

Property, Mobility, and Epistemology in U.S. Women of Color Detective Fiction

DISSERTATION

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By

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Abstract

This project explores how U.S. women of color detective fiction novels interpret and revise methods for obtaining and transmitting knowledge while operating within political and economic climates that discipline and occlude oppositional narratives, historiographies, and identifications. U.S. women of color detective fiction emerged in the early 1990s during a time when institutions began to incorporate historically marginalized perspectives, but also when American and transnational corporate initiatives sought to stigmatize and profit from poor women of color. The novels featured in this project make use of a genre that is invested in creating exceptionally intelligent and capable detectives who seek to identify and correct social injustice. In the process, these novels employ historiographic epistemologies that are typically elided in Anglo-European philosophical and narrative productions. Historiographic epistemologies are theories concerning the encoding and transmission of knowledge that also serve as mediations regarding the composition of history, testimony, and narrative. Through the use of historiographic epistemologies, U.S. women of color detective fiction novels reveal the creative and narrative-building aspects of logical reasoning employed by detective fiction and rationalist discourse more broadly.

Moving from the local with Barbara Neely's *Blanche on the Lam*, to the transnational with Lucha Corpi's *Black Widow's Wardrobe* and Alicia Gaspar de Alba's

Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders, to the global with Charlotte Carter's *Coq au Vin* and Lupe Solano's *Havana Nights*, this project identifies connections and distinctions among these texts that in turn enable a more nuanced understanding of how precarity is constituted through the pervasive, implicit division between domestic (white) space and public (surveilled) space. In their use of a genre that reflects institutional and social structural alignments and in their employment of non-European epistemologies such as second sight, jazz, *conocimiento*, spiritual *mestizaje*, and public motherhood, the novels featured in this project also emphasize the fact that categories of difference are dynamic and that the uniqueness of each individual experience within the U.S. matrix of institutional and social power creates unique modes of resistance. As a result, the larger critical contribution of this project is its identification of connections between place-based, decolonial, and global womanist theories of subjecthood and space that test the predictability of the gender-race-class intersectional lens of analysis.

Dedication

This document is dedicated to Olga, Andrei, Katie, Jim, and Hugo

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In her discussion of the collective history of African American women's critical and coalitional works, Patricia Hill Collins notes that "Historically, much of the Black women's intellectual tradition occurred in institutional locations other than the academy" (18). Who knew that detective fiction would become one of these other institutional locations, especially given that detective fiction has been read a traditionally masculinist, xenophobic, and gender-conservative genre? In fact, U.S. women of color detective fiction novels contribute important reinterpretations of the processes of logical reasoning located in detective fiction. From its early manifestations in nineteenth- and twentieth-century British and American literature, detective fiction is a genre that is fundamentally concerned with how we arrive at knowledge and the various insidious dangers that threaten the environment surrounding the detective. In the early 1990s, a group of texts authored by African American, Mexican American, and Cuban American female authors emerged to reconsider and challenge some of the precepts of the genre. In their epistemological reconceptualization of "working a case" and in their evocations of multiethnic, transnational, and decolonial feminisms, the novels explored in this project offer important new ways of thinking about how we come to know what we know and the processes of narrative building.

These texts follow in the general vein of revisionist tendencies located in U.S.

women of color literature, specifically their investment in reconceptualizing of some of the smoothing functions of the European novel with respect to linear time progression, narrative closure, and individualist ethos. At the same time, U.S. women of color detective fiction highlights the political and ideological undercurrents of some of the core epistemological maneuvers located in detective fiction and in Western rationalist discourse more broadly. Specifically, U.S. women of color detective fiction unsettles the naturalized maneuvers of logical process of retroduction, or working backwards from a piece of evidence to produce an explanatory narrative, and abduction, or the production of a plausible hypothesis to explain a seemingly connected series of events. As a result, these novels read the processes of logical abduction and retroduction as methods of narrative building that require a seamless concealment of inconvenient facts, evidence, and context. Furthermore, the detectives in these novels employ historiographic epistemologies and acquire knowledge through various “backchannel” methods like gossip, displaced testimonies, and unofficial documents to solve the case and reveal gaps in dominant historical accounts and official documents. While uses of the detective fiction genre to engage in the problems of social justice have been explored by critics such as Frankie Bailey, Stephen Soitos, and Maureen T. Reddy, the alternative epistemologies and methods for transmitting knowledge employed by characters who must contend with intersectional factors of inequality remain to be studied.

This introductory chapter aims to define the terms and focus of the project by providing a brief comparative historical, contextual, and formal contextualization of U.S. women of color detective fiction through the critical framework of multiethnic feminist

critique, critical deconstruction, and studies of epistemology in the detective fiction novel. I begin by aligning the formal and critical paradigms of U.S. women of color literature with a certain set of detective fiction novels that emerged in the early 1990s. Then, I discuss how U.S. women of color detective fiction novels make use of conventions from both the classic whodunit and the hardboiled to ultimately offer a counter-critique to some of the conservative features and epistemological conventions of both sub-genres.

Situating U.S. Women of Color Detective Fiction

While the early 1990s is generally acknowledged as a time of institutional diversification, it was also a period during which the United States launched foreign and domestic policies and trade agreements that impacted, and continue to impact, poor women of color in the Americas and in other international zones. Recognizing detective fiction as an “epistemological genre *par excellence*” (McHale 16), certain U.S. women of color authors took to the detective fiction genre to offer alternative epistemologies including public motherhood, backchannel historiography, affective epistemology, queer temporality, spiritual activism, and *testimonio*. In these novels, the U.S. women of color sleuths all work from the position of being identified, in the words of W.E.B. Du Bois, as being “the problem” in public policy. Many of the protagonists work in, love in, and perform social justice work in (and from) the same marginalized communities that are merely pegged as abandoned economies by official and public discourse accounts. At the same time, these detectives’ standpoints and resources enable and disable certain methods

of detection and knowing, and the woman of color detective approaches challenges with a set of tools to which other detectives are not privy.

The social and institutional critiques with which U.S. women of color detective fiction authors engage are not absent from other literary forms in which U.S. women of color authors have elected to work. Indeed, discussions of legibility, representation, and social justice critique are interrelated in contemporary fiction by U.S. women of color authors. Many U.S. women of color authors have used and experimented with the novel form to encourage readers “to understand that ‘history’ is recorded in multiple material forms—written in documents, told in oral stories, and inscribed on the body” (Romero 67), as well as to recognize both the English language and Western literature as colonizing forces. Consider, for example, the following examples: Diane Moon Glancy’s (Cherokee) parallel narration of the Lewis and Clark Expedition from the “official” journals and Sacagawea’s point of view in *Stone Heart: A Novel of Sacajawea* (2003); Julia Alvarez’s aversion to determining a singular narrative point of view in *In the Time of Butterflies*; Octavia Butler’s signification of the body as textual evidence in *Kindred* (1979); Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s highly stylized experimental poetry collection *Dictée* (1982) categorized as an “auto-ethnography,” which forces a reconsideration of the light-hearted nature of the postmodernist “cut-up” technique in light of repressed histories on behalf of colonized subjects; and Maxine Hong Kingston’s opener to her “memoir” *Woman Warrior* with a series of paraphrased quotes from her mother, who performs a kind of “secondhand” narration on behalf of an aunt who had disappeared.

These works, and others, appear keenly aware of the politics of representing

voices and experiences as well as the violence of selective memory. We can also recognize themes of disillusionment in contemporary U.S. women of color literature in regards to setting up ideal examples of community and social justice practices. Texts like *Paradise* (1997) by Toni Morrison, *So Far from God* (1993) by Ana Castillo, and *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992) by Christina García emphasize the difficulty of establishing solid community ties in the context of oppressive national, heteronormative, and patriarchal histories. They also reveal the continued impact of imperialism and late capitalist enterprises on poor communities of color and migrant communities. These texts draw out a complicated line to walk between celebrating a self-preservational ethos and a social justice agenda. Yet another important feature of literature written by U.S. women of color authors is their use of non-European cultural and narrative traditions to critique and destabilize both the popular realist mode and dominant U.S. historical and literary canons.

U.S. women of color detective fiction contributes a unique subset of texts to the literary field that investigate the ways in which certain epistemological processes come to be valued over others and how intelligence is a politically charged rhetoric. As a genre, detective fiction reflects social reality, including the workings of social and legal institutions, while also offering a space for counter-institutional critique located within the figure of the detective. By the nature of its conventions, detective fiction is invested in representing modes of authority as well as providing a critique of these modes on the part of a protagonist who situates him or herself in opposition the dominant legal order. Lastly, the “playful” features of the genre offers an opportunity to analyze alternate forms

of power that may not be found (as of yet) in the real world. As Stuart Hall has written, popular culture is “a theater of popular desires” (477), a space to play out both regulatory and revisionist fantasies and desires. Perhaps more than any other literary genre, detective fiction both reflects and deconstructs social conditions deemed relevant by the author by employing the lens of a pervasively popular fictional archetype who is super-intelligent and wary of institutional corruption.

U.S. women of color detective fiction builds on previous interventions on behalf of authors of color and white feminist authors to offer new prototypes for the detective persona. However, their novels also offer an important emphasis on intersectional modes of oppression that the alternative canon of revisionist detective fiction works sorely lacks. For example, while white women authors were writing mystery and detective fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the mysteries produced by authors such as American author Anna Katherine Green and British writer Agatha Christie were aligned with the upper-class perspective of the classic whodunit. In contrast, early twentieth-century African American authors Rudolph Fisher and Chester Himes took up the hardboiled approach in their counter-institutional and working-class detective points of view, but their texts have also tended to espouse certain homophobic and sexist representations. One exception to these single-focus revisions to the mystery genre is Pauline Hopkins’ work. However, it is not until the 1990s that a woman of color was written as a detective character without being relegated to the sidekick role.¹

¹ One text that challenges the move to categorize early women-authored detective fiction as entirely “domestic” (Nickerson 197) and upper-class is African American woman author Pauline

In relation to the set of texts discussed in this project, it is important to emphasize the political and mobilizing backbone of the group term “women of color” as well as the legal and economic conditions that forced the need for this mobilization. The term “women of color” emerged out of a radical refashioning of feminist politics by African American, Native American, Asian American, Chicana and Latina women in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This coalition of women aimed to expand the pressing issues of feminism beyond the scope of white and middle-class concerns and ideologies. The term “women of color” was first used at the National Women’s Convention. According to Ross in her talk during the Sistersong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, during the National Women’s Convention, a group of black feminist activists came forward with a statement, and Asian American, Native American, and Chicana feminists asked to be included.

Because it no longer made sense to call it a black feminist statement, the coalition came up with the term “women of color.” Ross notes that the coalition did not see this

Hopkins’ Gothic-inspired detective fiction serial novel *Hagar’s Daughter* (1901). Hopkins interrogates the racist antebellum period and the issues of due inheritance and racial passing. Hopkins’ interrelation of race and gender as a force that allows abuses and murder on the part of those who benefit from racial and gender privilege stands as distinct from white feminist and lesbian detective fiction. Indeed, my study would start with *Hagar’s Daughter* except for the fact that the Black female detective in the text, Venus, has to go undercover as a man to complete her detecting, a factor that none of the texts featured in this study have. Moreover, Venus is not the central protagonist in the novel, nor even the main detective: Venus works as a maid for one of the main characters and is employed for her “inherited hoodoo powers” (Soitos 64) to help the central detective (white and male) figure, Henson, solve the case. And, the conditions impacting Venus’s ability to sleuth and deliver justice are different between the periods of antebellum and immediate postbellum and the 1990s. With respect to women of color in lead detective roles, it would be a mistake not to acknowledge the work of actors like Pam Grier in Black Action Films of the 1970s. However, these productions were financed and produced by white producers looking to engage African American audience members and carry their own issues regarding representation, authenticity, and empowerment. See Kara Keeling’s discussion of the African American woman detective in Black Action Films in her book *The Witch’s Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (2007).

term “as a biological designation—you’re born Asian, you’re born Black, you’re born African American, whatever—but it is a solidarity definition, a commitment to work in collaboration with other oppressed women of color who have been ‘minoritized’” (Plaid, “For Your Women’s History Month”). In sum, the term “women of color” as it was initially invoked pushes for an intersectional connection among all women, and especially non-white women, in their experiences of being largely ignored and misunderstood by the mainstream white feminist movement and political arenas at large.

While I commit the normative practice of defining a canon, or set, of texts at the exclusion of others, my first step is to acknowledge the gaps or absences that the application of “women of color” requires. On the one hand, the criminalization and hyper-sexualization of Black, Latina, and Chicana women in popular cultural forms has produced an environment where there is a kind of recognition or legibility in seeing Black, Latina, and Chicana women in narratives focusing on crime, violence, and disorder. This is clearly not a good thing when left in the hands of mainstream productions that do not necessarily have the interests of women of color in mind, or perhaps must work to integrate their solidarity with women of color radical politics with mainstream and corporate investments. Indeed, as I discuss later in this introduction, even productions like the Black Action films of the 1970s that star a woman of color as the principal fighter and victor are limiting in their ability to offer a liberating space for the woman of color protagonist. On the other hand, we might surmise that it is precisely because of this legibility that Black, Chicana, and Latina women authors, much like Black, Chicano, and Latino authors, have recognized detective fiction as a tradition that

has historically presented maligned depictions of people of color. Pointedly, and critically, these authors also view the genre as a productive space for turning these representations on their head, given the continued mass appeal of detective fiction and its core genre elements like the production of anxiety about the causes of social disorder.

For example, one of the most salient features of U.S. women of color detective fiction is the illustration of how legal and social institutions exclude poor women of color. As Frankie Y. Bailey suggests, “Mystery writers are among those who participate in the construction of images of crime and justice” (1). This is in line with women of color coalitional work that has sought to bring to light the fact that when it comes to people of color in America, studies have shown at least two things: that black and brown people in this country are the permanent underclass (Lee 22), and that the rhetoric of colorblindness under the regime of late capitalism has enabled this system to flourish. However, this history is nothing new. What is new, and perhaps what prompted the emergence of U.S. women of color detective fiction in the early 1990s, is the fact that while the early 1990s is generally acknowledged as a time of institutional diversification, it was also a period during which the United States launched foreign and domestic policies and trade agreements that have directly impacted poor women of color in the Americas and in other international zones. African American, Latino/a, and Native communities have been shown by studies on crime and the law to be the most

vulnerable.²

The War on Drugs Campaign, the “welfare queen” campaign, and the impact of deindustrialization in combination with an extreme cutting of social services helped supply surplus labor for the emergent private prison industrial complex. As Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and Michelle Alexander make clear, the private prison industrial complex was the answer to deindustrialization and the subsequent dearth of jobs in areas that were initially designed for manufacturing and farming. Behind the institutionalized paradigm of a celebrated multiculturalism was the slow building of a private prison industrial complex, modeled after the military complex. As a result, even while the early 1990s were heralded by official and institutional channels as the beacon of multicultural “post-racism” and modern equality, socioeconomic policies in fact extended the historical practices of making use of black and brown bodies for labor that mimicked slavery and Jim Crow-era practices. U.S. women of color detective fiction explores the problems of social justice as these problems are constituted through the intersectional, uneven, and concealed mechanisms of biopolitical regulation.

While the 1990s has been shown to be a time of severe cutbacks and cultural pathologization of poor women of color living in the United States, it was also a time of institutional celebration of a “post-racial” and “gender-equal” society, evidenced in the expanding inclusions of the intellectual labor of women of color. U.S. women of color detective fiction signifies on this intellectual labor to illustrate the fact that the time for

² See Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (2012) and J.C. Gonzalez and E.L. Portillos, “The Undereducation and Overcriminalization of U.S. Latinas/os: A Post-Los Angeles Riots LatCrit Analysis.”

the celebration of true parity and inclusion has yet to come. Furthermore, many texts of this sub-genre emphasize the importance of connecting intellectual labor to community and grassroots coalitional work, which are themselves intellectual labor yet under-recognized by institutions of higher learning. The third world liberation movement of the 1970s and women of color coalitions in the 1980s worked to open institutions of higher learning to include men and women of color. These politically forged groups fought to bring to these institutions an awareness of the long history of communal activism and cultural legacies located in historically marginalized cultures in the U.S. and the Americas more broadly.

Moreover, these coalitions called for the recognition of the fact that “members of marginalized groups have unique viewpoints on our own experiences and provide a needed critique” (Dillard 18-9). These intellectual movements (both inside and outside the academy) have sought to reveal the extent to which our seemingly innate perceptions are prompted by social mechanisms and the fact that how, where, why, and from whom we learn has a deep impact on what we know. Moreover, these critical interventions into modern philosophy “understood Western rationality as a limited ethnophilosophy--as a *particular* historical location marked by gender, race, class, region, and so on” (Sandoval 8). An important aspect of these poststructuralist theories of racial and gender discourse was the questioning of the Enlightenment rationalist movement that ultimately enacted what Gayatri Spivak calls “epistemic violence” (75).

Epistemic violence is a colonialist practice that is invested in “the ‘disappearing’ of knowledge, where local or provincial knowledge is dismissed due to privileging

alternative, often Western, epistemic practices” (Dotson 236). According to Adorno and Horkheimer in their Marxist analysis *The Dialectics of Enlightenment* (1944), Enlightenment rationalism took a troubling turn when it began to diagnose individuals into classes without any attention to fallible judgment or personal investments by the cataloguer as well as what they perceived to be a “deification” of the individual human mind (4).³ The strength of the reception of pseudoscientific theories and scientific racism by European publics enabled the subjection of non-white, non-male, and women of color bodies to inhumane conditions and violence based on the fallacy that only white property-owning males were granted with first, the “God given,” then, the conditionally human, ability to reason.

In line with such critiques of Enlightenment rationalism and the emergence of critical attention to the ways in which institutionalized knowledge can thwart social justice initiatives, multiethnic feminist theories and queer of color critique have contributed important arguments to expanding our understanding of how the dissemination of knowledge works. For one, stemming from an expansive tradition of African American women’s literary and social activism and further shaped by women of

³ For example, inspired by Rousseau’s notion of The Social Contract and general theories of innate moral reason, Immanuel Kant “sought within the structures of human experience fixed, permanent, and enduring structures that would ground moral actions as law” (Eze, cited in Hill and Boxhill 108). On the one hand, Kant’s perspective enabled a nuanced understanding of “moral existence as necessity” (108). On the other hand, Kant’s theorizing also led him to believe in polygenism, or the idea that each race has a separate origin, the germ of which inspired the eugenics movement.

color coalitional work during the 1980s,⁴ black feminist critique sought to call attention to epistemologies and discourses that are important to better understanding how we know and how communities of knowers aside from the academy produce insightful and important knowledge. But the tenets of black feminist critique do not stop with the recognition that our knowledge bases stem from shared experiences. The epistemologies emphasized by black feminist critics such as Ann DuCille, Patricia Hill Collins, and Audre Lorde (and others) also question the efficacy of Cartesian Dualism, or the split between mind and body, especially given the fact that body itself is a theoretical construct created from social understandings of form, value, and difference.

In tandem, Latina feminist theorists called for a reconsideration of the concept of “border,” “nation,” and epistemology that politically and theoretically aligned with black feminist thought in their mutual attention to the fact that “the coloniality of gender is constituted by and constitutive of the coloniality of power, of knowledge, of being, of nature, and of language” (Lugones 86). As with the black feminist literary and activist tradition, Latin American feminist activism has a long, varied, and intersectional legacy of feminist and social justice interventions into the status quo.⁵ In total, multiethnic

⁴ For example, from Phillis Wheatley’s poetry (1773), to Mary Prince’s autobiography (1831), to Harriet Tubman’s abolitionist mobilization, to Sojourner Truth’s calls for intersectionality in her public speech at the Akron Women’s Convention (1851), to Harriet Ann Jacob’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), to health and labor activism and literature produced during the early twentieth century and during what is identified generally as The Harlem Renaissance, to the civil rights movement and the development of a black radical nationalist tradition, to the recovery of Zora Neale Hurston’s literature, and through to the *This Bridge Called My Back Anthology* (1981), American literary and social history must recognize a large body of creative and critical black feminist productions and political mobilizations well before the emergence of *This Bridge Called My Back*.

⁵ While the various national and transnational Latina feminist chronologies are too numerous to account for in a footnote (this is also the case for my partial chronology of African American women’s

feminisms have called for a reconsideration in how we talk about both geographic and conceptual borders. Moreover, both queer of color critique and disability studies have sought to call attention to the ways in which embodiment and the notion of subjectivity are regulating mechanisms as well, thus inviting theorists to think about the body as border akin to the deconstructive elements of decolonial and multiethnic feminist critiques of geographical and gender formations. In line with decolonial thinking that seeks to theorize the practice of social, physical, and embodied division, a continued, albeit tense, debate has continued between grassroots activism and working spaces outside of academia and institutions of higher learning—namely the concern shared by social justice provocateurs that the process of institutionalizing knowledge and social justice perspectives becomes threatened in the course of individual success inside academia.⁶ In response, women of color and queer of color coalitions sought to make transparent that the interests and politics of mainstream white feminism did not reflect their concerns and did not push for a social justice paradigm that would overhaul existing power hierarchies embedded in late capitalism.

U.S. women of color detective fiction negotiates, reflects, and problematizes some

writing and activism and black diasporic women's writing), it is significant to note that while the Chicana movement gained momentum during the 1970s in the U.S., one of the first two women to be published in the continent of America is Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz, a poet and nun of mixed indigenous and Spanish ancestry (b. 1651 in San Miguel Nepantla, Mexico) who argued openly for women's access to education. Implicit in this note is the fact that Latin American, Latina, and Chicana women have been writing and organizing well before the identification of Chicana feminism as a movement and of Latin American "third world" feminist consciousness raising in the wake of the push against neoliberal economic policy by the mainstream feminist movement in the 1980s.

⁶ See Roderick Ferguson's *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (2012) and the last chapter of Hortense Spillers' *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (2003).

of the multiethnic feminist, decolonial, and embodiment critiques briefly mentioned in this section. At the same time, women of color coalitional work and theory is as dynamic as it is invested in dismantling existing structural paradigms. The category of U.S. women of color detective fiction reflects this dynamism, and my project must account for the absences and omissions in this project's corpus and in my general emphasis on African American, Mexican American, and Cuban American women's detective fiction. I reiterate the emphasis on the reality of precarity that African American female and Latina working-class women face that has made the detective fiction genre almost ironically suitable. At the same time, it would be a mistake not to recognize the wealth of research on the impact of unjust legal, medical, and territorial abuses that indigenous women continue to face in the United States. However, North American indigenous authors have elected to work with anti-detective fiction elements rather than writing fiction that emphasizes a central detective persona. With respect to Native American women's literary productions, detectives have in fact appeared in Native American detective fiction written by North American indigenous authors. However, they are either killed in the middle of the book, as in the case of Gerald Robert Vizenor's (Anishinaabe) Felipa Flowers in *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991); function as a side character, as in the case of Linda Hogan's (Chickasaw) *Mean Spirit* (1991) (a novel that has been, I would argue, misidentified as a detective fiction novel); or play with the conventions of pulp and noir genres, as in the case of James Welch's (Blackfoot-Gros Ventre) *Winter in the Blood* (1974). In other words, unlike in U.S. detective fiction (even in U.S. women of color detective fiction) where the protagonist has to survive, in North

American indigenous fictions, the detective is put aside and cast as a minor character.

There are several possible explanations for this deviation from the detective fiction mode. For one, “U.S. woman of color” as a category implies a national tie to the American criminal justice system, whereas sovereign nations as recognized by the American government have their own systems of legal and social governance. This is not to say that there are no commonalities among women of U.S. color detective fiction and Native American literature that has an appearance of the detective figure. For one, what connects these texts is the feeling of a lack of resolution toward the end, which is more pointedly made clear in the anti-detective novel, but is also implied in the hardboiled genre. However, the issues of property rights, agency, and narrative voice in North American indigenous “anti-detective fiction” are large enough to require coverage beyond the scope of this particular project. As such, while more work needs to be done in what I identify as an anti-detective model in Native American literature, this particular project focuses on the negotiation of social justice, recognition, and power in relation to a group of people whose rights are entirely tied to, and largely infringed upon, by the U.S. criminal justice system. For more on anti-detective elements of North American indigenous literature, see my conclusion.

In a similar vein, Asian American female authors have elected to work with certain elements of detective fiction as African American female and Latina authors. Asian American women detectives do exist in works by white authors. With that said, unlike indigenous women who face similar kinds of policy and social discrimination as black and Latin@ women in the U.S., amateur sleuth novels like Nina Revoyr’s novel

Southland (2003) and neo-noir short stories like Naomi Hirahara's "The Chirashi Covenant" (2007) are invested in exploring the dynamic interplay between "model minority" social citizens, disenfranchised communities, and white culture couched within a historiographic recuperation of experiences of internment during World War II. This is not because criminality and exploitation are not ongoing issues for Asian Americans that require immediate attention. In fact, as many scholars and critics have noted, Asian American communities have been pathologized, criminalized, and exploited and continue to be abused. However, Asian Americans have had to fight a somewhat different, but equally fraught, battle of (il)legibility than African American, Latin@, and indigenous authors.⁷ One of the most widely acknowledged aspects of this triangulation has been the over-determined application, or stereotype, of the "model minority" myth to Asian Americans.

This myth has imposed a restriction on the ways in which Asian American authors can express themselves, from the kinds of stories mainstream presses want to print to the type of genres that are "allotted" Asian American authors. As King-Kok Cheung recognizes: If "ethnic presses and ethnic studies programs in the past tend to valorize texts that are bitter, brashly political, and accountable to an ethnic

⁷ The stereotypes that have been applied to Asian Americans are affected by what James Kyung-Jin Lee titles a "triangulation" among and between white, black, and Asian relations. This triangulation pits Black against Asian in the bid for the privileges controlled by whites. Moreover, the "reading" of the Asian stereotype operates differently in relation to either group: not citizens but not welfare recipients, the stereotype of the Asian model minority relegates Asian Americans to a state of limbo. In other words, Asian American authors would have much to say about exploitation and criminalization, if not for the fact that they must negotiate this triangulated state that relegates them inadvertently to invisibility given the black-white framing of race relations in America.

community...the commercial presses seem to have favored works at the other end of the spectrum: those that are optimistic, apolitical, autobiographical” (Cheung 17). Revoyr’s and Hirahara’s works actively work against this imperative toward optimistic and apolitical tones in Asian American writing. Moreover, overt criticism of U.S. social and legal institutions are present in Asian American, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander works. It is also important to recognize the excellent experimentation with narrative and prose form by women authors like Karen Tei Yamashita, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and Monique T.D. Truong that actively resist the autobiographical mode. And, perhaps I am being limiting by defining the work of “detection” and “sleuthing” as rigidly as I am in this project. With that said, the fundamental difference between the detective in Revoyr’s *Southland* and the detectives discussed in this book is that Jackie Ishida’s experienced and historically situated precarity is not the same type of precarity as experienced and historically situated by the other detectives in this project, with the exception of Carolina Garcia-Aguilera’s protagonist Lupe Solano, whose political and identitarian orientations serve as a test case to some of the overarching claims I make about the general category of “U.S. Women of Color Detective Fiction.”

Reading the Process of Detection as a Creative and Narrative Endeavor

At first glance, the epistemological processes employed by the detective fiction genre may be read as contradictory to the aims and perspectives of multiethnic feminist theories and women of color coalitional work. For one, the epistemological methods of

early detective fiction pair troublingly well with the processes of stereotyping. Reading people for clues, where they come from, what style of dress they wear, their ethnicity, their gender, their quirks, or profiling, became part of the game. Indeed, it appears that the roots of the whodunit, while stemming from Enlightenment rationalism and medical hypotheses, also lie in the processes of scientific racism that allowed one to “read” a person like an ailment. For instance, Sherlock Holmes “builds up to a ‘diagnosis,’ that is, an identification of a criminal pathology, through a series of minute perceptions, linked together by hypothesis” (Sebeok 36) by “testing a hypothesis as to the identity of a person through the collection of clues from that individual’s physical appearance, speech patterns, and the like involves a certain amount of guessing” (38). To questionable ends, Agatha Christie emphasized this mode of reading people in her mystery works as well. The implications for such a method are huge in that they reflect a general attitude that privileged intellectuals are free to gawk without reservation at those “others” presumably to ensure their own safety. In sum, while the whodunit tends to be lauded as rooted in logic and reason, many critics have also come to recognize that much of the type of reasoning that occurs in these texts is predicated on intuition, guesswork, profiling, and access to a wide mental catalog of erratic encyclopedias.

At the same time, while the classic whodunit employs inductive and deductive reasoning in its reading of people as ailments and reliance on available stereotypes, the core epistemological method employed by the genre is in fact the processes of retroduction, or working backwards to construct a plausible narrative, and logical abduction, or the creation of plausible hypotheses explaining interesting phenomena. The

more commonly known process of induction relies on the strength of the number of similar cases to form its hypothesis for a pattern, and deduction relies on the strength of the premise to obtain its credibility. Deductions can be proven wrong, while inductions can be proven weak. In contrast, abduction is an inference to the best explanation, and retroduction is the form that this inference takes shape by working backwards through a series of events and employing a combination of abductive, inductive, and deductive methods (Chlasson "Abduction as an Aspect of Retroduction"). The term "abduction" might at first suggest physical absence, especially in the context of detective and mystery fiction. However, logical abduction is the process of the search for a plausible explanation in the absence of available evidence, not the least the silenced human body or the artifact that is found out-of-place. In this way, abduction is a type of guesswork: "Since the rule is selected as the more plausible among many, but it is not certain whether it is the 'correct' one or not, the explanation is only entertained, waiting for further texts" (Eco 206). This is different than induction because induction is concerned with stipulating a generalization to accommodate what the perceiver has recognized to be a general pattern among a series of events or "surprising facts." And, deduction is about testing a maxim or generally accepted theory to accommodate new "surprising facts." Of the three, abduction is the most "intuitive" in that the world of possible correct hypotheses will be limited to the available knowledge of the perceiver, or what cultural semiotician (and mystery fiction author) Umberto Eco refers to as available "encyclopedias" (Eco 207).

While mystery fiction tries to conceal the reality of historiography's reliance on narrative, "which is to say, on storytelling" (Chen 1077) in its seemingly objective and rationalist methods for obtaining knowledge, the case at hand is always just as creative as the historiography that pieces the narrative account together. In the reframing of the detective process as a creative method and in detective fiction's reliance on abductive reasoning, the genre has the potential to offer an important challenge to Enlightenment rationalism's innate knowledge thesis. In fact, even classic detective fiction registered that the detective may be wrong at times and that the processes of retrodution and abduction involve both the knowledge available to the detective and the detective's own imagination. According to Don Truzzi, the famous Holmesian epistemological method "is not a simple or mechanical view of the process" (Truzzi 59) but, in the words of Holmes himself, a "mixture of imagination and reality" ("The Problem of Thor Bridge"). And, "it must be said that in practice he [Holmes] gets much more conclusive results from observation than logical processes" (Nordon, cited in Truzzi 245).

This notion as stemming from American pragmatist philosopher and semiotician Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) was in fact radically at odds with the Cartesian tradition of believing in an innate programming that we already had access to but had to wait to develop when the time was right. Peirce's straying from this hardline rationalism has huge consequences for theories of how we acquire knowledge: in arguing that all our knowledge "has a hypothetical basis" (Bonfantini & Proni 124), we have to accept that we as rational thinkers also have the potential of being wrong. Moreover, according to

this way of thinking about how we come to know, the logical conclusion is that we must seek consensus from others to form a most serviceable hypothesis.

Of course, back in the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century world of the British whodunit, the detective can never be wrong. As Joan Copjec notes of the classic whodunit: “The detective is one who withdraws from the world of the senses, of which he remains infinitely suspicious, in order to become more attentive to the clear and distinct prescriptions of *a priori* ideas” (Copjec 169). In the classic mode, unexplainable or supernatural elements (like some of Poe’s stories) are relieved in the whodunit in order to uphold a perfect social system within which acts of crime are a temporary, fixable aberrant. While the detective’s imagination leads him or her to seemingly solid guesses about certain surprising facts, the Holmesean worldview insists that everything is capable of being explained. In effect, the whodunit is meant to inspire a sense of awe within the reader in response to the detective who is “never wrong.” Moreover, the whodunit form is also meant to produce an affect of safety in the fact that order is restored by the end of the book, and that the momentary disorder brought forth by a singular individual’s bad intentions is merely an aberration to an otherwise perfectly ordered universe. In the world of the classic whodunit, the members of society are classed so that they are in alignment, constitutive of the world that excludes a conceptualization of the laboring bodies that serve them.

The hardboiled detective fiction genre that emerged in the 1940s in American pulp magazines is generally characterized as antagonistic to the classic whodunit. However, there are some consistencies in how these two mystery subgenres access

knowledge. Specifically, both work off of “intuition,” but in variant ways and for different purposes. The classic detective fiction mode of the “whodunit” follows the intuition model by privileging the process of abduction, or the creation of most probable set of hypotheses based on stored, encyclopedic knowledge that seek further testing and collaboration with other theorists. In direct contrast, the hardboiled detective physically wrangles the truth out of people and relies on “hunches” about how people tend to behave (or the social stereotypes that the detective has amassed). Furthermore, while the classic whodunit emphasizes the fact that all knowledge is accessible to the detective, the hardboiled emphasizes the limitation of what we can know, aside from what we can intuit about people’s (often nefarious and selfish) motivations. As Slavoj Žižek argues in his essay “‘The Thing That Thinks:’ The Kantian Background of the Noir Subject,” hardboiled detective fiction negotiates the implicit contradiction of believing oneself to be objective while also being a subject: “If I were to possess an intuition of myself *qua* Thing-that-thinks, that is, if I were to have access to my noumenal self, *I would thereby lose the very feature which makes me an I of pure apperception*—I would cease to be the spontaneous transcendental agent that constitutes reality” (206). In this way, the hardboiled detective fiction text pushes the epistemological nature of the mystery novel toward near ontological considerations in its refusal to recognize that a coherent, ordered worldview, or system, exists to be rationally read and maintained.

Unlike the ordered universe of the classic whodunit, the hardboiled universe is entirely controlled by capitalism and institutionalized corruption. Modern society is a fundamentally flawed system: “The end products of people’s criminal actions, then, are

definable [theft, rape, murder], but the human reality that underlies these actions [motivation, passion, emotion, personality] can never be fully understood or conveniently explained” (Gregory 86). As a result, crime becomes the status quo and corruption becomes naturalized. In the world of the hardboiled, people are not motivated to cooperate beyond to fulfill their personal self-interest. Furthermore, Stephen Soitos emphasizes the new condition of the detective where the detective has the potential of getting hurt: the emphasis on adventure rather than investigation in hardboiled detective fiction” (Soitos 50) also implicates the actual physical body of the detective in the plot. No more the detached, casual observer without the need for self-protection, the detective now must work with his mind and body, another challenge to Cartesian philosophy. That said, in both the hardboiled and whodunit detective fiction texts, the triumph of the detective tends to be expected, as does their capacity to maintain an aura of detachment from the physical manifestations of crime and corruption that are aberrations in the whodunit world and status quo in the hardboiled world.

Through the use of epistemological processes not typically emphasized in Western philosophical and social discourse, the novels in my project reflect the creative and narrative aspects of rationation found in earlier detective fiction texts, underscoring the problematic elements of induction and deduction when used at the service of drawing conclusions about characters based on their physiognomy, style of dress, and social character. At the same time, these texts also reflect the creative and narrative aspects of abduction, or the process of developing a testable hypothesis, which in fact has been stressed by Umberto Eco as the underlying methodology in mystery fiction written by

Sherlock Holmes. As a result, traditional mystery fiction and U.S. women of color fiction may not be all that different with respect to their investments in creating testable hypotheses to explain interesting phenomena. However, my archive reveals that the stereotypic methodologies invoked by the uses of induction and deduction rarely help the detectives featured in this project.

Historiographic Epistemology in U.S. Women of Color Detective Fiction

In contrast to the aura of detachment exhibited by the hardboiled detective, the woman of color detective protagonist is directly involved, both physically and emotionally, in the case.⁸ For example, in the majority of the novels, the woman of color protagonist is forced into the role of detective because there is a threat to her safety or the safety of her loved ones. As a result, these works highlight the fact that knowledge is privileged, selective information and that stories that run counter to dominant narratives are often buried beneath official accounts. Therefore, both the knowledge that “makes it” down the line of cross-generational discourse and the stories that have to be reconstructed when no information exists are equally important in the context of a more representative historiographic narrative.

The novels presented in this project illustrate and build a willful archive of historiographic epistemologies, or theories concerning the encoding and transmission of

⁸ At the same time, the demands of the commitment to family, children, and community are often explicitly discussed in women of color detective fiction, as in the case of Alicia Gaspar de Alba’s protagonist, Ivon, who is uncertain about the prospect of adopting a child with her partner. With that said, these protagonists sometimes mess up and sometimes have to separate themselves from their families, but they never leave.

knowledge that also serve as mediations regarding the writing of history, testimony, and narrative. In his essay “Blank Spaces and Secret Histories: Questions of Historiographic Epistemology in Medieval China,” Jack W. Chen emphasizes historiography’s problematic capacity to determine the “standards for evidence” (1071) especially in the context of official and state-sanctioned regulation of what counts as evidence. Chen notes the potential of anecdotes and gossip to serve as counter-histories to officially sanctioned historiographies: “if the state archives and its documentary records represent one order of epistemic attitude, then the anecdotal tale or item of gossip represents a very different order of knowledge, one that issues from sources outside of the central state’s sphere of control” (1071). These anecdotes, pieces of gossip, and information travel through unofficial, “backchannel” sources that threaten “to reveal the private scandals that those in power would rather keep secret” (1071). In this way, historiography, as a narrativizing of historical events, merges with epistemology, the study of the encoding and transmission of knowledge. And, relatedly, historiographic epistemology is a theory of knowledge that is invested in recognizing the partiality of historical narratives and written records as well as the significance of oral testimonies and unofficial sources of/for the flow of information.

The following chapters explore the employment of historiographic epistemologies in U.S. women of color detective fiction texts that focus on pieces of evidence and stories that are typically relegated to the margin by dominant historical accounts. For example, in *Blanche on the Lam*, the central protagonist’s historiographic epistemology leads her to rely on gossip from backchannel sources to obtain information. *Black Widow’s*

Wardrobe and *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* employ Nepantla and spiritual mestizaje as critical and Chicana feminist orientations that read geographic borders conceptually to form *testimonios*, or the collective aggregations of stories and shared experiences that are incomplete but still inalienable. *Coq au Vin* utilizes a jazz epistemology that enables the central protagonist to consider and hold in accord contradictory and plural historiographies. And, while *Havana Heat: A Lupe Solano Mystery* follows a more hardboiled conventional path by relying on insider sources from the criminal justice system, the text itself charts a counter-historical periodization of Cuban and Cuban-American art that calls into question normative Anglo-European artistic historiographies and periodization.

Furthermore, in line with historiographic epistemology, each chapter explores texts that navigate local, regional, national, transnational, and even global institutional and social disciplining mechanisms. As a result, this project reveals the conditional ability of the hardboiled detective fiction genre to travel beyond the confines of the “mainland” U.S. border: the novels indicate that the hardboiled detective fiction genre is locally attuned in the ways that its subjects are able to reflect on the workings of U.S. power even as they distance themselves both critically and geographically from the “center.” At the same time, the porous nature of the detective character enables the central protagonist to take on variable identifications that can at times undermine feminist and decolonial projects, even within the archive of U.S. women of color detective fiction genre.

In my second chapter, I provide an overview of early British and American detective fiction and interventions into these forms by underrepresented authors. Then, I offer a historical and cultural contextualization for the emergence and development of U.S. women of color detective fiction. I attempt to account for the complex negotiations of gender, race, spatiality, and performance in early twentieth-century American detective fiction and revisions to this genre by ethnic minority, white feminist, and white lesbian authors. I make that case that there is critical potential inherent in the hardboiled that is not available to the whodunit by exploring the hardboiled detective genre as a counter-institutional genre that is invested in navigating what Mary Louise Pratt calls “contact zones,” or spaces that bring together typically disaggregated individuals, cultures, ideologies, and economics.

My third chapter implodes the contained “coziness” of the local and regional in my reading of Barbara Neely’s *Blanche on the Lam* (1992). The novel takes place on a wealthy estate in South Carolina, but the main protagonist is misaligned from the classic whodunit because her racial, gender, and economic position leads the narrative down a decidedly non-conformist and hardboiled path. While cleaning for a wealthy family, the main protagonist, Blanche White, also stages her own investigation of a series of strange behaviors exhibited by her wealthy employers. She utilizes historiographic epistemology accessed through her informal gossip network and spiritual advisor. Furthermore, when Blanche applies Enlightenment taxonomic techniques (long-hand for racial stereotyping), she is in fact lead astray from the truth and puts herself at the mercy of the murderous Grace Edwards. This missed connection is reciprocated by Grace’s assumption that

Blanche lacks the ability to reason, which in turn enables a theorization of betrayal as an inevitable process in a white supremacist society that charts a varied, and problematic, feminist historiography with respect to racial and class difference.

My fourth chapter works with Lucha Corpi's *Black Widow's Wardrobe* (1999) and Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* (2005) to explore the shared and differential references and epistemological strategies invoked by these two novels to more clearly illuminate a Chicana decolonial critique of national and heteropatriarchal disciplinary mechanisms. In my analysis, I argue that Lucha Corpi's novel tests the temporal and narrative aspects of the detective fiction formula by considering the process of acquiring knowledge as a mode requiring past, present, and future testimonios, or collective, partial accounts stemming from speakers who have been silenced by oppressive regimes. In its sociological and present-day footing, Alicia Gaspar de Alba's novel expands on Derrida's concept of the trace of the sign and difference by recognizing speech in graphics and cognitive mapping of social values. While their temporal and informational methodologies may differ, I posit that these texts mutually deconstruct social conceptions of national, communal, and female "body" and/as territory. Furthermore, I propose that these texts encourage the examination of how testimony and evidence function both through official discourse and metaphorically through State production, occlusion, and control of women's bodies. In effect, the bodies of murdered girls that are "reproduced" in Gaspar de Alba's novel create pertinent questions regarding how certain testimonies are legitimized over others and how the concept of the woman as national metaphor is both selective and violent. As such, I

interpret the function of the dead women's bodies in these novels as "narrative capital" as well as a form of *testimonio* in its simultaneously personal and collective signification (Delgadillo 46).

Chapter 5 brings together Charlotte Carter's *Coq Au Vin* (1999) and Carolina Garcia-Aguilera's *Havana Heat: A Lupe Solano Mystery* (2000) to unpack the established paradigm of racial-gender-class intersectional analysis and the trappings of cultural-economic cosmopolitanism within the context of the novels' negotiations of the appropriation by dominant corporate enterprises of cultural artifacts like music and art from historically disenfranchised communities. I begin with Charlotte Carter's *Coq Au Vin* (1999) to engage with historical criticism on the politics of the appropriation of the African American blues and folk traditions, arguing that the main protagonist's knowledge of the roots of the jazz tradition through her active practice and engagement enables her to solve the case and to escape from being complicit in a paradigm of economic cosmopolitanism and cultural tourism I call "ethnic (as) kitsch." I then move to analyzing *Havana Heat: A Lupe Solano Mystery* (2000), the theme of which is the black market enterprise of selling and forging Cuban art across the Cuban-U.S. borders. I argue that the main protagonist's economic, social, political, and gender investments in American capitalist enterprise prevent her from tracing significant counter-histories and connections among the artworks and counterfeits she encounters. As a result, Lupe inadvertently upholds an "ethnic (as) kitsch" valuation of Cuban art that is measured against a fragmented and partial reflection of "Cuban time" in the context of U.S. military and economic continuous intervention. In my comparative analysis, I argue that these

novels differ in their interpretations of the function of art as a sellable commodity or as a source for the enactment of collective becoming and that Carolina Garcia-Aguilera's novel actively challenges some of the typically unified assumptions about U.S. women of color as a political category and U.S. women of color detective fiction.

My conclusion reflects on the connections and divergences across the chapters with respect to established modes of intersectional analysis in favor of an intersectional approach that allows for dynamic, parallel, and contradictory perspectives on social justice while recognizing that women of color are policed in a certain unified way within the schema of U.S. institutional and social power. I also consider the ways in which the sub-genre of U.S. women of color detective fiction makes concessions to an Anglo-European individualist ethos even as it deviates from the traditional hardboiled script. In my discussion, I consider the sub-genre's misalignment from "pop feminism," or mainstream productions featuring women of color in powerful positions, that still reinscribe certain normative and limiting presentations of power, authority, and voice. I end with a brief commentary that emphasizes the need for more critical work on the concept of both individual and group voice as these concepts relate to defining creative expressiveness and collective political consciousness.

What initially attracted me to the detective fiction genre was my sensitivity to the ways in which power functions through unofficial channels. My sensitivity is owed in large part to my having grown up for the first seven years of my life in what was formerly called The Soviet Union as well as my experience of emigrating to the United States. As I look back on it now, growing up in The Soviet Union during the first seven years of my

life was a heavily policed and controlled experience. My grandparents and my parents lived close to each other in cramped high-rises, eating all of our meals at home. My grandmothers kept their religious icons in the low-lit corners of shelves. We were also disciplined by the methods of police surveillance that shadowed all of our interactions over the phone and on the street. The backchannel sites for trading food, important information, warnings, and celebratory news were as significant in our everyday exchanges as our daily trips to work, to the store, and to visit. This covert surveillance coupled with the attitude of “there’s always another way” continued with us as we emigrated to the United States in 1990, two years prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, and my parents accrued the interesting friendship of secret service agents who said they were just really interested in Russian culture. An American police officer whose great grandfather allegedly worked as a guard for Lenin took me on my first trip to Chuck E Cheese in Rochester, New York.

Perhaps this is the reason for my continued affective response of slight panic when I see officers in uniform, an entirely irrational fear given that I am a white woman working in higher education with no remaining trace of a foreign accent. And yet, perhaps my personal experience is what led me to recognize in U.S. women of color detective fiction an overt illustration and critique of legalized and institutionally sanctioned modes of surveillance and control. Moreover, my academic experiences theorizing the value and materiality of knowledge in a decolonial and feminist framework also connect to my personal experiences growing up and hearing adults talk about big news in tiny, deceptively private kitchens. In the interpretation of retroduction and logical

abduction as creative and economic acts, the novels included in this project theorize and even poetize detective fiction's quest for a most complete narrative. They theorize detective fiction because they ask us to consider the meta-textual aspects of piecing together a story that has gone "missing." They poetize detective fiction because the attempt to enact closure by creating a plausible hypothesis, to "close the case," is as much an affective gesture that betrays the desire for restored order as it is a form of epistemic erasure.

Chapter 2: Imperialist and Willful Critiques of Empire: Connections among Early U.S. Hardboiled Detective Fiction and Revisionist Texts

From its originations in Edgar Allen Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) to Attica Locke's exploration in *The Cutting Season* (2012) of the violent racial underpinnings of an old sugar plantation, detective fiction continues to be a space where authors can indulge in creating exceptionally intelligent, resourceful protagonists who are particularly skilled at putting together pieces of the puzzle and reading the subtexts of the surrounding physical and social landscape. With that said, one of the principal distinctions that critics typically make between the British whodunit and the American hardboiled is the shift in levels of precarity that the protagonist has to face. This level of precarity has typically been measured in relation to the protagonist's financial, physical, and social position. For example, while the "country cozy" and the "whodunit" formulas of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century British and American detective fiction texts have offered readers the "armchair" detective whose safety and economic stability is generally secured throughout the novel, the American hardboiled novel provided its readers a new kind of detective: a working-class character whose safety and security is always tested. In line with this differentiation with respect to the protagonist's variable guarantee of safety, the whodunit and the hardboiled differ with respect to each sub-genre's imperative to restore order at the end of the plot and reconstitute conservative social and institutional values.

The sense of precarity and counter-institutional positionality of the hardboiled persona is as fundamental to a larger portion of mainstream cultural productions as it is in unpacking U.S. women of color detective fiction novels and their critique of normative scripts and U.S. power. What attracts us to the detective persona? Is it the sense of justice and the courage to call out hypocrisy, or is it the “attitude?” Or is it all three? In this chapter, I attempt to answer this question by looking at the characteristics of the hardboiled detective from the genre’s emergence to revisions to this character by authors who have been historically excluded from the realm of mainstream aesthetic productions. First, I offer a brief overview of the emergence of American hardboiled detective fiction and a discussion of the ways in which this tradition differs from the British whodunit, employing Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of the contact zone to parse the nuances between these two genres.

Then, I discuss revisions to the hardboiled by U.S. male authors of color as well as U.S. white feminist and lesbian authors, while also drawing out aspects of the hardboiled persona that have remained unchanged. Following this, I contextualize the emergence of detective fiction written by U.S. women of color authors and featuring a woman of color detective, focusing on the historical, social, and economic factors that helped facilitate this emergence. While the protagonists assessed in this project differ with respect to the places that the main character works and her economic status, each work follows the hardboiled protagonist’s characteristic counter-institutional perspective and the sub-genre’s refusal to uphold economic progress narratives.

At the same time, U.S. women of color detective fiction novels bring a new

perspective to the detective fiction genre in their re-orientation of socially and culturally marginalized perspectives to be positioned at the center of the plot. While the traditionally white and male hardboiled detective must make concessions to the social and legal institutions that rely on his “going along” with racial, gender, and xenophobic scripts, the novels featured in this project illuminate the contradictions of working against intersectional modes of oppression. The detectives are “willful,” to borrow Sara Ahmed’s term, in their refusal to reinscribe normative scripts that are important to the perpetuation of power hierarchies. In this connection to, and deviations from, the counter-institutional hardboiled sub-genre, U.S. women of color detective fiction forms a willful archive that allows critics to get a better sense of how the detective’s critical distance can either work for or against a social justice imperative.

Gender, Racial, and Spatial Anxiety in The Classic Whodunit and The American Hardboiled

Detection as a narrative mode that relies on the intellectual and material resources of a singular protagonist to piece together an account to explain a disturbing series of events is recognized in works as early as *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet*. Moreover, elements of the mystery genre have been identified in the Gothic mode as well. However, the detective fiction story as a recognizable formula is identified by many critics to have originated in 1849 with American author Edgar Allen Poe’s character Dupin from “The Purloined Letter.” Dupin is recognized as the prototype for British author Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, as both are “armchair detectives,” or independently wealthy

provocateurs who have the ability of detecting for pure fun. A host of white female mystery writers came to the genre after Poe, prompting critics like John Scaggs to evaluate the initial, or “classic,” detective fiction authorship base as “dominated by women” (35). However, contrary to Scaggs’ estimation of the mystery genre as dominated by women, the woman detective or woman amateur sleuth appears in relatively few mystery works by female contemporaries of Doyle.

Specifically, the female sleuth appears in works by American white women authors Anna Katherine Green, Susan Glaspell, and Susan Freeman, and British white female author Agatha Christie. While the detectives who appear in these texts are often described as “spinsters,” this characterization fails to register the fact that women detectives appearing in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were both tough and capable: “These ‘lady detectives’ are independent, confident, clever women who variously use knowledge and observation of domestic environment and human behavior, female intuition, and their capacity for going unnoticed or being underestimated in solving crimes” (Gavin 258). That said, Gavin notes that once they solve their mysteries, these detectives either tend to marry or continue to detect in the “armchair” style, exhibiting continued interest in cases not “out of financial need” but “from human curiosity” (Gavin 261). Overall, the female sleuth’s upper-class mobility and willful curiosity is tempered by spatial restrictions related to the regulation of women in public spaces during this time.

One text that challenges the move to categorize early women-authored detective fiction as entirely “domestic” (Nickerson 197) and upper-class is African American

woman author Pauline Hopkins' Gothic-inspired detective fiction serial novel *Hagar's Daughter* (1901). Hopkins interrogates the racist antebellum period and the issues of due inheritance and racial passing. Hopkins' emphasis on the protection of property as the core aspect of the greed that motivated the crime is in line with subsequent U.S. women of color detective fiction texts, making Hopkins the first in the lineage of feminist detectives who sleuth for social justice. With that said, Hopkins' interrelation of race and gender as a force that allows abuses and murder on the part of those who benefit from racial and gender privilege also stands as distinct from white feminist and lesbian detective fiction. While Venus is not the central protagonist in the novel, nor even the main detective, and the conditions impacting Venus's ability to sleuth and deliver justice are different between the periods of antebellum and immediate postbellum and the 1990s, the Hopkins' novel signals the perspectives and critiques located in later women of color detective fiction. I discuss *Hagar's Daughter* in tandem with Barbara Neely's *Blanche White* series in the third chapter for their shared interest in illuminating the politics of land inheritance and the violence of the country cozy mystery.

With all this in mind, the "Golden Age" of mystery fiction is most commonly identified with the Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie novels, featuring Sherlock Holmes and Miss Marple. From these two personas, the whodunit was solidified into a recognizable formula. This formula consists of the following fundamental properties: (1) the story privileges the narrative telling and perspective of the detective; (2) the detective is exceptional in reason and cunning above both criminals and police enforcement; (3) the detective is independently wealthy and thus works the case because of the enjoyment

of solving the puzzle; (4) the criminal act threatens a particular aspect of an otherwise stable social order, typically registered from an upper-class position in terms of the “afflicted” characters, and (5) this disturbed social order demands closure and resolution in order to restore the temporary disorder to the previous stable order.

The classic mode was followed by the explosion of the “Golden Age” of American hardboiled detective fiction in the 1930s and 40s. Critics identify the development of the American hardboiled genre as taking place during the interwar years and The Great Depression, evolving out of 1920s serial pulps. The hardboiled originated with the *Black Mask* magazine that featured grisly stories taken from the reported news of the day (Denning 118). These grizzly stories also inspired the other established “cousin” genres to the hardboiled, namely the crime fiction and the cinematic film noir genres. Some critics elect not to distinguish between the whodunit, the hardboiled, and crime fiction, relying on the umbrella of “crime fiction” to encapsulate all of these genres. However, I deem it extremely important to call attention to the nuances among these genres because this move has enabled me to comprehend why some U.S. women of color authors have gravitated toward a particular sub-genre within the general category of fiction that focuses on a crime having been or being committed.

The first salient distinction between the general mystery/hardboiled and crime/noir genres is the figure of the protagonist: in the case of the mystery and hardboiled genres, the central figure is both alienated from other legal institutions and is identified by the reader to have scruples. In other words, readers must trust the detective to make choices that align with a moral code in line with the implied readers’ moral

codes, a demand that becomes difficult when reading texts featuring detectives who are not committed to ethical practices or oriented toward social justice or when reading classic mystery texts that utilize problematic stereotypes. As an overarching theme, in the mystery and hardboiled detective fiction genres, the main protagonist cannot be killed off at the end, nor can he/she cannot fail in his/her ability to arrive at the answer to the central mystery. A factor that blurs the lines between crime fiction and the hardboiled is that crime fiction often situates a main protagonist who has to locate a missing person or find out who has committed a murder. However, there is a marked difference between a character in a crime fiction or film noir text and a protagonist in a mystery or hardboiled text based on their own perceived sense of authority: in the crime and noir genres, we are meant to lose faith in the central protagonist, to watch the narrative spin out of control. In the mystery and hardboiled genres, we cling to the detective's sense of his or her own extraordinary ability and critical insight.

Another distinguishing feature between crime/noir fiction and the mystery/hardboiled is that in crime fiction and the noir genres, while corruption and vice are evident on the page, in the whodunit and hardboiled genres, we expect the main protagonist to confront the corruption on some level to the reader's satisfaction. As a result, much depends on if the main protagonist is able to shift the power structure within the text, even to force others to recognize the social injustice that stands at the center of the mystery. While it becomes more complicated to identify whether a text is following crime fiction conventions or hardboiled detective fiction conventions when the main protagonist is not recognized as an authority by the police network, as is the case in many

of the detective fiction texts written by U.S. women of color, I would still make the case that the protagonists featured in these texts are intelligent and cannot die, even though they may get seriously hurt.

