been carefully planning her attack on an archrival. Initially, the omniscient narrator describes her as someone who has succumbed to egoism, driven by "deseos insatisfechos" (*Detente, sombra* 175) that have moved her to plot out the murder, down to the fraudulent fingerprint on the murder weapon. On the day of her intended crime, she moves through a fashionable area of downtown Mexico City known for its mid-twentieth century shopping area where she will meet an unknowing female acquaintance for a meal and drinks in a city center Sanborns. She is able to unobtrusively go unnoticed, as she has calculated that it will only take about ten minutes to commit the crime without raising any suspicions from her companion. As she enters the living room, she notices that her target is watching a television program with a foreign voice signing the ballad, "It's Now or Never." The first lines of the song the murderess hears, prior to

committing her crime, provide a bit of a motivating force as the lyrics impel her to act, “...tomorrow, —will be too late. It’s now or never...” (178), as soon as she places the gun on her victim’s temple, she shoots. The killer becomes dazed when she realizes that her intended victim is not whom she has killed and the last lyric of the song jars her back to the present, “Volvió a la realidad y escuchó: ‘It’s now or never...’ ” (179). The song at first, appears to be placed as a device that provides mellow ambience to the scene of the crime, almost as an item that can be easily overlooked by the reader but, the song reappears during the epilogue of the novella, when the story has unfolded and it has been discovered that Mexico City politician, Angeles Vela had mistakenly killed writer América Fernández instead of her intended victim, attorney and literary critic Georgina Banuet who is mistakenly being charged with the crime.

At the end of the narrative, Angeles is attempting to leave Mexico City and has a trip prepared to Los Angeles, which is not necessarily her first choice in seeking refuge, as it is mentioned that she cannot return to Spain, “Había sacado boleto para Los Ángeles. De ningún modo podía regresar a la península. Había dejado ahí algunos envidiosos. Al verla, se acordarían del tiempo en que estuvo ahí, de la chamba y de los negocios en los que le fue tan bien. Quizá intentarían remover cosas. Y eso no le convenía” (222). The character discloses the discontent she left behind on the Iberian Peninsula but also exposes her ties to corrupt dealings she created during her time there. I must also add a footnote here in regards to Angeles Vela’s destination as she attempts to flee; instead of selecting a different European or Latin American city she has opted for Los Angeles. In the 1960s L.A. is an interesting choice for a place of refuge, as it is not the currently the Los Angeles of the twenty-first century where U.S. Census Data shows that the largest ethnic population in the state of California and the city of Los Angeles is the Latino community. Currently outside of

Mexico, L.A. has become a significant urban center, as it presently has the largest population of Mexican-born residents.¹⁴ Therefore by selecting a U.S. destination, Bermúdez demonstrates a shift in Mexico, whereas before Europe and more particularly Spain tended to be a vital destination for Mexicans, here that is no longer the case. As European influence is subsiding, the rise of U.S. political, cultural, and economic power is illustrated in Angeles' choice of refuge, Bermúdez is not the only one to take notice of Los Angeles' future metropolitan clout as Octavio Paz earlier in the 1940s had recognized the city's Mexican roots and imminent potential in "El pachuco y otros extremos" as he described Los Angeles as having "la atmósfera vagamente mexicana de la ciudad, imposible de apresar con palabras o conceptos. Esta mexicanidad—gusto por los adornos, descuido y fausto, negligencia, pasión y reserva—flota en el aire" (*El laberinto* 15). Even though Angeles does not mention why she is leaving to Los Angeles as opposed to the other cosmopolitan American city, New York, I must underscore the city's growing importance for Mexicans which goes hand-in-hand with United States' prominence in Mexico.

As Angeles Vela is attempting to escape prior to crossing into the airport terminal, she once again hears the song's warbled lyrics she heard prior to erroneously killing América "...tomorrow will be too late. It's now or never..." (*Detente, sombra* 222). The song brings her panic, and she begins to run through the airport attempting to ignore her name that is being called through the overhead speakers in the attempt to prevent the women police officers that are about to arrest her. To Angeles' disbelief she cannot understand how detective María Elena Morán was able to figure out the case so quickly and also she

¹⁴ In May 2013 the Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project released a study on Mexican and Mexican-Americans in the United States. Data shows that California holds the largest Mexican-born and Mexican origin population in the nation. Please see: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/05/01/a-demographic-portrait-of-mexican-origin-hispanics-in-the-united-states/>

laments not having killed her true target, political rival Georgina Banuet. With the song appearing for a second time in the story, I assert that it serves as a tool that allows for the critique of women who mimic the actions of their male-counterparts when it comes to the game of power and politics. Yet the song also provides a space to let women know that it is their time to step onto the national stage as full-fledged citizens of a country who has only recently within the last decade given women the cross-national and local right to vote as well as hold public office in Mexico. To understand how Bermúdez's selection of a song like "It's Now or Never" serves as an embedded feminist "message," I must turn to a concise history of rock 'n' roll and Elvis Presley in Mexico.

From the mid to late 1950s, Mexico was experiencing a cultural shift throughout the nation, women had incrementally gained suffrage during the first half of the twentieth century officially receiving national voting rights in 1953, which would transform them into a growing voting force when it came to national and local elections as well as political participants in positions of public office. Though it would be an uphill battle, since male voters and politicians continued to believe that women did not possess the full intellectual capacity to understand their rights much less consciously practice them for the benefit of the nation (Bartra 450). As gender politics continued to evolve, the youth counter-culture also began to rise across Mexico with U.S. popular mediums as music, art and film making their way across the border and hence, influencing how young people constructed their Mexican identity.

Rock 'n' roll music and films swept the Mexican nation during the 1950s, where the American-made musical genre was popularized at first by middle to upper middle class adult audiences, only to later on be further consumed by young adults everywhere. Latin American historian Eric Zolov explains that for a Mexican audience, the influence of rock 'n'

roll had two polarizing features, “For many adults, the new youth culture attached to rock music epitomized the cosmopolitan aspirations of a middle class in ascendancy. But at the same time, the sudden challenges to patriarchal authority in the home and society suggested the darker risks of rapid development and the need for greater control over the mass media” (Zolov 17). Zolov discusses the consumption of rock ‘n’ roll by Mexican audiences, examining record sales, dance hall parties as well as U.S. and Mexican films produced. By the mid 1950s the musical genre had transitioned from mostly big band performers to solo acts, with Elvis Presley leading at the forefront of the genre.

As a masculine symbol, Presley reified Mexican virility and machismo by embodying and performing the rebellion he continuously crooned about, while also bridging the genre with modernity, which in turn attracted Mexican middle class audiences to participate in the metropolitanism bound to rock ‘n’ roll. Zolov states that there existed the recognition of “one’s social achievements in an economy increasingly tied to the United States. Most children of the upper classes had the opportunity to study and travel abroad; flaunting one’s English became a recognized sign of wealth and privilege” (Zolov 34). Although the influence of the rock ‘n’ roll genre provided Mexican elite class access and acknowledgement, the genre also promoted rejection and challenge to traditional moral codes and status quo.

The shift from representing modernity to becoming a rebellious and delinquent genre became centered on the idea of *desmadre*, or social chaos, deviant behavior, which stands in direct opposition to those who continued to practice the traditional and national *buenas costumbres*, good customs or practices of the nuclear Mexican family. Even Elvis Presley who had previously been seen as the model masculine White performer began to have a controversial reputation in Mexico as he was accused of not only disseminating

sexual deviation but of racism¹⁵ as well. His masculine image was even placed into question when the Mexican media alleged that his true intent was to promote homosexuality and transvestite culture. As Zolov states, the attack on Presley came from an attempt to control and veer away from the now deformed values of modernity, imported by the likes of Presley and return the youth to the conservative values and national historical icons upheld by the current political party, the PRI. The focus was not only on the Mexican youth but also women of the era who, as previously mentioned, had only recently gained full suffrage at the beginning of the decade and their potential voting power as well as political presence brought about patriarchal anxieties:

The rock 'n' roll gesture—characterized by rupture and defiance—directly challenged the steady gaze of parental authority, substituting rebellion for obedience. Such defiance, in turn, opened a critical space for women, who began to question their own subordinate role. This relationship between policing the boundaries of respect for one's elders and upholding patriarchal authority over women was made explicit in the conflict over Presley. (Zolov 46)

Although Zolov captures how rock 'n' roll had the potential to serve as a vehicle for Mexican women's liberation he does not delve into the irony of the Mexican government and media's reaction to Elvis' alleged racist comments. As male authoritative figures were up in arms over Presley's remarks regarding Mexican women, insisting on discrediting his

¹⁵ According to Zolov, Presley had been accused numerous times of making disparaging remarks against Mexican women, such as comparing them to dogs, or "even less worthy" than black women. Zolov debunks the reported rumors that Presley ever said these comments, and instead claims that they were a fabrication of the Mexican government and media in an attempt to dissuade the Mexican audience from furthering their consumption of non-Mexican patriarchal values via the defiant culture of rock 'n' roll, which would then force the return to traditional patriarchal and national values easing authoritative anxieties of possible political and social revolutions (Zolov 40-43).

cultural and social influence in Mexico and disrespecting *las mujeres de nuestra patria*, the government and male citizens in turn have a long standing history with heterosexist and misogynist practices. As I stated previously, women continuously are seen as the inferior counterpart to the Mexican macho man, her intellectual capacity interrogated and placed into doubt in both the public and private spheres. The patronizing approach of wanting to protect Mexican women from Elvis Presley's racist and deviant social codes, discloses the hypocrisy that lies in the treatment of women, the attempt to safeguard them from the foreign White man yet permitting for Mexican men to reduce women to second-class citizenship or even de-humanization. For a writer like María Elvira Bermúdez, whose professional and writing careers were flourishing during this era, embedded feminist practices within her short story defy colonial patriarchal powers.

In "Detente, sombra" the incorporation of Presley's song "It's Now or Never" serves as a dual device, with one being more obvious than the other. The obvious indicator being that the song only appears when the killer, Angeles Vela commits her crime as well as at the end of the story when she is on the verge of escaping. As I mentioned before, the lyrics can be interpreted as enticing Vela to commit the murder almost without thinking, which turns out to be disastrous in her case as she kills the wrong woman and has to revise her plan by framing Georgina Banuet, her intended victim. The other less obvious interpretation for this story is to look at what happens in between the song's cameos, as the narrative is centered on a very tight and complex Mexican female cosmos.

The characters of "Detente, sombra" are all women from different and diverse parts of the metropolitan capital. The detective María Elena Morán finds herself visiting Mexico City and encountering women with powerful public and professional positions. From lawyers to police officers, journalists to politicians, this all-female world undermines the

insistence of Mexican patriarchy within gender politics. Bermúdez's choice to include a song by Elvis Presley presents an interesting strategy because the author does not to incorporate the typical and apparent rock 'n' roll song normally associated with Presley, such as "All Shook Up" (1956) or "Jailhouse Rock" (1957), both songs would continuously cause infinite female adoration, longstanding screams and the uncontrolled need to dance whenever he performed. Instead Bermúdez took a much more softer, calmer route, incorporating his 1960 hit ballad "It's Now or Never," whose chords are framed around the popularized Italian-Neapolitan song "O sole mio." To have selected a more upbeat rock 'n' roll song would have been a blatant and forceful challenge to Mexican patriarchy especially taking into consideration the all-female universe of the narrative but, what makes Bermúdez's detective story unique is that she works within the confines of her society while also practicing Mexican feminism within the pages of her literature. The writer is acutely aware of her position as one of the only, if not, the only Mexican female writer of the Mexican detective-mystery genre, and in order for her to avoid alienation from her predominantly male colleagues, she strategized her feminist practice. Choosing an Elvis Presley song already demonstrates Bermúdez's willingness to test the gendered boundaries, as Presley represents social depravation and deviation in the eyes of Mexican male rulers.

When you take the song out of its standard romantic narrative of passionate want and desire, then place it within a feminist framework narrative, with the message structured around Mexican female empowerment and advocacy the lyrics "It's now or never, tomorrow will be too late" take on a different meaning, where Bermúdez's embedded feminist message is asking for women to take control of their lives, to be active in the present, as she presents the readers with the possibility of what an urban Mexican

world may look like with women as educated, engaged and active leaders as well as contributing members of their communities. She is also careful to not provide a one-dimensional utopia, giving a view of women's lives as complicated as if the story were to be told through a man's world. As much as the writer celebrates the accomplishments of this diverse cast of women exhibiting high ranking officials to a young street-corner woman newspaper seller, not the traditional newspaper boy, and *ruleteras*, women taxi drivers, which to this day in Mexico City it is considered to be a rarity, the author carves out a feminist space which then allows for women to possess shortcomings as well, such as Angeles Vela's crime, or who seek political power over female solidarity. Her realistic portrayal of women takes them out of the cookie-cutter stereotype, where a woman's world would be free of conflict and problems, rather Bermúdez gifts her female characters with multidimensionality and truly human struggles; the Mexican writer has the foresight to include a world with diverse sexualities within this all female cast as has been previously pointed out by literary scholars Duffey and Choi (Duffey 25-26; Choi 122-123).

While Morán is listening to her good friend and criminal defense lawyer, Oralia Vargas explains the case to her, the detective begins to ask questions in the hopes of finding something that Vargas and the police investigators have missed in the case. At first, she does not find much of what has been previously repeated to her, the shock among the community of women that Georgina would commit such a crime. Morán then notes that there's something odd in the retelling of events, she notes that América had been inside Georgina's apartment, sitting on the sofa watching television show with Elvis serenading his popular ballad without the apartment's owner being present. When Morán points out this detail to Georgina's lawyer, Oralia explains that Georgina confirmed that she had locked the door before going out that evening, and could not explain why the door was

open and unlocked when police arrived after the murder. Morán inadvertently uncovers more information about the victim and the accused, as the lawyer declares:

Pero por fuera se rumora que fue un crimen pasional.

—¿Un crimen pasional? —Como lo oyes. Es indecente, ¿verdad? Sucede que América Fernández tenía cierta fama. Pero Georgina es normal, absolutamente normal. Es soltera y no se le conoce ninguna aventura; pero de eso a que...¡No hay derecho, de veras! María Elena reprimió una sonrisa e indagó: —Y lo de América, ¿sería cierto? —Quién sabe. A mí no me consta, y no me gusta hablar de lo que no me consta. Lo único que sé decirte es que en los altos círculos literarios y políticos de México hay algunas gentes...volteadas, como suele decirse. (*Detente, sombra* 190-191)

Though it is never fully revealed or confirmed as to whether América and Georgina, two powerful women in the literary world of Mexico City, were or were not in a lesbian relationship, what matters here is that the possibility exists.

Bermúdez's conscious inclusion of other sexualities aside from the prescribed heterosexist values instilled in patriarchal practice can exist for Mexican women and their sexuality does not devalue their social and cultural worth as the two characters are respected within their own professional worlds, Georgina as a literary critic and América as a well-known prolific writer. Even with rumors swirling about "las raras" (*Detente, sombra* 191) the ambiguity left by Bermúdez parallels Mexico's national narrative surrounding Presley and rock 'n' roll, as previously discussed, historian Eric Zolov noted how Presley's image went from a model of male virility to a socially deviant homosexual (42). Unlike Presley who denied questions surrounding his sexuality and masculinity, Bermúdez, although inconclusive within the narrative, initiates the chiseling of these alternative

female identities and sexualities, the importance not only lies in solving the mystery and gaining justice but also forging other possible existences for present-day and future Mexican women. Bermúdez's short story and the lesbian narrative is a precursor to future writers of Mexican lesbian literature. As queer literature scholar Cynthia Duncan has noted, only two novels have been categorized as Mexican lesbian literature in the second half of the twentieth century. The first novel written by Rosamaría Roffiel, who is mostly known for her poetry has also been credited with writing the first contemporary lesbian narrative *Amora* (1989). One year later, Jewish-Mexican writer Sara Levi Calderón publishes *Dos mujeres*, a more explicit and intimate portrayal of Mexican lesbianism (Duncan 72-73). As "Detente, sombra" exemplifies the diverse world of women, it also creates an homage to one of the first modern Mexican feminists, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz.

While scholars like J. Patrick Duffey and Myung Nam Choi have pointed out that the title of Bermúdez's short story alludes to Sor Juana's poem "Detente, sombra de mi bien esquivo," and pays homage to the criolla colonial writer. What these particular scholars do not mention are the similarities found within this important Mexican historical icon and the writer, lawyer, judge and literary critic María Elvira Bermúdez as both women serve not only as Mexican feminist figures but also as public intellectuals in Mexico City. As many historians and life-long researchers of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695) such as Norma Alarcón, Octavio Paz, Margo Glantz have pointed out, the intellectual nun was not only admired for her writing but also for her intellectual prowess at a time when intellect was determined by a gendered hierarchy, placing men at the forefront while women were constantly excluded. As a criolla woman, Sor Juana and her works made international news as word regarding the child prodigy had traveled all the way to Imperial Spain. Alicia Gaspar de Alba's essay "The Politics of Location of La Décima Musa" (2014) discusses the

various intelligence tests Sor Juana was submitted to by a variety of male academics and philosophers, who were determined to question a child with her caliber of intellect but were also in disbelief that a female could possess such capacity. Gaspar de Alba contends that “We must remember, however, that those were dangerous times for an intelligent and independent female; the spies of the Holy Inquisition lurked in every household. Literacy for criolla girls was tolerable even desirable in some circles; genius was another story” (43). In her public letter “Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz” (1691), Sor Juana openly defends her position as an active female intellectual, insisting on equality and equity between men and women, this letter along with her poem “Hombres necios” have become early Mexican feminist anthems.

One of the leading Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz scholars in the United States, Georgina Sabat-Rivers emphasizes that the intellectual feminist was in fact fighting for her own life but also the future lives of women intellectuals and writers:

I think that we may say that the whole literary production is permeated by her feminine consciousness of her society’s patriarchal character and of her exceptional status as a female writer and intellectual. I therefore cannot accept what has sometimes been asserted: that she wished to be identified with the masculine sex. Born a woman and an intellectual what she did do was to assert herself and demand the same rights that were conceded to enlightened men [...] The conviction that she had of her own capacity and her consequent desire for recognition as a woman comparable to men, led her to rectify, by her own practice, the prejudice against women and to demonstrate by example what a woman writer was capable of achieving within the level of Golden Age literature. (144-145)

Sabat-Rivers' assessment of Sor Juana's proto-feminist objective echoes into the twentieth century as María Elvira Bermúdez also renders a similar discourse with her short story. As public intellectuals both Bermúdez and her character María Elena Morán are heirs to Sor Juana's early Mexican feminist groundwork, as these two contemporary women of twentieth-century Mexico continue to deconstruct and challenge patriarchal practices while also continuing to forge new spaces for Mexican women in political, social and cultural spheres. Bermúdez as a literary critic, law-maker and writer reaches into realms of Mexico's political and social structures traditionally dominated by and reserved for men and yet she, like Sor Juana, is able to demonstrate the full capability of women in public life. During her tenure Bermúdez becomes one of, if not the most recognized writer in Mexican detective fiction, as she has previously been acknowledged as "la Agatha Christie mexicana"; in 1988, one year prior to her death, at the II Encuentro Internacional de autores de la novela policial, Bermúdez is named "La madrina de la novela policiaca mexicana" (Gutiérrez Luna 13-14), a label that continues to follow her legacy to this day. While Bermúdez works in the physically real Mexico City, Morán symbolically embodies what Sor Juana fought for as an outspoken writer and intellectual.

The feminist detective María Elena Morán along with the multitude of women characters publically navigate and permeate through social and political worlds traditionally controlled by men. From their professional positions to careers in politics, Moran and the other women characters illustrate a kind of Mexico that the intellectual nun had wanted for herself and other women. Morán, like Sor Juana and Bermúdez, serves as a public feminist detective among women who are clearly concerned with women's issues in their nation. She may be modest about her success in the detective field but she does not allow for her modesty to overshadow her clear and composed approach towards the

investigation at hand. For example, as she attempts to interview a variety of women during her investigation Morán is invited to attend a meeting for La Unión de Mujeres, a political party responsible to lobby for women's rights in Mexico City, it is here where her investigative skills are placed on display. There she comes into contact not only with the committee leaders but women from all areas of Mexican life, poet, writers and artists along with politicians, judges and lawyers. The gathering was not only a tool Bermúdez employed to permit her detective to go about subtly investigating who could have killed América Fernández but also allows to for the writer to exhibit the diversity and intellectual gains women have had in mid-twentieth-century Mexico.

As Duffey points out "Bermúdez was quite passionate about Latin American women poets" (25), and "Detente, sombra" would be a prime example of his observation as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's presence encompasses the story. While her poem, "Detente, sombra de mi bien esquivo" may be interpreted as the female speaker expressing her inability to physically unite with the object of her desire except only in the abstract, "poco importa burlar brazos y pecho/si te labra prisión mi fantasía" (de la Cruz 182), the element of the *sombra* or shadow that constantly escapes Sor Juana becomes an important element with the feminist detective story. Like Elvis' song "It's Now or Never," the references to Sor Juana's sonnet visually "sings" throughout the story. The reader is first introduced to shadows when Angeles is about to kill who she thinks is Georgina but in reality is América watching an Elvis Presley film playing on television from the sofa. The apartment is dark and the only light emitting is from the electronic set, therefore only providing dark silhouettes of the furniture and body. Due to the lack of light, Angeles mistakenly kills América and does not realize her error until after she has turned on the light in the apartment, "Retrocedió hasta la puerta y encendió la luz. Dio luego vuelta para enfrentar a

su víctima [...] En su cerebro, las palabras de una deploración tardía: ‘Yo no quise matar a esta mujer’, fueron pronto reemplazadas por el intento de organizar el ambiente” (*Detente, sombra* 178-179). Her mistake does not dissuade Angeles from completing her crime, as she reconfigures her course by framing Georgina for the murder. The story’s instances of justice and injustice allows for the echoes of Sor Juana’s shadow to be witnessed as the detective story unfolds.

Georgina, who has been falsely imprisoned for a crime she did not commit but has been judged as guilty by the court of public opinion, as the only people who are willing to visit her are her lawyer Oralia, Morán who is investigating her case, and a writer named Blanca Rosa. When Morán first meets with Georgina her description of the imprisoned writer has a curious edge as she illustrates Georgina as “Decididamente tenía aspecto de intelectual y de feminista” (205), already setting up a frame paralleling a contemporary Mexican woman in present day Mexico City to the criolla colonial feminist genius, just like Morán describes Georgina as an attractive woman, Gaspar de Alba similarly characterizes the child prodigy as physically beautiful, hence creating a contradiction as a woman with her beauty surely would not possess the intellectual competence she demonstrated (46-47). Georgina vocalizes her frustration with her country’s justice system, as she confesses “Creo que estoy adquiriendo un complejo de Sor Juana. Ella, prácticamente, estuvo presa también” (206), and although Georgina is technically incarcerated due to being accused of murder, Georgina who is collectively known as “una idealista incorregible” (200) and “la crítica más crítica de todas las críticas” (212) is a leftist feminist, an overall critic on literary, social, and political issues. Through her incarceration, she comes to the realization that like her colonial feminist counterpart she is not judged due to América’s death but rather her relentless intellectual feminism. When speaking as to why her own mother has

not come to visit her in jail, Georgina exclaims, “Me ha maldecido. Dice que todo lo que me pasa lo tengo bien ganado, por mis ideas herejes, por mi soberbia, por mi libertinaje [...] Por eso estoy aquí, no por lo de América...” (208). Her self-awareness underscores the contemporary issues Mexican feminists have in modern-day Mexico, Georgina’s narrative updates Sor Juana’s narrative from seventeenth-century Mexico, as Sor Juana in her “Respuesta a Sor Filotea” which serves as a present day legal deposition, defends women’s rights to education as well as intellectual life, and Georgina vocalizes that she is being punished due to said life. But unlike Sor Juana who was forced to give up her life as an academic and donate her voluminous library as well as her scientific instruments, Georgina receives a bit of justice and hope as the shadow returns at the end of the narrative, when Angeles is caught by two female police officers and led to the patrol wagon, “Y las sombras que los tres cuerpos proyectaban, se confundieron al fin en una. Ante la *julia* del Distrito Federal, esa ancha sombra se detuvo” (224). The merged shadow engulfs the women and serves as a witness to the implementation of justice; Sor Juana’s presence is finally able to witness how in Mexico, the possibility of freedom from the prison cloister she had been designated to centuries earlier, can exist as Bermúdez, the literary lawyer continues Sor Juana’s legacy in protecting and championing for women’s right to intellectual, social and political lives.

As this story demonstrates Morán’s public detective persona, Bermúdez has also included a Morán detective story demonstrating how her feminist investigator works with the private sphere, in the domestic area within a heterosexual world. In one of the last María Elena Morán detective stories Bermúdez wrote, the writer continues to practice her strategic application of Mexican decolonial feminism by including the dynamic relationship between Morán and her husband in the short story “Las cosas hablan.”

Las cosas (que no se) hablan

Between “Detente, sombra,” and “Las cosas hablan” published in a collection of Bermúdez’s short detective stories, *Muerte a la zaga* (1985) there is about a twenty-five year time span where feminist crime-solver María Elena Morán reappears in Bermúdez’s writing. In this short story, the reader encounters Morán and her husband Bruno who are forced to seek shelter in a house whose owner withholds information regarding the strange noises Morán identifies throughout the home. Through her own investigative efforts, Morán uncovers a husband who has held his wife imprisoned for a number of years within the home and has accomplices who have contributed to the silencing and oppression of this captive female. With the assistance of her husband, Morán not only is able to free the wife, but she also uncovers a history of domestic violence and abuse within this private domestic space. The short story becomes an example of Mexican feminist legal storytelling, Bermúdez places real life issues contemporary women face in a fictional setting. By doing so, the writer challenges the colonial Mexican family with the father/husband as the oppressive patriarch. Later on in this chapter, I further discuss how through the act of counter-storytelling Bermúdez catalyzes a discourse surrounding *lo justo mexicano*.

For this narrative, Bermúdez begins the story with what some critics have labeled as *the cliché* opening for any story, “It was a dark and stormy night...” except Bermúdez regionalizes her introduction by including the Mexican landscape near the Mexico-U.S. border in her dark and stormy night: “Cierta noche de principios de diciembre una intensa nevada hería los campos tristes de una región de Chihuahua cercana a la carretera de Ciudad Juárez” (*Muerte a la zaga* 80). Interestingly, celebrated gay Mexican-American writer John Rechy has an essay regarding this very opening line, “A Dark and Stormy Night” (2004). In it he discusses the uses of said line and how “Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s

introductory line in “Paul Clifford” is often considered the worst opening of a novel. But what’s so terrible? It makes a direct statement, identifies the setting and creates mood. It’s no worse--often better--than others, even in celebrated novels” (Rechy “A Dark and Stormy”).¹⁶ Throughout the essay, Rechy envisions how this particular line could have been written by the great wordsmiths, evoking Marcel Proust, Gabriel García Márquez, Tennessee Williams, and Sandra Cisneros; he concludes that although labeled as a cliché, the adage works as he is creatively able to employ each author’s own clichés within the cliché itself. The writer even includes himself in the imaginative examples he provides with a quote from his groundbreaking gay novel, *City of Night* (1963), “And myself: ‘Later I would think of America as one vast city of dark and stormy night.’ [...] Not bad at all, Mr. Bulwer-Lytton” (Rechy “A Dark and Stormy”). As Rechy asserts, Bermúdez’s opening does set the mood and scene for her story, she relies on this device as it would explain why she and her husband are stranded practically in the middle of nowhere and why their vehicle has refused to continue their trek. The line serves as a catalyst to force the two characters to exit the vehicle and seek out shelter in a house that will provide the reader with the second literary case in the Morán detective series.

The dark and stormy night is an introduction to a landscape that recalls Gothic fiction where subjectivity beyond human agents is distributed among objects including the classic animistic landscape where imminent messages or meaning may be found.