Another popular genre that begs distinction from the crime/noir genres is the police procedural. The police procedural followed the hardboileds and are a subset of the hardboiled tradition and features a detective protagonist who must negotiate the institutional demands of the criminal justice system and bureaucratic confines while also solving the case. This makes sense, given the fact that the act of unofficial detection was recognized as a social function much earlier than centralized organizations for social surveillance existed. Consider, for instance, the fact that the first trained police forces in New York in 1845 U.S. were modeled after the plantation slave patrols that first emerged in South Carolina more than a century earlier in 1702.⁹ The police procedurals often feature a working-class detective who is battling both organized and institutional corruption. At the same time, police procedurals have been read by critics as being conservative in their reification of the central institutions for policing society. That said, authors of color who have elected to write police procedurals have tended to feature a main character who is often derisive and critical of the institution that the character nonetheless continue to battle for *and* with. An important fact to note is that much of U.S. women of color detective fiction trends toward the isolated hardboiled genre rather than the police procedural genre, with Paula Woods being a notable exception. I view this

⁹ See Reichel, Philip L., "The Misplaced Emphasis on Urbanization in Police Development." *Policing and Society* 3.1 (1992).

decision as a way for the authors to push past the limiting conditions of the police procedural in order to more accurately reflect the ways in which women of color and communities of color are alienated from dominant legal institutions.

While it is relatively easy to distinguish between the crime and noir genres and the mystery genres, there are also important distinctions between the whodunit and the hardboiled. John Scaggs and John Gruesser note that the hardboiled detective fiction genre differentiated itself from the British Golden Age “whodunit” by revoking the reader’s right to a tidy restorative plot ending, moving the setting from removed, pastoral locales into the new modern city, and by relocating the character of “the frontier hero of the Western into an urban environment” (Scaggs 56). The basic contours of the hardboiled detective genre function loosely around the following six characteristics: (1) “Tough talk:” the use of an affected English dialect that is meant to resonate as “non-standard” and mirroring working-class vernacular(s); (2) Distrust of authorities and a willingness to forego personal gain due to the protagonist’s obsession with fairness and anti-capitalist orientation; (3) a “reading” of social ills that create the type of problem/plot that the detective must pursue; (4) a general sentiment made clear at the end of the novel that the specified social ills are not fixed even if the mystery is resolved; (5) the detective is a loner and doesn’t know how to live with other people (as such, they can be overly critical and blunt); (6) the notions of visibility, invisibility, masquerade, and working undercover are all significant in the detective’s sleuthing methods.

A key feature of the hardboiled detective persona is that he is decidedly working-class. In fact, John Scaggs presupposes that class status is the fundamental factor that

distinguishes the classic (or what I call whodunit) detective fiction text from the hardboiled: “Unlike the Miss Marples, Hercule Peroits, Peter Wimseys, and Gideon Fells of classic detective fiction, the hard-boiled private eye is no longer an eccentric or wealthy amateur” (Scaggs 60). Modeled after the hardboiled detective’s older cousin, the white Western settler-cowboy, the hardboiled detective knows that stability of any kind is never a given. And in fact, the hardboiled detective resists being paid off because he recognizes that money is the source of the corruption: As Joan Copjec writes in her description of the *noir* (dis)order that was modeled after the hardboiled pulps: “the neutral, dead system of symbolic community and exchange that had supported the classical world has given way in *film noir* to a world that crawls with private enjoyment and thus rots the old networks of communication” (Copjec 194). Recuperating payment only to cover his expenses, the hardboiled detective prefers to live with meager wages because he is principally opposed to privatized capital. In this way, the hardboiled detective further differentiates himself from the casual observer of the classic whodunit. His short-wired temper and counter-institutional stance leads him to willfully oppose capitalist mechanisms that seek to undermine his position as a working-class, righteous protagonist, even as he is apparently helpless to stop the flow of capitalist corruption. At the same time, the hardboiled detective’s allegiance to any social justice paradigm or efficacy is as variable as the crime fiction genre is expansive.¹⁰

¹⁰ For example, William Hare reads a number of famous hardboiled protagonists as “pawns of fate” in adherence to “the universal victimization of humanity in the novels of hard-bitten realistic novelist Theodore Dreiser” (107) during the return of veterans from World War II. In a similar vein, Sinda Gregory reads Dashiell Hammett’s Continental Op’s personal code of conduct as a method to

The initial hardboiled detective character also differs from previous models in the new emphasis on physicality and masculine performance, blending aspects of The Western with the mystery genre. Specifically, in contrast to the “armchair detective,” the early hardboiled detective resembled more closely the Western cowboy in the extralegal measures and tough talk that are condoned, and indeed, extolled, in the hardboiled text. As Erin A. Smith notes, readers of the hardboiled appeared to commiserate with the “rugged individual who struggled to maintain his autonomy in the face of an entrapping society and a wilderness to be conquered, both cast in unmistakably feminine terms” (39). Consider, for instance, the published description of the ideal *Black Mask Magazine* reader as written by the editor for the magazine in 1933: “He is vigorous-minded, hard...responsive to the thrill of danger, the stirring exhilaration of clean, swift, hard action...[He] knows the song of a bullet. The soft, slithering hiss of a swift-thrown knife, the feel of hard fists, the call of courage” (Smith 28, citing *Black Mask*). The emphasis on action, intuition (“hunches”), and brutal honesty differentiate the hardboiled detective from the armchair detective.

The deconstruction of the hardboiled hero by critics like Michael Denning, Christopher Breu, and Linda Mizejewski highlights the action-oriented and renegade nature of the hardboiled detective, who is “smart but, more important, street-smart, a tough action hero” (Mizejewski 17). The hardboiled persona pushed for the recognition that there are “different kinds of smart” and that being smart was not limited to the skills

not engage in the politics of the corrupt environment, opting instead to perform the responsibilities to which he is assigned by the agency and maintaining an emotional distance from others (54-7).

of ratiocination. Christopher Breu also notes the physical attributes privileged in the Western cowboy-turned-hardboiled detective, who exemplified the new rule that “Manhood was no longer a moral quality but a physical attribute; it was to be proven on the playing field, in the bar, in the bedroom, in the streets, and on the factory floor” (6). On the one hand, the celebration of physicality located in the hardboiled revision of the armchair detective speaks to a disruption of the capitalist generation of the “autonomous liberal subject” (Day 111). In her theorization of The Ability Contract, Ally Day emphasizes the significance of predictability in the Lockean definition of the subject’s value through labor and utility: “It’s not just that to labor is to enclose an object and make it useful, but it is also to expect that object to *continue to be* useful” (108). The factor of predictability that accompanies the invention of currency increases “man’s private property...beyond labor and utility; in doing so, he relies upon understandings of his own labor, and the predictability of the labor, reifying stable boundaries of the body” (109). The hardboiled persona is fundamentally unpredictable in his work methods and results; as a result, he may be read as having the potential to throw off The Ability Contract in his desire to willfully thwart the predictive mechanisms of capitalist industry and biopolitical social discipline.

At the same time, the performance of physical, and implicitly ableist, manhood celebrated in the antagonistic hardboiled persona also complicates the social justice aspects of the hardboiled character’s anti-capitalist stance. The aspects of this character that align with the Anglo-European male working-class demographic are the same aspects that perceives the individual body as private property that is newly threatened,

indeed endangered, because of the capitalist modernization project. Specifically, as Day outlines in her theory of The Ability Contract, “The purpose of theorizing the Ability Contract is two-fold: first, to highlight the centrality of predictability in the value of labor; and second, to demonstrate how identifying as a person with disability, as a stable identity, is contingent upon male-bodied whiteness and global north citizenship” (106). While the hardboiled hero is unpredictable in his labor schedule and service to capitalist production, his own disciplining mechanisms for non-white, non-Anglo, non-male, non-heteronormative, and differently abled others renders his overall performance as falling in predictable service to the Ability Contract of the global north.

One clear aspect of this predictable, even cliché, performance of manhood is that it fundamentally relied on gendered and racialized public spaces for it to complete the performance, a fact that increased the hardboiled detective’s levels of anxiety as he witnessed public and work spaces becoming increasingly diverse. In her analysis, Erin A. Smith posits that it is this demand for the performance of a particular kind of masculinity that actually lead to the effeminizing of male British mystery writers because of their upper-class standpoint (39). The early twentieth-century hardboiled persona succumbed to xenophobic, sexist, and ableist language and perspectives because the danger was felt to be coming from “those Others” invited by capitalism to share the space with working-class white males. In other words, while the anti-capitalist, existentialist stance of the hardboiled detective falls in line with Marxist critique, this figure clings to certain aspects of heteronormative performance as identity because this figure recognizes that he has something to lose beyond wage consideration.

The performance of this masculinity is characterized by the hardboiled's ironic obsession with costuming, social décor, and commodities, as these elements were read as signifiers of masculine or feminine gender as scripted by early twentieth century heteronormative and xenophobic scripts (Smith 41). Consider, for instance, Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*, in which hostility toward non-white immigrants is rendered through interchanging visual effeminization and queering of the immigrant figure of Cairo, "The Levantine." First of all, the description of Cairo's clothing runs nearly three times longer than the description of the "femme fatale" (see, for example, page 42). More pointedly, Cairo is described by Spade's female assistant as "queer" (67) and Spade asks at one point: "Where is he...the fairy" (94-5). Cairo is further effeminized when he gets beat up by a girl: "A voice in Spade's living-room screamed: 'Help! Help! Police! Help!' The voice, high and thin and shrill, was Joel Cairo's" (72). In this deep resentment of the figure of the foreigner of color, the text both queers and effeminizes Cairo in order to shore up the comparative image of the hardboiled detective. Moreover, in rendering Cairo "impotent" as compared to the "white dick," race as virility comes to the forefront as a prevalent issue in the hardboiled school, wherein white male privilege was felt to be endangered.

The classic whodunit and the hardboiled detective fiction genres both appeal to anxieties about an uncertain social order, staging the investigation as a "space of imperial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (Louise Pratt 8). With that said,

the staging of what Mary Louise Pratt terms the “contact zone” is variably normalized, depending on the sub-genre. Specifically, while the classic whodunit approaches the rupture of social order, often staged by the entrance into the environment by a marked stranger, as a temporary breach that is restored by the novel’s end, the hardboiled detective fiction genre approaches modern urban spaces as irrevocable “contact zones” that can offer no such respite. As a result, there are certain aspects to both the detective persona and the modern environment within which he operates that makes the traditional hardboiled detective fiction genre more malleable for social critique than the classic whodunit.

In line with simultaneous anxieties about urbanization and domestication, late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century detective fiction texts extended the notion of private/public space toward a mapping of “safety” and “danger” implicated in the depictions of the kinds of people that the detective registered as surrounding him. Pratt’s notion of “the seeing man” is appropriate here. In her discussion of the expansive travel genre, she describes the seeing man as “an admittedly unfriendly label for the white male subject of European landscape discourse—he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess” (24). Like Walter Benjamin’s conceptualization of the flâneur, or the voyeuristic, pleasure-seeking urban tourist, the hardboiled detective surveys, and tries to repossess, the modern urbanized landscape and the willful bodies that encroach on previously stable (read: white and masculine) environment. As Pratt further elucidates: “the flâneur is in many ways an urban analogue of the interior explorer” (Pratt 203). As a result, the hardboiled protagonist employs an imperialist critique of empire, or more

specifically, of late capitalist mechanisms, because these new mechanisms threaten the previous stability that the prototype for the basis of the hardboiled persona previously enjoyed. This mapping often took the form of racist “coloring,” wherein entire areas were relegated to cartographic euphemisms implying that non-white races lived and worked there.

In fact, Joan Copjec connects the calculating detective with the insurance men and claims adjusters:

This new numberlust was an immediate response to the various democratic revolutions which demanded that people be counted. The increased interest in numbers had a double-edged effect. The first was corrosive: statistics had a mordant effect on the image of the monarchical body that had held the old, premodern nations together. The second was constitutive: statistics served to individualize the mass of the citizens, to create more and more kinds of people (169).

The hardboiled detective's panic and registration of “more and more kinds of people” reflect both effects, supporting the thesis that “modern bureaucracies and detective fiction spring from the same source” (170). In the hardboiled text, these embodied spaces that signified upon “the Other” revealed the portent of the messiness that modern urbanization propelled in its cementing of lines between privileged and marginalized communities. characterization of the *noir* hero.

The connection between being a wrangling outlaw on the outskirts of civilization and the hyper-masculine, take-no-bull hardboiled detective is as easy to recognize as it was a factor in the hardboiled detective's popularity among white working-class males. Indeed, Smith demonstrates that these pulps were oriented toward and attracted a readership of a particular sub-group of working-class men, readers who “constituted part

of a ‘labor aristocracy,’ a class of workers distinguished by their skill, high wages, steady work, autonomy on the job, and leadership roles in working-class communities” (89). As Smith astutely points out, these workers were also more likely to be able to afford to buy fiction. Furthermore, tensions about the nature of work versus play, the role of unionization, and the emergent system of Taylorism that redefined both the workday and method of work all rendered the hardboiled genre as a distinctly wary genre: wary of social sea change but also wary of organized and institutionalized corruption. In short, the “labor aristocracy” experienced unique developments in the workforce that in turn led to anxieties about the disappearance of white-European and masculine-dominant public spaces.

Readers of the hardboiled enjoyed the text’s reflections on the sources of tension and anxiety in the modern era as felt by the “labor aristocracy” as well as the hardboiled hero’s “willful” refusal to conform to societal and institutional pressures. These anxieties are reflected in hardboiled fiction through the emphasis on what Smith calls “woman-free zones”: “Detective, Western, and adventure pulps were woman-free zones, zones rapidly disappearing from everyday life. As all-male work and leisure spaces dwindled in working-class communities, imagined communities of working-class male readers emerged in part as psychic compensation” (30). Hardboiled detective fiction marked these work and leisure spaces as endangered. As such, hardboiled detective fiction relished all those social spaces that appeared to “replenish” masculinity, like the saloon, the hotel, the back street, and the very sparse, single-guy detective apartment. The “mean streets (where women, as in turn-of-the-century saloons, do not go unescorted), boxing

matches, tobacco shops, bars” (31) were registered as aligning with the interests of a certain demographic of white male readers, catering to what was perceived by writers and publishers alike as male taste. As a result, the performance of “manhood” exhibited by the hardboiled detective was directly tied to, and embodied through, the public spaces that were becoming restructured, gendered, and racialized in their new accommodation of capitalism and women and immigrant workers.

True to this reading of the labor aristocracy’s anxiety about territory encroachment, while the hardboiled has been ascribed “masculinist” features, the sub-genre is not devoid of any commentary on marriage, family, sex, and identity. In fact, these topics are some of the core sources of anxiety for the hardboiled detective. Consider, for example, the random lengthy parable in *The Maltese Falcon* about a man who abandons his family only to find himself in the same position. The simultaneous anxiety and feeling of inevitability of becoming the chained “family man” is palpable. Moreover, the detective partnerships and group criminal networks (our early “bromances”) located in the hardboiled detective fiction genre dismantle the romantic notion that the detective was always isolated. Instead, the hardboiled detective is wary of social contracts, of being entangled in social commitments to others. However, in reality, the hardboiled detective is always surrounded by other people, and often other males. It’s just that the hardboiled detective is wary of all this socializing.

Another crucial way that the hardboiled text distinguished itself from the whodunit was in its emphasis on a lack of restoration of order at the end. The emphasis for a plot resolution in the classic whodunit is what for certain critics principally aligns

whodunits with British authors (Gruesser 14). Indeed, the imperative to “restore order” has come to be read as a conservative feature of the whodunit that seeks to keep a lid on social critique by reifying the appearance of everything (and everyone) restored to its (their) rightful place. For example, in texts like Agatha Christie’s *Murder on the Orient Express*, the whodunit formula entertains the detective with “the right kind of people” (Smith 88). Often, the selected/selective group of people can decide together whether justice has been done, sidestepping the procedure of following up with police. As Smith points out in her analysis of Christie’s novel: “Those assembled decide that justice has been done, so they agree on a story for the Yugoslavian police that will close the investigation” (85). What this shows is that even in the whodunit, there is a specter of extra-legality and privilege that enables a state of exceptionalism to those who are most lucky to survive the brief breach in social order. In Smith’s words: “The truly guilty man is punished, the good go free, and the prelapsarian circle of the innocents from the right kind of families is restored” (86). The restoration of order can be read as an upper-class, or “genteel” concern.

In contrast, the working-class position of the hardboiled detective may push the protagonist to question how resolutions tend to coerce the arm of the law to protect those with the most financial advantage. In its unsettling of the whodunit, the hardboiled’s “attempts to contain various threatening ‘others’ ultimately deconstruct it, and the general tendency of hard-boiled fiction to replicate, explore, and even interrogate its own conventions allow the entire sub-genre to be appropriated for a variety of ideological, formal, and generic purposes” (Scaggs 78). As a result, this sub-genre can be read for its

mirroring of both the social and institutional conditions of power. Indeed, critics have also noted the hardboiled detective's status as "double agent" (Scaggs 133) in terms of his simultaneous cynicism and idealistic desire to right social wrongs.

Overall, three core characteristics of the hardboiled can be emphasized that differentiate it from the whodunit, even as these two models have shared similar antipathies toward marginalized communities: the protagonist's class position, an emphasis on action and violence, and a refusal to restore social order at the end of the story. Specifically, in the hardboiled, the detective's working-class standpoint and wariness of greed plays a role in refusing a restoration of order at the end of the text, even when we find out who committed the crime. In other words, in the hardboiled text, we know that there will always be a new murder under the principles of a capitalist market economy (and a mentality) that by definition lacks a sense of humanity. To summarize, hardboiled detective fiction text is simultaneously conservative and democratic: it is conservative in its dread at losing those spaces that were once only reserved for a certain group of select individuals. And, it is democratic in that it is critical of socioeconomic paradigms that condone, or even require, corruption. What appears to be a constant and significant feature in texts that have taken up the hardboiled detective fiction genre and revised it is the hardboiled persona's working-class standpoint and distrust of capitalist greed and corruption. This feature can align the hardboiled persona with other social justice projects.

While the whodunit and the hardboiled share the convention of emphasizing the exceptional abilities of the main character, the hardboiled detective is wary of financial

gain and often, if not always, comes from meager resources. From its emergence in the gritty pulps in the 1920s, the American “hardboiled” detective fiction genre combined a distinctly anti-authoritarian stance with a lower-class standpoint that is markedly distinct, and in some ways antagonistic to, the independently wealthy detective of the whodunits located in Edgar Allen Poe stories and early twentieth-century British mystery fiction. Thus, the counter-institutional standpoint of the hardboiled detective combined with his uniquely modern anti-capitalist position leaves open space for critiques to be taken up in the hardboiled detective fiction texts that are not allotted the whodunit. With that said, what these two traditions share is the privileged position of the detective in respect to race, gender, and citizenship, a feature that is often underplayed in celebrating the counter-institutional stance of the hardboiled detective. For example, one aspect that pairs the whodunit and the hardboiled and differentiates it from the film noir and literary noir sub-genres within the expansive category of crime fiction is that the position of the main protagonist is automatically set up to be viewed as the ethical and intellectual superior to the other characters in the text (See Table 1). It is this moral and intellectual superiority as perceived by the detective that serves to justify the detective’s independent will.

Sub-Genre	Originary Time Period	Protagonist	Plot	Threat to Protagonist	Resolution
Mystery fiction	Late 19th-early 20th Century	intelligent, upper-class	central mystery to be solved according to rationalist methods.	Protagonist must live	the solving of the case restores social order to the novel's satisfaction
Hardboiled detective fiction	1930s-40s, prompted by <i>Black Mask</i> magazine	intelligent, working-class	capitalist corruption at every organized level, mystery is at the forefront, often prompted by the disappearance of a priceless artifact or the disappearance (or appearance) of an attractive woman.	Protagonist must live	case is solved but there is general ennui about pervasive corruption in society
Police procedural	Post-1940s	Similar to hardboiled persona but must meet departmental demands and regulations	similar to hardboiled, but detective negotiates social and institutional corruption from inside	Protagonist must live	order is restored; sub-genre has been critiqued for upholding conservative in its reification of the central legal institution
Film and literary noir	1920-1940s; neo-noir hereafter	falsely accused of crime; on the run; fundamental lack of exonerating information	central mystery is whether the crime is in the subject's head or if it is the cause of corrupt social and legal order	Protagonist may die	variable, but resolution points to whether the protagonist's false understanding was at fault or the corrupt environment

Table 1: The Main Sub-Genres of Crime Fiction

Interventions into The Hardboiled by Ethnic Minority Authors, White Feminist Authors, and White Lesbian Authors

The timeline of interventions into the detective fiction genre by U.S. authors of color and feminist authors does not match the standard timeline of gradual integration of diverse voices into academia and the canon. For one, as mentioned in my introduction, women had been revising some of the precepts of the mystery genre since the late nineteenth century. For another, there exists a clear parallel chronology of African American authored detective fiction texts stemming from the early twentieth century to the present. Beginning with Pauline Hopkins *Hagar's Daughter* (1901) and moving to Rudolph Fisher's *The Conjure Man Dies* (1932) and Chester Himes' *For Love of Immabelle* (1957), the early twentieth century witnessed revisions to the hardboiled and whodunit formulas that corroborated with the interests of African American authors to expand on the types of genres they could work in as well as utilize existing popular genres for social criticism. On the one hand, black writers were in large part dependent on white patrons to finance and vocally support their writing (Bailey 9). On the other hand, the emergence of African American newspapers and periodicals during the Antebellum period helped facilitate a more open space for black authors, even as magazines like *Colored American Magazine*, the venue in which Pauline Hopkins published, still had to "appeal to white, middle-class audiences for economic, social, and political support" (Cordell 52).

The uneven relationship that black authors have held with white publishers helps explain the fact that revisions to the hardboiled detective fiction genre are located in

somewhat parallel terms in relation to which authors were capable of publishing and where. Consider, for example, the fact that Chester Himes wrote his detective fiction novel *For Love of Immabelle* (1957) in France at the prompting of his French editor, who witnessed an opportunity given the growth and development of the hardboiled and film noir genres in the U.S. and in Europe. Moreover, the style and form of African American detective fiction reflects certain conventions of its respective time period, which is unsurprising given my reading of the detective fiction genre as a form that attempts to reflect the social conditions of the present day. As The Harlem Renaissance expanded and solidified a literary space for black writers (even as many still had to rely on support from white patrons), other literary forms took precedence from the still-nascent genre of the hardboiled. Still, early African American detective fiction contributed key revisions to the mystery and detective fiction genres. The texts of Hopkins, Fisher, and Himes inaugurated the figure of what Stephen F. Soitos calls “The Blues Detective.” These works and subsequent African American detective fiction texts combined African American and black diasporic aesthetic forms with the detective fiction genre to “reinterpret and revise existing Euro-American forms with heightened consciousness” (Soitos 37). As Soitos outlines, the early African American detective fiction authors “signified on detective fiction” through an “alteration of detective persona, double-consciousness detection, black vernaculars, and hoodoo” (Soitos 27).

That said, critics have identified a clear division between uses of the detective fiction genre by early twentieth-century authors and authors who began working in the genre during the 1980s. After the student protest movements of the 1970s, the “canon

wars” of the 1980s, and the often-celebrated expansion of the literary market, the detective fiction genre reemerged as a useful literary mode for U.S. male authors of color. This reemergence of the hardboiled formula as it was appropriated by male authors of color is the result of both the expansion of publishing market opportunities and the sociopolitical re-envisioning of how people of color should be seen in literature. The most readily recognizable example is Walter Mosley’s *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990). However, authors Ishmael Reed and Colson Whitehead also utilized and reframed the hardboiled genre mode. In contrast to Mosley, Reed and Whitehead produced works that more closely aligned with the “anti-detective” mode, in part exploring the postmodernist turn that desired to disrupt narrative and realist conventions. In short, certain African American literary authors of the 1980s and 1990s recognized in the hardboiled tradition the strength and allure of a counter-institutional figure and a genre mode that attempted to unsettle the desire for closure typically associated with the whodunit and with the mystery genre in general.

In a similar historical vein to the reemergence of black detective fiction, Chicano and Chicana authors broke into the detective fiction genre after the realist-based literature stemming from the Chicano Nationalist Movement (El Movimiento) in the 1970s and 1980s tapered off and authors sought to explore new genre forms. Perhaps another way to explain it is to suggest, as Ralph E. Rodriguez does in his book, *Brown Gumshoes: Detective Fiction and the Search for Chicana/o Identity* (2005), that because in the 1960s and 1970s mainstream presses “largely overlooked Chicana/o authors,” these authors were hesitant to work in a genre form that has always carried with it a degree of

condescension, “something well beneath the respectability of literature” (3). According to Susan Sotelo, Rudy Apodaca’s *Waxen Image* (1977) was the first Chicano “whodunit,” and the “novel’s focus on an African idol, an Anglo protagonist and the use of a popular middle-class genre—the problem-to-be solved detective novel—limited its critical Chicano audience, and it was generally ignored by the mainstream audience” (Sotelo 151).

With that said, as Ralph E. Rodriguez explains, over time, the isolationist position of the detective within the popular formula has resonated “especially well with Chicana/os who, though subjects of the nation, are often represented as alien to it” (Rodriguez 6). With respect to the desire on the part of Chicano and Chicana authors to diversify their use of genre forms, it is important and interesting to note that every Chicano and Chicana detective fiction author wrote poetry or novels prior to entering into the genre. Consider, for instance, the statement of one of the most popular Chicano detective fiction authors, Ronaldo Hinojosa, in his answer to the question of why he chose to write a detective fiction novel: “I chose to use the detective genre in 1985 for two reasons: to show young writers not to restrict themselves to one form of the novel—I knew of no Mexican American writer who had published a crime novel prior to 1985—[and] it fit the Series given the changes in the Valley” (Sotelo 169). In fact, the two Chicana authors featured in this study, Lucha Corpi and Alicia Gaspar de Alba, are teachers and authors who may have taken up the genre for similar reasons: to explore with literary forms and to work in a genre that could highlight themes of isolation, (ill)legality, and counter-institutional discourse.

As Chican@ forays into the mystery genre grew, authors began to explore the parameters of the formula, looking to “define their particular detectives’ communities in relationship to the hegemonic U.S. community in addition to delineating the immunity of their protagonist” (Sotelo 190). For example, consider Sheila Ortiz Taylor’s *Coachella* (1998), which features a protagonist who investigates the spread of AIDS in the Coachella Valley of California in 1983. In Taylor’s novel, the criminal is not one individual per say, but a force and a mentality, specifically “the lack of concern for the spread of AIDS within minority population” (Sotelo 155). In sum, Chican@ authors came to the detective fiction genre during the 1980s in order to experiment with the formula, to expand on the types of genre modes that were being published, and to signify on the notion of a definitive ending to the mystery. With all this said, the mystery genre is still a small subset of Chicano literary productions, which authors like Lucha Corpi and critics like Sandra Sotelo attribute more to mainstream publishing practices than any inherent split between the detective fiction genre and author interests. For instance, Lucha Corpi sees the lack of readership on behalf of Chican@ readers as the result of “a lack of acknowledgement of all of these writers [Latin American and Chicano].” Supporting this claim is Sotelo’s noting of Corpi that “Like Hinojosa, her reading public is larger in Europe” (Sotelo 176).

On an even smaller scale, the only detective fiction novel featuring a Latina detective and written by a Latina author is Cuban American writer Carolina Garcia-Aguilera’s Lupe Solano Series. With respect to the seeming dearth of detective fiction authored by Latin@ authors, we might speculate along, as do critics Raphael Dalleo and

Elena Machado Sáez, that the preference for more overt forms of protest literature and Latino-Caribbean writers of the 1960s like Jesus Colon, Piri Thomas, Pedro Pietri, and the Young Lords also led to a subsequent move away “from literature as high art in the direction of cultural studies more broadly conceived” (6). Dalleo and Sáez identify studies of music and dance as the cultural forms that are getting more attention. However, this is not to say that Latino crime fiction has not also become a successful genre in its own right. Latino crime fiction has mirrored the positivist recuperation of “street lit” located in the emergence of Black crime fiction, which has seen an enormous boom recently in the self-publishing market. However, crime fiction does not tend to feature an alienated protagonist who stands in opposition to both institutional and local forms of corruption with whom we are meant to align our moral guard, aspects that are the focus of this project on detective fiction. And, there has been a huge boom in the publication of detective fiction novels in Latin American countries written by both male and female authors.

Since the 1980s, Asian American authors have also elected to take up the detective fiction genre. Henry Chang writes a series that is situated in New York’s *Chinatown*. Lisa Lee and Qui Xialong both write novels that move between the U.S. and China. As such, A critique of my corpus may be made that I am incorporating texts that consider the U.S.-Mexico and U.S.-Cuba national divides, and as such am simply avoiding working with Lee’s and Xialong’s texts for the sake of convenience. However, as I will make more clear in the subsequent chapters, the history of pan-American relations are directly tied to the creation and perpetuation of U.S. nationalism and

neoliberal capitalism, going back to colonial and imperial conquest of the indigenous people in North, South, and Central America and the subsequent wars over these territories. As a result, while I explore and scrutinize the notion of U.S. nationalism as a clearly definable identity, Chican@ politics and critiques of Pan-Americanism fit more into the contours of this particular project than U.S.-China relations and other border crossings that are being explored in detective fiction texts all over the world.

On a comparative scale, in consideration of how male authors of color have revised or manipulated the hardboiled genre, one feature stands prominent, as pointed out by Maureen T. Reddy and Stephen Soitos: the characterization of the detective's alienated persona "is mitigated by his community connections" (Reddy 46). The tension between personal choice and the perceived obligations toward family and community have created an altered thread of the hardboiled motif of preferring alienation. Specifically, these revisionist texts indicate that the hardboiled detective doesn't have to be (or cannot survive while living) completely alone. At the same time, the revisionist texts share with the initial hardboileds a passion for personal moral guidance, wherein the detective must be on alert for easy answers, including uncritical support for social rites that carry the potential to actually deter social justice. Another line of inquiry, in particular given the advent of police procedurals, is that characters like Michael Chabon's ethically-inclined Landsman and Shemets and Henry Chang's Jack Yu are committed to the institution of the police force, having to negotiate reprimands and meeting rank requirements. These negotiations often take place in the context of an overtly racist, hostile environment that keeps the detective in a perpetual state of frustration and

discomfort. In short, male authors of color have revised the hardboiled isolationist paradigm to function as a platform of critical distance, rather than the buying of the wholesale ideology of personal independence and freedom that marks the white and male hardboiled tradition.

With that said, texts written by male authors of color often fall prey to the employment of one narrow lens of social critique. This lens has tended to deconstruct racial disparity at the expense of recognizing how gender and sexuality enable privileges afforded the male detective as the result of the power inequities these categories have historically enacted. For example, Maureen T. Reddy notes in relation to Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress*: "Easy's clarity about race, however, does not extend to the narrative's depictions of women and race, as seen in the binary split of Daphne/Ruby//flesh/spirit. The novel, in short, has a serious racial blind spot where women are concerned" (Reddy 92). In her large comparative study of representations of race and racial politics in American detective fiction, Reddy sees that black male detectives "tend to share the motives of their white hard-boiled precursors, with the difference that the texts in which they appear stress openly that their race is often a chief reason that they are hired in the first place; while that is also demonstrably true of the white hard-boiled detectives, that fact never gets mentioned in the novels" (Reddy 60). Similarly, while Chicano detective fiction emphasizes community ties and the interrelationship between the police officer's family and the "police family," the work-domestic divisions seem to remain fixed in their seemingly natural binary relationship according to heteronormative gender conventions.

White feminist detective fiction parallels the general timeline of interventions into the traditional detective fiction genre by Chicano authors while also breaking with earlier feminist mystery conventions. Specifically, critics studying interventions on behalf of white feminist authors into the mystery genre note that the late 1970s and early 1980s marked a break with earlier women-authored mystery and detective fiction, going so far as to declare that feminist detective fiction writers like Marcia Muller, Sarah Paretsky, and Sue Grafton had entirely “reconceptualized what it meant to be a female detective” (Kim 2). The first U.S. white feminist detective fiction novel that attempted this reconceptualization is Marcia Muller’s *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* (1977), followed by Liza Cody’s *Dupe* (1980) and what would be two best-selling series, Sue Grafton’s *A is for Alibi* and Sara Paretsky’s *Indemnity Only*, in 1982.

The late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed a historical breach with domesticity as a central theme for white women’s fiction, which might explain this sudden development. The second wave feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s, consisting of largely white and middle class women, pushed for more professional and work opportunities for those women for whom the professional arena was still a masculinist space. The white feminist “right to work” movement prompted a new form of the feminist hardboiled, in which female protagonists demand recognition that they are capable of being “action bodies themselves” (Mizejewski 143). Moreover, white feminist authors sought to reflect these changes in popular fiction by creating female protagonists who were able to take charge and embody powerful figures operating in traditionally male-dominated public spaces: “Introduced as single, intelligent, and in their thirties, these urban private investigators

take a physically active approach to crime that is far from ‘spinster cozy’” (Gavin 264).

Perhaps it is due to the fact that white women were taking on more important roles in institutional positions of police work that police procedurals were the first subgenre to be taken up by female authors (Walton and Jones 13). The working-girl novels that first appeared in the 1840s (Denning 85) reflected modern changes in work conditions by illustrating that women could walk in the street and inhabit historically white male spaces. However, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the ending to such novels often reaffirmed heteropatriarchal and upper-class values by requiring the amateur woman detective to marry, thus changing both her single status and her economic position. Therefore, in the late 1970s, the reemergence of the single white working-class *professional* feminist detective marks a historical breach with former prototypes of the female sleuth (Mizejewski 18-19). As Sarah Paretsky stated in an interview: “I wanted to read about a woman who could solve her own problems” (Smith 2, citing Stasio). As part of these historical changes, the publishing market began to recognize its female readership and began to reconsider what sells and to whom (Radway 10).

At the same time, it is important to recognize that while white American women were calling to be included in the workspace, women of color have always worked. Indeed, as critic Nicole Decuré notes, in detective fiction “...white women writers try to escape into fantasies, imagining women living on their own, encountering all sorts of dangers” whereas “black women’s tales are more realistic, more concerned with the social conditions in the black community, paralleling life and statistics” (Decuré 183). One recognizes in Decuré’s contextualization of more recent white feminist detective

fiction a brazenness associated with the new sentiment that white women *could* demand access to the spaces that hold potential danger and reward. In short, the historical contexts of the 1970s and 1980s brought about the novel notion that (white) women could occupy the street and be perceived more or less as figures that signified legally-sanctioned authority (Mizejewski 143). At the same time, these detectives established strong bonds with other women, echoing some of the shared characteristics of male African American and Chicano-authored detective fiction. Moreover, one of the most salient characteristics that white feminist detective fiction shares with U.S. women of color detective fiction is an investment in exposing the persistent violence against women and continued sexism toward women in both professional and social contexts (Gavin 265-266).

In line with the emergence of white feminist detective fiction texts, the 1980s also witnessed the emergence of white lesbian detective fiction, which, in addition to exposing the issue of violence against women, also utilized the detective fiction genre to critique the social policing of gender, sexuality, and women's bodies. As emphasized in detective fiction written by M. F. Beal, Katherine V. Forrest, J. M. Redmann, and Barbara Wilson, the white lesbian detective experiences alienation not just because of her perceived critical distance from legal institutions but also because of her status as an outsider in respect to heteronormative gender scripts. As a result, the position of social alienation that is characteristic of the detective persona is doubled in white lesbian detective fiction, illustrated in the protagonist's feelings of "loneliness and borderline neurosis" (Mizejewski 49).

The question arises of what to do with the white feminist and lesbian detective

fiction that began selling in the late 1970s and 1980s: do we situate these as following from the mystery fiction written by early American women detective fiction authors like Anna Katherine Green, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Susan Glaspell, and Pauline Hopkins, or do we state that these texts are reconfiguring the masculinist features of the hardboiled genre? In response, I would emphasize that the post-1970s white feminist detective fiction created characters who were recognized legally and socially as professional detectives like the hardboiled detectives of the 1940s, rather than amateur detectives in early white women's detective fiction. As a result, I propose that in creating a timeline of (re)discovery of detective fiction that has inaugurated what some critics have referred to as a "Neo-Golden Age," we should focus on the renegotiation of private/public space that has roots in the difference between the whodunit and the hardboiled. To be more exact, it appears that while both male authors of color and white feminist authors capitalize on the liberating distance the hardboiled mode allows from the domestic sphere, white feminist authors also implicitly resist some of the normative conventions of the whodunit and "country cozy" mysteries in their refusal to keep the mystery in the domestic and private sphere. In fact, this aggravation of the domestic plot serves as critical commentary on the nature of the legal and social disciplining systems in America. Moreover, there is also the important fact of new professionalization opportunities for white women that were not accessible to earlier white female authors. For example, while during the early twentieth century women authors could imagine amateur women detectives, later authors witnessed women being employed by the police academy and filling positions of power. Most importantly, however, I argue that these revisionist texts should be aligned with the

hardboiled genre rather than the whodunit because these texts imply that the larger causes of social disorder cannot be resolved come the mystery's resolution.

As is the case with revisionist detective fiction written by male authors of color, critics have identified an apparent singular focus in white feminist detective fiction in its emphasis on how gender and sexuality affect the detective's standpoint and access to resources: "The white women detectives seldom reflect upon the ways in which their race offers them privileges and thereby complicates gender discrimination" (Reddy 63).

Specifically, Reddy notes that:

The plots of feminist crime fiction usually violate the disorder-to-order, injustice-to-justice pattern by suggesting that what the broader society defines as justice is in fact most unjust and that the current social order is inherently oppressive. However, in the worlds of white feminists writing before 1995 or so, these insights are usually limited to gender bias, leaving racism unexamined. (Reddy 55)

As her illustrating example, Reddy reads the interracial relationship in Linda Grant's *A Woman's Place* as exemplifying a one-dimensional reading of inequality, stating that in Catherine's mind, she is gendered, whereas her black lover, Jesse, is raced (Reddy 64).

One exception Reddy notes to this reading of white feminist detective fiction is in Sarah Paretsky's *Total Recall* (2001), where "V.I. recognizes how her own behavior or attitudes create consequences she does not intend or anticipate...*Total Recall*...mourns the gap that has opened between Jews and blacks since the heyday of the civil rights movement, and shows how pitting those routes against each other serves the interests of the white ruling class" (Reddy 132). However, Warshawski does not interpret her own position in the intersectional feature of racial, gender, and class oppression. In other words, Warshawski still interprets her own complicity from a singular point of analytical entry,

without recognizing the intersectional features of the way race, gender, class, and other forms of difference mutually work to enact social hierarchies.

When it comes to revisions to the detective fiction genre by male authors of color and white feminist authors, while the counter-institutional position of the hardboiled detective is refreshing in its spirit of non-conformity, there is also the shared emphasis among these texts that the male detective of color, the white feminist detective, and the white lesbian detective are not entirely autonomous and “free” to do whatever s/he chooses. In fact, a salient discomfort on the part of the detective of being hyper-visible in a predominantly white-male police department appears to be the primary reason that the majority of the novels on my reading list feature private investigators rather than cops from the department. As in the case of Rita Mae Brown’s postmistress and horse rider Harry Haristeen, Sara Paretsky’s proto-feminist V.I. Warshawski, James Lee Burke’s former Texas Ranger Billy Bob Holland, private detectives can set their own hours and are free to snoop, so to speak, because it is one of their skillsets to be able to find out information through covert means and using previous ties to the police department when necessary. These detectives are able to commit semi-legal acts to get the information they need. However, some of these semi-legal acts are in actually deemed extralegal by the overt racist or sexist societal structure that render these characters helpless in front of the law.

In the “diversification” of the detective fiction genre, the muddled question of authenticity and ownership continues to weigh heavily. Particularly, some have questioned whether authors can (or should) write from the point of view of protagonists

who do not share the identity of the author. Every book in the revisionist detective fiction archive deals issues related to structural inequality and the opportunities and disadvantages in working alone or with an appointed team. However, this does not mean that the political orientation of the protagonist toward the dominant legal system is homogenous among detective fiction written by male authors of color, white feminist authors, and women of color authors. Nor does it mean that white authors writing from the point of view of detectives of color have achieved the same political perspective as the authors studied in this project.

This brings me to the thorny issue of the politics of representation in fictional texts. Some may argue that it would be a wrong assumption to make that women of color know how to write a woman of color protagonist better than a white author or a male author of color might. And yet, I must say that largely the political critique surrounding the characters that are featured in U.S. women of color detective fiction is markedly different than in the case of texts written by white authors featuring women of color detectives and male authors of color. Maureen T. Reddy characterizes this difference as an issue of ideology within the centered standpoint of the protagonist. She notes that: “White writers with ‘ethnic’ detectives but without that progressive critique have fared extremely well in the marketplace...the mass of whites feel no pressure to change their worldview, which puts whiteness at the center, and welcome reading experiences in which that worldview is reinforced” (Reddy 190).

To be more specific, in her analysis of such white-authored texts featuring a central protagonist of color, Reddy noticed that “Race continues to be an issue

exclusively in relation to people of color: without people of color, this logic suggests, there is no race to be examined. Whiteness continues to be transparent in these novels, requiring no analysis in itself” (Reddy 151). While there is a cultural currency in “othered” protagonists, in many of the texts written by white authors and featuring a protagonist of color, we are “left with the reassurance the blacks are like whites—not, significantly, the reverse—and that racism is akin to any other reform of social alienation” (Reddy 160). More dangerously, many authors have taken an approach to representing the politics of race that “derives from a perspective that sees racism as identical to personal prejudice, a seriously limited analysis that ignores the systemic nature of racism and thus offers no challenge to existing power relations. From this perspective, ideas about ‘reverse racism’ make sense” (Reddy 166-7). As a result, we must consider carefully that while the detective figure is always tropic in a sense, because the detective is meant to be recognizable, we must also ask the following: “When are ‘ethnic’ investigators a genuine means for social or political commentary, when are they merely a means to add exotic ‘color’, not unlike their colonial predecessors?” (Caroline Reitz 7). In the current political climate of what Jodi Melamed calls neoliberal multiculturalism, representing/speaking for other cultures while reifying existing social stratifications is greatly rewarded. This representation comes at the expense of achieving a social critique that dismantles the structures that enact and perpetuate real inequality.

The use of a cultural group in order to add an element of exoticism to the text has been identified in many detective fiction texts, stemming all the way back to the original hardboileds that used people of color as decoration for a “noir” setting. But, more recent

authors have been charged by certain critics as committing the same errors. Consider, for instance, Tony Hillerman, who is often categorized by reviewers and some critics as a Native American author of detective fiction, although he is a white author. One of the biggest issues with Hillerman's texts is that he assumes a white audience, which, as Reddy notes, may "make practical sense, given the demographics of book selling, but treating that assumption uncritically is fraught with problems. Making American Indians the objects of attention—the read, not the readers; the looked-at, not the lookers—is not a liberatory or transgressive act but a deeply conservative one" (Reddy 171).

Reddy states the dilemma with Hillerman's representation of North American indigenous cultures more precisely here: "Despite his good intentions, Hillerman remains a kind of cultural tour guide, with readers able to dip into the mildly exotic—witchcraft, for instance, and arcane rituals—through his work and feel good about that minor detour into another America" (Reddy 170). In other words, Hillerman's representations of American Indian cultures and relationship to the U.S. Federal Government are problematic because not only do they exoticize the dispossessed, but they also naturalize the culture to which this "other" is compared as a group and national identity without an interrogation of the historical, legal, and social causes for this comparative, yet, binary relationship. As a result, I have a difficult time characterizing, as many critics do, Tony Hillerman as an American Indian author, even as his attempt to illustrate the cultural, political, and legal distinctions and tensions between American and North American Indigenous borders differentiate his approach from the descriptions of urban spaces located in early American hardboiled detective fiction.

It is important to recognize that white feminist authors have also written characters who have a different racial and cultural background from the author. Unfortunately, these texts fall into similar traps to texts like Hillerman's. For example, as critic Adrienne E. Gavin recognizes, the first fictional feminist lesbian sleuth is Chicana: detective Kat Guerrara appeared in M. F. Beal's *Angel Dance* in 1977. However, just as is the case with Leslie Glass' April Woo,¹¹ the aspects of race and ethnicity with respect to characters of color written by white feminist authors seem to serve as decorating features rather than reflecting an interest by the authors to trouble existing power hierarchies. With all this in mind, I agree with Maureen T. Reddy that it is possible for non-marginalized authors to represent with dignity and complexity the struggles and issues of historically marginalized groups as told through the perspective of one character. But, as Reddy notes, this representation must work to dislodge normative frames of reference and emphasize the standpoint of the marginalized person in the complex ways this standpoint challenges status quo structural inequality.

Reddy has an example of someone who successfully performs this task: white female author Barbara Hambly's Benjamin January detective series. In part relying on the conventions of historical fiction, Hambly's Black male detective, Benjamin January, is a musician and trained surgeon who solves cases of social injustice in old New Orleans

¹¹ For example, commenting on her choice of featuring a Chinese American character April Woo, Leslie Glass notes that "April was an accident. I requested a female detective to interview, and NYPD assigned me a Chinese detective in Chinatown. I went down to talk to her at the Elizabeth Street Precinct. She was beautiful and smart, and I thought I would base a character on her for one book. She came from my imagination, and took over the series." In fact, Glass notes that she started working on a young adult series with her daughter when her daughter commented that "my protagonists went from April Woo to Julie Wood. I didn't even notice." (*Aunt Agatha's*).

during the late nineteenth century. January's male privilege is checked by his status as a former slave and African American in an openly racist society. At the same time, January's presence in the streets and his connections to different social networks is more affordable to him because of his gender than would be to a woman of color during this time. One gets the sense that Hambly did not create this character because of a mere fascination with African American culture or an interest in adding "color" to her work. Rather, in reading the text, it seems that Hambly created this detective character to explore the complexities of old New Orleans in regards to racial and gender tensions during the period immediately following postbellum. January's mission to protect his family coupled with his perspective as he is policed and tailed by legal and social institutions serves as an important contribution to the detective fiction mode as well as literature at large. All in all, while the politics of group representation are complex, there are degrees to which representation of another person's experience is helpful or harmful to the task of social justice and the destabilization of existing, naturalized power hierarchies.

Some critics who have heralded the indictment by feminist detective fiction of masculinist conventions and spaces have had difficulty negotiating the intersectional feature of U.S. women of color detective fiction. Consider the awkward situating by critic Adrienne E. Gavin of African American mystery writer Barbara Neely's detective fiction. Gavin describes Neely's series as foregrounding "the racism White meets, while both her race and her job give her a cultural invisibility that aids in her crime writing" (Gavin 267). Gavin emphasizes Blanche's racial identity while simultaneously relegating

Blanche's gender to the background, thus preventing a recognition of the ways in the interrelation between race and gender has historically created specific conditions of inequality for working women of color that white women and men of color have not experienced. However, the factual intertwining of racial and gender politics means that Neely's novel cannot be as (merely) a race or gender critique. As the next chapter of this project will tease out more thoroughly, Neely's main protagonist employs the tools of black womanist critique and an intersectional lens to analyze her surroundings. In effect, she complicates the notion of an assumed and unproblematic feminist camaraderie between white and black women living in the United States.

And, consider the nearly hostile terms Larry Landrum uses to describe Neely's protagonist Blanche White in his otherwise encyclopedic 1999 catalog of American mystery and detective fiction: Landrum describes Blanche White as an "angry, overweight black domestic" (Landrum 176). The wording here that employs the pervasive "angry black woman" cultural stereotype, and as couched against Landrum's other, less adjective-fueled brief descriptions in his book, registers not only discomfort, but, more crucially, a tragic misunderstanding of Neely's funny, intelligent, non-conformist central protagonist. Critical readings of U.S. women of color detective fiction such as these demonstrate an unease (or perhaps unfamiliarity) with negotiating complex and intersectional standpoints, even as the same critics recognize the counter-institutional potential in the hardboiled tradition more generally.

As I have outlined earlier, detective fiction can serve as a transgressive and liberatory space to identify institutionalized and naturalized forms of power, or it can be

used to engage with a cultural tourism and voyeurism that capitalizes, both literally and figuratively, on marginalized spaces that are typically not frequented by a mainstream consumer. The detective fiction genre reflects the concerns of the authors as they identify the social ailments that threaten, successfully or unsuccessfully, those with whom the author sympathizes or identifies. The protagonists located in white-authored detective fiction as well as detective fiction written by male authors of color have been limited in their capacity to reflect and criticize how identity categories are intertwined and how power works through interlocking forces of oppression. These novels have tended to overemphasize a “single axis” (Alexander-Floyd 4) factor of difference and inequity in their texts. The task of representing the intersectional operation of power hierarchies has apparently been left to U.S. women of color detective fiction. In the following section, I discuss more carefully U.S. women of color detective fiction authors and their relationship to both the politics of representation and to a cross-over audience of mystery lovers and women of color readers.

Historicizing and Contextualizing The Emergence of U.S. Women of Color Detective Fiction

The emergence of U.S. women of color detective fiction in 1991 came in the midst of a vast array of changes in socioeconomic policies. These policies include the cutting away of New Deal public programs, the privatization of the prison industry, and deindustrialization. Another significant change was a cultural shift that ushered in an era of celebrating “multiculturalism” and equal rights while at the same time ignoring the

fact that the socioeconomic changes and policies were creating more disparity than ever. U.S. women of color detective fiction texts reflect and negotiate this simultaneous celebration of diversity and relegation of communities of color to a type of economic and social abandonment. It is important to describe how the cultural imperative toward “diversification” in institutional initiatives sought in effect to silence critiques of socioeconomic policies. This description can assist in understanding how detective fiction texts illustrate power inequalities even in a society that has deemed itself “Post-Race” and gender bias-free.

In explaining my methods for textual inclusions and exclusions, it is also important to address the fact that African American women detectives were appearing on the movie screen more than ten years prior to the emergence of the first woman of color detective fiction text, Nikki Baker’s *In the Game* in 1991. These appearances are located in Black Action films of the 1970s, commonly referred to as “Blaxploitation Cinema,” which was produced by white Hollywood directors to capitalize on what they saw as a burgeoning African American viewer market. While Black Action films still incorporated racial drama at the core of their narratives, this racial drama was tied to the notion that both internal and external corruption was the result of people wanting to make money, a core theme also in the hardboiled detective fiction genre. Moreover, Black Action films enabled a narrative space for the black heroine to walk away, bruised, torn up, abused both sexually and physically, but walking away. This, as Yvonne D. Sims, suggests, has had profound consequences for staging new opportunities not just for how black women may be perceived, but also for how black women are enabled to perceive

themselves (Sims 14).

However, there is a contrast that needs to be acknowledged in terms of the degree of power and social critique between Black Action films that feature an African American female detective and African American women's detective fiction. Specifically, it is important to recognize that while the image of a black woman in control was empowering in its own right, this image was being constructed by white directors and captured traces of a common fetishization, and exploitation, of the black heroine. Following Kara Keeling's analysis of the imago in her book wherein "In order to be perceptible, an image must be recognizable to some degree according to 'official' conceptions of the world" (Keeling 95), the black action heroine may be interpreted as corresponding with "official," or most common, tropes about Black women circulating around the 1970s. To Keeling, the primary source of the creation and recognition of identity categories and tropes is located in the cinematic. The processes of racialization are rooted in the visual given that "For those identity-based groups that traditionally have been denied access to the mechanisms of representation, the politics of representation is primarily a politics of visibility" (44). In order to explore how identity circulates through cinematic operations, Keeling offers a "cinematic Fanon" reading into Deleuzian film theory, suggesting that one cannot interpret how value and exchange operate within cinematic reality without looking at how both the "black image" and the "white image" are problematic sources of production.

Specifically, Keeling brings together the theories of Deleuze and Fanon to explain how niche markets and blockbuster movies can oftentimes share certain clichés: the basic

assumption is that studio executives, movie producers, and advertisers all have an interest in making money off of the affective response of their intended audience members, and the intended audience members have the intention of getting a recognizable cultural value for their money, a circular consumer exchange system that prompts Keeling to view this exchange as mutually-constitutive of re-producing clichés. In her words, “Affectivity is the labor that holds cinematic reality together” (25). According to Keeling, this process of affectivity explains both the popularity and the cliché elements of Blaxploitation films that originated in the 1970s, which were developed at first as an alternative to a white-dominated film industry and subsequently created a “surplus” of young Black viewers who then expanded their tastes to both black *and* white audience-oriented films. Movie and television producers can then utilize this surplus at any time to capitalize on the interests of black viewers. In effect, Keeling reads Blaxploitation films as simultaneously exploitative and “queer,” because “Blaxploitation films disrupt gender ideals and sexual norms while simultaneously staging and seeking to quell some of the anxieties that attend such disruptions” (107).

In turn, Keeling performs a historical and gender studies reading of the Black Arts Movement and The Black Panther Party and identifies instances where black nationalist politics actually reconstitute hegemonic codes of oppression and division, particularly at the site of gender and sexual identity. For example, the critic contends with black nationalism’s quest for a collective identity that has relied on images of the masculine and an aversion to the feminine in order to achieve empowerment. This meant that black women could not be considered feminine because femininity was both reversed onto

white male bodies and witnessed in the passivity of white (middle-class) women: “Within the common sense forming in and informing the Black Power era, the effort to reverse the feminization, both discursive and corporeal, of black males in order to further the argument for their humanity involved a strict repudiation of any connection between femininity and the emergent understanding of blackness” (84). As such, during 1960s, “the cinematic appearance of Black Revolutionary Woman was masculine” (88).

Indeed, the question arises as to why Blaxploitation was “allowed” to exist, given the sheer panic on behalf of both legal forces and the consumer public in response to the idea of “militant Blacks with guns.” The answer may fall in line with Keeling’s discussion of the black male as a signifier for the threat of violence that these films worked in fact to perpetuate. This threat of the black male as aggressor actually helped shore up the paradigm of rationalizing “a society in which white supremacy and bourgeois culture are inseparable. On television, the appearance of blacks with guns was distilled into an imago of the Black that has secured the official perception of blacks today, especially of ‘black males,’ as violent and criminal” (Keeling 94). In other words, “Blacks with guns” assisted in perpetuating the division between white-middle class cultural values and the violent Other.

The fact of Blaxploitation cinema’s “willingness to associate black women with violence suggests a nasty cultural undertow” (Mizejewski 115). These films rendered a flat representation of the concerns and conditions of African American women. Indeed, “Sheba Baby” appeared to be a composite of white male fantasies about the “jezebel” stereotype and the black male fantasies about the black woman as standing *behind* the

Black Revolutionary Man (Keeling 93). As such, while there is liberating potential in the figure of the “black femme,” to borrow Keeling’s term, the process of acculturation, or de-acculturation, of certain stereotypical and injurious stereotypes associated with black women is a slow one. Moreover, much depends on who is at the helm of the profit-motivated image production machine. In the case of Black Action films, white producers located a desire on behalf of black audience members to see empowered black figures, even as the empowerment was curtailed by the problematic association of blacks with violence and black women as both violent and hypersexual. Perhaps detective fiction, with its critical stance toward institutional structures and intelligent protagonist, is the next logical step in the process of envisioning and making space for “the black femme.” Or, rather, perhaps detective fiction written by women of color can empower the black femme in ways not previously accommodated by white-produced mainstream films and literature.

Indeed, detective fiction written by African American women and featuring a black woman protagonist that emerged in the early 1990s was invested in reflecting black radical and coalitional politics that were diminished in pop feminist and Black Action films. While the early 1990s may be seen as a late intervention into the genre by women of color authors, it was also a period when uneven institutional integration of underrepresented voices was being matched with increased social and economic policing of poor women and mothers of color. The 1980s brought forth rapid deindustrialization from the collapse of blue-collar factory jobs in areas that otherwise did not have the means of supporting community infrastructures (Lee 1-29). At the same time, drastic cuts

to public assistance and government programs on the part of The Reagan Administration resulted in what many historians refer to as a Post-Keynesian State, wherein public support through New Deal Programs became a target for rhetoric about undeservedness.¹² The Reagan and Clinton Administrations also implemented strict and irrational drug policies and the War on Drugs campaign that has been primarily targeted at youth of color. Moreover, the opening of prisons to privatization in the 1980s under the Reagan Administration and expanded by the Clinton Administration in the 1990s means that prison labor is now able to be privately contracted.

Today, the prison industrial complex is a multimillion dollar business with stockholders and kickbacks. The communities most impacted by these racist policies are undergoing a sort of “indefinite detention,” to borrow Judith Butler’s terminology, or “an illegitimate exercise of power” that is “significantly, part of a broader tactic to neutralize the rule of law in the name of security. ‘Indefinite detention’ does not signify an exceptional circumstance, but, rather, the means by which the exceptional becomes establishes as a naturalized norm” (Butler, *Precarious Life*, 67). This state of indefinite detention extends to those people of color who have been released from prison but who, because of their records, cannot find steady employment and even have to pay back exorbitant legal fees.

Ironically, these targeted communities are not simply lawless states, divorced

¹² Consider, for example, Ronald Reagan’s popular go-to anecdote of “the welfare queen” stereotype in his attempt to stigmatize working women of color during his public speeches and the official announcement of The Reagan Administration’s War on Drugs Campaign in 1982 (Alexander 49).

from all ties to the U.S. Criminal Justice System and socioeconomic policy. Instead, the move toward economic abandonment has required “the expansion of state capacity in the form of increasing police/military presence, prison economies, and social regulation, and the changing status of the estate’s role toward managing social relations” (Lee 20).

According to James Kyung-Jin Lee, the abandonment planning and regulation policies associated with The New Deal and “the welfare state” transitioned American society into “a ‘warfare state’ attending to ‘flexible economics’” (Lee 13). This transformation solidified a police state in areas most vulnerable to police abuse, given that these communities have the least recourse to police and legal protection. The evidence of this state is witnessed in the racist policies of Stop and Frisk, the recent mandates to allow police officers to demand identification of suspicious persons, and the overtly racist policies toward drug-related incarceration and unequal penalties for drug use that predominantly impact lower-income areas.

In theory, the legal system is assigned by the dominant public to “protect and serve” the interests of that public. All are told to call on police when they are in danger with the implication that the police will use their (allotted physical) force to protect the caller. However, in a police state that relies on hierarchies of power predicated on race, gender, sex, class, faith, and national differentiation to perform the “triage” of whom to save and whom to leave behind (to borrow Lee’s terminology), the signification of official authority has an opposite affect than a feeling of security on those who are targets of the police state. In other words, police are dangerous to communities of color. In this officially benign, but highly patrolled, abandonment of entire communities of color, the

same question that the 1951 petition on behalf of William Patterson and Paul Robeson to the UN charging the US with genocide against the Negro people remains salient: What does it mean to be “the object of government inspired violence” (Hartman 34)?

As a way of safeguarding this new, selective police state, the mainstream public has been trained to be fearful of these areas. According to political theorist Slavoj Žižek, this training is instrumental in orchestrating a “Post-Race biopolitics.” In Žižek’s definition, post-race biopolitics is a:

politics which claims to leave behind old ideological struggles and instead focus on expert management and administration, while ‘bio-politics’ designates the regulation of the security and welfare of human lives as its primary goal...with the depoliticized, socially objective, expert administration and coordination of interests as the zero level of politics, the only way to introduce passion into this field, to actively mobilize people, is through fear, a basic constituent of today's subjectivity. For this reason, bio-politics is ultimately a politics of fear; it focuses on defense from potential victimization or harassment. (40)

In our current economy’s attempt to sway voters to sanction the extreme policing of communities of color while also condoning their economic abandonment, fear is mobilized by dominant discourse in order to steer successful(ly) fearful citizens away from deindustrialized locations that threaten to “intrude” on the rightful citizen’s wealth and property.

One important discursive tactic to keep citizens fearful is the demarcation of space as attached to specific racialized identities. As Charles Mills discusses in *The Racial Contract*, the naturalization of “colorlines” is the key aspect of perpetuating inequality. In the context of racialization in the postwar American social and political landscape, Mills argues that

...in the United States the growing postwar popularity of the location of 'urban jungle' reflects a subtextual (and not very sub-) reference to the increasing non whiteness of the residents of the inner cities, and the corresponding pattern of 'white flight' to suburban vanilla sanctuary: our space/home space/civilized space. In America, South Africa, and elsewhere, the white space is patrolled for dark intruders. (48)

In other words, "Morally, vice and virtue are *spatialized*" (Mills 46). This specification of geographical space according to a moral typology is what assists the "euphemism" of "bad area" to be naturalized without identifying the racist and classist overtones of such euphemisms. It is not the case that identity politics is the cause of this moral spatialization. Rather, racialization works in tandem with spatiality in order to coordinate racist attitudes with destructive public policy. As in the case of the failures of Section 8 housing vouchers, communities of color are cornered through deindustrialization and then set up to fail when poorly planned social programs merely succeed in further stigmatizing people of color.

At the same time as deindustrialized areas saw the various manifestations of official and discursive abandonment in the 1980s, various powerful cultural agents also established a platform of "Post-Racism" and determined officially antiracist policies that, paradoxically, did more to stifle conversations about racialization and disenfranchisement and more to boost a neoliberal global economy. On the heels of The Civil Rights Movement, the Third World Liberation Movement brought about campus protests in the 1970s to reorient American institutions of higher learning toward greater inclusion of people of color and the goals of social justice. However, these goals went unrealized as instead the universities and corporations promoted the inclusion of: "members of marginalized groups that they had deemed the most valuable for incorporation into

multiracial managerial classes” while simultaneously abandoning “large majorities to the devastating consequences of deindustrialization and resegregation and the accelerating control of the economic prerogatives of private capital over black and brown lives” (Melamed 31). According to Jodi Melamed, the move toward an official antiracist platform was initiated after World War II, which positioned the U.S. as a nation critical of fascism even as the U.S. itself had not yet claimed full recognition and responsibility for the enslavement of Africans. The Soviet Union was quick to point out this inconvenient truth, which in turn pushed the U.S. to attempt to redefine itself as a liberator of all people, regardless of race. Melamed terms the period that followed this redefinition as “racial liberalism,” a period she identifies as lasting from the 1940s to the 1960s. Next came two periods that sought to institutionalize antiracism as a general policy: “liberal multiculturalism” (1980s to 1990s) and “neoliberal multiculturalism” (2000s) (Melamed 1).

The core feature of these latter two movements is that while the U.S. State sanctioned violence against communities of color, the official decree in places of learning and business is that America is now a “Post-Race” society (or in a period of “official antiliberalism” according to Melamed). At the same time, Melamed notes that “official antiracisms have made inequalities appear fair, and they have represented people exploited for or cut off from distributions of wealth and institutional power as outsiders to antiracist liberal subjectivity—or multicultural subjectivity—for whom live can be disallowed, even to the point of death” (Melamed 13-4). In sum, the reality of “official antiracism” within an neoliberal capitalist economic order is that the legal system

violently patrols communities of color while discussions about racialization quickly shut down. Indeed, this reality realizes Foucault's definition of disciplinary power.

The late capitalist enterprise "enables the disciplinary power to be both absolutely indiscreet, since it is everywhere and always alert, since by its very principle it leaves no zone of shade and constantly supervises the very individuals who are entrusted with the task of supervising; and absolutely 'discreet,' for it functions permanently and largely in silence" (177). These facts carry important implications for our assessment of the law and the U.S. criminal justice system as "colorblind" and gender-neutral. The social contract works to fulfill its contractual obligation by the very nature of its unstated agreements to uphold social hierarchies that are predicated on sexual and racial differentiation from the male and white standpoint. In response, I find potential in women of color detective fiction written from the standpoint of a woman of color protagonist to work out an analysis of how power operates along intersectional lines of inclusion and exclusion.

U.S. Women of Color Detective Fiction in the Context of New Marketability

Because literary visibility depends as much on the publishing houses that publish the books as the subsequent readers who purchase them, it is important to address the issue of publication support and marketability as these features have promoted (and in some ways stifled) U.S. women of color detective fiction. The recognition of a black mystery reading demographic appeared to trail the recognition of black literature readers and movie viewers. This fact can be attributed to publishing trends and what publishers viewed as profitable. As Zora Neale Hurston remarked in 1951:

Publishing houses and theatrical promoters are in business to make money. They will sponsor anything that they believe will sell. They shy away from romantic stories about Negroes and Jews because they feel that they know the public indifference to such works, unless the story or play involves racial tension. It can then be offered as a study in Sociology, with the romantic side subdued. (2)

That said, as this project emphasizes, the genre positions the detective in a place of personal empowerment. These texts work against the grain that Hurston recognized was occurring in earlier African American texts, wherein there seemed to be an “insistence on defeat in a story where upper-class Negroes are portrayed[...] Involved in Western culture, the hero or the heroine, or both, must appear frustrated and go down to defeat, somehow” (3). Revisionist opportunities were (and are) still capped by larger publishing houses. However, because of the recognition of a “niche market” of Black readers by mainstream publishing presses, these texts have more room to represent social situations and criticisms than earlier twentieth century fiction and Black Action films in the 1970s.

Nikki Baker’s black lesbian amateur sleuth Virginia Kelly in *In The Game* was published in 1991, making it the first woman of color detective fiction novel featuring a woman of color protagonist. *In the Game* came more than a decade after black action films began featuring a woman of color detective. However, while woman of color detective fiction is expanding to incorporate different lenses and identifications, the genre still has to vie for its place in mainstream publishing, a continuing source of frustration for authors and literary agents alike. For example, in a 1998 interview with detective fiction author Terris McMahan Grimes, literary agent and creator of her own publishing company Jacqueline Turner Banks discussed:

The joy I felt when I held my first novel that was published by Houghton Mifflin. We're doing this because of some of the trends we've seen in publishing. Big houses are gobbling up each other, becoming even bigger, and consolidating their lists. As a result, the two or three slots assigned to books by and about African Americans from two or three houses. have become 2 or 3 slots from one huge publisher. What I'm saying is roughly 9 slots (from 2-3 publishers) have become 3 from one publisher. I doubt if anybody in the business will admit this is happening, but I've seen it. And, surprisingly enough, this is coming at a time when statistics prove that our readership and buying power has never been greater. We believe the time to moan and groan about what's not being done for us is over (if it ever existed). If we want to see our books in the marketplace it's our responsibility to put them there. (*Sister Sleuth*)

Here, Banks registers the fact that mainstream publishing is still a hurdle. In fact, Barbara Neely characterizes the publishing market as being headed by Toni Morrison, who is “like this huge umbrella out in space under which there is all of this space for the rest of us” (Carroll 182). More importantly, Banks also suggests that going mainstream may not even be the best option for authors of color.

In fact, building resources outside of the rhetorics and promotional mechanisms of white publishing campaigns can be seen as a political and self-preservational move. Consider, for instance, the ventures of the African American Literature Book Club (1998-2014), whose “mission is to promote the diverse spectrum of literature written for, or about, people of African descent by helping readers find the books and authors they will enjoy. We accomplish our goals through AALBC.com, our related platforms, and strategic partnerships” (*aalbc.com*). Or, take a look at the BlackBoard African-American Bestsellers List, the seed for which was planted when Faye Childs was shopping her first novel and was told by an agent that “black people don't buy books.” Instead of retreating, Childs decided to do something to turn that statement around, learning from her

experiences that “you cannot sit back and wait for the publisher to promote your book. So we are aggressively pursuing other avenues.” These avenues include hiring an independent publicist who specializes in African-American publishing and planning a corporate-sponsored multi-city tour. A documentary based on the book is also in the works (*Publisher’s Weekly*).

And yet, the African American women’s detective fiction texts in this study were released with mainstream presses: St. Martin’s, Penguin, Avon Books, Mysterious Press, and William Morrow, specifically. On the other hand, in regards to Chicana detective fiction, Arte Publico Press has served as the publisher for both Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Lucia Corpi. In fact, Arte Publico Press has served an important role in the promotion and distribution of Latin@ and Chican@ literature starting in the 1970s. For example, the press was the first to publish Sandra Cisneros’s novel *The House on Mango Street*. The continued success of this publisher and its already invested legacy indicates that the mainstream market is not the end-all-be-all for women of color authors. There is room in alternative markets and smaller presses for new ideologies, standpoints, and radical revisions, although these markets still have to remain in business. And, considering the fact that three of the novels featured in this project have gone out of production and can only be purchased as used copies on Amazon or accessed through library archives of American fiction, the misalignment of these texts from every sense of the word “popular” in popular fiction has a bleak undertone.

In sum, as the aforementioned experience of Faye Childs indicates, smaller presses may support a work that mainstream presses pass over entirely. These smaller

presses and alternative markets are more supportive of viewpoints and issues that are salient to women of color authors and their readers. Thus, while an argument could be made that U.S. women of color detective fiction texts work as much in stereotypes as other works, the frequent and ongoing alienation of women of color authors from the mainstream market has meant ironically that authors have often stood their ground when asked by editors to change their stories. Moreover, the writers do not easily play into mainstream expectations of how the detective should behave. For example, in an interview, Valerie Wilson Wesley stated that when her editor asked her to change an important aspect of her first book, she told them it was a “dealbreaker” after she spoke with her husband and decided that one change could mean a series of future changes and determinations for her work by her publisher (Sotelo 311). This is not to say that compromises were not made; undoubtedly every author is forced to make certain concessions. But the bigger point is that while alternative presses showcasing women of color literature are still relatively new and forthcoming, the number of supporting publications and alternative publishing markets indicate that these authors, their agents, and their readers are looking to establish supportive markets that are not necessarily tied to larger publishing houses.

When it comes to marketing U.S. women of color detective fiction to an audience consisting of both mystery lovers and women of color readers, it is important to register that women of color detective fiction is not an autobiographical mode that somehow enables a one-to-one character or social status correlation between women of color detective fiction authors and their women of color detective protagonists. In fact, women

of color detective fiction authors are decidedly middle-class, educated, and publish in other forms of literature. The authors featured in this project do not share the class or profession of their protagonists, with the exception of Carolina Garcia-Aguilera, who worked as a certified Private Investigator for ten years. Every author in this study is college-educated, and hold master's or doctorate degrees. Barbara Neely holds a master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning. Carolina Garcia-Aguilera holds a master's degree in Languages and Linguistics and an MBA in finance. Pamela Thomas-Graham is a graduate of Harvard-Radcliffe College, and the Harvard Law and Business Schools. She was the first black woman to be named a partner at McKinsey & Company in Manhattan. Valerie Wilson Wesley holds a master's in Early Childhood Education and an a master's from The Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. Several of the authors work in academia and write in other creative forms, as in the case of Valerie Wilson Wesley, Lucha Corpi, and Alicia Gaspar de Alba.

In line with Stuart Hall's recognition of the opportunities for fantasy and play in popular culture, several of these authors have talked about their created protagonists as fantasies. Their protagonists are enabled in certain ways to act very much *unlike* their creators. For example, in a New York Times interview, Pamela Thomas-Graham sums up the limited similarities between herself and her character: "My heroine is living in this environment in Cambridge, which is predominantly white. Her work life has very few people of color in it. My work life is similar" (*New York Times*). Or, consider Theresa McMahan Grimes's response to an interviewer on whether her protagonist, Theresa, is her alter-ego: "I don't think so. We come from similar backgrounds. We have a few

things in common, but Theresa has way more fun than I do. I only dream about some of the things she does... Oh, like driving a BMW for one. Getting in fights and winning for another.—We both work for the state, but we're in different departments” (*Sister Sleuth*). Carolina Garcia-Aguilera states that while she was writing a character who describes herself as a “Cuban Princess,” drives a Mercedes, and is extremely liberal with gun-carry laws, Garcia-Aguilera describes herself as “a mom, car pooling with a Volvo, the three children, the station wagon, the, you know, the golden retriever” (*NPR*). In these interviews and others, the authors featured in this project do not see themselves reflected in the characters beyond similarities in terms of race and gender. The U.S. women of color sleuth is as much a fantasy of the social justice provocateur as she is a woman of color.

And yet, the women of color authors featured in this project are also deeply involved in social justice work themselves. As such, these authors can relate to topics of legality, legibility, and power through their non-writing work. Several of the women are college professors and are high-profile in their community outreach and business practices oriented around women of color feminism. Barbara Neely is an activist. Penny Mickelbury worked for many years as a newspaper, radio and television reporter, based primarily in Washington, D.C. Valerie Wilson Wesley is former executive editor of *Essence* magazine. In short, social justice issues and political mobilization are important to these authors. For instance, on the theme of femicide that is the central issue in her novel, Alicia Gaspar de Alba (also a professor) states that: “This wasn’t a case of ‘whodunit,’ but rather of who was allowing these crimes to happen? Whose interests

were being served? Who was covering it up? Who was profiting from the deaths of all these women?” (Sotelo 333). As the forthcoming chapters will show, U.S. women of color detective fiction asks us to think about how the creation of the fantastic empowered character can offer alternate realities and opportunities for both reflecting and challenging the status quo.

Key Themes in U.S. Women of Color Detective Fiction

Overall, U.S. women of color detective fiction reflects the early American hardboiled detective fiction interests in representing a detective character wary of organized corruption enacted by capitalist greed. At the same time, U.S. women of color detectives are markedly, and importantly, different from the long-celebrated white and male hardboiled detective. The crucial difference lies in these sub-genres’ illustrations of the social and legal privileges accorded by institutional power structures to the protagonist. These privileges vary in relation to the detective’s race, gender, class, regional, and national status. Unlike the hardboiled detective, who employs the privileges of the sexual contract and the racial contract in order to bypass the dominant legal contract, the woman of color detective is a “justice provocateur” (Cavender and Jurik 283, citing Aiken, 2001) who negotiates the legal contract from the standpoint of having “neither the means to escape ‘the law,’ nor any protection within it” (Kaplan 95).

As detailed earlier in this chapter, the hardboiled can be said to be more adventurous than the classic whodunit, although Miss Marple and Sherlock Holmes do travel often. However, the hardboiled’s fascination with new bodies, languages, and

perspectives coming into contact by way of the negative machinations of late capitalism combine a sense of voyeurism and tourism with anti-capitalist critique. In some ways, the early twentieth-century hardboiled helps set the stage for more extensive and intersectional modes of analysis that explore how gentrification, racialization, and unequal distribution of resources lead to pockets of contained bodies and geographies. To this end, U.S. women of color detective fiction invokes an intersectional lens that recognizes the dynamic and individualized impact of the intersections of racial, gender, class, and ability constructs that impact the lives of women of color. Furthermore, in U.S. women of color detective fiction, connections are made explicit between property and value in the context of colonialist and heteropatriarchal regimes that have relied on exclusionary social contracts and physical intimidation to perpetuate systems of inequality. Indeed, these texts enable a critical lens into how contracts, legal and social, operate in such a way as to perpetuate power inequities long after legal codes permitting the legal disenfranchisement of women and racial minorities had been revoked.

The first U.S. women of color detective fiction novel, Nikki Baker's *In the Game*, emerged during the same year as Patricia Williams' *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* was published in 1991. Thematic connections are easily established between the two texts. Williams' legal scholarship intertwined with personal narratives reflected Critical Race Theory's call to dismantle the popular framing of the U.S. criminal justice system as a neutral, or bias-free space. In consideration of the cases she worked on, Williams pushed for a reinterpretation of seemingly neutral words like "contract," "freedom of choice," and "autonomy." In the same way, but by the employment of different formal methods,

Baker's *In The Game* inaugurated a corpus of texts that are rife with discussion of how the legal and social orders are deeply imbricated in the politics of representation and the politics of recognition.

Consider, for instance, Baker's novel. Wealthy, successful Virginia Kelly works at Whytebread and Greese Brokerage Firm as a financial adviser. When the lover of her best friend is found brutally murdered outside of a popular lesbian bar, Kelly decides to investigate on her own for fear that her connection to the case will inadvertently reveal her sexual orientation to her white and male dominated law firm, rendering her jobless. In the text, Virginia's identity as a black woman is constantly being negotiated from an intersectional perspective as she negotiates where to live, work, and play. For one, the mainstream gay and lesbian rights movement's reservation about racial diversity is indicated by the fact that the lesbian bar that had previously turned women of color away only initiated a special night in the middle of the week called "Women of Color Wednesday" in response to heated criticism. For another, Virginia's, or Ginny's, interracial relationship with her Polish American girlfriend Em draws "derision that comes to black people with white spouses" (21).

In the same vein, Ginny notes that "In Chicago, race hate and prejudice cross barriers of class and money. Consequently, middle-class neighborhoods as well as slums and housing projects are still segregated for the most part. People are territorial even in their poverty" (31). At the same time, Ginny and Em have to find a neighborhood that will work for them both, a seemingly impossible feat: "On the South Side where I could live quietly as a lesbian because black people will look the other way for their own, I

could not live with Em. So we lived together on the Lakefront where I am lonely” (32). Certainly the racial contract can be seen at play here, as the area divisions among race and class resemble the geographic discipline that Mills discusses in *The Racial Contract*: the naturalization of color lines, or the demarcation of space as attached to specific identities, is the key aspect of perpetuating inequality (48).

Moreover, the novel intersects critique of the racial patrolling of space with a critique of the ways in which queer and female bodies of color are also disciplined in these spaces. In a time when women of color are often tokenized to signify the expansion of the multiculturalism and diversity initiatives, she believes that revealing her lesbian identity will be a step too far for her overwhelmingly white, male, good ole’ boy network to swallow. This reflects Carol Pateman’s assessment of the modern patriarchal contract that is “fraternal, contractual, and structures capitalist civil society” (25). Because she is afraid of being outed and fired, Ginny herself ends up negotiating the law through extralegal measures, much like the infamous 1940s hardboiled detective Sam Spade. Indeed, Baker’s novel echoes saliently some of the features of the original hardboileds, registered in the protagonist’s propensity to drink too much and to be unfaithful and callous to her partners. On the other hand, Ginny’s self-described “bourgeoisie” concerns about living an upper middle-class lifestyle while also keeping her gay identity a secret resonates with white lesbian detective fiction texts. Perhaps it is no mystery that Baker’s book was published by Naiad Press, which is dedicated to lesbian literature, and was edited by Katherine V. Forrest.

At the same time, when Ginny stumbles upon a money-laundering scheme initiated by a young black lesbian intern and her white male boss, she states in frank terms: “I won’t tell you that Mary Tally’s scheme was ethical. But when I looked at her I saw myself in different circumstances. I saw a woman with some brains in a country where women are valued for our bodies. I saw a black face where blackness is valued not at all. I could not judge her” (23). There is an overt ambivalence in this statement regarding Ginny’s perceived obligation to the criminal justice system in light of her consideration of the intern’s position in relation to the intersectional modes of inequality. The moral codes are blurred, because, as Ginny registers, the dominant legal and social codes are blurred. Baker’s novel also resonates with criticisms of socially rigid urban centers appearing later in Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day* (1993). Specifically, *In The Game* uses the form to discuss the institutional parameters of policing non-heteronormative and black bodies.

The novel often explicitly comments on the inherent contradictions located in Ginny’s class, race, and gender identities. She is often conflicted in interpreting whether people snub her because she is a woman, because she is black, or because her coworkers “suspect” her sexual orientation. As such, her entire life is rendered through the lens of intersectionality, although in the end her rescue by her white stalker, Susan, marks a *femme fatale* reversal that struggles with an entirely race-critical perspective. That said, throughout the novel Ginny longs for a politics of black feminist collectivity that creates its own sources for safe spaces within an urban setting, alluding to similar concerns located in Audre Lorde’s *Zami: A Spelling of My Name* (1982). Thus, Baker’s first

mystery exhibits contradictions and a political “messiness” that is exhibited in all of the women of color detective fiction texts featured in this study, texts that have to waver and fluctuate in commitments to calls for social justice and the pressure to protect oneself and loved ones.

While Baker’s novel is the first U.S. woman of color detective fiction text featuring a woman of color sleuth, it seems unfair not to note that two other women of color texts emerged only a year later Baker’s debut: Barbara Neely’s *Blanche on the Lam* and Eleanor Taylor Bland’s *Dead Time*, both of which came out in 1992. In relative contrast to *In the Game*, Taylor Bland and Neely’s texts emphasize a connection to the plight of children and an overt social justice perspective that is critical of wealth. These texts promote not only a social justice agenda to protect the rights of women of color, but also extend to an agenda of protecting other vulnerable bodies and collectives. As such, these books designate a politics of difference through a collectivist discourse that emphasizes the role of family for preservation, while at the same time registering the fact that some families are more vulnerable to abuse than others. Perhaps most significantly, Baker, Neely, and Taylor Bland exploded a new pathway for women of color authors to experiment with narrative modes that both register and question authority, legitimacy, and property.

Parsing out what the woman of color detective has in common with the white and male hardboiled detective and what differences they hold can enable a deeper analysis of the allures of the detective character. More expansively, comparing the initial hardboiled detective character with the U.S. women of color detective character can help illustrate

how social and legal disciplinary regimes attempt to coerce “deserving subjects” into “the good life” at the ready expense of “undeserving subjects.” The critical lens toward corrupted institutions located in the hardboiled tradition reveals the genre’s interest in making connections between growing capital and the estimated value of personhood. Similarly, U.S. women of color detective fiction “de-cozies” the classic whodunit by way of the protagonist’s intersecting negotiations of racial, gender, sexual, class, and national identity. At the same time, many U.S. women of color detective fiction novels also distance themselves from the hardboiled tradition in their critical attention to, and condemnation of, racist, xenophobic, and sexist discourses that inadvertently reproduce an “imperialist internal critique of imperialism” (Pratt 221) even from the detective’s anti-capitalist perspective.

For example, one of the most salient and easily recognized aspects of the detective fiction genre is the “willful” protagonist who stands in opposition to legal and social institutions. This “willful” characteristic of the detective protagonist enables the detective fiction text to serve as a counter-institutional social critique of society. In its emergence in the gritty pulps during the 1930s and 1940s, American hardboiled detective fiction moved away from the British “whodunit” by refusing to restore order at the end of the plot. It also “de-classed” the central detective figure, who in the British mystery worked the case for fun from the standpoint of having plentiful financial resources, privileges, and lack of other commitments. In direct contrast, the hardboiled detective was broke and operated within a new modern paradigm of an expanding urban center that

was increasingly (and alarmingly to the detective viewpoint) bringing in immigrants and women into public employment spaces.

The defensively white and male detective outclassed the immigrants, outsexed the *femme fatales*, and outsmarted the incompetent and often corrupt institutional legal forces. Because of his cunning, but more realistically because of his privilege based on his racial and gender alignment with white heteronormativity, the hardboiled detective never gets caught, never gets into a fix he can't get out of, and never marries. Indeed, these early hardboiled texts are fraught with anxiety about having to conform to "the good life": to marriage, to a workforce, even to a detective partner. In other words, there is a clear refusal of those regulated, commanded "happiness scripts" (Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* 91) that threaten to "straighten" the wayward, drinking, trash-talking detective.

In a way, the early hardboiled detective and the 1990's-emergent woman of color detective share a willfulness not sanctioned by the dominant and normative values of the good life. In this, they both "become a problem" (Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* 3). The white and male hardboiled detective from the early twentieth century (and various instantiations of this type in more recent cultural productions) is a killjoy in his refusal to be bought off and to join the good life. He is not interested in "making others happy" (*The Promise of Happiness* 20). At the same time, he is invested in exposing corruption brought about by the systems of capitalism and global commerce. However, this figure is also quite clearly not a feminist killjoy, to make use of Ahmed's term. It may be more suitable to call him an anti-capitalist killjoy. However, to extend and revise Ahmed's notion of "feminist

killjoy” holds the danger of loosening the concept to the point that it can be used to the antithesis of its initial direction, and I am not interested in losing the critical strength of the term. As such, I would call the early hardboiled figure a “willful subject,” especially given that Ahmed uses the term “will” expansively to indicate both conservative and radical potentials in the way that the individual will is negotiated.

In other words, there is a major distinction between the willful subject that is the early hardboiled detective figure and the willful subject that is the woman of color detective. This distinction must be recognized in order to accurately reflect how these figures function as “willful subjects,” and is as important as life (freedom) and death (social alienation and lack of mobility). Detective fiction protagonists are sexy because they are irreverent. They are fun because they are “willful.” They go against the rules and paths of dominant social norms. But detective fiction protagonists differ in why they bend to rules and what they stand to gain in so doing. Specifically, the white, male, Anglo-European detective with “frenemies” on the police force has the privilege of walking away from happiness. He demands freedom from conventional happiness.

Sara Ahmed discusses willfulness not in terms of arrogance, but in terms of the danger implicit in the willful act of not following the orders of the imposing sovereign. If, as Ahmed posits: “Authority assumes the right to turn a wish into a command, then willfulness is a diagnosis of the failure to comply with those whose authority is given” (1). As a result, willfulness may be read as selfish behavior, but it is willful in the sense that Ahmed stipulates if the behavior knowingly refuses the order because the subject refuses to be aligned with problematic power structures that disable the potential for this

subject's livability and social justice. In fact, to claim to be willful often carries with it the acceptance of the possibility that the subject will be dismissed or terminated for her refusal (133). As Ahmed further describes: "Willfulness is thus compromising; it compromises the capacity for a subject to survive, let alone flourish. The punishment for willfulness is a passive willing of death, an allowing of death" (1). While behavior that is identified to be non-aligned with sovereign desires and proscriptions is often described as selfish, as putting one's personal needs above the needs of the dominant interest group, it matters whether the subject is acting willfully in order to survive despite being relegated to the margins, or whether the subject's non-alignment perpetuates brutal conditions for others as the expense for one's will.

In fact, these possibilities are not mutually exclusive: for example, when critical perspectives must be blunted in order to be aligned with institutional procedures and capitulation to donors and investors, one's willful antagonism toward these structures may negatively impact one's fellow workers. Or, to stay closer to the focus of this project, when the hardboiled detective refuses some of the heteronormative happiness scripts forced upon him by American middle-class society on its way toward selective suburbanization, the detective often trades his marriage pass in exchange for perpetuating xenophobic, sexist, and racist attitudes that are in alignment with heteronormative Anglo-European ethics. In other words, the traditional hardboiled detective utilizes his privilege of willfulness to resist happiness scripts. In the process, the hardboiled detective who resists the "straightening device" (Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* 7) becomes complicit, if not overtly responsible, for other acts of straightening. To summarize, in some of his worst

moments, the hardboiled detective is responsible, but does not feel compelled to feel responsible, for other people's deaths or "straightening." In some of his more negative lights, the hardboiled detective is a narcissist. In some of his best moments, the hardboiled detective is an anti-capitalist "willful subject."

In contrast to the white male hardboiled detective, the woman of color detective has been set on a path of unhappiness by the social and legal institutions that insist there must be suffering of some to activate the path to happiness for others (Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* 13). As I argue in my introduction, U.S. women of color detective fiction authors highlight the contractual, exclusionary nature of the American criminal justice system. As part of this illumination, the woman of color detective reveals how certain bodies, lives, and communities are predetermined to be sidelined from the very happiness scripts that are afforded to "eligible citizens." For example, in the majority of the texts I analyze in my dissertation, the woman of color protagonist is propelled/forced into the role of detective because there is a threat to her safety or the safety of her loved ones.

Consider, for instance, the predicament of Blanche from Barbara Neely's *Blanche on The Lam* (1992). Blanche must choose to escape from prison or be sentenced for not paying her checks because her employers skipped town before paying her. Clearly, her choice is to either become a felon or to "go along" with the unjust system that is punishing her and putting her in jail (labeling her a criminal) because the racial caste system means that her employers are immune to scrutiny and punishment. Blanche's predicament is just one example of dominant legal and social institutions placing the

woman of color detective placement on a deterministic path to be unhappiness. Unlike the hardboiled detective who has the privilege to walk away from happiness and is read as delightfully willful in so doing, the woman of color detective becomes a willful subject when she insists on her freedom from required unhappiness.

To summarize this chapter, U.S. women of color literature offers a corpus of texts that both signifies on and complicates issues relating to the politics of representation, desire for social justice, and cultural and textual hybridization. These texts aim to keep in tension the notion of literary play with the gravity of the exceptionalism that comes with (de)privileging certain written and oral forms. In fact, to further invoke Mary Louise Pratt's terminology, U.S. women of color detective fiction novels approach contact zones from a "transcultural" perspective, wherein the detective is coming into the contact zone from a position of a relative lack of social, economic, and political privilege. True to this reading, some of the texts in this project, specifically novels by Lucha Corpi, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, and Carolina Garcia-Aguilera operate from bicultural, bilingual, transnational, and decolonial perspectives that take up the idiom of detective fiction to further investigate the trappings of nationalism, patriarchy, and global capitalism. As a result, it is assumed that these works are working conscientiously in a hybrid genre and speaking to a hybrid audience. It is in this hybrid transcultural space of the novel that can accommodate nuanced engagements with knowledge, power, agency, and mobility.

At the same time, it is important to note that novels featured in this project reflect the messiness of realities of unequal resource distribution and multiply-coded bodies. For example, Charlotte Carter's and Caroline Garcia-Aguilera's relatively economically

stable detective protagonists navigate relatively different concerns than Barbara Neely's professional maid and mother, Blanche White. However, this project welcomes the difficult task of acknowledging links and differences in the lives of the fictional characters presented to readers as they negotiate multiple identifications, uneven geographic and social terrain, and their own wariness and/or complicity in the oppression of others. Because of these factors, I disagree with critic Andrew Pepper's argument that assuming a "crime novel by a black female writer will automatically be more radical than one by a white male writer" is merely "the kind of bland, politically correct assumptions that have tended to underwrite this kind of project" (8). Instead, I would argue against Pepper to reiterate the fact that authors have different embodied relationships to power that impact their perceptions of the ills that thwart order and social justice. However, in contrast to the memoir and autobiography genres, readers are not meant to assume the notion that the author *is* the detective; instead, the reader might assume that the detective and the author may share similar perceptions and investments regarding the types of factors realistically threaten the protagonist's world.

Another important qualification to make in these concluding remarks is the notion that even while the novels featured in this project navigate intersectional oppressions, U.S. women of color detective fiction texts are not entirely dystopic. If dystopia is the triage of the crash from the utopian, then hardboiled detective fiction may be perceived as fundamentally dystopic. The depicted social reality in hardboiled detective fiction attempts to reflect a predetermined world that has no illusions of a happy ending. However, if the function of the detective is to operate under certain moral guidelines that

strain against the corrupt status quo, then this function betrays a gleam of hope. In the case of revisionist texts that work in the vein of the hardboiled detective fiction text but question the mode of exceptionalism for which the Sam Spades of the tradition are often celebrated, the critical distance of the detective figure enables the text to consider how people *have* survived, maintained, and even loved in a world bent to destroy their peace of mind.

In line with this recognition, this project is not interested in simply taking up a “problem” frame of analysis in relation to U.S. women of color detective fiction and the detective fiction genre at large. Instead, this project is invested in acknowledging the importance of the study of the role of pleasure and/in intellectual legitimation in U.S. women of color literary and cultural productions. I am interested in unpacking the inherent messiness, or contradictions, in the fact that the sleuthing protagonist is confined to a predetermined legal system but is also enabled through the genre to carry a certain amount of power and agency. For instance, how do the ambivalent yet powerful aspects of legibility and authority located within the detective figure enact the pleasure of legitimation, either through the protagonist’s antagonism or lack of need for recognition by dominant authority figures? A mode of analysis that makes room for the consideration of both limitations and expansions of personal freedom and joy will only deepen critical and affective understandings of the counter-institutional, super-intelligent persona that has been such a drawing force within the detective fiction genre.

Chapter 3: *Disquieting Estates*: Troubling the Country Cozy and the Crooked Feminist
Pact in Barbara Neely's *Blanche on the Lam* (1992)

"Blanche knew exactly what Grace meant. As far as the Graces of the world were concerned, hired hands didn't think, weren't curious, or observant, or capable of drawing the most obvious conclusions. When would they learn?"

— Barbara Neely, *Blanche on the Lam*

"If this is a story about 'betrayal,' then the central, unspoken, betrayal here is, of course, my own assumption of a universal sisterhood among women."

— Kamala Visweswaran

In her discussion of Barbara Neely's fictional sleuth Blanche White, Daylanne K. English writes that "Blanche represents a new sort of detective: black and female and working class, with those social categories driving the novels' content" (English 787). What exactly is it that makes Blanche a new detective? Is it the fact that she is larger, darker, and older than the prototypical white feminist detective or Black Action Film heroines like Pam Grier's Sheba Shayne? Or, is it the way that these social categories, as English calls them, influence the means through which the detective can arrive at certain truths? This chapter explores the strategies enlisted by Neely's character in her first mystery novel, *Blanche on the Lam* (1992) to arrive at knowledge by making use of epistemologies that have often been overlooked or denigrated in Anglo-European modern philosophy. In my discussion, I hope to expand beyond the surface identifications of difference, or what Ann DuCille refers to in her essay "On Canons: Anxious History and

the Rise of Black Feminist Literary Studies,” as “ready-to-wear difference” (43) in order to engage with a character whose standpoint enables us to theorize the politics of logical abduction in a society coded through racialized, gendered, and classed power hierarchies.

What are Blanche’s sources for gaining information and wisdom? How does she use her knowledge to advance the case and to persevere? And, does she make any mistakes in her epistemological grounding, as other detectives at times have done? I attempt to answer these questions by discussing how Blanche’s employment and social status both enable and disable certain methods of detection and knowing as she investigates a white family’s suspicious inheritance dealings and the murder of the groundskeeper. In the novel, Blanche’s social position coupled with her methods for acquiring knowledge make her a “different” detective than the likes of Sherlock Holmes, *The Continental Op*, and even V.I. Warshawski. Frankie Bailey describes Neely’s series “as having a double significance: “first, because of her purposeful use of the mystery genre to address social issues; second, because her character, Blanche White, comes out of a tradition of literary writings and scholarly discussions about black females as women and as workers” (Reddy 56-7, citing Bailey 191). It is Blanche’s unique position that leads her to employ epistemological methods that expand and redefine the parameters of rationalism and empiricism, but it is also her unique position that enables us to think about why the text lets Blanche be terribly wrong about her abduction.

In my analysis, I posit that Blanche is similar to the hardboiled character of early U.S. detective fiction in her “willful” (Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*) counter-institutional stance and working-class standpoint. However, Blanche also offers important revisions to

this problematic figure. Because of her standpoint as a woman of color, mother, and self-identified perpetual wanderer who cleans wealthy people's homes, Blanche approaches her challenges with a set of tools to which other detectives, particularly white and male detectives, are not privy. Specifically, I argue that Blanche accrues new knowledge to build her case by making use of Du Boisian second sight epistemology, historiographic epistemology, and "affective epistemology," which employs a combination of observation and intuition and stresses the interrelation between mind and body in the process of "making sense" of social unrest and piecing together a plausible case. At the same time, I also point out in my analysis that Neely's text bravely allows a thoughtful consideration of the potential for fallible judgment. Using Crystal Parikh's notion of betrayal as a useful critical tool and Kamala Visweswaran's reading of betrayal as an interpersonal failure, I argue that Blanche and Grace actually betray one another in their faulty assumed knowledge of the other. All in all, Neely's text presents a critical commentary on the complex networks of kinship, property rights, and the pitfalls of the mainstream feminist movement in America.

Blanche on the Lam starts out a little differently from the typical introduction of the confident, inspired detective in other texts. Detective fiction novels typically start out by introducing us to our intelligent detective, situating us within his or her narrative and unique vision. As a result, readers tend to come to detective fiction texts ready to bestow authority upon the detective-narrator. This trust is rendered in the reader's expectation that the detective will solve the puzzle. Also, the typical detective's status as a government agent or private investigator means that the other characters also bestow a

certain amount, however begrudging, of respect onto the detective. In contrast, Blanche starts out from a position of a lack of authority—and from an identification of labeled criminal. In *Blanche on the Lam*, the reader first encounters the main character and presumed sleuth in court. However, at this point, Blanche is not a detective on the stand or an enterprising lawyer wrapping up a preceding case; rather, Blanche is sentenced to forty days in jail for bounced checks because her employers did not pay her on time and left town.

Blanche is panicking, afraid to lose her children and to be holed up in a prison cell for a crime she could not avoid. During a brief time when the warden is preoccupied, she slips out of the courthouse and goes “on the lam.” While on the run, she thinks to go to the domestic job she cancelled in the morning and pretend that she is the replacement. Seeing that the employment agency has not yet sent a replacement, she “passes” for her intended replacement and manages to easily convince the white housewife, Grace that she has worked for her before. Subsequently, Grace announces that they are leaving for their country estate and that Blanche is to go with her. Blanche agrees because this will get her further from the hands of the law. An odd will signing that leaves Grace’s cousin Mumsfield, who has mosaic Down syndrome, without his inheritance and the subsequent suspicious death ruled suicide of the county sheriff shifts Blanche into detective mode to figure out what’s really happening in the confines of this wealthy estate.

Reading the people around her, the estate she works on, and her connective relationship to the people who inhabit the domestic space and the domestic space itself is a mandatory practice for Blanche, one that requires an epistemology that takes into

account the long legacy of the exploitation of U.S. women of color domestic workers (and poor women of color workers worldwide). Indeed, as L.S. Kim notes in her work on the representation of domestic employees in post-1945 American television, “The importance of looking at the figure of the maid is that she is a recurrent and patterned image of and occupation for women of color, demonstrating a discourse on and revealing the nexus of race, class, and gender hierarchies in American culture” (Kim 1). It is important to look at Blanche’s position as a domestic worker not only because of the common stereotypes associated with this figure, but also because this figure is actually powerful. Blanche’s methods for getting herself out of the hands of the law necessitate certain skills and epistemological methods that those in the position of privilege would not access.

Specifically, Blanche’s methods for learning information and putting together a plausible narrative rely upon her experiences and skillsets as a black female domestic worker, her recognition of the value of collective wisdom stemming from her various discursive channels in her community, and her unique spiritual syncretism that brings together intuition and sense experience. One of the fundamental instruments in Blanche’s epistemological toolbox is what Du Bois called “second sight.” Second sight epistemology is similar to standpoint theory in that it affirms a minority subject’s unique perspective of the society that oppresses the subject. However, it expands standpoint epistemology’s emphasis on identifications to affirm the fact that certain narratives, facts, and truths gain credibility the more they are heard and in cases where they are confirmed by direct experience. Connected to and responding to the scopic regime, which Maurice

Wallace defines as “a systematic visual violation of the body that tends first to criminalize, then to eroticize” (Wallace 140) black and brown people, women of color are alert to how they may be perceived by whites, because they have to be. This awareness is not recognizable to those who are oriented within the position of relative privilege predicated on racial and gender differentiation as well as other markers used to naturalize white heteronormativity.

At the same time, this double consciousness also enables a certain degree of self-preservation because the awareness of how one may be perceived can lead to anticipatory tactics of “greeting” the gaze, even if one is working from a disenfranchised position. Perceiving this gaze from the vantage point of being the outsider, marginalized groups are better equipped to study this gaze from a point of estrangement and thus document the problematics of this gaze. For instance, people of color who work in domestic service do not just employ procedural knowledge, or know-how, to do their jobs. They also have to employ aspects of social knowledge and intuition in order to meet the demands of their employers. As Patricia Hill Collins notes, while “Domestic work fostered U.S. Black women's economic exploitation,” it also “allowed African-American women to see White elites, both actual and aspiring, from perspectives largely obscured from Black men and from those groups themselves” (Collins 13). Blanche’s position within the house paradoxically gives her access to the secrets that prop up the economy and legacy surrounding the house. As Nancy D. Tolson states:

So what better literary figure to enter into the detective genre than a Black maid who knows the household better than the household, who is seen but not seen, and who is never questioned for opening up drawers? She is never detected because she has been invisible

for years, and now she speaks out when the dirt that is found in places besides the windows and the laundry spills over on her or her people. (75)

From her vantage point as a worker rendered invisible by those who employ her, Blanche relies on methods to locate resources and obtain information to protect herself that work outside the scope of institutional and dominant forms of knowledge dissemination. These methods encapsulate Blanche's epistemology, but they also serve as preservation tactics. The position of seeming invisibility that is forced upon domestic workers provides for Blanche the paradoxical ability to investigate and locate facts that slide by others in the story – she can go places, listen to conversations, and look through “domestic dirt” while never being suspected by her employers of doing anything but cleaning. As a result, while *Blanche on the Lam* has been characterized by some reviewers as a “country cozy,” there is nothing cozy about the implicit context of her employment status nor her contextualized standpoint as an African American woman and mother trying to survive in America.

As an illustrating example, Blanche employs second sight epistemology when she is first presented with an opportunity to escape the law by pretending to be another domestic worker at a compound managed by a wealthy white woman, Grace. When Blanche first gets to the job she had initially canceled, Grace assumes that she has worked for her before. Altering her tone, language, and facial expression, Blanche attempts to “pass” for this other woman. From her personal experience as a domestic worker, Blanche knows that “signs of pleasant stupidity in the household help made some employers feel more comfortable, as though their wallets, their care keys, and their ideas

about themselves were all safe. Putting on a dumb act was something many black people considered unacceptable, but she sometimes found it a useful place to hide” (*BOL* 13). She passes as a socioeconomic “typecasting” of herself because domestic workers, by being seen by their biased employers as “merely” domestic workers, are rendered invisible by those who hire them. Indeed, as Blanche notes wryly: “As far as the Graces in the world were concerned, hired hands didn't think, weren't curious, or observant, or capable of drawing even the most obvious conclusions. When would they learn?” (*BOL* 185). Blanche’s recognition, or second sight knowledge, that Grace is likely to misread her enables her to act accordingly. And act, she does, by putting on the role of the woman of color stereotype of the “mammy.”

Patricia Hill Collins identifies the three most common and injurious stereotypes applied to Black women, namely the “jezebel, the mammy, and the sapphire.” However, of the three, the stereotype of the “mammy” is the seemingly least threatening to white supremacist consciousness, given that the “Mammy is defined so as to acquiesce to and support white supremacy” (Smith 67). Lawyer and black feminist scholar Pamela J. Smith describes the stereotype of the mammy as “‘asexual,’ ‘maternal,’ and ‘deeply religious.’ Her principal tasks were caring for the master’s children and running the [master’s] household. Mammy was said to be so enamored of her white charges that she placed their welfare above that of her own children” (67). To this end, Smith characterizes “mammyism” as a psychological disorder and as the most threatening to women of color because “Believing that one can positively manipulate the negative perceptions whites hold without negatively impacting one’s self-esteem and psyche is a

horrible myth” (Smith 157). However, readers are made aware through various interior asides that Blanche strategically uses “mammyism” to her advantage while not letting it take over her consciousness, thus wearing it as a mask. As the aforementioned quote indicates, Blanche is well aware of “mammyism,” or what she calls “Darkies’ Disease.” To Blanche, “Darkies’ Disease” eclipses the subject’s ability to critically evaluate her standpoint in racial-gendered sociopolitical economy bent on stigmatizing and then exploiting women of color; instead, the subject becomes a shell of herself in her efforts to please. According to Blanche, Nate, the property manager for Grace’s estate, has been overtaken by “Darkies’ Disease” to the detriment of not only his well-being and sense of freedom but ultimately his life. Readers learn (too late) in the text that Nate chooses to let go an important detail in his recounting of the history of the estate to Blanche, a detail that would undermine Grace’s master plan of deception. While Grace later tells Blanche that she could see that Nate recognized this half-sister as “one of his own,” Nate says nothing so as to protect Grace. By placing her wellbeing above his, Nate is later murdered by Grace in a violent and intentional house fire.

In contrast to Nate’s “disease,” Blanche at times passes for the stereotype of “mammy” in order to *appear* subservient so that she can get more information. As Tolson puts it:

She is not struck by what she calls the “Darkies’ Disease” that she believes so many Black domestics have. She does not give her mind, body, and soul to her employer and fill her life with their life experiences. She is an anthropologist of sorts who studies her employers and her surrounding environment in order to know how to maneuver around them, not because she wants to stay out of their way but to make sure that they stay out of hers. (Tolson 76)

Blanche is more aware of the potential for losing a critical consciousness that also provides protection in staging off the “cognitive” illness of “Darkies’ Disease.” By leaning into the mammy stereotype at strategic moments, Blanche is able to get more information about the occurrences of the compound (33). As such, Blanche does not make a good “mammy” – she makes a good “willful subject.” Instead of putting on the mask and forgetting herself, Blanche plays with the mask to prevent Grace from recognizing her as someone other, or more, than “the maid.”

Furthermore, Blanche subtly subverts the codes of expected subservience while at work. She becomes the “willful subject” as she uses the telephone, tub, and makes herself comfortable in living rooms. She eats the food she makes. She makes eye contact with her employers, corrects them and sets them straight when they are rude. In her course of employment, she wants to alert her white employers to the fact that while domestic work is a hard job, it is a respectable job, and she is to be respected. Moreover, she sees this as a way to “getting some of her sold self back” (*BOL* 52), a comment that alludes to the long and violent history of domestic work as a position where the labor of women of color is equated with their bodies to be “bought out” and “sold” regardless of their consent. Blanche’s pointed practices of self-care are revolutionary acts if we consider, as Sara Ahmed does, that “For those who have to insist they matter to matter: / selfcare is warfare” (Ahmed, “Selfcare Is Warfare”).

While these everyday instances of willful behavior may seem merely idiosyncratic and small, the fact that she is actually raped by one of her white male employers when she is caught taking a bath speaks to the danger to Blanche when she

attempts to direct others to view her as a person who deserves selfcare and respect. Blanche reveals in an interior aside that she did not report to the police because she was concerned that the employer's actions would be justified by a legal institution that continues to equate the labor of women of color with (as) property. As a result, even though Blanche plays with the mask of "the mammy," she also finds herself in a precarious position of being identified wholly as this mask: "precisely because what is visible is caught in the struggle for hegemony and its processes of valorization, one cannot want the relative security promised by visibility" (Keeling 576). However, Blanche will not be intimidated in this space to reject her body's needs, to be a mere ghost of a presence. She has certain survival methods that enable her to survive this violent treatment, even while justice for her rape has not been served.

Blanche's strategy is reminiscent of the African American literary conventions of "wearing the mask" and the trickster motif. Her strategy also alludes to the strategies of The Continental Op, who employs "a simple code of behavior that enabled the operative to submerge his own personality—with all its vulnerabilities and emotions—into a controlled persona that was better suited for investigative work" (Gregory 4). Blanche wears the mask as a professional trickster who is able to survive because of her enlistment of a stereotype as a costume. Nancy Tolson argues that this makes Blanche a trickster in her ability to put on the mask but stay true to her own conscience. The aspect of the trickster personality located in both African and North American indigenous cultures is his shape-shifting ability. Blanche's shape-shifting consciousness also works in line with the Haitian Vodou tradition, where tricksters tend to be "randy, playful,

childish, and childlike” (Brown 330). Tricksters like Papa Gede, the Haitian Vodou spirit of death, “raises life energy and redefines the most painful situation—even death itself—as one worth a good laugh” (Brown 330). But there is nothing comical about Blanche’s situation as she “passes” for another maid who has similar physical attributes to Blanche, notably her skin color, size, and gender. In fact, the irony, or laughing matter, is precisely in the painful fact that Blanche can pass for herself, that her employer doesn’t recognize her own previous employees, and that they all blend for her to form a domestic servant “imago” or the stereotype of the “mammy.” But aside from this dry irony, Blanche’s passing as her self is a tactic for survival wherein laughter is not part of the matter.

Blanche on the Lam is reminiscent of another mystery/domestic fictional work that preceded it by nearly a century: Pauline Hopkins’ *Hagar’s Daughter* (1901), a “racial discovery plot” that joins the Gothic, domestic, and court procedural modes. However, Neely’s novel appears to be an inversion of the traditional African American passing motif: unlike Hagar, who passes for white, Blanche strategically passes as herself, and she is very dark. Cheryl Harris recognizes the material and immediate appeal of passing, or the practice on behalf of non-white people with light skin to “pass” for white: “As whiteness is simultaneously an aspect of identity and a property interest, it is something that can both experienced and deployed as a resource” (Harris 1734). But Blanche does not have the ability to pass for white. Instead, Blanche bets on the fact that the previous worker was a woman who looked like Blanche. This hints at the fact that the domestic cleaning profession enlists certain women to do this type of work within a socioeconomic and political context that makes life harder for poor women of color than

nearly any other demographic in the U.S. Using the cloak of over-determination that leads to inaccurate seeing of people, Blanche is in fact hidden in plain sight, thus using the stereotype Grace already has in place for women of color domestic workers to conceal herself. In this way, Blanche does and doesn't pass: she passes for another domestic worker who looks similar to her (and appears identical to her in Grace's eyes). In this way, Grace does not know Blanche for who Blanche is, and Blanche is able to use this to her advantage. But Blanche does not pass for someone other than her racial, gender, and class identity, which expands definitions of passing to include any type of pretending that does not enable one to represent oneself in a most honest light for fear of rapprochement and even sentencing or death (as in the case of Nate).

Blanche's assessment of Nate as succumbing (fatally) to "Darkie's Disease" forces the recognition that second sight epistemology can be obscured. As such, it is important to ask what tactics Blanche has to keep her sight on point. In the text, readers learn that one method at Blanche's disposal to keep playing with the mask rather than succumbing to "Darkies Disease" and losing her rightful vision is her ability to retain a characterization of herself as "Night Girl." Blanche was made aware that the definitions of others do not constitute the potential for self-definition and affirmation at an early age, when her aunt told her she was powerful because she was dark-skinned, giving her the action hero title of "Night Girl." While Blanche acknowledges that:

Cousin Murphy's explanation hadn't stopped kids from calling her Ink Spot and Tar Baby [...] Aunt Murphy and Night Girl gave Blanche a sense of herself as special, as wondrous, and as powerful, all because of the part of her so many people despised, a part of her that she'd always known was directly connected to the heart of who she was. (*BOL* 59)

Blanche registers that her status as an “outsider-within” (Collins 15), to borrow Patricia Hill Collins’ term, does not limit her functionality, but rather enables her to think outside the racist box and silhouette into which her classmates had attempted to place her.

As such, while she can be a trickster in putting on the “mammy” mask in order to protect herself, she has resources to rely on that prevent her from forgetting to love herself for who she is and what she looks like. Blanche’s ability to hide in plain sight and invoke her inner hero via “Night Girl” are tactics that assist her in her detection processes. At the same time, these self-preservation tactics of masking become epistemologies in that they redirect the common ways of knowing (or thinking that we know) what women of color domestic laborers are like for the reader of the text: “Through Blanche, Neely changes the media image of the Black female domestic and replaces it with a literate, logical, and liberated woman” (Tolson 76). Reading the text, we come to realize that Blanche’s second sight and masking abilities force us to reconsider who we think we know.