Bermúdez combines the mystery detective genre and the Gothic romance thriller. No doubt, “Las cosas hablan,” is literary realism but the ambience is otherworldly. The beginning of the story bears repeating: “Cierta noche de principios de diciembre una

¹⁶ John Rechy’s essay “A Dark and Stormy Night” (2004) has only been published on the author’s personal website under “On Writing” at www.johnrechy.com/onWriting_darkStormy.htm

intensa nevada hería los campos tristes de una región de Chihuahua” (80). The dim light in the distance gives way to a three-story stone, tezontle, house that seemed “una señora del siglo pasado, santurrona y rencorosa” (80). The opening of the large door with noisy hinges reveals an elderly male servant carrying a candle and on a mantel a bust of Charles Dickens. The narrator describes the house with “ese ambiente confortable digno de una novela inglesa del siglo XIX” (81). Indeed, owner, the sixty-year-old Francisco Balvanera, and home have English origins. María Elena Morán and husband Bruno have stumbled upon another Mexico, an English country-side manor where a Gothic romance tale will unfold with a woman who has been imprisoned and abused within her own home, which scandalously and sadly, in 2014 continues to occur. Bermúdez situates this story in a symbolic past but in the present Mexico to bring the reader to the understanding of the mannered machismo, a cultural law bolstered by the legal system, wherein the home, the husband is the father, therefore the one who controls and dominates the intimate space. Here in “Las cosas hablan,” with its nineteenth-century manor, Balvanera is both husband and colonial patriarch. María Elena hears “[u]n grito lástimero y hondo que no venía de fuera, sino que partía de la casa misma” (83). In order to comprehend Bermúdez’s Mexican feminist gothic elements in the short story, it is important to discuss the first gothic narrative, *The Castle of Otranto* and the ways in which Bermúdez readjusts and shifts the genre.

The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story, published in 1764 by English writer Horace Walpole tells the story of an Italian man named Manfred who believes that a prophecy regarding his dominion over the castle is coming to an end. His son Conrad is about to marry Princess Isabel, but he is unexpectedly killed. The death of Conrad only furthers Manfred’s anxiety that the prophecy will become a realization, thus he decides to divorce

his current wife, Hippolita in order to marry his son's bride, believing that she will redeem him in producing another legitimate male heir. Isabel refuses and decides to run away, trying to escape her father-in-law's obsession with becoming his wife. The story becomes more intricate as Manfred discovers that Theodore is also in love with Isabella, therefore challenging Manfred's patriarchal right to marry the princess, as he now must confront a male rival. Isabella's estranged father, Frederic appears and falls in love with Matilda, Manfred's only daughter, the two fathers come to an agreement that they will both marry each other's daughters. As the web slowly comes undone, through a feminist analysis it is clear that this gothic story at its root is about objectifying and controlling the female body. Manfred, the oppressive father has little to no respect for his female family members as his wife is constantly seen as a broken entity due to her sterility and he is easily willing to throw away his marriage to hold on to his dominion in the castle. Matilda, is also seen as a worthless entity, until her father can use her as a pawn to get what he wants, which is Frederic's approval to marry Isabella. The writer describes the relationship between father and daughter by comparing it to Conrad, the household's male heir: "Manfred, Prince of Otranto, had one son and one daughter: The latter the most beautiful virgin, aged eighteen, was called Matilda. Conrad, the son, was three years younger, a homely youth, sickly, and of no promising disposition; yet he was the darling of his father, who never showed any symptoms of affection towards Matilda" (Walpole 1). All of the elements that *The Castle of Otranto* possesses in regards to female characters are also found in Bermúdez's short story with one exception, María Elena and Bruno Morán.

Unlike Walpole's story and other writers like Edgar Allan Poe's detective fiction short stories, these narratives traditionally take place in a land far away or a geographical landscape that is not directly connected with the author. Walpole, an English writer set his

story in an Italian castle; Poe, who is also one of the founders of American Gothic literature, placed his detective, C. Auguste Dupin in the city streets of Paris, France. The distance allows for their readers to be disconnected geographically from where the story takes place, that way it creates a comforting read, where issues such as oppressive fathers or murders seem to happen abroad instead of one's own backyard. Yet, Bermúdez places her story in the lonely country-side of Mexico with gothic components: a dark rainy night, a decrepit house in the far horizon, an imprisoned woman, an oppressive father/husband, and by doing so she refuses to allow for her reader to remove themselves from the story, as the crimes committed here, such as female imprisonment cannot be fictionalized nor placed in the distance. The landscape becomes an important marker in the storyline with its romantic elements. Chicano scholar Héctor Calderón analyzes the effect of landscape in Chicana/o literature by focusing on Rudolfo Anaya's novel *Bless Me Última*, where the New Mexican setting possesses romantic elements which "through the high level of abstraction that runs through the stylized characters, both attractive and evil, settings, scenes and almost any aspect of the physical landscape. These aspects of the narrative can be meaningfully good or evil, which is to say that through the filtering mind of the characters they can be given the categories of subjectivity and agency" (*Narratives of Greater Mexico* 38). Literary theorist, Fredric Jameson's understanding of romance with a Marxist lens influences Calderón's use of romance in a Mexican American landscape. Jameson states "the semantic reading of genre ultimately grounds itself in expressive materials" (Jameson 147). Along with the landscape and expressive materials, the old home in "Las cosas hablan" is an important site to consider. Feminist Gothic critic, Kate Ferguson Ellis discusses how the house/castle in gothic literature becomes a "site of terror" for women, as they are constantly kept locked in (Ellis ix), which can also be representative of the

heterosexual relationship between husband and wife, in Morán's case, the colonial patriarchal family. Therefore, when thinking about Bermúdez's critique on the traditional gothic genre via detective fiction, I turn to the relationship between Bermúdez and her husband, along with the "expressive materials" found in the short story.

Prior to solving the case, Bermúdez exhibits the relationship between Morán and her husband during the first scenes of the story. Once they have both concluded that the vehicle will not move any more forward, Morán exclaims that they are probably safer to stay in the car and wait for help but her husband disagrees, he claims:

—¡Tú siempre con esa imaginación alebrastada! Apuesta que ya estás urdiendo algún cuento. —No, Bruno. Pienso que nos hemos alejado del camino y que estamos cerca de una casa. Mira, allí se ve una luz. Morán sonrió con escepticismo y murmuró: —La lucecita que ven a lo lejos los niños de los cuentos que se pierden en el bosque... —Pero miró en dirección indicada. Y en efecto, en medio de una masa negruzca advirtió un tenue resplandor. (*Muerte a la zaga* 80)

With this exchange, Bermúdez communicates how the relationship Morán had with her female colleagues in "Detente, sombra" will not necessarily be replicated with the relationship she has with her husband, as he exhibits doubts regarding what she sees, along with letting her know that her "overactive imagination" is unreliable and yet, the writer creates a relationship for the reader to trust the detective not only because of what she executed in the previous short story, but how her husband's premature assessment regarding his wife is deflated by the actual light emitting from their future haven. Though Morán does not vocally confront her husband's incorrect observations, Morán's strategic

silence allows for the setting to challenge Bruno, which further cements the trust for the detective.

Once Morán and her husband have been invited to stay at the old mansion, the detective instinctually senses that something is wrong within the house, “María Elena temblaba. Quizá no solamente del frío. Musitó: —Siento como si no estuvieran espiando unos ojos invisibles” (81). In this scene Morán’s *facultad*¹⁷ is set into motion, the instinct Chicana scholar and theorist Gloria Anzaldúa has identified within women of color (Anzaldúa 60) and it is Morán’s *facultad* that allows for her to remain acutely aware of her surroundings in the strange home that is possibly holding unknown secrets. As their host, Francisco Balvanera entertains them for the night, Morán hears an anguished scream that none of the two men hear, startled by it she keeps the information to herself until her and her husband are alone in their room. Returning to the scene described in Chapter One of this dissertation when comparing Christie’s Miss Marple and Bermúdez’s María Elena Morán, once the female detective finds herself exclusively with her husband, Morán retells her story to Bruno to which he responds, “—Estás en plena novela, chata. Personajes ocultos, ruidos extraños, ¡todo un misterio! Pero en realidad nada hay de raro o de temible en esta casa. Balvanera y su criado son un par de viejos chochos o inofensivos. ¿Por qué tienes miedo? Además, ¿no estoy yo aquí? [...] Y Bruno, sin hacer caso de las explicaciones de su esposa se dispuso a acostarse” (84). Upon hearing that her husband was resolute in not helping her investigate the sounds that she has heard throughout the house, she decides to follow her own instinct and investigate without her husband, especially if he was

¹⁷ Gloria Anzaldúa defines *facultad* as “the capacity to see the surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant “sensing,” a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide. The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world” (60) in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987).

only going to continue critiquing her suspicions, she came to her own conclusion, “Resolvió correr el riesgo: si alguien en esa casa necesitaba ayuda, allí estaba ella para prestársela” (85).

Upon her investigation, Morán is caught and held captive by Balvanera along with his employees Teófilo and Pomposa; she has been tied down and silenced through a knotted rag. The host then moves forth into a speech where he declares that it is Morán’s intelligence and unwillingness to ignore her instinct which will be the cause of her and her husband’s demise, “Su mente suspicaz ha sido la causa de su ruina. Porque espero de su clara inteligencia de que usted comprenderá que ninguno de los dos puede salir vivo de aquí” (85-86). Balvanera acknowledges Morán’s *facultad* but claims that because of it she has placed herself and her husband in an unfavorable position, which will lead them to their death and yet, it is this same *facultad* that at the end of the story saves not only Morán and Bruno’s lives but also the life of the wife Balvanera has kept trapped inside the house. Morán exercises her decolonial feminism to communicate in an alternative method that is not common amongst patriarchal values. Anzaldúa described *facultad* as “an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings” (60). Prior to leaving her sleeping husband, Morán leaves a series of symbols using his clothing and the bedroom furniture, which he would then decipher and understand that she along with him were in real danger as she had previously disclosed to him. As in the Gothic genre and as previously expressed by Fredric Jameson, “expressive materials” or inanimate objects will have messages. In this particular case, the message Morán leaves behind with the clothing and furniture for her husband serves a dual purpose.

The first one would be the most obvious one, Morán needed to make sure she had a safety net, her husband, if anything dangerous came up when she was exploring the mysterious noises throughout the house. The second purpose, serves to exhibit Morán practicing decolonial feminism through material expressions, in other words Bermúdez's story critiques and dismantles the traditional colonial family, where the oppressive father/husband/male from the Gothic genre only perceives his wife/daughter/female as objects for beneficial exchange as was witnessed in *The Castle of Otranto*.¹⁸ Balvanera had confessed to Morán that while she was in her room, he had been watching her, observing her every move, however what he was not able to clearly understand was the message she had left behind for Bruno when he would wake up from his sleep. Because Balvanera ascribes to the colonial patriarch/father identity, he cannot decode the symbols and objects she uses, but Bruno does as he is an example of the new Mexican male described by Bermúdez in *La vida familiar del mexicano*.

Her strategic silence in "Las cosas hablan" cannot be interpreted by someone who practices the silencing and repression of women, as Balvanera has been doing with his own wife inside their home, which explains why Bruno is able to decipher Morán's call for help because although he is a skeptic surrounding Morán's ideas and sentiments, she always feels comfortable sharing them with her husband, he does not silence her but does challenge what he at times finds to be an exaggeration or extreme. While Balvanera adheres to patriarchal codes, Bruno Morán represents one of the new men Bermúdez describes in *La vida familiar del mexicano*, one who respects his female counterpart rather than oppress and suppress her. Bruno is able to decipher María Elena's secret code

¹⁸ In her classic *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Juliet Mitchell defines patriarchy as "living according to the law of the father" (xvi).

because he breaks away from the colonial father/husband figure and exemplifying a heterosexual relationship based on equity and equality. This decolonial couple triumphs in this story over the colonial father/husband who is caught and brought to justice. If Bruno and María Elena had the relationship Balvanera had with his wife, Rosalía more than likely the clothing and furniture would simply be what they are, clothing and furniture, not a code in need of interpretation. Yet, within this intimate relationship and in this private sphere of the Balvanera nineteenth-century country manor, the “expressive materials” represent a new form of communication for this decolonial couple, María Elena and Bruno who echo Bermúdez’s sociological project on the Mexican family and the modern possibilities for women and men. The short story provides a shift away from the traditional colonial family, specifically when looking at the heads of the household, the heterosexual couple. When María Elena and Bruno’s relationship is read against Balvanera and Rosalía’s, the reader witnesses how Bruno becomes María Elena when he correctly reads the coded clothing she left behind. The union of gender opposites performs a rewriting of the Gothic thriller within a twentieth-century setting by a Mexican feminist. Gone is the traditional sexist and oppressive Mexican macho.

María Elvira Bermúdez, attorney, judge, researcher and detective fiction writer sought *lo justo mexicano* in her writing. As one of Mexico’s early modern feminist writers of the twentieth-century, she is a contemporary to Rosario Castellanos and a predecessor to Elena Poniatowska, two of the most well known and largely studied Mexican female writers. Bermúdez’s socio-historical study, *La vida familiar del mexicano* demonstrated early on her commitment in the pursuit of gender justice, which was difficult to do in 1950s Mexico when few women like Bermúdez were able to obtain high educational degrees, professional success and a well-respected literary career all while challenging a society that

was underscoring *lo mexicano*, in other words *el mexicano*. Bermúdez carries on the legacy begun by colonial-era feminist Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz by exercising Mexican feminist legal-storytelling in the narratives she writes as she speaks to the injustices women endure in contemporary Mexican society via philosophy, literature and real-life circumstances. When she critiques the colonial family regulated by the machista patriarch, she strikes at one of the core values in Mexican society but not without providing decolonial solutions to Mexican men and women. Her short stories “Detente, sombra” and “Las cosas hablan” exhibit Bermúdez literary commitment to justice by presenting a female feminist detective and a world of female characters free from the oppressive colonial bonds, intelligent, public professionals committed to their nation while working towards *lo justo mexicano*.

Chapter Three

Myriam Laurini's *Morena en rojo*: Ethnographer with a Gun

If María Elvira Bermúdez is credited with creating the first Latin American and Mexican feminist detective, a heterosexual and upper-class woman who is able to work within the limitations of Mexican patriarchy, sexism and neo-colonialism, then Myriam Laurini's character, simply known as la Morena is the literal Mexican body of intersections among gender politics, race, and class. Laurini's novel *Morena en rojo* (1994; 2008)¹⁹ is the first of its kind, as it presents to the reader the first Afro-Mexican feminist detective; and of special note, Laurini is an Argentinian-Mexican or *argenmex*, by definition an Argentinian immigrant and/or political exile who resides in Mexico since the 1970s and 1980s at the height of the Videla dictatorship in Argentina. The hyphenated author provides her reader with an itinerant Afro-Mexican detective, who begins her career as a journalist in the Mexican border-city of Nuevo Laredo and evolves to solve transnational crimes involving issues of gendered violence such as prostitution, rape, organ and human trafficking²⁰ as well as child pornography. Like her itinerant detective, the narrative is also an itinerant one, as it builds on a hemispheric dialogue between Mexican and Argentinian histories, which previous scholarship on *Morena en rojo* has neglected to unfold. Laurini's character illustrates an extension of decolonial feminist narrative begun by Bermúdez at mid-twentieth century. By underscoring race beyond the traditional Mexican *indigenismo*

¹⁹ The novel was first published by Editorial Joaquín Mortiz in 1994, and a second publication with slight differences was published by Ediciones Bolsillo Zeta in 2008.

²⁰ The United Nations' Office on Drugs and Crime has defined human trafficking as "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs" (www.unodc.org).

narrative from the early to mid-twentieth century and incorporating Black-Mexican experiences, Laurini's journalist-detective Morena serves as a literary ethnographer with a gun, seeking justice and solving transnational crimes in Mexico.²¹ La Morena travels through Mexico's diverse cultural geographies and climates, beginning at Nuevo Laredo, to Veracruz, Mérida, Mexico City, Nogales, ending in Tijuana, and recording diverse working-class women's colloquial Spanish, customs, racial and social conflicts, a cultural critique of Mexico in the early 1990s.

Argen-Mexile Status:

Myriam Laurini, born in Santa Fe Province, Argentina in 1947 in small town Los Quirinchos about 300 miles northeast of the capital city of Buenos Aires, earned a Bachelor's degree in literature from the Universidad Nacional de Rosario (UNR) in 1972; five years later, in 1977, she was forced into exile after General Jorge Rafael Videla's coup d'état in 1976. With her two children and husband, fellow-writer and journalist Rolo Diez, Laurini lived in several European and Latin American countries before settling in Mexico. According to Linda S. Zee, Laurini's third child stayed in Argentina and "was subsequently disappeared during the government's 'dirty war' against its own citizenry" (116). Laurini has worked as a journalist, editor, formerly a planning director for CONALEP in Estado de México, and as of 2009 works for *Gestión Cultural* as a coordinator of the *Libro Club de la ciudad de México* in the department of *Secretaría de Cultura*. In 1994, she published her first novel *Morena en rojo*, giving Mexico its first significant literary Afro-Mexican female

²¹ Morena's itinerary in the novel's text is marked by the small image of a revolver, which alternates pointing right or left at each textual division. The cover of the original 1994 edition of *Morena en rojo* published by Editorial Joaquín Mortiz features an Afro-Mexican woman with the loose Afro hairstyle holding a revolver against a red background.

character since before mid-twentieth century,²² followed by *Para subir al cielo* (1999) and *Qué raro que me llame Guadalupe* (1999) and her short story “Violeta Isn’t Here Anymore” published in the 2010 anthology *Mexico City Noir* edited by Paco Ignacio Taibo II and translated by Achy Obejas. She has resided in Mexico City along with her family since 1980.

Myriam Laurini’s exile status in Mexico is not a rarity, as historians such as Martin Edwin Andersen, Fernando Reati, and Elizabeth Borland have noted that the South American presence, especially in Mexico City became commonplace after the oppressive military dictatorships of the 1970s. Artists, intellectuals and writers like Chile’s Roberto Bolaño, Argentina’s Manuel Puig, Rolo Diez, and Néstor García Canclini migrated to Mexico City at the height of their respective countries dictatorships; some deciding to stay even after democratic governments took over. Even internationally renowned Colombian writer and winner of the 1982 Nobel Prize in Literature, Gabriel García Márquez made Mexico City his permanent home after 1980 having previously lived in Mexico in the 1960s during his first round of exile from Colombia. His second leave was due to accusations of being a communist sympathizer and supporter of guerilla forces the government had to suppress and eliminate, obligating García Márquez to leave his native country and never return.²³ Many Mexican and South American scholars discuss the presence of South Americans in Mexico and document their experiences as “new” Mexicans who negotiate politics of exile.

²² Anthropologist Francisco Rojas González published his novel of the Mexican Revolution *La negra Angustias* featuring an Afro-Mexican woman in 1944, two years later in 1946 that Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán published the first major study of Mexico’s Black population, *La población negra de México*. In 1962, writer Carlos Fuentes’ *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* introduced one of Mexico’s first modern Afro-Mexican male characters with mulato, Artemio Cruz.

²³ In 2014, after García Márquez’s death, one of the oldest Colombian newspapers resurfaced the question as to why García Márquez had left his beloved nation. Acknowledging that García Márquez had written his literary masterpiece *Cien años de soledad* (1967) during the late 1960s in Mexico. The article explains that even in the 1980s with the newly democratic Colombian government of Julio César Turbay Ayala, “una acusación de esas equivalía tortura y cárcel”; See Torres Duarte.

Debra Castillo in her essay “Going Home: Tununa Mercado’s *En estado de memoria*” explores the identity marker of *argenmex*, creating an extension to the label by also studying Argen-Mexicans who left Mexico and return to Argentina only to live in a constant state of reminiscence, decorating their homes in ‘typical’ Mexican handicrafts and artwork. She poignantly observes how dwellings of returned Argen-Mexicans have “identical interior decorating schemes based on Mexican handicrafts that distinguish Argentine exile dwellings—furniture from Taxco, rugs from Chiapas, tablecloths from Michoacán—and on the other hand, the curious way that the obsession with Argentina translates into a nostalgia for Mexico on their return: then endless “Argenmex” conversations about chile, chipotle, and tomatillos and where to find cilantro” (113). The nostalgia reversal Castillo discusses raises fascinating questions as to the impact states of exile have at a variety of levels, and while the scholar focuses on those who return to Argentina, it is important to turn the focus on the exiles who no longer feel the need to reestablish residency in Argentina, and how their decision to stay in Mexico affects Mexican literary and cultural productions.

The influence exiled Argentinians have had on Mexican critical discourse has been experienced in a variety of ways; one example is Néstor García Canclini (1939-), a socio-anthropologist and cultural critic who brought about a breakthrough susceptibility regarding the U.S.-Mexico border, an area that had been largely ignored by contemporary Mexican anthropologists. His often-cited *Culturas híbridas* (1989, 2009; *Hybrid Cultures* 1995, 2005) has an international readership and has become a stable text in cultural studies discussions along with Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall and James Clifford. In his book, García Canclini explored a variety of geographic locations and metropolises; his particular attention to the border city of Tijuana, naming it as “uno de los mayores laboratorios de la

posmodernidad” (293), opened up the possibility of Border Studies as a legitimate discipline from the Mexican side.²⁴ This academic shift directed by García Canclini’s work is contemporary with a host of new Chicana/o scholars, writers, artists and academics who drew on Américo Paredes’ 1958 classic study of Mexican immigration at the beginning of the twentieth century, *With His Pistol in His Hand*, and theories derived from cultural studies and Chicana feminism (see Cherrié Móruga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Héctor Calderón and José David Saldivar, José Limón, and Renato Rosaldo). García Canclini’s work on Tijuana initiated a south-north dialogue with Chicano anthropologists; he has been a contributor to Chicano cultural studies conferences in the United States; Chicano anthropologist Renato Rosaldo wrote the Foreward to the 2009 edition of *Hybrid Cultures*. With regard to the most northern border and a city not regarded as Mexican by Mexican intellectuals from Mexico City, it took an Argentinian, someone who was able to look at Mexico from an outsider’s perspective to expose the much needed Mexican scholarship in this area.

Like García Canclini, celebrated author and film connoisseur Manuel Puig and his cinematic novel *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976), which later becomes an award winning English-speaking film titled *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1985) earning international recognition, receiving Academy Award nominations for Best Picture and awarding actor William Hurt the Oscar for Best Actor, serves as a narrative representative of the prisoner resistance via cinematic storytelling, political activism, and sexuality. While Puig finished working on *El beso de la mujer araña*, he had self-exiled to Mexico when his *The Buenos Aires Affair: novela policial* (1973) had been censored and banned by the Argentinian

²⁴ In 2009, in an interview with Tijuana-based Professor Fiamma Montezemolo, García Canclini admitted that he no longer identified the border city as a postmodern laboratory instead, he stated: “quizá un laboratorio de la desintegración social y política de México a consecuencia de una ingobernabilidad cultivada” (143). See Montezemolo.

government; the novel was accused of being anti-Peronist²⁵ literature, leading to Puig receiving life threatening phone calls which spurred his move away from Argentina. Like García Márquez, Puig produced major works in Mexico. While in Mexico, Puig wrote the initial screenplay for Mexican filmmaker Arturo Ripstein's now classic 1977 gay film *El lugar sin límites* based on José Donoso's 1966 novel of the same title. The reasons for Puig asking not to be included in the film credits ranged from fear of reprisals for being out as a gay person exiled from Argentina, and disagreement with Ripstein over the portrayal of a gay cross-dresser La Manuela in the film. Having regretted his decision of omitting his name in the final filmic product, Puig tries to explain himself for doing so: "I liked it but I had taken my name off it, because of the threat of censorship. At that time, 1978, the Argentine drama was at its worst, so I became hysterical. I was also censored in Spain and Hungary, so I was becoming paranoid. The film was a success" (qtd. in Levine 287). Like Argentinian-Mexicans García Canclini and Laurini, Puig was also drawn to the border city that was not Mexico, Tijuana. He wrote a screenplay, a cabaret story titled *Reucerdo de Tijuana* (1985) that was never filmed though it was presented as theater. The screenplay tells the story of business battles between two drug lords in the northern region of Mexico specifically Hermosillo and Tijuana, who are trying stay in favor with an American drug lord, the story comes to a deadly end for the characters involved in the attempt to gain and maintain control. Later on in this chapter, I will discuss Puig's screenplay in relationship to *Morena en rojo*, as both texts employ Tijuana as a critical space that tries to resist U.S.

²⁵ At the time of publication, *The Buenos Aires Affairs* was released during the presidency of Isabel Martínez de Perón, who served as president of Argentina from 1974-1976, she promised a socialist economy but had hard held policies of political subversives, signing decrees which allowed the military to perform forced disappearances of political activists. In 2007, the Argentinian courts ordered her arrest and extradition due to crimes against humanity but as of 2012 the Spanish government repetitively has rejected the extradition orders, allowing her to continue residing in the Spanish nation. See McDonnell.

consumption and domination. After leaving Argentina in 1975, Puig lived between Mexico and Brazil. He died in Cuernavaca, Mexico in 1990.

Even though the threats against his life were very real, Puig took his creative production a step further in *Beso de la mujer araña* by giving his readers two imprisoned male characters, Valentín ArreguÍ and Molina, both from divergent social positions, one a leftist political activist protesting an oppressive militant government, and the other a passionate gay cinephile. The emergence of this novel highlights issues of politics and sexuality within a regime of extremely oppressive patriarchal institutions. The reader does not know which country or nation-state Valentín and Molina find themselves imprisoned in (presumably Latin American), which allows for the novel to be explored from an Argentinian context (the birthplace of Puig) as well as a Mexican one (his current place of exile). While Argentinians were escaping political repression and suffering “disappearances” of their own citizens within their country, the Mexican government was also executing its own *guerra sucia*.

From the late 1960s to the early 1980s, historians and cultural critics like Carlos Monsiváis and Julio Scherer mark the massacre of Tlatelolco as one of the most public demonstrations of Mexico’s governmental oppression as well as the beginning of the dirty war, where Mexican citizens suffered political repression along with “disappearances” of political activists and artists.²⁶ When Valentín and Molina turn to each other during their time of imprisonment the prison space allows for intersectionality to take place between politics and sexuality. Their physical and emotional connection brings about an important U.S. feminist slogan made popular by second-wave feminist Carol Hansich, whose essay “The Personal is Political” (1969) begins to include conversations regarding

²⁶ Please see Scherer and Monsiváis’ *Los patriotas: De Tlatelolco a la guerra sucia* (2004).

intersectionality from a White Anglo feminist perspective, stressing that “personal problems are political problems” (Hansich).²⁷ As Hanisch challenges the patriarchal nucleus family, Puig on the other hand brings together politics and sexuality at a time when the historical tendencies of public discourse was to create exclusions between both identity markers, as sexuality has no place in politics and politics had no place in sexual identity. Puig’s novel is of importance to both nations, as he is one of the first writers to insert political queer discourse with the literary imaginary; but for escaped Argentinians like Puig, the transition into Mexican society, as is with any host nation, came with complications.

Specialist in Argentinian exiles Pablo Yankelevich describes Mexico as this place of refuge for those from the Southern Cone: “México era un territorio habitado por esperanzas, y entre ellas ninguna más urgente que la de salvar la vida” (15). Removed from their beloved nation, Argentinians in exile had the opportunity to observe their country from afar, forcing a reflection on the aftermath of the dictatorship, the potential recuperation process, and when will the real possibility of returning to their previously known life make itself viable? While in Mexico, this exiled community’s integration was not an easy one. Argenmex scholars Mempo Giardinelli and Jorge Luis Bernetti describe that although Argentinians were relieved to have escaped Videla’s oppressive power and politically they were welcomed into the country, Mexico’s social politics were not necessarily as welcoming:

El chovinismo y la xenofobia existentes en la sociedad mexicana, como en todas las sociedades humanas, fueron padecidos por los argentinos cuando

²⁷ Hanisch has posted her well-known essay on her personal website along with an introduction to her essay where she explains its origin, the public reception and evolution of her essay, “The Personal is Political.” Please see Hanisch.

llegaron al aeropuerto internacional Benito Juárez 1976 y 1977 en formas muy duras, crueles a veces. Sumadas al desconcierto inicial, actitudes xenófobas de algunos mexicanos provocaron rabia y depresiones varias en muchos argentinos. Descubrir que junto con la solidaridad por nuestra situación de exiliados y perseguidos políticos se manifestaban formas agresivas de desconfianza y rechazo hacia los argentinos fue algo difícil de aceptar. Los chistes sobre la identidad gaucha y sobre algunas de nuestras características, casi siempre grotescos y brutales, y aplicados en terreno visitante, nos dolieron tanto [...] Los argentinos éramos en México materia de burla casi permanente y los chistes sobre nosotros nos forzaban a reprimir la indignación que a veces sentíamos. La condición de minoría débil descubrió nuestra forzada capacidad de indulgencia y simulación. (38)

Much like immigrants in other nations, Argentinians encountered Mexican nativist sentiments and distrust for the foreign other as the exiled community attempted to settle. The lack of social welcoming can only further intensify what Debra Castillo had previously described as the nostalgia for *la madre patria*. Exiled writers and intellectuals felt that although the banishment from their country creates an immense physical and emotional distance, the alienation experienced within the Mexican nation created a new kind of Mexican community, *the argenmex*.