The creation of a positive inner-self character is not the only way that Blanche manages to evade buying into “Darkies’ Disease.” Blanche’s syncretic spiritual beliefs and practices also appear to serve her more as a method of protection rather than divine revelation, an important point that speaks to the role that spirituality can play aside or beyond finding certainty in an uncertain world. Blanche’s spiritual practices allow her to remain centered even as she is constantly on the move. She doesn’t explicitly state her spiritual views, but readers can piece together clues from the text and from her next book, *Blanche among The Talented Tenth*, as Nancy Tolson does, that Blanche culls a unique

spiritual practice. Specifically, Tolson surmises that Blanche's spiritual practices invoke the figure of Mami Wata, or Mother Water, the African water goddess (Tolson 82) whose roots stem from "worship among Igbo communities" (Krishnan 1). At the same time, the fact that Blanche reaches out to her Haitian friend for information implies that she also borrows from Haitian Vodou. Blanche also curses some rude boys with "some broken Swahili and Yoruba phrases she'd picked up at the Freedom Library in Harlem" (*BOL* 31). As is the case with many of the world's established religions, Haitian Vodou is a patriarchal belief system and there are many concerns regarding the treatment of women in Haitian culture. However, even as Haitian Vodou is "a misogynist culture...rife with anti-woman jokes" (Brown 220), it also offers practitioners the opportunity to worship powerful female spirits, a fact intensified by the adaptation of Haitian spirituality to fit the lives and reality of women-run households in American immigrant communities.

For instance, Blanche's practices and perspective have some things in common with the female spirits found in Haitian Vodou, particularly the spirit of the market woman, Kouzinn, who is the female counterpart of Azaka (peasant farmer) and the Ezili. The market woman, or *machann*, has a "keen business sense" that is "a key survival skill for poor Haitian women" (156), especially in American immigrant communities where "many families are headed by women...In urban settings, much of the wage labor available to the poor is either piecework or domestic service, and, on average, women fare better than men in this job market" (157). The *machann* has certain unique communicative and resourceful abilities, namely: "a style of earning a living that depends on constant work, high energy, and the ability to exploit several small and often erratic

sources of income simultaneously” (158). The market woman’s ability to exchange services and goods in the form of gifts, flexible exchanges, barter, and other seeming “trifles” creates a trade economy predicated on both expanded kinship and the kind of business acumen particular to the talents of the *machann*. Certainly it would be a compliment to be associated with the figure of the market woman, and Blanche’s insights about the “trifles” that are not trifles at all but clues that help her decode the entire network and historiography of the estate. Her ability, like the *machann*’s keen sense of, and usefulness for, the quotidian, speak to the importance of the woman who knows how to deal in small yet significant matters.

Blanche’s spiritual practices and water rituals also invoke the Ezili, or the three female spirits in Vodou: Lasyrenn, the mermaid “who links ancient African senses of woman power and water power,” Ezili Danto, “the hardworking, solitary, sometimes raging mother, and Ezili Freda, the sensual and elegant, flirtatious and frustrated one” (220). Of these three, Lasyrenn is the most provocative and the most dangerous. She is both mermaid and whale, creature of the deep sea: “Gazing at her is like gazing at your own reflection. It is seductive because she gives a deeper and truer picture of self than is likely to be found in the mirrors of everyday life. But it is also dangerous to try to get too close or hold on too tightly to the vision” (223). Blanche’s flirtations yet lack of commitment to her boyfriend, her duty to her sister’s children to raise them and to protect them, and her quest to arrive at an understanding of a deeper part of herself, all align with some of the characteristics of these spirits.

The ethical aspects of Haitian Vodou, in its emphasis on healing rather than

redemption, are also key for Blanche's self-preservation of mind and body. Contrary to the stereotypes of Haitian Vodou found in a myriad of mainstream popular culture productions that depict it as a dangerous, spasmodic, irrational, and illegitimate practice, it is healing, not direct divination, that "is at the heart of the religions that African slaves bequeathed to their descendants" (4-5). Blanche does not turn to religious syncretism for answers, nor does she turn to this practice to solve her problems. Instead, Blanche's particular mode of spiritual practice provides for her a walking companion and aligns with the Haitian saints who seem more like people, fallible and even at times unlikeable, but available for communication at all times. One aspect of Haitian voodoo that supports this reading of Blanche's syncretic belief system is that unlike in Christianity, the spirits in Haitian voodoo can be wrong and act much like people do:

The Vodou spirits are not models of the well-lived life; rather, they mirror the full range of possibilities inherent in the particular slice of life over which they preside. Failure to understand this has led observers to portray the Vodou spirits as demonic or even to conclude that Vodou is a religion without morality—a serious misconception. Vodou spirits are larger than life but not other than life. (6)

Moral virtue is reliant upon a person's deeds, and the spiritual practice of voodoo serves as a support network for the person working toward their goals of achieving a personal balance in this world.

The epistemological aspects of Vodou actually connects more to rationalism than to a belief in a higher order, the logic of which is divorced from our understanding of the world. Blanche's reference to her spiritual beliefs within the narrative of detection actually highlights the fact the scientific method proceeds from an individual's set of

beliefs, and as such, the scientific method is always imbricated in the values of its user. On the other hand, another aspect of Vodou that ties its practices to the detective tradition is the fact that both practices require an explanation for seeming random, or surprising, events. According to Cheryl Wall, African American religious syncretism was derived from “metaphysical underpinnings of nineteenth-century African American sacred beliefs” wherein “the fundamental premise was that life was not random or accidental. Events were meaningful, and human beings could divine and understand their causes. Human beings could ‘read’ the phenomena surrounding and affecting them” (Wall 172). Pairing with Haitian Vodou’s demand for personal accountability with respect to the crimes committed in *Blanche on the Lam*, Blanches’ spirituality requires everyone around to her have a purpose for her, and responsibility to themselves and others. As a result, racism cannot be an ethereal, unspoken shadow, but rather will have structural explanations, the mystery of which Pauline Hopkins attempted to illustrate and solve in 1901.

Ironically, the freedom of a syncretic and un-institutionalized spiritual belief system enables Blanche to stay centered even as she is constantly being forced to move. In some ways, Blanche’s spiritual practices and connections to Vodou divination are a sort of traveling safe space for her, following Farah Jasmine Griffin’s definition of safe spaces: “as places where ritual evokes a Southern or African ancestor. In many ways they are spaces of ‘safe time’ as well, for they evoke history and memory, and their pace is often slower than that of the city. In these spaces linear notions of time are challenged. The past exists alongside the present” (Griffin 111). A core feature of the detective

character is that they will refuse to settle down, to follow plans that are not marked by their own terms. However, Self-preservation takes on a more urgent tone in the context of Blanche's prerogatives and position. Even though Blanche worked routinely and honestly as a domestic cleaner and took care of her children, she still inadvertently became a wanted woman in the eyes of the law. In the vein of staying free and clear of another kind of institutionalized system of control, prison, Blanche is forced by factors outside of her control to keep moving. The legal and social structures that police Blanche's every move prevent her from cultivating a rooted home. Blanche needs a spirituality that enables her to travel, not to be registered to a particular church, home, or group practice. In fact, Blanche never explicitly identifies her spiritual beliefs with a particular branch or line of identified religions, and I see this as both an allusion to the spiritual heterogeneity that developed within African American communities as well as a refusal to self-label.

In Blanche's alienation from heteronormative and middle-class domestic bliss "scripts," the novel employs a counter-discourse to what Erica R. Edwards identifies as "pop black feminist" cultural productions that tend to discipline and repackage radical black feminism to reproduce "compensatory promises of domestic bliss and salvation" (Edwards 78).¹³ For example, much like she resists the comforts of group practice of spirituality, Blanche also resists the comforts of love. Daylanne English reads this as a

¹³ Edwards identifies the period between the 1970s to the 2000s, the latter point the time of her article's release as an emergence of the period of "black women's empowerment adaptation" that expanded representation of black women on screen but nevertheless limited the potential for black radical politics (78).

major character flaw in Blanche: “Overall, Blanche is left with no clear-cut solution to the mystery of how to sustain either black community or heterosexual black love...Blanche fails to make connections with other African Americans because her rhetoric of authenticity cannot lead either to community or to solution” (English 789). However, Patricia Hill Collins frames Blanche’s lack of interest in the institution of marriage a little differently. Speaking of both Barbara Neely’s and Valerie Wilson’s protagonists, Collins notes that “Interestingly, in both Neely and Wilson’s fiction, working-class women spend little time bemoaning their unmarried, uncoupled status. Neither fictional heroine agonizes over the absence of a Black male husband or lover in their lives. In contrast, middle-class Black women become emergent women by changing their expectations about their femininity and Black men’s expectations” (Collins 104). As social and legal status, marriage is also a historically heteropatriarchal and racialized institution, one whose legal codes not only prevented women of color from marrying, but also one that criminalized women of color when they were forced to separate from their partners and children. As Ann DuCille remarks about the limitations of the mainstream feminist movement: “While white women sought definition outside the roles of wife and mother, black women sought the freedom to live within traditional gender roles, to claim the luxury of loving their own men and mothering their own children” (“On Canons” 30).

As a result, the notions of love, coupledness, and security must be troubled when reading the motivations of characters like Blanche because, like Hortense Spillers notes, “Under these circumstances, the customary aspects of sexuality, including ‘reproduction,’ ‘motherhood,’ ‘pleasure,’ and ‘desire,’ are all thrown into crisis” (Spillers 221). Blanche

can't have love in the way that heternormative coupling scripts typically describe love: grounded, static, setting down roots. Like the hardboiled detective, Blanche is alienated from the institution of marriage. However, unlike the hardboiled detective, she did not have a choice in this course of action. Instead, in line with black feminist critique of the heternormative and racially-inscribed conventions of the marriage contract, the novel reveals marriage to be a propertied institution that functions as "another instance of vestibular cultural formation where 'kinship' loses meaning, *since it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by the property relations*" (Spillers 218, italics in the original). While the hardboiled detective says no to happiness scripts, Blanche must negotiate an avalanche of scripts writing her unhappiness. To stay her own course is at the very least to stay alive.

However, lest we read Blanche's tactics for preservation and alienation from compensatory frames as limiting the potential for "a radical ethos of collective survival" within the detective fiction formula's "compensatory frame of individual success" (76), Blanche does not betray Patricia Hill Collins' notion of the ethics of care that is integral to Collins' theorization of black feminist epistemology. Contrary to English's assessment of Blanche's isolation, Blanche is very much not alone. As Collins notes: "Grandmothers, sisters, aunts, or cousins act as other mothers by taking on child-care responsibilities for one another's children. Historically, when needed, temporary child-care arrangements often turned into long-term care or informal adoption" (Collins 193). Blanche exemplifies Collins' notion of "othermother," or "women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities" (192). Indeed, Collins refers to the practices of

othermothering as “central to the institution of Black motherhood” (192). Motherhood as an institution is an important concept that counters the insulated modern nuclear family model found in Western culture. Blanche’s mother, her sister’s children, her friend Ardelle, and her friends from her community comprise a network of care and kinship that very much aligns with the practices of a collective activism and black feminist ethics of care. In this way, she is also aligning herself with aspects of black feminist critique that emphasize collective organization and are often eclipsed from the big screen of pop black feminist productions.

In other words, Blanche is not alone, even though she is alone. And she is responsible for her children, even though she asks her mother to care for them while she tries to avoid being confined to forty days in jail. At the same time, Blanche does not set down roots. She moves, shifts locations, and is unattainable. She is a perpetual wanderer, an identification that subtly, but importantly, revises the script that demands women of color to be policed and controlled when they set foot on the street. Blanche is a symbol of resistance in the heteropatriarchal white supremacist schema that prefers that Blanche not stay in her own home, but rather that she stays in someone else’s home most of her time so that she can care for someone else’s children. Blanche fundamentally, ardently, refuses the mammy role, even if this means that she has to place her sister’s children in the care of her mother. She always, however, returns to her children. No, Blanche is not married, but she is an integral part of a matrilineal institution of ethical care.

Blanche’s connection to the female spirits and to a black feminist ethics of care leads her to utilize another type of epistemology not typically discussed or privileged in

Western discourse: historiographic epistemology, or the channeling of information through verbal and informal backchannels, such as gossip. As a woman working in the professional cleaning services industry, Blanche trades goods, services, and intimate knowledge with other working women in a process of collective knowing. Blanche trades information back and forth with her best friend Adelle, who also goes back and forth to the Haitian reader in the community. Crucially, these bits of information, channeled informally through gossip, expand the definition of information intelligence and how we coerce knowledge from different sources in both official and unofficial capacities. These pieces of information save Blanche's life and therefore are not mere "trifles" or gossip. Gossip, stories, myths, back channeling are all aspects of what Jack Chen calls "historiographic epistemology. According to Chen, "Neither anecdote nor gossip belongs to the discursive registers of the documents that serve as the state's memory of itself; rather, both are born in the networks that crisscross civil society" (1071). Because of their general estrangement from master historiographies, these backchannels of information function to "contest and complicate the official historical narratives" (1071).

As Chen notes, gossip is "not simply a matter of idle talk, but operates at the heart of social economy, delineating the networks through which the information and moral judgments are given and received" (1072). Indeed, U.S. women of color detective fiction emphasizes gossip as both an epistemology and as an art. Blanche herself thinks of gossip as an aesthetic form: "Their rhythm, the silences between their words, and their intonation were as important to the telling of the tale as the words they spoke. The story might sound like common gossip when told by another person, but in the mouth of a

storyteller, gossip was art” (77). Her aesthetic lens leads to an enhanced understanding of history as a collective and creative process, as well as a reinterpretation of gossip as an informal epistemology that requires creative license and collaborative credit.

Viewed through this lens, gossip and history also come to function as potential sources for political activism. The novel troubles both Western epistemologies and the detective persona by raising awareness that our sources of knowledge are relational and that knowledge is built through what Patricia Hill Collins calls “collective wisdom.” To support this claim, it is important to note that, as Barbara Neely herself has expressed in interviews, Blanche “does not come to feminism through an organization or the academy” (Goeller 302). This leads Blanche to invoke the politics and strategies of black feminist thought and resist identifying with the reductive social interpretations of her character and body to build her own epistemologies and definition of self. Patricia Hill Collins reminds us that “the heavy concentration of U.S. black women in domestic work coupled with racial segregation in housing and schools meant that U.S. Black women had common organizational networks that enabled them to share experiences and construct a collective body of wisdom” (Collins 28). Moreover, these communities established their own schools, learning center, afterschool programs, and extended kinship relations for raising children.¹⁴

The testament of community outreach and support of learning is shown in the text when it is revealed that Blanche took a course in African history and culture in the sixties

¹⁴ Collins states that after the militarization in the 1980s coupled with an migration to upwardly mobile African Americans to the suburbs means that “now that Blacks live in economically heterogeneous neighborhoods, achieving the same racial solidarity has become difficult.”

at the Freedom Library. Moreover, Blanche connects the knowledge she acquired about wise women elders in the course and the channel of information to which she has access through Miz Minnie: “among some African people, there were wise women elders who chose the chiefs and counseled them. Had Miz Minnie been born among such a people, she would undoubtedly have been one of those women. Miz Minnie knew a good portion of the private affairs of every black person in her community” (*BOL* 95). Blanche’s connection from past symbols of knowledge and wisdom to the present illustrates the fact that a common sense epistemology does not merely rely on current gossip. It also relies on narratives that are passed down through backchannels from generation to generation, creating counter-histories to official historical narratives and documents. By emphasizing the corroboration of narratives, discourses, and facts both through cross-generational communication and through different present learning communities, historiographic epistemology questions the logic of framing the process of knowing as a singular experience and divorcing the concept of the body from theoretical claims. Moreover, it demands that the individual recognize that any ties or allegiances they have with other people are both strategic (willful) and inscribed by social value.

In the text, Blanche makes use of her connections to her extended network without apology, highlighting the egocentric aspect of the traditional alienated detective persona that has no real likeness to either detectives or human beings. The information Adelle, Miz Minnie, Blanche’s mother, Nate, and Mumsfield provide for Blanche involves not only the present people at the country estate, but the people *of* the people who had owned and worked the estate previously and the historical and economic

conditions that brought them together and into unequal but interrelated power dynamics. Unlike the single hardboiled detective who beats people up for information or the Holmes-ean detective who wait until the end to showcase his impressive encyclopedia of knowledge, women of color detectives demonstrate the necessity of discursive networks that assist the detective in her case. In this way, Neely's novel reveals the political subtext for retrodution as a potentially violent or recuperative epistemology, depending on whether inconvenient facts are being brought to light or being forced into the seamlessess of a dominant historiography.

Armed with the aforementioned epistemological and collective resources, Blanche enlists another ally in the house apart from Nate, and an unlikely ally: Grace's cousin Mumsfield. Their connection enables an epistemological and theoretical reading of embodiment while also emphasizing the difficulty of coalition-building across racial lines. Blanche recognizes that Mumsfield has mosaic Down syndrome, which means he has fewer features of the condition of Down syndrome. At the same time, Mumsfield is kind to Blanche: "including recognizing her as an intelligent, knowledgeable person, something the majority of her employers seemed to miss" (40). Mumsfield is open and honest with her about the facts he has at his disposal on the estate. He even seems to share a wavelength with Blanche, which surprises her, given that he is a white male with an inheritance. However, Mumsfield shows no interest in protecting his inheritance, unlike Grace, who is entirely concerned with stealing it from him. In Blanche's and Mumsfield's relationship, a new structural support network emerges, akin to the connections between Queer of Color Critique and Crip Theory that are being made in

current scholarship that is interested in issues of embodiment and conceptualizing difference.

For example, Grace's lack of recognition of Blanche as a sentient being mirrors Grace's disdain for Mumsfield as someone who does not "deserve" Emmeline's inheritance: Grace alleges she was the closest relative to Emmeline, at least "Her closest *normal* relative, at any rate. Just how did she think it would look?" (154). Grace's constructions of Blanche and Mumsfield are predicated solely on surface reading of their bodies: Blanche as a woman of color, Mumsfield as having mosaic Down syndrome. From this construction, or "reading," Grace erroneously assumes that Blanche and Mumsfield lack the intelligence and the grit to prevent her from getting her way. Because the reader knows otherwise, *Blanche on the Lam* in effect critiques Grace's surface reading of Blanche's and Mumsfield's bodies, promoting the idea that bodies are themselves discourses and systems of knowledge. We "know through" our bodies and our bodies are told to us and are framed as knowledge. Moreover, when we are deprived of having access to our own bodies, our minds suffer. However, Blanche commits certain errors in the analysis of Mumsfield's condition, often referring to him as childlike and attempting to assess his level of "retardation," a term the National Down Syndrome Society strongly condemns. And, in the end, Blanche has to leave Mumsfield to fend for himself because she is still on the lam. Mumsfield will be fine in the hands of the family's lawyer, and with his inheritance in tact, he will be able to continue to enjoy the things he likes to do, like work on automobiles. Blanche, on the other hand, is still in danger.

Even as Blanche relies on the processes of collective wisdom and historiographic epistemology, in some ways, Blanche is already hard at work piecing the historiographic puzzle of Nate's relationship to the estate, the possible troubles between Grace and Everett, and the connection between Mumsfield and his cousins before the murder even occurs. Both the aspects of the case as they unravel and Blanche's methods for solving the case while protecting herself from imminent danger have a lot to do with where all of the action takes place: a small Southern town with class disparity and hereditary wealth that resides in large estates managed by white families. Blanche is quite aware of the implications of domestic work in the South, as compared to the North. At the start of the text, the protagonist notes wryly:

Farleigh was not New York, or even Raleigh or Durham, and certainly not Chapel Hill, where there are plenty of professional and academic folks eager for good help. Farleigh was still a country town, for all its pretensions. The folks who lived here and had money, even the really wealthy ones, thought they were still living in slavery days, when a black woman was grateful for the chance to work indoors. (*BOL* 4)

Blanche's move from New York to North Carolina leads her to recognize that Farleigh still functions along racial lines of exclusion that are propped up by inheritance and generational wealth that is passed down from generation to generation, stemming back to the days of slavery. Indeed, Blanche's escape from the law that in effect traps her in court uncomfortably signifies toward that the first trained police forces in New York in 1845 U.S. were modeled after the plantation slave patrols that first emerged in South Carolina

more than a century earlier in 1702.¹⁵ Blanche's hyper-visibility in the eyes of a law that selectively serves and protects at the financial and physical expense of poor people of color implies uncomfortable truths about the (diminished) role of democratic justice our current criminal justice system.

As the passage cited above indicates, Blanche has to stay vigilant and to be prepared to read her environment for clues that will help her protect herself. For example, Blanche knows it is fundamentally important to try to piece together clues about the history of the estate upon her arrival, clues that she may be able to obtain even before she speaks with other people. Blanche's use of historiographic epistemology asks us to recognize that Blanche already has history with the house, and a story that bleeds into the present to impact the future. In her long aside, Blanche recounts having been physically present during the instances of police brutality of the 1960s and the civil rights protests of the 1970s. She also remarks that Southern law enforcement was at times even more hostile than during those riots. In the course of her investigation, she recognizes the aspect of Nate's and Emmeline's long connection with the house that predates her own experiences with institutionalized racism, and these narratives also blend into her temporally-layered historiography.

In fact, Blanche's way of looking at the past enables her to make important connections to the case at present: the history specific to the compound is entirely embroiled with colonial history, a relic in relation to today's seemingly progressives

¹⁵ See Reichel, Philip L., "The Misplaced Emphasis on Urbanization in Police Development." *Policing and Society* 3.1 (1992). Print.

society. For example, although the murder that prompts Blanche to begin detecting does not even start until page 99, prior to which Blanche is an escapee and domestic employee, the conditions for the murder are “preset” in the historical shadow of the house and its owners. For Blanche, this epistemology involves imagining the particular history of the estate she works on through narrative digressions and visual snapshots, or what Stephen Soitos calls “blackground,” “so that the digressions often in themselves become the story” (Soitos 49). For the immediate purposes of Blanche’s survival, the history of the estate is not an objective narrative with one viewpoint that promotes an essentially progressive and optimistic national history. As a result, when Blanche considers the history of the house, she reflects on it as a second degree of separation from her own position: the history is ongoing, and, significantly, the history is not progressive. Instead, the colonialist aspects of property ownership and the exploitation of laborers of color are read through a cyclical historiography that recognizes the repetition of a similar story through seemingly dramatically different timelines, or a historical loop that problematizes the linearity of progressive narratives that are committed to describing our current society as a “Post-racial” democratic society.

Indeed, Blanche already has an intimate, affective relationship to the house before she meets the people who own it and people who care for it. Her “wavelengths” and potential for reading spaces stem from her knowledge of the work that people put into a place, and how a place comes into existence with the care and attention of those who tend to it. Upon her arrival, Blanche senses danger emanating from the house that she describes in terms that readers might characterize as anthropomorphic. For example,

when she first arrives at Grace's house, she sees the following:

White wicker chairs and small tables were placed casually around the porch and added to the touches of white that framed the doors and windows and shimmered on the wheelchair ramp. The gabled roof and woodland setting made Blanche think of fairy tales. But the house didn't have a fairy-tale air. The house was anxious, as though something of which it did not approve had taken place on its premises, or was about to. Blanche wondered if it was her arrival or something else. She rooted for something else. There could be no harder task than working in a house that didn't like you. For as long as she was here, she needed to keep a very low profile. She hoped the house would cooperate. (29-30)

This passage inverts Mary Louise Pratt's discussion of the flâneur-explorer perspective and reading of landscape as symbolizing or requiring utility. While the outward appearance of the house is described as an "esthetic project" (216) and the property is surveyed with reference to Blanche's vantage point, Blanche does not employ a "mastery of the landscape, the estheticizing adjectives, the broad panorama anchored in the seer" in order to stage "an interventionist fantasy" that "completely displaces the reality of the landscape" (Pratt 220). Instead, Blanche recognizes that the esthetic presentation is a façade that covers the domicile's implicit, yet covert, lurking danger, a gothic trope that is reapplied to a seemingly charming, suburban, contemporary dwelling. In reading the house, Blanche ascribes certain emotions to the house that may at first seem like she is reading the house as an animate object. However, these emotions are narrative events in themselves, pieced together from her previous experiences with other homes and other domestic workers, and her own premonitions about the house given her current position as a woman of color on the run.

Moreover, given the fact that Blanche is to become one of those invisible laboring

bodies, the spectral aspect of a house that stands alone yet impeccably groomed, implicates her future labor in this intuitive reading. In fact, Blanche's affective response to the presentation of the house is in itself a form of labor, if we follow Kara Keeling's definition of affect as "a form of labor that sentient bodies use to constitute themselves as such through interactions with other phenomena" (Keeling "M" 566). Blanche is using her intuition to guess what the working conditions will be like for her, an act that is as part of her self-preservation as it is a means to find out how these wealthy people live. Intuition, like abduction, relies on the creation of hypotheses that ask for further testing. The kind of work that Blanche does requires a solid instinct that avoids possible error, because her job as a domestic employee requires her not only to be efficient and skilled at cooking, cleaning, and organizing, but also "pleasant" to whatever variable degrees her employers decide. To this end, making sense of something by relying on one's intuition, the thing that we cannot yet name, is an affective practice: "Most commonly, we talk about affect as a feeling or an emotion, but it is important to think about affect also as involving the mental activity required to make sense of the world" (Keeling 566).

Gut instinct, "spidey-sense," wavelength, these ways of knowing are quite similar to intuition in that they rely on complex, seemingly innate, processes of recognition and abduction, the strength of which rests on previous stores of experience and intuition. As a result, Blanche's affective reading of the house illustrates Keeling's expansion of the definition of affect as a form of labor to also identify how one learns this labor: "Insofar as affectivity accesses our individual past experiences and the forms of common sense we have forged over time (even when it breaks the sensory-motor link that chains us to the

past), it has both subjective and collective elements to it” (Keeling 566). In this way, inanimate objects like houses can invoke affective responses from an intuitive person who has learned to see danger before this danger can be named.

Thus, Blanche’s gut instincts are predicated not on innate knowledge but on both sense experience and learned knowledge, an aspect that bridges rational and empiricist epistemologies. Blanche’s awareness that others are coming into the room before she can verify this through her immediate sense experience, or what she refers to as her “wavelength,” appears to be an aspect of the affective capabilities that Blanche has culled from her previous experience and her awareness of the typical treatment of women of color domestic employees working in wealthy domiciles in the Northern and Southern United States. Blanche does not only assess the present character of a house through an endarkened affective lens; she also treats the house like a patient whose shifts in symptoms can mean dramatic consequences. For example, Blanche notices a shift in presentation of Grace’s country estate: “When she’d first arrived, the house had had a timid kind of feeling, like a dog who’d been kicked too many times. When she’d looked at the house from out back last night, it had seemed worried. Now the house seemed to have somehow divorced itself from the household as surely as if a lawyer had served papers” (122). Blanche’s instinctual read on the house helps her realize that there is something remiss in it, a mystery to be solved even prior to the revelation that the property manager had been murdered.

To sum up, Blanche employs a historiographic epistemology through her reconstruction of historical narratives relevant to the workers of Grace’s estate and the

historiography of the house itself. For this reconstruction, Blanche relies both on her imagination (abduction) and on a social epistemology based on collective wisdom that is shared between her and her community back home. In her lack of access to certain pieces of information that has stayed in the family through generations, Blanche also has to rely on reconstructed historiographies, or “re-memories” as Toni Morrison calls them, that she constructs from her affective reading of the house and the partial clues Nate provides for her. Through her reliance on these various strategies, she reveals that Mr. Everett’s ancestors owned Lace Hill Plantation and that the Sherriff’s ancestors were sharecroppers of Lace Hill (78). At the very end, readers also learn that in her childhood Grace killed Attorney General’s daughter. With all this said, Blanche’s piecing together of the historiography of the house has some significant gaps. Blanche recognizes that she is an outsider to the estate when Grace chides her for not “reading” Nate’s reaction when Nate recognizes that Grace switches her aunt Emmeline with Emmeline’s half-sister from an affair Emmeline’s father had with a domestic worker. Grace even says that she assumes Blanche would have recognized “one of her own.”

For example, it is disclosed at the very end and only through the family lawyer that the old drunk is the “daughter of Great-uncle Robert, Cousin Emmeline’s father. Her mother was their house maid...I think the child’s name was Lucille or Lucinda, or something of that sort” (173). Blanche was not able to abduce the quick changes in Emmeline’s behavior, which were actually body snatchings orchestrated by Grace. Grace had physically and mentally coerced Emmeline’s half-sister to “pass” for white in order for Grace to steal Emmeline’s inheritance. The injury of a partial memory rests heavily in

the absence of both Emmeline and “Lucille or Lucinda.” Readers never get the satisfaction of hearing their sides of the story. At the end of the text, we aren’t even sure of Emmeline’s sister’s exact name, a vanished narrative that alludes to the erased historiographies and specters on which the estate still stands.

Lucille or Lucinda’s spectral narrative haunts the space as a greater menace than the illusions of the Gothic Romance: hers is a historiography occluded, and her disease of alcoholism that causes her to flee the house further disables Blanche from hearing her story. In the stead of Lucille or Lucinda’s narrative account, Blanche and the readers can only imagine what it must have been like to grow up around this estate, partially named but never justly recognized. This reconstruction of the mystery of both the estate and of Lucille’s account signifies on both the detective fiction genre’s interest in composing a plausible narrative to achieve a “closed case” and African American historical narratives and testimonies that are often left out in official and dominant accounts of American history. As Daylanne English remarks: “in writing crime novels, contemporary black writers are enacting a kind of literary-generic anachronism in order to comment on a distinct lack of progress regarding race within legal, penal, and judicial systems in the US” (773). Lucille, or Lucinda, is part of the “sixty million and more” (Morrison, dedication in *Beloved*). The definitive explanation for Lucille, or Lucinda, is missing. The historical narrative is incomplete, lacking a key testimony.

The historical narrative also appears to be circular, rather than linear: while Grace appears to be a diabolical serial killer entirely out of her mind, the socioeconomic conditions were preset for her to replicate the particularly, if historically quotidian, brutal

treatment of Nate and Blanche that merely mirrors the brutality of slavery and policies that value Black bodies solely as property. In other words, the estate's cyclical historical narrative is a recycling of dominant historical injustice. The reflection of from Blanche's perspective, however, questions the linearity that progressive historiographies prefer to invoke. Instead, the text engages with a "queer temporality," one that relies "on various techniques and technologies for making visible what had been 'hidden from history'" (Keeling 572). Linear history becomes suspect in its appraisal of progressive narratives that occlude inconvenient truths. As such, the novel aligns with multiethnic feminist and decolonial investments to make obvious the fact that histories are narratives, resisting "normative temporality that insists on the future as the singular horizon of meaning and politics" (Winnubst 138).

Blanche's epistemologies seem to serve her well. However, there comes a moment in the text when Blanche places herself in danger due to a terrible error in judgment on Blanche's part. Throughout her secret investigation, Blanche suspects Grace's husband, Everett. Prompted by her own experiences, she reads Everett as a controlling man, possibly making comparative connections to her former employer who raped Blanche when he found her taking a bath in his home. In reading Everett, Blanches notes: "He was a rich white male. Being in possession of that particular set of characteristics meant a person could do pretty much anything he wanted to do, to pretty much anybody he chose--like an untrained dog chewing and shitting all over the place. Blanche was sure having all that power made many men crazy" (*BOL* 150). In her reasoning, Blanche reverts to making a deductive argument that starts with the premise

that white male employers are controlling toward women. Blanche consolidates this argument with an induction based on Grace's jitteriness around Everett, employing logical abduction to create an assumptive argument about Everett's character. In the earlier half of the novel, Blanche feels sympathy for Grace because of Blanche's perception of Everett as a threat: at one point, she says to Grace: "Anyone can see you're a kind, sensitive woman. But you got too much on your shoulders" (173). Grace's behavior around her husband seems to confirm Blanche's theory. Throughout her employment at the estate, Blanche reads Grace as an abused housewife.

Readers of the novel experience an unexpected reversal when it is revealed that Grace is not only a murderer but a serial killer, killing her first victim when she was a child. In an effort to take what she thought should be hers, Grace kills "Everett's first wife in order to get him to marry her. She then proceeds to eliminate an aunt, the sheriff, and Nate, the Black handyman, so that she can acquire Mumsfield's inheritance" (Tolson 79). Grace's motives and the reasons she has not been stopped are tied to the conditions of The Sexual Contract. Grace's mission is to equip herself with the material resources to walk away from the demands of the marriage contract. As Carol Pateman explains: "middle-class and upper-class women were enabled through the ownership of land titles, trusts, and pre-nuptial contracts to disengage from The Marriage Contract" (Pateman 119). Of course, Pateman is referring to middle-class and upper-class white women, and young ones. Grace's attempts at forgery to steal the inheritance and right to property from her cousin betray her quest to independence for any cost. Grace's only option at gaining money and power is to acquire the rights to the estate and to become empowered

separately from Everett. Grace has her aunt Emmeline's example: Aunt Emmeline was able to "parlay" "fifty thousand dollars of the money her husband had left her into two million dollars on the stock market" (*BOL* 116). However, the husband bequeathed the entitlement to Emmeline, so Emmeline had to wait until her husband's death to make decisions with the money. In contrast to Emmeline's widow status, Grace has no property to speak of (just the illusion of it).

The sexual contract both created the conditions for Grace's selfish behavior and has protected her in her ambitions and murder sprees as it is coupled with the racial contract. Given the fact that Grace relies on her racial privilege to free herself from the sexual contract, the novel highlights the intersectional aspects of the contractual nature of the American criminal justice system—a contract that is enforced by the U.S. Criminal Justice System through both discursive and physical means. The framers of the American Constitution who held access to the full privileges of citizenship were white, male, property owners. These men participated in the social contract, a concept that emerged during the 17th and 18th century in the works of Hobbes, Rousseau, and Locke in their biological and sociological interest in defining the workings of modern democracy. Social contract theory "regards society as originating in, or based on, an agreement between individuals composing it" (Cole xx). A collection of citizens comes together and elects a representative, or sovereign, to create laws in their collective interest. These laws do not just affect who is able to participate in the determination of future laws and regulations of these laws – they affect those who cannot participate.

The social contract is an agreement that determines exclusions and inclusions, and

is, by definition, an exclusionary practice. The available critiques on behalf of theorists of the implicitly racist, sexist, and classist undertones of (classic) social contract theory have charted new methods to trace the ways in which these problematic ideas continue to be applied and celebrated today in counterpoint to a seemingly “post-race” and “gender-equal” society. As Carole Pateman and Charles W. Mills specify, the social contract works to fulfill its contractual obligation by the very nature of its unstated agreements to uphold social hierarchies that are predicated on sexual and racial differentiation from the male, white, and propertied standpoint.¹⁶ For example, while the framework of the American Constitution has emphasized the equality of all men on the basis of citizenship, legal and CRT scholars have long argued that it very much depends on who “registers” as having full citizenship rights. In the case of white women, slaves, and indigenous populations, this contractual order was not only established to enforce the power on behalf of white men, but also to ensure that anything of value, including property, would be one of the key ways in which power continued to be passed through the hands of those on power. However, what Pateman and Mills have yet to work out is the complex and messy ways in which the racial contract and the sexual contract are both interrelated and oppositional: in the case of Grace and Blanche, their assumptions of one another as

¹⁶ Both Carole Pateman and Charles W. Mills, who built on Pateman’s application of social contract theory for his work *The Racial Contract*, urge for clarity in their “non-ideal” application of the concept. To be more clear, Pateman and Mills are interested not in idealizing the social contract as a “natural” and/or “inevitable” communal transaction, but rather working with social contract from a “non-ideal” standpoint that registers the limitations and failures that the idealization of this construct has afforded. In other words, Pateman and Mills do not uphold social contract theory as an ideal standard, but are rather interested in tracing social contract theory’s legacy and continued impact in the injuries its exclusionary practices have caused.

women who would collaborate with other women regardless of factors of race and class is the assumption that leads both women to fail in their goals.

Specifically, what blinds Blanche to Grace's real motivations is her assumption that she and Grace have a seemingly shared worldview, and an implicit sister pact (social contract), predicated on their similar experiences as women living in a heteropatriarchal society. Blanche assumes that Grace is the abused wife, possibly because Grace is always looking worn and thin, because Everett appears menacing to Blanche, and because the relationship between Grace and Blanche as employer-employee has been naturalized through the discourses of "civility" so that Blanche recognizes nothing behind Grace's cool demeanor other than the typical aloof behavior of a snooty white lady boss. For example, several times over, Grace and Emmeline in turn make it a point to remind Blanche that she is not their companion, nor is she even a family member. Under the guise of civility, they put Blanche in her place. It is Blanche that seems to be speaking out of turn. It is Blanche that is going places and asking questions she should not be asking. These codes of civility, at Lynn Itagaki explains, push for a particular colorblind "race-neutrality, while the uneven demands for certain kinds of civil behavior for racially marked bodies are predicated on fundamental hierarchies and inequalities" (Itagaki 24). In this way, civility is a disciplining mechanism that thwarts potential for open dialogue and reaffirms the exclusionary social contract predicated on racial, gender, and ability (mis)alignment. As Itagaki remarks: "Fascinatingly, in proposing yet again the liberal autonomous subject unmarked by race and gender, discussions of civility emerge as a compelling way to talk *around* feminist and anti-racist concerns with a determined and

dedicated ignorance” (24). In enforcing these codes of civility, one action read as a misstep on the part of a person of color can lead to devastating “checks” to their person and even to their life.

Overall, Blanche’s error in character judgment is not all that unconventional within the mode of detective fiction: she “falls for” the cunning maneuvers the prototypical white femme fatale who alternates between her finicky and vulnerable “natures” to achieve her selfish endgame. Other detectives have famously committed such an error, and indeed the femme fatale has driven the plot points of many a Hammett and Chandler story. However, as opposed to the hardboiled formula, wherein sex is the dangerous “weapon of women who are otherwise powerless in the world of money and violence they inhabit” (Steiner 858), Blanche’s false assumption of Grace’s sincerity is based on the fact that they are both women. Because Blanche has internalized both Grace and Emmeline’s behavior to her as “civil” in the context of their unequal and racially-coded employer-employee relationship, she does not see Grace’s strange behavior as anything but normal in respect to Grace’s self-perceived superiority; in other words, Blanche doesn’t see anything amiss in the way Grace speaks to her, which actually ends up blinding her to Grace’s real ambitions and fake anxiety.

Grace’s deception and Blanche’s failure to see it due to the civility clause reveal just how significant the “cult of true womanhood” has been to heteronormative patriarchy and the division between “deserving” subjects (moneyed white heterosexual women) and “undeserving” subjects (poor women of color). Blanche’s error reveals the lesson that patriarchy is not the only evil that perpetuates white heteropatriarchal supremacy: so does

kyriarchy. Specifically, Grace's and Blanche's positions in relation to heteropatriarchy are inverted. While Post-World War II placed gendered expectations on white women to be housewives instead of entering the workforce that white middle-class women attempted to thwart, "The gendered economic power of anti-Black racism made such an expectation for African American women impossible, since there was no likelihood either that their own paid labor would soon become unnecessary or that their mates could ever earn a reliable family wage" (Gilmore 188). In some ways, Blanche's blind spot was the lack of recognition of the complexities of the sexual contract, which in typical fashion ascribe the woman's role as subservient to her husband's, but do not account for how racial difference places women of color at a unique disadvantage in comparison to white women.

In short, the politics of civility and respectability are just as racially coded as they are gendered, and, importantly, these politics and the policies they help support rely on an interlocking of gendering and racialization that makes white women's oppression and the oppression of women of color both contingent upon one another and quite distinct from one another. As Patricia Hill Collins observes about the cult of true womanhood: "Propertied White women and those of the emerging middle class are encouraged to aspire to these virtues. African-American women encountered a different set of controlling images" (Collins 80). Angela Davis similarly points out the differences in disciplining white women convicts and women of color convicts in the nineteenth century, wherein white women were placed in "home-like" prison rooms that attempted to retrain their domestic instincts, while women of color were "disproportionately

sentenced to men's prisons" (72).

In this way, *Blanche on the Lam* alludes to the historical conditions that placed white women in the positions of privilege, but at the cost of the freedom and rights of women of color. As S.L. Kim suggests, within the gradual incorporation of white women into the workplace at the onset of World War I, "Domestic work as an occupation declined for some women, but not for minority and immigrant women" (Kim 9). As a result, Grace's lust for ownership of her own estate, and subsequently herself, undermines whatever coalition Grace and Blanche may have developed: "Both Blanche and Grace face false assumptions about each other because of their status in society. Blanche assumes that Grace is shallow and has neither meaning nor goals set in her life, besides being the wife of a wealthy man. And Grace assumes or doesn't care what Blanche is like as long as the maid cleans up behind her" (Tolson 75). The aspects of heteronormative patriarchy that comply with late capitalism are the ones that in fact enable late capitalism: property is contained to the person who is capable of defending his or her lineage-right to it.

Under this paradigm, Blanche and Grace's relationship is, in Wendy Steiner's terms, "a determinist symbiosis" (Steiner 868). Blanche and Grace are deeply intertwined in their mutual banishment from taking ownership of what can be argued is rightfully theirs: the estate, the compound, the home that the hands of women (and the women they employ) maintain. At the same time, this mutual inheritance shut-out (even as both women are shut inside the domestic sphere) dissolves at the moments that Grace makes the choice to kill Nate and force Emmeline to stand in for her privileged half-sister. In

these maneuvers, Grace betrays Blanche because Blanche cannot side with Grace's actions against the people who built the house. It is more theirs than hers. At the same time, Blanche betrays Grace in her refusal to keep quiet, in her refusal to stop looking into the clues, and in her refusal to let Grace kill her, to give in. At these moments, readers might both mourn and celebrate a sort of loss of the potential for interracial feminist camaraderie. As Kamala Visweswaran states: "Feminist innocence is betrayed by relations of power; betrayal signals the loss of innocence. The terms recur as place markers for the loss of an earlier moment in feminist thinking that theorized a sisterhood without attending to the divides that separated women" (Visweswaran 90). Blanche will not give into Grace, and Grace will not give up her believed entitlement to a house that was not given to her and that she herself did not build. Thus, Blanche's error in judgment serves as a parable for the difficulty of coalition building and trust between women from different grounds of privilege. The situating of Grace and Blanche as dialectically opposed within the explicitly stated employer-employee and the implied white feminist-black feminist structures illustrates Parikh's notion, following Levinas and Derrida, that there exists "a radically subjective interdependence between self and Other, an interdependence that precedes subjectivity and makes subjectivity possible" (Parikh 6). While the ending may be bleak in the rupture of any potential positive relationship between Blanche and Grace, it is important to note that their symbiosis makes "visible heterogeneous objects of loyalty, motives for violating such loyalties, and modes of violation" (Parikh 11).

Blanche realizes her grave error in judgment quite late in Grace's murder spree,

and interprets Grace's psychotic pathology as evolving from her perceived ability to do whatever she wants, and to whomever she wants. The mental abuse that white supremacist factions have continued to rain on people of color is viscerally depicted in Grace's disgusting attempt to bring Blanche out of hiding: "She could hear Grace thrashing about. Every once in a while Grace bellowed Blanche's name, along with some other names... names Blanche had long ago learned had nothing to do with her and everything to do with the person from whose mouth they came" (*BOL* 199). The threat of physical harm coupled with Grace's racist diatribe is met with definitive action that also provides pleasure for a reader desiring to get Grace to finally shut up: "As Grace's right foot and head appeared through the doorway, Blanche pivoted her body and pictured Grace's head as a large baseball. The blow sent Grace sprawling backward to lie spread-eagled on the ground in front of the shed...A slow, satisfied grin spread over Blanche's face" (199).

This violent interaction between Blanche and Grace has its own teachable moment, beyond the notion that Blanche has to fight physical and mental abuse forced upon her by Grace and by people like Grace through any means necessary. Blanche's survival has another significant meaning: if the hardboiled detective's "triumph over pain and violence often carried the plot" (Soitos 50), then Blanche's survival is important because, as a woman of color working in domestic service, her life was perceived by Grace to be entirely expendable. Her survival, then, is not protected, and when she manages to survive this encounter, she is more the vigilante feminist hero and willful subject. In the end, Neely's highlighting of their dialectic interconnection may be

interpreted as the necessary step in the collective desire on behalf of humanitarian thinkers of achieving social justice. White women are not just subservient to heteronormative patriarchy and white supremacy, they are active agents in this system.

Blanche's awareness of her position as a domestic worker and the requirement that she pay constant vigilant attention to the context and space around her contradicts the classification by several reviews and book covers of *Blanche on the Lam* as a country cozy mystery. In fact, the text critiques the country whodunit and the pattern of order that seeks to remedy all seemingly momentary disruptions to an organized bio-political *disorder*. At the close of *Blanche on the Lam*, the main protagonist solved the puzzle, helped reign in the killer, was paid a large sum of hush money, and was now free to move on from rural North Carolina to the city of Boston, but without her children for fear of being caught (still) on the lam. However, in the second to last paragraph of the closing, Blanche laments that "she was now approaching Boston as yet another enemy territory. It seemed that enemy territory was all there was in this country for someone who looked like her. She had no place to go—at least to make a living—except among those who disdained her to death" (180).

While the country cozy, as a form of the whodunit, would have the protagonist safely stowed from harm's way, at the close of this novel, Blanche is still on the lam from the police. She is also still vulnerable in other ways because of her position as a Black woman with few connections riding a bus from the South to the North alone. And, there is a double entendre in the notion that her future employers would disdain her "to death." As she knows too well, the people who hire her to work in their home have no imperative

to care for her emotional or even physical safety, and are often the root of the danger themselves. As a result, instead of feeling relief now that the case was shut and closed, Blanche's case remains open: she remains a perpetual suspect because of her race and in a state of perpetual endangerment because of her gender and class position.

Enemy territory: the chosen words are dramatic, akin to the type of rhetoric found in media covering international news. To call someone an enemy is not only to recognize that they are not your friend and do not have an interest in your wellbeing, but also that they are actively invested in bringing you down. To call someone an enemy requires an intimate knowledge of yourself and that person—otherwise they may simply be called a “stranger.” As such, “enemy” is an intimate category that invokes both negative affect and intimate experience of the enemy. “Enemy” might at first indicate more of an affective relationship between the subject and the object of the subject's concern than “territory.” When placed together, “enemy territory” demands attention to how the drawing up of borders and policing of spaces relies as much on discursive and affective methods of control as on physical methods.

Concretely, both both words “enemy” and “territory” signify the drawing up of borders that both regulate and exclude the subject. Like “enemy,” “territory” also invokes intimate knowledge of what you can claim as yours, and what you cannot. Territory also implies that there are people there to safeguard this territory. Therefore, if you can claim territory, then you can also claim those who safeguard it as in your corner—as your “friends.” In contrast, “enemy territory” is terrifying in the pairing of these two words because the phrase implies that not only are the people within this territory not your

friends, but that the territory itself has guards that are bent to protect this territory *from* you. In respect to Barbara Neely's first mystery novel, *Blanche on the Lam*, "Enemy territory" describes the main protagonist's position at the end of the novel accurately.

To Blanche, "enemy territory" is expansive and encompasses even the territory that by legal standards and constitutional rights would consider Blanche a legal citizen with recourse to due process and legal protection. However, Blanche's most recent case as well as her history in the line of domestic work and personal experiences have exposed her to the unjust realities of being a capable and intelligent black woman in a society that values women for their bodies and devalues blackness. In short, "enemy territory" encapsulates the affective and legal disciplining systems of which Blanche is keenly aware. Neely's novel highlights the fact that in an economic system that functions on inherited (privileged) wealth and a lack of enforcement of reparations and actual contracts when it comes to men and women of color, it is all about the home, the property. Moreover, the benefit of Blanche's perspective is witnessed in the text's clear allusion to the fact that estates and vacation homes rely on historical exclusions of laboring bodies as they simultaneously rely on "invisible labor" to maintain the "coziness" of the retreating space. Crucially, the bodies that are abused are denied agency and rights and are simultaneously branded as "private property" (DuCille, "The Occult of True Black Womanhood," 605) to be managed by those who give themselves the credibility of rational thought and human rights.

Indeed, Blanche's spiritual syncretic practices illustrate the significant presence of black diasporic and transatlantic cultural inheritance, further rendering inadequate the

“local color” features of the country whodunit to describe Barbara Neely’s novel.

Blanche connects to these practices even as they are incapable of being harnessed, enscribed, tied down, rendering Blanche a black diasporic subject, a traveling spiritual womanist and mother, and a willful subject. In the end, Blanche elects not to go to the police, but to take hush money in order to put her sister’s kids through school. The scopic regime, to Blanche’s exclusion, does not factor into her means of personal survival. Pointedly, Blanche’s hush money establishes her as a moneyed individual, a fact unpacked in her next book, *Blanche among The Talented Tenth*. Blanche is not entitled to a community because she is a woman of color with small means who is now also on the run. At the same time, Blanche does resist arrest and lives to fight another day. She also has a piece of the estate with her, which will enable her to continue get in people’s way in novels to come, applying her own skillful and adapted epistemological methods, and to equip her children with the tools and resources that they will need to survive. Moreover, she continues to reveal the dark secrets of the estate through the course of the series.

Narratively, the text offers a mode of historiography that resists colonial history’s preference for progressive narratives. Like the hardboiled, there is no resolution in the end in respect to a restoration of order and calm in the community. As a result, novels like *Blanche on the Lam* are country cozies if the analysis is limited solely to geospatial location. But if we are interested in looking at the power play between corrupt forces and a moral order, as detective fiction is celebrated for so doing, then texts like *Blanche on the Lam* are critical of that “cozy” factor. They want to implode this factor because Blanche White is not Miss Marple, for the reasons discussed in this chapter. In sum, even

women of color detective fiction texts that seemingly follow the country house whodunit formula frustrate the conventions by which a neat ending is expected and fulfilled. While there may be the humor and the rural setting in these texts that remind us of the whodunit, the endings to these books do not restore social order. In this way, they, too, are hardboiled.

Chapter 4: Staging the Disappeared: Collective Testimony and Public Motherhood in
Lucha Corpi's *Black Widow's Wardrobe* and Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood: The
Juárez Murders*

"In this sense, I grant you, that the best managed homes are those where the wife
has more power. But when she despises the voice of her head, when she desires to usurp
his rights and take the command upon herself, this inversion of the proper order of things
leads only to misery, scandal, and dishonor"

— John Jacques Rousseau

"Stupid men imputing shame /
on a woman unreasonably"

— Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz¹⁷

Reading Lucha Corpi's *Black Widow's Wardrobe* (1999) comparatively with
Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* (2005) may seem like a
commonsense literary studies approach: after all, both novels inhabit a relatively narrow
geographic region of the Southwest U.S. And Mexico. And, conceptually, both texts
incorporate Chicana feminist epistemologies, namely the Anzaldúan concepts of the
process of *conocimiento*, *new mestiza*, and *Nepantla* as a conceptual, liminal theory of
the borderlands. The uses of these epistemologies reveal the ways in which collective
accounts, staged public interventions, and recovered Chicana feminist historiographies
function as alternative epistemologies in their "assertion of collective presence against

¹⁷ Poem excerpt from "In Which She Argues As Invalid the Pleasure and Blame of Those Men Who
Accuse Women of What They Cause"

the collusion of ideological and material forces that render them invisible and expendable” (Delgadillo 93-4).

However, these novels are as distinct as they are critically and geographically aligned: for one, the novels differ in the ways in which the concept of geography and mapping are used during the course of the investigation. While *Black Widow's Wardrobe* connects Gloria's “dark gift” of intuition with Gloria Anzaldúa's spiritual mestizaje, which in turn equips Gloria to read temporality as a geographic terrain that encompasses past, present, and future, Ivon's invoking of cartographic epistemology in *Desert Blood* leads her to chart the physical terrain of the red light district and read the spatial geography of the U.S.-Mexico border not so much as a physical demarcation but as an economic interrelationship. And, Corpi's novel connects temporal folds and tests the potential of enfolding magical realist elements into the decidedly presentist genre of detective fiction, while Gaspar de Alba's novel is a sociological excavation of the reasons behind the disappearance of hundreds of girls along the Juárez border. In effect, Corpi's novel reflects the significance of ritual, testimony, and bearing witness as public performances that in effect “turn out” acts of domestic violence and libel perpetuated against Chicana women and historically maligned female icons. In contrast, Gaspar de Alba's novel moves from the opposite perspective of the domestic vs. public binary to illustrate the inadvertent privatization and obscuring of evidential material that is found in the public space by official and legal institutions that rely on the testimonial narrative of those who have been disappeared to stay disappeared, even in the face of insurmountable, publically visible evidence.

At the same time, the mutual pairing of these novels reveals their shared investments in reinterpreting domestic labor, motherhood, and domestic violence as public acts and ethical functions while also calling attention to the refusal by governmental, corporate, and legal institutions to recognize these social and material acts as existing outside of the “privatized” confines of domestic and embodied personal experience. Specifically, through their distinct epistemological, temporal, and geographical traces, both novels reveal the issue of domestic violence as a public affair with respect to the fact that violence against poor women of color is not contained to the domestic sphere, but is in fact an aspect of corporate, legal, and governmental policy that requires the bodies of women to serve as national icons while obscuring available evidence that leads to their precarity in both home and at work. Furthermore, in the two novels’ uses of the destabilized hardboiled detective fiction genre to upend any easy distinctions between the safety and sanctity of the domestic space and the erroneous perception of the social sphere as a publically accountable territory, each novel offers a reconsideration of the role of motherhood not as a domestic role to be carried out by women alone, but as an exemplary ethics of care by “public mothers” (Gilmore 194) that ties into ethical and moral philosophical considerations of the role of civic members in society.

In effect, both Lucha Corpi and Alicia Garpar de Alba use the hardboiled detective fiction genre to critique the ways in which women of color become objectified in neocolonial and global capitalist socioeconomic policy through simultaneous silencing and restriction of inconvenient narratives and evidence. The focus of their novels on the

physical and discursive flow of bodies, information, and capital across and through the U.S.-Mexico border complicates any simple understanding of national and transnational social politics, especially with respect to how these political, social, and economic configurations discipline and claim women of color as subjects and as sources of capital. As a result, the geographic locations of these novels as working “side by side” within and across the U.S.-Mexico border provides the opportunity to think critically about how women of color have been placed as within or exterior to these heavily patrolled and regulated spaces in line with heteropatriarchal and nationalist agendas.

Gloria Damasco, the central protagonist in *Black Widow's Wardrobe*, does not find herself falling into the detective role accidentally like Blanche White from Barbara Neely's series. Instead, Damasco is a fully-licensed Private Investigator working in Oakland, California. Nevertheless, her status as a Private Investigator enables her to take cases and to utilize investigative procedures outside of the confines and surveillance of the criminal justice system. Moreover, Gloria takes the case of the Black Widow against her own consideration of the fact that there is very little information and very little evidence to follow with respect to The Case of the Black Widow, hence following her “gut instinct” rather than a professional and economic obligation. What compels Gloria to take the case is akin to what compels Blanche White to become an accidental detective: curiosity and the feeling that an injustice has been committed that no one has recognized.

In the beginning of the novel, Gloria is attending the annual Day of the Dead celebration in the Mission District of San Francisco with her daughter and mother when she witnesses a masked assailant attempt to take a woman's life. Gloria decides to find

out who attacked Licia Lecuona, or “Black Widow,” as she is referred to by the mainstream press. Gloria subsequently finds out that Licia was recently released from prison for murdering her violent husband in self-defense. Gloria also learns that Licia’s jury predominantly consisted of white men. During the Day of the Dead procession, she recognizes that while Licia was criminalized for murdering her husband, no one speaks of why she did it. Thus, while Licia was publically and legally condemned for not conforming to the cult of domesticity (a good wife must keep her domestic troubles out of public light, a good wife obeys), the court of public opinion has no harsh words for her abusive husband.

Gloria also learns that Licia is convinced that she is the reincarnation of La Malinche, the mythic and maligned mistress of Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortéz, given to him by Mayan traders in 1519. There are two simultaneous mysteries that are subsequently investigated in the novel: the first mystery appears to be within the parameters of detective fiction, with its realistic threat to Licia, a person living in the same time period as Gloria Damasco, circa middle 1990s in Oakland, California. The second mystery is whether Licia’s supposed reincarnation as La Malinche is a tactic, a ruse, or a true statement. This second mystery makes more trouble for the classification of Corpi’s series as detective fiction and seems to foray into magical realist themes that are also recognized as hugely popular with Latin American and Latin@ authors. A key aspect to Gloria’s dual investigations is to figure out who the Black Widow is, and whether her past crimes have any bearing on the present, especially with respect to the motivations of the person who out to hurt her.