Bernetti and Giardinelli express in their testimonial work that although not an ideal situation, exiled Argentinians are active participants despite their status in Mexico and as such “nos corresponde parte de la responsabilidad de la vida comunitaria en el exilio” (19). The creation of a community of exiles and their active engagement in Mexican society spurs the Argenmex generation, as some political exiles after years of living in one of the largest

metropolises in Latin America decide to make Mexico their permanent home. Myriam Laurini, along with Rolo Diez, Mempo Giardinelli, Néstor García Canclini and others have become one more piece in the fabric of Mexican society. As of 2013, the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (INEGI) has calculated that about 30,000 Argentinians are currently residing and working in Mexico (www.inegi.org.mx), while in the same year the Argentinian embassy inaugurated Mexico City's "La Semana de la Cultura Argentiniana" as a way to celebrate the second largest Latin American community living in the nation's capital, largest being Colombians (Maristain). For an exiled writer like Laurini who has decided to permanently reside in Mexico City, her novel *Morena en rojo* serves as a hemispheric discussion on exile and transnational crimes as the novel parallels issues pertinent to both Mexico and Argentina.

Racial Discourse within the Hemispheres

Argentina's Racial Project

With Laurini incorporating an African-Mexican feminist character in her debut novel, one must ask why an Argentinian-born woman would choose a protagonist like *la Morena*? How does this *mulata* female character fit within Latin America's literary discourse on race? For answers to build upon Laurini's literary contributions to Mexican detective fiction, I direct my study towards a hemispheric dialogue between Argentina and Mexico in order to understand the racial connections the *argentiniana* writer develops in her novel. First I will address Laurini's birthplace, Argentina and its literature of the nineteenth century. As a Latin American nation, Argentina's project on whitening its population came with an attempt to literally and figuratively exterminate its non-white population. Indigenous communities and natives to the land along with African slaves who had been

forcibly shipped to the Americas, stopping off first in the port city of Veracruz, Mexico before being distributed to the multiple regions of the hemispheres. In Argentinian literature a prime example of the eradication of non-whites is Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-1888). A writer, political leader, proud intellectual, and President (1868-74), Sarmiento is credited with attempting to create a democratized Argentina, creating social service programs meant to benefit the poor and uneducated, he gained many followers and admirers for his staunch politics and commitment to modernizing his nation. In 1845 he published *Facundo o Civilización y Barbarie en las pampas argentinas* and it is undeniably Sarmiento's most famous work.

Written while Sarmiento was exiled in Chile, *Facundo* was first published in newspaper installments and later, due to its popularity as a volume. The text is a philosophical tale that places at the center a debate regarding Argentinian civilization and barbarism, proposing how citizens may progress and modernize their country. One of the tenets promoted by Sarmiento was the cleansing of non-white populations, as he deemed them to be barbaric and backwards. The Argentinian's proposed project in racial cleansing is further discussed in *Conflicto y armonías de las razas en las Américas* published in 1915 which was lauded by many and seen as a necessary means to an end, ideologically aligning himself with Western-European discourse on racial diversity (Garrels). Sarmiento's philosophies had a powerful impact on Argentina, prompting citizens to believe that progress meant total embrace of White-European identity and the eradication of indigenous and Black populations who clearly did not fit the racial mold Sarmiento propagated. Sociologist José Ingenieros can hardly contain his praise for his fellow countryman as he states, "La palabra de Sarmiento parece bajar de un Sinaí [...] Su verbo es anatema: tan fuerte es el grito, que por momentos, la prosa se enronquece [...] No puedo

reproducir aquí las otras páginas calurosas en que expresé mi admiración por Sarmiento” (Ingenieros 7-8). Ingenieros’ insatiable worship for Sarmiento and his ideas reveal the fervor the Argentinian writer placed on his reader, which demonstrates how the racial cleansing project was a real possibility in Argentina. Yet, while some celebrated Sarmiento’s ethnic cleansing, scholars like Elizabeth Garrels’ research underscores the impact of the deeply embedded racist nineteenth-century discourse affected the non-white population in Argentina.

Garrels’ article “Sobre indios, afroamericanos y los racismos de Sarmiento” opens with a quote from Peruvian-Spanish writer Mario Vargas Llosa and his observations regarding Sarmiento’s nineteenth-century racial project by stating how the eradication of the indigenous population continues to weigh heavily in the Argentinian imaginary, appearing as though he is critiquing the success of Argentina’s ethnic cleansing project. And yet, almost in the same breath, Vargas Llosa agrees with Sarmiento, stating that if he needed to select between the indigenous population and progress and modernity for Latin America, he would select the latter, stating, “modernization is only possible with the sacrifice of the Indian cultures” (Garrels). Although Vargas Llosa focuses on the indigenous community in his comments, the marginalization and eradication of non-European populations would include the Black population as well. Garrels’ study points out the influence the nineteenth-century writer continues to have in twentieth century Latin America; his proud remarks where he parades the diminishing of non-whites in Argentina would stand side-by-side with Vargas Llosa’s previous contemporary comment as Sarmiento asserts: “la América, en lugar de permanecer abandonada a los salvajes, incapaces de progreso, está ocupada hoi [sic] por la raza caucásica, la más perfecta, la más intelijente [sic], la más bella i [sic] la más progresiva de las que pueblan la tierra” (qtd. in

Garrels). He subscribes to the myth of European monoculturalism (excluding the Spanish for being too close to Africa and too racialized) affirming racial homogeneity is necessary for Argentina's progress.

In *Conflicto y armonías*, Sarmiento observes how Argentina's youth of color is nearly a non-existent population, "como raza, como elemento social, no son ya sino un accidente pasajero habiendo desaparecido del todo de las provincias" (Sarmiento 122), and this sits well with him, as he perceives this population to be incapable of civilized harmony and modern progress. Sarmiento's literary legacy is not alone, as other Argentinian writers like José Esteban Antonio Echeverría (1805-1851) who as a predecessor to Sarmiento also wrote about the Black population in denigrating tones. His most well known work "El matadero" is a short story thought to have been written in 1838 but not published until 1871, well after Echeverría's death. In a Buenos Aires slaughterhouse, the story depicts the various abuses and torture performed by the Mazorca, who symbolize the political repression of President José Manuel de Rosas' regime. The description of women workers in the slaughterhouse has a racialized effect, as Black women are described as "negras y mulatas achuradoras, cuya fealdad trasuntaba las arpías de la fábula, y entremezclados con ellas algunos enormes mastines, olfateaban, gruñían o se daban de tarascones por la presa" (Echeverría). They are like the animals that are being gutted for consumption. The women described are always mixed along with the entrails and blood left behind by the butchered animals, "allá una mulata se alejaba con un ovillo de tripas y resbalando de repente sobre un charco de sangre, caía a plomo, cubriendo con su cuerpo la codiciada presa" (Echeverría). Echeverría creates an undesirable being, as the Black woman like the animals depicted, is easily disposable and forgettable. Later on the black body becomes an afterthought in Argentinian literature, as writer Jorge Luis Borges best expresses the nearly

extinct black population in his 1935 “Hombre de la esquina rosada,” his first published short story, where the Black body has been broken down to blindness, “Hasta la jeta del mulato ciego que tocaba el violín, acataba el rumbo” (Borges 99). Without sight, the anonymous *mulato* is only able to play his instrument for those at the brothel-bar, in the midst of new immigrants and mestizos, unable to fully be a witness to the tension between the *compadritos*, further alienating the Black presence from the nation’s collective imaginary.

Recently, Argentina received some criticism regarding its lack of diversity during the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, where it was noted that European countries like Germany and the Netherlands were more “black” than Argentina’s soccer team’s roster.²⁸ Retuning to a late twentieth century novel such as *Morena en rojo* written by an Argentinian-born writer creates an important contribution to both Mexican and Argentinian literary canons. Myriam Laurini, unlike her fellow Argentinian male writers, resuscitates the Black body in the form of la Morena and not only does she underscore the African presence she also creates a character that dismantles the literary discourse established by Sarmiento, Echeverría, and Borges as Morena is an intelligent, educated, and empowered Black woman, whose very presence resists the erasure of her race from the northern and southern hemispheres. Similar to Argentina, Mexico has also had a history of racial erasure when it comes to the African presence in Mexican socio-historical memory. Mexico’s complicated relationship with the Black presence can be perceived through one of Mexico’s most popular forms of literature, comic books.

²⁸ Please see Decosté, Rachel. “Why Are There No Black Men on Argentina’s Roster?” (2014).

The Graphic Race in Mexico's Comic Literature

Though the comic book may not be an obvious choice when analyzing literary racial discourse in Mexico, it is a popular one as it is one of the most consumed artistic mediums in the nation. The comic book genre also is a kindred spirit to the genre of detective fiction, as the literary industry has deemed both as forms of low art or “*masificación*” literature (Monsivais 1). A study from the early 1990s of Mexico's comic book history of the 1960s and 1970s, states incredibly that Mexico had the “highest per capita consumption of comic books in the world” (Hinds and Tatum 1), as such, comic books serve as an important literary tool within this popular culture medium and as such an important springboard from which to analyze twentieth century racial literary discourse.

The comic magazine *Lágrimas, risas y amor* has been one of the longest running titles in Mexico and has been one of the most popular in Latin America. Its stories are told via the graphic novel and center on men and women who seek love but encounter misadventures when attempting to obtain it. Credited with the creative direction of the magazine are Mexican writers and artists Yolanda Vargas Dulché and her husband Guillermo de la Parra, both of who actively participated in the creation of each story published by the magazine.

Traditionally the comic book has been seen as a low art form, not considered as traditionally classic forms of fiction such as the short story or novel. In an interview, de la Parra expresses his awareness of this hierarchy and challenges the elitism surrounding “low” and “high” art as he states: “No podemos aspirar a tener la candidatura para el Premio Nobel pero sí tenemos el derecho de considerarnos escritores. Los clubes de intelectuales no nos comprenden, nos quitan el mérito a quienes escribimos literatura popular y los críticos tampoco nos reconocen, ni siquiera se toman la molestia de leer

nuestras revistas y hacer una crítica con fundamento” (Hinds and Tatum 55). De la Parra’s frustration with literary elite dismissing comic books as legitimate literature parallels similar sentiments detective and mystery fiction writers encountered in Mexico; like comic books, detective mystery fiction has been seen as a low form of literature, only to be consumed for entertainment purposes and if Mexicans want to read about detectives, crimes and mysteries, the readers are better off with *la nota roja*, the crime section of the local newspaper (Monsivais 11). The lack of literary legitimacy for comic books and recognition for their graphic stories does not deter public consumption and the magazine’s large circulation, which allows for a diverse cast of characters to be included in the pages of the comic book series, one of them being the “exotic” persona of Rarotonga.²⁹

The comic *Rarotonga* was inaugurated in 1973 and became one of the magazine’s most popular tales. It features a mixed-race woman from the island of Rarotonga who also happens to be a powerful businesswoman in Mexico. While she travels back and forth between the two nations, she also functions as a seductress who is attempting to lure light-skinned and blonde-haired Doctor Alejandro Rivera into a love affair. Rivera is described as an intelligent scientist, married with children, and committed to his scientific research all while trying to evade Rarotonga’s advances. Though Dulché and de la Parra are acknowledged as the powerhouses behind *Lágrimas, risas y amor*, from which Rarotonga emerges, artist Antonio Gutiérrez Salazar creates the distinctive visuals. With Gutiérrez Salazar as the illustrator, the arrival of Rarotonga into Mexican readership presents an interesting representation of Black female identity. While it may be Dulché, the Mexican

²⁹ Though I will not discuss it in this particular chapter, I will acknowledge the other famous and popular Black comic book figure, the Cuban-Mexican character of Memín Pinguín, a monkey-like child with exaggerated African and animal features with dark skin, his story centers on his troublemaker ways. Please see Hernández Cuevas.

woman writing Rarotonga's stories and adventures, it is Gutiérrez Salazar's male gaze, the visual interpreter of the stories that the reader encounters. A superficial visual analysis of *Rarotonga* magazine covers provides an overarching image regarding the Black female character. Although she is a powerful owner of an important enterprise in Mexico, her profession is never highlighted on the covers of the magazine, for cover after cover illustrates Rarotonga as a scantily dressed woman in high-fashion two piece bathing suits, emphasizing her dark shiny skin, exotic eyes and large, round afro-styled hair. She almost personifies the African-American film character, Foxy Brown as interpreted by Black actress Pam Grier at the height of the blaxploitation era of the 1970s. That these two women arise around the same time period cannot be a mere coincidence; these particular female characters communicate to their readers/audience the racialized and gendered discourses of the time in both nations. Unlike some Latin American nations, as is the case with Argentina where the Black body is rejected and erased, in Mexico as well as the United States, she exists but as an exoticized other, and specifically in Mexico via Rarotonga, she is a woman who pursues mestiza women's husbands, and uses her body as a tool for sexual dominance.

In Mexico, a woman as sexually liberated and aggressive as Rarotonga is depicted, can fall under the traditional virgin and whore gender dichotomy, and by adding race, the comic further objectifies and marginalizes her Black body and identity. Her cover tagline, "Hazme tuya cada martes" is a double entendre, easily making her a sexual and economic commodity, to be consumed and then presumably disposed of once she becomes useless. Afro-Mexican Studies scholar Marco Polo Hernández Cuevas considers these pop culture images to be dangerous to Afro-Mexican identity, as they only reiterate "colonial cultural perceptions of so-called non-white people" (143). The cultural perceptions could then lead

to structural violence as is witnessed in Mexican Alternative Rock band, Café Tacvba's song "Rarotonga" (1992). In this particular song she is no longer the CEO of her own company, instead she is a prostitute dwelling in Mexico City's underground Metro system:

Rarotonga se murió

Yo la vi morir.

Hace poco yo la vi

"Hazme tuya cada martes."

Esa noche la encontré

Vendiendo su amor

En el subterráneo tren

Donde diario viajo yo. (Café Tacvba 1-8)

As the presumably fallen woman, Rarotonga the prostitute meets death in Mexico City's metropolitan subway system, which is a far cry from her previous life as an international jet setter and corporation owner. Rarotonga's literary legacy leaves a much needed re-writing of the Afro-Mexican female experience, redeeming her from racist and exoticized portrayals of Black female identity. Due to these hemispheric representations of the African presence in Latin America, Myriam Lourni's *Morena en rojo* defies the racial subordination Black figures have had in Latin American history and literature, and turns the tables by having Morena be a social critic and ethnographer documenting prostitution, racism, poverty, human and organ trafficking in contemporary Mexico.

Situating “la negra” in *la novela negra*

Morena en rojo is a story within the story, as the reader is introduced to Morena in a pre-script, something she has presumably written to open the novel, as writer-character Myriam Laurini has been credited with its written narration. In it Morena discloses:

Hay viajes mágicos. Es una afirmación que puedo demostrar. En Julio de 1989, en un vuelo a Buenos Aires, conocí a la autora de esta novela [...] meses después, cuando me buscó y me propuso convertir esas historias en novela. Justamente a mí, que llevo en la conciencia las promesas incumplidas, hechas a varias mujeres, de escribir sobre sus vidas. Acepté con la condición de que sólo lo esencial de cada anécdota fuera real. (9)

Though character of Laurini is acknowledged with authorship, the stories that Morena relays to Laurini, stories about the diverse women Morena encounters throughout Mexico are the central force of the text. The plot almost plays out like a game of telephone, where women characters disclose to Morena their experiences with racism, prejudice, gender violence, and poverty while Morena simultaneously narrates her own personal encounters throughout her investigations to then tell her story and their stories to the writer-character Laurini. Moreover, the reader cannot help but regard Morena’s (and ultimately Laurini’s) description of the agreement on a flight to Buenos Aires as a political message. The exiled journalist Laurini returns home with an Afro-Mexican journalist to a country that has erased its Black history and repressed its population through brutal dictatorship and forced many citizens to seek political asylum elsewhere. This Argemex novel, as we shall see, is also about exile for both author and character.

Laurini’s fictional persona serves as a mediator between intra- and inter-personal experiences of these Mexican women. Like Bermúdez’s “Detente, sombra”, *Morena en rojo*

is another narrative about women confessing their untold stories, except in this particular case instead of the focus being the Mexican epicenter, Mexico City and its well-to-do female professional elites, we have an itinerant female journalist-detective who travels to various regional points of the Mexican nation, starting at the marginal border city of Nuevo Laredo and ending at the one of the most well known marginal border cities in Mexico and the northern tip of the Latin American hemisphere, Tijuana, Baja California Norte. Morena's family history mimics her movement, as her parents are not a traditional Mexican couple. Her mestiza mother comes from a well to-do land owning family in the northern state of Chihuahua, giving Morena *norteña* roots, which would explain why she finds the border as a geographical refuge. Her father, simply known as "El Black" which correlates with Morena's lack of a proper name in the narrative, is an African-American businessman and engineer, who traveled to Mexico and fell in love and married Morena's mother. Due to his blackness, his new wife's family sent them both to manage a ranch in Chihuahua where her father died and her mother remains. El Black's presence in Mexico is not an uncommon one as other African-American writers and artists spent time in Mexico, one prime example is the founding father of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes.³⁰

After his parent's separation, Hughes father had moved away from the United States, traveling to Cuba and eventually settling in Mexico. Hughes had gone to live with his father, learning Spanish and taking in the cultural elements of Mexico but eventually left due to a strained relationship with his father. Yet, Mexico had left a deep impression on the young

³⁰ About one century earlier Black Seminoles or Black-Indians migrated to Mexico in order to escape U.S. slavery. The majority of Black Seminoles came from the state of Florida and settled in the northern Mexican territories. Mexico had become a desired location for runaway slaves as it had abolished slavery in 1829, nearly forty years before the U.S. radicalization of the Thirteenth Amendment. Please see Kenneth W. Porters *Black Seminoles: History of a Freedom-Seeking People* (1996); Shirley Boteler Mock *Dreaming With the Ancestors: Black Seminole Women in Texas and Mexico* (2010); Documentary film *De Florida a Coahuila: La historia de los mascogos* (2002).

writer, inspiring Hughes to write a children's tale titled "The Pasteboard Bandit" (1935) told from the perspective of a Mexican boy who befriends a young white boy from the United States. Appearing to be a simple children's story, the narrative demonstrates depth and complexity on issues of cross-racial and cultural interactions "telling the story from the point of view of the Mexican observing Americans is a reversal of the usual literary convention. In Hughes' book it's the Americans who are peculiar" (Smith). With Hughes' life story and literary creation, Black's presence in Mexico becomes a plausible story and although Morena's father does not have a central role in *Morena en rojo*, Laurini creates a deeply complex family history for Morena, breaking away from creating a unidimensional Afro-Mexican female character.

As an ethnic-narrator-ethnographer, Morena possesses an acute awareness of the injustices marginalized populations in Mexico experience; she acknowledges that their stories are of a different nature, contrary to mainstream narratives; her empathy makes her a valuable asset with re-telling these stories as she expresses when meeting a victim of prostitution and human trafficking: "Esa niña-vieja valiente y derrotada me conmovió. Me empezó a doler una vida que no había vivido, que conocía a oídas, de afuera, desde el margen de lo marginal" (137). It is the deep personal connection Morena feels towards her fellow female storytellers that hold the heart of her ethnographic narrative.

La Morena is fluid in her movement as she travels from east to west, north to south, covering multiple cultural exchanges and social codes between the various Mexican cities. Due to her having the ability to easily move in and out of different geographic locations, she travels in one of the most inexpensive modes of transportation in Mexico, charter buses. Traveling by bus is her own choice as it is disclosed in the middle of the novel that she comes from a very well to-do Mexican family, therefore her economic status, unlike the

majority of Mexican bus riders, does not impede her from accessing more comfortable and safer modes of transit such as a private car or air and yet, her choosing to travel by bus and on her own tells the reader that she is willing to interact and literally sit next to citizens with whom she would not traditionally mingle thinking of her social class background. The bus rides offer Morena an opportunity for her body to remain motionless while the massive vehicle traverses through the Mexican countryside, allowing for two components to happen for Morena. The space of the bus allows for introspection to occur as she describes the space as being “un narcótico. Me vuelven surrealista, esquizofrénica, remilgada soñadora” while also observing the everyday life, “veía sin ver a los campesinos que guardaban los animales y a sus mujeres que regaban el huerto y preparaban la cena” (57). Morena is well educated and knowledgeable of literature. She dreams of winning prestigious journalism awards along with interviewing Italian directors, artists; her fantasy even resurrects important international revolutionary leaders of the past like Argentinian-born Latin American guerilla Ernesto “Che” Guevara and Chinese Communist Mao Zedong, even Argentinian writer and exile Julio Cortázar, someone known for his creative writing as well as political views, makes an appearance for her interview. But then she is jarred back to reality as the commotion that goes on while traveling in a charter bus reminds her of where she is, like the yell of the bus driver delivering the amount of time left at each rest stop before the bus takes off again.

While in the colonial city of Mérida, Morena befriends a local police officer, Güicho, and his wife, Rosi, who both assume a parental role in their relationship with the journalist. Even after she has long left Mérida and may not return in any foreseeable future, Güicho and Rosi keep in touch with Morena, the officer’s parental care for Morena follows her throughout the novel, he even provides her with connections in Tijuana, police officers she

can work with while investigating for their clandestine undercover group *Súper Agente 86*,³¹ as she attempts to solve a case of what she suspects to be child prostitution and organ trafficking on the Mexico-U.S. border.

Prior to leaving Mérida, Güicho gifts Morena a .22 caliber gun, which she easily takes as her father had taught her how to shoot when she was a young girl, “Mi padre me enseñaba a disparar con una escopeta Winchester de doble cañon. Que hermoso era mi padre. Tenía la voz gruesa y una tos crónica de fumador de dos cajetillas diarias. Escribía poemas, en secreto, los encontramos después que murió. Por qué se habrá muerto mi padre” (85). Morena’s sweet recollection of her father and his influence in her life translates later on into her adulthood, when we see Morena as a strong, independent woman who travels throughout Mexico via bus and refuses to tolerate any kind of careless and inconsiderate interactions.

While riding the bus from Mérida to Nogales, two men board the bus, sit behind Morena and begin to play loud music through a boom box. The journalist attempts to distract herself from the noise and tries to pep talk herself into not taking any action “<<La violencia no conduce lo bueno>>, pensé. <<Son jóvenes, como yo, sólo que un poco sordos. Hay que explicarles que el ruido contamina, daña los oídos y el cerebro, es justo y necesario ser respetuoso con el gusto de los demás, aprender a convivir>>” (58). When the men refuse to be respectful of the enclosed and inescapable space of the bus and mock Morena’s request, matters take a turn.

³¹ Super Agente 86 is taken 1960s U.S. television comedy series *Get Smart*. The male lead Maxwell Smart (actor Don Adams) was Agent 86, a codename he employed when conducting undercover governmental affairs. Interestingly, Smart had a female counterpart, Agent 99 (played by actress Barbara Feldon) whose true identity is never revealed, though throughout the duration of the show it is always speculated about. She is highly intelligent and clearly more skilled than her male partner.

She warns one of the men that she will use violence if that is what it will take for the men to shut off the music. Instead of taking her seriously, they insult her with misogynist and sexual comments: “Esta vieja está bien loca, menopáusica”, “A lo mejor lo que quiere que le bajas son los calzones” and “Pélame el nabo” (58-59). When the men believe they have the upper hand and final word in the situation, Morena decides to pull out her gun and points it at them, letting them know that she will not hesitate to use it against them. She then forces the men to ask the driver to let them off the bus, as a final attempt to regain their power with one more final insult, this time instead of being misogynist in nature it turns into a racial one: “El sordo, para salvar su honor, me dijo vete a tu pinche país. —¡El mismo que el tuyo, pendejo!—retruqué” (59). The scene illustrates Morena actively representing the intersections between race and gender and is able to subvert the patriarchal misogynist power structure both men exercise and attempt to hold onto.

While insulting her and making sexually explicit comments, Morena is able to challenge their gender and sexual power through the act of holding and pointing her gun, one of the most phallic symbols of masculine dominance and power. The interaction between Morena and the two men along with the insurrection of her power allow for Morena to decolonize a misogynist, sexist and racist discourse. The men employ patriarchal and racist language to maintain their dominance over a Black female bus rider, but what they do not expect is for her to exercise agency as they possibly have used this type of language beforehand and have not experience any consequences because of it. While they threaten her with bodily violence, even alluding to rape, Morena flips the violent discourse through the use of her own language and weapon, which in turn serve as a mirror to reflect back to the men how women experience daily violence. She maintains the upper hand throughout the entire exchange, even when extracting them from the bus and

not allowing their racial prejudice, the assumption that she is a foreigner in Mexico to shake the control she has over the situation. Though she uses her weapon, the .22 gun to grab the attention of the two men, Morena's empowerment does not rely on using any of their identity markers to demean and maintain situational control. Aside from their gender, never once does she mention their class, mestizo status, not being able to own a personal stereo with headphones, instead their total disrespect for the public space is what she finds to be insulting and in need of immediate remedy. As Morena takes matters into her own hands via her weapon she represents how other Mexican women in the twenty-first century also take up arms when governmental and cultural institutions cannot protect nor provide justice for them.

In August 2014, feminist Mexican journalist Sanjuana Martínez published a report in *La Jornada* on the trend of women in the Pacific state of Michoacán arming themselves with guns and assault rifles to fend for themselves and their families against the narco-traffickers in the area. Like Morena in the novel, the women are employing their guns to take control over a social, economic and political situation that has harmed their families and communities, as the majority of the women are single mothers whose husbands have left, been arrested, killed or disappeared. Martínez's article has published pictures of women holding high-powered guns like AK-47s and the journalist even goes as far as naming these women modern-day Adelitas, recalling the historic female soldiers, *las soldaderas* of the Mexican Revolution. Though, Martínez makes a clear distinction between the two women groups, "A diferencia de las soldaderas que participaron en la Revolución Mexicana, ellas no están dispuestas a ganarse el derecho usar una arma preparando alimentos o lavando la ropa para ocupar un lugar en la tropa; al contrario exigen igualdad de entrenamiento y condiciones a la hora de la pelea" (Martínez 8). Aside from their

struggle with the drug cartels, the women also express that their concerns not only encompass who they are as citizens but also as mothers.

In the report, María de la Luz Sandoval Zamora recounts how her own daughter was almost kidnapped to possibly be sold off into child prostitution, which only further motivated her to join up with other women and community members who have decided to form communities of *autodefensas*, no longer depending on the local police or government authorities to protect them from the various crimes in the state. According to Martínez, aside from drug trafficking, the cartels have also included in their repertoire human trafficking especially young women and children: “el tráfico de niñas y mujeres con fines de explotación sexual, [es] un “mercado humano” que deja más de 10 mil millones de dólares anuales al crimen organizado en México, según el último informe de la Coalición contra el Tráfico de Mujeres y Niñas en América Latina y el Caribe (Catwlac)” (Martínez 8). Although not recognized by the state government of Michoacán as a legitimate entity, the women interviewed refuse to follow orders of abandoning their arms, as there is a massive sense of distrust for police commissioner Alfredo Castillo and his newly hired police force, and until local residents believe in the institutions of authoritative justice, they will not lower their defensive strategy. When Martínez asks Sandoval Zamora what is her weapon of choice, an AK-47 or an automatic handgun, she replies, “con el *cuerno*;³² ese tiene más tiros y es el que usan todos: los buenos y los malos” (Martínez 8). Morena and the female *autodefensas* are examples of how women who have historically been subjected to patriarchal and

³² In Mexico the popular name for the automatic assault rifle, AK-47 is “cuerno de chivo” as it is believed that the frame of the gun, specifically the magazine clip reproduces the image of goat horns. In popular music, specifically Norteño, banda and corridos, many songs have been dedicated to this weapon. One of the most popular Norteño bands, Los Huracanes del Norte sing the corrido “Cuerno de Chivo “yo con mi cuerno de chivo, no respeto federales.” Interestingly, the song starts out in the southern hemispheres of the Americas, specifically Peru moving north to Mexico and continues on to various cities in the United States, leaving a little bit of its “carga blanca” in each major city from El Paso to Chicago, San Francisco and Sacramento.

misogynistic power structures have found alternative ways to subvert said power and gain a sense of control, as a writer Laurini adds another dimension to women's struggles in modern-day Mexico when she incorporates race into the narrative's discourse.