In order to arrive at a most plausible explanation for Licia's attack, Gloria engages with transnational, post-colonial, colonial, and pre-colonial Mexican history from a Chicana activist lens and by employing the critical and material resources at her disposal. To engage these historical and critical tools, Gloria employs her "dark gift," which is an invocation of Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of "new mestiza," a critical orientation that seeks a deconstructive perspective that is also cognizant of one's involvement and ethical responsibility and thwarts traditional biologically essentialist understandings of racial mixing and identity.¹⁸ Similar to the positive re-appropriation of the U.S. derogatory misnomer "Chicano" by Mexican American activists, the concept of "old mestizo" was reconfigured into "the new mestiza" by Gloria Anzaldúa to indicate a more flexible, pluralist understanding of biological and cultural hybridity.

In other words, "The crossbreeding that produces a mestiza consciousness is, in Anzaldúa's writings, more a metaphor for cultural strife than an act of biological reproduction" (Amado 449), and a perspective that recognizes, rather than attempts to discount, the presence of Indigenous and African histories that are a part of Latin American roots as a consequence of colonial and diasporic hybridization. The "new mestiza" corrects the nationalist-imperialist erasure of indigenous groups within the

¹⁸ Damián Baca situates Mestiz@ cultures as cultures that "emerged across the Western Hemispheres in the late fifteenth century as a consequence of 'mestizaje,' the fusion of bloodlines between American Indians and Spanish Iberian conquerors under colonial situations" (Baca 2). Mestizaje is a term used to generally connote racial or cultural mixing in the Americas, first created as a racial label by Spanish and Portuguese colonizers "to identify the off springs of European white men and Amerindian women" (Amado 447) and invoked problematically by nationalist Mexican philosopher Jose Vasconcelos to describe a mixed-race identity that was "supposed to subsume all others" (Amado 448).

formation of the binary U.S.-Mexico, which is manifest in the Chican@ identity. Moreover, the new mestiza speaks with a woman's voice. The conscience of the borderlands, is, in Anzaldúa's words, "una consciencia de mujer—a woman's consciousness...that defies both misogynist and racist legacies of colonialism" (Amado 454). Rather than erasing boundary markers, Anzaldúa's concept of "new mestiza" positions the mestiza subject against definitive boundary markers, enabled through her seven-step process of *conocimiento*.

Conocimiento is a theory of acquiring knowledge and a theory of praxis, built by way of dismantling the heterodoxical subject in favor of a critically aware emergent mestiza subject, a subject who recognizes that *mestizo/a* is "a concept whose shape and content depend on the ideological and political context within which it is produced" (Amado 457). Anzaldúa constructs *conocimiento* as a form of "reflective consciousness" that brings one closest to "direct knowledge (gnosis) of the world" (542). Anzaldúa's intuitive process of arriving at *conocimiento* is meant to change the subject irrevocably, as well as to connect the subject to an ethical relationship with those around the emergent self. The author's careful verb shifts reflect her stylistic illustration of *conocimiento*'s deconstruction-to-reconstruction process: first, the "you" in the process is a grammatical patient, wherein something is done to the subject. Then, a middle-path between complacency and agency is enacted by the verb choice "descend," and subsequently, the subject becomes an agent in the process, doing something, or in this case, several things: testing theories, forming alliances, enacting spiritual activism.

In this process of deconstruction-to-reconstruction, Anzaldúa's *conocimiento* is different than both Enlightenment rationalist epistemology and the detective process of abduction in that it involves the additional step of recognizing that you are, all the while, scripting a new story, rather than arriving at an irrevocable, objective truth: "Self and world are 'a text we co-create' by giving meaning to experiences and setting the tasks of our lives" (Levine 174).¹⁹ To be more clear, *conocimiento* is critical of the classifications and categorizations that attempt to fossilize abduction into objective knowledge: "conocimiento questions conventional knowledge's current categories, classifications, and contents." Moreover, the methods of carrying out *conocimiento* are creative, as it is "a form of spiritual inquiry." As a result, "conocimiento is reached via creative acts—writing, art-making, dancing, healing, teaching, meditation, and spiritual activism—both mental and somatic (the body, too, is a form as well as site of creativity)" (Anzaldúa 542).

Furthermore, new mestiza consciousness is a form of spiritual practice and epistemology, if we take Theresa Delgadillo's definition of *spiritual mestizaje* to mean a critical practice representing an ongoing collective resistance to gender, racial, and colonial subjugation, the force of which works through the bridging of personal memory, testimonios, and the sacred from the past and present (Delgadillo 1-27). Amala Levine clarifies in her essay on Anzaldúa's new mestizaje consciousness that Anzaldúa's

¹⁹ Anzaldúa's steps are written in active verb form, emphasizing the individual subject's agency and limited perspective: "the earthquake jerks you...you are catapulted into nepantla...you descend into Coatlicue...you undergo a 'conversion'...you track ongoing circumstances of your life...you take your story out into the world, testing it...you form 'holistic alliances'...enacting spiritual activism" ("now let us shift..." 544).

spirituality is neither like the practices of organized religions nor is it a “whatever you like” new age belief system. Instead, Anzaldúa’s method of spiritual activism is “an animist view of the universe, interconnecting the heavens with the depth of the ocean and the human with inorganic matter as a living whole imbued with consciousness” (Levine 173). This spiritual epistemology calls the self to recognize its interconnectedness with others, and hence the self’s responsibility to others. In this critical and ethical engagement with the construction of the physical and psychic self, and the call for an awareness that these are scripts that we go by and that others also assist in constituting, the binary between mind and body comes to be inadequate, arbitrary. It is out of this method of *conocimiento* that Anzaldúa crafts her theory of the borderlands and *Nepantla* as reflecting physical and conceptual geography: “In these discussions, ‘borderlands’ shifts from geographic space in which two physical worlds come into contact to cultural space where real people enter into relationship as a result of occupying proximate locations” (Torres 196-7).²⁰

Gloria embodies spiritual mestiza critical consciousness by tapping into her professional experiences as a Private Investigator and her “dark gift” of intuitive knowledge that comes to her through her dreams. This gift enables Gloria to explore critically yet empathically the experiences of other Chicana women. Like all senses of intuition, Gloria does not know where her gift comes from, rendering it by Derrida’s

²⁰ *Conocimiento* illustrates the critical and theoretical strengths of spiritual mestizaje as a deconstructive and reconstructive process. In Anzaldúa’s seven step process toward *conocimiento*, the subject experiences a critical awakening that causes a radical shift in subjective self-awareness. Within this scope of critical awakening, the emphasis on the process of deconstructing assumptions and identifications that have prevented the subject from achieving a critical and conscientious perspective.²⁰

accounts to be genuine. According to Derrida's theorization of the gift, "For there to be a gift, there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, counter-gift, or debt" (Derrida, *Given Time*, 12). To function as a gift, the gift "must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift, by the process of exchange" (7). Gloria's gift is not given by someone per se, but was received through the unique set of circumstances that has enabled her to attune herself to the conditions of those around her. Gloria's dark gift is an unintentional gift, but is still a gift in the sense that Gloria did not exchange anything initially for it, and did not consciously "purchase" it; instead, her dark gift is an incidental accumulation, akin to the preservational aspects of Blanche White's "nightgirl" persona, that equips her with certain unique abilities. This subjectless gift, in the sense that Gloria cannot pinpoint a giftor, in effect frees her to be grateful for the gift. Because there is no designated giftor, it remains a gift, but also affords Gloria to "give back" to someone else, to become the giftor. In effect, Gloria's confirmation of her "dark gift" actually inverts the negative implications of Derrida's "gift policy" to redefine the acknowledgement of a gift as an acknowledgment of indebtedness.

The emphasized juncture of the personal and the professional inherent in Gloria's dark gift leads Gloria to enlist all of her faculties and resources to solve her case. Gloria invites her mind and body to collaborate, paying attention "when images, visions, and feelings come to her" and valuing "the information achieved in this relatively unconventional way" (Bickford 13). As an example of how Gloria's visions actually bridge mind and body and push Gloria to integrate herself further into the case rather than stepping away from it to "ponder it" more objectively, Gloria at times feels phantom

pains in her body upon waking up, as though her travels catapult her into Licia's bodily experiences (10). These affective twinings physically impact Gloria, make her more painfully aware than ever upon waking. In Gloria's affective relationship with Licia's case and in her consolidation of bodily and mental senses, she takes the trope of the "intuitive detective" further to align it with spiritual *mestizaje*: Unlike the hardboiled detective's hunches, which are largely predicated on stereotypes, and the armchair detective's secret stores of idiosyncratic, encyclopedic knowledge that enables him/her to bring forth a clue seemingly out of nowhere, Gloria's dark gift of insight is relational, coalitional, and aware of its narrative-weaving (thus also being epistemological). Unlike biological *mestizaje*, which is predicated on scientific proof of blood, the intuition and embodied affect Gloria feels in her consideration of Licia's story is as self-reflective and communicative as it is critical.

A good detective is one who is always on alert, always ready to pick up on the smallest clue, the tiniest trace of evidence, the miniscule variation in a pattern. And, seemingly all detective characters require non-rational, or intuitive, practices to assist in their detection and reconstruction of the missing narrative account. Much like Sherlock Holmes and Sam Spade, Gloria has periods of retreating into herself to think, ponder, connect the dots, most often at night. However, unlike the opium fogs of Holmes or Spade's restless binge-drinking and wandering of the streets, Gloria's dream-like states are a way to delve deeper into both the case and the realization of her connection, both mentally and physically, to the signification of the case. In other words, the bridging of the knowledge provided by way of her dark gift and intuition implied by the adjective

“dark” to describe the gift in the novel is less haunting than it is critical: the dark gift within a Chicana feminist epistemology recognizes that certain sources of knowledge are eclipsed by the “enlightening” mechanisms of positive science and positive law that do not acknowledge, let alone celebrate, their own subjectivity.

When Gloria reemerges into the world, she is not necessarily the wiser, still standing apart from the crowd – in many ways, she is more confused, but also more alert, knowing she needs to take in everything that may suggest how to connect the dots further. In fact, Gloria’s intuition is not limited to abduction (an educated guess to explain a phenomenon) or to her ready stores of knowledge (although she does have an extensive knowledge the history of the Berkeley and Oakland areas as well as their spatial and cultural geographies). Instead, like Anzaldúa’s methods to achieve *conocimiento*, Gloria views her body not only as “the site of experience but also the repository of knowledge, which can only be fully deciphered in tandem with research and contemplation” (Delgadillo 7). At one point, one of her dreams folds with the real experience when she is chasing a disguised suspect toward a hospital. We can say at this point that dreaming the future is too farfetched to be considered weighty or credible information; however, if we think carefully about the description of these visions, that these visions move around fragmented images to assist Gloria in constructing the “larger picture” once she is awake, we could be inhabiting the realm of “night working.” At the same time, there is a sense of the uncanny that she would have registered the “same thing happening” in a prior state. This state of uncanny coincidence, or repetition with a too-slight difference, is quite similar to the similarities between La Malinche’s historiography and Licia’s story.

Gloria's dark gift also enables her to see beyond and aside from temporal designations of past, present, and future that seemingly discredit Licia's claim that she is Malintzin. In this way, Gloria's abilities signify on Anzaldúa's notion of *Nepantla*, an indeterminate state one temporarily inhabits after having gone through a sudden shift in awareness during the process of *conocimiento*. Being a temporary state of liminality that is revealed as a conceptual abyss for the bereft self is not a place anyone can stay for long.

In its investments in breaking down temporal, spatial, and narrative boundaries, *Black Widow's Wardrobe* also signifies both on alphabetic and non-alphabetic scripts to theorize how one comes to knowledge working from the borderlands within spiritual *mestizaje*. For example, textual excerpts as evidenced in seemingly "found" journal entries from Licia's diary that serves as a preface to the novel and partial accounts in published historiographies of Malintzin Tenepal illustrate that we can only ever recover a partial narrative, and that these narratives will inevitably distort "material to suit the needs of the writer" (López 162). Moreover, Gloria's reliance on her mother and her mother's friend to do some investigative research in the public library produces some interesting details about both the documented history of Malintzin and the inevitable omissions. Nina and Gloria's mother are able to piece together a "counter-patriarchal historiography" in their abduction about Malintzin Tenepal, drawn from their found clues and contextualized through their thinking about what it must have been like to be Malinche and have so few choices in her life.

In their retroductive and relational reconstruction of the fragmented pieces of Malintzin's biography, the maternal figures who assist Gloria both politicize and

publicize matters of the home, and “the home, understood as the sphere of women, shifts over time from a site of containment or delusion to one of feminist spiritual praxis” (Delgadillo 41). The detective methods and retroductive filling in of clues to account for Malintzin’s absent testimony signifies on the over-determined role of the secret will in classic mystery fiction, which, when it turns up, resolves all matters of the case. In Licia’s case, historiographical evidence is required, and valued, even if it would not withstand the scrutiny of positive law. In Gloria’s conjoining of affective-intuitive and abductive-intuitive epistemologies, “Writing becomes both an intensely physical, bodily process of decolonization and an examination of the imprint of the ideologies and religions on the physical self” (Delgadillo 7-8). Her choice not to privilege the visible, the easily traceable, the documented helps her obtain knowledge that may otherwise have gone unnoticed, particularly with her and her feminist network’s recovery of Malintzin Tenepal’s historiography. The basic account provided by Gloria’s matriarchal sleuths corroborates with academic accounts of Malintzin Tenepal: a Nahua woman who was fluent in Maya and Nahuatl and trained in Aztec pictography and the Aztec art of discourse at the Calmecac conservatory (Baca 108-11). She served as an interpreter between the Spanish colonizers and emissaries from Moctezuma as well as the Oaxacan valley populations. She was given as a sexual slave to Hernán Cortés in 1519 after being sold by Maya slave traders who bought her from her mother.

This historical context is expanded upon in the novel through the development of a Chicana historiographic recuperation that draws empathy into the story and hence expands the scope. This historiographic recuperation is enriched by additional

information provided by Licia, who is allowed to contribute to the project of the reconstruction of Malinche's biography through her own private collection of resources: "Two tall bookcases in Licia's reading room, now my room, contained a large alphabetized collection of Chicana poetry books...The other bookcases contained volumes on Mexico, from pre-Conquest to modern history, ethnography, geography, and folklore to literature and other fine arts. Each shelf was labeled according to the category" (95). The construction of an alternative textual archive on Malinche and of Chican@ literature and history implies that while the Chicano Studies Library UC Berkeley does have materials on Malintzin Tenepal, Licia was able to create a more useful and representative archive on her own, thus having to locate sources and materials through various backchannels. Licia's necessity to create her own alternative archive addresses the tensions of the institutionalization of Chicano and La Raza Studies in places of higher learning since the 1970s, perhaps suggesting that the masculinist aspects of El Movimiento have committed dangerous fallacies with respect to representing the contributions of both men and women to the liberation and broader representation of Mexican Americans.

Licia's library is not the only resource that assists in the collective retroductive building of Malinche's testimony. Licia also contributes through performance. When speaking with Gloria at one point about her experience living under domestic abuse, her eyes closed and quickened breathing, Licia/Malintzin says:

I have been called a traitor to my people...But who were my people?
My poor mother, who gave me away to the slave traders because as a
woman she could retain her power only through her male child? The
slave traders to whom I was only a commodity? My Mayan and

Tabascoan masters? The Mexicas who subjugated everyone and went to war for the sole purpose of getting human hearts to appease their gods' wrath? To whom did I owe my loyalty? No, I belonged to no one...I didn't belong, that was part of my problem. I betrayed no one, except my children (121).

Licia's narrative embodiment of Malintzin is a performance that is at once embodied and performative, recognizing a temporal space between the historiographies but also keeping them together in a comparative and collective signification. According to Diana Taylor, even seemingly mundane, non-staged behaviors can be read as performing according to "theatrical, rehearsed, or conventional/event-appropriate" (Taylor, *The Archive*, 3) implicit guidelines. Licia's simultaneous performance of Malintzin, while similar to Gloria's affective dream experience of Licia's flight, is theatrical in that it is performed and witnessed in public. Furthermore, unlike Gloria's flights, which are generally interior even as they help her connect empathetically, spiritually, and epistemologically to Licia, Licia's spoken narrative becomes a testimony because it is witnessed by others and assists in gathering context for the case. While this given testimony is both fiction and a reparative piecing together of Malinche's story, it is also an important reminder of the lack of options for Malinche and women like her who do not have a lot of options and have to take the most advantageous option for survival. In fact, in this alignment between Licia's and Malintzin's stories, a collective Chicana feminist testimony, or *testimonio*, is produced. Referencing Doris Sommer, Theresa Delgadillo summarizes that "key features of women's testimonios include an exploration of subject formation that recognizes difference within networks of relationship as well as multiple subjectivities (33).

Testimonio is cognizant of the cooperative and collective aspects of historiography, and is therefore epistemological.

Another unique contribution of Lucha Corpi's novel is the novel's reconsideration of ritual as a form of *testimonio*, in effect building on the implications of private pain and repetitive behavior located in ritualistic behaviors to reinterpret ritual as a public right of partial, yet inalienable, narrative construction. Specifically, Licia's performative embodiment of Malintzin during El Dia de los Muertos parade at the beginning of the novel becomes ritualistic because it is a reiterated behavior within a contextual staging that is also engaged in a ritualistic, reiterated celebration of Pan-Latino pride and association. However, Licia's simultaneous embodiment of various historically maligned or essentially sanctified female figures within Chicana and indigenous histories also asks the Pan-Latino unification to account for its pervasive erasure and silencing of female and maternal testimonies of violence and degradation that appear to be the cost of the nationalist, heteropatriarchal social and economic pacts.

During the El Dia de los Muertos procession in the Latino Mission District of San Francisco, some attendees are dressed in dutiful black and carry flowers to commemorate their departed, some are dressed as machistes and perform Aztec ritual dances, and still others carry on and wear Halloween-like costumes, seemingly divorced from the significance of this yearly ritual within the Mexican American and more recently the Latin@ community (2). Clearly, the significance of the event is variable for the attendees, and the choices of dress and behavior reflects this heterogeneity. At the same time, this festival also expands on the notion of ritual in the annual celebration's illustration of

“how specific contemporary actors *use* ritual and festivals and other sites of commemoration to affirm a relation to a past, a future, and a present community and to mark themselves off as members of a distinct community” (Norget 12-13).

According to Regina M. Marchi, The Day of the Dead festivities “comprise a syncretic mix of both Latin American Indigenous practices and Roman Catholic spiritual traditions that have been reconfigured by Chicanos and other U.S. Latinos to transmit messages of cultural identity and political expression” (Marchi 1). Indeed, ritual performance abounds in the novel’s description of The Day of the Dead procession. First of all, the yearly celebration of the departed is commemorated by the donning of black and the abundant presence of marigolds, the ritual flower of the dead. Moreover, the dancers who perform the Matachines ritual signify on Spanish colonial dance rituals but also revise these rituals to enact a critique of European conquest by incorporating Pueblo elements. This revision turns the stereotypical sanctimonial script of private ritualistic behavior, kept secret and safe from public elements of transculturation and corruption, into a public declaration and avowal of transculturation: private and public merge to form into collective process of retelling mestizaje experientiality and history.

For example, the matachin dances, typically associated with the theme of Moorish-Christian conflict and a type of dance known in Spain as a morisca and in England as morris dances, is also located in Pueblo variations. The Matachines ritual “mirrors centuries of IndoHispano cultural relations and provides a shared rhetorical framework upon which Pueblo and Hispano communities embellish their own local histories” (Baca 101). The Matachines dance “communicates metaphorically about the

colonial history and character of IndoHispano relations in the communities that perform it” (Baca 105), thus enabling a reflection on European conquest and revising the commemorative script of celebrating European conquest on Catholic holidays that appeared in the European performances.

In its pan-ethnic and transnational focus, this Day of the Dead celebration reflects the 1980s and 1990s cultural expansion of the holiday toward a “pan-Latino, rather than strictly Mexican identity, as California became home to vast numbers of immigrants from other parts of Latin America” (4). Moreover, the ritual celebration of El Día de los Muertos has been utilized by cultural institutions and corporate investments alike “toward asserting a positive Latino presence in the U.S public sphere” (Marchi 2). Aside from the celebratory vibe and dutiful commemoration of the dead, according to Regina M. Marchi, Day of the Dead rituals have helped “fill a cultural void in U.S. society by providing a public space in which to tell stories about departed loved ones, collectively mourn, and heal” (7). While the creation of this alternative public space has raised concerns regarding the commercialization and appropriation of both the history and continuing struggle for visibility on behalf of Chican@s and Latin@s within the U.S., the picture as it unfolds creates a bridge between and among present and thriving U.S., Mexican, indigenous, and Latin American cultures.

In the middle of the ritual ceremony described in *Black Widow's Wardrobe*, the participants suddenly witness an apparition: a mourning woman dressed in white, shocking the onlookers and invoking a smattering of different descriptive elocutions. It is Licia, who shows up in white, carrying flowers. She is scrutinized by the public, and the

onlookers whisper variable estimations: “She is...regal in her sadness. Like a tragic Greek heroine”; “More like a tragic Aztec princess”; “More like a brown murderess.” With that said, everyone besides Gloria seems to know that this is “Black Widow.” Licia’s choice to wear white during the Day of the Dead procession but to also carry flowers in reverence for her husband and children appear to radicalize her presence further. Both the Day of the Dead celebration and Licia’s behavior function as ritualistic performances, behaviors that reiterate spiritual, narrative, and behavioral conventions through embodied practice. In her choice to wear white instead of black, Licia is not celebrating the ritual like the others who are in attendance. Instead, she is performing by folding her narrative in with the visual signifiers of La Virgen de Guadalupe and Malintzin Tenepal. Licia performs as the woman in white who has been castigated by society as “Black Widow,” signifying on the sinister notion of only partially mourning for her murderer by wearing all white instead of the ritual black. It should be clarified that Black Widow is what Licia is to others; Malintzin is what she claims for herself. She does not dress in black to identify with or reinterpret the label of Black Widow; she wears white to perhaps commemorate the conversion from Guadalupe to the Virgin Mary, in a similar vein to Malintzin’s inadvertent conversion from her Mayan culture to Catholicism.

This merging of La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Malinche is a willful, even dangerous, move on Licia’s part. As Leslie Petty notes in her discussion of the “dual-ing” images of La Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe in Sandra Cisneros’s fiction, La Malinche and La Virgen de Guadalupe have been defined as dialectically and morally

oppositional. On one end, La Virgen “represents the holy, chaste woman, the embodiment of feminine purity as well as the virtues of nurturing and self-sacrifice” (121). On the other end, La Malinche presents the active challenge to Mexican male authority: “she either openly challenges his authority or is not saved by his protection” (122). Petty’s emphasis on this dialectical model is sensitive to the fact that the virgin/whore dichotomy is not a spectrum, but an “either-or” disciplinary measure that seeks to consolidate the complex identifications of women into “useful” or “used” models. Malintzin’s willful behavior is similar to the public’s applied label of treachery to Licia, who is punished by the public through social sanction and exclusion not just for murdering her husband, but also for violating the covenant of Marianismo. Licia is not a passive subject, which aligns her with the worst judgments made of women who sleep with colonizers and/or who take matters into their own hands.

At the same time, Licia’s experience is different from Malintzin’s, even as “there is a slide between the parallel stories of these two women, a slide across centuries” (Pearson 39). As a result, Licia’s performance can be interpreted as either an indication of her full identification with Malintzin, or her use of Malintzin as a performative, affective symbol in order to achieve a degree of separation from her own personal trauma of domestic violence leading to murder. According to Moira Fradinger in her critical assessment of the use of tragic performance by female survivors of imprisonment, performance can help trauma victims by providing them with a veil, a degree of separation, from uncannily similar events that are unfolding within the script. While “the ‘actresses’ embody the haunting world without theater from which they came—the world

of torture,” those other elements of theater that mark its separation from reality like “the controlled choral movements and characters prevents the spectacle of revictimization and perhaps the invasion of unconscious traumatic symptoms in the actresses, allowing instead for remembering without reliving onstage” (766). Licia is a tragic figure, but she also “performs” the tragedy.

There is danger in reading Licia’s use of Malintzin as merely a mask that allows her some space from the recounting of her own trauma, because “understanding traumatic experience as ‘performance’ flattens the concept of performance and ironically erases the specificity of traumatic suffering” (Fradinger 771, f. 8). We might think of Licia’s performance of Malintzin as a way for her to bear the trace of her own witnessing and testimony. In a type of testimonial conversion that nearly reflects Malintzin’s conversion to Catholicism, as suggested by Licia’s white dress, Licia simultaneously serves as witness to Malintzin’s traced testimony and confesses herself to the unique vantage point because her own story is so similar to Malintzin’s; in other words, Licia’s performance brings together the religious, ethical, and political significance of bearing witness to, and retelling, other people’s stories (Delgadillo 45), stories that fall outside the scope of documented and reproducible narratives.

To make a martyr out of Licia, who has been forced to mourn her children and spend many years in prison isolation, is to further individuate and domesticate the public issue of the pervasive abuse and control of women of color: whether Licia did nor did not do everything she could to protect herself and her children from abuse, the onus is on all individuals to collectively stage an intervention into heteronormative behaviors and

allowances that say that a man can do whatever he wants with a woman's body and time. Calling attention to these stories as pieces of evidence aligns the novel with the other women of color epistemological and critical methods discussed in this project: Licia's recuperative performance of *testimonio* reaffirms the incomplete yet inalienable testimonial weight of shared histories of abuse and libel experienced by women of color at the hands of heteropatriarchal regimes within the expansive scope of the histories of both Spanish and British colonization.

Licia also invokes the erased testimony, or script, of Malintzin's experience of being sold into sexual slavery and subsequently being maligned by society in similar fashion. In other words, Licia does not appropriate Malintzin as a momentous, exceptional emblem of mestizaje. Rather, Licia ritualizes Malintzin's historiography by pointing to the fact that despite living hundreds of years apart, the two women share uncannily, and disturbingly, similar stories. In this way, Licia's testimony bears the trace of Malintzin's erased testimony. The trace has been theorized as a discursive practice by Jacques Derrida and Gayatri Spivak. However, Licia's embodied tracing of Malintzin's testimony unites theoretical discussions of what "subaltern" elocution may look like up and against dominant discursive trace emphasized in Derrida's *Of Grammatology*.²¹

²¹ In Gayatri Spivak's preface to her translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, the author notes that "both Heidegger and Derrida teach us to use language in terms of a trace-structure, effacing it even as it presents its legibility" (Spivak, Preface, xviii). According to Derrida, "The 'formal essence' of the sign can only be determined in terms of presence" (18), and this presence is revealed to us by way of our parsing of its difference from other signs. In fact: "The structure of reference works and can go on working not because of the identity between these two so-called component parts of the sign, but because of their relationship of difference. The sign marks a place of difference" (Spivak, "Preface," xvi). As a result, the trace is a historical relationship between signs, signs that are available to us through dominant discursive fields, and the trace is always under erasure because it is set up to be displaced or replaced with a more timely sign. In this way, "The structure of the sign is determined by the trace or track of that other which is forever absent"

There is a difference between action and writing/speaking within the paradigm of the Derridean trace: it is not that events do not happen, but our ability to speak of those events and to relay their significance is tempered by the means we have of communicating that event and whether the official or dominant channels for communicating this information are open to our version, our language. This is why in her famous work “Does the Subaltern Speak?” Gayatri Spivak leans on Derrida to suggest that because the subaltern is not enabled to speak in dominant discourses (but is rather always spoken for by intellectuals), the subaltern does not speak. Spivak insists that intellectuals recognize and speak of their own subjective “geo-political determinations” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 66) instead of assuming the concealed position of the Subject by way of a rationalist discourse that sets up the Subject to interpret the Object in a seemingly straightforward way.

This would put the staging of Licia’s agential performance of Malintzin into trouble: is she not appropriating a forever disappeared discourse of one of the earliest “others”? My answer would be yes and no: Malintzin cannot speak for herself, and Licia makes use of her erased testimony to reconstitute her own story. However, Spivak says that intellectuals should not abandon writing altogether; instead, “intellectuals must attempt to disclose and know the discourse of society’s Other” (66). In other words, it is

(xxvii). Derrida’s push to hold absence and presence in tension leads to his concept of *différance*, a critical strategy of recognizing that all legible signs are constituted through their binaristic comparison with other signs, creating a structure of reference based on their mutual, yet comparative, interdependence: “The ‘a’ serves to remind us that, even within the graphic structure, the perfectly spelled word is always absent, constituted through an endless series of spelling mistakes” (xliiii). All utterances are (but) traces of previous utterances...like narratives, words build their definition through a repetitive layering of traces, but also from their differentiation from previous words (xix).

important to make space for various scripts, grammars, and discursive channels that have been functioning all along in parallel to dominant discourses that seek to objectify these alternative scripts in their position of holding center stage (82-3).

Reading Licia's use and reference to Malintzin through this lens, Licia's testimonial performance of Malintzin also invokes the trace structure of the sign, wherein both Licia and Malintzin's narratives are partially constructed and told, but with obvious gaps that even Licia herself cannot fill when she is interviewed by Gloria. For example, when Licia absconds to Mexico, Gloria is left with Licia's staff and the contents of Licia's wardrobe, an inversion of the ritual altar in its secret compartments and holding of Licia's bloodied wedding dress, itself a site and source of evidence of her domestic abuse. Domingo sees Licia writing on a pad, and Dora does a pencil rubbing to reveal the place to which Licia is traveling: "Their act of translation, of rendering legible Licia's hidden words, parallels La Malinche's translation work for Cortes. The act of rubbing thus folds these four women together and catalyzes Gloria's and Dora's plans to travel immediately to Mexico City" (López 156). This act of translation, of re-scribing, and of literal and figurative tracing reaffirms the novel's interest in excavating multiple, parallel channels for tracing historiographies and by way of alternative epistemologies.

There are commonalities across Licia's and Malintzin's narratives that stretch across, time, geographic borders, and particular contexts of their entrapments to collude in a willful reclamation of Chicana feminist historiographies that in turn allow room for difference, for rupture. As López interprets the connection between Licia and Malintzin: "Licia repeats Malinche. While imperfect representations, these copies, these interactive

instances, nonetheless create a sense of rupture, a fleeting awareness where the points of the fold meet but do not really match” (164). Licia’s more recent account of her violent abuse serves to collaborate Malintzin’s story in the method of simile: Licia is like Malintzin. Licia’s decision to connect her more recent past to an ancient past aligns with Lopez’s reading of history on the part of the novel “as circular. The novel uses circulation and travel to make an argument about the positive value of things despite the impossibility of authenticity” (López 155). The text’s reclamation of La Malinche, La Chingada, is predicated on making Malintzin’s circumstance of “non-choice” commonplace, as part of the ritual of domestic (yet publicized) violence against women of color.

Licia’s ritual performance serves as a partial recollection of the eclipsed testimonies and histories of other ritualized and sacrificed female and maternal figures from the past. By bringing Malintzin’s narrative back into the present, Licia, and the novel, increases the potency of the testimonial feature of Licia’s performance. Specifically, Licia’s performance reflects the features of testimonio wherein “the substitution of the metaphoric ‘I’ of heroic autobiography with the metonymic ‘I’ of testimonio” (Delgadillo 33). The allegorical feature of Malintzin’s story, “Don’t be like that traitor-whore,” is replaced by a “metonymic” quality of the emphasized similarity of both testimonies that shifts the figure of Malintzin from allegory to metonymy: Malintzin represents all of the women, past, present, and future, in corporeal, material, and spiritual lines, who have had their lives, bodies, and testimonies degraded by dominant forces. Moreover, while Licia is the agent who is bringing Malintzin’s narrative to the public, her

agentive act of recovery and refusal to wear the mask of shame for her self-defense also reinscribes Malintzin as an agentive figure. As the novel expresses, the scholars who have been busy studying Malintzin's historiography have hoped:

... to give Mexicanas and Chicanas a better sense of themselves, not as *las hijas de la chingada*—the Indian woman violated and subjugated by the conqueror—but as *las hijas de la Malinche*—the daughters of an intelligent woman who had exercised the options available to her and chose her own destiny. (*Black Widow's Wardrobe* 97)

In this passage, Malintzin is reconceived as an agentive, intelligent figure, negating both sides of the virgin/whore dichotomy and attendant traitor/passive victim dichotomy.

Corpi's novel re-reads La Malinche against both her commonly invoked traitor-status and as her positionality as a passive female figure in the histories of men-led wars. In fact, Svetlana V. Tyutina reads Corpi's novel as recovering La Malinche's voice from the annals of history that have marked her as a passive figure: "La Malinche de Corpi ya no es una figura pasiva, como en las obras de los escritores anteriores. Ella tiene la voz propia y se expresa libremente [...] en este personaje, en Gloria, se juntan la linea historica y la literaria de *Black Widow's Wardrobe*" (70).²²

In other words, Gloria's agentive feminist orientation and Licia's visual and narrative recuperation both connect to and emphasize La Malinche's agentive historiography, effectively displacing dominant narratives that have marked La Malinche as inferior. This transformation on the part of the novel of both temporality and history aligns with the Chicana project of incorporating women from community and

²² My *malo* translation: "Corpi's Malinche is not a passive figure akin to the way others have inscribed her previously. Instead, she has a strong voice and expresses herself freely." In this character, in Gloria, the historical and fictional lines traced through *Black Widow's Wardrobe* meet.

professional arenas to create a balanced counter-history and to bridge the domestic with the public in an act of rendering domestic violence a public matter and the public erasure of women's testimonies a collective shame. Countering the proscribed social rules for Latina women, or in Rosa Linda Fregoso's terms, "Marianismo," this ability to communicate with the dead assists in a Chicana feminist recuperation of occluded and misaligned female icons.²³ As a result, while Gloria Damasco reaffirms the hardboiled detective's characteristic counter-institutional yet precarious state of being, the novel as a whole challenges the isolationist and presentist scope of detective fiction to assist in thinking more critically and more expansively about how certain theories, bodies, and fragments of knowledge come into view and come to be recognized as valuable.

²³ Rosa Linda Fregoso defines "Marianismo" as "Latino patriarchy's do's and don't's for Latinas." One of the significant ascriptions of Marianismo is the covenant of keeping silent in public about domestic affairs. According to Fregoso, the 9th Commandment is "Do not discuss personal problems outside the home" (30). Part of the reason why Latina women are encouraged to remain silence about domestic abuse is that speaking about abuse may cast further shadow onto Latino men, reconfirming the social biases held by dominant culture that Latino and Black men are somehow more violent than white men. This assumption is faulty, evidenced by studies that illustrate "that most of the empirical evidence on sexual assault and domestic violence shows that Mexican and Chicano men are no more prone to commit violence against women than are those from any other national or racial group" (Fregoso 34). As Fregoso goes on to outline, while domestic violence is the leading cause of female injuries in every country, regardless of various factors particularizing the woman's identity and location, "The difference that researchers have found among various social groups is related to the level of activism around sexual assault, especially in reporting of incidents of sexual and physical violence, where Latinas trail behind white women" (Fregoso 34). Ironically, the fear of strengthening one cultural bias, that Latino men are more violent than white men, in effect upholds another social reality: that Latina women are pressured not to come forward and to seek help, above the statistical number of white women (still relatively diminutive with respect to the number of actual domestic violence, rape, and assault cases that go underreported). In sum, "the desire for alternative (humanized) portrayals of Chicano masculinity involves imposing a gag order on Chicana feminists" (Fregoso 32). This is part of the problematic aspect of Marianismo in the context of the heteropatriarchal values of "la familia," which also mirror some of the restrictive discursive covenant of the Victorian and nuclear family models developed in Anglo-European upper and middle-class societies. Another aspect to Fregoso's discussion of the mandates of Marianismo and la familia is that these models resemble Anglo-European models in their upholding of a strict dichotomy between woman as virgin and woman as whore, and regulating women's actions to be self-sacrificing in every aspect of their daily life.

Indeed, Licia's taking on of Malintzin in order to perform her testimony aside from her required testimony within the confines of positive law speaks to the ways in which Mestiz@ scripts like dance and pictography signify on the procedures of acquiring accountable testimony, expanding the notion of typed and authorized court testimony to think about how legal testimony is itself a kind of performance (Fradinger 765). Licia's ritual performance of Malintzin emphasizes the significance of Mestiz@ scripts as non-alphabetic modes of epistemic transmission: like the onlookers, Gloria "reads" the traces of eclipsed testimonies and historical significations in Licia's dress and within the context of the recuperative public ritual of the yearly El Dia de los Muertos celebration. By reinterpreting the concept of performance as a function that has the capacity to "forge a new belief through reiterated behaviors" (Taylor 1418), performance can become a methodological lens and as an epistemology. After all, "Embodied practice, along with and bound up with other cultural practices, offer a way of knowing" (Taylor, *The Archive*, 3). According to Damián Baca, mestiz@ scripts are non-alphabet oriented ritual dance and painting/writing that are themselves "performances of meaning-making that resist assimilation" (Baca 3).²⁴ Mestiz@ scripts enable us to think about how the past

²⁴ In Baca's historical contextualization of the codices, the Conquistadors burned the codices and rewrote them in an alphabet-rendered Nahuatl (Baca 78). However, Baca's theoretical contribution is his argument that "Mestiz@ codex rhetorics revise the dominant narrative of assimilation" (79). Instead of framing Mesoamerican scripts and cultural practices as emblematic of a distant past, Baca posits that Mestiz@ scripts are opportunities to locate new knowledge of pre-Conquest historical sites as well as function as generative methods in contemporary rhetorics and communication: "This 'new' knowledge reasserts the importance of Mesoamerican gestural and graphic expressions rendered 'barbarian' and passive by Christianization and alphabetic literacy" (Baca 18). Visually represented materials like codex pictography, Chicano murals, and dance performances can deliver information about time, place, and event (77). Moreover, following the nature of the codices, Mestiz@ scripts can be read and reread in reverse (Baca 82), enabling an comparative interpretation of events as they are constituted through connected events.

informs the present, but also how the present introduces the past narratively, symbolically, and even legally. Furthermore, Licia's performative testimony serves to reiterate that even within positive law, "testimony only succeeds if there is trust" (Adler 264), and yet, so much of court procedure is invested in the subjective and discursive practices of negotiating and inhibiting testimony as credible.

In service to the collaborative and temporally transgressive features of testimonio, Licia does not invoke only Malintzin Tenepal's historiographies. Licia's testimonio also calls into the present the partial historiographies of other feminist icons of the Americas namely the Black Widow, La Llorona, La Virgen de Guadalupe, The Virgin Mary, and Coyolxauhqui, as these alternatively feminized and sexualized icons intersect with Malintzin Tenepal. Like Malintzin Tenepal, who spoke at least three languages and was trained in the art of political negotiation, and like Eve, who ate from the tree of knowledge, Black Widow is dangerous because she is a threat to men, both in her commanding presence and because of her desire to learn. The novel's invocation of these figures from different national, cultural, and temporal locations revise the maternal figure as deficient with the novel's invocation of La Llorona.

When Gloria's mother initially sees Licia, she erroneously identifies Black Widow as La Llorona, "referring to the centuries-old Mexican legend of the woman who drowned her children and whose soul had been condemned to roam the world eternally in search of them" (6). Gloria corrects her saying that Black Widow did not kill her children, only her husband. However, Gloria later learns that Licia, while made to believe that she suffered giving birth to twin stillborns while in jail, in fact gave birth to twins, a

boy and a girl, who were adopted out illegally to Peter Legoretta and his wife Isabel, who is also Licia's husband's sister. The Legorettas named them Martin and Ines. As a result, this trace of the wrong signifier is in fact made correct later in the novel's progress towards piecing together the narrative of Licia's assault case.²⁵ In the simultaneous trace and erasure that occurs in the error that is corrected by Gloria, a comparative yet differential relationship is invoked by these three simultaneously feared and revered Chicana feminist *and* maternal icons. Like Malintzin, La Llorona has been vilified for turning on her children, or her attempted infanticide. She has no room for error. Good mothers do not attempt to kill their children, no matter how little economic or social support they are lacking, no matter the complex circumstances of motherhood in places where women are either virgins or whores, and where mothers, in the context of patriarchal family relations where mothers are the primary caregivers, are either entirely blamed or reified for everything that happens to their children.

Licia's tragic performance of erased and maligned Chicana mothers and icons reveals the importance of viewing the Day of the Dead procession as a space for composing alternative and revisionist historiographic scripts, given that the theatrical stage "reminds us that whereas testimonials may be perceived as first-person, or 'private,' narrations, in fact they require a theater: their meaning depends on how speakers are

²⁵ In a similar tracing, Gloria Anzaldúa connects the pre-Conquest legend of La Cihuacoatl, Serpent Woman with La Llorona. La Cihuacoatl would wander the street, lamenting to her children that they are about to be estranged because of the Spanish invasion. After colonial conquest, the story was revised to describe a peasant woman whose husband abandons her and her two children for a wealthier wife and she drowns her children in a moment of despair. Significantly, Serpent Woman's lament comes to be similar to the actual set of events that disenfranchised Malintzin Tenepal's son in favor of the children Hernán Cortéz fathered with his second wife.

heard by audiences in a given institutional setting” (Fradinger 765). Licia utilizes the public space of the Day of the Dead procession to signify on the testimonies that can and can’t be told, and the ritualistic violence that has condemned both her and women like her historically to be both victim and perpetrator in their “traitorous” relationship to the heteropatriarchal nation: “No script mitigates the unpredictability of torture, in all its traumatic first-time bodily discoveries, ranging from previously unknown thresholds of pain to thresholds of strength that determine whether one resists or collapses. Nothing in this experience speaks of the repeatable: each torture session finds the body in a different state, each could be the last, each individual resists singularly” (Fradinger 764). Licia’s consolidation of disparate myths and accounts in her public performance serves as a public account, a testimony, and reiterates testimonio as a radical act of narrative and physical recuperation for Chicana women like Licia for spectral figures like Malintzin. In line with the detective fiction genre’s fascination with gaining unique insights into the case in order to build a more cohesive explanation, Licia’s ritualistic, testimonial performance during the procession meets helps Gloria connect the different contexts from which Licia is drawing in her recovery of Chicana historiographies that in turn allows her to think more broadly, and from a decolonial perspective, about the killer’s motivations.

The resolution of the novel that takes place in Cuernavaca brings together considerations of gender, nation, religion, and motherhood to illustrate uncomfortable truths about how mothers of color have been, and continue to be, sacrificed for the purposes of colonialist and global capitalist expansion. At the end of the novel, it is revealed that Licia’s son and Isabel’s husband, an anthropology professor at UC

Berkeley, have been working together as smugglers of Mexican indigenous artifacts and drugs. Gloria realizes that it is Licia's son who attempted to assassinate her at El Dia de los Muertos celebration. Upon this realization, Gloria further surmises that Licia has disappeared to find and take back her children from the Legoretas, who have gone to Cuernavaca, the same village from which Juan and Martin smuggle artifacts.²⁶

While Gloria figures out earlier that it was Licia's son, Martin, who attempted to kill her because his father told him that she was going to put Peter in jail, readers are still expectant of the moment of revelation that Licia is in fact the biological mother of Ines and Martin. At first, readers are led to believe that Martin knew he needed to kill his mother; Martin is attempting to protect his father and keep him out of jail, out of the clutches of "Black Widow." However, by the end of the novel, readers are shocked to find out that Martin did indeed suspect that Licia was his mother, but wanted to kill her

²⁶ Cuernavaca is described a small village that has no police force and where people rely on their friends and neighbors for help. In Cuernavaca, past and present fold into one another: on the one hand, it is revealed that the locations from which the stole artifacts are procured is not a mythic, untraceable, long-forgotten land. Instead, a bustling market is attended by many villagers, a real estate deal by Peter to put up a golf course is in the works; people still use horses to get around, but also drink coca-cola (170). In some ways, this time fold is not so much a "time warp," destabilizing the normal cogency of modernization; instead, it destabilizes the normalizing functions of the discourse of modernity. For example, the scenes describing Cuernavaca question several naturalized assumptions about modern society: 1) the notion that police forces (and guns) have always been, and should be, part of a civilized community; 2) that people without cars don't have modern commerce and marketability (for example, the exchange of goods and services on both a local and international scale); and 3) that real-estate development would somehow improve this area rather than merely reduce those features of the land that are most currently serviceable to people who live there. This village resists national homogenization as well. The Church of the Holy Trinity displays an artful revision of the father by depicting "the Father as a man with high cheekbones and arched brows and a long straight mustache hanging down each side of his mouth—a god deserving of a prayer in Nahuatl or Chinese." Moreover, the Church—La Santisima—is adjacent to "the narrow steep path up the mountain to the pyramid that had been the temple of the god Tepoztecatl" (163). Religious syncretism and subtle revision of Catholic orthodoxy is witnessed in the depiction of the Father, but religious pluralism is also indicated in the proximal, yet distinct, existence of these two places of ritual worship and historical reflection.

anyway because he valued the weight of the absence of his patriarch over the presence of his mother (who, in his eyes, is still a traitor). Both Licia's and Malintzin's sons are named Martin, and both are mestizos. When Peter shoots and murders his adopted son in front of Licia, Martin's death not only comes to signify patrilineal sacrifice, but also eerily resembles the actual murder of the first mestizo, Malintzin Tenepal's and Cortéz' son Martin Cortez, who was falsely accused of treason by the Spanish crown, tortured, and killed, a sacrifice to national mythos of pure origin and undying loyalty to the patriarchal nation.

In its recuperation of eclipsed and denigrated histories of Chicana women within the scope of heteropatriarchal and economic investments, *Black Widow's Wardrobe* also pushes for a reconsideration of maternal care as a public affair rather than a private one. *Black Widow's Wardrobe* redresses the role of motherhood as an isolated, and isolating, condition and instead gives motherhood a public, interactive, and activist definition that defies domestication and biological specificity in service of a public motherhood within the context of a decolonial feminist care-giving network. The novel's end is certainly devastating—after all, a child dies before having the opportunity to reunite with his mother, to heal the wounds that the patriarch has reigned on this potential connection. However, perhaps the aspect of the novel that most explicitly reworks private motherhood into a public network is Licia's decision to leave her surviving female heir in the care of Ines, who has raised her. Licia also leaves them both her inheritance, a sacrifice that may be surprising, given how hard Licia has worked to reclaim her children. In her actions, Licia establishes a “maternal trust” that another woman can care for her

female heir. The novel's grave resolution implies that it is not only women continue to bear the burden of blame, but also mothers: Malintzin, Licia, and even Peter's sister Isabela are forced to sacrifice children in the context of abusive domestic relationships, and these women are then forced to be the sole bearers of the blame and shame for their children's suffering. Moreover, by acknowledging the relative lack of options that these women had to care for their children, the novel invokes "Public Motherhood" as a theory of knowledge that lays claim to the fact that reproduction is bound up in a global capitalist and State management of populations, families, and bodies that simultaneously extolls the virtue of self-sufficiency.

In connecting the maternal figures across and through differential historiographies of the Americas and through the lens of Public Motherhood, *Black Widow's Wardrobe* also expands on new mestiza consciousness to bridge indigenous and colonized maternal icons and decolonial perspectives.²⁷ The gender, transnational, and multiethnic interconnection between the maternal figures of Black Widow, La Malinche, La Llorona,

²⁷ Anzaldúa's writing has received its share of criticism from indigenous scholars who are right to point out that reifying the "roots" of Hispano-indigenous cultural formations also implies that there is no remaining live presence of indigenous North and South American cultures today. Scholars of the concepts of indigeneity such as Andrea Smith have critiqued Gloria Anzaldúa's mestizaje discourse for her inadvertent reification of European nationalisms in her reading of the U.S.-Mexico border as constitutive of Chicana identity: "The consequence is that queer of color critique, while making critical interventions into both critical race and queer studies, generally lacks an analysis of settler colonialism" (Smith 12). In other words, the new mestiza as a fundamentally hybridized identity can obscure the ongoing and vital struggle by indigenous nations to regain sovereignty outside of the U.S.-Mexico binary paradigm as well as support a constituted perception of Indian identity as static. Indeed, Corpi's novel reaffirms this nationalistic reification when Gloria's partner reads Mexican Americans as children of fighting parents, the implied infantilization of which still upholds nationalism as a familial paradigm. However, one could also argue that Anzaldúa creates a space for bringing in the historiographies of critically non-identifying subjects who may still be claimed by either (or neither) nation.

Coatlicue, and Licia expands to encompass another North American legend: Sacajawea. First of all, Malintzin was given away like Sacagawea was given away. But also, both Malintzin's male child and Sacagawea's male child were taken by the patriarch. Like La Llorona, these women seemed to have little choice in giving up their children. In fact, the novel's critical attention to maternal care as a political and potentially mobilizing concept also affords it a transnational and decolonial emphasis on maternal lineage. Specifically, the novel weaves together the North American myth of Black Widow with the partial account of Sacajawea, the Mesoamerican myth of La Llorona, and the Spanish conquest mythologization of La Malinche. As a result, Licia's significations toward Pre-Conquest and transnational feminist figures recharts the Americas as discursive and animative constructs, constituted from "hemisphere-wide events and processes that pre-dated nationalism, reframed it, or transcended its limits" (Taylor "Remapping Genre," 1425). In, line with this project's tracing of alternative epistemological methods and non-dominant discourses, it is worthwhile to consider the significance of Black Widow as a spider, which alludes to spiritual and cultural myths edifying spiders as artisan weavers, as possessors of knowledge, and within the maternal lineage in North American indigenous cultures.²⁸

While Licia spares her daughter the pain of separating from her effectively adoptive mother, Licia does not spare herself. During the short course of time when Gloria is recovering in the hospital from a serious wound she received while fighting

²⁸ Indigenous writers like Paula Gunn Allen reify the female as spider (Spiderwoman), the originator of all discourse and epistemologies.

Legoretta, Licia vanishes, and Gloria only has subsequent accounts and gossip to go on to attempt to piece together whether Licia is still alive. Toward the very end of the novel, Licia's home, the one that contained her wardrobe and the memories of the abuse and torment she suffered from her husband, unexpectedly goes up in flames. Gloria finds it an uncanny coincidence that this fire happens at the same time as The Oakland Firestorm that swept the area in October of 1991. It as though local history and transnational context are in conversation, and Licia is still "stirring up the flames" as a hemispheric justice provocateur. Moreover, the metaphorical significance of stirring the flames by way of making "gender and racial trouble" is compounded when considering the minute temporal separation between the Oakland Firestorm, also referred to as the East Bay Hills Fire, and the L.A. Riots that were prompted by the April 1992 acquittal of police who were taped beating Rodney King. This timeline of both natural and man-made disasters, so to speak, recontextualizes the traditional and celebratory progress narrative of the "making" of the Americas.

Black Widow's Wardrobe both reifies and concretizes the figure of La Malinche, in the process destabilizing the convention of mythic idealism located in magical realist texts and forcing its readers to question at what point does an account become credible, believable, buyable, and valuable. Moreover, the novel's reintegration of the myth of La Malinche as a relevant, even present, source for understanding Licia's case aligns with critical and counter-institutional methods of speaking truth to power located within Chicana literary practices and to dismantle what Rosa Linda Fregoso identifies as the "U.S. ideology of 'presentism' — an attitude toward the past dominated by present-day

attitudes and experiences” where subjects are seen as an “embodiment as object of nation but absent as its speaking subject” (Fregoso 53). In the trace comparison of Licia’s testimony with Malintzin Tenepal’s, the text interrogates the ways in which such methods presuppose a natural linearity that places past, present, and future into distinct categories and classifies events into these categories that are marked as objective.

In contrast, the novel posits that both testimony and history are narrative events.

Hayden White asks the following question of history as narrative making:

Does the narration of past events, which, in our culture from the time of the Greeks onwards, has generally been subject to the sanction of historical ‘science,’ bound to the underlying standard of the “real,” and justified by the principles of “rational” exposition - does this form of narration really differ, in some specific trait, in some indubitably distinctive feature, from imaginary narration, as we find it in the epic, the novel, and the drama? (12).

Corpi’s novel would answer “no,” and would also ask how the imperative to bound historical events to the “underlying standard of the ‘real’” commits a disservice to inconvenient evidence and historiographies that are developed in non-dominant, yet parallel, discursive and material channels. In his seminal work, *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History* (1991), José David Saldívar reappraises some of the conventional interpretations of the powers and intentions of the Latin American magical realist genre, a genre that has “travelled well” in the literature of the Americas. Specifically, the critic reads Gabriel García Márquez’s concept of magical realism as presupposing “the narrator’s identification with the oral expression of popular cultures in the Third World pueblo” (Saldívar 94). The systemic, physical, and coercive violence brought about by uneven economic development in Latin America and the

global capitalist and neocolonial insertion of U.S. policy is as magical (ridiculous) as it is quotidian (inflected into everyday individual and communal functions).

In a similar fashion, *Black Widow's Wardrobe* pieces together Chicana *testimonio* that centers on the spectacularity of the fact that systemic violence against women is accepted as part of everyday lived experience. In its collective composition of female historiographies spanning hundreds of years, the novel's quotidian application of some elements of magical realism to collapse temporal boundaries functions as “a collective voice, inverting, in a jesting manner, the values of the official culture” (94-5), specifically the valuation of women's rights. In this way, Corpi's novel troubles the distinction between plausible hypothesis and testable hypothesis, taking the conceit of “testimony” and “witnessing” out of the realm of positive law and expanding the notion of empirical data. In other words, by reviving Malintzin's story, by concretizing it, by making it still relevant (and perhaps even more so, given that apparently so little has changed with respect to viewing women and women's bodies as autonomous), Malintzin can, in some sense, speak more clearly and above the din of the rumors that continue to will her away.

Like Lucha Corpi's *Black Widow's Wardrobe*, Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* employs *conocimiento*, *Nepantla*, and public motherhood as epistemologies in the novel's critique of the functions of heteronationalist discourses and abuses against women and queer people of color. Moreover, like Corpi's Gloria Damasco, Ivon Villa arrives at a critical awareness that the U.S.-Mexico borders are constituted through material, discursive, and affective interrelationships that are predicated on heteronormativity, racism, and mutual interest in transnational commerce.

Unlike Corpi's novel, however, *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* does not attempt to repair a forgotten testimony but rather asks a question that demands an immediate answer, and from both individuals and large governing bodies alike: when there is evidence, witnesses, and proof available of the many murders of young women of color, why don't the murders stop? In the novel's attempt to answer to this question, Garcia de Alba's novel emphasizes the interrelation between logical abduction, wherein missing pieces are glossed over for the purposes of arriving at narrative cohesion, and physical abduction, where a person is taken out of an environment and a subsequent narrative gap is emplaced.

The novel focuses on the issue of the ongoing slaughter of hundreds of young women who work and live near the Maquiladora plants in Juárez, Mexico. After the initial noir staging of a disappeared and unnamed girl at the beginning of the book (who is never discussed again in the text), the novel moves to describe its central protagonist, Ivon, who is reading a disturbing article about "The Maquiladora Murders" on her flight home to El Paso from Saint Ignatius College in Los Angeles, where she works as a visiting professor in Women's Studies. As she reads about the horrific ways that poor Mexican women have been violated and dumped in the border between Juárez and El Paso, she is shocked. Shocked, not only at the gruesome violence, but also at the fact that Ivon, a former native, a Chicana and queer activist, a *scholar*, knew nothing of this violence until a short story appeared in *Ms. Magazine*, almost ten years after the murders started happening, and more than five hundred bodies of Mexican women and girls have been found (not to mention those that have been disappeared and never found) (Gaspar de

Alba and Guzmán 3; Delgadillo 94). Ivon is surprised at her own lack of knowledge about these girls, given that she is originally from the area, that she is an academic who is capable of acquiring information easily, and that she has family in the area. Unlike the white and male hardboiled detective, Ivon becomes personally invested in the case when it is her own sister who goes missing. By organizing the plot around Ivon's queer identity and activism and emphasizing the political mobilization of the matrilineal side of her family, the novel clearly rejects "the deployment of patriarchy as a solution to the Juárez femicides" (Volk and Schlotterbeck 147). Through her investigation, Ivon reveals connections between geographic and sexual mapping conducted and condoned by corporate transnational policy, the success of which relies on the exploitation of the bodies of women of color.

In the beginning of the novel, Ivon Villa is on a plane to visit her family in El Paso and to adopt a child in Juárez with the help of her cousin, Ximena, who works as a social worker. Ivon is consumed by middle-class, academic concerns, namely getting a tenure-track job, buying a house, and adopting a *suitable*, "clean" child with her wife, Brigit. At the same time, the sheer fact that Ivon is a Chicana activist, has family in both Juárez and El Paso, and is invested in her family speaks to the fact that even women of color academics can be blinded to the stark realities of how seamless the ritual sacrifice of poor women of color functions, especially when first-world superpowers and transnational corporations are at the helm of legal regulations with little government oversight and no transparency. At the same time, Ivon's personal connection to the case

alienates her from the “academic” and disinterested professional demeanor typical of both the occasional detective and the hardboiled Private Investigator.

Maquiladora factories have been in operation since the 1960s, when they replaced the U.S. guest-worker program under The Border Industrialization Program (BIP). The subsequent trade agreements made between the U.S. and certain third-world countries put in place in 1994 enabled global capitalist initiatives to grow and expand and wreak a different sort of havoc on poor women of color outside of the U.S. borders. In effect, women of color living in the U.S. and abroad were overwhelmingly targeted to be the bearers of the labor required for global outsourcing and production measures under an economic system that seeks to accrue capital at any cost and regards human beings as disposable labor. According to feminist legal scholar and Executive Director of *Women on the Border, Inc.*, Elvia R. Arriola, These corporations have sought a particular kind of worker, “a hybrid of stereotypes based on sex, race, and class—she was not only more docile and passive than Mexican men, but submissive, easily trainable, and unlikely to pose problems with union organizing” (31).

That said, the bodies of girls only began appearing along the Juárez border in 1994. Several important socioeconomic shifts might explain this fact: prior to the peso’s devaluation in 1994, female workers were able to purchase cheap cars in the U.S. to drive to and from work (Córdoba and Guzmán 116). The NAFTA agreement between the U.S. and Mexico brought poor unemployed people from Southern Mexico to compete for jobs, which, contrary to its idealist marketing goals of improving all of Mexico, only created more available bodies for cheap labor and thus supported global capitalism at the expense

of a lack of reduction of unemployment. And, the increased militarization of both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, coupled with the public attitude that the border is itself a lawless state, meant that certain bodies were meant to be policed in certain ways, to the resulting exclusion of protections for *las mujeres del sur* (the women of the south) (Volk and Schlotterbeck 127).

The mounting count of the bodies, coupled with the count of those who have been disappeared, reflects an entrenched social attitude regarding women and the feminine that generally is in fact common to both Mexico and the U.S. It appears that it is not so much a reinforcement of each side's distinctive nationalism that has perpetuated the disappearance and murder of poor women on the border, but the shared attitudes and policies on both sides regarding poor women of color and the perceived worth of the Maquiladora workers that actually enact a "social contract" of sorts between the U.S. and Mexico to disregard *these* crimes in their heavily militarized yet capital-fluid schemas. On the other hand, this social contract is different than the type of social contract that Rousseau and other Enlightenment philosophers wrote about in their quest to theorize a democratic union: Mexico depends on the U.S. for financial capital. As a result, Mexican corporations have less power, and less of an investment, than American CEOs to induce the U.S. to create better and safer working and living conditions for the people who make the goods Americans consume. In other words, the position of Mexican corporations and the region itself as financially submissive to the U.S. may be the cause of the stringent reinforcement of heteropatriarchal values, even at the cost of the lives and stories of the disappeared.

As a result, Juárez can be read as a site where the nationalist border dissolves and is replaced by a gendered border to serve the interests of global capital at the expense of elements that stand in the way of submissive laboring bodies (and nations). Ivon deconstructs the border as a material, discursive, and ritualistic product of colonialist, imperialist, and global capitalist enterprises early in the text during her flight over the U.S.-Mexico border:

Unless it's twilight, the only thing you see when you fly into El Paso is the desert—the brown, pachydermal, sagebrush-stubbed skin of the desert. But at twilight what you notice right away is the sky, the green veil of sky that stretches between Mount Franklin and the Guadalupe Mountains. From the plane you can't see the boundary line, the cement riverbed that separates El Paso from Juárez. The borderland is just one big valley of lights...For the locals on each side of the river, the border is nothing more than a way to get home. (7)

Ivon recognizes that the physical demarcation of national boundaries is an illusion that becomes overdrawn by commercial and technological interconnections that “light up” this U.S.-Mexico infrastructure at night.

Indeed, Ivon's own identity is bound up in gender, sexual, class, national, and regional factors, constituting Ivon herself as “complicated terrain.” Through the course of the novel, Ivon negotiates physical and gendered spaces, made more complicated by her non-alignment with heterosexual norms of *la familia*. In fact, Ivon's familial pseudonym “Ivonhoe” aligns her with a male heroic figure in European popular lore. Moreover, her complicated relationship with her previous lover, Raquel, with whom she spends the night later in the novel, aligns her with the troubled hardboiled detective who has a hard time with commitment. No clearer is this seen than in Ivon's ambivalence about adopting a child with Brigit, expressed in her constant wavering between feeling suffocated and

yearning to parent (13). On the other hand, her connection to her younger sister and her protective stance against her mother's abuse reinscribes her status as a queer hero in her willful antagonism to the heteronormative, at times physical, disciplinary measures of Marianismo.

However, it takes Ivon some time to obtain *conocimiento* in order to perform this act of recovery. An example of some of the blind spots that initially prevent Ivon from being able to understand politics and geography as constitutive of each other is her focus on her own studies when she first tours the red-light district in Juárez. While using the bathroom, she notices that:

Someone had scrawled that old saying of Mexican President Porfirio Diaz: *Poor Mexico, so far from God, so close to the United States*. Underneath it, somebody else had written in red nail polish and shaky lettering, *Poor Juárez, so close to Hell, so far from Jesus*. Even as angry as she was, Ivon recognized a gift from the gods. Talk about the representation of class and gender in bathroom graffiti! Violence against women, the economic exploitation of the border, even the politics of religion. She could use Juárez as her third case study. With Cecilia's murder and Elsa's story about medical testing and illegal insemination at the *maquilas*, the chapter could write itself. (98)

In her exultation that she has been given an academic equivalent of a lucky break, Ivon is still focused on her own personal motivations for being in Juárez, as a cultural tourist and an academic ethnographer. She is temporarily blinded by the trace of dominant discourse about counter-institutional modes of critique, public women's bathrooms serving as a "catch all" for her thesis. However, when she finds herself going back to this very same club but now in search of her missing sister, she is able to recognize that this bathroom spot is more than a representation of the alternative intersections of gender, class,

national, and sexual oppressions: it is live testimony and subaltern trace appearing from “beneath” sanctioned public and dominant discourse.

While Ivon is made aware of the murder of hundreds of girls by her cousin Ximena, who is a social worker, upon her arrival to El Paso, she embarks on an epistemological dig for further information only once her own sister is physically abducted and the local police appear to be least apathetic. Ivon quickly runs into a problem of a fundamental lack of information on these girls and the possible motivations behind the crime. Because both the police and the local community outreach programs cannot provide her with specifics, and because even her academic training in women’s studies has not educated her on this issue, Ivon takes to the place that by institutional accounts is quite un-academic: the internet. While searching for possible links and background information, Ivon narrates her research process for the reader: she first creates a series of categories of related topics. She then details the word choices that she puts into the search engine and further comments on where her sources are coming from and who appears to be supporting the site.

This epistemological dig is not only functional for Ivon’s search, but also meta-textual: Ivon requires the knowledge produced by non-academic channels in order to create a workable hypothesis of why these girls are being murdered and why, importantly, no one seems to care. In fact, Ivon’s process of logical abduction fills the gap of the silence on which border violence fundamentally relies: Ivon’s illumination of the threat and the facts that link each disparate case of murder takes the secrecy out of the popular conceit of the “dark border,” which is made popular in its aura of mystery, its

ability to keep vices, crimes, and workings of capitalist enterprise hidden from public discourse. Moreover, Ivon's reliance on various sources that are typically discarded or dis-preferred by academics in their quest for "reliable" and "responsible" research aligns her epistemology with the historiographic, backchannel methods used by the other women of color detectives featured in this project.

In fact, many of Ivon's investigative methods align with Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of the liminal state of *Nepantla* in the author's theory of the process of *conocimiento*. *Nepantla* is an indeterminate state where you are two people "split between before and after" after being jarred out of a state of complacency in response to an event (Anzaldúa 544). Ivon's sudden awareness of her non-alignment with the heteronormative aspects of Mexican American culture, or what Rosa Linda Fregoso describes as "Latino patriarchy's do's and don't's for Latinas" (Fregoso 30), as well as her pushback against her mother's homophobic rhetoric brings her into a state of temporary dislocation even as she is "visiting back home." As I outlined earlier in this chapter, *Nepantla* is a nowhere-ness, a lack of subjectivity and identification, and is a temporary state.

Ivon is in *Nepantla* nearly the entire time she is working her case: she cannot understand why the authorities do not care to follow up on pertinent information; she is at a loss with respect to her mother's vitriolic attitude about her queer identity; she is policed and checked in public for her style of dress. And, throughout the novel, she is deeply ambivalent about her potential role as a parent. There is little comfort for Ivon to be had with respect to any sort of identity label, possibly simply because queer

Chicanidad is not reified in the Marianismo and familia scripts that drove her away in the first place to a women and gender studies department. Perhaps for all these reasons, Ivon feels like an outsider, like a trilingual with respect to speaking the cultural scripts of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. A clue to her lack of critical insight into her “roots” is evident in her misrecognition that the priest with whom Ximena works pronounces Ximena’s name in proper Nahuatl, saying “Sheemena” rather than “Chimena.” Ivon simply assumes he is saying it wrong.

Ivon’s decision to take to the streets and to inhabit spaces that not only police women of color but heavily regulate what they should be doing in these nightclubs aligns her with the counter-patriarchal position of the pachuca,²⁹ even while her academic and class status enable her to push beyond some of the heteronormative covenants of both Marianismo and masculinist tendencies of Chican@ street culture. Indeed, her mother berates her by using these terms, albeit meaning them in the most derogatory sense:

Ivon’s mother’s policing of her sexual orientation, from raining insults at her targeting her as a “maricón,” a derogatory term used by straight people to attack gay men, to

²⁹ The figure of the pachuca is irreverent in the fact that the girls who embody this identity are on the street because they choose to be, and in this sense “loitering” or noising about takes on a political feminist feature by resisting the impetus placed upon women of color to always have to explain why they are in a certain place, as though they are doing something wrong if their business is not bound up with a white employer. As Fregoso recalls: “the pachucas of my youth embodied adolescent rebellion, sexuality, and deviance—an urban toughness and coolness usually associated with masculine behavior...Indeed it is on the streets where pachucas subverted expected gender roles and negotiated a presence for themselves as women in public life” (Fregoso 91). In this way, pachucas interrupted and disrupted the masculine familial project by refusing to “be contained by domesticity or to be limited by the prevailing orthodoxy of appropriate female behavior” (94). However, Fregoso is quick to remind us that pachucas are not exceptional feminist figures who break out of the restrictive home sphere; with respect to labor conditions specific to women of color, Chicanas have always been navigating the street and traveling to other people’s homes to work: “Under modern capitalism, women of color and white working-class women have operated in both levels of the private sphere—in both market relations and the family, as both workers (producers) and mothers/wives (reproducers)” (Fregoso 93).

saying that she should not be having children and is responsible for Irene's disappearance, is disturbing to say the least. At the same time, her mother has been forced to assume the command position of both maternal and paternal figure to her daughters since their father left. In this case, the maternal figure is distinct from the mothers discussed elsewhere in this project: Ivon's mother is the definitive example of the restrictive, abusive, intolerant paradigm of Marianismo and la familia rhetoric, which "valorizes subservience and self-abnegation" in the daily practices of Latinas (Delgadillo 114). To continue her investigation while pushing against these social disciplining mechanisms, Ivon has to find her support system elsewhere, namely in her Uncle Joe and her cousin Ximena. Indeed, while Ivon has to negotiate her queer identity in a restrictive, homophobic national and familial environment, her extended support network brings into the fold other queer narratives and bodies that betray the heteropatriarchal social contract. For example, her Uncle Joe is extremely supportive of her marriage and queer identity, and holds himself in charge of cooking a large barbacoa welcome dinner for her. Moreover, her Tia Luz, who is a truck driver, is rumored to have slept with her father and angered her mother, even though she is also rumored to be gay. And, we come to find out that Ximena is sleeping with Ivon's former girlfriend, Raquel.

Ivon's misalignment from heteronormative ideals of la familia enable her to see things that others cannot. Moreover, her support network provides a significant clue in the text that borders on paratextual evidence, insofar as this clue does not help Ivon's search for her sister, but does assist in a decolonial feminist recovery of feminist icons. Finally, the detective who takes up the Juárez femicide case (in his free time without the

support of the department) was born to a lesbian woman, Bernie, who wanted to have a child and essentially worked out a deal with Pete's father over a drink. Bernie named Pete for the ten muses.³⁰ In the invocation of the tenth muse, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, a significant clue is formed in the consideration of the potential connection between the prolific seventeenth-century Mexican female poet and Ivon's own sister, who is also named Ines. Born sometime to a Mexican indigenous woman and a Spanish male in San Miguel de Nepantla, Sor Juana took advantage of the tutelage and private library collections in her home and city university and subsequently became a nun who also wrote prolific poetry. In fact, she was also "one of the first two women published in the continent of America" (Mendoza 287). Her success in Baroque New Spain kept her poetry, essays, and plays in circulation even while the "men of the cloth" in Colonial Mexico rallied against her public exposure and characterized her writing as "audacious, blasphemous, and unbefitting a woman, let alone a cloistered nun" (Prendergast 29). As a result, "Because of her unique subject position as a Mexican writer who circulated largely in Spain, she occupies a most uncommon space as both a representative of Colonial Latin America and as a part of Spain's Golden Age of literature and cultural production" (29). In other words, Sor Juana had to negotiate the double-bind of victimhood and character assignation of being a traitor to Mexico in her biological and cultural connections to Spain. At the same time, portrait poems enabled her to "inscribe her own subjectivity and

³⁰ The addition of Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz to the nine Greek Muses provides an alternative and comparative transnational model for the study of cultural myth across Old World cultures.

rhetorically frame herself” (35) even while submitting to the aesthetic and social terms of the period.³¹

Moreover, one hundred years before Mary Wollstonecraft would use the same reasoning, Sor Juana argued that equal educational opportunities for women were imperative to uphold their connection with God: “As if responding to Rousseau herself, Sor Juana defends her right as an individual, intellectually gifted by God, to study and write and the prerogative of women for self-determination. As does Wollstonecraft, she insists on the genderless nature of the soul and the intellect” (Mendoza 289). Sor Juana’s desire for education and her willful transgression of masculinist and national borders repositions Ivon’s sisters motivations as well as the motivations of the disappeared girls of Juárez. Specifically, Ines goes to the fair from which she is abducted because she wants to explore, to learn. Similarly, the women who work in the Maquiladora plants are castigated for their seeming desire for independence and personal survival, apart from the care and surveillance of husbands, brothers, and fathers.

While Ivon’s recovery of Sor Juana is less pronounced than Gloria’s recovery of La Malinche, allusions within the novel to Sor Juana offer readers metatextual and meta-historical connections between historical feminist renegade figures and contemporary discussions of Mexican women’s right to self-determination. In this way, a decolonial, anti-nationalist, and feminist connection forms across the novels through the specters of

³¹ As Prendergast notes, her frontispieces illustrate the tension between self-representation and catering to aesthetic and political conventions of the period. See, for instance, the engraved frontispiece by Lucas de Valdés from Sor Juana’s *Segundo volumen de las obras*: “It highlights her role in the process of self-representation as a writing subject” (39).

La Malinche and Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz, both daughters of illegitimate coupling between Mexican indigenous women and Spanish men, both bilingual and educated women, both read alternatively as traitors or victims. Sor Juana's double-bind mirrors that of Malintzin's, as both women had to negotiate strict rules for female behavior and were heavily disciplined for their perceived treason.³² In this temporal fold of feminist icons, narratives, and motivations, connections are revealed that disrupt essentializing gestures of both nationalism and transnationalism: the women discussed in both *Black Widow's Wardrobe* and *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* are traveling subjects of the Americas.³³ Moreover, the fact that Sor Juana was born in the actual village of Nepantla geographically concretizes Anzaldúa's metaphoric expansion of Nepantla as a liminal state of mind. With respect to Ivon's case, this concretization calls attention to the fact that real bodies are being managed as a consequence of imagined and economic cartographies. The invocation of Sor Juana and her geographic, activist, and philosophical orientations encourage the reading of the "global Borderlands" as "historically connected postcolonial spaces" (Saldívar 153) whose historicity relies on both discursive and physical coercion and disciplining of bodies.

While Ivon does not overtly recognize the allusion to Sor Juana, her refusal to stay within the heteronormative boundaries of dress and behavior proscribed for Latina

³² Like Malintzin Tenepal, Sor Juana died in impoverished and ill-deserved conditions: in the context of the Inquisition, she "died in solitude without her books at her side, stricken by plague, like others before her in Mexico" (Mendoza 290).

³³ Breny Mendoza explains: "From the perspective of Latin America, 'America' is the name of the whole continent that includes North, Central, and South America, and not the name of one country" (291, footnote 1).

women lead her to also transgress the restrictive geographical terrain of the red light district, ultimately leading her to an important clue. Harnessing Nepantla's critical awareness, Ivon boldly goes where women of color "should not go," or go "at their own peril," marking her as a crossing Subject and justice provocateur. According to Chela Sandoval, cartographic proficiency "requires the skill of knowing how to chart or map social and cultural territories in consciousness or imagination as one is moving across them" (Sandoval 29). While Sandoval's "cognitive mapping" serves as a sort of cartographic epistemology that enables Ivon to see space and social identity as imbricated, Ivon's investigative methods also push for an embodied experientiality with mapping that is illustrative of Diana Taylor's concept of mapping as "practiced space" rather than drawing maps as "projections seemingly viewed from above" (Taylor 1420). Similar to the intuitive aspects of the hardboiled but also cognizant of the material realities of inhabiting a physical space that is strictly zoned according to economic valuation of visible bodies. For example, when Ivon decides to search for her sister along the strip behind Juárez Avenue, colloquially known as "The Mariscal area," or the "red-light district," she and her male cousin make use of a map Ivon printed out from a site detailing the district to potential customers. As Ivon reads the map, she is also negotiating her presence within it, literally walking the map as she is being read herself by the police, her cousin, and the employees who occupy this space.

In this way, Ivon's geographic and cartographic negotiation "cannot be removed from lived experiences and behaviors" (Taylor 1420). She is literally drawing a visible trace of the constitution of spaces as identity markers. Through this cognitive and

embodied cartographic praxis, Ivon stumbles upon a clue that helps her later in the investigation: a half-erased Derridean slogan on the bathroom wall of a bar that brings together geography and metaphor in its revealing testament: “Poor Juárez, so far from the Truth, so close to Jesus” (186-7). Ivon realizes later that this reworking of the popular quote “Poor Juárez, so far from God, so close to the United States” indicates that the warehouse housing the snuff film company is geographically close to the ASARCO agribusiness that is also close to Mount Cristo Rey, where a large statue of Christ the Redeemer resides. In the context of Sandoval’s critical unification of cartographic proficiency and differential consciousness, Ivon’s epistemological perspective allows her to read the bathroom wall as a place where the subaltern is speaking.

Desert Blood illustrates the ways in which women of color can be discursively branded as non-compliant because of the neighborhoods within which they work, leading to the abuse of these women’s bodies as aligned with victim-blaming discourses. Victim-blaming discourses resemble the pathologization of single mothers and “welfare queens” in U.S. social media rhetoric, wherein abusive policies and benign neglect toward poor women of color are initiated under the seemingly subjectless umbrella conceits of “population management,” “urban renewal,” and “capitalist freedom.” As a consequence, the mutilated and abandoned bodies of the women of the south are both a sign of caution and evidence of a fear of a different kind of productivity: reproduction.

When Ivon comes to find out that El Paso houses the largest concentration of registered sex offenders, the political entanglements of “disposable” bodies and “disposed” convicts become more clear: “McCuts found a link that I think is really

crucial to figuring out why all those women are being killed in Juárez. Apparently there are over 600 registered sex offenders in El Paso right now” (328). The Mexican border and proximal areas serve as dumping grounds for U.S. sex offenders and the poor women of color who work in the Maquiladora. Somehow, the problems of overpopulation “fix themselves” with respect to managing populations that are deemed threatening and not worthy of “salvation.” Thus, *Desert Blood* illustrates the ways in which women of color can be discursively branded as non-compliant because of the neighborhoods they constitute or bear, and the bodies of women of color can be dissected and manipulated via social and medical policies that take on the detached rhetoric of “population control” and “urban renewal.” No where more dangerous, yet telling, is the illustration within the novel of how sexual and reproductive regulation can be physically charted by way of maps, reflecting the fact that young women of color are being punished for their potential sexual transgression and potential reproduction on U.S. soil before they even have the chance to “transgress.”

In reading the physical terrain of this city within the context of its cultural and social aspects, particularly how this space functions in tourist discourse as against/within the realities of sex work and a tourist-reliant economy, Ivon displays a nuanced cartographic proficiency that stems beyond knowing how to read a physical map. Drawn, printed, and circulated maps are themselves performative and identitarian, constituted through these regulatory mechanisms that enable the discursive designations of certain geographic areas as “abandoned,” “bad,” “dark,” “mysterious,” “sexy.” In the novel, reading geographic areas like they are behaviors or social aberrations and reading people

like they are embodied terrain to be charted, dissected, and tagged merges together to illustrate Sandoval's point that mapping and reading (both physical landscape and people) are performative and regulatory.

In fact, the mounting count of the bodies, coupled with the count of those who have been disappeared, reflects an entrenched social attitude regarding women and the feminine that generally is in fact common to both Mexico and the U.S. It appears that it is not so much a reinforcement of each side's distinctive nationalism that has perpetuated the disappearance and murder of poor women on the border, but the shared attitudes and policies on both sides regarding poor women of color and the perceived worth of the Maquiladora workers that actually enact a "social contract" of sorts between the U.S. and Mexico to disregard *these* crimes in their heavily militarized yet capital-fluid schemas. Concealed under the illuminated cloak of the U.S.-Mexico commercial border cluster, these bodies are subjected to a literal and figurative eclipse. From the "U.S." point of view, the disappeared women are proving their function as sites for sexual tourism, and with diminished reproductive baggage to boot. From the "Mexican" point of view, the transgressive nature of women to seek independence and employment apart from the control of the males in their lives, under the presumed guidance of "American feminism," designates these women as ruined before they are even killed. While these perspectives may appear to be oppositional, this social contract between the U.S. and Mexican corporations and governments affords both sides to lose a few workers in light of bigger economic gains through the Maquiladora program and the NAFTA agreement.

In some ways, the willing ignorance on both sides of the border of the disappearances is a sacrifice. In her connection of Mesoamerican mythology to the femicide of poor women of color in Ciudad Juárez, Jane Caputi makes the case that ritual sacrifice is not so much a relic of the past, but rather very much in practice today: “Modern Western people might suppose that human sacrifice is a thing of the past, something done only by the ‘primitive others’ of history, those ‘rightfully’ defeated by the supposedly civilized and civilising Europeans. But when I look at my own European American culture, then and now, I see human sacrifice everywhere” (Caputi 282). Caputi notes that seemingly ritualistic, and indeed very performative, acts of lynching, genocide, ethnic “cleansings,” state-sponsored executions, and “corporate and military production and dumping of environmental pollutants leading to early death, particularly for the dispossessed” are just some of the “forms of human sacrifice to Gods of Purity, Power, Profit, and Progress, as well as War” (283).

In her expansion of the concept of the ritual of human sacrifice, Caputi makes it clear that “The aim of gynocide is not to destroy all women, but to destroy women as a spiritual, political, and cultural force and to obliterate women’s group identity, with a shared history, responsibility, consciousness, and sense of values and purpose” (Caputi 280). Economic valuation of bodies: identifying a set price or measurable profit loss is another kind of ritual: renders one body like the next in accordance with an economic taxonomy that reads the bodies of poor women of color as variably serviceable, but not unique with respect to their collateral.

Once Ivon uncovers the snuff film company that abducted her sister, Ivon considers the full weight of the fact that present historiographies often serve to obscure inconvenient testimonies. Moreover, she recognizes that the snuff film industry serves as a physical and symbolic manifestation of the global capitalist investment in silencing women of color for financial gain—at the service of those tastes that (de)value women of color bodies and lust to see them mutilated, disciplined. The reproductively-capable but deleted bodies of these women come to signify a type of testimony that has been effectively erased, even in the face of abundant material evidence. Furthermore, while the internet aided in Ivon’s research on the disappeared women, it also functions in the novel, as in reality, as an alternative “site” where both economic transactions, exploitations, and violence are staged in a liminal zone that occupies the territory between physical landscape and ethereal webspace. The fact that the website serves as an open, yet anonymous, invitation to those who have the money and the desire to participate in the violation and murder of young girls further erodes the logic of the U.S.-Mexican border as a definitive, traceable line.

In Ivon’s re-tracing of geography as a conceptual and epistemological force in national and transnational policy, her retroduction fills the gap of the silence on which border violence fundamentally relies. As a result, Ivon’s historiographic reconstitution (in the absence of reliable testimony) brings to the forefront the plight of The Disappeared, of the taken.³⁴ An actual political category, The Disappeared refers to those who have

³⁴ Maquiladora and The Disappeared are interchangeably capitalized in scholarship on associated topics. I elected to capitalize these terms when discussing their collective signification.

been forcibly and secretly abducted “as a repressive method of state terror against its own population” set against the backdrop of the Cold War and the US national security doctrine in Latin America (Karl 728). By connecting the ongoing slaughter of hundreds of women along the Juárez murders to the similar lack of attention toward The Disappeared by the state, the novel takes the logic and process of abduction to another level, politicizing the apparent function of the body in detective fiction as merely a source of evidence. Specifically, the novel reflects on the processes of detection that work to form a persuasive narrative that also has to let go of inconvenient and contradictory evidence and claims. As a result, the function of the dead women’s bodies in the novel come to function less as “narrative capital” that is conventional in detective fiction and more as a form of *testimonio* in its simultaneously personal and collective signification (Delgadillo 46). This welding of the personal and the political becomes a central force in fighting the silencing function of dominant historiographies and official accounts and legal practices that in effect aim to discredit and disregard evidence that is inconvenient to neoliberal and global capitalist agendas.

To assist in empowering these silenced voices, social justice organizations have started to paint black crosses on pink backgrounds, which brings together the sanctified image of the cross and the prints of both the dead (black) and the feminine (pink) and

⁴ Garcia de Alba’s novel also makes space within organized religion for spiritual mestizaje: in the text, Father Francis aligns his practices with the oppressed by setting up and going on walks to recover bodies and other evidence and by driving Ximena and Ivon to different homes and appointments, invoking the spiritual activism of other liberation theologians “who seek to distance themselves from power” (Delgadillo 98).

suggests “not only the significance of the spiritual in these lives but the attempt to create new and more just spiritual communities” (Delgadillo 95). In Ivon’s recovery of the gaps and missing testimonies of *las hijas de Juárez*, she cannot bring back the dead. However, like the “non-institutional” ritual (Delgadillo 135) of painting the names of the disappeared on pink crosses against a black background which brings together the sanctified image of the cross and the symbolism of both the dead (black) and the feminine (pink), Ivon’s detective recovery signifies the disappeared women’s absent testimonies, turning each woman’s disappeared testimony into *testimonio*. The ritualistic sacrifices of young women of color are inverted to harness the power of visual re-representation and symbolic re-integration, emphasizing in turn that these girls are not inalienable and that the dominant public sphere is responsible to them and their families. While Ivon remains critical of organized religion, she nevertheless reaches a state of *spiritual mestizaje* toward the end of the novel. Ivon’s and others’ collective recovery of the irrecoverable is an act of faith and hope incapable of being proven, attested, by empirical fact.³⁵

Garcia de Alba’s novel is one of the more sociological works in the corpus of U.S. women of color detective fiction: the method of logical abduction and canvassing for clues is rendered through a meta-textual framework given that the detective protagonist is herself working on a dissertation about women of color feminism. Moreover, the sheer amount of research, information, and explanations that is enfolded

within the novel helps to explain its extensive length when compared to, say, an Agatha Christie or a Dashiell Hammett novel. It is the almost superfluous amount of information that makes Garcia de Alba's novel a "bad" mystery: there is simply too much to follow and loose ends are not tied up at the close of the novel. And, in some ways, Ivon is an ineffective detective: unlike the celebrated ethos of traditional male rescuers, Ivon does not have all the answers at the end, nor can she save the girls who have disappeared aside from her sister. Indeed, given that her sister has been brutally, shockingly mutilated and raped by humans and bitten by dogs, the question arises of whether Ivon played the Ivanhoe trope to the Medieval legend's romantic ideal. However, it is the novel's sociological bent and resistance to a streamlined explanation of facts that also makes it both a willful mystery and a multiracial and transnational feminist project.

Another theorization of knowledge production and dissemination arises at the end of the novel and involves thinking through the roles and concept of maternal care. In Ivon's tracing of the illegitimated clues and spaces in Juárez and along the border, important theorizations take place about how visibility does not equal justice. Moreover, Ivon interrogates the ways in which Chicano Marianismo and "la familia" regulatory rhetorics discipline queer Chicanas and those who dare to step out of bounds of heteropatriarchal prescriptive behaviors for women. As a result, this novel brings in activist discourses and methodologies such as "Political Motherhood," to borrow Ruth Wilson Gilmore's term, while also expanding on definitions and social applications of something *like* maternal ethics. As a result, these connections, or traces, emphasize that motherhood is an agentive praxis and epistemological model, wherein one can "mother"

and “parent” even if one is not a biological mother, or one can fail to parent “in the right way” even if one is a biological mother.

Ivon’s concern for her sister is paralleled to her revelation that there are hundreds of girls “like Ines.” Moreover, the organizations on the ground that perform daily walks in the hot desert to look for bodies and clues when both U.S. and Mexican institutional agencies look the other way and that include activist women, men, and children are an illustration of Public Motherhood. Public Motherhood is an extension of the feminist refusal to obey, particularly in the interest of dismantling the dangerous border between the domestic and the social, which has had the consequences of privatizing domestic violence and gender inequality while making public, and negatively exemplary, the sins of the women who transgress that familial-civil border. But these social movements that seek allies also assert that motherhood is an epistemology, a praxis, and an ethics of care, which means that “one need not be a woman or a parent to participate in an action-based critique of vulnerability grounded in, but not bounded by, local conditions” (196). In the novel’s relative resolution that recognizes the continued absence of corporeal and collected testimony on behalf of those bodies not recovered by the detective, *Desert Blood* locates an animative decolonial feminist collective exemplified by the protestors who come to occupy this territory for/on behalf of The Disappeared.

This expansion of motherhood to include those who cannot, or choose not to, biologically reproduce takes motherhood as an act and identification out of the private realm of the domestic sphere and politicizes this role in order to push for the recognition that those who mother are as much a part of the political landscape as those who have at

one point or another been mothered. Stemming from her comparative discussion of the development of empowering “mothering lessons” and outreach programs within the long history of African American women’s clubs and the emergence of Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Argentina in 1977 who sought answers and justice for the disappeared, Gilmore notes that both histories involve a “motherwork” epistemology that interprets motherhood as a practice, a system of knowledge, and, importantly as a form of labor. Both movements that reintroduce motherwork as a public act also push for the integration of mothers and issues surrounding mothering into the dominant public sphere. For example, Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo “defied the presumption that women should not meddle in affairs of the state—which is to say the male, or public sphere—by organizing on the basis of a simple and culturally indisputable claim that mothers ought to know where their children are” (Gilmore 194). This strategy is ingenious because it puts the money where the mouth of those pesky service announcements runs: if parents are wholly responsible for their children’s safekeeping, then parents should be given access to the governing strategies and resource management of the State, rather than being castigated and pathologized for doing a poor job raising children under a system that sets poor parents of color up to fail.

Moreover, the Public Motherhood movements exhibited by African American “other-mothering,” Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, Las Madres, and Mothers ROC, which also echo “similar movements in such places as South Africa, Palestine, and El Salvador” (195), push for the recognition that “children are not alienable” (195). These movements lay the groundwork for the reconsideration of maternal care as a private,

domestic, and feminine role rather than a position of social, ethical, and material support to those most in need. Viewed through this lens, motherhood is taken out of the domestic realm, and raising children becomes less an aspect of “women’s domain” and more an aspect of civic concern and responsibility: “In this historical context, motherhood functioned through, and as an attribute of, the woman-as-laborer, enacted as collective, or social, rather than individualized practice” (Gilmore 189).

The designation of motherhood as a social function turns a critical eye toward those who claim to parent but do not engage in an ethics of care and those who desire to parent but are not permitted to by institutional paradigms that seek a restoration of the nuclear and heteronormative family modes. After Irene is recovered and the snuff film business is busted, Ivon takes time to reevaluate her position toward motherhood as a role and toward motherhood as a practice of public care. While in the course of the novel, Ivon is uncertain about her potential role as a mother and caretaker, the expansion of motherhood into a political and public category as evidenced by the protestors and scavengers also realigns her perspective and her perceived obligation to Jorjito. Specifically, Ivon’s search for Ines and her realization that visibility equals knowledge prompts her to reconsider the role of motherhood as an ethics of care that can be embodied by those who are willing to do the work and become part of the social network.

In *Desert Blood*, the subversion of the regimentation of both *la familia* and *Marianismo* recognizes the parallel discourses occurring in what Gayatri Spivak would refer to as subaltern spaces, discourses that call for recognition of the fact that poor women of color have sexual agency and personal goals, that queer Chican@s exist, and

that women are not to be handled by others, but should have the social, spatial, and legal freedom to handle themselves—these are the counter-discursive trends that are made more apparent in Garcia de Alba’s work. Let’s chart a different path, the novel suggests, by way of differential cognitive mapping, Public Motherhood, and practiced space, a path that reconfigures the traces of the feminine as empowering in their threat to wrought straightening devices, a path that is attuned to the idea that human justice, equality, and respect are as dangerous for their possibility to be achieved as their apparent idealism and their ability to “kill” the mood.

Overall, *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* shares with *Black Widow’s Wardrobe* an emphasis on recovering disappeared voices and narratives and questioning why certain crimes continue to be unresolved. Both novels focus on reclaiming female voices that have disappeared: in the case of *Black Widow’s Wardrobe*, the act of recovery focuses on Gloria’s construction of a more coherent and Chicana feminist historical account of the Malintzin Tenepal, colloquially known as La Malinche, in order to make sense of her sudden reincarnation/symbolic invocation in the novel through The Black Widow, a woman who murdered her husband in self-defense who is now being targeted by an unknown assailant. In *Desert Blood*, the act of recovery centers on the Ivon’s location of her sister, who disappeared under eerily similar circumstances as hundreds of other poor women of color along the U.S.-Mexico border. Like *Black Widow’s Wardrobe*, part of Ivon’s process of detection is to construct, in the absence of reliable official testimony and data, a plausible explanation not only for why these girls continue to go missing but also why little attention is being paid to this public danger. Indeed, the comparative, yet

differential, reading of *Black Widow's Wardrobe* and *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* also stages a temporally and nationally-transgressive reunion of two of the most controversial, “willful” Chicana female icons within the Latin American and Chican@ imaginary: La Malinche and Sor Juana Inés de La Cruz. These renowned icons were educated, bilingual women who were ultimately characterized as traitors to the Mexican nation in their nonalignment with heteronormative and national prerogatives.

In short, both novels perform acts of recovery that attempt to bring to the surface bodies, physical and narrative, that have been occluded from national and official accounts. Like in *Black Widow's Wardrobe*, the underlying, or nodal, crime in *Desert Blood* goes unpunished. If, in the case of Corpi's novel, it is the vibrant drug trade that escapes mention, in *Desert Blood*, it is the corporations that remain hidden beyond the immediate takedown of the porn site producers. By interpreting the processes of retroduction and logical abduction as creative and compensatory acts, these novels theorize and even poetize detective fiction's quest for a most complete narrative. The desire to be sure, to be objective, performs a metacritical function with respect to both detective fiction and criticism: both Gloria and Ivon rely extensively on the help of others and are ready to admit their partial understanding of the case and potential errors.³⁶

³⁶ On a personal and professional level, my ignorance of the poetry and feminist historiography of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz resembles Ivon's relative lack of knowledge about the ongoing murders in Juárez: the fictional character and I have both been academically trained. Having received my B.A. at Kenyon College and then an M.F.A. in Poetry from The New School, why has it taken me this long to find her poetry, her instance of willfulness that precedes so many male authoritative voices and texts that have been naturalized as foundational creeds? I am grateful to my advisor, Lynn Itagaki, for asking me to go further in the direction of learning about Sor Juana Inés de La Cruz. Knowledge takes cooperation, guidance, a humility that is capable to withstand the personal injury of realizing one's own ignorance: knowledge is relational and creative.

Moreover, Lucha Corpi's and Alicia Gaspar de Alba's novels share a commitment to deflating some of the celebratory aspects of global and transnational corporate projects that inadvertently concretize the border between consolidated definitions of "United States" and "Mexico" without recognizing the ways in which such sweeping, yet legitimating, gestures occlude the intersectional, historically-situated, and local-economic contexts of women's lives.

In turn, these novels call for a critically regional approach that holds local context "in tension with globalization" (Limón 166). The temporal, spiritual, and critical connections and methodologies enacted by these novels support a pan-American and transnational yet locally-attuned Chicana feminist project that is invested in analyzing the physical and discursive ways women of color are both claimed and disciplined as national subjects in accordance with restrictive prescriptions of "good behavior." If traditional hardboiled detective fiction is concerned with overly porous borders, Lucha Corpi's and Alicia Gaspar de Alba's detective fiction is concerned with the over-determined solidification of the concept of border that does not reflect the networks, capital flows, and uneven surveillance of female and queer bodies in the constitution of the borderlands.

Chapter 5: Portable Art or Ethnic (as) Kitsch: The Politics of Home, Tourism, and Access to the Real in Charlotte Carter's *Coq au Vin* and Carolina Garcia-Aguilera's *Havana Heat: A Lupe Solano Mystery*

“Would I ever see Paris again? Probably. It was unbearable to think of dying without seeing those lights once more. Would I ever cry again as I drove past the Arc de Triomphe or walked in the Bois du Boulogne? Maybe. Would I ever again feel that the city belonged to me, and I to it? Like I wasn’t just another savvy tourist, or even a starry-eyed expatriate, but the genuine article—*une femme française*.

No.”

— Nanette in *Coq au Vin*

“The very last, the topmost face on the totem pole, is that of kitsch. It is the last mask of the banal, the one with which we adorn ourselves, in dream and conversation, so as to take in the energies of an outlived world of things.”

— Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in The Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*

This chapter performed a comparative analysis of two detective fiction texts, African American author Charlotte Carter’s *Coq au Vin* (1999) and Cuban American author Carolina Garcia-Aguilera’s *Havana Heat* (2000) to explore how these two works variably destabilize popular understandings about cultural tourism as well as the nationalist underpinnings of the hardboiled genre. Specifically, I make that case that both novels expand on hardboiled’s anxiety about travel and migration within the urban cosmopolis to consider how certain subjects cannot leave “home” behind, particularly when traveling within social, economic, and aesthetic paradigms invested in creating commodified versions of historically marginalized aesthetic values. The protagonists of

each novel are adult women living in the United States during the late 1990s but who also exist in a liminal psychic territory between two countries. For *Coq au Vin*'s Nanette Hayes, a saxophone jazz musician, her liminality is explored between her ambivalent affinity for two of the world's busiest cosmopolitan centers, New York and Paris. For *Havana Heat*'s Lupe Solano, a wealthy licensed Private Eye working in the upper-class Cuban community in Miami, her ambivalence is oriented toward how to reconcile the nearly mythic ideal of returning to Cuba and identifying as a "habanera" (240) with her enjoyment of certain economic, gender, trade, and business privileges afforded her within the gated community in Miami. Both protagonists' inhabitation of a liminal space in the context of an increasingly commercialized cultural diaspora does not get resolved, marking their exile within/to an "elsewhere" both nostalgic and critical.

Moreover, both Nanette Hayes and Lupe Solano take on detective cases that deal with forgeries and counterfeit works of black diasporic art (African American expatriate jazz, in Nanette's case, and the paintings of Wifredo Lam, an Afrocuban avant-garde painter, in Lupe's case). *Coq au Vin* and *Havana Heat* in fact appear to also share certain texts. For instance, they seem to conceptually briefly sojourn together in France (given that the *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestry series was given as a gift to a French Queen and Nanette explores the footprints of expatriate Parisian jazz culture). But they also join up, oddly enough, through the specter of Ernest Hemingway, a key figure of Anglo-European modernism who spent nearly as much time as a residential expatriate writer in the small

fishing village of Cojimar Bay, ten miles east of Havana, Cuba, as he did as an expatriate in Paris.³⁷

While the authors write from disparate cultural, social, and even feminist perspectives, both texts reveal the extent to which global capitalism disciplines aesthetic value to produce “ethnic (as) kitsch.” In the actions and experiences of her main protagonist, Charlotte Carter's *Coq au Vin* invokes jazz as an epistemology to offer a reconstruction of the central mystery that affords plural and contradictory pieces to coexist from a Blues Womanist perspective. Conversely, Carolina Garcia-Aguilera's wealthy protagonist who is wary of Cuban revolutionary politics and works on the side of the art speculator does not have the ability to contextualize and “place” the artworks she encounters outside of “Cuban time.” As a result, the novel upholds a historiographic interpretation of Cuban diasporic artworks within an “ethnic (as) kitsch” analogous relationship to stifled “Cuban time,” itself a constrained perspective of temporality that is predicated on interpretations of Cuban life and culture through the lens of U.S. economic, military, and cultural interventions. In total, Carolina Garcia-Aguilera's novel is an important contribution to the project's archive because it enables the consideration of how historiographic epistemologies are thwarted when artworks are interpreted through governmental and economic lenses. The comparison of these two novels helps illustrate

³⁷ It was in Cuba where Hemingway wrote that high-school classic *The Old Man and the Sea*. Busts of Hemingway are erected in national parks alongside busts of Stalin. Apparently, Fidel Castro won a Hemingway-themed fishing competition in 1960, one year after the Cuban Revolution. However, there has been little evidence to support the claim that Hemingway was sympathetic to the revolution. Instead, it is safer to say that Cuba “kitsch-ified” Hemingway for tourist revenue. Hemingway left Cuba in 1960 and committed suicide in 1961 in his Idaho home.

the notion that values of aestheticism and community pride can drastically change when situated within a society that reduces the notion of value to the attainment of pure capital, rendering culture into a sellable and fake-able commodity.

In what follows, I start by analyzing each text's geographically and culturally-localized negotiations of the themes of nostalgia, aesthetics, and aesthetic commodification, beginning with *Havana Heat* and following with *Coq au Vin*. Then, I discuss how the two novels both converge and diverge with respect to their investments in economic cosmopolitanism, patriotism, and inclinations toward feminism, arguing that these investments in turn offer contrasting perspectives regarding the possible separation of art value from art market speculation. Specifically, I argue that Lupe Solano is imbricated in the economic aspects of art (re)production from her professional position as a P.I. and her status as devoted friend to Miami law enforcement. In contrast, Nanette Hayes' job as a practicing jazz saxophone player and student of the tradition animate *Coq au Vin's* discourse of value to recognize both the legacy and technique of jazz music beyond kitsch representations of black Parisian jazz as primitive "jass culture."

Nanette Hayes is a thirty-something professional saxophone player who performs solos in the streets of New York City and who is caught off-guard when her willful aunt sends a desperate note to her mother asking for money to be sent to Paris, where her aunt is presumably living. Her mother informs her that she has been holding an inheritance for her aunt and that she wants Nanette to go to Paris and give it to her. Nanette, who has previously visited Paris many times and has a special relationship to the city, takes little time to say yes. Upon her arrival, she plays music in several public spaces and meets

Andre, with whom she enlists a romantic relationship. Together, they attempt to locate her aunt, who has proven to be very difficult to find. Moreover, Nanette realizes that her aunt has been involved with a drug dealer and pimp and may be in trouble. Through the course of her investigation, Nan uncovers her aunt's scheme involving a fraud folk singer who has stolen field recordings and was posing as an original "authentic" musician from the South. Moreover, Nanette uncovers the fact that the most prestigious club manager in town is behind both the musician's untimely death and her aunt's disappearance. Toward the end of the novel, Nanette's aunt suddenly appears with the strong desire to avenge her lover's murder at the hands of the club manager. Ultimately, the novel raises the question whether the central mystery of the novel is Aunt Viv's whereabouts, the revelation of the fake blues act, or Nan's relationship to Paris and to jazz in the context of her gradual emotional estrangement from both American and French political climates.

Nanette's displacement effectuates her social standing as a black diasporic subject and practicing musician. The novel appears at first to be a straightforward homage to the cosmopolitan and liberal roots of early twentieth-century Paris as an international and liberal hub where African American musicians, dancers, and intellectual elites could gather without having to negotiate Jim Crow-era restrictions. However, throughout the novel, Nanette remains self-aware with respect to her desire for reconnection to this mythic community even as she frequents and enjoys the tourist incantations of Parisian jazz specters. For example, during a day tour orchestrated by her new lover and jazz violinist Andre, she describes that she was: "being escorted around the hallowed grounds of our ancestors, so to speak. The hotel where Bud Powell lived. The cabaret (at least the

address where once there had been a cabaret) where one celebrated musician reportedly shot another to death. And, of course, the site of the original Bricktop's on rue Fontaine" (52). Within this description lie fighting notions of reverence and ambivalence about the mythification of the black jazz scene in Paris.

The fact that Carter elected to write a novel splitting its time between contemporary New York and Paris is no accident: both New York and Paris (and their cultural exchange) occupy a significant space in historiographies and literatures about black diasporic art and culture. With respect to the popularity of jazz music in these spaces during the early twentieth century, African American musical forms have had a complex relationship with issues and tensions related to their dissemination, particularly the appropriation and capitalization by more powerful white entrepreneurs. Kobena Mercer emphasizes that during the early twentieth century: "various black modernist practices that were scattered around the globe became self-consciously diasporic for the first time—artists and writers saw themselves as part of a trans-national movement in twentieth-century art and culture rather than one restricted to a national milieu" (Mercer, "Cosmopolitan Contact Zones," 40). As a result, Mercer points to the problematics of narrativizing Afro-Modernism within an entirely nationalist framework, as in the case of solely focusing on the Harlem Renaissance and African American culture in a Black Studies course. At the same time, critics cannot ignore the historical tensions that arose with the gradual integration of black diasporic art and artists into mainstream white

cosmopolitan centers, specifically with respect to the discourses and identifications of “primitivism” that accompanied the reception of black diasporic aesthetics.³⁸

Primitivism was first evidenced in the “initial pre-war engagement of Dada, Fauvism, Cubism and Expressionism” with what was understood at the time to be African and black diasporic culture (Barson 10). This engagement was subsequently bolstered by Surrealism’s “ideas about beauty in a synthesized statement that pitted the African savage state against conventional bourgeois values” (Archer 28). In the context of the celebration of Afro-American and black diasporic art in Europe, the Parisian “negrophilia”³⁹ professed by the Anglo-European avant-garde during the early twentieth-century “paralleled the innovations and cultural borrowing reflected in modernist art as well as the rebellious postures associated with their ‘outsider’ status. African objects were considered sources of divine inspiration” (Archer 30). Moreover, within general Anglo-modernist aesthetics, there has been a habitual application of non-western aesthetic productions as “primitive” or “traditional” to offer a counter-weight to the modernizing and “civilizing” measures of aesthetic modernism and technological modernization (Sims 97). For instance, critics and artists during the explosion of jazz in Paris where hooked on “The seemingly paradoxical pairings of jazz with ‘modern’ American skyscrapers and ‘primitive’ African totems” (Blake 87). If the polyrhythmic

³⁸ In fact, the linear chronology of modernism morphing into postcolonial critique is upset when we consider, as Mercer does, that “many of the metaphor-concepts put into play by the postcolonial turn of the 1980s—hybridity, syncretism, creolisation, were first registered in the debates of the 1940s that saw cross-cultural exchange as source of fresh aesthetic possibilities brought about by the global conditions of modernity” (41).

³⁹ Defined by Petrine Archer as “from the French negrophile, a term used by avant-garde artists themselves to affirm a passion for things African that was temporary and defiant” (Archer 30).

and discordant stylings of jazz inspired surrealists and dadaists because of their irreverence toward institutional conformity, the same stylings were read as indicative of an “other” temporality, in line with primitivism evidenced in the treatment of artists like Afrocaribbean avant-garde painter Wifredo Lam. At the same time, African American musicians encountered an environment less overtly hostile to them than Jim Crow United States (Asukile 29).

Early twentieth-century cosmopolitan centers that housed these Anglo-European transnational, diasporic, and romantic movements were akin to world exhibitions, wherein “World exhibitions are places of pilgrimage to the commodity fetish” (Fox 101). In such spaces, “modernity is always citing primal history” (105) precisely to engage in a comparative temporal and aesthetic disjuncture between that which is perceived as new and that which is perceived as outmoded and needing aspects of that which is new to fashion the old. Parisian cosmopolitanism was at once a spontaneous and capitalist affair: after all, the social spaces in which important performers and intellectuals gathered were commercial institutions that were in the business of making money through selling food, liquor, cigarettes, and an atmosphere conducive to lingering and buying more of all of these things. With roots in the Arcades Project in the nineteenth century, which Walter Benjamin describes as “the first establishments to keep large stocks of merchandise on the premises...The arcades are a center of commerce in luxury items. In fitting them out, art enters the service of the merchant” (96). The affect of Parisian cosmopolitanism was invested in the outfitting of the newly “furnished gentleman” by providing this “tenant” with a “furnished room” (239). In the case of the revues, bars, and restaurants, the tenant

is being provided with a social room that is furnished with ambiance incorporating textiles and exotic culture. The desire for culture, like the desire for the latest fashion, is what creates the anxious longing for the latest in design, both textile and aesthetic. Was it a fortuitous accident or the inevitable merging of military power, capitalist speculation, and aesthetic primitivism that recognized something valuable in James Reese Europe's Hellfighters of the 369th New York Regiment, an all-black regiment and jazz band first to play jazz music in Paris after arriving in 1918 once the U.S. entered WWI (Asukile 25)?

In Carter's novel, Nanette's enjoyment of The Parisian Jazz Age "scene" vacillates between reclamation and complicit commodification of black diasporic jazz culture. When visiting various establishments with Andre, the couple stumbles upon a renovated bar, Bricktop, that played a key role in hosting black revues and musical groups during the Parisian jazz explosion. Upon surveying the renovated establishment, Nanette herself refers to the renovated place as "African American Kitsch":

Cole Porter and Mabel Mercer were definitely not in residence. No ladies in bare-back evening gowns and diamonds. Not a tuxedo in sight. The new Bricktop's was African-American kitsch. Autographed photos of the namesake lady herself, of Louis Armstrong and Lady Day, Alberta Hunter and you name them. Stuffed piccaninny dolls. Posters for Oscar Micheaux movies. Laminated Bessie Smith records. Items on the menu named after this or that famous personage. The food wasn't half bad though. We devoured hot cornbread and smothered chicken and collards while we goofed on the place. The generic old black gentleman at the baby grand played terrific stride.
(53)

Nanette's disappointment that Porter and Mercer were not in attendance is a comic dig at herself for wanting to reach back into time to experience Paris of the 1920s, a desire she knows she cannot fulfill. However, there is also more to this description than the

awareness that Nanette cannot mingle among the tuxedoed individuals in the 1920s: namely, it seems important that the revamped Bricktop's new aesthetic counters everything that Nanette has assumed or heard about the jazz scene of the 1920s. Instead, things one can own or take in are substituted for both the performers and the extravagant style of the roaring '20s. Instead of faithful representations of the glamorous style of the African American expatriate glitterati, the new place has an assortment of goods set against a backdrop of what can only be described as—African American kitsch.

Kitsch is often cast in a negative light because unlike the political investments of the 1960s Pop Art movement, the mass-produced material goods representing kitsch are “designed both to ‘save’ and to ‘kill’ time. To save time, in the sense that its enjoyment is effortless and instantaneous; to kill time, in the sense that, like a drug, it frees man temporally from his” (Călinescu 8). According to culture critic and historian of modernism Matei Călinescu, kitsch is the opposite of modernism, because modernism seeks respite from technological modernization and finds solace in the analytic, symbolic interiority of the mind. In contrast, kitsch is an “expendable art” in both the time-waste and money-waste senses of the word: “Historically, the appearance and growth of kitsch are the results of the intrusion of the other modernity—capitalist technology and business interest—in the domain of the arts” (8). Whether saving or killing time, kitsch is defined as standing in opposite to “great art” or, perhaps, art that is designed to take time to understand, to force the viewer into an engagement with his/her condition. A clearer way to think about the dangers of kitsch is that in its temporal isolation of objects from their origins, kitsch kills the object's historiography. As Walter Benjamin notes in his

expansive and key work, *The Work of Art in The Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, “The very last, the topmost face on the totem pole, is that of kitsch. It is the last mask of the banal, the one with which we adorn ourselves, in dream and conversation, so as to take in the energies of an outlived world of things” (238). Kitsch is the fantasy of recreating an experience of a material object, often folk-ish or “authentic,” that cannot in reality be reproduced.

The desire to reach the folk by way of the kitsch stresses the difference between what Benjamin terms “folk art” and “dream kitsch.” As Benjamin assesses, folk art is crafty—it is not of “great art,” but of making things. According to Benjamin, both folk art and kitsch “depend on great art at the level of individual works, but apply what they have taken in their own way and in the service of their own goals” (254). However, folk art does not really depend on great art, because, as Benjamin himself ascertains, folk art “passes certain themes from hand to hand, like batons, behind the back of what is known as great art” (254). If, for Benjamin, both folk art and kitsch bring the individual closer to a reality that the individual has heretofore never recognized, it does not mean, however, that folk art (in the sense that blues, for example, is a folk art) is incapable of teaching “us to see into things” (255). In line with David Wondrich’s and Houston A. Baker’s theorizing of jazz and blues as decidedly standing outside, or even against, “great art” of the “Topworld,” it might be better said that kitsch is a method of those outside the “Underworld” to experience *what they perceive* as “folk art.” It is kitsch, or folk art reproduced and price-tagged, that gives the illusion that the consumer may “see outward from within things” (255).