When Morena aims in the two men's direction, she forces them to exit the bus. As a last ditch effort even as the gun continued to be pointed at them, the men experiencing their emasculation, and not being able to maintain their power via patriarchy, shift their strategy by focusing on their racial privilege as Morena's blackness disrupts the dominant narrative of mestizo identity. For decades, Mexico has solely focused on an indigenous and Spanish racial inheritance; said inheritance has been promoted and preached about on a national level by gatekeepers like José Vasconcelos, Alfonso Reyes, Samuel Ramos and Octavio Paz. Hernández Cuevas describes this affinity as "'Mestizophilia [which] has sustained the disappearance of Mexican Africanness on the one hand and the strengthening of Mexican Spanishness on the other" (4). The two men on the bus, thinking of her as a racial outsider to Mexico believe that they will regain and retain control through their mestizo identity by telling her to go back to her country. Yet once again, Morena undermines the nativist discourse as she yells in return that she is just as Mexican as the poor fools exiting the bus. She includes her blackness as part of a national identity that has historically and systematically been ignored and erased. And although indigenous identity is employed to promote the uniqueness of Mexican identity, it has historically served as a conceptual identity and the narrative deeply critiques the existing hypocrisy when it comes to indigenous issues and lives in Mexico. Readers can also think of the Argenmex receiving similar nativist Mexican sentiments.

Back in Mérida, Morena's female co-workers at the local newspaper tell her a story about one of their colleagues, Margarita Covarrubias who is in love and having a secret

affair with a man by the name of Paulino Cach Chi. Morena surprised that they would even need to have a concealed relationship, two single consenting adults, inquires why the secrecy. Her co-workers explain that Margarita's family objects to the relationship due to his last name, "porque para las resonancias coloniales del apellido Covarrubias ubicarse detrás de un Cach Chi era un oprobio. Él estaba orgulloso de ser maya y no aceptaba hablar de cambiarse el apellido" (26). Even with the celebrated indigenous identity underscored in Mexican philosophy, art and culture, the relationship between Margarita and Paulino are an example of how the mestizo discourse exists through the abstract, in theory and on paper. The various indigenous nations are theoretically revered but Mexican citizens themselves do not practice every day reverence and integration. According to Laurini's novel, at the turn of the twenty-first century "la raza cósmica" continues to have trouble in accepting that mixture, clinging onto the Spanish fantasy heritage inculcated during colonization.

Margarita and her family embody how in Mexico social and racial restrictions continue to be perpetuated by refusing the most basic process of mestizaje, mixture. Morena, upon hearing this story and celebrating Paulino's resistance to the erasure and colonization of his indigenous identity vis-à-vis his last name, concedes, "No hubo arreglo. Pelear contra siglos de intolerancia blanca era como hacerlo contra molinos de viento. Mi intransigencia y la sumisión de ellas parecían irreconciliables" (26). Though the deep-rooted racial hierarchies left behind by colonialism continue to be alive and well, Morena's alliance and praise for Paulino's resistance to European colonial erasure provides a future possibility of a different kind of indigenismo, one that consciously and willingly defies the theoretical performance of mestizaje and through his resistance, Paulino reifies the Mayan and indigenous identities promulgated by Mexican government officials and

anthropologists. Though Morena's racial makeup does not come up in this particular instance, her empathy towards this relationship forces the reader to recall the bus scene with the two men, when Morena is leaving Mérida and is on her way to Veracruz. Her alliance with Paulino's contemporary indigenous pride and defiance discloses to the reader the likelihood of her having experienced something similar due to her African racial inheritance and the beginning of the novel provides another examples of her identification with the "racial other."

Hemispheric Discourse: Child trafficking in Argentina and Mexico

When the novel begins, Morena is currently working on a murder case as the Police Commander of Nuevo Laredo, Videla has been found stabbed to death. From the very beginning she is suspicious of his death, as she notes that it could be crime of passionate revenge, even if Videla has a respectable reputation among the inhabitants of the city. As she leaves the crime scene, Morena decides to rest and eat inside a Chinese café where she encounters a woman who she suspects to be a prostitute as it is midnight and the woman "traía el pelo mojado y olía lavanda" (12). Here, Laurini includes another cultural group in Mexico, the sizeable Chinese communities on the border. Asian-Latino Studies scholar, Roberto Chao Romero in his pivotal text *The Chinese in Mexico, 1882-1940* (2010) affirms that about 60,000 Chinese migrated to Mexico between the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the number grew when the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was implemented, Chinese who migrated southward became the second largest migrant community in Mexico (Romero 1-2). With the concentration and settlement of Chinese immigrants in northern Mexican territories, the likelihood of Morena stopping by for a quick meal at a Chinese fast food restaurant is completely plausible, as the Chinese-Mexican

community has become an integral part of border culture. My family members who are native to Baja California Norte, in the cities of Tijuana, Ensenada and Valle Guadalupe always try to convince anyone who will listen that the best Chinese food on this side of the hemisphere can be found south of the border, not in the United States.

When Morena settles down at the restaurant she meets a woman with whom she strikes up a conversation, and Morena immediately takes a liking to her, finding out that her name is María Crucita, an indigenous woman from the southern sierras of Mexico whose migration to the north and across the border into the United States has brought her much pain and despair. As with all women that Morena meets, Crucita begins to recount her story, a young girl who at an early age became a single mother, who found herself in need of employment in order to support her family. Crucita recalls the gender dynamics in her hometown “—En la sierra —me dijo— las mujeres valen poco. Primero medio comen los hombres y si sobra los niños y si sobra las mujeres y si sobra las niñas” (13). Her hunger becomes a dual significance, as she suffers from literal and historical hunger. María Crucita describes her life as a domestic worker at a rich household in Mexico City, and the unending hunger she felt every time she opened the refrigerator door, she would hide in her apron any kind of food that would fit and keep it until she was able to escape the chore at hand in order to go to the servant’s quarters to sit, savor and eat every item she had taken. As Morena re-narrates the story she describes the young indigenous girl’s hunger as a historical one: “A María Crucita no le importaba porque tenía una hambre de quinientos años” (13). The short sentence reminds the reader that although Mexico is living through an era of modernity and progress, the First Nations, indigenous communities who over five hundred years earlier were conquered, exterminated and colonized by the Spanish continue to suffer from the most basic human necessities such as daily nutrition. Crucita’s

hunger, their hunger contradict the idea of a modern Mexico, when the nation and its leaders have failed to solve a consistent social issue in over five hundred years.³³ Yet clearly it does not stop there as the injustices natives to the Americas have endured and resisted to, are layered ones such as racism, poverty, and territorial displacement. With Crucita's story, human trafficking and violence against women also form part of the quincennial narrative.

Crucita tells Morena that once she came to Nuevo Laredo as a young girl “con sus trenzas negras llenas de cintas de colores y sus huaraches, escondiendo los ojos para que nadie descubriera su esperanza, ganas de vivir” (13) she met a man whom she immediately trusted as it seemed that he was truly concerned for her well-being. Since she wanted to cross the border into the land “donde hay puro güero” and “Los más, más pobres que ellos, tenían su carro, [...] Las mujeres no llevaban trenzas, comían todos los días y nadie las regañaba, y los hijos también comían” (14) the man told her that she would need a lot more money than what she came with if she wanted to migrate to the United States. He quickly set her up with a *madrota*, Señora Rosalinda to help her “earn” her way into the United States. Crucita's transition from indigenous girl to mestiza teenage prostitute is a vivid one as it illustrates the stripping of her physical identity to then mold her into a sexual object of economic exchange: “El primer día le cortó las trenzas, le quitó la falda y las enaguas y los huaraches. Le regaló un vestido y unos zapatos verdes de tacón muy alto, con los que no podía caminar” (16). Crucita falls in love with the young man who she believes is helping her get to the United States and endures heinous abuses by her male clients. The pimp

³³ The non-profit organization The Hunger Project Mexico's (THPM) 2012 annual report stated that “there are 28 million people living under food-insecurity and there are 11 million living in extreme poverty. These conditions are mainly concentrated in rural areas, especially in indigenous people and women” (thp.org.mx). As a nation, Mexico lives in server extremity having the richest man in the world as one of their own and yet not being able to solve the life-threatening crisis of hunger.

eventually helps her cross the border only to reinstall her in another brothel with another *madrota*. Crucita describes the experience as hell on Earth; to further illustrate her suffering she opens up her blouse to show Morena the deep and dark scars she has, remembering how one of her clients threw acid at her chest because he blamed her for his flaccidity during their sexual interaction.

Crucita's body becomes a roadmap to the abuses poor, brown, and uneducated women like her have endured and currently endure on both sides of the border. She possesses a literal hunger with such depth that it has figuratively lasted for over five hundred years and now she has the bodily scars that document her experiences. Crucita's pain and life experiences become too arduous to bear, explaining to Morena that whatever dream she had when she arrived to Nuevo Laredo had been destroyed by this man and his accomplices, being sold off and used as a human sex object for the economic and sexual gain of others became too large of a cross for her to withstand. And unlike her name, one that alludes to her being an eternal martyr/cross bearer, she refuses to fall for the fake religious rhetoric and decides to take matters into her own hands.

Crucita confesses to Morena that she committed Videla's murder, as the highly respected Police Commander was the same man who she had met ten years earlier when she got off the bus in Nuevo Laredo. She was incensed because the man who had altered her life had not recognized her, and he was now in a position of authoritative and governmental power, pretending that the previous sins he had committed had been forgiven and forgotten. She could no longer endure the abuse and hypocrisy; he had taken away everything from her even her ability to "soñar en pequeño" (20). Videla half apologizes, telling Crucita that she needed to understand that he was on a path to reform his life and build a new one with his wife and children, leaving behind his life as a recruiter

for human trafficking and child prostitution, he had become a respected male citizen. But Crucita had not been able to go after her small dreams, as she now possessed the scars that would serve as a daily reminder of the abuses she has sustained, it had become a weight too heavy to continue carrying, she was no longer willing to understand: “Pero María, que siempre había tenido que entender el mal humor de la señora cuando era sirvienta; el desprecio del panadero porque era india; que el chavo negara ser padre de su hija; los caprichos de los tipos cuando era puta. María con su entendimiento resignado dijo ¡No! ¡No entiendo ni madres!” (20). Videla’s death was inevitable, the build up in Crucita’s life had been occurring ever since she was a young girl, being served the scraps of the breadcrumbs in order to survive, which ultimately killed her hope that life would get better. The Mexican/American Dream she had sought turned out to be a malicious hoax for an undocumented, brown and poor woman like her. Yet, Morena’s retelling of Crucita’s story about gender violence, human trafficking and child prostitution in Mexico allows for Crucita’s life story to enter into a hemispheric dialogue with Argentina when paralleled with the dictatorship and dirty war tactics of 1970s and 1980s. While other scholars, like Myung Choi and Salvador Fernández have focused on the Laurini’s themes of prostitution, pornography and trafficking on the U.S.-Mexico border (Choi 45; Fernández 131-133), their research has been limited to a South-North perspective, therefore, overlooking the bridge the *argenmex* author assembles on Mexican and Argentinian histories of violence.

For Myriam Laurini to create a character like Videla, one who works as a child prostitution pimp and human trafficker only to later attempt to redeem himself as a revered police commander, the reader does not have to reach far to envision who served as inspiration to this deplorable character. The real-life Videla, Jorge Rafael Videla was senior commander in chief of the Argentinian army and dictator from 1976-1981. Videla has been

accused of employing a variety of inhumane methods to exercise control and oppression of fellow Argentinian citizens who ideologically disagreed and vocally protested against the military's coup d'état and Videla's authoritarian regime. Ethnographic narratives paint an agonizing recollection from family members and friends who witnessed their loved ones being kidnapped and forcibly taken away from their households in the middle of the night. In an uploaded YouTube video dated from 1979, Videla is asked by a reporter to discuss the problem of the "disappeared" and the political prisoners who have not had any due process and their connection to human rights issues in Argentina. His response has a chilling effect:

Frente al desaparecido, en tanto esté como tal, es un incógnita, el desaparecido. Si el hombre apareciera, bueno tendrá un tratamiento equis. Si la desaparición se convirtiera en...certeza, de su desaparecimiento, tiene un tratamiento zeta. Pero mientras seas desaparecido no puedes tener ningún tratamiento especial, es un incógnita, es un desaparecido. No tienen identidad, no está. Ni muerto, ni vivo, está desaparecido. ("Pregunta a Videla sobre los desaparecidos")

Videla's self-assured and unapologetic description demonstrates at what capacity a government and nation controlled by a military dictatorship works to thoroughly deny involvement in the disappearance of fellow citizens but also in the act of dis-remembering, an erasure of the actual existence of these particular human beings. Videla states that the disappeared have no identity that they are unknowns and by dehumanizing them he perpetuates the purging of their existence.

By denying their existence, Videla also denies their histories, narratives, and lives; he creates a national collective amnesia. Yet, what Videla fails to address are the ones who are left behind, the family members, friends, and acquaintances: the non-disappeared. They

were left with the everyday trauma and are forced to continuously remember their loved ones in silence and secrecy during the oppressive military government. The Argentinian families who are left to remember their disappeared brethren parallel the Mexican indigenous character in *Morena en rojo*, María Crucita. She, unlike the fictional character Videla, remembered everything that had occurred to her in the last ten years, down to the pain and scars the acid burn had left on her brown body. Memory, the act of remembering is an important issue in the novel because even though Crucita is not a disappeared woman and she remembers the lies and deceptions Police Commander Videla had lured her with into prostitution and eventually human trafficking, it is Videla's imaginary that performs the same injustice real-life Videla does with Argentina's disappeared. Police Commander Videla literally disappears Crucita from his memory. He does not recognize her when she returns to Mexico after a decade, and as a police officer of the law, one who has sworn to uphold and protect the citizens of the nation, he did nothing to bring Crucita justice, even after he claimed to slightly remember her. Like fictional Videla, Dictator Videla also infamously participated in human trafficking, by denying political prisoners and disappeared women the right to give their newly born children back to their biological families.

In their study, *Por-venires de la memoria, Efectos psicológico multigeneracionales de la represión de la dictadura: Hijos de desaparecidos* (2007) clinical psychology investigators Diana Kordon and Lucila Edelman capture one government official's justification for trafficking newborn children of political prisoners and disappeared women:

El General Camps, jefe de policía de la provincia de Buenos Aires durante la dictadura militar, responsable auto-asumido de más de 5.000 desaparecidos, definió claramente esta cuestión: los hijos de desaparecidos no debían estar

con sus familias de origen porque éstas no iban a transmitir los valores
hegemónicos: <<personalmente yo nunca maté aun niño; lo que hice fue
entregar algunos a organizaciones de caridad para que pudieran ser dados a
nuevos padres. Los padres subversivos educan a sus hijos para la
subversión. Esto debe ser detenido>>. (148)

While the official believed that this dirty war method would eliminate political subversives, what he could not foresee were the mothers and grandmothers who were willing to become vocal dissidents and protesters with their pots, pans and photographs of missing children at the most public space in the nation, Buenos Aires' Plaza de Mayo, a place that gave birth to the revolution for Argentinian independence and where the Presidential Residence is located. The Madres de la Plaza de Mayo have been an integral force in propelling the act of remembering the disappeared and challenging Videla's historical amnesia project. The Mothers have refused to take governmental persecution and silence as closure to their cases; their physical and vocal presence has been credited with spurring investigations that uncovered inhumane war crimes during the dictatorship along with recuperating children who were trafficked to sympathizers of the regime. Important studies and films like Oscar winner *La historia oficial* (1985) and *Cautiva* (2003) have dealt with the subjectivity of "recuperated children," children of the disappeared who now have to remember a recuperated identity, family, and history. The recuperation process continues to happen in the twenty-first century, for example in August 2014 National Public Radio's daily program "Morning Edition" reported on Estela de Carlotto, founding member of Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, who has overseen "the discovery and reuniting with families of over one-hundred of these missing grandchildren" (National Public Radio) and after thirty-six years she has finally found her grandson via DNA test results. The

women in the northern and southern hemispheres, politicized grandmothers, indigenous child-prostitutes are re-writing and dismantling official histories that have forgotten and erased marginalized lives. By resisting and remembering, they take further steps towards healing the violent trauma left behind. Laurini's novel rewrites a hemispheric history, as both Mexico and Argentina exist within the narrative's imaginary yet she does not limit the narrative to only two hemispheres as she also includes a third geographical point of reference, the African roots of Latin America.

Los negros en la *novela negra*

Aside from *Morena*, *Morena en rojo* contains a variety of Black characters as it is fitting in a story concerned with late-twentieth century human trafficking to include a population that experienced the largest human trafficking: African slavery. As an Argentinian and Mexican storyteller, Laurini is one of the few writers to include a strong Black presence. Even though Argentina's racial whitening project diminished non-white populations from national and literary memory, Laurini returns to that erased history. Mexico, on the other hand, has for centuries officially ignored its Black population. It was not until the administration of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari who in 1992 during the quincentennial anniversary of Spanish contact, conquest, and colonization of the Americas, acknowledged "la tercera raíz mexicana" to be African (Ruiz). Before *Morena* leaves Mérida she becomes involved in a case where a young girl has been sold into child prostitution. Prior to that the child had been a domestic worker in the home *Morena* shared with her American lover who she nicknamed "Clint Eastwood." She quickly dislikes the girl, describing her as "la niña jetona" (30) whose disappearance sparks *Morena's* interest in researching, investigating, and seeking justice for victims of human trafficking and

prostitution; the girl also becomes a springboard for Laurini to include Black identity in her narrative.

The young girl, “la niña jetona” represents a call back to Jorge Luis Borges’ short story, referred to earlier in this chapter, “Hombre de la esquina rosada,” where the blind Black man was also described as someone who was big-lipped with “la jeta” (Borges 99), but due to his blindness was left on the margins of the story, ultimately representing his erasure from Argentinian history. But in this particular scene, “la niña jetona” has the total ability to see, as she is described as having “doce años y unos ojos negros” (29). A novel that highlights Black Mexican experiences via Morena’s ethnographies suggests alternative readings of the Black body. Unlike Borges’ short story that marginalizes Black figures, a poem by Cuban Nicolás Guillén confronts the historical marginalization when it comes to the exoticizing and objectifying of Black bodies (read: Rarotonga). Guillén’s “Negro bembón” from the groundbreaking *Motivos de son* (1930) celebrates this particular physiognomy as an expression of Black pride, asking el negro bembón: “¿Po qué te pone tan brabo, / cuando te disen negro bembón, / si tiene la boca santa, / negro bembón? / Bembón así como ere / tiene de to” (Guillén 1-6). Using Afro-Cuban patois to interrogate the misdirected anger, Guillén calls for a collective embrace of Afro-Latino identity, sparking a *negrismo* movement molded by music, poetry, literature, and art. The novel also gives the reader an exiled Afro-Cuban character in Lázaro, a Tijuana newspaper senior editor with whom Morena instantaneously feels a strong connection. Her first impression is a bodily one; the couple dances to music that celebrates blackness: “Bailamos toda la noche poseídos por el Negro José, la Negra Tomasa y quién sabe cuántos negros más” (25). Along with his dancing, Lázaro also charms Morena by crooning poetry by Vallejo, Lorca, and Guillén, writers whose poetic subject matter focused on marginalized subjectivities, fitting

for Lázaro, who for unknown reasons, is living in Mexico as an exile and cannot return to his homeland.³⁴ He embraces his Black identity, recalling Guillén, who was a contemporary of the U.S. Harlem Renaissance Black pride literary movement and predecessor to future Black movements of the twentieth century, such as the Black Pride and U.S. Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s. Laurini, like Guillén, participates in a turn of the century literary movement centralizing African subjectivities in Mexico, hence contributing to the growing canon of Afro-Mexican Studies, as Morena, an Afro-Mexican is not the only intelligent and resilient Black character in the novel.

When Morena leaves Mérida, she decides to go to Veracruz, a historically significant city, as it was the area from which Hernán Cortés and his soldiers travelled west to conquer and colonize the Náhuatl city of Tenochtitlán. Traveling from Yucatán to Veracruz, Morena retraces Cortés' journey of 1519. The seaport of Veracruz was also the first land of the Americas upon which African slaves would step before being sent to other areas of the American continent. According to Afro-Mexican Studies historian, Marco Polo Hernández Cuevas, some three hundred thousand African slaves were brought through Veracruz from 1519 to 1800s, however, "The continental African presence and persistence is little known, little celebrated, and often relegated to the point of phobia as has been the case of Mexico and other parts of the Americas" (5). It is in Veracruz where Morena meets the only other Black woman in the narrative, Zindzi, whose name in South African Xhosa means warrior.

³⁴ Langston Hughes and Nicolás Guillén had a long friendship beginning in 1930 when Hughes, already known for his musically-informed book of poetry, *The Weary Blues* (1926), traveled to Cuba. Federico García Lorca also traveled to Cuba in 1930. Hughes and Lorca also had a friendship. Hughes was the translator for Lorca's *Gypsy Ballads* (1951). Like *Weary Blues* and Lorca's *Romancero gitano* (1928), Guillén's *Motivos de son* was also inspired by popular musical forms.

Zindzi befriends Morena, finding in each other a kindred spirit.³⁵ Once again, as with Crucita's Videla story, Morena promises to document and retell Zindzi's *mulata jarocho* story.

Zindzi's *mulata jarocho* narrative, which is how Morena describes Zindzi when she first meets her, is one that symbolizes the resiliency of Afro-Mexican culture. Previously the term *jarocho/jarocho*³⁶ was a disparaging one, as it arose during the colonial era and was employed by Spanish colonizers when referring to *mulato* people in the area. Etymology of the term has been tied to the Spanish moniker "jaro" which was given to "mountain pigs in Muslim Spain" but by the eighteenth century the term was recuperated by Afro-Mexicans of Veracruz and now proudly refers to any native from the historical port city (Hernández Cuevas 41). Zindzi's story like the term *jarocho* lives as a transformative narrative, challenging the Mexican national fallacy produced by Black female images like Rarontonga where Black women are exotic, sexualized femme fatales aggressively pursuing Mexican mestizos and easily dominated with a slogan like "Hazme tuya cada martes." Her counter-story performs an act of legal-story telling as she critiques the racial and gender violence women of color experience at the hands of White men. The *mulata jarocho* works as a street food cook, making some of the best roadside tacos, quesadillas and *aguas naturales* in the area. Morena notes Zindzi's white teeth, which are always flashing a smile to her customers while she diligently juggles the various sections of her food stand. When Zindzi learns of Morena's profession, she asks Morena to write Zindzi's life story as a novel. Morena is at first hesitant, claiming that she is more of a journalist (i.e. ethnographer) who writes about real-life events but Zindzi insists that her story is one filled with real life

³⁵ One of anti-apartheid activist and revolutionary Nelson Mandela's daughters is named Zindzi. After decades of activism and incarceration, Mandela eventually became President of South Africa in 1994.

³⁶ According to Hernández Cueva the term *jarocho/jarocho* was previously "analogous to the 'N' word" (41).

experiences. When Morena agrees to write Zindzi's *novela*, the journalist-detective sits down with pen and paper to take notes as in an ethnographic situation.

Zindzi's narrative begins with a love story when she falls in love with a Senegalese sailor, Samy, who she wanted to marry. Samy would always recall Africa, painting a beautiful image of a land where "el sol pone blanca la tierra y puede llover sin parar cuarenta días" (65). Black racial and cultural *mestizaje* is the backdrop for Zindzi's love story. Her mother was a white woman who worked as a prostitute and her father was a Haitian immigrant who was killed before Zindzi was born. When Zindzi's mother left her life as a prostitute, she opened up the food stand, which Zindzi took over after her mother's death. She recalls the day when "se nos pegó un güerito. Era rico, estudiante y pasaba todos los días a comer y platicar" (65). Though she was in love with and committed to Samy, the white male student was obsessed with Zindzi and asked her to marry him. Though she had rejected his proposal, it did not deter the student from continuing a friendship with Zindzi and Samy, until one day she came home to find her lover dead in a pool of blood. Immediately the police accused her of the murder and she was imprisoned while she awaited a trial. Zindzi became suspicious when the student began to visit her every week while she was held prisoner; he continued to insist on getting married, helping pay for a lawyer to assist with her case. He continuously made promises to Zindzi "promete una larga y feliz vida a su lado, con dinero, mucho dinero. Y qué crees, el hijo de su puta madre jura que me adora y que soy su virgen de Guadalupe" (67). To compare Zindzi to one of Mexico's most iconic female cultural images that repeats the objectification of women, but to have Zindzi scoff at the comparison tells the reader another story. Laurini as a writer creates a radical feminist departure from the traditional Mexican woman, as she has a *mulata*-warrior from Veracruz ridicule the idea of being called and compared to the

Virgin of Guadalupe. Zindzi's gender politics would align with Chicana feminists of the time period; the novel had been published in 1994 and by that time Chicana feminist scholars, writers and artist like Gloria Anzaldúa³⁷ had been critiquing this heterosexist discourse as it promotes and negates Mexicana and Chicana agency. Laurini's Afro-Mexican character crosses racial and cultural borders, creating solidarity with Chicana women who like Zindzi, come from a working class background and possess a deep understanding of gender and racial politics. Laurini's feminist statement remains radical even today, as many Mexican women would have difficulty reacting in the same manner Zindzi did while using "*puta madre*" and Guadalupe in the same breath.

In Zindzi's case, white male patriarchy desires her as a sexual object as well as an object to be dominated, as the white student "Se había obsesionado y quería que fuera su propiedad a cómo diera lugar" (186). Zindzi decolonizes the traditional and historical image of Black women by refusing to align herself with an image that represents female subjugation; instead she dismantles the sexist master narrative by underscoring the privileges and unequal treatment white men receive due to their racial and gender social locations, "los muy pendejos se la dieron, como es güero, estudiante y milloneta le abren todas las puertas" (67). She literally has to fight off the white male student from killing her, because when she refused to marry him and had uncovered his crime, illustrating the incompetency of the male police officers and lawyer, she became an undesirable, uncontrollable woman, one who refuses to be dominated and loudly vocalizes her injustice. She a poor, Black, Mexican woman fought an unjust accusation of murder and a homicidal white man who refuses to acknowledge her as a free human being. She disputes the

³⁷ For literary and artistic Chicana feminist responses to the Virgin of Guadalupe, please see: Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987); Ana Castillos' *Goddess of the Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe* (1996); Alma López-Gaspar de Alba's *Our Lady* (1999).

common cultural belief: a *mulata* is always willing to marry a rich white man, no matter the circumstances (68). Instead, if Zindzi cannot have the love that she desires then she will fight for her freedom, as one of the final comments she makes to Morena is about her leaving this land to live eternally on a boat with a sailor-lover because her story is not to be pitied, as it is her own: “Ésta es mi historia. Es una historia con final feliz, de las que me hacen ilusión” (68).

Welcome to Tijuana/Bienvenido a Tijuana

As Morena moves throughout the various Mexican regions, her final stop in the novel is in the border city of Tijuana. While investigating maquiladora factory abuses in Nogales, Morena receives a secret message from Mérida sent by Güicho and Rosi. Knowing that Morena left the colonial city with a heavy heart, because they were not able to help “la niña jetona” who had been sold off into sexual slavery and refused their help once she was found, the married couple continued investigating the trafficking of children in the area. The message informed Morena that Tijuana is where she needs to be in order to expose the criminals of the case: “los perros lleban a los niños por tijuana, aquí uvo soplo y estan busos, los jefes no quieren nada, puro narco. Te vas a tijuana [...] Rosi dise que no bebas mucho, que te cuides, cuidate y vete a tijuana. Muchos años detras de los perros, ay que atraparlos” (117). Lázaro, the Cuban exile she had met in Mérida was living in Tijuana and working as a senior editor for a local newspaper. Morena was determined to bring the case to a close but to also begin living a life with Lázaro as she narrates: “Le tomé la palabra que jamás me abandonaría, de su amor eterno y etcétera, etcétera. Tenía ganas de creerle y ser feliz” (142). Morena wants her own love story. Once in Tijuana, Morena begins to work at Lázaro’s newspaper, she decides that she wants to continue writing for la nota roja, which

will then allow for her to continue the investigation she started in Mérida on gender violence and human trafficking. Güicho had given Morena the name of a police commander who was to be her contact during her investigation, Commander Montiel. Montiel, on the other hand, had other plans as he did not believe Morena to be capable of handling a heavy investigation insisting that she dedicate herself to her work, and if she were to write anything it would be approved by him beforehand. He then hands her off to Officer Albornoz who is charged with keeping Morena away from the investigation and controlling the information she receives. Morena, the willfully strong ethnographer-investigator decides she will not allow Montiel and Albornoz's manipulation to dissuade her from investigating.