It is also significant that Nanette does not just use the term “kitsch” to describe the gaudy décor, but “African-American kitsch,” in effect making an overt connection between the culture that is being commodified and primitivized and the function of this primitivization (to sell the “folk” experience). As a result, it may be useful to think about how kitsch is itself a process of othering that depends on the simultaneous determination and erasure of racial and class difference in order to capitalize on those aspects of identity that have come to be associated with the “culture” of racial difference, or ethnicity. Unlike the social concept of race as “workings of the physical body,” ethnicity has been defined as “cultural traits” and “social practices—language, religion, rituals, and other patterns of behavior—that defined the content of a group’s culture” (Yu 103). However, the identification of a culture as “ethnic” has followed the variable flows of racialization. In this way, “ethnicity” only applies to those who do not pass for white or white-acting.

The concept of ethnicity has come to serve simultaneously as a method for preserving white exclusion and for disciplining those behaviors of non-white others that do not align with model minority status, with the exception of those behaviors and practices that have been identified as safe enough to consume in exchange for money (food, clothing, jewelry, music, art, in some cases, dialect). As bell hooks writes in her seminal essay, “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance”: “Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture” (21). What becomes dangerously fun yet also safe is the illusion of coming into “contact with the Other” (22) while never relinquishing “one’s mainstream positionality” (23). As hooks further emphasizes, this leads to a fetishization of what one

perceives to be a different culture, an “Other,” based on the grounds of a consumable image of an Other that is all the while safe to consume, to enjoy, without ever entering into real contact or conversational exchange with the people and cultures one perceives as Other. As hooks notes, the fun to be had in eating the Other is a reflection of the “contemporary revival of interest in the ‘primitive,’ with a distinctly postmodern slant” in that the dominant “self” seeks to re-constitute its assuredness in itself as subject by locating distinctly Others as objects (22). Objects to be consumed for pleasure, for fun, from a safe distance.

“Ethnic kitsch,” then, reduces historical and material realities of racialized difference into a bland, non-racial “non-whiteness” that in turn supplies cultural aspects that can be commercialized without being foreseen as some sort of threat to dominant white order. This is perhaps why ethnic (as) kitsch often zeros in on food and clothing: everybody likes to eat! Those fashions are so wild! Thus, ethnic food is “non-white” food, is gritty, “down-low,” authentic, whereas non-ethnic food, “American food,” is patriotic, normal, lacking cultural specificity (what IS American food?). In fact, because “ethnic” has already been revamped in popular culture as “consumable non-whiteness,” it would be redundant to read commodifications, exotifications, and “traditionalizing” of non-Western European aesthetics and cultural practices as “ethnic kitsch.” Instead, it is more accurate to say that within the paradigm of systemic and discursive exclusions that rely on the dichotomy of white vs. ethnic, “ethnic” *becomes* kitsch, a reducible, ahistorical nomenclature that eclipses its taxonomic and binaristic injury by couching

such assessments in seemingly celebratory zeal for “other(ed)” cultures, in effect rendering ethnic (as) kitsch, as ahistorical and unproblematic.

The new Bricktop trades in ethnic (as) kitsch, erasing historical resonance even as it trades in the nostalgia for that resonance. In the novel, the old Paris of Nanette’s fantasy and the new Paris she inhabits are not all that different, except for the fact that the new Bricktop is not attempting to historicize or faithfully replicate the old Bricktop, but is instead invested in selling (to) an idea of a culture, an idea that has already been received. The piccaninny dolls (an anti-black caricature of children) and food are paired with famous jazz records and photographs on the wall, a collage of “things” commemorating a time-past that is irretrievable. The disingenuous feel that Nanette and Andre express in their laughter is ameliorated by the act of “eating” the past—the recipes that don’t have to change and yet are also stock fare in this limited representation of what African American expatriate jazz musicians might have eaten, drank, and brought with them.

One fact, for example, that gets diminished in the overabundant primitivism of the décor is the fact that the original owner of Bricktop’s, Ada Smith, was an African American expatriate performer and entrepreneur. In the quoted passage above, there are two ladies being referenced: “the namesake lady herself” and “Lady Day.” Lady Day is a nickname for Billie Holiday, who was also called just “Lady” at times. However, “Lady” would always be capitalized in criticism and press when used in reference to the singer. The “namesake lady” refers to the owner of the original Bricktop, Ada ‘Bricktop’ Smith, a black-Irish American expatriate performer and formerly a headliner in Harlem’s top

Jazz Age cabarets whose red hair was the basis for the establishment's name ("A Night at Bricktop's"). In fact, in his discussion of the significance of the reporting of J.A. Rogers to the emergence of transatlantic jazz culture, Thabiti Asukile identifies Ada Smith as "besides Josephine Baker [...] without a doubt one of the most famous Afro-American women who lived in Paris" (Asukile 27). Ada Smith's legacy illustrates the fact that black women were not just performers in the 1920s, they were also business entrepreneurs. The notion of a black female business owner, smart, capable, agentive, and creative, trumped the widespread "black model as muse" that was "deployed by the Parisian vanguard to promote their ideas of the primitive" (Archer 30). But so much of that is made inconsequential, somehow, when the new ambiance seems to trade more in cliché than black feminist recovery.

Kitsch also kills the referentiality required to understand the allusions a song makes in its groove and swerve. Alexander Weheliye stresses in *Phonographies* that songs and musical performances are already always mediated, even during live performance (22). It is not as though musical technologies took unadulterated sound and commercialized it. Instead, we might read the places, stages, scenes, and bodies that create the conditions of an audience as themselves a mediation within which sound, form, and genre is created. In this process of (re)reading aesthetic expression, "the emphasis shifts from the ways in which the original is tainted by the technological process to the ways the apparatus and the cultural practices (re)shape and (re)frame the musical object" (Weheliye 33). However, given that the roots of blues lay in work songs and gospel that were alternative forms for dialogue and exchange, and that blues and ragtime later

formed the basis of jazz technique, the commodification of African American musical forms to the point of erasing their referentiality stands in direct opposition to blues methodology, because, as black feminist scholar and social justice activist Angela Y. Davis notes: “A blues song sung by one person and heard, remembered, revised, and resung by another belonged as much to the second performer as to the first. This socializing character of the blues rendered conscious the shared nature of emotional experience as well as collective character of the blues form itself” (Davis 136).

In short, to stage African American musical historiography as merely a scene rather than an ongoing, and continuous, discourse, is to be ethnic *as* kitsch. The ethnic (as) kitsch of the new Bricktop comes to carry an even greater significance when Nanette and Andre realize that they have been fooled by the new manager, Morris Melon, who had made his money by trading in music rip-offs of field recordings of African American plantation songs. When they realize that the new Bricktop manager is a fraud, the discord between the spontaneous overflow of promise and community channeled through the cosmopolitan Parisian scene (itself a commodified and controlled endeavor) and the attempted recreation of this great affair in the late 1990s blows up Nanette’s fantasies of a Paris she once thought she could (re)claim.

However, Nanette’s personal relationship to, and professional knowledge of, jazz music and key performers provide moments of artistic interlude amongst and against all this kitschy-ness. Specifically, there are important implications to her line of work and choice of instrument that signify on a rich body of black feminist scholarship that has been invested in considering the freedoms, occupations, and travels of African American

women relating to the social, legal, and economic conditions of the time. For example, while Nanette is a jazz saxophone player, her professional inhabitation of the street and newfound freedom to travel aligns her with the joys and limitations expressed in the songs of Blues Women like Bessie Smith and Gertrude ‘Ma’ Rainey, both of whom also “traveled light.” As critics of African American literature Houston A. Baker and Stephen Soitos and blues scholar David Wondrich point out, the blues is not just about playing music—rather, it is an ideology reflective of the dynamic, heterogeneous, and working-class sources for its inception and development. Blues music is unique in the fact that its roots lie in historically fraught yet close proximity of Celtic and West African slaves and laborers (Wondrich 9-15).

As Blues historian David Wondrich asserts: “Something happened to African music in Anglo-Saxon North America that didn’t happen to it anywhere else” (11). While spirituals, field songs, and church hymns defined much of black music production, the Blues is said to have emerged from The Delta in the 1890s due to a certain set of social and cultural conditions particular to black subjects during Emancipation and the failure of the promises that came with the abolishment of slavery.⁴⁰ According to David Wondrich, the blues is also a music of “(oblique) resistance: like gangsta rap, it refused to aspire. For Topworld, this is the ultimate sin. Slackness. The blues stood for the utter lack of that ‘extraordinary gift for hope’ that redeemed Gatsby (at least to Nick Carraway). You

⁴⁰ Delta in the 1890s—disappointment of “New South” in stagnant economy and new form of debt slavery (Wondrich 134).

couldn't call Bessie Smith hopeful. Lively, sure, but not optimistic"(132).⁴¹ Moreover, as Angela Davis elucidates in her study of African American female blues singers:

the blues categorically refrains from relegating to the margins any person or behavior. Because the blues realm is open to discourse on every possible subject affecting the people who created it, it need not banish religion. Rather, what it rejects is religion's manner of defining the blues as an inferior expression of an inferior people" (Davis 133).

The freedom of subject matter inherent in the blues form is upheld by its musical register, which can waver from happy to sad and back: the speed of the musical structure enables a fluidity and improvisational schema where "'sad' lyrics may become 'happy,' depending on their musical context" (Wondrich 174).

The blues relieves the binaristic division of pleasure and pain and creates as space for addressing the interconnection of these emotions. Thematically, "The blues idiom requires absolute honesty in the portrayal of black life. It is an idiom that does not recognize taboos: whatever figures into the larger picture of working-class African-American realities—however morally repugnant it may be to the dominant culture or to the black bourgeoisie—is an appropriate subject of blues discourse" (Davis 107). The genre is also poetic in its affirmation of a singular, yet shared, experience as narrated by the singer. According to Wondrich, while ragtime emphasizes a danceable beat, the blues

⁴¹ According to the Columbia Center for Jazz Studies, the formal definition of Blues is loosely culled from the following attributes, each of which is less or more emphasized by music, literary, and social criticism: (1) A 12-bar form built on the I, IV, and V chords; (2) a scale with a flattened third, fifth, and perhaps a seventh; (3) a poetic form; (4) a way of articulating tones; (5) a set of verbal sentiments similar to those used in folk blues songs; (6) a vaguely defined, mythic "feeling" that some say is basic to all jazz" (Center for Jazz Studies, "blues"). Musically, Blues notes are two or three flattened notes in a scale, or areas around pitches that can be lowered or raised "to increase the expressivity of the music, not merely to alter an existing scale" ("blues").

emphasizes the human voice: “When we think of someone singing the blues—or gospel, or soul, for that matter—there’s a voice attached to that thought. And it’s gruff, rough, tough, and anything but pretty” (124). Furthermore, as Houston A. Baker notes, while this voice often discloses personal information, “What emerges is not a filled subject but an anonymous (nameless) voice issuing from the black (w)hole” (Baker 5). In this way, “Like translators of written texts, blues and its sundry performers offer interpretations of the experiencing of experience” (7). In sum, blues is unique in that it provides a judgment-free zone and emphasizes the individual voice that in turn speaks to social conditions that are shared between the performer and the audience.

In recognition of the connections between the liberatory features of blues music and the improvisational features of jazz, *Coq au Vin* offers readers the opportunity to consider the politics associated with black women performing in public during the Jim Crow Era and speaking frankly of sexuality and agency. In fact, Nan embodies the “Blues woman” in the sense that she, like Bessie Smith and Gertrude ‘Ma’ Rainey, creates a space to speak truthfully about the limits of heteronormative, middle-class ideas about love, morality, and travel (Davis 13). Given the fact that “The conditions of production under U.S. Slavery—which required women to perform virtually the same labor tasks as men” led to gender politics that diverged from some of the concerns of the white feminist movement (121). As a result, Blues Women Bessie Smith (the first African American artist, female or male, to produce a blues record) and Gertrude “Ma” Rainey sang openly about domestic violence and the complexities of heteropatriarchal institutionality at a

time when such disclosure was unheard of in white feminist and middle-class African American feminist circles.

The Blues Women broke down, or rather, rendered irrelevant, the separation of domestic and public space so ingrained within Anglo-European and upwardly mobile African American ideologies. At the same time, motherhood, feminine virtue, and marriage were not blues topics principally because “blues women found the mainstream cult of motherhood irreverent to the realities of their lives” (Davis 13). Indeed, if “The only distinct personal attribute that most detectives share is doggedness in pursuit of a solution that doesn’t leave much room for casual concerns, romantic infatuation, or personal history” (Soitos 30), then Nanette’s ability to travel light that comes to be questioned and restricted in various ways throughout the novel expand on Stephen Soitos’ conceptualization of the “Blues Detective.” Soitos describes the detective fiction genre as a vernacular popular art, and detective fiction written by African American authors as engaging in vernacular criticism that “attempts to establish a coherent system of principles derived from the rural and urban culture of everyday African Americans” (5). The Blues Detective as identified by Soitos transformed the detective fiction tradition by the use of four major tropes: the detective persona, double-consciousness detection, black vernaculars, and hoodoo.

However, while Soitos discusses African American female detectives, he does not theorize Charlotte Carter’s detective fiction, which considers the ways in which music as a vernacular art form has been employed by black female performers as an empowering critical methodology. From the other side, Houston A. Baker’s notion of a “blues

ideology” emphasizes the potential of the blues form to serve as a critical and liberatory critical lens, but does not consider the ways in which black women performers have utilized blues and jazz to offer counter-institutional and counter-sexist perspectives. In response, combining Soitos’ blues detective, Baker’s blues ideology, and Davis’s blues woman enables a reading of *Coq au Vin* that is attuned to the ways in which the novel employs both blues and detective fiction as critical and ideational methods to help elucidate a jazz epistemology as employed by a traveling black woman saxophone player.

At the same time, while Nanette’s self-directed freedom to play her way in the streets aligns her with blues womanist figures that Davis applauds, Nanette, who earns a stable income playing sax in the streets of New York but who also has a general security net from her financially stable divorced parents, inhabits an interesting liminal space between blues womanism and the politics of respectability. We might even say that Nan’s jazz playing parallels both the ascendancy of jazz into mainstream and canonical musical theory and middle-class educated black women in the U.S. In line with blues topics, Nanette finds herself newly single at the beginning of the novel. Her relationship strife frees her to travel without restriction while still sticking to her investigation of Aunt Viv’s whereabouts, symbolizing the formal conventions of “groove” and “swerve” that is the backbone of jazz music.⁴²

⁴² Wondrich defines “swerve” a point in musical performance wherein “Whenever there’s a proper, legit, ‘dirty’ way of phrasing the tune in question and a musician plays something arbitrary, irrational, spontaneous, unexplainable, that’s the swerve” (6).

And yet, her ability to fund her travels without the need to set up a tour schedule, to play at will, as it were, introduces a new type of black female performer: somewhere between the club woman who is restricted in her sense of duty to upholding the cult of respectability and the working-class performer who relies on available bookings and interested ears to make a living, Nanette is temporarily free to play her way, which she elects to do upon her arrival in Paris, taking her saxophone to certain corners to play a set list she has memorized. During her free play, she ventures into competition with an encroaching violinist, Andre, with whom she ends up cohabitating. Andre's Paris situation is somewhat different from Nanette's: while his white mother was able to curry favor with program financiers and scholarship review board committees to educate Andre in jazz, Andre is in Paris without a visa and is temporarily staying in his professor's top-floor penthouse apartment (on the same street as James Baldwin lived). Will this "duet" last is one of the underlying questions throughout the novel.

Nanette's ambiguous position between street performer and bourgeoisie "citizen of the world" leads her to draw certain heteronormative and idealist assumptions about herself and others. For example, at several parts in the text, we meet Ernestine, her conscience, who seems older and identifies with bourgeois heteronormative values. Ernestine chides her from Nanette's own mind to stay pure, work hard, be frugal (17). Another split dimension that cannot be easily reconciled with Nanette's womanist and feminist transgressions of national and public spaces is her limited understanding and support for queer bodies and histories, which is reflected in her missed opportunity to connect her present location with the specter of James Baldwin's historic presence when

she moves to the same street that Baldwin also occupied several decades prior. The biggest missed connection with respect to uniting African American queer and womanist literatures in their varied participation in (and exploitation by) the Parisian early twentieth-century avant-garde movement is evidenced when Nanette and Andre have a momentary misunderstanding regarding Andre's (hetero)sexuality that implies Nanette's placid homophobia.

Their fight takes place in the apartment located on the same street where James Baldwin lived and wrote, a fact Nanette recognizes earlier in the chapter. However, when Nan and Andre have a nearly physical altercation because she misreads his sexuality, their fight threatens to subsume Baldwin's presence in the queer activist historiography of Parisian cosmopolitanism. Specifically, when Andre asks Nan whether she thinks he is "a fag" (56) and she ambivalently responds, he moves toward her menacingly: "He reached for my wrist but at the last moment pulled back. 'I'm not gay'" (57). This is a strange conversation to have, given the context of Paris as having a reputation of being more liberal and open to gender, sexual, and racial diversity as well as the localized context of Nan and Andre sharing an apartment with the specter of Baldwin on the rue Christine. This episode harkens back to Nanette's quoting of Baldwin ten pages earlier in the novel: "'Like Baldwin said, 'I had to get out before I killed somebody.' Is that how you felt?'" (47). It is clear that Nan, who is scornful of Andre's educational elitism and scoffs at academia at other parts of the novel, has (mis)read Baldwin even while Nan and Baldwin may have a shared affinity for the (more) liberal aspects of Parisian cosmopolitanism and are loosely related as black diasporic and expatriate subjects.

With all this said, Nan's middle-class, heterosexual and seemingly homophobic values do not interfere with the novel's brilliant use of jazz as methodology to think about the importance of the power of voice and improvisation in acquiring knowledge and asserting agency. Pointedly, Nan is not a singer but a saxophone player: in the musical arena and genre wherein women are most often relegated to the options of singing or dancing, Nan plays the sax (32). Nan's ability to play the sax within a musical world that has traditionally placed women into the role of singer/dancer make her not only a Blues Woman but also a Jazz Player, as Nan is further breaking restrictive conventions placed on women of color and women of color performance artists. In order to better understand both Nan's decisions and the more symbolic aspects of the novel's investments in jazz history and performance, it is helpful to consider how jazz and voice are interrelated. For one, while many songs are difficult to label as solely blues or jazz, jazz is renown for its polyrhythmic and at times discordant melodies that tests the bounds of harmony, clean tone, and habituated tempo.

According to Jeff Pressing, polyrhythms "set up tension by introducing two (or possibly more) pulse streams of significant perceptual viability" (302). One of the prevailing stereotypes regarding not only jazz but African American music more broadly is that that black music can be distinguished from European music based on its aversion to melody in favor of rhythm. However, it is not so much that African American music has no melody or emphasizes rhythm, but rather that African American music (and especially jazz) tests the bounds of song structure and harmony: each song makes a decision to accentuate the groove or the swerve. Perhaps more than other genres, jazz

reveals the relationship among instruments through their mutual exchange, their dialogue. The rhythm sets the backbone to the melody, which is developed through improvisation and referentiality to other works and familiar melodies as well as the interrelationship between the drive (the set rhythm of the song) and the swerve (the improvisational features of the song that throw the drive off-balance).⁴³ Moreover, improvisation has a certain cap on its possibilities: there is a structure to the choices the improvising musician can make. As Wondrich says of the blues (which can be similarly said of jazz):

It's not that the blues is entirely without system... You can jiggle the words and phrases, twist them, recombine them. But you can't just wrench the grammar around at random. In practical terms, this means that the Senegambian mode is articulate through a whole crazy quilt of stock figures, patterns, riffs, licks (125).

In other words, even improvisational form has a standard set of modes and procedures at the artist's disposal, modes the artist has come to know so well that they can play it off-hand without looking at notes.

The instrumental solos in jazz are taken in turn but also demand a conversation with the other instruments, which expands the common definition of "voice" to consider vocal performance as playing an instrument and playing an instrument as expressing one's voice. Moreover, when a jazz song also includes a vocal performer, this confluence

⁴³ Wondrich explains that the principle tension in any musical work is the relationship between the drive, "when you get everybody doing the same thing at the seams time over and over again—oom-PAH oom-PAH oom—PAH—you get maximum drive, but it's powerful dull," and swerve: "When everybody does her own thing, each avoiding any kind of overlap with the character in the next chair, you get a circus of swerve, but it sure ain't gonna be a toe-tapper. Drive demands repetition, swerve surprise" (8). In other words, drive and swerve are interdependent: "Now, a little reflection will lead to the conclusion that drive and swerve are relative: if it's only a swerve until everybody gets thoroughly used to it, then it's only drive until something louder or punchier comes along and folks get with the new groove" (8). It is in their varying relationship that drive and swerve create "danceable" songs or "performative" songs.

is even more present. Billie Holiday (1915-1959) serves as an excellent example of someone who uses her voice like an instrument. While the blues “gave a number of musicians, many of whom were black women, their first public ‘voice’” (Daubney 20), Billie Holiday is an exceptional figure in jazz history because she learned how to work with her limited vocal range to create improvisational melodies and distinguish her performance from others. Indeed, while Billie Holiday has been cast by media and public attention as a “torch singer” (Daubney 20) with a chaotic childhood and troubled love life, the emphasis on her choice of partners and drug habit have overshadowed Holiday’s singular vocal technique that illustrates her extensive familiarity with both Blues and Jazz improvisation.

Specifically, Holiday “adopted techniques of ‘instrumental vocalisation’ which allowed her to blend with the band virtually as an instrumentalist (20-1). She also played with the set time signature in such a way as to test her accompaniment, often holding back on the beat. Lastly, “to create an impression of power she used an enormous variation in timbre, particularly through vowel sounds” (22). However, while I agree with Daubney that Holiday’s variation in timbre through vowel signs created an impression of power, I might expand on how power is conceived with respect to Holiday’s technique: in line with the blues theme of bringing together pleasure and pain, I would argue that Holiday’s wavering is a consolidation of confidence and hesitation, allowing the two to be contained together, even in their inherent antagonism, within the lyric and the chord progression. This reading encourages future reconstructions of Holiday’s historiography

to accept the imbricated workings of agency and vulnerability, as well as their symbolic implications, via her vocal technique.

Aside from the songs and artists Nan alludes to in the novel, the paratextual setlist suggested by the *Coq au Vin*'s chapter headings provide an epistemological frame for the novel's thematic and critical concerns. Each of the seventeen chapters listed in the novel appear to be allusions to popular jazz standards, each of which have in turn been covered by multiple musicians. As a result, the novel encourages each reader to improvise and create their own set list, so to speak, of song covers. In my interest in connecting Angela Davis's and Farrah Jasmine Griffin's recovery work of blues and jazz womanist figures, I have created a chart (see Table 2: *Coq au Vin* Setlist, p. 293) designating my selections paired with each chapter. I have also created a Youtube compilation of the song covers using Prezi Presentation Software.⁴⁴ I have incorporated covers by both Ella Fitzgerald (1917-1996) and Billie Holiday. I also include a cover by Sarah Vaughan (1924-1990), a near contemporary of Holiday's whose comparatively demure life earned her a lot less attention in the press and media than Holiday.

The setlist wavers between more and less "bluesy" jazz standards, but throughout the progression of this "record," the concept of voice is mediated between vocal and saxophone solos. Moreover, in some of the more polyrhythmic tracks that test the conventions of harmony and groove, such as John Coltrane's covers of "Straight Street" and "I Want to Talk about You," Jimmy Van Heusen's cover "It Could Happen to You,"

⁴⁴ Istomina, Julia. "Charlotte Carter's *Coq Au Vin* Setlist." Prezi. Web. https://prezi.com/che84nd_43wl/coq-au-vin-playlist/#.

and especially Donald Byrd's "Parisian Thoroughfare," the locomotive rhythms signify toward mobility, dialogue, and even argument providing a kind of onomatopoeic experientiality of performing in the city. At the same time, it is important to remember that the vocals, whether human or material instrument, are in conversation with the rest of the ensemble, and each piece of the ensemble is in conversation with one another. Each performance both builds on and expands considerations of voice to include both vocal (human) and instrumental (saxophone) solos that engage the text and also serve to build a momentum across the set.

Reading and listening to the entire text as a discography encourages readers to think about definitions of vocal character, call and response, improvisation, reference, and possibilities for the transmission of African American style culture that "are impossible to represent by the printed word alone" (Soitos 39). For example, in the emergent "dialogue" between Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, John Coltrane, Billy Strayhorn, and the other included ensembles, a spirited conversation is formed around the general theme of negotiating constraints to the instrumental changes (the measures) and making room for improvisation, for speaking back to the establishment. The improvisational call-and-response aspect of jazz reconfigures the progressive linear plot line of detective fiction in order to offer nodes that "stage time as time," nodes that "generally remain absent from linear and chronological perception so as to enable its ostensibly seamless functioning" (Weheliye 63). Indeed, the paratext of the novel is itself quite crafty and functions as an innovative jazz epistemology, or a way of thinking about the encoding and transmission of knowledge.

For example, reading Aunt Vivian through jazz epistemology assists Nanette in piecing together the various crafted embellishments of the truth her aunt gives her: “What I mean is, she laid out the cast of characters, and she provided a list of their actions—their betrayals, if you will. What I had to do was juggle the players—switch the names and faces and match them with the crimes committed” (*Coq au Vin* 184). But the accompaniment of contradiction inherent in both jazz and blues also enables Nan to understand her aunt without really understanding her. Jazz epistemology emphasizes being inclusive rather than exclusive, of incorporating dynamic binarisms to produce a richer account of the story. For example, bringing together the judgment-free aspects of blues with the polyrhythmic and dialectic aspects of jazz enables a more nuanced reconstruction of Nanette’s Aunt’s motivations and character. While Vivian’s actions may be perceived as rash, dangerous, even selfish, she is also an elusive character around whom family talk gathers. In some ways, she is a mystery woman even after the novel ends: Nanette cannot seem to reconcile her aunt’s actions and her own memories of her aunt. Aunt Vivian, caught up, intelligent, a public figure with many stories to tell, someone who is not sorry, cannot be sorry, does not see the point of being sorry.

In fact, Aunt Vivian can be read as a manifestation of that other elusive public figure in the music scene, Billie Holiday. Holiday, too, was pathologized for her upbringing, her behaviors and choices for male companionships, her style, in summary everything African American females have been, and continue to be, judged for aside from their contributions to and innovations of genre. In fact, Holiday’s stigma has overridden the focus on her craft, which is lamentable and not uncommon. For example,

in her biography homage to the singer, *In Search of Billie Holiday* (2001), Farah Jasmine Griffin asserts that:

The Holiday icon presents a danger to women like Mary J. Blige because it demands that black women who refuse the limited options society designated for them be tragic figures. At its most pernicious, this interpretation of Holiday's life insists upon her victim status. Holiday as strategic victim helps to contain and control black women who are multidimensional, talented and ambitious. (33)

However, the novel refuses to cast Aunt Vivian in a tragic light. Or, rather, the mysteries of Aunt Vivian's choices are allowed to rest with her instead of to encloak her in a overly simplistic tragic lens.

Like Billie Holiday's partial yet very public historiography, Aunt Vivian's partial historiography must be read in the context of her choices as an African American woman and illegal resident of Paris. As Griffin notes of Billie Holiday: "If we think of Holiday as a woman shown as victimized instead of as a woman who was a perpetual victim, our perspectives of her, her achievement, and ultimately of our own possibility, change profoundly" (Griffin 33). Specifically, "Billie Holiday emerged at a time when the dominant cultural stereotypes of black women were Mammy and the Tragic Mulatto. Black women rarely appear read in films in roles other than that of maid" (Griffin 28). If one were to read Aunt Vivian's historiography through a blues lens, a judgment-free perspective, and take up the polyrhythmic scope of jazz to consider Viv's life alongside, yet distinct from, Nanette's, then one would start to see the scales and striations that engender a similar commitment to living free and relatively unencumbered while also having the desire to love and be loved in return.

Indeed, such comparisons between Nanette's widely traveled Aunt Vivian and Nanette's subsequent disillusionment with Parisian life push for a reconsideration of Parisian cosmopolitanism that at one point perhaps looked promisingly democratic and liberal to Nan. One moment in the novel that seems to impact Nanette's considerations of her future in Paris involve the correcting of her demeanor by an elderly Parisian investigator. When Andre goes missing, Nanette calls Inspector Simard to fill him in on certain details of her case she previously left out. Inspector Simard is rightfully concerned for both her and Andre's safety and advises her to go to the Parisian Embassy to seek help. However, he provides additional advice:

It will not do to go to the embassy, and especially not to the Paris police, as a hysteric demanding action. Present yourself as a respectable young woman, one who has taken a misstep perhaps—but a woman, if you take my meaning. *Une femme française*. Cry discreetly, cross your legs demurely, show how distraught you are over the disappearance of the man you love. But do not become shrill in the face of their lassitude (138).

The inspector's call for proper conduct implies that Nanette has been, or may be, acting improper. This marker of (in)civility is both a racial and gender-informed microaggression and a commentary on French citizenship. As Lynn Itagaki theorizes, it is most often those who are privy to already owning the privileges and allowances accorded with the social contract who can misbehave and not be called out for being uncivil (Itagaki 50). In the post-race neoliberal era of polite discourse and ever-tightening freedom of speech, Nanette is essentially told that she can never be a citizen of Paris.

At the same time, because Nan was also already wary of the police state in the United States, she is effectively displaced from both nations, becoming a refugee-citizen.

Much like Blanche White in *Blanche on the Lam* and Ivon Villa in *The Juarez Murders*, Nanette now becomes critically aware of the dangers of accepting any place as one's home because this acceptance often comes with conditions of exploitation and abuse of self and/or others. toward the end of the novel, Nan's tough decision to choose between a heteronormative, patriotic love ending with Andre and the freedom to play her way illustrates the "conditions of im/possibility" that Alexander Weheliye uses to describe the desire for the location of black identity and culture within/through "the complicated rapport among sound, writing, orality, and technology in the twentieth century" (16). Nanette comes to Paris already fed up with racial politics embedded in American society: "You could view our disenfranchisement as a kind of massive swindle—all that blood, sorrow, loyalty, hope, and patience deposited over the centuries, and the checks keep bouncing" (47). However, her experiences in Paris leave her with no home to strictly speak of, aside from the home she refuses to romanticize with Andre. Instead, she aligns herself surprisingly with Little Rube Haskins and Morris Melon as falling into the class of "All us permanent strangers" (200). While "The alienated detective, while politically aware of class, seldom acts in concert with any group in attempting to challenge political corruption" (Soitos 54), Nanette may be said to be acting in concert with the exiles, albeit in continued alienation.

On the one hand, Nanette's refusal of Andre's proposal to stay together makes her appear superficial: is it just about the fact that Andre has no financial stability, as Nanette's friend Aubrey emphasizes? Or, can Nanette's refusal be interpreted as a simultaneous refusal of the commander's script, that willed her to becoming a Parisian

lady, with all of its racial, sexual, and national subtext? In fact, it appears that Nanette becomes a “self-declared willful subject” in her refusal to take part in the heteronormative happiness script presented to her by Andre and the confines of Parisian society. If, as Sara Ahmed posits, willfulness is often criminalized but can also function as “an *orientation toward crime* (to expose willfully the injustice of the law” (Ahmed 135, emphasis in original), then Nanette’s refusal is as strategic as it is self-preservational: in her willful refusal of heteronormative complacency, she retains her creativity, her ability to decide when, where, and for whom “to play.” In her refusal, Nanette Hayes joins Sara Ahmed’s unofficial archive of willful subjects *and* feminist killjoys.

Nan’s activation of her improvisational voice by playing in the streets and asserting her independence aligns her with Billie Holiday’s ability to work within the constraints of a set time (signature). Overall, *Coq au Vin*’s invoking of jazz as an epistemology, a way of understanding the inception and transmission of knowledge and resources across time, space, and narrative stages a polyrhythmic historiography that brings together the disjointed historiographies of early twentieth-century Paris and 1990’s Paris. While both contexts derive from the noted source of African American blues, the differences are clear. In this way, the novel invokes a “craft” politics that upholds the distinction between kitsch and folk art while also recognizing that folk art, like “great art,” requires intimate and extensive knowledge of the technique, referentiality, and possibilities for innovation within the form. At the same time, the play list requires at least minor knowledge of jazz in order for a reader to recognize the references. This

implicit call for further study and historical recovery emphasizes the idea that art is portable and can avoid certain entrapments of commodification only when the art object is contextualized and allowed to make its referentiality to other temporalities and voices known.

Carolina Garcia-Aguilera's *Havana Heat: A Lupe Solano Mystery* shares *Coq au Vin*'s focus on negotiating the commodification of aesthetic productions as well as the general theme of expatriate nostalgia. Moreover, the artworks traced through the *Havana Heat* reflect similar tensions to *Coq au Vin* with respect to the gradual inclusion of artists of color into Anglo-European circuits. Like *Coq au Vin*'s jazz references, *Havana Heat*'s citation of certain key Cuban artists produces a counter-archive that in turn questions some of the normative conventions of Anglo-European aesthetic periodization. However, the central protagonist in *Havana Heat*, Lupe Solano, is less skilled and less invested in learning about the artists she encounters in carrying out her responsibilities as a private investigator. As a result, interesting correlations and divergences with respect to the virtues and dangers of art market speculation and aesthetic commodification emerge in the comparison of these two novels.

Havana Heat's central plot revolves around the black market enterprise of forging, selling, and smuggling Cuban art across the Cuban-U.S. borders. The novel opens with an elaborate Cuban wedding uniting two wealthy families and catering to one thousand attendees, inclusive of Lupe and her date, Alvaro, a politically left-leaning criminal defense attorney. Although the wedding comprises a matrix of former and

current clients of Lupe's P.I. services, Lupe stands apart from some of the conservative ethos implicit in this marriage and material-social strengthening of two of the most powerful families in Miami Cuban society. Specifically, while Lupe has expensive taste and expansive knowledge of designer attire, she mentions her ill-fitting dress no less than six times in the first fifteen pages of the novel: the dress is restrictive to her circulation and symbolizes Lupe's distancing from the heteronormative coupling conventions of the society within which she lives and works, especially in her refusal to settle down, marry, and have children. Instead, she is an active participant in the criminal-justice world and recently worked several art repatriation cases, giving her a favorable reputation within the Miami gossip network as an expert in Cuban art repatriation. During the wedding, Lucinda Miranda, of the wealthy and renown Miranda Family, pesters Lupe for a private meeting at her office to discuss a sensitive and important case. Lupe comes to find out that the case involves recuperating a tapestry that completes *The Hunt of the Unicorn Tapestries* series belonging to the family that is currently hidden in an underground vault in Havana, Cuba. Lupe is to recover the tapestry and deliver it to its rightful owners.

Lupe reluctantly agrees to the case because of its large financial payoff and because it comes to intersect with two other cases that come Lupe's way nearly simultaneously: first, Lupe agrees to work a case for her former lover and criminal attorney Tommy on a missing art dealer's case that went cold at the hands of a lesser qualified P.I. named Osterman. The missing person's name is Rafael Santamaria. Another of Lupe's cases tasks her with finding out who strangled to death her "sleazy" yet useful art dealer Angel Estrada. Estrada just recently attempted to convince her to go

into the forgery business with his sister, Camila, who works in the Cuban embassy and plans to steal real artworks and replace them with fakes in the embassy (thereby sticking it to the Cuban government). In sum, Lupe is working on the cases of one murdered art dealer, one missing art dealer, and one displaced priceless work of art. All of the cases have to do with art theft or forgery and in turn reveal certain realities about the U.S.-Cuban art black market during the course of Lupe's concurrent investigations.

Toward the end of the novel, the three cases come together: Lupe is surprised and held at gunpoint by the missing art dealer once she arrives to Cuba and recovers the lost tapestry with Camila, whom she agrees to help smuggle the artworks in exchange for her assistance with the tapestry. Lupe subsequently kills Santamaria in self-defense and, when Camila refuses to escape Cuba with her, knocks Camila out with a single punch of her fist. Lupe smuggles Camila, along with the artworks, to the U.S. She then proceeds to use Camila as bait to lure and reveal the mystery muscle that is at the nexus of the illicit deal, who turns out to be Osterman. At the close of the novel, Lupe worries for Camila's illegal status but is confident that her lawyer friends will help her. She also sets a date to get back together with her estranged beau, Alvaro.

Lupe Solano is perhaps the least "accidental" of the detectives featured in this study: she is a licensed Private Investigator with an affinity for guns and designer labels. While she has her own business, she lives in her father's house within a wealthy gated community in the Cuban sub-division of Miami. Moreover, Lupe has friendly connections in both the Miami police department and the criminal justice system: her current boyfriend is a left-leaning criminal justice lawyer, and her previous boyfriend,

with whom she continues to work cases, is a successful immigration attorney. She also has a steady stream of clients who would prefer to keep their affairs as private as possible from the Cuban gossip stream between Miami and Havana. While Lupe's decision not to marry or have children and to have relationships with several men at the same time is perceived as radical with respect to her Catholic family and community mores, there are certain aspects to her perspective that make it hard to align her with characters like *Blanche on the Lam's* Blanche Neely or even *Black Widow's Wardrobe's* Gloria Damasco (who is also a licensed P.I. but works from a definitively social-justice oriented perspective). On the other hand, Lupe's independent P.I. status and abundant access to resources affords her the ability to negotiate traditionally masculinist and highly policed social and legal spaces and thus enables the text to illustrate the difficulties the Cuban elite face with respect to their home and host-turned-home countries. Furthermore, her reliance for information on her friend Suzanne, who works as a madam and caters to wealthy clientele resembling, in Lupe's words, the "human resources of a Fortune 500 company" (226) illustrates Lupe's navigation of backchannel and unofficial sources. In short, while Lupe herself is the most traditionally "hardboiled" of the detectives featured in this project even as she does not share the hardboiled detective's working-class background, her status as a liminal subject caught between two national and cultural worlds as well as her propensity to bend the rules even within Cuban waters makes her willful subject in that she does not ascribe to Cuban revolutionary doctrine.

At the same time, this willfulness against Cuban sovereignty problematically aligns Lupe with U.S. neoliberal and global capitalist ideologies that in turn render

invisible the historical and pervasive political and corporate investments the U.S. has held in Cuba throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Lupe's perspective falls in line with the perspective of a group Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez call "the Cuban-American establishment," or "a group of Cuban exiles located primarily in Miami that often makes public claims on Cuban-American identity and regards itself as the arbiter of Cuban-American culture" (Dalleo and Sáez 186). While within Miami "diverse ethnic and racial groups (European, African, Asian, Jewish) blend to form a fluid identity traceable to Cuban cultural and social patterns" (Borland and Bosch 1), Dalleo and Sáez point out that because of the white, educated, middle-class composite of the largest group of Cuban exiles in Miami, this group has been "traditionally the most insular and politically conservative Latino-Caribbean group" (Dalleo and Sáez 15).

In fact, Cuban Americans are often not brought into the categorical term "Latino/a" predominantly because of the specification of the "Cuban establishment's" lack of identification with the social justice imperatives of the general Latin@ community. With that said, it is not as though social activist, liberal, or anti-establishment Cuban-American literary texts do not exist. However, as Isabel Alvarez Borland and Lynette M. F. Bosch, editors of the volume *Cuban-American Literature and Art* (2009) remark, "Cuban-American male writers have concentrated mainly on issues of self-understanding rather than political activism whereas the fictions and personal writings of Cuban-American women such as Cristina García and Achy Obejas, for example, consistently include issues related to minority politics, gender issues, and women's rights" (5). While there is a gendered element implicit in this claim, this claim does not extend to

Havana Heat: Garcia-Aguilera's novel, even as it is written by a Cuban American female author and centers on a Cuban American female protagonist, appears to be in allegiance with "the establishment" in the sense that there is little sympathy, and much derision, regarding Cuba's revolutionary politics and ideological investment in a classless society.

Still, the socioeconomic and gender politics depicted in the novel show that there is a strong ideological resemblance to Cuban patriarchal society, some aspects of which are reaffirmed by American heteropatriarchal norms. Lupe's position as the daughter of a wealthy contractor and as a female P.I. also help illustrate the interworkings of patriarchy, a seemingly social condition, and capitalism, a seemingly structural-economic condition. One might assume that the Cuban exile community, having moved into a U.S. capitalist economy, would start to resemble the nuclear family's socioeconomic structures and abandon some of the social and economic aspects of Cuban culture, and this is indeed the case in many ways. However, the socioeconomic and ideological fabric of the Cuban exile community as illustrated in the novel also provides a unique opportunity to explore how the interrelationship between production and reproduction under the system of capitalism alters the shape of the domestic-public divide but nevertheless replicates certain problematic assumptions about human value as/and labor. As Marxist feminist scholar Lindsey German puts it: "Capitalist production gives rise to the capitalist form of family" (152). In fact, German points out that the very concept of domestication relies on the emergence of wage labor (155). With respect to *Havana Heat*, the strong patriarchal-Catholic structures embedded in traditional Cuban society when

placed under capitalism actually strengthen the patriarchy instead of relieving it because women can now occupy the workforce.

What does the happy capitalist family look like? Lindsey might answer: replace biological reproduction with economic exploitation. Consider, for example, Lupe's relative freedom not to procreate at the same time as she benefits from living with her extensive family. Lupe's "odd family" is constituted of her father, her two sisters, her sister's twin daughters, and an elderly couple that functions doubly as the family's servants and step-in grandparent figures for Lupe (Lupe's mother passed away). The family's daily ties to Cuba are menially supplied by Aida and Osvaldo's continuous use of Spanish, Aida's authentic Cuban cooking, and Osvaldo's killer mojitos. Furthermore, when Lupe needs to steal her father's boat without him knowing, she baits Osvaldo into believing that she wants to have an elicit night out with a family friend, and his position as her grandfather figure is consolidated by the fact that he apparently has less room to say no than her father.

Glimpses of capitalist exploitation are also seen in the underpaid, yet invisible, female labor that can now be reproduced in the public domain. This labor is produced not only by Aida, but also through "mulatta" friend Barbara's reproductive choices and, later in the text, Camila, whose new status as illegal immigrant with no wage or legal power positions her in an inferior position to Lupe, giving Lupe the freedom to use her as physical bait to capture Osterman and his cronies. If, as Sara Ahmed determines, "One way of thinking of sovereign will *is the right to determine whose wills are the willful wills*" (136), then Lupe's decision for Camila that also involves physical abduction of

Camila positions Lupe as the sovereign, however temporarily, over Camila, disrupting the potential for a Cuban-American feminist collusion, given that Lupe is the financial and physical superior to/of Camila.

With respect to her own alignment or non-alignment with heteronormative social scripts, while Lupe is never explicitly told that she is acting out of bounds, she constantly makes references to her behavior and sexual relations that indicate her necessity to find a balance between following gender normative scripts and asserting her will in a male-dominated work force. And yet, Lupe's alignment with some of the more "tough" aspects of the traditional hardboiled persona actually reveal some truths about U.S. exceptionalism. According, to Guillermina de Ferrari in her article "Embargoed Masculinities: Loyalty, Friendship, and the Role of the Intellectual in the Post-Soviet Cuban Novel," the core values ingrained in socialist governmental rhetoric are "loyalty, honor and courage" (84). In the U.S. hardboiled genre, however, these values are not so much inverted from the revolutionary idealism as they are realigned to service the needs of the individual: loyalty to those who are beneficial to the individual, honor to those that serve the individual, and courage that marks the individual as exceptional to others, rather than standing in solidarity (in shared courage) with others. Lupe's connections reflect this conditional reciprocity. While her skills are evident (she is a better detective than most P.I.'s in the area), her continued success stems largely from her material resources and breadth of insider contacts within both the criminal justice system and underground criminal circuit. Her contacts help her out in exchange for information, and her inside

sources continue to work with her because they recognize the value of having a “cop and lawyer friendly” P.I. on their side.

Lupe is loyal to the shared ethos of the freedom of choice and attainment of capital without restriction even as she is attuned to the ways in which social judgment serves as a straightening device. In fact, she takes turns both marking others’ behavior as uncivil or impolite but at other times acting the same way as those “uncivil” people herself. However, as Lynn Itagaki point out in her forthcoming book, *Racial Burnout*, while incivility “is routinely defined as social behaviors that are rude, discourteous, impolite, insulting, lacking manners, or unfriendly” (Itagaki 52), these behaviors are also rewarded and revered with respect to privileged social and legal actors. With respect to detective fiction, the detective persona is also pretty rude, but when it comes to protagonists like Blanche White and Ivon Villa, their “rudeness” is in fact counter-institutional critique read/marked/disciplined as uncivil by those around them. In contrast, Lupe’s uncivil approach illuminates how “civility helps naturalize and legitimate legal and governmental jurisdictions and functions” (51) wherein the rhetoric of appropriate codes of conduct and discourse function “as a tacit social contract between those in the same community” at the exclusion and stigmatization of everyone exterior to this privileged social contract.

On the other hand, transnational Marxist feminist criticism also points out the difficulty of discerning whether immediate calls for parity do in fact stand at odds with the vision of overturning unjust structures. While, as German notes, “Role reversals do not begin to challenge the privatized family and its role in the reproduction of labor

power” (158), there may be something liberating to Lupe’s refusal to settle down and her insistence on working as an independent detective. Furthermore, in her discussion of the heterogeneity of “Latin American feminism,” Norma Chinchilla points out the difficulties of thinking activism as feminism in Latin American countries in the twentieth century, wherein feminism as a political identification and active social agenda is often identified as a middle-class and Americanized perspective. As Chinchilla states: “Reinforcing traditional religious and left thinking, the Latin American mass media stigmatized feminism as a ‘radical and crazy’ movement of relatively privileged, but unhappy, women from economically developed countries.” Chinchilla also notes that “Latin American women who had attempted to organize feminist groups after having lived or traveled abroad tended to be viewed as having lost their cultural and national perspective” (217). This raises the question, then, of how much freedom Lupe has to critique the establishment while also retaining her role within it—for example, even her left-leaning romantic partner, Alvaro, is considered a questionable suitor for her and remains a political specter in the text. The only reason why their relationship is not an all-out scandal is because Lupe’s and Alvaro’s families go back a long time: the patriarchal assemblage is strong enough to withstand Alvaro’s “erratic” political proclivities.

In response, I want to avoid the easy essentialization and othering implicit in this comparative contextualization of Cuban feminist politics as compared to feminist and gender discourses in the United States. While I cannot argue that Lupe’s approaches to gender parity reconcile the problematics of her conservative and abusive orientations toward other women of color workers and indeed the heteropatriarchal capitalist schema

itself, transnational scholars of women's liberation movements stress the fact that for many women, to identify publically as a feminist is either a dangerous or seemingly irrelevant act. There is something to be said, after all, for the fact that within Latin American Marxist theory, Democracy and feminism were not "topics of serious discussion in the search for an indigenous Latin American Marxism until the 1980s" and were replaced instead by direct revolutionary action as the target goal in countries like Cuba (Chincilla 219).⁴⁵ It is not, however, the case that acts of social justice in Latin America are not feminist in scope – it's just that feminism looks and sounds a certain way—a middle-class, white, American way, something to register when thinking about the tensions arising from applying the term "feminism" to transnational and global contexts rather than employing a term like "women's liberationism" ("Lindsey German Responds").

For all its perspectival limitations, *Havana Heat* illustrates the fact that the socioeconomic disciplining aspects of Cuban Miami elite society are hardest on poor women of color, queer people, and dissenting political voices. For example, while Lupe's long-time friend Barbara is seemingly lauded in the text for her toughness, preparedness, and loyalty, there are certain essentializations made through Lupe's descriptions of Barbara that underscore the racial tensions and fissures within the Cuban-American establishment, particularly the ambivalent relationship between Spanish descendent and

⁴⁵ During the 1960s, "Reformist democratic governments were seen as incapable of breaking the cycle of economic stagnation; economic development was seen as the key missing element for Latin America, with little attention paid to political institution. No form of development was seen as possible unless it challenge the dominance of (capitalist) imperialism; socialism or fascism were seen as the only alternatives, and the only road to socialism was a revolution (like that of Cuba)" (219).

lighter-skinned Cubans on the one hand, and Afrocubans on the other. Lupe mentions at one point that she cannot recall whether Barbara has roughly around twelve children. Moreover, Barbara later reveals that her children are being taken away from her by social services and placed with her sister, who has a husband, a house, and a big backyard. Lupe also suggests that Barbara was at one point involved in a baby selling scheme. Describing Barbara as a “mulatta” (120), Lupe also continuously refers to her large frame, graceless style (for example, not wearing underwear or a bra in public), and dangerous drinking habit. Moreover, Barbara, by choice and by plot, is literally relegated to occupy the liminal, international space in the seas between Cuba and the U.S.

Barbara’s seemingly magical ability to reproduce so many children compounded by her apparent inability to care for them naturalizes her function within Cuban society as a perpetual reproducer for society’s future workforce so that ostensibly Lupe does not have to herself while never being invited into the social fold. While this may be a harsh reading of Barbara, the associations of mixed-race and Afrocuban women with procreation is a common theme in Latin American aesthetics. As scholar of Latin American art Claire F. Fox notes: “In the dominant theories of race developed in Mexico and Brazil, race mixing operated exclusively through the bodies of women of color” (Fox 77). Moreover, in Fox’s discussion of the distinctions between Mexico’s celebratory *mestizaje* and Cuban’s more strict racial dichotomy, Cuban dominant society falls more in line with America’s historical anxiety about interracial reproduction than with Mexico’s late nineteenth century countering of the rape of indigenous peoples with the new celebrated mythos of racial mixing in Vasconcelos’ theory of biological *mestizaje*.

While Lupe's gender, racial, and class orientations lead her to be seemingly disinclined to engage in social justice activism, her negotiation of the black market between the U.S. and Cuba reveal some important and disturbing truths that in turn imply a critique of an entirely unregulated global market system. The black market trading and forgery of Cuban artworks that is at the center of the plot illustrates the ways in which American capital and Cuban revolutionary corruption are deeply intertwined to the benefit of those who can afford to trade and protect themselves from legal and deadly repercussions. For example, the fictional "hunted" remaining tapestry set to complete the *Hunt of the Unicorn* series functions in the novel much like priceless artifacts in traditional mystery fiction, wherein the object serves as the catalyst for the plot. However, unlike traditional mystery fiction, the hunted tapestry also signifies a social order devoid of due respect for the priceless artifact, falling more in line with the hardboiled tradition, namely Raymond Chandler's *The Maltese Falcon* (1929). As in the case of the hunt for the Maltese falcon, the hunt for the secret eighth tapestry is significant for the financial rewards the capture means for the owner, Lucia Miranda, who makes it clear at the end of the novel that she was in it for the money. While Lupe mentions at several points in the novel that she is committed to repatriating artworks to their rightful owners, this desire is not the principal focus in her job; instead, it serves as a justification for Lupe to commit the crime of stealing *into* Cuba and stealing artwork *out* of Cuba.

The significance of this particular tapestry also lies in its fragmented, yet extensive historiography, which in turn functions as a symbolic connector within and

across Cuba and Cuban exile communities. Woven in the Southern Netherlands between 1495 and 1505, the actual *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries “are among the most celebrated and cherished works of art from western Europe, and their conservation is therefore of considerable importance” (Colburn 97). The tapestries were given to MoMA by John D. Rockefeller Jr. in 1938 and have hung in The Cloisters since. The preserved panels are in fact already in distortion: six panels depict a narrative series and each tapestry has its own name. The seventh, number six in the series, was recovered in three fragments and titled the *Mystic Capture of the Unicorn*. The narrative and symbolic elements combine pagan and Christian themes. They were preserved primarily because they were not valued as art pieces at one point. Ironically, they acquired value precisely because of their tenuous status as being nearly destroyed but also permeable with everyday possessions. The series’ physical and narrative shapes have undergone damage, rendering the tapestry and its historiography as irrevocably fragmented.

A 1942 *MoMA Bulletin* article written by James J. Rorimer speculates with good evidence that the tapestries were made in honor of Queen Anne of Brittany. Aside from the central woven inclusion of the Queen’s initials within the tapestries, during The Middle Ages, as in the Renaissance, the unicorn symbolized marriage and virginity (Rorimer 10). This gift is speculated to have been produced so as to both honor and “chasten” Anne’s quick marriage to Louis XII, who had secured a marriage annulment from Pope Alexander VI in order to marry Anne, a wedding that took place less than a year after the death of Anne’s first husband (12). A more feminist tribute to the queen lies in the maiden’s capture of the unicorn (The maiden is meant to resemble Anne) (9). At

the same time, Helmut Nickel acknowledges in an 1982 *MoMA Bulletin* article that “Much has been written about the identity of the Lady and that of the original owner of the tapestries, sometimes with widely divergent results” (Nickel 13).

Furthermore, the sequence of the works and even whether a single artist produced them also remain contentious topics (9). What critics can agree on is that the source of the magic inherent in the unicorn’s form was the unicorn’s horn “had the power to neutralize poison. In its natural habitat the gentle unicorn was said to purify water by dipping its horn into streams and springs that had been polluted by the venom of snakes, whose prior visits had made the water undrinkable for other animals” (9). When the galleries at The Cloisters were renovated in 1998, the tapestries were taken down, further studied, and restored. The proximity of this date to the publication of *Havana Heat* invites connecting the fragmented historiography and partial physical recovery of the tapestry to the detective fiction plot. However, the tapestry is the only named artwork mentioned in Garcia-Aguilera’s novel (every other artwork, ten in total, are only referred to by the name of the artist). Moreover, the novel provides a different historiographical account for the tapestry than the one produced for this chapter from evidence culled from the cited, and seemingly credible, sources. Given that the publicly-accessible aforementioned scholarship serves as the definitive account, it is important to ask why the novel, or rather Lupe’s wealthy client, Lucia Miranda, rewrites the tapestry’s story.

The narrative that Lucia gives Lupe to explain her family’s secret possession of the eighth tapestry acknowledges the standard account of the first seven tapestries as a gift to Queen Anne of Brittany to commemorate her wedding. However, the rest of the

tale is quite fantastic and highly symbolic. Lucia spins a transnational, pre-colonial narrative that positions Italian explorer Christopher Columbus not as bearer of colonialist and imperialist brutality but as a beacon of new world and hemispheric development. The explanation for the creation and preservation of the tapestry is rewritten in the text to function as a sort of romance and indebted relationship between Queen Isabella (of Spain) and Columbus, a curious rewriting given the violent and exploitive pervasive consequences of the arrival of Columbus in 1492 in South America.

Lupe's client informs her that the eighth tapestry was a gift to the aunt's ancestor Rogelio Miranda from Cristobal Colon. Colon received the tapestry from Queen Isabella as a token of her romantic desire for Colon. Colon and Queen Isabella shared a "chaste love" (*Havana Heat* 34). Cristobal Colon feared putting the tapestry into the wrong hands and gave it to Rogelio Miranda for safekeeping, who was serving Columbus as a "lowly ship's mate" (35) at the time. During the French Revolution in 17th Century France, the first seven tapestries were used by peasants to "warm potatoes." The eighth tapestry was kept secret by the Miranda family and later authenticated by Alfred O. Manfredi, who was working for MoMA during the acquisition of the other seven tapestries. The tapestry still lay under "the patriarch's house" in an "underground gallery" (37) at the time of Licia's employment of Lupe's services. Several points of this narrative merge with the historical record, aside from its national and date of origin. First, Garcia-Aguilera's novel and Colburn's description of the uses of the tapestry indicate that previous owners of tapestries did use them as rugs, or even rags: the former owner of the Unicorn fragments, Comte Gabriel de La Rochefoucauld used the fragments "to plug drafty services in the

walls” (Nickel 97). This indicates that what is considered priceless art worth millions, perhaps even billions of dollars on the market was once priceless in the opposite way.

The French Revolution both foreshadows and mirrors the Cuban Revolution’s seizing of private property. The relative “worthlessness” of the tapestries kept them out of the hands of the French revolutionaries who sought to recoup and destroy private property of the bourgeoisie. In fact, after the French Revolution, the workshops of the county of the Marche lost their status of State Manufactures. Upholstery and machine-made carpets replaced wall tapestry, which was no longer appreciated. Over the course of time, the diminished material use value of the rugs turned them into artifacts, and then priceless art. In this light, the lost “Unicorn” serves as a metaphor for the Cuban exile community members who had at one point owned the works of art that have now become “priceless” and coveted because of the repossession and estrangement of the treasured pieces from their owners. And, fittingly, the lost unicorn resembles the nostalgia Cuban exiles feel for a country they view at once as theirs and not theirs. However, the framing narrative regarding the pure romantic love between Isabella and Colon is both incredulous and seemingly unnecessary. It appears to be meant as reflective of a romantic cosmopolitanism, the quest for great art and fulfillment of appetites for the exotic with new world treasures.

However, the ending to the tapestry’s historiography in the novel troubles the celebration of the privatized familial collection and (thinly) the reviling of governmental intervention. When Lupe discovers the murdered body of Manfredi plastered into the wall in the same underground gallery as the tapestry, her initial assumption is that the

Cuban government killed him. However, she realizes that this is nonsensical and it must have been one of the Miranda family members who killed Manfredi to keep his forged certificate of authentication a secret. because the Miranda family's wealth and political power staved off any official governance of their business and collecting practices, which in turn allowed them to commit this and potentially other crimes. At the same time, the extensive, romanticized, and even invented historiography of the tapestries as provided by the text in comparison to the occlusion of art titles of any of the other art pieces mentioned in the novel romanticize Christopher Columbus's ventures into the new world as a form of cultural cosmopolitanism while occluding the pervasive impact of New World imperialism and colonialism. Lupe implicitly bolsters this vision by deciding upon her realization that the Mirandas were not the rightful owners of the tapestry that the art piece does not belong with the set in The Cloisters but with the Spanish ambassador to Cuba.

The mystic historiography rendered by the rewriting of *The Hunt of the Unicorn Tapestries* is further rendered exceptional by the fact that none of the other artworks mentioned in the novel even get cited for their titles. Unlike Charlotte Carter's *Coq au Vin*, whose practicing musician protagonist is extremely knowledgeable about major jazz artists and their dynamic oeuvres, Lupe Solano cannot specify any of the artworks she comes across during the course of the novel beyond the commodified identification of their artists, measured in numbers (i.e., two Emilio Sanchez's). Aside from the Unicorn Tapestries, the Aubusson tapestries, and the Emilio Sanchez Cuban flag print, every art work mentioned in the novel remains nameless, in effect preventing a representative

curatorial project that can be read through and with the novel. The constitutive Cuban archive is constructed by way of Camila's forgeries and replacements of eight real artworks that hangs in Cuba's Museo Nacional. Unlike Nanette Hayes, who moves around the different Parisian jazz sites as a jazz practitioner-tourist, Lupe Solano cannot tell the period or oeuvre of each piece—she can only detect, to a modest degree, who painted them, a demonstration of analytic and aesthetic skill nonetheless: “I was no expert, but I recognized what I saw. Two Rene Portocarreros. Two Mario Carreños. One Wilfredo Lam. One Amelia Pelaez. One Emilio Sanchez. One Antonia Eiriz” (273, no Spanish accentuations in the original).

It appears the reader is meant to keep in mind the extraordinary capital value of each of these works, extraordinary and nearly priceless in the sense that any amount of money they would bring the dealer or the Cuban government would be exorbitantly higher than any living wage Cubans can make legally in Cuba. In the absence of specificity, the artists can only be compared by the taxonomies assigned to them by state and private art institutions and curators for their personal websites/stores. The lack of specificity with respect to the works of art mentioned and managed in the text aligns their treatment with the lack of specificity yet economically valued attention to designer labels worn and recognized by Lupe, which are also frequently copied and sold on the “grey market.” Furthermore, stacking of these artists according to the number of their productions de-values the uniqueness of each piece in contradiction to the typical ways artwork is typically assessed and valued.

In fact, the effacement of aesthetic uniqueness in favor of a commodity-oriented description aligns with the development and expansion of the Cuban-American art market over the course of the twentieth century, supported and interrelated with U.S. Cold War policy and economic investments. Lynette M.F. Bosch describes four waves of Cuban art beginning with the 1898 War of Independence, the first of which is generally known as the Vanguardia Generation (1920s-1930s). This generation negotiated Cuban identity “by introducing European modernism linked to a social agenda[...] and its championing of a vernacular people’s art” (130). The Vanguardia turned their “backs on the academic traditions of their teachers at the Academia de San Alejandro, in Havana” (130). Ironically, “This veneration of the Vanguardia and the desire for their work on the part of exiled Cubans represents a fantastic paradox as they seek to buy (for increasing prices) the work of artists who consciously align themselves with the political and social forces that eventually led to the Cuban Revolution that rendered them exiles” (133). The next generation of artists who came of age in the 1940s-1950s was not so much interested in searching for “lo cubano” identity and has been defined primarily by their shared expatriation from Cuba in large numbers between the 1960s and 1970s. Part of the expatriate group that settled in Miami “eventually became known as La Vieja Guardia.” Instead of Cuba-New York as a transnational hub, it became Miami-New York, although a group style “was never developed” by the group of artists generationally referred to as La Vieja Guardia. After the 1959 revolution, however, the status the La Vieja Guardia artists changed to “permanent exiles,” something that influenced the context of their work (135).

In consideration of the historical, economic, and cultural contexts within with Cuban exile and Cuban-American artists have had to operate, it is surprising to learn that the third group loosely identified as sharing a Cuban aesthetic style has been designated as an artistic generation for their shared time period of the artists than any shared aesthetic. This group was the first generation of Cuban children and adolescents, sometimes referred to as the “Pedro Pan” or “Peter Pan” children,⁴⁶ who “became the first hyphenated generation of exiled Cuban-American artists” (136). Within this group of artists, a shared style was “impossible to discern. Yet, all shared the division of their creative roots into their Cuban and American sides, their memories of Cuba, their experience of exile, their process of assimilation to the United States, and their acceptance or rejection of American culture” (137). The current generation of artists “have begun a slow process of temporary return to the homeland from which they have been banned for so many years” (141), a nostalgic yet reachable point of rediscovery that resonates with *Havana Heat*. At the same time, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990s brought in another wave of immigrants from Cuba who, unlike La Vieja Guardia, found a “highly developed cosmopolitan city with a diverse Latin American culture” within which to develop and sell their work (143).

⁴⁶ The term originated with Operation Pedro Pan Group, Inc., An early 1960s program in which more than fourteen thousand Cuban children were sent unattended to Miami to escape Castro’s regime. The program was created by the Catholic Welfare Bureau of Miami in December 1960, authorized by the U.S. Department of State to waive visa requirements for children of Cuban parents concerned that their children were going to be indoctrinated into Communism. The program “was the largest recorded exodus of unaccompanied minors in the Western Hemisphere” (“The Cuban Children’s Exodus”). Close to 60% of the children were reunited with family members.

Of the three aesthetic groups, La Vieja Guardia played the most significant role in developing an art market for Cuban art during the late 1970s. However, the idea of Miami as a “Pan-American metropolis” in fact goes back to the early twentieth century as part of the U.S. government’s cultural containment program that sought Pan-Americanism as a brace against Soviet ideology. For example, in her article “Tourism and the Hispanicization of Race in Jim Crow Miami, 1945-1965,” Chanelle N. Rose points out that Miami was advertised in the 1920s-1940s as an ideal vacation spot to both domestic and wealthy Latin American visitors, a fact bolstered by the development of expansive air travel accommodation: “Since the early 1920s, the city had gained national attention for its early development as a major airplane hub of the eastern division of Pan American Airways” (Rose 739). Furthermore, the Cuban Revolution ushered in an unprecedented support on behalf of the city’s white business owners to grow and develop the Miami economy by catering to Latin American tourists and the educated, often wealthy exiles who were sponsored by the U.S. to flee Castro’s regime. As a result, “the convergence of people from the American South and North, the Caribbean, and Latin America created a border culture in a city that never comfortably fit within the paradigm of the Deep South experience as it is broadly understood” (Rose 736).

As a result, the city’s attitudes and official policies with respect to non-white subjects complicated the black-white racial dichotomy that was key to the establishment and perpetuation in various manifestations of the American slave economy. In effect, Miami transnationalized racial taxonomies within the national borders of the U.S. The Latin American tourist economy, alleviated certain restrictions toward non-white and

Spanish-speaking subjects as a result of “The purchasing power of Spanish-speaking visitors during the postwar era” who “transformed a tourist economy that had traditionally catered to primarily wealthy white transplanted Northerners” (Rose, abstract). However, this seemingly more inclusive economy also negatively impacted the socioeconomic and political conditions for subjects outside of the Cuban tourist and elite class. Specifically, the continued “tripartite” configurations of exclusion of U.S.-born and Anglo-Caribbean blacks “reaffirmed the second-class citizenship of African Americans as expatriates began receiving federal and local government aid while impoverished native-born blacks continued to confront economic injustice” (Rose 748). The central preoccupation of Miami’s “modernizing elites” to secure “the Magic City’s tourist paradise and multicultural image,” in effect upheld an economic cosmopolitanism that invites and supports a very specific (wealthy and educated) passport-citizen.

The Cuban exile community’s thriving yet corrupt art market provides yet another opportunity for unpacking how social value is disciplined by capitalism and corporatism and serves in effect to stifle creative freedom. First, a quick reminder that the U.S. held power and dominion over Cuba in the first half of the twentieth century, starting in the Spanish-U.S.-Cuban war of 1898 wherein Spain ceded Cuba to U.S. and the U.S. took over Cuba, despite of Cuba itself being in the middle of a revolution inspired by José Martí.⁴⁷ Subsequently, during the twentieth and twenty-first century, the U.S. took

⁴⁷ The institution of the Platt Agreement and U.S. control over imports in Cuba, as in other Latin American countries (not to mention the Philippines and Hawaii) was temporarily ameliorated during Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy in 1933. Then, during the 1940s when other Latin American countries began to be influenced by the Soviet Union’s expansion, the U.S. implemented the Inter-Asian Treaty of Reciprocal

measures to discipline the Cuban economy when revolutionary actors took command or to support anti-revolutionary dictators. Most notably, the 1962 U.S. embargo against Cuba punished countries that dealt with Cuba and led Castro to implement economic policies that contradicted the utopian ideals of communist society. While many people assume that the Soviet Union's collapse was the largest precipitating factor in Cuba's subsequent depressed economy, the passage of the Helms-Burton Law by the U.S. allowed the United States to punish companies who do business with Cuba, regardless of their national identities, which also had a drastic impact on the Cuban economy (Haddad 8). The decision on behalf of the Fourth Congress of the Cuban Communist Party in October 1991 to legalize foreign investment in Cuba through joint ventures and to legalize U.S. dollar holdings and transactions by Cuban citizens while continuing to pay its government employees in pesos meant that while the economy continued to spiral, the "dollarization of the Cuban economy" meant that people could only get what they need, such as medical and food supplies, if they "developed autonomous, independent strategies" (11) within the informal and black market economy under the radar of the Cuban government: "extra pesos or dollars cannot be earned in state-owned enterprises" (9-11).

The art market is no exception and perhaps illustrates most aptly how capital drives valuation of material objects that have been rendered ostensibly "priceless." Nowhere is this more evident than in the United States' Cold War containment strategy to

Assistance, otherwise known as the "hemispheric defense" treaty. "Containment" a translation of the French *cordon sanitaire*, used to describe Western policy toward the Soviet Union in the 1920s.

use Latin American art to create Latin American peoples into “cultural citizens.”

According to Claire Fox’s insightful reading of this strategy, government and wealthy benefactor-sponsored state programs like the Pan American union’s Visual Arts Section and Nelson Rockefeller’s Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA) initiated “buy and spy” trips to various Latin American and South American countries in order to promote hemispheric diplomacy and “to counter the spread of fascism in Latin America through the promotion of hemispheric commercial and cultural relationship” (Fox 43). While the OIAA’s “use of cultural diplomacy for explicit military and economic ends stood in marked contrast to the State Department’s disinterested’ approach to cultural diplomacy” (53), the diligent and decades-long work by Concha Romero James, José Gómez-Sicre, and Rafael Squirru on behalf of PAU not only “stroved to harmonize regional cultural distinction with universal aesthetic values through their work as art administrators” (218) but had definitive impact on aesthetic valuation, periodization, and exposure that remains salient to this day.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ For example, at the PAU both Gómez-Sicre and his mentor Barr had a strong distaste for social realist aesthetic, including Mexican muralism, in favor of more avant-garde, or Anglo-modernist approaches. Moreover, there were clashes between PAU members, specifically “between the PAU’s current of latinoamericanismo, with its roots in nineteenth-century humanism, and Barr’s embrace own an emerging cold war professionalism, heralded by Talcott Parsons and the New Critics. Barr’s famous graphic charts of modernist movements and his 1945 installation plans for the MoMA galleries indicate that he favored integrating selected examples of Latin American art into the history of Western aesthetic movements, while Romero James approached Latin American art according to a coverage model, as geographically bounded and as intrinsically worthy of study” (Fox 59). There are echoes in this passage of current debates about whether art should be or already inherently is political, and how coverage models should negotiate the seemingly dialectic national-geographic and universal-humanist aspects. It may be easy enough to summarize the divides as follows: aesthetically, avant-garde (modernist) abstraction vs. social realism (populism), and elitism (cultural critics serving as gatekeepers) versus mass culture (art is for and by all people).⁴⁸ Could these terms be even more politicized than the heated debates about high/low divide draw from critics and consumers? Short answer: yes. In the middle of these debates is another debate concerning the roles that curators, government officials, and private investors should or should not play in their capacity to educate and discipline a civil society. Indeed, Fox’s analysis of the interplay between cold war

With that said, it is still possible to interpret the connections among the listed artists. Thinking about how the cited artists are historically and aesthetically connected illuminates the contradictory ways in which “Cuban art time” and “Anglo-modernist art time” have labeled and periodized these artists in the context of the cosmopolitan industrialization of Miami throughout the twentieth century. With respect to parsing details about the noted artists in *Havana Heat*, the following generational categorization can be assumed: Mario Carreños (1913-1999), René Portocarrero (1912-1985), Amelia Peláez (1896-1968), and Wifredo Lam (1902-1982) fall align with the Vanguardia generation; Antonia Eiríz (1925-1995) and Emilio Sanchez (1921-1999) are classified as modern, so they might fall into La Vieja Guardia. Tomás Sánchez (b. 1948) is still alive and is identified as contemporary, but he also studied at San Alejandro in 1964 and was trained by Antonia Eiríz at Cubanacan National School for Art sometime between 1965 and 1969. In fact, all of the artists with the exception of Emilio Sanchez (who moved to New York City permanently at the age of 22) studied at San Alejandro Academy. Lest this leads to the presumption that the artists across the generations must shared an academic aesthetic stemming from training at the same Cuban institute, Lynette M.F. Bosch points out that the Vanguardia actually spoke against the academic conventions of the Academy, turning “their backs on the academic traditions of their teachers at the Academia de San Alejandro” (130).

political and socioeconomic containment and aesthetic valuation prompts her to speculate that identity politics and multiculturalism, heralded as the innovation of the neoliberalization and democratization of the 1980s, was helped by cultural-economic events unfolding as early as these policies, nowhere more clearly seen than the multiculturalist nightmare of San Antonio’s HemisFair ’68.

Moreover, even the European-inspired and San Alejandro Academy-trained Vanguardia cannot be encapsulated as a homogenous aesthetic movement: As Bosch notes, Amelia Peláez “painted in a manner that evoked stained glass windows (such as those seen in the doors of Cuban homes) and an adaptation of Cubism, with hints of Cezanne.” In contrast, Wifredo Lam brought Cubism inspired by his study with Picasso with Haitian and elements of Santería: “In so doing, his style mirrored the blend of African and European found in Santería, wherein the identity of African deities (Orishas) were masked by the use of images of European saints” (133). Indeed, these artists were/are not just American hemispheric traveling subjects but transnational-cosmopolitan traveling subjects, given the fact that most of the artists specified in the text traveled not just to New York and/or Miami for training and exhibitions but also Paris and/or Spain as well as Haiti, in the case of Wifredo Lam (who was accompanied by Andre Bréton, the famous founder of the Surrealism). All of these nuances reflect complex relationships regarding national and global affiliations that undoubtedly influenced each artist’s evolving style.

The comparison of these Cuban and Cuban-American artists within the contexts of their nuanced aesthetic and geographic mobility builds on what Richard Ortiz refers to as “Cuban time” (Ortiz 133). However, the comparative connections between U.S. artistic periodization and Cuban artistic periodization, as well as their economic and political interrelations, also make possible a historical narrative that expands beyond the stagnant affect of Revolution and Exile as defining endpoints of Cuban Time. This interpolation requires the questioning of the fossilized European-cosmopolitan

periodization schema that ends up privileging Anglo-European artistic development through a myopic lens. For example, reading the progression of aesthetic art practice through the timeline of avant-garde, modernism, postmodernism, and contemporary aesthetics seems inadequate when placed against “Cuban-American” aesthetic time, and calls for greater nuance and historical-conceptual parallelism to grasp how art, economics, politics, and value are always already deeply imbricated. This greater nuance is encapsulated, for example, in C.L.R. James’ anticolonial approach to art criticism through a “dialectical model” that retains historical pluralities and cultural incommensurability (Craven 152-5).

Havana Heat periodizes Cuban revolutionary art from the outside (avant-garde, vanguardia, Peter-Pan, contemporary), but also aside from dominant Anglo-European aesthetic periodization (avant-garde, modern, postmodern, contemporary). However, it misses the opportunity to reflect on the Afrocuban and mixed cultures located in Miami and within its own ostensible archive. However, the absence of specificity with respect to the names of the artworks in *Havana Heat* not only erases the significance of stylistic evolutions and changes with respect to each artist’s development (including the international travels, appointments, political associations, and changes in medium that undoubtedly influenced each work), but it also erases the significance of Wifredo Lam’s contribution to the collection. Lam is not only the sole Afrocuban artist to be “canonized” in this partial archive of Cuban national art provided by the text, but he has also been identified as “the first artist of colour to make an impact on the international art scene, and did so in the 1920s and 30s during the full florescence of primitivism” (Sims 88).

The economic viability of the Miami establishment renders effectively invisible the concurrent artists, communities, and historiographies that are in fact embedded in its mix. As a result, in *Havana Heat*, aesthetic valuation becomes corrupt because of the U.S.'s distancing from and simultaneous micromanagement of Cuban economics as well as the post-1980s neoliberal practices of trade liberalization and state/supranational regulation of the art market (Fox 167). Stolen, forged, and smuggled art becomes an inflated revolutionary artifact as a result of this interrelationship: in March 2014, *The Art Newspaper* reported that ninety five works have recently been stolen from the National Fine Arts Museum in Havana. And, according to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Director John Morton, "The plundering of cultural property is one of the oldest forms of organized cross-border crime and has become a world-wide phenomenon that transcends frontiers" ("ICE Returns Stolen and Looted Art.").

Paradoxically, the power of erasure under Cuban militantism and isolationism due to its embargoed exile from "the post-Sixties global marketplace" (Fox 125) is mirrored in the short-term speculative market practices within global capitalism. The extensive, albeit fragmented, historiography of the *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries in comparison to the lack of specificity and historiography with respect to Cuban-cosmopolitan art illustrates the novel's romanticizing, in effect, of not just European cultural cosmopolitanism, but also of "economic cosmopolitanism," a theory of economic expansion going back to late eighteenth-century German philosophy that "aims at establishing a global free market where all humans are equal potential trading partners" (Kleingeld 506). Christopher Columbus, the world explorer, becomes a romantic partner

with fine artistic taste in search of greater treasures to bring back and to pollinate the new world within a transatlantic, commercial trade network.

At first glance, the American hardboiled detective fiction genre seems like it might not “travel well” outside of the immediate U.S. context. After all, as outlined in Chapter 1 of this study, there is a particular vernacular or idiomatic compensation to the American hardboiled protagonist that celebrates his “grit,” his counter-institutional position afforded to him because of his lack of investment in corporate power, his (perhaps self-volunteered) alienation from the good life. And, as studies of Latin American and Scandinavian detective fiction novels illustrate, different nations engage with the genre in different ways, perhaps reflecting both the fact of the genre’s malleability and the draw to the genre’s characteristic counter-institutional persona that is critical of its immediate surroundings.⁴⁹ The “vernacular art” of the detective fiction genre is also what makes it ambivalently localized: every detective fiction text is a tour, so to speak, of its centralizing character. This is not to say, however, that this centralizing tendency cannot be employed to examine the notions of home, nation, citizenship, and value. At the same time, what makes the hardboiled detective fiction genre attractive to those seeking to write from the liminal or diasporic position is the fact that the traditional

⁴⁹ There is huge market support for, and proliferation of, Latin American detective fiction, with a number of fascinating case studies that engage with the question of how the protagonist’s critical standpoint and the particular legal and surveillance system of the government in question play out. As Glen S. Close notes in her article “The Detective Is Dead. Long Live the Novela Negra!”, these Latin American detective fiction texts share certain characteristics with the U.S. hardboiled tradition, but also differ in their reaction to “a moment of multiple crises throughout the region” (147).⁴⁹

detective's lack of attachment to other people is precisely what makes the character a wandering prophet, so to speak.

It is this analytical service that the hardboiled detective fiction genre provides to the two novels that are analyzed in this final chapter: Charlotte Carter's *Coq au Vin* (1999) and Carolina Garcia-Aguilera's *Havana Heat: A Lupe Solano Mystery* (2000). While both of the protagonists featured in this final chapter have a steady income (one of them is abundantly wealthy), both protagonists also have a personal investment in solving the mystery that is entangled with their desire to understand their relative liminality and dislocation from an uncomplicated patriotism and heteronormative disciplinarity that extends to the cities of their brief self-imposed exiles. For example, like Nanette Hayes, who remains ambivalent about both New York and Paris after her disappointing sojourn to the city of her dreams, Lupe Solano is devastated to realize that the Cuba of her nostalgic fantasy is not the Cuba she could be attached to in reality.

As a result, Carter's and Garcia-Aguilera's novels similarly invoke a complex critique of economic cosmopolitanism, or global free-trade, that seeks short-term investments in cultural productions that have served as methods of unique resistance and counter-discourse for historically marginalized people. Like Lupe Solano, Nanette Hayes negotiates the complexities of cultural cosmopolitanism in the context of the colonial history of transatlantic and hemispheric American development that prevents her from enjoying, and upholding, the exploitive aspects of cultural tourism that is imbricated in economic cosmopolitanism and that is invested in selling fake access to stereotypical assumptions of "the folk." This fake access in fact prevents engagement with historically

marginalized communities. At the same time, Nanette's practiced knowledge of the jazz tradition leads her to employ jazz as an epistemology, whereas Lupe's imbrication with the establishment leads her away from recognizing textual and contextual nuance in the artworks she handles, thus revealing the dangerous nature of ethnic (as) kitsch to prevent historiographic and counter-institutional epistemologies and narratives from emerging.

As a result, the novels differ in their interpretations of the function of art as a sellable commodity or as a source for the enactment of collective becoming: whereas Carter's work illustrates what Alexander Weheliye calls "the conditions of im/possibility" of twentieth-century black culture to utilize aesthetics for collective becoming, Garcia-Aguilera's novel cannot disengage corporate regimentation of aesthetics from the function of art as a method for critical and unique engagement. As art economist Clare McAndrew defines an artwork in the following terms: "One of the key things about art versus, for example, trade in commodities is that artworks are unique. Each work has no substitute" (McAndrew 261). But to be able to ascertain whether an artwork is unique requires training, practice, and devotion to long-term speculation: in other words, art can only survive its immediate circuits to retain its "aural" or unique qualities, to be "portable, as it were" without being turned into kitsch or stock, if it is informed by deep contextualizing practice. In fact, McAndrew actually cautions against art market speculation as an investment strategy in favor of a long-term financial strategy that builds a unique collection and acknowledges the value of a slow-return cultural investment in a private-public archive.

According to Claire F. Fox, “Visual art has the capacity to engage diverse audiences while also constituting a material and experiential archive of social movements, communities, and historical events” (212). However, Fox notes that “In order to heighten art’s contestatory possibilities, however, it is necessary to decouple the aesthetic form from its prescribed role as a barometer for development, and to revive the concept of an avant-garde linked to rupture and critique” (212). *Havana Heat* illustrates what happens when an emphasis on quick trade and market speculation overrides investment in art and art education for their long-term investment opportunities, so to speak. The effectiveness of the forgeries on the black market disappears the aural properties of the artwork as artifact, in effect enfolding capitalism and radical art in the service of a “state- private network” (Cohn 30) that fundamentally restricts, to the degree of censorship, freedom of speech and collective becoming through art.

In their shared investment in, and critique of, cultural and economic cosmopolitanism, Both *Coq au Vin* and *Havana Nights* are far from idealistic about supporting and supplying a nostalgic read of older community aesthetic practices and instead explore the relationship between a community’s claiming of aesthetic practices and the historical co-opting of these practices by dominant economic enterprises. As a result, these works both replicate and expand on the practices of troubling normative temporal and historiographical conventions conducted by authors like Barbara Neely, Lucha Corpi, and Alicia Gaspar de Alba. At the same time, these texts more than the others featured in this study trouble the notion that women of color detective fiction is a stable category itself with respect to a social justice and women’s liberation. From

heteronormative respectability politics (*Coq au Vin* and *Havana Nights*) to actual participation in the exploitation and physical abuse of women of color (*Havana Nights*), the two novels featured in this chapter reflect the messiness of a broad-based understanding and application of terms like feminism, womanism, and women's rights.

Chapter Title	Textual Summary	Song Title	Featured Voice
“Travelin’ Light”	Nanette asked to go to Paris by her mother	“Travelin’ Light”	Vocal; Billy Holiday
“Can’t We Be Friends?”	Confrontation with Andre over playing spot; Nazis attack Nan	“Can’t We Be Friends?”	Vocal; Ella Fitzgerald
“I Didn’t Know about You”	Andre’s educational tour of history of Paris Jazz; confusion regarding his sexual orientation	“I Didn’t Know about You”	Vocal; Ella Fitzgerald
“It Could Happen to you”	Aunt Vivian’s suitcase is found with money; Andre tells Nan she’s staying with him for safety	“It Could Happen to You”	Guitar; Jimmy Van Heusen
“Straight Street”	Nan moves in with Andre into a top-floor apartment overlooking the rue Christine; they play a duet and make love.	“Straight Street”	Sax; John Coltrane
“Lush Life”	Nan meets and hires Gigi Lacroix, an ex-pimp, to look for her aunt. Nan and Andre learn from Gigi about Little Rube Haskins. They locate a photograph of one of Aunt Vivian’s friends from her abandoned photo album in a dusty yet jazz-wealthy music shop. Haskins had two names and was murdered. Andre gifts Nanette a framed pen-and-ink sketch of Thelonius Monk.	“Lush Life”	Vocal; Billy Strayhorn

Table 2: *Coq Au Vin* Setlist

Table 2, continued

Chapter Title	Textual Summary	Song Title	Featured Voice
“Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop!”	Nan and Andre meet the new owner of Bricktop, Morris Melon. He tells them Haskins was “falsely primitive” (97). Melon asks Nan and Andre to work at Bricktop.	“Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop!”	Vocal group; Levert
“Mountain Greenery”	Nanette goes to police headquarters and meets inspector Monsieur Simard. Nanette imagines Andre as a Frenchman and “retired professor”, asking herself where she fits into his fantasy.	“Mountain Greenery”	Vocal; Ella Fitzgerald
“Parisian Thoroughfare”	Nan and Andre perform at Bricktop and come upon a stabbed and killed Gigi Lacroix.	“Parisian Thoroughfare”	Sax; Donald Byrd
“What Is There to Say?”	Nan and Andre worry about the murder; question their relationship; Aubrey informs Nan over the phone that Andre and she have no security and hence no security	“What Is There to Say?”	Ella Fitzgerald
“What’ll I Do?”	Andre locates a bootleg copy of a Rube Haskins live performance. Nan and Andre make love but feel at a loss. When Andre disappears, Nan suspects he has been abducted.	“What’ll I Do?”	Vocal; Nat King Cole

(continued)

Table 2, continued

Chapter Title	Textual Summary	Song Title	Featured Voice
“Poor Butterfly”	Nan goes to Inspector Simard, who advises her to go to the Paris police but to act civilized. Andre calls Nan to come and it is Vivian who abducted Andre at gunpoint for a ransom from Nan.	“Poor Butterfly”	Vocal; Sarah Vaughan
“You’ve Changed”	Nan hears Vivian’s story and reasons for her desperate actions. Vivian is determined to murder Jerry, the man who double-crossed her and killed Rube Haskins.	“You’ve Changed”	Vocal; Billie Holiday
“Do Nothing Till You Hear from Me”	Andre and Nan listen to Haskins’ record; Andre recognizes that it is a pastiche of lifted Lomax field recordings; Nan learns from Inspector Simard that the man Vivian is out to kill was murdered last month.	“Do Nothing Till You Hear from Me”	Vocal; Billie Holiday
“Wham Bebob Boom Bam”	Nan and Andre return to Bricktop. Vivian turns up to kill Morris Melon, revealing that Melon was in on the Haskins scheme and double-hired (then killed) Gigi Lacroix to keep tabs on Nanette. Vivian kills herself.	“Wham Bebob Boom Bam”	Vocal group

(continued)

Table 2, continued

Chapter Title	Textual Summary	Song Title	Featured Voice
"I Want to Talk about You"	Vivian accuses Andre of being "deep into Mr. Black Paris exile." Nanette insists she cannot live in Paris, but only visit. Nan catches Inspector Simard on what happened. Simard suggests that Vivian used the ten thousand dollars to give to Haskins' family as compensation for his death. When Nanette returns to Andre's apartment, he had gone.	"I Want to Talk about You"	Sax; John Coltrane
"Parting Is Not Goodbye"	Nanette returns to New York to take Vivian's body home. She questions her bond with music "of the past" (198-9). Ends on a negation: she would visit Paris again, but she would not be <i>une femme française</i> . While it is ambivalent whether Nan will keep playing music, it is clear she will not see Andre again romantically.	"We'll Meet Again"	Vocals; Billie Holiday

Chapter 6: Conclusion: Toward a Radical Elsewhere, Pop Feminism, and Voice

Every novel explored in this project ends ambivalently and with no sure closure with respect to the main protagonist's security or sense of "home." In their resistance to closure and seemingly permanent a⁵⁰lienation from the easy conceptions of national or subject identity, these novels move toward what Kara Keeling has referred to as a "radical elsewhere," or a space and a direction that runs counter to the violence of hegemony within the "common sense" of mainstream and corporate culture. As a result, the novels featured in this project reflect a decolonial feminist critical method, one that recognizes that the subjugation of women of color is imperative to neocolonial and global capitalist initiatives, and one that recognizes that this subjugation is reliant on both physical and social disciplining mechanisms.

Furthermore, in the transculturation of epistemological, cultural, critical, and social experiences as they cross the conventions of traditional hardboiled detective

⁵⁰ Based on my abstract, readers of this dissertation might expect a comparative discussion of how the archive featured in this project expands on existing notions of the purpose and usefulness of intersectionality theory. However, given the nature of the dissertation writing process, there are insights and orientations that were produced in collaboration with my advisors during my oral exams that will be more thoroughly worked out during the stages of turning this dissertation into a book. I hope by the time the embargo is lifted on this manuscript that I will have published a richer exploration of the critical methodologies explored in this project and their service to women of color and decolonial critiques.

fiction, U.S. women of color detective fiction novels bring in sources that are exterior, and in some ways appositional, to some of the traditional aspects of detective fiction. In this sense, U.S. women of color detective fiction did not really emerge in the early 1990s; instead, these novels develop a transcultural enfolding that performs with the genre even as it resists its temporal, and hence narrative, enclosure. For example, many of the texts not only rely on non-alphabetic scripts to think through the encoding and transmission of knowledge, but they also implicitly critique the overdetermination of physical evidence and processes of logical reasoning that would be recognized by positive law.

In the first part of my project, I provided an overview of early British and American detective fiction and interventions into these forms by underrepresented authors, reading the processes of logical abduction and retroduction as both creative and narrative-building endeavors that in turn reveal the subjective and taxonomic nature of the epistemological practices evidenced in traditional detective fiction modes. Then, I offered a historical and cultural contextualization for the emergence and continuation of U.S. women of color detective fiction. My third chapter explored the strategies enlisted by Barbara Neely's character Blanche White in *Blanche on the Lam* to arrive at knowledge by combining logical abduction with gossip as a form of historiographic epistemology, and "affective epistemology," which employs a combination of observation and intuition and stresses the interrelation between mind and body in the process of "making sense of" of civic corruption.

At the same time, I also pointed out in my analysis that Neely's text bravely allows a thoughtful consideration of the potential for fallible judgment. Using Crystal

Parikh's notion of betrayal as a useful critical tool and Kamala Visweswaran's reading of betrayal as an interpersonal failure, I argued that Blanche and her employer Grace actually betray one another in their faulty assumed knowledge of the other. Neely's work deconstructs the social and economic structures that enact the "coziness" of the traditional country cozy. The novel pushes for the recognition that the local is not divorced from the national and the transnational, but rather that all three are interrelated in the creation of selective environments that rely on the privileges stemming from ancestral wealth.

My fourth chapter focused on a comparative analysis of Lucha Corpi's *Black Widow's Wardrobe* and Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* to consider how the novels disassemble naturalized geographical and temporal understandings of the U.S.-Mexico border. In comparing these two novels, the chapter explored the implications of missing evidence, particularly with respect to missing evidence that takes the form of inconvenient testimonies and disappeared bodies. In its play with temporal order, Corpi's work strains the boundaries of the mystery formula the most out of all the works featured here. However, I argued that the novel is not an example of magical realism, but rather an illustration of Gloria Anzaldúa's theorizations of spiritual mestizaje, conocimiento, and Nepantla that compels the individual to move from inner work to public activism. In contrast, Gaspar de Alba's work is the most sociological of the texts featured in this project, given the novel's incorporation of a seemingly overflowing amount of information to counteract the relative lack of public awareness about murdered girls along the U.S.-Mexico border. All in all, these two

novels enable us to think about how ritual, performance, and witnessing are interrelated and how property as value is a rhetorical device in the service of the deployment of neoliberalism and global capitalism. At the same time, the employment of historiographic epistemologies like testimonio, public motherhood, and Nepantla by both of the detectives featured in these novels enacts a critical dissolution of the line demarcating domestic (private) space from social (public) space that has often served to occlude Chicana feminist historiographies and the violence of the “domestic border.”

Chapter five brought together Charlotte Carter’s *Coq au Vin* and Carolina Garcia-Aguilera’s *Havana Heat* to consider how the two texts, while being written from different contexts and cultural positions, share an investment in considering the ways in which the centralizing yet disseminating features of cultural cosmopolitanism are troubled when placed in the hands of economic cosmopolitanism. Specifically, the chapter explored the measures to occlude historical and cultural contexts from music and art that turns them into kitsch commodities and disables a critical historiographic reading of the respective artworks. Nanette’s investment in jazz history and practice leads her to employ a counter-kitsch jazz epistemology that accounts for the contradictory and partial historiography of her aunt’s life in through a judgment-free, dynamic lens. In contrast, because the Lupe is operating on the side of protecting capital interests of the buyer, she fails to connect the unique value of each of the art pieces she handles, in effect precluding readers from engaging in alternative epistemological considerations of Cuban and Cuban-American artistic oeuvres in the context of the art market’s local-global mobility.

With respect to all of the works analyzed in this project, the detectives' critical engagement with how property, mobility, and assumptions about knowledge are interrelated to produce unequal working and social conditions for women of color even in a presumed "post-race" and "gender-neutral" period of U.S. national consciousness turn these novels into philosophical tracts themselves. *Blanche on the Lam*'s Blanche White explores the utter lack of reflectivity on the part of white wealthy employers to recognize the power and knowledge their employed staff accrue as the result of being relegated to the margins of the dining room. Gloria Damasco's "dark gift" in *The Black Widow's Wardrobe* enables her to make contact with Chicana feminist icons in her investigation through an empathic and temporally-expanded method that builds on and revises some of the aspects of the detective "instinct" and "hunch" so pervasive in traditional mystery and hardboiled detective fiction. In *Desert Blood: the Juárez Murders*, Ivon Villa realizes that the academic and sociological training she received from her work in women's studies inadvertently led her away from knowing more about the perils of gaining employment independence and procuring the respect of employers on behalf of Maquiladora workers. And, *Coq au Vin*'s Charlotte Carter recognizes the importance of practicing the cultural habits of endangered traditions as they come to be commodified, to be rendered "ethnic (as) kitsch" by global markets invested in selling to economic cosmopolitanism through cultural cosmopolitanism.

At the same time, the porous nature of the detective fiction genre, especially with respect to the hardboiled detective's alignment or misalignment from prevailing assumptions and fears regarding women, people of color, and immigrants, leads it to be a

porous genre for U.S. women of color as well. For example, the relatively secure economic status of Nanette Hayes in *Coq au Vin* and the very privileged economic and social position of Lupe Solano in *Havana Heat* lead these two characters to variably invoke some of the prevailing tenets of the cult of respectability, namely in relation to nonheteronormative people and behaviors. In turn, while Nanette Hayes shares with *Desert Blood: The Juarez Murders*' Ivon Villa a condescending perspective regarding poor mothers of color (this perspective shifts for Ivon eventually) and for poor people of color, Ivon's open identification as a queer Chicana scholar forces open serious critical considerations on the part of the novel regarding the heteronormative conditions of the Chicano family script that has disturbing similarities to the disciplining of Latina women within the cult of Marianismo.

Havana Heat's Lupe Solano, however, does not make large-scale critical revelations, even as her physical and emotional navigation between her family's former nation, Cuba, and her home in a wealthy Cuban gated community in Miami while she inadvertently smuggles Cuban priceless art allows for an engagement with the issues of short-term market speculation in art. With that said, some of the aspects of Lupe's personality, mainly her refusal to follow the Catholic Cuban establishment's social and institutional script of settling down, rub against some of the aspects of her normative alignment with social and economic American conservatism. Perhaps the most obvious alignment with the "one percent" is her proud card-carrying status as a gun lover. She has her favorite Beretta that she takes with her everywhere in her Chanel purse, and her "backup Beretta." She disdains Carmela, the woman she ends up smuggling with the

artworks to keep her safe from Cuban authorities, for not knowing how to use a gun and not being strong-willed enough to learn.

In fact, Lupe follows similar protocol for obtaining knowledge as the traditional hardboiled detective, using her might and connections to the circuits of law enforcement. In short, Lupe's behavior aligns more consistently with the hardboiled detectives of the masculinist literary and popular culture tradition. In attendance to Lupe's misalignment from the social justice orientation of the other detectives featured in this project, while I commit the normative practice of defining a canon, or set, of texts at the exclusion of others, I also keep in mind Robyn Wiegman's critique that:

We are now in the midst of emerging divergences within the global majoritarian category, *women of color*, which finds its political formation increasingly articulated across geopolitical terrains that force race into different critical alignments to discern its competing uses, territorialities, temporalities, national frames of reference, and identity formations. (88)

This nuance is reflected in the comparison and contextualization of the novels analyzed in this project.

U.S. women of color detective fiction texts also do not exist in isolation from other detective fiction perspectives and subgenres; instead, the shared perspective of these novels of working from the margin to assess the center, as well as their transcultural models, equip these novels to engage in social critique invoking a decolonial feminist lens. In fact, this critical lens can be used in service of deconstructing the politics of any detective fiction text, even a text featuring a white male protagonist. After all, black feminist critique, queer of color critique, and crip theory all point to the fact that social and economic disciplinarity is often staged at the level of perceived difference. As a

result, the bodies, opinions, and acts that are perceived as “normal” need to be looked over not once, not twice, but intersectionally, to think about where the normalcy is being contrived and where normalcy is being reinscribed. As a result, the novels explored in this project can also be read as methodologies for reading. The critical question becomes: in these respective worlds, what ideas, values, and social conditions are ultimately being promoted? Are these elements working in alignment or misalignment from normative structural conditions that seek to perpetuate integration without representation?

Consider, for example, the recent instantiation of the traditional hardboiled male detective duo in HBO’s *True Detective* (2014-). *True Detective* is an excellent show with some important, hard-hitting truths about the intersections of heteronormative disciplinarity and sexual violence that causes both of the protagonists to slowly but surely realign themselves with advocacy for female and child victims of sexual abuse and murder. What I like about *True Detective* is that it is a show about the exteriority of facts and perceptions: the male detectives seldom, if ever, have point of view shots that may provide an analysis of their “interiority.” Rather, the people and objects who surround the two detectives offer contextual clues about their lives and their moral limitations. However, the emphasis on the show is on the gradual growth, development, and revolution of the male characters: the wives, sex workers, and female victims who occupy the narrative space operate as scales to measure the detective’s development, as victims of the detectives and the dogmatic, contradictory principles of stale orthodox Americana. As a result, the women who also occupy the space of the show are there to serve as measures for the detective’s resolutions to his ambiguous status, or are there just

to serve. In effect, while *True Detective* is interested in violence against women, it is not a feminist project. We need only to play the Bechdel Test to recognize this issue with female representation and affirmation.

For similar reasons, neither is the show a decolonial project, even as it emphasizes long areal shots of the Louisiana landscape and signifies toward a transcultural historiography. The show is disinterested in thinking about the relationship of space, mobility, and epistemology to the ways in which colonialism, slavery, and subjugation of women have built up the territory. In a nearly metatextual moment, the detectives themselves miss the fundamental clue provided in the landscape: the violent, evil killer is the person who has been overseeing this ravaged land in his job as a landscaper: he is the cultivator of the abandonment of social justice. Furthermore, the show misunderstands, or perhaps is disinterested in reflecting, the crucial and complex interculturalization between black and indigenous populations, illustrated in its characterization of Vodoun and the syncretic religion's practitioners as haunting or vacuously superstitious. The show's allusion to "Vodoun" in the first season upholds a debased and misguided view of non-Christian religions that serves to bolster the show's evocative "atmosphere."

The spiritual historiography of Louisiana is rich, complex, and warrants that attention, especially with respect to its long, complex, and interweaving history of indigenous, West African, and Christian spiritualities. The original inhabitants of the area now known as Louisiana included The Atakapa Indians, The Caddo Indians, The Chitimacha Indians, The Choctaw Indians, The Houma Indians, The Natchez Indians, and The Tunica Indians. These tribes have distinct tribal identities, languages, rites, and

contemporary presence in the State of Louisiana. There are four federally recognized tribes today. But none of this is granted much context in the show. The setting is primarily used to stage a rationalist intervention into hypocritical and stale religious orthodoxy that becomes further possessed by the confusing immoral contours of capitalism. In future seasons, *True Detective* would be remiss not to take into consideration the complex interweaving of spiritual practices that “clue into” the long history of settler colonialism, slavery, the sectioning of areas, and the brutality of Christian missionary “work.”

The critical perspectives and methodologies employed in U.S. women of color detective fiction can also be harnessed to explore popular culture feminism. For example, the desire for a happy ending and certain normative scripts are rendered problematic in black pop feminism that cedes certain radical black feminist investments. The resistance of U.S. women of color detective fiction novels to normative happy endings align them with what Erica R. Edwards calls an “absurdist politics of black feminist praxis,” which the critic describes as “a politics not aimed at healing and harmonic closure within intraracial hierarchies of gender and sexuality but rather driven by the screech of petulant and incandescent discontent” (92). Like Keeling’s “critical elsewhere,” Anzaldúa’s critical orientation toward the critical border in her theorization of *Nepantla*, and Charlotte Carter’s staging of jazz as an epistemology that enfolds contradictory and disjointed affects and narratives through the mode of a popular, initially vernacular mode, Edwards’ notion of an absurdist politics of black feminist praxis also encapsulates the absurdist politics of a decidedly non-conclusive ending that is enacted by each of the

novels featured here. Such “absurd elements project sensations into some place outside of—out of tune with—the visual and aural rhetoric of compensatory empowerment” (92). This critical awareness and misalignment from compensatory frames bring an interesting frame of reference to current popular depictions of women of color in literary and popular culture productions.

For instance, with respect to the representation of powerful African American women on Primetime television, it is valuable to identify how certain scripts are written for the main protagonists who occupy these roles that may fall prey to the compensatory narratives identified by Edwards while also invoking perspectives that further break down the pervasive divide between domestic and public space. Take the popular series *Scandal* (2012-), in which Olivia Pope (played by Kerry Washington) is a professional fixer for the Washington elite who both tells and is told what to do by powerful white men. Olivia is written as a empowered, confident, and exceptionally intelligent black feminist woman who commands white male presidents and other high-security officials. However, her power is also often subsumed (and often through sexual and violent coercion by white men) by her underlying role of mothering the entire nation in a post-racial and counter-insurgency era of U.S. power.⁵¹

At the same time, the show’s producer Shonda Rhimes and her writer Peter Nowalk (who was also the longtime writer and producer on Shonda Rhimes’ shows

⁵¹ I am indebted to Erica R. Edwards for her reading of Olivia Pope’s character in *Scandal* in her recent talk, “Black Text and the Biopolitics of Counterinsurgency” presented at the Modern Language Association (Vancouver, 2015).

Grey's Anatomy and *Scandal*), also quickly moved in with *How to Get Away with Murder* (2014-), a show starring Viola Davis as Annalise Keating. Annalise is a powerful, no-nonsense defense attorney and professor whose white husband is implicated in the murder of a young, and pregnant, student. While the correlation with the character's over-determined, even myopic dedication to her work is reminiscent of the Sapphire stereotype applied to successful black women to undermine their achievement (Smith 113-118), the fact that (spoiler alert) the white husband is subsequently murdered by her students and then covered up by the protagonist goes against the white supremacist and heteropatriarchal reinscriptions of other pop feminist shows, *Scandal* included. Is *How to Get Away with Murder* getting away with indicting this order by making the white male body less relevant to the continued power structure in the show than other mainstream television productions? We can only stay tuned to find out. It is extremely interesting, and suggestive, that both Olivia Hope and Annalise Keating have domiciles that continue to be inhabited and compromised by their professional arenas: Olivia is often visited by unwanted guests and even kidnapped in her own home; Annalise works out of her home, bringing not only strange clients into her home, but her personal relationship with a potential killer (her husband) from the home into the public sphere of her scrutinizing students. Manifest in this dissolution of the private-public divide are the recognition that these powerful women both manage and are managed by legal, governmental, capitalist, and patriarchal disciplining mechanisms.

In contrast to some of pop feminism's compensatory frames that at times contradict black feminist radical politics, and in line with the hardboiled's disinclination

to restore social order at the end of the plot/text, U.S. women of color detective fiction novels do not suggest that because one case has been solved, all social disequilibrium is also resolved. At the same time, U.S. women of color detective fiction novels push this disquiet even further by leading their detective protagonists to question their own relationship to space in the context of their relative ability or inability to move, to love, and to grow within that space. The ways in which U.S. women of color detective fiction exposes the conditional acceptance of the right of certain subjects to be heard by harnessing the unconditional power and draw of the detective persona warrants close study, even as questions and contradictions come to the surface by the end of the study that require methodologies, texts, and contexts outside the scope of this project. Specifically, the confines of this project to detective fiction, which focuses on an individual heroic character, undermines a more inclusive and expansive overview of the ways in which underrepresented authors make use of other literary genres that more loosely explore the conditions of intersectional oppression within different geographic and social locations.

For example, none of the novels in this project take place in the institutional walls of the police academy or the university. However, as the police procedural series written by Paula L. Woods and Pamela Thomas-Graham's Ivy League mysteries emphasize, the social, economic, and political structures that work tirelessly and quietly to undermine principle tenets of participatory and representational democracy also work to discipline those subjects it invites as an outward reflection of social progress and inclusion. As Henry Louis Gates notes in his personal essay about graduating from Yale in 1973,

“narratives of ascent, whether or not we like to admit it, are also narratives of alienation, of loss” (193).⁵² These primary sources reflect the critique of such conditional, and illusory, engagement with diversity that are found in more recent edited volumes like *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia* (2012) and monographs like Sara Ahmed’s *On Being Included: Race and Diversity in Institutional Life* (2012), and Roderick Ferguson’s *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference (Difference Incorporated)* (2012). More work is needed to think about the ways in which the police procedural is another geographic and critical exploration of institutional violence.

The exaggerated physicality of the hardboiled detective and the implicit ableism attached to this requirement are further exaggerated and critiqued in the willful and at times physical antagonisms enacted by the protagonists featured in this project. The protagonists are often told to obey, to apologize for the temperaments, color, and size of their bodies as they navigate normative disciplinarity of “proper codes of conduct.” While the willfulness enacted by characters like Blanche White and Ivon Villa, who fight back, literally, against their assailants brings the required and even exaggerated hyper-masculine aspects of the hardboiled detective into crisis, there is little discussion in these texts about how the ability to walk, to run, to fight back is often inscribed in physical terms—at the exclusion of the awareness that fighting back is often a mental game, on that requires many approaches and manifestations of personal and collective

⁵² “How to Join The Black Overclass.”

empowerment. On the other hand, in their considerations of the ways in which historiographies, pieces of evidence, and testimonies are heavily regulated by biopolitical and institutional regimes, each of the novels featured in this project registers the need to fight for justice through discursive and critical engagement with injurious ideologies. With that said, more work needs to be done on the ableism that accompanies much of the general action genre and the implications of non-normative and heavily policed bodies who will to act in unprecedented or alternative ways.

To a similar point, the novels featured in this project and within the broad archive of U.S. women of color detective fiction stage interventions into the genre in their invocation of a competent woman of color detective. However, while this competence is very much needed because it is not necessarily presumed, it also carries the weight of reifying the individualist ethos of the detective persona, who is modeled after the hybrid model of the white Western cowboy and the armchair observer. On the one hand, this has worked to achieve a certain parity with personas that have been, and continue to be, extolled in popular culture, literature, and U.S. policy. And yet, such a reading raises a potential problem in my focus on women of color detective fiction as a text that problematizes, rather than simply mirrors, the tradition of the hard-boiled.

Specifically, this reading implies that women of color detective fiction privileges the isolationist standpoint of the detective, an interpretation that appears to be at odds with my reading of women of color detective fiction as a political and social critique of the normative features of isolationism, masculinity, and privatization of property. In their emphasis on an individual self whose interiority goes unquestioned, both the traditional

hardboiled and revisions to the genre by historically underrepresented authors fall prey in some sense to the centralizing and individuating features of Anglo-modernism and late capitalism: to defend the self, to stage it as inalienable, unassailable, but also separate from, and in many ways antagonistic to, the collective voice and reflexivity of social justice movements.

The hardboiled detective, the Anglo-Western cowboy, and the detached observer-surveyor are themselves modeled after the rationalist dogma of the free-thinking individual that has been of such service to “bootstrap mentality” ethos in economic and social policy. The privileging of the individualist “I” in detective fiction, along with the exceptional intelligence, wit, and ability allowed this “I,” in turn upholds certain problematic trends in literature and social discourse. It is important to note, however, that most of the novels featured in this project, with the exception of *Havana Heat*, emphasize the relative inability of the detective to solve a mystery on her own, that it takes creative and cooperative measures to obtain information and to achieve social justice. At the same time, the narrative “I” that is staged throughout the plot as it encounters other beings falls in line with the lyrical “I,” the bildungsroman “I,” and the tourist “I,” all of which presume that the main objective of the narrative is to watch these “I”s achieve their goals or a sense of completion as they come into contact with new ideas, beings, dilemmas.

With that said, one of the central critical interventions featured in this project is to counter the limiting conceptualization of women of color as either victims or undeserving recipients of equal opportunity measures. Both fallacious perspectives render women of color as passive—recipients of injury or undue consideration. In U.S. women of color

detective fiction, the presumption is that the woman of color detective is inherently intelligent, capable, and morally aligned with a counter-institutional, and hence, critical, perspective. Because of the ways in which women of color have been, and continue to be, policed, the embodiment of women of color of the detective persona is a radical and willful act that in effect highlights the normalized power function of Anglo-European heteromasculinist performance. In this embodiment, U.S. Women of color detectives also reveal the ways in which certain bodies and voices claim a right to power and become dominant, while other bodies must fight to claim this right but are most often read as willful. In sum, the detective persona as embodied by the woman of color becomes a political performance of voice, character, and empowerment. As a result, the novels featured in this project and that are encapsulated by the label “U.S. Women of color detective fiction” play an important role in the broad field of revisionist literary and popular culture narratives and performative scripts and must be recognized for their simultaneous alignment and misalignment from dominant structuring forms of voice, (re)presentation, space, and knowledge.

Given the focus and space restrictions of this project, more work also remains to reflect upon the influence and incongruity of literary genres that focus on an independent character written from the point of view of subjective interiority. For example, there appears to be a line of novels written by North American indigenous authors that invoke a decidedly anti-detective perspective, bringing in the detective character as a side-character who is ineffective and does not take up the scope of the point of view. For example, Sherman Alexie’s *Indian Killer* (1996), Linda Hogan’s *Mean Spirit* (1990),

Gerald Vizenor's *Heirs to Columbus* (1991), and James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1974) engage with both noir and detective fiction conventions in order to produce decolonial and subject critiques that are imperative to understanding the attractiveness, and the danger, of celebrating individualism in literature and in policy.

The anti-detective novel is often conceptualized as postmodern in its use of detective fiction conventions for the purposes of frustrating, rather than restoring, order to the plot. As such, the fiction is set up to fail in terms of what readers may expect from their initial registration of the genre convention and what they end up receiving for the (lack of) resolution in the detection schema. In other words, what the reader expects based on the signifiers of the text is what operates to undermine the reader's expectation—where the reader expects a neat conclusion or restoration of order because the text signifies this as a promise based on the narrative elements of the opening narrative, the reader will come to be frustrated by the lack of resolution. While this seems to fall in line with my analysis of revisions to the hardboiled motif, and indeed the hardboiled motif itself, one salient feature of the anti-detective fiction thread in Native American literature qualifies it as a genre apart: it seems that Native American literature has used the figure of the detective, but does not centralize this figure, often in effect obscuring this detective's role in the narrative. This use of the detective character is different from U.S. women of color detective fiction, wherein there is one protagonist who is the one doing the sleuthing and remains constant throughout the text.

Another distinction between U.S. detective fiction and what I identify as an anti-detective strand in North American indigenous literature is that the latter approaches the

critique of U.S. power and U.S. culture from a triangulated, transnational, and indigenous perspective. While indigenous people have been criminalized and pathologized in similar ways to African Americans and Mexican Americans, we must recognize the fact that there is another kind of triangulation happening here in terms of circuits of power: that of the indigenous body, the sovereign nation's tribal court, and the U.S. criminal justice system. In contrast, the U.S. woman of color detective is also entirely confined to working with, and against, the U.S. Criminal Justice System. The opposite may be said of indigenous claims to land and the recognition (and lack thereof) of sovereign rights on behalf of the U.S. Federal Government. Detective fiction written from the point of view of the tribal court system would take up slightly different issues than women of color detective fiction which features protagonists forced to reckon fully from within the confines of the American justice system (and its measures of injustice). To be more clear, "U.S. woman of color" as a category implies a national tie to the American criminal justice system, whereas we must recognize the fact that sovereign nations as recognized by the American government have their own systems of legal and social governance.

This is not to say that there are no commonalities among U.S. women of color detective fiction novels and the appearance of the detective figure in North American indigenous literatures; but the issues of property rights, community politics, agency, and narrative voice are large enough to require coverage beyond the scope of this particular project. What may connect these groups is the perception of a lack of resolution toward the end, which is more pointedly made clear in the anti-detective novel but is also implied with the hardboiled genre. My hunch is that the more attention scholars, teachers, and

readers pay to the power of voice in its myriad connotations and literary appropriations, the clearer the significance and social justice goals of (re)presentation will become.

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