Upon interviewing Gisele, a prostitute at a brothel, Morena learns that in Tijuana there is a multi-layered system set up when it comes to gender violence and human trafficking. Gisele, as a matter-of-factly expresses to Morena that child prostitution is the norm in Tijuana, wanting to easily solve the crimes dismisses the complexity of how deeply this violence is embedded in everyday life. The prostitute tells Morena, "Carnala, tú eres una inocente, eso que cuentas es más corriente que yo. La neta es que hay miles de niños que se pierden al año, no esos tres o cuatro que dices [...] No tienes tan mal olfato, ¿sabías?, por Tijuana y por Juárez es por donde pasan más niños para el otro lado" (183-184). She continues to explain to Morena the legal systems and agencies set up to supply children across the border for a variety of needs: organ harvesting, sexual exploitation, and drug smuggling. Morena, wanting concrete evidence, seeks out a child adoption agency in Tijuana and disguises herself as an American citizen married to a rich American husband who wants to adopt a newborn child or toddler.

Upon speaking with the case manager, Morena discovers how easy it is to adopt Mexican children, especially if one has the means and capital to pay for a child. She also unearths the lack of accountability from the agency and the Mexican government to assure first-hand the child's safety once it has crossed the border into the United States. The agency's case worker assures a concerned Morena that no one will be demanding for the child's return once s/he moves to the United States, the agency, nor the government and much less the mother. Morena leaves the organization promising to consult with her spouse, as she is walking away she asks haunting questions about what she has just learned: "—¿Cuántos de estos niños pasarían a ser "la alegría del hogar", el hijo deseado, mimado? ¿Cuántos serían destripados para quitarles un órgano, o la sangre?—, pensé cuando salía de AHNI (Ayuda Humanitaria a Niños Indefensos)" (187). Morena's questions force the difficult conversation about racialized infant genocide happening between Mexico and the United States. The young mestizo children are objects of commerce as foreign investors disguised as barren couples easily buy them. The adopted children then serve with their lives by unwillingly providing their organs to American children who are in need of transplants, hence creating a slaughter of brown child bodies across the border while the perpetuating cycle of First World needs above those of the Third World continues over and over. Morena's reflection on her interactions with the adoption agency hit close to real life, as transnational organ harvesting continues in Mexico.

In 2014 the Huffington Post reported on a Michoacán drug cartel that would kidnap children and harvest their organs for an immense payout. The article asserts, "Mexican authorities have said drug trafficking is no longer the top source of income for the Knights Templar, which was once a top producer of crystal meth. The officials say the cartel's main sources of income are illegal mining" (Rodríguez). Bioethics scholar Nancy Scheper-Hughes

asserts that the black market on organ harvesting is difficult to control as “the growing market in human bodies and organs as those on both sides of the transplant equation – desperate organ buyers and equally desperate organ sellers – are beginning to accept these still largely covert transactions” (Scheper-Hughes 32). Morena’s observations uncover the multiple layers in the intricate relationship between the United States and Mexico along with the consumption and commodification of mestizo bodies. When travelling with Lázaro by car from Nogales back to Tijuana, he tells Morena that he prefers to drive through the Arizona desert claiming that the roads are better than the ones south of the border, yet for Morena, moving across the desert has an affect on her, as she thoughtfully states, “Lázaro propuso viajar por Arizona, el desierto, más bello del mundo, la sepultura de cientos de paisanos que intentaron atravesarlo en pos de un sueño y dejaron, si seguirán dejando allí, sus huesos sin nombre. Nunca me gustó ir a un cementerio sin llevar flores” (Laurini, 2008 261). Comparing the border/desert to a cemetery recalls Gloria Anzaldúa’s famous quote from *Borderlands/La Frontera* where she vividly illustrated the border as “una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (25).³⁸

By including Tijuana as a vital city in Mexico, Laurini’s *novela negra* pushes for literary and academic discourses to consider the Northwestern tip of Latin America as a legitimate case study. Having previously been marginalized, scholar Diana Palaversich discloses in her article “La vuelta a Tijuana en seis escritores”, the overwhelming shadow non-Mexico City dwellers face, “Sus voces están ignoradas por el *mainstream* cultural de México, un país que sufre del notorio centralismo y desprecia lo que se produce en las

³⁸ In his “The Child” from *The Iguana Killer* (1984), Arizona writer Alberto Ríos narrates the story of man and a sick child on a bus from Sonora to Nogales on the Arizona border. Two Mexican women on the bus worry over the child’s health and desire to assist. The nervous man disappears and the women discover the child’s body had been excavated and filled with opium bags.

provincias" (99). As an *argenmex* writer, Laurini is not the only one who thinks about how Tijuana impacts Mexican history, culture and politics; Manuel Puig has also employed Tijuana in his screenplay *Recuerdo de Tijuana* (1985) to critique the manipulation and control U.S. capital and consumers have over Mexico.

The story takes place in two cities, Hermosillo and Tijuana. Both have two Mexican drug lords who are fighting for control over the region while being controlled by a bigger entity, an American who lives in Los Angeles and goes by the name of Mister Leonard. El Moreno, the Tijuana drug lord and bar-brothel owner, wins Leonard's attention and favor as he has saved Leonard's granddaughter Laurie from kidnappers who were drugging and using her for ransom. Leonard decides to visit Moreno to discuss the expansion of the business but to also retrieve his granddaughter. Moreno's trusted companion and accomplice, a woman named Carnada who is described as "la Cimarrona de Tijuana" (88) risked her life to save Laurie in order to help Moreno's business. While Leonard and Moreno are speaking to one another, Carnada observes their interactions from afar. She is a woman who understands the drug trafficking and prostitution business as she has betrayed, stolen, and lied in order to survive in it. Yet, when she sees the submissiveness of Moreno towards the white American drug lord/business man, an anger grows inside of her and she declares that she cannot continue because "estoy cansada de dar vueltas..." (144). In that moment she decides to take control of her situation by robbing the brothel, and freeing Laurie, who does not want to return with her grandfather as she'd rather be free in Tijuana. Upon discovering Carnada's treason, Moreno threatens to kill her but he is surprised when she kills him, forcing his bodyguard to kill her in retaliation. When reading Carnada's disgust towards Moreno's complete compliance toward Mister Leonard along with her declaration that she no longer desires to go in circles, Puig like Laurini, critiques

the cyclical relationship between the United States and Mexico. As a world power, the U.S. historically has exercised its economic domination over other countries, especially Mexico. Yet to symbolically end the cycle in the narrative, it takes a woman like Carnada to kill Moreno taking him out of the equation of continuing a bi-national submission to First World power, Leonard. Though the reader knowingly understands that the end of Moreno and Carnada does not necessarily mean the end of this vicious relationship, as its destruction would take a lot more than the death of a pimp/drug-lord and his accomplice.

At the end of *Morena en rojo*, Morena through Commander Montiel is taken to a house raid in the middle of the night; she is informed that they are entering a safe house that is known for trafficking young children across the border and selling them into sexual slavery and organ harvesting. Morena, believing that she will finally be able to rest the case she has been following since Mérida, is taken into the house after the raid and is escorted by the commander himself. There she sees a group of young Mexican children who are too scared to speak to the psychologist assisting on the case, when she enters the room where the accused traffickers are being held, she, at first does not want to look at their faces but Montiel insists. She raises her head and lists to the reader what she sees, “Un gringo pelirrojo. Un chicano. Un gringo castaño. Un mulato. Un mexicano. Un mulato. Lázaro. Un mulato. Era Lázaro. Cerré fuerte los ojos, los volví a abrir, era Lázaro” (219). She is in total disbelief, accusing the police of setting her up but Montiel dismisses her words by stating, “Vea bien señorita, tan a mano tenía el material para su reportaje y lo desperdició. Tiene mal olfato. Tuvo que recurrir a mí” (220). Morena has a mental breakdown forcing her to recuperate for two weeks in a mental health facility, while she had been dreaming about writing the *nota roja* that finally presented a solved case, she could not bring herself to write it and instead bought a one-way ticket to Chihuahua, her mother’s current residence

and Morena's birthplace. While the novel's ending, like Puig's *Recuerdo de Tijuana* is disturbingly devastating, Laurini challenges the formulaic genre where criminals are brought to justice at the end of the narrative. Instead, violence, real-life violence, violence consisting of drug trafficking, organ harvesting, child prostitution, colonialism, racism, and gender oppression does not have an easy, simplistic solution especially when crimes are transnational, when they cross borders and are systemically multi-layered. However, Laurini's lack of solution does not include a lack of resistance, agency, autonomy and resiliency as Morena along with María Crucita, Zindzi, Rosi and Güicho have demonstrated throughout the narrative that the lack of solution does not mean that there is a lack of survivors. If female characters like María Crucita who has endured five hundreds year of hunger and Zindzi "Warrior" who has suffered gender violence and sexual objectification, continue fighting for their lives, their act of resistance is a redefinition of their existence as they are women working through the limitations placed in front of them due to their race, gender, and social class. Although Laurini's novel does not offer explicit solutions, the author highlights alternative narratives and stories of women's lives excluded from official histories and hemispheric dialogues.

La Nota Roja Writ Large

Publishing an Afro-Mexican novel two years after the Mexican government declared national recognition for a Black population, whose presence can be traced back centuries in the Americas, marks an important turn in Mexican literature. Laurini's narrative critiques the fallacy and propaganda behind the national ideology of mestizaje as her female characters with their counter-stories underscore alternative experiences. It must be stated that the novel appeared in the same year the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional

(EZLN), the indigenous Zapatista movement, made its first appearance on the Mexican national stage declaring parallel injustices included in *Morena en rojo*. The EZLN chose January 1 for their first public appearance, the day that the North American Free Trade Agreement took effect. In *Morena en rojo*, readers find another form of hemispheric integration--violence, trafficking, prostitution, and organ harvesting. *Morena's* first case, María Crucita, an indigenous woman whose own name symbolizes the First Nations under Spanish conquest and colonialism then evolving into present day Mexico, possesses a five hundred year old hunger that has yet to see any ending in sight.³⁹ The women of the novel, *Morena*, Zindzi, la niña jetona, María Crucita as a collective represent the cross-hemispheric disasters of European colonization, slavery, and annihilation forcing into question the proliferation and transmission of, to borrow Hernández Cuevas' term, mestizophilia. Mestizaje discourse and practice is denied to Mexican indigenous women, Black women, poor women, migrant women; mestizaje is meaningless if in every day human interactions women are exploited, violated and denied a just existence. By creating a hemispheric dialogue between Mexico and Argentina, the novel explores the continuous practice of racism, political corruption, authoritarian regimes, and while none of Mexico's modern-day presidencies have officially been declared a dictatorship, in 1990 Mario Vargas Llosa gave a speech at a conference for European and Latin American intellectuals where he bluntly declared that the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), Mexico's longest ruling political party to date, was "una dictadura perfecta" (aristeguinoticias.com). Mexico, like Argentina, has also been involved in dirty war tactics, disappearing vocal political

³⁹ Cortés brought the banner of Mary as Nuestra Señora de los Remedios who became known as La Conquistadora. And, of course, Cortés also brought the cross and Christianity. The conversion of Indigenous Mexico was the largest mass conversion since the beginning of Christianity.

opponents, silencing protesters and producing systemic gender violence; Laurini, an Argentinian journalist and writer, who escaped political repression from her homeland and experiences life in Mexico as a full-time resident dares to intersect the histories of these two nations via her characters of María Crucita and police commander Videla. Both women, Laurini the author and Morena the ethnographer-journalist, give their reader a chronicle that counters official narratives and decolonizes histories by presenting hemispheric dialogues, opening the reader to alternative possibilities shunned by mainstream master discourses.

As an exiled chronicler living in Mexico, Laurini is joined by the likes of Nestor García Canclini and Manuel Puig. Canclini, an innovator in Border Studies with his socio-anthropological work on hybrid cultures to which the Argenmex belong, and Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña* and *Recuerdo de Tijuana* complements Laurini's novel as both texts innovatively include homosexual characters that challenge discourses of power claiming to celebrate diversity and difference. Interestingly all three writers gravitate towards Tijuana, interpreting through their *argenmex* experience, the border city in their works: Canclini with *Culturas híbridas*, Puig with *Recuerdo de Tijuana* and Laurini with *Morena en rojo*. Tijuana is another city like Nuevo Laredo, Mérida, Nogales; it is part of the Mexican nation yet these three writers expose the experiences and direct consequences that occur such as human trafficking, child prostitution and organ harvesting when bordering a world power like the United States. While *argenmex* writers and scholars continue to produce their work in their adopted nation, one must also think about other significant Argentinian exiles, like Julio Cortázar who I would identify as an Argentinian-French as he spent the second half of his life in exile after he was released from prison for protesting against the Perón presidency. Cortázar's literary production never left Latin America behind even when the

majority of his work was published abroad, away from his homeland. Yet, in his literary imaginary much like in Laurini's, Argentina and Latin America were never neglected or forgotten. Life as an exile is repeated throughout *Morena en rojo*, at one point Morena announces: "Y yo, tal vez, una eterna exiliada" (Laurini, 2008 145)⁴⁰ but like the stories Morena retells throughout the narrative, she, the eternal exile, refuses to forget.

⁴⁰ This line does not appear in the 1994 version of the novel published by Editorial Joaquín Mortiz but does appear in the 2008 dual-novel publication by Ediciones Bolsillo Zeta *Qué raro que me llame Guadalupe/Morena en rojo*.

Chapter Four

Crónica de un secuestro: Postmodern Noir in

Patricia Valladares' Tan frío como el infierno

The opening sequence of 2004 U.S. film *Man on Fire* begins with a disconcerting statistic: “There is one kidnapping every sixty minutes in Latin America. 70% of the victims do not survive” (*Man on Fire*) and what follows is a chaotic flashback of a kidnapping. From start to finish, the abrupt snapshots show a young upper-middle class couple walking through Mexico City’s triangulated historical center: the Cathedral-Zócalo-National Palace. They head towards an awaiting car as images of iconic Mexico City buildings and streets are peppered throughout. The young male is swiftly taken by two men, shoved into a car and used as leverage for ransom. A family is in distress; a body part arrives at the home, and finally, the patriarch agrees to the ransom figure leaving the money in a hidden unmarked car. His son is left on a busy Mexico City highway, bound without clothing as cars continue on their route, none of them stopping to assist the sobbing young man. The juxtaposition of Mexico City images with scenes from the kidnapping informs the viewer that these two entities parallel one another. The scene sequence mimics the city itself, as it is full of noise, the cathedral bell’s constant ringing, heightened feelings, running vehicles, screams as though they are an everyday occurrence in the Mexican metropolis: the act of kidnapping and the act of living in this city and nation are one and the same. Unfortunately the film’s subject matter is not too far off from reality. CNN Mexico reported that at the beginning of 2014 the country has experienced a rise in kidnappings and extortions as well as 185 cases of homicide with the majority of reported incidents occurring in Estado de México (Mexico.CNN.com). The dystopian representation and presence of Mexico City and

its crimes also come alive in Patricia Valladares' first novel *Tan frío como el infierno* (2014), introducing detective Milena Ruiz as a private investigator searching for the kidnapped Eloísa Castellanos, a famous photojournalist known for documenting images of war who is about to have an exhibit at an important gallery in the city. Valladares, in an intricately tangled weave, creates an insular and transnational narrative, she employs multiple geographies like Mexico, Palestine/Israel and the female body to represent literal and symbolic "territorios de guerra," fighting to exist in a glistening postmodern⁴¹ twenty-first century Mexico City. By categorizing *Tan frío como el infierno* as a postmodern Mexico City noir, I argue that the narrative defies and critiques the effects of global capital as the novel's noir element is an embodied and emblematic experience, unveiling the atrocious consequences of urban modernization such as poverty, gender violence, and spatial injustices.

Since the novel is a recent publication, released in May of 2014, limited scholarship is available. As a result, my dissertation performs one of the first academic analyses into this groundbreaking contribution to Mexican feminist detective fiction. In my analysis, I will also incorporate an interview I conducted with Valladares in September 2014 where she discusses her academic and literary works. Patricia Valladares is a native of Mexico City; she earned her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Psychology at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in Iztacala. For the past twenty-five years she has worked as a professor of clinical psychology at her alma mater, focusing on issues surrounding gender violence, specifically sexual violence against women. Her commitment to her research is demonstrated in a variety of ways, in 1988 she created a research center, Programa

⁴¹ Later on in the chapter I will discuss my working definition of the terms postmodern and postmodernism and how I employ them when analyzing this work.

Interdisciplinario para la Atención de la Violencia (PIAV, 1988) where she has been able to fund and study the effects of gender violence in Mexican society. By 1994, she had founded the first national center for survivors of domestic violence in Mexico, Centro de Atención Multiple (CAM) in Tlalnepantla. She has also instituted the Centro de Atención al Maltrato Intrafamiliar y Sexual with the support of the Mexican government agency, Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado de México (1997). Her academic and clinical work has garnered her awards such as the Medalla de la Mujer Tlanepantlense in Education (2005) awarded by the city of Tlanepantla. She was also given the Medalla al Mérito de su Trayectoria (2004) honoring the work in her field. Her research has been committed to bringing awareness to gender violence at the popular level, in 2002 she co-authored a series titled *Manuales de prevención de la violencia de género* which are now integrated into governmental manuals and can be currently found under the website for Mexico's governmental agency Comisión Nacional de Seguridad, directed by the nation's secretary of state.⁴² She participated in a major regional study funded and organized by the Cámara de Diputados, LIX Legislatura titled *Violencia feminicida en Sonora* (2006) which served as a case study to further understand femicides occurring throughout the Mexican nation; the study has been published by the Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres.⁴³ Valladares finished a doctorate in creative writing and literature in 2013 at Mexico City's well-known cultural institution, Casa Lamm, where her doctoral project *Mujeres de agua* (2013) served as a foundation and precursor to her first novel, *Tan frío como el infierno*. Valladares' academic work and activism functions as an important groundwork to her creative literary

⁴² The manuals can be found under the "Compendio de Documentos de Prevención Social de la Violencia y la Delincuencia" at <http://www.cns.gob.mx>

⁴³ The study can be found under the center's publications link at <http://cedoc.inmujeres.gob.mx/lgamvly/CAMARA/son.pdf>

production, as the link between her professional career and the literary world she creates in *Tan frío* is palpable. Her character, Milena Ruiz a former federal police officer, turned private investigator has built a career dedicated to bringing justice to survivors of gender violence. The character acknowledges that her choice in career path comes with heavy stigma, as early on in the narrative she recalls:

Me acuerdo cuando llegué por primera vez comisionada a Delitos Sexuales; fue cuando empezaron las agencias especializadas. Creía que podía cambiar el mundo, puras pendejadas idealistas. Luego terminé el máster en criminología, me mandaron a Homicidios y luego a Femicidios. <<Solo te gusta investigar cosas de mujeres>>, me dijo mi jefe entonces. Mira si yo lo sabré; las mujeres no matamos, ni hacemos la guerra, pero siempre nos toca la peor parte. Mierda, a ver con qué me encuentro. (22)

The memory of Milena's career trajectory and dedication to women's issues in Mexico echoes the work Valladares does in her professional and personal life. Unfortunately, it is easy to imagine Valladares also getting the same critique Milena does from her boss, for liking and focusing on investigating "cosas de mujeres." The quote connotes that the male superior sees issues such as femicides as things that solely concern and affect women. Therefore he, as a male subject, can remove himself from such issues, he does not and cannot concern himself with such matters, as they do not directly involve his gender nor challenge his male privilege. Milena along with Valladares remain unfazed by such critique, as both women continue with their passionate dedication in working towards gender equality and equity.

Hay muertos porque tenemos éxito: Mexico City in the Twenty-First Century

Milena is first introduced to the reader when she is on her way to meet her first client. She has recently returned from a long stay abroad and has opened her own private detective agency in Mexico City. The scene begins at a Starbucks close to the Ángel de la Independencia, more formally known as El Monumento a la Independencia and popularly called el Angel. The monument consists of a tall roman column, shooting about one hundred and seventy feet into the air and at the very top is a golden statue of the winged Greek goddess, Nike, symbol of war and victory though Mexicans commonly refer to the angel in the masculine *el Angel* when her physical appearance clearly indicates that she is a woman. This important monument commissioned by Dictator Porfirio Díaz was meant to commemorate Mexico's one-hundredth anniversary of freedom from the Spanish Empire. Ironically, during Díaz's thirty-three year regime, the country was anything but independent with an oligarchy suppressing civil liberties and foreign economic investments draining the nation's capital, the middle class of the time was more in debt than generating new wealth for the country (Kandell 386). Diaz's gift to Mexicans citizens was an artificial one at best, as historians suggest that his motivation for a major celebration in September 1910 was not for Mexico's independence but rather a grandiose 80th birthday celebration as the "cost of the centennial had exceeded the nation's education budget for 1910" (Kandell 395). Díaz's attempt to present Mexico as a modern nation came with urban development as new public buildings, hotels and theaters had risen in the western part of the city. Over one hundred years later, two hundred after independence, Valladares brings the reader back to this phallic monument, with a postmodern twenty-first century city struggling with its new identity in a world rapidly overtaken by foreign

investments and global capital. For the purposes of this study, I define postmodern/postmodernism according to its presence in the novel by underscoring the historic, political, economic, social, and cultural changes in Mexico City as witnessed and experienced by character Milena Ruiz. Milena's Mexican world is not the same as María Elena Morán's who over fifty-years prior engaged with a wholly different city and era. Milena's multiple interactions with other Mexicans, along with city architecture and monuments and other nations serve as launching points in discussing the evolution of the Mexican feminist *novela negra* in early twenty-first century.

The Angel serves as an important and constant focal point in the novel. Valladares takes Milena through a postcard Mexico City--hotels Nikko, Four Seasons, Intercontinental, and Maria Isabel, residential areas Polanco and Las Lomas, and Corporativo Santa Fe--to return to el Angel where Milena sometimes reflects on her present case as well as her personal life. The Angel is at the intersection of Paseo de la Reforma and Río Tíber where Eloísa was kidnapped. El Angel is also a monument that functions as a marker of urban changes throughout the city. When Díaz erected the memorial, Mexico City's modernized spaces were westward towards Las Lomas de Chapultepec, Condesa, and Polanco. Mexico City the gigantic metropolis, like Milena has been in constant motion, evolving in the name of progress and modernity. Mexico historian Jonathan Kandell describes the transformations occurring in the nation's capital:

Paseo de la Reforma, which spearheaded the city's westward expansion, led to the emergence of working-class neighborhoods northwest of the central district. Newspapers dubbed them instant slums, and noted that the authorities were maintaining a double standard for the wealthy and poor. Reimbursed by the government, real estate developers provided the new

neighborhoods for the affluent with electricity, running water, sewage pipes, and asphalted streets graced with trees. But the poorer districts received none of these amenities because the developers could expect no public subsidies. (Kandell 387)

While María Elvira Bermúdez's Mexico City of the 1950s and 1960s was illustrated as a city working towards modernization it was clearly at the cost of poor, working-class citizens who are the backbone of the city's success and transformation. Milena's Mexico City of the early twenty-first century has become a spatial realm struggling with its own paradoxical post/modern advances.

As Milena narrates her urban spaces, the buildings surrounding the monument have taken on new identities. Change has come to the neighborhoods surrounding the Angel that had traditionally been working class areas, transformations caused by the influence of global capital in the area. During María Elvira Bermúdez's era meeting someone in the city, meant going to one of the most popular department stores and cafés in the nation, Sanborns. Carlos Fuentes' novel, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962) contains a scene with Catalina and Teresa Cruz as they shop for a wedding dress. Catalina, to calm her daughter's nerves about the marriage, suggests they go to Sanborns for lunch and afterwards shop around the city for a bit (10-11). While the scene is brief, the significance here is that two wealthy Mexico City women from the Lomas area have their selected establishments when it comes to shopping and dining, which allows for the reader to note the difference in 2014 when Milena decides on a different establishment for her meeting. The scene speaks to the movement of wealth and capital in the city, as the older southern areas of Coyoacán, San Angel, Chimalistac, and Tlalpán, areas presumably Artemio Cruz moved through since he lived in Coyoacán separated from Catalina, do not appear in *Tan frío como el infierno*, as

Milena exists within a different era of Mexico City. The restaurant, formerly an American owned business chain, was established in Mexico City during the early 1900s, is an institutional staple in Mexican urban life. Though founded by American businessmen brothers Frank and Walter Sanborn, the wealthiest Mexican citizen, Carlos Slim bought the majority company shares in the mid-1980s and his corporate group Carso currently owns the multi-function department store.⁴⁴

Yet, the contemporary private investigator does not meet with her client at Sanborns, instead she decides to meet him at a U.S. business, the internationally popular Starbucks Café. The average reader or consumer may not make note of this change since Starbucks has become central to everyday lives not only for U.S. residents but for Mexicans as well. When the first Starbucks opened in Mexico City in 2002,⁴⁵ skeptics were unsure of its brand, but ten years later in 2012, Alsea, Mexico's largest branding corporation and distributor of American fast food restaurants⁴⁶ published a study announcing Starbucks' economic impact in Mexico. According to Alsea's data, Starbucks is the second largest coffeehouse chain in Mexico and number one in total gross income with a 35% commercial presence in the industry. Its existence has also altered Mexicans' coffee drinking habits and city life and culture: "La marca vino a revolucionar la forma de tomar café en México, no sueles citar a los amigos en Vips o el Toks sino en el Starbucks, incluso tratas negocios ahí.

⁴⁴ The popularity of Sanborns lies on its ability to provide the Mexico City dweller with nearly everything s/he needs in one stop, as the store chain is comprised a variety of different departments from restaurants to bookstore, cafes to clothing retail, making any kind of consumer necessity as easily accessible as possible.

⁴⁵ Interestingly, Starbucks did not open a store in Tijuana until a half-decade later due to its direct copy D'Volada, the "Mexicanized Starbucks [...] part of the sadness of Starbucks Tijuana is the threat it poses to D'Volada, a "glocal" success story now tightly woven into Tijuana's urban fabric. Even worse, D'Volada shops are franchised by a family-run company; the Starbucks outlets in Mexico are part of the empire of Carlos Slim"; please see Kun.

⁴⁶ Alsea is the owner of mostly U.S. fast food corporations, on its official website it states that Alsea controls the following U.S. food companies: Starbucks, Domino's Pizza, The Cheesecake Factory, Burger King, California Pizza Kitchen and Chili's Restaurants. Please see Alsea.net.

Creo que Alsea y Starbucks Coffee Internacional (SCI) nunca se imaginaron el éxito que iba a tener” (Ugarte). Starbuck’s example serves to demonstrate contemporary changes the city has come to witness when foreign investment dominates not only the market but the culture as well. Starbucks cafés are present in hotels, hospitals, and department stores. In the novel, Milena has meetings at the well-known María Isabel Hotel and Towers, a renovated luxury hotel owned by the U.S. Sheraton Starwood Group, which also happens to house the Starbucks Café where Milena is meeting her client. If one were to walk around the area, take Milena’s steps in the narrative, one would encounter all the buildings she does. Valladares produces a literary reality that the average Mexico City native will see reflected in everyday life, which was her original intent when writing this narrative, she affirms during our interview, “De hecho, yo vivo en la calle principal de la Colonia Roma y uno puede hacer un recorrido literal por los lugares por donde transcurre la novela, lo que le da verosimilitud y la hace muy cercana para los chilangos de cepa como yo” (Valladares *Personal Interview*). Paying homage to her city allows for Valladares’ narrative to be experienced in real-time Mexico City, absorbing Milena’s perspective as the reader absorbs the novel producing a literary connection between the writer and her audience.

The Angel, aside from ironically representing freedom and independence from a nineteenth-century European colonial power, exhibits the transference of powers in the twenty-first century. With an architectural visual analysis one can directly assess that they are not Mexican. Aside from Starbucks and the Sheraton hotel, the Angel’s intersectional crossing also contains the shadow of the United States’ Embassy as well as La Bolsa Mexicana de Valores, Mexico’s powerful stock exchange. This quadrilateral urban space from Paseo de la Reforma overlooks the Angel, overpowering a space where historically the average Mexico City resident goes to physically and vocally protest political, economic, and

social injustices; and yet, these four entities are in control from above, in their tower buildings looking below to the rest, representing a physical and symbolic dominion of the city and ultimately the nation. Urban planning scholar Edward Soja researches and interprets urban social spaces in Los Angeles. His study *Seeking Spatial Justice* (2010) discusses the importance of adopting a “critical spatial perspective” (2) when analyzing particular city spaces. In doing so, one will uncover “a consequential geography” (1) or intentional geographies, which help explain the symbolic purposes certain spatial realms possess. If we return to the four entities previously discussed, the Sheraton Hotel, Starbucks, U.S. Embassy and La Bolsa de Valores, all in line on Reforma, surround the national symbol of Mexican independence and autonomy like soldiers covertly watching over and waiting to take action if anyone moves out of line. And, in fact, the area around the Angel is almost always surrounded by armed soldiers; the U.S. Embassy is always protected with barricades and soldiers. Soja’s study helps to read the geography as one of spatial injustice, a location where the economic, political and social powers lie not with the Mexican people but in global capital, principally U.S. transnational capitalism.

In a postmodern era, where diversity and cultural difference is celebrated, there is an existing paradox, when witnessing and experiencing the radical changes that have occurred throughout Mexico City in the name of progress and globalization. Theorist Terry Eagleton provides an important lens for analyzing what is occurring in this “glossy postmodern” urban jungle, as he states: “Postmodernism, among other things, concerns the cherishing of cultural difference; it is therefore an irony beyond anything flaunted by its own fictions that it is now actively contributing to the remorseless cultural homogenization of the globe, exporting a philosophy of difference as, among other things, a mode of Western cultural integration” (5). While the Angel symbolizes Mexican autonomy, its

surrounding buildings give a different narrative: one of Western cultural homogenization and because of it there is a heightened sense of security creating a “hierarchy of security”, meticulously selecting those who are secured versus those who are not.

Community scholar and Los Angeles historian, Mike Davis has studied the urban phenomena of social strata preoccupied with controlling their environments via the idea of security. He offers that the notion behind it provides a dual perception, one that is false and removed from the issue at large. According to Davis, security serves “As a prestige symbol – and sometimes as the decisive borderline between the merely well off and the ‘truly rich’ – ‘security’ has less to do with personal safety than with the degree of personal insulation, in residential, work, consumption and travel environments, from ‘unsavory’ groups and individuals, even crowds in general” (Davis 224). In Mexico, personal insulation or security provides an artificial sense of safety especially in a city where a staggering number of kidnappings and extortions occur, but the city’s ultra- wealthy continuously perpetuate their own demise through the displacement of capital, the urban poor and working class. The practice of displacing the urban poor is not new, as Mexico historian Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo notes during the early 1900s the Porfirio Díaz administration “wished to eliminate the presence of the poor so close to the corridors of power and wealth and feared the problems of health and morality,” hence creating a divided and two tiered city where the urban poor were pushed and placed in the western part of the metropolitan space which was severely underdeveloped, while the upper class elite enjoyed modern amenities such as paved roads, electricity and clean running water (Tenorio-Trillo 12-13). One modern day example of urban displacement is Mexico’s controversial presidential airplane and airport hangar.

Felipe Calderón and Enrique Peña Nieto's presidential administrations had set forth the purchase of a presidential airplane with incredulous figures. As reported by Mexican news outlets, former President Calderón had initiated the contract with Boeing, a U.S. entity specializing in aerospace engineering and manufacturing, to design and build Mexico's presidential aircraft. The reported cost stated figures to be nearly six hundred million dollars, not including the planned presidential hangar at the Benito Juárez International Airport along with the maintenance cost of the airplane, bringing the total cost to over one billion dollars ("Multimillonario avión presidencial"). The *Los Angeles Times* also reported on the controversial purchase by the Mexican government, asserting that "This would make it the most expensive plane of its kind, more costly than planes belonging to Presidents of the United States, China, Russia or Germany" ("Enrique Peña Nieto to Become First President in World"). When the information was made public and public funds such as taxes were going to be used to pay for the airplane, Mexican citizens expressed heavy indignation and outcry at the absurdity of the transaction, made behind closed doors and without citizen approval by Calderón's administration and taken on by Peña Nieto's presidency.

Mexican newspaper, *Proceso* broke down the significance behind the overinflated and astounding cost, "Con esta cantidad podrían construirse por lo menos ocho hospitales como el del IMSS que, apenas el 22 de abril, inauguró Peña en Hermosillo, Sonora, y que, a costo de mil millones de pesos, tiene 189, 11 quirófanos, dos salas de partos y una sala de urgencias para atender a 240 mil derechohabientes" ("El capricho de Peña"). The public protest has not dissuaded the Mexican government; it is expected to have the Boeing 787 Dreamliner delivered to its hangar by September 2015, while, as has been discussed in Chapter Three, the non-profit organization The Hunger Project México stated in their 2012

Annual Report over twenty-eight million people are living under food-insecurity and eleven million people live in extreme poverty in Mexico; the majority of Mexican citizens presently suffering from hunger are indigenous communities, women and children (The Hunger Project México). Here is where the modern paradox lies, as Terry Eagleton succinctly explains as the failed promises of Western Enlightenment “what China and other ‘emergent’ societies need is less Lyotard than civil liberties, full individual autonomy, material well-being, a democratized public sphere, in short all of the advantages which European Enlightenment promised to bring to the West, however dismally failed to deliver” (Eagleton 5-6). Mexico as a nation-state claims to embrace one of the foundational elements of the Enlightenment and modernity: democracy. Yet, its governing body neglects to practice it at the most basic level, with the very citizens that voted them into power and instead make secret deals with multinational corporations like Boeing to purchase a grandiose aircraft.

Along with hunger, a recent Televisa article reported that from December 2012 to January 2014 2,913 kidnappings took place in Mexico, 664 occurred in the state of Mexico while an average of 217 have been attributed to Mexico City alone (“México registra un promedio mensual”). While Mexico’s wealthy and elite concern themselves with their security anxieties based on urban capital and wealth, creating carceral enclaves such as gated communities, twenty-four hour bodyguards and personal drivers to control their safety and push out the undesirables, Davis’ study questions these acts. He asks the reader to consider those who exist outside of the protected communities, those how are not included in issues of security such as the average Mexican citizens whose insecurities come from unjust living conditions, surviving without the most basic human necessity: daily nutrition. How then, does a *novela negra* like *Tan frío como el infierno* and a character like

Milena defy the urban spatial injustices found in her city? To understand strategies employed, the reader must turn to the feminist detective character of Milena for answers.

Resistencias: Mexican Nike Seeks Urban Justice⁴⁷

In *Tan frío como el infierno*, Mexico City is Milena's constant companion, as it is the place she goes to whenever she needs an escape from her apartment or her own thoughts, unlike the wealthy who retreat to live in their guarded and gated homes, she physically interacts with her urban concrete jungle. When describing her neighborhood and all of its amenities, a fruit juice station, taco stand and pharmacy, Milena expresses a great adoration for it, "Amo esta puta colonia. La Roma es el ombligo del mundo. Álvaro Obregón resuelve casi todas mis necesidades primarias" (37) while in nearly the same breadth and scene as she reads the daily newspapers discussing the cuts in governmental funding dedicated to investigating femicides in Juárez she announces, "Pura violencia reprimida. No me extraña que la secuestraran en México. Por lo menos sabrá cómo lidiar con los malos" (39). In the second quote Milena refers to Eloísa's kidnapping paralleling with the national discourse on kidnappings in the city not being a rare occurrence, but also strangely finding comfort in knowing that Eloísa, a Mexico City native and resident knows how to handle herself in her unfortunate situation. Though Milena does not directly state it, her comment demonstrates a narrative that women of Mexico City constantly deal with: gender violence in the city exists and very few institutional structures that have been implemented to safeguard the city's female residents. One only has to see the signs in Mexico City's underground Metro system that warn women which train carts are safe to board during rush hour commuter traffic.

⁴⁷ The title is plays on Edward Soja's work *Seeking Spatial Justice* (2010)

In 2008, the Instituto de las Mujeres del D.F. initiated a program “Viajemos Seguras”⁴⁸ which implemented safe riding policies for women throughout the capital. While the program’s intent is commendable, designed to prevent, assist and sanction sexual violence against female commuters who use the city’s public transportation system, it does not directly address the issue. Most of the programs require for men and women to use public transportation separately during heavily trafficked rush hours, there are special train cars and buses that have been designated as women-only safe cars where female passengers can “securely” ride to and from work. Milena and her best friend Congresswoman Silvia Plata discuss the system which turns into a critique on the security flaws for Mexico’s most vulnerable, “—Sí, pues, pero podrían andar en cuatro cilindros. Vi que hay autobuses rositas sólo para mujeres, ¿no? —Sí, pero no son suficientes. —¿Cuál es el mensaje? Que las personas se encierren en sus casas para que no les pase nada. No mames, *no way*” (27). This is how bad it is for women in Mexico City, they have to resort to separating themselves from their male counterparts in order to be able to safely ride public transportation, and even when they do ride the specially designated spaces, there is not enough for everyone. Milena ridicules the idea, as she perceives both methods as unrealistic, proclaiming that no one can live imprisoned in their own home due to the government’s weak response to this social issue. Milena and Silvia’s conversation counters the Mexican government’s master narrative regarding women’s safety issues, deeming it impractical; Valladares’ novel produces a feminist discourse on legal-storytelling when her characters critique legal policy, “Viajemos Seguras” places the responsibility on women’s safety on the women themselves versus the implementation of a systemic approach

⁴⁸ Please see Instituto de las Mujeres del D.F.’s official website as it contains the full program of Viajemos Seguras at:
http://www.inmujer.df.gob.mx/wb/inmujeres/programa_interinstitucional_viajemos_seguras_en_el

inclusive of both men and women. When the program separates the sexes and creates specially designed metro carts and color-coded buses for women travelers, the Instituto de las Mujeres del D.F. overlooks the larger issues at hand: solving gender violence in Mexico City's public transportation system is more complex than adding special riding hours for women and pink security buses. The program does not solve the issue and instead the women's group reiterates a patriarchal discourse: the responsibility lies solely on the female rider, not the male, as it is she who must follow the "Viajemos Seguras" program in order to guarantee her safety, it is not a communal effort but an individual one, or rather a gendered one. Valladares' novel exposes and challenges government discourses and practices in present-day Mexico allowing alternative discourses to emerge.

In the novel, Milena narrates a historical run-down of the short list of known Mexican serial killers and while all of them have been involved in murdering women, what she clearly sees is that serial killing is not common in Mexico. In our questionnaire interview, Valladares discusses this very issue stating that the serial killers list is real, as she and her co-researchers had compiled it for the study requested by the 2006 Cámara de Diputados on the nation's femicides. Valladares states that with the major research findings "desmitificamos la hipótesis de asesinos seriales (está en la novela) para explicar que la violencia de las mujeres es un problema estructural, que está entreverado en la cultura misógina y la corrupción del Estado mexicano y sus instituciones [...] Diez años después sabemos más del tema, pero sigue siendo un problema grave de salud pública y social en México" (Valladares *Personal Interview*). Valladares' conclusion echoes Arthur Asa Berger's interpretation of Fredric Jameson's use of postmodernism in urban spaces, "we have changed the way we relate to architectural spaces much more quickly than we have changed our psyches and our social systems" (Berger 103). The Mexican government's

inadequate response to this grave social issue contradicts the modern and progressive image it presents on the international stage, spending over a billion dollars on an ostentatious airplane while its own female citizens cannot safely return home or get to work without being sexually accosted or harassed, this is the postmodern noir of Mexico City.

Spatial justice conceivably exists for those who can afford it, pay for it, trade it and sell it, and yet, security flaws exist even for those who choose selective imprisonment. When Milena stakes out the safe house she believes is holding Eloísa, located in the middle-class suburban neighborhood of Ciudad Satélite, about ten miles northwest of el Ángel de la Independencia, she also observes the lack of community in the area and the accessibility she and her crew will have to the house when saving Eloísa:

No tendremos problemas. Los suburbanos ni locos caminarían por las amplias aceras de sus colonias, ni se les ocurriría tampoco detenerse para que algún peatón ingenuo cruce la calle. Los satelucos prefieren circular a gran velocidad en sus autos de lujo, que compran a plazos con sus tarjetas de crédito, y por las noches penetran a sus casas por puerta automáticas. Pasan días sin encontrarse con los vecinos. La mayoría de las casas tiene grandes bardas que impiden ver lo que pasa adentro. ¿Será que viven cagados de miedo por los secuestros? Eso les pasa por aparentar. (Valladares *Tan frío* 162)

Milena's comments align with Mike Davis observations on Los Angeles, a city rapidly losing public spaces to the privatization of redevelopment and gentrification; the city becomes a carceral space, "Even as walls have come down in Easter Europe, they are being erected all over Los Angeles" (Davis 228). Milena's expressed disdain mocks the false sense of

security she observes in the suburban neighborhood, her description produces the image of a ghost town, as its dwellers are too concerned with their own safety to actually live outside of their walls, walk their streets and get to know their own neighbors. And yet, she with her military-style training and having lived previously in a similar neighborhood, she knows all the flaws of the suburban, cookie-cutter tract homes. Milena as a character refuses to allow the perpetual cycle of patriarchal and misogynist culture to imprison her in her own home and in her own city, where spatial justice is scarce and insufficient, the Mexican feminist detective subverts the narrative of security as imprisonment by running free throughout the city.

When Milena is first introduced, she has just finished a quick run in the city before ending up at el Angel de la Independencia and heading over to Starbucks to meet with her first client Mauricio Fuentes, Eloísa Castellanos' secret lover, who is the first person to report her missing and possibly kidnapped. Milena measures her run as being "not bad at all" but has a preference for running in Mexico City climate, "No me gusta el sol, prefiero correr cuando las aceras exhalan humedad que deja la lluvia" (15). Milena determines when to run not by a governmental decree letting the public know when it is "safe or not safe" for a woman to be running in the city but rather through something practical, she does not like to run in the sun, an inclination most runners would likely have when running outdoors. The second time Milena is at the Angel, she has once again just finished a run, and is now sitting on the monument's footsteps reflecting on her kidnaping case: "Estoy sentada en las escalinatas del Ángel, mirando hacia la calle de Tíber. Me arden las plantas de los pies (no entiendo, si solo fueron quince kilómetros y los tenis tiene suela de aire)" (69). Milena's free movement in Mexico City is uncommon, particularly for a Mexican woman to run through the city streets when she cannot peacefully ride the underground

subway during commuter traffic. Valladares' placement of Milena after she runs is significant, in the two examples previously presented Milena is always near or under the Angel or Nike,⁴⁹ the Greek goddess of war, victory, and sport, who holds a crown of laurels representing victory and a broken chain in the other hand symbolizing freedom. While Nike is a significant goddess in classical Greek mythology, her relationship with Milena takes on a contemporary Mexican context. Milena, like Nike, is a woman in constant motion, when she is not running she is at the gym, training, exercising, kickboxing; when she self-exiled to Israel, she registered for a self-defense course in the Israeli martial art of Krav Maga. As a modern woman, Milena wears Nike clothing as she mentions putting on "tenis Air Pegasus 25 y me largo a correr en Chapultepec" (91) and her t-shirt with "tecnología *dry-fit*" (36) which is in reference to the U.S. multi-national clothing and shoe corporation, Nike, the inventor of Dri-Fit technology, exercise clothing made from textiles that work to evaporate a person's bodily sweat when they are training or working out. Milena's body reinterprets the fixed Angel/Nike of the monument who, when seen, is on the edge of moving almost like an unfinished act; she is about to take off into flight but is not fully there yet. Intriguingly, Nike's unfinished act parallels a conversation shared by Silvia and Antonio Pineda, politician and spouse of Eloísa, where they describe Mexico as "el país de ya 'merito."

After saving Eloísa from her kidnappers, the two colleagues lament some of their losses, specifically not being able to bring to justice the corrupt governor of Oaxaca, allowing Antonio to run for southern state's gubernatorial seat. Instead the fraudulent government will continue the prolonged exploitation of indigenous populations in the state. Upon reflecting on these setbacks Antonio says, "Pero ya ves, Silvia, vivimos en el

⁴⁹ In Roman mythology she is known as Victoria.

país del ya merito, ya merito ganamos, quizás pa' la póxima, ya merito desaforamos al gobernador de tercera, ya merito se organizaba una nueva revolución” (231). Unlike the Greek Nike, who gave out victories at her own discretion, in Mexico those victories are few and far between for those who seek to correct political and social injustices. Yet, Silvia and Antonio’s resiliency emerges, as they both believe in Mexico, “el país de ya ‘merito’ and its people deserve better: —Hay que seguir insistiendo. Si quieres cambiar las cosas, hay que estar adentro —aseguró la doctora diputada. —Para mí, hoy es el momento de volver a empezar —reflexionó Antonio Pineda—. Del pasado sólo quedarán cicatrices. Mañana nadie recordará nada” (233). Whereas Antonio and Silvia will continue fighting from inside the government, with their progressive politics and social justice agendas, Milena endures the battle outside the government walls as the detective is the embodiment of a twenty-first century Mexican Nike, a Mexican mestiza feminist who figuratively and literally exercises her own spatial justice in Mexico City.

By running, Milena converts an inhospitable city into her own as running becomes a public performance she does freely in an urban culture preoccupied with confinement, security and vigilance. As she runs, she exercises her right as a woman to Mexico City, *her* urban space. Running is defiance and she does it every day, as a tool for conditioning her body for physical battle but she also figuratively battles for her autonomy and agency, her right to a place in the city that alienates, violates and negates Mexican women. Milena practices what urban theorist Henry Lefebvre identified as “*the right to the city*, a politically charged idea about human rights in an urban context [...] the need for those most negatively affected by the urban condition to take greater control over the social production of an urban space” (qtd in Soja 6). Once a person becomes acutely aware of the social, political, and cultural structures built to oppress and dominate a citizen, an

intelligent and conscious woman like Milena strategizes alternative methods she can apply to subvert “los territorios de guerra” in her urban context. By running as a free woman throughout Mexico City, Milena is demonstrating her control over a geographical space that has been uncontrollable for decades, from its expansion, to its politics, to the displacement of its poor residents; no one would disagree that Mexico City is a monster of a metropolis. Nevertheless, this petite woman with an 1980s punk style haircut and purple highlights, the contemporary Mexican Nike is able to find her own sense of being, her own autonomous control in an overpowering space through the act of running.

As a runner, she controls her own body and refuses to allow the expansion of global capital along with its consequences such as extreme security measures taken by the rich or the lack of security given to the utmost poor to determine how she connects with her urban space. Without a doubt, Mexico City for most of its inhabitants is a territory of war: political war, economic war, cultural war, and racial war. Yet, Milena exhibits a self-defined victory by freely exercising her body as she runs the city streets. Challenging the government’s legal policies of forcing women to use infantilized pink buses, only further marginalizing and trivializing issues of violence against Mexican women. Milena as the Mexican feminist Nike extends her battles to include other narratives when solving urban crimes of gender violence for she connects with territories inside and outside of Mexico.

While Milena works to find Eloísa and safely bring her back to her loved ones, the private investigator constantly has flashbacks to her time spent in Israel/Palestine, where she met Yossi Levy, an ex-Israeli soldier turned political activist, who becomes her lover. With Yossi, Milena also becomes a political activist, critiquing Israeli occupation and exploitation of the Palestine people; she vocally goes as far as comparing what she is

witnessing with Yossi to what she sees in Mexico with the basic necessity, water. Milena runs in the rain; and yet, water is not available to all citizens:

parece un pipa de agua con las que hacen el reparto en las colonias depauperadas de *Mexico City* [...] Pienso en las elegantes colonias de la Ciudad de México y en las zona marginadas que sobreviven a su lado. Casi siempre la historia es que primero vivían allí los pobres, luego les expropiaron o les malcompran sus terrenos y como arte de magia las colonias se transforman en viviendas de lujo para ricos. (170-171)⁵⁰

Milena's experiences abroad along with her personal and professional experiences in Mexico produce a hemispheric dialogue when taking foreign subjectivities, such as the Palestine experience and bridging them with Mexican urban life. Therefore, Valladares' work produces hemispheric solidarity between two groups who on the surface seem to be an unlikely connection. The narrative also includes Mara, an *indigenista* activist living and working in Oaxaca. She has organized an exhibit in Mexico City to raise money for a poor Oaxacan orphanage; the exhibit highlights Eloísa's photographs taken in various war-torn countries abroad. With Mara, the novel provides the reader with three distinct areas that exist as "territorios de guerra" as experienced by women: Mexico City, Oaxaca and Palestine.

⁵⁰ "Pedir pipa" in poor Mexico City neighborhoods means to request water service through a truck with a water tank and a pipe, la pipa. The water truck is for the poorest neighborhoods who are not part of the "sistema de aguas" or whose service is not working or whose service has been terminated (See http://www.tramitesyservicios.df.gob.mx/wb/TyS/suministro_de_agua_en_carros_tanque_o_pipas)

Nuestros territorios de guerra

Valladares places her detective character in a Middle East nation, historically riddled with powerful conflicts since the Israeli occupation of 1967. In the twenty-first century, this nation continues to be a territory of war having, escalating in Summer 2014 when heavy war fire was exchanged between the Gaza Bank and the Israeli military for weeks. Literary scholar, Barbara Harlow in her insightful 1991 essay, "Sites of Struggle: Immigration, Deportation, Prison and Exile" discusses the parallel connections between Israeli/Palestinian and Chicana/o literatures and histories of the late twentieth-century. She identifies both territories and their respective identities as sites of struggle, in constant combat, yet interestingly defines these sites for "potential social transformation" (150) as entities like "border becomes bonds among peoples, rather than the articulation of national difference" (152). Harlow's essay provides an early hemispheric dialogue uncovering strategic negotiations by people of the borderlands when fighting for their territorial sovereignty. Though the scholar does not include a Mexican context, instead focusing on the Mexican Diasporic experience of Chicanas and Chicanos, Valladares' novel extends Harlow's discourse when the author places two Mexican feminists in the Middle East. The author adds another geographical point of reference to Harlow's work when she introduces Third World women's bodies as sites of struggle.

While Milena diligently works to recuperate Eloísa from her captors, she decides to investigate Eloísa's life story, while also consciously not allowing herself to get too close to her subject. Milena employs the use of nicknames in order to assure herself some distance, not wanting to become too involved and possibly overlook potential clues to the case: "Fracciono a la gente como estrategia para mantener cierta distancia emocional. Si pensara en las víctimas o en los asesinos como si fueran personas completas, sentiría tanta

conmiseración o tanta rabia que no podría actuar con objetividad” (19). She names Eloísa “Ojos Brillantes” as it is the first feature Milena admires when she sees a photograph of the female photojournalist. Milena gains access to Eloísa’s computer hard drive and downloads the data onto her personal computer, hacking and breaking into every password-protected file, demonstrating her aptitude for modern-day technology. In fact, Milena’s apartment is a technophile’s dream, as she has every up-to-date gadget imaginable and of high quality as well. She appears to only use Macintosh/Apple products, narrating that she sends emails via her “iPhone” (233) and reads the newspaper on her “iPad” (36) to do research for her case. Milena’s use of twenty-first century technology is telling of the impact it has had in contemporary Mexico. Milena’s hacking skills which she uses to help solve the crime would be considered part of a current movement throughout Latin America known as *ciberactivismo*, the use of modern-day technology and social media to bring to light injustices produced by capitalism, corruption and oppression. Media Studies scholar Tommaso Gravante defines *ciberactivismo* in Mexico as “la apropiación y uso de los medios digitales [...] es parte de una práctica cultural y política que encuentra espacio en el portaequipaje de toda la sociedad “otra”, por otro lado podemos añadir que la práctica de ciberactivismo además de ser un fenómeno social y político es también un laboratorio de innovación y experimentación de medios y modelos sociales” (Gravante 51). For Milena the use of technology is indispensable as it allows for her to reflect on her case from a different spectrum, Milena’s private investigator skills continue to include those of the U.S. hard-boiled detective, asking questions, speaking to people, going into unpermitted areas, but what makes Valladares’ novel innovative is its use of technology as a tool for justice, although not everyone interprets its use in the same manner.

In spring 2014, a Cancun couple decided to post a video on Facebook where the viewer hears the couple interrogating their female domestic worker. The worker is about to leave when they ask to see her purse and in it they find a Tupper Ware container with two *chiles en nogada*. They condescendingly inquire as to why she did not eat the meal they had given her in their home. The domestic worker timidly explains that she wanted to share the meal with her son after work. The couple is baffled, accuse her of not only lying to them, but also of robbery because she is taking the chiles outside of their home and did not ask for permission to use the Tupper Ware to take the chiles to her own home. Wanting to set an example for all “potential” domestic workers, the couple post the video online and the response was not the one for which they were fishing. The video became an online sensation, and a hashtag was created under the name of “#LadyChiles” and people attacked the couple in every medium possible, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Memes as viewers were disgusted by their elitist behavior. Hackers went as far as posting the couples’ home phone numbers, email addresses and work information, riding a fine line between cyberjustice and cyberbullying. Mexican newspapers picked up the story and reported on the incident along with the Mexican public’s reaction to the video. Recently the newspaper *Excelsior* spoke to the couple who claim to be the victims in this situation, “A través de su cuenta de Facebook, #LadyChiles aseguró que no ha salido de su casa en días por las agresiones que existen en su contra” (“#LadyChiles se defiende”). While this particular example does not showcase the uses of technology in an empowering format it does demonstrate the infiltration of technology in every day Mexican life. Mexico’s Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía reported that in 2013 over 35% of Mexican households have a home computer, nearly 47% above the age of six use the Internet, and 30% have

Internet at home (INEGI).⁵¹ The uploaded video has also spurred on the filing of a claim on behalf of the humiliated domestic worker by El Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación (Conapred); Conapred is investigating if any forms of discrimination were used against the female worker (“El Conapred abre queja de oficio”). The data from INEGI tell an interesting narrative, there is a steady rise in the use of technology by Mexicans, this has been noticed by cyberactivists as well as the Mexican government.

Mexican writers, journalists, and activists have employed Twitter, another technological medium as an important tool to reach a wide audience on socio-political issues occurring in Mexico during real time. What does this mean? The average Mexican citizen can report on Twitter what is happening at local political protests via video or photographs before the traditional press gets a chance to publish their reports. Writer Paco Ignacio Taibo II, journalists Lydia Cacho, and Sanjuana Martínez are known to employ their Twitter accounts to share information or provide real time accounts with their followers; former Mexico City mayor Andrés Manuel López Obrador caused a sensation as reported by the newspaper *El Universal* when he opened a Twitter account and used it as a cyber town hall forum to respond to questions and issues from his constituents (“López Obrador abre cuenta de *Twitter*”). Sanjuana Martínez “retweets” requests from family members of missing people who want to share digital flyers with photographs and personal information in the hopes of finding their missing loved ones. As technology in Mexico seems to be democratic tool, it does come with its issues. In mid-2014, Enrique Peña Nieto’s presidential administration passed a bill into law popularly known as “Ley Telecom” but officially titled as “La Ley Federal de Telecomunicaciones y Radiodifusión” which claims to reform current Federal Telecommunications policies into a more

⁵¹ Please see “Indicadores sobre sociedad de la información, 2010 a 2013” at www.inegi.org.mx.

democratizing medium while at the same time giving the Mexican government full control of the Internet, especially radio waves and outgoing cell phone messages. Paco Ignacio Taibo and Elena Poniatowska have taken to Twitter to discuss what they call cyber censorship, in 2012 both joined forces to create and promote a socio-technological movement known as Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (MoReNa), which is described on its official website's tagline as "Red Social del Movimiento Regeneración Nacional" that works towards democratizing the flow of information in all twenty-first century telecommunications formats (Morena.org). While Milena's use of technology does not necessarily engage in the same manner Taibo and Poniatowska do, Valladares' inclusion of a modern female character that is skilled in these particular technological vehicles expands the canon of Mexican detective fiction. Since modern technology is a recent phenomenon Milena's character captures how deeply infiltrated technology can be in every-day life, as one does not have to step outside of her/his own home to know what has occurred in the world throughout the day. As a staple in the developing world, technology allows for some areas of life to become more efficient, but the modern-day paradox exists: one can order books online and have them delivered the next day, while women in Mexico repetitively experience acts of gender violence, subjugation, and oppression.

As Milena researches online information on Eloísa/Ojos Brillantes, she comes across Eloísa's book, a collection of photographs depicting Afghan women in a Pakistani refugee camp. Along with the pictures, is an interview Eloísa gave discussing her experiences:

En la segunda entrada del buscador, aparece un catálogo de fotografías de mujeres afganas en un campo de refugiados pakistaní; hay una larga entrevista en la que un reportero a Eloísa le pregunta por qué se convirtió en corresponsal de guerra: [...]

Van por la vida mirando el mundo a través de las rejillas de tela como si fueran jaulas coloridas. Como ellas, no puedo elegir. Siempre regreso a los lugares donde el cuerpo de las mujeres es un territorio de guerra.

¿Qué le pasa a esta dama? Me levanto, me sirvo otro trago escribo en automático en el pizarrón: El cuerpo de las mujeres como territorio de guerra. (18)

Milena, intrigued by Eloísa's mantra "women as territories of war," writes the phrase on her graphic map, a wall where she places any material that may relate to her case. Later on in the narrative, Milena goes back to this phrase when she learns that Eloísa spent many years documenting women in different war-torn regions of the world. She continues reading Eloísa's book with her experiences in distant lands. At one point, in a bout of frustration Milena asks out loud why Eloísa would travel so far to document issues that are prevalent in their home country of Mexico:

¿Cuándo te nació la conciencia? Por qué te fuiste tan lejos, Ojos Brillantes. Si no se necesita ser talibán para joder mujeres. Podrías haberte ido a Oaxaca, a Chiapas o aquí nomás a Chimalhuacán..., qué sé yo; en cualquier lado de este bendito país. Tampoco se necesita llevar un burka para estar presa. Tienes razón, todas estamos cautivas. Y no solo las presas, las locas o las monjas. Avasalladas. Sometidas a los deberes cotidianos o a un mal marido, a un padre autoritario o a los hijos. Cercadas entre murallas de prejuicios. Subyugadas rendidas a los mitos amorosos. Vendidas, intercambiadas, doblegadas, torturadas, encadenadas. (40-41)

Milena's monologue unfolds the multiple ways patriarchy is experienced in women's daily lives. Focusing on Mexico, the detective does not hold back in listing inequities and unjust

treatment of women, subtly alluding to the Mexico's most historic and colonial "mito amoroso": Malinche and Hernán Cortés.

Indigenist chiefs gave adolescent slave Malinche along with twenty young women to Cortés and his men. From Cortés' letters to King Carlos I, readers know that she was constantly at his side during the conquest of Mexico. He mentions her twice briefly in his letters of 1520 and 1526 as his *lengua*, his translator and the Tlaxcalan Codex often depicts her next to Cortés translating on his behalf (Calderón 117). Literary scholar Héctor Calderón documents the changes in Malinche's image, from the noble and powerful indigenous mother, doña Marina as illustrated by Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, to mid-twentieth century's "Hijos de la Malinche" where modern writer Octavio Paz demotes her to being "La Chingada." Calderón marks the transition as one that happened a century earlier; during the Latin American wars of independence an unsigned narrative surfaces, *Jicotencatl* (1826), depicting the transfiguration of the indigenous noblewoman, "In the novel, Marina's fate is sealed as "la Malinche," traitor to her people. The conquest is seen as an allegory of the newly born patria, the Republic of Mexico, trying to rid itself of Spanish influences. Marina is characterized as an accomplice to evil, foreign influences that can corrupt and divide the nation. She uses her feminine guile to bring down the Indian nations. She becomes the Mexican Eve and her original sin is betrayal" (119-120). Octavio Paz's portrayal of Malinche transmits to Mexican (and by Diasporic connection Chicana) women, as they all become a disposable and transferrable object; he uses misogyny and patriarchy to explain Mexican modern nationalism and gender identity politics through a narrative of distrust for "los hijos de la Chingada," but at the root the distrust truly lays with "las hijas de la Chingada." Chicana feminist writer Cherríe Moraga when dialoguing with Paz's work in her seminal

collection of essays, *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (1983) asserts that “Slavery and slander is the price she must pay for the pleasure our culture imagined she enjoyed” (118). The narrative of the willing female submissive in Paz’s work oversimplifies a complex situation. Paz’s patriarchal couple is disputed by María Elvira Bermúdez’s *La familiar del mexicano* where she dismantles Paz’s colonial family and produces a new decolonial Mexican woman and man. Myriam Laurini takes on the task proposed by Bermúdez when she represents an unwilling woman through the survivor story of Zindzi, the Afro-Mexican jarocho who fought against the rich white male student who objectified and try to lure her with false promises of love and adoration. Zindzi refuses to be aligned with sacred Mexican icons, like the Virgin of Guadalupe, historically tied to discourses of victimization and submission of women. She tells Morena her story as a resilient and proud survivor. Like Bermúdez and Laurini, Valladares brings the representation of new Mexican women and men into the twenty-first century via the strong and independent characters of Milena, Silvia, and Eloísa.

In Eloísa’s book, Milena reads the silver lining the photojournalist sees when confronted with lives destroyed by acts of war, especially for women who are the most vulnerable in these instances, “Sin embargo, en medio del horror, aflora a ratos lo mejor de las personas: las mujeres se ayudan entre sí, cuidan a los hijos de otras como si fueran suyos. Resisten, hablan, no se dan por vencidas” (40). The collective resistance is what gives Eloísa hope, that women can uplift each other and resist together even under the most dire of circumstances. Valladares explains that although the present situations are difficult real life experiences, resistance has always existed amongst women, “el cuerpo de las mujeres es un territorio de guerra en cualquier lugar del mundo: ya sea Tlalnepantla, Oaxaca, Palestina, Pakistán. Dicho sea en mexicano ‘En donde quiera se cuecen habas’. Pero

el otro subtexto de la novela es retratar a las mujeres que se niegan a ser víctimas. Ellas luchan, resisten, se organizan, son solidarias o activistas” (Valladares *Personal Interview*).

Valladares’ novel allows for an alternative and decolonial narrative to exist when speaking of women’s bodies as territories of war, the survival of a long, historical legacy of resistance endures from the era of the indigenous Malinche to María Elvira Bermúdez’s Mexico and resistance to the colonial father and family, to Morena’s ethnographic narratives documenting Mexican women’s histories, to twenty-first century women like Milena, Eloísa and Afghan women refugees. The collective bond is witnessed throughout the novel, as Milena and her best friend Silvia constantly depend on each other for support, are each other’s confidants and have a long history in the fight for women’s rights in Mexico. When Antonio Pineda, Eloísa’s spouse, receives a background report he had done on Milena before hiring her to find his wife, he reads "Según las averiguaciones de su jefe de seguridad, Milena Ruiz es una criminóloga experta en feminicidios. Fue una alta funcionaria en el sexenio anterior. Con Silvia Plata resolvió algunos casos importantes. Ambas son muy conocidas en su campo y tienen fama de cabronas" (35). The report’s assessment is correct, Milena along with Silvia are unapologetic “cabronas,” they represent a woman who refuses to back down, to subjugate herself to the deplorable patriarchal culture, a woman who physically and metaphorically battles through her own wars, leaves with scars as she continuously prepares and conditions for the future.

Somos de otra generación

The theme of water is present throughout the novel and it cements the narrative as one of resiliency and resistance among Mexican women. When Mara, the Oaxacan *indigenista* activist is watching the local news on television and witnessing Cipriano

González, a known criminal, be sentenced to federal prison, she is elated for the small victory of her community. Mara imagines Silvia, Eloísa and herself as triumphant Mexican Sirens: “Las tres estarán como sirenas bajo del agua, denunciando los abusos contra las mujeres e infantes en Oaxaca ante decenas de cámaras y micrófonos” (228). Mara subverts the Greek mythology of the Sirens traditionally depicted as female sea creatures, noisemakers and femme fatales whose enchanting songs and cries lured male sailors towards them with the intent of shipwrecking and killing the men at sea. Mara’s description of the three women keeps the myth’s most basic element: their call, but redefines its original purpose. As Mexican Sirens, Eloísa, Silvia and Mara’s call does not produce death and destruction, rather they are crying out for life and justice for their country’s most marginalized and oppressed. Mara places herself and the other women in front of a public forum, with modern-day tools such as cameras and microphones that will help magnify their protest songs becoming unavoidable as they are geared towards fighting for and with the most vulnerable group in Mexico, indigenous women and children. By subverting the mythology, Mara converts the mythical icons of the Greek Sirens into Mexican female empowerment and collective resistance, moving away from the traditional Greek and Mexican patriarchal discourses.

Although Valladares’ original title for the novel was *Mujeres de agua*, it was changed to its current title when the novel was published under Editorial Planeta, but the author fuses the elemental force through the use of powerful imagery. In the fifteen days that the novel takes place, rain occurs nearly every day in the narrative, which is typical during the summer months when tropical storms take over urban afternoons. Beautiful descriptions of a wet Mexico City are interspersed throughout the narrative, creating images like “Las calles huelen a lluvia recién escampada. Las hojas de los árboles brillan como cristales y

traslucen el débil sol de la mañana” (117) and “El aguacero de anoche engendró un cielo inusitadamente azul” (193). Yet, the imagery of water in the novel is also tied to women’s bodies especially in moments of sexual expression. When Eloísa and Mauricio clandestinely meet in their hotel room for the first time, the narrator describes their sexual encounter as a transformation of Eloísa’s body “Eloísa se volvió líquida; lágrimas, lluvia, mares, espejo de lago que había más allá de la ventana” (59). The scene provides the reader with a woman willing and capable of giving into her sexual pleasure, without the guilt and remorse inculcated by religious and patriarchal discourse (read: Paz). Valladares depicts a beautifully poetic moment between Milena and Yossi, Milena’s lover, an ex-Israeli soldier has finally arrives in Mexico and the two reunited and reconnect after many months of separation. In the moment of their sexual encounter, Milena narrates powerful descriptions of her perception as a sexual being, she converts her body into symbols and metaphors of water, becoming the liquid force that destroys, cleanses and nurtures the Earth. Yossi is almost nowhere to be found during her inner monologues, as Milena places herself at the center of this vivid scene: “Creadora de mundos,” “Soy agua derramada” and “Diosa de la lluvia (212-213). She then moves to include herself in the plural, with other women joining her liquid litany:

Mujeres de agua que besan y tiemblan. Mujeres que eyaculan. Mujeres inundando páramos. Destilo espejismo. El diluvio arrasó con el pasado. Escaldó las tumbas de mis muertos. Arrojó mis fantasmas al olvido. Todo es ahora. Persisto como la gota de agua que perfora muros. Sorbo de agua fresca en el desierto. Agua que enjuga la sangre derramada. Cuerpos femeninos flexibles, como de agua. Mujeres de agua. (213)

Her final call is to herself, inundating the reader with her release, “Soy una presa liberada” (213). Valladares’ Mexican woman is life and earth, while simultaneously embodying resistance, protest, and resiliency. Milena, a fighter determined and capable of exercising her autonomy, challenges discourses that paint women as dull and insubstantial when she vocalizes phrases like “Solo quiero agarrarlo por los güevos” (201) and “el hijo de su puto padre” (207), dismantling a culture nationalist discourse prone to patriarchy and gender violence. Valladares’ novel revolutionizes the Mexican male identity with the inclusion of men who are just and work towards solidarity alongside the narrative’s female characters.

In one of the many conversations between Milena Ruiz and Silvia Plata, the female politician confesses to her detective friend that she is having an affair with a married man. Milena recalls that her friend is a survivor of domestic violence from her first marriage and notices that Silvia is happy to share the news about this love affair. As Silvia describes her relationship, she also sets forth the course for decolonial relationships between men and women. Though she cares for her lover, she wants to remain free of institutional control granted to social structures such as marriage and the government. Silvia has a moment of self-reflection when she states, “me vas a decir que parezco hombre, pero lo que me gusta de mi hermoso es tenerlo ratos, que cada ocasión sea intensa; no quiero amanecer con él cada mañana, ni que vayamos juntos al supermercado o a las reuniones familiares. De ninguna manera quiero negociar con él mi tiempo libre” (111). Although Silvia describes her behavior as a masculine one, she is not attempting to masculinize her female sexuality or identity; instead the Congresswoman includes traits traditionally ascribed to men and extends them to also include female identity. She does not desire to become a man, her desire is to be with one, while at the same time enjoying the sexual rights and privileges Mexican men have delighted in for multiple centuries. She decolonizes heterosexual

relationships by embracing multi-dimensionality in female sexuality, as opposed to the repressed submissive depicted by Octavio Paz. Silvia's lover, a journalist whose name is not given to the reader, epitomizes the new Mexican male of the twenty-first century.

When Silvia first mentions her male lover to Milena, she shows her friend a picture of him. Milena immediately notices his striking features, “—Parece descendiente directo de Cuauhtémoc. —Es del color de la tierra, delgado, ojos almendrados, con una coleta que le cae sobre la espalda...Por cierto, tampoco tiene vellos... —¿Será alguna mutación masculina posmoderna?—interrumpió Milena” (28). Though Milena says this to Silvia in a joking manner, one must stop and analyze this male figure in the narrative. When Mara sees Silvia at a public event she also notices the same features Milena does in the previous scene, “Silvia Plata, viene del brazo de su novio periodista, el que parece descendiente directo de Cuauhtémoc. El joven luce igual que el príncipe azteca de las estampas escolares: joven, delgado, lampiño y con la piel lustrosamente oscura” (183). Clearly for both members of this love affair, they do not wish to hide it behind closed hotel room doors and secret apartments, as they are seen together in public. It is also important to note the many times that the male journalist's racial features are described, constantly connecting him back to an important indigenous ruler, the last ruler in Mexica history. Silvia, a mestiza woman does not have any racist and racial complexes, as she adores this intelligent man along with his indigenous physiognomy, “tiene la piel tostada” (112) she tells Milena. Silvia's relationship evolves away from the secret relationship discussed in Chapter Three in Myriam Laurini's *Morena en rojo*. Mayan Paulino Cach Chi and Margarita Covarrubias' secret love affair could never come into fruition due to Paulino's refusal to change his indigenous name and because of it shame and hardship would come to the family and any future children, “Tú no entiendes. Te cierran las puertas. Tus hijos estarán condenados a la

marca del mestizo, serán de segunda...” (Laurini 26). Although the conservative characters in *Morena en rojo* practice and allow racial hierarchies to continue social divisions, in *Tan frío como el infierno* racial difference is celebrated and embraced.

Silvia’s lover is also described by the two women as being a feminine man, as she defines some his interactions reminiscent of nurturing acts women commonly perform in caring relationships, “Creo que mi hombre es bastante femenino” (110). Silvia’s observation does not emasculate her male lover, rather she enhances his male identity and makes sure to inform Milena that with his feminine traits he continues to remain a man, “Al mismo tiempo, es super varónil” (110). The conversation between the two friends extends to discuss the power dynamics within the relationship, when Milena asks, “Por cierto, ¿cómo se siente tu hombre con una mujer poderosa? —Está orgulloso. Escribe artículos en la revista de la Cámara. A veces me manda información entre líneas. —Será porque es más joven, o porque es de otra generación o qué... —Tal vez los chavos son menos machos, no sé...” (112). The male journalist’s lack of *machista* traits is what attracts Silvia to her lover, and it has helped the relationship last for multiple years. Valladares continues to redefine the new Mexican male initially proposed by María Elvira Bermúdez’s *La vida familiar del mexicano* and then fictionalized in her short story “Las cosas hablan” via her feminist detective character’s spouse Bruno Morán. In Bermúdez’s narrative Bruno is never described as a machista, though it is assumed that he does not possess that trait as he was able to decode María Elena’s secret messages, demonstrating a strong unity between the couple, and he most definitely was not described as a man with feminine attributes. Valladares’ couple moves away from the constraining institution of marriage, and promotes a different relationship between men and women, one where both individuals feel empowered within in their relationship without the limitations traditional colonial gender

roles. While introducing a twenty-first century Mexican male character, the writer also creates an intimate hemispheric relationship between Milena and Yossi.

Even though Yossi is not Mexican, he is a man whose history is as complex as Milena's, having been born in an area of conflict and traveled throughout different parts of the world working as a social and political activist. When he arrives on Milena's doorstep in Mexico City, he explains to her that he had been in Mexico for several weeks hired by Antonio Pineda to work on a project with indigenous communities in Oaxaca, "Trabajo con ellos. Es un proyecto de energía alternativa, en una comunidad, Los Girasoles. Vine con Anwar. Hace días que se suspendió todo" (213). Milena and Yossi first meet when she left Mexico in self-exile after having lost a child due to a brutal and violent attack ordered by Cipriano González, a deposed federal officer rumored to be a rapist, who was found guilty of physically assaulting a female secretary who refused his sexual advances. Milena was in charge of his case and was relentless in making sure the government responded to the accusations, giving them no choice but to fire the commander from his position. He went into hiding, while Milena left Mexico to soul search in the Middle East. Once she arrived in Tel Aviv, she signed up for a self-defense course in Krav Maga, Yossi was the instructor. In a series of multiple flashbacks, Milena returns to Palestine/Israel. She becomes a political ally, supporting and assisting Yossi and his fellow activists. Milena's memories of Palestine oscillate between the Middle East and Mexico; upon entering Hebron, one of Palestine's entry points, she immediately begins to make the comparisons between the two nations, "Vamos a Yatta, una villa Palestina, polvorienta y marginada, como nuestros pueblos" (164) and "Todos los árabes son Mohamed algo, igualito que nosotros, muchos se llaman José: José Juan, José Esteban, José María, José Eduardo..." (170). She witnesses how the Israeli Occupation has displaced the Palestine people from their lands and as Israel claimed them

as part of their nation. These political and physical displacements remind Milena of those occurring in Mexico City, “Lo mismo pasó en San Ángel, en Las Lomas o en los basureros de Santa Fe” (171). She remembers how as a young child her parents took her to a poor neighborhood near Las Lomas de Chapultepec and watched as police officers were evicting poor families from their makeshift homes in order to exploit the newly discovered mines in the area, “uniformados aventaban a la calle las pocas pertenencias de esa gente; otros tapiaban con ladrillos las entradas a las cavernas para que no pudieran ocuparlas de nuevo. Chale, me parezco a Pedro Infante: ustedes los ricos y nosotros los pobres. Por cierto, Pepe el Toro es inocente” (171). Reflecting on her experiences with Yossi in diminishing Palestinian land, she says out loud to herself that she is not sure which place is worse, Mexico or Palestine/Israel.

Yossi’s arrival in Mexico results in assisting Milena with her operation to save Eloisa from her kidnappers. Milena with Silvia’s help has discovered that Cipriano is behind Eloísa’s kidnapping on behalf of the Oaxacan governor who is embroiled in a political battle with Eloísa’s husband, Antonio Pineda. Yossi, like Milena when she was with him in Palestine, acts as her support system and acknowledges her as the leader and mastermind behind the rescue operation. Yossi does not question Milena’s tactics, instead he is impressed that the petite Mexican woman is fully prepared for battle, “—*Is your operation legal?*—inquirió el hombre. —Obviously not. —*Indeed. It’s your choice, baby.* —*Sure!* —*Ok, we go*—dijo Yossi” (220). An intimate transnational alliance occurs with this couple, as neither one is obligated to support the other, yet they do. While the relationship is not a long lasting one, Yossi leaves to another adventure abroad, and Milena stays behind in Mexico City to continue building her private investigation business, Valladares’ fictional characters offer new possibilities for twenty-first century relationships. Milena and Yossi

acknowledge that they are not your typical couple, especially in their communication style, as they both do not fully speak the same language, but are able to interconnect via their linguistic code switching. Milena and Yossi know multiple languages and speak them with each other in order to communicate. When Milena describes her relationship with Yossi to Silvia, she acknowledges that although there is a bit of an age (she is older) and language difference, they do not allow it to determine their relationship. Both women are amused at how different the younger generation of men is in comparison to their generation of men:

—¿En qué idioma hablan? —Yo en *spanglish*. Aprendí algunas frases en hebreo. Ya sabes lo mío no son los idiomas; tengo una tara idiomática (será también la culpa de mi trastorno de atención) y una pronunciación *awful*. —¿Y Yossi? —Conmigo habla sesenta por ciento inglés; estudió en Londres. Diez por ciento hebreo, treinta por ciento español con groserías. También habla árabe. Desde niño vivió en varios países. —Lo importante es que te entiendes con el muchachito, ¿no? (121)

Milena not only code switches with Yossi but she does it throughout the entire narrative, even having a favorite English saying, “*not bad at all*” (15) when things seem to be working out in her favor. While code switching between Spanish and English is not new to Mexico, as linguistics studies have shown, the manner in which Milena embraces her forked tongue innovates the genre and challenges notions of Mexican national identity. Linguistics studies have theorized that in Mexico speaking Spanish is tied to expressing a form of patriotic solidarity and ethnic identity tied to the nation (Hidalgo 133-134). What then does it mean for a Mexican feminist detective to speak not only Spanglish but other languages as well? If speaking Spanish is a reinforcement of Mexican national identity, as linguist Margarita Hidalgo has stated above and Milena, as a woman, as a feminist, as a global citizen is not

included in this discourse, then one way to defy this limited identity that excludes her is through her language, her tongue, with no connotation of betrayal for speaking another language such as English in Spanglish form. With it she not only defies patriarchal Mexican politics, but she also creates alliances and solidarity with other marginalized groups, such as Yossi, Palestinian activists, Afghan women, indigenous women whose first language was colonized by the Spanish conquerors. The nationalistic project fails to acknowledge these groups, Milena is acutely aware the marginalizing effect traditional Mexican identity politics has on the excluded. The Oaxacan *indigenista* activist Mara, like Milena, fully comprehends the experiences of living outside Mexican nationalist discourse through the narratives she provides on Oaxacan politics paralleling the novel's thematic use of *secuestro*/kidnapping.

The theme of *secuestro*/kidnapping permeates throughout the narrative, beginning with Eloísa's abduction, Milena learns that the abductors, associates of the corrupt Oaxacan governor hope to use the photojournalist as a pawn in his game of dirty politics against his opponent, Eloísa's husband Antonio Pineda. Before anything can happen between both parties, Milena along with Yossi and her associates rescue the woman and are able to arrest the kidnappers along with Milena's long-time nemesis, Cipriano González. Ironically, the "Casa de Seguridad" where Eloísa was being held captive was not secure at all, as Milena and her operatives were able to infiltrate the home with military tactics planned out by the feminist detective, rescue Milena and apprehend the criminals. The "safe house's" lack of security allows for the discussion of a much larger issues in Mexico. The novel takes the reader back to Oaxaca 2006, when the southern, mostly indigenous state experienced a political reawakening as educators and their allies took over the streets of the capital, Oaxaca City. Demanding that then governor Ulises Ruiz step down from his position due to

the false promises, stolen educational funds and non-existent support. When Mara leaves Oaxaca for Mexico City to prepare the fund raising exhibit with Eloísa's photographs, she stops by an old friend's bar in Tlalnepantla. He asks what bring her to the city and she explains to him that she was organizing a benefit for a clinic in Oaxaca, "—Los camaradas de la organización estamos consiguiendo dinero para equipar una clínica de salud allá, en los Girasoles. —¿Te falta mucho? —Aunque usted no lo crea, la construyeron, la inauguró el gobernador, hubo fotos. A la semana siguiente, se llevaron los muebles. Supongo que para inaugurar otra clínica, otra comunidad..." (129). She continues explaining to her oblivious friend the many conflicts political activists and protesters have encountered in the state: freedom of speech violated, police brutality, lack of public funds, school buildings in disrepair and without resources. When Mara returns from her Mexico City trip, she recounts one of the worst clashes between governmental forces and the movement as she describes the air as one that "Huele a guerra" (181). Though some have been killed and disappeared, the mobilizers refuse to give up, and reset their protest, "al unísono vociferan que se tiene que saber en todo el mundo, que quieren a los suyos de regreso que se largue el gobernador mafioso" (184). By illustrating the uprising Oaxaca experienced for seven months in 2006 and placing the event into a novel published in 2014, Valladares demonstrates that little change has happened in Mexico the last eight years, the presidents and governors may be different, but the politics remain the same.

While the Mexican government claims to be introducing and implementing reforms that will improve and move Mexico towards progress, vocal opponents to the reforms see them as a re-appropriation of civil liberties and human rights. Valladares' novel depicts the kidnapping of Mexican lands through financial and physical occupations by multinational corporations. Barrios like Santa Fe, that formerly housed the urban poor, were

redeveloped and gentrified in the name of progress. Currently the new neighborhood accommodates corporate business centers for Fortune 500 Companies like those belonging to Eloísa's lover, Mauricio Fuentes, and has a mammoth-size shopping plaza designed for the high-class and ultra-wealthy. A modern and glossy building-mall, it sells consumer goods that the average Mexican could never afford to buy at retail price, giving the urban space a lot of gloss with little substance behind it. In 2014, many activists, writers and scholars vocally objected against the Mexican government's supposed reforms regarding Mexico's petroleum industry, that since the era of President Lázaro Cárdenas had been nationalized and is the national pride of Mexico, but President Peña Nieto altered the Mexican Constitution which now allows for Mexican petroleum to be privatized by foreign investors under the guise of helping Mexico enter into the era of new and alternative energy for the nation. ("Mexico Signs Landmark Energy Law"). Oscar winning Mexican director Alfonso Cuarón, repulsed by the government's reforms, wrote and published an open letter to Peña Nieto asking him to justify the lack of democracy in the nation when it comes to such an important Mexican resource that affects all Mexicans citizens and not just Peña Nieto's presidential administration or those who will most benefit from the selling off of an important Mexican institution, "el proceso legislativo y democrático de estas reformas fue pobre y careció de una discusión profunda, y la difusión de una campaña propagandista que evadió el debate público. No estoy informado porque el gobierno que usted embarca no ha compartido conmigo—con nosotros, los mexicanos—elementos indispensables para entender "el alcance y el sentido de las reformas"" ("10 Preguntas del ciudadano Alfonso Cuarón"). From Pemex becoming an open public entity for the benefit of the foreign investor, to educational reforms that tax educators and schools already in dire conditions, to displacing the urban poor for excessive shopping centers out of reach for the average

citizen, Valladares' novel underscores the larger secuestro/hijacking taking place in Mexico as one that is political, social, economic, and cultural.

Crónica de un secuestro

Each chapter in Valladares' novel moves like a countdown, as though one is reading with a ticking bomb with headings for time, location, and character for every scene in the novel. The rapid cinematic pace of the narrative performs the classic traditional ritual in detective fiction which makes the genre appealing: it can be a finish-reading-in-one-sitting book. But, unlike the fictional worlds of Poe, Doyle, and Christie that lack the social-ethical-public contexts, *Tan frío como el infierno* stays with the reader after the last page. The novel gives multiple perspectives and experiences, transitioning from the Casa de Seguridad in el Estado de México where Eloísa is being held captive, to Milena's *habitat* in La Roma, to Mara's walks in the countryside of Oaxaca, to the deserts of Palestine. It is as though Valladares wants her reader and narrative to perform a hemispheric and geographical dance throughout Mexico and abroad, taking the reader to various points of social, political, economic and cultural locations. And yet, at the heart of the novel lies Mexico City and environs, the greater metropolitan areas of the central plateau, from Puebla to Cuernavaca, to Estado de Mexico, Ciudad Neza, and Toluca. Mexico City is the center of culture, religion, art, and government for the nation. It is also postmodern mega city that continues to change and grow, as its growing populations move in and through the various cityscapes. Like her predecessors, María Elvira Bermúdez and Myriam Laurini, Patricia Valladares' twenty-first century Mexico City has its women warriors, who fight against daily social injustices. The professor, clinical psychologist, and writer activist relates real-life documented experiences to her reader, denouncing the lack of accountability at various

levels of the Mexican nation. Her feminist detective novel addresses social ills occurring in areas of Mexico, Oaxaca, Juárez, Mexico City, and bridges struggles with other marginalized groups creating alliances. With the mystery story centered on the kidnapping of photojournalist Eloísa Castellanos, Valladares' macro-story tells a narrative of Mexico's biggest *secuestro*: the hijacking of Mexican democracy and autonomy. Though it is not explicitly mentioned throughout the novel, the anniversary of Mexican Independence, celebrated on September 15th pervades the story.

The novel takes place in the month of September, counting down to exactly 15 days, Milena having rescued Eloísa two days prior to the national celebration. During this month, Mexico as a nation and Mexico City as the capital emerge in full regalia to mark the anniversary. Shopping centers decorate with the traditional colors of the Mexican flag, papier-mâché liberty bells are hung from various public spaces, faces of important independence fighters like José María Morelos and Father Miguel Hidalgo are cut into *papel picado* banners, and signs cry "¡Viva México!" Physical symbols of the independence are everywhere, reminding its citizens that Mexico is a free nation and yet, in *Tan frío como el infierno* there is little to almost no mention of *el quince de septiembre*. While the narrative does not directly address the upcoming celebrations for Mexican independence, monolithic symbols like el Monumento a la Independencia are continuously present in the novel. From el Angel, a symbolic historical and cultural crossroads, where Milena rests and reflects after a run, to the subtle mention of the city's decorations, "Por lo visto a Mauricio le sigue gustando Reforma y ahora más con sus adornitos septembrinos y sus luces tricolores" (234) along with the anticipation for the annual "Grito" at the city's historic center in front of the Palacio Nacional, independence in the novel is a static symbol. Valladares' book argues that Mexico's freedom has been sold off to the highest bidders, Enrique Peña Nieto, Carlos

Salinas de Gortari, Carlos Slim, PRI-PAN, Emilio Azcárraga Jean, U.S. multi-national corporations; a small elite group dominate and control Mexico's economy; every presidential election has been plagued with accusations of corruption, rigged votes, and electoral fraud, leaving the average citizen in what may feel like the cold depths of hell. Even the title in Valladares' novel, *Tan frío como el infierno* refers to the misery Mexico is currently in. Milena mentions the connection while she's in the freezing Middle Eastern desert with Yossi, "En verano la temperatura aumenta hasta cincuenta grados. En cambio ahora, según mi inseparable iPhone, estamos a menos siete grados, o sea hace un puto de frío como del infierno de Dante (no estoy loca, en la *Comedia* el infierno era helado)" (171). The feminist detective is correct, in Dante's *Inferno* at the center of the ninth circle of hell is a frozen ice-covered Satan, sent there by God to spend his eternal days. Though the Christian interpretation as to why Satan is in hell produces a good versus evil mythology, it does not suffice for the analysis of this novel. I turn to Elaine Pagels work, *The Origin of Satan* (1995), where the Princeton University scholar of religion proposes the character of Satan to be looked upon as the "other": "I invite you to consider Satan as a reflection of how we perceive ourselves and those we call "others." Satan has, after all, made a kind of profession out of being the "other"; and so Satan defines negatively what we think of as human" (Pagels xviii). Once again, Milena is not wrong; Mexico is hell for women, for the indigenous community, for the urban poor, for the sex worker, for the disappeared, for the uneducated, for the *other*. And yet, Patricia Valladares, Milena Ruiz and the other characters refuse to give up, the novel as a whole incarnates Silvia Plata's mantra: "Hay que seguir insistiendo. Si quieres cambiar las cosas" (255). *México, hay que seguir insistiendo*.

Chapter Five

Conclusion:

When Crime Fiction Matters

*Y por segundos
todo se vuelve
a la primera página
innumerada
blanca
sedienta
de una gota de tinta
que le recuerde
la impureza
del tiempo viviente
y que parece murmurar
"Escribe en mí
escribe
¡Qué terrible
morir limpia! [...]*

Lucha Corpi "Quedarse quieto" 1980

Introduction

What happens when detective crime fiction is left in the hands of Mexican feminist writers? What are their contributions to this popular literary genre invented by a nineteenth-century American poet and storyteller living in the streets of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore? In the cases of María Elvira Bermúdez, Myriam Laurini and Patricia Valladares, these Mexican writers twist, bend, and reinvent Edgar Allan Poe's original formulaic genre into a literary force that dispels any notions of women writing "soft literature." The founding father of the detective genre would never have imagined the various ways his genre would be reinvented over a century later by female writers south of the U.S.-Mexico border. Feminists Bermúdez, Laurini, and Valladares leave the ghosts of C. Auguste Dupin, Sherlock Holmes, and Hercule Poirot in social and literary worlds of the past. Dupin, the elusive and detached detective, and Holmes, the cerebral and arrogant investigator, would find it difficult to survive in twentieth and twenty-first century Mexico,

in the social worlds represented in the pages of these three Mexican writers. Each one of the writers through their intelligent and independent female detective characters humanizes the genre; they reject the detached, aloof, intellectual detective because in Mexico in order to write about crime and justice, a disengaged detective does not suffice. The individual crime plots are certainly invoked by the three writers; however, detectives María Elena Morán, la Morena, and Milena Ruiz enter a world of social and gender crimes. It is crime fiction on a larger scale against national, international, and hemispheric backdrops. Within the national, they dismantle the gender dichotomy produced in works such as Octavio Paz's, *El laberinto de la soledad* challenging discursive violence against women in "Los hijos de la Malinche." In the international, crimes involve multiple borders, the trafficking of women and children. And in the hemispheric, these writers portray crimes committed against entire races and cultures from the Americas, to Africa, to the Middle East.

Writing and Social Activism

These Mexican writers and their detective characters perform what Héctor Calderón calls "social and literary activism" (188) when speaking of Mexican-American writer Sandra Cisneros. Turning the critical eye south of the border, I have encountered women writers who, like Cisneros, are writer-activists. Each one, through her own written works, is "Staking out her political and literary territory" (Calderón 174) in twentieth and twenty-first century Mexico, a complex landscape with an ever more complex history. Crime fiction in the hands of these three writers becomes transformative fiction as the women along with their characters perform social and political activism. María Elvira Bermúdez is a woman of many firsts: first woman to graduate in Mexico with a law degree; creator of

the first Latin American female detective character; one of the first female judges in Mexico City; and a vocal champion of Mexican women's rights. Mexican writer and journalist Ignacio Trejo Fuentes recalls the mentorship he received from Bermúdez as a young writer in *la Capital* along with the struggles she encountered as a woman forging her path in Mexico City, "Nos contó, por ejemplo, que fue la primera abogada litigante en este país, y que sus colegas le recriminaban: "¿Qué haces aquí, en este mierdero de hombres?" Y dijo que luchó porque las mujeres mexicanas tuvieran derecho a votar en elecciones gubernamentales" (Trejo Fuentes). He also recalls that her advocacy was limitless, sharing her experience as a judge for Mexican newspaper, *El Nacional's* annual "Premio de la novela" where she supported *Utopía gay* (1984) by José Rafael Calva only to be interrogated by the two other male judges as to why she supported "novela de jotos" to which she replied "Pinches viejos retrógradas" (Trejo Fuentes). Bermúdez's writer-activism is sharply focused in María Elena Moran's detective stories, especially in "Detente, sombra," a multi-faceted Mexican woman's world, filled with female activists fully capable of producing the needed changes in Mexican society.

Journalist and writer Myriam Laurini has developed her activism in Mexico and abroad. As an exiled writer, she has been a vocal supporter of women's rights as well as South American political refugees. In 1999, she among other Argentinians and Mexican writers, artists and intellectuals published a letter in Mexican journal *La Jornada* demanding then-Uruguayan president José María Sanguinetti to respond to human rights violations committed by the country's military dictatorship (1973-1985) where fellow poet Juan Gelman's grandson and daughter-in-law were among the nation's disappeared ("Insisten a Sanguinetti que dé respuesta a Gelman"). Laurini's commitment to women's issues has also extended into mediums of popular culture. In 2008, the writer produced a

script for Mexico's Convención sobre la Eliminación de Todas las Formas de Discriminación contra la Mujer (CEDAW) who along with other women's rights organizations published a newspaper serial as a graphic storyboard with a diverse group of Mexican women cartoonists, dedicated to the informing the public on gender discrimination. For Laurini her ideological position enters into her writing, her personal and professional experiences inform her creative literary production. In an interview when asked how Mexican women writers of "el género negro" differ from male writers she asserts:

La mujer de la mirada es distinta, la lucha de nosotras es por la equidad de género, la igualdad de oportunidades, el tema de la violencia que viven las mujeres. Esas luchas nos hacen evidentemente distintas, a la hora de ponernos a escribir nuestro trabajo es diferente, hay una sensibilidad ante la problemática que nos afecta. Lo importante, es que sea buena literatura, no si escribe un hombre o una mujer, aunque a los hombres les cuesta trabajo escribir de mujeres [...] (Torres Pastrana)

Laurini is not alone in acknowledging the power in women's writing when depicting women's voices and issues, similar to Laurini, clinical psychologist, social activist and writer Patricia Valladares consciously allows her professional and personal activism to crossover into her fiction. When discussing her favorite authors of the detective genre she mentions the names of Eliot Ness, John Connolly, and Raymond Chandler among others, but she recognizes that the list consists of mostly male writers. Therefore, when she started her Ph.D. in the Creative Writing Program at Mexico City's Casa Lamm, she had three goals, "1) escribir novela negra, que es un campo casi masculino, 2) que la detective fuera mujer, y aunque mantuve algunos clichés de la novela negra: borracha, autodestructiva, ruda, al mismo tiempo fuera femenina, 3) Mostrar la violencia de género y el desastre de la guerra

contra el narco y la corrupción política [...] Por eso estoy muy interesada en analizar cómo vemos las mujeres esos temas” (Valladares *Email Interview*). As one of the few Mexican women currently writing in the genre of detective-crime fiction, Valladares’s *Tan frío como el infierno* does not apologize for its social, political and cultural locations, instead the writer along with her female protagonist chastises those who dare to be unmoved and apathetic citizens. From Bermúdez to Laurini to Valladares, each writer-activist confronts and resists the lack of disengagement in the classic male writers of the genre by reforming and politicizing their creative literary works. Their activism and writing parallels female writers of the north, Mexican-American/Chicana feminist writers like Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga who have consciously linked their professional and creative lives as “writer-activists and community leaders” (Calderón “A New Connection, a New Set of Recognitions” 297).

The Origins of Modern Mexican Feminism and Crime Fiction

María Elvira Bermúdez who took on the patriarchal and colonial rhetoric of “lo mexicano” with her study, *La vida familiar del mexicano*, critiqued the limited nationalist identity marker and reinterpreted the traditional Mexican family. As a Mexican feminist Bermúdez’s study should be placed side-by-side with Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) and Rosario Castellano’s “Sobre cultural femenina” (1950). During the Post-World War feminist movement, Simone de Beauvoir declared, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”(267), with this well-known statement de Beauvoir addresses the socialization and regulation of the female sex. Her seminal second wave feminist text, *The Second Sex* included a critique on not only gender relations but also the heterosexual institution of marriage and family, where she discusses the second-class treatment of

women within these two important clusters. The French philosopher builds a platform for other feminist writers to interpret and redefine according to their own social locations, this becomes especially true for women who exist outside of de Beauvoir's French, middle-class context. Rosario Castellanos' "Sobre cultura femenina" has provided many Mexican and Chicana feminist writers a launching point for discussing gender subjectivities in Mexico.

Castellanos like de Beauvoir was also a philosopher, having received her Master's degree in Philosophy at Mexico's UNAM. Castellanos' essay inquires "¿Existe una cultura femenina?" (260), to which she responds by critiquing the patriarchal culture that controls, modifies and builds feminine gender roles that force women to adhere to them. She looks towards the colonial family, the patriarch, the brother, the father, who through cultural traditions inculcate and dictate women's lives and bodies. Women do not have an essence, Castellanos argues and like de Beauvoir she concludes that female identities are socially and culturally constructed. Castellanos' gender politics depict her modern critical thinking in mid-twentieth century Mexico where she generates a contemporary feminist discourse for women intellectuals and justifies Mexican women's voting rights, gained three years after her essay was written. María Elvira Bermúdez, who by 1955 was an accomplished lawyer and judge in Mexico City, was also a first-hand witness and activist to the women's movement in Mexico. Bermúdez continues Castellanos' philosophical undertaking when she introduces her socio-historical study on the life of the Mexican family, one of the cultural foundations of Mexican identity. Bermúdez is the first woman intellectual to directly engage in her writing with Mexican male philosophers and the intellectual search for "lo mexicano"; she begins with Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de la soledad* and his construction of the alienated Mexican identity based on the differences between men and women.

The intellectual female writer responds by asking her readers to turn their eyes to the traditional Mexican family and like Castellanos concludes that Mexican machismo has commanded the family dynamics via the female figure creating a dichotomy in woman's identity. According to Bermúdez, men create a state of nepantla, "Ahora bien, en sus relaciones amorosas y familiares, el mexicano está, indudablemente, [en] nepantla," hence, creating a false sense of Mexican identity, "la forma en que los falsos conceptos de hombría y feminidad impiden que los mexicanos sean sencillos y humanos y las mexicanas, dignas e independientes" (*La vida familiar* 100-101). Bermúdez's study anticipates future intellectual writing, specifically from Mexican-American intellectuals, writers and artists such as Sandra Cisneros and Lucha Corpi. Both Chicana feminist writers address issues of the Chicano family within their writing, Cisneros with her short story collection *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991) and Corpi's Chicana detective novel, *Black Widow's Wardrobe* (1999) represent the violence Mexican and Chicana women along with their families experience in Chicano patriarchal family and institutional structures. Although there is nearly a forty-year gap between Bermúdez and the Chicana writers, the themes addressed by both groups of women continue at the turn of the century making Bermúdez's study an essential tool when confronting Mexican machismo.

While challenging notions of machismo, Bermúdez insists, "esos rasgos tiende mi esfuerzo, no a determinar si el mexicano es mejor o peor que el extranjero. Lo que importa es que el mexicano de mañana sea mejor que el de ayer y que el de hoy" (*La vida familiar* 11). As the only female intellectual of the time period to publish under Leopoldo Zea's direction for the collection *México y lo mexicano*, she dared to take on the old boys club head on by continuing her feminist work through her literary contributions.

In her own creative literary production, she takes on the task of producing an improved Mexican with the introduction of her heterosexual couple, María Elena and Bruno Morán in “Las cosas hablan.” The couple decolonize familial practices rooted in gender hierarchies and female suppression when they encounter a colonial patriarch in Francisco Balvanera, an abusive husband who had been holding his wife hostage, Rosalía Balvanera. She, as the object wife-daughter, becomes an interest to her father who years previously had abandoned her, but returned because he believed Rosalía had married into money. Unlike the Balvaneras, the Morán couple does not engage in sexist gender dynamics privileging the male over the female, instead the couple understands one another as each other’s counterpart, communicating in innovative ways that illustrate a new generation of Mexicans, forging paths for new characters like Morena in *Morena en rojo* to emerge and redefine Mexican identity.

Morena’s presence in Mexican detective fiction begins to pay dues owed for the minimal literary presence of one-third of Mexican racial and cultural heritage: African subjectivities in Mexico. “El silencio es cómplice...” (*Morena* 41), *Morena en rojo*’s feminist detective states when fighting against social practices and a judicial system plagued with corruption, racism, sexism, and violence. While institutions of justice participate in being silent and maintaining silence, Morena’s narrative is anything but silent. The multiple women she encounters all freely share their stories of survival, and Morena is in the field to document, comment, lament, and cry out for help when the injustices are a heavy emotional burden. Readers encounter la niña jetona, who resonates with Morena throughout her travels, catalyzing her quest to help children exploited as sex workers and human organ donors, to Violeta a reporter from Nogales who shares with Morena her past as a successful business woman who had the opportunity to explore her sexual identity as a

sex worker, and María Crucita, la niña-vieja who dared to “soñar en pequeño” only to be bought, traded and used by a *padrote* and *madrota* on both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border. Laurini’s narrative also breaks the silence left behind Jorge Videla’s dictatorship in Argentina and the survivors attempting to put back the pieces in its aftermath.

The author’s hemispheric literary dialogue links both northern and southern hemispheres with Mexico and Argentina to retell marginalized histories and through that very process she adds a third geography: Africa. The African presence in Mexico was not an academic study until 1946 with the publication of Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán’s *La población negra en México: Estudio etnohistórico*. Afro-Mexican activist and Catholic priest Glyn Jemmot Nelson, who since 1984 has been working in Guerrero’s Costa Chica, initiated recent Black pride movements in Mexico. He is founding member of México Negro, an organization dedicated to promoting black pride and cultural contributions of the Afro-Mexican community. These two examples provide some of the few instances where Mexico’s black presence is highlighted before the 1992 national recognition when the Mexican government declared, during the five-hundred year anniversary of the Spanish arrival to the Americas, that Mexico’s *tercera raíz* was African.

Similar instances have occurred in the United States as reported by National Public Radio. In 2009, due to “decreasing cordial relations between Mexican and African-American in the U.S.,” Chicago’s National Museum of Mexican Art curated an exhibit *The African Presence in Mexico* to uncover and bridge the complex racial histories between these two important groups in the United States (“Same People, New Context”). Laurini is at the forefront of this discourse, with Morena’s father, El Black, an African-American engineer who migrated south for business, but decided to plant his own roots in Mexico. Concurrent with the Black presence in Laurini’s Mexico is the Juárez phenomena, the

femicides that have been documented since 1993 and have gained international attention from human rights groups and activists. *Morena en rojo*, published in 1994 encompasses all of these discourses, underscoring the dangers for a racialized, poor, marginal, rural and urban woman.

Detective-activist Milena Ruiz blasts onto the literary stage with such feminist vigor that by the time the reader finishes the novel, she/he is left wanting more. Patricia Valladares, a native of Mexico City, has been contributing her own activism to the fight against gender and sexual violence in Mexico. Her research and clinical work opened the first shelter for battered women in the nation, and she has participated in a national study researching the endemic issue of femicides. In our interview, she states that her feminist upbringing began in the intimacy of her parents' household, "Recuerdo con gusto que en la primaria tuve que dar un discurso sobre Sor Juana que mi padre escribió, y era súper feminista, escrito en femenino. Muchas veces las pláticas de sobremesa eran sobre diferentes causas sociales y la defensa de los derechos de las minorías" (Valladares *E-mail Interview*). The author brings a rich personal background to her novel, filled with a techie-bilingual tongue only a twenty-first century reader would understand, as the evolution of language has now become saturated with the modern day machinery, which permeates into our daily existence.

Tan frío como el infierno takes place in three geopolitical points, Mexico City, Oaxaca and Palestine/Israel. In Mexico the presidential administration of Felipe Calderón has ended and Enrique Peña Nieto's has just begun, the shifts between political parties has occurred from the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN) back to the former ruling party Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). The political parties may have changed but the rulers and their ruling strategies remain the same. The narrative documents Mexico City's

growth and progress, the urban development along Reforma, Starbucks Coffee shops by el Ángel de la Independencia, WalMart sharing “commercial” space with the pyramids of Teotihuacán, an ultra modern and futuristic Terminal 2 at the Bénito Juárez Internatioal Airport, big enough to be its own city with hotel rooms, luxury shopping stores and state-of-the-art security system. And yet, Milena, the feminist detective protagonist is solving the kidnapping case of Eloísa Castellanos. Security in the mega-metropolis is flawed, where everyone is in danger of being caught up in its whirlwind. From Eloísa, a well-travelled and popular photojournalist whose own husband, a Mexican congressman could not save her from the city’s lack of security, to the everyday woman who must ride the capital’s underground subway at hours assigned during the day or buses marked pink because they are considered safer than any of the other vehicles in the city. The gendered oppressions experienced in the city exist in the literary world of Valladares’ novel. Her social location as a scholar-writer-activist informs the multiple issues discussed by the various characters along with the diverse physical and bodily geographies, that continue to be “territorios de guerra.” This novel is a Mexican post-punk decolonial feminist chronicle, unapologetic for the consistent and real-life reminders that *lo mexicano* no longer has a hold, as the sole identity to which women must adhere.

In the Shadow of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

While the three writers do not directly mention the term feminism in their texts to describe their female detective characters, all three writers leave imprints in their works of the most well known Mexican feminist, *el fénix de América*, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Like the mythical phoenix that rises from her own ashes, Sor Juana’s presence emerges across all three literary works through her secular intellectual writing. From the confinements of

her cell, the colonial nun advocates for women's rights and independence in seventeenth century New Spain. Her final and last "profesión de fe" written in 1694 and signed with Sor Juana's own blood, serves as a symbol of her defiance to the colonial constraints of her gender as she literally uses her own bodily fluids to document her final act of insubordination. The presence of the colonial feminist nun in twentieth and twenty-first century Mexican feminist detective fiction contextualizes the struggles present day women in Mexico continue to encounter, while the writers, like Sor Juana, work towards a decolonial feminism, actively critiquing and dismantling gender oppression and violence.

María Elvira Bermúdez evokes Sor Juana in her first short story, "Detente, sombra" through its title but also through the imprisonment of Georgina Banuet, an intellectual and literary critic, who declares herself to have a Sor Juana complex after falsely being accused of murder, only to find herself awaiting trial and searching for the truth ("Detente, sombra" 206). In *Morena en rojo*, Morena, after feeling unsettled about a case of child sex trafficking and organ harvesting in Tijuana, turns to modern day Mexican feminist writer, Rosario Castellanos to help with her concerns, "Saqué de la bolsa *El eterno femenino*, que llevaba por la mitad; leí varias páginas y tuve que volver porque no me había enterado nada, sólo se me habían grabado dos versos: <<detente, sombra de mi bien esquivo, / imagen del hechizo que más quiero...>> (128). Laurini creates a metacommentary as Castellanos, like the three detective fiction writers, also returns to Sor Juana in her posthumous *El eterno femenino* (1975) and the only words Morena can remember from Castellanos' drama are Sor Juana's verses. In *Tan frío como el infierno*, the post-modern world of twenty-first century Mexico City with its trendy coffee houses, sleek shopping centers and hip neighborhoods, appears with the free and independent runner, feminist detective Milena Ruiz. As she walks through Chapultepec Park, she comes across Sor Juana's statue, and

recounts, “De nuevo, la estatua de Sor Juana y sus redondillas en letras doradas: <<Hombres, necios...>> (91). The detective recites the famous poem used by many feminists as a shield, like Sor Juana had done in her era, against contemporary patriarchy, misogyny, and sexism. Yet, unlike Sor Juana who was kept in her cell, Milena freely explores her city from the Monumento a la Independencia to Chapultepec Park while working to end violence against women nationwide and abroad. The intellectual women writers argue for the presence of Mexican women and not just any kind of woman, but a thinking woman, who no matter her social, racial, and economic location, is capable of fully engaging, critiquing, and analyzing her positionality in contemporary Mexico. The shadow of Sor Juana in these three writers represents a genealogy of Mexican women intellectuals who return to colonial Mexico through Sor Juana as she is the founding fighter for women’s independence and critic of human rights violations. As feminist writers, they are part of her tradition and continue her legacy through their active engagement in their own communities.

Crimes without Borders

Therefore, why *does* crime fiction matter? María Elvira Bermúdez, Myriam Laurini and Patricia Valladares produce a crime fiction that raises the awareness of social, political, and economic crimes occurring throughout the Mexican nation and abroad. Never before have readers had such an in-depth cognizance of real-life crimes; these writer-activists have consciously produced work that while written as fiction does not necessarily make it fictional accounts, as gendered and domestic violence continues to be a prevalent issue for many women. A recent study by investigative journalists Deborah Bonello and Erin Siegal McIntyre on Central American women who migrate north into the United States through

Mexico report that an alarming 80% of women and young girls experience sexual assault and/or rape when attempting to move through Mexico into the United States.⁵² Mexican lawyer Elvira Gordillo, who assists migrant women and girls who get trafficked into prostitution, states that the Central American migrant women “know the price to pay for getting to the United States. The price is being sexually violated” (Bonello and Siegal McIntyre). In 2013, CNN México stated that every year about 112,000 Mexican women report having been raped, this number is equivalent to one sexual violation happening almost every five minutes in Mexico and this is only on reported cases, the number could be much higher if we were to take into consideration unreported sexual assaults. The news report continues with the disclosure of a 2012 study done by Amnesty International that found that for every 10 reported rape cases, 2.3 are sentenced in a court of law (“La violencia sexual en México”). The Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (INM) de México organized an open forum and published a conference discussion titled “Sesión de la Comisión sobre la Condición Jurídica y Social de la Mujer (CSW)” dedicated to women’s safety issues in their country. Many of the organization’s members agreed, “la muerte de una mujer por razones de género es un delito de la más alta gravedad para el Estado mexicano” (“Violencia de género”). The congressional session went forth to document and demand the incorporation of programs designed towards creating a more equitable environment, seeking support from people at all levels of the Mexican government and society. INM’s goals are aligned with Bermúdez in her *La vida familiar del mexicano* where she stated nearly sixty years earlier that Mexico will not improve as a nation if justice does

⁵² This number represents an increase from Amnesty International’s previous report from 2010 that estimated the statistical data to be at about 60%. Please see: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR41/014/2010/en/8459f0ac-03ce-4302-8bd2-3305bdae9cde/amr410142010eng.pdf>

not exist for women, and if both men and women do not commit to building new Mexican relationships for future generations. If not, the cycle of these gendered crimes will continue occurring in the backdrop of a “reformed and progressive” Mexico.

While Mexico’s statistics on violence against women are dire and deadly, one can also shift her/his view north, to a First World power like the United States to witness the manner in which American women experience “liberty, progress and the pursuit of happiness.” In 2014, several U.S. news and social media outlets gave attention to Columbia University Emma Sulkowicz’s case, an undergraduate who reported a rape to her university officials accusing a fellow male student of having sexually violated her in her own dorm room. The university waited seven months to grant Sulkowicz a hearing and she later found out that two other female students from the university had accused the same male student of rape. All three cases have been dismissed by the university’s administrators, leaving Sulkowicz in shock “I was so naïve because I guess I thought they would just believe me because I was telling the truth [...] I didn’t expect the school was going to try to not take my side” (“Columbia University Student”). In response to the university’s complete disregard for the students’ cases, she has decided to focus her senior thesis research on a performance piece titled “Mattress Performance or Carry the Weight.” Every day for the remainder of her senior year Sulkowicz will carry her mattress throughout the campus until the university dismisses her rapist or he decides to willingly leave the university. She has called her performance “endurance art” to symbolize the emotional weight college women endure knowing that the person who sexually assaulted them continues to roam free throughout the university. Sulkowicz’s example is one of many as university women are beginning to call attention to the systemic disregard to gender violence that occurs in institutions meant to cultivate knowledge and academic

freedom. Lawsuits have been filed accusing several U.S. universities and colleges of violating Title IX, a 1972 educational amendment enforced by the U.S. Department of Education that implements non-discriminatory practices in areas of public and higher education. Yet, even with the laws and policies, women continue to experience sexist discriminatory practices as the university level.

Gender oppression and violence against women has also been uncovered in other U.S. social and cultural institutions. Recent media attention has been given to professional athletes in the multibillion-dollar sport, the National Football League (NFL). The industry has a history of ignoring reports that involve their own athlete's arrests in cases of rape, sexual assault, and domestic violence. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that while a great amount of public attention has been given to "the long-term damage NFL players suffer from concussive hits that are inherent to the game [...] the league has consistently turned a blind eye to the blows sustained by women at the hands of many NFL players over the last two decades" ("The NFL's Willful Ignorance"). Stories like Sulkowicz's and many others like hers takes my research north of the Mexico-U.S. border, back to the birthplace of Poe and the genre itself, to include writers of the Mexican Diaspora, Chicana feminists and artists as well as U.S. Latina writers who are also expanding, pushing, and evolving mystery, detective, crime fiction with their own socio-historical experiences and stories. Lucha Corpi, the first Mexicana-Chicana detective writer, who is also a well-known poet and essayist, confronts issues of spousal rape along with its legal and historical implications in her detective novel *Black Widow's Wardrobe* (1999). Her narrative symbolically addresses Mexican and Chicana women's history with rape by returning in her narrative to Malinche and the conquest, the original site of struggle, as women's indigenous bodies become real and symbolic "territorios de guerra." With her poetic sensibility, Corpi knows first hand

what the task ahead means as her poem declares, “Escribe en mí / escribe / ¡Qué terrible / morir limpia!”

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